NEW HORIZONS
NEW HORIZONS
REMINISCENCES OF THE
RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY
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CHAPTER I

“In 1348 the Plague devastated Florence, one of the most beautiful towns in Italy. . . .

Whereupon, ten young ladies and gentlemen fled to a certain country house, thus hoping to escape infection. No doubt, this dread disease was little more than God’s judgment for our sins. . . .”

(Extract from Décameron: Boccaccio.)

HOWEVER, that is past history.

Now in the present, in March, 1917, not only Florence, but the whole world seemed like a country of the dead . . . like the tragic remnants of a torn civilisation.

We were sitting on the terrace of the Villa Ariane talking idly about the future. Ten of us together—Julie, Hélène, Nina and I, Proche Proctian and Boris Kamnoff actually lived in the Villa. Then there were the others who used to visit us each day—a young American journalist; Katia, a peasant girl; Stas and his beautiful Polish cousin.

As hostilities had been declared it was difficult to return home. We were more or less interned here in Italy, in this madly idyllic setting of flowers and orange groves.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . .

“It’s terrible . . .” said Julie, “the way one’s surrounded by all this beauty while the rest of the world is blowing itself to bits.”

“It’s like the Plague back in 1348,” Stas remarked.
There’s ten of us, too—just as in Décaméron. By Jove, what a funny coincidence!”

Julie sat up indignantly.

“What nonsense! In Boccaccio, when they isolated themselves in that villa, they did so of their own free will—just because they were frightened of catching it. But it’s a different matter with us. We’re forced to stay here against our will, and who knows for how long? I’m getting to hate these everlasting blue skies and orange groves. They seem so unreal in a World War.”

“Yes, and what I hate most is this awful inertia . . . the way we’re cooped up here day after day with nothing to do!”

Proche Proctiane was a Russian revolutionary of Armenian extraction. He had aquiline features and lively black eyes. He held strong convictions which usually seemed to involve him in some argument or other, particularly with Hélène.

“Yes, you’re right. It’s the inactivity that’s driving us mad. One gets to feel so helpless stuck away down here, unable to take part in it all,” said a voice from another corner. It was Boris Kamnoff, also a Russian revolutionary who, since his early youth, had devoted all his energies to the “Cause.” Circumstances made him an eternal vagabond. He once managed to sneak through the Russian frontier without a passport and started doing violent anti-Tzarist propaganda in his own country. Another time when he escaped from Siberia he began studying in Germany and even managed to become a Doctor of Philosophy and Law at Heidelberg.

“Then why not join up?” asked Proche. “You hate the Germans and you’ve always said you’re an internationalist—well, let’s have some proof of it!”

“And I meant what I said. There’s a lot of our comrades, good revolutionaries too, fighting in the French army. I’d have joined up long ago myself if I hadn’t been in Italy.”

“What’s that matter to you as an internationalist?”

“Italy’s only an ally, she’s not the main cause. I was in Germany when the War started. I saw their racial hatred with my own eyes. I saw how it spread in a night, even among the Socialists . . .”

So the same old argument began all over again. And the two friends snapped at each other angrily until Julie intervened.

“Look, there’s a boat!” said Stas, anxious to change the subject. Nothing bored him more than war and politics. He was a snobbish, aesthetic-looking young man, rather blasé and sophisticated. He seemed to ignore all such problems as troubled our two Russian friends.

“Well, I can’t see any boat,” drawled Julie, shading her eyes to the horizon.

“Look where my finger’s pointing! Now it’s passing that clump of trees,” cried Stas excitedly. “I say, she seems to be running awfully close. Why, I can even see the passengers on deck.”

As he spoke the boat seemed forced up out of the water and split clean in half. A few seconds later an immense jet of water spurted into the air and splashed back noisily on the angry waves. There was no trace now of the little steamer and its load of passengers.

“Well, would you believe it?” whispered Proche in an awed voice. We all stood still, quite speechless in our amazement. Then we heard the rush of voices, quick rasping tones as boats were lowered down the shingle.

“Come on, you fellows! Let’s see what they’re up to—”

So off we went, bounding down the steps three at a time until we reached the little sandy beach. The place seemed in an uproar. The women gesticulating wildly while the men hurried down with coils of rope, life-belts and the rest of their tackle.

A German submarine had been seen close to the coast and this meant a German spy close at hand. One old fisherman had sworn he saw a periscope several days
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ago, but of course, no one was willing to believe him then. Now this awful thing had happened . . . the submarine was clearly responsible. The rescuers came back hours later, empty-handed and quite exhausted.

CHAPTER II

In the evening it was warm and misty. As usual, we were lounging about on the studio sofas doing nothing in particular. Since that explosion all the electricity had been cut off along the coast and we were forced to sit in darkness.

"Supposing we each tell a story in turn," suggested Stas. "An adventure or love-affair—something that's really happened in our own lives. Rather like they did in Décameron, d'you remember?"

"Why, that might be rather fun. It's something new anyway. What do you others think?" asked Katia.

"We'd have a different story each night," continued Stas eagerly. "After all, that shouldn't be so difficult. . . . "Truth is stranger than fiction," so the saying goes. And besides, most of us know what it's like being in love!" he concluded all in one breath.

"Love! Pah, that's all you ever think about," said Proche in disgust.

"Well, as for you, you've got no human feelings at all. I've never met such a cold-blooded individual," retorted Stas.

"Not at all. Love and marriage are part of my beliefs, but I don't think they ought to be dragged out in public."

"Anyway, let's try out his idea. It'd be such fun!" cried Hélène clapping her hands.

"Stas, supposing you start?"

He needed no encouraging and began telling us about an early love-affair.

The other men turned away, making no attempts to hide their boredom.

Nina was vexed at his story . . . how like a man,
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she thought. But Julie listened with frightened eyes, like a child hearing some fairy story for the first time.

When he had finished Harriet burst out laughing.

"Well, that's certainly a love-romance, but I don't call it true to life."

"Neither do I," added Nina disparagingly. "It sounds like one of those 'Penny Dreadfuls.'"

"Yes, that's what comes of being idle!" said Katia.

The men refused to comment.

"I didn't expect you'd understand, but you will one day." Stas looked annoyed.

"Katia, won't you tell us your story?" I said hurriedly, seeing that a dispute was brewing. Living in such close quarters made everyone short-tempered.

Katia agreed, and told a childhood story... a visit she and her peasant mother had paid to a nobleman's immense estate. She had always been acutely conscious of her peasant upbringing, of her inferior social status. She was employed somewhere locally as nurse to a rich business man's family. Proch and I knew she was cut off from all her Russian friends and felt sorry for her. So we asked her up to the Villa and then she began coming every day when the children were in bed. Blessed with a natural intelligence, she seemed able to take part in any discussion. She was avid and unrelenting in her questions! Finally, after much persuasion, three of us ended by giving her regular lessons as best we could. History, literature and mathematics were quite unknown to this peasant girl.

"Call it true to life? Sounds like one of those 'Penny Dreadfuls.'"

Katia was finishing her story.

"Yes, how I loathe all 'society'! I hate their riches, their cars, champagne and artificial love. I've seen quite enough of it in the place where I work."

Her voice sounded hard and hostile. Then she got up hurriedly and went outside. I found her weeping bitterly on the stone steps.

"Katia, what is it?"

"It's only... only that I feel different to all of you. I know I'm not your equal, I know now that I'll

never lead the same life or be able to enjoy the same things. It seems so unfair somehow—I'll always have to be minding grubby little kids or scrubbing other people's floors. I was born among peasants and I love all my peasant folk, but why should we slave for a mere pittance while half the world lives in luxury?"

Katia's voice rose to a mournful wail. 'She stood quivering in front of me like some wounded animal. I was at a loss to know how to reassure her.

"Katia, you mustn't feel like that. You're our friend, you're just one of us. You're going to get on in life—I'll help you all I can when this war is over."

"That's sweet of you. Oh, I know I've just made a fool of myself again. Forget all about it—good night, I must be going."

Back in the studio I told Proch about Katia.

"That girl's quite right. There are too many class barriers in society. They sap a man's life, they eat out his very soul," remarked Proch with some vehemence.

"Oh, dear, everything seems to start a fresh argument. It's so stupid," sighed Helene wearily. "Why can't we each tell our story and leave it at that? Julie, let's have yours now!"

Julie was another revolutionary. Although born in North Russia, she came of Polish parents. But she had a Russian upbringing and as a young girl began doing propaganda work among the sailors in Kronstadt. They worshipped her like a saint; indeed, even her soft, translucent features resembled some pre-Raphaelite painting. She had already been in prison more than once. Last time she had managed to escape with the help of her friends.

"I know nothing that'd interest you."

"Of course you do. Tell us how you escaped that time," insisted Helene.

"Well, they arrested me just after the revolt in Kronstadt. I was so fed up with it all that I didn't really care what happened. I'd been in prison several weeks and that alone made one feel pretty suicidal.
Anyway, some comrades had already arranged my escape without telling me and I naturally felt very annoyed.

“Why annoyed?”

“It was far too risky—they might all have been shot and then I’d have been worse off than ever. An armed guard day and night, you know the kind of thing—Anyway, having finally agreed to their plans, the next thing was to get myself removed to hospital. Well, I managed it somehow. I knew salt was supposed to make one feverish, so I swallowed a whole packetful! Ugh, I shall never forget it!” She made a wry face.

“After that little effort my temperature rose to 103 and I was almost delirious. So they rushed me off to the nearest hospital, which was kept by nuns, very kind, friendly people. The next night my friends had arranged to wait outside with a sledge. I was still delirious half the time and then towards evening my head suddenly began to clear. I soon realised that these poor nuns would get all the blame if I escaped. It seemed unfair somehow—you see, they’d been so sweet and thoughtful to me. Anyway, in the end I sent a hasty message asking them to call it all off. One of the maids took it secretly; she felt sorry for me, so she said. Night came on, and I lay half dozing when I suddenly heard footsteps. The night nurse must have gone downstairs for something, anyway the room was empty. More footsteps, there at the foot of the bed stood my two friends, well armed and thickly clad.

“I’m not coming after all. You get out quickly before it’s too late,” I whispered, sitting up in bed. We started arguing. They were furious and wouldn’t go.

“You can’t change your mind now, you little fool. Come on for God’s sake. If we wait much longer we’ll all get caught.”

“I can’t, really I can’t—” I wailed miserably.

“We’ll make you. We’ve got the sledge ready outside,” hissed one of them. So saying, they wrapped the blankets round me and hoisted me out of bed. I struggled as best I could, but I was quite powerless against the two of them. Someone caught me outside the window and dumped me unceremoniously on the sledge. I was told to crawl underneath a pile of furs, and then we sped off silently through the night. And I lay there faint and feeble, staring vacantly at the winter stars.”

Julie paused and then continued in a dreamy, wistful voice: “People say the nights here are far prettier than up North, but I’ll never forget those brilliant Russian skies, that opaque moon in a glittering starlit world.”
CHAPTER III

It was Friday, March 16th. Everything seemed to go wrong—there was a threatening grocer's bill, our money had never arrived, our charwoman gave notice, the chimney started smoking, and in the end I retired to bed with a splitting headache. I felt fed up with the world in general.

After lunch Proche knocked on my door.

"Get up quickly. I've some important news!"

"Leave me alone, can't you? I've got an awful head—"

"But you must come, I tell you. Listen—there's been a revolution in Russia!" he cried breathlessly.

I thought he was joking and said as much. "You'ke sure the world hasn't come to an end?" I asked sarcastically.

Then I heard footsteps and cries on the balcony. I leapt up and opened the door. They were all outside, jostling each other impatiently. To-day's paper was divided amongst them. They snatched up page after page and read it aloud:

"The Tzar abdicates."

"Revolution in Russia."

Everything seemed blurred, the terraced garden, the people standing there, all but that one headline. Revolution! A Revolution! Yes, d'you hear that? A Revolution! In Russia! So the words drummed in my ears.

The Italian papers told one very little, we must wait till to-morrow. Yes, to-morrow, perhaps our own papers would arrive.

What then? What was the next move? No one knew, we were kept in suspense.

Russia is free! They've won the Revolution!

CHAPTER IV

At last our Russian newspapers arrived. The news seemed fantastic and incredible. We devoured each page, repeating it aloud, as though reassuring ourselves that such things had actually happened in Petrograd.

"Russia belongs to the people!" announced a Sunday issue of the Ketch.

"Garrison from Peter Paul prison joins the rebels."

I can still see that grim fortress with its grey, dank walls and underground cells. Since the time of Peter the Great, State prisoners had always been interned there. Most of its inmates never came out alive. They either died of disease or were drowned when the water rose in their cells. I remember pausing once outside its massive iron gates and thinking: "When the revolution comes we'll never be able to break in here!" Yet lo and behold! that was exactly what had happened.

"On March 13th," Proche began, paper in hand, "the Imperial Guard forced the Peter Paul garrison to submit and joined up with the rebels. The prison is ours! There, how's that?" he asked excitedly.

I moved towards the window. I wanted to touch something familiar—the geranium pots on the balcony—so that I knew it was all quite real, and not just a mad, hopeless dream. The geranium pots were real, baked red in the sun like a peasant's hard wrinkled skin. And the geraniums, they were real too. Fresh and scarlet, like the rebel's flag hoisted on the Palace flagstaff. The Tzar's eagles had gone—once and for ever!

"Just listen to this." Julie tugged at my hand.
“This is what the Vice-President of the Workers’ Council said: ‘So far we’ve had amazing successes, and we’re getting fresh support from all sides. All the Military Cadets deserted to us on Friday and we’re expecting their officers to do so before the week’s out. Yesterday, our mob stormed the old Palace, tore down the Tzar’s flag and ousted the Imperial Staff.’

I tried to picture that strange, frenzied mob with their red banners floating in the wind. On the white chalk road below a donkey was struggling under his heavy load. Whenever he stumbled the peasant whipped him on. . . I felt so sorry for the poor beast.

“Here’s what Kerensky says.” Proche pointed out a certain paragraph. “‘Comrades, soldiers and fellow-citizens. I have been elected your Minister of Justice. And in the name of the Provisional Government I hereby declare a complete amnesty for all political prisoners. I have arrested the Ministers of the old régime and they will be tried before the people for their crimes.’”

“Who’s this man Kerensky?” asked Katia curiously. “I have never heard of him before. Has anyone?”

“Yes, I remember his name now,” declared Hélène. “He’s a barrister, I believe.”

I myself could remember meeting him once in Russia. I recalled that strange lively creature with his piercing dark eyes and gesticulating manner. His intense personality had electrified all around him.

“But our Party’s playing the most important rôle,” Proche insisted. “You know, we must hurry and get back there before it’s too late. Boris is a lucky devil . . . if he’s in Denmark now he can reach Russia in a few days. It’ll take us God knows how long by the time our visas get signed. . . .”

Boris had left a few days before the great event. His plan was to reach a neutral country via France and thence sneak through the North Russian frontier.
CHAPTER V

DURING the War my husband, Victor Tchernoff, was a special correspondent in France.

One day, quite unexpectedly, he telegraphed asking me to start for Paris at once. On the way to Nice I began to realise what this sudden departure meant. I was to be wrenched from our enchanted prison and plunged into reality. The grim, morbid reality that was war. I looked round the crowded carriage; it was full of Italians on their way to fight; laughing country lads who thirsted for adventure, who dreamed of power and glory. And I wondered bitterly how many would come back alive, how many would ever marry and breed strong sons like themselves. Only a few, the rest were already marked out by Fate. . . . They must be victims of the world's butchery!

So the train rumbled on until night fell like a satin blind across our windows. The recruits soon tired of their singing and began to doze propped up on each other's shoulders: sometimes they smiled in their dreams. Sometimes they started up and looked around anxiously. Watching their flushed faces made me think of another sleep . . . dreamless, still and eternal. Just death. Death would come when the flush left their faces and their taut limbs relaxed. Yes, death would come to all these men. It seemed almost as if this was a funeral train bearing them on their last journey. If only I were God Almighty and could cry out: "Stop, enough blood's been shed! Go back to your homes and live in peace! . . ."

But I was only a woman, as frail and helpless as the

rest. The train sped northwards; each mile nearer my husband, each mile a little nearer their doom.

We arrived after what seemed an interminable journey. Yes, I was in Paris again, that gay, cosmopolitan city where we refugees might always seek shelter. But things had altered now. . . . now Paris seemed in mourning for her dead. The boulevards were empty, the cafés closed and the streets unlighted. Old women with drawn, haggard faces queued up for food and scrambled for their bread ration. Shell-shocked creatures, men without limbs, men whose faces were blown out, crawled hopelessly from street to street. Children got killed in air raids and throughout Paris war laid a deathly hand.

Meeting Victor again made me forget all about the War for a few hours. The Revolution was our chief topic and (we) seemed to strengthen each other's faith in the future. We felt impatient for the journey home like the hundreds of other refugees. After their long exile they were at last returning to Russia to build a new State and make peace in the world. In the cafés which we refugees frequented, one saw strange reunions and wild scenes of enthusiasm. Exiled politicians who spoke gravely of the new régime, artists and writers . . . blaming the world for their failure, young, earnest revolutionaries, uniformed recruits and women from cheap night-haunts, all joined in those hysterical Russian café parties while waiting for the visas to arrive.

And the delay seemed endless. My husband was on tenterhooks lest he should arrive too late. He spent each day at the Embassy or police headquarters trying to hurry on matters. Meanwhile I was made to read all the newspapers and note down every detail about Russia.

It was rumoured that Lenin and his supporters had already reached Germany.

A telegram from the Provisional Government stating
their urgent need of certain persons listed among the
refugees finally decided the French authorities. We
were given our visas and allowed to start.
But even then I couldn’t actually travel back with
Victor as I had to settle affairs in Italy and fetch our
children. So we said good-bye rather miserably,
hoping to join each other again in a few weeks,
although, in point of fact, we didn’t meet till July—
nearly four months later.

CHAPTER VI

WITHIN a week I had disposed of our villa,
paid all the tradesmen, packed up our
belongings and set off once more with the
three children.
We had booked our tickets to Zurich, where other
Russian refugees were arriving daily from all parts of
Switzerland and Italy. Proche, Nina and her small
son came to meet us at the station. . . . I was glad to
be with friends again.
That same evening I met the local Socialist Party
who were supposed to be helping us. They wanted
me to continue our journey through Germany as it
was the quickest route to Russia. However, I strongly
disagreed, knowing that the Germans had always hated
Russian refugees and were unlikely to facilitate our
departure in order to oblige us.
The Swiss Socialists laughed at my fears. “Whatever
harm could they do? You’re only an exile returning
home. Surely, it’s important to reach Russia as
soon as possible.”
I refused to decide at once, so we left it at that. I
wanted to think things over quietly.
The next day I had to be Chairman at a Party
meeting and again the same question arose: whether
to travel through Germany, which was the quickest
way; or take the longer route via France, England and
Scandinavia. There was some difference of opinion
and the debate grew very heated. At last, I suggested
we should decide it by vote and everyone agreed. The
majority voted against the German route for the same
reasons as I had. It seemed impossible to accept the
German Government’s rather suspicious compliance over this matter.

Proche was furious, he accused me of having influenced people against the German route. His one thought was to reach Russia as soon as possible.

However, the affair was not yet closed. On the following morning another Socialist announced himself breathlessly at our hotel.

“You’re to travel via Germany, both Kerensky and your husband think so. We’ve just had their telegram.”

“Let’s see it.”

“You shall have it to-morrow, but get ready to start in the meantime.”

Shortly after, Victor’s telegram arrived from the Embassy. He was impatient to see me again, that was all. No mention of going through Germany. Some weeks later he told me he would never have suggested that route as it seemed quite impossible.

My final refusal made all the rest decide against Germany, even those who seemed in favour of it in the first place. But Proche and Nina were still adamant, and took the next goods train across the German frontier. They laughed scornfully at our fears.

Meanwhile, I had booked our tickets and the next night we set off on our long journey. Julie, Hélène and Katia were to accompany us.

... ... ...

Geneva. Paris. Then London at last! Here we had to wait for the next boat and abide our turn with the other refugees. There were far too many for the first mail-boat and others sailed very seldom owing to the menace of German submarines.

So until the next boat was due we had to be boarded out in various lodging-houses, dingy, characterless places with the same landlady and the same roast beef every evening.

After waiting three weeks we heard that a packet-boat would leave Aberdeen in a few days. Which of us were to sail in this boat or wait indefinitely until another arrived? It was a difficult question and we decided to draw lots. Those people to be drawn first would sail in this boat—the remainder must wait. My daughter Ariane, being the youngest, was asked to draw out the slips. We were all on tenterhooks as we handed in our bits of paper! Someone jumbled them up together, then Ariane stepped forward with a determined little face and plunged her hand in. By a stroke of luck she drew out our numbers and those of Hélène, Katia and Julie—we had entered all our names on one slip as we didn’t want to travel separately. And so here we were, among the very first to be chosen! To this day I’ve never understood how it happened.

“I knew I’d get them,” cried Ariane delightedly.

“I wished that we’d go first and somehow the right one just fell into my hand! Isn’t it splendid, Mother?”

“Yes, darling, but don’t forget all about the others—they’ve still got to wait,” I said, trying not to appear too selfish.

So the following day we left for Scotland.

When we arrived our boat was already getting up steam—she sailed that same evening, showing no lights and escorted out by a British torpedo boat. There was little comfort on board. The cabins were dirty and unventilated, and the food very scarce. We ourselves were so overcrowded that most of us had to sleep on the floor, packed tight like sardines.

There was only one scare during the voyage. We were almost half-way across when a periscope was sighted on the water. Of course, this started a panic. People rushed about in lifebelts, crying hysterically for the boats to be lowered—everyone felt certain our boat would be shelled. Even the officers looked anxious and gave an order to stand by the lifeboats. One frantic American offered some Estonian two hundred dollars in exchange for the life-jacket he happened to possess. The Estonian hesitated—fear and greed filled
his mind. Which would be uppermost? In the end, neither! He didn't decide until we were nearing land and by then the American felt safe enough without his life-jacket. Two hundred dollars! The Estonian cursed himself for being a tardy fool and sulked for the rest of the voyage.

CHAPTER VII

Beloostrov, the Russian frontier. We were there at last! The express slowed down with a screaming of brakes. I peered out, anxious to absorb every detail of the new Russian scene.

The platform was surging with people, some peasants, some refugees like ourselves. Several Kronstadt sailors raced up and down gesticulating. Everyone babbled and got in each other's way. Luggage and cattle and odd bits of furniture were dragged in and out the station quite indiscriminately. Everything was in great disorder and no one worried very much so long as they could shriek and push along with the rest!

"Don't go on. There's been a lot of rioting in Petersburg," advised one old peasant.

"Yes, a revolt against the Provisional Government. . . ."

"They're well armed too, and they've killed God knows how many! It's not safe. . . . I'd stay back here for a while." And the speaker proceeded to describe the killing in lurid details.

I turned away and wondered how much had really happened. The people in our carriage were talking in the same agitated strain. Suddenly there was the sound of cheering. People pointed at me and flung their caps in the air.

"They're cheering you," cried Hélène. "Those sailors have found out you're Tchernoff's wife. You'll have to acknowledge them, go on!"

I was pushed on to the platform amid further cheers. People crowded round, all trying to shake my hand.

"There's our Minister's wife, give her three cheers,

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boys. Hip, hip, hoorah. And Tchernoff too—he's a good comrade and a true Socialist if ever there was one! Come now—hip, hip, hoorah!” bawled a Kronstadt sailor at the top of his voice.

“Yes, he's true to the cause, he won't desert us like the others. Pah, they're only capitalists, they're not worth trusting. . . ."

"Here's best of luck to our comrade—Victor Tchernoff! Yes, and to his wife—hoorah! And to his kids—hoorah!"

The train was moving. I closed my eyes wearily and leant back against the cushions. Victor's popularity had been very overwhelming——! I felt quite sick with excitement. If only we'd arrive so that I could see for myself what had happened! But the journey seemed endless. There were continual hold-ups. Twice our coach was shunted on to a side-line, twice we had to change trains altogether and wait for another connection. Three hours, four hours late. More delay and confusion. Would we never arrive?

It was ten o'clock at night when we eventually steamed into the giant station—Petersburg at last! The train slowed down, doors were wrenched open and we all sprang out excitedly. Each clamoured for the latest news. Each wanted to feel the "revolution" deep down, right in his very bones.

I forgot all about children and luggage—I became just part of that crowd, surging eagerly towards the exit door. Strange hands were thrust in mine, friendly and admiring like those others at the frontier station.

Then I saw Victor, my own husband—standing close by. He was craning his head anxiously above the crowd—he hadn't seen me yet!

"Vicky, darling! Well, we're all safe and sound. Though I thought we'd never get here—have you been waiting hours?"

Victor swung round on his heels. "Olga! Why, I'd given up hope of ever finding you in this crush! My darling, how are you all and where are the kids?" he asked hoarsely.
“Hélène’s minding them, they’ll be along in a minute, I expect.”

Sure enough, Hélène appeared that instant, complete with luggage, children and tickets. Whereupon we all clambered into one taxi and drove off to our rooms.

“Why are you so hoarse, dear?”

“Too many speeches! We’ve had a lot of open-air meetings. I’ve lost my voice for the moment,” he croaked, indicating his throat with one hand. “The Bolschies tried a coup d’état last week—nothing happened though. Since then, there’s been a lot of fighting. The Reactionaries and the Extreme Left are against us; but don’t worry, we’ll win through somehow. At any rate the masses are on our side.” He paused breathlessly. “I’m not supposed to talk much—my throat’s burning!”

“That’s all right, we’re quite happy looking at everything. You can tell me the news later—Ariane, d’you see that palace in the trees? That’s where we’re going. Isn’t it lovely?”

“Oh, Mamma, is it a real palace?” cried Ariane, clapping her hands delightedly.

Our cab stopped and we found ourselves beneath a vast marble portico—it was the palace of the Grand-Duke Audrey Vladimirovitch. Ariane seized hold of my hand.

“Just look at those bears! Are they alive, Mamma?”

Two ferocious black bears, standing erect on their hind legs with paws outstretched, guarded the inner door. However, they were only stuffed and obviously relics of the Grand-Duke’s hunting days.

The apartment allotted us seemed very luxurious, but considerably less ornate and grandiose than most rooms in the palace. I believe it was originally kept for the Grand-Duke’s own guests.

Victor opened the large French windows and let me on to the balcony. It was a clear night and the purple
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dawn already loomed over the horizon. Below us lay the river Neva and the sleeping town shrouded in silver mist. It was all so unreal. The cobbled streets with their granite buildings and majestic open squares seemed almost diaphanous in this strange light... I felt this mysterious, silent city might suddenly vanish, as though in a dream.

Far away sparkled the golden dome of the Peter Paul prison, and insistent memories at once flooded my mind. I thought of all those poor devils who never felt the sun, who were starved and half-mad, yet who had come back to life with the Revolution. What a changed world it must seem to them!

Victor had seen my fixed expression:

"Isn't that fortress just like some phantom of the past? They've released all the prisoners and now the dungeons are flung open to the public—just as something of historical interest!"

Yes, I repeated to myself: A grim symbol of past horror, a mere phantom in the present turbulent world. What else would the Revolution bring? Maybe amnesty and new hope, but months of hardship and violence besides! Now Russia's future depended on the faith of her people... 

CHAPTER VIII

PETERSBURG, where I spent all my student years, seemed strange and unfamiliar. Its outward character and appearance had changed very much since my youth.

It wasn't so much the war-stricken atmosphere that one had sensed in Paris, but rather the strange aspect of a town suddenly invaded by millions of exiles and peasants from all over Russia. Moscow, in 1812, then occupied by Napoleon's army, must have had the same foreign atmosphere, the same dangers, and hostile, furtive faces.

One saw nothing but khaki uniforms or sailor's serge. Everywhere one met armed soldiers carrying enormous kitbags. Alternately, in the main streets or public buildings one might suddenly come across straggling processions of peasants who had just arrived from some outlying village.

So this grey, singing crowd, which thronged the streets, avenues and squares, cast a strange cloak on the once-renowned capital.

For despite the Revolution, soldiers and peasants still seemed incongruous in Petersburg's majestic thoroughfares. Whence they had come and where Fate would yet lead them, no one knew! They were uncontrollable in their thousands. They were just part of the surging mass being swept towards an unknown destiny.

After a time I found I could distinguish the different types. Those in ragged uniforms, with their kitbags and tired, vacant faces had obviously come back from the Front. Others carried nothing but their revolvers and patrolled the footways with a confident, almost
menacing air. They were the civil guard who had deserted to the rebels and greatly helped them to victory.

I saw nothing but mistrustful looks, dark and expectant faces waiting for the crisis. I felt the secret whisperings about me—and the feverish tension in the air...just a lull before the approaching storm. Yes, I felt like some stranger in a completely homogeneous milieu. This was another side of the Revolution! Not the idealistic, but the hard bitter side of reality.

Yes, such thoughts filled my mind as I strode down towards the Nicolaivsky station. Here, there was a similar scene. Livestock, luggage and goodness knows what, were scattered about everywhere. Peasants, en famille, lay asleep on the ground or propped up against their goods and chattels. No one paid them any attention except to tread on them occasionally, which they didn't seem to mind.

"They're all waiting for trains," explained one soldier. "Sometimes they get stuck here for days 'cos the bloomin' trains are so full. And it's the same everywhere, all down the line—you can't get a seat for love nor money. Half of them are trying to get home, others have come here with a grievance and the rest just don't know what they are trying to do. This Revolution's turned everything crazy seems to me."

He shook his head with a puzzled air. "But my word, you should see the scramble when a train does arrive! Why, it's an absolute riot!"

What he called a riot was really the migration and general exodus caused by the Revolution. It was the obstinate march towards an ideal which already seemed within their reach. And at last I understood the reason for their sour, mistrustful looks. It was just the hatred of anything which might delay their arrival in the Promised Land. To these people the Revolution meant a new life, equality, freedom, enough bread for their children, and having grasped its full significance they were determined to attain these ends.
CHAPTER IX

It was late afternoon, and having eaten nothing since breakfast I began to feel very famished. All the restaurants were closed and I had almost given up hope of a meal when I discerned a little café in one of the squares where they served tea and snacks. I ordered zaghouri and an omelette. The place was singularly depressing with its gloomy-eyed waiters and rows of dirty, deserted little tables.

I felt a sudden desire to run away from it all and not wait for my omelette. Then I heard my name called and saw Nicholas Ivanovitch standing in front of me. It was Hélène’s husband.

Although we hadn’t met since 1914 he was comparatively unchanged. I missed his dreamy, vacant expression which Hélène had always loved. Being rather nervous, and impressionable, she used to say that his strange somnolence rested her mind.

But to-day Nicholas Ivanovitch had a different air. He was obviously troubled and had lost his usual self-confidence.

“Don’t you know where Hélène is?” he asked quickly.

“Why no, I naturally thought she was with you. I haven’t seen her since we arrived.”

“Oh, my God, then I am in a mess!”

“Whatever’s happened?” I cried, feeling quite mystified as he slumped down beside me with his head in his hands. Then he explained that Hélène had been to his flat the previous night.

“I wasn’t expecting her and I’d already . . . but it’s no use, you won’t understand any more than she did!” He broke off abruptly.

And I still couldn’t guess what “disaster” had befallen them. I begged him to continue.

“Well, it was like this. You’ll never believe me, but I swear it wasn’t my fault. . . . You see, I’d had an affair with another girl. Oh, nothing serious! Just someone I met in a café—we were lonely and it seemed sort of natural somehow. Afterwards she said she was destitute and had lost her job through staying with me. Anyway, she ensconced herself in the flat and simply refused to budge. Of course, I loathed the sight of her by then and told her so, but she didn’t care. She played at being Madame Ivanovitch with the servants! Well, what was I to do? What could a fella do. I couldn’t turn her out like a common little tart!”

His mournful eyes and troubled expression made him very pitiful. Nevertheless I couldn’t help smiling at the thought of this gauche young intellectual being involved with an ordinary adventuress. It seemed such a curious situation and he was certainly unable to cope with it.

“Ah, you’re laughing at me. I knew you would. Anyway, I’d decided to go to Moscow to-day and wait for Hélène there. If only I’d known when she was arriving this awful business wouldn’t have happened! Well, to cut a long story short, she did come late last night when we’d both gone to bed. . . .” Nicholas Ivanovitch paused for breath.

“Yes, and what then?” I asked.

“The maid told her we were in bed—of course, she’s an absolute half-wit!—‘Oh, so my mother-in-law’s staying here?’ Hélène apparently said. ‘No, only Madame Ivanovitch and the master,’ retorted the maid, and of course then the fat was in the fire. Mind you, I never heard the bell ring, so I didn’t know she was there till this imbecile came in to explain. Oh, I could kill myself for letting that happen. What will she think of me now?’ he wailed. ‘Of course, I leapt out and tore down to the street, calling her to stop, but there was no sign of her anywhere. Where d’you think she can have gone?’

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“It’s difficult to say. Did she leave no message?”
“None at all. But I felt so certain she’d be with you. Oh, God, I am a cad... What can have happened! She’s probably crying her eyes out, poor darling! Olga, you must help me find her.” Nicholas wrung his hands and looked at me pleadingly as though I could suddenly produce his lost wife out of nowhere.
“What about the other girl?”
“Oh! I’ve finished with her for good. We had a quarrel that night and I kicked her out!”

As I suspected, when things came to a crisis she was only too willing to make herself scarce! However, I resolved not to tell Nicholas this as it would have upset him further.

The great thing was to try and find Hélène, but how? She had been devoted to her husband. When the Revolution was first announced I shall never forget her joy and pleasure at the thought of seeing him again. But she was a nervous, temperamental creature and might quite likely do something desperate in her misery.

CHAPTER X

THE Grand-Duke’s palace was the very centre of revolutionary activities. In fact, the Petersburg Council held most of their meetings in these tapestried salons. This Council, which had only recently installed itself here, was the Central Committee of the Revolutionary-Socialist Party. All agricultural, military and domestic problems were brought before this Committee, who then had to find a solution for them. It usually meant publishing a decree which would temporarily satisfy the workers.

There was a perpetual bustle and clamour up and down the long corridors. Some rooms were reserved for delegations from the provinces, others for interviewing Party-members who wanted directions; volunteers and speakers for their street meetings.

Diego Navoda, the Party organ, also had its offices in the palace, which brought a further stream of poets, journalists and staff correspondents.

Each morning we were called punctually at six, and by a quarter to seven my husband was down in the reception-room starting to interview people.

Peasants, soldiers and artisans, all were determined to see the Minister of Agriculture personally. It was the secretary’s job to note down their individual complaints and decide whose demands were important enough for a personal interview. This in itself was a very delicate matter, as everyone had similar grievances, yet my poor husband couldn’t possibly see all the hundreds of people queued up outside his office.
One day, when the secretary was out, I offered to take her place for the time being.

"I want the Minister to see I'm given back my estate. It's my lawful inherited property and now these brutes have taken it. Oh, what can a poor widow do, alone and destitute in the world?" cried one woman, her chest heaving beneath the black lace.

"I'm afraid the Minister can't help you. The Agrarian Councils are supposed to settle these disputes."

"Pah, I think nothing of your rotten Councils. I'd never agree to their decisions. No, I want to see the Minister himself and persuade him to get my land back. If he refuses... well, he'd better watch out. I'll get my revenge somehow, just you wait and see!" she concluded in a menacing tone.

A younger woman, a fruit-seller from the suburbs, whose black head-awl almost hid her features, stepped forward with her petition. On a slip of paper was written: "An urgent, confidential matter."

It's hopeless trying to reason with an obstinate woman, so we gave her an interview.

"What is it you want to see me about?" asked Victor.

"My divorce. My husband's a brute."

"But, citizen, the person you want is a solicitor. I'm only the Minister of Agriculture."

"No, this is the Revolution and it's the Ministers themselves who ought to defend us poor, oppressed women. I tell you, my husband's a tyrant. He's a rogue, a beast."

Next came a retired army officer, looking very nervous and ill at ease in this crowd of poor people.

"I've got a special scheme I want to show the Minister."

"Is it to do with agricultural planning?" I asked, thinking that perhaps he really had got a genuine idea up his sleeve.

"No, of course not. Whatever d'you take me for? I'm not interested in agriculture," he said tersely.

"Well, what is it then?"

"It's a psychological approach to the Revolution. You see, what one needs is..."

"Are you sure it's the Minister of Agriculture you want to see?" I broke in hurriedly, before he could expand some useless theory.

"Yes, quite sure. You see, none of the other Ministers would accept."

With great difficulty I at last persuaded him to leave his plan in my hands, promising to pass it on to the Minister directly he was free.

Besides this dilettante kind of visitor, Victor had to interview numerous peasant delegations from the provinces. They used to complain bitterly of present conditions on the land. The Peasants' Congress had been set up to divide the land equally among the people so that in principle private estates were already abolished. In actual fact the peasants couldn't acquire the land until the Constitutional Assembly had passed a resolution.

But now the peasants were getting impatient of promises—and in some districts they had seized the land by force. Something obviously had to be done, and done quickly. With the harvest season approaching there was bound to be trouble between themselves and the big landowners.

"We can't wait any longer. If they don't give us legal rights we'll take our land by force."

One old peasant with a shrunken, bearded face and mistrustful eyes began to struggle towards us. He greeted Victor ceremoniously and then was silent again. Then he made another bow and began to speak:

"We know this Provisional Government intends to help the peasants, and we're relying on you as our Minister of Agriculture. We've all read your circular about refusing further transactions and we've done as requested. But now our landlords have shown us an order from the Minister of Justice which cancels your decree. And as you both belong to the same government we don't know whose word counts most!"
Naturally, we’re anxious to take your instructions, but our landlords will only recognise that order from the Minister of Justice. Well, what’s to be done about it?” he demanded with a malicious half-triumphant look in his eyes.

“I’m afraid the final solution rests with the Council, and with them alone. They’re the only people who can make this decree law,” replied Victor, becoming very red and embarrassed.

It was such an awkward situation and these people were obviously right up to a point. What they didn’t understand were the intricacies of Party Politics (even in a Revolution!) and the necessity of coalescing wherever possible, with the bourgeois and upper classes. So we tried now to persuade them to await the Council’s decision.

“You needn’t be afraid of their decision, because the majority are your own representatives, so that it’ll really be you peasants who are deciding this for yourselves. Meanwhile, local committees in each village must decide on farming prices and land dues, etc.”

Victor knew how to talk to peasants. He used clear simple phrases which everyone could understand. The delegates were listening attentively and I think in the end he managed to convince them.

“Oh, yes, I get your meaning,” said one man truculently. “You fellows defending our interests are in a darned tight squeeze at the moment—you’re powerless. Well, you can tell the other lot that we’ve already claimed the land. The land’s ours now, d’you hear that? If any bloomin’ landlord tries to stop us we’ll set light to the fields!”

So they returned once more to their villages, more or less satisfied for the time being. Although who knew for how long? And even if these delegates felt satisfied, would they be able to reassure the great mass of peasants, already exasperated by this long period of waiting? That, only time could show.

Victor mopped his forehead, he was sweating all over.
CHAPTER XI

EACH afternoon, Victor used to go off to the Cabinet Meeting.

The situation was critical. On July 19th the offensive at the Rumanian Front had been an utter catastrophe. Despite earnest speeches from the Government officials, the regiments retreated en masse after the first attack, and deserted in large numbers.

Then the officers spent whole nights trying to convince their men that a German victory would mean the end of liberty and the new Republic. But the Germans had already sent provisions and cigarettes and a message saying they wished to fraternise with our soldiers. This was too much for them and the men hesitated no longer: “The bourgeois are trying to trick us, that’s all. The Germans are like us, they don’t want to fight any more than we do!”

On July 25th Victor came home looking very haggard and overwrought. There had been a long session that night.

“Anything the matter?” I asked casually.

“Yes, they’ve restored the death penalty in military zones!” he whispered in a hoarse voice.

His news came as a thunderbolt.

“The death penalty? Good God, but didn’t you protest? I thought you were always so against it.”

“I am, but as we’re going on with this bloody war, we’ve got to control the men at all costs.”

That was logic, I realised. But I also realised that nothing could now save the Government’s prestige and authority.

Now, as I write these lines, after years of ruthless civil war, after the Bolsheviks have themselves restored the death penalty, I realise how very puerile our scruples must have seemed. In those days intellectuals and Socialists had precisely the same outlook. A respect for human life was part of their beliefs, and they considered the death penalty inadmissible in any circumstances whatsoever.
CHAPTER XII

THE Socialist Party was holding a general meeting in one of the larger salons.

The speeches had just started when we arrived. On the agenda was the outlined policy of a group called “Left-Wing Revolutionary-Socialists,” who had split with the official Party. They disapproved of the Council’s scheme for a coalition with bourgeoisie.

This Left-Wing Group was crowded together in one corner of the room. Their supporters weren’t numerous, but they included some of the younger and more active members. Moreover, they were united and enthusiastic, which could not be said of the official rank and file.

Their leader was our friend Boris and he smiled at us defiantly. In the centre of their group sat a young girl whom they all seemed to respect and admire. She had a pale face and fine delicate features. On her head she wore a white shawl, knotted beneath her chin in the usual peasant style.

It was Marie Spiridonova, a well-known terrorist who had killed the Governor of Tambor back in 1906. This man had brutally ordered hundreds of peasants to be shot after their conflict with certain big landowners. So Marie Spiridonova, then aged eighteen and already a strong Socialist, went and killed him with her revolver.

She was arrested and the Tribunal sentenced her to death for this outrage. However, there was such public feeling over the trial that her sentence was finally commuted to life imprisonment. Eleven years later, when the Revolution came, she was released along with the rest.

Marie Spiridonova got up on the platform to speak. She attacked the Party’s leaders violently, and accused the Central Council of being unable to carry out their original programme. At the present moment, she maintained, they were only supporting bourgeoisie interests and neglecting those of the peasants. Her speech grew more and more vehement.

“What’s more,” she cried, raising her voice, “you condemn the Bolsheviks, who are really good Socialists like yourselves . . . it’s almost impossible to imagine such things happening during a revolution when support is needed on all sides. And in my opinion it’s nothing short of a crime!”

There were murmurs of assent from the rest of the group.

“You call yourselves Socialists, yet it’s you who’ve restored the death penalty which is against all Party principles. It’s an everlasting disgrace to the Socialist Party!”

“Yes, dishonour and shame!” echoed Boris and his fellow-supporters. Then angry voices and cries of abuse from the rest of them.

The President called for order, but in vain. Marie Spiridonova began to talk of Egor Sasonoff, who had been in prison with her at Zeranto. He lived in the adjoining men’s quarters and they used to correspond frequently.

Egor Sasonoff, a great revolutionary, had committed suicide in prison as a protest against the humiliating and inhuman treatment of political prisoners.

Since his death he had become an almost legendary figure in the Socialist Party.

Marie Spiridonova continued—she seemed transported with rage, almost hysterical in fact.

“If he were here now he would feel as I do. He would say to you all: ‘You’re deserting the People’s cause!’”

Having finished she sat down pale and trembling, too upset even to notice the tumult her speech had
aroused. The majority felt indignant, but her Left-Wing Group applauded feverishly—she was their star speaker. Even Boris was cheering at the top of his voice.

I caught sight of Proche talking animatedly with the rest of his group. Then our gaze met and he turned away his head with supreme disdain. Since that parting in Switzerland our friendship had never been the same.

Now it was Victor’s turn to speak. As he got on to the platform he seemed outwardly quite calm, although I could tell how nervous he really felt from his peculiar strained voice. He was very reserved in his statements. Marie Spiridonova had made some grave accusations and as spokesman of the official Party he now had to try and justify the Council’s action. I know this caused him some effort, because he, like many others, felt at variance with the Party’s present tactics. I think his own individual policy was more Left-Wing as far as emergency decrees were concerned. He hated this continual delay and inefficiency and futile wrangling among the Council members. He realised that owing to this the Government were rapidly losing their hold on the people. In a revolution no one’s going to trust your promises, not unless they’re put into action!

Although he profoundly disagreed with this coalition scheme, it had been accepted by the majority, and he felt bound to do the same. As a well-disciplined Party member he had no alternative but to follow the official policy.

Now he indignantly denied Marie Spiridonova’s accusations.

“We may not all hold the same views, but that’s no reason to make false libellous statements about the Party,” he said sharply, looking towards her group.

He began describing Bolshevik tactics and their fanatical demagogy. Bolshevikism, he announced, was Russia’s greatest menace.

“As for you people who want to join forces with them,
CHAPTER XIII

TRIBUNES had been erected on the spot where the Emperor used to review his troops. They were decorated in red and hung with garlands; over them flew scarlet flags with emblazoned gold inscriptions.

The band struck up a march and its blaring brass instruments flashed in the sunlight. Our car moved slowly through the cheering crowds. There was wild applause as Victor ascended the tribune steps, very moved but trying nevertheless to retain his official dignity. His warm expressive voice resounded in the silence which followed. They were quiet and attentive. But as he spoke of the Bolshevik riots, accusing them of treason against the new republic and their newly-born liberty, the crowd which a few days before had cheered these very same Bolshevik leaders, now seethed with indignation. I watched their heads move to the rhythm of his words, their lips first smiling, then closed together angrily. There they were at his feet, a subdued ocean seething with the emotions he had aroused, muttering, gesticulating, throwing up waves of enthusiasm, higher and higher, until the culminating point was reached.

"... You are the chosen. You people have seen the dawning of liberty; it is your duty to defend it. ..."

They began shouting hysterically, carried away by his words. I took Ariane's hand and saw she was trembling. All eyes were on us. We were caught up by the crowd and dragged towards the tribune. Someone cried out: "Tchernoff's daughter is there!"

They held out their arms and lifted her up, passing her from hand to hand over their heads. She was wearing a red dress which ballooned in the wind, and with her fair curls flying loose, she looked just like a flag as she was handed up to the tribune. They put her down carefully beside her father, and the crowd stood on one side to let me pass. Ariane had turned pale, her mouth was drawn together. But whether it was a smile or tears she was trying to hold back I could not see. I could guess, however, that for all her eight years she was filled with happiness, which she was trying to hide, in order to be worthy of this touching scene. She tried very hard to remain serious and collected.

At the end of his speech Victor was carried to our car through madly cheering crowds, with the band playing a triumphant revolutionary hymn. We left the place in a tumult!

I felt both wildly exhilarated and quite exhausted with emotion. Ariane, sitting beside us, no longer attempted to conceal her delight.

"Why did they throw Papa into the air when they were carrying him?" she asked. "They had such red faces and such large mouths, and they shouted so that I was quite afraid. But that was only to show they were happy, wasn't it?"

"Yes, darling."

I, too, was happy for Ariane's sake. I knew that she would never forget that day. All the same, I understood her feeling of suspicion and fear only too well, for I myself was neither reassured nor absolutely happy. Now at last I was beginning to understand these people. That same enthusiastic crowd which had just given my husband such an overwhelming ovation would become mistrustful and incredulous again once they had dispersed. The troubles and anxieties of their poor disorderly lives would get the upper hand once more. They would be just as easily excited by an appeal from the other Party. Yes, our Party chiefs had triumphed for the moment, but their success was a fragile one.
WAS asked to speak at a factory which had been put out of work by the Revolution. The huge ovens were out, and the streams of incandescent metals had hardened. The electric cranes rested idle in mid-air, silent and menacing, their chains hung down listlessly, their wagons were empty, their machines lifeless, no longer giving one that impression of superhuman strength, even greater than that of a factory working at full speed. Gathering in their shadows, one could see the black dwarfs who had the power to make these giants work again, to send the boiling metal circulating through their veins.

These all-powerful beings came in crowds to hear me speak. In all their eyes I saw the same look of mocking indulgence, friendly and familiar, directed against my double frailty in being a woman and yet a representative of the "bourgeoisie." But as an educated person I inspired them with respect and confidence. They felt a kind of satisfaction that the brains and learning of our class should now be dedicated to the service of the people.

They sat down in front of me, hunched up on blocks of metal, on stray pieces of iron and steel, destined for I knew not what. They stared at me exactingly and imperiously, compelling me to tell them all, determined to hear the truth from me, to force me into obedience, to make me enlighten them, and yet to guide them according to their will and their ideas.

They were all eyes, rows and rows of them, lighting up like lights in an unknown town, watchful and attentive, mocking yet kindly. We were like two different worlds, totally unknown to one another, each
in possession of something bewildering and uncomfortable to the other.

The improvised platform was made of planks, supported by barrows turned upside-down. The moment I got up I ceased to be aware of those staring lights. They faded out and a thick mist separated me from them. I knew I must free this town from such a fog if my appeal was to succeed. In front of me lay a monster of steel and flesh, and I felt at that moment the indissoluble bond between man and machine. Both slaves, both driven by the same force, terrifying, invincible, one of the powers behind the Revolution, pushing it forward. There, surrounded by the pathetic silence of idle machines, I suddenly caught sight of the lever with which the Bolsheviks had roused up the people—a very formidable lever in its dual entity! What of the Bolshies—do they merely promise material gain? That wouldn't be enough to win the people's allegiance. No. Materialists above all else, they have overthrown religion, but in their place they have set up another religion, placed other gods on their altars, dug down to the very source of popular enthusiasm, idealised its aspirations, sanctified its instincts, made of their simple and common words a doctrine which can respond to the ever-present need of the people for the great and eternal truths.

But how was I to span the precipice which separated us? I closed my eyes, seized with dismay and horror, seeing myself at the edge of a deep abyss which was about to engulf me.

I had been asked to talk about the programme of our Party and its tactics under the old régime. It was a subject in which I believed from the bottom of my heart, and my words flowed easily, almost without my knowledge. I finished my lecture by telling them about our terrorists, Sasonoff, Kalaeff, and many others who killed and gave their own lives in exchange; and of those heroic women who, in their early youth, devoted themselves to the cause of the Revolution. I quoted Galia Benedictova, who said: "Fate has been
too generous to me. I feel I must give some of my great happiness to the oppressed!"

The audience had been won over. Now, there was only one united force sitting in front of me, alive and enthusiastic, drawn to me by invisible bonds.

When I had finished they asked me questions, both oral and written. Written on dirty creased slips of paper, and scarcely legible, were such remarks as these:

"Bravo, comrade, even though you are a revolutionary Socialist, that's to say a traitor, you've dealt with your question fair enough!"

_We have faith in your Party. Stick to the helm!_—(Signed) _An old sailor._

"Why don't the Socialist Ministers sweep these _bourgeois_ out of the Ministry?"

Some of them were insults, from the Bolsheviks, no doubt.

"Your Party has betrayed the people's cause!"

"When will you stop stuffing the workers' heads with your nonsense. We have had enough of it..."

The unknown town was lit up at last. It had become a familiar place, and I was no longer alone.

But the car was already waiting to take me to another factory. I had to take leave of my new friends. A comrade got in beside me. It was his duty to tell me, as we went along, what the subject of my next lecture was to be.

At last we came, in the clear white night, to the bright quay of the Neva, then to the silent square where Peter the Great rides his rearing charger proudly, and shows old Russia a new path into the future, into the unknown. Was he sure that the way of the future would pass by him?

I was taken towards the suburbs again, along twisting humpy roads, to those dark places which had become the axis of the Imperial city....

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CHAPTER XV

SEVERAL times I actually heard Kerensky—the Revolution's first hero, at public meetings. He would electrify the crowds and leave them quite spellbound. Everyone felt a strange elation after one of his speeches. Although exactly why, no one ever knew. Probably it was his manner more than the actual speech itself.

He was a clever speaker. His words came easily and convincingly. His gestures were brusque and theatrical. He would pace up and down the platform, or pause suddenly and stare at someone with his vacant eyes. Inspired by his own fugitive visions he seemed to awaken a new faith in the attentive eager crowd.

His arguments, anecdotes and persuasion, likewise his dominating belief, all seemed to touch the crowd's imagination. He managed to create a kind of ecstatic atmosphere which few could resist.

Kerensky's power was almost hypnotic. He could rouse people from inertia or even hostility to a wild, delirious enthusiasm. Yet, strangely enough, this power seemed ephemeral...it did not last. After he had gone their enthusiasm waned like a vanishing dream.

This was Kerensky! The man who had stirred up Russia and one of those who founded the Provisional Government at a time of great stress.

Despite these successes Kerensky failed desperately at the Front. He tried to win over the Russian Army by rousing their patriotic feelings. What more glorious death than to die for one's country! Everyone can recall the immortal words of that Italian patriot, Garibaldi:
"I want you to steel yourselves against treachery and hardships. You may starve or fall sick, you may be wounded, perhaps even killed, and you may be defeated. But at least you will know you have served your country."

At that time the "Fatherland" meant something real and fundamental to Italians—it was something in your very bones—and no sacrifice seemed too large.

Now Kerensky had made the same appeal, but without much success. He asked them to sacrifice their lives for Russia. But for which Russia? The old régime was dead, hated and cast off by the masses. The new régime was barely formed and had yet to impress itself on the spirit of the people.

In fact, what was Russia for the time being? For Milioukoff and the Central Party it signified a bourgeois régime such as they had long dreamt of.

For industrialists and big landowners it meant a democratic régime which they were prepared to accept so long as it safeguarded their interests, already so severely crippled by the War.

For the petit-bourgeois the new régime meant liberty and order. For the peasants it meant that Russia's wide-open spaces would belong to all those who worked on the land.

Such ideas were firmly embedded in the people's minds . . . this was the new Russia. But beyond this point no one knew quite what to expect! Except, of course, that the new régime wouldn't have anything in common with the old.

In which case, the old Tzarist patriotism wasn't likely to arouse enthusiasm any longer. The War had started in the Tzar's régime, and now anyone asked to go on fighting would argue that it was just a capitalist enterprise and of no interest to the new Russia.

As I have said, Kerensky addressing the masses seemed like one inspired. His ardent patriotism was infectious, he could force people to enthuse with him. Class hatred and mistrust were swept aside for the moment.
But once the hypnotism had passed, and they were alone again, discussing his speech among themselves, their faces became troubled and hostile. For one moment he had made them believe they had a common purpose, but in reality their aims were very far apart.
CHAPTER XVI

SOME strange force propelled me through the streets, whither I could not tell. I felt chiefly concerned with the crowds and their momentary pulsations...they were all plodding along together like pieces in one giant kaleidoscope.

The town itself seemed drab and dismal in spite of the crowds and the Staff cars filled with armed soldiers which bore through the streets.

Passers-by looked like ghosts with their pinched faces and ragged grey clothes.

There was a long queue in front of the baker’s. Here the housewives gossiped and grumbled bitterly to each other. Their children played around on the kerb. “Eh, things go from bad to worse. Heaven help us when the snow comes!” said someone meaningly.

Outside the dairy there was another queue.

An old market-woman, huddled up in her black fringed shawl, announced that there would be a milk shortage this season because the cows refused to supply any more.

“It’s the Antichrist!” she whispered in an awed voice.

I joined the milk queue, thus hoping to hear more.

“Yes, he was born in the neighbouring village, quite close to us,” she continued eagerly. “My cousin’s the midwife over there and she thought this kid was a queer ‘un when they first took it from the mother. Shall I tell you why? He had a mark on his left shoulder, like a mouse’s paw. They say that’s his sign!”

“A mouse’s paw, what rubbish! That’s because his mother felt scared of mice while she was pregnant. Why, that doesn’t prove anything! And, anyway, who knows he’s got such a mark?” asked one young wife rather sceptically.

“My cousin does, of course. But that’s not all. You should just see the way he grows! They say he gets a year older each day...at a week old he had all his teeth. Now he’s five weeks old, that is to say thirty-five, and they’re all wondering...”

An old sailor who had been listening to the story interrupted her:

“Listen, Mother, no one believes this crazy talk of yours—it’s only women’s gossip, I’ll be bound!”

“Speak for yourself! If you don’t hold with it, there’s no need for you to listen. And I may be a mother, but I’m not yours, so don’t you go ‘mothering’ me!”

“The Antichrist,” sneered the sailor. “Pah, I never heard such rot!”

“Shut up, you old fool! Who asked you to speak, anyway?”

“Yes, take no notice of him.”

“Tell us some more...go on now,” chorused several other women.

Whereupon they started mocking the old man, jeering at his dishevelled sailor’s rig-out, his bell-bottomed trousers, and slanting beret pulled down over one ear.

In return he swore blindly and spat in their faces. But this female abuse proved too much for him and he finally had to back his way out of the crowd.

The market-woman, still beside herself with rage, muttered like an indignant old hen. She caught sight of me and my calm, somewhat amused, expression seemed to annoy her.

“As for you, my beauty”—she began addressing me—“I suppose you carry your milk in your hands, eh! Fancy standing in a queue with nothing to put your milk in—what d’you think of that, comrades?”

Everyone turned towards me.
“But it’s butter I want, not milk,” I said, trying hard to remain collected.

“Butter? Ha, ha, ha, that’s a joke! Why, citizen, there’s no butter here . . . they only sell milk!”

So I retired in a state of confusion, without, alas, hearing the end of her “Antichrist” story.

Rather disgruntled by their coarse jests I walked on till I came upon a large square. A large crowd were gathered in one corner, their faces raised towards a first floor balcony, where I could perceive the figure of a man gesticulating. He was a solidly built man and had a clear compelling voice, his sentences were mostly punctuated by dramatic gestures with his right hand.

“These traitors are lying, they’re deceiving you! You’ll never get peace or land while your class enemies are in power. Your worst enemy at the moment is the Provisional Government, they’re only a rotten lot of bourgeoisie Socialists. Turn them out, comrades! Fight for the great Russian proletariat! Fight for a free, classless State!” The speaker ended with an imperative gesture of his right hand, as though he meant to sweep the bourgeoisie out of existence. He turned round and I recognised him at once . . . it was Lenin!

His speech did not merely fire the crowd with a momentary enthusiasm. Its effect was more lasting and profound—altogether different from that of other speakers.

He spoke entirely as an intellectual, never deigning to lower his speech to the crowd’s level. He used complicated Marxist terms which were obviously unknown to this working-class gathering. But, strangely enough, these words produced a magical effect, just as a sacred Latin text is accepted and venerated by simple Catholics, who then interpret it in their own way.

His philosophy seemed so logical in its formidable simplicity. He had rooted his beliefs deep down in the people . . . class hatred. Oh, yes, it was only too obvious!

“Wipe out the past, comrades. You are the Russian proletariat, it’s you who must help build the new world—it’s you who must institute freedom and peace!”

Proletarian justice. This was their new religion, something tangible, something eternal!

Lenin suddenly disappeared before the crowd had time to applaud him. We didn’t see him again. Some of his followers had already hustled him into the waiting car. They weren’t taking any chances.

Then a woman dressed in black got up on the stands and began shouting and gesticulating in an hysterical manner.

“They mean to go on with this war. They want to sacrifice your blood and end the Revolution!”

The crowd, who had remained silent during Lenin’s speech, now gave vent to their rage.

“There’s been too much bloodshed. What we want is peace!”

“Yes, peace, food, and land enough to live on. We Bolschies know what that means. . . .”

“Peace. We want peace at once . . .” yelled the mob.

“Down with the bourgeoisie traitors!” screamed the woman in black.

“Peace! Peace!”

“War’s only a capitalist ramp, anyhow!”

“Yes, let them settle their own bloody game. We won’t, that’s a cert!”

This ill-feeling was yet another sign of the impending eruption.
CHAPTER XVII

We were living in a newly built peasant’s dwelling, an isba which we had rented from friends of Niana, my children’s nurse, who had persuaded us to come to her native village. The food that was needed for the children had become more and more difficult to obtain in Petrograd, so we moved to that little village in the province of Novgorod, forty miles from the nearest railway station.

I was woken each morning by a kind of pastoral symphony. A cock’s crow was the first sound at break of dawn. His solitary note was soon echoed by others, louder and more determined, until it was drowned by the clear song of the birds. This in turn was answered by a sound of lowing from the open stables, by the regular noise of the milk falling into the wooden buckets, or by the voice of the farmer’s wife soothing the cow which she was milking.

I turned round on my mattress of freshly mown hay and closed my eyes. The noises mingled together in confusion, the farmer cracking his whip, the horn calling the scattered flock together. As it grew lighter the noise increased, augmented by the regular beating of wet linen on the river bank, and by the rattling of a chain which drew buckets up from the well. Once more I went to sleep, to the accompaniment of a cock crowing out his joy at being alive.

I was woken up for the second time by Niana’s laughter, as she came to look for us, a baby on each arm. Her hair shone golden in the sun and she was followed by a group of small children. Breakfast was waiting for us. It was served by Niana’s mother, an old woman with a wrinkled and smiling face, who used to spoil us all. The table was covered with a coarse, unbleached linen cloth. There were some delicious-looking fried eggs and hot rolls, with the butter running into the cracks of their brown crusts—also plates of thick cream and cheese, white and so fresh that it was still warm. Compared with Petrograd, where we could only get tinned food and often had to go without bread, this country meal was a real feast.

We went into the forest which was so dense in some places that the sun never penetrates the enormous pine trees... these figured in all manner of rôles in the strange stories Niana used to tell my children. It was an unknown world for them, and I myself had half forgotten that it existed, with all its mysterious noises, the confused murmurs and rustlings and creakings of the wood, the squirrels leaping lightly about, and all the other animal life which goes to make up the life of the northern jungle. Was there really a revolution? Surely it could never disturb the solemn magic of this place. It was late when we returned, our baskets filled with bilberries and mushrooms.

In the evening the men, who were preparing the ground for seed, came back dragging their ploughs. And the women returned, singing, bronzed by the sun, covered with dust and sweat, sickles glistening on their shoulders. The doors opened to receive them; one could see the fires crackling on the hearths and everywhere there was a smell of burning wood, of vegetable soup and of potatoes cooking on the ashes. The neighing of horses being taken to drink, the soft cries of babies being suckled, mingled in the approaching twilight, the flaming lights stranded by the setting sun gradually faded away.

Niana’s family was gathered round the large white wooden table. The room was full of people. Some of the neighbours had come to consult me about their children’s ailments, the teeth they were cutting, their little womanly troubles. Young girls came for advice about the cut of a dress, and showed me pieces of white
linen which they had been weaving during the long winter months, decorated with fine embroidery.

The men asked me questions:
"Have we any cause to worry about our land?"
"When will the vote for the Constitution take place?"
"When will the War be over?"

Those were the three things that worried the country people. Our village was quiet, it had never known the big landlords. Formerly it had rented the land it needed from the State; after the Revolution the ground had been allotted provisionally, and they were now impatiently awaiting the final Agricultural Bill.

On Saturday evening a young peasant, one of the members of our party, came to fetch me in a carriage. The Revolutionary Socialist Committee of some distant village had asked me to come and tell them about the Constitution and the future Agricultural Law. That night, while the horses were being rested, the peasant told me about the situation in his part of the country. It seemed to be rather serious; the peasants were excited because a rumour was being circulated that their land had been secretly sold by their erstwhile landlord to an Englishman and former director of the paper factory.

We left at daybreak, and shaken about in the coach, which did not boast a single spring, travelled along a road full of deep ruts leading to the forest. Our coachman was an artful, ironic and talkative person. He entertained me with many humorous stories of the perpetual struggles between the overseer who had been sacked by the Revolution and the peasants. But as the forest grew wilder, so he became more and more silent, and there were long pauses between each of his stories. The daylight was almost shut out, the tall pines hid the sky from our view, the overwhelming silence of the forest cut short the coachman's tales; finally he relapsed into total silence, and not till several hours later, when we emerged from the forest to follow the hilly road across the plains, did he show any sign of life. The fine fresh grass of the prairies was a brilliant green, was covered by bright moving specks,—women in the Sunday finery going to the next village to join in a parish fair, their dresses of purple, yellow and blue, their fichus of green, red and orange, were reflected in the sun. They were followed by groups of young men, playing folk-tunes on their accordions.

"Ah well, youth doesn't bother about these things," said the coachman. "All the same it isn't what it used to be. There are no longer any handsome boys in the villages, they are all soldiers come back from the front. No more love-making for our young girls, all those boys are wounded or crippled, mad some of them! They're all a bit wrong in the head, as you'll see. It's the same in our village as everywhere else, and they've got the gift of the gab too. It won't lead to any good!" he ended suddenly.

We passed the village where the dance was being held, down a hill, up another, keeping to the edge of a wood, and at last came near to our destination. We passed a beautiful estate, a huge park surrounding a lake in which was reflected a house façaded with white columns, a broad terrace with steps descending on to a stretch of English grass surrounded by old lime trees. The wooden houses were like toys next to this grand mansion which overlooked the village.

Outside the school was a dense mass of people, crowding into the courtyard and the street beyond. They were there to settle the quarrel between the Agrarian Committee, which represented the rights of the peasants, and the new proprietor of the land, who was upholding the former landlord, and claimed for him the harvest gathered by the peasants on his own land. The president of the meeting, a young soldier, was seated at a table. Behind him stood ranks of soldiers, their faces contorted with rage. The meeting proceeded angrily; one of the soldiers, wounded in the shoulder and his left arm amputated, got up to speak.

"We will not tolerate this situation, we shall oppose it with force... Let the strangers get out. You
think you can deceive us again, do you. Well, the War taught us something we shan't forget so quickly. I lost my left arm, but my right hand is still active, and I won't let it go too easily!"

The pastoral symphony was transformed into a fugue.

CHAPTER XVIII

NEXT day I started off on a tour of the neighbouring villages. Everywhere I found the same growing discontent. I was bombarded with questions about the Minister of Agriculture's circular, the counter-order from the Minister of Justice, and the latest War news.

Things came to a head in the very first village I visited. Fired by the soldiers' enthusiasm, the peasants armed themselves with axes, stones and hammers, and made off for the manor house.

An overseer fled just in time as the mob swarmed up the terrace steps. The house was deserted and all its shutters closed. However, they forced open the doors without much difficulty. But overawed by the magnificence of the hall, by the gilt hand-carved furniture, the silence and the half-dark, they held back. There was a moment's hesitation, and then someone smashing a window-pane destroyed the spell.

The mob became mad for destruction... It was a bitter, unfulfilled lust. They tore down the priceless tapestries, smashed all the gilt chairs, destroyed the upholstered plush sofas, the rosewood cabinets and an entire ivory collection, specially brought from India.

Smashing, tearing, ransacking, in a frenzy of destruction, they forced every cupboard, some were full of antique china, and pulled out all their contents. Then they hurled them out of the window, listening eagerly for the crash, as they fell in a thousand pieces.

The women, their eyes shining with greed, snatched up great handfuls of bright jewels, as many as they could hold, jewels already destined for destruction.

Destruction everywhere! Beautiful old dresses,
gleaming silks and fine lace were trailed in the dust. So much for the old life, the mysterious life that had seemed eternal. Now it was trampled into oblivion.

Meanwhile these men had seized hold of the fine parchment-bound volumes, whose leather backs shone with the polish of age. Books in foreign tongues, unknown and mysterious, unfolding knowledge for the benefit of the wealthy. They pulled out the pages and tore up the old prints. Jewelled Venetian mirrors were dragged out on to the balconies and the grand-pianos had got tilted over on to their keyboards.

But the destruction was not yet over. The past still confronted them, vibrating plaintively from the strings of the wrecked pianos. Yes, the past was there all right! It cried out from the strewn wreckage of marble and glass, from every broken fragment that lay scattered on the ground.

Someone with a lighted torch had set the place on fire—flames soon encircled the windows and leapt up greedily towards the roof.

Now they began searching for the overseer and lord of the manor, who were both in hiding. They found one of them crouching in an underground cellar, but the other was nowhere to be seen. Almost faint with terror the wretched man was dragged out towards the huge furnace. A piercing shriek, strong arms thrusting him onwards, and the flames enveloped him for good.

The scorching breath of this inferno rose up high. All night long the fire blazed and crackled, chasing the shadows away. People from distant villages hurried towards the red glare in the sky. They harnessed their horses and came galloping through the night, guided by this grim beacon. Owners with their servants and families rushed from their houses and set off in the opposite direction!

While my carriage was being fetched a small crowd collected and the conversation turned to the event of the preceding night—the manor fire.

"But why destroy things which would have been
useful? Why did you burn that poor man alive?" I asked curiously.

They looked at me in silence. An old man answered:

"Heaven only knows! But what I regret most is destroying the garden and all those fine fruit trees. And the stables, too, they killed several stallions, good stock breeders. But there you are... You're right, we should have driven the overseer out, not burnt him. After all, he's a man just like ourselves!"

A soldier looked fixedly at me: "We shall build other gardens and other houses, but this time they'll be for ourselves," he said slowly.

But it'll take years, hundreds of years to rebuild all this!" I cried, trying hard to make them see my point.

"Ah, that's what your class'll never understand. We've got to make a clean sweep of the past and begin all over again. But you leave us to do things our way, Missus! We know what we want, and we mean to get it this time!"
CHAPTER XIX

W e returned to Petrograd at the beginning of September. There was no longer that sour distrustful atmosphere which had been so noticeable on my arrival in Russia. Life had again subsided into the usual routine with its daily joys and sorrows. One had grown accustomed to the Revolution's ever-changing moods.

Theatres, cabarets and the palatial concert halls were all full. Chaliapine, the great and only Chaliapine, had a frenzied reception from the public.

Simultaneously, food queues lined the cobbled streets in the icy rain: one would wait all night long to buy milk and bread. One lacked even the bare necessities of life, and in return one was offered the luxury of being idle, of listening to political speeches and of following courses in philosophy, literature, history and music!

Intellectual, men and women alike, discussed complicated problems of metaphysics or theology—alas, this seemed but an artificial barrier against tragic reality.

Anxious crowds stormed public meetings and debated the bourgeois coalition, agricultural reforms and the peace problem. Everywhere one went there were riots and street demonstrations, Bolsheviks and Socialists, bourgeois or peasants, all took their part in the political manifestations.

A well-dressed man with a rather bilious-looking face, who had been watching the gesticulating crowds at a street debate, turned to me, saying:

"Who'd have thought that the Russians could suddenly become so vehement and determined about their rights? For hundreds of years they've just been serfs without hope or thought of betterment!"

So this was apparently what the ancient régime thought of the great Russian masses! It was the kind of false reassurance they needed.

Still, the fact remained that they had learnt to speak for themselves just as they had learnt to read and write. The amount of literature which was being absorbed at the moment was quite incredible. After all these years the Russian masses had established their identity as free people instead of serfs.

Town and country alike were saturated with different periodicals and peasant literature. Each party had its own news organ, its own brochures and pamphlets; but none could rival those of the Bolsheviks.

Propaganda leaflets were scattered about the streets everywhere, the walls displayed large sensational appeals to the people:

"Comrades, support the Revolution!" cried the Socialists.

"Citizens, save the country. Maintain order and discipline to avert a Bolshevik putsch!"—was the slogan of the Right-Wing party.

The masses at last begun to organise themselves in different groups. There were trade unions for coachmen, chauffeurs, kitchen servants, shop workers and many others. These people held endless street demonstrations in the bourgeois quarters.

But it was in the working-class districts that the Revolution had really taken hold of the people. In the Government ranks very little had changed during my absence.

"There are always these ministerial crises," complained Victor. "First they found the Provisional Government, then there's a rupture and now they are trying to reform it again!"

Under pressure from the workers the Soviets were directing a Socialist Government without the former bourgeois members.

The bourgeois members of the Government still
tolerated a few of the old Socialists, of whom the most undesirable was Victor Tchernoff, the "Minister of Agriculture", with his agrarian policy.

However, since July 22nd the Cabinet had unfortunately lost much of its popularity and the following resolution was adopted by the Workers and Peasants' Soviet: at the next session:

(1) The Country and the Revolution are in danger.
(2) The Provisional Government is a Government which supports the Revolution.
(3) In future, Ministers must report to the Executive Soviet Committee on the week's affairs.

The bourgeois ministers naturally protested at this unconstitutional control, but with no effect. Their resignation would logically lead to a Socialist Cabinet controlled solely and entirely by the Soviet.

Kerensky tried to form a new Cabinet, which was unfortunately not united by any real force, since it was made up of heterogeneous elements without expert knowledge or personal appeal to the masses.

However, my husband was still loth to abandon his post as Minister of Agriculture at a moment when the agrarian bill seemed like to be passed. This bill would guarantee the common distribution and ownership of land which had been his life's greatest aim as well as the basis of his party's programme.

But even though he remained in the Cabinet he was unable to take any measures such as would have pleased the peasants, because his colleagues' opposition, whether masked or open, was in any case quite insurmountable.

"Fundamental social reforms must be adjourned to the Council's next session", was their inevitable reply whenever he called for action, whenever he tried to stress the urgency of meeting the peasants' demands before it was too late.

They remained deaf and blind to all suggestions. They knew well enough that the peasants were ravaging the countryside. But what they could not foresee was
that these rebel masses, if organised by the Bolsheviks, would cause the downfall of the entire Socialist Party. The Revolution was a vital force and nothing could stop the people now. It was no use forbidding them this or giving them that: they would fight till they got what they wanted and without thought of the consequences!

The Workers' Soviet had left the Palace of the Tauride which was being got ready for the next opening of the Constituent Assembly, and now they were gathered together at the Smolny, which had once been an institution for the daughters of nobility. It was an enormous building, two storeys high, situated on the banks of the Neva.

The Soviets occupied over a hundred rooms. The long corridors and reception-rooms were invaded by soldiers, sailors and peasant delegates from the provinces. The Soviet itself met in the immense drawing-room which had formerly been used for balls attended by members of the Imperial family. In the passages, in odd corners and unused doorways were tables stacked high with propaganda literature of the various parties. As I walked along I noticed that on several doors the plaques had not been removed "Headmistress's Room", "Infant Class", etc. . . . Beneath these were written in rough chalk: "Executive Office", "Central Committee Rooms of the Bolshevik Party", "Delegates Enquiry Bureau", "Revolutionary Socialist Group", or, again, the "Mensheviks". Doors banged incessantly and feet clattered across the parquet floors which had once echoed with the light steps of the young aristocrats dressed in the regulation uniform.

Workers, soldiers, sailors, peasants, and other delegates circulated the Palace, some bustling along in haste, others lost in the strange medley of people. At the canteen they shared out a thick kind of soup, mostly cabbage water and flour, which was gulped down hungrily with rough wooden spoons, much joking
and coarse laughter. There was a rough camaraderie which united all the delegates—it was indeed a grand jamboree, the vital centre of revolutionary activity.

The Soviet took on an entirely different aspect after that Assembly Meeting. Enthusiasm was accelerated even more, and for the second time the Bolsheviks found themselves on the crest of the wave.

Who knows what this faith might not accomplish? The future rested in the hands of the people from now on. Every week a period of renewed force and violence seemed inevitable, the Bolsheviks were still gaining power day by day.

It was with this in mind that I decided to leave Petrograd and settle down in Moscow, where everyone assured me I should find a more normal life for my children.

CHAPTER XX

Since my arrival in Moscow I had been working at the Soviet on the Election Committee organised by the Party.

Together with the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, we were trying to organise the electoral lists of voters all over the country: No. 3, the Socialists; No. 4, the Mensheviks; No. 5, that of the Bolsheviks.

On the morning of October 26th I left the children at school and went on to the Soviet as usual. I took with me a whole case of appeals and election addresses intended for voters in the provinces, which I had been asked to correct and re-write if necessary.

The streets were quiet. On my way I met earnest-looking students and housewives with their shopping bags. The concierges were sweeping their front-door steps.

The Soviet had installed itself in that ancient palace once belonging to the Grand Duke Serge. General Sebottoff Square in front of the Soviet was in an uproar. The cars and carriages packed with delegates stopped at the main entrance, at each door was a soldier armed with bayonet and rifle. There was a continual stream of armed troops, and rifles clicked as the officers rasped out orders. Where they were destined for I did not know. Was some fresh coup d'état intended, or were they merely a safeguard for the Soviet?

Yes, I could sense a general feeling of unrest which foreboded no good. All these people, soldiers and the cheering crowds lined up outside seemed to be waiting for some stupendous piece of news; some decision that was imminent, that would alter their whole future, and give them revenge.
Moscow, the heart of Russia, did not want to admit the actuality of civil war!

Train services had stopped, and all communications from Petrograd were broken down. Fantastic rumours spread through the town: the Palace had been burnt down, the Provisional Government routed, there were street riots and shooting everywhere.

But one had no definite news except that the Bolsheviks had brought about a coup d'état! This I heard to my horror as soon as I reached the Palace.

That day at the Soviet I spent in a state of misery and suspense: I was haunted by this terrible vision, by the spectre of civil war.

All day long General Scobeloff on his gigantic bronze horse in front of the Palace seemed to be rearing up at our windows and joining in the general tumult. Frantic telephone messages, hasty meetings and discussions took place hour after hour.

Towards evening the Revolutionary-Socialist members of the Soviet and those on separate committees were summoned together for a joint meeting. Agitated and nervous, they hovered round the telephone awaiting a message from the Town Hall. It was there that the Town Councillors elected last August, nearly all of them Revolutionary-Socialists, and the Mayor V. Roudneff, were still in session.

We expected them to have further news from Petrograd, but when their message came through it conveyed next to nothing. No one in Moscow had any definite information from Petrograd and we had little chance of getting any since all communications were cut.

So at last we began to take stock of the situation: We must decide on a common course of action. Could we withstand any attack if the coup d'état was confirmed? Had we got to face civil war?

"But the Bolsheviks have already started it in Petrograd."

"Why, that's impossible!"

"Well, we know nothing definite, so what can we do."

"It's as likely to be true as not!"

"At any rate I'm quite sure the Bolsheviks would never march against us here in Moscow."

The Bolshevik Party had already issued a formal statement:

"They may do as they like in Petrograd but here we shall continue our mutual work together. We do not want any rupture between Bolsheviks and Revolutionary-Socialists sharing the same ideals."

In the passage I met Ponamarenko, a lieutenant of the Civil Guard who had been a Communist even in the old régime.

"If there's any trouble, and it looks as though there might be before long, you tell your comrades they've got nothing to worry about. We shan't turn on them like traitors, it would be madness to think of such a thing. You see the men are wild with this Anti-Revolutionary gang, and I think they're the ones who'll get a wiggling. Once the shooting starts, God knows what will happen! The men are game for anything if they think it will save the Revolution. They can't bear the thought of defeat now it's gone so far.

But the staircases and passages told a very different story. Everywhere the walls were lined with machine guns and armed soldiers. As yet they were still and silent. So still that they made me shiver uncomfortably as I passed down between them. They were doubtless there for some very good purpose! There could be no more effective method of dealing with awkward questions or for putting rebel Socialists well out of the way!

With this in mind I ran down the marble staircase, already fugitive in thought. Eventually I reached a room where the telephone and morse apparatus was installed; here all the latest messages were taken.

"The Bolsheviks have won. Kerensky is routed—all Socialist parties are supporting the Bolsheviks!"

"Kerensky has collected those few regiments who are still with the Provisional Government; he is marching on Petrograd at the head of the Cossacks!"
The tape jerked on and I waited in vain for further news. However, that was the latest from Petrograd.

We had had no dinner. Now, we began munching sandwiches that one woman had produced out of nowhere.

Fresh news: "In Petrograd the Provisional Government is holding on. They have many regiments behind them!"

Where was my husband?

Luckily he was no longer a Minister of the Government. I had already heard of his resignation some days ago.

But I knew well enough that he would still be fighting this coup d'état, that he'd do all in his power to stop a Bolshevik victory. Who knows, perhaps he was in danger, perhaps wounded at this very moment.

The telephone rang again. An urgent voice repeated the news: "The Government is holding on!"

And this lasted throughout the night until there came a final confirmation that the coup d'état had succeeded—there was no longer any doubt whatsoever.

Civil war had broken out in Petrograd!

In the white marble ball-room with its gilded walls illuminated by six dazzling crystal chandeliers sat the entire Assembly. The hall was full. The workers' blue tunics, women's faces and above all the peaked caps and military jackets bobbed up and down like a kaleidoscopic pattern. All eyes were focused on the Mayor and his Councillors. I found myself pressed against the peaked caps, whose owners were sweating visibly from the suffocating heat. They exuded a kind of hot animal steam, more like hard-worked oxen than a crowd of civilised human beings. At my left side stood two soldiers, bayonets in hand, with grave but determined faces. On the platform through the blue smoky atmosphere one could just discern the speaker's face. He announced the victory:

"In Petrograd the Bolsheviks have won complete power. The army, the banks, the wireless station and telephone exchange, all are in the hands of the Bolsheviks! The Provisional Government is routed—some have escaped, others are arrested, but at any rate no one is supporting them. The Left-Wing Revolutionary-Socialists have gone over to the Bolsheviks!"

Boris and Proche Proctiane would be with them. This thought made me despair, but I still refused to believe it was truth.

The speaker's voice was dull and lifeless like his face; he spoke without expression,—making monotonous gestures with his right hand.

"Comrades, we've won through at last. Your chance has come to wipe out your enemies. Throughout the centuries you have suffered degradation, you’ve been severely wronged but have borne it in silence. Now is the chance for you, the great proletarian masses, to have your revenge...!"

Like a flash of lightning a strange vision crossed my mind. The workers' hands stretched out to a distant dream, to an ideal they had been taught to cherish. Was it indeed the Promised Land?

I noticed the speaker's hands. He had the thin nervous fingers that belong to an intellectual, no sign of hard toil about those hands. Indeed, what right had he to speak in the name of the proletariat? Yet the eyes of his audience, those thousands of eyes, were fixed on this white hand almost hypnotised, as though they awaited some miracle.

In fact, to most of them the coup d'état meant nothing short of a miracle. The old régime had been crushed after all these years and with it the old way of living. Peasants would no longer work as serfs to the big landowners; families would not be broken up and sold as part-payment to impatient creditors. The young wives would not be left desolate because their husbands were sent off on twenty-five years' military service—and many other atrocities, all part of capitalist Russia, were finished with for good.

"Your grandparents were slaves, do you hear that?
Yes, that was barely fifty years ago. Yet you are hesitating to wipe out these bourgeois, these bandits, who've tortured millions of innocent people!

There was a hubbub of voices, some murmured approval, others were dissenting.

"Why bring up history? We want to know what's going to happen now!"

This gibe came from a working man close behind me. The soldiers on my left gave him an angry look.

"Shut up! You're only a rotten bourgeois yourself."

"While you were sweating in factories, worn out and hungry—the Tzar was holding receptions in this very hall! The orchestra was playing waltzes and women in décolleté, bedecked with precious jewels, were . . ."

"Yes, but where are they now? My Gawd, I'd like to set eyes on one of them!" broke in one stout peasant rapturously.

Did these people understand the truth? Were they fully aware of the grave and inevitable danger which lay ahead of us if we were plunged into civil war? Did they realise the cruelty, violence and injustice involved in a complete Bolshevik victory? No, it seemed that they were swayed by the momentary enthusiasm rather than by any deep-seated belief in a Communist State. Each was concerned with his own betterment and his own rights, hardened by an inbred feeling of resentment against the existing authorities. And that was all! I am sure there was no great concern for the general good of the people. Only the intellectuals ever managed to regard a political belief outside the orientation of their own lives.

"Those who refuse to fight for the cause are our enemies!" was the speaker's conclusion, and he stepped down amidst loud cheers from the workers.

Then a member of our Party began to speak: "It's not the past but the present we have to consider at the moment, comrades."

"Yes," retorted a soldier, "the past's dangerous, that's why you don't like it!"

"Some people don't like the truth, eh, boys?" gibed another.

"Comrades, listen . . ."

"Don't waste your breath, we don't want to hear you."

"Yes, throw him down. What's he struttin' about up there for? Socialist, pah! Why, they're only a dirty lot of bourgeois like the rest!"

The room was in an uproar. The chairman rang for order but in vain.

"Comrades and citizens! . . ."

The speaker had got up again.

"We want you to vote on the appeal we are publishing to-morrow. Either you're for the Socialists or for us. Anyone against us is our enemy, do you understand?"

After the count the Revolutionary-Socialists were in a minority; nearly all the delegates had voted for the coup d'état.

A new phase of the Revolution had started. In Petrograd the proletariat had broken down all anti-Revolutionary support. They had routed the Provisional Government, whom they accused of only supporting capitalist interests!

That meant my husband—that meant Kerensky and Tzeretelli, all of them old Revolutionaries and Socialists.

But what did the truth matter at such a time? People were swayed by mass enthusiasm; logic meant nothing. The people had plumped for Bolshevism; that was sufficient. It was a binding brotherly faith which called for action.

"Kerensky is fleeing from the capital!"

"We depend on you, soldiers, workers and peasants of Moscow, to fight for the cause. It is your turn now. The rest of the Government are hiding in Moscow. 
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You must rout your enemies once for all. Meet to-morrow in Scobeloff Square with any arms you can muster."

This notice was pasted up in the streets on the following day—I still have each word imprinted on my memory.

CHAPTER XXI

SILENCE seemed to have been banished from earth. The air was filled with the ceaseless muttering and roaring of the riots, like a tidal wave sweeping over the land. Sirens shrieking, rifle volleys and the barking of machine-guns all strained our nerves to breaking-point. The streets were deserted. The sky was grey and overcast; the snow fell softly, then melted and covered the ground with slime. Every door was bolted, and all the windows closed. But behind them I could just imagine the bourgeoisie, pale, trembling and almost fainting with terror. Who would win, Reds or Socialists? These two parties were fighting this terrible battle! I seemed to see people in their houses, moving about stealthily, terrified faces peering through the cracks in the blinds, waiting to hear the result of the battle. It would be the end of them if the Bolsheviks were victorious, but for the moment they were keeping quiet, ambushed in their strongholds, while the centre and outskirts of the town were alive with the rioters. The Duma, the Town Hall in the centre of Moscow, was the rallying point of those forces which remained faithful to the Provisional Government. What was there to remain faithful to now, merely a vanished ghost? All the same, at the moment it was also the symbol of resistance against the Bolsheviks' armed attack, and behind it was the future Constitution for which they were fighting, the only hope of Democracy!

On November 7th a "Committee for Public Security" was formed by the Duma, to direct the fight against the Bolsheviks.
The Bolsheviks had formed a “Revolutionary Military Committee” in the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Soviet where I had worked. It was adopted by 394 votes to 106, and consisted of four Bolsheviks and two Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks’ central force was in the Soviet. Ours was divided into two sections, not very strongly united among themselves. The section which inspired and conducted the fight was the Committee for Public Security, with its headquarters at the Town Hall. The other, which took chief part in the actual fighting, was the Alexander Military College, where the officers of the young intelligentsia, cadets, students, grammar school boys, and volunteers had joined together, ready to die in defence of the democratic revolution. They meant to resist what they considered a counter-revolutionary attack from the Bolsheviks, who were also willing to lay down their lives for their cause.

It was a battle of the supremacy of the people against the dictatorship of the proletariat. But whereas the idea of a dictatorship is clear and simple, and was defended by already existing soviets; supremacy of the people is a vague and complex conception, the principle of an already non-existent Constitution defended by Socialists and Democrats. That intangible principle, forced to fight against something real and concrete, was the vulnerable point of the Democrats.

Events followed one another in quick succession. The Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee, which had that one great advantage of being united, became feverishly active. It took the arsenal, which was not guarded by our troops, and armed the workers in the suburbs, thereby forming the Red Guard which occupied the Kremlin.

I was at a meeting in one of the workers’ quarters when the news came of the taking of the arsenal. The men, all of them Revolutionary Socialists, were highly indignant:

“Why was the arsenal left to the Bolsheviks? Why
didn't they distribute the arms among us sooner? If we'd been armed the Bolshevik workmen would never have taken up arms against us, their fellow-workers!"

Other voices were raised in protest against the fight.

"But we can't go and fight our comrades, we can't march against other workers."

"Are we then to allow the Soviets supreme power? Are we to be dictated to by a group of Bolsheviks?"

"We must avoid civil war!"

"And do you think you can avoid it by accepting dictatorship?"

"Yes. War is disaster. War between those who work and toil, between the men who made the Revolution."

Civil war, though already declared, was not yet admitted among the working men. There was confusion and disorder everywhere.

On November 9th, Riabzeff sent an ultimatum desiring the dissolution of the Revolutionary Committee and the Red Guard, the evacuation of the Kremlin, and the surrender of the arsenal. The Bolsheviks refused to give in. The General Strike was declared on the 10th. There were no newspapers, the trams did not run, bread was practically unobtainable. That day troops from the Town Hall drove the Reds back towards the suburbs, occupied the Kremlin, the centre of the town, the chief post office, the electricity works, and the principal stations.

Our street came to life once more, doors were flung open, and the inhabitants hurried to the shops. They were closed, but could be entered through the courtyards.

"It is all right! We heard by telephone that our troops are gaining steadily!"

"God be praised! We shall beat them yet."

They did not notice the irony that lay in that "We." The sound of shots made the gossips retire into their
houses, once more closing their doors and bolting them fast.

Armoured cars drove past, troops, groups of students and scholars, all armed, passed by, and the women came out of their houses to give them bread, sandwiches and cigarettes.

CHAPTER XXII

On November 11th we knew the worst. The shooting had started and throughout the streets one heard the dull thud of artillery which the Bolsheviks had called into action.

Several shells burst near the Duma, at the doors of the Kremlin and all round the Alexander Military College, which was close to our house. We were having dinner in the flat with Katia and two friends when a shot pierced the window-panes; then another and yet another followed. The house shook to its foundations. I felt certain it must have been hit. It seemed as though the walls must fall in and the ceiling descend on our heads; but actually only the top story had been damaged. There were footsteps in the passage, then someone hammered on the door.

"It's not safe here. Come down quickly—we must go to the cellars!" So we tumbled downstairs followed by the other flat residents in the building. In a few moments everyone was assembled in the low cellars beneath the street.

The bombardment continued menacingly at intervals. After some time the noise abated, and as the streets seemed clear we began to creep back to our own rooms. However, it was obviously unsafe to stay there much longer. No one knew what would happen next. Perhaps another attack was impending?

Katia was silent. She sat near the window listening to the distant sound of gun-fire.

"Do you hear that?" she asked. "Well, that's your Party! Your allies have turned against the whole population! Ugh! It makes me sick! As a proletarian, what am I doing here in the enemy's camp?"
I remember you saying once that the *bourgeois* were our enemies. But they’re not yours, they’re mine! I can’t stick here any longer, I ought to be out among the others who are fighting for liberty!"

“For liberty?”

“Yes, for the liberty of our class. Don’t try and dissuade me, it’s useless. Olga, you know I’m very fond of you, there’s nothing personal in this. It’s just that I hate your class!“

With that she fled from the room and returned dressed in coat and hat ready to leave. Her long curls were hidden by the close-fitting toque such as most Russian girls wore during winter.

“I’ve got friends in the suburbs, I shall go and join them.”

When the moment came to say good-bye she began to lose heart, she looked sad and even downcast. She tried desperately to keep back her tears, then bracing herself up she came to kiss me farewell.

“I shall always love you, Olga. I’ll never forget all you have done for me, no, never. We belong to a different party, that’s the difference.”

Then she kissed the children, who were at a loss to understand all this, and went out quickly. Katia, the little peasant girl with her fiery pride, her warm heart and her bitter resentment against “Society,” was at last beginning to realise her ambition.

Night approached. Again another night passed. The telephone rang. It was Genia Ratner speaking from the Town Hall, where our comrades sat in conference trying to make a vital decision. It was important that I should join them somehow. The streets were dangerous. Did I think I could manage it? I replied I would do my best.

I left my children to the care of my two friends who didn’t dare go home on account of the shooting. Then I tiptoed downstairs and opened the heavy street door. It creaked noisily on its hinges. I started back into the shadow and my heart beat faster. Still, all seemed quiet. There was no one about. No footsteps on the stairs, and no sound from the street. So I crept gingerly and began hurrying along the frozen pavements. It was a black starless night and the cold made your body ache.

I walked on in the darkness guided by the sound of the shooting, which was most intense near the Town Hall. As I got nearer a sickening fear crept over me. Would I ever reach them? I was bound to run up against a shooting-squad somewhere in the main square. They were not likely to leave any entrance unguarded.

I turned a corner which brought me into one of the main streets and even here there were no lights and no passers-by. All, save the rioters, had retired to their homes. Windows were hermetically sealed, doors bolted and barred, and no lights showing anywhere.

A shell burst in some neighbouring square. I could even hear the shrieks of the women-occupants. Then there was a pause, and again, a few moments later, the machine-guns began to fire. Obviously a rumour had gone round that Socialist members were in hiding in those houses.

“Who goes there?” Someone in uniform stepped out of the shadow.

I started back uncertainly. Who could this be? Did he belong to the Red Guard or to the Military College? I must appear calm at all costs.

"Don’t you see it’s a woman? I’m going back to my family, I expect they’re scared stiff with all this shooting," I replied indignantly.

Then the man, whom I could not distinguish, answered:

“Well, you’re mad to come this way. There’s no one about here to-night!”

He lifted his lamp and stepped back a few paces. I was still not sure of his identity. Then he pointed to a dark mass on the ground. Stooping down, I saw that it was a man’s body all crumpled up in the snow.
His limbs were frozen stiff, his features stark and immobile. I knew at once that he was dead.

"He was walking home just like you when it happened!" added the soldier in a grim voice.

However, he let me pass without further questioning. And again I began hurrying along the dark deserted streets.

CHAPTER XXIII

At last I reached the Town Hall. Dazzling chandeliers lit up the rooms. People were hurrying blindly to and fro. Telephones rang. Someone rushed in with news, someone else denied it and started a fresh argument. Each party was discussing matters in groups apart. I went over and joined ours.

Through the smoky atmosphere I caught sight of Genia Ratner's face. This young woman was a town councillor besides being a member of the Central Committee of our Party.

The Mayor, V. Roudneff, a Revolutionary Socialist, got up on the platform. He looked pale and agitated, but managed to control his voice. He told the Assembly that the Workers' Syndicate proposed calling an armistice for twenty-four hours, so as to draw up some definite peace proposals. The rioting was more or less at a standstill since the railways refused to transport any troops for either of the belligerents. It was necessary to hold a debate on possible conditions or concessions to be made with the Bolsheviks.

Roudneff then read out what the Committee for Public Security considered to be the only acceptable proposal.

"The Bolsheviks must surrender themselves completely. They will be disarmed and tried as rebels. Full constitutional power will be given to the Duma as before."

Counter-proposals of the Revolutionary Committee were equally intransigent.

"The Soviet must have complete power. The White Guard and all reactionary parties will be disarmed."

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The Central Council is to be made up of representatives of all democratic organisations.

The Committee for Public Security refused unanimously to accept any of these conditions. So further suggestions were put forward, but nothing seemed to meet the approval of both parties. The speaker's voice was quite lost in the ensuing tumult. Even the chairman was unable to restore order and all the speeches were interrupted by wild jeering or applause. At last, however, they were persuaded to let a few members speak in turn. It was the only way one could hope to reach any conclusion.

"We can't rely entirely on forces from the Alexander College, we must have greater numbers. We must try and enlarge our ranks by enlisting the workers and other soldiers. It's important that we should have the people's whole-hearted support and not that of one section only." This was Genia Ratner speaking, in her deep sonorous voice. Her hands trembled as she moved up and down the platform.

"The Bolsheviks have already armed their workers, that's how they started the Red Guards. But look at us? Our forces could never make a stand against them if the people begin supporting the Bolsheviks."

In herself she hated these rebels that usurped the power and proclaimed another dictatorship. Nevertheless she realised it was impossible to fight them without the soldiers' and workers' support. She had worked at the Duma for a long time. But while her colleagues were absorbed in their executive affairs, she had never lost touch with the workers themselves. She had often been asked to give lectures or to speak at club meetings in the factories. She understood better than the others did that their great danger was to lose contact with the masses. She knew that these millions of workers and peasants were the Revolution's most active force.

It was only as I left the Town Hall that I realised
how tired I was. The shooting had almost stopped, as usually happened toward morning. I reached home almost asleep as I turned the heavy oak door. The household was not yet up. I hadn’t even the energy to eat despite my great hunger, and just dropped down on my bed and I slept on just like that, still in my outdoor clothes, till someone came and woke me towards evening.

Negotiations had just begun. The Bolsheviks refused to accept those conditions laid down by the Committee of Public Security. They were adamant for the moment. The Red Guards had seized several arms depots, so ammunition was not scarce and they held the strongest positions. Besides which, the post office, the wireless station and two important railway junctions had fallen into their hands. Street rioting went on as usual. Several public buildings had been badly shelled, the barracks, the Town Hall, churches, schools and other administrative centres were their chief targets. Negotiations were broken off on the same day.

On November 12th rioting and street shooting began again in real earnest. The Red Guard bombarded the telephone exchange. The whole town was like an armed camp or a field of battle. By now numerous houses were demolished by stray shells. The streets were littered with dead bodies which no one bothered to cart away. Each night some terrific blaze lit up the darkness. It was usually a palatial mansion or factory on fire.

The forces of the Alexander College approached the Soviet, and Scobeloff Square was invaded by their troops. The Bolsheviks were preparing to evacuate the place where civil war had originally been proclaimed on November 8th.

Then the offensive stopped, no one knew why. For the next few hours we were on tenterhooks to discover their plan of action.

On the 13th the Red troops started another offensive under intense artillery fire. All the left side of the
town was in their hands and now they were advancing on the Military School.

November 14th was another memorable day. The Bolskies began their attack on the Kremlin, which they bombarded with heavy artillery. The Kremlin, that amazing chef d ’œuvre, and the Church of St. Basilé, which contained inestimable treasures and had been built by Ivan the Terrible in 1570, were in danger of being destroyed.

The firing became more and more violent. The noise was infernal. An armoured car tore across Scobeloff Square and began firing on the Soviet just as a bomb exploded in the precincts. Another car began attacking from the side. The Reds after a moment of panic managed to rout the enemy. They marched in force towards Loubianka Square where the Town Hall stood. Here they stormed the Hotel Metropole, situated next to the Duma, and from its windows they set up a machine-gun barrage which soon emptied the entire square. So that at the moment it was impossible to reach the Town Hall. At every corner one was entrapped by a Bolshie guard.

The telephone was out of order. After a five days’ struggle the telephone exchange had at last fallen into the Bolshies’ hands.

On November 15th the Red Guards stormed the Kitai-Gorod and from there directed their attack on the Kremlin, defended by cannons and machine-guns.

A group of town councillors with Genia Ratner at their head, marched up to the Kremlin under open fire. They were determined to reach the Soviet Commissars and find out whether some alternative plan could not be decided upon. It was a daring action. But it had a certain effect among the Reds at any rate. There was a definite lull for the next few hours. But the Commissars themselves were hostile and resolute; they felt they were playing a winning game and had no desire to back out for the sake of a few lives and public buildings. As before, nothing was decided.

On the 16th Roudneff sent in another note to the Revolutionary Committee, and again they reiterated the same conditions. The Soviet must have supreme power; the White troops must be dissolved.

Roudneff asked for time to think it over. The Bolsheviks waited till two o’clock next afternoon and then gave orders to carry on the offensive. The bombardment increased. The shells of the machine-guns devastated the neighbouring streets.

At five o’clock the Treaty was signed. The fight was ended. The Duma was in the hands of the Soviets.

They dissolved our forces, mostly troops from the Alexander College, but left them free to return home or to the provinces as they wished. The shooting had more or less ceased, but one still heard an occasional burst of shooting here and there.

Everywhere one saw traces of the rioting; windows spattered with bullet marks, houses half demolished, and the black charred remains of fires. The streets were still littered with dead and wounded. People stepped across them carelessly and even stole their belongings when no one was looking.
CHAPTER XXIV

DEMOCRACY had given way to the Red Guards and now the Bolsheviks had stolen the power. Nevertheless, we had no doubt as to where the people's sympathy lay since the majority was known to be on our side. The Bolsheviks accused the Provisional Government of adjourning the Constituent Assembly and of putting off the elections until their own Party's prospects seemed more favourable. Thus it was that the convocation of the new Constituent Assembly finally took place.

January, 1918. Petrograd lay shrouded in snow. One walked knee-deep along the pavements and the streets were empty of traffic save for the little troikas with their sturdy ponies.

"THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ASSUMES POWER!" announced the street placards everywhere.

At home everything had been in a chaos to-day, the children were ill and in one of their worst moods, and I had spent hours trying to get them nourishing food, but without much success. In the stores everything was salted or tinned and there was little enough of that.

Now I was late for a meeting. I tried to hurry along over the slippery cobbles, stumbling at every step. I turned out of one wide avenue and made my way through a little courtyard to the Workers' Committee Rooms—they were crowded with men and women. Half paralysed with cold I slid out of my damp coat and crossed towards the fire. A group of young workers, all dressed in blue tunics, were crouching over the stove. They moved aside for me as I went to warm my hands. One or two nodded a greeting, but most of them were strangers. When I had thawed slightly, I looked round and began to realise what was happening.

I had never seen these Committee Rooms so crowded before. What's more, there were a number of strange faces and I guessed that the workers' demonstrations must have brought in many new members. The rough wooden tables, set apart at one end of the room, were covered with strips of red cloth, on these were emblazoned in gold:

"ALL POWER TO THE SOVIET!"

On the floor near by, a young girl was painting another slogan on some sort of scarlet banner. She was tracing the letters carefully with a gold paintbrush. "L-L-V-TheSoVieT!" She finished the last letter with a proud flourish and then stood up, holding the banner in her hands for all to see.

Someone began shouting excitedly:

"Comrades! Listen! We're all going to meet to-morrow at nine o'clock opposite the Permanence. We shall march towards the Perspective Liteiny, where other groups are going to join us. A general rallying place is at the Tauride Palace."

The Workers' Committee were manifesting in favour of the Constituent Assembly, which was due to open on January 5th. Since the elections, which had resulted in a large majority for the Revolutionary Socialists, the Bolshevik Commissars had been trying hard to prevent the opening of this Assembly.

"I've got my banner all ready. Don't you think that's a fine inscription?—"THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY PROMISE LAND AND FREEDOM!"—And just look at these gold fringes and tassels ... that's all my own idea!"

"Damned fine!" laughed one old man. "The Bolsheviks ought to be very touched at the trouble you take. Yes, you'll have to march at our head. You'll do us real proud!"

"Oh, don't tease!" pouted the young girl. "I think
it's very nice and Ellie told me we must make a good display."

General laughter. But even these ribald jokes did not manage to conceal the emotion which everyone felt. They felt they were on the brink of some great adventure, an adventure which would involve them all until the goal was reached.

"Don't you think it's madness to hold a mass demonstration quite unarmed? At the moment, as you all know, these Bolshies are only too ready to shoot!"

the speaker scratched his head. "H'm, it seems to me devilish risky!"

"On the contrary, that's the only way to demonstrate. The workers have nothing to fear when they're marching to defend their own delegates! Hang it all, we've elected these men and it's our duty to stand by them."

This made me think of the machine-guns I had heard in the main square a short while back.

"Well, then, that's settled. The demonstration starts at nine!"

We were marching in closed ranks towards the Tauride Palace.
I was beside a standard-bearer, an old worker, who was carrying an immense scarlet banner draped with gold and red trimmings.
The velvet banner which had caused so much laughter the day before was borne aloft gaily by two young girls.
The sun had pierced the winter clouds and shone down on the little procession which increased at every street corner. A gentle breeze caressed the banners and ruffled the hair from the girls' faces.
We marched along quickly, and tried to keep in step with the singing. Everyone was chanting triumphant revolutionary songs.

Comrades! March onwards! Be strong and valiant.

At the far end of the Perspective Liteiny a dense crowd advanced towards us. Was it another group of marchers who were supposed to join us?

When they drew closer we could see that they all wore grey uniforms and carried rifles.

"Halt! You can't go past here!"

"Comrades! This is a peace demonstration. We're making for the Tauride Palace!"

A trumpet sounded as a standard-bearer advanced.

"Comrades!"

The trumpet sounded another blast:

"Comrades, don't you see we're workers? We're unarmed, we're only demonstrating at the Palace!"

A third blast pierced the frozen air; then three short notes and a spoken command: "Open Fire!"

A brisk snap of rifles worried no one. We were all so sure it was only a friendly salute. We stood quite still, expecting the officer to come forward and meet our leader.

Our standard-bearer crumpled up and fell. His red banner wilted beside him in the snow. The crowd stared horror-struck, but did not move. There was another discharge. The young girl, who had helped carry the velvet banner, lurched backwards with a cry of pain.

This was too much and our crowd began screaming in horror. Now two of our marchers fell on the ground, either dead or wounded. One woman began singing a revolutionary hymn, the others tried to join but were almost speechless in their panic. The trumpet sounded again.

"Down on the ground quickly! Lie flat on your faces!" The marchers sank down in the snow, hiding their faces between their hands. A few women remained standing up:

"Assassins! Do you dare shoot defenceless women? Aren't you ashamed . . . ?"

The soldiers hesitated. The sound of horses made them pause. Then they split up in two, leaving a free passage for the approaching horsemen.
The crowd tore on to the pavements, taking refuge in the shop doorways. The women cried hectically as we were thrust one against the other and thrown down on the cobbles. Their one desire was to get out of the way of the horses! But by the time the brigade reached us there were luckily very few marchers left in the roadway, so that the cavalry couldn't do much harm. They could only disperse a few unfortunate ones unable to reach the pavement in time. This they did brutally enough, making free with their horse-whips and bayonets. Then they made off again round the corner, with a clatter of hooves echoing harshly in the snow.

We collected our wounded. I lifted up a girl whose fair hair was bedraggled with snow. In my hand I held the little fur toque which I found quite intact by her side. Her skin was marble. There was a serene smile on her face. I recognised her as the young girl who had made the velvet banner.

Three days had passed since that tragic affair. It was now January 5th, 1918. It was the opening of the Constituent Assembly at the Tauride Palace.

Someone rang for order.

The grand amphitheatre was crowded. As usual, soldiers and sailors, workers and peasants invaded the public galleries. People were shouting at the top of their voices, some trying to argue above the din, others merely shouting their views at large. In either case nobody paid much attention.

The only person who seemed the least perturbed was the speaker himself. This man was Chvetzov, a Revolutionary Socialist and President of the old Provisional Government. It was his duty to open the session of the Assembly. He rang for order several times, but without much effect.

Then a young Bolshevik strode on to the platform, tore the bell from his hands and gave it to Sverdloff, a
member of the Government, who forthwith rang and declared the Assembly open.

The tumult gradually abated. Some began singing the *Internationale*. The most important matter for today was the presidential election—in other words, who was to be elected President of the Constituent Assembly?

Two candidates came forward. Marie Spiridonova, put up by the Bolsheviks, the leader of our old Left-Wing comrades who had rallied to the Bolsheviks. She wore a white shawl knotted loosely beneath her chin; her grave immobile features and far-off expression made her seem like some Byzantine icon. The other candidate was Victor Tchernoff, the leader of the Revolutionary Socialists.

He was elected president with 244 votes, and Marie Spiridonova only got 153.

When the results were known a fresh uproar started. An angry murmur came from the Left-Wing Socialists. Boris Kamnoff slammed his desk, producing a deafening noise. I saw his face which seemed to be split by his open mouth.

Victor was then installed in the massive old presidential chair above the speakers’ platform. He picked up the bell, it was his only weapon against a riotous hall.

Then he began his opening speech. It was a declaration of Party policy, modified by his own views as much as possible. He had never been in complete agreement with the Revolutionary Socialists, but had felt obliged to follow their official policy. Now, for the first time, he began enlarging on his individual ideas, and this gave his speech a certain duplicity of meaning. It was an amazingly calm, academic kind of speech in the midst of such an audience; but I’m afraid it had a mixed reception.

"The Constituent Assembly must mould itself to the people’s will!" decreed Victor.

"A bullet through his head, that’s what they want!" yelled a soldier, raising his rifle and pointing at Victor.

"The People" was like a red-hot iron to the
Bolsheviks! The people, just a bourgeois invention. All that counts is the will of the proletariat...

Under the menace of raised rifles Victor continued his speech resolute and calm, in appearance at any rate.

He had irritated the Right-Wing by his internationalist theme, incensed the Bolsheviks by proclaiming that the people were against a proletarian dictatorship.

Nevertheless, he succeeded in finishing his speech and in quelling the tumult to some extent. This was despite the groups of jeering soldiers who surrounded the platform trying to drown his speech with coarse, insulting remarks.

Lenin sat in the midst of the people's commissars. He was very pale and tried to hide his emotion by a sardonic smile. He laughed from time to time, then he shut his eyes and pretended to be dozing. His nonchalant attitude expressed utter boredom, and I'm sure this was the effect he wanted to create. His chair was turned towards the Assembly and he never looked at the speaker.

Different speeches followed. When a Bolshevik speaker got up the people listened more attentively, and when their opponents tried to speak the uproar was renewed. Boukhariane, a young Bolshevik, railed against the democratic principles in a sarcastic, provoking speech.

"From this platform we'll proclaim war on the whole bourgeois republic. In future there's only one dictatorship, that of the proletariat!"

"The people don't exist!" cried another Bolshevik.

"It's a fiction invented by the ruling classes."

Tzeretelli, an ex-Minister of the Provisional Government, was received with threats and menacing gestures when he got up on the platform.

"Traitor! Capitalist! . . . look at him, comrades! He's the man who restored the death penalty!"

Victor rang the presidential bell, and called for order. But his voice was quite lost in the fracas.

Tzeretelli remained calm and pretended to ignore this outburst. He waited until the first access of rage had passed and then began speaking again. His stern, impressive manner even managed to impose silence.

He accused the Bolsheviks of having ruined the Revolution, of having destroyed public liberty and of violating the people's will. Even his enemies were impressed by this passionate speech. But in the end, just as before, their anger burst into a wild chaos of derision and dissension.

Roudneff, the ex-Mayor of Moscow who had directed the October attack during the Bolshevik coup d'état, got up on the platform, but he had to be persuaded to leave, as the mere sight of him infuriated the Red soldiers and started a fresh onslaught from the Bolshevik quarters. Indeed, the soldiers had now become a quite uncontrollable menace in the Assembly. No one, save their own favourite speakers, were allowed a hearing.

"Stop the session. We've had enough of your bourgeois speakers! We want to get down to action. Where are our own members? Let's hear what they've got to say!"

Indeed, the hall began to resemble a battlefield. Chairs and tables were overturned, pictures torn from the walls, in every row there were groups of soldiers trying to heckle the speakers, their rifles cocked menacingly towards the platform. The sailors' faces were distorted with rage, they seemed almost inhuman. Their attitude was menacing, their impatient, feverish hands never left the trigger. As I saw all this I grew more and more alarmed. Surely disaster was inevitable if the session was continued, but no one else seemed to take much notice.

The members remained motionless. The President rang his bell, and the speaker went on as before.

A sailor called Gelesniak clambered up on the platform and touched the President's arm. He said he'd been ordered to clear the room.
“By whose orders?” asked the President in surprise. Disappointed, Gelesniak cried that that was of no importance, but that in any case the Guard was tired and that they were going to cut off the electricity.

“Comrade, the members are just as tired, only it’s their duty to settle the agrarian problem as the people wish. We must come to some definite decision,” said Victor quietly.

At this Gelesniak’s companions began shouting loudly: “That’s enough! We’re all tired, we don’t want to listen to your people. Nothing’ll come of it, anyway! Come on, boys, we’ll cut off the light, that’ll stop them blathering!”

More cries of derision followed, coming mostly from the armed troops scattered about the hall.

Then in a firm, distinct voice, Victor summarised the agricultural reforms which were to be included in the Constitution. It would become a fundamental law, unable to be modified or adapted by local interested parties. This bill was the proud work of the Revolutionary-Socialist Party. The Assembly now had to vote on its adoption.

So he went on reading it out, article by article, interrupted from time to time by cries of: “That’s enough!” “Chuck him out, comrades!” and always menaced by the soldiers’ rifles.

But luckily the peasant delegates’ attitude imposed comparative silence. Although bored and weary after the other speeches, their faces lit up and they seemed enthusiastic directly Victor began to speak. At last the Russian peasants’ vain and happy dream was about to become law. They were reassured by this reform so essential to all their interests. It would serve as a rampart against all future exigencies.

“Private property is abolished! The land would be distributed among the peasants!”

This announcement even silenced the Guards’ anger for the moment.

Four o’clock in the morning: the President and delegates had no resistance left. They knew they were losing ground at every step. But at least the treasure had been saved, for there was a unanimous vote in favour of the agricultural bill.

There followed another debate on free speech and the censorship of the Press. Then the question of separate treaties with the Allies was brought up. But this was their last effort; at the moment nothing could save the Assembly.

Chaos had broken loose. It was redoubled since the agricultural vote. Again the President rang for order and again he was shouted down by the howling mob. He was like a captain on the bridge just before his boat went down.

He announced that the session was over and they would continue on the morrow.

A well-known Bolshevik came up to Victor and said

in a low voice:

“You’d better go out by a secret door, there’s a crowd round your car waiting to assassinate you!”

So the Tauride Palace emptied itself slowly. I saw delegates scurrying across the courtyard, glad to have got out unharmed. Dark silent cannons still encircled the square—they were like grim spectators of the night. An icy wind swept us home along the boulevards...
CHAPTER XXV

THE Constituent Assembly, that ardent dream of past generations, existed no longer. It was nothing but an hallucination. Our democracy had caused its death-blow. We had always striven against violence, we were always so convinced that ideas had more force than bayonets. But at the moment there was only one way to stop a Bolshevik dictatorship and set up a People's Government. One must call in more forces and fight them on equal ground.

The next time the Constituent Assembly met they were guarded by the People's Army!

They met on the Volga, where the peasants would always be faithful to Revolutionary-Socialist policy. Here liberty was a tradition and the militant members of the Party had always done propaganda work, even during the Tzar's régime. As the elections had shown, Socialism was very popular in this district.

We decided to leave for Saratoff, my husband's native city, where we hoped to be among parents and friends.

Before leaving Moscow I did all in my power to discover Hélène's whereabouts. Her husband, Nicholas Ivanovitch, was in prison. He had not been able to find her. She had disappeared, and shortly afterwards he was arrested at an anti-Bolshevik meeting. One day, just before we left, he arrived at our house.

"Olga, you'll never guess what's happened. I've been released and I've just found Hélène again. She's been nursing at the Front all this while!"

NEW HORIZONS

Half an hour later I went to her rooms. She seemed strangely demure in her nurse's uniform. But a secret joy lit up her fine features, her eyes sparkled as they'd never done before.

The tiny bed-sitting-room was full of flowers; violets, lilies and red carnations, flowers which it was impossible to find in Moscow at this time of year.

"You're looking at the flowers? Nicholas brought me all those. Really, I've never known him so attentive. How he manages to find flowers when one can't even get bread... is astounding! Apparently he got to know a gardener who worked in the old palace nurseries. Nicholas did him a good turn, I believe. Anyway, now out of gratitude, he gives him fresh flowers every day. I'm so afraid he'll get himself arrested again for having bourgeois products!" she said laughingly, but her pale cheeks coloured and I could see she was slightly embarrassed. She had been with me the night before her flight and I alone knew the cause of their parting.

"It's funny, isn't it, meeting Nicholas again? He doesn't actually live here because I didn't want him to, not at the moment. We see each other every day. We're the best of friends again..."

By the emotion in her voice I knew that their reunion would be the start of another romance. I sent up a prayer that this one might end more happily. They'd been doomed to each other since they met, their lives were inextricably bound together. Whether they found bliss or suffering, they would still be united.

We began making arrangements for the journey with great difficulty, and thanks to Genia Ratner's energetic help we managed to get hold of tickets and passports.

Hélène was coming with us.

Victor would join us later, and Nicholas Ivanovitch also: we thought it wiser to travel separately.

When we got to the station we found that our train
was made up almost entirely of goods trucks. There were only four or five carriages, and these were already over-full. So we clambered into a cattle wagon. There was barely room for us and the other passengers to sit crouched up on the floor. I remembered seeing a notice on the outside saying: "8 Horses—40 Passengers!"

On first sight it seemed like a heterogeneous but mobile mass, composed of arms, legs, hands, trunks, food baskets, bits of clothing and other indefinable shapes. Crouched together in one corner beneath our blankets, we seemed in danger of being crushed by two enormous wooden boxes. Who did they belong to? We didn't know, and it was impossible to pick out any one individual from this human chaos! In the end we decided to shift them ourselves so that we could at least doze without fear of their crashing down on our heads.

The people had started singing. It was a melancholy song:

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The world is a dark prison
Full of the hungry and oppressed.
Workers and Comrades, unite!
We must destroy this world,
We must shout our faith to the winds,
Our promised land
Expands
Across the horizon.
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The frightful agony of this chant conjured up a totally different picture of the outer world. It was something fierce and hostile, it revealed life as a bitter struggle to the very end.

The soldiers started another song. This time it was a gay, haunting tune, but the refrain itself melancholy and sad, as the other had been.

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Red apple,
Where are you going?
If you roll as far as the frontier
You'll never come back!
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This song had a tremendous success. It was an anonymous creation of the people without beginning or end, and spread throughout Russia during the Revolution. It was called the “Song of the Little Apple”—this little red apple which had left the big towns and crept into all the trenches and prisons.

Some crude humorist always modified the couplets to the day’s events.

My good little apple,
You’ve got red blood too!
The Soviet régime
Is very powerful, is it not?

Wasn’t it the apple from the garden of Hesperides, that golden apple, the dream of humanity, which had rolled in the trenches and in the blood of the Revolution?

As the song went on I remembered all the hardships of this interminable war, I felt the hatred towards those who would prolong it. Meanwhile the little red apple went on rolling:

We will drop their bodies
Deep down in the sea,
And the White Guards’ flesh
Shall be food for the fishes!

Now, I began to distinguish the different faces. Some smiling, some silent, some fast asleep. What was the matter with that pretty young girl? She never joined in the singing and sat huddled up in her orange shawl, her face distorted with grief. After a while I noticed she was crying: “Can I help you, comrade?” I whispered gently so that the others shouldn’t hear.

“No, it’s only my husband—I’ve just seen his grave in Moscow,” she said faltering. “He was wounded at the Front and died in hospital! The last few days he never even knew me, at least not to speak to.”

I nodded, we were silent again. Still the train rolled on, while people sang and quarrelled and munches
CHAPTER XXVI

The troops were worn out by their years of exacting service. Their behaviour was violent and they were always speaking angrily of the way they had been betrayed by their generals, or the Tzarina and Rasputin. They no longer had confidence in anyone. They might have been afraid of being betrayed yet again by the Revolution. They were armed and resolute, and had set out to defend the promised land which beckoned them once more. They spoke aggressively, and it was some time before we got used to their wild manners.

Never during the whole of our journey had we the least cause to complain of them. Hardened though they were, the soldiers had a soft spot for us and would render us little services, such as filling our tea kettle with hot water at every station, and procuring us bread. When we wanted to get out they would offer us their shoulders, and would help us up with their arms when we wanted to get back, for the cattle truck had no steps and one had to be an acrobat to climb into it.

The darkness was thick in our closed truck, without a glimpse of light anywhere. Our fellow-passengers snored. When the darkness got too much for me I used to light a piece of candle that I had brought from Moscow. Curled up among their bags the soldiers slept as peacefully as children. A few peasants, wrapped up in woollen shawls or coats of badly-cured sheepskin, gave out a sharp smell, and assumed fantastic proportions in the flickering light of the candle.

I felt at the end of my strength; my back seemed fit to break, my skin burned and my temples throbbed. Helen could not sleep, but lay staring into the dark-
ness, worn and pale. My daughter Natacha fell asleep at last beside Ariane, for whom we had cleared a small space to stretch in. In spite of all our woes, she loved the journey and was enraptured by the sights and sounds of the Russian winter. Olga, on the other hand, had a weak heart, and could only breathe with difficulty. I made her come near the door. She looked terribly white, and her eyes were swollen; she said it was impossible to sleep. A clean bed, fresh air, a bath—such things seemed part of a far-off dream. The candle was visibly diminishing; I tried to give Olga enough room to stretch her limbs, and she began to fall asleep. Then I blew out the light.

Presently, in the darkness, I heard a man telling his war adventures to his companion:

“When we moved in she was weeping for her husband, and when we went away she was weeping for her lover. Just like a woman: ever in tears, ever in someone’s arms.”

Another voice replied:

“I rather liked her myself, you know, because she was a foreigner. I couldn’t understand a word she said. Maybe she loved me, maybe she didn’t? She used to glide about like a shadow. But in the end I got tired even of that, and my head began to ache because I could never understand what she was saying.”

“Ah! yes, there are some women whose thoughts one can never discover.”

“Do you remember the schoolmistress, for instance? We went into her house. She was nice to us, and smiled, and called us comrades. And then she asked us what had happened to So-and-so. So we had to tell her that we’d killed him because he was a traitor, and then somebody else said that he’d been taken prisoner and had died. Then she began to laugh, in a sneering sort of way—yes, it’s quite true, she laughed—and lean against the wall. And when we got near her we found that she was dead. Would you ever’ve believed it?”
them. She was a proud little thing, and used to say to me: 'I'm not hungry.' All the same, I knew very well that there wasn't a crumb in the house. She came down to the barracks one day to wash the sheets with her little white hands, and I said to her: 'Marry me, missy, I shall have my discharge soon, and I'll take you to my village with your mother and you'll be well looked after there.' But she said: 'No, it's better like this.' You can well imagine how heartbroken I felt. She was pretty and well brought-up, that girl. And soon afterwards she and her mother were arrested and charged with spying. It ought to have ended like that, I suppose, but I somehow managed to get them both set free. Then she came and sought me out.

'Marry me, comrade,' she said, with her lips trembling. Something twisted inside me at that moment and I wanted to seize her in my arms. But nevertheless I asked her:

"Why do you say that?"

"Out of gratitude," she said, 'because you saved mother's life.'

"I took my courage in both hands and said: 'No, my dear, you'd better both go away, and live in peace!'

"Then she wept for joy, and it tore my heart to see her. But I stood by my word and never touched her once, and that's the truth!"

I forgot all our troubles and felt comforted as I listened to these naïve tales, for I recognised in them the depth of the people's soul at a time when civil war had let loose all the worst instincts and passions of man. How simple and how rich is their language! I remembered Turgenieff's words:

"As long as the great Russian language is living, I shall never doubt my country's destiny."

CHAPTER XXVII

The miraculous took place at last. We had arrived at Saratoff and were being well looked after by our friends. Baths, hot food and sleep in a clean and comfortable bed made us forget all our journey's sufferings for the time being.

Everything settled down by degrees. In the open country near Saratoff I found an untenanted house; there were no other houses in sight of it, and it had a garden with a grand view over the ice-bound Volga. It was an isolated spot, in which my husband could live without fear of being discovered.

So we moved into this little snow-covered country house, and cleared up the garden paths and the avenue leading to the high road. We were awakened each morning by the soft white light that came through the silvery frost-flowered panes, and as the day grew brighter, everything in the house, the furniture, the smallest objects, began to shine as though polished with radiance.

The door leading on to the wooden verandah was sealed up by the frost, and I had much trouble in unfastening it. The steps were covered with a thick layer of snow, on which strange little designs had been traced, for a fox and a ferret had passed that way, leaving behind them the delicate prints of their paws.

The sun shone, the days sparkled with snow, and an extraordinary atmosphere of light and happiness surrounded us. The days were spent in reading and in continuing the children's lessons that had been interrupted by the events of October in Moscow. I spent my time in arranging some hastily jotted down notes. For relaxation I went for long walks in the fields.
The snow had hardened, and cracked beneath my feet. One could wander everywhere, even over the numerous gulleys that exist round about Saratoff and that were now filled in with snow.

The great deserted silence of the white plains made the Revolution withdraw into a vague distance, until it almost seemed never to have happened. Had I really lived through it all, the fire and the blood, the rattle of the machine-guns and the roar of heavy artillery, my wild escape through the dark Moscow night? And those rowdy meetings, the demonstrations, the frantic speeches! Here, a great silence reigned. Sometimes there came a few distant echoes, but they were muffled as all sounds are by the snow. If the villages were in a ferment it was only inwardly; on the surface everything was still calm. The peasants in those parts were easy-going and independent; they only laughed at the Bolsheviks who had taken power in the towns and were governing Saratoff.

"As long as we have the land we shall continue to be our own masters," they said. "In the spring the People’s Army will come and free us once and for all from this Bolshevik gang."

The sun grew warmer, and the snow became softer every day, so that our feet sank into it when walking. On hillsides exposed to the sun the streams began to sing, and over the porous snow came the sweet sound of flowing water. Pools of blue water reflected the sky. The fringe of icicles round our roof began to melt in the sun, and drops of crystal were scattered over the ground beneath like pearls from a broken necklace. The blackbirds began to sing in the sunlight. The wonderful Russian spring-time, that we had so often dreamed of in Italy, had come at last.

But the great river was still bound by the hard ice as though by iron. From our garden you could see its surface covered with thick snow, and the dark band made across it by the sledges.

One night I was awakened by the deep and rumbling note of distant cannon-fire. I rose in haste and hurried out. A strong warm wind moistened my face. The sound of cannon-fire had come from the banks of the Volga. It was the great thawing of the river, the great breaking-up of the ice.

I went in to get dressed, and was soon back again on a steep slope overlooking the Volga. How can I describe that savage music? It was like an orchestra played by invisible giants—the sobbing and shrieking of the strings, the grinding thunder of the brass and a continual percussion accompaniment of cannons. The roaring grew louder and louder, until suddenly there was heard a terrific sort of subterranean explosion—a cracking of the earth, followed by a shuddering collapse.

In the first glimmer of the dawn I knew that the inert mass had moved. The sound was like that of a human being in agony, like the heartrending cries of a woman giving birth to a child. The darkness dispersed and evaporated in the shining clearness of the air, and now there was unrolled before my eyes the spectacle of the immense river struggling for its liberty, like the struggling of an unchained people. The wind rushed against my burning face, my clothes were nearly torn off my back, and the violent shocks nearly jerked me off my feet. Here was that palpitation of new life that I had tried to feel on the day of my arrival. I now felt that I really was standing at the heart of my country at the very hour of its birth-pangs.

A sharp light pierced through the pale sky covered with wind-dishevelled clouds, and the broken-up surface of the ice appeared, where enormous blocks were crashing against each other furiously. The chaos of transparent rocks and inky black chasms was illumined by the first rays of the sun, which brought forth rainbow reflections. Between the incessant rumblings came the sound of a thousand waterfalls.

The banks of the Volga were black with people who had come to watch the thaw. Many of them were trying to rescue the boats, sledges and beams of wood that had been left behind on the ice the night before
and that were now being carried along by the current.

I was fascinated by the unique spectacle, and came back for many days afterwards to watch the powerful current gradually spreading ever wider and wider towards the banks.

Spring triumphed everywhere. The lilac burst into flower, and our garden was full of fresh, humid bushes, their branches overladen with scented blossom. All the pots and vases in the house were crammed with mauve and white flowers. In the evening, our feet wet with dew, we listened to the nightingales; all night long we listened to them through the open windows, and when the dawn came, full of murmurs and echoes and movements, they were still singing.

 Everywhere there was blossom and song. After the dead silence of the winter we were dazzled by the miracle of spring.

"We will never leave our country again!" cried the children.

"Never, never!" said little Ariane, with conviction.

And at that moment my husband arrived secretly from Moscow.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THEN came a sudden alarm: we were told that my husband's presence at Saratoff had been discovered. We had to leave our house and find a surer hiding-place.

As he had been born on the Volga my husband was a devoted fisherman; since the day of his arrival he had gone out with his line every morning before dawn. It was thus that he had made friends with an old man who had a boat and nets and lived in a hut on the bank of the river.

Victor asked the old fisherman whether he could come and stay in his hut for a time to help him with the fishing. The season being a good one his offer was accepted with delight. So the next day, taking every precaution against being followed, with a bright-coloured neckerchief tied under my chin and attired in a peasant's cotton dress, I set out for the hut to take some provisions to my husband.

His old host was very hospitable:

"It's a big hut," he said, "and you can stay here if you like—that is, if you're not afraid of the mosquitoes. I'll make you some fish soup after the catch, and you'll see how good it is!"

I was already well accustomed to fighting the fever-bearing insects which were the scourge of this district, and I knew that the surest weapon against them was petrol. I had brought some of this with me.

"Stephen and I are going out in the boat," the old man said to me (my husband's name was Stephen, for the time being), "to visit our nets. We're going to draw them in to-night, so you'll have plenty to take away with you to-morrow! You might light the fire
while you're waiting—the mosquitoes are getting thick."

They both went down to the boat and began to push it out into the water. The sun was sinking towards the horizon. A cloud of mosquitoes were buzzing about, making a sharp, irritating sound, and their stings made my skin smart. I rubbed myself with my petrol. Its sickly smell was quickly absorbed by the pure evening air. I breathed in the sweetly mingled smell of damp grass, of earth that was still warm, and of river mist. Dry branches cracked and twisted among the swiftly rising flames of the little camp fire, into which I threw a few handfuls of earth, making a thick smoke rise into the air. It hung there for a minute and was then dispersed by the light breeze. The mosquitoes disappeared.

At nightfall the fishers returned, carrying great wicker baskets full of fish that glittered metallically in the fantastic light of the camp fire. A pot was filled with water and placed on a tripod over the glowing embers, and the fisherman emptied one of his baskets into it, adding salt, pepper and a few onions. At the end of a quarter of an hour he took out the fish, threw them away and carefully placed in the pot three large sterlet, the famous fish from which caviare is obtained. The soup was most excellent—limpid, and of a clear amber colour. I have never tasted anything so good in even the most expensive restaurants! And those sterlet! They have delicate flesh like that of trout, but even finer and more tasty.

"You have to know how to cook it properly," the fisherman told us, "and there are very few people who know that! It has to be cooked in river water, and you ought to eat it as soon after it's caught as possible. They don't do it like that in the towns, I'll be bound. Ah! don't talk to me about the towns! I never could stand that stupid sort of life, packed one on top of the other like sardines in a tin. While here you are free to live as you like. The Bolsheviks are upsetting everything in the towns. But we shall get rid of them soon, for this civil war is even worse than the other one, and people won't put up with it much longer. What do you think?" I was careful of what I said. I gave a sigh and came out with a phrase that the peasant women always used to say:

"Oh! the War! God forbid that it should start again! We have suffered enough!"

"But the Bolsheviks have started it again already. You see what's happened to the people's representatives. I voted for the Revolutionary Socialists myself; they always used to say that the land belongs to the peasants. One of the men we elected to the Assembly was born in Saratoff. Victor Tchernoff his name was!"

I gave a startled jump. It immediately flashed into my mind that Victor had been discovered, and that the old man was simply biding his time before giving us away. I thought I saw him wink and smile maliciously. Undoubtedly an ambush had been prepared for us and we should be seized at any minute now...

Victor gave me a sidelong glance. Then he stood up and stretched himself, so that I could only see his legs. He yawned.

"Victor Tchernoff?" he said, nonchalantly. "Who's he? I can't remember anything about him, though I seem to know the name."

"Ah! You don't belong to this part, perhaps? But he's the man for us all right, Tchernoff is; you can rely on him. The Bolsheviks have dissolved the Assembly, which would have given the land back to the peasants, and they've started a war between brothers."

Everything was still quite calm. We heard the rhythmic slapping of water against the boat.

What was to be done? There was no doubt that my husband had been recognised, and the old man had started this risky conversation on purpose. The best thing to do was to slip away into the darkness. Victor approached the boat. The fisherman continued:
"I'm too old. I've got my boat and my fishing, what more do I want? But in my time I've known the Revolutionary Socialists. They were always for us, that's certain. But what can you do? It's always been like that... It doesn't do you any good to tell the truth."

He seemed perfectly sincere, with his sunburnt, bearded face and his serene blue eyes. It was impossible that he should betray us. He began to tell us about the days of his youth, his journeys in Siberia, where he had met the political exiles and the religious offenders who had been sent away from their country because of their views.

"It's always like that... governments don't like to hear the truth!"

Just as I was beginning to feel reassured there came a sudden crack out of the darkness, and the sound of approaching footsteps. Too late now! A figure loomed up out of the shadows.

"Ah! good; here's my nephew," said the fisherman. "Have you already eaten? We've finished everything, I'm afraid; you come too late, my boy. It's time to go to bed now, for we've got to get up before dawn to-morrow."

I went down towards the water and found Victor standing near the boat. Little by little the darkness closed in round the fire. The fisherman threw a few damp branches on to the dying embers, and smoke rose into the air. Followed by his nephew he then went into the hut, where we heard them talking peaceably.

Presently a double snoring told us that they were asleep. No suspicious sounds came to trouble our solitude. The stars were reflected in the dark and heavily moving water. The seeming danger that we had just gone through made our freedom still more precious to us.

How lovely life seemed! I felt at one with the night, and was no longer afraid of the mysterious future. What had it in store for us? I only knew that the present moment seemed interminable.

I awoke before dawn. The fishermen were outside. I had not slept long, but I felt thoroughly rested. I shivered in the morning freshness. A woolly mist was hanging over the river.

The nephew's boat was there; he left it for us and got into his uncle's. I placed myself at the helm and we began to glide gently along. The sky changed colour; it was pearly grey, tinted with pale pink, lemon and clear jade green. The water glittered with steely blue and silver and its surface was as sleek as satin. By the time the sun had risen we were far from the banks, right in the middle of the seemingly limitless river.

No one would come to look for us here. We were out of all danger and an eternity lay before us.
CHAPTER XXIX

"THE RAVINE"—every child in Saratoff understood the sinister meaning of this word.

"The Ravine"—there was only one such ravine, the others didn't exist in their eyes. Although there were many steep, treacherous-looking ravines on the outskirts of the town which the spring waters of the Volga had flooded, leaving behind a dark swelching mass of stagnant mud.

This particular ravine which the Tcheka had chosen as an execution place had impressed itself irradically on the people's minds. At the bottom, over a space of 150 to 200 metres, was a jumbled collection of corpses, roughly covered by the muddy earth. In winter the snow guarded this awful secret, but it was unmasked each fresh spring, revealing all the details of a past drama.

Between 1918 and 1919 nearly 1500 people, according to official statements, had been shot in this ravine! We had often heard mention of this place in Moscow, but we had never understood its significance until after the plot against Lenin, which had brought many of our friends to a tragic death in this ravine.

An old Socialist worker, much respected by the Bolsheviks, although their enemy at heart, took us all under his wing. We were installed in his house in the rôle of relatives who had arrived from the country.

The day after our arrival our host told us the stupefying news: The Tcheka had received an order from Moscow to shoot a number of political prisoners.

"Our enemies must pay their contribution of blood! They have wasted enough of the workers' lives, and now it is their turn to be sacrificed."

This was the official explanation given by the Tchekists to justify such an act of vengeance.

The Tcheka drew up a list on the following day: fifty people, chosen quite at random, were executed that same night.

Many of our comrades were among the victims: Boris Averkieff—the only son of an old Socialist exiled to Siberia during the Tsar's régime; the two Gousseffs, and Zenaide Mourachkina, a mistress in a communal school. They had been arrested on quite unimportant charges, and were about to be released when this dreadful affair happened.

The other names meant nothing to me, but were well known to our host's wife. She was almost weeping as she read down the list of those executed: "That one was a doctor, he used to look after my kids. Such a nice young fellow he was! Let me see, Alexejef—oh, yes, he's one of the biggest fishmongers here, I knew him quite well. Holy Mother of God, would you believe it? Here's the name of their schoolmaster—the kids used to love him, he was always the most popular man in the school. Here's another one, I knew him too. And that man was a chemist, I'm sure he never did anyone any harm. May the Lord have mercy on them, they're all innocent!"

The woman sobbed and went on reading the names.

"Here's one I don't know—he must be a stranger here, I've never heard such a name in our town."

Quite mechanically I repeated the name after her. He was some young artisan about twenty-nine years old. Who was this stranger, aged twenty-nine? Why was he chosen as one of the victims? No one could say. This was a kind of infernal lottery in which the winners were picked out by chance.

A country woman who had come by boat from some provincial town told me of Hélène's arrival. She was here to see her husband, Nicholas Ivanovitch, who had been transferred to Saratoff from the prison at V.
After we had left he was again arrested en route to Samara, and imprisoned at V. Hélène with her usual untiring energy was trying to manœuvre his escape. But when everything had been arranged he was deported to Saratoff on the eve of his intended flight.

When I found Hélène she was bowed down with grief. She seemed unconscious of people and her surroundings.

"She hasn't said a word since the terrible news..." whispered her companion.

"What news?"

"Why, don't you know? It's Nicholas, her husband...

She made a mysterious sign. But Hélène never moved, she didn't seem to hear. When we went into the next room the woman explained what had happened to Hélène.

"Her husband was shot on the night of the massacre. That 'contribution of blood,' do you remember?"

"But I never saw his name!" I said almost stuﬁﬁed.

"No. It was an assumed name. You see, he'd got a false passport."

As I visualised the list of names I remembered that unknown stranger: Artisan, age 29. So that was him...

For days and days Hélène never said a word. At night-time she refused to sleep, unable to rid herself of this spectral vision—the Ravine. We forced her to eat, she swallowed with difficulty and obvious distaste. Her friend told me the details of the pre-arranged flight.

Each evening she made her way to the prison—one side of the grim buildings overlooked the ﬁelds, quite unguarded save for the high prison wall—thus it was possible for her to crawl near enough to be right beneath the cell windows. She had already managed to convey Nicholas a message and ﬁnd out the position of his cell.

Now, when the lights went out and the prison lay plunged in darkness, she would wait until the night watchman had made his round and then creep up to the walls. A faint noise, barely perceptible in the night—that of a small pebble rolling on the gravel near where she waited, this was their signal.

Attached to this pebble was a bit of paper containing its precious message. Then she would wait a while longer for their second signal, a light ﬂickering at one of the cell windows, which went out almost as soon as it had appeared; and then, seeing his light, she would hurry back to the deserted streets, not pausing to read the message till she was safely in her room once more.

All was well. Their plans were arranged; they had even bribed one of the gaolers to help them. On the last night she was at her usual waiting-place. For the next day at this same hour he was to make his escape—a boat would be waiting for them.

The noise of sentries changing guard seemed particularly poignant that night. There had been no message this time, just a signal as they had arranged, a window lighted by a match. This red light which ﬂickered and died almost instantaneously was more than a mere signal, it was the symbol of their joint life together. Through the darkness she saw his window light up and for a moment even recognised his silhouette.

The next day someone told her that a group of prisoners had been transferred to Saratoff at dawn. So that last fugitive signal was really their adieu! And for how long...

For always. She had found this out on arriving at Saratoff. That lighted match had been the last contact between her and her husband.

The Ravine had become a place of pilgrimage, despite the fact that it was strictly forbidden, despite the fear of being arrested, and the stench of human bodies gradually rotting away, people still came and peered over the edge and tried to discern their friends and relatives among the dead bodies. They would
walk round the Ravine with slow, hesitant steps, their eyes almost hypnotised by the fatal spot.

A young girl from a neighbouring village was searching in vain for her dead brother. She met a peasant and tried to enlist his help.

He worked near there most days as his fields adjoined the Ravine. On the night of the massacre he had slept beneath his cart so as to start work again at dawn.

These peasants had a unique way of speaking without betraying any emotion or concern. Now he began telling us what had happened in his slow, indifferent voice:

"About two o'clock in the morning I heard the lorries arriving up there. Mind you, I wanted to run away, but it seemed safer to stay where I was—those Red Guards, they fair put the wind up one! They started tearing off the prisoners' clothes, some were proud and undressed themselves, but the others didn't budge and just stood there, having their clothes torn off them shred by shred. Oh! it was a terrible sight; it made my heart bleed!"

"Then I saw them stumbling towards the edge, stark naked. They were blindfolded and roped together in a straight line. One saw nothing but these white shapes, then came a discharge and they all hurtled down into the Ravine. I don't know how they shot them, but I think it must have been in the back.

"The other Guards crossed the bridge and clambered down with their lanterns till they'd reached the bottom of the pit. There were a few more shots, then all was silent. But I'll never forget the groans of those poor devils. It was something terrible.

"When daylight came I walked over the cliff edge where they'd been shot. I found an old pair of specs. there, someone must have worn them when he was shot, because the lenses were pierced through the centre. I've still got them at home; I'm having them as a keepsake."

The young girl had a presentiment and asked if she could see them. She went home with the peasant and found that the spectacles were her own brother's!

Each day brought further disappointment: it seemed impossible to get hold of a false passport which answered to Victor's description. Meanwhile, with the increasing power of the Red Guards it became more and more difficult to lead a clandestine life at Saratoff. Moreover, it was vitally necessary that my husband, as President of the Constituent Assembly, should arrive in time for the opening of their first session at Samara.

So we decided to leave as soon as possible. To make arrangements for our flight I had to enlist the help of an old Socialist peasant, who felt hostile towards the Bolsheviks. When he heard who I was he received me with open arms and promised that he would lend his farm cart and his wife's old clothes as a disguise. In a day or so everything was settled. We were to leave on a dark night and he would put us well on the way to Samara.

But Hélène still refused to accompany us; nothing could persuade her to leave, neither pleas nor arguments had any effect.

"Hélène, you can't stay here by yourself. Why, it's impossible!"

"I'll be all right, don't you worry. I just can't leave this town at present. I often go back to the Ravine... you see, I've a curious feeling something might happen, to do with Nicholas, I mean. Oh, I don't know, I suppose I'm just being stupid... but I'd rather stay here for a while, so you mustn't mind, Olga. I'll let you know if anything turns up."
CHAPTER XXX

WHEN we returned to Saratoff some months later I learnt that Nicholas Ivanovitch had escaped the massacre by some miracle, having only been lightly wounded in the arm. He had stood naked on the edge of the Ravine with the rest of the prisoners, waiting for death. When the shots came he had fallen backwards into the Ravine with the rest of them, but a soft muddy ledge saved his life. During the night he regained consciousness and found himself half embedded in the wet earth.

His first thought was that he had been buried alive. An acute pain in his left arm made him change his position, as he moved his hand touched another cold corpse and he shrank back in horror. While unconscious he had evidently rolled to the bottom of the Ravine and now lay in the midst of these frozen bodies.

He made a superhuman effort to stand up and struggle through the mire. For a moment only he contemplated the black mud-heaps which he knew covered the remains of his old comrades. An hour later, perhaps not so long, and the mud would have engulfed him like the rest. While unconscious he had evidently rolled to the bottom of the Ravine and now lay in the midst of these frozen bodies.

He reached the top safely and started running across the open fields without any idea of direction, guided by some savage instinct and only too glad to feel himself still alive and free.

Little by little, as he stumbled blindly on, the stars paled in the night sky and a red aura of dawn rose on the horizon. Already the cock crowed and he could see wisps of smoke curling up from the house chimneys. As he looked round on the approaching day and realised that he was quite lost, standing stark naked in someone else’s field, he was seized with a mad fear of being discovered and began running frantically in the opposite direction, not that this could have any effect, for he still had no idea as to where he was going.

Suddenly he caught sight of a tiny straw hut standing right in the midst of a cornfield. It was obviously one used by peasants as a night shelter when they didn’t want to make the long journey home. Sure enough, as he drew closer, he perceived someone moving about inside. Numb with terror the peasant shrank back as he saw this naked man with his bleeding arms coming towards him. He made a sign of the Cross and mumbled a prayer for mercy. Surely this was God’s judgment for his sins! So they stared at each other for a while. The peasant too frightened to speak and Nicholas wondering how he could best explain his extraordinary appearance.

As Nicholas said nothing the peasant grew more and more bewildered. Was this creature alive? The peasant shook his head doubtingly and again made the sign of the Cross.

At last Nicholas, trembling with cold, began to explain his story, but it seemed to have little effect on this dumb peasant. He merely looked him up and down as though he could not believe his eyes, and then mumbled another prayer.

"Perhaps he’s a Bolshevik,” thought Nicholas, “and wants to hear what I’ve got to say. ‘T’d better be careful!" He half thought of turning on his heels there and then and running back across the fields before it was too late. “Supposing this man was pretending, supposing he wasn’t a peasant after all!”
But just as he was trying to decide the peasant mumbled: “Dirty swine!” beneath his breath and swore volubly. At the same time he made signs that Nicholas should enter his hut, and draped him in an old sackcloth which he used as bed covering. Towards evening, when it was dark, they returned together to the farm. Here Nicholas Ivanovitch spent several days and was clothed and cared for by the peasant’s wife. They were hostile to the Bolsheviks, but their hatred was something taciturn and silent which only showed itself now and then. They knew perfectly well that in these days it wasn’t safe to voice their feelings openly. Even to Nicholas, a Bolshevik victim, they were never expansive.

One night, when he had more or less recovered, the peasant conducted him to safe friends at a neighbouring farm on the banks of the Volga and sent word to Hélène.

Later she told me about their first meeting. It was on a gentle autumn day when the sky was limpid and the air pure as crystal. She waited for him on the banks of the Volga. The crackling of dry leaves announced her husband’s approach.

“At that moment I felt as though a knife had stabbed my heart, my legs were trembling and I could hardly breathe for excitement. During those few seconds all my former life fled past in my mind. . . . I remembered all the lovely times we had had together. I remembered our parting . . . !”

Hélène couldn’t continue for some while, her emotion left her quite speechless.

“I’ll try and explain what I mean—Nicholas couldn’t seem to understand it. Can you imagine what I felt when I saw him coming towards me? Could you believe that I saw my whole past, my childhood, our romance and marriage; but at the same time that didn’t prevent me seeing the blue sky, his familiar profile, and the sparkling silver water, or the rich wheat fields and the trees in their golden glory? It was as though the whole perspective of my life had suddenly changed with Nicholas’s return. I felt reborn, I felt myself on the threshold of a new life. . . . But I see that you don’t understand either.”

Certainly it wasn’t till some time later that I understood this vision of hers.

“Yes, my past life means nothing to me now, I want to try and forget it. I want to enjoy every moment of the present—I’m afraid of losing our new happiness, that’s what it is!

“Now we’re living on a tiny little farm right in the midst of the forest. Nicholas loves being there, it’s so quiet, and so far we haven’t met anyone. We live mostly on butter and eggs, and I’ve been trying to make my own bread—it’s such fun! What do you think of that, Olga?”

“I just can’t imagine it! Can poor Nicholas eat any of your bread?” I asked laughingly.

“Of course, I’m a far better cook than I used to be. And, seriously though, Nicholas has changed just as much as I have. Do you remember his calm, dreamy, rather thoughtful nature? He was always devouring books and filling pages and pages of scribbled notes. He was quite content so long as he was reading or working on some particular theme. With the public he usually seemed gauche and distracted, he always said he couldn’t be bothered with idle talk!”

Hélène smiled, and in her smile I perceived a soft indulgence, an infinite sadness and pity as she recalled the past.

“Well, that’s all finished now. There’s none of that nonchalance or dreaminess about him. If you saw him you’d see the difference: he’s bright-eyed, his gestures are impulsive, and he has the wondrous expression of a child waking up on its birthday. Yes, it’s just as though someone had opened his eyes to reality—life is a new thrilling experience to him!”

When I eventually saw Nicholas Ivanovitch again he was indeed a changed man. He himself told me about his miraculous escape from the Ravine. Hélène, of course, knew the details by heart and listened with
such a doleful expression that I expected her to cry at any moment. It was all part of the past which she was so determined to forget!

Nicholas Ivanovitch stroked her hand.

"Darling, you mustn't be so sensitive. Every time I tell this story you go through hell like a martyr! One shouldn't live in the past, Hélène, it's all over and done with now. And here I am safe and sound like a newborn creature! Can you imagine someone being born with all his faculties fully developed so that he can think, talk, love and enjoy life to the full, with a man's reasoning powers and yet a child's fresh enthusiasm? Well, that's the state I'm in, amazing though it may seem! Facing death, being resigned and prepared for death—that purifies one's soul in a way that nothing else can. At that moment one becomes conscious of all that is fine and beautiful in life!"

He paused and turned towards me to see if I understood.

"Yes, that's undoubtedly true, only at death can one attain infinite wisdom," I said slowly.

"There's one thing that makes me sad: Hélène doesn't laugh like she used to. I'm afraid it's the awful life she's gone through for my sake!"

At this Hélène made an effort to laugh.

"I feel a little shaken, that's all. Our joy came too suddenly. But I'm very happy really, too happy in fact, can't you see that?"

"Yes, dearest, I'll believe you. Probably it's only a silly fancy of mine."

When we were alone that evening Hélène returned to the same subject:

"You see how he's changed now. He's another man; nothing can damp his desire to live."

"What about you?"

"With me it's the very opposite. I realise the futility of everything. How fragile humanity is! I see how quickly the present becomes the past and I'm afraid of losing him again!"

"Hélène, that's stupid of you—you mustn't spoil your happiness like that. After all, Nicholas has been saved."

She smiled at my words just like a grown-up smiles at a child's innocent remarks.

"Yes, you're right. He's saved for the moment at any rate. The days go by so quickly, and I'm frightened, . . . I can't bear the thought of being alone. He's part of my life, Olga. I know I shall die without him."

"But, Hélène, why think of such things. You're both young, you've got a long life together!"

"Oh, well, don't let's talk about it . . . I'll try not to be so morbid."

"That's right. Think of Nicholas, it's not fair on him."

"Nicholas won't stay in hiding long, I'm sure. He'll want to join up with his Party again, but this time I'll follow him everywhere, I'm not taking any more chances!" she said with a quick smile.
CHAPTER XXXI

CIVIL war had broken out on the banks of the Volga. The peasants were in revolt; the country people were rising against the dictatorship of the towns. The sound of revolt echoed in the wind; the tocsin was sounding the rising of the masses against their new masters.

The Tchekoslovakians on the Austrian frontier were making towards Siberia, intending to return to Europe by a devious sea route, there to rejoin the Allies against Germany. But they met with unexpected resistance from the Bolsheviks. Trotsky issued the fateful order to disarm the Tchekoslovakian troops and to shoot down all those who would not surrender. Whereupon the Tchekoslovakians joined in the civil war.

In May the Revolutionary Socialists, supported by the deputies of the Assembly, instigated a rising against the Bolshevik Soviets at Samara. This town then became the centre of the struggle. The Soviets were dissolved, and a democratic government composed of deputies of the Assembly at Samara and of representatives of the Municipality was formed, to be known as the “Constitutional Committee.” In June the Committee organised the People’s Army, which acted in collaboration with the Tchekoslovakians. They seized three towns on the Volga which were governed by the Bolsheviks, Stavropol, Sisrane and Simbirsk.

On August 7th Kazan, whence the Soviets had transported the gold reserve of the State Bank (six and a half million golden roubles, as well as silver, bank-notes, etc.), was taken by the People’s Army under the command of Fortunatoff and Vladimir Lebedeff, members of the Revolutionary-Socialist Party. This exploit was accomplished by only a handful of men, thanks to the bravery and initiative of two officers.

The gold reserve was transported to Samara and taken over by the Constitutional Committee. This event was greatly noised abroad throughout the entire region of the Volga.

The Communist Party, being Marxist, was consequently hostile to the peasants. It had proclaimed the nationalisation of the land, but had disfigured the meaning of this law. It had always classed the peasants as petit-bourgeois and treated them as enemies of the proletariat. The Communists were town-dwellers, with no understanding of country life or the needs and struggles of the farmers. They only excited the hatred of the country districts.

The Revolutionary-Socialist Committee, on the other hand, having carefully studied agricultural conditions, passed an agrarian law that conformed to the needs of the country districts, and so was very well received by the peasants.

I began to be often in the country. I made frequent journeys to the villages, where I noticed a strong feeling that everything would be all right once the Bolsheviks were defeated.

“Now that the land belongs to us, leave us to look after it in peace,” said the peasants. “We don’t want to have the city folk imposing their laws on us.”

“We don’t care a jot for the towns . . .” “When the Assembly meets again . . .” was the refrain on all sides.

The final victory seemed near. All parts of the Volga would soon be free and the troops would march on Moscow.

We were still unaware that the monarchist factions were getting hold of command and that the People’s Army had been changed into the White Army.

It was a fact. The generals and officers of the old régime were fighting under the red flags of the Assembly, which they hated, while only waiting for an
opportunity to dissolve it and run up the yellow and black flags of the monarchy. But as yet we knew nothing of this inner struggle.

Confident in the future we were waiting to set out for Samara, the home of liberty.

For safety's sake we decided to travel by different routes. I accompanied Victor to the edge of the town, where a wagon drawn by two horses was waiting for him. It had been lent us by peasants devoted to our cause. I had to rejoin him two or three days later, with the children, at Khvolinsk, where a steamer was waiting to take us to Samara.

Next dawn it was our turn to leave. I love wide spaces, having been born on the steppes which border the Black Sea, so the fields that we passed through were familiar to me. The maize and the golden sunflowers, their heads hanging because of the heat, reminded me of my childhood.

The sky was dull; a thin, cold rain made us shiver. The horses plodded with difficulty through clayish mud. In the twilight of the day's end we arrived at a village about halfway from Khvolinsk.

Our driver left us at an izba (peasant's hut). I told the children to stay there while I went to find the owner of the horses which were to draw us the next day. A bearded peasant consented to take us to the free town that had been conquered by the People's Army. He winked at me and said with a smile:

"You must be in a hurry to get back to your people. Have no fear. I also am on their side and am only too glad to help them. I hope they'll soon come here to chase the Bolsheviks away and bring back peace. My horses are strong, and if we leave here early in the morning we shall get there by the end of the day."

I returned happily to the izba to tell the children the good news. I found Ariane lying on the floor with her sisters by her side. She complained of a headache.

The atmosphere in the izba's one room was stifling, for our host slept there with his numerous family. The only fresh air came from the cracks of the door.

It was clear that we could not start again the next day. Ariane was feverish all night long. She had over 100°.

The next morning I foresaw that we should remain there for some time. The bearded owner of the horses, whose name was Ivan Vassilievitch, offered to put us up in his hut.

There was a hospital and a doctor in the village. I fetched the doctor to Ariane. He soon made his diagnosis: she had Spanish 'flu.

Our hosts were not afraid of contagion themselves, but we had to find another lodging for Olga and Natacha. It all seemed like a bad dream. The days passed by unnoticed. My little girl's temperature was the only division of time that existed for me.

100°—99°—98°—100° again.

Ariane recognised no one in her delirium.

The window of our room looked out on to the churchyard. One saw the whitewashed walls and blue dome of the church. The passing bell tolled every day. The Spanish 'flu was claiming many victims.

The days and nights were all alike. I used to go to sleep in my clothes when Ariane got worse, and would wake up each time she groaned or began to be delirious, accenting every syllable in a strange voice.

I ceaselessly renewed the hot compress on her forehead. I forgot everything else and became completely absorbed in this struggle against death. I gathered together every effort of my will, with a single purpose in my mind: to save my daughter from certain death, to hypnotise her into wishing to live.

At night I often heard men's voices in the next room, murmuring that "something was happening..." The thought that this might possibly be so crossed my mind, but I paid no attention to it.

A groan from Ariane was sufficient to cut me off from the exterior world. I leant over her. A little nightlight veered and spluttered. I seemed to be sharing the child's delirium. The walls shook. Huge goblins with long moustaches were twisting about on
the walls and ceiling, growing ever larger and more threatening.

When I got up to change Ariane’s compress the goblins shrank, but then I saw them again, squeezed in between the cracks of the door.

Once more the church bell tolled. A procession of sobbing women wrapped in shawls was following a coffin. A young peasant girl was chanting a dirge that I knew: it was for a dead child. I could not distinguish the words, but I knew it was the mother who was singing the mournful tune, while the peasants walked along silently and bareheaded, with the wind blowing back their hair.

The doctor had little hope. He tried to make me understand that I must prepare myself for the end. I began to hate him bitterly.

After a while everyone who did not believe that Ariane would get better became my enemy. Only old Martha, the mistress of the house, did not irritate me. She always used to say: “Don’t despair. The good God is always there to work miracles.”

I did not yet know that the Bolsheviks were advancing and had turned back the People’s Army not far from our village. But one night the Red soldiers arrived. They occupied all the houses and helped themselves to food.

I heard voices laughing and giving orders. Martha took some eggs and some milk to them. She placed the food before them without a word, but her flashing eyes betrayed how angry she was.

She came back to the room where I was and crossed herself before the ikons.

“Some of them are real devils!” she whispered. “Small and hunchbacked and yellow, with narrow, squinting eyes…”

At a given moment the door started shaking.

“You can’t come in, there’s a young lady ill in here.”
“Good God! Then why didn’t you tell us? We’d get on well with a young lady!”

The door burst open with a crash. Men in khaki jackets came towards the bed where I was sitting holding Ariane’s hand. They saw the compress on her head.

“The fever? Spanish ‘flu? It’s catching, comrades. Here, let’s get out of it quickly. You ought to have warned us, you old witch!”

They left the house immediately, for no one cared to remain in a contaminated spot.

One night, when I had lost all hope, without admitting as much to myself, and when Ariane was weaker and more feverish than ever, I heard her suddenly stop breathing. I threw myself on her like a mad-woman, taking her in my arms. I saw that she was all bathed in sweat. Suddenly she looked at me with lucid eyes and recognised me for the first time. It was like a resurrection. I felt sure that she was saved.

It was during her convalescence that I learnt of the defeat of the People’s Army.

Ariane got better little by little. We began to get ready to leave. I returned to reality, and found that we were in the very middle of the district ravaged by the civil war.

During the time when my daughter was delirious, the soldiers had pillaged everything. The danger had skimmed us by. We now had at all costs to find a way through the moving barrier that separated us from our friends.

Ivan Vassilievitch called to me:

“Come quickly, there’s someone just come from Moscow.”

In a nearby isba I found Genia Ratner with a baby in her arms. She told me that she had been kept in Moscow by the birth of her third child and that as soon as it had arrived she had left her two elder children with her husband and her mother and set out for Samara, under an assumed name, with her new-born—Sacha.
As she sat feeding him she gave me news of our Party and of our persecuted comrades in Moscow. Some of them had been arrested, the others shot. A mutual friend of ours had met with the latter fate while trying to make his way to Samara.

Genia Ratner went away the same evening. Alarmed to find that I had no money, she insisted on sharing with me what little she had. My small store of "Kerinskys" had all gone during Ariane's illness and we were being lodged and fed free by our hosts.

During the Revolution I met many common folk who helped us in every possible way and in the most perilous circumstances. They will never read these pages, but I should like to record my profound gratitude to the provincial and Moscow workers and to the peasants who, at the risk of being arrested or shot, gave refuge to us during our hunted exile and shared their food with us during time of famine.

Ivan Vassilievitch was calm, dignified and intelligent; his wife reserved, severe and wrapped up in the religion of "the ancient faith." They sheltered us under their roof without fear of contagion while the Bolshevik commissars were masters of the village. A small betrayal or an indiscreet word, and they would have been lost.

When I offered them money they refused. "We aren't doing this to be paid for it!" they said. They were right, for their generosity, goodness and courage were beyond price.

One fine autumn day, when Ariane was nearly well again, we set out in Ivan Vassilievitch's wagon for Khvolinsk, a town on the way to Samara.

The steppe was undulating, and we went up and down from hill to hill. In the distance we saw what seemed a shining splinter of glass. It was the Volga, showing us the way to Samara.

When we got to the top of the next slope we saw a swarm of black dots coming up towards us from the distance.

Our wagon slipped and nearly went over. The descent became precipitous.

Coming up to meet us we saw a long procession of wagons and all kinds of carts piled with bags, furniture, household utensils and children. Many people were on foot and carrying heavy bags on their backs.

"What's happening? Why this pilgrimage?"

"We're escaping! The People's Army has abandoned us, the town is quite defenceless and the first columns of the Reds are advancing towards Khvolinsk!"

It was a thunder-clap. What to do? How to decide?

Ivan Vassilievitch turned to me with an anxious and inquiring face. Perhaps there was still some way left of rejoining our army? If only we had come one day sooner...

"If you don't want to come back with me I'll put you down at the next inn and escape as quickly as possible!"

At the bottom of the hill we were jostled on every side by carts and vans that were hastening to leave the town.

Our wagon stopped in a large coach-yard full of horses. Ivan Vassilievitch put our luggage down on the ground and wished us good luck. I had no time to make up my mind, for he was disappearing at a gallop.

The manager of the low-class inn where we had been put down seemed scared. He wouldn't answer any of my questions, but simply pointed to a long corridor with many doors on both sides, from which a continual rumble of talking and shouting issued. Soldiers in worn and dusty uniforms were walking about everywhere and we were deafened by the noise of laughter, swearing and rattling arms.

An untidy servant took our luggage to a small room.

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1 20 and 40 rouble notes distributed by the Provisional Government.
upstairs. In it there was a rickety table, a chair and a bed whose mattress was covered with the stains of squashed fleas. The wallpaper hanging in strips from the walls gave out a poisonous smell.

An army of fleas gorged with blood kept coming and going. Suffocated with disgust and despair we sat down on our luggage in the middle of the room. My thoughts rushed round and round in my head; I racked my brains to think of some solution.

Suddenly I remembered that a woman doctor from Saratoff had asked me to visit some childhood friends of hers if ever I should be passing through Khvolinsk. I saw a light. Leaving my children at the inn I forced my way out through the soldiers, who stared at me insolently.

The street was full of marching troops. I tried to look indifferent and self-assured.

An old man with an honest, kindly face was sitting in the doorway of a wooden house. He was watching the soldiers with childish curiosity.

"Do you know any people called B——?" I asked him.

"Yes, very well, Madame; everyone knows them. They are the owners of a beautiful house."

He gave me their address and went part of the way with me to show me which road to take.

I found the house without any difficulty. Madame B——, a young, rather stout and pasty-faced woman, received me with open arms when I mentioned the name of the woman doctor.

"You are welcome," she said, "but you'd better move in quickly. The soldiers were here last night and they've turned everything upside down. They threatened us and were not at all polite. They've gone now, but some more may arrive at any moment. I shall say that you're my cousin and that there's no more room left in my house."

An hour later we had moved into the home of the honest bourgeois, having carried all our luggage ourselves.
another room from her, where I was able to do my cooking without taking part in the gargantuan repasts of my landlady. We bade one another a cordial farewell. I keep her in my memory because, after all, she did offer us asylum at a very critical moment. She did not doubt the cause of our departure, and said good-bye to us with tears in her eyes. A few days after we left the Bolsheviks requisitioned her of all her treasures and gradually removed all her provisions.

We shall always remember our tragi-comic stay at her house. She often made us laugh by her absurd ingenuousness and simple-minded meanness. She was the born bourgeoise, whom no upheaval, no world catastrophe could take out of her hereditary mediocrity. She had only one original habit: she used constantly to chew balls of rolled-up paper.

The printed page had an irresistible attraction for her. She would tear a page from a book or paper, when no one was looking, roll it up, put it in her mouth and chew it with delight. In this way she had eaten pages torn from volumes of Ibsen, Victor Hugo, Knut Hamson and Maeterlinck. She possessed the works of all these authors in Russian translation. Often when reading them during the long autumn evenings we came across irreparable gaps.

This is the final struggle—
Stand together, and to-morrow
The Internationale
Will be our whole life . . .

The song echoed through the silence of the deserted street. Battalions of Red soldiers were coming in my direction. They had tired young faces and looked like schoolboys from the suburbs of large towns.

The Revolution I had thought of as being far away passed before the white curtains of the street, through which frightened eyes looked out.
and beating up all the peasants. I’ve seen it with my own eyes, I tell you! Do you imagine that peasants who have been whipped would not want to join our ranks? If you had seen all that I’ve seen you’d be with us.

“They want to re-establish the whole of the old régime, even the Tzar. But we are invincible. The peasants will never support them when they find that they want to take away their land.”

I began to understand the causes of the unexpected check met with by the People’s Army after its first brilliant success.

But our Party? And the deputies of the Assembly. No, I couldn’t understand a thing.

“You see what energy and enthusiasm there is in our ranks! We are all brothers and we are going to change the whole of life; we are going to build an earthly paradise for everyone who will march with us. And you and the best of your comrades will belong to our Party. That is my dream!”

We parted late in the night.

The news which reached me became more and more desperate. Samara was threatened, Samara was taken. I was all alone in the enemy’s camp. The town was drenched by ceaseless rains. The waters of the Volga were laden and swollen by floods. The great river would soon become frozen until the spring.

We were told that a last steamer was about to leave for Saratoff. We suddenly decided to take it, and hastily packed our few bags. There was a long wait before the boat finally left. We had to sit for a whole day on the pier, paralysed by the cold wind.

At last the steamer made its departure, forcing a difficult passage through masses of floating ice.

CHAPTER XXXII

The reason I went to Moscow was to try and get news of my husband, for I had had no word from him for quite six months.

While the reactionary forces were strengthening along the Samara front the Bolsheviks were gaining ground and the People’s Army was falling back the whole time, abandoning first Samara, then Ufa, and in the end the whole Ural, to be finally driven back into Siberia.

After I had been a few days in Moscow the telephone rang. I recognised Julie’s voice:

“Come round at once to ——’s. We’ve got a great surprise waiting for you.”

I went out before nightfall. It was a long way to ——’s. There were no means of communication and I had to go on foot.

The Kremlin, with its square towers and crenellated walls, made me pause on my way. Here it was that the fight between democracy and dictatorship had ended. Here, in the ancient palace of the Tzars, the winning side had at last been installed.

I stopped yet again to admire that strange artist’s dream, St. Basil’s Church; its many onion-shaped cupolas, all coloured, gilded and richly carved, were shining against the evening sky. Each dome has its own particular colour and design, but the general effect is one of complete harmony. What an extraordinary dream it is! And a unique one, because Ivan the Terrible had the eyes of the visionary architect put out, to prevent him giving away the secret of his prodigious art.

I went along the boulevards that surround Moscow
and crossed the Lubianka Square, where the Tcheka, its power continually growing, was fortified in old hotels and vast furnished apartments belonging to insurance companies.

Over the Opera House glowed the scarlet letters of electric signs: "Children are the Flower of Life." "If you don't work you don't eat." "The Soviet Republic is a Children's Paradise."

Several suspicious-looking shadows were hovering about, so I hastened on my way. I arrived at ——'s house just as night was falling. Genia Ratner opened the door to me, and she was laughing.

"Someone is waiting for you in the next room," she said.

It was my husband. He had come back at last from the Ural. We spent hours in telling each other our different adventures. I learned that the democracy had come to a tragic end, struck down this time by a blow from the reactionary forces.

Victor told me that when he arrived in Samara the People's Army was in the command of the monarchists, who thought only of restoration. The fight organised by the Revolutionary Socialists, to which the democratic elements rallied in defence of liberty, turned into a fight for the restoration of the old régime.

Under pressure from the Right-Wing, which was in command of the army, the Samara government, represented by the "Constitutional Council," lost a little more of its power every day. No longer having the support of the workers or of the democratic element, the moderate Socialists, who were in a majority on the "Constitutional Council," went from compromise to compromise, slowly giving way to the reactionary elements. Our "moderate" comrades naively imagined that by making concessions they could form a coalition in which they would be able to overpower the monarchists.

"The struggle against the Bolsheviks," said Victor, "became a struggle against the peasants and workers, a national struggle against the minority parties. And now you see the consequences: the people, who at the beginning of the campaign received with open arms those who would deliver them from the Bolsheviks, turned against them when they realised the real meaning of the struggle. They restored the land to the old property owners, who behaved as though they were conquerors, threatening to punish the peasants as soon as they were finally victorious. So at last the peasants had to side with the 'White Army,' the army of the landed proprietors.

"In fact, it became in the end a struggle against all revolutionary forces. So the Revolution swept them all away pell-mell and herded them into Siberia! And Siberia itself was soon vanquished by the Bolsheviks with the people's aid. The Bolsheviks carried on a pathetic propaganda: 'Look this democracy in the face,' they said, 'it is the face of the old régime; it means giving back the land to the overlords, the slavery of the people, the oppression of the workers,' etc., etc. And what could we reply to that?

"The Constitutional Council followed up its compromises with complete submission. It gave up its power to a Directory of five members, of which only two were of our Party.

"On November 18th, 1918, Admiral Koltchak made his coup d'état, proclaiming his dictatorship and arresting Left-Wing members of the Directory. (The other three had helped him to accomplish his strategy.) Then he dissolved the Constituent Assembly at Ekaterinburg."

Victor went on to tell us of the dramatic scene that took place when their local bureau was invaded by armed monarchists. A brawl ensued, and one of the deputies was killed; the others were only saved by the intervention of a Tchekoslovakian commander. Now my husband was particularly hated by the monarchists, so the Tchekoslovakian commander, fearing he would meet with a tragic end, took him under his protection and thus he escaped from the White's fury. The other deputies were put in prison and, in spite of the
promise made to the Tcheks, were finally transferred to Omsk and massacred there in December.

Reaction swept Siberia. The White terror recommenced, and there were torturings and shootings right and left. Working-class organisations were forbidden, the workers persecuted, those suspected of Socialist ideas shot down or put to torture. Corporal punishment for workers and peasants was re-established, and at last the exasperated people went over to the side of the Bolsheviks.

"And I am forced to admit," said Victor, "that eminent members of the Party, our comrades, were among those who helped Koltchak's dictatorship to happen. They pulled down the bulwark of democracy with their own hands. I foresaw what would happen as soon as I arrived at Samara, for I was horrified by the progress made by the monarchists, and by the weakness of the moderate ones among us in consenting to a coalition with all the anti-democratic forces.

"They played the same part as our old comrades the Left-Wing Socialist Revolutionaries played with regard to the Bolsheviks. They both accepted the aid of their allies at the beginning, and then rejected it with scorn as soon as they no longer had need of it.

"When the Directory opened its Conference at Ufa I was unable to arrive in time, but I telephoned to the members of our Party and used all my strength to argue against the coalition. I implored them not to take part in the Directory, but of no avail. When I made my escape after Admiral Koltchak's coup d'état, I was hidden by workers. You cannot imagine how bitterly they hated Koltchak's Government. His power cannot last, you will see in the end—the Bolsheviks will triumph because the people are with them."

CHAPTER XXXIII

We found an empty house on the outskirts of Moscow, hidden in the depths of a pine-forest, and decided to move into it. Our children were brought with great difficulty from Saratoff. At last we were all together once again.

The distance from the town and an assumed name protected us from danger. Nevertheless, life was very trying. All private trade was forbidden, so it was very difficult to get food; it was still to be obtained in Moscow in certain shady establishments that were half forbidden and half allowed, but there was always the danger of falling into the hands of the secret armed guard. I went all the same to one of these shops, in order to sell my Paris frocks, or rather what there remained of them.

On Sukharevka Square stood a famous store that had often been disbanded by the armed forces, but which had risen each time from its ashes, like the legendary phoenix. Anything could be bought and sold there: objets d'art, pictures, jewellery, carpets. One could buy flour and bread, bacon, butter, shoes, books and furniture.

Hungry-looking children and old men, women both young and old, dressed in worn clothes, exchanged their jewels and other such belongings for pieces of bacon or for small quantities of rye flour. Silk curtains, antiques and miniatures went the way of all flesh. Brokers roamed among the crowded sellers; peasants brought shoes or pieces of cloth; soldiers brought flour and butter from the country and exchanged them for jewels.

It was in this shop that I managed to sell a much-
treasured black dress in georgette crêpe over a silk slip to a hearty young red-cheeked nouveau riche, who was moved to ecstasy by the fineness of the material.

"Ah!" she cried, "I'm not surprised that you bourgeois women looked lovely when you had dresses like this one to wear! But we are going to wear them now!" She was so delighted with the thing that she added another piece of bacon to the exchange, saying: "Here, take this and satisfy your hunger for once!"

A pair of expensive Paris shoes obtained enough rye flour to last us for a week.

Fortunately, we had friends among the peasants in the neighbouring village. They knew our secret and kept watch for us, so that we were warned in case of danger. From time to time they brought us presents of black bread, milk and honey. The peasants on the outskirts of Moscow had been plundered by the Bolsheviks and were in a very bad way themselves, but nevertheless they shared with us what they had. They gave us some seed potatoes, which we gaily planted one day when the sun was shining.

We were very grateful for the mushrooms that grew in the forest. We used to fetch great baskets full of them, and the whole house was scented with their sharp peculiar odour.

Summer was hot that year. The pastures glittered in the sunlight. The forests were surrounded by fields of oats and rye. Sometimes I would dive in among their yellow waves to come out laden with great bunches of cornflowers. The air resounded with the song of unseen larks, the like of whose celestial voices I have never heard since.

I'm afraid, though, that we never had enough to eat. Nothing really nourishing, such as sugar, butter, suet, meat or eggs; only millet mashed in water, some mushrooms and a few potatoes. But in the summer we could bear any sort of privation. In the fields and forest, listening to the larks, everything was forgotten, even our hunger. We would fall asleep in the sun, and wake up feeling strengthened.
In the autumn we were told that our hiding-place had been discovered, so we had to find a room in Moscow.

With the winter of 1919–1920 came the Red Terror, famine and frost. People made useless attempts to find even a sack of rotten potatoes or frozen turnips, such as animals are fed on as a rule.

From time to time Victor managed to get food from one of the workmen’s co-operatives, bringing the bags home on one of those children’s sledges that had become an indispensable feature of all Moscow households. All the shops were closed down; one could only sell things secretly and to trusted persons; the price of flour, bread and fatstuffs had gone up to an unheard-of height.

On one occasion my Saratoff friends sent us a few pounds of bacon just at a moment when our supply of frozen potatoes was exhausted, and we were obliged to eat the beautiful rashers all by themselves, without even bread. When, after a great deal of trouble, we managed to find a few potatoes, nothing remained of the bacon but a sweet memory. . . . We needed fatstuffs so badly that one of our greatest treats was to eat potatoes fried in cod-liver oil or castor oil, but this was not often possible.

The cold was perhaps even worse than the famine. Moscow, buried under immovable blankets of snow, seemed to be situated at the North Pole. The central heating and Dutch stoves that had once given the house a kind and even warmth now worked no longer, for lack of fuel. Instead, tiny little stoves called “La Bourgeoise” were installed, with long cumbersome flue-pipes which had to be trained out through one of the windows. To feed this fire we burnt furniture and books. We slept rolled up in coats and rugs. The water was frozen hard in the taps and one had to use melted snow to wash in.

The town seemed to have reached its last gasp. At
night it was plunged in pitchy darkness, for the electricity did not work in private apartments and the street lamps were all extinguished. Only the Lubianka Square, where the Tcheka reigned supreme, bathed the passers-by in light. All night long, while motors full of prisoners arrived, the beacons of the Tcheka surrounded the chief gate of their fortified city with a blinding glare.

After a day of work and wearisome searching for food the hungry and shivering inhabitants would anxiously listen for the sound of the Tcheka’s motors on their rounds. I knew of peaceable citizens who had nothing to fear, but whom fear drove crazy. They would almost have preferred to be arrested—even shot down—than to undergo any longer the torture of protracted waiting in the icy darkness of their flats.

The terror grew worse every day; one heard nothing but whispers of arrests, nightly investigations, shootings in the prisons. On all sides it was rumoured that Victor Tchernoff was being searched for throughout the city. While Moscow slept the work of the Tcheka went on.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ONE night when we were all asleep in our single unheated room there came an imperative rapping at the door which woke us up with a start. The electricity was not working; my husband got hastily dressed in the dark, but could not find his hat or his leather jacket, a sort of Communist uniform in which he used to disguise himself. He jumped out of the window in his shirt-sleeves; it was 20° below zero outside. Our room-mate lent us a fur cap and, having found the leather jacket, I threw them both out of the window after him. He still would not go away, but stood there outside the window asking for the manuscript of the History of the Revolution on which he was working.

I closed the window at the very moment when the Tchekists were coming into the entrance-hall. I just had time to get back into bed and pretend to be asleep. Then the Tchekists invaded the room and made us all get up at once. They searched everywhere, turning out cupboards and drawers by the light of a candle. I managed to find the manuscript that Victor wanted and, when no one was looking, to slip it inside the coat I had put on when getting out of bed. The investigation and inquiry lasted all night long. They found nothing—neither jewellery, nor letters, nor papers of any kind. As a matter of fact there was nothing there for them to find, except the manuscript that I had hidden.

“You are Tchernoff?” the leader of the Tchekists asked me, point blank.

“No, certainly not; I am So-and-so” (giving my pseudonym).
While the Tchekists hesitated voices were raised in the next room:

"Here's Tchernoff! Caught at last!"

Our neighbours were so unlucky as to have the same name as ours. In vain the pair protested that the young man in question did not in the least resemble the Party leader, whose hair was beginning to turn grey, and that they were not even distantly related to him.

They were both arrested, and I met them later in prison, where they remained for a long time.

When dawn came the Tchekists left the flat, taking the other Tchernoffs with them. As my identity had not yet been established, they left me behind in the charge of a picket of soldiers. For five days they kept watch over my little girls and myself. On the first night, in total darkness, one of the soldiers knocked on our door.

"What do you want?"

"Open, or I'll break down the door!"

"But you're crazy! If you've got something to say you can say it through the door."

The soldier began to swear. "We can't stand the darkness, we don't know what you're up to in there! How do we know that you're not getting ready to cut our throats? If you don't open, I fire!"

His voice had an insane ring. I lit a small piece of candle and opened the door. In the shadows my eyes met those of a man who had obviously lost his nerve. I spoke to him sternly:

"What have you got to fear from one woman and three children? Go and lie down at once and let us sleep. There's plenty of carpet there."

The soldier seemed to awaken from a nightmare. He lowered his eyes and went back to lie down once more on the floor of the entrance-hall, although he had been ordered by the Tchekha to keep watch all night sitting on a chair.

On the third night I heard someone knock while the guards were snoring. I looked through the window and saw that it was Julie, wrapped in a shawl and carrying a great sack upon her back. She was quivering with cold, but I signed to her to go away, trying to indicate that we were being watched. I shall never forget the ghastly expression that crossed her face as she collapsed into the snow. At that moment the nervous soldier came in.

"You're talking to someone!" he cried. "What are you doing in here?"

"You must be dreaming again," I replied. "I'm not talking to anyone, the door is closed. Go to sleep."

I dared not look out of the window any more, and did not know whether Julie was still there or not. Long afterwards she told me that she had fallen down with fatigue, completely worn out by her journey and the cold. She had come to spend the night with us, having no other place of refuge. In the sack she was carrying were some potatoes for us, which she had intended to cook as soon as she arrived, as she had eaten nothing for two days. She remained for a long while lying in the snow and nearly fell asleep, when at last, by sheer will-power, she forced herself to get up and went away to find somewhere else to lodge.

At the end of the five days the Tchekha removed the guard. My husband was changing his hiding-place every night. I often spent the night with him in different lodgings; sometimes these were luxury flats with frozen central heating and in a lamentable state of disorder, and sometimes we were received in the suburbs by workers who were friendly towards us and wished us well in spite of the growing terror. We learned that one such night spent with friends had been followed the next day by an investigation. The circle was closing in; Victor was being followed step by step.

The famine became more and more difficult to bear. Sometimes, in the street, I had to cling to the wall in order not to collapse with weakness. More than anything else I suffered to see my children so rapidly losing their health and strength beneath my very eyes.
One day I met Boris. He was unrecognisably thin and sallow, and seemed to be really ill. We had not seen each other since the tragic days of the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. I only knew that after having been on the Bolsheviks' side, the Left-Wing Revolutionary Socialists had found themselves in disagreement with them, and that after the shameful peace of Brest-Litovsk they had broken away altogether. At present they were being tracked down and persecuted like us. Boris had changed, but his deep and noisy laughter was just the same.

"Well, and what do you think of this lunatic asylum, the Soviet Republic?" he asked.

"It was your group that helped to build it!" I said.

"Oh, to hell with arguing just now!" he replied laughingly. "Here is my address, I shall be expecting you this evening."

In the room where he was hiding under a pseudonym, like myself, he told me that his friends had been arrested and some of them even shot. Proche was dead. He had declared war on the Bolsheviks, after the rupture, and had died of an illness caught while in hiding, his friends not having the means to look after him properly.

Boris shared his provisions with us—millet, rice and a piece of bacon. I carried away a log, hidden under my coat so that the owner of the house should not notice, and when cut into pieces it kept our little stove going the whole of the next day. On each visit we took away a little of the food that Boris had managed to procure for us.

The famine obliged us to think of leaving the city. Some friends suggested that we should go out into the country in a special train reserved for officials. Our papers were prepared and our safe-conducts put in order. Victor remained for the time being in Moscow.

My children and I had a carriage to ourselves. A snowstorm kept the train from starting; gales and
CHAPTER XXXV

At the end of a week of storm we were told that the train would start the next day. I intended to pay a last visit to the place where my husband and I were in the habit of meeting; it had always seemed quite a safe spot and we had already spent several nights there together. This evening, however, I found myself hesitating, and my eldest daughter begged me not to go. “It’s too dangerous,” she said, “when you know perfectly well that the Tchekists are hunting everywhere for you.”

I knew that what she said was true, but my husband had some most important papers that he wanted me to take to the country. He was waiting for me for the last time.

And so there I was, in the end, on my way through the dark streets, lit only by the reflection of the snow. The gale had died down, and the hard, virgin snow crunched under my feet. To-morrow, I said to myself, I shall be travelling towards unknown horizons; to-morrow I shall be far away from the Moscow that I love, now so terribly transformed by famine and terror...

I had a long way to go, along the great boulevards and through narrow lanes half buried under drifts of freshly-fallen snow, which sparkled in the feeble glow of a few lamps that were burning at distant intervals. I at last reached the enormous and unlighted building where Victor was waiting for me. This was the “Professional Union,” deserted and silent at such a late hour of the night. An old friend, the head of one of the departments, had lent us the key of his office. All was quiet, the avenue was deserted, and there were no lights in any of the windows. As I approached the heavy front door I thought for a moment that I heard someone utter my name. A vague disquiet filled me, but when I looked around there was no one to be seen; it was only my own heart beating or the crackling of the hardened snow.

I opened the door. As though by magic the large hall was instantly flooded in light. A soldier levelled the muzzle of his revolver at me with one hand and seized me by the wrist with the other. Before I knew what was happening I was surrounded by Tchekists, who snatched my bag away, lifted my cloak and searched me.

“You are Olga Tchernoff! There’s no doubt about it this time!”

Who had betrayed us? That is a riddle that I have never solved. But evidently someone had given away the exact time and place of our meeting. The Tchekists had been watching me out of the darkness. And my husband? Had he also arrived? He is usually so punctual, I thought, tormented with uncertainty. If he had been trapped, then all was finished, nothing further could save him.

When we saw each other again, later, Victor told me that he had come to the place quite without any suspicions, like myself, and had been about to open the door when he had a vague presentiment that made him hesitate for a moment. Then he saw a car drawn up not far away, and thought he saw a furtive glimmer of light through one of the windows. He went away at once.

I was carried off by car to the Tcheka, and led into a sumptuously furnished apartment lit by sparkling chandeliers. A number of men whom I had never seen before—all of them nervously excited and smiling—were seated in huge arm-chairs about a magnificent table. They bade me welcome.

Among them I recognised Latsis, the celebrated head of the Tcheka. He was exactly like his portrait: a fairly young face with a large carefully-trimmed
"Give me his address," she kept on saying, in a toneless voice that lacked all conviction.

Then came another questioning, and I again refused to answer. I was taken out into another room, with light in it this time. The door opened and in came my two eldest daughters, Olga and Natacha. Ariane was not there. The door opened yet again, and Iya Denissevitch reappeared.

She was well dressed and of fairly smart appearance, but her smile betrayed her. She could not look us in the face; lowering her eyes she spoke in a trembling voice:

"Aren't you going to give me Victor's address? Can it be that you have no confidence in me, Olga? I shall be set free to-morrow, and will go and see him at once."

"What would your mother say if she knew you were a Tchekist spy?" I said by way of reply.

"But you are wrong!" she protested.

"Aren't you ashamed of betraying your old friends?" I said.

The entry of the armed guard put an end to this unpleasant scene. My daughters were taken away to be questioned and a new prisoner, a woman who was in tears, was put into our cell. She told me that on her way to the audience chamber she had seen a little girl about seven or eight years old, sitting on a chair guarded by a soldier. I had no doubt that it was Ariane.

Once more I was called to the audience chamber. I found all eyes upon me. Latsis said:

"Your daughters have told everything. They have given us their father's address. Now it is your turn, and when you have confirmed their statement you will be set free immediately."

I knew at once that this was untrue, that it was a trick and a contemptible lie. My daughters would never have breathed a word. Without bothering to reply I turned to Latsis and said:

"Where is my daughter Ariane?"

Latsis laughed sneeringly and stroked his bushy
are very fond of your daddy you know. Only you must first tell us where he lives.'

We were so overwrought with emotion that we didn't feel much like going to sleep on the wooden bench of our cell, so my daughters began to tell me the story of their arrest. About midnight, when they were already asleep in the railway carriage, side by side with Julie and a lady who was going with us to the country, they were awakened by a stranger, a soldier, who called them by their names. In a low voice he told them that I had been arrested and that they ought to go and warn their father. He was an old Socialist friend of Victor Tchernoff's, he said; but they didn't trust him, for although they were young they were very wide-awake and always showed a shrewd insight in summing people up. But the lady who was with them believed that the soldier was telling the truth (though he was simply an agent-provocateur of the Tcheka, sent straight from the spot where I had been arrested: my railway tickets, with the number of the train and of the carriage on them, had been found in my handbag). The lady persuaded Olga and Natacha to leave Ariane in Julie's care and to go with her to the house of a friend who, she said, would both hide them and give Victor the warning.

Naturally, they were followed by a spy who was waiting for them at the station exit. During the long walk Olga and Natacha often thought they heard footsteps in the snow behind them, but the lady would not stop, insisting that there was no one there.

Half an hour after their arrival at the friend's house the Tchekists turned up. They were terribly pleased with themselves, being convinced that the children had gone straight to their father and that the friend in question was Tchernoff himself. They took the whole lot off to the Tcheka, where it did not take them long to discover the real identity of the supposed Tchernoff, though that did not prevent them from keeping him in prison for several months, as well as the rather too confident lady.
I was never examined again during all the years that I was kept in prison, and neither were any of the other older members of our Party, though the young recruits had to go through a long and harrowing series of cross-examinations.

After having signed my declaration I told my examiner that I would start knocking and shouting again, and would even break windows, if he did not immediately give me some food for my starving children. He reflected for a moment, and then said:

“You have a very unpleasant character, citizen! But we in the Tcheka are not quite such monsters as you would like to make out, and I will give you something to eat.”

He called a soldier and told him to fetch me some potatoes from the Co-operative. We cooked them that evening on the stove in our cell.

At the end of a week my children were set free and confided to the care of one of our oldest friends, Madame Pechkoff, the representatives of the political Red Cross and wife of Maxim Gorky.
CHAPTER XXXVI

I was, of course, relieved and thankful that my children had been set free, but felt very miserable in the communal cell where I was transferred! My thoughts were my only companions, for there was no one there in whom I could confide anything. It seemed impossible to get any news of my husband. Was he free, I wondered, or had Iya Denissoevitch found some means of tracking him down and betraying him?

The memory of that sinister meeting with our treacherous, one-time friend still haunted me. The Iya whom we had all known as a child and whose family was so dear to us ... it seemed impossible!

Perhaps she had gone to mutual friends of ours and managed somehow to find out Victor’s whereabouts that way? He might even be arrested at that very hour!

I spoke to no one. To all questions I invariably replied: “I know nothing.”

One night I was awakened by my bedmate. She looked frightened, and glanced towards the door by way of showing me that I was wanted.

It was Adamson, the celebrated Tchekist. He was standing near the door, dressed in an enormous leather jacket. His vain, hard-set face, and the disproportionate development of his lower jaw gave him an appearance of great cruelty.

“Get up and put your things together, and look sharp about it,” he snapped at me.

It was no use speaking to him; I knew from experience how foolish it was to ask questions.

“Come along, come along, don’t dawdle!”
“Who?!” murmured a few sleepy voices.

While I was silently dressing my frightened neighbours put my few things together in a bundle for me. It was a long time since anyone had been taken away in the middle of the night with all her belongings, and they were all rather startled and apprehensive.

“If it was without your belongings it might mean just an inquiry, which often happens. But so late at night, and with all your things, that only happens when —well, you simply can’t tell what it’s for or where you’re going to.”

Then the door opened and another Tchekist came in. This time it was the famous and terrible Maga, whom everyone hated and feared.

“Isn’t she ready yet?” he growled impatiently.

The women in the cell looked at me pityingly. A few of them came over to say good-bye, weeping on my shoulder and making the sign of the Cross on my brow.

“What are all these conversations about?” shouted Adamson, tearing me away from them. “Do you want solitary confinement?” he demanded of one of the women, who was sobbing bitterly.

They took me out into the court-yard, which was illuminated by an enormous electric lamp. It did me good to breathe the fresh air and to catch a glimpse of the distant stars.

“Turn right, turn to the right!”

We went down a stifling corridor, divided in two by a partition, past a series of grilled and padlocked doors. One of them was opened.

I was pushed into a tiny but brilliantly illuminated wooden cage, which was almost entirely taken up by a bed. Between the bed and the door there lay a narrow space, less than one foot wide and no more than three feet long.
"Where do you come from? The communal cell?"
An old, bent woman was sitting upon the bed. She had a long, thin face, and her sharp eyes pierced me through.
"You probably won't like it here very much," she said. "It's so narrow that you can hardly move, but at any rate it's clean and quiet; these boxes haven't been up for long, and the walls are made of new planks. You see—there aren't any windows, only the shutters in the doors. You might think we were in a stable. But never mind, you'll get used to it. Are you bothered by the light? I'm afraid there's nothing to be done about it; they're not allowed to put out the lights in the single cells. They're afraid we might commit suicide, you see. In the communal cell they do at least let you turn down the lamp, but the Governor goes on his round every night here, and if he sees that you've put up a shade he wakes you up and makes you take it down. But tell me, do you know why you were transferred? You were afraid, I expect, when they came to fetch you? It's a nasty moment, that, a very nasty moment!"
She took a cigarette from her bag, lit it, and began to smoke.
"Don't you smoke too?" she asked me. "I don't know how you can do without it. It's my only consolation. I couldn't last an hour without my cigarettes. I only formed the habit in prison. Prince K— my son-in-law, sends me plenty, thank God; but if it ever happens that I come to the end of my store, I go mad, quite mad, until someone brings me some more."
While I undid my bundle and was settling down beside her she told me she was a baroness, condemned to death for counter-revolutionary activity, but had somehow managed to buy her freedom. "It was all so silly!" she said.
To my great surprise she already knew who I was and seemed to have been waiting for my arrival.
"It was lucky for you that they put you in here. My case has taken a new turn, and my superintendent has promised me that I shall be released in two days' time, so I shall be able to do all sorts of things for you. You can tell me your husband's address and I will take him all your messages. I'll go anywhere you like. You and I are both enemies of the Bolsheviks, in different ways, and I shall be glad to help you. I may be a baroness, but I have always sympathised with your Party. I have often had dealings with the Revolutionary Socialists, and have been able to help them from time to time. My husband, of course, was a die-hard senator, and I used to have to hide forbidden pamphlets in our flat. Even now I sometimes go to 'the Party,'"
"Where's that?" I asked.
"Why, your Party's local," she said. "I knew the address and I used to go there to give them money. I'll go back when they've set me free, and do anything there that you want."

While I slept I had the feeling that something was pressing down my lids and that I must wake up at once. I felt that if I could not throw off my drowsiness something would happen, I knew not what. But I couldn't move.
The feeling grew more acute. I nearly woke up, but could not quite open my eyes. An awful weight was pressing down my lids.
With a sudden start I came to myself and opened my eyes. In the steady glare of the electric light that never ceased to fill the cell I saw the baroness leaning over me, her lips twisted in an evil smile, her dark eyes piercing through me.
"What is it, Ekaterina Petrovna?" I said.
"How can you go on sleeping like that when I can't sleep at all ...?"
My coat had slipped to the ground. I covered myself up and tried to close my eyes once more.
"I know that you'll soon wake up again if I watch you. You were breathing so calmly at first, and then,
They were both lying flat on their faces. You know what it's like?"

She stopped and reflected for a moment.

"Have you ever seen death, right close to? On the very edge of the abyss, I mean? That has happened to you, did you say? In bed perhaps, during a bad illness, but that's not the same thing. In the street, in the middle of a crowd and with bullets whistling all round you? No, that's not what I mean; you don't understand. I mean the way it was in that cellar, with one's feet slipping in the blood . . . and a puddle in the corner still warm perhaps . . . and entirely at their mercy, without the least chance of help. Then you are seized with nausea and your knees turn weak beneath you. Every second is a hundred years and every second passes away, and you know that suddenly the end will come and that it will last for ever—I mean the torture and the agony of waiting would last for ever—but that's something that you can't understand; no, I can see that you've no idea of what I'm talking about.

"Then they told me to undress and I was as though hypnotised. My hands moved of their own accord, undoing the buttons. I took off my cloak—yes, this one here" (and she showed me the cloak which served her as a blanket), "and then I heard a distant voice saying: 'Down on your knees!' and they pushed me down among the corpses. Some of them were still warm and twitching. Suddenly there came a feeble, distant cry, and someone said: 'Get up, then,' and took me by the hand. And then I saw Romanovski standing there with a smile on his beastly face.

"So you're feeling rather frightened, Ekaterina Petrovna?" he said. "Somewhat of a strain for the nerves? Never mind. You'll be a little more tractable now, a little easier to talk to, I hope?"

She fell silent, and stared ahead without seeming to see anything. Then she turned sharply to me and said:

"I suppose you think that that sort of thing couldn't
happen to you? But you’re wrong! It happened to one of my best friends. She used always to say that they might keep her in prison for ever, but that they’d never shoot her because she hadn’t done anything. But they shot her in the end, you know, whether she’d done anything or not. They shot her in the end!"

She looked at me angrily and defiantly, as though waiting for me to contradict her. The longer I remained silent the more irritated she got.

"It can happen to you, too. The Ve-Tcheka is all-powerful here. Do you suppose that they don’t shoot Socialists? I know very well they do. Everyone is afraid, everyone—and what of, do you think? Is life any better? They play cat and mouse with us. You know Romanovski’s methods, I expect? He rubs his hands together and his horrid little eyes sparkle gleefully behind his spectacles, and he says: ‘Sit down, dear Ekaterina Petrovna, we’re good friends, aren’t we? We’ve gone through it together, and there are certain things that we shan’t easily forget, aren’t there?’ And he goes on rubbing his hands together, and gives a little smile. Oh! he’s a sadist, a monster! He goes along softly, gently—and then suddenly lands you one just when you aren’t expecting it, and stands back to admire the effect from behind his glasses, watching to see whether you turn pale, whether your lips tremble, whether you’re struggling not to give yourself away. And it is that struggle which is so terrible! Not to give oneself away.

She got up and looked out through the barred window into the corridor. Along the dreary stretch of walls march the sentinel, ready to drop with fatigue. He had to struggle incessantly against the desire to fall asleep; he tapped with his feet, and stared with all his might at the drawings and inscriptions on the walls, the work of other soldiers who had been bored to death.

"Give me a light, comrade," said the baroness, "I’ve got no more matches left."
"I haven't got any cigarettes. I've finished them all, and I'm falling asleep as I walk. But I've got a tinder. Here you are!"

"Aren't you afraid of going to sleep?"

"Course I am! Not only that, I've got no cigarettes, which is worse. But wait a minute—that's better!"—and the sleepy soldier, a beardless country boy, puffed at the cigarette which the baroness gave him.

"Tell me, my friend," said the baroness, "have you ever had to lead people to their death?"

"Good Lord, yes!" replied the soldier, unwillingly.

"How many of them were there? Were they afraid?"

"They all were," he said, more reticently still, and he went away from the window.

"You see! He's done it all right, but he's ashamed to talk about it," said the baroness. "He doesn't like to say what he's done. They're all like that, those soldiers. They'd shoot themselves if they were told to!" And she gave a scornful laugh.

"Have you seen the inscriptions of the condemned upon the walls?" she asked me, presently. "Very expressive, eh?"

As though I could have missed seeing them! I had studied them all carefully, particularly the one that was just above my head. The letters stood out clearly from the white wood in the brilliant electric light:

"They're going to take me out and shoot me in a minute. And I am still so young. I want so much to go on living. It is hard to die when one has so much strength. And life is so beautiful . . . They're coming now, good-bye."

The last sentence was written by another hand. It was almost illegible, and the signature was broken off in the middle:

"Someone has found it hard to die, and when they came to fetch him he probably went off quietly as a sheep and undid his clothes like a dummy. They're all the same. Do you think he put up a fight and tried to run away? He wrote that it is hard to die, but it
isn't true. It's hard to live. Oh, when you have to go on living, then it's hard enough!

I was aware that every time I moved or sighed or even slightly changed the expression of my face I was being watched by the piercing eyes of the baroness. During the daytime we sat side by side, or lay stretched out on the bed; there was no room to do anything else. We only changed our positions when our limbs got cramped.

Shut in on all sides by planks of timber we stifled one another. The light seemed blinding, and those awful, straggling inscriptions were ever before our eyes.

So near to one another, and yet so far! We were forced to keep up a continual mutual pretence. I knew that she hated me because I always seemed so calm, because I did not suffer the same torture as she did, and because I was a Socialist and believed in all the things that she most loathed. Because I could sleep when I wanted, too, and above all, because she was forced to try and make me answer certain questions in order to make her own fate easier.

She only needed a few words—a name and an address! She tried to catch me unawares. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, when we were talking of something else. It became a sort of game between us. She used to pretend to be a friend to our Party, although it was easy to see that she really hated it. "It was you Social-Revolutionaries who created the Bolshevists!" she let slip out one day. She would adopt a friendly attitude at the very moment when her eyes were blazing most wickedly.

"Well, and have you been awake long?" she would say, smilingly. She had a sinister smile, like that of a mask. "Yesterday I didn't let you sleep at all, did I? My nerves are leading me such a dance. Not surprising. Anyone would get nervous in a box like this. Though you, I notice, seem to know how to control

yourself." A slight trace of irony crept into her words. "But then I am no longer your age; and besides, I've had to go through a good deal more than you have."

She got up and shook her dress, arranging the folds of her skirt. She always slept in her clothes. She once explained to me that since the time when she had been made to take off her things in the cellar she no longer undressed at night.

"And I don't intend to undress any more until I'm back in my own home," she said.

She went out to the lavatory to wash, accompanied by the guard.

"Come along, let's drink our tea," she said, when the guard had brought her back and the key had turned once more in the lock. The tea was already cold, but we poured it out, peaceably chatting.

"I'm soon going to be taken before the Court of Inquiry again, you know," she said. "Perhaps I shall leave it this time once and for all. Romanovski has promised to set me free. Then I can do all those things for you. I'll go to the Party and tell them all that's necessary. But I've forgotten the address again; you'll give it to me, won't you?"

"I think I've already told you that I don't know the Party's address, and besides, I've got nothing to tell them."

"But perhaps you ought to tell your husband something? Think how worried he must be!"

"My husband is not in Moscow, as I told you before."

"Ah, yes. I keep on forgetting."

She could not sleep on the night before the inquiry. She turned and twisted on the bed, and kept on waking me up. She smoked one cigarette after another.

"What a refined and amiable smile Romanovski's got! It's enough to freeze the blood in your veins! Everything is in his hands. Ah! I'm not afraid for myself, but last time he mentioned my daughter and kept
the interview was over. We were separated before we had scarcely had the time to embrace one another.

I was upset when I returned to the cell—happy and sad at the same time. In my thoughts I continued to talk to Natacha, repeating the endearments that I had not had time to say to her. "Perhaps that’s the last time you’ll see her!" said the baroness, angrily. "Who knows?"

One night I heard a distant door slam, and footsteps, voices and laughter. I listened carefully, and then gave a sudden start, for the deep laughter sounded just like Boris. So he was there too? I was sure that I was not mistaken. I got up and went towards the shutter, but found the eyes of the baroness fixed on me.

"Why did you wake up?" she said. "What are you listening to?"

"I heard some footsteps and the sound of a lock turning at the end of the corridor."

"Well, what of it? It’s only someone being taken out to an inquiry, or to be killed."

I turned away my head and went back to lie down once more. How shall I ever forget that terrible impotence and hatred?

I could no longer bear her company. I often remained lying down the whole day, with my eyes closed so as not to see her ghastly smile. If only I could have stuffed up my ears so as not to hear her voice!

Yes, hers was a hard life to bear. When I was transferred to another prison two months later, I often heard the baroness mentioned. During the course of the year, transferred from one prison to another, I heard news of her wherever I went. Sometimes she was put into the communal cell, sometimes into one of the solitary condemned ones. The Tcheka’s victim, she in her turn made victims of those with whom she was imprisoned. She caught out many an inexperienced young Socialist, mentioning her friendship with me by way of recommendation—many a still less experienced counter-revolutionary, deceived by her title of baroness,
her social relations, her age and all that she had gone through.

Who could listen without emotion to her story of the seconds that passed like centuries when she had had to face death in the cellar? Who could watch with indifference the torture she went through on the eve of the inquiries, her terror of the cat-and-mouse game she would be made to play? One often forgot that, once out of the hands of her persecutors, the mouse often changed in her turn into a cat. . . . Until, in the end, her story became universally known throughout the prisons.

I have not the courage to name her, still less can I judge her. Besides, could anyone invent a more hideous torture than that which she was condemned to endure for ever in her heart?

CHAPTER XXXVII

"COME out with your belongings!"

I hastily packed my things together. The baroness watched me with eyes that were full of hatred.

"Now they're going to set you free, I suppose," she said, her mouth twisted in anger.

I did not know where I was going, but I was at any rate glad to be leaving her behind.

I crossed Moscow on foot, under an escort of Red Guards. It was a long tramp, but I wanted to make it as long as possible in order to breathe the fresh air once more, though it made me feel giddy after having spent an entire winter shut up in an airless wooden box. The spring sunlight dazzled my eyes.

The towers of the famous Boutirky prison rose up against the sky. There was a grating of keys and the door of the Pougatcheff Tower fell heavily open.

Four grey granite towers pierced with tiny barred windows surmount the corners of the Boutirky, a prison left over from the old régime, and it is divided into parts by numerous court-yards. It is as solid and imposing as a fortress.

Every prisoner had to spend three weeks in quarantine in one of the towers before being put into a cell.

A few days after my arrival the door opened and the head wardress and a guard brought in a young girl of about ten or twelve years of age and wrapped in a heavy red cloak that concealed her slender body.

"What's this kid doing in here?"

"Where's her mother? Being tried?"

A cool voice replied:
time in the tower, and I was still bewildered by my new surroundings.

When I went out to wash, my neighbour followed me and said laughingly:

"You can see that they understand each other, those drug-fiends!"

"But what do you mean?" I asked.

"You're a bit slow in the uptake, aren't you? You have to have everything explained. 'Dopers' are people who take snow, coco-cocaine, or whatever you call it. They are all three very dangerous, so you be careful of them. The chiefs keep them going on snow, and then they'll give anyone away, you see? Irma and Ophelia are both Tchekist spies, and so is the kid, I should think. You saw how they went round that flask?"

"Yes, I saw. But what's in the flask?"

"That's ether. They take that when they haven't got any snow left."

"But where does it all come from?"

My companion roared with laughter. "You're still new," she said, "but you've got plenty of time to find out for yourself. The judges gave it to them—for services rendered. Or sometimes they get it from the guards, or from one of the other spies. They always find some way of getting hold of it."

That night I heard the newcomer moaning. Irma and Ophelia consoled and petted her, putting the empty flask beneath her nose. The morning found her shivering under her long red cloak. Her troubled eyes seemed to have taken on a new expression of firmness.

Bring me some paper," she demanded, when the wardress came in with our hot water at breakfast-time. "She wants to make a declaration," Irma said. "Call the head wardress, and ask for a piece of paper."

The turnkey who brought the pencil and paper looked at Irma scornfully. "This is your doing," she said.

Irma shrugged her shoulders. The girl whispered to her two friends, and then scribbled a few lines in
seemingly feverish haste. When her long sleeves got in her way she pushed them back impatiently. An hour later she was called away. When she came back in the evening she seemed quite changed. Her eyes shone, her cheeks looked pink and fresh and her mouth had taken on a charming softness. She laughed and chattered volubly.

"They're all very nice and young and friendly and good-looking, the examiners," she declared.

"Oh, yes, as charming as yourself!"

"They were awfully bright, and they gave me sweets, with powdered sugar?" interrupted Irma, laughing.

The girl got more and more lively, and talked without restraint. She took off her cloak and held it up for the others to look at.

"This used to belong to my poor mother," she said. "She always loved that colour. She was shot the day before I was put on the prison train. Oh! she was so young and so beautiful, Mother was—she was like a young girl. I'm her eldest child. I've got two little brothers, but I don't know what has become of them. Mother seemed so young that no one ever tried to flirt with me when she was there; they flirted with her instead. She had such a lovely laugh, and you should have seen how blonde she was! Why, my hair's quite dark in comparison with hers."

"And why did they shoot her?"

"Oh, for nothing!" She began to cry. "For nothing . . . for no reason at all. . . . It was my fiancé's fault. I was arrested all because of him and his friends. They were White officers, you see. Every night I had to go to the inquiry, and Mother knew nothing about it."

"And that was when they taught you to take snow?" asked the woman next to me.

"No, it was one of the prisoners in the common cell. I was cold and kept crying, my nerves were so bad, and then one of the spies came and gave me some 'to give me courage.' "

"That's their job," my companion murmured. "And did you betray your own mother?" she asked, aloud.

"No, no, I didn't want to! I didn't say anything about her! I only knew that she kept her jewel-box in a certain secret place. . . ."

"You did betray her, then!"

At this the girl began to sob desperately, burying her face in the red cloak, which she fondled with her hands, and moaning: "It's Mother's cloak!"

Presently she asked the wardress to take her out to the lavatory.

"She's got the snow hidden in the folds of her cloak," someone said, "and she's gone out to take some."

When she came in she was very pale, and even more excited, and her blazing eyes were lined with shadows. Then she told us the story of her mother's box:

"It was just an ordinary tin box, you know, like one of those big sweet tins that you buy at Christmas-time. It was buried in the garden and covered with snow. I had to go three days and three nights without the powder. It was terrible. I struggled and prayed, but it didn't do any good. I had told them everything I knew, there was nothing more to tell them except about the box. It was night-time, and the electric light shone down on the white powder lying in a little packet on the examiner's table. It was white as snow, and made me think of the snow on top of the box. Without meaning to, I—said: 'Under the snow. . .' I made them promise not to do anything to Mother, only to take her jewels and keep her in prison a little while. But they found some letters in the tin, and that was what did for her! Poor Mother. . . ."

She stared in front of her, with widely distended pupils. Her great unseeing eyes seemed black and fathomless.

"It was their fault, the devils. . . . I didn't know that she'd got letters hidden there. They came and took her away to be shot at dawn. She stopped in front of the door of my cell, and the wardress opened
the shutter. Mother looked through and gave me her blessing. ‘Don’t cry, Ninotchka, my darling,’ she said. ‘I’m not afraid to die. I have to leave your little brothers behind, but God will take care of them.’ And I couldn’t do anything for her, I could only whisper: ‘Little Mother, would you like a little powder, a big pinch so that you won’t feel anything at the last moment?’ But she said: ‘No, my child. I want to die like a Christian.’ Then they parted us. Presently they brought me this red cloak. It’s too big for me, because Mother was tall and well made. They made her take it off before they shot her. The executioner was going to have it, but someone said: ‘Leave that for her daughter,’ and so it was given to me.”
NEW HORIZONS

That evening Irma came and sat on the edge of Bertha's bed.

"Don't think I'm hard up," she said. "When I was arrested I was wearing a most beautiful orange evening dress made in Paris. I look awful in this skimpy old prison blouse and low-heeled shoes, I know—but you should have seen me then, with my glad-rags on and my golden wig. When I woke up in prison they'd taken away my dress and shoes, but I'll show you the wig, if you like."

She went back to her own bed and opened her attaché-case. When she returned she was almost unrecognisable. The shining golden curls contrasted oddly with her dark eyes and complexion, and her long black eyelashes did not seem to go with her heavy chin and common mouth. There was something rather shocking about her whole appearance, and the blonde wig only served to accentuate this impression.

"But I don't quite understand," said Bertha, shyly. "When you were arrested you were . . . employed by the Tcheka—weren't you?"

"Yes, of course," interrupted Ophelia, sitting down beside Irma. "By the Em-Tcheka, the Moscow Tcheka, you know. Why should that astonish you?"

"The Em-Tcheka sent me to a party," Irma said, "where there were a lot of old officers and their dames. I had to play the rôle of a tart, in order to get round them and make them talk about subjects that the Tcheka was interested in."

"So it was a . . . a sort of trap?" said Bertha.

"Well, I don't care if it was. I work for the Tcheka because I like it, so it doesn't matter to me what I do. All's fair in love and war. Well, as I was saying, this was a very interesting job. There was a lot to drink and lots of women. Tarts, you know, and I was supposed to be one, too—a poule de luxe, of course."

"She's still proud," said Ophelia maliciously.

"I'll say! You have to be smart for that kind of job, and you have to possess a few of my qualities."

NEW HORIZONS

"Though you come from a good family and are married and have a beautiful baby . . ."

"A child? Married, did you say?" Bertha was astonished.

"Yes, I've been married three times, and all in order. I've got a lover just now, one of the Em-Tcheka's commissars. He adores me, of course, but I find that one isn't enough. I've got plenty of others!"

"They call her the Messalina of the Em-Tcheka! That's really how we became friends. Messalina and Ophelia sounds awfully good, doesn't it?"

"Is your name Ophelia? You must be joking. Or perhaps it's a nickname?"

"It's my own name, right enough. I've been called that ever since I was born. It's a good thing I've got fair hair."

Ophelia's straw-coloured hair was arranged in a crown round her head and fastened by two large black knots above her ears. She had delicately coloured skin and roguishly laughing eyes.

"Messalina's kiddy is really adorable," she said. "He's only three, but he knows the whole music-hall repertory by heart; he's a regular turn!"

"Oh, yes, Didi has a lovely voice, and he's such a cherub. . . ."

"But why were you arrested?" Bertha asked impatiently, lowering her eyes.

"Well, it seems there was some sort of rivalry between the Tcheka and the Em-Tcheka. I was trying to work for them both at the same time, so it was really my fault, in a way. The Em-Tcheka arrived too late and the trick didn't work.

"I was having a marvellous time. They were drinking and laughing and playing the piano, and there were two dark rooms where you could flirt as you pleased, and a lot of nice boys . . . ."

"You call that flirting?"

Ophelia rocked with laughter. "You, an ardent Communist, flirting with counter-revolutionaries?"

"Well, I'm not exactly a Communist, you know. I
adore the Em-Tcheka, but I also believe in God, and I don’t like the Jews. . . ."

"I’m a Jewess myself, and I’ve had enough of you!" said Bertha, her voice trembling with indignation. "Don’t talk to me any more, please, I’ve had enough!"

"Oh, but I have Jewish friends, you know. In love and friendship the question of race does not exist. I only dislike them in mass. You, for instance, are very nice and kind. When I say the Jews, I only mean in principle."

Bertha lay motionless and with closed eyes, exhausted by her cough. Irma stroked her hands.

"Lie still, my dear, and listen. We were all drunk, and I was flirting like mad, but between kisses I did not forget my job. "A toast to the health of our generals!" I cried, ‘and another to the health of our future sovereign!’ and so on. The officers all got up and shouted: ‘God save the Tsar!’"

"And at that moment in came the Tchekists. Unfortunately, they weren’t ours from the Em-Tcheka, but from the Pan-Russian Tcheka. Everything got mixed up. The officers went on singing and shouting, and nobody knew who was who; and then, just when the Ve-Tcheka had practically finished their round-up, in came the Em-Tcheka! There was another row, and before I knew where I was I found myself being carried off in a motor! After that I fell asleep, and I don’t remember any more. When I woke up I was alone in a cell, my dress and shoes had been taken away and I had an awful headache. I shouted and banged on the wall, but nobody took any notice. They’ll be sorry for it one day, the damned fools. My friend the commissar is in the Em-Tcheka’s Collegium."

......

Late that night I heard Ophelia creep up to Bertha’s bed.

"Are you awake? Were you very upset by what Irma told you? She may be an agent of the Em-Tcheka, but she’s very good-hearted, really."

"And yet she can give people away like that?"

"She can’t help it, that’s her job. Apart from that, she has a heart of gold. She works for the Em-Tcheka because she likes it, and nothing could make her change her mind. She was very well brought up, you know. She speaks English and French as well as Russian, and she spent her childhood with her parents in Paris, Biarritz and London. But her family life was never very happy, because she has such a weakness for men. That’s why she is known as Messalina. The real reason she likes the Em-Tcheka so much is because it enables her to have as many lovers as she wants. Men are her only trouble, really. But I can see that you want to go to sleep, Bertha dear, so good night, and don’t be too hard on Irma; she’s a good sort when you get to know her."

The two friends terrorised the whole ward. The patients were afraid to upset them, and the nurses, including the head wardress, were all indulgent to them. Only Bertha refused to speak to them, and the prostitute, whose bed was on my left, dared to joke about them and show up the lies they told.

They made friends with a third woman, called Gerda, who was suffering from consumption. Her husband, a Communist, had been accused of embezzlement, and she had been arrested with him. She had been sentenced to death, and then reprieved, and was now being moved from prison to prison, awaiting a re-trial.

The three women were bound together by an almost hysterical friendship. It was an affair of endless intrigues, confidences, quarrels and endearments, always ending in stormy scenes and mutual denunciations. Ophelia had the extraordinary gift of being able to arouse disputes and hatred without seeming to. All day long she would move about the ward, whispering first to one friend and then to the other. She would often provoke fierce tussles between Irma and Gerda.

"So you believe that Tchekists are beyond bribery?" she asked Irma sweetly one day, in front of Gerda.

"Of course they are! They sacrifice everything to
"Would you like a little ether, Irma, dear?"
"Have you really got some?"
Irma sat up at once, her nostrils trembling. Her friend took the cork out of the flask and gave it to her to sniff.
"You're an angel, my sweet!"
"I shan't give you any more."
"Why not, you fool?"
"It's so difficult to get hold of, and besides, I want some myself."
"Just a little more, Ophelia, my darling, just a little..."
"Very well, on one condition." She walked away, lifting the flask above her head. "You must crawl across the room on all fours."
"Oh, you pig, beast, devil!"
Ophelia jumped gracefully on to her bed, and hid the flask away.
"Don't tease so, Ophelia!"
Irma went over to the bed, but her friend moved away towards the door, half opening the flask and holding it out as she walked. Irma, unable to bear the suspense any longer, threw herself to her knees and followed her across the room on all fours. Her dress split at the shoulder; it slid down, uncovering her breasts. Ophelia smilingly held out the flask for her to sniff, and then hid it away again.
"Now you must climb up on the chest and repeat everything I tell you."
"Ah, that I will never do!"
She begged and implored her friend for mercy, then swore at her and began to sob. Nothing would move her, so in the end Irma had to make up her mind to it. She climbed up on to the linen chest, with her dress hanging down, her eyes staring and her mouth twisted into a strange smile.
"The Em-Tcheka is something very sacred to you, is it not?"
"You know it is!"
"But you are fonder of ether and snow, of course?"
“You’ve no right to call yourselves women,” said Bertha. She buried herself beneath the covers, and I heard her stifled sobbing.

From time to time Ophelia was called before an inquiry. She would come back late at night, pale, worn out and with swollen eyes. She was accused of spying for the Whites, and at the same time—so she said—had been expelled from Esthonia for being a Red spy.

“Red or White, I know nothing about her affairs,” Irma once told us during Ophelia’s absence. At all events she tells me that things are going from bad to worse for her. They’ve asked her to be a Tchekist agent, and I’m not surprised. Ophelia is charming, and I am very fond of her; but she’s a close bird and you never know quite what she’s thinking. I don’t doubt she’s playing some sort of double game.”

After one of these inquiries Ophelia came back in tears. The examiner, she said, had threatened to have her shot. She was not called again, after that. She languished and grew thin, and became more and more irritable and depressed. At last she told the doctor that she was no longer ill, and asked to be transferred to the interior prison of the Tcheka. The three friends wept all day before the separation.

“You must be crazy,” said Irma. “What did you do that for? The inner prison is the most terrible of all.”

“I have my own ideas on the subject,” Ophelia replied.

When she had gone, Irma asked for paper to make a declaration, which she handed to one of the guards.

“Something against Ophelia,” the patients whispered.

On the following night they came to look for Ophelia after midnight, a thing that very rarely happened in the infirmary.

“They’re going to shoot her,” declared Irma when
they had gone. "They're sure to find her, and to- 
morrow perhaps the poor little thing will be lying in a 
cellar with her skull smashed in. And I loved her as 
though she were my own sister!"
Gerda wept too.
"She is safe and sound," said a newcomer who had 
just arrived from the inner prison. "I heard they were 
transferring a young informer from cell to cell, and she 
sounded just like your friend."
In fact, the first thing I saw on entering my cell, 
when I was myself transferred to the inner prison a 
few months later, was Ophelia's straw-coloured hair. 
She had grown thin and had a bad cough. Her eyes 
were no longer merry.
"Can you give me news of Irma and Gerda? Irma 
free? Are you sure? It seems impossible. But some 
people have all the luck. She is stupid, weak and 
crooked; but all the men are crazy about her. She'll 
get on all right. It was that commissar friend of hers 
who got her out, I'll be bound!"
Anger and envy came into her eyes, but she tried to 
hide it.
"And Gerda? In a concentration camp? With 
those bad legs of hers? We were all right in the 
infirmary, but here it's just like hell."
The cell had a metal roof, and it was summer-time. 
The prisoners, lying in their underclothes on wooden 
bunks, were bathed in a continual sweat. It was 
absolutely stifling.
Ophelia was called before the magistrates on the 
same day as I arrived. She hastily arranged the coils 
of her hair, put on a short, worn frock and rubbed her 
lips and cheeks with a scrap of red paper.
As soon as she had gone the other prisoners sur-
rounded me and told me she was a "wretched nark."
"She's to be pitied, all the same," said an old woman 
with a kind and intelligent face, for whom I soon came 
to have a great admiration. She was a teacher of 
history; her only son had been shot. Her courage, 
dignity and kindliness impressed everyone around her.

"Yes, she is indeed to be pitied," she said. "She's 
tubercular, as you can see; she coughs up blood. And 
then they're continually threatening to shoot her, and 
she has this dreadful craving for drugs. . . ."
"That creature to be pitied?" said a peasant. "It'd 
be a jolly good thing if they did shoot her, I should say. 
She's a nark. There's no hope for her in this world or 
the next."
Everyone else was asleep by the time the guard 
brought Ophelia back to the cell.
"Well, how did you get on?" I asked.
"The same old story, as usual. They asked me 
things I didn't know and made me admit crimes that 
were never committed."
She fell silent. A long while afterwards she said:
"I know I shall never escape from their clutches. 
Never."
Just before dawn I was awakened by a strange sound. 
In the half-light I saw Ophelia sitting up in her bunk, 
with her loosened hair falling on to her bare shoulders. 
She was crying softly, trying to hold back her sobs. 
A guard opened the shutter in the door and looked in 
through the bars, holding up his lamp. Ophelia 
looked like a hunted animal; she tried to conceal her 
tears and pretended to be combing her hair. The dark 
eye continued to stare at her through the hole. Then 
the light went out and the eye disappeared, but I had 
the feeling that it was still there, staring in through the 
darkness.
Pale daylight presently flooded the cell.
I saw Ophelia's slender silhouette shaking, and 
heard the dreadful sound of her subdued weeping.
CHAPTER XXXIX

SOON I was removed to the inner prison, noted for its stern régime. In my cell there were women of all ages and from all walks of life. Women of the world, work-girls, students, old wandering pedlars, actresses and nuns were packed side by side on plank beds without mattresses. Some of them did not even have a bed, but were reduced to lying on the ground. Some of them had scarcely arrived before they were called away to an inquiry from which they never returned. Their places were taken by others who stayed there for months on end without having to go to an inquiry at all.

All kinds of friendships were formed in this cell. The close proximity of Death awoke strong affections, jealousies, loves—the whole range of human passions, in fact.

Death was all-powerful within these walls. She was always there, just out of sight, ready to transform into a traitor anyone who feared her too much. How many of the human beings that I saw there bore the indelible mark of Judas!

The power of Death extended even into the inaccessible realm of dreams. Ah! those frightful prison dreams, fraught through and through with terror! We would awaken from our nightmares gasping and bathed in sweat, with palpitating heart and throbbing temples.

Or they were dreams that brought back memories of a happier past. How many times in my dreams I used to return to the Villa Ariane! I saw the sea once more, and my children, and it seemed I was always searching for something that it was indispensable to find. Then the voice of the wardress bringing round hot water for our breakfast called me back to my plank bed. I lay defeated, with closed eyes, not wanting to return to cold reality.

For most of the prisoners the morning began with desperate attempts to recapture the essence of dreams that had escaped them; and throughout the day they would vainly try to decipher the dark language of sleep in order to find out what fate had in store for them.

There was a whole science of good and evil omens in prison. The unconscious reflections of the most secret thoughts and the obscure bodily desires that are revealed in dreams were translated into words. Hardly had the nocturnal mirage been effaced by the light of day than it was examined from all points of view. There was no modesty about the telling and interpreting of dreams. Kisses and naked bodies, as well as pearl necklaces, were just so many signs to be deciphered.

The telling of fortunes from dreams, palms or cards, formed the prisoners’ main occupation during the interminable day. This mania for discovering the workings of fate made the illusory life of the cells seem even more unreal. And if the days passed slowly, the nights passed more slowly still.

The only remedy against nights full of the fear of death was the intoxicating pleasure of reciting in a loud voice all the most intimate details of one’s life, and of listening to these confessions.

Each night there was someone to play the part of Sheherazade and pass the fatal hour away with her narration.

The day after I was installed in cell No. 23 at the Tcheka a girl called Lise was brought in, who was soon to become the chief story-teller of our nights. Accompanied by a smiling gaoler she came in with a bunch of snowdrops in her hand, bringing with her the smell of the fresh open air and of the thawing wind. The reflection of the sky was still in her eyes and the smile she had intended for her fiancé still on her lips. We learnt that it was he who had given her the flowers and
that it was the moment after he had left her that she had been arrested.

Hardly had she sat down on the free bed that had been pointed out to her than she told us the story of how she had been arrested, without even first taking off her little fur cap and gloves, just as though she were paying us a visit.

She was sure to be set free soon, she said. Her arrest was simply due to a misunderstanding. Her fiancé would look after her.

The cell shared her optimism with her, only too glad to get a breath of fresh air and freedom, even at second-hand.

When night had fallen she told us all the details of her romance. We heard about the first meeting in a theatrical studio, the moonlight walks, her fiancé’s transparent blue eyes, and the coffee which had brought about the happy solution of their affair.

This coffee was nothing like the faked-up mixture of dandelion roots and carrots that had replaced tea and coffee after the Revolution; it was real moka. With its scented and shining beans her fiancé had managed to finally break down the resistance of the old countess. Lise’s mother was of no account; it was always the grandmother who had the last say.

The old lady had been quite unmanageable since the Revolution. To her it was a catastrophe that deprived her not only of luxuries but of things of primary necessity, such as sugar, coal, her chambermaid, her hairdresser, and the reader who alone was able to drive away the insomnia of her nights.

“Poor little Djinn was fading away without his daily piece of sugar,” said Lise, “and grandmother was getting awfully upset about him. But my fiancé, Paul, was so clever and good that Djinn was able to crunch his sugar between his teeth and lick up his paste just as before. Paul got some coal for us, too, and a little iron stove was installed near the frozen radiator in the room where our family all lodged. The fire made us feel more hopeful.

“It was a lucky day when that excellent coffee was poured out into the Saxony porcelain cups, for when grandmother had tasted it she at last gave her consent. She had been hesitating for a long time because she didn’t want to have a ‘commoner’ for her grandson-in-law.”

Lise chuckled. A commoner! Weren’t these prejudices funny? He was Prince Charming—what further title did he need?

Altogether, she had no cause to complain of the Revolution. Unless their lives had been completely disorganised she would never have had to attend those dramatic classes, and how would she have met Paul then?

The recital was continued every night, until we all knew the story by heart. Paul might have been living in the cell, we were so well acquainted with him. In the end he became a sort of symbolic fiancé—the ideal lover of every woman in our cell.

Lise was undoing her long fair hair for the night.

“And what about the first kiss?”

She blushed. “Yes, he often kissed my hands—during our meetings.”

“And your mouth?”

“Oh, that wasn’t till later—a few days before my arrest.”

She smiled and said no more. The women round her smiled, too, and fell a-dreaming.

One day Lise’s ephemeral reign was taken over by another.

Madame Sorina became our Sheherazade after Lise, and her power was great.

She came in like a queen. Her dominating glance flew rapidly round the cell and alighted on a carefully-prepared bed against which an old peasant woman was saying her evening prayers.

The newcomer removed her sable coat with a light gesture and marched resolutely towards the bed, dragging the coat behind her.

We expected to hear a dispute, but the old woman
The only ones to remain outside the magic circle were peasants; during the daytime they sat absorbed in their own thoughts, and nothing could disturb their heavy sleep at night. They said their prayers all the morning until dinner-time; after dinner they washed their plates and remained motionless and silent until supper.

Clear soup with fish-heads and greenstuff in it was distributed at noon.

Twice a week a few prisoners received parcels of provisions sent by parents and friends.

Each group of friends shared their food with one another.

One of the few women who resolutely refused to take part in these nocturnal conversations was a Mother-Superior of a convent, disdainful and impene-trable—who sat with her hands folded and eyelids closed in prayer.

My neighbour was equally indifferent—a young dark-haired girl called Tonia; she said very little and refused to disclose any of her secrets. Stretched out on her bed she passed the days lost in far-off dreams.

What was she thinking about? I wondered.

One day she confided in me.

She had fever and complained of a headache. I was worried and asked the gaoler to call a doctor. All that night I was on watch by her bedside until the crisis was over. And it was after this illness that I became her confidante.

Why had they arrested her? She didn’t seem to know. She was not a Communist, but she had never felt hostile towards the new régime. She had a job in one of the Co-operatives, and did it to the best of her ability.

Tonia led a very quiet life—she spent her Sundays and leisure hours alone in her room. Certainly, she did have a sweetheart, but he came to see her very seldom—he was always so busy at his work. She
didn't know his surname or what his profession was: she only knew him as Peter. He was always so tired. . . . Poor boy!

"Why was he always so tired? I used to wonder at this often. I used to wonder what worries and suffering he had to put up with, what could have made him so dejected. But I never asked him. He seemed to be so bound up in his own life and there was very little for me."

"I often wanted to ask him where he came from and how he spent his days, but then when I saw the tired despondent look in his eyes I hadn't the heart to go on pestering him. Instead, we used to sit together silently, my hands stroking his eyes.

"One day he disappeared, and just after that I was arrested—that's all."

After this confidence she used to look up joyfully when she saw me coming—she would laugh and smile, and she would often speak to me of the mysterious man whom she loved.

The monotony of the days was interrupted by the arrival of my old friend Katia. She threw her arms round my neck and I saw that she was just the same.

"You, here? Olga Elissevna?"

"And you, Communist that you are? You still are a Communist, I suppose?"

Yes, she was still. Like most of the other prisoners she had no idea why she had been arrested.

Installed in her new home Katia besieged me with questions and began telling me all her exciting adventures.

She was still the same old Katia—an ardent believer in the new religion and confident of the success of their Party.

"Of course it's very slow work, but one can't help that. You intellectuals and Revolutionary Socialists just refuse to help us and it's you who have delayed our final victory. Your husband with his great talents and eloquence; and you, and Julie, and many others, you break down all our good work—I know there'll always be a barrier between us, but I like you nevertheless, far more than I could the others. No, I shall never forget those days at the Villa Ariane—"

She had been doing Communist propaganda work in the villages. On her return she had organised Communist cells among the workers. She had met a young Bolshevik—"a great fair-headed chap with steely eyes."

"What energy he had!" she exclaimed. "You should have seen him! An intellectual, yes; but of the proletarian stamp, a worker's son.

"Unfortunately we couldn't live together, he was too busy—he often went away. I was arrested during his absence. I hope he'll come back soon and get me set free."

Soon after Katia's arrival a dancer known as Lilian made her tempestuous appearance. She was brought in at night, still wearing her spangled muslin ballet skirt, and with her short hair all in disorder. She had been arrested in her dressing-room at the end of a triumphant performance, and had only had time to gather up a few random garments to change into later.

She was laughing and crying at the same time. She ran across the cell, turned round and flung herself across an already occupied bed. Then she got up again and began to pour out a torrent of questions to which no one had time to reply. She told us of her arrest. She was, of course, completely ignorant of the causes.

Perhaps she had talked too much. Her tongue was her worst enemy.

She knew so many people—friends, admirers, theatre folk—but she had no enemies.

There was also someone whom she knew very intimately. Such a man! Oh, you should have seen him! But he loved her too much to do her any harm.

Sorina and the dancer became great friends. Lilian left no one in peace, not even the old peasant women, whose reserve she broke down by predicting good luck
for them with the cards. The timid Lise, too, got to like her in the end.

At night it was now her turn to tell her adventures, which were all thrilling. The captivating grace with which she recounted them made a pleasant change after Sorina's disturbing talk.

The latter often interrupted Lilian and started a discussion about the various qualities to be desired of a man in love.

The dancer's lover was a man of action, proud, ambitious and with a will of iron. The love between them was like a continual struggle: that was her conception of love. The kind of man who fought with you was more attractive than all others, she said.

"She's right, you know," said Katia to me; "one can only love a man who is strong-willed and full of energy. But why fight? That seems to be the sort of complication that intellectuals go in for. Lovers should march side by side. That is my ideal, and I am happy to have found it in my own life."

"I shouldn't care for that type of man at all!" whispered Lise. "Paul wasn't like that; oh, no, he was always so gentle and shy and kind."

"The unmelting ice in his eyes made me wild!" went on Lilian. "I felt as though frozen in ice eternal!"

"Ah! no, you are wrong," said Sorina. "Eyes dark with passion are the only ones worth anything. A man indifferent to everything outside his love—there you have the perfect lover!"

Then one day the dancer told Sorina's fortune with the cards. She predicted an important happening for her, to be followed by a sudden change in her life.

A few minutes later she was herself called away to an inquiry.

When Lilian came back she was obviously very upset. As she came in at the door she cried:

"I'm finished for ever, my dears! All's up with me! There's no doubt about it, this time. And I know who's responsible. Ah! I never knew he could be as contemptible as that!"
Thanks to his unusual charm he succeeded in conquering them all and divulging their secrets. Sometimes as a passionate lover, sometimes as a fiancé or the well-meaning protector of actresses, he always knew how to make them speak. Rosenthal was able to unravel many important plots and this made him valuable to the Em-Tcheka. His victims were numerous, and never once did they guess his true identity. Overcome with his success he began to use means which even the Em-Tcheka could not tolerate.

Rosenthal pocketed their confiscated money, gave extravagant supper-parties which he pretended would attract fresh victims, enjoying himself with these various women and living a luxurious life at the same time. Soon his activities as an examining magistrate became well known.

His enemies, jealous of his success, had denounced him. He was brought up for cross-examination and even the Tchekists found his activities quite incredible. He was immediately arrested and with him his recent unfortunate victims.

The population of the cell slowly changed. The nuns were all sent to a concentration camp, and their Mother-Superior was shot. The same fate was reserved for Lilian.

She did not shrink when her last hour came; she went laughing to her death. Stopping the gaolers with an imperious gesture she took a stick of rouge from her bag and touched up her blanched lips and cheeks. She embraced all the sobbing women in turn, and then turned to Sorina.

But the latter gave a piercing cry and fainted. When she regained consciousness Lilian was no longer there. The wardresses all had red eyes that day. "What courage!" they said. "And how beautiful she was, poor thing!"

Sorina soon left the prison to become in her turn an agent-provocatrice of the Tcheka: that was the price of her liberty. We heard afterwards that she was working
COME out with your things!"

The much-feared formula filled me with relief, this time. Anything would be better, I thought, than the inner prison, ruled by the relentless Jagoda. I bade my chance companions farewell, not knowing whether I should ever even hear of them again.

The journey was short. We went down a few empty streets, through a narrow lane, through a gateway, and I was once more in prison. It was the famous Em-Tcheka, this time, the Tcheka of Moscow.

I found myself once more in a communal cell full of women; it seemed to me that the atmosphere was even more feverish than that of the prison from which I had just come. The women's faces looked over-excited, and their nervous conversation was interrupted every now and then by hysterical laughter.

"My husband was brought here from Boutirky at the same time as I."

"For the ship?"

"Don't ask me—oh, don't ask me!" The young woman who had spoken threw herself down on a bank, sobbing wildly.

"The Death-Ship is filling up, and one of these nights, they say . . ."

_The Death-Ship_ was the picturesque name given to that part of the prison where the condemned awaited their last hour. It was a queer sort of room, divided into two floors, the upper part of which consisted of a narrow balcony with cells leading off it all the way round. A spiral staircase led up to the balcony, and in the middle of the ground floor there was a trap-door.
with a ladder leading down into a cellar. It was really not at all unlike a ship.

The "captain" was a heavily-built creature named Pankratoff, with a thick jaw, red face and stubby-fingered hands. Every evening after sunset he steered his passengers to unknown lands.

In the cabins of the hold the passengers awaited the hour of departure. A sinister silence reigned. No sound from the outer world could penetrate the thick walls, not a glimmer of daylight could get in. The hours were all alike. Neither space nor time existed any more.

The top of the ladder was continually guarded by sentinels. The prisoners only set foot on the rungs when they were about to make a journey from which they would not return. Every evening, from the top of the ladder, Pankratoff's rough voice would call for some passenger whose turn had come to leave the hold. Prisoner and executioner then descended into the cellar, where everything was arranged for mass murders, with a sloping floor and a deep trough for blood.

Pankratoff, the executioner, was twenty-seven, of middling size, with broad shoulders, a thick neck and restless green eyes. He was a vigilant "captain," never leaving the building until late at night, when he was worn out by his job. He was there all day long, peacefully chatting with the condemned. He had his likes and dislikes among the prisoners, giving away cigarettes to some and grumbling at others, but he never spared anyone at the last hour.

He had once been a simple, peace-loving peasant, with nothing much to distinguish him from innumerable other peasants in Central Russia. At the end of 1914 he entered the army and was taught the arts of war and bloodshed, after which harsh lesson all his primitive instincts of cruelty awoke. He was promoted. During the Revolution he was appointed chief of the Em-Tcheka's guard. At first it was only by chance that he had to carry out a few executions,
but he soon became an expert at the job, an executioner of high standing.

On his evenings off he went home to his mistress, Euphrosine Ivanovna. She was an ex-prostitute aged about twenty-five. Since meeting Pankratoff she had become the perfect little bourgeoisie housewife, happy and obedient. She prepared all his meals for him, and was an excellent cook. The next day, if he was in a good humour, he would detail the menu to the condemned prisoners, smacking his lips in greedy recollection.

“Ah! if only you could have tasted that stock we had last night!” he would say. “And the pork and vegetables! It was enough to make you lick your fingers afterwards!”

No one knew the exact number of his victims, but there must have been several hundred of them, perhaps even more than a thousand. He did not like talking about those who were dead. During the intervals he drank and smoked. His eyes would begin to shine crazily as time went on, until at last even the most rebellious of his victims no longer dared to face his glance. They were overcome with terror, and followed him down the ladder without a murmur, already half-dead; they would themselves unbutton the clothes that were to pass on to Pankratoff after their death. Before starting his job he would smoke a last cigarette, gazing down at them as they lay waiting on the sloping floor of the cellar.

When his victims were from the leisured class he would make them show him their teeth before he shot them. If any of their teeth were gold he would pull them out while their corpses were still warm.

The passengers in the Death-Ship were of all types and classes. They came in an endless procession from all places of detention: from the Em-Tcheka prison, from the inner prison of the Tcheka, from Boutirky, Taganka and others still. Condemned women awaited their last hour in the cells of the women’s quarter of the Em-Tcheka; men were kept in the “ship.”

Old men, adolescents convicted of banditry, illegal
trading or simply of being of noble birth, swindlers, workmen accused of sabotage, doctors accused of issuing falsified certificates—all spent a few hours, a few days or even a few weeks in the cells of the “ship” before being executed.

The procedure of the executions varied. It was an affair of a few minutes for some, and a long agony for others. He used to smoke and stare and make the trembling victims await his pleasure. Everything depended on his moods, and he was given to improvisation.

During my stay at Boutirky they took away a whole group of prisoners, most of whom had not been expecting the supreme penalty. They were condemned without a final trial, in their absence, by the “Troika,” the all-powerful Three. In January a group of nineteen were condemned, then a group of twenty-three, then twenty-five, and so on.

After the bomb-throwing affair of September 25th, 1919, when a group of Left-Wing Revolutionary Socialists had tried to blow up the People’s Commissariat in Leontiev Street, the Soviet Government ran completely amok. There followed a regular orgy of shooting. Hundreds of victims were taken from all the prisons.

On September 26th the one-time minister, Makaroff, Prince Dolgorovsky (personal friend of Nicholas II), many provincial governors and numerous servants of the old régime were all taken from Boutirky and shot the same day. On the succeeding days the victims became too numerous to count. They were of all classes, and were accused of crimes which, more often than not, they had never committed.

It was then that Pankratoff began to get tired. He had literally hundreds of executions to carry out every day. He began to have sleepless nights, and when he did sleep, nightmares came to trouble his repose. Pankratoff got scared.

At last he hesitated no more, and handed over his job to his fellow-countryman, Joukoff; and his flat and his mistress went with it. A few days later he left Moscow for the country, and I was told that he afterwards became director of an agricultural commune. He must have been troubled, at times, by memories of the silence of that cellar, when he used to smoke and stare at his victims before starting work. . . .

The “ship” continued its course under another’s command. The ex-soldier Joukoff was not unkind to his prisoners; he used even to perform little services for them occasionally. He drew a good salary and was well looked after, like everyone else in the Tcheka’s service.

Every night the “ship” unloaded and filled up once more. There were always a good many passengers. Eternities of mortal anguish passed in the ship’s hold. Wild-eyed and no longer of sound mind, they waited there until the moment when Joukoff’s firm voice began to call out their names, one by one.

And the “ship” sailed on towards:

The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns.
CHAPTER XLI

ONCE more I came under the protection of Providence.

In her white hospital dress Marguerite was singing the jewel song. The walls of the courtyard, full of closely-barred windows, resounded with her marvellous voice. Her audience listened in silence, sitting on a heap of sand.

When she had finished there was applause on every side.

Everyone was laughing and joking. Were we in prison? Yes, this was Boutirky, "the meeting-place of the counter-revolution," as my examining magistrate said when signing my transfer there. Since the spring I had been confined in the political section, after a fortnight's quarantine in the Tower.

There were intellectuals of all kinds at Boutirky: Socialists, anarchists, constitutional-democrats, monarchists; every kind of profession was represented, too: lawyers, doctors, teachers, artists, clergymen and people connected with foreign embassies; there were also numerous princes, princesses, counts, one-time ministers and functionaries of high standing. Also a few laymen accused of religious propaganda.

The life of political prisoners was not a hard one, for the time being. The reunited Socialists of all parties had managed to obtain certain concessions. Their cells were only locked at night; and although the men and women lived in different sections they were allowed to meet during the daytime, and to organise lectures, courses, and study circles for foreign languages.

There was no lack of teachers and specialists. On

Sundays the prisoners performed plays and sketches, under the direction of professional actors.

I was almost happy, after the inner prison, and had plenty to do all day. I met a lot of very interesting people and entered into the most various sorts of company. All Russia seemed to be there—all classes were represented.

Genia Ratner, like myself, had been arrested on her return to Moscow. I now met her again. We used to run a satirical magazine together; artists of talent used to illustrate for it, and quantities of poetry and prose came in every day.

Genia, always brimming over with fun and energy, was the life and soul of our group. She gave lectures on politics, ran debates against the Marxists and wrote articles for our paper. She also found time to look after her baby, Sacha, whom we had seen at the time of our journey to Samara, and who was now a year and a half old. Her other child, Maroussia, was known throughout the prison for her sweet and laughing nature; even the warders spoiled her.

Unfortunately, this first happiness was not to last long. I soon had to take on a serious responsibility, which made me the involuntary witness of all kinds of suffering.

I was elected starosta by the political prisoners of our section, which meant that I had to act as intermediary between the political prisoners and the administration of the prison. The starosta's duty was to lay complaints and requests before the Governor of the prison, and in cases of conflict with the warders to report the matter to the authorities and to plead the prisoners' cause. She had to keep order and to look after the property of the various cells, and was responsible to those in charge.

As soon as I had been elected I was bombarded with petitions. Since injustice was so common in the prison I was continually confronted with grievances,
complaints and despair, and was quite unable to do anything about them.

What could I do in such a position? Listening, collecting, reporting complaints and finding useless arguments didn’t do much good, and I knew it.

When those who had been condemned to death arrived I used to fill in inquiry forms, and was also authorised to write to the governors demanding a revision of the sentence, though I seldom received any reply.

There were two of the condemned whom I shall never forget. They were both brought in on the same day. One was a woman of uncertain age, the other was a young peasant woman wearing a brightly-coloured scarf.

“Have you got any books?” asked Magoursky (as the first woman was called) when I went in to see her. “I’m worn out with not being able to sleep. No, not novels; I should prefer history, I think, or perhaps philosophy. I should rather like to read Louis Blanc again, if you’ve got anything of his. I’ve not had any books for such a long time, you know. I am waiting for capital punishment. Why do you look at me with such scared sort of eyes? Surely death is a perfectly simple affair?”

I brought her a mattress and some books.

“What are you accused of?” I asked.

“I? Nothing at all. My husband and his friends have been convicted of forgery, but it was nothing to do with me. They wanted to get confessions out of me, but I wasn’t having any of that. The “Troika” are supposed to be deciding what to do with us; but, of course, I know the sentence already. . . .”

Her laughter made me feel very uncomfortable. It seemed to come from far away, as though she were a ventriloquist. I turned round to see whether someone else was there; but no, it was she who was laughing. Her eyes were at once roving and attentive; she took in every detail of my appearance and yet did not see me at all. Otherwise, everything about her was quite simple. She had a round and insignificant face, and wore a jacket whose sleeves were too short for her arms, which made her keep pulling them up, the only gesture which betrayed the state of her nerves. She seemed calm and at ease. Her voice was rather high-pitched; she spoke a little too fast, articulating her syllables in an un-Russian way, though she really was Russian.

She asked me questions about the life at Boutirky and seemed interested in the smallest details; but I felt that she was secretly smiling to herself, and enjoying the lofty superiority of a person speaking to a child out of politeness, while thinking of other things.

The bonds that unite the living were, in fact, already broken between her and us. I found her detachment terrifying, and could not awaken in myself any feeling of compassion towards her. That restless yet motionless look in her eyes made me want to hide myself or run away.

The keys rattled at the door.

“A new one for you, starosta!”

There was only one empty cell left. I went to it at once.

“Help me! save me! Don’t let me die!”

A young peasant woman fell to her knees and held out her arms to me, sobbing.

“Quickly, quickly, write to the judges for me! They say you must send in a petition, there’s still time. . . . It was his cloth. . . .”

She gasped between her sobs and could not finish her sentences properly.

“I’m innocent, it wasn’t me, it was his piece of cloth. . . . Oh, my God, if only I’d known it was forbidden! Just a rough bit of cloth, and they want to shoot me for it!”

Her vague blue eyes like a new-born child’s were flooded in tears. Her scarf slid off her head and I saw the locks of hair that lay tied with pink ribbon bows on her neck. At last I began to understand.

A spy had managed to sell her a piece of cloth, and had then reported her. The same night the Tchekists
found the cloth in her house and arrested her. She was accused of illegal trading and condemned to death.

The following night we were awakened by an inhuman wailing. Whence came that harsh and piercing voice, and to whom could it belong?

The wardress came to fetch me, though it was forbidden to enter other people's cells during the night. "Do try and calm the poor thing," she said.

The woman was sitting on her bed, swaying to and fro and wailing:

"God pardons all, He is all-powerful and forgiving. Think of Him and don't make me die. I don't want to die. Do you really want to shoot me? Make me cart stones in the court-yard, in the mud, and I will kiss your feet. Don't let me die, dearest lady! Write to them again, tell them everything, tell them I'm innocent, that I swear it before God! I'm ready to do anything, anything at all. Please write to them, I'll give you my gold ring if you do! They'll believe what you say because you're educated, you're not an ignorant peasant like me."

She tried to give me her ring, but her fingers were so swollen with work she couldn't get it off.

"Don't you want my ring? Take my scarf, then, it's pure linen. Look at the lovely blue and red flowers on it. Don't you want that either? Don't you want anything? That must be because you think it's no use writing. Isn't there any hope?"

She sank down on the ground, then raised her head towards the black hole of the barred window and let out a long, wild cry into the night, the inarticulate cry of a dying animal.

It was a night of terrible suffering. Our tears mingled; we were both distraught. But at the same time I felt separated from her, even in my sympathy, for I knew that nothing could prevent her slipping further and further away from me into the abyss...

She was asleep when the dawn came, worn out by her tears, Her lips were swollen and her cheeks still moist with weeping. I felt her and, on my way, passed by the door of the other condemned cell. All was quiet. I was unable to resist opening the shutter.

Magoursky was sitting on the bunk in her short-sleeved jacket with a book on her knees.

"Did you know that there was another inquiry yesterday?" she said, looking up. "They tried to make me give evidence against my husband, but they found that trick wouldn't work with me!"

On the following evening they came to fetch the peasant woman. She could no longer walk. Two wardresses had to hold her up and drag her towards the door. Though her mouth was wide open, she couldn't cry out any more. But her clear eyes cried out and clung to us all, imploring us to help.

"Save me! There is still time, I am still alive!" her eyes seemed to say. I shall never forget their mute appeal as long as I live.

An hour later we heard Magoursky's mocking voice:

"Good-bye, my friends," she said, with perfect distinctness. "They're taking me out to be shot!" Her strange laugh echoed down the corridor, and that was all.

Life at Boutirky went on as usual. There were lessons, lectures, music, friendships, love and death. But everything seemed empty after the violent emotions I had gone through.

Our Revolutionary-Socialist Group at Boutirky was very worried as to the fate of our comrades of the Central Assembly, who were being kept in the inner prison of the Tcheka. They were being abominably treated.

We had asked the Tcheka to imprison them with us at Boutirky, and to drive home our request we had decided to go on hunger-strike in the event of our friends not being with us by a certain date.

On the eve of the strike we met for discussion. During the course of our arguments, in which it
became apparent that certain members of the group were only agreeing half-heartedly to the strike, the prison was unexpectedly invaded by the international troops of the Tcheka, composed of Germans, Magyars and Austrians.

The Governor of the prison, followed by armed Tchekists, came in with a list in his hand, called out our names and invited us to surrender.

They replied to our questions with swearing and laughter, so we refused to leave the prison until we knew the reason why.

At that moment the soldiers opened fire in the courtyard. Political prisoners of all parties, and even criminals, made reply by hurling all the missiles they could find out of the windows. A serious battle began.

Some of my comrades were wounded. They were handcuffed and taken away, with their clothes all torn and their faces covered in blood. Two armed Tchekists pinned me by the arms.

The uproar and confusion made the walls of the prison tremble. The last thing that I saw was Genia Ratner, with blazing eyes, clutching Sacha in her arms while furious soldiers tried to tear him away from her.

A police van was waiting for us. We were thirty-two in all: twenty-six men and six women. Genia Ratner stayed behind at Boutirky.

The vehicle passed through the town and the suburbs and out into the open country. None of us were afraid. "They're going to shoot us," we said. Exalted by the fighting and the danger we embraced one another and shook hands in the darkness.

The hostile winds
Blow over us

sang untrembling voices.

The motor stopped at last. It's all up now, we thought. Each prisoner was taken out with a Tchekist on either side of him. It was a deserted spot. There was a little railway station there and we found that we were being taken to a train.

We were surprised and delighted to find our comrades from the inner prison waiting for us in the truck. One of them happened to be a doctor, and he was able to give first aid to the wounded. We were all overjoyed to be together once again.

All night long the train sped towards an unknown destination. The end of the journey came next day, when we learnt that we were on the banks of the Volga, at Jaroslav, where we were to be interned in an ancient prison that had isolated cells and was governed with the utmost strictness.

Through the bars of my cell I saw the Volga once more.

For a whole month we were almost dying of hunger. All that we had to eat each day was a quarter of a pound of black bread and a plate of clear soup with rotten fish-heads in it.

Many of us fell ill and began to suffer from hallucinations. In the end we were saved by the Political Red Cross, which sent us supplies of sugar, millet and bacon. We began to sit up and take notice at last.

We used to write notes to one another from cell to cell, and every day we had half an hour's walk together in the court-yard.

A few months passed in this way, and then the Tchekists separated us. I was among the first group to be sent away from Jaroslav.
CHAPTER XLII

My wanderings had started again.

I was now in a provincial prison in an unknown and far-off town. When I climbed up on a stool to look out of the barred window I saw the boundless steppe rolling away beyond the walls. I pressed my face against the bars and breathed in the sweet smell of the prairies. The wind lightly touched me. Sometimes it came from the deserts of Asia, bringing the thaw in spring-time and the drought in summer; sometimes it was a chilly blast that heralded the approach of autumn.

But I was not always able to watch the clouds passing across the evasive and beckoning horizon. There was usually a sentinel with a loaded gun outside, and it was his duty to fire if he saw a prisoner's face at any of the windows. Fortunately the guards were not all alike. Some of them watched over us like hawks and would fire every time they saw even a prisoner's shadow (a woman was shot in this way just before I arrived); but others were not so strict, and would give us time to jump down before firing. The most indulgent were peasants, who would often give us a kindly smile and turn away, pretending not to see.

The war between the Bolsheviks and the Green Army was the cause of the arrival of scores of new prisoners. Men and women accused of complicity filled the cells.

The Governor became very busy, and was no longer seen in the little court-yard outside my window, where a soldier marched to and fro all through the day, longing for sleep.

Inside our prison there was a series of small court-yards, with one large one in the middle, where the prisoners used to promenade once a day. There was also another, mysterious yard, which was only mentioned in hushed voices. This was the orchard yard. It was right at the back, surrounded by thick walls that separated it from the inhabited part of the prison. It could not be seen from any of the windows.

When all the women prisoners were herded to the steam baths, once a week, we used to see the leafy tops of trees above the walls. Then I could hear voices whispering: "There's the orchard!"

It was in this isolated yard that the condemned prisoners were shot. There, beneath the apple trees, the victims' corpses were buried.

No one went near the orchard and it was only once a week that we saw the rustling movement of its yellow and green branches, but its shadow seemed to weigh over the whole prison. "The supreme penalty," "Death," and so on, were replaced by a single expression: "The orchard." The prisoners' dreams were haunted by the terrifying vision of a shady court-yard planted with fertile trees on which grew large, juicy, golden-cheeked apples; luscious autumn fruit, a little red on one side.

Oh! those apples! People spoke of them with eyes wide with terror. . . . I tried to think of them as seldom as possible.

When there were kindly sentries on duty I used to climb up and sit on my window-sill, looking out through the bars.

The steppes fascinated me. They were the country of my childhood, for I was born far in the west, on the steppes that border the Black Sea. I loved their strong, bitter-sweet smell, like a mixture of honey and dry, bitter plants. I loved their colours, too: bluish-mauve, ochre and deep bronze, formed by thistles, bitter wormwood, gorse and tufts of silky esparto grass, that rolled in the wind like the surface of the sea. I had always been captivated as a child by this great unlimited space and the misty, ever-changing dreams
that seem to make it wider still. Those who have once known the great open spaces always long to go back.

The wind, too, was familiar to me. The wind was free, yet it was always the prisoner’s friend, coming to stroke his face and to bring him news. The way it carried rumours was extraordinary. The least movements of the Green Army were always known in even the furthest villages and most closely-guarded cells.

The Green Army was composed of Cossacks and bandits, and peasants oppressed by the Bolshevik rule had joined them. They were well acquainted with the lie of the land and could read all the signs of wind and weather, which gave them a great advantage over their Communist enemies, who found it almost impossible to track them down.

Exaggerated legends were woven round the leaders of this outlaw band. At the moment it happened to be Ermolaeff that everyone was talking about. This man had managed to unite all the scattered outlaw factions under his command. He was known as “the Invincible Ermolaeff.” The Bolsheviks dreaded him, but he was loved by all the poor and oppressed. If injustice were committed he would swoop down and avenge it and then be gone again before anyone knew where he was. He might have had wings.

He would attack an important town on one day, plundering and killing—and the next he would be celebrating his victory in a village over fifty miles away. The villagers would take part with the soldiers in the rejoicings. The peasant women would dance with the bandits to the sound of accordions round the camp fires, their wild songs echoing across the plains. If by any chance the Red soldiers came and took them by surprise they would never find their leader—only a few country people amusing themselves!

Where is the ataman? Disappeared! You might as well try to catch the prairie wind!

The gaolers and wardresses told us all this secretly. They were on good terms with the prisoners. The most friendly were those left over from the old régime.

Domna Ivanovna, the head wardress, was old. During the course of her long life she had seen a great many things. She had been a wardress in this same prison under the Tsar. She had seen political prisoners condemned to hard labour being transferred to Siberia with irons on their feet. And women political prisoners, too, so she told me. “They were young, and friendly, and brave,” she said, “and real ladies with it all.”

Sometimes, during her night watch (for though she was head wardress, she too had night duty), I would hear the sound of her padding feet and rattling keys coming along to my door. She would open the shutter and talk to me in a low voice.

The daring and superhuman strength of Ermolaeff often formed the subject of her conversation.

“He protects the peasants against injustice. He’s the son of a peasant himself, you see, and wants to free his people from the Red yoke. He is loved by the men, and all the women adore him, young and old. They would do anything for him. They bring him food when he’s in hiding, spy for him and warn him of danger. Gossip has it that he’s had many love-affairs, but at the same time they say that he’s above all human passions.”

Yet a husband’s jealousy proved in the end to be the cause of his downfall.

One day I was awakened at dawn by the sound of a tumultuous confusion—hurrying footsteps, a neighing voice and the cries of sentries in the great court-yard.

Breakfast was brought round at half-past five: warm water in an enormous copper cauldron and half a pound of black bread.

Old Ivanovna seemed to be upset, but she said nothing as she handed me my ration of bread. With her was a young Communist soldier who poured the water into my tin mug. His eyes were unusually bright that morning, and he carried the steaming cauldron around with lively step.

The cells were opened at six o’clock and we were
taken in parties of ten to the wash-place. It was then that I heard the amazing news. Ermolaeff, the famous ataman, chief of the Green Army, had been arrested. He was now locked up in a secret cell of our prison.

I heard all the details later, during the daily promenade, when the women were allowed to walk about freely for an hour in the paved court-yard. No one did much walking that day. The women were all gathered together in groups round a heap of sand in the corner, talking excitedly. Occasionally we were interrupted by a soldier roughly ordering us to be quiet, but the tension was too great and the chattering soon broke out again.

Ermolaeff had been betrayed by a jealous husband who suspected his wife of being the ataman's mistress. He had been tracked down in his most secret hiding-place. Surrounded by Red soldiers he threw himself on his famous charger and galloped away across the steppe, as swift as the wind. The terrible chase began. . . .

The prison no longer existed for me as I listened. In imagination I was following the bandit's last ride. He was bending forward over his horse's mane, which was white with froth. I could hear the Reds galloping ever closer and closer behind.

That evening, stretched out on my bunk in the half-light of my cell (complete darkness was forbidden by the prison authorities), I could hear the frantic beat of hooves and see the tense, white face of the hunted man as the soldiers thundered after him. Then I saw the terrible homeward procession: Ermolaeff, roped to the saddle of a soldier's horse, being dragged along with his head nearly touching the ground, his veins swollen and his body bound with cords. His wounded horse had been left behind on the steppe to die.

And now the Invincible Ermolaeff was lying in a secret cell, his liberty gone for ever. What could he be thinking about, I wondered?

The days passed by, all alike. Only the colour of the horizon changed.
covered with inscriptions: "Long live Ermolaeff!" "He will slip through your fingers like water!" "Ermolaeff will be revenged!"

These clumsy scrawls were quickly removed by the warders, but the next day there were others, more emphatic still, full of threats and obscene words.

Domna Ivanovna had great confidence in me. At night she lifted the shutter and told me the most recent news:

"He won't open his mouth! The judge can't get a word out of him, even at the point of a revolver. He makes him so furious, it's really terrible to see them both together! The judge gets so angry that he starts swearing loud enough to make the walls shake, and then the ataman's blood begins to boil and you should just see his eyes! It's enough to make you tremble all over! And then after the inquiry he lies doubled up in his cell, biting his lips and frothing at the mouth till the floor's all covered with mess. . . ."

When Domna Ivanovna spoke of Ermolaeff, her soft white face seemed to grow larger, and the wrinkles stood out sharply round her shining deep-set eyes. I can still see her head framed by that shutter, with her everlasting brown shawl tied underneath her double chin and a gentle smile playing over her sad, peaceful mouth.

"What is Ermolaeff like?" I asked.

"He's unlike anyone else. He's big and strong, of course, and well made. He can twist a horse-shoe in his fingers."

"Yes, but is he fair or dark? Big or small?"

"He's not like anyone else," she invariably replied.

During the daily exercise-hour the women spoke only of him. He ceased to be a real person and became a legend woven round his name. For some—who had known him—he was large and fair and had fascinating grey eyes. For others—who also said they knew him—he was heavily built, slightly bent and with kind dark eyes that became very terrible when he was angry.
NEW HORIZONS

CHAPTER XLIII

FOR the first few days Ermolaeff was plunged in a sort of stupefied. He seemed to be stunned by his defeat and spent his whole time lying on the bed with closed eyes, half asleep.

It was the sharp smell of a wild plant that finally woke him. A warder threw a little broom made of freshly-gathered wormwood into the cell and told him to sweep the floor with it. This simple thing—a bundle of bitter-smelling twigs tied together with a piece of string—was all that was needed to dispel his lethargy. Its smell, reminding him of many others, brought back to him the memory of the free steppe. It awakened in him all the tumultuous sensations of a life of freedom, with its smells, sounds and livelively colours. He began to thirst for liberty once more.

Memories of his previous existence came flooding into the cell: the sun and wind, childhood games, long days full of the sound of an accordion—the smell of the new clothes, scarlet, orange and pink, that the village girls wore on holidays—the tarry smell of new boots and of harnesses, the whistling of shot...

The prison walls gave way before the strong pressure of life; he was free once more, surrounded by his comrades; echoing voices, cries and songs were mingled in a confused roar in his head.

Suddenly a host of forgotten details of the past surged up and forced themselves into his consciousness. He remembered an owl hooting as he went one evening to a tryst, a thorny hedge that scratched him as he pushed his way through it, and the brief plop of a pebble that he had thrown into a dark, deep well. He could see himself leaning over the mossy rim, staring down into the blackness and listening for the hollow splash. A few shining circles broke the surface of the distant water, and then all became quiet and motionless once more.

These incoherent memories followed one another endlessly. Out of them suddenly came the smell of crushed walnut leaves—the scent of a girl’s smooth skin. He had only spent a short part of the night with her (she had come to give him a warning), and then, after a burning embrace, she had fled into the darkness. It was a long time since he had thought about her again, but the most distant memories were returning now.

By the palpitating strength of his memories he reaffirmed his existence, even in the restricting prison cell. His ego had come to life again.

He evoked the presence of his wife, Maroussia, an epileptic with the eyes of a sad child. Her mysterious fits attracted him to her in the same way as, when a child, he had been attracted by the riddle of the deep well’s magic surface. Where did she return from when her fits were over? To what unknown distance had she been transported?

Her fits began with a sort of heavenly ecstasy. The pupils of her eyes grew wider and wider, and then the cries and convulsions came on. A mysterious force suddenly transformed her slender body into granite. When she at last softened and gradually came back to herself, worn out and bathed in sweat, she would find her husband bending over her, caressing her and murmuring unfamiliar, gentle words.

He saw her again now, with her clear eyes surrounded by shadows, her hair combed in a fringe over her forehead, and her pitiful little fingers like those of a sick child.

"Why haven’t we got a baby?” she used to say in her childish little voice.

But he only replied with laughter. Have a kid? What for? To bring him up in the saddle?

He had known many women, but to this question...
he had invariably replied: “Don’t talk to me about kids. A soldier’s got other things to think about!”

Ermolaeff had confused dreams in prison, dreams that had all the burning intensity of real life. They seemed just as clear and real to him as his memories, and led him into a world such as he had never known before. He used to wake up with a strange feeling of the continuity of life and with a confused understanding of something that went on beyond it, though its full meaning escaped him once the mist of sleep had cleared away.

All his dreams brought back to him the presence of Maroussia, even those which seemed to have no connection with her at all.

One afternoon, when he had emptied his bowl of clear soup, he fell asleep and saw an old man with a long white beard pruning some trees with a knife that glittered in the sun.

“Why are you cutting these trees?” he asked.

“They are dreams,” the old man replied, “and I want to make them all alike before sending them down to the earth.”

“But why must they be all alike?”

“I am making them all the same so that no one will be able to remember them.”

Ermolaeff felt a dull ache in his heart. Sure enough, he could never remember his dreams.

Heavy warm tears swam into his eyes. The old man became hidden by a veil of light, and the bright blade that was lopping the branches could hardly be seen any more. A large tear fell down and scalded the bandit’s hand.

He woke up. The warder was bending over him with a cauldron full of hot water. A scalding drop escaped from the tilted spout of the cauldron and fell on the prisoner’s hand.

The sun was setting. A last ray of light made a strange-patterned stain stand out on the wall. The bandit forgot the mug of hot water and the piece of black bread on the table in front of him and tried to recapture his dream. He knew that in some mysterious way it concerned Maroussia, and he made desperate attempts to get back the clear atmosphere of the vision; but it eluded him, vanishing into the twilight that now filled his cell. An obscure regret remained in his aching heart.

The same night he dreamed that a bearded stranger was presenting him with some large apples, that were red on one side. He then perceived that these apples were growing out of the sockets of the stranger’s eyes and that it was with apples that he was gazing at him. They had become enormous and were breaking the sockets open and hurting him. His disgust was great, but he was powerless to tear the apples out, for they were deeply rooted in his flesh.

He woke up terrified, and told the dream to Domna Ivanovna when she came round to his cell. She crossed herself. They were accursed apples, she said, and nothing could purify them, not even the blessing of a priest on St. Saviour’s day. Holy water could exorcise all other curses, but not that which lay upon the apples.

Ermolaeff began to be tormented. Would his flesh and blood become the food of apple trees when he died? Were his eyes to be turned into apples? When the spring came round the trees would awaken once more in the warmth of the sun and their roots would reach down to clasp themselves more firmly about his body. Was that how his marvellous life of bravery and adventure was to end?

He heard a childlike voice whisper to him:

“Why is it that we have no children?”

Suddenly he realised that he would have to have an heir, a successor, a child of his own flesh and blood. He began to be obsessed by this idea. The apples had cast a spell over him, as Domna Ivanovna said.

Ermolaeff thought that if he had a child it would form a kind of bond between him and the life that was soon to be taken from him. The idea of begetting a child became for him a refuge and defence
by the task that lay before her. In a weak electric light she saw the stranger sitting on his bunk against the wall, with his head hanging down and his fair hair covering his forehead. He looked up when she had come right into the cell, and she saw his strong chin and firm though delicate mouth.

The eyes of the bandit frightened her. They were heavy-lidded and red with sleeplessness. While she sat looking for a suitable text he began to speak to her.

A dreamlike atmosphere suddenly surrounded her. What on earth was he talking about? It seemed to be something to do with his childhood. And then, without any transition, he began to describe the frenzied chase across the steppe, and then the wormwood broom that had brought back so many memories to him. Had he gone mad? He was crying out a frenzied refusal to give his life to the apples, the apple tree roots.

She had the sensation of being carried away by a storm, without being able to hold on to anything. The walls were dissolving and the ceiling was fading away. Ermolaev's rough face was transformed, becoming distant and strange.

He kept on talking about the fat and twisting roots that struck down through the darkness like the tentacles of a giant octopus, trying to enlace his lifeless limbs and suck his frozen blood away, drop by drop.

"What shall I do once I'm dead?" he kept saying. "How shall I be able to fight them when I'm lying in the earth?"

Instinctively she backed towards the door. Then he clutched hold of her dress and began to mumble senseless words. "I want to give my blood to a living being!" he said. She felt the warmth of his body and of his breath upon her face. Obscure and incomprehensible feelings invaded her, and a terrifying new world began to open up before her. Though he was no longer holding her, she felt as though struck motionless by a mysterious force.

"It must be of your own will," he exclaimed distinctly, "of your own free will, my White Dove. You
are free to go away and leave me if you do not want to stay."

Nothing could astonish her any more. He pointed to the door, but she felt so drawn by his powerful magnetism that she could not move a step further. The force she was struggling with seemed stronger than life itself. Her defeat was inevitable in this tragic duel. Ermolaeff won his last victory.

The White Dove never knew how she managed to get back to the hospital. When she woke up at dawn she found herself in bed. She was feverish, burning and shivering at the same time. In her delirium she saw again the man's red eyes, like glowing coals, and the arms around her that changed into clinging roots, sinking into her flesh and stifling her so that she could not move. She wanted to cry out, but even in her delirium she knew that she had to keep everything a secret. At last she fainted, and did not regain consciousness until the evening. The dull glow of an electric bulb filled the ward. It was the night of death.

"I was suddenly filled with anger and disgust," she told me. "I have never been able to explain why. He had only a few more hours to live. My temples throbbed and everything spun round me, as though I were on a sinking boat. I argued with myself in vain. Nothing could dispel the un pitying anger that I felt at that moment.

"The whole of the rest of the prison was angry, too. They were angry because he was going to die. You could hear sobs and cries and oaths of vengeance on all sides. Whilst I only wished he would die as quickly as possible, so that everything might be forgotten.

"I thought of my mother, and of my fiancé, too. I had a fiancé at that time, you know, and he loved me very much and was going to marry me soon. That night I remembered his loyal and tender love, and the way he always used to treat me as though I were a sort of superior being. I had always been rather bored by this admiration before, but at that moment I longed to

be in his care. I was also cowardly enough—I admit it to you—to think of our coming marriage."

She kept a long silence. Everyone was awake on the last night of the condemned man. The prisoners in the communal cells were quarrelling as to who should be allowed to have the shutter looking out into the passage. They all expected a miracle to happen, right up to the last moment.

In the condemned cell itself there was no one who doubted that the miracle had already happened, for Ermolaeff had spent his last hours in a state of ecstatic joy. The examiners, who had come to interview him for the last time, gave up all hope of getting any information or confession from him.

He was freshly shaven and attired as though for the celebration of one of his greatest victories. He walked down the corridor with a firm tread. His echoing voice was heard throughout the prison:

"Good-bye, comrades! Good-bye, my White Dove—take good care of our treasure!"

These last words were discussed and commented on for a long while afterwards. Everyone tried to understand their mysterious meaning. The whole prison was in an uproar; there came shouts of admiration and encouragement from every side. The warders (even they were moved) tried in vain to restore silence. The hubbub swelled, and the piercing cries of women in hysterics were heard. Some of the prisoners struck up a bold tune, the outlaw's favourite song. Then the tumult was drowned by the rising sound of the motor that was always started when an execution was to take place.

The White Dove heard the funereal sound of the motor, and a moment later fell asleep.

When she woke up again the prison was completely silent. The dawn was whitening the barred windows of the hospital ward. She got up to pour out a mug of fresh water for herself, which she drained at one gulp; then she crossed herself, remembering that "he was no longer of this world." At the same moment she realised
that she was forever bound to him by bonds that were stronger than those of earthly marriage. Her vow had not been expressed in words, but by her whole body and soul, and had now been taken into eternity. She would have his child—perhaps—but she knew no other fear.

When I met her again at the Tcheka she was pregnant.

"It's going to be a son," she said, smilingly.

She was being sent to a concentration camp, but she hoped to be set free again before her confinement. They had promised her that she should be.

"Do you remember those dreadful apple trees?" she asked me, with a shiver. "I went through a bad time there after his execution. I was full of remorse for having hated him so much during his last hours. And I kept remembering those strange dreams he told me about—those huge, juicy apples growing out of the sockets of his eyes. . . . It became my worst nightmare. And that was the real reason he wanted to have a child. Everything he said to me was very strange, but after a time I began to understand it all and to love him. I resolved to carry out his last wish, but you can imagine that it wasn't so easy in that prison, in the shadow of the apple trees.

"Now that I can hear my son's heart beating within me I am no longer afraid. The apples can't possibly harm the whole three of us, can they?"

CHAPTER XLIV

In the spring of 1921 I was again transferred to Moscow, where I was set free and then arrested for a second time. My wanderings from prison to prison were not yet over.

I remained for some time at the Tcheka, where I fell seriously ill. I was then moved to the Boutyrky prison hospital; and when I was convalescing to "Novinskaya," a women's prison where the discipline was less strict than elsewhere. The cells were only locked at night and we were allowed to walk about all day long in the pleasant, tree-planted court-yard. As soon as I had arranged my things in the political prisoners' cell, I hurried out to breathe the fresh air of which I had been starved so long.

The first person I met was Miss Harriet. For a moment I doubted whether a citizen of the free United States could possibly be in prison, but it was really she, with her light, self-confident walk and her charming smile. Her eyes were worn and she looked tired out.

"Don't you recognise me?" She greeted me effusively. "It's sad to find you in a hole like this, but I'm awfully glad to see you again!"

I was delighted by this affectionate greeting, by the sky and the scudding clouds, the shade of the linden trees and the singing at the end of the court-yard.

"But it's paradise!" I cried.

"Oh! you'll soon see about that! Do you remember those electric signs, boosting the children's paradise? 'Children are the Flower of Life?' Well, there are flowers growing here in prison, too.

"But come along—you're just in time to watch a unique and priceless performance."

The lively rhythm of a popular tune guided us
towards a group of women who were singing and clapping their hands in chorus.

In the middle of the circle a thin, swarthy-complexioned woman was executing a Russian dance. She was wearing the blue and white striped prison dress of the old régime. Tight-lipped and with lowered eyes she was balancing difficultly and kicking out her scrawny legs, fixing her eyes on the ground. Her red coral earrings hardly moved. The melody got gradually softer and slower.

Suddenly the choir quickened the rhythm. An imperceptible movement of the shoulders and a darting glance transformed the dancer. Her eyes began to glow, and one saw that her energy was all the greater for having been held in check.

Miss Harriet whispered in my ear: "She's the most famous woman in the prison—Fenia Cassino, queen of the thieves, the leader of a gang of burglars. We've laid a bet on her. The condition is that while she's dancing she's got to keep a straight face. You see—they're trying to make her laugh. But she's not supposed to give even the least little smile. She's got a strong head, so she always wins. The prize is a day's ration of bread. Some of them have betted ten or twenty rations, and if they lose they'll have to go hungry for a month. I'm in the bet myself; I wagered the biscuits and condensed milk that the American Red Cross sends me."

Things began to warm up, the allegro of the music getting faster and faster. The words of the song got more and more comic, arousing general mirth. The laughter was contagious and the humour fast and free. The dancer threw away all her reserve and whirled about like a mad-woman, though always keeping a serious face.

Miss Harriet was so excited that she couldn't take her eyes off her. A delicate, fair-haired little urchin came and took hold of her hand.

"I've betted my bread, too," she said, in French, "but you mustn't tell mummy."
I had no time to show my surprise. A crystal pure soprano had joined in the song. A young girl entered the circle and took up her position opposite the dancer. She was wearing a brown shawl over her head, which showed up the freshness of her colour to perfection.

"Steady, Fenia! Take care!" the audience cried.
Miss Harriet's cheeks were crimson.

The soprano was singing by herself now, accompanied only by the clapping of hands. At the end of each verse the choir answered her. The gay tune was the same, but the words had been changed to those of a religious chant.

Gradually the singer began to slip in a few double meanings here and there, though always keeping to the main text. The circle drew closer and closer, roaring with laughter and straining to watch Fenia's face. The little girl clung tightly to Miss Harriet's arm.

The pious words of the song told of the vigils of a saint who prayed all night that she might not sleep for twenty-four days. But now it no longer concerned the saint, but the mistress of a priest, who followed the saint's example by lying sleepless for twenty-four nights by her lover's side. The audience rocked and roared, seized with convulsive laughter.

At last the dancer could stand it no longer. Her face twisted and we saw her white teeth glitter for an instant; then she was serious again, but it was too late. A moment later the curses, shouts of laughter and jeers were so great that she had to stop.

"Oh! you idiot!" shouted one old woman. "A whole month's bread gone because of you!"

Miss Harriet wiped the perspiration from her brow. Her condensed milk and biscuits had all gone. The little girl at her side began to let out piercing yells.

There were many children in the prison. Little girls and boys had to stay there throughout the length of their mother's terms of imprisonment.
The name of the little girl who had wagered her bread on Fenia Cassino was Sonia. She was nine years old and her mother was a shot colonel's widow. I asked her the length of her mother's sentence.

"It's for life," she answered gravely. "We're serving it together."

Her mother was continually in pain and used to remain lying in her cell. Sonia ran about everywhere all day long. I have seen her crying and wringing her hands while listening to someone reading *Les Misérables* and then, a moment later, heard her roaring with laughter at the spectacle of two cooks quarrelling in the kitchen.

She was a very wideawake little thing, high spirited, irritable and sensitive, and was always well informed as to whatever was going on in the prison.

"Are you for the thieves or for the prostitutes?" she asked me point-blank one morning.

I turned to stare at her. She then explained that there was bound to be a row soon, because a prostitute had slapped the face of one of Fenia Cassino's friends.

I already knew that there were two hostile camps in the prison: the thieves, burglars and murderesses on one side, and the prostitutes on the other. The two groups entertained a mutual hatred for one another and were continually coming to blows.

That afternoon the sound of an uproar announced that the battle had begun. At the same moment Sonia's mother asked me to fetch the little girl to her side.

I found her in the cell from which all the noise was coming.

Fenia was fighting with two girls. I saw her fall to the ground with her two adversaries on top of her. They were beating her with their fists. She fought desperately to get rid of them, biting and scratching. Her dress was torn, revealing a couple of long scars on her throat.

She had already spoken to me of these scars; they were the traces of an accident that she had brought on herself purposely. Wishing to be transferred to a lunatic asylum where it would be easier to escape she had simulated madness and poured a saucepan full of boiling water over her body.

Suddenly, with a powerful jerk of her whole body, she hurled off her two assailants one after the other. She sprang to her feet and stood back against the wall, ready for a fresh attack. But at that moment the wardresses came rushing in to separate the vociferous combatants.

Sonia was standing in a corner, trembling with excitement. She was surrounded by a pack of other children who had come from all the different cells to cheer on the battle.

Practically the only child not present was Micha, who was lying on his mother's bed with his fingers in his ears. He was a tiny little fellow who, knowing that his mother was in prison somewhere, had come all by himself from the country to look for her. He had made many vain attempts to get lifts in railway trains, until at last an engineer had taken pity on him and allowed him to stay in the coal truck during the journey. When he got to Moscow he went from prison to prison in search of his mother, until he finally found her in the "Novinskaya." In order to be allowed to see him his mother had promised to keep him with her throughout the term of her sentence. So Micha had become a prisoner too. He lay lost in his reveries for hours at a time, getting thinner and paler every day.

There were still other children in the prison. These were in the "feeding cell," and had only just been born. The sound of endless crying and bickering came from this cell. It was filled by a continual flux of nursing mothers from Siberia, who spent only a few days in this prison before passing on elsewhere.

Only a few of the prison children were entitled to rations of food. The others used to come to our cell every day at noon, knowing that the political prisoners always used to keep something for them. This pro-
cession of ravenous children, eagerly sniffing for fish-head soup, made me very sad and reminded me of a certain evening during the time when I was still free:

The snow was falling in heavy flakes and I was bewilderedly wandering through the darkened streets in the company of Miss Harriet. Suddenly we were dazzled by the vivid light from the signs on Theatre Square. One by one the gigantic letters stood out in red fire against the black night sky.

Above the Moscow Opera House ran the glowing and triumphant sign: “Children are the Flower of Life. The Soviet Republic is a Children’s Paradise.”

We stood there hypnotised. Miss Harriet clutched my arm.

“Oh, isn’t it grand?” she said. “The Soviets really are marvellous!”

I had to interrupt her, for Lubianka Square, headquarters of the Tcheka, was not far away, and if we had been heard talking in a foreign language it would have placed suspicion on us.

We left the floodlit square. In the darkness of a narrow lane we said good-bye and went our ways.

Now that we had found one another again in the Novinskaya Prison, Miss Harriet and I used often to remember the glowing letters of that sign: “Children are the Flower of Life.”

We even saw one of these “flowers” coming to life on the prison floor. One morning we heard groans in the corridor. A woman was lying on the stone floor in the throes of childbirth. A number of prisoners rushed to help her. Inexperienced hands gave the mother first-aid, and a little blind creature soon lay wriggling between her legs. Just near by I saw Sonia’s horrified face. The woman, who had lost consciousness, remained lying on the ground until the arrival of the prison doctor, and we carried the baby boy away to our cell. He was whimpering feebly. Prisoners came hurrying in from all the cells, bringing sheets and dresses torn up in strips, and basins of hot water. We washed him, and everyone was ecstatic about his beauty. Fenia Cassino forced her way breathlessly through the visitors and stood there gazing in awe.

The child opened his eyes as soon as they were washed, and we saw that they were deep blue and still full of the light of the beyond. On every side there were exclamations, cries of delight and tender smiles. Everyone felt herself the mother of the newly-born and was overflowing with love for him!

One woman offered him a feeding bottle, another—from the mother’s ward—her breast.

“The mother is dead,” announced a voice.

“Then he will be mine!” cried Fenia Cassino.

“No, he belongs to our cell!” “No, no, he shall be the adopted son of the whole prison!” “He shall be our mascot!” “We will call him Vanya.” “No, Nicholas, the prisoners’ friend.” “He shall be called Aloicha!” “Vassily!”

There was such a commotion and so many names were suggested that it was difficult to choose.

Then the prostitutes came in. They all had bobbed hair and wore brightly-coloured scarves. Fenia Cassino and her friends forgot their hostility and made way for them to pass. The leader of the group, a fat girl with a turned-up nose, solemnly presented us with a yellow lace collar. “For baby’s trousseau,” she said, blushing with emotion.

Swaddled in torn-up sheets the baby continued to whimper plaintively in a tiny voice. We all felt full of pity and tenderness for him. We seemed so huge and strong beside his fragileness. We had to save and protect him at all cost.

And suddenly the little one ceased his crying. There was a great silence; everyone held their breath for fear of waking him.
CHAPTER XLV

EVERY Wednesday we in our cell were taken to the baths.

"Disguise Day" was the nickname for this excursion. There are steam baths (or Turkish baths as they are called), such as the one we went to, throughout Russia, even in the poorest villages.

We took soap and towels with us, and crossed the court-yard in a happy tumult. We undressed in a room just outside the large bathing-hall. The damp floor was all swollen. I forced it open with an effort, and stepped on to the slippery flagstones, blinded by clouds of steam.

The bathers took up pails and went either towards the hot stone slabs or to the long wooden benches under running taps of hot and cold water. I could see nothing through the milky fog and was confused by the heat, the shouting and the sound of running water. Gradually I could distinguish glistening bodies with heads all covered in frothy soap, but the disguise of nudity prevented anyone from being recognised.

The heat was so great that I felt giddy sometimes. But sitting on a warm bench I soon felt a state of careless well-being steal over me, and would remain perfectly still for fear of dispelling it.

A young woman at my side was pouring cascades of water over the head and body of her neighbour, whose skin was a delicate pink. When she had finished she pushed her companion away, screaming with laughter. She turned her back to me, and on her shoulders I remarked a number of dark purple weals. As I was going to the taps with my pail I heard someone whisper:
“Did you see? They’re the wounds from the tortures they gave her when she was imprisoned by the Whites at Kieff.”

I dared not ask for details. We went back to the prison with our skin tingling deliciously, singing and shouting in spite of the wardress’s demand for silence.

They brought us a steaming cauldron of lentil soup at supper-time. The two prisoners who were on duty shared it out in twenty-three equal quantities. The rest of the food consisted of things sent by parents and friends.

My daughters, who were in the “Silver Forest” children’s colony on the outskirts of Moscow, came in turn to see me twice a week, bringing me sugar (I afterwards learnt that they used to deprive themselves of it for me), pieces of salted pork and dried fruit.

Whatever we received was given to those who were on duty that day and shared out between the whole cell.

To-day, besides the soup, I had a piece of white bread, a small round of sausage and an eighth of an apple. Supper was very gay, as always after the bath. The prisoners never ceased joking and laughing.

But I found myself unable to take part in the general gaiety: I was still thinking of those delicate-skinned shoulders covered with wounds that were barely healed...

After supper the prisoners on duty cleared the table.

At half-past seven the head wardress came in with a gaoler to hold the evening roll-call. The prisoners were obliged to stand up when their number was called out.

“One, two,” counted the wardress in a high voice, “fourteen, fifteen... twenty-two.”

There was one missing; there were twenty-three of us in the cell. The wardress counted again, annoyed by the prisoners’ mocking smiles. She made the recount several times, but she was so nervous by now that she easily made mistakes.

“... Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four....”

One extra this time.
even heroic, they made excellent comrades. They were all very young and full of high spirits. My favourite among them was Sonia, the leader of the band. She was nicknamed "Madcap" because of the extraordinary rapidity with which she changed her opinions. She had red hair and her light skin was scattered with freckles. She had a really lovely voice and was the choir leader of our cell.

Apple—red apple,
Where are you rolling? . . .

she would sing, sometimes in a bold and humorous vein, sometimes with all the immense sadness created by the Revolution, and the whole cell would laugh or cry with her.

In the evening she would perform prodigious acrobatic feats. Her friend, a fat little woman called Vera, would try to imitate her, but always fell sadly to the ground, provoking shouts of laughter.

Once the table was cleared it was pushed back against the wall beneath the three-barred windows and covered with our books and papers.

Groups were formed for studying foreign languages and reading treatises on philosophy or science.

The sun's last rays fell on the pages of the History of Napoleon's Campaigns that I had found in the prison library, colouring Bonaparte's portrait a vivid pink. God knows what he was doing in that cell! How had he come to be mixed up in our acts and gestures?

The light of the sunset made everything in the cell stand out in vivid colours. At that moment the cell was like a schoolroom during "prep." The sad, dark eyes of the girl sitting opposite me wandered from the open page of the book that was in front of her and lingered on the fantastic arabesques traced in purple by the light upon the wall.

The girl was Ira Kakhovsky, and her book was Bergson's Creative Evolution, about which she was passionately enthusiastic. But to-day she was distracted and thinking of something else.

I admired Ira Kakhovsky and had a great affection for her. She was the great granddaughter of the celebrated decembrist Kakhovsky, a member of the group of aristocrats who had the courage to revolt against Nicholas I in 1825 by reclaiming the liberty and enfranchisement of the serfs. Five of them, including Kakhovsky, were hung, and the others condemned to penal servitude for life in Siberia.

Kakhovsky's great granddaughter was full of courage and revolutionary faith. At the age of seventeen she had been sentenced to hard labour for Socialist propaganda work, and had been set free with Marie Spiridonova by the Revolution. She became a Left-Wing Revolutionary Socialist of the group to which Boris belonged, and at the beginning of the Revolution worked with the Bolsheviks. But presently they broke away from the victorious Party and became their worst enemies.

Ira had been at Kieff during the German occupation. The Left-Wing Revolutionary Socialists plotted two attacks against the Germans. At Moscow they killed Count Mirbach, at Kieff General Eichorn. The first assassination was organised by Marie Spiridonova, the second by Ira Kakhovsky and two of her comrades.

After the outrage they were arrested and condemned to death. Her two comrades were executed, and she herself was only saved by a miracle—the Revolution that had just broken out in Germany. I was told that she had been tortured by the Whites, who were fighting on the side of the Germans. But she herself never spoke of her imprisonment at Kieff. When she was set free she returned to Moscow, where she continued to fight against the Bolsheviks and was imprisoned by them.

"I can't read to-day," she said softly, "it's the anniversary of Eichorn's assassination. My comrade who threw the bomb was arrested and executed."

"Were you arrested at the same time?"

"No, two days later. We were both waiting for Eichorn to pass by. My comrade threw the first bomb,
and I should have thrown the second if he had missed; but mine wasn’t necessary, for the General was killed by the first throw. I went away with my bomb, to discharge it and make it useless.

"After two days’ hiding I returned to the villa where we had lived before the outrage."

"But why did you go back? Weren’t you afraid of an ambush?"

"I had been told that it was all quiet and that no one knew where we had lived. I wanted to take away a few necessary things and some papers that we had left behind.

"It was night. I crept softly through the darkness of the garden. There was no light, not the least movement. Having made sure that the house was empty I climbed the terrace steps, holding my breath. Suddenly two strong arms surrounded me, I heard a triumphant cry and was dazzled by a wave of light.

"The German soldiers had been waiting for me in the shadows."

She fell silent. The purple sunset had gone and there was twilight in the cell. I was afraid that the intimacy of our conversation might be spoiled by the electric light; but when the lamp was switched on she didn’t seem to notice it, and went on with her story. It was as though she were talking to herself. Almost all the women who were reading and studying abandoned their occupations and gathered round to listen.

After having been foolishly beaten-up Ira was taken to prison. There she was questioned by a young Russian officer named Petrovsky, who was wearing the uniform of the old Imperial Guard. He had pale, ice-blue eyes. He politely asked the young girl to reveal all the details of the plot and the names of all her accomplices. Ira Kakhovksky firmly replied that she would never answer these questions.

He then smiled and went on in the same courteous voice: "If your decision is irrevocable I’m afraid I shall be obliged to make you undergo a little treatment that may perhaps be disagreeable, though indispensable."

From the table in front of him he took a metal case, which he opened. Out of this box full of shining surgical instruments he selected a long needle. He seized the terrified prisoner’s arm and forced the point of the needle beneath one of her finger-nails.

She soon fainted. When she came to herself she was half lying in an armchair. There was an acute pain in her fingers, which were bleeding. Petrovsky was standing over her with a smile upon his lips.

"I hope, Mademoiselle, that you will be a little easier to talk to now?" he said.

She was not. And the torture began again, with more cruelty and refinement every day. The sadistic officer always retained his polite and smiling manner, and worked calmly and methodically.

He stuck needles and sharp-edged instruments into her skin. He tore off her nails. He then turned an electric fan towards her bleeding fingers. While the breath of the fan was slightly relieving her pain a strange numbness plunged her into a semi-sleep. Then the inquisitor bent over and repeated in a monotonous voice:

"Go to sleep, the fresh wind is breathing away your pain, rest and sleep, the wind is blowing in the street and you are crossing the street to visit your friends at number ... tell me what number ... and tell me the name of the street you are in. ..."

Ira was shaken by a vague terror and woke up with a start. She made a tremendous effort not to go to sleep again and involuntarily betray her friends. She was terribly frightened by the monotonous voice that tried to hypnotise her. Her strength nearly failed her, but she always just managed to hold out till the end.

After the fingers came the body. She was carried in a state of collapse to an isolated cell where the soldiers tied her hands and feet to a plank bed with pieces of wire. She remained lying in the same position all day.
long. Even at meal-times she was not untied; the gaolers simply lifted her head. After that came moral torture. She was put in a cell next to that of a raving lunatic. Through a shutter in the door she discovered that the madman was one of her old comrades. From his regular screams she learnt that he was tortured every day at fixed hours. The White officer tortured her morally too; he used to come and describe her comrades’ tortures to her and talk about their approaching execution.

Our cell was dumb with horror. Ira’s voice gradually sank lower and lower until it was hardly a whisper. Her eyes seemed not to see us.

The efforts of the Kieff executioners were all in vain. She said nothing, betrayed no one. She was right at the end of her strength, and the monsters were forced to leave off torturing her in order to preserve the life necessary for her to face capital punishment.

She was condemned to be shot. German soldiers guarded her. A fat German general came in person to announce her approaching execution. He ordered her to be set free from her chains and authorised her to be given pen, ink and paper in order that she might write to her mother.

"It was my last night, and I only wanted one thing: to be left alone to pull myself together and write to my mother. But just as I was beginning my letter I was interrupted by a German soldier coming into the room. He was called Hans.

"Fraulein," he said, 'you are going to die. When I return to my own country I shall often speak to my fiancée about the young lady who organised the plot against General Eichorn. Your name will belong to history. So I should like to show my fiancée some souvenir of you. Will you give me a button off your jacket?"

"He handed me a knife. I cut off the button. He went away and I started my letter again.

"Soon the door opened a second time. Hans was there once more:
girl was informed that she would probably be shot next
dawn. Everything depended on the august sanction;
no other solution of the difficulty was possible. Her
guardians, the German soldiers, were driven frantic
by the long wait and kept asking her for souvenirs, until
in the end there were no buttons left on her jacket at all!
The Kaiser’s reply never came, for revolution had
broken out in Germany.

And so Ira Kakhovsky was saved. The Germans
evacuated the town, but the danger was still not yet
over, for when they had gone the Whites returned.
Fortunately, in the new government there was a school
teacher who knew her. He ordered her to be set free
and advised her to leave Kieff as soon as possible.

She returned to Moscow, where she continued to
fight against the Bolsheviks until the time of her arrest.

CHAPTER XLVI

ONE fine and sunny afternoon while the
prisoners were walking in the court-yard I sat
reading in the empty cell.

“Olga Tchernoff wanted in the office.”

Someone had come to fetch me. I was rather
worried as I hurried after the wardress, but she turned
with an encouraging smile and said:

“Nothing very serious, you’ll find.”

In the office my daughters were waiting for me.
I rushed forward to greet them, happy and astonished,
but was struck by the sadness of their faces. They
were tired and dejected.

“We came to see you yesterday,” they told me,
“but there was such a fuss about it all! First of all,
when we got here they found that the Tcheka had
forgotten to write ‘Personal interview’ on the per-
mission form, so they tried to give us a ‘common
interview’ instead. We weren’t having any of that,
though; it’s awful, you have to talk through two lots
of bars and you can’t kiss or say anything. So we went
back to the Tcheka and your examiner added ‘Personal’
in red ink. We had to run to get back here in time for
the interview hour, and then, when we presented the
form, they suspected us of having falsified it, because
the ink was red and the writing a bit different!

“You can imagine how furious we were! But there
was nothing to be done about it. We had to sleep the
night in Moscow and go to the Tcheka again this
morning to ask the judge to make out another permit.
He swore and protested, but in the end, when we
insisted hard enough, we forced him to write: ‘Kindly
trust the added inscription,’ and his signature. Even
“Come along! You must separate now, the half-hour is up!”

We hastened to say a few more words to one another before parting. I had an awful feeling that I had something very important to tell them but could not remember what it was. We were all in a complete muddle. The precious minutes were passing, but we remained silent.

“The miracle will happen, though, you’ll see. We shall be free and happy again soon. Believe in the miracle!”

“Oh, do come along! You’ve had five minutes extra already, and that’s quite enough.”

I returned to my cell, mechanically clutching in my arms the dahlias and the parcel that the children had left for me.

My cell-mates unloaded me, putting the flowers in water and opening the parcel.

“Look! Aren’t your red dahlias lovely! And the apples and sugar and slices of bacon! We’ll have to have a party this evening!”

It was not until I left prison that I found out that my daughters had been going without sugar all the week in order to bring me their ration. Knowing that the political prisoners used to share their provisions all round they used always to try and bring enough for everyone.

My heart was heavy. I no longer believed what I had been saying a little earlier. Freedom! . . . A free country. . . . France. . . . I must have been crazy to think of such things!

Days passed, weeks passed. The court-yard was scattered with yellow leaves; the evenings were drawing in. At night, through the barred window, I watched the shooting stars.

And suddenly a great divertissement interrupted the regular monotony of our lives: the preparation of a play, under the direction of an actress prisoner.

The play was Ostronsky’s The Storm. The actresses were recruited from among the criminals. Men’s
parts were to be played by women. The political cell was not allowed to take part in the play or to see it.

But in spite of this ban our aid was continually being sought. We became indispensable, helping with the rehearsals and teaching unlettered women their parts.

Fenia Cassino, who could hardly read, was really amazing in the part of Catherine. How subtle her gestures were, and what a profound understanding of her part she displayed! She moved and spoke like a great tragedienne. A young woman nicknamed "Knife-tongue" because of the cutting nature of her repartees—she was the one who had improvised ambiguous songs to make the dancer laugh and lose her bet—played Catherine's terrible mother-in-law.

During the rehearsals she was not made up, but in spite of the lively colour of her fresh skin one forgot how young she was. One saw a face deformed by anger and jealousy—a nagging and despotic mother who had broken and destroyed the will-power of her children. A great actress would not have disdained to borrow her interpretation of this part.

It was very difficult to find actresses for the men's parts. One had to choose among the prostitutes whom the thieves disliked so much. One of them, a tall, stiff, bony girl, had a very deep voice, and knew how to manipulate it well. She played the part of Catherine's shy and unhappy husband admirably.

The Administration had invited leading members of the Commissariat of Public Instruction and heads of the Tcheka to attend the performance.

The political prisoners were shut up in their cell. But they came to fetch me at the last moment, for I had been the prompter during nearly all the rehearsals, and when someone else took my place on the day of the performance the actresses could not understand what she said.

I was taken secretly into the canteen that formed the theatre. They hid me under the draped table which served as the prompter's box.

The actresses displayed not the least awkwardness.
They performed with an assurance and go that you would never have expected from uneducated beginners.

Fenia Cassino surpassed herself in the last stormy scene; without any scenery and accompanied by rolls of primitive thunder made by shaking a heavy sheet of tin behind the door, she managed to create an atmosphere of real horror and tragic fear. When the curtain fell she remained motionless on the stage, completely crushed by the public declaration of her adultery that she had made at the top of her voice. When the curtain rose again she was still standing there, looking absent. The shouts and acclamations made her start; she ran away to hide, and would not return to acknowledge the applause.

I met them in the corridor after the performance. A wardress was taking them back to their cells, but they were no longer imprisoned thieves and prostitutes; they were Catherine and her sister-in-law, Varvara, the terrible old woman and her son. They were still playing their parts, intoxicated by emotion and success.

_The Storm_ was the sole topic of conversation for many weeks afterwards. The leaves fell, sunny days were followed by days of rain, and the whole prison was distressed by the approach of winter.

It would be my third winter in prison—the third winter that my daughters would be obliged to spend without me, continuing to play the part of children looking after their mother, when it should have been the other way round.

I did not think I should be allowed to spend the winter at Novinskaya. My journeys from prison to prison were sure to begin again soon.

"Olga Tchernoff, get your things together!"

The whole cell sprang up at once, seized with excitement.

"What? Where's Tchernoff going? Which prison? The concentration camp? Siberia?"

"Hurry up, Tchernoff."

I couldn't find my belongings. My books were scattered in every corner of the cell. My companions
NEW HORIZONS

helped me to pack everything together. The whole prison had heard the news. The criminals were gathering in the corridor outside our cell to speed me on my way with farewell songs, according to the prison custom. Only in the most terrible prison of all, the inner prison of the Tcheka, are these songs forbidden.

Perhaps that was where I was going to be taken... Every new period of imprisonment began there.

I crossed the court-yard, looking for the last time at the golden linden trees. I advanced into the middle of the circle of my friends, followed by the criminals.

Fenia Cassino embraced me, weeping. The burglars and prostitutes were all there to give me a last smile.

The adorable Sonia, the child who was spending a life sentence with her mother, threw her arms round my neck and sobbed: “You mustn’t let them do you any harm!”

Our group began to sing the Internationale, and then the Russian revolutionary song:

The hostile winds
Blow over us... .

Then “Knife-tongue’s” clear soprano rang out:

Apple—red apple,
Where are you rolling?
If you go to the Tcheka
You will come back no more!

Some voices protested: “Nothing sad for the farewell!”

But she went on boldly to other couplets, joking ones, invented in prison. The choir joined in with the refrain:

Red apple,
Where are you rolling?

At last I was in the street, and rolling towards the unknown.

I was escorted by an armed soldier. A pre-war hansom cab drawn by a horse was the vehicle in which we were travelling across Moscow.

We finally arrived at Lubianka, the fortified citadel of the Terror, directed by Jagoda: the Pan-Russian Tcheka. The office, so busy at night, was deserted and silent at this hour of the afternoon. The desolate and sinister atmosphere of the place gave me a dreadful sinking sensation. A hardened commissar with an indifferent face looked in my direction without seeing me.

“Olga Tchernoff? There’s a paper for you to sign.”
“What? To sign?”
“Read it. It’s an order of release.”

He repeated this to me twice and said sneeringly:

“Doesn’t it suit your arrangements, citizen? Would you rather stay with us?”

I passed by the yawning guards with my suitcase and my strapped-up pillow and blanket.

Lubianka Square was deserted; passers-by avoided crossing it. I hurried away from the accursed place.

Free? Surely I was dreaming? And where was I to go?
CHAPTER XLVII

I WENT along the Prechistinsky Boulevard, remembering how I had crossed it to get to the Town Hall on the night when the guns were all going.

Where was I to go? To the "Silver Forest," to look for my children? But I hadn't the strength to carry my luggage. I sat down on a bench.

My thoughts were floating like the clouds that passed above me. I did not try to stop them or to define them. They could hardly be called thoughts, even; they were more like feelings. My whole being was turned into a receptacle for the ideas of the universe that I was beginning to know and whose nature I discerned only dimly.

Some children who passed by laughing, a dog that looked at me pricking up its ears, a few yellow leaves that fell on my hands—all became joined to me like fragments of myself. And everything cast a spell on me. I thought vaguely of the leaves of the Silver Forest. The autumn had turned them to bronze and gold and covered them with splashes of purple. I seemed to hear voices and to see bright-coloured dresses through the trees.

I was not asleep, but the elements of a dream were becoming mixed up with reality. I knew that my children were not with me, but their presence was absolutely real and made me feel a strange, acute happiness such as I had never known before.

I had nowhere to go. I had reached a state of blessedness, and as long as that lasted... It was not a dream, but its spell was not to be broken.

"Are you feeling ill, citizen?"

A man dressed in rags, with a thin, worn face, touched my arm.

"Have you had a fall, are you ill?"

"No, not at all."

I stood up, but I hadn't the strength to lift my suitcase. The man took my luggage.

"I'll help you carry them. Where are you going?"

I suddenly remembered the address of the political Red Cross which used to help prisoners.

The stranger carried my luggage without asking questions. Not far from the house where I was going he put the things down and disappeared before I had time to thank him. I pressed the button, the door opened, and there were my three daughters. They had been told of my release already and had come to wait for me.

I remember the first few moments in the darkness of the hall, the cries of joy, the tea waiting in the next room. Then we were all sitting round the table, talking and laughing.

After that there is a long gap in my memory. I can recollect nothing more, neither of the first day of freedom nor of the following days.

I vaguely recall that we were getting ready to go away. On being released I was expelled abroad, instead of being exiled to Siberia. There were a few more formalities to be gone through and then we should be free to leave.

One night I was awakened by the shrill ringing of a bell. Our room was invaded by Tchekists. It was a nocturnal investigation. Commanding voices, hostile looks. My freedom was at an end! I stood rooted to the spot, overcome by a feeling of violent despair.

The Tchekists swarmed everywhere. They turned out drawers and unpacked trunks, throwing clothes and books all over the floor. They were searching for compromising documents; so, naturally, they found nothing. Dawn began to break.

"We shall now go to receive orders concerning you, citizen, and you will be kept under observation."
A long day of waiting followed. Our flat was being watched. A few people coming from the Red Cross to see me were arrested. We trembled every time the door-bell rang.

Still another ring. The soldier opened the door, and this time it was Julie, our Julie, who fell into the trap.

But fortunately she was dressed like a peasant. With her habitual presence of mind she played the part of a charwoman come to do the cleaning.

While Julie pretended to tidy up the flat she talked to us in asides and gave us hidden smiles. I wanted to take her in my arms and ask her where she came from, what misfortune she was at present bearing, who was receiving her loving care.

But she gave us a swift glance of farewell, whispered a few words in French and went out into the kitchen, where we dared not follow her. While she was chopping up some wood she engaged the soldier on duty in conversation, explaining to him that she had to go and feed her baby, so that he let her go in the end without any dispute.

We remained in agonising uncertainty until the evening. Were we going to be arrested again?

At nightfall the guard was removed. We were left free and alone. We might not go to see anyone before our departure.

The next day I visited the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, where I was provided with a passport and the necessary visas.

On Wednesday, October 5th, we went to the station. There was no one there to see us off; since my release I had become a dangerous person and none of my friends dared risk being seen with us. We left the city we loved so much like strangers.

The train was slow in leaving, and we had to pass through minutes of seemingly endless waiting. To pass the time away we counted our luggage again. We were silent amidst the noisy, hurrying crowds of passengers and their friends. I wondered how long it would be before I heard Russian spoken again.

Our carriage began to sway and rattle at last. Walls, factories, trees and fields slid back behind us.

We held our breath when we got to the Russian frontier, hardly daring to speak or to look at one another. It was the anxious moment when papers are examined.

I was expecting some discussion, some last-minute discovery of a mistake in the passports. Everything was in order, however. We were allowed to pass the frontier, and Russia receded into the distance.

The well-dressed, kindly Estonian train guard asked us:

"Perhaps you are hungry, madame? And the children too? Would you care for something to eat?"

"Yes, if you have something we can buy. But we've only got Soviet money, I'm afraid."

He went away and came back with an enormous round white loaf and a great lump of butter. The smell of the newly-baked bread brought the saliva into our mouths.

"How much do I owe you?"

The guard roared with laughter. "Nothing, madame," he said. "Please eat as much as you like. We've got more than we can do with here, it's going stale."

We could no longer resist. The bread was deliciously soft and as white as snow. Ecstatically we covered the thin slices with a thick coating of butter, and ate them slowly and in small mouthfuls so as to taste them to the full.

"Do you still consider me an incurable optimist, Olga?" I said. "And do you remember that interview in the prison, Natacha, when you said: 'Mother is a child who lives in a dream'? Do you believe that dreams come true, now?"

I was proud of my revenge. We laughed happily and reconstructed in detail the scenes of our interviews in prison. It was a miracle, an incredible miracle.
“I always believe in miracles,” said Ariane firmly. “You’ve only got to want something hard enough and then it always happens.”

We passed through Narva. On October 7th we arrived at Revel, the capital of the new Estonian Republic.

Among the happy, well-dressed crowds waiting on the platform we distinguished my husband. He was looking for us.

I arrived weighed down by my past. I was happy, yes, but not yet detached from all that I had left behind, my friends and comrades in prison, persecuted, tracked down and unhappy; the struggling and painful new life of my people that I was sharing with them no more.

A strange state of over-excitement, sorrow and exaltation prevented me from fully enjoying the miracle of my release. That was perhaps why Fate sent me two last trials.

CHAPTER XLVIII

On the evening after our arrival the house next to ours caught fire.

Whilst we were watching the flames issuing from the windows the wind suddenly veered and scattered a cascade of sparks over our roof.

We scarcely had time to escape into the street. Several fire-engines had arrived; a crowd of shouting people were trying to rescue their things from the flames.

Our two-storied house was burning like an immense torch. The beams were falling in. The flames rose up against the black night sky, throwing a fantastic glare on to the horrified faces of the people below.

I had never seen so rapid and so pitiless a fire. Our house was entirely burnt. Amidst the frightful uproar of crackling wood and falling beams, the owners of the house took us away in a motor-car to their daughter’s, at the other end of the town.

I felt no surprise. The fire seemed to be the logical conclusion of our unreal life in Russia.

In fact, I did not yet feel completely back in real life. After the fire I was suddenly attacked by an illness, which took me back to the realm of dreams once more.

After our temporary lodging I went to the house of an Estonian friend. I was suffering from a strange headache. While telling my friend the story of my imprisonment and release I suddenly fainted.

When I opened my eyes again I was in bed with a raging fever. I remained there with a temperature of over 100°.

I was burning in the fire. It was the prison that was
I was alone in the Black Forest. My feet slid easily over a smooth carpet of pine-needles. Everywhere there were red-polished tree-trunks. They stood straight and tall along both sides of the path leading up to the Sanatorium.

I was alone. Why did I feel as though a watchful eye was following me?

Everything in this solitary spot was under control. Nature was guided by a steady hand. The strong scent of the pines did not fill the air in vain. Resin flowed drop by drop into the saucers carefully placed at the foot of the grooves slashing all the trunks.

Every tree was mutilated. Out of the wounds dripped the liquid amber of their blood. Order. Necessity. I kept climbing all the time; when I had reached the end of my breath I could at last see the white walls and many terraces.

It was the sanatorium, temple of health and justice. Within this magnificent building the prisoners awaited their sentence—blind and arbitrary as man-made sentences, but how much more irrevocable.

Implacable also was the sovereign order that reigned everywhere. The long linoleumed corridors were of an almost immaterial cleanness, but they were nevertheless inhabited. By ghosts, no doubt?

And there were double doors which opened without a sound. . . . Even the floors seemed to be no more than lightly skimmed by those who haunted the building. All the same the ghosts were extraordinarily brave people. They spent their lives fighting against an unrelenting force, whose inscrutable will crushed their human wills without pity.

CHAPTER XLIX

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your doctor about you. There’s nothing wrong with your lungs any more.”

“Yes, I know. My pneumonia’s quite gone and we shall be leaving in a few days’ time, but lungs aren’t everything, you know.”

I was allowed to take a room left free by the departure of a patient; this room was beside Hélène’s, so that I was able to stay with her for the few days before she left.

Nicholas only came once a day; his presence was not good for her.

During the rest-hour, when all the patients were lying on the terrace and they were undisturbed by any sound, I escaped into the park to meet Nicholas. He was walking to and fro, following the little path as far as the white walls surrounded by terraces.

“Her lungs are healed,” he said, “but her nerves are still bad. She can’t bear the sunlight and fine weather; the least pleasure makes her afraid.”

The wood was perfectly kept. There were no fallen branches, no useless pebbles. Out of the wounded bark dripped the amber blood, giving out a penetrating smell: when the tree was dried up the wound was allowed to heal until the following year, when a new slash of the knife made it run once more.

“It’s just like in the sanatorium. The patients are healed until life prepares new wounds for them.”

In the evening, when the blue shadows of twilight fell around, Hélène could not sleep.

“Nicholas has understood nothing up till now. When I am happy I always see the minutes flowing past like the sand in an hour-glass. Nicholas is as simple as a child: he thinks that the treasure of the hours, the days, the years, is inexhaustible, like the goose that laid the golden eggs.”

Hélène cupped her childish hands as if to catch the fleeting seconds.

“Isn’t each moment of happiness an eternity?” he says. “Isn’t it a closed circle that nothing can destroy?”

Hélène fell silent and became pensive. Was she...
trying to recapture the things that were past? I, also, 
evoked the days of vanished happiness; but for me 
they went on into eternity and I still breathed their 
perfume.

"But, Hélène, the past remains. It never disappears, 
it is bound up with our memories, with our body and 
soul. When I hear the murmur of that stream I think 
of the day that I spent on the Volga just before our 
flight. How can I forget it? Who could blot out 
from your memory the day when you found Nicholas 
again?"

"The peak of happiness," my friend gently replied, 
"the utmost pinnacle—do you understand the meaning 
of that word? When you are on the peak everything 
is as swift as thought, and then you have to descend. 
You slide towards the gulf; it’s a giddy precipice from 
the peak to the foot of the mountain.

"When that branch cracked under Nicholas’s foot 
I could see the approaching end already. And I was 
no longer happy. I was shown to be right afterwards; 
we were separated again, there were long waitings, 
dangers, death—all passed by us; but it was preferable, 
believe me, to peaceful happiness threatened by Time."

"But now you’re together again for ever...."

"For ever! How can you say that word? Does it 
really exist at all? Can Time be brought to a stand- 
still? Don’t the seconds pass by here as they did when 
we were in prison: people die here as they did then? 
Do you think that the Tchekists are more dreadful 
than one’s unknown Fate? Are they more terrifying 
than illnesses, treachery, old age and neglect? Here, 
as then, we do not know when we are going to be 
called away, and our sanatorium is more frightful than 
all the Tchekist prisons. Do you not feel Fate working 
even now? It’s useless to struggle if you’ve been 
marked out. In prison one at least knew who one’s 
 enemies were; here it is an invisible presence with 
whom one cannot argue."

"But people get well here, sometimes...."

"Yes, if Fate consents, but her will is always a 
mystery to us. And if we leave here it’s the same thing 
everywhere else. I read the émigrés’ papers; they 
think that the Bolsheviks have taken their goods, their 
trees and their domains; but it is Time who has stolen 
those things from them. Ah, well! their trees will 
flower no more for them, their youth will never return, 
even if a miracle happened and the émigrés went back 
to Russia. Everything would be changed.

"Nothing is stationary, that is what is so 
terrifying. Clouds keep passing by for ever. You 
know how I detest them, for they are the very image 
of impermanence."


Hélène and her husband went away, they used to 
send me post cards of blue skies and decorative palm 
trees.

Nicholas wrote and told me that they had taken a 
villa. The garden was full of bay trees, green oaks 
and myrtles—all evergreens. He had thought out all 
the details; there was to be nothing to show the passing 
of time—no clocks, no watches. The clouds were 
hidden by curtains of orange silk. Hélène was still 
very weak, but she was more calm: she talked and 
listened to reading aloud, holding her husband’s hand 
in her own.

Hélène sent me a few pages torn from a notebook. 
The lines were in pencil, as though they had been 
drawn during the last stage of a journey.

"Nicholas thinks that the green oak never changes its 
leaves; he does not see that every second transforms 
it. There is no doubt that it is always changing, I can 
see it with my own eyes. I see the atoms moving, 
replacing one another; it makes me so tired.

"I regret the sound of the river outside our Black 
Forest sanatorium, the murmur of the clear water 
carrying our lives with it as it flowed; if only I had 
something stable to grasp, as once I had. I am worn 
out by the speed of life, I can’t bear things that rush, 
I am so weary...."
Two days later I had a letter from Nicholas telling me that Hélène had died.

On the last day she asked her husband to draw back the orange curtains so that she might see the sky. She watched the mad scurry of the clouds brought by the mistral. Nicholas left her alone for a moment, calm and smiling; when he returned Hélène was no longer breathing.

CHAPTER I

WHILE I was abroad I anxiously followed the long-drawn-out trial of the Central Committee of our Party, which took place in 1922.

Twelve comrades, most of whom had been with me at Boutirky and at Jaroslav, and among them Genia Ratner, appeared before the Bolshevik tribunal. The Public Prosecutor, Krilinko, demanded the death penalty. They were accused of high treason against the proletariat. The prisoners, who had consecrated their lives to fighting against the old régime, had almost all spent long periods in convict prisons and in exile. They replied with fierce denunciations of the Bolshevik Party.

The trial became a duel between the two parties. The speeches of the accused were charged with a tragic emphasis; they scourged their enemies with biting irony. They pleaded the cause of democracy against the dictatorship, the cause of humanity against terrorist governments, and the cause of the oppressed peasants.

Genia spoke with fervour. Her arguments, sometimes subtle, sometimes pathetic, detailed the crimes of the Bolsheviks against the people: civil war, oppression, terror and political dictatorship.

"The value of human life, freedom, honour, humanity, you have denied them all," she flung at her opponents.

The sentence was monstrous; the twelve prisoners were condemned to death with conditional reprieve, an unparalleled punishment.

They remained for more than a year hidden in the isolated cells of the inner prison, threatened with
execution if an act of violence was committed by any members of the Party who remained at liberty; the prisoners, in fact, became hostages responsible for the behaviour of their free comrades.

One of the condemned, Serge Morosoff, a member of the Central Committee, who had been with me at Boutirké and Jaroslav, put an end to this treatment by committing suicide.

This protest made the Bolsheviks decide to exile the eleven others to Siberia and Asia.

Genia was sent to Samarkand, where she occupied herself with the wool industry of that country, and started to write a book dealing with this special subject.

She died in 1932, of cancer, which it was not possible to operate on there. The political Red Cross intervened and obtained the permission of the Tcheka to transfer her to Leningrad, but it was then too late.

I seemed to see her again as I had seen her during our second and last meeting in prison, when she had gone on hunger strike in order to be set at liberty to go and look after her family and children.

Her fiery temperament and inflexible will could only be overcome by sleep, and death was, in fact, a sleep to her.

Suicide, death, prison and exile—such was the fate reserved for my friends who stayed in Russia.

From time to time I received news of them. My old comrades—such as Boris, for instance—continued to be transferred from prison to prison, as in my time.

I happened to hear that some of those who were in exile had an opportunity of exercising their intellectual powers by taking part in the economic reconstruction of the countries where they were.

At the houses of French and Russian friends who had remained abroad during the Revolution I came across that dry sterility which produces disenchantment, fatigue, disgust or selfish arrivisme.

And I heard these people ask me: "How can you live after having gone through this tragedy? How can you keep looking towards the new Russia? You should forget it, or try not to see its hideous reality!"

Having gone through so many trials with my people, having endured hunger, cold, prison and exile, I felt, on the contrary, enriched and magnified by this experience, and I replied to them: "He is happiest who bears with him the immense richness of the tragedy he has lived through! Not see the face of reality? But in prison we saw it in all its aspects, we heard the cries of the tortured, we saw the Ravine scattered with corpses and the "Death-Shop" on its unending voyage towards the fatal bank. Could even an eternity of happiness compensate the victims' sufferings? But Death has always been closely bound up with Life. And, in spite of all, wonderful things have risen from the collapse of the past, and Life has triumphed in the end!"

When I think of the centuries of darkness that Russia has gone through I hear a groan of pain.

It was with rivers of blood that my people freed itself from the Tartar yoke. The growing power of the State, the Tzars—Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, the Great Catherine, Nicholas I—the slavery of the people—all were bathed in torrents of Russian blood.

Was it surprising, then, that the anger and hatred ripening through the centuries had burst forth at last? Why be astonished by the excesses of revenge? The castles have been burnt, works of art have been pitilessly thrown through the broken windows, old books and historic treasures have been stamped underfoot by the crowd, drunk with the desire to destroy the past.

Here, in Europe, civilised people seem to be strangling one another. Haven't they bombed cathedrals and hospitals? Is it not true that the most cultured nations are preparing once more for war?

It is always the innocent victims who pay, in the end.
We have seen the suffering of the pure and the impure, of innocents and criminals, herded together in the death-cell; they were all purified by their agony and sanctified by the executioner’s last gesture.

I was in the midst of this uprooted mass which moved inarticulately towards the future, and I have seen in it, as in a mirror, the eternal dream of mankind.

A reflection of this vision appeared in a letter written on a piece of coarse paper, sent to me from the country that continues to struggle and suffer. It was Katia who wrote:

"Life is always hard. We are living in one room with two other families whom we don’t know. I am working in a factory to make a living for myself and my son, for I have left my husband in order to bring up my little boy independently and away from all influence.

"It is always the same story, you know, comfort is for the privileged; and my husband, who is a Communist, is one of those fortunate people. At last I couldn’t bear it any longer and ran away from him. It’s hard, but I do not want my son to grow up profiting from injustice and privileges.

"But we are going to do away with these new privileges as well as the old! We workers are strong. I am staying with those who work and suffer and believe in the future.

"When my son was quite tiny I couldn’t feed him and I hadn’t any baby food or semolina or rice to give him. At the moment we haven’t any meat, and very little sugar, but perhaps it isn’t necessary. Yesterday I got up before dawn to join the queue before going to the factory, and I got a quarter pound of butter.

"My little boy is getting strong now and hardened to the cold. Our room is not heated and the tap-water is frozen, neither have we any warm clothes, gloves, nor shoes. Oh, you should see how torn his feet are in his broken shoes. He really is sweet, with a skin like satin, a little round turned-up nose and a smiling mouth. He is already able to walk, nothing can stop him. Just think, yesterday he saw a big dog which growled at him, and he went straight up to it and began to stroke it!

"He began to walk when he was eleven months, all by himself, perfectly upright, without any fear. I am sure that he will not be afraid of anything, not even of telling the truth.

"Alas, I have to make wearisome efforts in order to raise sufficient to keep us. It’s an endless struggle for life. You know what I’m like, I was meant for struggle, but now it begins to tire me at times.

"We are destroying the past to construct the future, but the destruction sometimes gets a bit too energetic; we sometimes destroy those feelings considered, like the rest of the past, bourgeois—sensibility, kindness, tenderness, and also the courage to tell the truth when it runs contrary to the dominating ideas.

"I cannot describe my state of mind to you in a letter, sometimes my strength is lacking for the double—the multiple—fight. For I have to fight for my life and my son’s, and I also have to fight for our class and our Party, side by side with those who—in my opinion—are turning it from the right path.

"Happily, life gives back my strength tenfold, and I have an inexhaustible source of encouragement in my son!

"I no longer do propaganda as I used to. On the contrary, I am studying on my own account, I am so ignorant. Every evening I fetch my little boy from the crèche where he spends the day, bring him home and put him to bed. We have only one bed between us, but that brings him nearer to me, at night at least. He goes to sleep very quickly, then I go out to the Workers’ University, where a great number of us are taking the evening courses, for there seems to be a general leaning towards science, an impetuous desire to study after the day spent in the factory. Was there ever anything like that under the old régime?
"I am beginning to understand lots of things, but I have still so much to learn."

"During one of the lectures on Ancient Greece the teacher mentioned the legend of the Golden Fleece that you told me at the Villa Ariane. Do you remember? And also the magic Garden of Golden Apples.

"I am not so simple as I used to be, I know that our generation will never reach the Fleece nor the Apple. We thought we held it in our hands, but it rolled away into the dirt and blood. Then, still splashed and stained, we saw how it shone as it rolled along. It is that light which leads us.

Apple—red apple,
Where are you rolling?

Do you still remember that tune which everyone used to sing. That apple is rolling towards the happiness of the whole world, dear Olga Elissevna, I am certain of that. Will my son live to see that day?

"Do you still persist in turning your back on our new life? Are you aware in your exile of the miracles it has done?

"At the moment of sending you this letter I have just had great good news: I'm not going to work any more in the factory. I told you I had been at the Workers' University since the autumn, well, now I'm going to study electricity and radio-telegraphy in order to realise my dream. Although I love my son very much I am going to leave him for some time to take part in the Arctic expedition which is now being organised. You will see what wonders our people will discover."

A breath of fresh air came to me. Why did Katia also speak of me turning my back and closing my eyes? Have I ever closed them? No, I saw the Revolution with wide-open eyes; how could I dare to close them now? I have the profound conviction that

Life will win the victory in the end. I feel my country's heart beating again, and in my own I have carried the wild rhythm of its march towards the future, for, in spite of everything, it is towards the future that it is marching.

THE END
Hutchinson's

IMPORTANT NEW BOOKS FOR THE SUMMER OF

1936

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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