THE MULTI-MILLION-COPY BESTSELLER

NICHOLAS and ALEXANDRA

The story of the love that ended an empire

Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *Peter the Great*

ROBERT K. MASSIE

With a new introduction by the author

NICHOLAS AND ALEXANDRA

An Intimate Account of the Last of the Romanovs and the Fall of Imperial Russia

ROBERT K. MASSIE

Robert K. Massie

NICHOLAS

AND

ALEXANDRA

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To Suzanne

"I have a firm, an absolute conviction that the fate of Russia—that my own fate and that of my family—is in the hands of God who has placed me where I am. Whatever may happen to me, I shall bow to His will with the consciousness of never having had any thought other than that of serving the country which He has entrusted to me."

NICHOLAS II

"After all, the nursery was the center of all Russia's troubles."

SIR BERNARD PARES

"The Empress refused to surrender to fate. She talked incessantly of the ignorance of the physicians. . . . She turned towards religion, and her prayers were tainted with a certain hysteria. The stage was ready for the appearance of a miracle worker. . . ."

GRAND DUKE ALEXANDER

"The illness of the Tsarevich cast its shadow over the whole of the concluding period of Tsar Nicholas II's reign and alone can explain it. Without appearing to be, it was one of the main causes of his fall, for it made possible the phenomenon of Rasputin and resulted in the fatal isolation of the sovereigns who lived in a world apart, wholly absorbed in a tragic anxiety which had to be concealed from all eyes."

PIERRE GILLIARD, *Tutor of Tsarevich Alexis*

"Without Rasputin, there could have been no Lenin."

ALEXANDER KERENSKY

Introduction

The writing of this book is the result, like most things in life, of a circumstance of Fate. Since the day, now over ten years ago, that my wife and I discovered that our son had hemophilia, I have tried to learn how other families dealt with the problems raised by this unique disease. In time, this led to curiosity about the response of the parents of the boy who was the most famous hemophiliac of all, the Tsarevich Alexis, the only son and heir of Nicholas II, last Tsar of all the Russias.

What I discovered was both fascinating and frustrating. There was general agreement that the child's hemophilia had been a significant factor in the lives of the parents, Tsar Nicholas and Empress Alexandra, and thereby in the fall of Imperial Russia. Thus, in the most comprehensive political study of the period, *The Fall of the Russian Monarchy,* Sir Bernard Pares declares categorically: "On August 12, 1904 . . . took place the event which more than anything else determined the whole later course of Russian history. On that day was at last born the heir to the throne, long expected and fervently prayed for." What Pares is saying, and what is scarcely disputed by anyone, is that in an effort to deal with the agonies hemophilia inflicted on her son, the distraught mother turned to Gregory Rasputin, the remarkable Siberian

mystagogue. Thereafter, Rasputin's presence near the throne —his influence on the Empress and, through her, on the government of Russia—brought about or at least helped to speed the fall of the dynasty.

This was fascinating. But it was frustrating to discover that even those who attached the greatest significance to the effect of the disease on events did not explain, either in human or in medical terms, exactly what happened. This seemed a serious gap affecting larger areas than the one which first attracted my interest. If the illness of

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this boy and the aid given him by Rasputin had, in fact, brought down the ancient Romanov dynasty and led to the Russian Revolution with all its awesome consequences, why had there never been an attempt to decipher and interpret these episodes of grim suffering and dramatic healing? As for Rasputin, who has not heard something of this extraordinary man and his garish murder? But who knows precisely what he did to help the Tsarevich? In both historical and human terms, this seemed to me enormously important, for only by understanding the basis of this relationship does the rest of the story become coherent.

I have read the diaries, letters and memoirs left by the men and women who were intimately involved in this great drama. In the letters from Nicholas and Alexandra to each other and from the Tsar to his mother, scattered through the books by Imperial relatives, intimate friends of the Empress, ladies-in-waiting, court officials, government ministers and foreign ambassadors, there is a wealth of fragmented information. But it has never been collected and assembled. In this book, my purpose has been to weave together from all the threads, and interpret in the light of modern medicine and psychiatry and of the common experience which all families affected by hemophilia necessarily share, an account of one family whose struggle with the disease was to have momentous consequences for the entire world.

If at first my interest was primarily in tracing the role of hemophilia, I soon found it expanding to include the rich panorama of the reign of Nicholas II, his role as tsar, his place in history, and the glittering epoch over which he presided. In reading and conversation, I discovered that, despite the passage

of fifty years, people still react strongly to Nicholas. A few, mostly Russian émigrés who see in him the symbol of an age now fading beyond recall, revere and even idolize him; by some members of the Russian Orthodox Church, he and all his martyred family are regarded as un-canonized saints.

On the opposite side, there still are those who for political or other reasons continue to insist that Nicholas was "Bloody Nicholas." Most commonly, he is described as shallow, weak, stupid—a one-dimensional figure presiding feebly over the last days of a corrupt and crumbling system. This, certainly, is the prevailing public image of the last Tsar.

Historians admit that Nicholas was a "good man"—the historical evidence of personal charm, gentleness, love of family, deep religious faith and strong Russian patriotism is too overwhelming to be denied —but they argue that personal factors are irrelevant; what matters is that Nicholas was a bad tsar. The virtues which we admire in private life and profess in our religion become secondary qualities in our

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rulers. The test of greatness in tsars or presidents is not in their private lives or even in their good intentions, but in their deeds.

By this standard, one has to agree: Nicholas was not a great tsar. Historically, the great leaders of the Russian people—Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Lenin and Stalin—have been those who by sheer force and terror have thrust the backward nation forward. Until perhaps the present day, Russians have stood in awe of the ruthless man who wielded the whip and drove them forward. Peter, who broke his enemies on the rack and hanged them in Red Square, who had his son tortured to death, is Peter the Great. But Nicholas, whose hand was lighter than that of any tsar before him, is "Bloody Nicholas." In human terms, this is irony rich and dramatic, the more so because Nicholas knew what he was called.

In terms of accomplishment, it may be unfair to compare Nicholas II with his towering ancestors. No one can say how well they would have managed under the cascade of disasters which broke upon Nicholas. Perhaps a more equitable and revealing comparison might be made between Nicholas II and

his contemporaries on the thrones of Europe: King Edward VII and King George V, Kaiser William II and Emperor Franz Joseph. Was there among this group one who could better have ridden the storm which Nicholas had to face? History itself provided part of the answer: the same catastrophic war which helped drive Nicholas off his throne also toppled the emperors of Germany and Austria-Hungary.

A comparison with the two kings of England, Edward VII and George V, Nicholas's uncle and first cousin, only deepens the irony. For if Nicholas had not been instructed from childhood that constitutions were anathema, he would have made an excellent constitutional monarch. He was at least as intelligent as any European monarch in his day or ours: his qualities and tastes were surprisingly similar to those of King George V, whom physically he so much resembled. In England, where a sovereign needed only to be a good man in order to be a good king, Nicholas II would have made an admirable monarch.

But Fate did not intend for the last Romanov Tsar so serene an existence or so comfortable a niche in history. He was Russian, not English, and he became, not a constitutional monarch, but Emperor-Tsar-Autocrat over millions of people and a vast region of the earth. Once on the throne, he faced simultaneously two wholly extraordinary disasters: a son with hemophilia and the imminent disintegration of his great empire. From the moment his son was born, the two disasters were intertwined. Although he stood at the highest pinnacle of political power in a system which had clearly lived beyond its time,

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Imperial Russia was not necessarily marked for total destruction. There were chances to adapt the autocracy to the modern world. But then, as if to ensure the implacable ending, Fate introduced hemophilia and Rasputin. It was the blow from which Nicholas and Imperial Russia could not recover.

Essentially, the tragedy of Nicholas II was that he appeared in the wrong place in history. Equipped by education to rule in the nine-tenth century, equipped by temperament to reign in England, he lived and reigned in Russia in the twentieth century. There, the world he understood was

breaking up around him. Events were moving too swiftly, ideas were changing too radically. In the gigantic storm which swept over Russia, he and all he loved were carried away. To the end, he did his best, and for his wife and family that was a very great deal. For Russia, it was not enough.

The man who, sensing only imperfectly the dimensions of the storm which beats against him, still tries with courage to do his duty is a particularly recognizable twentieth-century figure. Perhaps for this reason we today are better equipped to understand the ordeal and the qualities of Nicholas II. In an earlier era when the world seemed ordered and disorder the result primarily of human weakness or folly, then wars or revolutions could be blamed on a single leader. Since then, two world wars, the Great Depression and twenty years of the Nuclear Age have taught us, among other things, tolerance. We have come to accept the fact that there are forces beyond the control of any single man, be he tsar or president. We have also adjusted our measure of human achievement. Facing together things which we only dimly see, uncertain which course to follow, we place a higher value on intentions and effort. We may lose—more often than not we will lose— but we must try: this is the essence of a rational twentieth-century morality.

Caught in a web he could not break, Nicholas paid for his mistakes —he died as a martyr with his wife and his five children. But Fate had not taken everything from them. The old values by which they had lived, the very faith for which they were derided, gave them the courage and dignity that over the years have redeemed everything else. These human qualities are eternal and will survive and transcend the rise and fall of every empire. It is for these qualities that Nicholas II was an exceptional man. For, in the end, he did succeed.

R.K.M.

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Cast of Characters

NICHOLAS II, TSAR OF RUSSIA, 1894–1917
Before 1894, the Tsarevich Nicholas

ALEXANDRA FEDOROVNA, EMPRESS OF RUSSIA
Born Princess Alix of Hesse-Darmstadt

ALEXIS, THE TSAREVICH
Fifth child and only son of Nicholas and Alexandra

OLGA
TATIANA
MARIE
ANASTASIA
} *Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra*

ALEXANDER III, TSAR OF RUSSIA, 1881–1894
Father of Nicholas II

MARIE FEDOROVNA, DOWAGER EMPRESS
Mother of Nicholas II. Born Princess Dagmar of Denmark

GRAND DUKE GEORGE
GRAND DUKE MICHAEL
} *Brothers of Nicholas II*

GRAND DUCHESS XENIA
GRAND DUCHESS OLGA
} *Sisters of Nicholas II*

GRAND DUKE VLADIMIR
GRAND DUKE ALEXIS
GRAND DUKE SERGE
GRAND DUKE PAUL
} *Brothers of Tsar Alexander III and uncles of Nicholas II*

GRAND DUCHESS MARIE PAVLOVNA
Wife of Grand Duke Vladimir

GRAND DUKE CYRIL
GRAND DUKE BORIS
GRAND DUKE ANDREI
} *Sons of Vladimir and Marie Pavlovna and cousins of Nicholas II*

GRAND DUCHESS ELIZABETH (*Ella*)
Sister of Empress Alexandra and wife of Grand Duke Serge

GRAND DUKE NICHOLAS NICOLAIEVICH
Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army in World War I

GRAND DUKE ALEXANDER MIKHAILOVICH (*Sandro*)
Husband of Nicholas II's sister Xenia

PRINCE FELIX YUSSOUPOV
Murderer of Rasputin. Husband of Princess Irina, the daughter of Grand Duchess Xenia and Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich

GRAND DUKE DMITRY
Murderer of Rasputin. Son of Grand Duke Paul

EDWARD VII, KING OF ENGLAND, 1901–1910 (*Uncle Bertie*)
Brother-in-law of Dowager Empress Marie Fedorovna. Uncle of Empress Alexandra and Kaiser William II

GEORGE V, KING OF ENGLAND, 1910–1936 (*Georgie*)
Through his mother, first cousin of Nicholas II. Through his father, first cousin of Empress Alexandra

WILLIAM II, KAISER OF GERMANY, 1888–1918 (*Willy*)
First cousin of Empress Alexandra. Distant cousin of Nicholas II

Presidents of the Council of Ministers (Prime Ministers) after the 1905 Manifesto:

COUNT SERGIUS WITTE, 1905–1906
IVAN GOREMYKIN, 1906
PETER STOLYPIN, 1906–1911
VLADIMIR KOKOVTSOV, 1911–1914
IVAN GOREMYKIN, 1914–1916
BORIS STÜRMER, 1916
ALEXANDER TREPOV, 1916–1917
NICHOLAS GOLITSYN, 1917

COUNT VLADIMIR FREDERICKS *Minister of the Imperial Court* COUNT PAUL BENCKENDORFF *Grand Marshal of the Imperial Court, Fredericks' subordinate* DR. EUGENE BOTKIN *Court physician. Botkin attended primarily the Empress Alexandra* DR. FEDOROV *A doctor who cared for the Tsarevich Alexis* DR. VLADIMIR DEREVENKO *A doctor permanently assigned to the Tsarevich Alexis* FIERRE GILLIARD *Swiss tutor of the Tsarevich Alexis* ANNA VYRUBOVA *The Empress Alexandra's closest friend and confidante* DEREVENKO

A sailor assigned to watch the Tsarevich Alexis night and day. No relation to Dr. Derevenko

MATHILDE KSCHESSINSKA

Ballerina. Mistress of Nicholas II before his marriage

GREGORY RASPUTIN

A Siberian peasant

ALEXANDER KERENSKY

Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, 1917

Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin)

First leader of the Soviet State

PART ONE

NOTE

The titles emperor *and* tsar, *and* empress *and* tsaritsa, *are all correct and are used interchangeably in this book,* emperor *was a higher rank, first taken by*

Peter the Great, but Nicholas II, a Slavophile, preferred the older, more Russian title, tsar.

Dates in Russian history can be confusing. Until 1918, Russia adhered to the old Julian calendar. In the nineteenth century, this calender was twelve days behind the Gregorian calender used almost everywhere else. In the twentieth century, the Russian calender fell thirteen days behind. In this book, all dates are given according to the newer, Gregorian calender, except those specifically indicated as Old Style (O.S.).

Every Russian has three names: his first or Christian name; the name of his father with vich *added (meaning* son of) ; *and his family name. Thus, Nicholas was Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov. For women, the second name is their father's with* evna *or* ovna (daughter of) *added. The Tsar's youngest daughter was Anastasia Nicolaevna.*

CHAPTER ONE

1894: *Imperial Russia*

From the Baltic city of St. Petersburg, built on a river marsh in a far northern corner of the empire, the Tsar ruled Russia. So immense were the Tsar's dominions that, as night began to fall along their western borders, day already was breaking on their Pacific coast. Between these distant frontiers lay a continent, one sixth of the land surface of the globe. Through the depth of Russia's winters, millions of tall pine trees stood silent under heavy snows. In the summer, clusters of white-trunked birch trees rustled their silvery leaves in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. Rivers, wide and flat, flowed peacefully through the grassy plains of European Russia toward a limitless southern horizon. Eastward, in Siberia, even mightier rivers rolled north to the Arctic, sweeping through forests where no human had ever been, and across desolate marshes of frozen tundra.

Here and there, thinly scattered across the broad land, lived the one hundred and thirty million subjects of the Tsar: not only Slavs but Baits, Jews, Germans, Georgians, Armenians, Uzbeks and Tartars. Some were clustered

in provincial cities and towns, dominated by onion-shaped church domes rising above the white-walled houses. Many more lived in straggling villages of unpainted log huts. Next to doorways, a few sunflowers might grow. Geese and pigs wandered freely through the muddy street. Both men and women worked all summer, planting and scything the high silken grain before the coming of the first September frost. For six interminable months of winter, the open country became a wasteland of freezing whiteness. Inside their huts, in an atmosphere thick with the aroma of steaming clothes and boiling tea, the peasants sat around their huge clay stoves and argued and pondered the dark mysteries of nature and God.

In the country, the Russian people lived their lives under a blanket of silence. Most died in the villages where they were born. Three

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fourths of them were peasants, freed from the land a generation before by the Tsar-Liberator Alexander II's emancipation of the serfs. But freedom did not produce food. When famine came and the black earth cracked for lack of rain, and the grain withered and crumbled to dust still on the stalks, then the peasants tore the thatch from their roofs to feed their livestock and sent their sons trudging into town to look for work. In famine, the hungry *moujiks* wrapped themselves in ragged cloaks and stood all day in silence along the snowy roads. Noble ladies, warm in furs, drove their *troikas* through the stricken countryside, delivering with handsome gestures of their slender arms a spray of silver coins. Soon, along came the tax collector to gather up the coins and ask for others.

When the *moujiks* grumbled, a squadron of Cossacks rode into town, with lances in their black-gloved hands and whips and sabers swinging from their saddles. Troublemakers were flogged, and bitterness flowed with blood. Landowner, police, local governor and functionaries were roundly cursed by Russia's peasants. But never the Tsar. The Tsar, far away in a place nearer heaven than earth, did no wrong. He was the *Batiushka-Tsar,* the Father of the Russian people, and he did not know what suffering they had to endure. "It is very high up to God! It is very far to the Tsar!" said the Russian proverb. If only we could get to the Tsar and tell him, our troubles would be at an end—so runs the plot of a hundred Russian fairy tales.

As the end of the century approached, the life of many of these scattered towns and villages was stirring. The railroad was coming. During these years, Russia built railroads faster than any other country in Europe. As in the American West, railroads bridged the vast spaces, linked farms to cities, industries to markets. Travelers could step aboard a train in Moscow and, after a day in a cozy compartment, sipping tea and watching the snowbound countryside float past, descend onto a station platform in St. Petersburg. In 1891 the Imperial government had begun the construction of Russia's greatest railway, the Trans-Siberian. Beginning in the eastern suburbs of Moscow, the ribbon of track would stretch more than four thousand miles to the Pacific Ocean.

Then, as now, Moscow was the hub of Russia, the center of railroads, waterways, trade and commerce. From a small twelfth-century village surrounded by a wooden stockade, Moscow had become the capital and Holy City of Russia. It was there that Ivan the Terrible announced, when he took the throne in 1547, that he would be crowned not as Grand Prince of Moscow, but as Tsar of all Russia.

Moscow was "The City of Forty Times Forty Churches." High

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above the green rooftops glistened the blue-and-gilded onion domes of hundreds of church towers. Below, the wide avenues were graced by the columned palaces of princes and the mansions of wealthy textile merchants. In the maze of back streets, rows of two-story wooden buildings and log cabins sheltered the city's clerks and factory workers. The streets themselves lay deep in the snows of winter, the spring mud or the thick dust of summer. Women and children who ventured out had to watch for the sudden dash of a carriage or a thundering band of Cossacks whooping like cowboys in a town of the American West.

In the heart of Moscow, its massive red walls jutting from the bank of the Moscow River, stood the somber medieval citadel of Russian power, the Kremlin. Not a single building but an entire walled city, it seemed to a romantic Frenchman no less than a mirror of Russia

itself: "This curious conglomeration of palaces, towers, churches, monasteries, chapels, barracks, arsenals and bastions; this incoherent ramble of sacred and secular buildings; this complex of functions as fortress, sanctuary, seraglio, harem, necropolis, and orison; this blend or advanced civilization and archaic barbarism; this violent conflict of crudest materialism and most lofty spirituality; are they not the whole history of Russia, the whole epic of the Russian nation, the whole inward drama of the Russian soul?"

Moscow was the "Third Rome," the center of the Orthodox Faith. For millions of Russians, most of the drama and panoply of life on earth were found in the Orthodox Church. In the great cathedrals of Russia, peasant women with kerchiefs over their heads could mingle with princesses in furs and jewels. People of every class and age stood for hours holding candles, their minds and senses absorbed in the overwhelming display taking place around them. From every corner of the church, golden icons glittered in the glowing light. From the iconostasis, a high screen before the altar, from the miters and crosses of gold-robed bishops, blazed diamonds and emeralds and rubies. Priests with long beards trailing down their chests walked among the people, swinging smoking pots of incense. The service was not so much a chant as a linked succession of hymns, drawing unbelievable power from the surging notes of the deepest basses. Dazzled by sights and smells, washed clean by the soaring notes of the music, the congregation came forward at the end of the service to kiss the soft hand of the bishop and have him paint a cross in holy oil upon their foreheads. The Church offered the extremes of emotion, from gloom to ecstasy. It taught that suffering was good, that drabness and pain were inevitable. "As God wills," the Russian told himself and, with the aid

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of the Church, sought to find the humility and strength to bear his earthly burden.

For all its glory, Moscow in 1894 was no longer the capital of the Tsar's empire. Two hundred years before, Peter the Great had forcibly wrenched the nation from its ancient Slav heritage and thrust it into the culture of Western Europe. On the marshes of the Neva River, Peter built a new city,

intended to become Russia's "Window on Europe." Millions of tons of red granite were dragged into the marshland, piles were driven, and two hundred thousand laborers died of fever and malnutrition, but before Peter himself died in 1725, he ruled his empire from this strange, artificial capital at the head of the Baltic Sea.

Peter's city was built on water. It spread across nineteen islands, chained by arching bridges, laced by winding canals. To the northeast lay the wide expanse of Lake Ladoga, to the west the Gulf of Finland; between them rolled the broad flood of the river Neva. "Cleaving the city down the center, the cold waters of the Neva move silently and swiftly like a slab of smooth grey metal . . . bringing with them the tang of the lonely wastes of forests and swamp from which they have emerged." The northern shore was dominated by the grim brown bastions of the Fortress of Peter and Paul, surmounted by a slim golden spire soaring four hundred feet into the air above the fortress cathedral. For three miles along the southern bank ran a solid granite quay lined by the Winter Palace, the Admiralty, the foreign embassies and the palaces of the nobility.

Called the Venice of the North, the Babylon of the Snows, St. Petersburg was European, not Russian. Its architecture, its styles, its morals and its thought were Western. The Italian flavor was distinct. Italian architects, Rastrelli, Rossi, Quarenghi, brought to Russia by Peter and his heirs, had molded huge baroque palaces in red and yellow, pale green or blue and white, placing them amid ornate gardens on broad and sweeping boulevards. Even the smaller buildings were painted, plastered and ornamented in the style and colors of the south. Massive public buildings were lightened by ornamented windows, balconies and columned doorways. St. Petersburg's enormous Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan was a direct copy of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Despite its Mediterranean style, St. Petersburg was a northern city where the Arctic latitudes played odd tricks with light and time. Winter nights began early in the afternoon and lasted until the middle of the following morning. Icy winds and whirling snowstorms swept across the flat plain surrounding the city to lash the walls and windows

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of the Renaissance palaces and freeze the Neva hard as steel. Over the baroque spires and the frozen canals danced the strange fires of the aurora borealis. Occasionally a brilliant day would break the gloomy monotony. The sky would turn a silvery blue and the crystal snow-flakes on the trees, rooftops and gilded domes would sparkle with sunlight so bright that the eye could not bear the dazzling glare. Winter was a great leveler. Tsar, minister, priest and factory worker all layered themselves in clothing and, upon coming in from the street, headed straight to the bubbling *samovar* for a glass of hot tea.

Summer in St. Petersburg was as light as the winters were dark. For twenty-two hours the atmosphere of the city was suffused with light. By eleven in the evening the colors of the day had faded into a milky haze of silver and pearl, and the city, veiled in iridescence, slept in silence. Yet those who were up after midnight could look to the east and see, as a pink line against the horizon, the beginning of the next dawn. Summer could be hot in the capital. Windows opened to catch the river breezes also brought the salt air of the Gulf of Finland, the aromas of spice and tar, the sound of carriage wheels, the shouts of street vendors, the peal of bells from a nearby church.

St. Petersburg, in 1894, still was faithful to Tsar Peter's wish. It was the center of all that was advanced, all that was smart and much that was cynical in Russian life. Its great opera and ballet companies, its symphonies and chamber orchestras played the music of Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky and Tchaikovsky; its citizens read Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and Tolstoy. But society spoke French, not Russian, and the best clothing and furniture were ordered from Paris. Russian noblemen vacationed in Biarritz and Italy and on the Riviera, rather than going back to the huge country estates which supplied the funds to finance their pleasures. Men went to the race track and the gambling clubs. Ladies slept until noon, received their hairdressers and went for a drive to the Islands. Love affairs flourished, accompanied by the ceaseless rustle of delicious gossip.

Society went every night to the Imperial Ballet at the gorgeous blue-and-gold Maryinsky Theatre or to the Theatre Français, where "fashionable

décolletage was compensated for by an abundance of jewels." After the theatre, ladies and their escorts bundled themselves into furs in little, bright red sleighs and sped noiselessly over the snows to the Restaurant Cuba for supper and dancing. "Nobody thought of leaving before 3 a.m. and the officers usually stayed until five . . . when the sky was colored with pearl, rose and silver tints."

The "season" in St. Petersburg began on New Year's Day and

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lasted until the beginning of Lent. Through these winter weeks, the aristocracy of the capital moved through a staggering round of concerts, banquets, balls, ballets, operas, private parties and midnight suppers. Everybody gave one and everybody went. There were receptions at which officers in brilliant uniforms with blazing decorations and old ladies in billowing white satin dresses milled about in high-ceilinged drawing rooms, plucking glasses of champagne from passing servants and filling their plates with cold sturgeon, chicken creams, stuffed eggs and three different kinds of caviar. There was the *Bal Blanc*, at which young, unmarried girls in virginal white danced quadrilles with young officers, carefully watched by vigilant Chaperones sitting in stiff-backed gold chairs. For young married couples, there were the *Bals Roses*, a swirl of waltzes and gypsy music, of flashing jewels and blue, green and scarlet uniforms, that "made one feel one had wings on one's feet and one's head in the stars."

At the height of the season, ladies put on their diamonds in the morning, attended church, received at luncheon, took some air in the afternoon and then went home to dress for a ball. Traditionally, the finest balls of all were those given by Their Majesties at the Winter Palace. No palace in Europe was better suited for formal mass revelry. The Winter Palace possessed a row of gigantic galleries, each as wide and tall as a cathedral. Great columns of jasper, marble and malachite supported high gilded ceilings, hung with immense crystal and gold chandeliers. Outside, in the intense cold of a January night, the whole three blocks of the Winter Palace would be flooded with light. An endless procession of carriages drew up, depositing passengers who handed their furs or cloaks to attendants and then ascended the wide white marble staircases, covered with thick velvet carpets. Along

the walls, baskets of orchids and palm trees in large pots framed huge mirrors in which dozens of people could examine and admire themselves. At intervals along the corridors troopers of the Chevaliers Gardes, in white uniforms with silver breastplates and silver eagle-crested helmets, and Cossack Life Guards in scarlet tunics stood rigidly at attention.

The three thousand guests included court officials in black, gold-laced uniforms, generals whose chests sagged with medals from the Turkish wars, and young Hussar officers in full dress with elkskin breeches so tight it had taken two soldiers to pull them on. At a great court ball, the passion of Russian women for jewels was displayed on every head, neck, ear, wrist, finger and waist.

An Imperial ball began precisely at 8:30 in the evening, when the

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Grand Master of Ceremonies appeared and tapped loudly three times on the floor with an ebony staff, embossed in gold with the double-headed eagle of the tsar. The sound brought an immediate hush. The great mahogany doors inlaid with gold swung open, the Grand Master of Ceremonies cried out, "Their Imperial Majesties," and hundreds of dresses rustled as ladies sank into a deep curtsy. This announcement in the winter of 1894 produced the appearance of a tall, powerful, bearded man, Tsar Alexander III. Beside him, in a silver brocade gown sewn with diamonds, her famous diamond tiara in her hair, was his dark-eyed Danish wife, Empress Marie. The orchestra broke into a polonaise, then as the evening progressed, a quadrille, a chaconne, a mazurka, a waltz. At midnight, in adjacent rooms, a supper was served. While demolishing plates of lobster salad, chicken patties, whipped cream and pastry tarts, the merrymakers could look through the double glass of the long windows to see the wind blowing gusts of fine powdered snow along the icebound river. Through clusters of tables, the Tsar, six feet four inches tall, ambled like a great Russian bear, stopping here and there to chat, until 1:30, when the Imperial couple withdrew and the guests reluctantly went home.

Tsar Alexander III had an enormous capacity for work and awesome physical strength. He could bend iron pokers or silver plates. Once at dinner

the Austrian ambassador hinted at trouble in the Balkans and mentioned ominously that Austria might mobilize two or three army corps. Alexander III quietly picked up a silver fork, twisted it into a knot and tossed it onto the plate of the Austrian ambassador. "That," he said calmly, "is what I am going to do to your two or three army corps." Alexander's mode of relaxation was to rise before dawn, shoulder his gun and set off for a full day of hunting in the marshes or forests. Like a bear, he was gruff, blunt, narrow and suspicious. He had a strong mind, strong Hkes and dislikes and a purposeful will. After making a decision, he went to bed and slept soundly. He disliked Englishmen and Germans and had a passion for everything Russian. He hated pomp and felt that a true Russian should be simple in manners, table, speech and dress; he wore his own trousers and boots until they were threadbare. Queen Victoria once said frostily of this huge Tsar that he was "a sovereign whom she does not look upon as a gentleman."

Alexander III dominated his family as he did his empire. His wife achieved a role of her own by charming the gruff giant; his children, especially his three sons, scarcely had any independence at all. The Tsar's words were commands and, to one official of his court, when

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he spoke he "gave the impression of being on the point of striking you." When he gathered a small group to play chamber music together, the Tsar dominated the room, puffing away on his big bassoon.

Under Alexander III, the Russian system of autocracy appeared to work. The tsar personally was the government of Russia. His power was absolute, his responsibility only to God. From the tsar, power flowed downward and was exercised across the empire by an army of ministers, governors, clerks, tax collectors and policemen, all appointed in the name of the tsar. No parliament existed, and the people had no say in their government. Even members of the Imperial family, the grand dukes and grand duchesses, were subject to the tsar's will. Imperial grand dukes served as governors of provinces, or high-ranking officers in the army or navy, but they served only at the pleasure of the tsar. A snap of his finger and they stepped aside.

Alexander III was a dedicated autocrat, exercising to the limit the powers of his rank. He would have been a forceful tsar under any circumstances, but the fierceness of his belief in autocracy was inspired by his revulsion against those who had murdered his father, the Tsar-Liberator Alexander II. That his father's assassins were not liberals but revolutionary terrorists did not concern Alexander III; he lumped them all together.

Throughout the thirteen years of his reign, Alexander III devoted himself to crushing all opposition to autocracy. Hundreds of his political enemies made the long journey to exile in the lost towns of Siberia. Heavy censorship shackled the press. Before long, the vigor of his policies actually began to create a psychological force in favor of autocracy, and the zeal of the assassins and revolutionaries began to wane.

Except in his reactionary political views, Alexander III was a forward-looking tsar. He made an alliance with France in order to attract the huge French loans he needed to build Russian railways. He began rebuilding the Russian army and resisted all temptations and provocations which might have dragged it into war. Although he disliked Germans, he encouraged German industrialists to bring their capital and develop the coal and iron mines of Russia.

The attempt to run this vast empire by himself required all of Alexander Ill's great energy. In order to work undisturbed, he chose to Uve in the palace at Gatchina, twenty-five miles southwest of St. Petersburg. The Empress Marie much preferred living in town, and every winter she brought him into the capital to preside over the season. Alexander III flatly refused, however, to Uve in the huge,

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ornate Winter Palace, which he thought cold and drafty, and the Imperial couple took up residence in the smaller Anitchkov Palace on the Nevsky Prospect.

It was Russia's good fortune that Alexander III was married to a woman whose talents exactly suited her position. Born Princess Dag-mar of Denmark, she was a younger sister of Princess Alexandra, who married

Edward, Prince of Wales, and became Queen of England. As a girl, Dagmar was engaged to Tsar Alexander Ill's older brother, Nicholas, then the heir to the Russian throne. When Nicholas died before their marriage, he bequeathed to Alexander not only his title of Tsarevich, but his dark-haired fiancée as well. Before her marriage, Princess Dagmar took the Russian name of Marie Fedorovna.

Russians loved this small, gay woman who became their Empress, and Marie gloried in the life of the Russian court. She delighted in parties and balls. "I danced and danced. I let myself be carried away," she wrote at the age of forty-four. Seated at dinner, she was an intelligent, witty conversationalist and, with her dark eyes flashing, her husky voice filled with warmth and humor, she dominated as much by charm as by rank. When something worth gossiping about occurred, Marie delightedly passed the tidbit along. "They danced the mazurka for half an hour," she once reported in a letter. "One poor lady lost her petticoat which remained at our feet until a general hid it behind a pot of flowers. The unfortunate one managed to hide herself in the crowd before anyone discovered who she was." Amused by human foibles, she was tolerant of human weaknesses. She regarded with droll pity the ordeal suffered by the Archduke Franz Ferdinand when he paid a ceremonial visit to St. Petersburg in 1891: "He is feted, he is stuffed with lunches and dinners everywhere so that he will end by having a monstrous indigestion. Last night at the theatre, he looked already rather pasty and left early with a migraine."

By the time she was thirty, Marie had met the requirements of royal motherhood by producing five children. Nicholas was born May 18, 1868, followed by George (1871), Xenia (1875), Michael (1878) and Olga (1882). Because of her husband's involvement in work, it was Marie who clucked over the children, supervised their studies, gave them advice and accepted their confidences. Frequently she acted as a maternal buffer between her growing brood and the strong, gruff man who was their father. Her oldest son, the shy Tsarevich Nicholas, was especially in need of his mother's support. Everything about Alexander inspired awe in his son. In October 1888, the Imperial train was derailed near Kharkov as the Tsar and his family

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were eating pudding in the dining car. The roof caved in, but, with his great strength, Alexander lifted it on his shoulders and held it long enough for his wife and children to crawl free, unhurt. The thought that one day he would have to succeed this Herculean father all but overwhelmed young Nicholas.

As the year 1894 began, Nicholas's fears appeared remote. Tsar Alexander III, only forty-nine years old, was still approaching the peak of his reign. The early years had been devoted to reestablishing the autocracy in effective form. Now, with the empire safe and the dynasty secure, he expected to use the great power he had gathered to put a distinctive stamp on Russia. Already there were those who, gazing confidently into the future, had begun to compare Alexander III to Peter the Great.

CHAPTER TWO

The Tsarevich Nicholas

It was with special care that Fate had selected Nicholas to be Tsarevich and, later, Tsar. He was not a firstborn son. An older brother named Alexander, who had he lived would have been Tsar Alexander IV, had died in infancy. Nicholas's next brother, George, three years younger than the Tsarevich, was gay with quick intelligence. Throughout their childhood Nicholas admired George's sparkling humor, and whenever his brother cracked a joke, the Tsarevich carefully wrote it down on a slip of paper and filed it away in a box. Years later when Nicholas as Tsar was heard laughing alone in his study, he would be found rereading his collection of George's jokes. Unhappily, in adolescence George developed tuberculosis of both lungs and was sent to live, alone except for servants, in the high, sun-swept mountains of the Caucasus.

Although the palace at Gatchina had nine hundred rooms, Nicholas and his brothers and sisters were brought up in spartan simplicity. Every morning, Alexander III arose at seven, washed in cold water, dressed in peasant's clothes, made himself a pot of coffee and sat down at his desk. Later when Marie was up, she joined him for a breakfast of rye bread and boiled eggs. The children slept on simple army cots with hard pillows, took cold baths in

the morning and ate porridge for breakfast. At lunch when they joined their parents, there was plenty of food, but as they were served last after all the guests and still had to leave the table when their father rose, they often went hungry. Ravenous, Nicholas once attacked the hollow gold cross filled with beeswax which he had been given at baptism; embedded in the wax was a tiny fragment of the True Cross. "Nicky was so hungry that he opened his cross and ate the contents—relic and all," recalled his sister Olga. "Later he felt ashamed of himself but admitted that it had tasted 'immorally good.' " The children ate more

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fully when they dined alone, although these meals without their parents' presence often turned into unmanageable free-for-alls, with brothers and sisters pelting one another across the table with pieces of bread.

Nicholas was educated by tutors. There were language tutors, history tutors, geography tutors and a whiskered dancing tutor who wore white gloves and insisted that a huge pot of fresh flowers always be placed on his accompanist's piano. Of all the tutors, however, the most important was Constantine Petrovich Pobedonostsev. A brilliant philosopher of reaction, Pobedonostsev has been called "The High Priest of Social Stagnation" and "the dominant and most baleful influence of the [last] reign." A wizened, balding man with coldly ascetic eyes staring out through steel-rimmed glasses, he first came to prominence when as a jurist at Moscow University he wrote a celebrated three-volume text on Russian law. He became a tutor to the children of Tsar Alexander II, and, as a young man, Alexander III was his faithful, believing pupil. When Alexander mounted the throne, Pobedonostsev already held the office of Procurator of the Holy Synod, or lay head of the Russian Orthodox Church. In addition, he assumed the tutorship of the new Tsarevich, Nicholas.

Pobedonostsev's brilliant mind was steeped in nationalism and bigotry. He took a misanthropic Hobbesian view of man in general. Slavs in particular he described as sluggish and lazy, requiring strong leadership, while Russia, he said, was "an icy desert and an abode of the 'Bad Man.' " Believing that national unity was essential to the survival of this sprawling, multi-racial empire, he insisted on the absolute authority of Russia's two great unifying

institutions: the autocracy and the Orthodox Church. He insisted that opposition to them be ruthlessly crushed. He opposed all reforms, which he called "this whole bazaar of projects . . . this noise of cheap and shallow ecstasies." He regarded a constitution as "a fundamental evil," a free press as an "instrument of mass corruption" and universal suffrage as "a fatal error." But most of all Pobedonostsev hated parliaments.

"Among the falsest of political principles," he declared, "is the principle of the sovereignty of the people . . . which has unhappily infatuated certain foolish Russians. . . . Parliament is an institution serving for the satisfaction of the personal ambition, vanity, and self-interest of its members. The institution of Parliament is indeed one of the greatest illustrations of human delusion. . . . Providence has preserved our Russia, with its heterogeneous racial composition, from like misfortunes. It is terrible to think of our condition if

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destiny had sent us the fatal gift—an all-Russian Parliament. But that will never be."

For the same reason, and from his special position as—in effect— Minister of Religion, Pobedonostsev attacked all religious strains in Russia unwilling to be assimilated into Orthodoxy. Those who most strenuously resisted, he hated most. He was violently anti-Semitic and declared that the Jewish problem in Russia would be solved only when one third of Russia's Jews had emigrated, one third had been converted to Orthodoxy and one third had disappeared. It was the pupil of Pobedonostsev speaking in Alexander III when he wrote in the margin of a report depicting the plight of Russian Jewry in 1890, "We must not forget that it was the Jews who crucified our Lord and spilled his precious blood."

Pobedonostsev's virulent prejudice was not restricted to Jews. He also attacked the Catholic Poles and the Moslems scattered across the broad reaches of the empire. It was Pobedonostsev who wrote the document excommunicating Leo Tolstoy in 1901.*

The Russia described to Nicholas by Pobedonostsev had nothing to do with the restless giant stirring outside the palace windows. Instead, it was an ancient, stagnant, coercive land made up of the classical triumvirate of Tsar, Church and People. It was God, the tutor explained, who had chosen the Tsar. There was no place in God's design for representatives of the people to share in ruling the nation. Turning Pobedonostsev's argument around, a tsar who did not rule as an autocrat was failing his duty to God. Heard as a school lesson, the old man's teaching may have lacked a basis in reality, but it had the compelling purity of logic, and Nicholas eagerly accepted it.

For Nicholas, the most dramatic proof of Pobedonostsev's teachings against the dangers of liberalism was the brutal assassination of his grandfather, Alexander II, the most liberal of Russia's nineteenth-century tsars. For his historic freeing of the serfs, Alexander II was known as the "Tsar-Liberator," yet his murder became the preeminent objective of Russian revolutionaries. The assassins went to extraordinary lengths. Once, near Moscow, they purchased a building near the railway track and tunneled a gallery from the building under the track, where they planted a huge mine. The Tsar was saved when

* Tolstoy had left the Church, and the excommunication was only a formal acknowledgment of this fact. Still, Pobedonostsev may have taken a personal satisfaction in expelling the great novelist. Since 1877, when Tolstoy completed *Anna Karenina,* it had been rumored that the character of Alexis Karenin, the coldly pompous bureaucrat whom Anna cuckolds and then divorces, was modeled on an episode in the family life of Constantine Pobedonostsev.

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his train left Moscow in a different direction. Six other attempts were made, and on March 1i, 1881—ironically, only a few hours after the Tsar had approved the establishment of a national representative body to advise on legislation—the assassins succeeded. As his carriage rolled through the streets of St. Petersburg, a bomb, thrown from the sidewalk, sailed under it. The explosion shattered the vehicle and wounded his horses, his equerries and one of his Cossack escorts, but the Tsar himself was unhurt. Stepping from the splintered carriage, Alexander II spoke to the wounded men and even asked gently about the bomb thrower, who had been arrested. Just then a second assassin ran up, shouting, "It is too early to thank God," and threw a second bomb directly between the Tsar's feet. In the sheet of flame and

metal Alexander II's legs were torn away, his stomach ripped open, his face mutilated. Still alive and conscious, he whispered, "To the palace, to die there." What remained of him was picked up and carried into the Winter Palace, leaving a trail of thick drops of black blood up the marble stairs. Unconscious, he was laid on a couch, his right leg torn off, his left leg shattered, one eye closed, the other open but vacant. One after another, the horrified members of the Imperial family crowded into the room. Nicholas, aged thirteen, wearing a blue sailor suit, came in deathly pale and watched from the end of the bed. His mother, who had been ice-skating, arrived still clutching her skates. At the window looking out stood his father, the Heir Apparent, his broad shoulders hunched and shaking, his fists clenching and unclenching. "The Emperor is dead," announced the surgeon, letting go of the blood-covered wrist. The new Tsar, Alexander III, nodded grimly and motioned to his wife. Together they walked out of the palace, now surrounded by guardsmen of the Preobrajensky Regiment with bayonets fixed. He stood for a moment, saluting, then jumped into his carriage and drove away "accompanied by a whole regiment of Don Cossacks, in attack formation, their red lances shining brightly in the last rays of a crimson March sunset." In his accession manifesto, Alexander III proclaimed that he would rule "with faith in the power and right of autocracy." For the thirteen years of his father's reign, Nicholas saw Russia ruled according to the theories of Pobedonostsev.

Nicholas, at twenty-one, was a slender youth of five feet seven inches, with his father's square, open face and his mother's expressive eyes and magnetic personal charm. His own best qualities were gentleness, kindliness and friendliness. "Nicky smiled his usual tender, shy,

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slightly sad smile," wrote his young cousin and intimate companion Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich. Himself prepared to like everybody, Nicholas hoped that people liked him. As best he could tell through the thickets of flattery and etiquette surrounding his rank, they did.

In many respects, his education was excellent. He had an unusual memory and had done well in history. He spoke French and German, and his English was so good that he could have fooled an Oxford professor into mistaking

him for an Englishman. He rode beautifully, danced gracefully and was an excellent shot. He had been taught to keep a diary and, in the style of innumerable princes and gentlemen of that era, he faithfully recorded, day after day, the state of the weather, the number of birds he shot and the names of those with whom he walked and dined. Nicholas's diary was identical to that of his cousin King George V; both were kept primarily as a catalogue of engagements, written in a terse, monotonous prose, and regarded as one of the daily disciplines of an ordered life. Curiously, Nicholas's diary, which lacks the expressive language of his private letters, has proved a rich mine for his detractors, while George's diary is often praised for its revelation of the honest character of this good King.

In May 1890, a few days before his twenty-second birthday, Nicholas wrote in his diary, "Today I finished definitely and forever my education." The young man then happily turned to the pleasant business of becoming a rake. His day usually began in mid-morning when he struggled out of bed exhausted from the previous night. "As always after a ball, I don't feel well. I have a weakness in the legs," he wrote in his diary. "I got up at 10:30. I am persuaded that I have some kind of sleeping sickness because there is no way to get me up."

Once on his feet, he went to a council meeting, or received the Swedish minister, or perhaps a Russian explorer just back from two years in Ethiopia. Occasionally he was lucky. "Today, there was not a meeting of the Imperial Council. I was not overwhelmed with sadness by the fact."

Most of the time, Nicholas was required to do absolutely nothing. The essential function of a tsarevich, once he had finished his schooling and reached manhood, was to wait as discreetly as possible until it came his turn to become tsar. In 1890 Alexander III still was only forty-five years old. Expecting that he would continue to occupy the throne for another twenty or thirty years, he dawdled about giving his son the experience to succeed him. Nicholas happily accepted the playboy role to which he had tacitly been assigned. He

appeared at meetings of the Imperial Council, but his eyes were fixed on the clock. At the first reasonable opportunity, he bolted.

On winter afternoons, he collected his sister Xenia and went ice-skating. "Skating with Xenia and Aunt Ella. We amused ourselves and ran like fools. Put on skates and played ball with all my strength," he wrote. He fell on the ice, got sore knees, sore feet and had to hobble around in slippers, grumbling about the good luck of people still able to skate. At twilight, flushed by exercise and the freezing air, the skaters bundled themselves into a drawing room for glasses of steaming tea. Dinner might be anywhere: at home, as a guest, or in a restaurant with a party of friends, entertained by an orchestra of balalaikas.

Every night during the winter season, Nicholas went out. In the month of January 1890, he attended twenty performances, sometimes two in a day, at the opera, theatre and ballet. It was during this month that Tchaikovsky's ballet *Sleeping Beauty* was first presented in St. Petersburg; Nicholas went to a dress rehearsal and two performances. He attended plays in German, French and English, including *The Merchant of Venice.* He was especially fond of *Eugene Onegin* and *Boris Godunov* and in February he even arranged to play a small part in a production of *Eugene Onegin.* He was a much-prized guest at exclusive late-evening soirees where the guests were entertained by the Imperial Navy Band, or a chorus of sixty singers, or a famous raconteur who told stories to amuse the guests. Two or three times a week, the Tsarevich attended a ball. "We danced to exhaustion . . . afterwards supper ... to bed at 3:30 a.m." The arrival of Lent abruptly ended this round of festivities. The day after the ball and midnight supper which ended the winter season in 1892, he wrote in his diary, "All day I found myself in a state of gaiety which has little in common with the period of Lent."

During this quieter period, Nicholas stayed home, dined with his mother and played cards with his friends. A telephone was installed in his room at the palace so that he could listen to Tschaikovsky's opera *Queen of Spades* over an open line direct from the stage. He regularly accompanied his father on

hunting parties, leaving the palace at dawn to spend a day in the forests and marshes outside the capital, shooting pheasants and hares.

Nicholas was never happier than when he was sitting on a white horse outside the Winter Palace, his arm frozen in salute as squadrons of Cossacks trotted past, their huge fur caps sitting down on their eyebrows, pennants fluttering from their lances. The army, its pag-

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eantry and history fascinated him all his life, and no title meant more to him than the rank of colonel awarded him by his father.

At nineteen, Nicholas was given command of a squadron of Horse Guards and went with them to Krasnoe Selo, the great military camp outside St. Petersburg used by regiments of the Imperial Guard for summer maneuvers. Installed in a private bungalow with a bedroom, study, dining room and a balcony overlooking a small garden, he lived the pleasant, mindless existence of any wealthy aristocratic young Russian officer. He participated fully in the life and chatter of the messrooms and his modesty made him popular among his fellow officers.

"I am happier than I can say to have joined the army and every day I become more and more used to camp life," he wrote to his mother, Empress Marie. "Each day we drill twice—there is either target practice in the morning and battalion drill in the evening or the other way round—battalion drill in the morning and target practice in the evening. . . . We have lunch at 12 o'clock and dine at 8, with siesta and tea in between. The dinners are very merry; they feed us well. After meals, the officers . . . play billiards, skittles, cards or dominoes."

The Empress worried that the eager subaltern would forget that he was also the Tsarevich. "Never forget that everyone's eyes are turned on you now, waiting to see what your first independent steps in life will be," she wrote. "Always be polite and courteous with everybody so that you get along with all your comrades without discrimination, although without too much familiarity or intimacy, and *never* listen to flatterers."

Nicholas wrote back dutifully, "I will always try to follow your advice, my dearest darling Mama. One has to be cautious with everybody at the start." But to his diary he confided more fully: "We got stewed," "tasted six sorts of Port and got a bit soused," "we wallowed in the grass and drank," "felt owlish," "the officers carried me out."

It was as a young officer in the spring of 1890 that Nicholas first met a seventeen-year-old dancer in the Imperial Ballet, Mathilde Ksches-sinska. A small, vivacious girl with a supple body, a full bosom, an arched neck, dark curls and merry eyes, Kschessinska had been rigorously schooled in ballet for ten years and in 1890 was the best dancer in her graduating class. By chance, that year the entire Imperial family attended the. graduation performance and supper.

In her memoirs, Kschessinska recalled the arrival of Tsar Alexander III, towering over everyone else and calling in a loud voice, "Where is Kschessinska?" When the tiny girl was presented to him, he took

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her hand and said to her warmly, "Be the glory and adornment of our ballet." At supper, the Tsar first sat next to Mathilde; then he moved and his place was taken by the Tsarevich. When Kschessinska looked at Nicholas, she wrote, "in both our hearts an attraction had been born impelling us irresistibly towards each other." Nicholas's entry in his diary that night was more laconic: "We went to see the performance at the Theatre School. Saw a short play and a ballet. Delightful. Supper with the pupils."

From that moment, Kschessinska struggled to put herself in Nicholas's line of vision. Knowing that Nicholas and his sister Xenia often stood on a high stone balustrade of the Anitchkov Palace watching passers-by on the Nevsky Prospect, Kschessinska strolled past the building every day. In May, on Nicholas's birthday, she decorated her room with little white, blue and red Russian flags. That summer she was selected to join the troupe which danced in the wooden theatre for officers at Krasnoe Selo, where the Tsarevich was on duty with the Guards. He came every day to watch Kschessinska's performance. Once when Tsar Alexander III saw them talking, he said to her with a smile, "Ah, you must have been flirting."

As the Tsarevich and the dancer were never alone, the romance that summer did not go beyond flirting. "I thought that, without being in love with me, he did feel a certain affection for me, and I gave myself up to my dreams," she wrote. "I like Kschessinska very much," Nicholas admitted to his diary. A few days later he wrote, "Gossiped at her window with little Kschessinska." And just before leaving the camp, he added, "After lunch, went for the last time to the dear little theatre at Krasnoe Selo. Said goodbye to Kschessinska."

Nicholas did not see Mathilde again for almost a year. In Ocotober 1890, he set out with his brother George on a nine-month cruise which took them from the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal to India and Japan. In George's case, his parents prayed that the weeks at sea in warm sunshine and salt air would clear his congested lungs. For Nicholas, they intended a royal grand tour, an education in diplomatic niceties and an interval which would help the Tsarevich forget the young women who had begun to complicate his life.

Kschessinska was not the only one. Nicholas found the dancer appealing; she was close at hand; she was pretty; and she was letting him know in every way possible how much she Uked him. But his feelings for a tall, golden-haired German princess, Alix of Hesse, were more serious. Princess Alix was a younger sister of Grand Duchess Elizabeth, the twenty-five-year-old wife of Nicholas's uncle Grand Duke Serge. Elizabeth, called Ella, was a gay young woman

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whose skating parties and family theatricals had brought a youthful bounce into the Imperial family. Nicholas was a frequent visitor in the home of this young aunt; when Ella's sister Alix came to St. Petersburg, Nicholas's visits became even more frequent. Serious and shy, Alix burned with inner fires. When she set her blue-gray eyes on Nicholas, he was overwhelmed. Unfortunately, she lived far away in Hesse-Darmstadt and his parents saw little to recommend their matching a Russian tsarevich with a minor German princess.

Leaving St. Petersburg in a gloomy mood, Nicholas and George went to Athens, where they were joined by their cousin Prince George of Greece. There the three cousins, accompanied by several young Russian noblemen, including Prince Bariatinsky, Prince Obo-lensky and Prince Oukhtomsky, boarded a Russian battleship, the *Pamiat Azova.* By the time the battleship reached Egypt, the cruise had turned into a traveling house party and Nicholas's spirits had soared. On the Nile, they transferred to the Khedive's yacht and began a trip up the river. In the broiling heat, Nicholas stared at the riverbank, "always the same, from place to place, villages and clusters of palm trees." Stopping in towns along the river, the youthful Russians became increasingly interested in the local belly dancers. "Nothing worth talking about," Nicholas wrote after watching his first performance. But the following night: "This time it was much better. They undressed themselves." The travelers climbed two pyramids, dined like Arabs, using their fingers, and rode on camels. They got as far as the first cataracts of the Nile at Aswan, where Nicholas watched Egyptian boys swimming in the foaming water.

In India, Bariatinsky and Oblensky each killed a tiger, but Nicholas, to his immense chagrin, shot nothing. The heat was intense and the Tsarevich grew irritable. From Delhi he complained to his mother, "How stifling it is to be surrounded again by the English and to see red uniforms everywhere." Hurriedly, Marie wrote back:

"I'd like to think you are very courteous to all the English who are taking such pains to give you the best possible reception, shoots, etc. I quite see that the balls and other official doings are not very amusing, especially in that heat, but you must understand that your position brings this with it. You have to set your personal comfort aside, be doubly polite and amiable, and above all, never show you are bored. You will do this, won't you, my dear Nicky? At balls you must consider it your duty to dance more and smoke less in the garden with officers just because it is more amusing. One simply cannot do this, my dear, but I know you understand all this so well and you know my

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only wish is that nothing can be said against you and for you to leave a good impression with everybody everywhere."

George suffered in the Indian heat. His cough persisted and he developed a constant fever. To his great disappointment, his father and mother ordered him to break off the tour. When the *Pamiat Azova* sailed from Bombay, George left on a destroyer in the opposite direction to return to his quiet life in the Caucasus.

Nicholas continued eastward, stopping in Colombo, Singapore, Batavia and in Bangkok, where he called on the King of Siam. He went on to Saigon and Hong Kong, and arrived in Japan just as the cherry trees were blooming in Tokyo parks. He visited Nagasaki and Kyoto and he was passing through the town of Otsu when his tour— and his life—nearly came to an abrupt end. Suddenly on a street a Japanese jumped at him swinging a sword. The blade, aimed at his head, glanced off his forehead, bringing a gush of blood but failing to bite deep. The assassin swung a second time, but Prince George of Greece forcefully parried the blow with his cane.

The assailant's motives have never been clear. Nicholas, although he bore a scar for the rest of his life and sometimes suffered headaches in that part of his skull gave no explanation. Two stories, both largely rumor, have been offered. One attributes the assault to a fanatic outraged by the supposedly disrespectful behavior of Nicholas and his companions in a Japanese temple. The other describes it as the jealous lunge of a Samurai whose wife had received the Tsarevich's attention. The episode terminated the visit, and Alexander III telegraphed his son to return home immediately. Thereafter, Nicholas never liked Japan and customarily referred to most Japanese as "monkeys." A subsequent entry in his diary reads, "I received the Swedish minister and the Japanese monkey, the chargé d'affaires, who brought me a letter, a portrait and an ancient armor from Her Majesty [the Empress of Japan]."

On his way home, Nicholas stopped in Vladivostock long enough to lay the first stone of the eastern terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway. He found Vladivostock a desolate frontier town of muddy, unpaved streets, open sewers, unpainted wooden houses and clusters of mud-plastered straw huts inhabited by Chinese and Koreans. On May 31, 1892, he attended an outdoor religious service swept by cold Siberian winds. He wielded a shovel

to fill a wheelbarrow with dirt, trundled it along for several yards and emptied it down an embankment of the future railroad. Soon after, he grasped a trowel and cemented into place the first stone of the Vladivostock passenger station.

Upon his return to St. Petersburg, Nicholas again began to see Kschessinska. At first, they rendezvoused secretly in carriages on the bank of the Neva. Later, the Tsarevich began to call on Mathilde at her father's home. Usually, he brought with him three youthful cousins, Grand Dukes Serge, George and Alexander Mikhailovich. Kschessinska served the young men her father's champagne and listened while they sang songs from Russian Georgia. On Sundays, Mathilde went to the race track and sat just opposite the Imperial box, never failing to receive a bouquet of flowers, delivered for the Tsarevich by two fellow officers of the Guards.

As Nicholas's affection for Kschessinska grew stronger, he gave her a gold bracelet studded with diamonds and a large sapphire. The following summer, when Kschessinska returned to the military theatre at Krasnoe Selo, Nicholas came often to rehearsals, sitting in her dressing room, talking until the rehearsal began. After the performance, Nicholas came for Kschessinska, driving his own *troika.* Alone together they set off on starlit rides, galloping through the shadows on the great plain of Krasnoe Selo. Sometimes, after these blood-stirring rides, the Tsarevich stayed after supper until dawn.

At the end of that summer of 1892, Kschessinska decided that she needed a place of her own. "Though he did not openly mention it," she said, "I guessed that the Tsarevich shared this wish." Her father, shattered by her announcement, asked whether she understood that Nicholas could never marry her. Mathilde replied that she cared nothing about the future and wished only to seize whatever brief happiness Fate was offering her. Soon after, she rented a small two-story house in St. Petersburg, owned by the composer Rimsky-Korsakov.

When her house was ready, Nicholas celebrated the housewarming by giving her a vodka service of eight small gold glasses inlaid with jewels. Thereafter, she said, "we led a quiet, retiring life." Nicholas usually rode up on

horseback in time for supper. They gave little parties, attended by the three young Grand Dukes, another dancer or two and a tenor of whom Nicholas was fond. After supper, in "an intimate and delightful atmosphere" the company played baccarat.

Nicholas, meanwhile, continued his functions at court. "I have been nominated a member of the Finance Committee," he wrote at one point. "A great honor, but not much pleasure. ... I received six members of this institution; I admit that I never suspected its existence." He became president of a committee to aid those who were starving in a famine, and he worked hard at the job, raising money and donating substantial funds of his own. His relations with his father

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remained distant and deferential. "I would have liked to exercise with the Hussars today," he wrote, "but I forgot to ask Papa." Sergius Witte, the burly, efficient Finance Minister who built the Trans-Siberian Railway and later served Nicholas during the Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution, gave an account of a conversation he had with Alexander III. According to Witte, he began the conversation by suggesting to the Tsar that the Tsarevich be appointed president of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Witte says Alexander III was astonished by his proposal.

"What? But you know the Tsarevich. Have you ever had a serious conversation with him?"

"No, Sire, I have never had the pleasure of having such a conversation with the Heir."

"He is still absolutely a child, he has only infantile judgments, how would he be able to be president of a committee?"

"Nevertheless, Sire, if you do not begin to initiate him to affairs of state, he will never understand them."

In 1893, Nicholas was sent to London to represent the family at the wedding of his first cousin George, Duke of York—later King George V—to Princess

Mary of Teck. The Tsarevich was lodged in Marlborough House with most of the royal personages of Europe living just down the hall. The Prince of Wales, always concerned with sartorial matters, immediately decided that the young visitor needed sprucing. "Uncle Bertie, of course, sent me at once a tailor, a bootmaker and a hatter," Nicholas reported to his mother. This was his first visit to London. "I never thought I would like it so much," he said, describing his visits to Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's and the Tower. Appropriately, he avoided that citadel of representative government, the Houses of Parliament.

Nicholas was immediately taken with Princess Mary. "May is delightful and much better looking than her photographs," he wrote. As for his cousin George, Nicholas and the bridegroom looked so much alike that even people who knew them well confused one with the other. George was shorter and slimmer than Nicholas, his face was thinner and his eyes somewhat more protuberant, but both parted their hair in the middle and wore similar Van Dyke beards. Standing side by side, they looked like brothers and almost like twins. Several times during the ceremonies, the resemblance caused embarrassment. At a garden party, Nicholas was taken for George and warmly congratulated, while George was asked whether he had come to London only to attend the wedding or whether he had other business to transact. The day before the wedding, George, mistaken for Nicholas, was

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begged by one gentleman of the court not to be late for the ceremony.

After the wedding, Nicholas visited Windsor Castle and had lunch with Queen Victoria. "She was very friendly, talked a lot, and gave me the Order of the Garter," he reported. He went to a ball at Buckingham Palace and, knowing his mother would be pleased, told her, "I danced a lot . . . but didn't see many beautiful ladies."

In St. Petersburg, meanwhile, little Kschessinska's career as a dancer was gathering momentum. Already, at nineteen, she was dancing such roles as the Sugar Plum Fairy in Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* and Princess Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty.* Tchaikovsky himself came to her rehearsals and accompanied the dancers on the piano. Once after Mathilde had danced

Princess Aurora, the composer came to her dressing room especially to congratulate her. In later years Mathilde Kschessinska would rank with Anna Pavlova and Tamara Karsavina among the great ballerinas of pre-revolutionary Russia.

There were those, of course, who ascribed Mathilde's early success primarily to her connection with the Tsarevich. Not that society regarded the liaison on either side with moral disdain. For the Russian aristocracy, ballet was a supreme art and the mingling of great titles and pretty ankles was a common thing. Many a deep-bosomed young dancer in the back row of the Imperial Ballet left the Maryinsky Theatre pulling her cloak about her shoulders, gathered her skirts and stepped into the plush velvet interior of a waiting coach to be whirled away to a private supper in one of the city's elegant palaces.

Despite Mathilde's success on the stage, the flame between her and Nicholas began to flicker. Nicholas had never hidden from Kschessinska his interest in Princess Alix. Early in 1894, he told Mathilde that he hoped to make Alix his fiancée. Later that year, Nicholas and Mathilde parted, saying goodbye at a highway rendezvous, she seated in her carriage, he astride a horse. When he rode away, she wept. For months, she went through "the terrible boundless suffering ... of losing my Niki." The great ballet master Marius Petipa consoled her by persuading her that suffering in love is necessary to art, especially to the great stage roles to which she aspired. "I was not alone in my grief and trouble. . . . The [younger] Grand Duke Serge ... remained with me to console and protect me." Serge bought her a *dacha* with a garden by the sea. Later, at the height of her success, she met Grand Duke Andrei, another cousin of the Tsar. Although Andrei was seven years her junior, they traveled together on holidays to Biarritz and Venice. In 1902, Mathilde and Andrei had a son, and in 1921, in Cannes, they married.

CHAPTER THREE

Princess Alix

My dream is some day to marry Alix H. I have loved her a long while and still deeper and stronger since 1889 when she spent six weeks in St. Petersburg. For a long time, I resisted my feeling that my dearest dream will come true."

When Nicholas made this entry in his diary in 1892, he had not yet established his temporary little household with Kschessinska. He was discouraged about the prospects of his interest in Princess Alix. Russian society did not share Nicholas's rapture for this German girl with red-gold hair. Alix had made a bad impression during her visits to her sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth in the Russian capital. Badly dressed, clumsy, an awkward dancer, atrocious French accent, a schoolgirl blush, too shy, too nervous, too arrogant—these were some of the unkind things St. Petersburg said about Alix of Hesse.

Society sniped openly at Princess Alix, safe in the knowledge that Tsar Alexander III and Empress Marie, both vigorously anti-German, had no intention of permitting a match with the Tsarevich. Although Princess Alix was his godchild, it was generally known that Alexander III was angling for a bigger catch for his son, someone like Princess Hélène, the tall, dark-haired daughter of the Pretender to the throne of France, the Comte de Paris. Although a republic, France was Russia's ally, and Alexander III suspected that a link between the Romanov dynasty and the deposed House of Bourbon would strengthen the alliance in the hearts of the French people.

But the approach to Hélène did not please Nicholas. "Mama made a few allusions to Hélène, daughter of the Comte de Paris," he wrote in his diary. "I myself want to go in one direction and it is evident that Mama wants me to choose the other one."

Hélène also resisted. She was not at all willing to give up her Roman Catholicism for the Orthodox faith required of a future Russian em-

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press. Frustrated, the Tsar next sent emissaries to Princess Margaret of Prussia. Nicholas flatly declared that he would rather become a monk than marry the plain and bony Margaret. Margaret spared him, however, by

announcing that she, too, was unwilling to abandon Protestantism for Orthodoxy.

Through it all, Nicholas nurtured his hope that someday he would marry Alix. Before leaving for the Far East, he wrote in his diary, "Oh, Lord, how I want to go to Ilinskoe [Ella's country house, where Alix was visiting] . . . otherwise if I do not see her now, I shall have to wait a whole year and that will be hard." His parents continued to discourage his ardor. Alix, they said, would never change her religion in order to marry him. Nicholas asked permission only to see her and propose. If Alix were denied him, he stated, he would never marry.

As long as he was well, Alexander III ignored his son's demands. In the winter of 1894, however, the Tsar caught influenza and began having trouble with his kidneys. As his vitality began to ebb alarmingly, Alexander began to consider how Russia would manage without him. Nothing could be done immediately about the Tsarevich's lack of experience, but Alexander III decided that he could at least provide his heir with the stabilizing effect of marriage. As Princess Alix was the only girl whom Nicholas would even remotely consider, Alexander III and Marie reluctantly agreed that he should be allowed to propose.

For Nicholas, it was a great personal victory. For the first time in his life he had overcome every obstacle, pushed aside all objections, defeated his overpowering father and had his way.

Alix Victoria Helena Louise Beatrice, Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt, was born on June 6, 1872, in the medieval city of Darmstadt a few miles from the river Rhine. She was named Alix after her mother, Princess Alice of England, the youngest of Queen Victoria's nine children. "Alix" was the nearest euphonic rendering of "Alice" in German. "They murder my name here, Aliicé they pronounce it," her mother said.

Princess Alix was born "a sweet, merry little person, always laughing and a dimple in one cheek," her mother wrote to Queen Victoria. When she was christened, with the future Tsar Alexander III and the future King Edward

VII as godfathers, her mother already called her "Sunny." "Sunny in pink was immensely admired," Princess Alice reported to Windsor Castle.

If the emotional ties between England and the small grand duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt were strong, those between Hesse and Prussia, ruled by the House of Hohenzollern, were weak and embittered. Only two years before Alix's birth, Hesse had been forcibly incorporated into the newly created German Empire. As recently as 1866, Hesse had sided with Austria in an unsuccessful war against Prussia. Alix's father, Grand Duke Louis of Hesse, hated Prussia and the Hohenzollerns, and throughout her life Alix shared his bitterness.

Darmstadt itself was an old German city with narrow cobblestone streets and steeply roofed houses covered with ornamental fifteenth-century carvings. The palace of the Grand Duke stood in the middle of town, surrounded by a park filled with linden and chestnut trees. Inside, Victoria's daughter had filled its rooms with mementoes of England. The drawing rooms were hung with portraits of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and all the living English cousins. Sketches of English scenes and English palaces lined the walls of the bedchambers. 'An English governess, Mrs. Orchard, ruled the nursery. Mrs. Orchard was not one for frills. The children's bedrooms were large and airy, but plainly furnished. Meals were simple; Alix grew up eating baked apples and rice puddings. Mrs. Orchard believed in strict daily schedules with fixed hours for every activity. Years later, when Alix had carried this training to Russia, the Russian Imperial family ate on the stroke of the hour and divided its mornings and afternoons into rigid little blocks of time while Mrs. Orchard watched and nodded approvingly. She, along with her well-drilled habits, had been brought to Russia.

Before she was six, Alix drove her own pony cart through the park, accompanied by a liveried footman who walked at the pony's head. In the summertime, her father, Grand Duke Louis, took his family to a hunting lodge called Wolfsgarten. There, Alix spent her mornings in a sun-filled courtyard, running up and down a flight of high stone steps and sitting by the courtyard fountain, dipping her hand in the water, trying to catch a goldfish. She liked to dress in her mother's cast-off dresses and prance down the hall

engulfed in crinoline, imagining herself as a great lady or a character from a fairy story.

Christmas was celebrated with German lavishness and English trimmings. A giant tree stood in the palace ballroom, its green branches covered with apples and gilded nuts, while the room glowed with the light of small wax candles fixed to the boughs. Christmas dinner began with a traditional Christmas goose and ended with plum pudding and mince pies especially shipped from England.

Every year, the family visited Queen Victoria. The Hessian children loved these visits to Windsor Castle near London, to the granite castle of Balmoral in the Scottish Highlands and to Osborne, the tiled Renaissance palace by the sea. Many years afterward, in Russia, the Empress Alexandra was to dream of herself as a little girl again, fishing for crabs, bathing and building sand castles on an English beach.

In 1878, when Alix was six, diphtheria swept the palace in Hesse-Darmstadt. All but one of the Grand Duke's children were stricken. Victoria sent her own physician from England to help the German doctors, but, despite their efforts, Alix's four-year-old sister, May, died. Then, worn out from nursing her children, Alix's mother, Princess Alice, also fell ill. In less than a week she was dead.

The death of her mother at thirty-five, had a shattering effect on six-year-old Alix. She sat quiet and withdrawn in her playroom while her nurse stood in the corner, weeping. Even the toys she handled were new; the old, familiar toys had been burned as a precaution against the disease. Alix had been a merry, generous, warm little girl, obstinate but sensitive, with a hot temper. After this tragedy she began to seal herself off from other people. A hard shell of aloofness formed over her emotions, and her radiant smile appeared infrequently. Craving intimacy and affection, she held herself back. She grew to dislike unfamiliar places and to avoid unfamiliar people. Only in cozy family gatherings where she could count on warmth and understanding did Alix unwind. There, the shy, serious, cool Princess Alix became once again the merry, dimpled, loving "Sunny" of her early childhood.

After her daughter's death, Queen Victoria treated Grand Duke Louis as her own son and invited him often to England with his motherless children. Alix, now the youngest, was the aging Queen's special favorite and Victoria kept a close watch on her little grandchild. Tutors and governesses in Darmstadt were required to send special reports to Windsor and receive, in return, a steady flow of advice and instruction from the Queen. Under this tutelage, Alix's standards of taste and morality became thoroughly English and thoroughly Victorian. The future Empress of Russia developed steadily into that most recognizable and respectable of creatures, a proper young English gentlewoman.

Alix was an excellent student. By the time she was fifteen, she was thoroughly grounded in history, geography and English and German literature. She played the piano with a skill approaching brilliance, but she disliked playing in front of people. When Queen Victoria asked her to play for guests at Windsor, Alix obliged, but her reddened face betrayed her torment. Unlike Nicholas, who learned by rote, Alix

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loved to discuss abstract ideas. One of her tutors, an Englishwoman named Margaret Jackson—"Madgie" to Princess Alix—was interested in politics. Miss Jackson passed her fascination along to Alix, who grew up believing that politics was a subject not necessarily restricted to men. Alix's grandmother, after all, was a woman and still managed to be the dominant monarch in Europe.

Alix first traveled to St. Petersburg at the age of twelve for the marriage of her sister Ella to Grand Duke Serge, younger brother of Tsar Alexander III. She watched with interest as her sister was met at the station in St. Petersburg by a gilded coach drawn by white horses. During the wedding ceremony in the chapel of the Winter Palace, Alix stood to one side, wearing a white muslin dress, with roses in her hair. Between listening to the long, incomprehensible chant of the litany and smelling the sweet incense which filled the air, she stole side glances at the sixteen-year-old Tsarevich Nicholas. Nicholas responded and one day presented her with a small brooch. Overwhelmed, she accepted, but then shyly pressed it back into his hand during the excitement of a children's party. Nicholas was offended and

gave the brooch to his sister Xenia, who, not knowing its history, accepted it cheerfully.

Nicholas and Alix met again five years later in 1889, when she visited Ella in St. Petersburg. This time, she was seventeen, he was twenty-one—ages when girls and young men fall in love. They saw each other at receptions, suppers and balls. He came for her in the afternoon and took her skating on frozen ponds and tobogganing down hills of ice. Before Alix departed, Nicholas persuaded his parents to give her a special tea dance, followed by a supper of *blinis* and fresh caviar, in the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo.

The following summer Alix returned to Russia, but not to St. Petersburg. She went instead to Ilinskoe, the Grand Duke Serge's country estate near Moscow. There Serge and Ella lived a simple country life with friends invited for prolonged visits. Summer was at its golden height, there were lazy rambles in the fields and searches through the woods for berries and mushrooms. It was Alix's first sight of the wide expanse of Russian meadowland, of the white birch groves and the peasants in their loose blouses and baggy knickers. She was impressed by the deep, respectful bows they gave to her, a visitor. When she visited a country fair with Ella, she happily bought wooden dolls and gingerbread to take back home to Darmstadt.

Alix and Nicholas did not meet on this trip, and that autumn he left on his long cruise to the Far East. Alix was increasingly sure, however, that she loved the Russian Tsarevich. From the beginning, Nicholas

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had been polite and gentle. She liked his wistful charm and his appealing blue eyes. She saw that Nicholas still was treated as a boy by his parents, but she also saw his quiet persistence in pursuit of her against their wishes. In his devotion, he was a person in whom she could confide.

For Alix, the insuperable obstacle to any thought of marrying this shy, affectionate youth was his religion. Confirmed into the Lutheran Church at sixteen, Alix had accepted its Protestant theology with all the fervor of her passionate nature. She took everything in life seriously, and religion was the

most serious matter of all. To reject casually a faith she had just sworn to accept seemed to her a direct affront to God. Yet still she loved Nicholas. Princess Alix plunged herself into a turmoil of doubt and self-examination.

The fact that Nicholas would one day be one of the mightiest rulers in Europe influenced Alix not at all. She had no interest in titles or the size of empires. In 1889, she rejected the proposal of Prince Albert Victor, the oldest son of the Prince of Wales and, after him, the heir to the British throne. This gay, popular young man, known to the family as Prince Eddy, died in 1892 at the age of twenty-eight, a sad event which put his younger brother, George, in line for the throne. It is one of the fascinating "if s" of history that if Alix had accepted Prince Eddy's proposal and Eddy had lived, he and Alix, not King George V and Queen Mary, would have ruled England. In this case, today Alix's son might sit on the British throne.

In any case, Alix had no interest in Eddy, and even Queen Victoria, who favored the match, admired the strong-minded way in which her granddaughter rejected Eddy's suit. "I fear all hope of Alicky's marrying Eddy is at an end," the Queen wrote to a friend. "She has written to tell him how it pains her to pain him, but that she cannot marry him, much as she likes him as a Cousin, that she knows she would not be happy with him and that he would not be happy with her and that he must not think of her. ... It is a real sorrow to us . . . but . . . she says—that if she is forced she will do it—but that she would be unhappy and he too. This shows great strength of character as all her family and all of us wish it, and she refuses the greatest position there is."

Alix played the part of a conscientious princess. She visited schools and hospitals and sponsored charities. She went to costume balls, sometimes dressed as a Renaissance princess in a gown of pale green velvet and silver with emeralds in her red-gold hair. With a friend, she sat in a palace window, singing songs and playing a banjo. She escorted Queen Victoria on a tour of the mining districts of Wales

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and insisted on being taken down the shafts and walking through the grimy labyrinthine tunnels. On a visit to Italy, she toured the palaces and galleries

of Florence and settled herself into a gondola for a ride down the canals of Venice.

In the spring of 1894, Alix's older brother Ernest, who had succeeded his father as Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt, was to be married. The wedding in Coburg had attracted Europe's most distinguished royalty. Queen Victoria, then seventy-five, was coming from England with her son Edward, Prince of Wales. Kaiser William II, Victoria's thirty-five-year-old grandson, was arriving from Berlin. And Nicholas, having wrung from his father permission to propose to Alix, was coming to represent Russia.

On a warm April night, Nicholas boarded a train in St. Petersburg accompanied by three of his four uncles, Grand Dukes Vladimir, Serge and Paul. When he arrived in Coburg a day and a half later, dressed in full uniform, Alix was waiting at the station. That night, they went to dinner and an operetta with the family. The following morning, unable to wait any longer, Nicholas went straight to Alix and proposed. In his diary and in a letter to his mother he described what happened.

"What a day!" he wrote in his diary. "After coffee about ten, I went with Aunt Ella to Alix. She looked particularly pretty, but extremely sad. They left us alone and then began between us the talk which I had long ago strongly wanted and at the same time very much feared. We talked till twelve, but with no result; she still objects to changing her religion. Poor girl, she cried a lot. She was calmer when we parted."

In his letter to Gatchina, Nicholas wrote: "I tried to explain that there was no other way for her than to give her consent and that she simply could not withhold it. She cried the whole time and only whispered now and then, 'No, I cannot.' Still I went on repeating and insisting . . . though this went on for two hours, it came to nothing."

But Nicholas was not alone in his suit. As the relatives gathered from all over Europe, there were so many people present that family dinners had to be divided into two sittings, one at seven, the second at nine. A few hours after Nicholas's first talk with Alix, Queen Victoria arrived, escorted by a squadron of British Dragoons. The Queen favored the Russian marriage and

had a talk with the reluctant girl, taking the somewhat original tack that Orthodoxy was not really so very different from Lutheranism. The following day, the Kaiser appeared. Not at all unhappy at the prospect of marrying a German princess to the future Tsar of Russia, he too pressed Nicholas's suit

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with Alix. Above all, it was Ella who calmed Alix's fears and encouraged her ardor. Ella had not been required to change her religion to Orthodoxy when she married Serge, since her husband was not in line for the Russian throne. But she had accepted Orthodoxy voluntarily. She insisted to Alix that a change of faith was not really so enormous or unusual an experience.

Long before it took place, Grand Duke Ernest's wedding had been thoroughly overshadowed by the matter of Nicholas and Alix. During the wedding ceremony, Nicholas watched Alix closely. "At that moment," he wrote, "how much I would have liked to have been able to look into the depths of Alix's soul."

The very next day Alix capitulated. Nicholas wrote exultantly in his diary: "A marvelous, unforgettable day. Today is the day of my engagement to my darling, adorable Alix. After ten she came to Aunt Miechen * and after a talk with her, we came to an understanding. God, what a mountain has rolled from my shoulders. . . . The whole day I have been walking in a dream, without fully realizing what was happening to me. William sat in the next room and waited with the uncles and aunts till our talk was over. I went straight with Alix to the Queen [Victoria]. . . . The whole family was simply enraptured. After lunch we went to Aunt Mary's Church and had a thanksgiving service. I cannot even believe that I am engaged."

To his mother, Nicholas wrote: "We were left alone and with her first words she consented. ... I cried like a child and she did too, but her expression had changed: her face was lit by a quiet content. . . . The whole world is changed for me: nature, mankind, everything, and all seem to be good and lovable. . . . She is quite changed. She is gay and amusing, talkative and tender."

Later, everyone present remembered the moment that this fateful match was made. "I remember I was sitting in my room," recalled Princess Marie

Louise of England. "I was quietly getting ready for a luncheon party when Alix stormed into my room, threw her arms around my neck and said, 'I'm going to marry Nicky! ' "

Nicholas awoke the next morning to the clatter of horses' hoofs on cobblestones and the hoarse shout of military commands. Under his window, Queen Victoria's Dragoons were executing a drill in his honor. "At ten o'clock," he wrote in his diary, "my superb Alix

* Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, the wife of Nicholas's eldest uncle, Grand Duke Vladimir.

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came to me and we went together to have coffee with the Queen." While they remained in Coburg, every day began with "coffee with Granny." Victoria was delighted with the young couple. An incurable romantic and an indefatigable royal matchmaker, she loved to surround herself with soft-eyed young people in love. Alix was her special pet, and now that the match was made, she wanted to revel in it.

The weather was cold and gray that day, Nicholas wrote, "but everything in my heart was bright." Uncle Bertie suggested that since so large a part of the family was present, there ought to be a photograph. The thirty members of the family trooped down to the garden, and the result was a remarkable panorama of royalty. The old Queen, tiny and indomitable, sat in the middle of the front row, holding her cane. The Kaiser was there, the only man seated, dressed in a uniform and his fierce mustache. Nicholas, small and mild in a bowler hat, stood next to Alix, who appeared pretty but unsmiling.

From everywhere came congratulatory telegrams. "We answered all day," Nicholas complained, "but the pile grew rather than diminished. It seems that everybody in Russia has sent flowers to my fiancée."

Whatever their opposition to the match, Tsar Alexander III and his wife responded gallantly, once it was made. Alix wrote the Empress calling her "Aunty-Mama," and Marie wrote back to Nicholas: "Your dear Alix already is quite like a daughter to me. . . . Do tell Alix that her . . . [letter] has

touched me so deeply—only— I don't want her to call me 'Aunty-Mama'; 'Mother dear' that's what I am to her now. . . . Ask Alix which stones she likes most, sapphires or emeralds? I would like to know for the future." As a start, Marie sent Alix an emerald bracelet and a superb Easter egg encrusted with jewels.

Spring came suddenly to Darmstadt, and the park was filled with flowers, the air perfumed and warm. Nicholas couldn't believe what had happened. "She has changed so much these last days in her relationship with me, that I am brimming with pleasure. This morning she wrote two sentences in Russian without error." When the family went for drives in carriages, Nicholas and Alix followed behind in a pony cart, taking turns at the reins. They walked, gathered flowers and rested beside the fishponds. They dined together at every meal. "It isn't easy to talk with strangers present, one has to give up talking about so many things," Nicholas complained. In the evenings they went to concerts in the local theatre. At Nicholas's request, the choir of the Preobrajensky Regiment of the Imperial Guard arrived by

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train from Russia to sing for his fiancée and the other assembled guests.

Nicholas began spending the end of each day with Alix in her room. "We were together a long time, she was remarkably tender with me. ... It is so strange to be able to come and go like this without the least restraint. . . . What a sorrow to part from her even for one night."

Finally, after ten days of bliss, the time came for Nicholas to say goodbye. He spent the last evening in Alix's room while warm spring rain fell on the trees outside her window. "What sadness to be obliged to part from her for a long time," he wrote. "How good we were together—a paradise."

The following day, as he traveled eastward to Russia, Nicholas's heart was suffused with love and sadness, and he wore a new ring on his finger. "For the first time in my life, I put a ring on my finger. It makes me feel funny," he said. At Gatchina, he found his family gathered to meet him, Tsar Alexander III still wearing the knickers in which he had just returned from shooting ducks. There were telegrams waiting from Alix and Queen Victoria

to be answered. Then Nicholas took a long walk in the park with his mother and told her everything that had happened.

The month of May seemed interminable to the Tsarevich. He spent his days pacing among the lilacs in the park, then rushing off to write another letter to Alix. At last, in June, he boarded the Imperial yacht *Polar Star,* which carried him down the Baltic and across the North Sea to Alix in England. At the end of the four-day trip, nearing the English coast, he wrote, "Tomorrow I shall see my beloved again. . . . I'll go mad with joy." He landed at Gravesend and hurried by train to London's Waterloo Station "into the arms of my betrothed who looked lovely and more beautiful than ever."

Together, the pair went to a cottage at Walton-on-Thames belonging to Alix's eldest sister, Princess Victoria of Battenberg. For three memorable days, they relaxed on the banks of the gently flowing river. They walked on the bright green lawns and gathered fruit and flowers from nearby fields. Under an old chestnut tree in the cottage garden, they sat in the grass and Alix embroidered while Nicholas read to her. "We were out all day long in beautiful weather, boating up and down the river, picnicking on the shore. A veritable idyll," Nicholas wrote his mother. Years later, both Nicholas and Alix remembered every detail of those three shining days in the English countryside, and the mere mention of the name Walton was enough to bring tears of happiness to Alix's eyes.

When the three days were over, the young couple emerged from their private cocoon of happiness. "Granny" waited to greet them at Windsor Castle. Tsar Alexander III had sent his personal confessor, Father Yanishev, and the priest was anxious to begin Alix's religious instruction. At Windsor, Nicholas presented his formal engagement gifts: a pink pearl ring, a necklace of large pink pearls, a chain bracelet bearing a massive emerald, and a sapphire-and-diamond brooch. Grandest of all was a *sautoir* of pearls, a gift to his new daughter-in-law from the Tsar. Created by Fabergé, the famed Russian court jeweler, it was worth 250,000 gold roubles and was the largest single transaction Fabergé ever had with the Imperial family. Staring at this dazzling display of gems, Queen Victoria smilingly shook her head and said, "Now, Alix, do not get too proud."

The heat was stifling in England that summer. Nicholas began riding out from Windsor Castle in the morning while it still was cool. He liked to trot down Queen Anne's Way, a popular horse path bordered by magnificent trees, then come back home through open fields, "galloping like a fool." He was always back by ten to join Alix and the Queen for coffee. Lunch was at two, and afterward everybody rested and tried to ward off the heat. Before tea, Nicholas and Alix drove under the great oaks of Windsor Park and admired the blooming rhododendron. Nicholas admitted to his mother, "I can't complain. Granny has been very friendly and even allowed us to go for drives without a chaperone." In the evening, when the air had cooled, they dined with guests on a balcony or terrace and listened to music being played in the castle courtyard. Once when a violinist came up from London, Alix accompanied him on the piano.

Despite her lessons with Father Yanishev, Alix frequently popped into Nicholas's rooms. He apologized to his mother for not writing home more often. "Every moment," he pleaded, "I simply had to get up and embrace her." During one of these visits, apparently, Alix discovered that Nicholas was keeping a diary. She began to write in it herself. These entries, most of them in English, began with short notes—"Many loving kisses," "God bless you, my angel," "forever, forever"—and progressed to lines of verse and prayers:

"I dreamed that I was loved, I woke and found it true and thanked God on my knees for it. True love is the gift which God has given, daily, stronger, deeper, fuller, purer."

As the object of such overwhelming devotion, Nicholas felt that he had to speak about certain episodes in his past. He told her at this point about Kschessinska. Although she was only twenty-two, Alix rose to the occasion like a true granddaughter of Queen Victoria.

She forgave him handsomely, even gushingly, but she also delivered a brief little lecture which cast Nicholas in the role of the male redeemed by the purity of love:

"What is past is past and will never return. We all are tempted in this world and when we are young we cannot always fight and hold our own against the temptation, but as long as we repent, God will forgive us. . . . Forgive my writing so much, but I want you to be quite sure of my love for you and that I love you even more since you told me that little story, your confidence in me touched me oh so deeply. . . . [May] I always show myself worthy of it. . . . God bless you, beloved Nicky. . . ."

Knowing Nicholas's love of military pageantry, the Queen arranged a succession of displays. At Windsor he watched a thousand cadets from the naval academy at Greenwich perform gymnastics to music. He reviewed six companies of the Coldstream Guards, and the officers invited him to dinner. Normally, Nicholas would have jumped at this invitation, "But . . . Granny loves me so and doesn't like me missing dinner, nor does Alix," he wrote, explaining to his mother why he refused. At Aldershot, the huge British military camp, they watched a torchlight retreat ceremony and listened to a massed choir of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish voices. Next day, Nicholas, dressed in his uniform of the Imperial Hussars, took the salute of columns of British infantry, cavalry and horse artillery. He liked especially the pleated kilts and the skirling pipes of the Highland regiments.

While Nicholas was in England, a baby was born into the British royal family. "Yesterday, at to o'clock a son was born to Géorgie and May to the general joy," he wrote. The baby, named Prince Edward, would become King Edward VIII, and later the Duke of Windsor. Nicholas and Alix were chosen as godparents of the little Prince. "Instead of plunging the infant into the water," noted the Tsarevich, "the archbishop sprinkled water on his head. . . . What a nice, healthy child." Afterward the baby's father dropped in on the engaged couple at Windsor. Even in his diary Nicholas showed a quaint touch of prudery as he described the visit: "Géorgie came for lunch. Alix and he stayed in my room with me. I add these words 'with me' because otherwise it would sound a bit odd."

Before he left England, the Tsarevich and his fiancée went with the Queen to Osborne, the seaside royal residence on the Isle of Wight. From the palace lawns they could watch flotillas of sailboats scudding before the wind. Like

a small boy, Nicholas took off his shoes and walked through the waves rolling up on the sand.

As the end of July approached, the six-week idyll came to an end. Alix had filled the diary with messages: "Love is caught, I have bound his wings. No longer will he roam or fly away. Within our two hearts forever, love sings." As the *Polar Star* slipped past Dover, north-bound for the Baltic, Nicholas read her prayer, "Sleep gently, and let the gentle waves rock you to sleep. Your Guardian Angel is keeping watch over you. A tender kiss."

Next day, Nicholas stood at the rail watching a fiery sunset off the coast of Jutland and gazing across the water as twenty ships of the Imperial German Navy dipped their flags in salute. Entering the Baltic through the Skaggerak, the *Polar Star* steamed slowly down the Danish coastline within sight of the ancient castle of Elsinore. But Nicholas's thoughts were far away.

"I am yours," Alix had written, "you are mine, of that be sure. You are locked in my heart, the little key is lost and now you must stay there forever."

There was another entry, too—a strangely prophetic line from Marie Corelli: "For the past is past and will never return, the future we know not, and only the present can be called our own."

CHAPTER FOUR

Marriage

At Gatchina, Nicholas found his family in a state of alarm over his father's health. Troubled by headaches, insomnia and weakness in the legs, the Tsar had consulted doctors, who recommended that he rest, preferably in the warm climate of the Crimea. But Alexander III was not a man to disrupt his schedule simply because he was not feeling well. The family entrained in September, not for the Crimea, but for the Imperial hunting lodge at Spala in Poland.

There, the Tsar continued to feel ill, and a specialist, Professor Leyden, was summoned from Vienna. Leyden carefully looked over the bearlike frame and diagnosed nephritis. He insisted that his patient be moved to the Crimea immediately and forced to rest. This time, Alexander III agreed. Nicholas, meanwhile, found himself caught in a struggle between "my duty to remain here with my dear parents and follow them to the Crimea and the keen desire to hurry to Wolfsgarten to be near my dear Alix." Eventually, he suppressed his ardor and went with the family to the summer palace at Livadia in the Crimea.

There, amid warm breezes scented with grapes, the Tsar began to improve. He ate well, took sunbaths in the garden and even went down to walk on the beach. But this improvement was only temporary. After a few days, he again began to have trouble sleeping, his legs gave way and he took to his bed. His diet was rigidly restricted and, to his distress, he was forbidden ice cream. Sitting alone by his bedside, his sixteen-year-old daughter, Olga, suddenly heard her father whisper, "Baby, dear, I know there is some ice cream in the next room. Bring it here—but make sure nobody sees you." She smuggled him a plate and he enjoyed it immensely. A St. Petersburg priest, Father John of Kronstadt, whose followers believed him ca-

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pable of miracles, was summoned. While the doctors worked, Father John prayed, but the Tsar grew steadily worse.

Sensing what was coming, Nicholas asked Alix to come to Livadia. She came immediately, traveling by train as an ordinary passenger. Normally the fiancée of a tsarevich would have been honored with a special train, but the Minister of the Imperial Court, whose job it was to make such arrangements, was so involved with the illness of the Tsar that he simply forgot. Approaching the Crimea, Alix wired ahead that she wanted the ceremony of her conversion to Orthodoxy to take place as soon as possible. Nicholas could not suppress his happiness. "My God, what a joy to meet her in my country and to have her near," he wrote. "Half my fears and sadness have disappeared."

He met her train in Simferopol and brought her to Livadia in an open carriage. During the four-hour drive, they were stopped repeatedly by Tartar villagers with welcoming bread and salt and armloads of grapes and flowers. When their carriage rolled up in front of the palace guard of honor, it was brimming with fruit and flowers. In his bedroom, seated in an armchair, Alexander III awaited the young couple. He was dressed in full-dress uniform. He had insisted, despite all objection, that this was the only way for the Tsar of Russia to greet a future Russian empress. Kneeling before the pale, enfeebled giant, Alix received his blessing, and she and Nicholas were formally betrothed.

For the ten days that followed, the life of the household revolved about the sickbed of the dying Tsar. Nicholas and Alix went quietly about the house, caught up in an unsettling swirl of happiness and despair. They walked through the vineyards and by the sea, although they never dared to go too far from the house. She sat at his side while he began reading over the reports submitted by his father's ministers. It was a difficult role. Plunged into the bosom of a grief-stricken family, she felt herself an outsider. Her one contact and confidant was Nicholas. Marie was too busy caring for her husband to worry about the niceties of welcoming her future daughter-in-law. It was natural, of course, in a household where the patient was husband, father and ruler of a great empire, that attention should be concentrated on him and his wife. Doctors, government ministers and court officials treated Marie not only with the normal deference due an empress, but with the extra consideration accorded a human being facing a great personal ordeal. Doctors hurried from the bedside to the Empress, scarcely noticing the shy young man and woman standing outside the door or waiting at the foot of the stairs. In time Alix

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became offended by this treatment. Her lover, whom she honored, was Heir to the Throne. If this huge Tsar whom she scarcely knew should die, her fiancée would be the Tsar. Yet he was treated like a nobody.

She put many of these feelings into a famous passage in his diary: "Sweet child, pray to God. He will comfort you. Don't feel too low. Your Sunny is praying for you and the beloved patient. ... Be firm and make the doctors

come to you every day and tell you how they find him ... so that you are always the first to know. Don't let others be put first and you left out. You are Father's dear son and must be told all and asked about everything. Show your own mind and don't let others forget who you are. Forgive me, lovy."

For ten days after Alix's appearance at Livadia, the agony in the sickroom continued. Then, on the afternoon of November 1, 1894, Alexander III suddenly died. Marie fainted into Alix's arms. "God, God, what a day," wrote Nicholas. "The Lord has called to him our adored, our dear, our tenderly loved Papa. My head turns, it isn't possible to believe it. All day we rested upstairs near him. His respiration became difficult, suddenly it became necessary to give him oxygen. About 2:30 he received extreme unction; soon light trembling began and the end followed quickly. Father John remained with him an hour at the bedside, holding his head. It was the death of a saint, Lord assist us in these difficult days. Poor dear Mama."

No one better understood the significance of the death of the Tsar than the twenty-six-year-old youth who had inherited his throne. "I saw tears in his blue eyes," recalled Grand Duke Alexander, Nicholas's brother-in-law. "He took me by the arm and led me downstairs to his room. We embraced and cried together. He could not collect his thoughts. He knew that he was Emperor now, and the weight of this terrifying fact crushed him.

" 'Sandro, what am I going to do?' he exclaimed, pathetically. 'What is going to happen to me, to you, to Xenia, to Alix, to mother, to all of Russia? I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. I have no idea of even how to talk to the ministers.' "

In the late afternoon, while the guns of the warships in Yalta harbor still thundered a last salute to the dead monarch, an altar was erected on the lawn in front of the palace. Courtiers, officials, servants and family formed a semicircle, and a priest in golden vestments solemnly administered the oath of allegiance to His Imperial Majesty, Tsar Nicholas II.

When morning came the following day, the palace was draped in

black and a storm raged on the Black Sea. As the embalmers arrived to deal with the body, the priests effected the religious conversion of the Protestant German Princess who suddenly stood so close to the Russian throne. Before noon that very day, the new Tsar, his betrothed and his widowed mother went to the palace chapel for a special service.

"Even in our great grief, God gives us a sweet and luminous joy," wrote Nicholas. "At ten o'clock in the presence only of the family, my dear Alix has been consecrated to Orthodoxy." After the service, Alix, Marie and Nicholas took Holy Communion together and, said Nicholas, "Alix read beautifully and in a clear voice, the responses and the prayers." When they returned to the palace, the new Tsar Nicholas issued his first Imperial Decree. It proclaimed the new faith, new title and new name of the former Princess Alix of Hesse. Queen Victoria's Lutheran granddaughter had become "the truly believing Grand Duchess Alexandra Fedorovna."

The death of the powerful Tsar Alexander III at the age of forty-nine was a shock to all Russia. No arrangements had been made for a funeral, and the body of the dead Tsar was forced to wait for a week at Livadia while telegrams flew between the Crimea and St. Petersburg. The wedding, originally planned for the following spring, was moved forward at Nicholas's insistence. Staggering under the weight of his new office, he had no intention of allowing the one person who gave him confidence to leave his side.

"Mama, many others, and I think it would be better to celebrate the marriage here in peace, while Papa still is under this roof," he noted in his diary, "but all the uncles are against it, saying that I should marry in Petersburg after the funeral."

Nicholas's uncles, the four brothers of the dead Tsar, were independent, strong-minded men who carried great weight in the family. Their view, that the wedding of their young nephew was too important a national event to be performed privately at Livadia, prevailed. Meanwhile, the Orthodox ceremonies of death went on continuously. The family kissed the lips of the dead Tsar as he lay in his coffin, and went to the chapel twice a day to pray for his soul. "My dear Papa was transferred from the chapel to the large

church," Nicholas wrote. "The coffin was carried by the Cossacks. . . . When we got back to the empty house, we absolutely broke down. God has afflicted us with heavy trials."

At the end of a week, the coffin, draped in purple and accompanied by the mourning family, left Livadia for Sevastopol, where a funeral train awaited. As the train rolled north from the Crimea across the Ukraine, clusters of peasants gathered along the track to watch the dead Tsar pass. In the cities of Kharkov, Kursk, Orel and Tula, the train halted and services were held in the presence of local nobility and officials. In Moscow, the coffin was transferred to a hearse and carried to the Kremlin for an overnight rest. Low clouds whipped across a gray November sky, and splinters of sleet bit into the faces of the Muscovites who lined the streets to watch the cortege. Ten times before reaching the Kremlin the procession stopped and separate litanies were sung from the steps of ten different churches.

In St. Petersburg, red-and-gold court carriages heavily draped in black waited at the station to pick up the family and move off through streets filled with the slush of an early thaw. For four excruciating hours the cortege advanced slowly across St. Petersburg to the Cathedral of the Fortress of Peter and Paul, where the Romanov tsars were buried. Throughout the city, the only sounds were the beat of muffled drums, the clatter of hoofs, the rumble of iron carriage wheels and the slow tolling of church bells. In the procession, the new Grand Duchess Alexandra Fedorovna rode alone, thickly veiled, behind the rest of the family. As she passed, the silent crowd strained to see their young Empress-to-be. Shaking their heads, old women crossed themselves and murmured darkly, "She has come to us behind a coffin."

The Kings of Greece, Denmark and Serbia arrived to join the royal mourners. Edward, Prince of Wales, and his son George, Duke of York, represented Queen Victoria; Prince Henry of Prussia represented his brother, the Kaiser. In all, sixty-one royal personages, each with an entourage, gathered that week in the marble palaces of St. Petersburg. In addition, the ministers of the Imperial government, the commanders of the Russian army and navy, the provincial governors and 460 delegates from across Russia

came to pay their respects. "I have received so many delegations, I had to walk in the garden. My head is spinning," wrote Nicholas. At a banquet arranged in honor of the foreign guests, "I almost broke into sobs sitting down at the table because it was so difficult to see all this ceremony when my soul was so heavy."

For seventeen days, the body of Alexander III lay exposed in its coffin. Thousands of people shuffled past the open bier while a priest stood by chanting prayers and a hidden choir sang mournful hymns.

Twice a day all the royal mourners rode through the dank and misty streets for services. During this period, the future King George V wrote to his wife, Mary:

"Every day, after lunch, we had another service at the church. After the service, we all went up to [the] coffin which was open and kissed the Holy Picture which he holds in his hand. It gave me a shock when I saw his dear face so close to mine when I stooped down. He looks so beautiful and peaceful, but of course he has changed very much. It is a fortnight today."

Amid the priests and their litanies, the rooms and streets decorated in black, the sad faces, the tears and the wringing hands, Alexandra suppressed her own small, pathetic happiness. "One's feelings one can imagine," she wrote to her sister. "One day in deepest mourning lamenting a beloved one, the next in smartest clothes being married. There cannot be a greater contrast, but it drew us more together, if possible." "Such was my entry into Russia," she added later. "Our marriage seemed to me a mere continuation of the masses for the dead with this difference, that now I wore a white dress instead of a black."

The wedding took place on November 26, one week after the funeral. The day selected was the birthday of Empress Marie, now the Dowager Empress, and for such an occasion protocol permitted a brief relaxation of mourning. Dressed in white, Alexandra and Marie drove together down the Nevsky Prospect to the Winter Palace. Before a famous gold mirror used by every Russian grand duchess on her wedding day, the bride was formally dressed

by the ladies of the Imperial family. She wore a heavy, old-fashioned Russian court dress of silver brocade and a robe and train of cloth of gold lined with ermine. From a red velvet cushion, Marie herself lifted the sparkling diamond nuptial crown and settled it carefully onto Alexandra's head. Together the two women walked through the palace galleries to the chapel where Nicholas waited in the boots and uniform of a Hussar. Each holding a lighted candle, Nicholas and Alexandra faced the Metropolitan. A few minutes before one in the afternoon, they became man and wife.

Alexandra was radiant. "She looked too wonderfully lovely," said the Princess of Wales. George, the Duke of York, wrote to Mary in England, "I think Nicky is a very lucky man to have got such a lovely and charming wife and I must say I never saw two people more in love with each other or happier than they are. I told them both that I could not wish them more than that they should be as happy as you and I are together. Was that right?"

Because of the mourning, there was no reception after the wedding,

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and no honeymoon. The young couple returned immediately to the Anitchkov Palace. "When they drove from the Winter Palace after the wedding, they got a tremendous . . . ovation from the large crowds in the streets," George wrote to Queen Victoria. "The cheering was most hearty and reminded me of England. . . . Nicky has been kindness itself to me, he is the same dear boy he has always been and talks to me quite openly on every subject. . . . He does everything so quietly and naturally; everyone is struck by it and he is very popular already." At the Anitchkov Palace, Marie was waiting to welcome them with bread and salt. They stayed in that night, answered congratulatory telegrams, dined at eight and, according to Nicholas, "went to bed early because Alix had a headache."

The marriage that began that night remained unflawed for the rest of their lives. It was a Victorian marriage, outwardly serene and proper, but based on intensely passionate physical love. On her wedding night, before going to bed, Alexandra wrote in her husband's diary: "At last united, bound for life, and when this life is ended, we meet again in the other world and remain together for eternity. Yours, yours." The next morning, with fresh, new

emotions surging through her, she wrote, "Never did I believe there could be such utter happiness in this world, such a feeling of unity between two mortal beings. I love you, those three words have my life in them."

They lived that first winter in six rooms of the Anitchkov Palace, where the Dowager Empress Marie remained mistress of the house. In his haste to be married, Nicholas had allowed no time for preparation of a place for himself and Alexandra to live, and they moved temporarily into the rooms which Nicholas and his brother George had shared as boys. Although he ruled a continent, the young Tsar conducted official business from a small sitting room while the new twenty-two-year-old Empress sat next door in the bedroom working on her Russian language. Between appointments, Nicholas joined her to chat and puff on a cigarette. At mealtime, because the apartment lacked a dining room, Nicholas and Alexandra went to dine with "Mother dear."

The young couple minded their cramped quarters less than the long hours apart. "Petitions and audiences without end," Nicholas grumbled, "saw Alix for an hour only," and "I am indescribably happy with Alix. It is sad that my work takes so many hours which I would prefer to spend exclusively with her." At night, Nicholas read to her in French, as she wanted to improve her use of the court

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language. They began by reading tales by Alphonse Daudet and a book about Napoleon's life on St. Helena.

Occasionally, on snowy nights, Nicholas bundled Alexandra into fur robes beside him in a sleigh. Then he set the horses to flying under the walls and domes of the city and across the frozen white landscape. Back in their apartment, they changed into dressing gowns and had a late supper before a roaring fire.

On the last day of 1894, Nicholas looked back at the enormous events of that fateful year. In his diary he wrote: "It is hard to think of the terrible changes of this year. But putting our hope in God, I look forward to the coming year without fear, because the worst thing that could have happened to me, the

thing I have been fearing all my life [the death of his father and his own accession to the throne], has already passed. At the same time that He has sent me irreparable grief, God has sent me a happiness of which I never dared to dream, in giving me Alix."

Certain problems are universal. Nicholas, genuinely grieved for his abruptly widowed mother, tried to comfort her by his presence, dutifully dining with her and often staying to sit with her after dinner. During the early months of his reign, Nicholas turned to his mother for political advice. She gave it freely, never suspecting that Alexandra might be resenting her role. To Marie, Alexandra was still an awkward young German girl, only recently arrived in Russia, with no knowledge or background in affairs of state. As the period of mourning ended, Marie returned to public life, to the clothes, the jewelry, the brilliant lights she loved so much. She was constantly seen driving down the Nevsky Prospect in an open carriage or sleigh pulled by a pair of shiny blacks, with a huge, black-bearded Cossack on the runningboard behind her. In the protocol of the Russian court, a dowager empress took precedence over an empress. At public ceremonies, Marie, dressed all in white and blazing with diamonds, walked on the arm of her son while Alexandra followed behind on the arm of one of the grand dukes. So natural did the leading role seem to Marie that when she discovered that her daughter-in-law was bitter, Marie was surprised and hurt.

Alexandra, for her part, felt and behaved much like any young wife. She was shocked by the sudden blow which had struck Marie, and her first reaction toward her mother-in-law was sympathetic. Before long, however, the strains of living under the same roof and competing for the same man began to tell. At meals, Alexandra

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was doubly insulted. Not only was she completely ignored, but the older woman treated her beloved Nicky like a schoolboy. Despite elaborate politeness between "dear Alix" and "Mother dear," a veiled hostility began to appear.

One incident especially irritated Alexandra. Certain of the crown jewels traditionally passed from one Russian empress to the next, and, indeed,

protocol required that Alexandra wear them on formal occasions. But Marie had a passion for jewelry and when Nicholas asked his mother to give up the gems, she bristled and refused. Humiliated, Alexandra then declared that she no longer cared about the jewelry and would not wear it in any case. Before a public scandal occurred, Marie submitted.

Like many a young bride, Alexandra sometimes had difficulty accepting the swift transition in her life. "I cannot yet realize that I am married," she wrote. "It seems like being on a visit." She alternated between despair and bliss. "I feel myself completely alone," she wrote to a friend in Germany. "I weep and I worry all day long because I feel that my husband is so young and so inexperienced. . . . I am alone most of the time. My husband is occupied all day and he spends his evenings with his mother." But at Christmas she wrote to one of her sisters, "How contented and happy I am with my beloved Nicky." In May she wrote in his diary, "Half a year now that we are married. How intensely happy you have made . . . [me] you cannot think."

The domestic tensions eased in the spring of 1895 when Nicholas and Alexandra moved to Peterhof for the summer and Marie left Russia on a long visit to her family home in Copenhagen. More important, Alexandra discovered that she was pregnant. Grand Duchess Elizabeth came to stay with her sister, and together the two young women painted, did needlework and went for carriage rides in the park. Both Nicholas and Alexandra marveled at the baby's growth. "It has become very big and kicks about and fights a great deal inside," the Tsar wrote to his mother. With the baby coming, Alexandra began planning and decorating her first real home in the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, fifteen miles south of St. Petersburg. "Sad to leave Peterhof and . . . our little house on the shore where we spent our first summer so quietly together," Nicholas wrote to Marie. "But when we entered Alix's apartments [at Tsarskoe Selo] our mood changed instantly ... to utter delight. . . . Sometimes, we simply sit in silence wherever we happen to be and admire the walls, the fireplaces, the furniture. . . . Twice we went up to the future nursery; here also the rooms are remarkably airy, light and cozy."

Both parents hoped that the new baby would be a son; a male heir would become the first tsarevich born directly to a reigning tsar since the eighteenth century. As the date approached, Marie returned, bubbling with excitement. "It is understood, isn't it, that you will let me know as soon as the first symptoms appear?" she wrote to Nicholas. "I shall fly to you, my dear children, and shall not be a nuisance except perhaps by acting as a policeman to keep everybody else away."

In mid-November 1895, when Alexandra began her labor, artillerymen in Kronstadt and St. Petersburg were posted beside their guns. A salute of 300 rounds would announce the birth of a male heir, 101 would mean that the child was a girl. Alexandra suffered intensely in labor, and birth was protracted. At last, however, the cannon began to fire, 99 . . . 100 . . . 101 . . . But the 102nd gun never fired. The first child born to Tsar Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna was the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaievna. At birth, she weighed nine pounds.

The joy of having their first baby instantly dispelled all worries about whether the child was a boy or a girl. When the father is twenty-seven and the mother only twenty-three, there seems infinite time to have more children. Alexandra nursed and bathed the baby herself and sang the infant to sleep with lullabies. While Olga slept, her mother sat by the crib, knitting a row of jackets, bonnets and socks. "You can imagine our intense happiness, now that we have such a precious little one to care for and look after," the Empress wrote to one of her sisters.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Coronation

In the spring, when the ice on the Neva, used all winter as a thoroughfare for sleighs and people, began to crack, the thoughts of all Russians turned to the coronation. The year was 1896, the twelve-month period of mourning was over and the new Tsar was to be crowned in Moscow in May.

Realizing that for the forty-nine-year-old Dowager Empress Marie the coronation would be partially a reminder of the sudden death of Alexander III, Nicholas attempted to console her. "I believe we should regard all these difficult ceremonies in Moscow as a great ordeal sent by God," he wrote his mother, "for at every step we shall have to repeat all we went through in the happy days thirteen years ago! One thought alone consoles me: That in the course of our life we shall not have to go through the rite again, that subsequent events will occur peacefully and smoothly."

The coronation of a Russian tsar was rigidly governed by history and tradition. The ceremony was held in Moscow; nothing so solemn, so meaningful to the nation, could be left to the artificial Western capital thrown up by Peter the Great. By tradition, the uncrowned tsar did not enter the city until the day before his coronation. Upon arriving in Moscow, Nicholas and Alexandra went into retreat, fasting and praying, in the Petrovsky Palace outside the city.

While the Tsar waited outside the city, the Muscovites painted and whitewashed buildings, hung strings of evergreen across the doorways and draped from the windows the white-blue-and-red Russian flag. Every hour thousands of people poured into the city. Bands of Cossacks galloped past creaking carts filled with peasant women whose heads were covered with brilliant kerchiefs of red, yellow, blue and orange. Trains disgorged tall Siberians in heavy coats with fur collars, Caucasians in long red coats, Turks in red fezzes and cavalry gen-

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erals in bright red tunics with golden, fur-trimmed cloaks. The mood of the city was buoyant: besides excitement, pageantry and feasting, the coronation meant a three-day holiday, the granting of pardons to prisoners, the lifting of fines and taxes.

On the afternoon of May 25, the day of Nicholas's formal entry into Moscow, the sun sparkled on the city's domes and windows. Two ribbons of troops bordered the four-mile line of march, holding back the crowds. Every balcony and window above the street was jammed with people. On one of the viewing platforms built along the street sat Mathilde Kschessinska. "It

was agonizing to watch the Tsar pass . . . the Tsar who was still 'Niki' to me, one I adored and who could not, could never, belong to me."

At two o'clock, the first squadrons of Imperial Guard cavalry rode into the streets, forming the van of the procession. Those watching from the windows could see the flash of the afternoon sun on their golden helmets and cuirasses. The Cossacks of the Guard came next, wearing long coats of red and purple, their curved sabers banging against their soft black boots. Behind the Cossacks rode Moscow's nobility in gold braid and crimson sashes with jeweled medals sparkling on their chests. Then, on foot, came the Court Orchestra, the Imperial Hunt and the court footmen in red knee breeches and white satin stockings.

The appearance of the officials of the court in gold-embroidered uniforms signaled the coming of the Tsar. Nicholas rode alone, on a white horse. Unlike the lavishly costumed ministers, generals and aides who wore rows of medals from shoulder to shoulder, he was dressed in a simple army tunic buttoned under his chin. His face was drawn and pale with excitement and he reined his horse with his left hand only. His right hand was raised to his visor in a fixed salute.

Behind Nicholas rode more clusters of horsemen, the Russian grand dukes and the foreign princes. Then came the sound of carriage wheels, mingled with the clatter of hoofs. First came the gilded carriage of Catherine the Great, drawn by eight white horses. On top was a replica of the Imperial Crown. Inside, beaming and bowing, sat the Dowager Empress Marie. Behind, in a second carriage, also made of gold and drawn by eight white horses, sat the uncrowned Empress, Alexandra Fedorovna. Dressed in a pure white gown sewn with jewels, she wore a diamond necklace around her neck which blazed in the brilliant sunlight. Leaning from left to right, bowing and smiling, the two Empresses followed the Tsar through the Nikolsky Gate into the Kremlin.

The following day, on coronation morning, the sky was a cloudless

blue. In the city's streets, heralds wearing medieval dress proclaimed that on that day, May 26, 1896, a tsar would be crowned. Inside the Kremlin, servants laid a crimson velvet carpet down the steps of the famous Red Staircase which led to the Ouspensky Cathedral, where the ceremony would take place. Opposite the staircase, a wooden grandstand had been built to hold guests who could not squeeze inside the cathedral. From this vantage, hundreds of people watched as soldiers of the Imperial Guard in red-white-and-gold uniforms took up positions on the staircase, lining the crimson carpet.

In their apartment, Nicholas and Alexandra had been up since dawn. They had coffee, and while Alexandra's hair was being done by her hairdresser, Nicholas sat nearby smoking one cigarette after another. With her attendants, she practiced fastening and unfastening rhe clasps of her heavy coronation robe. Nicholas settled the crown on her head as he would do in the cathedral and the hairdresser stepped up with a diamond-studded hairpin to hold the crown in place. The pin went too far and the Empress cried with pain. The embarrassed hairdresser beat a retreat.

The formal procession down the Red Stairway was led by priests, trailing long beards and golden robes. Marie came next in a gown of embroidered white velvet, her long train carried by a dozen men. At last, Nicholas and Alexandra appeared at the top of the stairway. He wore the blue-green uniform of *the* Preobrajensky Guard with a red sash across his breast. At his side, Alexandra was in silver-white Russian court dress with a red ribbon running over her shoulder. Around her neck she wore a single strand of pink pearls. They walked slowly, followed by attendants who carried her train. On either side walked other attendants, carrying over their sovereigns' heads a canopy of cloth of gold with tall ostrich plumes waving from its top. At the bottom of the steps, the couple bowed to the crowd and stopped before the priests, who touched them on the forehead with holy water. Before an icon held by one of the priests, they said a prayer; then the churchmen in turn kissed the Imperial hands, and the pair walked into the cathedral.

Beneath the domes of its five golden cupolas, the interior of the Ouspensky Cathedral glowed with light. Every inch of wall and ceiling was covered

with luminous frescoes; before the altar stood the great iconostasis, a golden screen which was a mass of jewels. Light, filtering down from the cupolas and flickering from hundreds of candles, reflected off the surfaces of the jewels and the golden icons to bathe everyone present in iridescence. A choir, dressed in silver and light blue, filled the cathedral with the anthems of the Orthodox Church.

Before the altar stood ranks of high clergy: metropolitans, archbishops, bishops and abbots. From their miters glittered more diamonds, sapphires, rubies and pearls, adding to the unearthly light.

At the front of the cathedral, two coronation chairs awaited the Tsar and his wife. Nicholas sat on the seventeenth-century Diamond Throne of Tsar Alexis, encrusted almost solidly with gems and pearls. Its name was derived from the 870 diamonds embedded in its surface; the armrest alone was set with 85 diamonds, 144 rubies and 129 pearls. Alexandra sat next to her husband on the famous Ivory Throne brought to Russia from Byzantium in 1472 by Ivan the Great's Byzantine bride, Sophia Paleologus.

The coronation ceremony lasted five hours. After a lengthy Mass came the formal robing of the Tsar and Tsaritsa. Then Alexandra knelt while the Metropolitan prayed for the Tsar. While everyone else remained standing, Nicholas alone dropped on his knees to pray for Russia and her people. After receiving Communion and being an-nointed with Holy Oil, Nicholas swore his oath to rule the empire and preserve autocracy as Emperor and Autocrat of all the Russias.* Then, for the first time and only time in his life, the Tsar entered the sanctuary to receive the sacrament as a priest of the church. As Nicholas walked up the altar steps, the heavy chain of the Order of St. Andrew slipped from his shoulders and fell to the floor. It happened so quickly that no one noticed except those standing close to the Tsar. Later, lest it be taken as an omen, all these were sworn to secrecy.

By tradition, a tsar crowned himself, taking the crown from the hands of the Metropolitan and placing it on his own head. In planning his coronation, Nicholas had wished to use for this purpose the eight hundred-year-old Cap of Monomakh, a simple crown of gold filigree said to have been used by

Vladimir Monomakh, twelfth-century ruler of Kievan Russia. Besides emphasizing his attachment to Russia's historic past, Monomakh's Cap had the distinct advantage of being light: it weighed only two pounds. But the iron etiquette of the ceremony made this impossible, and Nicholas lifted onto his head the huge nine-

* Nicholas's complete title was: Emperor and Autocrat of all the Russias, Tsar of Moscow, Kiev, Vladimir, Novgorod, Kazan, Astrakhan, of Poland, of Siberia, of Tauric Chersonese, of Georgia, Lord of Pskov, Grand Duke of Smolensk, of Lithuania, Volhynia, Podolia and Finland, Prince of Estonia, Livonia, Courland and Semigalia, Samogotia, Bialostock, Karelia, Tver, Yougouria, Perm, Viatka, Bulgaria, and other countries; Lord and Grand Duke of Lower Novgorod, of Tchernigov, Riazan, Polotsk, Rostov, Yaroslav, Belozero, Oudoria, Obdoria, Condia, Vitebsk, Mstislav and all the region of the North, Lord and Sovereign of the countries of Iveria, Cartalinia, Kabardinia and the provinces of Armenia, Sovereign of the Circassian Princes and the Mountain Princes, Lord of Turkestan, Heir of Norway, Duke of Schleswig Holstein, of Storman, of the Ditmars, and of Oldenbourg, etc.

pound Imperial Crown of Russia made in 1762 for Catherine the Great. Shaped like a bishop's miter, it was crested with a cross of diamonds surmounting an enormous uncut ruby. Below, set in an arch supporting the cross and in the band surrounding the head, were forty-four diamonds, each an inch across, surrounded by solid masses of smaller diamonds. Thirty-eight perfect rosy pearls circled over the crown on either side of the central arch. Nicholas let the gem-encrusted crown rest on his head for a moment. Then, reaching up, he took it off and carefully placed it on Alexandra's head. Finally, he replaced it on his own head and Alexandra was given a smaller crown. Nicholas kissed her and, taking her hand, led her back to the two thrones. The ceremony ended with Empress Marie and every member of the Imperial family approaching to do homage to the crowned Tsar of all the Russias.

Despite the length of the ceremony, Alexandra later wrote to one of her sisters that she had never felt tired, so strong were her own emotions. To her, the ceremony seemed a kind of mystic marriage between herself and Russia. At the coronation, she left behind the girl who grew up in Darmstadt and England. In her heart she now truly thought of herself, not only as Empress, but as *"Matushka,"* the Mother of the Russian people.

At the end of the service, the newly crowned monarchs walked from the church wearing brocaded mantles embroidered with the double-headed Imperial eagle. They climbed the Red Stairway, turned and bowed three times to the crowd. From thousands of throats roared a mighty cheer. From the muzzles of massed cannons, thunder rolled across the city. Above everything, making it impossible for a man to speak into the ear of his neighbor, clanged the thousands of bells of Moscow. From the towers and churches of the Kremlin the concentrated ringing of the bells obliterated all other sounds.

Among the seven thousand guests who dined at the coronation banquet, among the grand dukes and royal princes, the emirs and ambassadors, was one room filled with plain Russian people in simple dress. They were there by hereditary right, for they were the descendants of people who, at one

time or another, had saved the life of a Russian tsar. The most honored among them were the descendants of an old servant, Ivan Susanin, who had refused under torture to tell the Poles where young Michael Romanov, first of the Romanov tsars, was hiding. At hundreds of tables the guests sat down and found before them a roll of parchment tied with silken cords. Inside, in illuminated medieval lettering, was the menu. The meal consisted of borshch and pepper-pot soup, turnovers filled with meat, steamed fish,

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whole spring lamb, pheasants in cream sauce, salad, asparagus, sweet fruits in wine, and ice cream.

On a dais beneath a golden canopy, Nicholas and Alexandra dined alone, according to ancient tradition, watched from the galleries by the cream of the Russian nobility. The highest court officials personally passed them their golden plates. During the lengthy meal, foreign ambassadors were admitted one by one to drink the health of the Imperial couple. For the rest of the day, Nicholas and Alexandra greeted their other guests, moving through the great Kremlin halls, hung with blue silk and lined with gilt chairs. All day the Tsar wore the huge coronation crown, so big that it came down almost over his eyes. Resting directly on the scar made by the Japanese fanatic, its great weight soon gave him a headache. The Empress walked at his side, still in her silver-white dress, her train supported by a dozen pages.

At the coronation ball that night, the Kremlin shimmered with light and music. The gowns worn by Russian women were thought by foreign ladies to be shockingly far off the shoulder. There were tiaras, necklaces, bracelets, rings and earrings, some with stones as big as robins' eggs. Grand Duchess Xenia, Nicholas's sister, and Grand Duchess Elizabeth, his sister-in-law, were covered with emeralds. Other women were drowning in sapphires and rubies. Alexandra wore a thick girdle of diamonds around her waist. Nicholas himself was draped with an enormous collar, made of dozens of clusters of diamonds, reaching around his entire chest. Even in a day which had seen a thousand kingly fortunes, the jewels that appeared that night brought gasps of awe.

That night the entire city of Moscow glowed with the light of special illuminations. Within the Kremlin itself, the churches and public buildings were lit by thousands of electric light bulbs which all flashed on when Alexandra pressed a button hidden in a bouquet of roses. Outside, millions of candles flickered in the streets and homes. At ten o'clock, when Nicholas and Alexandra walked onto a Kremlin balcony overlooking the river to gaze at the city, their faces shone with reflected light. Even after they went to bed, the walls of their bedchamber in the Kremlin apartment still were covered with shadows from the illuminated city outside.

The day following the coronation belonged to the people of Moscow. Grand Duke Serge, who was Governor General of Moscow, had arranged the traditional huge open-air feast which the Tsar

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and the Empress would attend in a field outside the city. Cartloads of enameled cups, each stamped with the Imperial seal, were to be given away as souvenirs, and the authorities had ordered hundreds of barrels of free beer.

Khodynka Meadow, the field selected for this mass festivity, was a training ground for troops of the Moscow garrison and it was crisscrossed by a network of shallow trenches and ditches. It was the only place which could accommodate the hundreds of thousands of Muscovites expected to pour out of the city to see the new Tsar and Tsaritsa.

The night before, thousands of people walked to the meadow without bothering to go to bed. By dawn, five hundred thousand people waited, some already drunk. The wagons loaded with cups and beer began to arrive and draw up behind skimpy wooden railings. The crowd watched with interest and began moving forward, full of good nature. Suddenly a rumor passed that there were fewer wagons than had been expected and that there would be beer enough only for those who got there first. People began to run. The single squadron of Cossacks on hand to keep order was brushed aside. Men tripped and stumbled into the ditches. Women and children, knocked down in the mass of rushing, pushing bodies, felt feet on their

backs and heads. Their noses and mouths were ground into the dirt. Over the mutilated, suffocating bodies, thousands of feet relentlessly trampled.

By the time police and more Cossacks arrived, the meadow resembled a battlefield. Hundreds were dead and thousands wounded. By afternoon, the city's hospitals were jammed with wounded and everybody knew what had happened. Nicholas and Alexandra were stunned. The Tsar's first frantic impulse was to go immediately into a prayerful retreat. He declared that he could not possibly go to the ball being given that night by the French Ambassador, the Marquis de Monte-bello. Once again, the uncles, rallying around their brother Grand Duke Serge, intervened. To adorn the ball, the French government had sent priceless tapestries and treasures of silver plate from Paris and Versailles, along with one hundred thousand roses from the south of France. The uncles urged that Nicholas not magnify the disaster by failing to appear and thus giving offense to France's only European ally. Tragically, the young Tsar gave in and agreed.

"We expected that the party would be called off," said Sergius Witte, the Minister of Finance. "[Instead] it took place as if nothing had happened and the ball was opened by their Majesties dancing a quadrille." It was a painful evening. "The Empress appeared in great distress, her eyes reddened by tears," the British ambassador informed

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Queen Victoria. Alexander Izvolsky, later Russian Foreign Minister, declared that "far from being insensible, they [the Imperial couple] were deeply moved. The Emperor's first impulse was to order a suspension of the festivities and to retire to one of the monasteries. The Tsar's uncles urged him not to cancel anything to avoid greater scandal."

Expressing their grief, Nicholas and Alexandra spent a day going from one hospital to another. Nicholas ordered that the dead be buried in separate coffins at his own expense rather than dumped into the common grave customary for mass disasters. From the Tsar's private purse, the family of every victim received a thousand roubles. But no act of consideration could erase the terrible event. Masses of simple Russians took the disaster as an omen that the reign would be unhappy. Other Russians, more sophisticated

or more vengeful, used the tragedy to underscore the heartlessness of the autocracy and the contemptible shallowness of the young Tsar and his "German woman."

After a coronation, the newly crowned monarch was expected to travel, making state visits and private courtesy calls on fellow sovereigns. In the summer of 1896, Nicholas and Alexandra went to Vienna to visit the aging Emperor of Austria-Hungary, Franz Joseph, called on the Kaiser at Breslau and spent ten quiet days in Copenhagen with Nicholas's grandparents, King Christian IX and Queen Louise of Denmark. In September, taking with them ten-month-old Olga, they sailed to visit Queen Victoria.

The Queen was in Scotland at the great, turreted, granite castle of Balmoral deep in the Highlands of Aberdeen. In a driving rain, the Russian Imperial yacht *Standart* anchored in the roadstead at Leith, and Uncle Bertie, the Prince of Wales, came aboard to escort the Russian guests through the wild mountains. Thoroughly drenched from riding in open carriages, they arrived at the castle after dark. The Queen was waiting for them on the castle steps, surrounded by tall Highlanders holding flaming torches.

Overjoyed to see each other, grandmother and granddaughter spent hours playing with the baby. "She is marvelously kind and amiable to us, and so delighted to see our little daughter," Nicholas wrote to Marie. Nicholas was left in the hands of Bertie. "They seem to consider it necessary to take me out shooting all day long with the gentlemen," he complained. "The weather is awful, rain and wind every day and on top of it no luck at all—I haven't killed a stag yet. . . . I'm glad Géorgie comes out to shoot too—we can at least talk."

From Scotland, the Russian party traveled to Portsmouth and then to France. Unlike the British visit, which had been a family holiday, the Tsar's visit to Paris was an event of the highest importance to both countries. Despite the great difference in their political systems, the needs of diplomacy had made military allies of Europe's greatest republic and its most absolute autocracy. Since 1870, when France lost the Franco-Prussian War and was stripped of its eastern provinces of Alsace and Lorraine,

French statesmen and generals had dreamed of the day they would take revenge on Germany, aided by the countless soldiers of the Tsar. For his part, Tsar Alexander III had wanted a counterbalance to the immense military power of the German Empire which had grown up on his western frontier. Besides, France was willing to loan to Russia the enormous sums Alexander III needed to rebuild his army and to build his railways. In 1888 and 1889, the first of these loans was floated on the Paris Bourse at a low rate of interest. In 1891, the French fleet visited Kronstadt, and the Autocrat of all the Russias stood bareheaded while the bands played the *"Marseillaise."* Until that moment it had been a criminal offense to play this revolutionary song anywhere in the Tsar's dominions. In 1893, the Russian fleet visited Toulon, and in 1894, the year of Alexander Ill's death and his son's accession, Russia and France signed a treaty of alliance. In his *Memoirs,* Raymond Poincaré, President of France during World War I, recorded, "Those of us who reached manhood in 1890 cannot recall without emotion the prodigious effect produced by the friendliness of the Emperor Alexander III."

Nicholas II was the first tsar to visit France since the *entente* had been formed, and the French government proposed to give him an overwhelming welcome. It being late September, Paris carpenters were ordered to wire artificial chestnut blooms to the famed chestnut trees to give the city its most pleasing appearance. Police were stationed every twenty yards along the line of parade to dampen the enthusiasm of revolutionaries or anarchists who might jump at the chance to assassinate an autocrat. The French fleet steamed to the middle of the English Channel with flags flying and bands playing to greet the Tsar as he crossed from England.

From the moment Nicholas's carriage appeared on the wide boulevards of Paris, the people of France raised a thunderous, unceasing ovation. Huge crowds frantically waved their handkerchiefs and shouted as Nicholas and Alexandra went by. Seeing Olga and her nurse in another carriage, the crowds shouted *"Vive le bébé," "Vive la Grande Duchesse"* and even " *Vive la nounou."* Nicholas was overcome. "I can only compare it with my entry into Moscow [for the

coronation]." Together, the Imperial guests visited Notre Dame, the Ste. Chapelle, the Panthéon and the Louvre. At the Invalides, they looked down on the tomb of Russia's invader, Napoleon. In the Place de la Concorde, with Alexandra in a blue satin gown standing at his side, Nicholas laid a foundation stone of the Pont Alexander III over the Seine. At Versailles for an evening, Alexandra was assigned the rooms of Marie Antoinette.

The French visit concluded with a huge military review on the river Marne. Nicholas, dressed in a Cossack uniform, sat on a sorrel horse and watched seventy thousand Chasseurs Alpins, African Zouaves, Spahi horsemen in flowing robes, and regiments of regular infantry in red pantaloons. Then, as a climax to the review, the Spahis whirled and charged *en masse,* engulfing the reviewing party in clouds of dust. Leaving the field to board his train, Nicholas rode down a road lined on both sides with battalions of French infantry. Spontaneously the French soldiers began to cheer *"Vive l'Empereur!"*

Exhilarated by their reception in France, Nicholas and Alexandra hated to begin the journey back to Russia by train across Germany. "We arrived at the frontier at eleven in the evening," Nicholas wrote to Marie. "There for the last time, we heard the strains of our national anthem. After this began German helmets and it was unpleasant to look out of the window. At every station in France one heard 'Hurrah' and saw kind and jolly faces, but here everything was black and dark and boring. Happily, it was time to go to bed; by daylight it would have been even more depressing."

Nicholas never forgot the outpouring of emotion displayed by the people and soldiers of France on his first visit as Tsar. In the future, this favorable impression in the mind and heart of the young Tsar was to serve France well.

CHAPTER SIX

The New Tsar

At home, Nicholas plunged into "the awful job I have feared all my life." He attacked the mountains of paper brought him every day and dutifully initialed them, wrote comments in their margins, signed orders, promotions and lists of honors. At first, feeling his way, he relied on Marie for guidance. "The various affairs you left me, petitions, etc. have all been attended to," he reported faithfully. Two weeks later she wrote back, "I am sorry to have still to forward you so many papers, but it is always like that in early summer just before the ministers go on leave."

But Nicholas did not always follow his mother's recommendations. When she asked as a favor the loan of one million roubles from the State Bank to a needy princess, Nicholas lectured her sternly: "I must talk to you, darling Mama, about some rather unpleasant things. . . . As regards ... a loan of a million roubles from the Bank, I must tell you honestly that this is impossible. I should have liked to see how she would have dared even to hint at such a thing to Papa; and I can certainly hear the answer he would have given her. ... It would be a fine state of affairs indeed at the Treasury if, in Witte's absence (he is at present on a holiday) I were to give a million to one, two millions to another, etc. . . . What forms one of the most brilliant pages in the history of dear Papa's reign is the sound condition of our finances—[this] would be destroyed in the course of a few years."

Far more difficult for Nicholas were the uncles, the four surviving brothers of Alexander III. Vladimir, the oldest, a hunter, gourmet and patron of the arts, was Commander of the Imperial Guard and President of the Academy of Fine Arts. Alexis, a man of infinite charm and enormous girth, was simultaneously Grand Admiral of the Russian Navy and an international *bon vivant*—"his was a case of fast women and slow ships." Serge, the husband of Grand Duchess Eliza-

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beth, was the violently reactionary Governor General of Moscow, a man so narrow and despotic that he forbade his wife to read *Anna Karenina* for fear of arousing "unhealthy curiosity and violent emotions." Only Paul, a mere eight years older than his nephew, made no trouble for Nicholas.

"Nicholas II spent the first ten years of his reign sitting behind a massive desk in the palace and listening with near-awe to the well-rehearsed bellowing of his towering uncles," wrote Grand Duke Alexander, the Tsar's cousin. "He dreaded to be left alone with them. In the presence of witnesses his opinions were accepted as orders, but the instant the door of his study closed on the outsider—down on the table would go with a bang the weighty fist of Uncle Alexis . . . two hundred and fifty pounds . . . packed in the resplendent uniform of Grand Admiral of the Fleet. . . . Uncle Serge and Uncle Vladimir developed equally efficient methods of intimidation. . . . They all had their favorite generals and admirals . . . their ballerinas desirous of organizing a 'Russian season' in Paris; their wonderful preachers anxious to redeem the Emperor's soul . . . their clairvoyant peasants with a divine message."

It was not surprising that the uncles had a powerful influence; all were vigorous, relatively young men when their inexperienced twenty-six-year-old nephew suddenly became Tsar. Three of them had been present in Darmstadt to steer Nicholas through his proposal to Princess Alix; later it was they who decided that Nicholas should marry publicly in St. Petersburg, not privately at Livadia; at the coronation, the uncles insisted that Nicholas go on to the French ambassador's ball after the disaster at Khodynka Meadow. The uncles' influence continued over the first decade of the reign. It was not until Nicholas had gone through the fires of war with Japan and the 1905 Revolution and was himself thirty-six that their influence began to fade.

Along with becoming Tsar of Russia, Nicholas had suddenly become head of the House of Romanov and manager of the vast Imperial estate. His income, totaling 24 million gold roubles ($12 million) a year, came partly from an annual Treasury appropriation and partly from the profits of the millions of acres of crown lands— vineyards, farms and cotton plantations —purchased mainly by Catherine the Great. In 1914 the value of these Romanov lands was estimated at $50 million. Another $80 million was frozen in the form of the immense treasures of jewelry bought in three centuries of rule. Along with the fabulous Russian Imperial Crown, these included the

Orlov Diamond of 194.5 carats, which was set in the Imperial Scepter; the Moon of the Mountain diamond of 120 carats; and the Polar Star, a superb 40-carat ruby.

Despite this wealth, the Tsar's private purse was often empty. There were seven palaces to be kept up: the Winter Palace and the Anitchkov Palace in St. Petersburg; the Alexander and Catherine Palaces at Tsarskoe Selo; Peterhof; Gatchina; the Imperial apartments in the Kremlin; and Livadia Palace in the Crimea. In these palaces, fifteen thousand officials and servants required salaries, food, uniforms and appropriate presents on holidays. There were the Imperial trains and yachts. Three theatres in St. Petersburg and two in Moscow, the Imperial Academy of Arts and the Imperial Ballet with its 153 ballerinas and 73 male dancers, all were maintained from the Tsar's private purse. Even the little students at the Ballet School, wearing dark blue uniforms with silver lyres on their collars, and training in leaps and entrechats, were considered members of the personal household of the Tsar.

In addition, every member of the vast Imperial family received an allowance from the Tsar. Each of the grand dukes was given $100,000 a year and every grand duchess received a dowry of $500,000. Innumerable hospitals, orphanages and institutions for the blind depended on the Imperial charity. A flood of private petitions for financial aid poured in each year to the private chancery; many were worthy and had to be satisfied. Before the end of the year, the Tsar was usually penniless; sometimes he reached this embarrassing state by autumn.

In running his family and empire, Nicholas looked to his father and the Russian past. Nicholas preferred to be Russian down to the smallest details of personal Hfe. At his desk, he wore a simple Russian peasant blouse, baggy breeches and soft leather boots. Once he toyed with the idea of converting formal court dress to the ancient long *caftans* of the days of Ivan the Great and Ivan the Terrible. He gave up the project only when he discovered that the cost of ornamenting these robes with jewels in the style of the ancient Muscovite *boyars* was more than any modern purse could

bear. Although Nicholas's English, French and German were excellent, he preferred to speak Russian. He spoke Russian to his children and wrote in Russian to his mother; only to the Empress Alexandra, whose Russian was awkward, did he speak and write in English. Although French was the popular language of the upper classes, he insisted that his ministers report to him in Russian and was displeased even by the insertion of a foreign phrase

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or expression. Even culturally, Nicholas was intensely nationalistic. He liked to read Pushkin, Gogol and the novels of Tolstoy. He was fond of Tchaikovsky and went to concerts, opera and ballet several times a week; his favorite ballet was *The Hunchback Horse*, based on a Russian fairy tale. Of all the tsars, Nicholas most admired Alexis the Mild, last of the purely Muscovite tsars and father of Peter the Great. In 1903, Nicholas's interest led to a lavish costume ball at which everyone present appeared in robes and gowns of the seventeenth century and danced old Russian dances which they had rehearsed for weeks. Once when an aide was talking enthusiastically about Peter the Great, Nicholas replied thoughtfully, "I recognize my ancestor's great merits, but... he is the ancestor who appeals to me least of all. He had too much admiration for European culture. . . . He stamped out Russian habits, the good customs, the usages, bequeathed by a nation."

In his work habits, Nicholas was solitary. Unlike most monarchs and chiefs of state—unlike even his own wife—he had no private secretary. He preferred to do things for himself. On his desk he kept a large calendar of his daily appointments, scrupulously entered in his own hand. When official papers arrived, he opened them, read them, signed them and put them in envelopes himself. He once explained that he placed things exactly because he liked to feel that he could enter his office in the dark and put his hand on any object he desired. With much the same sense of privacy, Nicholas disliked discussions of politics, especially in casual conversation. A new aide-de-camp, galloping at the side of the Tsar near Livadia on a morning ride, supposed that his duty was to amuse the Tsar with small talk. He chose politics as his subject. Nicholas replied reluctantly, and quickly switched the conversation to the weather, the mountain scenery, the horses and

tennis. When the aide persisted, Nicholas put spurs to his horse and galloped ahead.

This sense of privacy, along with an unwillingness to provoke personal unpleasantness, created perennial difficulty between the Tsar and his ministers. Ministers were appointed and dismissed directly by the crown. In theory, they were the servants of the Tsar, and he was free to give these posts to whomever he liked, to listen to or ignore a minister's advice, and to hand down dismissals without explanation. In practice, the ministers were the heads of large government departments where continuity and coordination were administrative necessities. In addition, the ministers were also ambitious, proud and sensitive men. Nicholas never mastered the technique of forceful,

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efficient management of subordinates. He hated scenes and found it impossible to sternly criticize or dismiss a man to his face. If something was wrong, he preferred to give a minister a friendly reception, comment gently and shake hands warmly. Occasionally, after such an interview, the minister would return to his office, well pleased with himself, only to receive in the morning mail a letter regretfully asking for his resignation. Not unnaturally, these men complained that they had been deceived.

The major lines of Nicholas's character as Tsar were set in these early years of the reign. Coming to the throne unprepared, he was forced to develop his administration of the office as he went along. Because he was influenced at first by his mother, his uncles and his tutor (Pobedonostsev remained Procurator of the Holy Synod until 1905), his enemies declared that he had no will of his own. It would be more accurate to say that he was a man of narrow, special education; of strong and—unfortunately—unchanging conviction; of soft-spoken, kindly manner; and, underneath, of stubborn courage. Even Sergius Witte, whose abrupt dismissal from office later bred in him a venomous hatred of Nicholas, nevertheless wrote of the early years: "In those days, the young Emperor carried in himself the seeds of the best that the human mind and heart possess."

To the despair of Russian liberals who had hoped that the death of Alexander III would mean a modification of the autocracy, Nicholas quickly made it clear that he would closely abide by his father's principles. Even before the coronation, he struck this note. In sending to the new Tsar the traditional address of congratulation on his accession, the Zemstvo of Tver, a stronghold of liberalism, had voiced an appeal "that the voice of the people and the expression of its desires would be listened to" and that the law would stand "above the changing views of the individual instruments of supreme power." In this mild language Pobedonostsev discovered a dangerous challenge to the principle of autocracy, and with his help the young Tsar drafted a reply which he delivered in person to the Tver delegation. Admonishing them for their "senseless dreams of the participation of the Zemstvos' representatives in the affairs of internal administration," Nicholas added, "I shall maintain the principle of autocracy just as firmly and unflinchingly as it was preserved by my unforgettable dead father."

Nicholas's speech was a blunt dashing of liberal hopes and a renewed

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challenge to revolutionaries, who once again set to work to undermine the monarchy. Yet within the family he was widely congratulated. From Kaiser William II came a happy note: "I am delighted by your magnificent address. The principle of the monarchy must be maintained in all its strength."

In foreign affairs, Alexander III had left a legacy of thirteen peaceful years, but he had not considered it important to acquaint his heir with even the most basic information concerning Russia's international position. It was not until Nicholas's accession, therefore, that the young Tsar learned the terms of the Franco-Russian alliance." * Anxious to keep this peace and unwilling to trust it solely to a military alliance, Nicholas issued a dramatic appeal for disarmament and "universal peace" which led to the formation of the International Court of Justice. In August 1898, a Russian note lamenting the economic, financial and moral effects of the armaments race was delivered to all the governments of the world, proposing an international conference to study the problem. It has been suggested that the Tsar's

proposal stemmed wholly from the fact that Austria was re-equipping her artillery with modern field guns which Russia was unable to match, but this was not entirely the case. Another reason was the publication that year of a six-volume work by Ivan Bliokh, an important Russian Jewish railroad financier, who depicted in a massive array of facts, statistics and projected casualty rates the grim horror of any future war. Bliokh had an audience with Nicholas and helped persuade the Tsar to issue the appeal.

The strange proposal from St. Petersburg astonished Europe. From some quarters Nicholas was hailed as a tsar who would be known in history as "Nicholas the Pacific." Sophisticated folk, on the other hand, dismissed it in the tones of the Prince of Wales, who described it as "the greatest nonsense and rubbish I ever heard of." The Kaiser was instantly, frantically hostile. Imagine, he telegraphed the Tsar, "a Monarch . . . dissolving his regiments sacred with a hundred years of history and handing over his town to Anarchists and Democracy."

Despite apprehensions, in deference to the Tsar and Russia a conference was convened at The Hague in May 1899. Twenty European powers attended along with the United States, Mexico, Japan, China, Siam and Persia. The Russian proposals for freezing armament levels

* The strange phenomenon of powerful chiefs of state withholding vital government information from their immediate heirs has not been restricted to Russia or autocracies. Only when he suddenly became President on the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt did Harry Truman learn that the United States was in the final stage of an immense effort to build an atomic bomb.

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were defeated, but the convention did agree on rules of warfare and established a permanent court of arbitration. In 1905 Nicholas himself referred the Dogger Bank incident between Britain and Russia to the World Court, and in 1914, on the eve of the First World War, the Tsar pleaded with the Kaiser to help him send the dispute between Austria and Serbia to The Hague.

Europe's surprise that so unusual an idea as universal peace should come out of "semi-barbaric" Russia betrayed its lack of awareness of the richly creative culture which was flourishing there. The early years of Nicholas's

reign were a period of such glittering intellectual and cultural achievement that they are known as the "Russian Renaissance" or the "Silver Age." The ferment of activity and new ideas included not only politics but philosophy and science, music and art.

In literature, Anton Chekov was writing the plays and short stories which would become world classics. In 1898, Constantine Stanislavsky first opened the doors of the famous Moscow Art Theatre, and its second play, Chekov's *The Sea Gull*, written in 1896, determined its success. Thereafter the appearance of *Uncle Vanya* (1899) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) confirmed the arrival of a new concept of naturalistic acting and a new era in the history of the theatre. In 1902, Stanislavsky directed *The Lower Depths*, a grimly realistic play by Maxim Gorky, hitherto known primarily for his massive novels. In Kiev, from 1900 to 1905, Sholom Aleichem, who had already lost a fortune trading on the grain and stock exchanges, was devoting himself entirely to writing in Yiddish the scores of short stories which have made him known as the "Jewish Mark Twain."

In philosophy, Vladimir Solov'ev, the preeminent religious philosopher and poet, had begun publishing his works in 1894. In 1904, the poems of Solov'ev's famous disciple Alexander Blok began to appear. At the Institute of Experimental Medicine in St. Petersburg, Ivan Pavlov, one of a group of Russian scientists making significant advances in chemistry and medicine, was conducting the experiments in physiology which won him a Nobel Prize in 1904.

Russian painting was in transition. Ilya Repin, then a professor of historical painting at the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts, was crowning a career of painting the great historical scenes of Russia's past. Victor Vasnetsov and Michael Nesterov had gone back even further and were attempting to re-create medieval religious art. Meanwhile, a rank of younger artists was responding excitedly to exhibitions

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in Russia of Cézanne, Gauguin and Picasso. Serov, influenced by the French Impressionists, painted evocative portraits of many contemporary Russians including, in 1900, the Tsar. In 1896, Vassily Kandinsky, a lawyer

in Moscow, gave up his career and left Russia to begin painting in Munich. In 1907, Marc Chagall arrived in St. Petersburg to study with the famous contemporary painter Lev Bakst.

At the Imperial Ballet, Marius Petipa was in the midst of a half-century reign as choreographer which would last until he resigned in 1903. In richly magnificent succession, he staged sixty major ballets, among them Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake, Nutcracker* and *Sleeping Beauty.* It was Petipa who thrust onto the stage the glittering parade of Russian dancers which included Mathilde Kschessinska, Tamara Karsavina, Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky. Even today, the great ballet companies of the world are measured for excellence against the standards set by Petipa. In 1899, Serge Diaghilev founded the influential journal *The World of Art* and editorially began to criticize Petipa's conservative style. In 1909, Diaghilev, with a daring new choreographer, Michael Fokine, founded the Ballet Russe in Paris and took the world by storm.

In the superlative music conservatories of St. Petersburg and Moscow, an unbroken succession of famous teachers passed their art to talented pupils. Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakov was the conductor of the St. Petersburg Symphony. While writing his own magnificent *Golden Cockerel*, he was instructing a youthful Igor Stravinsky, whose brilliantly original ballet scores written for Diaghilev, *Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911) and *Rite of Spring* (1913), were to have gigantic influence on all twentieth-century music. Later, in 1914, another of Rimsky-Korsakov's pupils, Serge Prokoviev, was to graduate from the conservatory. Among the violinists and pianists trained in Imperial Russia were Serge Rachmaninov, Vladimir Horowitz, Efrem Zimbalist, Mischa Elman and Jascha Heifetz. Serge Koussevitsky conducted his own symphony orchestra in Moscow. In 1899, the matchless basso Fedor Chaliapin made his debut and thereafter dominated the opera stage.

Across Russia, people flocked to hear music and opera. Kiev, Odessa, Warsaw and Tiflis each had its own opera company with a season of eight to nine months. St. Petersburg alone had four opera houses. In 1901, Tsar Nicholas built one of these, the Narodny Dom or People's Palace. Believing

that ordinary Russians should have an opportunity to savor the best in national music and drama, Nicholas had constructed a vast building which included theatres, concert halls and restaurants, with admission fees of only twenty kopecks. In

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time, the best orchestras and the leading actors and musicians appeared there. St. Petersburg society, enjoying the flavor of something new, trooped to follow.

During these years, the young Tsar's family grew rapidly. At two-year intervals, three more daughters were born. In 1897, when Alexandra was pregnant a second time and feeling ill, the Dowager Empress advised: "She ought to try eating raw ham in bed in the morning before breakfast. It really does help against nausea. I have tried it myself, and it is wholesome and nourishing, too. ... It is your duty, my dear Nicky, to watch over her and to look after her in every possible way, to see she keeps her feet warm. . . ." That June, Grand Duchess Tatiana was born.

A year later, in October 1898, Alexandra was pregnant again. "I am now in a position to tell you, dear Mama, that with God's help we expect a new happy event in the family next May," wrote Nicholas. "Alix does not go driving any more, twice she fainted during Mass..." A month later, in November: "The nausea is gone. She walks very little, and when it is warm sits on the balcony. ... In the evening, when she is in bed, I read to her. We have finished *War and Peace."* Grand Duchess Marie was born in May 1899, and their fourth child, also a girl, arrived in June 1901. They named her Anastasia.

Along with births, there were illnesses and deaths. In the summer of 1899, Nicholas's brother Grand Duke George finally died at twenty-seven of tuberculosis, and in the fall of 1900, Nicholas himself came down with typhoid fever in the Crimea. Alexandra nursed him herself. "Nicky was really an angel," she wrote to her sister. "I rebelled at a nurse being taken and we managed perfectly ourselves. Orchie [Mrs. Orchard] would wash his face and hands in the morning and bring my meals in always. I took them on the sofa. . . . When he was getting better, I read to him almost all

day long." "Alix looked after me better than any nurse," Nicholas wrote to Marie once he was feeling better. "All through my illness I could not stand up. Now I can easily walk from the bed to the dresser."

Scarcely had Nicholas recovered when Queen Victoria died. Only the summer before, when the eighty-one-year-old Queen had invited the Empress to England, Alexandra had written to a friend: "How intensely I long to see her dear old face . . . never have we been separated so long, four whole years, and I have the feeling as tho' I should never see her any more. Were it not so far away, I should have gone off all alone for a few days to see her and left the children and

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my husband, as she has been as a mother to me, ever since Mama's death 22 years ago."

When the news of Victoria's death arrived in January 1901, Alexandra wanted to start immediately for Windsor, but, being pregnant with Anastasia, she was persuaded not to go. At the memorial service in the English church in St. Petersburg, the Empress wept in public. To her sister she wrote, "How I envy you being able to see beloved Grandmama being taken to her last rest. I cannot really believe she has gone, that we shall never see her any more. . . . Since one can remember, she was in our life, and a dearer, kinder being never was. . . . England without the Queen seems impossible."

The death of her grandmother did more than carry away the woman Alexandra loved best. It also removed an influence of stability and a source of encouragement. Ever since her marriage, the Empress and the Queen had written regularly, although Alexandra destroyed their letters in March 1917. The Queen had always worried about Alexandra's excessive shyness, fearing that the dramatic ascent in a single month from being a German princess to becoming Empress of Russia had left no time for developing ease in society.

This had, in fact, been a problem since Alexandra's first public appearance as Empress in the winter season of 1896. As she stood beside her husband

at a ball, Alexandra's eyes were cold with fright and her tongue was stilled by nervousness. That night, Alexandra later admitted, she was terrified and would have liked to sink beneath the polished floors. But she stayed until midnight and then gratefully swept away.

The new Empress's first receptions for the ladies of St. Petersburg were blighted by the same shyness. As the reception line filed past, the invited ladies found themselves confronting a tall figure standing silent and cold before them. Alexandra rarely smiled and never spoke more than an automatic word of welcome. In an awkward way, her hand hung in the air, waiting to be kissed. Everything about her, the tight mouth, her occasional glance down the line to see how many more were coming, plainly indicated that the young Empress's only real desire was to get away as soon as possible.

It did not take many of these balls and receptions before nervousness and uncertainty turned on both sides to active dislike. Alexandra's childhood in the little court at Darmstadt, her training under the strict Victorian standards of Windsor, had not prepared her for the gay, loose society of St. Petersburg. She was shocked by the all-night parties, the flaunted love affairs, the malicious gossip. "The heads of the young ladies of St. Petersburg are filled with nothing but thoughts

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of young officers," she declared, accurately enough. Scandalized by the flourishing love affairs among the aristocracy, Alexandra took the palace invitation lists and began crossing off names. As one prominent name after another disappeared, the list was decimated.

Many people in St. Petersburg society quickly dismissed the young Empress as a prude and a bore. There is a story that at one of her first court balls she saw a young woman dancing whose décolletage she considered too low. One of her ladies-in-waiting was sent to tell the offender: "Madame, Her Majesty wants me to tell you that in Hesse-Darmstadt we don't wear our dresses that way."

"Really?" the young woman is said to have replied, at the same time pulling the front of her dress still lower. "Pray tell Her Majesty that in Russia we *do* wear our dresses this way."

Alexandra's new zeal over Orthodoxy embarrassed society. Themselves Orthodox from birth, they thought of the Empress with her aggressive collecting of rare icons, her wide reading of church history, her pilgrimages, her talks about abbots and holy hermits, as crankish. When she tried to organize a handiwork society in St. Petersburg whose members would knit three garments a year for the poor, most St. Petersburg ladies declared that they had no time for such rubbish.

Members of the Imperial family resented the way the Empress seemed to seal them off from the palace and the Tsar. Large and scattered though it was, the Russian Imperial family, like most Russian families, had always been closely knit. Uncles and aunts and cousins were accustomed to frequent visits and invitations to dine. Anxious to be alone with her young husband, Alexandra was slow to issue these invitations. The family became indignant. Imperial grand duchesses, themselves the sisters or daughters of a tsar, huffed that a mere German princess should attempt to come between them and their prerogatives.

Society enjoyed the friction between the two Empresses, Alexandra and Marie, siding openly with Marie and talking longingly of gayer days. But Marie lived mostly abroad, either in Copenhagen or visiting her sister, now Queen Alexandra of England, or staying in her villa on the French Riviera.

Perhaps, because of the shyness she carried from childhood, the Empress Alexandra could never successfully have acted the public role demanded of her. Yet, in addition to her own personality, every happenstance conspired against her. Marie had lived in Russia for seventeen years before she came to the throne; Alexandra barely one month. The new Empress spoke almost no Russian. Unable to

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grasp the intricate ranking of the court, she made errors and gave offense. Once she was Empress, there was no way for her to make friends; ladies

could not simply drop in on her or casually invite her for tea. Her sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth, who might have acted as a bridge between the throne and society, had moved to Moscow. Alexandra's private plans to start giving lunches were interrupted by her recurring pregnancies and long confinements. Childbearing was not easy for her and, long before each birth was due, she canceled all appointments and went to bed. After the birth, she insisted on nursing each child and disliked being far from the nursery.

Between the Empress and the aristocracy it became an unhappy cycle of dislike and rebuff. In her own mind, Alexandra found the explanation for this by telling herself that they were not real Russians at all. Neither the jaded nobility, nor the workers who went on strike, nor the revolutionary students, nor the difficult ministers had anything to do with the real people of Russia. The real people were the peasants she had seen during her summer at Ilinskoe. These humble people, multiplied into millions, who walked through the birch groves on their way to the fields, who fell on their knees to pray for the Tsar, were the heart and soul of Holy Russia. To them, she was certain, she was more than just an Empress; she was *Matushka.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Two Revolutionaries

Alexandra's view of life in the provinces, although oversimplified, was generally accurate. Even at the turn of the century, the Russian countryside was studded with manor houses belonging to loyal country squires, and with villages inhabited by peasants whose fathers had been serfs and who themselves still clung to traditional patterns of life. Each sleepy provincial town was much like the next: at the top a crust of local nobility and gentry, then the bureaucrats and professional classes—judges, lawyers, doctors and teachers—and below them, priests and clerks, shopkeepers, artisans, workmen and servants. At times a current of unrest, a tricklet of liberalism, might run through one of these towns, but overwhelmingly the prevailing mood was conservative. Ironically, exactly such a town was Simbirsk on the Middle Volga, the childhood home of two men who in succession would

play major roles in the overthrow of the Russia of Nicholas and Alexandra. One was Alexander Fedorovich Kerensky. The other, eleven years Kerensky's senior, was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, called Lenin.

Simbirsk in the 1880's and 1890's was an isolated town perched on a hill above the Volga River. There was no railroad, and although paddlewheel steamers stopped at its quay during the summer, in winter the only highway was the ice of the frozen river. On the crest of the hill, looking out over the river and the meadowland stretching away to the eastern horizon, stood the town's cathedral, the governor's mansion, the high school, the library. "From the summit right down to the Waterside," recalled Kerensky, "stretched luxuriant apple and cherry orchards. In the spring the whole mountain-side was white with blossom, fragrant, and at night breathless with the songs of the nightingales. From the summit . . . the view across the river over miles of meadowland was magnificent. With the melting of the snow,

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the river used to leave its banks and flood the low-lying fields . . . stretching like an endless sea over the fields which later in the heat of summer would be gay with the songs and games of peasants and townspeople come to mow the rich, fragrant grass."

In this pleasant place Vladimir Ulyanov was born in 1870, two years after the birth of Nicholas II. His father, Ilya Ulyanov, the son of a serf who had won his freedom, had graduated from Kazan University and begun his career as a teacher of mathematics. Ilya Ulyanov rose rapidly through the ranks of the state educational system and in 1863 he married Maria Blank, a Volga German whose father, a doctor, owned a large estate. Vladimir, named after the saint who became the first Christian ruler of Russia, was the third of Maria's six children.

In 1869, the year before Lenin's birth, Ilya Ulyanov became Inspector and, five years later, Director of Schools for the Province of Simbirsk. He worked zealously training teachers and opening new schools, and he was away from home for long periods, but in twelve years the number of primary schools in the province rose from 20 to 434. In recognition of this work, Ilya was promoted to the rank of Actual Councilor of State, a rank in

the hereditary nobility equivalent to an army major general. When Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, Ilya Ulyanov "sadly buttoned on his official uniform and went off to the Simbirsk cathedral to mourn the death of the Tsar-Liberator."

Vladimir, called Volodya in the family, was a plump, red-haired boy with a large head, stocky body and short legs. In the summers, with his brothers and sisters, he swam in the Volga and hunted mushrooms in the birch woods; during the winters, he went ice-skating and sleighing. Unlike Alexander, his impulsive, idealistic older brother, Vladimir tended to be precise and sarcastic. When he played chess with his brothers and sisters, he established a strict rule: "Under no circumstances, take a move back. Once you have touched a piece, you have to move it." He was an excellent student in school, and when the other Ulyanov children brought their marks home and solemnly reported them to their parents, Volodya simply burst through the door and up the stairs, shouting, "Excellent in everything!"

Within a span of sixteen months in 1886 and 1887, the comfortable Ulyanov household collapsed. In 1922, replying to a census questionnaire, Lenin wrote: "Nonbeliever [in God] since the age of 16" —this was his age when, in January 1886, his father died of a stroke before his eyes. In the spring of 1887, his older brother Alexander was arrested in St. Petersburg, along with four other university students,

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on the charge of trying to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. They had been apprehended with a crude, unworkable bomb concealed inside a hollowed medical dictionary. Alexander did not deny the charge. To his mother, who hurried to his side, he declared, "I tried to kill the Tsar. The attempt failed and that is all there is to it." In May 1887, Alexander Ulyanov was hanged. His mother walked beside him to the gallows, repeating over and over, "Have courage. Have courage."

The effect of his brother's death on Vladimir is a subject of dispute. "The execution of such a brother as Alexander Ulyanov was bound undoubtedly to have a crushing and destructive psychological result upon any normal mind," said Alexander Kerensky. But Lenin, of course, was very far from

normal. In addition, there is evidence of friction between the two brothers, especially after their father's death. "Undoubtedly, a very gifted person but we don't get along," said Alexander of Vladimir during this period. Alexander particularly disliked Vladimir's impertinence, arrogance and mockery of their mother. Once when her two sons were playing chess, Maria reminded Vladimir of something she had asked him to do. Vladimir answered rudely and did not move. Maria insisted and Vladimir became ruder. At this point, Alexander said calmly, "You either go and do what Mama asks or I shall not play with you again."

Alexander was hanged in the spring of Vladimir's final year in the Simbirsk high school. Outwardly unperturbed, Vladimir took his final examinations and, wearing a tight-fitting blue uniform, graduated at the head of his class. When he did so, the school headmaster (at considerable risk, considering the scandal then hanging over the Ulyanovs) wrote a warm endorsement of Vladimir:

"Very gifted, always neat and assiduous, Ulyanov was first in all his subjects, and upon completing his studies received a gold medal as the most deserving pupil with regard to his ability, progress and behavior. Neither in the school, nor outside, has a single instance been observed when he has given cause for dissatisfaction by word or by deed to the school authorities. . . . Religion and discipline were the basis of this upbringing . . . , the fruits of which are apparent in Ulyanov's behavior. Looking more closely at Ulyanov's character and private life, I have had occasion to note a somewhat excessive tendency towards isolation and reserve, a tendency to avoid contact with acquaintances and even with the very best of his school fellows outside school hours."

The signature under this document was that of Fedor Kerensky, headmaster of the school, and friend and admirer of the deceased Ilya Ulyanov. Because of this friendship, the court temporarily en-

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trusted Fedor Kerensky with the management of young Vladimir's affairs.

As the widow of a hereditary nobleman, Maria Ulyanov continued to draw her pension, but the scandal made it necessary for her to move from Simbirsk. Vladimir entered the University of Kazan and was quickly expelled for taking part in a mild student demonstration. Thereafter, hoping to save her second son from the course which had destroyed his brother, Maria bought a farm of 225 acres and installed Vladimir as farm manager. He did not like it. "My mother wanted me to engage in farming," he recalled. "I tried it but I saw that it would not work. My relations with the *moujiks* were not normal." The farm was sold and the family moved to Samara to live with Maria's parents. There, sitting beside his grandfather's fireplace, Vladimir read omnivorously: Pushkin, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy. He began to study law at home and crammed four years of work into a single year; when he received permission to take his examinations, he was again first in his class. Despite his academic brilliance, he failed in his brief attempt at legal practice. He took a dozen cases in Samara on behalf of peasants and workmen accused of minor crimes; all were found guilty. For exercise, he swam every day. In the winter, he hung upside down and did gymnastics on a pair of cross-bars he made himself.

With the same intensity with which he had mastered law, he began to study Karl Marx. The totality of the Marxist dream and the compelling logic of Marx's style appealed to Vladimir far more than the impulsive emotionalism displayed by his brother Alexander Ulyanov. Alexander thought of assassinating a single man whose death would alter nothing. Marx—and after him, Lenin—wished to change everything. To his mother's despair, Vladimir turned every family meal into a heated discussion of *Das Kapital*. She despaired even more when he announced that, because Marx had declared that the core of the revolution would be the urban proletariat, he intended to follow his brother's footsteps to St. Petersburg.

In 1893, just one year before the youthful Tsar Nicholas mounted the throne, twenty-three-year-old Vladimir wearing his father's frock coat and top hat, arrived in St. Petersburg, where it was arranged that he would work in a law office. He joined a Marxist study group which met to debate in the evenings. At a traditional Russian Shrove Tuesday supper of *blinis*, Vladimir first met another dedicated Marxist, Nadezhda Krupskaya. A

round-faced, snub-nosed schoolteacher with short hair, full lips and unusually large eyes, Krupskaya, as she was always called, was a year older than Vladimir. After the party,

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Vladimir walked her home along the banks of the Neva. Thereafter they attended meetings together. At one of these, someone suggested the establishment of literary committees to educate the masses. "Vladimir Ilyich laughed," recalled Krupskaya, "and somehow the laughter sounded so wicked and dry. . . . 'Well,' he said, 'anybody who likes to save the fatherland with a literacy committee, why, fine, we shall not interfere.' "

In 1895, Vladimir went abroad for the first time. He was eager to go to Geneva to meet George Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism and idol of all young Russian revolutionaries. Yet Plekhanov, after twenty years in exile, had begun to lose touch with the movement in Russia, and Vladimir, anxious to talk, found him cold and distant. He went on to Zurich, Berlin and Paris, where he admired the wide tree-lined boulevards. A few weeks later, he returned to Russia with a false-bottomed trunk stuffed with wads of illegal literature, and plunged into organizing strikes and printing anti-government leaflets and manifestoes. For the sake of expediency, he avoided personal attacks on the young Tsar, who had been on the throne for less than a year. "Of course, if you start right away talking against the Tsar and the existing social system, you only antagonize the workers," he explained. Arrested in December 1895, he spent a year in jail in St. Petersburg and then was exiled for three years to Siberia.

The life of a political exile in Siberia during the last years of tsarist rule was not always a frozen nightmare. It could be and often was a remarkably permissive arrangement. Punishment consisted only in the requirement that the exile live in a prescribed area. If the exile had money, he could live exactly as he did in European Russia, establishing a household, keeping servants, receiving mail, books and visitors. Vladimir, released from prison in St. Petersburg, was given five days in St. Petersburg and four in Moscow to prepare for his exile. He traveled alone across the Urals, taking with him a thousand roubles and a trunk filled with a hundred books. His three years

in the quiet backwater Siberian village of Shushenskoe near the Mongolian border were among the happiest of his life. The river Shush flowed nearby and was filled with fish, the woods teemed with bears, squirrels and sables. Vladimir rented rooms, went swimming twice a day, acquired a dog and a gun and went hunting for duck and snipe. He was the wealthiest man in the village and demonstrated to a local merchant how to keep his books. His mail was enormous, and through it he maintained contact with Marxists in every corner of Russia and Europe. Several hours each day he worked on his lengthy work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.

He had been there a year when Krupskaya joined him. Herself arrested for organizing a strike, she had arranged to be sent to Shushen-skoe by telling the police that she was Vladimir's fiancée. Vladimir was delighted to see her and to have the books she brought, but less happy to welcome her mother, whom she had brought along and whom he disliked. To his own mother he wrote that Nadezhda "has had a tragi-comic condition made to her; if she does not marry immediately, she has to return to Ufa." On July 10, 1898, to solve the problem, they married. As newlyweds, they settled down to translate *The Theory and Practice of Trade Unionism* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb; their Russian version ran to a thousand pages. In the winter, they ice-skated on the frozen river. Vladimir was expert; with his hands in his pockets, he glided quickly away. Krupskaya tried valiantly and stumbled behind. The mother-in-law went once and fell flat on her back. But all three loved the whiteness of the Siberian winter, the clear, glowing quality of the air, the peaceful silence of the snowy woods. "It was Uke living," said Krupskaya, "in an enchanted kingdom."

Because his term ended before hers, Vladimir left his wife and her mother in Siberia and returned to St. Petersburg. Soon after, he drew up a petition from "the hereditary noble, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov" asking the authorities to permit him to return to Siberia to see his wife before going abroad. The petition was granted, Vladimir said goodbye and began a lonely life as a Russian revolutionary in the cities of Europe. His work as an underground organizer and a forceful writer had already brought him a significant reputation; this was enhanced when he became an editor and regular

contributor to *Iskra (The Spark),* a revolutionary magazine published abroad for smuggling into Russia. It was at this point that Vladimir began to use the pen name "Lenin." He wrote a pamphlet titled *What Is to Be Done?* which attracted wide attention, and drafted a program for the Social Democratic Party, as the exiled Russian Marxists had begun to call themselves. He no longer feared to attack the Tsar personally; "Nicholas the Bloody" and "Nicholas the Hangman" were favorite expressions.

When Krupskaya's term of exile was ended, she joined her husband in Munich. In 1902 the offices of *lskra* were moved to London, and Lenin and Krupskaya followed, arriving in a dense fog. For Krupskaya particularly, the transition from a peaceful Siberian village to an immense city with its noise and dirt and clanging traffic was painful. They rented an unfurnished two-room apartment at 30 Holford Square kept by a Mrs. Yeo, and Lenin, under the name "Jacob Richter," applied for entrance to the Reading Room of the British Museum. In the

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mornings he worked, and in the afternoons he and Krupskaya took trips around London on the top of a double-decker bus. There was trouble with Mrs. Yeo, who protested that Krupskaya did not hang curtains and wore no wedding ring. Finally a Russian friend warned the landlady that her lodgers were legally married and that if she persisted in chattering, she would be sued for defamation of character.

By his implacable certainty and singleness of purpose, his overwhelming energy and self-sacrifice, Lenin rapidly became a dominant figure within the party. Once recognized as a leader, he was fiercely intolerant and unwilling even to discuss his views with others unless circumstances forced him to do so. On the rock of Lenin's intransigence, the tiny party of exiles began to splinter.

It was to end this quarreling that the Social Democratic Party called a unity conference to be held in Brussels in July 1903. With forty-three delegates in attendance, the conference opened in an old flour warehouse draped with red cloth but infested with rats and fleas. The Belgian police, who had harassed the Russians by searching their rooms and opening their baggage,

suddenly gave the exiles twenty-four hours to leave the country. In a body, they boarded a boat and crossed the English Channel to London, arguing all the way.

Continuing their sessions in a socialist church in London, the delegates soon realized that their momentous "unity" conference was leading to a dangerous split between Plekhanov and Lenin. Plekhanov's speeches were lyrical and moving; Lenin's were simpler, cruder, more logical and more forceful. The divisive issue was the organizational structure of the party. Lenin wanted the party restricted to a small, tightly disciplined, professional elite. Plekhanov and others wanted to embrace all who were willing to join. On a vote, Lenin was narrowly victorious; thereafter his followers took the name of Bolsheviks (Majorityites) and the losers became the Mensheviks (Minor-ityites). Half fearful, half admiring, Plekhanov looked at Lenin and said, "Of this dough, Robespierres are made."

If Lenin was Robespierre, Alexander Kerensky was Russia's Danton. Himself struck by the coincidence of their background and upbringing, Kerensky once wrote: "Let no one say that Lenin is an expression of some kind of allegedly Asiatic 'elemental Russian force.' I was born under the same sky, I breathed the same air, I heard the same peasant songs and played in the same college playground. I saw the same limitless horizons from the same high bank of the Volga and I know in my blood and bones . . . that it is only by losing all touch with our native land, only by stamping out all native feeling for it,

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only so could one do what Lenin did in deliberately and cruelly mutilating Russia."

Fedor Kerensky, Alexander's father, was a gentle, scholarly man, destined originally to become a priest, who instead became a teacher. Early in his career, he married one of his pupils, an officer's daughter whose grandfather had been a serf. As director of the high school in Simbirsk, Fedor Kerensky was a leading member of local society. "From my earliest glimpses of consciousness I remember an enormous, splendid flat provided by the government," wrote Fedor's son, Alexander. "A long row of reception

rooms; governesses for the elder sisters, nurseries, children's parties in other 'society' households." At school, standing in chapel in a white suit and pink Eton bow, Alexander was an important boy, the headmaster's son. "I see myself in my early childhood as a very loyal little subject. I felt Russia deeply . . . the traditional Russia with its tsars and Orthodox Church, and the upper layer of provincial officialdom." In the same town of Simbirsk, the parish priest was Alexander's uncle. Alexander himself dreamed of becoming a "church bell-ringer, to stand on a high steeple, above everybody, near the clouds, and thence to call men to the service of God with the heavy peals of a huge bell."

In 1889, when Alexander was eight, Fedor Kerensky was promoted to become Director of Education for the Province of Turkestan, and the family moved to Tashkent. There, one night, Alexander overheard his parents discussing a pamphlet circulating illegally in which Leo Tolstoy protested the alliance of the backward Russian autocracy and the French republic which Tolstoy admired. But "my youthful adoration of the Tsar was in no way impaired through hearing Tolstoy," said Alexander; ". . . when Alexander III died, I read the official obituaries . . . and I wept long and copiously. I fervently attended every mass and requiem held for the Tsar and assiduously collected small contributions in my class for a wreath to the Emperor's memory."

In 1899, Kerensky arrived in St. Petersburg to study at the university. The city, bursting with creative excitement in every field of the arts and intellect, was packed with-students from every social class and every province of the empire. "I doubt whether higher education before the war was so cheap and so generally accessible anywhere in the world as it was in Russia. . . . The lecture fees were practically negligible, while all laboratory experiments and other practical work . . . were completely free . . . one could have dinner for from five to ten kopecks . . . the poorest among us often lived in very bad

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conditions, ran about from house to house giving lessons and did not dine every day; still we all lived and studied."

At first Kerensky, the loyal son of a government bureaucrat, had little interest in politics. But politics was a part of student life in St. Petersburg, and he became caught up in the waves of student agitation, mass meetings and strikes. Student opinion was split between the two leading Russian revolutionary parties, the Marxists and the Narod-niki or People's Party. Kerensky instinctively favored the latter. "Simbirsk, the memories of my childhood . . . the whole tradition of Russian literature drew me strongly towards . . . the Narodniki movement. . . . The Marxist teaching, borrowed in its entirety from abroad, deeply impressed youthful minds by its austere completeness and its orderly logic. But it tallied very badly with the social structure of Russia. In contrast . . . the Narodniki teaching was indistinct . . . inconsistent. . . . But it was the product of national Russian thought, rooted in the native soil, flowed entirely within the channel of the Russian humanitarian ideals."

Swept along by his youthful enthusiasm, Kerensky one day found himself making a speech at a student gathering; the following day, he was summoned before the rector and deans and temporarily sent home. He returned, planning an academic career, hoping to take up post-graduate study in criminal law. Before he had graduated, however, this "highly respectable pastime" began to pale for him—it "even, perhaps, repelled me a little. One does not want to attend to private interests when one dreams of serving the nation, of fighting for freedom. I decided to be a political lawyer."

For the next six years, Kerensky would travel to every corner of Russia, defending political prisoners against prosecution by the state. But before he left St. Petersburg, in 1905, an extraordinary episode occurred:

"It was Easter and I was returning late at night, or rather in the morning, about four o'clock from the traditional midnight celebration. I cannot attempt to describe the enchanting spell of St. Petersburg in the spring, in the early hours before dawn—particularly along the Neva or the embankments. . . . Happily aglow, I was walking home . . . and was about to cross the bridge by the Winter Palace. Suddenly, by the Admiralty, just opposite the Palace, I stopped involuntarily. On an overhanging corner

balcony stood the young Emperor, quite alone, deep in thought. A keen presentiment [struck me]: we should meet sometime, somehow our paths would cross."

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Kaiser's Advice

In the early years of the reign, along with his mother, the tutor Pobedonostsev and his uncles, Nicholas was also taken in hand by his cousin Kaiser William II of Germany. From the first months, William peered over the Tsar's shoulder, tapped him on the elbow, flattered him, lectured him and dominated him. William was nine years older than Nicholas and had become Kaiser in 1888, six years before Nicholas became Tsar. He thus had the advantage of experience as well as age, and he used it vigorously. For ten years, 1894-1904, the Kaiser manipulated Russian foreign policy by influencing the youthful, susceptible Tsar. Eventually, an older and wiser Nicholas shook off this meddlesome influence. But the harm was done. Urged on by William, Russia had suffered a military catastrophe in Asia.

In character, the two Emperors were totally unlike. Nicholas was gentle, shy and painfully aware of his own limitations; the Kaiser was a braggart, a bully and a strutting exhibitionist. Nicholas hated the idea of becoming a sovereign; WilUam all but wrenched the crown from the head of his dying father, Frederick III. As Tsar, Nicholas tried to live quietly with his wife, avoiding fuss. William delighted in parading about in high black boots, white cloak, a silver breastplate and an evil-looking spiked helmet.

William II's thin face, bleak gray eyes and light-colored curly hair were partially masked behind his proudest possession, his mustache. This was a wide, brushy business with remarkable upturned points, the creation of a skillful barber who appeared at the palace every morning with a can of wax. In part, this elegant bush helped to compensate for another physical distinction, one which William tried desperately to hide. His left arm was

miniaturized, a misfortune believed to have been caused by the excessive zeal with which an obstetrical surgeon used forceps at William's birth. William arrived in the

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world with his arm pulled almost from its socket; thereafter the arm grew much too slowly. As much as possible, he kept this damaged limb out of sight, tucking it into especially designed pockets in his clothes. At meals, the Kaiser could not cut his meat without the aid of a dinner companion.

In the military atmosphere of the Prussian court in which he grew up, William's bad arm had a pronounced effect on his character. A Prussian prince had to ride and shoot. William drove himself to do both expertly and went on to become a swimmer, rower, tennis player as well. His good right arm became extraordinarily powerful, and its grip was as strong as iron. William increased the sensation of pain in those he greeted by turning the rings on his right hand inward, so that the jewels would bite deep into the unlucky flesh.

When he was nineteen and a student in Bonn, William fell in love with Princess Elizabeth of Hesse, the Empress Alexandra's older sister. William often visited in Darmstadt with the Hessian family of his mother's sister. Even as a guest, he was selfish and rude. First he demanded to ride, then he wanted to shoot or row or play tennis. Often he would throw down his racket in the middle of a game or suddenly climb off his horse and demand that everybody go with him to do something else. When he was tired, he ordered his cousins to sit quietly around him and listen while he read aloud from the Bible. Alix was only six when these visits occurred, and she was ignored. But Ella was a blossoming fourteen, and William always wanted her to play with him, to sit near him, to listen closely. Ella thought he was dreadful. William left Bonn, burning with frustration, and four months later he became engaged to another German princess, Augusta of Schleswig-Holstein. After Ella married Grand Duke Serge of Russia, the Kaiser refused to see her. Later he admitted that he had spent most of his time in Bonn writing love poetry to his beautiful cousin.

William's restless temperament, his vanities and delusions, his rapid plunges from hysterical excitement to black despair kept his ministers in a state of constant apprehension. "The Kaiser," said Bismarck, "is like a balloon. If you don't keep fast hold of the string, you never know where he'll be off to." William scribbled furiously on the margins of official documents: "Nonsense!" "Lies!" "Rascals!" "Stale fish!" "Typical oriental procrastinating lies!" "False as a Frenchman usually is!" "England's fault, not ours!" He treated his dignitaries with an odd familiarity, often giving venerable admirals and generals a friendly smack on the backside. Visitors, official and otherwise, were treated to dazzling displays of verbosity, but they could never be sure

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how much to believe. "The Kaiser," explained a dismayed official of the German Foreign Ministry, "has the unfortunate habit of talking all the more rapidly and incautiously the more a matter interests him. Hence it happens that he generally has committed himself . . . before the responsible advisors or the experts have been able to submit their opinions." To witness the Kaiser laughing was an awesome experience. "If the Kaiser laughs, which he is sure to do a good many times," wrote one observer, "he will laugh with absolute abandonment, throwing his head back, opening his mouth to the fullest possible extent, shaking his whole body, and often stamping with one foot to show his excessive enjoyment of any joke."

William was convinced of his own infallibility and signed his documents "The All Highest." He hated parliaments. Once, at a colonial exhibition, he was shown the hut of an African king, with the skulls of the king's enemies impaled on poles. "If only I could see the Reichstag stuck up like that," blurted the Kaiser.

William's bad manners were as offensive to his relatives as to everyone else. He publicly accused his own mother, formerly Princess Victoria of England, of being pro-English rather than pro-German. Writing to *her* mother, Queen Victoria of England, the Princess said of her twenty-eight-year-old son, "You ask how Willy was when he was here. He was as rude, as disagreeable and as impertinent to me as possible." Tsar Alexander III snubbed William,

whom he considered "a badly brought up, untrustworthy boy." When he spoke to the Kaiser, Alexander III always turned his back and talked over his shoulder. Empress Marie loathed William. She saw in him the royal *nouveau riche* whose empire had been made in part by trampling over her beloved Denmark and wrenching away the Danish provinces of Schleswig-Holstein. Marie's feeling was that of her sister Alexandra, who was married to King Edward VII. "And so my Géorgie boy has become a real, live, filthy, blue-coated Pickelhaube German soldier. I never thought I would live to see the day," Queen Alexandra wrote to her son, later King George V, when George became an honorary colonel in one of the Kaiser's regiments. When it came Russia's turn to make the Kaiser an admiral in the Russian navy, Nicholas tried to tell Marie gently. "I think, no matter how disagreeable it may be, we are obUged to let him wear our naval uniform; particularly since he made me last year a Captain in his own navy. . . . *C'est à vomir!"* After another visit from the Kaiser, he wrote, "Thank God the German visit is over. . . . She [William's wife] tried to be charming and looked very ugly in rich clothes chosen without taste. The hats she wore in the evening were particularly impossible." The Empress

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Alexandra could barely be civil to William. She turned away when he made his heavy jokes, and when the Kaiser picked up her daughters in his arms, she winced. A mutual loathing of William was perhaps the point of closest agreement between the young Empress and her mother-in-law.

Nicholas himself was both repelled and attracted by the Kaiser's flamboyance. From the first, William managed to restore the old custom of former monarchs who kept personal attachés in each other's private retinues. This, the Kaiser pointed out, would enable Nicholas "to quickly communicate with me . . . without the lumbering and indiscreet apparatus of Chancelleries, Embassies, etc."

The famous "Willy-Nicky" correspondence began. Writing in English and addressing himself to his "Dearest Nicky" and signing himself "Your affectionate Willy," the Kaiser drenched the Tsar with flattery and suggestions. Delighted by Nicholas's "senseless dreams" address to the Tver

Zemstvo, he hammered on the importance of maintaining autocracy, "the task which has been set us by the Lord of Lords." He advised that "the great bulk of the Russian people still place their faith in their . . . Tsar and worship his hallowed person," and predicted that "the people will . . . cheer you and fall on their knees and pray for you." When they met in person, William tapped Nicholas on the shoulder and said, "My advice to you is more speeches and more parades."

Using this private channel, William bent himself to undo the anti-German alliance between Russia and France. Nicholas had been Tsar less than a year when the Kaiser wrote to him: "It is not the friendship of France and Russia that makes me uneasy, but the danger to our principle of monarchism from the lifting up of the Republicans on a pedestal. . . . The Republicans are revolutionaries *de nature.* The French Republic has arisen from the source of the great revolution and propagates its ideas. The blood of their Majesties is still on that country. Think—has it since then ever been happy or quiet again? Has it not staggered from bloodshed to bloodshed and from war to war, till it soused Europe and Russia in streams of Blood? Nicky, take my word, the curse of God has stricken that people forever. We Christian kings have one holy duty imposed on us by Heaven: to uphold the principle of the Divine Right of Kings."

Russia's alliance with France withstood these assaults, but on another theme the Kaiser's exhortations had a striking success. William hated Orientals, and often raved about "the Yellow Peril." In 1900, bidding farewell to a shipload of German marines bound for China to help disperse the Boxer revolutionaries, the Kaiser shouted blood-curdling

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instructions: "You must know, my men, that you are about to meet a crafty, well-armed, cruel foe! Meet him and beat him. Give no quarter. Take no prisoners. Kill him when he falls into your hands. Even as a thousand years ago, The Huns under King Attila made such a name for themselves as still resounds in terror through legend and fable, so may the name of German resound through Chinese history a thousand years from now. . . ."

In writing to the Tsar, William elevated his prejudice to a loftier pedestal. Russia, he declared, had a "Holy Mission" in Asia: "Clearly, it is the great task of the future for Russia to cultivate the Asian continent and to defend Europe from the inroads of the Great Yellow Race. In this you will always find me on your side, ready to help you as best I can. You have well understood the call of Providence ... in the Defense of the Cross and the old Christian European culture against the inroads of the Mongols and Buddhism. ... I would let nobody try to interfere with you and attack from behind in Europe during the time you were fulfilling the great mission which Heaven has shaped for you."

William pursued the theme into allegorical art. He sent the Tsar a portrait showing himself in shining armor, gripping a huge crucifix in his raised right arm. At his feet crouched the figure of Nicholas, clothed in a long Byzantine gown. On the Tsar's face, as he gazed up at the Kaiser, was a look of humble admiration. In the background, on a blue sea, cruised a fleet of German and Russian battleships. In 1902, after watching a fleet of real Russian battleships steam through naval maneuvers, William signaled from his yacht to the Tsar aboard the *Standart*, "The Admiral of the Atlantic salutes the Admiral of the Pacific."

William's hatred of Orientals was genuine, but there was more to his game than simple prejudice. For years, Bismarck had urgently promoted Russian expansion in Asia as a means of diminishing Russian influence in Europe. "Russia has nothing to do in the West," said the crafty German Chancellor. "There she can only catch Nihilism and other diseases. Her mission is in Asia; there she represents civilization." By turning Russia away from Europe, Germany decreased the danger of war in the Balkans between Russia and Austria, and Germany herself was left a free hand with Russia's ally, France. In addition, wherever Russia moved in Asia, she was certain to get into trouble: either with Britain in India or with Japan in the Pacific. William II enthusiastically revived Bismarck's design. "We must try to tie Russia down in East Asia," he confided to one of his ministers, "so that she pays less attention to Europe and the Near East."

The Kaiser was not the only man filling Nicholas's head with expansionist dreams; many Russians were equally anxious to go adventuring in Asia. The temptations were strong. Russia's only Pacific port, Vladivostock, was imprisoned in ice three months a year. Southward, the decrepit Chinese Empire stretched like a rotting carcass along the Pacific. In 1895, to Russia's chagrin, the vigorous, newly Westernized island empire of Japan occupied several Chinese territories which Russia coveted, among them the great warm-water port and fortress of Port Arthur. Six days after Japan had swallowed Port Arthur, Russia intervened, declaring that Japan's new arrangements "constituted a perpetual menace to the peace of the Far East." Japan, unwilling to risk a war, was forced to disgorge Port Arthur. Three years later, Russia extracted a ninety-nine-year lease on the port from the helpless Chinese.

The occupation of Port Arthur was heady stuff in St. Petersburg. "Glad news . . . ," wrote Nicholas. "At last we shall have an ice-free port." A new spur of the Trans-Siberian was constructed directly across Manchuria, and when the railroad was finished, the Russian workmen and Russian railway guards remained behind. In 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion, Russia "temporarily" occupied Manchuria. Only one further prize remained on the entire North Pacific coast, the peninsula of Korea. Although Japan clearly regarded Korea as essential to her security, a group of Russian adventurers resolved to steal it. Their plan was to establish a private company, the Yalu Timber Company, and begin moving Russian soldiers into Korea disguised as workmen. If they ran into trouble, the Russian government could always disclaim responsibility. If they succeeded, the empire would acquire a new province and they themselves would have vast economic concessions within it. Witte, the Finance Minister, vigorously opposed this risky policy. But Nicholas, impressed by the leader of the adventurers, a former cavalry officer named Bezobrazov, approved the plan, whereupon Witte in 1903 resigned from the government. Predictably, Kaiser William chimed in, "It is evident to every unbiased mind that Korea must and will be Russian."

The Russian advance into Korea made war with Japan inevitable. The Japanese would have preferred an agreement: Russia to keep Manchuria, leaving Japan a free hand in Korea. But the Mikado's ministers could not

stand by and watch the Russians swarm along the whole coast of Asia, planting the Tsar's double-headed eagle in every port and promontory facing their islands. In 1901, the greatest of Japanese statesmen, Marquis Ito, came to St. Petersburg to negotiate. He was treated shamefully. Ignored, finding no one to talk to, he put

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his requests in writing; replies were delayed for days on trifling pretexts. Eventually, he left Russia in despair. Through 1903, the permanent Japanese Minister in St. Petersburg, Kurino, issued urgent warnings and begged in vain for an audience with the Tsar. On February 3, 1904, bowing grimly, Kurino also left Russia.

In Russia, it was taken for granted that if war came, Russia would win easily. It would not be necessary for the Russian army to fire even a single shot, gibed the drawing-room generals. The Russians would annihilate the Japanese "monkeys" simply by throwing their caps at them. Vyacheslav Plehve, the Minister of Interior, wrestling with a growing plague of rebellious outbursts, openly welcomed the idea of "a small victorious war" to distract the people. "Russia has been made by bayonets, not diplomacy," he declared.

Nicholas, lulled into belief in Russia's overwhelming superiority, assumed that the decision was his, that war would not come unless Russia began it. Foreign ambassadors and ministers, gathered for the annual gala diplomatic reception on New Year's Day, heard the Tsar talk grandly of Russia's military power and beg that there would not be a test of his patience and love of peace. Nevertheless, during the month of January 1904, Nicholas's indecision kept the Kaiser in a state of constant alarm. He wrote, urging that Russia accept no settlement with Japan, but go to war. He was appalled when Nicholas replied, "I am still in good hopes about a calm and peaceful understanding." William showed this letter to his Chancellor, von Bulow, and complained bitterly about the Tsar's unmanly attitude. "Nicholas is doing himself a lot of harm by his flabby way of going on," said the Kaiser. Such behavior, he added, was "compromising all great sovereigns."

Japan made a Russian decision unnecessary. On the evening of February 6, 1904, Nicholas returned from the theatre to be handed a telegram from Admiral Alexeiev, Russian Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief in the Far East:

"About midnight, Japanese destroyers made a sudden attack on the squadron anchored in the outer harbor of Port Arthur. The battleships *Tsarevich*, *Retvizan* and the cruiser *Pallada* were torpedoed. The importance of the damage is being ascertained." Stunned, Nicholas copied the text of the telegram into his diary and added, "This without a declaration of war. May God come to our aid."

The next morning, huge, patriotic crowds filled the streets of St. Petersburg. Students carrying banners marched to the Winter Palace and stood before it singing hymns. Nicholas went to the window and saluted. Amid the rejoicing, he was depressed. He had flirted with war

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and tried to bluff his enemies, but the idea of bloodshed revolted him. The people now looked forward to a quick Russian victory; Nicholas knew better. As confidential reports of the damage at Port Arthur continued to arrive, Nicholas set down his "sharp grief for the fleet and for the opinion that people will have of Russia."

The disaster that followed was far greater than even Nicholas had feared. In scarcely a single generation, Japan had leaped from feudalism to modern industrial and military power. Military instructors from France and naval instructors from England had helped create an efficient army with skilled, imaginative commanders. In the two years since Ito returned, humiliated, from St. Petersburg, Japan's generals and admirals had perfected their plans for war against Russia. The moment further negotiations seemed futile, they struck.

From the beginning, the match was unequal. Although the Japanese army consisted of 600,000 men and the Russian army numbered almost three million, Japan threw 150,000 men into battle at once on the Asian mainland. There they faced only 80,000 regular Russian soldiers, along

with 23,000 garrison troops and 30,000 railway guards. Japanese supply lines stretched back to the homeland over only a few hundred miles of water, and losses could be quickly replaced. The Russians had to haul guns, munitioris, food and reinforcements four thousand miles over the single track of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Even the railroad was not complete; around the mountainous southern end of Lake Baikal, a gap of a hundred miles yawned in the track. In summer, the gap was bridged by lake ferries; in the winter, every soldier and shell had to be moved across the ice in horse-drawn sledges.

The Russian Far Eastern Fleet and the Imperial Japanese Navy were more equal in size; the Russians actually had more battleships and cruisers, the Japanese more destroyers and torpedo boats. But with their first surprise attack, the Japanese seized the initiative and gained command of the sea. Russian ships which survived the war's first blow were hemmed in by Japanese minefields and harassed at their moorings by further torpedo attacks. When Russia's most distinguished admiral, Makarov, sortied from the harbor of Port Arthur on April 13, his flagship, the battleship *Petropavlovsk*, hit a mine and sank with a loss of seven hundred men, Makarov included. "This morning came news of inexpressible sadness . . . ," Nicholas wrote of the disaster. "All day long I could think of nothing but this terrible blow. . . . May the will of God be done in all things, but we poor mortals must beg mercy of the Lord."

With the sea secured, Japanese expeditionary forces were free to

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land where they chose along the mainland coast. One army came ashore in Korea, overwhelmed five Siberian regiments, crossed the Yalu River and marched north into Manchuria. Another Japanese force landed at the head of the Yellow Sea and laid siege to Port Arthur with monster eleven-inch siege cannons. Through the summer and fall of 1904, the Japanese infantry stormed one fortified height around Port Arthur after another; by January 1905, when Port Arthur finally surrendered, it had cost Japan 57,780 men and Russia 28,200.

From St. Petersburg, Nicholas watched with dismay. His first instinct had been to go to the front and place himself at the head of his beleaguered troops. Once again, his uncles overruled his inclination. To his mother the Tsar wrote: "My conscience is often very troubled by my staying here instead of sharing the dangers and privations of the army. I asked Uncle Alexis yesterday what he thought about it: he thinks my presence with the army in this war is not necessary— still, to stay behind in times like these is very upsetting to me."

Instead, Nicholas toured military encampments, reviewing troops and passing out images of St. Seraphim to soldiers about to entrain for the Far East. The Empress canceled all social activities and turned the huge ballrooms of the Winter Palace into workrooms where hundreds of women of all classes sat at tables, making clothing and bandages. Every day Alexandra visited these rooms and often sat down herself to sew a dressing or a hospital shirt.

As the grim prospect of a Russian defeat seemed ever more likely, Nicholas, urged on by William, ordered the Russian Baltic Fleet to travel around the world to restore Russian naval supremacy in the Pacific. Admiral Rozhdestvensky, the fleet commander, viewed the project without much hope, but once the Tsar had commanded, he placed himself on his bridge and ordered his ships made ready for sea. In October 1904, Nicholas took the final salute from the deck of the *Standart.* As the fleet of gray battleships and cruisers slowly left its anchorage and steamed out into the Baltic, he wrote, "Bless its voyage, Lord. Permit that it arrive safe and sound at its destination, that it succeed in its terrible mission for the safety and happiness of Russia."

Unfortunately, long before he got anywhere near Japan, Admiral Rozhdestvensky almost involved Russia in a war with England. The Admiral had been much impressed by Japan's surprise torpedo attack on the fleet at Port Arthur. Assuming that such wily tactics would have a sequel, he suspected that Japanese ships flying false colors might sb'p through neutral European waters to deliver another fright-

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ful blow to the Russian navy. No man to be tricked, the Admiral ordered extra lookouts posted from the moment his ships left home port. Steaming at night through the North Sea in this trigger-happy state, Russian captains suddenly found themselves surrounded by a flotilla of small boats. Without asking questions, Russian guns sent shells crashing into the frail hulls of British fishing boats in the waters of Dogger Bank. After the first salvos, the Russians realized their mistake. Such was the Admiral's fear, however, that, rather than stopping to pick up survivors, he steamed off into the night.

Only one boat had been sunk and two men killed, but Britain was outraged. Nicholas, already irritated by Britain's diplomatic support of Japan, was in no mood to apologize. "The English are very angry and near the boiling point," he wrote to Marie. "They are even said to be getting their fleet ready for action. Yesterday I sent a telegram to Uncle Bertie, expressing my regret, but I did not apologize. ... I do not think the English will have the cheek to go further than to indulge in threats."

The Russian Ambassador in London, Count Benckendorff, more accurately assessed the extent of Britain's anger and quickly recommended that both parties submit the matter to the International Court at The Hague. Nicholas reluctantly agreed, and eventually Russia paid ,£65,000 in damages.

Leaving this nasty crisis in his wake, Admiral Rozhdestvensky steamed into the Atlantic, bound for the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. He stopped and lay at anchor for three months at the French island of Madagascar while Russian diplomatic agents scoured the world's shipyards seeking to buy extra battleships to reinforce the fleet. The Kaiser ordered German merchant vessels to fuel the Russian squadron. At secluded anchorages in Madagascar and Camranh Bay, Indochina, German seamen transferred hundreds of tons of coal into the bunkers of Admiral Rozhdestvensky's weath-erbeaten ships.

At two o'clock in the afternoon on May 27, 1905, the Russian fleet, led by eight battleships steaming in columns, appeared in the Strait of Tsushima between Japan and Korea. Admiral Togo, the Japanese commander, ranged his ships seven thousand yards across the head of the Russian columns,

bringing his guns to bear first on one Russian ship, then another. As this blizzard of Japanese shells ripped though them, Russian warships exploded, capsized or simply stopped and began to drift. Within forty-five minutes it was over. Togo flashed his torpedo boats to attack and finish the cripples. All

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eight Russian battleships were lost, along with seven of Rozhdestvensky's twelve cruisers and six of his nine destroyers.

Tsushima, the greatest sea battle since Trafalgar, had a powerful impact on naval thinking everywhere. It confronted Britain, whose whole existence depended on the Royal Navy, with the appalling prospect of losing a war in one afternoon in a general fleet engagement. The Kaiser, who cherished his High Seas Fleet, became equally frightened. As a result, during the four years of the First World War the huge British and German navies collided only once, at Jutland. In the United States, Tsushima convinced President Theodore Roosevelt that no nation could afford to divide its battle fleet as the Russians had done. Roosevelt immediately began pressing ahead with his plan to build a canal through Panama to link the two oceans that washed American shores.

The Tsar was traveling aboard the Imperial train when the news of the disaster reached him. He sent for the Minister of War, General Sakharov, who remained alone with him for a lengthy discussion. Returning to the lounge car where the staff was waiting to learn Nicholas's reaction, Sakharov declared, "His Majesty showed that he thoroughly recognized the problems ahead of us and he sketched a very sensible plan of action. His composure is admirable." In his diary that night, Nicholas wrote, "Definite confirmation of the terrible news concerning the almost complete destruction of our squadron."

Recognizing that Russia no longer had a chance of winning the war, Nicholas sent for Sergius Witte and dispatched him to America to make the best of a peace conference which Roosevelt had offered to mediate. Although the war was ending as he had predicted, Witte accepted the assignment grudgingly. "When a sewer has to be cleaned, they send for

Witte," he grumbled. "But as soon as work of a cleaner and nicer kind appears, plenty of other candidates spring up."

Crossing the Atlantic on the German liner *Wilhelm der Grosse* accompanied by a swarm of European journalists, Witte struck a pose as the "representative of the greatest empire on earth, undismayed by the fact that that mighty empire had become temporarily involved in a slight difficulty." Arriving in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the scene of the peace conference, to find Americans filled with admiration for the "plucky little Japs," Witte set out to reverse this image. "I may say that I succeeded in swerving American public opinion over to us," he noted afterward. "I gradually won the press over to my side. ... In this regard, the Japanese plenipotentiary Komura

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committed a grave blunder. . . . He rather avoided the press. ... I took advantage of my adversary's tactlessness to stir up the press against him and his cause. . . . My personal behavior may also partly account for the transformation of American public opinion. I took care to treat all the Americans with whom I came in contact with the utmost simplicity of manner. When traveling, whether on special trains, government motorcars or steamers, I thanked everyone, talked with the engineers and shook hands with them—in a word, I treated everybody, of whatever social position, as an equal. This behavior was a heavy strain on me as all acting is to the unaccustomed, but it surely was worth the trouble."

Maneuvered by Witte into the role of villains, the Japanese envoys had difficulty in pressing all of their demands. Finally Nicholas— knowing that Japan was financially unable to continue the war—told his Foreign Minister: "Send Witte my order to end the parley tomorrow in any event. I prefer to continue the war, rather than to wait for gracious concessions on the part of Japan." Komura, who had come as victor, accepted a compromise.

Lunching after the conference with President Theodore Roosevelt at Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay, Long Island, Witte described the meal as "for a European, almost indigestible. There was no tablecloth and ice water

instead of wine. . . . Americans have no culinary taste and . . . they can eat almost anything that comes their way." He was "struck by . . . [Roosevelt's] ignorance of international politics. ... I heard the most naïve judgments." Nor did Roosevelt care much for Witte. "I cannot say that I liked him," said the President, "for I thought his bragging and bluster not only foolish, but shockingly vulgar when compared with the gentlemanly restraint of the Japanese. Moreover, he struck me as a very selfish man, totally without ideals."

Returning to Russia, Witte was pleased with himself. "I acquitted myself with complete success," he wrote, "so that in the end the Emperor Nicholas was morally compelled to reward me in an altogether exceptional manner by bestowing upon me the rank of count. This he did in spite of his and especially Her Majesty's personal dislike for me, and also in spite of all the base intrigues conducted against me by a host of bureaucrats and courtiers whose vileness was only equalled by their stupidity."

In fact, Witte had handled the negotiations brilliantly; "no diplomat by profession could have done it," said Alexander Izvolsky, who was soon to become Russia's Foreign Minister. Nicholas received the returning hero on his yacht in September 1905. "Witte came to see

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us," wrote the Tsar to his mother. "He was very charming and interesting. After a long talk, I told him of his new honor. I am creating him a Count. He went quite stiff with emotion and then tried three times to kiss my hand!"

Tsushima abruptly ended Russia's "Holy Mission" in Asia. Beaten and humiliated by the Japanese "monkeys," the Russian giant staggered back toward Europe. In Berlin, as he watched events unfold, the Kaiser was not displeased. With a sullen, defeated army, no navy and a disillusioned, embittered people, the Tsar was no longer a neighbor to fear. William assumed that he still possessed Nicholas's friendship. He soothed the Tsar, reminding him that even Frederick the Great and Napoleon had suffered defeats. He strutted in the loyalty he had shown to Russia by "guarding" Russia's frontier in Europe—presumably from his own ally, Austria. Now,

stepping smoothly over the ruins of the Far Eastern adventure he had done so much to promote, the Kaiser reverted to his original purpose: breaking the Russian alliance with France by seducing Nicholas into a new alliance of autocrats between Russia and Germany.

This last spectacular attempt by the Kaiser to manipulate the Tsar was the episode at Bjôrkô on the coast of Finland in July 1905. It had its immediate origins in the international furor arising from the incident at Dogger Bank. The British press, loudly advocating that the Royal Navy prevent German steamers from coaling the Russian warships, had driven the Kaiser to frenzy. Nicholas replied to a letter from William by saying, "I agree fully with your complaints about England's behavior ... it is certainly high time to put a stop to this. The only way, as you say, would be that Germany, Russia and France should at once unite to abolish Anglo-Japanese arrogance and insolence. Would you like to lay down and frame the outlines of such a treaty? As soon as it is accepted by us, France is bound to join as an ally."

William was overjoyed and feverishly began to draw up the treaty. The following summer, the Kaiser privately telegraphed the Tsar, inviting him to come as a "simple tourist" to a rendezvous at sea. Nicholas agreed and left Peterhof one afternoon without taking any of his ministers. The two Imperial yachts, *Hohenzollern* and *Standart*, anchored that night in the remote Finnish fjord and the two Emperors had dinner together. The next morning William reached into his pocket and "by chance" found the draft of a treaty of alliance between Russia and Germany. Among its provisions was an agreement that

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France was to be told only after Russia and Germany had signed and then invited to join if she wished. Nicholas read it and, according to William, said, "That is quite excellent. I agree."

"Should you like to sign it," said the Kaiser casually, "it would be a very nice souvenir of our interview."

Nicholas signed and William was jubilant. With tears of joy, he told Nicholas that he was sure that all of their mutual ancestors were looking

down on them from heaven in ecstatic approval.

Upon returning to their respective capitals, both Emperors received unpleasant shocks. Von Bulow, the German Chancellor, criticized the treaty as useless to Germany and threatened to resign. The deflated Kaiser wrote his Chancellor a hysterical letter: "The morning after the arrival of your letter of resignation would no longer find your Emperor alive. Think of my poor wife and children." In St. Petersburg, Lamsdorf, the Russian Foreign Minister, was aghast; he could not believe his eyes and ears. The French alliance, he pointed out to Nicholas, was the cornerstone of Russian foreign policy; it could not be lightly thrown aside. France, said Lamsdorf, would never join an alliance with Germany, and Russia could not join such an alliance without first consulting France.

Eventually William was informed that, as written, the treaty could not be honored. The Kaiser responded with an impassioned plea to the Tsar to reconsider: "Your Ally notoriously left you in the lurch during the whole war, whereas Germany helped you in every way. . . . We joined hands and signed before God who heard our vows. What is signed is signed! God is our testator!" But the Bjorko treaty was never invoked, and the private Willy-Nicky correspondence soon dwindled away. Thereafter, the Kaiser's influence over the Tsar also faded rapidly. But Nicholas's eyes were opened late. By 1905, he had lost a war and his country was rushing full tilt into revolution.

CHAPTER NINE 1905

The "small victorious war" so ardently desired by Plehve, the Minister of Interior, was over, but Plehve did not Uve to see it. Vyacheslav Plehve was a professional policeman: his most spectacular piece of work had been the rounding up of everyone involved in the plot which killed Alexander II. Appointed Minister of Interior in 1902 after his predecessor had been killed by a terrorist, Plehve was described by a colleague as "a splendid man for little things, a stupid man for affairs of state." As Minister, he permitted no political assemblies of any kind. Students were not allowed to walk together

on the streets of Moscow or St. Petersburg. It was impossible to give a party for more than a few people without first getting written permission from the police.

Russia's five million Jews were a special object of Plehve's hatred.* In a bitter cycle of repression and retaliation, Russian Jews were driven in numbers into the ranks of revolutionary terrorism. Under Plehve, local police were encouraged to turn a blind eye toward anti-Semites. On Easter Day, Plehve's policy led to the most celebrated pogrom of Nicholas's reign: a mob running wild in the town of Kishenev in Bessarabia murdered forty-five Jews and destroyed

* Anti-Semitism, an endemic disease in Russia, stemmed from the oldest traditions of the Orthodox Church. "To the devoutly . . . Orthodox Russians," explains a Jewish historian, "... the Jew was an infidel, the poisoner of the true faith, the killer of Christ." Every tsar supported this faith. Peter the Great, refusing to admit Jewish merchants to Russia, declared, "It is my endeavor to eradicate evil, not to multiply it." Catherine the Great endorsed Peter's decision, saying, "From the enemies of Christ, I desire neither gain nor profit." It was Catherine who, upon absorbing heavily Jewish regions of eastern Poland into her empire, established the Jewish Pale of Settlement, an area in Poland and the Ukraine to which all Russian Jews supposedly were restricted. The restrictions were porous, but the life of a Jew in nineteenth-century Russia remained subject to harassment and persecution. That this antagonism was religious rather than racial was repeatedly illustrated by cases of Jews who gave up their faith, accepted Orthodoxy and moved freely into the general structure of Russian society.

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six hundred houses; the police did not trouble to intervene until the end of the second day. The pogrom was condemned by the government, the governor of the province was dismissed and the rioters tried and punished, but Plehve remained in power. Witte bluntly told the Interior Minister that his policies were making his own assassination inevitable. In July 1904, Plehve was blown to pieces by an assassin's bomb.

Plehve's death did not destroy his most inventive project, a workers' movement created and secretly guided by the police. The movement was led by a youthful St. Petersburg priest, Father George Gapon, who hoped by his efforts to immunize the workers against revolutionary viruses and strengthen their monarchist feelings. Economic grievances were to be channeled away from the government in the general direction of the employers. The employers, understandably touchy, were persuaded in turn

that it was better to have an organization watched and controlled by the police than to leave the workers to the dangerous blandishments of clandestine socialist propagandists.

Gapon was not an ordinary hack police agent. His interest in the people was genuine, and in the working-class districts of St. Petersburg where he had worked and preached for several years, he was a popular figure. He sincerely believed that the purpose of his Assembly of Russian Workingmen was to strive "in a noble manner under the leadership of educated, genuinely Russian people and clergymen toward a philosophy of life and the status of the working man in a sound Christian spirit." By some, Gapon's police connections were suspected, but the mass of workers, happy enough to have any machinery which enabled them to meet and protest, looked to him for leadership.

Early in January 1905, the humiliating news of Port Arthur's surrender sent a wave of protest against mismanagement of the war sweeping across the country. In St. Petersburg, a minor strike at the huge Putilov steel works suddenly spread until thousands of disillusioned, restless workers were out on strike.* Swept along by this surge of feeling, Gapon had a choice: he could lead or be left behind.

* The era was one of bitter labor strife in all industrial nations. In the United States, for example, during the Pullman strike of 1894, Judge William Howard Taft, a future President, wrote to his wife, "It will be necessary for the military to kill some of the mob before the trouble can be stayed. They have killed only six as yet. This is hardly enough to make an impression." In the end, 30 were killed, 60 wounded and 700 arrested. Six years later, Theodore Roosevelt, campaigning for Vice President, said privately, "The sentiment now animating a large proportion of our people can only be suppressed ... by taking ten or a dozen of their leaders out, standing them against the wall and shooting them dead. I believe it will come to that. These leaders are planning a social revolution and the subversion of the American Republic."

Rejecting his role as agent of the police, he chose to lead. For a week he went from meeting hall to meeting hall, giving dozens of speeches, whipping up impassioned support and, day by day, enlarging his list of demands. Before the end of the week, carried away by his sense of mission, he was rallying the workers with an extravagant theatrical vision: He personally would lead a mass march to the Winter Palace, where he would

hand to Nicholas a petition on behalf of the Russian people. Gapon visualized the scene taking place on a balcony above the vast sea of Russian faces, where the *Batiushka-Tsar,* acting out the Russian fairy tale, would deliver his people from their evil oppressors, named in the petition as the "despotic and irresponsible government" and the "capitalistic exploiters, crooks and robbers of the Russian people." Along with deliverance, the petition also demanded, specifically, a constituent assembly, universal suffrage, universal education, separation of church and state, amnesty for all political prisoners, an income tax, a minimum wage and an eight-hour day.

Gapon did not communicate the extent of his intentions to any responsible government official; had he done so, they probably would not have listened. Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, the newly appointed liberal Minister of Interior, was concerned for most of the week about the Tsar's ceremonial visit to St. Petersburg on Thursday, January 19, for the traditional religious service of the Blessing of the Waters. In balance, that day was a success: Nicholas was received with cheers as he drove past dense crowds in the streets. While he stood on the Neva bank, a cannon employed in the ceremonial salute fired a live charge which landed near the Tsar and wounded a policeman, but investigation proved that the shot was an accident, not part of a plot.

Only on Saturday, January 21, when Gapon informed the government that the march would take place the following day and asked that the Tsar be present to receive his petition, did Mirsky suddenly become alarmed. The ministers met hurriedly to consider the problem. There was never any thought that the Tsar, who was at Tsarskoe Selo and had been told of neither the march nor the petition, would actually be asked to meet Gapon. The suggestion that some other member of the Imperial family receive the petition was rejected. Finally, informed by the Prefect of Police that he lacked the men to pluck Gapon from among his followers and place him under arrest, Mirsky and his colleagues could think of nothing to do except bring additional troops into the city and hope that matters would not get out of hand.

On Saturday night, Nicholas learned for the first time from Mirsky what the morrow might bring. "Troops have been brought from the

outskirts to reinforce the garrison," he wrote in his diary. "Up to now the workers have been calm. Their number is estimated at 120,000. At the head of their union is a kind of socialist priest named Gapon. Mirsky came this evening to present his report on the measures taken."

Sunday morning, January 22, 1905, with an icy wind driving flurries of snow, Father Gapon began his march. In the workers' quarters, processions formed to converge on the center of the city. Locking arms, they streamed peacefully through the streets in rivers of cheerful, expectant humanity. Some carried crosses, icons and religious banners, others carried national flags and portraits of the Tsar. As they walked, they sang religious hymns and the Imperial anthem, "God Save the Tsar." At two p.m. all of the converging processions were scheduled to arrive at the Winter Palace.

There was no single confrontation with the troops. Throughout the city, at bridges and on strategic boulevards, the marchers found their way blocked by Unes of infantry, backed by Cossacks and Hussars. Uncertain what this meant, still not expecting violence, anxious not to be late to see the Tsar, the processions moved forward. In a moment of horror, the soldiers opened fire. Bullets smacked into the bodies of men, women and children. Crimson blotches stained the hard-packed snow. The official number of victims was ninety-two dead and several hundred wounded; the actual number was probably several times higher. Gapon vanished and the other leaders of the march were seized. Expelled from the capital, they circulated through the empire, exaggerating the casualties into thousands.

The day, which became known as "Bloody Sunday," was a turning point in Russian history. It shattered the ancient, legendary belief that tsar and the people were one. As bullets riddled their icons, their banners and their portraits of Nicholas, the people shrieked, "The Tsar will not help us!" It would not be long before they added the grim corollary, "And so we have no Tsar." Abroad, the clumsy action seemed premeditated cruelty, and Ramsay MacDonald, a future Labor Prime Minister of Britain, attacked the Tsar as a "blood-stained creature" and a "common murderer."

Father Gapon, from his place of hiding, issued a public letter, bitterly denouncing "Nicholas Romanov, formerly Tsar and at present soul-murderer of the Russian empire. The innocent blood of workers, their wives and children lies forever between you and the Russian people. . . . May all the blood which must be spilled fall upon you, you Hangman!" Gapon became a full-fledged revolutionary: "I call upon all the socialist parties of Russia to come to an immediate agreement among themselves and begin an armed uprising against Tsarism."

But Gapon's reputation was cloudy, and the leaders of the Social Revolutionary Party were convinced that he still had ties with the police. They sentenced him to death and his body was found hanging in an abandoned cottage in Finland in April 1906.

At Tsarskoe Selo, Nicholas was stunned when he heard what had happened. "A painful day," he wrote that night. "Serious disorders took place in Petersburg when the workers tried to come to the Winter Palace. The troops have been forced to fire in several parts of the city and there are many killed and wounded. Lord, how painful and sad this is!" The ministers met in great alarm and Witte immediately suggested that the Tsar publicly dissociate himself from the massacre by declaring that the troops had fired without orders. Nicholas refused to cast this unfair aspersion upon the army and instead decided to receive a delegation of thirty-four hand-picked workers at Tsarskoe Selo. The workers arrived at the palace and were given tea while Nicholas lectured them, as father to sons, on the need to support the army in the field and to reject the wicked advice of treacherous revolutionaries. The workers returned to St. Petersburg, where they were ignored, laughed at or beaten up.

The Empress was in a state of despair. Five days after "Bloody Sunday," she wrote to her sister Princess Victoria of Battenberg:

"You understand the crisis we are going through! It is a time full of trials indeed. My poor Nicky's cross is a heavy one to bear, all the more as he has nobody on whom he can thoroughly rely and who can be a real help to him. He has had so many bitter disappointments, but through it all he remains

brave and full of faith in God's mercy. He tries so hard, works with such perseverance, but the lack of what I call 'real' men is great. . . . The bad are always close at hand, the others through false humility keep in the background. We shall try to see more people, but it is difficult. On my knees I pray to God to give me wisdom to help him in his heavy task. . . .

"Don't believe all the horrors the foreign papers say. They make one's hair stand on end—foul exaggeration. Yes, the troops, alas, were obliged to fire. Repeatedly the crowd was told to retreat and that Nicky was not in town (as we are living here this winter) and that one would be forced to shoot, but they would not heed and so blood was shed. On the whole, 92 killed and between 200-300 wounded. It is a ghastly thing, but had one not done it the crowd would have grown colossal and 1,000 would have been crushed. All over the country, of course, it is spreading. The Petition had only two questions concerning the workmen and all the rest was atrocious: separation of the Church from the Government, etc. etc. Had a small deputation

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brought, calmly, a real petition for the workmen's good, all would have been otherwise. Many of the workmen were in despair, when they heard later what the petition contained and begged to work again under the protection of the troops.

"Petersburg is a rotten town, not one atom Russian. The Russian people are deeply and truly devoted to their Sovereign and the revolutionaries use his name for provoking them against landlords, etc. but I don't know how. How I wish I were clever and could be of real use. I love my new country. It's so young, powerful and has so much good in it, only utterly unbalanced and childlike. Poor Nicky, he has a bitter, hard life to lead. Had his father seen more men, drawn them around him, we should have had lots to fill the necessary posts; now only old men or quite young ones, nobody to turn to. The uncles no good, Mischa [Grand Duke Michael, the Tsar's younger brother] a darling child still. . . ."

But "Bloody Sunday" was only the beginning of a year of terror. Three weeks later, in February, Grand Duke Serge, the Tsar's uncle and Ella's husband, was assassinated in Moscow. The Grand Duke, who took a harsh

pride in knowing how bitterly he was hated by revolutionaries, had just said goodbye to his wife in their Kremlin apartment and was driving through one of the gates when a bomb exploded on top of him. Hearing the shuddering blast, Ella cried, "It's Serge," and rushed to him. What she found was not her husband, but a hundred unrecognizable pieces of flesh, bleeding into the snow. Courageously the Grand Duchess went to her husband's dying coachman and eased his last moments by telling him that the Grand Duke had survived the explosion. Later she visited the assassin, a Social Revolutionary named Kaliayev, in prison and offered to plead for his life if he would beg the Tsar for pardon. Kaliayev refused, saying that his death would aid his cause, the overthrow of the autocracy.

The murder of her husband changed Ella's life. The gay, irrepressible girl who had guided her small, motherless sister Alix; who had fended off the attentions of William II; who had skated and danced with the Tsarevich Nicholas—this woman disappeared. All of the gentle, saintly qualities suggested by her quiet acceptance of her husband's character now came strongly forward. A few years later, the Grand Duchess built an abbey, the Convent of Mary and Martha, in Moscow and herself became the abbess. In a last gesture of worldly flair, she had the robes of her order designed by the fashionable religious painter Michael Nesterov. He designed a long, hooded robe of fine, pearl-gray wool and a white veil, which she wore for the rest of her life.

As the months rolled by, violence spread to every corner of Russia. "It makes me sick to read the news," said Nicholas, "strikes in schools and factories, murdered policemen, Cossacks, riots. But the ministers instead of acting with quick decision, only assemble in council like a lot of frightened hens and cackle about providing united ministerial action." The slaughter of Rozhdestvensky's fleet in Tsushima raised a storm of mutiny in the ships remaining in the Baltic and Black Sea fleets. Sailors of the battleship *Potemkin,* angered when they were served portions of bad meat, threw their officers overboard, raised the red flag and steamed their ship along the Black Sea coast, bombarding towns, until the need for fuel forced them to intern at the Rumanian port of Constanza.

By mid-October 1905, all Russia was paralyzed by a general strike. From Warsaw to the Urals, trains stopped running, factories closed down, ships lay idle alongside piers. In St. Petersburg, food was no longer delivered, schools and hospitals closed, newspapers disappeared, even the electric lights flickered out. By day, crowds marched through the streets cheering orators, and red flags flew from the rooftops. At night, the streets were empty and dark. In the countryside, peasants raided estates, crippled and stole cattle, and the flames of burning manor houses glowed through the night.

Overnight, a new workers' organization bloomed. Consisting of elected delegates, one for each thousand workers, it called itself a soviet, or council. Like the strike itself, it came from nowhere, but grew rapidly in numbers and power. Within four days, a leader emerged in Leon Trotsky, a fiery orator and a member of the Menshe-vik branch of the Marxist Social Democratic Party. When the Soviet threatened to wreck every factory which did not close down, companies of soldiers were brought into the city. Sentries paced in front of all the public buildings, and squadrons of Cossacks clattered up and down the boulevards. The revolution was at hand; it needed only a spark.

In one of his most famous letters, written to his mother at the height of the crisis, Nicholas described what happened next:

"So the ominous quiet days began. Complete order in the streets, but at the same time everybody knew that something was going to happen. The troops were waiting for the signal but the other side would not begin. One had the same feeling as before a thunder storm in summer. Everybody was on edge and extremely nervous. . . . Through all those horrible days I constantly met with Witte. We very often met in the early morning to part only in the evening when night fell. There were only two ways open: to find an energetic

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soldier to crush the rebellion by sheer force. There would be time to breathe then but as likely as not, one would have to use force again in a few

months, and that would mean rivers of blood and in the end we should be where we started.

"The other way out would be to give to the people their civil rights, freedom of speech and press, also to have all laws confirmed by a state Duma—that of course would be a constitution. Witte defends this energetically. He says that, while it is not without risk, it is the only way out at the present moment. Almost everybody I had an opportunity of consulting is of the same opinion. Witte put it to me quite clearly that he would accept the Presidency of the Council of Ministers only on condition that his program was agreed to and his action not interfered with. He . . . drew up the Manifesto. We discussed it for two days and in the end, invoking God's help, I signed it. . . . My only consolation is that such is the will of God and this grave decision will lead my dear Russia out of the intolerable chaos she has been in for nearly a year."

Sergius Witte, who gave Russia its first constitution and its first parliament, believed in neither constitutions nor parliaments. "I have a constitution in my head, but as to my heart—" Witte spat on the floor. Witte was a huge, burly man with massive shoulders, great height and a head the size of a pumpkin. Inside this head Witte carried the ablest administrative brain in Russia. It had guided him from humble beginnings in the Georgian city of Tiflis, where he was born in 1849, to the role of leading minister of two tsars.

Witte's mother was Russian, but on his father's side his ancestry was Dutch. His father, a native of Russia's Baltic provinces, was a cultured man who lost his fortune in a Georgian mining scheme, leaving Witte to battle upward on wits and ego alone. In both respects, Witte was handsomely equipped. "At the University [of Odessa]," he wrote, "I worked day and night and achieved great proficiency in all my studies. I was so thoroughly familiar with the subjects that I passed all my examinations with flying colors without making any special preparations for them. My final academic thesis was entitled, 'On Infinitesimal Quantities.' The work was rather original in conception and distinguished by a philosophical breadth of view."

Hoping to become a professor of pure mathematics, Witte was compelled instead to go to work for the Southwestern District Railroad. During Russia's 1877 war with Turkey, he served as a traffic supervisor in charge of transporting troops and supplies. "I acquitted my-

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self with success of my difficult task," he declared. "I owed my success to energetic and well thought-out action." In February 1892, he was promoted to Minister of Communications (including railroads). "It will not be an exaggeration," he noted, "to say that the vast enterprise of constructing the great Siberian railway was carried out by my efforts, supported, of course, first by Emperor Alexander III and then by Emperor Nicholas II." In August 1892, Witte was transferred to the key post of Minister of Finance. "As Minister of Finance, I was also in charge of our commerce and industry. As such, I increased our industry threefold. This again is held against me. Fools!" Even in his private life, Witte took care to ensure that he was not outsmarted. He married twice; both wives had previously been divorced from other men. Of his first wife he said, "With my assistance she obtained her divorce and followed me to St. Petersburg. Out of consideration for my wife I adopted the girl who was her only child, with the understanding, however, that should our marriage prove childless, she would not succeed me as heiress."

Along with the throne, Nicholas inherited Witte from his father. Both the new Tsar and the veteran Minister hoped for the best. "I knew him [Nicholas] to be inexperienced in the extreme but rather intelligent and ... he had always impressed me as a kindly and well-bred youth," Witte wrote. "As a matter of fact, I had rarely come across a better-mannered young man than Nicholas II." The Empress Witte liked less, although he was forced to admit that "Alexandra does not lack physical charms." As Minister of Finance, he struggled successfully to put Russia on the gold standard. He brought in armies of foreign traders and industrialists, tempting them with tax exemptions, subsidies and government orders. His state monopoly on vodka brought millions into the treasury every year. Nicholas disliked Witte's cynicism and arrogance, but admitted his genius. When Witte brought the Portsmouth peace negotiations to what under the circumstances

amounted to a brilliant conclusion for Russia, the Tsar recognized his indebtedness by making Witte a count.

Experienced, shrewd and freshly crowned as a peacemaker, Witte was the obvious choice to deal with the spreading revolutionary upheavals. Even the Dowager Empress Marie advised her son, "I am sure that the only man who can help you now is Witte. . . . He certainly is a man of genius." At the Tsar's request, Witte drew up a memorandum in which he analyzed the situation and concluded that only two alternatives existed: a military dictatorship or a constitution. Witte himself urged that granting a constitution would be a cheaper, easier way of ending the turmoil. This recommendation gained further

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weight when it was vehemently endorsed by Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaievich, the Tsar's six-foot-six-inch cousin, then in command of the St. Petersburg Military District. So violently did the Grand Duke object to the idea that he become military dictator, that he brandished the revolver in his holster and shouted, "If the Emperor does not accept the Witte program, if he wants to force me to become Dictator, I shall kill myself in his presence with this revolver. We must support Witte at all cost. It is necessary for the good of Russia."

The Imperial Manifesto of October 30, 1905, transformed Russia from an absolute autocracy into a semi-constitutional monarchy, It promised "freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association" to the Russian people. It granted an elected parliament, the Duma, and pledged that "no law may go into force without the consent of the State Duma." It did not go as far as the constitutional monarchy in England; the Tsar retained his prerogative over defense and foreign affairs and the sole power to appoint and dismiss ministers. But the Manifesto did propel Russia with great rapidity over difficult political terrain which it had taken Western Europe several centuries to travel.

Witte now had maneuvered himself into an awkward corner. Having forced a reluctant sovereign to grant a constitution, Witte was expected to make it work. He was installed as President of the Council of Ministers, where he

quickly obtained the resignation of Constantine Pobedonostsev. After twenty-six years as Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev left, but not before he had scathingly referred to his successor, Prince Alexis Obolensky, as a man in whose head "three cocks were crowing at the same time."

To Witte's despair, rather than getting better, the situation grew steadily worse. The Right hated him for degrading the autocracy, the Liberals did not trust him, the Left feared that the revolution which it was anticipating would slip from its grasp. "Nothing has changed, the struggle goes on," declared Paul Miliukov, a leading Russian historian and Liberal. Leon Trotsky, writing in the newly formed *Isvestia*, was more vivid: "The proletariat knows what it does not want. It wants neither the police thug Trepov [commander of the police throughout the empire] nor the liberal financial shark Witte: neither the wolf's snout, nor the fox's tail. It rejects the police whip wrapped in the parchment of the constitution."

In parts of Russia, the Manifesto, by stripping the local police of many of their powers, led directly to violence. In the Baltic states, the peasants rose against their German landlords and proclaimed a rash of little village republics. In the Ukraine and White Russia, bands of Ultra-Rightists, calling themselves Black Hundreds, turned against the familiar scapegoats, the Jews. In Kiev and Odessa, pogroms erupted, often with the open support of the Church. In the Trans-Caucasus, similar attacks, under the guise of patriotism and religion, were made on Armenians. In Poland and Finland, the Manifesto was taken as a sign of weakness; there was a sense that the empire was crumbling, and mass demonstrations clamored for autonomy and independence. At Kronstadt on the Baltic and Sevastopol on the Black Sea, there were naval mutinies. In December, the Moscow Soviet led two thousand workers and students to the barricades. For ten days they held off government forces, proclaiming a new "Provisional Government." The revolt was crushed only by bringing from St. Petersburg the Semenovsky Regiment of the Guard, which cleared the streets with artillery and bayonets. During these weeks, Lenin slipped

back into Russia to lead the Bolsheviks; the police soon found his trail and he was forced to flit secretly from place to place, diminishing his effectiveness. Still, he was gleeful. "Go ahead and shoot," he cried. "Summon the Austrian and German regiments against the Russian peasants and workers. We are for a broadening of the struggle, we are for an international revolution."

Nicholas, meanwhile, waited impatiently for his experiment in constitutionalism to produce results. As Witte stumbled, the Tsar became bitter. His letters to his mother mark the progression of his disillusionments:

November 9: "It is strange that such a clever man [Witte] should be wrong in his forecast of an easy pacification."

November 23: "Everybody is afraid of taking courageous action. I keep trying to force them—even Witte himself—to behave more energetically. With us nobody is accustomed to shouldering responsibility, all expect to be given orders which, however, they disobey as often as not."

December 14: "He [Witte] is now prepared to arrest all the principal leaders of the outbreak. I have been trying for some time past to get him to do it, but he always hoped to be able to manage without drastic measures."

January 25, 1906: "As for Witte, since the happenings in Moscow he has radically changed his views; now he wants to hang and shoot everybody. I have never seen such a chameleon of a man. That, naturally, is the reason why no one believes in him any more."

Feeling his status slipping, Witte tried to recapture the Tsar's good will by cynically chopping away most of the strength from the Manifesto he had only recently written. Without waiting for the Duma

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to be elected, Witte arbitrarily drafted a series of Fundamental Laws based on the declaration: "To the Emperor of all the Russias belongs the supreme autocratic power." To make the government financially independent of

Duma appropriations, Witte used his own great personal reputation abroad to obtain from France a massive loan of over two billion francs.

Despite these efforts, Sergius Witte took no part in the affairs of the Russian parliament which he had helped to create. On the eve of its first meeting, Nicholas asked for his resignation. Witte pretended to be pleased by the move. "You see before you the happiest of mortals," he said to a colleague. "The Tsar could not have shown me greater mercy than by dismissing me from this prison where I have been languishing. I am going abroad at once to take a cure. I do not want to hear about anything and shall merely imagine what is happening over here. All Russia is one vast madhouse." This was nonsense, of course; for the rest of his life, Witte itched to return to office. His hopes were illusory. "As long as I live, I will never trust that man again with the smallest thing," said Nicholas. "I had quite enough of last year's experiment. It is still like a nightmare to me." Eventually, Witte returned to Russia, and Nicholas made him a grant of two hundred thousand roubles from the Treasury. But in the nine years which were to pass before Witte died, he would see the Tsar only twice again, each time for a brief interview of twenty minutes.

In all these months of war with Japan and the 1905 Revolution, Nicholas and Alexandra had had only one brief moment of unshadowed joy. On August 12, 1904, Nicholas wrote in his diary: "A great never-to-be-forgotten day when the mercy of God has visited us so clearly. Alix gave birth to a son at one o'clock. The child has been called Alexis."

The long-awaited boy arrived suddenly. At noon on a hot summer day, the Tsar and his wife sat down to lunch at Peterhof. The Empress had just managed to finish her soup when she was forced to excuse herself and hurry to her room. Less than an hour later, the boy, weighing eight pounds, was born. As the saluting cannon at Peterhof began to boom, other guns sounded at Kronstadt. Twenty miles away, in the heart of St. Petersburg, the batteries of the Fortress of Peter and Paul began to thunder—this time the salute was three hundred guns. Across Russia, cannons roared, churchbells clanged

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and flags waved. Alexis, named after Tsar Alexis, Nicholas's favorite, was the first male heir born to a reigning Russian tsar since the seventeenth century. It seemed an omen of hope.

His Imperial Highness Alexis Nicolaievich, Sovereign Heir Tsarevich, Grand Duke of Russia, was a fat, fair baby with yellow curls and clear blue eyes. As soon as they were permitted, Olga, nine, Tatiana, seven, Marie, five, and Anastasia, three, tiptoed into the nursery to peek into the crib and inspect their infant brother.

The christening of this august little Prince was performed in the Peterhof chapel. Alexis lay on a pillow of cloth of gold in the arms of Princess Marie Golitsyn, a lady-in-waiting who, traditionally, carried Imperial babies to the baptismal font. Because of her advanced age, the Princess came to the ceremony especially equipped. For greater support, the baby's pillow was attached to a broad gold band slung around her shoulders. To keep them from slipping, her shoes were fitted with rubber soles.

The Tsarevich was christened in the presence of most of his large family, including his great-grandfather King Christian IX of Denmark, then in his eighty-seventh year. Only the Tsar and the Empress were absent; custom forbade parents to attend the baptism of their child. The service was performed by Father Yanishev, the elderly priest who had served for years as confessor to the Imperial family. He pronounced the name Alexis, which had been carried by the second Romanov Tsar, Alexis the Peaceful, in the seventeenth century. Then he dipped the new Alexis bodily into the font, and the Tsarevich screeched his fury. As soon as the service was over, the Tsar hurried into the church. He had been waiting anxiously outside, hoping that the aged Princess and the elderly priest would not drop his son into the font. That afternoon, the Imperial couple received a stream of visitors. The Empress, lying on a couch, was seen to smile frequently at the Tsar, who stood nearby.

Six weeks later, in a very different mood, Nicholas wrote again in his diary: "Alix and I have been very much worried. A hemorrhage began this morning without the slightest cause from the navel of our small Alexis. It

lasted with but a few interruptions until evening. We had to call . . . the surgeon Fedorov who at seven o'clock applied a bandage. The child was remarkably quiet and even merry but it was a dreadful thing to have to live through such anxiety."

The next day: "This morning there again was some blood on the bandage but the bleeding stopped at noon. The child spent a quiet day and his healthy appearance somewhat quieted our anxiety."

On the third day, the bleeding stopped. But the fear born those

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days in the Tsar and his wife continued to grow. The months passed and Alexis stood up in his crib and began to crawl and to try to walk. When he stumbled and fell, little bumps and bruises appeared on his arms and legs. Within a few hours, they grew to dark blue swellings. Beneath the skin, his blood was failing to clot. The terrifying suspicion of his parents was confirmed. Alexis had hemophilia.

This grim knowledge, unknown outside the family, lay in Nicholas's heart even as he learned of Bloody Sunday and Tsushima, and when he signed the Manifesto. It would remain with him for the rest of his life. It was during this period that those who saw Nicholas regularly, without knowing about Alexis, began to notice a deepening fatalism in the Tsar. Nicholas had always been struck by the fact that he was born on the day in the Russian calendar set aside for Job. With the passage of time, this fatalism came to dominate his outlook. "I have a secret conviction," he once told one of his ministers, "that I am destined for a terrible trial, that I shall not receive my reward on this earth."

It is one of the supreme ironies of history that the blessed birth of an only son should have proved the mortal blow. Even as the saluting cannons boomed and the flags waved, Fate had prepared a terrible story. Along with the lost battles and sunken ships, the bombs, the revolutionaries and their plots, the strikes and revolts, Imperial Russia was toppled by a tiny defect in the body of a little boy. Hidden from public view, veiled in rumor, working

from within, this unseen tragedy would change the history of Russia and the world.

PART TWO

CHAPTER TEN

The Tsar's Village

The secret of Alexis's disease was hidden and carefully guarded within the inner world of Tsarskoe Selo, "the Tsar's village." "Tsarskoe Selo was a world apart, an enchanted fairyland to which only a small number of people had the right of entry," wrote Gleb Botkin, the son of Nicholas IPs court physician. "It became a legendary place. To the loyal monarchists, it was a sort of terrestrial paradise, the abode of the earthly gods. To the revolutionaries, it was a sinister place where blood-thirsty tyrants were hatching their terrible plots against the innocent population."

Tsarskoe Selo was a magnificent symbol, a supreme gesture, of the Russian autocracy. At the edge of the great St. Petersburg plain, fifteen miles south of the capital, a succession of Russian tsars and empresses had created an isolated, miniature world, as artificial and fantastic as a precisely ordered mechanical toy. Around the high iron fence of the Imperial Park, bearded Cossack horsemen in scarlet tunics, black fur caps, boots and shining sabers rode night and day, on ceaseless patrol. Inside the park, monuments, obelisks and triumphal arches studded eight hundred acres of velvet green lawn. An artificial lake, big enough for small sailboats, could be emptied and filled like a bathtub. At one end of the lake stood a pink Turkish bath; not far off, a dazzling red-and-gold Chinese pagoda crowned an artificial hillock. Winding paths led through groves of ancient trees, their massive branches latticed for safety with cables and iron bars. A pony track curved through gardens planted with exotic flowers. Scattered in clumps throughout the park were lilacs planted by a dozen empresses. Over the years, the shrubs had grown into lush and fragrant jungles. When the spring rain fell, the sweet smell of wet lilacs drenched the air.

Tsarskoe Selo sprang up when Catherine I, the lusty wife of Peter

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the Great, wanted a country retreat from the granite city her husband was building on the Neva marshes. Peter's daughter, Elizabeth, displayed her parents' instinct for grand construction. At a cost of ten million roubles, she built the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and then turned her attention to Tsarskoe Selo. Disliking the joggling carriages which bore her in and out of the city, she began constructing a canal so that she could make the journey entirely by water. Elizabeth died before the canal was finished, but the completed sections provided excellent bathing for the inhabitants of Tsarskoe Selo.

The two palaces standing five hundred yards apart in the Imperial Park during the reign of Nicholas II had been built by Catherine the Great and her grandson, Alexander I. In 1776, Catherine ordered the famous architect Rastrelli to build a palace at Tsarskoe Selo which would outshine Versailles. Rastrelli erected the big blue-and-white Catherine Palace, an ornate structure with more than two hundred rooms. It pleased Catherine so much that she made Rastrelli a Russian count. Mingling taste with exquisite diplomacy, the French ambassador at Catherine's court told the Empress that her beautiful palace lacked only one thing—a cover of glass to protect so breathtaking a masterpiece. After Napoleon's defeat in 1812, Alexander I commissioned another Italian, Quarenghi, to build a second, smaller palace at Tsarskoe Selo. Quarenghi's building, the Alexander Palace, was as simple as the Catherine Palace was ornate. It was here, to the Alexander Palace, that Nicholas II brought his bride to live in 1895, in the spring after their marriage. It remained their home for twenty-two years.

In describing palaces, simplicity becomes a relative term. The Alexander Palace had over one hundred rooms. From the tall windows of the Catherine Palace, the Tsar and his wife gazed down on terraces, pavilions, statues, gardens and ornate carriages drawn by magnificent horses. Inside the palace were long, polished halls and tall, shaded rooms furnished in marble, mahogany, gold, crystal, velvet and silk. Beneath huge chandeliers, rich Oriental rugs were spread on gleaming parquet floors. In winter, sapphire-

and-silver brocade curtains helped to shut out the murky chills of Russian twilight. Large multicolored porcelain stoves warmed the cold rooms, mingling the smell of burning wood with the fragrant scent provided by smoking pots of incense carried by footmen from room to room. In every season, Empress Alexandra filled the palace with flowers. When autumn frosts ended the growing in the gardens and greenhouses at Tsarskoe Selo, flowers were brought by train from the Crimea. Every room had its swirl of odors; the sweetness of lilies in tall Chinese vases, the delicate

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fragrance of violets and lilies of the valley bunched in silver bowls, the perfume of hyacinths in rare lacquered pots.

To guard this paradise, to tend its lawns and pick its flowers, to groom its horses, polish its motorcars, clean its floors, make its beds, polish its crystal, serve its banquets and bathe and dress its Imperial children took thousands of human hands. Besides the Cossacks, a permanent garrison of five thousand infantrymen carefully chosen from all the regiments of the Imperial Guard provided guard detachments at the palace gates and foot patrols in the Imperial Park. Thirty sentries were always stationed inside the palace, in vestibules, corridors, staircases, kitchens and even in the cellars. The guardsmen were supplemented by plainclothes police who inspected the servants, tradesmen and workmen and kept notebook records of all who came and went. In bad weather, the Tsar could look from any window and see a tall soldier in a long greatcoat, cap and boots pacing his round. Not far away, there was usually a forlorn policeman with galoshes and umbrella.

Inside, an army of servants in gorgeous livery moved through the polished halls and silken chambers. Equerries in red capes bordered with Imperial eagles, and hats waving long red, yellow and black ostrich plumes, stepped noiselessly on the soft soles of their patent-leather shoes. "Resplendent in snow white garters, the footmen ran before us up the carpeted staircases," wrote one visitor to the Imperial palace. "We passed through drawing rooms, ante-rooms, banqueting rooms, passing from carpets to glittering parquet, then back to carpets. ... At every door stood lackeys petrified in pairs in most varied costumes, according to the room to which they were

attached; now the traditional black frock coats, now Polish surcoats, with red shoes and white stockings and gaiters. At one of the doors [stood] two handsome lackeys with . . . crimson scarves on their heads, caught up with tinsel clasps."

Nothing had changed, neither the trappings nor the rhythm of palace life, since the days of Catherine the Great. Court protocol, handed down from a forgotten era, remained as obstinately rigid as a block of granite. In the palace, courtiers backed away from the presence of the sovereigns. No one ever contradicted a member of the Imperial family. It was improper to speak to a member of the family without being spoken to, and when walking with the sovereigns, friends did not greet each other or even notice each other's existence unless an Imperial personage did so first.

Frequently, court protocol almost seemed to conduct itself, taking its own course, making its own decisions, running on its own vast

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internal energies of tradition, exclusive of all human management. One day Dr. Botkin, the court physician, was surprised to receive the award of the Grand Cordon of the Order of St. Anna. According to protocol, he asked for a formal audience with the Tsar to thank him for the decoration. As he saw Botkin daily in his capacity as physician, Nicholas was surprised by the request. "Has anything happened that you want to see me officially?" he asked. "No, Sire," said Botkin, "I came only to thank Your Majesty for this." He pointed the the star pinned on his chest. "Congratulations," said Nicholas, smiling. "I had no idea I had given it to you."

Everything at Tsarskoe Selo centered on the Tsar. Outside the palace gates, Tsarskoe Selo was an elegant provincial town dominated by the Hfe and gossip of the court. The mansions of the aristocracy, fining the wide tree-shaded boulevard which led from the railway station to the gates of the Imperial Park, pulsed with the rhythm that emanated from the Imperial household. A week of excited conversation could follow a nod, a smile or a word sent by the sovereign in an unusual direction. Severe crises arose over matters of promotion, decorations and clashing appointments for tea. Invitations to the palace were hoarded like diamonds. No greater delight

offered itself than to have the telephone ring and hear one of the deep male voices of the palace telephone operators announce, "You are called from the apartments of Her Imperial Majesty" or, if the caller was one of Her Majesty's daughters, "You are called from the apartments of Their Imperial Highnesses."

The master of court life, the impresario of all court ceremonies, the bestower of all stars and ribbons, the arbitrator of all court disputes, was a Finnish nobleman advanced in years, Count Vladimir Fredericks. In 1897, at the age of sixty, Fredericks became chief minister of the Imperial court; he held the post until 1917, when it ceased to exist. Nicholas and Alexandra were devoted to "the Old Man," as they referred to Fredericks. He, in turn, treated them as his own children and in private addressed them as *"mes enfants."*

Fredericks, according to Paléologue, the French Ambassador, was "the very personification of court life. Of all the subjects of the Tsar, none has received more honors and titles. He is Minister of the Imperial court and household, aide-de-camp to the Tsar, cavalry general, member of the Council of Empire. . . . He has passed the whole of his long fife in palaces and ceremonies, in carriages and processions, under gold lace and decorations. . . . He knows all the secrets of the Imperial family. In the Tsar's name he dispenses all the favors and gifts, all the reproofs and punishments. The grand dukes and grand

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duchesses overwhelm him with attention for he it is who controls their households, hushes up their scandals and pays their debts. For all the difficulties of his task he is not known to have an enemy, such is the charm of his manner and his tact. He is also one of the handsomest men of his generation, one of the finest horsemen, and his successes with women were past counting. He has kept his lithe figure, his fine drooping mustache, and his charming manners ... he is the ideal type for his office, the supreme arbitrator of the rites and precedences, conventions and traditions, manners and etiquette."

As old age crept over him, Fredericks became ill and his energies sagged. He dozed off in the middle of conferences. He became forgetful. During the war, Prince Bariatinsky arrived at the palace to present the Tsar with the military order of the Cross of St. George. "Fredericks went to announce the Prince to His Majesty," wrote Botkin, "but on his way from one room to the other, forgot what he was supposed to do, and wandered off, leaving the Emperor to wait for the Prince in one room and the Prince to wait for the Emperor in an adjoining room, both bewildered and angry at the delay." Another time, Fredericks approached the Tsar and said, "I say, did His Majesty invite you for dinner tonight?" When Nicholas looked at him in utter bewilderment, Fredericks said, "Oh, I thought you were somebody else."

After Fredericks, Nicholas's favorite among the inhabitants of his court was Prince Vladimir Orlov, Chief of the Tsar's Private Secretariat. A highly cultivated, sarcastic man and a descendant of one of the lovers of Catherine the Great, the Prince was known as "Fat Orlov" because he was so obese that, when sitting, he was unable to see his own knees. Orlov had been a cavalry officer, but in middle age he no longer was able to mount a horse. At parades when the Tsar and the Imperial suite rode by on horseback, Orlov was seen in the middle of the cavalcade, marching along on foot.

Naturally, these courtiers were fervent monarchists, *"plus royaliste que le roi."* The Russia that men like Orlov preferred to see was a land of meek, sentimental, devoutly religious *moujiks*, overwhelmingly loyal to the Tsar. Russia's enemies, they believed, were those who degraded the autocracy—the politicians and parliamentarians as well as the revolutionaries. This view, sounded in Nicholas's ear whenever he would listen, survived defeats in war, revolutionary upheavals, the rise and fall of ministers and Imperial Dumas. Year after year sHpped away, wrote Botkin, and "the enchanted little fairyland of Tsarskoe Selo slumbered peacefully on the brink of an abyss, lulled by the sweet songs of bewhiskered sirens who gently hummed 'God Save the Tsar,' attended church with great regularity . . . and from

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time to time asked discreetly when they were going to receive their next grand cordon or advance in rank or raise in salary."

A graceful two-story building in simple classical style, the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo was made up of a center and two wings. In the central building were clustered the state apartments and formal chambers. The ministers of court and ladies- and gentlemen-in-waiting had apartments in one of the two wings. In the other wing, Nicholas and Alexandra established a world and led a carefully scheduled and domestic existence.

The Empress Alexandra's first command as a bride was that the rooms of this wing be redecorated. Curtains, rugs, upholstering and pillows were done in bright English chintzes and in mauve, her favorite color. On the second floor, the rooms selected as nurseries were cleared of heavy furniture, and simple beds and dressers of lemon-wood were installed, with covers of cheerful English cretonne. Under her direction, the general appearance of the private wing became that of a comfortable English country house.

Mounting guard over the frontier between this private world and the rest of the palace was a gaudily fantastic quartet of bodyguards. Four gigantic Negroes dressed in scarlet trousers, gold-embroidered jackets, curved shoes and white turbans stood guard outside the study where the Tsar was at work, or the boudoir where the Empress was resting. "They were not soldiers," wrote Alexandra's friend Anna Vyrubova, "and had no function except to open and close doors and to signal by a sudden noiseless entrance into a room that one of Their Majesties was about to appear." Although all of these men were referred to at court as Ethiopians, one was an American Negro named Jim Hercules. Originally a servant of Alexander III, Hercules was an employee, bound to the family only by loyalty. He took his vacations in America and brought back jars of guava jelly as presents for the children.

Behind the heavy doors guarded by this flamboyant quartet, the Imperial family lived a punctual existence. In the winter, Tsarskoe Selo lay under a heavy blanket of snow and the sun did not come until nine o'clock. Nicholas

rose at seven, dressed by lamplight, had breakfast with his daughters and disappeared into his study to work. Alexandra rarely left her room before noon. Her mornings were spent propped up on pillows in bed or on a chaise-longue, reading and writing long emotional letters to her friends. Unlike Nicholas, who wrote painstakingly and sometimes took hours to compose a letter,

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Alexandra wrote voluminously, dashing off lengthy sentences across page after page, punctuating only with dots and dashes and exclamation points. At her feet, while she wrote, lay a small shaggy Scotch terrier named Eira. Most people considered Eira disagreeable; he liked to dart from under tables and nip at heels. Alexandra doted on him and carried him from room to room—even to the dinner table.

Unlike many a royal couple, Nicholas and Alexandra shared the same bed. The bedroom was a large chamber with tall windows opening onto the park. A large double bed made of light-colored wood stood between two windows. Chairs and couches covered in flowered tapestry were scattered about on a thick carpet of mauve pile. To the right of the bed, a door led to a small chapel used by the Empress for her private prayers. Dimly lit by hanging lamps, the room contained only an icon on one wall and a table holding a Bible. Another door led from the bedroom to Alexandra's private bathroom, where a collection of old-fashioned fixtures were set in a dark recess. Primly Victorian, Alexandra insisted that both bath and toilet be covered during the day by cloths.

The most famous room in the palace—for a time the most famous room in Russia—was the Empress's mauve boudoir. Everything in it was mauve: curtains, carpet, pillows; even the furniture was mauve-and-white Hepplewhite. Masses of fresh white and purple lilacs, vases of roses and orchids and bowls of violets perfumed the air. Tables and shelves were cluttered with books, papers and porcelain and enamel knicknacks.* In this room, Alexandra surrounded herself with mementoes of her family and her religion. The walls were covered with icons. Over her chaise-longue hung a picture of the Virgin Mary. A portrait of her mother, Princess Alice, looked

down from another wall. On a table in a place of honor stood a large photograph of Queen Victoria. The only portrait in the room other than religious and family pictures was a portrait of Marie Antoinette.

In this cluttered, cozy room, surrounded by her treasured objects, Alexandra felt secure. Here, in the morning, she talked to her daughters, helping them choose their dresses and plan their schedules. It was to this room that Nicholas hurried to sit with his wife, sip tea, read the papers and discuss their children and their empire. They talked to

* Along with religious crosses, icons and images of every description, Alexandra was fascinated by the symbol of the swastika. Its origins buried deep in the past, the swastika has been for thousands of years the symbol of **the** sun, of continuing re-creation and of infinity. Swastikas have been found on relics unearthed at the site of Troy, woven into Inca textiles and scrawled in **the** catacombs of Rome. Only to the generation that grew up after Alexandra's death has the meaning of the swastika been perverted and the symbol transformed **into** a despised emblem of violence, intolerance and terror.

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each other in English, although Nicholas and all the children spoke Russian to each other. To Alexandra, Nicholas was always "Nicky." To him, she was "Alix" or "Sunshine" or "Sunny." Sometimes through the rooms of this private wing, a clear, musical whistle like the warbling song of a bird would sound. This was Nicholas's way of summoning his wife. Early in her marriage, Alexandra, hearing the call, would blush red and drop whatever she was doing to hurry to him. Later, as his children grew up, Nicholas used it to call them, and the birdlike whistle became a familiar and regular sound in the Alexander Palace.

Next to the mauve boudoir was the Empress's dressing room, an array of closets for her gowns, shelves for her hats and trays for her jewels. Alexandra had six wardrobe maids, but her modesty severely limited their duties. No one ever saw the Empress Alexandra undressed or in her bath. She bathed herself, and when she was ready to have her hair arranged, she appeared in a Japanese kimono. Often it was Grand Duchess Tatiana who came to comb her mother's hair and pile the long red-gold strands on top of her head. After the Empress was almost dressed, her maids were summoned to fasten buttons and clasp on jewelry. "Only rubies today," the Empress would say, or "Pearls and sapphires with this gown." She preferred pearls to

all other jewels, and several ropes of pearls usually cascaded from her neck to her waist.

For daytime, Alexandra wore loose, flowing clothes trimmed at the throat and waist with lace. She considered the famous "hobble skirts" of the Edwardian era a nuisance. "Do you really like this skirt?" she asked Lili Dehn, whose husband was an officer on the Imperial yacht. "Well, Madame, *c'est la mode,"* replied the lady. "It's no use whatever as a skirt," said the Empress. "Now, Lili, prove to me that it is comfortable—run, Lili, run, and let me see how fast you can cover ground in it."

The Empress's gowns were designed by St. Petersburg's reigning fashion dictator of the day, a Mme. Brissac, who made a fortune as a *couturière* and lived in a mansion in the capital. Her clients, including the Empress, all complained about her prices. To the Empress, Mme. Brissac confided, "I beg Your Majesty not to mention it to anyone, but I always cut my prices for Your Majesty." Subsequently, Alexandra discovered that Mme. Brissac had met similar complaints from her sister-in-law Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna with the whispered plea, "I beg Your Imperial Highness not to mention these things at Tsarskoe Selo, but I always cut my prices for you."

In the evening, Alexandra wore white or cream silk gowns embroidered in silver and blue and worn with diamonds in her hair and

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pearls at her throat. She disliked filmy lingerie; her undergarments and her sleeping gowns were made of fine, embroidered linen. Her shoes were low-heeled and pointed, usually bronze or white suede. Outdoors she carried a parasol against the sun, even when wearing a wide-brimmed hat.

Lili Dehn, recalling her presentation to the Empress in the garden at Tsarskoe Selo in 1907, gives a vivid first impression of the Empress Alexandra: "Advancing through the masses of greenery came a tall and slender figure. . . . The Empress was dressed entirely in white with a thin white veil draped around her hat. Her complexion was delicately fair . . . her hair was reddish gold, her eyes . . . were dark blue and her figure was

supple as a willow wand. I remember that her pearls were magnificent and that diamond earrings flashed colored fires whenever she moved her head. ... I noticed that she spoke Russian with a strong English accent."

For the children of the Imperial family, winter was a time of interminable lessons. Beginning at nine in the morning, tutors drilled them in arithmetic, geography, history, Russian, French and English. Before beginning their classwork, they submitted themselves every morning to the examination of Dr. Eugene Botkin, the court physician, who came daily to look at throats and rashes. Botkin was not solely responsible for the children; a specialist, Dr. Ostrogorsky, came from St. Petersburg to render his services. Later, young Dr. Vladimir De-revenko was especially assigned to care for the Tsarevich's hemophilia. But Botkin always remained the children's favorite. A tall, stout man who wore blue suits with a gold watch chain across his stomach, he exuded a strong perfume imported from Paris. When they were free, the young Grand Duchesses liked to track him from room to room, following his trail by sniffing his scent.

At eleven every morning, the Tsar and his children stopped work and went outdoors for an hour. Sometimes Nicholas took his gun and shot crows in the park. He had a kennel of eleven magnificent English collies and he enjoyed walking with the dogs frisking and racing about him. In winter, he joined the children and their tutors in building "ice mountains," big mounds of snow covered with water which froze and made a handsome run for sleds and small toboggans.

Dinner at midday was the ceremonial meal at Tsarskoe Selo. Although the Empress was usually absent, Nicholas dined with his daughters and members of his suite. The meal began, according to the Russian custom, with a priest rising from the table to face an

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icon and intone his blessing. At the Imperial table this role was filled by Father Vassiliev, the confessor to the Imperial family. Of peasant origin, Vassiliev had never graduated from the Theological Academy, but what he lacked in schooling he made up in fervor. As he shouted his prayers in a cracked voice, Alexandra was convinced that he represented the simple,

essential Orthodoxy of the Russian people. As a confessor, Vassiliev was comforting. No matter what sin was confessed to him, he smiled beatifically and said, "Don't worry. Don't worry. The Devil does none of these things. He neither smokes nor drinks nor engages in revelry, and yet he is The Devil." At the Imperial table, among the gold-braided uniforms of the court officials, Vassiliev cut a starkly dramatic figure. Wearing a long, black robe with wide sleeves, a black beard that stretched to his waist, a five-inch silver cross that dangled from his neck, he gave the impression that a great black raven had settled down at the table of the Tsar.

Another presence, not always visible, graced the Imperial table. It was that of Cubat, the palace chef. At Tsarskoe Selo, Cubat labored under a heavy burden. Neither Nicholas nor Alexandra cared for the rich, complicated dishes which the great French chefs had brought from their homeland to spread across the princely tables of Russia. Nicholas especially enjoyed slices of suckling pig with horseradish, taken with a glass of port. Fresh caviar had once given him severe indigestion and he rarely ate this supreme Russian delicacy. Most of all, he relished the simple cooking of the Russian peasant—cabbage soup or *borshch* or *kasha* (buckwheat) with boiled fish and fruit. Alexandra cared nothing for food and merely pecked at anything set before her. Nevertheless, Cubat, one of the greatest French chefs of his day, struggled on, happily anticipating the time when the Tsar's guests would include a renowned gourmet. Sometimes when an especially elegant dish was being served, Cubat would stand hopefully in the doorway, immaculate in his white chef's apron and hat, waiting to receive the compliments of master and guests.

In the afternoon, while her children continued their lessons, Alexandra often went for a drive. The order "Prepare Her Majesty's carriage for two o'clock" stimulated a burst of activity at the stables. The carriage, an open, polished black rig of English design, was rolled out; the horses were harnessed into place and two footmen, in tall hats and blue coats, mounted the steps in the rear. Not until all else was ready did the coachman appear. He was a tall, heavy man amplified to greater size by an immense padded coat which he wore covered with medals. Two grooms placed themselves

behind him and, at his grunt of command, boosted him into place. Taking the reins, he

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crossed himself, gave the reins a flick and, with a mounted Cossack officer trotting behind, the carriage moved under an arch toward the palace to wait for the Empress.

Not only the stables but also the vast and cumbersome apparatus of police surveillance was alerted when Alexandra asked for her carriage. Squads of detectives were hastily dispatched, and when the Empress drove out the gate an hour later, every tree and bush along her route concealed a crouching policeman. If she stopped to speak to someone along the way, no sooner had she driven on than an agent of the police stepped forward, notebook in hand, to ask, "What is your name and what reason had you for conversation with Her Imperial Majesty?"

Nicholas rarely accompanied his wife on these excursions by carriage. He preferred instead to ride out on horseback accompanied by Count Fredericks or by a friend, the Commander of Her Majesty's Uhlans, General Alexander Orlov. Usually they went through the countryside in the direction of Krasnoe Selo, passing through villages along the way. Often, during these outings, the Tsar stopped to talk informally to peasants, asking them about themselves, their village problems and the success of the harvest. Sometimes, knowing that the Tsar frequently rode that way, peasants from other districts waited by the road to hand him petitions or make special requests. In almost every case, Nicholas saw to it that these requests were granted.*

* There is a story told by General Spiridovich which has all the quality of a fairy tale except that Spiridovich, a sternly practical and conscientious policeman, filled his book with nothing but precise and exhaustive descriptions of fact. The story is this:

Late one night in the room of the Peterhof palace set aside for the receiving of petitions, General Orlov heard a strange sound coming from the anteroom. He found a girl hiding there, sobbing. Throwing herself on the floor before him, she explained that her fiancé had been condemned to death and that he would be executed the next morning. He was a student, she said, who had tuberculosis and who had gotten mixed up in revolutionary activities. Just before his arrest, he had tried to extricate himself from the movement, but had forcibly been prevented from doing so. He would die

anyway in a short time from his disease. Clutching Orlov about the knees, her eyes brimming with tears, she begged him to ask the Tsar for a pardon.

Moved by her plea, Orlov decided to act despite the lateness of the hour. He ordered a troika and dashed to the Alexandra Villa, where the Tsar was staying. Bursting through the door, he was stopped by a valet who told him that the Tsar already had retired. Nevertheless, Orlov insisted. A few minutes later, Nicholas appeared in his pajamas and asked quietly, "What is happening?" Orlov told him the story.

"I thank you very much for acting the way you did," said Nicholas. "One must never hesitate when one has the chance to save the life of a man. Thank God that neither your conscience nor mine will have anything to reproach themselves for." Quickly, he wrote a telegram to the Minister of Justice: "Defer the execution of S. Await orders." He handed the paper to a court messenger and added, "Run!"

At four, the family gathered for tea. Teas at Tsarskoe Selo were always the same. Year after year, the same small, white-draped tables were set with the same glasses in silver holders, the same plates of hot bread, the same English biscuits. Cakes and sweetmeats never appeared. To her friend Anna Vyrubova, Alexandra complained that "other people had much more interesting teas." Although she was Empress of Russia, wrote Vyrubova, she "seemed unable to change a single detail of the routine of the Russian court. The same plates of hot bread and butter had been on the same tea tables . . . [since the days of] Catherine the Great."

As with everything else at Tsarskoe Selo, there was a rigid routine for tea. "Every day at the same moment," Anna Vyrubova recalled, "the door opened, the Emperor came in, sat down at the tea table, buttered a piece of bread and began to sip his tea. He drank two glasses every day, never more, never less, and as he drank, he glanced over his telegrams and newspapers. The children found teatime exciting. They dressed for it in fresh white frocks and colored sashes, and spent most of the hour playing on the floor with toys. As they grew older, needlework and embroidery were substituted. The Empress did not like to see her daughters sitting with idle hands."

After tea, Nicholas returned to his study. Between five and eight p.m. he received a stream of callers. Those having business with him were brought by train from St. Petersburg, arriving at Tsarskoe Selo just as dusk was falling. They were escorted through the palace to a waiting room where

they could sit and leaf through books and magazines until the Tsar was ready to see them.

"Although my audience was a private one," wrote the French Ambassador, Paléologue, "I had put on my full dress uniform, as is fitting for a meeting with the Tsar, Autocrat of all the Russias. The Director of Ceremonies, Evreinov, went with me. He also was a symphony of gold braid. . . . My escort consisted only of Evreinov, a household officer in undress uniform and a footman in his picturesque (Tsaritsa Elizabeth) dress with the hat adorned with long red, black and yellow plumes. I was taken through the audience rooms, then the Empress's private drawing room, down a long corridor leading to the private apartments of the sovereigns in which I passed a servant in very plain livery who was carrying a tea tray. Further on was the foot of a little private staircase leading to the rooms of the

Orlov returned to the girl and told her what had happened. She fainted and Orlov had to revive her. When she could speak, her first words were, "Whatever happens to us, we are ready to give our lives for the Emperor." Later, when Orlov saw Nicholas and told him her words, the Tsar smiled and said, "You see, you have made two people, she and I, very happy."

Imperial children. A ladies' maid flitted away from the landing above. The last room at the end of the corridor was occupied by . . . [the Tsar's] personal aide-de-camp. I waited there barely a minute. The gaily and weirdly bedecked Ethiopian who mounted guard outside His Majesty's study opened the door almost at once.

"The Emperor received me with that gracious and somewhat shy kindness which is all his own. The room in which he received me is small and has only one window. The furniture is plain and comfortable. There are plain leather chairs, a sofa covered with a Persian rug, a bureau and shelves arranged with meticulous care, a table spread with maps and a low book case with photographs, busts and family souvenirs."

Nicholas received most visitors informally. Standing in front of his desk, he gestured them into an armchair, asked if they would like to smoke and lighted a cigarette. He was a careful listener, and although he often grasped the conclusion before his visitor had reached it, he never interrupted.

Precisely at eight, all official interviews ended so that the Tsar could go to supper. Nicholas always terminated an audience by rising and walking to a window. There was no mistaking this signal, and newcomers were sternly briefed to withdraw, no matter how pleasant or regretful His Majesty might seem. "I'm afraid I've wearied you," said Nicholas, politely breaking off his conversation.

Family suppers were informal, although the Empress invariably appeared at the table in an evening gown and jewels. Afterward, Alexandra went to the nursery to hear the Tsarevich say his prayers. In the evening after supper, Nicholas often sat in the family drawing room reading aloud while his wife and daughters sewed or embroidered. His choice, said Anna Vyrubova, who spent many of these cozy evenings with the Imperial family, might be Tolstoy, Turgenev or his own favorite, Gogol. On the other hand, to please the ladies, it might be a fashionable English novel. Nicholas read equally well in Russian, English and French and he could manage in German and Danish. His voice, said Anna, was "pleasant and [he had] remarkably clear

enunciation." Books were supplied by his private librarian, whose job it was to provide the Tsar each month with twenty of the best books from all countries. This collection was laid out on a table and Nicholas arranged them in order of preference; thereafter the Tsar's valets saw to it that no one disarranged them until the end of the month.

Sometimes, instead of reading, the family spent evenings pasting snapshots taken by the court photographers or by themselves into green leather albums stamped in gold with the Imperial monograph.

Nicholas enjoyed supervising the placement and pasting of the photographs and insisted that the work be done with painstaking neatness. "He could not endure the sight of the least drop of glue on the table," wrote Vyrubova.

The end of these pleasant, monotonous days arrived at eleven with the serving of evening tea. Before retiring, Nicholas wrote in his diary and soaked himself in his large, white-tiled bathtub. Once in bed, he usually went right to sleep. The exceptions were those occasions when his wife kept him awake, still reading and crunching English biscuits on the other side of the bed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"OTMA" and Alexis

Directly over the mauve boudoir of the Empress were the nurseries. In the morning, Alexandra could lie back on her couch and through the ceiling hear the footsteps of her children and the sound of their pianos. A private elevator and a private stairway led directly to the rooms above.

In these large, well-aired chambers, the four Grand Duchesses were brought up simply, in a manner befitting granddaughters of the spartan Alexander III. They slept on hard camp beds without pillows and took cold baths every morning. Their nurses, both Russian and English, were strict, although not without their own weaknesses. A Russian nurse assigned to little Olga was

fond of tippling. Later she was found in bed with a Cossack and dismissed on the spot. Marie's English nurse, a Miss Eager, was fascinated by politics and talked incessantly about the Dreyfus case. "Once she even forgot that Marie was in her bath and started discussing the case with a friend," wrote the Tsar's younger sister, Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna. "Marie, naked and dripping, scrambled out of the bath and started running up and down the palace corridor. Fortunately, I arrived just at that moment, picked her up and carried her back to Miss Eager, who was still talking about Dreyfus."

The passage of time and the shortness of their lives have blurred the qualities of the four daughters of the last Tsar. Only Anastasia, the youngest, stands out distinctly, not for what she was as a child, but because of the extraordinary, often fascinating claims made on her behalf in the years after the massacre at Ekaterinburg. Yet the four girls were quite different, and as they became young women, the differences between them became more distinct.

Olga, the eldest, was most like her father. Shy and subdued, she had long chestnut-blond hair and blue eyes set in a wide Russian face. She

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impressed people by her kindness, her innocence and the depth of her private feelings. Olga had a good mind and was quick to grasp ideas. Talking to someone she knew well, she spoke rapidly and with frankness and wit. She read widely, both fiction and poetry, often borrowing books from her mother's tables before the Empress had read them. "You must wait, Mama, until I find out whether this book is a proper one for you to read," she parried when Alexandra spotted her reading a missing book.

Reading *Les Misérables* in French under the guidance of her Swiss tutor, Pierre Gilliard, Olga almost brought the tutor to calamity. Gilliard had instructed his pupil to underUne all the French words she did not recognize. Arriving at the word spoken at Waterloo when the commander of Napoleon's Guard was asked to surrender, Olga dutifully underlined *"Merde!"* That night at dinner, not having seen Gilliard, she asked her father what it meant. The following day, walking in the park, Nicholas said to the tutor, "You are teaching my daughter a curious vocabulary, Monsieur."

Gilliard was overcome with confusion and embarrassment. "Don't worry," said Nicholas, breaking into a smile, "I quite understand what happened."

If Olga was closest to her father, Tatiana, eighteen months younger than Olga, was closest to Alexandra. In public and private, she surrounded her mother with unwearying attentions. The tallest, slenderest and most elegant of the sisters, Tatiana had rich auburn hair and deep gray eyes. She was organized, energetic and purposeful and held strong opinions. "You felt that she was the daughter of an Emperor," declared an officer of the Imperial Guard.

In public, Grand Duchess Tatiana regularly outshone her older sister. Her piano technique was better than Olga's although she practiced less and cared less. With her good looks and self-assurance, she was far more anxious than Olga to go out into society. Among the five children, it was Tatiana who made the decisions; her younger sisters and brother called her "the Governess." If a favor was needed, all the children agreed that "Tatiana must ask Papa to grant it." Surprisingly, Olga did not mind being managed by Tatiana; the two, in fact, were devoted to each other.

Marie, the third daughter, was the prettiest of the four. She had red cheeks, thick, light brown hair and dark blue eyes so large that they were known in the family as "Marie's saucers." As a small child, she was chubby and glowing with health. In adolescence, she was merry and flirtatious. Marie liked to paint, but she was too lazy and gay to apply herself seriously. What Marie—whom everyone called "Mashka"—hked most was to talk about marriage and children. More

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than one observer has noted that, had she not been the daughter of the Tsar, this strong, warmhearted girl would have made some man an excellent wife.

Anastasia, the youngest daughter, destined to become the most famous of the children of Nicholas II, was a short, dumpy, blue-eyed child renowned in her family chiefly as a wag. When the saluting cannon on the Imperial yacht fired at sunset, Anastasia liked to retreat into a corner, stick her fingers into her ears, widen her eyes and loll her tongue in mock terror.

Witty and vivacious, Anastasia also had a streak of stubbornness, mischief and impertinence. The same gift of ear and tongue that made her quickest to pick up a perfect accent in foreign languages also equipped her admirably as a mimic. Comically, sometimes cuttingly, the little girl aped precisely the speech and mannerisms of those about her.

Anastasia, the *enfant terrible*, was also a tomboy. She climbed trees to dizzying heights, refusing to come down until specifically commanded by her father. She rarely cried. Her aunt and godmother, Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, remembered a time when Anastasia was teasing so ruthlessly that she slapped the child. The little girl's face went crimson, but instead of crying, she ran out of the room without uttering a sound. Sometimes Anastasia's practical jokes got out of hand. Once in a snowball fight, she rolled a rock into a snowball and threw it at Tatiana. The missile hit Tatiana in the face and knocked her, stunned, to the ground. Truly frightened at last, Anastasia broke down and cried.

As daughters of the Tsar, cloistered at Tsarskoe Selo without a normal range of friends and acquaintances, the four young Grand Duchesses were even closer to each other than most sisters. Olga, the eldest, was only six years older than Anastasia, the youngest. In adolescence, the four proclaimed their unity by choosing for themselves a single autograph, OTMA, derived from the first letter of each of their names. As OTMA, they jointly gave gifts and signed letters. They shared dresses and jewels. On one occasion, Baroness Buxhoeveden, one of the Empress's ladies-in-waiting, was dressing for a ball when the sisters decided that her jewels were inappropriate. Tatiana rushed off and reappeared with some ruby brooches of her own. When the Baroness refused them, Tatiana was surprised. "We sisters always borrow from each other when we think the jewels of one will suit the dress of the other," she said.

Rank meant little to the girls. They worked alongside their maids in making their own beds and straightening their rooms. Often, they visited the maids in their quarters and played with their children.

When they gave instructions, it was never as a command. Instead, the Grand Duchesses said, "If it isn't too difficult for you, my mother asks you to come." Within the household, they were addressed in simple Russian fashion, using their names and patronyms: Olga Nicolaievna, Tatiana Nicolaievna. When they were addressed in public by their full ceremonial titles, the girls were embarrassed. Once at a meeting of a committee of which Tatiana was honorary president, Baroness Buxhoeveden began by saying, "May it please Your Imperial Highness . . ." Tatiana stared in astonishment and, when the Baroness sat down, kicked her violently under the table. "Are you crazy to speak to me like that?" she whispered.

Cut off from other children, knowing little about the outside world, they took the keenest interest in the people and affairs of the household. They knew the names of the Cossacks of the Tsar's escort and of the sailors on the Imperial yacht. Talking freely to these men, they learned the names of their wives and children. They listened to letters, looked at photographs and made small gifts. As children they each had an allowance of only nine dollars a month to spend on notepaper and perfume. When they gave a present, it meant sacrificing something they wanted for themselves.

In their youthful aunt Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, the girls had an intimate friend and benefactress. Every Saturday she came from St. Petersburg to spend the day with her nieces at Tsarskoe Selo. Convinced that the girls needed to get away from the palace, she persuaded the Empress to let her take them into town. Accordingly, every Sunday morning, the aunt and her four excited nieces boarded a train for the capital. Their first stop was a formal luncheon with their grandmother, the Dowager Empress, at the Anitchkov Palace. From there they went on to tea, games and dancing at Olga Alexandrovna's house. Other young people were always present. "The girls enjoyed every minute of it," wrote the Grand Duchess over fifty years later. "Especially my dear god-daughter [Anastasia]. Why I can still hear her laughter rippling all over the room. Dancing, music, games—why she threw herself wholeheartedly into them all." The day ended when one of the Empress's ladies-in-waiting arrived to take the girls back to Tsarskoe Selo.

In the palace, the two oldest girls shared a bedroom and were known generally as "The Big Pair." Marie and Anastasia shared another bedroom and were called "The Little Pair." When they were children, the Empress dressed them by pairs, the two oldest and the two youngest wearing matching dresses. As they grew up, the sisters gradually made changes in the spare surroundings arranged for them

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by their parents. The camp beds remained, but icons, paintings and photographs went up along the walls. Frilly dressing tables and couches with green and white embroidered cushions were installed. A large room, divided by a curtain, was used by all four as a combination bath and dressing room. Half the room was filled with wardrobes; behind the curtain stood a large bath of solid silver. In their teens, the girls stopped taking cold baths in the morning and began taking warm baths at night with perfumed bath water. All four girls used Coty perfumes. Olga preferred *"Rose Thé,"* Tatiana favored *"Jasmin de Corse,"* Anastasia stayed faithfully with *"Violette"* and Marie, who tried many scents, always came back to *"Lilas."*

As Olga and Tatiana grew older, they played a more serious role at public functions. Although in private they still referred to their parents as "Mama" and "Papa," in public they referred to "the Empress" and "the Emperor." Each of the girls was colonel-in-chief of an elite regiment. Wearing its uniform with a broad skirt and boots, they attended military reviews sitting side-saddle on their horses, riding behind the Tsar. Escorted by their father, they began attending theatres and concerts. Carefully chaperoned, they were allowed to play tennis, ride and dance with eligible young officers. At twenty, Olga obtained the use of part of her large fortune and began to respond to appeals for charity. Seeing a child on crutches when she was out for a drive, Olga inquired and found that the parents were too poor to afford treatment. Quietly, Olga began putting aside a monthly allowance to pay the bills.

Nicholas and Alexandra intended that both their older daughters should make their official debuts in 1914 when Olga was twenty-one and Tatiana nineteen. But the war intervened and the plans were canceled. The girls

remained secluded with the family at Tsarskoe Selo. By 1917, the four daughters of Nicholas II had blossomed into young women whose talents and personalities were, as fate decreed, never to be unfolded and revealed.

"Alexis was the center of this united family, the focus of all its hopes and affections," wrote Pierre Gilliard. "His sisters worshipped him. He was his parents' pride and joy. When he was well, the palace was transformed. Everyone and everything in it seemed bathed in sunshine."

The Tsarevich was a handsome little boy with blue eyes and golden curls which later turned to auburn and became quite straight. From the beginning, he was a happy, high-spirited infant, and his parents

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never missed an opportunity to show him off. When the baby was only a few months old, the Tsar met A. A. Mosolov, director of the Court Chancellery, just outside the nursery. "I don't think that you have yet seen my dear little Tsarevich," said Nicholas. "Come along and I will show him to you."

"We went in," said Mosolov. "The baby was being given his daily bath. He was lustily kicking out in the water. . . . The Tsar took the child out of his bath towels and put his little feet in the hollow of his hand, supporting him with the other arm. There he was, naked, chubby, rosy—a wonderful boy!"

"Don't you think he's a beauty?" said the Tsar, beaming.

Next day Nicholas said proudly to the Empress, "Yesterday I had the Tsarevich on parade before Mosolov."

In the spring following his birth, the Empress took Alexis for rides in her carriage and was delighted to see the people along the road bowing and smiling before the tiny Heir. When he was still less than a year old, his father took him to a review of the Preobrajensky Regiment. The soldiers gave the baby a mighty "Hurrah! " and Alexis responded with delighted laughter.

From the beginning, the disease of hemophilia hung over this sunny child like a dark cloud. The first ominous evidence had appeared at six weeks, when the boy bled from his navel. As he began to crawl and toddle, the evidence grew stronger: his tumbles caused large, dark blue swellings on his legs and arms. When he was three and a half, a blow on the face brought a swelling which completely closed both eyes. From London, Empress Marie wrote in alarm: "[I heard] that poor little Alexei fell on his forehead and his face was so swollen that it was dreadful to look at him and his eyes were closed. Poor boy, it is terrible, I can imagine how frightened you were. But what did he stumble against? I hope that it is all over now and that his charming little face has not suffered from it." Three weeks later, Nicholas was able to write back: "Thank God the bumps and bruises have left no trace. He is as well and cheerful as his sisters. I constantly work with them in the garden."

Medically, hemophilia meant that the Tsarevich's blood did not clot normally. Any bump or bruise rupturing a tiny blood vessel beneath the skin could begin the slow seepage of blood into surrounding muscle and tissue. Instead of clotting quickly as it would in a normal person, the blood continued to flow unchecked for hours, making a swelling or hematoma as big as a grapefruit. Eventually, when the skin was hard and tight, filled with blood like a balloon, pressure slowed the hemorrhage and a clot finally formed. Then,

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gradually, a process of re-absorption took place, with the skin turning from a shiny purple to a mottled yellowish-green.

A simple scratch on the Tsarevich's finger was not dangerous. Minor external cuts and scratches anywhere on the surface of the body were treated by pressure and tight bandaging which pinched off the blood and allowed the flesh to heal over. Exceptions, of course, were hemorrhages from the inside of the mouth or nose—areas which could not be bandaged. Once, although no pain was involved, the Tsarevich almost died from a nosebleed.

The worst pain and the permanent crippling effects of Alexis's hemophilia came from bleeding into the joints. Blood entering the confined space of an ankle, knee or elbow joint caused pressure on the nerves and brought nightmarish pain. Sometimes the cause of the injury was apparent, sometimes not. In either case, Alexis awakened in the morning to call, "Mama, I can't walk today," or "Mama, I can't bend my elbow." At first, as the Hmb flexed, leaving the largest possible area in the joint socket for the incoming fluids, the pain was small. Then, as this space filled up, it began to hurt. Morphine was available, but because of its destructive habit-forming quaUty, the Tsarevich was never given the drug. His only release from pain was fainting.

Once inside the joint, the blood had a corrosive effect, destroying bone, cartilage and tissue. As the bone formation changed, the limbs locked in a rigid, bent position. The best therapy for this condition was constant exercise and massage, but it was undertaken at the risk of once again beginning the hemorrhage. As a result, Alexis's normal treatment included a grim catalogue of heavy iron orthopedic devices which, along with constant hot mud baths, were designed to straighten his limbs. Needless to say, each. such episode meant weeks in bed.* The combination of exalted rank and hemophilia saw to it that Alexis grew up under a degree of care rarely lavished on any child. While he was very young, nurses surrounded him every minute. When he was five, his doctors suggested that he be given a pair of male companions and bodyguards. Two sailors from the Imperial Navy, named Derevenko and Nagorny, were selected and assigned to protect the Tsarevich from harm. When Alexis was ill, they acted as

* Today, at the first sign of severe bleeding, hemophiliacs are given transfusions of frozen fresh blood plasma or plasma concentrates. New non-habit-forming drugs are used to lessen pain. Where necessary, joints are protected by intricate plastic and light metal braces. Most of these developments in the treatment of hemophilia are quite recent. The use of plasma, for example, was a medical outgrowth of the Second World War, while the design of new lightweight braces is the result of new syntheses of metals and plastics. Hemophilia today is a severe but more manageable disease, and most hemophiliacs can survive the difficult years of childhood to live relatively normal adult lives.

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nurses. "Derevenko was so patient and resourceful, that he often did wonders in alleviating the pain," wrote Anna Vyrubova, an intimate friend

of the Empress. "I can still hear the plaintive voice of Alexis begging the big sailor, 'Lift my arm,' 'Put up my leg,' 'Warm my hands,' and I can see the patient, calm-eyed man working for hours to give comfort to the little pain-wracked limbs."

Hemophilia is a fickle disease, and for weeks, sometimes months, Alexis seemed as well as any child. By nature he was as noisy, lively and mischievous as Anastasia. As a toddler, he liked to scoot down the hall and break into his sisters' classroom, interrupting their lessons, only to be carried off, arms waving. As a child of three or four, he often made appearances at the table, making the round from place to place to shake hands and chatter with each guest. Once he plunged beneath the table, pulled off the slipper of one of the maids-of-honor and carried it proudly as a trophy to his father. Nicholas sternly ordered him to put it back, and the Tsarevich disappeared again under the table. Suddenly the lady screamed. Before replacing the slipper on her foot, Alexis had inserted into its toe an enormous ripe strawberry. Thereafter, for several weeks he was not allowed at the dinner table.

"He thoroughly enjoyed life—when it let him—and he was a happy, romping boy," wrote Gilliard. "He was very simple in his tastes and he entertained no false satisfaction because he was the Heir; there was nothing he thought less about." Like any small boy's, his pockets were filled with string, nails and pebbles. Within the family, he obeyed his older sisters and wore their outgrown nightgowns. Nevertheless, outside the family, Alexis understood that he was more important than his sisters. In public, it was he who sat or stood beside his father. He was the one greeted by shouts of "The Heir!" and the one whom people crowded around and often tried to touch. When a deputation of peasants brought him a gift, they dropped to their knees. Gilliard asked him why he received them thus, and Alexis replied, "I don't know. Derevenko says it must be so." Told that a group of officers of his regiment had arrived to call on him, he interrupted a romp with his sisters. "Now girls, run away," the six-year-old boy said, "I am busy. Someone has just called to see me on business."

Sometimes, impressed by the deference shown him, Alexis was rude. At six, he walked into the waiting room of his father's study and found the Foreign Minister, Alexander Izvolsky, waiting to see the Tsar. Izvolsky remained seated. Alexis marched up to the Minister and said in a loud voice, "When the Heir to the Russian Throne enters a room, people must get up." More often, he was gracious. To

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one of his mother's ladies-in-waiting who had done him a favor, the Tsarevich extended his hand in an exact imitation of his father and said with a smile, "It is really nice of you, you know." As he grew older, he became sensitive to the subtleties of rank and etiquette. At nine, he sent a collection of his favorite jingles to Gleb Botkin, the doctor's son, who drew well. Along with the jingles he sent a note, "To illustrate and write the jingles under the drawings. Alexis." Then, before handing the note to Dr. Botkin to take to Gleb, Alexis abruptly crossed out his signature. "If I send that paper to Gleb with my signature on it, then it would be an order which Gleb would have to obey," the Tsarevich explained. "But I mean it only as a request and he doesn't have to do it if he doesn't want to."

As Alexis grew older, his parents carefully explained to him the need to avoid bumps and blows. Yet, being an active child, Alexis was attracted to the very things that involved the greatest danger. "Can't I have my own bicycle?" he would beg his mother. "Alexei, you know you can't." "May I please play tennis?" "Dear, you know you mustn't." Then, with a gush of tears, Alexis would cry, "Why can other boys have everything and I nothing?" There were times when Alexis simply ignored all restraints and did as he pleased. This risk-taking behavior, common enough among hemophiliac boys to be medically labeled the "Daredevil reaction," was compounded of many things: rebellion against constant overprotection, a subconscious need to prove invulnerability to harm and, most important, the simple desire to be and play like a normal child.

Once, at seven, he appeared in the middle of a review of the palace guard, riding a secretly borrowed bicycle across the parade ground. The astonished Tsar promptly halted the review and ordered every man to pursue, surround

and capture the wobbling vehicle and its delighted novice rider. At a children's party at which movies had been shown, Alexis suddenly led the children on top of the tables and began leaping wildly from table to table. When Derevenko and others tried to calm him, he shouted gaily, "All grown-ups have to go," and tried to push them out the door.

By deluging him with expensive gifts, his parents hoped to make him forget the games he was forbidden to play. His room was filled with elaborate toys: There were "great railways with dolls in the carriages as passengers, with barriers, stations, buildings and signal boxes, flashing engines and marvelous signalling apparatus, whole battalions of tin soldiers, models of towns with church towers and domes, floating models of ships, perfectly equipped factories with doll workers and mines in exact imitation of the real thing, with miners

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ascending and descending. All the toys were mechanically operated and the little Prince had only to press a button to set the workers in motion, to drive the warships up and down the tank, to set the church-bells ringing and the soldiers marching."

Like his father, Alexis was enthralled by military pageantry. From birth, he had borne the title of Hetman of all the Cossacks and, along with his toy soldiers, toy forts and toy guns, he had his own Cossack uniform with fur cap, boots and dagger. In the summer, he wore a miniature uniform of a sailor of the Russian navy. As a child, he said that he wanted most to be Uke one of the ancient tsars, riding his white horse, leading his troops into battle. As he began spending more and more time in bed, he realized that he would never be that kind of tsar.

Alexis had an ear for music. Unlike his sisters, who played the piano, he preferred the balalaika and learned to play it well. He liked nature and kept a number of pets. His favorite was a silky spaniel named Joy, whose long ears dragged on the ground. From a circus the Tsar acquired an aged performing donkey with a repertory of tricks. When Alexis visited the stable, Vanka, the donkey, expected to find sugar in his master's pocket; if it

was there, he turned it out with his nose. In the winter, Vanka was harnessed to a sled and pulled Alexis about the park.

Once Alexis was presented with the rarest pet of all, a tame sable. Caught by an old hunter in the depths of Siberia, it had been tamed by the old man and his wife, who decided to bring it as a present to the Tsar. The couple arrived, having spent every kopeck on the long journey. After the palace authorities had checked by telegram with their home village to make sure that the two were not revolutionaries, the Empress was informed. An hour later a message came back, instructing the old man and woman to come with the sable "as quickly as possible. The children are wild with impatience." Later the old hunter himself described to a palace official what had happened:

"Father Tsar came in. We threw ourselves at his feet. The sable looked at him as if it understood that it was the Tsar himself. We went into the children's room. The Tsar told me to let the sable go and the children began to play with it. Then the Tsar told us to sit down on chairs. He began to ask me questions. What made me think of coming to see him . . . What things are like in Siberia, How we go hunting ... [The sable, meanwhile, was racing around the room, pursued by the children, leaving a trail of ruin.] Father Tsar asked what had to be done for the sable. When I explained, he told me to send it to the Hunters village at Gatchina. But I said,

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" 'Father Tsar, that won't do. All the hunters will be wanting to sell the skin of my sable. They will kill it and say the animal had an accident. . . . '

"The Tsar said:

" 'I would have chosen a hunter I could trust. But perhaps after all you are right. Take it back with you to Siberia. Look after it as long as it lives. That is an order you have received from me. . . . But mind, don't forget to look well after the sable; it's my sable now. God be with you!' "

The old man was given a watch crested with the Imperial eagle and the old woman a brooch. They were paid generously for the sable and also given

money to travel home. But the children were inconsolable. "There was no help for it," they said. "Papa had made up his mind."

Pets were only a substitute for what Alexis really wanted: boys his own age as playmates. Because of his hemophilia, the Empress did not want him to play often with the small Romanov cousins who appeared infrequently at the palace with their parents. She considered most of them rough and rude, and she was afraid that they would knock Alexis down while playing their games. His most constant companions were the two young sons of Derevenko the sailor, who played with Alexis while their father watched. If the play got rough, Derevenko growled and the three children obeyed immediately. Later, carefully selected young cadets from the military academy were instructed as to the danger involved and then brought to the palace to play with the Tsarevich.

More often, Alexis played with his sisters or by himself. "Luckily," wrote Gilliard, "his sisters liked playing with him. They brought into his life an element of youthful merriment that otherwise would have been sorely missed." Sometimes, by himself, he simply lay on his back staring up at the blue sky. When he was ten, his sister Olga asked him what he was doing so quietly. "I like to think and wonder," said Alexis. "What about?" Olga persisted. "Oh, so many things," he said. "I enjoy the sun and the beauty of summer as long as I can. Who knows whether one of these days I shall not be prevented from doing it?"

More than anyone else outside the family, Pierre Gilliard understood the nature of hemophilia and what it meant to the Tsarevich and his family. His understanding developed gradually. He came to Russia from Switzerland in 1904 at the age of twenty-five. In 1906, he began tutoring Alexis's sisters in French. For six years, he came to the palace almost every day to tutor the girls without ever really knowing the

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Tsarevich. He saw the boy as a baby in his mother's arms; later he caught glimpses of him running down a corridor or out in the snow riding his sled, but nothing more. Of Alexis's disease the tutor was almost completely ignorant.

"At times, his visits [to his sisters' classroom] would suddenly cease and he would be seen no more for a long time," Gilliard wrote. "Every time he disappeared, the palace was smitten with the greatest depression. My pupils' [the girls] mood was melancholy which they tried in vain to conceal. When I asked them the cause, they replied evasively, 'Alexis Nicolaievich is not well.' I knew that he was prey to a disease . . . the nature of which no one told me."

In 1912, at the request of the Empress, Gilliard began tutoring Alexis in French. He found himself confronted with a nine-and-a-half-year-old boy "rather tall for his age ... a long, finely chiseled face, delicate features, auburn hair with a coppery glint, and large grey-blue eyes like his mother. . . . He had a quick wit and a keen, penetrating mind. He surprised me with questions beyond his years which bore witness to a delicate and intuitive spirit. Those not forced to teach him habits of discipline as I was, could quickly fall under the spell of his charm. Under the capricious little creature I had first known, I discovered a child of a naturally affectionate disposition, sensitive to suffering in others just because he suffered so much himself."

Gilliard's first problem was establishing discipline. Because of her love and fear for him, the Empress could not be firm with her son. Alexis obeyed only the Tsar, who was not always present. His illness interrupted his lessons for weeks at a time, sapping his energy and his interest, so that even when he was well he tended to laziness. "At this time, he was the kind of child who can hardly bear correction," Gilliard wrote. "He had never been under any regular discipline. In his eyes, I was the person appointed to extract work from him. ... I had the definite impression of his mute hostility. ... As time passed, my authority took hold, the more the boy opened his heart to me, the better I realized the treasures of his nature and I began to feel that with so many precious gifts, it was unjust to give up hope."

Gilliard also worried about the isolation which surrounded Alexis. Princes inevitably live outside the normal routine of normal boys and, in Alexis's case, this isolation was greatly intensified by his hemophilic condition. Gilliard was determined to do something about it. His account of what

happened—of the decision by Nicholas and Alexandra to accept his advice and of the anguish they and Alexis suffered when a bleeding episode ensued—is the most intimate and moving eye-

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witness account available of how life was really lived in the inner world of Tsarskoe Selo:

"At first I was astonished and disappointed at the lack of support given me by the Tsaritsa," wrote Gilliard. . . . "Dr. Derevenko [co-incidentally, the Tsarevich's doctor had the same name as his sailor attendant, although the two were unrelated] told me that in view of the constant danger of the boy's relapse and as a result of the religious fatalism developed by the Tsaritsa, she tended to leave the decision to circumstance and kept postponing her intervention which would inflict useless suffering on her son if he were not to survive. . . ."

Gilliard disagreed with Dr. Derevenko. "I considered that the perpetual presence of the sailor Derevenko and his assistant Nagorny were harmful to the child. The external power which intervened whenever danger threatened seemed to me to hinder the development of will-power and the faculty of observation. What the child gained possibly in safety, he lost in real discipline. I thought it would be better to give him more freedom and accustom him to resist the impulses of his own motion.

"Besides, accidents continued to happen. It was impossible to guard against everything and the closer the supervision, the more irritating and humiliating it seemed to the boy and the greater the risk that it would develop his skill at evasion and make him cunning and deceitful. It was the best way to turn an already physically delicate child into a characterless individual without self-control and backbone even in the moral sense.

"I spoke ... to Dr. Derevenko, but he was so obsessed by fears of a fatal attack and so conscious of the terrible responsibility that devolved on him as a doctor that I could not bring him around to share my view. It was for the parents and the parents alone to take a decision which might have serious consequences for their child. To my great astonishment, they

entirely agreed with me and said they were ready to accept all risks of an experiment on which I did not enter myself without terrible anxiety. No doubt they realized how much harm the existing system was doing to all the best in their son and if they loved him to distraction . . . their love itself gave them the strength to run the risk of an accident . . . rather than see him grow up a man without strength of character. . . . Alexis Nicolaie-vich was delighted at this decision. In his relations with his playmates, he was always suffering from the incessant supervision to which he was subject. He promised me to repay the confidence reposed in him.

"Everything went well at first and I was beginning to be easy in my

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mind when the accident I had so much feared happened without warning. The Tsarevich was in the classroom standing on a chair, when he slipped and in falling hit his right knee against the corner of some piece of furniture. The next day he could not walk. On the day after, the subcutaneous hemorrhage had progressed and the swelling which formed below the knee rapidly spread down the leg. The skin, which was greatly distended, had hardened under the force of the blood and . . . caused pain which worsened every hour.

"I was thunderstruck. Yet neither the Tsar nor the Tsaritsa blamed me in the slightest. So far from it, they seemed intent on preventing me from despairing. . . . The Tsaritsa was at her son's bedside from the first onset of the attack. She watched over him, surrounding him with her tender love and care and trying a thousand attentions to alleviate his sufferings. The Tsar came the moment he was free. He tried to comfort and amuse the boy, but the pain was stronger than his mother's caresses or his father's stories and moans and tears began once more. Every now and then, the door opened and one of the Grand Duchesses came in on tiptoe and kissed her little brother, bringing a gust of sweetness and health into the room. For a moment, the boy would open his great eyes, around which the malady had already painted black circles, and then almost immediately, close them again.

"One morning I found the mother at her son's bedside. He had had a very bad night. Dr. Derevenko was anxious as the hemorrhage had not stopped and his temperature was rising. The inflammation had spread and the pain was worse than the day before. The Tsarevich lay in bed groaning piteously. His head rested on his mother's arm and his small, deadly white face was unrecognizable. At times the groans ceased and he murmured the one word, 'Mummy.' His mother kissed him on the hair, forehead, and eyes as if the touch of her lips would relieve him of his pain and restore some of the life which was leaving him. Think of the torture of that mother, an impotent witness of her son's martyrdom in those hours of anguish—a mother who knew that she herself was the cause of those sufferings, that she had transmitted the terrible disease against which human science was powerless. Now I understood the secret tragedy of her life. How easy it was to reconstruct the stages of that long Calvary."

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Mother's Agony

Hemophilia is as old as man. It has come down through the centuries, misted in legend, shrouded with the dark dread of a hereditary curse. In the Egypt of the Pharaohs, a woman was forbidden to bear further children if her firstborn son bled to death from a minor wound. The ancient Talmud barred circumcision in a family if two successive male children had suffered fatal hemorrhages.

Because over the last one hundred years it has appeared in the ruling houses of Britain, Russia and Spain, it has been called "the royal disease." It has also been called "the disease of the Hapsburgs"; this is inaccurate, for no prince of the Austrian dynasty has ever suffered from hemophilia. It remains one of the most mysterious and malicious of all the genetic, chronic diseases. Even today, both the cause and the cure are unknown.

In medical terms, hemophilia is an inherited blood-clotting deficiency, transmitted by women according to the sex-linked recessive Mendelian pattern. Thus, while women carry the defective genes, they almost never

suffer from the disease. With rare exceptions, it strikes only males. Yet it does not necessarily strike all the males in a family. Genetically as well as clinically, hemophilia is capricious. Members of a family in which hemophilia has appeared never know, on the birth of a new son, whether or not the child will have hemophilia. If the child is a girl, the family cannot know with certainty whether she is a hemophilic carrier until she grows and has children of her own. The secret is locked inside the structure of the chromosomes.*

* At the heart of the problem of hemophilia are the genes which issue the biochemical instructions that tell the body how to grow and nourish itself. Gathered in curiously shaped agglomerations of matter called chromosomes, they

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If modern science has made little progress in finding the cause of or a cure for hemophilia, it has achieved an extensive charting of the scope of the disease. Hemophilia follows no geographical or racial pattern; it appears on all continents, in all races at a statistical ratio of one hemophiliac among every 5,000 males. In the United States, there are 200,000 hemophiliacs. Theoretically, the disease should appear only in families which have a previous history of hemophilia. But today, in the United States, forty percent of all cases appearing have no traceable family history. One explanation for this is that the defective gene can remain hidden for as many as seven or eight generations. A more probable explanation is that the genes are spontaneously changing or mutating. What causes these spontaneous mutations, no one knows. Some researchers believe they are the result of new and rapidly changing environmental factors such as drugs or radiation. In any case, their number apparently is increasing.

The most famous case of spontaneous mutation occurred in the family of Queen Victoria. The tiny indomitable woman who ruled England for sixty-four years and who was "Granny" to most of Europe's royalty was, unknowingly at her marriage, a hemophilic carrier. The youngest of her four sons, Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany, had hemophilia. Two of her five daughters, Princess Alice and Princess Beatrice, were hemophilic carriers.

When the daughters of Alice and Beatrice—Queen Victoria's granddaughters—married into the royal houses of Russia and Spain, their sons, the heirs to those two thrones, were born with hemophilia.

The Queen, on learning that her own son had hemophilia, was astonished. Bewildered, she protested that "this disease is not in our

are probably the most intricate bundles of information known. They determine the nature of every one of the trillions of highly specialized cells that make up a human being. Scientists know that the defective gene which causes hemophilia appears on one of the female sex chromosomes, known as X chromosomes, but they have never precisely pinpointed the location of the faulty gene or determined the nature of the flaw. Chemically, most doctors believe that hemophilia is caused by the absence of some ingredient, probably a protein factor, which causes normal blood to coagulate. But one eminent hematologist, the late Dr. Leandro Tocantins of Philadelphia, believed that hemophilia is caused by the presence of an extra ingredient, an inhibitor, which blocks the normal clotting process. Nobody really knows.

There is a remote prospect that current research into the structure of chromosomes will help hemophiliacs. If it should become possible to locate the genes responsible—and then to correct or substitute for the faulty gene-hemophilia could be cured. But medical researchers hold out little hope for the immediate future. So far, science has been unable to change genetic characteristics in any form of life except bacteria.

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family," and indeed it had not appeared until that point. A spontaneous mutation had occurred, either in the genetic material of Victoria herself or on the X chromosome passed to her at conception by her father, the Duke of Kent. Nevertheless, soon after Leopold's birth in 1853, the evidence of the disease in the form of bumps and bruises was unmistakable. At the age of ten, he was assigned to tend, during a family wedding, his equally stubborn, four-year-old nephew William, the future Kaiser. When William fidgeted and Leopold reprimanded, the small German boy bit his uncle on the leg. Leopold was unharmed, but Queen Victoria was angry. Leopold grew up a tall, intelligent, affectionate and stubborn prince. Throughout his boyhood and adolescence, his wilfulness often led to hemorrhaging, and he was left with a chronically lame knee. In 1868, the *British Medical Journal* reported one of his bleeding episodes: "His Royal Highness . . . who has previously been in full health and activity, has been suffering during the last week from severe accidental hemorrhage. The Prince was reduced to a state of extreme and dangerous exhaustion by the loss of blood." In 1875, when Leopold

was twenty-two, the same journal recorded: "The peculiar ability of the Prince to suffer severe hemorrhage, from which he has always been a sufferer ... is essentially a case for vigilant medical attendance and most careful nursing. . . . He is in the hands of those who have watched him from the cradle and who are armed by the special experience of his constitution, as well as the most ample command of professional resources." The Queen reacted in a manner typical of hemophilic parents. She was unusually attached to this son, worried about him, overprotected him, and as a result of her constant admonitions to be careful, she often fought with him. When he was fifteen, she gave him the Order of the Garter at a younger age than his brothers "because he was far more advanced in mind and because I wish to give him this encouragement and pleasure as he has so many privations and disappointments." When Leopold was twenty-six, his mother wrote to the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, that Leopold could not represent her at the opening of an Australian exposition as Disraeli had asked. Using the royal third person, the Queen wrote: "She cannot bring herself to consent to send her very delicate son who has been *four or five times at death's door* [italics the Queen's] and who is *never* hardly a *few* months without being laid up, to a great *distance,* to a climate to which he is a stranger and to expose him to dangers which he may not be able to avert. Even if he did not suffer, the terrible anxiety which the Queen would undergo would unfit her for her duties at home and might undermine her health."

Constantly frustrated by his mother's attempts to shelter him, Leopold looked for something to do. His older brother Bertie, the Prince of Wales, suggested giving him command of the Balmoral Volunteers, a military company stationed near the royal castle in Scotland. The Queen, fearing for Leopold's knee, declined, and Leopold thereafter refused to go to Balmoral. When the Queen tried to keep her son sequestered on an upper floor of Buckingham Palace, Leopold sUpped away for two weeks to Paris. At twenty-nine, to his mother's surprise, he found a German princess, Helen of Waldeck, who was unafraid of the disease and willing to marry him. They lived happily for two years and she bore him a daughter. Helen was pregnant a second time when, in Cannes, Leopold fell, suffered a minor blow on the head and died, at thirty-one, of a brain hemorrhage. His mother

sorrowed for herself and the family, but, she wrote in her journal, "for dear Leopold himself, we could not repine . . . there was such a restless longing for what he could not have . . . that seemed to increase rather than lessen."

Prince Leopold, the first of the royal hemophiliacs, was the Empress Alexandra's uncle. His affliction meant that all of his five sisters were potential carriers, but only Alice and Beatrice actually transmitted the mutant gene into their offspring. Of Alice's eight children, two of the girls —Alix and Irene—were carriers. One son, Alix's brother Frederick, called "Frittie," was a hemophiliac. At two, he bled for three days from a cut on the ear. At three, Frittie and his older brother Ernest burst romping into their mother's room one morning while she was still in bed. The windows which reached to the floor were open. Frittie tumbled out and fell twenty feet to the stone terrace below. No bones were broken and at first he seemed only shaken and bruised. But bleeding in the brain had begun, and by nightfall Frittie was dead.

The Empress Alexandra was a year-old baby when Frittie died, and she was twelve at the death of Leopold. Neither tragedy struck her personally. Her first meaningful contact with hemophilia occurred when it appeared in her two nephews, the sons of her older sister Irene and Prince Henry of Prussia. One of these boys, a younger Prince Henry, died, apparently of bleeding, at the age of four in 1904, just before the birth of Alexis. His short life was Hved behind palace walls and his disease was concealed, probably to hide the fact that hemophilia had appeared in the German Imperial family. The older brother, Prince Waldemar, survived to the age of fifty-six and died in 1945.

Under normal circumstances, the appearance of hemophilia in her uncle, her brother and her nephews should have indicated to Alex-

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andra the possibility that she was carrying the hemophilic gene. The genetic pattern had long been known: it was discovered in 1803 by Dr. John Conrad Otto of Philadelphia and confirmed in 1820 by Dr. Christian Nasse of Bonn. In 1865, the Austrian monk and botanist Gregor Johann Mendel formulated his law of genetics, based on twenty-five years of cross-breeding garden

peas. In 1876, a French doctor named Grandidier declared that "all members of bleeder families should be advised against marriage." And by 1905, a year after Alexis was born, Dr. M. Litten, a New Yorker, had had sufficient experience with the disease to write that hemophilic boys should be supervised while playing with other children and that they should not be subjected to corporal punishment. "Bleeders with means," he added, "should take up some learned profession; if they are students, dueling is forbidden."

Why, then, did it come as such an overwhelming shock to Alexandra that her son had hemophilia?

One reason suggested by the late British geneticist J. B. S. Haldane is that although the genetic pattern was known to doctors, this knowledge never penetrated the closed circles of royal courts: "It is predictable," wrote Haldane, "that Nicholas knew that his fiancée had hemophiliac brothers although nothing is said in his diaries or letters, but by virtue of his education, he attached no importance to this knowledge. It is possible that they or their counselors consulted doctors. We do not know and doubtless will never know if . . . the court doctor counseled against marriage. If a distinguished doctor outside court circles had desired to warn Nicholas of the dangerous character of his approaching marriage, I do not believe he would have been able to do it, either directly or in the columns of the press. Kings are carefully protected against disagreeable realities. . . . The hemophilia of the Tsarevich was a symptom of the divorce between royalty and reality."

There is, as Haldane says, no evidence that either Nicholas or Alexandra ever interpreted the laws of genetics to determine their own chance of having a hemophilic son. Almost certainly, both considered the mystery of the disease, of who would and would not be afflicted, to be a matter in the hands of God. This also seems to have been the attitude of Queen Victoria, who apparently did not understand the hereditary pattern of the disease she had spread so widely. When one of her grandchildren died in childhood, she wrote simply, "Our poor family seems persecuted by this awful disease, the worst I know."

If Alexandra was surrounded by hemophilic relatives before she married, so were most of the princesses of Europe. So numerous were

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Queen Victoria's royal progeny—nine children and thirty-four grandchildren—that the defective gene had been spread far and wide. In marrying and having children, hemophilia was considered one of the hazards royal parents faced, along with diphtheria, pneumonia, smallpox and scarlet fever. Royal princes, even those who were heirs to a throne, did not shy away from a prospective mate because there was hemophilia in her family. Prince Albert Victor of England, who, had he lived, would have been king in place of his younger brother, George V, sought Princess Alix's hand before Nicholas won it. Had they married, hemophilia would have come down through the line of the British royal family. Kaiser William II was surrounded on all sides by hemophilia. He and his two sons escaped, but his uncle and two of his nephews were victims. William himself was in love with Ella, Empress Alexandra's older sister. Had Ella married William instead of Grand Duke Serge (they were childless), the Kaiser also might have had a hemophilic heir.

In that era, every family, including royal families, had a long string of children and expected to lose one or two in the process of growing up. The death of a child was never a casual experience, but it rarely brought the life of a family to more than a temporary halt. Nevertheless, in Alexandra's case the mere threat of death to her youngest child involved her totally, and through her, the fate of an ancient dynasty and the history of a great nation. Why was this so?

It is important to understand what the birth of Alexis meant to Alexandra. Her greatest desire after her marriage had been to give the Russian autocracy a male heir. Over the next ten years, she had four daughters, each healthy, charming and loved, but still not an Heir to the Throne. The Russian crown no longer passed down through the female as well as the male line, as it had to the daughters of Peter the Great and to Catherine the Great. Catherine's son, Tsar Paul, hated his mother and changed the law of succession so that only males could inherit the throne. Thus, if Alexandra

could not produce a son, the succession would pass first to Nicholas's younger brother Michael and after that, into the family of his uncle Grand Duke Vladimir. Each time Alexandra became pregnant, she prayed fervently for a boy. Each time, it seemed, her prayers were ignored. When Anastasia, their fourth daughter, was born, Nicholas had to leave the palace and walk in the park to overcome his disappointment before facing his wife. The birth of the Tsarevich, therefore, meant far more to his mother than the arrival of just another child. This baby was the crowning of her marriage, the fruit of her hours of prayer, God's blessing on her, on her husband and on the people of Russia.

All who saw the Empress with her infant son in those first months; were struck with her happiness. At thirty-two, Alexandra was tall, still slender, with gray-blue eyes and long red-gold hair. The child in her arms appeared to be glowing with health. "I saw the Tsarevich in the Empress's arms," wrote Anna Vyrubova. "How beautiful he was, how healthy, how normal, with his golden hair, his blue eyes, and his expression of intelligence so rare for so young a child." Pierre Gilliard first saw the Tsarevich when his future pupil was eighteen months old. "I could see she [Alexandra] was transfused by the delirious joy of a mother who had at last seen her dearest wish fulfilled. She was proud and happy in the beauty of her child. The Tsarevich certainly was one of the handsomest babies one could imagine, with lovely fair curls, great grey-blue eyes under the fringe of long curling lashes and the fresh pink color of a healthy child. When he smiled, there were two little dimples in his chubby cheeks."

Because she had waited so long and prayed so hard for her son, the revelation that Alexis suffered from hemophilia struck Alexandra with savage force. From that moment, she lived in the particular sunless world reserved for the mothers of hemophiliacs. For any woman, there is no more exquisite torture than watching helplessly as a beloved child suffers in extreme pain. Alexis, like every other child, looked to his mother for protection. When he hemorrhaged into a joint and the pounding pain obliterated everything else from his consciousness, he still was able to cry,

"Mama, help me, help me! " For Alexandra sitting beside him, unable to help, each cry seemed a sword thrust into the bottom of her heart.

Almost worse for the Empress than the actual episodes of bleeding was the terrible Damoclean uncertainty of hemophilia. Other chronic diseases may handicap a child and dismay the mother, but in time both learn to adjust their lives to the medical facts. In hemophilia, however, there is no *status quo*. One minute Alexis could be playing happily and normally. The next, he might stumble, fall and begin a bleeding episode that would take him to the brink of death. It could strike at any time in any part of the body: the head, nose, mouth, kidneys, joints, or muscles.

Like Queen Victoria's, Alexandra's natural reaction was to overprotect her child. The royal family of Spain put its hemophilic sons in padded suits and padded the trees in the park when they went out to play. Alexandra's solution was to assign the two sailors to hover so closely over Alexis that they could reach out and catch him before he fell. Yet, as Gilliard pointed out to the Empress, this kind of protection can stifle the spirit, producing a dependent, warped and crippled mind.

Alexandra responded gallantly, withdrawing the two guardians to permit her son to make his own mistakes, take his own steps and—if necessary—fall and bruise. But it was she who accepted the risk and who bore the additional burden of guilt when an accident followed.

To maintain the balance which provides adequate protection as well as attempting a degree of normalcy is a cruel strain for a mother. Except when the child is asleep, there are no hours of relaxation. The toll on the Empress was like battle fatigue; after too long a period of sustained alertness, her emotions were drained. This often happens to soldiers in war, and when it does, they are withdrawn from the front to rest. But for the mother of a hemophiliac there is no withdrawal. The battle goes on forever and the battlefield is everywhere.

Hemophilia means great loneliness for a woman. At first, when a hemophilic boy is born, the characteristic maternal reaction is a vigorous

resolve to fight: somehow, somewhere, there must be a specialist who can declare that a mistake has been made, or that a cure is just around the corner. One by one, all the specialists are consulted. One by one, they sadly shake their heads. The particular emotional security that doctors normally provide when confronting illness is gone. The mother realizes that she is alone.

Having discovered this and accepted it, she begins to prefer it that way. The normal world, going about its everyday life, seems coldly unfeeling. Since the normal world cannot help and does not understand, she prefers to cut herself off from it. Her family becomes her refuge. Here, where sadness need not be hidden, there are no questions and no pretensions. This inner world becomes the mother's reality. So it was for the Empress Alexandra in the little world of Tsarskoe Selo. Alexandra, trying to control the waves of anxiety and frustration that kept rolling over her, sought answers by throwing herself into the Church. The Russian Orthodox Church is an emotional church with a strong belief in the healing power of faith and prayer. As soon as the Empress realized that no doctor could aid her son, she determined to wrest from God the miracle which science denied. "God is just," she declared, and plunged into renewed attempts to win His mercy by the fervent passion of her prayers.

Hour after hour, she prayed, either in the small room off her bedroom or in the palace chapel, a darkened chamber lined with silken tapestries. For greater privacy, she established a small chapel in the crypt of the Fedorovski Sobor, a church in the Imperial Park used by the household and soldiers of the Guard. Here, alone on the stone floors, by the light of oil lamps, she begged for the health of her son.

In periods when Alexis was well, she dared to hope. "God has heard

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me," she cried. Even as the years passed and one hemorrhage followed another, Alexandra refused to believe that God had deserted her. Instead, she decided that she herself must be unworthy of receiving a miracle. Knowing that the disease had been transmitted through her body, she began to dwell on her own guilt. Obviously, she told herself, if she had been the

instrument of her son's torture, she could not also become the instrument of his salvation. God had rejected her prayers; therefore she must find someone who was closer to God to intercede on her behalf. When Gregory Rasputin, the Siberian peasant who was reported to have miraculous powers of faith healing, arrived in St. Petersburg, Alexandra believed that God had at last given her an answer.

For most young mothers of hemophilic sons, encircled by corrosive fear and ignorance, hope is thin and help is uncertain. The greatest support which any woman can have in this lonely torment is the love and understanding of her husband. In this respect, Nicholas's contribution was remarkable. No man ever was gentler or more compassionate to his wife, or spent more time with his afflicted son. However this last Russian tsar may be judged as a monarch, his behavior as a husband and father was something which shone nobly apart.

The other support which the mother of a hemophiliac can hope for is the understanding of her friends. Here, Alexandra was at a special disadvantage. She had never made friends easily. The friends of her childhood had been left behind in Germany; when she came to Russia at twenty-two, it was to move onto the lofty isolation of the throne. Even before Alexis was born, Alexandra disliked the gay balls and empty life of society and the court. After his birth, she was wholly involved in her private struggle, and the normal life of a woman of her station seemed even emptier and more superficial. What she longed to find was, not the stylized attentions and conversations of most ladies of the court, but the simple, profound friendship of the heart which leaps all barriers and reaches from one soul into another, sharing the most intimate fears, dreams and hopes.

Once in a letter to Princess Marie Bariatinsky, one of the few close friends of her first years in Russia, the Empress described what she sought in her friends: "I must have a person to myself; if I want to be my *real* self. I am not made to shine before an assembly—I have not got the easy nor the witty talk one needs for that. I like the *internal being,* and that attracts me with great force. As you know, I am of the preacher type. I want to help others in life, to help them to fight their battles and bear their crosses."

The compulsion to fight other people's battles and help bear their crosses stemmed in part from Alexandra's own frustration. Nothing is more discouraging and debilitating than to be permanently confronted with a situation which never changes and which cannot be changed, no matter how hard one tries. Frequently, mothers of hemophiliacs experience an overwhelming urge to throw themselves into helping others who *can* be helped. Many of the problems of this world, unlike hemophilia, hold out some promise of hope. By helping others, Alexandra was actually trying to keep a grip on her own faith and sanity.

One of those whom the Empress helped in this way was Princess Sonia Orbeliani. A Georgian girl who arrived at court in 1898 at the age of twenty-three, Sonia Orbeliani was small, blonde and high-spirited, an excellent sportswoman and a fine musician. The Empress was always fond of Sonia's cleverness and cheerfulness, but it was not until the girl fell ill while accompanying the Imperial party on a visit to Darmstadt that Alexandra's feelings were fully aroused. As soon as Sonia became sick, Alexandra dropped everything to care for her, despite the criticism of her German relations and of members of the Imperial suite. The illness was a wasting spinal disease which all knew was hopeless. But for nine years, until Sonia died, Alexandra made her life worth living.

"The Empress had great moral influence over her," wrote Baroness Buxhoeveden, a lady-in-waiting who witnessed the long ordeal. "It was she who led the doomed woman who knew what was awaiting her, to the attainment of that wonderful Christian submission with which she not only patiently bore her malady but managed to keep a cheerful spirit and keen interest in life. For nine long years, whatever her own health was, the Empress never paid her daily visit to her children without going to Sonia's rooms, which adjoined those of the Grand Duchesses. When Sonia had an acute attack of illness . . . the Empress went to her not only several times a day but often at night when she was very ill: indeed no mother could have been more loving. Special carriages and special appliances were made for

Sonia so that she could share the general life as if she were well. . . . She followed the Empress everywhere."

Sonia Orbeliani died in 1015 in the hospital at Tsarskoe Selo where the Empress Alexandra was tending wounded soldiers from the battle-front. Rather than change into black mourning clothes, Alexandra came directly to the memorial service in her nurse's uniform. "I feel somehow nearer to her like this, more human, less Empress," she said. Late that evening, before the coffin was closed, Alexandra sat beside the body of her friend, staring at the peaceful face, stroking the golden

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hair. "Leave me here," she said to those who wanted to take her away to rest. "I would like to be a little more with Sonia."

Sonia Orbeliani came close to being what Alexandra so fervently desired at the Russian court: a friend of the heart. But even Sonia never fully tapped the immense reservoir of emotion inside the Empress. Outside her own family, the only person to whom Alexandra ever fully opened her whole soul was a heavy, round-faced young woman named Anna Vyrubova.

Anna Vyrubova, born Anna Taneyeva, was twelve years younger than the Empress Alexandra. Her family was distinguished; her father, Alexander Taneyev, was both Director of the Imperial Chancellery and a noted composer. Through his house moved government ministers, artists, musicians and ladies of society. Anna herself attended an exclusive dancing class where an occasional partner was young Prince Felix Yussoupov, the son of the wealthiest family of the Russian nobility.

In 1901, at seventeen, Anna Taneyeva fell ill, and the Empress paid her a short visit in the hospital. It was one of many such calls that Alexandra made, but the romantic girl was overwhelmed by the gesture. Anna conceived a passionate admiration for the twenty-nine-year-old Empress. After her recovery, Anna was invited to the palace, where Alexandra discovered that she could sing and play the piano, and the two began to play and sing duets.

An unhappy romance further strengthened the bond. Although Anna Taneyeva was too heavy and soft to be considered beautiful, she had clear blue eyes, a pretty mouth and a trusting, innocent charm. "I remember Vyrubova when she came to visit my mother," said Botkin's daughter Tatiana. "She was pink-cheeked, full, and all dressed in fluffy fur. It seemed to me that she was too sweet talking to us and petting us and we didn't like her very much." In 1907, Anna was being courted by Lieutenant Boris Vyrubov, a survivor of the Battle of Tsushima. Anna was reluctant to marry Vyrubov, but Alexandra overrode her objections and urged her to go ahead. Anna agreed, and the marriage was performed with the Tsar and his wife as witnesses. Within a few months, the marriage collapsed. Vyrubov, whose ship had been sunk from under him, had shattered nerves and never managed to consummate his marriage.

The Empress blamed herself for Anna's misfortune. For a while, she devoted most of her time to her romantic and lonely young friend. Anna was invited that summer to join the Imperial family for its annual two-week cruise aboard the Imperial yacht through the Finnish

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fjords. Sitting on deck during the day or under lamplight in the yacht's salon at night, Anna poured her heart out. Alexandra responded by talking of her own childhood, her dreams before her marriage, her loneliness in Russia, her hopes and fears for her son. From those days on board the yacht there sprang one of those intimate, confiding relationships such as exist only between women. The tie between them grew so strong that they could sit for hours in silence, secure in unexpressed affection. On each side, anxieties were calmed, wounds healed and faith encouraged. When the cruise ended, Alexandra cried out, "I thank God for at last having sent me a true friend." Nicholas, who liked Anna, told her good-naturedly, "Now you have subscribed to come with us regularly."

From that summer, Anna Vyrubova centered her life on the Empress Alexandra. If for some reason Alexandra could not see her for a day or so, Anna pouted. At these times, the Empress teased her, calling her "our big baby" and "our little daughter." To bring her closer, Anna was moved into a

small house inside the Imperial Park, just two hundred yards from the Alexander Palace. It was a summer house with no foundations, and in the winter an icy chill rose up through the floors. Often after dinner Nicholas and Alexandra came to visit.

"When their Majesties came to tea with me in the evening," Anna wrote, "the Empress generally brought fruit and sweetmeats with her and the Emperor sometimes brought a bottle of cherry brandy. We used to sit around the table with our legs drawn up so as to avoid contact with the cold floor. Their Majesties regarded my primitive way of life from the humorous side. Sitting before the blazing hearth, we drank our tea and ate little toasted cracknels, handed around by my servant. ... I remember the Emperor once laughingly saying to me that, after such an evening, nothing but a hot bath could make him warm again."

When not playing hostess in her cottage, Anna was at the palace. She came after dinner, joining in the family's puzzles, games and reading aloud. In conversation, she rarely proposed a political subject or urged an original opinion, preferring instead to endorse whatever the Tsar and the Empress had just said. If husband and wife disagreed, her role was to come down ever so gently on the side of the Empress.

Unlike most famous royal favorites, Anna Vyrubova asked nothing for herself except attention and affection. She was without ambition. She never appeared at court ceremonies and never asked for favors, titles or money for herself or her own relatives. Occasionally, Alexandra made her accept a dress or a few hundred roubles; usually Anna

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gave the money away. During the war, she spent most of her small inheritance on equipment for one of the military hospitals at Tsarskoe Selo.

In a court where the sharp edges of petty intrigue and ambition showed all too plainly, Anna Vyrubova outraged many people. Some scorned her unattractiveness and her naïveté, others felt simply that an empress of Russia deserved a more glittering companion. Grand duchesses of the Imperial blood who were never invited to the Imperial palace were irked to

think that the dumpy Vyrubova was sitting night after night in the intimate circle of the Imperial family. Maurice Paléologue, the French Ambassador during the war, was shocked by Anna's inelegant appearance. "No royal favorite ever looked more unpretentious," he wrote. "She was rather stout, of coarse and ample build, with thick, shining hair, a fat neck, a pretty, innocent face with rosy, shining cheeks, large strikingly clear bright eyes and full, fleshy lips. She was always very simply dressed and with her worthless adornments had a provincial appearance."

For the same reasons that others scorned Anna Vyrubova, the Empress prized her. Where others thought only of themselves, Anna's apparent selflessness set her apart and made her seem all the more rare and valuable. On no account would Alexandra listen to criticism of her young protégée. When Anna sensed dislike in a person and reported it to the Empress, Alexandra bristled toward the antagonist and increased her attentions to Anna. Almost belligerently, the Empress refused to make Anna an official lady-in-waiting and allow her to become enmeshed in the duties and intrigues which went with that rank. "I will never give Anna an official position," she said. "She is my friend, I wish to retain her as such. Surely an Empress is allowed the right of a woman to choose her friends."

Later, during the war, when the Empress assumed an important part in the government of Russia, Alexandra's friendship for Anna took on political significance. Because she was known as the Empress's most intimate confidante, every gesture Anna made, every word she uttered, was watched and commented on. Correctly or incorrectly, Anna's opinions, activities, tastes and mistakes were associated in the public mind with Alexandra Fedorovna. This association was especially significant in connection with Anna's unqualified devotion to the extraordinary Siberian miracle-worker Gregory Rasputin, whose influence on the Imperial couple and therefore on Russia was to grow to towering proportions. Anna met Rasputin when he first arrived in St. Petersburg; he prophesied the collapse of her marriage, and she became convinced that he was a man divinely blessed. Certain that

Rasputin could help ease the burdens carried by her mistress, Anna became his most passionate advocate. When Alexandra and Rasputin communicated, Anna was often the physical link. She carried messages in person and telephoned Rasputin daily. She transmitted his opinions faithfully and urged them upon the Empress. But Anna herself was not a source of ideas or political action. Everyone who dealt with her personally—ministers, ambassadors, even Rasputin's secretary—described her in the same terms: "a vehicle," "an ideal gramophone disc," "she understood nothing."

Nevertheless, in the tumultuous days culminating in the fall of the dynasty, the unpretentious Anna was accused of holding major political influence over the Tsar and his wife. Rumor inflated her into a monster of depravity who was said to reign over sinister orgies at the palace. She was accused of conniving with Rasputin to hypnotize or drug the Tsar; she was described as sharing the beds of both Nicholas and Rasputin, with a preference for the latter and a lewd dominion over both. Ironically, both the aristocracy and the revolutionaries told the same stories with the same relish and the same small grunts of rage. After the fall of the monarchy, with the rumors swirling viciously around her head, Anna Vyrubova was dragged off to prison by the Provisional Minister of Justice, Alexander Kerensky. Later, put on trial for her "political activities," Anna pathetically defended herself in the only way she knew: she asked for a medical examination to prove her sexual innocence. The examination was performed in May 1917 and, to the astonishment of all Russia, Anna Vyrubova, the notorious confidante of the Empress Alexandra, was medically certified to be a virgin.

As one precarious year followed another, emotional stress took a terrible toll on Alexandra's physical health. As a girl, she suffered from sciatica, a severe pain in the back and legs. Her pregnancies, four in the first six years of marriage, were difficult. The battle against her son's hemophilia left her physically and emotionally drained. At times of crisis, she spared herself nothing, sitting up day and night beside Alexis's bed. But once the danger had passed, she collapsed, lying for weeks in bed or on a couch, moving about only in a wheelchair. In 1908, when the Tsarevich was four, she began to develop a whole series of symptoms which she referred to as the

result of "an enlarged heart." She had shortness of breath, and exertion became an effort. She was "indeed a sick woman," wrote Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, the Tsar's sister. "Her breath often came in quick,

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obviously painful gasps. I often saw her lips turn blue. Constant worry over Alexis had completely undermined her health." Dr. Botkin, who came every day at nine in the morning and five in the afternoon to listen to her heart, mentioned years later to an officer in Siberia that the Empress has "inherited a family weakness of the blood vessels" which often led to "progressive hysteria." In modern medical terminology, the Empress Alexandra undoubtedly was suffering from psychosomatic anxiety symptoms brought on by worry over the health of her son.

Alexandra's own letters occasionally mentioned her poor health. In 1911, she wrote to her former tutor, Miss Jackson: "I have been ill nearly all the time. . . . The children are growing up quite fast. . . . I send them to reviews with their father and once they went to a big military luncheon ... as I could not go—they must get accustomed to replace me as I rarely can appear anywhere, and when I do, am afterwards long laid up—overtired muscles of the heart."

To her sister Princess Victoria of Battenberg she wrote: "Don't think my ill health depresses me personally. I don't care except to see my dear ones suffer on my account and that I cannot fulfill my duties. But once God sends such a cross it must be borne. ... I have had so much, that, willingly I give up any pleasure—they mean so little to me, and my family life is such an ideal one, that it is a recompense for anything I cannot take part in. Baby [Alexis] is growing a little companion to his father. They row together daily. All 5 lunch with me even when I am laid up."

Alexandra's inability to participate in public life worried her husband. "She keeps to her bed most of the day, does not receive anyone, does not come out to lunches and remains on the balcony day after day," he wrote to his mother. "Botkin has persuaded her to go to Nauheim [a German health spa] for a cure in the early autumn. It is very important for her to get better, for

her own sake, and the children's and mine. I am completely run down mentally by worrying over her health."

Marie was sympathetic. "It is too sad and painful to see her [Alexandra] always ailing and incapable of taking part in anything. You have enough worries in life as it is without having the ordeal added of seeing the person you love most in the world suffer. . . . The best thing would be for you to travel . . . that would do her a lot of good."

Taking Botkin's and his mother's advice, Nicholas escorted his wife to the German spa of Nauheim so that the Empress could take the cure. Nicholas enjoyed himself on these trips. Dressed in a dark suit and bowler hat, he strolled, unrecognized, through the streets of the little German town. Alexandra, meanwhile, bathed in the warm waters, drank bottled water and went shopping in Nauheim with an attendant pushing her wheelchair. At the end of several weeks, she went back to Russia, rested but not cured. For the mother of a hemophiliac, as for the son, no cure has ever been found.

Russians are a compassionate people, warm in their love of children and deeply perceptive in their understanding of suffering. Why did they not open their hearts to this anguished mother and her stricken child?

The answer, incredibly, is that Russia did not know. Most people in Moscow or Kiev or St. Petersburg did not know that the Tsarevich had hemophilia, and the few who had some inkling had only hazy ideas as to the nature of the disease. As late as 1916, George T. Marye, the American Ambassador, reported, "We hear all sorts of stories about what was the matter with him [Alexis] but the best authenticated seems to be that he has some trouble of the circulation, the blood circulates too close or too freely near the surface . . . [of] the skin." Even within the Imperial household, people such as Pierre Gilliard who saw the family regularly did not know for many years precisely what was wrong with Alexis. When he missed a public function, it was announced that he had a cold or had suffered a sprained ankle. No one believed these explanations and the boy became the

subject of incredible rumors. Alexis, it was said, was mentally retarded, an epileptic, the victim of anarchists' bombs. Whatever it was, the mystery made it worse, for there was never a focus for sympathy and understanding. Just as at Khodynka Meadow after their coronation, Nicholas and Alexandra attempted to continue in the midst of disaster by pretending that nothing unusual had happened. The trouble was that everyone knew that behind the façade of normalcy something terrible was happening.

Alexis's secret was deliberately withheld at the wish of the Tsar and the Empress. There was a basis for this in court etiquette: traditionally, the health of members of the Imperial family was never mentioned. In Alexis's case, this secrecy was vastly extended. Doctors and intimate servants were begged not to reveal the staggering misfortune.* Alexis, his parents reasoned, was the Heir to the Throne of

* Dr. Botkin kept the secret well and never discussed the illness with his own family. In 1921, his daughter Tatiana wrote a book about the Imperial family without mentioning the nature of the Tsarevich's illness or the word "hemophilia." This suggests either that she still did not know or that, true to her father's code, she still felt bound by secrecy.

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the world's largest and most absolute autocracy. What would be the fate of the boy, the dynasty and the nation if the Russian people knew that their future Tsar was an invalid living under the constant shadow of death? Not knowing the answer and fearing to discover it, Nicholas and Alexandra surrounded the subject with silence.

A revelation of Alexis's condition would inevitably have put new pressures on the Tsar and the monarchy. But the erection of a wall of secrecy was worse. It left the family vulnerable to every vicious rumor. It undermined the nation's respect for the Empress and, through her, for the Tsar and the throne. Because the condition of the Tsare-vich was never revealed, Russians never understood the power which Rasputin held over the Empress. Nor were they able to form a true picture of Alexandra herself. Unaware of her ordeal, they wrongly ascribed her remoteness to distaste for Russia and its people. The years of worry left a look of sadness settled permanently on her face; when she spoke to people, she often appeared preoccupied and deep in gloom. As she devoted herself to hours of prayer,

the life of the court became stricter and her own public appearances were reduced. When she did emerge, she was silent, seemingly cold, haughty and indifferent. Never a popular consort, Alexandra Fedorovna became steadily less popular. During the war, with national passions aroused, all the complaints Russians had about the Empress—her German birth, her coldness, her devotion to Rasputin—blended into a single, sweeping torrent of hatred.

The fall of Imperial Russia was a titanic drama in which the individual destinies of thousands of men all played their part. Yet in making allowance for the impersonal flow of historic forces, in counting the contributions made by ministers, peasants and revolutionaries, it still remains essential to understand the character and motivation of the central figures. To the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna this understanding has never been given. From the time her son was born, the central concern of her life was her fight against hemophilia.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Royal Progress

Each year as spring crept north across Russia, the Imperial family fled the frosts and snows of Tsarskoe Selo for the flowering gardens of the Crimea. As the moment of departure approached, the Tsar's spirits always lifted. "I am only sorry for you who have to remain in this bog," he said cheerfully to the cluster of grand dukes and government ministers who came to see him off in March 1912.

There was a regular cyclical pattern to these annual migrations. March brought the spring exodus to the Crimea; in May, the family moved to the villa on the Baltic coast at Peterhof; in June, they cruised the Finnish fjords on the Imperial yacht; August found them at a hunting lodge deep in the Polish forest; in September, they came back to the Crimea; in November, they returned to Tsarskoe Selo for the winter.

The Imperial train which bore the Tsar and his family on these trips across Russia was a traveling miniature palace. It consisted of a string of luxurious royal-blue salon cars with the double-eagled crest emblazoned in gold on their sides, pulled by a gleaming black locomotive. The private car of Nicholas and Alexandra contained a bedroom the size of three normal compartments, a sitting room for the Empress upholstered in mauve and gray, and a private study for the Tsar furnished with a desk and green leather chairs. The white-tiled bathroom off the Imperial bedroom boasted a tub with such ingeniously designed overhangs that water could not slosh out even when the train was rounding a curve.

Elsewhere in the train, there was an entire car of rooms for the four Grand Duchesses and the Tsarevich, with all the furniture painted white. A mahogany-paneled lounge car with deep rugs and damask-covered chairs and sofas served as a gathering place for the ladies-in-waiting, aides-de-camp and other members of the Imperial suite, each

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of whom had a private compartment. One car was devoted entirely to dining. It included a kitchen equipped with three stoves, an icebox and a wine cabinet; a dining room with a table for twenty; and a small anteroom, where before every meal *zakouski* were served. Even while traveling, the Imperial suite observed the Russian custom of standing and helping themselves from a table spread with caviar, cold salmon, sardines, reindeer tongue, sausages, pickled mushrooms, radishes, smoked herring, sliced cucumber and other dishes. At dinner, Nicholas always sat at the middle of a long table with his daughters beside him, while Count Fredericks and other court functionaries sat opposite. With rare exceptions, the Empress ate alone on the train or had her meals with Alexis.

Despite the excitement of leaving St. Petersburg, a trip on the Imperial train was not an unmitigated pleasure. There was always the nagging thought that, at any moment, the train might be blown up by revolutionaries. To make this less likely, two identical Imperial trains made every trip, traveling a few miles apart; potential assassins could never know on which the Tsar and his family were riding. Worse for the travelers were the normal

discomforts and boredom of long train trips. Although it could go faster, the train customarily rattled along at fifteen to twenty miles an hour. Accordingly, the trip from St. Petersburg to the Crimea meant two nights and a day of bumping and jostling across the interminable vastness of the Russian landscape. In the summer, the sun beat down on the metal roofs, turning the salon cars into carpeted ovens. It was a regular practice to halt the train for half an hour wherever a grove of trees or a river offered an opportunity for the passengers to get out, stretch their legs and cool themselves in the shade or by the water.

Once when the train was stopped in open country at the top of a high embankment, the children took large silver trays from the pantry and used them to toboggan down the sandy slope. After dinner, in the presence of the Tsar and Empress, General Strukov, an aide-decamp, shouted to the children that he would beat them on foot to the bottom. Wearing his dinner uniform with the ribbon of Alexander Nevsky over his shoulder and his diamond-studded sword of honor in hand, the General threw himself down the bank. He slid for twenty feet, became mired up to his knees and gallantly waved as the children glided past, giggling with pleasure, on their silver saucers.

If the Imperial train was a means of travel, the Imperial yachts were a mode of relaxation. For two weeks every June, the Tsar gave himself completely to a slow, seaborne meandering along the rocky coast of Finland. By day, the yacht steamed among the islands, finding an anchorage at night in a cove deserted except for the lonely hut of an isolated fisherman. The following morning, when the passengers awoke, they found themselves surrounded by sparkling blue water, beaches of yellow sand, red granite islands and dark forests of green pines.

Nicholas's favorite yacht was a 4,500-ton, black-hulled beauty named the *Standart*, especially built for him in a Danish shipyard. Moored in a Baltic cove or tied up beneath the Crimean cliffs in Yalta harbor, the *Standart* was a marvel of nautical elegance. As big as a small cruiser, fueled by coal and propelled by steam, the *Standart* nevertheless was designed with the

graceful majesty of a great sailing ship. An immense bowsprit encrusted with gold leaf jutted forward from her clipper bow. Three tall varnished masts towered above her twin white funnels. The gleaming decks were covered with white canvas awnings and lined with wicker tables and chairs. Below were drawing rooms, lounges and dining rooms paneled in mahogany, with polished floors, crystal chandeliers and velvet drapes; only the private staterooms of the family were done in chintz. Along with a chapel and spacious rooms for the Imperial suite, there were quarters for the ship's officers, engineers, stokers, deckhands, stewards, valets, maids and a whole platoon of Marine Guards. In addition, somewhere in the yacht's lower decks, space had been found to house the members of the *Standart's* brass band and balalaika orchestra.

Life aboard the *Standart* was easy and informal. The family mingled freely with the crew and knew many of the sailors by their first names. Often a group of ship's officers was invited to dine at the Imperial table. During the day, the girls wandered the decks unescorted, wearing white blouses and polka-dotted skirts. Conversations and bantering shipboard flirtations sprang up between young officers and the blossoming Grand Duchesses. Even in the winter, when the yacht was laid up for refurbishing, the special bonds of shipboard life held firm. "During the performances of the opera, especially *Aida,* . . . sailors from the Imperial yacht *Standart* would often be called upon to play parts of warriors," wrote the Tsar's sister Grand Duchess Olga. "It was a riot to see those tall husky men standing awkwardly on the stage, wearing helmets and sandals and showing their bare, hairy legs. Despite the frantic signals of the producer, they would stare up at us [in the Imperial box] with broad grins."

When the children were young, each was assigned a sailor whose duty it was to prevent his small charge from toddling overboard. As

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the children grew older and went ashore to swim, the sailor-nannies went along. At the end of each year's cruise, the Tsar rewarded these husky seafaring nursemaids by giving each man a gold watch.

Even aboard the *Standart,* Nicholas was not free of the burdens of office. Although he barred government ministers and poHce security agents from the decks of the yacht, courier boats from St. Petersburg churned up daily to the foot of the *Stand-art's* ladder, bringing reports and documents. As a further reminder of the presence of its august passenger, the yacht was never without an escort of navy torpedo boats anchored nearby or cruising slowly along the horizon.

At sea, Nicholas worked two days a week. The other five he relaxed. In the morning, he rowed ashore to take long walks through the wild Finnish forests. When the *Standart* moored near the country estate of a Russian or Finnish nobleman, the owner might awake to find the Tsar at his door asking politely if he might use a court for tennis. Sometimes Nicholas dismissed the gentlemen who accompanied him on these hikes and walked alone with his children, searching the woods for mushrooms or wandering down a beach looking for bright-colored rocks.

Because her sciatica made it difficult for her to move, Alexandra rarely left the yacht. She spent the days peacefully sitting on deck, knitting, doing needlework, writing letters, watching the gulls and the sea. Alone in the lounge, she played Bach, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky at the piano. As they grew older, the girls took turns staying aboard the ship, keeping their mother company. In 1907, when Anna Vyrubova began making these cruises, the two women spent their days sitting in the sun, knitting and talking.

At teatime, the Tsar and the children returned with stories, wild-flowers, mosses, cups of berries and pieces of quartz. Tea was served on deck while the ship's band thumped out marches or the balalaika orchestra strummed Russian folk melodies. Occasionally, the girls acted out skits. Anna Vyrubova recalled the day that the older Imperial yacht, *Polar Star,* carrying the Dowager Empress, anchored nearby and the girls' grandmother came on board the *Standart* for tea and a play. Afterward, Vyrubova saw Marie "sitting on Alexis's bed talking to him gaily and helping him peel an apple just like any other grandmother."

The part of the day Alexandra liked best was sunset. As the last slanting rays touched trees, rocks, water and boats with golden light, she sat on deck watching the lowering of the flag and listening to the deep, echoing male voices of the crew singing the Orthodox service of Evening Prayer. Later in the evening, while Nicholas played bil-

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liards and smoked with his staff, the Empress read and sewed by lamplight. Everyone went to bed early. By eleven p.m. the waves had rocked them to sleep, and stewards bringing evening tea into the drawing room invariably found the place deserted.

In 1907, the cruise on the *Standart* ended in near-calamity. The yacht was moving out to sea through a narrow channel while, on deck, the passengers were having afternoon tea. Suddenly, with a shuddering crash, the ship hit a rock. Teacups flew, chairs overturned, the band went sprawling. As water poured into the hull, the ship listed and began to settle. Sirens wailed and lifeboats were lowered. For a moment, the three-year-old Tsarevich was missing, and both parents were distraught until he was located. Then Alexandra herded her children and maids into boats and, with Anna Vyrubova, bustled back to her own stateroom. Stripping sheets from the bed, she tossed jewels, icons and mementoes into a bundle. When she left the yacht, the last woman to depart, she carried this priceless bundle securely in her lap.

Nicholas, meanwhile, stood at the rail supervising the lowering and casting off of the lifeboats. As he did so, he bent over the side every few seconds and looked at the waterline, then consulted a pocket watch he held in his hand. The Tsar explained that he intended to stay aboard to the last, and that he was calculating how many inches a minute the boat was sinking; he estimated that twenty minutes remained. Nevertheless, due to its watertight compartments, the *Standart* did not sink, and it was later pulled off the rock and repaired. That night the family slept in crowded quarters aboard the navy cruiser *Asia*. "The Emperor, rather disheveled, brought basins of water to the Empress and me to wash our faces and hands," said Anna. "The next

morning, the *Polar Star* appeared and we transferred to its more spacious quarters."

In August 1909, the *Standart* steamed slowly past the Isle of Wight, carrying the Russian Imperial family on its last visit to England. The Tsar arrived just before Regatta Week, and before the races began, King Edward VII honored Nicholas with a formal review of the Royal Navy. In three lines, the world's mightiest armada of battleships and dreadnoughts lay at anchor. As the British royal yacht, *Victoria and Albert*, steamed slowly under the rail of each of these mountains of gray steel, pennants dipped, saluting cannon boomed, bands played "God Save the Tsar" and "God Save the King," and hundreds of British seamen burst into rippling cheers. On the deck of the yacht, the- portly King and his Russian guest, wearing the white uniform of a British admiral, stood at salute.

After the naval review, the sailing races which climaxed the sum-

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mer social season began. A great fleet of hundreds of yachts lay in the roadstead, their varnished masts gleaming in the sunlight like a forest of golden spars. "Ashore and afloat," wrote a British observer, "there were dinner parties and balls. Steam launches, with gleaming brass funnels, and slender cutters and gigs, pulled by their crews at the long white oars, plied between the yachts and the Squadron steps. By day, the sails of the racing yachts spread across the blue waters of the Solent like the wings of giant butterflies, by night the riding lights and lanterns gleamed and shone like glow-worms against the onyx water and fireworks burst and spent themselves in the night sky."

This visit was the only time that Prince Edward, the present Duke of Windsor, met his Russian cousins. Prince Edward, then fifteen, and his younger brother Prince Albert, who became King George VI, were cadets at the Naval College of Osborne, near Cowes on the Isle of Wight. Both British Princes were scheduled to show the Russian party through their school, but, at the last minute, Albert developed a cold which rapidly worsened into whooping cough. Dr. Botkin feared that if Albert passed the

disease along to Alexis, the fits of coughing might trigger bleeding. Accordingly, Albert was quarantined.

"[This] was the one and only time I ever saw Tsar Nicholas," wrote the Duke of Windsor, looking back on the event. "Because of assassination plots . . . the Imperial government would not risk their Little Father's life in a great metropolis. Therefore the meeting was set for Cowes on the Isle of Wight, which could be sealed off almost completely. Uncle Nicky came for the regatta with his Empress and their numerous children aboard the *Standart.* I do remember being astonished at the elaborate police guard thrown around his every movement when I showed him through Osborne College."

The Empress Alexandra was overjoyed to be back in the land where she had spent the happiest days of her childhood. Pleased with the warm hospitality offered by King Edward, she wrote that "dear Uncle" has "been most kind and attentive." Less than a year later, "dear Uncle" was dead. His son, King George V, was on the throne and the young Prince Edward became the Prince of Wales.

Every emperor, king and president in Europe trod at one time or another upon the polished decks of the *Standart.* The Kaiser, whose own 4,000-ton white-and-gold *Hohenzollern* was slightly smaller than the *Standart*, openly proclaimed his envy of the Russian yacht. "He said he would have been happy to get it as a present," Nicholas wrote to Marie after William had come aboard for the first time. In reply, Marie sputtered indignantly, "His joke . . . was in very doubtful

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taste. I hope he will not have the cheek to order himself a similar one here [in Denmark]. This really would be the limit, though just like him, with the tact that distinguishes him."

The Tsar and the Kaiser saw each other for the last time in June 1912, when the two Imperial yachts *Standart* and *Hohenzollern* anchored side by side at the Russian Baltic port of Reval. "Emperor William's visit was a success," Nicholas reported to Marie. "He remained three days and ... he was very

gay and affable and would have his joke with Anastasia. . . . He gave very fine presents to the children and quite a lot of toys to Alexei. . . . On his last day he invited all the officers to a morning reception on board his yacht. It lasted about an hour and a half and afterwards he . . . said that our officers had got through sixty bottles of his champagne."

To every other place in Russia, Nicholas and Alexandra preferred the Crimea. To the traveler coming down from the north by train, wearied by hour after hour of the flatness and emptiness of the Ukrainian steppe, the scenery of the Russian Crimea is lushly dramatic. On this southern peninsula washed by the Black Sea, rugged mountain peaks rise from the blue and emerald waters. On the upper slopes of this Haila range, there are forests of tall pines. In the valleys and along the sea cliffs, there are groves of cypresses, orchards, vineyards, villages and pastures. The flowers and grapes of the Crimea have always been famous. In Nicholas's day, no winter ball in St. Petersburg was complete without a carload of fresh flowers rushed north by train from the Crimea. No grand-ducal or princely table anywhere in Russia was set without bottles of red and white wine from the host's Crimean estate. The Crimean climate was mild the year around, but in the spring the sudden massive flowering of fruit trees, shrubs, vines and wildflowers transformed the wild valleys of the peninsula into a vast perfumed garden. Lilacs, wisteria, violets and white acacias bloomed. Apple, peach and cherry trees burst into pink and white blossoms. Wild strawberries covered every slope. Grapes of every taste and color could be plucked wild along the road. Most spectacular of all were the roses. Huge, thick vines curled over buildings and walls, dropping petals across paths, courtyards, lawns and fields. With its swirl of colors and delicate odors, with its bright sun and warm sea breezes, with the aura of health and freedom that it bestowed, it is not surprising that of all the Imperial estates scattered across Russia, Nicholas and Alexandra preferred to be at the Livadia Palace in the Crimea.

Before 1917, the Crimea was deliberately maintained as an unspoiled wilderness. Along the coast between Yalta and Sevastopol, the handsome villas of the Imperial family and the aristocracy nestled between the cliffs

and the sea. Half the peninsula lay behind the high posts surmounted by golden eagles which marked the lands of the Imperial family. To preserve the natural seclusion and beauty of these valleys, Alexander III and Nicholas II had forbidden the building of railways, except for the track coming down from the north through Simferopol to Sevastopol. From this port, one traveled overland by carriage or by boat along the sea cliffs to reach Yalta, the little harbor on the edge of the Imperial estate. The voyage took four hours, the carriage ride all day.

The people of the Crimea were Tartars of the Moslem faith, the residue of the thunderous Tartar invasions of Russia in the thirteenth century. Until they were conquered by Prince Gregory Potemkin for Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century, the Tartars were ruled by their own khans. Under the tsars, they lived in picturesque whitewashed villages scattered along the slopes and marked from afar by the delicately laced minarets of their Moslem mosques rising gracefully into the blue sky. Tartar men, sinewy and dark-complexioned, wore round black hats, short embroidered coats and tight white trousers. "To see a cavalcade of Tartars sweep by was to imagine a race of Centaurs come back to earth," wrote the admiring Anna Vyrubova. Tartar women were handsome creatures who dyed their hair bright red and wore floating veils to hide their faces. At the summit of all fervent Tartar loyalties stood the tsar, successor to the khan. When the Imperial carriage passed through Tartar villages, it had first to be halted so that the ranking Tartar chief could exercise his duty and privilege of riding through his village before his Imperial master.

The Imperial palace at Livadia was the special pride of the Empress Alexandra. Built in 1911 to replace an older wooden structure, it was made of white limestone and perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea. Its columned balconies and courtyards were in an Italianate style admired by the Empress from her fond recollection of the palaces and cloisters she had seen in Florence before her marriage. The gardens, laid out in large, triangular flower beds, were studded with ancient Greek marbles excavated from Crimean ruins. On the ground floor, a white state dining room was also used—with tables and chairs removed—for dances. From the dining room, glass doors opened directly into the rose garden; at night, the sweet

smell filled every corner of the palace. Upstairs, from her rooms furnished in pink

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chintz with mauve flowers, Alexandra had magnificent vistas. From her boudoir she could see the mountains, still glistening with snow in May; from her bedroom, she could see the sweeping sea horizon. Nearby was Nicholas's study; down the corridor were rooms for the children and a private family dining room. On the day in April 1911 when the new palace was opened, it was blessed in the Orthodox fashion by priests going from room to room, swinging smoldering censers of incense and sprinkling holy water. When they finished, Alexandra hustled in to unpack and arrange her favorite pictures and icons on the walls and tables.

For Alexandra and Alexis, the warm days at Livadia meant recovery from illness and renewal of strength. The Empress and her son spent their mornings together, she lying in a chair on her balcony, he playing nearby with his toys. In the afternoon, she went into the garden or drove her pony cart along the paths around the palace, while Alexis went swimming with his father in the warm sea. Once in 1906, Nicholas was swimming in the surf with his four daughters when a large wave swept over them. The Tsar and the three older girls rose to the crest of the wave, but Anastasia, then five, disappeared. "Little Alexis [aged two] and I saw it happen from the beach," wrote the Tsar's sister Olga Alexandrovna. "The child, of course, didn't realize the danger, and kept clapping his hands at the tidal wave. Then Nicky dived again, grabbed Anastasia by her long hair, and swam back with her to the beach. I had gone cold with terror."

Despite this accident, Nicholas enjoyed the water so much and considered it so healthy for his children that he had a large indoor bath constructed and filled with warm salt water so that their daily swimming would not be affected by wind or rain or a drop in the temperature of the sea. When Alexis appeared healthy, Nicholas was overjoyed. In 1909, in the middle of writing to Empress Marie, the Tsar interrupted himself to report cheerfully, "Just now, Alexei has come in after his bath and insists that I write to you

that he kisses 'Granny' very tenderly. He is very sunburned, so are his sisters and I."

At Livadia, Nicholas and Alexandra could live more informally than anywhere else. The Empress drove into Yalta to shop, something she never did in St. Petersburg or Tsarskoe Selo. Once, entering a store from a rainy street, she lowered her umbrella, allowing a stream of water to form a puddle on the floor. Annoyed, the salesman indicated a rack near the door, saying sharply, "Madame, this is for umbrellas." The Empress meekly obeyed. Only when Anna Vyrubova, who was with the Empress, addressed her in conversation as "Alexandra Fedorovna" did the astonished salesman begin to realize who his customer was.

Nicholas spent most of his days at Livadia outdoors. Every morning, he played tennis. He made horseback excursions with his daughters to neighboring villas, to the farm which supplied their table, to a mountain waterfall. As in Finland, the children and their father collected berries and mushrooms in the woods. Sometimes in the fall, Nicholas built a small fire of twigs and dry leaves and cooked mushrooms in wine, stirring the bubbling tidbit in a tin cup. In 1909, when the Russian Ministry of War was redesigning the clothing and equipment of the Russian infantryman, Nicholas decided to test it himself for lightness and comfort and ordered an entire kit in his size brought to Livadia. He put on shirt, breeches and boots, shouldered the rifle, cartridges, knapsack and bedding roll and, leaving the palace, marched alone for nine hours, covering twenty-five miles. He was stopped at one point by a security policeman who did not recognize him and roughly ordered him to leave the vicinity. Returning at dusk, Nicholas pronounced the uniform satisfactory. When the Kaiser heard about this exploit, he was vexed that the idea had not occurred to him and asked his military attaché for a full report. Later, the commander of the regiment whose uniform the Tsar had worn asked Nicholas to fill out a common soldier's identity booklet as a memento. In the booklet, Nicholas filled in the form: *Last name:* "Romanov"; *Home:* "Tsarskoe Selo"; *Service Completed:* "When I am in my grave."

If possible, the Imperial family always spent Easter at Livadia. The celebration of Easter was an exhausting but exhilarating experience for the Empress. During the days of the great religious festival, she spent freely of the strength she had been carefully hoarding. In Imperial Russia, Easter was the climax of the Orthodox Church year. More profoundly holy and more joyous than Christmas, it brought an intense outpouring of emotion. Across Russia on Easter night, huge, reverent crowds packed into cathedrals and stood, holding lighted candles, to hear the great choral litany. Beginning just before midnight, they waited for the moment when the priest, the bishop, the Metropolitan, or all of them in procession, went in search of the Savior. Followed by the entire congregation, making a river of candles, they circled the outside of the church. Then, returning to the door, they reenacted the discovery of Christ's tomb when the stone before it was rolled away. Looking inside, seeing that the church was empty, the priest turned his face to the crowd. His features lighted with joy, he shouted, *"Khristos Voskres!":* "Christ is risen!" The congregation, the candles lighting their own glowing faces, responded with a mighty shout, *"Voistinu Voskrese!":* "Indeed he is risen!" Everywhere in Russia—in Red Square before St. Basil's Cathedral, at the doors of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg, in tiny churches

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in lost villages—this was the moment when the Russian people, peasants and princes alike, laughed and wept in unison.

At the conclusion of the religious service, the Russian Easter festival began. It was an unbelievable surge of eating, visiting and exchanging gifts. Most Russians hurried from the church to begin, in the middle of the night, the sumptuous feasting which broke the long Lenten fast. Because butter, cheese and eggs had been denied, the climax of these meals was *paskha,* a rich, creamy dessert, and *kulich*, the round Easter cake, crowned with white icing and the symbol XB, "Christ is risen." It was a tradition that any stranger who entered the house was welcome, and the table was set with food night and day. In the Crimea, the Imperial palace became a vast banqueting hall. Presiding over this gaiety, Nicholas and Alexandra greeted the entire household with the traditional three kisses of blessing, welcome

and joy. Schoolchildren came the following morning from Yalta to stand in line and receive little cakes of *kulich* from the Empress and her daughters. To members of the court and the Imperial Guard, the sovereigns gave their famous Easter eggs. Some were simple: exquisitely painted eggshells from which the yolks had been drawn through tiny pinholes. Others were the fabulous gem-encrusted miracles made by the immortal master jeweler Fabergé.

Peter Carl Fabergé was a Russian of French descent. At the peak of his success, around the turn of the century, his workshops in St. Petersburg employed five hundred jewelers, smiths and apprentices. He had branch offices in Moscow, London and Paris, and he did an enormous business in silver and gold, especially in large dinner services. His lasting fame, however, rests on the extraordinary quality of his jewelry. It was Fabergé's genius to ignore the usual flamboyant emphasis on precious stones and to subordinate gems to the over-all pattern of the work. In designing a cigarette box, for example, Fabergé's craftsmen used translucent blue, red or rose enamel as the primary material, lining the edges with a row of tiny diamonds. The result was a masterpiece of restraint, elegance and beauty.

Fabergé was officially the court jeweler to the Tsar of Russia, but his clients were international. King Edward VII was a regular customer, always demanding, "We must have no duplicates," to which Fabergé could always reply with serene assurance, "Your Majesty will be content." In a single day in 1898, the House of Fabergé played host to the King and Queen of Norway, the Kings of Denmark and Greece, and Queen Alexandra of England, Edward VII's consort. In Russia, no princely wedding, no grand-ducal birthday, no regimental or society jubilee was complete without a shower of Fabergé brooches,

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necklaces, pendants, cigarette cases, cufflinks, writing sets and clocks. To satisfy his eager patrons, Fabergé produced a breathtaking array of imaginative jewelry. In an endless, gorgeous stream, his craftsmen turned out jeweled flowers, a menagerie of tiny animals, and figures of Russian peasants, gypsy singers and Cossack horsemen. His miniatures included

tiny parasols, garden watering cans ornamented in diamonds, an equestrian statue of Peter the Great done in gold and less than an inch high, a gold Louis XVI cabinet only five inches tall, and three-inch sedan chairs made of gold and enamel with interiors of mother-of-pearl.

The supreme expressions of Fabergé's art were the fifty-six fabled Imperial Easter eggs which he created for two Russian tsars, Alexander III and Nicholas II. Alexander began the custom in 1884 when he presented a Fabergé *egg* to his wife, Marie. After his father's death, Nicholas continued the custom, ordering two eggs each year, one for his wife and one for his mother. The choice of materials and the design were left entirely to Fabergé, who surrounded their construction in his workshops with enormous secrecy. From the first of these commissions, Fabergé hit upon the idea of using the egg only as a shell which would open, revealing a "surprise." Inside, there might be a basket of wildflowers made with milky chalcedony petals and gold leaves. Or the top of the *egg* might fly open every hour on the hour to elevate a jeweled and enameled cockerel which crowed and flapped its wings.

Fabergé's problem was that every year's masterpiece made his task that much more difficult in the year that followed. He never really excelled the Great Siberian Railway Easter Egg which he made in 1900. Because Nicholas as Tsarevich had been president of the railway, Fabergé created an egg of blue, green and yellow enamel on which delicate inlays of silver traced the map of Siberia and the route of the Trans-Siberian. The top could be lifted from the egg by touching the golden double-headed eagle which surmounted it, revealing the "surprise" within. It was a scale model, one foot long, five eighths of an inch wide, of the five cars and a locomotive of the Siberian express. "Driving wheels, double trucks under carriages, and other moving parts were precision made to work so that, given a few turns with the gold key . . . the gold and platinum locomotive, with a ruby gleaming from its headlight, could actually pull the train," wrote an observer. "Coupled to the baggage car are a carriage with half the seats reserved for ladies, another car for children, . . . still another car for smokers . . . [and a] church car with a Russian cross and gold bells on the roof."

Fabergé himself survived the Revolution, but his art did not. With his workshops broken up and his master craftsmen scattered, Fabergé escaped Russia in 1918 disguised as a diplomat and lived his last two years in Switzerland. An artist and purveyor to emperors, he had created works of art that survive as symbols of a vanished age, an age of opulence but also of craftsmanship, integrity and beauty.

Along with the palaces and villas of the Russian aristocracy, the seaside hills of the Crimea were dotted with hospitals and sanatoria for tuberculosis. Alexandra often visited these institutions; when she could not go herself, she sent her daughters. "They should realize the sadness that lies beneath all this beauty," she said to a lady-in-waiting. The Empress herself founded two hospitals in the Crimea, and every year she sold her own needlework and embroidery at a charity bazaar in Yalta to raise money for these institutions. The bazaar was held near the Yalta pier, with the *Standart,* tied alongside, used as a lounge and stockroom. Sometimes Alexis appeared at his mother's table. When this happened, a crowd gathered and men and women begged that the boy be lifted up high so they could see him. Smiling, Alexandra placed the small Tsarevich on the tabletop, where he sat cross-legged and, at her whisper, made a courtly bow.

Nicholas and Alexandra preferred to live quietly at Livadia, but the inhabitants of the neighboring estates followed a lively existence of picnics, sailing parties and summer balls. As they grew up, Olga and Tatiana were invited to these parties, and occasionally, well chaperoned, they were allowed to attend. Even the Tsar's household life was more active than at Tsarskoe Selo. The palace was usually filled with visitors—ministers down from St. Petersburg to report to the Tsar, local residents or guests from neighboring palaces, officers of the *Standart* or one of the army regiments stationed in the Crimea—and unlike the procedure at Tsarskoe Selo, visitors were always invited to lunch. The children's favorite guest was the Emir of Bokhara, the ruler of an autonomous state within the Russian Empire, near the border of Afghanistan. The Emir was a tall, dark man whose beard flowed down over a robe topped with a Russian general's epaulets encrusted with diamonds. Although he had been educated in St. Petersburg and spoke perfect Russian, the Emir followed the custom of Bokhara, and when he

spoke officially to the Tsar, he used an interpreter. When the Emir arrived, escorted by two of his ministers wearing long beards dyed bright red, he gave extraordinary gifts. The Tsar's sister remembered receiving from the Emir "an enormous

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gold necklace from which, like tongues of flame, hung tassels of rubies."

At Livadia in 1911, to celebrate the sixteenth birthday of her oldest daughter, Grand Duchess Olga, the Empress gave a full-dress ball. Before the dance, Olga's parents gave her a diamond ring and a necklace of thirty-two diamonds and pearls. These were Olga's first jewels, intended to symbolize her coming into young womanhood. Olga was dressed in pink in her first ballgown. With her thick blond hair coiled for the first time in womanly style atop her head, she arrived at the dance, flushed and fair.

The ball was held in the state dining room of the new white Livadia Palace. The glass doors were thrown open and the fragrance of the roses in the garden filled the room. The lights in the chandeliers blazed in clusters, catching the gowns and jewels of the women and the bright decorations on the white uniforms of the men. Afterward, a cotillion supper was served and the dancers strolled in the garden and along the marble balconies at the top of the cliffs. As they stood watching from the palace of the Tsar, a huge autumn moon came up and cast its silver light across the shining waters of the Black Sea.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"The Little One Will Not Die"

On August 19, 1912 (O.S.), Empress Alexandra wrote a letter from Peterhof to her old tutor, Miss Jackson, who was retired and living in England:

Darling Madgie:

Loving thanks for yr last letter—forgive me for being such a shockingly bad correspondent. I had Victoria's visit for a week wh. was delightful, and Ella came also for 3 days, and I shall see her again in Moscow. Ernie and family we had in the Crimea, Waldemar came for 3 days on the *Standart* in Finland and Irene will come at the end of September to us in Poland, Spala. . . . Next week we leave for Borodino and Moscow, terribly tiring festivities, don't know how I shall get through them. After Moscow in spring, I was for a long time quite done up—now I am, on the whole, better. . . . Here we had colossal heat and scarcely ever a drop of rain.

If you know of any interesting historical books for girls, could you tell me, as I read to them and they have begun reading English for themselves. They read a great deal of French and the 2 youngest acted out of the *Bourg. Gentilhomme* and really so well. . . . Four languages is a lot, but they need them absolutely, and this summer we had Germans and Swedes, and I made all 4 lunch and dine, as it is good practice for them.

I have begun painting flowers, as alas, have had to leave singing and playing as too tiring.

Must end. Goodbye and God bless and keep you.

A tender kiss from Your fondly Loving old P.Q. No. III *Alix*

Despite the stream of visitors, the summer of 1912 was peaceful for the Imperial family. The girls were getting older: Olga was seventeen, Tatiana fifteen, Marie thirteen and Anastasia eleven. Alexis, who was eight, was a source of pride and relief. He was cheerful, mischievous and lively; he had been so well that year that Alexandra had begun to hope her prayers had been answered and he might be getting permanently better.

At Spala, six weeks after this letter was written, this hope disintegrated. That autumn, in the depths of the Polish forest, Nicholas and Alexandra were plunged into a crisis that seared them both forever.

The Borodino ceremonies mentioned in Alexandra's letter were a centenary celebration of the great battle before Moscow in 1812 when Kutuzov's army finally gave battle to Napoleon. For the centenary, Russian army engineers had reconstructed the battlefield, rebuilding the famous redoubts marking the positions of French and Russian batteries, and identifying the spots where infantry and cavalry charged. Nicholas, mounted on a white horse, rode slowly across the battlefield, which was lined with detachments of soldiers from the regiments that had fought at Borodino. As a climax to the ceremony, an ancient Sergeant Voitinuik, said to be 122 years old and a survivor of the famous battle, was led forward and presented to the Tsar. Nicholas, deeply moved, warmly grasped the hand of the tottering veteran and congratulated him. "A common feeling of deep reverence for our forebears seized us there," he wrote to Marie.

The ceremonies concluded in Moscow, which one hundred years before had burned before Napoleon's eyes. Nicholas moved through cathedral services, receptions, parades and processions. He visited museums, attended balls and reviewed seventy-five thousand soldiers and seventy-two thousand schoolchildren. As she had predicted, Alexandra exhausted herself trying to keep up. With relief, she and her family boarded the Imperial train in mid-September for the westward journey to the Polish hunting lodges of Bialowieza and Spala. They stopped only once along the way; in Smolensk they took tea with the local nobility. That afternoon, reported the Tsar to his mother, "Alexis got hold of a glass of champagne and drank it unnoticed after which he became rather gay and began entertaining the ladies to our great surprise. When we returned to the train, he kept telling us about his conversations at the party and also that he heard his tummy rumbling."

The hunting lodge at Bialowieza in eastern Poland was surrounded by thirty thousand acres of deep forest filled with big game. Along

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with elk and stag, it was the only place in Europe where the auroch, or European bison, were still to be found. At Bialowieza, the Imperial family began a pleasant holiday routine. "The weather is warm, but we have constant rain," the Tsar wrote to his mother. "In the mornings my daughters

and I go for rides on these perfect woodland paths." Alexis, not permitted to ride, went rowing on a nearby lake. On one of these excursions, while jumping into a boat, he fell. An oarlock ground itself into the upper part of his left thigh. Dr. Botkin examined the spot and found a small swelling just below the groin. The bruise hurt Alexis, and for several days Botkin made him stay in bed. A week later, the pain and swelling had dwindled and Botkin believed that the incident was closed.

After two weeks at Bialowieza, the family moved on to Spala, the ancient hunting seat of the kings of Poland. Lost at the end of a sandy road, the wooden villa resembled a small country inn. Inside, it was cramped and dark; electric lights were left burning all day so that people could find their way through the tiny rooms and narrow hallways. Outside, the forest was magnificent. A clear, fast-flowing stream cut through the middle of a wide green lawn. From the edge of the lawn, small paths branched off into the forest. One was called the Road of Mushrooms because it ended at a bench surrounded by a fairy ring of mushrooms.

Nicholas threw himself eagerly into hunting. Every day, he rode off with the Polish noblemen who came to visit. At night, after dinner, the slain stags were laid out on the grass in front of the villa. While huntsmen stood beside the beasts holding flaming torches, the Tsar and his guests came out and examined their kill.

It was while Alexis was convalescing from his original fall in the boat that Alexandra first asked Pierre Gilliard to begin tutoring her son in French. This was Gilliard's first intimate contact with the Tsarevich. He still did not know the nature of the boy's disease. The lessons were soon interrupted. "[Alexis] had looked ... ill from the outset," Gilliard recalled. "Soon he had to take to his bed. ... [I was] struck by his lack of color and the fact that he was carried as if he could not walk."

Alexandra, like any mother, worried about her son being cooped up in the gloomy house without sunlight and fresh air. Deciding to take him for a drive, she had him placed in her carriage between herself and Anna Vyrubova. Bouncing and jostling, the carriage set off down the sandy roads.

Not long after starting, Alexis winced and began to complain of pain in his lower leg and abdomen. Fright-

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ened, the Empress ordered the driver to return to the villa immediately. There were several miles to travel. Every time the carriage jolted, Alexis, pale and contorted, cried out. Alexandra, now in terror, urged the driver first to hurry, then to go slowly. Anna Vyrubova remembered the ride as "an experience in horror. Every movement of the carriage, every rough place in the road, caused the child the most exquisite torture and by the time we reached home, the boy was almost unconscious with pain."

Botkin, examining the boy, found a severe hemorrhage in the thigh and groin. That night, a stream of telegrams flew off from Spala. One by one, the doctors began to arrive from St. Petersburg: Ostrogorsky, the pediatrician, and Rauchfuss, the surgeon, joined Fedorov and Dr. Derevenko. Their presence at Spala added worried faces and urgent whispers, but none of them could aid the suffering child. The bleeding could not be stopped and no pain-killers were given. Blood flowed steadily from the torn blood vessels inside the leg, seeping slowly through the other tissues and forming an enormous hematoma, or swelling, through the leg, groin and lower abdomen. The leg drew up against the chest to give the blood a larger socket to fill. But there came a point when there was no place else for the blood to go. Yet still it flowed. It was the beginning of a nightmare.

"The days between the 6th and the 10th were the worst," Nicholas wrote his mother. "The poor darling suffered intensely, the pains came in spasms and recurred every quarter of an hour. His high temperature made him delirious night and day; and he would sit up in bed and every movement brought the pain on again. He hardly slept at all, had not even the strength to cry, and kept repeating, 'Oh Lord, have mercy upon me.' "

Day and night, screams pierced the walls and filled the corridors. Many in the household stuffed their ears with cotton in order to continue their work. Yet for eleven days, the most critical part of the crisis, Alexandra scarcely left her son's side. Hour after hour, she sat by the bed where the groaning,

half-conscious child lay huddled on his side. His face was bloodless, his body contorted, his eyes, with hollow black circles under them, were rolled back in his head. The Empress never undressed or went to bed. When she had to sleep, she lay back on a sofa next to his bed and dozed. After a while, his groans and shrieks dwindled to a constant wail that tore her heart. Through the pain, he called to his mother, "Mama, help me. Won't you help me?" Alexandra sat holding his hand, smoothing his fore-

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head, tears running down her cheeks as she prayed mutely to God to deliver her little boy from torture. During these eleven days, her golden hair became tinged with gray.

Even so, she stood it better than the Tsar. "I was hardly able to stay in the room, but of course had to take turns with Alix for she was exhausted by spending whole nights by his bed," he wrote to his mother. "She bore the ordeal better than I did." Anna Vyrubova says that once when Nicholas came into the room and saw his son in agony, his courage gave away and he rushed out of the house, weeping.

Both parents were certain that the boy was dying. Alexis himself thought so and hoped so. "When I am dead, it will not hurt any more, will it, Mama?" he asked. In another moment of relative calm, he said quietly, "When I am dead, build me a little monument of stones in the woods."

Nevertheless—incredibly, it seemed to Gilliard—outside the sickroom, the surface household routines went on unchanged. Polish noblemen continued to arrive to hunt with the Tsar, and Nicholas rode off with them into the forest. In the evenings, the Empress would briefly leave the bedside and appear, pale but composed, to act as hostess for her husband. Desperately, they played this charade, trying to conceal from the world not only the extent of the Tsarevich's illness, but their own anguish.

Gilliard, watching from his newly intimate vantage point, could scarcely believe what he saw. One night after dinner, his pupils Marie and Anastasia were to present two scenes from Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* before their parents, the suite and some guests. As prompter, Gilliard stood in the

wings of the makeshift stage behind a screen. From there, he could see the company as well as whisper to the girls.

"I could see the Tsaritsa in the front row, smiling and talking gaily to her neighbors," the tutor wrote. "When the play was over, I went out by the service door and found myself in the corridor opposite Alexis Nicolaievich's room from which a moaning sound came distinctly to my ears. Suddenly I noticed the Tsaritsa running up holding her long, awkward train in her two hands. I shrank back against the wall and she passed me without observing my presence. There was a distracted and terror-stricken look on her face. I returned to the dining room. There all were happy. Footmen in livery were handing around refreshments and everyone was laughing and exchanging jokes. . . .

"A few minutes later the Tsaritsa came back. She had resumed the mask. She smiled pleasantly at the guests who crowded around her.

But I noticed that the Tsar, even while engaged in conversation, had taken up a position from which he could watch the door, and I caught the despairing glance which the Tsaritsa threw him as she came in. The scene . . . suddenly brought home to me the tragedy of a double life."

Despite all precautions, the shroud of secrecy surrounding the illness began to tear. St. Petersburg buzzed with talk, none of it accurate. There were blind guesses as to what had happened; a lengthy article in the *London Daily Mail* declared that the boy had been attacked by an anarchist and gravely wounded by a bomb. At last, after Dr. Fedorov warned Nicholas that the hemorrhage in the stomach, still unchecked, could be fatal at any hour, Count Fredericks received permission to begin publishing medical bulletins. Still, there was no mention of the cause.

Official announcements of the grave illness of the Heir to the Throne plunged Russia into national prayer. Special services were held in great cathedrals and in small churches in lonely villages. Before the blessed icon in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg, Russians stood and prayed night and day. There was no church at Spala, but a large green tent

was erected for that purpose in the garden. "All the servants, the Cossacks, the soldiers and all the rest were wonderfully sympathetic," Nicholas wrote to his mother. "At the beginning of Alexei's illness, they begged the priest, Vassiliev, to hold a *Te Deum* in the open. They begged him to repeat it every day until he recovered. Polish peasants came in crowds and wept while he read the sermon to them."

More than once, it seemed the end had come. At lunch one day, the Tsar was handed a note scribbled by the Empress from her place beside Alexis's bed. Alexis was suffering so terribly, she said, that she knew he was about to die. Pale but collected, Nicholas made a sign to Fedorov, who hastily left the table and went to the sickroom. But Alexis continued to breathe and the agony continued. The following night, when the suite was sitting helplessly in the Empress's boudoir, Princess Irene of Prussia, Alexandra's sister, came to the doorway. With a white face, she begged the suite to retire, saying the boy's condition was desperate. The last sacrament was administered, and the bulletin sent to St. Petersburg that night was worded so that the one to follow could announce that His Imperial Highness the Tsarevich was dead.

It was on this night, at the end of hope, that Alexandra called on Rasputin. She asked Anna Vyrubova to telegraph him in Pokrovskoe, his home in Siberia, begging him to pray for the life of her son.

Rasputin immediately cabled back: "God has seen your tears and heard your prayers. Do not grieve. The Little One will not die. Do not allow the doctors to bother him too much."

The next morning, Alexandra came down to the drawing room, thin and pale, but she was smiling. "The doctors notice no improvement yet," she said, "but I am not a bit anxious myself now. During the night, I received a telegram from Father Gregory and he has reassured me completely." A day later, the hemorrhage stopped. The boy was spent, utterly wasted, but alive.

The part played by Rasputin's telegram in Alexis's recovery at Spala remains one of the most mysterious episodes of the whole Rasputin legend. None of the doctors present ever discussed it in writing. Anna Vyrubova,

the link between Rasputin and the Empress, writes of the telegram and the boy's recovery without comment or evaluation. Pierre Gilliard, at that time a minor member of the household to whom many doors still remained closed, does not even mention Rasputin's telegram. Strangely, even Nicholas, in writing to his mother, fails to mention the dramatic telegram from Siberia. His account, written after the ordeal had ended, was this:

"On Oct. 10 [O.S.] we decided to give him Holy Communion and his condition began to improve at once. The temperature fell and the pain almost disappeared and he fell quickly into a sound sleep for the first time. The family suite received Holy Communion and the priest took the Holy Sacrament to Alexis. It snowed all day yesterday, but it thawed last night. It was cold standing in Church but all that is nothing when the heart and soul rejoice."

The Tsar's silence in this letter on the matter of Rasputin's telegram does not mean that he was unaware of it, or of the significance attached to it by his wife. Rather, it indicated his own uncertainty as to what had happened and his unwillingness to commit himself to belief in Rasputin, especially in a letter to his mother. Marie considered Rasputin a fraud, and a letter from Nicholas announcing that Rasputin had saved Alexis by sending a telegram from Siberia would have dismayed the Dowager Empress. Knowing this, Nicholas tactfully left Rasputin out of his account.

The remaining evidence is skimpy. Mosolov was at Spala. He suggests that Fedorov, the surgeon, may have had something to do with the recovery. Mosolov's story is that at the height of the crisis Fedorov came to him and said, "I do not agree with my colleagues. It is most urgently necessary to apply far more drastic measures, but they involve a risk. Ought I to say so to the Empress? Or would it be better to prescribe without letting her know?" Later, after the bleeding had

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stopped, Mosolov asked Fedorov, "Did you apply the remedy you spoke of?" Fedorov threw up his hands and said, "If I had done so, I should not have admitted it. You can see for yourself what is going on here." The implication that Fedorov did nothing is strengthened by the fact that later

that year Fedorov met Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna and told her that "the recovery was wholly inexplicable from a medical point of view."

Despite what Fedorov said, there is a possible medical explanation of this episode. After a greatly prolonged period of time, hemophilic bleeding may stop of its own accord. As long ago as 1905, Dr. M. Litten wrote: "It is impossible to predict in any individual case when the hemorrhage will be arrested; the great loss of blood itself seems to exercise a beneficent effect in the direction of constricting the hemorrhage. Anemia of the brain produces fainting accompanied by a reduction in blood pressure, and the hemorrhage eases soon after. Occasionally, on the other hand, it persists for so long a time that the patient bleeds to death."

Today, long before a hemophiliac is allowed to reach this state, hemorrhage is arrested with transfusions of plasma. If plasma were not available, however, hemotologists agree that hemophiliacs often would find themselves in the state described.

Because the crisis at Spala is so obscure and yet so enormously important to what happened later, every possible explanation should be examined. In this context, it is reasonable to speculate that the arrival of Rasputin's telegram did, of itself, have a beneficial effect on the desperate medical situation.

To begin with, one passage in Rasputin's telegram—"Do not allow the doctors to bother him too much"—was excellent medical advice. With four doctors hovering anxiously around the bed, taking his temperature, probing his leg and groin, Alexis probably was denied the total absence of trauma he desperately needed. A clot, gradually formed, still fragile, could easily have been dislodged in the course of one of the doctors' frequent examinations. When at last they left Alexis alone, either because they had given up or because of Rasputin's advice to the Empress, the effect could only have been good.

There is another possibility, more shadowy, but important to consider. That emotion plays a role in bleeding has long been suspected. Recently, the hypothesis has been greatly strengthened. In 1957, Dr. Paul J. Poinsard, of

Jefferson Hospital in Philadelphia, described to an international symposium on hemophilia his belief "that the hemophiliac patient bleeds more profusely under a condition of emotional stress." Turning the thesis around, Dr. Poinsard continued, "Emo-

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tional tranquillity with a feeling state of well-being appears to be conducive to less severe and less frequent bleeding than in the subject who is emotionally distressed."

At the moment Rasputin's telegram arrived at Spala, Alexandra, the only person with whom the semi-conscious Alexis had strong emotional communication, was in a state of frantic, if exhausted, hysteria. Alexis must have felt her fear and despair. Perhaps, in the manner Dr. Poinsard suggested, his condition was affected by these emotions. If it was, then the sudden overwhelming change in his mother's emotional state produced by Rasputin's telegram may also have affected Alexis. Alone, the new aura of calm and confidence probably could not have stopped the hemorrhage. But together with the natural reduction of the loss of blood caused by lowered blood pressure and the slow formation of clots, it may have helped. It could even, as Alexandra believed, have been the factor which turned back the tide of death.

Whatever the cause, everyone—doctors, court officials, grand duchesses, people who believed in Rasputin and those who hated him —recognized that a remarkably eerie coincidence had occurred. Only to one person was the mystery not a mystery. In her own mind, Alexandra understood clearly what had happened. To her, it seemed quite natural: after the best doctors in Russia had failed, after her own hours of prayer had gone unanswered, her plea to Rasputin had brought the intervention of God and a miracle had taken place. From that time, Alexandra was unshakably convinced that her son's life lay in Rasputin's hands. From this belief, enormous consequences were to flow.

Once the crisis had passed, most of the Imperial household quickly returned to their normal pursuits. Nicholas received his ministers to discuss the war which Bulgaria and Serbia were waging against Turkey. He hunted, played

tennis, walked in the woods and went rowing on the river. He took Anna Vyrubova out in a, boat which hit a rock in a rapid current and almost capsized.

But for the two most intimately involved in the ordeal, recovery was slow. For weeks, Alexandra and Alexis sat together in his room. He was propped against pillows in his bed, while she sat in a chair beside him, reading aloud or knitting. "I must warn you that according to the doctors, Alexei's recovery will be very slow," Nicholas wrote to Marie. "He still has a pain in his left knee and cannot bend it. It has to be propped up on a pillow. But that does not worry the

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doctors for the chief thing is that the process of internal absorption continues and for this, complete immobility is necessary. His complexion is quite good now, but at one time he looked like wax, his hands, his feet, his face, everything. He has grown terribly thin but the doctors are now stuffing him for all they are worth."

A month later, Alexis had recovered sufficiently to be moved back to Tsarskoe Selo. At the Empress's command, the road from the house to the station had been smoothed and graded so that there should not be the slightest jolt. On the homeward journey, the Imperial train crawled at fifteen miles an hour.

Almost a year was to pass before Alexis could walk again. For months, his left leg, drawn up against his chest, refused to straighten. The doctors applied a metal triangle with sliding sides which could be moved to varying points as the leg permitted. Bit by bit, the triangle was widened and the leg extended. But even a year later, at Livadia, Alexis still was undergoing a series of hot mudbaths as a treatment for the limp he had acquired at Spala. Through all this time, official photographs of the Heir were posed either seated or on steps so that the bent leg would appear to be normal.

After Spala, Alexis became a more serious child, more reflective and more considerate of other people. For an eight-year-old boy, it was a matter to ponder that his father was autocrat over millions of men and the master of

the largest empire on earth, and yet had no power to spare him the pain he had felt in his leg. For Alexandra, Spala was a supreme religious experience. She had been, for what seemed an eternity, in Hell. The power that vanquished Hell and saved her son had been a sign from Heaven. Beneath that sign stood Gregory Rasputin.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Rasputin

There was much about Gregory Rasputin that was repulsive. When he first appeared in 1905 in several of St. Petersburg's most elegant drawing rooms, the heralded Siberian "miracle worker" was in his early thirties, broad-shouldered, muscular, of average height. He dressed roughly in loose peasant blouses and baggy trousers tucked into the top of heavy, crudely made leather boots. He was filthy. He rose and slept and rose again without ever bothering to wash himself or change his clothes. His hands were grimy, his nails black, his beard tangled and encrusted with debris. His hair was long and greasy. Parted loosely in the middle, it hung in thin strands to his shoulders. Not surprisingly, he gave off a powerful, acrid odor.

To his devotees, none of these details mattered. Women who found him disgusting discovered later that disgust was a new and thrilling sensation; that the rough and strong-smelling peasant was an alluring change from a surfeit of perfumed and pomaded cavalry officers and society gentlemen. Others, less sensual, reasoned that his coarse appearance was a sure sign of his spirituality. Were he not a Holy Man, they said to themselves, such a ragged *moujik* would not be here among us. Satisfied with this conclusion, they went out, adding their voices to the growing chorus which chanted that Rasputin was indeed a Man of God.

Rasputin's eyes were his most remarkable feature. Friends and enemies alike described their strange power. Anna Vyrubova, who worshipped Rasputin, spoke of him as having a "pale face, long hair, un-cared for beard and the most extraordinary eyes, large, light, brilliant." The monk Iliodor,

who hated Rasputin, described his "steely grey eyes, deep set under their bushy eyebrows, which almost sank into pinpoints." Paléologue, who had to consider Rasputin as a political phenomenon, found himself focusing on the eyes: "Rasputin was dark, with long stiff hair, a thick black beard, a high forehead, a broad

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prominent nose, and sensuous mouth. The full expression of his personality, however, seemed concentrated in his eyes. They were pale blue, of exceptional brilliance, depth and attraction. His gaze was at once piercing and caressing, naïve and cunning, far-off and intent. When he was in earnest conversation, his pupils seemed to radiate magnetism. He carried with him a strong animal smell, like the smell of a goat."

It was difficult to resist the power of Rasputin's steady gaze. Men and women who met him out of curiosity found themselves fascinated, lured and compelled by the glimmering eyes and the urgent, mysterious will behind them. Prince Yussoupov, who murdered Rasputin, went to him first, coolly announcing that he was sick, to learn more about Rasputin's methods of "healing."

"The *'starets'* made me lie down on the sofa," Yussoupov wrote later. "Then, staring intently at me, he gently ran his hand over my chest, neck and head, after which he knelt down, laid both hands on my forehead and murmured a prayer. His face was so close to mine that I could see only his eyes. He remained in this position for some time, then rising brusquely, he made mesmeric passes over my body.

"Rasputin had tremendous hypnotic power. I felt as if some active energy were pouring heat, like a warm current into my whole being. I fell into a torpor, and my body grew numb; I tried to speak but my tongue no longer obeyed me and I gradually slipped into a drowsy state, as though a powerful narcotic had been administered to me. All I could see was Rasputin's glittering eyes; two phosphorescent beams of light melting into a great luminous ring which at times drew nearer and then moved farther away. I heard the voice of the *starets* but could not understand what he said.

"I remained in this state without being able to cry out or to move. My mind alone was free, and I fully realized that I was gradually falling into the power of this evil man. Then I felt stir in me the will to fight his hypnosis. Little by little the desire to resist grew stronger and stronger, forming a protective armour around me. I had the feeling that a merciless struggle was being fought out between Rasputin and me. I knew that I was preventing him from getting complete mastery over me, but still I could not move: I had to wait until he ordered me to get up." Rasputin closed the interview with "Well, my dear, that'll be enough for the first time."

A story told by Fulôp-Miller, Rasputin's biographer, indicates the strange duality of Rasputin's nature:

"A young girl who had heard of the strange new saint came from her province to the capital and visited him in search of . . . spiritual

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instruction. His gentle monastic gaze and the plainly parted light brown hair ... all at first inspired her with confidence. But when he came closer to her, she felt immediately that another quite different man, mysterious, crafty, and corrupting, looked out from behind the eyes that radiated goodness and gentleness.

"He sat down opposite her, edged quite near and his light blue eyes changed color and became deep and dark. A keen glance reached her from the corner of his eyes, bored into her, and held her fascinated. A leaden heaviness overpowered her limbs as his great wrinkled face, distorted with desire, came closer to hers. She felt his hot breath on her cheeks, and saw how his eyes, burning from the depths of their sockets, furtively roved over her helpless body, until he dropped his lids with a sensuous expression. His voice had fallen to a passionate whisper and he murmured strange, voluptuous words in her ear.

"Just as she was on the point of abandoning herself to her seducer, a memory stirred in her dimly . . . she recalled that she had come to ask him about God . . . she gradually awoke . . . the heaviness disappeared . . . she began to struggle. . . . He was at once aware of the increasing inner

resistance, his half-shut eyes opened again, he stood up, bent over her . . . and pressed a passionless, gentle, fatherly kiss on her forehead. His face distorted with desire became smooth again and was once more the kindly face of the wandering teacher. He spoke to his visitor in a benevolent, patronizing tone, his right hand raised to his forehead in blessing. He stood before her in the attitude in which Christ is depicted on old Russian icons; his glance was again gentle and friendly, almost humble, and only in the depth of those little eyes still lurked, almost invisible, the other man, the sensual beast."

Rasputin focused his eyes not only on feverish women, but on ministers of the Imperial government. At the request of the Empress, he called on and was received by two successive Prime Ministers of Russia, Peter Stolypin and Vladimir Kokovtsov.

Stolypin, a man of great strength and will, later described the visit of Rasputin to his friend Michael Rodzianko, President of the Duma: "He [Rasputin] ran his pale eyes over me, mumbled mysterious and inarticulate words from the Scriptures, made strange movements with his hands, and I began to feel an indescribable loathing for this vermin sitting opposite me. Still, I did realize that the man possessed great hypnotic power, which was beginning to produce a fairly strong moral impression on me, though certainly one of repulsion. I pulled myself together. . . ."

To a remarkable degree, the same scene was repeated with Stolypin's successor, Kokovtsov: "When Rasputin came into my study and sat

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down in an arm chair, I was struck by the repulsive expression of his eyes," Kokovtsov wrote. "Deep seated and close set, they glued on me and for a long time, Rasputin would not turn them away as though trying to exercise some hypnotic influence. When tea was served, Rasputin seized a handful of biscuits, threw them into his tea and again fixed his lynx eyes on me. I was getting tired of his attempts at hypnotism and told him in as many words that it was useless to stare at me so hard because his eyes had not the slightest effect on me."

Both Stolypin and Kokovtsov departed from their interviews convinced that they, at least, had triumphed over the Siberian *moujik*. In fact, both had simply made more certain their own political fates. The interviews had been arranged by Alexandra so that Rasputin could evaluate the two ministers. Leaving each of them, he reported to her that neither man seemed attentive to him or to the will of God. Upon these reports, unknown to them, the palace reputations of both of these Prime Ministers, the best men that Russia had, began to decline.

Rasputin's eyes were the foundation of his power, but when they failed him, he was quick to use his wheedling tongue.

The rise of Gregory Rasputin would have been impossible in any country other than Russia. Even in Russia, pungent, shaggy, semi-literate peasants did not normally take tea with prime ministers. Yet neither Kokovtsov nor Rasputin considered the scene quite as bizarre as it seems today; it was not, as someone put it, "as if Og had entered the White House."

Rasputin appeared in St. Petersburg as a *starets*—a Man of God who lived in poverty, asceticism and solitude, offering himself as a guide to other souls in moments of suffering and turmoil. Sometimes, as in his case, the *starets* might also be a *strannik*—a pilgrim who carried his poverty and his offerings of guidance in wanderings from place to place. These were types that all Russians could recognize. Through Russian history, armies of impoverished pilgrims had walked across the steppes from village to village and monastery to monastery, living on whatever the peasants or monks might choose to give them. Many ascetics walked barefoot in the winter or wrapped their legs with heavy chains. Some preached, others claimed powers of healing. If the Orthodox Church caught them preaching heresy, they went to prison, but their poverty and self-sacrifice often made them seem holier than the local priests.

All Russians listened to these holy men. To illiterate peasants who

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had never walked beyond the nearest river, they talked of mighty cities, foreign lands, mysterious healings and miracles of God. Even educated

Russians treated them with respect. Dostoyevsky wrote in *The Brothers Karamasov,* "The *starets* is he who takes your soul and will and makes them his. When you select your *starets,* you surrender your will. You give it to him in utter submission, in full renunciation." Before his death, Count Leo Tolstoy visited the revered *starets* of Optina Poustin for counsel. Traditionally, the rags, the chains, the clear renunciation of the world gave these men freedoms that others lacked. They could rebuke the mighty, sometimes even the tsars themselves.

Rasputin was a fraudulent *starets.* Most were saintly old men who had left all temptation and worldly goods behind. Rasputin was young, he was married and had three children, and his powerful friends later bought him the grandest house in his village. His mind was impure and his moral behavior was gross. But he had in lavish abundance some of the dramatic trappings of holiness. Along with his burning eyes, he had a fluent tongue. His head was filled with Scriptures, and his deep, powerful voice made him a compelling preacher. Besides, he had wandered the length and breadth of Russia and twice made pilgrimages to the Holy Land. He presented himself as a humble penitent, a man who had sinned greatly, been forgiven and commanded to do God's work. It was a touching symbol of his humility, people said, that he kept the nickname "Rasputin" which he had earned as a young man in his native village. "Rasputin" in Russian means "dissolute."

Rasputin was born Gregory Efimovich, the son of Efim, a farmer who once had been a coachman in the Imperial Mail. The year was 1872; thus he was thirty-three when he first met the Imperial family, and forty-four when he died. His birthplace was Pokrovskoe, a village on the Tura River in western Siberia, 250 miles east of the Ural Mountains. It was a hard, wind-swept land where the temperature in winter dropped to forty below zero and to survive took great strength and hard physical work. Climate and isolation had their effect on the mind, and more mystics, more holy men and more outlandish sects came out of Siberia than any other part of Russia.

There is a story that, as a boy, Gregory uttered his first startling bit of prophecy. He lay in bed with fever while a group of villagers gathered in his father's house to discuss the theft of a horse. From his bed, the story goes,

Gregory arose, flushed and excited, and pointed his finger at a peasant in the room, declaring that he was the thief. Outraged, the peasant denied it, and Gregory was beaten. That night, however, a pair of distrustful villagers followed the accused man and

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saw him take the horse from his shed into the forest. Gregory acquired a modest local reputation as a seer, a heady thing for a boy of twelve.

As a young man, the seer became a rake. He drank and fought and made free with the village girls. He became a wagoner, carrying goods and passengers to other villages, an occupation that extended the range of his conquests. A good talker, sure of himself, he tried every girl he met. His method was direct: he grabbed and started undoing buttons. Naturally, he was frequently kicked and scratched and bitten, but the sheer volume of his efforts brought him notable success. He learned that even in the shyest and primmest of girls, the emptiness and loneliness of life in a Siberian village had bred a flickering appetite for romance and adventure. Gregory's talent was for stimulating those appetites and overcoming all hesitations by direct, good-natured aggression.

On one of his trips, Gregory—now dubbed Rasputin by his snickering neighbors—carried a traveler to the monastery of Verkhoturye, a place used both as a retreat for monks and as a seat of ecclesiastical imprisonment for heretical sectarians. Rasputin was fascinated by both groups of inhabitants and remained at the monastery for four months.

Most of those confined at Verkhoturye were members of the Khlysty, a sect which believed in reaching God through the raptures of sexual encounter. Their secret nocturnal orgies took place on Saturday nights in curtained houses or clearings deep in the forest. Both men and women arrived dressed in clean white linen gowns and began singing hymns by candlelight. As the candles burned lower, the singers began to dance, slowly and reverently at first, then more wildly. In a fever of excitement, they stripped their bodies and submitted to the whip brandished by the local leader of the sect. At the peak of their frenzy, men and women fell on each other, regardless of age or

family relationship, and climaxed their devotions with indiscriminate intercourse.

In later years, Rasputin's enemies often charged him with membership in the Khlysty. Had they been able to prove it, even the Empress might have been shocked, but solid evidence was never available.

The most that could be proved—and Rasputin freely admitted this -

was that, like the Khlysty, Rasputin believed that to sin was the first step toward holiness.

Soon after returning to Pokrovskoe, Rasputin, then barely twenty, married a blonde peasant girl four years older than he. Through all his life, even at the height of his notoriety, his wife, Praskovie, remained at home in Pokrovskoe. She knew about his womanizing

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and never complained. "He has enough for all," she said with a curious pride. She bore him four children—two sons and two daughters. The eldest son died in infancy and the other was mentally deficient; the two girls, Maria and Varvara, later came to live with their father and be educated in St. Petersburg.

To support his family, Rasputin took up farming. One day while plowing, he thought he saw a vision and declared that he had been directed to make a pilgrimage. His father scoffed—"Gregory has turned pilgrim out of laziness," said Efim—but Gregory set out and walked two thousand miles to the monastery at Mount Athos in Greece. At the end of two years, when Gregory returned, he carried an aura of mystery and holiness. He began to pray at length, to bless other peasants, to kneel at their beds in supplication when they were sick. He gave up his drinking and curbed his public lunges at women. It began to be said that Gregory Rasputin, the profligate, was a man who was close to God. The village priest, alarmed at this sudden blossoming of a vigorous young Holy Man within his sphere, suggested heresy and threatened an investigation. Unwilling to argue and bored by life in Pokrovskoe, Rasputin left the village and began once again to wander.

Rasputin's first appearance in St. Petersburg occurred in 1903 and lasted for five months. Even in the capital, remote and sophisticated, his reputation had preceded him. He was said to be a strange Siberian *moujik* who, having sinned and repented, had been blessed with extraordinary powers. As such, he was received by the city's most famous churchman, Father John of Kronstadt. John was a saintly figure noted for the power of his prayers, and his church at Kronstadt was an object of pilgrimages from across Russia. He had been the private confessor to Tsar Alexander III and had sat with the family by Alexander's bed at Livadia while the Tsar was dying. To be received and blessed by this most revered priest in Russia was an impressive step in Rasputin's progress.

In 1905, Rasputin was back in St. Petersburg. This time, he was taken to meet the aged Archimandrite Theophan, Inspector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and former confessor to the Empress Alexandra. Like Father John, Theophan was struck by the apparent fervor of Rasputin's faith and arranged for him to meet another ranking churchman, Bishop Hermogen of Saratov. With all of these priests and bishops, Rasputin's approach was the same. He refused to bow and treated them with jolly, spontaneous good humor, as if they were friends and equals. Put off balance by his egalitarianism and simple sincerity, they were also impressed by his obvious gifts as a

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preacher. He was a phenomenon, it seemed to them, which had been given to the Church and which the Church, then trying to strengthen its roots among the peasants, could put to valuable use. They welcomed him as a genuine *starets.*

In addition to the blessing of the Holy Fathers of the Church, Rasputin began his life in the capital with the endorsement of two ladies of the highest society, the Montenegrin sister princesses, Grand Duchess Militsa and Grand Duchess Anastasia. The daughters of King Nicholas I of Montenegro, each had married a cousin of Tsar Nicholas II, and both were prominent practitioners of the pseudo-Oriental brand of mysticism then in vogue in many of the capital's most elegant drawing rooms. This upper

layer of society, bored with the old church routines of traditional Orthodoxy, looked for meaning and sensation in the occult. Amid an atmosphere of decadence, of cards and gold lying on green baize tables, of couples flushed with champagne dancing all night, of galloping *troikas,* of fortunes staked at the race track, the mediums and clairvoyants flourished. Grand dukes and princes gathered around tables, the curtains drawn behind their backs, to hold seances and try feverishly to communicate with the other world. There were table-rappings in darkened rooms where strange voices were said to speak and the tables themselves were declared to have risen and floated in the air. Numerous great mansions had their domestic ghosts. Footsteps sounded, doors creaked and a certain tune was always played on the piano by invisible hands whenever a member of the family was dying. Rasputin, who had so impressed the saintly men of the Church, was received with equal excitement by this coterie of the occult.

It was Grand Duchess Militsa who first brought Rasputin to Tsar-skoe Selo. The fateful date, November 1, 1905 (O.S.), is fixed by an entry in Nicholas's diary: "We have got to know a man of God, Gregory, from Tobolsk Province." A year later, Nicholas wrote: "Gregory arrived at 6:45. He saw the children and talked to us until 7:45." Still later: "Militsa and Stana [Grand Duchess Anastasia] dined with us. They talked about Gregory the whole evening."

Rasputin was not, in fact, the first "Holy Man" brought to the palace by the Grand Duchess Militsa. In 1900, when Alexandra was desperately anxious to give her husband a male heir, Militsa advised her of the existence of a French mystic and "soul doctor" named Philippe Vachot. Vachot had begun as a butcher's assistant in Lyon, but he had found life easier as a faith healer; many believed he could also determine the sex of unborn children. This did not impress the French authorities, who three times had prosecuted him for practicing

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medicine without a license. In 1901, Nicholas and Alexandra paid an official visit to France, and Militsa arranged for them to meet Vachot. He proved to be a childlike little man with a high forehead and penetrating

eyes. When the Imperial couple returned to Russia, Vachot went along as part of their baggage.

Unfortunately for Vachot, the Empress's next child, like the preceding three, proved to be a girl, Anastasia. In 1903, Vachot declared that the Empress was pregnant and would have a son. She was not even pregnant and Vachot's stock plummeted. Despairing, Alexandra was persuaded to give up Vachot and he was sent home, lavishly remunerated, to die in obscurity. But before he left, he told the Empress, "You will someday have another friend like me who will speak to you of God."

At first, Rasputin's reception at the palace caused little comment. His credentials on all sides were impeccable. He had the blessing of the most saintly men of the church; Father John and the Archimandrite Theophan had both advised the Empress to have a talk with the devout peasant, and he was introduced from the highest social circle of the capital.

None of these people, however, expected the degree of intimacy with which Rasputin came to be accepted at the palace. Usually, he came in the hour before dinner when Alexis was playing on the floor in his blue bathrobe before going to bed. When Rasputin arrived, he sat down with the boy beside him and told stories of travels and adventures and old Russian tales. There was the story of the humpbacked horse, of the legless rider and the eyeless rider, of Alyonushka and Ivanushka, of the unfaithful Tsaritsa who was turned into a white duck, of the evil witch Baba Yaga, of the Tsarevich Vasily and the beautiful Princess Elena. Often, the girls, the Empress and the Tsar himself found themselves listening.

It was on such an evening in the autumn of 1907 that Grand Duchess Olga, the Tsar's youngest sister, first met Rasputin. Nicholas said to her, "Will you come and meet a Russian peasant?" and Olga followed him to the nurseries. There, the four girls and their small brother, all wearing white nightgowns, were waiting to go to bed. In the middle of the room stood Rasputin.

"All the children seemed to like him," said Olga. "They were completely at ease with him. I still remember little Alexis [then three], deciding he was a

rabbit, jumped up and down the room. And then, quite suddenly, Rasputin caught the child's hand and led him to his bedroom, and we three followed. There was something like a hush as though we had found ourselves in Church. In Alexis's bedroom no

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lamps were lit; the only light came from the candles burning in front of some beautiful icons. The child stood very still by the side of the giant, whose head was bowed. I knew he was praying. It was all most impressive. I also knew that my little nephew had joined him in prayer. I really cannot describe it—but I was then conscious of the man's sincerity. ... I realized that both Nicky and Alicky were hoping that I would come to like Rasputin. ..."

Rasputin's manner with Nicholas and Alexandra exactly suited his role. He was respectful but never fawning; he felt free to laugh loudly and to criticize freely, although he larded his language heavily with biblical quotes and old Russian proverbs. He referred to the sovereigns not as "Your Majesty" or "Your Imperial Majesty," but as *Batiushka* and *Matushka*, the "Father" and "Mother" of the Russian peasants. In these ways he deepened the contrasts between himself, the Man of God and representative of the Russian people, and the polished figures of court and society whom Alexandra despised.

Both Nicholas and Alexandra spoke freely to Rasputin. To the Tsar, Rasputin was exactly what he had described to his sister, "a Russian peasant." Once, speaking to one of the officers of his guard, Nicholas elaborated: "He [Rasputin] is just a good, religious, simple-minded Russian. When in trouble or assailed by doubts, I like to have a talk with him, and invariably feel at peace with myself afterward." To Alexandra, Rasputin became much more important. Gradually, Alexandra became convinced that the *starets* was a personal emissary from God to her, to her husband and to Russia. He had all the trappings: he was a peasant, devoted to the Tsar and the Orthodox faith; he represented the historic triumvirate: Tsar-Church-People; in addition, as an irrefutable proof of his divine mission, Rasputin was able to help her son.

This was the key. "It was the boy's illness that brought Rasputin to the palace," writes Sir Bernard Pares. "What was the nature of Rasputin's influence in the family circle?" Pares goes on to ask. "The foundation of it all was that he could undoubtedly bring relief to the boy, and of this there was no question whatsoever." The eyewitnesses agree. "Call it what you will," declared Alexandra Tegleva, Alexis's last nurse, "he [Rasputin] could promise her [the Empress] her boy's life while he lived." Mosolov, the court official, writes of Rasputin's "incontestable success in healing." Gilliard states that "Rasputin's presence in the palace was intimately connected with the prince's illness. She [Alexandra] believed that she had no choice. Rasputin was the intermediary between her and God. Her own prayers went unanswered but his seemed to be." Kerensky, intruding on the family

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circle after Rasputin was dead, nevertheless declares that "it was a fact that more than once before the eyes of the Tsar and the Tsaritsa, Rasputin's appearance by the bedside of the apparently dying Alexis caused a critical change."

What was it, exactly, that Rasputin did? The common belief, never verified, is that Rasputin used his extraordinary eyes to hypnotize the Tsarevich and then, with the boy in a hypnotic state, suggested that the bleeding would stop. Medically, it could not have been that simple. No doctor established in this field accepts the possibility that hypnosis alone could suddenly stop a severe hemorrhage. Nevertheless, there is a strong body of responsible opinion which believes that hypnosis, properly used, can play a part in controlling hemophilic bleeding.

"Rasputin took the empire by stopping the bleeding of the Tsarevich," wrote J. B. S. Haldane, the British geneticist. "It was perhaps an imposture, but it is also possible that by hypnotism or a similar method, he was able to produce a contraction of the small arteries. These last were placed under the regulation of the [autonomic] nervous system and although they are not normally controlled by the will, their contraction can be provoked in the body of a hypnotized subject." *

If it is medically possible that Rasputin could have controlled Alexis's bleeding by using hypnosis, it is far from historically certain that he did. General Beletsky, Director of the Police Department, which monitored all Rasputin's activities, declared that in 1913 Rasputin was taking lessons in hypnotism from a teacher in St. Petersburg; Beletsky put an end to the lessons by expelling the teacher from the capital. Rasputin's successes with Alexis, however, began well before 1913.

* Recently, over a three-year period, 1961-1964, at Jefferson Hospital in Philadelphia, Dr. Oscar Lucas used hypnosis to extract 150 teeth from hemophilic patients without transfusing a single pint of blood or plasma. Normally, for hemophiliacs, tooth extraction means a major operation requiring the transfusion of dozens of units of plasma before, during and for days after an operation. Lucas uses hypnosis in his work primarily to dissipate the fears that hemophiliacs naturally suffer when faced with the prospect of surgery and the accompanying major bleeding. "An emotionally tranquil patient has less bleeding difficulty than one emotionally distressed," Lucas has explained. "Bleeding engenders fear and fear of bleeding is considerably greater in the hemophiliac than in non-bleeders. The anxiety which results may be averted through hypnosis." Generally, Lucas suppressed anxiety by asking patients to recall pleasurable experiences. One patient enjoyed himself hugely during surgery by returning himself to a baseball park for the climactic inning of a crucial game. Whether Rasputin actually hypnotized the Tsarevich or not, the distraction a contemporary American receives from watching an exciting baseball game cannot be far different from that a small Russian boy would find in hearing the dramatic stories and legends told by a mysterious wanderer. Interestingly, Oscar Lucas was inspired to begin his own work in hypnosis after reading about Rasputin.

If he had been using hypnosis all the while, why did he need lessons?

The probable answer to this mystery derives from recent explorations into the shadowy links between the working of mind and body and between emotions and health. In hematology, for example, it has been proved that bleeding in hemophiliacs can be aggravated or even spontaneously induced by emotional stress. Anger, anxiety, resentment and embarrassment cause an increase in blood flow through the smallest blood vessels, the capillaries. In addition, there is evidence that overwrought emotions can adversely affect the strength and integrity of the capillary walls. As these tend to become more fragile and break down under stress while at the same time they are attempting to handle an increased flow of blood, the likelihood of abnormal bleeding becomes greater.

There is an opposite side to this proposition: It is strongly suspected that a decrease in emotional stress has a beneficial effect on bleeding. As calm and a sense of well-being return to a patient, his capillary blood flow will decline and the strength of his vascular walls increase. In this context, the question of whether Rasputin hypnotized the Tsarevich becomes a matter of degree. If, technically, it was not hypnosis that he practiced, it was nevertheless a powerful suggestion —Prince Yussoupov's account gives an indication of its strength. When Rasputin used this power on Alexis, weaving his tales, filling a darkened room with his commanding voice, he did in effect cast a spell over a boy overwhelmed by pain. Then, as Rasputin assured him in tones which left no room for doubt, Alexis believed that the torment was receding, that soon he would be walking again, that perhaps they would go together to see the wonders of Siberia. The calm and sense of well-being produced by this powerful flow of reassuring language produced a dramatic emotional change in the Tsarevich. And, as if by a miracle, the emotional change affected Alexis's body. The bleeding slowed, the exhausted child dropped off to sleep and eventually the bleeding stopped altogether. No one else could have done it, neither the anguished parents nor the terrified doctors. Only a man supreme in his own self-confidence could transmit this self-confidence to a child.

Like every other explanation, this one is only a guess. It is supported, however, by current medical knowledge. It is also suggested by a wisp of testimony from Maria Rasputin, the *starets's* daughter: "The power, the nervous force that emanated from my father's eyes, from his exceptionally long and beautiful hands, from his whole being impregnated with willpower, from his mind concentrated on one desire . . . [were] transmitted to the child—a particularly nervous and impressionable subject—and ... in some way . . . galvanized

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him. At first through the stream of emotion and later through the power of confidence, the child's nervous system reacted, the envelope of the blood vessels contracted, the hemorrhage ceased."

The truth about Rasputin's effect on the Tsarevich will never be precisely known. Few medical records of these episodes were kept and none survived the Revolution. Not even persons intimate with most of the family secrets were privy to these dramatic episodes. Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, the Tsarevich's aunt, declares, "There is no doubt about that [Rasputin's healing powers]. I saw those miraculous effects with my own eyes and that more than once. I also know that the most prominent doctors of the day had to admit it. Professor Fedorov, who stood at the very peak of his profession and whose patient Alexis was, told me so on more than one occasion, but all the doctors disliked Rasputin intensely."

It turns out, however, that if Olga saw the "miraculous effects," she never saw the cause. She did not ever see with her own eyes what happened at Alexis's bedside. The sole experience she cites is this:

"The poor child lay in pain, dark patches under his eyes and his little body all distorted, and the leg terribly swollen. The doctors were just useless . . . more frightened than any of us . . . whispering among themselves. ... It was getting late and I was persuaded to go to my rooms. Alicky then sent a message to Rasputin in St. Petersburg. He reached the palace about midnight or even later. By that time, I had reached my apartments and early in the morning Alicky called me to go to Alexis's room. I just could not believe my eyes. The little boy was not just alive—but well. He was sitting

up in bed, the fever gone, the eyes clear and bright, not a sign of any swelling in the leg— Later I learned from Alicky that Rasputin had not even touched the child but merely stood at the foot of the bed and prayed."

Olga may have been misled, both about the severity of the hemorrhage and about the speed of recovery. But not necessarily. It is one of the mysteries of the disease that the recuperative powers of its victims, especially when they are children, are extraordinary. A child who has been totally disabled and in great pain can be quickly restored. Even a night's sleep can bring color into the cheeks and life into the eyes. Swellings recede more slowly and afflicted joints may be weeks or months returning to normal. But to observers like Olga Alexandrovna, the difference between a night and the following morning could well have seemed miraculous.

There were those who, in regard to Rasputin, expressed skepticism that his presence had any effect at all. Pierre Gilliard mentions the theory that Rasputin was a clever cheat who had an accomplice in the

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palace; the one most suspected, of course, was Anna Vyrubova. When Alexis fell sick, this theory runs, Rasputin waited until the crisis reached its peak. Then, signaled by his ally, he appeared at the precise moment the crisis was passing and took credit for the recovery. This theory, as Gilliard himself admits, is shaky. For one thing, it presupposes a medical knowledge on Anna Vyrubova's part which her subsequent book does not reveal. It would have been risky; had Rasputin been summoned too soon or too late, his game would have been exposed. Most damaging of all to this theory is the fact that it assumes that Anna Vyrubova owed a greater allegiance to Rasputin than she did to the Empress. Overwhelmingly, the evidence denies this last assumption.

Whatever it was that Rasputin did or did not do, there was only one judge of his effectiveness who mattered. This was the Empress Alexandra. She believed that Rasputin was able to stop Alexis's hemorrhages and she believed that he did it through the power of prayer. Whenever Alexis began to recover from an illness, she attributed it exclusively to the prayers of the Man of God.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Holy Devil

Success at Tsarskoe Selo ensured Rasputin's success in society. As his social position improved, his wardrobe became more elegant. The rough linen shirts were exchanged for silk blouses of pale blue, brilliant red, violet and light yellow, some of them made and embroidered with flowers by the Empress herself. Black velvet trousers and soft kid leather boots replaced the mud-spattered garb of the peasant. The plain leather thong belted around his waist gave way to silken cords of sky blue or raspberry with big, soft, dangling tassels. On a chain around his neck, Rasputin wore a handsome gold cross. It too was a gift from Alexandra.

In his new trappings, Rasputin strode confidently into crowded parlors and became the immediate center of attention. His rich clothes were in striking contrast to his rude, open, peasant's face with its unkempt hair, matted beard, broad, pockmarked nose and wrinkled, weather-beaten skin. Advancing on the guests, Rasputin seized the hands of every new acquaintance between his own wide, horny palms and stared fiercely into the other's eyes. Holding them with his gaze, Rasputin began his familiar banter, studded with impertinent questions. Asked what she liked least about Rasputin, Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna cited his "curiosity, unbridled and embarrassing." Olga had a strong taste of this in her first meeting with Rasputin at Tsarskoe Selo.

"In Alicky's boudoir," Olga wrote, "having talked to her and Nicky for a few minutes, Rasputin waited for the servants to get the table for evening tea and then began plying me with most impertinent questions. Was I happy? Did I love my husband? Why didn't I have any children? He had no right to ask such questions, nor did I answer them. I am afraid Nicky and Alicky looked rather uncomfortable. I do remember I was relieved at leaving the palace that

evening and saying 'Thank God he hasn't followed me to the station' as I boarded my private coach in the train for St. Petersburg."

Rasputin was always ready, even in public gatherings, to offer intimate personal advice. The Empress's friend Lili Dehn first met Rasputin at a moment when she was wondering whether to go on a trip with her husband or stay behind with her infant son. "Our eyes met," she wrote. ". . . His eyes held mine, those shining, steel-like eyes which seemed to read one's inmost thoughts. He came forward and took my hand. . . . 'Thou art worried. . . . Well, nothing in life is worth worrying over—*tout passe*—you understand. That's the best outlook.' He became serious. 'It is necessary to have Faith. God alone is thy help. Thou art torn between thy husband and thy child. Which is weaker? Thou thinks't that thy child is the more helpless. This is not so. A child can do nothing in his weakness. A man can do much.' "

Beneath his new finery, Rasputin remained the *moujik*. He gloried in the fact that a peasant was accepted in the silken drawing rooms of the aristocracy and he strutted his origins before his titled admirers. Amid a stream of guests coming in from the street and divesting themselves of furs and velvet capes, Rasputin handed the footman his plain, long, black *caftan*, the age-old coat of the Russian peasant. In polite conversation, Rasputin used coarse barnyard expressions. It was not a matter of the words slipping out accidentally; Rasputin used them often and with gusto, and he enjoyed the little gasps they invariably produced. He liked to describe in detail the sexual life of horses which he had observed as a child in Pokrovskoe, then turn to a beautiful woman in a décolleté dress and say, "Come, my lovely mare." He found that society was as fascinated by his stories and tales of Siberia as the Imperial family. Frequently, seated in an elegant parlor, he would shake his head reprovingly and say, "Yes, yes, my dears, you are all much too pampered. Follow me in the summer to Pokrovskoe, to the great freedom of Siberia. We will catch fish and work in the fields and then you will really learn to understand God." His table manners left people aghast. There is no more vivid image of Rasputin than that left by Simanovich, his aide and partner, who described Rasputin "plunging his dirty hands into his favorite fish soup." Yet, this raw confirmation of Rasputin's nature seemed

to attract rather than repel. For a jaded, mannered, restless society, Rasputin was an exotic diversion.

At first, Rasputin walked carefully in this new world of the wealthy. He soon discovered, however, that to many of the women who thronged around him, his sensual side was as interesting as his spiritual nature. Rasputin responded quickly. His lusts flared up, his gestures

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became excited, his eyes and voice turned suggestive, lewd and insinuating. His first conquests were easy and those that followed even easier; talk of his amorous adventures only increased his mysterious reputation. Noble ladies, wives of officers on duty far away, actresses and women of lower classes sought the rough, humiliating caresses of the *moujik.* Making love to the unwashed peasant with his dirty beard and filthy hands was a new and thrilling sensation. "He had too many offers," said Simanovich.

Rasputin made it easier for the ladies by preaching his personal doctrine of redemption: salvation is impossible unless one has been redeemed from sin, and true redemption cannot be achieved unless sin has been committed. In himself, Rasputin offered all three: sin, redemption and salvation. "Women," says Fiilôp-Miller, "found in Gregory Efimovich the fulfillment of two desires which had hitherto seemed irreconcilable, religious salvation and the satisfaction of carnal appetites. ... As in the eyes of his disciples, Rasputin was a reincarnation of the Lord, intercourse with him, in particular, could not possibly be a sin; and these women found for the first time in their lives a pure happiness, untroubled by the gnawings of conscience."

For some, bestowal of this supreme honor by Father Gregory was a matter for boasting, not only by the ladies but also by their husbands. "Would you be ready to accede to him?" an outsider once incredulously asked one of Rasputin's disciples. "Of course. I have already belonged to him, and I am proud and happy to have done so," the lady supposedly replied. "But you are married! What does your husband say to it?" "He considers it a very great honor. If Rasputin desires a woman, we all think it a blessing and distinction, our husbands as well as ourselves."

Every day, numbers of admiring women came to Rasputin's apartment to sit in his dining room, sip wine or tea, gossip and listen to the Father's wisdom. Those who could not come telephoned tearful apologies. One frequent visitor, an opera singer, often rang up Rasputin simply to sing to him his favorite songs over the telephone. Taking the telephone, Rasputin danced around the room, holding the earpiece to his ear. At the table, Rasputin stroked the arms and hair of the women sitting next to him. Sometimes he put down his glass of Madeira and took a young girl on his lap. When he felt inspired, he rose before everyone and openly led his choice to the bedroom, a sanctum which his adoring disciples referred to as "The Holy of Holies." Inside, if necessary, he whispered reassurance into the ear of his partner: "You think that I am polluting you, but I am not. I am purifying you."

Giddy at his success, not knowing where to stop, Rasputin even made advances to Grand Duchess Olga. One evening after dinner, Olga had gone with her brother and Alexandra to Anna Vyrubova's cottage. "Rasputin was there," she wrote, "and seemed very pleased to meet me again, and when the hostess with Nicky and Alicky left the drawing room for a few moments, Rasputin got up, put his arm about my shoulders, and began stroking my arm. I moved away at once, saying nothing. I just got up and joined the others. . . ."

Not many days afterward, Anna Vyrubova arrived, flushed and disheveled, at Olga's palace in town. She begged the Grand Duchess to receive Rasputin again, pleading, "Oh please, he wants to see you so much." "I refused very curtly. . . . To the best of my knowledge Nicky put up with the man solely on account of the help he gave to Alexis and that, as I happen to know very well, was genuine enough."

Although the moments were wholly innocent, Rasputin's visits to the palace nurseries touched the Tsar's young daughters with rumors of scandal. On the pretext of saying prayers with the Tsarevich and his sisters, Rasputin sometimes hung about their upstairs bedrooms after the girls had changed into their long white nightgowns. The girls' governess, Mlle. Tiutcheva, was

horrified to see a peasant staring at her charges and demanded that he be barred. As a result, Alexandra became angy not at Rasputin, but at Tiutcheva, who dared to question the saintliness of the "Man of God." Nicholas, seeing the impropriety of Rasputin's presence, intervened in the quarrel and instructed Rasputin to avoid his daughters' rooms. Later, Tiutcheva was dismissed, and blamed her downfall on Rasputin's hold over the Empress. Tiutcheva returned to Moscow, where her family had important connections and were especially close to Alexandra's sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth. Busily spreading her story across Moscow, Tiutcheva at the same time implored the Grand Duchess to speak bluntly to her younger sister the Empress. Ella was more than willing; having herself entered into religious retreat, she regarded Rasputin as a blasphemous and lascivious impostor. At every opportunity she spoke, sometimes gently, sometimes bitterly, to Alexandra about the *starets.* Her efforts had no effect except to open a breach between the two sisters which, as time went on, became so wide that neither could touch the other.

By 1911, St. Petersburg was in an uproar over Rasputin. Not all the husbands were *complaisant,* nor did all the ladies of St. Petersburg enjoy having their buttons undone. The Montenegrin princesses,

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Grand Duchess Militsa and Grand Duchess Anastasia, closed their doors to their former protégé. Anastasia's soldier-husband, Grand Duke Nicholas, swore "never to see the devil again." The two Montenegrins even went to Tsarskoe Selo to report to the Empress their "sad discovery" about Gregory, but Alexandra received them coolly.

It was the Church which initiated the first formal investigation of Rasputin's activities and carried the first official complaints to the Tsar. Bishop Theophan, the saintly Inspector of the Theological Academy, who had been impressed by Rasputin's faith and had recommended him to the Empress, was the first to entertain doubts. When women who had given in to Rasputin began coming to him with their confessions, Theophan went to the Empress. Once he had been Alexandra's confessor; now he advised her that something was fearfully wrong about the "Holy Man" he had recommended

to her. Alexandra sent for the *starets* and questioned him. Rasputin affected surprise, innocence and humility. The result was that Theophan, a distinguished theologian, was transferred from the Theological Academy to become Bishop of the Crimea. "I have shut his trap," gloated Rasputin in private.

Next, the Metropolitan Anthony called on the Tsar to discuss Rasputin. Nicholas replied that the private affairs of the Imperial family were no concern of the Church. "No, Sire," the Metropolitan replied, "this is not merely a family affair, but the affair of all Russia. The Tsarevich is not only your son, but our future sovereign and belongs to all Russia." Nicholas nodded and quietly ended the interview. But soon afterward, Anthony fell ill and died.

The single most damaging attack on Rasputin came from a flamboyant young zealot of a monk named Iliodor. Iliodor was even younger than Rasputin, but he had built a reputation as a fiery orator and crowds flocked to hear him whenever he spoke. Simply by telling the multitude that he wanted to build a great monastery ("Let one man bring a plank, let another bring a rusty nail"), he attracted thousands of volunteers who erected a vast spiritual retreat near Tsaritsyn [later Stalingrad, now Volgograd] on the banks of the Volga.

Austere in his behavior, Iliodor was fanatical in his beliefs. He preached strict adherence to the Orthodox faith and the absolute autocracy of the tsar. Yet alongside his extreme monarchism, he advocated a vague peasant communism. The tsar should rule, he said, but beneath the autocrat all other men should be brothers with equal rights and no distinctions of rank or class. As a result, Iliodor was as unpopular with government officials, local governors, aristocrats and the hierarchy of the Church as he was popular with the masses.

In Rasputin, Iliodor saw an ally. When Rasputin was first brought to him by Theophan, Iliodor welcomed the primitive religious fervor manifested by the *starets*. In 1909, Iliodor discovered Rasputin's other face. He invited Rasputin to come with him to his spiritual retreat near Tsaritsyn. There, to

Iliodor's surprise, Rasputin responded to the respect and humility of the women they met by grabbing the prettiest and smacking their lips with kisses. From Tsaritsyn, the monk and the *starets* set out for Pokrovskoe, Rasputin's home. On the train, Iliodor was even more dismayed when Rasputin, bragging about his past, boasted openly of his sexual exploits and jibed at Iliodor's innocence. He gave a swaggering account of his relations with the Imperial family. The Tsar, said Rasputin, knelt before him and told him, "Gregory, you are Christ." He boasted that he had kissed the Empress in her daughters' rooms.

Once they had reached Pokrovskoe, Rasputin supported his boasts by showing Iliodor a collection of letters he had received from Alexandra and her children. He even gave several of these letters to Iliodor—or so Iliodor said—saying, "Take your choice. Only leave the Tsarevich's letter. It's the only one I have." Three years later, portions of these letters from the Empress to Rasputin began appearing in public. They became the basic incriminating documents for the lurid charge that the Empress was Rasputin's lover. Of them, the most damning was this:

My beloved, unforgettable teacher, redeemer and mentor! How tiresome it is without you! My soul is quiet and I relax only when you, my teacher, are sitting beside me. I kiss your hands and lean my head on your blessed shoulder. Oh how light, how light do I feel then. I only wish one thing: to fall asleep, to fall asleep, forever on your shoulders and in your arms. What happiness to feel your presence near me. Where are you? Where have you gone? Oh, I am so sad and my heart is longing. . . . Will you soon be again close to me? Come quickly, I am waiting for you and I am tormenting myself for you. I am asking for your holy blessing and I am kissing your blessed hands. I love you forever.

Yours,

M. [Mama]

Assuming for a moment that Alexandra wrote this letter to Rasputin, did it, as their enemies charged, prove that they were lovers? No responsible

participant in the events of these years and no serious historian who subsequently has chronicled these events has accepted

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this charge. Sir Bernard Pares says of this letter, "Alexandra, it appears, had inadvisedly used some expressions which a cynical reader might interpret into an admission of personal attraction." Pares was putting it too carefully. The fact is that Alexandra wrote to all of her intimate friends in this florid, emotional style. Almost all of these sentences could have been addressed to Anna Vyrubova or any one of a number of friends. It is equally possible that the letters were faked. Only Iliodor saw them, and his credentials as an objective source were thoroughly undermined by subsequent events.

Despite Iliodor's surprise and disgust at what he saw and read in 1909, he and Rasputin remained friendly for another two years. He continued to urge Rasputin to change his ways. At the same time, Iliodor stoutly defended Rasputin when others attacked him. Then, in 1911, Rasputin attempted to seduce—and when that failed, to rape—a nun.

Hearing about it, Iliodor was sickened and enraged. Along with Bishop Hermogen of Saratov, he invited Rasputin into his room and confronted him with the story. "Is it true?" thundered Hermogen. Rasputin looked around and then mumbled, "It's true, it's true, it's all true." Hermogen, a powerful man, was beside himself. He hit Rasputin in the head with his fist and then beat him with a heavy wooden cross. "You are smashing our sacred vessels," bellowed the outraged Bishop. Subdued, Rasputin was dragged into a little chapel, where Hermogen and Iliodor made him swear on an icon that he would leave women alone and that he would stay away from the Imperial family. Rasputin swore enthusiastically. The following day, Rasputin appeared before Iliodor, begging, "Save me! Save me!" Iliodor softened and took Rasputin with him to Hermogen. But the Bishop turned his back on the humbled *starets*, rejecting his pleas with the haughty words, "Never and nowhere."

Rasputin recovered quickly from his beating and from his brush with abstinence. Within a few days, he was back at the palace, giving his version of the episode. Soon afterward, by Imperial order, Hermogen was sent to

seclusion in a monastery. Iliodor was ordered into seclusion also, but he refused to submit. Instead, he wandered from place to place, bitterly and ever more hysterically denouncing Rasputin. The peasant "Holy Man" to whom he had extended his friendship, whom he had meant to use as a tool in purifying the Church and in steering the Russian people back to their historic values—this same unwashed, lewd, immoral peasant—had shattered his own bright dreams. The great career as an orator and prophet had tumbled into the dust. And the knave who had destroyed him walked freely in and

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out of the palace, had the ear of the Empress and could move bishops and prophets around like pieces on a chessboard. It was at this point, when Iliodor was in this mood, that the letters from Alexandra allegedly taken from Rasputin's desk first appeared.

Iliodor surrendered himself and was imprisoned for several months in a monastery to await a trial. From his cell, Iliodor scribbled feverish letters to the Holy Synod: "You have bowed down to the Devil. My whole being is for holy vengeance against you. You have sold the glory of God, forgotten the friendship of Christ. . . . Oh, cheats, serpents, murderers of Christ ... I will tear off your cloaks. . . . Traitors and renegades . . . You are all careerists; you despise the poor; you ride in carriages, proud and arrogant . . . you are not servants of the people, you put present-day prophets to the stake. . . . Godless anti-Christs, I will not be in spiritual communion with you. . . . You are animals fed with the people's blood."

The addressees retaliated by unfrocking Iliodor. Raging, he screamed, "I will not allow myself ever to be pardoned," and renounced Orthodoxy. Uncertain what to do with himself, he considered becoming a shepherd and "borrowed sufficient money to buy a flock of fifty sheep." But this idea seemed tame, and, instead, he decided to start a revolution. "It was my intention to start a revolution on October 6, 1913. I planned the assassination on that day of sixty lieutenant governors and forty bishops throughout Russia. ... I chose a hundred men to execute this plan." But the plan was uncovered by the police and Iliodor went into hiding. As a

fugitive, he gave his blessing to the formation of an organization of women and girls, most of them wronged by Rasputin, which had as its sole purpose Father Gregory's castration. One of the women, a pretty twenty-six-year-old former prostitute named Khina Gusseva whom Rasputin had used and then spurned, wished to go further and kill the *starets*. Iliodor pondered the thought, agreed, opened her blouse and hung a knife on a chain around her neck, instructing her, "With this knife, kill Grishka."

Eventually, Iliodor slipped across the frontier into Finland disguised as a woman and began writing a book about himself and Rasputin. When his book was finished, Iliodor first offered it to the Empress for sixty thousand roubles. This piece of blackmail was rejected and the vengeful former monk then took his manuscript to an American publisher. Later, even he admitted that into the book he had put "a bit extra."

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Although he wielded great influence, Rasputin was not a frequent visitor at the Alexander Palace. He lived in St. Petersburg, and when he came to Tsarskoe Selo, it was usually to the little house of Anna Vyrubova. Avoiding the palace was not Rasputin's idea. Rather, it represented a decision by the Imperial couple to observe a certain circumspection in their interviews with the controversial *starets*. The palace police saw everything. It was impossible even to creep up a back staircase without the event being noted and recorded; the following day, the news was all over St. Petersburg. In the later years, so rarely did Rasputin come that Gilliard never met him inside the palace. Baroness Buxhoeveden, who lived just down the hall from the young Grand Duchesses, never met him at all.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that she saw Rasputin infrequently and then under circumstances ideal for him, Alexandra refused to consider that there might be another side to her Man of God. "Saints are always calumniated," she told Dr. Botkin. "He is hated because we love him." The family despised the police who surrounded them day and night; they took it for granted that the police reports of Rasputin's activities were fabrications. The Empress flatly refused to accept any hint of Rasputin's debauchery. "They

accuse Rasputin of kissing women, etc.," she later wrote to the Tsar. "Read the apostles; they kissed everybody as a form of greeting." Alexandra's opinion was confirmed by the faithful Anna Vyrubova. "I went often to Rasputin's lodging," said Anna, "bringing messages from the Empress, usually referring to the health of Alexis." But Anna saw nothing of which she did not devotedly approve. "Rasputin had no harem," she insisted. "In fact, I cannot remotely imagine a woman of education and refinement being attracted to him in a personal way. I never knew of one being so attracted."

Neither by temperament nor by experience was Anna Vyrubova equipped to judge the matter of physical attraction. Nevertheless, her innocent reports of Rasputin's behavior were not the result of blindness or stupidity. When Anna was present—and her visits were always announced in advance—Rasputin's behavior was rigidly correct. The ladies of his circle, knowing Anna's importance to their hero, followed suit.

After the Revolution, Basil Shulgin, an intensely monarchist member of the Duma and one of the two men who, trying to preserve the monarchy, obtained the abdication of Nicholas II, analyzed Rasputin's role: "Rasputin was a Janus. . . . To the Imperial family he had turned his face as a humble *starets* and, looking at it, the Empress cannot but be convinced that the spirit of God rests upon this man.

And to the country he has turned the beastly, drunken unclean face of a bald satyr from Tobolsk. Here we have the key to it all. The country is indignant that such a man should be received under the Tsar's roof. And under the roof there is bewilderment and a sense of bitter hurt. Why should they all be enraged? That a saintly man came to pray over the unhappy Heir, a desperately sick child whose least imprudent movement may end in death? So the Tsar and the Empress are hurt and indignant. Why should there be such a storm? The man has done nothing but good. Thus a messenger of death has placed himself between the throne and the nation. . . . And because of the man's fateful duality, understood by neither [Tsar nor people], neither side can understand the other. So the Tsar and his people, however apart, are leading each other to the edge of the abyss."

Pierre Gilliard was more succinct. "The fatal influence of that man [Rasputin] was the principal cause of death of those who thought to find in him their salvation."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"We Want a Great Russia"

If any man outside of the Imperial Family could have saved Imperial Russia, it was the burly, bearded country squire who served as prime minister from 1906 to 1911, Peter Arkadyevich Stolypin. A man of the country with roots in the rural nobility, Stolypin had little in common with either the great figures of the princely aristocracy or the dry, professional civil servants who scrambled diligently up the ladders of promotion to the seats of power in the St. Petersburg bureaucracy. Stolypin brought to the Imperial government a clean, strong breath of youth and fresh country air. Direct, outspoken, brimming with impassioned patriotism and overwhelming in his physical energy, Stolypin grappled with the fundamental causes of Russia's troubles. A passionate monarchist, he hated the revolutionaries and ruthlessly crushed the last outbursts of the 1905 Revolution. But Stolypin was also a realist who sensed that the monarchy would survive only if the government and the structure of society itself could adapt to the times. Accordingly, he reconstructed the system of peasant land ownership and began the transformation of an absolute autocracy into a form of government more responsive to the popular will.

No Russian statesman of the day was more admired. In the Duma, Stolypin's big, bearlike figure attracted every eye. Dressed in a frock coat with a watch chain across his chest, he spoke with such eloquence and such evident sincerity that even his adversaries respected him. "We are not frightened," he boomed at his enemies on the Left in the Second Duma. "You want great upheavals, but we want a great Russia." His ministerial colleagues were unanimous in their praise. "His capacity for work and his moral power of endurance were prodigious," wrote Alexander Izvolsky, the Foreign Minister. Vladimir Kokovtsov, the Finance Minister, declared that

Stolypin's "nobility, courage and devotion to the State were indisputable." Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador, called him "an ideal man to transact business with ... his promises were always kept." Most important of all, Stolypin pleased the Tsar. In October 1906, after Stolypin had been in office for only three months, Nicholas wrote to his mother, "I cannot tell you how much I have come to like and respect this man."

Peter Stolypin was born in 1863 while his mother rested at the Rhineland spa of Baden-Baden. He was educated in St. Petersburg, where his father had a position at court and his mother was in society. Stolypin himself preferred the country, and most of his career was spent away from the capital. In 1905, at the height of the first revolution, he was governor of Saratov province, charged with suppressing local peasant uprisings that were among the most violent in Russia. Stolypin accomplished his task with a minimum loss of life. Often, rather than ordering government troops to bombard an insurgent village, Stolypin himself would walk into the village alone to talk to the rebel leader and persuade him to have his men lay down their arms.

Because of his success in Saratov province, Stolypin was brought to St. Petersburg in 1906 to become Minister of Interior. He arrived as Witte was departing and took office under Witte's successor, an elderly bureaucratic relic named Ivan Logginovich Goremykin. Goremykin conducted his office on the simple, undeviating principle that ministers were servants of the tsar, appointed to execute, not initiate, policy. Sir Arthur Nicolson, who preceded Buchanan as British Ambassador, called on Goremykin at this time, expecting to find a harried, overworked statesman. Instead, he found himself confronting "an elderly man with a sleepy face and Piccadilly whiskers" reclining on a sofa surrounded by French novels. Goremykin foundered after only three months in office, and before departing, he recommended to the Tsar that Stolypin be appointed in his place.

On the evening of July 7, 1906, Stolypin was summoned to Nicholas's study at Tsarskoe Selo and asked to become Prime Minister. Kokovtsov wrote

later: "Stolypin told us that he had attempted to point out his lack of experience and his unfamiliarity with the crosscurrents of St. Petersburg society, but the Tsar had not let him finish: 'No, Peter Arkadyevich, here is the icon before which I often pray. Let us make the sign of the Cross over ourselves and let us ask the Lord to help us both in this difficult, perhaps historic, moment.' Then the Tsar made the sign of the cross over Stolypin, embraced him and kissed him, and asked him on what day it would be best to dissolve the Duma."

Once in power, Stolypin became a whirlwind of energy. He meant to attack root problems such as the peasants' long-suppressed thirst for land of their own, but nothing could be done about these matters until the terrorist attacks on local officials and police had been suppressed. To restore law and order, Stolypin established special field courts-martial. Within three days of their arrest, assassins swung from the gallows. Before the end of the summer, six hundred men had been strung up and Russians had named the hangman's noose "Stolypin's necktie." Yet, the number of men hanged by the government was smaller than the sixteen hundred governors, generals, soldiers and village policemen killed by terrorists' bombs and bullets.

Inevitably, Stolypin himself became the assassins' target. On a Saturday afternoon, scarcely a month after taking office, he was writing at his desk in his country villa outside St. Petersburg when a bomb exploded. A wall of the house collapsed and thirty-two people, including visitors and servants, were killed. Stolypin's young son, playing on an upstairs balcony, was hurt, and his daughter, Natalia, was badly maimed. But Stolypin himself was merely splattered with ink. "A day and a half after the explosion, the Ministers' Council resumed its work as if nothing unusual had happened," Kokovtsov wrote. "Stolypin's calm and self-control won the admiration of everyone."

The government's repression, to which the bomb plot was a reaction, was only a harsh preliminary to reform. While terrorists still dangled at the end of government ropes, the new Prime Minister attacked the basic problem of land. In 1906, three quarters of the people of Russia coaxed a living from

the soil. Since 1861, when Alexander II freed the serfs, most of Russia's peasants lived in village communes, made communal plans for the land and worked it in partnership. The system was ridiculously inefficient; within each commune, a single peasant might farm as many as fifty small strips, each containing a few thin rows of corn or wheat. Often, the peasant spent more time walking between his scattered furrows than he did plowing the earth or scything the grain. Stolypin overturned this communal system and introduced the concept of private property. By government decree, he declared that any peasant who wished to do so could withdraw from the commune and claim from it a share of ground to farm for himself. Further, the new plot was to be a single piece, not in scattered strips, and the peasant was expected to pass it along to his sons.

Nicholas strongly approved Stolypin's program and, in order to make more land available, proposed that four million acres of the crown lands be sold to the government, which in turn would sell

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them on easy terms to the peasants. Although the Tsar needed the consent of the Imperial family to take this step, and both Grand Duke Vladimir and the Dowager Empress opposed him, eventually he had his way. The land was sold and Nicholas waited hopefully for members of the nobility to follow his example. But none did so.

The impact of Stolypin's law was political as well as economic. At a stroke, it created a new class of millions of small peasant landowners whose future was tied to an atmosphere of stability which could be provided only by the Imperial government. As it happened, the most vociferous peasant troublemakers were often the first to claim land, and thus became supporters of law and order. By 1914, nine million Russian peasant families owned their own farms.

At bottom, political success or failure in Russia depended on the crop. For five fruitful years, nature smiled on Peter Stolypin. From 1906 to 1911, Russia was blessed with warm summers, mild winters and steady, gentle rain. Acre for acre, the crops were the best in Russia's history. As food became plentiful, government tax revenues rose; the budget was balanced

and even showed a surplus. With the help of large French loans, the railroad network expanded rapidly. Coal and iron mines broke records for production. American firms such as International Harvester and Singer Sewing Machine Company established offices in Russia. In the Duma, the government introduced and passed bills raising the salaries of primary-school teachers and establishing the principle of free primary-school education. Censorship of the press was lifted, and the government became more liberal in the sphere of religious tolerance. "It is all wrong," said Stolypin, explaining these changes to Sir Bernard Pares, "that every proposal of reform should come from the opposition."

Ironically, the fiercest opposition to Stolypin's programs came from the extreme Right and the extreme Left. Reactionaries disliked all reforms which transformed the old, traditional ways. Revolutionaries hated to see any amelioration of a system which bred discontent. For Lenin and his dwindling band of exiles, the Stolypin era was a time of fading hope. Sadly convinced that a "revolutionary situation" no longer existed in Russia, Lenin wandered from library to library through Zurich, Geneva, Berne, Paris, Munich, Vienna and Cracow. Gloomily, he watched the success of Stolypin's land reforms. "If this should continue," he wrote, "it might force us to renounce any agricultural program at all." For some dedicated Marxists, it seemed that the dream was entirely dead; in 1909, Karl Marx's despairing daughter and son-in-law Laura and Paul Lafargue committed suicide. Lenin took

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the news with grim approval. "If one cannot work for the Party any longer," he said, "one must be able to look truth in the face and die the way the Lafargues did."

The appearance in May 1906 of the First Imperial Duma was so new, so alien to everything that had gone before in Russia, that neither the Tsar nor the members of the fledgling representative body knew quite how to behave. Everything had to be begun at the beginning and be constructed overnight: constitution, parliament and political parties. Before October 1905, there were no political parties in Russia other than the Social

Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries, both revolutionary parties which had worked underground. Under the circumstances, it was remarkable that two responsible liberal parties sprang up quickly: the Constitutional Democrats or Cadets, led by the historian Paul Miliukov, and the Octobrists, who took their name from their adherence to the 1905 October Manifesto and were led by Alexander Guchkov.

Nevertheless, the gap in understanding between monarch and parliament remained too wide. The Duma was received by the Tsar in the throne room of the Winter Palace. It was not a promising occasion. Masses of police and soldiers waited outside in the palace square. The newly elected deputies, some in evening clothes, others in peasant blouses, stood on one side of the room, staring at the huge crimson-and-gold throne, at the court officials in gold braid, and at the Empress and her ladies in formal court dress. On the other side stood the court and the ministers, among them Count Fredericks. "The deputies," he said. "They give one the impression of a gang of criminals who are only waiting for the signal to throw themselves upon the ministers and cut their throats. What wicked faces! I will never again set foot among those people." Fredericks was not the only one who felt uncomfortable. The Dowager Empress Marie noticed the "incomprehensible hatred" on the deputies' faces. Kokovtsov found himself staring at one of the deputies particularly, "a man of tall stature, dressed in a worker's blouse and high oiled boots, who examined the throne and those about it with a derisive and insolent air." Stolypin, standing near Kokovtsov, whispered to him, "We both seem engrossed in the same spectacle. I even have the feeling that this man might throw a bomb."

The feelings of the Duma were quickly manifested. Scarcely had the 524 members taken their seats in a hall of the Tauride Palace when they formulated a sweepingly aggressive "Address to the Throne."

To Nicholas's horror, it demanded universal suffrage, radical land reform, the release of all political prisoners and the dismissal of ministers appointed by the Tsar in favor of ministers acceptable to the Duma. At Nicholas's command, old Goremykin tottered down to the Duma and, with trembling

hands and in a scarcely audible voice, rejected everything the Duma had asked. When Goremykin sat down, there was a moment of complete silence. Then one member leaped to the rostrum and cried, "Let the executive power bow before the legislative." He was greeted by deafening applause. Other speakers followed, each more stinging in his attack on the government. When those ministers who were present rose and attempted to speak, they were shouted down with cries of "Retire! Retire!"

Appalled by these scenes, Nicholas was eager to dissolve the Duma, but he recognized that Goremykin was not the man to ride out the turmoil which would follow dissolution. It was at this point, in July 1906, that Goremykin resigned and Stolypin was appointed. Two days later, Stolypin locked the doors of the Tauride Palace and posted the Imperial decree dissolving the Duma. That afternoon, a number of members took trains across the nearby border into Finland. Meeting in a forest, they declared, "The sessions of the Duma are hereby resumed," and called on the nation to refuse to pay taxes and to send no recruits to the army until the Duma was restored. But this appeal, the famous Vyborg Manifesto, had no effect. Numbed by revolution, Russians were not willing to fight again to preserve their parliament.

Nicholas, disgusted by this experience, would have been happy to end the experiment in representative government. It was Stolypin who insisted that the Tsar's signature on the October Manifesto constituted a solemn promise to the nation which must not be broken. Grudgingly, Nicholas abandoned his plans for eliminating the Duma altogether and gave permission for the election of a Second Duma.

As the Second Duma met for the first time, in February 1907, the ceiling of the hall caved in over their heads. It was an appropriate beginning for a Duma session which, in every way, was worse than the first. The Leftist parties, including the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries, which had boycotted the First Duma, had won two hundred seats in the Second, more than a third of the membership. Determined to defy the government in every way, they turned the Duma into a madhouse of shouts, insults and brawls. At the other extreme, the reactionaries were determined to discredit and abolish the Duma once and for all. Police plots were

arranged to incriminate the Leftist members, accusations were hurled, debates became violent and meaningless. At one point, Stolypin stood up amid a torrent of abuse and

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thundered, "All your attacks are intended to cause a paralysis of will and thought in the government and the executive; all these attacks can be expressed in two words which you address to authority: 'Hands up!' Gentlemen, to these words the government, confident in its right, answers calmly with two other words: 'Not afraid!' "

Again, Nicholas waited impatiently to rid himself of the Duma. In two letters to Marie, he let his bitterness flow:

"A grotesque deputation is coming from England [to see liberal members of the Duma]. Uncle Bertie informed us that they were very sorry but were unable to take action to stop their coming. Their famous 'liberty,' of course. How angry they would be if a deputation went from us to the Irish to wish them success in their struggle against their government."

A little later he wrote: "All would be well if everything said in the Duma remained within its walls. Every word spoken, however, comes out in the next day's papers which are avidly read by everyone. In many places the populace is getting restive again. They begin to talk about land once more and are waiting to see what the Duma is going to say on the question. I am getting telegrams from everywhere, petitioning me to order a dissolution, but it is too early for that. One has to let them do something manifestly stupid or mean and then— slap! And they are gone!"

Three months later, the moment came. A deputy named Zurabov rose in the Duma and, in insulting and occasionally profane language, accused the army of training its soldiers exclusively for repressing civilians. Zurabov directly appealed to the troops to revolt and join the people in overthrowing the government. This insult to the Russian army was more than enough for Nicholas. He issued a manifesto accusing the Duma of plotting against the sovereign, troops 'were brought into St. Petersburg and the Duma was

dissolved. Thirty Social Democratic members were exiled to Siberia and most other Leftist members were placed under police surveillance.

Stolypin followed this dissolution by publishing a new electoral law which abandoned all pretense of universal suffrage and concentrated elective power largely in the hands of the country gentry. As a result, the Third Duma, elected in the autumn of 1907, was a thoroughly conservative body; its membership even included forty-five Orthodox priests. With this carefully tailored representative body, Stolypin generally got along well. He did not share the innate dislike for any legislature expressed by Nicholas and by most of his fellow ministers. In debate in the Duma, Stolypin's great voice allowed him to argue his policies effectively. Nevertheless, when the Duma remained

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hostile, Stolypin had no qualms about invoking Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws, which empowered the Tsar to issue "urgent and extraordinary" emergency decrees "during the recess of the State Duma." Stolypin's most famous legislative act, the change in peasant land tenure, was promulgated under Article 87.

Despite its prevailing conservatism, the Third Duma remained an independent body. This time, however, the. members proceeded cautiously. Instead of hurling themselves at the government, opposing parties within the Duma worked to develop the role of the body as a whole. In the classic manner of the British Parliament, the Duma reached for power by grasping for the national purse strings. The Duma had the right to question ministers behind closed doors as to their proposed expenditures. These sessions, endorsed by Stolypin, were educational for both sides, and, in time, mutual antagonism was replaced by mutual respect. Even in the sensitive area of military expenditures, where the October Manifesto clearly had reserved decisions to the throne, a Duma commission began to operate. Composed of aggressive patriots no less anxious than Nicholas to restore the fallen honor of Russian arms, the Duma commission frequently recommended expenditures even larger than those proposed.

Sir Bernard Pares, who was on the closest personal terms with many members of the Duma, looked back on the period with nostalgia: "May an Englishman, bred in the tradition of Gladstone, to whom the Duma was almost a home with many friends of all parties, recall that vanished past? At the bottom was a feeling of reassurance, and founded on it one saw a growing courage and initiative and a growing mutual understanding and goodwill. The Duma had the freshness of a school, with something of surprise at the simplicity with which differences that had seemed formidable could be removed. One could feel the pleasure with which the members were finding their way into common work for the good of the whole country. . . . Some seventy persons at least, forming the nucleus of the most important commissions, were learning in detail to understand both each other and the Government. One could see political competence growing day by day. And to a constant observer it was becoming more and more an open secret that the distinctions of party meant little, and that in the social warmth of their public work for Russia, all these men were becoming friends."

With the passage of time, Nicholas also began to have confidence in the Duma. "This Duma cannot be reproached with an attempt to seize power and there is no need at all to quarrel with it," he said to Stolypin in 1909. In 1912, a Fourth Duma was elected with almost the

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same membership as the Third. "The Duma started too fast," Nicholas explained to Pares in 1912. "Now it is slower, but better. And more lasting."

Despite Stolypin's successes, there were influences constantly working to poison the relationship between the Tsar and his Prime Minister. Reactionaries, including such powerful men at court as Prince Vladimir Orlov, never tired of telling the Tsar that the very existence of the Duma was a blot on the autocracy. Stolypin, they whispered, was a traitor and a secret revolutionary who was conniving with the Duma to steal the prerogatives assigned the Tsar by God. Witte also engaged in constant intrigue against Stolypin. Although Stolypin had had nothing to do with Witte's fall or with Nicholas's contempt for Witte, the former Premier

blamed the incumbent. Witte himself had written the 1905 Manifesto creating the Duma, but now, overflowing with spite, he allied himself with the reactionaries and worked a gradual corrosion on Stolypin's power.

Unfortunately, without intending it, Stolypin also had angered the Empress. Early in 1911, alarmed that a man such as Rasputin should have influence at the palace, Stolypin ordered an investigation and presented a report to the Tsar. Nicholas read it, but did nothing. Stolypin, on his own authority, then commanded Rasputin to leave St. Petersburg. Alexandra protested vehemently, but Nicholas refused to overrule his Prime Minister. Rasputin departed on a second long pilgrimage to Jerusalem, during which he scrawled lengthy, flowery and mystical letters to the Empress.

Stolypin's banishing of Rasputin was still another example of the tragic isolation and lack of understanding which surrounded the Imperial family. Stolypin was not a heartless man. Had he once been present when the Tsarevich lay in pain and observed the relief which Rasputin brought to mother and child, he would not have ordered this forcible separation. Yet, in political terms, the abrupt purging of this dangerous influence from the palace must have seemed the essence of wisdom. To Alexandra, however, it seemed that Stolypin had deliberately severed the bond on which her son depended for life, and for this she hated the Prime Minister.

Stolypin, meanwhile, was beginning to weary in office. Attempting to overturn the traditions of centuries in five years was more than even so robust a figure as Stolypin could manage. His health waned in repeated attacks of grippe and he became constantly irritable. For a man who preferred clear, decisive action, working with a sovereign

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who believed in fatalism and mysticism was frustrating. As an example, Nicholas once returned to Stolypin a document unsigned with the note: "Despite most convincing arguments in favor of adopting a positive decision in this matter, an inner voice keeps on insisting more and more that I do not accept responsibility for it. So far my conscience has not deceived me. Therefore, I intend in this case to follow its dictates. I know that you, too, believe that 'a Tsar's heart is in God's hands.' Let it be so. For all laws

established by me I bear a great responsibility before God, and I am ready to answer for my decision at any time."

In March 1911, Stolypin lost his temper when the Council of Ministers rejected a bill which Stolypin had ushered through the Duma. Stolypin concluded erroneously that the Council had acted as it did because Nicholas had been maneuvering behind his back. In a fit of anger, stating that he obviously no longer commanded the Imperial confidence, he asked to be relieved of his office. The move was unprecedented. Two years before, when Stolypin had casually mentioned resigning, Nicholas had written: "This is not a question of confidence or lack of it; it is my will. Remember that we live in Russia, not abroad . . . and therefore I shall not consider the possibility of any resignation."

In the interim, Nicholas had not softened these views, and when Stolypin insisted, a heated argument took place. It was the Tsar who backed away. "I cannot accept your resignation," he said to Stolypin, "and I hope that you will not insist upon it, for you must perceive that in accepting your resignation I not only should lose you but also should create a precedent. What would become of a government responsible to me if ministers came and went, today, because of a conflict with the Council, tomorrow, because of a conflict with the Duma? Think of some other way out and let me hear it."

At this moment of impasse, the Dowager Empress sent for Kokovtsov to get his impressions. She took Stolypin's part. "Unfortunately, my son is too kind," she said. "I can well understand that Stolypin is almost in despair and is losing confidence in his ability to conduct the affairs of state." Then Marie began a frank discussion of Nicholas's problems: "I am perfectly sure that the Tsar cannot part with Stolypin. ... If Stolypin were to insist, I have not the slightest doubt that in the end the Tsar would give in. He has not given his answer because he is trying to find some other way out of the situation. He seeks advice from no one. He has too much pride and, with the Empress, goes through such crises without letting anyone see that he is agitated. ... As time goes by, the Tsar will become more and more rooted in

his displeasure with Stolypin. I feel sure that Stolypin will win for the present but for a short time only; he will soon be removed which would be a great pity both for the Tsar and for Russia. . . . My poor son has so little luck with people."

Marie's prophecy was accurate. Nicholas arranged for Stolypin to stay by permitting him to suspend sittings of the Duma for three days to enact his law by decree in the interim. But a coolness sprang up between the two men. Stolypin, knowing how much encouragement the episode had given his enemies, lived in expectation of dismissal. He complained to his friends that he was being ignored at court, that petty slights such as forgetting to assign him a carriage or a place on an Imperial boat were being administered.

In September 1911, Stolypin and Kokovtsov accompanied Nicholas to Kiev to unveil a statue of Alexander III. As the procession wound through the streets, the Tsar was surrounded by guards and police, but the carriage in which the two ministers were riding was completely unprotected. "You see, we are superfluous," Stolypin said to Kokovtsov.

By a startling but purely coincidental meshing of fates, Rasputin was in Kiev that day, standing in the crowd, observing the procession. As Stolypin's carriage clattered past, Rasputin became agitated and began to mumble. Suddenly, he called out in a dramatic voice, "Death is after him! Death is driving behind him!" For the rest of the night, Rasputin continued muttering about Stolypin's death.

The following day, before the eyes of the Tsar, Peter Stolypin was assassinated. The Imperial party was attending a performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Tsar Sultan* at the Kiev Opera House. Nicholas was sitting with his two eldest daughters in a box overlooking the stage, while Stolypin and other officials were seated in the first row of the orchestra. During the second intermission, Stolypin rose and stood with his back to the stage. As he did so, a young man in evening clothes walked down the aisle from the rear of the house. The Prime Minister looked at him questioningly. In

response, the man drew a Browning revolver and fired two shots which struck Stolypin in the chest.

From his box, Nicholas saw what happened next. He described the lurid scene in a letter to the Dowager Empress:

"Olga and Tatiana were with me at the time. During the second interval, we had just left the box as it was so hot, when we heard two sounds as if something was dropped. I thought an opera glass might have fallen on somebody's head and ran back into the box to look. To the right I saw a group of officers and other people. They seemed to

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be dragging someone along. Women were shrieking and directly in front of me in the stalls Stolypin was standing. He slowly turned his face towards me and with his left hand made the sign of the Cross in the air. Only then did I notice that he was very pale and that his right hand and uniform were bloodstained. He slowly sank into his chair and began to unbutton his tunic. Fredericks . . . helped him. Olga and Tatiana . . . saw what happened.

"While Stolypin was being helped out of the theatre, there was a great noise in the corridor near our box; people were trying to lynch the assassin. I am sorry to say the police rescued him from the crowd and took him to an isolated room for his first examination. . . . Two of his front teeth were knocked out. The theatre filled up again, the national anthem was sung and I left with the girls at 11. You can imagine with what emotions. . . . Tatiana was very upset and she cried a lot. . . . Poor Stolypin had a bad night."

The plot against Stolypin was intricate and sordid. The assassin, Mordka Bogrov, was a revolutionary and, at the same time, a police informer. Allowed to continue his underground work while making regular reports to the police, Bogrov apparently gave his primary allegiance to the revolution. The commonly accepted and most likely version of the plot is that Bogrov used his police connections to achieve a revolutionary goal. Before the Tsar and Stolypin arrived in Kiev, Bogrov had given the police detailed information about a plot against Stolypin's life. The police followed the trail and discovered, too late, that it was false. Meanwhile, Bogrov, using a

police ticket to gain admittance, was striding into the opera, where his mission, supposedly, was to guard Stolypin by spotting and pointing out potential "assassins" who might have slipped through the police net. Inside, Bogrov drew a revolver from under his cape and fired.

This was the official version and the one accepted by all of the Imperial family. "I cannot say how distressed and indignant I am about the murder of Stolypin," wrote Empress Marie. "It is horrible and scandalous and one can say nothing good of the police whose choice fell upon such a swine as that revolutionary to act as informer and as guard to Stolypin. It exceeds all bounds and shows the stupidity of the people at the top." Nevertheless, a question remains which this account does not answer: Why, if Nicholas was also present, did the assassin shoot the Prime Minister and not the Tsar? Although Bogrov was hanged and four officials of the police were suspended for negligence, the suspicion has always remained that Stolypin's murder was the work of powerful reactionaries who had connections with the police.

Nicholas's shock over the murder of his Prime Minister was gen-

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uine. Stolypin lived for five days after the shooting, and the Tsar, although urged by palace security officials to leave Kiev immediately for the safety of Livadia, remained in the vicinity. "I returned to Kiev in the evening of September 3rd, called at the nursing home where Stolypin was lying, and met his wife who would not let me see him," he wrote to Marie. Nicholas continued his program, making a short trip down the Dnieper. "On September 6th at 9 a.m. I returned to Kiev. Here on the pier I heard from Kokovtsov that Stolypin had died. I went at once to the nursing home, and a memorial service was afterwards held in my presence. The poor widow stood as though turned to stone and was unable to weep."

It was Kokovtsov who, on the night of the assassination, took the reins of government and averted a second disaster. Because Bogrov was a Jew, the Orthodox population of Kiev was noisily preparing for a retaliatory pogrom. Frantic with fear, the city's Jewish population spent the night packing their belongings. The first light of the following day found the

square before the railway station jammed with carts and people trying to squeeze themselves onto departing trains. Even as they waited, the terrified people heard the clatter of hoofs. An endless stream of Cossacks, their long lances dark against the dawn sky, rode past. On his own, Kokovtsov had ordered three full regiments of Cossacks into the city to prevent violence. Asked on what authority he had issued the command, Kokovtsov replied, "As head of the government." Later, a local official came up to the Finance Minister to complain, "Well, Your Excellency, by calling in the troops you have missed a fine chance to answer Bogrov's shot with a nice Jewish pogrom." Kokovtsov was indignant, but, he added, "his sally suggested to me that the measures I had taken at Kiev were not sufficient . . . therefore I sent an open telegram to all governors of the region demanding that they use every possible means—force if necessary—to prevent possible pogroms. When I submitted this telegram to the Tsar, he expressed his approval of it and of the measure I had taken in Kiev."

Nicholas also quickly confirmed Kokovtsov's official position, naming him as Stolypin's successor. One month later, the new Prime Minister visited the Tsar at Livadia to discuss future policy. "I . . . was accorded a most hearty welcome. The members of the court . . . vied with each other in their graciousness to me," Kokovtsov wrote. ". . . The next day, after lunch, the Empress who found it painful to stand for any length of time, sat down in an armchair and called me to her side. ... A part of this conversation impressed itself upon my memory because it . . . showed me the peculiar, mystic nature of

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this woman who was called to play such an extraordinary part in the history of Russia. . . .

"The Empress said ... 'I notice that you keep on making comparisons between yourself and Stolypin. You seem to do too much honor to his memory and ascribe too much importance to his activities and his personality. Believe me, one must not feel sorry for those who are no more. I am sure that everybody does only one's duty and fulfills one's destiny, and when one dies that means that his role is ended and that he was bound to go

since his destiny was fulfilled. Life continually assumes new forms, and you must not try to follow blindly the work of your predecessor. Remain yourself; do not look for support in political parties; they are of so little consequence in Russia. Find support in the confidence of the Tsar—the Lord will help you. I am sure that Stolypin died to make room for you, and this is all for the good of Russia.' "

In 1911, when Stolypin ordered an investigation of Rasputin's activities, the outcry against the *starets* was still a matter for private conversation. By 1912, when Kokovtsov inherited Stolypin's office, the scandal had burst into the public arena. In the Duma, broad hints at "dark forces" near the throne began to creep into the speeches of Leftist deputies. Soon the "Rasputin question" dominated the political scene.

"Strange as it may seem," wrote Kokovtsov, "the question of Rasputin became the central question of the immediate future; nor did it disappear during my entire term of office as Chairman of the Ministers' Council." Censorship had been abolished by the Manifesto, and the press began to speak openly of Rasputin as a sinister adventurer who controlled appointments in the Church and had the ear of the Empress. Newspapers began to print accusations and confessions from Rasputin's victims and the cries of anguished mothers. Alexander Guchkov, leader of the Octobrists, obtained copies of Iliodor's letters allegedly written by the Empress to Rasputin; he had them copied and circulated through the city. "Although they were absolutely impeccable, they gave rise to the most revolting comments," said Kokovtsov. ". . . We [Kokovtsov and Makarov, the Minister of Interior] both believed that the letters were apocryphal and were being circulated for the purpose of undermining the prestige of the sovereign but we could do nothing. . . . The public, of course, greedy for any sensation, was according them a very warm reception."

As the attack on Rasputin intensified, the Moscow newspaper *Golos Moskvy* denounced "that cunning conspirator against our Holy Church, that fornicator of human souls and bodies—Gregory Rasputin" as well as "the unheard-of tolerance exhibited toward the said Gregory Rasputin by the

highest dignitaries of the Church." Nicholas issued an order banning any mention of Rasputin in the press on pain of fine. But Rasputin made much too good copy for editors to worry about fines; they published and cheerfully paid. The unprintable stories, passed from mouth to mouth, were infinitely worse. The Empress and Anna Vyrubova, it was said, shared the peasant's bed. He ordered the Tsar to pull off his boots and wash his feet and then pushed Nicholas out of the room while he lay with Alexandra. He had raped all the young Grand Duchesses and turned the nurseries into a harem, where the girls, mad with love, fought for his attentions. "Grishka," the diminutive of Gregory, appeared in obscene drawings chalked on walls and buildings; he was the subject of a hundred smutty rhymes.

Nicholas was bitterly offended at the dragging of his wife's name and honor through the mud. "I am simply stifling in this atmosphere of gossip and malice," he told Kokovtsov. "This disgusting affair must be ended." Neither Nicholas nor Alexandra understood the meaning of freedom of the press; they did not understand why the ministers could not prevent the appearance in print of what they both knew was inaccurate and libelous. On the other hand, for the ministers, the Duma and even the Dowager Empress, the solution lay not in repressing the newspapers, but in ridding the throne of Rasputin. Once again, Marie invited Kokovtsov to call on her, and for an hour and a half they discussed Rasputin. "She wept bitterly and promised to speak to the Tsar," Kokovtsov wrote. "But she had little hope of success." "My poor daughter-in-law does not perceive that she is ruining both the dynasty and herself," said Marie. "She sincerely believes in the holiness of an adventurer and we are powerless to ward off the misfortune which is sure to come."

Inevitably, the demand rose for an open debate in the Duma on the role of Rasputin. The Duma President, Michael Rodzianko, a massive figure weighing 280 pounds, was a former cavalry officer of aristocratic family whose political views were not much different from those of a Tory country squire in England. To him, the idea of a public debate in the Duma on Rasputin's relations with the Imperial family seemed highly offensive. Seeking advice, he too visited Empress Marie and heard the same

depressing views that Marie had addressed to Kokovtsov. "The Emperor ... is so pure of heart," she concluded, "that he does not believe in evil."

Nevertheless, Rodzianko persisted and he was granted an audience with the Tsar. So important did he consider his mission that before going to the palace, he went to pray in the cathedral before the holy icon of Our Lady of Kazan. At the palace, Rodzianlco bravely told the Tsar that he meant to "speak of the *starets,* Rasputin, and the inadmissible fact of his presence at Your Majesty's Court." Then, before going any further, he said, "I beseech you, Sire, as Your Majesty's loyal subject, will it be your pleasure to hear me to the end? If not, say but one word and I will remain silent." Nicholas looked away, bowed his head and murmured, "Speak." Rodzianko spoke at length, reminding Nicholas of those such as Theophan and Iliodor who had condemned Rasputin and suffered for it. He mentioned the major charges against Rasputin. "Have you read Stolypin's report?" asked Nicholas. "No," said Rodzianko, "I've heard it spoken of, but never read it." "I rejected it," said the Tsar. "It is a pity," said the Duma President, "for all this would not have happened."

Moved by Rodzianko's honest fervor, Nicholas gave way and authorized a new investigation of Rasputin's character and activities to be conducted by Rodzianko himself. Rodzianko immediately demanded and received the evidence which had been collected by the Holy Synod and passed along to Stolypin to form the basis of his earlier report. The following day, an official of the Holy Synod appeared and ordered Rodzianko to hand the papers back. "He explained," Rodzianko wrote, "that the demand came from a very exalted person. 'Who is it, Sabler [Minister of Religion]?' 'No, someone much more highly placed.' . . . 'Who is it?' I repeated. 'The Empress, Alexandra Fedorovna.' 'If that is the case,' I said, 'will you kindly inform Her Majesty that she is as much a subject of her august consort as I myself, and that it is the duty of us both to obey his commands. I am, therefore, not in a position to comply with her wishes.' "

Rodzianko kept the papers and wrote his report, but when he asked for another audience to present it, the request was denied. He sent it to the Tsar,

nevertheless, and Sazonov, the Foreign Minister, was present when Nicholas read it at Livadia. Afterward, Sazonov spoke to Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse, the Empress's brother, who also was present. Sadly, the Grand Duke shook his head and commented, "The Emperor is a saint and an angel, but he does not know how to deal with her."

Two years after his appointment as Prime Minister, Kokovtsov toppled from power. Once again, it was Rasputin who poisoned this political career. Upon appointing Kokovtsov Minister of Finance,

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Nicholas had told him, "Remember, Vladimir Nicolaievich, that the doors of this study are always open to you at any time you need to come." When Kokovtsov sent the Tsar his proposed budget speech to the Duma in 1907, Nicholas returned it with a personal note reading, "God grant that the new Duma may study calmly this splendid explanation and appreciate the improvement we have made in so short a time after all the trials sent to us." The Empress also was initially well disposed toward Kokovtsov. During their first interview after he became Finance Minister, she said, "I wished to see you to tell you that both the Tsar and I beg you always to be quite frank with us and to tell us the truth, not hesitating lest it be unpleasant for us. Believe me, even if it be so at first, we shall be grateful to you for it later."

But Alexandra's warmth and her desire to hear the truth faded quickly once the newspapers began their attack on Rasputin. Kokovtsov himself understood clearly what had happened and even sympathized with Alexandra:

"At first, I enjoyed Her Majesty's favor," he wrote. "In fact, I was appointed Chairman of the Ministers' Council with her knowledge and consent. Hence, when the Duma and press began a violent campaign against Rasputin . . . she expected me to put a stop to it. Yet it was not my opposition to the Tsar's proposal to take measures against the press that won me Her Majesty's displeasure; it was my report to His Majesty about Rasputin after the *starets* had visited me. From that time on, although the Tsar continued to show me his favor for another two years, my dismissal was assured. This changed attitude of Her Majesty is not hard to

understand. ... In her mind, Rasputin was closely associated with the health of her son, and the welfare of the Monarchy. To attack him was to attack the protector of what she held most dear. Moreover, like any righteous person, she was offended to think that the sanctity of her home had been questioned in the press and in the Duma. She thought that I, as head of the government, was responsible for permitting these attacks, and could not understand why I could not stop them by giving orders in the name of the Tsar. She considered me, therefore, not a servant of the Tsar, but a tool of the enemies of the state and, as such, deserving dismissal."

Despite his wife's animosity, Nicholas retained his affection for Kokovtsov. Nevertheless, on February 12, 1914, the Prime Minister received a letter from the Tsar:

VLADIMIR NICOLAIEVICH:

It is not a feeling of displeasure but a long-standing and deep realization of a state need that now forces me to tell you that we have to part.

I am doing this in writing, for it is easier to select the right words when putting them on paper than during an unsettling conversation.

The happenings of the past eight years have persuaded me definitely that the idea of combining in one person the duties of Chairman of the Ministers' Council and those of Minister of Finance or of the Interior is both awkward and wrong in a country such as Russia.

Moreover, the swift tempo of our domestic life and the striking development of the economic forces of our country both demand the undertaking of most definite and serious measures, a task which should be best entrusted to a man fresh for the work.

During the last two years, unfortunately, I have not always approved of the policy of the Ministry of Finance, and I perceive that this can go no farther.

I appreciate highly your devotion to me and the great service you have performed in achieving remarkable improvements in Russia's state credit; I am grateful to you for this from the bottom of my heart. Believe me, I am sorry to part with you who have been my assistant for ten years. Believe also, that I shall not forget to take suitable care of you and your family. I expect you with your last report on Friday, at 11:00 a.m. as always, and ever as a friend.

With sincere regards, NICHOLAS

Kokovtsov found little solace in Nicholas's description of his successor as "a man fresh for the work," especially when he discovered that this successor was to be Goremykin. Certainly Goremykin made no such estimate of his talents. "I am like an old fur coat," he said. "For many months I have been packed away in camphor. I am being taken out now merely for the occasion; when it is passed I shall be packed away again till I am wanted the next time."

After his dismissal, Kokovtsov was asked to call on the Dowager Empress. "I know you are an honorable man and I know that you bear no ill will toward my son. You must also understand my fears for the future. My daughter-in-law does not like me; she thinks that I am jealous of her power. She does not perceive that my one aspiration is to see my son happy. Yet I see that we are nearing some catastrophe and the Tsar listens to no one but flatterers, not perceiving or even suspecting what goes on all around him. Why do you not decide to tell the Tsar frankly all you think and know, now that you are at liberty to do so, warning him, if it is not already too late?"

Almost as distressed as Marie, Kokovtsov replied that he "could do nothing. I told her that no one would listen to me or believe me. The young Empress thought me her enemy." This animosity, Kokovtsov explained, had been present ever since February 1912.

It was in the middle of February 1912 that Kokovtsov and Rasputin had met and disliked each other over tea.

When he first came to St. Petersburg, Gregory Rasputin had no plan for making himself the power behind the Russian throne. Like many successful opportunists, he lived from day to day, cleverly making the most of what was offered to him. In his case, the path led to the upper reaches of Russian society, and from there, because of Alexis's illness, to the throne. Even then he remained indifferent to politics until his own behavior became a political issue. Then, with government ministers, members of the Duma, the church hierarchy and the press all attacking him, Rasputin counterattacked in the only way open to him: by going to the Empress. Rasputin became a political influence in Russia in self-defense.

Alexandra was a faithful patron. When government ministers or bishops of the church leveled accusations at the *starets*, she retaliated by urging their dismissal. When the Duma debated "the Rasputin question" and the press cried out against his excesses, the Empress demanded dissolution of the one and suppression of the other. She defended Rasputin so strongly that it became difficult for people to dissociate in their minds the Empress and the *moujik*. If she had determined to hate all his enemies, it was not surprising that his enemies decided to hate her.

General Beletsky, Director of the Police Department, later reckoned that Rasputin's power was firmly established by 1913. Simanovich, who worked with Rasputin in St. Petersburg, estimated that it took Rasputin five years, 1906-1911, to gain power and that he then exercised it for another five, 1911-1916. In both estimates, the turning point falls in the neighborhood of 1912, the year that the Tsarevich Alexis almost died at Spala.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Romanov Dynasty

In 1913, the gilded world of the European aristocracy seemed at its zenith. In fact, fashionable society, like the rest of mankind, stood one step from the abyss. Within five years, three European empires would be defeated, three emperors would die or flee into exile and the ancient dynasties of

Hapsburg, Hohenzollern and Romanov would crumble. Twenty million men, aristocrats and commoners alike, would perish.

Even by 1913, there were omens of danger. The aristocracy of Europe continued to move through a world of elegant spas, magnificent yachts, top hats, tailcoats, long skirts and parasols, but the old monarchs who had given character to this world were vanishing. In Vienna, the aged Emperor Franz Joseph was eighty-seven; already he had sat on the throne for sixty-four years. In England, not only Queen Victoria but also her son King Edward VII were in their graves. King Edward's death left his nephew the Kaiser the dominant monarch in Europe. William reveled in his new preeminence and scorned the pair of gentle cousins who occupied the thrones of England and Russia. William, meanwhile, changed uniforms five times a day and let it be known that when he commanded troops at army maneuvers, the side he was leading was expected to win.

Beneath the polished sphere of kings and society, there was a wider world where millions of ordinary people lived and worked. Here, the portents were even more ominous. Nations ruled by kings and emperors had grown into industrial behemoths. The new machines had given the monarchs vastly greater power to make war; by 1913, it was scientifically assured that a dynastic quarrel would lead to the death not of thousands, but of millions of men. In the upheaval of such murderous wars lay promise of revolution. "A war with Austria would be a splendid little thing for the revolution," Lenin wrote to Maxim

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Gorky in 1913. "But the chances are small that Franz Joseph and Nikolasha will give us such a treat." Even without war, the stresses produced by industrialization promised future storms of frustration and unrest. Governments shuddered under the impact of strikes and assassinations. The red banners of Syndicalism and Socialism floated beside the golden standards of militant nationalism. These were the days when, in Churchill's words, "the vials of wrath were full."

Nowhere was there greater contrast between the effortless lives of the aristocracy and the dark existence of the masses than in Russia. Between

the nobility and the peasants lay a vast gulf of ignorance. Between the nobility and the intellectuals there was massive contempt and flourishing hatred. Each considered that if Russia was to survive, the other must be eliminated.

It was in this atmosphere of gloom and suspicion that Russia began a national celebration of the ancient institution of autocracy. The occasion was the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty, which had come to power in 1613. The hope of the Tsar and his advisors was that by raising again the giant figures of Russia's past they might submerge class hostility and unite the nation around the throne.

To an astonishing degree, the tercentenary succeeded. Huge crowds — workers and students among them—flooded the city boulevards to cheer Imperial processions. In the villages, peasants flocked to catch a glimpse of the Tsar as he passed by. No one then dreamed that this was the sunset of autocracy, that after three hundred years of Romanov rule no tsar would ever pass that way again.

In February 1913, Nicholas and Alexandra prepared for the tercentenary celebrations by moving with their children from Tsarskoe Selo to the Winter Palace. None of them was fond of the palace. It was too large, too gloomy, too drafty, and the tiny enclosed garden was much too small for the children to play. Besides, Alexandra had a special reason for disliking the Winter Palace: it reminded her of the weeks she had spent in St Petersburg as a bride, going to the theatre, speeding along in a *troika,* having cozy suppers before a blazing fire. "I was so happy then, so well and strong," she told Anna Vyrubova. "Now I am a wreck."

The official tercentenary celebration began with a great choral *Te Deum* in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan. On the morning of the service, the Nevsky Prospect, down which the Imperial carriages would pass, was jammed with excited crowds. Despite lines of soldiers holding the people back, the crowd, cheering wildly, burst the cordons

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and mobbed the carriage containing the Tsar and the Empress.

Under its great golden dome, the cathedral was packed to capacity. Although most of those present were standing, seats in front had been saved for members of the Imperial family, foreign ambassadors, government ministers and members of the Duma. Shortly before the Tsar arrived, a dramatic squabble had occurred over the Duma seats. Michael Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, had with great difficulty secured these seats for his members. As he entered the church, a guard whispered to him that a peasant had sat down in one of them and refused to move.

"Sure enough," wrote Rodzianko, "it was Rasputin. He was dressed in a magnificent Russian tunic of crimson silk, patent leather top boots, black cloth trousers and a peasant's overcoat. Over his dress he wore a pectoral cross on a finely wrought chain." Rodzianko firmly ordered the *starets* out of the seat. Then, according to Rodzianko, Rasputin tried to mesmerize him on the spot. "He stared me in the eyes. . . . I felt myself confronted by an unknown power of tremendous force. I suddenly became possessed of an almost animal fury, the blood rushed to my heart and I realized I was working myself into a state of absolute frenzy. I, too, stared straight into Rasputin's eyes, and, speaking literally, felt my own staring out of my head. . . . 'You are a notorious swindler,' I said." Rasputin fell on his knees, and Rodzianko, who was bigger and stronger, began to kick him in the ribs. Finally the Duma President lifted Rasputin by the scruff of his neck and threw him bodily out of the seat. Murmuring, "Lord, forgive him his sin," Rasputin slunk away.

The days after the service were crowded with ceremonies. From all parts of the empire, delegations in national dress arrived to be presented to the Tsar. In honor of the sovereign, his wife and all the Romanov grand dukes and grand duchesses, the nobility of St. Petersburg jointly gave a ball attended by thousands of guests. Together, the Imperial couple attended a state performance of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* at the opera. "The orchestra was a mass of officers in uniform and the boxes were filled with ladies in jewels," wrote Anna Vyrubova. "When Their Majesties appeared, the whole house rose and gave them tumultuous applause."

The strain of these activities, coming only four months after Spala, was intense. At receptions in the Winter Palace, the Empress stood for hours in the middle of the enormous crowds jamming the state rooms. She looked magnificent in dark blue velvet with a diamond tiara and diamond necklace; for one ball she wore white with pearls and emeralds. Several times, as a reminder of Russia's past, she wore a

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long Oriental gown of silk brocade and the tall cone-shaped *kokoshnik* worn by Russian empresses before the court was Westernized by Peter the Great. Her daughters appeared in shimmering white gowns wearing the Order of St. Catherine, a scarlet ribbon blazing with diamonds. But Alexandra's strength was fragile. At one ball, wrote Baroness Bux-hoeveden, "she felt so ill that she could scarcely keep her feet . . . she was able to attract the attention of the Emperor who was talking at the other end of the room. When he came up it was only just in time to lead her away and prevent her from fainting in public."

One night at the Maryinsky Theatre, she appeared pale and silent in a white velvet dress with the pale blue ribbon of the Order of St. Andrew across her breast. From an adjacent box, Meriel Buchanan watched her closely: "Her lovely, tragic face was expressionless . . . her eyes enigmatic in their dark gravity, seeming fixed on some secret inner thought that was certainly far removed from the crowded theatre. . . . Presently it seemed that this emotion or distress mastered her completely, and with a few whispered words to the Emperor she rose and withdrew. ... A little wave of resentment rippled over the theatre."

For Easter that year, Nicholas gave Alexandra a Fabergé *egg* which bore miniature portraits of all the reigning Romanov tsars and empresses framed in Russian double eagles. Inside, the surprise was a globe of blued steel with two maps of the Russian Empire inset in gold, one of the year 1613, the other of 1913. In May, the Imperial family set off on a dynastic pilgrimage to trace the route taken by Michael Romanov, the first of the Romanov tsars, from his birthplace to the throne. On the Upper Volga, where the great river curves north and west of Moscow, they boarded a

steamer to sail to the ancient Romanov seat of Kostroma, where in March 1613 sixteen-year-old Michael was notified of his election to the throne. Along the way, peasants lined the banks to watch the little flotilla pass; some even plunged into the water to get a closer look. On this trip, Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna remembered, "Wherever we went we met with manifestations of loyalty bordering on wildness. When our steamer went down the Volga we saw crowds of peasants wading waist-high in the water to catch a glimpse of Nicky. In some of the towns I would see artisans and workmen falling down to kiss his shadow as we passed. Cheers were deafening."

The climax of the tercentenary came in Moscow. On a brilliant blue day in June, Nicholas rode into the city alone, sixty feet in advance of his Cossack escort. In Red Square, he dismounted and walked, behind a line of chanting priests, across the square and through

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a gate into the Kremlin. Alexandra and Alexis, following in an open car, also were supposed to walk the last few hundred yards. But Alexis was ill. "The Tsarevich was carried along in the arms of a Cossack of the bodyguard," wrote Kokovtsov. "As the procession paused . . . I clearly heard exclamations of sorrow at the sight of this poor helpless child, the heir to the throne of the Romanovs."

Looking back on the tercentenary once it was over, the principals drew different conclusions. In Alexandra, it confirmed once more her belief in the bond between the Tsar and his people. "Now you can see for yourself what cowards those State Ministers are," she told a lady-in-waiting. "They are constantly frightening the Emperor with threats of revolution and here—you see it yourself—we need merely to show ourselves and at once their hearts are ours." In Nicholas, it aroused a desire to travel further within Russia's borders; he talked of sailing again along the Volga, of visiting the Caucasus, of going perhaps even to Siberia. Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, writing in retrospect, knowing what was to come, declared, "Nobody seeing those enthusiastic crowds, could have imagined that in less

than four years, Nicky's very name would be splattered with mud and hatred."

Even Kokovtsov, who felt that the ministers and Duma had been ignored, admitted that the celebrations appeared successful. "The Tsar's journey was to be in the nature of a family celebration," he wrote. "The concepts of state and government were to be pushed into the background and the personality of the Tsar was to dominate the scene. The current attitude seemed to suggest that the government was a barrier between the people and their Tsar, whom they regarded with blind devotion as anointed by God. . . . The Tsar's closest friends at the court became persuaded that the Sovereign could do anything by relying on the unbounded love and utter loyalty of the people. The ministers of the government, on the other hand, [and] ... the Duma . . . both were of the opinion that the Sovereign should recognize that conditions had changed since the day the Romanovs became Tsars of Russia and lords of the Russian domains."

The Romanov dynasty was the fruit of a marriage in 1547. The bride was Anastasia, daughter of the Romanovs, a popular family of the Moscow nobility. The groom was the seventeen-year-old Muscovite prince Ivan IV, who had just proclaimed himself Tsar of Russia. Ivan's technique of choosing a wife was in the grand manner: he ordered two thousand girls lined up for his inspection; from this assembly he chose Anastasia. Nevertheless, Ivan was deeply in love with

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his young wife. When she died ten years later, Ivan suspected that she had been poisoned. His grief turned to rage and perhaps to madness. His reign thereafter was such a crescendo of cruelties that he became known as Ivan the Terrible. He carried an iron staff with which he impaled courtiers who irritated him. When the city of Novgorod rebelled, Ivan surrounded the city and for five weeks sat on a throne in the open air while before his eyes sixty thousand people were tortured to death.

Torn between good and evil, Ivan talked incessantly of leaving the throne. He did leave Moscow midway in his reign for a monastery, where he alternated between spectacular debauchery, bloody executions and abject

remorse. Returning to the throne, he soon fell into a rage and stabbed his eldest and favorite son. When the young man died, Ivan tried to atone by reading the Bible and interminable prayers. He sobbed that his life had been ruined by the death of his beloved Anas-tasia Romanovna. Writing to his enemy Prince Kurbsky, he said, "And why did you separate me from my wife? If only you had not taken from me my young wife . . . none of this would have happened." Toward the end, he was haunted by his victims. His hair fell out and he howled every night. When he died, supposedly in the middle of a game of chess with his courtier Boris Godunov, his last act was to call for a cowl and become a monk.

Ivan was succeeded by his feeble second son, Fedor, who was succeeded in turn by the regent, Boris Godunov. Boris ruled as Tsar for five years. His murder opened the door to a horde of claimants and pretenders—in Russian history, this period is known as the Time of Troubles. At one point, the throne was claimed by a son of the King of Poland. A Polish army occupied Moscow, entrenched itself in the Kremlin and burned the rest of the city. Besieged by the Russians, the Poles held out in the Kremlin for eighteen months, fending off starvation by eating their own dead. In November 1612, the Kremlin surrendered. Russia, which had had no tsar for three years, convened a national assembly, the Zemsky Sobor, to elect a new tsar.

The choice fell on another boy, 16-year-old Michael Romanov. By blood, Michael's claim was weak; he was no more than the grand-nephew of Ivan the Terrible. But he remained the only candidate on whom all the quarreling factions could agree. On a cold, windy day, March 13, 1613, a delegation of nobles, clergy, gentry, traders, artisans and peasants, representing "all the classes and all the towns of Russia," arrived at Kostroma on the Upper Volga to inform Michael Romanov that he had been elected Tsar. Michael's mother, who was present, demurred, pointing out that all previous tsars had found their

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subjects disloyal. The delegates admitted that this was true, but, they added, "now we have been punished and we have come to an agreement in all the

towns." Michael tearfully accepted and on July 11, 1613, in the Kremlin, the first Romanov tsar was crowned.

The greatest of the Romanovs was Michael's grandson, Peter the Great. Peter became tsar in 1689 and reigned for thirty-six years. From boyhood, Peter was interested in Europe. As an adolescent in Moscow, he shunned the Kremlin and played outside the city with three older companions, a Scot, a German and a Swiss. In 1697, Peter became the first tsar to leave Russia, when, traveling under an alias, he toured Western Europe for a year and a half. His incognito was difficult to maintain: Peter was almost seven feet tall, he traveled with a retinue of 250 people including dwarfs and jesters, his language was Russian, his manners barbarous. Fascinated by the art of surgery being practiced at the Anatomical Theatre in Leyden, Peter noticed squeamish looks on the faces of his courtiers; instantly, he ordered them to descend into the arena and sever the muscles of the cadavers with their teeth.

When he returned to Russia, Peter wrenched his empire violently from East to West. He personally shaved the waist-long beards and sheared the *caftans* of his *boyars* (nobles). To modernize their sleeping habits, he declared, "Ladies and gentlemen of the court caught sleeping with their boots on will be instantly decapitated." Wielding a new pair of dental pliers which he had acquired in Europe, he collected teeth from the jaws of unwary and terrified subjects. When he considered that St. Petersburg, his European capital, was sufficiently finished to be inhabitable, he gave his *boyars* twenty-four hours to pack their belongings in Moscow and leave for the north.

There was no side of Russian life that Peter did not touch. Along with the new capital, he built the Russian army and navy and the Academy of Science. He simplified the Russian alphabet and edited the first Russian newspaper. He flooded Russia with new books, new ideas, new words and new titles, mostly German. He wreaked such havoc on the old Russian culture and religion that the Orthodox Church considered him the Antichrist. For all his modern ideas, Peter retained the impulses of an ancient, absolute autocrat. Suspecting that his son and heir, the Tsarevich

Alexis, was intriguing against him, Peter had the youth tortured and beaten to death.

The other towering figure of the Romanov dynasty was not a Romanov or even a Russian. Catherine the Great was born an obscure German princess, Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst. At fourteen, she married Peter the Great's grandson, Peter III. For eighteen years they lived

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together, first more as brother and sister, then as antagonists when Peter insulted her in public and lived openly with his mistress. In 1762, a conspiracy was organized on her behalf and Peter was forced to abdicate. Soon afterward, at a dinner party, he died in a scuffle. Prince Alexis Orlov, one of the conspirators entrusted with his custody, declared, "We cannot ourselves remember what we did." Because it has never been established that Peter III fathered Catherine's son Paul, there is a strong chance that the original Romanov line ended in this scuffle.

Catherine's reign brought classical style to the Russian autocracy. Diderot, Locke, Blackstone, Voltaire and Montesquieu were her favorite authors. She wrote frequently to Voltaire and Frederick the Great; she built the Hermitage to serve as a guest house if Voltaire should ever come to Russia, but he never did. Catherine herself wrote a history of Russia, painted and sculpted. She never remarried. She lived alone, rising at five to light her own fire and begin fifteen hours of work. Over the years, she took dozens of lovers. A few, such as Prince Gregory Orlov and Prince Gregory Potemkin, helped her rule Russia. Of Potemkin, she wrote that their letters might almost be man to man, except that "one of the two friends was a very attractive woman."

Catherine died in 1794, the year that Napoleon Bonaparte was winning his first military triumphs in Italy. Eighteen years later, Napoleon invaded Russia and entered Moscow only to see his army destroyed by winds and snows. Two years after that, in 1814, Catherine's grandson, Tsar Alexander I, rode into Paris at the head of a Russian army. After Alexander I came his brother, Nicholas I. Nicholas II, descendant and heir to Michael Romanov,

Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, was the great-grandson of Nicholas I.

Maurice Paléologue once did some idle arithmetic and calculated that, by blood, Tsar Nicholas II was only 1/128th Russian, while his son, the Tsarevich Alexis, was only 1/256th Russian. The habit Russian tsars had of marrying German and Danish wives was responsible for these startling fractions; they suggest better than anything else the extent to which the original Romanov blood had been diluted by the beginning of the twentieth century.

As head of the family, Nicholas II presided over an immense clan of Romanov cousins, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews. Although keenly jealous of name and rank, they were often casual about duties and obligations. By education, language and taste, they were part of

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the cosmopolitan aristocracy of Europe. They spoke French better than they spoke Russian, they traveled in private railway coaches from hotels at Biarritz to villas on the Riviera, they were more often seen as guests in English country houses or palaces in Rome than on their family estates beside the Volga or the Dnieper or the Don. Wealthy, sophisticated, charming and bored, most of the Romanovs considered "Nicky," with his naïve fatalism, and "Alicky," with her passionate religious fervor, to be pathetically quaint and obsolete.

Unfortunately, in the public mind, all the Romanovs were lumped together. If Nicholas's inadequacies as tsar weakened the logic of autocracy, the family's indifference to its reputation helped to corrode the prestige of the dynasty. Nicholas's sister Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna recognized the family's failure. Shortly before her death in 1960 she observed sorrowfully:

"It is certainly the last generation that helped to bring about the disintegration of the Empire. . . . All those critical years, the Romanovs, who should have been the staunchest supporters of the throne, did not live up to their standards or to the traditions of the family. . . . Too many of us

Romanovs had . . . gone to live in a world of self-interest where little mattered except the unending gratification of personal desire and ambition. Nothing proved it better than the appalling marital mess in which the last generation of my family involved themselves. That chain of domestic scandals could not but shock the nation . . . but did any of them care for the impression they created? Never."

The problem was divorce. By law, members of the Imperial family were forbidden to marry without the sovereign's consent. They were also forbidden to marry commoners or persons who had been divorced. The Orthodox Church permits divorce in cases where adultery has been committed; indeed, in the eyes of the Church, the act of adultery itself dissolves a Christian marriage. But what is permitted is certainly not encouraged. In the Imperial family, whose private life was supposed to set an example, divorce was considered a stain and a disgrace.

Yet, scarcely was Nicholas II on the throne before the strict code began to crumble. First, his cousin Grand Duke Michael Mikhailovich casually married a commoner and went to live in England. Next, the Montenegrin princess Grand Duchess Anastasia divorced her husband, the Duke of Leuchtenberg, to marry Grand Duke Nicholas, the tall soldier who commanded the Russian armies in World War I. Soon afterward, the Tsar's youngest uncle, Grand Duke Paul, having been left a widower, married a commoner and a divorcée.

"I had a rather stern talk with Uncle Paul which ended by my

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warning him of all the consequences his proposed marriage would have for him," Nicholas wrote to Marie on this occasion. "It had no effect. . . . How painful and distressing it all is and how ashamed one feels for the family before the world. What guarantee is there now that Cyril won't start at the same sort of thing tomorrow, and Boris and Serge the day after? And in the end, I fear, a whole colony of members of the Russian Imperial family will be established in Paris with their semi-legitimate and illegitimate wives. God alone knows what times we are living in when undisguised selfishness stifles all feelings of conscience, duty, or even ordinary decency."

Three years later, Grand Duke Cyril, Nicholas's first cousin, fulfilled the Tsar's gloomy prophecy by marrying a divorcée. To make matters more delicate, Cyril's new wife was Princess Victoria Melita, whose former husband was Empress Alexandra's brother Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse. It had been at the wedding of "Vicky" and "Ernie" that Nicholas had proposed to Alexandra. Nicholas reacted to Cyril's move by dismissing him from the Imperial Navy and banishing him from Russia. This action, in turn, infuriated Cyril's father, Grand Duke Vladimir, who threatened to resign all *his* official posts. In the end, Nicholas retreated. "I wonder whether it was wise to punish a man publicly to such an extent, especially when the family was against it," he wrote to Marie. "After much thought which in the end gave me a headache, I decided to take advantage of the name day of your grandson and I telegraphed to Uncle Vladimir that I would return to Cyril the title which he had lost."

Of all the blows delivered against the dynasty by the Romanov family itself, none was more damaging or more personally painful to the Tsar than the one which came from his brother Michael. Like many another youngest son and younger brother of a reigning monarch, Michael was ignored in public and indulged in private. Even as a child, he had been the only one able to tease his redoubtable father, Alexander III. A family story told of the morning that father and son were strolling in a garden when the Tsar, suddenly angry at Michael's behavior, snatched a watering hose and drenched his son. Michael accepted the dousing, changed his dripping clothes and joined his father at breakfast. Later in the morning, Alexander got up from his desk and, as was his habit, leaned meditatively out of the window of his study. A torrent of water descended on his head and shoulders. Michael, waiting at a window above with a bucket, had had his revenge.

Grand Duke Michael, ten years younger than Nicholas, grew up a handsome, affectionate nonentity. Although from the death of his

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brother George in 1898 until the birth of his nephew Alexis in 1904 Michael was Heir to the Throne, no one seriously considered the possibility

of "darling Misha" becoming tsar. It was unthinkable. Even in public, surrounded by government ministers, his sister Olga Alexandrovna blithely addressed Michael by her own pet name for him, "Floppy."

Michael himself enjoyed automobiles and pretty girls. He had a garage filled with shiny motorcars which he loved to drive. Unfortunately, the Grand Duke had the troublesome habit of falling asleep at the wheel. Once, with Olga beside him, speeding to Gatchina to dine with their mother, "Floppy" nodded off and the car rolled over. Both brother and sister were thrown clear, unhurt.

Among his relatives, Michael was closest to Olga, the other baby of the family. Consequently, he was often around Olga's attractive young female friends and maids-of-honor. In 1901, at the age of twenty-three, Michael decided that he was in love with the prettiest of these girls, Alexandra Kossikovsky, whom Olga called "Dina." Romantically, he followed his sister and her suite to Italy, and in Sorrento he and Dina began planning an elopement. Before the scheme had advanced beyond the planning stage, Empress Marie heard about it. Summoning Michael, she overwhelmed him with anger and scorn. Dina was summarily dismissed.

Five years later, in 1906, Michael, now twenty-eight, again fell in love. This time, he wrote to his brother asking permission to marry a woman who was not only a commoner but who had twice been divorced. In dismay, Nicholas wrote to Marie: "Three days ago, Misha wrote asking my permission to marry. ... I will never give my consent. ... It is infinitely easier to give one's consent than to refuse it. God forbid that this sad affair should cause misunderstanding in our family."

This time, Michael did not give up. The lady involved was born Nathalie Cheremetevskaya, the daughter of a Moscow lawyer. At sixteen, she had married a merchant named Mamontov, then divorced him three years later to marry a Captain Wulfert of the Blue Cuirassier Guards. The colonel of her new husband's regiment was none other than His Imperial Highness Grand Duke Michael. Within a few months Nathalie managed to become Michael's mistress. From that moment on, she dominated his life.

Nathalie Cheremetevskaya was a beautiful woman of great allure. Paléologue encountered her once in a St. Petersburg shop during the war and hurried home to describe her to his diary with Gallic ex-

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uberance: "I saw a slender young woman of about 30. She was a delight to watch. Her whole style revealed great personal charm and refined taste. Her chinchilla coat, opened at the neck, gave a glimpse of a dress of silver grey taffeta with trimmings of lace. A light fur cap blended with her glistening fair hair. Her pure and aristocratic face is charmingly modeled and she has light velvety eyes. Around her neck a string of superb pearls sparkled in the light. There was a dignified, sinuous soft gracefulness about her every movement."

At first, Michael respected the Tsar's denial of permission to marry. Nevertheless, he and Nathalie left Russia to live together abroad. In 1910, Nathalie bore the Grand Duke a son whose name became George. In July 1912, the lovers took up residence in the Bavarian resort village of Berchtesgaden. One morning in October of that year, they secretly crossed the border into Austria and in a small Orthodox church in Vienna they were married. Only after their return to Berchtesgaden as man and wife did they notify the Tsar.

Their telegram was delivered to Nicholas at Spala. Coming immediately after the crisis with Alexis, it staggered the Tsar. "He broke his word, his word of honor," Nicholas said, agitatedly rubbing his brow as he showed the telegram to Anna Vyrubova. "How in the midst of the boy's illness and all our trouble, could they have done such a thing?" At first, Nicholas wanted to keep the marriage a secret. "A terrible blow ... it must be kept absolutely secret," he wrote to Marie. The impossibility of this soon became obvious. Nevertheless, Nicholas deprived his brother of the right of regency on Alexis's behalf, and put Michael in a state of tutelage as if he were a minor or a mental incompetent. Grand Duke Michael, second in line for the Russian throne, was then forbidden to return to Russia.

Later, the reason for Michael's seemingly impetuous decision to marry became clearer. From the medical bulletins and news reports that were

filtering across Europe, Michael suddenly became aware of the fact that his nephew might die at any moment. If Alexis died, Michael knew that he would be compelled to return to Russia under circumstances which would make it impossible for him to marry a woman of Nathalie's standing. Before this could happen, he—or she— decided to act. "What revolts me more than anything else," said Nicholas, "is his [Michael's] reference to poor Alexis's illness which, he says, made him speed things up."

Despite his anger, Nicholas could not ignore his brother's *fait accompli*. Nathalie was now his brother's wife. Reluctantly, he granted her the title of Countess Brassova and consented that her infant son,

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his nephew, should be styled Count Brassov. When the war began, Nicholas permitted the couple to return to Russia and Michael went to the front in command of a Cossack brigade. But neither Nicholas nor Alexandra ever received or uttered a word to the bold and beautiful Nathalie Cheremetevskaya.

To those who remember it, the winter season in St. Petersburg following the tercentenary seemed especially brilliant. The tall windows in the great palaces along the Neva blazed with light. The streets and shops were filled with bustling crowds. Fabergé, with its heavy granite pillars and air of Byzantine opulence, was thronged with customers. In elegant hair-dressing salons, ladies sat on blue-and-gold chairs, congratulating themselves on getting an appointment and exchanging the latest gossip. The most delicious story that year concerned Vaslav Nijinksy's expulsion from the Imperial Ballet. The banishment followed a performance of *Giselle* in which the magnificent dancer had worn an unusually brief and revealing costume. When he appeared on stage, there was a commotion in the Imperial box. The Dowager Empress was seen to rise, fix the stage with a devastating glare and then sweep out of the theatre. The dancer's expulsion followed immediately.

The mood of the capital was one of hope. Russia was prosperous, memories of the war with Japan had faded, the tercentenary had provided a surge of enthusiasm for the ancient monarchy. There were rumors that court balls

would be held again, now that the Tsar's daughters were growing up. Grand Duchess Olga, golden-haired and blue-eyed, had already made her first appearances at St. Petersburg balls. Grand Duchess Tatiana, slender, with dark hair and amber eyes, was ready to be presented. The court balls did not take place that winter, but the social event of the season was a ball which the Dowager Empress gave for her granddaughters at the Anitchkov Palace. The Empress came, but left at midnight, and it was the Tsar who remained until 4:30 a.m. to escort his daughters home. On the train back to Tsarskoe Selo, he sipped a cup of tea and listened while the girls discussed the party and planned how late they would sleep the next morning.

Beyond the circle of sparkling light, the enthusiasm of the tercentenary quickly dissipated. Unrest among the workers and peasants continued to grow. In April 1912, an incident had taken place in the remote Lena goldfields of Siberia. The miners had gone on strike and were walking in protest toward the office of the Anglo-Russian Lena

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Gold Mining Company when a drunken police officer ordered his men to open fire. Two hundred people were killed, and Russia seethed with anger. In the Duma and the press, the massacre was called "a second Bloody Sunday." The government ordered a Commission of Inquiry, and the Duma, unwilling to rely on the report of a government commission, decided to conduct its own investigation. The head of the Duma commission was Alexander Kerensky.

Since leaving the university in St. Petersburg in 1905, Kerensky had become a familiar figure as he defended political prisoners in courtrooms all across Russia. Although his arguments and his successes frequently were embarrassing to the government, "I was not subject to the slightest pressure," he said. "No one could oust us from the courts, no one could lift a finger against us." The same sense of legal fair play prevailed at the Lena goldfields investigation: "The government commission sat in one house and we sat in another. Both commissions were summoning and cross-examining witnesses . . . both were recording the testimony of the employees, both were writing official reports. . . . The gold fields administration greatly

resented our intrusion but neither the . . . [government investigators] nor the local officials interfered in any way; on the contrary . . . the Governor actually helped." Kerensky's report bitterly damned the police, and not long afterward the Minister of Interior resigned.

From the goldfields, Kerensky went straight to the Volga region to run for election to the Fourth Duma. He ran as a critic of the government, was elected, and for the two years before the war he traveled across Russia making, speeches, holding meetings and doing "strenuous political organizing and revolutionary work . . . The whole of Russia," he wrote, "was now covered with a network of labor and liberal organizations—the co-operatives, trade unions, labor clubs." It was no longer even necessary for agitators to be secretive about their work. "In those days a man as openly and bitterly hostile to the government as myself toured from town to town quite freely making speeches at public meetings. At these meetings, I criticized the government sharply. . . . [Never] did it enter the heads of the Tsarist Cheka to infringe on my parliamentary inviolability."

Kerensky's work, and that of others like him, had an effect. In 1913, the year of the tercentenary, seven hundred thousand Russian workers were on strike. By January 1914, the number had grown to one million. In the Baku region, fighting broke out between the oil workers and the police, and, as it had always been in Russia, the Cossacks came at a gallop. By July 1914, the number of strikers had swollen to one and a half million. In St. Petersburg, mobs of strikers were smash-

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ing windows and erecting barricades in the streets. That month, Count Pourtalès, the German Ambassador, repeatedly assured the Kaiser that in these chaotic circumstances Russia could not possibly fight.

The end of the Old World was very near. After three hundred years of Romanov rule, the final storm was about to break over Imperial Russia.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Long Summer of 1914

By the spring of 1914, the nine-year-old Tsarevich had made a good recovery from the attack at Spala eighteen months before. His leg had straightened and, to his parents' delight, he walked with only a trace of a limp. In celebration of Alexis's return to health, the Tsar decided one clear May morning to abandon his papers and take his son on an outing. The excursion from Livadia into the mountains was to be entirely male. Alexis was overjoyed.

Two touring cars set out after breakfast. Alexis and his father were in the first, along with Gilliard and an officer from the *Standart;* the sailor Derevenko and a single Cossack guard followed in the second. Trailing long plumes of dust, the cars climbed the slopes of the mountains behind the Imperial palace, passing through cool forests of towering pines. Their destination was a great rust-colored cliff called Red Rock, which offered a majestic view of the valleys, the white palaces and the turquoise sea below. After lunch, descending the northern slope, the little cavalcade came on patches of still un-melted winter snow. Alexis begged that the cars be stopped, and Nicholas agreed. "He [Alexis] ran around us, skipping about, rolling in the snow, and picking himself up only to fall again a few seconds later," wrote Gilliard. "The Tsar watched his son's frolics with obvious pleasure." Although he intervened from time to time to caution his son to be careful, Nicholas was convinced for the first time that the ordeal at Spala was finally over.

"The day drew to a close," Gilliard continued, "and we were quite sorry to have to start back. The Tsar was in high spirits during the drive. We had an impression that this holiday devoted to his son had been a tremendous pleasure to him. For a few hours, he had escaped his imperial duties."

Despite her shyness and the close family circle that surrounded her,

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talk of marriage began to focus that year on eighteen-year-old Grand Duchess Olga. A match with Edward, the Prince of Wales, was mentioned.

Nothing came of it, and the Prince remained unmarried until 1936, when he gave up his throne to marry Wallis Warfield Simpson. More serious discussion centered on Crown Prince Carol of Rumania. Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, was an advocate of this match; he saw in it a possibility of detaching Rumania from her alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Nicholas and Alexandra were receptive to Carol's suit, but Olga herself was implacably opposed.

On June 13, the Russian Imperial family paid a brief, formal visit to the Rumanian Black Sea port of Constanza. Carol and his family waited on the pier as the *Standart* brought the Russian visitors from Yalta. The single day was crowded with ceremonies: a cathedral service, a naval review and luncheon in the morning, followed by a military review, a formal tea, a state dinner, a torchlight parade and fireworks in the evening. All day long, the Rumanians stared at Olga, aware that in the Russian girl they might be observing their future queen.

In that sense, the visit was a waste of time. Even before the *Standart* arrived in Constanza, Olga found Gilliard on deck. "Tell me the truth, Monsieur," she said, "do you know why we are going to Rumania?" Tactfully, the tutor replied that he understood it was a matter of diplomacy. Tossing her head, Olga declared that Gilliard obviously knew the real reason. "I don't want it to happen," she said fiercely. "Papa has promised not to make me, and I don't want to leave Russia. I am a Russian and I mean to remain a Russian."

Olga's parents respected her feelings. Alexandra, sitting one day on the terrace at Livadia, explained their viewpoint to Sazonov. "I think with terror that the time draws near when I shall have to part with my daughters," she said. "I could desire nothing better than that they should remain in Russia after their marriage. But I have four daughters and it is, of course, impossible. You know how difficult marriages are in reigning families. I know it by experience, although I was never in the position my daughters occupy, being [only] the daughter of the Grand Duke of Hesse, and running little risk of being obliged to make a political match. Still, I was once threatened with the danger of marrying without love or even affection, and I vividly remember the torments I endured when . . . (the Empress named a

member of one of the German reigning houses) arrived at Darmstadt and I was informed that he intended to marry me. I did not know him at all and I shall never forget what I suffered when I met him for the first time. My grandmother, Queen Victoria, took pity on me, and I was left in peace.

God disposed otherwise of my fate, and granted me undreamed-of happiness. All the more then do I feel it my duty to leave my daughters free to marry according to their inclination. The Emperor will have to decide whether he considers this or that marriage suitable for his daughters, but parental authority must not extend beyond that."

Rebuffed by Olga, Carol did not give up hope of marrying a Romanov grand duchess. Two years later, he arrived in Russia and suggested to Nicholas that he marry Marie, then sixteen. Nicholas laughingly declared that Marie was only a schoolgirl. In 1947, Carol, as King of Rumania, made a third marriage with the woman who had been his mistress for twenty-two years, Magda Lupescu.

In Europe, the early summer of 1014 was marked by glorious weather. Millions of men and women went off on holidays, forgetting their fears of war in the warmth of the sun. Kings and emperors continued to visit each other, dine at state dinners, review armies and fleets and bounce each other's children on their knees. Beneath the surface, however, differences were detectable. The important visits took place between allies: King George V visited Paris; the Kaiser visited the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand; Raymond Poincaré, President of France, visited the Tsar in St. Petersburg. In their entourages, the chiefs of state brought generals and diplomats who sat down quietly with their opposite numbers to compare plans and confirm understandings. Military reviews took on special significance. Troops on parade were carefully watched for signs of *élan*, vigor and readiness for war.

An event of special symbolic importance took place at the end of June when the dashing British Admiral Sir David Beatty led the First Battle Cruiser Squadron of the Royal Navy up the Baltic on a visit to Russia. England, alarmed by the rapid building of the Kaiser's powerful High Seas Fleet, was

reluctantly abandoning a century of "splendid isolation." A closer tie with Tsarist Russia, hitherto despised in press and parliament as the land of the Cossack and the knout, was part of Britain's new diplomacy. On June 20, a blazing, cloudless day, Beatty's four huge gray ships, *Lion, Queen Mary, Princess Royal* and *New Zealand*, steamed slowly past the *Standart* and anchored at Kronstadt. The Imperial family went aboard Beatty's flagship, *Lion*, for lunch. "Never have I seen happier faces than those of the young grand duchesses escorted over *Lion* by a little band of middies especially told off for their amusement," reported the British Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan. "When I think of them as I saw them that day," he added,

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"the tragic story of their deaths seems like some hideous nightmare." The following day, while thousands of Russians stared at the English ships swinging silently on the Baltic tide, Beatty and his officers visited Tsarskoe Selo. Beatty himself, the youngest British admiral since Nelson, made a tremendous impression. His youthful, cleanshaven face caused many Russians, accustomed to seeing admirals with beards to their waists, to mistake Beatty for his own flag lieutenant. But Beatty's manner was unmistakably one of command. His square jaw and the jaunty angle at which he wore his cap suggested the sea dog. He spoke in a voice which would have carried over the howl of a gale. It was as if the solid reality of Britain's enormous seapower, a thing few Russians understood, had suddenly been revealed in Beatty's person.

After Beatty's departure, the Imperial family boarded the *Standart* for their annual two-week cruise along the coast of Finland. They were at sea four days later, June 28, when the terrible day arrived which is known in European history simply as "Sarajevo."

A hot Balkan sun shone down that morning on the white, flat-roofed houses of the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. The streets were crowded with people who had come from miles away to see the middle-aged Hapsburg prince who one day would be their emperor. Tall and fleshy, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was not ragingly popular anywhere within the sprawling Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had been ruled for sixty-six years by his aged

uncle, Emperor Franz Joseph. Yet Franz Ferdinand was sufficiently enlightened politically to see—as his uncle and the government in Vienna did not—that unless something was done about the Slav nationalism burning inside the empire, the empire itself would disintegrate.

Austria-Hungary in 1914 was a hodge-podge of races, provinces and nationalities scattered across central Europe and the upper Balkans. Three fifths of these forty million people were Slavs—Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Bosnians and Montenegrins—yet the empire was ruled by its two non-Slavic races, the Austrians and the Magyars of Hungary. Not surprisingly, most of the Slavic peoples within the empire restlessly longed for the day they would be free.

On these turbulent Slav provinces within the empire, the small independent Slav kingdom of Serbia acted as a magnet. Inside Serbia, passionate Slav nationalists plotted to break up the crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire and weld the dissident Slav provinces into a single Greater South Slav Kingdom. Serbia lacked the military strength to

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wrest the provinces away by force, but Belgrade, the Serb capital, became a fountainhead of inflammatory Slav nationalist propaganda. Belgrade also became the headquarters of a secret terrorist organization called the Black Hand, designed to strike at Austria-Hungary by sabotage and murder.

In Vienna, the Imperial capital, the disruptive influence of Serbia was greatly feared. Field Marshal von Conrad-Hotzendorf, Chief of the Austrian General Staff, described Serbia as "a dangerous little viper." For years, Conrad-Hotzendorf had impatiently awaited orders to crush the Serb menace. But in 1914 the Emperor Franz Joseph was eighty-four. He had come to the throne in 1848; the years of his reign had been marked by tragedy. His brother Maximilian had become Emperor of Mexico and had been shot by a firing squad on a Mexican hillside. His only son, Crown Prince Rudolf, had died with his mistress in a love-pact suicide at Mayerling. His wife, Empress Elizabeth, had been struck down by an assassin's knife. His nephew and heir, Franz Ferdinand, had defied his will and married a commoner, Countess Sophie Chotek. Before settling the

succession on Franz Ferdinand, the old Emperor forced the Archduke to renounce the throne for any children he should have by Sophie. On public occasions, Sophie, wife of the heir, was forced to walk behind the least important ladies of the royal blood and to sit at a distant end of the Imperial table. She found the humiliations unbearable; the Archduke made violent scenes with his family, but the Emperor refused to give way. His last hope was to die in peace with his Imperial dignity and his empire intact.

Busy soothing his wife, absent from the court, Franz Ferdinand knew nevertheless that the Emperor would not live forever. Politically, he understood that the policy of drift could not continue. His proposal was to appease the Slavs within the empire by bringing them into active participation within the government: he foresaw an eventual broadening of Austro-Hungarian "dualism" into a "trialism" which would include in the government Austrians, Magyars and Slavs. His solution was opposed by all concerned: by Austrian and Magyar ministers who did not wish to share their power, and by Slav nationalists who feared that the plan's success would destroy their own dreams of a South Slav kingdom. Yet Franz Ferdinand persisted. As a preliminary step, he decided that while he was watching Austrian army maneuvers in the Bosnian mountains, he would also pay a ceremonial visit to the provincial capital of Sarajevo. To expand this gesture of friendship, the Archduke brought his wife, the mother of his three disinherited children. In addition, he asked that the troops which normally lined the streets during an Imperial visit be dispensed with.

Except for 150 local policemen, the crowds were to have free access to the Heir to the Throne.

Franz Ferdinand was dressed that day in the green uniform of an Austrian field marshal, with feathers waving from his military cap. As his six-car motorcade entered the town, he was in the open back seat of the second car with Sophie beside him. On the streets, he saw smiling faces and waving arms. Flags and bright-colored rugs hung as decorations, and from the windows of shops and houses his own portrait stared back at him. Franz Ferdinand was enormously pleased.

As the procession neared the city hall, the Archduke's chauffeur glimpsed an object hurled from the crowd. He pressed the accelerator, the car jumped forward and a bomb which would have landed in Sophie's lap bounced off the rear of the car and exploded under the wheels of the car behind. Two officers were wounded. The young Serb who had thrown the bomb ran across a bridge, but was apprehended by the police.

Franz Ferdinand, meanwhile, arrived at Sarajevo's city hall. He was pale, shaken and furious. "One comes here for a visit," he shouted, "and is welcomed by bombs!" There was a quick, urgent conference. One of the Archduke's suite asked if a military guard could be arranged. The provincial governor replied acidly, "Do you think Sarajevo is filled with assassins?" It was decided to go back through the city by a different route. On the way, however, the driver of the first car, forgetting the alteration, turned into one of the prearranged streets. The Archduke's chauffeur, following behind, was momentarily misled. He too started to turn. An official shouted, "Not that way, you fool!" The chauffeur braked, pausing to shift gears not five feet from the watching crowd. At that moment, a slim nineteen-year-old boy stepped forward, aimed a pistol into the car and fired twice. Sophie sank forward onto her husband's breast. Franz Ferdinand remained sitting upright, and for a minute no one noticed that he had been hit. Then the governor, sitting in front, heard him murmur, "Sophie! Sophie! Don't die! Stay alive for our children!" His body sagged and blood from a wound in his neck spurted across his green uniform. Sophie, the wife who could never become an empress, died first from a bullet in the abdomen. Fifteen minutes later, in a room next to the ballroom where waiters were preparing chilled champagne for his reception, the Archduke died. His last muttered words were "It is nothing."

The assassin, Gabriel Princip, was a native Bosnian of Serb extraction. On trial, the boy declared that he had acted to "kill an enemy of the South Slavs" and to "avenge the Serbian people." The Archduke,

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Princip explained to the court, was "an energetic man who as ruler would have carried through ideas and reforms which stood in our way." Years

later, after Princip had died of tuberculosis in an Austrian prison, the truth came out: the plot had been laid in Belgrade, capital of Serbia, by the Serbian terrorist society known as the Black Hand. Its leader was none other than the chief of Serbian Army Intelligence.

The Austrian government reacted violently to Princip's act. The Heir to the Throne had been killed in a Slav province by a Serb. The time and the pretext had arrived to crush "the Serbian viper." Field Marshal von Conrad-Hôtzendorf immediately declared that the assassination was "Serbia's declaration of war on Austria-Hungary." Count Berchtold, the Chancellor, who hitherto had opposed preventive war against Serbia, changed his mind and demanded that "the Monarchy with unflinching hand . . . tear asunder the threads which its foes are endeavoring to weave into a net above its head." The most candid appraisal of the situation came in a personal letter from the Emperor Franz Joseph to the Kaiser:

"The bloody deed was not the work of a single individual but a well organized plot whose threads extend to Belgrade. Although it may be impossible to establish the complicity of the Serbian government, no one can doubt that its policy of uniting all Southern Slavs under the Serbian flag encourages such crimes and that the continuation of this situation is a chronic peril for my house and my territories. Serbia," the Emperor concluded, "must be eliminated as a political factor in the Balkans."

Despite the excitement in Vienna, most Europeans refused to consider the Archduke's assassination a final act of doom. War, revolution, conspiracy and assassinations were the normal ingredients of Balkan politics. "Nothing to cause anxiety," said the Paris newspaper *Figaro.* "Terrible shock for the dear old Emperor," Britain's King George V wrote in his diary. The Kaiser received the news three hours later aboard his sailing yacht, *Meteor,* as he was setting out from Kiel to take part in a race. A motor launch sped toward the yacht and William leaned over the stern to hear the shouted news. "The cowardly detestable crime . . . has shaken me to the depths of my soul," he wired his Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg. But William did not think that the assassination meant war. What appalled him was the occurrence of that most monstrous of crimes, a regicide.

Three days before the events at Sarajevo, the Russian Imperial family sailed from Peterhof on their annual summer cruise along the Baltic

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coast As they were boarding the *Standart*, Alexis, jumping for the ladder leading up to the deck of the yacht, caught his foot on a rung and twisted his ankle. Toward evening that day, he began to feel serious pain.

The following morning, the *Standart* was anchored in the heart of one of the Finnish fjords. Gilliard, making his way to Alexis's cabin, found both Dr. Botkin and the Empress with his pupil, who was suffering intensely. The hemorrhage into the ankle was continuing, the joint swollen and rigid. Alexis was weeping; every few minutes, as the throbbing pain mounted, he screamed. Alexandra's face was white. Gilliard went back to collect his books and then settled down to read to him as a distraction. Despite the illness, the cruise continued.

It was aboard the *Standart* that Nicholas and Alexandra learned what had happened at Sarajevo. Because neither he nor his ministers expected the assassination to lead to war, the Tsar did not return to his capital. On the day following the Archduke's death, other news, even more sensational for every Russian, arrived on the *Standart*. It passed quickly through the ship in excited whispers: an attempt had been made on Rasputin's life. None dared speak openly, but almost every person aboard hoped that the *starets* was finished. Alexandra, struggling with Alexis's illness, became frantic with worry. She prayed continually and telegraphed daily to Pokrovskoe.

What had happened was this: Rasputin, returning to his village on June 27, had been followed there without his knowledge by Khina Gusseva, Iliodor's agent. Gusseva caught the *starets* alone in a village street. She accosted him and, when he turned, drove Iliodor's knife deep into his stomach. "I have killed the Antichrist," she screamed hysterically and then attempted unsuccessfully to stab herself.

Rasputin was gravely hurt; the slash in his stomach had exposed his entrails. He was taken to a hospital in Tyumen, where a specialist sent by his friends in St. Petersburg performed an operation. For two weeks, his life

was uncertain. Then, with the enormous physical strength which marked his life, he began to recover. He remained in bed for the rest of the summer and, accordingly, exercised no influence on the momentous events which were to come. Gusseva was placed on trial, declared insane and put into an asylum.

It was sheer coincidence that placed the two assassination attempts, the one at Sarajevo and the one at Pokrovskoe, so close together in time. Yet the coincidence alone is enough to provoke a tantalizing bit of speculation: Suppose the outcome of these two violent episodes had been reversed. Suppose the Hapsburg Prince, a well-meaning man, the heir and the hope of a crumbling dynasty, had lived, while

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the surging life and mischievous influence of the Siberian peasant had ended forever. How different the course of that long summer—and perhaps of our twentieth century—might have been.

On July 19, the *Standart* returned its passengers to Peterhof. Alexis, still suffering from a swollen ankle, was carried ashore. Nicholas and Alexandra plunged immediately into preparations for the state visit of the President of France, Raymond Poincaré, who was due in St. Petersburg the following day.

Raymond Poincaré was ten years old in 1870 when Prussian armies seized his native province of Lorraine, exiling him for most of his life from the place of his birth. Poincaré became a lawyer and then, successively, Foreign Minister, Premier and President of France. A short, dark-haired, robust man, he impressed all who met him. Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, reported to the Tsar: "In him [Poincaré], Russia possesses a reliable and true friend endowed with a statesmanlike understanding that is exceptional and with an indomitable will." The German ambassador in Paris had much the same impression. "M. Poincaré differs from many of his countrymen by a deliberate avoidance of that smooth and fulsome tone characteristic of the Frenchman," he wrote. "His manner is measured, his words unadorned and carefully weighed. He makes the impression of a man with a lawyer's mind who expresses his conditions with stubborn emphasis and pursues his aims

with a powerful will." Nicholas, who had met Poincaré once before, said simply, "I like him very much. He is a calm and clever man of small build."

Only a few weeks before Poincaré's arrival in Russia, he had been preceded to St. Petersburg by the new French Ambassador, Maurice Paléologue. A veteran career diplomat, Paléologue was also a brilliant writer whose talents later brought him membership in the French Academy. From the moment of his arrival in Russia, Paléologue began keeping a diary of people, events, conversations and impressions, providing an extraordinarily vivid account of Imperial Russia in the Great War.

Paléologue's diary began on July 20, 1914, the day that Poincaré arrived in Russia. The President was steaming up the Baltic aboard the battleship *France;* that morning the Tsar invited Paléologue to lunch with him aboard his yacht before the arrival of the *France.* "Nicholas II [was] in the uniform of an admiral," wrote Paléologue. "Luncheon was served immediately. We had at least an hour and three quarters before us until the arrival of the *France.* But the Tsar likes to linger

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over his meals. There are always long intervals between the courses in which he chats and smokes cigarettes. . . ." Paléologue mentioned the possibility of war. "The Tsar reflected a moment. 'I can't believe the Emperor [William II] wants war. ... If you knew him as I do! If you knew how much theatricality there is in his posing!' Coffee had just arrived when the French squadron was signalled. The Tsar made me go up on the bridge with him. It was a magnificent spectacle. In a quivering silvery light, the *France* slowly surged forward over the turquoise and emerald waves, leaving a long white furrow behind her. Then she stopped majestically. The mighty warship which had brought the head of the French state is well worthy of her name. She was indeed France coming to Russia. I felt my heart beating. For a few minutes there was a prodigious din in the harbor; the guns and the shore batteries firing, the crews cheering, the *Marseillaise* answering the Russian national anthem, the cheers of thousands of spectators who had come from St. Petersburg on pleasure boats."

That night, at Peterhof, the Tsar welcomed his guest at a formal banquet. "I shall long remember the dazzling display of jewels on the women's shoulders," wrote Paléologue. "It was simply a fantastic shower of diamonds, pearls, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, topaz, beryls —a blaze of fire and flame. In this fiery milieu, Poincaré's black coat was a drab touch. But the wide, sky-blue ribbon of St. Andrew across his breast increased his importance in the eyes of the Russians. . . . During the dinner I kept an eye on the Tsaritsa Alexandra Fedorovna opposite whom I was sitting. She was a beautiful sight with her low brocade gown and a diamond tiara on her head. Her forty-two years have left her face and figure still pleasant to look at."

Two days later, Paléologue attended the review of sixty thousand troops at the army encampment at Kransnoe Selo. "A blazing sun lit up the vast plain," he wrote. "The elite of St. Petersburg society were crowded into some stands. The light toilettes of the women, their white hats and parasols made the stands look like azalea beds. Before long the Imperial party arrived. In a court horse *calèche* was the Tsaritsa with the President of the Republic on her right and her two elder daughters opposite her. The Tsar was galloping by the side of the carriage, followed by a brilliant escort of the grand dukes and aides de camp. . . . The troops, without arms, were drawn up in serried ranks as far as the eye could reach. . . .

"The sun was dropping towards the horizon in a sky of purple and gold," Paléologue continued. "On a sign from the Tsar an artillery salvo signalled evening prayer. The bands played a hymn. Everyone uncovered. A non-commissioned officer recited the *Pater* in a loud

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voice. All those men, thousands upon thousands, prayed for the Tsar and Holy Russia. The silence and composure of that multitude in that plain, the magic poetry of the hour . . . gave the ceremony a touching majesty."

The following night, the last of Poincaré's visit, the President entertained the Tsar and the Empress at dinner aboard the *France*. "It had indeed a kind of terrifying grandeur with the four gigantic 304 cm. guns raising their huge muzzles above the heads of the guests," wrote Paléologue. "The sky was

soon clear again; a light breeze kissed the waves; the moon rose above the horizon. ... I found myself alone with the Tsaritsa, who asked me to take a chair on her left. The poor lady seemed worn out. . . . Suddenly she put her hands to her ears. Then with a pained and pleading glance she timidly pointed to the ship's band quite near to us which had just started on a furious allegro with a full battery of brass and big drums.

" 'Couldn't you?' . . . she murmured.

"I signalled sharply to the conductor. . . . The young Grand Duchess Olga had been observing us for some minutes with an anxious eye. She suddenly rose, glided towards her mother with graceful ease and whispered two or three words in her ear. Then addressing me, she continued, 'The Empress is rather tired, but she asks you to stay, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, and to go on talking to her.' "

As the *France* prepared to leave, Nicholas invited Paléologue to remain aboard the Imperial yacht. "It was a splendid night," Paléologue wrote. "The Milky Way stretched, a pure band of silver, into unending space. Not a breath of wind. The *France* and her escorting division sped rapidly away to the west, leaving behind long ribbons of foam which glistened in the moonlight like silvery streams. . . . Admiral Nilov came to the Tsar for orders. The latter said to me, 'It's a wonderful night. Suppose we go for a sail.' " The Tsar told the Ambassador of the conversation he had just had with Poincaré. "He said, 'Notwithstanding appearances the Emperor William is too cautious to launch his country on some wild adventure and the Emperor Franz Joseph's only wish is to die in peace.' "

At 12:45 a.m., July 25, Paléologue said goodnight to the Tsar, and at half past two he reached his bed in St. Petersburg. At seven the next morning, he was awakened and informed that the previous evening, while he had been out for a sail, Austria had presented Serbia with an ultimatum.

The wording and the timing of the Austrian ultimatum had been

carefully planned in Vienna. With the Emperor Franz Joseph's approval, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had decided to make war on Serbia. Conrad-Hôtzendorf, the Chief-of-Staff, wanted to mobilize and attack Serbia immediately. But Count Berchtold, the Chancellor, took a subtler line. He persuaded his colleagues to send the Serbs an ultimatum so outrageous that Serbia would be forced to reject it.

The ultimatum declared the the Archduke Franz Ferdinand's murder had been plotted in Belgrade, that Serb officials had supplied the assassin's bomb and pistol, and that Serb frontier guards had arranged their secret entry into Bosnia. As satisfaction, Austria demanded that Austrian officers be allowed to enter Serbia to conduct their own investigation. In addition, the ultimatum demanded suppression of all Serb nationalist propaganda directed at the empire, dissolution of Serb nationalist societies and dismissal of all Serbian officers who were "anti-Austrian." Serbia was given forty-eight hours to answer.

The ultimatum was drafted and approved by Franz Joseph on July 19. Then it was deliberately withheld for four days during the visit of President Poincaré to St. Petersburg so that the President and the Tsar would not be able to coordinate the response of France and Russia. Only at midnight on June 23, after Poincaré was at sea, headed down the Gulf of Finland, was the ultimatum delivered.

Every diplomat in Europe, reading the document, understood its implications. In Vienna, a government official, Count Hoyos, said flatly, "The Austrian demands are such that no state possessing the smallest amount of national pride or dignity could accept them." In London, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, told the Austrian Ambassador that he had never before seen one state address to another so formidable a document. In St. Petersburg, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sazonov, said simply, *"C'est la guerre Européenne."*

Upon receiving the ultimatum, Serbia immediately appealed to Russia, traditional protector of the Slavs. From Tsarskoe Selo, Nicholas telegraphed to the Serbian Crown Prince: "As long as there remains the faintest hope of

avoiding bloodshed, all my efforts will tend in that direction. If we fail to attain this object, in spite of our sincere desire for peace, Your Royal Highness may rest assured that Russia will in . no case remain indifferent to the fate of Serbia." A military council was convened at Krasnoe Selo on July 24, and on July 25 the Tsar summoned his ministers to Tsarskoe Selo.

To the men seated in Nicholas's study that summer day, the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia appeared aimed directly at Russia. Russia's classic role as protector of the Slavs and Nicholas II's personal guarantees of Serbian independence were part of the permanent fabric of European

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diplomacy; a threat to Serbia, therefore, could be interpreted only as a challenge to Russian power and influence in the Balkans. In the discussions that took place near St. Petersburg those hectic two days, both Sazonov and Grand Duke Nicholas, Inspector General of the Army, declared that Russia could not stand by and permit Serbia's humiliation without herself losing her rank as a great power.

The roots of this Russian dilemma in July 1914 went back seven years to another European diplomatic crisis, provoked in 1907 by Austria's sudden annexation of Bosnia. On that occasion, when Russia had been humiliated before the world, the fault lay primarily in the ornate secret diplomacy and personal character of the Russian Foreign Minister of the day, Alexander Izvolsky.

Izvolsky came to power at the end of the disastrous war with Japan and promptly proceeded to liquidate what remained of Russia's Far Eastern adventure. From the moment he took office with Stolypin in 1906, Izvolsky concentrated on a historical Russian objective: the opening of the Dardenelles. Izvolsky himself was simply for grabbing both the Strait and the city of Constantinople from the decrepit Turkish Empire, but Stolypin absolutely prohibited any such provocative aggressive act, at least until Russian strength had grown. Then, said Stolypin, "Russia could speak as in the past."

Izvolsky did not give up his dream. Alert, able and ambitious, Alexander Izvolsky was the archetype of the Old World professional diplomat. A plumpish, dandified man, he wore a pearl pin in his white waistcoat, affected white spats, carried a lorgnette and always trailed a faint touch of violet *eau de cologne*. In his world of secret diplomatic intrigue, achievement of one objective might mean betrayal of another; Izvolsky took such arrangements easily in stride.

It was entirely in character, therefore, when Alexander Izvolsky secretly met his Austrian counterpart, Foreign Minister Freiherr von Aehrenthal, in 1907 and reached a private agreement from which both countries would benefit. In return for Austrian support of a Russian demand that Turkey open the Dardenelles to free passage by Russian warships, Izvolsky agreed to turn his back when Austria-Hungary annexed the Balkan provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both halves of this bargain were in violation of general European treaties signed by all the great powers. Recognizing this, the two statesmen agreed—or so Izvolsky afterward claimed—that the two moves should be made simultaneously, in order to present Europe with a *fait accompli*. No date was set for the moves. In Izvolsky's case, the

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bargain involved not only defiance of treaties but, infinitely worse, the betrayal of a small Slavic people. His willingness to go ahead indicated the importance he attached to opening the Strait.

Unfortunately for Izvolsky, before he was ready to betray the Bosnians, he himself was betrayed by Aehrenthal. Three weeks after the secret meeting, long before Izvolsky was ready to press Russia's demand on Turkey, the Emperor Franz Joseph suddenly proclaimed the annexation of Bosnia to Austria-Hungary. Caught red-handed, without a thing to show for his betrayal, Izvolsky hurried to London and Paris, attempting to get support for a belated Russian move on the Strait. He failed. Nicholas, informed of the bargain after it had been secretly struck, was furious. "Brazen impudence gets away with anything," he wrote to Marie. "The main culprit is Aehrenthal. He is simply a scoundrel. He made Izvolsky his dupe."

Serbia mobilized and called on Russia for aid. Russian troops began to assemble on the Austrian frontier.

At this point, Germany intervened to save her Austrian ally. The intervention was performed in the bluntest possible manner; the Kaiser himself later described it as appearing in "shining armor" beside his ally. The German government asked Izvolsky whether he was prepared to back down. "We expect a precise answer, yes or no. Any vague, complicated or ambiguous reply will be regarded as a refusal." Izvolsky had no choice; Russia was unready for war. "If we are not attacked," Nicholas wrote Marie, "of course we are not going to fight." Later, he explained the situation to her more fully. "Germany," he wrote, "told us we could help solve the difficulty by agreeing to the annexation, while if we refused the consequences might be very serious and hard to foretell. Once the matter had been put as definitely and unequivocally as that, there was nothing for it but to swallow one's pride, give in, and agree. . . . But," added the Tsar, "German action towards us has simply been brutal and we won't forget it."

Russia's humiliation in the Bosnia crisis was spectacular. Sir Arthur Nicolson, then the British Ambassador to St. Petersburg, wrote, "In the recent history of Russia . . . there has never previously been a moment when the country has undergone such humiliation and, though Russia has had her troubles and trials both external and internal and has suffered defeats in the field, she has never, for apparently no valid reason, had to submit to the dictation of a foreign power."

It was in the depths of this humiliation that Russian statesmen, generals and the Tsar himself had formed their resolve never to withdraw again from a similar challenge. From 1909 onward, the commander of

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Kiev military district in the Ukraine had standing orders to be ready within forty-eight hours to repel an invasion from the West. Izvolsky left his post in St. Petersburg to become Russian Ambassador to France, where vengefully he worked night and day to strengthen the alliance. In 1914, when war came, Alexander Izvolsky boasted happily in Paris, "This is my war! My war!"

Nicholas recognized that the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia was the feared second challenge to Russia. For years, he had faced the fact that Russia could not back down again. But against this resolution he had balanced a hope that the challenge would not come until Russia was ready.

In 1911, Nicholas stressed this point in an interview with his new Ambassador to Bulgaria, Nekliudov. "The Tsar," Nekliudov later recalled, "after an intentional pause, stepping back and fixing me with a penetrating stare, said, 'Listen to me, Nekliudov, do not for one instant lose sight of the fact that we cannot go to war. I do not wish for war; as a rule I shall do all in my power to preserve for my people the benefits of peace. But at this moment of all moments everything that might lead to war must be avoided. It would be out of the question for us to face a war for five or six years—in fact until 1917—although if the most vital interests and the honor of Russia were at stake we might, if it were absolutely necessary, accept a challenge in 1915; but not a moment sooner in any circumstances or under any pretext whatsoever.' "

With Russia's unpreparedness in mind, the Tsar hoped desperately that this new crisis could be negotiated. He instructed Sazonov to play for time. Sazonov's first move, accordingly, was a plea that the limit on the Austrian ultimatum be extended beyond forty-eight hours. Vienna, determined to let nothing prevent its destruction of Serbia, refused. Next, Sazonov attempted to persuade Austria's ally Germany to mediate the Balkan quarrel. The German government refused, declaring that the matter was an issue solely between Austria and Serbia and that all other states, including Russia, should stand aside. Sazonov then asked Sir Edward Grey to mediate. Grey agreed, and proposed a conference of ambassadors in London. Sazanov hurriedly accepted Grey's proposal, but the German government refused. Finally, in reply to Serbia's appeals for aid, Sazonov advised the Serbian Premier, Pashich, to accept all the Austrian demands which did not actually compromise Serbian independence.

The Serbs, no less anxious to avoid a military showdown than their

Russian patron, agreed, and replied to the Austrian ultimatum in extravagantly conciliatory terms. So humble was their reply, in fact, that it took Vienna entirely by surprise. Count Berchtold was aghast and didn't know what to do with the document. Accordingly, for two days, July 26 and July 27, he hid it. When the German Ambassador in Vienna asked to see it, he was told that he would have to wait because of the pile-up of paperwork in the Austrian Foreign Ministry. By July 28, however, Berchtold and his colleagues had reached a decision. Austria, rejecting the Serb reply, issued a declaration of war. At 5 a.m. the following morning, July 29, Austro-Hungarian artillery began hurling shells across the Danube into Belgrade, the Serbian capital. The bombardment continued all day, in disregard of the white flags fluttering from Belgrade rooftops. In St. Petersburg, Tsar Nicholas gave the order to mobilize all Russian military districts along the Austrian frontier.

How fast and how far the war was to spread now depended on the reaction of Germany. Despite the urgent demands of the Russian General Staff for general mobilization, Nicholas had permitted only partial mobilization against Austria. The long frontier with Germany running through Poland and East Prussia still slumbered in peace. The Tsar believed, as he had said to Paléologue, that the Kaiser did not want war.

Predictably, the Kaiser's views had changed several times during the crisis. He first assumed that the cringing Slavs could be bullied into backing down before the shining Teutons. In October 1913, William had spoken of just such a situation to Count Berchtold, the Austrian Chancellor: "If His Majesty the Emperor Franz Joseph makes a demand, the Serbian government must obey," said William. "If not, Belgrade must be bombarded and occupied until his wish is fulfilled. And rest assured that I am behind you and ready to draw the sword wherever your action requires."

As he spoke, William rested his hand on the hilt of his ceremonial sword. Berchtold was suitably impressed. After Franz Ferdinand's assassination, the Kaiser's militancy appeared to increase. "Now or never," he scribbled on the margin of a telegram from Vienna. "It is time to settle accounts with the Serbs and the sooner the better." "We could reckon on Germany's full

support," cabled Count Szogyeny, the Austrian Ambassador in Berlin, after a talk with the Kaiser. "His Majesty [the Kaiser] said . . . Austria must judge what is to be done to clear up her relations with Serbia. Whatever Austria's decision may

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turn out to be, Austria can count with certainly upon it that Germany-will stand by her friend and ally." Having given his pledge, William cheerfully left for Kiel to board the *Hohenzollern* for a cruise through the Norwegian fjords.

Wreathed in his own bluster, the Kaiser miscalculated the reactions of each of Germany's three major antagonists. According to Sazonov's estimate: "The authorities in Berlin were not convinced that Russia would care to risk a war in order to preserve her position in the Balkans. ... In any case, they scarcely believed her capable of carrying on a war. Nor did they entertain a very high opinion of France as a military power. As for the possibility of England siding with their enemies, no one in Germany ever thought of it; the warnings of the German Ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky, were derided, and he was indulgently referred to as 'good old Lichnowsky' at the Berlin Foreign Office."

The wisdom of presenting Austria-Hungary with exactly this kind of *carte blanche* to determine the fate of Germany had often been questioned in Berlin. As late as May 1914, the German Ambassador to Vienna wrote to Berlin wondering "whether it really pays to bind ourselves so tightly to this phantasm of a state which is cracking in every direction." The dominant view in Berlin, however, was expressed in a résumé from the German Foreign Ministry to the German Embassy in London summarizing the factors determining German policy:

"Austria is now going to come to a reckoning with Serbia. . . . We have not at the present time forced Austria to her decision. But neither should we attempt to stay her hand. If we should do that, Austria would have the right to reproach us with having deprived her of her last chance of political rehabilitation. And then the process of her wasting away and of her internal decay would be still further accelerated. Her standing in the Balkans would

be gone forever. . . . The maintenance of Austria, and in fact of the most powerful Austria possible is a necessity for us. . . . That she cannot be maintained forever I willingly admit. But in the meanwhile we may be able to arrange other combinations."

The Kaiser's endorsement of this position was significantly reinforced by the reports he was getting from his elderly Ambassador in St. Petersburg, Count Pourtalès. Pourtalès, the dean of the St. Petersburg diplomatic corps, had spent seven years in his post. He was enormously fond of Russia. But he knew that, in July 1914, a million and a half Russian workers were out on strike; he had seen with his own eyes the barricades erected in the streets of the capital. Citing

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these factors, he repeatedly assured his sovereign that Russia could not go to war. On July 28, Pourtalès lunched at the British Embassy with his British colleague, Sir George Buchanan. Over cigars, Pourtalès expressed his views on Russia's weakness, declaring that he was regularly forwarding these views to Berlin. Appalled, Buchanan grasped his guest by the shoulders and said, "Count Pourtalès, Russia means it." Nevertheless, as late as July 31, the Kaiser was speaking confidently of the "mood of a sick Tom-cat" which, his Ambassador had assured him, infected the Russian court and army.

To the end, William expected to bluff his way. On July 28, back from his cruise, he saw the abject Serb reply to Austria's ultimatum. His expectations seemed brilliantly confirmed. "A capitulation of the most humiliating character," he exulted. "Now that Serbia has given in, all grounds for war have disappeared." When, that same night, Austria declared war on Serbia, William was astonished and frustrated. Nevertheless, the war was still only an affair in the Balkans. Unless Russia moved, Germany need not become involved. With this in mind, William personally telegraphed the Tsar:

It is with the gravest concern that I hear of the impression which the action of Austria against Serbia is creating in your country. The unscrupulous agitation that has been going on in Serbia for years has resulted in the outrageous crime to which Archduke Franz Ferdinand fell victim. You will

doubtless agree with me that we both, you and me, have a common interest, as well as all Sovereigns, to insist that all the persons morally responsible for this dastardly murder should receive their deserved punishment. In this, politics play no part at all.

On the other hand, I fully understand how difficult it is for you and your government to face the drift of public opinion. Therefore, with regard to the hearty and tender friendship which binds us both from long ago with firm ties, I am exerting my utmost influence to induce the Austrians to deal straightly to arrive at a satisfactory understanding with you. I confidently hope you will help me in my efforts to smooth over difficulties that may still arise. Your very sincere and devoted friend and cousin.

Willy

The Kaiser's telegram crossed a message to him from the Tsar:

Am glad you are back. In this most serious moment I appeal to you to help me. An ignoble war has been declared on a weak country. The indignation in Russia, shared fully by me, is enor-

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mous. I foresee that very soon I shall be overwhelmed by pressure brought upon me, and forced to take extreme measures which will lead to war. To try and avoid such a calamity as a European war, I beg you in the name of our old friendship to do what you can to stop your allies from going too far.

Nicky

The "pressure" on Nicholas to which he referred in his telegram came from the Russian General Staff, which was insisting on full mobilization. Sazonov, once he had heard that the Austrians were firing on Belgrade, had abandoned his protests and endorsed the generals' request.

On the 29th, WilUam replied to the Tsar's telegram:

It would be quite possible for Russia to remain a spectator of the Austro-Serbian conflict, without involving Europe in the most horrible war she ever witnessed. I think a direct understanding between your government and Vienna possible and desirable and as I already telegraphed you, my government is continuing its exertions to promote it. Of course, military measures on the part of Russia which would be looked upon by Austria as threatening, would precipitate a calamity we both wish to avoid, and jeopardize my position as mediator which I readily accepted on your appeal to my friendship and help.

Willy

Nicholas replied, suggesting that the dispute be sent to the Hague.

I thank you for your conciliatory and friendly telegram, whereas the communications of your Ambassador to my Minister today have been in a very different tone. Please clear up this difference. The Austro-Serbian problem must be submitted to the Hague Conference. I trust to your wisdom and friendship.

Nicholas

On the morning of the 30th, Nicholas wired the Kaiser an explanation of Russia's partial mobilization:

The military measures which have now come into force were decided five days ago for reasons of defense on account of Austria's preparations. I hope with all my heart that these measures won't interfere with your part as mediator which I greatly value. We need your strong pressure on Austria to come to an understanding with us.

Nicky

The Tsar's telegram announcing that Russia had mobilized against Austria put the Kaiser into a rage. "And these measures are for defense against Austria which is no way attacking him!!! I cannot agree to any more

mediation since the Tsar who requested it has at the same time secretly mobilized behind my back." After reading Nicholas's plea; "We need your strong pressure on Austria . . . ," William scribbled: "No, there is no thought of anything of that sort!!!"

On the afternoon of July 30, Sazonov telephoned Tsarskoe Selo to ask for an immediate interview. Nicholas came to the telephone and, suspecting the purpose, reluctantly asked his Foreign Minister to come to the palace at three p.m. When the two men met, Sazonov sadly told his sovereign, "I don't think Your Majesty can postpone the order for general mobilization." He added that, in his opinion, general war was unavoidable. Nicholas, pale and speaking in a choked voice, replied, "Think of the responsibility you are advising me to take. Remember, it would mean sending hundreds of thousands of Russian people to their deaths." Sazonov pointed out that everything had been done to avoid war. Germany and Austria, he declared, were "determined to increase their power by enslaving our natural allies in the Balkans, destroying our influence there, and reducing Russia to a pitiful dependence on the arbitrary will of the Central Powers." "The Tsar," Sazonov wrote later, "remained silent and his face showed the traces of a terrible inner struggle. At last, speaking with difficulty, he said, 'You are right. There is nothing left for us to do but *get* ready for an attack upon us. Give . . . my order for [general] mobilization.'"

Before news of Russia's general mobilization reached Berlin, two more telegrams passed between Potsdam and Tsarskoe Selo. First, Nicholas cabled to the Kaiser:

It is technically impossible for me to suspend my military preparations. But as long as conversations with Austria are not broken off, my troops will refrain from taking the offensive anyway, I give you my word of honor on that.

Nicky

William replied:

I have gone to the utmost limits of the possible in my efforts to save peace. It is not I who will bear the responsibility for the terrible disaster which now threatens the civilized world. You and you alone can still avert it. My friendship for you and your empire which my grandfather bequeathed to me on his deathbed is still sacred to me and I have been loyal to Russia when she was in

trouble, notably during your last war. Even now, you can still save the peace of Europe by stopping your military measures.

Willy

News of the general mobilization of the huge Russian army caused consternation in Berlin. At midnight on July 31, Count Pourtalès appeared in Sazonov's office with a German ultimatum to Russia to halt her mobilization within twelve hours. At noon the following day, August 1, Russia had not replied, and the Kaiser ordered general mobilization.

Nicholas hurriedly telegraphed to William:

I understand that you are compelled to mobilize but I should like to have the same guarantee from you that I gave you myself —that these measures do not mean war and that we shall continue to negotiate to save the general peace so dear to our hearts. With God's help our long and tried friendship should be able to prevent bloodshed. I confidently await your reply.

Nicky

Before this message arrived in Berlin, however, coded instructions had been sent by the German government to Count Pourtalès in St. Petersburg. He was instructed to declare war on Russia at five p.m. The Count was tardy and it was not until 7:10 p.m. that he appeared ashen-faced before Sazonov. Three times Pourtalès asked if Sazonov could not assure him that Russia would cancel its mobilization; three times Sazonov refused. "In that case, sir," said Pourtalès, "my government charges me to hand you this note. His Majesty the Emperor, my august sovereign, in the name of the empire accepts the challenge and considers himself in a state of war with Russia." Pourtalès was overcome with emotion. He leaned against a window and wept openly. "Who could have thought I should be leaving St. Petersburg under such circumstances," he said. Sazonov rose from his desk, embraced the elderly Count and helped him from the room.

At Peterhof, the Tsar and his family had just come from evening prayer. Before going to dinner, Nicholas went to his study to read the latest dispatches. The Empress and her daughters went straight to the dinner table to await the Tsar. Nicholas was in his study when Count Fredericks brought him the message from Sazonov that Germany had declared war. Shaken but calm, the Tsar instructed his ministers to come to the palace at nine p.m.

Meanwhile, Alexandra and the girls waited with growing uneasiness. The Empress had just asked Tatiana to go and bring her father to the table when Nicholas appeared in the doorway. In a tense voice he told them what had happened. Alexandra began to weep. The girls, badly frightened, followed their mother's example. Nicholas did what he could to calm them and then withdrew, without dinner. At nine p.m., Sazonov, Goremykin and other ministers arrived at the palace along with the French and British Ambassadors, Paléologue and Buchanan.

Four months later, in another conversation with Paléologue, Nicholas revealed how the day had ended for him. Late that night, after war had been declared, he had received another telegram from the Kaiser. It read:

An immediate, clear and unmistakable reply of your government [to the German ultimatum] is the sole way to avoid endless misery. Until I receive this reply, I am unable to my great grief to enter upon the subject of your telegram. I must ask most earnestly that you, without delay, order your troops under no circumstances to commit the slightest violation of our frontiers.

Almost certainly this message had been intended for delivery before the declaration of war and had been caught in the crowded bureaucratic pipeline. Yet it was composed during the same hours that his country was declaring war, an indication of the Kaiser's state of mind. To Nicholas, this last message he ever received from the German Emperor seemed a final revelation of William's character.

"He was never sincere; not a moment," Nicholas told Paléologue, speaking of the Kaiser. "In the end he was hopelessly entangled in the net of his own

perfidy and lies. ... It was half past one in the morning of August 2. ... I went to the Empress's room, as she was already in bed, to have a cup of tea with her before retiring myself. I stayed with her until two in the morning. Then I wanted to have a bath as I was very tired. I was just getting in when my servant knocked at the door saying he had 'a very important telegram . . . from His Majesty the Emperor William.' I read the telegram, read it again, and then repeated it aloud, but I couldn't understand a word. What on earth does William mean, I thought, pretending that it still depends on me whether war is averted or not? He implores me not to let my troops cross the frontier! Have I suddenly gone mad? Didn't the Minister of the Court, my trusted Fredericks, at least six hours ago

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bring me the declaration of war the German ambassador had just handed to Sazonov? I returned to the Empress's room and read her William's telegram. . . . She said immediately: 'You're not going to answer it, are you?' 'Certainly not!'

"There is no doubt that the object of this strange and farcical telegram was to shake my resolution, disconcert me and inspire me to some absurd and dishonorable step. It produced the opposite effect. As I left the Empress's room I felt that all was over forever between me and William. I slept extremely well. When I woke at my usual hour, I felt as if a weight had fallen from my mind. My responsibility to God and my people was still enormous, but at least I knew what I had to do."

PART THREE

CHAPTER TWENTY

For the Defense of Holy Russia

The next afternoon, August 2, 1914, the Tsar issued a formal proclamation of hostilities at the Winter Palace. It was a blazing-hot midsummer day. The palace square, one of the largest in Europe, was packed with thousands of

sweltering, excited people carrying banners, flags and icons and waiting impatiently for the moment when they could pour out their emotion in the presence of the sovereign himself. On the Neva side, where the Tsar would arrive by boat from Peterhof, crowds of people swarmed along the bridges and quays, singing and cheering. The river itself was teeming with yachts, steamers, sailboats, fishing smacks and rowboats, all streaming flags and crowded with spectators.

When Nicholas and Alexandra stepped onto the quay at the Palace Bridge, wave on wave of cheers rolled over them: *"Batiushka, Batiushka,* lead us to victory!" Nicholas wore the plain uniform of an infantry regiment. Alexandra, in a pure white dress, had turned up the brim of her picture hat so that the crowds could see her face. The four young Grand Duchesses walked behind, but the Tsarevich, still unable to walk because of his injury on the *Standart,* remained at Peterhof, weeping in disappointment.

Inside the palace, the Tsar and the Empress slowly made their way through the crush of people lining the grand staircases and wide corridors. As Nicholas passed, bowing and nodding, men and women dropped to their knees and frantically tried to kiss his hand. The service was held in the great white marble Salle de Nicholas, where five thousand people had jammed themselves beneath the glittering chandeliers. An altar had been erected in the center of the hall, and on it stood the miraculous icon, the Vladimir Mother of God. The icon, brought to Moscow in 1395, was said to have turned back Tamerlane. Before the icon in 1812 the grizzled General Kutuzov had

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prayed as he was leaving to take command of Tsar Alexander I's armies in the war against Napoleon. Now, at the beginning of a new war, Nicholas II invoked the icon's blessing. Raising his right hand, he pronounced in a low voice the oath taken by Alexander I in 1812 : "I solemnly swear that I will never make peace so long as **a** single enemy remains on Russian soil."

After taking the oath, Nicholas and Alexandra went to meet the expectant masses waiting outside. When the two small figures appeared alone on a red-draped balcony high above them, the great crowd knelt. Nicholas raised his

hand and tried to speak; the front rows hushed, but at the rear the excitement and commotion were too great and his words were drowned. Overwhelmed, Nicholas bowed his head. Seeing him, the crowd spontaneously began to sing the Imperial anthem whose chords make up the final crescendo of Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture":

God save the Tsar, Mighty and powerful, Let him reign for our glory,

For the confusion of our enemies, The Orthodox Tsar, God save the Tsar.

Hand in hand, the man in the khaki uniform and the woman in the white dress stood on the balcony and wept with the crowd. "To those thousands on their knees," declared Paléologue, "at that moment the Tsar was really the Autocrat, the military, political and religious director of his people, the absolute master of their bodies and souls."

It was the same throughout the empire: wild excitement, crowds filling the streets, laughing, weeping, singing, cheering, kissing. Overnight, a wave of patriotism swept over Russia. In Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, Kazan, Tula, Rostov, Tiflis, Tomsk and Irkutsk, workmen exchanged their red flags of revolution for the icons of Holy Russia and portraits of the Tsar. Students rushed from the universities to enlist. Army officers, caught in the street, were happily tossed in the air.

In St. Petersburg, every day brought new demonstrations in favor of the Tsar and Russia's allies. From his window in the French Embassy, Paléologue looked down on huge processions carrying flags and icons, shouting *"Vive la France/"* On August 5, as the German armies crossed the frontiers of neutral Belgium, a telegram from London to Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador, announced that England had entered the war. The same day, the Union Jack was

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hoisted into line with the Tricolor and the Russian Imperial banner. With a fine Gallic sense of detail, Paléologue noted that "the flags of the three nations blend eloquently. Composed of the same colors, blue, white and red, they are a picturesque and striking expression of the coalition."

At the German Embassy, an immense granite building surmounted on the roof by two huge bronze horses, the violent mob predicted by Count Pourtalès made a sudden vengeful appearance. Their rage was directed not at their own government, as Pourtalès had promised, but at his. Invading the building, they smashed windows, ripped tapestries and pictures and hurled into the street not only the Embassy furniture, china and glassware, but the Count's own priceless collection of Renaissance marbles and brasses. Ropes were coiled around the equestrian statues on the roof, hundreds of hands pulled and tugged, and with a crash the Kaiser's prancing horses toppled into the street.

In those early days, patriotism was closely tied to a deep-rooted fear of the Germans. "For Faith, Tsar and Country!" and "For the defense of Holy Russia!" were the calls that stirred the barracks, factories and villages. "The war with Japan," wrote Kerensky, was "dynastic and colonial," but "in 1914 the people immediately recognized the conflict with Germany as its own war ... a war which meant that the destinies of Russia were at stake." Rodzianko, walking in the streets of Petersburg, mingled with workers who a few days earlier had been chopping down telegraph poles, overturning streetcars and building barricades. "Now all Russia is involved," they told him. "We want to rally to our Tsar to make certain of victory over the Germans." Nobility and peasants burned with the same emotions. "This is not a political war," said Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, widow of the Tsar's uncle Vladimir. "It is a duel to the death between Slavism and Germanism. One of the two must succumb." An old peasant from Novgorod told Kokovtsov, the former Prime Minister, "If we are unlucky enough not to destroy the Germans, they'll come here. They'll reign over the whole of Russia and then they'll harness you and me—yes, you as well as me—to their plows."

The Duma sat only one day, August 8, passing the government's military budget without a dissenting vote. "War was declared and all at once, not a trace was left of the revolutionary movement," declared Kerensky. "Even the Bolshevik members of the Duma were forced to admit—though somewhat sullenly—that it was the duty of the proletariat to cooperate in the defense."

That Germany would be defeated, few Russians doubted; Britain's

entry made the outcome certain. There was controversy as to how long the war would go on. "Six months," said the pessimists, who argued that the Germans might fight. "The Germans don't know how to fight," replied the optimists. "They only know how to make sausages. All the Russians will have to do to annihilate the whole German army is simply to throw their caps at them."

Ancient tradition prescribed that Russian tsars begin their wars by going to Moscow to ask the blessing of God in the historic seat of tsarist rule, the Kremlin. If anything, when Nicholas and his family arrived in Moscow on August 17, the city was more wildly enthusiastic than St. Petersburg. A million people lined the streets, jammed balconies, windows and rooftops or clung from the branches of trees as the Imperial procession wound through the streets to the Kremlin's Iberian Gate. That night, inside the Kremlin, a private worry reappeared. "Alexis Nicolaievich is complaining a good deal of his leg tonight," Pierre Gilliard wrote in his diary. "Will he be able to walk tomorrow or will he have to be carried? The Tsar and Tsaritsa are in despair. The boy was not able to be present at the ceremony in the Winter Palace. It is always the same when he is supposed to appear in public . . . some complication will prevent it. Fate seems to pursue him."

On the following day, Gilliard continued: "When Alexis Nicolaievich found he could not walk this morning, he was in a terrible state. Their Majesties have decided he shall be present at the ceremony all the same. He will be carried by one of the Tsar's Cossacks. But it is a dreadful disappointment to the parents who do not wish the idea to gain ground among the people that the Heir to the Throne is an invalid."

At eleven, the Tsar, the Empress, their four daughters, the Tsare-vich, in the arms of a huge Cossack, and Grand Duchess Elizabeth, wearing the gray robe of her religious order, appeared in the St George Hall of the Kremlin. In the center of the hall, Nicholas proclaimed to the nobility and people of Moscow: "From this place, the very heart of Russia, I send my soul's greeting to my valiant troops and my noble allies. God is with us!" Moving into the Ouspensky Sobor—the Cathedral of the Assumption—where eighteen years earlier they had been crowned, the Tsar and the Empress

prayed before the lofty, jeweled iconostasis. In the flickering glow of hundreds of candles, through pungent clouds of sweet incense, they walked around the church to kneel and pray before the tombs of Russia's patriarchs.

The triumphant setting and the glorious display of pomp and piety seemed an eloquent dramatization of the basic principle of the Russian autocracy: "As it is God Himself who has given us our supreme power, it is before His altar that we are responsible for the destinies of Russia."

The following morning, while Moscow still seethed with excitement, Gilliard and his young pupil slipped quietly out of the Kremlin for a drive into the hills outside the city. Returning through narrow streets clogged with workmen and peasants, their unescorted automobile was slowed and halted by the mass. Surging on all sides of the auto, the crowd suddenly recognized its young passenger. "The Heir! The Heir!" they shouted, struggling for a better view. As those nearest the car were crushed against its sides, the bolder of them thrust their arms inside and touched Alexis. "I've touched him! I've touched the Heir!" shouted a woman in triumph. Frightened and pale, the Tsarevich huddled back in the seat while Gilliard frantically tried to get the car moving. Eventually the auto was rescued by two large Moscow policemen who happened on the scene and moved the crowd back with much puffing and shouting.

When the Imperial family returned to Tsarskoe Selo on August 22, Nicholas was exhilarated. The two largest cities of his empire had given spontaneous, overwhelming demonstrations of affection and patriotism. Determined to be worthy, Nicholas issued a decree intended to expunge every blemish from the holy crusade on which Russia was embarking. Throughout the empire, the sale of vodka was banned for the duration of the war. The gesture, coming at a moment when military expenditures were soaring, was more noble than wise, for the sale of vodka was a state monopoly from which the Imperial government drew a substantial proportion of its revenue. Nor did the ban stop drinking in Russia; the rich drew from their well-stocked cellars, the poor made alcohol at home. In a second burst of enthusiastic patriotism, after returning from Moscow, Nicholas suddenly changed the

name of his own capital. On August 31, 1914, the German St. Petersburg was changed to the Slav Petrograd.

In the opening days of the war, the same heady emotions surged through Paris, London and Berlin. But after the trumpets had sounded, the hymns had been sung and the men had marched away, then war began its stern testing of the nations. In the terrible years ahead, Britain, France and Germany each called up deep reserves of national purpose and strength. But in Russia, behind the massive façade of an enormous empire, the apparatus of government, the structure of society and economy were too primitive, too inflexible, and too brittle

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to withstand the enormous strains of a great four-year war.

Two shrewd and cunning Russians sensed this danger immediately. From the beginning, although their voices were drowned in the gush of war excitement, Rasputin and Witte opposed the war. Still close to the villages, Rasputin sensed what war would cost in peasant blood. Once before, in 1908, he had argued against fighting Austria over the annexation of Bosnia: "The Balkans are not worth fighting for," he had said. In 1914, still lying in bed in Siberia recovering from his stab wounds, he telegraphed, "Let Papa not plan war, for with the war will come the end of Russia and yourselves and you will lose to the last man." Anna Vyrubova, who delivered the telegram to the Tsar, reported that he angrily tore it to pieces before her eyes. Rasputin was undeterred. Taking a large piece of paper, writing in almost illegible letters, he scrawled this ominous prophecy:

Dear friend, I will say again a menacing cloud is over Russia lots of sorrow and grief it is dark and there is no lightening to be seen. A sea of tears immeasurable and as to blood? What can I say? There are no words the horror of it is indescribable. I know they keep wanting war from you evidently not knowing that this is destruction. Heavy is God's punishment when he takes away reason that is the beginning of the end. Thou art the Tsar Father of the People don't allow the madmen to triumph and destroy themselves and the People. Well, they will conquer Germany and what about Russia? If one thinks then verily there has not been a greater sufferer since

the beginning of time she is all drowned in blood. Terrible is the destruction and without end the grief.

Gregory

Witte, abroad when the war broke out, hurried home to urge that Russia withdraw immediately. He spoke bluntly to Paléologue: "This war is madness. . . . Why should Russia fight? Our prestige in the Balkans, our pious duty to help our blood brothers? . . . That is a romantic, old-fashioned chimera. No one here, no thinking man at least, cares a fig for these turbulent and vain Balkan folk who have nothing Slav about them and are only Turks christened by the wrong name. We ought to have let the Serbs suffer the chastisement they deserved. So much for the origin of the war. Now let's talk about the profit; and rewards it will bring us. What can we hope to get? An increase of territory. Great Heavens! Isn't His Majesty's empire big enough already? Haven't we in Siberia, Turkestan, the Caucasus, Russia itself, enormous areas which have not yet been opened up? Then what are the conquests they dangle before our eyes? East Prussia?

Nicholas II, painted by Serov

Empress Alexandra

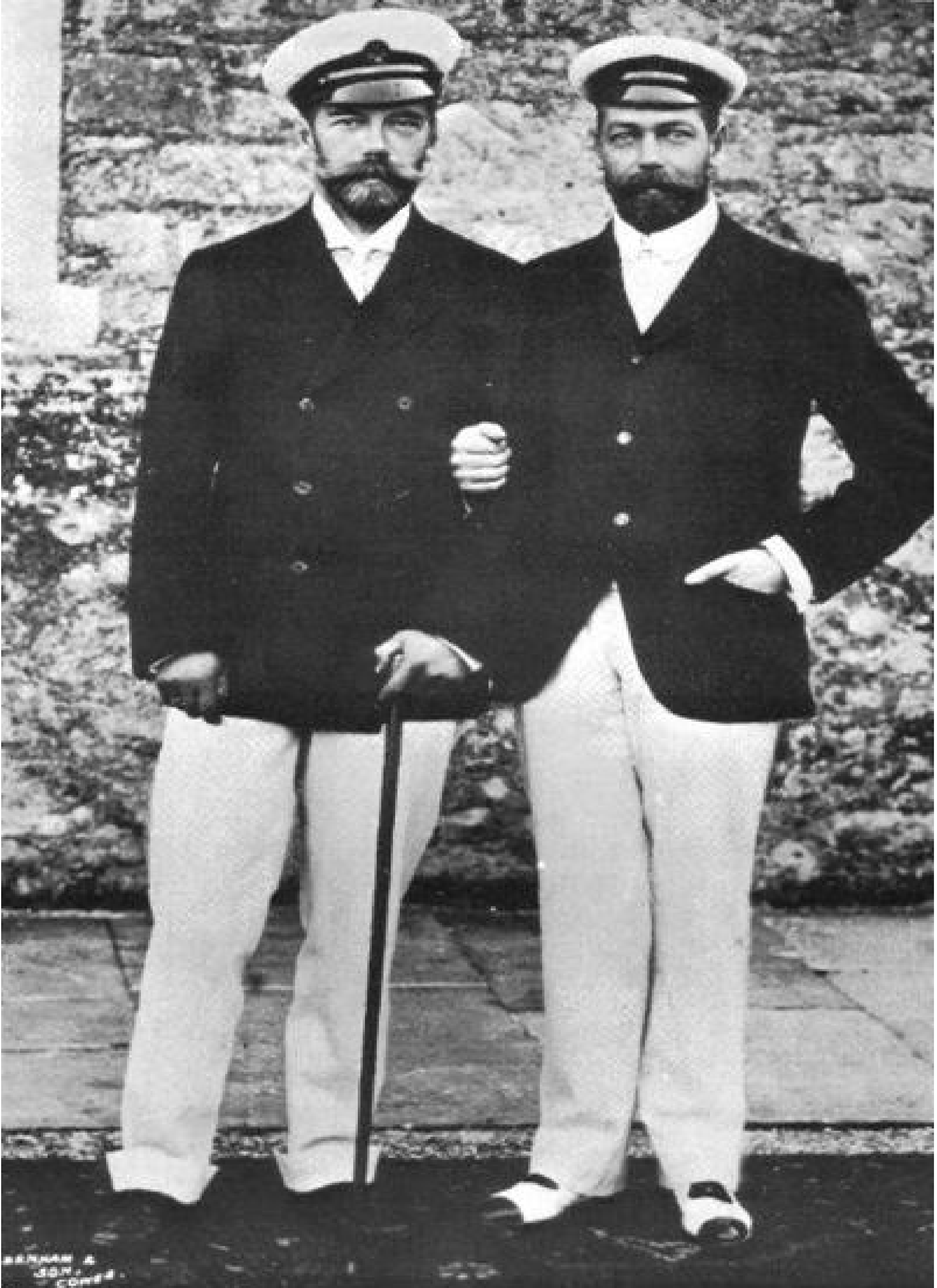
The Tsarevich Alexis

Nicholas s family: (left to right) *Michael, Empress Marie, Nicholas, Xenia, George* Seated: *Tsar Alexander III holding Olga*

Mathilde Kschessinska

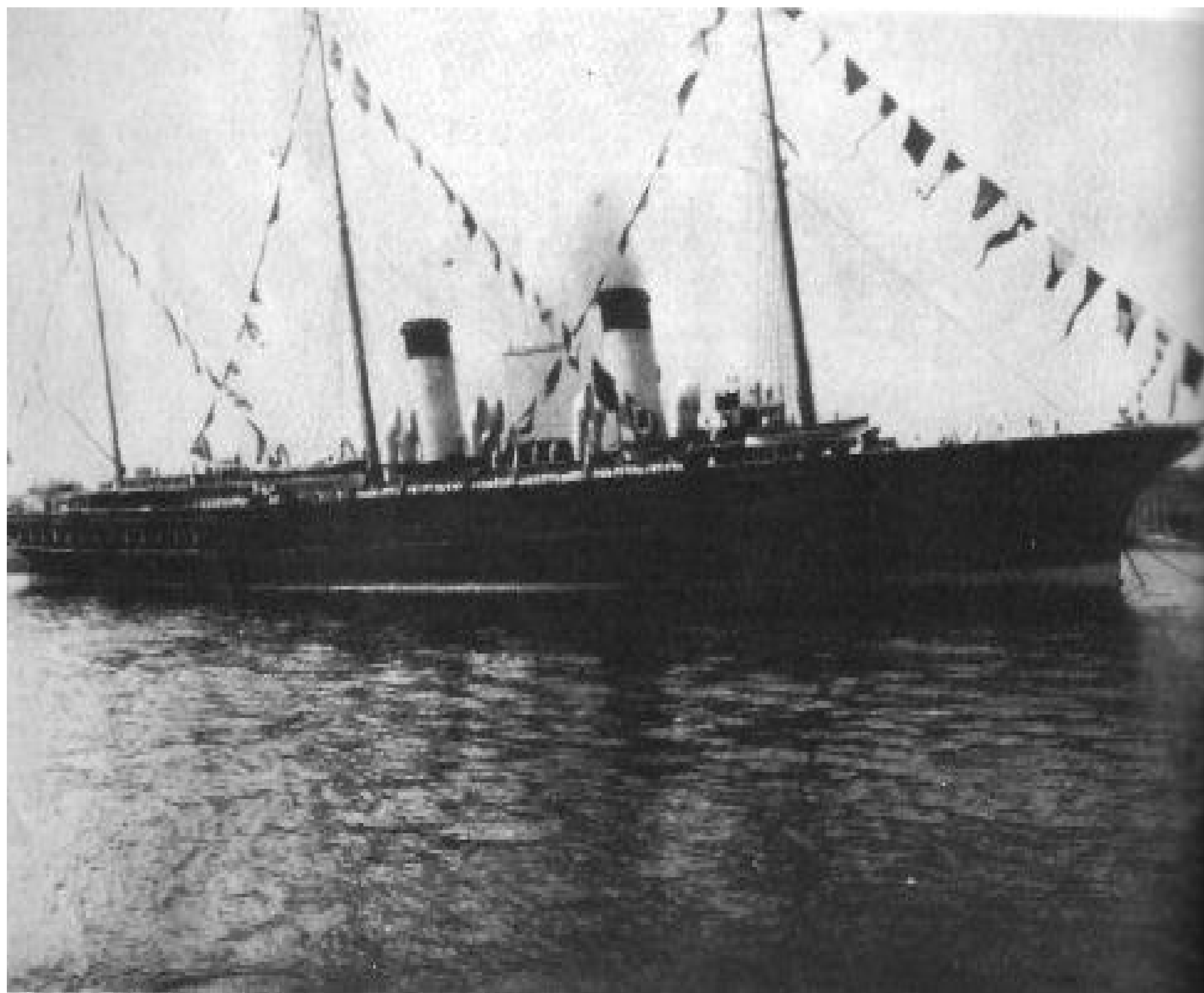
The Grand Tour: Nicholas, a Maharajah, Prince George of Greece

Alix at seventeen before her first ball. Mrs. Orchard, Alix (seated), *Grand Duchess Elizabeth*


SON.
COWES.

Nicholas II and the Frince of Wales, later King George V, at Cowes, 1909

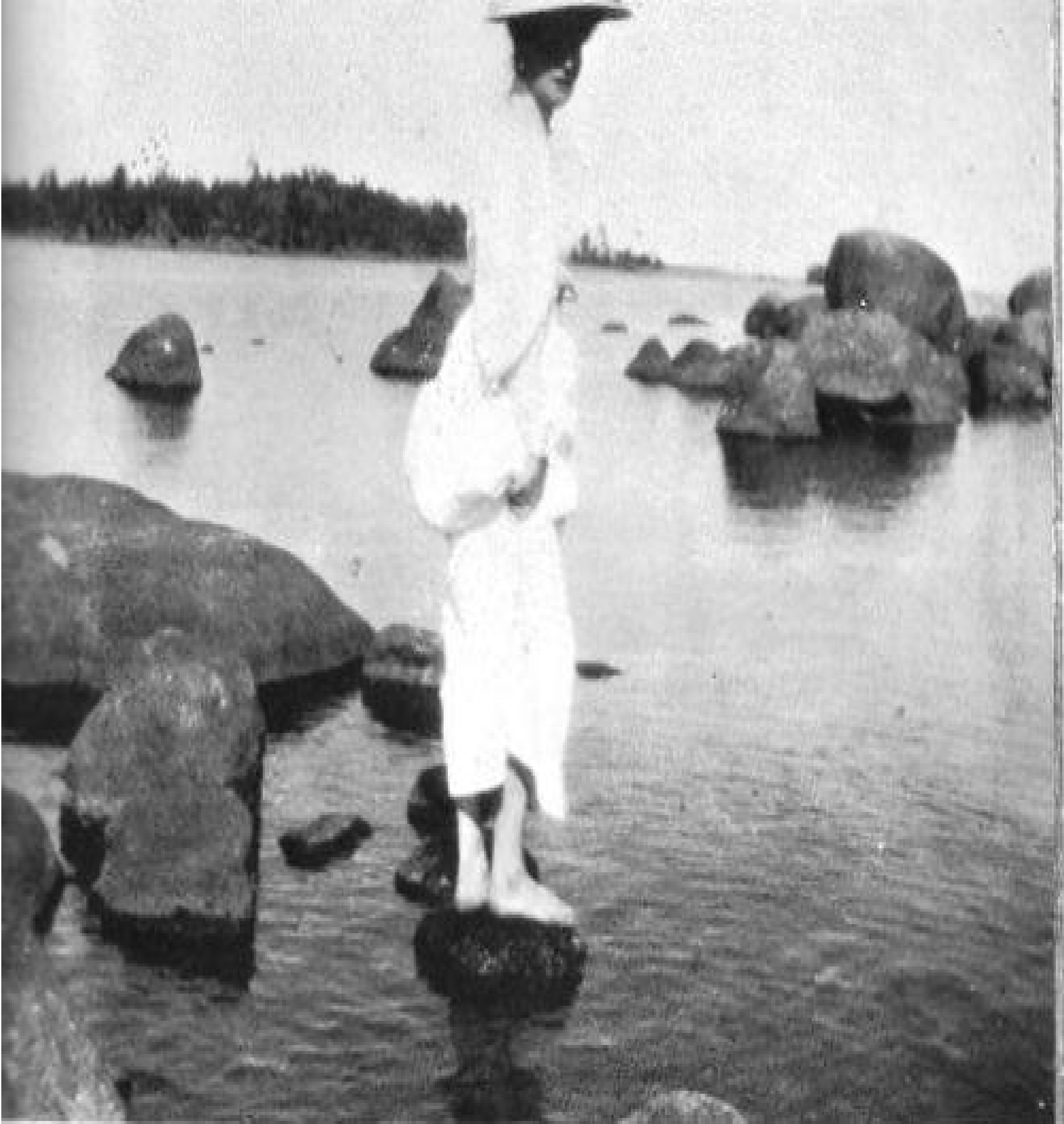
Alexandra and her daughters arriving aboard the Imperial yacht Standart



Pierre Gilliard and Alexis

Nicholas and Alexandra aboard the Standart

facing: above, *Picnick*-*in*g *on the coast of Finland: Alexandra, Anna Vyrubova,and Olga, the Empress's eldest daughter;* below, *Derevenko and Alexis*



The Empress

The Tsar

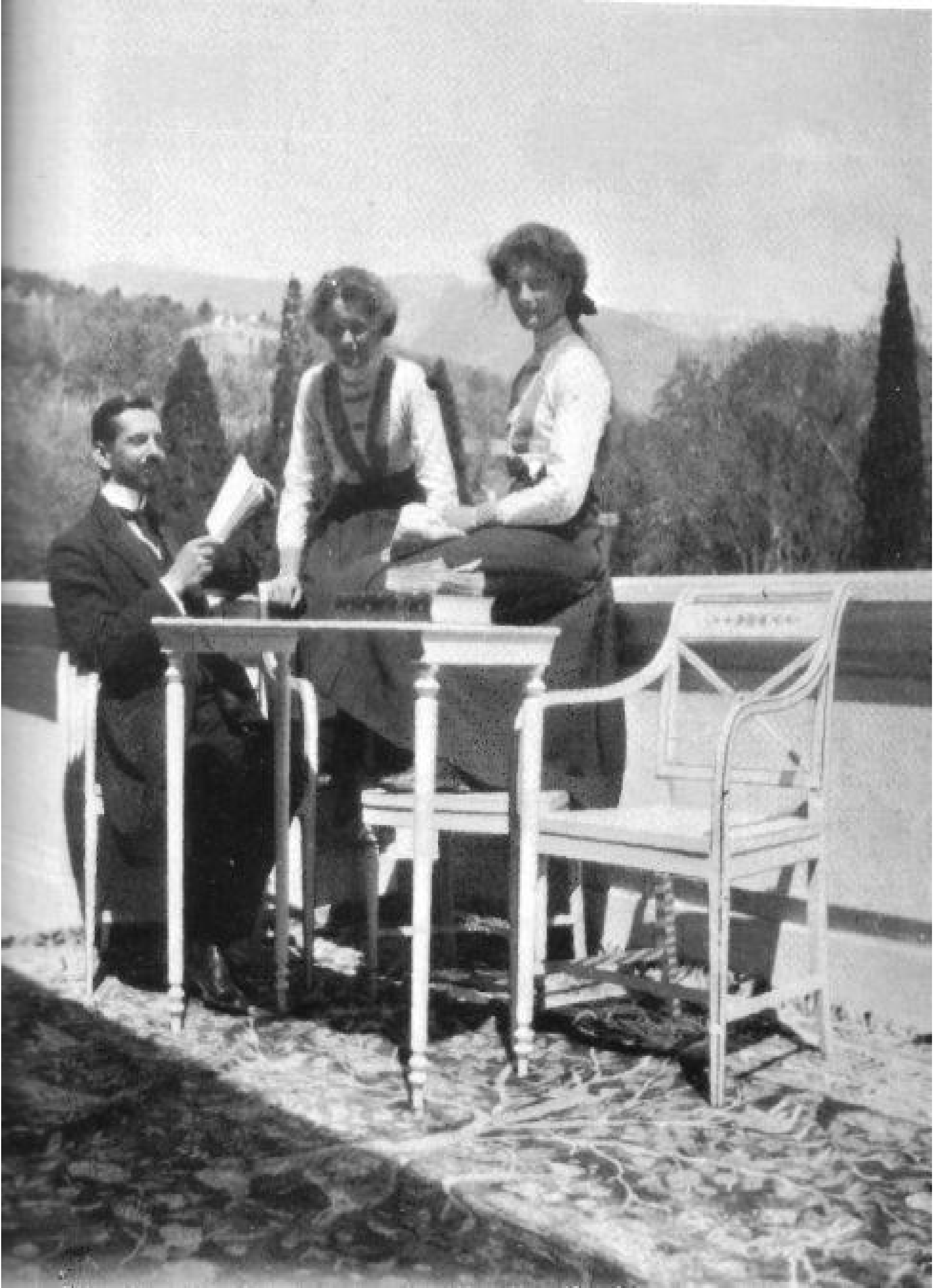
Nicholas with his officers

Nicholas with Alexis, just before setting out on an all-day march to test the Russian private soldier's uniform and equipment

Alexandra in her mauve boudoir With Alexis

Nagorny pulling Alexis (third from left) and his friends

Derevenko and Alexis (third from right)



Livadia: Pierre Gilliard with Olga and Tatiana

At Spala: Alexandra

After Spala: Alexis. The Tsarevich's left leg is bent and a metal brace is attached to his shoe

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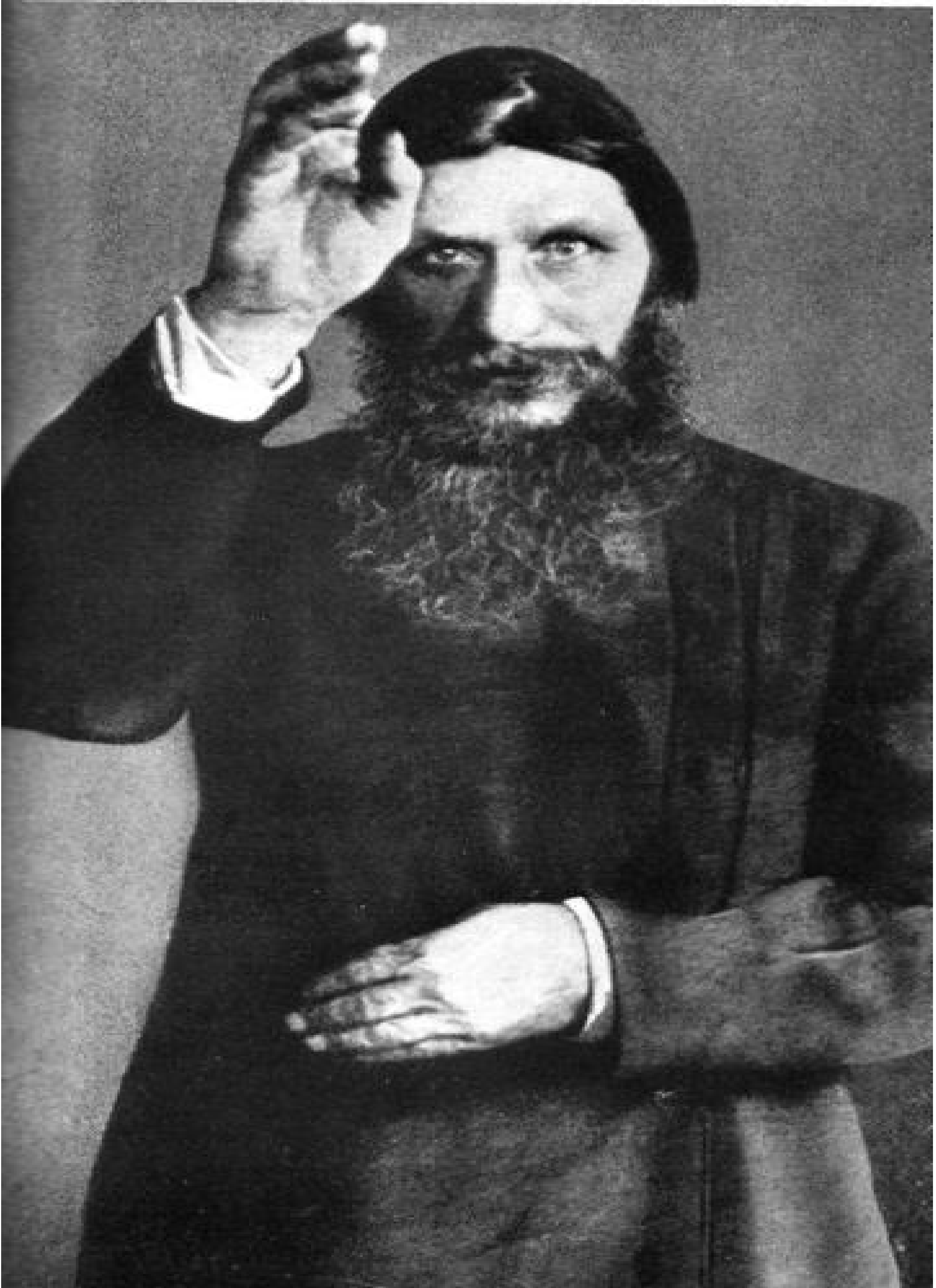

In a hospital: (from left) *Olga* (partly hidden), *Tatiana* (foreground), *Alexandra Nicholas and Alexis inspecting a Cossack regiment during the war*

The Tsar with Grand Duke Nicholas

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facing: *Anastasia*

Marie, Tatiana, and Olga (seated)

Nicholas, Alexis, and Tatiana, 1916

Hasn't the Emperor too many Germans among his subjects already? Galicia? It's full of Jews! . . . Constantinople, the Cross on Santa Sophia, the Bosporous, the Dardanelles. It's too mad a notion to be worth a moment's consideration. And even if we assume a complete victory, the Hohenzollerns and Hapsburgs reduced to begging for peace and submitting to our terms—it means not only the end of German domination, but the proclamation of republics throughout central Europe. That means the simultaneous end of Tsarism. I prefer to remain silent as to what we may expect on the hypothesis of our defeat. . . . My practical conclusion is that we must liquidate this stupid adventure as soon as possible."

Paléologue, whose job it was to do everything possible to keep Russia in the war fighting on France's side, watched Witte go and mused on the old stateman's character: "an enigmatic, unnerving individual, a great intellect, despotic, disdainful, conscious of his powers, a prey to ambition, jealousy, and pride." Witte's views, he reflected, were "evil" and "dangerous" to France as well as to Russia.

Nowhere was Nicholas's optimism more keenly shared than among the officers of the Russian army. Those unlucky enough to be stationed with regiments far from the frontier were frantic with worry lest it all be over before they had a chance to see action. Guards officers, fortunate enough to be leaving immediately for the front, asked whether they should pack their dress uniforms for the ceremonial parade down the Unter den Linden. They were advised to go ahead and let their braid and plumes follow by the next courier.

Day after day, the capital trembled to the cadence of marching men. From dawn until nightfall, infantry regiments marched down the Nevsky Prospect, bound for the Warsaw Station and the front. Outside the city, other regiments of infantry, cavalry squadrons and batteries of horse artillery clogged the roads leading toward the Baltic provinces and East Prussia. In motion with only casual organization, the soldiers walked rather than marched, followed in no particular order by long columns of baggage carts, ammunition

wagons, ambulances, field kitchens and remount horses. So dense were the moving columns that in places they left the roads and spread out across the dry summer fields, swarming in a jumbled confusion of dust, shouts, horses' hoofs and rumbling wheels, recalling the Tartar hordes of the thirteenth century.

Paléologue, driving back to the capital from an audience with the Tsar, encountered one of these regiments marching along a road. The

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general, recognizing the Ambassador, saluted and boomed out, "We'll destroy those filthy Prussians! No more Prussia! No more Germany! William to St. Helena!" As each company paraded past Paléologue's car, the general rose in his stirrups and bellowed, "The French Ambassador! Hurrah!" The soldiers cheered frantically, "Hurrah! Hurrah!" Finally, the general galloped away, shouting over his shoulder, "William to St. Helena! William to St. Helena!"

Sometimes, women with children followed for the first few miles: "One . . . was very young . . . and she was pressing a baby to her breast. She was striding out as well as she could to keep pace with the man at the rear of the file, a fine fellow, tanned and muscular. They did not exchange a word, but gazed fixedly at each other with loving, haggard eyes. Three times in succession, I saw the young mother offer the baby to the soldier for a kiss."

The same scenes were repeated in railway stations in every town and village in Russia. In Moscow, British Consul R. H. Bruce Lockhart remembered: "the troops grey with dust and closely packed in cattle trucks; the vast crowd on the platform to wish them Godspeed; grave, bearded fathers, wives and mothers, smiling bravely through their tears ... ; fat priests to bless the happy warriors. The crowd sways forward for a last handshake and last embrace. There is a shrill whistle from the engine. Then, with many false starts, the overloaded train, as though reluctant to depart, crawls slowly out of the station and disappears in the grey twilight of the Moscow night. Silent and bareheaded, the crowd remains motionless until the last faint echo of the song of the men, who are never to return, has faded into nothing."

Somehow, it was the men rather than the officers who sensed what was coming. Beneath the gaudy talk of parades in Berlin and cries of "William to St. Helena!" many a Russian soldier marched to war suffused with a melancholy resignation that he would never see his family or his village again. At the front, General Alfred Knox, a British military attaché, found a tall young recruit from Kiev downhearted because he had left his wife and five children. Knox tried to cheer him, telling him he would come back, but the soldier only shook his head and said, "They say it is a wide road that leads to war and only a narrow path that leads home again."

In sheer numbers of soldiers, the Russian army was a colossus. The pre-war regular strength of the army was 1,400,000; mobilization immediately added 3,100,000 reserves. Behind this initial mass stood millions more. During three years of war, 15,500,000 men marched

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away to fight for the Tsar and Holy Russia. In the British press, this mass of bodies ready to bleed was reassuringly described as "the Russian steamroller."

In every respect except numbers of men, Russia was unprepared for war. The railroads were hopelessly inadequate; for every yard of Russian track per square mile, Germany had ten. French and German reserves moving to the front traveled 150 to 200 miles; in Russia, the average journey was 800 miles. A general commanding a Siberian corps told Knox that he had been on a train for twenty-three days bringing men to the front. Once the operations began, the supremacy of German railroads allowed the German command to move whole armies rapidly from one front to another. On the Russian side, said Knox, "the Supreme Command ordered, but the railroads decided."

Russian industry was small and primitive. For every factory in Russia, there were 150 in Great Britain. Russian generals, expecting a short war, had accumulated limited reserves of weapons and ammunition. Russian guns, having fired all their ammunition, quickly fell silent, while enemy shells, arriving steadily from German factories, burst continually overhead. At one

point, Russian artillerymen were threatened with court-martial if they fired more than three rounds per day.

Russia's immense and isolated geography made it impossible for the Western Allies to help. Germany easily blockaded the Baltic, and Turkey, entering the war against the Allies in November 1914, barred the Dardanelles and the Black Sea. Communication remained only through Archangel, frozen solid in the winter, and Vladivostock on the Pacific. Russian exports dropped 98 percent and imports 95 percent. An average of 1,250 ships called at Russian ports *annually* during the war, while arrivals in British ports amounted to 2,200 *weekly.* Once the British and French attempt to break the blockade by storming the Dardanelles at Gallipoli had failed, Russia became a "barred house which could be entered only through the chimney."

Not all the flaws lay in technology and geography. At its summit, the Russian army was commanded by two men who hated each other: General Vladimir Sukhomlinov, the Minister of War, and Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaievich, the Tsar's distant cousin, who commanded the armies in the field. Sukhomlinov was a small chubby man with a fat feline face of whom Paléologue observed, "with his sly look, his eyes always gleaming watchfully under the heavy folds of his eyelids, I know few men who inspire more distrust at first sight." Although totally bald and advancing on seventy, Sukhomlinov retained a strong taste for expensive pleasures including a voluptuous wife thirty-two

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years his junior. Mme. Sukhomlinov enjoyed giving enormous parties, clothing herself in Paris and vacationing on the Riviera; her husband was left to pay the bills as best he could. Allowed a handsome traveling allowance based on mileage, he conducted frequent inspection trips to Vladivostock, eight thousand round-trip miles from his office. Once there, local officers found that the War Minister disliked leaving his train.

Sukhomlinov's reputation was not so much bad as a mournful joke. "The true picture of a drawing room soldier, scented, pomaded, with gold chain bracelets on his white wrists," recalled a lady who met him in society. "In spite of his mature age, Sukhomlinov was . . . eager for pleasure like a

youth," wrote Sazonov, his ministerial colleague. "He enjoyed life and disliked work. ... It was very difficult to make him work, but to get him to tell the truth was well-nigh impossible." Nevertheless, along with supporting his wife, it was Sukhomlinov's responsibility to organize and equip the Russian army. A former cavalry officer who had won the Cross of St. George in the 1878 war against the Turks, he believed in the charge—the cavalry with sabers, the infantry with bayonets. Modern weapons, such as machine guns and rapid-firing artillery, he thought unworthy of brave men. As a result, the Russian army entered the war with half as much field artillery as the Germans—seven field-gun batteries per division as opposed to fourteen—and 60 batteries of heavy artillery compared to 381. "Sukhomlinov," explained General Nicholas Golovine, who served under him, "believed that knowledge acquired by him in the 'seventies of the last century and largely of no further practical importance, was permanent truth. His ignorance went hand in hand with an extraordinary light-mindedness. These two personal characteristics enabled him to treat the most complicated military questions with astonishing levity. His attitude of easy assurance made the impression on those not familiar with the complicated technique of modern military art that Sukhomlinov handled such problems well and took the right decisions quickly."

Most significantly, Sukhomlinov made this impression on the Tsar. Like many rogues, he could be enormously charming, and he carefully did everything in his power to please Nicholas. His reports, unlike those of other ministers, were brief and free from gloomy predictions. Knowing that the Tsar took pride in the army, he gave constant assurance that morale and equipment were in splendid condition. When he reported in person, he larded his talk with selections from his vast fund of funny stories. At court, he was known as *"General Fly-Off"* because of his alertness and speed in anticipating the Tsar's

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wishes. Nicholas enjoyed him greatly, and, watching the superbly polished regiments of the Imperial Guard march past on parade, could not believe that the Russian army was unready for war.

Sukhomlinov was a courtier who used high military rank to support a lavish way of life. His arch-rival, the Commander-in-Chief in the field, Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaievich, was a prince of the Imperial blood, a grandson of Tsar Nicholas I. Although born to great wealth and impeccable position, Nicholas Nicolaievich devoted his life to service in the army. In appearance, the fifty-seven-year-old Grand Duke was awesome. Standing six feet six inches tall, with a thin body, blazing blue eyes in a narrow face, his beard trimmed to a neat point, a dagger or sword hanging from his belt, he was the ancient warrior chieftain. "He was the most admired man in the army, not only an old-fashioned soldier, but deeply Slav," wrote Paléologue. "His whole being exuded a fierce energy. His incisive measured speech, flashing eyes and quick, nervous movements, hard, steel-trap mouth and gigantic stature personify imperious and impetuous audacity."

In the army, the Grand Duke inspired feelings of awe. By "the peasant soldiers of the Russian army," declared Knox, "... he was regarded as a sort of legendary champion of Holy Russia. . . . They felt that, though he was a strict disciplinarian and very exacting . . . he would ask from the private soldier no greater effort than he . . . imposed upon himself."

Naturally enough, the Commander-in-Chief and the Minister of War despised each other. The Grand Duke took his responsibilities as seriously as Sukhomlinov took his lightly. In 1908, when the Duma had criticized the appearance of members of the Imperial family in high military ranks, Nicholas Nicolaievich resigned from active command. Sukhomlinov, appointed War Minister in 1909, had seen a clear field for his own advancement to the more glamorous role of Commander-in-Chief once war was declared. To his chagrin, in 1914 the Tsar, having been dissuaded from assuming personal command of the armies in the field, appointed his cousin to the post. Thereafter, both in word and in deed, the jealous War Minister did what he could to undercut the Grand Duke. At one point, with messages streaming in begging for more shells, Sukhomlinov refused to raise the order for more ammunition. When the Chief of Artillery came to him weeping to say that Russia would have to make peace because of the shortage of shells, Sukhomlinov told him curtly to "go to the devil and shut up."

Both in Berlin and in Paris, strategy was tailored to the size and

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clumsiness of the Russian colossus. Aware that the state of Russia's railroads would not permit a rapid concentration of the Tsar's millions of soldiers, the German General Staff planned that the weeks before the cumbersome giant could move should be used to destroy France. "We hope in six weeks after the beginning of operations to have finished with France, or at least so far as to enable us to direct our principal forces against the East," General von Moltke, Chief of the German General Staff, told his nervous Austrian counterpart in May 1914. The Kaiser characteristically expressed the German plan more crudely: "Lunch in Paris, dinner in St. Petersburg."

Knowing that the blow was coming, French generals and diplomats had struggled single-mindedly for twenty years to ensure that the Russians would move quickly in the East once war began. To speed up Russian mobilization, France had poured money into her ally; the loans were given strictly on condition that they be used to build railroads leading to the German frontier. Even with this new track, the number of men in position by M-15—fifteen days after mobilization— would be only a fraction of Russia's strength. Nevertheless, France insisted that the Russians attack on M-15 with whatever they had ready; the French counted on seven hundred thousand men. To wait longer meant catastrophe for France.

In its first weeks, the war ran brilliantly according to the German timetable. Through the hot weeks of August, the cream of the German army, one million men in gray uniforms, moved like a human scythe across Belgium and northern France. On September 2, less than a month after crossing the frontier, the Kaiser's weary advance guard stood thirty miles north of Paris. With a single lunge, they would be on the Champs-Elysées.

From the day war began, the primary mission of the French Ambassador in St. Petersburg was to urge the Russians to hurry. With a stream of anguished telegrams from Paris flowing into his Embassy, Paléologue bustled from one office to the next, begging, imploring and demanding haste. On August 5, he told the Tsar, "The French army will have to face the formidable onslaught of twenty-five German corps. I, therefore, implore Your Majesty to order

your troops to take the offensive immediately. If they do not, there is danger that the French army may be crushed." Nicholas responded emotionally. Reaching out and clasping Paléologue in his arms, he said, *"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur,* let me embrace in you my dear and glorious France. . . . The moment mobilization is complete I shall order an advance. My

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troops are most enthusiastic. The attack will be pressed with the greatest vigor. No doubt you know that the Grand Duke Nicholas is extraordinarily forceful."

On the same day, the Ambassador called on the Grand Duke: "The generalissimo received me in his enormous study where maps were spread out on all the tables. He came towards me with his quick firm strides. 'God and Joan of Arc are with us,' he exclaimed. 'We shall win. . . .' " "How soon will you order the offensive, Monseigneur?" asked Paléologue. "Perhaps I shan't even wait until the concentration of all my corps is complete. As soon as I feel myself strong enough, I shall attack. It will probably be the 14th of August." Escorting Paléologue to the door, he vigorously shook the Ambassador's hand, crying, "And now, into God's hands."

The Grand Duke was as good as his word. The front he commanded was 550 miles long, beginning in the north on the Baltic where the Russian Baltic provinces bordered East Prussia. From there, the front curved south and west around the enormous bulge that made up Russian Poland. Then, along the bottom of the Polish bulge, it ran eastward to the frontier of the Ukraine. On the southern sector of this long line, in the Austrian province of Galicia, an Austro-Hungarian army of one million men was massing. West of Warsaw, on the direct line to Berlin, the Russians could not advance because of the danger on their lengthy Galician and East Prussian flanks. The Russian attack, therefore, was delivered in the north, against East Prussia.

Two Russian armies were selected to make the attack. The First Army, consisting of 200,000 men under General Rennenkampf, was to move southwest parallel to the Baltic coast, while the Second Army, 170,000 men under General Samsonov, would advance northward from Poland. Rennenkampf's army was to start first, drawing on itself the bulk of the

German forces in East Prussia. Two days later, once the Germans were fully engaged, Samsonov was to strike north for the Baltic, putting himself across the rear of the Germans fighting Rennenkampf. Each of the Russian armies individually was larger than the German force. If the Grand Duke's strategy worked, the Germans would be ground up between the two armies, and the Russians would begin crossing the Vistula River below Danzig. Ahead of them, the road to Berlin—only 150 miles away—would lie open.

Because of the need for haste, the Russian offensive was assembled piecemeal. Grand Duke Nicholas did not leave the capital for field headquarters until midnight of August 13. Allowing his train to be shunted onto sidings so that troop trains could pass, he took fifty-seven hours for the journey and arrived on the morning of the 16th.

General Samsonov, commander of the Second Army, was an asthmatic and had been on leave with his wife in the Caucasus. He arrived at his headquarters on the 16th to find his troops already on the march toward the frontier. General Rennenkampf, a swashbuckling cavalry officer, sent his Cossacks raiding across the border as early as the 12th. A German machine gun, captured on one of these forays, appeared as a trophy two days later on the lawn at Peterhof, where it was examined with interest by the Tsar and the Tsarevich. On August 17, Rennenkampf's entire army advanced, driving the German frontier troops before them. In these first skirmishes, Rennenkampf's tactics recalled the Napoleonic Wars one hundred years before. Under fire from German cannon, the General sent his cavalry to charge the guns. As a result, in the war's first engagements many young Guards officers, the flower of Russia's aristocratic youth, were shot from their saddles.

Although the German General Staff had anticipated a Russian advance into East Prussia, the news that Cossack horsemen were riding over the rich farms and estates of Junker aristocrats sent a thrill of horror through Berlin. Temporarily ignoring the Russian Second Army moving up from the south, the Germans engaged Rennenkampf's force on August 20. The Russian artillery, firing 440 shells per day, was effective, and the result was a partial German defeat. In desperation, the German General Staff hastily dispatched

a new pair of generals to take command. On August 22, Paul Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, the formidable military duo which was to lead Germany through four years of war, were both aboard the same train bound for East Prussia.

While Rennenkampf rested—too long—from his victory, Samsonov's army was struggling north through the wild, uninhabited country north of the Polish border. The route lay through a maze of pine and birch forests intersected by streams and marshes, with few inhabitants, poor roads and no railroads. There were few farms on this sandy soil, and the army ate only what it could pull behind it in carts. On the eve of battle, some of the men had been without their full ration of bread for five days.

Despite their hardships, Samsonov's men struggled forward. Many of the men, coming from small Russian villages, were pleased at the sight of the East Prussian towns. Soldiers of the 23rd Corps, reaching the town of Allenstein, cheered enthusiastically, believing themselves to be entering Berlin. Samsonov himself was less sanguine. At the end of a long chain which began in Paris, passed through Paléologue, the Grand Duke and the Northwest Front commander, Samsonov received

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constant signals to hurry. "Advancing according to timetable, without halting, covering marches of more than 12 miles a day over sand. I cannot go more quickly," he telegraphed back. As it was, his men were hungry, his horses without oats, his supply columns disorganized, his artillery mired.

On August 24, a day after their arrival in East Prussia, Hindenburg and Ludendorff decided on a sweeping gamble. Leaving only two brigades of cavalry to face Rennenkampf, whose army still was motionless five days after its victory, they loaded every other German soldier onto trains and trundled them south to meet Samsonov. By August 25, the transfer was complete. Rennenkampf still had not resumed his advance, and Samsonov was now confronted by an army equal in size and vastly superior in artillery. Informing General Jilinsky, commander of the Russian Northern Front, of his predicament, Samsonov was rudely told, "To see the enemy where he

does not exist is cowardice. I will not allow General Samsonov to play the coward. I insist that he continue the offensive."

In four days of battle, Samsonov's exhausted troops did what they could. Nevertheless, faced with hurricane barrages of German artillery, enveloped on three sides by German infantry, the Second Army disintegrated. Samsonov was fatalistic. "The enemy has luck one day, we will have luck another," he said and rode off alone into the forest to shoot himself.

The Germans named their victory the Battle of Tannenberg in revenge for a famous Slav defeat of the Teutonic Knights near the same site in 1410. At Tannenberg, the Russians lost 110,000 men, including 90,000 prisoners. Blame fell on General Jilinsky, who was replaced, and on Rennenkampf, who was discharged from the army. Grand Duke Nicholas, whose southern armies were winning a great victory against the Austrians in Galicia, met the defeat at Tannenberg with equanimity. "We are happy to have made such sacrifices for our allies," he declared when the French military attaché at his headquarters offered condolences. In St. Petersburg, Sazonov told Paléologue, "Samsonov's army has been destroyed. That's all I know," and then added quietly, "We owed this sacrifice to France, as she has showed herself a perfect ally." Paléologue, thanking the Foreign Minister for the generosity of his thought, hurried on to discuss the only thing that truly concerned him: the massive threat to Paris which was mounting by the hour.

For all the reckless gallantry and foolish ineptitude of the premature Russian offensive, it nevertheless achieved its primary objective: the diversion of German forces from the West. The limited penetration

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of East Prussia had had a magnified effect. Refugees, many of them high-born, had descended in fury and despair on Berlin, the Kaiser was outraged, and von Moltke himself admitted that "all the success on the Western front will be unavailing if the Russians arrive in Berlin." On August 25, before the decisive blow against Samsonov, von Moltke violated his supposedly inviolable war plan of ignoring the Russians until France was finished. On urgent orders, two army corps and a cavalry division were stripped from the German right wing in France and rushed to the East. They arrived too late

for Tannenberg; they could not be returned before the Marne. "This was perhaps our salvation," wrote General Dupont, one of Joffre's aides. "Such a mistake made by the Chief of the German General Staff in 1914 must have made the other Moltke, his uncle, turn in his grave."

As France's generals had foreseen, one key to the salvation of France lay in immediately setting the Russian colossus in motion. Whether the colossus met victory or defeat mattered little as long as the Germans were distracted from their overwhelming lunge at Paris. In that sense the Russian soldiers who died in the forests of East Prussia contributed as much to the Allied cause as the Frenchmen who died on the Marne.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Stavka

At the outbreak of war, Nicholas's first impulse had been to take command of the army himself, assuming the ancient role of warrior-tsar at the head of his troops. He was urgently dissuaded by his ministers, who pleaded that he not risk his prestige as sovereign, especially—as Sazonov put it—"as it is to be expected that we may be forced to retreat during the first weeks." The supreme command went to Grand Duke Nicholas, who departed with his staff from Petrograd on August 13 to establish field headquarters at Baranovichi, a Polish railway junction midway between the German and Austrian fronts. The camp, called *Stavka* after an old Russian word meaning the military camp of a chief, was set off the main Moscow-Warsaw track in a forest of birch and pine. Here, surrounded by three concentric rings of sentries, the Grand Duke and his officers lived and worked in a dozen army trains drawn up fanwise beneath the trees. In time, as the encampment became semi-permanent, roofs were built over the cars to shield them from heat and snow, and wooden sidewalks were laid so that officers could walk from train to train without slipping on mud or ice.

From his private railway car spread with bearskins and Oriental rugs, the Grand Duke dominated the life of the camp. On the wall of his sleeping compartment, crowded between the windows, were more than two hundred

icons. Over the doors of all the rooms frequented by the Grand Duke, small pieces of white paper were affixed to remind the six-f oot-six-inch Nicholas Nicolaievich to duck so as not to bump his head.

General Sir John Hanbury-Williams, British military attaché in Petrograd, arrived at *Stavka* on Grand Duke Nicholas's train and remained there until the Tsar's abdication. His diary of these two and a half years gives a vivid portrait of Imperial Russian Headquarters

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during the First World War: "We all attended the little wooden church in the camp. All the headquarters troops were drawn up at the entrance to the church, Guards and Cossacks of the Guard ... all in khaki with long, grey overcoats reaching to their feet—still as rocks— looking almost like a line of statues against the pine forests. Here we waited till suddenly a fanfare of trumpets rang out and in the distance, coming along a road from the train, there marched, stern-faced and head erect, that great and to the army he loved so well, almost mystical figure, Grand Duke Nicholas. . . . He reached the line and swung around facing his men . . . looking them absolutely straight in the eye, and called out to all ranks the customary 'Good day.' With the rattle of presenting arms came the answering shout from every man in reply . . . and so we all slowly filed into church."

It was to this vigorous, masculine atmosphere that the Tsar came often as an enthusiastic visitor. When the Imperial train, its long line of blue salon cars emblazoned with golden crests, glided slowly under the sunlit foliage onto a siding alongside the Grand Duke's, the Tsar stepped happily into the routine of army life. He loved the disciplined sense of purpose at *Stavka,* the clear-cut giving and taking of orders, the professional talk at the officers' mess, the rough, hardy, outdoor life. It called back memories of his days as a junior officer when his heaviest responsibility was getting out of bed in time to stand morning parade. It was a release from government and ministers and a change from Tsarskoe Selo, where, no matter how devoted he was to wife and children, the world was small, closed and predominantly feminine.

Nicholas was careful during his visits to Headquarters not to intrude on the authority of the Grand Duke. Sitting beside the Commander-in-Chief at

morning staff conferences, the Tsar played the part of the interested, honored guest. Together, the two men listened to reports of the previous day's operations at the front; together, they bent over the huge maps of Poland, East Prussia and Galicia, studying the red and blue lines which marked the positions of the opposing armies. But when the moment came to issue commands, the Tsar was silent and the Grand Duke spoke.

It was when the Tsar was in this relaxed, happy mood at Headquarters that General Hanbury-Williams first met him. "At 2:30 I was summoned to meet the Emperor," he wrote. "On arrival, I found two huge Cossacks at the door of His Imperial Majesty's train. . . . The Emperor received me alone. He was dressed in perfectly plain khaki uniform, the coat being more of a blouse than ours, with blue breeches and long black riding boots, and was standing at a high writing desk. As I saluted, he came forward at once and shook me warmly by the hand. I was at once struck by his extraordinary likeness to our own

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King, and the way he smiled, his face lighting up, as if it were a real pleasure to him to receive one. His first question was one of inquiry after our King and Queen and the Royal family. ... I had always pictured him to myself as a somewhat sad and anxious-looking monarch, with cares of state and other things hanging heavily over him. Instead of that I found a bright, keen, happy face, plenty of humor and a fresh-air man."

Meals at Headquarters were hearty and masculine: plentiful *zakouski*, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, vodka and wines. The vodka, wrote Hanbury-Williams, "went down my throat like a torchlight procession." At the table, surrounded by men he considered his fellow officers, Nicholas spoke freely without the inhibitions imposed at court. Once he offered an analysis of the difference between Russia and the United States:

"At dinner tonight, H.I.M. [His Imperial Majesty] talked about empires and republics. His own ideas as a young man were that he had a great responsibility and he felt that the people over whom he ruled were so numerous and so varying in blood and temperament, different altogether from our Western Europeans, that an Emperor was a vital necessity to them.

His first visit to the Caucasus had made a vital impression on him and confirmed him in his views.

"The United States of America, he said, was an entirely different matter, and the two cases could not be compared. In this country [Russia], many as were the problems and the difficulties, their sense of imagination, their intense religious feeling and their habits and customs generally made a crown necessary, and he believed this must be so for a very long time, that a certain amount of decentralizing of authority was, of course, necessary but that the great and decisive power must rest with the Crown. The powers of the Duma must go slowly, because of the difficulties of pushing on education at any reasonably fast rate among all these masses of his subjects."

As for the personal role of the Autocrat, Nicholas admitted that, while he could give any order he liked, he could not ensure that it was carried out. Often, when he found that something he had asked had not been properly done, he said wistfully to Hanbury-Williams, "You see what it is to be an autocrat."

At Headquarters, the Tsar took long afternoon walks along country roads thoroughly scouted in advance by Cossack patrols. In warm weather, he rowed on the Dnieper, often removing his blouse so that the sun could tan him. Occasionally, for variety, he challenged other officers to a race. Nicholas liked to win, but he would row only against men who had a chance of beating him.

In November 1914, the Tsar left Headquarters for a long journey

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to the southern Causasus, where his troops were fighting the Turks. "We are passing through picturesque country," he wrote to Alexandra, "... with beautiful high mountains on one side and the steppes on the other. At each station, the platforms are crowded with people . . . thousands of them. . . . We are running along by the Caspian Sea. It rests the eyes to look on the blue distance, it reminded me of the Black Sea . . . not far off are the mountains, beautifully lit by the sun." In Kuban province, passing Cossack villages, he admired the people and their rich orchards. "They are beginning

to be wealthy, and above all they have an inconceivably high number of small infants. All future subjects. This all fills me with joy and faith in God's mercy. I look forward in peace and confidence to what lies in store for Russia."

On trips, when outdoor exercise was impossible, Nicholas solved the problem by rigging an apparatus inside the train. "My hanging trapeze has proved very practical and useful," he wrote. "I swung on it many times and climbed it before meals. It really is an excellent thing for the train, it stirs up the blood and the whole organism." From this description arises a piquant image of the Imperial train rolling through dusty villages, past platforms crowded with curious and worshipful peasants, while inside, hidden from view, the Little Father hangs by his heels, swinging back and forth on his trapeze.

In the autumn of 1915, the Tsar brought his son, the eleven-year-old Tsarevich, to live with him at Army Headquarters. It was a startling move, not simply because of the boy's age but also because of his hemophilia. Yet, Nicholas did not make his decision impetuously. His reasons, laboriously weighed for months in advance, were both sentimental and shrewd.

The Russian army, battered and retreating after a summer of terrible losses, badly needed a lift in morale. Nicholas himself made constant appearances, and his presence, embodying the cause of Holy Russia, raised tremendous enthusiasm among the men who saw him. It was his hope that the appearance of the Heir at his side, symbolizing the future, would further bolster their drooping spirits. It was a reasonable hope, and, in fact, wherever Alexis appeared he became a center of great excitement.

Perhaps more important, the Tsar was thinking of the distant future and the day his son would sit on the throne. Alexis's education, up to that point, had been anything but normal. As a prince, he lived in a restricted world; because of his illness, it was primarily a world of

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adoring women. By taking his son from the muffled, silken-pillowed atmosphere of the palace and bringing him into the bracing air of beards,

leather and uniforms at *Stavka,* Nicholas proposed to broaden the education of the future tsar.

It was enormously difficult for the Empress to let Alexis go. During his entire lifetime, he had not been out of her sight for more than a few hours; whenever he was gone, she imagined dangers which others would never dream of. On his trips to Headquarters, the Tsarevich was surrounded with protection by his personal retinue: Fedorov and Derevenko the doctors, Gilliard the tutor, Derevenko and Nagorny the sailor bodyguards. Yet real risks were involved and the Empress was acutely aware of them. In traveling on the Imperial train, there was danger of stumbling and falling in the corridors as the carriages lurched. Bouncing in automobiles over dirt roads, traveling in a zone where German airplanes might appear, walking long distances and standing for hours as thousands of men marched by—no doctor would permit this activity for any other hemophiliac. While he was away, Alexandra's letters to the Tsar were filled with concern for him: "See that Tiny [Alexis] doesn't tire himself on the stairs. He cannot take walks. . . . Tiny loves digging and working and he is so strong and forgets that he must be careful. . . . Take care of Baby's arm, don't let him run about on the train so as not to knock his arms. . . . Before you decide, speak with Mr. Gilliard, he is such a sensible man and knows all so well about Baby." Every night at nine p.m., the Empress went to Alexis's room as if he were there saying his prayers. There, on her knees, she prayed to God that her son would come home safely.

Once when Gilliard had returned alone to Tsarskoe Selo, leaving Alexis at Headquarters, the Empress explained to him why she had let her son go at all. "After the meal, we went out on the terrace," wrote the tutor. "It was a beautiful evening, warm and still. Her Majesty was stretched on a sofa and two of her daughters were knitting woollen clothing for the soldiers. The other two Grand Duchesses were sewing. Alexis Nicolaievich was naturally the principal topic of conversation. They never tired of asking me what he did and said . . . with a candor which utterly amazed me [the Empress then] said that all his life the Tsar had suffered from his natural timidity and from the fact that, as he had been kept too much in the background, he had found himself badly prepared for the duties of a ruler on the sudden death of

Alexander III. The Tsar had vowed to avoid the same mistakes in the education of his own son." Suppressing her own terrible fears, the Empress agreed with her husband.

Alexis himself was longing to escape from the Alexander Palace. For

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months, his greatest excitement had been a series of afternoon automobile drives taken within a radius of twenty miles of Tsarskoe Selo. "We used to start out immediately after lunch," wrote Gilliard, who arranged the excursions. "[We] often stopped at villages to watch the peasants at work. Alexis Nicolaievich liked questioning them, and they always answered him with the frank, kindly simplicity of the Russian *moujik,* not having the slightest idea whom they were speaking to. The railway lines of the suburbs of St. Petersburg had a great attraction for the boy. He took the liveliest interest in the activities of the little stations we passed and the work of repair on track and bridges. . . . The palace police grew alarmed at these excursions which took us beyond the guarded zone. . . . Whenever we left the park, we were certain to see a car appear and follow in our tracks. It was one of Alexis Nicolaievich's greatest delights to try and throw it off the scent."

For a lively, intelligent eleven-year-old boy, the chance to visit Army Headquarters was a promise of high adventure. On an October morning in 1915, the Tsarevich, dressed in the uniform of an army private, delightedly kissed his mother goodbye and boarded his father's train. Even before reaching Headquarters, Alexis saw his first review of front-line troops. As the Tsar walked down the ranks, Gilliard wrote, "Alexis Nicolaievich was at his father's heels, listening intently to the stories of these men who had often stared death in the face. His features, which were always expressive, became quite strained in an effort not to lose a single word of what the men were saying. His presence at the Tsar's side greatly interested the soldiers . . . they were heard whispering their ideas about his age, size and looks. But the point that made the greatest impression on them was the fact that the Tsarevich was wearing the uniform of a private soldier."

A series of German victories in the summer of 1915 had forced relocation of *Stavka* from Baranovichi to Mogilev, a Russian town on the upper Dnieper

River. Here, the trains had been abandoned and Headquarters established in the house of the provincial governor, a mansion on the crest of a hill overlooking a bend in the river. As the building was crowded, Nicholas reserved only two rooms for himself—a bedroom and an office. For Alexis, a second cot was placed in the Tsar's bedroom.

"It is very cosy sleeping side by side," Nicholas wrote to Alexandra. "I say prayers with him every night. ... He says his prayers too fast and it is difficult to stop him. ... I read all [your] letters aloud to him. He listens lying in bed and kisses your signature. ... He sleeps well and likes the window left open. . . . Noise in the street

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does not disturb him. . . . Yesterday evening when Alexei was already in bed, a thunderstorm broke out; the lightning struck somewhere near the town, it rained hard after which the air became delightful and much fresher. We slept well with the window open. . . . Thank God he looks so well and has become sunburnt. . . . He wakes up early in the morning between 7 and 8, sits up in bed and begins to talk quietly to me. I answer drowsily, he settles down and lies quietly until I am called."

There was a tender charm in this intimate companionship between father and son, briefly shared in the middle of a great war; for them, the room at Mogilev became a tiny haven of peace and affection set in the eye of the hurricane. "He brings much light into my life here," Nicholas wrote. Later, he said, "His company gives light and life to all of us."

Every morning at Headquarters, the Tsarevich did lessons with Gilliard on the veranda. Afterward, he played in the garden with a toy rifle. "He always carries his little gun with him and walks backwards and forwards on the path marching and singing loudly," wrote Nicholas. "I went into the little garden where Alexei was marching about singing loudly and Derevenko was walking on another path, whistling. . . . His left hand hurts him a little because yesterday he worked in the sand on the river bank but he pays no attention and is very cheerful. After lunch, he rests for about a half an hour and Mr. Gilliard reads to him while I write. At the table, he sits on my left

hand. . . . Alexei loves to tease. It is extraordinary how he has lost his shyness. He always follows me when I greet my gentlemen."

In the afternoons, "we go out in the car . . . either into a wood or on the bank of the river, where we light a fire and I walk about nearby." On hot days in summer, they swam in the Dnieper: "He splashes about near the bank. I bathe not far away." Once "we found a lovely place with soft sand where he played happily. The sand was as soft and white as on the seashore. Baby [Alexis] ran about shouting. Fedorov allowed him to go barefoot. Naturally, he was delighted." Sometimes, playmates appeared. "Did he [Alexis] describe to you how the peasant boys played all sorts of games with him?"

In Mogilev, meals were served in the dining room of the governor's house or, in warm weather, in a large green tent set up in the garden. Along with the regular Headquarters staff, there were always "colonels and generals who are returning from the front. ... [I] invite them to lunch and dinner. Mogilev is like an enormous hotel where crowds of people pass through." Alexis plunged happily into this bustling atmosphere. "He sits on my left hand and behaves well but sometimes

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becomes inordinately gay and noisy, especially when I am talking with the others in the drawing room. In any case, it is pleasant for them and makes them smile."

The Tsarevich's favorites at Headquarters were "the foreigners— the military attachés of Britain, France, Italy, Serbia, Belgium and Japan. Before long, they had, in effect, adopted the high-spirited boy as their mascot. "I had expected to find a very delicate and not very lively boy," wrote Hanbury-Williams, who became one of the Tsarevich's favorites. "But in the periods of what may be called his good health, he had all the spirits and the mischief of any ordinary boy of that age. . . . He wore a khaki uniform and long Russian boots and was very proud of himself as a soldier, had excellent manners and spoke various languages well and clearly.

"As time went on and his first shyness wore off, he treated us as old friends and . . . had always some bit of fun with us. With me it was to make sure that

each button on my coat was properly fastened, a habit which naturally made me take great care to have one or two unbuttoned, in which case he used at once to stop and tell me I was 'untidy again,' give a sigh at my lack of attention to these details and stop and carefully button me all up again."

Once Alexis had made sure of his new friends, quite incredible things began to happen, especially at lunch: "While the rest of the party were eating *zakouska*, every conceivable game went on, a 'rag' in fact, ending most likely in a game of football with anything that came handy. The Belgian general of whom he was very fond, and used always to call 'Papa de Ricquel,' being a man of no mean girth, gave great opportunities for attack. The devoted tutor was almost in despair and it generally ended with the intervention of the Emperor, by which time the small boy was carefully hidden behind a curtain. He then used to reappear with a twinkle in his eye and solemnly march to take his place at the table. There he would begin again by a bread pellet attack . . . which risked all the Imperial china and glasses. If, however, he had a stranger sitting next to him he had all the courtesy and charm of his father, talking freely and asking sensible questions. The moment, however, that we adjourned to the anteroom the games used to begin again, and went on fast and furious till either the Emperor or his tutor carried him off."

After lunch, the games often continued in the garden: "He dragged some of us off after lunch in the tent to a round fountain in the garden which had porpoise heads all round it, with two holes in each to represent the eyes. The game is to plug up these holes with one's fingers,

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then turn on the fountain full split and suddenly let go. The result was that I nearly drowned the Emperor and his son and they returned the compliment, and we all had to go back and change, laughing till we nearly cried." Nicholas, expecting that the Empress might disapprove of such rough games, wrote an explanatory note: "I am writing . . . having come in from the garden with wet sleeves and boots as Alexei has sprayed us at the fountain. It is his favorite game . . . peals of laughter ring out. I keep an eye in order to see that things do not go too far."

Late in October, to show his son that war was not all games and toy forts and lead soldiers, the Tsar took Alexis on a month-long trip the length of the battlefront. In Galicia, returning after dark from a mass review, Nicholas and Alexis made a surprise visit to a front-line dressing station. The rooms were lit only by torches. Moving from one bandaged body to the next, Nicholas spoke to the suffering men, many of whom could scarcely believe that the Tsar himself was walking among them. Close behind came Alexis, deeply moved by the groaning and suffering all around him. Later, standing before a field of men on parade, Nicholas asked those who had served since the beginning of the war to raise their hands. "But very few hands were lifted above those thousands of heads," wrote Gilliard. "There were whole companies in which not a man moved. . . . [This] made a very great impression on Alexis Nicolaievich."

Wherever they went, Alexis was insatiably curious. At Reval, on the Baltic coast, they visited four British submarines which had been sinking German ships in the Baltic. The hulls and conning towers were sheathed in sparkling ice as Nicholas thanked the officers and men and awarded the St. George Cross to the four Royal Navy captains. For Alexis, the submarines had an extraordinary fascination. "Alexei . . . crept into every possible hole," wrote Nicholas. "I even overheard him talking freely to a lieutenant asking him questions." That night, to the Tsarevich's delight, the Tsar brought the four submarine captains back to the train for dinner.

In the south, the Tsar and his son inspected four regiments of Caucasian cavalry. Alexis was thrilled, and even the stolid Gilliard was impressed: "Among other units were the Kuban and Terek Cossacks, perched high in the saddle and wearing the huge fur caps which make them look so fierce. As we started to return, the whole mass of cavalry suddenly moved forward, took stations on both sides of the road, broke into a gallop, tearing up the hills, sweeping down the banks of ravines, clearing all obstacles, and thus escorted us to the station in a terrific

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charge in which men and animals crashed together on the ground while the *mêlée* rose the raucous yells of the Caucasian mountaineers. It was a spectacle at once magnificent and terrible."

Besides visiting troops, father and son toured cities, factories, shipyards and hospitals. In Odessa, wrote Nicholas, "the streets were crowded with young soldiers and . . . people. . . . Our Treasure [Alexis] sat with a serious face, saluting all the time. Through the tumult of the crowd and the shouts of 'Hurrah!' I managed to hear women's voices calling out, 'The Heir!, The Angel!, The pretty boy!' . . . He heard them too and smiled at them." Once when the train stopped outside a town, "Alexei's cat ran away and hid under a big pile of board. We put on our great coats and went to look for her. Nagorny found her at once with a flashlight, but it took a long time to make the wretch come out. She would not listen to Alexei. At last, he caught her by one of her hind legs and dragged her through the narrow chink." Returning to Headquarters after a month on the train, Nicholas reported happily to Alexandra, "Alexei has borne the strain . . . astonishingly well, only occasionally he suffered from a little bleeding at the nose."

The Empress, as if unable to stay away from the exclusive male retreat of her husband and son, made occasional visits to Headquarters. Bringing her daughters and sometimes Anna Vyrubova, she lived aboard her train. During the mornings, while the Tsar was at work, she sat by the river or visited the families of peasants and railway workers. At noon, staff motorcars arrived to bring the ladies to the governor's house for lunch. In the afternoon, while the family went driving together, the cars went back to the train for the maids, gowns and jewels needed to costume the women for dinner. In a house crowded with men, the ladies changed as best they could in niches and closets.

At dinner, Hanbury-Williams found her "much easier to get on with than I expected. . . . She told me how terribly shy she felt on coming into the room where we all were assembled . . . the chiefs of the Allied military missions . . . and a galaxy of Russian officers. . . . The moment one began to laugh over things, she brightened up and talk became easy and unaffected. ... It seems extraordinary how little it takes to cheer her up. . . . She is so proud of Russia and so anxious that the Allies should win the war. . . . War to her seems almost more terrible, if such a thing is possible, than to other people. But she spoke of it to me as the 'passing out of darkness into the light of victory.

Victory we must have.' "

As long as Alexis was alone with his father, the Tsar carried the day-to-day burden of caring for his son's health. His letters to Alexandra were filled with detailed descriptions: "When we arrived by train in the evening, Baby played the fool," he wrote late in November 1915. "[He] pretended to fall off his chair and hurt his left arm (under the armpit). It did not hurt afterwards but swelled up instead. And so the first night here, he slept very restlessly, kept on sitting up in bed, groaning, calling for you and talking to me. Every few minutes he fell off to sleep again. This went on till 4 o'clock. Yesterday he spent in bed. I explained to everyone that he had simply slept badly. . . . Thank God, it is all over today except for paleness and a slight bleeding at the nose. For the rest, he is exactly as he usually is and we walked together in the little garden."

The following summer, in July 1916, Nicholas wrote: "This morning while we were still in bed, Alexei showed me that his elbow would not bend; then he took his temperature and calmly announced that he had better stay in bed all day." In November 1916: "The Little One is suffering from a strained vein in the upper part of his right leg. . . . During the night, he kept waking and groaned in his sleep. Fedorov has ordered him to lie quietly in bed." On the following day: "Baby's leg hurts from time to time and he cannot get off to sleep the first part of the night. When I come to bed, he tries not to groan."

Although the situation was unprecedented in the history of war and monarchy—an emperor, the commander-in-chief of the world's largest army, spending his nights caring for a groaning child—Nicholas carefully avoided any specific discussion of his son's illness. "He rarely refers to the Tsarevich's health but tonight I could see that he was anxious about him," wrote Hanbury-Williams. "I suppose he recognizes that the boy's health can never be satisfactory and no doubt wonders what will happen if he lives to succeed to the throne. Anyhow, he is doing all he possibly can to train him on what, if he ever succeeds, will be a very heavy task. He wishes very much that he may be able to travel about and see something of the world, and gain experiences from other countries which will be of use to him in Russia, with all the complications, as he put it to me, of this enormous Empire."

For the most part, all went well, the disease remained under control, and Nicholas enjoyed the deceptive sense of calm and stability which often comes to the parents of hemophiliacs. But the disease, capricious and malevolent, awaits precisely these moments to strike. In December

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1915, the Tsarevich suffered a severe nosebleed. The attack was the worst since Spala, the kind which haunted the dreams of the Empress. Unlike other external bleeding which can be checked by pressure and bandaging, nosebleeds pose an extreme danger to hemophiliacs. Difficult to treat, unsusceptible to pressure, once started they are almost impossible to check.

Nicholas and Alexis were on the train headed for Galicia to inspect a number of regiments of the Imperial Guard. "On the morning of our departure," recalled Gilliard, "Alexis Nicolaievich, who had caught cold the previous day and was suffering from a heavy catarrh in the head, began to bleed heavily at the nose as a result of sneezing violently. I summoned Professor Fedorov but he could not entirely stop the bleeding. . . . During the night, the boy got worse. His temperature had gone up and he was getting weaker. At three o'clock in the morning Professor Fedorov, alarmed at his responsibilities, decided to have the Tsar roused and ask him to return to Mogilev where he could attend to the Tsarevich under more favorable conditions.

"The next morning we were on our way back to GHQ, but the boy's state was so alarming that it was decided to take him back to Tsarskoe Selo. . . . The patient's strength was failing rapidly. We had to have the train stopped several times to be able to change the [nose] plugs. Alexis Nicolaievich was supported in bed by his sailor Nagorny (he could not be allowed to lie full length), and twice in the night he swooned away and I thought the end had come."

During the crisis, Anna Vyrubova was with the Empress: "I was with the Empress when the telegram came announcing the return of the Emperor and the boy to Tsarskoe Selo, and I can never forget the anguish of mind with which the poor mother awaited the arrival of her sick, perhaps dying child. Nor can I ever forget the waxen, grave-like pallor of the little pointed face as

the boy with infinite care was borne into the palace and laid on his little white bed. Above the blood-soaked bandages his large blue eyes gazed at us with pathos unspeakable, and it seemed to all around the bed that the last hour of the unhappy child was at hand. The physicians kept up their ministrations, exhausting every means known to science to stop the incessant bleeding. In despair, the Empress sent for Rasputin. He came into the room, made the sign of the cross over the bed and, looking intently at the almost moribund child, said quietly to the kneeling parents: 'Don't be alarmed. Nothing will happen.' Then he walked out of the room and out of the palace. That was all. The child fell asleep and the next day was so well that the Emperor left for the

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Stavka. Dr. Derevenko and Professor Fedorov told me afterwards that they did not even attempt to explain the cure."

Gilliard's account gives more credit to the doctors' efforts, but does not challenge Vyrubova's assertion that the Empress was convinced that only Rasputin had saved her son: "At last we reached Tsarskoe Selo. It was eleven o'clock. The Empress, who had been torn with anguish and anxiety, was on the platform with the Grand Duchesses. With infinite care the invalid was taken to the palace. The doctors ultimately succeeded in cauterizing the scar which had formed at the spot where a little blood vessel had burst. Once more the Empress attributed the improvement in her son's condition to the prayers of Rasputin, and she remained convinced that the boy had been saved thanks to his intervention."

Nicholas, sadly leaving his son surrounded again by women and pillows, returned to his life at the front. From Galicia, where he reviewed the Guards, he wrote, "They did not march past owing to the deep, thick mud—they would have lost their boots under my very eyes. ... It was already getting dark. ... A Te Deum [was held] in the center of a huge square in complete darkness. Having sat down in the car, I shouted 'Good bye' to the troops and from the invisible field rose a terrible roar. . . . On that day, I inspected 84,000 soldiers, Guards alone, and fed 105 commanding officers [on the train]. . . . Tell the Little One I miss him terribly."

At Mogilev, a stillness settled over the governor's house. Conversations at meals became formal and professional. "Tell him," Nicholas wrote to Alexandra, "that they [the foreigners] always finish their *zakouski* in the little room and remember him. I also think of him very often, especially in the garden and in the evenings and I miss my cup of chocolate [with him]."

The Tsarevich remained at Tsarskoe Selo the rest of the winter, regaining his strength. The Empress reported his progress in every letter: "Thank God, your heart can be quiet about Alexei . . . Baby has got up and will lunch in my room. He looks sweet, thin, with big eyes. . . . Sunbeam is at last going out and I hope he will regain his pink cheeks again. . . . He received a charming telegram from all the foreigners at Headquarters in remembrance of the little room in which they used to sit and chat during *zakouski."*

By February, he was well enough to go out into the park to play in the snow. One day, the Tsar—home for a few days—and his sisters were with him. "He [Alexis] slipped behind his youngest sister, who had not seen him coming, and threw a huge snowball at her," wrote Gilliard. "His father . . . called the boy to him and talked to him

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severely: 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Alexis! You're behaving like a German to attack anyone from behind when they can't defend themselves. It's horrid and cowardly. Leave that sort of behavior to the Germans!' "

In May 1916, six months after Alexis was stricken, the Empress reluctantly allowed him to return to Headquarters. He was promoted from private to corporal. "He is very proud of his stripes and more mischievous than ever," reported Hanbury-Williams. "At lunch the Tsarevich pushed all the cups, bread, toast, menus, etc. which he could get hold of across to me and then called the attention of his father to count all the pieces I had."

On December 20, 1916, the Tsarevich paid his last visit to Army Headquarters. A few days later, he was to leave for Tsarskoe Selo for the winter; before spring, revolution would sweep his father off the throne. On that night, General Hanbury-Williams received word from England that his eldest son, an officer with the British army in France, had died as a result of

wounds. As the General sat alone with his grief in his tiny, barren room, the door quietly opened. It was Alexis, saying, "Papa told me to come to sit with you as he thought you might feel lonely tonight."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"Poor Fellows, They Are Ready to Give Their Lives for a Smile"

Victory on the Marne and disaster at Tannenberg tended to dim the result of a third great battle fought in the opening weeks of war. Even as Rennenkampf's Cossacks rode through East Prussian barnyards, the main mass of the Austro-Hungarian army, one million strong, launched itself north from Galicia intending to amputate Poland from Russia. Within less than three weeks, the Russians had stopped and smashed these invaders. Four Austro-Hungarian armies were routed, two hundred thousand prisoners and Lemberg, the capital of the province, were taken, and Russian cavalry crossed the Carpathians to ride out onto the great Danube plain toward Budapest and Vienna. In terror, hinting that it might be forced to a separate peace, the Austrian government appealed to Berlin for help.

The German General Staff ordered Hindenburg to rush reinforcements. On September 14, 1914, two German army corps headed south from East Prussia; four days later, Hindenburg raised the rescue force by two additional army corps and a cavalry division. Even this help might not have been enough if the Russian offensive had not suddenly halted of its own accord. The source of this command—inexplicable and keenly frustrating to front-line generals who sensed a chance to knock Austria-Hungary out of the war—was Paris. On September 14, Paléologue received a telegram from his government. "It instructs me to impress on the Russian government that it is essential for the Russian armies to press home their direct offensive against Germany," he wrote. "[We are] afraid that our Allies may have had their heads turned by their relatively easy successes in Galicia and may neglect the German front in order to concentrate on forcing their way to Vienna." On the Tsar's command, to accommodate the wishes of his ally, the triumphant

Russians began receding from the Carpathians. Two of the four Russian armies in Galicia were shifted north to begin

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a fruitless attack on German Silesia. Again, Russia had made gallant and expensive gesture toward her hard-pressed ally. But it represented a gross violation of sound military strategy as nicely expressed by the old Russian proverb: "If you chase two hares, you won't catch either." Russia's chance to crush Austria-Hungary at the outset was lost.

In the early battles of 1914, the Russians learned that the Austrians were a far weaker foe than the Germans. Fighting Austrians soon came to be considered almost unworthy by Russian officers. Knox discovered this feeling among twenty young subalterns just posted from artillery school: "The poor boys were keen as mustard and told me that their one fear was lest they might be employed till the end of the war against the Austrians and never have a dash at the Prussians."

The Russians also discovered on every battlefield that dash and bravery were not enough. The Russian cavalry, carrying long lances and swinging sabers, rode exuberantly to meet the Prussian Uhlans and Austrian Hussars. The Russian infantry, wielding vicious four-edged bayonets, willingly attacked whatever positions their officers indicated. But where those positions were defended by superior artillery and plentiful machine guns, the charging Russian ranks were scythed like rows of wheat. By the end of 1914, after only five months of war, one million Russians—one quarter of the army—had been killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

Among the officers, the ratio of loss was far higher. Unlike German and Austrian officers, who took sensible precautions, Russian officers considered it cowardly to take cover. Attacking in the face of murderous enemy fire, the officers made their men crawl forward on the ground while they themselves stood erect and walked into the enemy bullets. The famous Preobrajensky Guard Regiment lost 48 of its 70 officers; the 18th Division had only 40 of its original 370 officers. "These people play at war," said Knox sadly.

To make good these losses, three thousand military cadets were commissioned early and sent to the front. Fifteen thousand university students, originally deferred from military service, were ordered to take four months of military training and become lieutenants. Orders were given to curb the flamboyant, wasteful bravery of young officers. "Remember what I am going to say to you," said the Tsar on October 1, 1914, addressing a company of cadets promoted to lieutenant. "I have not the slightest doubt of your courage and bravery, but I need your lives, because useless losses in the officer corps may lead to

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serious consequences. I am sure that every one of you will give his life willingly when it becomes necessary, but do it only in cases of exceptional emergency. In other words, I am asking you to care for yourselves."

Despite their sacrifices, the Russians began the war as a gentlemanly undertaking. Captured enemy officers were not questioned; it was considered improper to ask a brother officer to inform on his compatriots. In time, the relentlessness of the German combative spirit was to alter these generous feelings. One German officer, being carried wounded from the battlefield, drew his revolver and shot his stretcher bearers. Later, the Tsar was to write, "We take no prisoners where the enemy uses explosive bullets."

Much of the power and resilience of the Russian army lay in its religious faith. Knox was enormously impressed by the simple, unquestioning belief, permeating all ranks, that prayer would lead to victory. In an underground hut near the front, he once listened to a Russian general discussing tactics with a group of Russian officers. "Then," wrote Knox, "in the simplest possible way, without any hypocritical flourish ... he added, 'You must always remember, too, the value of prayer—with prayer you can do anything.' So sudden a transition from professional technicalities to simple primary truths seemed incongruous, and gave me almost a shock, but was taken quite naturally by the officers crowding around, with serious, bearded faces, in the little dugout. This religious beUef is a power in the Russian army."

Knox watched a regiment of veterans drawn up on parade. Near the front, "The General . . . thanked them in the name of the Emperor and the country for their gallant service. ... It was touching to see how the men were moved by his simple words of praise. . . . The latter leaned over and chucked men here and there under the chin as he rode along. 'Poor fellows,' he said as we drove away, 'they are ready to give their lives for a smile.' "

The difference that faith could make was demonstrated on every battlefront. At Easter in 1916, a German attack was launched near the Baltic. At five a.m., German artillery began pounding the Russian trenches cut into the marshy ground. At the same time, the Germans released gas into the Russian lines. The Russians, lacking both gas masks and steel helmets, endured. After each hour of bombardment, the German artillery paused to learn the effect on the Russian trenches. Always, there was a resumption of rifle fire from the Russians, followed by a new German bombardment. After five hours of this devastation, Russian battalions of 500 men were reduced to 90 or 100.

Yet when the German infantry finally advanced, it was met by a Russian bayonet charge. In all that day, the Russians gave up only a mile and half of front. That night, from within the Russian lines the Germans heard the sound of hundreds of men singing the Easter hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead, conquering death by death."

Despite the huge losses of the previous autumn, the coming of spring 1915 found the Russian army again ready for battle. Its strength, down to 2,000,000 men in December 1914, had swollen to 4,200,000 as new drafts of recruits arrived at the front. In March, the Russians attacked, hurling themselves again on the Austrians in Galicia. They had immediate, brilliant success. Przemysl, the strongest fortress in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, fell on March 19 with 120,000 prisoners and 900 guns. "Nikolasha [Grand Duke Nicholas] came running into my carriage out of breath and with tears in his eyes and told me," wrote Nicholas. A *Te Deum* in the church "was packed with officers and my splendid Cossacks. What beaming faces!" In his joy, the Tsar presented the Grand Duke with an ornamental golden sword of victory, its hilt and scabbard studded with diamonds. Early in April, the Tsar

himself entered the conquered province, driving along hot roads covered with white dust. In Przemysl, he admired the fortress—"colossal works, terribly fortified, not an inch of ground remained undefended." In Lemberg, he spent the night in the house of the Austrian governor-general, occupying a bed hitherto reserved exclusively for the Emperor Franz Joseph.

Once again, waves of Russian infantry and horsemen rolled exultantly up to the Carpathians. The peaks, craggy and thickly forested, were desperately defended by crack Hungarian regiments. Because of their pitiful lack of heavy artillery and ammunition, the Russians were unable to bombard the heights before their attacks. Instead, each hill, each ridge, each crest had to be stormed by bayonet. Advancing with what Ludendorff described as "supreme contempt for death," the Russian infantry swept upward, leaving the hillsides soaked with blood. By mid-April, the Carpathian passes were in Russian hands and General Brusilov's Eighth Army was descending onto the Danubian plain. Again Vienna trembled; again there was talk of a separate peace. On April 26, 1915, convinced that the Hapsburg empire was collapsing, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary.

It was at this moment that Hindenburg and Ludendorff let fall on Russia the monster blow which for months they, had been preparing. Having failed to destroy France in 1914, the German General Staff

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had selected 1915 as the year to drive Russia out of the war. Through March and April, while the Russians devastated the Austrians in Galicia and the Carpathians, the German generals calmly and efficiently massed men and artillery in southern Poland. On May 2, 1,500 German guns opened fire on a single sector of the Russian line. Within a four-hour period, 700,000 shells fell into the Russian trenches.

"From a neighboring height one could see an uninterrupted line of enemy fire for five miles to each side," wrote Sir Bernard Pares, who witnessed the bombardment. "The Russian artillery was practically silent. The elementary Russian trenches were completely wiped out and so, to all intents and purposes, was human life in that area. The Russian division stationed at this point was reduced from a normal 16,000 to 500."

In this maelstrom, the Russian line disintegrated. Reinforcements were brought by train directly to the battlefield and detrained under fire. The Third Caucasian Corps, rushed into the breach, was quickly reduced from 40,000 men to 6,000; even this remnant, attacking at night with bayonets, took 7,000 prisoners. The Russian Third Army, which took the brunt of the German blow, had—said its commander —"lost all its blood." On June 2, the fortress of Przemysl was lost. Lemberg fell on June 22. "Poor Nikolasha," wrote the Tsar, "while telling me this, wept in my private room and even asked whether I thought of replacing him by a more capable man. . . . He kept thanking me for staying here, because my presence here supported him personally."

In the retreat, men lost their rifles or flung them away. The shortage quickly became desperate; one officer suggested arming some battalions with long-handled axes. "In recent battles, a third of the men had no rifles," reported General Belaiev from *Stavka*. "These poor devils had to wait patiently until their comrades fell before their eyes and they could pick up weapons. The army is drowning in its own blood." Unarmed men, waiting in support trenches until casualties on the firing line made weapons available, were "churned into gruel" by exploding shells and bursting shrapnel. The men understood what was happening. "You know, sir, we have no weapons except the soldier's breast," an infantry private said to Pares. "This is not war, sir, this is slaughter."

Nothing could stem the German columns advancing through the deep summer dust of Poland. Ahead of them came the long, slow-moving lines of refugees, trudging eastward. So intense was their suffering that a Russian general who had always been friendly suddenly turned on Knox and demanded to know what the British were doing in the war. "We are playing the game," said the Russian, distracted

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with anguish. "We are giving everything. Do you think it is easy for us to look at those long columns of refugees flying before the German advance? We know that all those children crowded on those carts will die before the winter is out." Knox, overcome by the tragedy, bowed his head and did not speak.

On August 5, 1915, Warsaw fell. For Grand Duke Nicholas, Russian strategy had become a question not of saving Warsaw or even Poland, but of preserving the army. Like Kutuzov in 1812, he retreated, giving up villages, towns, even provinces, intent only on keeping the army intact. Through it all, the Russian soldiers never lost their fighting spirit. On the day Warsaw fell, Knox visited officers of the Preobrajensky Guard. He found them still joking. "We will retire to the Urals," they explained, "and when we get there the enemy's pursuing army will have dwindled to a single German and a single Austrian. The Austrian will, according to custom, give himself up as a prisoner, and we will kill the German."

The ordeal of the Russian army in the spring and summer of 1915 seared all who survived. Half of the army was destroyed: 1,400,000 men were killed or wounded, 976,000 became prisoners. "The spring of 1915 I shall remember all my life," wrote General Deniken. "The retreat from Galicia was one vast tragedy for the Russian army. . . . The German heavy artillery swept away whole lines of trenches, and their defenders with them. We hardly replied—there was nothing with which we could reply. Our regiments, although completely exhausted, were beating off one attack after another by bayonet. . . . Blood flowed unendingly, the ranks became thinner and thinner. The number of graves constantly multiplied. ..." *

It was impossible to hide from the country what was happening at the front. The gaudy optimism which had placed the Russian Guards on the Unter den Linden in less than six months was replaced bv pessimism and gloom. There were no great balls that winter in the gray, snow-covered cities of Russia; the young men who had danced so gaily two winters before lay dead in the forests of East Prussia or on the slopes of the Carpathians. On the Nevsky Prospect, there were no flags, no bands playing the national anthem, no cheering crowds, only silent groups standing in the cold reading the casualty lists posted in

* Not surprisingly, those Russian soldiers who survived this maelstrom came to regard artillery as the God of War. Thirty years later, in April 1945, when Marshal Zhukov began the Red Army's final assault on Berlin, his attack was preceded by a barrage from 20,000 guns.

shopwindows. In hospital wards across the land lay the wounded soldiers, patient, gentle, grateful as children. *"Nitchevo*—it is nothing, little sister," they responded to sympathy. Only rarely did the nurses hear a low-voiced "I suffer, little sister."

The thrilling sense of national unity which had so profoundly moved the Tsar in the Winter Palace and the Kremlin had evaporated, and in its place surged all the old suspicions, quarrels and hatreds. Worst was the hatred of everything German. In Petrograd, Bach, Brahms and Beethoven were banned from orchestra programs. The windows of German bakeries were broken, and exclusive German schools were threatened with arson. At Christmas in 1914, the Holy Synod had foolishly banned Christmas trees as being a German custom. "I am going to make a row," wrote the Empress to the Tsar when she heard about it. "Why take away the pleasure from the wounded and children because it originally comes from Germany? The narrow mindedness is too colossal."

Anti-German feeling was strongest in Moscow. French-speaking people riding Moscow streetcars found themselves hissed as *"Nemtsy"* [Germans] by Russians who understood no foreign tongue. Bitter stories were told about the German-born Empress. The most popular of these tales concerned a general, walking along a corridor of the Winter Palace, who came upon the Tsarevich, weeping. Patting the boy on the head, the general asked, "What is wrong, my little man?" Half smiling, half crying, the Tsarevich replied, "When the Russians are beaten, Papa cries. When the Germans are beaten, Mama cries. When am I to cry?"

With the defeat of the supposedly invincible Russian army, the people of Moscow rushed into the streets to take vengeance. For three days beginning June 10, 1915, shops, factories and private houses belonging to people with German names were sacked and burned. "The country house of Knop, the great Russo-German millionaire who more than any man helped to build up the Russian cotton industry . . . was burned to the ground," wrote the British Consul, R. H. Bruce Lock-hart. "The police could or would do nothing. ... I stood and watched while hooligans sacked the leading piano store of

Moscow. Bechsteins, Bluthners, grand pianos, baby grands, and uprights, were hurled one by one from the various stories to the ground."

In Red Square, a mob shouted open insults to the Imperial family, demanding that the Empress be shut up in a convent, the Tsar deposed, Rasputin hanged and Grand Duke Nicholas crowned as Nicholas III. From Red Square, the crowd surged to the Convent of Mary and Martha, where the Empress's sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth met

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them at the gate. There were wild, accusing shouts that she was giving sanctuary to a German spy and that she was hiding her brother Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse. The Grand Duchess, standing alone in white-and-gray robes, calmly invited the leaders to search the house to see for themselves that her brother was not there. As she answered, a stone landed at her feet. "Away with the German woman!" shouted the crowd, just as a company of soldiers arrived to drive them off. Within the government, military defeat and the nation's angerbrought swift political repercussions. General Sukhomlinov, at last ata loss to explain away the desperate lack of guns and munitions with another amusing story, was swept away on June 20. On June 27, the Tsar, calling on "all faithful sons of the Fatherland without distinction of class or opinion, to work together with one heart and mind to supply the needs of the army," announced that the Duma would be summoned "in order to hear the voice of the land of Russia." A new Special Defense Council, including both ministers of the government and leaders of the Duma, was formed. These were hopeful signs, but they were appearing late. General Polivanov, Sukhomlinov's successor as Minister of War, a vigorous, brusque, efficient man, spoke frankly to his fellow ministers at a meeting of the ministerial council on July 16. "I consider it my duty to declare to the Council of Ministers that the country is in danger," he declared. "Where our retreat will end, only God knows."

With his soldiers retreating, the Tsar's intense feelings about beinsr with the army were revived. On July 16, walking restlessly in the park at Tsarskoe Selo with the Tsarevich and Gilliard, he said to the tutor, "You have no idea how depressing it is to be away from the front. It seems as if everything here saps energy and enfeebles resolution. . . . Out at the front men fight and die

for their country. At the front there is only one thought—the determination to conquer."

Nicholas's strong feelings about the army were constantly stimulated from another, less noble source: the personal animosity of the Empress against Grand Duke Nicholas. Alexandra had never liked the fiery, impetuous soldier who towered over her less colorful husband. She had never forgotten that it was his melodramatic threat to blow out his brains in the presence of the Tsar and Witte which had forced the signing of the 1905 Manifesto, creating the Duma. At the front, she knew that "Nikolasha's" heroic size gave him the aura of the warrior grand duke, the real strong man of the Imperial family. There were rumors that among his intimates the Grand Duke did nothing to

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correct the stories that he would one day be crowned as Nicholas III. Worst, she knew that Nicholas Nicolaievich had sworn implacable hatred against Rasputin. Once Rasputin, hoping to regain favor with the man who had been his most prominent patron and had first introduced him at the Imperial palace, telegraphed the Grand Duke offering to come to Headquarters to bless an icon. "Yes, do come," replied Grand Duke Nicholas. "I'll hang you."

Against this powerful, dangerous enemy Rasputin fought back skillfully. He quickly discovered the arguments to which the Empress was most susceptible, and whenever he was in her presence, he used them with poisonous effect against the Commander-in-Chief: The Grand Duke is deliberately currying favor in the army and overshadowing the Tsar so that one day he can claim the throne. The Grand Duke cannot possibly succeed on the battlefield because God will not bless him. How can God bless a man who has turned his back on me, the Man of God? In all probability, if the Grand Duke is allowed to keep his power, he will kill me, and then what will happen to the Tsarevich, the Tsar and Russia?

As long as the Russian army continued to advance, Grand Duke Nicholas's command remained secure. But once his soldiers began to retreat, his position became increasingly vulnerable. Through the summer, Alexandra's

letters to the Tsar maintained a steady drumfire of criticism against the Grand Duke, echoing and re-echoing Rasputin's arguments:

June 11 (O.S.): "Please my angel, make N. [Nikolasha, the Grand Duke] see with your eyes. ... I hope my letter did not displease but I am haunted by our Friend's [Rasputin's] wish and know it will be fatal for us and the country if not fulfilled. He means what he says when He speaks so seriously."

June 12: "Would to God N. were another man and not turned against a Man of God's."

June 16: "I have absolutely no faith in N.—know him to be far from clever and having gone against a Man of God, his work can't be blessed or his advice good. . . . Russia will not be blessed if her sovereign lets a Man of God sent to help him be persecuted, I am sure. . . . You know N.'s hatred for Gregory is intense."

June 17: "N's fault and Witte's that the Duma exists, and it has caused you more worry than joy. Oh, I do not like N. having anything to do with these big sittings which concern interior questions, he understands our country so little and imposes upon the ministers with his loud voice and gesticulations. I can go wild sometimes at his false position. . . . Nobody knows who is the Emperor now. ... It

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is as though N. settles all, makes the choices and changes. It makes me utterly wretched."

June 25: "I loathe your being at Headquarters . . . listening to N.'s advice which is not good and cannot be—he has no right to act as he does, mixing in your concerns. All are shocked that the ministers go with reports to him, as though he were now the sovereign. Ah, my Nicky, things are not as they ought to be and therefore N. keeps you near to have a hold over you with his ideas and bad counsels."

The Tsar did not share his wife's strong views of Grand Duke Nicholas. He respected the Grand Duke and had full—and thoroughly justified—

confidence in his loyalty. Paléologue, visiting *Stavka,* once attempted to discuss the Tsar's views with the Commander-in-Chief. Drawing himself up, the Grand Duke replied coldly, "I never discuss an opinion of His Majesty's except when he does me the honor of asking my advice." To suppress talk in some ranks of the army that Russia could not go on fighting, the Grand Duke issued an Order of the Day: "All faithful subjects know that in Russia, everyone from the Commander-in-Chief to the private soldier, obeys and obeys only the sacred and august will of the Anointed of God, our deeply revered Emperor, who alone has the power to begin and end a war."

Wherever possible the Tsar tried to buffer relations between the Empress and Grand Duke Nicholas. In April 1915, when Nicholas was to visit Lemberg and Przemysl, Alexandra wanted the Grand Duke to remain behind so that her husband alone could receive the cheers of the troops. Calmly, Nicholas dissuaded her: "Darling mine, I do not agree with you that N. ought to remain here during my visit to Galicia. On the contrary, precisely because I am going in wartime to a conquered province, the commander-in-chief ought to be accompanying me. It is he who accompanies me, not I who am in his suite."

Nevertheless, as the retreat continued, the Tsar's determination to take personal command of the army intensified. With the army and the nation in danger, he was convinced that it was his duty to unifv civil and military authority and take on his own person the full weight of responsibility for Russia's destiny. In the Council of Ministers, where bitter attacks had been made on Grand Duke Nicholas's handling of military operations, Prime Minister Goremykin warned his colleagues, "I consider it my duty to repeat to the members of the Council my emphatic advice to be extremely careful in what thev are going to say to the Emperor about . . . those questions that relate to General Headquarters and the Grand Duke. Irritation against the Grand Duke at Tsarskoe Selo has become of a character which threatens serious consequences. I fear that your representations may serve as a pretext to bring about grave complications."

On August 5, Warsaw fell. "The Emperor, white and trembling, brought this news to the Empress as we sat at tea on her balcony in the warm autumn air," wrote Anna Vyrubova. "The Emperor was fairly overcome with grief and humiliation. 'It cannot go on like this,' he exclaimed bitterly."

Three weeks later, Nicholas and Alexandra made an unannounced, private visit by automobile to Petrograd. They drove first to the cathedral in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, where they knelt before the tombs of the tsars. From there they went to the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, where they remained for several hours kneeling at the miraculous icon of the Virgin, praying for guidance. That night, the Council of Ministers was summoned to the Alexander Palace. Nicholas dined that evening with his wife and Anna Vyrubova. Before leaving for the meeting, he asked them to pray that his resolution remain strong. Silently, Anna pressed into his hand a tiny icon which she always wore around her neck. Carrying the icon, Nicholas walked out of the room and the two women settled down to wait. As the minutes stretched into hours, Alexandra grew impatient. Throwing a cloak around her shoulders and motioning Anna to follow, she slipped out onto a balcony which led past the windows of the council chamber. Through the lace curtains inside, they could see the Tsar, sitting very straight in his chair, surrounded by his ministers. One of the ministers was on his feet, arguing passionately.

Without exception, the ministers were aghast at the Tsar's proposal. They pointed to the disorganization of governmental machinery that would come if the head of state were to spend all his time at Headquarters, more than five hundred miles from the seat of government. They declared that the unity of administration which Nicholas sought would merely become a concentration of all blame for military defeats and political turmoil on the head of the sovereign. In the last resort, they begged him not to go to the front at a moment when the army was defeated. Nicholas listened, his brows and hands covered with perspiration, until every minister had spoken. Then he thanked them and announced quietly, "Gentlemen, in two days I leave for *Stavka."*

His public letter to the Grand Duke, explaining his decision, was characteristic of the Tsar. Eloquent and felicitous, it managed to spare the Grand Duke's pride while gracefully easing him out of his post:

To Your Imperial Highness:

At the beginning of the war there were reasons of a political nature which prevented me from following my personal inclinations and immediately putting myself at the head of the army.

Hence the fact that I conferred upon you the supreme command of all the military and naval forces.

Before the eyes of all Russia, Your Imperial Highness has during the war displayed an invincible courage, which has given me and all Russians the greatest confidence in you, and roused the ardent hopes with which your name was everywhere associated in the inevitable vicissitudes of military fortune. Now that the enemy has penetrated far into the empire, my duty to the country which God has committed to my keeping ordains that I shall assume supreme command of the fighting forces, share the burdens and toils of war with my army and help it to protect Russian soil against the onslaught of the foe.

The ways of Providence are inscrutable; but my duty and my own desires strengthen me in a determination which has been inspired by concern for the common weal.

The hostile invasion which is making more progress every day on the western front, demands above all an extreme concentration of all civil and military authority, unity of command during the war, and intensification of the activities of the whole administrative services. But all these duties distract our attention from the southern front, and in these circumstances, I feel the necessity for your advice and help on that front. I therefore appoint you my lieutenant in the Caucasus and Commander-in-Chief of the brave army operating in that region.

To Your Imperial Highness I wish to express my profound gratitude and that of the country for all your work in the war.

Nicholas

The letter was personally delivered to Grand Duke Nicholas at Headquarters by the War Minister, Polivanov. "God be praised," said Nicholas Nicolaievich simply. "The Emperor releases me from a task which was wearing me out." When the Tsar himself arrived at *Stavka,* he wrote: "N. came in with a kind, brave smile and asked simply when I would order him to go. The following day at lunch and dinner he was very talkative and in a very good mood."

The fall of the Grand Duke was a source of grim satisfaction to the Germans. "The Grand Duke," Ludendorff wrote later, "was really a great soldier and strategist." In the Russian army, officers and men were sad to see him go, but the summer of disaster had dimmed his hero's luster. Within the mauve boudoir at Tsarskoe Selo, the change was hailed as a supreme personal triumph. When Nicholas left for *Stavka,* he carried with him a letter of ecstasy from Alexandra:

My very own beloved one, I cannot find words to express all I want to—my heart is too full. I only long to hold you tight in my arms and whisper words of intense love, courage, strength and endless blessings. . . . You have fought this great fight for your country and throne—alone and with bravery and decision. Never have they seen such firmness in you before. ... I know what it costs you . . . forgive me, I beseech you, my Angel, for having left you no peace and worried you so much, but I too well know your marvelously gentle character and you had to shake it off this time, had to win your fight alone against all. It will be a glorious page in your reign and Russian history, the story of these weeks and days. . . . God anointed you at your coronation, he placed you where you stand and you have done your duty, be sure, quite sure of that and He forsaketh not his anointed. Our Friend's prayers arise day and night for you to Heaven and God will hear them. ... It is the beginning of the great glory of your reign, He said so and I absolutely believe it. . . . Sleep well, my Sunshine, Russia's Savior.

Remember last night how tenderly we clung together. I shall yearn for your caresses. ... I kiss you without end and bless you. Holy Angels guard your slumber. I am near and with you forever and ever and none shall separate us.

Your very own wife, Sunny

In France and England, the Tsar's decision was greeted with a sigh of relief. Russian defeats had aroused fear in both countries that the Tsar's government might be forced to withdraw from the war. By taking personal command, Nicholas was regarded as pledging himself and his empire once again to the alliance.

In the Russian army, it was clearly understood that the Tsar's role would be that of a figurehead, and that the actual military decisions would be made by whichever professional soldier became his chief of staff. Nicholas's choice for this post was reassuring. Michael Vasilevich Alexeiev was an energetic soldier of humble beginnings who had risen to the top by sheer ability and hard work. A former professor at the military staff college, he had served in the southwest against the Austrians and had commanded the Northern Front. Now, as Chief of Staff, he was in fact, if not in name, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies.

In appearance, Alexeiev compared poorly with the Grand Duke. He

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was short, with a simple, wide Russian face which, unlike most Russian generals, he chose to expose without a beard. He had trouble with an eye muscle, and Nicholas once described him to Alexandra as "Alexeiev, my cross-eyed friend." At Headquarters, he was solitary, avoiding contact with the Imperial suite. His weakness was a failure to delegate authority; he tried to do everything himself, including checking map references on the huge war maps spread out on Headquarters tables. Nevertheless, Nicholas was delighted with him. "I have such good help from Alexeiev," he telegraphed immediately after taking command. And a few days later: "I cannot tell you how pleased I am with Alexeiev. Conscientious, clever, modest and what a worker!"

In September 1915, soon after the change of command at Russian Headquarters, the German offensive began to lose impetus. Russian troops, fighting now on the soil of Russia itself, gave ground slowly, contesting every river, hill and marsh. By November, as winter closed down most of the front, Alexeiev had managed to stabilize a line which ran, on the average, two hundred miles east of the front in May. Firmly in German hands lay all of Russian Poland and the lower Baltic territories. Indeed, the battle line at the end of 1915 became almost precisely the western frontier of Soviet Russia until 1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War.

There were no further great German offensives in the East during the war. Assuming that the losses of 1915 had broken the back of the Russian army, the German General Staff transferred its main effort back to the Western Front. Beginning in February 1916, all of the great mass of German artillery and a million infantrymen were hurled at the pivotal French fortress of Verdun. To the utter astonishment and intense dismay of the Kaiser's generals, no sooner were they committed in the West than the Russians attacked again in the East. From May until October, the Russians pressed forward; by July, eighteen German divisions had been transferred from West to East and the assault on Verdun had been abandoned. But the cost to the Russian army of the 1916 campaign again was a terrible one: 1,200,000 men.

After the war, Hindenburg paid tribute to the bravery and sacrifices of his Russian enemies: "In the Great War ledger the page on which the Russian losses were written has been torn out. No one knows the figures. Five or eight millions? We too have no idea. All we know is that sometimes in our battles with the Russians we had to remove the mounds of enemy corpses from before our trenches in order to get a clear field of fire against fresh assaulting waves." Ten

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years after Hindenburg wrote, a careful analysis of Russian casualties was made by Nicholas Golovine, a former general of the Imperial army. Weighing all the evidence, he estimated that 1,300,000 men were killed in action; 4,200,000 were wounded, of whom 350,000 later died of wounds;

and 2,400,000 were taken prisoner. The total is 7,000,000—over half of the 15,500,000 men who were mobilized.

Thus, the military collapse of 1915 played a major part in all that was to happen afterward. For it was the tragic and bloody defeat of the army which weakened the grip of Grand Duke Nicholas and persuaded the Tsar to take personal command of his troops. By going to the army, hundreds of miles from the seat of government, the Tsar gave up all but a vague, supervisory control over affairs of state. In an autocracy, this arrangement was impossible; a substitute autocrat had to be found. Uncertainly at first, then with growing self-confidence, this role was filled by the Empress Alexandra. At her shoulder, his "prayers arising day and night," stood her Friend, Rasputin. Together they would finally bring down the Russian Empire.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Fateful Deception

The Empress had thrown herself heart and soul into the war. Burning with patriotism, filled with energy and enthusiasm, she forgot her own illness to plunge into hospital work. Alexandra was happiest when immersed in other people's problems, and the war gave endless scope to this side of her nature. "To some it may seem unnecessary my doing this," she said, "but . . . help is much needed and every hand is useful." Nursing became her passion. The huge Catherine Palace at Tsarskoe Selo was converted into a military hospital, and before the end of 1914 eighty-five hospitals were operated under her patronage in the Petrograd area alone. This activity, although on a grand scale, was not unique; many Russian ladies at this time established themselves as patrons of hospitals and hospital trains. But only a few followed the Empress's example by enrolling in nursing courses and coming daily in person to tend the wounded.

Life inside the Alexander Palace was transformed. The Empress, who had stayed in bed nursing her ills until noon, now was up for Mass at seven.

Promptly at nine, dressed in the gray uniform of a nursing sister, she arrived at the hospital along with her two eldest daughters, Olga and Tatiana, and Anna Vyrubova for her nursing course. The hospital atmosphere was brutal and pathetic. Every day, Red Cross trains brought long lines of wounded and dying men back from the front. Most had had only first aid in the trenches and frontline dressing stations. They arrived dirty, bloodstained, feverish and groaning. Under the direction of trained nurses, the students washed and bandaged the ripped flesh and mangled bodies. "I have seen the Empress of Russia in the operating room," wrote Anna Vyrubova, "... holding ether cones, handling sterilized instruments, assisting in the most difficult operations, taking from the hands of busy surgeons amputated legs and arms, removing bloody and even vermin-

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ridden field dressings, enduring all the sights and smells and agonies of the most dreadful of all places, a military hospital in the midst of war." Nevertheless, wrote Anna, "I never saw her happier than on the day, at the end of her two months training, she marched at the head of the procession of nurses to receive the Red Cross ... diploma of a certified war nurse."

After a morning in the operating room, Alexandra ate a hurried lunch and spent the afternoon visiting other hospitals. Moving through the aisles between hospital beds, the tall figure of the Empress in her nurse's uniform stirred the wounded men. They reached out bandaged hands to touch her; they wept as she knelt beside their beds to pray. Officers and peasant boys alike, facing amputations, cried from their beds, "Tsaritsa, stand near me. Hold my hand that I may have cour-age.»

To Alexandra, this was Russia, bleeding and dying. She was the Russian Empress, the *matushka* of all the brave men and boys who had given themselves for Russia. "Very bad wounds," she wrote to Nicholas on October 21, 1914 (O.S.). "For the first time, I shaved one of the soldiers' legs near and around the wound. ..." Later, the same day, in a second letter: "Three operations, 3 fingers were taken off as blood poisoning had set in and they were quite rotten. . . . My nose is full of hideous smells from those blood poisoning wounds." And again: "I went in to see the wound of our

standard bearer—awful, bones quite smashed, he suffered hideously during bandaging, but did not say a word, only got pale and perspiration ran down his face and body. . . ." On November 19 (O.S.): "An officer of the 2nd Rifles, poor boy, whose legs are getting quite dark and one fears an amputation may be necessary. I was with the boy yesterday during his dressing, awful to see, and he clung to me and kept quiet, poor child." On November 20 (O.S.): "This morning we were present (I help as always giving the instruments and Olga threaded the needles) at our first big amputation. Whole arm was cut off."

Alexandra spared herself nothing, not even terrible, shattering wounds in the groin: "I had wretched fellows with awful wounds— scarcely a man any more, so shot to pieces, perhaps it must be cut off as so black, but hope to save it—terrible to look at. I washed and cleaned and painted with iodine and smeared with vasoline and tied them up and bandaged all up. ... I did three such—and one had a little tube in it. One's heart bleeds for them—I won't describe any more details as it's so sad, but being a wife and mother I feel for them quite particularly—a young nurse (girl) I sent out of the room."

To Nicholas, at Army Headquarters, death was remote, a question of arithmetic, as regiments, brigades and divisions shriveled away and then were restored by new recruits. To Alexandra, death was familiar and immediate. "During an operation a soldier died . . . hemorrhage," she wrote on November 25, 1914 (O.S.). "All behaved well, none lost their heads [Olga and Tatiana] were brave—They and Ania [Vyrubova] had never seen a death. But he died in a minute. . . . How near death always is."

In November, she formed a special attachment to a young boy, mentioning him repeatedly in her letters: "A young boy kept begging for me . . . the little boy begged me to come earlier today ... I find the young boy gradually getting worse ... in the evenings he is off his head and so weak . . . He will pass away gradually. I only hope not whilst we are away."

Early in March, he died. She wrote: "My poor wounded friend has gone. God has taken him quietly and peacefully to himself. I was as usual with

him in the morning and more than an hour in the afternoon. He talked a lot —in a whisper always—all about his service in the Caucasus—awfully interesting and so bright with his big shiny eyes. . . . Olga and I went to see him. He lay there so peacefullv covered under my flowers I daily brought him, with his lovely peaceful smile—the forehead yet quite warm. I came home with my tears. The elder sister [nurse] cannot either realize it—he was quite calm, cheery, said felt a wee bit not comfy and when the sister 10 minutes after she had gone away, came in, found him with staring eyes, quite blue, breathed twice—and all was over—peaceful to the end. Never did he complain, never asked for anything, sweetness itself—all loved him and that shining smile. You, lovy mine, can understand what that is, when daily one has been there, thinking only of giving him pleasure— and suddenly—finished. . . . Forgive my writing so much about him, but going there and all that, had been a help with you away and I felt God let me bring him a little sunshine in his loneliness. Such is life! Another brave soul left this world to be added to the shining stars above. It must not make you sad what I wrote, only I could not bear it any longer."

The Empress's letters to the Tsar were never meant for any eyes but his. In all, 630 letters were found in a black leather suitcase in Ekaterinburg after her death; of these, 230 were written over the period from their first acquaintance to the outbreak of war in 1914. The other 400 were written during the war years 1914-1916. They

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were written with no inkling that anyone else would ever read them, far less that they would one day be published and become key historical documents used to explain events, personalities and decisions on the eve of the Russian Revolution. Today, they offer this and even more: an intimate window into a soul, a unique portrait of a woman which none of her contemporaries in Russia could possibly have seen.

Alexandra wrote voluminously. She would begin early in the morning, add paragraphs during the day, go on for pages late at night and perhaps add even more the next day. In a bold, rounded hand, she wrote to the Tsar in English in the same telegraphic style she used for her friends: breathless

prose with irregular spelling, many abbreviations, frequent omissions of words that seemed obvious, and punctuation largely with dots and dashes. Both the length and the style of her letters are unfortunate. Often by skipping and jumping, she gives an impression of light-mindedness on subjects about which she actually cared deeply. Similarly, the intense fervor of other passages is strong evidence of the great passions of which Alexandra was capable, but not—as some have charged—sufficient proof that the Empress was mad. The sheer length of her letters has made their interpretation difficult for historians and biographers. It is arduous to read them all and impossible to quote more than a minuscule fraction. Yet, in her case to an extraordinary extent, excerpting has been misleading. A thought whose germination has been proceeding for sentences— perhaps paragraphs—suddenly arrives full strength in a stark and damning phrase. These phrases, plucked from the mass of verbiage, make a loquacious woman seem hopelessly hysterical.

A remarkable feature of these letters was the freshness of Alexandra's love. After two decades of marriage, she still wrote like a young girl. The Empress, so shy and even icy about expressing emotion in public, released all her romantic passion in her letters. Beneath the Victorian surface of reserve, she revealed the extravagant, flowery emotions of the Victorian poets.

The letters, usually arriving with petals of lilies or violets pressed between their pages, begin "Good morning, my darling . . . My beloved one . . . My sweetest treasure . . . My Own Beloved Angel." They end: "Sleep well, my treasure ... I yearn to hold you in my arms and rest my head upon your shoulder ... I yearn for your kisses, for your arms and shy Childy [Nicholas] gives them me [only] in the dark and wify lives by them." She was in anguish whenever he left for the front: "Oh, my love! It was hard bidding you goodbye and seeing that lonely, pale face with big sad eyes at the . . . [train] window—my heart cried out, take me with you ... I gave my good-

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night kiss to your cushion and longed to have you near me—in thoughts I see you lying in your compartment, bend over you, bless you, and gently

kiss your sweet face all over—oh my Darling, how intensely dear you are to me—could I but help you in carrying your heavy burdens, there are so many that weigh on you." Their burdens were much on her mind: "I . . . try to forget everything, gazing into your lovely eyes. ... So much sorrow and pain, worries and trials—one gets so tired and one must keep up and be strong and face everything. . . . We show nothing of what we feel when together. Each keeps up for the other's sake and suffers in silence. We have lived through so much together in these 20 years—and without words have understood each other." Although her language had the fresh, gushing quality of young love, Alexandra did not deceive herself about the passing of time: "32 years ago my child's heart already went out to you in deep love. ... I know I ought not to say this, and for an old married woman it may seem ridiculous, but I cannot help it. With the years, love increases and the time without your sweet presence is hard to bear. Oh, could but our children be equally blessed in their married lives."

Nicholas read her letters in bed at night, the last thing before going to sleep. His replies, if more restrained, were no less intimate and tender. "My beloved Sunny," he wrote, "when I read your letters my eyes are moist ... it seems that you are lying on your sofa and that I am listening to you, sitting in my armchair by the lamp. ... I don't know how I could have endured it all if God had not decreed to give you to me as a wife and friend. I speak in earnest. At times it is difficult to speak of such things and it is easier for me to put it down on paper, owing to stupid shyness. . . . Goodbye, my beloved sweet Sunny. ... I kiss you and the children tenderly. Ever your old hubby, Nicky."

Sitting on her balcony, the Empress described the changing seasons at Tsarskoe Selo: "the sun behind the trees, a soft haze over all, the swans swimming on the pond, steam rising off the grass," and later, "the leaves are turning very yellow and red," and then, "the pink sky behind the kitchen and the trees thickly covered in snow look quite fairy like." From Mogilev, in early spring, Nicholas wrote "the Dnieper broke up yesterday. The whole river was covered with blocks of ice, they moved swiftly but noiselessly and only occasionally could be heard the sharp sound of the clashing of two large ice blocks. It was a magnificent spectacle." A few weeks later: "the

birches are growing green, the chestnuts are shimmering and soon will burst into

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bud. Everything smells good. I noticed two small dogs chasing each other while I stood washing at my window."

Knowing how much he missed his children, Alexandra filled her letters with homey details of their activities: "Baby has his lessons and goes out in the donkey sled twice a day. We take tea in his room and he likes it. . . . Baby madly enjoys your bath and made us all come and look on his pranks in the water. All the daughters beg too for the same treat some evening. May they?" When the Tsar's permission arrived: "The girls are wild that they may bathe in your bath." And later: "Baby ate lots of blinis. . . . Baby improves playing on the balalaika. Tatiana too. I want them to learn to play together. . . . Marie stands at the door and, alas! picks her nose. . . . On the train, the girls are sprawling on the floor with the sun shining full upon them to get brown. From whom have they got that craze? ..."

Despite the distraction of hospital work, the Empress continued to suffer from shortness of breath and used a wheelchair when not in public. Her feet were swollen and her teeth ached. During the spring of 1916, the dentist came daily; sometimes she saw him three separate times in a day. Alexis was bothered with recurring bleeding into his elbows and knees. When he was unable to walk, the Empress spent hours lying on a sofa in his room and took her dinner beside his bed. As evening approached and his pain became stronger—"he dreads the night," she wrote—his sisters Olga and Tatiana came to distract him.

"Baby was awfully gay and cheery all day ... in the night he woke up from pain in his left arm and from 2 on scarcely got a moment's sleep," she wrote on April 6, 1916. "The girls sat with him a good while. It seems he worked with a dirk and must have done too much—he is so strong that it's difficult for him always to remember and think that he must not do strong movements. But as the pain came with such force in the night and the arm won't bend I think it will pass quicker—generally three nights pain. ... I cried like a baby in church. Cannot bear when the sweet child suffers."

That night, she wrote again: "This afternoon I spent in Baby's room whilst Mr. G. [Gilliard] read to him. . . . He suffered almost the whole time, then would doze for a few minutes, and then again strong pains. . . . Reading is the best thing, as for a time it distracts the thoughts. . . . Seeing him suffer makes me utterly wretched. Mr. G. is so gentle and kind with him, knows exactly how to be with him."

For those who knew her, there never was any question of the Em-

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press's Russian patriotism. War between Germany and Russia was personally excruciating—her brother Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse was in the German army—but her allegiance was fervently Russian. "Twenty years have I spent in Russia," she explained to a lady-in-waiting. "It is the country of my husband and my son. I have lived the life of a happy wife and mother in Russia. All my heart is bound to this country." Nevertheless, she grieved at the change that had come over Germany. "What has happened to the Germany of my childhood?" she asked Pierre Gilliard. "I have such happy, poetic memories of my early years at Darmstadt. But on my later visits, Germany seemed to me a changed country, a country I did not know and had never known. ... I had no community of thought or feeling with anyone." She blamed the change on Prussia and the Kaiser. "Prussia has meant Germany's ruin," she declared. "I have no news of my brother. I shiver to think that the Emperor William may avenge himself against me by sending him to the Russian front. He is quite capable of such monstrous behavior."

Because of her awkward personal position, Alexandra was especially sensitive to the national reputation of the soldiers on both sides. When the German army savagely burned the Belgian library town of Louvain, she cried, "I blush to have been a German." On September 25, 1914 (O.S.), she wrote to the Tsar, "I long that our troops should behave exemplarily in every sense and not rob and pillage—leave that horror to the Prussian troops. ... I want our Russian troops to be remembered hereafter with awe and respect—and admiration. . . . Now I am bothering you with things that

do not concern me, but only out of love for your soldiers and their reputation."

Her deep sorrow was war itself and the suffering it brought. Like so many others, she yearned that the suffering would have meaning: "I do wonder what will be after this great war is over. Will there be a reawakening and new birth in all—shall once more ideals exist, will people become more pure and poetic, or will they continue to be dry materialists? So many things one longs to know. But such terrible misery as the whole world has suffered must clean hearts and minds and purify the stagnant brains and sleeping souls. Oh, only to guide all wisely into the right and fruitful channel."

Sharing the Tsar's patriotism, convinced that she and her husband were the center of a great national movement which was sweeping Russia, the Empress worked in the hospitals and awaited victory which would surely come. It was not until the spring of 1915, when the

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prospect of early victory had faded, that Alexandra's letters first showed a serious interest in her husband's work.

Her concern began, curiously enough, with the matter of the Tsar's personal bearing. Wholly imbued with the principle of autocracy, convinced that it was the only form of government for Russia, Alexandra worried that her gentle husband, whom she loved for his kindness and charm, was not sufficiently regal. "Forgive me, precious one," she began to write in April 1915, "but you know you are too kind and gentle—sometimes a good loud voice can do wonders and a severe look—do, my love, be more decided and sure of yourself. You know perfectly well what is right. They [the ministers] must remember who you are. You think me a meddlesome bore, but a woman feels and sees things sometimes clearer than my too humble sweetheart. Humility is God's greatest gift but a sovereign needs to show his will more often."

At the same time, she was advising, "Be more autocratic, my very own sweetheart ... Be the master and lord, you are the autocrat," Alexandra also

began to warn against those she thought were encroaching on the Imperial prerogatives. Grand Duke Nicholas was one target of her criticism; she continued her chiding until he fell. Simultaneously, the Empress bitterly inveighed against the Duma. "Deary, I heard that that horrid Rodzianko and others . . . beg the Duma to be called at once together," she wrote in July 1915. "Oh, please don't it's not their business, they want to discuss things not concerning them and bring more discontent—they must be kept away." Over and over in her letters, she sounds the theme: "We're not a constitutional country and dare not be, our people are not educated for it. . . . Never forget that you are and must remain autocratic Emperor. We are not ready for constitutional government." It was not only her husband's prerogative she was protecting, but also the rights of her son, the future tsar: "For Baby's sake we must be firm as otherwise his inheritance will be awful, as with his character he won't bow down to others but be his own master, as one must in Russia whilst people are still so uneducated."

Seen from Alexandra's viewpoint, the next step was entirely logical. In waging this great fight to save Russia and the autocracy, she needed a powerful ally. Rasputin, she was convinced, was a Man of God; his credentials had been proved in the hours when his prayers had seemed miraculously to check the Tsarevich's hemorrhages. Now, in a time of war, he also appeared the living embodiment of the soul of the Russian people: coarse, simple, uneducated, but close to God and devoted to the Tsar. From these premises, it was no great step for her to conclude

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that God intended Rasputin to guide Russia through the ordeal of war. If she could trust him with the dearest thing she possessed—the life of her son—why should she not also trust him with choosing ministers, commanding the army or directing the life of the entire nation?

For a while in the first autumn of war, Rasputin's influence at Tsarskoe Selo had dwindled. Nicholas could not forgive him his opposition to what the Tsar considered a patriotic war; the Empress was busy from morning until night with hospitals, fulfilling herself in nursing. Once when Rasputin telephoned Anna Vyrubova and asked to see the Empress, Anna replied that

the Empress was busy and that he had better wait a few days. Rasputin put down the phone with loud annoyance.

Early in the winter of 1915, however, Rasputin's influence over the Empress was sweepingly restored by another of those remarkable episodes which studded his life. Late on the afternoon of January 15, 1915, a train carrying Anna Vyrubova from Tsarskoe Selo into Petro-grad was wrecked. When Anna was found and extricated from the wreckage, she was in critical condition. Her legs had been crushed by the coils of a steam radiator; a steel girder had fallen across her face and pinned her head; her skull and her spine were badly injured. At the hospital where she was taken, a surgeon declared, "Do not disturb her. She is dying." Nicholas and Alexandra came to her bedside and waited helplessly for the end. Rasputin, quite out of touch, did not hear about the accident until the following day. When he did, he jumped up from his table and drove straight to the hospital in a car lent to him by Countess Witte. When he entered the room, Anna was in a delirium, murmuring, "Father Gregory, pray for me," while the Tsar and the Empress stood by. Rasputin strode to Anna's side, took her hand and called out "Annushka! Annushka! Annushka!"

The third time he called, Anna slowly opened her eyes.

Rasputin ordered her, "Now wake up and rise."

She made an effort to get up.

"Speak to me," he commanded.

She spoke in a feeble voice.

"She will recover, but she will remain a cripple," said Rasputin, turning to the others. Then he staggered from the room and collapsed in a wave of dizziness and perspiration.

Exactly as Rasputin had predicted, Anna recovered but thereafter moved only on crutches or in a wheelchair. Her devotion to Rasputin became

unquestioning. Convinced that he was sent by Heaven to save the Imperial family, she dedicated herself to assisting Rasputin in his

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mission. Acting as intermediary, she did everything in her power to smooth over differences between her mistress and the *starets.*

In Alexandra, the episode overwhelmingly revived her conviction that Rasputin was a true saint capable of accomplishing miracles. Utterly convinced herself, she did her utmost to transfer her conviction to Nicholas. "No, harken unto Our Friend," she wrote in June 1915. "Believe him. He has your interest and Russia's at heart. It is not for nothing God sent him to us, only we must pay more attention to what He says. His words are not lightly spoken and the importance of having not only his prayers but his advice is great. ... I am haunted by Our Friend's wish and know it will be fatal for us and for the country if not fulfilled. He means what he says when he speaks so seriously." In September 1916: "I fully trust in our Friend's wisdom, endowed by God to counsel what is right for you and our country. He sees far ahead and therefore his judgement can be relied upon."

One block from the Fontanka Canal, at 64 Gorokhovaya Street in Petrograd, stood the building where Rasputin lived during these crucial years, 1914-1916. A five-story brick apartment house, entered through a small paved courtyard, with a concierge's room at the foot of the wide stairs, it was architecturally similar to thousands of buildings erected in that era in Paris, London, Berlin or New York. Socially, there was nothing distinguished about the house of the Imperial favorite. Rasputin's neighbors were working people: a clerk, a seamstress, a masseuse. The staircase was thick with pungent smells: leather, sheepskin coats, thick clouds of cabbage soup and the rancid odor of hot sheep's cheese.

Rasputin's apartment on the third floor of this building was surprisingly small and sedate. It consisted of five rooms. "The bedroom . . . was small and very simply furnished," wrote Prince Felix Yus-soupov, who often visited Rasputin. "In a corner close to the wall was a narrow bed with a red fox bedspread, a present from Anna Vyru-bova. Near the bed was a big chest of painted wood; in the opposite corner were lamps which burned

before a small icon. Portraits of the Tsar and Tsarina hung on the walls along with crude engravings representing bibUcal scenes." [In the dining room] "water was boiling in the samovar; on the tables were a number of plates filled with biscuits, cakes and nuts; glass bowls contained jam and fruit and other delicacies; in the center stood a great basket of flowers. The furniture was of massive oak, the chairs had very high backs, a bulky dresser

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full of crockery took up most of one wall. There were a few badly-painted pictures. A bronze chandelier with glass shades lighted the table. The flat had an air of middle-class solidity."

Here, on days when he had not been drinking late, Rasputin rose early and went to Mass. By the time he returned for a breakfast of bread and tea, the first of his petitioners already was climbing the stairs. Rasputin's influence at court brought him people from all walks of life: bankers, bishops, officers, society women, actresses, adventurers and speculators, peasant girls, old women who had traveled miles simply to get his blessing. The callers came in such numbers that many had to wait in line on the staircase. Outside, the curb was lined with the automobiles of important people visiting Rasputin.

If Rasputin liked a visitor and decided to help, he took his pen and scrawled a few clumsy lines: "My dear and valued friend. Do this for me. Gregory." These scraps of paper, carrying the aura of great connections, were often all that was needed to obtain a position, win a promotion, delay a transfer or confirm a contract. Some of these notes, attached to petitions, went straight to the Empress, who forwarded them to the Tsar. Because Mosolov was head of the Court Secretariat, Rasputin's notes often arrived on his desk. "All were drawn up the same way," he wrote, "a little cross at the top of the page, then one or two lines giving a recommendation from the *starets*. They opened all doors in Petrograd." In one case, Mosolov was unable to help. "A lady in a low cut dress, suitable for a ball . . . handed me an envelope: inside was Rasputin's calligraphy with his erratic spelling: 'My dear chap, Fix it up for her. She is all right. Gregory.' The lady explained that she

wanted to become a prima donna in the Imperial Opera. I did my utmost to explain to her clearly and patiently that the post did not depend in any way on me."

Usually, because he wrote poorly and slowly, Rasputin did not bother to name the service to be performed, leaving it to the petitioner to supply these details. Often, he did not even name the addressee, assuming that the petitioner would place it in the most appropriate hands. Eventually, to save time, Rasputin made up a supply of these notes in advance. As his petitioners arrived, he simply handed them out.

In return for his services, Rasputin accepted whatever his visitors might offer. Financiers and wealthy women put bundles of money on the table and Rasputin stuffed them into his drawers without bothering to count. If his next petitioner was a person in need, he might pull out the whole bundle and give it away. He had little need of money

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himself; his flat was simple, most of his wines and foods were brought as gifts. His only real interest in acquiring money was to accumulate a dowry for his daughter Maria, who was in school in Petrograd and lived in a room in his apartment.

For pretty women, there were other methods of payment. Many an attractive visitor, thinking she could win his help with words and smiles, rushed suddenly out of his apartment, weeping or trembling with rage. Helped down the stairs, she went off to the police station to complain that Rasputin had tried to rape her. There, her name and the circumstances of her plight were duly noted, but Father Gregory was never punished.

Along with his droves of petitioners, another cluster of people attended faithfully on Rasputin. Day after day, in front of the house, in the concierge's lodge and on the stairs leading to Rasputin's door, lounged a squad of detectives. They had a double function: to guard the *starets's* life and to take careful notes of everyone he saw and everything that happened to him. Bored, shifting their feet on the stairs to let the petitioners pass, they scribbled down minute details: "Anastasia Shapovalenkova, the wife of a

doctor, has given Rasputin a carpet. . . . An unknown clergyman brought fish for Rasputin. . . . Councilor von Kok brought Rasputin a case of wine." When a visitor left Rasputin's apartment, the plainclothesmen swarmed around, hoping to learn what had happened inside. If the visitor was garrulous, little dramas were scrawled deadpan into the notebooks:

November 2: "An unknown woman visited Rasputin in order to try to prevent her husband, a lieutenant at present in hospital, from being transferred from St. Petersburg. . . . [She said] 'A servant opened the door to me and showed me to a room where Rasputin, whom I had never seen before, appeared immediately. He told me at once to take off my clothes. I complied with his wish, and went with him into an adjoining room. He hardly listened to my request; but kept on touching my face and breasts and asking me to kiss him. Then he wrote a note but did not give it to me, saying that he was displeased with me and bidding me to come back next day."

December 3: "Madame Likart visited Rasputin ... to ask him to intervene on her husband's behalf. Rasputin proposed that she should kiss him; she refused, however, and departed. Then the mistress of Senator Mamontov arrived. Rasputin asked her to return at 1 a.m."

January 29: "The wife of Colonel Tatarinov visited Rasputin and

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... the *starets* embraced and kissed a young girl in her presence; she found the incident so painful that she had decided never to visit Rasputin again."

The staircase watch was maintained at night as well as by day, and the police kept track of Rasputin's evening companions: "Maria Gill, the wife of a Captain in the 145th Regiment, slept at Rasputin's. . . . About 1 a.m. Rasputin brought an unknown woman back to the house; she spent the night with him. . . . Rasputin brought a prostitute back to the flat and locked her in his room. The servants, however, afterwards let her out. . . . Vararova, the actress, slept at Rasputin's."

Sometimes when Rasputin had been aroused but left unsatisfied by his female visitors, he wandered up and down the stairs, pounding on doors:

May 9: "Rasputin sent the concierge's wife for the masseuse but she refused to come. He then went himself to Katia, the seamstress who lives in the house, and asked her to 'keep him company.' The seamstress refused. . . . Rasputin said 'Come next week and I will give you fifty roubles.' "

June 2: "Rasputin sent the porter's wife to fetch the masseuse, Utilia, but she was not at home. ... He went to the seamstress Katia in Flat 31. He was apparently refused admittance, for he came down the stairs again, and asked the porter's wife to kiss him. She, however, disengaged herself from his embrace, and rang his flat bell, whereupon the servant appeared and put Rasputin to bed."

In time, Rasputin became friendly with the detectives. As his door opened and his powerful figure and weather-beaten face appeared, the detectives would bow, lift their hats and wish him good morning. Often, they were able to be of service to him. One night, two gentlemen with drawn revolvers dashed up the stairs, declaring that their wives were spending the night with Rasputin and that they had come to avenge the dishonor. While one group of agents staved off the angry husbands, others raced up the stairs to give warning. In haste, Rasputin managed to bundle the ladies down the back stairs before their husbands burst in the front door.

Late at night, Rasputin thundered down the stairs, jumped into his car and drove off to carouse until dawn. The police, stuffing their pencils and notebooks into their pockets, scurried to follow:

December 14: "On the night of 13th to 14th December, Rasputin, accompanied by the 28 year old wife of . . . Yazininski, left . . . about 2 a.m. in a car for the restaurant Villa Rode. . . . He was refused admittance on account of the lateness of the hour; but he began

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to hammer on the doors and wrenched the bell off. He gave five roubles to the police officer on guard, not to annoy him. Then he went off with his

companion to the Mazalksi gypsy choir at Number 49 and remained there until 10 a.m. The pair, in a very tipsy state, then proceeded to Madame Yazininskaia's flat, from which Rasputin did not return home until midday. In the evening, he drove to Tsarskoe Selo."

April 15: "Rasputin . . . called on the honorary burgess Pestrikov. ... As Pestrikov was not at home, he took part in a drinking party which Pestrikov's son was giving to some students. A musician struck up and there was singing and Rasputin danced with a maidservant."

His revels ended, Rasputin staggered home, still accompanied by the exhausted but dogged detectives:

October 14: "Rasputin came home dead drunk at 1 a.m. and insulted the concierge's wife."

November 6: "Rasputin . . . came back drunk ... as he went up to his flat he inquired if there were any visitors for him. On hearing that there were two ladies, he asked 'Are they pretty. Very pretty? That's good. I need pretty ones.' "

January 14: "Rasputin came home at 7 a.m. He was dead drunk. . . . He smashed a pane of glass in the house door; apparently he had had one fall already, for his nose was swollen."

Day after day, these reports piled up in huge bundles on the desks of the police. From there, they were passed to some whose duty it was to read them, and to many who, although unauthorized, paid handsomely to savor their lusty flavor. Ministers, court officials, grand dukes, countesses, foreign ambassadors, great industrialists, merchants and stockbrokers all pored over them. The talk of Petrograd, they titillated or outraged every important citizen. Marye, the American Ambassador, wrote breathlessly in his diary: "Rasputin's apartments are the scene of the wildest orgies. They beggar all description and from the current accounts of them which pass freely from mouth to mouth, the storied infamies of the Emperor Tiberius on the Isle of Capri are made to seem moderate and tame." The notes convinced all who read them that the man they described was coarse, unscrupulous, a satyr.

Only one person, offered the chance, refused to read them. The Empress was convinced that the senior officials of the police hated Rasputin and would do what they could to blacken his name. For her, the famous "staircase notes" were only fiction.

The sheer, blind obstinacy of Alexandra's refusal to see the truth was never more dramatically displayed than in the notorious incident of the Yar in April 1915. Rasputin had arrived in Moscow, supposedly to pray at the tombs of the patriarchs in the Ouspensky Sobor

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inside the Kremlin. At night, however, he decided to visit the popular Yar restaurant, where he soon became roaring drunk. Bruce Lock-hart happened to be present. "I was at Yar, the most luxurious night haunt of Moscow, with some English visitors," he wrote. "As we watched the music hall performance in the main hall, there was a violent fracas in one of the private rooms. Wild shrieks of women, a man's curses, broken glass, and the banging of doors. Headwaiters rushed upstairs. The manager sent for policemen. . . . But the row and the roaring continued. . . . The cause of the disturbance was Rasputin—drunk and lecherous, and neither police nor management dared evict him." Eventually, a telephone call reached the Assistant Minister of Interior, who gave permission to arrest him, and Rasputin was led away "snarling and vowing vengeance." According to witnesses, Rasputin had exposed himself, shouting boastfully that he often behaved this way in the company of the Tsar and that he could do what he liked with "the Old Girl."

A report including every detail of Rasputin's behavior was drawn up and personally submitted to the Tsar by General Dzhunkovsky, an aide-de-camp who was commander of all the police in the empire. It was assumed by those who knew its contents that this time Rasputin was finally finished. Nicholas summoned Rasputin and angrily asked for an explanation. Rasputin's excuse was ingenious and contained at least a kernel of truth. He explained that he was a simple peasant who had been lured to an evil spot and tempted to drink more than he should. He denied the grosser parts of the report and swore that he had never made any statement about the

Imperial family. Nevertheless, without showing the report to Alexandra, the Tsar ordered Rasputin to leave Petrograd for a while and return to Pokrovskoe.

Later, the Empress read the report and exploded with wrath. "My enemy Dzhunkovsky has shown that vile, filthy paper to Dmitry [Grand Duke Dmitry, later one of Rasputin's assassins]. If we let our Friend be persecuted, we and our country will suffer for it." Dzhun-kovsky's days were numbered. From that moment, the Empress's letters were filled with a stream of pleadings to "get rid of Dzhunkovsky," and in September 1915 he was dismissed.*

* A novel explanation of Rasputin's two violently contrasting images—the holy man and the debauchee—is offered by Maria Rasputin in her book, *Rasputin, My Father.* According to this faithful daughter, her saintly father's good name was blackened by the monstrous device, concocted by the Tsar's enemies, of hiring an actor who resembled the *starets* and instructing him to debauch himself in the most obscene manner in the most public places. It is a dutiful effort, but it breaks under the weight of contrary evidence.

Whatever else he might be doing, Rasputin always took exquisite care to preserve the image of piety he had created at Tsarskoe Selo. It was the keystone of everything, his career and his life, and he protected it with cunning and zeal. Sometimes, an unexpected telephone call from Tsarskoe Selo would break in and upset his evening plans. He growled, but even when thoroughly drunk, managed to sober himself immediately and rush off to consult with "Mama," as he called the Empress, on matters of state.

Alexandra's disbelief in the evil half of Rasputin's nature was considerably more complicated than a simple, prudishly Victorian blindness to that side of life. She was certainly moralistic, but she was not ignorant or squeamish about sex and vice. She had heard most of the stories about Rasputin's villainous behavior and she had consciously rejected them as false and slanderous. For this fateful misjudgment on her part, Rasputin himself was shamefully—and yet, as an actor, brilliantly—responsible.

Gregory Rasputin was one of the most extraordinary and enigmatic men to appear on earth. He was an overwhelming personality and a superbly

convincing actor. He had prodigious physical strength and caroused night and day at a pace that would kill a normal man. His physical presence projected enormous magnetism: prime ministers, princes, bishops and grand dukes as well as society women and peasant girls had felt his powerful attraction and, when the relationship soured, had been as powerfully repelled.

Now, all of the terrible power of this remarkable personality was concentrated on a single objective: convincing the Empress that he was as she saw him, the pure, devoted Man of God, sprung from the soil of peasant Russia. Because of his painstaking care, Alexandra never saw him as anything else. His superb performance was strongly enhanced by the miracles she had seen take place at the bedsides of Alexis and Anna. Whenever he felt himself threatened, Rasputin skillfully played on the Empress's fears and her religious nature. "Remember that I need neither the Emperor or yourself," he would say. "If you abandon me to my enemies, it will not worry me. I am quite able to cope with them. But neither the Emperor nor you can do without me. If I am not there to protect you, you will lose your son and your crown within six months." Even had she begun to doubt the *starets's* purity, Alexandra—having been through Spala and the nosebleed on the train—was not willing to take risks. Rasputin must be what he said he was and he must stay with her or her world would collapse. Shrewdly, Rasputin secured his position and enhanced his hold by meeting the Empress's more prosaic need for constant reassurance and encouragement. His conversation and telegrams were an artful blend of religion and prophecy, often sounding like the gloriously meaningless forecasts which fall from penny machines at county fairs: "Be crowned with earthly happiness, the heavenly wreaths will follow. . . . Do not fear our present embarrassments, the protection of the Holy Mother is over you—go to the hospitals though the enemies are menacing—have faith. . . . Don't fear, it will not be worse than it was, faith and the banner will favor us." Blurred though these messages were, the Empress, weary and harassed, found them comforting.

Politically, Rasputin's advice was usually confined to carefully endorsing policies which the Empress already believed in, making certain that the idea was rephrased in his own language so that it would seem freshly inspired. Where his ideas were in fact original and specific, they accurately and realistically represented peasant Russia. Throughout the war, he warned of the bloodletting. "It is getting empty in the villages," he told the Tsar. Yet, when challenged by Paléologue that he had been urging the Tsar to end the war, Rasputin retorted, "Those who told you that are just idiots. I am always telling the Tsar that he must fight until complete victory is won. But I am also telling him that the war has brought unbearable suffering to the Russian people. I know of villages where there is no one left but the blind and the wounded, the widows and the orphans."

As the war continued, Rasputin, like Lenin, saw that along with peace the other predominant concern of the Russian people was bread. He recognized that the shortage of food was mainly a problem of distribution, and never ceased to warn the Empress that the most critical of Russia's problems was the railways. At one point in October 1915, he urged Alexandra to insist that the Tsar cancel all passenger trains for three days so that supplies of food and fuel might flow into the cities.

When it came to the choice of ministers to rule the country, the area in which he exercised his most destructive influence, Rasputin had no design at all. He nominated men for the highest positions in the Russian government simply because they liked him, or said they liked him, or at the very least did not oppose him. Rasputin had no burning ambition to rule Russia. He simply wished to be left untroubled in his free-wheeling, dissolute life. When powerful ministers, despising his influence over the Empress, opposed him, he wanted them out of the way. By placing his own men in every office of major importance, he could ensure, not that he would rule, but that he would be left alone.

In time, every appointment in the highest echelon of the govern-

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ment ministries and in the leadership of the church passed through his hands. Some of Rasputin's choices would have been comical except that the

joke was too grim. Rasputin once found a court chamberlain named A. N. Khvostov dining at the nightclub Villa Rode. When the gypsy chorus began to sing, Rasputin was not satisfied; he thought the basses much too weak. Spotting Khvostov, who was large and stout, he clapped him on the back and said, "Brother, go and help them sing. You are fat and can make a lot of noise." Khvostov, tipsy and cheerful, leaped onto the stage and boomed out a thundering bass. Delighted, Rasputin clapped and shouted his approval. Not long afterward, Khvostov unexpectedly became Minister of Interior. His appointment provoked Vladimir Purishkevich, a member of the Duma, to declare in disgust that new ministers now were asked to pass examinations, not in government, but in gypsy music.

Similarly, Rasputin's ardent endorsement of the Empress's belief in autocracy was at least in part self-defensive. Only under a system in which his patron and patroness were all-powerful would he survive. He resisted the demands of those in the Duma and elsewhere who urged responsible government, because the first act of such a government would have been to eliminate him. Furthermore, Rasputin honestly did not believe in responsible government. He did not believe that the Duma members or Rodzianko, their President, represented the real Russia. Certainly they did not represent the peasant Russia from which he had sprung. He believed in the monarchy not simply as an opportunist, but because it was the only form of government known in the villages. Traditionally, the peasants looked to the Tsar. Aristocrats, courtiers, landowners—precisely the men who sat in the Duma—were the classes which, historically, had barred the peasants' access to the Tsar. Seen in this light, it became the Duma members, not Rasputin, who were the unscrupulous opportunists trying to steal the Tsar's powers. To give the Duma more power than it had, to further dilute the role of autocracy, would bring to an end the old, traditional Russia of Tsar, Church and People. Rasputin understood this and resisted it. "Responsible government," wrote the Empress to the Tsar, "as our Friend says, would be the ruin of everything."

How did Nicholas regard these ardent, persistent letters exhorting him to choose this or that minister and, above all, to believe more in "our Friend"? There were times when he reacted by quietly ignoring her advice, wrapping

himself in a mantle of silence, avoiding direct answers and calmly going his own way. The very vociferousness of Alexandra's letters is evidence that she was often dissatisfied with his response; had she truly been ruling the empire and Nicholas merely a

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pawn executing her commands, these insistent, repetitive exhortations would not have been necessary.

But if Nicholas did not always gratify his wife's entreaties, he rarely confronted her with an overt refusal. This was especially true in any matter involving Rasputin. Toward the *starets,* the Tsar's own attitude was one of tolerant respect tinged with an amiable skepticism. At times, he confessed himself soothed by Rasputin's semi-religious chatter. Leaving for the front in March 1915, he wrote to Alexandra, "I am going with such a calm in my soul that I am myself surprised. Whether it is because I had a talk with our Friend or because of the newspaper telling of the death of Witte [who had died of a stroke at sixty-seven] I don't know." On other occasions, Nicholas was annoyed at Rasputin's intrusion into political matters and begged his wife "do not drag our Friend into this."

Nevertheless, when the Empress threw herself at him verbally, pleading that he follow the advice of "the Man of God," Nicholas often bowed. He knew very well how much she counted on the presence and prayers of Rasputin; he had seen with his own eyes what had happened at the bedsides of Alexis and Anna. To comfort her, encourage her and appease her fears, he endorsed her suggestions and recommendations. This relationship was greatly accentuated once Nicholas had left for Headquarters. Then, having left the management of internal affairs in the Empress's hands, Nicholas regularly deferred to her suggestions in the appointment of ministers. And it was her choice of ministers, proposed by Rasputin, beseechingly pressed on and unwisely endorsed by the absentee Tsar, which lost the Tsar his throne.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The Government Disintegrates

In the early autumn of 1915, Alexandra Fedorovna had been Empress of Russia for twenty-one years. During this time, she had shown little interest in politics and no personal ambition. Except in defense of Rasputin, she rarely even mentioned government affairs to the Tsar. She scarcely knew her husband's ministers and, during the first decade of her marriage, held them completely in awe. In 1905, Count Fredericks persuaded her with difficulty to speak to the Tsar on a political matter. When he came back and asked her a second time, Alexandra burst into tears. After her son was born and Rasputin appeared, she intervened when he seemed threatened. Then her power could become formidable: Kokovtsov's dismissal as Premier was primarily her work. But she remained shy and silent in the presence of the ministers and she still had no experience in government affairs.

All this changed when Nicholas took command of the army. Then the gap he left behind in the civil administration was filled by his wife. It was not a formal regency; rather, it was an almost domestic division of family duties. As such, it was wholly within the tradition of the Russian autocracy. "When the Emperor went to war, of course his wife governed instead of him," said Grand Duke Alexander, explaining what he considered a natural sequence of events.

That Nicholas regarded her role in this light is clear from his letters. "Think, my wify, will you not come to the assistance of your hubby now that he is absent," he wrote cheerfully after leaving for Headquarters. "What a pity that you have not been fulfilling this duty-long ago or at least during the war." On September 23, 1916 (O.S.), he said, "Yes, truly, you ought to be my eyes and ears there in the capital while I have to stay here. It rests with you to keep peace and harmony among the Ministers—thereby you do a great service to me and to our

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country. ... I am so happy to think that you have found at last a worthy occupation. Now I shall naturally be calm and at least not worry over internal affairs." And the next day: "You will really help me a great deal by speaking to the ministers and watching them." When she felt unsure and apologized for her presumption, he reassured her: "There is nothing to

forgive you for, on the contrary, I must be deeply grateful to you for so far advancing this serious matter by your help."

Once the Tsar had asked for her help, Alexandra threw herself into the task. To "keeping peace and harmony among the ministers" and managing internal affairs, she brought the same intense devotion and narrow stubbornness she had shown in fighting for the life of her son. Lacking experience, she made numerous, outsized mistakes. She groped blindly for people and facts, unable to verify what she was told, often depending on the impressions of a single short interview. As she went along, her self-confidence improved, and it was a personal triumph when in September 1916 she delightedly wrote to the Tsar, "I am no longer the slightest bit shy or afraid of ministers and speak like a waterfall in Russian."

Rasputin was not only her advisor, he was also her yardstick for measuring other men. "Good" men esteemed Rasputin's advice and respected him. "Bad" men hated him and made up disgusting stories about him. The work of "good" men would be blessed, and therefore they should be appointed to high office. "Bad" men were sure to fail, and those already in office should be driven out. Alexandra did not particularly care whether a prospective minister had special aptness or expertise for his new role. What mattered was that he be acceptable to the Man of God. It was far more important that he like Rasputin than that he understand anything about munitions or diplomacy or the distribution of food.

Every new candidate for the Council of Ministers was scrutinized and measured in this manner: "He likes our Friend. . . . He venerates our Friend. . . . He calls our Friend Father Gregory. ... Is he not our Friend's enemy?" Unlike the Duma, whose very existence she considered a stain on the autocracy, the Empress accepted the Council of Ministers as a legitimate institution. Ministers, appointed by the Tsar and responsible only to him, were necessary to govern the country. What Alexandra could not abide were ministers who opposed the autocratic will. Any sign that a minister disagreed with the Tsar made her suspicious; the thought that ministers and Duma might be working together drove her frantic.

For her, the ideal minister was personified by the aged Prime

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Minister, Ivan Goremykin. Having stepped down as Prime Minister in 1906 to make way for Stolypin, Goremykin had been restored to power before the outbreak of war. Now seventy-six and in failing health, Goremykin had no illusions about his role. As far back as 1896, Pobedonostsev had written to Nicholas that Goremykin needed a rest, otherwise "he would not last throughout the winter." Goremykin had repeatedly asked—and been denied—permission to resign. "The Emperor can't see that the candles have already been lit around my coffin and that the only thing required to complete the ceremony is myself," he said mournfully.

Nevertheless, Goremykin's stubborn, old-fashioned views of autocracy and the role of the minister were much too rare and valuable for him to be let go. "I am a man of the old school and an Imperial Command is for me a law," he declared. "To me, His Majesty is the anointed one, the rightful sovereign. He personifies the whole of Russia. He is forty-seven and it is not just since yesterday that he has been reigning and deciding the fate of the Russian people. When the decision of such a man is made and his course of action is determined, his faithful subjects must accept it whatever may be the consequences. And then let God's will be fulfilled. These views I have held all my life and with them I shall die." Not surprisingly, the Empress was delighted with Goremykin, whom she always affectionately called the "Old Man." "He sees and understands all so clearly and it is a pleasure speaking to him," she declared.

Just how unique Goremykin and his views of autocracy were became glaringly apparent in the severe ministerial crisis which followed the Tsar's decision to take command of the army. Of all the ministers, Goremykin alone supported his master's decision. In vain, he urged them, "I call upon you, gentlemen, in the face of events of extraordinary importance to bow to the will of His Majesty, to lend him your full support in the moment of trial, and to devote all your powers to the service of the Sovereign." When they refused, he said wearily, "I beg you to inform the Emperor that I am not

fitted for my position and that it is necessary to appoint a man of more modern views in my place. I shall be grateful to you for the service."

Instead, the majority of the ministerial council decided that, as the Tsar refused to heed its advice, there was nothing to do but resign. "It is our duty," declared Sazonov, the Foreign Minister, ". . . to tell the Tsar frankly that under existing conditions we cannot govern the country, that we cannot serve conscientiously and that we are doing harm to the country. . . . The Cabinet cannot perform its functions while it does not enjoy the confidence of the Sovereign." A collective

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letter of resignation, signed by eight of the thirteen ministers, was addressed to the Tsar. It had no effect whatsoever. Nicholas summoned the ministers to Headquarters and told them that until he saw fit to replace them, they were not permitted to resign.

A few days later, in a letter to Alexandra, he ruminated on the gap between himself and his ministers. "The behavior of some of the Ministers continues to amaze me. After all I told them at that famous evening sitting, I thought they understood . . . precisely what I thought. What matter—so much the worse for them. They were afraid to close the Duma—it was done. I came away here and replaced N. [Grand Duke Nicholas] in spite of their advice; the people accepted this move as a natural thing and understood it as we did. The proof— numbers of telegrams which I receive from all sides with the most touching expressions. All this shows me clearly one thing: that the Ministers always living in town, know terribly little of what is happening in the country as a whole. Here I can judge correctly the real mood among the various classes of people. . . . Petrograd and Moscow constitute the only exceptions on the map of the fatherland."

The Empress was less interested in finding excuses for ministerial behavior than she was in driving each man who had signed the letter out of office. Thus, the next sixteen months saw a sad parade of dismissals, reshuffles and intrigues. In that time, Russia had four different prime ministers, five ministers of interior, four ministers of agriculture and three ministers of war. "After the middle of 1915," wrote Florinsky, "the fairly honorable and

efficient group who formed the top of the bureaucratic pyramid degenerated into a rapidly changing succession of the appointees of Rasputin. It was an amazing, extravagant, and pitiful spectacle, and one without parallel in the history of civilized nations."

Two of the signers, Prince Shcherbatov, the Minister of Interior, and Samarin, the Procurator of the Holy Synod (Minister of Religion), went quickly, dismissed without explanation early in October. Krivoshein, the Minister of Agriculture, left in November, and Kharitonov, the State Controller, departed in January. The next to go, in February 1916, was the faithful Goremykin. "The ministers do not wish to work well with old Goremykin . . . therefore, on my return some changes must take place," had written Nicholas. At first, the Empress was reluctant. "If in any way you feel he hinders, is an obstacle for you, then you better let him go," she wrote, "but if you keep him he will do all you order and try to do his best. . . . To my mind, much better clear out ministers who strike and not change the President who

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with decent, energetic, well-intentioned . . . [colleagues] can serve still perfectly well. He only lives and serves you and your country and knows his days are counted and fears not death of age, or by knife or shot." Rasputin also hated the idea of losing Goremykin: "He cannot bear the idea of the Old Man being sent away, has been worrying and thinking over that question without end. Says he is so very wise and when others make a row ... he sits merely with his head down—it is because he understands that today the crowd howls, tomorrow rejoices, that one need not be crushed by the changing waves."

Nevertheless, in Goremykin's enfeebled hands, the government had almost ceased to function. His fellow ministers avoided or ignored him. When he appeared in the Duma, the elderly man was greeted by a prolonged hiss which made it impossible for him to speak. The Tsar, the Empress and Goremykin himself understood that the situation could not continue. "I keep wracking my brains over the question of a successor for the Old Man," wrote Nicholas. Alexandra sadly agreed, and for a while they thought of

appointing Alexander Khvostov, the conservative Minister of Justice. An uncle of the singing Minister of Interior, this older Khvostov was one of the ministers who had refused to sign the infamous letter. First, however, Khvostov was to have a visit from Rasputin.

"Our Friend told me to wait about the Old Man until he had seen Uncle Khvostov on Thursday, what impression he will have of him," Alexandra wrote to the Tsar. "He [Rasputin] is miserable about the dear Old Man, says he is such a righteous man, but he dreads the Duma hissing him and then you will be in an awful position." The following day, the Empress wrote, "Tomorrow Gregory sees old Khvostov and then I see him in the evening. He wants to tell his impression if a worthy successor to Goremykin." But Khvostov did not survive the interview; Alexandra wrote indignantly that Rasputin was received "like a petitioner in the ministry."

The next candidate brought forward, Boris Sturmer, was more successful. Equipped with Goremykin's arch-conservative instincts while lacking completely the old man's courage and honesty, Sturmer, then sixty-seven, was an obscure and dismal product of the professional Russian bureaucracy. His family origins were German; his great-uncle, Baron Sturmer, had been Austria's representative on the guard which sat on St. Helena keeping watch on Napoleon. Stiirmer himself, first as Master of Ceremonies at court, then as the reactionary governor of Yaroslav province, had attracted a universally bad repu-

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tation. "A man who had left a bad memory wherever he occupied an administrative post," declared Sazonov. "An utter nonentity," groaned Rodzianko. "A false and double-faced man," said Khvostov.

When Sturmer first appeared, Paléologue, who had scarcely heard of him, busied himself for three days gathering information. Then he penned this discouraging portrait: "He ... is worse than a mediocrity—third rate intellect, mean spirit, low character, doubtful honesty, no experience and no idea of State business. The most that can be said for him is that he has a rather pretty talent for cunning and flattery. . . . His appointment becomes intelligible on the supposition that he has been selected solely as a tool; in

other words, actually on account of his insignificance and servility. . . . [He] has been . . . warmly recommended to the Emperor by Rasputin."

In fact, Sturmer was first recommended to the Tsar by Rasputin's friend and protégé Pitirim, who, with Rasputin's aid, had been named Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in Petrograd. "I begat Pitirim and Pitirim begat Sturmer" was the way Rasputin sardonically put it. Nevertheless, Stunner's name was the one that filled the Empress's letters. "Lovy, I don't know but I should still think of Sturmer. . . . Sturmer would do for a time. He very much values Gregory which is a great thing. . . . Our Friend said about Sturmer to take him for a time at least, as he is such a decided loyal man."

To the astonishment of Russia and even of the faithful Goremykin, who had no inkling that his wish for retirement was about to be granted, the unknown Sturmer was suddenly named Prime Minister in February 1916. The Duma regarded the appointment as a crushing humiliation, an insult to all of their work and aspirations. There was no doubt that when the new Prime Minister appeared before them, their outrage would exceed anything they had directed at Goremykin. At this point, Rasputin offered an ingenious suggestion. The *starets* had no love for the Duma, but he understood its usefulness. "Dogs collected to keep other dogs quiet," he called the members. Under the circumstances, he advised Nicholas to make a placating gesture. "Of course if you could have turned up for a few words, quite unexpected at the Duma . . . that might change everything," Alexandra explained the scheme to her husband. Nicholas agreed, and on February 22, 1916, the Tsar appeared in person before the Imperial Duma. The gesture was an overwhelming success. A *Te Deum* was sung, Nicholas greeted the members as "representatives of the Russian people" and presented the Order of St. Anne to Rodzianko. Although Sturmer was present at the side of the Tsar, his appointment was temporarily for-

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gotten—as Rasputin had cunningly foreseen—amid a storm of cheers.

With Stunner installed at the top, the Empress, urged on by Rasputin, continued to weed among the ministerial ranks. Her next major target was Polivanov, the Minister of War. The Empress had never liked him. "Forgive

me," she had written the Tsar when Polivanov was appointed, "but I don't like the choice of Minister of War Polivanov. Is he not our Friend's enemy?" In the short time since he replaced the indolent Sukhomlinov, the brusque, efficient PoUvanov had worked wonders in training and equipping the army. It was primarily due to his efforts that the beaten Russian army of 1915 was able to recover and launch the great offensive of 1916. Nevertheless, Polivanov was marked, not only by his rough refusal to have anything to do with Rasputin, but also by his eagerness to work closely with the Duma in obtaining maximum support for his army program. In the end, Polivanov's doom was sealed when he discovered that Rasputin had been supplied by Sturmer with four high-powered War Office cars too fast to be followed by the police when he set off for one of his steamy nocturnal haunts. Polivanov sternly objected, and soon Alexandra was writing to Nicholas, "Get rid of Polivanov . . . any honest man better than him. . . . Remember about Polivanov. . . . Lovy, don't dawdle, make up your mind, it's far too serious." On March 25, PoUvanov fell. "Oh, the relief! Now I shall sleep well," she said when she heard the news. Others were appalled. Polivanov was "undoubtedly the ablest military organizer in Russia and his dismissal was a disaster," wrote Knox. General Shuvaiev, Polivanov's successor, Knox described as "a nice old man, quite straight and honest. He had no knowledge of his work, but his devotion to the Emperor was such that if the door were to open and His Majesty were to come into the room and ask him to throw himself out of the window, he would do so at once."

The next to go was Sazonov, the Foreign Minister. A brother-in-law of Stolypin, Sazonov was a cultivated man of liberal background and a close friend of both Buchanan and Paléologue. He had been Foreign Minister since 1910 and was completely trusted both by the Tsar and by the Allied governments. Nevertheless, since his signing of the ministerial letter, Alexandra had wanted him removed. She suspected, rightly, that along with his friendship with England and France, he also wanted a responsible government in Russia; both, she believed, would undermine the autocratic Russia she hoped to pass along to her son. Through the winter, she kept up a barrage at "long-nosed Sazonov . . . Sazonov is such a pancake." Then, in March 1916, she wrote to

Nicholas, "Wish you could think of a good successor to Sazonov— need not be a diplomat. So as ... to see we are not later sat upon by England and that when questions of ultimate peace come we should be firm. Old Gorernykin and Stiirmer always disapproved of him as he is such a coward towards Europe and a parliamentarist—and that would be Russia's ruin."

Sazonov's downfall came in July 1916, and was actually precipitated by the question of autonomy for Poland. At the outbreak of war, Russia had promised a virtually independent, united Polish kingdom, linked to Russia only in the person of the Tsar. The Poles were enthusiastic, and on first entering Galicia, Russian troops were welcomed as liberators. Military defeat and the loss of most Polish territory in 1915 had delayed action on the pledge, at the same time encouraging those Russian conservatives who resisted its enactment, fearing that autonomy for one part of the empire would stimulate other provinces to seek the same thing. Alexandra, spurred by Rasputin, argued that "Baby's future rights" were challenged. Nevertheless, Sazonov, backed by Britain and France, continued to insist.

On July 12, Sazonov saw Nicholas at Headquarters. "The Emperor has entirely adopted my views. ... I won all along the line," he reported jubilantly to Buchanan and Paléologue. In enormous good humor, the Foreign Minister left for a Finnish holiday during which he planned to draft an Imperial proclamation on Poland. Meanwhile, both Stiirmer and the Empress hurried to Headquarters, and while he was still in Finland, Sazonov was abruptly dismissed. Appalled, Buchanan and Paléologue pleaded that the dismissal be set aside. Failing, Buchanan then boldly asked the Tsar's permission to have King George V grant the fallen minister a British court decoration in recognition of his services to the alliance. Nicholas agreed and was genuinely pleased that Sazonov, whom he liked and had dealt with shabbily, was receiving the honor.

Sazanov's replacement at the Foreign Ministry was none other than Stiirmer, who took on the office in addition to the Premiership. The appointment was a further hideous shock to Buchanan and Paléologue, who would now be dealing daily on an intimate professional level with Russia's new Foreign Minister. Each Ambassador reacted in character: Buchanan

stiffly wrote London that "I can never hope to have confidential relations with a man on whose word no reliance can be placed." Paléologue, after an interview, confided to his diary, "His [Sturmer's] look, sharp and honeyed, furtive and blinking, is the very expression of hypocrisy ... he emits an intolerable odor of false-

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ness. In his bonhomie and his affected politeness one feels that he is low, intriguing, and treacherous."*

The key ministry in troubled times was not Foreign Affairs or even the presidency of the ministerial council. It was the Ministry of Interior, which was responsible for the preservation of law and order. Under this office came the police, the secret police, informers and counterespionage—all the devices which, as a regime grows more unpopular, become all the more necessary to its preservation. In October 1916, the Tsar suddenly appointed to this critical post the Vice-President of the Duma, Alexander Protopopov. The choice was a disaster, yet, ironically, Nicholas made it at least in part as a gesture to Rodzianko and the Duma.

Alexander Protopopov was sixty-four, a small, sleek man with white hair, a mustache and bright black eyes. In his native Simbirsk, the Volga town which also gave Russia Kerensky and Lenin, Protopopov's social position was far higher than that of either of his famous fellow townsmen. His father was a nobleman and landowner who also owned a large textile factory; the son went to cadet cavalry school, studied law and became a director of his father's factory. An important local personage, he was elected to the Duma, where, although he showed little political distinction, his smooth and ingratiating air made him thoroughly popular. "He was handsome, elegant, captivating in a drawing room, moderately liberal and always pleasant. . . . There was a slightly cunning air about him but this seemed very innocent and goodnatured," wrote Kerensky, who also sat in the Fourth Duma.

Protopopov's charm and his membership in the large, moderately liberal Octobrist Party saw him repeatedly elected to the Duma vice-presidency. Rodzianko, as President, respected his deputy's abilities. In June 1916 he

suggested to Nicholas that Protopopov would make a good minister. "For the post [of Minister of Trade] he proposed

* Buchanan and Paléologue, as representatives of Russia's allies, were naturally the preeminent members of the Petrograd diplomatic corps, but American representation was unusually and unnecessarily weak jdue to President Wilson's appointment of nonprofessionals to the post. From 1914 to 1916, the U.S. Ambassador was George T. Marye, a San Franciscan who had little contact or interest in Russia and got most of his information from the newspapers he received from Paris. At his farewell audience with the Tsar, Marye mentioned that he hoped that after the war American businessmen would flock to invest in Russia. "Russia needed American energy, American money and the Americans who engaged in business in Russia would find the field immensely profitable. No one, of course, is in business for his health—the Emperor smiled slightly as I indulged in this somewhat homely expression," reported Marye. Marye's successor was David R. Francis, a wealthy businessman and former Governor of Missouri who arrived in Russia with a portable cuspidor with a foot-operated lid.

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his *tovarish* Protopopov," Nicholas wrote to Alexandra, adding, "I have an idea that our Friend mentioned him [Protopopov] on some occasion." But no changes were made at that time, and Protopopov remained as the second man in the Duma. In this capacity, he led a delegation of Duma members on good-will visits to England and France in July 1916; on the way home, he stopped at Stockholm and had a mysterious talk with a Swedish financier known to be close to the German Embassy. Upon arriving in Russia, he traveled to Headquarters to make an official call on the Tsar. "Yesterday I met a man I like very much, Protopopov, Vice President of the State Duma," Nicholas wrote. "He traveled abroad with members of the Duma and told me much of interest."

All of the ingredients necessary for Protopopov's elevation to the Ministry now were present: he had charmed the Tsar with his manner, he had been recommended as a solid worker by Rodzianko and, most important of all, he had the sweeping endorsement of Rasputin and therefore of the Empress. Protopopov's acquaintance with Rasputin stretched back over several years. The prospective Minister was not in good health. He suffered from a disease variously described as progressive paralysis of the spine or advanced syphilis, depending on the informant's feelings about Protopopov. When doctors were unable to help, Protopopov went to Badmayev, a quackish Siberian herb doctor then fashionable in Petrograd. Badmayev

knew Rasputin, and Protopopov, who was fascinated by mysticism and the occult, was introduced into an outer ring of the *starets's* circle. Now, struck by the news that Nicholas was pleased by his amiable protégé, Rasputin seized the initiative and began proposing that Protopopov be named Minister of Interior.

"Gregory earnestly begs you to name Protopopov," Alexandra wrote in September. "He likes our Friend for at least 4 years and that says much for a man." Two days later, she repeated: "Please take Protopopov as Minister of Interior. As he is one of the Duma, it will make a great effect and shut their mouths." Nicholas balked and chided his wife for accepting every one of Rasputin's whims: "This Protopopov is a good man. . . . Rodzianko has for a long time suggested him for the post of Minister of Trade. [But] I must consider this question as it has taken me completely by surprise. Our Friend's opinions of people are sometimes very strange as you know yourself— therefore this must be thought out very carefully." Nevertheless, a few days later the Tsar gave in and telegraphed, "It shall be done." In a letter, he added, "God grant that Protopopov may turn out to be the man of whom we are now in need." Overjoyed, the Empress

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wrote back, "God bless your new choice of Protopopov. Our Friend says you have done a very wise act in naming him."

The appointment caused a sensation. In the Duma, Protopopov's acceptance of office under Stunner was regarded as a scandalous betrayal. When an old friend in the Duma bluntly told the new Minister that his appointment was a scandal and that he ought to resign immediately, Protopopov, bubbling with excitement over his promotion, replied candidly, "How can you ask me to resign? All my life it was my dream to be a vice-governor and here I am a minister."

Rodzianko was angriest of all. Shaking with rage, he confronted the turncoat and lambasted him for his treachery. When, in servile tones, Protopopov explained, "I hope I shall succeed in bringing about some changes," Rodzianko replied scornfully, "You haven't sufficient strength for the fight and will never dare to speak outright to the Emperor." Soon

afterward, Protopopov returned to Rodzianko, hinting that, with his help, the Duma President might be appointed Premier and Foreign Minister in place of Sturmer. Rodzianko, fully aware that neither Nicholas nor Alexandra would dream of such an appointment, stated his terms: "I alone shall have the power to choose the Ministers . . . the Empress must remain ... at Livadia until the end of the war." Hastily, Protopopov suggested that Rodzianko speak to the Empress herself.

Once he was in office, Protopopov's behavior became wholly eccentric. Although a minister, he kept his seat in the Duma and appeared at meetings wearing the uniform of a general of gendarmes, to which, as head of the police, he was entitled. Beside his desk he kept an icon which he addressed as a person. "He helps me do everything; everything I do is by His advice," Protopopov explained to Kerensky, indicating the icon. Even more astonishing was the sudden transformation of Protopopov the Duma liberal into Protopopov the arch-reactionary. He was determined to become the savior of tsarism and Orthodox Russia. Not only was he not afraid of revolution; he hoped to provoke it in order to crush it by force. At meetings, Rodzianko wrote, "he rolled his eyes repeatedly, in a kind of unnatural ecstasy. 'I feel that I shall save Russia. I feel that I alone can save her.' "

In addition to controlling the police, Protopopov also assumed responsibility for the most critical problem facing Russia, the organization of food supplies. The idea was Rasputin's. Not without logic, he proposed that authority should be transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture, which was floundering, to the Ministry of Interior, which had the police to enforce its orders. Seizing the idea, the Em-

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press issued the transfer command herself. It was the only episode in which Alexandra did not bother first to get the Tsar's approval. "Forgive me for what I have done—but I had to—our Friend said it was absolutely necessary," she wrote. "Stiïrmer sends you by this messenger a new paper to sign giving the whole food supply at once to the Minister of Interior. ... I had to take this step upon myself as Gregory says Protopopov will have all in his hands . . . and by that will save Russia. . . . Forgive me, but I had to

take this responsibility for your sweet sake." Nicholas acquiesced, and thereby, as Russia moved into the critical winter of 1916-1917, both the police and the food supply remained in the trembling, ineffectual hands of Alexander Protopopov.

Although her informal mandate from Nicholas was only to oversee internal affairs, Alexandra also began to trespass on the area of military operations. "Sweet Angel," she wrote in November 1915, "long to ask you heaps about your plans concerning Rumania. Our Friend is so anxious to know." That same month: "Our Friend was afraid that, if we had not a big army to pass through Rumania, we might be caught in a trap from behind."

With supreme self-confidence, Rasputin soon passed from asking questions about the army to transmitting instructions as to the timing and location of Russian attacks. His inspiration, he told the Empress, had come to him in dreams while he slept: "Now before I forget, I must give you a message from our Friend prompted by what he saw in the night," she wrote in November 1915. "He begs you to order that one should advance near Riga, says it is necessary, otherwise the Germans will settle down so firmly through all the winter that it will cost endless bloodshed and trouble to make them move . . . he says this is just now the most essential thing and begs you seriously to order ours to advance, he says we can and we must, and I was to write to you at once."

In June 1916: "Our Friend sends his blessing to the whole orthodox army. He begs we should not yet strongly advance in the north because he says if our successes continue being good in the south, they will themselves retreat in the north, or advance and then their losses will be very great—if we begin there, our losses will be very heavy. He says this is . . . [his] advice."

At Headquarters, General Alexeiev was less than charmed to hear of this new interest in the army. "I told Alexeiev how interested you were in military affairs and of those details you asked for in your last

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letter," Nicholas wrote on June 7, 1916 (O.S.). "He [Alexeiev] smiled and listened silently." Alexeiev's silence concealed his worry-over the possible

leakage of his plans. After the abdication, he explained, "When the Empress's papers were examined, she was found to be in possession of a map indicating in detail the disposition of the troops along the entire front. Only two copies were prepared of this map, one for the Emperor and one for myself. I was very painfully impressed. God knows who may have made use of this map."

Although the Tsar thought it quite natural to admit his wife to military secrets, he did not want them passed to Rasputin. Repeatedly, after giving her a number of military details, he would write, "I beg you, my love, do not communicate these details to anyone. I have written them only for you. ... I beg you, keep it to yourself, not a single soul must know of it." Almost as frequently, Alexandra ignored her husband's request and told Rasputin. "He won't mention it to a soul," she assured Nicholas, "but I had to ask his blessing for your decision."

Rasputin's intervention in military affairs appeared most conspicuously during the great Russian offensive of 1916. Following Polivanov's miracles in supply and manpower, wrought during the winter of 1915— 1916, the Russian army erupted in June 1916 with a heavy attack on the Austrians in Galicia. The Austrian line sagged and broke. Brusilov, the Russian commander, inflicted a million casualties, took 400,000 prisoners, pulled 18 German divisions away from Verdun and prevented the Austrians from exploiting their great victory over the Italians at Caporetto. In August, Rumania, sensing an Allied victory, entered the war against Germany and Austria.

Yet, all this was done at heavy cost to Russia. Through the summer, as Brusilov ground forward, Russian losses reached 1,200,000. As the army moved forward, leaving behind a carpet of dead, it seemed to the Empress and to Rasputin that Russia was choking in her own blood. As early as July 25 (O.S.), she wrote: "Our Friend . . . finds better one should not advance too obstinately as the losses will be too great." On August 8 (O.S.): "Our Friend hopes we won't climb over the Carpathians and try to take them, as he repeats the losses will be too great again." On September 21 (O.S.), Nicholas wrote: "I told Alexeiev to order Brusilov to stop our hopeless

attacks." Alexandra replied happily, "Our Friend says about the new orders you gave to Brusilov: 'Very satisfied with Father's [the Tsar's] orders, all will be well.'"

Meanwhile, at *Stavka,* Alexeiev had discussed the operation with the Tsar, and even as the Empress was congratulating herself, Nicholas

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was writing: "Alexeiev has asked permission to continue the attack . . . and I have permitted it." Surprised, Alexandra responded: "Our Friend is much put out that Brusilov has not listened to your order to stop the advance—says you were inspired from above to give that order . . . and God would bless it. Now he says again useless losses." On the 24th (O.S.), Nicholas wrote, "I have only just received your telegram in which you inform me that our Friend is very disturbed about my plan not being carried out." Carefully, he explained that an additional army had been massed which "doubles our forces . . . and gives hope for the possibility of success. That is why ... I gave my consent." He added that the decision, "from a military point of view is quite correct," and implored, "these details are for you only—I beg you, my dear. Tell him [Rasputin] only 'Papa has ordered that sensible measures be taken.' "

But the Empress was now in full cry. On the 25th (O.S.), she wrote: "Oh give your order again to Brusilov—stop this useless slaughter. . . . Why repeat the madness of the Germans at Verdun. Your plan, so wise [was] approved by our Friend. . . . Stick to it. . . . Our generals don't count the lives any—hardened to losses—and that is sin." On September 27 (O.S.), two days later, Nicholas finally gave in: "My dear, Brusilov has, on the receipt of my instructions, immediately given order to stop." As a result, Brusilov's great offensive ground to a halt. After the war, General Vladimir Gurko, who participated in the operation, wrote, "The weariness of the troops had its effect . . . but there can be no question that the stoppage of the advance was premature and founded on orders from Headquarters." The hard-bitten Brusilov responded impatiently, "An offensive without casualties may be staged only during maneuvers; no action at the present time is taken at random and the enemy suffer as heavy losses as we do . . .

but to defeat the enemy or to beat him off, we must suffer losses and they may be considerable."

By October 1916, with Sturmer and Protopopov occupying the key ministries of the Russian government, the Empress had apparently achieved what she had set out a year before to do. The ministers who signed the collective letter were gone; those in power fawned on Rasputin. "Sturmer and Protopopov both completely believe in our Friend's wonderful, God-sent wisdom," she wrote happily.

In fact, the entire arrangement—and with it, all Russia—was beginning to disintegrate. A new governmental scandal loomed up when Manuilov, Stunner's private secretary, was arrested for blackmailing

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a bank. Two episodes put the army's loyalty in question. In Marseilles, a Russian brigade on its way from Archangel to fight in Greece suddenly mutinied and killed its colonel. French troops intervened and twenty Russian soldiers were executed. Far more serious, two infantry regiments in Petrograd, called out in October to disperse a crowd of striking workers, turned instead and fired on the police. Only when four regiments of Cossacks charged and drove the infantry back to their barracks at lance point was the mutiny subdued. This time, 150 soldiers went to the firing squad.

Worst of all was the growing economic breakdown. Nicholas, more perceptive than the Empress, had seen this coming for months. "Sturmer ... is an excellent, honest man," he wrote in June, "only, it seems to me, he cannot make up his mind to do what is necessary. The gravest and most urgent question just now is the question of fuels and metals—iron and copper for munitions—because with the shortage of metals, the factories cannot produce a sufficient quantity of cartridges and shells. It is the same with the railways. . . . These affairs are a regular curse. . . . But it is imperative to act energetically." In August, he confessed that the load was becoming unbearable. "At times when I turn over in my mind the names of one person and another for appointments, and think how things will go, it seems that my head will burst. The greatest problem now is the question of

supplies. ..." In September, as Alexandra was urging the appointment of Protopopov: "And whom am I to begin with? All these changes make my head go round. In my opinion, they are too frequent. In any case, they are not good for the internal situation of the country, as each new man brings with him alterations in the administration." In November: "The eternal question of supplies troubles me most of all . . . prices are soaring and the people are beginning to starve. It is obvious where this situation may lead the country. Old Sturmer cannot overcome these difficulties. ... It is the most damnable problem I have ever come across."

Early in November, Nicholas, with Alexis, went to Kiev to inspect hospitals and to visit his mother, who was living away from Petrograd. On this visit, everyone noticed the change that had come over the Tsar. "I was shocked to see . . . Nicky so pale, thin and tired," wrote his sister Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, who was with her mother in Kiev. "My mother was worried about his excessive quiet." Gilliard saw the same thing: "He had never seemed to me so worried before. He was usually very self-controlled, but on this occasion he showed himself nervous and irritable, and once or twice he spoke roughly to Alexis Nicolaievich."

Under the pressure of his dual role as Tsar and Commander-in-Chief, Nicholas's health and morale were beginning to suffer. Old friends such as Prince Vladimir Orlov had gone, driven away by their disapproval of Rasputin. Even old Count Fredericks managed to remain near the Tsar only by talking about the weather and other inconsequentia. In Kiev, Nicholas had thought to relax from the problems of war and government. Instead, in their first conversation Marie demanded that he dismiss Sturmer and push Rasputin away from the throne.

Although bowed by the cares of his office, Nicholas in Kiev made a graceful Imperial gesture. In the ward of the hospital where his sister worked, "we had a young, wounded deserter, court-martialed and condemned to death," she wrote. "Two soldiers were guarding him. All of us felt very troubled about him—he looked such a decent boy. The doctor spoke of him to Nicky who at once made for that corner of the ward. I

followed him, and I could see the young man was petrified with fear. Nicky put his hand on the boy's shoulder and asked very quietly why he had deserted. The young man stammered that, having run out of ammunition, he had got frightened, turned and ran. We all waited, our breath held, and Nicky told him that he was free. The next moment the lad scrambled out of bed, fell on the floor, his arms around Nicky's knees, and sobbed like a child. I believe all of us were in tears. ... I have cherished the memory all down the years. I never saw Nicky again."

While the Tsar was in Kiev, the Duma met and the storm began to break. Party lines no longer mattered: from extreme Right to revolutionary Left, every party opposed the government. Miliukov, the leader of the liberals, made a direct attack on Stiirmer and Rasputin, and indirectly attacked the Empress. Stiirmer he accused outright of being a German agent. One by one, as he ticked off his charges of inefficiency and corruption against the government, he asked after each accusation, "Is this stupidity or is it treason?" Miliukov was followed by Basil Maklakov, a Right-wing liberal, who declared, "The old regime and the interests of Russia have now parted company." Quoting from Pushkin, he shouted, "Woe to that country where only the slave and the liar are close to the throne."

By the time Nicholas had returned from Kiev to Headquarters, the outrage in the Duma could no longer be ignored. With his mother's pleas ringing in his ears, the Tsar decided to dismiss Stiirmer. The Empress was not entirely opposed, but she suggested a holiday rather than dismissal: "Protopopov . . . [and] our Friend both find for the quiet of the Duma, Stiirmer ought to say he is ill and go for a rest for 3

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weeks. It's true ... he is really quite unwell and broken by those vile assaults —and being the red flag for that madhouse, it's better he should disappear a bit."

Nicholas quickly agreed, and on November 8 (O.S.), he wrote, "All these days I have been thinking of old Smrmer. He, as you say rightly, acts as a red flag, not only to the Duma, but to the whole country, alas. I hear this from all sides; nobody believes in him and everyone is angry because we

stand up for him. It is much worse than with Goremykin last year. I reproach him for his excessive prudence and his incapacity for taking on himself the responsibility of making them all work as they should. He is coming here tomorrow. I will give him leave for the present. ... As to the future, we shall see; we will talk it over when you come here."

Rasputin's suggestion was that Stiirmer give up one of his offices, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to appease the Duma, but not both: "Our Friend says Stiirmer can remain still some time as President of Council of Ministers," Alexandra reminded. But Nicholas, this time, had made up his mind. "I am receiving Stiirmer in an hour," he wrote on November 9 (O.S.), "and shall insist on his taking leave. Alas, I am afraid he will have to go altogether [i.e., give up the presidency of the Council of Ministers as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]— nobody has confidence in him. I remember even Buchanan telling me at our last meeting the English consuls in their reports predict serious disturbances if he remains. And every day I hear more and more about it."

The Empress was surprised at the Tsar's decision. "It gave me a painful shock you also take away from him the Council of Ministers. I had a big lump in my throat—such a devoted, honest, sure man. . . . I regret because he likes our Friend and was so right in that way. Trepov [the new Premier], I personally do not like and can never have the same feeling for him as to old Goremykin and Stiirmer—they were of the good old sort . . . those two loved me and came for every question that worried them, so as not to disturb you—this one [Trepov] I, alas, doubt caring for me and if he does not trust me and our Friend, things will be difficult. I too told Stiirmer to tell him how to behave about Gregory and to safeguard him always."

But Alexander Trepov, the new Prime Minister, already had decided how he would behave about Gregory. A former Minister of Communications, builder of the newly completed Murmansk railroad, Trepov was at once a conservative monarchist and a stern enemy of Rasputin. He was determined to purge the government of Rasputin's influence. As a first important step, he meant to evict Proto-

popov, Rasputin's instrument. On accepting appointment to the premiership, he had won the Tsar's promise that Protopopov would be dismissed. "I am sorry for Protopopov," Nicholas wrote Alexandra, explaining his decision. "He is a good, honest man, but he jumps from one idea to another, and cannot make up his mind on anything. I noticed that from the beginning. They say that a few years ago he was not quite normal after a certain illness. ... It is risky to leave the Ministry of Interior in such hands in these times." Then, anticipating her reaction, he added significantly, "Only I beg, do not drag Our Friend into this. The responsibility is with me, and therefore I wish to be free in my choice."

On hearing that both Sturmer and Protopopov were to be eliminated, Alexandra became desperate: "Forgive me, dear, believe me—I entreat you don't go and change Protopopov now, he will be alright, give him the chance to get the food supply into his hands and, I assure you, all will go [well]. . . . Oh, Lovy, you can trust me. I may not be clever enough—but I have a strong feeling and that helps more than the brain often. Don't change anybody until we meet, I entreat you, let's speak it over quietly together. . . ."

The next day, Alexandra's letter rose in pitch: "Lovy, my angel . . . don't change Protopopov. I had a long talk with him yesterday—the man is as sane as anyone ... he is quiet and calm and utterly devoted which one can, alas, say of but few and he will succeed—already things are going better. . . . Change nobody now, otherwise the Duma will think it's their doing and that they have succeeded in clearing everybody out. . . . Darling, remember that it does not lie in the man Protopopov or x.y.z. but it's the question of monarchy and your prestige now, which must not be shattered in the time of the Duma. Don't think they will stop at him, but will make all others leave who are devoted to you one by one—and then ourselves. Remember . . . the Tsar rules and not the Duma. Forgive my again writing but I am fighting for your reign and Baby's future."

Two days later, the Empress arrived at Headquarters on a visit already planned. Together, in the privacy of their room, they wrestled out the problem of Protopopov; the Empress won—and Protopopov remained in

office. Nevertheless, the trial of strength was not easy for either of them. In Nicholas's letter bidding farewell to the Empress at the end of her visit, there is evidence of the tension. It is, in fact, the only evidence in the whole of their correspondence of a serious personal quarrel. "Yes," wrote the Tsar, "those days spent together were difficult, but only thanks to you have I spent them more or less calmly. You were so strong and steadfast—I admire you more than I

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can say. Forgive me if I was moody or unrestrained—sometime's one's temper must come out! . . . now I firmly believe that the most painful is behind us and that it will not be hard as it was before. And henceforth I intend to become sharp and bitter. . . . Sleep sweetly and calmly."

Alexandra, sending her husband back to the front, could not help being pleased with her great triumph. Over the following days, a torrent of exhortation poured from her pen: "I am fully convinced that great and beautiful times are coming for your reign and Russia . . . we must give a strong country to Baby, and dare not be weak for his sake, else he will have a yet harder reign, setting our faults right and drawing the reins in tightly which you let loose. You have to suffer for faults in the reigns of your predecessors and God knows what hardships are yours. Let our legacy be a lighter one for Alexei. He has a strong will and mind of his own, don't let things slip through your fingers and make him build all over again. Be firm . . . one wants to feel your hand—how long, years, people have told me the same 'Russia loves to feel the whip'—it's their nature—tender love and then the iron hand to punish and guide. How I wish I could pour my will into your veins. ... Be Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, Emperor Paul—crush them all under you—now don't you laugh, naughty one."

Nicholas took these exhortations calmly. With a touch of acid, he replied: "My dear, Tender thanks for the severe scolding. I read it with a smile, because you speak to me as though I was a child. . . . Your 'poor little weak-willed' hubby, Nicky." The immediate loser, however, was Trepov. Having failed to eliminate Protopopov, he tried to resign himself. Nicholas, freshly spurred by his wife's letters, refused, telling him sternly, "Alexander

Fedorovich, I order you to carry out your duties with the colleagues I have thought fit to give you." Trepov, desperate, tried another way. He sent his brother-in-law, Mosolov, to call on Rasputin and offer him a handsome bribe. Rasputin was to get a house in Petrograd, all living expenses and a paid bodyguard, plus the equivalent of $95,000, if he would arrange Protopopov's dismissal and then himself quit any further interference in government. As a sop, Trepov offered Rasputin a continued free hand with the clergy. Rasputin, already wielding immense power and having little use for wealth, simply laughed.

By the autumn of 1916, Petrograd society mingled a deep loathing of Rasputin with a blithe indifference to the war. At the Astoria and the Europa, the two best hotels in Petrograd, the crowds drinking

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champagne in bars and salons included many officers who should have been at the front; now there was no disgrace in taking extended leave and shirking the trenches. Late in September, the season began when society appeared at the Maryinsky Theatre to watch Karsavina dance in *Sylvia* and *The Water Lily.* Paléologue, taking his seat in the sumptuous blue-and-gold hall, was struck by the unreality of the scene: "From the stalls to the back row of the highest circle, I could see nothing but a sea of cheery, smiling faces . . . sinister visions of war . . . vanished as if by magic the moment the orchestra struck up." Through the autumn, the splendid evenings continued. At the Narodny Dom, the matchless basso Fedor Chaliapin sang his great roles, *Boris Godunov* and *Don Quixote.* At the Maryinsky, a series of gorgeous ballets, *Nuits Egyptiennes, Islamey* and *Eros,* wrapped the audience in fairy tales and enchantment. Mathilde Kschessinska, the prima ballerina assoluta of the Imperial Ballet, danced her famous role in *Pharaoh's Daughter.* In the treetops high above the ballerina's head, a twelve-year-old student playing the part of a monkey jumped from branch to branch while Kschessinska tried to shoot him down with a bow and arrow. After the performance on December 6, the student, George Balanchine, was taken to the Imperial box to be presented to the Tsar and the Empress. Nicholas gave the boy a gentle smile, patted him on the shoulder and handed him a silver box filled with chocolates.*

To most of Russia, however, the Empress was an object of contempt and hatred. The German-spy mania was now flowering to its fullest, ugliest growth. Most Russians firmly believed in the existence of a secret pro-German cabal which was systematically betraying them from the top. The Tsar was not included in its supposed membership; whenever the subject of reconciliation with Germany came up, Nicholas always said bluntly that those who said he would make peace separately from his allies or while German soldiers stood on Russian land were traitors. But the unpopular Empress, along with Sturmer, a reactionary with a German name, and Protopopov, who had met a German agent in Stockholm, were widely and loudly accused. After the abdication, the entire Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo was searched for the clandestine wireless stations through which these plotters were supposed to have been in secret communication with the enemy.

Rasputin, everyone assumed, was a paid German spy. In all the years since 1916, however, no evidence of any kind has ever been offered

* Fifty years later, struggling to convey his strong impression of the Empress, Balanchine said, "Beautiful, beautiful—like Grace Kelly."

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from either the German or the Russian side that this was so. On balance, it seems unlikely. For the same reason that Rasputin rejected Trepov's bribe, he would have refused money. No foreigner could offer him more power than he already possessed; besides, he disliked foreigners, especially the English and Germans. What is more likely is that Rasputin was used and drained of the information he acquired by others who were German agents. In this sense, Kerensky argues, "it would have been inexplicable if the German General Staff had not made use of him [Rasputin]." It was not difficult to infiltrate Rasputin's circle. He hated the war and did not avoid people who spoke against it. His entourage already was filled with so wide a variety of people, many of them shady and disreputable, that a few additional faces would scarcely have been noticed. Rasputin was loud and boastful; all an agent would have had to do was sit and listen carefully. There is some evidence that this is exactly what happened. Every Wednesday night, Rasputin was invited to dinner by Manus, a Petrograd

banker. A number of charming and attractive ladies always were on hand. Everybody drank a great deal and Rasputin talked indiscriminately. Manus, Rasputin's host for these evenings, was openly in favor of reconciliation with Germany. Paléologue, whose own local intelligence service was efficient, believed that Manus was the leading German agent in Russia.

On far flimsier evidence, the Empress was accused of treason. When Alexandra sent prayerbooks to wounded German officers in Russian hospitals, it was taken as evidence of collusion. Knox, at the front, met a Russian artillery general who shrugged his shoulders and said, "What can we do? We have Germans everywhere. The Empress is a German." Even at Headquarters, Admiral Nilov, the Tsar's devoted flag captain, cursed the Empress in violent language. "I cannot believe she is a traitoress," he cried, "but it is evident she is in sympathy with them."

Alexandra's support of Rasputin seemed to confirm the worst. Most people took it for granted that the connection was sexual. In society drawing rooms, municipal council meetings, trade-union conferences and in the trenches, the Empress was openly described as Rasputin's mistress. Alexeiev even mentioned the prevalence of this gossip to the Tsar, warning him that censorship of the soldiers' letters revealed that they were writing continuously of his wife and Rasputin. As these rumors flew and feeling against Alexandra rose higher, many of the outward signs of respect in her presence were discarded. In the summer and fall of 1916, in hospital wards she was treated by some surgeons and wounded officers with careless disrespect and sometimes

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with open rudeness. Behind her back, she was referred to everywhere simply as *Nemka* (the German woman), just as the hated Marie Antoinette had been known to the people of France as *L'Autrichienne* (the Austrian woman). The Tsar's brother-in-law Grand Duke Alexander, trying at this time to locate the source of some of these "incomprehensible libels" on the Empress, talked to a member of the Duma. Bitingly, the member asked, "If the young Tsarina is such a great Russian patriot, why does she tolerate the presence of that drunken beast who is openly seen around the capital in the

company of German spies and sympathizers?" Try as he could, the Grand Duke could nor supply an answer.

By the end of 1916, some form of change at the top was regarded as inevitable in Russia. Many still hoped that the change could be made without violence, that the monarchy could be modified to make the government responsive to the nation. Others felt that if the dynasty was to be preserved, it had to be brutally purged. One group of officers revealed to Kerensky their plan to "bomb the Tsar's motorcar from an aeroplane at a particular point on its route." A famous fighter pilot, Captain Kostenko, plotted to nose-dive his plane into the Imperial car. There were rumors that General Alexeiev was plotting with Guchkov to force the Tsar to send the Empress to the Crimea. Alexeiev, however, came down with a high fever, and it was he who went to the Crimea to rest and recover in the sun.

The growing peril was obvious to other members of the Imperial family. In November, after his return from Kiev, the Tsar received a visit from his cousin Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich, a well-known historian who was President of the Imperial Historical Society. The Grand Duke, a wealthy man-about-town and a habitué of Petro-grad clubs, was an outspoken liberal; already he had written the Tsar a number of letters stressing the importance of broadening the government's support in the Duma. At Headquarters, he had a long talk with Nicholas and then handed the Tsar a letter. The Tsar, believing that he already had fully understood his cousin's views, forwarded the letter to the Empress without reading it. To her horror, Alexandra found in the letter a direct and scathing accusation against herself: "You trust her, that is quite natural," the Grand Duke had written to the Tsar. "Still what she tells you is not the truth; she is only repeating what has been cleverly suggested to her. If you are not able to remove this influence from her, at least protect yourself." Indignantly, the Empress wrote

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to her husband, "I read Nicholas's [letter] and am utterly disgusted ... it becomes next to high treason."

Despite this setback, the family persisted. At a meeting of all the members in and near Petrograd, Grand Duke Paul, the Tsar's only surviving uncle, was chosen to go to the Tsar and ask that he grant a constitution. On December 16, Paul had tea with Nicholas and Alexandra and made his request. Nicholas refused, saying that he had sworn at his coronation to deliver his autocratic power intact to his son. While he was speaking, the Empress looked at Paul and silently shook her head. Then the Grand Duke talked openly of the damaging influence of Rasputin. This time, Nicholas remained silent, calmly smoking his cigarette, while the Empress earnestly defended Rasputin, declaring that in his own time every prophet was damned.

The most poignant of all the warning visits was that of Grand Duchess Elizabeth. Dressed in the gray-and-white robes of her religious order, Ella came from Moscow especially to speak to her younger sister about Rasputin. At the mention of his name, the Empress's face grew cold. She was sorry, she said, to find her sister accepting the "lies" told about Father Gregory; if that was all she had to discuss, her visit might as well end immediately. Desperate, the Grand Duchess persisted, whereupon the Empress cut off the conversation, rose and ordered a carriage to take her sister to the station.

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had not come," said Ella sadly as she prepared to leave.

"Yes," said Alexandra. On this cold note, the sisters parted. It was their last meeting.

On one matter, grand dukes, generals and members of the Duma all agreed: Rasputin had to be removed. The question was how. On December 2, a stinging public denunciation was delivered by Vladimir Purishkevich in the Duma. Then in his fifties, a man of sparkling intelligence and wit, the writer of brilliantly satiric political verse, Purishkevich was an orator of such renown that when he rose to speak the entire Duma, including his enemies, beamed in anticipation of what they were about to hear. Politically, Purishkevich was on the extreme Right, the most ardent monarchist in the

Duma. He believed in absolute autocracy and rigid orthodoxy, in the Tsar Autocrat as the emissary of God. A fervent patriot, Purishkevich had thrown himself into war work, going to the front to organize a system of relief for the wounded and personally administrating a Red Cross train which trav-

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eled back and forth from Petrograd to the front. Invited to dine with the Tsar at Headquarters, Purishkevich had left a highly favorable impression: "wonderful energy and a remarkable organizer," wrote Nicholas.

Devoted to the monarchy, Purishkevich stood before the Duma and for two hours thundered his denunciation of the "dark forces" which were destroying the dynasty. "It requires only the recommendation of Rasputin to raise the most abject citizen to high office," he cried. Then in a ringing finale which brought his audience to a tumultuous standing ovation, he roared a challenge at the ministers who sat before him. "if you are truly loyal, if the glory of Russia, her mighty future which is closely bound up with the brightness of the name of the Tsar mean anything to you, then on your feet, you Ministers. Be off to Headquarters and throw yourselves at the feet of the Tsar. Have the courage to tell him that the multitude is threatening in its wrath. Revolution threatens and an obscure *moujik* shall govern Russia no longer."

Amid the storm of cheers which rolled through the Tauride Palace when Purishkevich had finished, a slender young man sitting in the visitors' box remained utterly silent. Staring at him, another visitor noticed that Prince Felix Yussoupov had turned pale and was trembling.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The Prince and the Peasant

At twenty-nine, Prince Felix Yussoupov was the sole heir to the largest fortune in Russia. There were four Yussoupov palaces in Petrograd, three in Moscow and thirty-seven Yussoupov estates scattered across Russia. The

family's coal and iron mines, oil fields, mills and factories churned out wealth which exceeded even the wealth of the tsars. "One of our estates," wrote Yussoupov, "stretched for one hundred and twenty-five miles along the Caspian Sea; crude petroleum was so abundant that the ground seemed soaked with it and the peasants used it to grease their cart wheels." Once, on a whim, Prince Yussoupov's father had given his mother the highest mountain in the Crimea as a birthday present. In all, the size of the Yussoupov fortune was estimated fifty years ago at $350 million to $500 million. What the same possessions would be worth today, no one can guess.

The wealth of the Yussoupovs had been accumulated by centuries of standing at the elbows of Russia's tsars and empresses. Prince Dmitry Yussoupov, descended from a Tartar khan named Yusuf, had whispered in the ear of Peter the Great. Prince Boris Yussoupov was a favorite of Empress Elizabeth. Prince Nicholas, the greatest Yussoupov of all, was a friend of Catherine the Great, an advisor to Catherine's son, Tsar Paul, and a counselor to her two grandsons, Tsar Alexander I and Tsar Nicholas I. Prince Nicholas Yussoupov's estate at Archangelskoe near Moscow was a city in itself, boasting huge parks and gardens with heated greenhouses, a zoo, private glass and porcelain factories, a private theatre and the Prince's own companies of actors, musicians and ballet dancers. Seated in the audience, Prince Nicholas could, with a wave of his cane, produce an extraordinary effect: all the dancers would suddenly appear on stage, stark naked. A gallery on this Archangelskoe estate contained por-

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traits of the Prince's three hundred mistresses. When the old grandee died at eighty-one, he had just concluded a liaison with a girl of eighteen.

At his birth in 1887, Felix Yussoupov stepped into a fairyland of art and treasure left behind by these lusty progenitors. The drawing rooms and galleries of the Moika Palace, where he was born, were lined with a finer collection of paintings than those hanging in most of the museums of Europe. There was furniture which had belonged to Marie Antoinette and a chandelier which had lighted the boudoir of Mme. de Pompadour. Jewel-

encrusted cigarette boxes by Fabergé were scattered idly about on tables. Dinner parties brought two thousand guests to sit before golden plates and be served by costumed Arab and Tartar footmen. One Yussoupov mansion in Moscow had been built in 1551 as a hunting lodge for Ivan the Terrible; it was still connected by tunnel with the Kremlin several miles away. Beneath its vaulted halls, filled with medieval tapestries and furniture, there were sealed underground chambers which, when opened in Felix's boyhood, revealed rows of skeletons still hanging in chains from the walls.

Cradled in wealth, Felix nevertheless was a spindly, lonely child whose birth caused his mother great disappointment. Princess Zenaide Yussoupov, one of the most famous beauties of her day, had borne three previous sons of whom only one had survived. She had prayed that her next child would be a girl. To console herself when Felix was born, she kept him in long hair and dresses until he was five. Surprisingly, this pleased him and he used to cry out to strangers in the street, "Look, isn't Baby pretty?" "My mother's caprice," Prince Yussoupov wrote later, "was to have a lasting influence on my character."

In adolescence, Felix Yussoupov was slender, with soft eyes and long lashes; he was often described as "the most beautiful young man in Europe." Encouraged by his older brother, he took to dressing up in his mother's gowns, donning her jewels and wigs and strolling in this costume on public boulevards. At The Bear, a fashionable St. Petersburg restaurant, he attracted enthusiastic attention from Guards officers, who sent notes inviting him to supper. Delighted, Felix accepted and disappeared into intimate private dining rooms. In Paris, continuing these masquerades, he once noticed a fat, whiskered gentleman staring persistently at him from the opposite side of the Theatre des Capucines. A note arrived which Felix hastily returned; his beaming admirer was King Edward VII of England.

Yussoupov's first sexual experience occurred at the age of twelve in the company of a young man from Argentina and his girl friend. At fifteen, roaming Italy with his tutor, Felix first visited a Neapolitan

bordello. Thereafter, he wrote, "I flung myself passionately into a life of pleasure, thinking only of satisfying my desires. ... I loved beauty, luxury, comfort, the color and scent of flowers." He also tried opium and a liaison with "a charming young girl" in Paris. Bored, he enrolled as a student at Oxford, maintaining at the university a chef, a chauffeur, a valet, a housekeeper and a groom to look after his three horses. From Oxford, he moved on to a flat in London, where he installed black carpets, orange silk curtains, modern furniture, a grand piano, a dog, a pet macaw and a French couple to cook and serve. He moved in a gay circle which included ballerina Anna Pavlova, Prince Serge Obolensky and ex-King Manuel of Portugal. Day or night, when friends visited Felix Yussoupov, he took out his guitar and sang gypsy songs.

Felix, the younger Yussoupov brother, became the family heir when Nicholas, his older brother, was killed in a duel by an outraged husband. In 1914, Felix returned to Russia to marry. His bride, Princess Irina, was the niece of the Tsar and the most eligible girl in the empire. At their wedding, Felix wore the uniform of the Russian nobility: a black frock coat with lapels and collar embroidered in gold, and white broadcloth trousers. Irina wore Marie Antoinette's lace veil. The Tsar gave her in marriage and presented as his gift a bag of twenty-nine diamonds, ranging in size from three to seven carats apiece.

During the war, Yussoupov was not called for military service. Remaining in Petrograd, he achieved a glittering reputation as a bo-hemian. "Prince Felix Yussoupov is twenty-nine," Paléologue observed, "and gifted with quick wits and aesthetic tastes; but his dilettantism is rather too prone to perverse imaginings and literary representations of vice and death ... his favorite author is Oscar Wilde ... his instincts, countenance and manner make him much closer akin to . . . Dorian Grey than to Brutus."

Yussoupov first met Rasputin before his marriage. He saw him often, and they caroused together at dubious night spots. As treatment for an illness, Yussoupov submitted himself to Rasputin's caressing eyes and hands. During this time, he often heard Rasputin speak of his Imperial patrons: "The Empress is a very wise ruler. She is a second Catherine but as for him,

well, he is no Tsar Emperor, he is just a child of God." According to Yussoupov, Rasputin suggested that Nicholas should abdicate in favor of Alexis, with the Empress installed as Regent. One year before he finally acted, Yussoupov concluded that Rasputin's presence was destroying the monarchy and that the *starets* had to be killed.

Purishkevich spoke in the Duma on December 2. The following morning Yussoupov called on Purishkevich in a fever of excitement. He said that he planned to kill Rasputin, but that he needed assistance. Enthusiastically, Purishkevich agreed to help. Three other conspirators were brought into the plot: an officer named Sukhotin, an army doctor named Lazovert and Yussoupov's youthful friend Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich. At twenty-six, Dmitry was the son of Nicholas IPs last surviving uncle, Grand Duke Paul. Because of the difference in age, Dmitry referred to the Tsar—actually his first cousin—as "Uncle Nicky." Elegant and charming, Dmitry was a special favorite of the Empress, who often found herself laughing at his jokes and stories. Nevertheless, she worried about his character. "Dmitry is doing no work and drinking constantly," she complained to Nicholas during the war. ". . . order Dmitry back to his regiment; town and women are poison for him."

As December progressed, the five conspirators met regularly, weaving the threads of entrapment, death and disposal of the corpse. The date was determined by Grand Duke Dmitry's heavy social calender; December 31 was the first evening he had free. To cancel one of his previous engagements, the conspirators decided, might arouse suspicion. The place selected for the murder was the cellar of Yussoupov's Moika Palace. It was remote and quiet and Princess Irina was away in the Crimea for her health. Yussoupov himself was to bring Rasputin there in a car driven by Dr. Lazovert disguised as a chauffeur. Once in the cellar, Yussoupov would feed Rasputin poison, while the others, waiting upstairs, would take charge of removing the body.

As the heavy December snows swirled through the streets of Petro-grad, Rasputin sensed that his life was in danger. After the impassioned

denunciations hurled at him in the Duma, he understood that a crisis was coming. The ebullient Purishkevich, unable to abide by his pledge of secrecy, soon was bubbling with hints to other Duma members that something was about to happen to Rasputin. Catching wisps of these rumors, Rasputin became moody and cautious. He avoided as much as possible going out in daylight. He was preoccupied with the idea of death. Once after a lonely walk along the Neva he came home and declared that he had seen the river filled with the blood of grand dukes. In his last meeting with the Tsar, he refused to give Nicholas his customary blessing, saying instead, "This time it is for you to bless me, not I you."

According to Simanovich, Rasputin's secretary and confidant, it was

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during these last weeks of December 191 [illegible] that Rasputin produced the mystically prophetic letter which has become part of the legend of this extraordinary man. Headed "The Spirit of Gregory Efimovich Ras-putin-Novykh of the village of Pokrovskoe," its message of warning is directed mainly at Nicholas:

I write and leave behind me this letter at St. Petersburg. I feel that I shall leave life before January 1. I wish to make known to the Russian people, to Papa, to the Russian Mother and to the Children, to the land of Russia, what they must understand. If I am killed by common assassins, and especially by my brothers the Russian peasants, you, Tsar of Russia, have nothing to fear, remain on your throne and govern, and you, Russian Tsar, will have nothing to fear for your children, they will reign for hundreds of years in Russia. But if I am murdered by *boyars,* nobles, and if they shed my blood, their hands will remain soiled with my blood, for twenty-five years they will not wash their hands from my blood. They will leave Russia. Brothers will kill brothers, and they will kill each other and hate each other, and for twenty-five years there will be no nobles in the country. Tsar of the land of Russia, if you hear the sound of the bell which will tell you that Gregory has been killed, you must know this: if it was your relations who have wrought my death then no one of your family, that is to say, none of your children or relations will remain alive for more than two years. They will be

killed by the Russian people. ... I shall be killed. I am no longer among the living. Pray, pray, be strong, think of your blessed family.

Gregory

Because the plot hinged on Yussoupov being able to bring Rasputin to the cellar of the Moika Palace, the young Prince intensified his approaches to Rasputin. "My intimacy with Rasputin—so indispensable to our plan—increased each day," he wrote. When near the end of the month Yussoupov invited him "to spend an evening with me soon," Rasputin readily accepted.

But there was more to Rasputin's acceptance than friendship for a charming dilettante and a taste for midnight tea. Yussoupov deliberately encouraged Rasputin's belief that Princess Irina, widely known for her beauty but a stranger to Rasputin, would be present. "He [Rasputin] had long wished to meet my wife," wrote Yussoupov. "Believing her to be in St. Petersburg, and knowing that my parents were in the Crimea, he accepted my invitation. The truth was that Irina was also in the Crimea, but I thought Rasputin would be more likely to

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accept my invitation if he thought he had a chance of meeting her."

The bait was attractive and Rasputin swallowed it. Both Simanovich and Anna Vyrubova, hearing of the forthcoming supper, tried to dissuade Rasputin from going. Anna Vyrubova visited him in his flat that afternoon, bringing him an icon as a gift from the Empress. "I heard Rasputin say that he expected to pay a late evening visit to the Yussoupov palace to meet Princess Irina, wife of Prince Felix Yussoupov," wrote Anna. "I knew that Felix often visited Rasputin, but it struck me as odd that he should go to their house at such an unseemly hour. ... I mentioned this proposed midnight visit that night in the Empress's boudoir, and the Empress said in some surprise, 'But there must be some mistake, Irina is in the Crimea.' . . . Once again she repeated thoughtfully, 'There must be some mistake.' "

By evening, the cellar room had been prepared. Yussoupov described the scene: "A low vaulted ceiling . . . walls of gray stone, the flooring of granite

. . . carved wooden chairs of oak . . . small tables covered with ancient embroideries ... a cabinet of inlaid ebony which was a mass of little mirrors, tiny bronze columns and secret drawers. On it stood a crucifix of rock crystal and silver, a beautiful specimen of sixteenth century Italian workmanship. ... A large Persian carpet covered the floor and, in a corner, in front of the ebony cabinet, lay a white bear skin rug. ... In the middle of the room stood the table at which Rasputin was to drink his last cup of tea.

"On the table the samovar smoked, surrounded by plates filled with the cakes and dainties that Rasputin liked so much. An array of bottles and glasses sat on a sideboard. . . . On the granite hearth a log fire crackled and scattered sparks on the hearthstones. ... I took from the ebony cabinet a box containing the poison and laid it on the table. Doctor Lazovert put on rubber gloves and ground the cyanide of potassium crystals to powder. Then, lifting the top of each cake, he sprinkled the inside with a dose of poison which, according to him, was sufficient to kill several men instantly," When he finished, Lazovert convulsively tossed the contaminated gloves into the fire. It was a mistake; within a few moments the fireplace was smoking heavily and the air became temporarily unbreathable.

Rasputin also prepared himself carefully for the rendezvous. When Yussoupov went alone at midnight to Rasputin's flat, he found the *starets* smelling of cheap soap and dressed in his best embroidered silk blouse, black velvet trousers and shiny new boots. Yussoupov promised, as he took his victim away and led him down into the cellar, that Princess Irina was upstairs at a party but would be down shortly.

From overhead came the sounds of "Yankee Doodle" played on a phonograph by the other conspirators, simulating the Princess's "party."

Alone in the cellar with his victim, Yussoupov nervously offered Rasputin the poisoned cakes. Rasputin refused. Then, changing his mind, he gobbled two. Yussoupov watched, expecting to see him crumple in agony, but nothing happened. Then, Rasputin asked for the Madeira, which had also been poisoned. He swallowed two glasses, still with no effect. Seeing this, wrote Yussoupov, "my head swam." Rasputin took some tea to clear his

head and, while sipping it, asked Yussoupov to sing for him with his guitar. Through one song after another, the terrified murderer sang on while the happy "corpse" sat nodding and grinning with pleasure. Huddled at the top of the stairs, scarcely daring to breathe, Purishkevich, Dmitry and the others could hear only the quavering sound of Yussoupov's singing and the indistinguishable murmur of the two voices.

After this game had gone on for two and a half hours, Yussoupov could stand it no longer. In desperation, he rushed upstairs to ask what he should do. Lazovert had no answer: his nerves had failed and he had already fainted once. Grand Duke Dmitry suggested giving up and going home. It was Purishkevich, the oldest and steadiest of the group, who kept his head and declared that Rasputin could not be allowed to leave half dead. Steeling himself, Yussoupov volunteered to return to the cellar and complete the murder. Holding Dmitry's Browning revolver behind his back, he went back down the stairs and found Rasputin seated, breathing heavily and calling for more wine. Reviving, Rasputin suggested a visit to the gypsies. "With God in thought, but mankind in the flesh," he said with a heavy wink. Yussoupov then led Rasputin to the mirrored cabinet and showed him the ornate crucifix. Rasputin stared at the crucifix and declared that he liked the cabinet better. "Gregory Efimovich," said Yussoupov, "you'd far better look at the crucifix and say a prayer." Rasputin glared at the Prince, then turned briefly to look again at the cross. As he did so, Yussoupov fired. The bullet plunged into the broad back. With a scream, Rasputin fell backward onto the white bearskin.

Hearing the shot, Yussoupov's friends rushed into the cellar. They found Yussoupov, revolver in hand, calmly staring down at the dying man with a look of inexpressible disgust in his eyes. Although there was not a trace of blood, Dr. Lazovert, clutching Rasputin's pulse, quickly pronounced him dead. The diagnosis was premature. A moment later, when Yussoupov, having surrendered the revolver, was

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temporarily alone with the "corpse," Rasputin's face twitched and his left eye fluttered open. A few seconds later, his right eye also rolled open. "I

then saw both eyes—the green eyes of a viper—staring at me with an expression of diabolical hatred," Yussoupov wrote. Suddenly, while Yussoupov stood rooted to the floor, Rasputin, foaming at the mouth, leaped to his feet, grabbed his murderer by the throat and tore an epaulet off his shoulder. In terror, Yussoupov broke away and fled up the stairs. Behind him, clambering on all fours, roaring with fury, came Rasputin.

Purishkevich, upstairs, heard "a savage, inhuman cry." It was Yussoupov: "Purishkevich, fire, fire! He's alive! He's getting away!" Purishkevich ran to the stairs and almost collided with the frantic Prince, whose eyes were "bulging out of their sockets. Without seeing me ... he hurled himself towards the door . . . [and into] his parents' apartment."

Recovering, Purishkevich dashed outside into the courtyard. "What I saw would have been a dream if it hadn't been a terrible reality. Rasputin, who half an hour before lay dying in the cellar, was running quickly across the snow-covered courtyard towards the iron gate which led to the street. ... I couldn't believe my eyes. But a harsh cry which broke the silence of the night persuaded me. 'Felix! Felix! I will tell everything to the Empress!' It was him, all right, Rasputin. In a few seconds, he would reach the iron gate. ... I fired. The night echoed with the shot. I missed. I fired again. Again I missed. I raged at myself. Rasputin neared the gate. I bit with all my force the end of my left hand to force myself to concentrate and I fired a third time. The bullet hit him in the shoulders. He stopped. I fired a fourth time and hit him probably in the head. I ran up and kicked him as hard as I could with my boot in the temple. He fell into the snow, tried to rise, but he could only grind his teeth."

With Rasputin prostrate once again, Yussoupov reappeared and struck hysterically at the bleeding man with a rubber club. When at last the body lay still in the crimson snow, it was rolled up in a blue curtain, bound with a rope and taken to a hole in the frozen Neva, where Purishkevich and Lazovert pushed it through a hole in the ice. Three days later, when the body was found, the lungs were filled with water. Gregory Rasputin, his bloodstream filled with poison, his body punctured by bullets, had died by drowning.

"Next morning," wrote Anna Vyrubova, "soon after breakfast, I

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was called on the telephone by one of the daughters of Rasputin. ... In some anxiety, the young girl told me that her father had gone out the night before in Yussoupov's motor car and had not returned. When I reached the palace, I gave the message to the Empress who listened with a grave face but little comment. A few minutes later, there came a telephone call from Protopopov in Petrograd. The police . . . had reported to him that a patrolman standing near the entrance of the Yussoupov palace had been startled by the report of a pistol. Ringing the doorbell, he was met by . . . Purishkevich who appeared to be in advance stages of intoxication. [He said] they had just killed Rasputin."

In the excitement of the moment, Purishkevich had again completely forgotten the need for secrecy. After the sharp report of his four pistol shots had split the dry winter air and roused a policeman, Purishkevich had thrown his arms around the man and shouted exultantly, "I have killed Grishka Rasputin, the enemy of Russia and the Tsar." Twenty-four hours later, the story, embroidered with a thousand colorful details, was all over Petrograd.

The Empress, remaining calm, ordered Protopopov to make a complete investigation. A squad of detectives, entering the Yussoupov palace, found the stains of a trail of blood running up the stairs and across the courtyard. Yussoupov explained this as the result of a wild party the night before at which one of his guests had shot a dog—the body of the dog was lying in the court for the police to see. Nevertheless, Protopopov advised Alexandra that Rasputin's disappearance was almost certainly linked to the commotion at Yussoupov's house; Purishkevich's boast and the blood found by the police suggested that the *starets* had probably been murdered. Technically, only the Tsar could order the arrest of a grand duke, but Alexandra ordered that both Dmitry and Felix be confined to their houses. Late that day, when Felix telephoned asking permission to see the Empress, she refused, telling him to put his message into a letter. When the letter arrived, it contained a denial of any part in the rumored assassination. Grand Duke Paul, shocked

at rumors of his son's complicity, confronted Dmitry with a holy icon and a photograph of Dmitry's mother. On these two sacred objects, he asked his son to swear that he had not killed Rasputin. "I swear it," said Dmitry solemnly.

On the afternoon after the murder, the Empress's friend Lili Dehn found Alexandra lying on a couch in her mauve boudoir, surrounded by flowers and the fragrant odor of burning wood. Anna Vyrubova and the four young Grand Duchesses sat nearby. Although Anna's

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eyes were red from weeping, Alexandra's blue eyes were clear. Only her extreme pallor and the frantic disjointedness of the letter she was writing to the Tsar betrayed her anxiety.

My own beloved sweetheart,

We are sitting together—you can imagine our feelings— thoughts—Our Friend has disappeared.

Yesterday A. [Anna] saw him, and he said Felix asked him to come in the night, a motor would fetch him, to see Irina. A motor fetched him (military one) with two civilians and he went away.

This night big scandal at Yussoupov's house—big meeting, Dmitry, Purishkevich, etc. all drunk; police heard shots, Purish-kevich ran out screaming to the police that Our Friend was killed.

. . . Our Friend was in good spirits but nervous these days. Felix pretends he [Rasputin] never came to the house. ... I shall still trust in God's mercy that one has only driven Him off somewhere. Protopopov is doing all he can. . . .

I cannot and won't believe that He has been killed. God have mercy. Such utter anguish (am calm and can't believe it) . . . Come quickly. . . .

Felix came often to him lately.

Kisses,

Sunny

The following day, when Rasputin still had not appeared, Alexandra telegraphed: "No trace yet. . . . The police are continuing the search. I fear that these two wretched boys have committed a frightful crime, but have not yet lost all hope. Start today, I need you terribly."

On the third day, January 1, 1917, Rasputin's body was found. In their haste, the murderers had left one of his boots on the ice near the hole. Divers probing beneath the ice in that vicinity brought up the corpse. Incredibly, before he died, Rasputin had struggled with sufficient strength to free one of his hands from the ropes around him. The freed arm was raised above the shoulder; the effect was that Rasputin's last gesture on earth had been a sign of benediction.

In Petrograd, where everyone knew the details and juicy stories of the Rasputin scandal, confirmation that the Beast was slain set off an orgy of wild rejoicing. People kissed each other in the streets and hailed Yussoupov, Purishkevich and Grand Duke Dmitry as heroes. At the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, there was a crush to light a sea of candles around the icons of St. Dmitry. Far off in the provinces, however, where the peasants knew only that a *moujik,* a man like themselves, had become powerful at the court of the Tsar, the murder

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was regarded differently. "To the *moujiks,* Rasputin has become a martyr," an old prince just returned from his estate on the Volga reported to Paléologue. "He was a man of the people; he let the Tsar hear the voice of the people; he defended the people against the court folk, the *pridvorny.* So the *pridvorny* killed him. That's what's being said."

History, with all its sweep and diversity, produces few characters as original and extravagant as Gregory Rasputin. The source and extent of his extraordinary powers will never be fully known; the shadow of this uncertainty perpetually will refresh the legend. The duality of his countenance—the one face peaceful, soothing, offering the blessings of God; the other cynical, crafty, reddened by lust—is the core of his

mysterious appeal. In his single, remarkable life, he represents not only the two sides of Russia's history, half compassionate and long-suffering, half savage and pagan, but the constant struggle in every soul between good and evil.

As for the evil in Gregory Rasputin, it should be carefully weighed. He has been called a monster, yet, unlike most monsters in history, he took not a single life. He schemed against his enemies and toppled men from high places, yet, once they had fallen, he sought no vengeance. In his relations with women he was undoubtedly villainous, but most of these episodes occurred with the consent of the women involved. Unquestionably, he used his "holy" aura to seductive advantage and, failing all else, forced himself upon unwilling victims. But even here the screams of outrage were greatly amplified by rumor.

Rasputin's greatest crime was his delusion of the Empress Alexandra. Deliberately, he encouraged her to believe that there was only one side of him: Father Gregory, Our Friend, the Man of God who gave relief to her son and calmed her fears. The other Rasputin—drunken, leering, arrogant—did not exist for the Empress except in the malicious reports of their common enemies. An obvious rogue to everyone else, he carefully hid this side from her. Yet no one could believe that the Empress did not know; therefore, her acceptance of him was taken as acceptance of his worst behavior. On her part, this can be called foolishness, blindness, ignorance. But on his part, the deliberate exploitation of weakness and devotion was nothing less than monstrous evil.

Predictably, the impact of Rasputin's death fell less severely on Nicholas than on Alexandra. Told of Rasputin's disappearance while he sat in a staff meeting at Headquarters, the Tsar left the room immediately and telegraphed "Am horrified, shaken." Nevertheless, he did not leave for Petrograd until January i, when Rasputin's death was confirmed. Once again, in death as in life, Nicholas was less concerned about Rasputin than about the effect that the murder would have on his wife. In the months preceding the assassination, Rasputin's advice had become less welcome.

Often Nicholas was irritated by what he regarded as clumsy intrusions by Rasputin into political and military matters. The Tsar, wrote Gilliard, "had tolerated him [Rasputin] because he dared not weaken the Empress's faith in him—a faith that kept her alive. He did not like to send him away, for if Alexis Nicolaievich died, in the eyes of the mother, he would have been the murderer of his own son."

For Nicholas himself, the quickest pang of Rasputin's death lay in the fact that the murder had been committed by members of the Imperial family. "I am filled with shame that the hands of my kinsmen are stained with the blood of a simple peasant," he exclaimed. "A murder is always a murder," he replied stiffly in refusing an appeal from his relatives on behalf of Dmitry. Almost fifty years later, the Tsar's sister Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna still showed the same shame and scorn for her family's behavior: "There was nothing heroic about Rasputin's murder," she said. "It was . . . premeditated most vilely. Just think of the two names most closely associated with it even to this day—a Grand Duke, one of the grandsons of the Tsar-Liberator, and then a scion of one of our great houses whose wife was a Grand Duke's daughter. That proved how low we had fallen."

Soon after Nicholas's return to Petrograd, enough evidence had been amassed to incriminate the three leading conspirators. Grand Duke Dmitry was ordered to leave Petrograd immediately for duty with the Russian troops operating in Persia; the sentence undoubtedly saved his life, as it put him out of reach of the revolution which was soon to follow. Yussoupov was banished to one of his estates in the center of Russia; a year later, he left his homeland with Princess Irina, taking with him, from all his vast fortune, only a million dollars in jewels and two Rembrandts. Purishkevich was allowed to go free. His part in the murder had placed his prestige at a peak. To strike down a member of the Duma who had also become a hero was no longer possible even for the Autocrat of all the Russias.

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In secrecy, Rasputin's body was taken to the chapel of a veterans' home halfway between Petrograd and Tsarskoe Selo, where an autopsy was

performed and the body was washed and dressed and laid in a coffin. Two days later, on January 3, Rasputin was buried in a corner of the Imperial Park where Anna Vyrubova was building a church. Lili Dehn was present: "It was a glorious morning," she wrote. "The sky was a deep blue, the sun was shining and the hard snow sparkled like masses of diamonds. My carriage stopped on the road . . . and I was directed to walk across a frozen field towards the unfinished church. Planks had been placed on the snow to serve as a footpath, and when I arrived at the church I noticed that a police motor van was drawn up near the open grave. After waiting several moments, I heard the sound of sleigh bells and Anna Vyrubova came slowly across the field. Almost immediately afterwards, a closed automobile stopped and the Imperial family joined us. They were dressed in mourning and the Empress carried some white flowers; she was very pale but quite composed although I saw her tears fall when the oak coffin was taken out of the police van . . . the burial service was read by the chaplain and after the Emperor and Empress had thrown earth on the coffin, the Empress distributed her flowers between the Grand Duchesses and ourselves and we scattered them on the coffin."

Inside the coffin, before the lid was sealed, the Empress had two objects placed on Rasputin's breast. One was an icon, signed by herself, her husband, her son and her daughters. The other was a letter: "My dear martyr, give me thy blessing that it may follow me always on the sad and dreary path I have yet to follow here below. And remember us from on high in your holy prayers. Alexandra."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Last Winter at Tsarskoe Selo

During the dreary weeks of winter that followed Rasputin's murder, the Tsar of all the Russias suffered something close to a nervous collapse. Utterly weary, craving only tranquillity and rest, he remained secluded at Tsarskoe Selo. There, in the bosom of his family, surrounded by a narrow circle of familiar figures, he lived quietly, avoiding decisions that affected ministers,

munitions, his millions of soldiers and tens of millions of subjects. Rodzianko, who saw him twice during this period, recalled the audience in which Nicholas got up and went to the window. "How lovely it was in the woods today," he said, looking out. "It is so quiet there. One forgets all these intrigues and paltry human restlessness. My soul felt so peaceful. One is nearer to Nature there, nearer to God."

Nicholas remained all day in his private quarters. He converted his billiard room into a map room, and there, behind a door guarded by his motionless Ethiopian, he stood for hours over huge maps of the battlefields spread out on the billiard tables. When he left the room, he carefully locked the door and carried the key in his own pocket. At night, he sat with his wife and Anna Vyrubova in the Empress's mauve boudoir, reading aloud. His public utterances were vague. He issued a manifesto to the army which, although written for him by General Gurko, was molded of Nicholas's own continuing patriotic dream: "The time for peace has not yet come. . . . Russia has not yet performed the tasks this war has set her. . . . The possession of Constantinople and the Straits . . . the restoration of a free Poland. . . . We remain unshaken in our confidence in victory. God will bless our arms. He will cover them with everlasting glory and give us a peace worthy of your glorious deeds. Oh, my glorious troops, a peace such that generations to come will bless your sacred memory!" Pale-

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ologue, reading the manifesto and wondering at Nicholas's meaning, decided that it "can only be ... a kind of political will, a final announcement of the glorious vision which he had imagined for Russia and which he now sees dissolving into thin air."

Visitors were shocked by the Tsar's appearance; there were wild rumors that Alexandra was giving him drugs. On the Russian New Year, the diplomatic corps arrived at Tsarskoe Selo for its annual reception. Nicholas appeared, surrounded by his generals and aides, to exchange handshakes, smiles and congratulations. "As usual," wrote Paléologue, "Nicholas II was kind and natural and he even affected a certain care-free air; but his pale, thin face betrayed the nature of his secret thoughts." A private audience left the

French Ambassador filled with gloom. "The Emperor's words, his silences and reticences, his grave, drawn features and furtive, distant thoughts and the thoroughly vague and enigmatical quality of his personality, confirm in me . . . the notion that Nicholas II feels himself overwhelmed and dominated by events, that he has lost all faith in his mission . . . that he has . . . abdicated inwardly and is now resigned to disaster."

Nicholas made a similar impression on Vladimir Kokovtsov, the former Prime Minister. Kokovtsov had always had a high regard for Nicholas's quick, intuitive grasp of most subjects and his exceptional memory. Entering the Tsar's study on February 1, Kokovtsov was deeply alarmed by the change in his sovereign: "During the year that I had not seen him, he became almost unrecognizable. His face had become very thin and hollow and covered with small wrinkles. His eyes . . . had become quite faded and wandered aimlessly from object to object. . . . The whites were of a decidedly yellow tinge, and the dark retinas had become colorless, grey and lifeless. . . . The face of the Tsar bore an expression of helplessness. A forced, mirthless smile was fixed upon his lips and he answered, repeating several times: 'I am perfectly well and sound, but I spend too much time without exercise and I am used to much activity. I repeat to you, Vladimir Nicolaievich, I am perfectly all right. You have not seen me for a long time, and possibly I did not have a good night. Presently I shall go for a walk and shall look better."

Throughout the interview, Kokovtsov continued, "the Tsar listened to me with the same sickly smile, glancing nervously about him." Asked a "question which seemed to me perfectly simple ... the Tsar became reduced to a perfectly incomprehensible state of helplessness. The strange, almost vacant smile remained fixed on his face; he looked at me as if to seek support and to ask me to remind him of a matter

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that had absolutely slipped his memory. . . . For a long time, he looked at me in silence as if trying to collect his thoughts or to recall what had escaped his memory."

Kokovtsov left the room in tears. Outside, he found Dr. Botkin and Count Paul Benckendorff, the Grand Marshal of the court. "Do you not see the state of the Tsar?" he asked. "He is on the verge of some mental disturbance if not already in its power." Botkin and Benckendorff both said that Nicholas was not ill, merely tired. Nevertheless, Kokovtsov returned to Petrograd with the strong impression "that the Tsar was seriously ill and that his illness was of a nervous character."

Alexandra was bowed by Rasputin's murder, but, drawing on the same reserves of inner fortitude which were to sustain her during the pitiless months ahead, she did not break. Rasputin had often told her, "If I die or you desert me, you will lose your son and your crown within six months." The Empress had never doubted him. Rasputin's death removed the savior of her son and her link with God. Without his prayers and counsel, any disaster was possible. The fact that the blow had come from within the Imperial family did not surprise her. She knew their feelings and understood that she had been the real target of the assassins.

After the murder, she sat quietly for a number of days, with tear-stained face, staring in front of her. Then, she rallied, and the face she showed even to those in the palace was calm and resolute. If God had taken her Friend, she was still on earth. While life remained, she would persevere in her faith, in her devotion to husband and family, in her resolve, sealed now by Gregory's martyrdom, to maintain the autocracy given to Russia by God. Touched by the same sense of earthly doom that afflicted the Tsar, she steeled herself for the shocks to come. From that point, through the months left to her to live, Alexandra never wavered.

It was the Empress who took matters in hand. Since the day of the assassination, Anna Vyrubova's mail had been filled with anonymous threatening letters. By the Empress's command, Anna was moved for greater safety from her small house to an apartment in the Alexander Palace. Although the Tsar was in the palace, the Empress continued to exert a predominant influence on political affairs. The main telephone in the palace was not on his desk but in her boudoir on a table beneath the portrait

of Marie Antoinette. Protopopov's reports at the palace were given to either Nicholas or Alexandra, whoever was available,

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sometimes to both of them together. In addition, with her husband's knowledge, the Empress took to eavesdropping on the Tsar's official conversations. Kokovtsov sensed something of this kind in his interview. "I thought that the door leading from the [Tsar's] study to his dressing room was half open, which had never occurred before, and that someone was standing just inside," he wrote. "It may have been just an illusion but this impression stayed with me throughout my brief audience." It was not an illusion, but it was a temporary device. Soon afterward, for greater convenience, the Empress had a wooden staircase cut through the walls to a small balcony overlooking the Tsar's formal audience chamber. There, concealed by curtains, the Empress could lie on a couch and listen in comfort.

In the conduct of Russia's government, Rasputin's death changed nothing. Ministers came and went. Trepov, who had replaced Sturmer as Prime Minister in November, was allowed to resign in January to be replaced by Prince Nicholas Golitsyn, an elderly man whom the Empress had known as deputy chairman of one of her charitable committees. Golitsyn was horrified by his appointment and unsuccessfully begged the Tsar to choose another. "If someone else had used the language I used to describe myself, I should have been obliged to challenge him to a duel," he said.

It made little difference. Protopopov was the only minister in whom the Empress had genuine confidence. The rest of the Cabinet scarcely mattered, and Protopopov rarely bothered even to attend its meetings. Rodzianko refused even to speak to him. At a New Year's Day reception, the Duma President tried to avoid his former deputy. "I noticed he was following me. ... I moved to another part of the hall and stood with my back [to him]. Notwithstanding . . . Protopopov held out his hand. I replied, 'Nowhere and never.' Protopopov . . . took me in a friendly manner by the elbow, saying, 'My dear fellow, surely we can come to an understanding.' I felt disgusted by him. 'Leave me alone. You are repellent to me,' I said."

Dependent, like Rasputin, solely on the favor of the Empress, the Interior Minister hastened to clothe himself in Rasputin's spiritual trappings. As the *starets* had done, he telephoned every morning at ten, to either the Empress or Anna Vyrubova. He reported that Rasputin's spirit sometimes came to him at night; that he could feel the familiar presence and hear the familiar voice as it gave him advice. A story making the rounds in Petrograd depicted Protopopov in the middle of an audience with Alexandra suddenly falling on his knees and moaning, "Oh, Majesty, I see Christ behind you."

Although the Empress was resolute, she had no joy in her work.

Every Thursday evening, a concert of chamber music was given in a palace drawing room by a Rumanian orchestra. The Empress's chair always was placed near the fire burning in the grate, and she sat absorbed by the music, staring into the glowing flames. On one of these nights, only two weeks before the Revolution, her friend Lili Dehn slid into a chair behind her. "The Empress seemed unusually sad," she wrote. "I whispered anxiously, 'Oh, Madame, why are you so sad tonight?' The Empress turned and looked at me. . . . 'Why am I sad, Lili? ... I can't say, really, but ... I think my heart is broken.' "

A British visitor calling on the Empress during these same weeks was struck by her air of sadness and resignation. General Sir Henry Wilson, visiting Russia with an Allied mission, had known Alexandra as a girl in Darmstadt. Now, "taken down a long passage to the Empress's own boudoir —a room full of pictures and bric-a-brac . . . ," he reminded her of "our tennis parties in the old days, 36 years ago, at Darmstadt. . . . She was so delighted with the reminiscences, and remembered some of the names I had forgotten. After this it was easy. She said her lot was harder than most people's because she had relations and friends in England, Russia and Germany. She told me of her experiences and her eyes filled with tears. She has a beautiful face, but very, very sad. She is tall and graceful, divides her hair simply on one side, and it is done up at the back. The hair is powdered with grey. When I said I was going to leave her, as she must be tired of

seeing strangers and making conversation, she nearly laughed and kept me on for a little while."

Wilson was moved by this talk. "What a tragedy there is in that life," he wrote. Nevertheless, when he left Russia a week later, he added, "It seems as certain as anything can be that the Emperor and Empress are riding for a fall. Everyone—officers, merchants, ladies— talks openly of the absolute necessity of doing away with them."

The killing of Rasputin was a monarchist act. It was intended by the Grand Duke, the Prince and the Right-wing deputy to cleanse the throne and restore the prestige of the dynasty. It was also intended, by removing what they conceived to be the power behind the Empress, to eliminate the Empress herself as a force in the government of Russia. The Tsar, they thought, would then be free to choose ministers and follow policies which would save the monarchy and Russia. This was the hope of many members of the Imperial family, most of whom disliked the murder, but were glad the murdered man was dead.

The Tsar's punishment of Grand Duke Dmitry and Prince Felix Yussoupov, mild though it was, disappointed these hopes. The family addressed a collective letter to Nicholas which combined a plea for pardon for Dmitry with a request for a responsible ministry. Nicholas, still outraged that members of his family had been involved in the assassination, was further offended by the letter. "I allow no one to give me advice," he replied indignantly. "A murder is always a murder. In any case, I know that the consciences of several who signed that letter are not clear." A few days later, hearing that one of the signers, the liberal Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich, was going around his Petrograd clubs openly berating the government, the Tsar ordered him to leave the capital and remain in residence on one of his country estates.

The murder, far from closing the breach within the Romanov family, had widened it further. The Dowager Empress was greatly alarmed. "One should . . . forgive," Marie wrote from Kiev. "I am sure you are aware yourself how deeply you have offended all the family by your brusque

reply, throwing at their heads a dreadful and entirely unjustified accusation. I hope that you will alleviate the fate of poor Dmitry by not leaving him in Persia. . . . Poor Uncle Paul [Dmitry's father] wrote me in despair that he had not even been given a chance to say goodbye. ... It is not like you to behave this way. ... It upsets me very much."

From his home in Kiev, the Tsar's cousin and brother-in-law Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich hurried to Tsarskoe Selo to plead that the Empress withdraw from politics and the Tsar grant a government acceptable to the Duma. This was the "Sandro" of Nicholas's youth, the gay companion of his suppers with Kschessinska, the husband of his sister Xenia and the father-in-law of Prince Felix Yussoupov. He found the Empress lying in bed, dressed in a white negligee embroidered with lace. Although the Tsar was present, sitting and quietly smoking on the other side of their large double bed, the Grand Duke spoke plainly: "Your interference with affairs of state is causing harm ... to Nicky's prestige. I have been your faithful friend, Alix, for twenty-four years ... as a friend, I point out to you that all the classes of the population are opposed to your policies. You have a beautiful family of children, why can you not . . . please, Alix, leave the cares of state to your husband?"

When the Empress replied that it was impossible for an autocrat to share his powers with a parliament, the Grand Duke said, "You are very much mistaken, Alix. Your husband ceased to be an autocrat on October 17, 1905."

The interview ended badly, with Grand Duke Alexander shouting in a wild rage: "Remember, Alix, I remained silent for thirty months. For thirty months I never said ... a word to you about the disgraceful goings on in our government, better to say in *your* government. I realize that you are willing to perish and that your husband feels the same way, but what about us? . . . You have no right to drag your relatives with you down a precipice." At this point, Nicholas quietly interrupted and led his cousin from the room. Later, from Kiev, Grand Duke Alexander wrote, "One cannot govern a country without listening to the voice of the people. . . . Strange as it may appear, it

is the Government which is preparing the Revolution . . . the Government is doing all it can to increase the number of malcontents and it is succeeding admirably. We are watching an unprecedented spectacle, revolution coming from above and not from below."

One branch of the Imperial family, the "Vladimirs," were not content to write letters, but talked openly of a palace revolution which would replace their cousin by force. Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna and Grand Dukes Cyril, Boris and Andrei—the widow and sons of the Tsar's eldest uncle, Grand Duke Vladimir—carried resentments which stretched deep into the past. Vladimir himself, a forceful, ambitious man, always jealous of his older brother, Tsar Alexander III, had accepted with difficulty the accession to the throne of his mild-mannered nephew. A vociferous Anglophobe, he was infuriated when Nicholas chose as his consort a princess who, although born in Darmstadt, was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Vladimir's widow, Marie Pavlovna, also was German, a Mecklenberger, and the third lady of the Russian Empire, ranking directly after the two Empresses. Socially, Marie Pavlovna was everything that Alexandra was not. Energetic, poised, intelligent, well read, devoted to gossip and intrigue, openly ambitious for her three sons, she turned her grand palace on the Neva into a glittering court which far outshone Tsarskoe Selo. In the lively conversations which dominated her dinner parties and soirees, amusement and scorn directed at the ruling couple were frequent themes. Never did the Grand Duchess forget that after the Tsarevich, who was ill, and the Tsar's brother, who had married a commoner, the next in fine for the throne was her eldest son, Cyril.

In addition, each of the Vladimir sons had separate personal reasons for prickly relations with the Tsar and the Empress. Cyril was married to the divorced wife of Alexandra's brother Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse. Andrei kept as his mistress the ballerina, Mathilde Ksches-sinska, who had been in love with Nicholas II before his marriage. Boris, the middle Vladimir son, had proposed to his cousin Olga, the

Tsar's eldest daughter. The Empress, in writing to her husband, expressed some of the flavor of her rebuff to Boris: "What an awful set his wife would be dragged into . . . intrigues without end, fast manners and conversations ... a half-worn, blasé . . . man of 38 to a pure fresh girl 18 years his junior and live in a house in which many a woman has 'shared' his life! ! An inexperienced girl would suffer terribly to have her husband 4-5th hand—or more! " As the proposal had been transmitted not only in the name of Boris, but in that of his mother as well, Marie Pavlovna bore great bitterness toward Alexandra.

Rodzianko got a taste of this bitterness, and the conspiracy growing out of it, when in January 1917 he was urgently invited to lunch at the Vladimir Palace. After lunch, he wrote, the Grand Duchess "began to talk of the general state of affairs, of the Government's incompetence, of Protopopov and of the Empress. She mentioned the latter's name, becoming more and more excited, dwelling on her nefarious influence and interference in everything, and said she was driving the country to destruction; that she was the cause of the danger which threatened the Emperor and the rest of the Imperial family; that such conditions could no longer be tolerated; that things must be changed, something done, removed, destroyed. ..."

Wishing to understand her meaning more precisely, Rodzianko asked, "What do you mean by 'removed'?"

"The Duma must do something. She must be annihilated."

"Who?"

"The Empress."

"Your Highness," said Rodzianko, "allow me to treat this conversation as if it had never taken place, because if you address me as the President of the Duma, my oath of allegiance compels me to wait at once on His Imperial Majesty and report to him that the Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna has declared to me that the Empress must be annihilated."

For weeks, the grand-ducal plot was the talk of Petrograd. Everyone knew the details: four regiments of the Guard were to make a night march on Tsarskoe Selo and seize the Imperial family. The Empress was to be shut up in a convent—the classic Russian method of disposing of unwanted empresses—and the Tsar was to be forced to abdicate in favor of his son, with the Grand Duke Nicholas as Regent. No one, not even the secret police who had collected all the details, took the Grand Dukes seriously. "Yesterday evening," Paléologue wrote on January 9, "Prince Gabriel Constantinovich gave a supper for his mistress, formerly an actress. The guests included the Grand Duke Boris ... a few officers and a squad of elegant courtesans. During

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the evening the only topic was the conspiracy—the regiments of the Guard which can be relied on, the most favorable moment for the outbreak, etc. And all this with the servants moving about, harlots looking on and listening, gypsies singing and the whole company bathed in the aroma of Moët and Chandon *brut imperial* which flowed in streams."

The Imperial government was crumbling and among those who watched the process with dismay were some who were not Russian. The war and the alliance had conferred on the Ambassadors of France and Britain, Maurice Paléologue and Sir George Buchanan, positions of vast importance. Through the two Embassies in Petrograd and across the desks of the two Ambassadors flowed major questions of supply, munitions and military operations, as well as matters of diplomacy. As it became increasingly apparent that Russia's domestic political crisis was affecting her capacity as a military ally, Buchanan and Paléologue found themselves in a delicate situation. Accredited personally to the Tsar, they had no right to speak on matters affecting Russian internal policy. Nevertheless, by the winter of 1917 both Ambassadors found themselves begged on all sides to use their access to the Tsar to plead for a government acceptable to the Duma. Personally convinced that nothing else could save Russia as an ally, they both agreed. Paléologue's attempt, put off by Nicholas's vagueness and gentle courtesy, failed completely. On January 12, Buchanan, in turn, was received at Tsarskoe Selo.

Sir George Buchanan was an old-school diplomat, distinguished by discretion, silvery hair and a monocle. Seven years' service in Russia had left him weary and frail, but with a host of friends and admirers, including the Tsar himself. His only handicap in fulfilling his post was his inability to speak Russian. This made no difference in Petrograd, where everyone who mattered also spoke French or English. In 1916, however, Buchanan visited Moscow, where he was made an honorary citizen of the city and given a priceless icon and a massive silver loving cup. "In the heart of Russia," wrote R. H. Bruce Lockhart, the British Consul General, who was assisting in Buchanan's visit, "he had to say at least a word or two in Russian. We had carefully rehearsed the ambassador to hold it up and say to the distinguished audience, '*Spasibo'* which is the short form of Russian for 'thank you.' Instead, Sir George, in a firm voice, held up the cup and said, '*Za pivo'* which means 'for beer.' "

At Tsarskoe Selo, Buchanan was surprised to be received by the

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Tsar in the formal audience chamber rather than in Nicholas's study, where they usually talked. Nevertheless, he asked whether he could speak frankly, and Nicholas assented. Buchanan came straight to the point, telling the Tsar that Russia needed a government in which the nation could have confidence. "Your Majesty, if I may be permitted to say so, has but one safe course open to you—namely, to break down the barrier that separates you from your people and to regain their confidence."

Drawing himself up and giving Buchanan a hard look, Nicholas asked, "Do you mean that I am to regain the confidence of my people or that they are to regain *my* confidence?"

"Both, Sire," Buchanan replied, "for without such mutual confidence Russia will never win this war."

The Ambassador criticized Protopopov, "who, if Your Majesty will forgive my saying so, is bringing Russia to the verge of ruin."

"I chose M. Protopopov," Nicholas interjected, "from the ranks of the Duma in order to be agreeable to them—and this is my reward."

Buchanan warned that revolutionary language was being spoken not only in Petrograd but all over Russia, and that "in the event of revolution only a small portion of the army can be counted on to defend the dynasty." Then he concluded with a surge of personal feeling:

"An ambassador, I am well aware, has no right to hold the language which I have held to Your Majesty, and I had to take my courage in both hands before speaking as I have done. . . . [But] if I were to see a friend walking through a wood on a dark night along a path which I knew ended in a precipice, would it not be my duty, Sire, to warn him of his danger? And is it not equally my duty to warn Your Majesty of the abyss that lies ahead of you?"

The Tsar was moved by Buchanan's appeal and, pressing the Ambassador's hand as he left, said, "I thank you, Sir George." The Empress, however, was outraged by Buchanan's presumption. "The Grand Duke Serge remarked that had I been a Russian subject, I should have been sent to Siberia," Buchanan wrote later.

Although Rodzianko had disdained Marie Pavlovna's suggestion that the Empress be "annihilated," he agreed with the Grand Duchess that the Empress must be stripped of political powers. Earlier in the fall, when Protopopov had come to him and mentioned that the Tsar might appoint the Duma President as Premier, Rodzianko had stated as one of his terms that "the Empress must renounce all interference in affairs of state and remain at Livadia until the end of the war." Now, in the middle of winter, he received a visit from the Tsar's

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younger brother Grand Duke Michael. Michael, the handsome, good-natured "Misha," was living with his wife, Countess Brassova, at Gatchina, outside the capital. Although after the Tsarevich he was next in line for the throne, he had absolutely no influence on his brother. Worried and realizing his own helplessness, he asked how the desperate situation might be saved.

Again Rodzianko declared that "Alexandra Fedorovna is fiercely and universally hated, and all circles are clamoring for her removal. While she remains in power, we shall continue on the road to ruin." The Grand Duke agreed with him and begged Rodzianko to go again to tell the Tsar. On January 20, Nicholas received him.

"Your Majesty," said Rodzianko, "I consider the state of the country to have become more critical and menacing than ever. The spirit of all the people is such that the gravest upheavals may be expected. . . . All Russia is unanimous in claiming a change of government and the appointment of a responsible premier invested with the confidence of the nation. . . . Sire, there is not a single honest or reliable man left in your entourage; all the best have either been eliminated or have resigned. ... It is an open secret that the Empress issues orders without your knowledge, that Ministers report to her on matters of state. . . . Indignation against and hatred of the Empress are growing throughout the country. She is looked upon as Germany's champion. Even the common people are speaking of it. . . . "

Nicholas interrupted: "Give me the facts. There are no facts to confirm your statements."

"There are no facts," Rodzianko admitted, "but the whole trend of policy directed by Her Majesty gives ground for such ideas. To save your family, Your Majesty ought to find some way of preventing the Empress from exercising any influence on politics. . . . Your Majesty, do not compel the people to choose between you and the good of the country."

Nicholas pressed his head between his hands. "Is it possible," he asked, "that for twenty-two years I tried to act for the best and that for twenty-two years it was all a mistake?"

The question was astonishing. It was completely beyond the bounds of propriety for Rodzianko to answer, yet, realizing that it had been asked honestly, man to man, he summoned his courage and said, "Yes, Your Majesty, for twenty-two years you followed a wrong course."

A month later, on February 23, Rodzianko saw Nicholas for the last time. This time the Tsar's attitude was "positively harsh" and Rodzianko, in turn, was blunt. Announcing that revolution was imminent, he declared, "I consider it my duty, Sire, to express to you

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my profound foreboding and conviction that this will be my last report to you."

Nicholas said nothing and Rodzianko was curtly excused.

Rodzianko's was the last of the great warnings to the Tsar. Nicholas rejected them all. He had pledged to preserve the autocracy and hand it on intact to his son. In his mind, urbane grand dukes, foreign ambassadors and members of the Duma did not represent the peasant masses of the real Russia. Most of all, he felt that to give way during the war would be taken as a sign of personal weakness which would only accelerate revolution. Perhaps when the war was ended, he would modify the autocracy and reorganize the government. "I will do everything afterwards," he said. "But I cannot act now. I cannot do more than one thing at a time."

The attacks on the Empress and the suggestions that she be sent away only angered him. "The Empress is a foreigner," he declared fervently. "She has no one to protect her but myself. I shall never abandon her under any circumstances. In any case, all the charges made against her are false. Wicked lies are being told about her. But I shall know how to make her respected."

Early in March, after two months of rest with his family, Nicholas's spirits began to improve. He was optimistic that the army, equipped with new arms from Britain and France, could finish the war by the end of the year. Complaining of the "poisoned air" of Petrograd, he was anxious to return to *Stavka* to plan the spring offensive.

Protopopov, meanwhile, sensing the approach of a crisis, tried to mask his fears by recommending forcible countermeasures. Four cavalry regiments of the Guard were ordered from the front to Petrograd, and the city police

began training in the use of machine guns. The cavalry never arrived. At *Stavka,* General Gurko was disgusted at the prospect of fighting the people and countermanded the order. On March 7, the day before the Tsar left for Headquarters, Protopopov arrived at the palace. He saw the Empress first; she told him that the Tsar insisted on spending a month at the front and that she could not change his mind. Nicholas entered the room and, taking Protopopov aside, said that he had decided to return in three weeks. Protopopov in agitation said, "The time is such, Sire, that you are wanted both here and there. ... I very much fear the consequences." Nicholas, struck by his minister's alarm, promised if possible to return within a week.

There was one moment, according to Rodzianko, when Nicholas wavered in his determination to refuse a responsible ministry. On the eve of his departure, the Tsar summoned several of his ministers,

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including Prince Golitsyn, the Prime Minister, and announced that he intended to go to the Duma the next day and personally announce the appointment of a responsible government. That same evening, Golitsyn was summoned again to the palace and told that the Tsar was leaving for Headquarters.

"How is that, Your Majesty?" asked Golitsyn, amazed. "What about a responsible ministry? You intended to go to the Duma tomorrow."

"I have changed my mind," said Nicholas. "I am leaving for the *Stavka* tonight."

This conversation took place on Wednesday, March 7. Five days later, on Monday, March 12, the Imperial government in Petrograd collapsed.

CHAPTER T W ENTY - SEVEN

Revolution: March 1917

In the grip of an intense thirty-five-degree-below-zero cold, the people of Petrograd shivered and were hungry. Outside the bakeries, long lines of

women stood for hours waiting for their daily ration of bread while the snow fell gently on their coats and shawls. Workers, whose factories had closed for lack of coal, milled in the streets, worried, grumbling and waiting for something to happen. In their stuffy, smoke-filled barracks, soldiers of the garrison gathered around stoves and listened from supper until dawn to the speeches and exhortations of revolutionary agitators. This was Petrograd in the first week of March 1917, ripening for revolution.

On February 27, the Duma reconvened and Kerensky shouted defiance not only at the government but at the Tsar. "The ministers are but fleeting shadows," he cried. "To prevent a catastrophe, the Tsar himself must be removed, by terrorist methods if there is no other way. If you will not listen to the voice of warning, you will find yourselves face to face with facts, not warnings. Look up at the distant flashes that are lighting the skies of Russia." Incitement to assassination of the Tsar was treason, and Protopopov began proceedings to deprive Kerensky of his parliamentary immunity so that he could be prosecuted. Rodzianko told Kerensky privately, however, "Be sure we shall never give you up to them."

In the mood which lay over the capital, even Kerensky's inflammatory speech did not seem abnormal. On the very day of the speech, Buchanan, whose political antennae were acutely sensitive, concluded that the city was quiet enough for him to slip away on a much-needed ten-day holiday in Finland.

The underlying problem was the shortage of food and fuel. The war had taken fifteen million men off the farms, while at the same time the army was consuming huge quantities of food. The railroads

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which brought supplies into the capital were collapsing. Barely adequate in peacetime, the Russian railroads had now the added load of supplying six million men at the front with food and ammunition, as well as moving the men themselves according to the dictates of Army Headquarters. In addition, hundreds of coal trains had necessarily been added to the overtaxed system. Before the war, the entire St. Petersburg industrial region, with its giant metallurgical industries, had used cheap Cardiff coal

imported up the Baltic. The blockade required that coal be brought by train from the Donets basin in the Ukraine. Creaking under this enormous military and industrial load, the railroads' actual capacity had drastically decreased. Russia began the war with 20,071 locomotives; by early 1917, only 9,021 were in service. Similar deterioration had reduced the number of cars from 539,549 to 174,346.

The cities, naturally, suffered more than the countryside, and Petro-grad, farthest from the regions producing food and coal, suffered most. Scarcities sent prices soaring: an egg cost four times what it had in 1914, butter and soap cost five times as much. Rasputin, closer to the people than either the Tsar or his ministers, had seen the danger long before. In October 1915, Alexandra had written to her husband: "Our Friend . . . spoke scarcely about anything else for two hours. It is this: that you must give an order that wagons with flour, butter and sugar should be obliged to pass. He saw the whole thing in the night like a vision, all the towns, railway lines, etc. . . . He wishes me to speak to you about all this very earnestly, severely even. . . . He would propose three days no other trains should go except those with flour, butter and sugar—it's even more necessary than meat or ammunition."

In February 1917, winter weather dealt Russia's railroads a final blow. In a month of extreme cold and heavy snowfall, 1,200 locomotive boilers froze and burst, deep drifts blocked long sections of track and 57,000 railway cars stood motionless. In Petrograd, supplies of flour, coal and wood dwindled and disappeared.

Ironically, there were not, in the winter of 1917, any serious revolutionary plans among either workers or revolutionaries. Lenin, living in Zurich in the house of a shoemaker, felt marooned, depressed and defeated. Nothing he tried seemed to succeed. The pamphlets he wrote drew little response, while the hair oil which he bought in quantity and rubbed assiduously into his skull failed to stimulate even the slightest growth of hair.* In January 1917, addressing a group of

* Krupskaya's mother died while Lenin was in Switzerland. There is a story that one night Krupskaya rose exhausted from her vigil beside her dying mother

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Swiss workers, he gloomily declared that while "popular risings must flare up in Europe within a few years . . . we older men may not live to see the decisive battles of the approaching revolution." Keren-sky, the Duma's most vociferous advocate of revolution, said later, "No party of the Left and no revolutionary organization had made any plan for a revolution." None was needed. Revolutionary plots and political programs became insignificant in the face of the growing hunger and bitterness of the people. "They [the revolutionaries] were not ready," wrote Basil Shulgin, a monarchist deputy, "but all the rest was ready."

On Thursday, March 8, as Nicholas's train was carrying him away from the capital back to Headquarters, the silent, long-suffering breadlines suddenly erupted. Unwilling to wait any longer, people broke into the bakeries and helped themselves. Columns of protesting workers from the industrial Vyborg section marched across the Neva bridges toward the center of the city. A procession, composed mainly of women chanting "Give us bread," filled the Nevsky Prospect. The demonstration was peaceful; nevertheless, at dusk a squadron of Cossacks trotted down the Nevsky Prospect, the clatter of their hoofs sounding the government's warning. Despite the disorders, no one was seriously alarmed. At the French Embassy that night, the guests threw themselves into a passionate argument as to which of the reigning ballerinas of the Imperial Ballet—Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina or Mathilde Kschessinska—was supreme in her art.

On Friday morning, March 9, the crowds poured into the streets in greater numbers. More bakeries were sacked and again the Cossack patrols appeared, although without their whips, the traditional instrument of mob control in Russia. The crowd, noting this absence, treated the Cossacks cheerfully and parted readily to let them pass. The Cossacks, in turn, bantered with the crowd and assured them, "Don't worry. We won't shoot."

On Saturday, most of the workers of Petrograd went on strike. Trains, trolley cars and cabs stopped running, and no newspapers appeared. Huge crowds surged through the streets, carrying, for the first time, red banners

and shouting, "Down with the German woman! Down with Protopopov! Down with the war!" A sense of

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and asked Lenin, who was writing at a table, to awaken her if her mother needed her. Lenin agreed and Krupskaya collapsed into bed. The next morning she awoke to find her mother dead and Lenin still at work. Distraught, she confronted Lenin, who replied, "You told me to wake you if your mother needed you. She died. She didn't need you."

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alarm began to speed through the city. That night the violinist Georges Enesco gave a recital in the concert hall of the Maryinsky Theatre. The theatre was practically empty; not more than fifty people sat in the audience, and there were wide gaps in the orchestra. Enesco came up to a corner of the huge stage and played an intimate, private concert for the few people sitting close together in the front of the deserted hall.

The Cabinet, trying desperately to solve the problem of food supply, met all day and through the night. By telegram, they begged Nicholas to return. With the exception of Protopopov, the entire Cabinet also offered to resign, urging the Tsar to appoint a new ministry acceptable to the Duma. Nicholas refused. Five hundred miles away, misinformed by Protopopov as to the seriousness of the situation, believing the crisis to be only another of the turbulent strikes which had plagued his entire reign, he replied to Prince Golitsyn, the Prime Minister, that Cabinet resignations were out of the question. To General Khabalov, Military Governor of Petrograd, he telegraphed brusquely: "I order that the disorders in the capital, intolerable during these difficult times of war with Germany and Austria, be ended tomorrow. Nicholas."

The Tsar's order clearly meant that, where necessary, troops were to be used to clear the streets. The sequence, arranged by Protopopov, entailed meeting disorders first with the police, then with Cossacks wielding whips and, as a last resort, with soldiers using rifles and machine guns. Ultimately, of course, the plan and the security of the capital depended on the quality of the troops available.

As it happened, the quality of the troops in Petrograd could not have been worse. The regular soldiers of the pre-war army—the proud infantry and the cavalry of the Imperial Guard, the veteran Cossacks and regiments of the line—had long since perished in the icy wastes of Poland and Galicia. The best men who remained were still in the trenches facing the Germans. The Petrograd garrison in the winter of 1917 consisted of 170,000 men, most of them raw recruits crowded into training barracks. The Cossacks of the garrison were young country boys, fresh from the villages, wholly inexperienced in street fighting. Many of the infantry recruits were older men, in their thirties and forties, drawn in part from the working-class suburbs of Petrograd itself. Poor fighting material, not wanted by the generals at the front, they were left in the capital, where it was hoped that their proximity to home would keep them from stirring up trouble. There were too few officers; those on hand had been invalided back from the front or were boys from military schools incapable of

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maintaining discipline in a crisis. Lacking both officers and rifles, many units of the garrison never bothered to train.

Despite the caliber of his garrison, General Khabalov prepared to obey the Tsar's command. Early risers, venturing into the city's streets on Sunday morning, found huge posters bearing Khabalov's orders: All assemblies and public meetings were forbidden and would be dispersed by force. All strikers who were not back at their jobs the following morning would be drafted and sent to the front.

The posters were ignored completely. Huge crowds swarmed from the Vyborg quarter across the Neva bridges into the city. In response, lines of soldiers began issuing silently from their barracks. At 4:30 p.m. there was shooting on the Nevsky Prospect opposite the Anitchkov Palace. Fifty people were killed or wounded; throughout the city that day, two hundred people died. Many of the soldiers were bitter, and only reluctantly obeyed orders. Before the Nicholas Station, a company of the Volinsky Regiment refused to fire into a crowd, and emptied its rifles into the air. A company of the Pavlovsky Life Guards refused to fire at all and, when its commander

insisted, turned and shot the officer instead. The situation was quickly restored when a loyal company of the crack Preobrajensky Guard moved in to disarm the mutineers and send them back to their barracks.

That night, Rodzianko, who had been meeting with the helpless ministers, sent an anguished telegram to the Tsar: "The position is serious," he said. "There is anarchy in the capital. The government is paralyzed. Transportation of food and fuel is completely disorganized. . . . There is disorderly firing in the streets. A person trusted by the country must be charged immediately to form a ministry." Rodzianko ended with a heartfelt plea: "May the blame not fall on the wearer of the crown." Nicholas, scornful of what he considered hysterics, turned to Alexeiev and declared, "That fat Rodzianko has sent me some nonsense which I shall not even bother to answer."

Instead of concessions, Nicholas decided to send reinforcements. He ordered General Ivanov, an elderly commander from the Galician front, to collect four of the best regiments from the front line, march on the capital and subdue it by force, if necessary. He telegraphed Prince Golitsyn to instruct Rodzianko that the Duma session was to be suspended. And he decided to return to Petrograd himself within a few days. "Am leaving day after tomorrow [the 13th]," he telegraphed Alexandra. "Have finished here with all important questions. Sleep well. God bless you." In Petrograd that night, although two hundred people lay dead, most of the city was quiet. Buchanan, returning at last from his Finnish holiday, noted that "the part of the city through

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which we passed on our short drive to the Embassy was perfectly quiet and, except for a few patrols of soldiers on the quays and the absence of trams and cabs, there was nothing unusual." Paléologue, returning home at eleven p.m., passed the Radziwill mansion, blazing with the lights of a gala party. Outside, among a long line of elegant cars and carriages, Paléologue happened to spot the car of Grand Duke Boris.

Monday, March 12, was the turning point in Petrograd. On Monday morning, the Tsar's government still clung to a last shred of power. By

Monday night, power had passed to the Duma.

The key to this swift, overwhelming change was the massive defection of the Petrograd soldiery. Many of the workers had had enough of going to the Nevsky Prospect to be killed. Indeed, on Sunday night, Iurenev, the leader of the Bolshevik Party in Petrograd, had gloomily concluded that the uprising had failed. "The Reaction is gaining strength," he said to a group of extreme Left party leaders meeting in Kerensky's study. "The unrest in the barracks is subsiding. Indeed, it is clear that the working class and the soldiery must go different ways. We must not rely on day dreams . . . for a revolution, but on systematic propaganda at the works and the factories in store for better days."

Iurenev was wrong: the unrest in the barracks was not subsiding. On Sunday afternoon, the Volinsky Regiment, which had displayed reluctance to fire on the crowd, had retreated to its barracks in confusion and anger. All night the soldiers argued. Then, at six in the morning, a Volinsky sergeant named Kirpichnikov killed a captain who had struck him the previous day. The other officers fled from the barracks and, soon after, the Volinsky marched out, band playing, to join the revolution. The mutiny spread quickly to other famous regiments, the Semonovsky, the Ismailovsky, the Litovsky, the Oranienbaum Machine Gun Regiment and, finally, to the legendary Preobrajensky Guard, the oldest and finest regiment in the army, created by Peter the Great himself. In all of these cases, the units that went over were recruit battalions of inferior quality; nevertheless, they carried the colors and wore the uniforms of the proudest regiments of the Russian army.

In most parts of the city, the morning of March 12 broke with deadly stillness. From a window of the British Embassy, Meriel Buchanan, the Ambassador's daughter, stared out at "the same wide streets, the same great palaces, the same gold spires and domes rising out of the pearl-colored morning mists, and yet . . . everywhere emptiness, no lines of toiling carts, no crowded scarlet trams, no

little sledges. . . . [Only] the waste of deserted streets and ice-bound river . . . [and] on the opposite shore the low grim walls of the Fortress and the Imperial flag of Russia that for the last time fluttered against the winter sky."

A few minutes later, from a window in his own Embassy, Paléologue witnessed the dramatic scene when the army confronted the mob: "At half past eight this morning just as I finished dressing, I heard a strange and prolonged din which seemed to come from the Alexander Bridge. I looked out; there was no one on the bridge which usually presents a busy scene. But almost immediately, a disorderly mob carrying red flags appeared at the end ... on the right bank of the Neva and a regiment came towards them from the opposite side. It looked as if there would be a violent collision, but on the contrary, the two bodies coalesced. The army was fraternizing with the revolution."

Two hours later, General Knox heard "that the depot troops of the garrison had mutinied and were coming down the street. We went to the window. . . . Craning our necks, we first saw two soldiers—a sort of advance guard—who strode along the middle of the street, pointing their rifles at loiterers to clear the road. . . . Then came a great disorderly mass of soldiery, stretching right across the wide street and both pavements. They were led by a diminutive but immensely dignified student. All were armed and many had red flags fastened to their bayonets. . . . What struck me most was the uncanny silence of it all. We were like spectators in a gigantic cinema."

A few minutes later, Paléologue, trying to find out what was happening, went out into the street: "Frightened inhabitants were scattering through the streets. ... At one corner of the Liteiny, soldiers were helping civilians to erect a barricade. Flames mounted from, the Law Courts. The gates of the Arsenal burst open with a crash. Suddenly, the crack of machine-gun fire split the air; it was the regulars who had just taken up position near the Nevsky Prospect. . . . The Law Courts had become nothing but an enormous furnace; the Arsenal on the Liteiny, the Ministry of the Interior, the Military Government Building . . . the headquarters of the Okhrana and a score of police stations were in flames, the prisons were open and all the prisoners

had been liberated." By noon, the Fortress of Peter and Paul had fallen with its heavy artillery, and 25,000 soldiers had joined the revolution. By nightfall, the number had swollen to 66,000.

During Monday morning, the Imperial Cabinet held its last meeting. Protopopov, who was present, was urged to resign. He rose and walked

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out of the room, melodramatically mumbling, Now there is nothing left to do but shoot myself." The Tsar's younger brother Grand Duke Michael arrived and, after listening to the ministers, decided to appeal to Nicholas himself. Leaving the meeting, he telephoned directly to Headquarters and urged the immediate appointment of a government which could command the nation's confidence. General Alexeiev, at the other end of the line, asked the Grand Duke to wait while he spoke to the Tsar. Forty minutes later, Alexeiev called back: "The Emperor wishes to express his thanks," he said. "He is leaving for Tsarskoe Selo and will decide there." Hearing this, the Cabinet simply gave up. It adjourned itself—forever, as it turned out—and the ministers walked out of the building. By nightfall, most of them had arrived at the Tauride Palace to have themselves arrested and placed under the protection of the Duma.

At the Duma, events were moving with breathtaking speed. The Imperial order suspending the Duma had reached Rodzianko the previous night. At eight the next morning, he summoned the leaders of all the political parties to a meeting in his office. There it was decided that, in view of the collapse of law and order, the Imperial order should be ignored and the Duma kept in session. At half past one, the first large crowds of workers and soldiers, carrying red banners and singing the *"Marseillaise"* arrived at the Duma to offer their support and to ask for instructions. Swarming through the unguarded doors, they surged through the corridors and chambers and engulfed the parliament. It was a motley, exuberant mob. There were soldiers, tall and hot in their rough wool uniforms; students shouting exultantly; and here and there a few gray-bearded old men, just released from prison, their knees trembling, their eyes shining.

"I must know what I can tell them," Kerensky cried to Rodzianko, as the mob jostled and crowded the uncertain deputies. "Can I say that the Imperial Duma is with them, that it takes the responsibility on itself, that it stands at the head of the government?"

Rodzianko had little choice but to agree. Still personally loyal to the Tsar, he protested to Shulgin, a monarchist deputy, "I don't want to revolt." Shulgin, a realist as well as a monarchist, overrode him, saying, "Take the power ... if you don't, others will." Reluctantly, Rodzianko mounted a platform which creaked under his bulk, and assured the crowd that the Duma would refuse to be dissolved and would accept the responsibilities of government. At three in the afternoon, the Duma met and appointed a temporary executive committee for the purpose of restoring order and gaining control over the

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mutinous troops. The committee included the leaders of all the parties of the Duma except the extreme Right.

Nor was the collapse of the Imperial government and the rise of the Duma all that happened on that remarkable day. On the same day, there arose a second, rival assembly, the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies, consisting of one delegate from each company of revolutionary soldiers and one delegate for each thousand workers. Incredibly, by nightfall, the Soviet was sitting under the same roof as the Duma.

It was Kerensky who created this astonishing situation. As he explained it later: "The entire garrison had mutinied and . . . the troops were marching towards the Duma. . . . Naturally a question arose ... as to how and by whom the soldiers and workmen were to be led; for until then their movement was completely unorganized, uncoordinated and anarchical. 'A Soviet?' The memory of 1905 prompted this cry. . . . The need of some kind of center for the mass movement was realized by everyone. The Duma itself needed some representatives of the rebel populace; without them, it would have been impossible to reestablish order in the capital. For this reason the Soviet was formed quickly and not by any means as a matter of class war: simply about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, the organizers applied to

me for suitable premises; I mentioned the matter to Rodzi-anko and the thing was arranged."

The Tauride Palace, an eighteenth-century building presented by Catherine the Great to her favorite Prince Potemkin, possessed two large wings; one was the chamber of the Duma, the other, formerly the budget committee room of the Duma, was given to the Soviet. Thereafter, wrote Kerensky, "two different Russias settled side by side: the Russia of the ruling classes who had lost (though they did not realize it yet) . . . and the Russia of Labor, marching towards power, without suspecting it."

Although Rodzianko assumed the chairmanship of the temporary Duma committee, from the first it was Kerensky who became the central figure. Only thirty-six years old, he became the bridge between the Soviet and the Duma committee. He was elected Vice-Chairman of the Soviet; within three days, he was also Minister of Justice in the new Provisional Government. "His words and his gestures were sharp and clear-cut and his eyes shone," wrote Shulgin. "He seemed to grow every minute." A stream of important prisoners—Prince Golitsyn, Stiirmer, the Metropolitan Pitirim, all the ministers of the Cabinet— were brought in or presented themselves for arrest. It was Kerensky

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who saved their lives. "Ivan Gregorovich," he said, striding up to one prisoner and speaking in a ringing tone, "you are arrested. Your life is not in danger. The Imperial Duma does not shed blood."

With justification, Kerensky later took credit for averting a massacre. "During the first days of the Revolution, the Duma was full of the most hated officials of the monarchy . . . ," he wrote. "Day and night the revolutionary tempest raged around the arrested men. The huge halls and endless corridors of the Duma were flooded with armed soldiers, workmen and students. The waves of hatred . . . beat against the walls. If I moved a finger, if I had simply closed my eyes and washed my hands of it, the entire Duma, all St. Petersburg, the whole of Russia might have been drenched in torrents of human blood as [it was] under Lenin in October."

Toward midnight, Protopopov came to ask for protection. After leaving the final meeting of the Council, he had spent the night hiding in a tailor shop. He arrived now in a makeshift disguise: an overlong overcoat and a hat down over his eyes. Sighting Kerensky in one of the corridors, he crept alongside and whispered, "It is I, Protopopov." Shulgin, at that moment, was in the adjoining room. "Suddenly," he wrote, "there was coming something especially exciting; and at once the reason was whispered to me. 'Protopopov is arrested,' and at that moment I saw in the mirror the door burst open violently and Kerensky broke in. He was pale and his eyes shone, his arm was raised; with this stretched out arm, he seemed to cut through the crowd; everyone recognized him and stood back on either side. And then in the mirror I saw that behind Kerensky there were soldiers with rifles and, between the bayonets, a miserable little figure with a hopelessly harassed and sunken face—it was with difficulty that I recognized Protopopov. 'Don't dare touch that man!' shouted Kerensky—pushing his way on, pallid, with impossible eyes, one arm raised, cutting through the crowd, the other tragically dropped, pointing at 'that man.' ... It looked as if he were leading him to execution, to something dreadful. And the crowd fell apart. Kerensky dashed past like the flaming torch of revolutionary justice and behind him they dragged that miserable little figure in the rumpled greatcoat surrounded by bayonets."

By Tuesday morning, March 13, except for a last outpost of tsarism in the Winter Palace, which General Khabalov held with 1,500 loyal troops, the city was in the hands of the revolution. In the afternoon, the revolutionaries in the Fortress of Peter and Paul across the river gave Khabalov's men twenty minutes to abandon the palace or face bombardment; having lost all hope, the dejected loyalists marched out and simply melted away.

In the anarchy" that followed, wild celebrations were mingled with violent outbursts of mob fury. In Kronstadt, the naval base outside the city, the sailors brutally slaughtered their officers, killing one and burying a second, still living, side by side with the corpse. In Petrograd, armored cars, with clusters of rebel soldiers perched on their tops, roared up and down the streets, flying red flags. Firemen, arriving to put out the fires blazing in

public buildings, were driven away by soldiers and workmen who wanted to see the buildings burn. Kschessinska's mansion was sacked by the mob from top to bottom, the grand piano smashed, the carpets stained with ink, the bathtubs filled with cigarette butts.*

On Wednesday, March 14, even those who had wavered flocked to join the victors. That morning saw the mass obeisance to the Duma of the Imperial Guard. From his Embassy window, Paléologue watched three regiments pass on their way to the Tauride Palace: "They marched in perfect order," he wrote, "with their band at the head. A few officers came first, wearing a large red cockade in their caps, a knot of red ribbon on their shoulders and red stripes on their sleeves. The old regimental standard, covered with icons, was surrounded by red flags." Behind came the Guard, including units from the garrison at Tsarskoe Selo. "At the head were the Cossacks of the Escort, those magnificent horsemen who are the flower . . . and privileged elite of the Imperial Guard. Then came His Majesty's Regiment, the sacred legion which is recruited from all the units of the Guard and whose special function it is to secure the personal safety of their sovereigns."

Even more spectacular was the march of the Marine Guard, the *Garde Equipage,* most of whom had served aboard the *Standart* and personally knew the Imperial family. At the head of the marines strode their commanding officer, Grand Duke Cyril. Leading his men to the Tauride Palace, Cyril became the first of the Romanovs publicly to break his oath of allegiance to the Tsar, who still sat on the throne. In the presence of Rodzianko, Cyril pledged allegiance to the Duma. Then, returning to his palace on Glinka Street, he hoisted a red flag over his roof. Writing to his Uncle Paul, Cyril coolly explained, "These last few days, I have been alone in carrying out my duties to Nicky and the country and in saving the situation by my

* One elegant Petrograd mansion was saved by the quick wits of its owner, the artful Countess Kleinmichel. Before the mob arrived, she barred her doors, shuttered her windows and placed in front of her house a sign which read: "No trespassing. This house is the property of the Petrograd Soviet. Countess Klemmichel has been taken to the Fortress of St. Peter and Paul." Inside, Countess Kleinmichel then packed her bags and planned her escape.

recognition of the Provisional Government." A week later, Cyril gave an interview to a Petrograd newspaper: "I have asked myself several times if the ex-Empress were an accomplice of William [the Kaiser]," he said, "but each time forced myself to recoil from the horror of such a thought."

Cyril's behavior drew a terse, prophetic comment from Paléologue: "Who can tell whether this treacherous insinuation will not before long provide the foundation for a terrible charge against the unfortunate Empress. The Grand Duke Cyril should ... be reminded that the most infamous calumnies which Marie Antoinette had to meet when she faced the Revolutionary Tribunal, first took wing at the elegant suppers of the Comte d'Artois [the jealous younger brother of Louis XVI]."

Petrograd had fallen. Everywhere in the city, the revolution was triumphant. At the Tauride Palace, two rival assemblies, both convinced that tsarism was ended, were embarking on a struggle for survival and power. Yet, Russia was immense and Petrograd only a tiny, artificial mound, scarcely Russian, in a corner of the Tsar's empire. The two million people of Petrograd were only a fraction of the scores of millions of subjects; even in Petrograd, the revolutionary workers and soldiers were less than a quarter of the city's population. A week had gone by since Nicholas had left for Headquarters and the first disorders had broken out. In that week, he had lost his capital, but still he kept his throne. How much longer could he keep it?

The Allied ambassadors, desperately concerned that the fall of tsarism would mean Russia's withdrawal from the war, clung to the hope that the Tsar would not topple. Buchanan still talked in terms of Nicholas "granting a constitution and empowering Rodzianko to select the members of a new government." Paléologue thought that the Tsar had a chance if he pardoned the rebels, appointed the Duma committee as his ministers and "appeared in person . . . and solemnly announced on the steps of Our Lady of Kazan that a new era is beginning for Russia. But if he waits a day it will be too late." It was Knox who sensed more accurately the ominous future. Standing at a corner of the Liteiny Prospect, watching the burning of the district court across the street, he heard a soldier say, "We have only one wish: to beat the

Germans. We will begin with the Germans here and with a family that you know called Romanov."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Abdication

Nicholas, leaving home for Headquarters on the night of March 7, was subdued and downhearted. Twice, from the train, he sent melancholy telegrams tinged with the loneliness that overwhelmed him on leaving his family after two months at Tsarskoe Selo. In Mogilev, he missed the buoyant presence of the Tsarevich. "Here in the house it is so still," he wrote to Alexandra. "No noise, no excited shouts. I imagine him sleeping—all his little things, photographs and knicknacks, in exemplary order in his bedroom."

Nicholas's last letters as Tsar, written as it were from the brink of the abyss, have often been cited as evidence of his incorrigible stupidity. The most famous remark of all, invariably quoted in even the briefest estimate of Nicholas's character, is the line: "I shall take up dominoes again in my spare time." Taken by itself, the remark is devastating. Any tsar with so little wit as to sit playing dominoes while his capital revolts deserves nothing: neither his throne nor understanding.

Yet, there is more to it than that. It was the Tsar's first night back at Army Headquarters and he was writing to his wife of familiar things. Immediately before this much-quoted line, he is talking about his son. He says that he will greatly miss the games they had played every evening; in lieu of them, he will take up dominoes again to relax in his spare moments. Even more significantly, the letter was written not against a backdrop of revolution, but at a moment when Nicholas believed that the capital was quiet. The date on the letter is March 8, the day on which the first bread riots occurred in the city. The first reports of these disorders arrived at Headquarters on the morning of the 9th; Nicholas did not learn until the 11th that anyone in Petrograd considered them serious.

Despite the weeks of rest with his family, Nicholas returned to

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Mogilev still mentally fatigued and physically exhausted. A vivid warning signal on the state of his health flashed on Sunday morning, March 11. As he stood in church, Nicholas suffered "an excruciating pain in the chest" which lasted for fifteen minutes. "I could hardly stand the service out," he wrote, "and my forehead was covered with drops of perspiration. I cannot understand what it could have been because I had no palpitation of the heart. ... If this occurs again, I shall tell Fedorov [the doctor]." The symptoms are those of a coronary occlusion.

If the revolution in the streets of Petrograd came as a shock to everyone in the city, it is not entirely surprising that the Tsar, at Headquarters five hundred miles away, was neither more alert nor more prescient. Indeed, Nicholas had less information than those who continued blithely to attend dinners, parties and concerts in the capital. He depended on reports passed to him through a chain of officials which included Protopopov in Petrograd and General Voeikov at Headquarters. Both Protopopov and Voeikov served him badly, deliberately underplaying the seriousness of the situation as it developed. Protopopov was defending his own position; disorders which he could not control were a damning reflection on his abiUties as Minister of Interior. Voeikov, at the other end of the line, was a conservative, unimaginative man who simply could not face the prospect of walking into the presence of the Tsar and announcing a revolution.

From Thursday, March 8, until Sunday, the nth, Nicholas heard nothing which caused him serious alarm. He was told that the capital was afflicted with "street disorders." "Street disorders" were not a matter to worry Nicholas: he had faced them innumerable times in the twenty-three years of his reign. There were officials to deal with them: Khabalov, the Military Governor, and above him Protopopov, the Minister of Interior. The Tsar of all the Russias, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, need not bother himself with an affair which was a matter for the city police.

On the night of the 11th, after the troops had been called out and had fired into the crowd and two hundred people lay dead, Nicholas was told that the

"street disorders" were becoming nasty. Reacting quickly, he sent an order to Khabalov commanding that the disorders, "intolerable in these difficult times of war with Germany and Austria," be ended immediately. That same night, he wrote to Alexandra, "I hope Khabalov will be able to stop these street disorders. Protopopov must give him clear and definite instructions."

On Monday, the 12th, the news was much worse. "After yesterday's news from town, I saw many frightened faces here," Nicholas wrote. "Fortunately, Alexeiev is calm, but he thinks it is necessary to appoint a very energetic man, so as to compel the ministers to work out the solution of the problems—supplies, railways, coal, etc." Late that night, a jolting telegram arrived from the Empress—"Concessions inevitable. Street fighting continues. Many units gone over to the enemy. Alix." At midnight he ordered his train, and at five a.m. he was under way for Tsarskoe Selo. Nevertheless, even at this point Nicholas did not proceed straight to the capital. Knowing that the most direct route was heavily used by troop supply trains, he chose a longer route to avoid dislocations. He still could not believe that his presence was so urgently required that supplies for the army and hungry civilians should be shunted aside.

As the Imperial train traveled north on Tuesday, the 13th, rumbling through village stations where local dignitaries still stood saluting on the platform to honor the passage of the Tsar, the grim news continued to come. Telegrams from the capital announced the fall of the Winter Palace and the formation of an executive committee of the Duma under Rodzianko. At two a.m. on the morning of the 14th, the train was at Malaya Vishera, just a hundred miles south of the capital, when it was slowed to a halt. An officer boarded the train and informed Voeikov that revolutionary soldiers with machine guns and artillery were just up the track. Nicholas was awakened, and in the middle of the night, alternative possibilities were discussed. If they could not go north to Petrograd and Tsarskoe Selo, they might go east to Moscow, south to Mogilev or west to Pskov, headquarters of the Northern Group of Armies, commanded by General Ruzsky. The discussion leaned in the last direction. Nicholas concurred and declared, "Well, then, to Pskov."

It was eight o'clock in the evening when the Imperial train glided slowly into the station at Pskov. The platform, usually lined with a guard of honor, was deserted except for General Ruzsky and his deputy, General Danilov. Ruzsky, entering the Tsar's car, brought more bad news: the entire garrison of Petrograd and Tsarskoe Selo had gone over, including the Guard, the Cossack Escort and the *Garde Equipage* with Grand Duke Cyril marching in front. Ivanov's expedition, sent ahead to restore order, had reached Tsarskoe Selo earlier in the day, where the trains had stopped and been surrounded by revolutionary soldiers calling on Ivanov's men to join them. Ivanov himself had received a telegram from Alexeiev advising that order had been restored in the capital, and that if there was no further

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bloodshed, the monarchy might be saved. Alexeiev had suggested that he withdraw; Ivanov had done so, and his little force had quickly-melted away.

The report that his personal guard had defected was a heavy blow to Nicholas. Along with the revelation of personal betrayal, it clearly indicated the end of hope for support from within the city, while the loss of Ivanov's men displayed the futility of sending more troops from the front. Nicholas's freedom of action was narrowing rapidly, and as he sat listening to Ruzsky, he made a decision. He asked Ruzsky to telephone to Rodzianko and offer what he had so long refused: a ministry acceptable to the Duma, with a prime minister, presumably Rodzianko, who would have full power over internal affairs. Ruzsky left the railway car and hurried to the telegraph.

Rodzianko, answering Ruzsky's message, was surrounded by people pushing, shouting, asking advice and yelling instructions. Above the din, the harassed Rodzianko wired melodramatically to Ruzsky: "His Majesty and yourself apparently are unable to realize what is happening in the capital. A terrible revolution has broken out. Hatred of the Empress has reached a fever pitch. To prevent bloodshed, I have been forced to arrest all the ministers. . . . Don't send any more troops. I am hanging by a thread myself. Power is slipping from my hands. The measures you propose are too late. The time for them is gone. There is no return."

Rodzianko spoke truly in describing his own position. A compromise reached that morning between the Duma committee and the Soviet had produced the nucleus of a Provisional Government. Miliukov, leader of the Cadet Party in the Duma, was Foreign Minister; Keren-sky, representing the Soviet, became Minister of Justice; Guchkov, leader of the Octobrists, was War Minister. The Prime Minister, however, was not Rodzianko, to whom the Soviet would not agree, but Prince George Lvov, the liberal and popular chairman of the Zemstvo Red Cross. Rodzianko continued to take part in the government's discussions, but his influence, like that of the Duma itself, faded rapidly.

Rodzianko was entirely accurate when he said that it was too late for concessions. Already the Duma committee and the Soviet had agreed that Nicholas must abdicate in favor of his son, with the Tsar's brother Grand Duke Michael as Regent. Even those on the committee who wished to preserve the throne—Guchkov, Miliukov and Basil Shulgin, a Right-wing deputy who participated in all the discussions— had concluded that if the Imperial system and the Romanov dynasty were to be saved, Nicholas would have to be sacrificed. "It is of vital

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importance that Nicholas II should not be overthrown by violence," declared Guchkov. "The only thing which can secure the permanent establishment of a new order, without too great a shock, is his voluntary abdication."

On this matter, the leaders of the new government in Petrograd already had been in touch with the leaders of the army. On the 14th, as the Tsar's train was approaching Pskov, Rodzianko had talked to Alexeiev at Headquarters. Alexeiev himself found abdication the only solution and agreed to collect the opinions of the generals commanding the different fronts. By the morning of the 15th, these replies had come back to Alexeiev and were forwarded to Ruzsky in Pskov. They were grimly unanimous: Nicholas must abdicate. Admiral Nepenin of the Baltic Fleet had stated: "It is only with the greatest difficulty that I keep the troops and fleet under my

command in check." Grand Duke Nicholas, in the Caucasus, telegraphed that he begged "on my knees" for his cousin's abdication.

In Pskov, after breakfast on the morning of March 15, Ruzsky brought the generals' telegrams to the Imperial train and laid them before the Tsar. Nicholas was overwhelmed. His face became white, he turned away from Ruzsky and walked to the window. Absent-mindedly, he lifted the shade and peeped out. Inside, the car was absolutely still. No one spoke, and most of those present could scarcely breathe.

If the anguish felt by Nicholas at this last, climactic moment of his reign is impossible to know, the logic of his reasoning is relatively clear. If he rejected the advice of the political leaders in Petrograd and of his generals, what could he do next? He knew from the defection of the Guard and from Ivanov's experience that it would not be easy to find loyal regiments to march on the city; without the support of his generals, it probably would be impossible. If he could find the men and fighting broke out, there was a risk to his family, still at Tsarskoe Selo, now firmly in the hands of the Provisional Government. On top of this, Nicholas had no real stomach for a bloody, pitched battle in the streets of his capital. Years of rule, years of war, years of personal strain and anguish had left him few inner resources with which to face the prospect of plunging his country into civil war.

Ultimately, the factor which swung the Tsar's decision was the advice of his generals. For Nicholas, each one of these telegrams was more significant than a dozen messages from Rodzianko. These were his fellow soldiers, his comrades, his brothers-in-arms. Nicholas loved the army, and he truly loved his country. He cared far more about

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winning the war than he did for his crown. To start a civil war, with Russians killing Russians while the hated Germans looked on, would be a negation of all that he deeply believed. If it was the advice of his generals that the highest act of patriotism he could perform would be to abdicate, then it became impossible for Nicholas to refuse.

All at once, with a sudden movement, the Tsar spun around from the window and announced in a clear, firm voice, "I have decided that I shall give up the throne in favor of my son, Alexis." Nicholas made the sign of the cross, and the others in the car crossed themselves. "I thank you gentlemen for your distinguished and faithful service," he continued. "I hope it will continue under my son."

A form of abdication, prepared at Alexeiev's direction and forwarded from Headquarters, was produced. Nicholas signed it, and the document was dated 3 p.m., March 15. The throne had passed from father to son, as prescribed by law. His Imperial Majesty Tsar Alexis II, aged twelve, was the Autocrat of all the Russias.

At this point, with the signing completed, a confusion in procedure arose. The night before, in Petrograd, the monarchists on the governing committee had decided that Guchkov and Shulgin should be present to witness the signing and to bring the document back to Petrograd. A train for them was provided at dawn, and throughout that day the two delegates were traveling toward Pskov. As they were not expected before evening, Ruzsky was instructed simply to hold on to the document which Nicholas already had signed.

This interval—almost six hours—gave Nicholas time to reflect on the consequences of the act he had just performed. For himself, the shedding of power came as a relief. He assumed that he would be allowed to retire with his family to Livadia, that Alexis would remain with them at least until he had finished his education, and that the actual responsibility of government would pass to his brother Michael as Regent. It was a conversation with Fedorov, the doctor, which caused Nicholas to change his mind. Sending for Fedorov, Nicholas first asked for a frank estimate of Alexis's prospects with hemophilia.

Fedorov, fully aware of the political significance of the question, replied carefully, "Science teaches us, Sire, that it is an incurable disease. Yet those who are afflicted with it sometimes reach an advanced old age. Still, Alexis Nicolaievich is at the mercy of an accident." The young Tsar would never

be able to ride, the doctor explained, and he would be forced to avoid all activity which might tire him and strain his joints. Then Fedorov went beyond a purely medical opinion. He pointed out that Nicholas, once off the throne, would almost certainly be exiled with the Empress from Russia. If

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that happened, the new government would never allow its sovereign to be educated abroad by the deposed parents. Even if the entire family was allowed to remain in Russia, Alexis's upbringing was certain to be transferred to other hands.

Fedorov's words confronted Nicholas with a heart-breaking dilemma. As Tsar, he knew that his son was the rightful heir to the Russian throne; as a father, he could not bring himself to abandon his beloved child to strangers ignorant of all the ramifications of his disease. For the second time that fateful day, Nicholas was forced to a dramatic decision, a decision which would affect not only the fate of himself and his family, but the history of Russia.

At nine in the evening, Guchkov and Shulgin arrived in Pskov and were led across the tracks to the brightly lit Imperial train. Nicholas, wearing a simple gray tunic, greeted them with a handshake and invited them to sit. With his own back to the green silken wall of the drawing-room car, he listened as Guchkov began to explain why the abdication was necessary. Before Guchkov had finished, Nicholas interrupted. "This long speech is unnecessary," he said calmly, almost apologetically. "I have decided to renounce my throne. Until three o'clock today, I thought I would abdicate in favor of my son, Alexis. But now I have changed my decision in favor of my brother Michael. I trust you will understand the feelings of a father." As Nicholas spoke this last sentence, his voice dropped into a low, hushed tone.

When the Tsar had spoken, Guchkov handed him a new text prepared in Petrograd. Nicholas took it and left the room. Some time afterward, he reappeared with a document which he had written himself, editing in several points from Guchkov's text. This final version was splendidly and yet pathetically illuminated by the patriotism of its author:

In this great struggle with a foreign enemy, who for nearly three years had tried to enslave our country, the Lord God has been pleased to send down on Russia a new, heavy trial. The internal popular disturbances which have begun, threaten to have a disastrous effect on the future conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honor of our heroic army, the good of the people, the whole future of our dear country demand that whatever it cost, the war should be brought to a victorious end.

The cruel enemy is gathering his last forces, and already the hour is near when our gallant army, together with our glorious allies, will be able finally to crush the enemy.

In these decisive days in the life of Russia, we have thought it

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a duty of conscience to facilitate for our people a close union and consolidation of all national forces for the speedy attainment of victory; and, in agreement with the Imperial Duma, we have thought it good to abdicate from the throne of the Russian State, and to lay down the supreme power.

Not wishing to part with our dear son, we hand over our inheritance to our brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and give him our blessing to mount the throne of the Russian State. We bequeath it to our brother to direct the forces of the State in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative institutions, on those principles which will by them be established.

In the name of our dearly loved country, we call on all faithful sons of the Fatherland to fulfill their sacred duty to him by obedience to the Tsar at a heavy moment of national trials, to help him, together with the representatives of the people, to bring the Russian State on to the road of victory, prosperity, and glory.

May the Lord God help Russia!

Nicholas

The historic scene was almost concluded. Before it broke up, Nicholas's signature was obtained on two final appointments nominated by the Provisional Government. The first was Prince Lvov as premier, the other was Grand Duke Nicholas, who once again was appointed commander-in-chief of the armies. When this was done, Nicholas rose. At this point, Shulgin, whose heart was bursting with affection and pity for the man who had just been humbled, moved with Nicholas into a corner of the car. "The Emperor looked at me," wrote Shulgin, "and perhaps he read in my eyes the feelings which were distressing me, because in his own there was something like an invitation to speak and my words came of themselves: 'Oh, Your Majesty, if you had done all this earlier, even as late as the last summoning of the Duma, perhaps all that . . . ' and I could not finish. The Tsar looked at me in a curiously . . . [unaffected] way: 'Do you think it might have been avoided?' "

The meeting was over. A coat of varnish was placed over Nicholas's signature on the abdication, and Guchkov and Shulgin left immediately for Petrograd. At 1 a.m. on March 16, after thirty hours in Pskov, the Imperial train left the silent railway platform, bound for Mogilev, where Nicholas would say goodbye to his armies. Through the long day when, with a stroke of his pen, he had removed two Romanovs from the throne of Russia, he had remained calm and al-

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most kindly to those around him. That night in his diary, normally a repository of only the most cryptic and phlegmatic observations on the day's events, Nicholas finally uttered a heartfelt cry: "For the sake of Russia, and to keep the armies in the field, I decided to take this step. . . . Left Pskov at one in the morning. All around me I see treason, cowardice and deceit."

The Tsar had fallen. It was an event of gigantic significance, and yet, neither in Russia nor abroad was this significance more than dimly understood. On the Sunday following the abdication, Paléologue visited three Petrograd churches: "The same scene met me everywhere; a grave and silent congregation exchanging grave and melancholy glances. Some of the *moujiks* looked bewildered and horrified and several had tears in their eyes.

Yet even among those who seemed the most moved I could not find one who did not sport a red cockade or armband. They had all been working for the Revolution; all of them were for it, body and soul. But that did not prevent them from shedding tears for their Father, the Tsar. Buchanan had the same impression: "It was not so much the Emperor as the regime of which the nation as a whole was weary. As a soldier remarked . . . 'Oh yes, we must have a Republic, but we must have a good Tsar at the head.'" Far away in a peasant village on the steppe of southern Russia, the peasants clustered around the notice of abdication. "Well, so he's gone, just think of that," said one, "and he's been our Tsar for God knows how many years, and when he leaves us everything will be the same as ever. I suppose he will go to manage his estates somewhere; he always liked farming." "Poor man," said an old woman, "he never did anyone any harm. Why did they put him away?"

"Shut thy mouth, old fool," she was told. "They aren't going to kill him. He's run away, that's all."

"Oh, but he was our Tsar, and now we have *no one/"*

If anything, the governments of England, France and the United States had even less understanding of the event than the Russian peasants. In England, where the Tsar was seen as the tyrant wielding the knout, most Liberals and Laborites were exuberant. In the House of Commons, Andrew Bonar Law, leader of the House, quoted Wordsworth: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven." From Paris, the French Socialist Minister of Munitions, Albert Thomas, telegraphed Kerensky his "congratulations and fraternal greetings."

In the United States, the news was greeted even more extravagantly.

On March 22, only one week after the abdication, the United States became the first foreign government to recognize the Provisional Government. For America, on the verge of entering the war because of the German policy of unrestricted U-boat sinkings, the fall of tsarism removed the taint of fighting beside an autocratic Russia. On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow

Wilson asked Congress to declare war and make the world "safe for democracy." In the same speech, he spoke glowingly of "the wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia. . . . The autocracy . . . has been shaken off and the great, generous Russian people have been added in all their naïve majesty and might to the forces that are fighting for freedom in the world, for justice and for peace. Here is a fit partner for a League of Honor."

This almost universal ardor and optimism was not shared by the brilliantly erratic Englishman whose mercurial career had been temporarily blighted by the failure of his special brainchild, the attack on Gallipoli. Even a decade later, when the wartime role of Nicholas II and Imperial Russia still was ignored or derided, Winston Churchill, alone in his viewpoint, gave this estimate:

"It is the shallow fashion of these times to dismiss the Tsarist regime as a purblind, corrupt, incompetent tyranny. But a survey of its thirty months' war with Germany and Austria should correct these loose impressions and expose the dominant facts. We may measure the strength of the Russian Empire by the battering it had endured, by the disasters it had survived, by the inexhaustible forces it had developed, and by the recovery it had made. In the governments of states, when great events are afoot, the leader of the nation, whoever he be, is held accountable for failure and vindicated by success. No matter who wrought the toil, who planned the struggle, to the supreme responsible authority belongs the blame or credit.

"Why should this stern test be denied to Nicholas II? He had made many mistakes, what ruler has not? He was neither a great captain nor a great prince. He was only a true, simple man of average ability, of merciful disposition, upheld in all his daily life by his faith in God. But the brunt of supreme decisions centered upon him. At the summit where all problems are reduced to Yea or Nay, where events transcend the faculties of man and where all is inscrutable, he had to give the answers. His was the function of the compass needle. War or no war? Advance or retreat? Right or left? Democratise or hold firm? Quit or persevere? These were the battlefields of

Nicholas II. Why should he reap no honor from them? The devoted onset of the Russian armies which saved Paris in 1914; the mastered agony of the

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munitionless retreat; the slowly regathered forces; the victories of Brusilov; the Russian entry upon the campaign of 1917, unconquered, stronger than ever; has he no share in these? In spite of errors vast and terrible, the regime he personified, over which he presided, to which his personal character gave the vital spark, had at this moment won the war for Russia.

"He is about to be struck down. A dark hand, gloved at first in folly, now intervenes. Exit Tsar. Deliver him and all he loved to wounds and death. Belittle his efforts, asperse his conduct, insult his memory; but pause then to tell us who else was found capable. Who or what could guide the Russian state? Men gifted and daring; men ambitious and fierce, spirits audacious and commanding—of these there were no lack. But none could answer the few plain questions on which the life and fame of Russia turned."

Inevitably, members of the Imperial family greeted news of the Tsar's abdication with dismay. Some, thinking only of the awkwardness of their own situation, leaped to attack. "Nicky must have lost his mind," wrote Grand Duke Alexander. "Since when does a sovereign abdicate because of a shortage of bread and partial disorders in his capital? . . . He had an army of fifteen million men at his disposal. The whole thing . . . seemed ludicrous."

Far more widely criticized was Nicholas's decision to sign away the rights of his son. Shulgin and Guchkov, both strong monarchists, were surprised by the change from Alexis to Michael. They knew it would make trouble, but in the emotion of the moment on the train, they bowed to a "father's feelings." Among the legalistic, bureaucratic classes whose main concern was to obey whatever government was properly legal, and among the devout monarchists, faithful to tradition, who might have rallied to the legitimate heir, the change created consternation. "The immediate accession of the Tsarevich was the only means of stopping the Revolution," declared Nicholas Basily, an official at Headquarters, who had drafted the first abdication document and been shocked to see the switch from son to brother. "In the first place, the young Alexis Nicolaievich would have had

the law on his side. He would also have benefited by the sympathetic feeling of the nation and army towards him."

Even those who had served Nicholas long and faithfully failed to completely understand that the Tsar was also the father of a delicate twelve-year-old boy. Sazonov, who had been Nicholas's Minister of Foreign Affairs for some years, spoke of the matter to Paléologue. "I

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needn't tell you of my love for the Emperor and with what devotion I have served him," he said with tears in his eyes. "But as long as I live, I shall never forgive him for abdicating for his son. He had no shadow of right to do so. Is there a body of law in the world which allows the rights of a minor to be abandoned? And what's to be said when those rights are the most sacred and august on earth? Fancy destroying a three-hundred-year-old dynasty, and the stupendous work of Peter the Great, Catherine II and Alexander I. What a tragedy! What a disaster!"

With Nicholas and Alexis both removed, Michael now was Tsar. There was an old Russian legend that when Tsar Michael II sat on the throne, Russia would win her eternal goal, Constantinople. There had been no tsar named Michael since the founder of the Romanov dynasty; Nicholas's younger brother, therefore, would be Michael II. There were other propitious omens. Britain and France, which always before had blocked Russia's advance to the south, now were her allies, and had promised Constantinople as a prize of victory. If Michael took the throne and the Allies won the war, the ancient legend might at last be fulfilled.

As it happened, the reign of the new Tsar Michael was ludicrously brief. The news burst upon him at Gatchina in a telegram from his older brother: "To His Majesty the Emperor Michael: Recent events have forced me to decide irrevocably to take this extreme step. Forgive me if it grieves you and also for no warning—there was no time. Shall always remain a faithful and devoted brother. Now returning to Headquarters where hope to come back shortly to Tsarskoe Selo. Fervently pray God to help you and our country. Nicky."

Michael, now thirty-nine, was wholly unprepared for this abrupt transformation. Before the birth of the Tsarevich, he had for six years been Heir to the Throne. During Alexis's periods of illness, he had faced the possibility of becoming Heir again. But he had never dreamed that both his brother and his nephew would be removed simultaneously and that, with the arrival of a telegram, he would suddenly find himself Tsar. Michael was no coward; he had won the St. George Cross commanding troops in the Carpathians. Nor was he politically insensitive: watching the disintegration of the government earlier that winter, he had come to Rodzianko to see what he could do to help. But he was not a bold, decisive man with extraordinary energies and will power, and it was a man of this character who was required. Nevertheless, taking leave of his wife, now beside herself with ex-

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citement at the prospect of becoming the consort of an emperor, Michael traveled from Gatchina into Petrograd to make his historic decision.

In Petrograd, the anti-monarchical tide was running strong. Even as Guchkov and Shulgin were in Pskov obtaining Nicholas's abdication, the Soviet had decided that replacing one tsar with another was not enough. "No more Romanovs! We want a Republic!" became their cry. Guchkov and Shulgin, returning to Petrograd with the document of abdication, were invited to address the railway workers at the station. Shulgin, believing it would please them to hear of Nicholas's abdication, fervently shouted, "Long live the Emperor Michael!" To his horror, the workers were outraged. Closing the doors, they attempted to seize both Guchkov and Shulgin, who barely managed to slip away to a waiting automobile. From the station, the two delegates drove straight to a private house where the new government was meeting. Rodzianko was present, and in an armchair at the head of the table, waiting to hear the advice of the men who would become his ministers if he accepted the throne, sat Michael.

The debate that followed was waged with passionate intensity. Miliukov, Guchkov and Shulgin pleaded that Michael had no right to evade the throne. They argued that the monarchy was the single unifying force in

Russia, without which Russia would be destroyed. With equal force and conviction on the other side, Rodzianko and Kerensky threatened that if a new tsar took the throne against the people's will, a new torrent of revolution would be released. The first victim, they predicted, would be Michael himself. "He asked me point-blank whether I could vouch for his life if he accepted the crown," Rodzianko wrote later, "and I was compelled to answer in the negative because there was no armed force I could rely on."

Kerensky was even more vehement than Rodzianko. Knowing the fury that the proclamation of a new tsar would rouse in the Soviet, he declared, "In any case, I cannot answer for the life of Your Highness." Michael asked for a few minutes to think the matter over and left the room with Rodzianko and Prince Lvov. Five minutes later, he returned and announced, "I have decided to abdicate." He added that he would accept the throne later only if invited to do so by a constituent assembly.

Kerensky was overjoyed. "Monseigneur, you are the noblest of men," he shouted. The second deed of abdication was typed out on the desk of a children's schoolroom in the house next door, and Michael signed it.

Three hundred and four years after a shy sixteen-year-old boy had

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reluctantly accepted the throne at the plea of the Russian nation, his descendant, also named Michael, had given it back. The Romanov dynasty was swept away.

Although it was the defection of his trusted generals which ultimately swung his decision to abdication, Nicholas could not abandon the throne without saying goodbye to the army. In Pskov, immediately after signing the abdication, Nicholas applied for permission to return to Headquarters. The Provisional Government agreed without hesitation. Nicholas was not hostile but submissive; at Headquarters, Alexeiev was with them; at all the battlefronts, the commanding generals had united to urge the abdication. The likelihood that Nicholas would suddenly change his mind, revoke his abdication, rally his troops and march on the capital simply did not exist.

As the train approached Mogilev, Alexeiev sent Basily to meet the Tsar. "He was absolutely calm, but it shocked me to see him with a haggard look and hollow eyes," Basily wrote of his former sovereign. "... I took the liberty of saying that we at the *Stavka* were greatly distressed because he had not transferred his crown to the Tsarevich. He answered quietly: 'I cannot be separated from my son.' A few minutes later dinner was served. It was a melancholy meal. All of us felt our hearts bursting; we couldn't eat or drink. Yet the Emperor retained wonderful self-control and asked me several questions about the men who form the Provisional Government; but he was wearing a rather low collar and I could see that he was continually choking down his emotion."

In Mogilev, Alexeiev met the train at the station and drove with the Tsar in an open car back to the governor's house. Sitting down at his desk, Nicholas drafted as an Order of the Day his farewell to the army:

"My dearly beloved troops," he wrote, "I address you for the last time. Since my abdication, for myself and my son, from the throne of Russia, the power has passed to the Provisional Government, which has arisen on the initiative of the Imperial Duma. . . . Submit yourselves to the Provisional Government, obey your commanders. . . . May the Lord God bless you and may the Holy Martyr and Conqueror St. George lead you to victory." Sadly, the message never reached the troops. Forwarded for approval to Petrograd, it was suppressed by the same Provisional Government which Nicholas was so loyally recommending. The Soviet, sitting under the same roof of the Tauride Palace, had let it be known that it did not favor the issuance of Orders of the Day by deposed monarchs.

During these last five days in Mogilev, Nicholas exhibited the same steady restraint and self-control which he had been taught since boyhood. At a ceremonial farewell arranged by Alexeiev, the main hall of the house was packed with officers of the Headquarters staff. Nicholas, appearing at the front of the crowded room, quietly thanked the officers for their loyalty, begged them to forget all feuds and lead the army and Russia to victory. His modesty made a vivid impression; when he had finished, the room burst

into loud cheers and most of those present wept openly. But none spoke up to urge him to change his mind, and Nicholas quietly bowed and left.

Alone in his room, he said goodbye to the foreign military observers. General Hanbury-Williams found Nicholas in a khaki uniform, looking tired and pale, with large black lines under his eyes. He smiled and got up from his desk to join his guest on the sofa. "He said that he had meant to carry out . . . [reforms]," wrote Hanbury-Williams, "but that matters had advanced so quickly and it was too late. The proposal that the Tsarevich should take his place with a regent he could not accept as he could not bear the separation from his only son, and he knew that the Empress would feel the same. He . . . hoped that he would not have to leave Russia. He did not see that there would be any objection to his going to the Crimea . . . and if not, he would sooner go to England than anywhere. . . . He . . . added that the right thing to do was to support the present Government, as that was the best way to keep Russia in the alliance to conclude the war. . . . He feared the revolution would ruin the armies. ... As I said 'Goodbye' ... he turned to me and added: 'Remember, nothing matters but beating Germany.' "

The change in his status was tactfully concealed by the continuing personal courtesy with which he was treated. It appeared, nevertheless, in the little matters of procedure and ceremony which are the visible trappings of power. On the morning following his last meeting with the staff, the same officers assembled to take the oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government. While Nicholas sat alone in his room, his suite, the staff and the troops of his escort lined up outside the house and pronounced the new oath in an audible chorus. In the prayers that followed, for the first time in hundreds of years the names of the Tsar and the Imperial family were omitted. The town of Mogilev greeted the abdication with noisy celebrations. At night, the town was illuminated and excited crowds stayed up shouting in the streets. From the windows of the local city hall, just opposite Nicholas's window, two large red flags were draped. One by one, as the days moved along, the officers of the suite began removing the Tsar's

initials from their epaulets and cutting away the golden shoulder knots which marked them as aides-de-camp. Nicholas reacted gracefully to this melancholy sight: on March 21, Alexeiev telegraphed Brusilov: "The deposed Emperor understands and has given permission to remove initials and shoulder knots immediately."

On the second day of Nicholas's stay at Headquarters, his mother, the Dowager Empress, arrived from her home in Kiev. "The news of Nicky's abdication came like a thunderbolt," wrote the Tsar's sister Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, who was with her mother in Kiev. "We were stunned. My mother was in a terrible state. She kept telling me it was the greatest humiliation of her life. . . . She blamed poor Alicky for . . . everything." In Mogilev, the Dowager Empress's train was brought to the Imperial platform and a few minutes later Nicholas drove up in his automobile. He said good morning to the two Cossacks standing at the entrance to Marie's car and went inside. For two hours, mother and son were alone. Then Grand Duke Alexander, who had accompanied Marie, entered the car. He found the Dowager Empress collapsed in a chair, sobbing aloud, while Nicholas stood smoking quietly and staring at his feet.

For three days, Marie remained in Mogilev, living aboard her train. She and Nicholas spent most of their time together, going for long drives in the afternoon and dining together every evening. It was the son who comforted the mother. Marie, always gay, witty, brilliant, decisive and totally in control of her emotions, had lost the regal bearing which was her emblem; for once she was frightened, ashamed and miserable. It was Nicholas, the son she had always lectured on behavior, who carefully steered his mother back toward courage and self-control.

While at Mogilev, Nicholas had only the scantiest communication with his family at Tsarskoe Selo. Anxious to return to them as soon as possible, he applied for permission to the Provisional Government, which again had no objections. In Petrograd, however, the position of the Imperial family had deteriorated. Rumors circulated through the city that Nicholas had returned to Headquarters to lead the army against the revolution or to "let the Germans in." Newspapers were filled with garish accounts of the sexual

relationship of Rasputin and the Empress, along with stories detailing the Empress's "treason." On March 20, therefore, primarily to assure their own safety, the Provisional Government resolved "to deprive the deposed emperor and his consort of their liberty." The Empress was to be arrested at Tsarskoe Selo on March 21. That same day, Nicholas was to be ar-

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rested at Mogilev and then, escorted by four commissioners sent by the Government, brought back to his family at Tsarskoe Selo.

On March 21, the Tsar, knowing that he was to become a prisoner, had lunch alone with his mother. At three p.m., the express from Petrograd arrived, bearing the government envoys. At a quarter to four, the delegation, accompanied by Alexeiev, arrived to claim the Tsar. Nicholas stood up and tenderly kissed his mother goodbye. Neither could guess the future; both hoped that they would soon be reunited either in the Crimea or in England. Nevertheless, Marie cried unrestrainedly. Nicholas left her car, walked across the platform and entered the drawing-room car of his own train, which stood on the adjacent track. Whistles blew, there was a lurch and the Tsar's train started to move. Nicholas, standing at the window, smiled and waved his hand; Marie, still in tears, made the sign of the cross. A few minutes later, when his train was only a blur of smoke on the northern horizon, her car rolled out of the station headed southwest for Kiev. Neither could know it at the time, but the proud Empress and her quiet eldest son were never to meet again.

On the platform a few minutes before, as the Tsar's train was leaving, Alexeiev and other officers of the Headquarters staff had stood at attention as the train bearing their former sovereign departed. As the car carrying the Tsar moved past him, Alexeiev saluted. A second later, as the last car of the same train, bearing the representatives of the Duma, rolled by, Alexeiev took off his cap and made a deep bow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Empress Alone

A ten a.m. on Monday, March 12, a telephone rang in the Petrograd house of the Empress's friend Lili Dehn. Lili, still in bed, got up to answer. It was the Empress. "I want you to come to Tsarskoe Selo by the ten-forty-five train," said Alexandra. "It's a lovely morning. We'll go for a run in the car. You can see the girls and Anna and return to Petrograd at four p.m. . . . I'll be at the station."

With only forty-five minutes to catch her train, Lili dressed rapidly, snatching her gloves, rings and a bracelet, and rushed to the station. She managed to scramble aboard the train just as it was leaving the platform.

It was a superb winter morning. The sky was a rich blue and the sun sparkled on the deep drifts of white snow. True to her word, the Empress was waiting at the Tsarskoe Selo station. "How is it in Petrograd?" she asked anxiously. "I hear things are serious." Lili replied that the general strike had made things inconvenient, but that she herself had seen nothing alarming. Still troubled, the Empress stopped the car on the way to the palace to question a captain of the marine *Garde Equipage.* The captain smiled. "There is no danger, Your Majesty," he said.

Over the weekend, Alexandra had paid less attention than usual to events in Petrograd. From Protopopov and others, she had heard that there had been disturbances and that in places the police had had difficulty in calming and dispersing the crowds. Soothingly, Protopopov had assured her that matters were under control. In any case, the Empress had little time to worry about street disorders. At the palace, she faced an urgent family crisis.

Three of her children had come down with the measles. A week before, a group of young military cadets had come to the palace to

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play with the Tsarevich. One of these boys arrived with a flushed face and spent the afternoon coughing. The following day, the Empress learned that he had measles. Then, on Thursday, March 8, just after the Tsar's train had departed for Mogilev, both Olga and Alexis had developed a rash and high fever.

The disease spread quickly. Olga and Alexis were followed to bed by Tatiana and Anna Vyrubova. The Empress, in her white Red Cross uniform, nursed the invalids herself. "She spent all the succeeding days between her children's rooms and mine," wrote Anna Vyrubova. "Half-conscious, I felt gratefully her capable hands arranging my pillows, smoothing my burning forehead, and holding to my lips medicines and cooling drinks." Despite her efforts, the patients grew worse. On the night of March 12, Olga had a temperature of 103 degrees, Tatiana 102 and both Anna and Alexis 104.

It was during Lili Dehn's visit that the Empress learned that the Petrograd soldiery had joined the mob. Lili was upstairs, sitting in a darkened room with the ill Grand Duchesses; Alexandra had gone to talk to two officers of the palace guard. When the Empress returned, she beckoned Lili into another room: "Lili," she said, breathlessly, "it is *very* bad. . . . The Litovsky Regiment has mutinied, murdered the officers and left barracks; the Volinsky Regiment has followed suit. I can't understand it. I'll never believe in the possibility of revolution. . . . I'm sure that the trouble is confined to Petrograd alone."

Nevertheless, as the day wore on, the news got worse. The Empress tried to telephone the Tsar and was unable to get through. "But I have wired him, asking him to return immediately. He'll be here on Wednesday morning [the 14th]," she said. Alexander Taneyev, Anna Vyrubova's father, arrived puffing and footsore, his face crimson with excitement and anger. "Petrograd is in the hands of the mob," he declared. "They are stopping all cars. They commandeered mine, and I've had to walk every step of the way."

That night, rather than attempt to return to the capital under these conditions, Lili decided to remain at the palace. So that she could stay in the private family wing where there were no extra bedrooms, a couch was arranged for her in the red drawing room. There, while the Empress talked with Count Benckendorff, the elderly Grand Marshal of the Court and senior court official at the palace, Lili and Anastasia sat on the red carpet and assembled jigsaw puzzles. When the Empress returned from her conference with Benckendorff, she sent her daughter to bed and said to Lili,

"I don't want the girls to know anything until it is impossible to keep the truth from them, but people are drinking to excess, and there is indiscriminate shooting in

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the streets. Oh, Lili, what a blessing that we have here the most devoted troops. There is the *Garde Equipage;* they are all our personal friends."

That night, a message arrived from Rodzianko, now the chairman of the Temporary Committee of the Duma, warning that the Empress and her children were in danger and should leave Tsarskoe Selo as soon as possible. On his own initiative, Benckendorff withheld this message from the Empress and instead communicated it to Mogilev, asking the Tsar for instructions. Nicholas telegraphed that a train should be made ready for his family, but that his wife should not be told until the following morning. Meanwhile, he himself was leaving Mogilev and would arrive in Tsarskoe Selo early on the morning of the 14th.

On Tuesday, March 13, a fresh blizzard swept down from a gray sky, and an icy wind howled dismally outside the palace windows. The Empress was up early, taking *café au lait* in the sickroom with Olga and Tatiana. From Petrograd, the news was grim: the mob had swept all before it, and General Khabalov with his 1,500 men holding the Winter Palace constituted the only tsarist island in the entire city. Benckendorff informed the Empress of his previous night's conversations: Rodzianko's warning and appeal, and the Tsar's command that a train be prepared for her. The train itself was already only a hope; on telephoning the Petrograd yards, the palace staff had learned that it was doubtful that workers would roll out a train for any member of the Imperial family.

As it happened, this obstructionism became irrelevant. Alexandra refused to go. To Rodzianko and the Duma committee, as Benckendorff transmitted her message, she declared that she would never leave by herself and, "owing to the state of her children's health, especially that of the Heir Apparent, departure with them was completely out of the question." Rodzianko, more alarmed than ever at the rising pitch of revolutionary fever all around him, argued with Benckendorff, saying "when a house is

burning the invalids are the first to be taken out," but Alexandra's mind was made up. At 11:30 that morning, Benckendorff was informed by railway officials that within two hours all railway lines would be cut, and that if there was any idea of leaving Tsarskoe Selo they should do so at once. Knowing the Empress's mind, the Count did not even bother to give her this message. At four in the afternoon, Dr. Derevenko returned to the palace from visiting hospitals in Tsarskoe Selo village. He brought with hirn the news that the entire network of railways around Petrograd was in the hands of the revolutionaries. "We could not

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leave," wrote Gilliard, "and it was highly improbable that the Tsar would be able to reach us."

Even before that day was over, it seemed that Alexandra's decision would lead to calamity. From Petrograd, on a sudden inspiration, a crowd of mutinous soldiers set off by truck for Tsarskoe Selo. Their plan, shouted gleefully from truck to truck, was to seize "the German woman" and her son and bring them back to the capital. Arriving in the village of Tsarskoe Selo, they became distracted and began smashing into wine shops, looting and drinking. At the Alexander Palace, where the sounds of shooting and cheering were plainly heard, the size of the crowd was magnified by rumor. "Lili," the Empress said, "they say that a hostile crowd of three hundred thousand is marching on the palace. We shall not be, must not be afraid. Everything is in the hands of God. Tomorrow the Emperor is sure to come. I know that when he does, all will be well."

The Alexander Palace was not completely defenseless. That morning, before the arrival of the mutineers, Count Benckendorff had ordered a battalion of the *Garde Equipage*, two battalions of the picked Composite Regiment of the Imperial Guard, two squadrons of Cossacks of the Emperor's Escort, a company of the Railway Regiment and a battery of field artillery—in all, about 1,500 men—to take up defensive positions around the palace. By nightfall, their soup kitchens and warming fires were established in the palace courtyard. The Empress was reassured, and her

younger daughters, seeing the familiar faces of the marines, declared happily, "It's just like being on the yacht again."

The night was spent awaiting an attack. At nine p.m. a telephone call advised that the rebels were on their way. A moment later, a sentry was shot less than five hundred yards from the palace. Through the trees of the park, the sound of firing grew steadily closer. From a palace window, the Empress looked down on General Ressine, commander of the defense forces, standing in the courtyard before his men. On impulse, she decided to go out to speak to the soldiers. Throwing a black fur cloak over her white nurse's uniform, accompanied by seventeen-year-old Grand Duchess Marie and Count Benckendorff, she walked out into the frigid night.

"The scene was unforgettable," wrote Baroness Buxhoeveden, who watched from above. "It was dark, except for a faint light thrown up from the snow and reflected on the polished barrels of the rifles. The troops were lined up in battle order . . . the first fine kneeling in the snow, the others standing behind, their rifles in readiness for a sudden attack. The figures of the Empress and her daughter passed from line

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to line, the white palace looming a ghostly mass in the background." Walking from man to man, she told them that she trusted them completely, and that the life of the Heir was in their hands. Count Benckendorff, a rigid old soldier, thought that some of the men answered in surly fashion, but the Empress, according to Lili Dehn, returned to the palace "apparently possessed by some inward exaltation. She was radiant; her trust in the 'people' was complete. . . . 'They are all our friends,' she kept on repeating. 'They are so devoted to us.' " She asked that the men, many of whom were stiff with cold, be brought into the palace to warm themselves and be given cups of scalding tea.

During the night, Alexandra lay down, but did not undress. From time to time, she arose: first to bring extra blankets to Countess Benckendorff and Baroness Buxhoeveden, who were camping on sofas in the drawing room; later, appearing in her stockinged feet, she offered them fruit and biscuits from the table beside her bed.

Outside, the night was filled with confusion and occasional skirmishing. Mutinous soldiers had pressed as close as the Chinese Pagoda near the great Catherine Palace. There, hearing rumors that the Alexander Palace was defended by immense forces and that the roof was studded with many machine guns, they lost their nerve and withdrew.

Although the palace was not assaulted, the sound of shooting carried clearly into the children's rooms. The sick children, still feverish, were told that the shots came from manuevers; Lili and Anastasia, sleeping together in the same room, went to the window. In the courtyard, a big field gun was emplaced, with sentries and gunners stamping their feet around it to keep warm. "How astonished Papa will be," said Anastasia, staring at the huge gun.

The following morning—Wednesday, March 14—the Empress was up at five a.m., expecting the Tsar to arrive at six. She was told that he had been delayed. "Perhaps the blizzard detains him," she said and lay back on her couch to wait. Anastasia was instantly alarmed. "Lili, the train is *never* late. Oh, if only Papa would come quickly." At eight, Alexandra learned that Nicholas's train had been stopped at Malaya Vishera. She rose and sent a telegram. There was no reply. Other telegrams followed in an anxious stream. Over the next several days, all were returned marked in blue pencil: "Address of person mentioned unknown."

During the day, the loyalty of the troops guarding the Alexander Palace began to deteriorate. Standing at the window, the Empress noticed that many of the soldiers in the courtyard had bound white handkerchiefs to their wrists. The handkerchiefs were symbols of a

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trace worked out between the palace guards and the revolutionary troops in the village: if the Alexander Palace was not attacked, the loyal troops would not intervene against the mutineers in the village. The truce had been arranged by a member of the Duma. Learning this, the Empress said bitterly, "Well, so everything is in the hands of the Duma."

On the following morning, Thursday, March 15, the Empress had a far heavier blow. Very early that morning, deathly pale, she came up to Lili and said in an anguished whisper, "Lili, the troops have deserted!"

"Why, Madame? In the name of God, why?"

"Their commander—the Grand Duke Cyril—has sent for them." Then, unable to contain herself, the Empress said brokenly, "My sailors—my own sailors—I can't believe it."

In Pskov, on the 15th, the Tsar on his train was amending and signing the instrument of abdication. At Tsarskoe Selo, unaware even of her husband's whereabouts, Alexandra was coping with new difficulties. Alexis was better, but Anastasia and Marie were beginning to display unmistakable signs of oncoming measles. Both electricity and water had been cut off. Water was supplied only by breaking the ice on the pond. The Empress's small elevator, running between her rooms and the nurseries upstairs, stopped running. To reach her children, she had to climb slowly up the stairs, supported under the arms and gasping for breath. The lights were out. To visit Anna Vyrubova, whose room was in another wing of the palace, Alexandra was wheeled through the vast, darkened halls, now empty of all servants. Yet, knowing that others were watching for any sign of panic, she said to Lili, "I must not give way. I keep on saying, 'I must not'— it helps me."

Friday, March 16, another blizzard roared in, rattling the windows and piling the snowdrifts deeper in the park. Through the storm, more unsettling reports and rumors began to seep into the palace. At 3:30 a.m., a member of the Duma committee had telephoned Dr. Botkin, asking for news of the Tsarevich's health. During the afternoon, household servants making their way back from Petrograd on foot said that leaflets announcing the Tsar's abdication were being distributed in the capital. The Empress refused to believe them. At five p.m., the printed sheets announcing Nicholas's abdication, the renunciation of the throne by Grand Duke Michael and the establishment of a Provisional Government reached the palace. Officers of

the Guard and members of the suite read them with tears in their eyes. At seven, Grand Duke Paul, the Tsar's uncle, arrived and went straight

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to the Empress. Grand Duchess Marie and Lili Dehn, waiting in the next room, heard agitated voices.

Then, wrote Lili, "the door opened and the Empress appeared. Her face was distorted with agony, her eyes were full of tears. She tottered rather than walked, and I rushed forward and supported her until she reached the writing table between the windows. She leaned heavily against it and taking my hands in hers, she said brokenly: *'Abdiqué!'* I could not believe my ears. I waited for her next words. They were hardly audible. 'The poor dear ... all alone down there . . . what he has gone through, oh my God, what he has gone through . . . And I was not there to console him. . . .' "

That night, wrote Gilliard, "I saw her in Alexis Nicolaievich's room. . . . Her face was terrible to see, but with a strength of will which was almost superhuman, she had forced herself to come to the children's rooms as usual so that the young invalids . . . should suspect nothing."

The same evening, Count Benckendorff, Baroness Buxhoeveden and others went to see the Empress to assure her of their personal loyalty. "She was deadly pale," wrote Baroness Buxhoeveden. ". . . When the Empress kissed me, I could only cling to her and murmur some broken words of affection. Count Benckendorff held her hand, tears running down his usually immobile face. . . . 'It's for the best,' she said. 'It is the will of God. God gives this to save Russia. That is the only thing that matters.' Before we shut the door, we could see her sinking into her chair by the table, sobbing bitterly, covering her face with her hands."

Painful as it was, the Tsar's abdication improved the immediate situation at Tsarskoe Selo. The virtual state of siege surrounding the palace ended as officers and men of the palace guard, absolved by the abdication from their oath to the Tsar, swore allegiance to the Provisional Government. Communication between the deposed sovereigns, no longer a danger to the revolution, was restored. On March 17, upon his arrival at Headquarters,

Nicholas was allowed to telephone his wife. Word of the call was brought by an aged servant, trembling with excitement. Oblivious of etiquette, he stammered: "The Emperor is on the phone!" Alexandra stared at him as if he had taken leave of his senses; then, realizing what he was saying, jumped up like a girl of sixteen and rushed to the telephone. Knowing that other people were listening in at both ends of the line, Nicholas said only "You know?" Alexandra answered nothing more than "Yes," before they went on to discuss the health of their children.

After ten o'clock at night on March 18, Count BenckendorfF was

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startled to hear that Guchkov, now Minister of War in the Provisional Government, and General Kornilov, a regular soldier who had come from the front to take command of the Petrograd garrison, were on their way to Tsarskoe Selo to see the Empress. Guchkov was an avowed enemy—a former President of the Duma, an early antagonist of Rasputin, just back from overseeing the Tsar's abdication at Pskov. His coming, plus the lateness of the hour, seemed to indicate imminent arrest. Benckendorff informed Alexandra, who sent for Grand Duke Paul. The Grand Duke got out of bed and hurried from his house in Tsarskoe Selo. At eleven, Guchkov and Kornilov arrived, accompanied by twenty members of the new revolutionary council of the village of Tsarskoe Selo. While the Empress and the Grand Duke received the two envoys, these men, mostly workers and soldiers, wandered through the palace, abusing the servants and addressing the suite as "bloodsuckers."

As it happened, Guchkov and Kornilov had come only to investigate the state of affairs at the palace and to offer the protection of the Provisional Government to the Empress and her children. Guchkov respectfully asked whether the Empress had what she needed, especially medicines. Alexandra, relieved and grateful, replied that their own supplies were adequate, but she asked Guchkov to look into the supplies for the numerous hospitals around Tsarskoe Selo. In addition, she asked, for the children's sake, that order be maintained around the palace. Guchkov promised to arrange both of these matters. The first interview between the Empress and

her captors had gone well. Returning home after the interview, Grand Duke Paul told his wife that he had never seen Alexandra more "beautiful, tranquil and dignified."

Nevertheless, the future still seemed precarious. During the days which preceded the Tsar's return, the Empress began burning her diaries, bound either in white satin or leather, and much of her private correspondence. All of her letters from Queen Victoria and her own letters to the Queen, which had been returned from Windsor after her grandmother's death, were destroyed. "A fierce fire was burning in the huge grate in the red drawing room," wrote Lili Dehn. "... She reread some of them. ... I heard stifled sobs and . . . sighs. . . . Still weeping, [she] laid her letters one by one on the heart of the fire. The writing glowed for an instant . . . then it faded and the paper became a little heap of white ash." There were some letters which Alexandra did not burn. With rumors flying that one or both of them would be placed on trial, she carefully saved all of her letters to Nicholas and his to her to use as evidence of their patriotism.

Morale among the defending garrison began to erode. Following the dictate of Order Number One of the Petrograd Soviet, the troops began electing their officers. The Cossacks all reelected their former commanders, but General Ressine, commanding the Guard, was voted out. Discipline slackened, the men began to slouch on duty and argue when given a command. Those who remained loyal were frustrated and helpless because of the abdication. One devoted squadron of the Chevalier Guards, stationed at Novgorod, a hundred miles south of Tsarskoe Selo, had set out through the snow to defend tsar and dynasty. They rode for two days through bitter cold, reaching the palace gates, bedraggled and exhausted, to find that they had come too late. There no longer was a tsar or a dynasty for them to defend.

On the morning of March 21, General Kornilov returned to the palace. His mission this time was to place Alexandra Fedorovna under arrest. The Empress, dressed in her white nurse's uniform, received him in the green drawing room. Appraised of his mission, she stood icily silent and did not

hold out her hand to receive him. Kornilov carefully explained that the arrest was purely precautionary, designed to safeguard her and her children from the excesses of the Soviet and the revolutionary soldiery. Her husband, he said, had been arrested at Mogilev and would be returned to Tsarskoe Selo the following day. As soon as the children's health permitted, he declared, the Provisional Government intended to send the entire family to Murmansk, where a British cruiser would be waiting to take them to England. Kornilov's reassuring words overcame Alexandra's reserve. Half an hour later, an aide returned to find the Empress and the General sitting together at a small table. She was weeping and there were tears in his eyes. When she rose to say goodbye, she held out both her hands.

Moving to the Tsar's audience chamber, Kornilov addressed the assembled officers of the guard and the palace suite. He announced that, as the Tsar and his wife both were under arrest, the officers' duties at the palace had come to an end and that their men would be relieved by other troops. He told the suite that those who wished to leave were free to go; having gone, however, no one could return. Those who stayed would be placed under house arrest with Her Majesty. At that point, a majority rose and left the hall. Kornilov, disgusted, muttered under his breath: "Lackeys!" Kornilov informed Benckendorff that except for two entrances, the kitchen and the main entrance, the palace would be sealed. Captain Kotzebue, who had accompanied Kornilov, was assigned as palace commander, and the General warned that all in the palace must submit absolutely to the Captain's orders.

At two in the afternoon, the men of the Composite Regiment were relieved of their posts. "The soldiers of the new guard were horrible to look at," said Benckendorff. "Untidy, noisy, quarreling with everybody. The officers, who were afraid of them, had the greatest difficulty in preventing them from roaming about the palace and entering every room. . . . There were many quarrels between them and the household staff whom they reproached for wearing livery and for the attention they paid to the Imperial family."

As soon as Kornilov left her, the Empress sent for Gilliard. "The Tsar is coming back tomorrow," she said. "Alexis must be told everything. Will

you do it? I am going to tell the girls myself." Both Tatiana and Anastasia then were suffering from painful ear abscesses as a result of secondary infections. Tatiana temporarily was quite deaf and could not hear what her mother was saying. Not until her sisters wrote the details down on paper did she understand what had happened.

Meanwhile, Gilliard went to the Tsarevich:

"[I] told him that the Tsar would be returning from Mogilev next morning and would never go back again.

" 'Why?'

" 'Your father does not want to be Commander-in-Chief any more.'

"He was greatly moved at this, as he was very fond of going to G.H.Q. After a moment or two, I added:

" 'You know your father does not want to be Tsar any more, Alexis Nicolaievich.'

"He looked at me in astonishment, trying to read in my face what had happened.

"'What! Why?'

" 'He is very tired and has had a lot of trouble lately.'

" 'Oh yes! Mother told me they had stopped his train when he wanted to come here. But won't Papa be Tsar again afterwards?'

"I then told him that the Tsar had abdicated in favor of the Grand Duke Michael, who had also renounced the throne.

" 'But who's going to be Tsar, then?'

" 'I don't know. Perhaps nobody now . . . '

"Not a word about himself. Not a single allusion to his rights as the Heir. He was very red and agitated. . . . Then he said:

" 'But if there isn't a Tsar, who's going to govern Russia?'

"I explained that a Provisional Government had been formed. ..."

At four that afternoon, the palace doors were locked. That night, the first of their imprisonment, a bright moon came up. From the park came the sounds of rifle shots; this time, it was the soldiers of the new guard killing the tame deer. Inside, the private wing of the palace

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was silent; from elsewhere in the building came sounds of laughter, broken by occasional snatches of song and drunken shouts.

Lili Dehn offered to sleep outside the Empress's door: "I went quietly downstairs to the mauve boudoir," she wrote. "The Empress was waiting for me and as she stood there, I thought how girlish she looked. Her long hair fell in a heavy plait, down her back, and she wore a loose silk dressing gown over her night clothes. She was very pale, very ethereal, but unutterably pathetic. As I stumbled into the boudoir with my . . . sheets and blankets, she smiled. ... As she watched me trying to arrange my bed on the couch, she came forward, still smiling. 'Oh Lili, you Russian ladies don't know how to be useful. When I was a girl, my grandmother, Queen Victoria, showed me how to make a bed. I'll teach you. . . .'

"Sleep for me was impossible. I lay on the mauve couch—her couch—unable to realize that this strange happening was a part of ordinary life. Surely I was dreaming; surely I would suddenly awake in my own bed at Petrograd, and find that the Revolution and its attendant horrors were only a nightmare! But the sound of coughing in the Empress's bedroom told me that, alas! it was no dream. . . . The mauve boudoir was flooded with moonlight. . . . All was silent save for the footsteps of the Red sentry as he passed and repassed up and down the corridor."

The morning of March 22, the day scheduled for the Tsar's return, was cold and gray. Alexandra, both excited and worried that her hopes might be disappointed, went to wait with her children. Alexis, like his mother, in a state of nervous agitation, kept looking at his watch and counting aloud the minutes until his father arrived.

Nicholas's train arrived on schedule and pulled into the private siding at Tsarskoe Selo station. On the platform, the representatives of the Duma turned their prisoner over to the newly appointed palace commander. As the Tsar was taken away, the members of his suite peeked out the windows of the train and, seeing that the coast was clear, quickly scuttled across the platform in all directions. Only Prince Vassily Dolgoruky, Count Benckendorff's son-in-law, chose to accompany his former sovereign to whatever awaited him at the Alexander Palace.

At the palace gate, about a hundred yards from the entrance hall, Nicholas faced another humiliation. The gates were locked when his car drove up. The sentry asked who was inside and telephoned an officer, who came out on the palace steps and again asked in a shout

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"Who is there?" The sentry bawled back, "Nicholas Romanov." "Let him pass," cried the officer. "After this offensive comedy," wrote Benckendorff, "the motor arrived at the steps and the Emperor and Dolgoruky descended." They entered the antechamber, which was filled with people, most of them soldiers crowding to catch a glimpse of the Tsar. Some were smoking, others had not bothered to remove their caps. By habit, as he walked through the crowd, Nicholas touched the brim of his cap, returning salutes which had never been given. He shook hands with Benckendorff and left for the private apartments without saying a word.

Upstairs, just as the Empress heard the sound of the arriving automobile, the door flew open and a servant, in a tone which ignored the events of recent days, boomed out: "His Majesty the Emperor!"

With a cry, Alexandra sprang to her feet and ran to meet her husband. Alone, in the children's room, they fell into each other's arms. With tears in

her eyes, Alexandra assured him that the husband and father was infinitely more precious to her than the tsar whose throne she had shared. Nicholas finally broke. Laying his head on his wife's breast, he sobbed like a child.

PART FOUR

CHAPTER THIRTY

Citizen Romanov

In the afternoon, the Tsar reappeared, walking alone through the hushed rooms of the palace. In the red drawing room, he met Lili Dehn. Taking her hands in his, he said simply, "Thank you, Lili, for all you have done for us." She was shocked to see how much he had changed. "The Emperor was deathly pale," she observed. "His face was covered with innumerable wrinkles, his hair was quite grey at the temples, and blue shadows encircled his eyes. He looked like an old man." Nicholas smiled sadly at Lili's expression. "I think I'll go for a walk," he said. "Walking always does me good."

Before going out, Nicholas spoke to Count Benckendorff, who explained the arrangements made with General Kornilov. At first, Kornilov had wished to keep the Imperial family locked inside the palace, but Benckendorff, knowing the Tsar's intense need for outdoor exercise, had arranged for a small section of the park to be used. Nevertheless, it was required that every excursion be arranged in advance so that sentries could be posted. On this first afternoon, none of these arrangements had been made, and Nicholas was forced to wait for twenty minutes before an officer appeared with a key. When at last he did go outside, the Empress, Lili and Anna Vyrubova were watching from an upstairs window.

They saw Nicholas marching briskly across the park when a soldier stepped up and blocked his path. Surprised, the Tsar made a nervous gesture with his hand and started in a different direction. Another sentinel appeared and ordered him back. A moment later, Nicholas was surrounded by six soldiers

armed with rifles. Anna was horrified: "With their fists and with the butts of their guns they pushed the Emperor this way and that as though he were some wretched vagrant they were baiting on a country road. 'You can't go there, *Gospodin Polkovnik* (Mr. Colonel).' 'We don't permit you to walk in that

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direction, *Gospodin Polkovnik.'* 'Stand back when you are commanded, *Gospodin Polkovnik.'* The Emperor, apparently unmoved, looked from one of these coarse brutes to another and with great dignity turned and walked back to the palace." In the window above, Alexandra said nothing, but reached out and tightly clutched Lili's hand. "I do not think that until this moment we had realized the crushing grip of the Revolution," said Lili. "But it was brought home to us most forcibly when we saw the passage of the Lord of all the Russias, the Emperor whose domains extended over millions of miles, now restricted to a few yards in his own park."

Still, the long, tumultuous day was not over. At dusk, three armored cars packed with revolutionary soldiers from Petrograd burst through the palace gates. Leaping from the steel turrets, the soldiers demanded that Nicholas be given to them. The Soviet had unanimously resolved that the former Tsar be removed to a cell in the Fortress of Peter and Paul; this detachment had come to seize him. The palace guard, surly and disorganized, made no move to resist, but their officers hurriedly mustered to defend the entryway. Rebuffed, *the* invaders backed away and agreed not to take the Tsar if they were allowed to see him. Benckendorff reluctantly agreed to arrange an "inspection." "I found the Emperor with his sick children," recalled the Count, "informed him of what had happened, and begged him to come down and walk slowly along the long corridor. . . . He did this a quarter of an hour later. In the meantime, the Commandant, all the officers of the Guard . . . and myself, stationed ourselves at the end of the corridor so as to be between the Emperor and . . . [the invading band]. . . . The corridor was lit up brightly, the Emperor walked slowly from one door to the other, and . . . [the leader of the intruders] declared himself satisfied. He could, he said, reassure those who sent him."

Even when the armored cars had rumbled off into the night, Fate was to add a lurid epilogue to this extraordinary day. Sometime after midnight, another band of soldiers broke into the tiny chapel in the Imperial Park which had become Rasputin's tomb and exhumed the coffin. They took it to a clearing in the forest, pried off the lid and, using sticks to avoid touching the putrefying corpse, lifted what remained of Rasputin onto a pile of pine logs. The body and logs were drenched with gasoline and set on fire. For more than six hours, the body burned while an icy wind howled through the clearing and clouds of pungent smoke rose from the pyre. Along with the soldiers, a group of peasants gathered, silent and afraid, to watch through the night as the final scene of this baleful drama was played. It had happened as Rasputin once predicted: he would be killed and his body not left in peace, but burned, with his ashes scattered to the winds.

The small group which had ignored the offer to leave and remained with the family in the palace seemed, in Anna Vyrubova's words, "like the survivors of a shipwreck." It included, besides Anna herself and Lili Dehn, Count Benckendorff and his wife; Prince Dolgoruky; two ladies-in-waiting, Baroness Buxhoeveden and Countess Hendrikov; the tutors Pierre Gilliard and Mlle. Schneider; and Doctors Botkin and Derevenko. The two doctors were coping as best they could with Marie, who had developed pneumonia on top of measles. Dr. Ostrogorsky, the Petrograd children's specialist who for many years had made regular visits, had declined to return, informing the Empress that he "found the roads too dirty" to make further calls at the palace.

Inside the palace, the little band of captives was entirely isolated. All letters passing in and out were left unsealed so that the commander of the guard could read them. All telephone lines were cut except one connected to a single telephone in the guardroom. It could be used only if both an officer and a private soldier were present and the conversation was entirely in Russian. Every parcel entering the palace was minutely examined: tubes of toothpaste were ripped open, jars of yogurt stirred by dirty fingers, and pieces of chocolate bitten apart. When Dr. Botkin visited the ill Grand

Duchesses, he was accompanied by soldiers who wanted to come right into the sickroom and hear everything that was said. With difficulty, Botkin persuaded the soldiers to wait at the open doorway while he examined his patients.

The attitude and appearance of the guards grated on Nicholas's precise military sensibilities. Their hair was shaggy and uncombed, they went unshaven, their blouses were unbuttoned and their boots were filthy. To others, such as Baroness Buxhoeveden, this crumbling discipline offered moments of comic relief. "One day," she remembered, "the Grand Duchess Tatiana and I saw from the window that one of the guards on duty in front of the palace, struck evidently with the injustice of having to stand at his post, had brought a gilt armchair from the hall and had comfortably ensconced himself therein, leaning back, enjoying the view, with his rifle across his knee. I remarked that the man only wanted cushions to complete the picture. There was evidently telepathy in my eye, for when we looked out again, he had actually got some sofa cushions out of one of the rooms,

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and with a footstool under his feet, was reading the papers, his discarded rifle lying on the ground." In time, even Nicholas saw the humor in this behavior: "When I got up," he told Alexandra one morning, "I put on my dressing gown and looked through the window. . . . The sentinel who was usually stationed there was now sitting on the steps—his rifle had slipped out of his hand—he was dozing! I called my valet, and showed him the unusual sight, and I couldn't help laughing—it was really absurd. At the sound of my laughter the soldier awoke ... he scowled at us and we withdrew."

Off duty, the soldiers wandered freely through the palace. Baroness Buxhoeveden awoke one night to find a soldier in her bedroom, busily pocketing a number of small gold and silver trinkets from her table. Alexis attracted the most attention. Groups of soldiers kept tramping into the nursery, asking, "Where is Alexis?" Gilliard once came on ten of them standing uncertainly in a passage outside the boy's room.

"We want to see the Heir," they said.

"He is in bed and can't be seen," replied the tutor.

"And the others?"

"They are also unwell."

"And where is the Tsar?"

"I don't know; but come, don't hang about here," said the determined Swiss, at last losing patience. "There must be no noise because of the invalids." Nodding, the men tiptoed away, whispering to each other.

Gilliard became even closer to the Tsarevich at this time because Alexis had just been abruptly and cruelly deserted by another of the key figures in his small, intimate world. Derevenko, the sailor-attendant who for ten years had lived at the boy's side, catching him before he fell, devotedly massaging his injured legs when he could not walk, now saw his chance to escape this life which apparently he had hated. He did not leave without an act of petty but heartless vengeance. The scene was witnessed by Anna Vyrubova: "I passed the open door of Alexis's room and ... I saw lying sprawled in a chair . . . the sailor Derevenko. . . . Insolently, he bawled at the boy whom he had formerly loved and cherished, to bring him this or that, to perform any menial service. . . . Dazed and apparently only half conscious of what he was being forced to do, the child moved about trying to obey." Derevenko immediately left the palace. Nagorny, the Tsarevich's other sailor-attendant, was outraged by the betrayal and remained.

In the long imprisonment that followed, Alexis found happy distraction in a movie projector and a number of films given him before

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the revolution by the Pathé film company. Using the equipment, he gave a number of "performances," inviting everyone to come to his room, where with grave delight he played the role of host. Count Benckendorff, a guest at these soirees, found himself thinking, "He is very intelligent, has a great deal of character and an excellent heart. If his disease could be mastered, and should God grant him life, he should one day play a part in the

restoration of our poor country. He is the representative of the legitimate principle; his character has been formed by the misfortunes of his parents and of his childhood. May God protect him and save him and all his family from the claws of the fanatics in which they are at present."

Once all the children were well enough, the parents decided to resume their lessons, dividing their subjects among the people available. Nicholas himself became an instructor in history and geography, Baroness Buxhoeveden gave lessons in English and piano, Mlle. Schneider taught arithmetic, Countess Hendrikov taught art, and the Empress, religion. Gilliard, besides teaching French, became informal headmaster. After Nicholas had given his first lesson, the Tsar greeted Gilliard, "Good morning, dear colleague."

The tranquillity of Nicholas's behavior during his imprisonment, beginning with the five months he and his family were held at Tsarskoe Selo, has attracted both contemptuous scorn and glowing praise. In general, the scorn has come from those who, distant in place or time, have wondered how a man could fall from the pinnacle of earthly power without lapsing into bitter, impotent fury. Yet those who were closest to Nicholas during these months and saw him as a man; who had been with him during the years of supreme power and knew what a burden, however conscientiously carried, that power had been—these witnesses regarded his calm as evidence of courage and nobility of spirit. It was not a secret inside the palace that the Tsar's immense shield of reserve and self-control had broken when he returned to the palace; everyone knew that Nicholas had wept, and for a moment, for everyone, the anchor was gone. Then, he recovered and his bearing became once again the anchor which held everything and everyone else. "The Tsar accepted all these restraints with extraordinary serenity and moral grandeur," said Pierre Gilliard. "No word of reproach ever passed his lips. The fact was that his whole being was dominated by one passion, which was more powerful even than the bonds between himself and his family—his love of country. We felt that he was ready to forgive everything to those who were inflicting such humiliations upon him so long as they were capable of saving Russia."

Through the Russian newspapers and French and English magazines he was allowed to have, Nicholas followed military and political events with keen interest. At his request, the priest in church prayed for the success of the Russian and Allied armies, and when the priest offered a prayer for the Provisional Government, Nicholas fervently crossed himself. Above all, he was anxious that the army be kept disciplined and strong and that the country remain faithful to its allies. Having seen with his own eyes the collapse of discipline at the palace, he worried about the decay taking place at the front. Hearing that General Ruzsky had resigned, Nicholas said indignantly, "He [Ruzsky] asked that an offensive be undertaken. The Soldiers' Committee refused. What humilation! We are going to let our allies be crushed and then it will be our turn." The following day, he mellowed and consoled himself. "What gives me a little hope," he said, "is our love of exaggeration. I can't believe that our army at the front is as bad as they say."

Purely in a physical sense, the abdication and imprisonment at Tsarskoe Selo were a blessing for the fearfully weary man whom Nicholas had become. For the first time in twenty-three years, there were no reports to read, no ministers to see, no supreme decisions to make. Nicholas was free to spend his days reading and smoking cigarettes, playing with his children, shoveling snow and walking in the garden. He read the Bible from the beginning. At night, sitting with his wife and daughters, he read aloud to them from the Russian classics. Gently, by example, he tried to make easier for Alexandra the painful transition from empress to prisoner. After the long midnight service on Easter Eve, Nicholas quietly asked the two officers of the guard on duty to join his family for the traditional Easter meal in the library. There, he embraced them, not as prisoner and jailor, but as Russian and Russian, Christian and Christian.

Alexandra, unlike Nicholas, faced the overthrow of the monarchy and the beginning of captivity with deep bitterness. Proud and silent, thinner than ever before, her hair now predominantly gray, she remained most of the day on the sofa in the girls' room. In the evening, she traveled by wheelchair to visit Anna, with Nicholas himself usually pushing the chair. Everything spoke to her of humiliation. Used to filling her rooms with violets, lilies of

the valley and hyacinths from the park greenhouses or brought fresh from the Crimea, she was now forbidden these as "luxuries unnecessary for prisoners." Occasionally when a maid or footman brought her a single branch of lilac, the Empress wept in gratitude.

For weeks, Alexandra remained convinced that, despite what had happened in Petrograd, the real Russia—the millions of peasants and the army—remained faithful. Only gradually, with a kind of bitter humor, did she begin to accept reality. Nicholas showed her the way. "He would sometimes laugh at the idea of being what he called 'an Ex,' " said Lili Dehn. Alexandra picked up the expression. "Don't call me an Empress any more—I'm only an Ex," she would say. One day at lunch when an especially unpalatable ham appeared on the table, Nicholas made everyone laugh by shrugging and saying, "Well, this may have once been a ham, but now it's nothing but an ex-ham."

In Petrograd during the weeks after the abdication, feelings mounted against all Romanovs. On March 24, Grand Duke Nicholas, reappointed by the Provisional Government to his old post of Commander-in-Chief of the Armies, arrived to take up his duties at Mogilev only to find a letter from Prince Lvov awaiting him. In the letter, the new Premier asked the Grand Duke to resign, explaining apologetically that "the national feeling is decidedly and insistently against the employment of any members of the House of Romanov in any official position." Rigidly loyal, the Grand Duke immediately acquiesced, handing the command to Alexeiev with the grandiloquent declaration, "I am happy once more to be able to prove my love for my country which so far Russia has not doubted." Then the old soldier retired from the army and retreated to his estate in the Crimea.

Still, the focus of popular hatred was always the Tsar and his family at Tsarskoe Selo. From the moment of abdication, rumors spread through Petrograd that "Citizen Romanov" and his wife, "Alexandra the German," were working secretly to betray the country to the Germans and with their help restore the autocracy. The press, freed of censorship and restraint, rushed into print with lurid tales of Rasputin and the Empress which

hitherto had been passed only by word of mouth. The "private lives" of the Tsar's four daughters were written by their "lovers." A Rabelaisian palace dinner menu, described as "typical," was published so that the hungry people of Petrograd could read how "Nikolasha" and his family were gorging themselves: "Caviar, lobster soup, mushroom patties, macaroni, pudding, roast goose, chicken pie, veal cutlets, orange jelly, pork chops, rice pudding, herrings with cucumber, omelet, rissoles in cream, fresh pineapple, sturgeon." Cartoons depicted Nicholas clapping his hands with joy while he watched the hanging of a political prisoner,

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and Alexandra bathing in a tub filled with blood and saying, "If Nicky killed a few more of these revolutionaries, I could have such a bath more often."

It was at this point, with public opinion thoroughly aroused and the Soviet demanding that Nicholas be thrown into the Fortress, that the Provisional Government placed responsibility for the safety of the Imperial family entirely on Kerensky's shoulders. On April 3, the new warden decided to take a personal look at his prisoners.

He arrived early in the afternoon in one of the Tsar's automobiles driven by a chauffeur from the Imperial Garage. Alighting at the kitchen door, he assembled the soldiers of the guard and the palace servants in a passageway and delivered an impassioned revolutionary speech. The servants, he announced, were now the servants of the people, who paid their salaries, and who expected them to keep a close eye and report everything suspicious that happened in the palace. Next, in the Tsar's waiting room, Kerensky met Benckendorff. "He was dressed in a blue shirt buttoned to the neck, with no cuffs or collar, big boots, and he affected the air of a workman in his Sunday clothes," recalled the Count. ". . . He introduced himself and said, 'I have come here to see how you live, to inspect your Palace and to talk to Nicholas Alexandrovich.' " According to Keren-sky, "the old dignitary [Benckendorff] with a monocle in his eye replied that he would put the matter before His Majesty." In the meantime, Benckendorff, knowing that Nicholas and Alexandra were still at lunch with the children,

distracted Kerensky by proposing a tour of the palace. Kerensky agreed. "His manner was abrupt and nervous," Benckendorff recalled. "He did not walk but ran through the rooms, talking very loudly. . . . He had the Emperor's private rooms opened; and all the doors, drawers and cupboards searched, and told those who accompanied him to look in every corner and under the furniture." Without saying a word to them, Kerensky went through the rooms of the ladies-in-waiting, who stood and watched him. Eventually, he came to the door of Anna Vyrubova.

Nearly recovered from measles, Anna had been up having lunch with Lili Dehn when the noise and confusion in the palace signaled Kerensky's arrival. In terror, she grabbed a pile of her private papers and threw them into her fire, then jumped into bed and pulled the covers up to her head. As the commotion outside grew louder, Anna, "with an icy hand" upon her heart, whispered to Lili, "They are coming." A moment later, Kerensky entered, noting the fireplace filled with the glowing ash of burning paper. "The room seemed to

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fill up with men," Anna wrote, "and walking arrogantly before them I beheld a small, clean-shaven, theatrical person whose essentially weak face was disguised in a Napoleonic frown. Standing over me . . . right hand thrust into the bosom of his jacket, the man boomed out, 'I am the Minister of Justice. You are to dress and go at once to Petrograd.' I answered not a word but lay still on my pillows. . . . This seemed to disconcert him somewhat for he turned . . . and said nervously 'Ask the doctors if she is fit to go.' " Botkin and Derevenko were questioned and both declared that, from a medical viewpoint, it would not harm her to leave. Later, Anna bitterly attributed the doctors' decision to "craven fear."

Leaving Anna, Kerensky passed Gilliard's room. Assuming that the Swiss—being a citizen of a republic—was a friend, Kerensky nodded pleasantly and said, "Everything is going well."

By then, Nicholas and Alexandra were ready. Kerensky was conducted to the children's schoolroom, where Benckendorff left him standing before a closed door while he stepped in to announce the new Minister. Then,

swinging wide open the double door, the Count announced grandly, "His Majesty bids you welcome." "Kerensky," Benckendorff recalled, "was in a state of feverish agitation; he could not stand still, touched all the objects which were on the table and seemed like a madman. He spoke incoherently."

Kerensky admitted his extreme nervousness: "To be frank I was anything but calm before this first meeting with Nicholas II. Too many hard, terrible things had been connected in the past with his name. . . . All the way along the endless chain of official apartments I was struggling for control over my emotions. . . . [Entering the room] my feelings underwent a lightning change. . . . The Imperial family . . . were standing . . . near the window, around a small table, in a huddled, perplexed Uttle group. From this cluster of frightened humanity, there stepped out somewhat hesitantly, a man of medium height in military kit, who walked forward to meet me with a slight peculiar smile. It was the Emperor ... he stopped in confusion. He did not know what to do, he did not know how I would act, what attitude I would adopt. Should he walk forward to meet me as a host, or ought he to wait for me to speak first? Should he hold out his hand?

"In a flash, instinctively, I knew the exact position: the family's confusion, its fear at finding itself alone with a revolutionary whose objects in bursting in upon it were unknown. . . . With an answering smile, I hurriedly walked over to the Emperor, shook hands and

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sharply said, 'Kerensky'—as I always do, by way of introduction. . . . Nicholas II gave my hand a firm grasp, immediately recovering from his confusion, and smiling once again, led me to his family.

"His daughters and the Heir Apparent were obviously burning with curiosity and their eyes were simply glued to me. But Alexandra Fedorovna stood tense and erect—proud, domineering, irreconcilable; she held out her hand to me slowly and unwillingly. . . . When the hand-shaking was over, I inquired after their health [and] told them that their relatives abroad were taking a keen interest in their welfare. ... [I] told them not to be frightened . . . but to have complete confidence in the Provisional Government. After

that the Emperor and I went into the next room where I again assured him that they were safe. . . . He had fully recovered his impressive calm. He asked me about the military situation and wished us success in our difficult new task."

In recalling the events of this day, Kerensky makes no mention of the arrest of Anna Vyrubova and Lili Dehn. Before leaving, both women briefly said goodbye to the Empress. "The last thing I remember," wrote Anna, "was the white hand of the Empress pointing upward and her voice, 'There we are always together.' " Alexandra's last words to Lili were similar: "With a tremendous effort of will, she [Alexandra] forced herself to smile; then, in a voice whose every accent bespoke intense love and deep religious conviction, she said: 'Lili, by suffering, we are purified for Heaven. This goodbye matters little. We shall meet in another world.' " Leaving her pet spaniel Jimmy behind, Anna stumbled on her crutches to the waiting car and climbed in beside Lili. "The car shot forward, and I left the palace at Tsarskoe Selo forever," Anna later wrote. "Both Lili and I pressed our faces to the glass in a last effort to see those beloved we were leaving behind, and through the mist and rain we could just discern a group of white-clad figures crowded close to the nursery windows to see us go. In a moment of time the picture was blotted out and we saw only the wet landscape, the storm-bent trees, the rapidly creeping twilight." In Petrograd, Lili was released the following day, but Anna was sent to spend five chilling months in the Fortress of Peter and Paul.

Six days later, on April 9, Kerensky returned to the palace to begin an investigation of the Empress's "treasonable, pro-German" activities. While the interrogation was under way, he ordered the Empress separated from her husband and children. At once, he ran into a storm

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of protest from both doctors and ladies-in-waiting, who declared that it was inhuman to separate a mother from her sick children. Kerensky relented and named Nicholas as the parent who would have to live apart. The couple were permitted to meet at prayers and meals, providing an officer was always present and only Russian was spoken.

Although the separation lasted for eighteen days, the investigation was casual and Kerensky learned nothing. His questioning of Alexandra was confined to a single session lasting one hour. As Bencken-dorff later described it, Kerensky began politely and mildly by asking about "the part the Empress had played in politics, [and] her influence on the Emperor in the choice of ministers whom she often had received in the absence of the Emperor. Her Majesty answered that the Emperor and herself were the most united of couples, whose whole joy and pleasure was in their family life, and that they had no secrets from each other; that they discussed everything, and that it was not astonishing that in the last years which had been so troubled, they had often discussed politics. ... It was true that they had discussed the different appointments of ministers, but this could not be otherwise in a marriage such as theirs." Benckendorff learned afterward that Alexandra had been impressed by Kerensky's politeness and that Kerensky had been "struck by the clarity, the energy and the frankness of her words." When the Minister came out, he said to the Tsar, who was waiting outside, "Your wife does not lie." Quietly, Nicholas observed that this was scarcely news to him.

Questioning Nicholas, Kerensky learned even less. He asked why the Tsar had changed ministers so frequently, why he had appointed Sturmer and Protopopov and dismissed Sazonov, but Nicholas avoided answering directly and Kerensky quickly let the conversation drop. There was no further discussion of "treason" and Kerensky himself declared to his colleagues in the Provisional Government that the Empress Alexandra had been loyal to Russia.

As time passed and Kerensky continued to visit the palace, the relationship between the socialist minister and the deposed sovereign and his wife markedly improved. "Kerensky's attitude toward the Tsar is no longer what it was at the beginning. . . . [He] has requested the papers to put an end to their campaign against the Tsar and more especially the Empress," Gilliard wrote in his diary on April 25. Kerensky admitted that, during these weeks, he was affected by Nicholas's "unassuming manner and complete absence of pose. Perhaps it was this natural, quite artless simplicity that gave the

Emperor that peculiar fascination, that charm which was further increased by his wonderful eyes, deep and sorrowful. ... It cannot be

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said that my talks with the Tsar were due to a special desire on his part; he was obliged to see me . . . yet the former Emperor never once lost his equilibrium, never failed to act as a courteous man of the world." On Nicholas's part, Benckendorff noted that "the confidence which the Emperor felt in Kerensky increased still more . . . and the Empress shared this confidence." Nicholas himself declared of Kerensky, "He is not a bad sort. He's a good fellow. One can talk to him." Later, Nicholas was to add, "He [Kerensky] is a man who loves Russia, and I wish I could have known him earlier because he could have been useful to me."

Spring melted the snow, and in the afternoons the family began to go out together into the park. At first, they had to wait in the semicircular entry hall for an officer to come with the key, then file out, the Empress being pushed in her wheelchair, through a gauntlet of gaping, loitering soldiers, many of whom gibed and snickered as they passed. Sometimes, the men did more than mock: when Nicholas got his bicycle and started to pedal along a path, a soldier thrust his bayonet between the spokes. The Tsar fell and the soldiers guffawed. Yet Nicholas was unfailingly friendly even to those who insulted him. He always said "Good morning" and held out his hand. "Not for anything in the world," declared one soldier, turning his back on the outstretched hand. "But, my dear fellow, why? What have you got against me?" asked Nicholas, genuinely astonished.

The news that the former Tsar and his family were walking under guard in the park attracted crowds who lined the iron fence to watch, whistle and jeer. At one point, an officer of the guard went up to Nicholas and asked him to move to avoid provoking the crowd any further. Nicholas, surprised, replied that he was not afraid and said that "the good people were not annoying him in any way."

The line of guards with fixed bayonets, the restriction of movement to a corner of the park and, especially, the humilation of his father were hard for Alexis to understand and to bear. He had seen his father treated only with

respect and reverence, and he blushed with shame whenever an incident occurred. Alexandra, too, flushed deeply when her husband was insulted, but she learned to keep silent. When the weather was fine, she sat near the pond on a rug spread beneath a tree. Usually, she was surrounded by a ring of curious soldiers. Once when Baroness Buxhoeveden, who had been sitting next to the Empress, got up, one of the men dropped with a belligerent grunt onto the rug beside Alexandra. "The Empress edged a little bit away,"

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wrote the Baroness, "making a sign to me to be silent, for she was afraid that the whole family would be taken home and the children robbed of an hour's fresh air. The man seemed to her not to have a bad face, and she was soon engaged in conversation with him. At first he cross-questioned her, accusing her of 'despising' the people, of showing by not travelling about that she did not want to know Russia. Alexandra Fedorovna quietly explained to him that, as in her young days she had had five children and nursed them all herself, she had not had time to go about the country and that, afterwards, her health had prevented her. He seemed to be struck by this reasoning and, little by little, he grew more friendly. He asked the Empress about her life, about her children, her attitude towards Germany, etc. She answered in simple words that she had been a German in her youth, but that that was long past. Her husband and her children were Russians and she was a Russian, too, now, with all her heart. When I came back with the officer ... to whom I had risked appealing, fearing that the soldier might annoy the Empress, I found them peacefully discussing questions of religion. The soldier got up on our approach, and took the Empress's hand, saying, 'Do you know, Alexandra Fedorovna, I had quite a different idea of you. I was mistaken about you."

In May, a new officer assumed command of the Tsarskoe Selo garrison. Colonel Eugene Kobylinsky was a thirty-nine-year-old veteran of the Petrograd Life Guards who had twice been wounded at the front and then reassigned to one of the hospitals at Tsarskoe Selo. Kobylinsky was not a revolutionary, simply an officer doing the duty assigned him by General Kornilov. Although in name he was their jailer, in fact Kobylinsky was

deeply loyal to the Imperial family and, during the twelve months that he was with them, did much to buffer them from shocks. Nicholas well understood Kobylinsky's situation, and from Siberia he wrote to his mother that Kobylinsky was "my last friend."

There were limits, however, to what any officer could do with the obstreperous soldiery, and unpleasant incidents continued to happen. In June, Alexis was playing outside with the toy rifle which he had played with in the garden at *Stavka*. Suddenly, the soldiers spotted the gun and began to shout to each other, "They are armed." Alexis, hearing the hubbub, went to this mother, who was sitting on the grass. A minute later, the soldiers arrived and demanded "the weapon." Gilliard tried to intervene and explain that the gun was a toy, but the soldiers insisted and walked off with the gun. Alexis, in tears, looked from the Empress to the tutor; both were helpless. The gun

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was turned over to Colonel Kobylinsky, who was furious that his men had bothered the child. Carefully, he took the gun apart and, carrying it under his coat, returned it piece by piece to the Tsarevich. Thereafter, Alexis played with his rifle only behind the door of his room.

Despite harassment and humiliation, the family continued to go out every day, happy for the chance to spend time in the fresh air. In the middle of May, they began digging up part of the park lawn to plant a vegetable garden. Together, they carried the grassy sod away, turned the soil, planted the seeds and brought water in tubs from the kitchen. Many of the servants helped; so did some of the soldiers, who discovered more pleasure in working beside the Tsar than in mocking him. In June, once the seeds were in, Nicholas turned to sawing up the dead trees in the park for firewood. Soon, piles of wood, neatly stacked, began to appear all over the park.

At night, tired from this exercise, the family sat quietly together before going to bed. One stifling evening in July, he was reading to the Empress and his daughters when an officer and two soldiers burst into the room shouting excitedly that a sentry in the park had seen someone signaling from the open window by flashing red and green lights. The men searched

the room and found nothing. Despite the heat, the officer ordered the heavy curtains to be pulled shut—and at this moment the mystery was unraveled. Anastasia had been sitting in a window ledge doing needlework as she listened to her father. As she moved, bending to pick things up from a table, she had covered and uncovered two lamps, one with a red and the other with a green shade.

Harmless in themselves, these incidents revealed the underlying tension which prevailed at Tsarskoe Selo. Day and night, the sentries paced their rounds, believing that at any moment a rescue attempt might be made, for which, if successful, they would be held responsible. The prisoners waited inside the palace, living from day to day, uncertain as to who and where were friends, wondering whether the following morning would find them released or flung into a Soviet dungeon.

From the beginning, they most expected to be sent abroad. This was what every representative of the Provisional Government—Guchkov, Kornilov and Kerensky—had promised; that they would be powerless to keep this promise, no one could know. "Our captivity at Tsarskoe Selo did not seem likely to last long," said Gilliard, "and there was talk about our imminent transfer to England. Yet the days passed and our departure was always being postponed. . . . We were only a few hours by railway from the Finnish frontier, and the

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necessity of passing through Petrograd was the only serious obstacle. It would thus appear that if the authorities had acted resolutely and secretly it would not have been difficult to get the Imperial family to one of the Finnish ports and thus to some foreign country. But they were afraid of responsibilities, and no one dared compromise himself."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

"His Majesty's Government Does Not Insist"

Gilliard could not have known it, but, from the earliest days of the revolution, an overriding preoccupation of the Provisional Government had been to get the Tsar and his family to safety. "The former Emperor and the Imperial family were no longer political enemies but simply human beings who had come under our protection. We regarded any display of revengefulness as unworthy of Free Russia," said Kerensky. In keeping with this spirit, the new government had immediately abolished capital punishment in Russia. As Minister of Justice, Kerensky initiated this law, partly because he knew it would help forestall demands for the Tsar's execution. Stubbornly, Nicholas objected to the law. "It's a mistake. The abolition of the death penalty will ruin the discipline of the army," said the Tsar. "If he [Kerensky] is abolishing it to save me from danger, tell him that I am ready to give my life for the good of my country." Nevertheless, Kerensky held to his view. On March 20, he appeared in Moscow before the Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies and listened to an angry cacophony of cries for the Tsar's execution. Boldly, Kerensky replied, "I will not be the Marat of the Russian Revolution. I will take the Tsar to Murmansk myself. The Russian Revolution does not take vengeance."

Murmansk was the gateway to England and it was to England that all of Kerensky's fellow ministers hoped that the Tsar could be sent. As early as March 19, while Nicholas was still with his mother at *Stavka,* Paul Miliukov, the new Foreign Minister, was saying anxiously, "He should lose no time in getting away." On the 21st, when Buchanan and Paléologue confronted Miliukov with the news of the Tsar's arrest at Mogilev, Miliukov eagerly explained that Nicholas had simply been "deprived of his liberty" in order to ensure his safety. Buchanan officially reminded Miliukov that Nicholas was a relative of

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King George V of England, who was expressing a strong interest in his cousin's welfare. Seizing upon the relationship, Miliukov agreed that the Tsar must be saved and begged Buchanan to wire London immediately asking for asylum for the Imperial family. Imploring Buchanan to hurry, he explained, "It's the last chance of securing these poor unfortunates' freedom and perhaps of saving their lives."

Buchanan was equally concerned, and the following day his urgent telegram was placed before the British War Cabinet. At the head of the table at 10 Downing Street sat the Liberal Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. The fiery Welshman had little sympathy for the Russian autocracy. In a famous speech made in August 1915, he had thundered grim approval of Russia's terrible defeats: "The Eastern sky is dark and lowering. The stars have been clouded over. I regard that stormy horizon with anxiety but with no dread. Today I can see the colour of a new hope beginning to empurple the sky. The enemy in their victorious march know not what they are doing. Let them beware, for they are unshackling Russia. With their monster artillery they are shattering the rusty bars that fettered the strength of the people of Russia."

When Imperial Russia fell, Lloyd George exuberantly telegraphed the Provisional Government: "It is with sentiments of the profoundest satisfaction that the people of Great Britain . . . have learned that their great ally Russia now stands with the nations which base their institutions upon responsible government. . . . We believe that the Revolution is the greatest service which they [the Russian people] have yet made to the cause for which the Allied peoples have been fighting since August 1914. It reveals the fundamental truth that this war is at bottom a struggle for popular Government as well as for liberty."

In his own heart, Lloyd George was highly reluctant to permit the deposed Tsar and his family to come to England. Nevertheless, he and his ministers agreed that, as the request for asylum had come not from the Tsar but from Britain's new ally, the Provisional Government, it could not be refused. Buchanan was signaled that Britain would receive Nicholas but that the Russian government would be expected to pay his bills.

On March 23, Buchanan carried this message to Miliukov. Pleased but increasingly anxious—the unauthorized descent on Tsarskoe Selo by armored cars filled with soldiers had occurred the day before— Miliukov assured the Ambassador that Russia would make a generous financial allowance for the Imperial family. He begged, however, that Buchanan not reveal that the Provisional Government had taken the

initiative in making the arrangement. If the Soviet knew, he explained, the project was doomed.

But the Soviet, rigidly hostile to the idea of the Tsar leaving Russia, already knew. Kerensky had told them, in Moscow, that he would personally escort the Imperial family to a British ship. On March 22— the same day that Nicholas returned to his family, that Rasputin's corpse was disinterred, that the British Cabinet decided to offer asylum—the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet was shouting hoarsely, "The Republic must be safeguarded against the Romanovs returning to the historical arena. That means that the dangerous persons must be directly in the hands of the Petrograd Soviet." Telegrams were wired to all towns along the railways leading from Tsarskoe Selo with instructions to the workers to block the passage of the Tsar's train. At the same time, the Soviet resolved that the Tsar should be taken from Tsarskoe Selo, properly arrested and clapped into the bastion of the Fortress of Peter and Paul until the time of his trial and execution. The fact that this last resolution was never carried out was attributed by one scornful Bolshevik writer to the domination of the Soviet at that point by irresolute Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries.

For the moment, the question of the Tsar's fate became a stand-off between the Soviet and the Provisional Government. The Soviet lacked the strength to penetrate the Alexander Palace and simply drag the family off to the Fortress. The government, on the other hand, was not sufficiently master of the country, and especially of the railways, to embark on an enterprise such as moving Nicholas to Murmansk. This journey, from Tsarskoe Selo, south of the capital, through the heart of Petrograd, meant running the very real risk that the train would be stopped, the Imperial family pulled off and carted away to the Fortress or worse.

Unwilling to take this risk, Kerensky, Miliukov and their colleagues decided to postpone the trip until the psychological atmosphere improved. In the meantime, they appeased the Soviet. On the 24th, the day after the British offer of asylum arrived, the Provisional Government pledged to the Soviet that the deposed sovereigns would remain in Russia. On the 25th,

Miliukov informed Buchanan that he could not even deliver to the Tsar a personal telegram from King George which declared harmlessly, "Events of last week have deeply distressed me. My thoughts are constantly with you and I shall always remain your true and devoted friend, as you know I always have been in the past." When Buchanan argued that the telegram had no political significance, Miliukov replied that he understood this, but

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that others would misinterpret it as part of a plot to escape. The only indication Nicholas and Alexandra ever had of this telegram was Kerensky's comment during his first visit to Tsarskoe Selo that the King and Queen of England were asking for news of their Russian relatives.

Days passed and the impasse remained. On April 2, Buchanan wrote to the Foreign Office, "Nothing has yet been decided about the Emperor's journey to England." On April 9, Buchanan talked to Keren-sky, who declared that the Tsar's departure would be delayed for several more weeks while his papers were examined and he and his wife were questioned. In England, meanwhile, the news that asylum had been offered had been received coldly by the Labor Party and many Liberals. As opposition to the invitation began to mount, the British government began backing away. On April 10, a semi-official Foreign Office statement coolly announced that "His Majesty's Government does not insist on its former offer of hospitality to the Imperial family."

On April 15, even Buchanan began to withdraw his support for asylum, explaining to London that the Tsar's presence in England might easily be used by the extreme Left in Russia "as an excuse for rousing public opinion against us." He suggested that perhaps Nicholas might be received in France. Hearing this, Lord Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador in Paris, wrote a scathing personal letter to the Foreign Secretary, brimming with vicious misinformation about the Empress Alexandra. "I do not think that the ex-Emperor and his family would be welcome in France," wrote Bertie. "The Empress is not only a Boche by birth but in sentiment. She did all she could to bring about an understanding with Germany. She is regarded as a

criminal or a criminal lunatic and the ex-Emperor as a criminal from his weakness and submission to her promptings. Yours ever, Bertie."

From April until June, the plan remained suspended. Kerensky admitted later that, during this period, the suspension had nothing to do with the views of English Liberals and Laborites but was determined by the internal political situation in Russia. By early summer, however, conditions in Russia had changed and the moment seemed ripe for a discreet transfer of the Imperial family to Murmansk. Once again, the Russian government approached England on the matter of asylum.

"[We] inquired of Sir George Buchanan as to when a cruiser could be sent to take on board the deposed ruler and his family," said Kerensky. "Simultaneously, a promise was obtained from the German Government through the medium of the Danish minister, Skavenius,

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that German submarines would not attack the particular warship which carried the Royal exiles. Sir George Buchanan and ourselves were impatiently awaiting a reply from London. I do not remember exactly whether it was late in June or early in July when the British ambassador called, greatly distressed. . . . With tears in his eyes, scarcely able to control his emotions, Sir George informed . . . [us] of the British Government's final refusal to give refuge to the former Emperor of Russia. I cannot quote the exact text of the letter. . . . But I can say definitely that this refusal was due exclusively to considerations of internal British politics." Apparently, Bertie's letter from Paris had done its poisonous work, for Kerensky remembers the letter explaining that "the Prime Minister was unable to offer hospitality to people whose pro-German sympathies were well-known."

Subsequently, confusion, accusations and a sense of guilt appeared to permeate the recollections of all those involved in this inglorious episode. Both Sir George Buchanan and Lloyd George flatly contradicted Kerensky, insisting that Britain's offer of asylum was never withdrawn and that the failure of the project was solely due to the fact that the Provisional Government—in Buchanan's words—"were not masters in their house." Meriel Buchanan, the Ambassador's daughter, later overrode her father's

account, explaining that he had offered it in order to protect Lloyd George, who was responsible for the refusal. She recalled that a telegram refusing to let the Tsar come to England did arrive in Petrograd on April 10; she remembered the words her father used and the anguished expression on his face as he described the telegram. Lloyd George did not respond formally to her charge, but she noted that the former Prime Minister "is reported to have said in an interview that he does not remember refusing the late Emperor admission to England, but that, if the matter had been considered, he probably would have given such advice." In his memoirs, Lloyd George left no doubt of his lack of sympathy for Imperial Russia or its Tsar. The Russian Empire, he said, was "an unseaworthy Ark. The timbers were rotten and most of the crew not much better. The captain was suited for a pleasure yacht in still waters, and his sailing master had been chosen by his wife, reclining in the cabin below." Nicholas he dismissed as "only a crown without a head . . . the end was tragedy . . . but for that tragedy this country cannot be in any way held responsible."

King George's attitude on the matter vacillated. At first, he wanted to help his relatives, but by March 30, his private secretary was writing to the Foreign Secretary, "His Majesty cannot help doubting not only on account of the dangers of the voyage, but on general

grounds of expediency, whether it is advisable that the Imperial family should take up their residence in this country." By April 10, the King was concerned about the widespread indignation felt in England against the Tsar. He realized that if Nicholas came to England he would be obliged to receive his cousin, an act which would bring considerable unpopularity down on him. Accordingly, he suggested to Lloyd George that, because of the outburst of public opinion, the Russian government should perhaps be informed that Britain was obliged to withdraw its offer.

Later, of course, when the murder of the Imperial family had outraged the King, memories tended to blur. "The Russian Revolution of 1917 with the murder of the Tsar Nicholas II and his family had shaken my father's confidence in the innate decency of mankind," recalled the Duke of Windsor. "There was a very real bond between him and his first cousin, Nicky. . . . Both wore beards of a distinctive character and as young men, they had looked much alike. ... It has long been my impression that, just before the Bolsheviks seized the Tsar, my father had personally planned to rescue him with a British cruiser, but in some way the plan was blocked. In any case, it hurt my father that Britain had not raised a hand to save his cousin Nicky. 'Those politicians,' he used to say. 'If it had been one of their kind, they would have acted fast enough. But merely because the poor man was an emperor—' "

In Switzerland, Lenin's first reaction to the revolution in Russia was skepticism. Only seven weeks had passed since his statement on January 22, 1917, that "we older men may not live to see the decisive battles of the approaching revolution." Even the news of the Tsar's abdication and the establishment of a Provisional Government left him with reservations. In his view, the replacement of an autocracy by a bourgeois republic was not a genuine proletarian revolution; it was simply the substitution of one capitalist system for another. The fact that Miliukov and the Provisional Government intended to continue the war confirmed in his mind that they were no more than tools of Britain and France, which were capitalist, imperialist powers. On March 25, Lenin telegraphed instructions to the

Bolsheviks in Petro-grad, "Our tactics: absolute distrust, no support of the new government, Kerensky especially suspect, no rapprochement with the other parties."

Lenin became desperate to reach Russia himself. "From the moment the news of the revolution came, Ilyich did not sleep and at night all

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sorts of incredible plans were made," Krupskaya recalled. "We could travel by airplane. But such things could be thought of only in the semi-delirium of the night." He considered donning a wig and traveling via France, England and the North Sea, but there was the chance of arrest or of being torpedoed by a U-boat. Suddenly, through the German minister in Berne, it was arranged that he should travel through Germany itself to Sweden, Finland and then to Russia. The German motive in this bizarre arrangement was sheer military necessity. Germany had gained little from the fall of tsarism, as the Provisional Government meant to continue the war. Germany needed a regime which would make peace. This Lenin promised to do. Even if he failed, the Germans knew that his presence inside Russia would create turmoil. Accordingly, on April 9, Lenin, Krupskaya and seventeen other Bolshevik exiles left Zurich to cross Germany in a "sealed" train. "The German leaders," said Winston Churchill, "turned upon Russia the most grisly of all weapons. They transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus from Switzerland into Russia."

On the night of April 16, after ten years away from Russia, Lenin arrived in Petrograd at the Finland Station. He stepped from his train into a vast crowd and a sea of red banners. In an armored car, he drove to Mathilde Kschessinska's mansion, which had been commandeered as Bolshevik headquarters. From the dancer's balcony, he addressed a cheering crowd, shouting to them that the war was "shameful imperialist slaughter."

Although Lenin had been welcomed with the blaring triumph due a returning prophet, neither the Petrograd Soviet as a whole nor the Bolshevik minority within the Soviet were by any means ready to accept all of his dogma. In the early days of the revolution, the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who dominated the Soviet believed that some degree of

cooperation should be shown the Provisional Government, if only to prevent the restoration of the monarchy. Besides, Marxist theory called for a transitional period between the overthrow of absolutism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Soviet might argue whether Nicholas belonged in his palace or in a cell, but its over-all policy was to support the policies of the Provisional Government "insofar as they correspond to the interests of the proletariat and of the broad masses of the people." Even some Bolsheviks supported this program.

Lenin would have none of this. Speaking to the All-Russian Conference of Soviets on the morning after his return, he issued his famous April Theses, demanding overthrow of the Provisional Government, the abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy.

Most important, he demanded an end to the war and urged the troops at the front to begin fraternizing with the enemy. Amazement and consternation greeted Lenin's words; he was interrupted in the middle of his speech by shouts, laughter and cries of "That is raving! That is the raving of a lunatic!" Even Molotov, who had remained one of the Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd, and Stalin, who returned on March 26 from three years' exile in Siberia, were caught off guard. *Pravda*, the Bolshevik newspaper which they had been editing, had been agreeing that a protracted period of bourgeois government was necessary before proceeding to the final stage of the socialist revolution. Lenin's enemies hastened to gibe. He had been away too long, they said, living comfortably in exile; he had taken no part in the overthrow of tsarism; he had been transported back to Russia under the protection of the most autocratic and imperialistic regime remaining in Europe. As word got around that the Soviet had disowned him, the Provisional Government was vastly relieved. "Lenin was a hopeless failure with the Soviet yesterday," said Miliukov gleefully on April 18. "He was compelled to leave the room amidst a storm of booing. He will never survive it."

Yet Lenin scarcely noticed his defeat. A brilliant dialectician, prepared to argue all night, he gained ascendancy over his Bolshevik colleagues by

sheer force of intellect and physical stamina. On May 17, Trotsky, who had been living on East 162nd Street in New York City and writing for *Novy Mir,* an émigré Russian newspaper, while studying the American economy in the New York Public Library, returned to Petrograd. Nominally a Menshevik, within weeks of his return he and Lenin were working together. Of the two, Lenin was leader.

Through the spring and summer, Lenin hammered away at the Provisional Government. The Marxian subtleties of the April Theses were laid aside; for the masses, the Bolsheviks coined an irresistible slogan combining the two deepest desires of the Russian people: "Peace, Land, All Power to the Soviet." In May, when Miliukov once again proclaimed that Russia would honor its obligations and continue to fight, a massive public outcry forced him from office. Guchkov also resigned and, early in July, Prince Lvov decided that he could no longer continue as Prime Minister. Kerensky became simultaneously Prime Minister and Minister of War.

In constantly urging that Russia continue to fight, Russia's allies played directly into Lenin's hands. Terrified that Russia's withdrawal from the war would release dozens of enemy divisions for use in the west, Britain, France and the newly belligerent United States exerted

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heavy pressure on the shaky Provisional Government. Beginning m June, the U.S. government extended loans of $325 million to the Provisional Government. But Elihu Root, who led President Wilson's mission to Russia, made clear that the terms were: "No war, no loan."

Pressed by the Allies, the Provisional Government began to prepare another offensive. Kerensky made a personal tour of the front to exhort the soldiers. In early July, Russian artillery opened a heavy bombardment along forty miles of the Galician front. For the first time, supplies and munitions were plentiful, and the thirty-one Russian divisions attacking the Austrians quickly broke through. For two weeks, they advanced while Kerensky exulted and Nicholas, at Tsar-skoe Selo, radiated happiness and ordered *Te Deums* to celebrate the victories. Then, on July 14, the news darkened. German reserves arrived and checked the advance. On the Russian side,

Soldiers' Committees debated the wisdom of further attacks and whole divisions refused to move. When the enemy counterattacked, there was no resistance. The Russian retreat became a rout.

In Petrograd, news of the debacle provided the spark for an atmosphere already electrically charged. On July 16, half a million people marched through the streets carrying huge scarlet banners proclaiming "Down with the War!" "Down with the Provisional Government!" Lenin and the Bolsheviks were not prepared for the rising, and the Provisional Government crushed it, mainly by circulating among the loyal regiments a document purporting to prove that Lenin was a German agent and that the uprising was intended to betray Russia from the rear while the Germans advanced at the front. The disclosure was temporarily effective. The Bolshevik strongholds—Kschessinka's house, the offices of *Pravda,* the Fortress of Peter and Paul—were stormed and occupied. Trotsky gave himself up to the police, and Lenin, after spending the night hidden in a haystack, escaped over the border into Finland disguised as a fireman on a locomotive. The first Bolshevik uprising, later known as "the July uprising," was over. Admitting that it had been halfhearted, Lenin was to describe it later as "something considerably more than a demonstration but less than a revolution."

Despite his narrow victory, the rising made plain to Kerensky the danger of any further delay in moving the Imperial family away from Petrograd. Even before the rising, the new Prime Minister had come to warn Nicholas, "The Bolsheviks are after me and then will be after you." He suggested that the family would be safer in some distant

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part of Russia, far from the seething revolutionary passions of the capital. Nicholas asked if they might go to Livadia. Kerensky replied that Livadia might be possible, but he explained that he was also investigating a number of other spots. He suggested that the family begin packing in secret to avoid arousing the suspicions of the palace guard.

The thought that they might soon be leaving for Livadia was a tonic to the family's spirits. In their excitement, they talked openly about it until

Benckendorff begged them to keep silent. Yet, as Kerensky weighed the advantages and disadvantages of the Crimea, it became increasingly obvious that it could not be managed. It was remote, the Tartar population was favorable and many of the Tsar's relatives, including the Dowager Empress, were already there, but it was a thousand miles away across the breadth of Russia. To reach Livadia, a train would have to pass through densely populated industrial towns and rural provinces where a revolutionary peasantry was already terrorizing landlords and expropriating land. Under these conditions, Kerensky felt no greater certainty that he could safely deliver his prisoners to Livadia than that he could place them aboard a British cruiser in Murmansk. The same considerations ruled out the country estate of Grand Duke Michael near Orel in central Russia, which Kerensky himself was inclined to favor.

Eventually, by elimination, he settled on Tobolsk, a commercial river town in western Siberia. The choice had nothing to do with a vengeful poetic justice. Rather, it was a matter of security on the railways. The Northern Route across the Urals to Siberia passed through wide expanses of virgin forest, with towns and villages thinly scattered along the track. Once in Tobolsk, the Imperial family would be relatively safe. "I chose Tobolsk," Kerensky later explained, "because it was an out-and-out backwater . . . had a very small garrison, no industrial proletariat, and a population which was prosperous and contented, not to say old-fashioned. In addition . . . the climate was excellent and the town could boast a very passable Governor's residence where the Imperial family could live with some measure of comfort."

On August 11, Kerensky returned to the palace and, without telling Nicholas where he was being taken, warned that they would leave within a few days and should take plenty of warm clothes. Nicholas immediately understood that their destination was not to be Livadia. When Kerensky, embarrassed, began to explain vociferously why the family's safety required this decision, Nicholas interrupted him with a penetrating look. "I have no fear. We trust you," he said

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quietly. "If you say we must move, it must be. We trust you," he repeated.

Preparations went ahead rapidly. The Tsar and the Empress chose the people they wanted to accompany them: Countess Hendrikov and Prince Dolgoruky as lady- and gentleman-in-waiting; Dr. Botkin; and Pierre Gilliard and Mile. Schneider, the tutors. Baroness Bux-hoeveden was to remain behind for an operation and would join the family in Tobolsk. To his immense regret, Count Benckendorff had to remain behind because of his wife's severe bronchitis. Asked whom he wished to replace the Count, Nicholas named General Tatishchev, an aide-de-camp. Without hesitation, Tatishchev packed a small suitcase and reported to the palace.

August 12 was the Tsarevich's thirteenth birthday, and at the Empress's request a holy icon was brought for the celebration from the Church of Our Lady of Znamenie. The icon arrived in a procession of clergy from the village which was admitted to the palace, proceeded to the chapel and there asked prayers for the safe journey of the Imperial family. "The ceremony was poignant ... all were in tears," wrote Benckendorff. "The soldiers themselves seemed touched and approached the holy icon to kiss it. [Afterward, the family] followed the procession as far as the balcony, and saw it disappear through the park. It was as if the past were taking leave, never to come back."

The following day, August 13, 1917, was the last which Nicholas and Alexandra were to spend at Tsarskoe Selo. Through the day, the children rushed excitedly about, saying goodbye to the servants, their belongings and their favorite island in the pond. Nicholas carefully instructed Benckendorff to see that the vegetables they had raised and the piles of sawed wood were fairly distributed among the servants who helped with the work.

Within the government, Kerensky's plan had been kept a successful secret. Only four men including the Premier knew about the transfer to Tobolsk. The subject was never discussed at Cabinet meetings; Kerensky managed all the details by himself. On the night of departure, Kerensky left a Cabinet meeting at eleven p.m. to supervise the final arrangements. His first task

was to speak to the troops selected to act as guards when the family reached Tobolsk. For this assignment, three companies—six officers and 330 men—had been culled from the 1st, 2nd and 4th Regiments of Sharpshooter Guards on duty at Tsarskoe Selo. Most of the men selected were noncommissioned officers who had been at the front. Many had been decorated for bravery. On Kerensky's orders, they had been issued

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new uniforms and new rifles and told that they would receive special pay. Despite these blandishments, some of the men were reluctant to go. Through the barracks ran a current of restlessness, grumbling and uncertainty.

With Colonel Kobylinsky, who was to command the detachment, Kerensky made for the barracks, gathered the new guard around him and addressed them persuasively: "You have guarded the Imperial family here; now you must guard it at Tobolsk where it is being transferred by order of the Provisional Government. Remember: no hitting a man when he is down. Behave like gentlemen, not like cads. Remember that he is a former Emperor and that neither he nor his family must suffer any hardships." Kerensky's oratory worked. The men, partially shamed, prepared to leave. The Prime Minister then wrote a document for Kobylinsky which said simply: "Colonel Kobylinsky's orders are to be obeyed as if they were my own. Alexander Kerensky."

By evening, the family had finished packing and was ready to leave except for trunks and chests scattered through the palace. Fifty soldiers, ordered to pick up the baggage and assemble it in the semicircular hall, flatly refused to work for nothing. Benckendorff, disgusted, eventually agreed to pay them three roubles each.

In the middle of these preparations, as the semicircular hall was filling with trunks and suitcases, Grand Duke Michael arrived to say goodbye to his older brother. Kerensky, who had arranged the meeting, entered the Tsar's study with the Grand Duke and watched the brothers embrace. Not wishing to leave them completely alone, he retreated to a table and began thumbing through the Tsar's scrap-book. He overheard the awkward conversation:

"The brothers . . . were most deeply moved. For a long time they were silent . . . then they plunged into that fragmentary, irrelevant small-talk which is so characteristic of short meetings. How is Alix? How is Mother? Where are you living now? and so on. They stood opposite each other, shuffling their feet in curious embarrassment, sometimes getting hold of one another's arm or coat button."

The Tsarevich, nervous and excited, had spotted Michael upon his arrival. "Is that Uncle Misha who has just come?" he asked Kobylinsky. Told that it was, but that he could not go in, Alexis hid behind the door and peeked through a crack. "I want to see him when he goes out," he said. Ten minutes later, Michael walked out of the room in tears. He quickly kissed Alexis goodbye and left the palace.

The night was confused and sleepless. Alexis, holding his excited spaniel Joy on a leash, kept running from the semicircular hall into

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the family rooms to see what was happening. The Empress, sitting up all night in her traveling clothes, was unable to hide her anxieties. "It was then," wrote Kerensky, "that I first saw Alexandra Fedorovna worried and weeping like any ordinary woman." The soldiers, milling about carrying trunks into the hall and out to the railroad station, kept their caps on and cursed and grumbled at the work they were doing. Their officers sat at a table drinking tea with Countess Benckendorff and the other ladies. When the Tsar approached and asked for a glass, the officers stood up and loudly declared that they would not sit at the same table with Nicholas Romanov. Later, when the soldiers were not looking, most of the officers apologized, explaining that they feared being brought before the soldiers' tribunal and accused of being counterrevolutionaries.

The hours passed, but the train, ordered for one a.m., did not appear. The railwaymen, suspicious and hostile, had refused to shunt the cars together, then refused to couple them. Kerensky himself went repeatedly to telephone the yards. Kobylinsky, exhausted and still unwell, collapsed into a chair and fell asleep. At one point, Benckendorff got Kerensky's attention and asked him before witnesses how long the Imperial family would stay in Tobolsk.

Kerensky confidently assured the Count that, once the Constituent Assembly had met in November, Nicholas could freely return to Tsarskoe Selo or go anywhere he wished. Undoubtedly, Kerensky was sincere. But in November he himself was a fugitive from the Bolsheviks.

Between five and six a.m., the waiting group at last heard the blare of automobile horns in the courtyard. Kerensky informed Nicholas that the train was ready and the baggage loaded. The family entered the automobiles, and the little procession was surrounded by a mounted escort of Cossacks. As they left the palace grounds, the early-morning sun cast its first rays on the sleeping village. The train, wearing Japanese flags and bearing placards proclaiming "Japanese Red Cross Mission," was standing on a siding outside the station. The family walked beside the track to the first car, where, for lack of steps, the men lifted Alexandra, her daughters and the other women onto the car platform. As soon as all were aboard, the train began moving eastward, toward Siberia.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Siberia

If the train which Kerensky provided for the Tsar's journey to Siberia was not of Imperial quality, it was nevertheless a luxurious vehicle for the transfer of prisoners. It consisted of comfortable *wagon-lits* of the International Sleeping Car Company, a restaurant car stocked with wines from the Imperial cellar, and baggage compartments filled with favorite rugs, pictures and knickknacks from the palace. In their portable jewel chests, the Empress and her daughters brought personal gems worth at least a million roubles ($500,000). In addition to the ladies and gentlemen of their suite, the Imperial family was accompanied to Siberia by two valets, six chambermaids, ten footmen, three cooks, four assistant cooks, a butler, a wine steward, a nurse, a clerk, a barber and two pet spaniels. Colonel Kobylinsky also rode aboard the Tsar's train, while most of his 330 soldiers followed on a second train.

The train routine deferred entirely to the established habits of the Imperial family: breakfast at eight, morning coffee at ten, lunch at one, tea at five and dinner at eight. Between six and seven every evening, the train came to a stop in open country so that Nicholas and the children could walk the dogs for half an hour along the track. Alexandra did not attempt these excursions. She sat fanning herself in the heat by an open window and was delighted one afternoon when a soldier reached up and handed her a cornflower.

For four days, the train rolled eastward, clicking monotonously over the rails through the heat and dust of European Russia. The passengers saw no one. At every village, the station was surrounded by troops, the blinds in the coaches were drawn and no one was permitted-to show himself at the window. Only once was the train forced to halt by curious local officials. At Perm, on the edge of the Urals, a talk white-bearded man entered Kobylinsky's compartment,

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introduced himself as head of the railroad workmen in that district and said that the comrades wanted to know who was on the train. Kobylinsky produced his paper bearing Kerensky's signature, and the workers immediately stood aside.

On the evening of the third day, as the train was crossing the Urals, the air grew noticeably cooler. East of this low range of forested hills lay the beginnings of the Siberian steppe. From the windows of the puffing, rattling train, the Empress and her children saw for the first time the meadowland stretching to the horizon. In late afternoon, the immense dome of sky overhead turned bright crimson and gold as the last rays of sunset glowed on the white trunks of the birches and the green stems of marsh grasses.

Near midnight on August 17, the train crawled slowly into Tyumen on the Tura River. At a dock across from the station, the river steamer *Rus* was waiting. Tobolsk lay two hundred miles to the northeast, a two-day journey on the Tura and Tobol rivers. Nicholas spent the voyage pacing the steamer's upper deck and staring at the villages scattered along the bare river shores. One of these villages was Pokrovskoe, Rasputin's home. As

Pokrovskoe glided past, the family gathered on deck to look. They saw a prosperous village with flowers in the windowboxes and cows and pigs in the barnyards. Rasputin's house was unmistakable: two stories tall, it loomed above the simple peasant huts. The passengers were fascinated to see this remote but famous hamlet. Long before, Rasputin had predicted to the Empress that one day she would visit his village. He had not foretold the circumstances, and the family accepted this glimpse as a fulfillment of the prophecy.

Before sunset on the afternoon of the second day, the boat rounded a bend in the river and the passengers saw the silhouette of the old Tobolsk fortress and the onion bulbs of the city's churches. At dusk, the steamer docked at the wharf of the West Siberian Steamship and Trading Company, and Kobylinsky went ashore to inspect the governor's house, where the prisoners would live. He found the house dilapidated and bare of furnishings. The following morning, postponing the family's occupancy, he hired painters and paperers and bought furniture and a piano from stores and private families in Tobolsk. Electricians were summoned to improve the wiring, and plumbers came to install bathtubs. During the eight days it took to refurbish the house, the family lived aboard the *Rus*. To break the monotony, the steamer made afternoon excursions along the river, stopping so that Nicholas and the children could walk along the bank. Finally, on August 26, the house was ready, and at eight in the morn-

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ing the Tsar, the Tsarevich and three of the Grand Duchesses walked from the dock to the house along a road lined with soldiers. Alexandra and Tatiana followed in a carriage.

Tobolsk, where the Tsar and his family were to live for the next eight months, lay at the juncture of the Tobol and the mighty Irtysh River. Once it had been an important trading center for fish and furs, a link with the Arctic, which lay farther north. But the builders of the Trans-Siberian Railroad had by-passed Tobolsk, going two hundred miles to the south, through Tyumen. In 1917, Tobolsk was, as Kerensky described it, "a backwater." Its twenty thousand people still lived mostly from trade with

the north. In the summer, all transport moved by river steamer; in the winter, when the rivers were frozen, people traveled in sledges along the river ice or paths cut through the snow along the banks. The town itself was a sprawl of whitewashed churches, wooden commercial buildings and log houses scattered along streets thick with dust in the summer. In spring and fall, the dust turned to thick, syrupy mud, and the wooden planks laid down as sidewalks often sank out of sight.

The governor's house, a big, white, two-story structure fringed on each side with second-floor balconies, was the largest residence in town. Still, it was not large enough for the Imperial entourage. The family itself filled up the mansion's second floor, with the four Grand Duchesses sharing a corner room and Nagorny sleeping in a room next to Alexis. Gilliard lived downstairs off the big central drawing room in what had been the governor's study. The remainder of the household lived across the street in a house commandeered from a merchant named Kornilov.

At first, Kobylinsky posted no guards inside the governor's house and allowed the family considerable freedom of movement. On their first morning in Tobolsk, they all walked across the street to see how the suite was settling into the Kornilov house. The soldiers immediately objected to this degree of freedom for prisoners, and Kobylinsky reluctantly authorized the building of a high wooden fence around the house, enclosing a section of a small side street which ran beside the house. Inside this muddy, treeless compound, the family took all its exercise. The suite, on the other hand, was permitted to come and go freely, and when Sidney Gibbs, the Tsarevich's English tutor, arrived from Petrograd, he had no difficulty entering the house and joining the family. Several of the Empress's maids took apartments in town, and Dr. Botkin was even allowed to establish a small medical practice in Tobolsk.

Evening prayer services were held in a corner of the downstairs

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drawing room which was decorated with icons and lamps. A local priest came in to conduct these prayers, but because there was no consecrated altar he was unable to offer Mass. On September 21, Kobylinsky arranged

for the family to begin attending a private early Mass at a nearby church. On these occasions, two lines of soldiers formed in the public garden which lay between the house and the church. As the Imperial family walked between the two lines, people standing behind the soldiers crossed themselves and some dropped to their knees.

As Kerensky had suspected, the people of Tobolsk remained strongly attached to both the symbol and the person of the Tsar. Walking past the governor's house, they removed their caps and crossed themselves. When the Empress appeared to sit in her window, they bowed to her. The soldiers repeatedly had to intervene and break up clusters of people who gathered in the muddy street whenever the Grand Duchesses came out on a balcony. Merchants openly sent gifts of food, nuns from the local convent brought sugar and cakes, and peasant farmers arrived regularly with butter and eggs.

Removed from the inflammatory atmosphere of Petrograd, Colonel Kobylinsky managed to restore some discipline in his men. The soldiers, watching the once august and unapproachable personages walking a few feet away, were surprised to find them a simple, united family. Although the men of the 2nd Regiment remained hostile, the soldiers of the 1st and 4th Regiments warmed, especially to the children. The Grand Duchesses talked often to these men, asking them about their villages and families. Marie quickly learned the names of all the wives and children. To many of the men, Alexis remained "the Heir," an object of special respect and affection. When one favorite section of the 4th Regiment was on duty, Alexis and his father sometimes slipped quietly into the guardhouse to play games with these men.

Kobylinsky remained in sole authority until late in September, when two civilian commissars arrived to take charge of the captives, although Kobylinsky was ordered to keep his command of the military guard. The two commissars, Vasily Pankratov and his deputy, Alexander Nikolsky, both were Social Revolutionaries who had spent years in exile in Siberia. Although they were friends, Pankratov and Nikolsky were opposite in character. Pankratov, a small, earnest man with busy hair and thick glasses, presented himself formally upon arrival to the Tsar.

"Not wishing to infringe the rules of politeness," he wrote, "I re-

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quested the valet of the former Tsar to report my arrival and to state that I wished to see his master. . . .

" 'Good morning,' said Nicholas Alexandrovich, stretching out his hand. 'Did you have a good journey?'

" 'Thank you, yes,' I replied, grasping his hand.

" 'How is Alexander Fedorovich Kerensky?' asked the former Tsar. . . ."

Pankratov asked whether Nicholas was in need of anything.

" 'Could you allow me to saw wood? ... I like that kind of work.'

" 'Perhaps you would like to have a carpenter's shop? It is more interesting work.'

" 'No, just see that they bring some logs into the yard and give me a saw,' replied Nicholas Alexandrovich.

" 'Tomorrow it shall be done.'

" 'May I correspond with my relatives?'

" 'Certainly. Have you enough books?'

" 'Plenty, but why do we not receive our foreign journals; is this forbidden?'

" 'Probably it is the fault of the post. I shall make enquiries.' "

Pankratov pitied the Tsar and was genuinely fond of the children. Alexis's illness disturbed him, and he sometimes sat, just as Rasputin had done, and spun long stories of his years in Siberia. Once, entering the guardhouse, he was astonished to discover Nicholas and his children sitting and talking to

the guards. The Tsar graciously asked Pankratov to sit and join them at the table, but Pankratov, disconcerted by this scene, excused himself and fled.

Nikolsky, tall, with a broad face and thick, uncombed hair, felt differently about the captive family. Rough and unmannered, he bitterly blamed the Tsar personally for his imprisonment and tried in petty ways to even the score. He burst into rooms without knocking and spoke to the prisoners without removing his cap. He liked to offer his hand in apparent innocence and then, seizing the hand proffered in return, squeeze with his bony fingers until his victim winced with pain. As soon as he arrived, Nikolsky announced that the entire Imperial party would have to be photographed for identification. Kobylinsky objected, saying the sentries already knew everyone by sight. Nikolsky flew into a rage, shouting, "We were once ordered by the police to have our pictures taken, full face and profile, and so now their pictures shall be taken." As the pictures were being taken, Alexis peeped to watch, which brought another bellow from the angry Nikolsky. The Tsarevich, who had never been yelled at before,

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retreated in astonishment. Later, a case of wine for the family arrived from Petrograd. Its appearance in Tobolsk fired a passionate debate among the soldiers on the issue of pampering prisoners. The soldier who accompanied the case from Petrograd declared that it had been packed not only with Kerensky's permission but in Kerensky's presence. Dr. Derevenko pleaded that if the alcohol was not to be given to the Imperial family, he be allowed to take it for use in the city hospital. The arguments were useless; Nikolsky sternly saw his duty. Without being opened, the bottles were dropped into the river.

As old, doctinaire Social Revolutionaries, both Pankratov and Nikolsky believed it their duty to assist the political education of the soldiers. Unfortunately, said Kobylinsky, who watched these proceedings with apprehension, "the result of these lectures was that the soldiers were converted [not to Social Revolutionary principles] but to Bolshevism." There were more complaints about pay and food.

Nevertheless, the family was not markedly affected. They had endured worse treatment at Tsarskoe Selo, and they remained unafraid and hopeful for the future. All of the survivors remarked that, despite the narrow confinement, the peaceful autumn months in Tobolsk were not wholly unpleasant.

In October, the long Siberian winter descended from the Arctic upon Tobolsk. At noon, the sun still shone brightly, but by mid-afternoon the light had faded, and in the gathering darkness, crisp, heavy frosts formed on the ground. As the days grew shorter, Nicholas's greatest privation was lack of news. Despite Pankratov's assurances, the mail did not arrive regularly, and he depended for information on the blend of rumor and fact which drifted into Tobolsk and appeared in the local newspapers. It was through this medium that he morosely followed the rapid crumbling of Kerensky and the Provisional Government.

Ironically, Kerensky himself had assisted in making this tragedy inevitable. Despite the government's narrow triumph over the July Uprising, General Kornilov, now Commander-in-Chief of the Army, concluded that the government was too weak to resist the growing power of the Bolsheviks. Accordingly, at the end of August, Kornilov ordered a cavalry corps to occupy Petrograd and disperse the Soviet. He proposed to replace the Provisional Government with a military dictatorship, keeping Kerensky in the Cabinet but assuming the dominant role himself. Kerensky, as strongly socialist as he was anti-Bolshevik, resisted Kornilov's Rightist coup by what seemed to him

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the only means available: he appealed to the Soviet for help. The Bolsheviks responded enthusiastically and began forming the workers into Red Guard battalions. Meanwhile, as part of the arrangement, Kerensky released Trotsky and the other Bolshevik leaders.

As it happened, Kornilov's threat evaporated quickly; his cavalrymen immediately began to fraternize with the militia sent to oppose them. Kerensky then asked the Red Guards to return the weapons they had been issued, and they refused. In September, the Bolsheviks gained a majority

within the Petrograd Soviet. From Finland, Lenin urged an immediate lunge for supreme power: "History will not forgive us if we do not take power now ... to delay is a crime." On October 23, Lenin, in disguise, slipped back into Petrograd to attend a meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee, which voted 10 to 2 that "insurrection is inevitable and the time fully ripe."

On November 6, the Bolsheviks struck. That day, the cruiser *Aurora*, flying the red flag, anchored in the Neva opposite the Winter Palace. Armed Bolshevik squads occupied the railway stations, bridges, banks, telephone exchanges, post office and other public buildings. There was no bloodshed. The next morning, November 7, Kerensky left the Winter Palace in an open Pierce-Arrow touring car accompanied by another car flying the American flag. Passing unmolested through streets filled with Bolshevik soldiers, he drove south to try to raise help from the army. The remaining ministers of the Provisional Government remained in the Malachite Hall of the Winter Palace, protected by a women's battalion and a troop of cadets. Sitting around a green baize table, filling the ashtrays with cigarette butts, the ministers covered their scratch pads with abstract doodles and drafts of pathetic last-minute proclamations: "The Provisional Government appeals to all classes to support the Provisional Government—" At nine p.m., the *Aurora* fired a single blank shell, and at ten, the women's battalion surrendered. At eleven, another thirty or forty shells whistled across the river from the batteries in the Fortress of Peter and Paul. Only two shells hit the palace, slightly damaging the plaster. Nevertheless, at 2:10 a.m. on November 8, the ministers gave up.

This skirmish was the Bolshevik November Revolution, later magnified in Communist mythology into an epic of struggle and heroism. In fact, life in the capital was largely undisturbed. Restaurants, stores and cinemas on the Nevsky Prospect remained open. Streetcars moved as usual through most of the city, and the ballet performed at the Mary-insky Theatre. On the afternoon of the 7th, Sir George Buchanan walked in the vicinity of the Winter Palace and found "the aspect of

the quay was more or less normal." Nevertheless, this flick of Lenin's finger was all that was necessary to finish Kerensky. Unsuccessful in raising help, Kerensky never returned to Petrograd. In May, after months in hiding, he appeared secretly in Moscow, where Bruce Lockhart issued him a false visa identifying him as a Siberian soldier being repatriated home. Three days later, Kerensky left Murmansk to begin fifty years of restless exile. Trotsky later, in exile himself, scornfully wrote Kerensky's political epitaph: "Kerensky was not a revolutionist; he merely hung around the revolution. . . . He had no theoretical preparation, no political schooling, no ability to think, no political will. The place of these qualities was occupied by a nimble susceptibility, an inflammable temperament, and that kind of eloquence which operates neither upon mind or will but upon the nerves." Nevertheless, when Kerensky left, he carried with him the vanishing dream of a humane, liberal, democratic Russia.

From distant Tobolsk, Nicholas followed these events with keen interest. He blamed Kerensky for the collapse of the army in the July offensive and for not accepting Kornilov's help in routing the Bolsheviks. At first, he could not believe that Lenin and Trotsky were as formidable as they seemed; to him, they appeared as outright German agents sent to Russia to corrupt the army and overthrow the government. When these two men whom he regarded as unsavory blackguards and traitors became the rulers of Russia, he was gravely shocked. "I then for the first time heard the Tsar regret his abdication," said Gilliard. "It now gave him pain to see that his renunciation had been in vain and that by his departure in the interests of his country, he had in reality done her an ill turn. This idea was to haunt him more and more."

At first, the Bolshevik Revolution had little practical effect on far-off Tobolsk. Officials appointed by the Provisional Government—including Pankratov, Nikolsky and Kobylinsky—remained in office; the banks and lawcourts remained open doing business as before. Inside the governor's house, the Imperial family had settled into a routine which, although restricted, was almost cozy.

"Lessons begin at nine," the Empress wrote in December to Anna Vyrubova. "Up at noon for religious lessons with Tatiana, Marie, Anastasia, and Alexei. I have a German lesson three times a week with Tatiana and once with Marie. . . . Also I sew, embroider and paint, with spectacles on because my eyes have become too weak to do without them. I read 'good books' a great deal, love the Bible, and from time to time read novels. I am so sad because they are allowed no walks except before the house and behind a high fence. But at

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least they have fresh air, and we are grateful for anything. He [Nicholas] is simply marvelous. Such meekness while all the time suffering -intensely for the country. . . . The others are all good and brave and uncomplaining, and Alexei is an angel. He and I dine a deux and generally lunch so.

". . . One by one all earthly things slip away, houses and possessions ruined, friends vanished. One lives from day to day. But God is in all, and nature never changes. I can see all around me churches. . . and hills, the lovely world. Volkov [her attendant] wheels me in my chair to church across the street . . . some of the people bow and bless us but others don't dare. ... I feel old, oh, so old, but I am still the mother of this country, and I suffer its pains as my own child's pains and I love it in spite of all its sins and horrors. No one can tear a child from its mother's heart and neither can you tear away one's country, although Russia's black ingratitude to the Emperor breaks my heart. Not that it is the whole country though. God have mercy and save Russia."

A few days later, she wrote again to Anna: "It is bright sunshine and everything glitters with hoarfrost. There are such moonlight nights, it must be ideal on the hills. But my poor unfortunates can only pace up and down the narrow yard. ... I am knitting stockings for the small one [Alexis]. He asks for a pair as all his are in holes. . . . I make everything now. Father's [the Tsar's] trousers are torn and darned, the girls' under-linen in rags. ... I have grown quite grey. Anastasia, to her despair is now very fat, as Marie was, round and fat to the waist, with short legs. I do hope she will grow. Olga and Tatiana are both thin."

In December, the full force of the Siberian winter hit Tobolsk. The thermometer dropped to 68 degress below zero Fahrenheit, the rivers were frozen solid, and no walls or windows could keep out the icy chill. The girls' corner bedroom became, in Gilliard's words, "a real ice house." A fire burned all day in the drawing-room grate, but the temperature inside the house remained 44 degrees. Sitting near the fire, the Empress shivered and suffered from chilblains, with her fingers so stiff she could hardly move her knitting needles.

For Alexis, the winter weather and the family coziness were an exhilarating treat. "Today there are 29 degrees of frost, a strong wind and sunshine," he wrote cheerfully to Anna. "We walked and I went on skees in the yard. Yesterday, I acted with Tatiana and . . . [Gilliard] a French piece. We are now preparing another piece. We have a few good soldiers with whom I play games in their rooms. ... It is time to go to lunch. . . . Alexis."

Through the winter, the Tsarevich was lively and in excellent health. Despite the cold, he went out every morning, dressed in boots, overcoat and cap, with his father. Usually his sisters, in gray capes and red and blue angora caps, came too. While the Tsar walked back and forth with his fast military step from one side of the yard to the other with his daughters hurrying to keep up, Alexis wandered through the sheds attached to the house, collecting old nails and pieces of string. "You never know when they might be useful," he explained. After lunch, he lay on a sofa while Gilliard read to him. Afterward, he went out again to join his father and sisters in the yard. When he returned, he had his history lesson from his father. At four, tea was served, and afterward, Anastasia wrote to Anna, "We often sit in the windows looking at the people passing and this gives us distraction."

For the four Grand Duchesses, all active and healthy young women —that winter Olga was twenty-two, Tatiana twenty, Marie eighteen and Anastasia sixteen—life in the governor's house was acutely boring. To provide them with entertainment, Gilliard and Gibbs began directing them in scenes from plays. Soon, everybody was eager to participate. Both Nicholas and Alexandra carefully wrote out formal programs, and the Tsar acted the title

role of Smirnov in Chekov's *The Bear.* Alexis gleefully joined in, accepting any part, overjoyed to put on a beard and speak in a hoarse basso. Only Dr. Botkin categorically refused to take part on stage, pleading that spectators also were essential. Taking Botkin's reluctance as a challenge, Alexis purposefully set himself to overcome it. After dinner one night, he approached the doctor and said in a serious tone, "I want to talk to you about something, Eugene Sergeievich." Taking Botkin's arm, the boy walked him back and forth through the room, arguing that the part in question was that of an old country doctor and that only Botkin could supply the necessary realism. Botkin broke down and agreed.

After dinner, the little group all huddled near the fire, drinking tea, coffee and hot chocolate, trying to keep warm. Nicholas read aloud while the others played quiet games and the grand duchesses did needlework. "In this atmosphere of family peace," said Gilliard, "we passed the long winter evenings, lost in the immensity of distant Siberia."

At Christmas, the group became especially intimate. "The children were filled with delight. We now felt part of one large family," recalled Gilliard. The Empress and her daughters presented to the suite and servants the gifts on which they had been working for many weeks: knitted waistcoats and painted ribbons for use as bookmarks. On Christmas morning, the family crossed the public garden for early

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Mass. At the end of the service, the priest offered the prayer for the health and long life of the Imperial family which had been dropped from the Orthodox service after the abdication. Hearing it, the soldiers became angry and thereafter refused the family permission to go to church. This was a great hardship, especially for Alexandra. At the same time, soldiers of the guard were posted inside the house, ostensibly to make certain that the same prayer was not uttered again. Their presence led to closer surveillance and stricter supervision.

One night after the inside watch had been established, the guard on duty reported, "at about 11 p.m. ... I heard an extraordinary noise upstairs where the Romanovs lived. It was some family holiday with them, and dinner had

lasted until far into the evening. Finally the noise grew louder, and soon a cheerful company, consisting of the Romanov family and their suite in evening dress came down the staircase. Nicholas headed the procession in Cossack uniform with a colonel's epaulets and a Circassian dagger at his belt. The whole company went into the room of Gibbs, the tutor, where they made merry until 2 a.m." In the morning, the guard reported the incident and the soldiers grumbled, "They have weapons. They must be searched." Kobylinsky went to Nicholas and obtained the dagger.

The same minor episode led to the affair of the epaulets. As the meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution penetrated through to Tobolsk, the soldiers of the 2nd Regiment became increasingly hostile. They elected a Soldiers' Committee which encroached increasingly on Ko-bylinsky's authority. Soon after Nicholas was seen wearing epaulets, the Soldiers' Committee voted 100-85 to forbid all officers, including the Tsar, to wear epaulets. At first, Nicholas refused to comply. He had been awarded his colonel's epaulets by his father and he had never taken a higher rank, even as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army. Kobylinsky did what he could to override the order, telling the soldiers that Nicholas could not be humiliated in that manner, that even if he no longer was Tsar he remained the cousin of the King of England and the Emperor of Germany. The soldiers brushed Kobylinsky rudely aside, threatening violence. "After dinner," Gilliard wrote, "General Tatishchev and Prince Dolgoruky came to beg the Tsar to remove his epaulets in order to avoid a hostile demonstration by the soldiers. At first it seemed as though the Tsar would refuse but after exchanging a look and a few words with the Empress, he recovered his self control and yielded for the sake of his family. He continued nevertheless to wear epaulets in his room and when he went out, concealed them from the soldiers under a Caucasian cloak."

To the faithful Kobylinsky, the affair of the epaulets seemed a

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final blow. "I felt I could bear it no more," he said. "I knew that I had absolutely lost all control of the men and I fully realized my impotence. I . . . begged the Emperor to receive me . . . and I said to him, 'Your Majesty, all

authority is fast slipping out of my hands. . . . I cannot be useful to you any more, so I wish to resign. . . . My nerves are strained. I am exhausted.' The Emperor put his arm on my shoulder, his eyes filled with tears. He replied: 'I implore you to remain. Eugene Stepanovich, remain for my sake, for the sake of my wife and for the sake of my children. You must stand by us.' . . . Then he embraced me. ... I resolved to remain."

Kobylinsky's decision was fortunate, for on February 8, the Soldiers' Committee decided that Pankratov and Nikolsky must reign. Simultaneously, the Bolshevik government issued an order demobilizing all older soldiers of the Imperial Army. "All the old soldiers (the most friendly) are to leave us," Gilliard wrote in his diary on February 13. "The Tsar seems very depressed at this prospect; the change may have disastrous results for us." Two days later, he added: "A certain number of soldiers have already left. They came secretly to take leave of the Tsar and his family."

Their effort to say goodbye to the men of the 4th Regiment of Sharpshooters cost the family heavily. In January, amid the heavy snows, Nicholas and his family had begun to pile up a "snow mountain" in the courtyard. For ten days they worked, shoveling snow and carrying water from the kitchen to pour on the snow and freeze it into a small toboggan run. Everybody helped—Dolgoruky, GilUard, the servants and even members of the guard. Often they had to run from the kitchen to pour the water before it froze solid in the bucket. When it was finished, the children were delighted. A number of wild games were developed by Alexis, Anastasia and Marie, involving pell-mell racing down the slide and tumbling and wrestling in the snow, all accompanied by shrieks of laughter. Then, early in March, Nicholas and Alexandra used the hill to stand on in order to see over the stockade and watch the departure of the 4th Regiment. The Soldiers' Committee immediately declared that the Tsar and the Empress, exposed in this manner, might be shot from the street, an event for which they would be held responsible. The committee ordered that the hill be demolished. The following day, Gilliard wrote in his diary, "The soldiers with a hang-dog look, began to destroy the snow mountain with picks. The children are disconsolate."

The new guards sent from the regimental depots at Tsarskoe Selo were younger men, strongly affected by the currents of revolutionary excitement. Many enjoyed offering little insults to the captives. On a

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pair of swings used by the Grand Duchesses, they carved obscene words into the wooden seats. Alexis spotted them first, but before he could study them Nicholas arrived and removed the seats. Thereafter, the soldiers amused themselves by drawing lewd pictures and inscriptions on the fence where the girls could not avoid seeing them.

Through the winter, Kobylinsky's increasing difficulty with the soldiers had stemmed as much from problems of pay as those of politics. He had arrived in Tobolsk entrusted by the Provisional Government with a large sum of money out of which to pay the expenses of the Tsar's table and household. The soldiers were to be paid from separate funds to be forwarded later. When the Provisional Government was replaced by the Bolsheviks, the sums promised by Kerensky stopped coming and Kobylinsky had to pay the soldiers from his original sum. When it was gone, he and General Tatishchev twice visited the local District Commissioner and each time borrowed fifteen thousand roubles. Meanwhile, in Petrograd, Count Benckendorff visited government offices pleading for money to maintain the Tsar and his family. As news of the Tsar's circumstances spread, offers of money began to flow in. One foreign ambassador anonymously offered enough to keep the Tsar's household for six months. A prominent Russian quietly offered even more. Eventually, Benckendorff collected two hundred thousand roubles, which was sent to Tobolsk. Unhappily, it fell into other hands and never reached the Imperial family.

In Tobolsk, meanwhile, the captives were living on credit which soon began to wear thin. Just as the cook announced that he was no longer welcome or trusted in the local stores, a strongly monarchist Tobolsk merchant advanced another twenty thousand roubles. Finally, the matter was settled by a telegram which announced that, as of March i, "Nicholas Romanov and his family must be put on soldier's rations and that each member of the family will receive 600 roubles per month drawn from the interest of their

personal estate." As the family consisted of seven, that meant 4,200 roubles a month to support the entire household. Nicholas, facing the novel task of drawing up a family budget, asked for help. "The Tsar said jokingly that since everyone is appointing committees, he is going to appoint one to look after the welfare of his own community," said Gilliard. "It is to consist of General Tatishchev, Prince Dolgoruky, and myself. We held a 'sitting' this afternoon and came to the conclusion that the personnel must be reduced. This is a wrench; we shall have to dismiss ten servants, several of whom have their families with them in Tobolsk. When we informed Their Majesties we could see the grief it caused

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them. They must part with servants whose very devotion will reduce them to beggary."

The new self-imposed regime was harsh. As of the following morning, butter and coffee were excluded as luxuries. Soon, the townspeople, hearing of the situation, began to send packages of eggs, sweetmeats and delicacies which the Empress referred to as little "gifts from Heaven." Musing over the nature of the Russian people, she wrote, "The strange thing about the Russian character is that it can so suddenly change to evil, cruelty and unreason and as suddenly change back again."

At times, it seemed to the exiles in Tobolsk that they were living on a separate planet—remote, forgotten, beyond all help. "To-day is Carnival Sunday," wrote Gilliard on March 17. "Everyone is merry. The sledges pass to and fro under our windows; sound of bells, mouth-organs, and singing. . . . The children wistfully watch the fun. . . . Their Majesties still cherish hope that among their loyal friends some may be found to attempt their release. Never was the situation more favourable for escape, for there is as yet no representative of the Bolshevik Government at Tobolsk. With the complicity of Colonel Kobylinsky, already on our side, it would be easy to trick the insolent but careless vigilance of our guards. All that is required is the organized and resolute efforts of a few bold spirits outside."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Good Russian Men

The idea of escape grew slowly inside the governor's house. At first, it had scarcely seemed necessary. Had not Kerensky promised the safety of the Imperial family? Had he not assured them that Tobolsk was intended only as a winter refuge? "From there," Kerensky wrote later, "we thought it would be possible in the spring of 1918 to send them abroad after all, via Japan. Fate decided otherwise."

Despite Kerensky's promises, even before the Bolshevik Revolution there were Russians who were secretly planning to liberate the Imperial family. Both in Moscow and in Petrograd, strong monarchist organizations with substantial funds were anxious to attempt a rescue. The problem was not money but planning, coordination and, above all, clarity of purpose. Nicholas himself raised one serious obstacle whenever the question of escape was mentioned: he insisted that the family not be separated from one another. This increased the logistical problem: an escape involving a number of women and a handicapped boy could not be improvised. It would require horses, food and loyal soldiery. If it was to take place in summer, it would need carriages and boats; if it was planned for winter, there would have to be sledges and possibly a train.

Soon after the Imperial family arrived in Tobolsk, a number of monarchist organizations began sending agents to Siberia. Former officers using assumed names stepped off the train in Tyumen and strode onto the river steamers bound for Tobolsk. Mysterious visitors with fine-combed beards and precise Petrograd accents mingled with the well-to-do merchants and shopkeepers of Tobolsk. They made veiled remarks and vague promises about the Imperial family, then quietly disappeared, accomplishing nothing. It was easy at first to establish contact with the Imperial family. Servants and members of

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the suite passed freely in and out of the governor's house, carrying letters, messages and gifts. Only when the couriers attempted deception did the guards object. The clumsiest of these cases, involved Mlle. Margaret

Khitrivo, a friend and maid-of-honor of young Grand Duchess Olga. In Petrograd, this girl decided on her own to share the family's imprisonment. She traveled openly to Tobolsk, carrying a thick wad of letters to the family concealed in a pillow. Upon arrival, she was searched and the letters came tumbling out. They were harmless, but the guards were angered, and thereafter access to the governor's house became more limited.

The major obstacle to rescue was always lack of leadership. There were too many groups, each jealous of the others. The Dowager Empress Marie, assuming that she should take precedence in arranging the rescue of her son, sent an officer to Bishop Hermogen of Tobolsk, proudly demanding his aid. "My lord," wrote the Tsar's mother, "you bear the name of St. Hermogen who fought for Russia. It is an omen. The hour has come for you to serve the motherland." An equal claim was made by members of the Petrograd group which had clustered around Rasputin and Anna Vyrubova. Feeling the Empress to be their special patroness, they demanded leadership of the effort to save her. Count Benckendorff and a group of former government officials were active in raising money and interest. Acting independently, each of these groups dissipated its energy in milling about, squabbling over money and arguing who was to have the honor of conducting so glorious an enterprise as the rescue of the Imperial family.

Eventually, a leader seemed to appear in the person of Boris Soloviev. Establishing himself in Tyumen, Soloviev gathered into his hands all the threads of the various rescue enterprises. So clear was his authority that monarchists arriving in Tyumen to assist the Imperial family automatically reported to Soloviev for instructions. His mandate, it appeared, came from the Empress herself. In fact, this was true; Alexandra trusted Soloviev implicitly for what seemed to her an overwhelming, unchallengeable reason: he was the son-in-law of Gregory Rasputin.

Boris Soloviev, the adventurous son of the Treasurer of the Holy Synod, had studied in Berlin and then become private secretary to a German tourist who was traveling to India. Once there, Soloviev left his employer and entered a school of mysticism founded by a Russian woman, Mme. Blavatskaya. For a year, Soloviev trained himself in hypnotism.

During the war, as an officer of a machine-gun regiment, Soloviev

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managed to avoid serving at the front. In Petrograd, where he was stationed, his background in mysticism provided splendid credentials for entering the occult gatherings which still amused society. In 1915, he became friendly with Rasputin and Anna Vyrubova. At the time, he showed little enthusiasm for their august Imperial patrons. On the second day of the March Revolution, Soloviev led his entire unit to the Tauride Palace to pledge his allegiance to the Duma.

Neither Rasputin's death, the fall of the Tsar nor Anna's imprisonment disturbed the faith of those who believed in Rasputin's mystical powers. During the spring and summer of 1917, groups of fervent admirers continued through spiritualistic prayer meetings and seances to attempt to converse with the departed *starets.* Soloviev continued to attend these meetings. Maria Rasputin, Gregory's daughter, was also present and a romance was hastily induced. "I went to Anya's house last night," she wrote in her diary. "Daddy spoke to us again. . . . Why do they all say the same thing: 'Love Boris—you must love Boris. ... I don't like him at all' "

In August, immediately after the Imperial family was transferred to Tobolsk, Soloviev now acting as agent for this group in Petrograd, went to Siberia to explore the situation. He returned to Petrograd and on October 5, 1917, married Maria Rasputin in the Duma chapel. With Maria, he returned to Siberia and lived for several weeks in her father's house in Pokrovskoe.

Upon arriving in the region, Soloviev quickly established contact with the Empress through one of her maids, Romanova, who had an apartment in Tobolsk. Through her, he passed on notes and a part of the money with which he had been entrusted. More important, Soloviev used Romanova to raise the captives' hopes by promising that "Gregory's family and his friends are active."

It was impossible, given Soloviev's family connection, for Alexandra to doubt his word. Confident that plans were proceeding for their liberation, she even passed along to him her choice for the name of the rescue

organization which he was building. It was to be "The Brotherhood of St. John of Tobolsk" in honor of the town's famous saint. Frequently, when her family became gloomy, she cheered them with the reminder that "three hundred faithful officers" of the Brotherhood were disguised in the vicinity, only waiting for Soloviev's signal.

Before long, however, Soloviev's behavior began showing odd twists. He left Pokrovskoe and settled not in Tobolsk, where the prisoners were, but in Tyumen, where he could keep watch on the railroad and monitor all contact between Tobolsk and the outside

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world. In time, his careful scrutiny of every north-bound traveler became unnecessary; those who were involved in anything to do with the Imperial family came straight to him, handed over the money they had brought and asked for instructions. Soloviev operated with ruthless efficiency. He insisted that all agents and funds be channeled through him. When other conservative monarchist groups attempted to operate outside his control, he announced that any additional attempts to contact the Imperial family would jeopardize the efforts which were already going forward. Occasionally, when necessary, Soloviev went so far as to declare that the Empress herself believed that the work of groups other than his was endangering their chance of escape.

In time, of course, the other groups began to ask for evidence of Soloviev's rescue plans. He replied that he had converted eight regiments of Red soldiers in the area to monarchism. To prove it, he took skeptics to watch the cavalry of the Tyumen garrison at drill. There, just as Soloviev had promised, the officer at the head of the squadron made a prearranged hand signal, indicating his adherence to the plot. When skeptics proved unusually stubborn, Soloviev sent them to Tobolsk to stand in the street near the governor's house. As arranged through Romanova, a member of the Imperial family would step onto the balcony and make a carefully prescribed gesture.

Despite these persuasive indications, there remained four stubbornly suspicious officers who still did not trust Soloviev. Why, they asked, was he

passing his messages through a parlormaid when Dr. Botkin— more intelligent, more devoted and more trusted by the Imperial family —was available? Why, because a single officer responded at drill to Soloviev's presence, did it follow that eight regiments stood ready to fight for the Tsar? Why did Soloviev continually assure Petrograd and Moscow that no more men should be sent but that they should show their support by advancing more money? The officers put these questions to Soloviev in January after the Bolsheviks had seized control of Tyumen. Immediately, three of the four officers were handed over to the Bolsheviks and shot; the fourth escaped.

Needless to say, no rescue attempts occurred under Soloviev's command. A few months later, when the Imperial family was moved from Tobolsk, Soloviev was conveniently arrested by the Bolsheviks, held for a few days and then released, thus providing him with a suitable alibi for doing nothing to prevent the transfer. During the civil war, he wandered with his wife through Siberia in the rear of the White armies, eventually reaching Vladivostock. From there, he made his way to Berlin, where he was hailed by unknowing Russians as the

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man who had tried to save the Imperial family; some of these grateful folk made him the manager of a restaurant.

Subsequently, a number of isolated facts relating to Soloviev came to light. The cavalry officer who supplied hand signals at his squadron's drill admitted that, of all his men, he alone had had anything to do with Soloviev. A Petrograd banker declared that he had raised 175,000 roubles and given them to Anna Vyrubova for transmission to the Imperial family. Of this sum, Soloviev had delivered only 35,000 roubles. As soon as the Imperial family left Tobolsk, Soloviev hurried there to talk to the maid Romanova; later, Romanova was to marry a Bolshevik commissar. In Vladivostock, Soloviev was arrested by the Whites and found to be in possession of documents indicating that he might be a German agent. However, his reputation as the gallant—if unsuccessful—"savior" of the Imperial family was strong, and he was released.

Soloviev's motives during his adventure in Tyumen have remained cloudy. He may have been only greedy. Having established an enormously profitable enterprise—in effect, a tollgate at Tyumen for everyone concerned with helping the Imperial family—he may have wished to extract what he could before he was forced to flee. But many believe that his intrigue was far more sinister. Kerensky later wrote, "In the Tobolsk region . . . the royalists were captained by the traitor Soloviev . . . who was sent there ... to save and protect the family, but who was actually betraying to the Bolsheviks the royalist officers who came to Tobolsk."

It is possible that Soloviev was working for both the Bolsheviks and the Germans. It may be that his eager acceptance by Rasputin's devotees, his introduction and marriage to Maria and his mission to Siberia were all arranged by the same shadowy people who lurked around Rasputin before his death. Unquestionably, this marriage was the surest way to gain the Empress's confidence and persuade her not to seek other avenues of escape. With the Empress convinced that a strong, secret "Brotherhood" operating in the name of Rasputin stood ready to help, she naturally assisted Soloviev in discouraging other monarchists from making conflicting plans. In the end, whatever Soloviev's motives, the effect was the same. When the moment came for the laboriously constructed, lavishly financed escape machinery to swing into action, it did not do so because it did not exist.

In March, spring brought hope with the first warming rays of the sun. Sitting on her balcony in the sunshine, Alexandra closed her eyes

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and dreamed of English gardens. As Easter approached, she began to hope that some miraculous resurrection might happen for Russia. "God will not leave it like this," she wrote to Anna. "He will send wisdom and save Russia I am sure. . . . The nation is strong and young and soft as wax. Just now it is in bad hands and darkness and anarchy reign. But the King of Glory will come and will save, strengthen, and give wisdom to the people who are now deceived." Alexandra considered it a sign of this coming transformation that the soldiers changed their rules and allowed her to go frequently to church.

Just at this point, an enemy older than the Bolsheviks rose up to shatter her hopes. Alexis had been well all winter and was filled with energy and high spirits. The destruction of the snow mountain had deprived him of an activity which had absorbed much of his vitality; in its place, he was devising new and reckless games which no one seemed able to inhibit. One of these—riding down the inside stairs on a boat with runners which he had used on the snow mountain—led to calamity. He fell and began to bleed into the groin. The hemorrhage was the worst since Spala five years before. The pain increased rapidly and became excruciating. When it became intolerable, Alexis gasped between his screams, "Mama, I would like to die. I am not afraid of death, but I am so afraid of what they will do to us here." Alexandra, alone, without Rasputin to come or telegraph or pray, could do nothing. "He is frightfully thin and yellow, reminding me of Spala," she wrote to Anna. "I sit all day beside him holding his aching legs and I have grown about as thin as he."

A few days later, in her last letter to Anna Vyrubova, the Empress described Alexis's progress and mentioned a source of new alarm. "Yesterday for the first time, he smiled and talked with us, even played cards, and slept two hours during the day. He is frightfully thin with enormous eyes, just as Spala. He likes to be read to, eats little. . . . I am with him the whole day, Tatiana or Mr. Gilliard relieving me at intervals. Mr. Gilliard reads to him tirelessly, or warms his legs with the Fohn apparatus. ... A great number of new troops have come from everywhere. A new commissar has arrived from Moscow, a man named Yakovlev and today we shall have to make his acquaintance. . . . They are always hinting to us that we shall have to travel either very far away or to the center of Siberia. . . . Just now eleven men have passed on horseback, good faces, mere boys. . . . They are the guard of the new commissar. Sometimes we see men with the most awful faces. . . . The atmosphere around us is . . . electrified. We feel that a storm is approaching, but we know that God is merciful

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. . . our souls are at peace. Whatever happens will be through God's will."

Alexandra sensed accurately that the political storm was upon them; what she could not know was that her son would never walk again.

The collapse of Kerensky's government had been even more swift and bloodless than the overthrow of the autocracy. In scarcely more than the passage of a single night, Lenin stood at the helm of the new Soviet state. Nevertheless, his control over the huge territory of Russia was precarious. To consolidate their grip, the Bolsheviks had to have peace—at any price. The price set by the Germans was a terrible one: loss of most of the territory won by Russia since the days of Peter the Great, including Poland, Finland, the Baltic States, the Ukraine, the Crimea and most of the Caucasus. Within these four hundred thousand square miles lived sixty million people, more than one third of the population of the empire. Yet Lenin had no choice. "Peace" was the cry which had brought him to power. Russian soldiers, prodded by the Bolsheviks' own propaganda, were deserting by the millions. A German army was advancing on Petrograd, and the capital was moved to Moscow, but Russian soldiers could not be recalled to arms, least of all by the party which had promised them peace. Therefore, to save the revolution until, as he confidently expected, it spread to Germany itself, Lenin made peace. On March 3, 1918, in the town of Brest-Litovsk, now headquarters of the German Eastern Front, a Bolshevik delegation signed the German treaty. So humiliating were the terms and the German treatment of the Russian delegation that, after observing the ceremony, one Russian general went out and shot himself.

When news of the treaty reached Tobolsk, Nicholas was overwhelmed with grief and shame. It was, as Lenin was well aware, a total rejection of Russian patriotism. Nicholas called it "a disgrace" and "suicide for Russia." "To think that they called Her Majesty a traitor." he said bitterly. The Tsar was appalled that the Kaiser, Europe's most strident spokesman of the monarchical principle, had been willing to deal with the Bolsheviks. "I should never have thought the Emperor William and the German Government could stoop to shake hands with these miserable traitors," he cried. "But they [the Germans] will get no good from it; it won't save them from ruin." Hearing a rumor that the Germans were demanding that the Tsar

and his family be handed over to them unharmed, Nicholas called it "either a maneuver to dis-

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credit me or an insult." Defiantly, Alexandra added, "They [the Germans] must never dare to attempt any conversations with Father [Nicholas] or Mother [herself]. . . . After what they have done to the Tsar, I would rather die in Russia than be saved by the Germans."

Inevitably, once the fighting had ended, both Germans and Russians had more time to think of the Tsar and his family. Nicholas remained a symbol, a human pawn with potential value. To the Kaiser, who was indeed ashamed of his embrace of the Bolsheviks, a pliable Nicholas willing to endorse the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk would have had great value. The Bolsheviks, sensing this German interest, immediately understood that in whatever bargaining and maneuvering lay ahead, the Tsar must be kept beyond the Kaiser's reach. As the soldiers in Tobolsk and their commander, Kobylinsky, were all still holdovers, from the Kerensky regime, the Bolshevik leaders resolved to place the Imperial family under more reliable guard.

There was another factor which was to influence the fate of the Imperial family. Of all the regional Soviets which had sprung up in Russia, none was more fiercely Bolshevik than that which sat in the Ural Mountain city of Ekaterinburg. For years, the Ural miners and workers, toiling underground or before open blast-furnaces, had maintained a tradition of discontent and rebellion which had earned the area the name of the Red Urals. In 1917, well before the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, the Ekaterinburg Soviet had nationaUzed the local mines and factories. For a reason quite different from the central government's, this group of militant Bolsheviks was anxious to lay hands on the Tsar. Once in Ekaterinburg, the Tsar and his family would become not pawns in a game of international politics, but victims in a grim drama of retribution. In March, the Ural Regional Soviet asked permission from Moscow to bring the Imperial family to Ekaterinburg.

Before Moscow could reply, a Bolshevik detachment from the city of Omsk suddenly arrived in Tobolsk. Omsk was the administrative capital of the province of Western Siberia and a rival of Ekaterinburg for supremacy in the regions east of the Urals. Technically, Tobolsk lay within the sway of Omsk, and this band of soldiers had come not to take away the Tsar, but to dissolve the local government and impose Bolshevism on the town. Pathetically, the Imperial family persisted in hoping that the Omsk soldiers were rescuers. The Empress, looking down from her window as they dashed by in *troikas* festooned with tinkling bells, happily waved and called her daughters to come and look out at "the good Russian men." Nicholas also was hopeful. "His Majesty tells me he has reason to believe that there are among these

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men many officers who have enlisted in the ranks," said Gilliard, who did not share this optimism. "He also asserts, without telling me definitely the source of his information, that there are three hundred officers at Tyumen."

On April 13, a detachment from Ekaterinburg under a commissar named Zaslavsky finally arrived in Tobolsk. Moscow still had not replied to the request to remove the Tsar from Tobolsk, and without this permission, neither Kobylinsky's men nor the soldiers from Omsk would allow the family to be taken. Zaslavsky then suggested that they at least be moved to the local prison, where they could be strongly guarded. Kobylinsky refused and Zaslavsky's men thereupon launched a campaign of propaganda, urging Kobylinsky's soldiers to ignore the orders of their commandant. It was at this low point that Moscow directly intervened in the form of Commissar Vasily Vaslevich Yakovlev.

From the beginning, an air of mystery attended Yakovlev. The prisoners were aware that someone important was coming from Moscow; there were rumors that it might be Trotsky himself. Instead, on April 22, Yakovlev arrived at the head of 150 horsemen, bringing with him a private telegraph operator through whom he communicated directly with the Kremlin. On his first evening in Tobolsk, he had tea with the Tsar and the Empress, but said nothing about his mission. They noted that he was around thirty-two or

thirty-three, tall and muscular with jet-black hair and that, although he was dressed like an ordinary sailor, there was unmistakable evidence of a more cultured background. His language was refined, he addressed Nicholas as "Your Majesty" and greeted Gilliard by saying *"Bonjour, Monsieur."* His hands were clean and his fingers long and thin. Despite these observations, the prisoners were not necessarily reassured. "Everyone is restless and distraught," Gilliard wrote in his diary that night. "The commissar's arrival is felt to be an evil portent, vague but real."

On the second morning, April 24, Yakovlev summoned Kobylinsky and showed him documents signed by Jacob Sverdlov, an intimate of Lenin who occupied the key administrative post of President of the Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. "The first document was addressed to me," wrote Kobylinsky, "and ordered me to comply without delay with all requests of the Special Commissar Tovarich Yakovlev who had been assigned a mission of great importance. My refusal to execute these orders would result in my being instantly killed. The second document was addressed to the soldiers of our detachment. ... It also carried a threat of the same

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penalty—i.e. courtmartial by a revolutionary tribunal and instant death."

Kobylinsky did not argue and, at Yakovlev's request, took him to see Nicholas and Alexis. The Tsarevich was lying in bed, his leg still badly flexed from the recent hemorrhage. The commissar was disturbed by this sight. Later in the day, he returned with an army doctor, who examined Alexis and assured Yakovlev that the boy was seriously ill.

Observing these movements, Gilliard became thoroughly alarmed. "We feel we are forgotten by everyone, abandoned to our own resources and at the mercy of this man. Is it possible that no one will raise a finger to save the Imperial family? Where are those who have remained loyal to the Tsar? Why do they delay?"

On the morning of the 25 th, Yakovlev finally revealed his mission to Kobylinsky. He explained that originally he had been assigned by the

Central Executive Committee to take the entire Imperial family from Tobolsk. On arriving, his discovery that the Tsarevich was seriously ill had forced a reconsideration. By telegraph, he had been communicating steadily with Moscow. Now, he concluded, "I have received an order to leave the family in Tobolsk and only to take the Emperor away." He asked to see the Tsar as soon as possible.

"After lunch, at two o'clock," said Kobylinsky, "Yakovlev and I entered the hall. The Emperor and Empress stood in the middle of the hall, and Yakovlev stopped a little distance away from them and bowed. Then he said, 'I must tell you that I am the Special Representative of the Moscow Central Executive Committee and my mission is to take all your family away from Tobolsk, but, as your son is ill, I have received a second order which says that you alone must leave.' The Emperor replied: 'I refuse to go.' Upon hearing this Yakovlev said: 'I beg you not to refuse. I am compelled to execute the order. In case of your refusal I must take you by force or I must resign my position. In the latter case the Committee would probably send a far less scrupulous man to replace me. Be calm, I am responsible with my life for your safety. If you do not want to go alone, you can take with you any people you wish. Be ready, we are leaving tomorrow [morning] at four o'clock."

Yakovlev bowed again, first to the Tsar, then to the Empress, and left. As soon as he was gone, Nicholas summoned Kobylinsky and asked where he thought Yakovlev intended to take him. Kobylinsky did not know, but Yakovlev had mentioned that the journey would take four or five days; therefore, he assumed the destination was

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Moscow. Nicholas nodded and, turning to Alexandra, said bitterly, "They want to force me to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. But I would rather cut off my right hand than sign such a treaty." The Empress agreed and, harking back to the abdication, declared emotionally, "I shall also go. If I am not there, they will force him to do something in exactly the same way they did before."

The news spread quickly through the house. Tatiana, weeping, knocked at Gilliard's door and asked him to come to her mother. The tutor found the Empress greatly upset. She told him that the Tsar was being taken that night and explained her own painful dilemma:

"The commissar says that no harm will come to the Tsar and that if anyone wishes to accompany him there will be no objection. I can't let the Tsar go alone. They want to separate him from his family as they did before. . . . They're going to try to force his hand by making him anxious about his family. The Tsar is necessary to them; they feel that he alone represents Russia. Together, we shall be in a better position to resist them and I ought to be at his side in the time of trial. But the boy is still so ill. Suppose some complication sets in. Oh, God, what ghastly torture. For the first time in my life, I don't know what to do. I've always felt inspired whenever I had to take a decision and now I can't think. But God won't allow the Tsar's departure; it can't, it must not be."

Tatiana, watching her mother, urged her to make a decision. "But, Mother," she said, "if Father has to go, whatever we say, something must be decided." Gilliard suggested that if she went with the Tsar, he and the others would take excellent care of Alexis. He pointed out that the Tsarevich was over the worst of the crisis.

"Her Majesty," he wrote, "was obviously tortured by indecision; she paced up and down the room and went on talking rather to herself than to us. At last she came up to me and said: 'Yes that will be best; I'll go with the Tsar. I shall trust Alexis to you.' A moment later the Tsar came in. The Empress walked towards him saying, 'It's all settled. I'll go with you and Marie will come too.' The Tsar replied: 'Very well, if you wish it.' " The decision that Marie should accompany the parents had been made by the girls themselves. Hurriedly meeting, they decided that Olga was not well enough, that Tatiana would be needed in Tobolsk to supervise the household and manage Alexis, and that Anastasia was too young to be helpful to their mother, and so Marie was chosen.

Somehow, during this hectic day, General Tatishchev managed to send a telegram to Count Benckendorff's group in Moscow, pleading

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for advice: "Doctors demand immediate departure to health resort. Much perturbed by this demand and consider journey undesirable. Please send advice. Extremely difficult position."

The monarchists in Moscow knew nothing of Yakovlev's mission and could only reply: "Unfortunately we have no data which could shed light on reason for this demand. Hesitate to give definite opinion since state of health and circumstances of patient unknown. Advise postpone journey if possible, agreeing only if doctors insist."

Later, a single, last message was received from Tobolsk: "Had to submit to doctors decision."

During these hours, Yakovlev also was nervous. He had discovered that Zaslavsky, the commissar from Ekaterinburg, had left Tobolsk suddenly that morning. Yakovlev was so worried that he scarcely noticed when Kobylinsky arrived to discuss the departure and the luggage. "It makes no difference to me," he said distractedly. "All I know is we must leave tomorrow at all costs. There is no time to waste."

Meanwhile, Alexis, who was still unable to walk, was lying upstairs awaiting the visit his mother had promised to make after lunch. When she did not appear, he began to call, "Mama, Mama!" His shouts rang through the house even as the Tsar and the Empress were talking to Yakovlev. When Alexandra still did not come, Alexis became frightened. Between four and five, she quietly came into his bedroom, her eyes reddened, and explained to him that she and his father were leaving that night.

The entire family spent the rest of the afternoon and evening beside Alexis's bed. The Empress, with her hope for earthly rescue fading, prayed for help from heaven. As they would have to cross frozen rivers, she prayed for the thaw and the melting of the ice. "I know, I am convinced that the river will overflow tonight, and then our departure must be postponed," she said.

"This will give us time to get out of this terrible position. If a miracle is necessary, I am sure a miracle will take place."

At 10:30 p.m., the suite went in to join them for evening tea. They found Alexandra sitting on a sofa surrounded by her daughters, their faces swollen from crying. Nicholas and Alexandra both were calm. "This splendid serenity of theirs, this wonderful faith, proved infectious," said Gilliard. At 11:30 p.m., they came downstairs to say goodbye to the servants in the main hall. Nicholas embraced every man, Alexandra every woman.

From the Kornilov house across the street, those watching from their windows saw the governor's house and its sheds blazing with

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lights throughout the night. Near dawn, the clatter of horses and the creak of carriages signaled Yakovlev's arrival in the courtyard. The vehicles, which had to carry the Tsar and the Empress across two hundred miles of mud and melting snow to Tyumen, were crude, uncomfortable peasant *tarantasses*, more cart than carriage, lacking both springs and seats. Passengers could only sit or lie on the floor. As cushioning, the servants swept up straw from the pigsty and spread it on the floor of the carts. In the only one which had a roof, a mattress was placed for Alexandra to lie on.

When the family came downstairs, the Empress, seeing Gilliard, begged him to go back up and stay with Alexis. He went up to the boy's room and found him lying in bed, his face to the wall, weeping uncontrollably. Outside, Yakovlev was infinitely courteous, repeatedly touching the brim of his hat in salute to the Tsar and Empress. Escorting Alexandra to her cart, he insisted that she put on a warmer coat and wrapped her in Botkin's large fur overcoat while sending for a new wrap for the doctor. Nicholas started to climb into the same cart with his wife, but Yakovlev intervened and insisted that the Tsar ride with him in a separate, open carriage. Marie sat beside her mother, and Prince Dolgoruky, Dr. Botkin, a valet, a maid and a footman were distributed among the other carriages.

When all was ready, the drivers flicked their whips and the carts lurched into motion. The cavalry escort spurred their horses, the procession passed

out the gates and down the street. Gilliard, sitting beside Alexis on the Tsarevich's bed, heard Olga, Tatiana and Anastasia climb slowly up the stairs and pass, sobbing, to their room. The months in Tobolsk were ended. There was no "Brotherhood," no "good Russian men," no rescue. Only a boy and his sisters, frightened and utterly alone.

The journey to Tyumen was difficult and exhausting. The cavalcade crossed the river Irtysh on the melting ice with wheels sloshing axle-deep in water. Farther south, reaching the Tobol River, they found the ice beginning to crack. For safety's sake, the entire party dismounted and crossed the river on foot. They changed horses frequently. The last of these remount stations was Pokrovskoe, and the change was carried out directly beneath the windows of Rasputin's house. There sat the Tsar and the Empress, prisoners in a caravan of peasant carts, while in the windows above them the family of the man who had done so much to destroy them stood looking down, waving white handkerchiefs. Before the procession moved on, Ras-
putin's widow, Praskovie, looked directly at Alexandra and carefully made the sign of the cross.

Fourteen miles north of Tyumen, the little cavalcade was met by another squadron of Red cavalry, who surrounded the carts and escorted them into town. As the horseman rode alongside, the Empress leaned to look at them, scrutinizing their faces, full of hope that they might be the "good Russian men" who would have been alerted by the news that the Tsar was being moved. Totally oblivious of this pathetic hope, the soldiers escorted the carts into town to the station where a special train was waiting. Yakovlev transferred his prisoners into a first-class coach and then, taking his telegraph operator, installed himself at the station telegraph office. His first message went back to Tobolsk: "Proceeding safely. God bless you. How is the Little One." It was signed Yakovlev, but those in Tobolsk knew who had written it. Then the commissar began sending a signal to Moscow.

When Yakovlev left the telegraph office some time later, he had made a startling decision. His orders had been to bring the former Tsar and Empress to Moscow. Either during his conversation with the Kremlin or perhaps

from what he had learned in Tyumen, he realized that if he took the direct route to Moscow, his train would be stopped in Ekaterinburg and his prisoners removed by the Ural Regional Soviet. Accordingly, to avoid Ekaterinburg, he decided to go eastward rather than westward from Tyumen. Traveling east, they would reach Omsk, where they could join the southern section of the Trans-Siberian track and then double back through Chelyabinsk, Ufa and Samara to Moscow. Returning to the coach, he confided this plan to the captives. At five a.m., with all lights extinguished, the train left Tyumen, headed east for Omsk. Yakovlev did not mention it, but he knew that beyond Omsk lay thousands of miles of clear track to the Pacific.

As soon as the train left Tyumen, Ekaterinburg was informed that Yakovlev was traveling in the wrong direction. A special meeting of the Ural Soviet Presidium was hastily summoned and Yakovlev was proclaimed "a traitor to the revolution" and an outlaw. Desperate telegrams addressed "to all, to all, to all" were sent to every Soviet and party headquarters in the region. At the same time, the Ural Soviet directly contacted the West Siberian Soviet in Omsk, asking that it block Yakovlev. The Omsk Soviet, having received no contrary instructions from Moscow, agreed to do so, and when Yakovlev's train reached the town of Kulomzino, sixty miles from Omsk, it was surrounded by troops. Yakovlev was told of the telegram declaring him a traitor. Unhitching the engine and one coach of his train,

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he left the Tsar and Empress behind and proceeded alone into Omsk to argue with the Omsk Soviet. When he failed to convince them, he insisted on contacting Moscow. He talked by telephone directly to Sverdlov, explaining why he had changed his route. Sverdlov replied that, under the circumstances, there was nothing for Yakovlev to do but give in, take his prisoners to Ekaterinburg and hand them over to the Ural Soviet. Sadly, Yakovlev returned to his engine, rejoined the stranded train and told Nicholas and Alexandra, "I have orders to take you to Ekaterinburg." "I would have gone anywhere but to the Urals," said Nicholas. "Judging from the local papers, people there are bitterly hostile to me."

What should be made of this strange tangle of cross-purposes, murky intrigue and reversed directions? Later, when Yakovlev defected from the Bolsheviks and became a White officer, the Bolsheviks charged that Yakovlev's enterprise had been all along a monarchist escape plot. Failing to break through Omsk to the Pacific—this theory goes—he turned back, but still considered stopping the train and taking the captives with him to hide in the hills. There is no serious evidence of this, and although Yakovlev was sympathetic to the plight of his prisoners, it is much more likely that he was exactly what he said he was: Moscow's agent, trying to carry out Moscow's order to bring Nicholas to the capital. When the most direct way was blocked and it looked as if he might lose his prisoners, he tried another way, via Omsk. But he became caught up in a struggle between the far-off Central Committee and the Ural Soviet, and, with the acquiescence of Sverdlov, he finally gave in to superior force.

But if Yakovlev's motives and objectives seem reasonably clear, those of other parties involved in this intrigue are more blurred and sinister. In addition to the two possible characterizations of Yakovlev already suggested—the monarchist cavalier attempting to save the Imperial couple, and the agent of Moscow bowing to Ekaterinburg's superior force—there is another role which Yakovlev may have been playing: that of dupe in an evil conspiracy involving the Ural Soviet in Ekaterinburg, the Bolshevik rulers in Moscow, and the German government of Kaiser William.

After the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and Russia's withdrawal from the war, it became clear that the Western Allies had completely lost interest in the fate of the Russian Imperial family. The Tsar, who had summoned fifteen million Russians into the trenches, who had sacrificed an army to help save Paris, who had refused even when his coun-

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try was being broken by war to make a separate peace, now was forgotten, scorned, despised. If the Tsar and his family were to be saved by the intervention of a foreign power, that power could only be Germany. In Russia, the Germans now spoke as conquerors. German troops had moved into the Ukraine to collect the food desperately needed by the Kaiser's

hungry people. The Germans had not occupied Petrograd or Moscow because it was easier to leave the administration of these chaotic areas to the enfeebled Bolsheviks. But, if necessary, German regiments could march on the two cities and scatter Lenin and his lieutenants like dry leaves.

For this reason, a number of Russian conservatives, including Benckendorff and Alexander Trepov, the former Prime Minister, turned for help to Count William Mirbach, the newly appointed German Ambassador. Mirbach's answer was always the same: "Be calm. I know all about the situation in Tobolsk, and when the time comes, the German Empire will act." Unsatisfied, Trepov and Count Benckendorff wrote Mirbach a letter, pointing out that Germany alone was in a position to save the Imperial family and warning that if the Tsar and his wife and children died, Kaiser William would be personally responsible.

Quite apart from the question of guilt, the Germans again were anxiously studying their eastern horizon. By injecting the Bolshevik bacillus into Russia, they had destroyed an enemy army. But they had also created a new menace which, they were beginning to sense, might become even more dangerous. Lenin's openly pronounced goal was world revolution; even now, his creed was exerting a pull on the war-weary soldiers and workers of Germany. With this in mind, the German government had a growing interest in restoring in Russia a monarchy which would crush the Bolsheviks and at the same time be friendly to Germany. Nicholas and Alexandra were known to be bitterly hostile to Germany. But the German government presumed that if it was the Kaiser who saved them and restored them to the throne, the Russian sovereigns would be grateful and submissive to the German will.

To achieve this goal, Mirbach began playing a delicate game. He insisted that Nicholas be brought to Moscow, where he would be within reach of German power. The request had to be made in such a way that the Bolsheviks would not take fright and guess the ultimate purpose, and yet also in a way which made clear that the request was backed by a threat of German military intervention. Sverdlov, apparently agreeing to Mirbach's demand, deputized Yakovlev to bring Nicholas to Moscow.

Sverdlov, of course, easily saw the German game and the need for thwarting it. He could not simply refuse; German power was too great. What he could do was to arrange secretly with Ekaterinburg, which was eight hundred miles east of Moscow and beyond the German reach, that they should intercept the Tsar and hold him in apparent defiance of the central government. This way, he could appear before Mirbach and say that he deplored the seizure but unfortunately was powerless to prevent it. The central government would appear all the more innocent as the fiercely Bolshevik sentiments of the Ural Soviet were widely known.

Thus, Sverdlov was betraying both the Germans and his own agent Yakovlev, who was not in on Sverdlov's scheme. With his right hand, Sverdlov was directing Yakovlev, urging him to skirt Ekaterinburg and bring the Tsar to Moscow; with his left hand, he was closing the net tighter around Yakovlev to ensure that Nicholas would go to Ekaterinburg. Finally, to complete this circle of deception, it is possible that Yakovlev, beginning the game as Sverdlov's dupe, began to guess what was afoot and actually did attempt to escape with the Tsar to freedom.

In the end, once his train had been stopped, Yakovlev had no choice but to obey Sverdlov. Followed by another train filled with Bolshevik soldiers, he proceeded into Ekaterinburg. There, the train was surrounded by troops, and officials of the Regional Soviet immediately took charge of the captives. Yakovlev wired again to Sverdlov, who confirmed his order to give up the prisoners and return directly to Moscow. That night, at a meeting of the Regional Soviet, Yakovlev's arrest was demanded. He argued that he had been attempting only to follow orders and bring his charges to Moscow as directed. As this could not be disproved and Yakovlev was still plainly a deputy of Sverdlov, he was allowed to go. Six months later, he deserted to the White Army of Admiral Kolchak.

Mirbach, realizing that he had been outwitted, was furious. Sverdlov was deeply apologetic, wringing his hands and telling the German Ambassador, "What can we do? We have no proper administrative machinery as yet, and must let the local Soviets have their way in many matters. Give Ekaterinburg time to calm down." But Mirbach, knowing that this game

was lost, decided to try another tack. Later, in May, one of the Kaiser's aides-de-camp appeared in the Crimea, where a scattering of Russian grand dukes had gathered. With him, this officer carried an offer from the Kaiser to proclaim Tsar of all the Russias any member of the Imperial family who would agree to countersign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. When every Romanov près-

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ent refused, the German emissary even asked for a meeting with Felix Yussoupov. The meeting never took place and Rasputin's murderer was spared the temptation of visualizing on his own head the Russian Imperial Crown.

Mirbach wasted no more time on Nicholas. When the Russian monarchists came back to him in June, imploring him to save the Tsar from his captors in Ekaterinburg, Mirbach washed his hands, declaring, "The fate of the Russian Emperor is in the hands of his people. Had we been defeated, we would have been treated no better. It is the old, old story—woe to the vanquished!"

Woe indeed! Early in July, Mirbach was assassinated in his Embassy in Moscow. His murderers were two Russian Social-Revolutionaries who were convinced that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had betrayed the revolution to the Germans: "The dictatorship of the proletariat," they cried, "has become the dictatorship of Mirbach!" Four months later, in November 1918, Germany itself was vanquished.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Ekaterinburg

The city of Ekaterinburg lies on a cluster of low hills on the eastern slope of the Urals. Atop the highest of these hills, near the center of town, a successful merchant named N. N. Ipatiev had built himself a handsome, two-story house. Constructed into a slight incline on the side of the hill, the lower story was at street level on one side of the house and became a semi-

basement on the other. At the end of April, as Nicholas and Alexandra were being taken from Tobolsk, Ipatiev was suddenly given twenty-four hours to vacate his house. After he left, a group of workmen arrived and hurriedly erected a high wooden fence shutting off the house and garden from the street. Five rooms on the upper floor were sealed as a prison, with the glass on the windows painted white so that those inside could not see out. The lower floor was hastily converted into guardrooms and offices. When it was ready, the house was given the ominous official designation "The House of Special Purpose."

As Yakovlev's train bearing the captives arrived in the city's main railway station, the mood of Ekaterinburg was all too evident. An angry mob surged around the coaches, shouting, "Show us the Romanovs!" So threatening did the crowd become that even the officials of the local Soviet agreed to let Yakovlev move the train back to an outer station before handing over his prisoners. Nicholas stepped out, wearing an officer's greatcoat with the epaulets removed, and carried his own luggage to a waiting car. Then, with Alexandra and Marie beside him, followed by only one other car, he was driven quickly through back streets to the Ipatiev house. There at the door stood Isiah Goloshchekin, a member of the Presidium of the Ural Soviet and personal friend of Sverdlov. Goloshchekin greeted the Tsar ironically: "Citizen Romanov, you may enter." At once, the captives were ordered to open their hand luggage.

Nicholas was willing, but the Empress objected. Seeing his wife upset, Nicholas paced up and down the room, saying bitterly, "So far we have had polite treatment and men who were gentlemen, but now . . ." The guards cut him short. Roughly, they told him to remember that he was no longer at Tsarskoe Selo, and that if he continued to act provocatively, they would isolate him from his family. A second offense, they warned, would result in hard labor. Frightened for him, Alexandra quickly submitted. Upstairs in their new room, she took a pencil and drew on a window a swastika as a symbol of faith. Beneath, she added the date of their first day in Ekaterinburg, "17/30 Apr. 1918."

In Tobolsk, meanwhile, the remaining four children waited anxiously to hear what had happened to their parents. On May 3, a telegram to Kobylinsky announced that the Tsar and Empress had been detained at Ekaterinburg. Soon after, a letter from Ekaterinburg, written by the maid Demidova but dictated by the Empress, said non-committally that all were well and advised the Grand Duchesses to "dispose of the medicines as had been agreed." In the code worked out by the family before separating, "medicines" meant "jewels." All of the gems brought from Tsarskoe Selo had been left in Tobolsk, as Nicholas and Alexandra, leaving on hours' notice, had had no time to hide them on their own persons. Now, having been thoroughly and roughly searched, Alexandra was advising her daughters to take the steps agreed on. Accordingly, for several days the girls and trusted servants sewed jewels into their clothing. Diamonds were sewed inside cloth buttons, rubies were hidden inside bodices and corsets. Tatiana, rather than Olga, supervised this work. She was regarded by prisoners and guards alike as head of the family remaining in Tobolsk.

The Bolsheviks had no intention of leaving the family separated. On May 11, Colonel Kobylinsky, who had held his command for twelve difficult months, was relieved, and on May 17, the soldiers of the Tsarskoe Selo regiments acting as guard on the governor's house were replaced by Red Guards from Ekaterinburg. Kobylinsky's place was taken by a bullying young commissar named Rodionov, whose orders were to bring the remainder of the party to Ekaterinburg as soon as the Tsarevich could travel. When Rodionov arrived, he went immediately to see Alexis. Finding the boy in bed, Rodionov stepped out of the room, waited a minute and then reentered, thinking to catch him up, using his malady as a pretext for not moving. Determined not to let anyone deceive him, Rodionov instituted daily roll-call of all the prisoners. He refused to allow the young Grand Duchesses to lock their doors at night, explaining that he had to be able to enter at any

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time to make certain that they were there. One morning, Anastasia came to the window and seeing Dr. Botkin's son Gleb in the street below, began to wave. Rodionov dashed into the street and pushed Gleb away, shouting,

"Nobody is permitted to look at the windows! Comrades," he cried to the sentries, "shoot everybody who so much as looks in this direction." Anastasia continued to smile as Gleb bowed to her and walked away.

By May 19, Alexis was well enough to travel, and at noon the following day, Nagorny carried him aboard the steamer *Rus*, which had brought them to Tobolsk the previous summer. On the river voyage, Rodionov again refused to permit the girls to lock their doors at night. He insisted, nevertheless, on padlocking Alexis and Nagorny into their room. Both Gilliard and Nagorny protested, "The child is ill and the doctor ought to have access to him at any time." Nagorny was enraged and bellowed at Rodionov, but the commissar merely stared with slitted eyes at the loyal sailor.

At the Tyumen railway station, Gilliard was separated from Alexis and placed in a fourth-class carriage at the rear of the train. They traveled all day and reached Ekaterinburg in the middle of the night. The following morning, looking out his window through a steady drizzle of rain, the tutor had a last glimpse of the Imperial children:

"Several carriages were drawn up alongside our train and I saw four men go towards the children's carriage. A few minutes passed and then Nagorny the sailor . . . passed my window carrying the sick boy in his arms; behind him came the Grand Duchesses, loaded with valises and small personal belongings. I tried to get out but was roughly pushed back into the carriage by the sentry. I came back to the window. Tatiana Nicolaievna came last, carrying her little dog and struggling to drag a heavy brown valise. It was raining and I saw her feet sink into the mud at every step. Nagorny tried to come to her assistance; he was roughly pushed back by one of the commissars. ... A few minutes later the carriages drove off with the children. . . . How little I suspected that I was never to see them again."

Once the children and Nagorny had disappeared, the guards divided up the rest of the party. General Tatishchev, Countess Hendrikov and Mlle. Schneider were sent to prison to join Prince Dolgoruky, who had been there since arriving with the Tsar. Kharitonov the cook, Trup the footman, and

Leonid Sednev the fourteen-year-old kitchen boy were sent to join the Imperial family and Dr. Botkin in the Ipatiev house. When these people had gone, Rodionov entered the coach and announced, to their amazement that everyone else—Dr. Derevenko, Baroness Buxhoeveden, Sidney Gibbs and Gilliard him-

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self—were free. For ten days, they remained in Ekaterinburg, living in the fourth-class railway carriage, until ordered by the Bolsheviks to leave the city. On July 20, in Tyumen, Gilliard and the others were rescued by the advancing White Army.

At the Ipatiev house, the children's arrival brought a burst of happiness. Marie slept that night on the floor so that Alexis could have her bed. Thereafter, twelve people were crowded into five rooms. Nicholas, Alexandra and Alexis shared a room, the girls had another, and the rest were divided between the male and female retainers.

In Ekaterinburg, Nicholas and his family were truly prisoners. Their guards were divided into two quite separate groups. Outside the fence and at intervals along the street, the guard consisted of ordinary Red soldiers. Inside, the guards were Bolshevik shock troops made up of former workers from the Zlokazovsky and Syseretsky factories in Ekaterinburg. All were old, hard-core revolutionaries, seasoned by years of privation and bitterness. Night and day, three of these men, armed with revolvers, kept watch outside the five rooms occupied by the Imperial family.

The leader of the inner guard was a tall, thin-faced man who habitually referred to the Tsar as "Nicholas the Blood-Drinker." Alexander Avadeyev had been a commissar at the Zlokazovsky works, where in the autumn of 1917 he personally had arrested the owner and had become head of the factory Soviet. Avadeyev hated the Tsar and dinned into the heads of his subordinates that Nicholas had forced Russia into war in order to spill the blood of larger numbers of workers. Avadeyev drank heavily and encouraged his men to join him. Together, they pilfered the Imperial family's baggage, which was stored in a downstairs room. Following Avadeyev's example, the guards went beltless and unbuttoned. They were

deliberately rude. If a member of the family asked, for example, that a window be opened on a sweltering day, the guards either ignored the request or transmitted it to Avadeyev, whose customary response was, "Let them go to hell." Then, pleased with themselves, they would go downstairs and brag that they had just refused this or that to "Nikolasha" and "the German woman." The family had no privacy. The guards entered the rooms whenever they liked, swearing, telling dirty jokes or singing lewd ditties. When the girls went to the lavatory, the soldiers followed with loud guffaws to "guard" them. Inside the lavatory, they had scrawled obscene pictures depicting the Empress with

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Rasputin. Before one of the Grand Duchesses entered, the guard would tell her to be sure to notice.

Except for a walk in the garden every afternoon, family activity was limited to what could be done within the walls of their rooms. Nicholas and Alexandra read, the girls knitted and embroidered, and Alexis played in bed with a model of a ship. The Empress and her daughters often sang hymns to drown out the noise of the soldiers singing revolutionary songs around a piano on the floor below. Birthdays passed and were scarcely noticed: on May 19, Nicholas was fifty, and on May 25, Alexandra became forty-six.

Every morning, the family arose at eight and assembled for morning prayers. Breakfast was black bread and tea. The main meal arrived at two p.m., when soup and cutlets, sent from the local Soviet soup kitchen, were rewarmed and served by Kharitonov, the cook. They dined on a bare table lacking linen and silverware, and while they ate, Avadeyev and his men often came to watch. Sometimes, Avadeyev would reach past the Tsar, brushing Nicholas's face with his elbow, to fetch himself a piece of meat from the pot. "You've had enough, you idle rich," he would say. "There is enough for you, so I will take some myself."

Nagorny, whose arguments with Rodionov had already marked him, soon ran into more difficulty. The guards insisted that Alexis was to keep only one pair of boots. Nagorny insisted on two pairs, explaining that if one became wet, the Tsarevich needed a second as he was unable to walk

without shoes. Soon afterward, one of the guards noticed a thin gold chain hanging from Alexis's bed on which the boy had strung his collection of Holy Images. The man began to take the chain for himself, and Nagorny, outraged, stopped him. It was his last service to Alexis. He was immediately arrested. As he stepped out of the house surrounded by Red Guards, Gilliard, Dr. Derevenko and Gibbs happened to be walking past in the street. "Nagorny was going to the . . . carriage," wrote Gilliard. "He was just setting foot on the step with his hand on the side of the carriage when, raising his head, he saw us all there standing motionless a few yards from him. For a few seconds he looked fixedly at us, then without a single gesture that might have betrayed us, he took his seat. The carriages were driven off ... in the direction of the prison." Nagorny was put in the same cell with Prince George Lvov, the first Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, who had been sent to Ekaterinburg. Their time as cellmates was brief; four days later, Nagorny was taken out and shot.

With Nagorny gone, it became Nicholas's task to carry Alexis into the garden. There, the Tsar placed his son in a chair and Alexis sat quietly while the others walked back and forth under the eyes of the guards. In time, the sight of Nicholas and his family began to change the impressions of even these seasoned revolutionaries. "I have still an impression of them that will always remain in my soul," said Anatoly Yakimov, a member of the guard who was captured by the Whites. "The Tsar was no longer young, his beard was getting grey. . . . [He wore] a soldier's shirt with an officer's belt fastened by a buckle around his waist. The buckle was yellow ... the shirt was khaki color, the same color as his trousers and his old worn-out boots. His eyes were kind and he had altogether a kind expression. I got the impression that he was a kind, simple, frank and talkative person. Sometimes I felt that he was going to speak to me. He looked as if he would like to talk to us.

"The Tsaritsa was not a bit like him. She was severe looking and she had the appearance and manners of a haughty, grave woman. Sometimes we used to discuss them amongst ourselves and we decided that she was different and looked exactly like a Tsaritsa. She seemed older than the Tsar.

Grey hair was plainly visible on her temples and her face was not the face of a young woman. . . .

"All my evil thoughts about the Tsar disappeared after I had stayed a certain time amongst the guards. After I had seen them several times I began to feel entirely different towards them; I began to pity them. I pitied them as human beings. I am telling you the entire truth. You may or may not believe me, but I kept on saying to myself, 'Let them escape ... do something to let them escape.' "

In the few days before Pierre Gilliard was forced to leave Ekaterinburg, he, along with Gibbs and Baroness Buxhoeveden, paid frequent calls on Thomas H. Preston, the British Consul in Ekaterinburg, urging him to do something to help the Imperial family. Preston was pessimistic.

"We spent long hours discussing ways and means of saving the royal family," said Preston later. "With 10,000 Red soldiers in the town and with Red spies at every corner and in every house, to have attempted anything in the nature of an escape would have been madness and fraught with the greatest danger to the royal family themselves. . . . There was never any organized attempt at Ekaterinburg to do so."

Preston's statement has been disputed by P. M. Bykov, Chairman of the Ekaterinburg Soviet, who saw a monarchist behind every tree. "From the first days of the Romanovs' transfer to Ekaterinburg," he

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wrote, "there began to flock in monarchists in great numbers, beginning with half-crazy ladies, countesses and baronesses of every calibre and ending with nuns, clergy, and representatives of foreign powers." According to Bykov, contact between these persons and the Imperial family was maintained through Dr. Derevenko, who was still allowed to enter the Ipatiev house to treat Alexis. In addition, Bykov said, notes were intercepted inside loaves of bread and bottles of milk, containing messages such as: "The hour of liberation is approaching and the days of the usurpers are numbered," "The Slav armies are coming nearer and nearer

Ekaterinburg. . . . The time has come for action," "Your friends sleep no longer."

Preston knew nothing of attempts to rescue the Tsar, and Bykov found plots seething on every corner. Almost certainly, the truth was that there were people anxious to rescue the Imperial family who were never able to put their intentions into a workable plan. Two letters of reasonable authenticity supporting this view are quoted by General M. K. Dieterichs, Chief-of-Staff of Admiral Kolchak's White Army, who assisted in the subsequent exhaustive White inquiry into the Tsar's imprisonment and murder. The first letter was a message from an anonymous White officer to the Tsar:

"With God's help and your prudence we hope to achieve our object without running any risk. It is necessary to unfasten one of your windows, so that you can open it; please let me know exactly which. If the little Tsarevich cannot walk, matters will be very complicated, but we have weighed this up too, and I do not consider it an insurmountable obstacle. Let us know definitely whether you need two men to carry him and whether any of you could undertake this work. Could not the little one be put to sleep for an hour or two with some drug? Let the doctor decide, only you must know the time exactly beforehand. We will supply all that is necessary. Be sure that we shall undertake nothing unless we are absolutely certain of success beforehand. We give you our solemn pledge of this before God, history and our own conscience." The letter was signed: "Officer."

The second letter quoted by Dieterichs is Nicholas's reply:

"The second window from the corner, looking out onto the square, has been kept open for two days already, even at night. The seventh and eight windows near the main entrance . . . are likewise kept open. The room is occupied by the commandant and his assistants who constitute the inner guard at the present time. They number thirteen, armed with rifles, revolvers and grenades. No room but ours has keys. The commandant and their assistants can enter our quarters whenever they please. The orderly officer makes the round of the

house twice an hour at night and we hear his arms clattering under our windows. One machine gun stands on the balcony and one above it, for an emergency. Opposite our windows on the other side of the street is the [outside] guard in a little house. It consists of fifty men. ... In any case, inform us when there is a chance and let us know whether we can take our people [servants]. . . . From every post there is a bell to the commandant and a signal to the guard room and other places. If our people stay behind, can we be certain that nothing will happen to them?"

Along with the letters, Nicholas's diary clearly indicates that something was up. On June 27, he wrote: "We spent an anxious night, and kept up our spirits, fully dressed. All this was because a few days ago we received two letters, one after the other, in which we were told to get ready to be rescued by some devoted people, but days passed and nothing happened and the waiting and the uncertainty were very painful."

On July 4, uncertainty was replaced by fear. On that day, Ava-deyev, whose drunkenness and thieving had become well known, was suddenly replaced along with his factory-worker guards. Their places were taken by a quietly efficient squad of ten "Letts" of the Bolshevik Cheka, or Secret Police, sent from Cheka headquarters in Ekaterinburg's Hotel America. In fact, the new men were not Letts, as uneducated Russians tended to call any foreigners who spoke in strange Germanic tongues. At least five of them were Magyars, taken as prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian army and hired by the Cheka for use in jobs at which they suspected native Russians might balk. Their leader, Jacob Yurovsky, was a Russian who had been a watchmaker in Tomsk and had become a photographic dealer in Ekaterinburg. When the Bolsheviks seized power, he became an active, efficient member of the secret police. Although Yurovsky's behavior was entirely correct, he was so chillingly cold that Nicholas immediately found him sinister. "This specimen we like least of all," he wrote in his diary. His apprehension was thoroughly justified. From the moment of Yurovsky's appearance, the fate of the Imperial family was sealed. The Cheka squad were not guards, but executioners.

Of everything that was to follow, Sverdlov and Moscow had full knowledge. Avadeyev had been replaced not only because of his pilfering, but because members of the Regional Soviet and the Central Executive Committee had sensed the change in the feelings of his men for the prisoners and realized that he was losing control. On

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July 4, the reassuring news of his replacement was telegraphed to Sverdlov: "Anxiety unnecessary. Useless to worry. . . . Avadeyev replaced by Yurovsky. Inside guard changed, replaced by others." The planning of the prisoners' fate now moved swiftly forward.

The Ural Soviet had never been in any doubt as to what to do with Nicholas. Soon after his arrival in Ekaterinburg, the Soviet decided unanimously in favor of execution. Unwilling to take this responsibility upon themselves, they sent Goloshchekin to Moscow to learn the attitude of the central government. Goloshchekin was not a local Ekaterinburg man. Born in the Baltic provinces, he was a professional revolutionary who had escaped abroad and attached himself to Lenin. He knew Sverdlov well and while in Moscow stayed with him. Goloshchekin learned on his visit that the leaders had not yet decided what to do with the Tsar; they were still toying with Trotsky's idea of holding a public trial at the end of July with Trotsky himself as prosecutor.

Before this could be arranged, however, there was a sudden dip in Bolshevik fortunes which, ironically, was to have a disastrous effect on the prisoners' fate. Civil war and foreign intervention had begun to challenge Boshevism's feeble grip on Russia. Already American marines and British soldiers had landed at Murmansk. In the Ukraine, Generals Alexeiev, Kornilov and Deniken had organized a White Volunteer Army in cooperation with the fiercely independent Don Cossacks. In Siberia, an independent Czech Legion of forty-five thousand men was advancing westward. They had taken Omsk and were moving rapidly toward Tyumen and Ekaterinburg. The Czechs were former prisoners of war taken from the Austro-Hungarian army, reorganized and equipped by Kerensky to fight on the Russian front for the freedom of their homeland. When the Bolsheviks

arrived and made peace, Trotsky had agreed that the stranded Czechs be permitted to leave Russia by way of Siberia, Vladivostock and the Pacific to sail around the world to France and there resume the fight. The Czechs were already in Siberia headed eastward in a string of trains on the Trans-Siberian Railroad when the German General Staff vigorously objected to their passage and demanded that the Bolsheviks block and disarm them. The Bolsheviks tried, but the Czechs fought back. Already a formidable force in that chaotic arena, the Czechs were strengthened by anti-Bolshevik Russian officers and soldiers. It was the rapidly mounting threat of this advancing army which forced the Bolsheviks to abandon their thoughts of a show trial of the former Tsar and make other plans for Nicholas and his family.

On July 12, Goloshchekin returned from Moscow and appeared

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before the Ural Soviet to declare that the party leaders were willing to leave the fate of the Romanovs in their hands. The commander of the Red military forces was asked how long Ekaterinburg could hold out against the Whites. He reported that the Czechs already had outflanked the city from the south, and that Ekaterinburg might fall within three days. Upon hearing this, the Ural Soviet decided to shoot the entire family as soon as possible and to destroy all evidence of the act.

Yurovsky was given this order on the 13th, and at once preparations for the massacre began. For the next three days, Yurovsky and Golosh-chekin made trips into the woods around the city, looking for a place to hide the remains. Fourteen miles from Ekaterinburg, near the village of Koptyaki, they discovered a suitable site: an abandoned mine shaft close to four lonely pine trees known to the peasants as the "Four Brothers." At the same time, Voikov, another member of the Ural Soviet, began buying drums containing 150 gallons of gasoline and 400 pounds of sulfuric acid.

The prisoners quickly sensed the change in mood. Yurovsky was not the drunken bully that Avadeyev had been. He did not rant about "Bloody Nicholas" and appeared to have no strong feelings about his captives. He was a professional; they were simply his next assignment. Two women who

came to the house to scrub the floors saw Yurovsky sitting and asking the Tsarevich about his health. Earlier that same day, Yurovsky had been at the "Four Brothers" supervising preparations.

The great change in the family's attitude these last days was noted by an Ekaterinburg priest who had been permitted once before to enter the House of Special Purpose to read the service. On his first visit, at the end of May, he noticed that although the Empress seemed tired and ill, Nicholas and his daughters were in good spirits. Alexis, although unable to walk, had been carried to the service on a cot. He seemed happy, and when Father Storozhov approached with the crucifix, the boy looked up at him with bright, merry eyes. On July 14, when the priest returned, the change was marked. The family appeared extremely anxious and depressed. When the deacon sang the prayer "At Rest with the Saints," the family knelt and one of the girls sobbed openly. This time, when the crucifix was brought to Alexis, the priest found him pale and thin, lying in a white nightshirt with a blanket covering him up to the waist. His eyes, looking up, were still clear, but sad and distracted.

On July 16, the day of the murder, Yurovsky ordered the kitchen \ boy sent away from the house. At four in the afternoon, the Tsar and

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his four daughters went for their usual walk in the garden. At seven p.m., Yurovsky summoned all the Cheka men into his room and ordered them to collect all the revolvers from the outside guards. With twelve heavy military revolvers lying before him on the table, he said, "Tonight, we will shoot the whole family, everybody. Notify the guards outside not to be alarmed if they hear shots."

The decision was carefully hidden from the family. That night, at 10:30, they went innocently to bed. At midnight, Yurovsky awakened them, telling them to dress quickly and come downstairs. He explained that the Czechs and the White Army were approaching Ekaterinburg and that the Regional Soviet had decided that they must be moved. Still unsuspecting, the family dressed and Nicholas and Alexis put on their military caps. Nicholas came down the stairs first, carrying Alexis. The sleepy boy had his arms tightly

around his father's neck. The others followed, with Anastasia clutching the spaniel Jimmy. On the ground floor, Yurovsky led them to a small semi-basement room, sixteen by eighteen feet, with a heavy iron grill over the window. Here, he asked them to wait until the automobiles arrived.

Nicholas asked for chairs so that his wife and son could sit while they waited. Yurovsky ordered three chairs brought and Alexandra took one. Nicholas took another, using his arm and shoulder to support Alexis, who lay back across the third chair. Behind their mother stood the four girls and Dr. Botkin, the valet Trupp, the cook Khari-tonov and Demidova, the Empress's parlormaid. Demidova carried two pillows, one of which she placed in the chair behind the Empress's back. The other pillow she clutched tightly. Inside, sewed deep into the feathers, was a box containing a collection of the Imperial jewels.

When all were assembled, Yurovsky reentered the room, followed by his entire Cheka squad carrying revolvers. He stepped forward and declared quickly, "Your relations have tried to save you. They have failed and we must now shoot you."

Nicholas, his arm still around Alexis, began to rise from his chair to protect his wife and son. He had just time to say "What ... ?" before Yurovsky pointed his revolver directly at the Tsar's head and fired. Nicholas died instantly. At this signal, the entire squad of executioners began to shoot. Alexandra had time only to raise her hand and make the sign of the cross before she too was killed by a single bullet. Olga, Tatiana and Marie, standing behind their mother, were hit and died quickly. Botkin, Kharitonov and Trupp also fell in the hail of bullets. Demidova, the maid, survived the first volley, and rather than reload, the executioners took rifles from the next room

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and pursued her, stabbing with bayonets. Screaming, running back and forth along the wall like a trapped animal, she tried to fend them off with the cushion. At last she fell, pierced by bayonets more than thirty times. Jimmy the spaniel was killed when his head was crushed by a rifle butt.

The room, filled with the smoke and stench of gunpowder, became suddenly quiet. Blood was running in streams from the bodies on the floor. Then there was a movement and a low groan. Alexis, lying on the floor still in the arms of the Tsar, feebly moved his hand to clutch his father's coat. Savagely, one of the executioners kicked the Tsarevich in the head with his heavy boot. Yurovsky stepped up and fired two shots into the boy's ear. Just at that moment, Anastasia, who had only fainted, regained consciousness and screamed. With bayonets and rifle butts, the entire band turned on her. In a moment, she too lay still. It was ended.

Epilogue

The bodies were wrapped in sheets and placed in a truck outside the cellar. Before dawn, the vehicle with its sickening cargo reached the "Four Brothers" and the process of dismembering and destroying the bodies began. Each body was carefully cut into pieces with axes and saws, then placed in a bonfire kept burning fiercely with frequent soakings of gasoline. As the ax blades cut into the clothing, many of the jewels sewed inside were crushed, and the fragments spilled out into the high grass or were ground into the mud. As expected, many of the larger bones resisted fire and had to be dissolved with sulfuric acid. The process was neither easy nor quick; for three days, Yurovsky's ghouls labored at their macabre work. Finally, the ashes and residue were thrown into the pool of water at the bottom of the mine shaft. So satisfied were the murderers that they had obliterated all traces that Voikov, the member of the Ural Soviet who purchased the gasoline and acid, proudly declared, "The world will never know what we did with them." Later Voikov became Soviet Ambassador to Poland.

Eight days after the murder, Ekaterinburg fell to the advancing Whites, and a group of officers rushed to the Ipatiev house. In the courtyard, half famished, they found the Tsarevich's spaniel Joy, wandering about as if in search of his master. The house itself was empty, but its appearance was sinister. The basement room had been thoroughly mopped and scrubbed, but the walls and floors bore the scratches and scars of bullets and bayonets. From the wall against which the family had been standing, large pieces of

plaster had fallen away. It was obvious that some kind of massacre had taken place in the room. But it was impossible to tell how many victims there had been. An immediate search for the family led nowhere. Not until the fol-

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lowing January" (1919) did a thorough investigation begin when Admiral Kolchak, "Supreme Ruler" of the White government in Siberia, selected Nicholas Sokolov, a trained legal investigator, to undertake the task. Sokolov, assisted by both of the Tsarevich's tutors, Gilliard and Gibbs, located the mine and uncovered a wealth of tragic evidence. For Gilliard, especially, the work was excruciating. "But the children—the children?" he cried when Sokolov first told him of the preliminary findings. "The children have suffered the same fate as their parents," replied Sokolov sadly. "There is not a shadow of doubt in my mind on that point."

Before the investigation was concluded, hundreds of articles and fragments had been collected, identified and catalogued. Even the heart-broken Gilliard was convinced. Among the objects collected were these: the Tsar's belt buckle; the Tsarevich's belt buckle; an emerald cross given to the Empress Alexandra by the Dowager Empress Marie; a pearl earring from a pair always worn by Alexandra; the Ulm Cross, a jubilee badge adorned with sapphires and diamonds, presented by Her Majesty's Own Uhlan Guards; and fragments of a sapphire ring which had become so tight on Nicholas's finger that he could not take it off.

In addition, the investigators found a metal pocket case in which Nicholas always carried his wife's portrait; three small icons worn by the Grand Duchess (on each icon, the face of the saint had been destroyed by heavy blows); the Empress's spectacle case; six sets of women's corsets (the Empress, her four daughters and Demidova made exactly six); fragments of the military caps worn by Nicholas and Alexis; shoe buckles belonging to the Grand Duchesses; and Dr. Botkin's eyeglasses and false teeth.

There were also a number of charred bones, partly destroyed by acid but still bearing the mark of ax and saw; revolver bullets, many of which had been reduced by heat to molten blobs; and a severed human finger

belonging to a middle-aged woman. It was slender and manicured like the Empress's.

The investigators collected an assortment of nails, tinfoil, copper coins and a small lock which puzzled them until they were shown to Gilliard. He immediately identified them as part of the pocketful of odds and ends always carried by the Tsarevich. Finally, mangled but unburned, the little corpse of the spaniel Jimmy was found at the bottom of the pit. For some reason, the murderers had taken great care to destroy the bodies of the owners, but had ignored the still recognizable body of their pet.

Later, to confirm this evidence, the Whites added the depositions

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of captured members of the guard at the House of Special Purpose, who described the execution. Later still, Sokolov's findings were fully confirmed from the Bolshevik side by P. M. Bykov, Chairman of the Ekaterinburg Soviet.

Within a few hours of the murder, a report was telegraphed to Moscow. On July 18, the Presidium of the Central Executive Council approved the action. That night, as the Commissar of Health was reading a draft of a new public-health law to the Council of People's Commissars, Sverdlov came into the hall and whispered to Lenin, who interrupted the speaker.

"Comrade Sverdlov wants to make a statement," said Lenin.

"I have to say," declared Sverdlov, "that we have had a communication that at Ekaterinburg, by a decision of the Regional Soviet, Nicholas has been shot. The Presidium has resolved to approve."

A hush fell over the room.

Then Lenin spoke up calmly: "Let us now go on to read the draft [of the health law] clause by clause."

Although only Nicholas's name was publicly mentioned, Lenin and Sverdlov knew that the entire family was dead. In their haste to evacuate Ekaterinburg, the Bolsheviks left behind the tapes of several telegrams exchanged with the Kremlin after the murder. "Tell Sverdlov," said one, "that the whole family met the same fate as its head. Officially, the family will perish during the evacuation." Another message asked how Moscow wished the news to be broken. Apparently the Bolshevik leaders decided that one murder was enough to announce at that time, and on July 20, the official proclamation mentioned only Nicholas. It came in the form of an announcement by the Ural Soviet with an endorsement by the Central Executive Committee:

DECISION

of the Presidium of the Divisional Council of Deputies of Workmen, Peasants, and Red Guards of the Urals:

In view of the fact that Czechoslovakian bands are threatening the Red Capital of the Urals, Ekaterinburg; that the crowned executioner may escape from the tribunal of the people (a White Guard Plot to carry off the whole Imperial family has just been discovered) the Presidium of the Divisional Committee in pursuance of the will of the people, has decided that the ex-Tsar Nicholas Romanov, guilty before the people of innumerable

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bloody crimes, shall be shot.

The decision of the Presidium of the Divisional Council was carried into execution on the Night of July 16th-17th.

Romanov's family has been transferred from Ekaterinburg to a place of greater safety.

Moscow's endorsement was worded:

DECISION

of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of all the Russias of July 18th:

The Central Executive Committee of the Councils of Deputies of Workmen, Peasants, Red Guards and Cossacks, in the person of their president, approve the action of the Presidium of the Council of the Urals.

The President of the Central Executive Committee

Sverdlov

A year later, unable to maintain their fiction, the Bolsheviks admitted that the entire family was dead. They still did not admit their own responsibility for the murders. Instead, they arrested and brought to trial twenty-eight people, all Social Revolutionaries, who, it was charged, had murdered the Tsar in order to discredit the Bolsheviks. Five of the defendants were executed. The hypocrisy of this second crime was later admitted by the Bolsheviks themselves in Bykov's book.

The link between the party leaders in Moscow who authorized the murder and the Ural Soviet which determined the time and method of execution was later described by Trotsky. He explained that he had proposed a public trial to be broadcast by radio throughout the country, but before anything could come of it, he had to leave for the front.

"My next visit to Moscow took place after the fall of Ekaterinburg. Talking to Sverdlov, I asked in passing: 'Oh, yes, and where is the Tsar?'

" 'It's all over,' he answered. 'He has been shot.'

" 'And where is the family?'

" 'And the family along with him.'

" 'All of them?' I asked, apparently with a touch of surprise.

" 'All of them,' replied Sverdlov. 'What about it?' He was waiting to see my reaction, I made no reply.

" 'And who made the decision?' I asked.

" 'We decided it here. Ilyich believed that we shouldn't leave the

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Whites a live banner to rally around, especially under the present difficult circumstances.'

"I did not ask any further questions and considered the matter closed. Actually, the decision was not only expedient but necessary. The severity of this summary justice showed the world that we would continue to fight on mercilessly, stopping at nothing. The execution of the Tsar's family was needed not only in order to frighten, horrify, and dishearten the enemy, but also in order to shake up our own ranks to show that there was no turning back, that ahead lay either complete victory or complete ruin. . . . This Lenin sensed well."

The ruthlessness of Lenin's logic had an effect on many in the world who remained uncertain as to the nature of Bolshevism. Wood-row Wilson, still struggling to keep his idealism about the course of events in Russia, heard the news of the murder while at dinner in the home of his Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane. Rising from the table, the President declared that "a great menace to the world has taken shape." He added that he was sure everyone present would share his view that "it was not the time for gaiety." The dinner party broke up immediately.

The same ruthless logic dictated the murder of every member of the Romanov family on whom the Bolsheviks could lay their hands. Grand Duke Michael, the Tsar's younger brother, was shot in Perm six days before Nicholas's death in Ekaterinburg. On July 17, the day after the murder of the Tsar, an Imperial party including the Empress's sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth, Grand Duke Serge Mikhailovich, three sons of Grand Duke Constantine and a son of Grand Duke Paul were brutally murdered. Grand Duchess Elizabeth had refused all offers of security and escape. In March

1917, the Provisional Government had asked her to leave her abbey and take refuge in the Kremlin, but she refused. In 1918, the Kaiser tried several times, first through the Swedish Embassy and then through Mirbach, to bring the woman he once had loved to shelter in Germany. Again, Ella refused. Moved by the Bolsheviks to the town of Alapayevsk in the Urals, she and the other victims were taken in peasant carts to the mouth of another abandoned mine shaft. They were thrown down the shaft still living, with heavy timbers and hand grenades thrown after them to complete the work. Not all of the victims were killed immediately, for a peasant who crept up to the pit after the murderers had left heard hymns being sung at the bottom of the shaft. In addition, when the bodies were removed by the Whites, the injured head of one of the boys was found

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to have been carefully bound with the Grand Duchess's handkerchief. In January 1919, four more grand dukes, including Paul, the Tsar's uncle, and Nicholas Mikhailovich, the liberal historian, were executed in the Fortress of Peter and Paul. On the basis of Nicholas Mikhailovich's historical reputation and his liberalism, Lenin's friend, the writer Maxim Gorky, pleaded that the life of this Grand Duke be spared. Lenin refused, declaring, "The Revolution does not need historians."

Ironically, within a very few years, the Revolution also did not need either Lenin or Trotsky. Lenin died in 1924 after a series of strokes already had removed him from power. Trotsky, exiled once again in 1927, later wrote that Lenin had been poisoned by Stalin, an accusation about which Lenin's biographers still argue. There is no question that Trotsky's own assassination by a pickax in the brain in Mexico City in 1940 was ordered by Stalin. It was Stalin who inherited the revolution and for thirty years ruled Russia more cruelly than any tsar since Ivan the Terrible. In January 1945, near the peak of his power, Stalin received his allies, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, at Yalta in the Crimea. The American party was housed in the Livadia Palace. Because the President was ill, the other two leaders came to him and the Yalta conference was held around a circular table in the state dining room where, thirty-four years earlier, Nicholas and Alexandra's daughter Olga had

appeared, flushed and fair, at her first ball to dance and celebrate her sixteenth birthday.

Jacob Sverdlov died within six months of the Ekaterinburg murder. The Bolshevik leaders gave pneumonia as his cause of death, although there were persistent rumors that he had been assassinated by a Moscow workman. In belated acknowledgment that it was Sverdlov who arranged the murder of the Imperial family, the town of Ekaterinburg was renamed Sverdlovsk. For years, the House of Special Purpose was kept as a Bolshevik museum and visitors were led down into the cellar where the family was shot. In 1959, a group of American correspondents accompanying Vice President Nixon's tour of Russia quietly visited the house. They found the museum had been closed, but the house, now a repository for the archives of the local Communist Party, was freshly painted in cream and white and brown. The basement room, they were told, was now occupied by dusty bins filled with old documents. In the decades since 1918, Sverdlovsk has grown from a small city to a huge, grimy coal and steel metropolis. It was over Sverdlovsk in May 1960 that the U-2 piloted by Francis Gary Powers was shot down.

The list of members of the Imperial family who escaped the Bolsheviks by leaving Russia was headed by the Tsar's mother, the Dowager Empress Marie Fedorovna. In April 1919, as the Red Army approached the Crimea, the seventy-two-year-old Empress left on board a British battleship, H.M.S. *Marlborough.* Marie rejected what she called the "rumors" of the Ekaterinburg murders and left Russia reluctantly only at the insistent urging of her sister Queen Alexandra of England and Alexandra's son, King George V. Returning to her native Denmark, the Empress lived in a wing of the royal palace of her nephew King Christian X. The King and his aunt disliked each other and argued over money. Marie had brought many of her jewels from Russia, and the King suggested that she sell or pawn them to pay her expenses. The Empress adamantly refused and kept the jewels in a box under her bed. In retaliation, King Christian subjected her to numerous petty humiliations. One night in 1920, as she sat with Grand Duchess Olga, one of the King's footmen entered the room. "His Majesty has sent me over

to ask you to switch off all these lights," he said. "His Majesty said to mention to you that the electricity bill he had to pay recently was excessive." The Dowager Empress paled and stared at the footman with stony eyes. Then, while the man still stood before her, she rang for her own servant and ordered him to light the palace from cellar to attic. In the end, the Empress's finances and dignity were saved by King George V, who forwarded a pension of £ 10,000 ($48,000) a year to his "dear Aunt Minnie." Marie never accepted the fact that Nicholas and his family were dead, although, contrary to general belief, she never met and interviewed any of the women who claimed to be her granddaughter Anastasia. In October 1928, the gay Danish Princess who had captivated Russia as the consort of the giant Tsar Alexander III died in Copenhagen at the age of eighty-one.

Marie's daughters, Grand Duchess Xenia and Grand Duchess Olga, also left Russia on board British warships. Xenia came to London, where her servants, upon first seeing King George V, fell on their knees and kissed the hem of his coat, believing him to be the Tsar miraculously resurrected. She lived her last twenty-five years in a "grace and favor" mansion provided by the British royal family and named—perhaps appropriately—Wilderness House. In i960, Xenia died at eighty-five. Olga, Nicholas IPs younger sister, lived quietly in Denmark until 1948, when she moved to a small farm outside Toronto, Canada. There, she lived in such peaceful obscurity that her rural neighbors were much surprised in 1959 when she was invited to lunch aboard the royal yacht *Britannia* with Queen Elizabeth and Prince

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Philip. In 1960, Olga became too ill to live alone and went to live with a Russian couple in an apartment over a barbershop in a poor section of East Toronto. There, in November 1960, seven months after her sister Xenia, she died at seventy-eight.

Among the Russian grand dukes who got away was the Tsar's first cousin Cyril. Ironically, although by leading the *Garde Equipage* to the Duma he was the first Romanov to break his allegiance to Nicholas II, Cyril was still the eldest son of the senior surviving branch of the family, and thereby he

became Nicholas's heir. In 1924, Cyril proclaimed himself "Tsar of all the Russias" and established his "court" in a village in Brittany. In 1930, he visited Paris for a "military review" of two thousand former officers of the Imperial Army in a forest outside the city. At Cyril's appearance, the officers shouted Cossack battle cries and yelled, "The day of glory is near!" Unfortunately for Cyril's cause, the Dowager Empress never recognized his title. He died at sixty-two in 1938 in the American Hospital in Paris. Today, Cyril's forty-nine-year-old son Vladimir, who lives in Madrid, is considered head of the House of Romanov.

Grand Duke Nicholas remained in the Crimea until 1919, when he left with the Dowager Empress aboard H.M.S. *Marlborough*. To many Russian émigrés, he seemed a more suitable pretender than Cyril, but the proud Grand Duke would have little to do with these maneuvers. When he died at Antibes in southern France in 1929, his funeral was attended with the elaborate military ceremony due a former commander-in-chief of one of the Allied armies.

For a while, another claimant to the nonexistent throne was Grand Duke Dmitry, whose life was saved by his banishment to Persia following Rasputin's murder. In 1926, Dmitry married an American heiress in Biarritz, and for a while in the 1930's he was a champagne salesman in Palm Beach, Florida. Unlike the other prominent murderers, Yussoupov and Purishkevich, he did not write a book and refused even to talk about his role in the assassination. Dmitry died of tuberculosis in 1941 at the age of fifty in Davos, Switzerland.

The Bolshevik toll of those who served the Tsar in one role or another was high. Countess Hendrikov and Mlle. Schneider, who shared the long captivity at Tsarskoe Selo and in Tobolsk, were executed in Siberia in September 1918. Prince Dolgoruky and General Tatishchev disappeared at the same time, but two bodies answering to their description were found. Baroness Buxhoeveden and Sidney Gibbs crossed Siberia and reached safety in England.

Of the Tsarist ministers, the aged Goremykin was caught by a Petrograd mob in 1918 and strangled on the spot. Sturmer and

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Protopopov were shot by the Bolsheviks. Kokovtsov and Sazonov escaped and went to live in France. Rodzianko, the Duma President, left Russia through the Crimea and died in 1924 in Belgrade, harassed to the end by Russian monarchists who blamed him for the overthrow of the monarchy. Purishkevich fought with the Whites in southern Russia and died there of typhus. Among the ministers of the Provisional Government, Prince Lvov, Miliukov and Guchkov all went to France, where they were active in anti-Bolshevik organizations.

Only two of Imperial Russia's leading World War generals left their homeland. These were the two arch-rivals Grand Duke Nicholas and Sukhomlinov. Alexeiev and Kornilov both died leading White armies, while Polivanov and Brusilov sided with the Bolsheviks. Brusilov, at least, saw this new allegiance as Russian patriotism. With the Allies landing troops in the Crimea, at Murmansk and at Vladivos-tock, with the Poles at the gates of Kiev and Smolensk, Brusilov declared, "The Poles are besieging Russian fortresses with the help of nations whom we rescued from certain defeat at the beginning of the war. With every drop of my blood, I wish success to the Red Army, so help me God." Sukhomlinov had no such patriotic feelings. In a sailboat, he escaped across the Gulf of Finland with his voluptuous wife and went to live in Berlin. Before he died in 1926, he wrote his memoirs, thoughtfully dedicating them to the Kaiser. William was so flattered that he proposed in turn to dedicate *his* memoirs to Sukhomlinov, but his publishers successfully suppressed this odd gesture. The youthful Mme. Sukhomlinov was not present to assist in her elderly husband's literary effort. Having seen him safely to Finland, she divorced him and returned to Russia to marry a young Georgian officer. They died together in the Bolshevik terror.

Buchanan and Paléologue both were transferred from Russia after the revolution to other diplomatic assignments, but for each, the years in the beautiful capital on the Neva remained the crown of his career. Buchanan

became Ambassador in Rome, where his last years were troubled by those who alleged that in the spring and summer of 1917 he had not done enough to help Nicholas and his family escape. Paléologue returned to Paris to become a senior official of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was elected to the Académie Française. He died in August 1944, just as his beloved Paris was liberated from the Germans.

The two dedicated officials of the Imperial court, Count Fredericks and Count Benckendorff, died only a few years after their Imperial master. Benckendorff painstakingly traced all rumors concerning the

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murder of the Imperial family and the disappearance of his stepson, Prince Dolgoruky. Only when he sincerely believed that all were dead did he attempt to leave Russia. He was held up by visa difficulties on the Estonian frontier and died in a dilapidated border-town hospital in 1921. Count Fredericks lived for a while in Petrograd, which was shortly to become Leningrad. Defiantly, he wore his fading gold court uniform in walks along the Nevsky Prospect. For the last year of his life, he was allowed to return to his native Finland, where he died in 1922 at the age of eighty-four.

Anna Vyrubova, after being taken by Kerensky from Tsarskoe Selo, was imprisoned for five months in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, released, then re-imprisoned several times, once in the stoker's quarters of the former Imperial yacht *Polar Star,* whose polished decks she had walked with the Empress. For a while, she lived in obscurity in Petrograd and even became friendly with the revolutionary writer Maxim Gorky, who urged her to write her memoirs. Finally, pursued again, she escaped to Finland in 1920. She lived there quietly for forty-four years until her death in 1964 at the age of eighty.

Pierre Gilliard remained in Siberia for three years, assisting in the work of Sokolov's investigation. With his wife, Alexandra Tegleva, who had been Grand Duchess Anastasia's nurse, he returned to Switzerland by way of Japan and the United States and there, in his early forties resumed the education interrupted almost twenty years before when he went to Russia. He became a noted Professor of the French language at the University of

Lausanne and was awarded the French Legion of Honor. To the end, through his writing and speaking, Gilliard defended the memory of the family he had served. He died in 1962 at eighty-three.

Iliodor, the fiery monk-priest who had been Rasputin's arch-foe, went back to Russia after the revolution with a quixotic plan to revamp the Orthodox Church to suit the Bolsheviks and make himself the new "Russian Pope." The Bolsheviks were uninterested, and in 1921, Iliodor came to New York City and became a Baptist. He lived in obscurity, working for a while as a janitor in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Building on Madison Square. In 1952, at the age of seventy-one, he died of heart trouble in Bellevue Hospital.

Maria Rasputin, the *starets's* eldest daughter, left Russia with her husband, Boris Soloviev, and became a lion-tamer. In the 1930's, she toured Europe and the United States, billed as "the daughter of the famous mad monk whose feats in Russia astonished the world." She now Uves in obscurity in Paris.

Now, in the winter of 1967, only a handful of the major characters

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in this immense historical drama remain alive. Mathilde Kschessinska, whose house was Lenin's headquarters in Petrograd, left Russia in 1920 and married Grand Duke Andrei at Cannes in 1921. For thirty years, she conducted a ballet studio in Paris, instructing, among many others, Margot Fonteyn. In 1936, at the age of sixty-three, she danced in a jubilee performance at Covent Garden. Today, the young ballerina who rode through the snowy nights in a *troika* beside Nicholas II still lives in Paris. She is ninety-four.

Prince Felix Yussoupov and his wife, Princess Irina, have lived mostly in Paris, where Yussoupov's generosity to other Russian émigrés has become legend. Two famous court cases have brought the Yussoupov name back into prominence. The first occurred in 1934, when Princess Irina sued Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for libel in London over a movie titled *Rasputin the Mad Monk.* The Yussoupovs won this case and MGM paid them $375,000.

In 1965, Prince Yussoupov came to New York City to sue the Columbia Broadcasting System for invasion of privacy over a television play depicting the murder of Rasputin. This time, the Yussoupovs lost. Today, at seventy-nine, Prince Yussoupov lives in the Paris district of Auteuil in a small house converted from a barn.

Alexander Kerensky has lived in London, Paris, Palo Alto, California, and New York City. In the near half-century since leaving Russia, he has written a series of books, most of them an impassioned retelling of the story of the brief, hectic seven months in which he stood at the center of Russian history. Today, still vigorous at eighty-five, he lives in New York City and Palo Alto.

It is impossible to trace exactly the course of one of the overwhelming influences in this drama: the defective gene which Queen Victoria passed to her descendants. Until recently, when plasma and powerful plasma concentrates become available, hemophilia, like other recessive hereditary diseases, tended to die out of afflicted families by the process of attrition. In Queen Victoria's enormous clan, this pattern has been followed. Among the fourth generation—the Queen's great-grandchildren—there were six hemophiliacs. Alexis was one of these. Two of the others were Crown Prince Alfonso and Prince Gonzalo, the sons of Alfonso XIII, the last king of Spain. Both brothers were killed as young men in automobile accidents, Gonzalo in Austria in 1934 and Alfonso in Miami in 1938. In both cases, except for uncontrolled hemorrhaging, their injuries would have been minor. The fifth generation of Victoria's family, which includes both Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, Prince Philip, has been free of hemophilia, as has the sixth. It is possible that the mutant gene may

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still exist in the carrier state among Queen Victoria's female descendants and could suddenly appear in a future boy. But with the passing of successive generations, that possibility, already distant, will become exceedingly remote.

There is a durable legend that an immense pile of Romanov gold lies somewhere in a sealed bank vault awaiting the arrival of any member of the

Tsar's immediate family who can positively identify himself or herself. The facts do little to support the legend. Nothing was left of the Imperial family's wealth inside Russia. Even before the Bolshevik Revolution, all the Romanov estates and properties were taken by the Provisional Government. When Nicholas abdicated, his personal capital in Russia amounted to a million roubles, or $500,000; the Empress's capital was one and a half million roubles, or $750,000. Portions of these sums were withdrawn by Count Benckendorff and used to pay the expenses of the Imperial family at Tobolsk; the rest was seized by the Bolsheviks. The jewelry belonging to the crown became the property of the state. Part of it was broken up and sold by the Soviet government; the residue makes up a dazzling permanent display in the Kremlin. Most of the personal jewelry taken by the Empress and her daughters to Tobolsk was discovered during the destruction of their bodies. The broken fragments later found by Sokolov were preserved as relics and later buried in the Russian cemetery outside Paris. Empress Marie's personal jewelry, once estimated at a value over $2 million, was sold after her death for a fraction of that sum. A number of pieces found their way into the collection of Queen Mary. Today, Queen Elizabeth II often wears the Empress Marie's spectacular diamond necklace and diamond tiara.

Before the First World War, the Russian Imperial family had deposits abroad, and it is here that many glowing expectations have been focused. There were funds in a bank in Berlin, but after the war, with the collapse of the mark in runaway inflation, the sum became insignificant. Today, there might be $1,500, but the bank is in East Berlin. The remaining hopes center on the Bank of England, but these too appear groundless. During the war, Nicholas and Alexandra devoted their private fortunes to the war effort. Deposits in England were withdrawn and brought back to Russia to help pay for the network of hospitals and hospital trains under the Empress's patronage. The money was transferred through the British Embassy in Petrograd; on August 26, 1915 (O.S.), Alexandra wrote to Nicholas:

"I see [Sir George] Buchanan tomorrow as he brings me again over 100,000 p. [pounds] from England." By the end of the war, there was nothing left.

In i960, the late Sir Edward Peacock, Director of the Bank of England from 1920 to 1924 and again from 1929 to 1946, discussed the question with a Canadian writer, Ian Vorres, who was collaborating with Grand Duchess Olga on her memoirs. Peacock had been personally instructed by King George V to look after his cousin Olga's financial affairs. From this vantage, he wrote:

"I am pretty sure there never was any money of the Imperial family of Russia in the Bank of England nor any other bank in England. Of course, it is difficult to say 'never' but I am positive at least there never was any money after World War I and during my long years as director of the bank,"

Nevertheless, despite all evidence to the contrary, the alluring idea that a lost fortune exists has continued to stimulate extraordinary activity. As in every case of the death of royal persons in mysterious circumstances, rumors persisted that some or all members of the Imperial family were still alive. In 1920, the Tsar himself was said to have been seen in the streets of London, his hair snow white. Another story placed him in Rome, secretly hidden in the Vatican by the Pope. The entire Imperial family was said to be aboard a ship, cruising eternally through the waters of the White Sea, never touching any land.

Over the years, dozens of claimants have stepped forward, proclaiming themselves this or that member of the Imperial family. The Tsarevich Alexis reappeared for the first time in Siberia soon after the murder. Gilliard saw him and found a young man who looked vaguely like Alexis but understood only Russian. Eventually, the boy admitted that he was an impostor. The pathetic story of Mrs. Anna Anderson's lifelong attempt to prove herself the Grand Duchess Anastasia has become world famous. Nevertheless, she has been challenged by numerous other Anastasias living in far corners of the globe. It was the fate of Grand Duchess Olga, who had been closer to her niece Anastasia than any other Romanov survivor, to meet many of these women. Occasionally, she met them willingly, as in Berlin in 1925 when she interviewed Mrs. Anderson and, after four days at her bedside, sadly pronounced her false. More often, the pretenders pursued Olga relentlessly and flung themselves upon her, loudly crying, "Dear Aunt Olga!" Olga

endured these intrusions, recognizing them as the inevitable consequence of public fascination with an exciting

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tale of miraculous escape from death. "My telling the truth does not help in the least," she once said, "because the public simply wants to believe the mystery."

Infinitely more remarkable and more fatefully enigmatic than the riddle of Anastasia is the awesome, overwhelming drama of the Russian Revolution itself. The rise of Communism, brought by Lenin to Russia, its rooting there and the spreading of its doctrines and power around the globe are the pivotal historical events of our time. Ironically, the two great Communist nations, Russia and China, are the only world powers with which the United States has never warred. The current struggle dividing the world is not over trade or territory, but over ideology. This is the legacy of Lenin.

And also the legacy of Rasputin and hemophilia. Kerensky once said, "If there had been no Rasputin, there would have been no Lenin." If this is true, it is also true that if there had been no hemophilia, there would have been no Rasputin. This is not to say that everything that happened in Russia and the world has stemmed entirely from the personal tragedy of a single boy. It is not to overlook the backwardness and restlessness of Russian society, the clamor for reform, the strain and battering of a world war, the gentle, retiring nature of the last Tsar. All of these had a powerful bruising impact on events. Even before the birth of the Tsarevich, autocracy was in retreat.

Here, precisely, is the point. Had it not been for the agony of Alexis's hemophilia, had it not been for the desperation which made his mother turn to Rasputin, first to save her son, then to save the pure autocracy, might not Nicholas II have continued retreating into the role of constitutional monarch so happily filled by his cousin King George V? It might have happened, and, in fact, it was in this direction that Russian history was headed. In 1905, the Russian people had had a partial revolution. Absolute power was struck from the hands of the Tsar with the creation of the Duma. In the era of Stolypin and the Third Duma, cooperation between the throne and parliament reached a level of high promise for the future. During the war,

the nation asked not for revolution but for reform—for a share of responsibility in fighting and winning the victory. But Alexandra, goaded by Rasputin, passionately objected to any sharing of the Imperial power. By giving way to his wife, by fighting to save the autocracy and denying every plea for responsible government, Nicholas made revolution and the eventual triumph of Lenin inevitable.

Why Lenin triumphed, why Nicholas failed, why Alexandra placed the fate of her son, her husband and his empire in the hands of a wandering holy man, why Alexis suffered from hemophilia—these are the true riddles of this historical tale. All of them have answers except, perhaps, the last.

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