

Konrad and Alexandra

The Chronicle of a Great Love

1898 - 1998

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Table of Contents

Click on the underlined links

1. Konrad's Watch 1969	36. The Summer of 1905 in Ca' Savio
2. Konrad Arrives in Georgia 1898	37. Snowbound in Eydtkuhnen, 1905
3. Tiflis 1898	38. Return to St. Petersburg, 1905
3. Alexandra Dadiani, Tiflis 1898	39. Exploring St. Petersburg 1905
4. Chekhov's "Chaika" Henri the Goldsmith	40. Sophia's Birth
5. Alexandra's Necklace	41. Uncle Mouravi's Benz
6. Georgia on Horseback	42. A Family Reunion, Tiflis 1907
7. The Engagement	43. Niko and Claudia's Wedding, Tiflis 1907
8. A Sufi Sema	44. The Dadiani Castle, Zugdidi 1907
9. Ilia Chavchavadze	45. Strange Happenings, Svaneti 1907
9. New Year 1899	46. Calling the Dead, Svaneti 1907
10. Alexandra's Abduction	47. Adishi, Gocha Teaching Dream Work
11. Easter at Zedazeni	48. Ilia Chavchavadse's Assassination 1907
12. The Last Feudal Wedding	49. Tamara and Vladimir, Alexandra and Helena
13. Venice 1899	50. Konrad Learns Chinese, 1910
14. Fiesole and Florence 1899	51. A Stunning Discovery, Paris 1981
15. St. Petersburg, The Summer Ball 1899	52. Alexandra in Paris, 1911
16. Alexandra Studies Medicine	53. Konrad in China, 1911-1912
17. Becky's Museum	54. Konrad's Return from China, 1912
18. Otto's Birth 1900	55. Alexandra's Journey to Munich, 1913
19. Vladimir 1904	56. Dahl's Examination of Alexandra, 1913
20. A Theosophists' Reception 1904	57. A visit to Kandinsky in Murnau 1913
21. Berlin 1904	58. Alexandra in Tiflis, Tamara's Quarrel 1913
22. Rheinsberg 1904	59. Revolutionary St. Petersburg, Winter 1913 - 1914
23. Munich 1904	60. The War Years, St. Petersburg 1914 - 1917

24. The Dahl's House, Katharina, 1904	61. Their Flight to Georgia, 1918
25. Claudia and Dioskorides, 1904	62. Tbilisi 1918
26. A Pilgrimage to Andechs	63. Alexandra at Forty, Tbilisi 1918
27. Steiner, Schoenberg and Kandinsky at the Dahls	64. German Troops in Tbilisi, 1918 - 1919
28. Music, Painting, and Psychology	65. A Visit to Tbilisi, 1982
29. Fashing, Munich 1905	66. Alexandra's Letters, 1983
30. Walking on Ice	67. A Concert in Kreuth, April 1989
31. Chamber Music 1905	A List of people in "Konrad and Alexandra"
32. Alexandra Learns to Drive Italy 1905	Sources
33. Fiesole 1905	
34. Alexandra's Time	
35. Meeting Clara Westhoff, 1905	

Konrad's Watch

Moscow, 1969

A heavy downpour drove me into a prominent shop on Moscow's October Square. People crowded at the glass display cases behind which robust salesladies dawdled in socialist apathy. A big English sign said, "*Russian Antiques*"—a high-brow pawnshop!

A motley array of old and new bric-a-brac filled the shelves, samovars, pots and pans, Russian lacquer boxes, second-hand clothing, art-nouveau bronzes, a life-sized statue of a Negro assembled from variously colored marble.

The people stared at the foreigner.

I had no intention of buying anything.

In the back of the store I found a wall covered with amateur paintings: a young woman reading on the verandah of a *dacha*, flower arrangements, a stand of white birches, a leaning peasant hut at the edge of a meadow. A melancholy painting of dappled sunspots under trees, through which one saw the blue of the sea, brought back long-forgotten memories of the summers of my childhood on the shores of the languid Baltic Sea, where the shady beech woods reach to the water's edge, and one could hear time sigh. This unexpected discovery became excuse for spending half an hour in the chaotic place.

I was about to leave when my gaze was caught by an antique silver fob-watch lying in a locked glass case among enameled brooches, amber necklaces, and old jewelry. I don't know why this watch attracted my attention. I am not a collector of antique timepieces.

I bent over the case and one of the buxom sales ladies descended upon me. Uncertain, I asked her to show me the watch. She placed it on a black velveteen cushion. I knew she would not let me handle it. The watch carried the markings of a renowned Swiss manufacturer. A lid covered its dial, another its back. In place of a crown it had an ear for a chain. The key to wind it was missing. The saleslady pressed a pin, and with a click the lid sprang open exposing an inscription in large, curlicue, German letters:

Konrad Rost Berlin, 1895

I stared at the inscription—my grandfather's name.

Vertigo overcame me, I grasped the counter. The sales lady darted from behind the table and offered me a chair. "Are you all right? It is terrible how many men die of heart attacks these days."

The room began to turn, time collapsed. A string of long-suppressed memories ran through my dizzy mind.

In Mid May 1945 we had fled from the advancing Soviet troops. Father, Mother, and my three siblings. We walked or hitched rides on the pony carts of the retreating German army.

One piece of luggage after another was abandoned. Carrying our heavy possessions had become impossible in the heat of spring.

All our efforts were in vain. We never reached the West, where we believed the Americans would protect us from the feared Soviets. On the day after the German surrender, near the Czechoslovak border, the Soviet Army overtook us.

Red Army men combed the thousands of refugees for German soldiers. They ordered my father aside. He had his hands up. A Russian soldier pulled the watch, which now lay before me, from his pocket. The soldier dangled his booty from his left hand. In the other he held an automatic.

For the first time in my life I heard Father speak Russian. He begged for his watch, then shouted at the Red Army man. Nervously the soldier threatened him with his automatic. Father grabbed for his watch. The soldier hit Father's outstretched arm with the gun and then continued, mercilessly beating him, to drive him towards a group of POWs by the roadside. Dissolved in tears, Mother ran after him. Her pleading was futile. Father disappeared down the road in a group of POWs.

For two days we hid in the woods and traveled only at night, carefully avoiding populated areas. Finally Mother and I decided to return home to the house in H— where we had lived throughout the war.

Grandfather Konrad had given this watch to my father Otto in 1918 when he had sent him to safety in Germany. I knew the watch well. It used to have a small key, and once in a while father would let me wind it.

The lady explained that the key no longer existed.

I bought the watch and locked myself into my shabby room at the "Hotel of the Academics" with my precious treasure. The lady at the shop had polished the slightly tarnished silver casing. The few minor dents in the lid only enhanced its faded elegance. Its Roman numerals gave it a most distinguished look, and a small, separate dial in gold and blue showed the phases of the moon.

I took the watch to a watchmaker in a bleak apartment block in the old part of the city. The old Jew whom I found in the overstuffed cubicle carefully examined Konrad's watch through his eyepiece. He offered to buy it. What would I do with such an antiquated timepiece in the age of digital watches? He shrugged resignedly when I told him that the watch was not for sale.

As he opened the lid the crazy idea struck me to invert its mechanism, so it would run backwards.

The graying watchmaker shot me a puzzled glance. Was I serious? What for would I want a watch that ran backwards?

"Oh," I told him, "it will count the hours you and I have lost during the last hundred years, and maybe it will tell me why there was so much suffering in this century."

"Are you one of us?" asked the watchmaker examining me with his sad, inquisitive eyes. I said no, I was not Jewish, I carried an American passport but had grown up in Germany.

He nodded, spread his hands acknowledging the inevitable and resorted to a mixture of Yiddish, Russian, and German. He explained that he could make the hands of the watch run backwards by an exchange of two tiny wheels, but the phases of the moon he could not reverse.

I was content to leave Alexandra's time untouched.

"Do you understand my German?" asked the old man.

He lamented his relatives lost in the German holocaust and Stalin's terror. He had lived through the horrors of the war, "which they call the 'Great Patriotic War' in this country." He let his gray head hang.

Yes, I understood him. I let him finish and then told him of the life of Konrad and Alexandra, my grandparents, the watch, and Father's fate.

He peered over his glasses and smiled.

"Now I see why you didn't want to sell me this watch," and tilting his head, commiseration in his eyes he continued, "You suffered as much as we did. The world is a cruel place. Who will tell the story of the people who suffered through this terrible century?"

When I left he hugged and kissed me, Russian style.

"I wish you *mazeltov*, a long life, and *glück* in finding your lost people."

A week later I picked up the watch. The watchmaker gave me a small key. As I wound the watch it chimed! I put it on my bedside table and as its silvery bell counted the hours of the night, its hands slowly recalled my grandparents' lives.

My great-grandfather Gymnasial Professor Julius Rost had died prematurely in 1890, leaving his wife and two sons behind. Money was short and as soon as his son Konrad had finished his degree in botany in 1895, he decided to accept the offer of a good position at the Caucasian Department of the Imperial Botanical Gardens in St. Petersburg. It came with Russian citizenship and a contract allowing him to spend a sabbatical leave every few years to teach in Tiflis, Georgia.

There Konrad had met Alexandra Dadiani. She came from an aristocratic Georgian family who owned large tracts of land in Western Georgia. They got married in 1899. My father Otto was born in 1900.

In 1918, when the Soviet terror threatened to flood Georgia, my grandparents sent Otto to Germany. They remained in Tbilisi. My father never saw his parents again. The outbreak of World War II put an end to a sporadic exchange of letters. A postcard mailed in 1943 through the Red Cross in Geneva signed "*In Liebe Konrad und Alexandra*," no date, no address, was the last message that reached us. The only tangible remains of his parents were Konrad's watch, a bundle of letters, and a portrait of Alexandra.

The portrait hung in Father's study in H—. It showed Alexandra at the height of her life. The head slightly turned, her deep-blue eyes fixed the viewer with an inquisitive, taunting look, which together with an ironic smile around her generous mouth, gave the impression of a sharp, possibly dangerous intelligence. She had an elongated face, with strongly-modeled cheekbones, finely delineated eyebrows, a prominent, aristocratic nose and dark hair: A formidable woman.

Her décolleté exposed her long, elegant neck, a charming clavicle depression, and an unusual necklace of omega-shaped gold links.

The painting cast a magical spell on my childhood. I imagined that her eyes followed me, and in unobserved moments she would talk to me.

I never met my grandmother.

Yet, before any other woman I fell in love with Alexandra.

I sank into a restless sleep and the ticking of the old watch spun me into a sequence of hopeless muddle dreams, mixing Alexandra's picture, our flight from the Russians, and my father's life.

I was back in the hot days of May 1945 fleeing from the Soviet armies. Mother had allowed each of us to take along one personal souvenir. Father had removed Alexandra's portrait from its frame and packed it in the suitcase now lying in the ditch beside the road.

Mother was trying to flag a ride on a German military convoy. In that unobserved moment I dashed back, opened Father's suitcase, dumped its contents, and rescued Alexandra's painting. I hid the canvas under my clothes and told nobody of the painting I wore.

The dream changed to the summer of 1945.

I was sitting at my father's hospital bed chasing the flies from his face. Father drifted in and out of awareness. He had contracted typhoid in the Russian POW camp. In a panic the Russians had sent him to this German hospital. It was very hot and the windows were open. The country was covered by a thick, brown smog reeking of burnt corpses. He was very ill but immensely lucky.

My dream shifted again. In August father came home from the hospital. Mother and I were supporting him from both sides, half-carrying the emaciated, hairless man into our house in H—. He saw Alexandra's portrait in the old frame hanging on the wall. I told him how I had saved it. Father smiled wanly. This smile on his gaunt face will forever remain superimposed on Alexandra's haunting portrait.

Konrad arrives in Georgia

1898

On a cold evening in May 1898, a tall, slender man in his thirties with dark-brown hair, a copious, untrimmed, reddish beard, and gray eyes got off the Moscow train at the forlorn station at Vladikavkas in the northern foothills of the Great Caucasus. For the first time Konrad Rost traveled to Tiflis to teach for a year at the *Gymnasium of the Georgian Nobility*. He had decided to exchange the dreary train ride via Baku for the *Georgian Military Road* across the mountains. It would be a strenuous journey but much more beautiful and shorter than the railway to Tiflis.

He had spent the night in the only guesthouse in the dusty garrison town and now waited in the dark of a cold morning for the postal carriage to arrive. He could barely make out the snow-capped mountains of the High Caucasus towards the south in the darkness. The carriage, drawn by four horses, rolled up: a box covered with black oilcloth which swayed on immense springs and high wheels. If the passengers squeezed, the carriage offered room for six.

Luckily there were only four other passengers that morning: an Armenian matron with her demure teenage daughter, a German professor who had introduced himself as Arthur Leist the previous evening, and an elegantly dressed young man on his way to buy Caucasian carpets in Tiflis .

The dashing rug dealer cut by far the most elegant figure. About Konrad's age, he wore a perfectly tailored white suit, a black kerchief in its breast pocket, matching spotless shoes, and an English bowler hat. He twirled a patent umbrella nervously in the air, which he let pop several times to frighten the young daughter of the Armenian lady, who giggling took cover behind her mother.



The Armenian lady, in her thirties, had already acquired a respectable figure. Dressed in the conventional costume of the merchant middle class, a long, black dress held together by an embroidered belt under which she wore a white, high-collared blouse with long sleeves and a flat cap on her high hairdo, she constantly corrected her daughter's manners. Although she pretended to ignore her three male fellow travelers, she stole curious glances from under long eyelashes at Konrad and Leist, the two foreigners.

Konrad had met Leist over supper. An unpretentious bachelor, Leist spoke, in addition to a charming Silesian, German, Russian and Georgian fluently. In his forties he stood a head shorter than Konrad. A well-trimmed, graying beard fringed his face. Contradicting his bourgeois appearance, he was vivacious, and loved to season his didactic remarks with

jokes.

Fifteen years ago Leist had come to Tiflis as a young man, learned Georgian, and with Ilia Chavchavadze's help, had translated Shota Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, the Georgian national epos, into German. On a subsequent sojourn he had hopelessly fallen in love with Georgia, had decided to settle in Tiflis permanently and devote himself entirely to the translation of Georgian classical literature and to studies of the Georgian languages and customs. Konrad was completely taken in by this congenial man. He could not have found a better guide and teacher.

As the coach rattled south the entire chain of the Caucasus, of which Konrad had dreamed for years, lit up. For a few minutes the icy peaks topped by the mighty cap of Mt. Kazbeg rose cold, pink and lemon-yellow before a turquoise sky. The rising sun quickly extinguished the colors and flooded the glaciers with a blinding, white light. The icy peaks seemed to float on thin transparent clouds above the dark-blue hills.

The Caucasus rose like a wall, five-thousand meters high, directly from the Southern-Russian plains. Between Mt. Kazbeg, higher than Montblanc, and the peaks of Khevsureti further east, only one road crossed the range, the Caucasian Military Road.

The rug merchant, obviously a veteran of many such trips, had pulled his bowler hat over his eyes and slept soundly in his corner of the carriage, undaunted by the shaking and rocking on the rutted road. Leist read a time-worn Alexander Dumas novel. The child had put her head into her napping mother's lap.



Mail coach on the Georgian Military Road, 1896 (Ermakov/Wiki)

The carriage labored up the Terek Valley. Numerous medieval watchtowers crowned the bare rocks on both sides, and after an hour the coach and the roaring river disappeared between steep rock walls.

Leist put down his book, waved his hand at the passing scenery, and said. "Now begins

the dramatic Daryan Gorge, the *Porta Caspiae* of the Ancients. Since prehistoric times people have migrated through this narrow defile and over the Pass of the Cross. Another name for these gorges was the 'Gates of the Alani,' and in fact, to this day the Osseti, the remains of the Gothic tribes, occupy these remote valleys. They speak an ancient Indo-European language."

They crossed a bridge to a posting station in an old fort under an overhanging rock. Local tribesmen in heavy shepherds' cloaks, armed with silver daggers and front-loading guns loitered around the station. Surprised, Konrad commented upon their blue eyes.

"Oh, yes," Leist said with a laugh, "these are the famous 'Blue Eyes of the Mountain Georgians'. Ethnically they are Osseti not Georgians, but they have mixed with the Georgians with beguiling results: imagine a statuesque woman with black hair and these unreal, deep-blue eyes!"

Hardly enough space remained for the road next to the roaring river in the canyon. The road got steeper, and the horses labored hard.

Unexpectedly a side valley opened on the end of which Mt. Kazbeg majestically towered over a craggy glacier.

At the end of the gorges the river fanned out across a rock-strewn floodplain where thousands of sheep grazed in the sparse grass along its banks. A group of wild shepherds squatted next to a two-wheeled cart and a smoking fire. In their high, conical, fur hats and dirty, long-haired, sheepskin coats, their black, bearded faces and tousled, matted hair looked medieval. Barking and snapping, the scrawny sheep dogs attacked the coach. The horses reared, and the driver, cursing in Russian, furiously whipped at the dogs, while the shepherds watched idly, laughing and shouting obscenities



Mount Kazbeg from the village of Kazbegi, 1890s.(Ermakov/Wiki)

Soon they were surrounded by a sea of wooly sheep. Led by stinking, evil-eyed billy

goats, and driven from behind by shepherds on horseback, the animals surged in waves around the carriage. Caught, the carriage had to wait until the herd had passed. The second coachman got off his box and walked ahead of the horses to part the woolly sea like Moses with a broom.

Around noon the road eased, and they reached the village of Kazbegi. Like a huge shepherd's hat the mighty ice mass of Kazbeg's volcanic hulk rose majestically over the verdant valley. Driven by high winds, continuously changing thin clouds veiled its glaciated peak.

"We break here for lunch," said Leist. "Let me take you to the only restaurant in this place. It is grubby, but they serve real Georgian food that one cannot find in Tiflis and from its terrace one has a fine view of the mountain."

Unaccustomed to the altitude, breathing heavily they clambered the steep hill to the restaurant. Green meadows stretched across the valley, a few houses at the foot of a bare hill crowned by the black silhouette of a church against the white snow fields of Kazbeg.

Leist pointed to the church. "One of Georgia's most celebrated landmarks: *Mtatsminda Zameba Kazbegis*. The Holy Mountain of the Trinity of Kazbegi. Sometimes you should visit it in late July when the rhododendrons are blooming from the church right to the edge of the Ortisferi Glacier. The view of Kazbeg from there is exceptional, and the meadows surrounding the church are covered with rare Caucasian gentians and primulas."

The eatery was a cave far dirtier than he had expected and full of smoke from the fire. They fled onto the terrace. Leist, in Georgian, ordered for both of them with a sly smile at Konrad.

"This is going to be your introduction to Georgia! A test of the strength of your character. Nowhere else but at Alaverdi in November can you find such freshly made *khashi*. You absolutely *must* try."

Konrad was surprised by a simple bowl of clear broth served with thick, circular loaves of flatbread and a saucer of chopped garlic. A few innocent looking bones and cartilages swam in the bowl. He tasted the first spoon and gagged. Leist's gloating laughter! The broth was revolting. Mutton leftovers seasoned with huge amounts of grated garlic.

Not to spoil Leist's pleasure, Konrad pulled himself together and bravely swallowed the soup. It did have an unexpectedly pleasant effect on his queasy stomach.

Konrad shook himself. "Now I am a fully seasoned Georgian, reeking of garlic!" Leist, pleased with his experiment, grinned and patted Konrad on the back: "Rost, you are a splendid fellow!"

For a while the road was passable. They skirted a fortified village, Sioni, with a watchtower and an old basilica on a steep promontory in a large, barren mountain bowl. Behind Kobi, a village populated by long-legged, black pigs and people who looked like robbers, the road became much worse.

In a desolate scree of red rocks the road deteriorated into a washboard of rivulets fed from the last snowfields on the slopes. Primitive wooden galleries, supposed to protect the road from avalanches but half collapsed during the winter, forced them into often hair-raising maneuvers.

Deep snow still covered Djvari Pass, the Pass of the Cross, the road a narrow, washed-out riverbed between snow walls as tall as a man.

Right and left the sheep wandered single file across the snow, the low sun projecting a

fantastic shadow play of animals and riders onto the white hillsides.

As the sun disappeared the temperature dropped rapidly to below freezing. The travelers huddled around the open fire in the smoke-filled room of the hospice and warmed themselves with *raki* and tea. A miserable night. No privacy, they slept on the hard benches along the black walls under filthy blankets that smelled of grease, smoke, and sheep.

Next morning the world was frozen. Braving the cold, Konrad and Leist watched the sun rise from the balcony. The hospice hung precariously at the edge of a valley. Thick fog boiled below. Wind-blown clouds drifted past the house. Occasionally they caught a glimpse of the high snowfields to the east. And then a sudden gust ripped the clouds away and revealed a steep mountainside down which the road wound in precipitous hairpins to the bridge at Mleti.

The wind stopped. A complete calm under a cold sun.

The opposite slope of the valley was rutted by snow-filled, deeply eroded ravines, bare except for a shimmer of fresh, green, spring grass. At the bottom the ruins of an ancient watchtower rose from the fog. A few houses, gardens with blooming fruit trees. A thin, striated layer of clouds remained, hovering suspended halfway above the valley.

"If one were to take a photograph from here," Konrad observed, "one would immediately recognize the picture as taken in the Caucasus. But why I couldn't explain."

Leist stroked his beard while he considered Konrad's question. "You are right, it is because we are at the border between the arid northern slopes of the range and the green, fertile valleys to the south. The high, northern slopes are bare and look, down there the orchards are blooming, and a few hours further south they are raising two crops a year. Another phenomenon typical of the Caucasus are the sun-warmed inversion layers above the cold air in the valleys on which these unique cloud striations float."

"Since yesterday," said Konrad, "I have the uncertain feeling that I have crossed the border of Europe."

"Nonsense. You will see that the Georgians and their culture are more European than their most holy Christian protectors to the north. Christianity and literacy came to Georgia five hundred years before anyone in Russia was able to recite the alphabet. The early Russian churches in Vladimir were built by craftsmen from Georgia in the eleventh century whilst here the earliest churches date from the fifth century, older than any in Germany. No, Rost, the border of Europe is at the Araxes."

Konrad smiled, pleased that he had succeeded in arousing his friend's emotions despite the cold of the morning.

"Forgive my ignorance, Leist, it will soon be corrected!"

The carriage rumbled down the steep bends in the road. Sometimes Konrad felt that only the thousands of sheep kept the carriage from tumbling over the edge into the foaming Aragvi river. The Armenian lady, dizzy from looking into the precipice, asked to exchange places with Leist.

With every turn of the road it became warmer, and after a few hours they were rolling through thick deciduous woods covering the Caucasian foothills. They passed increasingly luxuriant stands of dark stone oaks, light green beeches, and later tall chestnuts and wild cherries. Touched by nostalgia Konrad remembered his hikes in his beloved southern Black Forest.

They reached Tiflis after dark. With a congenial gesture and a laugh Leist said, "Rost, may I invite you to share my apartment. I like your company, and there is plenty of room for the

two of us."

Tiflis 1898



Tiflis and the Kura from Mt. Mtatsminda, 1890s (Ermakov/RWFG)

Leist's apartment was a simple but comfortable place on the second floor of a wooden house high above town on the slopes of Mount St. David. It had two rooms, a large kitchen, a spacious balcony, and an outhouse, but no bath.

"Oh, one doesn't need that," said Leist with a dismissive sweep of his hand. "I will introduce you to the Turkish bath, it is much preferable to a zinc tub of hot water in the kitchen!"

Next day Leist took Konrad to meet the professors at the Gymnasium. Konrad's new colleagues were very relaxed. They discussed his courses with him for an hour. He would give an introduction to chemistry and an upper-division seminar devoted to the botany of the Caucasian flora, eight hours a week. He had taught these courses before in St. Petersburg, and his students would be more docile than in the restless capital. There was no rush, the semester and his teaching duties wouldn't begin for two weeks, until then he should take it easy and acquaint himself with the colorful life of Tiflis.

However, the arrival of their new colleague from Berlin called for a celebration. The good professors decided to have a grand feast in Ortachala without their women. To their amusement, Leist wagged a finger at Konrad and smiled mysteriously. "This will be your

Georgian entrance examination, Rost!"

Life with Leist was casual. He made no special efforts to host Konrad; he gave him the guestroom and generally left him to himself.

Often his host disappeared at night, only to resurface, rumpled and worn out in the morning, from some overnight exploit, which Leist did not elaborate on and Konrad never asked about. After these disappearances Leist slept through much of the day.

Konrad ate out or prepared his own food in the kitchen, unless Leist scrambled up the hill carrying sacks of vegetables, walnuts, a chicken or some lamb, bottles of wine, and fruit for desert.

"Rost, tonight we have a feast," he announced and busied himself in the kitchen. He was an excellent cook, and these dinners were true occasions. Leist could easily empty two bottles of wine but never appeared drunk. They got pleasantly relaxed, and after dinner Leist would tell of his many adventures in the Orient. Whether they were all true was of no concern, they were always well told.

One morning, made curious by the tales he had heard in St. Petersburg, Konrad ventured into town. He scrambled down the steep cobblestone lanes to Golovinsky Boulevard, the main thoroughfare of the Russian quarter. Passing the turreted new opera house, the tree-shaded but dusty Alexander Garden, and the ostentatious columns of the Palace of the Russian Viceroy he reached Yerevan Square, the center of the modern town.

Unsure of where to continue, he chose a narrow street in the direction of the river and found himself in the crowded streets of the bazaar. Throngs of colorful, woolly people jammed the narrow lanes. The entire Orient was present, a bewildering Babel of races, faiths, and languages.

Soon Konrad was trailed by an aggressive horde of street urchins who, barefoot and ragged, pulled at his clothes and begged for money. He stopped and tried to shoo them off, but they only laughed. The angrier he got, the worse they taunted him in languages he could not understand.

Obviously this was the wrong method to rid himself of his tormentors. As he stood beleaguered by the children, a *kinto*, a hawker carrying a fruit basket on his head, rescued him by telling the children to back off. As the man came closer he whispered with a sweetish leer, "Mister, *gogonebi ginda?*" and repeating in Russian, because Konrad did not understand, "You want girls, mister? Beautiful girls!"

Konrad went purple and tried to shake off the pimp, at which the joker shouted at the top of his voice, "Look people, a virgin, he doesn't know where to put his cock!"

The *kinto* paused and surveyed the people who had assembled in expectation of good entertainment, and in a low, poisonous voice continued, "Or is he a pederast? He looks so elegant." And raising his voice: "Little boys, mister? We have those too, fat little boys, very willing and experienced suckers. Only a ruble an hour!"

The crowd laughed uproariously, and Konrad would have liked to vanish into the ground.

Fortunately, a troop of walking bushes came galloping down the narrow lane, donkeys hidden under huge loads of green branches. Everybody scrambled for safety in the nearest doorways. At the very last moment Konrad squeezed into a rug merchant's stall and found himself face-to-face with the elegant gentleman from their trip across the mountains. The man, with whom he had not spoken a word on their journey, looked like his savior. With clear

comprehension that fortune had sent him a potential customer, the clever man welcomed Konrad with a smile and made him sit down.

Much relieved, Konrad told him of his misfortunes. The man laughed and advised him to learn a few swear words in Georgian to get rid of the *kintonebi*. Against the urchins there was little he could do but ignore them.



Persian Rugdealer and Russian Buyer, Tiflis Bazaar, 1890s (Ermakov/Wiki)

A boy was sent off to fetch coffee. He returned with small cups of a thick, black brew on a brass tablet. The rug dealer introduced Konrad to the owner of the shop, a heavy-set, older Persian wearing a white prayer cap on his bald head. While Konrad slurped the over-sweetened coffee, the merchant had one beautiful rug after another rolled out before him. The man was very good at his business. He never suggested that Konrad buy a rug, nor did he mention money.

Intrigued by the beauty of the pieces at his feet, Konrad considered purchasing one of the Caucasian wonders. But he had left his money at home—in order to not have it stolen. So when the talk finally turned to prices, Konrad with an honest, innocent face confessed that he was penniless. The rug merchants thought this to be the best ruse in a long time, and only relented when Konrad turned his pockets inside out. Promising another visit soon, he left with an excellent education in Caucasian rugs.

The *kinto* was gone and the urchins had found another victim. Konrad followed two porters, each carrying a heavy wardrobe on his back. Their dirty skullcaps, long caftans, and cheap, string sandals showed them to be Azeri from the lowest class. Running in a short, rhythmic trot, bent over to almost a right angle, they were followed by an older Armenian businessman, apparently the owner of the furniture, who trotted, breathlessly, behind them.

Other porters carried wine in sheepskins that stretched their four amputated legs pitifully into the air.

This street was entirely occupied by rug merchants. Around the corner the furniture makers had their shops; then came a block of tinsmiths hammering away at anything from locks and knives to chain mail, copper pots, brass tables, and water pitchers.



Fishmongers, Tiflis Bazaar, 1890s (Ermakov/RWFG)

As he neared the river, the filth and dirt in the streets got worse. In open stands butchers and fishmongers displayed their wares covered by thick swarms of flies. From the basements of the houses wafted the acrid smell of the wine shops. The stench was overpowering.



Wine Merchants, Tiflis Bazaar, 1890s (Ermakov/Wiki)

He was glad to escape from the confinement of the narrow lanes onto the sandy flood banks of the Kura.

At a place further upstream he spied caravans of Bactrian camels being unloaded. From a distance the scene looked exotic, but as he got closer a fierce camel snapped at him and he fled.



Persian Camel Caravan, Tiflis, 1890s, (Ermakov/Wiki)

Later that night, Konrad, with mixed feelings of horror, embarrassment, and fascination, described his adventures.

Leist stroked his beard pretending to be in deep thought, but his mischievous eyes were laughing. "Rost, you were truly lucky. That rug dealer would have robbed you blind, had he seen your money. What foresight to leave your purse at home!"

"The rugs they showed me were truly beautiful and well made. I *do* know a little about oriental rugs." Konrad said miffed.

"But you know nothing about how to buy one in this environment. However, congratulations, you made a very elegant opening move. They, of course, thought you were bluffing. On your next visit they will treat you with high respect, and when you have finally bargained the price of your favorite beauty down to what you are willing to pay, they will see you off with tears in their eyes. No matter how cheap you think you bought it, these rogues have made at least a sixty percent profit."

Leist scratched his head and put on a serious mien. "You see, in principle, bargaining is easy. Depending on whether the merchant looks honest or not, you offer half to one-third of the asking price. It is a game, and the longer you draw out the drama, the happier everyone will be. The clever acting of the players in this drama distinguishes a good bargain from a bad one."



The Professors arriving in Ortachala, 1890s (Ermakov/Wiki)

Two days later, as they shared a *droshki* on the way to the faculty banquet in Ortachala, Leist said, "For me Ortachala is an ominous place. Everybody considers this village *the* locale to have fun, eat and drink, and to cavort with the girls, who are a little notorious but no worse than elsewhere."

Leist's seriousness was not a put-on; there was apprehension in his voice as he continued. "Every time I come here the dead rise from the ground and affect my emotional balance. Until 1864 Cherkesses, Yezidi, and other Muslim minorities used to live here. In that year the Christian Russians chased the Cherkesses *en masse* to Turkey. For years the place was deserted. Eventually the Tiflis pleasure girls and brothels moved into the haunted houses.

I can never completely shake off visions of the beautiful Circassian women who once lived here." He shuddered with an embarrassed laugh.

The rural area of orchards and vegetable gardens on the banks of the Kura was lovely. Among the gardens nestled a number of wooden houses surrounded by balconies and long tables where entire families in their colorful Sunday best were eating, singing, and drinking the good wine that flowed freely from skins the size of calves. A spigot had been mounted in one of their legs. Wine spurted from them like a fountain.

The three phaetons came to a halt at the *Eldorado Gardens*. A lively band of three wild-looking musicians received them, wearing peaked caps, rugged coats over narrow pants, and soft, strangely curved, pointed boots. They played two high clarinets and a small drum.

Laughing and joking, the serious professors complimented each other from their carriages. A full-bosomed hostess received each of them with three kisses and led them to their table under a mighty apple tree.

Konrad had heard much about the *grandes tables* of Georgia, but this scene exceeded his imagination. On a white table cloth two dozen platters with food he did not recognize had been arranged around the *pièce de résistance*, a gaudily dressed, roasted suckling pig, with protruding red cherry eyes, a glazed apple between its teeth, and a garland of edible greens and flowers. Young boys brought plates piled high with wheels of flatbread and airy squares of cheese-filled pastry. A battery of bottles, *raki*, wine, and mineral water rose from among these culinary riches.

With much bantering, a white-haired gentleman with penetrating blue eyes, an aristocratic nose, and a handlebar mustache was elected *tamada*, toastmaster and head of the table. Leist introduced him as Prince Irakli Dadiani, professor and head of the Georgian literature department at the Gymnasium. The congenial man greeted Konrad in fluent German.

Konrad sat between Leist and Dadiani, who raised his glass and offered a long and well-worded toast in German culminating in the wish that Konrad would come to love Georgia as much as Leist did. Leist smiled pleased and clinked glasses with Konrad shouting: "*Gagimadjos Sakartvelo!* Long live Georgia!"

Konrad made a short, serious speech. He thanked them for their hospitality and gregariousness and then, feeling that he was too heavy-handed for the prevailing mood, he toasted the beautiful Georgian women he hoped soon to meet. He had hit on the right subject and was applauded enthusiastically.

The next toasts cheerfully commemorated all women dead or alive who were absent at their gathering, their mothers, daughters, and sisters with a considerate mention of Konrad's mother.

After this emotional passage, Dadiani, with everybody's advice, filled Konrad's plate with helpings of the various dishes: a square of *khachapuri*, a cheese pastry, cold chicken in walnut sauce, carrots filled with walnut farce, two kinds of fish with various herb-laced sauces, spinach laced with walnut puree and pomegranate seeds, aromatic Georgian greens, eaten raw without a dressing, and a generous cut of the crisp suckling pig served with a spicy red sauce sprinkled with pomegranate seeds. Konrad, who had imagined the Georgian kitchen to be highly spiced, was surprised by the delicate and sophisticated flavors.

They started around five o'clock. By eight spontaneous singing had erupted. The professors' voices were surprisingly good. The *tamada* would sing a verse and the others join in the refrain. The pentatonic melodies sounded strangely melancholic and doleful to Konrad's

ears.

Overcome by all the good drink and the heavy walnut preparations Konrad excused himself. Behind a wall he found a stinking, abysmal row of dirty holes in the ground over which squatted three other guests. Disgusted, he urinated in the privacy of the dark orchard.

An overpowering desire for sleep made him lie down under a nearby tree.

An hour later Leist found him there. "*Mein Gott*, Rost what are you doing here!" shouted Leist shaking Konrad. A bewildered Konrad opened his eyes and sat up. Leist tried to sit next to him, but immediately jumped up again. He searched the ground with his hands and produced two squashed fruit. He smelled them and began to laugh. "Did you know, Rost, you fell asleep under an apricot tree! There are hundreds of apricots covering the ground."

He squatted next to Konrad. For a while they stayed there munching overripe apricots in the dark of the night.

"I am terribly sorry Leist, overcome by the wonderful food and the wine, I simply fell asleep."

"I warned you that this would be a profound experience for you." Leist chuckled. "We assumed that you had disappeared with one of the charming ladies. The others went home to their jealous wives. We two bachelors are the only survivors."

He searched for some more apricots and shared them.

"I'm all right, I guess," Konrad said with a dispirited voice. "No girls, but a strange dream. A tall, beautiful Georgian woman with deep blue eyes tried to lure me to Kakheti."

Leist laughed. "Oh, Kakheti, the land of wine and beauties. The ghosts, the ghosts! It's going on midnight. Let's get out of here before they take over!"

Leist jumped up and lent Konrad a hand.

"You know, I have a suggestion how to chase the spook away. Let's go to the *hamam*, the Turkish bath. The heat and a good massage will revive you. Around ten they clean the place and until the *muezzin* calls at four in the morning there will be no new customers. That's the best time to go to the baths. Let's stuff our pockets with apricots as provisions for the trip."

The *droshki* ride over the bumpy pavement revived Konrad's spirits. "Tell me Leist, that winsome, white-haired gentleman, was he really a prince?"

"Yes, yes, but don't get overawed, every third gentleman in Tiflis is a prince. Among the Georgians exist only two classes, landowners and peasants, the middle class consists of Armenians, and the artisans are either Jewish or Azeri. When the Russians usurped this God-blessed country they simply bestowed the title *knyaz*, Prince or Lord, on all feudal landowners. Dadiani comes from a rich land-owning family in Mingrelia, in western Georgia. He preferred to become a professor in Tbilisi and leave the family properties to his half-brother George."

The narrow valley below the Narikala fort smelled like Dante's inferno. The hot, sulfuric springs that gave Tiflis its Georgian name *Tbilisi*—*tbili* meaning hot in Georgian—steamed, stank, and fizzled. Their piping-hot water fed several Turkish and Persian bathhouses. One resembled a blue-tiled Turkish *medressa*, another, with a huge dome at the bottom of the valley, looked like a mosque, and several smaller baths climbed the slopes.

The streets around the baths were deserted. Leist took Konrad to *Abano Tsikhe*, a turreted palace owned by Prince Orbeliani. It was considered the best of the lot.

The attendant addressed Leist by his name and led them into a small room with two

couches. They were given big towels to wrap themselves in. Persian *nargilehs* were brought and Leist, covered only by his sheet, lay down to have a smoke.

"I have no idea what to do with this *hookah*, and, moreover, I don't smoke," said Konrad. Leist showed him how to slowly bubble the smoke from the glowing tobacco wad through the water in the glass vase. Konrad tried to copy him and was overcome by a terrifying cough.

Leist laughed. "Slowly, Rost, slowly. Don't inhale this potent stuff. Just take small sips." Konrad tried again, but then the wad stopped burning. Desperately trying to revive it by deep draws he became dizzy. Frustrated by a new coughing attack, Konrad abandoned the *hookah*.

The attendant led them into a small, hot room with benches along the wall.

"This is only the purgatory!" warned Leist, "a pre-hell to get you accustomed to the hot bath itself. Brace yourself!"

When they finally entered the main room its heat hit them like a wall. The room was large and octagonal with a low dais at its center faced with marble. Water fountains bubbled into basins along the walls.

Konrad had expected variously sized and heated bathing pools, like in the illustrations of the Roman baths in the Latin textbooks of his youth. There were no baths, only this breathtaking heat.

"Oh, that's it." Leist spread his arms in apology and said mockingly, "Ach, Rost, you are still yearning for a bathtub, there isn't one. But an attendant will soon come with a bucket of soapy water and massage you. Meanwhile, lie down on the dais, breathe deeply, and save your energies!"



Leist - or Konrad - in the Hamam, Tiflis 1890s (Ermakov/RWFG)

The heat came from the floor and the dais. Konrad lay down and broke out in profuse

sweat. His heart raced, and he felt like he was breathing fire.

Leist, lying very still on his back, breathing very slowly and systematically, advised Konrad that the water in the basins along the wall was ice cold and could be used to quench the fire. After a while Konrad's heart slowed down. The attendant returned with a wooden bucket of hot water, a piece of soap, and a loofa sponge. He made Konrad sit up and poured water over him. Then he whisked up clouds of soapsuds in the bucket with which he massaged Konrad, leaving no hair unturned.

Another bucket of water followed. Finally came the loofa ritual. Konrad had to lie on the hot dais face down. The man knelt over him and systematically rubbed his back with the loofa sponge. Konrad felt like he was being skinned alive. Leist sat next to him, chuckling. "Now you look like a newborn baby! You won't need a bath for another week." Konrad, groaning and moaning, rushed to the cold water fountains to cool off his burning skin.

At last his hangover was gone.

Alexandra Dadiani

Tiflis 1898

She was one of two female students in Konrad's chemistry course at the Gymnasium. Obviously, she was the daughter of an aristocratic family. An academic education was the prerogative of men. Parental influence, intelligence, and an exceptional determination were required of a young woman to enter a school of higher learning. The conservative Georgian fathers rarely gave their permission: a woman belonged in the house, why did she need a higher education?

Her blue eyes confused Konrad. While the other female student giggled behind her hand or dreamily looked past him, this young woman followed his every move and gesture with challenging, critical eyes.

He tried to ignore her, to concentrate on the students in the back rows. But again and again he was distracted by the play of emotions on her lively face. Waves of excitement seemed to well up from deep inside her and fill her finely delineated features, her brows, and her eyes with most ravishing animation.

At these moments Konrad, watching her bewitched, nearly lost the thread of his lecture.

After one of his classes, she approached him in a deep, melodious, alto voice asking for an elaboration of some point. She surprised him with a faultless German, much better than his heavily accented Russian.

"My name is Alexandra Dadiani."

"I am very impressed by your German, *Fräulein* Dadiani, where did you learn to speak it so well?"

Her closeness and her intensity confused him. Barely a smile passed between them. Her eyes! She must be the daughter of white-haired Prince Dadiani, he thought, I should have guessed it from her looks.

"My parents speak German," she said simply. "Besides there are two old ladies in this town who have tutored me since I was six. I do prefer German to Russian." She caught herself, blushed, and then added. "Because German has such an interesting, old literature."

Carelessly she had betrayed her Georgian dislike of Russian. He nodded, and her eyes returned his smile. In great seriousness they discussed her studies and his lectures.

For the coming spring Konrad planned an expedition to Khevsureti and Tusheti in the eastern Caucasus to collect plant samples for his institute in St. Petersburg. Because she was one of his best students, he invited Alexandra Dadiani to join the small group of graduate students that would accompany him. It would be an arduous trip of three weeks on horseback into barely pacified country. She accepted on the spot.

A month later it transpired that she would be the only woman in the group, and he found it necessary to ask for the express consent of her father. In response her father invited him to their summerhouse in Zaguramo.

Dadiani had sent an open phaeton. The road to Zaguramo followed the Kura valley. Just outside of town the river made a sharp bend to the north and was joined by the Aragvi. In the triangle of the confluence lay the walled town of Mtskheta, the medieval capital of *Kartli*,

Western Georgia with its prominent cathedral, the burial place of the Georgian kings. Overlooking this picturesque, historical spot, on a bare hill perched *Djvari*, the church of Nino, the female saint who had brought Christianity to Georgia.

They crossed the river on an old bridge and reached Zaguramo at the foot of a wooded mountain. The church of Zedazeni, an abandoned monastery, showed through its dense foliage.

Leist had described the Dadianis and Alexandra's mother, Tamara Chavchavadze to him. She came from Kakheti. Her family was famous far beyond the borders of Georgia. Together with the Bagrationis, the Chavchavadzes had held the political power in Georgia for centuries. Tamara's best known ancestor, Prince Alexander Chavchavadze, had been an influential poet, writer, statesman, and a friend of Pushkin's.



Ilia Chavchavadze's house in Zaguramo (RWFG)

The carriage stopped in front of an unpretentious, two-story house in an idyllic setting under huge, old, walnut trees. Its French doors overlooked the meadows bordered by rolling hills in the distance. It appeared more like a comfortable retreat for a poet than a mansion for princes. Konrad felt immediately at home.

Casually dressed, the host stood in the door to welcome him. Once again Konrad admired his mighty mustache.

Dadiani received him laughing. "Welcome! Be my guest. It is an honor for me to greet you at my house—Alexandra did well to lure you here. Come in and let us have lunch, you must be hungry from your ride."

Infected by Dadiani's jovial mood, Konrad asked him about the origin of his blue eyes.

"Ah, these are the eyes of the Mountain Georgians. My mother was a Dadashkeliani from Svaneti. The nose also comes from there. We have a saying that one can build generations on the noses of the Dadashkeliani!"

Dadiani laughed so heartily that Konrad was completely taken in.

On the porch in back of the house a table had been laid for two. "You had a taste of a Georgian feast, let us be civilized." Dadiani invited him with spread arms. "This is a small repast for the two of us." A servant offered a choice of red or white wine. "Start with the white," Dadiani suggested him, "it is an excellent year from the estate of my brother-in-law in Kakheti. He makes the best wines in Georgia."

They toasted to their meeting and Konrad found that the dry wine compared well with any from his own country, heavier and fuller than the wine from the Palatinate, but with more character than Italian wines. Dadiani nodded. "It is not easy to produce a dry, elegant wine in this hot climate. George Chavchavadze has put his admiration for Germany into this wine."

They clinked glasses.

"You see," continued Dadiani, "I am a squatter in the house of a cousin of my wife's. This house was built by Ilia Chavchavadze and his wife Olga Guramishvili. The Guramishvili own the land. *Zaguramo* means *chez Guramo* and *shvili* is the son in Georgian. Ilia is the scion of the Kvareli branch of the Chavchavadze. He is such a famous Georgian national hero that he had to leave for Europe for a while. His journal *Iveria* got him into trouble with our Russian benefactors. His nationalistic stance has long been a thorn in their side."

Dadiani cocked his head and thoughtfully looked at Konrad, questioning his political allegiance. "You will soon discover that not all is well in this praised land." Konrad smiled and thought of his first conversation with Alexandra. He remarked that he had noticed some tensions, but the details and reasons eluded him.

With a dry laugh Dadiani said. "We can discuss these problems another day. We own a large townhouse in Tiflis, but I love this place. It is exceptionally comfortable and allows me an uncomplicated life in a beautiful rural setting, close enough to Tiflis and the Gymnasium to travel back and forth as often as I please."

"How is your Georgian?" Dadiani asked casually. "Not that you have any need of it in Tiflis, where every educated person speaks several languages, but it is an interesting language for the curious linguist."

The question caught Konrad off guard. The idea of asking Alexandra to teach him Georgian had tempted him. Considering their difference in social status and the conventions of Georgia, he had dismissed the notion as presumptuous. But he had discussed the subject of learning Georgian with Leist. Had Dadiani talked to Leist and was referring to this conversation? Konrad assured Dadiani that he was most anxious to learn Georgian; his interest in this country grew daily. But Leist had discouraged him, Georgian was difficult and unusual, because its vocabulary and grammar were unrelated to any other known language.

"*Nun ja*," said Dadiani with a mischievous twinkle in his blue eyes, "how would it strike you, if Alexandra taught you Georgian. I am sure you will have less problems in mastering it than our Russian friends, who have very poor linguistic talents."

Konrad blushed. Had Dadiani second-guessed his secret dream, or was he attempting to probe what interests he might have in his daughter? Violating the complicated, indirect approach of the Orient, he decided to take the bull by the horns and shorten the lengthy drama of bargaining for Alexandra's participation in his expedition.

"For a planned research expedition to Tusheti and Khevsureti I urgently need an interpreter who speaks several East-Caucasian languages and is familiar with the territory. Your daughter has assured me that she could be of help in both. Would you give your

permission and allow Alexandra to participate in this expedition?"

Dadiani twirled his mustache, embarrassed by Konrad's insensitive approach to the touchy subject. "Alexandra mentioned that you had invited her. She is an excellent rider and has been to parts of the highlands that you plan to visit. She would be of great value to you. She speaks three East-Georgian dialects, and besides you may have an incomplete idea of the wild tribes who live in these regions and of their old feuds. These mountain men show limitless hospitality towards a stranger, but great tact and circumspection is required not to offend their unwritten tribal rules. Alexandra has this knowledge and could serve you in more ways than as a translator."

Dadiani lowered his gaze and concentrated on the walnut-filled aubergines and the spinach puree on his plate. After a few bites he continued. "I have considered the question of Alexandra's participation in your expedition. It is unthinkable in our society that a young woman would participate in such an undertaking without a chaperon. You as the teacher and leader of the group would have this responsibility. I respect you as a considerate and thoughtful man whom I trust, but I am not convinced that you are equal to *her*."

Konrad, finally made aware that his bluntness had been a mistake, waited quietly for an elaboration. Dadiani looked at him thoughtfully and when Konrad blushed under his gaze, Dadiani overlooked it tactfully. "You hardly have an idea of the determination and the willpower of this girl. She has put it into her head to participate in your expedition and neither you nor I will be able to talk her out of it. I could only forbid her to participate and would like to avoid that."

Such honesty! He saw the dilemma of this father. Not to reveal his affection for Alexandra he chose to remain silent.

"I am less worried about my daughter than about you, Herr Rost. Alexandra's willpower can be dangerous for a man."

Dadiani bent over the table, reached for the wine carafe and filled their glasses. When he looked up again he smiled enigmatically. "To a long friendship," he said when they clinked glasses.

Darkness had fallen. They had finished their meal. The servant cleared the table, brought a storm light and another decanter, this time with cognac. Dadiani filled the snifter glasses, and Konrad discovered that the cognac was of the best quality.

"This is another product from Tsinandali. In this case it compares well with French cognac."

They were silent for a while. Dadiani looked into the candle and sipped his cognac. Konrad was moved, but still could not fathom Dadiani's intentions nor understand what was happening to himself.

"Do you have any plans for tomorrow morning?" Dadiani asked. "The easiest thing would be for you to stay overnight. A room has been prepared for you, and in this way you will meet my wife tomorrow morning."

Konrad accepted happily. He felt comfortable in the presence of this man. Where would Dadiani's conversation lead? The question fascinated and ensnared him. And in any case, Dadiani had not yet given his permission for Alexandra to join his expedition.

"What do you know about the dark sides of Georgia?" Dadiani asked. "You think, of course, that we are extroverts, because we gesticulate with our hands and talk a great deal. That is a misunderstanding. As you become more familiar with Georgia you will find that we are

really introverted. We love tragedy, not in the unrestrained, depraved way of the Russians, we live in a warm and plentiful land, the more we drink of our wines the less tongue-tied we get. The Russians drink to forget, we to remember.... You should once attend a Georgian funeral, it would open your eyes to our sense of the tragic: We are poets and actors in the best sense of the Greek drama.— And then there is the Georgian woman...."

Dadiani raised his glass and toasted: "To the women we all depend on for our lives. To my incomparable wife and her beautiful but difficult daughter!"

Dadiani looked into space and smiled affectionately. His smile vanished, and absentmindedly twirling his mustache he continued. "At breakfast tomorrow you will meet my wife. The etiquette of our society demands that she not be present at a first meeting like ours. This could mislead you to assume that we live in a patriarchal society. This would be a misunderstanding, a myth perpetrated by Georgians and visitors alike. Our patriarchal behavior is a façade behind which hides an all-encompassing matriarchal order, to which an outsider rarely has access. If you ask a Georgian where he comes from, he will say, my mother was a Dadeshkeliani and my grandmother an Orbeliani—both were formidable women, who influenced my life deeply. Men are only of secondary consequence, they give the children their name. The women are in the *know*, without them the Georgian man is helpless. If he is exiled to a far-away land he dies tragically of his nostalgic yearning for the Georgian woman."

He drank a glass of the marvelously perfumed cognac to his grandmothers' memory.

"I assume that Leist has introduced you to Shota Rustaveli's epos *The Knight in the Tiger Skin*. Don't take Rustaveli at face value, he was a medieval troubadour, rather reread the story of Jason and Medea, if you want to understand Georgia. Medea who seduced Jason, not by offering her body, but by putting her brothers to sleep and stealing the Golden Fleece for Jason, the only thing he had his mind on. She compromised him, and he had to take her along. And you do remember the tragic end? Jason left her and their children for another woman of his own tribe. Medea, again very Georgian, did not kill him, but killed her children. Jason died of guilt."

They spent a long time nursing their cognacs in silence. "Forgive my melancholic monologue, Konrad Rost. But I had the feeling that someone had to introduce you to the hidden aspects of this country before its magic bewitches you."

Konrad made an attempt to thank him for the evening, but Dadiani waved him off, took him to his room, and bid him a good night.

Konrad sat by the light of a candle. This evening had taken a very different turn from what he had expected. There was a light knock on his door. Startled, he turned around, and, to his utter astonishment, saw Alexandra slip in without waiting for his permission to enter.

"Konrad, what did my father say, may I come along?" she whispered.

"What, you don't know?" Konrad exclaimed with raised eyebrows. "He recommended you as my interpreter, foreign envoy, and Beatrice all in one. But he did not clearly say 'yes, she may go.' Please Alexandra, do not discredit me in your father's house."

She vanished as noiselessly as she had come.

He shook his head. How had it happened that he had addressed her by her first name and in the personal *Du*?

By next morning the cobwebs of the night had vanished. Dadiani showed himself from his most engaging side. He teased his daughter and joked with her two brothers. Over a glass

of wine before breakfast he offered Konrad the personal *Du* in German, so that nobody noticed that Alexandra addressed Konrad again by his first name.

Konrad felt so much at home among these people that he forgot his astonishment about the course of events. He had never had a real family life—his father had died early, and his mother had turned into a care-worn, penniless widow. The easy acceptance of him into their family circle pleased him.

Alexandra's mother appeared only when all had sat down to breakfast. Dadiani introduced Konrad. Princess Tamara Chavchavadze did not participate in the lively banter around the breakfast table. Although she seemed fluent in German, she barely addressed her guest. Konrad, puzzled, could only explain her behavior as deferential reticence in presence of her husband.

Dadiani tried to persuade her to tell the tale of her abduction from Tsinandali. But true to conservative form she declined.

Her husband could not refrain from telling the tale himself.

When Tamara Chavchavadze had been three years old, her mother, an aunt, and six children had been abducted from Tsinandali by the Lesgian men of the infamous Imam Shamyl, the legendary leader of the Chechen Moslem guerrillas. Shamyl had kept the women hidden in his mountain retreat for over a year, until their families ransomed them in exchange for two carts of gold coins and Shamyl's son, whom the Russians had taken prisoner.

Alexandra appeared bored and restless. When her father finished the well-worn family saga, she pleaded for an excursion to Zedazeni. She was the *enfant terrible* of the family, but also her father's adored daughter. Alexandra's younger brothers Niko and Otar supported their sister's request and Dadiani finally let himself be persuaded. Their mother, citing domestic duties, asked to be excused. Two servants carried baskets with a copious lunch and two bottles of wine, and the entire party walked up the steep path behind the house.

Except for the church, the monastery of Zedazeni turned out to be a deserted, romantic ruin. A dilapidated wall surrounded the precinct, the church, a few decaying buildings, and an orchard.

The caretaker received them with a bow and a handshake. Dadiani introduced his guest as a professor from Germany. While the servants spread a large tablecloth under the trees and set up lunch, the caretaker unlocked the church for Alexandra.

Light-footed Alexandra took Konrad into the sanctuary. "This place predates Christianity," she explained as they entered. "You can still see the heathen altar behind the iconostasis."

Alexandra led Konrad into the sanctum where she showed him a stone column decorated like an Indian phallic *lingam*. It grew from a circular foundation, which in India represented the female *yonis*. The three foot high column was covered with a white cloth and garlanded with flowers.

"The village women come here to decorate this thing. This heathen altar is the reason that the church has been abandoned. The old spirits scared the monks away." Alexandra laughed, her blue eyes sparkling in complicity. "The priests and the good citizen of Tiflis deny the existence of this female place of worship, but at Easter the shepherds come here to celebrate the resurrection in an ancient rite. The heathen customs are alive everywhere and especially in the mountains. You will see."

"We Georgians love picnics!" Dadiani called when they emerged from the church.

"Konrad, come and join us, it must be your first Caucasian picnic."

The servants had laid out an opulent lunch *al fresco*. With a simple gesture Alexandra's father invited the caretaker.

Everyone sat or lay around the tablecloth on which the servants had arranged Georgian delicacies among bottles of wine and *Borzhomi* mineral water. They had brought glasses for the wine. One of the servants lit a fire and roasted *shashlik* on sharpened sticks cut from the local trees. Dadiani served a fine red wine, and toasts in Georgian, French, and German added a graceful touch.

Afterwards Alexandra and her brothers took Konrad to an old watchtower. They scrambled up the crumbling stairs. Quietly the three had agreed to let Konrad reach the topmost parapet first. A stunning view surprised him: the road to Kazbegi, a few villages amid fields and green meadows in the foreground. At the horizon stretched the entire snow-covered range of the Eastern Caucasus from Daghestan to Ossetia, with mighty Mt. Kazbeg in its center. Alexandra, full of pride and happiness about the successful surprise, stood next to him and pointed at all the peaks by name.

Towards the west they looked down into the rolling country of the Kura valley. In the triangle at the confluence of the two rivers huddled the houses of Mtskheta around the royal cathedral and far in the distance they could barely make out the houses and towers of Tiflis, its fort and the Metekhi cathedral. Vineyards covered the valleys and dense, deciduous woods the slopes, creating a serene, pastoral scene of exceptional beauty.



View of Djvari and Mtskheta from Zedazeni (RWFG)

Alexandra was glowing with excitement. She appeared more beautiful than ever to Konrad. Had he felt free to do so he would have kissed her.

"I wanted to show you this view," she said putting her hand on his arm. "This is why I insisted to take you up here. It is the most beautiful place in *my* Georgia."

During the summer months Alexandra became Konrad's guide and companion in Tiflis. He enjoyed her presence immensely, because—he told himself naïvely—she was an inexhaustible source of information on local customs. In truth, however, their mutual affection had become like a delicate, invisible fabric that they dared not touch lest it might rent.

Chekhov's "Chaika" and Henri the Goldsmith

Autumn had come to Georgia, and it began to rain. A strong wind blew the yellow leaves of the plane trees across the wet pavement of Golovinsky Boulevard.

Konrad was waiting impatiently for Alexandra in a café on the second floor across from the Grand Theatre. She was taking a course on architecture from Professor Schröder, and they had agreed to meet at the café after the lecture. She was half an hour late.

Ever since the theater had opened Schröder had become a celebrity in Tiflis. The theater, an instant landmark, was sold out every night. Konrad shook his head at the multicolored, Oriental fantasy across the street. The Georgians had bestowed their enthusiasm for dramatic theater on this sad piece of pseudo-Byzantine architecture.

Tonight he would attend a performance there for the first time. Alexandra had obtained two scarce tickets for *Chaika*, "The Seagull", a controversial play by a young dramatist named Anton Chekhov.



Chekhov reads *Chaika* to the cast at MkhAT, Moscow 1898 (Wiki)

All they knew about him was that he belonged to the Russian *avant-garde*, and that *Chaika* had been torn to pieces by the critics at its Moscow premiere three years earlier. A few months ago Konstantin Stanislavsky, an unknown director, had dared to re-stage *Chaika*. It had become a sensational success for Chekhov, Stanislavsky, and the Moscow Performing Arts Theatre. Tbilisi was jostling to see the controversial play on its first tour outside of Moscow.

When Alexandra finally walked down the boulevard from the opposite direction from

which he had expected her, he knew that she had a legitimate excuse for her lateness. She had been to the Dadiani's townhouse to change for the evening.

She had thrown a black shepherd's burka over her dress. Its simple rectangular shape enhanced her tall, slender figure. She knew how to dress with the simplest pieces available. Fascinated and full of expectation Konrad watched the elegant black figure walk among the brown leaves drifting in the wind.

His anger at her late arrival was gone. He got up to receive her at the upper landing of the staircase. The pleasure of watching her from a distance prevailed over his guilt of lying in wait for her. When she saw him, she gave him one of her radiant smiles. They embraced and exchanged the three perfunctory Georgian kisses, which still electrified him disproportionately.

He helped her out of her burka, which was of the finest Daghestani wool. Underneath she wore a deceptively simple, charcoal gray dress, from which evolved, enhanced by her warm body, the merest trace of perfume. Around her exposed neck lay a thin, exquisitely handcrafted gold necklace.

He loved her deliberate simplicity, which suited her clear candor so well.

Very lightly he put his hand on her back, a gesture of pride and affection and guided her to his table at the window.

He sat across from her, spellbound by the play of emotions on her even face. Delight, alternating with open, unrestrained excitement, swept in waves across her features like the wind over a quiet lake, breaking into ravishing smiles around her eyes. Then again, she could be very still, as if listening to the beating of her own heart. Several times Konrad was tempted to spontaneously take her in his arms, but all he permitted himself was to kiss her hand.

He would have liked to sit far away from her, at another table, out of reach of her radiance, to observe her—and himself.

For a moment he succeeded and was startled: He had lost the freedom for such games. He had fallen hopelessly in love with this extraordinary woman. Irresolute, he said, "That is an exquisite necklace."

"Do you like this necklace?" She raised her delicate brows, her blue eyes laughed. "I put it on for you, thinking of your love of unadorned austerity."

She unhooked the necklace and handed it to him. It flowed like water from her hand. Its links were simple ringlets, all the size of a thumbnail. The lower part of each ringlet had a broadened lip, hammered from behind, so that a slight wave wandered through the necklace. The rings were connected by thin horizontal bands. A figure-eight link, lying on its side, acted as clasp. Every link had been made separately, so that none was exactly like any other. This slight, almost imperceptible unevenness was the source of the life and beauty of the piece.

He looked at it, pouring it between his hands with true sensual pleasure. "An amazing piece. Who made it? Where does it come from?"

"Henri Halvejian, an Armenian goldsmith in the Bazaar designed it especially for me. I have to take you to him. He is an unusual man who only works for people he knows personally. No two of his pieces are alike. He says that a good piece of jewelry should heighten the beauty of a woman, to where she will—in the eyes of her lover—surprise herself."

She smiled, her questioning eyes holding his.

"I don't know where he gets his seemingly inexhaustible designs. In fact, what are you doing tomorrow? Can we go to see Henri in the afternoon after my boring architecture class?"

Confounded, Konrad lowered his eyes. "Are you bored by Schröder's lectures?"

He handed her the necklace. She struggled with the clasp, and he got up to help her. "Bored is hardly the word for it."

She shivered when he touched her neck.

"The man is insufferable. All he does is show us design templates for windows, doors, and ornamentation. We had to buy an entire book of such curlicues from which we have to copy five pages for tomorrow. He is the exact opposite of Henri."

Konrad nodded. "I am not surprised. Look at his building over there, he designed it from a set of such templates: 'Russo-Byzantine Ornaments for an Oriental Harem'. Have a look in his book."

She nodded. "Come to think of it, why could Henri not teach me to design such beautiful necklaces? Maybe I could even learn how to make them. I will have to ask Henri how he gets his ideas. Are you coming along?"

Konrad avoided looking at her, the challenge in her eyes made him giddy. "What will your parents say: a well brought-up young lady like you trying to learn gold-smithing from a man in the bazaar?"

Her eyes lit up with fierce resolve. "The daughter of a rich father may do anything she sets her mind on, as long as she remains a dilettante and does not embarrass him by making money."

She laughed and continued with an alarming obstinacy. "And I do set my mind on the things I like! But I had hoped that you would applaud my idea."

"Dear, blue-eyed revolutionary, at times I am delighted and at others frightened by your headstrong determination." He pulled out his watch and consulted the time. "We have to go, if we don't want to rush."

He went to fetch her burka.

As he stood behind her, holding her coat spread between his outstretched arms, her bare neck lay in front of him for the third time on that evening, utterly defenseless. He brushed it with a kiss.

She spun around and slapped him in the face with her loose glove. Her eyes ablaze.

For a few seconds he stood holding her burka like a crest-fallen, black-winged angel. She appeared irresistibly beautiful. And then her eyes changed, asked for forgiveness, and with a smile on her flushed face she gave him a kiss on the affected cheek.

On Golovinsky Boulevard she put her arm under his. "Hold on to me, I might slip on this wet pavement."

She glanced at him sideways full of affection. Her arm in his was a novel experience; there was, of course, no danger that sure-footed Alexandra would slip.

"Please don't embarrass me now," she asked as they entered the crowded foyer of the theater. "You will see how many people will watch us, we would be the gossip of town tomorrow. As it is, the two of us appearing together will already lead to enough speculation."

Next to each other they looked stunning.

Tout le monde de Tiflis seemed to be present. She bowed her head to half a dozen elegant people and steered him to a couple somewhat older than her parents. The gentleman was of an imposing stature with an enormous handlebar mustache and white unruly hair, his wife a formally dressed matron. Alexandra introduced him, "Professor Konrad Rost from Berlin and St. Petersburg, my uncle Prince Luarsab Tarkhan-Mouravi and his wife Princess Sophia Bagrationi."

Alexandra smiled affectionately. "Aunt Sophia is my *natlideda*, my very special godmother."

Prince Tarkhan-Mouravi scrutinized Konrad with unmitigated severity. He switched from Russian to a rather formal German and inquired after Konrad's professional interests, while Aunt Sophia, smiled warmly. "An unusual dress you are wearing," she teased Alexandra. "Forever the elegantly understated Dadiani! But you must go and take your professor to meet your young friends. We'll see you later."

"A daughter of the mythical kings of Georgia?" whispered Konrad when they walked away.

Alexandra raised her eyebrows. "Tchi, not now, later. Look, over there is our famous poet Varzha Pshaveli talking to the feared literary critic Gregori Robakidze. You see him, the one with the prominent hooked nose. The stiff threesome over there are the 'celebrated' German architects Grimm, Stern, and Schröder. Ha, ha!"

She bowed her head again.

"This was Ivane Javakhishvili who is the driving force behind a Georgian University in Tiflis. But the Russians are suspicious, we are much too Georgian for their comfort. This man there is Akaki Tsereteli, another one of my relatives and *the* beloved poet of our time. He is talking to Lado Korisheli, a young actor on whom every girl in Tiflis has a crush," she smiled, "except I."

Konrad observed that in contrast to Berlin or St. Petersburg few men wore military uniforms.

"You are right, this is a land of poets and wine growers, besides we are now under the gracious protection of Russia and have no need for an army."

Konrad, weary of running the gauntlet, was relieved when the bell sounded.

They shared a private loge with the Tarkhan-Mouravis. Alexandra, sitting next to Sophia Bagrationi at the balustrade, produced an opera glass from her bag, and the two ladies enjoyed themselves exchanging gossip about the people present. In the back row, behind the ladies, the ferocious looking gentleman continued his private examination of Konrad.

"You should visit us at our estate in Kaspi-Akhalkalaki. I am experimenting with some new grape vines, and could very well use some advice," Mouravi was saying when the lights went out and an expectant hush fell over the audience.

Two large gauze curtains, one behind the other, spanned the entire opening of the stage. Actors in various poses stood on the nearly dark stage, some in front, others between the curtains. A few pieces of furniture barely indicated the existence of a room up front. A few trees between the curtains simulated a garden, and the second curtain veiled a romantic, moon-lit landscape, a lake, and a rowboat. Except for the front room everything lay in a dream-like haze.

While the actors remained frozen in their poses, a deceptively real looking, brightly illuminated, white seagull, screeching "Íya, Íya", fluttered towards the moon above the lake.

"*Gespenstisch!*" whispered Mouravi to Konrad. "Ghostly!"

The play's bill had announced "A Drama in Four Acts". This scene looked like a setting for a ghost story. Alexandra was shuddering.

The play, without a trace of comedy, developed into a somber, symbolic melodrama, which during the evening became more and more depressing. After several chaotic love tangles the manic-depressed lover/hero shot himself in the darkness behind the second

curtain.

Konrad, raised on the cleanly and expertly crafted dramas of Schiller and the wild, three-dimensional tragedies of Shakespeare, was disappointed.

He had seen a sampling of modern plays in Berlin. Appropriately, Ibsen's *Wildente*, "Wild Duck" came to his mind. But Ibsen's play, though similarly symbolic, was a colorful satire filled with biting criticism of society and its petit-bourgeois morality. He found nothing like that in this chaotic parable. Maybe his Russian was not good enough to fully appreciate the poetry of the extended, albeit rather stiff love scenes, as if the lovers had never before experienced this emotion.

Being relegated to watch more than to listen, Konrad noticed that the play was decidedly two-dimensional, an aspect masterfully emphasized by the gauze curtains. None of the actors ever disappeared, they only vanished into the second or third sublevel of this dreamscape, dimly visible behind the gauze but fully present at all times. This trick gave the play its heavily symbolic air.

The acting was superb. No role was too small to have escaped the attention of the director. Chekhov had drawn the characters of the two protagonists so weakly by that there simply was no commanding role in the play. That, too, heightened the moral symbolism of this dark tragedy.

The director granted his audience no respite; he performed the entire, long play without an intermission. Once again the ghostly seagull rose and cried her desperate cry, a shot rang through the theater. The play was over. The dead man was never produced.

Konrad, rather cool to this experience, was curious what Alexandra would have to say. The audience applauded madly during five or six curtain calls. In the end Chekhov appeared arm-in-arm with Stanislavsky and his main actors. The seagull cried once more, another ecstatic round of applause by the grateful audience.

The Prince steered them towards the bar and ordered a cognac for everyone. He toasted to the Georgian *joie de vivre* and mumbled something about the tragically dense Russian mind, saying, "Thank God we live in a sunnier climate."

Alexandra commented on the superb acting, but was otherwise uncharacteristically silent. The Tarkhan-Mouravis offered to take Alexandra home in their phaeton, which prevented any further fueling the rumors about their relationship, but also any discussion about the play with Konrad.

They met on Golovinsky Boulevard to visit Henri the goldsmith. Alexandra appeared in a long, coarsely woven skirt, a black mantilla, and high leather boots! She laughed as heartily as her father at Konrad's surprised stare. Her prominent nose and blue eyes completed the disturbing similarity between father and daughter.

She surveyed his street clothes and his low, patent leather shoes with a disapproving look. "No wonder they chased you around the bazaar. We are not going by *droshki*, you know. Your shoes are highly impractical for those streets. We should order you a pair of high boots on our way to Henri, and riding boots for Tusheti."

She took him into a dark shop behind the synagogue in Avlabada. A sign with naive pictures of boots and shoes announced in Russian: "Anatoli Biniashvili, Shoemaker, Fine Shoes for Ladies and Gentlemen".

The owner bowed deeply. "Princess Dadiani, I am honored by your visit to my humble

store, how can I serve you today?"

Alexandra explained and Anatoli brought out a number of different boots for Konrad. They were made from the most supple leather, yet strong and durable where it mattered. Most had long, turned-up points in front.

"What are these horns for?" asked Konrad Alexandra in German, running his fingers along the extravagant curve.

"Oh," she laughed, "for decoration of course. But the local joke is that the heroes hold onto them when squatting down to answer a human need."

Both were laughing now. Anatoli, left out, watched his valued customers with alarm.

"Professor Konrad Yulyevich wanted to know why the shoes are pointed in front," she explained to Anatoli. "He said that he had no intention of growing claws. So I told him that the points served to fend off the pigs in the villages."

Anatoli, his dark eyes darting unsure from Alexandra to Konrad, meekly joined their mirth.

Konrad ordered a pair of high-shafted riding boots, Georgian style, but insisted on another pair without horns in the "English style. "For my city needs," he explained. The boots, made especially for Konrad, would be ready in a few days.

When they were back in the street Konrad declared sullenly, "I don't see any need for these horns in town."

"O *ho*," she laughed, "you think so? Evidently you have not seen our latrines yet!"

"I did, but, my God, you are a delightfully outspoken Princess. You are about to change my whole view of the aristocracy."

Her blue eyes flashed mockingly. "The reason is that you have never taken out a woman from the upper society, else you would have long realized that we are just as human as the bourgeoisie—but we have no need to conceal our vulgar side."

He had to admit to that.

Henri Halvejian had his shop on the second floor of a building that was entirely occupied by goldsmiths and jewelers. An armed guard with a dashing mustache who looked like a bandit with a high fur hat, two bands of munitions crosswise over his chest, and an old-fashioned gun by his side, stood at the narrow entrance. As they approached, he presented his gun, stood at attention, and let them pass with a "Good morning, Princess Dadiani!"

Konrad laughed. "Ha, the Georgian army at work. That comes from taking out a truly aristocratic lady. I am amazed, everybody seems to know you by name! "

"They do," she said with annoyance, dismissing his comment with a sweep of her elegant hand.

Henri, truly delighted, got up from his workbench and greeted Alexandra and her guest with a smile. A broad-shouldered man without a beard, about five years older than Konrad. Very personably and unpretentiously, he bade them to sit down. He took off his glasses and closed his shop.

"I don't want anybody to disturb us. How are your architecture classes coming, Alexandra?"

"Henri, they are terribly boring. Schröder is trying to make us memorize design templates for all kinds of architectural details. In another month he will have killed all my visual imagination. Will I ever be able to conjure up another beautiful design on my own, independent of these curlicues?"

Henry nodded. "I know what you mean, most goldsmiths here work from such templates, which they inherited from their master. Look at the conventional filigree work around, it is all done in exactly this way."

Alexandra picked up a brooch from his table and examined it. "How do you come up with these designs? I have never seen two that were alike."

Henri combed his dark hair back with his fingers and then looked at his hands. "I don't know how to explain it to you. They appear to me in my dreams. But this is hardly a satisfactory answer; you will ask how I come by those dreams! It is a long story, difficult to describe."

He looked first at Alexandra then questioningly at Konrad. He seemed to see a long past vision. "As a young man in Kilikia, where I grew up, I became the apprentice of a goldsmith who was an old Sufi." He paused. A smile passed over his face. "You see, my father and grandfather belonged to a professional Sufi brotherhood called the Halveji. That is how my name came about, my grandfather was simply known as Gregor the Halveji. The members of this brotherhood were all artisans; some printed books, others made jewelry, some were monks who painted miniatures."

He seemed to have found a way to answer her question and his eyes became more lively. "Konstantin, my teacher, was a very unusual goldsmith. Just as I try to, he only worked on commission for patrons he knew well, and all his designs reflected the personality of his patron. So, as nobody is exactly like anybody else, none of his designs were alike, but they were always perfect complements to their owners. He never made much money in this way, but he worked for some of the most discriminating people of his time." He smiled at Alexandra. "People like you, beautiful, sensitive, and of exquisite taste.... It was a hard apprenticeship, because, like you, I could not comprehend how he came up with ever new forms. Often Konstantin would forbid me to work on a piece. He ordered me to sit for days silently with crossed legs in a dark corner of the shop, and contemplate the lady I was working for, until I had completely identified myself with her. A hard task for a young man, because the lady was, of course, unobtainable."

"Forgive me, Sir," he looked at Konrad, "I know Alexandra better than she does herself. I have thought about her so long and so intensely that I love her as deeply as her father does. And so, one day I woke up from my dreams and simply saw the piece that fit her in all detail. After that it was only a matter of craftsmanship to make it."

With great concentration Henri began to draw a shape on a piece of paper. "Look Alexandra, you have changed since I last saw you. How do you like these shapes for another necklace for you?"

It was a twice convoluted, interlocked arabesque looking distantly like an abstract water fowl. He repeated the shape several times to form a circle of equal-sized links.

"It is fuller, more complex than the necklace I made for you years ago when you had just turned sixteen. I would say, this shape is in love. With itself? With some one else?" He looked at her questioningly. "I don't know which and have no right to ask."

Alexandra flushed deeply. "Yes, as always, you look right through me."

And then, as if from very far away, Konrad heard her say, "I am deeply in love with this man, Konrad, my serious, red-bearded German."

Konrad's face went pale and then flushed crimson. He was assailed by embarrassment which just as quickly changed into an immense joy. For a few moments he fought this invasion of his soul. He would have liked to disappear. Alexandra rose and in supreme disregard of the

penetrating eyes of the enigmatic Armenian stranger, put her arms around Konrad, and gave him a true kiss.

Henri discreetly walked out of the room.

And Alexandra and Konrad, in that small goldsmith's shop in the bazaar of Tiflis, held on to each other for dear life.

For days they were unable to talk about what had happened at Henri's shop. Bewildered by the sudden change of their relationship, they felt awkward in the presence of each other.

Finally, depressed by his inability to act and show Alexandra his happiness, Konrad returned to Henri who received him with a surprised smile. Konrad, embarrassed, formally begged Henri to make, on his order, the necklace he had drawn for Alexandra.

Henri, most unexpectedly, refused. "Konrad Yulevich, I find myself in a difficult situation. I had hoped to make this necklace as my wedding gift for Alexandra. It would have been my way of making Alexandra more than just a friend of many years. Now I have to atone for having precipitated the events at your last visit. I see that I misjudged the state of your and Alexandra's relationship and did both of you a disservice. I should not have provoked Alexandra's impulsive declaration of love. It was too early. I did not realize that."

He paused and deep in thought stroked his chin. "If I make her a present of that necklace now, I will most certainly lose you. I assure you, I am not your competitor for Alexandra's affection, but it may take years for you to understand that. On the other hand, if you ask me to make this necklace and you pay for it, both of you will very probably lose me, because my guilt would grow, and the power in that necklace would be nil."

Henri pressed his hands together and touched his lips with his fingertips. In deep thought he remained silent for a while.

"You have to understand," he said gently, "this necklace is no ordinary piece of jewelry the like you can buy in any store around here. It is a magic circle which has the power to protect the woman who wears it and to make her more beautiful than she ever imagined possible, but it can also destroy Alexandra, your love, and me."

After another silence a smile came over Henri's face. "There would be a way out of this dilemma, to resolve this complicated tangle: *You* make a necklace for Alexandra with my help. You will have to dream up a design of your own, mine will not do, and then you can use my shop, and I will teach you all the necessary technical skills to make it. In this way you can release us three from the evil powers of our last meeting."

Konrad was deeply moved by the seriousness of Henri's suggestion. But how could he make such a delicate thing? How would he, all by himself, come up with a design of his own? The task appeared insurmountable. But then he remembered Alexandra's enthusiastic plan to design jewelry. He should be able to do what she considered possible!

Curiously this thought gave him the wings to overcome his doubts. It was he who had to subject himself to this labor to save his love for Alexandra, to understand her, and to get to know this enigmatic man.

"Yes," Konrad said simply, "that is what I must do."

Henri hugged him spontaneously and gave him a kiss very much on the same spot where Alexandra had.

Konrad would later realize that Henri, by this hug and kiss, had quietly accepted him as his Sufi disciple.

"I know you feel overawed by the task of finding the right shape for the links of the necklace," said Henri with compassion. "I suggest that you put a pencil and several pieces of paper into your pocket and whenever you have a spare moment you doodle with half-closed eyes all kinds of designs on that paper. Don't at first envision them to become links of a necklace, shake your hand and for a while just draw free forms."

Henri found a piece of paper and drew a few examples.

"Have enough paper with you so that your doodles come out separate, and you can later pick out shapes you like. When you have found a shape you think fits her, or if you get stuck, come back to me."

At first Konrad felt sheepish doodling, but he had much time, and slowly this exercise took complete hold of him. Quiet and happy, he began to dream of shapes and necklaces in the early mornings.

He had not seen Alexandra for several days. He had no idea what had happened to her, but it seemed out of question for him to call at the Dadiani's townhouse in person. He finally scribbled a note and sent it to her. No answer.

His longing for her grew, made his hands clumsy, his designs became complicated and involved. He stopped himself and thought of Alexandra's gold necklace, its simple elegance suddenly seemed the only possible form suitable for this woman. He found that he could not think of a shape that could compete with those ringlets, they had been reduced to their ultimate simplicity. Look, he finally told himself, a circle is a circle, there is no simpler form except that of a sphere, which was outside of his design task.

He tried rows of ellipses of different sizes and discovered why in Henri's necklace all links were of the same size. It bestowed a formal strength and grace to the necklace that would be lost in meaningless playfulness if he graduated the links in size.

Yes, he thought, the shape of the links must have a meaning that added up to a whole that reflected Alexandra and his love for her. But what form would express his complex affection? Stuck, he walked around with a hanging head for several days. Instinctively he knew that Henri could not resolve this impasse.

One morning after his lecture a radiant Alexandra stood in front of the Gymnasium carrying a long, wrapped roll. She flew into his arms in front of all his students.

"Forgive me for avoiding you for such a long time without any explanation. I hid all by myself in Zaguramo for the entire week. Come let me show you what I did."

They went to Leist's apartment, her first visit there, where she carefully unwrapped a strange woolen affair from her package.

She held it up. It was a wall hanging woven from wool threads of different colors. Two bare twigs from a tree at the top, another on the bottom, weighed down the loose warp. She had then pulled a mass of deep blue waft threads very loosely across the top followed by fields and islands of white, green, gray, and dark brown towards the bottom. In an almost black area off-center she had spun in a large carline thistle, silver, gray, and green.

Despite its delicate three-dimensional body the hanging was nearly transparent, woven so thin and loose that he could see her laughing eyes through it.

"Do you remember the invisible, delicate fabric we imagined between us and were afraid to tear if we would kiss each other? This is it! After I almost destroyed our sacred web with my emotional outcry of affection, I decided that I, like Arachne, had to repair it and make it

stronger.

"You see this is the sky of Georgia, and the white fields are the snow of the high mountains below which grow vines and green meadows. The *carlina acaulis* is the sun and at the same time our relationship, beautiful and full of thorns. I found the thistle and the twigs at Zedazeni one early morning."

She dropped the hanging on his bed and hugged and kissed him happily.

Alexandra's Necklace

Konrad's emotional bind dissolved. His visualization exercises became fluid. Early in the morning between sleep and being fully awake he could now see Alexandra wearing the necklaces he drew, and in another week he found a shape he liked. It looked like a Greek omega upside-down with a thin bridge between two large eyes on top, which would also serve as the ringlets by which he would connect the links.

Full of excitement he took his design to Henri, who gave him a relieved hug and three kisses. Henri suggested that Konrad hammer the links from simple round wire and widen the bottom arcs of the omegas.

Every morning before his lectures Konrad worked at Henri's shop on this labor of love. Despite the toil and frustration these became the happiest hours of his days. He thought about Alexandra, their love, and their future. Would she agree to marry him, follow him into an uncertain future in a cold, northern country populated by people totally different from her? Would his love be strong enough to support her far away from her family and her beloved Georgia? He sensed the close ties between her and this sunny, cheerful, and yet mysterious land. She still posed a mystery to him to which he could not give a name.

Henri showed him how to wind the wire on a mandrel, but thereafter he hammered each link separately. In three weeks all eighteen links were finished. Konrad worked a long time to learn how to use a pointed, mouth-blown tube to fan the flame of an alcohol burner into a long, hot spike for soldering the delicate connecting ears to the links. During this operation the tiny pieces had to be fluxed and strapped to a block of charcoal. He burned two of the precious links before he mastered that task. Henri let him copy the figure-eight clasp, which he claimed as his personal trademark.



Alexandra's necklace

The finished necklace pleased Konrad immensely, it flowed from his hands just as beautifully as Alexandra's. He wrapped it into a piece of simple tissue paper and hid it in his coat pocket.

He had invited Alexandra for dinner that night. As they prepared to leave he mysteriously pulled out the small packet.

Her eyes filled with tears when he took her before a mirror in the hall and fastened the necklace around her neck. Alexandra embraced him. Looking over her shoulder he saw himself in the mirror and wondered, is that I? Who is this fabulous woman in my arms, and why am I so happy?

Overcome by her beauty he kissed her and quite spontaneously asked, "Will you marry me?"

She held on to him tightly. "Yes, I will, yes, my love."

Georgia on Horseback

1898

Konrad's riding boots fit like gloves. Looking oddly magnificent with their upturned tips they made him feel like a true Caucasian.

"Now you have to learn how to ride again," Alexandra said. "Let's go to Betania. This is not a long ride. It leads through beautiful woods to a romantic, old church built by Queen Tamara."

Alexandra took out her white stallion, and her father provided Konrad with a mare that could hold the stallion's pace, but was docile enough for him to practice and improve his horsemanship.

It was not the first time that Konrad sat on a horse. In his student days he had belonged to a *Burschenschaft*, a student fraternity that owned a stable of horses, and instead of fencing and drinking he had often gone riding through the sandy *Mark* north of Berlin. But for the past five years he had not had much opportunity to ride and badly needed a refresher before the planned trip to Tusheti.

They slowly rode up the hill north of Mtatsminda David, passed Kodjori, a small village of summerhouses, and soon found themselves in a magnificent, deciduous forest.

"I talked to Papá about us," Alexandra began. "Did you realize that you have a powerful advocate in him? Father truly likes you, it makes me very happy. But my mother has different ideas of what kind of man I should marry. Father promised to help us overcome the resistance of my mother and the Chavchavadze family."

Konrad remembered his puzzlement about the reticent silence of her mother. He slowed his horse. "I have met your mother only once, very briefly at breakfast in Zaguramo. She did not speak more than the most formal words a hostess is required to say. You hardly ever mention her, so completely are you in love with your father! I sensed your mother's reservations towards me."

Alexandra blushed. "*Ach*, dear Konrad, my relations with Mother are a long, sad story, which is not easily told, and moreover you do as yet know little about Georgian women, their dilemma and the conventions in which they are enmeshed."

She sighed but then picked up her thought again, resolved to get this subject over with. It weighed on her since she had confessed her love for Konrad to her father. "You think I am the most Georgian woman you ever met. I am not. I am a rebellious outsider in this society, the black sheep in my family. And my mother and the Chavchavadze ascribe this misfit in their midst to Father's Mingrelian origins."

They had reached the edge of the woods. Among fields and meadows lay the scattered houses of a village. Konrad was struck, this scene looked so much like a village in the Black Forest. He stopped his horse. "This landscape could be somewhere near Baden-Baden, it is so German."

Alexandra smiled. "I don't know Germany, but this village is called Elisabethtal, and its inhabitants are German Swabians from the Black Forest! These people settled here during Empress Catherine's time. They still speak German with a Swabian accent."

She turned east, back into the woods and after a while returned to the difficult subject of her father's doting and her mother's disapproval of her wishes and actions.

"My parent's different attitudes are in part a result of the prejudices between Western and Eastern Georgia. Mingrelia, the old Kolkhis in the West, is much richer than Kartli in the East. The Mingrelians are rich landowners who live well. Since Jason's times they have been known as cunning and treacherous, you should be mindful of them! While here in Kartli they are poets and professors, and these poor intellectuals look down on the Western Georgians. The Chavchavadze consider themselves one of the politically powerful families in Kartli. Father, a Mingrelian who chose to become a professor in Tiflis, has had a hard time measuring up to the expectations of his Chavchavadze in-laws."

She looked at Konrad uncertain whether he appreciated the deep, personal effect that these age-old family feuds had on her. She gave her horse the reins, but after a short distance changed her mind. There were still her personal troubles with Mother.

"Mother is the true Georgian woman," she began anew. "She is a good mother to us children, but foremost she is a devoted wife to her husband, whom she loves and admires deeply. Father, by virtue of his intelligence and his wife's admission, is the decisive person in our family. But following old Georgian custom, father tactfully defers internal family matters to her, and among those is the decision about who I should marry. Mother has always thought of an arranged marriage for me with some suitably boring member of a well-known family."

Eyes blazing dangerously, she impatiently spurred her horse. "I will make my own decision in this matter, and she knows that!"

She calmed herself. An idea to ease the tensions between all of them had occurred to her. She turned to Konrad. "You know, there is one all-important thing you could do—learn some Georgian. Not to speak it colloquially immediately, none of us speaks much Georgian at home, but to be able to recite some of our poetry. It would instantly win the hearts of all Chavchavadzes."



The Church of Betania, 1890s

Konrad laughed. "That was exactly what your father suggested on our very first meeting: 'Alexandra should teach you Georgian.' I feel that he has not only been your accomplice for a long time, but he knew all along that you had set your eyes on me! And I, in those long-gone days, did not have the nerve to ask you to teach me Georgian. I would love to learn some poetry from you."

With a mischievous sparkle in her eyes that reminded Konrad of her just alluded to Mingrelian genes, she said. "I have another idea. Father indicated that you should visit him soon. You will have to ask formally for the hand of his daughter. If you could learn those words in Georgian, it would be a complete surprise for both my parents. Maybe this would be the first phrase I should teach you."

Konrad reigned in his horse and kissed her hand and said laughing. "Dearest Lady Alexandra, may I first formally ask *you* for your hand in marriage? I promise to be a good husband, a doting father to your children, and the quiet spirit in your tempestuous life."

Alexandra blushed deeply and, a little awkwardly, leaned from horse to horse and kissed him.

They had arrived at a clearing in the woods. At their feet lay, surrounded by an apple orchard, lay the church of Betania. A narrow bridle path led down into the valley, and in another fifteen minutes they reached the church.

Whenever it did not rain in October and November, Alexandra took Konrad on ever-longer excursions. High on the pleasure of riding, they spent whole days in the vast steppe southeast of Tiflis, far from the prying eyes, the gossip, convention, and bustle of town.

They left very early one morning when the air was still crisp and frosty. As soon as the squalor of the busy streets lay behind them, they let their horses fly. Except for a few shepherds and their flocks, no villages interrupted the expanse of this landscape.

South of the road to Kakheti the grassy plain stretched for miles towards the hills of Garedshi on the Azerbeidjani border. They rode along a barely visible track straight into the noon sun.

"Let's see who wins!" she shouted and gave her horse free rein.

Konrad bent down on the neck of his mare, stirring her to give all she had. They flew over the empty plain like arrows. For the first time Konrad felt truly at one with his horse. Very slowly he gained a nose, then half a head, and finally half a length on Alexandra's stallion.

"I give up," shouted Alexandra raising her arms. "This time you win."

She reined in her panting horse, jumped off, and threw herself full-length into a sandy depression laughing and gasping for breath. He knelt next to his high-spirited Amazon and kissed her tenderly.

The low sun threw long shadows of the two lonely riders over the yellow grass, when they reached the seemingly bewitched rock formations of David Garedja. In an amphitheater surrounded by rock walls pocked with caves they came upon the Lavra, the dilapidated center of the monasteries of Udabno.

An Azeri shepherd family and their flock occupied the ground floor in the only intact building. The shepherds spoke a heavily Farsi-inflected Georgian, which Alexandra could barely understand. They offered them an empty room on the second floor, once a monk's cell, and for a small amount of money promised to provide for the horses.



Ruin of the Lavra at David Gareji

In the light of the fading day Konrad and Alexandra explored the ruins, defense towers, remnants of a collapsed church, and an elaborate system of water runnels feeding a cavernous cistern full of frogs. Hermits once occupied the caves in the soft rocks.

Along an extended incline they climbed to one of the caves, where they sat imagining the place inhabited by monks who, in the tenth century, had come to live at the feet of the revered Syrian mystic David Gareji.

A full moon rose. The caves in the rock walls filled with spooky shadows. The chanting of the night vigil surrounded them. "You wanted to learn Georgian?" She smiled quizzically at him. "Are you still prepared to do that, or have you changed your mind?" He frowned. "How could I have changed my mind? Are you still prepared to marry me?"

She put an arm around his shoulder and whispered, "*Me umorchilesad gtkhovt tkveni kalishvilis khels.*" Irritated he shook his head. "You know that I don't understand Georgian, will you translate for me?" "Just repeat after me." Loud and clearly she said again, "*Me umorchilesad gtkhovt tkveni kalishvilis khels.*"

He stuttered through the line. "Is this the beginning of a poem?" "Perhaps, but it is definitely the beginning of our life together. The triple consonants are difficult. Try again, you are getting better." Slowly he gathered that this was the magic formula that would persuade Irakli Dadiani to concede his daughter to him. In the end, after he had mastered the entire phrase and repeated it several times in a row, he kissed her and begged off until another day.

In a beautiful, clear alto voice Alexandra began to sing songs that sounded sad, mysterious, and exciting, all at once. The moon had come across the hills, and its light flooded the valley of the Lavra. A sheep bleated and the dogs began to howl. Soon an answer

came from the desert, a jackal or another sheep dog? The desert night sprang to life with voices.

In the early morning they walked up a steep path across the broad back of the ridge behind the Lavra. Alexandra had heard of another cave complex, but had never been there and had to ask the shepherds for the way. From an old chapel on top of the ridge a yellow-brown wasteland of rolling hills spread before them, here and there a darker rock formation cast slanted shadows. For a long time they searched for the elusive caves.

Konrad had climbed along a steep precipice and called. "Alexandra, these rocks are full of discarded snake skins, there must be dozens of them here. Come, have a look." "Snakes are one species I really don't like," she shouted back. "Thank you, I don't want to follow you. They are dangerous Asian sand vipers. Thank God it is not spring, you simply could not climb these rocks."

Finally she discovered the caves that they had been searching for hidden underneath the overhang: a collapsed refectory, numerous small cells, a chapel in a rock cave, the roof of which lay strewn about in jagged, crystalline boulders, fantastic sculptures in the early light.

Alexandra had to climb on Konrad's shoulders to reach the refectory, and then she pulled him up. Carefully watching for falling stones, they found six benches and tables in the cave hewn from the bare rock.

Suddenly they stood before a fresco of the Last Supper: Christ and the disciples seated around an oval table strewn with round loaves, a single fish in a bowl. Behind the table, to the left, the city of Jerusalem, a tree on the right. It was painted in delicate hues of green, pink, and yellow. Konrad counted the disciples and found only eleven! Judas was missing!

"Strange, in all four gospels Judas was part of the Last Supper. Why have these monks omitted him?"

"Maybe they wanted to punish him!" suggested Alexandra. "But these were Syrian monks, who often entertained strange beliefs that are not part of the gospels. To them Judas was the only one who *knew*—who recognized Jesus as Christ."

On their way back to the Lavra Alexandra asked Konrad about his attitude towards religion. Konrad began to laugh. "*Ah, die ewige Gretchen Frage: 'Heinrich wie hältst Du's mit der Religion?'*" (the eternal Gretchen question, Heinrich what is your attitude towards religion?) asks Margarete her enlightened friend Faust in Goethe's drama. One of the most famous lines in German literature!—Oh, as you know, I was baptized and brought up as a Lutheran, not in any rigorous way. The Church is unimportant to me, a human institution with all the shortcomings, errors, and political manipulations of the 'believers' that this implies. God? Sometimes I think I believe in God, on other occasions I am not sure he ever existed. Sometimes I am most certain he is dead, or has fled the miserable scene he has created. As a scientist I do prefer Darwin's theory over Genesis, but I love the symbolism and poetry of the Bible. What else do you want me to say?"

She fidgeted with her hair, which hung tousled in her face. "I thought you would laugh at me. Father asked me this question about you, expressing the hope that you would not be a fanatic. Well, I am happy that I was right when I reassured him that you were not. Father pays lip service to Orthodoxy, because it is the convention of our time here, but he thinks much like you. Are you a Socialist, then?" She cocked her head.

"If you wish to describe my political hopes for the future, you may call me a Socialist. I am certainly no royalist. But again I cannot muster any fanatic, political convictions. They only

lead to blind destruction."

In November Alexandra proposed to take Konrad to Alaverdi, where, in celebration of the local saint's feastday, the shepherds from the mountains congregated at this time to eat, drank, and danced for two weeks with the local peasants. The most colorful event in Kakheti. They took the ancient path through the low mountains that separate Tiflis from Kakheti.

"Father suggested that we get married in the cathedral at Alaverdi," explained Alexandra. "Because you do not belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church the priests in Tiflis would not marry us without first converting you, and Alaverdi is my favorite church."

Konrad was aware of this problem and had wondered how it could be resolved. "Russia needs a civil-law marriage which Bismarck instituted in Germany. That would end the medieval influence of the Church."

Alexandra sighed. "Here speaks my red-bearded Socialist." She looked dreamily at the horizon. "I love the Georgian wedding ceremony, it is very beautiful and gives a marriage meaning. I would never submit to a wedding before a magistrate, and I hope that our venerable Georgian institution will never be changed."

Konrad laughed. "So, an unbeliever cannot get legally married? I have met several such people among my students in St. Petersburg, they are forced to live in 'sin.'"

"Or bribe the priest!" she retorted with a shrug. "The priests are poor and corruptible, especially in the country. Papa and Ilia Chavchavadze will discreetly pay off the priest in Alaverdi, but this is difficult to do in Tiflis."



Alaverdoba, 1890s

Around the white cathedral that towered above the vineyards spread one huge encampment. The music, the neighing horses, and bleating sheep could be heard from a mile away. As they drew closer they came upon a Breughelian scene of dancers. An accordion, a drum, and a high clarinet provided the music. The young men formed a line. With their hands on each other's shoulders and loud shouts they snaked around the girls pretending to be disinterested. Then the music changed pace. The line broke up and each man performed a fancy figure of steps before the girl of his choice. Finally men and women alternating joined in a tight circle, which turned faster and faster as the drum beat at a frenzied pace and the clarinet screeched to a dizzying pitch—until the ring broke apart under great merriment.

They walked through the encampment, filled with uncounted carts and wagons, smoking fires, steaming cauldrons, and outspread tablecloths around which women and men sat separated, eating, singing, and carousing to their heart's delight. In one corner three women plucked chickens to be cooked in a cauldron of boiling water. In another two men skinned and slaughtered a sheep hanging from the side of a wagon. At every drinking party they passed, Konrad had to drink a glass of the dangerous, effervescent, new wine or eat a piece of lamb.

"If we walk around much longer, I will be drunk!" Konrad moaned.

"Let us look behind the scene," Alexandra suggested threading through the cheerful crowd. They entered the ambulatory that ringed the cathedral and there in a corner found an old man. Shepherds dragging bleating rams by the horns were jostling close to him.

Alexandra stopped at a distance from the scene. "He is a *khevisberi*, a shaman from the mountains. They have been consecrating sheep for millennia. They don't like women to enter their magic circle when they work. But you may go closer and watch what happens."

With a pair of thin candles, mumbling incantations, the old man burnt a cross into the wool of the sheep's forehead. The shepherd gave the *khevisberi* a ruble and filled his glass with wine from a pitcher his young son carried on his shoulder. Then they dragged the struggling sheep back to their cart.

Within minutes the sheep was dispatched and hung ready to be skinned. The meat was dressed, skewered, and broiled over an open fire. The bones, joints, and ligaments went into a cauldron of boiling water to make, with lots of garlic added, *khashi*, the traditional sheep broth.

"I know this abominable brew," said Konrad, "*khashi* was my first encounter with the wonderful Georgian kitchen. Leist obliged me to eat it in Kasbegi, the day I first set foot on Georgian soil."

Alexandra laughed as hard as her father.

Konrad discovered several other *khevisberi* hiding behind the church; one, standing in a puddle of blood, was consecrating roosters by cutting off their heads with one stroke of a sword, another was blessing and breaking rounds of flat bread. He kept a quarter of every third loaf for himself as payment.

Alexandra took him into the church. People crowded its soaring, Romanesque nave, quietly walking around, meeting friends, talking in a low voice. A few women were kneeling and praying in front of the iconostasis. All around the nave hundreds of lighted beeswax tapers stuck to the bare walls at eye level. There was no priest, no music, no singing, no loud praying. The people had their very own gathering in God's house.

Konrad was deeply moved by this communal atmosphere, by the light of the hundreds of candles, and by the friendliness of the people who unquestioningly accepted the stranger in their middle.

"Here," whispered Konrad with a choking voice, "I could find the presence of God again."

Late in the afternoon on their ride back to Tiflis, it was already getting dark and an early moon was rising over the hills, his mare lost an iron. She limped along at a snail's pace.

After a while they decided to unburden the lame animal. They tied the mare to Alexandra's horse and Konrad climbed into her saddle and held her tightly.

Her warm body and the slow gait of the animal soon aroused him. After a time, Alexandra struggled out of her underwear, and with a laugh and a pat to the horse's neck, pulled her underpants over its pricked up ears and turned around to embrace Konrad.

Under the sickle of the waxing moon, driven on by the rocking of her faithful horse, she slowly, gently lost her virginity, in the most loving way the Old Orient knows.

The Engagement

Konrad and Alexandra surprised her father at work in his study. Dadiani took off his reading glasses and slowly rose. With uncommon seriousness he embraced and kissed Alexandra and shook Konrad's hand.



Ilia Chavchavadze's study in his Tbilisi town-house, 1890s

"Yes, dear children, God walked in the garden and Adam and Eve hid in the bushes. You don't have to be embarrassed before me, I am not God. Besides, different from God, I took a wife at a similar time in my life as you, Konrad, and have never regretted that day."

He smiled briefly. Clasp his hands behind his back, he walked back and forth. "I have thought about you and have come to the conclusion that you might be good for each other. Konrad, you are a quiet and considerate man. You can listen and you complement Alexandra's often unruly, tempestuous nature."

He stopped and contemplated them with his clear, blue eyes. "Because your temperaments are so different, life will not bring you only bliss. But if you use your differences to support each other's strengths and weaknesses mutually and honestly, they will be the best guarantee for a stable and fruitful marriage in these rapidly changing times."

He folded his hands, touched his lips briefly, and then faced them squarely. "I have convinced Tamara to accept your wish to get married. Alexandra, please go and find your mother, she knows what decision we four have to make."

Alexandra left the room.

Dadiani took up his walk again, absentmindedly twirling his mustache in deep concentration. "Konrad, I am trying to help you to get this drama over with as painlessly as possible, but you do have to ask Tamara formally for the hand of her daughter. It is hard on her to see her daughter leave and follow you into an unknown future."

Konrad had tried to anticipate various versions of this scene, but in none of them had he seen himself asking Alexandra's mother for her daughter. He had assumed that this charade would be played out between him and his future father-in-law in his wife's, and especially Alexandra's, absence.

A proudly poised Tamara followed by an anxious Alexandra walked in. And Konrad, before the tableau could compose itself or anybody could stop him, in unaccustomed spontaneity, went down on one knee and kissed Tamara's hand.

"I have come to ask you and your husband for the hand of your daughter Alexandra. I promise to love her above anything else and to care for her to the end of my days, whatever fate may befall us." He recited the Georgian version Alexandra had taught him.

Silence befell on the room. Konrad remained on his knee. Tamara, taken by complete surprise, wiped a tear from her eyes and then did what nobody had expected. She extended her hand, raised Konrad, and embraced him.

"Konrad, I welcome you into our family as my son."

Blushing like a young girl, she gave him three kisses, took hold of his hand, and presented him first to her husband saying with a trembling voice: "Be this thy father," and then to Alexandra, "and this thy faithful wife for ever and ever."

Crying and laughing Alexandra buried her head on Konrad's chest. He gently kissed her hair. Confounded by his wife's unexpected ministrations, Irakli Dadiani looked on speechlessly. Finally Tamara took him into her arms.

Tamara led her bewildered family onto the verandah where lunch had been laid. A servant brought champagne and Father Dadiani raised his glass with a toast to their future.

Abashed, Tamara smiled over her glass at Konrad. "Do call me *Tamunia-Deda*, and you know, the Georgian word for father: *mama*!"

Konrad said a few improvised words to thank his newly found parents.

As they sat down, Alexandra rummaged in her purse and pulled out the necklace. Konrad raised his eyebrows. He had not expected this surprise. She handed it to him, and with a smile he fastened it around Alexandra's neck.

Alexandra was glowing. "Look what Konrad made for me."

Her mother asked to see the necklace up close. She held it by its ends in an arc and, as if weighing it, let the links flow between her hands. Alexandra had to tell the story of the necklace, and her father toasted the unexpected goldsmith in their midst.

Tying it around Alexandra's neck, new tears came to Deda's eyes. She kissed her daughter.

"How did you find this man? A foreigner who speaks Georgian and makes Sufi necklaces?" She shook her head. "This gold chain is a serious declaration of love. It has the power to protect you and your marriage as long as you live. Give it to your daughter before you die."

Konrad returned to Henri's shop. He felt a need to think about Alexandra in the quiet solitude of working precious metal into new life. He wanted to compose himself, to renew and

find the love she needed. He had put it into his head to make their rings himself.

Marriage seemed to him both sacred and mundane, unadorned, simple, and precious. Only two quite ordinary gold bands hammered wide to please her slender, tapered fingers, and bare of any adornments or precious stones, would describe his vision of their union. To soften these austere wedding bands he wanted to make a second ring for her that would carry a single, beautiful, softly shimmering pearl to reflect the woman that he hoped she would grow into—if he loved her well.

Henri suggested casting the rings, but this idea, in which he would model the rings in wax, appeared entirely too professional, fast, and easy. He would be deprived of the pleasure of beating the malleable gold to conform to his vision. He labored for several days with the task of slowly rolling, annealing, bending, and soldering two thick gold rods into the desired shapes. And as with the necklace, careful planishing with a polished hammer gave them the sparkle and life he envisioned.

Content, he looked at his work.

The design of the pearl ring proved more difficult. Because of its vulnerability, the pearl had to be protected as much as possible by the ring's construction. Even then, Konrad realized, Alexandra would be able to wear the ring only on special occasions. A precious piece indeed.

At first he tried to hide the pearl inside a cage of baroque forms: the pearl the secret symbol of their relationship. But his love for simplicity made him discard all those trial sketches.

Finally he thought of a hammered gold bowl that would mirror the backside of the pearl. He would mount it in the mirror's focus. Smiling he remembered his physics teacher in Berlin who had demanded that his students memorize the various optical images of spherical mirrors. In the end he added a thin flat ring around the edge of the bowl that surrounded pearl and mirror like a halo.

Henri took him to a dealer of precious stones. The beauty of dark opals, a large diamond with a soft, milky suspension, the likes of which he would never see again, and the profusion of pearls in all shades from a mysterious black to pinks, proved a great temptation to abandon his idea and start anew. Confused, he procrastinated for an hour during which they drank one cup of Turkish coffee after another.

Eventually, his heart beating double from excitement and the coffee, Konrad bought a large, mysterious, black pearl.

Following Henri's suggestion Konrad fastened the pearl in the middle of the bowl on a short stem made from gold tubing. Henri, who had never heard of optical physics, was much impressed by the visual effect of the hammered mirror. A fairly large ring, it was equally beautiful from close up and from far away, exactly what Konrad had hoped for.

A Sufi Sema

One day Henri surprised Konrad with an invitation to join him at a Sufi *sema*. Konrad could hardly hide his excitement. The *sema*, the mystical meeting of the Sufi, was shrouded in secrecy. Outsiders were rarely admitted. Henri explained that his brotherhood met once a month on a Thursday to dance in an abandoned church in Shavnabada, outside of town. A woman who lived in a room attached to the church was their *sheik*, their leader. She was also a famous psychic medium and a healer.

Konrad had thought that only Moslem men could belong to Sufi brotherhoods and was surprised to hear that their sheik was a woman.

"Among Moslem Sufi that is true, but no one in our group belongs to Islam. All of us are metal craftsmen, precious stone grinders or printers. We make no distinction as to the religious connection of our brothers. Persephone, our sheik, is a Syrian-Christian woman who grew up as a Nestorian or Jacobite. The Syrian Christians—who owe their survival to Islam, the Byzantines would have killed them all—have preserved many old Christian traditions, among them the Aramaic language Christ spoke."

Henri smiled, encouraging his student, "May that be as it is, do come along, it will be very interesting for you."

Konrad accepted and asked whether he could bring Alexandra along.

"You may, if you can persuade her," Henri said. "Her father is very much against mysticism, and you might find her reluctant to come."

As Henri had foreseen, Alexandra did not want to join him, but gave Konrad an intriguing piece of information. "Father, with his enlightened ideas, is dead set against Sufi and all other mystics, but Deda visits Persephone regularly to consult her in matters of her and our lives. We don't talk about that at home, and I have no idea what role Deda plays in those dances at Shavnabada. I am certain though that Deda discussed you and us with Persephone, who may also have consulted Henri about you. It would not surprise me, if Deda's change of mind about you and our getting married and Henri's invitation were connected with Persephone. Be careful, dear man, you are about to enter a dense psychic web, of which you are completely ignorant."

Much too curious to pay heed to Alexandra's warning of black magic, he became only more determined not to let slip a singular opportunity to penetrate below the surface of Oriental life.

A few days later Alexandra surprised him by asking whether he would after all take her along to Shavnabada. She had discovered that her father was taking Deda to the theater on that particular Thursday. Deda would not be present in Shavnabada. Under cover of being Konrad's companion she could learn something about her mother she had never dared to ask.

"Come," he said, "let us face the unknown together, who knows what we shall learn."

Henri, raising his eyebrows in surprise, assented.

Dressed in dark burkas and hoods that Henri had provided, which hid them completely except for their faces, they set out in a *droshki* from the Bazaar.

The half hour ride took them up a valley southwest of town. Henri bade the *droshki* to await their return in a village of a few houses from where they walked up a hill.

The night was dark. They passed a desolate Moslem cemetery, a vast treeless field. Crooked steles stood menacing at all angles as far as the eye could see. The mounds of the graves lay bare and uncared for, ghostly oil lamps flickered at a few sites. Two pariah dogs disappeared into the night.

On the top of the hill, the silhouette of the church and a tree stood out etched in black against the lights of the city below. A single candle flickered in the building.

Nobody spoke.

From a branch of the gnarled oak in front of the building hung a bell. Below they found two wooden tables and an ancient stone block. Another heathen altar? A butcher block for the slaughter of sheep?

The simple windowless stone building had a pitched roof. A dilapidated bell tower rose into the night. The door to a small room under the tower stood open. A flickering candle cast unsteady shadows over a disorderly bed, a table, a half-empty soup bowl, a couple of wine bottles.

Henri knocked at the narrow door. An indistinct murmur of voices. After an exchange of passwords a hooded man opened. Henri embraced and kissed the brother, then he introduced Konrad and Alexandra.

They took off their shoes and entered barefoot. The highly polished wood floor reflected uncounted candles waxed to the blackened stone walls. A dozen men in long, white skirts, short jackets, and high, brown, cylindrical top hats sat cross-legged on cushions along the wall. They quietly smoked softly bubbling water pipes. A pungent aroma filled the room.

Konrad helped Alexandra out of her burka and found that she wore baggy, white cotton pants, tied at her ankles, a similar buttonless shirt with a high collar—and his necklace. She turned to him with an encouraging smile.

Alexandra bowed deeply to a middle-aged woman in a black cloak and a green turban sitting cross-legged at one side of the open dance space, Persephone. Konrad followed Alexandra's example. Persephone acknowledged the guests with a nod. A brother led them to cushions on a carpet across from her. Henri in his white dance skirt and brown hat had already taken his seat among his brothers.

A brother brought a water pipe. Alexandra took a deep breath from the mouthpiece and whispered to Konrad. "Be careful, don't take too much, you are not used to this potent stuff, you might just fly off! I will help you keep the smoke burning."

It was *cannabis*. Its effect overwhelmed him. The room began to turn and a pleasurable dizziness descended upon his senses. He left most of the smoke to Alexandra.

A hush fell over the assembly, the gurgling of the water pipes ceased. Three men in dark cloaks carried a hand drum and two *neys*, simple oboes, into one corner of the room. The neys began to wind a doleful, quiet tune around each other and the drum.

Persephone rose and recited a prayer in Aramaic. The dancers got up and arranged themselves in a line before her. They held their hands up with bent elbows in an ancient gesture of prayer.

When Persephone had finished, the mood and tempo of the music changed, and one after the other the dancers bowed deeply before the sheik, kissed her hand, and spun off onto the open floor.

Arms spread wide, right hand cupped up, the left extended downwards, their top hats tilted slightly to one side they spun like tops. With closed eyes, they turned uniformly, their heavy skirts spread into cones. Weightlessly the dancers slowly orbited like planets.

Konrad closed his eyes and listened to the high, lilting oboes sailing like two birds above the rhythm of the hand drum. The soothing melody of the reeds flowed in waves, like transparent arabesques through his smoke dream. The music of the spheres? Was this what Plato had heard?



Dancers in a Mavlevi-Sufi Sema (RWFG)

He watched the bare feet of the dancers. They turned on their left heel, toes up, paddling with their right foot. With closed eyes? He shook his head, no one ever collided with another.

Abruptly the music stopped. The dancers froze, their skirts wound in a spiral around their bodies. They formed a line on the left of the sheik, bowed deeply, kissed her hand, and with the neys taking up a new melody turned off one by one into space and another dance.

This pattern was repeated four times. The music spun Konrad's mind into a dense cocoon, muting all sensations.

During the last two dances some of the dancers seemed to have reached a deep trance. One fell like a log, unconscious. Two more left the dance floor on their own and remained in deep rapture sitting cross-legged on the periphery.

Alexandra, eyes closed, was swaying with the waxing and waning of the music. Konrad smiled. How straight he was, even the skeptical daughter of old Dadiani was far removed.

After the dance ended, a deep silence fell onto the assembly. One by one the dancers bowed in front of the sheik. Persephone concluded the sema with a short prayer and soon most people had gone. Henri waited until only the three of them remained to formally introduce Alexandra and Konrad to Persephone.

Of swarthy complexion, a haggard eagle nose, an indication of a mustache over full lips which belied her advanced age, Persephone would have appeared like the Oriental witch Konrad had envisioned, had it not been for her large, guileless, Byzantine eyes, which with almost motherly concern sustained his gaze.

"Welcome, Alexandra, daughter of Tamara. I am delighted to finally meet you in person. Your mother has often spoken of you." And with an unexpectedly warm smile she turned to Konrad. "Is this the wonderful necklace Henri told me of? The one you made for Alexandra? It is magnificent. A true Sufi necklace. Konrad, persevere in your love and skills, this woman is worth all your efforts."

Konrad bowed. How much more civilized this woman was than he had imagined. Embracing and kissing Persephone they took their leave, and the tune of the neys singing in their ears wandered out into the night.

Ilia Chavchavadze's Return from Exile

Alexandra was coring carrots to fill them with the walnut farce her mother was stirring. They were preparing a dinner for Ilia and Olga Chavchavadze, who had returned from Europe. The servants had been dismissed for the night. Ilia, a controversial man, was surely under surveillance by the Russian Okhrana and one could not trust the ears of one's personnel.

"Deda, who is Persephone?" Alexandra asked suddenly.

Deda stopped stirring the walnut paste and caught by surprised looked at her daughter. Alexandra confessed that Konrad had been invited by Henri to a sema in Shav nabada, and she had accompanied him.

"Persephone was very civilized to Konrad and me. I had pictured her an evil witch with piercing eyes and long hair, casting spells on people." She laughed. "I noticed nothing of that. She was exceptionally kind."

Deda pushed back a strand of hair that had fallen into her eyes. "Persephone is an extraordinary person. Her mother was Greek, her father a Syrian precious-stone cutter. She grew up in the house of her Greek grandfather, who was a successful merchant in Batumi."

She took a bottle of vinegar from a shelf, added a teaspoon to the walnut paste, and tasted it. "Her father was a member of the Halveji brotherhood. He taught Persephone how to grind and polish precious stones, and introduced her to the Halveji. A woman cutting stones and entering a Sufi brotherhood was unusual twenty years ago. It is no longer."

Deda finished stirring the farce, chopped a bunch of cilantro, sprinkled it over the puree, and handed the bowl to Alexandra.

"As Persephone got older, she discovered that she had a gift for healing. She followed a man to Tiflis, but their relationship fell apart. She became widely known as a healer. Being a woman of sharp judgment and possessing a sensitivity that far exceeded that of the men in the Halveji Brotherhood in the Bazaar, they elected her their sheik. I met her through Henri many years ago, and she has become one of my closest friends."

Deda had folded her arms. She looked thoughtfully at her daughter and asked. "Does this answer your question? Because beyond these bare facts, I find it difficult to explain this woman to you. Maybe one day you will get to know her better and learn more about her. When she acts as our sheik, we call her *Brimo*. You see, Brimo was the ancient, sacred name of Persephone, the daughter of the Greek goddess Demeter."

Alexandra stopped her work, tilted her head, and quizzically looked at her mother. "Are you a member of the Halveji and participate in their dances?"

"We don't like to talk about these things, but you can find out yourself, my child, if you are interested. You will always be welcome in Shav nabada."

When Ilia and Olga arrived late at night, Alexandra received them at the door. They embraced. Ilia, a short man with a round head, wispy hair, and a splendid handlebar mustache peered into the dark hallway and anxiously asked whether they had let their staff go for the night.



Ilia Chavchavadze, Tiflis, 1900 (Wikipedia)

Deda appeared and lovingly embraced her old cousin Ilia. Olga Guramishvili, slightly taller than her husband, a few grey strands in her dark hair apologized. "Forgive us, Tamunia, we are late. Had we arrived during daylight hours, half of Tiflis would have stood singing patriotic songs in front of your door. The last thing we need. Did you read the article *On Occasion of Ilia Chavchavadze's Return from Exile* in yesterday's issue of *Iveria*? The Russians may not be able to read Georgian, but we received two death threats since yesterday—in Russian."

"Let's forget my worries tonight," pleaded Ilia with a short laugh making an effort to recover his usual, boisterous self. "Let us eat your good food, drink Irakli's wine, and be happy that I once more returned alive to my beloved but sad Motherland." He rummaged in his bag and pulled out a fat, German, mail order catalogue and two fashion magazines from France and Italy. "Alexandra, I hear you are getting married. I brought you something."

Alexandra thanked him and eagerly snatched the journals out of his hand. They were still standing in the foyer when Irakli and Konrad joined them.

Alexandra put her arm in Konrad's and with a sweet smile presented him to Ilia. "May I introduce my fiancé, professor Konrad Rost from Berlin and St. Petersburg—Ilia Chavchavadze, poet, politician, and revolutionary, but above all my very preferred uncle."

Ilia sized up Konrad with a trace of easy mockery in his eyes. "Professor Rost, are you worthy of this exceptional daughter of our beautiful land? We don't give away our young women lightly to foreigners."

Alexandra stepped forward, as if to protect Konrad. "Ilia, this man is a unique person, and I love him."

Ilia smiled indulgently. "I see, your love makes him special?"

They moved into the living room, Irakli poured each a glass of wine and welcomed Ilia, "To our Georgian hero, poet, and second brother-in-law, many happy returns to the Motherland!"

"Ah, you fat Mingrelian landowners," exclaimed Ilia sarcastically in Georgian. "You sit at home on your rich estates, grow tea, take the money from these northern barbarians, and care a hoot of what happens to this land of the Georgians. Have you forgotten your mother tongue?"

"Please, let's speak Russian," pleaded Irakli. "And if you cannot stand Russian, speak German. Konrad can recite his wedding vows in Georgian but not much else, and he certainly will not understand your complicated Georgian politics."

Konrad raised his glass to Irakli and Ilia. "Dear *mamebi zakartvelis*, Fathers of Georgia, you belittle my intelligence!" and began to sing the first stanza of one of Ilia's heroically patriotic songs in Georgian. He laughed. "That is as far as I have come! Next week Alexandra will teach me the second stanza!"

All applauded and Ilia made a small bow before Konrad. "Maybe you are worthy of an honorable adoption by this woman."

. "Tell us about your visit to Berlin and Paris," pleaded Alexandra with eager eyes. "I would first have gone to Italy. Venice has been my dream for years. What are the ladies wearing? Did you go to the opera, and is Berlin as rich and debased as they say?"

Ilia pretended distress. "I was afraid the you would ask me that question, that is why I brought you those journals. Now you can have yourself the latest wedding dress made." He pointed at the fashion magazines. "Yes, Berlin is expensive and booming, and the Kaiser is even more pompous than ours." He spread his empty hands. "I am sorry, I spent most of my time talking to the German and French Socialists. Sorry, no opera." He made a curtsy before Alexandra. "As far as the ladies go, I prefer the Georgian *gogonebi* over any other, they are the most beautiful."

He raised his glass to Alexandra. "Long live our Georgian women, the envy of Europe!"

Tamunia-Deda frowned wearily, cool disdain for her old cousin's buffoonery on her face she remonstrated with him. "Why do you always expose yourself? Consorting with these foreign Socialists! You can be assured that the Kaiser's secret service has already informed the Okhrana whom you met and where. Why put yourself, your relatives, and your Georgian mission at risk like that? What do you think you will achieve, Georgian autonomy with the help of the Socialists? You are a fool!"

Ilia in a soothing tone. "Dear Tamunia, I love you as dearly as I love Alexandra. Don't be jealous. But you are half Russian in Tsinandali, how can you understand my fight for Georgian freedom?"

Tamara flushed and with unexpected animation defended her family from this insult. "You know that this is infamy. The Tsinandali Chavchavadze are as Georgian as you are, but how do you imagine that Georgia could exist without Russian protection? The Persians and the Turks would have cut our Christian throats twice in the last forty years, not to mention Shamyl and his Chechen hordes. Have you forgotten Baryatinski's heroic campaign against Shamyl? Maybe the Chavchavadze women from Tsinandali who married the Tsar's advisors did more for Georgia than your entire campaign! We are like vines." She moved her hand from her breast in a flowing gesture through the air and back again. "One can cut us back, but we always grow again." She finished with determination. "One day, the son of a Georgian mother will occupy the Imperial throne of Russia and put an end to our oppression."

Irakli raised his glass. "Do bury this old family argument! Let us drink to Alexandra and her red-bearded, German bard! When shall we have your wedding?"

Irakli envisioned an old-fashioned Georgian wedding. They would set up long benches and tables in front of the church in Alaverdi. The musicians would sit on a small stage, a larger one would serve for dancing. Suckling pigs and sheep would roast over open fires. Ilia offered to contribute the orchestra and several skins of wine from his vineyards. In the evening they would dance to Georgian music.

Following old custom, the bride would spend the night before the wedding in Tsinandali. Riders in splendid uniforms would accompany her train of carriages. A triumphal procession through the villages. Konrad would stay at Irakli's manor house in Kvareli and meet the bride's train at Alaverdi.

Konrad asked whether after the wedding Alexandra and he could spend a few days in Kvareli to prepare for their expedition to Pshavi and Tusheti—their honeymoon.

Deda wrinkled her forehead, she had imagined they would spend their honeymoon in Europe.

Alexandra demurred reproachfully. "Our love began with Konrad's inviting me to go to Tusheti with him. We have to honor this oldest promise to each other." But then she reconsidered her mother's suggestion and with a pleading smile turned to Konrad: "Konrad, dear man, the prospect of seeing Venice *is* a temptation, could we return to St. Petersburg by way of a small detour instead of taking the dreary train north through Russia?"

Everyone held their breath. Her doting father laughed heartily and raised his glass to Alexandra. "Dear daughter of mine, I invite you and Konrad to be my guests on a trip to Italy!"

"But Papa, *you* are not invited!"

"Of course not, who said I would go with you—although I would enjoy nothing more! To your Italian honeymoon!" Irakli finishing his glass in one draught.

Alexandra fell around her father's neck. "Papa, you are wonderful. I love you."

Ilia could not hold still, he had to test Tamunia's feelings towards her future son-in-law. With a conniving smile he turned to her. "And who will introduce Konrad in Tsinandali? Could I be of help? I would enjoy giving a rousing speech that would melt all objections they may have to Alexandra's marrying the foreigner of her choice."

Deda, an irritated tone in her voice, cut him short. "I will take Konrad to Tsinandali myself to present him to my old mother. We don't need your kind services. And *please*, cousin, no pranks on that wedding." She waved a finger at Ilia.

Olga with an annoyed voice said. "Husband, you are becoming objectionable. The accolades of your Georgian followers and the fear of being murdered by the Okhrana have gone to your head. Stop picking fights with your hostess."

"Let him, Olga," said Tamara with a kinder voice. "I have known him since childhood, and I like this wild man. Even if I think he is a political fool, he still is an eloquent poet." She blushed and raised her glass. "To the memory of our younger years, Ilia."

Alexandra had been leafing through the Italian fashion magazine. From behind its pages she observed her mother intently. How little she knew about her. Had Deda been in love with Ilia as a young woman? She glanced at her father for a clue, but his face gave no hint.

Irakli rose and left the room to get another pitcher of wine.

Alexandra turned the page of the magazine and let out a cry of excitement. Triumphantly she held up a picture of a lady sheathed in a long, tightly fitting, silk dress.

"We are hopelessly behind in Tiflis. Look at this dress! I will have it made for my first public appearance in St. Petersburg. Look, Deda."

But Deda was not amused. She gave Alexandra a stern look. "Alexandra, you cannot wear this dress to an official reception, one can see every detail of your body! Will you ever grow up? You are going to be a married woman. You owe it to your husband's reputation to be properly dressed."

Alexandra stared at her mother in open rebellion. "Mama, I don't care about convention. I will take the magazine to Manana and have it made. But I will not embarrass you and wear it where I am known as your daughter. I will hide it in my trousseau. You will see, it will become the rage of St. Petersburg."

Konrad, the outsider, who amused by the family fireworks had quietly watched, shook his head. "We shall see. If we arrive in St. Petersburg from Italy, you may indeed win your bet."

After dinner Olga took her husband by the arm. She gave Konrad a sympathetic smile. "Can we give you a ride home, Konrad?" She turned to Irakli and said wearily. "As always we had an exciting evening at your house. You cheered up this husband of mine. It is late, may we go home."

When Alexandra embraced Konrad to say good night, she whispered, "There is a ball at the Artist's Club on New Years Eve, can we go? I want to dance with you!"

New Year 1899

The *jeunesse d'orée* of Tiflis crowded the Artist's Club on New Year's Eve. Konrad helped Alexandra out of her burka. She wore the Italian silk dress, Manana had made. No frills, lemon yellow, of ankle length, with a slit on both sides it clung to her slender body. In its deep décolleté his necklace, the pearl ring on the finger of her left hand.

She glowed in his admiration.

"Didn't Manana surpass herself?" she asked, turning in front of him. "But don't tell Mama that I wore it. I could not wait to model it for you."

She had done her hair up in a new way. She had trimmed her long, black tresses and wound them into a vertical roll above her nape. She looked several years older. The soft, feminine hairdo and her dress complemented each other perfectly.

"Do you think you could present me like this at your garden party in St. Petersburg next summer?" She smiled seductively. "And don't you already see the envious looks of all the ladies?"

Konrad did not dare to embrace this fabulous creature so he kissed her hand. She put her arm through his and they walked across the dance floor to their reserved table.

They had barely sat down when a very young man with dreamy eyes rushed up to them and asked Konrad for his permission to dance with Alexandra. Konrad, taken aback, nodded resigned and deferred the decision to Alexandra.

"Konrad, may I introduce Dato Ortaladze to you, Professor Konrad Rost, my fiancé. David is a friend of our family. Dato, please forgive me, I would like to dance the first dance with my fiancé, but do come back a little later, I have not seen you for a long time."

Dato flushed and apologized, mumbling that she had never looked more stunning.

A bottle of champagne and various French-style appetizers arrived. Konrad left it all standing and asked Alexandra for a dance.

"You better hold onto me," she said as she took his arm, "or as you see, I will vanish faster than you can say my name!"

Konrad danced beautifully, she nestled herself into his arms.

"Konrad, who taught you to dance like this? Oh," she bit her lip, "I shouldn't ask, I don't need to know."

"Her name was Sonya." He smiled at her. "She is no secret. She was a beautiful, blond medical student, and I was *unsterblich verliebt in sie*. I met her on a New Year's Eve ball in Berlin. She danced like a goddess, but she already had a boyfriend and was not interested in me. Regrettably I never danced with her again after that evening."

Alexandra leaned her head on his shoulder and whispered, "Please forgive my question."

"But why?" He said into their closeness. "Let there be no secrets between us, ever. Let us do only those things, which we need not keep from each other. Let us never possess each other, but be free and one at the same time."

The next dance was a fast waltz.

"Do you want to return to the table?" Konrad asked.

"No, I want to dance with you, but I have never danced a fast waltz before."

"Never mind, just let yourself go! You will learn very quickly."

He took her to the periphery of the dance floor and showed her the most important steps.

Most people had left the dance floor

She was the most pliable pupil, and in a very short time they were dancing as if they had danced the waltz together for years. Turning in perfect harmony they flew over the dance floor. Alexandra had her eyes closed. Her slender body in the tight dress was truly bewitching.

The other couples had stopped dancing and were watching them. Applause broke out when the music stopped. Alexandra made a deep curtsy before Konrad, and he kissed her hand.

Later David Ortaladze and his girlfriend joined them, and Konrad danced with Laila, a dark, sensuous beauty, to give Dato a chance to take Alexandra to the floor.

Dato wanted to study medicine in St. Petersburg, but was considering spending his clinical years at Jena in Germany. He spoke German well and was most eager for advice. Konrad encouraged him, but Dato's eyes were glued to Alexandra's figure. Laila showed signs of neglect, her body hung limp on her chair, her bored eyes wandered around the room. She spoke no German.

A pang of resentment hit Konrad. He asked himself, was he jealous? He shook his head. This young man, though he looked the proverbial, dashing, Georgian hothead, was not much older than sixteen. How could he be a serious danger to him? He had better get used to living with a most desirable, extroverted woman.

A slow waltz followed and Konrad asked Alexandra to dance.

"Do you know what jealousy is?" he asked her.

"Well, I think Laila suffers from it. How about you?"

"Does it show?" Konrad was appalled by the thought.

"Yes," she admitted, "to me anyway."

"What can I do about it? Do you know how to make it go away, or do you enjoy seeing me jealous? As a proof, maybe, of how much I love you?"

Her blue eyes lost their sparkle, with a reproachful undertone she said. "Dearest Konrad, I may seem frivolous to others, but I am not with you. Dear man, you challenge me in ways nobody else could, but other men might evoke aspects of me that you have no access to or know nothing about."

She looked at his worried face and kissed the hand that held her close. "I will always return to you. However, at times I will allow other men to provoke me, and this may even become a serious exploration. But I will do this only to show you these other aspects of me or to understand them myself, not to test our love, but to expand it."

She held him at a distance. "Could you live with this condition of my love? As you said, we should never possess each other, we should be free to be ourselves and be one? I think this might eventually cure any jealousy between us. It is probably harder to conquer jealousy than to love each other."

He felt his legs weaken. "With your help I will try. Please hold on to me tightly, so I don't lose my balance. It is a hard demand on a man in love."

She gave him a kiss and leaned her head on his shoulder.

Konrad took out his watch. "In five minutes the new year begins!"

"May I look at your watch? What is the blue crescent-shaped dial for?"

Konrad explained that it showed the phases of the moon. "You see the moon is increasing, tomorrow it will have reached the first quarter."

She examined the dial more closely. What were the markings along the rim of the blue half circle? He explained that these were the twenty-nine and a half days of the period of the moon.

A smile of recognition flushed her attentive face. "Very pretty, I have never seen a watch that shows the phases of the moon. What do *you* use it for?"

The music stopped. Konrad's watch chimed twelve. A cacophony of firecrackers exploded in the streets, and the badly tuned bells tolled. The dancers hugged and kissed each other and the orchestra produced a belated fanfare.

"Alexandra, our year!"

He took her into his arms, and she gave him a radiant smile and kissed him, but her thoughts seemed elsewhere. Had Dato cast his shadow on her? In former years it had happened to him too that he had been touched by a dark mood on this night, but this was the year of their new life.

An hour later, the ball still in full swing, Alexandra surprised Konrad by asking him to take her home. He looked at her questioningly. But she seemed to have found her usual self-assurance again and repeated her request, smiling enigmatically.

Outside on the street she took his arm and closely held onto him. In a dark corner, she grabbed him unexpectedly and began kissing him in earnest. "Please, take me into your bed and make love to me!" she whispered, "I can no longer wait for our new year to begin."

Alexandra's Abduction

One clear night Alexandra was riding home from Zaguramo, where she had visited Olga Guramishvili to talk about Konrad and other female matters. The moon stood dimly over the hill of Zedazeni. The road through the vineyards to Tiflis was empty except for a few revelers who, singing drunkenly, staggered home through the night.

Suddenly three hooded riders appeared from the shadows and blocked her way. One brandished a pistol. The other two had their hands on the daggers in their belts. Alexandra's horse reared. The man with the pistol grabbed its halter. The three riders surrounded her closely. She could not move.

"Don't scream," said the man with the pistol, "if you follow us quietly and without resisting we will not hurt you."

She thought that she recognized his voice. Her heart was beating furiously. "What do you want?" she asked hoarsely.

"We are defending the honor of Georgian women. This German professor wants to marry you. We shall prevent him from stealing another of our beautiful Georgian women." The speaker averted his face.

"Is this an abduction?" shouted Alexandra. "Let me go, you have no right or claim on me!"

"Don't shout!" the man waved the pistol in front of her face. "I do have a claim on you." He pulled off his hood.

"Dato!" She cried struggling to regain her composure. "What do you want from me, you know I am engaged to Konrad. This is a romantic game you are playing. Let me go!"

Dato raised himself in his stirrups. Proudly erect, looking very hurt, very beautiful, and very Georgian he refused to move.

"Alexandra," his voice was trembling, "I love you and will always love you. I will not let you go with this red-bearded German. I will either make you my wife, or shoot us both. If you will not resist, we will take you to Shuamta, and there perform the holy marriage rites. These two friends are my witnesses."

Alexandra calmed. She was able to think again. She discovered with a shudder that she secretly took pleasure in this ancient drama. This was high-style, Georgian tragedy looking for its invariably *grand finale*. Wild-eyed, the lover/hero/king struts on stage in short steps clicking his heels, he dances before the queen/mother/priestess who glides across stage as if floating. She has the right to choose her man. If she rejects him, he has no choice but to abduct and rape her. But then he must die, and she had to attend to his "sacrifice." Like in the Greek tragedies the Queen would not kill the King herself, overwhelmed by madness he would die by his own hand.

She was not afraid of Dato. He would not shoot her, that part of Dato's script, forbidden by the most fearful taboos, he had borrowed from a fashionable French novel, but he would try to shoot himself in her presence and make a horrible mess of it.

Konrad, the foreigner, would consider this an adolescent, romantic game. Only a Georgian could understand these unwritten, timeless rules.

She had promised Konrad to always come back to him, but had not considered the

possibility of a physical abduction when making that promise. She had to bring this tragedy to a modern, peaceful, totally un-Georgian end.

She admired Dato's high-flying audacity; his dark, tragic beauty, his racy recklessness. If she would play her role well, it would be a victory over her own tragic sense, her farewell to Georgia and its men, her final decision to break with the age-old rules that governed the relations between men and women in this ancient land.

"Yes, I will accompany you."

Dato relaxed and with a faltering voice, full of emotion, thanked her. They turned and rode off at a sharp clip towards the rising moon.

They followed the path Konrad and Alexandra had taken two months earlier. As they entered the mountains their pace slowed, and Alexandra recalled the night full of love and happiness. She was distressed, this incident was going to cause Konrad much pain, it would take her a long time to explain her part in this abduction.

However, she had to save Dato from his own ambiguous confusion in the hope that he would grow into a modern man. This was why she loved this unhappy man too, differently from Konrad.

She stood between the two men, between past and future, at the seam between the two worlds she had chosen to bridge, to make them work for each other in herself.



The three Churches of Shuamta in the early morning fog, (RWFG)

The four reached Shuamta at sunrise. Early morning fog was surrounding the three churches. The two witnesses set out to rouse the hermit from his sleep who cared for the three churches. They returned with the old man at knifepoint. Dressed in rags, his long hair and beard dirty and unkempt, he was slobbering and in a whining voice called on the Mother of God for protection. A sorry, befuddled figure, entirely in keeping with the sad drama. The hermit swore to God that he was not a priest and was not allowed to perform weddings. God would punish him in

eternity for such a sin.

The three men were at a loss what to do. Alexandra tired, full of pity for the old man, and wanting to get the bungled affair over with, suggested that they should stick some candles to the walls, get a Bible, and the two witnesses should perform the wedding.

Lacking a better suggestion Dato consented. Touched, Alexandra found that the three had brought a white shawl to cover her head and two wreaths connected by a string, the indispensable implements of the Eastern wedding ritual.

They lit the candles. Alexandra, covered by the bridal veil, knelt next to Dato before the iconostasis, and one of the young men placed the wreaths on their heads. The second young man, confused and disorganized, read some arbitrary text from the bible. When he had finished, he crossed the wreaths and solemnly intoned, "I pronounce you, Dato Ortaladze and Alexandra Dadiani, married."

After that he halted and exclaimed, "Dato, what am I to do next? I have never been married."

Alexandra giggled, "None of us has. Now comes the ring ceremony. Dato, where are the rings?"

Dato, pale-faced, admitted that he had no rings. He pulled his revolver and held it to his head.

In a lightening sweep Alexandra took the gun from his hand and stood, a blazing avenging angel, in front of the iconostasis with the loaded weapon in hand.

"Look Dato," she said with a cutting voice, "you are *not* going to shoot yourself in this sacred place. Collect yourself and say after me 'I promise to love you, Alexandra Dadiani, for ever and ever, until I die.'"

Dato, sobbing, repeated the sentence and collapsed at her feet.

Keeping his two friends at a distance with the gun, Alexandra knelt down besides the dissolved groom and covered him with her bridal veil. "Dato, I, Alexandra Dadiani promise to love you for ever and ever until I die. I do and will."

Dato stuck his head from under the veil. Fear and surprise on his face. He was still alive! "Truly, will you?"

"Yes, in the name of the Holy Mother of God and all the Saints, I will," repeated Alexandra, "and these two friends of yours are my witnesses."

Dato sat up and wiped away his tears, while Alexandra opened the magazine of the revolver, took the six bullets out, and handed the empty weapon back to him. She helped him up and embraced and kissed him. Recovered from their fright the witnesses applauded.

"Look Dato, whenever you are in need you can come to me, but I cannot, before God, become your wife. I am Konrad's wife and you and I would commit a grave sin, if I got married to a second man in this holy place, even if it were only informally."

She took him by the hand and spoke quietly to him. "I am dead tired after the long ride and all this emotional upheaval. Can we ride to Telavi and find a room to get some sleep? I would also like to send a telegram to my father. Deda must be out of her mind with worry about me. I promise you that I will protect you from the authorities, provided the three of you will take on some reason now."

They rode down to Telavi and Alexandra sent a telegram from the post office: *alive and*

well in Telavi, return tomorrow.

A room for the three men was found and a separate one for Alexandra. She sank into an exhausted sleep.

Alexandra woke late in the afternoon. She found the three men in a wine shop next door drinking and bragging about their exploits in front of the locals. When Alexandra entered they dropped silent. She walked slowly and very erect across the room, sat down at their table and ordered a glass of wine.

Dato raised his glass and drank to the beautiful Georgian woman he had rescued from the red-bearded foreigner.

"You would be dead, if this Georgian woman had not saved you from shooting yourself," she said sarcastically, interrupting his boisterous toast.

The local drunkards backed away and left the shop.

"Listen, Dato, you *promised* to behave yourself from now on. Stop boasting and stirring up trouble. What happened between us is nobody's business. You may yet end in prison."

Dato, quite tipsy, dissolved into tears begging her forgiveness and swearing to abide by his promise. He emptied another glass and grew sullen.

Suddenly they heard a commotion outside.

"They are here!" Konrad shouted as he came down the stairs followed by Ilia and Dato's father.

Dato went deathly pale when he recognized his father. He rose and swaying drunkenly pointed at Konrad. "This is the traitor who is stealing our Georgian women. May he be cursed," and collapsed vomiting helplessly.

Alexandra flew into Konrad's arms crying. Ortaladze *sen.* bent down to his destroyed son, and Ilia, looking fiercely at the other two delinquents, shouted. "Stay, don't move or you will be dead."

He did not have to pull the gun from its holster. He was too well known to them, they would not have dared to provoke their idol's famed anger. Ilia took their daggers. "March, let's get out of this dingy place. You are going to ride before me to Kvareli now, where we shall take care of you."

Trembling, the two let themselves be herded off by Ilia without resisting. Ortaladze and Konrad tied the senseless Dato onto his horse, and Alexandra alternately crying and laughing followed Konrad and the others into the night.

Reaching Kvareli, a good hour on horseback from Telavi, took them two that night. Ilia locked the two accomplices into a room without windows. They poured a bucket of cold water over Dato's head and settled him in a chair at the dining table. Father Ortaladze sat next to Dato, Konrad and Alexandra across from them, and Ilia as the master of the house and the local baron presided over the interrogation.

Drowsily Dato followed Alexandra's description of the abduction without interrupting her. When she had finished Ilia ordered a strong coffee for Dato and addressing him in a stern voice asked him to give his version of the story and to defend his actions.

Dato, ashen and resigned, said that he had nothing to add to Alexandra's account of what happened. He whined that he was deeply in love with her and had wanted to restore her honor as a Georgian woman. "When I tried to shoot myself, she promised to love me for the rest of her life," he offered meekly. Alexandra with a red face admitted that she had said that and that she meant it. Konrad grew pale but did not interrupt her.

The three men quickly agreed to accept Ortaladze's apologies and his offer to send Dato into exile to Jena, where he was to stay until he had successfully finished his medical education.

To avoid any further gossip in Tiflis, Ilia would keep the other two culprits locked up in Kvareli until their parents could pick them up. They hoped that the affair would quietly die of its own accord without any further publicity or the involvement of the authorities. Dato took his banishment without a show of emotion; he was ready to fall off his chair.

Early in the morning Alexandra and the three men, hapless Dato in tow, set out for the long ride home.

Konrad, trailing the others next to Alexandra, was deep in thought.

"Would you tell me the whole story again?" he asked.

She had expected his question and pained by the difficulty of explaining her complex, archaic role between two her cultures and the two men, she described the happening a second time.

Konrad listened quietly. He was immensely relieved to have her back alive and was quite prepared to accept her explanation.

After the first emotional welcome Alexandra's parents did not mention her abduction again. To them it was an embarrassing adolescent prank of a love-sick young man. Alexandra, however, was unusually quiet and withdrawn.

She tried hard to unravel the events and her mixed emotions which the melodrama at Shuamta had put into such strong perspective: her separation from her parents and her Georgian childhood, the approach of her wedding, and the difficult obligations which marrying a foreigner would put on her.

She longed for advice by an understanding person who was not connected to her as intimately as Olga or her mother. She finally decided to visit Persephone, not as a medium but as a woman.

She found her in her chaotic room under the tower at Shavnabada, very much Persephone the Queen of the Underworld, an entirely different person from Brimo the sheik. Alexandra thought to have seen a man disappear through a rear door when she entered.

If Persephone was surprised to see her, she did not show it. She cleaned some wine spots and breadcrumbs from the table and removed a half-empty bottle of wine. Then she offered Alexandra a chair.

"Does Deda or your fiancé know that you are here?" asked Persephone after Alexandra had told her that she wanted her advice in the emotional tangle resulting from her abduction.

"No, they don't, and I don't want them to know," said Alexandra.

Persephone nodded. "Good, it will be better that way. I will be able to talk to you more freely."

Persephone prepared a pot of strong tea for them, brought two chipped cups, and sat down opposite Alexandra. A strong smell of alcohol reached Alexandra on Persephone's breath. With sunken eyes and two deep, embittered furrows radiating from her pursed mouth, she looked much older than at the sema. Her cold, dark eyes pierced Alexandra without mercy. "You do know that your mother was here when you had disappeared? I tried to see you, but those visions are always vague. The important minor details often escape me. So, will you describe the episode to me and all of the experiences that were important to you?"

Alexandra described the sequence of events, but taken aback by Persephone's intoxicated condition she tried to hide her confused emotions in Shuamta and afterwards. But as she relived the scene before the iconostasis, especially Dato's attempted suicide and her confrontation with the two accomplices, Alexandra once again got highly excited.

Persephone did not seem to pay any attention to her. With a blank expression she stared straight at a spot on the wall.

How can I get her to focus, thought Alexandra, break her indifference? She moved her hand involuntarily and knocked over her cup. Fascinated Alexandra watched the puddle spread on the table. Persephone, still staring at the imaginary point on the wall, seemed entirely unaware of the accident.

"I see you quite clearly," Persephone said in a deep, rasping voice. "You are not afraid. Why are you so excited? Why do you prevent Dato from shooting himself?"

A cold shudder ran through Alexandra. Persephone was in a trance.

Desperately trying to contain the lake of tea on the table Alexandra whispered tensely. "I wanted to save Dato, so he could outgrow his childish infatuation with me, that he could become a man."

"Never mind the spilled tea, concentrate!" ordered Persephone focusing her veiled, dark eyes on Alexandra. "You are not telling the truth."

Alexandra blushed, but reassured by the sudden recognition on Persephone's face, collected herself and told her about the intense sensation that against her will she had been involved in a mysterious drama she did not know or understand. Its rules seemed to demand that she witness his death. "I knew that Dato would kill himself only to impress me, that he would not commit suicide by himself. If I were to refuse to play his game and take away his gun, he would be all right and live. With great certainty I knew that I had to prevent his death."

Persephone with an indignant face looked at her contemptuously. "The weak wretch will live—a miserable life! He had come to die in your arms, not to marry you. You are too young and ignorant to understand the old female rules. You would have had to seduce him into raping you, emasculate him at the height of his ecstasy, and let him bleed to death in your embrace. But which woman is still prepared to follow the ancient rules? You acted like a coward."

Persephone raised herself, pointed at Alexandra, and said. "*You are his Death. One day he will come back and demand that you attend to his dying.*"

Alexandra shuddered. She stared at Persephone—the drunk queen of the underworld.

Slowly her strength returned, she shook herself and rose. Blazing like Pallas Athene, she faced Persephone and fearlessly looked into her age-old eyes. "I shall dare to defy you. I shall marry clear-headed Konrad, the red-bearded foreigner, follow him into exile, and find the strength to save Dato from his guilt and the female spells of my beloved, archaic Georgia."

Shaken and deeply disturbed Alexandra swore never to see Persephone again.

Easter at Zedazeni

Alexandra often wondered what her mother had been like when she met Irakli. Irakli had first met Tamara at a well-chaperoned ball in Tiflis. He was studying literature and philosophy in St. Petersburg at the time. Tamara had been in the company of Aunt Sophia Bagrationi. Irakli, according to the family tale, fell in love with Tamara and had not rested until Uncle Tarkhan-Mouravi and Aunt Sophia had put in a word with Tamara's parents. The Chavchavadze had finally given in, and the match had been made. Since that time her father had the *idée fixe* that the Chavchavadze thought that they were 'better' than the Dadianis.

The circumstances of their courtship, and in particular Deda's life before her marriage was never discussed before the children, but Alexandra had the impression that her mother had been as unruly and nonconformist as she was. In fact, this was one of the main reasons for the impatient resentment Alexandra felt at times towards her mother. Deda often appeared unnecessarily severe, unforgiving, and critical of her, and Alexandra naturally felt misunderstood.

If Tamunia-Deda had been wild and independent, her mother must have changed dramatically after she married Irakli, because as Deda she was always careful not to question her husband's paternal authority, at least not in presence of her children or any outsiders.

Did Uncle Ilia play a role in her mother's previous life? Recently she had several times caught indications of such a possibility. Had Tamunia-Deda been married off in order to end a love relationship with Ilia? Now that she herself had experienced the power of passion, Alexandra almost felt sympathy for her mother. How terrible it would have been, if her father had disliked Konrad and would have forbidden her to see him. Even if she thought that she would have attempted to elope with Konrad, the inevitable break with her family was unimaginable. Maybe she would also have agreed to an arranged marriage.

Her mother was almost ten years younger than her father. In the past few years, during which Alexandra had become more aware of her parent's relationship, she had seen her mother chafe under the self-imposed, conventional restraints of her marriage.

Deda often went her own ways these days, which left Irakli impatient and depressed. Alexandra found it prudent to avoid him on such days. Her father had no part in her mother's meetings with Persephone. He was uncharacteristically critical of the Sufi and Shavnabada. Instinctively, because she loved her father, she had taken his side, which had removed her further from her mother's confidences. Alexandra had no idea where her mother went, or what she was doing, when she occasionally vanished for entire days.

She knew from experience that her mother would not answer direct questions concerning her private life. On several occasions Alexandra had tried, it was not done. Nevertheless, now that she was attempting to come to terms with her own role as a married woman, it seemed more important to her than ever before to understand her mother's hidden past.

A procession of motley people walked through the night to Zedazeni, rugged shepherds from the mountains of Chevsureti and Tusheti, many children among them. Some carried torches, others pulled sheep up the hill. One man carried a baby in a wicker basket.

It was Easter night.

On his last visit to the Dadiani house, Deda had surprised Konrad with an invitation to an unusual Easter midnight service at Zedazeni. Afterwards the family would meet for the Easter morning feast at Olga's in Zaguramo. Konrad had happily accepted.

When he told Alexandra of Deda's invitation, Alexandra had been taken aback. "For many years my mother has gone to Zedazeni for Easter service alone, separate from her family. You must understand that for us Easter has the same meaning as Christmas Eve for you, and that Deda goes to Zedazeni by herself is a serious challenge of family traditions. But Father has equally stubbornly refused to accompany her, and I, too, have never been to Zedazeni at Easter."

She paused and looked at him uncertain.

"When we visited Zedazeni for the first time, do you remember, I told you that the shepherds celebrate a very ancient, pre-Christian rite there on Easter night? Father says that Easter is the day of Christ's resurrection, and this tradition should not be debased by heathen rites. So Easter at Zedazeni, like the sema in Shav nabada, has become a subject that is not mentioned in our family. I have no idea what is going on up there."

Konrad told her that he had promised to accompany Deda, but left the decision of joining him up to her.

To his surprise, Alexandra, after some hesitation, asked to be taken along. "During the last months I have thought so much about my mother, that after Shav nabada I would also like to unravel this puzzle with your help. Obviously Deda has selected you who knows near nothing about our family feuds and who is not Orthodox, to help her open this secret. Please help me to find out why Deda has with such determination insisted to go up there every year."

When they were ready to leave Zaguramo for Zedazeni, Konrad could not find Deda. A servant told him that the mistress had left an hour ago, that they should not search for her, she would look for them after the service. Puzzled Konrad and Alexandra followed the shepherds on the steep trail.

Fires had been lit in the great courtyard of Zedazeni, sheep were roasting, large tablecloths had been spread, and everywhere people were sitting and talking, or just milling around, but nobody ate or drank.

Deda was nowhere to be seen.

Konrad and Alexandra found a place in the shadows and watched the colorful scene. An old bent over woman with a walking stick, hobbled from fire to fire, and wherever she went people were roaring with laughter. Finally the old crone spied Alexandra and Konrad and slouched over to them. Muttering hoarsely in Georgian she pointed her crutch at Konrad and then moved the index finger in and out of the hollow of her fist in the timeless gesture of copulation. Alexandra went purple with embarrassment.

The woman left with a cackle.

Konrad laughed. "What did this old witch say? She is much too old for such pleasures."

Alexandra searched for words. "I don't know how to translate her words. She used a very bawdy street-Georgian, which I did not understand well, either she spoke a dialect or her words were outdated. You saw her gesture? She was saying that this was the night of resurrection and urged us to copulate in the bushes and make a baby, and all the time she was playing on an old word for *erection*. But the strangest thing was that her words rhymed! Where

did she get *that* kind of poetry from?"

Konrad shook his head. "Prepare yourself, this is going to be a rough night for you. I can always pretend not to understand Georgian! But do at least try to translate as much as you can for me. You say she speaks in rhymed verses? I have a hunch that this crone is even older than you think."

Shortly before midnight, the wizened woman appeared in the door to the church. A hush went through the crowd, and the old crone delivered a lengthy piece of poetry. Now Konrad could hear that she spoke in rhymed couplets. When she had finished, laughter, a few taunts, and shouts of "*Yakkhos, Yakkhos*" rose from the crowd. Everybody pushed towards the door of the church.

"You know who she is?" said Konrad. "I do not even need to understand her words, this old woman comes straight from the Greek tragedies. Very exciting, her role must have survived as part of the oral tradition, two thousand years, incredible!"

"Her verses had to do with resurrection and the birth of a child," said Alexandra, "interspersed again with bawdy lines about a rape and an abduction into the underworld. It makes me shudder, but I do not understand the meaning of any of this. What does this have to do with Easter?"

They were carried through the door by the stream of people. The nave was jammed. People stood head to head, small children riding on their fathers' shoulders. Konrad chose a place along the rear wall.

Candles stuck to the darkened walls of the choir illuminated a strange scene: A woman, her long skirt spread, sat on the phallic post. She wore a crown with a halo of gilded rays. Next to her stood a woman with a white veil over her head, and a man wearing a horse's head and skin. The old crone with her stick stood next to this trinity.

The crone knocked the ground several times with her stick to quiet the crowd and then began, again in rhymed couplets, to give a long explanation pointing one after the other at the three masked characters.

Alexandra whispered that the woman was naming them. "The woman with the crown is a queen and priestess called Dimitra, the veiled woman is simply called Maiden, and the horse, *Yakkhos*."

As the old woman pointed at the horse the crowd rhythmically shouted, "*Yakkhos, Yakkhos*." *Yakkhos* in response let out a lusty neigh and pawed the ground. A man from the crowd shouted something Alexandra once again would not translate, but Konrad remembered that he had heard the expression on his wanderings in the bazaar: "Fuck her!"

After a while the church became very quiet, only a child was heard crying. Someone made a noise to hush up the infant.

Dimitra, the royal priestess, raised her hands in a gesture of blessing and recited a brief prayer. The Maiden lowered her head in mourning or in resignation. Restlessly Dimitra began to move back and forth and up and down on the phallic post.

Enthusiastic cheers from the crowd fired her on. The crone cackled some untranslatable verses, and a Hierophant, a young man in a long black robe appeared who extinguished one candle after the other, until the sanctuary lay in complete darkness.

Ashen-faced, Alexandra grabbed Konrad's arm and whispered alarmed, "The Priestess is my mother and the Maiden is Persephone!"

Konrad had come to the same conclusion and sucking in his breath, he whispered

hoarsely, "*Mein Gott*, you are right!"

As soon as darkness descended a wild noise started. The horse pawed the ground and neighed frenetically. Above the mad bustle the rhymed verses of the old crone could be heard. A deep drum began to pound inciting the crowd to rhythmical shouts: "Yakkhos!—Yakkhos!—Yakkhos!" Slowly the rhythm of the pounding drum and the pawing and neighing of the horse increased until the fracas reached a fortissimo.

Abruptly the fray stopped and complete silence set in. From far away in the underworld, the orgiastic scream of a woman was heard.

A deep sigh went through the crowd.

Alexandra, trembling, dug her face into Konrad's arm. She was sobbing.

Carrying a torch, the Hierophant emerged from a door illuminating the dark choir. In the uncertain light the priestess could be seen to rise from her seat and reveal a blood-soaked cloth that had covered the phallus. Triumphantly she shouted:

"Brimo has risen!"

"She has given birth to a boy!"

"His name is Brimus."

Under the ecstatic cries of the crowd shouting: "Brimus! Brimus!" Persephone walked into the light. Her veil replaced by a wreath of red poppies, she carried a naked baby boy in a winnowing basket.

The Priestess took the stained napkin off the phallus, showed it to the assembled people like the bridal bed sheet after the wedding night, and finally covered Persephone's baby with it.

While the Hierophant with his torch distributed the *phos*, the light to the candles everybody had brought, the Priestess began to sing to the old Greek Easter melody:

"Brimus *anesti!* Brimus has risen!"

A great euphoria broke out, the people sang, embraced, and kissed each other, friends and strangers alike.

After all the candles in the sanctuary had been lit by the New Light, the scene changed a third time: Twelve shepherds in wild and woolly burkas and hats, each carrying a baby lamb, entered and lined up against the wall of the choir.

Persephone left the sanctuary with her baby and was replaced by a young, bearded man carrying a cross: Brimus transformed into Christ.

The crowd, now led on by the Hierophant, began to sing the new Easter Message to the same, age-old Greek melody as before again and again:

"*Christos anesti!* Christ has risen!"

The Priestess removed her crown and Christ kissed her. With his cross he touched Yakkhos, who had fallen on his knees before him. Yakkhos threw off his skin and the horse head and revealed himself as St. John the Baptist with tousled hair and a shaggy beard. The Queen-Priestess, transformed into Mary, the mother of God, placed herself to the right of Christ—who occupied Demeter's throne—the Baptist to his left. They formed a *deesis* in front of the twelve shepherds with their lambs.

Relieved Alexandra joined the congregation in singing the familiar, fourth-century Easter night liturgy ascribed to St. John Chrysostomos.

As they left the sanctuary two hours later, the Hierophant distributed blessed breads to everyone and red Easter eggs to the young women. Outside the church's door, however, stood

the old crone whacking the backs of the young men with her stick cackling obscenities. Everyone loved it, and Konrad also received a beating.

"To the foreigner with the red beard!" said the old woman in German.

Konrad was stunned but collected himself and shouted at her in Georgian: "Go to hell, old witch!"

Which, to everybody's amusement, earned him two more whacks.

Konrad suggested they wait for Deda, but Alexandra refused to stay. "I don't want to meet Persephone, and right now not even my mother. Please, let's walk down. Olga is waiting for us at the Easter feast. I would like to forget this heathen scene."

As they walked, Konrad tried to clear his mind. He was deeply moved by the complex symbolism in which he discovered several references to the Greek tragedies and the Eleusian Mysteries.

The Old Crone had, he was certain, been borrowed from of the Greek tragedies where she was a standard character, most often the leader of the chorus, who with her sharp tongue and nasty jokes commented on the play and exposed actors and audience alike.

Alexandra listened to his ramblings but remained mute.

He was less certain about the origins of the female triad, but remembered a description in Pausanias' *Travels in Greece* of such a trio. In Arkadia Pausanias had heard of a horrifyingly archaic mystery play reserved for women in which the triad was, just as here, Demeter, Kore as the virgin Maiden, and a horse-headed Yakkhos. Both, the misbegotten Yakkhos and the lovely Kore were the offspring of rapes of Demeter by Zeus.

Later Hades raped Kore in Arkadia, where she had fallen asleep in a meadow of poppies, and abducted her to the underworld. Demeter searched wide and far for her disappeared daughter. When all-seeing Helios told her of Kore's abduction, she forced Zeus to allow Kore to spend nine months above ground, however, during winter Kore had to live in the underworld as Persephone, the Queen of Hades.

Persephone's resurrection in spring had been celebrated in mystery plays in many places in Greece and its colonies. Eleusis was only the most famous example. But the anthropologists knew few details. The participants of these festivities were sworn to silence.

In Greece the Mysteries were obliterated by Christianity in the third century. But on the shores of the Black Sea they might have survived much longer and provided the basis for this hybrid play. After all, he argued, both Kore's and Christ's resurrection were based on very similar shepherd's myths.

Konrad shook his head. "This is a most intriguing discovery. It is a pity that I am not an anthropologist, the publication of this mystery play would create a sensation."

He turned to his taciturn betrothed and said gently. "I can understand that you are pursued by very different thoughts. Thank you for coming with me. I am sorry that the discovery of Deda in this play caused you such anguish. Consider it as theater with a religious meaning, why should she not participate in it? There are many worse plays being performed today, and her role as Demeter/Mother of God is surely the most honorable of the three. Even if the bloody cloth was revolting."

The smell of roasting lamb wafted through the house in Zaguramo. The big table was decorated with flowers and bowls of dyed red eggs. The other family members were already home and mobbed Konrad and Alexandra with questions. "Where is Tamara?" asked Irakli

sharply. Konrad smiled. "We left her behind with the shepherds. She was still busy taking off her makeup and talking to her friends. We did not want to hurry her, and hungry as we were, we left early."

A cloud drifted across Irakli's face. "What is Tamara doing up there? You say 'taking off her makeup'? Is she acting in the play? Easter is Easter, we have celebrated the same liturgy since the fifth century. I do not want to see it changed, even if it boosts our national consciousness."

Konrad sensed that he was walking over treacherous ground.

Ilia, with a provocative glance at Irakli, remarked. "You don't know, Konrad, but Tamunia was a great actress in our National Theater before Irakli discovered her."

He made a pause waiting for Irakli to take the bait. But because Irakli remained silent he continued. "Irakli has never seen her on stage. Tamunia stopped acting when she met him. But I saw her often at the *Theatre des Artistes*. I was deeply in love with her at that time."

Irakli lowered his eyes and bit his lips. He was a guest at Ilia's house.

"Well," continued Ilia, merciless, "five years ago, Tamunia decided to act again, made up this mystery play, and staged it as her contribution to our National Renewal."

Konrad frowned and stuck his head out. "Ilia, I don't believe you. Tamara cannot have invented this piece. It is much too complex and reveals details of the Greek mysteries of which even the anthropologists have not heard. You are making fun of me! Where did Tamunia-Deda get this script from? It is a most amazing discovery."

"None of us has ever seen it," admitted Ilia sheepishly. "The influential critics, who have not seen it either, derided it as obscene and blasphemous, and now nobody would be caught dead up there. However, from the crowds that climb the mountain every Easter I see that it has become popular among the country folk."

Irakli's face sunk, and looking very old he raised his tired voice. "My wife's early acting career once posed a real problem to me. It does no longer, do tell us what is going on in that play. You are more objective than any of us, and maybe you know more about the origins of its script than we do. Tamara did not invent this play, it is based on an old manuscript she found in Svaneti."

Gingerly Konrad set out to describe the scene in front of the church, the uncouth rhymed jokes of the old crone and her attempts to entice Alexandra and him to perform in the bushes.

Ilia broke out in laughter, shouting, "Marvelous, such daring! No wonder our good critics were scared away and never saw the play."

Konrad vividly described the three masked figures in the choir of the crowded church, the queen sitting on the phallus, the veiled Virgin, and the horse-headed Yakkhos.

Shocked, Ilia pushed his chair back. "I cannot follow. What has this to do with Easter night?"

"Ilia," said Konrad irritated, "allow me to present my theory later. We were just as confused as you are now, but the greatest surprise was the identity of the actors. We never found out who played the horse, but," he held his breath, "beyond doubt Deda played the queen."

Ilia began to laugh. "What, Tamunia sitting on the phallus of Zedazeni?"

He shook his head mumbling, "Tamunia on the phallus?!" as he refilled their glasses.

Raising his glass to Konrad he shouted, "Continue, fearless German tiger! Continue your *decouverte*! And you, my dear Irakli, put wax into your ears so you don't faint!"

Irakli sat slumped in his seat. Listlessly he raised his glass to his host.

Konrad continued his description of the characters. When he mentioned that the maiden had been played by Persephone, Ilia exclaimed, "You mean the clairvoyant witch from Shavnabada? How does she get involved in all this?"

Olga had watched her husband with increasing restlessness. "Tamunia told me a long time ago that Persephone was part of this play. Calm down, Ilia! Persephone is another excellent actress. You could have gone there yourself. Let Konrad continue!"

Ilia sat down, and Konrad suggested that Persephone simply played herself, the Queen of the Underworld.

At this moment Tamara appeared in the door. Proud and bright-eyed, still high on the excitement of her role, very much Demeter, she surveyed the scene. Ilia froze embarrassed.

"Tamunia," said Olga, "we have been waiting for you with our feast, and, of course, my husband provoked Konrad to relate what happened at Zedazeni tonight. As if they could not have gone there and seen for themselves."

Deda smiled at her. "I invited Konrad to Zedazeni. I trust his sober judgement. Maybe Konrad can break the silence that has separated us for years. But first, give me something to eat, I am starving!"

Olga disappeared into the kitchen, and Ilia got up and filled a glass. Handing it to Tamara he welcomed her. "To the queen of the underworld!"

"You got that wrong, old cousin—I was the Goddess Demeter. Persephone was the queen of the underworld. Konrad, what did you tell them?"

"I have not finished describing the characters," said Konrad.

Tamara carried her glass to the table and sat down. "Well, let us enjoy Olga's feast. The best is still to come! Right, Konrad?"

Alexandra, embarrassed resentment written all over her face, stared at her mother. She was close to crying. Konrad very gently laid his arm around her shoulders. "Come my love," he told her quietly, "let us sit next to each other. This Easter night has taken another unexpected turn. But you will see, all will be well in the end and maybe even better than before."

Deda sat across from Konrad. She smiled encouragingly at him. A rustic feast was served, roasted lamb, eggplant puree, cucumbers, tomatoes, bunches of garden greens, mountains of Georgian bread, and two plates of traditional Easter *mtsvari*, the innards of the sheep crisscrossed with gut strings into a long, roasted sausage.

Konrad, happy to have Tamunia's support, glanced at her. "Father says that you produced this remarkable mystery play from an old Svani manuscript, where did you find it and what do you know about its history?"

Ilia abandoned his prerogatives as host and tamada. All eyes were on Tamara and Konrad.

"I discovered this play in David Dadeshkeliani's library when, newly married, Irakli and I visited him in Svaneti, years ago. It was written in ancient Svani, which you know is quite different from the Kartli spoken here, it seems to be two hundred years old."

She raised her glass to Konrad. "Eventually one of Irakli's Svani cousins and I translated the text into Kartli. It was an eye-opener as you can imagine. I never blushed so often in my life, and several times we had to consult a friendly *kinto* in the Bazaar for the appropriate expressions for all the bawdy words the old crone uses."

She ate a few slices of *mtsvari* and continued. "We tried to publish the text, but found

that no publisher would touch the manuscript for fear of being prosecuted as purveyor of blasphemous and pornographic literature. I fared no better with the Russian linguists whom I showed it to. They would gloat over it with large eyes, laugh maliciously, and suggest to hide the text well from His Majesty's Secret Service."

She looked at Ilia with a challenging smile. "The manuscript languished in one of my chests until a few years ago. Encouraged by Ilia's national Georgian campaign, I offered it to this cousin over there for publication in *Iveria*. He never read it, he just held up his hands saying that the Ochrana would put him into jail if he would touch this manuscript."

Ilia winced and lowered his eyes, but did not contest her words. Irakli had slowly recovered his composure. Absentmindedly Deda ate few pieces of the marvelous lamb. Olga passed her the plate with the aubergine puree, and they devoted themselves to the food for a while.

Eventually Deda resumed her report. "Because the original was more than three hours long, I finally staged a shortened version with Persephone's help in Zedazeni five years ago. I am afraid dear Irakli has never fully forgiven me this act of defiance against the patriarchal order of the land. I chose Zedazeni, because it is hard to get to and because of the phallic post in its choir, which the women from the villages decorate every week."

She tossed her head and her hair came undone. "The play was not a success. I guess more because of fear than its actual content the Tiflis elite has denied its existence and ostracized me ever since. But as you saw for yourself, it has had a sensational success among the less sensitive, less educated Georgians. They love it and come from far and wide to see it every Easter. It quite simply has become a true Georgian mystery play, which I am proud of. I will not let my shepherds down, no matter how much I upset the good citizens of Tiflis!"

A tense silence settled over the table. Konrad watched with curiosity. He had never heard Tamunia-Deda speak with such purposeful courage. He risked a glance at Alexandra. She was glowing in admiration of her mother. Irakli was brooding in his shell. It would be up to Ilia as the tamada to break the ice.

Ilia rose, lifted his glass to Tamara and very seriously said, "To the unquenchable spirit of my beloved cousin!" Trying to put meaning into this cliché he continued, "May you persevere in your courageous attempts to enlighten our Georgian peasants. I am sorry that we men are still powerless to help you find the recognition your discovery deserves."

Konrad, red-faced, had to control himself not to make a cutting remark at this shamelessly stupid toast.

"Please, Konrad," Tamara said, "don't get discouraged. All this night I prayed that you would break this terrifying, old ice that covers my family life."

Konrad pulled himself together, swallowed his anger, and related the happenings at Zedazeni without being interrupted. He concealed nothing—not even Demeters obscene movements on the phallus and the bloody cloth from which she had risen.

Ilia kept quiet, he had no more boisterous outbreaks of sarcasm. Irakli sat in grave silence. The play had become a test of their devotion to this woman, and Konrad was well aware of his role as arbiter and judge.

When Konrad ended, Ilia made no use of his right as tamada, and Konrad simply continued to explain what he thought he knew about the pre-Christian sources of the play.

"The original manuscript and a usable translation should be published some day. Our knowledge about the Greek mysteries is so sketchy that this late Greek-Christian hybrid would

be immensely valuable, quite apart from the light it sheds on the possible origins of Easter in the mysteries of resurrection of pre-Christian times. I am no anthropologist or specialist in any of the relevant areas, but one could be found in Western Europe.... However, I simply loved the play. Its raucous drama could only work with these shepherds as the participating audience. Many a theater director would envy you, Deda, for these people."

Konrad quietly sat back. To his great joy, Alexandra, defying all etiquette, her voice trembling with excitement, toasted her mother. "Dear Deda, for years I have not been able to speak openly to you, cowed by my ignorance and these ominous 'family secrets.' This night has changed all that. Today I am proud to be your daughter, proud of your strength and courage. I have finally reached the point in my life where I begin to understand the difficult role of a married woman. Thank you for your patience and your prayers, I love you with all my heart!"

The Last Feudal Wedding in Kakheti

1899

In the early morning hours, shrouded by a cloud of dust, the bridal procession wound from Tsinandali through the villages of Kakheti. Four splendidly costumed riders rode in front followed by an *arba*, a two-wheeled cart, carrying a large wine barrel filled with water. This innovation had been George Chavchavadze's idea. Two men sprinkled the road with water to cut the dust at least for the first few carriages.

On a second, larger *arba* crouched a band, a big drum, a clarinet, an English horn, and a fiddle.

The bride and her parents rode in an open phaeton, another carried the ninety-five year old Anna Chavchavadze, Deda's mother, escorted by her two sons George and David, the masters of Tsinandali. Behind them extended a train of twenty-five carriages, members of the family and their guests.

The men were dressed in full Georgian regalia: blazing red vests under short, black coats with sleeves long and wide enough that they could hide their hands in, and despite the sunny weather high, black fur hats. All wore their daggers on the belt over their coats and, of course, high boots with the inevitable horns up front.

The less glamorously dressed women wore black dresses held together by a red cummerbund, its two long ends hanging down in front, and a simple, rimless, red cap covered by a short, white veil.

Alexandra was dressed in the splendid, white Italian dress Manana had made for her; her veil, held to by two little Chavchavadze girls, stretched over the lowered canopy of her phaeton.

Alongside the carriages rode a dozen of liveried riders, sabers in hand—high fur hats, a gun in their belts, bandoleers across their chests—a flourish left over from the days of robbers and highwaymen. The villagers waited along the road, threw flowers at the bride, and cheered whenever David Chavchavadze tossed coins among them.

The groom was not in Alexandra's train. In the preceding night Ilia had taken Konrad to Kvareli. Irakli had invited the German consul in Tiflis, Herrn von Bredow, an old friend of his and David Chavchavadze's, to act as Konrad's best man. Clara von Arnim, von Bredow's young wife had offered to stand in for Konrad's mother

On the ride from Kvareli to Alaverdi, Konrad recalled the last four turbulent days. Alexandra and he were received with a formal yet warm cordiality in Tsinandali. He noticed no trace of the arrogance Irakli had envisioned. The cosmopolitan grace of the Chavchavadzes disarmed him. The older members of Deda's family spoke conversational German fluently and made him feel completely at ease.

His conversations with David Chavchavadze were an intellectual pleasure he had not enjoyed since his days in Berlin. No Georgian boasting and toasting, no easy nationalist outbursts marred the formal but relaxed dinners. It had all been a great delight.

The Chavchavadze manor house, located in a large park, was full of children. Some belonged to David, the philosopher and statesman, the others to George, the practical of Tamunia's two brothers. They all lived under the same roof.



The Chavchavadze of Tsinandali around 1895 (Wikipedia)

Anna Chavchavadze, the *grande dame de la maison*, with her beautiful, knowing eyes, had graciously inquired about the couple's plans for their Italian honeymoon and their life in St. Petersburg. She knew both places well. "Alexandra, with your interest in the arts and your visual gifts, don't miss the *Accademia* in Venice! I still remember how my first visit to this gallery opened my eyes."

Alexandra had been truly happy, and Deda smiled seeing Konrad's surprise.

Alexandra's brothers, Otar and Niko, had arrived from St. Petersburg a few days earlier. They had spent two days with Irakli in Kvareli to help him and Ilia prepare the wedding in Alaverdi. Niko, who was a year younger than Alexandra, would carry the rings that Konrad had made. Konrad had shown them to Alexandra. Her ring fit perfectly, and she liked them as much as he had hoped.

Konrad had been put in a fabulous morning coat in the English style, complete with a white silk handkerchief in the breast pocket, a red rose in the buttonhole, an elegant bowler hat made in London, and English shoes without pointed horns.

He felt funny but had to admit that all was in style. He and Bredow would be the only men in European clothes. Well, he thought, I am the representative of the "other" world that

Alexandra sees in me. A remarkably antiquated idea after having been in Tsinandali!



The Church at Alaverdi (RWFG)

Konrad, Ilia, and Bredow arrived at the venerable cathedral early, which gave them time to admire the arrangements Ilia, Irakli, and Alexandra's brothers had labored at.

They had set up several long refectory tables and benches and a platform with a magnificent, old Caucasian rug as a backdrop. A second smaller stage served the orchestra.

Four cooks were busy stirring enormous pots with vegetables heavily laced with walnut puree. Suckling pigs, chicken, and lamb shashlik roasted over several fires, from which wafted most unholy aromas across the churchyard. In one corner wine skins lay stacked reaching with their short legs heavenwards.

Ilia, in great spirits, told them that to complete the Old Georgian scene, the guests would be given only spoons and a few sharp knives to carve the meat, otherwise they would have to use their teeth and fingers. Young boys would carry water basins, soap and towels around, so the guests could wash their hands before and after the meal.

The traveling orchestra from Tsinandali would be augmented with drums and a virtuoso violinist. Ilia had also brought a famous female singer all the way from Tiflis, and he was hiding, as he told Konrad with a smile, a surprise to be revealed late at night, when the mood would be suitable.

Horn blasts announced the arrival of the bride's train. Encouraged by Ilia's doubtful jokes, Konrad and the Bredows positioned themselves halfway between the gate to the churchyard and the door of the cathedral.

The riders and footmen helped the guests descend from their carriages and then formed an honor guard through which Irakli led the completely veiled bride. Two young cousins of Alexandra's strew flowers before the bride. Following them walked Deda and George, and David escorting their old mother.

Excruciatingly slowly Irakli and Alexandra moved towards the groom.

Bredow and Konrad pulled their hats, and Konrad made a deep bow before Irakli. He had been encouraged to repeat his Georgian marriage proposal, which he did now. Under the applause of the guests Irakli and Konrad embraced.

Konrad, with the Bredows at his side arranged himself behind the bride and her father, and together they walked into the church.

As was customary in Orthodoxy they entered in complete silence accompanied only by the crackle of hundreds of flickering candles. In front of the iconostasis waited two priests and their young acolytes in full ecclesiastical regalia. The priests placed the customary interconnected wreaths on the couple's heads and began chanting the wedding service. It was all very slow and solemn. The wreaths had to be exchanged three times between them, and eventually Konrad was allowed to remove the veil from Alexandra's face. She looked pale but managed a brave smile.

Briefly Alexandra's mind wandered back to the scene in Shuamta a month ago. She was startled by the priest's question, "Are you willing to be husband and wife until death separates you?" But Konrad's "Yes" returned Alexandra's composure. Loud and clear she made her own vow. "Yes, I will to the end of my days."

Niko produced the rings on a small cushion. Konrad put hers on her finger, and she the other one on his. The priest pronounced them husband and wife, and they kissed. A loud, cheerful murmur went through the guests. Deda could be heard crying copiously.

Konrad had been given precise instructions: hand in hand they would have to follow the priests into the otherwise inaccessible Holy of Holiest behind the iconostasis. There Konrad was to deposit a sizable amount of money on a square, one-legged marble table that he would find in the sanctum. He should not be surprised, this circumambulation was usually performed in a great hurry.

A surprise awaited Konrad behind the iconostasis—he found the one-legged table at exactly the same spot as the "phallic post" in the desecrated sanctum of Zedazeni...!

To the applause of the guests, they walked arm in arm, a radiant Alexandra waving with her white glove to her friends, behind the singing priests back out of the church, where the liveried horsemen stood at attention forming an arch with their sabers through which they had to duck.

David Chavchavadze acted as the delicately circumspect tamada at the big feast that night. Toasts alternated with long speeches in German, Russian, and Georgian praising the couple, telling stories from their lives, and making jokes about Konrad's red beard and their future children. Konrad amused the guests by reading a short speech in Georgian which

Alexandra had phonetically transliterated for him. The audience applauded enthusiastically shouting "Well done!" and "More!" So he gave another, freelance speech starting in Russian which he slowly turned into German thanking his parents-in-law for accepting him so graciously into their family and remembering his own parents. In the end he raised his glass to Alexandra and expressed his hopes for a long shared life in which they would try to bring together their two countries and two cultures.

Alexandra rose and embraced him and together they sang one of the Georgian drinking songs they had practiced on their rides, and now the cheers knew no limit and everybody joined in the refrains.

As the evening continued the party grew noisier. The orchestra began playing Georgian dances. At first only a few dancers dared to try the old steps; too many people came from the city. Later torches and wind lights were brought and Ilia presented Darejan, the singer.

The tall, dark-haired woman began with several of the familiar, sad tunes accompanied by the orchestra, but then she tried to provoke young, innocent Niko Dadiani by teasing him with her Byzantine eyes to sing with her. She would start a song and call on Niko to finish the verse. They were love songs, the lines of which were alternatingly sung by the lover and his woman. Niko blushed deeply, but could not produce a single sound.

Suddenly George Chavchavadze answered Darejan's couplets, and soon an improvised poetic exchange between them ensued. As George caught on to her mood, Darejan interspersed her songs with single verse lines to which David responded with the appropriate rhyming line, to eventually join her in another duet.

The guests listened in breathless silence. As David became bolder the verses flew back and forth in rapid succession. Darejan challenged David in no uncertain ways as man and lover, but the exchange remained in perfect taste. Konrad, sensing that this was an ancient art, was enraptured. The audience was obviously familiar with it, but George became quite enamored with Darejan, far beyond convention.

"Darejan is famous in Tiflis," whispered Alexandra. "Family rumors claim that David's father had a passionate affair with Darejan when she was very young. Some even maintain that she had born him a daughter, but nobody seems to have ever seen the child."

Around midnight Ilia, to loud shouts of "Bravo!" from the men, unveiled his surprise—a belly dancer. Konrad had never seen a belly dancer before and was surprised by her advanced age. He made a whispered remark to Alexandra, who with a devastating glance put a finger on her lips. Watching he sensed that this dance demanded a full figure. A young girl would not have possessed the body control, nor radiated the mysterious aura this experienced woman of forty showed.

She had appeared covered by a veil which she used to play hide and seek with the men in the front row and especially Konrad who blushed in nervous embarrassment. Slowly she let one after the other of her veils fall. She was in control of every muscle of her beautifully proportioned body. Finally the music stopped. She ended her long dance on the floor, nude, except for one last veil.

After an almost reverent silence the audience broke out in wild applause.

Konrad wanted to make a sarcastic remark, but Alexandra cut him short: he was childish and had no appreciation for the high art of this woman, who was one of the best dancers in Georgia. He shook his head, how could Alexandra, a woman, defend this dubious

performance?

For the reception at the Dadiani's townhouse in Tiflis a week later Irakli had hired a modern dance band. A French-style buffet was served to the numerous guests, and everybody danced to their hearts' delight.

On that evening Konrad discovered the Bredows. At the wedding there had been little time to talk and his mind had been preoccupied with the events. Then Herr von Bredow had appeared like the proverbial disciplined, professional diplomat, obliging but reserved, a gaunt man of small stature.

Talking to him now he found that Bredow had a thorough knowledge of the history and art of Georgia. Naturally, as the German consul, he was especially interested in the many Germans who had lived and worked in Georgia. To Konrad's surprise he learned that two von Siemens brothers had died in Tiflis and were buried there. Others, like the idiosyncratic Orient explorer von Bodenstedt, had left interesting descriptions of Georgia at the beginning of the century, and Konrad's own grandfather Kiepert had spent many months in Tiflis surveying and mapping the land. For over three generations these travelers and emissaries had been hosted by the Chavchavadzes.

In addition, the gray-blue eyes of Clara von Arnim, the fine-boned, lively wife of Joachim von Bredow's enchanted and attracted him more than he would admit to himself.

Alexandra saw at once, that Clara excited Konrad's interest. Ah, she thought, the women from his own tribe against whom I will have to defend myself all my life

Dancing with Konrad, Alexandra smiled. "Clara has beautiful German eyes. She is tactful and sensitive, I would like to make her my friend. Don't you like her too?"

Konrad only nodded.

As Alexandra took Konrad around and introduced him to all the important friends of her family, he noticed that she had red spots on her cheeks, her eyes were unnaturally brilliant. He dismissed her feverish appearance as excitement. Then he lost sight of her for a while.

He was dancing with Clara when she remarked that Alexandra was not feeling well and had quietly disappeared to her room upstairs. She did not want to spoil the evening.

Alarmed, Konrad took Clara by the arm, and together they went upstairs to look for Alexandra. They found her lying on her bed glowing and feeling very weak. Konrad got some cold water and sitting at her bedside, put compresses on her forehead. Clara slipped out and looked for Deda. The three could not find any definite symptoms. Alexandra's temperature was high, and she felt terribly exhausted and tired.

Finally Deda sent a messenger to their family doctor, Friederika von Haffner, a competent German physician who came immediately. After a thorough investigation, the doctor suggested that it was probably a neuralgic fever caused by the excitement of the past weeks. She ordered strict bed rest, prescribed a few drops of paregoric in water and told Deda to put wet stockings on Alexandra's legs. "No excitement, please," she said waving her finger at Konrad with a smile.

In a weak voice Alexandra begged Konrad. "I am so terribly sorry, but I don't think I can go with you to Tusheti in this condition, don't be discouraged, please go without me!"

Konrad did not tell her that he would never leave her alone, not even in the care of her mother. He quietly shelved the trip they had planned for such a long time. She had to recover completely before they could sail for Italy.

"Listen my love, try to lie absolutely still and sleep like the Sufi do, very lightly and floating quietly, concentrating on getting better even in your sleep."

After a week, she slowly began to recover. She showed some appetite and took part in everyday life. But Konrad insisted that she rest quietly for several hours a day during which he read to her from Goethe's *Italienische Reise* a copy of which he had found in the Dadiani library.

Three weeks later they sailed on an old, rusty steamer from Batumi to Trapezond where they boarded an Italian ship for Venice.

Venice

1899

Very thin, a mere line floating between the sky and the sea, the Lido appeared in the early morning light. Billowing clouds towered in the north over the Upper Veneto, a thunderstorm of the past night. The sea a pastel blue, cold pink, green, a tinge of yellow in the sky. A thin, ethereal mist softened the horizon.

Slowly, before Alexandra's eyes, this whimsical trace of God's crayon grew more distinct. First it was just a fleeting yellow and green, then she could distinguish the two lighthouses at the entry to the Lagoon, a few buildings, the beaches to the north a white streak.

The islands of San Erasmo and Murano lay directly before her and in the mist, suspended over the water like a mirage, the transparent blue towers and churches of Venice.

How long this city had lingered in her dreams. How well she remembered its many spires from the etchings Aunt Sophia had brought back from her travels, which had left indelible images in her young mind.

They had spent a day in Constantinople—sagging, heavy and debauched, drained of its beauty, ravished by uncounted conquerors. Venice floated in her imagination, a piece of art, elegant, refined, fluid—*un mirage*.

A rowboat took them and their luggage to a modest hotel at the confluence of two canals behind the Piazza di San Marco, which Aunt Sophia had recommended. The musty-smelling room, its walls covered with half a dozen mirrors, was crowded with ornate furniture and an old-fashioned four-poster bed. Konrad pulled the heavy, silver-blue damask curtains to let in the sun and the bustling noises from the canal.

The porter had barely closed the door, when Alexandra threw off her clothes, and endlessly reflected between two mirrors, leaving all caution aside they made love on the creaking bed.

Alexandra saw her love and Venice in a myriad of reflections. A peeling palazzo dissected into uncounted images. Slowly drifting puddles of color on the surface of a canal, the serrated black prow of a gondola waving distorted by its own wake in the multi-hued images of the Doge's palace. And in the evening the copula of San Giorgio Maggiore floated on a surface of gold, pinks, and powder blues into the sunset.

Aimlessly following the unreliable, winding vicolos, they ventured into the labyrinth of the city, got lost, walked in circles unable to recognize the place they had come from. At the dead end of one narrow lane they found an altar leaf by Bellini hidden in the murky darkness of a church, or they suddenly stood before the house of Marco Polo—which they could never find again.

A labyrinth, which seemed made for them and uncounted hours of happy discoveries.

They dawdled away one afternoon in a Café watching the children, who had drawn their own maze on the flagstones of the piazza through which they skipped on one foot.

In the evening they would find a trattoria in a working neighborhood and eat the simple fare at the same table as the locals.

Alexandra's love became boundless, overflowing. In the past she had imagined that she would dance at fabulous balls, see herself, a mysterious masked lady, being rowed by a lover

over dark waters to an undisclosed destination. All of these fantasies vanished, were replaced by a simple, unquestioned happiness in the arms of this very real man.

One day, from one of the bridges, she saw herself arm in arm with Konrad reflected in the waters of a canal. A boat passed and their image wavered, hovered a moment suspended, and then exploded into a myriad of colorful shards.

She kissed him.

"Maybe you dream of Florence, this is my city."

"I have never been to a great art gallery. Could we go to the Accademia together?" She asked one morning.

Konrad stalled. He, the Northern German Protestant, had still not come to terms with the soft, sensuous colors and the overbearing Baroque of the Florentine churches. He was not ready to explore the paintings of the Accademia.

Remembering their promise to give each other freedom, they agreed to spend the morning separately and meet for a late lunch at a restaurant across the bridge from the museum.

All during this morning Konrad wandered, forlorn, through the quarters around the Campo di San Rocco. He discovered a workshop where they made masks for the Commedia dell'Arte, black leather half-masks with noses like beaks. He smiled, thinking of Irakli's joke about the long noses of the Dadiani, while watching the artisans push the soaked leather pieces into wooden dies and then dry them into shape. In the end he bought a long-nosed Pierrot mask for himself and a large, gilded half-moon for Alexandra.



Giorgione, The Tempest

He found Alexandra waiting at the restaurant. She was flushed and excited.

"I discovered *my* painting. It is a Giorgione: *The Tempest*. For over an hour I searched for the reason why I was in that museum, for the painting that touched me. There are many beautiful pictures in the gallery, but the Giorgione is mine."

Konrad had not heard of this painting.

"I had not either, it was a true surprise, a real discovery."

She described the painting to him: In the foreground a soldier who must have just arrived home from a war stands facing a young woman who nurses a child in a sunny landscape, a bridge, the houses of a town, a castle. The last lightning in a dark storm cloud drifting away into the background.

"The woman—she must be the soldier's wife—and the child are completely nude. The beauty of the painting lies in the contrast of the dark thundercloud and the light color of the woman's body. Maybe the soldier has never seen his child before."

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"The woman—she must be the soldier's wife—and the child are completely nude. The beauty of the painting lies in the contrast of the dark thundercloud and the light color of the woman's body. Maybe the soldier has never seen his child before." Alexandra sat across from Konrad and smiled. "Konrad, I want a child. A child conceived over the waters of Venice."

Konrad arched his eyebrows in surprise and smiled. "That happens when I let you go alone to the Accademia. You come back with all kinds of revolutionary ideas! You will have to take me to see your Giorgione, maybe I can identify with the soldier in the painting. But I thought you wanted to dance at the balls of St. Petersburg this winter, not walk around hugely pregnant? And what about the Italian silk dress, you will not be able to squeeze into it when we get home!"

"I have thought of that." She smiled. "I am tall and slender. I have much room for a child, it might not be visible for a while. "

"Forever the practical Dadiani! So you think you can have both, a child and half a winter of fun!"

He took her hand and kissed it tenderly.

"Let's go home. I like to make love to you in the afternoon, when I can see your eyes. But first I have to show you *my* treasures. I found something for my lunar goddess."

Konrad took the moon mask out of the bag.

"You see, the moon is waxing, it has just passed *your* First Quarter! And for myself I finally bought a Dadiani nose!"

He pulled out the Pierrot mask.

She laughed as hard as only her father would have laughed.

Wearing only the masks, in the slanting afternoon light, they clowned around in front of the mirrors until he pulled his lunar goddess down onto their bed.

It was not to be a Venetian child. A week later it became suddenly very hot. Bubbles rose from the waters, and the canals began to reek. Overnight, before their eyes Alexandra's Venice turned into a nightmare.

The Wolfsons Fiesole and Florence

1899

They bought train tickets to Florence and fled.

An older couple who spoke a mixture of German and English shared their compartment. Their name was Wolfson, "Walter and Sally," corrected Sally. "I am American, Walter comes from Frankfurt, and we live in Florence. Where are you from?"

When Alexandra told them that she came from Georgia Walter excitedly explained that he had long wanted to visit Georgia to look for Byzantine icons. He was an art dealer. "Oh, I am the expert and Sally provides the clientele! We buy art in Europe for rich American collectors. It is a challenging and not unprofitable profession for an art historian."

Walter and Sally owned a villa in Fiesole high above Florence. Sally, in her American expansiveness, invited Konrad and Alexandra to their house on the spot. They would be much more comfortable in Fiesole at this time of the year than in hot and noisy Florence.

Alexandra indicated that this was her first visit to Western Europe, they were on their honeymoon! Sentimental Sally obliged Alexandra to describe the details of their Old Georgian wedding .

Sally sighed, "Ah, you Europeans are so romantic and know so well how to do things right! I would have liked such a royal wedding."

Walter frowned and with an accusing tone admonished her. "We had a sumptuous wedding in Boston, what are you complaining about? And I am not sure who is more romantic, you or the Europeans."

Alexandra then told Walter of her discovery of the Giorgione at the Accademia. Walter's eyes brightened. "Ah Giorgione, a very important man," he said with conviction and delved into a lecture about the art historical problems of the *Tempest*. The picture had been painted in 1506 and ever since had remained controversial.

Alexandra remarked that she found the title *La Tempesta* exceptionally unimaginative, it did no justice to the three figures shown. Certainly Giorgione must have had more in mind than painting a thundercloud above a bucolic landscape!

"*Gnädige Frau*, that is exactly why the art historians named it *The Tempest*. The experts cannot agree on Giorgione's intentions, a nude woman nursing a child and a contemporary soldier? He had to be an allegory! But whom did he represent? Is he a mythological brigand who has come to harm her—I admit, he does not look ferocious—or some God in disguise, who wants to abduct her? But she is nursing a child! This is a very early *cinquecento* landscape painting, what was its mythological reference? At this early time only heathen Gods and Goddesses appeared in the nude!"

Alexandra, puzzled, knitted her brows. "But she is the soldier's wife! He has returned home after years of war. The threatening clouds are receding. He sees his child for the first time. Giorgione painted the woman in the nude to show that peace had finally arrived. Permit me to say that I cannot understand your interpretative problems, Herr Wolfson."

Wolfson's face lit up, he waved his open hand towards Alexandra. "*Gnädige Frau*, sometimes a woman sees things we art historians do not. Every now and then a woman

reminds us—you could also say puts our nose on the fact that we men love to get lost in complicated speculations."

He shook his head, but then said encouragingly. "Your explanation is not only charming, but convincing. You are asking me to reconsider the present reading of *La Tempesta*. Your interpretation would make this painting the earliest non-mythological nude in the history of art. An almost revolutionary thought."

Weighing this challenge, Walter explained. "You have to know that this honor belonged to another Giorgione in the Louvre which is of undeniably non-mythological character: two nude women in the company of two men playing a guitar and a flute in an extended landscape. And even in this case some insist that the women are nymphs. Giorgione painted this picture in 1508, two years after the so called 'Storm' and two years before his death."

Walter spoke not only a peculiar, antiquated and often funny German, he simply was the way he spoke, formal, long-winded, and touchingly impractical. Sally, on the other hand, was his complete opposite. Notwithstanding her sentimental outbreaks, next to frail Walter she appeared refreshingly blunt and direct. She also was a head taller than he.

As they passed the towns of the Emilia, Walter gave minute descriptions of the art found in each of them. Padova: Giotto's frescoes of 1304 in the Scrovegni Chapel; Ferrara: the city of the d'Estes where in 1470 in the Schifanoia Palace Francesco Fossa left behind a lively cycle of the allegories of the months; Bologna: the oldest university in the world founded in 1085, where an unusually large number of women taught in the early fourteenth century.

Walter glanced at Alexandra and lowered his eyes. "Gnädige Frau, you remind me of the most glorious of these exceptionally gifted women, Novella d'Andreae, she was so ravishingly beautiful that she had to lecture from behind a curtain in order not to distract her students. Gnädige Frau, she must have been as radiant as you!"

Konrad interrupted Walter's lecture by casually mentioning that Novella d'Andreae was his oldest known ancestor. Alexandra frowned. Was he making this up to derail Walter's dull discourse?

Walter turned to Konrad in surprise. "Herr Professor Rost, such illustrious ancestry? Novella d'Andreae was one of the most remarkable women of her time and not only because of her radiant beauty! She taught Greek and philosophy at Bologna. Would you, *verehrter Herr Professor Rost*, be so kind and describe to us how the d'Andreae are connected to your family. Your young wife seems to be unaware of her?"

Konrad had to recollect the details of his genealogy. One of his ancestors, a merchant in the city of Mainz, had, from a trip to Italy, brought back as his wife one Monica d'Andreae, the daughter of a business partner in Bologna. She was reputed to have been as beautiful as she was rich. Monica's earliest known forefather had been a certain Johannes d'Andreae, Professor at Both Laws at Bologna. Novella was Johannes' beloved daughter.

"After a long search my father solved this riddle. A professor with the name Calderini had married Novella d'Andreae! We do not know whether her beauty, her erudition, or the fame of her father induced Calderini to adopt the name of his wife d'Andreae. Be that as it may, you are looking at the rare case of a family tree founded upon a woman!"

Konrad was amused by the excitement this anecdote evoked in Walter, the historian of beauty. Konrad continued. "Novella occupied a prominent place in my childhood. *She* was the intellectual role model my father held up to his sons. Following 'family tradition' father sent us to a classical *Gymnasium* to learn Greek. Maybe that is why I almost forgot this genealogical

anecdote: my brother studied theology, I broke with tradition and became a scientist."

"And your father was the director of the Gymnasium?" asked Alexandra.

"Yes, that added to the significance of Novella."

Walter bowed to Alexandra and added portentously. "And after six hundred years a worthy descendent of the incomparable Novella has taken a wife of even greater beauty."

When they arrived in Florence the Wolfsons insisted that Konrad and Alexandra stay with them in Fiesole. A shiny, new Daimler touring car with an Italian chauffeur waited for them at the station—Konrad and Alexandra's first ride ever in an automobile.

Hidden in a steep orchard of olives, vines, and lemons they discovered *Villa Tasso*. Originally built for the sixteenth-century poet Torquato Tasso, the villa had last been owned by Gabriele d'Annuncio, who had sold the property to the Wolfsons to cover the debts of his extravagant lifestyle.

The rustic two-story building was filled with Italian Renaissance paintings and a few contemporary ones. In Walter's room hung a number of Byzantine icons from the Balkans, Greece, and Russia. More Byzantine treasures, ivories, jewelry, and glowing gold and enamel cloisonnés, were hidden in a tresor deep in the basement.

Sally gave Alexandra and Konrad two connecting rooms on the second floor with a delightful view. Between silver-green olive trees they looked down on the red and sienna-brown roofs of Florence.. A view as tranquil as from Zaguramo.

At night two other guests appeared, a doctoral student of art history from Harvard and Katharina, a young German painter from Munich, who was spending two months in Italy. Their dinners were lively gatherings with conversations in several languages. Alexandra immediately felt at home. She became Katharina's close friend, who taught her Italian. Katharina was exploring the dissolution of geometrical reality into light and colors. She had fallen in love with a Russian painter by the name of Wassily Kandinsky who had been her teacher in Munich and had sent her to Italy. Kandinsky's idea to create a new spirituality in painting had started her on this project.

The best times were the long evenings on the terrace under the olive trees. Over coffee or a glass of wine, Walter would hold forth on the wonders and treasures of Tuscany, the history of its painters and architects. Most often he directed his lectures at Alexandra, who followed his words with rapt attention.

Occasionally Walter would have his chauffeur motor them to some of the places he had described the previous night: to Lucca, through the valley of the upper Arno to San Sepolcro to see the frescoes of Piero della Francesca, the Greve and Siena. Walter would not accompany them, he wanted to give Alexandra the freedom to learn to see with her own eyes, but in the evening she had to give him detailed reports of what she had seen.

This improvised course in art history gave Walter as much pleasure as Alexandra. He maintained that he had never had a more eager and intelligent student. After a while, in the excitement of these evenings, Walter even arrived at an easy *Alexandra*, dropping the 'Gnädige Frau' and the formal 'Sie.'

However, to the Uffizi Walter took her himself. He led her first into a room filled with glowing religious panels, altar leaves, Madonnas, icons of saints, prophets, and angels in

elaborate Gothic settings. The profusion of gold surfaces oppressed Alexandra. Since her discovery of Giorgione at the Accademia she was looking for something new, something beyond the Byzantine art she had grown up with.

She was about to beg Walter to take her to the adjacent Renaissance room when he paused before a Madonna. A label identified the altar leaf: *Madonna Rucellai, Duccio, 1285*. The Mother of God sat on an elaborately carved throne before a shimmering gold background wearing a blue, hooded cloak. On her knee an age-old Christ child wrapped in a purple cloth extending his right hand in blessing. Six angels in colorful garments held onto a curtain behind mother and child.

"Look at this Madonna, Alexandra, first from a distance then close up. This Duccio is one of the most splendid Byzantine gold-ground panels of Tuscany painted just before the revolution of the Renaissance. Duccio's formality is steeped in Byzantine art, but he infused this Madonna and the folds of her garment with a fluidity that is thoroughly Italian."

Walter waved his outstretched arm at the other paintings in the room. "In our eyes the beauty of these Byzantine panels lies in their hierarchical monumentality. The artist and the viewers were not aware of this beauty, their feelings were entirely unimportant. These images showed the spiritual powers of the depicted saint. He and his icon were considered identical by the believers. I love the Byzantine images because of their forbidding magnificence, not because of their spiritual content. I am not a believer."

He pointed at the Duccio Madonna. "Now look closer. The painting is two-dimensional, it has no depth. Obviously Duccio did not know how to create the illusion of three-dimensional perspective on a flat surface."

Alexandra tilted her head and looked at the painting again. She turned to Walter. "To me this painting appears perfectly reasonable. In Georgian and Russian a saint is a *Lightman* of otherworldly splendor."

Walter looked at the floor. "I want to show you why the Renaissance discovery of three-dimensional painting was so important to our thinking. As you say, in Russia and here too Christ, the Madonna, and the saints were superhuman. They were different from ordinary people. The Renaissance changed all that and with it our entire attitude."

Walter took her before a large triptych in the next room. In the center a lovely Madonna was sitting on a raised throne, her sturdy child stood on her lap, as children do when they first test their legs. Two angels in the foreground with their back to the viewer attended to Mary's robe. The altar wings depicted pairs of saints and bishops. She quickly glanced at the label: *San Giovenale Triptych, Masaccio, 1422*.

"Masaccio, who painted this triptych for a Tuscan village church, was an extraordinary man. It was his first altar commission. A few years earlier Brunelleschi had invented three-dimensional perspective drawing. Masaccio was the first to use it in painting. He also conceived of employing light and shade to give his figures body and form. His contemporaries suspected him of magic! Compare Masaccio's throne with that of the Duccio Madonna. You see how its armrests recede towards an *imaginary point* behind the Madonna."

Alexandra peered at the revolutionary Masaccio. She had to admit, the throne appeared more like a chair, but she could not tell why, nor could she see Walter's imaginary point.

Challenged by the skeptical look in her blue eyes, a desperate Walter outdid himself, produced a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket, and drew, on a nearby window sill, a point from which radiated several lines. "This is the *imaginary point* and these lines are called

vanishing lines. They are not shown in the painting, the artist only *imagines* them."

Fascinated Alexandra watched this otherwise so impractical man insert the circular base of the throne, its armrests, legs, and the high back of the chair into the framework of those lines. For the first time in her life she saw a three-dimensional object being created on a flat surface. A wave of recognition passed over her face. The method looked exceedingly simple.

Walter smiled satisfied at his drawing. "Brunelleschi's *Perspective* in a nutshell!" He looked around and then at her. "He must have guided my hand. I have never done that before!"

"Now I see what you see!" she exclaimed and clapped her hand over her mouth.

Walter smiled beguiled. He awkwardly hid the sketch in his pocket. "And now you don't! Look at the triptych again. What do you see?"

Excited she pointed at the receding armrests of the throne and the angels in the foreground, which gave the painting depth.

Walter stepped away from her. "Yes, yes, but did you also notice that the Christ child is a naked village urchin who sticks his two fingers squarely into his mouth? The same fingers that used to bless the believers!"

Walter laughed happily as she nodded with a flushed face. She had been so preoccupied with visualizing the imaginary vanishing lines that she had not paid any attention to the child and his little gesture.

"Renaissance painting began with the Christ child sucking his fingers! Can you imagine how excited Masaccio's contemporaries must have been, awed *and* delighted? This child and his mother lived in their villages! God himself was walking among them."

He pointed at the figures on the side panels. "Neither are these sturdy saints with their beards and dark, gloomy demeanor any longer superhuman. You see how Masaccio uses light and shading to give his figures body? Look at the face of the Madonna with its lovely dimples—she is alive!"

Alexandra's sensitive features were glowing. Walter looked at his rapt student. "Unfortunately Masaccio died very young, he lived only twenty-seven years. But what effect he had on his contemporaries!"

He made to leave. "Let me take you to another painting from a different part of Europe to show you how quickly this new way of seeing spread in the fifty years following Massacio."

Without looking right or left, passing through droves of people, he walked her rapidly to the farthest corner of the museum where in a narrow corridor hung a large triptych.

"This is the *Pontinari Altarpiece* painted in 1475 by the Flemish painter *Hugo van der Goes*. It has been crammed into this forgotten corner, because it was not painted by an Italian artist. We are standing much too close, but never mind, its details are so extraordinary that you may as well examine them from close up."

Alexandra tried to take it all in. On the center panel the Madonna was kneeling before her naked child—a real baby, no longer the future Christ—lying on a lowly blanket on the ground. Still, this humble earthling was the center of attention. Three flocks of kneeling angels in colorfully embroidered garments surrounded the child. Joseph in a red coat on the left and three burly shepherds on the opposite side gazed at the newborn in rapture.

Walter, hands behind his back, quietly moved aside. Alexandra now noticed that directly before her appeared two vases of flowers, a bunch of red tiger lilies and white and blue iris in one, blue columbines in the other, their petals strewn all across the foreground in front of the child. The lifelike detail of these flowers took her breath away. She turned to Walter. "This must

be the most beautiful painting I have ever seen. Its translucent clarity and warm intimacy would be unimaginable, did I not stand before it."

"Yes, the Flemish have different eyes. You have not looked at the side panels. See the splendid garments of the ladies on the right? And on the left stand two holy men, and kneeling, in old-fashioned *inverted perspective*, the much smaller Pontinari, the sponsor of the altar with his two sons. His wife and daughter kneel on the other side. Pontinari was a rich merchant, like Konrad's ancestor. The self-important merchants and the cocky Italian princes paid for this revolution in art. Thanks to their riches Tuscany and Flanders became the birthplaces of the Renaissance."

Walter in his excitement took her arm. "Let me show you two Italian paintings that share the clarity of this van der Goes but are, unjustly, much more famous."

They walked back to the Italian section. On their way Walter, his eyes burning, exclaimed. "The discovery of this new way of *seeing* revolutionized everything, painting, philosophy, and the *belles lettres*. Tonight I will show you a literary example of this revolution. From the two-dimensional world of the Middle Ages modern, egocentric, three-dimensional man was born, fully formed—on his own power. Forgive me, I wanted to say *without the help of God*. This is the great experience of the *quattrocento*, the consequences of which still have not reached Russia and the East."

He went to show her Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. Venus in her full beauty stands on a seashell about to step on land. Aunt Sophia had given her a reproduction of this painting, it had been one of her favorites. How much smaller the painting was than she had imagined!

"You know this painting, don't you?" asked Walter fascinated by her expressive face. She smiled. "When I was twelve, I was in love with this Venus. It hung over my bed for years."

"After seeing the van der Goes," said Walter, "you will appreciate its clarity better. No reproduction can show this. The Birth of Venus was painted in 1478, three years after Pontinari donated the van der Goes altar to a church in Florenz. Has van der Goes influenced Botticelli's painting? He shows the same attention to detail but lacks van der Goes' intimate warmth. A classical, southern brilliance suffuses Botticelli's paintings contrasting with their mysterious strangeness."

He walked a few steps to the right and pointed at another much larger Botticelli. "Here is the equally famous *Primavera* painted a year later. It is even stranger than his Venus on the Seashell."

Alexandra had also seen reproductions of it, but never examined it closely: On the left three maidens danced in diaphanous robes—the *three Graces*? In the center stood a young woman with a red stole—a *heathen Madonna, Aphrodite*?—who held her quiet, serene head tilted. Her dress was gathered under her breasts. *Could Manana copy that dress?* To Aphrodite's right strode another young woman—*Spring or Flora*?—distributing flowers from a fold into which she had gathered in her flowing garment. Her highly sculpted face had an almost masculine strength, which, though no less beautiful, contrasted with the serenity of Aphrodite's face. A young man pointed towards the sky with a scepter—*Hermes with his caduceus*? Oranges hung in the dense foliage of trees that shaded the scene. All women except Aphrodite walked barefoot on the flower-covered ground. At the right margin a disconcerting scene: a male, winged figure in a windblown blue drapery—*Zephyr*?—flying through the trees in pursuit of a fleeing girl from whose mouth sprouted flowers—*she must be Ovid's Chloe!*

Alexandra tried to compare both paintings from a distance. "You know," she said to Walter, "were I not aware that they are by Botticelli and were painted in the fifteenth century, I would think they are from the Northern Gothic. You say they are mysterious, I think, it is this Gothic flavor that makes them so. Masaccio's Christ child is more of this world than these beautiful women who appear almost unreal. Who are they? And why are they all struck by sadness?"

Walter smiled. "We really don't know. People have speculated about their meaning and identity since Botticelli painted them. They are, of course, not Gothic in the historical sense, but if you mean religious, a new religion of beauty and love you have a point. Could it be that love made them sad?"

After supper Walter brought Alexandra a slim volume by the Latin poet Francesco Petrarca who had lived in Southern France near Avignon. He opened it to a letter written in 1393 to a friend in San Sepolcro. Petrarca described his impressions from an ascent of Mount Ventoux in Southern France.

"Read it carefully, dear Alexandra," said Walter. "This letter is a historical *document extraordinaire*, the first description of an *emotional* experience of the beauty of landscape. For the first time modern man sees more than just the *numinosity* of this world."

"What do you mean by the numinosity of this world?" asked Alexandra putting her coffee cup down. She had a sudden hunch that the answer was intimately related to her experience in Shuamta, that it might explain the seam between two worlds, which she felt she was about to cross.

"Before Petrarca's time the sky was *not* blue and a feast for the eyes, the stars were *not* distant worlds possibly inhabited by other human beings, but the unimaginable, unfathomable abode of God. Before man learned to *see*, the sky and the stars were a *transcendental foil*, the aura of God who controlled man's life. Such phenomena are called *numinous*."

Alexandra rose, her face tense, she reached towards Walter in great agitation. "And men acted without understanding of themselves? They were moved, forced by those *numinous* powers? They were too benighted to understand their own actions?" With burning eyes she stopped before Walter and stared at him.

Walter nodded. "You say it well. The Renaissance destroyed the magic of these powers and threw man back unto himself. He became free to know himself, but he would also be forced to shoulder the responsibility of his own actions."

One early morning, Konrad was roused from his sleep by Alexandra vomiting miserably. Concerned he jumped out of bed and found her squatting on the floor with her head over the bidet retching miserably. He supported her head, and she turned to him with a heroic smile on her drained face. "We women have to pay for every happiness, for every new insight with our bodies. Don't worry, dear man it is your child who is announcing its arrival. I am pregnant."

He kissed her tenderly and brought her a glass of water.

"They call this early-morning sickness. It will go away after a few weeks. I will, if everything goes well, bear you a child in March, a Tuscan child!" She smiled. "It will remind us of olive trees and the beginning of the Renaissance! Oh, how I am longing for him!"

He embraced her. "My numinous Georgian Goddess bears *Brimus*, *her other*."

St. Petersburg The Summer Ball

1899

After two days on the train from Florence to Berlin they changed to the Paris-to-St. Petersburg *Nord-Express* and found themselves surrounded by Russian upper class families returning from vacations in Paris, the Côte d'Azur, Italy. For five weeks they had not spoken Russian. To be suddenly submerged in this over-familiar culture evoked mixed feelings in Alexandra. The flocks of well-bred children supervised by French and German governesses, the overbearing, elegant ladies in their fashionable corsets, the boring cliques of arrogant gentlemen passing the time at playing cards for high stakes and drinking French cognac irritated her. Why? She could not say. Memories? Prejudices? Her apprehension of having to live in St. Petersburg?

Luckily they shared a four-bed compartment with a French-Armenian couple. Izabel and Martiros Sisakian had grown up in Istanbul. Because of the increasing harassment of Armenians in Turkey, they had fled to Paris. A few months ago they finally decided to settle in St. Petersburg. Alexandra felt this decision difficult to understand—they carried French passports—but Martiros Sisakian explained that it was a personal decision, they had many close friends in St. Petersburg. He was a painter, and Izabel, an intelligent, lively young woman, supported him by working as an interpreter.

Izabel, supporting her husband? Alexandra could see herself pursuing painting or weaving rugs, but a wife supporting her husband was a startling idea.

Izabel nodded. "My family thought so too. To judge by your name, you come from an aristocratic Georgian family. Imagine how conservative our bourgeois Armenian society is! At home it would have been impossible, but in Paris we met many women, who worked to make it possible for their men to pursue an artistic career. It takes a long time for a painter to become sufficiently established to earn regular money. I love this man and that made it easy."

Martiros smiled embarrassed. "In the beginning it was not easy to let Izabel do what she had set her mind to. We got married, because we were tired of the bohemian arrangement of lover and mistress in which most of our friends lived. Maybe the twentieth century will remove the social stigma which decrees that a married woman should remain at home and tend the hearth. Besides, I do sell a painting every so often. Izabel is a gregarious person, she enjoys other people. I guess my modern, Socialist friends in Paris gave me the courage to break with our obsolete Armenian customs."

Alexandra pensively traced her lips with her finger and looked at Izabel. "And what about children?"

Martiros nodded and opened his hands in resignation. "I would love to have a child, and maybe that is the main reason why the patriarchal men want their wives to stay home. But obviously having children will remain impossible for a while."

Izabel's large, dark eyes returned Alexandra's questioning look. "I am still young. I have not given up hope that I will have a child in a few years."

Alexandra did not say so, but this price for freedom appeared too high. Or was it not freedom the two sought, was it just love? Mulling over the marital arrangement of the

Sisakians, she found, disconcerted, how strongly she was after all still tied to inherited convention. She—who had always been proud of being the rebel.

Konrad sensed what was going on in Alexandra's mind and kept quiet.

East of Berlin they passed through the northern German plains: endless pine woods, sandy potato fields, moors and swamps, an occasional lake. Half-timbered, reed-thatched houses ducked from the wintry winds in impoverished villages. The long slanted beam of the village well like a gallows at their center. Here and there a modest manor house hidden in a stand of oaks, the residences of the Prussian gentry who owned the land and the peasants. The few small towns huddled at the feet of mighty Gothic brick cathedrals and castles, the last remains of the unlucky Germanic Knights, who had reclaimed the land and Christianized its Slavic tribes in the thirteenth century. The train stopped for a quarter of an hour in the Hanseatic Danzig and in Königsberg, the city of Kant and the Prussian Kings.

Three hours later they reached Eydtkuhnen and the Russian border. They were searched for two hours. Every suitcase was inspected for political and religious literature, "pornographic" pictures, and other "subversive" pamphlets.

Meanwhile the undercarriages of the Wagon-Lits cars were exchanged for the larger Russian gauge, the locomotive from coal to wood. Then the dark woods of Lithuanian Russia engulfed them.

Alexandra had fallen into melancholy silence. A great longing for her sunny homeland overcame her. As the last night fell she sank of into a restless sleep, dreaming that she was about to give birth to her child alone in an endless, snowbound, northern wilderness.

St. Petersburg came as a shock to Alexandra. Walking through the station in the early morning hour of their arrival, she had to step across a bunch of homeless drunks who had spent the night among the droves of stranded travelers waiting for their connections. Sacks and luggage, packages, bedding, crying children huddling with their mothers wrapped in shawls. The bearded men from the villages, smoking and drinking, leered at her. A sea of humanity. The stupor and resignation of this mass of people struck her—and the filth! Nowhere in Western Europe had she come across anything comparable.

Niko and Otar awaited them. They took a droshki to the place Konrad's institute had rented for them. A spacious apartment on the second floor in the *Litenaya Quartier*: four high-ceilinged rooms, a large, live-in kitchen, a small maid's room, and a modern bath. Their district, bordered by hospital foundations, the barracks of the Imperial Guard, and the Neva, was inhabited by the professional, bourgeois intelligentsia, professors, physicians, lawyers mixed in with the villas of a few rich merchants. One of the most desirable districts of town. A preferred location for preferred people. She could not have wished for anything better.

Konrad disappeared to his institute. The semester would start in a month. Meanwhile he was overwhelmed by bureaucratic work. He had to organize the annual summer ball at the botanical gardens, his obligation. Department meetings, the curricula needed to be worked out, the students had to be selected and registered in the courses the department offered. She saw him only at night.

For a few weeks she kept busy making the apartment livable. For the time being they

slept on a couple of mattresses on the floor and ate in the kitchen. They would have to buy more furniture in the months to come.

She hired a woman to help her in the house and do the daily shopping, who took her, one warm and humid morning, to the market in the neighboring Rozhdestvenskaya district. In the few blocks they had to walk, across Litovskaya Boulevard the world changed. In the run-down tenement blocks lived factory workers.

At one street corner a woman sold *kvass* from a big barrel on a cart, a turbid brown brew made from fermented rye bread. A mob of people holding bottles and enameled milk cans crowded around the cart jostling and pushing and shouting insults at each other. She found the same graceless scene repeated at the open market. One woman in a high voice addressed her as "fine lady" followed by a vulgar Russian epithet. Alexandra bristled, and then she realized, that these people were angry and restless. Their rage was not specifically directed at her, the social outsider, but equally at each other. Alexandra heard Ilia's voice saying, "Look at these disadvantaged, suppressed proletarian masses." She had never understood his Socialist jargon, but now she saw the conditions with her own eyes.

An equal distance from their street in the other direction she discovered the ostentatious glitter of the expensive shops along Nevsky Prospekt, the famous boulevard of St. Petersburg. Here the arrogant upper class raced their liveried carriages, or idled away in the specialty restaurants and French cafés. Police and military were everywhere.

Nowhere had she seen such a chasm between the poor and the feudal rich. Despite its wild mixture of races and languages, Tiflis seemed more homogeneous. For the first time in her life Alexandra felt a certain embarrassment to belong to the privileged class.

She decided to conquer the city. For days she wandered through its streets in search of beauty and her own destiny. She grew convinced that she had to do something to reduce human misery. In this environment her long-standing wish to paint or design rugs suddenly appeared frivolous.

One day on her way home walking through the pleasant, shady park surrounding the hospitals, she had the sudden inspiration that she should find work there.

At first she thought of seeking a part-time occupation as nurse, something that many socially concerned women did. Then she remembered Dr. von Haffner and saw herself as a physician. She had the intelligence to master medical school, and if she would apply herself, she could finish it in less time than the average student. She knew what she wanted and why.

She almost ran home. Out of breath she sat and examined her spontaneous idea, trying to think through all the many implications that such a decision would have for her and their life.

Times were not as stable as everyone wanted to believe. She sensed the unrest not only among the workers in the Rozhdestvenskaya but also among the students she had met. She was not Russian, and therefore able to clearly see the pomposity and sleepwalking aloofness of the emperor and his government.

Tsar Nicholas II, a good but weak man, lived in a God-given state of ignorant bliss. Preoccupied with the fatal hemophilia of his son, he was oblivious to the social fermentation that surrounded him, and whenever he was forced to notice the unrest, used draconian measures to suppress it.

Still the imperial house was the only guarantee for the stability of the empire. There

existed no viable political alternatives. The political opposition followed chaotic mystical ideas and was deeply split and leaderless. The possibility of a radical change was on everybody's mind.

She might one day have to provide for herself and her family, like Izabel. What better profession could there be in such a case than medicine?

She would have a child, and was traditionally expected to stay at home and devote herself to him entirely. She had grown up cared for by a succession of nursemaids and governesses. She would get a live-in nursemaid for the child and come home as often as possible during the day; both the university and the hospitals were close.

She had no doubt that Konrad would let her do what she wanted and made such excellent sense in every way. No longer did she have to worry about her father's opinion.

Where was Konrad? She needed to share her excitement with him.

To calm herself she went into the kitchen and prepared dinner. Cooking had become one of her favorite pursuits. She decided on *risotto con pollo* to remind Konrad of Fiesole, and as she patiently stirred the rice, her self-control and composure returned.

"Yes, that is what I need to do, for myself, for him, for the child, and for our future."

Konrad had been detained in a conference organizing the upcoming summer ball, which was to take place in two weeks.

She suppressed her excitement and took him into her arms. "Come, let's eat. I have prepared one of Sally's favorite dishes to take us back to Fiesole."

She asked him about the events of his day and let him unburden himself of his concerns, who was to be invited to the ball? What to serve? Should he hire a modern dance band in addition to the traditional university orchestra playing Mozart and Glinka?

"I am tempted to startle the establishment and engage a belly dancer. What do you think? The ladies would die of shock."

Alexandra remembered *his* shock at their wedding but said nothing. Why should he not engage a belly dancer?

"Ask in the Armenian community, they surely have one. Why don't we invite Izabel and Marti? He could help you."

Alexandra prepared a Turkish coffee, brought some fruit for desert and faced Konrad. "May I ask your advice in a serious matter?"

Konrad raised his eyebrows. "A surprise? Oh, dear woman, I married you, so that my life would never be boring again! What is on your mind?"

With great self-control she described her new plan, explaining the advantages and complications it would bring. She ended in an expectant silence, the tenseness of which hung palpable between them.

Konrad looked at her with loving, serious eyes. "Are you up to five or six years of hard work? The child will be a burden to you, and a second one will have to wait until you are finished with your degree, don't you think so too?"

She agreed. She would engage a live-in nanny, which she had wanted to do in any case. "I believe that with your cooperation I can manage the child *and* my studies. I am only twenty-two, before I turn thirty I could be an experienced, practicing physician."

"You see," she continued, "this idea is only partially selfish or an insurance towards our future in potentially unstable times. If I look at the human misery in this city, I feel a responsibility to help. Maybe this stems from my listening to Ilia, whose ideas also have a

social aspect hidden below their Georgian nationalist rhetoric and to Aunt Sophia who works as a midwife in their villages. I admire young Dr. von Haffner. And sometimes I am reminded of Walter who suspects that we Eastern Europeans are unable to take responsibility for our own actions."

Konrad, very serious, sighed. "Yes, my love, I will support you in this difficult venture with all I have."

She hugged him in all her joy, unbuttoned his shirt and put her hand on his heart.

"All this time I have tried to suppress my excitement in order to be able to look at this decision soberly, will you make love to me? Very gently, so Brimus does not get upset."

The bureaucrat responsible for admissions to the medical faculty scrutinized Alexandra with unconcealed disdain. Her university credentials from Tiflis were sufficient for entering the medical program, but the waiting list for admission was long, and—he was not rude enough to actually say so—she was a woman!

She had to use her full name, Princess Alexandra Iraklievna Dadiani and her husband's professional position in the university to get his attention.

Thereafter the balding clerk's demeanor became almost deferential.

"Yes, Princess Dadiani, the faculty committee might consider your application. You will need a recommendation from a well-known medical doctor and a written permission from your husband. You see, you have one thing in your favor, we desperately need good physicians in this country."

The man rose, formally kissed her hand, and with the mumbled remark *très enchanté Princesse Dadiani* held the door open for her. She walked out in style.

She decided to visit Dr. von Schliemann, a highly regarded German gynecologist and friend of the Mouravis, to sign up with him to care for her and the child and to ask him to write the needed letter of recommendation.

She felt pleased with herself and decided to share the news with her beloved brother Niko. She found Niko in the small apartment he shared with Otar. Otar was still at school. Niko had the same good looks as she but dark eyes. He was at least as intelligent as she. But lazy! He took life easy.

She kissed him tenderly. "Niko, I am going to join you at the university and study medicine!" She added sweetly, "and you are the first one to know."

He refused to be taken in and imitating his father's voice exclaimed. "*Lexako*, you are crazy!"

He used this epithet with its Latin connotation whenever he felt like badgering his older sister.

Alexandra unexpectedly charged.

"No, I am not. Stop fooling around, Niko! Take on some adult reason, this world is not a playground for rich kids, wake up!"

An annoyed blush went over his handsome face, and Alexandra toned down her voice.

"Look," she began anew, "when you come from Western Europe, this place appears rotten. Ever since I returned, I have been oppressed by the dark clouds that are gathering over the pompous and ignorant Emperor and his empire."

He looked at her surprised. "Should I introduce you to some of my revolutionary friends? I am not as oblivious to what is going on in St. Petersburg as you may think. And not all of the

Russian aristocrats are blind or sit back idly. In fact the father of one of my friends just went to prison, being accused of agitation against the Emperor."

Startled by the jeopardy such a relationship could put him into, she lost the point of her epistle. "I would like to meet your friends. But be careful associating with the extremists, or you will end up in exile like Uncle Ilia, or worse in some place in Siberia! You are not as famous as he is, they wouldn't handle you with kid gloves."

Niko stuck out his chest. "See, now you are chickening out again!"

"No, dear Niko, instead of joining your radical friends, I decided to do something real. I want to help people."

Niko put his aggressiveness aside. "What do you suggest that I should do instead of becoming a professor of literature?"

"Instead of idling away your summer with your lazy friends in Tiflis, go and spend it working in Germany or France and think about what you want to do. I really have no suggestion except medicine."

They took the tram to the Botanical Gardens and surprised Konrad at the institute. Together they went to a restaurant for an extended, late lunch. Proud of her success Alexandra described the happenings of the morning.

Konrad kissed her hand. "So you might be back in school in October! Congratulations, *Frau Doktor!*"

Alexandra brought up the subject of Niko's future. What did Konrad think Niko should do?

"Why don't you consider physics?" Konrad suggested after some thought. "It is the field of the future. There exist only two or three internationally known physicists in Russia—the government and the clergy seem to think physics is the invention of foreign devils—while in Germany, England, and France the most revolutionary discoveries are being made. Someday they will have to wake up in Russia or the country will sink back into a medieval mire."

How long she had waited for Konrad's Summer Ball in the Botanical Gardens, it seemed to her like years. She smiled, she had met Konrad only eighteen months ago! Preoccupied she pulled the yellow Italian silk dress over her slender body and stroked her belly with her hand. Brimus had remained cooperative, he did not show. She went before the mirror, put on Konrad's necklace and with a comb gathered her hair above her neck—she looked gorgeous.

After an exceptionally sunny late summer day, the evening was unseasonably warm. Konrad had smuggled in Niko to keep Alexandra company when he would be needed to keep things running smoothly. But everyone wanted to meet his exotic Georgian wife. Professor Fischer von Waldheim, Konrad's German-born superior and the director of the Imperial Botanical Gardens called at their table, and his wife, enchanted by Alexandra's German, stayed on for an extended chat.

Alexandra was in her element, she had not been the elegant center of attention since the performance of *Chaika* in Tiflis. Dr. von Schliemann, her new gynecologist, thrilled to have come across her, introduced his rather reserved wife. He shook hands with Konrad and reported that he had promptly written a letter recommending Alexandra for admission to the medical faculty. One of Konrad's younger colleagues, asked Alexandra for a dance. He gave

himself smitten by her elegant figure. It took her some time to shake him off politely.

She had only danced once or twice with Konrad when one of the liveried servants, who wove through the guests carrying hors d'oeuvres and glasses of wine on silver platters, approached him with the urgent request to come to the reception: A Mr. Sisakian with two ladies had arrived and had asked for him.

"One of the ladies is the belly dancer!" whispered Konrad and vanished. Niko, who had gone off to dance with a young lady, was nowhere to be seen. Alexandra, suddenly left alone, sat sipping wine and pensively watching the guests milling about under the trees, when a young Russian approached her asking for a dance. He addressed her as Princess Alexandra Dadiani and explained his knowledge of her name by the fact that he was a friend of her brother Niko.



Vladimir 1899 (Wikipedia)

The man was irresistibly good-looking, tall with an elongated, overbred face, pronounced cheekbones, long, narrow hands, and a perfectly arrogant demeanor. She gave in to his charm.

His name was Valdimir. In her confusion she did not listen to his patronymic and family name. It meant nothing to her. She was not good at remembering names, and did not want to ask him again. Valdimir spoke a highly cultivated Russian. That and his looks...she was certain he came from a good family.

He danced very well. He talked of his writing poetry and studying literature. In an unobserved moment he unexpectedly kissed her. She was not prepared for this surprise. He looked so good, she let it happen.

After two dances Vladimir escorted her back to her table and with a smile and a charming kiss on the hand took his leave. Niko had not returned, and considering her rapidly beating heart, she was glad he had not witnessed this incident.

She did not tell Konrad.

The ball became a great, albeit controversial, success. Even the older faculty members risked a leg to the modern dance music, and the younger people loved it. The belly dancer, who appeared late at night, became a scandal earning Konrad a reprimand by his superior. The matter eventually died down, when it became known that the majority of the sedate professors frequented the Armenian nightclubs regularly.

Alexandra became the talk of the faculty. Only much later would she find out that long before her arrival, she had already been the object of titillating rumors. The academic community attributed the novelties of the ball to her influence—*la Géorgienne fatale!* Alexandra was delighted.

Alexandra Decides to Study Medicine

After a general examination and an interview, the medical faculty admitted Alexandra. Full of energy, she threw herself into her course work, the delivery would steal the spring semester.

She had hoped to persuade Konrad to hire a wet nurse. But when she asked him, Konrad had, for the first time, become seriously annoyed. He glowered at her. "A wet nurse? You are not in such a hurry to get finished that you could not feed the child yourself."

She had never seen him lose his equanimity, which she depended on in her spontaneity. Was it the stress of his work, the drawn-out, embarrassing departmental dispute about the ball? Wet nurses were a common institution in their circles. Clad in white uniforms and wearing conspicuous headgear, a small army of them offered their services to the better families. But she saw that he was serious, and gave in to his demand.

Now she was trying to beat her course load by working overtime.

A few weeks into the semester the faculty notified her that they would allow her a full semester credit for two courses she had taken in Tiflis, chemistry and biology, which Konrad had taught.

Konrad laughed with a trace of envious admiration. She had been lucky again!

She grew larger, the baby could no longer be hidden. Her pregnant presence at the university raised many eyebrows, but her radiant beauty protected her and her reserved poise simply forbade any unwarranted comments.

Her professors began addressing her with a deferential 'Princess Dadiani-Rost'. She was amused to have inadvertently acquired this impressive double name. However, her final vindication was that, whatever course she took, she succeeded with the highest grades, and after a few months her teachers' skepticism and condescension changed into respect. She became a heroine not only for her co-students but for the entire faculty.

Her intellectual success gave her immense satisfaction and reawakened her old, cocky self-assurance.

Konrad had to restrain himself at times and mobilize all his humor to put up with her. Not that she neglected him in any arguable way. He continued to punctually find his breakfast and dinner every day, her kitchen was spotless, but she jumped out of bed before he could properly wake up—he had always been slow in the morning—and on many nights she would not retire until midnight. Their spontaneous love-making, most often initiated by her in the past, had become less frequent.

Konrad concluded that he was jealous. He felt pushed from his singular position in her life by the child, by her ambitious study program and her intellectual success—all problems that were of his own making, which he could only indirectly blame on her. Look at yourself, he thought, after all it turns out that it is not as easy as you had imagined to live with a working woman!

Alexandra kept up a faithful correspondence with her father. At least once a week they exchanged letters.

Konrad scrupulously adhered to two principles during their married life, he never read Alexandra's personal correspondence, and he never concerned himself with their finances.

He was not interested in controlling either. Alexandra had turned out to be so shrewd in money matters that he could not compete with her. He simply gave her his monthly salary from the institute and the fees from teaching at the university, and she administered it, paid the rent, bought the things they needed for daily life, and paid for the furniture they bought together, one carefully selected piece after another. If Konrad needed money for himself, she would simply give him a liberal amount. They never had an argument over money, but neither of them squandered it. He had few external obligations, and she, ever since they had set up a common household, kept tight control of her impulsive buying.

In appreciation of her circumspection, he would take her out to dinner every so often or to buy with her an exceptional piece of clothing, like the new winter coat she needed badly as it became colder.

Not to embarrass him in public, she would slip him a liberal amount of money before they entered the establishment. Konrad would laugh, "If other men would know how luxurious the life of a kept man is, they would all convert to our arrangement!"

Because married women could not open a bank account, she opened one in her own name, which proved sufficient to make the bank's manager serve her personally. She was aware that she was feeding the rumor mills with her unorthodox behavior, but that never bothered her.

All of this had another advantage—Konrad did not have to know how much money her father sent his beloved daughter in occasional transactions. They were rather large sums. She made no secret of her father's financial contributions, but he did not have to acknowledge or bother with them.

So it required no long discussions or begging to hire a cleaning lady twice a week when she could no longer bend down easily. But she continued to prepare all their meals, it had become not only a ritual of their life, but an exploration into the foods of other countries.

Occasionally Alexandra met with Niko for lunch when their classes coincided. On one such occasion she invited Niko and Otar for dinner. She promised Niko a Georgian feast—without tamada unless he wanted to preside—which he graciously declined. Quite casually she suggested that he bring a girlfriend. "If you have one," she teased with a smile. "And one of your radical friends. And if he has a girlfriend, he should bring her too. Niko smiled sarcastically. "My friend Vladimir Nomikoff might take you by surprise. I have not seen him for a long time."

Alexandra frowned. "Vladimir Nomikoff?" She pronounced every syllable. "I think I know him: arrogant, good-looking, and with a first-class background, but Vladimir a political radical? I thought he was a poet."

Niko looked at her in surprise. "Yes, that is he. Well, radical is slightly exaggerated, his father is an influential politician, who has been in custody off and on for criticizing the government. Vladimir went to the Gymnasium with me. The family chauffeur delivered him every morning in his father's Wolsley! One day he left the school. He was too arrogant to subordinate himself. His father got a tutor for him. But where did you meet Vladimir?"

"At Konrad's summer ball." She said nonchalantly, trying to divert him from this subject. "Do you have a girlfriend who is nice?"

Niko blushed. "I met her at the same occasion. We are good friends, her name is Nina." Eventually she also invited the Sisakians.

Niko's friend Nina turned out to be a blond, sensitive Russian girl who quite obviously adored Niko. She willingly offered to help in the kitchen, anxious to pick up one or another of Alexandra's Georgian recipes.

Konrad, meanwhile, talked to Niko about physics. He had borrowed some introductory books from the university library for him and tried to describe some of the latest, revolutionary developments in this field, the controversy about the nature of light, and the discovery of wireless transmission by electromagnetic waves. Niko, who had listened around at school, hung on Konrad's words.

Vladimir arrived late—driven by his father's chauffeur in an open Benz-Landau—accompanied by a dark-haired, luscious petite in a fabulous dress.

Alexandra raised an eyebrow. This complication she had not taken into account, but Vladimir was his studied self, the perfect gentleman. He kissed Alexandra's hand. "Princess Dadiani-Rost may I introduce my friend Rebecca, also known as Becky."

And then Alexandra made a mistake. Was it Becky's presence that confused her or Vladimir's faultless aplomb? In an attempt to disarm him and to make him more human, she said, "Valdimir Vladimirovich, may I ask you to drop my father's titles and simply call me Alexandra as everybody does who is present tonight? And would you permit me to address you as Vladimir?"

He allowed it with a slight inclination of his head and a supercilious smile. Only she noticed the trace of a blush on his arrogant face.

Becky appeared bored. Obviously she was used to circulate in the illustrious circles of Vladimir's parents and had some trouble adjusting to Alexandra's informality. She was not a student, she explained in fluent French, if one disregarded her dilettante attempts at painting and playing the piano.

Alexandra introduced her to Marti explaining that he was a painter who had just arrived from Paris. Becky's disdainful apathy disappeared, her father was a passionate collector of impressionist and contemporary French art, in fact, her parents had just left for Paris to search for new paintings.

Alexandra carefully mixed the couples around the table. With a mischievous eye she watched her husband and his exotic neighbor. Would sparks fly?

Konrad had found a supplier of Georgian wines and had bought a good Tsinandali, which Vladimir, the connoisseur, duly acknowledged.

"Oh," Niko shrugged indifferently, "this is a wine from my grandfather's estate."

Alexandra shot him a glance, which Niko acknowledged with a toss of his head. "Stop it, Lexako!"

Vladimir smiled. "I hear that you, Alexandra, were abducted in Georgia just before you got married. Is that a true story or a libelous rumor? In Russia we have a very romantic image of Georgia."

Konrad held his breath. Alexandra flushed and thought that is what you get for playing with fire. She dispassionately described the superficial facts of her abduction, her final rescue she mentioned only with a single sentence: obviously she had survived.

Vladimir commented that it sounded like an old Georgian epic, he joked: "The 'Lady in the Panther Skin!'". Alexandra silently forgave him, for reasons which she could not have explained. The others were more concerned with the uppermost level of her story. Becky shook herself. "What a horrible thing to happened to you. You must have been frightened. I

would have fainted." Niko laughed. "You don't know my sister, she is not easily frightened, and especially not by a man."

Alexandra gave him a grateful smile.

Pokerfaced, Vladimir winked at Alexandra, which she would not forgive him. One question Alexandra was curious about, how had the story of her abduction reached Vladimir's ears? "Oh," he said casually, "that rumor circulated long before you arrived. You are famous in St. Petersburg. I find you quite remarkable, not because you disarmed your Georgian abductor—obviously you knew your Georgian men well enough—but because you faced down the self-important St. Petersburg university officials. A pregnant lady! And you seem to be perfectly capable of holding your own. I doff my hat to you, Princess Alexandra Dadiani-Rost, first class!"

In different circumstances Alexandra would have slapped his face. "Well," she said with a seductive smile and a cutting voice, "now that you have met this famous lady, I give you permission to circulate your impression of her. I would be pleased to hear your high opinion repeated from another directions."

Konrad frowned and asked Becky whether it would be possible to see her father's collection. Marti joined him. The collection was rumored to be one of the largest private collections of contemporary French paintings outside of France. A flattered Becky indicated that during her parents' absence she could easily arrange a tour of the house. A date was set for December.

That night, after everyone had left, and they had washed the dishes together, Konrad made love to Alexandra. He was very gentle and considerate with her. In the middle of his efforts she suddenly began to laugh her father's laugh. Konrad stopped disarmed.

"Oh," she said tentatively, "it just occurred to me that you are making love to Becky!"

Konrad sat up, how did she know that his mind was distracted by the petite, voluptuous Becky?

"Look, it is not hard for a woman to guess what a man is thinking when he is so close to her, but the reason that I laughed was that I too was in bed with Vladimir—that lout. What are we going to do about these crossed attractions?"

Konrad, still numbed by her sixth sense, had not much to suggest. He would try to make an honest effort to put Becky out of his mind.

"Ah, nonsense," said his dear wife, "that wouldn't help much. Every time you got close to her, you would be boiling over, and if I slapped this man for his insolence, all I would accomplish is to increase his arrogance. The only way to shut him up would be to take him to bed. There words don't count, either he is a man, or he is a conceited coward with impertinent manners."

Konrad looked doubtful, hers was a tricky approach, but he did see her female logic, and since his preoccupation with Becky had to do with a woman, her argument could also be applied to him. "But wouldn't this be premeditated adultery?" He asked. "Legally yes," she said, "but not, if we both understand that it makes our love stronger and us freer."

He sighed, he would have to think about her proposition. "For a while, my dear," Alexandra laughed, "you don't have to worry that you might find your bed empty one night, in my condition my abilities to seduce a man are rather limited!"

She easily rekindled his desire, and he, now completely focused on her, took her more ardently than he had intended.

Becky's Museum

After weeks of leaden skies, icy fog, snow, and slush in the streets the day they were to meet at Becky's greeted them with a sharp wind, blinding sunshine, and a biting cold under a deep blue sky. The air was filled with fine, windblown snow crystals that piled into drifts along the fences and houses. Their apartment, which had been depressingly dark for months, was flooded with the diffuse reflected light.

They arrived in high spirits. Becky's house, an *art nouveau* villa near the Taurichevsky Gardens, seemed to float in the cold light. The white two-story building was adorned by a staircase with stained glass windows. Along the upper level ran a mosaic of semi-nude mermaids floating in blue irises. Swinging floral reliefs framed the windows. They climbed a flight of broad steps to the main entrance, under a balcony embellished with a hand-wrought iron arabesque: Ostentatious, but of uniform style and in the best taste.

Becky ushered her guests into an intimate salon where she served Earl Grey tea and *petit-fours* from the best French bakery in town.

Konrad looked around. The interior decor and the furniture complemented the outside, leaving the impression that her father had given free hand to a carefully selected architect and interior decorator.

In contrast to the subtle decor the paintings were overbearing. They covered the walls of the foyer, the living room, and a large formal dining room in two and three tiers up to the ceiling.

On a first superficial inspection Alexandra recognized only a few: two Renoirs, a southern French landscape by Cezanne, and a horse-racing scene, probably by Degas. Two large, disturbingly colorful canvasses, a turbulent landscape and a pair of provocative, dark-skinned nudes, she could not place. Marti explained that the Tahitian women were by Paul Gauguin and the Provençal landscape by Vincent van Gogh.

Marti became very agitated. Unable to sit still, he stared spellbound at the Gauguin. Umoved by their excitement, Becky lazily offered to take them around, if Marti would explain the paintings.

Konrad stood rooted before the Gauguin. It showed a tropical beach. A triangular stretch of hot-pink sand slanted diagonally across half the canvas. The two voluptuous Tahitian women, both stark naked, dominated the foreground. One was lying, highly foreshortened, with the head to the viewer. The other sat facing them, one leg bent up, the other angled underneath. In the background a horse drank from a colorful pond of paint in which a third woman took a bath.

Konrad declared the painting outright obscene but then moderated his judgement. "On second consideration, it is not the nudity that disturbs me as much as the outrage of the colors, the pink sand in particular. It has already burned a triangular hole into my retina."

Marti meekly defended the freedom of expression of an artist. Dissatisfied with Marti's apology, Alexandra, overcome by excitement, brushed all conventional decorum aside. "Look, what offends you is the unveiled sexuality that this painting conveys. Sex is a part of life, how to show it in a painting? Gauguin dares to express the emotional heat by his colors. His two nudes are in themselves completely innocent, the visual implications and the arousal are only in the mind of the observer – and the painter. Maybe Gauguin was as shocked by the Tahitian

women as you are now. His skill succeeded in making you feel it."



Paul Gauguin, "*Are you jealous?*" Pushkin Museum, Moscow

Konrad got a red face, embarrassed he stared at her in restrained silence.

"I admire you, Alexandra," said Marti. "You dare say such things openly. That is exactly what the critics in Paris should have said. After an initial scandal, Gauguin was ostracized as a barbarian for decades."

Konrad moved out of Alexandra's way and turned to Becky, but she was absentmindedly lost in her own dark sensuality. She had nothing to say that could rescue him.

Marti tried to lead them to other, less provocative paintings in the next room.

Still tingling from her attack on Konrad, Alexandra stayed behind. *She* was not yet finished with these paintings. She tried to concentrate on Van Gogh's wildly swirling sky. It radiated the hallucinating heat of Tuscany and the play of light and shade under the trees brought back the afternoon when, under such an olive tree, she had conceived the child she carried. She put her hand on her belly and felt the child move.

What had happened to her men? They trailed this spoiled, mindless child-woman Becky. Vladimir, her challenge, whom she had wanted to seduce and destroy, had turned out to be a pretentious, sarcastic talker. He had lost his eloquence among these paintings. He was out of his depth. He lacked a strong sense for the visual. How could he presume to write poetry without visions?

And Konrad? His whole body slouching, visibly annoyed by the 'hole in his retina,' he was seeking solace from this woman. She knew that Becky would fade from his mind, being

wiped out by the power of Gauguin.

She turned to the other van Gogh, a touchingly bare, blue room with a bed and a rickety red chair. Marti had mentioned that van Gogh had become deranged and had spent his last years in an insane asylum in Arles. He died in that bare, blue room.

Insanity?

Could insanity be a possibility in her life? Could her vibrant spontaneity turn into madness? Dizziness overcame her. She sat down on a chair and closed her eyes. Gauguin's pink seemed to flood the room. With an effort she concentrated all her energy on the kicking child in her belly. And then she knew that her female body and her eyes, yes, her eyes, would protect her from going insane.

She gave herself a push and got up.

She found sweet, blond Nina, tears running down her cheeks, standing alone before a small painting to which none of the others had paid any attention.

A conventional landscape, a villa in a park of willows, and a lake or river in the foreground. It could have been in Russia. And then she discovered the signature of the painter: *Wassily Kandinsky, 1899*. It was the first Kandinsky Alexandra saw.

Alexandra thought of her friend Katharina in Fiesole and guessed intuitively why Nina was crying.

Nina tried to collect herself and confessed that Kandinsky had been her first lover four years ago, before he had deserted her and eloped to Munich. She had to wait fifteen years until he returned, driven by war and history back to his native land. Eventually the fifty-year-old Kandinsky married her. Nina became his last companion.

Just before New Year a long letter from Deda arrived full of ominous messages, lamentations, and misgivings.

Uncle Ilia was in trouble again. The Russian viceroy had ordered him out of Georgia before the New Year, because the Russians expected a large demonstration for Georgian independence that night. He had been told to spend the season in one of the Russian resorts in the Crimea—where he could be better supervised and could cause no trouble. Ilia, of course, was indignant. A long article in his defense in *Iveria* had caused additional tension. It had cost Olga all her persuasion to take her upset husband to Sevastopol by boat.

When their steamer left Batumi, a demonstration in Ilia's favor had taken place that had been dispersed by the Russian militia. Ilia left with mixed feelings, because the demonstration had for the first time been heavily infiltrated by the dubious members of the new Georgian Socialist Party. A certain Soso Djugashvili, their main agitator, was a shady character with whom Ilia would prefer not to be identified.

Deda was frightened by the ominous clouds on the horizon of the coming century. Persephone had, in a lengthy trance, issued a terrible forecast of what the next century would bring: war, fire, murder, the death of thousands of innocent people.

"Oh, well," said Konrad when Alexandra read him the letter, "*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, the decline of the Occident has been a favorite subject of the pessimist school of German *Kulturphilosophie* for several years, we don't need a mystic clairvoyant to bring this subject to our attention. The historians of philosophy cannot agree whether this is the *fin de ciecle* or the dawn of civilization."

Alexandra, who had been pursued by similar visions since their arrival in St. Petersburg,

berated him. Had he not himself said that the Empire and the institution of the Tsar were ready to collapse? Didn't he also feel that a revolution of the masses of dispossessed people was imminent? What would one do if that happened?

Konrad sniggered. "Life has always been dangerous, it is only because the past few years have been so peaceful that people are pursued by fearful premonitions. You are much more sensible than you admit to yourself, was it not your idea to counteract your fears by studying medicine? What to do? Exactly what you are doing!"

But, she pointed out that her work had not assuaged her fears or ended her nightmares. "Maybe I should try to imagine how such a collapse would look to be able to cope with my fears should it happen."

Konrad shook his head. "Dearest woman, you are pregnant, that is most likely the reason for your nightmares. Brimus is disturbing your peace of mind. The *Gedankenexperiment*, the thought-experiment you propose would put you into a hypersensitive, hysterical condition, which would be more dangerous for your emotional balance than your premonitions. Be alert, watch the evolution of events with your clear eyes and act very fast when necessary without regard to your personal property, possessions, or safety."

Alexandra remembered the certainty she had experienced in front of van Gogh's paintings, that her body and her eyes would protect her from going insane. At this moment Brimus kicked her into the stomach. She sighed and with a laugh gave Brimus a slap.

She was, of course, not entirely wrong, thought Konrad later. The University was infiltrated with radicals, and because he was a young docent who did not belong to the establishment, he was often approached by these people trying to recruit him to their various causes. Konrad had a deep-seated aversion to radicals and their theories: One could spot them by their poor clothing and emaciated looks. Not that they were really poor, that was their "uniform." The most rabid of them were invariably women. They were brighter, and more determined than their male co-students.

Konrad found the ideas of the radical extremists chaotic and irrational. They were almost without exception confused political dreamers, influenced by mystics. Many were religious fanatics, who in the hope of becoming a revered "martyr," would willingly let themselves be rounded up and be taken to prison or sent to Siberia. There was no single leader that united them—if one excluded the old Tolstoi. The many groups fought each other more viciously than their common enemy.

Alexandra had been inoculated by her father against religious and political fanaticism. Her Georgian background made her a critic of the "system," not because of any vague philosophical idealism, but because the "system" was Russian. Her newly acquired "socialism" was not political ideology but practical humanism.

But, thank God, he mused, Alexandra had not yet been exposed to the worst in St. Petersburg. Every month thousands of illiterate peasants streamed into the city and overcrowded the horrible slum dwellings that housed the factory workers. They worked and slept in shifts, two or three people to one bed. Mercilessly exploited, their life was much better compared to the villages where a decade ago their parents had still been serfs.

Social friction was an inevitable consequence of these conditions, but this proletariat consisted of uneducated and unmotivated illiterates. They could not grasp the confusing

slogans of the Socialist agitators. When drunk they could be aroused into communal action, which inevitably turned into blind mayhem and a bloodbath as soon as the Cossacks appeared.

Most educated people looked at this proletariat with cynical disgust, not fear. The Tsar, the police, the Okhrana, and the military would keep them under control. Konrad felt pity for them, but Alexandra was frightened by their blind, benighted fanaticism.

A revolution had to happen. It was only a matter of time.

Otto's Birth

1900

At four in the morning, in the still darkness, Alexandra was shaken out of her sleep by the onset of her labor pains. A fierce contraction, more powerful than she had expected. She bit her lip and tried to relax as best as she could. Konrad was fast asleep beside her. Too early to wake him, she decided, and when the attack let up she turned onto her right side and relaxed completely, letting her mind float.

The last weeks passed by her inner eye in vivid pictures. Deda had insisted on coming to St. Petersburg to be with her, and Aunt Sophia had joined her on the long trip.

Far from her husband and the conventions of Tiflis, unimagined dimensions of Deda's character had surfaced, an expansiveness that occasionally bordered on the reckless.

Deda had taken Alexandra on an all but irresponsible tour of the fashionable cafes and stores, where she had indulged in a spontaneous shopping spree: French perfume, lingerie, clothes, a fur coat, even some expensive jewelry. She gave generous gifts to Alexandra, a largess of which Alexandra would not have believed her proper mother capable had she not seen it with her own eyes: Tamunia-Deda, rejuvenated by several years enjoyed herself like the mistress of some rich man.

Deda's moods had the force of divine trials. For hours she would wallow in deeply tragic lamentations. "All my children have left me. They have forgotten their beautiful country, why are they living in this cold and foggy Russian city? Look at me, a poor, neglected Georgian mother."

Alexandra, always conscious of her own occasional spells of the Georgian malaise, was tested to the limits of her patience. But as suddenly as Deda had fallen into this seemingly bottomless self-pity, she would come out of it, tilt her head to one side, flap her arms like a strange bird, and while her face was still suffering, she would pout and say something preposterously funny. These resurrections by her own power would invariably end in boundless merriment.

One sunny morning, after days of gloomy, snowbound grayness, and Deda under the spell of the weather, Konrad had suggested a walk to one of the out-lying islands. There Deda suddenly snapped out of her mood. Giggling like a young girl, she had started a snowball fight with Konrad. Alexandra, too big to participate, had watched with envious amusement.

Two days later they got into a political argument over Ilia's latest actions, which Tamunia-Deda, for an entire hour, fought for Ilia with heated abandon.

Not a dull day had passed during the last month.

Meanwhile Sophia had taught Alexandra yoga techniques to ease her delivery. The position on her right side was one of them. Sophia had for some time studied meditation and yoga with a woman from Central Asia in the hope of finding methods to control the pains of delivery.

She showed Alexandra how to breathe evenly, relax completely, and let her mind drift. Sophia told her to let images drift into her consciousness, look at them, and then dismiss them to make room for yet another image.

"And when the contractions come, pull up your legs, so you are as comfortable as

possible, concentrate your mind on one of these images, and hold it before your inner eye. Your body will do the rest."

Alexandra listened to the clock chiming from the nearby church. Almost half an hour had passed since her first contraction. The second overtook her. It was less forceful. But then their pace quickened. They now came every fifteen minutes. In between she easily regained her balance.

Lying half-asleep, half-awake, watching the images of her mind change from the outings with Deda into a series of scenes from Venice and the Toscana, she lost all apprehension of the events to come. Her head was clear, her body limp.

A new spasm slowly emerged from her center. She followed the pain as it radiated through her entire body. She was able to continue lying on her side until it ebbed away.

She relaxed again. The warmth of the sun and the soil under the olive trees, where she had conceived this child, invaded her. She saw Konrad above her, his loving eyes. Effortless the image changed into her sitting under the Gauguin and van Gogh paintings at Becky's house, and back to the reflections in Venice. *Her* Giorgione appeared, the clouds drifting over the castle. It was she who now sat naked in the sunspot waiting to present her child to her knight.

The next contraction hit a few minutes later. She became fully awake. This child is in a hurry, she thought.

This time the pain was sharp. As it flooded her body from her center down to between her legs, a bright red light appeared in her vision. It started as a small, highly concentrated source far away that raced towards her, growing as the pain increased, until it arrived at a spot just below her navel. Concentrating all her senses on this vision, she put her hand on her belly where she seemed to see it. The light exploded enveloping her in a rain of brilliant red stars just as the spasm reached its peak. She felt the child move downwards with a determined push, then the pain let up.

Still lying on her side, she tried to pull one leg up to make more room for the child, but that position did not feel right any longer. She turned on her back. Very gingerly she let her hand wander to where the child would appear between her legs and found herself wide open.

It was time to wake Konrad.

Konrad jumped up with a start. "How often have you had contractions?"

"They seem to come much faster than I had expected. Get me the rubber sheet and some towels to soak up my water, when it breaks and then go and get Deda and Sophia. Brimus cannot wait any longer."

Before he could get these things her water broke.

"Never mind, get me the towels. I will go to the bathroom to clean myself."

Konrad helped her up and brought her a bathrobe. While he prepared the bed for her, she went to the bathroom. Sophia had impressed on her that cleanliness was of greatest importance in preventing infections of the womb and the child. On her way she met Sophia who took her arm and led her back to bed.

"Lie down, dear child, I will get some warm water and wash you, this is no time to stand around in the bathroom."

Sophia got a basin with warm water and carefully washed her. "You are wide open, it will not be long."

A few minutes later another severe contraction arrived. The pain was excruciating, but

at the height of the contraction she saw the bright light again, only this time it was yellow. Alexandra concentrated all her energies on it and guided it down to where Brimus was demanding his release. She held it there in its full intensity. It enveloped her belly like a powerful aura and only faded when the contraction ceased. Quiet reigned for a few minutes. She could breathe again.

"Did you see the light that was around me?"

Sophia shook her head.

"Whenever I have a really painful contraction, I see brightly colored lights. They are very helpful, all I have to do is focus on them, and the pain lets up. This time the light was yellow and seemed to envelop my whole body like an aura." Another, milder contraction overtook her.

Deda and Sophia made Alexandra warm and comfortable. Konrad had been sent to the kitchen to heat a large pot of water. They would need it to wash the child.

An hour passed before the child's head appeared. Alexandra experienced a series of smaller and larger contractions. The largest ones were again accompanied by bright lights, first a green then a blue one.

The blue light invaded her entire body. The pain of the contraction seemed unbearable, but the light persisted. When she gave herself up to the vision all pain receded miraculously, she only felt the fierce powers gripping her body. At the height of the contraction her body released her. Flooded by an indescribable pleasure she floated weightless in blue space.

Suddenly the blue turned a blinding white which filled the room. She saw her body lying on the bed below her. The child's head had appeared.

Brimus emerged between her legs. She smiled at him. She felt one last, huge contraction shake her body, and there he was.

She watched Sophia cut and knot the umbilical cord, pick him up, turn him upside down, and slap him on his bottom. He let out a loud cry. Alexandra laughed, and with that laugh the white light abruptly collapsed, and she found herself back in her tired body, full of exhausted bliss.

Sophia carefully washed the blood-smeared child and placed him into Alexandra's arms. "I have never heard a woman laugh during delivery." Sophia said shaking her head and gave her the baby. "Of course, it is a boy!"

Konrad kissed his wife, and she handed the child to him. "Let us call him Otho in Georgian and Otto in German. I like that name."

Vladimir
St. Petersburg 1904

On a summer morning of the year 1904 Vladimir opened the door of Kluchkov's bookshop on Liteini Boulevard. The bell over the door chimed. He was met by the familiar cloud of dust and stale tobacco smoke. As he closed the door a sharp sense of danger attacked him from the back. He stopped and carefully turned around but could not see any cause .

The old bookseller peered at him over his reading glasses. "Good day, Vladimir Vladimirovich! You have become a rare visitor lately."

The foreboding of an impending disaster hung over St. Petersburg, the revolution appeared imminent. Vladimir's father had been detained again because of his connections to the Socialists. Vladimir had to be careful, spies and informers for the Okhrana were everywhere. He addressed the old man. "Vitali Ivanovich, have you seen my first volume of poetry? It should have appeared weeks ago."

The bookseller took a puff on his pipe and shook his balding head. "Don't worry, the volume is being held for further scrutiny until after your father has been released. You know the way the censors work."

Annoyed, Vladimir bit his lip. "But it contains harmless lyrics, the memories of a sensuous summer, love poems, nothing political."

"So, you will see it very soon, I am sure. Can I do anything else for you today?"

"I have not been in town for months, may I browse the shelves?"

Victor Ivanovich smiled and invited him in with his hand. "Be my guest. I am most happy to see you here."

Vladimir's apprehension had not lessened. He peered into the cavernous, dark shop with its rows of bookshelves. He was alone with the old man, whom he knew well. He gave himself a push.

As he passed the corner of the first shelf he saw who waited for him.

She sat hidden behind the stack on a low stool next to two piles of books and looked at him amused. In a simple gray Shantung silk printed with small orange leaves, she looked even more alluring than he remembered. Over her sternal cavity hung a shimmering black opal on a thin, hand-wrought gold chain. Her blue eyes mocked him affectionately.

Without a word Vladimir bent down and kissed her hand with a tender brush of his lips.

She let him feel the pleasure he gave her, the irony around her mouth disappeared.

Vladimir recovered his voice. "My God, Alexandra, for two people living in the same city it has been an eternity since we last met. When was it that I last saw you?"

"At Becky's house, on the day when we looked at her father's pictures."

"You were pregnant then, I remember."

"Yes, Otto is four!"

"Has it been that long?"

He had recovered his nonchalance and with a charming, but calculated blush regressed. "Do you remember the summer ball in the Botanical Gardens? I had a crush on you then, and

today you look even more gorgeous."

He stood towering over her.

She looked up at him and sighed. "Vladimir the Beautiful, always carefully choosing his words! I am still in love with your Russian."

Bending forward—the opal described a long pendulous arc out of her décolleté—she picked up a book from her pile, and held it up to him. "I am looking for a new novel or a volume of poetry for Konrad. As you know I am not up to date on Russian literature. Would you help me?"

He bent down, took the book, and squatted next to her. She had collected two piles, a Russian and a German one. Most of the Russian books were classical literature, but then he discovered a slim volume of poetry by Alexander Blok that had just appeared in print.

"Blok is beyond doubt one of our best Russian poets. Personally I find this collection too religious, but so are our times, and Blok will change. His new, unpublished poetry is very exciting."

He handed her the Blok and watched her leaf through the slim volume. She seemed more feminine, less provocative. Her closeness confused him. He attacked the German pile and immediately found two noteworthy volumes, a collection of poetry by Rilke and the *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann.

"To some Rilke is the greatest living poet, and the novel by Mann appeared a few years ago. It is very good, I recommend it highly."

She thanked him, collected the three volumes, and got up. "Are you busy? You could take me to a café where we can sit and talk more comfortably than here."

She paid, and he carried the bag with the books for her. Out of sight of the bookseller she put her arm into his, and, well-educated gentleman he was, he adjusted his step to hers.

"I overheard," she began, "that you just published your first volume of poetry—and that your father has been detained again. Are you still studying at the University?"

Her arm made him self-conscious.

"Yes, Father, who is a leading man of the *Cadets*, a member of the Constitutional-Democratic Party and a determined liberal, made contacts with Kerensky who is the clearest mind among the Socialists. Father's confreres among the Cadets feared that he was slipping to the left, and I don't have to put in words what the Okhrana thought. They detained him for 'questioning.' We are worried, and I have to be careful of the company I keep. I hope you don't mind, I am sure that I am under surveillance."

He awkwardly looked over his shoulder, but nobody was following them. "Unfortunately Mother has not taken this well, she is ill. For months we have been hiding at our estate south of town, and I rarely visit the city. I have left the university and continue my education at home with the help of private tutors. I don't mind, I have much time to write and read. Our property is very beautiful."

He paused pensively. "Yes, I submitted a first volume of poetry to my publisher and had come to town to check its progress. It also seems to be under detention."

He shook his head and fell silent. Trying to hide from her that he was involved in a turbulent love affair he returned to his mother's illness. "In search of a cure for Mother's tuberculosis we spent many months in France and Italy during the past two years. This is the reason why you have not heard from me. How is Niko? I hear he is in München."

A trace of mockery came back to her voice. "I am sorry to hear all these disturbing

news."

She suggested a student café on Liteini Prospect a few blocks further, where they would not encounter any acquaintances.

"You asked about Niko. On Konrad's suggestion he changed to physics and for the last three years has studied in München. He seems happy there and in any case he is safe. He has persuaded Konrad to spend a year in München too. The Academy will pay for us. Konrad is already in München looking for a place to live, and I will follow him in a month."

She disengaged her arm and turned to face him. "But the greatest news is that I finished my medical degree with honors a month ago! Do you remember how mercilessly you teased me when I started this education, pregnant as I was?"

She laughed her father's laugh. "I did very well and finished faster than anybody in the department. How do you like my new title, *Doctor Dadiani-Rost*?"

Vladimir with a perfect bow produced another, albeit formal kiss on the hand she offered.

"My congratulations, *Doctor Alexandra*! Teasing or not, I never doubted that you would finish most brilliantly what you had set your singular mind on."

She laughed shamelessly straight into his eyes.

Shaking his head, he had been sure that Tatiana, his love, would protect him from all new infatuations, he held the door of the café open for her.

As she passed him she asked with a mischievous smile. "How is sensuous Rebekka?"

Vladimir frowned. He found a table for them. The place was filled with groups of noisy students of all persuasions. "I lost Rebekka years ago. She got married to a rich merchant, an older man and friend of her parents. I was not invited to her wedding. It is a pity, because my education in the visual arts has come to an abrupt end with her departure."

He laughed briefly. "But you were very interested in modern painting, have you done anything yourself?"

"How could I? In addition to my studies I had to take care of a husband and a child. For four years we have not done any socializing, have not been to any concerts or in the opera. Our last extended vacation was our honeymoon. I am really looking forward to an occasional escape from München south across the mountains."

A group of Tolstoyans in white peasant shirts and long hair sat at the next table listening to a serious looking, young woman reading a political manifesto.

"Do you still frequent the revolutionary circles?"

He hesitated. "No, I cannot afford to be seen with some of my oldest friends. But let us talk about this subject elsewhere, at another time. Am I going to see you again?"

A small, taunting smile played around her full mouth. "Do you like to ride? We have two horses stabled in Lakhta, on the coast, north of here. To ride by myself is not very entertaining, would you accompany me for a day out there? The area is beautiful, especially along the shore of the Finnish Gulf."

For a split second his sense of danger returned, and then he heard himself say, "Why not, it would be my pleasure."

She suggested a date and a time. To avoid attention, they agreed to meeting on the train seemingly by accident. In parting Alexandra gave him a fleeting kiss and left him to walk home pensively.

The agreed-upon time had long passed, Vladimir had not appeared. Unobtrusively

Alexandra had waited for him and finally decided to find a seat in an empty compartment. In the very last minute, the train was already moving, she saw him running down the platform and jump on the last car.

Eventually they embraced.

"What happened?"

"We now have a policeman stationed in front of our door. To escape and prevent him from following me, I had our chauffeur drop me at the station just as the train was about to leave, an old trick. Now we will be unobserved."

She shook her head. "Where is this all leading to?"

He shrugged. "Sometimes I take life as a challenge, at other times as a game, but for my parents the condition of our existence is demoralizing. Father is thinking of sending us all to the West, should the situation deteriorate any further. He is determined to stay and help prevent the worst. Maybe I will tell you more when we are out there in the woods. Do tell me of your life in the past four years."

Alexandra contemplated this welcome opportunity to clear her mind of the thoughts that had gone through her head since Konrad had left. Vladimir was an outsider in her marriage, but not an unsympathetic one, and he appeared to have matured in those four years.

"I am hesitant to burden you with my personal problems. It is not in good taste to talk to you about my marriage, but I did a lot of thinking about our life since Konrad left, and it may help me to speak my mind."

He inclined his head and looked at her with understanding. "It was much harder to get your degree and keep Konrad and the child happy than you had expected?"

"As you know, I am very strong willed. I wanted this professional education as a safeguard against bad times, to conquer this city and my fears, and yes, to test my strength and intellectual capabilities.... Konrad supported me selflessly, but at times it was very hard on him. For five years our only recreation was to go riding outside on the weekends. These rides kept our marriage in balance. But the long winters and the bad weather in the summer often prevented this healing of our strained relationship. The long darkness of this northern world proved most depressing. I come from a warm and sunny country."

Her lively face clouded over. She had a fleeting doubt of telling him more, but then brushing her hand over her forehead and continued. "During the summer after the child was born, my mother stayed with us. Her loving insight and her hysterical humor prevented many quarrels between us. She wanted to take the child and me to Georgia, but I refused. In that winter died our mutual promise to have an open house full of friends."

She peered at Vladimir's face looking for a sign of recognition. He had never been married, would he understand these intimate tensions that surface under stress even in a great love?

"Konrad had planned to spend the following year on sabbatical in Tiflis teaching and collecting plants in the mountains for the institute. I finally gave in and let myself be persuaded to spend the winter with him, doing part of my clinical year at the hospital in Tiflis. At first these were most happy months, my family, old friends, a strenuous expedition on horseback to Tusheti. Konrad loves the easy, unstressed life of Tiflis, my family adores him. But as spring approached I became increasingly restless. Georgia was threatening to reclaim me."

She looked out the window. Heavy clouds hung over the countryside. The train had passed the ugly industrial suburbs of the city and ran along the shore of the Finnish Gulf.

A pained expression crossed her face. She returned to the depressing story of that spring a year ago. "We had a bitter argument. Konrad wanted me to stay, that I would finish my degree three months early was unimportant. His contract bound him to Tiflis until summer. I knew I had to leave Georgia or lose my spontaneity and my hard-earned freedom to act consciously. You are not Georgian and not a woman, maybe this is difficult for you to understand. The female powers of Georgia are pervasive."

The train turned inland again, woods and fields flew by. Soon they would reach Lakhta. She sighed, still deeply distressed. "I hate confrontations and attempts at burdening me with guilt. As long as I am clear-headed, I can avoid arguments, particularly with Konrad. But I was restless and deeply frustrated. I decided to leave Konrad. I left Otto in the care of my mother and returned to St. Petersburg alone. It was like going into exile, all caused by my stubbornness."

They had reached the small station. As they stood at the door waiting for the train to stop, Vladimir with his hand on the door's lever, she unexpectedly gave him a kiss. "Thank you for not letting me down and accepting my ambiguous invitation."

The sun would no longer break through the clouds of the gray, overcast day, but the opposite coastline of the Bay of Kronstadt was in sharp relief, as it sometimes happens when the air is humid. They rode through stands of elms and white-stemmed birches that reached down to the very edge of the motionless, leaden sea. Occasionally the island of Kronstadt with its defense works was visible through the trees, and behind it the other shore near Petershof. The city of St. Petersburg to the south was marked by trails of smoke from its factories that went straight up into the sky where they fanned out to form an extended, black cloud.

They let their horses find the trail that wound back and forth through the trees following the rocky shore.

Vladimir, begged her forgiveness, and asked sympathetically. "Did you go your own ways during that time?"

"No, having precipitated this separation, I felt so miserable, that I completely buried myself in my studies. I never worked so hard in my life. And Konrad is a faithful man, he saw I was deeply unhappy."

She looked at him expectantly. "We both feel strongly, that each of us should have the freedom to grow—limited only by our great love. But we learned that in order to use this freedom, one has to be strong and happy and know that the other is not suffering from one's actions."

She had recovered her spirits and smiled at him. "And that includes my riding alone with you through the woods of Lakhta."

Vladimir looked at her. "I admire your courage and envy you your clear head. Not many women have both!"

A simple country inn lay before them on a bluff above the sea, the fishing village of Lisi Nos in the distance. The inn was empty and they sat down for lunch on the verandah. It had become warm if not sunny.

Facing him, the steady gait of her horse gone, desire flooded her. She fell into a tense silence, nervously opening and closing her hands.

A gloomy Vladimir got up and left to settle the bill.

When he returned she was gone.



The Gulf of Finland near Lisi Nos

He looked around uncertainly, their horses were standing where they had tied them up. She was nowhere to be seen, and then he noticed her silk scarf hanging over the backrest of her chair. He went to pick it up and found himself enveloped in a cloud of her perfume hanging in the still air.

He followed the powerful trail of her scent down a narrow path through the woods. In a clearing at the edge of the bluff she was standing facing the gray sea, waiting.

Vladimir put his arms around her from behind. He unbuttoned her blouse and stroked her bare Artemis breasts, her excited nipples. The smell of her perfume. She abandoned her head on his chest and closed her eyes.

She wore Konrad's gold necklace. He tried to unhook it. She turned around and put her hands on his. "Don't, my life depends on this chain."

Following the trail of her warm scent downwards, he struggled to pull down her riding breeches. He buried his face in her black triangle. His erection had acquired such an urgency that it left him no time.

Standing, his pants hanging over his riding boots, he practically raped her. It was over after a few panicky thrusts. Spent and depleted he collapsed, leaning onto a tree, and staring at his beautiful, half-nude prey.

A tear of frustration ran down her cheek. Deliberately she first took off her boots then her pants. Dressed only in Konrad's necklace she squatted at a distance, glowering at her disappointing lover. "Now it is my turn. Take your boots and those silly pants off and sit cross-legged on your coat."

He did as he was told. She crawled on her knees and hands towards him, wild determination in her deep blue eyes.

Serious she searched his face and saw the fear in his eyes. She moved her fingertips

along his arrogant eyebrows and very slowly circled his sensuous mouth.

Valdimir shuddered. Artemis, the huntress, closing in to kill. But instead of biting and clawing, she kissed him tenderly, chastely on the mouth. In an almost oriental gesture, she bent down to his lap and with her tongue circled the tip of his penis, which responded by performing two touching kick-ups. She laughed and gently clasped his revived pride while she searched his mouth with her tongue.

Gingerly she lowered herself onto his shaft, slowly moving up and down, squeezing and releasing it with exquisite control.

All predatory malice had disappeared from her eyes, but he was still paralyzed by fright.

"Don't think of me, just follow my fingers."

She stopped her rhythm and moved her fingertips along his spine from his coccyx to his head. Repeating this sensuous massage several times, she finally pressed a point on the crown of his head. "Now put all your concentration into this spot."

She kissed him on the forehead. He finally relaxed, and responded to her movements. Slowly they rocked back and forth.

As she felt her crisis nearing, she held him tightly and increased her rhythm.

"Slow," he begged.

Letting her arms hang limp by her side, she relaxed completely. Two, three contractions rippled through her belly and burst. Then she resumed her movements again, very slowly, squeezing him on the upstroke and driving down hard. She only stopped when she felt another spasm coming.

Her head thrown back, her eyes closed, overcome by a wild joy, she flew off in a fireworks of colors. Vladimir, holding her limp body in his arms, exploded.

Later when they rode home, a still thoughtful Vladimir said. "You frightened me with your swoon. All of a sudden I had a seemingly lifeless woman in my arms. I have never loved a woman who was able to let herself go like you."

"The lotus position, my *yogi*, is used by the Tibetans to drive the *chi*, your sensual energy, to your crown. It gives the woman exceptional freedom and is the most pleasing way of making love to a man."

"I don't understand, are you interested in Tibetan yoga? Where did you learn it?"

"I found it described in a Tibetan text my aunt Sophia Bagrationi gave me."

Vladimir frowned and shook his head. "I know nothing about Tibetan eroticism, but it was a most pleasurable experience."

"It is no 'eroticism' but a concentration exercise, which is practiced in Tibet as meditation."

She paused pensively. Should she entrust this esoteric, easily misunderstood knowledge to him? "It is a long story. Since childhood I see colors to music. They are unobtrusive and the colors are quite muddled, not very exciting. But at Otto's birth I had a very strong color vision that exceeded anything I had seen before."

She described her sensation of flying over her body.

"Later I experienced something very similar at the height of a great orgasm—just as this time with you. It is an exhilarating experience. More I don't understand, but the lotus position is the best way to get there."

A few months after Otto's birth, an excited Sophia had appeared with a Tibetan text that

Count Nikolai Prshevalsky had brought back from one of his expeditions. Sophia believed she had found the explanation of the strange colors Alexandra had seen in giving birth. They were the same colors that distinguish the five Tibetan Buddhas in deep meditation.

Alexandra played down this seemingly far-fetched connection as a meaningless coincidence. They were simply the colors of the rainbow. What is so special about that. But Sophia had lent her the book, and the more she had read in it, the more intrigued she had become. She had discovered the lotus position there and had found that it afforded her an unprecedented spontaneity in lovemaking.

"What about the flying sensation you experienced?" asked Vladimir becoming suddenly interested. "Does the Tibetan text explain that too?"

"No, that is still a mystery to me. It is a very heady experience, especially when I make myself fly during lovemaking."

Vladimir lapsed into thought. Eventually he said very slowly. "I too have had such an experience under entirely different conditions. I have never talked about it to anyone. Two years ago I participated in a street demonstration with some of my radical friends. The Cossacks appeared and started shooting at random into the crowd. One of my best friends died that day. I was lucky, I only received a bullet in my shoulder. I lost a large amount of blood and was carried to the hospital in a coma."

A shadow went over his handsome face. "The curious thing was that, although I could not talk or move, I heard everything. I was flying high above my body looking down on it. It was not an unpleasant state to be in, like you, I felt no pain. I heard the voices of friends and of my mother, who were not present, and even that of my dead grandmother. They all called on me to join them in the afterlife. My sister, later in the hospital, called me back to reality. With a great effort I made myself wake up."

He looked questioningly at Alexandra, who had reined in her horse and stared at him. "I suddenly understand what I experienced," she said, "I'll might have the same sensations at my death: part of my soul leaves the body. Should dying, making love, and giving birth be that closely related? Could dying be a pleasurable, highly sensual experience?"

Vladimir nodded. "Yes, I think so. After this experience I lost my fear of dying. I now live every day as if it was my last one. And you think that death, love, and birth are accompanied by the same sensual experience, this would be an amazing insight."

A Theosophists' Reception

St. Petersburg 1904

The telephone had arrived in St. Petersburg, and Vladimir had given Alexandra his number to call him, but when she faced the black speaker funnel at the post office, she panicked and resorted to writing a personal note in her careful hand. It would be more discreet, and he would have something tangible in his hands. Besides who would listen in on their telephone conversation, the Okhrana?

Dear Yogi,

Would you like to join me in a fashionable séance of the Theosophists at the Palais of Prince Sergey Pavlovich V.? They promise to demonstrate yoga meditation, have a Tibetan pharmacist at hand, produce some occult magic, and—no promises—probably smoke some hashish. I owe this invitation to Sophia B.

You have heard of Mme. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, née von Hahn, haven't you? She is the Ur-mother of the Theosophists, and though dead for twelve years, she appears regularly, according to rumors, to her faithful.

You may wonder why I want to go there: I have some true medical interests. I am curious of what they understand about psychic phenomena, and I want to find out why so many artists and writers are attracted to Theosophy. Finally a personal curiosity, H.P.B., in the 1860s, was a frequent visitor to the house of my grandparents. My mother told many strange tales about her.

K. would never consent to accompany me, maybe you will! Unfortunately you may encounter more acquaintances there than you might care to be associated with: Toute le monde is deeply enraptured by Theosophy.

Affectionately,

Lexako

VI. 12. 1904

She received a note by return messenger.

Dear Lexako,

Will you permit me to call you by this affectionate name? I shall pick you up at your house with our car at eight sharp.

Expecting to be baffled!

Your pseudo-Yogi

The event turned out to be a glittering gathering of the rich and beautiful people of St. Petersburg without a trace of a séance. Chauffeured cars crowded the access to the electrically illuminated palais of Prince Volkonsky. Liveried attendants held the car doors open and collected the guests' *cartes de visites* on silver platters. Amused she noticed that Vladimir, with a slight of hand, retrieved his card unnoticed. The men wore black tie and the ladies fashionable dresses. Alexandra was glad to wear a conservative blouse and a loose skirt down to her ankles which would not attract any unwanted attention.

The entire ground floor had been opened to the guests, a buffet was laid out in the dining room, and attendants circulated among the crowd with fruit juices and iced yogurt drinks. Disappointed, Alexandra could not detect any smell of hashish.

They wandered around. In a one room a photo of Mme. Blavatsky's broad, pock-marked face with the protruding eyes framed by a black shawl, looked down on her famous books: *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Voice of Silence*, all in English, printed in America—for sale at horrendous prices!

Alexandra shook her head. "Do the Theosophists need money?" she asked Vladimir with a derisive laugh.

They met far fewer people whom they knew than Alexandra had expected. But the next room held a surprise: of all people they ran into Marti Sisakian!

She did not recognize him at first. He wore a Moslem cassock over baggy pants tied at the ankles, soft, leather boots, and a turban. A gaily-colored shawl was wound around his waist.

"Marti," cried Alexandra hugging him, "have you converted to Islam? Where is Izabel, is she hiding in a *chador*? What is this getup, and where have you been all these years?"

Two years ago Marti and Izabel had gone to Armenia and never returned.

Marti blushed and retorted. "Where is Konrad?" And with an inquisitive look shook Vladimir's hand. "You have not got divorced, Alexandra, during your crazy medical studies?"

Alexandra laughed. "Of course not, Konrad is in Munich and Vladimir volunteered to escort me to this party. But seriously, what are you doing here among the Theosophists?"

"Impetuous Georgian friend, one question at a time. I am selling my paintings, the labor of the past two years. And the 'Moslem getup,' as you call it, is a simple sales ruse. I am as poor a Moslem as I am a bad Christian or Theosophist. You will find Izabel somewhere among this crowd of wealthy sympathizers of the enigmatic Blavatsky. She is hiding in very regular clothes."

"You two, Theosophists?" Alexandra asked with raised eyebrows.

"*Chère* Alexandra, we joined the Theosophists in Paris a long time ago. For obvious reasons we didn't talk about that on the train from Berlin, and later you were so single-mindedly preoccupied with exploring *your* reality that you never found out! But how is Otto? He had just been born when we left for Yerevan. Did you have any more children since then?"

"No, he is our only one so far. He is four and keeps me and a governess on our toes. I just finished my medical degree, and for the first time I am able to devote myself entirely to him and the pleasures of St. Petersburg. You must come and see us soon. When did you get back?"

Marti placed his hands behind his ears and bowed deeply in a mock-Muslim gesture. "Congratulations! Izabel was not sure that you two would survive this ordeal. We returned from Samarkand two weeks ago. But come, let me show you the paintings, they tell all that has happened to us."

Along the walls hung a number of colorful paintings interspersed with photographs, obviously scenes in Armenia and Central Asia.

"Izabel took these photographs. She has become quite good at that. Look here, you know this view."

A picture of the Blue Bath in Tiflis hung next to one showing Marti, sitting on a dais, being scrubbed with copious amounts of soap suds by a bath attendant.

She laughed. "I like this one especially. You spent some time in Tiflis?"

"We spent two months in Georgia, then we moved on to Yerevan. Look, here are the paintings from Armenia. We loved it, the sun, the colors, the people. There are so many stones in Armenia, you cannot believe it. This is Mount Ararat floating above the clouds seen from Yerevan. The ruins of Svartnots in Echmiadzin. This is a scene in a village at the foot of the lava flows of Mt. Alagöz. The people bake *lavash* and hang the bread on clotheslines to dry."

Marti jumped from painting to painting excitedly rowing his arms. She had never seen him so animated. She looked carefully at the paintings. What did they have to do with Theosophy? His palette consisted of bold, passionate, strong colors, yellow and dark reds dominated, the shadows were deep blue. Bright green vines between red lava stones. The sky a thin, transparent blue. Imbedded in treeless mountains lay Lake Sevan, azure and turquoise. A church on a small rock island.

In places he had put the paint on with a knife, the painting's surface a three-dimensional landscape. She really liked the way he handled his colors: figurative and highly expressionist.

"I had to work very rapidly, the sun would dry out the paint in no time. Because we speak Turkish and Farsi, we were sent to Turkestan. All other canvasses are from there. You have probably never seen paintings from Turkestan. It became a real experience for me, it opened my eyes as a painter. Look here." He pointed at a painting of two Islamic buildings with turquoise domes and huge tile mosaics over the entrance gates.

He explained. "The Registan in Samarkand, these are two of the three medreses surrounding that square, Sufi schools."

He had outdone himself. His paintings had taken on an almost hallucinatory intensity, the sky a light green, the shadows violet, above ochre walls shimmered the turquoise and intensely blue-green domes of mosques, like jewels.

The ruins of an immense, half-collapsed arch or *ivan*, like two crooked teeth in a broken jaw, tiny turbaned people standing below. A large, green-tiled square on the otherwise bare, burnt sienna surface.

"You are looking at the remains of Tamerlan's once fabulous, *Aq Serai*, the 'White Palace' in Shakh-i-Zabz, south of Samarkand. Tamerlan was born in this dusty town, and his father lies buried there like a saint."

Alexandra stared at the painting trying to imagine the size of this ruin. "Marti, would you sell me this painting? I would like to give it to Konrad for his birthday."

Marti gave her a grateful look. "Konrad would like Turkestan. I have not sold anything today."

A servant called the guests to the buffet in the large dining room.

Suddenly Izabel stood before them. For a split second she was baffled and then hugged Alexandra. "Oh, I knew it! On my way here, I had a premonition that I would meet you tonight. Did I lure you here?"

The buffet was overloaded with exotic Indian dishes all new to Alexandra, no alcohol and no wine.

After some initial hesitation, Alexandra developed a real taste for the strange vegetable and rice dishes and gorged herself. The spices literally exploded in her mouth. She discovered that the food was entirely vegetarian. A "Caucasian chicken" in a thick sauce turned out to be small, peeled aubergines in an almond sauce, highly spiced with cardamom. It came with a saffron and pistachio pilaf decorated with glazed peach slices.

She finally learned to distinguish between the rich and beautiful and the Theosophists, who, like Izabel, were dressed quite modestly. Alexandra blended in very well. "You seem to recognize nobody in this glittering gathering of the St. Petersburg intelligentsia," said Vladimir in a low voice. "But look, over there is the painter Ilya Repin with his homely wife. The ravishing beauty with the big hat next to him is Maria Andreyeva, the sister of the playwright and mistress of Maxim Gorky, the boyish looking man with the long hair next to Repin.

With a tilt of his head he pointed at two older gentlemen. "The man with the curled mustache tips is Pyotr Stolypin, he is talking to Graf Sergey von Witte, our dismissed financial genius. Both are feared and disliked by the Emperor, because of their intelligence and outspoken criticism of the Emperor's indecisive reign. Stolypin, in my father's opinion, is the only man in Russia who could save the unstable situation. Why these two are here, I don't know. Gratefully absent are the hard-core revolutionaries, the military, and the clergy as well as all members of the extended imperial family. They follow other gurus."

Alexandra scrutinized the two politicians. "I have never seen Witte."

She stared at the slightly corpulent Witte. He had the high forehead of a professor posturing fully aware of his importance. She lowered her gaze and in a conspiratorial voice said. "Witte is a relative of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and a distant, younger cousin of my mother. He does look exactly like mother used to describe him, highly intelligent, incisive, enlightened, and powerful. I am not surprised that the Tsar dismissed him despite his success at bringing Russia into the twentieth century."

After supper everyone moved into the ballroom where a gaunt, sinewy, Indian fakir demonstrated yoga. The man wore only a loincloth. He went through a sequence of impossible contortions of his limbs and ended up standing on his head.

"To stand on the head and wiggle my feet, that I can do too," whispered Alexandra to Izabel, "but the other positions are too complicated and entirely unnecessary to gain insight."

Izabel put an admonishing finger to her lips.

Everybody applauded.

"This man is a Kundalini master," said Izabel. "These positions are not for you to imitate. I cannot produce them either."

The fakir retreated to the back of the room, where he lit a charcoal brazier. The gentleman introduced the "Tibetan" pharmacologist, Doctor Pyotr Alexandrovich Badmaev.

"Oh, well, Tibetan!" whispered Vladimir. "That charlatan. He is an urbanized Buryat shaman with a questionable medical degree who sells powders and cough remedies to the gullible ladies of the better society. My mother once consulted him."

The stocky Badmaev sat self-important with crossed legs on a carpet and displayed an array of medicines. With a monotonous voice and a strong accent he explained their origins and use. A number of women flocked around him. Alexandra wanted to have a closer look, but Vladimir held her back. "Stay away from him, he isn't trustworthy."

Suddenly Badmaev threw a handful of seeds into the fakir's brazier. Thick smoke began to fill the room, and like a vision the face of Mme. Blavatsky appeared in the smoke.



H.P.B. in the Hashish Clouds (Wikipedia)

The audience guffawed, although it was obvious to Alexandra that the image was a simple *laterna magica* projection. Yet, the back-and-forth wafting smoke uncannily brought her to life.

"Ah, *cannabis asiatica*! I can smell it," whispered Alexandra wrinkling her nose. A minute later she nervously pulled Vladimir by the arm and with an urgent voice said, "Please let's get out of here, fast."

Hoarse and highly alarmed she repeated, "Let's go, quick! Some grave danger is approaching."

Wordlessly Vladimir like a cat, deliberately slow and cautious, taking her arm, walked her toward the door, trailed by the worried Sisakians.

"The lady is unwell," Vladimir said to the servant who held the door open. "Thank you, I shall take her outside myself."

Working with great circumspection Vladimir found his car and waved to the chauffeur to pull up. They all piled in.

"Go Fyodor! We have to get out of here as fast you can."

"What is the matter Alexandra?" asked Izabel in confusion.

"I had a sudden premonition. We have a rule in our family to fear nothing, but act fast when a premonition warns us."

The shock wave of a massive explosion coming from the house interrupted her. The car rocked frighteningly.

Vladimir let go of a string of obscenities. "Go Fyodor, get us out of here before the police arrives. I must not be found in this place!"

Fyodor revved the engine and began pulling out into the street. Screaming people came

pouring out of the palais, the electric lights went out. They had reached the street.

Marti began to shout. "My paintings! Two years of work, my paintings! Let me out!"

Fyodor stopped the car and Marti and Izabel jumped out. Vladimir and Alexandra saw them running towards the smoking building as Fyodor shifted into high gear. Scattering the crowds of the curious running towards the place of disaster, they sped to safety.

"Explosion at Volkonsky Palais—Indian fakir killed, scores wounded" screamed the headlines next morning. The paper blamed the Indian and Badmaev for setting up the explosion. The Theosophists were nowhere mentioned. The palais had suffered extensive damage. An investigation of the causes was under way.

Alexandra was anxiously waiting for news from the Sisakians. She had no clue how to find them and was much relieved when Izabel and Marti stood before her door late that night.

"We saved the paintings!" cried Marti. "Here is the painting from Shakh-i-Zabz which you liked so much." He presented her with long roll wrapped in newspaper. "Take it as our thanks for saving our lives."

Izabel hugged Alexandra. "Thank you! You have a sense which rivals Mme. Blavatsky, you would make a perfect Theosophist!"

Alexandra unwrapped the painting. It still fascinated her in an undefinable way. She thanked Marti, but he could ill afford to make her such a present. Had he was like a Georgian, offering him money would have deeply offended him. But an Armenian had other feelings in such matters. She would have to give this some thought.

Alexandra proposed to prepare something to eat for them, and they moved into the kitchen.

"This was a narrow escape," began Marti. "The bomb exploded somewhere in the kitchen behind the wall where the yogi was stirring his brazier. The whole wall collapsed and buried him. People further away were spared, but Badmaev and the women who were crowding around him are all in the hospital. What a vicious way to demonstrate the government's displeasure with the Theosophists!"

"The paper blamed the Indian and Badmaev for having caused the explosion," remarked Alexandra.

Marti's dark eyes became furious. "You don't believe that story, do you? Of course, *they* would print such a calumny, the man is dead and cannot prove them wrong. Don't be naïve! It was a bomb planted by you know who. "

He made an obscene gesture. "And the mess when the police arrived! They came an hour late, and all they did was confiscate some literature and arrest some harmless people. Because of my 'getup' they held me for two hours until some influential person released me on his recognizance. Thank God, we had carried all my paintings to the house of friends before the police arrived, they would have confiscated those too."

He had talked himself into a real heat. He swore and rowed with his arms. "We should have stayed in Central Asia, where life is easier than here. And I tell you, the capital is going to explode any time and one more such experience, and I will join the revolutionaries in the streets!"

Alexandra shook her head. "You should be careful of what you say, Marti. This apartment is safe, but you can never tell who is listening in these days. There are many people, especially at the university, who think like you do. Sometimes I feel like you. I too

would join the revolution and get into trouble—ah, well, maybe it is providence that I leave for Munich in two weeks."

Glowering, Marti raised his fist and through clenched teeth cursed the Tsar, his government, and the Okhrana.

"Let us postpone our political discussion for a walk in the woods," suggested Alexandra, "tell me instead about your interest in Theosophy."

Marti shrugged. "You know that this subject is as dangerous to discuss as any other 'subversive' activity, don't you? That terrible henchman, Plehve, who runs the Internal Security, would like to arrest all Theosophists just as he would like to imprison all Socialists."

"But how did those expensive English books of Blavatsky get there, which were for sale last night?" asked Alexandra.

"Smuggled in by bribing, of course. Volkonsky is not a Theosophist, but he is a capitalist sympathizer who bribed the officials. You know, nothing is impossible for someone who has money and the right connections. Only we poor devils get persecuted."

Alexandra looked questioningly at Marti. He was understandably upset by the events of last night, but his voice had an aggressive edge, which sounded like the slogans of the extreme left, whom she detested as dangerous fools and with whom she had found rational discussions of political matters strictly impossible.

Alexandra shook her head. She was ready to attack Marti, to draw him out and expose the folly of his views, but told herself to remain calm and resist this temptation.

Fortunately, Izabel said. "It was I who was fascinated by Blavatsky. You would find her writings interesting too, she had a sharp mind and exciting insights. The Theosophists are muddled and gullible. They are taken in by her 'occult magic' and forget the sharp visions she had."

Alexandra tried to steer Marti to the question of the relationship between his pictures and Theosophy. "And you, Marti? Tell me, why are you as a painter interested in Theosophy? I searched your paintings unsuccessfully for an answer to this question."

They sat down and Alexandra put the supper on the table. She gave Marti a bottle of wine to uncork. They drank to their reunion. Marti had calmed down. "We have been interested in Theosophy for the same reason that so many Russians are. Aren't we all searching for a new spirituality? The church no longer fills this void."

He looked at Izabel for approval and continued. "Unfortunately our long journey has taught me that Blavatsky is a charlatan, and the Theosophists are gullible. You see, this trip was paid for by the Theosophical Society. We were supposed to interview people who had known Mme. Blavatsky, take pictures, and paint the places she had visited on her many travels."

He turned to Alexandra. "We had an interesting interview with your cousin Graf Witte. He was the only person who had some concrete information on Blavatsky."

Alexandra nodded. "I had never seen him in person until yesterday, but my mother knew him in Tiflis when she was a child."

Marti made a dismissive gesture with his hand. "Witte laughed about the fantasies of Blavatsky. He maintained that she had copied her mystical writings from the occult books in their common grandfather's library in Tiflis. We cannot mention this story to the Theosophists, they believe H.P.B. got her wisdom from her *Indian Masters* by telepathy. We found that H.P.B. had never been to Central Asia nor in Tibet as she claimed. And the secret letters from her

Indian Masters were fabricated by herself."

He poured down a glass of wine and asked for a refill. "Ah, we have to destroy all religious superstition in Russia and get rid of our mystics. They are a disgrace to our intelligence in the twentieth century!"

His disturbing slogans again! Had Marti in his frustrated search for spirituality turned to the radical Socialists? "So, you came back as a disenchanted Theosophists!"

"I never was an enchanted Theosophist. Izabel was taken in by *H.P.B.* Call me an opportunist if you wish, the offer of that journey to Central Asia was too great a temptation to resist. We would never have been able to afford such a trip, and you saw yourself what it did to my painting."

Alexandra looked at the picture from Shakh-i-Zabz, which was leaning against the wall, and to her surprise the ruins of the *ivan* changed. They had appeared to her like teeth yesterday, and now they looked like two praying hands in the faded green sky. The turquoise square with its Kufic writing appeared like an amulet on the wrist of one of the hands.

"When I look at your painting, I now see things which I had not seen yesterday. The *ivan* appears like two praying hands. Why is the sky green, and what is that strange square?"

Marti smiled with satisfaction. "Shakh-i-Zabz is a place of pilgrimage for the Islamic Sufi, that is why the sky is green: the color of the Prophet. And the square is a *Bustrahedron*, a magical square in which one can read 'Allah is Great' in all directions. Maybe the two stumps are two praying hands, maybe they are two dancing Sufi, or the melody of two *neys* expressed in stone? You have to decide that for yourself."

Alexandra listened intrigued. She had finally touched the deep feelings that lay hidden below his political slogans.

Marti began to warm to his subject. "All that this has in common with Theosophy is that Blavatsky's ideas have a certain Sufi content, and the Sufi originated in Samarkand. But you can find similar ideas also among the Sufi in Georgia. In my paintings I search for the hidden symbols, which lie behind the spiritual movements of our day. Long denied by Christianity, Sufism is one such source."

A softer glow had come to Marti's eyes. "Do you remember our visit to Becky's house? Since that day Gauguin has been my teacher, he knows so much more about the symbolism of colors and forms than our Symbolists. Can you see the Gauguin in my paintings?"

When they separated past midnight, Alexandra secretly slipped an envelope with a note of thanks and a reasonable amount of money for the picture into Isabel's purse. She offered them the apartment for the time of their absence, which the Sisakians accepted with gratitude. It would serve as a good hiding place for them.

Alexandra would never see Marti again and Izabel not for many years.

On the morning of Alexandra's departure for Germany, July 28, 1904, the newspaper sellers shouted:

"Plehve Assassinated. Minister succumbs to his injuries."

The city crawled with police and soldiers.

Vladimir, who had offered to take Alexandra to the station by car, appeared on foot, an hour earlier than agreed upon.

"Thank God—and the extremists—we have been delivered of this scourge!" He crossed himself three times. "Maybe life will become just a little easier without this oppressor." But then

he became pensive, "or it will get much worse, as those people believe who fear the extremists more than the Okhrana."

Alexandra embraced him. "The fuse is lit, and my guardian angel takes me away from this powder keg just in time!"

"Ha," laughed Vladimir, "and I thought you wanted to go onto the barricades with me and fight for this revolution: *la Liberté conduit le peuple de Saint Petersburg!* Do you know the painting by Delacroix?"

Vladimir took them by taxi. They embraced one last time. He finally remembered to thank her for having saved him at the Volkonsky party. When the *Nord Express* pulled out of the station he stood enveloped by clouds of steam waving his handkerchief. Alexandra, to her surprise, had tears in her eyes.

Berlin

1904

Alexandra had received a sizable sum of money from her father as a graduation present and had immediately hired a quiet, older German woman as governess for Otto. Elisabeth came from the Baltics. She would teach Otto German and would be invaluable in München.

The three had a first class sleeper to themselves. At the Russian border they were subjected to a thorough search. A hapless, young man was taken from the train at gunpoint. Alexandra thought of Vladimir, imploring him to be careful and not expose himself unnecessarily to danger. Hopefully his close scrape with death would protect him from any foolish, misguided sacrifice.

Strange, how these two meetings with Vladimir had subtly changed her. She lay awake in her berth and followed the lights of unknown towns running counter to the train's motion across the polished wood paneling in the compartment. The unsettling rattle of the wheels across uncounched switches—where did they lead to? Who had set them?

The train was taking her to Konrad, and yet her thoughts, like those lights, flew back to Vladimir, who had opened the gates to an inner landscape that she began to understand only now—a territory of which Konrad had no knowledge.

What did Konrad know about death?

Before her meeting with Vladimir it would have never occurred to her that her flying over Otto's birth might have been a death experience, a temporary separation of the soul from her body. And every overwhelming orgasm an euphoric experience of death?

She let their ride after their lovemaking pass before her eyes. In the past weeks she had not had the time to reexamine their conversation, and as she did so now, she was struck by the thought that while her experiences at birth and during lovemaking were restricted to women, it had been Vladimir who had given her the understanding that they were death experiences. Was the verbalization of a woman's knowledge the prerogative of the man? The woman *knows* but cannot give words to her knowledge, and the man constructs philosophical systems, but cannot experience the woman's fundamental insights?

She sat up wide awake, surprised: love making as a way to teach a man understand his religious speculations? In her opinion all religions were male constructs. She now saw that they might originally have been female insights, like the idea of rebirth, or that of resurrection. Both must have originated in the woman's experience that love, birth, and death are closely related. Was this insight at the core of the esoteric secrets which in the past had been handed down in female initiation rites?

Was this part of Deda's Easter Play too? The origin of the female trinity and Kore's resurrection that Konrad had alluded to?

Mother had never mentioned any deeper insights of this kind, but maybe she had never met a man who had been able to explain it as Vladimir had to her.

She leaned her forehead on the cool window looking out at the passing night. Why do I think like a man who has to analyze ideas to be satisfied? Why can I not just feel good and teach Konrad my new-found happiness: Look, I will show you the precious gift I gained from my encounter with Vladimir.

"Is this not all that is needed in our love?" she said aloud.

A catalogue of related questions, unanswerable for the time being, presented themselves to her: Could one have an extra-corporeal experience independently of dying? Could one learn to fly at will by separating one's "soul" from one's body? Probably this would be dangerous. Unless one had a sister to call one back, as in Vladimir's case, or a newborn's cry as in hers, one could easily drift off and not return to one's body.

And why would one want to try to dissociate one's innermost being in the first place, why risk the dangers of flying?

To fly around! To spy on other people! To experience the sensual pleasure of flying! Her own experiences had every time given her an immense pleasure.

"To fly around! To fly around!" she sang.

She laughed.

A sure way to acquire the knowledge of a *jadukali*, a sorceress!

Otto cried. She picked him up and took him into her arms and showed him the lights that were flying by. She gently returned him to his bed and sang a Georgian song until he fell asleep.

She looked at Otto, Konrad's child, her child, and a wild physical desire overcame her. She wanted another child from Konrad.

If I love this man with all I have, she told herself, I will be able to take him along on my journey, to let him partake of my new-old, female knowledge.

The culmination of her love would be to lead Konrad through the maze of his life and dying with her sensuous powers!

Konrad received them in Berlin in a state of happy excitement. "How is it possible that you look even more beautiful than I remembered!" he whispered in her ear when he held her in his arms.

Alexandra looked at her tall man with his graying beard and with unerring intuition knew that he had been with another woman. She smiled at him. "Maybe it is good to be separated from each other at times."

Full of childish jealousy Otto pulled at Konrad's coat demanding a ride on his shoulders. Elisabeth tried to convince Otto otherwise, but he would not be dissuaded. Konrad lifted him up, and the child grabbed Konrad's hair and babbled away in a mixture of Russian and German. Alexandra on Konrad's arm the happy threesome walked through the busy station followed by a smiling Elisabeth and a porter with their voluminous luggage. A taxi delivered them at the *Pension* where Konrad had reserved two rooms.

After Otto had been given his supper, put to bed, and left in Elisabeth's care, they ran off exited and laughing. Konrad jumped down the stairs two steps at a time, she could hardly follow. On the last step he turned around, caught her in his arms and kissed her ardently. On the street he put his arm into Alexandra's and steered her to the subway entrance in the next block.

Konrad talked nonstop about Munich. "You will really like this city, it has a cosmopolitan atmosphere spiced with a colorful, provincial flavor." About Niko and his new girlfriend, "She is a dark, liberated, Jewish beauty who studies medicine." On a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, "Katharina took me there together with the entire circle of painters around Kandinsky, five

pretty women. They are hanging on Steiner's every word. A strange man, I cannot decide whether he is a demagogue, a religious sectarian, or a scientist."

Alexandra smiled and nodded. So, it was Katharina, her fiend from Fiesole. How amusing that she should have persuaded him to listen to a Theosophist!

They had barely reached the platform of the underground when the electric train moved in with a squall of air and a deafening noise.

"Like in Paris, only more modern. There is a train every five minutes. Quick, get in, the doors close automatically."

She jumped in and with a fierce whistle the five cars took off and vanished into the black maw of the tunnel. The screeching wheels in the curves and the rattle of the cars drowned out all normal conversation.

Alexandra took Konrad by his coat and with an enigmatic smile wiggled her finger through one of its buttonholes.

"Was it nice to make love to Katharina?" she asked in Russian close to his ear.

Konrad, shocked, asked, "How do you know?" before the train screamed around another bend in the tunnel and cut off his words.

She smiled into his eyes and gave him a kiss. He got a red face and awkwardly tried to hold her at bay, but no one paid any attention, except for an old woman who, when she got out at the next station, said disarmingly, "I like you two. Have a wonderful night!"

"Ach, Konrad," said Alexandra with a tentative movement of her hand when they were back above ground, "it is written all over you, that you loved a woman. You are a changed man. I love you," and embraced him.

"Was it Katharina?" she asked with a trace of anxiety in her voice.

"Yes," he said, "we spent a weekend together at the Kochelsee south of Munich. It was wonderful, she is such a warm, passionate woman. You have taught me many things, but I guess she is the first woman whom I seduced."

No further explanation, but Alexandra understood why this experience had left him exuberant. Curiously she felt not the slightest jealousy, only an immense joy and an entirely unexpected gratefulness towards her old friend.

Konrad shook his head. "Katharina sends you her greetings. She smiled when she said that and asked me to give you a kiss and not to forget to do that. I do not understand you women."

Alexandra stole her friend's kiss from him. "I have been thinking of her, and I cannot wait to see her."

Konrad eagerly told her of the various times he had gone out with Katharina, a visit of the *Pinakothek*, a *premiere-concert* at which Richard Strauss conducted Gustav Mahler, and once they had gone to a dance together.

"But you dance many times better than she does." He laughed.

So, Alexandra mused, it seems to have done us both good to explore our own ways—and he even arrived before me. I could not have taught him what Katharina did. Now, how will I tell him of my adventures? He has no way of suspecting Vladimir.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"You do confuse me! Did I not tell you? I am taking you to the *Variété*, a show at the *Wintergarten* on *Friedrich-Strasse*, the latest entertainment imported from Paris, modified to suit Berlin."

The *Wintergarten*, turned out to be a glassed-in cast iron structure that had become the rage after the Paris World Exposition. Small groups of people sat at single tables eating dinner or just drinking champagne or wine. Potted palms and banana trees gave the whole a tropical ambiance. To one side opened a stage. An orchestra played popular music.

The hall, brightly lit by numerous electric chandeliers, was filled by a noisy crowd, rousing cheers, the clinking of glasses, the occasional pop! of a champagne cork. Long-legged, skimpily dressed waitresses moved between the tables. A *maître d'*, whom Konrad slipped a sizable tip, escorted them to a table close to the stage. Konrad shrugged. "Otherwise we would be sitting way in the back."

Konrad had barely placed his order when the lights dimmed and a hush quieted the crowd. The orchestra went silent and an old man pushed a *Leierkasten*, a barrel-organ on wheels, onto the stage grinding out a sentimental popular tune. The audience applauded. The *filles de corps de ballet* in gaudy dresses sailed on stage and danced around the organ grinder.

A fanfare. Down a passage between the dancers, caught in a bright blue spotlight, undulated a slender, no longer young lady in a tight, glittering lamé costume. Thunderous applause greeted her. In a low, husky voice she began to sing:

"*Ich hab' noch einen Koffer in Berlin.*"

Renewed applause, shouts, and whistles. The lady smiled, threw hand-kisses to the audience, and sang the next stanza:

"*Berlin, Berlin meine Sehnsucht ist dahin.*"

Konrad's eyes glazed over. After all, thought Alexandra, he still does have a suitcase of sentimental memories somewhere in Berlin.

Alexandra smiled bemused and uncertain, the voice of the singer drove a shiver down her spine.

To fend off this wave of alien sentimentality Alexandra let her eyes wander over the crowd. She found the shiny faces of the well-fed, middle-aged bourgeois gentlemen in their uniforms or starched shirtfronts repulsive. Their eyes were glued to the singer with stupefied attention. This was a different crowd from the aristocrats and the intelligentsia that attended similar, popular entertainment in St. Petersburg. Was this the "republican" public of the future? She was not sure that she would like to live among these people.

The waitress, dressed in a fancy, push-up dance costume, silk stockings covering her exposed legs, brought two glasses, a bottle of French champagne, caviar on ice, and two large plates of *belegte Brote*, slices of bread covered with various cold cuts.

"The Russians call this *butterbrot*," exclaimed Alexandra. "*Mein Gott*, I am lost between three cultures none of which I could honestly swear allegiance to."

Cardboard trees, a few symbolic bushes, and a park bench floated on stage followed by three monuments and a mock-up of the *Siegessäule* in the *Tierpark*.

Two characters wandered through the park, one in an Austrian uniform with a lorgnette on a golden chain, the other a *Berliner Bürger*, slovenly dressed in civilian clothes.

"Ah," cried the burgher doffing his hat at the uniformed character, "*Gutentag*, Graf Bobby, I am so glad I met you."

Graf Bobby put the lorgnette in his eye and delightedly exclaimed with a heavy Austrian accent. "*Grüß' Gott*, Ferdinand, it's my pleasure!"

"Graf Bobby," said Ferdinand, "I am bewildered, every week our government puts up another monument, you are a *studierter Mann*, who is that over there?"

He pointed at a monument everybody in the audience recognized as representing Goethe.

"Äh," said Graf Bobby peering through his lorgnon, "this must be the famous Austrian composer van Beethoven."

Ferdinand relieved, intoned a short melody.

"Ah, of course, of course, '*Eine kleine Nachtmusik*'" cried Ferdinand and hit Graf Bobby on the shoulder.

A few people laughed. Konrad was puzzled. "Well, that is getting rather sophisticated."

A bunch of policemen came running on stage. They encircled the two simpletons.

"Your papers, please!" said one of the mustachioed officers.

Graf Bobby pulled out an oversized passport with the Austrian double-eagle on its cover and waved it at the policemen, while Ferdinand, who had nothing to show, swore that his name was Ferdinand Fontane and that he lived in the Wedding. Under much threatening gesticulations the policemen arrested Graf Bobby as an Austrian spy, and Ferdinand as a long-wanted Socialist.

Exeunt the police with their captives in handcuffs.

Now the audience was really swept up in cheers.

"You have to understand, that Graf Bobby is a well-known character of many a Viennese joke and that Theodore Fontane—not Ferdinand—is a famous Berlin writer long suspected of sympathizing with the Socialists, who live in a part of Berlin called Wedding. But," he shook his head, "this triple joke is really high-brow considering this kind of audience."

The organ-grinder walked across the stage and played a new tune, which was picked up by the orchestra *con sordino*:

"*Das Mädchen vom Lande*," announced the master of ceremonies. A sweet blonde dressed in a pinafore with an innocent bow tie in her long hair accompanied by a strapping, young Lieutenant of the Guard began to sing a sentimental, tear-jerking Berliner street ballad.

Ein Mädchen kam from Lande ein jeder dachte sie sei schön.

Sie rannte weg vom Dorfe, um sich Berlin mal anzusehn.

*Sie wurde Magd bei reichen Leuten, sie aber wollte hoch hinaus,
sucht' nur des Lebens Freuden, wollt' nur noch Saus und Braus.*

Sie trug nur seidne Kleider und ging spazieren in Berlin.

*Ein Leutnant von der Garde nahm sie auf einen Ball
und als der Ball zuende da schlief sie müde ein.*

Dies war ihr Pech. Der Leutnant von der Garde, der raubte ihr die Unschuld weg.

Sie seufzte, schrie und war verzweifelt und wollte gleich in's Wasser gehn.

*Der Fluss jedoch, der war gefroren
und keine Öffnung war zu sehn.*

Sie kehrte heim auf's Lande, geschändet, dick, und nicht mehr schön.

*Ein Kindlein ward geboren, ganz unschuldig und süß,
doch durch der Mutter Sünde, sein Vater hat es nie gesehn.*

During the last two stanzas, the beauty's belly grew rapidly until the balloon under her pinafore burst with a bang. The pair was rewarded by hilarious laughter and the popping of champagne corks.

And so it went on, a juggler, a magician who pulled pigeons from a hat, a pair of children

who wound themselves like snakes around, above, and below each other, and in between the organ-grinder who played yet another sentimental tune. A peculiar mixture of the banal, the trivial, and the sentimental, at times outright crass with biting overtones.

The merry noise of the audience grew with the amount of champagne consumed.

Suddenly the waitresses vanished to reappeared on stage in *can-can* costumes paired off by an equal number of young men in tuxedos and bowler hats twirling canes. The girls enthusiastically kicked their pretty legs to the fast music.

Alexandra noticed that underneath their tri-colored *tout-touts* they wore only the skimpiest of panties and a *petit corset* to hold up their stockings on florid suspenders. With raised eyebrows she whispered to Konrad. "*Regarde, leurs sous-vêtements!*" Konrad pulled a grimace.

So far the ballet had been an imitation of Paris' *Folies Bergers*—but now the orchestra turned maudlin, and the new Berlin took over. In a single movement the girls let their *tout-touts* drop and stood there completely in the nude except for their panties, their black girdles and small, glued-on decorations covering their nipples.

Triumphantly their partners skewered the tri-colored *tout-touts*, and raised them like captured French flags on their canes.

The crowd applauded thunderously.

Unexpectedly the orchestra went silent, and down the middle of an alley of pretty legs and bare breasts snaked, equally nude except for a feather boa the famous singer of the first *Nummer*.

While everybody rose clapping wildly, Alexandra was speechless. To top it all off, the girls came down from the stage, and evading the prying hands of male customers here and there, danced between the tables to an exit in the rear.

The organ grinder wandered across the stage for the last time, and the singer with her seductively husky voice concluded the evening, "*Auf Wiedersehn, auf wiedersehn.....*"

The very last offering, however, was the Prussian anthem to which everyone stood and *sotto voce* joined the cast in singing.

"Well," Alexandra stretched her words, "what a show! Is this the entertainment of the future?" She finished her glass of champagne in one swig.

"Oh, no," laughed Konrad, "this is inimitable *Berlin*. This genre cannot be exported. You will see, in Bavaria such entertainment looks and sounds entirely different. There they are Catholic, and because they are no less crass, the bare breasts are replaced by the bucolic."

On their way home, Alexandra asked Konrad to take her on a ride to his favorite part of the country, away from this city.

"You will think that I suffer from Russian paranoia, but among these gross people I do not feel at ease. I want to tell you about the things that happened to me. Besides I have not been on horseback with you for an eternity and you once described the country around Berlin as beautiful."

Rheinsberg

1904

They traveled by train north for almost an hour. Konrad rented horses at a stable he remembered from his student years. The land was flat and green, strewn with small, dark lakes surrounded by reeds in shallow depressions, tall woods of red pines, the sour smell of an overgrown, waterlogged moor. On the horizon towered billows of white clouds. Their horses kicked up the light, sandy soil of the path, two deep ruts separated by a ridge of grass. How different this country was from her own land. Protestant, frugal, of a clear transparent blue-green sobriety, bare of sensuality. Konrad's land.

Konrad, happily whistled a tune from his student years.

"You know whom I met three weeks ago? You won't guess, Izabel and Marti!"

Surprised he stopped whistling. "Where have they been hiding for all these years?"

"It's a long story. I met them accidentally on a party where to another lost friend had taken me—Vladimir!"

Konrad frowned and his relaxed face clouded over like in the old days, when she had mentioned Vladimir's name. "Vladimir the Beautiful, your arrogant pursuer. We have not seen him either since that visit to Becky's museum."

She smiled at his familiar reaction. "Well," she continued, "the four of us were nearly killed in the bomb attack at the Volkonsky Palais two weeks ago. Did you hear about that?"

Konrad stopped his horse. "You did not tell me that you had been there. What a dreadful thought. How did you get there? Yes, I heard of this attack through the Kandinsky circle. Theosophists? What were you doing among the Theosophists?"

Alexandra drew him out. "A few things in my past you don't know, Mother is distantly related to Mme. Blavatsky. Since my childhood I have heard the most curious tales about this woman and her Theosophists, and the fact that they are officially banned in Russia only added to my curiosity."

Her smile turned into a tease. "Have you not also become interested in Theosophy all of a sudden? It is really a strange coincidence that we both attended Theosophical meetings independently and at nearly the same time."

Konrad looked irritated. "And what about Vladimir? Has he become a Theosophist? I cannot believe it. A new girl friend?"

She laughed, a little too self-sure. "Oh no, I seduced him into accompanying me there."

Konrad frowned preoccupied. "What happened in that bomb attack? Who planted the bomb and how did you escape?" He shook his head.

She laughed. "The bomb explosion was the great unplanned surprise of that evening, but it seems it was the only one in my control. We were saved by a sudden premonition which I had in the middle of all the glittering festivities."

She described the turbulent happenings of that evening, the beautiful intelligentsia, Marti disguised as a Moslem Sufi, the fabulous vegetarian food, Witte and Stolypin, the apparition of *H.P.B.* in the hashish cloud, the Indian Fakir, Badaev, the fake Tibetan medicine man, and their escape in Vladimir's car.

A meadowlark rose warbling into the silk-blue sky. Alexandra followed the tiny spot with

her eyes, and suddenly the bird dropped like a stone.

"You see, that it was high time I returned to your care, my sober Prussian!"

Konrad knitted his brows. "I am trying to imagine Izabel and Marti as Theosophists. I would have never guessed that they had connections to Blavatsky."

"I did not either. They visited me on the following evening to thank me for their 'rescue', and we spent half the night talking about that. Izabel seemed rather disillusioned with Blavatsky, most of whose magic seems to have been exposed as simple conjurer's tricks. Besides Marti has a different problem, I think he is a follower of Trotsky's and the Marxists'. He called himself an opportunist in his relation to the Theosophists who paid for their trip to Central Asia."

Konrad agreed that this sounded more in line with his character. "But is he not endangering himself by leaning so far left?"

"He never said anything like what I am telling you, this is entirely my conjecture. You see why I did not want to talk about these things in public where everybody listens."

Towards noon it became sultry. The clouds in the northwest had piled into an enormous white thunderhead. The sun "stung." A few thatched houses and low brick-farm buildings at the edge of an extended park of mighty, old trees appeared.



Schloss Rheinsberg

The castle came into sight, an unpretentious two story Biedermeier building flanked by two round towers, a rose garden between its horseshoe wings. A bridge spanned the lake.

Konrad pointed at the buildings. "This is Rheinsberg. My favorite *Landschloss*. Here King Friedrich Wilhelm I kept his young son Friedrich II under house arrest after the son had tried to flee from his authoritarian father with a boyfriend. Katte. The young man, was executed

under Friedrich's eyes. Friedrich was allowed to keep himself a coterie of philosophers, literati, and musicians there. Later he said that these had been the happiest years of his life."

They rode along an *Allee* of blooming linden, their intoxicating scent floated in the airless shade under the trees like lakes of forgetfulness. After the noiseless sand paths the horses clanked along the cobblestone pavement of an arrow-straight road that made the distance to the castle seem like miles. They were glad to find some cool under the park's trees.

The faded gilt roof of a Chinese teahouse came into view at the moment the first thunderclap broke.

Konrad spurred his horse into a fast gallop. "Quick, let's get to the Chinese kiosk before the rain comes down."

With a blinding flash of lightening followed by deafening thunder the clouds broke. The kiosk was deserted, boarded up and locked, but its eaves afforded ample cover for the horses and themselves.

Alexandra's hair hung in wet streaks over her face, her drenched blouse stuck to her skin. As usual she wore nothing under. Konrad watched her pull her blouse over her head. Deliberately slow she hung it on one of the baroque ornaments. For a minute she hesitated. With a challenging look, she took everything off and ran stark naked into the warm rain.

Laughing and teasing him she danced through the meadow.

A second flash very close. Alexandra a black witch madly beckoning from the blinding inferno.

Konrad, paralyzed, was still undecided. After the thunder had rolled away, she began to sing a Georgian love song in the streaming rain. Overcome by desire he ran after her.

As fast as the torrential thunderstorm had come upon them it was over. The sun came out. They dried their clothes sitting in the seclusion of the chintzy kiosk like Adam and Eve after the fall: happy.

Relieved from the heat, frogs and birds began to sing. Somewhere a cuckoo counted to nine.

"Vladimir has changed," began Alexandra as they cobbled along the *allee* again. She felt the irresistible need to get her story over with before this day passed.

"He lives like a haunted man in constant fear of the Okhrana, hiding on their estate most of the time. His father was arrested once more. Vladimir has lost none of his elitist views, but much of his *hauteur* is gone."

"Where did you meet him, if he is that elusive?"

"At Kluchkov's one day. I was sitting in the stacks looking for the books I brought you—in fact Vladimir suggested all three of them—when he came in hoping to find his first volume of poetry. He was much taken aback to come upon me so unexpectedly. I was hidden from his view, you see."

She fidgeted with the bridle. Her horse threw up its head and neighed. "You know that for years I wanted to settle my old account with him, but I sensed that it was too late. He had changed. *My* old charges had been preempted."

She pulled on the reins. Her horse misunderstanding her intentions and nervously danced a few steps until she could reign it in again. "He was very elusive that day, but I felt that I wanted to find out what was underneath the new Vladimir and invited him for a day's ride

along the coast north of Lakhta."

Her horse stood and Alexandra glanced at Konrad uncertain how to continue, hoping that he would come to her rescue, that he would say something and reveal his thoughts.

Konrad did not look at her, a mocking expression hung around his lips. "Did you find out how and why he had changed so much?"

My God, she thought, does he not guess that I made love to Vladimir? Before she could collect her thoughts and find the words to explain, a melodious bell-like sound spread across the blue firmament. It was soon answered by second clang at a slightly lower pitch.

"What is this sound?" asked Alexandra puzzled in her deep voice. "Is it a bird?"

Konrad smiled ironically. "It is the mating call of the toad, his female friend answered him, did you hear her?"

A second pair of calls.

"They sit at the edge of the castle's pond after the rain, very ugly to look at, big, slimy, orange-speckled frogs who inhabit the alluvial lakes of Northern Germany, their Latin name is *bombinator*. They blow themselves up to twice their size to make this uncanny sound."

He smiled at her.

Driven to desperation she cried out. "Konrad, I made love to Vladimir on the bluff above the sea at Lisi Nos!"

He continued to smile, kindly. "Yes, I imagined you did."

Mortified, she hung her head.

"Alexandra, you wanted to make love to arrogant Vladimir five years ago. I knew from the time you mentioned his name that you had finally succeeded. What did you learn about him or yourself?"

Konrad was neither upset, nor made fun of her. He was simply asking the only question that mattered to both of them. Perplexed she lost her concept. She was no longer in control of the situation and could not find how to tell him of her new experience.

Konrad tried to help her. "Forgive me for putting down Vladimir. You said that he had changed dramatically, did he get married or become famous?"

Pained by what she perceived was sarcasm, desperately trying to recover her thread, she blurted out Vladimir's story. "He participated in a student demonstration two years ago and was shot in the shoulder. He lost a lot of blood and was in a coma near death for several hours before his sister helped him to come back." Konrad pensive, waited silently for her to continue.

The toads were still calling each other in the bull rushes.

She collected herself. "Do you remember the strange sensation of flying I had at Otto's birth? Vladimir described exactly the same experience to me, but he had it during this coma. He thinks it was a death experience, and ever since I have been trying to understand what that means for me. Can a woman experience her death during childbirth? Or, what would be even more astounding, during the euphoria of a strong orgasm? Are such experiences general? Can this happen to anybody under extreme physical stress? Can one *learn* how to fly?"

She sighed and looked at him. Uncertain she continued. "Your matter of fact acceptance of my first adultery—as everybody else would call it—completely derailed me. I answered your question about Vladimir honestly, but I need time to understand how I can let you participate in the overwhelming consequences of this experience. In a certain way it turned all my emotions upside down."

Konrad, moved by her plea, finally did what she longed for. He dismounted, helped her

off her horse, and embraced her. Arm in arm they walked across the bridge to look at the blooming roses in the castle's garden.

On their way back Alexandra was pensive and downcast. She berated herself for her urgency to confess her tryst—at least that was how it appeared to her now, unjustly she knew. She had deprived herself of the possibility to let Konrad partake in her new knowledge.

But what depressed her even more was that Konrad had seemingly lost his newfound spontaneity. Her vacillations had put them both back onto the old track: Konrad the generous, smiling sage, and she the frivolous, young temptress.

"I do believe that my experience with Vladimir has a meaning for both of us, and yet I feel guilty."

Konrad shook his head. "Why should you feel guilty? Because you made love to Vladimir?"

"No, because I robbed you of the exuberant happiness which Katharina had given you. We are back on the same road we were on before, and I don't quite understand how that happened."

"Beloved woman," he laughed and pointed to the path ahead of them, "don't you see that I have carefully chosen another, a new path for us?"

Munich

1904

With much rumbling, shrouded in clouds of smoke and steam, their train pulled into the *Hauptbahnhof* in Munich. The four travelers tumbled from their carriage, first Konrad with Otto in his arm, followed by Alexandra in a magnificent wide-brimmed, soft hat, and last Elisabeth.

Katharina, who had restlessly paced the platform, fell into Alexandra's arms. She was all smiles, kisses, and affection.

"You know everything? You forgive me?" rejoiced an exuberant Katharina. Alexandra held her tightly embraced. Both had tears in their eyes. Konrad stood aside and watched the two women with a shy, embarrassed smile.

Katharina freed herself and put her arms around him. "But Konrad this is marvelous, why are you so mum? I have looked forward to this reunion with such apprehension. I am so happy to have you both back."

Infected by her friend, Alexandra joined the fray and put her arms around the two.

Konrad with his graying beard, immobilized by the crowing Otto on his shoulders, stood between them like a huge, patriarchal oak and smiled, a little condescendingly, on his two women, while Otto grabbed his mother's new hat and waved it triumphantly in the air.

In the arrival hall a breathless Niko came running towards them with a bunch of flowers in all colors shouting from afar. "Alexandra! Konrad! I am late, but I love you, and it is so good to see you. It's been so long."

He held the bouquet high above his head to embrace his sister, then pushed the flowers into her arms.

"Niko, flowers?"

He blushed. "They have such beautiful flowers in the market here. Look all the colors of Bavaria!"

Konrad had told Alexandra, "I found a large apartment on the top floor of a house on quiet Thiersch-Strasse, very close to the river. The furnishings are not entirely our taste, but the apartment comes with everything you will need, bed sheets, china, pots and pans, even a telephone!"

The university had connected him with the owner, Professor Sommerfeld, a physicist who would be on leave for a year to the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, England. It was pure luck, the Sommerfelds had been most pleased to rent the place with all their belongings to him.

"So that is where the famous professor lives," exclaimed Niko when they arrived at the place. He explained that he was the man with whom he wanted to do his dissertation.

"He is one of the most respected theoretical physicists. He was only very recently lured to Munich. His institute will become a Mecca for theoretical physics."

"So you like it in Munich?" asked Alexandra. "And physics has turned out to be the right subject?"

"Lexako, you have no idea how advanced they are here compared to Russia, and everyone is highly excited and works like crazy. Oh, yes, you stirred me out of my Georgian

lethargy and got me into this adventure." He laughed. "I will never forget the argument we had that day!"

She grinned, and teased her beloved brother. "And you have a new, attractive girlfriend, Konrad told me."

Niko blushed. "Claudia is very anxious to meet you."

"Come here," shouted Konrad, "they even have an icebox!"

They all followed him into the kitchen.

"You fill this thing with ice blocks which the beer breweries make and will deliver to your door. On certain days you can smell the malt from the breweries all over town."

Two of the rooms had mansard windows and the master bedroom had a large balcony towards the south.

"Just like in Tiflis!" commented Alexandra. "Even the furnishings remind me of my parents' house."

Konrad suggested that they all have supper in the beer garden at the *Chinesische Turm*, the Chinese Tower in the *Englische Garten*. Fascinated, Alexandra watched Niko nonchalantly pick up the telephone, crank it several times, and talk most animatedly into the funnel that had scared her so much. Niko invited Claudia to join them at the beer garden.

She smiled at him. "I see, you have learned how to have intimate conversations over the telephone." She shook her head. "I had an opportunity recently to try that, but I panicked before this black, impersonal hole!"

Niko pulled a face at his sister. "Lexako, you have been living in the provinces. You will soon get used to it!"

In the long twilight of the warm evening half of Munich seemed to have congregated under the *Englische Turm*. The long wooden tables under the chestnut trees were crowded with people.

"This is so much like Georgia!" Alexandra said, touched by nostalgia. "Look, entire families, a mother who nurses her baby, groups of men, and they all talk to each other!"

They were sitting on long benches rubbing shoulders—workers, students, academics, men and women, children talking, joking, eating—and everyone had at least one huge *Stein* of beer in front of him or her, even the nursing mother.

"Next time I will bring Otto along!"

Katharina and Niko finally found a table to share with a family who moved over to make room for them. Alexandra sat next to the young woman admiring her two children.

"Where are you from, you are not from here," asked the plain-faced woman very directly but not unfriendly.

"Ach, Anna," said her husband, "leave the strangers to themselves."

Anna apologized, but good-natured curiosity lit up her haggard face. Alexandra had difficulties understanding her, she spoke a strange German.

Katharina laughing came to her rescue. She explained in Bavarian that her friends had just arrived from Russia, that Alexandra was a physician and Konrad a professor who was going to teach at the university for a year. Anna's husband's dark-face changed, and in no time, Alexandra had the older boy on her lap examining his ear, which according to his father was infected.

Alexandra suggested washing it with tincture of camomile and arnica. Katharina laughed

affectionately: "*Frau Doktor* in action! You are doing very well! *Mein Gott*, so much has happened to you since Florence! Do tell me!"

Alexandra described the events of the last four years, Otto's birth, their expedition to the High Caucasus, the restless political situation in St. Petersburg, and her relentless drive to get through her medical studies. Everybody listened and asked questions including Anna and her husband

Niko and Konrad had gone to get some beer and food and returned with Claudia who had been searching for them among the crowd.

Alexandra's eyebrows arched in surprise. Claudia appeared entirely different from the girl she had thought Niko was looking for. Not tall, but delicately proportioned, straight dark hair done in a boyish page-cut, and a narrow intelligent face with two deep-set brown eyes that seemed to hold the knowledge of centuries. Despite her smile and lively, fluid gestures an aura of veiled tragedy surrounded her.

She has mediumistic powers! Persephone crossed Alexandra's mind, but her fleeting defensive mistrust was dispelled by Claudia's guileless exclamation, "I am so happy to finally meet Niko's beloved sister. You have no idea how often he talks of you, Alexandra."

Alexandra recalled that Claudia studied medicine, and soon the two were engaged in a lively discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the Munich hospitals where Alexandra intended to spend her second clinical year.

The beer arrived, *zwei Kleine* for Alexandra and Claudia and each *ein ganzes Mass* for the others. Konrad had also thoughtfully brought two big glasses for their new friends. To accompany the beer he brought *Bratwurst mit Sauerkraut*, sweet mustard, and huge pretzels.

Taken aback by the gigantic size of the beer glasses and the pretzels, Alexandra watched with mild horror how Katharina attacked her beer with gusto. Blond, full-bosomed Katharina, happy and spontaneous, completely at home, was the irrepressible life of the evening. What a robust woman compared to the fragile, complicated Claudia.

Katharina raised her glass to this unexpected, happy reunion, and wished herself many more such *gemütliche* evenings. Everyone clinked glasses.

Later, when Katharina distracted the others with a description of Kandinsky's painting classes, Anna asked Alexandra in a hushed voice. "How long are you married, Frau Alexandra?"

Alexandra told her, and Anna asked surprised. "And you have only one child? I suffered through two pregnancies in less than three years. How did you keep from getting pregnant? The many births are too much for me, but the church is preaching that we should have more children."

How often Alexandra had heard this plea from the indigent women she treated in the workers' housings in St. Petersburg. But this was no place to discuss such matters. At first Alexandra considered giving Anna her address, but her mentioning of the church kept her from doing so.

She looked at Anna and her youngest child. "Are you still nursing?"

"Yes," said Anna, "the midwife says that as long as I am nursing I cannot get pregnant, that's why."

"That is not true, and you know it, Anna. You conceived your second child when you were nursing the first, am I right?"

Anna nodded.

"Look, I will give you a recipe for a strong tea that will induce your period. You can drink it after making love, but you must not use it when you are nursing, you might kill the child. As long as you are feeding a baby you must keep your husband away from you, that is the only safe way."

"It's so difficult, doctor Alexandra," Anna said with a deep sigh.

Eventually, Alexandra wrote a recipe for a herbal mixture that she had used herself on a slip of paper and told her to drink two glasses of it for three days in a row after making love. "You must remember what I told you, use it only after you weaned the baby and never drink more. This is dangerous medicine."

"Yes, doctor Alexandra." Anna nodded and quietly hid the paper in her décolleté.

Depressed, Alexandra thought of the plight of women in these patriarchal societies and resolved to spend some time in the university library searching for the contraceptive knowledge of the past, which had been suppressed by the church and the medical profession. Her search in the libraries in St. Petersburg had been unsuccessful. Such information was locked and only available to the medical chairholders. One of her hopes was that the revolution would free the Russian women from that yoke.

When Anna said good-bye to take her children and husband home she kissed Alexandra wishing her health and a happy life.

"This was a *great* honor, Alexandra, considering the differences in social status between her and you," said Claudia with a didactic undertone.

When Alexandra described Anna's request, Claudia raised her eyebrows and with condescension in her voice said. "You were well advised not to give her your name and address, you could have got yourself into real trouble with the authorities in this deeply Catholic, patriarchal country."

Bristling Alexandra said with an unnecessarily sharp undertone. "My first thought was *not* my safety, but how to help this abused woman. You may not have seen as many female victims of unrestrained social pressures to reproduce as I have among the uneducated, impoverished workers of St. Petersburg. For these women children are a scourge. Modern medicine doesn't know the simplest details about the physiology of conception or the pharmacology of its prevention, despite the fact that this information was known to the ancient physicians and still exists among the women in our Georgian villages. I am determined to face down this male-dominated medical establishment and learn as much about birth control as I can."

Claudia's tired eyes looked at Alexandra wearily. "Yes, I *do* understand what you mean and share your concern. We have a similar situation in our villages, where the priests determine the number of pregnancies. Bavaria, despite its superficial *laissez-faire*, is a deeply Catholic, patriarchal, backward country. Some day I would like to discuss this subject with you at a different place."

On the way through the dark *Englische Garten* back to the tram in Schwabing, Konrad talked animatedly to Katharina. Alexandra and Niko, Claudia on his arm, lagged behind.

Quietly Alexandra mused about her sudden, sharp impatience with Claudia. What had irked her and had turned up her Georgian temper? Her sharp retort about birth control had only been a verbal explosion of some deeper crisis in herself which she could not name.

She looked at Claudia on Niko's arm—the complete opposite of Katharina's—sensitive, dark, her emotions controlled by an intelligent mind and an excellent education - "Am I jealous

of her?"

She had always loved this brother of hers more than was normal between siblings. At times she worried about her attraction to her handsome, Georgian brother. She could see that Niko was in love with Claudia. Was the cause of her irritation an impulse from this dark side of her heart? She could not figure herself out.

When they parted she embraced and kissed Claudia without any reservation, and in that instant she thought she knew what had provoked her. Claudia was much like herself, complicated, dark, and with a sense for the tragic. However, Claudia seemed to lack her often violent passions, and her outburst must have been an attempt to upset Claudia's equanimity. She envied Claudia the control of her emotions. I have still much to learn about myself, she thought. A trace of doubt remained, however.

"Look," Alexandra said to Niko with a laugh, trying to shake off her annoyance with herself, "two Germans followed by two and a half Georgians."

And to herself: Niko is about to marry his sister!

In that at least she would be right. A few days later Niko, with a trace of self-consciousness, said, "I really would like to marry Claudia. She is so much like you, Lexako, but she treats me much more kindly. Besides she plays the piano most beautifully."

Alexandra asked him to tell her more about Claudia, she had, after all, only met her very briefly. Niko told her that Claudia Dahl came from a family of medical men, her father was a clinical psychotherapist. Her mother, an accomplished pianist, was the dynamic center of their family. She came from an old Munich family of painters and artists. Her house was the meeting place of the famous and the controversial, artists, writers, and musicians.

Niko blushed. "Claudia and her mother have opened a whole new world of experiences to me, above all in music, about which I knew next to nothing. You remember the flute you gave me for Christmas five years ago? I have been taking lessons, and ever so often Claudia and I play flute sonatas together."

Alexandra smiled. "Your description of Claudia sounds like an advertisement for a young, nubile lady from the best society—very German—what about yourself?"

Abashed, Niko stuttered, "She says she loves me."

Laughing out loud she replied. "Dear brother, I know that."

She hugged him. "She chose well. Given time, she may even teach you how to give words to your emotions and make you comprehend your own love, which is not always easy for a woman to do."

The Dahl's House
Katharina Weisshuber
Munich 1904

The telephone rang for the first time. Suspicious, Alexandra picked up the receiver. Claudia's voice, far and alien, crackled and sputtered from the instrument. "Alexandra, this is Claudia. Come and visit me and bring Otto along. How about in the afternoon when the men are at work? I want to see you without Niko and introduce you to my mother."

Alexandra, still uneasy with the contraption that had such an alienating effect on Claudia's voice, accepted.

The Dahl's lived in Solln, a quiet part of southern Munich where 'better' people lived. She took the tram and from the station walked, Otto on her hand, along the tree-shaded streets of well-kept villas each in its own small park.

She was surprised to find the Dahl's house to be an exceedingly stark, box-like building with an odd roof and large, plain windows of various sizes randomly distributed over its bleak walls. How could anyone want to live in such a house? It looked as uninviting as a castle. For a while she stared at it in disbelief and then rang the bell. A small plaque announced *Prof. Dr. R. Dahl, Psychotherapy, By appointment only*.

A solicitous maid in servant uniform opened, but before she could announce them, Claudia came running. "Come in, come in, we have been waiting for you. Greetings, and this is Otto."

Alexandra unwrapped the bouquet of flowers she had brought following Niko's example, a few red roses amid dark-blue delphiniums. The maid took the wrapping paper out of her hand. "Oh, how beautiful," said Claudia, "give them to mother, she will love them."

Otto allowed Claudia to take him by the hand and lead him into the living room.

As forbidding as the outside of the house had been, its inside was dazzling. The light! Simple, blond oak floors covered by scattered oriental rugs, a few modern paintings on the plain white walls, a spare selection of antique furniture, a mirror in a gilded baroque frame in the entry hall—contrasted by a black grand-piano, three contemporary easy chairs, and a couch, and all was flooded from three sides by the light from the curtainless windows.

Speechless, Alexandra had never seen a room like this. She felt as if floating on light in its uncluttered space.

Claudia hugged her smiling. "I am so happy you came. Konrad told me that you liked beautifully simple things. A few years ago Father had this house built especially for my mother by a young Viennese architect. Our neighbors were up in arms because of its stark outside, but now that the architect received several awards for his designs they have acquiesced."

Claudia's mother entered, a tall, slender woman with an even, lovable face, copious graying, once chestnut-brown hair, and laughing brown eyes. She must have been a captivating beauty when young.

A little awkward—she had never brought flowers before—Alexandra presented her bouquet.

"They are wonderful, thank you, Alexandra," Claudia's mother said, combining the

formal *Sie* with her first name. "Let's go to the kitchen and find a vase for them," she added disarmingly.

While Mrs. Dahl carefully trimmed each of the flowers and one after the other arranged them in a glass vase, she asked Alexandra about her trip, her visit to Berlin, the apartment, and with a motherly smile, whether she did not feel homesick.

"After having met your charming brother, I am no longer surprised by your excellent German. But Niko, all by himself, was quite homesick in the beginning." Mrs. Dahl smiled. "Together, Claudia and I took him in and tried to make him feel loved and at home."

"Yes," Alexandra returned her knowing smile, "he seems as much attached to you as to Claudia. Thank you for your care of and devotion to him. It was I who sent him into exile. Under your tutelage he has become a different person."

Claudia had disappeared upstairs and a few minutes later returned with a large box of children's toys, a train, a doll, a teddy bear. Otto, who had not seen any toys besides the few they had brought, was soon playing happily in the living room. Mrs. Dahl placed the flowers on a small table near the window. "Look, Alexandra, how they glow in the afternoon light!" And indeed, it was as if they had been the missing touch of color in the room.

Over tea the three women had an easy, completely relaxed conversation. Alexandra was asked to describe her parents house and life in Tiflis, St. Petersburg, and her medical studies.

Slowly Mrs. Dahl brought the conversation to Alexandra's social engagement. "I hear from Claudia that you bring a strong social commitment to your medicine. I truly applaud that decision, we need good doctors who are willing to help the underprivileged more than our fashionable specialists."

Alexandra blushed. "The health conditions among the Russian workers in St. Petersburg are so depressing that you can hardly imagine them here."

Mrs. Dahl smiled. "In Berlin and in the Rhineland exist similar industrial slums. However, Claudia says that your main concern is to help women control the number of their children. This is an area that is hardly restricted to the destitute, but how are you proposing to do that? Here we know only of abortions and those have to be performed secretly because they are illegal."

From previous discussions Alexandra knew that even her medically trained, female colleagues could get highly irrational about this subject. It was dangerous territory, and she had to choose her words carefully. "I consider abortion justified only in cases where the mother is in grave danger, but there are pharmacological methods to prevent conception or abort a pregnancy about which modern medicine knows and says nothing."

"Our village midwives," added Claudia, "also know all kinds of herbal abortifacients and contraceptive brews. But how can you test the efficacy of such herbal medicines and study their side effects?"

Seeing that she had a surprisingly receptive audience, Alexandra lowered her guard. "I tried some of them, like the one I gave to Anna, on myself."

Mrs. Dahl raised her eyebrows. "I find that extraordinarily dedicated and courageous of you, to experiment with yourself to help your patients."

Alexandra smiled. "I was not quite as heroic as you imagine." She described her agreement with Konrad not to have another child until she had finished medical school.

"Another method is to observe the days during which a woman is fertile. Again little is

know in medicine of when these days are. From my experience it seems to be a week after my period. It requires intelligence, long observations of oneself, and a cooperative husband. This method is useless with people who cannot read and write."

Mrs. Dahl nodded. "Still these methods seem preferable compared to illegal abortions under unhygienic conditions."

Alexandra disagreed. "Most abortive herbal concoctions have very unpleasant side effects. I plan to use the library of this enlightened university to make a systematic study of the contraceptive knowledge of the ancients like Dioskorides and Soranus. In St. Petersburg books of these authors are locked up. In addition I do have another problem. My Greek is very limited."

"Oh," exclaimed Claudia, "there I can help, thanks to our Bavarian gymnasium my Greek is good enough!"

Alexandra smiled. How unexpected to find a collaborator in Claudia!

"Konrad, have you ever seen a house that completely and perfectly describes the character of its owner?" exclaimed Alexandra next day.

He thought for a moment. "Yes, Giulietta Malatesta's mausoleum in Rimini! But are you talking about the Dahl's house? I am sure it is not a mausoleum!"

Alexandra had to laugh. "Well, at first sight you could almost think it was. When you face it, it appears as forbidding as a castle. And then you enter and you find yourself in large, perfectly beautiful, open spaces flooded by light. I had the feeling I was floating on light in their uncluttered living room. But the surprise is that this perfectly describes Mrs. Dahl's personality. Can you imagine her?"

"I have never seen such a case, but I see the 'forever elegantly underdressed Dadiani' in your description. Have you found your match? Do you like Mrs. Dahl? You were less than enamored with her beautiful daughter?"

"Oh, you miserable German Sufi, always pointing out the negative sides of the world. Yes, I like Mrs. Dahl. I have also found a serious collaborator in my search for Dioskorides' contraceptive knowledge, believe it or not, in Claudia. She reads Greek, and we have decided to do this research together."

Konrad smiled patronizingly. "Your reprimand two weeks ago must have impressed her. Watch out that you two don't get blacklisted by the Catholic Church when you publish that paper."

Konrad, searching for news from Russia sat reading the newspaper at his favorite café. The coverage by the German papers of events in St. Petersburg was spotty at best. This café kept a rack of several papers on long yardsticks for their guests. He was waiting for Katharina.

Café Arzmilller occupied a corner of a quiet courtyard off *Theatiner Strasse* across from the *Feldherren Halle*. If he bent sideways he could see past the umbrella over his table the baroque towers of the Theatiner Church. His office at the university was around the corner only a few steps away.

Katharina was late, his coffee getting cold. During the past month, since Alexandra's arrival, they had met here often. He shook his head. He had reported to Alexandra every one of his meetings with Katharina, and she had not shown any signs of anxiety. He was proud of

her, he knew no other woman who would knowingly tolerate that her husband met another woman.

Since Alexandra had arrived Katharina seemed to have changed. Not that she was less cheerful, on the contrary, she was dancing on a taut rope between him and Alexandra like a sleepwalker, avoiding all dangerous situations that could cause her to fall. The vibrations he felt from being obliged to hold onto his end of that rope were an entirely novel experience. And Alexandra, what did she feel? He shied from asking her.

Katharina appeared in the archway to the courtyard. He watched her every movement.

How dissimilar they were, Katharina and Alexandra. The one sweet, soft, and seductive, the other self-sure, proud, and his continuing supreme challenge. Was he tired of the demanding relationship with Alexandra? Katharina was so much easier to be with. In her presence he did not have to use his mind all the time. Whatever it was, for the time being he needed them both.

She greeted him with a shy kiss on his cheek. "May I get you a piece of cake or *Torte*?" she asked already on her way to the *confiserie*.

When she came back she sat down across from him, well out of his reach.

She is withholding herself, he thought, that is what has changed. Absentmindedly he heard her say, "You were reading the papers, what is happening in Georgia and Russia? I long to be with Alexandra, I have not seen her for two weeks."

Before he could tell her the disturbing news from St. Petersburg, a waitress brought their two *Torte* sections, one with whipped cream, the other without. "The *Sahnestück* is for the gentleman," Katharina teased with a mocking smile. "You like *Schlagsahne*, don't you?"

She reached over with her fork and with a smile snatched a spoonful of his whipped cream. "Please allow me to eat a little of this airy temptation on the sly, *Herr Professor*."

She licked the last speck of cream off her fork. "You look so serious today. Do you have bad news? What would you think of going on a pilgrimage to Andechs? The three, or if you wish, all five of us? Then I am only the fifth wheel on your royal carriage? It is so beautiful out there at this time of the year."

Oh, stop staring at her, he told himself, and self-consciously destroyed the beauty of his piece of cake with his fork.

She began to laugh. "Konrad, first you look at me as if you want to devour me and now you destroy the innocent cake. Come, let's be easy on each other. I feel so happy since Alexandra is here, I walk between the two of you and love you both equally."

"I am concerned for our friends in St. Petersburg." He evaded her dark eyes. "After the assassination of the head of internal security the government has imposed martial law in St. Petersburg. We had hoped that with that man disposed of, the political situation would ease up. Now they are looking for a culprit." Konrad made a gloomy face.

Katharina smiled radiantly. "May I divert you from your worries? I had come to ask your help and company."

He nodded and they finished their torte and got up. She put her arm into his and her solid, warm closeness restored his balance.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Oh," she smiled enigmatically, "I want you to be my husband for a couple of hours. Or, if you prefer, my rich gentleman friend."

He frowned. "It depends on what services you expect from me!"

"I urgently need some new clothes and your advice. I always have to choose and pay those things myself and have nobody who admires what I buy. Besides it will give me the opportunity—and the excuse—to flirt shamelessly with you, and all you have to do is play the jaded gentleman and pay afterwards!"

He disengaged his arm from hers and laughed briefly. "But you know that I never have any money in my pocket."

"Oh, well," she said coquettishly, "I will pay you for this nicety," and slipped a hundred mark note into his pocket.

He pulled the bill out again and looked at it. "This is a nice, crisp bank note for my dubious services." He stuck the note back into his pocket. Shaking his head he said. "You will rob me of my last self-esteem, but I like the idea! Where to do you want to be taken?"

She put her arm back under his and steered him into a small boutique around the corner. "I need a new dress. So now don't embarrass me."

Konrad put on a jaded air. "The lady needs some new clothes, would you show us some of your dresses, maybe something loose and airy for a warm summer day."

Katharina played the coy mistress.

The sales lady assessed them discreetly and sized up Katharina. While she disappeared in the back of the store, Konrad seated himself in a comfortable easy chair and crossed his legs. "Shape up, you know I don't like demure women," he growled at her below his breath. "Besides I am richer than that lady thinks. Shh, here she comes, don't let her know."

The sales lady held up a two-part dress with a white, ample blouse and a long, gray, flowing skirt, suggesting, "Maybe you want to try this ensemble, so we can get an idea of what it should be that you like."

Katharina vanished with the dress into a dressing room in back of the store. Konrad knew that this was not the dress for her.

"Do you also carry some nice, wide-brimmed fedoras to complement the dress?" He thought of the fun Alexandra and he had had in Berlin selecting a hat for her. The lady brought a collection of three *grandes chapeaux*, feathers and all.

Katharina returned dancing and shimmying through the store. This outfit was not what she needed, not even when he added the most fashionable of the hats. The dress was elegant enough, but one that every woman wore these days.

Konrad, without blinking an eye, asked the lady, "Don't you have something more colorful, more daring, maybe with a shorter skirt?"

Well, of course, she had that too. "Maybe your wife would like one of the ethnic outfits that are so *à la mode* these days."

How easy it was to make her his wife!

The saleslady laid out an entire Hungarian "peasant" outfit, a colorful embroidered blouse, skirt, and red leather boots. "This dress will instantly transform your wife."

"Well," guffawed Konrad, "it certainly will make you into an entirely new woman. Go try it on, Katharina, and don't forget to kick your legs when you come back."

When she reappeared she had let her long, blond hair down and produced an imitation *Csardas* for him. The skirt barely covered her pretty knees.

Then Katharina made the mistake to say: "I really like this, Konrad!"

Which was supposed to mean that she too began to enjoy this fashion show, but the saleslady immediately seized upon the opportunity and declared, "Madame, this ensemble truly

brings out the best in you, it has been specially made for us in Budapest, first quality!"

Which was a lie, Konrad decided. "Totally unexpected possibilities in your personality are surfacing, Katharina. You should wear such a combination for the next *Fasching*—but forgive me, I cannot see myself going with you to a reception at the Dahls' like that."

Konrad got up. "I am afraid, I cannot describe what I am looking for. May I have a look myself?" Without waiting for permission he walked into the racks followed by the anxious saleslady. He started to part the blouses looking for a loose, colorfully printed silk blouse. The skirt would find itself.

"Sir," the sales lady said alarmed by his invasion of her domain, "these are the wrong sizes, you have to look here."

After pulling out half a dozen blouses in various colors he found the blouse *sans pareille*, an outrageous silk print of large red, yellow, and orange swirls on a dark, wine-red ground with a deep *décolleté*. Triumphant he held the blouse up to Katharina.

"That is it, if it fits you."

"Sir, I have to congratulate you on your excellent taste," stammered the sales lady disbelieving, "this is a collector's item, a limited edition hand-screened master print, which the young painter Oskar Kokoschka originally designed for his mistress Alma Mahler."

Choosing a suitable skirt Konrad left to the saleslady, who, finally attuned to her customers, found a neutral but color-matched, long, supple wool skirt.

Meanwhile Katharina had glanced at the price tag on the blouse. She turned to Konrad and pulled a face.

Konrad grinned. "Wait until you see yourself in this."

Katharina needed an eternity to change, when she reemerged, she was glowing and gave Konrad a kiss. She looked truly stunning.

They spent another quarter of an hour to find a complimentary hat, a fairly modest, soft, wide-rimmed affair without trimmings that would enhance Katharina's *mystique* without distracting from her blouse.

Konrad, delighted and completely restored, paid sixty-five Reichsmarks, a small weekly salary or a train trip, first class from Munich to Berlin.

"Well," said Konrad dryly, when they were back on the street, "thirty-five marks left." He added pensively, "Henri, my Sufi master-goldsmith once said, 'you have to make love and beautiful things for a woman until she appears more beautiful than she herself imagined possible.' What shall we do with the remainder of this afternoon? The only way to top off this experience is to make love."

"Oh, no!" burst out Katharina. "No, my dear friend, now we will go to your place, have tea with Alexandra, and I will model these treasures for her."

Alexandra with a pang of her heart saw at once how excited the two were. Had they spent the afternoon in bed?

Katharina pulled out her acquisitions, and with bouts of laughter describing the happening at the boutique, happily put on blouse, skirt, and hat.

Alexandra, however, was less than charmed and fought hard against a temptation to destroy Katharina's happiness. "Listen, you two adult children, now I want to be taken out! I sat at home all afternoon whilst you were having fun. I have never been to the cinema in my life."

They went to the late show in an old cellar between *Theatiner* and *Residenz Strasse* which showed three silent films by Georges Méliès.

When the lights came on again Alexandra had her anger against Katharina under control, but could not admit to herself that the diagnosis of her black mood was jealousy, instead of her husband she destroyed the films.

"What a horrible romantic Kitsch this was!" She declared with finality. "The film were like the flip-books we used to buy in the bazaar when I was small, only faster."

Konrad and Katharina silently accepted the dark cloud, which had descended on their innocent day.

Georgian Gloom overcomes Alexandra Claudia and Dioskorides

1904

Pursued by irrational fears, Alexandra railed against fate. Helpless, Konrad began to avoid her. With some excuse or other he would stay late at work.

One night he called to say that he would be detained at some faculty meeting and be home late, after supper. That evening Alexandra lost her head. Against all better knowledge, she suspected him to be with Katharina. She left the house in panic and wandered through the streets of Munich for hours, sobbing.

"He cannot do this to me. I love him and need him! He cannot leave me. I have nowhere to go, no place where I am at home. He has abducted me into this exile, where I am lost. He holds my life in his hands." Tears ran down her face.

"Konrad!" she cried in despair, "don't abandon me!"

People turned to stare at her. She did not care.

Somewhere in a back street of the *Lehel*, she passed an unpretentious church built into a row of houses. A curved facade, a brass plate: *St. Anna im Lehel, Johann Michael Fischeri fecit 1732*. In her despair she went in hoping for a quiet place to calm down.

Overwhelmed by the splendor and the airiness of its space, surrounded by colors, angels, flourishing, gilded ornaments, under a ceiling covered with an huge fresco, she sat down in one of the pews and let her eyes wander. Most astonishing are, she thought, the quiet proportions of this space.

She followed the curve of the ceiling from one of the four columns to the center and lost all her heaviness. What clear, serene beauty, how is it possible that color, stucco, and space harmonize like music? She thought of the churches of Russia, which resembled overloaded, gilded caves, how strange, this was a Christian faith completely unknown to her, of a wild joy, an ecstatic, extravagant otherworldliness—very different from the heavy Italian Baroque.

She forgot time and herself and left only when the church filled with somber people, and a priest appeared to celebrate the evening service.

Her head had cleared.

"It is my Georgian penchant to wallow in gloom and despair. Katharina has nothing to do with it, and Konrad is honest and really innocent. This is the moloch of jealousy who is trying to eat me up. I have to free myself from it, and all three of us will be blissfully happy."

When she came home, a worried Konrad was waiting for her. She embraced him. "Forgive me, I was overcome by my fear of losing you. I shall try to love you and Katharina better. Give me time, please."

"Alexandra," Konrad said. "Brace yourself, ours are small worries. I have bad news from St. Petersburg. Things are slipping towards a catastrophe."

Alexandra paled. "Did you find mail from home?"

"Yes, I found a letter from Deda to you in my office mail. According to the newspapers everything looks bleak and dark in Russia. Nicholas is clueless and improvises more

irresponsibly than ever. Instead of relaxing the tensions after Plehve's death, the government proclaimed martial law in St. Petersburg. There have been executions, strikes are paralyzing the city. The Japanese are tightening their noose around Port Arthur. Nebulous rumors abound of mutinies on the ships of the expeditionary fleet that was to relieve Port Arthur. How long can the Russian garrison there hold out against the overwhelming Japanese forces?"

Alexandra opened Deda's letter. She wrote in her less-than-perfect German, undoubtedly to make the censor's job more difficult. Her words were carefully chosen, but her gloom was glaring. A mutiny in the garrison in Tiflis had been suppressed, Ilia was under arrest, and her mother was very weak and would not live much longer.

And here, in this peaceful corner of the world, they spent their days visiting friends, going shopping, and playing frivolous games with each other. A wave of guilt distracted her from her own gloom. However, she was even less able to untangle these feelings than her confused jealousy.

When threatened by her Georgian moroseness, Alexandra had in the past submerged herself in some constructive work. She decided to call Claudia to start searching for Dioskorides in the university library.

They found a magnificent late-Byzantine manuscript of Dioskorides' *De Materia Medica*, which they were allowed to read in a special room under the supervision of a library official. It contained a beautifully written Greek text and drawings of plants. Claudia had a hard time with its medieval Greek and had to consult a special dictionary constantly. They split the job, Claudia copied the Greek text and Alexandra looked up unknown words which they noted in the margin of their copy.

Delighted they discovered that Dioskorides' indications were described by very explicit terms: *atokos* (anti-offspring): postcoital contraceptive; *ekmpallein tou embryon* (expel the embryo): abortifacients; *phthoros tou embryon*: late-term destruction of an embryo, etc. However, many of the plants Dioskorides mentioned were not in the dictionary. They would have to consult additional botanical literature to identify them—and for this reason they asked Konrad for help.

For days Claudia carefully copied the chapters of interest and Alexandra the plant illustrations.

"Tell me, Claudia," Alexandra asked over a cup of coffee, "what does a psychiatrist do? In Russia that profession does not exist. Your mother said that in the cities psychiatry replaces religion."

"Oh well," Claudia began to laugh, "*psyches iatros* is, of course, a 'physician of the psyche,' someone who treats 'psychic disorders' like hysteria, depressions, and schizophrenia. Mother did not exactly say what you heard. She meant, because people in the villages were religious, they relied on the priests to solve their emotional problems. Many people in the cities have broken with religious traditions or consider priests disagreeable, those people take their problems to my father."

"You mean, your father could help me with my depressions if they threaten to devour me?"

Claudia wrinkled her forehead and shook her head. "There is much skepticism towards psychotherapy, the field is young and its methods of treatment seem slow and experimental. He could try, but I don't think your depressions are that complicated, besides you are not rich

enough to afford my father!" She laughed. "It sometimes seems to me that psychotherapy is only for the rich and fashionable. Should I analyze your problem for you?"

Now Alexandra began to laugh. "I think, I do know my problem, but how to cope with my 'emotional disorder' that is the question. What do you think is bothering me?"

"Jealousy! Dear friend, simple old-fashioned jealousy."

Alexandra bit her lip. "Yes, and what does the doctor recommend?"

"To get rid of Katharina, of course!"

Alexandra flared up. "No! That wouldn't do. I cannot throw Katharina out, she is my close friend, and my jealousy has nothing to do with her, it is entirely between Konrad and myself."

"Well, then you have only two other choices, either learn *not* to be jealous or get rid of your dear husband, right?"

Alexandra touched her necklace and with a hostile look replied. "Your logic is excellent, but how can I get rid of Konrad? My entire life depends on this man. I love him."

She broke down in tears. "You have put your finger on the problem, I love both of these people, and I could even explain why. It is I who gets uncontrollably morose. This terrible Georgian affliction of tragic depression. It is not simple, old-fashioned jealousy. I have to find a way not to react viciously when I see Konrad and Katharina happy, they are both innocent. I even attacked you on that first night at the *Chinesische Turm* and you are not even involved in this drama. And two weeks ago I destroyed two harmless films we went to see, just because Konrad had spent the afternoon helping Katharina buy a new blouse. They were so happy. It is not right to hurt them with my impetuosity."

Claudia took her friend into her arms. "I know so little about passionate love, Alexandra, and passionate jealousy must be even harder to live down. Are you afraid that Katharina might take Konrad away from you?"

Alexandra was silent. Finally, from very far away, she said, "I have examined this question and cannot find a *rational* reason for such a fear. Of course, it would be a lie to say that I do not fear such a possibility."

Her friend smiled. "Look Alexandra, it seems to me that the moroser you get, the larger becomes the possibility that Konrad tires of you. In order that Konrad does not leave you out of despair over your fits of jealousy, you have to learn to control your moods and love them both equally."

After they had labored for two weeks over their translation. Konrad asked whether they had done a careful literature search on Dioskorides and the medical knowledge of classical antiquity. They had completely forgotten to do that. Alexandra had known of Dioskorides, and in her excitement to have tracked down the forbidden book and to have Claudia's help, had delved into the translation without much thinking.

They returned to the library and searched the catalogues for translations of the *De Materia Medica* and the *Gynæciorum*, a somewhat later treatise by Soranus. The bibliography of the German Soranus translation (Valentin Rose, Leipzig, 1882) became their key to the entire field of antique pharmacology. The two women were overwhelmed by the wealth of ancient knowledge on gynecology. Fortunately, only a few texts addressed the use of contraceptives.

They finally decided to cross-reference Dioskorides' indications, potions, and plants with

those of Soranus and the plants Alexandra had found in Georgian folk medicine with aunt Sophia and Leist's help.

Konrad became their invaluable expert in identifying the plants. Many of the plants still had the same Greek botanical names that Dioskorides had used, like *artemisia*, *epimedion*, and *aristolochia*.

There were a few surprises: The seeds of the pomegranate, *punica granatum*—which Hades had given Persephone when she arrived in the underworld—turned out to be a very old abortifacient! Konrad had always thought that Hades had given Persephone the seven seeds of the pomegranate for symbolic reasons—*who eats of the pomegranate will be fruitful and be destined for Hades*—it now appeared as if Hades might have given Persephone the seeds to prevent her from bearing a dead child in the underworld!

"Do you remember Deda's Easter play? My whole story of Persephone in the underworld will have to be revised. How can she bear Brimus, if Pluto made her use pomegranate seeds as a contraceptive?"

"Oh, very easily," laughed Alexandra, "she only ate the sweet meat off the seeds and spit out the pits when Pluto was not looking! Persephone was not that dumb."

"Well, maybe Demeter's desperate fight for Persephone's return every year gains a new aspect: to allow Persephone to deliver her children above ground in sunshine. Maybe underground she did after all use pomegranate seeds!"

Not always could Konrad correlate Dioskorides' plant names with known plants, such was the case with the mysterious *silphion*. This plant also appeared in Soranus, and in both texts headed the list of efficient and relatively harmless abortifacients. What was it? Soranus also called it "Cyrenaica juice" which led Claudia and Konrad to discover that the name also appeared in Herodotus (4.169) who reports that *silphion* was cultivated in the Cyrenaica. Rose, unable to identify the plant in his translation of Soranus, made a reference to Plinius' *Natural History* (19.15.38) where it is mentioned under the name *laserpicium*, "*quod Graeci silphion vocant, in Cyrenaica provincia repertum—sucus herbae ferula*." Yet, a little earlier (19.15.35) Plinius reported that the plant had been "extinct for many years."

Konrad was delighted. "Well, of course, it must have been a *ferula*, a fennel, like *ferula asafoetida*, which you encountered in Georgian recipes. But it is peculiar that *silphion* should have been extinct by Plinius' time, less than thirty years after Dioskorides. What happened?"

Wanting to examine the Dioskorides manuscript again, they found that a Professor Wellmann had his hands on the copy.

Wellmann was less than delighted to be pursued by two female competitors, he was also working on a translation of the *Materia Medica*. It took the two women several days to convince the suspicious professor, that they were interested only in a very narrow selection of medical plants and would delight in using his translation instead of their dilettante work of love and excitement.

Wellmann confessed that his translation was unfinished, that he had nothing to show yet. Finally Claudia invited him for tea to her parents' house which predictably melted the professor. At this occasion Alexandra charmed the professor into telling them what he knew about the elusive *silphion*.

Silphion was, in fact, a giant fennel that grew in a small region of the Cyrenaica. Its

abortifacient properties were well-known as early as the fifth century BC viz. Herodotus. *Silphion* was widely used all over the Mediterranean for that purpose, and Cyrene became so rich from its export that the Cyrenian coins carried an image of the plant. Attempts to plant the fennel in other places failed. By the first century AD the demand had risen so steeply that *silphion*, or *laserpicium* to the Romans, was exported by the shipload. The plant was over-harvested and during one extended dry spell became extinct.

He finished his tale with a dirty laugh. "A great tragedy for the expensive courtesans of Rome. *Silphion* had to be replaced by the inferior *ferula asafoetida* in the brothels of Europe."

"Alexandra, are you a typical Georgian woman?" asked Claudia out of the blue while copying some text. "What is Georgia like?"

"Oh, my dear Claudia, both of these questions cannot be answered. I always thought that I am an atypical Georgian woman. However, the longer I am living among non-Georgians the more I become aware of how Georgian I am. Next to Katharina I look very Georgian, my dark, depressive moods are very Georgian, as are my sudden outbursts of temper. Georgia is an old culture and its women are its oldest creatures. Niko and I have been brought up in a westernized family, we speak four languages and feel more at home in Germany, Italy, or France than in Russia...superficially at least. But now I know that we will always be homesick, for what, I still don't really know. Your mother asked me that question, and I have spent a lot of time thinking about it. Our men are terribly prone to that malaise—in case you want to know—they pine for the Georgian woman, but what *my* homesickness is made of I cannot say."

"You guessed right, I am thinking about Niko and myself."

She carefully wrote a word in Greek, then started a new one. "Would you consider me capable of being a good wife for Niko, to be able to hold his 'homesickness' at bay? Could I be a Georgian wife to him?"

She had finished her list of words. "Look, the Greeks have so many words and we have only one, if I could put them all together would that be enough for him?" She showed Alexandra her paper:

agape + eros + gamos + latreia + kharis = Love

Alexandra was moved. "Dear, serious Claudia, for a while you will need large quantities of the last kind of love for him, he does not know what love is. You will have to teach him. He needs to understand himself first as I had to and still have to. But he has always looked for non-Georgian girls and maybe his attachment to our old, female ways is not as great as mine was, besides you have many things in common with Georgian women, much more so than, for example, Katharina. You know the age-old tragic side of life, how that is possible, I cannot say."

Claudia suddenly very formal, straightened up. "Oh, because father comes from an old rabbinical family, I think that is the reason." She relaxed and looked at Alexandra. "Tell me, should I marry Niko?"

Alexandra hugged her. "Yes," she said simply and kissed her friend.

With Konrad's help they wrote a paper comparing Soranus' and Dioskorides' lists of contraceptive plants with those Alexandra had collected in Georgia, showing that this knowledge had survived, having been handed down by women, for two thousand years. They ended their investigation with a plea for careful medical research to identify the active ingredients of these plants, test their effectiveness as well as their side effects, and make them

available to the women of the twentieth century.

As Konrad had predicted, the paper was rejected by three journals with the explanation that this work was violating the Hippocratic Oath—and existing law.

A Comparison of Contraceptive Plants in Dioskorides and Soranus with Special Reference to Georgian Folk Medicine, by C. Dahl-Dadiani, A. Dadiani-Rost, and K. Rost, appeared twenty years later, in the Annals of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR.

A Pilgrimage to Andechs

The *Föhn* brushed over Munich, drawing lightning sparks from the charged bed covers and leaving behind frayed nerves and a few wispy clouds high in an electric-blue sky.

After a restless night, Alexandra had woken Konrad at seven from a last drugged sleep with the cry, "Konrad, come here, I can see the Caucasus on the horizon!"

Half-awake he had staggered onto the balcony and rubbed his disbelieving eyes. The entire chain of the Alps hovered, unreal, magnified by the crazy air, over the roofs and spires of the city.

"Look, *Liebster*, there is Kazbeg and here are Tebulos and Diklos Mta and the mountains of Tusheti. It is uncanny, so close!"

She had hugged him, tears running down her cheeks. "My head is humming like a beehive, it's the *jojokhetis kari*. I remember it so well, everybody would go crazy in Tiflis on days like this."

She had put her head under the cold water and swallowed two aspirins before breakfast. It was the day of Katharina's pilgrimage to Andechs. Katharina had not forgotten her wish to take them all to her beloved church, and with Alexandra's help had finally succeeded in persuading the skeptics among them. In the last minute Claudia had brought her older brother Friedrich along, to balance the tensions, as she quietly told Alexandra with a smile of complicity.

Friedrich was a good looking man, twenty-eight, with dark hair, a conspicuous nose in a haggard face, a strong Adam's apple, and long eyelashes. To elude his father's and grandfather's medical profession he was finishing a doctorate in mathematics. His fast mind and sarcastic comments had made immediate friends of Friedrich and Konrad. Katharina had suddenly acquired two admirers.

The only one unaffected by the *Föhn* seemed to be Katharina. Followed by the men she briskly walked towards the hills above Herrsching where they had got off the early morning train. Claudia and Alexandra lagged behind.

As they walked through the gardens that climb the steep hill behind the village a view over the *Ammersee* opened up. Sailboats were crossing the blue water and the meadows on the opposite shore were dotted with small villages and farms crowned by the church of Diessen—behind which the chain of the high mountains rose very close.

Alexandra, a trace of her morning nostalgia still clouding her mind, looked wistfully at this countryside. "Claudia, you once asked me what Georgia is like. In places it is like this. We don't have such big lakes, but these meadows, villages, and woods, and of course the mountains remind me so much of Georgia. Even the sun is comparably hot today, and we *do* have *Föhn*!"

Everyone was glad when they reached the woods, the moisture of the rains of the past week still hung in the trees and provided cool relief from the dry wind. The hill had been steep. "How far is it?" asked Friedrich, and Katharina laughed at him. "Another hour, but this is a pilgrimage, you should suffer a little to make it worthwhile."

Niko fell behind and joined Claudia and his sister.

"You seemed very anxious to join Katharina in this semi-religious outing," Claudia

asked Alexandra with her cool dark eyes. "Are you religious?"

Alexandra laughed about the famous, German question. "'*Heinrich, wie hältst Du's mit der Religion?*'" said Konrad when I asked him that question six years ago. No, not particularly. I was baptized, raised, and married in the Orthodox Church, but as you know I have rather liberal views."

After a thoughtful pause she added. "A few weeks ago, in my distress, I walked into the little church of *St. Anna-im-Lehel* and found solace in its unexpected, quiet beauty. I am still trying to find happiness and delivery from the hurts I inflict on my friends. Maybe Katharina's church is beautiful too."

Pensive, Claudia walked for a while in silence. "You see," she began, "my father is a declared atheist. Mother, who comes from a good Catholic family, has given up practicing her religion not to embarrass him, but I know that she sometimes secretly visits her favorite church, the *Asamkirche* in the *Sendlinger-Strasse*. What she does there I don't know, she never took any of us children along. I sneaked in there one day, it is a dark place, overburdened with heavily gilded Baroque stucco, not very cheerful. My *Gemüt*, the dark side of my soul, as you once called it, often longs for some indefinable religious experience, but I don't know what to do about that longing. I have never visited Andechs. It is famous, the 'Holy Mountain of Bavaria'. I am apprehensive about today's encounter with the unknown."

Niko, without a word, put his arm around her.

Katharina was waiting on a meadow at the edge of the woods. A smell of fresh hay drifted towards them with the wind from the south. The farmer had just cut the grass, and he and his wife were turning the hay.

Katharina, Konrad, and Friedrich seemed to have discussed the same subject. Friedrich, with a guilty glance at his sister, was still teasing Katharina.

Katharina, unruffled, declared with finality, "Look Friedrich, let's bury this subject. I am not a theologian, to me religion is part of my inheritance. I may be naïve, but I am neither a bigot nor a fanatic. If you need to, consider this excursion a 'pilgrimage' only for me, enjoy yourself on its other aspects. Leave me alone with your sophistries. This meadow is the place to have a rest and eat something."

She laid out a tablecloth in the shade of a lone oak and everyone shared their supplies.

Alexandra stretched out in the grass next to Katharina. "Ah, a day like in Georgia, good company, the smell of fresh hay, a picnic. I have not enjoyed that pleasure for years. Thank you for taking us here."

Afterwards Katharina ran barefoot, as she was, into the meadow and humming to herself began to dance. Friedrich was all eyes.

"Couldn't you sing or make some music!" she called to him.

Niko pulled a *Hohner* mouth-organ from his pocket, and played a fast dance melody. His sister, surprised by his facility with the harmonica, said something in Georgian, whereupon he changed the tune and played a lilting Georgian dance melody. Alexandra, using a lunch pail, began drumming the beat. "Let's all dance," she threw the drum to Friedrich, "you heard me, figure out the rhythm!"

Friedrich caught on in no time, and Alexandra took Konrad by the hand and formed a chain with Katharina. Right foot, right foot, left foot and one back, she called. Konrad pulled out his handkerchief and waving it in the air took the lead. Claudia joined and soon they snaked across the meadow, Niko dancing alongside with his harmonica and Friedrich drumming like

mad.

"The *jojokhetis kari!* The *Föhn* has made us crazy," sang Alexandra.

Full of curiosity, the farmer and his wife came over to have a look.

"Come join us," shouted Katharina in Bavarian and took the woman by the hand.

Reluctantly they let themselves be pulled along. Everybody was laughing and clapping. Niko started another Georgian song, and Alexandra sang its strange, sad, melody.

"Ah," cried Alexandra, "where is the wine?"

"Over there! Only it's beer, dark, dangerous beer!"

Katharina pointed towards the pink octagonal church tower above the trees. "It is only ten minutes from here." A deep gorge with a water mill and a bridge separated them from the Holy Mountain. Laughing they chased each other down the steep path to the bridge, Friedrich in pursuit of blond Katharina. Claudia smiled knowingly at Alexandra.

"Remember, dear would-be matchmaker, it was not I who set this trap!" said Alexandra with a frown. Sooner or later she would have to console Konrad.

"You godless heathens, do as you please. I will go inside and pray to the Virgin Mother for all of us," exclaimed Katharina when they had, out of breath, reached the church.

Alexandra joined her.

In the cavernous entry hall Katharina dipped her finger into the holy water and made a cross, first on Alexandra's, then on her own forehead. With an effort she pulled the heavy door open into another world.

This was not the serenely elegant space of St. Anna's but a peasant church, sturdy in proportions yet of a lovable cheerfulness. Alexandra slipped into a pew worn bare by generations of pilgrims next to two peasant women. Letting her fingertips run over the backrest of the bench she could feel the fine, exposed grain of the larchwood.

The Gothic columns and the ribs of the high ceiling were covered with delicately colored Baroque ornaments on a reseda-green ground. A lovely Gothic madonna with her child on the high altar had been reset in an overwhelming aura of golden rays. High above her, on the second level, floated Christ on the cross. A curvy balustrade waved along the walls. From one of its bends the life-sized figure of a white-haired saint in a flowing red coat was making ready to jump or fly down onto the altar. The benevolent faces of the local prince and his wife smiled from a *trompe d'oeil* window high up in the wall.

The woman next to Alexandra was following the lines in her prayer book with an arthritic index finger, her lips murmured silent prayers. It was all so familiar, even if the setting appeared far away from the churches of her childhood.

Katharina knelt on her left and prayed with closed eyes. A wave of affection overcame Alexandra.

Katharina sat up and whispered, "Is this not a place to find your happiness again, if you are confused and restless?" Alexandra nodded. She was controlling a sudden desire to kiss and hug Katharina.

A little later Katharina said, "Come, let's light some candles for the people we love."

Alexandra counted the tapers in her mind and bought six, Katharina only three.

"So many?" asked Katharina.

One by one Alexandra put the candles into the rack. "For my mother, for Aunt Sophia and for Niko, for Konrad—who needs one badly—for Claudia, and this one is for us to rekindle our love!"

She glanced furtively at Katharina.

Katharina gave her a quick kiss.

"This is for Konrad—do you think two will be too many for him? This is for you, and the last one is for silly Friedrich." She blushed. "I really like this man."

When they turned around, they noticed the others sitting in the last bench silently gazing at the church's splendor. Alexandra felt Konrad's eyes on her.

Katharina took Alexandra by the hand. "Come, let me show you a secret place."

Katharina opened a small door in the entry hall and pulled Alexandra onto a narrow spiral staircase that led into the onion dome. From a landing among the beams she pushed out a dormer window. "Look!" she called out of breath.

Alexandra stuck her head out and cried, "My God, Zedazeni!"

Alexandra explained to her, that the tower of Zedazeni was her favorite place in Georgia, from where one could see half the Caucasus.

They noticed their friends below searching for them in front of the church.

"Hey," shouted Katharina, "come up here. There is a marvelous view today!"

Alexandra could no longer hold back her emotions. She put her arms around Katharina and fervently kissed Katharina on the mouth. Blushing deeply, Alexandra looked at the familiar face, searching for an explanation to her sudden passion.

"I love you Katharina. Please, do remain my friend."

Surprised, Katharina stroked Alexandra's hair and then put a finger on her friend's mouth, as if to seal a secret.

The others were lumbering up the stairs.

When they reached solid ground again Katharina laughed. "I forgot all about the beer!" She led them between stalls selling religious trinkets down to the opposite side of the hill. In a tree-shaded garden other pilgrims were whiling away the afternoon drinking the dark beer of the monks. Their church banners leaned against the fence.

Katharina ordered a *Radlermass*, a mixture of light beer and lemonade, for herself and Alexandra, who had pulled a face at the huge glasses of the powerful, dark brew.

Happy and slightly adrift they walked back towards Herrsching in the slanting light. Katharina took them along the mill valley.

Niko, Konrad, and Alexandra began to sing Georgian songs.

"You are wonderful," said Claudia, "I wish I could join you, but the harmonies are very strange."

"Nonsense, Konrad learned them too." Alexandra took her by the arm, and taught her one of her favorite songs. Eventually even Friedrich and Katharina joined in the refrains.

On the train home everybody collapsed exhausted into their seats. Claudia dropped off to sleep, her head leaning on Niko's shoulder. Konrad and Alexandra were at peace again, only Katharina had enough energy left to tease Friedrich.

Wistfully Alexandra observed her blond friend. She had no need to worry about Katharina and Konrad—but what would become of Katharina and herself?

Steiner, Schoenberg, and Kandinsky at the Dahls'

Munich 1904

They were late to the Dahl's party. A row of cars lined the street. The house was crowded.

As they often did on such occasions, Konrad and Alexandra separated after paying their *honneurs* to the hostess. In this way they could each follow their own inclinations and on their way home compare notes.

Konrad searched for Friedrich and discovered him in animated conversation with Katharina, who looked stunning in her new blouse. Katharina waved at Alexandra from the distance.

Claudia took Alexandra to introduce her to Kandinsky. "You have to meet this interesting man."



Kandinsky 1904

Alexandra recognized and disliked him at once.

"Alexandra, this is Herr Wassily Kandinsky, my friend Alexandra Dadiani-Rost. Alexandra just arrived from St. Petersburg. Her husband has an appointment at the university, and she works at the Schwabing hospital as a physician."

Kandinsky scrutinized her through his rimless glasses and addressed her in Russian. "Your name is *Princess* Dadiani-Rost, am I right? A *gruzinska printsessa*...! From Tiflis?" He asked with a self-gratified smile, "I am enchanted to make your acquaintance."

With her sweetest smile Alexandra extended her hand, and he produced a perfect hand-kiss. It is pleasing to see this Russian Bluebeard stoop, she thought. I could slap his face.

"You guessed right," she said in German, "maybe, being in München, Dr. Dadiani-Rost would be more appropriate."

About forty, Kandinsky looked every bit the Muscovite intellectual she had expected: A thin pointed beard, a well-trimmed mustache above a full, soft mouth, heavy eyebrows, receding brown hair. He held his chin tucked in and gazed at her with unsmiling, brown eyes. A vest covered his prominent chest, a golden watch chain, high boots half-hidden under the trousers of a well-tailored suit.

"Oh," he said in German, "forgive me for falling back into my mother tongue, may I introduce *Fräulein* Gabriele Münter, Gabriele, Dr. Alexandra Dadiani-Rost."

Münter offered Alexandra her limp hand.

"Fräulein Münter is one of my most gifted students."

Münter, eyeing Alexandra disdainfully, squeezed a sour smile from her thin mouth. She wore a shimmering, yellow silk-blouse with wide angel-sleeves under a black, crocheted, wool dress girdled by a cummerbund. Maybe it was her poorly shaped chin and her compressed lips, or her high, accusing eyebrows, pointed nose, and veiled gray-green eyes that gave her a sheepish expression. Alexandra had the impression that *Fräulein* Münter would begin to cry any minute.

An unhappy person in a state of perpetual jealousy. Not very bright, judged Alexandra.

Kandinsky continued in German. "You must have obtained your medical degree in St. Petersburg. My compliments, a great accomplishment for a young lady in Russia."

Alexandra was fully aware of the impression she made on this Russian: a good-looking Georgian princess with a professional title! She had felt tempted to pass off the Queen of Spades on him, and discovered that he held only a graying Jack of Hearts. Poor, abandoned Nina, *brusquée* Katharina—she felt no physical attraction for this man, yet she discovered that his Russian attentiveness gave her pleasure—perverse?

"I heard of you in St. Petersburg," Alexandra baited him. "Martiros Sisakian, a close friend of ours, told me to look you up."

"I met Sisakian in Paris, but have not seen him for many years. You don't appear to belong to the political radicals, are you interested in Theosophy?" asked Kandinsky with a mocking smile and tucked in chin.

"Marti recommended that I should listen to Rudolf Steiner, the Theosophist."

"Oh, that should be easy, he is standing right over there talking to the hostess."

Kandinsky discreetly pointed to a tragically serious-looking man who, supporting his chin with his right hand, the left at an angle to his hip. He was involved in a deep discussion with Mrs. Dahl.

"*The Spiritual in Art, Music, and Painting* is an eminently Theosophical subject, isn't it?" Alexandra said evasively.

"Yes, of course, the motto for tonight's *soirée* was Herrn Steiner's idea and the hostess was only too pleased to oblige."

"I noticed that the invitations for this evening were adorned with a wood print by your hand. Would you show me your paintings?"

Alexandra had briefly glanced at the paintings and prints that were hanging in the Dahl's living room for the occasion: a selection of small oils, scenes from various parts of Europe, a series of wood prints on Russian mythological themes, which, because of their similarity to the print on the announcement, seemed to be Kandinsky's. There were also several disturbing

self-portraits, signed *A. Schönberg*, and a few architectural sketches for an auditorium in Dornach, Switzerland by Steiner.

Kandinsky took her around, quite obviously more fascinated by her person than by her interest in his pictures. *Fräulein Münter* excused herself.

"Art is in a state of rapid change," Kandinsky began to lecture, putting his right hand into his vest, gesticulating with the other. "We are searching for a new content in art and new forms of expression in painting as well as in music. Steiner is trying to combine music, dance, painting, and architecture in one great vision. My aim is more modest, I am trying to find a way out of symbolism, Russian and Western, and have to confess that I have not found a satisfactory expression for what I see."

He waved his left at the series of mythological woodcuts. "These are attempts to come to terms with my emotional Russian baggage, which seems to have followed me to the West. Memories of fairy tales my mother read to me when I was a child."

He smiled at her winningly for the first time and Alexandra had to fend off an attack of female weakness. "Is this what one calls Byzantine Symbolism?"

His smile disappeared. "You hurt me! These prints are my very personal exploration of the symbols that express my emotions and my Russian soul. They do not belong to any particular style."

She had misjudged the honesty of this man. His search might, after all, be as serious as her own, but she still could not relate to those dark prints. She thought of Uncle Mouravi's remark after Chekhov's *Chaika*, "*Thank God, we live in a sunnier climate.*" Maybe the Russians did after all carry a heavier emotional burden than she.

She softened her voice and said in Russian. "I do like your landscapes, they are full of light and color, they vibrate and sing. The first painting of yours I saw at the townhouse of the Sushinskys in St. Petersburg, a melancholy villa on a lake in a park."

His smile returned. "Oh, I painted it at their estate where I spent a beautiful summer as their guest. Another nostalgic memory."

He pointed at the small oils. "The landscapes you see here are from travels in Holland, Tunisia, and France in the last few years. They are *Studienarbeiten*, study pieces that I painted with and for my students, but they leave me dissatisfied. As I told you, I have not found the right mode of painting what I see. Nature holds no longer a challenge for me as a painter."

She looked at him and said with feeling. "What is it that you see in your mind? Can you describe it in words?"

His brown eyes lit up, and his voice warmed. "I could try, if you would allow me to return to my native Russian."

Disarmed, she nodded and gave him her best smile. Although no more attracted to him than before, she decided to discard her Queen of Spades.

They found a quiet corner and sat down. He pulled out a silver *etui* and offered her an expensive Oriental cigarette. During her hospital work, Alexandra occasionally permitted herself a cigarette, but she never smoked in public or at social gatherings. This time she accepted, and Kandinsky gave her a light and lit his own.

"Ach," he fell back into Russian, "the lot of the emigrant. We have no word in Russian for what I am looking for, *dukh*, spirit, comes close, *spiritualizm* spoils it again, our much abused *dusha*, soul, is something else, and *razum*, the mind, is too discredited for my purpose."

He switched back to German. "Can one translate the concept '*des Geistigen*' into any other language? Goethe uses it and Nietzsche, and of course, Steiner."

He continued in Russian. "It is all of these together, *razum*, *dusha*, and *dukh*, controlled by the mind. The Germans burden the heart with this task, which is a more structured organ than our chaotic mind. I am looking for a way to control and intensify painting by the use of the head, to tame color through geometrical forms without losing its passion."

He drew a circle in the air with his left hand and looked doubtfully at her. "Do you follow what I am trying to say? It would sound muddled in German. Steiner says the same more clearly, but his concern is to reintroduce true emotions into art, which is a specific German problem. I am neither German nor a philosopher."

He leaned back and blew a smoke ring. His eyes expressed skeptical curiosity as he examined her from the distance.

Alexandra felt a sudden sympathy with this man. "I do understand you. I have explored similar, Georgian problems. Would you allow me to freely paraphrase Nietzsche: *das Apollinische* must transform *das Dionysische* to convert our dark passions into serene clarity."

Kandinsky frowned and offered her another cigarette, which she declined.

He lit one for himself and slowly smoked in deep thought. "You read '*Die Geburt der Tragödie*'?"

Their conversation had arrived at some of the most serious questions in their lives, his spiritual and her tragic inheritance.

With a tense voice Alexandra said. "Yes, being Georgian, my problem is *das Tragische schlechthin*, quintessential *tragedia*, *feminine*. I found Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie* of great help in understanding my need for tragic drama. I read it a year ago, after a long preoccupation with the Florentine Renaissance, which taught me much, but offered no insight into my penchant for tragedy."

He suddenly withdrew from their conversation, extinguished his cigarette and rose. "We are going to be surprised by an example of the same quest in music." He excused himself, kissed her hand, and walked off.

Had she not sensed that he left her deeply moved, she would have taken offense at his abrupt termination of their conversation.

Alexandra was absentmindedly fingering Konrad's necklace when Claudia appeared with Niko, Konrad, and Friedrich in tow.

Claudia looked at her friend. "You are pensive. What happened? Did you have a serious conversation?"

Alexandra nodded. "I certainly misjudged this man, he is more intelligent and honest than his dallying with his female students led me to assume."

Mrs. Dahl announced the musical half of the evening and introduced Herrn Arnold Schönberg: "Teacher, composer, and musical revolutionary. However, teaching is his true passion."

Herr Schönberg, a short, heavy, and at thirty already balding man in a rumpled, ill-fitting suit bowed perfunctorily and with his left hand in his coat pocket, moved aside to make room for a string sextet. Mrs. Dahl introduced each of the six musicians by name.

Schönberg explained, in a high-pitched voice, that he was going to present a brief demonstration of how he suggested to recover the spiritual unity of mind and emotions in

contemporary music.

He was first going to play the *Passacaglia and Fugue in c-Minor* by the much-neglected Johann Sebastian Bach to show how Bach deliberately used harmonies in an abstract way to balance mind and emotions in his music.

"Most of Bach's compositions were intended for the religious services of the Lutheran Church, which gave them structure and purpose. Today we replace this service of God with an unbridled celebration of our personal emotions. We compose music to entertain the masses—or, occasionally, to please the critics.

"We need to invent a totally new tonal art, a new way of composing which reflects our changing perceptions of the individual. If this new music sounds eclectic, so be it. Such a musical notation does not exist as yet, but it will and has to come."

He pointed at his six musicians. "I arranged Bach's *Passacaglia*, which was written for organ, for string sextet to make the composition sound closer to the music that follows. Subsequently I will play two pieces for you in which one of my students and I will show you a possible transition from the prevailing Romantic tradition to a new tonality."

Schönberg led his six musicians through the Bach at a fast pace, however, he paid lavish attention to the towering chords that separate the *Durchführungen* of the theme in the *Passacaglia*. The powerful dissonances stood above the counterpoint like strange manifestations of Gothic religiosity. He had carefully orchestrated the subsequent fugue so that each voice had its own transparent timbre.

He was rewarded by generous applause, but one man shouted. "Herr Schönberg, you murdered the solemn piece with your fast pace, this is contemplative music, *andante sostenuto*."

Schönberg, undaunted, shrugged. "I did play it faster than Bach intended, to show how Baroque music can sound disturbingly modern. Ours is not a prayer meeting! Besides I am not playing an old, asthmatic organ with its pneumatic delay between keyboard and sound. You simply *could not* play the piece that fast on an organ. Look," he commended his players with an extended hand, "I use a body of living musicians. I am certain Bach would forgive me."

Friedrich initiated another enthusiastic round of applause.

"The next piece for six strings, I wrote six years ago. It was my first larger composition. Heavily indebted to Wagner, Mahler, and Herrn Strauss," he bowed in the direction of a gentleman in the audience, "In retrospect I now feel that it was my first attempt at overcoming the post-Romantic musical idiom. However, this piece, entitled *Verklärte Nacht*, is still a *tone poem*, a programmatic indulgence. It is closely set to words by Richard Dehmel. However, I would like for you to listen to its *musical* message without attaching yourself to the underlying words of the poem."

He bowed with a mock-apologetic smile. "Copies of Dehmel's poem will be available after the performance."

The music was indeed exceedingly eloquent. It began in a dark, wistful mood in the bass. The succeeding pessimistic passage ended in a dramatic culmination, a highly emotional cry for justice, love, or salvation. Thereafter the mood brightened. A consoling interlude, maybe some higher power trying to elevate the crying soul, led to a vision of a sweet and beautiful, celestial realm, forgiveness, heaven, peace?

This time the applause was more convincing, most people seemed comfortable with the musical vernacular. The dissatisfied minority was younger than Schönberg.

"It describes Wagner arriving at the gates of heaven after the *Götterdämmerung*," said Friedrich loud enough for people to turn around. His sister punched his side.

With an annoyed glance at Friedrich his father rose. "Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to act as a *moderator*." He pronounced the word in English. "I am not a professional musician, but a musically interested layman who has heard this piece before. Would Herr Schönberg take the trouble and elaborate on his initial claim that it musically transcends Wagner?"

"Unfortunately, my critics are right." Schönberg smiled sadly. "I like Friedrich Dahl's quip, it hit not far from Dehmel's poem and my personal feelings today. The piece *is* heavily indebted to Wagner. The treatment of the instruments, the manner of composition, and much of its sonority is pure Wagner. I was twenty-two when I wrote this piece. I felt compelled to profess emotions which the music of Wagner, Mahler, and Herrn Strauss' *Tondichtungen* had stirred in me."

He smiled at Strauss. "The method of developing the variations and the disparity of the measures I borrowed from Brahms. But there are distinct Schönbergian elements too—if you permit me to call them that—the broad-spread melodies, the use of contrapuntal confrontations of the bass and the melody, and a short interlude of three bars of atonal development. These elements are what I wanted you to hear, because they interest me more and more today."

He finished his comments with a bow to Richard Strauss, "Much of the success of this piece I owe to the generous and courageous support of Herrn Strauss."

Strauss mumbled, "I continue to disavow any paternity of this piece," which was greeted with general laughter.



Richard Strauss



Arnold Schoenberg



Anton von Webern

Schönberg returned to his lecture. "The last piece was written two months ago by one of my promising students, Herr Dr. Anton von Webern. Anton, would you please stand." He extended his arm in the direction of a young, clean-shaven intellectual with glasses, who rose. Two young people applauded. Webern bowed awkwardly.

"I chose this piece, because Herr von Webern, no longer beholden to the musical giants

that held my generation in thrall, composed the kind of music that I have been dreaming of. I believe this very short piece—we once timed it at a mere eight minutes—is a milestone in our search for a new style of composition. It leaves my *Verklärte Nacht* far behind.

"It is written for four strings, which is intentional as a thought-provoking deception as well as a way to increase its clarity. Structurally it is not a quartet in the classical sense. It is a tentative experiment, in which Herr Webern tried to use a new structural and tonal approach to composition by going back to Bach's daring harmonies.

"I present this piece for the first time here, in order to subject it to your discriminating judgment. It may not produce an unpremeditated hearing pleasure, it does not adhere to a given key, it is atonal throughout. For the time being Webern uses some contrapuntal elements, which he may drop again in the future. However, unlike Bach, the theme, a simple line of twelve notes you will easily discern in the very beginning, is not repeated as such. Each note of this sequence gives each of the twelve elaborations that follow a specific *musical color*.

"Try to *hear* this music by *visualizing* these blocks of color as if they formed a non-figurative, abstract painting, each block expressing a specific emotion."

He smiled and bowed towards the hostess.

"Herr Webern has dedicated this piece to you, Mrs. Dahl, as a contribution to the controversy of this evening: The Spiritual in Art, Music and Painting."

Alexandra sighed. The music, the polemic, and the didactic expositions of Herr Schönberg went over her head. All she had ever heard in Western music was Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* to which Aunt Sophia had taken her before Otto was born. But she had some experience in seeing colors with music. Maybe that would open this music to her. Expectantly she relaxed and closed her eyes.

In the beginning the first violin played the promised sequence of twelve tones. The notes would have formed a simple melody-like line, if they had been set in a customary key. They turned out to be the twelve notes of the chromatic scale but not in that order.

In the subsequent section the cello held, like a counterpoint, the first note of the series two octaves lower, and above that pure tone the other instruments performed an elaborate, elegiac musical figure. They ended in an ear-splitting, dissonant chord.

Suddenly extraordinary vibrant colors filled her mind. They formed geometrical shapes, lines, circles and spirals. The cello appeared as a dark red circular object that changed in shape with the instrument's volume. In the beginning the other three instruments each had a specific color attached, the viola was yellow, the second violin green, and the first violin deep blue. These colors were not stable, or primary, nor did they continue to be attached to particular instruments, the colors mixed and changed depending on the mood or the interpenetration of the voices.

A light, song-like passage followed, accompanied by a wavy green line that first rolled into a large spiral, and then collapsed into a yellow spot as the four instruments reached another cumulative chord. Abruptly the music stopped and immediately broke into a second chord, which turned the yellow spot into a rapidly expanding, irregular, blue shape that threatened to devour her entire field. In the last moment, the viola shot like a violet arrow diagonally across the blue field.

Alexandra took a deep breath; this colorful show was extraordinary.

The violin held the high note keeping the blue suspended and covering her entire field of vision. Across this foil three shapes chased each other, a large black disc connected now with

the cello, a red rectangle driven by the viola, and a narrow dark blue object for the second violin.

The mood changed to a violently dissonant interplay in the low registers between the cello and the viola, evoking magenta and green fields fighting for dominance. The episode was resolved by an orange invasion of the second violin, which soon took over.

In the end the cello began to play the original row of twelve tones, the first violin reentered, pure white. Together the four instruments repeated the first three bars of the piece decreasing to a pianissimo. One after the other they died away until the first violin ended on the highest note of the tone row in brilliant blue.

For a minute the audience remained in stunned silence. Alexandra, with a deep sigh, opened her eyes. She felt Konrad's eyes on her, and when she turned around, saw him smile with raised brows. His lips formed a question, but his voice was drowned by the general pandemonium.

Shouts of "Bravo!" and the pointed applause by Friedrich and several other young people were overpowered by the "Boos!" of the majority. Everybody was talking at the same time.

"Did you see colors?" Konrad shouted into the general din. Alexandra nodded. The excitement of the audience had reached tumultuous proportions.

Herr Dahl rose with raised hands. "Ladies and gentlemen, please, let us exercise restraint and come to a civilized discussion!"

Slowly the audience calmed down.

Herr Strauss rose. Not much taller and although younger looking, ten years older than Schönberg, said, "As conductor, may I introduce a consideration into this debate? I believe that the goal of music should be to produce a hearing pleasure for other people, maybe even 'the masses' which Herr Schönberg denigrated earlier. I cannot expect my concert-going audiences to follow or understand music like that of Herr Webern's. I am even prophesizing that this kind of music will never become popular. Although I understand what you are trying to do, I regret its results. Why write music which has such narrow, personal appeal, is so forbiddingly individualistic that nobody can follow it?"

Schönberg, his right hand in the pocket of his jacket, had listened with an inclined head. He took his hand out and gesticulated with both arms excitedly at Strauss. "Herr Strauss, for the beauty of it! If you would take the time to examine this piece closely you would also be struck by its beauty."

He dropped his arms in despair. "However, it has been made abundantly clear to me during the past years, that my music is unplayable, unlistenable, and unsuitable for the general concert audiences. I had hoped that some of you would be able to see the beauty of Herr Webern's piece."

Kandinsky asked to have a word. Ill at ease, he fidgeted with his words. "I have had two entirely unexpected encounters tonight. First I wish to thank Herr Schönberg for trying to show us how radically abstract music could lead the way to a corresponding revolution in painting. To me Herr Webern's music suggests a new kind of abstract painting, a symbiosis of music and painting. We have to learn to see music and vice versa to hear colors. Maybe then we will be able to hear *and* see the fundamental beauty in art again."

And then declared rather pompously. "The other revelation took place during an encounter with a young lady in this audience." He turned to Alexandra, who blushed. "It was of

a more fundamental, philosophical nature. Mrs. Dadiani-Rost suggested that we needed to reestablish the balance between the *Apollinische* and the *Dionysische* to recover *das Geistige in der Kunst*. I for my part have resolved to finally read Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*. I feel that Mrs. Dadiani-Rost's comments are eminently applicable to tonight's theme. Finally, may I thank Mrs. Dahl for having made this exceptionally interesting evening possible."

His remarks were unanimously applauded. Small groups formed in which Webern's music was heatedly discussed.

Kandinsky asked to be allowed to join the circle around the Dahl siblings and Konrad and Alexandra. He wanted to know if Alexandra had seen colors in the music. Noticing Alexandra's pensive look, he apologized for such a personal question. Was he allowed to invite her and her husband for another evening to discuss this matter? It was of great importance to him.

Alexandra pulled herself from her pensive silence. "I am a complete novice to Western music, there is so much I do not understand, but I did see colors of a purity and intensity that I have not seen before. Were anyone to try to paint what I saw in this music, he could fill a large canvas with colorful shapes and designs. However, they were completely abstract, they had no resemblance to real objects."

Kandinsky, very excitedly asked whether *she* would dare to paint such a picture.

Alexandra bit her lip. She thought that she might be able to do that. "But such a picture would be entirely personal and uninteresting to anybody besides myself. One would have to work on such a canvas for a long time to make it understandable to other people. I don't have the painterly skills for such a task. However, may I ask a question, has anybody besides myself seen colors like that?"

To her utter surprise nobody had.

With a laugh Kandinsky exclaimed. "Dear Princess Dadiani, the Mingrelians are well known to practice witchcraft. So as not to be suspected of that, will you explain to us how you succeeded in converting music into abstract images, a trick I would very much like to learn from you!"

Claudia, anger in her dark eyes, was watching her friend with increasing alarm, ready to come to her rescue. Konrad raised his eyebrows.

Alexandra waved her hand in apology. "I am afraid I can tell you only little about this phenomenon. I have seen colors to music since childhood, but never anything like tonight. Several years ago I saw very intense colors in a situation between life and death. Tonight was the first time that I saw colors of comparable intensity to music...maybe because Herr Webern's music created another extraordinary emotional state in me. I cannot explain my own visions, much less tell you how to see colors in music."

Friedrich inquired whether he could ask the two composers and his father to join in this discussion.

"Friedrich!" objected Claudia. "I don't want Alexandra to become another psychological case study. Please leave her alone!"

But Alexandra saw a chance to learn something about the unresolved phenomenon of her seeing colors under certain circumstances and encouraged Friedrich.

Later, after most guests had left, they formed a larger circle with the Dahls, Katharina, and the two composers to discuss, as Kandinsky put it, the question of how to see music in colors.

Had Herr Schönberg or Herr Webern ever seen colors in connection with their music? After all, Herr Schönberg had advocated this technique as a way to understand Herr Webern's piece.

The surprising answer was that Webern did and Schönberg admitted that he had been unsuccessful to date.

"It often happens," Schönberg said wistfully, "that my students teach me things, I don't know or cannot do. Seeing music in colors is one of them, composing abstract music like Herr Webern does, is another. In the last case I understand why, I cannot shake off Wagner's and Richard Strauss' influence. However, the colors elude me entirely."

Kandinsky smiled at Alexandra. "Dear *Frau Doctor*, may I reveal that you had a fascinating vision of moving colors and shapes during the performance of Herr Webern's piece."

Without waiting for her answer, with a slightly mocking undertone he addressed Claudia's father. "And what do you have to say Herr Professor, does psychology have a theory for this phenomenon? Can you enlighten us on how to see music? It would be of great importance to all of us."

Professor Dahl agreed that there was a rare phenomenon that some called *Synesthesia*. Certain people saw colors connected with letters and words and others did in fact see colors associated with music. The trouble was that when examined scientifically the phenomenon proved illusive and irreproducible, and worse the subjects often showed symptoms of a *noetic engrandissement*, which made the examination of their visions difficult and in his opinion worthless. He let his annoyed eyes rest on Kandinsky. At this time he could contribute little to their illumination.

Kandinsky turned to Webern as the only other person who had admitted to seeing colors. Webern receded in embarrassment. He finally conceded that he could see entire *Farbensymphonien*, color symphonies, at will and at any time. They were the inspiration for his music. In fact this ability had driven him to abandon philosophy and study music with Herr Schönberg. However, he could not explain these phenomena, they had been with him since childhood. In fact, he had gone to great troubles to teach Herr Schönberg, who was a gifted painter, without success.

"Maybe we should not try to analyze any of these sensations scientifically," commented Kandinsky with a smile at his *gruzinska printsesssa*. "Maybe we should just lend our ears to music, open our eyes to painting, and refrain from rationalizing. The spiritually gifted among us will know how to build a bridge between these two arts."

Two weeks later Alexandra received an envelope from Anton von Webern with two short pieces for piano, one a transcription of the piece for four strings they had heard, the other an entirely new composition. They were dedicated to her with admiration. Above and below the staves Webern had, in a tiny but beautiful hand, carefully noted the colors he had seen in composing the music. Looking at the manuscript, she immediately noticed that Webern had seen entirely different colors from her. As Claudia's father had indicated, the phenomenon was not reproducible.

Music, Painting, and Psychology

Alexandra worked four days a week at the Schwabing hospital as visiting intern. Her work was interesting but not demanding. She would rotate through the various departments to give her an insight into the general state of medicine in Germany. She was even paid a small salary.

Elisabeth cared for Otto and did the routine household chores. She had become Alexandra's alternate, a true gem. From her hospital pay Alexandra engaged a cleaning woman who came once a week. Alexandra prepared breakfast and supper—both she and Konrad ate their main meal at noon—and spent the evening playing with or reading to Otto. Most often Konrad would do the reading. He had become a doting father—more dedicated to Otto than Alexandra.

Before coming to Munich, Alexandra had expected that Kandinsky's painting classes and Steiner's Theosophy would be the great experiences of the year, now it had happened that music was taking over all her senses, feeding her hunger for a new, expanded understanding of herself.

Kandinsky's paintings disappointed her. Martiros' were more interesting. An evening at Kandinsky's apartment had left divided impressions with Konrad and her. As it turned out Kandinsky was married to a sweet Russian woman! Tanya Shemyenkina was a cousin of his with whom he had eloped from Moscow five years ago.

This discovery renewed Alexandra's old suspicion that he was irresponsible in his private relations.

"I am not morally narrow minded," she told Konrad on their way home, "but the way he has dealt with Nina and Katharina, not to mention Münter, offends my sense of faithfulness and balance, and now it seems that he is even more irresponsible towards Tanya, his wife. Look, an infidelity is excusable as long as the balance of a great love is not destroyed."

Konrad suppressed a smile, and she poked him in the ribs.

"You try it!" he said.

By contrast, Kandinsky continued to treat Alexandra with the utmost of polite, old-fashioned attention.

But the true surprise of that evening was that Kandinsky confessed that he too saw colors in music.

Alexandra was startled. Why had he not said anything on that memorable evening?

He reverted to his formal, unsmiling German. "Gnädige Frau, I offer my apologies for deceiving you in a certain sense, however, I hope only in a small way. I have been very reluctant to discuss this—should I call it a gift or an affliction? For years I have tried to paint these musical sensations and have not been able to find a way. Your comment that such paintings would turn out unacceptably personal is not forgotten. Herrn Webern's piece affected me so strongly that I am all but ready to throw my doubts to the winds. So I will have to spend several weeks on such a canvas—as you said—to make it generally valid. I do have the painterly skills for such an undertaking."

He paused pensively and Alexandra, to make him feel better, told him that Webern had sent her a piano arrangement of the quartet and a second, new one. Could she lend him these

scores? She had not heard either yet, Claudia Dahl was attempting to resolve the difficulties of playing it. Maybe listening to them would be of help.

He smiled gratefully at her. "Yes, it certainly would help to hear the composition several times. But I have to make another confession, I strongly dislike the psychologists who are out to analyze every such unusual mental capability. They destroy one's creative naïveté. This is the deeper reason why I refrained from discussing *my* visions in Professor Dahl's presence on that evening."

"Oh," laughed Alexandra. "So, I was the guinea pig behind which you tried to hide! I think we owe it to Claudia that Webern and I were not analyzed on the spot!"

Kandinsky blushed, embarrassed. "I apologize to you. The question of this color vision is of such importance to me that I had to find out what the composer and Schönberg knew about it. And Miss Claudia was ready to protect *you* from her father's inquisition, but not me. You see, the subject of a 'synesthetic fusion' of music and painting has been discussed in the Dahl's house before. Steiner believes he has invented this subject, and Mrs. Dahl is much taken by his philosophy. In fact these discussions with Steiner prompted Mrs. Dahl to produce this evening. Professor Dahl's allusion to a *noetic engrandissement* was a purposeful, directed comment. Dahl is a very analytical man who abhors spirituality. You know, he is, as we say in Russian, *bezdusheny*—he has lost his soul."

Alexandra could not make sense of Kandinsky's lax morality towards women and his almost naïve honesty towards her.

"But dear woman," Konrad summed up this subject, "right or wrong, he is exceptionally impressed by you. You should consider that a great compliment. His other women adore him blindly, which you don't. He considers them intellectually inferior by comparison with you."

Music became her great discovery—music and psychology. The Monday evening concerts at the Dahl's were a sensual revelation for her, Professor Dahl's course in psychology her intellectual challenge.

Every morning she attended Dahl's introductory psychology course at the university. The tall, gray-haired intellectual was a superb lecturer, clear, highly structured, and honest. He was presenting a critical review of a field in upheaval with exceptional impartiality.

If Dahl had a personal predilection, it was his dislike for metaphysical or philosophical speculations in psychology. He searched for scientifically verifiable facts. This led him to be critical of the theories of the aging Fechner, Groddeck, and the young Freud as well of the older, speculative schools of psychology. For him modern psychology began with the experimental approaches by Wundt and his students. With barely restrained sarcasm he recommended the reading of Freud and Nietzsche as two of the most imaginative writers of psycho-philosophical prose in German, but felt that empirically Freud could not show any therapeutic success based on his psychoanalytical speculations.

Alexandra had a well-developed, intuitive sense for the functioning of people. She would make highly accurate pronouncements of a person's character and predict their behavior in ways that often baffled and annoyed less sensitive people, among them Konrad. She had a sixth sense. And Konrad, more often than he would admit, relied on her ability to *divine the future*, as he called it—she simply *knew* such things, and if nobody distracted her, with baffling accuracy.

However, to her that was not a viable explanation, she wanted to understand *how* she

arrived at such hunches, and there she ran into a puzzling handicap. She discovered that she could often not predict the reaction of other people to herself with certainty.

She now learned from Dahl that this was caused by her interacting with her internal psychological *opposite*. Unfortunately, she would never be able to completely analyze her own self. The nature of the process of gathering information on herself precluded that. A sobering discovery of the limits of her attempts "to account for her own actions", which Walter Wolfson had challenged her to.

Several weeks later Katharina called. "Alexandra, could we meet somewhere in privacy? No, I don't want to talk on the telephone."

Alexandra shuddered from a strange premonition. They met in a small *Biergarten* in a neighborhood they rarely frequented. Resolutely Katharina came straight to the heart of the matter. "I am sure I am pregnant. I have missed my period twice. It never happened before."

She paused long enough for all kinds of thoughts to pass Alexandra's mind. She decided to ask the most difficult question first. "Is it Konrad's child?"

"It might be, but I am not sure. I seduced Friedrich a couple of months ago. I don't know whose child it is." Alexandra smiled encouragingly at her and asked, "What do you want to do?" She now guessed why Katharina had called her.

Katharina blurted in one hot stream. "Alexandra you know how to abort that child and you are a physician. Please help me, I trust you." Alexandra thought for a while: She had to persuade Katharina to have that child, the question was how to calm her down and convince her.

Katharina waited in agony. Alexandra asked the next obvious question. "Did you tell either of your men of your condition?"

Katharina shook her head. "You are the first and only person whom I have talked to."

"Do you love Friedrich?"

"I do, but we are so much each other's opposite. And would the Dahls ever accept me as their daughter in law? It looks so much like extortion, like I had planned my condition to catch Friedrich."

Alexandra took Katharina's hand and held it a long time gazing into her trusting brown eyes. And then she counseled her to keep the child, even if it was Konrad's. Nobody besides themselves ever needed to know of that suspicion. Aborting the child would still be possible, but very unpleasant and dangerous. The potion she knew would make her very sick for several days, and it was dangerous in the second month. She should have called her earlier.

She said, "Could you convince Friedrich to marry you, not to cover your pregnancy, but because you love him? Do tell him that you are pregnant only in a couple of months, when you are sure of his love and the child. Men are quite ignorant in such things.... I think that the two of you, with some compromises on your part, would make a good couple, *because* you are so different. Friedrich would be a good man for you. Claudia and I will help you in winning the Dahls over. I promise you, don't worry about that."

Katharina sighed deeply and ordered a *Mass* of beer for herself. Alexandra lit a cigarette.

Fashing

Munich 1905

Once a year Dionysus lands in Munich. Half-drunk, in the middle of winter, the God sails in his vine-slung boat onto the Königsplatz and puts up at the Glyptothek, where they keep his drinking bowl. He reigns the town for an entire month.

They call the chaotic madness that seizes the entire town *Fasching*. The city comes to a virtual standstill, the streetcars run erratically, the taxi drivers nap behind the wheel, the people grope, exhausted, along the streets like sleepwalkers in the gray fog of February. Yet at night they wake up and hasten in grotesque costumes to another orgiastic dance to revel the nights away without restraint.

Free love rules the days and nights, to dance with one's spouse or girlfriend is against the heathen order.

The Moon is waning, for twenty-eight nights Saturn rules the heavens, until on Ash Wednesday, under a new moon, the city plunges itself into repentance with the same fervor: *Confess your sins, repent your trespasses.*

At the exclusive *Ball des Nations* in the large ballroom of the Bayrischen Hof, whirled and turned self-important ambassadors and diplomats, the Bavarian aristocracy, the rich and famous, professors, artists, writers, opera stars, the entire corps de ballet. The Dahls had paid for their tickets.

Italian beauties and gigolos, Tyrolians, *Mauriskentänzer*, Morris dancers, a tribe of American Indians, fakirs and Turkish sultans, an English gentleman *a la* Oscar Wilde, the Marquis de Sade, Marx and Engels, French Republicans, monks, and circus people.

Konrad had come as a Georgian villain, a splendid, black, high fur hat, curve-tipped boots, long, tight *pantalons*, and a short jacket, a dagger in his belt.

He was dancing with a shapely, grey-eyed Russian beauty with two long, artificial braids. She spoke only broken German and had approached him in Russian hoping, as she expressed it, that this *gruzinskoi costum gavarit po russkiy*, and he had not had the heart to disappoint her.

For days Katharina had been their indulging guide to this Munich madness. The night before they had danced till morning at the *Weisse Fest* at the *Max-Emanuel-Brauerei* in Schwabing, a small, neighborhood brewery, to which everyone came dressed in white. All food was white, white mustard, white radishes, *Weisswürste*, and *Weissbier*. Konrad had been wrapped in his bed sheet, Alexandra in a scanty petticoat. The revelers had been mostly students, few wore masks. The Ball des Nations was, by comparison, a grand affair at which nearly all celebrants, desperately wishing to remain incognito, wore masks, especially the women.

Somewhere lost in this eddy danced Niko and Claudia, Katharina and Friedrich, who had arrived separately, and Alexandra, dressed as a Tcherkassian beauty straight from the thousand-and-one Arabian nights. Immediately separated and swallowed by the milling crowd, Konrad had not seen her since they had arrived.

They had slept only a few hours during the day. Konrad felt drugged, his sensory

perceptions heightened, his rational capabilities exhausted, over-tired after two nights of this strenuous activity. He found this dream state not unpleasant, and his Russian partner was leading him with determination. He did not have to think. She danced like a professional. A dance teacher? A ballerina from the opera?

Ever since he had learned her name was Nina, she had warmed up and pressed closer. In a dark corner she kissed him. Even that was pleasurable, for the first time. But when she began whispering into his ear, "*Rodnoi milogo kak ty zhazhdu*," he felt she was getting obsessive and disengaged himself. "*Izmennik*," she hissed at him, when he left her.

"Yes, 'traitor!'" Konrad laughed. "It isn't easy to learn to cope with the West!"

He sailed off with a tall wallflower, who had stood forlorn by the side and reminded him of his friend in Berlin who danced so well. She was from Berlin all right, but she was as awkward as a stick and a poor dancer.

Konrad got himself a large cognac from the bar and nursing it watched the whirling crowd. This was the *dionysische Fest* that Nietzsche talked about! The revelers did not shout "*Yakkhos, Yakkhos!*" like in Athens, but they were equally possessed by the God as then. How different Munich was from Berlin, how much closer to the land of the Greeks! Such a chaotically extroverted scene would be unthinkable in the stiff Protestant North.

The orchestra stopped. The lights dimmed. A Renaissance herald announced the arrival of the carnival delegations from around the world: "His Highness, the Doge of Venice, and the delegation from the City on the Lagoon."

In true operatic style a splendidly decorated *barga* was rowed on stage, greeted by a chorus of local dignitaries, singing some Verdi Konrad did not recognize. In their midst the mayor in tails and towering behind him a mighty *Bavaria*, the gigantic, secular protectress of Munich.

The Doge, all in gold, disembarked, waving to the audience. He embraced the mayor. Bavaria rattled her weapons. The six figures of the *Commedia dell'Arte* in their bird's masks scurried from the boat. They danced around the greeting ceremony. The audience applauded.

Bavaria pushed herself into the foreground and sang a duet with the Doge which was, Konrad thought, taken from Wagner's *Walküre*. The Marriage of North and South, *Figaro* and *Brunhilde*. Two huge tankards of beer were brought which the Bavarian *Walküre* and the Doge emptied to universal cheer. Lots of waving of blue and white checkered Bavarian and Venetian Lion flags.

The orchestra changed to a South American rhythm. The *Commedia dell'Arte* masks danced from the stage into the audience.

The Herald blew his trumpet: "The King and Queen of Brazil."

A fabulously built black couple descended from the rafters on ropes followed by a black King and Queen on a flying trapeze. They were barely covered by exotic, tropical flowers and *faux* bananas. The music exploded into a wild dance and the four performed an elaborate *Ballet Brazilienne*.

The mayor kissed the hand of the Queen, while the black King wooed *Bavaria* with a Caribbean love song: "Do, doo, da, huu, dada, doo..." The orchestra fell silent.

Like a panther Black Orpheus danced around his victim and first took her shield away, then her spear.

"Doo doo, Love, da, haa, do, do..."

He knelt, removed her knee and leg guards, the pointed breast plates, opened her

cuirass.

The audience watched breathlessly. What did the Iron Woman wear underneath her armor? Well, of course, a simple, flowing blue and white dress gathered by a golden belt and across her voluminous breasts the two lions of the *Hofbräuhaus* with knotted tails.

The black King removed her helmet and a coy maiden emerged, flushed purple from the heat, her blond hair parted in the center into thick long braids.

The orchestra played another piece from Wagner's *Nibelungen*. *Brunhilde* disarmed and charmed by the black snake-man unfastened her golden belt and handed it to Orpheus.

The audience roared.

Led by King Orpheus and his Teutonic Bride the entire stage—Brazilians, Italians, Germans, and extras—descended into the audience.

The orchestra played a slow South American dance. Patiently Orpheus taught Bavaria the new steps, while on the darkened stage Bavaria's armor and the *barga* were pushed into the wings. Suddenly the Brazilian court caught themselves partners from the audience. A chaotic, free for all erupted, great merriment, everyone tried the new dance steps.

In the general confusion Konrad was picked up by a masked, dark-haired Italian beauty. The taciturn lady smiled enigmatically. A strange feeling made him shiver. The memory of New Year's Eve with Alexandra at the Artist's Club appeared from the past. The taciturn, unknown-woman danced wonderfully. Before he could speak to her, she disappeared in the crowd, and he found himself in the arms of another dancer. Confused Konrad stepped on his new partner's toes.

The Herald announced the second part of the evening's presentation:

Resurrection, Redemption, and Apotheosis.

A search light focused on a tombstone lying at center stage. Clouds of swirling fog. Everyone craned their necks.

Resurrection: slowly the tombstone lifted and a man in a Jacobean cap, long hair, and a green, velveteen great-cloak emerged from the grave. Now everyone could see the tombstone's inscription clearly:

RICHARD WAGNER
1813–1883

Fog enshrouded, accompanied by the strains of the orchestra, Wagner raised his arms and began to sing with an unexpectedly beautiful bass voice.

"*Mein Gott!*" Konrad exclaimed, "*Parsifal*, Act Three, *Gurnemanz* in the Good Friday Scene!"

As the fog abated, the stage became bathed in warm light and from the rafters a fountain descended, *Kundry* sitting on its rim.

Incongruously *Kundry* wore a Bavarian *dirndl*.

Kundry and Wagner joined in a duet.

Konrad could now see *Kundry* clearly. She was not the usual witch-mother-temptress of the opera, but a beautiful, young, Raphaelite Madonna, with large, slightly protruding Italian eyes and chestnut-brown hair above a long neck. A resonant contralto voice added to her mystery.

But why her *dirndl* costume? And where was *Parsifal*?

A gasp went through the spectators. Above their heads a man suspended from a rope in

the ceiling came flying in a billowing coat across the entire house. Frantic applause. He landed on stage with an elegant flourish.

While Wagner needed a tombstone inscription to identify him, everyone recognized the newcomer by his ermine-trimmed, royal blue coat: "Bravo, Ludwig!" The 'mad king', the builder of extravagant, theatrical castles, the romantic, mythical darling of Bavaria. Ludwig bowed, the ovations became shouts, "Bravo!" and turned into rhythmic chanting. "We want our King Ludwig back!"

Wagner's *Easter Scene* took an unforeseeable turn.

As King Ludwig sang to Kundry, the composer receded into the background.

Suddenly the orchestra stopped and Ludwig exclaimed in a hallucinating voice: "*Sissy, bist Du es, meine Angebetete?*" Sissy, is that you, my adored Love?

Sissy—because of whom Ludwig had drowned himself—walked towards him. He took off his coat to reveal a Tyrolian costume of leather shorts, knee socks, and mountain boots. He kicked up a *Schuhplattler*, his nailed heels pounding the stage.

Ludwig began to yodel, Sissy his echo.

To thunderous applause Sissy put her arms around him. With a bang a cannon snowed confetti from above. Embracing each other still yodeling, the two floated upwards into a snow-clouded heaven.

Redemption and Apotheosis.

The orchestra intoned a Strauss waltz, with renewed fervor the obsessed crowd drowned itself in its narcissistic preoccupation.

Konrad's partner had drifted off. A great longing for Alexandra overcame him. Where was she? He sank into a chair and buried his tired head between his hands. Had she gone off with someone else? All the misery of the past months overcame him, Katharina in Friedrich's arms and now Alexandra disappeared. He rose and for a long time searched for her among the gay crowd, but the harder he searched the more elusive she became. How could she leave him like that?

Suddenly a masked lady in a Georgian costume, wearing an authentic *Imeretian* necklace floated across his view. She was dancing in the arms of some Indian or Turk. A *kartveli kalashvili*, a daughter of Georgia? He pursued them, and when she noticed him, Konrad asked her for a dance.

The lady stopped in mid-turn, disengaged herself and stood rooted, staring at him. She was smaller than Alexandra, a lithe fine-boned person with blond hair. Certainly no Georgian.

"*Gamardjobat* Konrad!" She exclaimed. "What a coincidence. You shaved off your beard! I almost did not recognize you." She embraced him and kissed him three times.

Konrad was taken aback, he had no idea who she was. "Yes, I shaved it off this morning. All the young revolutionaries hide their faces behind beards now, it was about time I shaved mine off. But who are you?"

She held him at a distance. "You are Konrad, aren't you? Where is Alexandra? I cannot believe it."

Puzzled, Konrad looked at her. "Did we meet in Tiflis? You are no genuine Georgian!" He ran through all their friends in Tiflis and shook his head. This mask really did hide its wearer.

She took her mask off.

"Clara!" he shouted. "Clara, my secret love! Where do you come from, are you for real?"

They sank into each other's arms.

"We arrived from Istanbul two days ago. Joachim is here too. When I last saw him, he was dancing with some dark-haired Italian beauty. Konrad, it is so good to see you. How are you?"

He kissed her most tenderly. "It is impossible to talk here, there is so much to say. Let's find a quiet place to look at each other."

Konrad offered his arm and led her to an empty table as far away from the orchestra as possible.

For a while Konrad just looked at her, very moved. To see this beloved, restrained woman was like oil on his sore heart.

She smiled at him. "We bring greetings and love from all your friends in Tiflis. Arthur Leist obliged me to give you a Georgian hug and kiss. They all miss you. There are letters to Alexandra from Deda and Sophia and from Olga too." She bubbled over in excitement. "We would have tried to find you tomorrow, but this chance meeting is wonderful."

Konrad still could not believe his eyes. He took her hands and kissed them. "But how did you get to this ball?"

"The diplomatic corps offered us the tickets, and we thought that it would be an appropriate homecoming celebration. You see, if one does not look for one another one always finds the unexpected."

A turbaned Persian steered towards them, Joachim von Bredow. The two men hugged and kissed each other as never before.

"We are missing Alexandra," Konrad said disturbed. "I have not seen her for hours. Has she eloped with another man?"

"Yes, she has," Joachim said with a laugh, "with me! If she had not been dancing with her brother Niko, I would not have recognized her. What a nice man Niko has become."

Konrad sighed. At least she had not deserted him with some stranger, not yet. Joachim decided that this chance meeting called for a bottle of champagne and left.

"How is Alexandra?" Clara asked her gray eyes searching his face full of concern.

"Ach, Clara, she is very well. After those long years of hard work in St. Petersburg she is flying at dizzying heights, discovering herself and innumerable things she has never tasted before, music, painting, her sharp mind, scientific research, and new variations on love. Sometimes I feel left behind and sometimes heavy, clumsy, and deserted."

Clara's eyes softened. "The years in St. Petersburg were a difficult test I imagine, do you feel that your marriage is endangered? Is she in love with an other man?"

"No, actually neither. It is much more complicated, Clara."

Joachim returned with two bottles of champagne. His smile faded as he looked at them. He filled the glasses. "Prost, to this unexpected reunion after five years! To your health, Konrad! What is it, you two look so serious?"

Clara lowered her eyes.

Konrad drank to Joachim and Clara and slumped in his chair. "I am tired. Last night we danced at another ball until the small hours, we slept little. I feel suspended in a strange, exhausted state, maybe that makes me maudlin. Clara, my sensitive friend, who listens so well, moved me to speak my heart. The relationship between Alexandra and me is difficult at the moment, we are drifting along on parallel tracks. Alexandra has embarked on a, for her, very exciting path and has left me behind. I am not entirely blameless in all of this, but cannot

regain my former balance."

He took a deep swill from his glass. In his present overwrought state the alcohol would not help. He waved this misgiving away. Somewhere in the distance he noticed a Tcherkassian woman drift by, but she had long blond hair. It was clearly not Alexandra.

Joachim viewed Konrad with sympathetic concern. "You are neither fish nor fowl, neither German nor Georgian, you have lost some of your roots, Konrad. Is Alexandra homesick?"

"You are right, and I have no real friend here to whom I could unburden myself. No, Alexandra is not homesick in the strict sense. She sometimes says that she has never felt so Georgian, but she is so busy discovering unexplored aspects of herself, that she has no time to be homesick. Besides, being very high, *she* has found two close female friends with whom she can discuss her problems. I am no longer her sole confidant as I was in Tiflis and St. Petersburg."

He fell silent. This aspect of his remoteness from her had not previously occurred to him. Alexandra was no longer his one and only student. Claudia had opened new doors to her in music and Katharina the possibility of physical love between women. He had not much to do with these two discoveries.

Konrad toasted their Georgian friends and their reunion. He felt the wine go to his head.

Joachim left to find Alexandra.

Clara put her hand on Konrad's shoulder. "Come Konrad, may I dance with you? Everything will find a balance and with a little effort you will keep Alexandra."

Konrad let her guide him onto the dance floor. She danced slowly, holding him close. Her warmth was good.

When they returned Konrad collapsed in a chair, and Clara, sitting next to him, very gently stroked his head which had sunk on the table.

Joachim returned with Alexandra who was concerned but not disconcerted. She knew how to handle a drunk tamada.

She bent over the collapsed shape. "Konrad, wake up its I, Alexandra. Please take me home."

Konrad raised his head, and looked at her. "Alexandra wears a Tcherkassian dress, you are not her."

Alexandra sat down with hanging arms. "He is right. I changed costumes with our friend Katharina, who wanted so badly to turn into an Oriental woman for one evening and, I suspect, had in mind to play a trick on Konrad. What a terrible mess."

Joachim, laughing heartily, saved the embarrassing situation. "You have got the three of you into a true Georgian farce, two women, one drunk tamada, and lots of melodrama."

Alexandra removed her mask and feeling hot opened the high collar of Katharina's blouse. "Konrad, *mein Liebster*, this is Katharina's dress which she lent me. She wanted to be a Georgian woman for one night. I am Alexandra. Please wake up and let's go home."

This time Konrad sat up and rubbing his eyes and aching head looked at her and saw the necklace in her décolleté.

He fell on his knees before her, buried his head in her lap, and sobbed frightfully. "Can you ever forgive me, Alexandra? I was so unhappy without you, and now I am drunk. I love you above anything."

They woke up late next morning. Konrad went downstairs to get the newspaper. He came running up the stairs, pale and breathless. "Alexandra, read this."
He held up the front page.

St. Petersburg, Monday, the 23rd of January 1905

**BLOODY MASSACRE.
GOVERNMENT FORCES PUT DOWN PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION.
THOUSANDS FEARED DEAD**

Yesterday a group estimated at ten thousand people carrying icons and church banners marched towards the Winter Palace under the leadership of a revolutionary priest to present a petition to His Majesty the Tsar. The police began shooting. Dead and wounded lay strewn in the snow on Dvortsovaya Square. Later the police opened fire on gatherings elsewhere in the city. The dead are still uncounted. Emperor Nicholas II is reported to have shrugged. "The godless rabble must be put down without mercy." The country and the world are in deep shock.

"My God, Konrad, I should be in St. Petersburg. Can you imagine the thousands of wounded?"

"No," he said dryly, "Thank God, you are here. You might have been one of the dead."

They imagined the persecutions that would now follow as the government attempted to put the blame on someone other than the leaders and troops of the Ministry of the Interior. Konrad and Alexandra realized that their knowledge of the preceding events was too scanty to clearly envision what had happened and what the consequences would be. Maybe Joachim could tell more.

Alexandra, tears streaming down her face, tried to call. The hotel concierge told her that the von Bredows had unexpectedly left by train for Berlin at seven that morning. Their luggage was still at the hotel, he was expecting them back later in the week.

With the afternoon mail a note arrived from Clara. The foreign ministry had convened all their available correspondents to discuss the situation in Russia. Hopefully, if the developments in Russia did not get worse, they would be back in a few days.

Ash Wednesday, a depressing, gray overcast covered the sky. Since the early morning it had snowed heavily.

A muffled shot. Alexandra ran to the window and shouted. "Elisabeth! Come here. A demonstration! They are shooting!"

Two more shots. Down in the street a long procession of people plodded through the snow. A priest, church flags, choir boys with a large cross, followed by a crowd of people singing and praying. The explosions continued but nobody seemed concerned. They just walked on. At the tail of the procession a group of grotesque, large masks danced around an oversized character on stilts apparently representing Winter. Alexandra heaved a sigh of relief. The shots were firecrackers thrown by the children who followed Winter.

The procession came to a halt at a church down the street. The priest and his choirboys set up a bowl with ashes, and as people passed, the priest marked a cross on their foreheads.

The masks were thrown on a pile. As Winter arrived, the priest swinging his cross, enacted a prolonged fight with the character, which ended with a furious cacophony of firecrackers. Winter fell off his stilts and was mercilessly done in by the pilgrims.

Before they all went into the church the children set fire to the pile of masks which smoldered for a long time shooting off random firecrackers.

Repent, repent your trespasses.

Walking on Ice

After the cold and foggy *Fasching* month and the heavy snowstorm on Ash Wednesday, solemn, repentant Lent began with a white, exhilaratingly cold Sunday.

Thin, vertical columns of smoke rose in the early morning sun from the houses of Murnau. The contours of the frozen *Staffelsee* beyond the village had vanished in the glistening snow that covered the low, undulating hills at the foot of the high mountains. One could reach the island in the lake on foot. All colors were extinguished by the snow and a blinding sun. The few bare, black trees made the intensity of the white expanse almost unbearable.

Deep snowdrifts covered the path circling the lake. On the ice the snow was only a few inches deep. Crossing the lake was a great temptation.

Alexandra was concerned that the ice would not be strong enough. But when a local assured them that the ice was perfectly safe, they ventured out onto the frozen, pristine space, unmarked by human steps.

They did not speak, the silence surrounded them like an empty bowl. Slowly their lonely tracks put the restless world, the emotional upheavals of the past months behind them. They felt suspended in the whiteness, words had lost their destructive power.

For weeks they had not been alone together. It had been Konrad's idea to heal their wounds, to listen to each other on a long walk in the fresh snow. Katharina had suggested Murnau, and they had taken the early morning train.

On the highest point of the island they found a dry bench under the overhang of a small chapel. The craggy peaks of the high mountains around the *Zugspitze*, which they could see from their balcony in Munich when the Föhn blew, rose misty-blue and white against the high sun to the south, very close. Below the mountains stretched the *Murnau Moos*, the Great Moor, dotted with hayricks on stilts. The roofs and houses of Murnau nestled to the east, Uffingen, at the end of an extended bay to the north, looked small and far away. The bells of the church in Murnau began to toll, Sunday service was over.

Alexandra leaned her head on Konrad's shoulder.

"Look," said Konrad, "a skater! Two, three!"

Three people came gliding unto the lake from the landing at Murnau. They carried large, square boards on long sticks.

"They are shoveling the snow off the ice."

Running in big circles, the three cleared a sizable skating rink. More people on skates appeared. Meanwhile the men were busy marking several long, straight runways on the side.

Several strange conveyances ventured onto the ice, unusually high-legged sleds with a bench, which were pushed by two skaters and low sleds with high handles in which the women took their children for a ride. It had turned into a *Volksfest*, half the village of Murnau was circling and turning on the ice.

"I'm hungry," Alexandra said.

Konrad, scanned the shore and discovered an inn very close, right across the lake to the south. As they walked towards the shore, a sudden low, thunder-like rumble startled them, although the sky was cloudless, clear and blue.

A few minutes later, another such rumble. The lake! The ice was rumbling dangerously. They hurried ashore.

The rumbling continued at regular intervals. From the high shore they spotted groups of men throwing heavy, round discs with a short stick on top skidding along the tracks. At each throw the frozen lake thundered like a big drum.

"Oh," said the innkeeper, "they are playing *Stockschiessen*."

Checkered cloths on the heavy tables, antlers on the walls, the *Gaststube*, the guest room of the inn was overheated. Nourishing smells wafted from the kitchen. Out of fear that someone might contract pneumonia while being engaged in the serious task of eating, all windows were tightly closed.

Konrad laughed. "This is what they call *gemütlich* in Upper Bavaria. But you will see, the food is *reell*, hearty and plentiful."

They ordered *Kalbsnierenbraten, Rotkohl and Semmelknödel*, veal-kidney roast with red cabbage and bread dumplings.

"With your permission, may I be so free and ask whether the young lady is from Italy?" inquired the stout innkeeper while taking their order. "My wife comes from near Merano and still feels homesick, nobody speaks Italian around here."

Konrad explained that Alexandra came from Georgia, a far away country in the mountains of southern Russia, near Persia.

The man wiped his hands in his apron and apologized disappointed. "I asked because the young lady has dark hair and such deep blue eyes. These only exist in the one valley in the Adige where my wife comes from."

Solicitous he called his wife from the kitchen to admire their rare guest from Persia. She almost did have Alexandra's blue eyes!

As they drank their beer, they watched the guests. Groups of men in local costumes sat drinking beer after church. At a long table gathered a large family, four sets of parents with their diverse children, presided over by a lean, old patriarch. Apparently they were celebrating grandfather's birthday. Everybody was talking animatedly, and Alexandra once again observed how familiar this scene was.

The food was good and plenty as Konrad had promised. When they had finished, the innkeeper's blue-eyed wife returned with two deserts.

"This is a surprise. It's on the house," she explained, "the *Herrschaften* may not know this dish, it's *Dampfnudel in Himbeersosse*, my specialty." Steamed dumplings in raspberry sauce.

The *Dampfnudel*, a white, indescribably airy hemisphere that would fill a hand surrounded by a sauce of preserved, wild, red raspberries was out of this world. Konrad carefully placed a raspberry on top of his dumpling and made the sauce run down the globe.

"The *dénouement* of the Virgin!" He laughed, and attacked the culinary work of art with his spoon.

Fortified and reassured by the good meal and friendly people they decided to walk across the lake to Uffingen and there catch the evening train home.

The sun was already low when they passed their island. The shadows grew longer, and the high mountains became furrowed by deeply etched contours. Slowly the stark black and white landscape of the morning took on colors in the waning light. Tinges of mauve and purple

in the shadows, and green edges around the yellow-tinged snow fields. A thin mist hung over Murnau. Still no wind.

They passed through another cleared rink where the people of Uffingen skated. For a while they watched a game of Stockschiessen. Like in the Italian *Bola* the object was to land one's disc as close as possible to a red-painted marker-disc, except the pieces were much more mobile on the slippery ice than *Bola* balls, they would careen for long distances if merely touched by one of the heavy missiles. On every shot the lake rumbled in descending eddies of sound.

As the sun went down and the graying shadows overtook them, a biting cold descended onto the lake. Shivering, they hurried towards the village.

A riotous display of orange and red raced across the peaks, the end of the day. With the last light a flock of cawing crows descended into the bare trees at the small railroad station only to be scared back into flight by the whistle of the approaching train.

They had just walked into their apartment when Clara called. She and Joachim had returned from Berlin. To Joachim the conditions in Russia appeared ominous. Konrad suggested that they take a taxi immediately. Alexandra would prepare a simple German supper, dark bread, butter, and cold cuts, after which they could talk into the night.

When the Bredows arrived, Clara peered into Alexandra's face, then hugged her relieved. "For heaven's sake, you look good and relaxed. What did you do?"

"We went to church to repent our sins!" Alexandra said with a laugh. "No, we spent some six hours in the sun walking across snowed-in *Staffelsee* near Murnau, watching people skate and play Stockschiessen. It was a most beautiful day. We, too, just arrived home."

"Did you have a long talk?"

"We hardly spoke. It was good to be silent and just listen to each other. We are well, the sun did it."

They sat down and over supper a serious-faced Joachim began. "Chaos rules Russia. Nobody is in control of the drifting government. It seems that everybody including the left-wing Socialists were caught completely by surprise by this huge demonstration and the massacre of people."

"We still have no reliable firsthand reports. Apparently a young priest, Father Gapon, had been set up by the government to found a 'Union for Cultural and Social Welfare' among the workers in order to draw people away from the influence of the extreme left. With the help of the liberals, Gapon composed a petition to the Tsar to air the worker's grievances and applied for permission to march to the Winter Palace to present this petition to the Emperor. The St. Petersburg city government could not make up their mind.

Gapon marched without permission, and when the singing and praying demonstrators grew to alarming numbers—some estimate that a hundred thousand pushed into Dvortsovaya Square—the police panicked and began systematically shooting at the people who were praying on their knees in the snow. The panic that broke out did the rest. Nobody has counted the dead and wounded."

Alexandra listened, numb. She had not touched her food.

Unrelenting, Joachim continued. "So much for the horrid facts. The Emperor remained disinterested, he gave no conciliatory speech, nor did he order an investigation into the police

action. Rumors say that he congratulated his troops for their valor. The immediate result of this tragedy was an international outcry, and the final collapse of all trust among the simple people into 'Father-Tsar' and his 'infallible' theocratic rule."

He bit off a piece of bread and slowly chewed on it with grim determination. "Two months ago I talked to Alexandra's distant cousin, Sergey Witte. Witte feels that only a military dictatorship could save the Tsar and the country, but because of the miserable progress of the Japanese-Russian War such an organized military coup would be technically impossible at this time. That brings me to the origins of this dangerous tragedy."

He paused with clenched teeth. Clara suggested that they eat a few bites, but nobody was in any mood for enjoying the food.

"Do continue Joachim," said Alexandra, "if we are still hungry after this tale, we can eat later."

Joachim began anew. "The war with Japan has taken a disastrous turn. Port Arthur had to capitulate to the Japanese who are now chasing the Russian troops through Manchuria. So many troops have been sent to the Pacific that there are not enough left to quell an uprising at home. To make things worse, the Army and especially the Navy are so thoroughly infiltrated by Socialist radicals, that there are not enough reliable soldiers around to guarantee the safety of the Emperor, not to mention of the general public."

Konrad raised his eyebrows. "The Emperor should resign immediately!"

"Konrad," Joachim weighed in, "this would lead to complete chaos in the present situation. Nobody has the power and level-headedness to run Russia. As long as the war in Mongolia is continuing, a change of government is out of question."

Joachim looked at Alexandra. "All of this has led to uprisings among the restive minorities—one third of the Tsar's subjects are not Russian!—in Poland, in the Baltics, and in the Transcaucasus. Your uncle Dadiani in Mingrelia has suffered extensive devastations in his tea plantations. Listen, this *is* serious, the revolution has started in Russia."

He shook his head and sighed. "There is only one person who could save the situation: Witte, with his skill, international connections, and his exceptional determination he could bring order and an end to the war. But Nicholas is incapable of any clear decisions, and the court clique, whose puppet Nicholas is, does not trust Witte."

"To my dismay I found that Berlin is working quietly to jeopardize Witte's attempts at securing a European state loan. Emperor Wilhelm would not be unhappy if his Russian cousin tumbled. But Wilhelm cannot comprehend that if the Russian throne collapses his would follow. Wilhelm is pursuing some rather megalomaniac political ideas in Europe and in Tangier.... But I should not discuss *my* personal problems with you. I would lose my position, if not my head, if any of what I told you would leak from this room with my name attached to it."

Joachim looked seriously from Konrad to Alexandra. "I would recommend for you to stay here. Tsar or Socialism, the chaos of the next few years is bound to be deadly."

Clara raised her hands and looked at him aghast. "How can you suggest such a thing? Alexandra has her family in Georgia. She is a Russian subject. Konrad's work is in St. Petersburg, and he is married to Alexandra for good or bad."

"Clara, I am serious. We will get out as diplomats, but Konrad and Alexandra will have to suffer the full consequences of what is to come. There is still time for such a move."

Konrad had listened resting his chin in his hand, elbows on the table. This was the first time the suggestion to return to Germany had turned up. He had never considered a flight to

Germany an alternative. He surely did not sympathize with the Russian nationalists, but Alexandra was Georgian.

He voiced the obvious, "I don't consider a retreat to Germany an acceptable solution. I may be German, but I don't feel an allegiance to Germany like you do, Joachim. I am married to Alexandra and my home is there. One cannot change one's allegiances overnight. And Alexandra feels she has a mission as a physician among her countrymen. This may sound like naïve Socialism to you, but I fully support her idealism."

Red-faced, Joachim said. "Konrad, it will be a matter of life and death, not a question whether you should stay or not."

Alexandra, who had listened quietly, sat bolt upright and said. "Joachim, if I try to look at your suggestion with a modicum of rationality, I see many reasons that speak for your suggestion and many personal ones that are against it. I *am* Georgian as Clara and Konrad point out. Georgians are very hard to transplant, and my 'mission' as Konrad calls it, is in no small measure my way of coping with these threats to our existence *and* with my 'homesickness' of living in northern Russia."

She picked up a piece of bread, plucked it into small crumbs which she arranged absentmindedly into designs on the table cloth. "Munich has turned out to be a place with a surprisingly 'Georgian' charm. I feel I could live here. Maybe this would be the closest place for me to live away from home. However, if St. Petersburg becomes too dangerous for us to stay, I would first go back to Tiflis before I would think of emigrating. In Tiflis my life would have a purpose, here not."

Clara called Joachim a Cassandra and argued once more for Alexandra, who with a grateful look decided to divert Joachim from his gloom. "Would you join us tomorrow night at a chamber concert at the house of friends? They are the parents of Niko's fiancé one of the culturally influential families in town. You would find them most congenial."

Clara was immediately interested, if Alexandra could get the agreement of the hostess. Joachim, still brooding under the dark shadow of the meeting in Berlin, remained stubbornly silent.

Alexandra tried again. "Look Joachim, these Monday evening concerts are most charming, they have given me my first taste of Western music. Besides Professor and Mrs. Dahl are an exceptional couple living in a very unusual, contemporary house. I know you will enjoy their company after so many years in that 'Oriental backwater.' It will divert you from your dark thoughts. Come along, forget Berlin and St. Petersburg for one evening. These two incapable emperors will disappear one day!"

Joachim, incredulous, shook his head. Alexandra gave him her most winning smile which finally melted his objections.

Chamber Music

Munich 1905

The concert was almost a family affair: Niko, Friedrich, and Claudia played a Bach flute sonata; Friedrich and his mother, a Beethoven sonata for cello and piano, and as a final offering Claudia premiered the two piano pieces that Webern had dedicated to Alexandra. Claudia's efforts were graciously applauded, but the forbiddingly abstract Webern piece left all except Alexandra aghast.

Clara, who played the piano herself, asked Claudia to play the pieces again and allow her to sit next to her and look at the score. She discovered Webern's color notations. An intense debate ensued about colors and music. Clara reported that similar attempts at combining colors and music were being explored by Rimsky-Korsakov and his student Skriabin in St. Petersburg. To her knowledge, the two composers had met with little success, they could not agree on a universal correlation between pitch and color.

Alexandra was amused. She had seen vivid colors to Webern's music, but neither were the colors the same today as then, nor did they agree with Webern's notations in the score.

Professor Dahl shook his head and suggested that the reason could be that they were not "seeing colors" at all, but that the brain intercepted unformed sensations at different times and in different places along the neurons of the cortex. The images were not formed on the retina. This suggested that there existed neural shortcuts between the auditory and the visual neuronic systems, which connected at different places in different individuals, and besides, very few people possessed them at all.

Alexandra supported his theory. She certainly was not looking at any colored shapes in front of her eyes. The spontaneous fireworks only existed inside her head, normal vision was not involved.

Dahl, content with this piece of voluntary information, did not insist on a further discussion of these phenomena.

Friedrich, who had fidgeted restlessly for some time, diverted this familiar discussion with an absurd suggestion. "Earlier tonight I asked Konrad why all modern revolutions seem to have begun during Carnival. Konrad had never thought about it and was skeptical. However, arguably the revolutions of 1848 in Prussia, Hungary, Austria, and France started at this time of the year. Louis XVI was guillotined on January 21, 1793; the uprisings that led to the Peasant Wars in Southern Germany started in February 1525; Kapodistria in Greece in 1821 and Garibaldi in Italy in 1859 rose in late February, and now the Russian revolution breaks out during the same time of the year. Had anyone an explanation?"

Alexandra thought of the penitents marching on Ash Wednesday. Did a connection exist between penitence and revolution? She offered this observation as a contribution. Katharina suggested that one should investigate the horoscopes of these events, she was sure the stars would provide the desired explanation.

Konrad grinned thoughtfully rubbing his beardless chin. "And all would-be revolutionaries grow Fasching beards to hide their fright behind."

"Well, that's *right*," Friedrich laughed, "and now you have become a reactionary conservative. It's that easy!"

Professor Dahl began to laugh. "I support Katharina. The horoscope is the answer: higher coincidences! We know nothing about such a correlation. But Alexandra's example has a strange meaning, the anthropological origins of the penitence movement, as well as Christ's death all relate to Carnival. This orgiastic festival is ancient."

He shook his head again and mused. "Come to think of it: *Saturn reigns and the Moon is waning!* How could I have forgotten? Katharina is right!"

Thus vindicated, Katharina pursed her lips smugly. "That is what I meant, Fasching and the Church festivals are governed by the lunar calendar, which is a female calendar, isn't it?"

Caught by his future daughter-in-law, Dahl gave himself charmed. "Yes, all religious ideas follow lunar cycles: four times seven equals twenty-eight days! Who invented the number seven, matriarchy? Was the moon female first—*i selene, la luna, la lune*—and after it God created woman? Presumably so, and I have foolishly entertained the vain hope that by using rational psychology we could do away with this kind of religious superstition. But what would we do without our charming women? I consider myself defeated!"

He lifted his glass to the women around the table.

Konrad said. "Ash Wednesday, Lenten, Easter is in a couple of weeks. Easter and the Mysteries, Joachim, have you ever heard the story of the Easter play at Zedazeni, which my mother-in-law produces every year?"

Joachim shook his head. "I have heard rumors of it, but in my official position in Tiflis I never dared attending, and nobody could explain to me what was happening up there during Easter Night. But Alexandra, what has your dear mother to do with these things?"

Alexandra laughed. "Konrad, may I tell our story including your tentative interpretation and its latest modification with Persephone eating the pomegranate pits?"

Konrad smiled, thinking of Zaguramo. "If everyone agrees to listen to a lengthy tale which has become part of the Chavchavadze-Dadiani family lore, so be it. I see, we have entered the charmed circles of Hauff's fairy tales."

Claiming everyone's rapt attention Alexandra told of the strange Easter happenings at Zedazeni.

"You know, Lexako," said Niko who had listened to his sister with increasing fascination. "I have never heard that story. Of course, I knew that Deda attended Easter service at Zedazeni, but she never told me what happened up there, nor that she acted in that play."

Alexandra nodded. "It was a well-kept family secret, only Ilia and Papa knew of her acting in the play, and Papa was not going to tell anybody. Besides neither he nor Ilia had ever seen Deda perform at Zedazeni. The whole matter was much too embarrassing. I am still proud of my mother's daring. Imagine a married woman acting and against the expressed will of her husband—in Georgia!"

Now Niko wanted to hear more of the details. "And what about that strange woman, Persephone? Was she really a close friend of Deda's? The witch of Shav nabada?"

Konrad, restless, looked at his watch. "Niko, it is almost ten, we should be going home."

But he was outvoted by the Dahls and the Bredows.

Very animatedly Mrs. Dahl pleaded. "Now that we have entered 'Hauff's maze', as Konrad says, we want to hear the next story nested in Alexandra's story, please Konrad let her continue."

Alexandra took off her necklace and handed it to Clara. "It all started with this necklace."

Konrad shook his head, but Alexandra continued undaunted. "Konrad met an Armenian

goldsmith, and under his tutelage he made this necklace for me. Henri is a Sufi, he took Konrad as his student and introduced him to his *tekke*. Persephone was the sheik of this tekke."

Joachim became agitated. "During my six years in Tiflis I have tried several times unsuccessfully to penetrate the Sufi circles, and your necklace I have admired so often and never dared to ask who made it. Konrad, you? A Sufi?!"

Konrad smiled about Joachim's excitement. "Not quite a Sufi, only an apprentice to an exceptional Sufi master."

Urged on by Joachim and Clara, Konrad and Alexandra alternately told the stories of the necklace, of Henri and Persephone.

At two in the morning Friedrich drove them home in his father's car.

"What an extraordinary evening!" exclaimed Joachim when they separated at the Bredow's hotel, "I should have had to come to Munich to discover the hidden life of Tiflis!"

A week later Joachim visited Konrad and Alexandra to bring them the encouraging news that the Tsar had appointed Witte President of the Council of Ministers, the emperor's advisory cabinet. Witte had immediately forced the Tsar to dismiss the incapable ministers in the cabinet and replaced them with energetic and trustworthy men of his own choice. The political situation must have frightened Nicholas sufficiently, commented Joachim, to accept this horse cure.

Konrad remarked that Witte was hardly a revolutionary. Joachim, the diplomat he was, pointed out that this was exactly the encouraging aspect of the development. Witte would strengthen the vacillating hand of the Emperor. A more radical government would create total chaos at this time. Witte had first to settle the war and stabilize Russia's economy, before he could persuade the Emperor to accept a constitution. Thank God, the threat of a radical revolution had once again been averted.

After Joachim left, Konrad and Alexandra got into a heated political argument. Alexandra, stung by Joachim's conservative pessimism, demanded the head of the Emperor, which Konrad countered with the sarcastic remark that she had a sharp mind but lacked, as did most Russian subjects of His Majesty, a sense for a constructive *Realpolitik*. Alexandra became angry, broke off the discussion, and went to bed in tears of frustration.

Friedrich and Katharina get married
Alexandra learns to drive
Fiesole
Italy 1905

Friedrich, in black gown and mortarboard, sat next to a beaming Katharina crowned with a wreath of flowers. On the previous day they had been married in a civil ceremony. Only the closest family had been present, Konrad and Alexandra were their witnesses. They were now on the traditional triumphal procession to celebrate Friedrich's *summa cum laude* doctorate. On long ropes four students pulled the car, a gift from his father, from the university to the Hotel Bayerischer Hof, where a banquet awaited them. A motley procession of professors, fellow students and wedding guests followed the car.

Friedrich had been offered a well-paid position as *Assistent* at the University of Hamburg. A respectable salary had been his father's last condition to a wedding. Mrs. Dahl had accepted Katharina as her daughter-in-law weeks earlier. The pair would move to Hamburg in December, after the birth of the child.

To the *grand diner* wedding reception and doctorate celebration in one, the Dahls had invited a large number of guests. Speeches in German and Latin, champagne, and excellent wines. Friedrich's father gave a speech, his mother cried, and Katharina in her designer blouse was glowing.

Friedrich and Konrad had hatched a plan of driving to Italy with the new car. Alexandra had immediately written to the Wolfsons. A telegram from Sally arrived a few days later. "Fantastic! Come. Stay two weeks. Two rooms reserved. Love Walter & Sally."

And then Alexandra voiced the startling wish to learn to drive before they would set out. A second driver would be a highly desirable insurance, and she had bet with Uncle Mouravi that she would return to Tiflis driving a car.

Konrad raised his eyebrows. "*Mei*, you are feeling high, Princess Dadiani! But I appreciate your practical sense, a second driver would indeed be of great help. How do you learn to drive though?"

Friedrich suggested the Royal Bavarian Automobile Club, which offered lessons. "Except for a startled instructor you should have few problems. I know of no women drivers in Munich. But I guess that only encourages you!"

By driving for an hour every night after work she passed the examination in less than four weeks. On the following weekend, Friedrich graciously offered Alexandra the keys to his new toy and they drove to Mittenwald to celebrate Alexandra's 'second emancipation.'

It became the dress rehearsal for their Italian adventure. Alexandra drove with great concentration, Katharina acted as navigator, the two men in the back seat commented on each and every oversight Alexandra made.

Katharina directed her to a narrow road shaded by old beeches along the eastern shore of *Lake Starnberg* with romantic views of the lake, Tutzinger, and the *Roseninsel* on the opposite shore.

"Alexandra watch out," shouted Friedrich when in the village of Berg a dog chased a chicken across their path. Alexandra hit the brake so hard that everyone jerked forward. She

almost caught the dog's tail. The chicken escaped.

"I am so sorry, I was thinking of how King Ludwig could have drowned himself in such a beautiful place. Are you all right?"

"You want me to drive?" said Friedrich with a sneer. She stubbornly refused. To her embarrassment the car had stalled, and Konrad had to crank it.

"You know," said Alexandra when the engine was purring again, "my problem is smaller than a dog. Whenever I see a cow dropping in the road, I instinctively try to avoid it. A chicken in the pot would have been decidedly more welcome!"

"But think of the irate farmer," Friedrich remarked, "and of the dent the chicken would have made in my new car."

They bobbed and bumped along the unpaved road. People jumped out of their way shouting and gesticulating, *diese Wahnsinnigen*, these madmen, and when they recognized the woman at the wheel, they stood open-mouthed by the side of the road.

They were not dressed right, observed Konrad: his ears hurt from of the draft, the dust got into his eyes, not to mention the clothing. They needed a full touring outfit, leather jackets, racing caps, and goggles.

Behind Garmisch came the first long hill. Heavily loaded as they were, the little engine—Friedrich had bragged that it had the power of thirty horses—slowed to a crawl. Half an hour further, steam hissed from the radiator.

"Rule number eight," said Alexandra and stopped the car at the roadside, "when the radiator overheats, turn off the engine. Do *not* open the radiator as long as it steams. *Achtung! Serious burns may occur.* To open the radiator, cover the cap with a rag!"

"Where is the old rag?" she demanded.

Friedrich sacrificed his kerchief, and Konrad fetched cold water from a nearby brook in his hat. She was in command, and enjoyed herself famously. "You see, we must get a few rags, a pail for water, and a sizable can for petrol!"

Eventually Konrad cranked the engine, and they got back on the road.

"Friedrich, we need a powerful twelve-cylinder Daimler for the four of us. This thing is too puny for the Brenner Pass," teased Konrad. But Alexandra would not hear of it. "A Daimler will overheat too, and then you will need even more water. I like this modest-looking vehicle!"

They stopped in Mittenwald on a meadow at the foot of the towering north face of the Wetterstein. Their spirits were high but Katharina felt quite exhausted. The two women slept an hour in the fresh mountain air, while Konrad and Friedrich sat apart.

Friedrich looked at the sleeping Katharina. "I don't think Katharina should drive all the way with us to Florence, it will be too much for her. Mother is right. Maybe she could go by train for a stretch, then meet us at night or drive with us for part of an easy day. What do you think, Konrad?"

Konrad was entirely in agreement, but advised to wait until Katharina would come to the same conclusion.

Konrad looked at "his" two women. Apparently Friedrich knew nothing of their threesome relations. He was happy that their foursome worked so well.

Alexandra handed the keys to Friedrich. "Thanks, it's your turn. I have done my driving for today."

Katharina suggested they drive home via Kochel. Friedrich cranked the car back to life, and they soon rolled down the steep, hairpin turns between Kochel and the Walchensee.

Alexandra was the first to notice the hot smell. "What are you doing?" she shouted from the back seat. "Are you driving on your brakes? For God's sake, you will lose your brakes and land us in the ditch. "

Friedrich admitted embarrassed that he was already losing his brakes. What was he supposed to do? Wait until they cooled off?

"Rule number two: When going down a steep hill put the car into second gear, take the foot of the gas, and let the engine do the braking. This will save the brakes and your life!" Friedrich jerked the car into second. The car jolted dangerously, but they rolled safely down the hill. Friedrich risked a look at Alexandra in the back, laughing, "Alexandra, thanks to the Auto Club you have saved us twice today. What else do you know that I was never taught?"

"We will discuss that when we get to the next crisis. Do you know how to change a tire? I do, but I will stand aside when that happens and let you men do the work under my supervision! It was clearly a good idea to learn how to drive!"

They left Munich at six in the morning. Katharina, to everybody's relief had decided to go by train. She would meet them in Innsbruck at the hotel at night.

Claudia had begged Alexandra to let her have Otto while they were away. Alexandra was delighted by that suggestion and gave Elisabeth a much deserved vacation.

On this brilliant spring day, they were dressed as if they were going to drive to Timbuktu: white racing caps, aviator's goggles, and beige leather jackets.

"Watch out Italy, here come the people from Mars!" shouted Friedrich.

Friedrich drove, he had chosen the fastest route to Mittenwald. The Automobile Club had furnished Alexandra with route maps, suggestions of where to find petrol and mechanical help, advice as to road conditions, and a special *trip-tique* that would assure them the free help of the Royal Touring Club of Italy in an emergency.

Their first crisis came as they reached the precipitous descent into the Inn Valley behind Ehrwald. Below them lay the city of Innsbruck, the Brenner rose across the green valley. The view was magnificent, but the road dived vertiginously for several kilometers straight down. They were glad that Katharina was not with them, she would have been frightened out of her mind. Alexandra and Friedrich finally decided to put the car into first gear. The engine whined but they ground down the hill safely.

The three reached Innsbruck at noon, and found Katharina asleep in her room. They washed up, had a rest, and spent the afternoon walking through town: the *Golden Dachl*, the grave of Emperor Maximilian I surrounded by thirty-six life-sized bronze statues of his mythical ancestors. Katharina knew a story for each of them. In the afternoon they dawdled eating *Linzer Torte* in an outdoor café.

Friedrich estimated that it would take three or four hours to cross the Brenner Pass and reach Bolzano. They left at daybreak. Katharina would follow an hour later, and they would pick her up at the station in Bolzano.

They slowly wound their way up the mountain through villages and cows grazing on lush green meadows. The silvery band of the Inn and the toy-like houses of Innsbruck lay below them. The ascent to the pass was less steep than they had feared, and the road was good. The engine boiled over only once. They tried a new method; whenever the thermometer began to climb Konrad would get a pail of cold water from a brook and throw it at the radiator. This preventative method and taking it easy made it unnecessary to open the dangerous radiator

cap. They reached the pass in an hour and a half.

And there began Italy! The formalities of clearing the car for "import" into Italy took almost an hour. Only the help of the local *TCI* representative got them through in the end. Alexandra, in her best Italian, beguiled the man most shamelessly.

"Maybe we should have bribed the customs officer," suggested Alexandra later, accustomed to this kind of manipulation of officials.

Friedrich laughed. "But you most successfully charmed the man from the Italian Touring Club, which you enjoyed and it cost us nothing!"

They had grown cold waiting at the border, the higher mountains were still covered by deep snow. Now the air warmed quickly as they reached lower altitudes. In Bolzano bloomed the apples. The balmy air! And the scents of Italy! Flowers everywhere. The smell of roasted garlic led them to a garden restaurant where they had lunch while waiting for Katharina. Her train was an hour late. Katharina begged to be driven along Lake Garda. It would take only an hour longer to get to Verona.

Alexandra drove. Blooming apple orchards and vineyards lined the road. Like in Georgia and different from Germany the new bright green vines were strung horizontally. In the villages, under overhanging roofs, three and four story houses painted in all colors. They played hide and seek with the foaming Adige river until a sign pointed to Gardone. Alexandra climbed over the low hills and before their eyes lay the blue expanse of the Lake.

The road along the lake skirted the steep wooded hills on its west side. They had to pass one tunnel after another. Every time they emerged from the darkness the blue water, only a few feet below, offered a new, unexpected surprise. Small villages dotted the low green hills and meadows on the opposite shore.

Between the tunnels squeezed houses with red clay roofs in villages that climbed precariously up the steep hillside. Like a mother hen the church tower with its baroque helmet in their midst. Green-slatted window shutters which, when tilted outwards, cast sharp-angled shadows on the sienna-brown walls in the midday sun. Behind a profusion of blue Clematis and Glycinias hid a villa in its garden by the lakeshore. Boats moored at its private pier. Hidden on protected terraces bloomed lemons whose sweet scent flooded the road in pockets of warm air. The perfumes and colors of the promised land.

In the middle of this beauty a flat tire. Alexandra caught it just in time. She stood with folded arms instructing her men: "No, don't jack up the car, first loosen the wheel bolts, then lift it."

They put on the spare. It was done in fifteen minutes. Konrad stripped to his underpants and jumped into the lake. He came back after a few minutes shivering and spraying water, too cold. The next village was so alluring that they spent an hour in a café, warming themselves in the sun.

Driving into Verona proved a daunting experience. The narrow cobblestone lanes of the old town were crowded with braying donkeys, carts, flying vendors, colorful umbrellas and people shouting in the open markets, cursing, and singing. Alexandra had to fight her way at snail's pace. Nobody paid attention to her honking. They garaged the car at the hotel, paid the attendant to patch their punctured tube, and set out on foot.

Konrad looked at his wife. "Are you happy? This town is the closest thing yet to the Tiflis Bazaar." They stayed another day. Katharina insisted that they take in an opera in the outdoor

arena.

Aïda in the immense Roman oval packed with people: live elephants, a flight of pigeons strategically released, a massive chorus, powerful singers, lavish costumes, everything bigger than big. However, the best show was provided by the audience. Everyone knew the opera by heart. Thunderous applause after every well-sung aria. The favorite singers received an ovation even before they had opened their mouth.

Alexandra shuddered remembering the *Variété* show in Berlin. Despite their multitude the natural grace of these people struck her as so much more pleasant, graceful, exuberant, and closer to her own sensibilities. They were simply excited. Yet she came away certain that opera of this dimension was not for her. The intimate, complex chamber music in Munich had touched her more deeply. Katharina gloated over the spectacle, the pinnacle of her musical experience

The road to Vicenza was a chaotic tangle of men and animals. Friedrich had to watch not to run over one of the many donkey carts that careened all over the road without order or discipline. In the endless, boring Po Valley the traffic was less, but the fine dust from the miserable tracks penetrated everything. They trailed a long dust cloud. In Padua's maze of busy streets Friedrich got hopelessly lost, the arena chapel was closed when they finally found it.

Dusted from head to toe, tired and disappointed, they decided to have lunch and wait. When the custodian opened the doors half an hour later, the Giotto murals were a letdown. Alexandra decided that they were strictly of historical interest, their visual appeal was limited: stiff, flat, and chalky. If only Walter were here to give them one of his lectures on the early Renaissance.

They quit the race in Ferrara. The Schifanoia Palace that Walter had praised so highly was already closed. It was an unfortunate day, dust and little beauty along the road, and all the sights inaccessible. Exhausted, they fell into bed in a musty, second-rate hotel.

Next morning they put Katharina on the train to Florenz and set out to conquer the Apennine passes. Alexandra was longing for the quiet discussions in Fiesole. Konrad, who had wanted to search for the beautiful Novella d'Andreae at the university, relented. They circled Bologna without stopping.

Florence was less than a hundred kilometers away, but the steep, winding road across the Apennines slowed them down. The car was continuously on the verge of overheating. There were not as many cold brooks to replenish the radiator as in the Alps. They finally solved the problem with the help of a large wine flask in a basket in which they carried extra water. Why did this car come with an insufficient radiator, muttered Konrad, and that produced the idea to have a larger radiator installed in Florence, which would solve the problem of mountain driving.

Wild, rocky crags rose from low, densely macchia-overgrown hillsides. Colorful fortified villages clung to steep slopes. Deplorable poverty everywhere, half-naked children played by the road. Herds of scrawny goats gnawed at the sparse oak bushes. The few stony fields yielded near nothing. Only the priests were fat and the churches over-decorated.

"Let me drive the rest of the way," offered Alexandra when they had finally reached the pass. But driving downhill was no easier or faster. She had to lug the car in second gear all the

way. Konrad in the back seat complained that he was getting dizzy from the many curves.

"Try to help me drive with your eyes, that will keep you from getting dizzy," advised Alexandra without mercy. She skirted Prato and Florence. They needed almost four hours from Bologna to reach Fiesole. Alexandra was so excited she missed the turnoff: *Villa Tasso!*

After all these years the house, hidden among the gray olives and the newly green vines, looked as enchanted as remembered, tranquil and rustic. A good place for intellectual exchanges. Alexandra had returned to give Walter an account of her new understanding.

Robust Sally reigned as overbearing as ever. Walter stood apart, older, bent, embarrassed by his excitement. He smiled shyly, a formal handkiss for Alexandra.

Fiesole 1905

"Walter, we have not seen each other for a very long time, why did you abandon us and never visit St. Petersburg?"

Walter looked past her. "Dear Alexandra, it pains me to explain. I know you are not to be blamed, you are not Russian. We did not abandon you, I have given up collecting Russian icons. I have only a few Georgian and Byzantine *émaillés* left."

He glanced at his young friend and lowered his eyes. "You see, it is because of the dreadful progroms in Russia and Poland. Every day new refugees arrive. The Jewish elders have decided to boycott the Russian market. I don't believe it will change anything, but if we don't hold together this cancer will spread." He awkwardly clasped and unclasped his hands. "Forgive me that I trouble you with my problems."

Alexandra considered his words. She had heard of the progroms that sprang up again and again in the West-Russian Jewish Pale. The central government had repeatedly issued decrees to stop the abuse, but Tsar Nicholas was known to be at best indifferent, and the local police authorities in the far away provinces paid no attention to these governmental decrees and looked aside when the Cossacks devastated Jewish villages.

The non-Semitic Georgian Jews, proselytized during the first century, were a fully integrated part of the populations of the towns. Largely indistinguishable from their Georgian neighbors. They were one of the bewildering collection of faiths in Transcaucasia. She held no antipathies against Jews.

She nodded and tried to ease Walter's embarrassment with her eyes. She truly felt for her old friend. He smiled wretchedly at her and apologized once more, begging that they avoid this distressing subject.

Konrad asked Sally for permission to show Friedrich the house. Alexandra joined him. Katharina was asleep upstairs. Sally would serve dinner in an hour.

Sally had given them their old room. Below their window the silvery leaves of the gray-green olive trees, the city below, a profusion of blue iris on the hillside. The quiet serenity. Spring was even more beautiful than the summer of their memories. They woke Katharina.

Alexandra excused herself. She had to find Sally. In the kitchen she asked where she could help. "You could prepare the salad and garlic *crostini*, we are having *médailles de veau chasseur*."

Washing and drying the lettuce leaves Alexandra began. "Sally, I am so happy to be here. Walter's discourses on the spirit of the Renaissance have been my challenge all through the past years. In the last months I finally encountered a new provocation in modern music and painting. Tell me, Walter is so depressed, what has happened?"

Sally did not answer. For a while she continued to pound the veal cutlets. After she had finally shaken them energetically in a bag with flour she faced Alexandra. "Please, don't take his words about the Russian progroms personally. You are right, he is depressed. The boycott is only part of the reason. The art market is changing rapidly. To make ends meet, I help him sell modern art, but his heart is not in modern painting. The business in Renaissance paintings

is shrinking and so is the supply."

She put the flour-dusted scaloppini into the pan and lit a ladle of cognac over them. For a second her features were lit by the flickering light. Alexandra noticed how much she had aged. A tear was running down her cheek. "Ach, Alexandra, most discouraging, he lost his best Renaissance customer, a woman in Boston, to an arrogant, young snob whom that woman put through Harvard and now uses as her exclusive scout and agent. There are indications that this Mr. Berenson is also working for a dealer in London, stealing Walter's customers in exchange for high commissions from London. Walter is too honest to expose the often dubious expertise of this young spud. I had hoped that you would help me cheer up Walter, and then he plows right into you at the first opportunity. *Do* remember that Walter is very fond of you."

While mixing the salad Alexandra considered how she could help. She was so full of her new discoveries in music, that she would have liked to talk with Walter about them. She now realized that in his downhearted mood Walter would not be free to listen to *her* excitement. She had to find a subject closer to his heart. Maybe later, with Sally's help, she could try to discuss the paintings she had seen at Becky's house and her conversations with Marti and Kandinsky. She definitely wanted to test her new understanding in the Uffizi.

The preparation of the *crostini* was finished. Alexandra smiled at Sally. "Let me briefly talk to my old friend until you call for dinner. Maybe I can help you."

She found Walter absorbed in a book in the library. He looked up as she entered and caressed her graceful figure with gentle eyes as she pulled a chair next to him.

"Walter, I have never told you how much you influenced my life in the past years. Your challenge to 'know yourself and be accountable for your actions' has been with me every day since that evening when you gave me Petrarca's letter to read. I want to thank you for this gift."

Walter averted his gaze. "Do you forgive me my thoughtless remarks earlier? I should have tried to keep my worries hidden from you. You know how very fond I am of you."

She searched his sad, old eyes and nodded.

He looked past her and sought support in his memories. "When I was your age, every day brought new surprises, life was glorious, exciting, and dangerous. Now fickle Fortuna has reduced me to holding still. I parry her strokes of as best I can. Do tell me of the great discoveries you have made during the past years."

Sally banged the gong and called. "*A table tous mes enfants!*"

Alexandra offered Walter her hand and playfully pulled him out of his chair. He gladly suffered her help.

Next morning they all had different wishes, Katharina wanted to take Friedrich to the top of the Duomo, Alexandra had made up her mind to brave the Uffizi. Konrad alone had no specific plan. He finally joined Alexandra, who, she knew, would have liked to be left alone.

As a compromise, he suggested that they explore the museum separately and meet after two hours to exchange their discoveries. Konrad was a meticulous viewer of pictures. He examined every detail of a painting as carefully as his plants. Alexandra could take one look at an entire room of paintings and dismiss it as unimportant to her at the time, although she knew from experience that one day she would find something entirely new among exactly those pictures.

She had invented a method that fitted her precisely. Almost frivolously she would ask, why did this place lure me here? What is the reason for my coming? Where is the fascinating painting to be discovered, ready to explode in my mind? She never failed in this game.

Last time Walter had taken her to the Uffizi eager to demonstrate how the Renaissance transformed man's vision in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. She still saw the Duccio Madonna, the vanishing lines of Massacio, the clear, transparent van der Goes, and Botticelli's enigmatic *Primavera* in her mind.

Somehow she felt she had passed beyond the question of seeing in three dimensions, of understanding the awareness, which Walter had insisted the Renaissance demanded of the New Man. What was beyond this world? Where was modern painting heading and most importantly, what was the next goal in her life? She restlessly searched for an expansion of her understanding that would include her experiences of the past five years.

Almost in a trance, all her senses alert, she walked through the galleries and deeply puzzled discovered that the Byzantine paintings—where years ago Walter had taken her much against her will—exerted an irresistible attraction.

Perplexed, she sat down on the only bench in the room. The well remembered panels of the *Primitivi* surrounded her. Figures in blue, dark green, or purple robes floated on shimmering gold surfaces. A sunspot brightly illuminated a Madonna, and the reflected light caught a flock of angels on the opposite wall. There was no question, these early visions were beautiful, their colors were as fresh as on the day they had been painted.

But what was their message? She closed her eyes and tried to concentrate. The gleam of the gold panels would not go away.

God is timeless! whispered an inner voice.

She shrugged. I know that they show a timeless God, I am no longer looking for the all-pervasive God.

She rose and went along the walls scrutinizing the paintings up close, as if she expected to find the answer to her puzzle in their detail. The magnificence of the chiseled gold ground, the intensity of the egg-based colors! But then the distorted faces, the horrifying scenes of martyrdom in the fringe stories of the saints stared at her—you are too close!

What you are searching for is in your own mind not in these panels.

If not God, was time the key to her conundrum?

She chose time as the center of her meditation.

She walked into the room of the early Renaissance. Here God was no longer the overriding subject. The Virgin and the saints had been reduced to ordinary human beings with emotions and earthly bodies. The Christ child sucked his fingers. The saints, clutching thick volumes, faced the beholder with dark questions in their eyes. Are you a sinner? Repent and we offer you salvation.

She gently pushed them aside. What had happened to time?

Her favorite Giorgione in Venice appeared to her. Here time stood still, was defined quite precisely. One could tell the hour of the day: it was late afternoon. The baby was hungry, his mother was feeding him when his father returned. Five years ago she had not noticed that. She smiled, Otto had taught her that.

Fleeting the picture of Otto's birth passed her mind, but Botticelli's *Primavera* a few steps further overwhelmed her meditation by its elusive beauty, and she discarded the fireworks of Otto's birth.

She took a step back and sank her eyes into the painting. The ravishing beauty of Botticelli's women made her dizzy, threatened to drown her. Almost bashful, she lowered her eyes, and her inner voice said, *they are caught in fluid time*. She tried to rescue herself along

Walter's perspective lines and discovered that the painting had three different vanishing points. And they seemed to move as she moved. As puzzled as years ago she had the feeling that an unseen heathen God watched her from behind the painting. Only this time there seemed to be three.

She walked back to her bench, sat down, and closed her eyes.

A picture of Easter at Zedazeni rose. She heard Konrad's voice. *"In Arcadia Pausanias found a horrifying female trinity: Demeter, Kore, and Yakkhos"*.

She shuddered. Drunk Persephone floated by.

"The Gods behind the painting are female."

She focused her mind on the center of her meditation. And in the next image her inner voice insisted, *"Your time is fluid too"*.

The vision of Otto's birth passed by a second time, and resisted her attempt to discard it.

"Your time is circular, lunar cycles of birth, love, and death."

Her intensity ebbed away, the images stopped coming. She put her chin into her hand and with blind eyes stared at the timeless gold surfaces of the Byzantines.

She had opened a Pandora's box of paradoxes.

Konrad found her, sitting lost among the glowing panels of the *Primitives*. "What happened to you?" he asked surprised. "You are still here, at the place I left you!"

"I am afraid I can't explain it. *I lost all time.*"

Alexandra's Time

"Friedrich," said Alexandra at night, "a few weeks ago I overheard you discuss a new theory with Niko that postulates a four-dimensional world. I had a curious experience in the Uffizi today which I will try to explain later provided I can clear my confused mind. It would help me, if you could describe that theory."

They were having coffee after dinner.

"You ask for an explanation of the latest ideas in physics. Are you sure you want to hear these esoteric speculations? What happened to you? The theory of Relativity in the Uffizi? You are not trying to goad me into a Theosophical discussion?"

Alexandra wrinkled her brows. "Don't mock me, you know that I pay no heed to the Theosophists. No, I am serious, my question has to do with the concept of time and with what will happen to our thinking in the future, after we have exhausted the Renaissance idea of banning a three-dimensional world on a flat canvas."

Friedrich mumbled that theoretical physics was comprehensible only to the initiated. "The essence of time *is* the deeper substance of this theory, but in the very limited sense of theoretical physics, it will not affect you or me in our daily lives."

She refused to give in. "Let's see about that later. Is this theory so complex that you could not put its central ideas into a few simple sentences?"

Friedrich cocked his head and smiled condescendingly. "A year ago a certain Albert Einstein, whom nobody had ever heard of, published a paper in a respectable journal in which he postulated that the movement of the stars takes place in a four-dimensional world, the fourth dimension being time."

He paused looking at Alexandra full of doubts. "This would not be so revolutionary, if Einstein had not shown that the lengths of the spatial and temporal coordinates shrink depending on how fast the earth—or another celestial body—moves. If the body moves very slowly, time expands to infinity, but if the body flies at high speeds time shrinks, until near the speed of light it becomes exceedingly short, and the body explodes in a flash of light, x-rays, or other electromagnetic radiation. We don't really understand yet what that means, but Einstein could explain some very subtle changes in the movement of the planets, which the old Newtonian physics could not."

He looked expectantly at Alexandra. "Does that help you in any way?"

"If I am honest, it doesn't—except that it encourages me to tell you what moves me since this morning. Apparently you physicists are also contemplating how to expand our vision beyond the confined concept of three dimensions and a linear time."

She smiled challenging at Walter, who was absentmindedly lost in his own thoughts.

"As I walked through the galleries of the pre-Renaissance today I was caught by the early Byzantine panels. Puzzled I sat in that room and asked what these painters knew that I did not know. An inner voice said, 'God is timeless.'"

She shrugged. "I am no longer searching for God, but last night, thinking about this subconscious message, another question came to my mind. Did they conceive of God as infinite and time standing still, or was He seen as a single point with time expanding to infinity? In both cases time could be non-finite."

Walter stirred from his private preoccupation and said animatedly. "Alexandra, I don't know what the Scholastics taught, I am not a theologian, but this idea is very much alive in Islamic art. Moslems, like Jews, are forbidden to make anthropomorphic representations of God—you know, a grandfather with a long beard. So their Sufi mystics invented an abstract image of God. In their mosques God is represented by a single point in the center of the dome."

He began to laugh. "Forgive me, this conversation is very serious, but speaking of the Christian God, Michelangelo's grandest joke comes to my mind. You have never been in Rome and seen the Sistine Chapel, but you have surely seen reproductions of its ceiling: God creating Adam, stars, the sun, and moon, etc. Well, after finishing all this work God flies off, his crimson robe fluttering in the draft, and right above the Papal altar you see him vanish into the clouds—with a naked *derrière* towards his lousy Creation! With your permission, according to the great Michelangelo, God has a fat ass and wears no underpants!"

Walter laughed and laughed. "Well, you see, such subtle insights are forbidden to Jews and Moslems." Still cackling, he shuffled out to get some wine. "Alexandra wait for me, I am very curious what you are getting at, I still have no clue what it is."

"You are not going to try to introduce God into Einstein's Theory of Relativity?" mocked Friedrich when Walter had gone. "If that is on your mind, I will go to bed!"

Annoyed Alexandra said with a sharp voice. "No, I told you, I have no intention to argue physics. I leave that to you."

Walter poured wine for everyone. "Let's hear your theory."

She touched her lips with her folded hands concentrating on finding her thread again. "Walter, I don't have a theory, but I had a string of visions which cry for one. Having no immediate need for God, I turned my attention to the role of time in painting."

She unfolded her hands and quickly glanced at Konrad for emotional support. "It must seem obvious to you, Walter, since the Renaissance time stands still in painting. All action is frozen at the moment the painter has chosen. In some paintings this moment is very precisely defined and gives the painting a very special meaning. I am thinking of *La Tempesta*, my favorite Giorgione, there it is five in the afternoon. The woman is feeding her hungry child when his father returns, the storm is receding. Maybe only a woman who has nursed a child sees that, but Giorgione's choice of the late afternoon generates the tranquility that pervades this painting."

Walter nodded. "Maybe only a woman can understand this Giorgione. When we first met on the train from Venice I told you that you have a privileged insight into this painting."

She smiled. "Let me continue the description of my adventures in the Uffizi. Still asking my question, what role time plays in Renaissance painting, I landed before Botticelli's *Primavera*. Walter, do you remember our conversation before this mysterious painting? This time I stared at *Primavera* with such intensity that I would have drowned in the beauty of its women had I not wrenched myself out of their spell. Trying to hold onto your elusive geometrical lines for support, I discovered that the painting has three vanishing points! They shift as you slowly walk past the picture. Very uncanny!"

Walter admitted that he had not noticed that. But there were other Renaissance paintings that had more than one vanishing point, and all were disturbing. "Are you saying that this is the reason for the strange flavor of the Botticelli's?"

"Well yes, but less easily demonstrated is that from each of these infinitely far, imaginary

points I felt the eyes of the Gods on me! A heathen, pantheistic trinity? I feel they are female, Goddesses!"

Walter rose and hands behind his back began pacing the room. "Alexandra, when we looked at this painting together, you already had a hunch that some strange Gods were present in Botticelli's paintings. Why do you think that they are female?"

Alexandra smiled. "Botticelli's visions are heathen dreams, if you wish. They leave one suspended in *fluid* time. Our linear, post-Renaissance time appears to me the invention of men. Would it surprise you if I told you, that women experience time as circular? Their time is fluid like in Botticelli's paintings, which is what makes me suspect his Gods are female."

Walter stopped his pacing and stared expectantly at Alexandra. "I have never heard of circular time. What do you mean, women *experience* time as circular?"

Alexandra hesitated a moment and then said. "When I gave birth to Otto, I had an experience of flying over my body. I later learned that this is a death experience. A woman can physically and sensually experience her death at the time of giving birth. This morning I finally understood that this leads to a circular time concept. Birth, love, and death repeat themselves in a circle."

"What do you mean?" asked childless Sally in her heavily accented Boston American. "I am scared of death."

Alexandra sighed and glanced at Konrad. "Men, who cannot share this experience, were driven to invent a linear time that vanishes in a supra-mundane infinity, heaven, God, nirvana, where they can dissolve and find rest, peace, redemption."

Friedrich said. "In Einstein's theory all bodies are spread out along space-time lines on which there is actually neither past nor future. Einstein is a man! We cannot perceive this time—except maybe shamans and clairvoyants like you could. Would you think that our future state of awareness would show a circular time?"

"Friedrich, this exceeds my judgment. Intuitively I would say yes, but my mind works differently from yours. Maybe you will discover that your four-dimensional time lines are really curved and turn back onto themselves. I don't know."

Walter stopped his wanderings in front of Alexandra. "So, now you will ask the question of what will happen to art in the future?"

"Yes, that is one of my questions. I met a young composer in Munich a few months ago, who writes music to abstract 'paintings' he sees, and Kandinsky is talking about painting the music he hears. In both cases time and painting will be combined in some way."

"Oh," said Friedrich, "both of these men have a special gift, they see abstract colors in music. And you do too."

Walter gazed at Alexandra. "I never heard of this ability. How do you do that?"

She said nonchalantly, "I don't do anything, it happens. I have seen colors in music since I was a child and only my meeting with Webern, the composer, and Kandinsky has made me aware that this was a special gift."

Walter insisted. "Then how do they want to combine music and painting? I fail to comprehend."

"Kandinsky asked me whether I could paint what I saw to Webern's music: rapidly moving and changing geometrical forms in very strong colors. I guess I could, but who will hear the music to such a painting? Now I suppose Kandinsky will try to find a way. Maybe he will paint a succession of canvasses, each a snapshot in time, like a film. Have you ever seen a

film, Walter? So far this art is not very exciting, because the filmmakers have such lousy taste. Another way to incorporate time in a painting could be to show several poses on the same canvas. I don't know, happen it will, we have exhausted the spatial experiments of the Renaissance."

Walter shook his gray head, and Alexandra in a spontaneous jump in her logic blurted out what had been on her mind all day. "I ask more. Where can I find an understanding that includes my experiences of the past years, Otto's birth, the miserable people I take care of, the ups and downs of a great love? My inherited Christian religion no longer fills this gap. I have practiced your advice to be aware of my actions everyday. I have found its limitations. I have exhausted the rational knowledge of the three-dimensional reality of the Renaissance. I am ready to leave it behind."

Walter, with bewildered eyes, said in a pleading voice. "You cannot do that. Only the smallest number of people have grasped the humanist ideas of the Renaissance. I appreciate your outburst, a teacher knows that his instructions have succeeded when his student puts him down. You have become yourself in those five years since our long conversations in this house. You have achieved *your* Renaissance, but other people are still much in need of its message. You have to help me spread the humanist ideas that are at its core."

Alexandra looked at him with her unrelenting blue eyes. "Walter, Massacio, Petrarca, and Michelangelo did not wait for the rest of mankind to understand the implications of their having uncovered God's *derrière*, as you put it! They simply followed their visions. It is on us to make sense of our time."

With bated breath Konrad watched her. She was flying so high that nobody could reach her. They did not have her intuitive imagination. In none of the disciplines she touched did she have any credentials, whether it was Friedrich's physics, Dahl's psychology, Webern's music, Walter's lifetime expertise in art, or the philosophy of religion. With her creative clairvoyance, and her sharp mind she cut the most artful knots, as no one else would dare to do.

In her exalted state she appeared frighteningly beautiful. He could see how she affected Walter, if she could not convince him, she would, without a scruple, seduce the old art expert.

He also understood what he himself lacked in comparison to her. His strength was his careful, systematic, occasionally pedantic methodology, he would never be able to grow her wings. He would remain the dead weight on her feet—but also her spirit. As she grew older and more certain of her ingenious insights, it would be he who would have to hold her on this earth, prevent her from taking off into a never-never-land of hubris and lunatic speculation.

She had made her point, now someone had to bring her down gently from the apogee of her free flight.

Walter caught her before she crashed. "Alexandra, it is unfair that your beauty should be paired off with such an astute mind. You should, like Novella d'Andreae, be relegated to speak from behind a curtain so as not to confuse your listeners."

Alexandra blushed. She had landed on good old, flat earth again. Konrad sighed relieved.

With a fine smile Walter looked at Konrad. "Konrad, maybe you should follow your wise forefather Calderini and change your name to Konrad Dadiani."

After several excursions into Tuscany suggested by Walter, the chauffeur of the Wofsons installed a larger radiator in their car, and they made it back to Munich in only four days.

Meeting Clara Westhoff München and Berg, 1905

A large, generous mouth, thick, dark brows, gray eyes tinged with a trace of sadness, a pronounced chin—her features struck Alexandra as coarse. Mrs. Dahl introduced them, Clara Westhoff, Alexandra Rost. Distracted, Alexandra thought, it can't be, I associate fine-boned, graceful women with that name. This Clara was, though slender, an imposing person, taller than herself. Her large feet! Hands like a man's!

Clara scrutinized Alexandra with her enigmatic eyes. Not unfriendly, but out of some deeply hidden reserve.

Her warm, resonant alto-voice came as a complete surprise. "Claudia has mentioned you to me. You are Nikos' older sister? You just returned from two weeks in Florence, how wonderful."

Mrs. Dahl explained. "Clara is a sculptress, she has just spent six months working with Rodin in Paris. I have long wanted to bring you two beautiful women together. Clara has a charming daughter, Ruth, a year younger than Otto."

Alexandra, used to being the center of attention, if only for her appearance, felt self-conscious and defensive. Clara occupied a large emotional space, yet the sadness that surrounded her contradicted the impression of emotional strength.

Mrs. Dahl abandoned the usual mixed seating order at the dinner table and placed them next to each other. Alexandra tried to shake off the Clara's spell and said. "Being a sculptor, you must know Florence well. It was my second visit to that city, and I still have not seen half of it. We drove to Florence in Friedrich's new automobile, which gave us a chance to also explore Tuscany."

"I hear you learned how to drive. Claudia is consumed by envy, right Claudia?" Clara laughed unexpectedly freely, without giving herself away.

Claudia blushed and glanced admiringly at Alexandra.

Friedrich, with an ironic smile, keenly watched the competition between Alexandra and Clara.

Alexandra self-consciously continued her attempt at winning over austere Clara. "Our journey to Italy was a real adventure. In Florence we stayed with a couple, dear friends of ours, who own a secluded villa in Fiesole. Walter is an art dealer in Renaissance paintings, an excellent cicerone for Tuscany. He has a resolutely practical American wife, Sally, without whom he would be lost. Claudia would fit Walter better than I, I am much too brusque and forward for the refined, old gentleman."

Clara asked where they had been.

Alexandra described their rides, the dusty roads through the intimate landscape, the abstract checkerboard of yellow mustard fields and the bright green vineyards that looked like they had been combed, plots of newly sprouted grain, rows of cypresses along the paths across the rolling hills, lonely farm houses, a profusion of iris on the roadside, red-roofed houses closely stacked into towns, always on hilltops, misty blue mountains on the horizon.

Clara's gray eyes grew lively. "How well you picture this landscape. You must truly love

Tuscany. Have you noticed how the paintings of the Florentine *quattrocento* mirror this sober countryside? Their colors and style are so different from the lush Venetian or Umbrian paintings."

Alexandra was relieved, she had touched the impassioned heart behind those serious, desperate eyes. She smiled at Clara. "Yes, this *is* one of Tuscany's great pleasures. Do you know the frescoes of Piero de la Francesca in Borgo di San Sepolcro? There I made that discovery for the first time. The medium lets the frescoes appear almost transparent, and they are forbiddingly severe as you say, for example his Madonna in the cemetery chapel."

Clara's face opened up, became animated and excited. "Do you paint?"

"No, I don't. When I first came to Italy I had never before seen an original Italian painting. Venice and later Florence completely overwhelmed my senses. That was six years ago. Ever since I see their colors before my eyes. They are my refuge and consolation during the cold, depressing winters in St. Petersburg."

A shadow passed over Clara's face. Hidden behind her forbidding features burnt an intense fire. Why did St. Petersburg disturb her?

"You two are completely absorbed into each other," remarked Friedrich.

Alexandar fell silent. Always sensitive, Claudia came to her rescue. "Clara, last night we hedged a plan. The six of us would like to spend the end of August on the beach in Italy. It will be Konrad and Alexandra's last month here before they have to return to the Russian winter. It would be wonderful to just lie on some beach, take Otto along, and swim in the blue Adria. Would you join us with Ruth?"

Clara passed her hand over her forehead as if trying to wipe away her despondency and with a measured voice said. "I have buried myself in work for eight months. Ruth and I too need to get back among people. I cannot forever mourn my loss of Rainer. The sea and a wide beach would really be wonderful. I would like to join you. Do you have a particular place in mind or may I make a suggestion?"

She looked from Claudia to Alexandra. "A few years ago we spent a summer in a small *pensione* in *Ca' Savio*, a village of four houses an hour by boat north of Venice. The house is run by a real Italian *mama*, spartan, ridiculously cheap, no service, everybody takes care of himself, one can use her kitchen or eat in a small, local fishermen's *trattoria* in the village. The beach is right in front of the house, miles of beautiful, white sand, completely empty."

Clara gazed absentmindedly at this vision and turned to Katharina with a smile. "The houseguests are poets, painters, and other artists from all over Europe. Katharina, you would not be bothered by any *paparazzi*. There is one unwritten house rule, Everybody has to bring one or two interesting books along to read to the assembled guests in the evening."

Clara's suggestion was received with enthusiasm. They hedged out the details well into the night.

In parting Clara invited Alexandra. "Come, visit me and bring Otto along. I rent a studio in Berg on Lake Starnberg. You take the train to Starnberg and a small boat from there."

Alexandra recognized Clara from far away, unmistakably statuesque, in a long white dress, she was waiting with folded arms at the landing.

Clara spontaneously embraced Alexandra. "Please, would you address me with the informal *Du*?"

She greeted Otto.

"I rented the large dining hall and two rooms in the house of an absent member of the Bavarian Royal Family. It is very close."

Alexandra laughed. "I did not realize, but Berg has a certain notoriety among us. Here I nearly killed a chicken the first time I drove Friedrich's car. The view across the lake was so beautiful that I did not watch the road. Was this the place where King Ludwig drowned?"

They walked along the lake shore. The slightly neglected, two-story house, right by the water, was shaded by old beech and chestnut trees. A small park separated it from the village.



Tsinandali came to Alexandra's mind and her beloved Zaguramo.

Rilke, Ruth, and Clara Westberg 1906

"Here we are." Clara opened a French door from the terrace and let them in. In the center of the room stood two large blocks of marble, unfinished sculptures, an arm, a head, the muscular body of a bearded man, still half-buried in the block. The floor was covered with a thick layer of white marble dust.

The spacious room took up the entire lake front of the house. Four French double doors created a soft and even light. The view through the trees onto the water, the houses of the town and the low, undulating hills on the opposite shore, quiet and lovely, a refuge for a distressed soul.

Alexandra ran her slender fingers over the rough, snow-white, crystalline surface of the freshly broken stone.

"Have you seen Michelangelo's unfinished *Slaves* in the *Accademia* in Florence?" asked Clara.

"No, sculpture is unexplored territory to me. The Michelangelos I saw, his *David* and *Night*

and *Day* in San Lorenzo, left me cold. I don't know, is it the smooth perfection of their surfaces? But these are fabulous. The broken stone," she touched the marble again, "is almost transparent. What are they?"

"They are a commission, a man and a woman, for a new building in Munich. I have Michelangelo's *Slaves* in my mind all the time, they are just like these, intentionally left unfinished, imprisoned in their blocks forever. I understand your difficulties with the Italian marbles, they are a challenge to the sculptor, but hard to appreciate by the untrained eye."

Clara went upstairs to get Ruth. "The children can play on the terrace outside."

Left to herself, Alexandra, awed, walked around the two giants. Along the wall stood three smaller pieces, a bronze bust of a young man with a bushy mustache and a funny-shaped nose, and two clay models of a very young woman with unusual large eyes in a round face. It said *Paula* on the plinth. Everything was thickly covered with marble dust.

Clara had changed into a short-sleeved shirt hanging loose over a pair of work pants. The muscles of her bare arms shocked Alexandra, they would have suited a prize fighter. Her hands looked even larger than she remembered.

Clara noticed Alexandra's look and for the first time laughed aloud. "The muscle woman from the circus!" She flexed her biceps. "This comes from swinging the mallet for days chipping away at the marble. I will show you."



Clara and Ruth 1905

Clara had brought Ruth's dolls and some toys. "Would you like some coffee? Later we will have a simple lunch. It will take just a few minutes." Clara carried a simple wooden bench outside and a small table. They sat next to each other and drank coffee from blue earthenware pots and watched the children. Alexandra lost all her apprehension in this serene, rustic setting, the handmade coffee mugs, the fluid, completely unselfconscious movements of Clara, the simple bench on which they sat next to each other.

She asked. "It must be a privilege to work for Rodin."

"Rodin has a flock of young women who do the dirty work in his atelier: making models for bronze castings, cleaning the casts afterwards, and the like. His favorites are allowed to do the rough work on the

precious marble blocks which he then finishes himself."

Clara waved her hand at her two blocks. "It's hard work. His girls don't last long. Sooner or later he tries to take them to bed. I resisted his advances, maybe I was too strong for him." She laughed easily. "I really don't know why, but I was readmitted twice to his workshop and spent last winter in Paris. Now I have decided to try to work on my own, this commission was a godsend."

The children were playing father and mother with Ruth's dolls.

"Let me show you how it is done. It might help you to appreciate the beauty of this material and the sculptor's work."

She left the doors open and gave Alexandra a smock to cover her dress, a cap, and a scarf to tie over her mouth and nose. Clara, in addition put on mittens.

Alexandra looked at them and laughed. "This reminds me of the delivery room in a hospital. Attending to the creation of new life!"

Clara took a big wooden mallet and a chisel. She began to rhythmically swing the mallet with powerful blows to the chisel. Pieces of marble flew all around her like bullets. Very slowly, after dozens of strokes, the rough contour of the shoulder of the man emerged from the stone.

The sheer power of this woman! Alexandra's arm hurt just from watching. After half an hour Clara put the mallet aside, shook the dust from her shirt and pants and smiled at her perplexed friend. "Now comes the fine work. Using a smaller mallet and a finishing tool I will work out the details and finally spend hours polishing the surface wherever required."

Despite the scarf, Alexandra could taste the marble dust. "I am impressed by your power and endurance. It must take weeks to finish one of these sculptures."

Clara nodded. "Three months on a piece of this size, if you are lucky and the block is uniform and does not break. One wrong blow and the piece could be ruined. In every marble shop you find spoiled blocks hidden away, and a good block is expensive. You see why Rodin, who produces a dozen such pieces a year, keeps himself an army of slaves and why they have such a high turnover. In the beginning you get muscle-bound after a few days."

"Would you show me the sketches from which you work?" asked Alexandra.

Clara brought her sketches and the layout plans for the two figures and spread them on the table on the terrace. "The most important time is in the very beginning, sizing up the stone, looking for faults in the material and laying out a plan of how to attack the raw block. The first blows are very exciting, and often we have to alter the original sketches to suit the block. To the very end it is a fight, a happening full of suspense. I do carry the vision of the final piece in my mind like a precious icon."

The children were having a marriage quarrel. "I don't like fathers!" cried Ruth. Otto stamped his foot. "But I don't want to play mother, I am a boy."

Clara sighed deeply. "The loss of her father is very hard on her. Did you see the bronze bust? This is he. He has become famous and is admired by many women, but he is incapable of supporting a family. We separated amicably and are not divorced, at the moment he lives in Paris. Occasionally, he visits us which always leaves me in a deep depression for weeks. I am afraid I still love him too much. Whacking away at this beautiful but recalcitrant stone is my therapy."

Summer of 1905 in Ca' Savio

From the crest of the dune Alexandra saw Friedrich running into the blue sea, stark naked. Katharina, hesitant, balancing her big belly, hovered at the edge of the water—also in the nude. The color of their skin under the southern sun, the sandy cove, dark pine trees in the background, and the sea, green near the shore, stretching in all shades of blue to an almost black, sharp line at the horizon.

Alexandra let out a cry and ran down the hill. Before the others could catch up with her—Konrad carrying Otto across the hot sand, Niko with Ruth on his shoulders, Clara and Claudia—Alexandra had stripped and pulled Katharina into the sea.

Friedrich was swimming towards the horizon, Alexandra and Katharina stood hand-in-hand in the knee-deep, transparent water.

"I have never been in water like this. I feel newborn, Botticelli's *Venus!*" shouted Alexandra coyly imitating Aphrodite's famous stance. "The cool water on the bare skin is wonderful."

The group of latecomers hovered undecided at the edge of the lazily lapping sea.

Alexandra laughed. "You look like hens whose ducklings have swum away"

Katharina, clowning, put her arm around Alexandra, her left hand rested protectively on her belly. The two, deprived of their long legs, presented a most comical picture.

Katharina giggled. "The moment before the Fall."

Waving to the undecided landlubbers, Katharina put her arms around Alexandra and made her fall backwards with a great splash.

Clara pulled her dress over her head and in her full, strong beauty dived into the sea. Konrad followed her. Only Niko and Claudia, embarrassed by the general exhibitionism, would not take off their bathing suits. Claudia undressed the two children, who ran off to dig in the sand.

"We will watch the children as long as you are in the water."

Konrad began splashing his two women. With long crawl strokes, Clara followed Friedrich out into the open sea.

At noon the sun became hot. Sprinkled with glittering grains they lay idly in the sand, sleeping or reading in various positions. Claudia, in her elegant, black bathing suit, suffered from the heat. Friedrich, sarcastic as always, had tried unsuccessfully to persuade her to take it off. Finally Niko pulled Claudia into the water. They swam far out into the sea. Katharina walked off by herself, to find a bush, as she had said.

When Claudia and Niko returned, Niko had tied her bathing suit to his arm. Claudia hovered offshore, hiding in the water. "Alexandra, you are right, the water is wonderful. Now I don't want to ever leave it again."

And then Katharina reappeared at a distance, limping. Friedrich jumped up, what had happened to her? As she drew nearer he broke out in laughter: Katharina wore a red fisherman's boot on her limping foot!

The women craned their necks. Katharina looked fantastic, her blond hair in disarray, her belly protruding, her full breasts and bushy blond triangle—and that red boot!

Konrad stood up, and as he faced her, his penis rose involuntarily and irrepressibly in

adoration of her bizarre beauty. Everybody broke out in mirth. Alexandra clapped her hand over her open mouth. Katharina made a deep bow before the God of Love, and Konrad, blushing furiously, ran desperately for the sea. They all applauded.

"Help! Help, my lover is on fire!" cried Alexandra and ran after Konrad, splashing and spraying him with cold water. In no time they were embroiled in a free-for-all water battle, except for Katharina, who in her boot contemplated the havoc she had wrought. With sudden resolve she kicked the boot in a high arc in Friedrich's direction and ran into the water. Friedrich passed the boot to Claudia, who instinctively rose from the protective element, to catch it.

With the afternoon boat, two teenage sisters arrived, accompanied by an old, unmistakably Russian aristocrat. After the gentleman had assured himself that his charges were in the good hands of *Mama* Angelina, the proprietress of the *pensione*, he returned to Venice.

Marina and Anastasia, Asya for short, came from Moscow. They had spent the year in a boarding school in Geneva, and their uncle had been burdened with the responsibility of chaperoning the sisters during summer vacation. Because Venice, where he lived, was too hot and at this time of the year stank abysmally, his choice had fallen on Angelina's place.

The sisters spoke the usual four languages, but only Marina was fluent in German. They were relieved to discover that Alexandra and Konrad spoke Russian.

"Ach," exclaimed Asya, "in matters of the soul Russian is irreplaceable." Asya confided to Konrad that Marina wrote poetry, which she, being the younger by a year and a half, admired glowingly.

Marina, short, shy, with a round face and a pageboy haircut, was badly nearsighted, but too vain to wear glasses in public. She fended off the fuzzy world that surrounded her with intellectual arrogance and an acute command of language.

The two sisters were readily accepted into their commune. Supper was prepared by the women. One of the men took the early boat to Venice every second day to do the shopping. Alexandra handled the communal finances. Take-along lunches and cleaning the rooms were individual responsibilities. Angelina did the two bathrooms. Whoever arrived first in the kitchen in the morning made coffee and tea, and everybody helped themselves to bread, eggs, melons, prosciutto and cheese. They ate their meals at a rustic table outside on an open verandah covered by grape vines.

"What shall we read tonight?" asked Claudia. The question was decided by common consent every night after dinner when the children had been put to bed. A kerosene lamp was brought for the reader and everyone relaxed at the fringe of the circle of light.

The choice of books ranged from Friedrich's tattered edition of *Herodotus*, the love letters of *Heloïse and Abelard*, Konrad's contribution, to a worn-out popular love story Katharina had devoured.

Their favorite became a mysterious novel Clara had picked up in Paris: *Le Manuscrit Trouvé à Saragosse ou l'Histoire d'Alphonse van Woerden* by Marquis Jean Potocki. No one had ever heard of the author or his novel, although it had been written at the end of the eighteenth century, and the literary critics had praised it as equal to *Don Quixote* and superior to the *Decamerone*. The reason was, explained Clara, that until recently the *roman* had existed only in fragments, which had been traded under the counter. A rare find.

In her impeccable French, Clara read the beginning chapters. Like Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, Potocki claimed to have found the manuscript. The autobiographic notes of Alphonse van Woerden, an Alsatian nobleman and soldier of fortune, describing his return from the Spanish Wars of Succession.

The hero, passing through the wilderness of the Sierra Morena, comes upon a deserted *Cartausa* where he decides to stay for the night. At midnight the bells toll and two veiled ladies appear. Black servants carry in candles, food, fruits, and wine. During the lavish feast the ladies reveal themselves as identical twin sisters, the granddaughters of the last Moor of Granada and distant cousins of the nobleman on his mother's side. The beauties blow out the candles and for the rest of the night make love to the delighted and confounded van Woerden. When he wakes up the ghosts are gone. He finds himself lying under a gallows from which dangle the corpses of two notorious bandits.

Van Woerden searches for the beguiling *succubi* through a bewildering succession of repetitions, mirrors of stories within stories, reflections in ever new guises. At one time he travels with a tribe of noble bandits, their gypsy chief reveals himself the secret protector of the twins. A Jewish astrologer and his intriguing sister lead van Woerden into an underground palace, filled with the immense treasures of his Muslim ancestors. The twin sisters reappear. In their arms Alphonse loses all track of time and space. Both sisters become pregnant and offer to marry him—provided he would convert to Islam. He is led before a court of Moslem nobles which offers him the vast fortunes hidden in the mountain on the same condition. Van Woerden tarries, is undecided whether to betray his faith, a huge explosion, everything vanishes. He wakes up—under the gallows. Meanwhile ravens have gnawed the corpses down to their bones....

Night after night they got lost in this labyrinth of love, in its exotic illusions, saw themselves reflected, magnified, and distorted by the magical mirrors of Potocki's arabesques. Like Van Woerden, they forgot all time. Wandered dreamlike and naked through the sensual labyrinth of their crossed relationships: Friedrich probed Alexandra's female defenses, Clara, starved for love, pursued innocent Niko, Konrad circled Clara and flirted with Marina, Niko tempted Claudia, who, visibly unhappy, had fallen in love with the children who tumbled between them. Only gravid Katharina, at the center of their maze, whiled away the days, lazily absorbed in herself.

One evening Marina offered to read a simple poem of her own which she had just translated, and a poem by her most admired German poet, as a respite from this endless eighteenth-century novel.

"My poem is dedicated to a man who is married to a friend of mine. I will read it in German."

Hitting blindly at an insect that was buzzing about her head, she held the sheet of paper very close to her myopic eyes.

*I like, that you don't suffer because of me,
I like, that I am not suffering because of you,
that the solid earth will never
float away from under our feet.
I like that I can be made fun of,
be dissolved, and not have to play with words,*

*and do not flush in breathless waves,
at the slightest touch of our hands.
I also like that you in my presence
may calmly hug another woman,
and do not wish me to burn in hell's fire
for not kissing you.
That my affectionate names, my gentle friend,
do not mention you at night,
that in the silence of a church
no one will sing a hallelujah over us.
Thank you, with my heart and hand,
that you, without Your knowledge, love me
for my night's peace,
for the rare meetings at the hour of sunset,
for our non-walks under the moon,
for the sun not above our heads,
for your - alas unfortunately - not suffering because of me
for my - alas unfortunately - not suffering because of you.*

Marina, acknowledged the applause and smiled uncertainly in the general direction of Konrad.

Alexandra nudged Konrad and whispered in Georgian, "Aren't you flattered? This was written for you! Teenage poetry as rough as sandpaper."

Desperately searching under the light for the book by the German poet, Marina eventually found it in the shadows on an empty chair right next to her. The page was marked by a paper flag. She began to read:

*Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, dass
sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie
heben über dich zu anderen Dingen?...*

Out of the dark came Clara's deep voice, intense, imperious, suffering no objections: "Marina, this poem was written for me by my husband. Please let me continue."

Marina, uncomprehending, stared blindly at Clara, who without any further explanation or apology walked into the light and took the book out of her hands. Mechanically Marina vacated her place by the lamp.

Into the stunned silence Clara continued.

*Ach gerne möchte ich sie bei irgendwas
Verlorenem im Dunkeln unterbringen
an einer fremden stillen Stelle, die
nicht weiterschwingt, wenn Deine Tiefen schwingen.*

Tears streamed down her face, but she willed her voice to hold steady to the end.

*Doch alles, was uns anrührt, dich und mich,
nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich,
der aus zwei Saiten eine Stimme zieht.
Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt?
Und welcher Geiger hält uns in der Hand?
O süßes Lied.*

Clara rose and in forbidding composure, walked very erectly out of their circle into the night.

Snowbound in Eydtkuhnen

1905

"Konrad, it is snowing." Alexandra's voice was tense. "Please wake up."

In a second Konrad was on his feet. "Oh, no! The last thing we need."

"Come and look, I am worried," she whispered. They stood in the corridor of the train and stared into the night. Big snowflakes fell densely through the light cones of the few lamps at the tiny station: Eydtkuhnen, the end of the western world. Alexandra nervously lit a cigarette. Slowly the smoke drifted down the corridor.

For three nights they had been stalled on a siding off the main line to St. Petersburg. The border was closed, the Russian railways on strike. The strike had taken them by surprise. Before they left Munich, Joachim had been unusually optimistic. Witte with Teddy Roosevelt's help had concluded an unexpectedly favorable peace agreement with Japan. The European state loan to Russia was finally on its way. Witte, against all odds, seemed to be stabilizing Russia single-handedly.

Konrad stared at Alexandra. Snowed in, a nice prospect! Specters of Siberia, trains stalled in snow storms for weeks. Nobody could tell how long the siege would last. So far the German crew had kept the train heated by keeping the locomotive under steam. Food for the first class dining car had been brought in every day. Wagons Lits seemed to have carried inexhaustible supplies of wine and alcohol. They were not really in want of anything. Not yet. People drank, played cards, chatted or read. Last night a roulette wheel had appeared in the dining car from somewhere, the bets were high and rising.

The German conductor came walking down the corridor as he did several times a day to look after the needs of his first class passengers. He stopped. "*Pardon*, are you *Frau Dr. Dadiani-Rost*?"

Alexandra extinguished her cigarette. "Yes?"

"We have a medical emergency, a woman in labor. Can you help? We took her to our staff compartment, she is traveling second class and speaks only Russian."

Alexandra glanced pleadingly at Konrad who frowned, but kept silent.

"Yes, give me a few minutes to collect my equipment. I shall be back."

With great efficiency Alexandra retrieved her new German doctor's case and a white frock coat. Konrad watched her. She had recovered her poise, her anxieties were blown away. Changing to Georgian she said, "I will see what I can do, I have never delivered a baby by myself. If there are any complications, I will try to have her taken to the nearest hospital." She gave him a kiss and left with the conductor. Konrad watched as she walked down the corridor with quick, determined steps. For the first time he witnessed how in a critical moment she could instantly mobilize her powers.

Konrad stared out the window and cursed Mother Russia in Russian. How often had they discussed their return. He should have listened to Joachim's repeated advice to remain in Germany, but every time Alexandra had been unyielding. She simply *had* to return to St. Petersburg. Why had he given in?

Half an hour later Alexandra was back. She closed the compartment door behind her. Her face was flushed but her movements had lost all nervous tension. "I calmed the woman."

She was screaming although her time is still hours off. She is very tight and badly frightened. Someone will have to give her an anesthesia. This is going to be a difficult birth. So I postured before the station master with all my titles." She laughed. "It is even easier to impress Germans than Gogol's Russians. He was cowed, '*Jawoll, Frau Doktor, Jawoll*'. I requisitioned a locomotive to take the woman to Gumbinnen. The engine will arrive in a few minutes!"

She rose onto her toes and gave Konrad a kiss. "*Liebster*, listen—I decided go with her. She is alone and speaks no German. Please, will you calm Otto and Elisabeth when they wake up? I will be back as soon as I can."

She threw her fur coat over her white uniform, put on her boots, and was gone again in a few minutes. The engine that would take her was hissing and blowing steam outside. A group of bored passengers had gathered to watch the distraction. They carried the moaning woman into the engineer's cabin. Alexandra climbed in behind her. She did not even turn around to wave to Konrad before she disappeared in the snow flurries of the night.

Konrad put on his coat and went out to walk in the snowstorm, back and forth along the now deserted platform. He had to get over his guilt about letting himself been persuaded to return to St. Petersburg.

They had arrived in Eydtkuhnen late at night. When the Russian railroad engineers refused to change the undercarriages to the Russian gauge or service the engine, two diplomats and a high Russian government official had tried to commandeer a Russian train on the other side of the border. The Russian railroad men, armed with pickaxes and waving red flags, had threatened to attack them. The telegraph was dead too. For a while there had been talk of turning the train around and heading back to Königsberg, but the negotiations had come to nothing.

The German railroad administration promised to keep the train heated and supplied, the strike would surely be put down by the army soon. Such strikes had never lasted longer than a couple of days, they were chaotic and unorganized. However, this time the Russian border troops had been sent to the Far East, and the remaining soldiers were in sympathy with the workers. The strike ground on. This was the third night. Thank God, the snow would not stay long, it was only the end of October.

Cold and wet he went back to their compartment and lay down. He tossed around. Too hot. He opened the window a bit and once more stared into the night.

The weeks after their return from Italy had been a series of dinners and farewell parties. Katharina was due any day now. The thought of her filled him with sad nostalgia, but also with the vague notion that their *affair-à-trois* would remain his and Alexandra's precious memory, a secret treasure to be retrieved in times of need, whenever their marriage would be threatened or go stale.

He understood, the woman in labor was Alexandra's first crucial test as a doctor. She had kept her head, resisting the temptation of improvising a delivery with her limited experience. He smiled. Requisitioning a locomotive, something the diplomats had not succeeded in, was truly Alexandra. How much he loved this woman. With the vision of her climbing into the engine cab in her fur coat and boots, elegant, alert, he fell asleep.

The snow still fell when Alexandra returned in the late morning. The woman had delivered a boy, and she had assisted the doctor at the hospital. Next time, she was sure, she could do that job by herself. Exhausted, she fell into bed.

In the afternoon a group of men and women from the second class carriages massed on

the platform. Someone unrolled a red flag. Singing revolutionary songs and waving their fists they marched on the border station. Konrad called Alexandra to come and watch the commotion. The group vanished in the snowstorm. Apparently the strikers had let them pass.

A German-speaking gentleman observing the scene made a few carefully phrased comments on the dangerously chaotic Russian proletariat and then introduced himself as Freiherr von der Schulenburg, a member of the German embassy in St. Petersburg. Round and jolly with a pink complexion, he seemed the most unlikely diplomat.

When introducing him to Alexandra, Konrad mentioned that his wife was Georgian, and von der Schulenburg immediately asked whether they knew Joachim von Bredow. Konrad told him that they had just seen the Bredows in Munich and invited him for a glass of cognac. Schulenburg's travel companion, Prince Konstantin de Oldenbourg an older, distinguished-looking Russian diplomat in full uniform, greeted Alexandra with a perfect handkiss. He had known her grandfather Chavchavadze in the late 1870s when he had been stationed in Tiflis during the Turkish campaign. Also, his wife, Agraphina Japaridze, was Georgian.

Oldenbourg asked. "Were you the Samaritan who requisitioned the locomotive to take that woman to the hospital last night?"

"I am a physician, it was my duty to help the hapless woman."

"Of course, but to persuade this hard-nosed, German station master to lend you his engine, is hardly part of your medical education."

He raised his glass and with the boisterous charm of an adopted Georgian toasted her. "My respects, Princess Dadiani-Rost! We diplomats were unable to do as you did. A worthy daughter of your illustrious ancestors!"

"Oh, well, a woman sometimes has more power than an official of his Majesty the Emperor!" remarked Alexandra with her father's laugh.

They whiled away the night, Oldenbourg telling heroic anecdotes from his Transcaucasian campaigns—he had been the commander of the feared Kubán-Cossack Cavalry.

On the fifth day of their forced detention the sun rose on a world covered in hoarfrost. Fantastic ice formations hung from the telephone wires and encrusted the bare branches of the trees. Deep snow blanketed the countryside. Konrad suggested to go for a walk. As they were getting ready to leave a gentleman in a heavy bearskin coat appeared asking for Professor and *Frau Dr. Rost*.

He introduced himself as Friedrich von Bredow, a cousin of Joachim's. Joachim had called from Munich asking him to care for Konrad and Alexandra, would they accept an invitation to his manor house? It was only an hour's distance from here. He would deliver them back to the station tomorrow morning.

Konrad asked how Joachim had discovered that they were stranded in Eydtkuhnen.

Von Bredow said that Alexandra's rescue of the pregnant woman had been carried by the papers as part of a report on the snowbound train. In fact two other colleagues of Joachim were on the train, Herr von der Schulenburg and Prince Oldenbourg. If they would allow him, he would like to invite them too. Three comfortable sleighs were waiting. Bredow was delighted that they had already met the two diplomats.

Alexandra consulted with the station master who assured her with many bows that the train would not leave without them. Should the border open during the night, he would telephone Herrn von Bredow, and "*selbstverständlich Frau Doktor*" he would hold the train until

their return.

Elisabeth would watch their belongings, could they bring Otto along? Oh, there was plenty of room in the sleighs and at the house there would be a throng of their own children for him to play with.

Konrad was overwhelmed by so much unexpected hospitality.

"Look," said Alexandra, dressing Otto in his warmest clothes, "they live out here in the woods on their baronial estates, two hours by train from the nearest larger city, the company of friends is their only real pleasure."

The horses steamed and snorted clouds in the cold air, jingling harnesses, an occasional crack of Bredow's whip. They flew across the snow, dark woods, frozen lakes and more woods. Wrapped in several rough blankets sitting between his parents Otto said.

"Mummy, the blanket scratches me. Where *are* we going?"

Alexandra tucked the blanket away from his face. "To the Snow Castle, Otto, deep in the woods. Herr von Bredow lives there with his many children."

Otto burrowed with his small arm through the blankets until he found his mother's hand.

"Mummy, tell me the story of your grandfather's castle."

Putting her arm around him she began. "Once upon a time my grandfather built a castle for Grandmother and their many children in a beautiful valley where grapes grow and the sun shines. From the house they could see the high snow mountains, but it never snowed in the valley. In the high mountains lived wild men who envied the people in the valley their grapes and good life. One night, when my grandfather was not home they came down on their horses and broke into the house and captured Grandmother and all her children. They took them to their hideout deep in the woods. Grandfather was very sad when he found his wife and all his children gone. But the Emperor of Russia came to Grandfather's aid and gave him much money to ransom his children. With that money Grandfather filled a whole wagon with gold pieces, drove into the mountains, and brought back Grandmother and her children. They lived many years happily thereafter. Grandfather died, but Grandmother is still alive in that castle with Uncle David and Uncle George and their children. Next year I will take you to Kakheti to Grandfather's castle."

"Mummy," said Otto, "are there wild men in these woods?"

Von Bredow turned around and laughed. "No Otto, our soldiers have driven them all across the border."

Alexandra smiled. "Where they live happily ever after."

Bredow cracked his whip over the horses and sighed. "We hope so, but who can foretell."

Soon the Snow Castle appeared, an elegant manor house surrounded by farm buildings and old oaks. Friedrich's wife, a tall, gaunt woman with the first few strands of gray in her blond hair and laughing blue eyes, welcomed her guests at the door.



The von Bredow's Snow Casle

From behind her a gang of children dressed in animal heads and costumes danced noisily into the yard. The children barked, trumpeted, and crowed dancing around Otto. At first Otto held on to his mother, but the animals cried, "We don't have a lion, will you be our lion king?" Otto roared from behind his mother. Under much shouting and laughter the children took him upstairs

The Bredows made their guests comfortable in front of a roaring fireplace in the salon. Herr von Bredow offered an aperitif, and while the men discussed the threatening developments in Russia, Alexandra had to describe Georgia to the curious ladies of the house. The lively conversation and the warm atmosphere reminded Alexandra of the family meetings at the house of her grandfather in Kakheti.

Mrs. von Bredow had prepared a festive table in the dining room, old family silver, Meissen porcelain, and Bohemian wine glasses. The delicate smell of burning charcoal wafted through the room from a simmering samovar that reflected the light of the many candles. Between the settings she had placed fir twigs as decoration. An enormous tiled stove reaching almost to the ceiling spread warmth.

They were served pheasant that Bredow had shot himself with preserved wild cranberries and potatoes and an old French red wine from his cellar.

After coffee the lady of the house accompanied Prince Oldenbourg—who turned out to have a respectable tenor voice—to selections from Schubert's *Winterreise*

When Otto and the children reached the upstairs, the donkey pawed his hoof, brayed at Otto, and turned him into a lion. Now, when he roared, everyone fled in terror. "Don't run away," Otto said in his natural voice, "I promise to be a good king to you."

The animals brayed and barked, the rooster crowed, the snake wound itself around his arm, but then the elephant trumpeted loudly, and Otto became frightened again. He had never heard an elephant trumpet before.

"Don't be frightened," whispered the snake, "You are the king, all you have to do is roar and the animals will obey you."

He roared at the elephant ferociously, and the elephant waved his trunk sideways and

knelt down before him. And then he noticed that the mouse had fearlessly climbed onto the elephant's broad back and was inviting him to follow her. He climbed next to the mouse holding on to the elephant's shoulder and off they went running through the house.

"This house has many hidden rooms and stairs," said the mouse, "I will show them to you. The elephant is too big to pass some of the secret passages, but I can."

They ran down a long, dark corridor with many rooms. In one the snake had her bed, another was occupied by the bird, it was full of feathers, the dogs lived in a surprisingly clean room.

"Where does the elephant live?" asked Otto. "Oh, he is already big, he goes to school and has a room downstairs," said the mouse, "and the rooster lives in the attic, so he can see the sun first every morning and crow when we have to get up."

Otto asked, "Do I get a room too?" "I will show you, it's a special room above the dining room," said the mouse and whispered to the elephant, who stopped and with his trunk grabbed the mouse and set her on the floor. Otto slid down by himself.

The mouse opened a door and let him in, the others all waited in the hall. "Look," said the mouse, "here is a hole through which you can see into the dining room and spy on the grown-ups." She opened a trap door in the floor. A blast of hot air came through the opening. Otto went on his belly and peered down. The door was above the huge, tiled stove in the dining room which almost reached to the ceiling. Voices came from below, and after he had figured out how to peer around the stove, he saw his mother sitting next to a gentleman who looked like his uncle Niko only much older. They were eating with silver forks from elegant plates, drinking red wine, and talking. He roared at them but they must have thought that it was the wind fanning the fire in the stove, no one paid attention to the lion.

When they returned to the dark corridor the animals were making a deafening noise surrounding Otto and threatening him with their arms, beaks, and the elephant's trunk. He raised his paws at them showing his claws and roared his most frightening roar. That shut them up.

"Bravo!" said the snake curling up to him, "that will show them who is the king."

Otto took the mouse's hand. The snake hissed, "She is only a little, gray mouse. Look at me! I am a poisonous snake, I could eat her up."

They all ran after the rooster who, flapping his wings, flew up a staircase to the attic. It was dark up there, old trunks, unused beds, and other furniture were cluttering the place. The rooster opened a door to a small room with a window. The moon was shining in. They became very quiet looking out the window at the white snow fields which glistened in the cold moon light.

"Do you like it up here all alone by yourself?" Asked Otto the rooster. "Oh," said the rooster bravely, "I am used to it and sometimes my brother sleeps with me." He pointed at one of the dogs. "You see, the two dogs are twins, and when they hate each other, he prefers to sleep in my room."

"Let's go down to where the elephant lives," said the mouse who was still holding Otto's hand. "I don't like the attic, there are so many mice up here." The other children began making mouse noises to scare their sister, and the lion had to roar at them to stop them from frightening her.

"Now, when we go downstairs you have to be very quiet so we don't arouse the governess or our father," said the elephant.

They tiptoed downstairs and along the corridor behind the dining room to the farthest end of the house. The elephant opened his room, next to a large wooden box-bed with thick feather bedding, there was a desk and a shelf full of books for the elephant's homework.

The elephant opened another door down the hall. "Here are our horses." A single kerosene lamp illuminated several big horses. Otto remembered their smell from the sleigh ride. One horse whinnied when it recognized the elephant who patted its head, but Otto was scared, he guessed that his roar would not frighten these big animals. "Please," he begged the mouse, "can we go back, it's cold and smelly here."

The children laughed.

On the way back the mouse took him aside. "Let me show you our secret mirror room, but you have to be very quiet." She slipped into a dark room behind the dining room. There was a large mirror one could look through and see all the adults at the long table. The mouse put her finger to her mouth. "They cannot see us," she whispered.

Otto's father's back was very close to him, he sat next to the man who had brought them here, and all the other guests from the train. "The old woman over there next to my mother is my grandmother, and that is my aunt. They all live with us."

The party looked very elegant. They were drinking coffee now, talking animatedly. The mouse's mother got up, opened the piano, and played some beautiful music.

The mouse dragged him out into the hall. The other children had vanished. "Are you a prince?" asked the mouse, "we are only simple nobles." Otto had never been asked such a question. "My mother is a princess, and she says father is a socialist. I don't know what I am." "Oh," exclaimed the mouse, "then you are a prince," and suddenly kissed him.

"Will you marry me? You are such a beautiful lion." Otto considered the mouse, she was really nice. He asked her, "Are we then going to be father and mother?" "Yes," said the mouse, "and you can stay with us for ever and ever. We have enough room."

The lion was not so sure, he would miss his Nana and his mother and father who were going to St. Petersburg on the train. "I will marry you," he told the mouse, "but tomorrow I have to go with my mother to St. Petersburg. I cannot stay here." "Oh, that doesn't matter," she reassured him, "I will wait for you."

They ran upstairs where they found the other children.

"The lion will marry me, he is a real prince!" cried the mouse. "Let's play getting married."

While the elephant put on a long black coat and found a book to be the minister, the snake coiled up to the lion and hissed. "The mouse is much too small for you. I am much older and smarter than she. You must marry me." "No, I can't," said the lion, "I have promised to marry the mouse, besides she has already kissed me."

All the children began dancing around them, even the elephant with the book and his black coat: "The mouse has kissed him, the mouse has kissed him." They sang.

In her disguise one could not see whether the mouse got a red face, but she stamped her foot and was close to tears. The lion had to roar again to bring the animals to order.

Finally the donkey brought a white scarf for the bride and the animals all lined up behind the couple. With the elephant at the lead they marched to the donkey's room. Their mother's piano music could be heard from downstairs, one of the guests was singing an aria to her accompaniment. Otto felt very solemn.

When the music had finished the donkey read something from the book and then asked

the couple whether they wanted to be husband and wife. The mouse whispered a barely audible "Yes," and the lion roared his agreement.

All the animals applauded and kissed the bride and the groom. The mouse took the lion to his room where holding hands they spent a long time watching the adults through the heating vent above the stove.

Late at night the station master called that the train would leave very early in the morning. Friedrich von Bredow offered to drive them back through the clear night. Alexandra, after a long search with the lady of the house, found Otto in his lion disguise next to the mouse asleep in that little room. The vent hole through which the upper floor was heated was open.

"They must have spied on the adults and fallen asleep," laughed Mrs. von Bredow. Alexandra carried Otto downstairs and put on his coat and shoes, he remained deep asleep.

It was a clear night, the moon was full. As they sped through the enchanted woods Otto woke and fantasized excitedly of riding on an elephant, of a poisonous snake winding around his arm, and of a mouse who was waiting to marry him when he came back. His mother smiled.

Otto stared at the moon above the glistening snowfields and buried his head in his mother's lap. "Mummy, the moon is so big. It frightens me. Can you take it down?"

Alexandra sang him a Georgian song about the moon in the trees. He was fast asleep in her arms when they reached the train.

Nobody waited for them at the station in the City on the Neva. They piled their luggage into a *droshki* and drove to their apartment. It was empty. Izabel had left a letter saying that they had suddenly to leave for Armenia. She thanked them for their hospitality. She would write soon.

Return to St. Petersburg

1905

Konrad was wandering aimlessly through town. Weary from the long journey, he was trying to reconnect to his old routine. St. Petersburg was no longer the town he had left a year ago. Elegant ladies crowded the fashionable cafés on Nevsky Prospect, shops were overloaded with expensive imports: fresh oysters, caviar from Persia, oranges from Morocco, lemons, *terrines de pâté*, vintage *Grand Cru* wines and French champagne, clothes from Paris, shoes from Italy...

As he passed Kluchkov's bookstore the irrational idea suddenly seized him to look for the lingering presence of Vladimir and Alexandra, her scent, their intimacy. The familiar, musty smell of tobacco greeted him. Kluchkov removed his pipe and delightedly welcomed Konrad. He involved Konrad in a drawn-out chat about Witte's new political order underscoring the important points with the pipe in his hand.

"Count Witte has accomplished amazing things. For me the most important one is, of course, the lifting of the stifling censorship. Look," he waved his hand over a table loaded with new books, "these books have existed only in clandestine manuscripts for the past eight years."

The blaring horns of a detachment of police automobiles interrupted him, followed by a cavalcade of crack-troops of the ministry of interior on horses. The contingent raced down Liteini Boulevard towards the outlying districts. Konrad went to the window to watch the ominous spectacle. People ducked into house entries. As soon the spook had passed, street life continued as usual. Kluchkov was puffing at his pipe as if nothing had happened.

"Where are they going?"

Kluchkov shrugged. "Who wants to know? It happens so often these days that we no longer pay attention to our government's crazy actions. Stay out of their way. It is all politics."

Kluchkov picked a collection of poetry by Blok and the latest novel by Tolstoy off the table.

"Look at these, Blok's poems have been suppressed for two years. He has become the most exciting new poet in this city. And this novel by Tolstoy was withheld for six years—for religious reasons! What a national shame to have suppressed the writings of our greatest living writer for so long. It is no *Anna Karenina*, a late work by an old man who preaches revolutionary Christian morals. But Tolstoy's Russian is unsurpassed."

Konrad, still pondering the demonstration of despotic power, sat down and leafed absentmindedly through the Tolstoy. *Voskresheniye*, *The Resurrection*, a mystical love story between an aristocrat and a prostitute who is exiled to Siberia in chains. Saturated with religious fervor, very Russian, not his kind of taste.

Distracted, Konrad scanned the stalls for traces of Vladimir and Alexandra. Where had they met? He was emotionally too absorbed in this game to ask Kluchkov for the whereabouts of Vladimir.

Really, how childish I am, Konrad thought, and then Vladimir's name jumped at him from a slim volume.

"Well, he is still around," Konrad exclaimed staring at Vladimir's first volume of poetry.

Alexandra called Vladimir to congratulate him—the Sisakians had installed a telephone. The Nomikoff's grouchy old *majordomo* answered and called for the young master. Vladimir showed himself surprised but was delighted to hear her voice.

He seemed much less harassed and paranoid than a year ago and took her good wishes in stride. His father was back in public life. However, his mother had died. The excitement and apprehension of her husband's imprisonment had aggravated her tuberculosis and ended her life prematurely a few months ago. Alexandra expressed her condolence and invited him for the evening. Konrad was fully aware of what had happened between them. If he, Vladimir, could feel at ease with that knowledge, both of them would welcome him most cordially. After a moment of hesitation Vladimir accepted.

He arrived on foot with a bouquet of flowers for Alexandra and a copy of his poems. Apart from the flowers, an extravagant present at this time of year, he was relaxed and unaffected.

Without a word he bowed to Konrad who offered him his hand and then poured a cognac for everyone. The two men retired to the *salon* while Alexandra prepared supper.

Vladimir let himself fall into an easychair. "You have escaped a lot of excitement during your absence."

Konrad indicated an imaginary horizon with his flat hand. "It was like summer lightening on the horizon, potentially frightening but far away. If we had not known St. Petersburg and Russia, we could have dismissed the events as barbaric but of no concern to us. I walked through town today. It appears that St. Petersburg has for practical purposes forgotten the bloodbath. The glittering life continues more hectic and more extravagant than before. Private automobiles and elegant ladies on Nevsky Prospect, an unprecedented display of foreign goods in the stores."

Vladimir shrugged and gestured with his hands. "Yes, yes, the Carnival of Vanities. His Majesty, the Imperial Hamlet, has forgotten the lesson he should have learned. More arrogant than ever—galvanized by his ultra-right advisors, his hysterical wife, and the mystic *starets*, her father confessor—he has barricaded himself behind the *idée fixe* of his God-ordained mission. He believes that he alone is bearing God's heavy hand, but also that nothing could happen to him. He is a sad production."

Konrad laughed. "Forgive my sarcasm, despite the seriousness of the situation I am reminded of a friend in Munich, who maintained that all 'revolutions' were part of carnival: bearded men, fantastic costumes, a lot of posturing, religious processions. You see, Bloody Sunday happened to fall into the middle of the annual *Fasching*, the month-long celebration of orgiastic lunacy in Catholic Munich."

Vladimir knitted his brows. "Close up it was less orgiastic than dangerous madness. Bullets were buzzing around your head. Nicholas has lost his last credibility among the intelligentsia, the bourgeoisie, the peasants and the workers. Even among the ultra-right aristocrats, who, behind Witte's back, are moving to fill the power vacuum created by the continuing indecision of the Tsar. They will try to influence Nicholas to give in to their reactionary blandishments to dismiss Witte and to reverse the small gains we have made towards a constitutional monarchy." He shook his head.

"I thought Witte had forced Nicholas to sign a constitutional manifest which limits his

power and calls for the establishment of a Duma."

Vladimir shrugged. "To an outsider it may appear like that, but the Emperor does not care a damn about that document and will try to thwart its provisions as best he can. It is a worthless agreement, not going far enough and definitely too late. Who trusts this monarch? Without Witte we would be exactly where we were before the blood bath. Did you hear what happened today?"

Konrad shook his head. Cut off by their long wait in Eydtkuhnen, flooded by contradicting emotions after his arrival in the city, he had not read the papers.

Vladimir raised his eyebrows. "A few days ago, Nosach, the Socialist leader of the Petersburg workers' Soviet, called for another general strike. To stem the tide, Witte stood up before the workers and gave a surprise speech describing Nosach as a dishonest agitator who pursued his own dubious interests. Apparently that worked, the disenchanted workers distanced themselves from Nosach, who conveniently also happens to be a Jewish lawyer. Witte acting with lightening speed, arrested Nosach and one hundred and ninety of his Socialist radicals today."

Vladimir swept his flattened hand through the air. "Finished! I am not Witte's greatest admirer, when all chips are down he is a faithful apologist of the Emperor, but he showed a lot of courage to stand up to the workers! And he certainly timed his move against Nosach with masterful precision. For a while Witte will not have much to worry about from the radicals."

So that was where the troops had been heading this morning, to clean out the Petersburg Soviet.

Alexandra called from the kitchen asking them to join her. "I also want to hear Vladimir's views on current politics."

The two men took their glasses and moved into the kitchen.

"What do you think of my distant cousin Witte?" asked Alexandra. "You remember the fateful Theosophical evening at the Volkonsky's? I had never seen him before. And what about Stolypin? You said your father had a high opinion of him."

"Stolypin is waiting in the wings. After Witte returned from America with the unexpectedly advantageous settlement of the war with Japan, Nicholas, who equally fears and hates Witte, owed him a commission. Nicholas offered the ailing Witte the dangerous position of President of the Ministerial Council. Probably Nicholas hoped to rid himself of Witte in this way. To everyone's surprise Witte accepted and immediately began to force a cabinet of his choice on the vacillating monarch."

Vladimir took a step in Alexandra's direction. "The amazing thing is that your cousin, beyond his incredible technocratic skills and his unbending willpower, is a true humanist. So far he has acted without bloodshed, and except for this morning without mass arrests—an unheard of event in Russian history."

Alexandra not in the mood to give Vladimir the satisfaction of simply applauding Witte's 'genius' asked, "What do you think is going to happen in the near future?"

Vladimir looked at the floor. "It is hard to say. I am no prophet, and the political situation is still very unstable. Witte is in sufficiently poor health that he cannot last as prime minister. The Emperor probably wished him dead, but Witte is the only man who can bring in the large foreign loan that would save the country economically by paying off the debts incurred by the idiotic Pacific adventure." He looked at Alexandra again. "Nicholas will have to suffer Witte's intransigence until this money arrives: I guess six months? A year?"

They helped Alexandra carry the supper into the dining room. Konrad found a last bottle of red wine in his cabinet, and they sat down to eat.

"Russian politics are a chaotic charade," said Konrad over supper. "Do you mind continuing your lecture? What about the revolution, is it dead or will it continue?"

Vladimir put his fork and knife down and shrugged. "The revolution? It has not started. The radical left had nothing to do with the October demonstration nor with the ensuing disaster. Everybody, on the right and the left, was completely taken by surprise. Only belatedly have the Bolsheviks tried to reap some undeserved political gain from the situation."

He laughed derisively. "I think today's arrests will break their back for the foreseeable future, at least in St. Petersburg, elsewhere they might be more successful. In Moscow they have a wealthy supporter in Sasha Manovsky—a rich sympathizer who channels his contributions to the radical Moscow Soviet through Maria Andreyeva. Do you remember her at Volkonsky's, Alexandra, Gorki's voluptuously beautiful mistress with the fabulous hat?"

Vladimir sighed and laughed. "Manovsky is the competitor of Becky's father when it comes to French paintings, he has an even bigger collection. He is a railroad millionaire, what he expects from the Marxists in return for his donations completely mystifies me. And Andreyeva?—I am still jealous of Gorki."

Alexandra suppressed a yawn. "We met a very young Russian woman in Italy, her name was Marina Tsvetaeva. Have you ever heard of her? She writes poetry."

Vladimir raised his eyebrows. "Tsvetaeva is a formidable competition for our Petersburg poets...."

"Her poems," interrupted Alexandra, "didn't strike me as particularly lyrical, besides she is still a *lycéeenne*, barely sixteen, how can she compete with Blok?"

Vladimir shrugged. "Have you heard her read?"

"Yes, she read an abrasive love poem, which she must have composed a day earlier—for Konrad who had flirted with her. She read it in German. Later she began reading a love poem by Rilke but never finished it."

Vladimir raised his chin. "Well, Rilke is something else, he is a giant. I once heard him read here when he visited Petersburg with Lou Salomé, a most striking woman of Russian descent. Where did you hear Tsvetaeva read?"

Alexandra finally understood why Clara had been disturbed when she mentioned St. Petersburg, another of Rilke's loves. "We spent three weeks in a lonely *pensione* on the beach near Venice with her."

She described the *commune* at *Mama Angelina's* and the appearance of the two Tsvetaeva sisters.

A smile of recognition lit Vladimir's face. "It sounds like Voloshin's hideout at Koktebel. Voloshin is a local poet with dubious philosophical ambitions whose mother runs a *pensione* in Koktebel on the southern coast of the Crimea, a popular summer haven for poets and painters."

He nodded. "I heard Tsvetaeva read on a visit to Moscow earlier this year. You are right, she is not lyrical and still very young and immature, but she handles her Russian like a broom with which she sweeps the pigsties of the Symbolists. In that, she already surpasses Blok. Tsvetaeva has only one competitor, another woman, three years older, Anna Gorenko, alias Akhmatova. How is Tsvetaeva's German, and why did she not finish her reading of Rilke?"

"It was a dramatic happening." Alexandra shook her head, recalling that night. "We had

taken Rilke's abandoned wife along, she could not bear Marina's hacking her husband's poetry to pieces and simply took the volume out of Marina's hands and in tears finished reading the poem herself."

"Good God, poor near-sighted Tsvetaeva! She never wears glasses and cannot make out approaching danger. It must have been a great blow to her silly *hauteur*, to be forcefully interrupted during a reading. It was not Lou Salomé?"

"No, Rilke's wife's name is Clara. Who is Lou Salomé, I have never heard of her?"

"Ah, we are getting into the realm of gossip among the literati. Nothing beats a good rumor for entertainment. You will hear all the rumors making the rounds in town: Akhmatova is infatuated with Blok, Nikolai Gumilev wants to marry Akhmatova, Elizaveta Dmitrieva pursues Gumilev while she sleeps with Voloshin, etc."

He pushed his chair back and stretched his legs. "Lou Salomé is Russian; she is the wife of a German professor by the name of Andreas, who leaves her an unprecedented amount of freedom, she inspired Nietzsche and was the muse of Rilke..."

With tongue in cheek, Vladimir looked at Alexandra. "And Lou Salomé does not simply preside at a *salon*, fearlessly unconcerned about her reputation she traveled with these men, appeared with them in fashionable resorts and at public parties. Amazing!"

He stretched the last word with such a sigh that Alexandra began to laugh. "Maybe you also need a sensuous muse like Lou or Andreyeva, obviously Becky was not made for that role?" She smiled ambiguously.

Vladimir did not blush.

Konrad sneered sarcastically. "Have you heard the remarkable story of Konstantin and Helena? Helena was Emperor Konstantin's sister, mother, and mistress—the Church says 'wife'—and both are glorious saints of the Orthodox Church! Figure that out! Byzantine!"

Alexandra, unruffled, continued her laughter. "You are not alluding to me, Konrad? I would never qualify as a muse for this man. I don't go into raptures about poetry, an unpardonable flaw in a Russian woman."

Without losing his studied pose of indifference, Vladimir looked her in the eye. "Maybe one could teach the young lady a few things, she is highly gifted, as past experience has shown. No offence, Konrad. What would you think if I were to take you on a tour of the new, wildly experimental literary underworld?"

Konrad smiled charitably. "Why not, although I am not as generous as Lou Salomé's husband."

Exploring St. Petersburg

1905

Their first excursion would, of course, be devoted to Alexander Blok.

"Are you in an expansive mood?" asked Vladimir when he arrived at their apartment to pick them up. "I would like to introduce you to Blok. No poetry reading, something new, a mini-opera. Blok wrote the script and Mikhail Kuzmin, an unknown poet, the music, and an actor named Vsevolod Meyerhold put the piece on stage and plays its main character: *The Puppet Show*. The world has never seen anything like it."

Before they left Vladimir suggested a masquerade. "I have to introduce you to my friends, but you don't want to appear in the gossip magazines tomorrow under your real names. So we have to invent new personalities for you—besides it will be much more fun to make my friends guess the identity of that ravishing, unknown lady!"

Konrad smirked. "Carnival begins only next month."

But Alexandra was tickled by the prospect of playing Vladimir's latest conquest while flirting shamelessly with Konrad. "I will be Alexandra d'Andreae, what do you think Konrad?"

Konrad mumbled something about blasphemy, but then smiled. "Walter would be amused."

Vladimir tried to guess. "Oh," said Alexandra, "her name was Novella d'Andreae, professor of Greek and philosophy at the University of Bologna, in the year 1299! The Ur-great-grandmother of one Konrad Rost. Can you believe it?"

Vladimir was impressed, and Konrad had to explain the connection and, of course, the reason for Novella's fame.

Vladimir was elated. "Italian-German, an old name, a fabulous combination! And you look it too. You will become the instant rumor of town. Your Georgian accent will sound very authentic. Are you a tourist from Florence? And Konrad?"

Alexandra objected. "No, I come from Munich, my Italian will not stand any serious test. Konrad's name will be Wolfson, he collects old Russian icons for the American market. He is, of course, German, he can't hide his accent. We met here over some deal entirely by accident."

Alexandra poked Konrad in the ribs.

"Alexandra and I met on the snow-bound train in Eydtkuhnen," Konrad suggested, catching up with her.

The men were already at the door when Alexandra ran back and returned, coquettishly displaying the *fedora* from Berlin.

Vladimir gasped. "My God, how did you know?"

"Know what?" Alexandra laughed winking at Konrad.

Vladimir quoted:

*Ancient beliefs waft
From her heavy silks,
And her hat with funereal feathers,*

And her narrow hand in rings.

"Ever since Blok wrote these lines in *The Unknown Woman*, every woman in Petersburg wants to wear a hat like this one. Where did you find it?"

"Oh, Konrad bought it for me in Berlin over a year ago."

With much laughter, the three, Vladimir on the left, Alexandra in the middle, set out for the theater. She offered her arm to Vladimir, "to complete the masquerade," she said.

The theater was an improvisation, a long, narrow room with a tiny stage, bent-cane chairs in rows, the audience a motley crowd of the fashionable and the marginal, hungry students with nickel-rimmed glasses, ladies from the upper society, men in well-tailored suits, the intelligentsia of Petersburg. The small place was sold out.

The musical was an improvisation too, but a masterful one. Meyerhold was listed on the handbill as the director and as Pierrot. A Columbine and a Harlequin completed the cast.

"Meyerhold is a genius, he has been looking for such a vehicle for years," whispered Vladimir.

The curtain opened to a minimal set of symbolic pieces of furniture, a couple of chairs, a few paper decorations and standing amid this plunder Pierrot: tall, lanky, a fantastic hook-nose, no beak-mask needed, his costume an abstraction of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

Meyerhold moved his lanky arms in jerky gestures like an old-fashioned mechanical doll. With a grating voice he shouted. "Help, help I am bleeding to death!"

He made a pause and pointing at a growing puddle on the floor said as an aside, "*Sok Klyukvy?*"—cranberry juice. From underneath his costume dripped red juice.

Laughter.

This beginning proved a gag. Quickly the poetry became sufficiently ambiguous that Alexandra had to interpret for Konrad several times. Pierrot loved Columbine, of course, but to Blok she also represented his Death—*smertj*, feminine. Kuzmin's hackneyed tunes, sung by the characters without instrumental accompaniment off-set the sophisticated text: banal, erotic, sentimental, deliberately simple. Like the melodies at the *Variété* in Berlin they crept under Alexandra's skin.

In the end Pierrot stopped at the ramp facing the audience with a drooping head and pendulous arms said. "Life is sad, the world a farce."

Suddenly he jerked up his long arm, pointed at the audience and shouted, "And you think this is frivolous amusement. You idiots."

He pulled a flute from the folds of his garment and played a melancholic tune as the curtain closed behind him.

A minute of dumbfounded silence, and then a storm broke loose, whistles and cat calls mixed with ecstatic applause and shouts of "Bravo!"

Meyerhold dragged Blok and a reluctant Kuzmin onto the stage. Blok tall, an even, oval face surrounded by an aura of curly blond hair, a sensuous mouth, gray eyes, and Kuzmin his complete opposite, dark, large, ancient near-Eastern eyes, a few flying hairs on a balding head too big for his small body. Lemur or Cagliostro?

Vladimir seemed to know everybody. With obvious pleasure he showed off Alexandra. Konrad played his role most convincingly. Meyerhold tried to flirt with Alexandra in Italian and then switched to a Viennese-tinged German. Nobody suspected her Georgian origins.

Blok, besieged by adoring women, made a poker face. "*Mnye nravitsya*," 'I am delighted,' was all he had to say. Alexandra did not care, he was not her type, she simply overlooked the most worshiped idol of St. Petersburg.



Alexandre Blok



Vsevolod Meyerhold as Pierrot, 1906



Mikhail Kuzmin

On their way home Alexandra defended her obvious dislike of Blok. "He is *ein kleiner Junge*—he is a little boy."

Vladimir stopped in his tracks and looked at her surprised. "You must be the only woman in St. Petersburg who doesn't swoon at the mere thought of being introduced to him."

"Oh," she said without mercy, "I'll change my verdict, he is a *hochbegabter dummer Junge*, a highly gifted fool."

"Well, you sure have no sense for poetry," parried Vladimir.

"Nonsense, I liked the play. How did you say, its language is like a broom with which one could sweep the Russian pigsties. We need more of that."

A few weeks later Vladimir called. "I need someone to hold my hand. I received a summons to appear at the weekly *salon* of Zinaïda Gippius or Hippus, as you would pronounce it—the name is related to the Greek word for 'horse'—to defend my poetry. No, not really, to receive the *pour-le-mérite* or a condemnation out of her mouth. This soirée is a private party. I could get only one additional invitation, would you ask Konrad to consider my miserable circumstances and let you accompany me?"

Konrad sneered. "Is he afraid of a woman?" But he gave his 'extraordinary' consent.

After Vladimir had hung up, Konrad gave his sarcasm free reign. "You are in the process of becoming his mother, sister, and confidante, to express it mildly. Since when have you any strong motherly instincts?"

Alexandra blushed and in tears defensively hugged Otto.

Later, that night she nestled up to Konrad. "I have not told you—I am pregnant."

Konrad, seduced, took her into his arms. Thinking of his earlier reprimand her eyes swam in tears, but she bravely presented him with a most radiant smile.

"This time it is my child, conceived in the waves of the blue Adriatic!"

They had, one day, swum out to a lonely stretch of beach and had passionately made love in the shallow sea.

"Tell me something about this Zinaïda Gippius," said Alexandra. "How is it possible that you tremble at the mere thought of the words that issue from this Horse's mouth?"

Vladimir's chauffeur drove at his usual breakneck speed through the night. Alexandra had irritated Vladimir by suggesting that she could drive him to the Gippius' residence.

"Gippius is the Cerberus and the literary oracle of the Symbolists. Her husband, Dimitri Merezhkovsky, is the founder of the Symbolist movement. Merezhkovsky, a shy, intellectual essayist and literary critic, writes; Gippius talks with a merciless, sharp tongue. Her judgement is final among the reigning poets' movement. Only very recently have a few young poets published without her expressed approval. Blok and Akhmatova are among them."

They were flying along the outer Nevsky Prospect. Slowly the houses became less imposing. The gaslights ceased. Darkness invaded the streets. Alexandra could barely make out the few pedestrians on the sidewalks. They passed Alexander Nevsky's monastery.

Vladimir spread his hands. "Why do I submit to this ordeal? She could be very helpful in publishing my poems. Since the death of my mother, who was my muse from my earliest attempts at writing poetry, I doubt that I am cut out to be a poet."

She was peering into the night. He turned towards her. "I had hoped that you would take her place. You are intelligent and sensitive, you don't mince words. I like you and would have no problem submitting to your judgment, but you have no sense for poetry and you are not Russian."

Alexandra sighed and looked at him with a thin smile on her lips. "The last reason is probably decisive. I look through the nationalistic, religious, pan-Slavic utterances of the Russian soul and find Russian poetry pathetic if not worse. I do not want to hurt you, but from reading in your slim volume, I get the impression that your heart is too sentimental for the kind of poetry which, in your own opinion, needs to be written. Do you remember what you said about Marina Tsvetaeva?"

Vladimir pleaded with his hands. "Probably, you are right, but it is still painful for me to admit that to myself. I fear that the *White Horse* is going to say the same. Do you think I should write essays or short stories instead?"

She wanted to encourage him, but her eyes were full of pity. "As you said, I am not a literary expert, but I think that your cultivated Russian language and your sharp, encyclopedic mind could be great instruments for writing contemporary prose—if you would allow your Russian heart to moderate these gifts. You need more experience to mature your talents. And along that path I am quite willing to be your muse."

He took her hand and kissed it.

Mme. Gippius lay stretched in a pair of tight pants on a chaise longue chain smoking cigarettes in an overlong cigarette holder, which she used like a baton to emphasize her words in sweeping gestures. Alexandra took an immediate dislike to her. Such airs! Mme. Gippius was embarrassingly sure of her status among the small coterie of assembled men.

Vladimir introduced Alexandra d'Andreae with a few words about her bogus background. Mme. Gippius sized up Alexandra and without taking her cigarette holder from her mouth asked in Russian. "Is she writing too? In German or in Italian?"

Vladimir explained that Mme. d'Andreae was a medical doctor.



Zinaida Gippius, 1906 painting by Leon Bakst

Gippius took her cigarette holder from her mouth, blew a smoke ring, and, waving the cigarette with a dismissive gesture, she sighed, "Thank God, my Italian is not very good, and the Germans are boors. I prefer French."

Alexandra smiled sweetly and thanked her in French for the invitation to her *salon* of which she claimed to have heard already in Munich.

Gippius' French turned out to be deplorable. She changed back to Russian. With raised eyebrows, extending her hand holding the cigarette towards Vladimir she said. "And you, young beginner, I have read some of the pieces you just published. *Bog prostit, stikhi o lyubi!* --God forgive, love poems! At one time we all went through a great love affair—though not with the daughter of a serf! Are you a Socialist or a follower of the old Tolstoy?"

Vladimir winced. With a poisonous smile she registered her cheap hit.

On her wink, one of the young men handed her a copy of Vladimir's slim volume of poetry. Holding the book in her left hand, Gippius turned her head sideways and blew a cloud of smoke. The young men smiled smugly in expectation of the *coup de grace*.

Convinced that Alexandra understood no Russian, Gippius continued. "Well, what are you planning next? You are still very young and innocent." She waved her cigarette holder in Alexandra's direction. "Maybe an erotic experience with *Anna Karenina* would help you, provided she allow that."

Vladimir froze.

The Horse continued, fully aware that she was cutting Vladimir to the core. "Erotic poems sell like hotcakes these days, and they don't even have to be good. But to make an

impression on us, you have to conceive of better words than this kitsch."

She fanned the cloud of smoke away with his slim volume and rearranged herself on the *fauteuil*.

A waiter appeared as if on cue with glasses of cognac. Vladimir poured one down in one gulp and grabbed a second glass. Alexandra smiled encouragingly at him.

Gippius changed her tone. "Seriously, let me give you some advice. Your father is an excellent writer of legal and historical essays, why don't you try to follow in his steps? I know I speak to deaf ears, you are too young to appreciate my advice, you will persist in writing poetry, but we urgently need more decadence."

She left him alone thereafter and called on a young man from the audience to read his latest piece of work, a poem in the established tradition with some mildly radical overtones.

Vladimir finished his second glass, lit a cigarette, and tried to relax. It was all over, they might as well drive home.

In front of Alexandra's house, Vladimir pulled a crumpled paper from his pocket and gave it to her.

"I dedicated my last poem to you."

He kissed her hand.

"From now on I shall write prose, maybe even erotic prose."

She gently brushed his lips and forehead with her gloved hand.

Sophia's Birth

During the winter pregnant Alexandra and her two men, an odd troika, roamed the underground theaters that were springing up all over the city like mushrooms. Alexandra gave up her disguise as a now visibly pregnant Novella d'Andreae. She had nothing to hide nor prove. She decided to work in the maternity ward of the hospital, to enroll in additional courses in gynecology, and look for another woman doctor with whom to establish a private family practice after the baby's arrival. As she grew bigger she laughed, "I am a good advertisement for my future practice. I should carry a sign on my belly with my name and credentials."

Her pregnancy was uneventful, the baby peaceful and unproblematic. Aunt Sophia offered to come, but Alexandra talked her out of it.

When her labor started on the eighth of May, Konrad took her in a taxi to her hospital, where she was well taken care of by her colleagues. She succeed in relaxing herself completely. The delivery was fast and easy.

Once again she saw the lights and floated across the last, hard phase of giving birth. She enjoyed these sensations, they were like old friends.

As she had expected, it was a girl.

They named her Sophia, after Alexandra's and the child's *natlideda*.

Two bouquets of flowers awaited her in her room after her delivery, one from Konrad, another from Vladimir.

To make Alexandra's life easier, Konrad agreed to engage a wet nurse for little Sophia after the second month. A cleaning lady took care of the heavy housework, and Elisabeth, Otto's beloved *Nana*, became Alexandra's indispensable adjutant at home.

During Spring 1906 St. Petersburg had stabilized. Witte's energetic sweep of the radicals in the factories did put an end to the recurring strikes. With new medical care for the workers and better housing provided by the owners of the factories, the life of the workers improved. The restless, gifted young found it much easier to enter and rise through the universities. A steadily increasing number of women and Jews from the West-Russian Pale, who had been strictly limited by quotas, were now able to gain a hold in the universities and the arts.

The ugly Marxist uprising in Moscow in December 1905 which Witte had put down, became the only bloodstain on his reign. After successfully securing the state loan sponsored by a consortium of Jewish banks in France, Germany and Holland, Witte handed in his resignation. A week later the first Duma was opened by Nicholas II with great pomp at the Winter Palace. It lasted only a few months before the Emperor dissolved it over a constitutional disagreement on the limits of power between parliament and the crown.

Stolypin became the new president of the council of ministers. Lacking Witte's humanist scruples, Stolypin began his reign with a ruthless cleansing of revolutionary troublemakers. He had them arrested, executed, or exiled. Thousands disappeared. Lenin, Trotsky and the entire leadership of the Bolsheviks were exiled or sent to Siberia. Among them was Sasha Manovsky. To avoid a scandal, Manovsky had been persuaded to leave "voluntarily" for Paris.

Georgia had a new viceroy, Vorontsev, a moderate, unusually sensible man, who tried

his best to bring some kind of stability to the politically chaotic and restive Transcaucasus.

Vorontsev first brought the politically powerful Armenian bourgeoisie on his side. He then made peace with Noe Jordania, the moderate leader of the Georgian Socialists, who had rallied the land-starved Georgian peasants.

Jordania, a wily Mingrelian seasoned by decades of underground existence in Georgia and France, understood that a conservative, practical Socialism with strong Georgian nationalist overtones would be the formula for his success in Georgia. He considered Lenin's autocratic posturing as merely another manifestation of Russian imperialism, and in the great schism of Russian Socialism sided with Trotsky's comparatively democratic Mensheviks. Another reason for Jordania to distance himself from Lenin's Bolsheviks was their local leader, the ruthless, criminal, co-Mingrelian Soso "Stalin" Djughashvili.

Stalin had, a year earlier, masterminded a gangster-style bank robbery in Tiflis to support his subversive operations in Georgia. He was Lenin's Georgian henchman. This association and the robbery cost the Bolsheviks whatever appeal they had among the small Georgian peasants who filled the ranks of the Georgian Socialist Party.

The time was ripe to clean out the Georgian Bolsheviks. After Stolypin's accession in St. Petersburg Vorontsev began with Jordania's active help a sweeping roundup of Stalin's followers in Georgia. Stalin and his close guard went underground in the British-owned oil-fields of Baku.

The traditional political influence of the Georgian landowners was waning. The laws of 1848 that had abolished serfdom in Russia and redistributed the possessions of the lower Russian nobility had so far not been enforced in Georgia. Time was running out fast.

Ilia Chavchavadze had stood for a seat in the new Duma. In his campaign he fought tooth and nail against both Jordania and Vorontsev. As a result, the viceroy simply ordered him to the Crimea until after the elections.

Deda entreated Alexandra to come to Tiflis: foolish Uncle Ilia was in real danger. This time he found himself threatened from two sides. The Okhrana had been bad enough, but the Socialists, who were inimical to the landowners and tired of Ilia's old-fashioned paternalistic nationalism, were dangerous criminals.

Her letter ended with the ominous exclamation. "Can you imagine? Ilia is swearing to secretly slip back into the country during the elections. We are all very worried about him."

Alexandra, as much as she wanted to see her family again and sympathized with Ilia's problems, was against a visit to Georgia. She argued that once she had opened a medical practice she would be needed in St. Petersburg for at least a year. Behind this argument hid the fact—a surprise for Konrad—that Alexandra had adopted St. Petersburg. She loved the excitement of the life in the cosmopolitan city. To her Tiflis now appeared a dead, provincial backwater. She feared to once again lose her hard-earned personal freedom.

She would not readily admit that, but Konrad sensed it. For him Georgia had lost none of its exotic appeal, and professionally Tiflis promised a comfortable, unpressured life. He very much wanted to visit Georgia and renew his connections with the people who worked for a Georgian University. But above all else, he dreamt of an expedition to Svaneti.

The tug of war between them went back and forth for a while. Konrad reminded Alexandra that Uncle Mouravi and her father were getting old. God only knew how long they would live.

A telegram from Aunt Sophia drove home Konrad's point: Uncle Mouravi had suddenly died of a stroke. He left his embattled estate to his oldest son—and his vintage Benz to Alexandra.

Alexandra mourned the beloved, overbearing old gentleman. She would no longer be able to surprise him by appearing at the wheel of a car at his house. To bequeath her the old Benz! What a charming compliment to his niece.

Alexandra agreed to spend the summer of 1907 in Tbilisi and to go to Svaneti in September, unless she found a partner for her cooperative practice before that time.

These still vague plans were eventually firmed up by Niko. Niko wrote that he had finally gotten the courage to ask Claudia to marry him, and she had agreed. He had finished his doctorate, and they were planning to come to Tiflis in August to celebrate the Georgian half of their wedding, which would not be as big as Alexandra's. Would they both come to Tiflis for the occasion? He had little hope of luring them to their civil ceremony in Munich in June. Claudia's parents would come to Tiflis too.

They would, of course, be there. Konrad smiled. "Now that Niko is coming to Tiflis, I am sure that no partner for your medical practice will materialize."

"Oh," wrote Niko as a p.s., "I almost forgot—greetings from Katharina! They had a boy whom they named Ingo. She asked me to tell you that he has dark hair and brown eyes, and everyone was blissfully happy."

Alexandra looked at Konrad. "Do you realize that had he been blond I would have considered you to be his father?"

Konrad frowned. "You mean that Katharina could have conceived this child during that one night? I did not sleep with her again after that, as you know."

She smiled at him and told him of Katharina's desperate appeal for her advice in the beer garden after their night together. Konrad was taken aback, this possibility had not occurred to him.

"Why did you not tell me?"

She quietly took him into her arms.

Alexandra wrote Niko of their coming. It would be the first family reunion since her wedding, and would he invite Vladimir? Since their return to St. Petersburg Vladimir had become a close and dear friend.

During a Christmas party at the German embassy, to which Herr von der Schulenburg had invited them, Alexandra met her future medical partner. Helene von Üxküll was a tall, gaunt, quiet, no-nonsense woman, the daughter of a Baltic nobleman with an estate just east of the German border. They had liked each other at first sight. Yelena, as she was called in Russian, was specializing in internal medicine, a perfect match. A year younger than Alexandra, she had one more year of clinical work to do, which suited Alexandra perfectly.

Uncle Muravi's Benz

Tiflis 1907

"Mama," asked Otto when they boarded the train, "are we going to the Snow Castle?"

They had just stowed their luggage in a compartment on the train to Baku and Tiflis. Otto had carried his own small suitcase and put it on the seat. He took his coat off by himself and gave it to his mother

Alexandra asked surprised. "What castle do you mean?"

"You know, the Snow Castle with the animal-children where we went in the sleigh at night when the moon was shining."

"No dear, we are going to the house I lived in when I was as old as you are. In Georgia. And I shall take you to the castle my grandfather built among the vineyards. What reminds you of the Bredow's house?"

"I saw the man get on the train who went with us in the sleigh."

"Are you sure?" She had not seen anybody she knew.

"Which one, the one who was round and small or the older man in uniform?"

"The short one, who spoke German with you."

Schulenburg? That would be a surprise. She had briefly spoken to him at the Christmas party, and he had not mentioned a trip to Tiflis.

With Otto leading her by the hand they went through the first class cars looking for Schulenburg.

"See, there he is!" whispered Otto, and sure enough it was Herr von der Schulenburg.

Schulenburg taken by surprise called from a distance. "What a coincidence! Are you going home? I have been unexpectedly transferred to Tiflis to replace Joachim von Bredow, who will move up to become ambassador to the *Sublime Porte* in Constantinople. May I introduce you to my wife, she will be delighted to have someone to take her to Georgia. She very reluctantly leaves St. Petersburg for remote Tiflis, about which she has been told horror stories."

His wife emerged from their compartment. "Amalia, a happy coincidence, I just found Alexandra Dadiani-Rost walking down the corridor, she is also going to Tiflis."

Amalia complemented her husband perfectly. A pair of beautiful, warm, brown eyes smiled expectantly at Alexandra. "You are a real godsend. My husband has told me about you. You met on the snow-bound train—one misfortune we will, thank God, be spared on this trip. I am delighted to meet you."

She spoke a funny, Badensian, southern German. Two children of Otto's age poked their heads out of their door.

"Angela and Traugot, say good morning to Mrs. Dadiani-Rost."

The girl made a dutiful curtsy and Traugot a bow. Oh, thought Alexandra, I hope Otto learns something from them.

"And this is your charming little boy, does he speak German too?"

Alexandra gave Otto a nudge, and to her utter surprise Otto made a bow and said in perfect German, "My name is Otto. I am no small boy. I will turn seven next month. I also have a sister, but she is still a baby."

The adults laughed, and the Mrs. Schulenburg suggested that their children show Otto their toys.

Herr von der Schulenburg good-naturedly stroked Otto's head. "Splendid, a German-speaking playmate, that will shorten the long journey. My wife brought a young German governess along who will watch the children."

Annoyed by the gesture of the good uncle, Otto took a step back and with a toss of his head vanished with the two Schulenburg children. Alexandra asked the Schulenburgs to their compartment. They surprised Konrad, who had the presence of mind to produce a bottle of Georgian cognac.

While the men discussed Transcaucasian politics, Alexandra calmed Mrs. Schulenburg's apprehension of the "wild" Tiflis. It will be good for me to describe Georgia to her, thought Alexandra, I have almost forgotten how beautiful my beloved country really is.

Over supper in the dining car, Konrad suggested that Schulenburg and he should take the postal carriage along the Georgian Military Road. Amalia von der Schulenburg protested, her Russian was poor. She spoke no Georgian and could not handle the children by herself on this long trip. Alexandra, who saw Konrad's excitement, persuaded her. They did not have to change trains and would be three women, Amalia should leave the organization to her.

Konrad got an emotional welcome by Deda, Irakli, and Otar when he surprised them half a day earlier than expected. The following morning they all drove to the station. Irakli had hired a band in the bazaar. Four *bazarliks* carried garlands and a welcome sign.

When Joachim and Clara von Bredow arrived at the station they found Konrad already there, who took a fiendish pleasure in producing Schulenburg. This nearly resulted in a complete confusion. A representative of Vorontsev had shown up with a brass band hired from the German Club and two photographers from the papers. They finally negotiated a peaceful compromise, the bands would play alternatingly German and Georgian music, and Schulenburg offered to climb back onto the train to pose with his wife for the photographers. It became the biggest welcoming reception in memory.

Alexandra, overwhelmed by this unexpected production, surprised herself by emotional tears at so much good, old Tiflis. Otto self-importantly saluted the band, Deda cried, and Irakli had an unquenchable attack of laughter. Irakli had grown visibly older, his hair was now completely white, but his black mustache was still a splendid affair. Alexandra hugged him. Did he dye it?

Two days later, led by Niko and Claudia, the Dahls arrived. They had taken the boat from Italy to Batumi.

Niko volunteered to pick up Vladimir at the station. Alexandra, feeling giddy, had found an excuse not to go. Use your head, she admonished herself, he is a good friend, no more.

Vladimir showed himself from his best side, the perfect gentleman without affectations or airs. He quickly won everybody's liking.

The big house had not seen so much life since Alexandra's wedding. Deda, alternating between crying and clowning, was happy. Alexandra searched Deda's still delicate face, now full of creases and wrinkles. "How are you, dearest mother of mine?"

Deda stepped back, she now had trouble seeing things close up, pouting and rowing her arms in the so familiar gesture, her head cocked at an angle. "I am at peace and happier than

you have ever known me. Can't you see? I have missed you badly. Since I saw you last in St. Petersburg, you have become even more beautiful. And you are so slender after two children, how do you do it? Papa retired from teaching and is devoting his whole time to the revised edition of his anthology of Georgian poetry. He has become more tolerant. We are both very well."

"How are Olga and Ilia, and how is Sophia taking the death of her husband?"

A cloud crossed Deda's face. "Olga, as always, followed Ilia into exile. They live under surveillance near Sevastopol, too close to Georgia. The house in Zaguramo stands empty."

She became animated. "You should soon go to Kaspi to visit Sophia. She has been hiding in mourning out there for too long. Maybe you can lure her here for little Sophia's christening. Take Otto along. She has not stopped talking about Otto's miraculous 'Tibetan' birth."

Alexandra laughed. "I saw those lights again when Sophia was born, it was very enjoyable and not Tibetan at all."

They took the old *phaeton* to Kaspi. Otto was happy, he had rediscovered *Tante* Claudia who spoiled him. Amazing, thought Alexandra, how easily children negotiate time and space. Otto was neither surprised nor curious how Claudia had materialized suddenly so far from Munich. Alexandra thought of their discussions in Fiesole. Children seemed to have neither a time nor a space consciousness. What was Uncle Mouravi's car going to look like? She had never seen it, some primitive, early three-wheeler?



The Benz

She gasped when she saw the machine, a state-coach in immaculate condition, four doors, a sofa in the rear, room for six people, a sliding-glass window behind the front seats, eight cylinders, a pneumatic starter, at least one hundred horses! The beauty shimmered in the sun. Niko and Konrad, excited like little boys, looked under the hood, fabulous workmanship

good for another twenty years.

Alexandra slipped behind the wheel and pressed the starter. The monster roared.

"Easy, easy," shouted Konrad, "or you will take off and land on the moon."

Otto knocked on her door wanting to be taken along. She took him on her lap and allowed him to help her steer.

Cautiously she turned a circle in the courtyard and then drove out onto the road to Kaspi. The feeling of power and elegance was fantastic, if only Friedrich could see this car.

"Well, we have found a fitting vehicle for Claudia and Niko's wedding! Tiflis is going to be dumbfounded."

Konrad and Niko took Claudia to Uplistsikhe on horseback. Otto, who at first wanted to stay with Alexandra and drive the car finally trembled with excitement when Konrad took him on his horse.

Alexandra stayed behind with Aunt Sophia. Sophia, dressed in black, in unusually sparse gestures, made Alexandra talk of their visit to Florence, the summer on the beach, life and friends in Munich, and the shock of their return to St. Petersburg.

"How is your marriage with this unusual man?"

"Ach, dear *natlideda*, we have weathered highs and lows, slowly exploring each other and the limits of our love. The emotional wasteland of my medical education was a hard test for both of us. But my profession now provides me with a focal point outside the family and Konrad, which allows me to see myself and our future with greater clarity."

She looked out the window at the peaceful countryside, the hills in the distance. "Konrad would like to leave the tensions and the chaos of St. Petersburg behind. When we were stuck in the snow on the train before the gates of the Russian Empire, he reproached himself for not having persuading me to stay in Germany. He is not often overcome by black visions of the future. Then he was."

She faced Sophia, her eyes lit up. "At that critical moment—a threatening gang of revolutionaries, barring our journey, were swinging red flags at the border station—I was asked to help a woman in labor on the train. I who had never attended to a delivery! There was no time for anxieties or philosophical considerations only actions counted. I requisitioned a locomotive to take the woman to a hospital, and on the ride through the night in that snowstorm, my head became very clear. I needed to overcome my fears and go back to Russia to help wherever I could."

The days in Munich came back to her mind, the evenings at the Dahls, their pilgrimage to Andechs. "Germany is very comfortable, I could live in Munich, but the tensions and excitement of St. Petersburg keep my spirits alive. I want to do something more useful than take care of fashionable patients. I am prepared to share the uncertain fate that the chaotic Russian people have brought upon themselves. I am not afraid."

Sophia looked at her with sad and serious eyes. "I am no longer as courageous as you are. Depressed, I watch the decline of the Georgian aristocracy. And our estate in particular. I feel for George, who inherited the responsibility for this centuries-old family property. The Socialist government and the tenant farmers will destroy it. But let me not complain, I am an old woman, why should I fear the future, which I will not have to live in."

Sophia smiled at Alexandra. "Tell me about your children. Otto is growing into a person all of himself, the way he rode off with Konrad on the horse recalled the nostalgic memory of George's first ride with your uncle. And little Sophia? You did me a great honor by naming her

after me. I would have liked to bring her into this world. How did you manage?"

Alexandra described the convenience of the hospital. "I really enjoyed this delivery."

"You already enjoyed the first one like few other women. I am still mulling over your experiences at Otto's birth. I have to tell you of a very interesting discovery I made recently." Sophia paused. Her face became animated. "A friend, a Tibetologue, brought back a translation of a Tibetan book from Sikkim, called the *Tibetan Book of Dying*. Instructions how to pass the experience of death consciously and reach nirvana or rebirth. The text describes the frightening visions during dying: the same light phenomena you experienced occur, only in the reverse order!"

Alexandra was startled. "This is remarkable! Since Otto's birth I have learned that these light phenomena can also accompany a person's dying. A friend had a very similar experience when he was shot and lay in a coma for many hours. Does your text also describe flying above one's body?"

Sophia shook her head. "I now remember that you also talked about flying, that you watched Otto's birth from above. In my preoccupation with the mystical colors I completely forgot about your flying experience."

Sophia leaned forward and with a tense voice said. "It seems that this happens when you die. Part of your soul separates from your suffering body. It is you who decides when to let your soul leave your body for good and die. To remain conscious up to this point is the final goal of all meditation exercises."

Alexandra stared at infinity. A flash of understanding flooded her face. She blinked and focused on Sophia. In great excitement she said. "And the same happens during love-making. I am convinced a woman can learn how to die. Birth, love, and death are similar sensuous experiences."

Sophia got up and took Alexandra into her arms. "You confirm my most secret feelings. Thank you, dear courageous child, for sharing this knowledge with an old woman preparing for her death."

She heard the returning riders clatter outside their window.

Otto came running into the room, shouting already from afar, "Mummy, we saw a mountain full of caves. We climbed into some of them. They had windows and doors like real rooms. Niko says people used to live there until an earthquake destroyed their houses. You could see it, the church had collapsed completely."

Otto grabbed Alexandra by the hand. "Come, I want to show you how I ride a horse."

Konrad helped him onto the horse twice his height. Otto, fearless, very proud, sat in the saddle and pulled the reigns. Slowly he turned a circle in the yard.

Konrad, full of pride, watched him. "Otto should learn to ride. Your father has a quarterhorse. I will teach him."

A Family Reunion

Tiflis 1907

Every morning Konrad took Otto along the paths of his rides with Alexandra, to Zaguramo and Zedazeni, across the mountain to Betania, and in the end on a two day ride to Kakheti. They visited Alaverdi and Telavi and spent the night with George and David Chavchavadze at Tsinandali.



Konrad and Otto, Tiflis 1907

On their way back Konrad took Otto up to Shuamta. Konrad had never been there, and approached the three little churches in the meadow with apprehension. But the place evoked no sensation of the drama between Dato and Alexandra. Konrad rode off disappointed. On the way down he realized that unconsciously he had brought innocent Otto along as a shield against Dato's lingering ghost. Konrad felt so moved by this discovery that he told Otto the tale of his mother's abduction and her heroic escape with the gun.

From the very beginning little Sophia's baptism turned into a worldly and ecclesiastical altercation. They had planned to baptize her following Niko and Claudia's wedding, but Deda objected. Would it not look like Sophia was Claudia's child? In an Orthodox baptism the mother is excluded from the service, she is considered unclean, and no ranting against these traditions by Alexandra could sway the priest. The child is held by her godmother and is surrounded by witnesses, most of them male.

In addition Claudia's father, frowning, voiced objections against a church wedding: Claudia and Niko were legally married under German law, so why was there a need for a church wedding? Russia did not recognize a civil service, explained Alexandra, by Russian law Niko's was an illegal marriage.

The greatest obstacle, however, turned out to be the priest of the church the Dadiani's usually attended. He refused to perform the rites without Claudia taking instructions from him and converting to Orthodoxy. Irakli, exasperated by the priest's intransigence, turned to another church and bribed its priest with a liberal donation. For once the universal poverty of the clergy proved beneficial. The man consented, provided it would not be a widely publicized event and take place on a weekday in the late afternoon. With another liberal bonus Irakli enticed him to also perform Sophia's baptism a few days before the wedding.

Sophia screamed throughout the entire ancient rite. She was submerged in a huge, gilded cauldron of water, while the priest read his incantations over her. Niko and Otar, Sophia's *natlimamanebi*, helplessly poured a handful of water over the head of their roaring niece. Aunt Sophia, who looked like a black angel in her severe widow's dress, finally quieted the child.

"Another unwilling soul pressed into the fold of the almighty church," joked Irakli, a glass of champagne in his hand, at the reception. "Only this child," he pointed with his glass at Alexandra, "rebelled louder against this ordeal than little Sophia, and you see what has become of her, always of her own mind, always unruly."

Alexandra gave her father a kiss and excused herself. Professor Dahl glanced at Irakli. "Alexandra once indicated that Georgia was a matriarchal society. She did not elaborate on her remark, and all I see is a deeply entrenched patriarchal system."

Irakli tilted his head and smiled awkwardly. "She did not divulge our best-kept secret? Yes, our patriarchy is a deception. But you should get that information from one of our ladies, I am implicated by my vested interests." He pushed out his chest and twirling the tips of his mustache laughed evasively. "You should pay a visit to the local synagogue. The Tiflis Jewish community consists mostly of native Georgians who were converted in the first century. They call themselves *Mosaic Jews* and are not Hebrews. Their rites are ancient, their history is very interesting."

Dahl shrugged and said coldly, "Thank you for the suggestion, but what do I have in common with Oriental Jews?"

Their conversation would have ended in an embarrassed stalemate had Alexandra not brought the Bredows along.

"Papa, it is such a pleasure to see our best friends from Munich united in your house. We spent many wonderful evenings at Mrs. Dahl's house, she was like a second mother to Niko and me. It is a pity that Friedrich and Katharina are not here."

Alexandra sensed that something had gone wrong between Dahl and her father. What

was it? Her father was such an easygoing man and Claudia's father such a thoughtful, intelligent, and worldly person? How was it possible that they seemed unable to find a common ground? Earlier she had noticed that her father appeared to avoid Mr. Dahl, but why?

Clara and Mrs. Dahl took over the conversation, and the tense moment passed.

At night Alexandra told Konrad of the puzzling tensions between her father and Dahl. Konrad was not surprised.

"Dahl involved me in a long, rambling discussion about his impressions of Georgia. It was a mistake to take him to the baptism, he was horrified by the 'barbarian' customs of 'forcing an innocent child into a religious system like that.' Religions were a dangerous humbug which obfuscated man's clear, rational mind—the reason for our lack of humanism. Whether it was Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, 'we need to eradicate religion by the roots.'

Konrad said. "Remember the day in Andechs with Claudia and Friedrich? You eloped with Katharina, happy to have found a kindred spirit. I had to listen to a long diatribe by Friedrich on the subject of religion. And you know how apprehensive Claudia is about the wedding and churches in general."

Alexandra nodded. "At Manana's, who is fitting my wedding dress for her, I tried to help Claudia over her irrational fears. But Dahl is a sensible, intelligent man, why can't he accept that other people have different traditions, needs, and emotions from his? He, as a psychologist, should understand that. Is that humanism? And why lay it on Papa who is such a cheerful, generous person?"

Konrad began pacing the room. He hesitated to voice what had occurred to him during the conversation with Dahl. After all he agreed with Dahl in principle, though, of course, with more moderate conclusions.

"You know that I am not a psychologist, it is you who has that sixth sense for the emotional traumata that warp people's views and behavior, but you seem to have no clue in this case."

He stopped his walking and looked at her. "During my talk with Dahl, it occurred to me that the origin of Dahl's impeccable distaste for religion may well have to do with his past. By the power of his sharp mind, he extracted himself from what was probably a very narrow-minded, Rabbinical upbringing, deeply steeped in ancient and, for him, meaningless rituals. That may be one of the reasons why he chose psychology for his profession: He is not fighting religion but his own ethnic inheritance, and you know how difficult that can be."

Without a moment of thought Alexandra agreed. "Sure, this could explain his dislike of churches, priests, and religious rituals, but it does not solve my puzzle about his dislike of father and..."

She interrupted herself hitting her forehead with her flat hand. "Come to think of, it is quite possible that father does not like Dahl either. *Why?*"

"Did you listen to their conversation?"

"Unfortunately not, it was still hanging in the air when I arrived with the Bredows."

Rowing his arms Konrad took up his pacing again. "You see, Lexako, there is an aspect of Georgian sensibility you are not aware of, and I, for good reasons, have never mentioned to you. It has to do with what the Russians call *dusha*, 'soul.' There are people who have a *soul* and others who don't have a *soul*. Irakli has a *soul*, Dahl, in Irakli's eyes, doesn't. Don't ask your father for an explanation, he cannot verbalize it, nor could most anybody who functions

like he: They look at someone and *know* that the person has no soul, period, end of all rational considerations." He laughed. "On my first meeting with father he resolved that I had 'soul' and received me with open arms. And you decided that I had so much soul that you had to have part of it!"

Alexandra knew, of course, exactly who were her soulmates and who her antagonists, and once she had made this distinction, it stuck to the person with many serious consequences. She nodded and looked pensively at Konrad. "How do you think this process works?"

Konrad stopped before her and faced her, a frown on his brow. "I have thought about how you acquire such knowledge for many years. It is obviously entirely visual. You look at somebody and *know*. In fact, words confuse you. You search for a picture in your mind that fits the stranger."

He scratched his head. "You and father read body language. There are people with the 'right' and others with the 'wrong' body language, or what is worse, no body language at all. Dahl speaks with his head. He has trained his body to remain mute."

Konrad touched his lips with his clasped hands and then swept his arm. "I am convinced that this is the reason why Papa is unable to trust him: Dahl is a *western, intellectual, humanist, a Kopfmensch*, who shows no feelings and permits himself no intuitive spontaneity. He decides between good and evil with his head—a decidedly dangerous person!"

Alexandra smiled and said mockingly. "Are you serious in thinking that Kopfmenschen are dangerous? I have tried all these years to control my emotions with my head."

Konrad waved his head. "Yes and no. Kopfmenschen believe they make predictable, rational decisions, which, without their knowledge, may be badly distorted by their suppressed emotions."

He laughed briefly. "With you this is an entirely different matter, you are so openly emotional that a little head-control is desirable for your own good. As long as you are aware that you make decisions emotionally everything is all right. It is when you lose your head that you become dangerous to yourself. Your intuitive grasp of good and evil is in excellent health, and you know that I rely on you more often than seems justified by my judgment. Your visions may sometimes be crazy, but they are not distorted by inherited traumata as Dahl's are—a fortunate circumstance you probably owe to your father who loves you so consummately."

Niko and Claudia's Wedding

Tiflis 1907

Alexandra finally swayed Claudia's father to consent to the wedding. Nobody took this religious ceremony overly seriously, she argued, it was part of Georgian tradition and should be of ethnological interest to Mr. Dahl. The ritual was part of Georgian life, he should simply consider it as a Georgian family celebration.

Alexandra's dream to drive Niko and Claudia to church in the colorfully draped Benz, had been preempted by the priest's demand for a low-key wedding. The bridal couple, Claudia bravely clothed in Alexandra's wedding dress, with a serious Otto holding the train, rode in the family phaeton. The guests left their hired carriages at a nearby square and walked the few blocks to the church. By Georgian standards it was a modest wedding.

The hurried and perfunctory ministrations of the priest and his helpers, the pair's breathless run through the sanctum behind the iconostasis, and the sarcastic comments among the guests made, in Alexandra's opinion, an unholy farce of the wedding service. But it helped to make the ceremony less oppressive to the 'unbelievers' than little Sophia's solemn dunking in the baptismal cauldron. The wedding guests arrived for the reception at the house in the best of spirits, laughing and joking about the Georgian church and its clergy.

At the wedding reception the Bredows persuaded the Dahls to stay with them in Constantinople on their way home. They would sail together from Batumi. At about the same time the expedition to Svaneti was set to leave. Irakli invited all to spend a few days as guests of his half-brother David at the Dadiani mansion in Zugdidi, which lay conveniently on the way to Batumi and Svaneti. Only Alexandra protested, she needed a volunteer who would share her driving and learn quickly.

She had half-hoped that Konrad would take driving lessons from her. But he grinned, it would probably not be a good idea to learn to drive from one's wife. He would prefer instead to continue riding with Otto.

The lot fell on Vladimir, who could barely hide his excitement of spending a couple of hours a day alone with Alexandra. She was aware of providing the pretext.

Konrad laughed when she told him. He had foreseen the outcome of her campaigning. Konrad felt good in this relaxed environment—his rides with Otto into the hills, conversations with Leist, visits to Henri. Alexandra's excursions with Vladimir did not disturb him. He had become fond of this man.

Vladimir discovered the unexplored pleasure of handling the big machine. His father would have considered driving an absurd proposition, why else did he have servants?

They would drive short distances out of town, drink a glass of tea or wine under the plane-trees of a local *chaihane*, a teahouse, watch the colorful natives, and talk.

Vladimir was interested in everything, the bewildering mixture of races, languages, and customs of Georgia. The life and times of her famous great-grandfather, Alexander Chavchavadze. The story of the unhappy Griboyedov, who fell in love with Alexander Chavchavadze's sister and was horribly slaughtered by Islamic fanatics. Alexandra enjoyed undermining Vladimir's romantic Russian notions. Vladimir's final driving test became a day-

long ride with Claudia and her parents along the Georgian Military Road to Kazbegi.

One evening Deda took Konrad aside. "Would you like to come with me to a *sema* in Shav nabada?"

Konrad was taken by surprise. "Lord, are you still going there? I cannot believe it." Tamunia-Deda lowered her eyes. "After you helped me at Easter to throw the skeletons out of the closets of my marriage, Irakli and I have found a new understanding. The following Easter he came to Zedazeni with me, and now tolerates that I regularly attend the *sema* in Shav nabada. The Halveji have elected me *sema-bashi*, dance master, who keeps the dancers from colliding and helps any that have fallen."

Konrad still could not accept Deda's involvement in Shav nabada. Pensive, he knew Alexandra would refuse to join him. "Are you aware of what happened between Persephone and Alexandra after Alexandra's abduction? Alexandra has sworn never to see Persephone again, and you know that she is not going to give in."

Deda frowned. "I heard of their meeting only from Persephone and know nothing of Alexandra's vow. Persephone has become older and wiser, she has got rid of the man with whom she was living at that time and who was a bad influence on her. She has given up drinking."

She raised her hand in defense. "Leave Alexandra out of this. I invited *you*, because I am worried about you. You are not consumed by professional interests as most men are. Your only real passion is Alexandra. You float through life without direction, and let her create the tensions and excitements in your marriage."

Konrad winced, Deda had put her finger on a sore and occasionally troublesome aspect of his marriage.

"I admire your equanimity," Deda continued. "Look at the intimate relationship between Alexandra and Vladimir. My husband would not permit me to spend hours with Vladimir teaching him to drive. You have to be blind, if you did not notice that Vladimir is in love with her."

Konrad smiled. "My indecision is occasionally troubling me, but Vladimir is not one of my worries. Deda, it would be silly of me to point out that we are living in a different age than you and Irakli. Alexandra and I are sufficiently sure of each other. We are neither jealous—or at least no longer—nor did I grow up with Irakli's code of honor. Assuming you were married to a different man, could you not imagine that you might have the freedom to have an affair without destroying your marriage?"

She lowered her eyes. "Maybe I am not free enough. But I can imagine that a love as strong and mutual as yours and Alexandra's could survive. Men have always taken the freedom to philander. But men are more insecure than women, they cannot bear the idea of their wives sleeping with another man. I see what you are saying, in exchange for a stronger, more intense and more equal relationship between the two of you, you give Alexandra the same freedom which society grants you as a man."

She looked questioningly at him. Konrad chuckled. "Well, something like that. In practice it is more complex and much more delicate. This kind of freedom depends on a myriad of emotional factors and an unconditional openness between the two partners. It is no cure for a marital dispute, nor should an affair be used to 'prove' something to the other. Under the right circumstances the strength and trust that can grow from such an experience is extraordinary,

believe me."

After a moment's hesitation Konrad continued. "Vladimir has become a trusted friend. He has the ease and grace I am lacking. I like this man, and at the moment I am so happy to be here that I can be generous. Knowing and watching these two has not always been easy."

Deda shook her head. "I do admire your courage and your dedication to Alexandra. You have taken away the *raison d'être* for my invitation. I really wanted to encourage you to learn the Sufi turn. You are an excellent dancer, it would be easy for you. You see, turning is a meditative exercise which does not require the head, only purely physical balance. You are a *Kopfmensch*, it would be very good for you to lose your head on occasion."

Konrad began to laugh. "Alexandra and I just discussed Dahl and used the same term to describe *him*. I am not nearly as involved with my head as he is. I have learned much about 'occasionally losing my head' from your daughter and from Henri."

He turned serious. "Maybe you are right. Perhaps I should explore the Sufi way further, which has served Henri so well."

Deda, suddenly lively, interrupted him. "And which has helped me to balance my creative side with Irakli's expectations as his wife. You sure have guessed by now that I was once as rebellious and willfully obstinate as Alexandra. Ilia and the theater were my first great infatuations."

She blushed deeply. "But you are right, Robert Dahl is intellectually more introverted than anybody I have ever met. And no female charm seems to be able to save him. Alexandra has access to him. I suppose Dahl admires her sharp mind."

Konrad had a sudden inspiration. "Have you discussed your invitation to the sema with Persephone and Henri?"

She shook her head.

"Then please ask whether I could bring Vladimir and Dahl along. Let me see what I can do to provoke their interest. But who will teach me the turn?"

"Oh," she said coyly, blushing profusely, "the *sema-bashi* does that!"

Konrad had a good laugh and gave Deda a kiss.

Alexandra was puzzled when Konrad told her of Deda's invitation. She said a few unfriendly words about Persephone adding predictably, "No, thank you, I am not interested in joining you."

When Konrad told her of his conversation with Deda and her suggestion that he should learn the turn, she did modify her criticism of her mother. But she remained adamant, she did not want to see Persephone again. Konrad pulled his surprise. "I shall try to persuade Dahl and Vladimir to come along."

Alexandra blinked. "Dahl, after the baptism experience? I don't know. A sema is a lot more emotional than a baptism."

"Exactly for that reason."

She shook her head. "Are you going to learn the turn, as Deda suggested? Who is going to teach you?"

He made a deliberate pause before he told her with a straight face that her mother would do that.

Alexandra laughed harder than ever. "My dear Deda, in love with her son-in-law! Good for her!"

"Shh, don't laugh so loud, and not a word to anyone, please! Isn't it charming?"

In the evening, alone with Dahl and Vladimir over a glass of wine, Konrad brought up the subject of the Sufi and their dances. Vladimir listened intently. Dahl referring to the discussion on the Sufiya in Munich and Bredow's excitement asked whether it would be possible to attend such a dance as an outsider.

It had not been difficult at all to get Dahl interested in this adventure! Konrad smiled. "I have been invited to a sema, and I think I could take you and Vladimir along. Let me talk to Henri and the Sheikh, a woman named Persephone, as you may recall. But I should warn you," Konrad laughed, "a sema is considerable more mystical than a Georgian baptism."

"What happened in Shav nabada?" asked Alexandra full of curiosity on the evening after the sema. Her parents had gone to the theater with Niko and Claudia and they were enjoying a glass of wine with the Dahls and Vladimir. Konrad made a polite gesture to let Dahl give the report.

"It was an unforgettable experience. I am afraid I will need some time before I will be able to comprehend what I saw. At this moment I am trying to understand the psychological aspects of this dance which seems to have a powerful effect on the participants."

Dahl glanced uncertainly at Alexandra. "But of course, the biggest surprise was to find your *Frau Mutter* acting as the dance master. When you told us in Munich the stories of Persephone, Henri the goldsmith, and your mother's Easter play, I considered them versions of a Georgian *Thousand and One Nights*. It is confusing to find you, Konrad and now your mother involved in these stories."

He laughed briefly. "These experiences are beginning to effect my sense of reality. You are all perfectly real people, who are acting according to perfectly normal, universal principles, drive cars, enjoy nature, discuss literature and art. You, Alexandra, have an exceptionally sharp mind complimented by a great intuitive sensitivity, and yet I cannot rid myself of the feeling that the society you live in is unreal—at least to my understanding. Why? It cannot be that the Georgians are fundamentally different from people in the West."

Alexandra guessed what Dahl was driving at, but knew it would be difficult to explain the female secrets of Georgia to him.

"I owe you a description of the manifestations of 'matriarchy' in Georgia, and of the role of the woman in our society."

Dahl inclined his head in her direction. "Alexandra this would be very kind of you. I asked your father for an explanation of your strange allusions, but he evaded my question. I do suspect that this may be part of the mystery of Georgia which I fail to grasp."

Alexandra smiled at him. "The nature of the subject makes it impossible to describe it in psychological terms, but I could try to use my own experience and the Greek myths to give you an idea."

Dahl nodded. She gave him a beguiling smile. "You have to understand, we don't talk about this women's knowledge. That is one reason why men—who have to talk and to create myths and religions to explain the world—have such limited understanding of what the woman knows. The secrets of women are handed down from mother to daughter. They are ways of dealing with the world, with death, love, and childbirth, and with the ignorance of men. And even between mother and daughter these things are not discussed in words. They are learned by doing. They constitute the ultimate, esoteric knowledge."

Dahl smiled. "As always, you have succeeded in disarming me. *Ab initio* you essentially dispose of any analysis I could offer!" He laughed. "I admit to being seduced and all yours!"

Alexandra gracefully inclined her head accepting his surrender and went straight to the heart of the matter. "You remember, in München I once told you the story of Dato and my abduction. I did not tell you, that afterwards I went to see Persephone for advice. It was a horrifying experience. In a half-drunk trance she accused me of having spared Dato. By the old 'matriarchal' rules, she said, I would have had to seduce and kill him in my arms at the height of his ecstasy. Now he would have to live a miserable life, the weak man, and one day he would come back to demand his death from me."

She paused a moment. "These are the ancient laws of matriarchy. Persephone's prophesy is still unfulfilled. So far Dato has not returned."

Dahl glanced at her with an incredulous smile but said nothing.

Alexandra, registering his smile, continued thoughtfully. "I was shocked. On that day I decided to marry Konrad, to follow him into exile and learn how to become conscious of my own actions in order to come back to Georgia and help other women to escape from these millennia-old ways. But I am sure Persephone will be proven right. Dato will return one day with such a request. I am terrified by the thought, but Georgian men go crazy or commit suicide when they have to live in exile, separated from their women."

She briefly considered the efficacy of the old myths. "Do you recall the Greek myth of Medea? She was a Georgian woman and the priestess of the Great Goddess in the Kolkhis. Her story is a good illustration of the rules of matriarchy. She did not seduce but compromised Jason by stealing the Golden Fleece from her brothers. She obliged him to take her home as his wife. When Jason later left her for a woman of his own tribe, she did not kill him or herself, but the children she had borne him."

Dahl nodded. "I am familiar with this archaic tale. You are not the only one who is using it to illuminate our subconscious. But to my knowledge, nobody has seen Medea as an exponent of matriarchy. Her pedicide already shocked the Greeks. It is still unexplained."

Encouraged, Alexandra boldly applied the myth to the present. "In less dramatic ways this is how Georgian women still take revenge on their men. They don't lay a hand on them, they make their men feel so ashamed and guilty that they kill themselves or go stark raving mad."

Dahl caught on. He raised his hand. "Alexandra, may I contribute to your myths? The Greek example is the *Oresteia*. There the matriarchal content is quite explicit. Orestes murdered his mother Klytemnestra. To avenge this matricide, the Erynnyes, the executioners for the Goddess, pursued Orestes all over Greece, until he went mad."

"Yes," said Alexandra. "And a thousand years later Sophocles, the New Greek, undertook to recast the old matriarchal law to suit patriarchal logic. Sophocles' Athene, the *Goddess not born of woman*, absolved Orestes of his crime before the court of the elders of Athens—I owe this insight to Konrad's excellent familiarity with the Greek drama."

She smiled at Konrad. "The Georgians, unlike the Greeks, were never conquered by Indo-Europeans. They still speak their six thousand-year-old language, and below the surface the age-old ways of the women are much alive. What you perceive as patriarchal customs in Georgian society today is a very thin veneer covering the unutterable ruminations of the Goddess."

"And the men?" asked Mrs. Dahl. "What are the men like who suffer this kind of

maternal rule?"

Alexandra burst out laughing. "We like our men to be chivalrous, quiet, romantic poets, with a sense for the tragic." She shot Konrad a loving glance.

All eyes turned on Konrad.

"Konrad," asked Vladimir, "how do you manage to live with this Georgian Priestess of the Great Goddess?"

Konrad smiled roguishly. "Does she frighten you? I don't have that impression."

Alexandra waved their words aside with her hand and laughed her father's laugh.

"Konrad appeared like Apollo in my life. He slew the Sacred Snake and rescued me from the chthonic powers of the Goddess. Since then a dark shadow attaches to his innocence. He has become the protector and spirit of the Delphic Oracle. The revenge of the Goddess is unfathomable!"

They all laughed with her, only Dahl said with a serious face. "These powers are no laughing matter. There is a new school of psychiatry, gathering around one of Freud's students. His name is Carl Gustav Jung. He has set out to describe the images of man's subconscious by way of what he calls 'archetypes.' They are exactly what you describe, and they are suitably ambiguous."

The Dadiani Castle

Zugdidi 1907



The Dadiani Castle

Ten years later, when he faced the guns of his pursuers, Vladimir would see the scene in hallucinatory clarity: a large, dark room with a beamed ceiling, lead-trimmed stained-glass in four arched, gothic windows through which the afternoon sun painted red, blue, and green puddles of color on the floor, heavy Burgundian furniture, a fireplace big enough to roast a calf in, the coat of arms of the Dadiani above its ledge.

Across this gloomy stage a young woman of Alexandra's age in a dusty riding outfit walked towards him. Tall, proud, with disheveled, dark hair and the blazing, blue eyes of the mountain people. He was spellbound and so confused that he involuntarily held on to a chair.

Tamara Dadeshkeliani had ridden two days from Svaneti to meet and guide them to her father's place in the mountains. Tamara was not given to many words. George Dadiani, who next to her looked stunted with his thin, reddish hair, introduced her to his guests. Barely polite she shook hands. Vladimir stuttered when he was introduced and barely managed to awkwardly kiss her hand.

Alexandra watched their encounter with mixed sensations. Poor Vladimir is finished, she concluded, all his worldly aplomb has deserted him. She had heard of her younger cousin, but had never met her. Alexandra's Dadiani grandmother had been a Dadeshkeliani and her father's good looks were hers. Grandmother Dadiani had died early, Grandfather had remarried, a petite woman with flaming red hair, who had been the rage of Tiflis. God knows from which Russian Jewess she had inherited her foreign looks. All her children had her blond

hair and build. Cousin Tamara was the first fresh wind in the house.

Alexandra had not visited Zugdidi since she was six. In the interim George had enlarged the house and redesigned it in the neo-gothic style: twenty-six rooms with a number of attached bathrooms, a huge dining hall, a chapel, Gothic arches, heavy oak portals, turrets and towers, a display of the riches George had reaped from his tea plantations. By comparison to this *chateau* the comfortable houses of the Chavchavadze were quaint. But, she reminded herself, her father's and her own easy life was provided for by George's business talent.

The neat, parallel rows of the dark-green tea bushes combed the low, rolling hills at the foot of the mountains for miles. Peasant women with big baskets wandered through the plantations picking the top leaves. Their voices, and the rustling of the bushes filled the air.

Two rainy seasons and plenty of fog during the rest of the year had proven favorable for tea growing. The high mountains kept the cold wind from the Russian steppes at bay and the Black Sea held the temperature constant. It rarely froze in winter. George had engaged a Chinese tea master, had expanded the tea acreage every year, and had built a tea processing plant in Zugdidi. But the quality of the final product was inferior to tea imported from China, not to mention Indian or Ceylonese teas, which were grown in a warmer climate and at considerably higher elevation.

Konrad and Uncle George had established such a good rapport, that George offered him a trip to China. He wanted to study Chinese tea processing with the help of his Chinese tea specialist. The trip would take three months. They would go by way of the new Transsiberian railway and return by steamer from Shanghai through the Suez Canal. All expenses would be paid.

Konrad was speechless. He accepted the offer without discussing it first with Alexandra, and suggested that he would learn some Chinese and study China's history and geography. Alexandra smiled, she would be condemned to be a straw widow for a long time!

Alexandra grew bored in Zugdidi. If she had not brought the Benz, which impressed Uncle George immensely, she would have taken a horse and eloped.

Otto disappeared among the many children of the house. He went riding with his cousins, learned to climb trees and to swim in the millpond on the property, chased rabbits in the tea plantations and went fishing in the clear brooks coming from the mountains. In the evening he fell dead-tired into bed. Blissfully happy, he had finally found *his* castle. Alexandra could leave him in Zugdidi for the length of their expedition to Svaneti without a second thought. She knew little Sophia in Elisabeth's loving care in Tiflis.

On the day of the Dahls departure Alexandra drove them to Batumi to see them off and to say good-bye to the Bredows. Unexpectedly cordial, Dahl embraced Alexandra and kissed her.

They waited for a spell of dry days. Tamara would take them to the high valley on a short but strenuous path along the Inguri river gorge. Because stretches of this trail were too exposed for horses, they would have to walk and needed dry weather. They would return by an easier but much longer horse trail from the upper Svaneti to Lentekhi in the Tskhenitskhali river valley, a hundred kilometers northeast of Zugdidi.

As their excitement grew so did the complications. Vladimir, smitten with Tamara, had

become a nuisance to everybody. He was beginning to affect their carefully balanced equilibrium. Alexandra took him aside.

"Look my dear friend, I share your excitement about Tamara, but this is not St. Petersburg. Keep your ardor under control. If you so much as kiss her, you run the risk of losing your private parts or having your throat cut one morning. The Svani are wild people with an old-fashioned code of honor, and this woman comes from one of their proudest families. Should you have serious intentions, my parents would be more than happy to act as go-betweens. Show yourself from your best side in Etzeri. I see no reason why a liaison between your two families should not be possible."

Vladimir smiled sheepishly at Alexandra. "You are not jealous, are you?"

She slapped him with her bare hand...lightly.

After this conversation, Vladimir took hold of himself, and everyone sighed with relief.

At long last the fog receded. Tamara called her father, and George had them driven to Kaishi where the trail began. They spent the night in the Kaishi school house under rough and doubtfully clean blankets, all five crowded into a single room.

Tamara scared them out of their sleep at five in the morning. A simple breakfast of bread, eggs, and tea, and they were on their way. She had hired eight porters who carried their belongings, warm clothing, a pair of extra shoes, bottles of tea, a lunch, and a few provisions that were needed at the house.

The path followed the telephone line. It very quickly rose steeply from the river valley, which immediately behind the village became a deep canyon too narrow for a footpath. After two hours of climbing, the path leveled out parallel to the valley high on its slopes. This was the dangerous part when it rained. Rock alternated with loose scree which fell precipitously several hundred meters down to the foaming Inguri river. A wrong step and one would disappear into the chasm, and, pointed out Tamara with a facetious laugh, a horse would take all one's belongings with him.

After slowly climbing for another two hours, they reached the foot of a rocky promontory where Tamara stopped for lunch. But before they let the weary hikers rest, she persuaded the party to climb the rock.

For the first time they saw the mountains flanking the lower end of the valley. Icy peaks on both sides. On the left Shtaler and Donbus Oron, over four thousand meters high, formed a wall behind which the broad snow cap of five thousand six hundred meter Elbrus was barely visible. On the right side, though lower, Laila's craggy snow fields rose spectacularly from dark, heavily wooded slopes. The Svaneti Valley proper was hidden behind a low wooded ridge on the opposite side of a chasm through which a tributary stream roared down from the Laila massif.

"Unfortunately," explained Tamara, "we will have to descend into this gorge and then climb out again over the ridge to reach Svaneti. This will take another three hours, but the path, except for the crossing of the river, will be much easier. And then we will be home."

They took a short break and after rounding the viewpoint clambered down into the chasm to the bridge. The view of the bridge sent shivers down Konrad's spine. Three parallel tree trunks spanned the chasm in which, fifteen meters below, thundered the river. Two ropes to hold onto, no railings.

"All right," said Tamara, "two weeks ago I did it by myself. I brought two climbing-ropes

along, which I will tie to the person walking across, so we can fish you out should you slip. Zhurab, the head porter, will carry the end of the rope across, and I will belay the other on this side. You can balance yourself by holding onto the rope rails. Who is free of vertigo?"

All looked at Vladimir, who shot Konrad a withering glance and then looked at Tamara. Blushing, he volunteered. The porter gingerly carried the rope across and attached it to a tree on the other side. The rope lay slack on the beams. Tamara expertly tied it and a second rope around Vladimir's waist.

"*Tsavide!*" shouted Tamara in Georgian, "off you go!"

Vladimir began his walk. Hesitant, he put one foot before the other staring at the porter on the other side. Halfway across he stumbled over a knob in one of the beams. He briefly looked down and promptly lost his balance. For a moment with arms spread he balanced on one leg, rowing with the other in mid-air.

"Don't look down, look at Zhurab." Shouted Tamara gathering in the rope and bracing herself with all her strength for the sudden shock should he go overboard.

They all held their breath. Vladimir raised his head and got both his feet back onto the beams.

"Good!" shouted Tamara, "Very good! Dance! Don't walk so hesitantly. The bridge is wide, you cannot miss it."

Vladimir now almost ran in short steps, head high, his sight on Zhurab. When he reached the other bank he wiped the sweat off his forehead and waved to his cheering friends, the hero of the day.

Tamara pulled the rope back, and the next person was tied up.

In this way Tamara ferried everyone across but Claudia. Claudia looked as white as a sheet. Fear widened her eyes.

"Well, Claudia, somehow we have to get you across too," said Tamara. "The only other way is that Zhurab carries you across piggy-back. Don't strangle the good man when you get scared, close your eyes and pray to the Mother of God, think of Munich or something else pleasant."

In this manner Zhurab ferried Claudia to the other shore. Niko took her to a spring and washed her face. She sat by the wayside exhausted and wearily watched the porters carry the loads across and Tamara doing a last solo dance.

"*Waah,*" sighed Tamara with a broad smile, "what a job to dangle five sheep across a harmless chasm." They all hugged her.

From the bridge the path climbed across the ridge through dense coniferous forest. On the other side the woods opened onto a high meadow framed by snow mountains on both sides. It was mid-afternoon, relieved they collapsed by the side of the path.

"We have made it!" shouted Tamara.

Konrad with the eye of the botanist immediately noticed the flowers in the green meadow, a small crocus (*colchicum autumnale*), eight-petal dryads and a few alpine arnica were still blooming, a profusion of his beloved arctic gentians, silver-green with fringed petals. He quietly left them and returned with a rare, spectacular bluebell (*primula wollastonia*) with delicate, silver-white frosting in its chalice. He smiled at Alexandra and presented the flower to Tamara.

An hour later, at the edge of the woods below Laila Mountain a fairy-tale castle came

into view. Two round towers with conical bonnets framed a rough-hewn, three-story stone building, a long larchwood porch under an overhang, roofs decked with irregularly hewn, gray slate. A Georgian and a German flag waved on the towers.

Tamara beamed. "My father's house! Welcome to Svaneti!"

Briefly Konrad envisioned another Gothic dungeon, but his fears were soon dispelled. The starkly simple rooms were filled with bare wood furniture, handmade by Svaneti craftsmen. Occasionally such pieces could be found in the bazaar in Tiflis as rustic Svaneti antiques, expensive and much in demand.

David Dadeshkeliani and his tall, gaunt wife Asmat welcomed them with the reserved grace and warmth only found in these mountains.

She gave them rooms on the second floor with a bearskin covered bed, a small table, two chairs, a closet, and a washstand. In their room Konrad discovered a slender vase with the *primula* he had given Tamara, with a note: *For Alexandra with love*.

Each room had a spectacular view of the peaks surrounding Elbrus. Under a small trapdoor hid the opening of a central heating system bringing warm air from the first floor. It also served for internal communication, through the opening one could hear every word spoken in the house.

The night was cold. After supper they relaxed before the fireplace, leisurely stretched out on rawhide-covered sling chairs talking of life in St. Petersburg, Munich, and Italy. The curiosity of the Dadeshkeliani was unlimited.

They spent a week with the Dadeshkeliani. To get acclimatized to the altitude they explored the neighboring valleys on day-long excursions. One morning Tamara led them on a steep hike up Becho Pass, across from Etzeri. Near its crest they were forced to stop where the path veered across Ushba glacier.

None of them had ever seen a large glacier close up. The ice stream, crossed by treacherous crevasses, glistened in the morning sun. It flowed from distant Mt. Ushba, the Matterhorn of Svaneti. Ushba's precipitous south face was visible through an ever-changing veil of clouds. The path continued winding precariously down through the maze of crevasses into the hazy depth of Baksan Valley and the Russian plains. On the opposite side of the valley, very close, standing all by itself, rose the mighty, volcanic snow-hulk of Mt. Elbrus.

The following night it rained, a nasty, cold rain. The thunder of avalanches woke them in the morning. It was bitterly cold. Fresh snow covered the high mountains. At noon, from the safety of the balcony, they watched an avalanche thunder down Ushba leaving a cloud of snow crystals suspended in the air.

The long, lazy days and the comfortable evenings turned into restlessness. Konrad longed to explore Free Svaneti, the upper part of the valley never conquered by either Moslems or Russians—and Vladimir saw his chance pass to propose to Tamara.

He approached Alexandra. "What should I do? I am certain that I want to marry Tamara. She is quiet, honest, and direct, she knows exactly what she is doing, and she would make a wonderful companion in all and every situation." Alexandra knitted her brows. "Except that she is Georgian or more precisely Svani. She might *never* completely adapt to the fast, intellectual life of St. Petersburg. Look what efforts I had to make to appropriate St. Petersburg. Would you consider learning Georgian and spend part of your life in Tiflis or up here?"

He lowered his eyes. "If I continue writing, and my inheritance would allow me to do that,

I could live just as well in Svaneti as in St. Petersburg. Of course, I could learn Georgian, what is one more language?"

Alexandra smiled contemptuously. "You know yourself that your inheritance might be destroyed overnight by that glorious revolution we so eagerly hope for. What then? Are you ready to write revolutionary pamphlets? You are honest but naïve!"

He got a red face and flared up. "I will never prostitute myself to write propaganda or political slogans, certainly not for the Socialists."

She pointed at him. "Well, there you are! I could at least care for the victims of such an upheaval. What would you do? Emigrate to Europe if that happens? With this mountain woman? I have carefully examined the possible scenarios in my mind and in practice. I will not flee to the relative safety of Western Europe. I will stay here. But I can afford it with a reasonable amount of willpower and determination. I might have to send Otto to Germany, he is half-German. I have no right to tie him to my fate. Konrad will not desert me."

He sighed. "I can see that you are serious, but it is hard for me to face this kind of bare reality. I am not afraid to lose my life, but you are right, what to do if I survive? How did you learn to live every day in such high spirits? How can you look into the face of the worst possible future without getting depressed? I know the answer you will give me, extort your fears and anxieties! That's what you do! But I was not born with a soul as tough as yours."

His eyes were pleading. Alexandra felt touched. "I once promised to be your muse on the path of finding yourself. My powers are limited. My commitment to Konrad preempted them. Maybe Tamara is the woman who could rescue you from your vacillating indecision, your greatest handicap. Maybe she could inspire your writing and mediate reality."

She shook her head. "But you should not propose to Tamara or ask her father for her hand now. Her parents like you, but you would violate their conservative formality."

She paused pensively. "Maybe I could invite Tamara to St. Petersburg. There you could discuss all these questions with her. She could acquire some professional education in St. Petersburg on which she could survive without you if necessary. Let me think about that."

Vladimir took her hand and kissed it passionately. Alexandra's knees weakened, and she quickly ended their conversation.

Later, at night in presence of her parents Alexandra invited Tamara to stay with them in St. Petersburg for a few months and see what the world outside of Georgia looked like. Tamara, who was not indifferent to Vladimir's attention, caught on to Alexandra's offer with enthusiasm.

Her father suggested that he might even send her to St. Petersburg to finish her education. With her competent cousin as mentor and chaperone this looked quite conceivable to him. Would Alexandra advise them in such an undertaking? He had been much impressed by Alexandra's single-minded effort in becoming a medical doctor.

Alexandra, chose her words carefully. Tamara would have to work hard, but the benefits of a professional education in these uncertain times were obvious. Tamara had already finished four years at St. Nino's College for Girls in Tiflis with good grades.

"Well, I feel almost embarrassed by being an accomplice to this conspiracy," said Alexandra to Vladimir that night. "Before the law one calls this pimping! But you are lucky, her father guessed what is going on between you and Tamara, and he likes you. I will be held responsible for protecting Tamara's innocence!"

Strange Happenings

Svaneti 1907

They set out in a cold fog, but the road was good and the horses were fresh. An hour on their way a spooky vision appeared in the fog, a dreamscape of high towers drifting in and out of the clouds, Mestia, Svaneti's largest village. Soon the horses' muffled clatter echoed from the gray slate-covered houses, each with its own four or five stories-high defense tower.

Free Svaneti received them with driving snow flurries on the pass to the village of Ipari. Going downhill was arduous, the horses skidded on the slippery rocks. But there was no imminent danger, the path wound down slowly in many serpentine twists. Ipari appeared on a rocky promontory at the confluence of the Inguri and the Adishi rivers. Cold and wet, they decided to call it a day. They would stay overnight at the school house, but the teacher was still conducting the afternoon class.

Two suspicious villagers ogled the foreigners. When they recognized Tamara they retreated embarrassed into a neighboring house. Tamara went after them and persuaded the grumpy men to invite the entire party in to dry their wet clothes by their roaring fire.

At the end of school all hell broke loose, a dozen aggressive children ringed them, throwing stones, singing teasing ditties, and scaring the horses. Konrad was at the edge of losing his temper when the teacher appeared and with many apologies chased their tormentors off.

"Welcome to Free Svaneti!" joked the stocky man. "Can you imagine what I had to suffer when I first came here? These kids are an unruly and independent crowd, but eventually some become really good students, many are bright and alert."

He showed them the room where they would sleep and then invited them all to his house. His wife, a pale, worn out woman, greeted them, her youngest on her arm. At her feet five more small children, one year apart, clambered over each other. Alexandra and Tamara offered to help and cooked a big pot of vegetable soup for the night meal. Her husband killed a chicken, which was added to the soup.

After dinner they sat around the fire and answered the eager questions of the teacher, while Alexandra inspected the sores of two of his ragged children and quietly listened to the woman's lamentations about her hard lot. Together, the teacher and his wife pleaded with Alexandra to hold a clinic next day and prescribe medicines for the many ailments among the villagers. They would then send someone to Zugdidi to pick up the medicines.

Alexandra sighed, but how could she refuse? She would stay in Ipari while the others rode up to Adishi to have a look at the glacier above the village. Eventually Claudia, sympathizing with her friend, offered to keep Alexandra company and help.

The night in the schoolroom was cold and uncomfortable. Fortunately it stopped snowing, and the morning sun warmed them quickly.

A large crowd of people waited in front of the schoolhouse where Claudia and Alexandra had set up their clinic. Many old people with eye infections had come and young ones with respiratory problems. Undoubtedly some of them suffered from tuberculosis. What could she do? They needed better food, a dry home, and rest, none of which was available. Deeply depressed by this daunting task, Alexandra finally decided to write notes for the people she

suspected to suffer from tuberculosis and advised them to go down to the Zugdidi clinic for a better diagnosis and treatment.

Alexandra was lancing abscesses, using high-grade raki as antiseptic, when an old withered woman appeared and handed her a jar of ointment, arguing that it would do the job without a knife. It contained arnica.

Alexandra smelled the ointment. "Look Claudia, memories of Soranus! *Salve vesicans con arnica*, we should have paid more attention to the general medical chapters of Soranus."



Gocha (Geoffrey Carr-Harris)

Alexandra sat down with the wrinkled witch and asked for other medicines. Sure enough, she had an entire apothecary of herbal remedies. Alexandra invited her to join them. Alexandra made the diagnoses, and the woman, after a consultation between the three of them, produced a suitable medicine. More than half of the patients would not have to go to Zugdidi. Alexandra smiled. The shrewd witch speculated that the city doctor would add to her reputation among the villagers.

"I am beginning to enjoy this," said Claudia. "Maybe we should spend some time up here and work with this woman. What is her name?"

Alexandra inquired.

"Her name is Gocha," said Alexandra. "She is the wife of the *khevisberi* or 'mountain hermit', the *shaman* of the area. You have met a *jadukali*, a wise woman. In Tiflis she would be considered a witch. I am mightily honored that she trusts me."

At the end of this long day, a young lad appeared who presented a formal invitation from

his father for the two doctor ladies to stay at their house. They should bring their husbands and friends along too. Alexandra equally formally accepted the invitation, and the boy promised to pick them up as soon as their friends would be back from Adishi.

Alexandra was pleased. They sat down with Gocha and made a list of her remedies and their indications advising her in return on how to diagnose the corresponding diseases. Claudia and Alexandra felt like during those exciting days of research in Munich, only this time the old, cunning woman was really the center of their fascination.

Tamara, impressed by their success, told Alexandra that the father of the young boy who had invited them was the *natsvali*, the local headman of the Upper Svaneti. A great honor for herself too. He was an institution quite separate from her father's authority and often his political antagonist. And Gocha, she shook her head, was a thorn in the flesh at least of the priest at the church.

"You are going to become famous up here. That you gave support to Gocha will be remembered for a long time. A doctor from St. Petersburg...and a Dadiani! They have long found out everything about you from the teacher. You are going to create a socio-political *éclat* in Svaneti." She laughed. "Prepare yourself! When we get to Murkmeli you will have the entire sick population of the Upper Svaneti waiting for you."

And so it happened. When they arrived at the *natsvali's* house a man from Murkmeli was already waiting for the doctors to beg them to hold a clinic for the three Ushguli villages. No doctor had been up there for several years.

A long negotiation ensued. Alexandra made one condition, a horse and accommodations in Murkmeli had to be provided for Gocha. The man was reluctant pointing out that the problem was not so much Gocha's questionable status in the community, but she could not stay overnight at any arbitrary house. She was subject to a number of taboos: no menstruating woman could be in the house, and no pregnant ones either, no death for at least two months, and she had to perform some purification rites of the place before she would stay there. She was not easily accommodated.

Alexandra was unmoved. In that case, she would stay with Gocha at the schoolhouse, which would satisfy all those conditions. Which, of course, was an insult to the hospitality of the village. The man left with the promise that some solution would be found.

"Well, you see nobody wants her in their house overnight," explained a grinning Tamara later, "because she might cast a spell on her hosts. That is the deeper problem. Most people are afraid of her."

Alexandra felt that she could handle Gocha. "Let me ride up to Adishi and talk to her, she did not seem unreasonable to me, and she sure understands what a boost to her reputation this clinic could provide. I would anyway like to find out more about her pharmacology and her life with that khevisberi."

Alexandra discussed the issue with the *natsvali*. He nodded and agreed that as long as Alexandra diagnosed the patients and dispensed Gocha's medicines, nobody should have cause to fear Gocha's 'spells' or 'evil eye.'

He struck the pose of an enlightened, modern man who is in control of his community. "You go up to Adishi tomorrow and I will take care of the matter. After all, you are providing us with a much needed service free of charge. We should be able to resolve our own problems and superstitions. There is no problem in your spending another few days at my house."

The dinner feast became a grand affair, bread baked in their own *tandori* or *tonne*-oven, aubergines and carrots filled with nut-meat, chicken served with hot sauce, and as the *pièce-de-résistance* a fabulously crisp suckling pig with cherry eyes and an apple in its mouth. Only the wine was poor, but grapes did not grow up here. Instead they were offered a dangerous, clear *raki*. They slept on large rugs with the entire family in the living room, covered by furs, warm and comfortable.

Gocha received Alexandra and Claudia with a chuckle. She had, of course, already heard the entire story. Shalva Mgeliani, *Son-of-a-Wolf*, her husband, a taciturn, old, weathered man with one, single, yellowed tooth, rummaged in the background. This was women's business not his.

Niko whom Alexandra had asked to come along to satisfy local etiquette—Tamara, Konrad, and Vladimir had gone on a ride exploring the old churches in the valley—joined Shalva, who took him outside to show him the *raki* still he operated and the implements for brewing barley beer, which was used at the local festivals. A dozen sheep cheeses sown into skins were piled into the rear of the cellar.

The *raki* still was a quixotic apparatus, a simple copper bulb with a long snout, such as the alchemists used, on a stone fireplace, a long inclined tube in running cold water, and a cooled copper bucket into which the *raki* dripped. Shalva explained that he repeated the distillation three times, between which the distillate was left sitting over charcoal for a day, "to take out the poison."

He offered Niko a small glass who poured it down and shook himself, it was pure firewater! Shalva was pleased.

The even more primitive beer "factory" consisted of several large, wooden mash-containers for the barley and a kettle to ferment the beer in, but it was not in operation.

Shalva mumbled and hissed in his rough dialect because of his missing teeth. "The beer has to be fresh for the festival. It is like 'holy water' and 'wine' in church—only there is always enough and everybody gets drunk." He snapped his finger at his conjugal vein and giggled.

Niko could hardly understand him, but his gestures were unmistakable. Shalva pulled his flat hand across his throat. "I also kill the sacrificial rams. When the priest is not looking." He made an obscene sign with his fingers. "I burn an old secret mark into the wool of the rams. They are always the best when roasted. Roosters?" A dismissive gesture. "Oh, only the poorest people sacrifice roosters. I get very little for blessing them."

Meanwhile Alexandra interrogated Gocha about the rules of her marriage.

"I am not married to Shalva," chortled Gocha, "certainly not in church. We live together. I wash his laundry and cook the special foods he needs to stay pure. During the winter, when I cannot find any herbs up here I go down to my village near Lentekhi, and he stays alone."

She squinted at Alexandra, her big, dark eyes nearly disappeared in the surrounding folds and wrinkles.

"They say, you married a foreigner from a far away country. It is like that with me up here, they will never accept me."

She cackled indignantly. "They say I am a witch who puts spells on them, where all I do is keep the evil spirits away from their houses—as long as they pay me for it. You know, there are many evil spirits up here who can make people sick or even kill them."

She pouted her small round mouth and opened her beautiful Byzantine eyes wide. She

must have been a beguiling beauty as a young girl.

"Last year," said Gocha, "a young girl came home from school in Tbilisi. She had walked up and was exhausted when she arrived. Her mother angrily screamed at her because of her foreign looks. You know, lipstick, perfume, and a really outrageous hairdo. Overheated, the girl drank from the brook at her mother's house and got very sick. She died a few days later with terrible cramps. They should have called me to purify the water. The water spirits were badly offended by that fight between mother and daughter, which destroyed the harmony of the house."

She crossed herself from right to left. "The priest could not do anything, he knows nothing, and we don't have a doctor like you up here. Shalva tried to drive out the evil spirits, but she was already too weak for that. All that Shalva could do was to call the spirit of the dead girl before the priest buried her, Christian fashion. Later Shalva called her soul back to pacify her. It was very sad, the girl came from a rich family."

Claudia's eyes grew large when Alexandra translated the story. "So she is a real *Hexe*, a witch?"

"Well, it depends on what kind of theory you use to explain illness. We suspect bacteria in the water, and they see the spiritual damage done by that fight between mother and daughter. In the end both may have contributed to the girl's death."

Alexandra was more interested in Shalva's spirit-calling procedure. But Gocha refused to talk. This was his work, only he was allowed to deal with the dead.

"He will hold a soul-of-the-dead calling session in a house in Ipari in a couple of days, maybe he will let you watch it. You have to ask him."

"So you are not married and have no children with him, right?"

Gocha almost coyly explained. "No, doctor Alexandra, this is not the reason. We don't sleep together, only on one day in the month may we 'birdie.' A jadukali must not get pregnant. She could not pick herbs if she became pregnant, they would turn bad in her hands. I am also too old to have children."

Alexandra changed the direction of her inquiry and asked Gocha about herbs to prevent pregnancies.

Gocha's dark eyes grew small. "Oh, there are many, but some are dangerous," she said evasively. "What would you like to do, prevent the conception of a child or get rid of one?"

Alexandra tried to assuage her suspicion by telling her about the many women among the working class who had already too many children and could not afford to have more.

Gocha, completely unmoved by the social dilemma, squinted cunningly at Alexandra. "I don't give away these recipes. These medicines are really good business. A pregnant woman will pay anything to get rid of an unwanted baby. But because you have done me a favor, I will give you a bag of tea to abort a baby with and tell you how to use it."

The tea was a similar mixture to the one Alexandra had used a couple of times. Alexandra described her concoction.

Gocha sized up Alexandra. "You are clever, you know something about these things. This is a good mixture, where did you learn about it?" She suggested some adjustments to the amounts in the mixture to make it more easily digestible.

Alexandra laughed and explained that this recipe came from a very old Greek medical book.

"I believe you, I once met a Greek woman in Batumi. She was very good at such

things."

Alexandra surprised Shalva with her request to attend his soul-calling ceremony. Who had told her? Gocha explained and put in a word for Alexandra. Shalva, still suspicious, grumbled that Niko and Alexandra could attend, but none of the other foreigners. They should come to a house on the outskirts of Ipari at night where someone would pick them up. Nobody should see them or hear about it, otherwise the authorities might try to prevent the ceremony.

Calling the Dead

Svaneti 1907

The man who picked up Alexandra and Niko led them to a house at the upper end of the village and into a room illuminated only by a few candles. More than twenty people were sitting on the floor surrounding a female bread dough effigy clothed in old rags. Behind the figure sat Shalva enthroned, wearing a paper crown and a heavy coat. A small hand drum rested between his knees. Across from him, in the first circle, sat the relatives of the deceased woman.

Alexandra and Niko took a place in the shadows behind the other villagers. They found themselves next to the wives of the natsvali and the teacher. The meeting must not be as secretive as they had been led to believe after all. Shalva must have resented their being outsiders more than he feared the officials.

Drumming a slow beat, Shalva sang an incantation in Svani. The teacher's wife whispered that he was calling the soul of the dead woman. Shalva swayed back and forth. With time his drumming got more hypnotic. Suddenly his voice flipped to a high female pitch. The audience sat spellbound.

The husband of the dead woman whispered her name. Mechanically Shalva opened a cage next to him and pulled out a pigeon that dragged a long string on its foot. He tied the string to the effigy and let the bird walk loose in the inner circle.

At first the pigeon stood rooted and seemed confused. Shalva began drumming at a higher speed. A sigh went through the audience when the bird shook itself. "The soul has entered the bird," whispered the wife of the natsvali.

Shalva in his high-pitched voice addressed the pigeon, urging it on. Someone put a plate with bread crumbs into the circle. The plate slowly passed from one to the other among the woman's kin. The pigeon followed, picking at the crumbs. As the bird came to the husband, it stopped. The audience held its breath, would it recognize him? Shalva increased his efforts and the pigeon jumped up and fluttered into the husband's lap. Beyond himself he babbled excitedly calling the bird with his late wife's pet name.

A young woman in the inner circle started to wail loudly. Shalva, eyes closed, mumbled an incantation in his normal voice. The pigeon walked on until it came to the young woman, it fluttered up and landed on the woman's head. The woman bent forward sobbing and laughing hysterically.

The people gasped.

"She is the dead woman's younger sister who wants to marry the widower," whispered the teacher's wife. "She has been waiting for a whole year."

Shalva lured the bird from its perch with his high-pitched spirit voice. It fluttered down and performed a dance, cooing and nodding before the sister of the dead woman.

"The spirit of the deceased has accepted the new bride."

Shalva called the bird back and put it into its cage, it had done its task. Everyone was relieved.

Shalva's voice returned to normal. Slowly drumming he removed the rags from the effigy and threw them into the fireplace. Then he produced a dagger and mumbling magic formulae,

cut the bread effigy into small pieces that he put into the pigeon's cage to prevent the spirit of the deceased from returning to the world of the living.

The session was over. Shalva would receive a handsome sum from the husband, who could now marry again.

As she parted, the new bride threw a handful of grain into the bird's cage.

Alexandra and Niko walked home silently with the wife of the natsvali. The natsvali waited for them at his house. He grinned superciliously. "The old wolf did not want you around. It was a great honor that he let you watch his ceremony. We would not break up such a soul-calling session. It's true, the priest is not happy, but he looks the other way, what can he do? Without the 'permission' of the deceased the widower cannot remarry, and Shalva is the only person who can procure it."

He shrugged. "Magic hocus-pocus, but now everyone is happy, and Shalva made a few rubles."

They sat around the fire, and Niko gave a full account of the evening.

"Oh," said Tamara coming to life, "there are stranger things happening in this valley in spring time. In April the *khevisberi* used to celebrate the deer sacrifice."

"Tamara," the natsvali said, "maybe one should not talk about this old magic business, it is really barbaric and ancient."

Tamara, a challenging twinkle in her dark eyes, paid no attention to his admonition. "This feast used to be celebrated every year to confirm the power of my ancestors in the valley, they paid for it." She laughed at the natsvali. "Is that the reason why you don't want me to talk about it? Look, father has ceased to support it, it has become an anthropological curiosity, the memory of which will be dead in a few years. Allow me to describe it to these lowland professors!"

Grumbling the natsvali poured more raki.

Tamara told about the sacred grove where the tree grew that connected the middle-world of the living with the lower world of the dead and the upper world in which the shamanic spirits live, who appeared as ravens in the tree. Every year before planting time a deer had to be sacrificed by all the *khevisberi* in the valley to reconnect the three worlds, to vouch for a good harvest, prevent disasters such as landslides and avalanches, and confirm the authority bestowed on the Dadeshkeliani by the spirits in heaven.

The young men would go out and snare a live deer. On their return the hunters were received with drums and banners and taken to the grove where the *khevisberi* were waiting. They had purified the area and built an altar under the tree.

First the spirits of the lower world, represented by snakes, had to be appeased.

"As a woman I have never been allowed to attend, so I don't know whether the shamans actually handled the snakes."

"Yes, of course, there used to be a whole basket of them," added the natsvali, showing the size of the basket with his arms. "They were given ewe's milk and set free, quite a scary affair. Everybody watched where they were going. The oldest *khevisberi* read an oracle predicting disasters, such as flooding and avalanches, from the snakes' behavior. They are water spirits."

Tamara continued. "Then grain was offered to the ravens, who came in large numbers from all over. They were hungry after the long winter. Anyway, before the deer arrived the ravens were shooed into the tree where they sat cawing. If they sat around for a long time and

made a great noise, it was a good sign.

"The hunters and the men from the villages arrived with the bound deer on a stretcher. A fire was lit near the altar and the deer was tied to the back of the strongest khevisberi. Singing and drumming the shamans carried the animal around the altar and the fire seven times.

"Eventually the deer was unbound. The scared animal lay very still, resigned to its fate. Had it kicked at this time, it would have been a terrible omen which meant that the spirits did not accept the sacrifice."

"Well," interrupted the natsvali, "there used to exist an approved way to calm it, if it would not lie still someone would pour a bucket of ice cold water over its head. Tamara, may I finish the story, I have attended this ceremony many times when I was a young lad?"

Tamara smiled and made an inviting gesture with her hand. He had finally caught on.

"Four men would hold the animal. In a flash the oldest khevisberi made an incision with a special dagger, stuck his hand in, ripped out the beating heart, and threw it onto the altar. The khevisberi stood around and watched the heart, if it pumped for a long time, it was a good omen for a prosperous year."

He faced Tamara. "Your grandfather would then throw the heart into the air to feed it to the ravens, shouting, 'Long live Svaneti and the house of Dadeshkeliani!' Again a lot of meaning was attached to how many ravens came and how long they fought over the offering. The number of children of the house of Dadeshkeliani was one question this omen decided. The last time this offering was made, the omen was not auspicious and that is why your father refused to pay for the affair any longer!"

He grinned at Tamara, who let the old issue rest.

"What happened to the deer?" asked Alexandra.

"The deer was skinned, drawn, and roasted over the fire. It was part of the payment to the khevisberi."

He emptied another glass of raki. "It is a strange land up here. When will the people give up their superstitions?"

"Oh," said Tamara provokingly, "when the Russians blast the road through the Inguri gorge, which you are all longing for. That will spell the end of Free Svaneti."

This time the natsvali, who had staked his reelection campaign on this project, decided to check his tongue.

In the morning they moved their camp up the valley to Murkmeli. On Tamara's suggestion Konrad left a generous amount of money on the natsvali's table, who accepted it without affectation.

"I feel like one of Christ's disciples whom they expect to perform miracles which only his master could do," said Alexandra when she saw the sick and infirm waiting for her in front of the school house.

Thank God Claudia was at her side. She put the old witch with her ointments and brews out of harm's way into the far corner, and began examining first the respiratory cases, then the eye infections for which Gocha had brought a special infusion to be used for washing the eyes, finally the abscesses and boils. This time a few cases of arthritis and bursitis had appeared, for which Gocha suggested a "heat-generating" earth. Alexandra knew this would only be a temporary relief, but aspirin was unavailable up here.

When Alexandra examined a patient with an arthritic knee, the man suddenly exclaimed that his knee was painless. Alexandra was perplexed. She had merely held his knee between

her hands during her examination.

What was going on? Had she all of a sudden acquired supernatural powers or was Gocha acting through her? She peered at the old witch, who was busily preparing another jar of her heat-producing concoction. She had not paid any attention to the man or her. The old man was still sitting before Alexandra. She put her hands once more around his swollen knee and made him get up. The nonplussed man assured her once again that he could move his knee and the pain was gone. He walked away.

Alexandra shook her head and then sat staring into space. She suddenly felt tired to the point of giddiness.

"What is it, Alexandra," asked Claudia, concerned, "are you unwell? Maybe we should rest a few minutes, you have been working for three hours without stopping."

Claudia took her outside. They sat on a low wall in the schoolyard.

"I need a cigarette."

One of the men offered Alexandra a cigarette. She inhaled and blew a smoke ring.

"Claudia, something very strange has happened. I cured this man's arthritic pain by doing no more than holding my hands around his knee. It cannot be possible, this is witchcraft."

Claudia stared at her and then started to laugh. "A year ago my skeptical father investigated a woman who claimed to be a faith healer. He never found out how she did it, but there was no question that she was able to heal certain ailments, especially arthritis. You must have accidentally discovered the same trick. What did you do?"

Alexandra could not explain it, she had done nothing outside the normal. She had just held her hands to this man's joint.

They sat for a while, trying to recover.

"You know, I will ask Gocha. I am curious what she will say."

Gocha tilted her head, and raised her hands. She was entirely unimpressed. "Yes, doctor Alexandra, you have healing powers. Did you never notice them before?"

Alexandra shook her head, this was entirely new to her.

"Your head is too big. Your sharp mind is in your way," said the old woman. "Today your mind is tired, it was late last night and you have been working very hard and so your hands just took over. Why don't you stop working for today and come to Adishi and spend the night with me? I will show you how to quiet your mind and strengthen your hands."

Alexandra told the remaining crowd to come back tomorrow and closed the clinic.

Konrad frowned when Alexandra told him what had happened and that she would spend the night at Gocha's place.

"Is black magic finally claiming you?"

Tired as she was, Alexandra lost her temper. Her head was as clear as ever. She was still able to tell true medical results from glib fakes. Claudia and she had both seen the arthritic man walk, without a limp, from of the school house, pain free. If she could learn how to repeat this cure, black magic or not, she could help many people for which academic medicine had no better remedy than aspirin and hot baths.

"Are you not interested in seeing the spectacular twelfth-century Tevdore paintings we have discovered in the churches?"

She was not to be swayed from her calling. Right now she had to learn as much as she could from the old *jadukali*.

Alexandra persuaded Claudia to come along as a skeptical observer, hoping that Gocha

would teach them both.

Adishi Gocha Teaching Dream Work



Adishi

Gocha was fidgety and taciturn, Claudia's presence disturbed her. She demurred that she had in mind to initiate Alexandra into dream work, but she could not do that in presence of the foreign doctor.

Alexandra did not translate this complaint. She asked Claudia to sit quietly on the side and then tried to persuade Gocha to at least show them both how to quiet their minds and empower their hands, as she had promised. Claudia, although she spoke no Georgian, was a good person who needed Gocha's power as much as she did to heal people in Germany.

Claudia sat in a corner on the floor with crossed legs and closed eyes, being very quiet.

Gocha squinted at Claudia and a cunning smile came to her wrinkled face. "She is trying to vanish. I can still see her, but her mind has almost stopped sending out messages. Maybe you are right that she could learn something."

"What is her name?" asked Gocha.

"Dia."

Suddenly Gocha shouted, "Dia come back! I want to teach you how to fly."

Alexandra raised her eyebrows. Flying? Claudia did not blink an eye, and that broke Gocha's last reserve.

"Go tell her that I think she is very good at vanishing."

Alexandra, in whose mind the word flying ran circles, very slowly went over to her friend.

"Claudia, you have won the contest. Gocha accepts you as a student, wake up. She will send us on a dream voyage."

Claudia cast off the invisible veil under which she had been hiding and opened her eyes. When Alexandra turned around Gocha had disappeared. They were alone in the dark room.

Claudia looked at Alexandra with large, bewildered eyes. Instinctively Alexandra put her finger on her mouth and sat next to Claudia. They waited in silence. The last light disappeared outside, the room grew dark. Claudia began to tremble. Alexandra put her arm around her shoulders. When she touched Claudia's eyelids to make her close her eyes, Claudia took her hand and kissed her fingertips. Arm in arm they overcame their fear.

After what seemed a very long time, the sound of low drumming came from the adjacent room. At first Alexandra's mind jumped in alarm, but nothing happened. The monotonous drumming changed into a strangely soothing tune. She felt immensely tired.

Claudia fell asleep first. She just lost her balance and tilted over sideways. Alexandra made her comfortable as best she could and lay down close to her, putting her arm around her friend's sleeping body.

A raven appeared in Alexandra's dream who could talk. He introduced himself quite formally, nodding his head after every word as birds do.

"I am your soul bird. If you quiet your mind perfectly you can hear your soul speak. It knows everything from the beginning of time and will teach you how to heal people."

She was floating high above the snow fields and mountains following the raven. She recognized the valley below, the towers of the Dadeshkeliani castle, the river and meadows.

The raven was heading for a small oak grove along the upper river where she had never been. The sacred grove where the tree grew that connected the three worlds.

On the stone altar lay the lifeless body of a young woman. As she got closer her heart stopped. It was Claudia.

"Your friend is dying of fright, she has not yet learned how to fly like you. You have to save her, call her back and teach her."

Her love for Claudia overwhelmed her. She hovered over Claudia's lifeless shape and slowly, first her shadow, then her whole self merged with that of her friend.

As she touched Claudia's heart with her fingertips it began to beat again, and the world around her exploded into the blinding white light she had seen when Otto was born. Claudia came to life and dazzled spoke her name.

The sun was shining into the room when Alexandra woke. Claudia was sleeping next to her. Alexandra, full of a boundless love for her, repeated the gesture of the dream and Claudia awoke with a strange look in her eyes.

"Is it you or am I dreaming you?"

Alexandra took her into her arms. "It is I, real and full of love and life."

"I dreamt that I was dying. At first I was much frightened, but I felt no pain only a great sadness. I saw my mother, and Niko, and Katharina. They were all calling me, and then you appeared floating effortless in space surrounded by a very bright light. You touched me, and I woke up."

Suddenly with a cackling laughter a black raven fluttered through the room, the door opened on its own accord, and he flew off cawing.

Claudia grabbed Alexandra's arm. Alexandra smiled sadly. "He is my soul bird. He

talked to me during the night, but now I cannot understand him any longer."

They washed their eyes and faces in a basin of cold water and searched for Gocha. She had vanished. They found no traces of her, they were alone in the house.

They never saw Gocha again. She did not appear at the clinic and nobody had seen her. Alexandra finally took to writing slips of paper with the remedies for the patients to pick up at Gocha's in Adishi. No more limping arthritic patients appeared to test her healing powers.

Ilia Chavchavadze's Assassination

They descended from Svaneti across Latpari Pass down into the Tsenitskhali river valley. In Lentekhi they heard the news for the first time. Ilia Chavchavadze, the leader of Georgian Renewal for forty years, had been assassinated by two Bolshevik thugs hired by the Okhrana.

George Dadiani had the Benz waiting for them. Alexandra raced to Tiflis in one day and night.

Tiflis was draped in black flags. Deda, all in black, received them with red eyes. Finally they heard the details of Ilia's murder.

Ilia had secretly returned to Tiflis a week before the Duma was to be sworn in. To avoid problems with Vorontsev he had quietly sat it out in Zaguramo.

On the fateful day Ilia, Olga, and Leist had visited friends in Tiflis. On their way back Ilia stopped their Phaeton at the Tsitsamuri Ravine to take a bottle of water home from the spring. Half a verst further two men jumped the carriage and shot Ilia at close range. Olga was wounded but not fatally, Leist escaped in shock.

Alexandra and Niko wanted to see Ilia one last time. Konrad and Claudia joined them. Alexandra drove them to Zaguramo that night.

Ilia was lying nearly buried under flowers on a bier in the living room where they had celebrated so many memorable nights. A large photo stood on an easel between candles near his head. His face was quiet and peaceful. The presence of the dead man and the smell of wilting flowers filled the house.

Konrad and Niko took Claudia on a walk through the house and left Alexandra alone with the hero of her childhood. She was finally able to shed tears. She retrieved a neatly folded piece of paper from her décolleté and put it into the breast pocket of the suit they had dressed him in. It was a poem she had written the night before. "Farewell my friend, I loved you as much as Mother did!" He seemed to smile ironically. She looked around. The others were upstairs. In a sudden impulse she slipped off her underpants and hastily stuffed them into his pocket. She smiled and briefly put a kiss on his lips with her finger.

United across all political differences, thousands followed the hearse that carried Ilia from Zaguramo to Tiflis. Jordania and Vorontsev walked next to Olga, Leist, Alexandra's parents, and the Tsinandali Chavchavadzes. Tamunia-Deda cried copiously, more than Olga whose head was still bandaged.

Ilia's death marked the end of the old Georgia.

They buried him in the graveyard behind the monastery on Mtatsminda Giorgi. Akaki Tsereteli delivered a rousing oratory invoking the spirit of the poet and the freedom of his beloved Georgia.



Ilia Chavchavadze's funeral train at Sioni 1907 (Wikipedia)

They buried him in the graveyard behind the monastery on Mtatsminda Giorgi. Akaki Tsereteli delivered a rousing oratory invoking the spirit of the poet and the freedom

It had become mid-September. After an emotional farewell Niko and Claudia left for Batumi. Claudia kissed Alexandra most affectionately, reminding her of their night at Gocha's in Adishi.

On the day of departure of the St. Petersburgers Tamara Dadeshkeliani appeared unannounced in Tiflis. She had persuaded her father to let her spend the winter with Alexandra in St. Petersburg and gain entrance to the university. She confided to Konrad that she had made up her mind to study law and to follow Vladimir. Her father could be asked for his blessing at a later date.

Tamara and Vladimir
Alexandra and Helena's Medical Explorations
St. Petersburg 1908

Tamara had moved in with them. At first Alexandra felt responsible for her cousin. After their return from Georgia Tamara had immediately begun to pursue her admission to the legal faculty of St. Petersburg University and had succeeded in entering it in the spring of 1908. It had been her idea to engage in political sciences. Encouraged by radical friends she met at the university, she soon developed a strong determination to run her own life, and Alexandra respected that, even if she did not share her persuasion. Her father had been selectively informed of her academic successes, but was left in the dark about Tamara's politics and her increasingly close relationship with Vladimir.

Vladimir's attachment to Alexandra had not escaped Tamara's intuition and had made her inexplicably defensive towards Alexandra. Alexandra only learned of the state of affairs between them through Vladimir, who would occasionally ask his older Georgian friend for advice in the, to him, often bewildering emotional outbreaks of Tamara.

Vladimir was unhappy and frustrated. He had asked Tamara to marry him. She rejected not him, but the institution of marriage. At the same time, out of an inherited pride, she exasperated him by refusing to sleep with him.

With the help of a generous, low-interest loan from her father, Alexandra and Helena had rented three rooms in the Liteini district, bought some second-hand equipment and opened a doctor's office: *Alexandra Dadiani-Rost & Elena von Üxküll, General Medicine*. They decided on an unusual policy: they would charge their patients according to their means. Students and the poor paid only a token fee for a doctor's visit, and truly needy cases, nothing. Soon their social attitude and their conscientious work brought them a small but growing number of interesting clients. Alexandra fought fiercely for the right of women to own their bodies. Helena, although just as direct as Alexandra, was smoother and less abrasive. An ideal pair.

Helena became a frequent visitor to the Rost's apartment. Her intelligence and cool, north German reserve was much appreciated by all and especially by Konrad.

The one person with whom Helena regularly lost her poise was Tamara, whose radically left-wing position was getting more vociferous with time. The two women would engage in fierce arguments over Lenin's ideology, which only Konrad with his level-headed sarcasm could calm. Both combatants liked and respected his judgment. Vladimir, not wanting to incite his girlfriend's temper any further, usually stayed out of these political discussions. He watched, quietly amused, Tamara's fireworks, which, like most of Lenin's slogans, was less practical than inflammatory.

By spring of 1910 Tamara's and Vladimir's relationship had become tense. At this point Tamara visited Alexandra in her office. Alexandra, touched by her trust, had given her sober medical advice on how to avoid a pregnancy without mentioning Vladimir or giving her a moral lecture.

Their slightly feminist-tinged conversation improved their relationship. Finally, Alexandra suggested that Tamara should put her radical beliefs to the test and move in with Vladimir. For a few seconds Tamara, taken aback, stared at her, and then began to laugh. "I thought you were in love with Vladimir and had a secret affair with him!"

Alexandra candidly explained to her that she did love Vladimir, but that she was not engaged in any affair with him. She assured Tamara that she was no competitor of hers. "Apart from that, according to your philosophical conviction," Alexandra admonished her, "'free love' and all, you should be able to allow me to love the same man." Alexandra avoided the word jealousy. Tamara would have to learn how to conquer this violent "bourgeois" emotion on her own.

Tamara moved in with Vladimir who rented an apartment for them. Thereafter her relationship with Alexandra greatly improved. And Vladimir was elated.

"I know that as a doctor I am sworn to secrecy," said Alexandra one evening to Konrad. "However, guess who appeared at my office today."

Konrad feigned disinterest.

"A few days ago was lovely Tamara, visited me seeking my help to prevent her from getting pregnant. I told her of what I know and recruited her for an experiment: In lieu of payment they will keep a careful diary of their periods and when they have had intercourse, so I can get a statistics of the fertile days of a woman. Nobody has ever dared doing that."

Konrad raised his brows. "You are impossible Alexandra, to invade the most intimate privacy of your patients!"

"They don't have to tell me their bedroom stories, just the scientific data. I impressed them with our scanty medical knowledge of this most important process in a woman's life. They are sober women, intelligent and very willing to participate in my study."

He grimaced.

"I will not tell you anything any more," she scorned, "if you cannot understand this much. But I do have to find a reliable, trustworthy, and competent abortionist for my patients. I cannot perform the required surgical procedure, and my potions are a miserable way to abort a pregnancy."

Marital Restlessness Konrad Learns Chinese 1910

Konrad had grown increasingly irritable. He felt bored. The daily routine of teaching two courses at the university and a seminar at the institute was interrupted only by endless faculty meetings and an occasional chat with a colleague. At home Vladimir's visits were predictable, literary rumors, his problems with Tamara, or his attempts at writing. Alexandra was kept busy at her practice by a growing number of new patients, many young women, students, mistresses, writers, musicians, and artists. Often interesting people, but Alexandra never brought her patients home. Elisabeth ran the routine household affairs. Alexandra prepared breakfast and dinner. At night they shared reading or playing with the children.

Konrad had become a family man, his greatest joy was reading to Otto. Last year they had read parts of Marco Polo's travels. With glowing eyes Otto had listened to the fabulous cities Polo visited along his way to Mongolia. Now Otto read by himself Schwab's *Illustrated Greek Myths*, a copy Konrad had owned as a child.

On weekends they went riding together, he and Otto, who now had his own three-quarterhorse stabled in Lakhta. He loved these rides. Alexandra, with this excuse or that, stayed away from their father-son excursions.

It was not only their relationship that drifted self-absorbed through the days and months. Since Witte's economic success and Stolypin's draconian suppression of the revolutionary elements, St. Petersburg had sunk into a lazy life of dissipation: affairs, literary intrigues, duels, plays, ballets, and operas. The intelligentsia was ensconced in comfortable bourgeois apartments, *dachas*, and country houses. More and more people spent their vacations in Western Europe or on the Crimea. The "revolutionary" scene had turned quiet, the censorship relaxed, no more strikes. The radical leaders languished in prisons, in Siberia or in exile. Despite the Tsar's attempts at curtailing Parliament, which led to a quick succession of four Dumas, part of Witte's constitution had survived.

By 1910 the world had become peaceful, satiated, and complacent. It came as a welcome relief to Konrad when George Dadiani renewed his offer to go to China with him. George had changed their itinerary, instead of taking the train directly to China, they would make a detour on the Transbaikal railway through Central Asia via Samarkand and Tashkent. They would go during the late fall and winter of 1911, when Central Asia and Southern China would not be so hot.

Konrad's heart jumped. Since his childhood reading of Marco Polo's adventures, Samarkand and Tashkent were even more colorful dreams of his than China.

Alexandra encouraged him. "Maybe you can visit Shakh-i-Zabz and see the last ivan of Tamerlan's *Aq Sarai*," she suggested. "God, where are Izabel and Marti hiding? What do you think, I will invite Niko and Claudia for part for the time you are away. I long to see them, and they will be good company."

Konrad was relieved. He threw himself headlong into Chinese.

The Chinese wife of a sinologist at the university gave him private lessons. Every week

he spent six hours with her and twice as many at home practicing reading and writing Chinese characters.

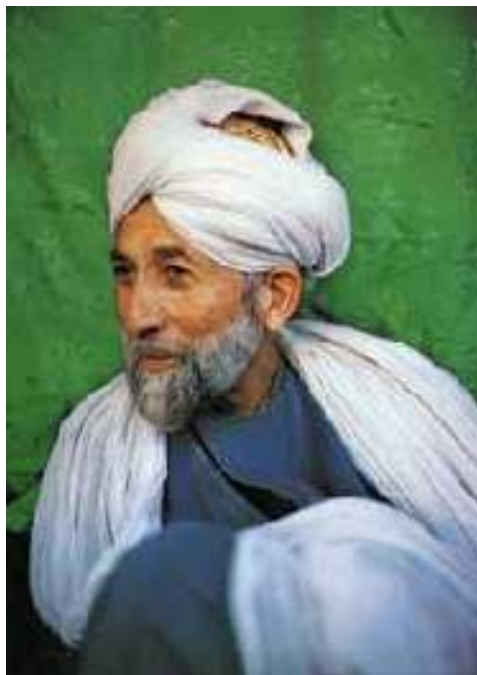
His teacher, an inexorably meticulous lady, lacked inspiration and flexibility. Occasionally they had a lighter moment together, like when Konrad discovered some etymological meaning in a character which she, because of long familiarity, had not noticed. She shook her head when Konrad showed her a character that quite obviously was composed of a woman and water or liquid and had the meaning of *you*. A liquid woman? He asked. It was the intimate *you*, she explained. Konrad laughed, "y-o-u," caressing an imaginary woman. She giggled holding her hand in front of her mouth. No, it had no such connotation.

Through her Konrad met Vitali Alekseev, a young Russian sinologist, who had visited China for several months in 1907. Alekseev, an unpretentious man with a sympathetic round face and an easy laugh, freely shared his excitement and his experiences in this enigmatic country with Konrad.

Finding a Central-Asian Sufi connection turned out to be more difficult. The Central-Asian Moslems in St. Petersburg, harassed and spied upon by the police, pretended to have no idea what a *tekke* or a Sufi was. He needed a personal introduction. Henri Halvejian finally sent him the post-office-box address of an Armenian named Grigor who had connections to the St. Petersburg Sufiya. A meeting was arranged.

Konrad had to wait a long time before a swarthy Armenian-looking man, of about his age, appeared. Konrad mentioned Henri's name. Grigor took him to a *chaihane*, a teahouse, where they "might find" a Sufi sheik.

The dark, smoke-filled room at the chaihane was crowded with Central-Asian men. They sat down at a table and the Armenian ordered tea. Nothing happened for half an hour. then an older man got up from a table across the room, came over, greeted the Armenian, nodded to Konrad, and sat down with them.



Anastasios El Zafaran

Beyond a doubt the man was a true Sufi. His bearing, his sparing gestures, and his intelligent, penetrating dark eyes which looked straight through Konrad at one moment only to probe his very heart a second later. A formidable aura surrounded him. Konrad shuddered, this man was far more impressive than good-hearted Henri and much more possessed than Persephone.

"Are you Georgian?"

"No."

"Where are you from? You speak Russian with a strong accent."

"I am German."

The sheik's tense wariness relaxed, he became more friendly. "How did you get introduced to the Armenian Halveji in Tiflis? Who was their sheik?"

"Persephone, but she is Syrian-Greek, not Armenian."

"I know her. She is a knowledgeable woman. Are you a goldsmith, because you know Henri Halvejian?"

Now Konrad began to realize that this was a ritual examination, the sheik was fully informed. But Konrad could understand the sheik's suspicion, his existence in St. Petersburg was a delicate matter. In addition the Sufi master chooses his student, not the student his teacher.

Konrad explained that he was neither an initiated member of the Halveji nor a goldsmith, but a professor of botany at the university. He had learned to work in gold under Henri's tutelage to improve his concentration, and Henri had introduced him to the Halveji.

"Can you show me a sample of your work?"

Konrad smiled. He had expected such a question. Undoubtedly the sheik had asked for a sign by which to recognize him. He pulled Alexandra's necklace from his pocket and handed it to the sheikh.

The man carefully inspected the workmanship and let the necklace run between his slender hands. A smile of pleased recognition went across his intelligent face.

"Good work! Did you design it or Henri?"

Konrad explained that he had spent several weeks dreaming up the design. The necklace had been his first piece of jewelry, a gift for his fiancé and present wife.

The sheikh's eyes narrowed. Almost rudely he asked. "So what do you want, to become my dance student or my goldsmith apprentice?"

Konrad had not considered either, he really wanted to find a contact in Samarkand. He realized that he could not ask for an introduction directly nor refuse this offer.

"It is not up to me to *want* to become either, but I would like to try to prove to you that I am a serious student of both."

Serious and fully inscrutable, the sheikh said. "I am inviting you to become my student. My name is Anastasios El-Zafaran after the place of my origin in Syria. I own a small goldsmith shop. I invite you to visit me there."

El-Zafaran pushed a piece of paper toward Konrad with the address of the store in Russian and suggested that it would be better to separate now and each go his own way.

The sheikh rose, nodded at them, and left the teahouse. A few minutes later Grigor indicated that they could leave. Konrad paid for the tea and they parted down the street.

On the tram home Konrad reviewed this strange meeting. Pleased with himself he chuckled, I have learned how to make the acquaintance of a true Oriental. Time, discretion,

and patience are most important.

A few weeks later Konrad visited El-Zafaran at his shop in the same remote part of town, far from the fashionable jewelry stores of St. Petersburg. Obviously El-Zafaran, like Henri, worked only on commission for a select few customers who were knowledgeable of Sufi work.

El-Zafaran received him with a smile and locked the door. "Greetings Konrad. I feared I would never see you again. What you are after is serious business. What would you like to do?"

"As I have told you, I am neither a master goldsmith nor a initiated Sufi. I undertook both labors to collect and understand myself. My wife's mother, who is the semabashi of the Halveji tekke in Tiflis, taught me the turn last year. I would like to improve my turning and next spring when I will return from China work in gold again. At the moment I don't have the time to do both."

"You seem to be a modern man, intelligent, skeptical, and worldly. You are not looking for any nebulous mysticism. I like that in you. You will visit China?"

Konrad bowed his head. "I have been invited by a Georgian tea grower to travel with him to Turkmenistan and China to study the tea-making process. The man wants to improve his Georgian tea production and to study the country."

"Do you speak Turkish or Chinese?"

"I am learning Chinese but don't speak Turkish."

For the first time Konrad noticed a discernable emotion crossing the even face of El-Zafaran. "I have long wanted to find information on the connections between Central-Asian Sufism and the Chinese Buddhist meditation sects. I was told that the name for these sects is *Ch'an*, the originally Chinese version of Japanese Zen. The oldest Sufi schools were founded in Samarkand in the twelfth and thirteenth century, but they surely have older roots."

Konrad held his breath. This was the kind of information that interested him. He had never heard of *Ch'an*, nor of a relationship between the Sufiya and China. He admitted his ignorance, but also his interest and promised to inquire among the China experts at the university.

"Do you practice writing Chinese characters with a brush?"

Konrad had to deny. His teacher considered the use of the brush an art of its own, which he did not have to learn at this time. Konrad wrote the characters with a pen without any artistic ambition.

"Working in gold is only one of many Sufi exercises," El-Zafaran said. "Writing Arabic script is another, which I had to practice for three years, but I speak Arabic so it made some sense. You should take up Chinese calligraphy. I am sure this would have the same merits, to concentrate entirely on your hand."

Konrad could easily see that. "Instead of the name of Allah I could copy Chinese classical poetry." He smiled, knowing that this Syrian Christian would not take offense to this otherwise sacrilegious comparison. "Would you show me some of your work?"

El-Zafaran retrieved a collection of gold pieces from a safe and laid out the jewelry before Konrad. They were very different from Henri's designs, edgy, monumental. They are male, thought Konrad, while Henri's round, flowing, free-form pieces were female. He said so.

"I have never seen Henri's work but your necklace is definitely female. Henri must have

sensed that this was what you needed most at the time. You are still more rigid than is good for you, but in this scatterbrained culture a little mental discipline is always useful. I think you should pursue Chinese calligraphy for a while. It can be either male or female."

Konrad was not surprised that the man had noticed his occasional absentmindedness. "You are right, the idle, superficiality of life in St. Petersburg has been getting to me."

It had become late. El-Zafaran invited him to their sema on any of the following Thursdays. Konrad would not be expected to participate in their turning, but El-Zafaran would introduce him to their semabashi who could teach him privately.

On leaving, Anastasios hugged and kissed him as his student.

Konrad asked his Chinese teacher for lessons in Chinese calligraphy. She was aghast. This was much too difficult for him and would take years. Konrad insisted, feeling that she was considering him a Western barbarian who simply could not and should not penetrate the secrets of her culture. If it was difficult, he would practice calligraphy for a few years. She then confessed that her calligraphy had always been judged poor; her father had sent her brothers to a calligraphy artist, but not her. She was a woman and could not teach him. But she promised to ask an old Chinese acquaintance, whose hand was excellent, to take Konrad as a student.

Konrad asked Alekseev about Ch'an. Alekseev was surprised, he did not know much about Ch'an, but had a practical suggestion. In the Yellow River archipelago outside of Shanghai lay an island, *Putuo Shan Dao*, inhabited by Ch'an monks. On the island was one of the five holy mountains of Chinese Buddhism, and the Ch'an monasteries were exceptionally beautiful. Putuo Shan Dao was an insider's tip, few foreigners knew of its existence. But Konrad should not get too hopeful of learning anything about Ch'an thought or literature there, the monks practiced age-old meditation exercises, but knew little which they could put into words.

The St. Petersburg university library owned several Ch'an texts, but they were poorly catalogued and, of course, in Chinese. Even if Konrad knew Chinese, it would be an impossible task to decipher the obscure, hyperbolic imagery of these texts.

"However, Ch'an is the most typically Chinese variant of Buddhism, laconic, ascetic, and dedicated to radically abstract meditation exercises, an attempt to overcome the Indo-European inclination to intellectually analyze fundamental religious insights. Ch'an claims to be the fastest meditative exercise to reach nirvana. I have no experience with eastern meditation exercises and cannot vouch for this claim."

Konrad's Chinese teacher finally introduced him to a highly cultivated sixty-year-old Chinese gentleman who, though almost offensively disinterested in Konrad, promised to teach him calligraphy. Obviously the man did not believe Konrad would last long, and offered to teach him strictly as a favor to Konrad's Chinese teacher.

The man, Professor Li, or *laoshi* Li, as his students addressed him, gave him a long Chinese brush and an ink-stone and first taught him how to rub a black sooty substance on the stone with water into a smooth ink. Then Konrad had to practice teasing the brush into a fine point and holding it in the right way. Laoshi Li was meticulous. No two right ways of holding that twenty-centimeter-long bamboo stick existed. Next, Konrad spent two weeks practicing various

strokes on large pieces of newspaper. It was not easy, but finally Konrad met with Li's approval.

Li never smiled and never made an encouraging remark. He signaled his satisfaction by giving Konrad a new sheet on which to practice. One day Li looked Konrad in the eye, he normally avoided all eye contact, and said,

"Now you will prove your mettle by drawing the character *ling*, meaning nothingness, the Void. It looks the same as a Western O. It is the only circular stroke in Chinese, and drawing it is one of the fundamental Ch'an exercises."

Konrad perked his ears. With one move of his wrist, his teacher drew a large, perfectly round circle that began with the full brush and ended in the thinnest lift-off just before closing the figure. Li's wrist control was uncanny, and of course, Konrad made a fool of himself trying to emulate him.

This was the first time Li smiled. "It is a concentration exercise that will take you months to learn. Keep on trying to perfect that stroke while you practice other characters. When you think you have mastered the '*art of ling*' show it to me. Then you might become my student."

One simple brush stroke instead of a hundred words was sufficient to be accepted as a Ch'an student.

Li considered the ling exercises a bonus after hours of hard work, "to limber up your wrist." Li made up sheet after sheet of characters that Konrad had to practice. He had intimated that he would teach him first a simple, easily readable style. Later he might learn a individualized hand. Li showed Konrad some scrolls painted in a flowing cursive style of fleeting, most feminine strokes that looked very elegant but were nearly unreadable. Calligraphy was the essence of Chinese art.

The ling exercises remained a most trying task—more daunting than the turn, which the semabashi of El-Zafaran's tekke taught him once a week.

Konrad worked into the small hours of the night at his Chinese exercises. Alexandra soon felt neglected. She had to get up at six to cope with her many obligations during the day. They barely saw each other at breakfast. Needing her sleep, Alexandra moved out of their common bedroom into the guestroom. Her deserting him, as he saw it, increased the tensions between them. Almost daily they had smaller and larger arguments about trivialities, although both knew, that a hurting word would forever be remembered while good deeds had to be repeated again and again not to be forgotten.

On one such occasion Konrad accused Alexandra of always pretending to know better.

"Better than what or who?" she objected. "I may know a few things which you don't, but when it gets to the detail, it's you who knows everything better than I. The problem is that you are irritated that I spontaneously voice what moves me, instead of burying my worries internally as you do. Unfortunately I am not like my mother, who spent all her life building up her husband."

"Sometimes I feel," mumbled Konrad, "that it would be better if you would hold your tongue more often instead of telling the whole world what *you* think is the truth."

Alexandra struck her husband from her mind. She did not have the time to concern herself with his emotional problems, though she could not avoid being constantly physically reminded of Konrad's dark mood. She devoted herself to her patients, among whom there now were also a few difficult emotional cases. Alexandra had become interested in the psychological problems of people, because she suspected that they were often the precursors

of serious systemic and chronic diseases such as cancer, asthma, and arthritis.

They were having dinner when the doorbell rang. Konrad went to open the door. A long silence, then they heard a woman sobbing. Alexandra got up to have a look and let out a cry. Izabel Sisakian hung dissolved in Konrad's arms.

They crowded around her asking questions. What has happened? Where do you come from? Where is Marti?

Alexandra had a terrible premonition. She took Izabel inside and made her sit down. Tears were running down Izabel's face. She laid her head onto her arms on the table and continued to sob heartbreakingly. Slowly she recovered sufficiently to answer Alexandra's questions.

"Can I stay with you for a few nights? I come from Baku. Marti has vanished. I lost him."

Alexandra heated some water for a bath. Izabel, hollow-eyed, hungry, drawn-out, had not slept for three days. She glanced, paranoid, at Helena and Tamara. Konrad assured her, they were trustworthy friends. Later, they gave her something to eat and piecewise put together the details of her story.

Marti and she had fled St. Petersburg during their absence because of Witte's sweeps of the revolutionaries. Marti had, for some time, maintained connections to the Bolsheviks. For a while they lived in Yerevan. Marti painted, she gave lessons in French and English. But the primitive life in Yerevan stifled Marti, he became restless. They moved to Tiflis, where they rented a small apartment in the Armenian quarter. There Marti had become ever deeper ensnared by Stalin's followers. He stopped painting and spent his days in Party meetings. They had terrible arguments, had separated several times, but moved back together again.

"This was in the months after Stalin robbed the bank in Tiflis. Hunted by the police, Stalin deserted his faithful and disappeared, which resulted in much infighting between the Bolsheviks and Jordania's Mensheviks. After Ilia Chavchavadze's assassination the Bolsheviks lost more and more ground, and then began Jordania's and the Russians' great 'clean-up.' For three years we moved under assumed names from hiding place to hiding place. Finally we had a dramatic quarrel, and that night Marti disappeared. This was ten months ago."

She looked at them with blind eyes. "A few months after his disappearance I heard through underground channels that they had all holed up in Baku. I spent the last three weeks searching for him in Baku. I saw him once for ten minutes. He has become a fanatic Bolshevik. He declared that he had lost interest in our 'bourgeois' marriage, and would I please leave Baku. I was endangering the entire cell with my searches. So, I left Baku, and here I am, penniless, heartbroken, maybe shadowed by the Okhrana, an orphan."

Alexandra, worrying that Tamara might take sides, sent Izabel to bed. Tamara kept quiet, but as soon as Izabel had gone to sleep they got into a heated discussion in hushed voices.

In later years when political discussions became dangerous to all of them and they often sat and argued at night in this hushed, conspiratorial voices, Alexandra would recall this evening.

Konrad decided to keep the fugitive. Vladimir did not think, she would be followed. For a

while Izabel became their quietly depressed guest. She helped Alexandra without being asked wherever she could. She spent many nights talking to Konrad about her experiences in Central Asia, which distracted her from her present worries. She slowly recovered and eventually found a job, using her maiden name, as interpreter and secretary with an Armenian trading company. Later Helena, who admired Izabel's quiet courage and determination, offered her a room in her apartment.

Soon, however, the Okhrana caught up with Izabel. One night she appeared wide-eyed, a hunted expression on her face. A man pretending to have news from her husband had appeared at her office. Fortunately, Izabel had been late that morning, and the man had not found her there. He had not left his name. Her boss was convinced that the man was from the Okhrana.

She had to disappear fast. Alexandra offered to hide her, but Izabel had discussed the situation with Helena who had suggested to have her smuggled across the border near her father's estate. Izabel still carried a French passport and intended to return to Paris, where she wouldn't be entirely safe from the Russian secret service, but they were after Marti, not her, and would not risk an international scandal because of her.

Izabel did not speak German, the idea of illegally crossing the German border, did not appeal to her. The direct train was out of the question. Helena made another suggestion, she could take the tourist excursion boat from Libau to Königsberg and then continue by train to Paris. This proposal seemed sensible.

Alexandra caught fire, her life had been unexciting lately. What would Izabel think, if she accompanied her to Paris?

"I always wanted to see Paris. I could be back in three weeks." She added with a challenging look at Konrad. "Nobody will really miss me here."

At first Konrad was speechless, then offered a few cautious objections. When Alexandra began arguing with hardly a pause, he receded into a gloomy silence. They would pose as tourists in Libau and in Germany she would handle their affairs. She could not wish for a better guide to the city on the Seine, would Izabel introduce her to her painter friends?

Konrad left the room and returned with a bottle of Georgian cognac, poured himself a liberal glass and offered one to the two women. By midnight they were quite drunk, and Izabel toasted Alexandra, her *amie extraordinaire*, as if they had already reached Paris.

A Stunning Discovery

Paris 1981

On one of my flights to Europe I discovered, in the airline's brochure, a review of a retrospective exhibition of Modigliani's paintings—in Paris. To see Modigliani's great nudes, which the article promised, was an irresistible temptation. Spontaneously, I rerouted my flight home via Paris.

I found myself a cheap hotel and in the morning walked to the museum.

Until then I had only seen one or the other of Modigliani's nudes; to face the entire amorous catalogue of his women was simply overwhelming. From the occasional *cocotte*, to his shy last companion, they had all posed for him, and presumably, he had been their lover. Wallowing in this sensuous feast for the eyes, I was entirely unprepared to come across a large canvas. I stood perplexed before —Alexandra

There was no question, it was Alexandra who was showing me her backside on Modigliani's bed. Her head was turned towards the viewer: The elongated oval of her face, her penetrating blue eyes, the aristocratic nose of the Dadiani, the sharp lines of her eyebrows, her dark hair. A masterful extension of the portrait in my father's study to the full sensual elegance of her body. The sign said, *Nude reclining on her left side, 1911, Private Collection*



Alexandra by Modigliani, 1911

Doubts rose in my mind. Were those subtly modeled, full thighs, her narrow, elegant

ankles, this *très-solide*, yet well proportioned *derrière*, her full back were they truly Alexandra's or a predilection of the artist? I went back to the other nudes on exhibition, frontal views of several very different women: splayed on his bed, seated in a red easy chair, modestly covering one breast with a silk scarf to make the other stand out more stunningly, or in the apathetic, spent pose after making love.

None of them had the subtleties of the *Nude reclining on her left side*, nor did they have the elegance and imperious beauty of Alexandra, her proud, contemptuous face and the skepticism of her look.

How and when had she been in Paris? Considering the compromising pose it seemed difficult to imagine that Konrad had accompanied her. She must have been traveling with one of her female friends. It could not have been Tamara, she was pregnant, Helena? No! Izabel and Marti were the only people, who knew the painter colony in Paris. But they had been missing for five years.

I called my old father that night, and to approach the touchy question of Alexandra in the nude on Modigliani's bed, I cautiously inquired after the whereabouts of the Sisakians in 1911.

"Marti vanished in Baku and Izabel appeared one night in St. Petersburg," said the tired voice on the other end. "Mother and father had a dramatic reunion with her. Later Izabel was pursued by the Okhrana and fled to Paris. It must have been 1911. Why, you didn't come across Izabel's tracks in Paris?"

Now I was sure of my construction.

"No, but I ran into traces of Alexandra's. Did she ever visit Izabel in Paris?"

There was silence at the other end of the line. Then he said with a weary voice, "Mother traveled much in those years, leaving us in Elisabeth's care. She may have been to Paris before Konrad's trip to China. What 'traces' of her did you discover?"

"A painting by Modigliani, which beyond doubt shows Alexandra."

I waited for a sound of recognition from him that could spare me a further description. But father had never heard of a painting of his mother except the one in his possession.

"It's a fabulous painting, Alexandra in the nude. More than I would ever have been allowed to see, had I been fortunate enough to meet this fascinating woman."

I should have kept my mouth shut, but I had to share this discovery with somebody.

With a dangerously sharp voice my father began to shout into the phone. "This part of her life is none of your business. All you want to know is, what was her sex life like? I have never seen or heard of a painting of my mother in the nude, and if I did know of such an affair, I would be too embarrassed to tell you."

Piqued, I had without malicious intent lifted an edge of the veil which covered Alexandra's life and had found her naked in the bed of a famous painter, and father tells me that this was none of my business?

I added insult to injury. "How about Vladimir, for example?"

There was silence on the line. Did father misunderstand me on purpose? I now regretted the edge in my question.

Ashamed I listened to his tired, old voice.

"I told you, that Vladimir was fully occupied with Tamara in those years, he did not have an affair with my mother, and he certainly did not go to Paris with her. But you are right, Mother did accompany Izabel to Paris in 1911 to cover up Izabel's flight from the Okhrana. There

existed an enigmatic postcard she wrote to Konrad from Paris. It was written in code. She apologized that she had deserted him so willfully. These were the years during which my parents' marriage was badly strained. — But I have never heard of a painting of her by Modigliani."

Next morning I called the museum to ask for the *provenance* of the painting, but the Museum refused to discuss its details over the phone.

"Sir, we are sorry, the condition of this loan was that the owner remain anonymous. Beyond that the provenance of the painting is described in our *catalogue raisonnée* which you can buy at the exhibition desk."

I went back and purchased the expensive catalog. It would provide me with a fair reproduction of the painting, which I was unlikely ever to see again.

In the commentary I found the following history of the sales of the picture in the telegraphic style of the art dealers which can speak volumes, hide fates, jealousies, madness, and occasionally more.

"Nude reclining on her left side". Loaned anonymously. Tentatively dated 1911, Provenance.: A. Dadiani, St. Petersburg 1911; S. I. Manovsky, Paris, 1912; private collect. Zürich 1918; Sotheby auct. catalogue #115, London 5 Oct. 1950; private. collect., Paris, 1950-present.

Here was the final proof.

My dear Alexandra held on to the beauty for less than a year. Was the painting in storage? Was it too provocative to hang in their bedroom? No wonder my father knew nothing about it. And Konrad? Considering their sacred honesty, he must have known of the painting. And in the end old Manovsky fell in love with it. He must have known who the woman in the painting was. At the end of the World War I, Manovsky had cashed it in in Switzerland. By this exigency the painting survived the Bolsheviks, the Fascists, and the Second World War.

What a temptation to play the sleuth and to uncover the stories hiding behind this lapidary history. But the actors were all dead. To my father's distress, I would, once again, have to intuit the details of what happened to Alexandra in Paris.

Years later, among Konrad's letters from China, I found the postcard from Paris which father had mentioned. A short note from the eloped Alexandra. Had I not known of Modigliani's painting, I would not have been able to decipher her cryptic message.

Liebster Mann,

V. 15. 1911

We arrived safely. H.'s suggestion was excellent, we reached P. without a hitch. The city is full of expatriates from every country of Europe. I was introduced to S. M., interesting man but deeply depressed, and I also ran into one of my patients and scientific subject A. who is having an affair with an Italian painter!

I feel remorse for having overruled you so high-handedly in my restlessness, and also because my heathen soul refuses to recognize neither sin nor guilt.

I love you truly and dearly. A.

So she had met Sasha Manovsky in Paris, where he had taken refuge from the Okhrana

in 1907! At first, this fact and that he had bought Alexandra's painting, led me to some wild speculations.

And with her patient A. she could only have meant Akhmatova. But how could Akhmatova have had an affair with an Italian painter in Paris in 1911, a year after she got married to Gumilev? Were the times even more corrupt than I had assumed?

I ordered a biography of Akhmatova from the library. My eyes grew large. Akhmatova had visited Paris with Gumilev in early May 1911! Gumilev had been called back to Russia by some family matter. He had left Akhmatova behind. Independent, young, and lovesick as she was, she sought consolation in the arms of charming Amedeo Modigliani. Modigliani made several drawings of her in the nude. Resolute Akhmatova never made a secret of this affair, one of the drawings remained in her possession until her death.

Later I would find that the postcard showed a photo of the Isle Saint Louis. Strange, why not the Eiffel Tower? Did Alexandra stay on fashionable Isle Saint Louis? I searched a map of Paris, on Quai d'Orleans, which the postcard showed, are no hotels, only private houses. And finally, why should she have carefully kept this postcard with the confession of her remorse?

Simple, this card was the only memoir of Paris she had!

She had sold Modigliani's painting to Manovsky.

Ingeniously Alexandra had made a tiny pinhole through the photo which connected a house at 16, *Quai d'Orleans* with the M. on the other side! That I found out only on a second, careful examination of the postcard. Manovsky rented that house in 1911!

Alexandra in Paris

1911

Alexandra sat across the table from a sagging Manovsky at the opulent *Tour d'Argent*. She looked onto the Seine and the lighted windows of the houses on the *Isle St. Louis* flickering through the plane-trees. A steady stream of droshkis flowed across the *Pont de la Tournelle*, and the *Bateaux Mouches* came and went like fireflies at the Quai below her window.

She had met Sasha Manovsky two days earlier at a get-together of a group of painters to which Izabel had taken her. Cheap red wine, conversations on paintings and women accompanied by eloquent gestures, nostalgic memories of lost homelands, heavy cigarette smoke filling the room. Except for an intellectual French writer all the men were expatriates: a short Spaniard with the build of a prizefighter and piercing black eyes, a handsome, boyish-looking Italian with disheveled locks, an older, deeply depressed Polish sculptor, whom she avoided, two mistresses of these men, and Manovsky.

Manovsky, his jacket open, dressed in tie and starched shirt, a golden watch chain on his belly, looked like a sitting bull among these *bohémien*s. His French was atrocious. When he discovered that she spoke Russian, he almost clung to her. The young men treated him with condescension. He was the patron who bought their paintings and paid for their debts. Aloof, they talked over his head.

She observed Manovsky now. She had agreed to this dinner invitation, because of an undefined titillating fascination with the brutal power he exuded. He was used to getting what he wanted. He had promised to show her his collection of paintings.

"My forefathers came from Spain in the seventeenth century," said Manovsky, "I love Mediterranean women, especially when they are as enigmatic as you are, Princess Dadiani, with your blue eyes."

His exterior belied his purported Spanish ancestry. Stocky, a few strands of thin white hair and watery blue eyes. The bags under his eyes, his fleshy nose and mouth made him look like any other aging Russian Jew. Except for his heavy, brutal hands.

"I have two passions, regal women and paintings which nobody has discovered yet. Both are high-risk gambles."

She smiled, and to distract him, asked him to tell her his life's story.

"I come from an impoverished family in the Polish-Russian Pale. To escape the recurring pogroms, tired of my fervently religious environment, I ran away from home when I was fifteen. I found employment with a Moscow merchant and discovered that I had a talent for financial speculations. After a few years I became the manager of the man's firm, he offered me a partnership and the hand of his daughter. I panicked and quit work. He was a good *Mensch*, he paid me off with a handsome sum.

"I invested the money into the booming railroad business, and soon found that I had accumulated enough to buy a controlling share in a company engaged in building the Trans-Siberian railroad. That was in the eighties. For a while I worked closely with your cousin Sergei von Witte, and several times tried to persuade this intelligent and well-connected man to join

my company. Together, we could have made enormous profits, but he was too much of an idealist. He wanted to save the Russian empire from disintegration."

Alexandra thought of Witte's political acumen and his honesty. Surrounded by a similar aura of unbending willpower as this man, Witte was a gentleman through and through. She could not imagine the two as partners.

Manovsky began again. "Maybe you have to be a liberated Jew to see that Witte was working into the hands of the reactionary clique around the Emperor, which was scheming all the time to dispose of him. I had no such illusions. I still believe that we should all support the Bolsheviks, they are the only political organization that has a viable concept for how to clean up the rotten Russian social order. I put my money where my mouth was, and here you see me, an outcast from the Motherland."

The waiter brought the dinner which Manovsky with superior arrogance had ordered for them, the famous pressed duck served on a silver platter accompanied by a small side dish with two shriveled, black nuts cut into thin slices and a *sauciere* with a brown sauce heavily laced with Madeira. The *sommelier* brought a heavy red *Bourgogne*. Manovsky inspected the cork and expertly swilled the wine in his mouth.

The waiter placed a piece of the duck and a few slices of the black nuts on her plate and withdrew discreetly.

"In very few Parisian restaurants can one get an honest *truffe périgourdine* with a taste worth one's money. Try this wine, it is far better than a Tsinandali."

Manovsky, trying to catch her eye, raised his glass with a toast to her beauty and regal bearing.

His blatancy insulted her, but she had to admit that she had never tasted a comparable wine. Its complex bouquet was most elusive and left a taste of violets on her tongue. This sensation was surpassed by her first slice of the truffle, its perfume exploded in her head: "The wine is excellent but nothing compares to the taste of this truffle. One could lose one's mind over it."

He did not smile about this successful surprise. His watery eyes watched her with a hungry expression.

She asked when he had begun to collect art.

"I never married, I devoted all my passion to paintings. At first it was as an investment, later they seduced me. With the help of a French art dealer, who represents the unknown painters whom you met the other evening, I abandoned myself to collecting contemporary art. The paintings became an addiction as powerful as any drug, they nearly drove me mad. An irrepressible craving took hold of me. I spent more time in Paris than in Moscow. I sat night after night through these boring bouts of drinking, paid for the wine which these lazy, arrogant, penniless *bohémiens* pour down by the liter, settled their debts and listened to their prattle, only to hunt down new paintings.

"Eventually I retired from the railroad business and completely devoted myself to the collecting of paintings: Gauguin's erotic Tahitian women, mad Van Gogh, and now Modigliani, Matisse, and Picasso. I have watched the value of these beauties rise every year. This passion is more exciting than roulette and more mind-numbing than these truffles."

She took another sip of the wonderful wine. The fragrance of the wine was getting more beguiling as time passed.

Manovsky's large, ruddy hand trembled as he put down the glass. An alcoholic, she

concluded. He ate in a great hurry, like an addict, who only seemed to long for more, and hardly noticed the exotic flavors of what he downed.

He pointed at a house across the river.

"That is my house, 16 Quai d'Orleans. Let me show you my collection of paintings, it is unique. Only then will you understand what I mean."

She was torn. She thought of the collection of Becky's father which had pursued her for years. But his was such an obvious ploy to entrap her that she felt annoyed.

She coolly examined her situation. Her honor was not her concern. What could happen? Maybe he would try to physically overwhelm her. Despite his age, he still looked powerful enough, but she had little doubt that she could incapacitate him with a blow to the right place. She doubted that he would go as far as using a weapon, and she smiled, she had experience with that too. She did not fear him. His most probable action would be that he would expose himself. Well, that would be unpleasant, but she had seen naked men before. What put her off was Manovsky's crass insensitivity. She had seen enough of him for tonight. She would finish with Manovsky on another day.

He was deflated when she asked him to order a taxi for her, but she could see that he was used to being turned down by women. He would go back to his place and console himself among his Gauguin nudes.

Manovsky offered to accompany her home, but she found it easy to shake him off. She thanked Manovsky once more for the evening and from the taxi waved at him with her gloved hand.

On the following weekend, at another drinking session, Manovsky was not present, but Amedeo, the Italian painter had brought along a friend—Anna Akhmatova .

Akhmatova immediately recognized Alexandra. For a few moments the two women stared at each other, then Akhmatova began to laugh. Without embarrassment she explained that Gumilev, her husband, had been with her until a week ago. He had suddenly and urgently been required to return to his family estate. She had stayed. Paris was wonderful, she did not get here so often. Amedeo was a long-time friend.

Alexandra smiled relieved. Last time she had met Akhmatova in St. Petersburg, Alexandra had recruited her for her study of female cycles. Their meeting had been personal yet distant, and Akhmatova had impressed her by her poise and sense of purpose. Now she seemed softer, less haughty and self-conscious. Quite obviously Amedeo and she were having an affair, which Akhmatova did not care to hide.

Handsome Amedeo had the natural, unaffected manners that Alexandra had found so attractive among the men she had met in Italy. His colleagues seemed to like him, but he was, as he said himself, not yet famous, and he loved Russian women. Akhmatova, with a mischievous smile, corrected him, Alexandra was not Russian but Georgian and on top of that a princess. Alexandra blushed and Amedeo asked naïvely whether that was a Russian fairy tale. Disarmed, Alexandra admitted it, but told him that it was also unimportant to her.

Amedeo invited her to visit Akhmatova and him at his studio. Alexandra felt his soft, brown eyes on her. Oh, she thought, I would not mind spending an afternoon with him.

Alexandra had imagined a large attic filled with half-finished canvasses. Instead, after climbing five stories, she found a tiny mansard room in with a large bed, an old easy chair

covered with faded, dark-red plush, a simple table, and a washstand. There was hardly room for an easel. A large window, overlooking the roofs and chimney pots of the quartier, was the only luxury.

Akhmatova prepared tea on a small gas burner, while Amedeo pulled some paintings from under the bed: a portrait of a young Pole and his wife, "my best friends," and an unfinished nude: Akhmatova sitting in the plush red chair.

Their domestic arrangement, however transitory it might be, was touching. Over tea they talked about Amedeo's many Eastern-European emigrant friends and St. Petersburg that he longed to see.

Alexandra felt Amedeo's painterly eyes resting on her again. And as if on cue, Akhmatova asked whether Alexandra would pose for him.

Amedeo smiled with lowered eyes. "I would really like to paint you in the nude. You are the most elegant lady who ever strayed into this dismal place of mine."

He said this with such charm and in presence of the woman he slept with, that Alexandra felt completely taken by surprise. She looked questioningly at Akhmatova, who shook her head. "Doctor Alexandra, don't let my presence trouble you. You have seen *me* without clothes!"

It is an arranged game, thought Alexandra, they plotted it before my arrival. But the two were so without guile that Alexandra felt ridiculed.

She blushed. "I have never sat as a model for a painter. What do you want me to do?"

"You can undress behind the Japanese screen. I will give you a shawl to cover yourself, and then I will make some fast charcoal sketches of you lying on the bed." He shrugged. "Unfortunately there is no other place for you to lie down comfortably."

After a few moments of hesitation Alexandra disappeared behind the screen. Akhmatova had turned away busying herself in the "kitchen." Amedeo threw her the shawl and put a new canvas on the easel. When he turned around he was facing Alexandra in her full beauty. She had discarded the shawl as a silly prop.

For a few seconds Amedeo stared at her, but then lowered his long eyelashes. Alexandra flushed from head to toe.

She sat on the edge of the bed with her arms crossed over her breasts. Amedeo asked her to lie on her right side with her back to him and her head turned towards him. She should look past him out the window. He asked her to rearrange her left arm and to bend her left leg over the right one.

Akhmatova brought her a cup of hot tea, sat in the chair, and looked at Alexandra with the most serious expression. Amedeo disappeared behind his easel. He worked with incredible speed. Occasionally he peered over the edge of the canvas to determine her proportions with a short stick.

During this first session Alexandra could not think of anything but the three of them in the small room, Akhmatova who earnestly watched the drawing emerge, and Amedeo who scratched and screeched with his charcoal on the canvas. She felt as if his long hands were caressing her body. She shivered. Akhmatova closed the window asking, whether she felt cold and wanted the shawl. Alexandra assured her that she was perfectly all right. Akhmatova smiled. "I too was not used to being looked at in such detail at first."

After a while Amedeo put down his charcoal and with blackened fingers turned the canvas around. With a few deft strokes he had produced a beguiling sketch of her, catching

her reclining body, her back and legs, her arms, and a rough layout of her head.

Her face was empty.

"This will be enough for today," said Amedeo. "I rework what I have and rough-in the background. Maybe I can begin to put on the paint tomorrow. Can you come back tomorrow afternoon for another hour or two? Finally, I will have to fill in your face, that will be the most difficult task and may take another two sessions."

Akhmatova asked whether he did not want to sketch Alexandra in another position.

"No, this will be a classical painting," he told her, "I see it before my eyes, I could almost finish it in my sleep."

Alexandra spent the afternoons at Amedeo's studio. In the mornings she wandered through the museums and the streets of town. Sometimes Akhmatova was present, often Alexandra was alone with Amedeo. Apparently no jealousy existed between Amedeo and Akhmatova, and despite the shivers that overcame Alexandra at times, Amedeo made no unwarranted advances. They floated in suspended time.

When Amedeo began to put on the paint he had a few critical hours, the plasticity of her body on the canvas did not satisfy his vision. He had to paint over her forms twice. In the end only her empty face was left.

He stared unhappily at his first layout of her face.

"I can't find the facial expression which matches your classical forms."

She tried to think of this and that but nothing satisfied him.

He should make love to me, she thought, maybe he is looking for this spent repose. She had seen such a sleeping beauty at the Louvre. They were alone, and she gingerly voiced her thought.

"No," he said blushing, "I am not looking for that pose, it would not fit this painting, I want your skeptical, arrogant side—and you think of lovemaking!"

Someone knocked at the door, and before Amedeo could open it, or she could cover herself, an agitated, breathless Manovsky stormed into the room.

Speechless, Manovsky stood in the door. Alexandra drew the bedcover over her body. Manovsky collapsed into the chair, watery-blue eyes bulging.

When he had caught his breath, he started to shout in his horrid French. "So this is where you are hiding! Naked in Modigliani's bed!"

He changed to a suppressed, threatening Russian. "I waited for you all last week and you did not come. I searched the town for you and could not find you. Your Armenian friends denied any knowledge of your whereabouts. Is that what one gets for one's generosity? You promised to visit me!"

Manovsky gasped for air, his eyes tearing. Amedeo, who had only caught the threatening undertone of Manovsky's lament, got up to defend Alexandra, but hesitated to attack his powerful patron.

Alexandra rose. Clutching the bedspread with one hand she pointed at Manovsky. With an icy, cutting voice she shouted. "You miserable, disgusting voyeur. Leave this room at once. You have neither been invited nor has anybody given you permission to enter. Disappear!"

She pointed at the door. But Manovsky had spied the unfinished canvas. He got up, and, saliva dripping from his mouth, shouted at Amedeo. "I must have this painting. If you will

not sell me this painting, I will destroy you on the Paris market. You will never be able to sell another canvas in this town."

Amedeo took a step back and stuttered that the painting was Alexandra's, not his. He had no authorization to sell it to anybody.

Alexandra, with fiery eyes, advanced against Manovsky who cowed and took a few steps backwards.

"You miserable scum, get out!" she shouted in her worst Russian argot.

Manovsky staggered backwards towards the door. "Alexandra, let me at least have this painting," he slobbered half in Russian and half in Yiddish. He bent down spreading his fleshy arms in front of her. "I offer you a large sum of money. I cannot live without this painting. You have no right to destroy my life. Alexandra, take pity on me."

She pushed him in the direction of the door. He crumpled but did not move from the spot. Suddenly she let her drapery fall to the floor and pummeling him with her right fist, shoving the whimpering shape towards the door.

Amedeo, finally recovered from his paralysis, came to her help, opened the door, and together they pushed the tottering man into the hallway.

Amedeo slammed the door.

Alexandra collapsed into the chair. Amedeo knelt down in front of her. As if recreating her, he very gently moved his finger across her eyebrows, her flushed cheeks, her mouth...

"I have seen your face," he said and kissed her shoulder.

Konrad picked up Alexandra at the train station. She took his arm and glanced at him. "Will you forgive my having overruled you so high-handedly in my restlessness? Helena's suggestion was excellent. We reached Paris without a hitch. The city is full of expatriates from every corner of Europe. I met Sasha Manovsky, the competitor of Becky's father. A deeply depressed man. He financed the Moscow uprising and is hiding from the Okhrana. I also ran into my patient and scientific subject Akhmatova who was having an affair with an Italian painter by the name of Modigliani."

Konrad raised his eyebrows. Her words were spilling out at an unusual speed. What was coming? She had never before asked him to forgive her one of her impulsive actions.

He looked at her guessing. "Did Manovsky show you his collection?"

She explained eagerly. "He tried but in such a plump and suggestive manner that I got rid of him."

He smiled imagining her dismissing the old man with a imperious gesture of her left hand. "And Akhmatova? Isn't she married to Gumilev?"

She described the ambiguous circumstances of Akhmatova's presence in Paris. "She was not at all embarrassed. They invited me to Modigliani's little mansard apartment for tea." She laughed briefly. "There, in the presence of Akhmatova, Modigliani asked me to sit for him as a model. A strange feeling, to be exposed in the nude to the searching eyes of a painter."

She described how Modigliani had, with incredible speed, produced a drawing of her, which he, during a number of later sessions had painted in. "Only the face was missing, when Manovsky burst upon the scene."

As she sketched a picture of the old voyeur sputtering and finally being pushed out of

the room, Konrad began to laugh. His naked wife pummeling Manovsky with her fists! "Where is the painting?" Konrad looked at her baggage. "You didn't bring it with you?"

She glanced at him in a mixture of irony and amazement. "Konrad, would you have liked a painting of your wife in her full nudity hanging in our apartment? It was an elegant and sensual pose from the back, a big canvas--I left it with Izabel to sell it to Manovsky for a the highest possible price and to split the money with Modigliani. He is really destitute."

Konrad frowned. Now the old lecher, was drooling over Alexandra's nude body. "We could have stored it in the attic!"

In a complete non-sequitur, Alexandra said, "After we had thrown Manovsky out, Amedeo made love to me. He had such beautiful hands."

Konrad in China

1911-1912

In October Konrad set out for China. The entire family gave him a send-off. Alexandra was looking forward to the months alone.

Niko and Claudia arrived at the same day as Konrad's first letter. Over dinner that night Alexandra gave it to Otto to read it aloud, a glowing description of Samarkand.

Samarkand, 16 October, 1911

Dearest Alexandra, dear Otto, Claudia, and Niko!

Imagine I am standing in a large square framed on three sides by arched Medresses, Islamic schools. Their colossal walls and gates are covered with tile mosaics in green, blue, yellow, ocher, and deep red. Monumental, they rival the imperial palaces of Rome. The Medressa to my right is flanked by two minarets, a gateway at its center. The wall above, a pointed arch, is covered with the mosaics of two of lions, mirror images of each other. Behind each rises a sun with a human face! When you walk closer you see that the background is a carpet of most intricately interwoven flowers.

This Registran square is a Babylonian confusion of animals and men. Horses, camels, lying, braying, wagons, trade-stands, mountains of stacked watermelons, men in turbans of various colors and shapes, long, ragged greatcoats with colorful trim, the womenfolk in dizzying silk blouses and shawls.

And all this stinking squalor, heated by a fierce sun, is covered by clouds of fine brown dust which gets into everything... From here the bazaar of Tiflis appears to lie in a far-western country.

I met George and his tea master in Baku. George suffered the rigors of this journey with a great calm and his special kind of humor, a good travel companion. The poor Chinese, however is beset by a mortal fear of the emptiness of the desert. He is hiding in his room behind drawn curtains.

The journey from Baku to Samarkand took four days—sixteen hours of which we spent on a rusty ferry reeking of oil on the Caspian Sea and two days crossing the forbidding Karakum desert. Small, dark brown scree, no black sand dunes as I had always imagined. A thin, abrasive veil of sand blows a foot high over this scorched earth. The railroad tracks get buried often. At noon the temperature was more than 30 degrees Celsius, in November!, and breathtakingly dry. And in this land live people! Occasionally we saw a caravan of camels, single file on the horizon.

*Love and greetings to all—but especially to you my love
from your newly excited husband
Konrad*

"Mummy," asked Otto, "may I keep daddy's letter? I want to go there one day."

The winter of 1911 was unusually mild in St. Petersburg. Otto persuaded Niko to take out the horses and ride north along the coast to the inn above Lisi Nos. Claudia and Alexandra joined them. Alexandra had not been there since her ride with Vladimir. Vladimir's presence still hung palpably in the air. Six years, was it that long ago?

Otto was their guide. He was riding ahead of her, talking to Niko about his memories of Munich. Proud of her grown son she followed him. He was eleven now and very much himself. This was his first year at the German Gymnasium. Intelligent, considerate and personable with his and their friends, he loved Niko and Claudia, but he had inherited Konrad's shyness. He was very much Konrad's child.

What would become of Sophia? Had she inherited her mother's wild need for independence, or would the sea that surrounded her conception sooth her temper? She shook her head, imagining a Georgian mermaid.

Claudia, who rode at Alexandra's side, had become addicted to riding. She had bought a horse that she stabled near Murnau. Alexandra caught herself thinking that Claudia was still childless after five years of marriage—how old-fashioned of herself! Claudia was unchanged. Quiet and thoughtful, she was still using her head instead of her emotions.

And Niko? Alexandra still loved her dear, faithful brother. Once in a while, with a nostalgic smile or in exasperation he would call her Lexako. Now Professor Sommerfeld's assistant, Niko should have been a poet after all. Alexandra did not understand the higher mathematics that he used to investigate atoms and molecules, but she sensed that theoretical physics had become the poetry of the twentieth century. Niko was comfortably ensconced in his science, well regarded by his peers, a careful, meticulous physicist. I wish him a great discovery that would leave him breathless, thought Alexandra. But his revered professor was of the same mentality—teaching and guiding his students was his mission.

Claudia sidled her horse next to Alexandra's and asked. "What has become of your dream-flying?"

Alexandra had been absentmindedly thinking of her ride with Vladimir and their conversation about dying that had cemented their friendship. She blinked. Did this place invite such discussions?

"I have not talked to anyone about it. I had two disturbing encounters with Gocha in the two years since Svaneti. I am still reluctant to use my healing powers, but I am certain I have them. Two bursitis patients walked out of my office like the man in Murkmeli..."

Claudia's dark eyes rested on her with admiration and curiosity: "I have tried your way of healing with no tangible results, which makes me doubt my own ability. But father and I have investigated several healers trying to systematically map out their methods. We would like to formulate a psychological model of healing."

Alexandra reigned in her horse. "Your father, engaged in an investigation of psychic processes? I cannot believe it!"

"Since our trip to Georgia father has been much interested in the psychology of spiritual experiences. The evening with Konrad at the Sufi sema, your long discourse on matriarchy kept him thinking for a long time. I told him all about our experiences with Gocha. It aroused his scientific curiosity."

She slowed her horse and, very animated, turned to Alexandra. "But I wanted to tell you that father and I miss your sharp mind and your understanding of these things. You know that

father is very impressed by your sober intuitive comprehension of psychological processes. He has asked me to invite you to München to discuss his investigations and to write a publication on medical processes and spiritual healing with you. What would you think of that?"

Alexandra slackened her reins. On its own the horse moved ahead of Claudia's.

Gocha's reappearance so far away from Svaneti had scared her. The first time Gocha appeared to her in a dream of such intensity that she forced herself to wake up.

The second time had been even more disturbing, because it happened during waking hours. On a warm, sunny day she had been riding with Konrad, not far from where they were now. A heavy thunderstorm growled somewhere in the distance. They stopped at the edge of a wood. Konrad had fallen asleep the moment he had lain down, and she had been on her back watching the sky and the distant flashes of lightening, drowsy but fully awake.

Suddenly she *flew*. She had simply lifted off effortlessly. She would never be able to tell whether she had fallen asleep at that very moment, but she distinctly remembered the storm clouds, the woods, Konrad lying asleep in the shade below her, the otherwise blue sky, and the brilliant sun. She had flown towards the sun. Attracted by the blinding light she had soared higher and higher. The landscape below had soon been drowned by the light surrounding her.

She lost time and space, but she wasn't afraid. The flying and the blazing light were familiar. Finally she had seen the Caucasus below her, Elbrus, the tooth of Ushba. A great joy had swept her, as she slowly went down, much like in her dream at Gocha's house. Should it be that easy to go home?

Abruptly her vision had narrowed, as if looking through a telescope. Adishi had appeared straight ahead. Gocha was sitting in front of her house and waved, expecting her. The color of the light had changed to an intense blue.

Gocha was drumming on a shaman's drum. Hers or Shalva's? A great anxiety overcame her connected with the monotonous sound of the drum. She was still hovering high above ground when Gocha spoke: "Child, you have avoided me. You should visit me more often, you are a healer wasting your precious gift. Why are you scared? Have you forgotten to talk to your soul bird?"

The raven suddenly swooped down on her, growing so big that he blotted out the sun. Struck by fear she began to fall rapidly towards the ground. The sickening feeling of falling woke her. Completely wrung out, her entire body aching, she found herself next to sleeping Konrad. The sun was gone, a thunder clap released a sudden downpour. This time Konrad danced in the rain, she was too benumbed to follow him. She had never told Konrad about this experience.

"Alexandra! Don't fall off the horse!" Claudia called.

Alexandra shook herself. "How long have I been away?"

Claudia stared at her with wide eyes. "What happened?"

Alexandra touched her head. "I felt dizzy."

They had ridden a good distance. Slowly she regained her senses. "Do you really want to hear about my encounters with Gocha?" she said very slowly. "They frighten me when they happen. I was thinking of the last time I have been 'flying,' and it completely put me out. I am lucky you caught me before I fell."

Then she remembered Claudia's request: "I envy you the sober intellectual environment

in Munich." Alexandra said looking straight ahead. "Here you have to defend yourself against psychic influences. People go into a deep trance at the drop of a hat, the tables start dancing, the dead rise, fashionable women shriek.... Imagine, the Empress makes all decisions under the spell of an unwashed religious mystic. It is he who effectively runs the country by suggestion. It is horrible and deeply disturbing. I stay miles away from 'spiritually' gifted people and their seances."

She wiped her hair out of her eyes and turned to Claudia. "But to be invited to work with your father is a great honor. I would have to work out some arrangement with Konrad and Helena to be able to visit you for a longer time. After Konrad's extended absence he will miss me," she sighed, "or so I hope. Otto is at school, I have patients to take care of, and my father is getting old. We need to consider a visit to Tiflis."

She knew that Claudia's invitation would not leave her in peace.

Late one night, they were having dinner, Tamara came home highly excited. Her face was blotched, her hair disheveled. Very unusual for her, she was obviously partly drunk. She could barely contain herself. "Stolypin is dead!" she shouted. "Finally they succeeded in assassinating the bloodsucker."

They stared at her in shocked silence.

Eventually Niko was able to get the details out of her. Four hours earlier Stolypin had been shot by an extremist at close range in the sold-out Kiev opera under the horrorstruck eyes of Emperor Nicholas and the Empress.

Niko crossed himself and very quietly pointed out how serious this tragedy was. Stolypin had been the only man capable of stemming the total disintegration of Russia.

"Exactly," screamed Tamara, interrupting him, "by shooting, exiling, and imprisoning thousands of revolutionaries! The Emperor has become a mere puppet of the Empress and Rasputin, her *starets*. Do you want to save this rotten regime? Nicholas has to go. *If he doesn't abdicate of his own, we shall push him off his throne!*" she shouted.

"And then what?" retorted Niko exasperated. "You are drunk! Let's discuss this matter when you have sobered up."

Tamara collapsed at the edge of the table. Tears streamed down her face. Vladimir got up and tried to calm her.

She pushed him away. "Leave me alone, you imperialist. You only make fun of me, you have no clear opinion and no marrow in your bones."

Vladimir sat defeated and smiled, embarrassed, at the others. He gestured with his hand to show that this was one of their usual, irrational fights.

Tamara rose, shot him a withering look, and disappeared into the bathroom.

"In principle, as far as Nicholas and the Empress are concerned, I don't disagree with her," said Niko pensively. "But Stolypin would have been the only man who could have persuaded Nicholas to abdicate."

Alexandra rallied to Tamara's help. "Niko, keep in mind that Stolypin was the arch-enemy of Socialists and Marxists. I don't agree with her, but I am not surprised by Tamara's rhetoric. This was the third assassination attempt at Stolypin. I don't have to tell you what happened to the revolutionaries who tried to ambush him before. In the present political climate Stolypin could never have rallied the left behind him."

Tamara returned slightly more composed. She ate a few spoons of soup and looked at

Niko. "You asked me what would happen if Nicholas were forced to abdicate. Then we could have a free democratic government led by the Socialists."

Niko tried to control his voice. "Before we discuss the question of a 'free democracy,' I would like to know for which brand of socialism you are praying?"

"I don't pray. I want to act."

Niko getting worked up, shouted, "What group do you think will give us hope for a stable government? I agree with you that the emperor has to submit to a constitution which restricts his reign or abdicate. But I don't see any party capable of governing itself, not to mention this country. The chaotic quarreling and the confused talk in the Duma is as much a national disgrace as Nicholas' governing in the name of God." He had calmed down, "Maybe Kerensky would be a possible prime minister, but his followers will desert him the minute he gains power. What do you propose? Seriously."

"Niko, you do know on whom I set my hope. Not Lenin and his Bolsheviks, they are too extreme, but on Trotsky and the Mensheviks. They are open to reason and could find a compromise with the bourgeois factions. Look at Jordania in Georgia, he is trying that quite successfully."

Niko heaved a sigh. "I wished I could convince myself that Trotsky could hold his own against the Bolsheviks. Georgia is a special case, you cannot compare it with Russia. Our sense of national identity and our traditions are a shield against the chaotic Russian radicalism. Here the Bolsheviks will simply push anybody aside who is not for them. The chaos which would follow a Bolshevik takeover not even you can imagine. And Georgia simply is, to the Russians, part of the empire. Jordania would be a marked man. And do not forget Josip Djughashvili, the Georgian criminal in Lenin's employ! Should Stalin win the power in Russia he will settle his own account with Georgia, and he knows the Georgians."

Tamara lowered her head. "Sometimes I, too, have such dark premonitions. They are the reason why I want to work with Jordania for Georgia as soon as I get my degree."

Through Niko's intervention Tamara had, for the first time, been given the chance to finish her argument. Alexandra understood and appreciated Tamara's resolve and within limits shared her ambitions.

Tamara said. "I know what Alexandra intends to do in case the revolution breaks out and the Russian empire collapses, she too will go back to Georgia trying to help people in her way. Niko, what are you going to do for your Motherland?"

Niko started and briefly glanced at Claudia. He fussed for a few moments and then said embarrassed. "I am afraid I will stay in Germany. As a physicist I have no future in an independent Georgia."

He looked down.

Tamara did not berate him. She said understandingly. "I thought so and wish you happiness and success in your field. There will be much heartache in your life, but Claudia will share it with you."

Konrad's second letter had taken three weeks to reach St. Petersburg.

On the train from Samarkand, 24. October 1911

Dear Alexandra,

I am writing on the train that will take us to China. I have to describe to you a meeting

on the day before our departure, which has considerably enlarged my understanding of the Sufi. We had a remarkable audience with an old teacher of Zafaran's who had given me a letter of recommendation to him.

After extensive inquiries we were told that he lived outside of Samarkand. We took a droshki and drove through a seemingly endless Islamic cemetery. Ghostly, narrow steles tilted in all directions, dilapidated, not a tree, nor a bush. Stray dogs, their tails between their legs, roamed between the wind-blown graves. The cemetery covered the hills for miles, thousands of graves. A most holy place.

Behind the cemetery began a peculiar rolling terrain, here and there old walls.

The locals call the area Afra-Siab. These are the melted down ruins of Marakanda, where Alexander the Great spent a winter, stabbed his bosom friend Klitos in a drunken rage, and later married Roxana, the daughter of the local potentate. Djenghis Khan sacked and destroyed the city in 1216. Timur Tamerlan built a new city right next to it, as it seems to be the custom in Asia. The ruins of Marakanda could keep ten Schliemanns busy for twenty years. The treasures buried in this earth are unimaginable.

The compound of El-Zafaran's friend hid inside an inconspicuous mud wall like all houses in Central Asia. A single gate permitted access to a large courtyard. The living quarters, small, separate, single-story houses were glued to the inside of the wall, daily life took place in the shade of two high Chinar trees. In summer they also sleep in this yard.

We were received at the gate by a servant who disappeared with my letter. After a considerable time the man returned and led us into one of the houses. A fairly small room, bare except for a few loose cushions and a precious oriental rug covering the floor. We took off our shoes and settled crossed-legged at a low table. Tea was brought. We were asked to wait.

In due time the master of the house appeared, a bent old man with a full white beard and sharp, penetrating dark eyes. He wore a long black cassock lined with blue silk, a splendid black turban on his head. His clasped hands played with the beads of an Islamic rosary behind his back. He introduced himself as Asisan Ali Ramitani, the teacher and friend of Anastasios El-Zafaran. A poignant figure.

With infinite kindness he bade us welcome in his house, inquired after El-Zafaran's health, and our plans and wishes. I told him that my interest was the history of the Sufi orders, and because we were going to China, the relationships between the early Sufi and the Chinese Buddhists.

Ramitani smiled, the same questions had occupied El-Zafaran's curiosity for twenty-five years. Because El-Zafaran did not speak Chinese, he had apparently burdened me with this unfinished search. I assured him that it was also my own curiosity.

Well, said the old man, I had come to the right place. Many of the great Sufi brotherhoods had been founded in Samarkand in the thirteenth century. Sufism was an invention of the Turkish-speaking people. One of the oldest orders, the Kwadjagani, the Masters of Wisdom, whom he belonged to, had been founded in Samarkand around 1220 by one Abd al-Khaliq Gudjuwani. One of his own ancestors had been the order's fourth Grandmaster a hundred years later. In the following centuries half a dozen other orders emerged in Samarkand. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Sufi held almost the entire Islamic culture in their hands, poetry, jurisprudence, architecture, calligraphy, philosophy, and, of course, the interpretation of the Koran—from Khorasan to Spain. The

teachers of the great Medresses in Samarkand, Tashkent and Buchara had all been Sufi. And still were.

Early Sufism had absorbed many influences. But the Sufi had always been more interested in mystical contemplation than in history. He believed that El-Zafaran's Syrian-Christian background was responsible for his interest in history. El-Zafaran had a big head and a Russian doctorate degree on top of that, not very useful in the search for otherworldly wisdom.

El-Zafaran's academic studies were a great surprise to me. Ramitani laughed. Had I not known of them? El-Zafaran had studied in Samarkand for many years as his pupil. Restless as he was, he had gone to Konya in Turkey to learn turning from the Mevlevi, and when these exercises had still left his big head dissatisfied, he had acquired a doctorate in comparative languages in St. Petersburg. Only then had he realized that working in gold was a better way to gain insight than studying with his head alone. But he had never given up his interest in such questions as the connections between the Sufi and the Chinese Buddhists.

Ramitani admitted that he did not have much to say about the Chinese subject, but all the more about the western influences on central Asian Sufism. From the fifth century through the reign of the Mongol Khans as emperors of China in the fourteenth, Persians and especially Syrians had been very active in Khorasan. The Syrians had brought Syrian-Christianity of the Nestoria persuasion, the Persians Zoroastrian and Manichean ideas to Turkestan, which when combined with Arabic-Islamic and late-Greek influences had led to the great flowering of Turkish-Persian culture in Central Asia, of which Sufism was the most beautiful blossom.

In his opinion, the Chinese contribution to this synthesis was restricted to meditation and teaching methods that Sufism had appropriated. On religious arts, poetry, and music, the most important manifestations of Sufism, the Chinese had had no influence.

Amazed that some of the outwardly so unpretentious Sufi were highly educated men, I asked him for his own educational background. And, lo and behold, he was a widely traveled man. He had obtained an Islamic doctorate from the university in Damascus. From those years dated his knowledge of Syrian and the friendship with El-Zafaran. Later he spent several years in Cairo to finally return to Samarkand. He spoke five languages, besides Russian, which he spoke reluctantly, English, French, Farsi, and Turkish.

When we parted Ramitani suggested with a smile that I should come to Samarkand for a longer time. "El-Zafaran praised your progress in turning, gold-smithing, and calligraphy. You could teach Western natural sciences in exchange for instructions in traditional Islamic knowledge."

Does this prospect shock you, my Georgian princess? It is a great temptation for me. Will you follow me here one day?

I embrace you, my only purpose in my life—until now.

Your husband

Konrad

Her heart went out to him. Yes, she would go with him to Central Asia some day.

For several weeks Alexandra followed Konrad's travels to China in her mind, anxiously waiting for another letter from him. One night, while everybody was asleep, deeply worried,

Alexandra decided to *fly* to China in search of him. What harm would there be in trying? If she could fly to Svaneti, she could also reach China. Sitting with crossed legs on her bed, she concentrated all her anxious intensity and love on Konrad.

After a while she did take off and rose above the sleeping city into the dark night. But the bright light, which had previously guided her, did not appear. She was surrounded by cold darkness. She tried to find a star, or the moon to direct her towards the east, but it was all in vain. The world was pitch dark. She became more and more alarmed. Strange apparitions appeared from the night. The city had long disappeared. She could not make out the features of the land below her. Where was she?

She began to call. "Gocha, I need you, I cannot find my way in this darkness. Gochaaa! Gochaaa, help me!"

Alexandra, once again, had the sickening feeling of falling from the night at increasing speed towards the dark earth below. She tried to roll herself into a ball and lost her balance, she tilted sideways, and dropped with a terrible scream.

Claudia, awoken by her scream, shook her. "Alexandra! You are having a nightmare." She woke in Claudia's arms.

"My God, what are you doing? You are bathed in sweat. Where were you?"

Alexandra with a racing heart, a dreadful fright in her eyes, stared at her friend who bedded her down and got a wet washcloth to put on her forehead.

Alexandra closed her eyes. With a deep sigh she kissed Claudia's hand. "I tried to reach Konrad and got lost in the night. It was a horrible dream-flight. Don't ever try to fly by yourself on a moonless night."

Claudia crept into her bed and held her tight much like Alexandra had done in Adishi. Slowly Alexandra calmed down. They finally fell asleep together.

And then Gocha appeared to Alexandra. She looked warm and motherly and not at all frightening. "You cried for me, what happened? I was asleep, and it took me some time to reach you. I see your friend Dia is with you."

Alexandra told her that she had been searching for Konrad in China. She was worried about him.

"You must never go on a journey when your soul is troubled. You are not complete then and in that state your *breath-soul* may try to follow your *shadow-soul*, which does the flying. If the *breath-soul* leaves your body you die. It was not the darkness of the night, if you had been whole you would have found the light to guide you. But death threw darkness over your mind. You have to thank Dia that she brought you back safely."

Alexandra woke, Gocha had disappeared too fast. She had so many questions to ask. How to use flying to heal people? How to contact Konrad? But the old witch had disappeared.

She kissed Claudia next to her, who opened her eyes with a smile.

"Yes, I also saw and heard Gocha explain what you have done wrong. I see that my reluctance to fly is not unfounded, it is dangerous considering the little knowledge we have."

"But you know," said Alexandra, "it was the first time that I tried to go on such a journey on my own free will. Now I know that it can be done, and I will certainly try again. Would you come with me to the office tomorrow? I have a very ill patient coming to see me, I want to try to heal him. I have to unravel this mystery. You can rescue me, if I have another hard landing."

Claudia promised, and hand in hand they went back to sleep.

The patient, an old man suffering from a severe case of arthritis, could not touch his palms with the fingertips. His joints were swollen to twice their normal size, and his spine was beginning to be affected. He could no longer straighten out and walked with his upper body bent forward.

Alexandra introduced the man to Claudia, then told him that she was going to try an experiment at healing him without medicine. Would he agree?

"Doctor Rost, I am in such pain that I am willing to try anything you feel could help me. What do you want me to do?"

He should sit in the chair and do nothing, he could read a journal. She gave him the journal and sat with crossed legs on the floor at a distance from him.

"Don't be afraid," Alexandra said to Claudia in German, "sit quietly over there, don't close your eyes or try to follow me. You will know if I am in trouble."

Alexandra closed her eyes and as Gocha had taught her in Adishi, when she had seen Claudia's lifeless body on the altar in the sacred grove, she concentrated on the sick man, letting all her love and care flood herself. Suddenly the raven perched next to her. "Don't think about healing the man, just envelop him completely with your love. Become one with him. You will know when you are done. It takes only a few minutes to accomplish a healing."

Guided by the raven her *shadow-soul* went out to the old man and wrapped itself around him. A strong sensuous tension spread from her center through her entire body.

After a while the feeling lessened. It was over. She came back easily. She opened her eyes and smiled at Claudia, who let out a deep sigh.

The man was still reading the journal.

"Did you feel anything?" she asked.

No, nothing unusual, maybe some comfortable warmth in his joints. Nothing had changed. He looked at his swollen hands.

Alexandra offered him her hand to help him out of the chair, and when the man reached out for her, he shouted. "I can bend my fingers. Look! They don't hurt at all. What did you do?"

And not only that, he could straighten his back, not completely, but further than he had been able to for years. In tears the man thanked Alexandra.

She told him, "Because this was a medical experiment, don't mention it to anybody. Come back in a few days, and let's see whether the improvements will stay. Maybe I have to try it once more."

On leaving, the old man tried to kiss her hand, she had to practically push him out the door.

"Helena can you come a few minutes? I have to tell you something very exciting."

The three women closeted themselves in Alexandra's office, and Alexandra told Helena what had happened. Helena did not believe her until Claudia swore that she had seen the man get up, bend his hands, and walk out. Helena shook her head, this was a miracle cure.

"No," insisted Alexandra, "it is really not, I just put this man's body back into contact with his soul, he healed himself. Or if you want to hear it in conventional medical terms, I mobilized his deranged immune system and that took care of his bad joints. Let's see whether his condition will remain, only then may we celebrate."

After the first excitement was over, Alexandra noticed how exhausted she was. "My energy walked away with this man," she said with a happy laugh.

They closed their practice and went home together.

When the man returned much excited a few days later, Alexandra found that the swellings of his joints had diminished somewhat, his back was still bent, but neither it nor his hands gave him any pain.

Alexandra controlled her euphoria carefully: she had succeeded in curing the man—it was a miracle after all! To prevent being mobbed by people seeking help, Alexandra sternly ordered the man to keep strict silence about this dramatic event. He was a simple person, so she did the frivolous thing of putting the fear of a relapse into him should the word of his cure spread.

Alexandra called skeptical Helena to witness the positive changes in the man's joints and posture. Helena was very pensive.

In the following months Alexandra tried to cure other patients in this manner but made the discouraging discovery that she was successful only half the time. The cases were similar, all involved arthritic swellings. Sometimes the inflammation receded and sometimes nothing happened at all. She could not explain why. The intensity of her involvement seemed the same, her exhaustion too. However, whatever improvement she did get seemed permanent, at least for the weeks she had been trying this method.

Perhaps, she thought, I don't love them all equally. That would be the simplest explanation. But maybe other unspecified dissimilarities existed between these cases. For a long time the old man remained her greatest success.

Konrad's Return from China

St. Petersburg 1912

Putuo Shan Dao, 15 December 1911

Beloved woman,

I can hardly believe it, we did reach the island of Putuo Shan! From the city of Ningbo we took a boat, which was crowded with pilgrims and weekend tourists. We were the only foreigners and were automatically put into the first class where we found ourselves in the company of distinguished-looking older businessmen and exalted much younger ladies, many in Western clothes.

Wei-ji, our Chinese guide, looked at this crowd for a while and then whispered. "Mr. Konrad, what monks did you say live on this island?" She giggled. "Do you notice? These are expensive ladies of easy virtue. They are on a weekend tryst with these businessmen."

It was obvious that she was right: Putuo Shan was a favorite weekend destination for tourists and Buddhist pilgrims alike. The pilgrims populated the lower decks and were easily recognizable by the large yellow pilgrims' bags they carried.

We soon found that the island is an idyllic paradise of old trees, fish restaurants, wine cellars and Ch'an monasteries. A nostalgic, beautiful place. The China I had dreamed of, which no longer exists elsewhere.

For an hour the boat navigated down the Ningbo river past docks and warehouses and later through meadows and harvested rice paddies, to take us eventually into a sea colored yellow by the silt of the Jangtse river.

Junks with red, brown, and yellow Chinese sails crossed between the many islands of the Jangtse archipelago. The sun was low and flooded this picture with warm light. A hand-colored engraving from an old edition of Marco Polo's travels.

Putuo Shan Dao, "Putuo Mountain Island," named after the minor mountain on the island which was crowned by a mast with colored flags and banners. We landed in a sandy bay, a rickshaw took us from the pier to the island village.

It had become dark. We walked along cobblestone streets, between medieval stone houses, trees, illuminated scenes, people eating in a basement tavern, a group of pilgrims negotiating accommodations with an inn owner in the wan light coming from the open door of the hostel. Only their yellow shoulder-bags and faces were visible. A flight of stairs between yellow-painted walls overhung by Cryptomerias finally led us into a large interior courtyard with a huge Gingko tree in the center. Unexpected electrical lighting, a three-story hotel, in the dining room sat our acquaintances from the first class with their girlfriends.

"Ah," laughed Wei-ji, "here are the monks!"

She negotiated two rooms, one with a balcony for us, a cheaper one for herself. When we returned to the dining room the kitchen had closed. Chinese hotels offer meals at pedantically precise times. The personnel shrugged. "Eat in the village!"

In a frivolous mood we returned to the streets of the nocturnal village. A fleeting

impression of being in France, it must have been the unusual multi-story stone houses. We came across a big trough, the village laundry, deserted except for a couple, kissing in the dark! Not far from this place, on a sandy flat next to a lake—a cinema! A humming projector, an improvised screen, a dozen people on rickety chairs under the open sky. We were speechless.

George discovered the restaurant. Nothing but shrimp! Mountains of red shrimp, briefly cooked, with everything on, heads, legs, feelers, hair. George pulled off the head of one, pried the meat out and ate it, as if he had done this all his life. Wei-ji applauded, and I shook my head. And then it turned out that George as a child used to fish for crayfish in the summer in the Mingrelian streams! "We ate them raw!" And why had he made such a fuss about eating shrimp in Peking?

He laughs. "Remember, I ate them with gusto! I did not know that shrimp looked like pink worms when one cooks them peeled. Where is the wine? They must be washed down with a glass of wine!"

The restaurant owner sent his boy out, who returned with three bottles of a heavy sweetish white wine. By midnight we had eaten three buckets of shrimp and drunk all the wine.

Our visit to Putuo Shan Dao began with a tipsy night.

The morning was sunny, the world in new colors. The village did look like it was from southern France. The lake where the films had been shown turned out to be full of fat red and golden carps, the sacred pond of the monastery to which led a zigzag footbridge, to confuse the ghosts who can only run straight!

A yellow-washed wall surrounded the monastery complex. The man-high character "fo" for Buddha painted in black strokes on the wall. It consists of the sign for "self" crossed by two vertical strokes, "the man with no self." The main meditation hall towered, slightly elevated at the center surrounded by small buildings, living quarters, a kitchen, prayer halls with Buddhist images. Everything very simple. Ancient Ginkgo trees gave shade. A rain of golden leaves fell onto the cobblestones. Like in the fairy tale I filled my pockets with the sacred gold.

From the meditation hall came the muffled booms of a heavy drum, above it the chant of a Sutra reading. After every line the jingle of a bell. At the end of a verse a great gong.

The monks wore ash-gray linen jackets and long pants buttoned at the bottom, shaven heads, many young neophytes, intelligent-looking older monks.

Through a side entrance I stole into the meditation hall and surprised two novices in an intimate conversation, gesturing hands. Startled, they dashed off. The sound of the big drum filled the hall, resonated in my chest. Under the lowered gaze of a colossal, seated Buddha two rows of monks recited a Sutra. Throughout the room knelt pilgrims on small cushions. Every time the gong sounded they bowed, touching the bare stone floor with their foreheads.

I seated myself in the farthest corner on an empty cushion and abandoned myself to the sound of the drum and the chanting. Then I got on my knees and joined in the bowing. I discovered that the bending down presses the air out of one's lungs. One has only to lose oneself entirely to this rhythm, then this becomes an effective meditation exercise accessible to anyone. The pilgrims mechanically repeated a formula

which I did not understand.

When I found Wei-ji and George they were having a glass of wine in the village tavern. George laughed, he had feared that I had gone straight to nirvana. They were discussing my cremation, hoping that the incineration of my mortal remains would free the world of my restless foreign spirit (gui-hu) and I would no longer threaten my friends' sense of reality. Wei-ji exploded in a peal of laughter. I must have looked nonplussed. But I could understand these two soulless materialists, they were bored.

In the afternoon we decided to climb the mountain. On our way we passed a nunnery with an over-life-sized reclining Buddha in Paranirvana, the death of the historical Buddha Gautama. The nuns had shaven heads and wore no headgear. Strange, how similar men and women look without hair.

The path to the top of the island mountain climbed straight up the steepest slope, by way of stairs! It was hot and humid. We passed two young girls in heavy clothing who threw themselves on the stairs, got up and two steps onwards threw themselves down again. In the heat of noon!

Wei-ji could not hide her disgust. She said guardedly. "Mr. Konrad, these are Tibetan girls, aren't they embarrassing? No Chinese would make a show of his emotions like that." I was overcome by contradictory feelings. The surprise of seeing Tibetans for the first time, compassion with their devout prostrations, annoyance with Wei-ji's Chinese arrogance—and the eminently sensible Confucian insight that man should leave religion to the clerics who specialize in such things. I am afraid it will cost me some time to resolve these contradictions in my mind.

At the top of the mountain opened a panoramic view across numerous islands and the open yellow sea, and then I discovered that the flags on the mast—squares of colored cloth frayed by wind and weather—were densely printed with Tibetan letters, prayer flags, so far from the Land of the White Clouds!

Exhausted and thirsty, we asked for a cup of tea in a monastery which cowered, protected from the wind, in a hollow on the far side of the mountain. The brother doorkeeper produced an intelligent-looking monk of my age who introduced himself in English as the abbot and inquired after our wishes.

Over a cup of tea, its leaves swimming—one strains them with one's teeth—I collected my courage and asked the abbot for the history of early Ch'an. In contrast to the Sufi, the Chinese have a very pronounced sense for history. The abbot gave us a brief description of this Chinese variant of Buddhism. Bodhidharma, the mythical founder, came to China from southern India in the sixth century. The characteristic Chinese form evolved a hundred years later. By the thirteenth century Ch'an had displaced all other schools of Buddhism in China. In this period it must have reached the Sufi in Turkestan.

To my question, what are the specific methods and doctrines of Ch'an, the man was silent. Eventually he smiled. "I assume, that you know nothing about Ch'an or its Japanese variant Zen?"

I nodded.

"Well, Ch'an uses a verbal and a rational method, which one can practice, but which defy description in words... Ch'an reduced the complex and slow Indian

meditational techniques, with which we search for enlightenment and understanding of ourselves, to their minimum essence. The methods of Ch'an are simple and practical: sit before a wall and count your breath. After some years of this meditation you will have a sudden experience of enlightened understanding. To speed up this process, the teacher occasionally gives his student a puzzle question, a conundrum to meditate on, which does not have a verbal solution. It is supposed to teach the student that life is not rationally comprehensible. The last step of Ch'an teaching does away with all words."

He took a piece of paper and a brush. "One typical answer to your question about the essence of Ch'an is this."

With a single movement of his wrist he drew a perfect ling on the paper. The abbot smiled at me expectantly, picked up his cup, and took a sip of tea. I felt an irresistible temptation to show off, asked for the brush, and with a lucky hand drew an equally perfect ling. The man stared at me, puzzled.

Proud that I had successfully surprised him, I did not notice what happened next until it had happened. The abbot made an involuntary movement with his hand and spilled his tea over my ling.

*I was speechless.
And then I understood. Complete spontaneity is the way to all insight.*

Slowly a smile went over the man's face that turned into unrestrained laughter. He rose, and in an entirely un-Chinese outburst of joy slapped me on the shoulder.

How is it possible that I have never understood that you, my extraordinary challenge, have been trying to teach me this insight for twelve years...?

We shall sail from Shanghai in three days and arrive in Batumi in the first week of February. I want to spend a week with Irakli and Tamunia-Deda and be home by the middle of February. I shall finally hold you in my arms again.

Be well until then.

*Your longing husband,
Konrad*

The whole family awaited the long-lost husband, father, and brother-in-law with flowers, hugs, and kisses at the railway station. This time little Sophia rode on Konrad's shoulders, while Otto walked next to him talking about Konrad's adventures in Samarkand and his rides with Uncle Niko.

At home Konrad opened his valise and spread his presents. Five lengths of magnificent printed silk, one a shade of light green that grew darker towards the bottom where a band of stylized field flowers bloomed in all colors. A yellow pilgrim's bag stamped with the large red woodprints the monasteries of Putuo Shan Dao. A box of ivory chopsticks imprinted with Chinese characters for all to try. A precious ink-stone for his calligraphy. Two necklaces of enameled beads and a strange yellow mask with a beaked snout and the big teeth of a monkey.

"What is this, Daddy?" asked Otto taken aback.

Konrad laughed. "The mask of the Monkey King, *Wang Hou*, who invented grammar and came to China as the emissary of the Buddha. These days he is the beloved acrobatic joker of the Chinese Opera. Let me show you."

Konrad dug a thick, battered sketchbook from the bottom of his luggage. "See," he showed one of the drawings to Otto, "here is a scene from the opera, and there is the Monkey King making a somersault before the bearded King and his ladies."

Alexandra looked over Otto's shoulder. "Did you do these drawings?"

"Yes," Konrad said happily. "I discovered that I could still draw. I used to sketch at school. You have seen me draw the flowers I collected?"

Alexandra put the volume on the table and leafed through it. His entire journey in pictures! Turbaned men on the Registran in Samarkand, the shores of Lake Baikal, Peiking, the Gardens of Suchow, and George gorging himself on shrimp on Putuo Shan Island. She embraced him and gave him a big kiss.

Otto had disappeared and now returned with a large map of Konrad's journey, which he had drawn. They spread the map and Konrad, full of admiration for Otto's work, pointed at the places where the sketches came from.

Meanwhile Niko had put on the monkey mask and was jumping around the room flailing his arms. He sank on his knees before Konrad laughing. "Welcome home Mepo Konradi!"

"The mask brings out the underused Georgian theatrical talents in you, Herr Physicist," joked Konrad. "But can you also do somersaults?"

"Your furniture is in the way. Give me a bigger stage!" Niko retorted and made a headstand wiggling his feet.

Claudia stood on the side and with serious eyes wistfully watched the exultant family scene until Alexandra took her into her arms, hiding her own tears.

Konrad turned to them "How is your medical practice doing?"

Claudia's eyes lit up. "Alexandra is performing miracles. Had I not seen her myself I would not believe it. She cured the severe arthritic swellings of an old man."

Konrad looked at his wife, who smiled quietly. He could see how happy she was to have him back.

"Konrad," Claudia said, "my father is inviting Alexandra to come to Munich to help us write a paper on the psychological aspects of healing."

Konrad sat up straight and shook his head. "Your father is interested in psychics?"

Claudia glanced at Alexandra, begging for her help. "Ever since father's visit to the *sema* with you he has puzzled over these phenomena. Now I have witnessed Alexandra at work. Her results are fantastic, and she can explain what she is doing better than anyone father and I have seen. Would you let her go? Please!"

Konrad promised to think about it. He knew, of course, that Alexandra would do exactly as *she* saw fit, and that he would let her travel.

Later that night, alone with him, Alexandra told Konrad of her abortive attempt to search for him in China.

Bewildered he took her into his arms and held her tight. "Dear woman, I vaguely sensed that you were in great danger, but could not guess what it was. I tried unsuccessfully to call you. I am relieved that Claudia watched over you."

A few days later Alexandra and Helena came home highly elated. Alexandra had healed another patient, a woman with skin cancer, a small cancerous growth on the neck. Within the

twenty minutes of her healing engagement, the growth had simply melted down. Only a small remnant was left. This time Alexandra shook her head in disbelief, whilst Helena was almost ecstatic. How was this possible? Even modern radiation treatment could not have removed that growth in so short a time.

Helena made an inviting gesture with her hand. "I should learn this method, there are so many cases, which, if we are honest, are in effect intractable. First arthritis and now cancer!"

"But look Helena, my healings are only successful in one out of two or three cases. Most often nothing happens. Again let us celebrate in a couple of months when I will know for sure that the remission is permanent. Nobody is cured of cancer until he has been free of it for several years."

This provoked another heated discussion on healing. Niko played the hardened skeptic. Faced with the incontrovertible medical facts that these two sober women reported, Konrad did not join him and asked, "What do you actually do?"

She described how she sat in the corner, the patient reading in a chair. He was not actively involved in the healing process. As soon as she had conquered her mind, she concentrated all her energies on the patient.

She stared into space. "I cannot describe this process well. I leave my physical body behind, it just sits there, and with part of my 'soul' I 'fly' into this embrace. I get completely lost in the person and become one with him."

She waved her hand. "That is all I can describe to you. I cannot explain *how* it works, I can give you only a general 'medical' theory of what goes on in the patient.

"I think what happens is that I mobilize the patient's immune system. The patient heals himself. Why the immune system should have been paralyzed before I cannot say. But I have the suspicion that in the cases which I have been able to cure, the patient has been suffering from a difficult psychological trauma or has problems in his family. In any case, later the euphoric patients invariably tell me of tormenting events that they feel are related to the illness. I will start asking my patients questions. Maybe I will learn why I am successful in some and not in other cases."

Konrad had listened with great concentration, chin in hand. "Do you think you could teach this to others, say to Helena?"

Alexandra stared at him and then said animatedly. "I have been looking for a way to experimentally prove my theory. Your suggestion would be an excellent test of my understanding."

Claudia objected. "I have not been able to learn to heal or to fly, although I have been involved with you or watched you work several times. Alexandra, you were born with this talent. I am awed by your healing. I am even scared by it. As we have both found out since Adishi, it is dangerous to let one's *shadow-soul* fly out of body. Look, Alexandra, you had this spontaneous experience when Otto was born, which took away your fears and makes it possible for you to experiment at the edge of death in ways that scare me. You cannot expect this fearlessness in others. I don't think you could or should teach your method to others."

"You have only to lose your fear of death!" mumbled Alexandra.

Niko pulled a face. "Lexako, you are presumptuous."

"No, not at all!"

But Alexandra knew that she could not explain her approach in the presence of

everybody.

"Konrad, will you let me go to Munich for three weeks next year?"

Konrad smiled. She had landed not particularly elegantly or heroically, and stood on solid ground again.

"I know that I cannot keep you back, München is too much of a temptation for you. Maybe it will do you good to have to defend your effusive feelings of success in presence of your skeptical friend Dahl. We are no match for you any longer—do go!"

Alexandra was relieved and happy, and all forgave her once more her euphoric arrogance. She would come to Munich in the spring of 1913.

When Niko and Claudia left, Claudia hugged Alexandra. "You said you envied me our intellectual life in Munich, but whenever I am with you the most unexpected things happen. Thank you, Alexandra, for this most stimulating time. When you come, you must teach me how to get over my fears, will you?"

In September 1913 Tamara's ambitions were ambushed by fate. She came to see Alexandra at her office to tell her that she was pregnant. Alexandra inquired carefully. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to have the baby! You finished your degree when you were pregnant, why should I not be able to do the same? The more complicated problem is how to tell my father?"

"I could help you there. But will you agree to marry Vladimir?"

Tamara lowered her head. "Yes," she said almost inaudibly.

"Then it should be possible to solve your problems. Send me that future husband of yours, and I will tell him what he has to do."

Alexandra began to laugh. "Chin up! Now I want to know the exact date on which you conceived and the exact dates of your last two periods. You promised me this information for my statistics, do you remember?"

Tamara blushed. She had kept a careful diary of these dates over the years, which had helped her from getting pregnant. This time they had been overcome by passion. It happened exactly in the middle between her periods.

Alexandra had a conference with Vladimir at her office. He joked embarrassed when he entered. "Doctor Dadiani-Rost, I am suffering from a case of dementia that needs immediate attention before I flip out completely."

Alexandra did not pull his leg or give him a lecture, she was brief and matter of fact. He should write a letter to Irakli Dadiani asking for his help in persuading David Dadeshkeliani to cede him his daughter in marriage. He should not mention Tamara's condition.

She added, "I will write to my father, explain the urgency of your request, and ask him to offer his house for your wedding, so that Tamara would not have to ride to Svaneti in her condition."

She looked him straight in the eye. "We have to shield Tamara from the prying eyes of the Svani. I am sure my father will offer his house for the occasion. He can work out the details with David."

Vladimir smiled gratefully and kissed her outstretched hand. Alexandra flipped her hand

around, palm up. She laughed. "Sir, this consultation will be twenty rubles. You are not indigent. To get off with a mere hand-kiss is far too cheap!"

He went purple, and she gently shoved him out the door.

"Be well and pull yourself together, old friend!"

A week later Alexandra and Helena prepared a charming, informal engagement party for the pair and their friends.

Vladimir discussed his predicament with his father, who finally gave him the dressing down he deserved. His father praised Alexandra's suggestions and regretted that Vladimir had never introduced him to this long-standing friend. "You were invited to her parent's house in Tiflis, why have you never brought her to our country house?"

Vladimir mumbled something about Alexandra being very busy as a physician, and added reproachfully that since his mother's death their home missed the hostess who could have received this unusual woman. For the same reason he had never taken Tamara home either. The conversation ended with Vladimir's father inviting all his close friends to spend a weekend with him in the country.

When Vladimir told Alexandra of the invitation, she called his father to thank him and offered that she would feel honored and happy to act as Vladimir's female protectress in the forthcoming wedding proceedings.

At first Vladimir's father was taken aback by her unusual suggestion, but then, the practical politician he was, turned the matter around and teasing her most charmingly, offered Alexandra the vacant place at his side. Would he be allowed to invite her for dinner at a restaurant of her choice to make her acquaintance?

Alexandra was about to fulfil the role as lover, sister, and mother to Vladimir with which Konrad had teased her. She dressed carefully, elegant but not seductively. Vladimir's father, all gentleman, picked her up in the big car. The familiar chauffeur did not blink an eyelash. A *séparée* with a table for two awaited them at the restaurant.

Completely relaxed, they enjoyed the excellent food and a bottle of *Premier Grand Cru Pommard 1907*. Since the horrid evening with Manovsky she had not eaten so elegantly.

M. Nomikoff apologized that Vladimir had spent weeks at her parent's house, and he, for lack of a wife and hostess, had never invited her and her husband. He tactfully inquired about her Georgian background, her father's profession, her mother. Alexandra described her childhood, Uncle Ilia Chavchavadze, rides through the beautiful Georgian countryside.

Slowly and almost imperceptibly M. Nomikoff steered the conversation to Vladimir's visit to Svaneti. He had, of course, heard many tales of the beauty and wildness of this part of Georgia. Alexandra teased him about his romantic notions, and then remarked that he was about to acquire a daughter-in-law from one of the oldest Georgian families.

"You are right, Mrs. Dadiani-Rost, I do probably have a rather distorted concept of the Dadashkeliani. I am ashamed that I have never met Tamara, so many things have been neglected since my wife died." He thoughtfully studied his large signet ring with the coat of arms of his family. "Forgive me, but I had a notion of a rather wild and uncultured clan up there in those mountains. But Vladimir assures me that Tamara is not only intelligent but also well educated. I had the idea the people in the valleys of the Caucasus were all Mohammedans."

Alexandra let out a peal of laughter. "Not only did they become Christians five hundred years before the Russian Bojars forcefully dunked their subjects in the Dnieper, but some of the oldest Georgian churches are in Svaneti. David Dadeshkeliani is a highly cultured man with a large library of valuable incunabulae and ancient religious art, besides he is a most charming man."

Uncharacteristically fidgety, Nomikoff blushed. "What do you suggest should be done to redress my son's indiscretion? He told me that you wrote to your father to ask him to help. I find this very laudable. It alone would earn you the position of Vladimir's mother at this wedding."

He bowed to her. "Would you think that a letter from me to your father would be in order?"

She nodded. "I am sure it would be highly appreciated. My father is a modern, worldly man, not at all narrow-minded. I did tell him the entire story of Vladimir and Tamara, which I advised the two not to broach to her father as yet."

M. Nomikoff raised his glass to her. "May I drink to our acquaintance, you are a perfectly charming lady. I should count myself lucky to find you at my side during the occasion. I trust your husband does not object to a temporary liaison of his beautiful, young wife with this old man?"

She smiled at him and reassured him that Konrad fully approved of her engagement.

He took the trouble of accompanying her home in his car and kissed her gloved hand most respectfully.

Alexandra was immensely pleased with herself, as woman and as diplomat.

Irakli wrote back immediately assuring Alexandra that he would negotiate the wedding to take place at his house in the last week of May. David Dadeshkeliani's reply took much longer. The letter was stamped in Tiflis. Apparently David had got on his horse and traveled to Tiflis to discuss the case with Irakli, who must have explained the facts to his cousin.

The tone of David Dadeshkeliani's letter was friendly and gracious, he welcomed Vladimir as his son-in-law and praised him as a person, but raised several reservations. One of them was the question of Vladimir's profession. Would he be able to support Tamara and a child in time of need? Tamara was assured of a generous dowry, and he assumed that Vladimir's inheritance would allow him to support himself and a family without any gainful occupation, but the future was not auspicious. His inherited support was not guaranteed to the end of their lives, as it had been for generations.

Tamara raged against this admonition. Her father was an old-fashioned man. The uncertain future was exactly why she had become a lawyer. But Vladimir was less sanguine, he felt reprimanded, asked to pull himself together and write a serious, publishable novel. "The Last Princess of Svaneti" was being printed in Paris, and the publisher had promised him a sizable return. But, of course, he could not publicly own up to this source of income. It was most vexing.

This time, Alexandra did not spare him her biting sarcasm, and he admitted that she had some justification for her dressing him down.

He sighed. "It is hard to shape up to conventional bourgeois reality as a spoiled heir to a good fortune."

Tamara defended Vladimir fiercely against Alexandra's accusations. Vladimir finally

suggested he would find some translation work—many famous Russian writers had supported themselves with translations—while he started a new, serious novel in order to show to his future father-in-law that he could do that too. To Alexandra's pointed question as to what this novel would be, Vladimir was silent.

Alexandra would go to Munich and return by boat to Batumi and Tiflis to celebrated Tamara's and Vladimir's wedding at her father's house.

Alexandra's Journey to Munich

1913

Alexandra shared a second-class sleeper compartment with three others. Her upper berth afforded some privacy, but did get hot and stuffy at night. East Prussia passed cold and gray by her window. Pouring rain had transformed the land into one vast lake. Eydtkuhnen, the memories of their long wait in the snow and the night at the Bredows, lay behind her.

She spent a good amount of time sitting on her bed reading and meditating. At home she did breath-counting exercises every morning after she woke up. "To separate my dreams from the new day," she would tell Konrad.

These exercises had become an effective way of renewing her energies and controlling the tensions of her days, to let her deep feelings and hunches surface and to prepare for her patients. She was convinced that these exercises had released her healing powers.

She now experimented with a less-structured method of visualizing spontaneous images floating from the depth of her subconscious past her observant mind, unpremeditated. She looked at them, took them in, and discarded them for a new image.

Among pictures from the past—Otto on the sleigh ride in the full-moon night, her ride with Dato to Shuamta—all of a sudden deeply disturbing images surfaced: the East Prussian landscape appeared covered with corpses floating in blood. She quickly wrenched herself out of this frightening state, but the latent afterimage returned whenever she looked at the pouring rain.

"An outgrowth of my hidden fears and anxieties," she told herself.

Suddenly the conductor stood before her. "Frau Doktor Dadiani-Rost, may I please see your ticket?"

Perplexed, Alexandra looked at the smiling man.

"Where are your son and husband? Don't you remember me and the night you took the pregnant woman to Gumbinnen?"

Now Alexandra recognized the man who had asked her for help seven years ago. It was not possible, was it?

"Yes," he said, "I am still traveling the same beat between Eydtkuhnen and Berlin, three times a week. Our meeting *is* a coincidence. Would you care to join me for a cup of tea? Or do you prefer an excellent Belgian coffee?"

Alexandra chose the coffee to revive her spirits and banish her black thoughts.

To her own surprise, she did most of the talking—was it because she had talked a whole day only to herself? The things that had accumulated in her mind for weeks just flowed from her. She had tried to keep those events to herself, especially her success in healing people.

The man was less surprised than she had expected.

"Here in Masuria live many women who do that, and in Kashubia, through which we will pass this evening, all the women seem to have a sixth sense. They are famous, the Kashubian Sibyls." He laughed.

But then he looked at her with serious eyes. "*Frau Doktor*, you are an educated lady. You live in the Russian capital, but you are not Russian. You are very different from the

Russians, and you have a German husband. I am an uneducated man from Gumbinnen, but I get around a lot. I see the rich people from Berlin and the aloof Russian aristocrats on my train and get scared. They don't know where they are going and don't seem to care. I feel a terrible war is coming. We have a clairvoyante woman, *eine hellseherische Frau*, in my village who on New Year's Eve prophesied blood raining from heaven and pestilence and murder. You are a clairvoyante too, what do *you* see?"

Alexandra sighed and thought. My vision does not go away. I don't want to be a clairvoyant. I don't need to know the future. I want to keep my freedom to act every day, at every moment. I don't want to stare like Persephone and Mother paralyzed by precognition at the future.

She knew she was lying to the man. "I really cannot see the future."

They arrived in Berlin in the early morning hours, still raining, a thin, steady drizzle. The farmers will be happy, she thought, but the city looked drab and uninviting. She would have to spend the whole day in Berlin to catch the direct train to Munich at night.

She went to the station restaurant, a dark place smelling of stale cigarette smoke and the metallic odor of locomotives and hot brakes. She ordered a substantial *Mittagessen* and looked around. The place was depressing. Memories of the evening with Konrad at the *Cabaret* returned, the smug, well-fed burghers, the nude dancing girls, the shallow, dubious ditties they had sung. Strange, she thought, despite Konrad I don't like Berlin

When a family of five under the stern, paternal supervision of a man in uniform settled at the next table and ordered beer and *Schweinebraten*, she knew she would not be able to sit in this place until evening. She paid, collected her belongings, and went to the information desk in search of another, earlier connection.

The officious clerk offered her a train to Hanover, where she could catch the express from Hamburg to Munich, an hour longer ride. For a small amount of additional money she fled the town.

Her connection in Hanover arrived after less than twenty minutes of waiting. She walked along the train's corridor in search of a seat. Looking through the sliding doors of the compartments she had detected a convenient window seat. A young woman sat on the opposite bench. She started. What was going on today? She looked again—Clara Westhoff was sitting there.

Alexandra took a deep breath, and carefully opened the sliding-door. With a smile she asked, "Is this seat still available?"

Clara looked up and very uncharacteristically screamed, "Alexandra, *mein Gott*, where do you come from?"

Alexandra sank into the strong arms of her friend.

"I am being pursued by apparitions, but your embrace feels real. It is good to find you. I fled Berlin. I am going to Munich, and you?"

"I too, after spending the winter in Worpswede, I am going to Berg for the summer. Sit down, you look tired. Do you come directly from St. Petersburg?"

"Is Ruth with you?"

Clara's eyes laughed. "Yes, she is almost a big girl now. She went on a tour of the train by herself."

Slowly the first shock of their unexpected meeting gave way to the pleasure of

rediscovering the old sympathies.

Pensive, a shadow passing her features, Clara said. "Rainer is in Ronda, in Andalucia. We are still not divorced and still live apart most of the time. He will come to Munich later this year, to be with us. We shall try again, but it will be difficult. He has written an unearthly beautiful cycle of poems in Triest at the castle of one of his female admirers. I will read you some of them in Munich. You are going to visit us in Berg, promise!"

Alexandra told her why she was going to Munich by herself, to work on a rather esoteric research project, to investigate psychic healing with Claudia and Robert Dahl. Clara showed surprise, Dahl working on clairvoyance?

Alexandra briefly described how this cooperation had come about. "And here I travel by myself and am overtaken by a chain of entirely unreasonable coincidences, first the conductor now you!"

She decided to pass over her frightening vision in East Prussia.

Ruth returned, a serious girl with a shock of her father's dark brown hair.

"Ruth, do you remember Alexandra? She is Otto's mother, the boy you played with on the beach in Italy many years ago."

Ruth made the expected curtsy, but gave Alexandra a skeptical look. "Mamma, you mean the boy with whom I played father and mother in Berg when you drank coffee?"

"Yes he. I am amazed that you remember Alexandra's and Otto's visit to Berg."

Ruth took a book and read. Alexandra resumed the conversation. "Have you seen Friedrich and Katharina? I will not have the time to visit them in Hamburg. Worpswede is close to Hamburg, isn't it?"

"I met them a year ago in Bremen. They looked happy, their child has grown, but you are lucky, they come to Munich for Easter early next month. To please Katharina, they make a pilgrimage to Andechs at this time of the year, it has become an annual institution."

"And Kandinsky? What has become of him? You were not close to him, but I hear he has become a *Münchner Institution*."

Clara shook her head. "Kandinsky, has left us all behind. He has gone completely abstract. Very colorful canvasses, but I cannot find anything in them. For a while they still showed recognizable subjects, now they are just chaotic scribbles, blots, lines, and circles. As an explanation he has published a kind of 'Manifesto of Abstract Art' last year, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, very obscure, unreadable."

Alexandra became excited. "We talked about this subject seven years ago. He was searching for a way to express exactly such ideas between music and painting in his art. I must see him."

"He now lives in Murnau with Gabriele Münter. She bought a house for them there."

Time flew, they had crossed the Main river. They would reach Munich in another four hours.

They had tea in the dining car. Clara described her work of the last few years. The two *caryatids* had long been installed. She had not become famous, but she had found a steady succession of commissions that kept her busy and paid for her living expenses—and occasionally even for Rainer's. She appeared, if not exuberant, this was not her nature, quietly balanced and content with her life and work. Alexandra could not understand how Clara managed her emotional life, the idea of living separated from Konrad was inconceivable.

In Munich Alexandra called Claudia and took a taxi to Solln.

The taxi driver asked her, "*Gnädige Frau*, are you from Italy? You speak German very well."

She explained that she came from Russia. The man was embarrassed and retreated into an icy silence. In all her travels she had never encountered any reservations towards herself. Eventually the man apologized for being nosy. It was none of his business where his customers came from. He was Serbian.

Dahl's Examination of Alexandra

Munich 1913

Robert Dahl had no finished manuscript to show. After listening to Claudia's reports about Alexandra's healing experiments, he had discarded much of his previous work and decided that Alexandra's experiences and insights would form the nucleus of their publication.

"Claudia described to me the healing sessions you two undertook together." Dahl told Alexandra. "I have every reason to believe that you observed true medical effects in your patients. Have you had any new successes since then? I would, of course, like to know the statistical rate of success you have experienced, that is, is your healing reproducible or sporadic?"

She told him of the skin cancer remission, which had now held for more than a year.

Dahl leaned back in surprise. "This is a totally new class of diseases distinctly different from the arthritis cases."

He explained that he wanted to explore primarily the psychological phenomena connected with the interaction between the healer and the healed. Questions such as, how does she do it, and what does the patient experience or contribute to the process? The question of what physiologically occurred in the patient, he was sure, was beyond normal medical explanations.

Alexandra ventured to contradict him and offered her immunological explanation. But she added that this was a working hypothesis, which, because of the profession's ignorance of the immune system, could not be proven one way or the other.

"But I have strong reasons to believe that psychological moments play a role in those cases which I have been able to treat successfully. In other words, I believe that the arthritis and the cancer, which I was able to cure, were of emotional origin."

Dahl leaned back in his chair with a skeptical face. "This idea has not occurred to me. To verify such an explanation would require an exhaustive collection of psychological data about the patients and their illness."

He returned to his two original questions. Alexandra assured him that her patients did not contribute anything to the healing process. What the patient did was entirely irrelevant, as long as he remained quiet.

Dahl took off his reading glasses and looked at her inquisitively. "Does it matter whether the patient believes in your healing powers? The healers I investigated are without exception 'faith' healers, who make Christ responsible for their healings. They are known as religious healers in the community and are consequently being consulted by religious patients. Both parties, the healer and the patients, emphasize that their Christian faith plays a decisive role in the process."

Alexandra tilted her head. "In my cases I can show that the patient's belief in me or my abilities plays no role. I have exclusively healed people who had no knowledge of my healing powers. With the simple trick of threatening a relapse if anybody heard of their having been healed, I have been able to keep fame at arm's length. I can say decisively that the patient does not contribute to the healing, either physically or spiritually."

Dahl put the ear of his glasses between his lips and nodded satisfied. "And what

happens to you? My religious healers become vague when I ask this question, they drivel about the intervention of Christ or similar visions."

Instead of answering his question directly Alexandra suggested that she believed that she could teach her method to a suitable person, who had never healed anybody in his life.

Dahl was startled. He became almost defensive.

"So far, I have had the impression, that people had this gift—healers invariably say their gift was from 'God' or contributed by some 'spirit,' 'devil,' or 'witch'. Do you seriously believe that you could teach, for example, me how to do faith healing?"

Alexandra laughed. She was not sure she could teach him. "To be honest with you, my proposal is a boast. I have given this question a lot of thought during the last month. I think I could teach my method to another, suitable person. But I have not tried it."

"Claudia told me of your mishaps, would such a teaching experiment not be a dangerous undertaking?"

Alexandra shrugged. A surgeon could cut his hand during an autopsy and die of sepsis. Apart from the obvious dangers of any radical psychological exploration, she felt that her mistakes allowed her a certain judgment of the risks involved in such a course of training.

Dahl knitted his brows and shook his head. "Alexandra, you have always succeeded in disarming me with some of the most unexpected, most imaginative surprises. This is a risky claim. Yet, if I look at your suggestion objectively and calmly, I see that this would be a *demonstration extraordinaire* of the validity of your healing method."

Dahl shot her a disbelieving glance and shook his head again.

"I see that," she said dryly. "However, *my* problem is that my method is not successful every time, in more than half of my experiments nothing happens."

During the following session Claudia took a shorthand transcript of their conversation.

Alexandra began with a smile of implicit challenge. "Let me describe my 'method' in the sequence I would use to teach healing to another person—I will need your active co-operation in finding a terminology which describes my experiences in psychological terms. I have never tried to do that."

Dahl, playing distractedly with his reading glasses, nodded.

She straightened and concentrated hard, her intense, blue eyes focused on Dahl, trying to gain his full attention. "First, I want to emphasize again that healing has nothing to do with God or the devil or with witches. That my way of healing should be learnable, and that while it uses seemingly irrational processes, it has its own self-consistent, inner logic. Occasionally these processes are called 'extrasensory.' I dislike this term, because I do have sensory experiences in the process of healing: I fly, see images, and have strong emotional experiences. After a healing I am, despite an outward euphoria, drained of all my energies."

Dahl lowered his eyes and said in a conciliatory voice. "All healers whom I investigated, talk about the 'transfer of energy' between themselves and the patient. Do you have that sensation?"

"Occasionally, I have used what is called *laying on hands*. In this method of healing I do feel something like energy, heat as it were, pass through my hands. But I have found that these healings are not permanent. In most of my successful healings I do not feel energy being transferred to the patient. However, inside myself I am in a highly exalted emotional state which leaves me exhausted afterwards."

Claudia looked up from her scribbling. "You mean the healing of that first man's arthritis

in Svaneti may not have been permanent?"

"I have not seen him again, but on later occasions I have found that my laying on of hands produced only temporary relief. I now use it only very rarely. If I try to give a name to the healing procedure you witnessed in St. Petersburg I would call it *superposition*.

"Healing by superposition requires a drastic dissociation of the healer. Part of me leaves my body and envelops the ill person. This dissociation is the dangerous moment in the process, and its control requires careful preparation."

She described how she sat cross-legged on the floor and the patient in a chair with a newspaper.

"In the beginning I quiet the noise in my head and attempt to empty my mind completely. This requires practice. We constantly talk to ourselves. For this purpose I use breath-counting, one of the simplest meditation exercises. I concentrate on counting my exhalations from one to six and again from one. This exercise now takes me five minutes.

"In control of my inner chatter and completely relaxed, I turn my attention onto the patient. Gocha and other shamans describe the process of dissociation which now follows as *flying*. I find this description highly appropriate. I read some recent investigations by Siberian shamans. Like Gocha, some of them talk of two souls a *shadow-soul* and a *breath-soul*. The *shadow-soul* carries all emotions and powers of the shaman. It can separate from the body and can fly. It effects the healing. The *breath-soul* stays with the healers physical body. If it leaves, the healer dies."

Dahl interrupted her. "I find this comment new. The term *flying* and the distinction between *shadow-soul* and *breath-soul* are not used by any of the faith healers whom I have interviewed. You say these are common shamanic terms. I do not know the literature of shamanism. Are the shamanic investigations you used scientific and generally available?"

"The newest is an exhaustive review in English of the extensive Russian research of the past years. I read it in manuscript. Written by a Polish anthropologist, Marie A. Czaplicka, it will appear early next year at Oxford University Press. I also talked with my mother and Aunt Sophia about my experiences in Svaneti, and they used very similar Georgian terms. Flying has nothing to do with healing, it is just a means to an end. I first experienced flying during Otto's birth, long before I knew how to heal. Claudia must have told you of this experience."

"No," injected Claudia, "I mentioned that you had such an experience, but I did not describe your birth experience to father. I felt that this was your very personal secret which only you should reveal."

Alexandra briefly described her visions during delivery. "Later I learned that a male friend who had been very close to death had very similar experiences. Apparently 'flying' also accompanies dying."

Dahl put his glasses, which he had continued to play with, back on and peering over Claudia's shoulder at the transcript asked, "So you believe that meditative exercises are the prerequisite for healing?"

Alexandra waited silently until he once again faced her. "Yes, and I would teach my students intense meditation first. Meditation opens a treasure of existential insights, which suddenly surface from one's subconscious and which we cannot normally hear or see because of the verbal noise in our head."

Dahl peered over his reading glasses at Alexandra and slowly took them off. She saw that he was annoyed at this new diversion from the course of his investigation.

"Alexandra, let us end our work for the day. I need to think for a while."

That weekend Mrs. Dahl asked Alexandra whether she would join them at a concert on occasion of the second anniversary of Mahler's death. Richard Strauss would conduct Mahler's *Sixth Symphony*, possibly his happiest and most unified work.

The concert hall, its walls and ceiling painted with mythological murals of the deeds of Herakles, was crowded with the intelligentsia of Munich. Strauss gave a speech praising the towering genius of twentieth century music, and a soft-spoken Alma Mahler read a tearful commemoration of her husband.

From the first few bars Alexandra, who had expected another *Farbensymphonie*, was overwhelmed by the music. She did see her usual colors but, at the same time, the ominous marches of the first movement made all her foreboding visions reappear. Entire armies marched before her eyes, battling nostalgic memories of a decadent, romantic way of life. Again and again the sweet dances of Vienna resurfaced for a few bars only to be trampled under the feet of another combative battalion of marching soldiers.

Relentlessly this destruction continued through the second movement. She was haunted by a vision of ruined cities and devastated landscapes. The melody of a broken merry-go-round playing on and on until it too broke off. A phalanx of armed men were mowed down by an army proceeding from the opposite direction.

The slow third movement, a euphonious lullaby, apparently intended to show a new generation of children growing up who survived this mayhem in some sylvan glade, almost made her angry.

The long last movement confirmed the lies of the third and the horrors of the first two. A gigantic battle between good and evil, between classical beauty and the voracious war machines, ended in three final blows of the kettledrum: thrice dead. A fitting requiem for Europe.

Alexandra, deeply shaken, remained unusually quiet for the rest of the evening. Beyond a heartfelt thank-you to Mrs. Dahl, she felt in no mood to talk about her experiences.

During their last session at Dahl's Alexandra finished her description of her meditation exercises including her new way of letting spontaneous images arise. Dahl found this an interesting exercise, as it would allow him to reproduce the content of the subconscious in pictures while fully awake.

"But how do you induce your dissociation? How do you separate yourself from your body and split your personality in order to fly?"

This Alexandra could not describe. "I guess, because I experienced flying spontaneously once—produced by an extreme condition—I find it easy to slip back into this state. Maybe one has to have had a death experience to learn to fly, and again maybe that is the reason why the initiation rites in Tibetan Buddhism and in all shamanic disciplines culminate in a death experience."

After she had reached the dissociated state what happened next? What was *superposition*?

"My shadow-soul flies into an embrace with the patient. I don't consider him a patient, he is a person who seeks help. I learned that I must not concern myself with the manifest symptoms of his illness, like the arthritic swellings or the skin cancer, instead I have to heal the whole person.... I cannot describe what happens in psychological terms, I have to use common language, which I, *nota bene*, borrow from the experience of a woman. I know no better metaphor, my shadow-soul makes love to the person. With the only difference that in lovemaking the embrace precedes the dissociation, which leaves a lifeless woman in the arms of her perplexed lover. The French call this '*la petite mort!*'" Alexandra laughed. "Maybe one should look at lovemaking as a healing process."

Dahl blushed. "Alexandra, you are singularly outspoken and honest. Few people would admit such a complex of emotions without dressing it up in some 'higher' garb. My religious informants speak of '*partaking in God's love*,' I prefer your analogy by far."

Dahl shook his head and gave her an inquisitive glance. "Would you like to discuss your hunch that in many cases the emotional condition of the patient contributes to his illness and makes your healing possible?"

Alexandra smiled. "I am primarily concerned with the question why I have no success in many cases, and how to select patients for healing. I notice that one trauma appears in almost all cases: the loss of an important reference person accompanied by strong guilt feelings, a spouse, a lover, a mother." Dahl nodded.

"At times a serious, guilt-ridden emotional estrangement may be sufficient," continued Alexandra. "A few years later arthritis or cancer strikes. The person seems, subconsciously of course, obsessed by a wish to die, associated by a deep, often carefully hidden, depression.— These cases I seem to be able to heal, provided the illness has not progressed so far as to have physically destroyed the body of the patient to the point of no return. Obviously, I cannot induce the self-regeneration of a completely cancer-ridden liver or bone system."

She paused and eyed him. "Maybe one could study people stricken by cancer or arthritis and elicit the suppressed emotional origins of their illness. It should be possible to predict the probability of a person contracting cancer from such a profile, and prescribe some course of action, for example, meditation exercises or psychotherapy to reduce their chances of killing themselves through a breakdown of their immune system."

Dahl very seriously said. "Bear in mind that such an investigation would be a terrible drain for the psychotherapist."

He leaned back in his chair. "For some time now, I have been tempted to ask you how you deal with the emotional demands your healing work must make on you. I would imagine that the burden of stripping yourself emotionally to the extent you described would lead to serious symptoms of introversion or withdrawal. You show neither. How do you handle your emotions under this kind of stress?"

For the first time in their exchange Alexandra hesitated. An unexpected thought was taking hold in her mind. Were her black visions and the irrational coincidences during her journey signs of emotional exhaustion?

"I have not given these questions much thought." She said pensively. "I have been so excited by my discoveries that my emotional energies seemed boundless. But very recently I have had a series of disturbing experiences of clairvoyance which could be a sign of an overwrought psyche. You once referred to this as *noetic engrandissement*. In the past my way of dealing with my emotional problems has been to extrovert them spontaneously. I know no

guilt. I extrovert my problems instead of suppressing them."

Dahl sighed. "If only we could all do that as well as you do, Alexandra!"

One night Claudia visited Alexandra in her room asking her to teach her how to cope with her existential fears.

All through the last few days Alexandra had watched her friend's very quiet demeanor in the presence of her father. To retrieve Claudia's latent emotional strength would be very difficult as long as she was under the influence of this man. Alexandra was not sure what to do and had hoped that the request Claudia had made when leaving St. Petersburg would go away. But here she was.

"I will gladly teach you my meditation techniques—you have heard almost all I have to offer—but I am not sure how to resolve your emotional bind and free your creative powers. What do you feel holds you back?"

Claudia folded her hands in her lap and looked down. "I cannot speak about my most intimate thoughts as easily as you can or externalize my emotional problems as you said one should."

Alexandra smiled at her encouragingly but kept quiet.

Claudia continued, "I think it is my relationship with Niko. Niko is wonderfully considerate and tactful with me, but he is not a passionate man. I wish he would sweep me off my feet and instead he waits for me to do that for him. I am not good at that as yet. Maybe Niko longs for Georgia and a Georgian woman."

Alexandra could see well enough that Niko was feeling too comfortable in this house. Did he love Claudia's mother more than his wife? And his relationship with professor Sommerfeld was equally complacent.

"What are Niko's plans for the future?" She asked. "Is he going to stay forever in Munich at Sommerfeld's institute? In Georgia he would simply fall asleep like most of the young men there. That is what happened in St. Petersburg years ago, and it is why I suggested that he go to Germany. Put the Georgian women out of your mind, that worry is entirely unproductive for him and for you."

Claudia rested her eyes on Alexandra. "He has had an offer from the university in Göttingen to 'habilitate' himself there, but has not done anything about it. Do you think it would be good for him to leave Munich?"

Alexandra nodded. "I think it might be good for both of you. It would force him to stand on his own feet and take you both out of this haven of maternal love and paternal domination. What would *you* like to do?"

Claudia described her increasing fascination with psychological questions. She had seen that only a good psychological understanding on part of a physician made working with patients effective.

"I don't think that I would ever become a good healer, maybe because of my fears, maybe because I am, like my father, more analytical than intuitively gifted. I don't agree with you that you don't need a special gift to become a healer. But is it necessary that every physician be able to perform healings like you do? Would a good psychological understanding not be enough to help most people? Besides, I am more interested in the scientific investigation of the functioning of our brain than in Gocha's frightening 'magical' methods."

Ever since Claudia's outbreak in St. Petersburg, Alexandra knew that she would not be able to teach Claudia her method. Still, she felt disappointed now. Claudia had been the witness of her newfound powers. Deep down, Alexandra had hoped that she could help Claudia overcome her fears and teach her healing. Claudia could have become the perfect example for her theoretical understanding of her healing methods. Alexandra was certain that this could also resolve Claudia's blocked relationship with Niko. She had to admit defeat. Claudia was beyond her capabilities.

For a moment doubt overtook her. Am I getting power-happy? Is megalomania overtaking me? Has my success in healing made me over-confident? You cannot move everything in this world!

She pushed her scruples aside thinking, let me try to do one thing at a time.

"I do think you should urge my brother to accept the position in Göttingen to strengthen his self-reliance and give him a chance to work independently from Sommerfeld. And you should explore a combination of medicine and psychology. Maybe brain neurology would be an exciting field for you. All of this might help, but will it resolve the stalemate in your marriage?"

Claudia avoided looking at Alexandra and shook her head. "The reasons for that lie deeper. Niko wants a child, and I am afraid of having one, the times are so uncertain. Will I be a good mother for the child? Giving birth frightens me."

Claudia began to cry. Alexandra took her in her arms.

"You know, maybe, after all, meditating *would* do you some good, never mind healing other people. I have found that in such times of confusion quieting your mind helps to give order to your thoughts and generates new ideas on how to overcome one's fears. You could do breath-counting, but if you have a specific question, there is another, more pointed method.— After you have quieted your mind think of the question that occupies your thinking, for example 'how could I love Niko better?' It should be a positive question, negative questions lead to depression. Wait for a spontaneous image to appear before your inner eye. It may seem completely irrelevant. Don't dwell on this picture, remember it, discard it, and go back to your question, waiting for another picture to float up. It may seem even more distant than the first. Continue this exercise until you feel your spontaneous images become pale or your concentration leaves you. It is most important that you don't force anything, the exercise has to be completely spontaneous and fluid."

"This method is not easy, I have never been very successful at it—it was too much work for me—but it may work for you. In all of these exercises I have found that one does not get an 'answer' right away, the images may remain puzzles for days. But one day you suddenly understand what they have to do with yourself and Niko. You should do this exercise every morning for a while. Have patience with the 'nonsense' that seems to be hidden in your subconscious, sometimes the insights derived from these fishing expeditions are very subtle."

Claudia nodded. "I will try this method. Do you think that if I would concentrate all my love on Niko, as you do when you heal people, I could help him to overcome his emotional binds? He will not want to do meditation exercises, I am afraid."

Alexandra told her that she had not been able to help people close to her, whom she loved. Somehow their strong mutual involvement seemed to interfere.

Alexandra smiled sadly. "I cannot help you either in this challenge. Don't forget, that everybody has to resolve this kind of problem by himself, including my patients. I only put them back on the right track for a very brief time, from there on they depend on themselves. Equally,

your work for Niko lies in learning to love yourself first, then you will find the strength and love to pull him with you."

A Visit to Kandinsky

Murnau 1913

Alexandra called Kandinsky. A few moments of embarrassed silence passed before he remembered her, but then his voice changed. "Yes, of course, the Georgian princess who can see music and reads Nietzsche!" he joked in Russian. He invited Alexandra and Claudia. "You will be surprised, I have found an abstract mode to paint music! I am very curious what you will hear with your sensitive, blue eyes."

Claudia drove. They first visited Clara Westhoff in Berg who received them with open arms.

They had an early lunch with Ruth, and afterwards, over coffee, Clara read, as she had promised Alexandra on the train, from Rilke's unfinished *Duineser Elegies*. Claudia moved, became very quiet. The stanzas were composed of complex religious images of such density that several times Alexandra had to ask for a rereading.

They told Clara of their invitation to Kandinsky's house for the late afternoon. Clara had kept the day free for Alexandra and Claudia. "You know, I would really like to join you. Maybe I would understand his paintings better when he explains them."

Alexandra called Kandinsky, and with only a trace of sarcasm in his voice, he said. "Do bring her. Three young women! I will have to collect all my charm, but it should be my pleasure."

When they arrived at the *Russenhaus*—as a young boy had called it whom they had asked for directions in Murnau—Kandinsky received them in high spirits. "For three weeks I have been alone in this house, holed up painting. It is a pleasure to be distracted by you."

Gabriele Münter was in Italy. "You are lucky to find me in Murnau, we travel a great deal. Come sit down and let me make some tea."

He fussed with the pots and cups in the kitchen. Dozens of canvasses cluttered the house, seemingly chaotic, abstract paintings, just as Clara had described them. In her mind Alexandra called them "doodles," several confusing layers of doodles, one on top of the other, very colorful, but apparently meaningless. Puzzled Alexandra stared at the paintings trying to extract the music that might have inspired them, but heard nothing.

Kandinsky returned with a silver serving tray, four delicate *Meissen* teacups, a matching pot, and *torte* from the local bakery. "Gabriele's china. I have become accustomed to having a woman in the house, forgive my poor service."

Alexandra's eyes examined the paintings leaning along the walls of the room.

"So what do you hear?" Kandinsky asked.

"Nothing," said Alexandra not very gracefully.

"Wait, I will put on the recording that inspired this large composition over there."

He picked a black disc from the bookshelf. "Since our conversation with Webern and Schoenberg I have tried to paint *Farbensymphonien*. It was very frustrating. I do see colors to music but cannot do the opposite. I cannot spontaneously hear the music of what I paint. So Princess Alexandra, I followed your advice. I tried over and over again to paint the colors and forms which I see when I hear music. I fear only I will see the music which I hear, but perhaps you can help me."

He held up the disc. "Thank God, modern technology came to my rescue in form of phonograph discs, which permit me to hear the piece of music again and again during my work."

He carefully placed the disc on the phonograph, cranked the machine, and very delicately lowered the needle into the groove.

A crackling noise came from the speaker funnel and then suddenly an instrument with a brassy, crowing sound rose, described a large arc, screeched to a high register only to fall back to a melody in the lowest bass. A piano with a strange syncopated rhythm hacked the melody to pieces. Drums and cymbals took over the beat. The brass instrument went silent for a stretch leaving the drummer and the piano in a frenzy of rhythmic figures. The drummer in an attack of wild madness picked up the melody.

Impossible. A drum making music? With great virtuosity the drummer performed a solo ending in a cadence of rhythmic noise until the brass burst in again, crowing with full force for a few bars, sweeping up the other instruments—and always this relentless, driving, swinging, syncopated, overheated beat.



Composition VII, Version 2, 1913, Lenbachhaus, Munich

Claudia and Clara sat shocked in stony silence. Alexandra fought against a flood of vivid colors, spirals, blobs pulsating with the rhythm, they attacked her whole body. She focused on the painting, and its lines and blotches began to dance, shamelessly. An image of Konrad in front of the Gauguin paintings at Becky's house passed before Alexandra's mind. The onslaught of this music was many times more "obscene" than the Gauguins, a mixture of

sexual arousal, dance rhythms, and overheated colors.

Kandinsky watched silently.

"What is this music?" asked Claudia, wide-eyed.

"*Negermusik*, Negro music. A friend brought me these recordings from America. The Negroes use this kind of spontaneously improvised music at weddings, dances, and funerals. To their ears it is highly spiritual."

"And what is that brassy instrument? I have never heard a sound like that."

"It is a saxophone, a reed instrument."

Alexandra was still trying to calm her emotions. Her mind held an image that was still gyrating and pulsing as she looked at Kandinsky's canvas.

"And Alexandra, did you see this music?"

"I have not recovered from it yet, your whole canvas is dancing."

Kandinsky beamed. "This music is so much more spiritual and passionate than Schoenberg or Webern. Maybe one day I will paint *their* dry, minimal compositions. For the time being this Negro music has me off my feet. I call my painting *Komposition VII*, because I recomposed this music on canvas. I am so pleased that *you* see it, none of my acquaintances and critics seem to be able to do that."

He waved his arms. "Rarely have I worked so hard as for *Komposition VII*. I have yet to exhaust what I hear in this piece. You know, this music is not 'composed,' the musicians cannot even read notes, they play spontaneously and intuitively. Is this drummer not fabulous?"

Kandinsky got up and arranged five large canvasses next to each other along the wall. Expectantly he stood aside, left hand on the last painting, his right in his vest in the Napoleonesque stance Alexandra remembered so well. The tea in the suddenly absurdly delicate *Meissen* service was getting cold, the *torte* was untouched.

He swept his hand over the paintings. "These are all different aspects of the piece I played for you. Can you see it?"

Clara spoke up. "I have seen some of your earlier 'abstracts' and came away with the impression that they were painted entirely at random, random lines, random colors. To my amazement I now see that you planned every spot, every color, and every form carefully. Some repeat themselves from painting to painting, some are added, others have been left out."

She got up and pointed at the features she meant.

A painful smile on his face Kandinsky admitted. "Unfortunately, you are correct, these paintings are carefully planned. I have to use my head, trying this, trying that, changing a shape or a color to compose what I want. I paint with my intellect instead of my emotions or my subconscious as these musicians seem to be able to."

Clara shook her head. "These pieces are an impressive achievement in exploring a new way of painting. The time and labor you must have spent in painting these large canvasses!"

Kandinsky took his right hand out of his jacket and made a dismissive gesture. "Oh, once I see what I want, the process is quite fast. I finished these five variations of *Komposition VII* in less than three weeks."

Clara asked whether he would show them selected examples of the paintings that preceded *Komposition VII*.

"Let me first show you the last version of *Komposition VII*. It hangs in the next room, a canvas of two by three meters, too big to carry around."

He had turned the warm, occasionally hot colors of the earlier paintings into light, cool greens and blues. A seemingly inextricable maze of delicately interwoven forms covered the center of the painting. Despite its size it appeared lighter, more spacious than the previous versions. The room was too small to see the painting from an appropriate distance.

Kandinsky took them through the house. He showed them a selection of *Impressionen* painted between 1911 and 1912. He had started with representational subjects, many with a religious content, Russian and Bavarian saints, several St. Georges. Slowly the human form dissolved into abstract signs. A yellow cow filling most of the canvas—*according to Steiner yellow is female. Your Anima is yellow!* One canvas, called *Impression 19, Konzert*, reminded Alexandra of the evening at the Dahls—you are right, the black grand piano, Steiner, the guests. Still earlier: Murnau almost fully representational—and among these smaller paintings a dreamscape, *Woman in Moscow, 1912*.

A disembodied Russian woman floating above a street scene, her left arm partially missing, the other hand holding a small dog on a flower stand, half-hidden behind the woman a *fiaker* in flight, and floating suspended a large, black blob...An apparition? On the street a pink spot. A rose? A faded puddle of blood? A discarded female napkin?



Kandinsky, Woman in Moscow

Alexandra stood rooted before the painting, magically attracted by the black blob flying above the scene. She blurted. "Her name is Nina." Kandinsky took a step backwards. He tucked his chin in and stared at Alexandra. "How did you guess? Are you clairvoyant?"

"Sometimes I am, and I dislike myself for it. I met Nina in St. Petersburg many years ago."

For the rest of the evening Kandinsky was despondent, his high spirits suddenly gone.

He invited them to dinner in the village *Gasthaus*. Nina and the painting were not mentioned again.

Alexandra berated herself for her thoughtlessness. But how could she have anticipated his reaction?

The black spot is he, she answered her own question, I should have guessed that.

Clara, trying to patch Alexandra's *faux-pas*, inquired what he planned to do with his *oeuvre*. It would already fill a small museum. Kandinsky shrugged, he was under no pressure to sell. He had a large number of paintings stored in Munich. Time would solve that question.

When they left, Kandinsky gave Alexandra a copy of his book *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, "On the Spiritual in Art," with a dedication in German:

Für Alexandra Dadiani, die georgische Prinzessin, die mich ermutigte den Weg in die Abstraktion zu suchen—For Alexandra Dadiani, the Georgian princess, who encouraged me to look for a way into abstraction.

After what had happened, Alexandra was mortified by his gift.

Kandinsky smiled. His last words were in Russian. "I am deeply obliged to you. Nina is waiting for me in Moscow."

Alexandra Returns to Tiflis Tamara's Quarrel with her Father

1913

Alexandra spent the day in a reclining chair on deck. The ship plowed the blue Aegean Sea towards Constantinople.

The Cycladic Islands, bare, tree-less rocks crowned by white-washed villages, drifted through the clear, sunny day. She found that she did not remember any of these islands, it must have been night when they passed the Aegean on their honeymoon.

For two days she had walked through Venice in search of Konrad. The city still exerted its spell on her. In a weak moment she had toyed with the thought of finding a man to make love to. But Konrad's presence was so strong, that she could not imagine another man able to satisfy her longings. How could she recover the fleeting reflections in which she had seen their love?

She had visited the Accademia to look for her favorite Giorgione. This time the painting no longer spoke to her. It looked smaller than she remembered. Should one not attempt to repeat such highs? The mood, the longings of another time cannot be recreated.

On the second day she felt as if someone was following her. Disturbed, she took refuge in a church. She waited in the cold and musty place and carefully watched the people who came in, genuflected in front of the altar, prayed, or lit a candle and left. They came and went. No one paid attention to the lonely tourist.

The church felt like a tomb, gray marble, a second-rate altar, cold, exalted memorials along the walls, dust and grime. None of the euphoria that had once rescued her in Santa-Anna-im-Lehel in Munich.

This fear of being followed was not her usual Georgian affliction, it lay deeper, it would not disappear on its own or be dismissed by a simple movement of her hand.

A voice came from behind her left shoulder. "Your death is watching you."

The voice was not threatening, rather, the words were delivered in a calm, matter of fact tone. There was no one around. She was entirely alone.

She left the church in confusion.

In a quiet *piazza* she found a stone bench in the sun. She leaned against the warm wall and closed her eyes.

Paranoia, auditory hallucinations, she analyzed herself with clinical precision. The next step, schizophrenia. She shook her head. What was going on inside her: the bloodbath in East-Prussia, the superstitious train conductor, Clara in Hanover, Dahl's skeptical analysis of her work, her clairvoyance before Kandinsky's painting of Nina, and now, voices.

Were these events related? Maybe the vision of the bloodbath and the voice in the church were products of her own distressed psyche, but she should not attach mystical meanings to the other happenings, they were ordinary coincidences.

What really did she know about death? She had never faced it, death had never before spoken to her. To imagine death as her constant companion was a matter she had not given

any thought to.

A group of children had set up a game of hopscotch on the flagstones of the piazza, their noisy laughter drove the ghosts away.

Clara had given her a copy of Rilke's *Elegies* and Claudia a slim volume, *Vereinigungen* by Musil. She read in both at random, drifting between Rilke's religious visions, Musil's dissolute characters, the floating seascape, and her new vision of ever-present death.

As night descended, the islands dissolved in a haze of blues and purples. Somewhere an orchestra played dance music. She had skipped dinner in favor of remaining on deck in her chair, letting herself be spun into a cocoon by her books and the night.

A man's voice interrupted her dreams. He spoke Georgian. "Alexandra, would you allow me to dance with you?"

The familiar voice startled her. She looked up and closed her eyes. Dizziness overcame her. Another apparition?

Dato Ortaladze.

He sat down in a chair next to her and silently waited for her to recover.

When she looked at him again, he was smiling.

"Forgive my disturbing you. I saw you already in Venice, and have watched you with confused feelings ever since. But I could not bring myself to speak to you. You did not recognize me. I finally told Christine, my wife, what happened in Shuamta. I had never dared disturb our marriage with these old, adolescent tales. Christine urged me to talk to you and bring you two together."

Silence befell them. Alexandra sighed. Persephone's prophecy. Dato had come back to her—with the only woman who could save him.

She tried to chase Venice from her mind. For the moment she needed a clear head. Dato had no idea of Persephone's curse and her expecting him. She looked at him and said very slowly, "Yes, I will dance with you. I once promised to be there for you whenever you needed me. And take me to Christine. Is she German?"

"Yes, she is from Hersfeld near Kassel. I met her in Jena and we got married five years ago. Fourteen years is a long time. I could not wait for a Georgian girl to fall in love with me...."

During her morning meditation that day, the same inner voice she had heard in the church spoke to her, this time in Georgian and with Konrad's German accent.

"Alexandra, don't fear, I am your most trustworthy friend and advisor. You can always find me behind your left shoulder."

She looked at Dato, "Yes," she said in Georgian, "I will dance with you."

She danced with him once or twice, careful not to arouse his Georgian ardor, and then Dato took her to meet Christine.

Clara von Bredow received Alexandra like a long-lost sister at the pier in Constantinople. For a week they walked all over the many-layered city. Alexandra began to appreciate Islamic architecture in Sinan's exquisite mosques. For the first time she was able to see beyond the painful, inherited memories of the loss of the Holy City of Eastern Christendom. Only in the Hagia Sophia could she not completely relinquish her deep-seated resentments of Islam.

Joachim, the skeptical, professional diplomat, was filled with ominous forebodings of

things to come. War seemed unavoidable to him, but he refused to be specific. He knew too much which he could not discuss. Kaiser Wilhelm II's arrogant posturing towards France and the British was inexcusably stupid. And dangerous. And the enfeebled Sultan would happily join in any adventure Wilhelm suggested.

Clara, who had spent their life easing her husband's rage against the diplomatic blunders of his imperial employer, tried to soften Joachim's pessimism to no avail.

It needed only some minor spark and the European political powder keg would explode—and God have mercy on us if that should happen. The largest and most disastrous conflagration the world had ever seen.

Alexandra had, as soon as she had disembarked in Batumi, sent a telegram to her parents. When she arrived in Tiflis her father waited for her at the station. Alone.

His hair had turned completely white, and he stooped more than she remembered. An old man. She embraced him. But where were Konrad and Otto, were they all right? "They are fine, they are in St. Petersburg. Everything has changed, there will be no wedding."

Irakli handed Alexandra's luggage to the houseboy and suggested they walk home. "I have to talk to you. Let's go to the German café by the bridge."

She linked her arm under her father's to support him. He let it happen. They slowly walked through the streets on the dismal left bank. The old, white-haired gentleman was led by his young, tall daughter.

At the café Irakli ordered coffee for them, and Alexandra selected two pieces of *torte*.

He spoke with a tired voice. "The wedding had to be called off. Tamara left with Vladimir in a dramatic show of rage. I tried my very best to patch the rift between her and David, but both were equally intransigent."

He glanced helplessly at his daughter.

"David came down to stay with us after Tamara and Vladimir had arrived. Tamara and he had a terrible argument in my house. If David had not been such an old friend of mine, I would have thrown them both out. It was most embarrassing for all of us—and yet I do sympathize with David."

Alexandra gave her father an affectionate kiss. A little embarrassed, he looked around, but then smiled gratefully at his beloved daughter.

"*Chemo mama*, it took me many years to understand your unusual relationship with me. I know of no other Georgian woman who has such an understanding father. I will love you forever for what you did for me and Konrad and look, it has worked so well."

Irakli took her hand, raised it to his lips, and kissed her ring finger. "When you wanted to marry Konrad, I was not alone. Your mother, remembering her wild days before her marriage, helped me to let go of you. But Konrad is an unusual man. I don't think Tamara and Vladimir will ever be happy together. But it is not for me to say so."

He let go of her hand and gave her a bewildered glance. "Tamara wanted it her way, no church wedding, no 'old-fashioned' rituals. Getting married was a concession to the child she carries, not to her parents. That broke David's pride, he had barely swallowed the idea that she was pregnant. And you can imagine, neither of them wanted to give in."

He raised his hands in despair. "At the height of their argument David slapped her, and Tamara stormed screaming out of the room where they had been shouting at each other. She collected her belongings and the sheepish-looking Vladimir, and took the next train back to St.

Petersburg. They will have a simple, expedient wedding there. Most embarrassing was that David had to write letters to all the people he had invited. He left for Svaneti a broken man."

Irakli touched her arm. "Are you going to stay with us for a few days? I can understand that you would like to be with Konrad and your children, but please give us a few days to reassure us."

She gently pulled him out of his chair. "Come, let's go home, Deda will be waiting anxiously. I will stay with you for a week."

On the way home, while Alexandra answered her father's questions about Niko and Claudia and the Dahls, the events that had led to this Georgian family disaster went through her mind. Had she overestimated her powers? She had been the one who had made it possible for Tamara to come to St. Petersburg. She had acted from the confidence of *her* experiences, built on the unusual trust the old man on her arm had given her. Her dejected mood suddenly turned into a wave of loving affection for her father, and in the middle of the street she embraced him spontaneously and kissed him.

"Thank you, *mama*, for your faith and your enduring love."

"Ah, child, how often have I asked God's forgiveness that I loved you too much? May He hold His hand over you, Konrad, and your children."

Revolutionary St. Petersburg

Winter 1913 – 1914

On his China trip Konrad had let his beard grow, not the wild, untamed one he had previously had, but a well-trimmed, civilized beard. It had turned out white. With his copious brown hair turning gray at the temples he looked dashingely elegant. Helena, who had long had a crush on Konrad, "fell in love" with him, as she said.

Alexandra, feeling that she had abandoned Konrad in too brusque a manner, had asked Helena to occasionally visit Konrad while she was away. Thus Konrad found himself in the company of an adoring, striking woman.

He invited Helena to dinner with Vitali Alekseev and El-Zafaran, to whom he owed a report on his searches for the Sufi and Ch'an. Konrad introduced El-Zafaran with a taunting smile, not as a Sufi sheikh, but as Doctor of Comparative Languages, which quickly dispelled the initial formality. El-Zafaran laughed, he shouldn't have sent Konrad to Ramitani who would uncover all his well-kept secrets. But then he showed his most relaxed and humorous side, excited by the new insights Konrad brought back. Jovial Alexeev meanwhile entertained Helena with funny anecdotes about famous, impractical *M. le Professeur* Chavannes, with whom he had traveled in China.

In the evenings, seeking a warm family atmosphere, Helena had often cooked dinner for Konrad and helped him and Otto with their grand project for Alexandra's birthday: a diary of Konrad's Chinese travels collated from his notes, letters, and drawings. Otto painstakingly drew the maps and occasionally copied Konrad's notes.

One evening Helena confided to Konrad that Alekseev had invited her to dinner. She blushed deeply, he was a most congenial and charming man.

These idyllic days without Alexandra had been rudely interrupted when Tamara arrived in St. Petersburg breathing fire. "You have no idea how narrow-minded Georgian fathers are. Irakli's love for Alexandra is downright incestuous. Konrad, you never had to fight for Alexandra."

She was now visibly pregnant. Konrad found her insufferable and to top it all off, Otto, who hung on Tamara's every word, asked, "Papa, what is incestuous love?" Pained and embarrassed, Konrad explained to him that incest was an overwhelming love of a father for his daughter. Because they were closely related, such a love was forbidden.

Tamara shouted. "I am no longer a child, I will do what I think is right, and not what convention decrees. When I said that, my father slapped me. It was an ugly scene. I am sorry it happened in Irakli's house. Irakli, who had tried everything in his power to change my father's mind, had to witness that scene. I will never forgive my father!"

She put her head on the table and cried in fits. "I love my parents, I always loved my father dearly. I was proud of him. All of that has been destroyed by his intransigence. I lost not only him but my entire family."

Vladimir tried to stroke her hair. She reared her head and shook her abundant mane. "Leave me *alone*. You are as arch-conservative as my father, and you got me pregnant."

She had another attack of hysterical sobs. "You never support my political aspirations,

you smile meekly and remain silent. Father at least objected openly to my wish to join Jordania's party. You never spoke up for me. You sabotaged my attempts at contacting the influential Socialists in Tbilisi. 'Don't do that now, it will incense all your relatives.' That was what you said. Why am I so weak in my condition?"

Her head, surrounded by her long black hair, sank back on the table. Valdimir smiled, abashed. Standing behind her, he spread his arms in an apologetic gesture of helpless despair.

The scene was fast approaching the limits of Konrad's usually imperturbable patience. "Stop crying!" Konrad said sternly. "What do you want to do about getting married? Go wash off your tears, and let us discuss that problem instead of these useless accusations."

She raised her head and looked at him wide-eyed. "All of you are paternalistic reactionaries. 'Go, marry this man!' I will marry only to protect my child from this bourgeois society."

Konrad's voice was rising. "I thought we had covered that ground months ago. Of course it is to protect your child from being born illegitimate. As far as I am concerned, you can live in a wild marriage, I don't care. You can even keep the name of your father, if that is a consolation to you."

"I will keep my name, I will. I will, even if father disowns me."

They left her alone, and eventually she got up and, glaring at the two men, retreated to the bathroom.

Vladimir and Tamara's wedding took place a week after Alexandra had come home. Alexandra at the side of Vladimir's father, Konrad and Helena as witnesses. The priest had been paid off to perform the ceremony in the sacristy of his church, no pomp, no singing, barely a ritual. Tamara and Vladimir in street clothes, only M. Nomikoff and Alexandra in formal dress.

Alexandra cried in sad frustration. Irakli's ominous prediction of the pair's unhappy future rang in her ears. Otto watched the pregnant revolutionary wide eyed.

Tamara's family ignored the wedding, no messages, no presents, or congratulatory letters from her parents, except a serious note from Irakli and Tamunia-Deda wishing God's blessing onto them and their unborn child.

Vladimir's father invited the pair and their five guests to a suitably elegant restaurant. Tamara ate almost nothing, she felt nauseous. Otto watched the vaguely threatening, enigmatic events with bewildered eyes.

On July 28, 1913 Tamara gave birth to a daughter. Alexandra delivered the baby at the St. Petersburg Lying-in Hospital. They called her Asmat Alexandra after Tamara's mother and her *natlideda*.

In the winter of 1913-14, actively supported by the Okhrana, political demonstrations returned to St. Petersburg. The government considered them a welcome diversion from the mounting social and political ills of the country. Well-controlled by troops of the Ministry of the Interior, the rallies were dressed as pan-Slavic protests supporting Serbia's fight against Austria over the remains of the Ottoman possessions in the Balkans. The 'Second Balkan War' smoldered for several months—the tinder on the European powder keg that had been Joachim von Bredow's worry.

The keg exploded in July 1914 when Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were assassinated by a Serb in Austrian Sarajevo. Austria invaded Serbia.

Overnight the mood in St. Petersburg became ugly. The press screamed revenge, excited crowds in the streets demanded war against Austria. Nicholas ordered a general mobilization. A feverish exchange of letters between Wilhelm II and Nicholas II was followed by a German ultimatum demanding an end to the Russian war preparations. Crowds of volunteers stormed the recruiting centers of the Russian army.

Within a week the few political voices who urged moderation, among them Witte, were silenced by the universal patriotic craze that swept Europe.

On August 2, 1914 the Emperor was to address his people.

A huge crowd flooded into Dvorskaya Square to cheer the father of all Russia—in the same square where the representatives of the people had been slaughtered nine years ago. Flags, banners, icons, peasants, popes, students, professors, workers, and the ornate Orthodox clergy massed in front of the Winter Palace.

Pale and bewildered, Konrad and Vladimir, Alexandra and Otto, intimidated by the restive crowd, stood in the arched entry to a building.

Tamara had refused to come along. She was not going to cheer the Russian Tsar! What did this war have to do with her? She was neither Russian nor German, she was Georgian. If this war would destroy the Russian Empire so much the better. Then the revolution would finally come, and Georgia would be freed from the Russian yoke.

A government speaker announced that the Emperor was praying in his chambers. Voices from the crowd called on God to protect the Tsar. Finally Nicholas in full uniform appeared on a balcony followed by a clergyman and the deathly pale Empress who, hysterical blotches on her face, leaned with closed eyes on the Tsarevich.

Loud cheers broke out, *Long live the Tsar*. Then silence. Nicholas, barely audible, began to pray. The crowd fell on their knees repeating every one of his words. The Tsar called on God for guidance in this most fateful hour. Spontaneous singing erupted.

With his cross the clergyman blessed the crowd and read, into a breathless silence, the declaration of war.

Pandemonium broke out. Cheers to Mother Russia, the Emperor. Shouts "Death to all Germans!", "New Year in Berlin!" The national anthem was played.

Alexandra, ominous forebodings written all over her face, looked at her German husband. Konrad took her arm and wordlessly pulled her away from the crazed scene. They ducked past screaming people denouncing Germany and waving red banners, from house entry to house entry through the back streets towards their apartment.

Alexandra held onto the trembling Otto. "Mother," he asked, "why do these crazy people want to kill all Germans? I was *born* in Russia. I hate that Tsar."

Outside their window on Liteini Boulevard the shouting mob surged through the night towards the German embassy, where they broke the windows, slashed the curtains and tapestries, threw the furniture into the street, and pilfered the private art collection of the ambassador. The idle police averted their eyes.

During this fateful night Alexandra, depressed by the ominous, threatening future, cried

herself to sleep.

With the last mail from Germany arrived a letter from Claudia. She was jubilant. Niko had accepted the faculty position in Göttingen. He would be working closely with Professor Courant, a dynamic personality in applied mathematics. The professorship came with an offer of German citizenship, an important benefit for Niko in these uncertain times. She had accepted an assistant position in the faculty of medicine at the university to specialize in brain neurology. They would move to Göttingen in early September.

...Alexandra, can you believe it, I am pregnant! With the prospect of a child, Niko has become a different man. I have never been so close to him nor felt so fortunate. Niko hovers over me with a never-before-shown love.

When will I see you again, my dearest friend? Everything is well now. I meditate every morning on my happiness.

Farewell, both of you.

Love from your sister in spirit and in law.

Claudia.

The War Years

St. Petersburg 1914 – 1917

All through early August patriotic spirits ran high. The Russian army had crossed the German border near Eydtkuhnen and was pushing into East Prussia.

Alexandra thought of the Bredows. Like Helena's parents, who had fled their estate eastwards, the Bredows would flee west. What would become of their house and fields?

By mid August a great battle near Soldau-Tannenberg in East Prussia was in progress. The churches were crowded with worshippers. Alexandra had a terrifying recurrence of her vision of a year ago.

The general euphoria suddenly collapsed, when the rumors of a terrible defeat turned into certainty. Two weeks after the battle, the high command reluctantly admitted the loss of one-hundred-thousand men, dead, missing, or taken prisoners by the Germans, and fifty-thousand wounded.

By the fall of 1914 the Russian armies had lost another hundred-thousand men in the retreat from East Prussia. The Germans were advancing on the Baltics, the Austrians in the south.

Refugees and wounded poured into St. Petersburg. All medical practitioners in town were pressed into emergency service. Alexandra and Helena were fortunate, they were allowed to work side by side in the hospital where they had trained. They worked in shifts. It was good to be close to each other, their job was gruesome. Many of the young men brought from the front were in dreadful condition, many died under their hands. But this horrible work kept Alexandra from brooding. Every day demanded all of her. After a ten-hour shift she returned home exhausted.

To detract from the East Prussian defeat the Emperor declared a Holy War to recapture Constantinople from the Turkish Infidels. Alexandra's worries about her parents grew, but Tiflis remained peaceful. The Ottoman Empire was so shaky that Russian troops soon occupied large parts of Eastern Anatolia.

At the same time the city government decided to change the "German" name St. Petersburg, which Peter the Great had given his foundation, to Petrograd.

In April, Otto was working on his homework, an enormous explosion blew out all windows in their apartment. Elizabeth found Otto lying dazed and covered with glass on the living room floor. He was unharmed. Wild speculations of a German bombardment ran through the city. Reality was worse than that, an explosion in a large munitions factory in Petrograd had destroyed the weapons reserves of the army. By summer 1915 only every third Russian soldier had a weapon and had to ration his ammunition.

As the extent of the military defeat in East Prussia became evident, the Emperor demoted the arrogant chief of staff of the Western Army, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich, and sent him as Viceroy to Tiflis. Vorontsev was dismissed. Jordania carefully watched this change of guard and for the first time discussed an armed uprising against Russia with the inner circle

of his faithful.

One night around that time a secret emissary of Jordania's appeared at Vladimir's apartment trying to recruit Tamara as an informer for the Georgian Socialists.

Tamara used baby Asmat as an excuse to decline this dishonorable offer, but she had caught fire. Vladimir and she had a fierce argument behind closed doors: Tamara demanded that they should leave for Tiflis at once, this was the moment for her to enter politics. They finally reached a compromise. Vladimir would take her and Asmat to Tiflis and then return to Petrograd. Aside from Alexandra they told none of their friends of the appearance of Jordania's emissary or the reason for their leaving for Georgia. Vladimir gave the safety of Tamara and Asmat in the face of the increasing chance of a German breakthrough as an explanation.

From the trip to Georgia Vladimir brought back a large envelope from George Dadiani.

Alexandra pulled out three documents covered with official tax stamps and the signature of the Zugdidi magistrate: a deed of twenty acres of land to Alexandra Dadiani and Konrad Rost and ten acres each for Otto and Sophia Rost.

Alexandra laughed facetiously. "Look, we are getting rich, George makes us landowners. Crazy, in these times."

But the transactions reflected the depressing times. The new socialist Duma of Georgia had resolved to finally put the Russian land reform of the 1870s into full effect. So far the Georgian landowners and the Russian crown, which had bought up the best third of Georgia, had been powerful enough to hold on to their possessions. From now on the largest piece of land any person could own would be ten acres. Cunningly, George had decided to simply distribute the best parcels of his land to his relatives.

You don't have to do anything except sign the enclosed documents and send them back. I will continue to take care of the tea plantations as before—except our combined land holdings will shrink from over four hundred acres to less than one hundred and sixty. What I cannot write over will go to the peasants in three-acre parcels or be swallowed by the state, without compensation. A terrible shame, because on parcels of that size you cannot run a profitable tea business. 'They' are out to ruin my life's work.

Tighten your belts, this will be the end of your easy living! I will pay you the profits from what I can squeeze from your share of land, less ten percent administrative costs. That will be it. Thank God, you have your own incomes. For the time being you will not be able to buy anything luxurious anyway—the stores are empty, right?

Your honest George.

P.S. If it were possible, I would leave the country with my family. I can no longer watch the disintegration of an order which is over a thousand years old, not to mention my very personal pain of seeing the work of my ancestors and that of my own life being destroyed.

That night Alexandra wept about the ruin of her family.

Beset by similar, though smaller, troubles Tamara's father came down to Tiflis and concluded an armistice with his daughter. His wife had left him no peace.

Vladimir reported that Tamara had not been as successful in finding herself a position in Jordania's government as she had expected in her youthful naïveté. She had little other income besides what her father sent her. Because of the war the sizable royalties from the French publisher of his novel reached him only occasionally. Deflated, Tamara gave in and moved to Etzeri, where her mother received her and little Asmat with open arms.

"I am relieved," said Vladimir. "I now know that both will be in good hands and far away from a possible Turkish attack on Tiflis in these final months of the war."

Alexandra, distraught by his vision of a Turkish offensive on Tbilisi, asked what he meant by the "last months of the war?" Did he really think that the war was going to come to a sudden end? And with uncurtailed glee in her eyes, did he believe the Russian empire would collapse?

"Both," Vladimir said dryly, but refused to elaborate.

Food became scarce and rationed in St. Petersburg. The supply lines for the city collapsed, the dispirited peasants neglected their fields or sold their produce on the rapidly growing black market. Otto and Elisabeth spent long hours standing in line at the bakeries and food stores and often all they could find were cabbage and turnips. Hunger became their daily companion. Alexandra discovered that Otto occasionally snatched butter and cottage cheese from the pantry. Since she did not catch him red-handed, she decided to overlook it, he was hungry. Yet compared to the many refugees they were lucky, they had a roof over their head, and Alexandra and Konrad brought home meat, butter, milk, and soap when once a week the government distributed food to the physicians and the members of the Academy.

The winter of 1916-1917 turned the food shortages into famine. Naked chaos broke out in St. Petersburg. Bands of ragged children led by deserters roamed the streets in broad daylight searching for food or attacking and robbing people. It became dangerous to walk alone. Shots echoed through the streets at night. The police and the army, diminished by desertion, were powerless. Everywhere cries rose demanding the resignation of the Emperor and his ruling clique. People left the city in droves.

One morning Vladimir arrived at the Rost's apartment highly agitated. "Tonight is the première of *Masquerade* at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, 'the show to end all shows.' For five years Meyerhold has worked on a production of Lermontov's *Princess Ligovskaya*. He finally got it together, an impossible staging of an equally impossible melodrama. You have to see it to believe what he has done. This is *Fasching* 1917, Russian style. The performance is sold out, these three tickets were given to me by a friend."

Tired and exhausted from her hospital work, Alexandra protested. "Tomorrow the world is going to come to an end and tonight the rich and powerful amuse themselves. Day and night I patch up maimed men from the front. Don't you have any shame left?"

"But Alexandra, you don't understand, this is *Carnival*, the world will dance to the Devil's tune. Meyerhold, inspired by Wagner's ghost, has staged the *Götterdämmerung* of Tsarist Russia. Meyerhold is a seer, Theiresias and Cassandra in one. This is *the* revolutionary theater. The production is already a legend. You absolutely *must* see it!"

The police were out in force. While groups of workers, carrying banners demanding

bread and the resignation of the Emperor, marched through the back streets, Nevsky Prospect and Alexandrinskaya Square were crowded by the carriages of the rich and powerful. The theater was packed to the last seat. Everyone noticed the presence of the Emperor and Empress in the Imperial loge, an unexpected honor for the iconoclast director.



A rare photograph of Meyerhold's "Masquerade", Petrograd, February, 1917

They sat in the third row of the *Parquet*, at arm's length from the stage. Golovin's set, in gold, red, and black, the colors of the Imperial Russian, was designed as an extension of the auditorium and so was the production, forcing audience and cast into a macabre reflection of each other. Meyerhold had invited the high society of St. Petersburg to attend their own funeral service.

Meyerhold used Glinka's lethargic *Valse Fantastique* to turn Lermontov's, never-before-performed, youthful melodrama—a jealous *Prince Arbenin* poisons his adulterous wife—into a modern reflection of morbid Russian upper-society. Arbenin was played by Yuriev, an outstanding but controversial dancer and actor.

The first act, a decadent gambling house, was followed by a *bal aux masques* in which an army of extras danced to merry music before the delighted eyes of the audience. The lavish set and the colorful costumes fused with the music into one grand tapestry. Meyerhold had choreographed every step, every gesture of the *corps de ballet* with a precision never seen before. In the middle of the act the dance changed into a military parade: like automata the dancers marched across stage with the mechanical exactitude of the organized masses of the coming age. Nobody seemed to notice. The act ended in raging applause.

The laughs and bravos died as Arbenin and his wife rushed to their dénouement. Shocked silence descended on the jaded audience during the last act. Meyerhold had engaged

an authentic Russian church choir to sing the eerily solemn Orthodox Requiem for the Dead.

When the curtain fell the people sat stunned. Into the silence a single hysterical voice from the ranks—was it Meyerhold's design or spontaneous?—intoned "*Gospodin promilyu...*" The confession of sins and prayer for salvation.

Only then did applause break out in seemingly unending waves. Yuriev, Golovin, Meyerhold, and the cast had to appear again and again. A standing ovation, baskets of flowers and laurel wreaths piled up on stage.

Finally an actor appeared who announced that His Majesty the Emperor had bestowed a gold cigarette case on Yuriev.

A puzzled murmur went through the theater. Yuriev's homosexuality was well known, and everybody recalled the incident in which six years earlier Nijinsky had been booed off the same stage and dismissed on imperial orders, because of his affair with Diaghilev.

The presentation of the cigarette case would be Nicholas II's last public act.

To Vladimir's surprise, Alexandra was elated.

"A grandiose, macabre funeral for this corrupt regime," she proclaimed. "You were right this production rivaled Munich's *Fasching*! The music was suitably shallow, the acting excellent, the choreography made you shiver, and the sets were superb. But Mahler's sixth symphony is a more profound requiem for Europe."

Vladimir countered mysteriously. "You don't know how close to reality this came. Let's go home. Do you have a good vodka? Your favorite Georgian cognac is not coarse enough to top off this experience. The graves for the imperial family are already being dug."

Going home was not easy. Shots could be heard on Nevsky Prospect. Police on horses attacked demonstrators on Liteini Boulevard with drawn sabers. They had to take cover several times in house entries to wait for the street to clear.

"I only have Polish vodka, it is excellent but you will have to swallow your Russian pride," said Konrad when he got the bottle and glasses for the three of them. Anxious to hear the news, Otto appeared in pajamas from his room woken by the noises of their return.

Vladimir handed him a glass. "Drink, Otto, the world is going to come to an end."

They huddled around the table in the dining room and Vladimir, in a conspiratorial voice began. "The emperor will resign. He doesn't know it yet, but I have it first hand. Alexander Kerensky will, in the name of the Duma, present the emperor with an ultimatum demanding his abdication. Before the week is over Kerensky will proclaim a Russian Republic."

He emptied his glass in one draw. "Adieu to a thousand years of Russian Empire."

Alexandra exchanged glances with Konrad. "Your imagination is overheated. Do you think Nicholas will give up without a whimper?"

"Nicholas has no choice, his troops are completely demoralized. They will side with the Socialists. The Petrograd garrison will stage an uprising if he refuses, and his Imperial Guard in Tsarskoe Selo is riddled with Bolsheviks."

Konrad shook his head. "And what will happen thereafter? Kerensky and the Cadets are not strong enough to hold their ground against the left-wing radicals or the conservative royalists. Do you have the Bolsheviks on your side?"

"For the time being yes. Nicholas will bear the fate of Russia on his weak shoulders, as he has said repeatedly. He will abdicate in order to fulfill the benighted vision of his tragic, God-ordained, religious mission."

Vladimir gulped down his glass of vodka and held it for a refill. "I don't know what will happen in the following months. Trotsky and Lenin are still in exile abroad, but they will for sure make their appearance at the liquidation sale of power. As long as they are not on Russian soil, Kerensky may well be able to keep his followers together."

His voice turned into a hoarse whisper. "But I know what I will do. I will collect Tamara as soon as the passes have opened and leave this country. To whomever Fortuna will give her nod, we will only have a short time of grace during which it will be possible to escape the terrible reckoning to come."

He looked at Alexandra. "And you should consider doing the same."

An ominous silence hung like a black cloud over them. Vladimir poured himself another glass of vodka, Otto watched his mother intently, and Konrad, deep in thought, stared at her portrait across the room.

Alexandra lit a cigarette. All four knew that this decision rested on her shoulders.

She sighed.

It was not the first time that she was confronted by this decision, only this time it was deadly serious. If the timing of Vladimir's prediction held, it would be possible to reach Georgia, if not they would have to cross into Finland through the snowbound woods of Karelia. And what then? How were they to reach Germany? The war was not over. And maybe the Germans would still win. All her Georgian relatives were convinced of a German victory, if only because, wedged between Russia and Turkey as they were, they had no other choice of hope.

She looked questioningly at Konrad.

Deliberately slowly she said, "I would try to reach Georgia as soon as that is possible."

The words, which Konrad had expected, had been said. Konrad did not comment.

With an agitated voice Otto began to examine the logistic questions. They could not take the train to Tiflis, because Baku was in the hands of Moslem insurgents. Going by boat was equally out of question. The Black Sea was controlled by Turkish torpedo boats. They had only one choice, to wait until the Georgian Military Road opened. Could they cross the pass in a sleigh?

"On foot is more likely," said Konrad with a dry voice. "And what shall we do with Sophia in that case? No, we will have to wait until early May."

Surprisingly, no one gave a thought to their possessions, the furniture, the books, the apartment.

Vladimir asked for asylum that night, it would be too dangerous to go home by himself.

Four days later, on March 2, 1917, Tsar Nicholas II, a willing, sacrificial lamb of predestination, signed the abdication which was presented to him—with a pencil as it were. The new government put the royal family under house arrest in Tsarskoe Selo. In a concession to the conservatives, Prince George Lvov was elected Prime Minister. A landowner with the intelligence of a village mayor.

The war continued, the Germans controlled the Ukraine. The Russian army disintegrated on all fronts. Bands of mutinous soldiers killed their officers and hid in the woods. Thousands streamed into Petrograd, swelling the left-wing radicals.

The aristocracy began to leave the country, across the border to Finland, to Siberia, and

to the Pacific Provinces. A few risked their lives and escaped across the Black Sea to Bulgaria and Greece.

Alexandra slowly and systematically gave away clothes and household items to the refugees and homeless. She told Elisabeth that she was free to stay in their apartment or to go home, they would not be able to take her along on their escape. In tears Elisabeth left for the Baltics by the end of March.

One night Helena appeared with Alexeev. They announced that they had decided to get married. Alexandra was overwhelmed by the news. Helena had kept her growing relationship with Vitali very quiet. Alexeev joked that they had even planned their honeymoon. They would seek temporary refuge at the estate of relatives of Helena's in eastern Russia before trying to reach America by way of the Far East. Together they emptied Konrad's last bottle of Georgian cognac.

By April Alexandra, her family, and Vladimir were the only ones left among their close friends anxiously waiting for the Caucasian passes to open.

In mid-April an unseasonable hot spell baked the South. Vladimir, restless and worried about Tamara and little Asmat, arrived at their apartment one night to say good-bye. He would take the train south early in the morning. God willing, they would meet in Tiflis. He crossed himself three times.

God had long ago abandoned his creation, this was the last time they saw Vladimir.

Their Flight to Georgia

May 1918

In the small hours of a cold May night Alexandra, Konrad, and their two children reached Vladikavkas. The train had carried an escort of heavily armed soldiers to fight-off bandits. Four days and nights had passed without mishap, but now the train's engineer refused to take them further. The Chechens had blown up the bridges along the tracks to Baku.

Vladikavkas was overcrowded with refugees and soldiers. They walked south out of town and hid in a small wood off the road. Sophia and Otto fell asleep under one blanket.

Konrad and Alexandra discussed the situation in whispers. Alexandra smoked a cigarette. For short moments its red glow would illuminate her face. In the distance the wheels of a locomotive screeched in repeated attempts to get a train moving on the rails. Shots rang sharply through the crisp morning.

Tense, Konrad said. "We cannot walk across the mountains by ourselves, we need to join a group of people to defend ourselves against bandits."

Alexandra suggested that she would find a gun to take along.

Konrad was aghast. "No, you will not, a gun would endanger us all. Maybe we can persuade or bribe a soldier to accompany us. That would be much better. What do you want to do about Sophia, she cannot walk all the way."

Alexandra drew one last time on her cigarette and tossed the butt in a luminous arc into the undergrowth. "We must find someone with a cart for her to sit on. We can walk. I will go into town and search for a horsecart to carry our luggage and Sophia. Maybe I can share the vehicle with some trustworthy people."

Konrad voiced his concern about her safety alone in town.

She shrugged. "What should happen to me? With a little luck and my Georgian sixth sense I will find a cart. You will have to be patient and not worry about me."

Otto piped up. "Mummy, I will accompany you."

"I thought you were asleep," said Alexandra.

Otto was wide awake. "Sophia grabbed the blanket. I got cold and have listened to you for some time."

They discussed Otto's suggestion, and Alexandra decided that because of his age he could be taken for a deserter and for that reason should stay with Konrad guarding their belongings and Sophia.

Alexandra got on her way and had soon disappeared.

Konrad looked at their scanty baggage. Alexandra had insisted that they take very little. Each carried a backpack, which she had sewn from rugs during the last days. Konrad also carried a suitcase with a few important valuables and Alexandra's portrait. Everything else they had left in the apartment in the in care of a refugee family related to Helena.

Konrad and Otto did not see Alexandra again until the afternoon when she reappeared with a man, a horse-drawn two-wheeled cart, and a couple with a child. She waved a document from the garrison commander guaranteeing them free passage at all military posts. The officer had assured her that they would be safe during daylight hours. The couple with the child she had met at the commander's office. They were on their way home to Tbilisi.

The owner of the cart came from Kobi on the northern approach to Djvari Pass. He was

not willing to take them all the way across. To make sure that he did not disappear along the way, Alexandra had paid him only half the sum he had asked for; the remainder she would pay him in Kobi. Alexandra shrugged, this was not an unreasonable agreement for Georgia. They loaded their baggage, Sophia, and Rusudan, the young girl onto the vehicle and set out towards the mountains.

They were not alone on the road. Military detachments marched south pulling heavy equipment, officers on horseback, refugees on foot or on carts like theirs. A *landau* drawn by three horses, the driver cursing through a bullhorn to clear the way, raced past them, a general with his adjutants.

"Ho," laughed the Kobi man, "Where do these gents think they are going in such a hurry? Up there everyone has to walk, the general too."

Alexandra asked, was the pass still closed by snow?

"Yes, yes," said the man, "I was there just a few days ago trying to take a rich Armenian merchant across to Mleti, and my cart got stuck. The Armenian was forced to walk through the snow. It is quite a distance to Mleti."

Concerned, Alexandra discussed the news with Konrad and Otto in German.

This time Konrad was sanguine. "He is just trying to get a higher price from you for taking us to Mleti. Don't worry, we will get through. Look at these soldiers, they will have to shovel a path through the snow to get their artillery across. Besides, we have, because of your excellent foresight, so little to carry that we can easily walk like everybody else."

Alexandra decided to overcome her anxieties and to improve her relations with the man, she made him talk about his children and life in Kobi. She discovered that in her heart she felt happy to be among Georgians again. After so many years, she was on her way home, what did it matter that the going was rough?

By evening they reached the checkpoint at the border to Georgia. A long line of people waited to show their permits at the turnpike and be searched for weapons by Russian-speaking soldiers.

Alexandra presented her document. The soldiers let them pass—except Otto, whom, suspecting him of being a deserter, they took into their shed. After an hour of anxious waiting, Alexandra went to see the Georgian officer in charge. In a loud voice she produced a histrionic, Georgian-style scene: my son, taking him away from his mother. He is not even seventeen. I can show you his birth certificate. Think of your own mother. What kind of Georgian are you? She did everything except bribe the officer.

Within fifteen minutes she emerged triumphant with a pale and shaken Otto.

Their companions and the cart had disappeared. It had become dark. They needed to find a place to spend the night. Everywhere people were camping in the open. Alexandra approached a group of Georgian men who sat around a roaring fire and celebrated their return to Georgian soil. The men invited them to join their supper, a freshly shot rabbit roasting over the fire.

Otto's Georgian was not fluent and Konrad or Alexandra had to translate for him. This was Otto's first encounter with the rougher side of Georgia. After supper, while bottles of wine made the rounds, the oldest of the men told stories.

It was an unreal night, the scare at the checkpoint, the uncertain future, and the strange, age-old tales of the mountain people. Alexandra handled these rough people with an expert mixture of hauteur and easy familiarity. One man asked her for her name, and when she gave it as Alexandra Dadiani and told them that her mother was Tamara Chavchavadze a great cheer went around the fire, and Otto and Konrad had to stand up and drink from a horn to Alexandra's health.

In the middle of the night Konrad woke. Alexandra was screaming obscenities. It was pitch dark. She let go of another series of Russian curses. Otto sat up. "What is going on? You scared me!"

"Tshi," whispered Alexandra, "Russian soldiers are trying to rob and rape a young girl over there. Be very quiet."

Alexandra changed to Georgian, calling with a high-pitched, shrill voice on all Georgian men to stand up and defend the honor of a Georgian woman against a "Russian swine." Within minutes the men in the encampment were on their feet, shouting and cursing the Russian intruders, who ran off into the night firing their guns into the air. The shots echoed from the rocks. Thereafter, they slept in peace for the rest of the night.

They woke shivering. It took the sun a long time to penetrate the deep canyon. Alexandra found the man with the cart and their companions, who had spent the night in a dirty room in a house that someone had rented to them for a high price. They had hardly slept because of rats and vermin and the shooting. Did she hear the shooting? they asked. They had been told that a group of Chechen bandits had staged a sneak attack on the post.

Alexandra laughed, "*Ho*, Chechen bandits, a single woman defended the honor of Georgia against a marauding group of Russians."

"Mother," asked Otto when they were back on the road, "where did you learn those terrible Russian swear words?"

"From the soldiers whom I took care of at the hospital during the last years. They would scream like this when they were in pain. Only they would curse the Emperor. Once in a while these curses come in handy, as you see. Konrad was right, you don't need a gun to scare off these yokels."

The going was steep, they were still at the bottom of the Terek gorge. Sophia and Rusudan had invented a game, and Sophia was fast learning Georgian from her new friend. Rusudan's parents stuck anxiously close to their possessions on the cart. Alexandra involved the man from Kobi in a long conversation. Otto and Konrad brought up the rear.

As they emerged from the canyon and Mount Kazbeg came into view, Konrad's dark mood lifted. The sun and the mountains swept his fears away. He told Otto of his first journey across the pass with Leist, and his adventures with Alexandra in Tusheti.

Exhausted, they reached Kobi by evening. Alexandra's devoting her attention on the owner of the cart brought them an invitation to his house. In true Georgian hospitality he gave them a room and heavy carpets to sleep on. He even invited them to supper.

Alexandra paid him and quietly added a liberal amount for the room. She knew how to handle such matters in the villages. Later she doctored an abscess from which one of his children was suffering with a sterilized kitchen knife. The good man was highly grateful. She thoughtfully avoided asking him to take them to Mleti on that warm and comfortable evening.

Over a cup of hot tea and fried eggs in the morning he opened the negotiations on his

own. He could not take them any further than Mleti, he said, because he had to be back for a wedding in Kobi on the weekend. He invited them to stay at his house for the wedding, he would take them early next week. The pass road had been cleared now by the army, but only God knew whether this unseasonably warm weather would hold.

They discussed the reliability of the weather, the problem of having to find another vehicle in Mleti, and the temptation of staying for the wedding. The good man finally helped them come to a decision by suggesting that they were not dressed to brave a snowstorm in these mountains.

They left after breakfast. Alexandra got a very favorable price, because, he said, she had cured the child's abscess.

The man was not willing to take their companions along, the road was very bad, washed out from the sudden snow melt, and steep. He had only one horse. Their companions would have no trouble finding another vehicle. He laughed, everyone in the village was in the transportation business these days.

The road up the bare mountains beyond Kobi was indeed like a riverbed. Huge boulders lay strewn in their way alternating with deeply eroded sections. A landslide had carried part of the road away. Snow patches still covered other stretches. Several times Sophia had to walk. The horse could barely pull the cart, which often listed so much that Sophia was in danger of falling off. On the pass itself the snow was still so high that they passed through a deep channel which the soldiers had dug through the snow.

They had a brief rest at the hospice in Gudauri where Konrad and Leist had spent the night. Alexandra wept when she saw the hills of Georgia in the distance. By nightfall they wound down the last serpentine to the bridge across the Aragvi at Mleti.

In Mleti the Kobi man introduced them to a friend who offered them a room for the night and promised to take them to Ananuri in the morning, an easy hike of six hours.

They reached Tbilisi two days later, exhausted but glad to be home. Tamunia-Deda, who had received no warning of their coming, took was crying and laughing. Frail, white-haired Irakli was shaking with excitement.

Alexandra and Deda in a flurry of hectic activity prepared two rooms. Later Alexandra took over in the familiar kitchen and prepared dinner. Deda cried : "You were forced to walk across Djvari Pass! At this time of the year, and they nearly took Otto away! I am so happy to see you all safe and healthy in my house."

Nobody in Tbilisi had seen Vladimir. Alexandra called Etzeri and left Tamara in tears. He had not arrived there either. Alexandra feared the worst.

A few days later, in the first week of May, a blinding blizzard swept the mountains. All passes were closed again for another two weeks. Svaneti would remain cut off from the outside world well into June.

All through May and June Tamara did not give up hope that Vladimir had taken refuge somewhere, or that he had been held for a while by the Chechens in the northern Caucasus.

One morning two villagers from Betcho appeared at to her father's house with a sled-like contraption, pulled by two oxen, which the Svaneti peasants used summers and winters to

negotiate the bad mountain tracks.

They carried a long bundle wrapped in a tarpaulin. A short distance below the house they halted.

Tamara went to greet them.

"Where are you going, and what are you carrying?"

The older of the two men answered in a tragic, sing-song voice:

"The body of your Russian lover..."

Stone-faced and dry-eyed, Tamara glared at the men with such crazed wildness that the two dumped the corpse and fled in mortal fright.

Tamara buried Vladimir in the village cemetery at Etzeri. The villagers avoided her. In time she learned that the two peasants had found the frozen body buried in the snow on Ushba Glacier just below Baksan Pass.

He had been shot through the head.

Tamara remained obsessed by the idea that the same two villagers who had brought him had murdered Vladimir trying to cross the pass in April.

If that was the case, her father argued, then it must have been an accident. The villagers, who had been guarding the pass against bandits entering Svaneti, would have recognized Vladimir.

But Tamara swore they had intentionally murdered the Russian who had sullied the body of the last princess of Svaneti.

Her father lowered his eyes in silence.

A few weeks after the burial, Tamara saddled her horse, tied little Asmat onto her back and, without a word of good-bye, left for Tbilisi.

Tbilisi 1918

Tbilisi—it had dropped its Russian name—appeared like an oasis to Konrad. Life meandered lazily through its narrow streets. The only reminder of the war was the large number of Russian soldiers. Every now and then frightening rumors about events in distant places swept town, but all good Georgians believed that Germany would soon win the war, free them from the Russian yoke, and protect them against the Turks.

The news that Lenin had been secretly shipped by the Germans to Petrograd was only a confirmation of German omnipotence. The power struggle between Lenin's and Trotsky's followers which raged in Russia went unnoticed except in the inner circles of the Georgian Socialists.

There was plenty of room at Irakli's house. Deda was busily caring for everybody, glad that Alexandra and her grandchildren were safe and unhurt. Irakli, however, looked old, depressed, and stooped. He did not complain, but the slow decline of the world he had known and George's ominous distribution of the Dadiani land possessions had demoralized him. He would often lean on his beloved daughter in search of reassurance.

One evening Leist came to look at the "refugees." After hugging everyone he unerringly put his finger on Konrad's touchy spot with one of his boisterous, caustic remarks. "You two are an unusual pair, Alexandra has become a German superwoman while you, Konrad, are turning more Oriental every time I see you. Konrad, what happened to your enthusiasm, to your energy? Wake up, *Mensch*, or you will get caught under the wheels!"

Pained, Konrad frowned. "I need to find work. I cannot continue to sit around all day. You are right, this relaxed place is not good for my soul. Considering the changes in the Dadiani fortune, I can no longer live off my father-in-law's generosity."

Leist shook his head. "My God, Konrad, in this place the grapes are growing on the street, you only have to stuff them in your mouth. By the end of the year we shall have a free Georgian University in a free Georgian Republic. Ivane Javakhashvili is recruiting the faculty. You know many of these people, and they know you. They will be delighted to offer you a professorship. Rightfully or not, the Germans have never stood in higher regard in Georgia. But you definitely have to perk up. In your despondent mood nothing can be done. Let me pull a few strings for you."

A few days later Javakhashvili invited Konrad for an interview. He introduced him to Petre Melikishvili, a dynamic man of Konrad's age. Konrad was pleasantly surprised, the pioneering spirit of these two men contrasted favorably with the conservative, condescending attitude of his St. Petersburg colleagues.

They were definitely interested in him, the sciences were underrepresented. He would be offered Georgian citizenship as part of the position as soon as the Georgian Republic would become a reality. It was going to be a Georgian university, and Georgian would be the language of choice. He did speak Georgian, didn't he?

Konrad switched to Georgian. The two were delighted. Would he also consider giving his permission for his wife to teach as part of the medical faculty? Leist had given them an enthusiastic description of Alexandra Dadiani's capabilities.

Konrad laughed. They would have to discuss this matter with Alexandra directly, she

was very much of her own mind.

Melikishvili grinned with raised eyebrows, David Ortaladze would be head of the medical faculty, and Ortaladze was a good friend of Alexandra's from long ago....

Konrad arrived at home in the best of spirits.

"For all practical purposes Javakhashvili has offered me a professorship and, sit down, one for you too!"

He watched Alexandra's doubting mien grow, but his enthusiasm was too strong. "Aren't you impressed by their interest in you? 'Frau Professor Dadiani-Rost?' It sounds grandiose, doesn't it? You should have seen their faces when I told them that this would be entirely your decision. Your dean would be Dato Ortaladze, head of the medical faculty—'*an old friend of yours!*' Melikishvili smirked when he intimated that to me. I tried hard not to blush."

He gave her a kiss. "Javakhashvili and Petre Melikishvili are more excited about their project than anybody I have met in years. The only aspect of the deal which I *don't* care for is their overbearing national chauvinism: 'all professors will be Georgian and all teaching will be conducted in Georgian.'"

"Oh," said Alexandra, "after eating dust for a hundred years, they should be forgiven a little chauvinism, in particular where it is directed against Armenians and Russians. I am sure Germans are excepted."

Alexandra was relieved, she had not seen Konrad in such high spirits for several years. How well she remembered his delightful sarcasm in the discussions with Walter in Florence. "I will go and visit Dato at the hospital, I had that in mind anyway."

Dato received Alexandra with honest pleasure. "Are you staying?"

"I am afraid so, St. Petersburg has become uninhabitable. We left everything behind and fled."

Dato called Christine, who was even more delighted that Alexandra was in Tbilisi. Christine suggested having dinner at their house, and she should bring Konrad.

Dato showed her the hospital with obvious pride. Despite the war, he had done an admirable job. Cut off from Europe, he was forced to buy secondhand instruments, but the discipline of his personnel and the cleanliness in the house were exemplary. Alexandra was impressed.

She asked Dato whether he could use her as a physician. Dato was delighted, he had lost two German doctors at the beginning of the war. She would make an excellent replacement.

Alexandra congratulated him on his university appointment which Konrad had heard about from Javakhashvili. Dato became serious, he had long hesitated to take on a second major burden besides running the hospital. He would have to teach four hours in addition to the bureaucratic paperwork of the department.

"You know what I would like to do? Hire you as my deputy director of the hospital. Your qualifications are excellent, and your organizational talents," he smiled, "are probably better than mine."

Alexandra blushed, but she liked the idea. She felt that this could be a satisfying job with considerably increased responsibility compared to St. Petersburg.

"Yes," she said, "it would be a good way to keep me from getting '*kartuli*-fied' and turning into a lazy Georgian matron!"

Dato laughed, "As if you had any talent for that. Would you feel like teaching a course in my department at the university? We are lacking good talent."

Alexandra confessed that Melikishvili had suggested exactly that to Konrad. She had to think about this proposal, in principle she would like to teach, but she had, unlike the men, to care for her family too, cooking, sewing, shopping, and the like.

Christine had prepared an elaborate German dinner, with Konrad in mind, she said. Alexandra was moved by the beautiful decor Christine had lavished on her table. It reminded her of the dinner at Friedrich von Bredow's house: table silver, beautiful china, a white table cloth, and flowers everywhere.

Christine was a quiet brunette, open and unaffected. She had worked as a nurse in the hospital where Dato had spent his clinical years. Alexandra had already liked her when they met on the boat. A good, reliable woman for Dato. When they had met for the first time, Christine had worried about living in Tbilisi. She seemed to have settled down well.

Christine asked, "Dato told me you left everything behind in St. Petersburg, did you leave in such a hurry?"

Suddenly Alexandra did not know how to describe to her what St. Petersburg had been like in the past four years, her gruesome work, the famine of the last year, the shooting in the streets, and the demonstrators. Here they lived in deepest peace time.

"We only took what we could carry across the mountains on our backs. It must seem crazy to you, but we went on foot from Vladikavkas to Ananuri."

A nagging doubt overcame Alexandra, had they left prematurely in a panic? From the vantage point of this cultivated table, the entire last three weeks appeared surreal and hysterical. Had they all gone crazy?

But then she remembered the walk home after *Masquerade*, the shootings, the protesters demanding bread and the head of the emperor, the police with drawn sabers chasing people down Nevsky. The tense night with Vladimir after they came home when she had made the decision to leave. How could she explain that without losing her composure?

She realized she could not. They would say, 'how horrible, we had no idea,' but the existential fears, the rumors, the ominous presence of the Okhrana, the anti-German threats and denunciations, the jeering masses, yes, especially those, they simply could not imagine.

Dato and Christine walked them halfway home through the sleeping town. Konrad was reminded that this had been the custom after such evenings in his German university years.

When Alexandra hugged Christine and thanked her, Alexandra broke down in tears. "Forgive me, it was so wonderful with you, we have not had an evening or walked home like this for four years. Don't worry, I am all right, the past just overwhelmed me. Thank you, thank you, both of you."

Konrad took Alexandra's arm. "I finally see that your decision to bring us here was the right one."

As expected, Javakhashvili offered Konrad a position, for the time being at the Gymnasium, as professor of botany and the natural sciences. When Javakhashvili and Melikishvili finally interviewed Alexandra she cleverly expressed her interest in a part-time teaching job, but told them that for now she would prefer to work as Dato Ortaladze's deputy-

director at the hospital until the university actually became reality. As she had guessed, Javakhashvili did not have a paid position for her at this time. He gladly accepted this face-saving solution.

By the end of the summer Konrad and Alexandra were professionally in more interesting and challenging positions than they had been in St. Petersburg.

Once again, Konrad taught chemistry, physics, and botany at the good, old Gymnasium. He was touched by nostalgia, the same auditorium, similar faces. The number of women had quadrupled, most of them studied medicine. They no longer confused him with their giggles, but neither did he find an Alexandra among them, except in his visions of a time long past.

"My God," he told his wife, "if I were to find you one morning sitting again at your old place, I would have a dizzy spell and completely lose my composure. I see you all the time in front of me: 'Princess Dadiani where did you learn your excellent German?'"

She smiled. "You did not call me *Princess* Dadiani although you should have known that I was Irakli's daughter—and I was so excited that I was afraid that my legs would give way."

In the middle of these explorations of their new world a haggard, worn-out Tamara descended upon them. Dressed all in black, she looked like out of a painting by Pirosmiani. She accepted the shelter Irakli offered her, but spoke little. They sympathized with her grief. Alexandra extracted the full, horrible story of Vladimir's end only several days later.

Deda wordlessly adopted Asmat, who became an animated doll for little Sophia. For Konrad and Alexandra, Tamara was a constant reminder that the terrifying world they had left behind indeed existed.

Often Tamara vanished in the morning and did not return until after midnight. Nobody asked questions about her comings and goings, and she did not volunteer any information.

Alexandra at Forty

Tbilisi 1918

Alexandra arranged for a small private practice at the hospital, where she continued her experiments with healing seemingly incurable cases. David was as unbelieving and later fascinated by her successes as Dahl had been. But Georgian as he was, he shrugged, if her methods worked, why should he argue? There existed enough traditional cures in medicine for which nobody had any explanation.

After four years of "forced labor" Alexandra finally could get back to the work she had wanted to do after her visit with Dahl. She began to test her hypothesis that psychological factors were the reason for her successes. She carefully selected the cases she treated from among the hospital patients on the basis of interviews she devised with Dahl in mind, and her success rate did increase to three out of four. As she had suspected, in all her successful healings the trauma of a separation from a close mate, parent, or friend played an important role.

Dato and his staff would only refer patients to her with her agreement. This process also shielded her from becoming known as a miracle doctor, nobody had direct access to her.

Awed, the doctors at the hospital soon looked up to her, which stood her in good stead in her position as deputy-director. To Dato's satisfaction, she discovered her innate gift for organizing and motivating people. Her relationship with Dato became close and cordial. They respected each other, and he eventually entrusted her with all personnel decisions.

With her healing successes the other long-standing temptation to try to teach her method to someone else resurfaced. She needed to find the right person for such an experiment. Dato suggested a disguise: Alexandra should let it be known that she would instruct a group in yoga. The response to her notice on the bulletin board was overwhelming. A score of applicants jostled to gain entrance to the small room Dato had given her for the purpose. All but two were women.

She decided to improvise. First, she told the crowd, she was not going to discuss or teach Indian philosophy, secondly she was not interested in yoga as a physical exercise to improve their figures. She wanted to study the psychological effects of yoga meditation and to this end she needed volunteers. This announcement reduced the crowd to four.

She looked at her four candidates, an intelligent looking man, she guessed he was twenty, probably from Central Asia, a blond, bony girl whose gray eyes looked straight through her. Russian? Finally an older woman who, Alexandra shuddered, appeared to have strong medial faculties—and to her surprise, Christine Orthaladze.

Barely perceptibly Alexandra shook her head at Christine. When Alexandra explained that she would give them a psychological test first, the 'medium' left. Well, thought Alexandra, *she* doesn't need me and settled down to ask each of her candidates a few personal questions.

All three worked at the hospital. The Central-Asian man's name was Sagdulla Bakhrami. He came from an old Uzbek family and his interest in Alexandra's course derived from his childhood: one of his uncles had been a poet and healer. The blond girl turned out to be third-generation German, Bertha Wagenbauer, born in Elisabeththal. She claimed to have had some spontaneous healing experiences under the tutelage of her grandmother, who was a

Kräuterfrau, a herbalist in the German community. Christine was the only person who had no healing experience. Alexandra confessed that her ultimate intention was to explore psychic healing. For the first time Bertha focused her gray eyes on Alexandra, quite obviously questioning her qualifications.

Looking into Bertha's doubting eyes Alexandra smiled. "I may not appear like a faith-healer, but I have treated a number of otherwise incurable cases during the past three years. I would like to understand how people get cured in this way and try to teach my method to others."

She asked them to keep their discussions and work strictly confidential. Dr. Ortaladze had agreed to her experiments, but the general public did not need to know of their work. They had seen how they would be mobbed by the curious and superstitious. Next time she would discuss her program in detail with them. Everyone was called upon to contribute.

Alexandra walked Christine home. She would teach her privately. Dato was home and with a pensive face listened to Alexandra's excited report. He was glad that their meetings would be kept at a low key not to attract any attention in town.

In August they celebrated Alexandra's fortieth birthday. Olga and Deda had prepared a dinner for her in Zaguramo. Leist, who had, after Ilia's assassination, become Olga's protector, was there. Alexandra had invited Dato and her new friend Christine.

The dinner table in the living room with the French doors open onto the meadows, the sun spots under the oak trees. It could have been one of the days of her childhood had the memory of Ilia lying in state in the living room not disturbed her. She had not been back to Zaguramo since that fateful day. With an energetic shake of her head she chased the cobwebs away and smiled at Konrad. Twenty years, was she that much older? Had she shared her life with this beloved man for that many years?

They walked up to Zedazeni as the sun went down. A lightening storm flickered above the distant snow mountains to the north, a reminder of war-torn Europe hiding behind this bulwark.

Tbilisi had become alien to Alexandra. Swelled by thousands of people from the villages it had grown to twice its size. Many Armenians had fled the increasing animosity of their Georgian neighbors, who resented their past collaboration with the Russians.

Alexandra decided to visit her uncle, David Chavchavadze. She hoped that he could give her a better understanding of her changed homeland. She took Uncle Mouravi's Benz out of the horse stable and had it washed by the houseboy. Gasoline was so scarce that she had not used the car.

She settled down with David over a cup of tea. When she asked David about the family property and what he was going to do about the upcoming expropriations, she made a shocking discovery.

"Didn't you know," said David surprised, "we don't own Tsinandali. We are only tenants on this land, it belongs to the Russian crown."

Alexandra was completely bewildered, she had thought that Tsinandali had been in the hands of the Chavchavadze for generations.

David shook his head. "It was—before my father had to mortgage it to the crown as a collateral for a loan that covered the ransom paid to Shamyl in return for my mother after their

abduction. You do know that story?"

Of course she did, but nobody had ever told her of this bitter end of the Shaml sag.

David spread his arms. "Ironically this situation is now in our favor. We aren't landowners like George Dadiani. My brother and I only lease this land from the emperor. And because it belongs to the Russian crown it is not subject to the land reform. A thorn in the flesh of Jordania's Socialists. Sooner or later they will, of course, find a twist to disown the Russian crown. We would be reduced to caretakers...." His voice trailed off. "Caretaker on my ancestors' land? I don't think I want to be a part of that. I would probably leave like George Dadiani before that happens."

David poured her a glass of cognac. "You need a drink. I see this comes as a real shock to you, but at the moment we are considerably better off than George Dadiani because we have not been landlords here for over seventy years. We are well liked in Kakheti and have become a kind of historic relic, Kakhetian folklore. Admittedly we *are* poor devils by comparison with George Dadiani."

He laughed bitterly.

"But don't feel sorry for George and his family, he has stashed away enough money in Switzerland to tide him over, whatever he decides. Don't misunderstand me, George has been exemplary in his generosity to your father and Tamunia. You know that I have the highest regards for George's business acumen."

She had never seen her otherwise gentle, sensitive uncle so bitter. Finally, she thought, I discover the deeper reasons for the smoldering resentments between my two families.

David gave her a smile. "Tell me about yourself and Konrad. I hear you fled St. Petersburg with only what you could carry. I can imagine that the social and political situation in Russia has, under the pressures of this disastrous war, become dangerously chaotic. Have you found suitable work in Tbilisi?"

She was touched and felt encouraged, here was someone who seemed to have an idea of what they had been through. She described their life during the past few years and their march across the mountains. She told him of the excellent jobs they had found. Finally she confessed that the reason for her coming was the hope that he could explain to her the confusing situation and the future of Georgia. "If one comes from St. Petersburg, Tbilisi appears like a tiny paradisaical island in a sea of collapsing empires. This illusion cannot last. What then? That is why I asked you about your views on the land reform, not guessing what abyss was waiting for me behind my question."

David looked past her and did not answer for a while. She followed his eyes and saw the portraits of her ancestors on the back wall of the room.

He lowered his gaze. "Yes, they will destroy the Georgia your ancestors built. The old landowning families will disappear to make room for a new order. Your wedding was the last traditional celebration in this valley, even Konrad looked like a specter from the last century. He reminded me of ill-fated Griboyedov marrying Tamara Chavchavadze eighty years earlier."

He smiled. "You did well to marry this man. And even better was your decision to study medicine when this was barely conceivable for a woman from an aristocratic Georgian family. You made the jump into a bourgeois life whether you knew it at the time or not. I admire Irakli for giving you that freedom. I would not have had his courage and foresight had you been my daughter."

He paused and took a sip from his glass. "Dear Alexandra, I am no prophet. I am not even cut out to play Cassandra. But I fear that for a while our lives are going to get much worse. Maybe a responsible Georgian bourgeoisie will grow up. You see, until now, the Armenians were the bourgeois middle class. The Georgians were either princes or peasants. Our society was feudal in the best sense until the end of last century. Ilia was one of the first Georgian *hommes bourgeois*. And that, not his politics, was the deeper reason why I was so often at loggerheads with him."

He crossed himself. "May he rest in peace."

David sank into silence for a while and sighed. "I am no friend of the Socialists. They will be the new order. I distrust and often despise them, not because they want to destroy the old aristocracy, but because they are upstarts who have no understanding of our culture."

Alexandra sympathized with her uncle, but she felt she was part of the new generation, and she did love Georgia as much as he did. "I may not feel the weight of my ancestors on my shoulders as you do. When I married Konrad my concern was to find a bridge between East and West, to free myself of my Oriental heritage as a woman as much as an individual—without losing my Georgian traditions. For years I fought to be aware of and responsible for my own actions. To learn this took twenty years of 'exile.'"

David looked at her with tired skepticism. She blushed and continued, "When I was young and naïve I hoped to come back and teach Georgian women how to free themselves from their limitations. Now I see that it is the *women* who up-hold the old order. The Georgian women are not in the least interested in taking responsibility for their own actions, lest they disturb their lazy, ignorant men in the sleep they provide for them."

Startled, David gave a hollow laugh. "You mean you pursue a program to radicalize Georgian women?"

Alexandra became alarmed, but continued. "No, not a program. Attempts at revolutionizing Georgian women I will leave to Tamara Dadashkeliani and her Socialist friends. But I feel all they will accomplish is to replace one straightjacket with another. If you understand me right, one belief system with another: Instead of God, the Church, and the Emperor, Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky will dispense salvation!"

David admitted that he did not understand. "Man has to believe in some higher being, in some system which acts as the final arbiter for his ethics. You are right, the Socialists would like to replace our Christian religion with a secular one. I find this very dangerous, one should never allow any man to determine what is right and wrong."

Alexandra became aware that she had overextended herself. She had steered the conversation into an area which she had not sufficiently explored herself. If only Konrad were here, his presence would give her the courage to continue her argument. David did not seem to understand what she was wanting to say.

She decided to try again to formulate her fundamental concern. "I do not want to abolish religion, but I would like to make every person responsible for his or her actions with respect to society as well as religion, instead of following long-established or new rules and prescriptions blindly. Maybe I do see the church as a human institution like any other, full of errors and open to being challenged. I certainly agree with you in that I seriously question the 'moral' values promoted by politicians, philosophers, and charlatans. But I allow myself the same critical right against religious values."

David sat up straight and stared at her distastefully. "Isn't that Western intellectual

humanism?"

Alexandra lost her verve. She felt driven into a corner. "If you want to give my conviction a label you could call it intellectual humanism. It does go back to the Renaissance."

Very serious, David explained that to him this individualist persuasion had always appeared to be the ultimate danger to any established order. "You are putting an enormous responsibility on man, how can you expect him to bear that weight? Decide what is good and bad on one's own cognizance? Are you doubting the existence of God as the final source of our moral values?"

Against her better judgement she confessed. "In a certain sense, yes. For me, God is part of me, not an outside authority which exists independent of myself. The knowledge of good and bad is given to me. I know it is difficult to tap this inner order, one has to learn to balance one's mind completely to see it. And even if one learns to do that, one still makes mistakes."

David was horrified by her individualism and made the remark which would continue to haunt her for the rest of her life. "I fear this persuasion will give you much trouble in the years to come. I wish you the strength and the discretion to continue to believe in this kind of freedom. Do hide it from your friends and neighbors. They might try to kill you."

As she drove home Alexandra recalled their meeting. She was unhappy with herself. She had wanted to get some guidance from David for the future, and the conversation, entirely out of her control, had slipped into this philosophical discussion which she should have had with Konrad or Friedrich, but not with David.

How had this happened to her? It was true that her conclusion about the relativity of God and all ethical values had been growing in her mind for a long time. The naked bottom of God in the Sistina! Looking for someone on whom to try out these thoughts, she had got the wrong person.

Well, my dear, she told herself, you did get your advice for the future: hide your thoughts from your friends and neighbors, they might try to kill you.

German Troops in Tbilisi

1918 – 1919

In November, 1918 the Bolsheviks' *coup d'état* deposed the Socialist coalition government in Petrograd. Lenin proclaimed the Revolution. At a time when the Russians were slaughtering each other, wily Jordania saw his opportunity to declare Georgia an independent Republic.

The war had exhausted the resources of Europe. While the German armies were bleeding to death in the trenches of France, their Eastern front extended as far as the Crimean. The complete disintegration of the Russian army forced Lenin to accept a separate armistice with Germany, which Trotsky signed in Brest-Litovsk. He gave away Poti and parts of Georgia and Armenia to Turkey, Germany's ally.

The new Georgian government refused to acknowledge the treaty and produced a bizarre charade by inviting the Germans to occupy Georgia in order to defend the young Republic against Bolsheviks and Turks alike.

On June 21, 1918, German troops marched into Tbilisi cheered by flag-waving crowds and the band of the German Club playing the *Parisian Entry March of 1871*.

Otto watched from the balcony of his grandparents' house because his father had sternly forbidden him to go into the streets. For the first time in his life Otto saw the military representatives of his Fatherland march. Later father and son had a serious discussion about the dangers and consequences of Otto's three allegiances.

A few days later Konrad's strict authority was badly undermined by an unexpected visitor, Freiherr Friedrich-Werner von der Schulenburg. He appeared at the house in a most cheerful mood with a thick package of letters from their relatives and friends. Schulenburg had been named German ambassador to the new Georgian Republic.

He received a most enthusiastic welcome. Irakli recovered a bottle of his best wine from the cellar, and they spent the evening talking, exchanging news, and discussing their common friends as if peace was at hand.

Alexandra cried over the first letters in years from Niko and Claudia, Katharina, Clara Westhoff, and a long, prophetic epistle from Joachim von Bredow, which Konrad read aloud. Joachim von Bredow was, as usual, prophesying the collapse of the world in a few months and once again urged them to leave for Germany as speedily as possible. This time there were reasons to take his advice seriously.

Schulenburg was so happy to be back in Tbilisi that he could not muster the courage to be honest with his hosts and confirm Joachim's black visions. By midnight they were all happily drunk, except for Konrad who had turned very quiet.

Alexandra, who had watched Konrad all evening, dreaded what she knew was to come. The following morning she and Konrad went for a long walk in the hills and for the fourth time argued the case for and against leaving for Germany, a question which they thought they had settled years ago.

Alexandra had made herself strong: they had a house and good jobs in Tbilisi. Here they were Georgians, in Germany they would be "Russian" refugees, without possessions, with no place to stay, with few connections and little support. Germany was an alien land and not

only to her. Also, if Joachim was only half-right, the political situation in Germany after a lost war would be at least as disastrous as Petrograd had been.

Konrad did not contradict her cool argument, he reassured Alexandra that he would stay with her. But this concession did not settle the matter. Alexandra, in tears, suggested that they should send Otto to Niko in Göttingen. She had no right to tie him to her fate. Otto was eighteen now and in eminent danger of being pressed into the army of whichever power would control Georgia. Claudia and Niko would receive him like their own son. She would persuade George Dadiani to pay Otto a small allowance against her inheritance from his Swiss bank account. Otto could attend the university in Göttingen and return once times had calmed down.

Konrad, moved by her last argument, a construct to still their darkest, unmentionable fear that they would never see Otto again, argued that Otto was old enough to handle his own life. *He*, Konrad, had left home at seventeen to attend university in Berlin. She should also think of Dato, who had been little more than sixteen when they sent him to Jena.

This did not quell Alexandra's tears. Konrad began to realize that the reason for her distress lay deeper. The guilt of not having given Otto enough love and care made her miserable. He hugged her silently, and slowly Alexandra's sobs quieted down.

Next day Konrad took Otto for a walk to prepare him for the pending decision and found that Otto was most eager to go to Germany. Konrad mentioned his mother's tears about losing him, but did not burden him with their fear of never seeing him again.

Otto's enthusiasm—he talked about Germany for several days—helped Alexandra collect herself. She discussed the matter with Schulenburg who offered to take Otto along on his next home-leave and issued an Imperial German passport for Otto.

"Strictly *extra-legal*," he said with a laugh, "but who cares. The Imperial government will not last much longer."

To regain his balance Konrad went back to Shav nabada to turn. Persephone, who was in her mid-sixties and had become very quiet, received him with an understanding smile.

"Konrad, I am very happy to see you among us. I heard that you spent many nights turning at El-Zafaran's *tekke* in St. Petersburg." She encouraged Konrad to dance with the others that night, notwithstanding that he was not formally initiated and did not wear the shroud and hat of the dervishes.

After the sema Persephone took Konrad aside and told him, "We would like to embrace you as a member of this tekke and bestow the hat and coat on you in a small ceremony."

Konrad, moved by her sincerity, sat very quietly for a few minutes with closed eyes. It had been a long time since his first evening in Shav nabada with Alexandra. Many times since, he had found the turning exercises his last refuge whenever he felt off balance. He thanked her and accepted.

Konrad's initiation became a solemn service full of restrained, ethereal joy, a rite of passage for Otto as much as Konrad, a thanksgiving for their safe return to Georgia, and a welcome for their new friends. Konrad had invited Sagdulla Bakhrami and a reluctant Dato, and Alexandra, who had consented to the ceremony with a tear in her eye, brought Christine and Berta. Gray-haired Henri had come. Deda acted as semabashi. The melody of the neys spun a tight consoling cocoon around the small group. Deda dressed Konrad in the long, white, skirt-like shroud of the Sufi, and Persephone placed the high, felt hat on Konrad's head, which

would crown the tombstone on his grave. And then he danced with his new brethren.

It all happened very quickly. Three weeks later Germany collapsed. By December the German troops had left Georgia.

The last person to leave was Schulenburg. He picked up Otto in the embassy car. A sullen Konrad loaded Otto's few cases. With a radiant smile Alexandra hugged her Tuscan child. He got into the back seat. They all waved, and in a few minutes he had disappeared down the street towards Poti.

Only then did Alexandra break down in Deda's arms.

A Visit to Tbilisi

1982

Following a conference in Novosibirsk I persuaded my all-powerful protector Academician B. at the Moscow Academy of Sciences to let me spend a week in Tbilisi. Officially I would discuss technical matters with Merab D— who was a professor of physics at Tbilisi University. On several previous visits to Tbilisi Merab had driven me to many of the places where Alexandra had lived. Only Merab knew of my search for my grandparents. I still wanted to find out what had happened to them after 1943 when they had vanished. But every time I asked this question I had met with embarrassed silence..

This time my schedule was very tight. Arrangements had been made for me to visit two new laboratories. The meetings with their dinners lasted into the nights. No time for long excursions with Merab.

I needed to be alone and asked Merab to let me spend the morning at Konrad's Botanical Gardens. He understood, and I went off on foot. The Botanical Gardens are separated from the city by the ridge that carries the Narikala Fort and the Iron Mother of Georgia. Absentminded, looking for the shortest way, I noticed a highly pregnant young woman with her husband coming towards me pushing a child in a stroller. A few seconds later we would have passed each other, and she would have disappeared forever.

I don't know, was it her condition, her unusual blond hair, or her light blue eyes looking at me? We smiled at each other, and I spontaneously asked her, in my poor Russian, for the way to the Botanical Gardens. She answered in fluent German. That was not unusual, other people in Tbilisi spoke German, but she spoke it with a strong Swabian accent.

She explained that there was a tunnel below *deda sakartvelis*, the Iron Mother of Georgia, which led directly to the Botanical Gardens. I thanked her and, intrigued by her *Schwäbisch*, asked where she came from.

"I was born in Uzbekistan, but my parents came from Elisabeththal, once a small Swabian village in the mountains south of here."

She pointed in the general direction of the television tower on Mount Mtatsminda. Now I was fully awake, not because of Elisabeththal, but because of her mentioning Uzbekistan. "How did your parents get to Uzbekistan?"

Her husband pulled at her sleeve and said something in Georgian.

Perfectly natural she said, "Oh, that story is too long to discuss in the street. I was born in Shakh-i-Zabz, married a Georgian, and returned to Tbilisi." She pointed with her head at her husband

She was, I guessed, 30. What prompted me to ask whether she had ever heard the name Alexandra Dadiani?

"Yes," she said to my complete surprise, "Alexandra was a friend of my mother's. She delivered me. She was our doctor in Uzbekistan. Why do you ask, did you know Alexandra?"

My voice was suddenly stuck, I could barely whisper. "Alexandra was my grandmother."

"Oh, what a coincidence."

Her husband was showing signs of restlessness. It was not advisable to be seen talking to foreigners in the street. He took her by the arm. She smiled apologetically. "I will have to go,

we are late."

"Tell me what was your maiden name?"

"Susanne Eberle."

She waved to me as her husband led her away.

They had already walked a short distance when I called after her. "Susanne, do you know where my grandmother is buried?"

She turned and called back. "In the cemetery at Zaguramo."

Rooted, I watched them disappear around the next corner. I knew I would never see her again.

I found the tunnel and a bench at its far end. It was hot outside. I sat in the cool shade of the tunnel and looked down on Konrad's garden. I put my head between my hands, my mind was spinning.... After all my fruitless searches, the most important stone of Alexandra's mosaic had fallen into my lap by pure chance. Alexandra had been in Shakh-i-Zabz in Uzbekistan in the 1950s. She had returned to Tbilisi and was buried in Zaguramo.

Merab drove me to Zaguramo. After a long search through the cemetery he found the grave. It was modest. No picture of the deceased, no elaborate iron fence surrounding the well-kept grounds, a simple black, marble stone.

ალექსანდრა სოფია დადიანი-როსტ
Alexandra Sophia Dadiani-Rost
- 9 August, 1877 + 18 May, 1965
Εὐνοὺν γὰρ Ἀρχὴ καὶ Περὶ καὶ Κυκλὸς Περιφέρειαι

Neither of us could decipher the Greek inscription. Merab insisted that I kiss the stone out of respect for my long-lost grandmother. It was a Georgian custom. I knelt down and kissed her name all the time distracted by the line about the periphery of the circle.

It took me a long time to translate the Greek inscription and find the quotation in a bilingual edition of Herakleitos' *Fragments*. Literally translated it reads: *Identical are Beginning and End on the Periphery of a Circle*.

A new riddle.

My old father wept when I brought him my photos of Alexandra's grave. Father had never been given to shows of emotion. Shy, reticent to the point of awkwardness, more intelligent than his colleagues, he had no close friends. I, like Alexandra, am an emotional person—and a poor listener. On this evening I kept mostly quiet. And my father was more eloquent than I could remember ever having seen him....

"You know," he began, "that I have not heard from my mother since 1939, when Schulenburg was German ambassador in Moscow and prepared the infamous German-Soviet

non-aggression treaty after the defeat of Poland."

Alexandra had suddenly appeared in Moscow, had managed to slip Schulenburg a letter, and had vanished without a trace.

"Schulenburg had a hard time finding us. You remember the winter of 1938? We had moved to H—, and Alexandra did not have an address for us. Neither did she know that Niko and Claudia had fled to America. Schulenburg finally found us through the Bredows."

A deep frown formed on his face. "My mother had a strange way of visiting me by psychic means, clairvoyance, or whatever you want to call it. She watched over me, and once she appeared to me in a dream.... No, I don't want to talk about that—my mother terrified me in those days."

He shook his head and paused in thought. "For many years Alexandra's spying was a fact of my life. And I had hoped that she would lose my tracks when we moved to H—... terrible, don't you think?"

"Claudia had explained to me, that Mother would go *flying*," he brightened a little and made the silly gesture of flapping his arms, "and visit people and places at night. Claudia once rescued her in St. Petersburg when Mother had *fallen from the sky* while looking for Konrad in China. Apparently Mother got confused and nearly passed out in her trance. Claudia was still shaken by this memory when she told me the story decades later."

He glanced questioningly at me through his glasses. "Mother had discovered that she had faith-healing capabilities, and somehow her flying was related to that. I did not pay much attention to this until, in 1920, she sent me a letter addressed to the Bredow's in East Prussia claiming to have seen me there in Annika's arms. Can you imagine how that alarmed me? My crazy Mother watching me without my knowledge. I had no sensation of her presence. In Annika's arms? She claimed she saw me often in this way, but she could not speak to me, because she had not taught me how to get into that state. In 1939 she had lost my tracks. She wrote, unhappy that she was not able to find the town nor the house we lived in."

My father ceremoniously got two glasses and opened a bottle of wine. My parents drank very little and then only on special occasions.

Encouraged by his openness, I dared to ask the question which had pursued me many times since I had emigrated to America.

"How was it when your parents sent you off to Germany in 1918? Were you very upset, or were you excited by the prospect of this new adventure?"

My father looked silently at the photo of Alexandra's grave. He had never talked to me about his separation from his parents.

With a deep sigh he continued. "When you left for America I got a taste of what it must have meant to my parents when I left Tbilisi. I have thought about that day many times since. Maybe you too?"

I nodded, and he continued. "I was as excited as you were on that night in 1956 when we saw you off on the train to Rotterdam. But you were twenty-five then and Andrea was to follow you soon. You know how much we love her. We knew you would be in good hands. When I left Tbilisi I was eighteen and apart from Niko and Claudia there was nobody in Germany with whom I had a close relationship. Mother must have been very depressed when I left, it had been her idea to send me to safety. I now ask her forgiveness for having accused her for many years of having been strange, aloof, and lacking the love I craved."

He looked at Alexandra's portrait on the wall of his study, and smiled. "I was full of

adventure on that German ship to Hamburg. It was one of the first ships on this route, the war had just come to an end. Herr von der Schulenburg, the good man, was pathetically concerned about the welfare of the orphan in his care. But later the entire misery of my having been abandoned in that chaotic, defeated country overcame me with a terrible force, and it was Mother whom I accused of coldness and neglect."

He stared absentmindedly into space. "For a few years I received an occasional letter from Mother but then even that thin lifeline was cut by the Second World War. Between 1919 and 1939 I received a total of seven letters from her, all smuggled out, and only two of mine got there, as far as I know. I was not able to go back and forth every two or three years to visit my parents as you can."

He turned to me with a quizzical glance. "For a long time Andrea, your mother had to carry the heavy burden of my hopeless despondency. She has not forgiven Alexandra, whom she considers the source of all her troubles with me. Maybe I can still persuade her to make peace with Alexandra. There isn't much time left for that labor of love."

He picked up the photo of Alexandra's grave and kissed it. I was startled—my father would barely give me a kiss when I came or left.

"You said your Georgian friend told you that it was the custom to kiss one's mother's grave. Well, it is really much more than that for me."

He glanced embarrassed at me.

To distract him from his troubled memories I asked, "What happened when you arrived in Hamburg? Niko and Claudia had no idea of your coming."

"In Istanbul we picked up another decommissioned German diplomat and his wife. They had been close friends of my parents, Joachim and Clara von Bredow. The man who, before the First War, had repeatedly urged my parents to return to Germany. Although they hardly knew me, they were truly delighted to see me. They took me in. They had a large house in Berlin and no children. Clara became my adoptive mother."

"I spent most of the winter of 1918-1919 with them in Berlin. Clara spoilt me beyond measure. These were wonderful days, although Berlin was in an uproar. When spring arrived they took me to East Prussia to the estate of Joachim's brother, Friedrich von Bredow.

"Do you remember, when you were small I used to tell you a 'fairy tale' of a young boy who got lost in the Snow Castle which was inhabited by children with animal heads? That young boy was I. When the train to St. Petersburg got stuck at the border in 1905 Friedrich von Bredow picked us up and took us to his nearby manorhouse. The house had been ravaged during the terrible battles in East Prussia in the early months of the First War, but by 1920 most of the damage had been repaired."

He smiled at the memory. "I fell in love with Annika von Bredow, the Mouse in my fairy tale. You are always so interested in the love stories of other people. Well, this was my great love, and she would have been your mother, had tragedy not intervened. She was murdered in the winter of 1924 by a gang of marauding Russians from across the border who broke into the Bredow's house. Annika and one of her brothers were killed that night trying to defend the property with a gun. It was a terrible loss."

His voice failed him. Embarrassed, he took his glasses off, cleaned them with his handkerchief, and rubbed his eyes. "The Bredows had convinced me to study agriculture, it seemed like a good profession in those uncertain days, and they envisioned me as son-in-law and future manager of their vast estate in East Prussia."

"I started at the university in Göttingen where Niko and Claudia provided me with room and board. Klaus, their child, was only five and both parents were absorbed in very busy research careers. They were very dear to me, but my old relationship with Niko never really returned. I was abysmally unhappy in Göttingen. I longed for Annika and the lonely woods of East Prussia. This was the time when my lost childhood overcame me, and I became aware of Alexandra's spying."

"I spent all my vacations in East Prussia. George Dadiani sent me 100 Swiss francs each month which I gave Claudia for room and board. In those bad times of the depression my Swiss allowance was a godsend. The Bredows paid for my university expenses and gave me some pocket money as compensation for my work on their estate."

"After Annika's death I left Göttingen. Unable to concentrate, I spent an entire year working in East Prussia. In 1925 I joined the *Wandervogel*, the German youth movement. We hiked, slept in barns on the way, sang folk songs, discussed philosophy, but not politics. In 1926 I visited Tuscany and Florence and the beaches of my dreams near Venice."

He smiled. "I hiked all over Tuscany and fell in love with the 'land of my conception.' Mother used to call me her Tuscan child, because of, as she would tell anybody who asked, my conception underneath an olive tree in Tuscany. Mother could be embarrassingly outspoken. I would invariably blush at this epithet. I did not find Alexandra's olive tree, but tracked down the Wolfsons. They had gotten very old and lived off Sally's inheritance, but *Villa Tasso*, though rundown, was still the paradise Mother used to rave about."

"I met your mother Andrea on a *Wandervogel* sing-in, as you would call it today, on the Ludwigstein near Göttingen. Well, you know that she came from Breslau in Silesia. I moved to Breslau and finished my doctorate at the university there in 1929. We got married in 1930. A year later you were born."

My father raised his glass and looked at me.

"There will not be many more such evenings between us."

I had many unanswered questions. "I now know that Alexandra went to Uzbekistan sometime after 1940 and that she returned. I assume Konrad went with her and died in Shakh-i-Zabz. I still don't know of the reasons and circumstances which took them to Central Asia. What can you tell me about your sister Sophia? Maybe I can trace her some place."

"She was eleven when I left Georgia. Mother would call her 'my Georgian girl.' Sophia did not look very Georgian. She had dark blond hair and Alexandra's deep blue eyes, but she had an unmistakably Georgian temperament, suave, a trifle lethargic, willing to please people and especially men."

"My parents and Sophia lived at the hospital after the Dadiani house had been confiscated by the Soviets. It is not clear whether Sophia worked as a nurse or was studying medicine. In her last letter Mother wrote that Sophia was about to marry a medical man, but she did not mention the name of her future husband. Mother must have hoped to write again. Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union put an end to her letters."

"And the Dahls," I asked, "what happened to them during the Nazi years? Weren't they Jewish? All you have told me about them was that Alexandra visited them in Munich in 1913."

"Yes, Claudia's father was Jewish. He died in Munich in 1926. Claudia took it very badly, but he was fortunate. Marie, Claudia's mother, died in 1936. She was still alive when Niko and Claudia escaped to New York with Professor Courant's group. I guess this separation destroyed Marie Dahl's will to live."

"Friedrich, who was a very successful mathematician and physicist in Hamburg, could not make up his mind to follow Niko and Claudia to America. He died in Buchenwald in 1944. My connection with him and Katharina was not very close. But you visited Katharina in München, she must have told you of her and Friedrich's life, and of their son Ingo who ran away to America in 1936. We always believed that Friedrich had helped him escape."

I had tracked down Katharina in Munich in the summer of 1951. I was just twenty and did not know much about my grandparents or their friends then. Katharina told me about Alexandra and Konrad's Italian journeys, their two visits to the Wolfsons, their stay in Munich, and the summer on the beaches of Ca' Savio. She did not tell me about Ingo's flight, her parents-in-law, or Friedrich's horrible end. She just said Friedrich had died in 1944, and during the war he had worked on military-related projects, which had kept him from being drafted. This was not without precedent, I had learned that other Jews had survived in secret military-related positions, among them several high-placed officers.

I had not asked Katharina any further questions, but had left puzzled. There was something Katharina was hiding, which I could not put my finger on. My father too never talked about Friedrich. Katharina had died in 1955.

"Tell me," I asked father on a sudden hunch, "was Friedrich a Nazi?"

He became pensive.

"After 1936 we never mentioned him at home. Friedrich was an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazis, he joined the party in 1935. It did not save his life, he was too intelligent and highly visible. I learned to hide, to be gray during those years—just an unimportant civil servant teaching the stupid sons of peasants. In 1944 rumors began to circulate that Friedrich Dahl had been involved in spying for the Soviets together with Klaus Fuchs. But I don't know whether there is any truth to that. Fuchs escaped east, and Friedrich they caught."

He paused. "Did you know that Friedrich-Werner von der Schulenburg was hanged in 1944? He was accused of involvement in the assassination attempt on Hitler—as was Friedrich von Bredow, Annika's father, who died in the same way."

I was 13 when the Second World War ended. I should have known about these people. But they had been *totgeschwiegen*, passed over in silence by my family for fear that we would be implicated in their fate. Their names were never mentioned.

My father was very tired, all his happiness about the photos of Alexandra's grave had been destroyed by the horrible memories of his life.

Next morning over breakfast my father almost perky, asked. "Could one visit Georgia as a tourist? Now that I know a place that I would truly like to visit, to beg my mother's forgiveness for maligning her for years, I would really like to go."

It was the first time he had voiced such a wish. Before he wanted nothing to do with the USSR. It would not be as happy a trip as he imagined, I feared, too much had changed in Tbilisi, but it was now entirely possible. We made tentative plans for such a journey.

It was not to be. My father suffered a stroke. Mother wrote that he had become very difficult. He was in no condition to travel to Georgia.

Alexandra's Letters

1983

One morning Konrad's old watch stopped. It seemed properly wound. How annoying, I thought, now that Konrad's and Alexandra's life was finally beginning to unravel the watch that had kept me company gave up.

I took it to a watchmaker. He looked at it. "It will need some cleaning, it looks as if it has not been cleaned for a hundred years. Have you set it to run so slow?"

"Oh," I told him, "I don't use it to count my hours, it runs at the pace of life in Eastern Europe, and you will find other things strange with this watch—it runs backwards. Please don't change any of these oddities."

He shook his head and laughed.

He took out a few screws and found the spring was broken. That would be a major repair. I signed my name authorizing the repair of the watch.

When I came home, I found Andrea in tears. What had happened?

She showed me a telegram. My father had died.

We flew to Germany the following day. Mother was relieved to see us. "You don't imagine how difficult the past year has been." She said. "After his stroke, he could no longer speak. Later he recovered some of his speech: he was able to sing. But he was indescribably despondent. When awake he sang Georgian nursery songs to himself and cried for his mother, in Russian. When I could no longer handle him physically, I had him transferred to a resthome. I found a nurse for him who spoke Russian. He insisted that the woman's name was Elisabeth.

"It was a dreadful time. I am so happy that you are here, and that he has been released from his long, unhappy life."

She wiped tears from her eyes with her apron. "He died alone, fighting the restraints they had put him into to keep him in bed. He again and again demanded to go to Tiflis to ask his mother to forgive him his trespasses against her."

We buried him in the cemetery at G—, the town where my parents had lived since my father's retirement. Mother was looking forward to a new life, planning to visit us at Christmastime.

Mother gave me Alexandra's portrait and a thin packet of letters. My father's treasure, which he had saved from the Poles when we were deported from Silesia. I knew they existed, but he had never shown them to me.

A few months later, before she could visit us, Mother died from a massive cerebral aneurysm.

On our return flight to Los Angeles, gliding at thirty thousand feet above the ice-fields of Greenland, I opened the package of letters. Those long flights strip time and space of meaning, one departs at twelve noon and arrives at two in the afternoon, on the other side of the earth. The sun has barely moved, meanwhile one has eaten three meals and lost twelve hours of one's life.

The package contained eight letters and the last postcard from Geneva, all in Alexandra's tiny hand. The entire correspondence of a mother to her abandoned son, seven letters in twenty-five years!

Alexandra's diminutive scribble was difficult to read. I had never seen anything written by her. She wrote in the old, German *Sütterlin* script which my father had still used, but we had no longer been taught in school. The long, energetic downstrokes of the lower-case f's and s's and the generous loops of the capital R's and H's spoke of her willpower and passion, but contradicted her otherwise highly controlled writing, yet there was nothing pretentious or artificial about her handwriting. It was slow reading, occasionally I needed Andrea's help to decipher a word.

I read one letter after the other, handing them page by page to Andrea. There was the last letter of 1939 that Schulenburg had smuggled out in his diplomatic pouch.

...Yesterday I learned that v. d. S. is in Moscow. I have arranged to fly to Moscow for a medical conference tomorrow in the hope that I can slip this letter to him personally, so I don't have to write in code. If I cannot get a hold of him, I will have to destroy the letter, it is too dangerous..."

Another letter was postmarked 9 August, 1920 in London, Alexandra's birthday.

...You won't guess who showed up in Tbilisi, after you and the Germans had left, Oliver Wardrope! He came as ambassador with the English troops, who replaced the Germans. You never met him, but he was a close friend and student of Ilia before Leist inherited his place close to Ilia's heart. Like Leist, Wardrope translated the 'Panther Skin.' I knew him well as a girl, so our unexpected reunion was a pleasure. He will mail this letter from London to you, my lost child,.

In contrast to the Germans, the English with Wardrope's exception, he speaks Georgian, are not liked, 'they have no soul' Konrad would say, they are too unemotional for this southern country.

Her earliest letter had been mailed from Germany in June of 1919 by an A. v. Reullaux, Berlin, whom I had never heard of. Written two months after Otto's departure, it was short but most heart-wrenching.

Tbilisi, 12. June, 1919

Dear Otto,

After months of unhappiness because of your departure, I found you today at the Bredow's in East-Prussia. Christine and I went on a "flight" together in search of you. You looked happy and in good hands. This knowledge makes me incredibly happy. I know now that you are safe, and that I will never be completely separated from you wherever you might be.

I should have taught you this skill, we would not need to write letters.

You found your way back to your earliest love, and Mouse looked beautiful. I bless her for making you happy.

We are in good health and spirits, although events around us are turbulent. Konrad is now a full professor and the head of the department of natural sciences. After 20 years wrangling with the Russians the Georgian University of Tbilisi has finally become a reality.

Your sister sends you greetings, she lives at Deda's and helps her take care of little Asmat.

I teach a course in healing at the hospital to three young, unusual people, Sagdulla Bakhrami from Samarkand, Bertha Wagenbauer from Elisabethtal, and Christine Ortaladze, who has become my close friend.

You may tell Claudia that I succeeded in teaching someone to "fly" and to heal who had no experience in this strange art—we had a long argument with Claudia's father about this subject on my last visit to Munich. Professor Dahl was very critical of my arrogant self-confidence in my "occult" capabilities. It can be taught!

How are Niko and Claudia, my special brother and my dear friend? How is their child, Klaus? He must already be a big boy. I long to see them. And how is goodhearted v. d. S.? Was the trip to Germany as exciting as you had hoped?

I love you with all my heart, even if you must have often felt neglected and unloved by me. I will hover around you and protect you, have confidence in your extravagant, strange mother. Give my thanks and greetings to Clara and Joachim and thank Friedrich von Bredow and his wife for giving you shelter. Don't forget to kiss the Mouse from me.

*I embrace you, my Tuscan child
with Love
Alexandra*

P.S. I shall entrust this letter to Alexander von Rollov. His name is a Russian version of Reullaux, an old East Prussian Huguenot name. Rollov has been the director of the botanical gardens. He decided to leave for Germany. Konrad will replace him at the gardens.

The violent overthrow of the Last Paradise came suddenly in February 1921.

...I am writing in great haste at the hospital in the middle of the night. Uncle David Chavchavadze is waiting to take this letter with him to Europe. His family and George's are already in Batumi. David has to leave before daylight to make his way out of Tbilisi.

The final fall came two days ago with the Red Army descending on Tbilisi from three sides, only the coast near Batumi is still open. Once again we have decided to stay. The Zugdidi Dadiani, the Orbeliani, and the Dadeshkeliani will leave with the inner circle around Jordania. Tamara, pig-headed as always, wants to stay. With her close ties to the Mensheviks she is in real danger...

This is going to be an ugly letter, but I trust you to understand that I cannot lie about three ugly days. You are no longer a child whom I need to protect.

The invasion took place at night. I was at the hospital on night shift because we have an outbreak of typhoid among the refugees in Ortachala—twelve serious cases and two dead so far. Thank God, Konrad was spared the worst, he was with my parents.

A group of soldiers stormed the hospital. They herded all female personnel into one ward, threw the patients out of their beds and mass-raped the women. The officer of the detachment stuck a gun into my mouth and neatly raped your mother, separately.

I am forty-three now and will survive it. But the shame, which I still have trouble living down, is that these soldiers were not Russians but native Georgian Bolsheviks.

The snotty character in the shaft-boots of an imperial Russian officer was from Gurian. Full of hatred, he addressed me as Princess Orbeliani.

Next morning they brought in old Persephone from Shavnabada. Someone had first raped her and then stuck his bayonet between her legs. She bled to death. That finally made me cry.

Our house has been confiscated by Comrade Sergo Ordzhonikidze, the leader and Stalin's mastermind of this raid, another Georgian from Vladikavkas. Your grandparents have been relegated to the attic. They are all right, but Irakli is not going to survive this collapse of Georgia. We worry much about Aunt Sophia...

Dear Otto, if all of this sounds horrifying, it really is, but we will survive. We Georgians are like vines, we are flexible and will grow back in time. Do not worry about your parents. If you feel like crying, weep about the downfall of Georgian decency. I will see Ordzhonikidze and face him down.

However, I fear this will be my last letter for a long time.

Be well my grown-up child, remain honest and true to yourself even in your darkest hours.

I love you

Alexandra

Alexandra's rebellious spirit was not dead, she went to see Ordzhonikidze in her father's house. She was led at gunpoint into her father's study, where behind Irakli's desk she found a boisterous, lean Georgian of about 35 in a shabby uniform with the resounding voice of a warlord.

"Yes, Princess Dadiani what can I do for you," he said with a condescending smirk.

"My name is Doctor Alexandra Dadiani-Rost, you can omit my father's title. I assume that you have been informed that I am the deputy-director of the hospital and one of only five medical practitioners left in Tbilisi. I am afraid, Comrade Ordzhonikidze, we are facing a serious situation. As of this morning we have fourteen cases of typhoid in Ortachala and four dead. The epidemic is likely to spread unless you take drastic measures."

Ordzhonikidze apparently had not been informed of the extent of the typhoid epidemic. He fidgeted nervously with Irakli's pen set eyeing Alexandra suspiciously. "What do you want me to do?"

Alexandra knew that she had won. "First of all, I need two motor vehicles to transport the worst cases. I would have taken my car for this, but you decided to retain the old Benz for your own personal transportation. Second, I need a house in which I can establish an isolation ward separate from the hospital."

"Third, I assume for your own Georgian self-respect that you were not informed of the rampage which one of your Georgian officers and his comrades committed at the hospital. They mass-raped my entire female staff, myself included."

"You should realize that this dedicated hospital staff under Professor Dato Ortaladze's direction is the only modern medical facility in Georgia and that it will be in your own interest, Comrade Ordzhonikidze, to protect the hospital from similar gratuitous abuse in the future. For that reason I ask for a guard responsible for the protection of the hospital against future lawless elements disturbing our work."

Alexandra was given what she had asked for, the officer from Guria was shot two days

later. For the remainder of Ordzhonikidze's reign in Georgia she lived under special protection at her hospital.

Konrad and Alexandra moved into two rooms at the hospital. Asmat and "little" Sophia stayed with Alexandra's parents—Tamara had gone underground. The two girls became Tamunia-Deda's life-spirit. They would slip through the guards surrounding the Dadiani house, ferrying messages and food, which Alexandra had the hospital kitchen prepare for them. Irakli sank into a despondent state. Occasionally Alexandra would obtain special permission to visit her parents, then Irakli would perk up for a few hours only to go back, unshaven and listless, to his bed when Alexandra left.

The Soviet troops stationed in Tbilisi were mostly Georgians, by and by Tbilisi reverted to the old Georgian humdrum ways. Corruption became the way of life, and despite food shortages—largely created by the disappearance of the landowning families and the general incompetence of the new regime—one could still obtain vegetables and an occasional chicken on the black market. The bakers worked under the threat of gun-toting soldiers using flour often provided by shipments from the American Hoover Foundation.

Apparently a letter from Otto reached Alexandra in 1923. She writes of her surprise that it had reached her at the hospital by regular mail.

...I am happy that you and Annika are still together. You should know that you and she, should you want to marry her, have all my blessings and good wishes.

In veiled terms she warns him of the censors and the dangers he could put her and others into. Personal messages were all right, and he should continue to send his mail to the hospital address.

But then she continues with her sad news:

Irakli died peacefully last year. We were given permission to bury him quietly, using one of my hospital vans as a hearse. There was even a priest. They have become few and are old, hungry, and dirty. It was a rare occasion where we were allowed to get together as a group of more than three people: Deda—who was less depressed than I had feared, Asmat keeps her young—Dato, Christine, Bertha, and Sagdulla—whom we have become very close to—Olga and Leist—who are very old too, the surprise was Henri, and finally Konrad and myself. We have not heard from Asmat's mother. Irakli's colleagues did not attend but sent flowers anonymously. We had a small dinner at a restaurant which has recently opened in the former Bazaar.

This was the end of my dear, most beloved father. An extraordinary man in spirit and wisdom and my closest friend, even before and above Konrad.

Alexandra sent this letter with a Russian Socialist attending a meeting in France in the spring of 1924. It came too late, Annika was dead by the time this message reached Otto.

Lenin's death in 1924 unleashed a fierce power struggle in Moscow in which Stalin usurped the party leadership. At first there was rejoicing in Georgia, the "Georgian Tiger" on the throne of the Russian empire would finally "make good" and elevate Georgia to supremacy and independence.

This national fantasy quickly turned into a cruel hoax. Lenin had so far curtailed Stalin's

final reckoning with Georgia. Within a few months Ordzhonikidze and the Georgian troops in Tbilisi were replaced by Russians under a Russian Red Army general. The easy, corrupt life of Tbilisi came to an abrupt end.

Georgia boiled over: An altercation between Russian soldiers and a few Georgian hotheads on *Mariamoba*, Mary's Ascension on August 28, 1924, ignited the long smoldering dissatisfaction into an uprising against the Russian occupation. An astonishing arsenal of hidden weapons surfaced in the hands of the insurgents.

When the head of the Russian forces was killed by his Georgian pilot running the plane kamikaze-style into the ground, Stalin put down the revolt unconditionally and mercilessly. Thousands were liquidated or deported, among them Tamara. She did return a year later, devastated and half dead. Alexandra, risking her own life, hid her in the hospital, and slowly revived her.

Everyone ducked and either paid lip service to the new order or kept his mouth shut, but sometimes this was not enough. Alexandra kept her position at the hospital, they needed her badly, and surprisingly Konrad survived at the University after a few days of detention. Javakhashvili was removed from the rectorship of the university and put under house arrest where he would live for years, expecting to be picked up any night.

Alexandra could not mention any of these events. Instead, her letter of 1928 is overshadowed by her anguish that she had lost connection with Otto. She had not heard from him for a long time, and her flying excursions had not brought any news which she could decipher.

I saw you on one of my flights in great distress in an unknown place. Mouse was missing. What has happened? At least I know you are still alive. Please, let me know where you are and what misfortunes have befallen you. Such knowledge would be better than this uncertainty.

We are all right. Konrad spends much time renovating the Botanical Gardens and teaching classes on how to improve agriculture on small plots. He is looking forward to his retirement from the university. I had to give up my private studies. I attend to my patients and try to keep the hospital going. There are sick people who need me more than ever. Fortunately babies are still being born. Delivering them is my preferred occupation.

Aunt Sophia died two years ago. She lived out her last days with relatives in town. Their manor house in Kaspi has been converted into a mental hospital. Our friends have shrunk. We don't see each other often. Christine remains very close to me, and I work with Dato every day. Bertha and Sagdulla, whom Konrad taught to dance, work at the hospital, as does your sister. Asmat is our great worry. Deda is getting old and is not always up to the demands of her growing adopted daughter.

The highlight of the past year was Bertha's wedding in Elisabethtal, it was like in the old days. She married Wachtang Eberle, a Swabian from Tbilisi. Bertha's mother prepared chicken tsatsivi for us and we drank wine from Kakheti. We even danced afterwards. Konrad was almost delirious with happiness.

From this letter my father knew of Bertha Wagenbauer's married name, Eberle. Susanne must be her daughter.

The Sufi had been driven completely underground, turning had become dangerous and

could only be done secretly in private houses, which is what they had done in remote Elisabethtal under cover of the wedding.

Otto sent an answer by regular mail, telling her of Annika's sudden death and that he had met Katharina, my mother, and had moved to Breslau. He must have asked Alexandra for her spiritual support of his wish to marry Katharina, because a letter by Alexandra carried by a Georgian wrestler on his way to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin begins with a blessing.

I take you and Katharina into my arms and wish you the happiness you lost. I tried to see Katharina, but her images are overlaid with those of the Bavarian Katharina. I cannot see her clearly. But tell your Katharina that I loved the other very much and maybe there are more parallels between the two than I can fathom. The Bavarian Katharina was an eminently practical woman with a great, imperturbable sense of reality and her own place in it. Such a woman would be good for you, my would-be poet.

Did Alexandra guess that the reason for her inability to see my mother was, at least in part, caused by my mother's life-long intense repudiation of Alexandra? Alexandra's characterization of my mother was surprisingly accurate. I can only assume that Katharina Weisshuber once fit Alexandra's description, the Katharina Dahl whom I had met had little in common with my mother. And yes, in a way my father was a *would-be poet*, although, to my knowledge, he had never written a single poem.

In 1936, during the Great Purges, Beria rose to political prominence in Georgia as Stalin's henchman. He mercilessly liquidated the last remaining Mensheviks, among them Tamara. She vanished in the Gulag and never returned.

Tamri has left us. At this time Asmat is living with Deda, who has moved into a small apartment in town. Deda is in poor health, I don't have much hope that she will live much longer. Asmat cares for her in the most touching way. Asmat is intelligent and inherited the independent spirit of her mother. She has been selected for a special elite school, and unless we come up with a better idea, will soon go her own way.

Asmat, the gifted orphan of a "misguided" revolutionary, had been selected for a special Party school. It would open a good career for her in the party hierarchy, but remove her completely from her foster-parents' influence. A standard trick of many ideological dictators. Alexandra was looking for ways to save her from this fate.

By 1939 the worst purges were over. Cowed, the Georgians kept their heads down. Yet undaunted Alexandra had successfully slipped Schulenburg her letter—her last.

I have good news for you. Your sister has found a man whom we all like. We hope to celebrate their wedding before the end of the year. He is a young physician who is an intern at the hospital. I am very happy that she will take her own life in her hands. My soft, pliable Georgian girl has lived too long under my charge.

Inexplicably, Alexandra did not mention Sophia's husband's name, apparently because she hoped to describe Sophia's wedding in a future letter. That letter was never written. Once

again war was raging behind the mountains.

I am glad to have borne you so early. You are now a man in your best years and out of the worst danger of contracting any of the children's diseases which are haunting the young these days. We are having occasional outbreaks of poliomyelitis leaving cripples and many young dead, and I have nothing to help them with. It is very depressing, as are the terrible thunderstorms over the high mountains at night. The world has become a dangerous place. I hope that Schulenburg's efforts will help cement the peaceful coexistence of our two countries. Then I might be able to write you again.

To her relief Otto was beyond the age when he would have been in danger of being drafted.

A few months ago we had the rare treat of a concert at the Opera House. Mravinsky, the new director of the Leningrad, alias St. Petersburg Symphony conducted the Fifth Symphony by Dimitri Shostakovich. A controversial composer you probably have never heard of. Since 1913, when the Dahls took me to a performance of Mahler's Sixth in Munich, have I not heard music like Shostakovich's. Maybe you have to have lived in St. Petersburg during the past twenty years to understand why we cried in shame and silence. Like Mahler's prophetic vision of the end of the Europe we knew and Meyerhold's "Masquerade," the requiem for the Russian Empire, Shostakovich put our sufferings and hopes to music.

During that year Shostakovich waited, expecting that Stalin would have him shot.

Your father has retired. He gets a small pension and occasionally visits the Botanical Gardens, but he is glad to be relieved of his teaching duties. Considering his age, he is in excellent health, a quiet, philosophical man who has turned inwards. He spends much time with the study of Eastern cultures.

Konrad tends more and more toward contemplative, abstract speculations, while I practice living every day on this earth in the greatest possible lucidity.

Both are meditation exercises. I will not retire for a long time, my spirit is unbroken, and my long search for complete awareness of my actions has not come to an end.

I had traversed twenty years of Alexandra's life in half as many hours. We were approaching Los Angeles. Below us stretched the hot, dry valleys and mountainous spines of the Nevada desert. How had Konrad and Alexandra ended in Uzbekistan, a land like this below, Konrad over seventy and Alexandra in her sixties? Did she make the decision to go there?

I practice living every day on this earth in the greatest possible lucidity.

A Concert in Kreuth

April 1989

I was visiting friends in Munich. To celebrate our reunion we had supper in a neighborhood *Biergarten*. "Would you like to join us tomorrow for a concert at a music festival near Tegernsee?" said my friend. "The Borodin Quartet and a Georgian pianist will play Shostakovich and the Schubert Quintet. You are in love with Georgia, aren't you?"

The idea of listening to music in one of the enchanted Bavarian places on a beautiful spring night was beguiling. "Who is the pianist?"

"Eliso Abashidze." I had never heard that name.

In the soft light of a warm afternoon my friends drove me through the lovely Bavarian countryside, rolling hills, villages flocking around the onion domes of Baroque churches, dark woods, wide-roofed farm houses in green meadows, to Wildbad Kreuth, a nineteenth-century spa—with a history. A bronze plaque commemorated the sojourns of Emperor Nicholas II of Russia, his wife and children on vacation in the years before World War I.

The French doors of the small concert hall were all open yet the room was unbearably hot. Tall, erect, self-possessed Eliso walked onto the tiny stage. Her black hair and strongly sculpted features, the prominent nose....

I shivered.

I could not determine the color of her eyes.

Unsmiling, she bowed—the skeptical look of Modigliani's painting—and with eloquent elegance swept up the aging Russian string players.

I barely listened to the music. I mumbled under my breath. Who is this woman?

In the intermission I headed, like a sleepwalker, to the performers' dressing room. Tired, Eliso gave the intruder her most critical look. Another admirer, how boring.

"I am sorry to disturb you. My name is..."

...*Alexandra's Necklace*...

Tongue-tied, I stared at the chain of golden Omegas around her neck.

She scrutinized me disconcerted—Yes, she did have Alexandra's blue eyes! She extended her hand. "What can I do for you?"

Barely audible, I stuttered. "My name is Konrad Rost. I am Otto Rost's son."

Her eyes softened. Wordless, we fell into each other's arms. She kissed me.

Next door the Borodin started Shostakovich's tenth quartet. We just sat there and looked at each other.

She gestured with her hands. "Otto? Grandmother Alexandra was certain that Otto had died a long time ago. She had lost spiritual contact with him. And I looked all over Germany and had given up all hope of ever finding any of you."

"Otto died six years ago. For thirty years I have been living in Los Angeles Is Sophia is your mother?"

She nodded.

I smiled at her. "Your necklace...All this time I searched for the woman who wears Konrad's necklace!"

She undid it and let it flow into my hands.

Fighting tears, I arranged its links on the table into Alexandra's mandala.

The quiet melody of the second movement of Shostakovich's tenth quartet could be heard from the concert hall.

I realized that all these years the Alexandra of my imagination had been the ever-young woman of her portrait, ageless, the icon of my childhood. I now sat across from the Alexandra of her last letter to Otto: *...my spirit is unbroken, and my long search for complete awareness of my actions has not come to an end.*

Eliso's serious, compassionate eyes, surrounded by creases, had seen a lifetime of deprivations. Alexandra's challenging frivolity was gone, her sensitive mouth had softened. But the well-defined, mobile arches of her black eyebrows and the shadows under her high cheekbones were unmistakably Alexandra's—Modigliani's painting.

"1964," said Eliso. "Shostakovich wrote the tenth quartet a year before Alexandra died. We had a recording of it. She loved this quartet. It summed up the agonies and hopes of her life."

She looked into space. "Can you stay tonight? There is so much to say. I am renting a small apartment in the village. You could sleep on the couch."

Applause came from the concert hall. The Borodin was embarking on the fourteenth quartet.

I still had trouble speaking. "I would like to stay with you. Friends brought me here."

She nodded. "Let's wait. This is Shostakovich's most beautiful quartet."

We fell silent. The necklace was still lying on the table. I rearranged it into an arc and finally collected and kissed it thinking of Alexandra's gravestone and the Herakleitos inscription: *Identical are Beginning and End on the Periphery of a Circle*. My search, too, had come full circle.

Holding the necklace suspended between my hands I handed it back to her. She smiled.

My friends waited for me after the performance. I introduced Eliso as my cousin. They thought I was putting them on.

Eliso prepared a late supper. "Have you been to Georgia? What do you know about us and our grandparents' lives?"

I had given some thought to what I wanted to ask her. There were so many questions. Where to start?

"About you, Sophia, and the time after 1939, I know near nothing. The war cut us apart. My father left in 1918, as you know. Between 1918 and 1939 Alexandra wrote seven letters to Otto, which I found after my father's death. He told me many stories from his childhood, which sounded like fairy tales. I am a physicist, which allowed me to visit Georgia and search for Alexandra's traces. I fell in love with Georgia, but besides her grave in Zaguramo my search yielded preciously little. I did learn that Alexandra went to Central Asia in 1943 with other Germans from Georgia. Konrad was over seventy then? You must have been born about that time. In 1939, in her last letter, Alexandra wrote that Sophia was about to get married, but did not mention her future husband's name. Is *he* your father?"

Eliso nodded.

She had produced a few squares of *khachapuri* and some walnut-filled aubergines from her refrigerator. She lit a candle and filled two glasses with Georgian cognac.

As she lifted her glass her intense eyes met mine. "To the memory of our dead."

She sighed. "1943, that fateful year..."

Her eyes were far away. "My earliest memories are of that year. I was three. In January my father died in the battle of Stalingrad. In the hot summer Christine Ortaladze, Alexandra's closest friend, contracted poliomyelitis and died under Alexandra's helpless hands. And later that year, Stalin, the Georgian monster, ordered all Germans deported to Uzbekistan. Konrad and Alexandra did not fall under that order, but their close friends in Elisabethtal did. 1943 was the lowest point in Alexandra's life. Konrad persuaded her to volunteer her services as a medical doctor to the German deportees. They left with that transport. Sophia and I stayed behind."

She looked at me. "Have you heard of these people?"

I nodded. "From Alexandra's letters I even know of Dato Ortaladze and Berta and Wachtang Eberle and Sagdulla Bakhrami. Entirely by accident I met Susanne Eberle on the street in Tbilisi in 1982. She told me that Alexandra had delivered her in Shakh-i-Zabz and was buried in Zaguramo—but she was too afraid to tell me more. I figured that Alexandra had returned to Tbilisi after Stalin's death. What happened to Konrad? I always assumed that Alexandra had decided to accompany the German colony to Uzbekistan. She made all other decisions in their lives."

Eliso remained silent for a while.

Deep shadows had formed around her eyes. "Konrad was seventy-four when he persuaded her to leave Tbilisi. Alexandra was in such a dangerously depressed state that he had to do something decisive to rescue her. He knew that he would never return. He died in Shakh-i-Zabz in 1954 and is buried there. When Alexandra returned a year later she chose me as her close companion. For ten years she lived with us. Unbroken and a formidable, outspoken person. She could be very warm and would protect me like a lioness, but she intimidated me often. Several secrets surrounded their leaving for Uzbekistan and Konrad's death, which she never explained to me."

She rose and retrieved three photographs from her bedroom, a formal picture of a soft, blond Georgian woman in her forties and another of a Muslim grave. A narrow stele crowned by the hat of the dervishes. Its weathered inscription was in Russian. I could barely decipher the name, Konrad Rost and the dates 1869-1954. The third photo she kept in her hand.

Eliso said, "This is my mother, and the grave is Konrad's. Why does it look like a Muslim grave?"

An intriguing question. Yet it opened up an unexpected explanation of why Konrad had taken the depressed Alexandra to Uzbekistan.

I hesitated. "It will shock you. Konrad was an initiated Sufi. Three weeks before Otto left for Germany, they celebrated Konrad's initiation at the Halveji *tekke* in Shavnabada. The conical object on his grave stone is the dervish hat he was given then."

"What," Eliso exclaimed, "Grandfather Konrad, a Moslem? You cannot be serious—but Alexandra also used to call it a Sufi hat."

I shrugged. "It is improbable that he ever converted to Islam—although I do not know what happened in Uzbekistan—but without doubt Konrad was a Halveji. It is a long story, which all started with the necklace you wear. It is a Sufi necklace which Konrad made for Alexandra in 1899."

She touched the necklace. "I do, of course, know that Konrad made this necklace. Alexandra gave it to me before she died. She told me that it had mystical powers to protect me,

but she did not explain why—a Sufi necklace?"

She shook her head. I told her the story of Henri Halvejian, the necklace, and of Konrad's initiation at Shav nabada. "I now see another, additional explanation for Konrad's taking Alexandra to Uzbekistan. Konrad introduced Sagdulla Bakhrami to the Halveji tekke at Shav nabada. Sagdulla became Konrad's connection to the Central Asian Sufis. He came from an old Uzbek family."

Eliso listened with increasing fascination. "You must be right. Alexandra once told me that Konrad had been carried to his grave by his Halveji brethren. And, finally, I own a diary of Konrad's journey to China with beautiful drawings by Konrad. In one of his letters he asks Alexandra whether, one day, she would accompany him to Central Asia. On his China trip he searched for connections between the Sufi and China. Now I begin to understand these references."

Excited, I interrupted her. "My father told me of this diary. Otto and Konrad put it together in 1913. I did not know that it survived their flight from St. Petersburg. I must see it!"

She smiled about my excitement. "I will bring it to you. The people who took over their apartment in St. Petersburg saved it and finally returned it to me."

And Sophia, Alexandra's Georgian child? I looked at her photograph. Visually she had nothing in common with either Eliso or Alexandra. "What was Sophia like? To Otto she was his little sister. Alexandra only made a few comments about her in her letters. I have no feeling who she was. Was she the Chavchavadze woman? The granddaughter who inherited Tamunia-Deda's softer, conformist side?"

Eliso turned serious. "My mother was an unhappy person. After Otto had left and Alexandra realized that she had neglected him for years, Alexandra cared for Sophia with great devotion. But they never enjoyed an exceptionally close mother-daughter relationship. Of course, this is all before my time. My father's death was a great loss for Sophia. She had bloomed under his kind guidance, and suddenly he was gone. My mother was thirty-six when he died."

Eliso replaced the smoking candle, which had burnt down. Pensively she touched her lips. "Since you know of Dato Ortaladze—he married Sophia in 1946. Against all odds they had a very happy marriage."

Eliso looked into space and then smiled. "Dato was touching in the way he loved me. By then I looked very much like young Alexandra."

I shook my head. What an archetypal confusion. Dato who—at least according to Persephone's prophesy—was destined to seek his death in Alexandra's arms, and whose return Alexandra feared for a long time—married Sophia, Alexandra's Georgian daughter. Soft, pliant, Chavchavadze-Sophia had to carry the burden of Alexandra's and Dato's karmic entanglement. And growing Eliso had become the spitting image of the young Alexandra he had once loved!

Eliso was observing me. I looked at her. "How much do you know about the relationship between Dato—and Alexandra?"

She lowered her eyes. "You mean the story of her abduction?"

"Yes, and about Persephone's prophesy after the abduction?"

Startled, she frowned. "You know about that? How could you have heard about it—from Otto?"

"In a weak moment, on a ride to Shuamta, Konrad told Otto about Alexandra's fear of

Dato's return. Otto was too young to understand the deeper meaning of Persephone's prophesy, but he remembered the ominous undertone in Konrad's voice."

She lowered her glance. "They are all dead now. They have fulfilled their destinies. I thought I was the only person who knew about that disturbing story. Alexandra described her meeting with Persephone to me shortly before she died and made me swear not to tell anyone as long as Dato or Sophia, who knew nothing about it, were alive. It was like a secret bond between Alexandra and me."

The clock of the village church struck twelve.

Eliso retrieved the photo which she had put aside and placed it before me in the soft light on the table.



Alexandra, Moscow 1963

She watched my stunned surprise. Moved, I stared at the picture for a long time, reading in the lines of her face "This is a portrait of Alexandra," said Eliso eventually, "which was painted in 1963, two years before her death."

My thoughts wandered to Alexandra's dying. "How did the Greek inscription on Alexandra's gravestone come about? It took me a year to find who had written this riddle. Herakleitos is not exactly a popular poet."

"She chose it in her final months," said Eliso in deep thought, "when she knew that her end was near. She was never a 'good' Christian and by that time had become an embarrassingly outspoken critic of Christian teachings and organizations. She searched for

weeks among the obscurer Greek writers for a sentence to her liking. 'I don't want any of that religious kitsch on my grave stone,' she would say.... Alexandra's view of life was circular, a never ending repeat of birth and death. Half in jest and to the perplexity of my mother, she would threaten, 'Watch out, I will return reincarnated.' When we called her a Buddhist, she would fiercely object. 'I am not a Buddhist and never will be one. My ego is much too strong.'" She looked at me trying to find out whether I understood. I nodded, and she continued. "When she had finally found the Herakleitos fragment, she said to me, 'It is not the perfect epigraph, but it will do. Now I can die. The circle of my life has come back to its beginning.'"

Eliso touched Konrad's necklace. "She also connected her life this necklace—her *magic circle* for sixty years, and to Konrad's *turning*, an allusion I only understood tonight.... I was with her when she died. It was a very deep experience for me, which I cannot describe. She was in a state of serene absence, yet completely lucid and conscious to her last moment. I think, she finally willed her death by letting go of life. I have often thought of her dying and wished I could learn her self-control, to die as she did."

We went to sleep around three. When I woke the late next morning I found a note from Eliso telling me where to find breakfast. She had gone to a rehearsal and would be back by noon. "Stay another night. We can go for a walk in the afternoon."

Another sunny day. How unusual for April! I spent the morning, over a very slow breakfast, looking at Alexandra's picture and musing about Eliso and our improbable meeting. I should have been shaken by this coincidence, its mathematical odds were infinitesimally small, but I had got used to such happenings. They now occurred to me as if they were most natural events. Did I believe in coincidences? I had to laugh, by now it was no longer a question of believing, I was entirely convinced that interpersonal events could mock any calculable probability.

Around ten I was startled from my thoughts by a highly agitated Eliso storming in. "Something terrible has happened in Tbilisi. We broke off the rehearsal."

She dashed to the TV and turned on CNN news. Pictures of a confusing disaster scene. A short take in a morgue, rows of bodies under white cloths. People putting flowers on a staircase. Police and military trying to control a mob of gesticulating, screaming people. Then a switchback, a group of young women sitting in front of a colonnaded building.

The commentator: "For two days these young women had been on a hunger strike for Georgian independence sitting peacefully on these stairs before the government building, knitting, singing, reciting poetry."

I realized that the scene was on Rustaveli Prospect in Tbilisi. On these same steps once stood the chief of the Georgian Communist Party under a Lenin portrait receiving the ovations of the October Revolution Parade. Now there hung a banner with a Georgian inscription. Eliso translated with a trembling voice. "We demand an independent, free Georgia."

The news coverage changed to a night scene. Keel lights illuminated the girls on the steps of the government building. Crowds of spectators. TV crews filming.

The commentator: "The first night passed without an incident. But on the second night the power in the central district of town suddenly went dead. Under the cover of darkness an elite commando of the feared Russian Ministry of Internal Security waded into the scene."

The filmstrip changed to frames that looked like negatives. Ghostlike soldiers were hacking at the girls with army spades. Pandemonium. Everybody was running, pursued by

Russian soldiers. The strip was only a few seconds long.

"These shots were taken by a bystander with an infrared-sensitive video camera. In the morning of the 9th of April the bodies of twenty young women, all under twenty-five, and one young man, were found laid out in the morgue of the Tbilisi hospital."

Tears were streaming down Eliso's face. When CNN changed to other news I turned off the TV. And then she started shouting at Gorbachev. Rowing her arms, her face distorted by years of hatred, she tore apart the man whom the West considered the "Good Man in Moscow" if not the new Russian saint. "Perestroika is a farce, and Gorbachev is a murderer. He ordered this massacre to scare Georgia back into submission."

This appeared an exaggeration to me. I shook my head. How could Gorbachev have ordered this massacre? Eliso was not to be quieted down, with renewed anger she continued. "You think Gorbachev will bring freedom and democracy to the Soviet Union? You do not understand this man, he is a Russian Communist as intent on saving the Communist Party and the power of the Soviet Union as any of his predecessors. Perestroika is at best an illusion and at worst a smokescreen behind which the old Russian imperialism lies in wait. As you see, ready to forcefully break the back of any republic which tries to secede from the union."

She looked into space. "This massacre will unmask perestroika, and that will be the end of it. After everybody will have understood what happened today, the Soviet Union is going to fall apart. *Deda Sakartvelis* will put an end to *Ruskaya Derzhava*, Russian power."

Eliso's prophecy would be proven true. The death of the twenty Georgian girls set the stone rolling. Within a year the Berlin Wall came down, Eastern Europe was free, and Transcaucasia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and the Baltics had split from the Union. Gorbachev was powerless to stop this process, and in the end he decided to help it on. He would be given the Nobel Peace Prize by a grateful West.

And Georgia would, for the second time since 1917, declare its independence from Russia—and within another year skid into a terrible, humiliating fratricidal war...

The End

A List of people "Konrad and Alexandra"

* historic Personalities

Konrad Rost + Alexandra Dadiani

Otto + Sophia

children of Konrad and Alexandra

Relatives of Alexandra in Georgia

Irakli Dadiani + Tamara (Deda) Chavchavadze

parents of Alexandra, Professor in Tiflis

Niko + Otar Dadiani

brothers of Alexandra, St. Petersburg + München

George Dadiani

half-brother of Irakli Dadiani, master of Zugdidi

Ilia Chavchavadze* + Olga Guramishvili*

uncle of A., Poet, Politician, Tiflis and Kvarebi

George + David Chavchavadze

brothers of Deda, masters of Tsinandali

Luarsab Tarchan-Mouravi + Sophia Bagrationi

uncle + godmother of A., master of Kaspi

David and Asmat Dadeshkeliani

uncle of A., parents of Tamara D.-Nomikoff

Tamara Dadeshkeliani

revolutionary, wife of Vladimir Nómikoff

Asmat ("Little Asmat")

daughter of Tamara Dadeshkeliani-Nómikoff

Katharina Rost

wife of Otto Rost, the author's mother

Andrea and Cornelius Rost

the author's wife and son

Eliso Abashidze

pianist, daughter of Sophia Rost

Friends of Konrad + Alexandra

Arthur Leist*

German linguist + floklorist, Tbilisi

Henri Helvajian

goldsmith and Sufi, Tiflis

Persephone, aka Brimo

Sufi sheikh and friend of A.'s mother, Tiflis

Dato Ortaladze

A.'s abductor, physician, Tbilisi

Christine Ortaladze

wife of Dato, Tbilisi

Joachim von Bredow + Clara von Arnim

German consul in Tiflis + ambassador Istanbul

Friedrich von Bredow

brother of Joachim v. Bredow, East Prussia

Walter + Sally Wolfson

art historian and dealer, Fiesole

Martiros + Izabel Sisakian

Armenian painter + wife, St. Petersburg

Vladimir Nómikov

friend of K + A., poet + writer, St. Petersburg

Prof. Robert Dahl + Marie-Elisabeth Dahl

psychiatrist + Prof. of Psychology, München

Claudia + Friedrich Dahl

Wassily Kandinsky*

Clara Westhoff*

Helene von Üxküll

Bertha Eberle, Sagdulla Bakhrami

Susanne Eberle

Other Persons

Gabriele Münter*

Arnold Schönberg*, Anton v. Webern*, Richard Strauss*

Anna Akhmátova*, Marina Tsvetáeva*, A. Blok*

Savva Mamonov

Amedeo Modigliani*

Graf von der Schulenburg*

Merab Djibladze

children of Prof. Dahl, München

Russian painter, München

sculptress, wife of Rainer Maria Rilke

physician, A.'s colleague, St. Petersburg

students of A.lexandra, Tbilisi

daughter of Bertha Eberle, Tbilisi

painter, woman friend of Kandinsky

composers, Wien and München

Russian poets, St. Petersburg

Russian Industrialist, art collector, expatriate, Paris

Italian painter, Paris

German consul and ambassador, Tbilisi

my friend, Professor at Tbilisi University

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