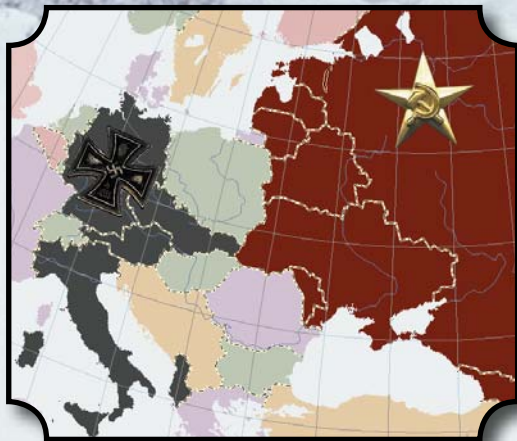


# ANJA

**Born in the wake of the Russian Revolution, Anna Ivanovna Keroshiva was the youngest of her family's twelve children. Together they lived a simple and peaceful life in a small village on the border of Poland and Belarus—until history caught up with them, and they found themselves trapped between the advances of the Nazi army on one side, and the forces and strength of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the other.**

**Faced with difficulties she could never have imagined, Anja would discover a source of strength, endurance, hope, and love—and a God who would prove to be a very present help in every kind of trouble.**



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Not recommended for children under 16 years of age.  
Portions of this book may be disturbing to sensitive readers.

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## PROLOGUE

My name is Anna Ivanovna Keroshiva. My friends called me Anja. I was born in Poland in 1917, right near what was then the border of Belarus<sup>1</sup>, or “White Russia.” My father was Russian and my mother Polish.

It is the most beautiful place in the world to me—a thousand times prettier than even the prettiest places in Russia. Lake Baikal is beautiful and the Russian steppe is also beautiful, as is the Siberian taiga—the wild, untamed wilderness kind of beauty. But Poland will always have a special place in my heart.

Of course, nothing compares to Heaven. It is so incredible here; it is hard to describe or even imagine! I am telling you this story from up here and I want you to know that it is not the easiest story to tell, because in telling it, I have to re-live it, and parts of it are not that pleasant to re-live.

But I think it will help you and others to know what I went through—what thousands of Christians and followers of Jesus have gone through over the years. And the fact that I made it, that I am now here, in this beautiful place, will I hope encourage your hearts and help you to keep going. And as you read, or listen, please remember that there *is* a happy ending!

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<sup>1</sup> See maps on pages 414–415.

## MY CHILDHOOD

“Anushka, Anushka.” It was my papa calling; my Papa Ivan—a loving, cuddly, sweet, gentle father. He was a big man with large, rough hands from the simple work of farming.

Although he was of Russian descent, he had lived in Belarus as a child, when the czar was still ruling Russia. My father was apprenticed to a blacksmith at the age of thirteen and worked there until the age of nineteen. He knew his business and could have taken over from his master if he had stayed on, but instead he married my mama, who was from Poland, and moved to her country. She was heiress to a large estate on the border of Poland and what would soon become the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. There was no money, but lots of land and livestock. She came from generations of farmers. She was tall, with long, light brown hair and a slight build.

Together my mama and papa had twelve children—of which I was the youngest—but you would have never known it by looking at her. She radiated a simple, natural beauty, and she kept in good form through her hard work.

By 1927 five of my older sisters, of whom I had seven, were married and the two closest to my age were in school. My parents were not wealthy, but they

worked hard to provide us with the best education and opportunities for life that they could. They hoped we would all marry well—hopefully above our station in life. So far most of my sisters had married fairly well and were all working on families. No one had “attained” to a really rich man, however, and they all had their hopes set on me, as the last of the daughters—and they all insisted, the prettiest—to marry well. There were three boys between me and my older sisters. Our oldest brother, Ivan, passed away when he was only six years old from the scarlet fever.

“Anushka! Sleepy head!” Father was still calling me to wake up and help with the farm chores.

“I am coming, Papa! Just give me a minute to wake!” Why was that always so difficult? No matter what time I went to sleep at night, I never could get up in the morning, especially if it was before dawn, as often happened on the farm. Human nature, I suppose. I am so glad that is over with. I never enjoyed that part of life—waking up tired in the morning.

I dragged myself out of bed, pulled on my long, woolen dress over my woolen underclothes that I slept in, and wrapped myself in a large fur coat made from the fur of foxes that my father had trapped the winter before, and a matching hat. I loved that set, but had trouble keeping it clean. My mama often admonished me to keep it only for good and not to wear it around the farm, but I just loved the way it felt and the way it kept me so warm and cozy on those freezing winter mornings. Also, I liked the way it looked, and I will admit, I was quite vain.

Next came my boots, which I laced up to my knees. I threw my heavy quilt over the bed and scurried down the ladder of my loft to join my father and brothers who were already doing the farm chores. I was ten years old, and was expected to do more than just sit

around and be waited on hand and foot.

My mama was in the kitchen making *blini*, a kind of pancake with white cheese rolled inside and topped with delicious, homemade berry jam. In the autumn we all went berry picking in the fields and forests around our farm and then came home and helped my mama preserve them for the long winters. Oh, those were the days—fun, carefree, wonderful days!

“Anja Ivanovna, how many times do I have to tell you not to wear your beautiful coat out to milk cows and feed chickens? Go upstairs immediately and put on your old woolen coat!”

“But Mama!” I snatched a bit of her jam on my finger and Mama playfully slapped my hand. “I love the way it looks and feels, and anyhow, I am growing so fast, I will grow out of it before I ruin it! You said so yourself!”

Mama let out a sigh. Times were harder than they had been. The effects of the Russian Revolution<sup>1</sup> had spilled almost right to our doorstep shortly after I was born, and the communists did not have a deep respect for borders. In times past we had often gone to the markets of Brest to sell our produce, but in recent years it had become impossible to cross the border, and so we lost a good portion of our income through that, and could no longer afford the kind of lifestyle my mother had once known.

My parents had worked hard and been saving and we had not felt the loss very much, that is, until now. It had been a bad harvest with early snow that destroyed some of the crops and that had been a precursor to a very hard winter—the winter of 1928. The fox fur coat had been my Christmas present, the

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<sup>1</sup> **The Russian Revolution:** *The overthrow of the Russian czarist empire in 1917 that led to the establishment of several Soviet Socialist Republics, which later banded together to form the communist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or the USSR.*

only one I received, and Mama wanted it to last a few years at least.

“Anushka, my *ptitchka*<sup>\*</sup>, where have you been? Your chores have been done already!”

“Oh Papa! Good morning. I am sorry. I just could not tear myself out of bed this morning. It was so cold and I was so comfy in my little bed. Please forgive me.” Papa took me in his arms and gave me one of his bear hugs. When he did that, I felt so safe and warm, so loved.

“Ivan, you spoil her! Just because she is your little *ptitchka* does not mean you should do her chores for her. She may be the youngest, but she has to learn to work sometime. Maria was doing farm chores at the age of eight and now she is a full grown, accomplished young woman and a mama of four children. It did not harm her in the least. I fear Anna is becoming lazy.”

“Oh, *milochka*<sup>\*\*</sup>—Mama could not resist Papa when he called her that—“she is still my baby. We have no more babies. Do we have to make her grow up so soon?” He paused for a moment and then with a faraway look in his eyes said, “Anyhow, if I have my way, she will never have to work in her life. One of my daughters is going to marry well and live in luxury for her whole life, and my Anushka is the one.”

“We all have our dreams and this is well,” my practical mama sighed, “but one thing that is not a dream is that the blini are getting cold and the sun is rising. Let’s eat and have our time of devotion and leave our dreams for the evening when we are gathered around the fire and have nothing better to do. *Davai!*<sup>\*\*</sup>”

Mama and Papa spoke a mixture of Russian and Polish. They wanted us to have a good command of

both languages and so Mama generally spoke Polish to us and Father generally spoke Russian, although they sometimes mixed it up, either out of habit, or just for fun, and the result was a funny mixture that we spoke in our family and amongst ourselves. My parents had done their best to bring us both Polish and Russian culture, which was evidenced by the food we ate, the customs we observed, and even our names—some being distinctly Russian, and some Polish.

Father pulled out the family Bible, a huge, white book which had been passed down through the generations. Mama was Catholic and Papa had been brought up as a Russian Orthodox. However, he never thought much of religion and had no problem converting to Catholicism to please my mama. In the beginning it was just going through the motions for him, but as time went on, the simple, trusting faith of my mama won him over and he became a devout Catholic. We knew nothing of salvation by grace, but we did believe in Jesus and loved and worshiped Him with all of our hearts. In the cold, winter months we were not able to go to Mass every day, but we had our own little devotions in our home, reading something out of the big old family Bible and saying the rosary together before we began the day. This was the way I was raised, and this simple faith and trust in God stuck with me through my whole life.



“The Russian economy is going from bad to worse. I heard talk of it today while I was in town buying a new head for our hoe.”

“You silly man! What do we need with a new hoe? The ground is frozen solid! You weren’t really in town buying a new head for our hoe. What were you really doing?”

Mama was giggling and Papa’s deep, hearty laugh

<sup>\*</sup> *ptitchka*: literally “little bird”—a Russian term of endearment

<sup>\*\*</sup> *milochka*: Russian for “sweetheart”

<sup>\*\*</sup> *davai*: Russian for “let’s go”

rang out across the room. I could not see them from my little loft, but if I lay very still I could hear them, and since I could not sleep, I lay still and listened. I tried to imagine what they were doing. It sounded like Mama was tickling Papa. When she tickled him the normal lion of a man was transformed into a little lamb. Things got very quiet down there. *Are they kissing?* I wondered. My older sister, Katarina—who was a bit of a rascal—had told me that it was something married people and people in love often did. Still, I was confused because friends also greeted each other with kisses on the cheek, and I couldn't figure out why married people would want to do something like that for minutes at a time. I often thought of peeking, but my conscience wouldn't let me.

*It would just be something else I would have to confess next time we go to confession, and I do enough bad things without meaning to without adding something I can avoid to the list.*

The giggling resumed. "Ivan!! You didn't!" Mama squealed.

*Papa must have gotten Mama a birthday present! Oh, I wonder what it is?* I lay in bed desperately trying to imagine what pretty thing Papa had gotten Mama. *I hope I will have time to finish the handkerchief I am embroidering for Mama before the party tomorrow night.*

"Darling, you know we can't afford it. But oh, it is so beautiful."

"Just because people around us are having trouble does not mean that I love you any less. God has been good to us and cared for us and anyway, this diamond is nothing compared to the one I will get you some day when we are rich. I love you so much, my wonderful Maria. This is such a small token of my undying love for you."

All went silent and then I heard sniffles. I knew Mama must have been crying. "Oh Ivan, I love you too." And then more crying.

"What is it, my love? What is marring this happy occasion? You have been so silent all day. What is the matter?"

"Oh Ivan, I worry so much about us and the children sometimes. The communists are so close to us. We can't help but be affected by their actions. We were so recently liberated from the Russians, and I constantly fear their return. And to top it all off, I received a letter from your cousin Valeriya in Brest. She has news from Russia. Horrible news. They are putting some sort of terrible 'five year plan' into action. All farms are being closed, and the farmers are being sent to places called collective farms. Some farmers are butchering their cattle rather than giving them to the government. *Kulaks*<sup>\*</sup> are being sentenced to prison and even being killed simply for wanting to keep what is rightfully theirs. Valeriya and Igor live so close to the Ukrainian border. They are afraid they will be next. Valeriya is shattered over this, as must be Igor. They worked all their lives for that little farm, and soon it will be gone, poof, in the twinkling of an eye. I can't help but worry that it will happen to us soon!"

Mama was sobbing fitfully. I could imagine Papa holding her tight. As long as Papa was there, everything was going to be all right, I reminded myself, although I felt a little scared too.

"Darling, I love this farm and I love the life we have built together, and I will fight to keep it for as long as possible, but if the day should ever come that we have to give it up, the thing that would keep me going would be to have you by my side. We have each other

<sup>\*</sup> *Kulaks: Russian farmers, a step above peasants*



and even if we lose everything else, we have God, who has promised in His Word to care for us. Remember what we read this morning about the sparrows? If God cares so much for sparrows, I know He will care for us, His little children.”

“You should have been a priest, you preach such beautiful sermons.” Mama stopped crying. “Thank you for reminding me of what is most important. And thank you for this beautiful ring. It means more to me than you know.”

With that I drifted off to sleep. Mama and Papa stayed awake for some time though, talking, as I awoke a few hours later to their voices, but did not stay awake long enough to hear what they were talking about.



When I awoke the next morning, Papa was gone.

“Mama, where has Papa gone?” I asked sleepily as she shook me awake. “Why are you waking me up?”

“He is taking a trip to Brest to see Aunt Valeriya and Uncle Igor. He will be back soon, in a day or two. We must work hard to take care of things here while he is gone.”

“But Mama, why did he leave on your birthday? Couldn’t he wait until the party?”

“Oh, we will have fun without him. The two of us already had our little celebration last night. Look.” A beautiful little diamond ring sparkled on Mama’s hand. “He didn’t want to go, but he had to. It was of utmost urgency.” Mama looked lost in her thoughts for a moment and then regained her composure. “Okay, enough lazing around and chatting. There is work to be done. Anja, you will need to make breakfast so I can oversee the boys doing their chores. Up, up, up!” She tickled me and I laughed and jumped out of bed. A new day had begun.



The workload doubled with Papa gone. I never noticed how much he did until he was gone. We worked from morning until night to make sure the cows were milked, the chickens fed, the eggs collected, the stables filled with fresh straw from the silo and the horses tended to and brushed down. The animals always got a little frisky in the winter, as we couldn’t let them out much. It hadn’t snowed in a few days, though, and although it was very cold, it was dry, so we took the horses out for a little exercise.

My fifteen-year-old brother, Jan, and I went riding around our farm on our two sturdy farm horses. Papa had taken our other two horses and the wagon with him to Brest. I let loose my hair from the scarf that had held it in place and let it fly in the wind. Jan thought I was just a silly little girl and didn’t say anything, although it really wasn’t considered proper for a girl of ten to do something so wild.

“Jan, what do you want to do when you grow up?” I asked during a pause in our ride. “I know what I want. Well, actually, I don’t know what I want. I know what I don’t want, though. I don’t want to just settle down and live a comfortable but predictable life. I want adventure! I want excitement! I want to do something with my life, to be remembered for something—like a hero, only a girl. What do you call that?”

“A heroine. You silly girl. You will change your mind once you get a little older. What about Papa’s desire for you to marry well? You know, there are the Wyszynskis. They are wealthy farmers and have a son a few years older than you. I think Mama has her eye on Pawel.”

I slapped his horse and it took off. I galloped after him.

“What was that for?” Jan asked, laughing.

“You think you know so much. Don’t talk of me marrying—especially not Pawel. I am only ten years

old. Well, almost eleven, but still. It really is too much to think about. I am far too wild to get married.”

“Let’s have this conversation in a few more years—shall we?” Jan suggested. “Then we will see who is right. Race you home!”



“Papa!” I ran and dashed into his arms as he jumped out of the wagon. “Why did you leave for so many days? Did you bring anything back with you? Who is that in the wagon?”

“So many questions, my little ptitchka.” Papa laughed. Oh, it was so good to hear that laugh again. I had been so worried about him, especially when he didn’t return after a few days as Mama had said he would. He had been gone almost two weeks. But now he was home and was holding me in his arms and I knew that everything was all right.

“Let me introduce you to your aunt Valeriya and her husband Igor. They have a son and a daughter about your age, Anja—your cousins. Gregory is thirteen and Katusha is twelve. They will be staying with us for a while.”

I watched as Aunt Valeriya stepped out of the wagon. She looked amazingly regal to be dressed in such a plain, gray, woolen dress. Her red hair was piled artistically on top of her head, and her white skin had a flush of red on it from the cold. She was wearing a long woolen coat with a fur muffler, and her boots were highly polished.

*She must be dressed in her very best clothes,* I thought as I wondered at her beauty. She was around the same age as Papa, I knew, maybe a bit younger, but she looked as if she was still in her twenties. Uncle Igor, a distant relation who also bore the name Keroshiva, was more plain and simple, but he looked like a nice man and someone I didn’t have to be too shy of.

Gregory was an awkward-looking thirteen-year-old. He looked like his hands and feet were growing too fast and the rest of his body was having a hard time keeping up, kind of like a puppy. He had big, innocent-looking brown eyes and a jolly smile. His sandy-blond hair was tousled as he jumped out of the wagon, looking very happy to escape its confines.

Katusha looked like a copy of her mama. She had flaming red hair and a regal bearing, but she also had a friendly smile. I hoped we would be friends, as I had not had many friends to play with, living way out in the country on a farm.

“Anja, would you mind terribly if Katusha shared your loft with you? I can have Jan carry up a spare mattress. I think it will fit nicely in the corner. Papa will build a frame for it as soon as he gets a chance.”

I wasn’t thrilled about sharing my loft with this girl, as I had only recently gotten it to myself, but I figured it might speed along our getting to know each other and becoming friends, so I was willing to give it a try.



“I don’t understand, Ivan, I thought you were just going to give them some money, advice, or moral support, not bring them home with you! What got into you, Ivan? Do you really think we can support them? And they are not even Catholic!”

“They are Christians, Milochka, and they love God. They just do not worship Him in the exact same way we do. Do you think God cares all that much? I don’t know. I haven’t really thought that much about it, but I do think God would want us to help them. They were in a very difficult situation. The policies of the Soviet state are threatening all they own and have worked for. They have sold their farm to a communist sympathizer while they could, and decided to come with me. That is why we were gone for so long.”

“But why bring them here?”

“They were in danger. Christians are not looked on kindly by the communists, no matter what church they belong to. So rather than sit and wait for trouble to catch up with them, they decided to sell the farm and leave. They had nowhere to go, so I offered to bring them home with me. We have room for them here, at least for the time being, till they can get started over again somewhere else. They don’t speak any Polish, and they need help to get settled. Please, darling, can they stay, at least for a while? Anyway, I could use help on the farm, and I think Anja will enjoy having a girl her age to play with. Please?”

I was lying still, listening again. Lord knows how much I learned listening to the late-night discussions of my parents.

Mama was silent for a while. Then she said, “Okay. I don’t know Igor, but he seems nice. Valeriya was a friend of mine in school and for old time’s sake and because they are your relatives, I am willing to have them here, at least for a while. But don’t expect me to be thrilled with their way of practicing religion. I don’t like it!”

“Just give them a chance. That is all I am asking.”

There was silence for a moment. I imagined my mama nodding her head. Then Papa said, “Thank you for understanding.”

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## THE DANCE

“Oh my God! You are beautiful! Spin around once more!” I was in seventh Heaven. Katusha—or Katya as we called her more frequently, now that we were older—and I were trying on gowns for our first, real-life dance. Mama had scrimped and saved and purchased yards of silk in a pale purple, which looked stunning against my white skin and black hair. Where I got black hair, I will never know for sure, as most of my people were fair of skin and hair, but Papa said his grandma had jet black hair and I guess I got it from her. The dress was long and flowing down to my ankles with a tight bodice and a modest but becoming neckline. The sleeves were two thirds in length and there were little rosettes at the waist. It was very delicate and feminine and I felt like a princess. I was fifteen years old and I had never owned anything so beautiful.

“Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain!” It was Mama admonishing Katya to watch her mouth. That fiery redhead who had become my best friend was always saying things she wasn’t supposed to. She didn’t do it on purpose, at least I don’t think so, but she just blurted out whatever she was thinking at the time. It got her into a lot of scrapes that she could have avoided.

Katya was wearing a similar dress, although more tightly fitted to her figure, in a deep green silk. She piled her hair on her head and kept it in place with her mama's pins. I begged my mama to let me wear my hair up, but she said I was too young. "Sixteen is the proper age to begin wearing your hair up," she said primly. She had reservations about my going to a dance at the age of fifteen, when sixteen would have been more proper, but Pawel had invited me, and she couldn't let this opportunity pass. "Wear your hair down with a few white flowers in it. That is modest and feminine and will do just fine."

"Mama, this is the 1930s! You haven't gone out since the 1800s! Please? I like the way I look when my hair is up on my head. Please?" But no, when Mama had her mind made up, there was no use begging.

By now we had a radio, but Mama was skeptical of its use and we only listened to musical programs and occasionally, the news. Papa sometimes listened to it at other times, but only when Mama was not around. Mama never did like new-fangled contraptions. She was very old fashioned and believed in loving and honoring her husband and raising her children to be responsible, mature adults with good morals and convictions—and new-fangled ideas and fashions did not fit in with her philosophy of life. She just pretended they did not exist. "If it isn't broken, don't fix it," she would say when one of us kids would question why she insisted on doing things the way they had always been done.

I loved my mama, because in spite of all her firmness and quirks, I knew she loved me and all of us kids. She never raised her voice at us or lost her temper, but we knew when she meant business. She was a no-nonsense kind of lady and Papa would have been lost without her.

"Oh Anushka, you look absolutely stunning!" I radiated at that compliment as it came from none other than my aunt Valeriya. Valeriya and Igor had become invaluable to Papa on the farm, and even Mama had gotten over her original dislike of the idea of them living with us, and they had stayed and become part of the family. They still dreamed of someday getting their own farm, but for now they were content to help us and save what they could towards a place of their own.

Uncle Igor had been educated in Germany where he converted to the Protestant religion. I was never clear on which denomination, as there wasn't a church they could attend, and they didn't speak of their religion much. They mainly tried to live it. In fact, they often came to Mass with us, although I always suspected it was mainly to keep Mama happy, as I had overheard Uncle Igor once saying, "God does not need a house. I can worship him better out in the fields or the forests than in a stuffy building."

Aunt Valeriya often read the Bible with us and explained to me how, if I believed in and accepted Jesus as My Savior, He would always be with me and never leave or forsake me and would forgive all my sins—past, present, and future. It was a little hard for me to reconcile this with the things I had been taught growing up about the importance of penance and attending confession, but secretly I liked this thought, and when I had a chance I would read from the little New Testament that Aunt Valeriya gave me for my fourteenth birthday and try to find verses about what Aunt Valeriya and Uncle Igor said. To my surprise, I found there were so many verses about Jesus' love for us and how He forgives us and loves us no matter what we do. I continued attending Mass and confession, but deep in my heart I knew that Jesus was with me and would never leave me, and that gave me such

peace. I admired and respected Aunt Valeriya as a lady of class, style, beauty, and conviction. I wanted to be like her when I grew up.

“Now remember, Anja,” my mama’s voice broke through my reverie, “if Pawel asks you to dance you should dance with him. Do try to make a good impression. I am beside myself that he invited you to this prestigious occasion and remember, don’t—”

“Don’t work yourself into a tizzy, Mama,” I laughed. “I know how to comport myself like a lady.” I sighed. I knew how, I just didn’t like to and Mama knew it. There was always a little bit of a tomboy inside of me and on the farm I often let it come out, but I knew how to behave if I had to. Mama’s family was not wealthy anymore, but there had been a time when they were what you might call “upper class” or “aristocrats,” and she had been taught to be a lady and passed that knowledge down to us daughters.



I may have told my mama not to work herself into a tizzy, but I was worked into a tizzy myself by the time the carriage stopped in front of the Wyszyński’s house. They lived in a mansion compared to where we lived. They were also farmers, but extremely wealthy. They raised livestock for meat, which was an expensive commodity, as well as normal crops. They also invested money in businesses elsewhere and had peasants who lived and worked on their farmlands.

Izaak Wyszyński, Pawel’s father, was a financial genius who somehow kept their family afloat, even through World War 1 when Poland was ravaged by the Russians and Germans. Now they were some of the wealthiest people in the area, and although I imagined that my mama’s family had once lived in a similar manner, the magnificence of the place felt foreign to me, and I felt completely out of place.

The Wyszyński mansion was brightly lit and carriages were pulling up to the front door and being greeted by servants in highly polished boots and black jackets. A dance like this would draw people from kilometers around, all decked out in their finest. Gregory had driven us girls to the dance in our big, old wagon, along with Aunt Valeriya who was coming along to chaperone. I was happy she had agreed to come—as much as I loved Mama, she would not have made the evening very enjoyable. Gregory looked nonchalant as he helped us down from the wagon. He was seventeen years old now—nearly eighteen—and his body had caught up with his hands and feet. He still had that rugged, wind-tousled look about him, although he had actually combed his hair and put on a clean white shirt.

He and I did not always see eye to eye about everything, and in general we always had some ongoing argument between us. I don’t even remember how it began, but it had gone on for so long that it had almost become a standing joke. We debated about everything, sometimes just for the sake of arguing. I was a little disappointed with his non-committal reaction to the way I was dressed. I had hoped to at least get a little reaction out of him, but no. If he did have any reaction, it was deftly hidden. He bid us goodnight and said he would be back at ten to pick us up, then he rode off into the night.

“Anja, how good to see you. Thank you for coming to our party. I see you brought your stunning, red-haired friend.” Pawel’s mama, Ela Wyszyński, was greeting me and looking me up and down. I felt as if I was under a microscope. “Pawel is in the drawing room and would be pleased to see you, I am sure.”

I had met Pawel only briefly on the few occasions when Papa had taken me into town and we had met

him at his family's store. They seemed to have some sort of business everywhere we went, and I could never keep track of them all. Pawel must have taken a liking to me, just as Papa and Mama had hoped, because after our first meeting he found some excuse to come over to our farm. Pawel was now eighteen years old and was soon to leave for college abroad. He was well read and educated. He was also extremely good looking, with dark eyes and brown hair. My heart skipped a beat when I saw him approaching us. Katya also had her eye on him, and as much as I loved her as my friend, I wished she wasn't around when he came to greet us—I felt she was stiff competition.

“Good evening ladies.”

*Did you hear that? He called me a lady! If he only knew.*

Pawel took my gloved hand and kissed it, while looking into my eyes. I must have blushed, for I felt my face flush and my body suddenly felt hot.

I somehow stammered out a good evening and then watched jealously as Katya greeted him with polished ease. To my relief, he then took my hand and escorted me to the dance floor. He hadn't even asked me to dance, but the presumption was forgiven because I was so swept away by him.

I glanced guiltily at Katya. I didn't want to leave her alone, but I didn't have anything to fear, for she was immediately surrounded by hopeful suitors and dance partners. Girls were scarce in these parts, at least girls with any kind of background or class, which is why we were invited in the first place.

The evening went by in a whirlwind of color. There was a punch, which must have been spiked with some sort of alcohol, as I started to feel dizzy after I had greedily drunk two cups of it. My head started spinning a little and I felt light on my feet. It

was not a bad feeling, just strange. Pawel must have noticed that I had gone quiet because he asked me what was wrong.

“Come out to the patio with me. We have lovely gardens and the patio overlooks the pool. You will feel refreshed.” He led me by the hand out into the dark night.

The patio was brightly lit, but rather than stopping on the patio, he took me down a set of stone steps, into the well-kept gardens. The air was cool and I shivered in my flimsy dress. He stopped and put his arm around me. “Here, let me keep you warm,” he whispered. I knew what he was doing was highly improper, but I kind of liked it and so I closed my eyes and snuggled up in his arm. The next thing I knew, his lips were lightly brushing against mine.

*So this must be kissing.*

I didn't know what to do. This was a highly compromising situation for a girl to be in—in the dark, unchaperoned, alone with a man—and not even a close friend, but a practical stranger. I shivered some more and turned my head away.

“I am sorry Pawel. I can't.” I turned and ran back towards the house. Aunt Valeriya was standing out on the patio with a worried look on her face. She saw me running up the stairs. I continued past her into the house. Pawel did not follow.

Valeriya said nothing, but a few moments later she came to me with a glass of cool water and suggested I sit down somewhere and rest a little. She never did ask about what happened that night. I guess she figured if I had wanted to tell her, I would have.

Soon it was ten o'clock and Gregory was back in the wagon to pick us up. Pawel saw us to the door, every inch the gentleman, while his mama looked on and beamed. I never knew what I did to impress her,

but from that day on his mama always stopped to talk with me if we met in town or along the road, and she called on us soon after to meet my parents. An alliance was being formed.

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## ENGAGED

“But Mama, I am too young to even think of getting married!”

“Oh Anushka”—she hardly ever called me that anymore—“it is everything your father dreamed of. Just imagine ... the lady of the house—no, lady of the mansion! You are definitely the prettiest of all your sisters and will do that fine house justice. You would be so close by. Masha has to travel for days any time she wants to visit. It would be wonderful to have my daughter and some of my grandchildren so near ... and living in such style.”

She walked out of the room muttering to herself about how great an opportunity this was. It was now 1935. Poland was doing well, independent for the first time in ages and recovering from the ravages of the first World War. We were living in somewhat of a dream world. Little did we know how soon it was all going to come crashing down around our ears.

Mama had brought me the news that Pawel had formally proposed marriage, even though I had never given him much encouragement. I was still somewhat charmed by him and his lifestyle, and I appreciated the attention he gave me, but marriage was out of the question, at least for a while yet. I was only eighteen and I wanted to experience a life of my own before

being tied down to a man, a house, and children. *Even if he is the richest man within a hundred kilometers*, I mentally added as an afterthought.

“Congratulations, my ptitchka. You have made the catch. You are a daughter to be proud of.” Papa took me in his arms. He was beaming. This had been his dream and it was now coming to pass. After World War I and the Russian Revolution, Papa and Mama had never been able to regain their former style of living, which although modest, had been quite comfortable. Things had stayed difficult all throughout my childhood. If I was well married it would be a burden off my parents’ hearts, and they would have a little more money to invest when they were too old to work.

My brothers were now grown. Jan was in Warsaw, working his way through college. He was determined to be a doctor and would not let anything stop him, not even lack of funding. Papa had not been able to save for the education of the three youngest: myself, Jan, and Alex. Alex did not care. He was a wild boy who had no desire for education. Much to my parents’ dismay, he ran off and joined the army. They only heard from him on rare occasions. Adam, the oldest of the three boys had married a sweet young girl from a neighboring farm, and they were living with us. He planned to take over the farm for Papa and Mama once they got older. Since he was the eldest boy, this was his duty and his right.

Gregory was also off in college. Uncle Igor and Aunt Valeriya finally saved enough to purchase a small farm of their own, only a few kilometers from ours. I was heartbroken to see them go, as I had grown very fond of them, but they were so happy to be able to begin their lives again, and I didn’t want to spoil that. I visited them often.

Mama had decided to educate me herself, since she was a learned woman, and I was not going to be able to go to any sort of school. She schooled me through eighth grade, which she felt was more than sufficient. The rest of my education I acquired through reading, which is what I did whenever I had a spare moment.

“Papa, I really am not ready to be married.” Now I was getting desperate. It was like I had no say in the matter, although it was going to be happening to me. “I don’t know if I love him enough to marry him. Please, give me time.”

“Darling, you can have all the time you need to think about it, but remember this, you should think about your future. We will not be able to provide for you much longer, and you will either need to marry or work, one or the other, to make it through life. This is the opportunity of a lifetime. Why let a little thing like a lack of romantic feelings get in your way? Don’t make a decision you will regret.” With that, Papa left the room.

I often wondered if Mama had ever regretted marrying Papa. She had wealthier suitors but had eloped with my papa after he came to visit his cousin Valeriya who was going to the same finishing school as Mama was. They had love—I knew that, and I wanted to have the same sort of marriage they had, something that would keep me going through thick and thin, good times and bad. If I married Pawel for his money, what would I have left if he ever lost it?

I walked out into the garden to think. Mama was out weeding her tomato garden. Tomatoes only had a few months of warm weather in which to grow, and Mama took great pride in tending her garden and raising prize tomatoes. I leaned over the garden wall and got her attention. “Mama, why did you marry Papa?”



She stopped and thought a moment, with a faraway look in her eye. “I married him because I loved him, I suppose.”

“Did you ever regret it?”

“Let me tell you a secret, my love. Pawel’s father, Izaak Wyszynski, proposed to me two months before I met your father. I did not love him but I was tempted with his wealth. I liked him well enough. I have sometimes wondered what life would have been like as his wife. However, I would not trade the love your father and I have for a thousand Izaak Wyszynskis and all their wealth. This is a decision you must make. What do you want most in life? If you want comfort, wealth, and position, marrying Pawel is the thing to do. You will be well cared for and never have to worry about where you will find the money to clothe yourself or your children or where your food will come from. One bad harvest won’t ruin you. You won’t have to work yourself to the bone just to survive. But, there is also a chance you won’t have love in your life, unless by and by you fall in love with him. If you have someone else you love enough to give all that up for so you can be with him, then you have my blessing. But think it through carefully, because it is a decision that will affect the rest of your life.”

I nodded and walked out towards the pastures. I spent my whole afternoon walking and thinking, wondering what to do. True, I did not really love Pawel, but was there anyone else I felt I loved enough to give up all that Pawel was offering? No! I would be a fool to say no and shatter all of Papa’s hopes and dreams, a fool to throw away such an incredible opportunity. *Besides, I argued with myself, if I am married to Pawel, we will be rich enough to travel and do some of the things I have always wanted to do. Maybe I will come to love him. It can’t be that bad.*

I thought of all the things I could do for my family if I was rich. The more I thought about it, the more marrying Pawel seemed the right thing to do. The only other person of the opposite sex around my age that I had had much contact with was Gregory. He and I did not always see eye to eye about things, but we did have fun together. Moving apart had helped us to stop our constant arguing, and although I counted him as a friend, I did not get any “hot flushes” when he came around. Pawel definitely seemed to be the better choice.

“Papa, please tell Pawel that I accept, but on one condition. I feel too young to get married quite yet, and so would like to have a long period of engagement. I would like to get married after my twentieth birthday.”

Any trepidation I felt at making this decision was dissolved by the tears of joy that my papa cried. His dream was fulfilled. His ptitchka would be well cared for, and he could rest easy and retire in peace with that knowledge. My parents were already nearing their sixties, and it was becoming more difficult for Papa to be as active around the farm as he had once been. Now he could retire in peace, and I knew he deserved it. He and Mama had raised twelve wonderful children and lived a full and meaningful life, giving love to those around them. They never passed up an opportunity to be of service to their fellow man, and although they were not flaming evangelists, their simple faith in God was an example that inspired many to come to know Him better. I was so happy that I could help them enjoy the remainder of their life in some, small way.



“He proposed? He proposed? What does he see in you anyway?” It was Katya, my dear friend with the big mouth. “Oh, I didn’t mean it that way. I just

was wondering ... well, you know what I meant. You are beautiful, of course, but you don't have anything else to offer—no dowry, no lands, nothing. You would think his parents would have opposed his wishes, but it seems they have been in on it just as much as he has. I wonder why?"

I did wonder why and I decided to ask Pawel the next time we met.



"You look stunning today, Anja. Do you mind if I call you Anusha? The pale pink of your dress contrasts so well with your raven black hair. I can hardly take my eyes off of you."

Pawel prattled on with his flatteries. I wished I knew why he was so intent on having me as his wife. Usually words of endearment from him caused me to blush and feel all jittery inside, but I was hardly listening this time. Finally he caught on. "What is bothering you, my dear? You look like you are lost in another time."

"Oh Pawel, why me? Why me? You who are so rich and handsome, you have everything your heart could wish for. You could have any girl you set your eyes on. Why the youngest daughter of a poor farmer? Why?"

"I care for you, Anusha. I truly do. From the first day I laid eyes on you. I have more money than I will ever be able to spend, so it really doesn't matter who I marry. I am not a nobleman, so there is no reason to keep "noble blood" in the family. The choice was mine and I freely chose you. As for my parents, it took some persuading, but they spoil me and I can make them see things my way. To put it bluntly, I wanted you and I got you. After all, I am the richest man in this area and I intend to have the most beautiful wife as well. I deserve you!"

"You deserve me? You haven't gotten me yet! And I am not a trophy to be shown off or a prized racehorse to be ridden occasionally." I blushed suddenly at the unintended double meaning of what I had just said.

Pawel threw his head back and laughed. "You see, that is what I love about you! Your spirit. You have so much life in you! You must accompany my family on our next trip to Germany. We will be going very soon. I am sure you could arrange for Katya or your Aunt Valeriya to come along and chaperone. It would be a wonderful time to get to know each other better."

I was pleased. This was turning out better than I had hoped. I did not want to hurt Pawel by telling him that I did not feel as strongly for him as he did for me, but I hoped that over the next two years my feelings for him would grow, and in the meantime, I would have some fun and adventure. He had not asked me to reciprocate his feelings. Maybe he just took them for granted. After all, he was a prized catch. But that was not worth dwelling on. There was a trip to Germany to plan!



The Wyszynski's business ties to Germany were a sore point with some Poles who hated the Germans for what they did to Poland, but I was just thrilled to be going to another country. I was too young to remember the horrors they had inflicted on us in the war.

Katya was overcome with jealousy. "A trip to Germany?" she said with a pout. "This is something I have always dreamed of! It is totally not fair! I am just as pretty as you!" She had always had a crush on Pawel, and although she was my friend and she tried to take it in good grace, it was hard for her to watch me get all the things she had dreamed of having.

"You are invited, Katya! I need a female companion. Please, oh please can you come? I enjoy Pawel's

company, but I could not bear it all the time—not just yet, anyhow.”

“You know that Mama wouldn’t let me travel to Germany with no chaperone,” Katya said. “Even though having a chaperone is going totally out of fashion, Mama won’t hear of it.”

“She could come along, you know. Pawel actually invited her as well. Well, he invited one of the two of you, but I think he would let me bring you both. It would be great fun! Oh please, ask her! Will you?”

Katya smiled broadly. “Of course I will! Do you think I would pass up this chance to travel? Maybe I will find a good catch amongst his friends.”

And so it was settled. Aunt Valeriya, Katya, and I would travel with Pawel and his family to Germany in the fall, which was still a few months away. There were many preparations—new clothes to be sewn, hats to be bought, trunks to be packed, and books to be read. We even got a book and tried to learn some German for the trip. (I already spoke a little German because of its lingering influence after the occupation.)



“Munich is so far away.” Katya was looking at the map. “Why do we have to take such a long route? Wouldn’t it be much quicker just to go through Czechoslovakia?”

“Is that what they are calling it these days?” It was Mama. She was a little behind the times in some things. After all, the Czechs and Slovaks had united to throw off the Austro-Hungarians and become a single nation in 1918. It was before I could even walk or talk, but Mama had been schooled long before that happened, and although she believed in her children having a good education, she was content to know what she learned as a young girl in school. She felt politics and the like were a man’s concern and really

had no interest in keeping up with happenings in the world. “Why can’t countries keep the same names? It just confuses things.” She walked off again, muttering to herself about something, I know not what. She had started doing that more as she was growing older. Dear Mama, I did not know it at the time, but she had what you would today call Alzheimer’s disease<sup>1</sup> and although it was not yet very advanced, she was not the person she had been when she was younger.

“The Wyszynskis have business in Berlin, so they are going to take the train from Warsaw to Berlin and then another one to Munich. It will be so much fun! Three major cities for the price of one!”

“No price at all, except your beauty and the promise to say ‘I do’ in two years—no, less than two years now. The countdown has begun,” Katya reminded me. She teased me about it because she knew it bothered me a little. She was not meaning to be mean, she just liked to bother me from time to time, and I allowed her that pleasure because I knew she really did love me.

“What is that festival called that we are going to go to in Munich?” She must have noticed I was bothered and thankfully changed the subject.

“I believe it is called the Oktoberfest,” I replied. I really did not know much about that festival, but I didn’t want to sound stupid. “It is held for sixteen days in October. It is supposed to be splendid. I think it is to celebrate the harvest or something like that. There are parades, parties, balls, all sorts of amusements, at least, that is what Pawel says. And, since we will be traveling in style, we will have the best of all amusements available to us. Oh what fun!”

Just then Papa walked in the door. “You have a letter from Jan. Go on, open it and tell us what it says.”

<sup>1</sup> **Alzheimer’s disease:** a degenerative brain disorder that attacks nerve cells and neural connections in the brain, causing the loss of memory and other brain functions, especially late in life

I eagerly opened the letter. Jan was such a dreamer. He dreamed of a better world and his way of making that happen was to become a doctor. He had managed by now to complete half of medical school. His letter had the usual news—about his studies, his friends, his social life—or rather, the lack of it because of his lack of finances—about his job working in a stable that kept rich people’s horses. Now that cars were becoming more and more fashionable, the rich and wealthy no longer needed their horses except to ride for pleasure and hunting and sports, and since Jan had a good working knowledge of how to care for horses, he was able to secure a position as a stable hand in a stable that catered to the rich and wealthy. He had worked hard and done well and was now a supervisor there and earned just enough money to pay for his tuition and a small flat which he shared with a friend named Roman.

I was reading aloud about the horrible medical experiments they had to partake of. Cutting up dead bodies in order to learn about the inner workings of the human body sounded gross, no matter how he tried to justify it. Papa was wincing and Katya actually turned and ran out of the room. I was glad Mama wasn’t there. I paused to catch my breath and then read ahead a little to see when the atrocious description would end, and my eye caught something. I gasped and had to sit down and collect my thoughts.

“What is it, Anushka? You have turned pale.” Papa had a very worried look on his face. I was not one to be taken easily by surprise. Being somewhat of a wild spirit, I usually took news, good and bad, in stride. But this was too much, even for me.

“Oh Papa, horrible news.” Tears welled up in my eyes. “Jan has joined the *Komunistyczna Partia Polska*<sup>1</sup>!”

Papa’s face went blank, then slowly turned a beet red. His eyes welled up and although not a tear escaped them, I knew he desperately wanted to cry. “Don’t tell Mama,” he whispered hoarsely. “It would kill her.” With that, he walked out of the room.

Jan was Mama’s pride and joy. Her firstborn son, Ivan, had passed away when he was only six. Adam, who was now her eldest son, was a sturdy, stoic fellow. He was a hard worker and perfect to take over the farm, but he was not very open about his feelings and kept to himself most of the time.

I don’t think anyone understood Alex—he was just not quite “of this world”—at least not our world. He was always trying to shock people and do things that were contrary to popular opinion. As a result he often embarrassed his family, and although no one ever said anything about it, I think Mama and Papa were sort of glad that he had run off and joined the army. At least maybe the army could control him.

But Jan, Jan was her favorite, just as I was Papa’s. Jan was a sensitive, caring boy—handsome and very gentlemanly. She had great hopes of him marrying a rich girl and living in comfort. She had hoped he could become a doctor, although she was utterly dismayed when she discovered there would not be enough money to put him through university and that he would have to work his way through. His leaving home seemed to signal the onset of her illness, which was now quickly progressing. She just wasn’t the same without him, and I worried about how we could hide this news from her.

I had so many questions. Jan and I had always been somewhat close. He was the only sibling that was even close to my age and though we were five years apart, he seemed to enjoy my company, at least most of the time. I often confided in him and he always

<sup>1</sup> *Komunistyczna Partia Polska*: the Communist Party of Poland

listened to my childish woes with such solemnity and care. He had such a caring heart—I could not understand how he could align himself with such monsters! I thought of writing him a letter but then realized that we would be in Warsaw in just a week. Instead, I sent him a telegram with the news and the address of the hotel where we would be staying and asked him to come and visit. *This calls for more than a letter*, I thought to myself.

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**JAN**

“There he is now.” A tall, handsome young man was coming towards me. Four years away from home and going without Mama’s good cooking had thinned him out a bit, but otherwise he was still in every way our dear Jan.

“Oh my, you are still looking very handsome.” Katya slid up to him and presented him her hand, which he gallantly kissed instead of shaking it. “And still as romantic as ever.” She sighed. Poor Katya. She was always dreaming of and searching for romance and never seeming to find it.

“Anusha!” Jan held out his arms and we gave each other a big hug. “I have missed you all so much. Do tell me about home and the farm. You don’t write nearly as much as you should. And what is this news of you getting married? I thought you weren’t interested in that kind of thing. I thought you were going to be a heroine,” he teased.

“Oh stop it, Jan. I have grown up, as we all have to do some time. Anyhow, I see that becoming a communist has not squelched your sense of humor any.” I really did not feel lightly about it, but didn’t know how else to broach the subject.

Jan suddenly fell silent and Katya, sensing the tension in the air, excused herself. “How did Mama and Papa take the news?” he finally asked.

“We did not even tell Mama. She is ill, Jan, and news like that could kill her. As it is, Papa was devastated, and I cannot understand why you would ever do such a thing. What got into your head? These people are monsters! Can’t you see that? And don’t you have to denounce your faith to join the party? How did this happen anyhow?” I was on the verge of tears and very agitated.

“I see you still ask too many questions,” Jan said with a wry smile. “Come, let us go to the hotel lobby and order a cup of tea and discuss this like adults. Shall we?”

Once seated, Jan filled me in on the events of the last year. It had all started when he had met Eva, a beautiful girl who was attending the same university as he was, also studying medicine. She and Jan began to see each other and a close friendship developed, which eventually turned to romance. Jan had never mentioned her before, and I could not understand why.

“Why didn’t you tell us of her before?” I asked.

“For the same reason why it was so difficult for me to tell you of my decision to become a communist. I knew Mama would be devastated if she found out that I was interested in marrying a girl that had no wealth and no background to speak of.”

“So what does she have to do with communism?” I asked. I was dying to know more of his mention of marriage, but thought I should stay on track with our discussion.

“She is a member of the Komsomol<sup>1</sup>. She is Russian; actually, well, half Russian, just like us. She was sent here to help further the cause of communism in Poland.

She recruited me, but in a way I also recruited her. We are due to be married next year.”

I felt my face get hot with anger. “Jan! How could you do this to us? Not only have you become a communist but now you want to marry one? And without letting us know in advance or letting us meet her or anything! I can’t believe you!” I was again on the verge of tears. Our family was close and every wedding within our family had been a large, family affair. “Were you ever going to tell us? Maybe when your sixth child was born?” I continued, now turning sarcastic. “I suppose you were just going to stop by Mama’s funeral and, ‘Oh by the way, I now have six children.’” I was getting a little carried away.

“Anusha, Anusha, calm down, please.” Jan looked around, embarrassed. Some other people in the lobby were staring at us, and one elderly couple in the corner were whispering as they looked at us. I couldn’t have cared less. I was so angry and confused. How could my wonderful, tender, caring older brother align himself with such people and then marry one of them without my parents’ consent? It was monstrous!

“Why Jan? What is it in their philosophy that appeals to you so very much? I love you so much, and I want to understand.”

“Anusha, remember the family that lived about a kilometer from us in that little cottage with no windows and an open hole for a door, no heat on the cold winter nights, hardly any food, and no one helped them? Remember?”

I remembered. They were a poor, immigrant family, refugees from the war that eventually united Czechoslovakia. They did not speak much Polish and people thought they were a little strange, just because they were different. They were Catholic and tried to join our church, but most people in our church shunned

<sup>1</sup> **Komsomol:** *the Young Communist League, a youth’s equivalent of the Communist Party*

them, spoke badly of them and did not try to help them in their desperate plight. Mama felt sorry for them and had us bring them some food and blankets a few times, but that was all.

I remembered the day Jan came home in tears. It was the only time I saw him cry. He was eighteen years old at the time, just preparing to go off to college and he had been out riding on our old, faithful farm horse, Jojo. He came home with a red face, ran into the house and dashed upstairs, gathered blankets and a heap of other things and dashed back out again without letting anyone know where he was going. He was gone for two days. Mama was worried sick, although Papa reassured her that he was probably just on one of his idealistic “missions of mercy” as he called it. Papa approved, I think, because he really, truly loved Jesus and believed His admonition to help others. He probably didn’t put it into practice as much as he could have, but he definitely approved of his son helping others.

Jan finally returned disheveled and tired. The blankets and other items were gone. He never spoke to Mama and Papa about what happened, but much later he told me that the mama of that poor refugee family had given birth to twins. They had both died of malnutrition, even though their mama had breastfed them as much as she could. But it wasn’t enough. Jan worked feverishly for two days to save them. He tried to feed them milk, but it was too late. The father was busy caring for their other children and working long hours in the neighboring fields for low pay. The father of the family had gone out begging for help, and no one had even tried to help him except for Jan. Jan was heartbroken—it was the first death he had ever seen and it made him want more than ever to become a doctor to try to somehow ease the pain and suffering in the world.

“I remember them,” I answered slowly.

“There are so many people like that in the world. We lived in such a sheltered environment out on our beautiful farm. You may have thought we were poor, but we have so much compared to the many truly poor of the world. Some day I will take you to the slums of Warsaw and you will see what I am talking about. The rich do not care about these people; the church has not done anything to help. Of course, there are always the faithful few who do what they can, but that is the wonderful thing about communism—they have a plan whereby all men may live equally, with peace and plenty for all.”

“But Jan, look what they have done in Russia—look at the poor, starving people in the Ukraine, and all the deaths and disappearances, and the prison camps. You don’t really think that the people doing all of that have ‘peace and plenty for all’ on their agenda, do you?”

“Anusha, a lot of that never even happened. Eva was living in the Ukraine before moving to Warsaw, and she said that everything is just fine. Of course, every country or government has its subverters and those who cause trouble and they must be dealt with, but I believe that the reports of death and mistreatment there are highly exaggerated.”

“Oh Jan, you are just blinded by your love for this girl.” What could I say? He talked to me for a few more hours about communism and what great benefits a socialist system could bring to the people of Poland. He was totally convinced of his cause. There was no reasoning with him or talking him out of it. Finally I asked him my last question.

“So where does God fit in all of this?”

Jan shook his head slowly and squinted his eyebrows together. “Don’t tell Mama this, she does not

need to know, but I just am not even sure that He exists and if He does, I don't think He is very interested in mankind. I think we have to make what we will of our lives and He is really not involved at all. After all, if there is a God, why does He allow sin and suffering. Why does He allow things like the death of those beautiful twin girls? Why?"

"So everything Mama and Papa have told us is a lie?" I was aghast at the thought! I didn't know what to think. I had grown up safe and secure in the knowledge that God loved me, that He cared for me. Aunt Valeriya had helped me understand that once I accepted Jesus, He would be with me all the time and would never leave or forsake me, so the thought of a disinterested God was very disturbing. I loved and respected my brother and did not know what to make of his change of heart.

"I am not accusing them of lying! Religion is like opium—it keeps people repressed. That is what the communists say, and I agree. They just believe in God because they like the way it makes them feel. They are so old fashioned. Let them keep believing if it makes them happy. I just don't put much stock in it, that's all."

"I don't know Jan, I just can't put God out of the picture like that, He has been too big a part of my life." I looked at the clock on the wall and realized just how late it was. It was nearing eight o'clock at night. We had been talking for three hours.

As if on cue, Pawel appeared, shook Jan's hand, gallantly kissed mine, and offered that we all go to a restaurant for dinner.

"You two go ahead," I told him. "I'm really not hungry."

I noticed the downcast look on Pawel's face, but I just couldn't face him or anyone else at that time. I needed some time to be alone and think.

Up in my room I sat on the bed and dissolved into tears. I was so confused. All I had been taught was being tried and tested, and I realized how weak my faith in God truly was. I did not know what to believe anymore. I decided to pray, not a written prayer like we usually prayed in church, but a prayer from my heart. I did not even pray out loud, only moving my lips and begging God that if He was real, to answer my questions, to hear my prayer, to prove Himself to me and to give me peace. I did not receive a tangible answer then and there, only the feeling of peace that I had done what I could and it was now out of my hands and in the hands of the Great Creator. *After all, I mused to myself, if He wants me to believe on Him, then it is His problem—I have asked and now I just need to wait for Him to answer.*



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## GREGORY

Our train ride through Poland was a memorable experience. I had never gone further than Warsaw, and it was wonderful to sit in that comfortable, first-class carriage and watch the world go by. Poland has such a beautiful and diverse countryside. There were rolling hills of green, flat farm lands, and forests with tall, stately trees. We rode in considerable comfort and arrived safely in Berlin. Pawel's father had business in Berlin, and so we were to stop there for three days before continuing our journey to Munich.

Berlin had been taken control of by Hitler and made the headquarters for the Third Reich only two years before, in 1933. Some subtle and some not-so-subtle changes were coming over the city. However, as a happy, carefree eighteen-year-old girl on an adventure, politics did not interest me. I had the whole city to see, and since Pawel was accompanying his father to learn about the family business, I had time to myself to roam about that great city of Berlin with Katya and Aunt Valeriya and see what there was to see.



"I have tickets to the opera." Pawel was beaming. He had been away from us for the last two days on business with his father, only joining us briefly for

dinner, and he was looking forward to a night out on the town with his bride-to-be.

“I have nothing to wear to the Grand Opera House!” Katya said, all in a flurry.

“Oh, don’t worry, I have already made an appointment for you girls to go and get something to wear at Madam Shek’s Boutique. She has the most exquisite clothing. She is keeping her store reserved for you only. I will pick you up at the front of the hotel at half past six.” With that he was gone.

Madam Shek’s was a beautiful little shop that sold evening gowns and all the accessories. She only catered to the rich and famous and it was an honor to be outfitted by her. She had impeccable taste and a true sense of fashion.

“Oh Katya, it is beautiful! I feel like a princess.” I twirled around and watched the satin folds in my dress spin with me. I had chosen a white, satin evening gown. It was very low necked and tight fitting, with a low bodice that flowed down into a full skirt. My shoulders were bare and I wore gloves up to my elbows. I felt so very elegant. Katya was over in the corner, trying on a black silk dress—it looked almost like a slip, although it wasn’t see-through. It was more modern in style, and although it went all the way to the floor, there was a high slit up the back. She looked stunning.

We all gasped as Aunt Valeriya came out of the dressing rooms. She was wearing an old fashioned, long, deep forest green dress made out of velvet. It contrasted beautifully with her gorgeous red hair and made for quite a pretty picture. *That is how she was meant to be dressed—after all, she has the bearing of a queen*, I thought to myself.

“Well ladies, I do believe you have all picked winners. After a selection of shoes and handbags, I will direct your chauffeur to a good hair dresser who I know

will be able to fix your hair to go with your dresses.” Madam Shek (I have no idea what her real name was) bustled us off to finish with our preparations.



I was eagerly awaiting Pawel. This was the first time in my life to go “out on the town” in style and I was overcome with excitement. He soon drove up in the latest model of motor car. We piled in, careful to smooth out our dresses, and we drove away. Little did I know that tonight the Lord would start to answer my prayers in a way that I could not have begun to imagine.



The opera was into the second act. We were in a balcony high above the stage, with a full view of everything and everyone in the theater. My dress had ended up being just a little too tight, and after a seven-course dinner at one of the finest dining establishments in Berlin, I was more than just full. I was stuffed and felt ready to burst and on top of it, I needed to use the ladies’ room. I quietly excused myself and went to the restrooms and then lingered in the foyer in order to get some fresh air. Lost in thought, I wandered towards the door. I really didn’t like opera all that much and didn’t want to return just yet. I was thinking about my life, Jan’s decisions, the decisions I had made, whether or not I really cared for Pawel and whether or not we would have a good marriage, when I was struck by an odd thought. *That looks just like Gregory!*

Outside I could see the back of a tall man with sandy-blond hair that looked like he had tried to tame it, although unsuccessfully. He stood at the corner of a dark alley across the street, and seemed to be deeply engrossed in a conversation with a young girl who was very scantily clad. I was an innocent young girl and knew nothing of city life. Any proper young lady would

have stayed far, far away from a girl like the one that man was talking to. However, being ignorant of all this, I immediately went out of the doors and crossed the street to where they were.

The girl looked like she was crying, and the man had his arm around her. He turned for a moment and I got a look at his face—it was Gregory! My mind was a whirl! I hadn't seen him for three years and he had never written in all that time, except for an occasional letter to his parents in which he would send his regards to me and to my family. I did not know he was in Berlin. What was he doing here, on the dark streets talking to a girl that looked to me like she was half naked? And why, of all things, was she crying?

I was too embarrassed to go right up to them so I waited until he had finished speaking to her. It seemed like I stood in the street for ages. I started to wonder if Pawel would be worried about me, but I continued waiting, as I just had to find out for myself if this indeed was Gregory and what in the world he was doing there. Finally he finished and the girl turned and walked off into the darkness. The lights from the opera house across the street cast a warm glow on him and I watched as he closed his eyes and bowed his head. *Is he praying? Out here—on the streets in the dark?* I had never heard of such a thing. Finally I whispered softly, “Gregory.”

He spun around, looking for the direction of the voice. When I stepped out of the shadows he looked like he was seeing a ghost.

“Anja?” he asked in shocked surprise.

“Gregory?” I was just as shocked that it really was him.

“What are you doing here?” We both started talking at once. Then we both stopped and looked at each other, embarrassed. I was embarrassed to have barged

in on his thoughts like I did and he told me much later that he was embarrassed that I saw him with that girl and wondered what I was thinking.

“You first,” I finally said.

“Anja! It is wonderful to see you! I had no idea you were here. What brings you to Berlin?”

“I have exactly the same question for you,” I replied. “But since I said that you could ask the questions first, I guess I will try to answer as quickly as possible. I am engaged to be married to Pawel Wyszynski.” I thought I noticed him wince a little, but he did not betray emotion of any kind and I figured it must have been my imagination. “He is on a business trip here, and he invited me to join him. Your mother and Katya are here as well, as my companions. I was at the opera and only stepped out to get some fresh air when I saw you. I had to come over and find out if it really was you and what in the world you could be doing here.”

“My mama is here?” He looked a little worried. “Well, I suppose I should tell you—I have been meaning to write you, but I am not good at writing and this was not something easy to tell in a letter, if you know what I mean.” I nodded. My curiosity was eating at me. “I have made a major change in the course of my life. I have decided to become a Christian minister.”

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. “First Jan, now you! What gets into you boys who go off to college? Good thing I didn't go off to college or maybe I would have become a Roman Catholic nun!” I said sarcastically.

“I heard about Jan,” he said quietly. “I am so sorry.”

“But how...” I was confused. I had only found out a week ago.

“Jan and I have kept in close touch. He and I lived in the same apartment building in Warsaw, and

although we are not bosom buddies, we are friends and we speak occasionally. He confided his decision to me and I advised him to wait before making such a commitment. I think the thing that spurred him to such quick action was his love for Eva. Anyhow, I am sure he told you all this and I fear I have said too much. I did not mean to meddle.”

“You said Christian. I don’t suppose it would be Catholic, would it?”

“Not exactly. I met a wonderful old man in Warsaw. His name was Father Bratz, and he spent many hours with me answering my questions from the Bible—questions I never really dared to ask my mother, and questions I’d never thought of until I left home. But it wasn’t only his answers. It was the way he lived and helped people around him all the time. He and his wife have a ministry here in Berlin reaching prostitutes, bums, runaways, and street children. They have a small house close to the slums that they fill up daily and nightly with these people, and they do their best to teach them about the Lord and help them break away from their destructive lifestyles.

“His wife is of Polish descent and they were in Warsaw visiting her relatives, one of whom is a teacher at the business college I was attending. I was sitting on a bench on the college campus when Father Bratz approached me and simply said, ‘Hello. God showed me to come and talk to you. I hope you don’t mind.’ And he sat down beside me on the bench. It was amazing because just hours before, I had been talking to Jan who was trying to convince me of the wonders and benefits of communism, and I had just prayed that God would somehow show me if He was real and reveal to me what I was supposed to do with my life.

“Father Bratz and I talked for hours. I went home with him and was completely won over by his family’s

love and their unselfishness and their firm, simple belief in Jesus, and how they would not only talk about their beliefs, as my mother often did, but actually live them. I spent the weekend with them and I was convinced that they had stumbled upon a great truth.”

“And what is that?” My mind was reeling at the “new” Gregory I saw before me. I could hardly believe he was the same insensitive, argumentative, and somewhat silly boy who had left us three years ago.

“That being a Christian is all about giving love—to each other, to the world, and especially to the unfortunate ones. That’s what Jesus preached and lived when He was on Earth. He lived love and gave love to those He met and that was His commission to us, His disciples—to love. Father Bratz and his wife have committed their lives to this and I feel called to do the same. It’s not a Christianity that just sits in a church and does nothing. It actually means something to me now, to be a Christian—not Catholic, not Orthodox, not even specifically Protestant, just a Christian, a disciple, a follower of Christ and His simple teachings of love. I am still only learning, but it has been a wonderful experience.”

“So what of college?” I thought of Aunt Valeriya and wondered what she would think of all of this. She was a firm believer in Christ, and at first I thought she would be pleased with her son’s conversion. He had never really been interested in religion before. But then I thought of her hopes and ambitions for her son to become a good businessman, to manage the family farm when she and Igor got older, and to marry and have children, live close to home, and basically be “normal” just like everyone else. How would she take this drastic change? I understood why he had been hesitant to write and share this experience with his family.

“I took a leave of absence. I really don’t feel that I need to finish college. I would rather find a good Bible college to attend. I am not even sure if I will align myself with a denomination—I feel my faith is between the Lord and me, but I do need someone to teach me more about the Bible and what it means to serve the Lord, which is why I am spending a few months here, in Berlin, with Father Bratz and his wife. That girl you just saw me talking to is a prostitute. She accepted Jesus Christ as her Savior. I will be meeting her here again tomorrow to speak more about Jesus’ words and the Bible. I am just learning to do this, but it has been thrilling.”

My face reddened as I realized why the girl he was talking to was so scantily clad. I was still in shock. I couldn’t think of what to say. He had prayed just like I had and God had heard his prayers—at least that was what he said. I had grown up believing in God but I can’t say I knew much about Him. I had never really had to make any decision for God that made my life difficult in any way. I was blissfully ignorant of many of the hardships in the world. I knew about Jesus, I loved Him, and believed He died for me to save me from my sins. I knew we should go to church once a week to worship Him, but that was as far as it went. I had never thought of the idea of living my life to serve Him simply out of gratitude for what He had done for me.

“I don’t know what to say, Gregory. Forgive me for my rather unpleasant reaction, but I can’t help but think about what your parents will feel at this sudden and unexpected news. Can’t you obey the scripture that says to ‘Honor thy father and mother?’” I knew that verse as Mama had quoted it to me on many an occasion. “Surely God would want you to honor your parents and do what they wish, rather than go off on this rather—if you will pardon my language—hair-

brained quest of yours to serve God in your own special way. If you must serve God, join some church and become a priest or a pastor. I really think that would sit better with your parents than you talking to prostitutes on dark streets in Berlin.” I shuddered at the thought that I had been so close to someone so “unclean” and that Gregory had actually been touching her!

“Anja, you must understand that this is not like old times where I am just arguing with you for the sake of arguing.”

I interrupted him with a naughty smile on my face. “So you admit that you used to do that!”

“Seriously, Anja, this is a whole new direction my life has taken. I don’t know where it will take me or what will happen—it is all so new. All of this only happened less than a month ago, which is why you haven’t heard from me. I was praying for guidance as to how to break the news to my family and my friends.” His voice lowered. “I just know that I have been called to serve God, and I must obey that call. How I am supposed to serve Him, where or with what church or denomination I have yet to discover. I am just trying to obey what I have been shown, trusting that more will come as I follow God step by step.”

“I don’t even know how to argue with you, Gregory. I am at a loss for words, and you know that that rarely happens to me.” I could argue with the old Gregory any day and shoot holes in his theories and assumptions and outlook on life—it was easy, but this, this newfound faith and conviction, this quiet assurance and peace, this I could not argue with. Although I did not agree with him, I found myself admiring him for being willing to buck the tide and go against all expectations of his family to do what he felt he needed to do. I did not feel I had that much courage. That was why I was marrying Pawel, was it not?

“Anja!!” Just then Pawel’s voice woke me from my reverie.

“Oh, hi Pawel. I was just stepping out for a bit of fresh air when I noticed Gregory—he and I were good childhood friends. You may have met each other on occasion.” Then, remembering my manners, I continued, “Gregory Igorovich Keroshiva, meet Pawel Wszyński, my fiancé.”

The two men shook hands rather awkwardly. Pawel, always the gentleman, invited Gregory to join us after the opera. We were going to an exclusive club for drinks. Mama would have been horrified, but then again, Mama didn’t need to know. Gregory must have felt awkward, because he declined the invitation, politely excused himself and slipped away into the night before we could get a word in edgewise. He did shake my hand before leaving, however, and I found a small, crumpled piece of paper in it after he was done. I tucked it away into my hand bag for later inspection.

“Just who was that, Anja?” Pawel was a little less cordial than before.

“My, my Pawel, I do believe you are jealous!” I was a little amused at his reddened face and upset manner. It took a lot to upset Pawel who was generally easy going. The only thing that upset him was not getting his own way, but since that seldom ever happened, all was normally well.

“This isn’t funny. Who was that? Don’t you know how improper it is for you to be conversing with strange men on the street, dressed as you are at this time of night?”

“I thought you liked how I was dressed. Or is this dress too ‘revealing’ for you?” I teased.

He scowled again.

“No, seriously, Gregory is an old, dear friend. He is Katya’s brother—Aunt Valeriya’s son. You never saw

much of him because he was never invited to any of the social occasions where we met. He has been away at college in Warsaw.”

“Then what the Devil is he doing here? Pardon my language.”

“Oh, it is a long story and one that I think I must tell to both you and dear Aunt Valeriya as well as Katya. Is the opera finished yet? I think I should like to go home.”



“*Bozhe moi!*” Katya was the one who was horrified. Aunt Valeriya took it all in stride with a strange smile playing about her lips. “Mama, how can you sit there so calmly and watch Gregory throw away the education that you and Papa worked so hard for to become an outcast—a religious fanatic?”

“Calm down, Katya. I am sure your mother is upset by it all and you freaking out is not going to do her any good,” Pawel said.

Pawel was in the corner, looking more than a bit pleased with my explanation of Gregory’s new vocation and calling. I guess he no longer saw him as competition, but rather just a religious fanatic that any girl in her right mind would not be attracted to. He tried to offer some sympathy to Mrs. Keroshiva and then excused himself politely.

“Mama, what has gotten into you? You look almost pleased that he is making a fool of himself and his family—us!” Katya was still ranting and raving. Finally she stopped and sat down.

Aunt Valeriya got up and simply said, “I bid you two good night. Anja, if you have his address, would you give it to me? I would like to go and see him tomorrow, before we leave Berlin. Don’t worry, Katya. God has a plan and sometimes it is hard to understand it at

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\* *Bozhe moi: Oh my God!*

the time, but just trust Him. Okay, darling? Good night.”

“I do declare—my mother is going senile or something!” Then Katya stopped short, realizing that senility was a painful subject for me as *my* mother *was* going senile. “Oh Anja, I am sorry—me and my big mouth again. Forget I ever said anything. Good night.”

I was left alone in the sitting room of our hotel suite to think and ponder on all the events of the last few days. I had had two very different experiences: one with Jan, which left me depressed and confused, and one with Gregory, which left me ... I didn't quite know what I was feeling. It just made me want to think about my life and ponder the decisions I had made and see if I was really happy with myself and my life. Was I? I didn't know. I thought I should be. What girl wouldn't be, with a fabulously rich, handsome young man madly in love with her, everything money could buy, a loving family and good friends, and a long and happy life full of fun and adventure ahead of me. What more could I ask? I was a Christian. I loved God. I attended church. I even prayed on my own and read the Bible for half an hour every morning upon awakening. I did good deeds, and if I was rich I could do more to help the poor, could I not?

I finally began to feel weary of all my inner thoughts and arguments and decided to go to bed and think more about it in the morning. First, however, I took out the small scrap of paper. There was an address scribbled on it. I copied it down and slipped the paper under Aunt Valeriya's door. Then I retired to my room, undressed, and was soon fast asleep.

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## KATYA

I sat and stared out the window at the passing scenery. Germany was beautiful. Our train was taking us through forests dotted with ancient castles from days gone by, picturesque villages and fields of wheat and other crops, all ripe for harvest or in the process of being harvested. There was a joyous feeling in the air. Harvest season was in full force, the trees were bursting forth with glorious color. All was well in the world. Little did I know what was looming around the corner.

Aunt Valeriya had left our hotel room early that morning, leaving a note saying she would be back in time to catch the train to Munich. She returned barely in the nick of time. She didn't say much, only reassuring Katya that Gregory was fine and that she shouldn't worry, that he wasn't a religious fanatic. Katya was not very soothed by that, but it helped a little. Aunt Valeriya seemed to be at peace about it all. Her only request was that we allow *her* to break the news to Igor. She then dropped the subject and took up our trip to Munich with great gusto. She commented on the scenery, oohed and ahed over the fine food served in our first-class dining car, and was in the seventh heaven over our comfortable first-class beds. I personally thought she was overdoing it a little.

We finally arrived in Munich late in the evening. There was a car waiting for us. I took in the sights as we drove to the hotel. It was a fine old city with many magnificent buildings. I was looking forward to the month we would spend partying and attending balls, social functions, touring the city, and going to plays and operas. I wasn't so fond of the opera, but I loved dressing up and going out. I felt somewhat like Cinderella who was used to sleeping in the basement with the cinders and was suddenly transported to the king's palace. It was all too much like a fairy tale or a good dream from which I would someday awake only to find it had never happened.



Munich was a rather wild city during Oktoberfest. People were partying and drinking large quantities of beer, amongst other stronger alcoholic beverages. The poor and middle class took to the streets in celebration, while the rich partied in luxury behind closed doors. We went to many social functions, danced all night sometimes and slept all day, and generally reveled in the party atmosphere. We even went out on the streets and joined in with some of the festivities as part of the "cultural experience" the city had to offer. I have to say, I felt more at home on the streets with the common folk, singing, dancing, and partying, than in the fancy dance halls and homes of the rich and wealthy of the city. However, if I was to become Pawel's wife, I would have to get accustomed to the wealth and socializing at some point, and now was as good a time as any.

At one of the first parties we attended in Munich, I noticed Katya was spending a long time in the company of a certain young man with blond hair and striking blue eyes. He seemed captivated by her and she was very animated in her conversation with

him, talking and laughing and gesticulating. She seemed to be having so much fun and I was happy for her. At one point, she took him by the arm and walked up to me.

"Anja, meet Fredrick Kroetz, my new friend. Fredrick is a captain in the German army." Fredrick reached out his hand to shake mine and Katya suddenly excused herself and me as we headed to the ladies room. I tried to protest, but she grabbed me by the hand and ran off. When we were out of sight she caught her breath and asked, "What do you think of him? Isn't he handsome? He is devilishly clever and very rich. Why he is in the army I do not know, as he could have gone into business like his father, who is one of the richest men of the city. He is very devoted to Hitler's cause, as is his father. He is so idealistic, but I don't really care about that. He is just soooo handsome and very charming!"

I sighed inwardly. My brother was a communist, my friend a religious fanatic, and my best friend was now falling in love with a Nazi! This was not happening to me! "Just be careful, Katya. I haven't heard the best things about the Nazi Party and its goals and ideals. They want to make Germany a world power. Poland is probably one of their targets."

"What do I care about Poland? I am not Polish! The only reason I am there is because of the damned communists, pardon my language. Anyway, the Nazis are totally against communism and that is good enough for me."

"Just be careful. Don't let your heart lead you into a situation you will ultimately regret," I cautioned.

She tossed her hair back. She had it cut into a short bob, which was the latest style. "Stop worrying. Have you ever known me to do anything rash or impulsive?"



“Every day,” I whispered under my breath as she sauntered off humming a tune. This was really too much.



After that fateful dinner party Fredrick became part of our company. He frequently called on us, or I should say, on Katya, at our suite of hotel rooms near the Marienplatz, the central square some called “the heart of Munich.” Fredrick was a very gallant young man who easily made himself friends. Katya had not mentioned to her mother that this “friend” was a Nazi. She didn’t feel it was relevant. I wondered if I should say something, but since Aunt Valeriya already had so much to bear with Gregory’s decision, I didn’t want to trouble her unnecessarily about Katya, especially since we were due to leave so soon. I hoped it was just a fling that wouldn’t amount to anything, but something told me there was more to it than that.

My premonitions were right—two nights before we were to leave, Katya came in and with tears in her eyes said she was not coming back with us. “Fredrick has proposed to me and I have agreed to be his wife.”

“But Katya, how ... why?” I was speechless. I thought he would break her heart, not propose to her. “Why in God’s name did you accept?”

“I am pregnant! I am almost sure of it. You know how that would devastate Mama if she found out. I must do this honorably. I care for Fredrick and although this is much, much sooner than I had hoped, he is a good catch. He is rich, he is ambitious, he is romantic—what more could I want?”

“How can you be so sure so soon? You only met him three weeks ago!”

“I just know! I missed my ... you know, and I never miss. I have been feeling tired and run down and now I am starting to feel sick at certain smells.

Aren’t those all tell-tale signs? At least that is what Mama told me once when she was explaining the whole process to me. She had two children, so I suppose she would know.”

I sat down on the couch. Katya and I were best friends. I told her everything and she also confided in me, or at least, so I thought. So all of this was a total shock. In the 1930s to be pregnant without a husband was unheard of and a terrible disgrace. Abortions were certainly not legal and very dangerous, so the only option was to marry, whether the parties involved wanted to or not. Better to marry quickly and then just say the baby was born early than to suffer disgrace and scandal and have your child branded a bastard for being conceived out of wedlock. Katya was an impetuous, hot-blooded Russian girl with a quick temper and wit, but I always thought she had more of a head on her shoulders, and I never feared for her in that way. What was I to say?

“Have you told your mama?”

“No. I couldn’t bear to, especially after all that has happened with Gregory. I am planning to elope with him tomorrow. We will send a letter announcing our marriage from Berlin. He has relatives there who own a small town house, and they have agreed to let us use it for the time being.”

“Does he know you are pregnant?”

“Yes. I told him. But I told him after he proposed to me. I think he may have suspected it. He is in love with me. I know that. He was not too happy to hear about the possibility of pregnancy, but what could he say? He had already proposed and I had accepted.”

“Do you truly love him?”

“You are not one to ask questions like that!” Katya got on the defensive. Her comment stung.

“I am sorry, Katya. I just love you and want you to

be happy. I went into my engagement to Pawel with my eyes wide open. I had plenty of time to think about and reflect on my decision, and I am not married yet. I could still pull out of it if I wanted to. But you ... this is so sudden.”

Katya started crying again. “Oh Anja, this is not at all how I imagined it. He is a wonderful man and I am sure I will be happy with him. I just wanted it to be closer to home and near to you and my family and all those I know and love. I will be leaving first thing in the morning, so wish me luck.” With that she kissed me and was gone.



“Anja, Anja, wake up! Something terrible has happened! Katya is gone! She left only a small note telling us not to worry about her—that all would be made clear in two days. Do you have any knowledge of this?”

Aunt Valeriya was greatly distressed. I felt so very guilty to hide the truth from her, but I couldn’t bring myself to break the news. There was nothing either of us could do about it, so I felt it best to act ignorant and let her find out from Katya herself.

I comforted her the best I could. We were due to leave the next morning. We would be traveling home via Berlin again, but only stopping in the city for a day. What had promised to be the most exciting adventure of my life thus far had turned out to be a tragedy. All I wanted now was to get home—home to our farm and the peace and security of the hills where I was born, to Papa’s strong arms. Even Mama’s illness seemed easier to cope with than the strange and new set of events that had taken place in my life. I felt torn as I watched those I loved and was the closest to choose their paths in life. Hadn’t I already chosen mine? Why then was I so confused?

A telegram was waiting for us at our hotel when we arrived in Berlin. It was from Katya. They had been married in a small chapel the night before and were now residing in Fredrick’s relative’s town house. They invited us to stop by if we had the chance. Aunt Valeriya wept openly when she heard the news. She was heartbroken. This was definitely not what she had planned for her daughter. We all tried our best to comfort her, but it seemed to no avail. She only wished to be left alone.

“I cannot understand your aunt, Anja,” Pawel confided in me after an unsuccessful attempt to get Valeriya’s mind on something else. “She hears of Gregory becoming a religious fanatic and does not shed a tear, then her daughter elopes with the son of one of the richest men in Bavaria and she weeps openly and will not be comforted. I do not understand it!”

“Fredrick is a Nazi—a very dedicated one at that. I did not think Aunt Valeriya knew, but I guess she did. She very openly opposes everything that they stand for, which may explain her distress. However, I do not know why she is taking this news so very differently than she did the news of Gregory. Someday, maybe, I will ask her. But for now, I am all she has left and I intend to comfort her the best I can. I suggest you stay out of the way, since your methods have not been working very well.” I was tired and worn and was not feeling charitable.

“I will put that down to an overtired and overwrought mind, Anja, and will try my best not to take it personally,” Pawel said gallantly.

“I am sorry, Pawel. I didn’t mean that. I just need some time alone. I feel as if my whole world has fallen apart around me in the last month. This trip was supposed to be such a fun one—so full of adventure—seeing new things, meeting new people. But instead

it has become one full of tragedy and heartbreaking revelations. I only hope this is the end of it. I don't know if I could handle another one."

Pawel took me in his arms as I wept. I did not push him away. I did not have the strength to. It felt good to have a shoulder to cry on, and he had the good sense to just let me cry and not try to explain anything away. Finally, he pulled out his handkerchief and handed it to me. "I must be going now to finalize the arrangements for our return home. We will take a train straight home—no more revelations for you, my love, if I can help it!" With that he was gone.

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## **NINETEEN**

Time went by slowly the next few months. Christmas came and went. It was nearing my nineteenth birthday. Pawel and I had been engaged for nearly a year. I still did not know if I really loved him, but everyone else was convinced of it and I had almost convinced myself. I spent a lot of those months caring for my ailing mother. Her sickness was quickly progressing. It was so sad to see the once alive, sharp-witted, down-to-earth woman slowly slip away. There were still times when she was herself, and Papa and I treasured those times. She sometimes asked about Jan, and we were careful to keep any bad news from her. He had gotten married to Eva and was doing very well in school and was also now working at a hospital as part of his training. He seemed happy in his letters and he always wrote Mama a separate letter with no mention of the changes in his life. We had asked him to do this and mercifully, he had agreed. There was no need to trouble her in her last years. The doctors did not think she would live to see him graduate from school.

Papa hired a boy to help with the farm chores, so between him and my brother Adam, the farm was taken care of. Adam's wife was having a difficult pregnancy with their first child, so I took over the cooking, cleaning, and housekeeping from Mama. I knew that once

I married Pawel I would no longer need to do any of that, but I still felt it was good experience for me to know how to do all the basic things that running a home involved. Mama did not want me working, but I knew it was too much for their budget to hire a maid as well. I resolved that once I was married to Pawel I would support them as much as I could and see that they spent the rest of their days in relative peace and quiet, with as little work and trouble as possible.



“Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Anja, happy birthday to you!” It was April 1936, my nineteenth birthday. As I blew out the candles on my cake I wondered what the year would bring.

“What did you wish for?” Katya giggled as she watched me carefully take the candles out of the cake and prepare to cut it.

Katya. Her marriage to Fredrick had finally been accepted by both families, and she was now living in Berlin. She had convinced Fredrick to take this trip with her to visit me for my birthday. I was so, so happy to see her. She had been pregnant when they had married, but she miscarried at two and a half months. I never asked her if she regretted her decision to marry Fredrick and she never mentioned it. It was something best left unspoken, since there was no way of changing it. They seemed happy enough. She had everything materially her heart could desire and he seemed to be a doting husband. She did mention to me once that he seemed quite relieved when she miscarried, although of course he was concerned for her health. It seemed having children did not fit in with his career choice of being a high-ranking military officer in the Third Reich. He wanted her to be an army wife and travel with him wherever he went, and children—as much

as Hitler advocated them—would definitely complicate that plan. She seemed saddened by this prospect, but then tossed her head in her own characteristic way and said, “But you never know—times change, and many things with it.”

I often wondered how marrying a Russian fitted in with Fredrick’s Nazi philosophy. I once broached the subject with him and he seemed perfectly comfortable with the idea. I don’t think he really knew what his philosophy of life was. All he believed in was the superiority of the German race and the fact that Germany deserved to be a world power. His wife was Russian, but she was white and of German descent and anyway, she was only his wife. The husband was the head of the house, so that mattered little. He had been berated for his choice from some of his fellow officers who were more staunchly against intermarriage, but because of his father’s position and contributions to the cause, he was generally left alone.

Pawel gave me a wonderful diamond ring for my birthday. I was already wearing a smaller diamond engagement ring, but he wanted me to wear both. I felt uncomfortable accepting it, as I still could not return his passion, but what could I say? He constantly talked of the gifts he would shower upon me once we were married. *I really should get used to it*, I thought to myself. He never seemed to notice my confusion or lack of emotion.

“So, what did you wish for?” Katya brought me back to the present.

“Yes, do tell!” everyone else joined in the playful banter.

“You know it won’t come true if I tell you.” What had I wished for? I had wished for peace and rest from a troubled mind. I wished for the knowledge that the path I was walking in my life was the right

one. I wished for happiness. How could I say that to the crowd that surrounded me?—They would not understand. I was the envy of every girl in the town. Pawel Wyszynski was the most eligible bachelor for kilometers around. It was a pre-determined fact that I should be the happiest woman alive, at least in our province. No, no one would have understood the inner turmoil I was facing. Not even Papa.



“Anja dear, may I come in?”

“Aunt Valeriya! You have come! I didn’t think you would. How is Uncle Igor? Is he recovering?”

“Yes. It was a nasty bout of flu, but the worst is over. His fever finally broke, and he is sleeping like a baby. I am so sorry I missed your birthday. I feel terrible about it.”

“Oh nonsense. You had a perfectly good reason. But I appreciate the visit nevertheless.”

Valeriya handed me a small box wrapped with gold wrapping paper. I eagerly untied it. Inside was a small, black book. I opened it and the pages were empty.

“It is a journal. I started keeping one when I was your age. It has helped me tremendously through the years to have formulated my thoughts and put them down on paper. Sometimes I write out prayers to God in my journal, and then I get quiet and meditate and write down the thoughts that come to me. I have to say that sometimes I think God Himself answers me through things I write. I go back and read it and I wonder if I even wrote it. I have found many wonderful answers in the quiet times I have spent in prayer and meditation with God, my Bible, and my journal. I thought you might like to start one as well.”

I didn’t really understand what she was talking about, so I simply said “Thank you. I will treasure this gift.” We sat in silence for a little while. Finally I got

up the courage to ask her the question that had been on my mind since that fateful trip to Germany. “Aunt Valeriya, why were you able to be so at peace about Gregory’s decision and then so upset by Katya’s? What was the difference between the two?”

She sat and thought for a few moments and then replied, “It is somewhat of a long story. Do you really want to hear it?” I nodded yes and she began.

“When I was a teenager my mother sent me to Germany to study in a prestigious finishing school. You know we are of German descent and we had relatives there. I do not know why my mother wanted me to be educated there, as it was truly above my station in life, but maybe she thought it would improve my chances of landing a good husband. I don’t know. Anyway, while in Germany I met some wonderful Christians who, like Father Bratz, had severed connections with the Catholic Church and any church for that matter, and were serving God full time, but in their own special way. They were a small group—a few families and a few unmarried men and women. They had a house church and they believed in evangelism—they preached in the streets and parks and invited people to receive Jesus as their Savior. They had Bible studies in their homes. Some of them worked, but most of them lived by faith—trusting God to supply their needs.

“A young man named Hans told me about the Lord, and I accepted Christ as my Savior. I also started attending their Bible studies. My life was wonderfully changed and I felt peace and love and joy for the first time in my life. I had always had a nagging sense that all was not right—that there was an aching void in my heart which needed filling and now it was filled. Jesus filled it! Anyway, I felt the call of the Lord to join them and work with them, but it was too much for me. I didn’t feel I could buck the tide of opinion

and prejudice. I felt I couldn't dash my parents' hopes and dreams to do this, no matter how strong of a call I felt. Instead, I went home, met and married Igor and except for losing our farm and having to start over in Poland, have lived a relatively quiet and uneventful life. I have often wondered what would have happened if I had accepted the call I received. I have tried to be a good Christian and to teach those around me the things I had been taught, but it hasn't been the same. So although Gregory's decision was not the plan I had for him, I feel it is God giving me a second chance through my child, and that is what I told him the day I went to see him. I have given him my blessing.

"Katya, on the other hand, is a wonderful, but at times impetuous girl. I think she often goes into situations without thinking things through, and I am afraid to say that I believe this to be one of those quick decisions that she will regret in the future. I am almost sure I know why she agreed to marry him. She thought she was pregnant, didn't she?"

I was stunned. These things were not proper to talk about. I simply nodded my head.

"Poor, poor dear. I will always love her and do my best to help her be happy in life, but my heart goes out to her. This was definitely *not* what I had in mind for Katya. In spite of all your mother's dreams of Jan marrying a rich girl, I had always hoped he would marry my Katya. Wouldn't they have made a splendid couple? Of course, all of that is changed now." She stopped talking and just stared out the window. She was right, of course. So much had changed.

"Well my dear, enough revelations for one day. I care for you so much. You are the closest thing I have left to a child, now that both Gregory and Katya have gone their separate ways. I do miss them." She sighed and then got up and left the room. I resolved

that I should visit her more and spend more time with her. She was pretty much all I had left in the way of friends, and she was always full of wisdom. Her story had gotten me thinking again about my life and the choices I had made. I wondered if I would look back someday and regret the things I was deciding then and there. I hoped not.

## **MAMA**

Time passed rather slowly. The winter snows melted and gave way to spring rains and then to summer heat. The days lengthened and I spent more time out in the pastures either riding the horses or walking in the fields, alone, thinking. It was so peaceful out there. Little did I know that it was the calm before the storm.

One hot, summer day I was walking in one of the farther pastures, picking wildflowers and thinking about life when I heard a horse come galloping up.

“Anja, Anja, come quickly! It is mother!”

I jumped on the back of the horse with my brother Adam and held on for dear life as we galloped back as fast as he could spur the horse on. My mind was racing. I hoped she was still alive. The doctors had not given her a good prognosis. It seemed she had developed cancer as well, and her body was slowly giving way, along with her mind. Her moments of lucidness had been significantly fewer of late.

As Adam helped me off the horse I searched his eyes for a hint of what had happened. My normally unemotional brother looked extremely worried, which to me was a very bad sign. “Adam, is she...?” I couldn’t bring myself to ask the question.

“She isn’t dead, if that is what you were trying to ask. But the doctor says she doesn’t have long.” Adam

was trying to be unfeeling about the whole thing, but I knew him well enough to know that that was what he did when he did not know how to deal with his emotions.

I ran as fast as I could up to the room, where I bumped into Papa who was just coming out. He had tears in his eyes. He took me in his arms for a moment and then said, “She doesn’t have long. Let us make these last few hours of her life happy ones. No weeping, okay, my ptitchka?” He hadn’t called me that in so long. I nodded mutely.

How could I not weep? I thought back on my sweet, wonderful mother. True, she was a tough woman, but it took a tough woman to bear and raise twelve children, to keep a home and farm running and manage Papa as well. She never complained about her lot, only tried to make the best of it and make the world a better place for her children. She was leaving quite a legacy behind and I was so proud of her. I swallowed the lump in my throat and determined to make these last hours her best, just as Papa had requested.

“Mama, can you hear me?” She was laying on the bed with her eyes closed. Suddenly she opened them and looked at me with full recognition. “Mama, do you know who I am?”

“Let me guess? You are that naughty little girl who used to sleep in when she was supposed to do her farm chores and wore her new fur coat to milk the cows.” I laughed. She was herself—at least for now. I prayed it would last.

“Yes Mama, it is me.” I held her hand and kissed her. What could I say? My heart was full to bursting with things I wanted to say to her, to thank her for all the love she had given me and for being such a wonderful mother. It is amazing how when you are faced with losing someone you love, all the petty things

that may have bothered you about them fades away, and all you are left with are the wonderful memories of your life together. “I love you so much. I couldn’t have asked God for a better mother.” I meant that.

Mama just smiled. She was weak but she understood me. Finally she started whispering. I leaned over to hear her. Papa and Adam and his wife came into the room and stood quietly and tried to hear her as well. “It is so beautiful. So shining. You know, don’t worry about me. I am going to a better place. Jesus came to me and told me that all my good works didn’t matter—He just loved me and wanted me, just little old me, in spite of all my sins and shortcomings. ...” There was a long, poignant pause. “You know I always wished I could have spent more time with you and had more fun with you.”

“Oh Mama.” Tears were flowing now whether I liked it or not. “Don’t say that! It doesn’t matter. It really doesn’t. You have been so wonderful. You have raised twelve wonderful children. We all love you so much!”

“Pray for Jan. Bring him with you when you come! Will you promise me that?” I was puzzled by that at first. How did Mama know about Jan when we had all conspired to hide his state from her? “He will see and understand someday, but now he is in the middle of a very dark tunnel. You must pray for him and shine a light on him so he can make it out. Promise me?”

I promised.

Papa, Adam, his wife, their baby girl, and I all gathered around her bedside. We held her hand and talked and laughed about old times. She could not talk above a whisper, but she was whole in her mind. I felt it was a special blessing from God that she could be in her right mind to say goodbye to all of us.

A priest was sent for to give her the last rites. He came and we gathered around her bed while he prayed



for her and gave her communion one last time. She then looked at us and smiled. “The angels are coming. It is time to go.” She then looked lovingly into Papa’s eyes and said, “I’ll be seeing you soon. I love you.” With that she let out a little gasp, and then she was gone.



When you lose a loved one, especially one as close as a parent, it feels like someone took a shovel and dug a big hole in your heart. You feel like you have an empty space and it takes a long time for the pain to heal. I spent a lot of time with Papa over the next weeks. He tried hard to be strong, but he wasn’t succeeding very well. We spent a lot of time just walking together in the fields or sitting in the parlor, staring at the empty fireplace. Adam made the funeral arrangements, and all of my brothers and sisters showed up for the occasion.

There was many a heartfelt eulogy delivered by different ones of us, her children. I searched the crowds for Jan, and finally I found him, with his wife Eva on his arm. She seemed quite distant from it all and of the opinion that this was all rather archaic and old fashioned—a church funeral and all that, but it meant something to Jan, so she had the good grace to hold her tongue and try to make a pleasant face. Jan introduced her to the other members of the family and although no one approved, everyone tried their hardest to be warm and accepting, if nothing else than for Mama’s sake, because we all knew Jan was her favorite.

I was in the kitchen washing pots and pans during the meal after the funeral. Some of my sisters had traveled a long way to attend the funeral and they were going to stay the night. It would have been a joyful family reunion if only Mama had been there too. As I was washing I heard a deep, raspy voice that sounded vaguely familiar. I turned and there, in front of me with a boyish smile on his face was Gregory!

“Gregory! What are you doing here? I haven’t heard a word from you in over a year and all of a sudden you show up out of nowhere!”

“Anja, you are looking as beautiful as ever.”

I blushed. *How stupid!* I thought to myself, *Why should you blush, Anja? You are an engaged woman and he is just a religious fanatic.* I was thoroughly embarrassed by my reaction to him.

“I am so sorry about your mother. I know what it feels like to lose someone you love.”

A questioning look spread over my face.

He explained. “Father Bratz passed on a few months ago. I accompanied his wife back to her relatives in Warsaw. Their ministry was turned over to a very dedicated young German couple who I am sure will do a good job. I prayed and felt for some reason that I should return home, at least for a little while. I have only been back for two days. I found out about your mother the day I returned. I always liked your mother.”

I smiled. Mama had liked Gregory—I knew that. She often laughed good-naturedly during our “arguments”—even calling them “lover’s quarrels” at times. Jan and Gregory were good friends when they were boys living on the farm together and Mama always made them special snacks and doted on them.

“So how long will you be with us?” I averted my eyes and tried not to sound too interested.

“Not long. Maybe a few months. My father’s health isn’t so good, and Mama needs some help on the farm. I want to try to get them through harvest season before deciding what to do next. Where is Pawel?”

“He is finishing his last year of college. He sent me a telegram apologizing for not being able to make it to the funeral, and sending his condolences. It is a little lonely without him here, but I am managing.” I put on a brave smile. “We are going to be married next spring.”

“I know.”

“And what about you? Have you found the love of your life yet?”

Gregory did not answer. He only smiled and then changed the subject. “Here, let me help you with that.” I was struggling with a heavy cast-iron pot and was about to drop it. He came to my rescue, and as he stood up with the pot our eyes met. I had forgotten how deep and blue they were. When he looked at me I felt as if he could see right through me. I quickly averted my eyes and, wiping my hands on my apron, muttered thanks for his help and rushed out of the room.

“Anja, what is the matter with you? You looked flushed and red. Are you all right?” Maria, my oldest sister, now expecting her fifth child, was at my side.

“I am fine, Masha. I just got very hot in the kitchen and needed a breath of fresh air. How are you? I should be taking care of you, with you in the condition you are in.”

“Oh nonsense.” She laughed. She took after Mama in that she was a hardy, strong woman who took childbearing in stride, along with everything else in life. “I am just fine. I am hoping for a girl, though. Poor Elisabet is so lonely without a sister and with three rough brothers.” Maria glanced up towards the kitchen just in time to see Gregory walking out looking this way and that.

She looked at me questioningly and then took me by the arm and walked out on the porch with me. “Look, Anusha, I do not want to meddle, but since Mama is gone, I feel it is my duty to tell you that I think Gregory likes you and you need to be careful not to compromise your engagement with Pawel.”

I burst out laughing. “He has been here for a whole fifteen minutes and you have already come to that conclusion? Is he that transparent? I must be blind, as

I didn’t notice a thing. Don’t worry about me, Masha. I am a big girl and I can take care of myself.”

“Alright, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

I turned and walked back into the house still laughing. However, deep down inside I wondered if Masha was right, and it set my mind awl.



I spent a lot of the next few months with Papa. Now that Adam’s wife was recovered fully from her childbirth, she took over the house and was an able housekeeper and better cook than I could ever be. She was a sweet, quiet girl, who kept busy watching her daughter and cooking and cleaning. She and I didn’t talk much—she seemed to prefer it that way and I didn’t mind. I had so much else on my mind.

“Anushka, I am worried about you.” Papa had been sitting quietly for over an hour after dinner, staring at the fireplace, where the orange fire danced lightly over the burning embers. Autumn was coming, the trees were turning glorious colors, and the air was chilly at night.

“Why Papa? I am fine. I have you and the farm, and Pawel will be returning in November from college. Then we will have to plan my wedding and I will be busy. I am enjoying spending time with you.”

“You didn’t let me finish.” Papa smiled. “I was thinking that you need to get out more—go visiting, make friends. You are becoming a hermit here and it is not good for your spirits. We wouldn’t want Pawel to come and find his wild-spirited girl changed into a dormouse, now would we?”

“And who would I visit?”

“You could at least spend some time with the Wyszyńskis. I know my cousin Valeriya would love to see you. She is feeling lonely as well, you know, with her daughter so far away and now her husband’s

illness. I know she thinks of you as a daughter, and I feel selfish having kept you with me all this time. I am doing better now. I think it would at least do you good to get out more in the fresh air and sunshine. You could also go to town more. The boy I hired could take you in the wagon.” Although cars were now quite common, Papa would not trust himself to the “iron carriage” as he put it and instead insisted on keeping horses and a wagon.

It was a little embarrassing to go into town in a wagon, with new cars zooming around town at twenty or thirty kilometers per hour, but there was no changing Papa’s mind. Anyway, he couldn’t afford a car. I figured that would all change when I married Pawel. I would get him a car and someone to drive it too, if he wanted. But that would have to wait.

“Thank you, Papa. Perhaps I will go and visit Valeriya sometime soon. I am feeling tired now. Do you mind if I bid you goodnight?”

Papa nodded and held out his arms for a hug and kiss. He seemed to need more hugs and affection now that Mama was gone. I kissed him goodnight and headed to my room. I was thinking about Pawel. I was missing him. I felt lonely and wanted someone to talk to. I guess Papa was right. I loved him dearly, but I needed a friend, someone I could relate to. I decided to go over and see Valeriya the next warm day. She was nowhere near my age, but she was my friend and a “kindred spirit,” so to speak. It would be good to talk to her.



The hills rolled softly and the ground was soft under my feet. It had rained the day before, but that morning the sun had come out in brilliant glory, illuminating the beauty that was all around me. The silver birch leaves were turning a glorious golden color, while the other foliage was ranging from a deep red to a light yellow.

The grass was green beneath my feet. It felt good to be alive. I looked up at the blue sky with puffy, white clouds sailing by and felt a measure of peace. *If only I could feel like this all the time*, I mused.

I was on my way to Valeriya’s farm. As I had gotten older I had stopped calling her Aunt, since she wasn’t really my aunt, but rather my second cousin, and now I just referred to her as Valeriya. It was quite a walk, but the weather was gorgeous, and it was worth the distance just to revel in the beauty of it all. I had been walking for nearly an hour when I came to a hill and spotted the farm just below, in a little valley. They had found a beautiful farm for sale in a secluded spot. It was not very large, but very picturesque, with a small stream running through it, good grazing pastures and land for planting crops and a small, stone farmhouse. Valeriya had fixed it up and made it look like a home. With cheerful red curtains at the windows and smoke coming from the chimney and the occasional waft of newly baked bread, it looked inviting and I wondered why I hadn’t come sooner. Then I heard a low, raspy voice singing and I remembered why I had avoided this place.

*Gregory?* Was he still here? It was already the middle of October. Harvest season was nearly over. I thought for sure he was gone. I had purposely been avoiding him, as he just seemed to complicate my life and my thoughts whenever I met him. But, here he was, walking up to me with a long stride, smiling cheerfully and singing some funny little ditty. Their dog was on his heels and barking up a storm at me. I suppose he wanted me to know that he considered me a stranger.

“Anja! How good to see you.” Gregory waved cheerfully. I waved back.

“What brings you here?” he asked, panting as he stopped to catch his breath.

“I was feeling lonely and in need of someone to talk to.” I blushed when I realized it sounded like I was coming to talk to him. “I came to see your mama,” I quickly added.

“Mama took Papa to town today. They got themselves a car just a few weeks ago. They were going to take it over to your place sometime soon, but because of the harvest and the rain they haven’t been able to make it. They had some shopping to do today.”

I was a bit dismayed. I hadn’t even thought of calling to see if they were home. Telephones were still fairly new in this part of the country, especially out in the small towns, but since Pawel’s father was part owner of the telephone company that serviced our province, he had phones and lines installed in our farms just the year before. I was still getting used to the idea that I could just dial a number and talk to someone through some wires. However, because of my lack of forethought, I was now stuck in the awkward situation of being alone with Gregory.

*I will just have to act as natural as possible and fake my way through this somehow,* I thought to myself. “So, you are still here. I thought you were gone. You said you would only be here a few months and since harvest is nearly over, I just thought that...”

“You wouldn’t run into me here?” he said, finishing the sentence for me.

“Well, yes, but I didn’t want to put it that way. Oh, why can’t we talk straightforward and simply like we did when we were children?”

“I hate to ruin any unrealistic memories you may have, but we argued all the time when we were children.”

“I know that, but I always thought of them as friendly disputes, almost more for the sake of argument than to make a point. Anyway, I miss that sometimes.

There, I said it. So, what are your plans now?”

Gregory looked off into the distance for a few minutes. “I don’t know what to do. The Lord has not shown me what to do yet, He has only told me to stay here until my way was made clear.”

“God speaks to you?” I asked incredulously. “I thought that was something that happened in the Bible to prophets and people like that!”

Gregory’s face lit up. He obviously loved talking about the Lord and an opportunity to pass on his new-found faith was not something he would pass up. He immediately started talking to me about things he had learned in his relationship with the Lord, how prayer was a real power and how the Lord could speak to you if you only took the time to be still and quiet and listen. He threw himself down on the grass and with a dreamy look in his eye, went on about how happy and at peace he had been since he developed a “personal relationship with the Lord” as he put it, and had discovered that true salvation was only by grace, and an eternal gift for all who accepted it. He told me how I could have the same relationship with the Lord, and eternal assurance of my salvation.

I sat on the grass beside him and listened to it all, transfixed by the light and joy I saw on his face and by what I was hearing. We must have talked for hours, because the sun was beginning to set when we heard the sounds of a car pull up to the farm house.

“Oh my goodness, we have been talking for nearly three hours!” Gregory jumped up and bounded down towards the farm house. He turned and motioned with his hand for me to follow him as he ran down the hill. I got up slower, looking down in consternation at the big wet spot on my back side from sitting in the damp grass. I thanked my lucky stars that I had decided against wearing my new white dress. At least

the serviceable navy-blue one I had on didn't become see-through when it got wet. I knew Valeriya would have a fit if she knew I was sitting on the ground. Russians have an old wives' tale about the dangers of direct contact with Mother Earth. They avoid it whenever possible and Valeriya was no exception.

I walked slowly down the hill, letting my dress dry and thinking about all that I had heard from Gregory. Many of the things he told me I had read about in the Bible or heard about in church, but to see someone living it with such joy in his eyes and peace in his heart, that was a profound experience. The fact that he prayed and actually heard God speaking to him was something I almost could not believe, but the light in his eyes told me he was telling the truth.

"Anja!" Valeriya was overjoyed to see me. "You should have called! We could have postponed our trip to town. Oh, you are looking well, although a touch pale. You haven't been out much lately, have you? You seemed to have missed the summer sun altogether."

"I have spent a lot of time with Papa lately."

"Well, do stay for dinner," Igor said. "We can drive you home to save you the walk and that way you can stay later." He was beaming as he looked lovingly at his car. That it was his pride and joy was obvious to all. Igor, it seemed, had taken the news of his son's conversion in good grace and thought it was wonderful. He was not very showy in his own faith, but it was solid and he was happy that his son was following in that path. He was not very happy with Katya's decision, but he loved her dearly and so forgave her and loved her anyway, and even tried to go out of his way to bring Fredrick into their family circle.

I was more than happy to accept their invitation. I was starving and the fresh bread smelled so good. We had a nice, simple meal and chatted about this and that.

I caught up on news of Katya. She was now expecting her first child, much to Fredrick's dismay. She seemed to be quite distraught over his reaction to her pregnancy and was even asking about the possibility of coming to live with Valeriya to have the baby here in Poland, as Fredrick was not being very supportive.

Finally I looked at the clock. "Oh my! It is eight o'clock already. I told Papa I would be back by now. I hope he does not worry."

"That is what the telephone is for, my dear." Valeriya beamed. They were more interested in the "new fangled gadgets" as Papa called them and definitely made more use of the telephone than Papa and I ever did. Igor listened frequently to the radio and was quite abreast of the news. He had gone into the next room to listen to the evening news broadcast, and as I was putting on my coat and getting ready to leave he walked in with a somber expression.

"Bad news. Germany and Italy have become allies. This cannot be good for Poland. I fear Hitler is gearing up for war of some sort, and I fear that Poland is on his agenda. We can only pray that we will be spared."

We all looked at him rather dumbly. It was so totally off the subjects that we had been thinking about and discussing. When I think about it now, I think he must have been given a glimpse into the future, for in a few years we were going to find out just how right he was in his assessment of the situation. At the time however, war was far from our minds.

"Don't get all glum on us now, dear Igor," Valeriya said with a laugh. "There is always something going on in the political world that bodes no good. I wouldn't worry too much about it if I were you."

I nodded my head in agreement and Igor walked slowly back to the living room to continue his perusal of the evening news.

Gregory drove me home and we rode in silence most of the way. Finally I asked, “What are you thinking?”

“I am thinking about what my father said,” he answered slowly. “I agree with him. I think war is coming, and coming soon. I only wonder what part we will have to play in all of this.”

“None, I hope.” I shuddered at the thought of war. I was such a sheltered girl—innocent in so many ways. War and politics did not come into my thoughts or my vocabulary. “Why do people have to fight, and hate?” I wondered out loud.

“That is an age-old question.” Gregory was starting on something but just then we pulled up to the front door of our house. Papa was out on the doorstep looking for me and registered pleasant surprise as he saw me pull up in the car with Gregory.

“So, your parents have gone and gotten themselves a new-fangled gadget, have they? Does it run well?”

“Oh yes, sir. You should try it out sometime. I could come by and take you for a ride.”

“I just may take you up on that, son,” Papa replied. “Thank you for seeing my Anja home safely. Give my regards to your parents. *Dobre viecher!*”

Gregory just smiled and waved and drove off into the night. As usual, he had given me much to think about.

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## CHRISTMAS EVE

Snow was falling lightly and the evergreen trees that graced the forest on the far side of our farmhouse were heavily laden with the white powder. It had been snowing off and on for weeks and the ground was covered in at least three feet of snow. It was definitely going to be a white Christmas this year.

Adam had chopped down a beautiful tree and we decorated it with handmade decorations, some of which had been passed down to us from a few generations before. We did not hang stockings or have presents, except for a few handmade gifts for Lusha, Adam’s daughter who was almost one.

Pawel had invited our family to a Christmas dinner and celebration at his home, but Papa was not feeling well and Lusha had the flu, so we declined and decided to spend Christmas at home together, seeing as it would be my last before I was married. Some of my sisters invited us to visit them as well, but none could come and see us, as all of them had either just had a child, or were expecting. Papa could now boast of seventeen grandchildren and he was not yet seventy!

Late in the evening on Christmas Eve, after a lovely but simple meal that Adam’s wife Mila and I had worked together to prepare, I was sitting, staring

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\* *Dobre viecher*: good evening

out the window, watching the snow fall when I heard a car pull up outside our house. I was puzzled as to who it could be, as we were not expecting anyone. Finally the doorbell rang and I wrapped a shawl around my shoulders and went to answer it.

“Gregory! What a pleasant surprise! I have not seen you since...”

“Since that day we talked for hours on the hill?”

“Why must you always finish my sentences?” I asked impatiently.

“Why must you always stop midsentence?” he retorted. Then he smiled. “There now, didn’t you say you missed our arguments? I have come to invite you to join me at midnight Mass.”

“I thought you weren’t a Catholic. Why in the world would you go to Mass?”

“Well, I may not be an ‘official’ Catholic, but I know good music when I hear it and they have the most beautiful choir there and I like to be with other Christians to celebrate the birth of my Savior. I knew you were alone and thought you may be lonely on this night when everyone should be happy and celebrating. Why aren’t you at Pawel’s? He has been back for some time now. You have seen him, have you not?”

“What does it matter to you?”

“Nothing. Just curious.” His tone sounded hurt.

“I am sorry. You have every right to be curious. Yes, I have seen Pawel. He comes often and we go riding together and he often joins us for tea or dinner. With Papa not feeling well, however, I have not gone to see him very much in the last two weeks. He invited us to dinner, but since this is the last Christmas I will have with Papa alone, I opted to stay home with him and Adam and Mila and baby Lusha, who is also sick, you know. Pawel very gallantly agreed. He was quite nice about it, actually.”

“Do you think he would be upset to hear you went out anyway?”

“Since when would it bother you if Pawel was upset or not?” I retorted.

“To be honest, it wouldn’t bother me that much, but it would bother me if it made you upset that he was upset and that is why I care about it.” He looked away from me. I realized it had taken a lot of effort to say that, and I was touched by his concern.

“I am sorry. I can be so sharp tongued sometimes. Please forgive me. I would love to go to Mass with you. Just let me check on Papa and change into something warmer. I am sure Pawel will be fine. He doesn’t go to Mass that often, but he knows I like to go, and who better to take me than my ‘religious fanatic’ of a friend.” I smiled as I said that and felt relieved when Gregory smiled too.

“Well, hurry then. Driving through this snow may take some time.”



The choir did sing beautifully and I actually thought I felt close to my Savior that night, as Gregory and I huddled together in the drafty church, trying to keep warm. Candles were flickering everywhere, and the priest delivered a beautiful sermon on the meaning of Christmas. I closed my eyes and felt a special love in my heart—not the love I felt for my parents and friends, not even the love I felt for Pawel (which I still wasn’t sure I felt at all). It was a deep, warm, all-encompassing love—a love that knows no boundaries, that transcends time, that flowed from a lowly manger in a rickety stable almost two thousand years before and straight into my heart. I opened my heart and let the love flow in, and I knew then that my prayer in the hotel room after talking to Jan had been answered. Of course there was a God and He loved me. He sent

His only Son to Earth to die for me and to give us all the good news of His love for us. He was not some detached God who enjoyed watching others suffer. I still did not know why there was so much sin and suffering in the world, but I figured that would be answered with time. At that moment I felt content in the knowledge that I was the Lord's and that He was mine and that we two would never part. That night is when I feel I was truly and fully saved, and from that moment on I never doubted my salvation.

I started weeping openly and laughing at the same time. All of this happened during the choir's last song. It sounded like angels were singing to me. Gregory never said a word. He just put his arm around me discreetly and let me cry. Afterwards we got up and left in silence. We drove all the way home in silence, and when we got to the front door Gregory simply said, "You know, He will never leave you. Good night and Merry Christmas."

I felt as if I was walking on air. I stayed outside for a long while, just looking at the stars and communing with my King and Savior in my heart. It was a wonderful feeling. I knew that He loved me and cared for me. I remembered what Mama had said on her deathbed. It all made so much more sense now. Finally the cold got the better of me and I went in and got into bed as quickly as I could. I still felt unsure about my future, but I knew it was in God's hands and He would take care of me. That night I slept in peace.



The next couple of days were a bit of a blur. I was still "high" from my wonderful spiritual experience. Everyone at home noticed a change in me and asked me what in the world had happened to lift my spirits so, especially since Papa had taken a turn for the worse and was in need of constant attention. I could

only smile. I did not know how to communicate in words what happened to me that night, I only knew that it did happen and that now I had peace and joy. My birthday wish had been granted. My circumstances had not changed, but my heart was at rest. I longed to call Gregory and talk with him more and ask him so many questions, but by the time Papa was well enough for me to leave him for any length of time, it had been a week. When I finally called, Valeriya informed me that Gregory was gone.

"Gone? Gone?" I couldn't believe it. He didn't even say goodbye. "Where did he go?"

"To the Ukraine." Valeriya's voice sounded tense.

"Why of all places—that is part of the Soviet Union. What in the world does he want to do there?"

"He was called and he accepted," she answered quietly. "He did not want to tell anyone as he knew he would have to face a lot of opposition and it might weaken his resolve to go. The pastor of a church there that we knew and worked with for some time has been imprisoned for his faith and for preaching the Word. He has a large flock to care for and wrote me begging me to find someone to continue his job. I am amazed the letter even got to me. It was smuggled out of the prison and sent via courier.

"The same day I received that letter, Gregory came to me with a solemn look in his eye and said, 'Mama, I must tell you something. God told me I am supposed to leave and that you know where I am supposed to go.' I was horrified at the thought of sending my beloved son to almost certain death, but how could I deny that God had called him. It was far too uncanny to be a coincidence. So he is gone, with my and his father's blessing. I hope we see him again, although I fear we may not see him until we get to Heaven." She was sobbing quietly now.



“Oh Valeriya, you should have called me sooner! Papa is doing better now. I will come and see you.”

I spent a lot of time with Valeriya and Igor, trying to comfort them. Although I missed Gregory terribly, I felt a strange peace about Gregory’s decision. I decided that since he was gone, the only other people that could instruct me in my new-found faith were Valeriya and Igor. They graciously taught me everything they knew, and I spent many hours reading my Bible and praying.

Finally one day I confided in Valeriya my trepidation about my coming marriage. She said, “Darling, why don’t you pray and ask God about it. If you are meant to marry Pawel, He will show you and then you can do so with a clear conscience. However, if you are not meant to marry him and you do, you will be sorry for it in the long run.”

So, one cold, wintry day in February I went up to the top of one of the gentle hills that surrounded our farm and prayed. I prayed desperately that God would show me what I was supposed to do. Should I marry Pawel or should I call off the wedding at such a late date? I did not hear an audible voice, but in my heart I knew God was telling me to marry Pawel and that there was a plan for my life. I came down the hill with new determination and love in my heart and threw myself into the wedding preparations with gusto.

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## THE WEDDING

“Oh my! You look like a princess, or something that stepped out of a fairy tale!” It was Katya again, only a very different Katya than the one I had known as a child. She was now eight months pregnant. She had been through difficulties which had deepened her and grown her up. Fredrick had turned from being indifferent to being abusive, so she had literally fled back to her parents to have the baby. Fredrick was too busy trying to get promoted to a higher command to care about coming after her. He simply sent a letter stating that once she had had the baby and recovered, he would come for her. She was rather thin, as all she had gone through had not helped keep her at a healthy weight for her and the baby, but since coming back her stomach had grown considerably and the doctor said she was carrying a large, healthy baby.

“I cannot believe I am going to be a blimp for your wedding! I always imagined myself as a dainty maid of honor, but now I am the matron of honor and *very* matronly at that!” She was dressed beautifully, but I guess it wasn’t quite how she had imagined it would be. Normally very pregnant women weren’t seen much in public, but Katya couldn’t have cared less and she was my very best friend, and I had to have her be my matron of honor. Pawel’s parents were none too pleased

with the arrangement, but what could they say?

I did feel like a fairy princess. My white gown hung from the shoulders with a tight bodice that went into a V shape at the waist. There were thousands of seed pearls stitched into the bodice. I wore long, satin gloves, and the skirt of my dress was made of many layers of lace and satin. My veil trailed so far behind me—I had to have two attendants just to carry it! With the beautiful bouquet in my hands, I felt like a bride and rightly so. Today was my wedding day.

I had always dreamed of an outdoor wedding and this was to be the wedding of my dreams. Papa had spared no expense in my wedding, and I only went along with it because Pawel had agreed to let me reimburse him in different ways after we were married. It was May 1937. I had turned twenty only a month before. Since putting my whole heart into my decision to marry Pawel, I had felt my feelings for him blossom and grow. They were not the passionate feelings of a heated love affair, but rather a warm glow in my heart when I thought about him. He was a wonderful man. He cared deeply for me and would take good care of me. True, he was a bit spoiled, but he was young and had much to learn. *All in good time*, I thought to myself.

The spring breeze gently caressed my face as I made my way from the house to the hill where the wedding was to take place. Asters and daisies were blooming everywhere and the world smelled fresh and new. A canopy had been set up and benches were lined up in rows, with an aisle of fresh grass running through the middle. My whole family had turned up for the occasion, including all my sisters and their families. It was a joyous occasion. A number of my young nieces were flower girls and one of the boys was the ring-bearer. Our priest had been convinced to

perform the ceremony out in the open, although it took a mighty lot of convincing and a generous donation to the church by the Wyszynskis. My brother Alex was there, although no one knew how the news had gotten to him. He looked smart in his army uniform and it seemed that the time away had grown him up. Jan was there too. His wife Eva did not come as she was too busy with her studies. Jan only had one year of school to go and was now working as an intern in a Warsaw hospital. He beamed at me when he saw me approaching. “So much for my little heroine,” he teased. I did not know how he really felt about me marrying a rich capitalist, but I did not criticize him for his decision to marry a communist, so I was glad he didn’t criticize me.

“Shhh!” Someone was shushing everyone and then the music started. Papa appeared, looking the best I had seen him look in years, and proudly took me on his arm. “My dream is coming true, my ptitchka,” he whispered in my ear. Tears welled up in my eyes. I was happy to be marrying Pawel and my heart was at peace, but I would miss my wonderful Papa and I knew he would be lonely without me.

The ceremony was not too long, but very moving. After the vows were said, Pawel and I embraced and kissed. My mind went back to that day long ago when we had kissed in the gardens of his home. How things had changed. Suddenly people were laughing and talking and throwing rice and confetti. I tossed my bouquet and one of my nieces caught it. We were then ushered off to another side of the house where an outdoor banquet, complete with live music and a huge wedding cake, was awaiting us.

Those were happy hours. I did not know it at the time, but this was the last time I was to see my whole family together, except for my dear mama, of course.

We talked and laughed and reminisced, danced, and sang and ate to our heart's (and stomach's) content. When the sun was beginning to set, Pawel excused himself for a few moments, telling me to bid the others goodbye. About fifteen minutes later he drove up in a shiny, new car bedecked in flowers. Everyone cheered as we got in together and drove away to a new life.



It was very dark and Pawel was still driving over country roads. My trunk was in the back with my new trousseau that Valeriya and I had gone shopping for the week before. I got new clothes in all the latest styles. I hoped Mama wasn't rolling over in her grave, but I had to look respectable as the new Mrs. Wyszynski.

"Pawel, my dear, will you please tell me where we are going? You have kept our whole honeymoon a secret from me and now I am tired of secrets and tired of riding in this car! Where are we going?" I demanded. I had been so busy planning the wedding, I let Pawel plan our honeymoon, as I really didn't care what we did, as long as it wasn't staying home.

Pawel just smiled mysteriously and then pointed at some dim lights up ahead. "There it is," he said. As we drove nearer I could make out a large stone edifice in the inky blackness. Finally we were at a gate of sorts and Pawel honked the horn. All of a sudden a burst of color and light lit up the surroundings—it was an old palace that looked more like a castle that had been lit up brilliantly with colorful lights. It looked beautiful. The gates were soon opened by a doorman who was dressed in medieval costume, and we drove up a long avenue of trees to the huge, ornately carved front entrance.

"What is this?" I exclaimed as we drove up and were met by a retinue of servants.

"This is our dream castle. I know how much you love fairy tales and I decided to make your dream

come true and make you a true fairy princess. This old palace was owned by royalty for many hundreds of years and belongs to a very rich man, but for the next three weeks, it is your home, my fairy princess."

I looked around in awe as I was led into this castle. It was truly a magnificent building and had been transformed into a home away from home with a fire burning in the hearth and large, plush rugs on the floor. Hanging tapestries graced the walls and in the dining area was a huge banquet table with a meal spread out fit for a king. "Pawel, this must have cost a fortune!"

Pawel smiled a mischievous grin. "Not as much as you may think. I won it in a bet."

"Pawel!" I was aghast. "I did not know that you gambled!"

"I usually don't, but one night I found myself invited to play cards against the owner of this castle at a men's club in Warsaw which I often frequent. I saw my opportunity and couldn't pass it up, as I had been hoping to do something stupendous for you. Of course, all the fixings, the food and the servants are a gift from me, but the use of the place is courtesy of Mr. Sosnkowski. He was most distraught that he lost it for a month, but took heart once I told him what it would be used for."

"Pawel you ... you rascal! I do love you!" We kissed in the hall and would have continued if we had not heard a throat being cleared behind us. It was a butler coming to inform us that dinner was served.

"And I will have you for dessert," Pawel whispered in my ear as we walked towards the dining room. I blushed. As much as I cared for Pawel, the thought of our wedding night had me bound up in knots inside. Valeriya had taken me aside and explained to me the basic process, but I was so afraid that something

would go wrong and ruin our first night together—the one that was supposed to be the most beautiful of them all, or so I was told. I tried to block out those thoughts and focus on the matter at hand, which was a sumptuous meal prepared by some of the best chefs in the province.



Later that evening I stood nervously in front of a large mirror in the ancient bathroom examining myself and my looks. I was wearing an ankle-length, white, silk gown, very sheer. I had never worn anything so luxurious or so revealing. I was debating whether to wear anything underneath it or not, and I finally decided not to wear anything. I knew Pawel was not at all conservative when it came to women, and I did not want him thinking I was a prude. I was so very nervous, I was having stomach cramps. Finally I buckled up on the floor and there on my knees I prayed and asked God to somehow help me get through this night in one piece. Praying for every little thing I did was definitely not something I had done up until now, but I was slowly realizing the wonderful truth that Gregory had tried to tell me about—that God was interested in the intimate details of my life and that He could help me in all sorts of situations, even embarrassing, personal ones. I felt peace in my heart and got the impression that being honest with Pawel would be the best way to start the evening. I cringed at the thought. Just then I heard his voice.

“Sweetheart—Anusha. Where are you? Are you alright? You have been in there for nearly half an hour.”

I gingerly slipped into the doorway and stood transfixed at the sight that lay before me. Candles were lit everywhere and the large bed was turned down with soft, silken sheets. A record player was playing

soft music in the background. The feather comforter was pulled back and there, on the bed lay Pawel. He had the good sense not to shock me with his nakedness and so was wearing a silken dressing gown. (I had never seen a man naked in my life!)

“My love, you look so beautiful. You don’t know how long I have waited for this evening.”

I nodded mutely. What could I say? That I was dreading this evening with everything within me? I was still afraid. *Be honest*, a little voice whispered to me.

“What is the matter? Are you alright?”

I nodded again, sidling my way to the bed. When I made it to the edge, I sat down. “Pawel, I don’t know how to say this, but I am terribly nervous. I don’t know what to do or how to do it and I am afraid I won’t please you.” I trailed off. I didn’t have the courage to say more.

He took me in his arms and didn’t say a word. He only kissed me and caressed me and finally he whispered, “Even if all I do all night is hold you in my arms and look at you, you will be pleasing to me!”

I snuggled up in his arms and we talked, first of little things from the day, then of future plans, hopes and dreams. Pawel got up and brought some champagne to the bed and we drank and talked some more. Finally he stopped talking and started gently caressing me. By this time I was more relaxed and I gingerly tried to return his caresses. Soon I was caught up in the emotion of it all and as he took me in his arms and kissed me passionately I felt myself melting.

I will not even attempt to express the rest of that evening. The tenderness and care that Pawel showed on that night and the wonderment of becoming one with the one that I loved has stayed with me for many years. I will never forget it. Finally, just as the sun was rising, we fell asleep in each other’s arms.



The next three weeks passed swiftly. Between our meals and the wonderful time we spent luxuriating in our bedroom, we found time to explore the castle. It had rooms full of old artifacts, furniture, and clothing from days gone by. It had been used as headquarters for the Germans during WW1, but thankfully the owner had hidden all the valuables and except for some telltale signs of target practice, it was restored to its former splendor. Why, I could almost imagine past Polish kings and queens—for we were no longer ruled by a king or queen—walking, talking, and dancing in these selfsame grand halls. We explored the grounds and the formal gardens and went walking and riding in the fields and forests that surrounded it.

We spent a great deal of time talking as well. I was able to explain to Pawel, however inadequately, about my spiritual experience, and although he did not express the same fervor as I felt, he seemed interested and wanted to hear more. He and I agreed that we would carry on my family's tradition of reading the Bible every morning together—and with our children, when we had them.

We both wanted children. I wanted many children, and although Pawel wasn't quite as thrilled with the thought of more than four or so, he said he was sure he would adjust to more if they came. As I got to know him better, I came to love him more. Underneath his somewhat shallow, spoiled exterior, was a gentle, sensitive soul who had never been loved only for himself, but only for his money and his influence. I was determined never to get my eyes on his possessions, but rather to love him for what he was and to somehow bring out the best in him by doing so. He deserved it!

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## MARRIED LIFE

Married life was something new, especially being married to a rich man. I found a lot of spare time on my hands. Besides the multitude of house servants, I had a personal maid to help me in whatever way I saw fit. She was a sweet, young girl by the name of Magda. She kept my room and belongings neat, ironed my clothes, did my hair and helped me dress for special occasions. I felt so strange to have all this help and attention after being on my own for so many years. I read a lot more and also went frequently to visit Papa. He was doing fine. Adam's wife had stepped in to try to fill my shoes. She had gotten closer to him and between her and his granddaughter, he seemed to be content.

In contrast, as the months passed I found myself growing more and more discontent with my life of leisure. I wanted to do something with my life, to be of use to someone. Sitting around like a queen and being waited on hand and foot was not my idea of fun.

We were living with Pawel's parents. The house was very large, however, and they lived in a separate wing, so besides the evening meal which we generally ate together, it was like we lived in two separate worlds. Pawel was busy being groomed to take over his father's business, as his father was hoping to retire in a year or two. Our marriage was good and we had

fun together, but I needed something to do to keep me busy and occupied while he was away during the day doing business.

I finally went to Pawel and asked if he would mind terribly if I started doing some sort of charity work. He agreed that it would be a good idea, and I started visiting the little village down the road from us and helping families in need with food, clothing, or just a word of encouragement.

I formed a close friendship with one lady in particular, Mrs. Elizabeth Kazimierz. She was a widow in her late fifties who worked as a seamstress in the village. Her husband had worked on the Wszyński farms since his youth, but he had passed away a few years earlier from a bad heart. She had had seven children, all of whom were now grown and married. She was a hard worker and a cheerful soul in spite of the troubles that had come her way. She knew the Lord in a very close, intimate way and she taught me more about Him and how I could get closer to Him. She was always quick to point me to the Word and the Lord in my times of trouble. She was a firm believer in Romans 8:28 and often quoted that verse to me. I found myself going to her more and more when I needed advice and counsel, and she also helped me in my dealings with the people of the village, advising me as to who needed help and what kind of help to give them and how to give it without them being offended or feeling like a “charity case.”

I also went to visit Valeriya as often as time permitted. Their farm was quite a ways from ours and so our visits were less frequent than before. Finally I convinced Pawel to let me learn to drive, so that I could go by car myself to visit them. Valeriya’s husband, Igor was still ailing. The doctors did not know what was wrong with him, but whatever it was, it was

sapping his strength and energy. He was quite a few years older than Valeriya and was now in his seventies and I guess his age was getting the better of him. They did not get much news from Gregory, but what little they received, they always passed on to me. He was doing well, although he could never give much news of his whereabouts or activities. I think they were just relieved to hear he was alive!

Katya had given birth to a beautiful baby boy with blond hair and blue eyes. He was the spitting image of his father. Fredrick had come to fetch them and when he saw his son, he fell in love with him, begged Katya’s forgiveness, and they went back to Berlin a happy family. Katya was deepened through her experiences and although she was still not totally happy with her brother’s radical conversion, she was much less vocally critical of him and even started attending church again.

Life was tranquil for a time. I was content with my husband, my home, my charity work and my reading. Then I began to feel a change coming over me.



“Oh my God! You have made me so happy!” Pawel had tears of joy in his eyes as I told him he was going to be a father. I had conceived sometime in October and the baby was due next year in the summer. It was now almost Christmas, 1938. Pawel took me in his arms and lifted me up and spun me around. He was overjoyed. I quietly thanked God for a loving, supportive husband. “So the sickness you have been feeling—the tiredness and all that, that is just because you are pregnant? Oh that is so wonderful!”

“I don’t see anything wonderful about feeling sick and tired and faint,” I pouted.

“Oh I didn’t mean that. It is just that I was worried sick about you, you know, that something was terribly

wrong. But this, well, this is wonderful news, darling, just wonderful!" He quickly led me to a chair and had me sit down, then ran and dragged a stool over for me to put my feet up on. He was scurrying around looking for something else to do and I cracked up laughing.

"You look so funny! Calm down! Come and sit by me. I am not an invalid and you don't need to run around like a chicken with your head cut off to wait on me—although I do appreciate the thought. I don't feel so well, but it will pass. Elizabeth Kazimierz told me all about it in great detail and I've also had a first-hand, day-by-day, running account from Katya. I think I will manage just fine, although my visits to the village will probably be fewer till I get over my morning sickness."

He sat down and wiped his brow. "I am sorry. I wasn't trying to make a fool of myself, I just am so concerned about you." He paused. "And the baby," he added, then leaned over and kissed me. "I am so proud to be your husband and the soon-to-be father of your child."

"And I am proud to be carrying your child. I love you!"



You will never understand what it is like to be pregnant until you experience it yourself—that is, if you are female. If you are male, you will have to content yourself with an explanation, but don't ever think you will really understand it. There is no comparison with any other sensation in this life. The wonder of having a new life grow inside of you, the closeness and tenderness you feel for the baby whom you have never met, but who is a part of your existence. The discomfort is also a foe to be reckoned with, although it seems a bit more bearable than the normal discomforts of life, because there is a goal in

sight. You know it is just a means to an end, that it will surely pass, and that your reward for enduring will be a beautiful new soul who will be yours forever to love, care for and cherish.

I was not strong during those first months of my pregnancy and needed a lot of rest and care, which Pawel and his mother were very lavish with. I thanked God every day that Pawel's mother and I got along well, for if we hadn't we would have driven each other crazy. I had difficulty keeping my food down during the first months, but once I was about five months pregnant, I began to feel much better and began to resume my trips to the village to visit my friends and those I was trying to help.



"Pawel, what is it? Why are you home so early?" I was worried. Pawel usually did not come home until around six or seven in the evening and it was not yet four o'clock in the afternoon. He had a very worried expression on his face, which he tried to hide as he took me in his arms and kissed me, but I knew something was seriously wrong. "What is it, darling? Please tell me!"

"I don't know how to tell you this, darling, but I have received a letter asking me to serve in the Polish army. You know all the incidents that have been happening on the German border? Well, it seems that Germany and Russia have signed some sort of treaty that they will not go to war with each other, which means that we are stuck in the middle—sitting ducks for whoever will get the urge to invade us first. A large army is being amassed as quickly as possible, and because I attended a military academy I am being offered a commission as an officer in the Polish army. I cannot refuse to fight for our country. I must go, although it breaks my heart to do so."

I sat down, flabbergasted. I wanted to weep and cry but no tears would come. I was seven months pregnant. The baby was due in early July and I could not imagine having it without Pawel nearby. “Must you go now? Can’t you wait until after the baby is born?”

“My love, if I leave now, I can finish the basic training course that all new recruits need to take—be they officers or not—and then get leave to come back and be with you for the delivery. I have thought this through all day and I feel I must go. To refuse to go would be turning my back on my duty to my country and even to you, and it could even put us both in danger. I would not be able to live with myself if I brought shame on you and this family.”

“Do you really think there will be war?” I asked timidly.

“God, I pray there won’t be! But just in case, we must be ready.”

We spent our last night together making sweet, tender love and then laying in each other’s arms until daybreak. I kissed Pawel goodbye and stood in the doorway, waving to him, hoping and praying that he would be back to see his child born.



The last few weeks before my baby was born were the hardest for me. Pawel wrote me every few days with as many details as he was allowed to write about how things were going. He finished his six-week refresher course and was now stationed over a hundred kilometers north of us in a training camp for new recruits. He was feverishly trying to arrange leave to come and be with me, but with so many other things happening, his commanding officers didn’t seem to think his request was all that urgent, and even his status as the son of a rich and influential man didn’t seem to make much difference.

The first of July came and went and no baby made an appearance. I went walking every day, just as Elizabeth told me to do. Elizabeth was also a trained midwife and had delivered many babies in the village, and she agreed to deliver mine as well. Much to Pawel’s mother’s horror, I insisted I would have the baby at home, just as my mother had had every one of us twelve children at home. Pawel’s mother had gone to a hospital to have him. Finally Pawel’s mother insisted that I have a doctor on hand in case of complications, and to pacify her, I agreed—as long as he wouldn’t be in the room unless absolutely necessary.

All the arrangements were made. The nursery was ready and waiting with a frilly yellow and blue satin-lined baby bed, a rocking chair, and plenty of toys and cute, dainty little baby clothes. All that was missing was the baby ... and Pawel.



“So, how is our big mama today?” Elizabeth asked with a cheery voice as she walked up to greet me on the porch of our house. She was coming over to check me and also to chat. I wasn’t able to get into the village much anymore, as it was too long of a walk and driving over the bumpy roads was very uncomfortable.

“Definitely big,” I moaned. “When is this going to be over? I cannot wait to get this child out of me! I am afraid it is getting so big, it won’t ever make it out.”

She shook her head and clucked sympathetically. “No, you actually aren’t that big. I have seen women with stomachs much larger than yours. Imagine if you were carrying twins! Then you could complain of being big.”

“You aren’t very sympathetic, are you? You remind me of my mama sometimes. She was such a tough woman. Nothing fazed her. She had her babies and the next day was up cooking and cleaning, at least



that is what everyone else said. I never saw her have a baby, of course, since I am the youngest. But me, look at me, I feel like a near invalid! My back is killing me and—”

“Now stop right there. If you keep up describing your aches and pains to me it will not make you feel any better and it will definitely not make me feel any better. Don’t you think I know what it is like? You will survive. Now come, let me check you and the baby and then let’s talk of something else.”

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## **MY BABY**

It was the middle of the night. I dreamt I was going to the bathroom and then all of a sudden I woke up in a puddle of water. I was mortified. I had never wet my bed since I could remember. Why now? I got up to go to the bathroom and was even more amazed when more water started running down my leg. “My water bag,” I suddenly said aloud, realizing what was happening. I was relieved. I hadn’t wet my bed after all!

I quickly went and woke up Magda and asked her to call Elizabeth. She scurried off to the phone and I went and tried to compose myself. Light contractions were coming now, although not very close together, but the excitement of it all made it so I could not sleep. I started to panic a little at the thought of having the baby without Pawel, and then quieted myself with a prayer. I poured out my heart to the Lord, explaining my fears for Pawel and for myself and the baby, and my desire to have Pawel with me when I had the baby. Then I asked for a safe, smooth delivery. I felt a calm and peace come over me—just in time for the next contraction.

“Oh ma’am, Elizabeth says she won’t be coming yet because it is sure to be hours before you are ready to have your baby. Shall I send someone to rouse her from her sleep?” Magda was all flustered and worried.

“No. I suppose she knows what she is talking about—either that or she is unusually tired. She did tell me that first births can take a long time. I suppose I should try to get some more sleep. I am sorry I woke you at such an ungodly hour, Magda. You should try to get some more sleep too. I will be fine here.”

Magda lingered for a while longer, and then, satisfied that there was nothing else she could do and that I really was okay, she retired to her room again.

As I lay alone in the stillness of the night waiting for the next contraction to come, I had a strange experience. It was a feeling of foreboding, of great danger ahead and great sadness, loss, and difficulty. However, it was almost as if I was detached from my body, watching myself go through all of these things. I saw it all from a distance and I also saw that there was happiness at the end, waiting for me, if I could only make it through. When the experience was over, I could not tell you what was to happen exactly, only that it would not be easy. I did not feel afraid, only forewarned. It was something like when you ask someone to tell you the ending of a scary movie, so that when you watch the movie, you don't feel as frightened, because you know it all works out in the end. That is the only way I can describe what I went through. The experience seemed to go on forever, although in reality it must have happened rather quickly, for it happened between contractions, and they were coming about ten minutes apart. I dozed fitfully between contractions for the rest of the night.



“*Dobre utra*\*! How are you my dear?” It was Valeriya. I had called her in the morning and asked her if she would come over and be with me until Elizabeth decided it was time to show up.

“I am okay, I guess. I slept a few hours, but not very deeply. The contractions are coming faster and harder now.”

“Have you timed them at all—do you know how far apart they are?”

“About five minutes or so. But they only last for a minute.”

“Well, I am no expert on these things, seeing as my last child was born over twenty years ago, but from what I can recall, you are still in the beginning stages and it will be a while yet. Have you tried walking? That can speed things up if you are up to it.”

I waddled out the door, holding Valeriya's hand, and we slowly walked through the beautiful gardens that surrounded the Wszyński house. Sometimes, when looking around at all the grandeur that surrounded me, I marveled that it was actually mine as well. I somehow never quite felt a part of it all, almost more like an outsider looking in. We came to a secluded spot in the formal gardens and suddenly Valeriya chuckled.

“What is so funny?” I was in the middle of a contraction and wasn't in the mood to laugh.

“Sorry. I was just thinking about that night at your first dance when Pawel took you out here and kissed you. You were so red in the face when I saw you rushing back into the house. My, how you have grown! I never expected that you and he would actually get married. I did not think that you loved him enough.”

“Well, for a long while I didn't, but I guess he grew on me slowly. Not a huge romantic rush of feeling, but rather growing to love him as I came to know and understand him, and as I got to know the man behind the riches and influence. He has a very sweet, tender soul, you know.” Then suddenly the realization hit me!

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\* *Dobre utra*: good morning

“Valeriya! You ... you were spying on me and you knew all these years what happened between me and Pawel that night! I can’t believe it!” Another contraction came and I stopped talking. When it was over, Valeriya was ready with her rebuttal.

“What is a chaperone for anyway, if not to spy? I would have stepped in if I thought you were in any real danger of being compromised, but I trusted you could handle the situation. And you did! So don’t be getting all mad at me. You would have been mortified if I had said something then, wouldn’t you?” She was laughing as she said all this. How could I be angry with her?

“You’re right. It is embarrassing to just think about it. Ooops. Here comes another one. I think they are coming stronger and faster now. Can we head back?”

By the time we returned, Elizabeth was waiting for us on the front porch with a smile on her face. “Good, good. Walking is good. Let’s get you inside and see how things are progressing.”



“Three fingers—this is good, very good.” Elizabeth had just checked me and was scurrying around preparing things for the delivery. Pawel’s mother was wringing her hands in the background, trying to be of help, but more getting in the way with her worrisome ways. Finally Elizabeth found something for her to do to keep busy and away from the delivery room for as long as possible.

No one had ever told me anything about breathing techniques, and although Elizabeth knew a lot about delivering babies, there was not much in the way of books or information on natural childbirth. Women who could afford it had babies at hospitals, using chloroform or some other chemical or shot to put them

to sleep while the doctors extracted the baby. That was the accepted method for rich women. Only the peasants had their babies at home, and there was no one writing books for them. It was not considered very polite to talk in-depth about bodily functions, unless you were a doctor, of course, so I really did not have a clue what was going on in my body. I was experiencing a lot of pain in my back and the contractions were coming very strong. It was all I could do to keep from screaming and losing control.

“I can’t do this any more! I can’t do it anymore!” I started to cry. I was having a lull between contractions. I had been in labor for over twenty-four hours, and although labor had been very hard for the last fourteen hours, it seemed I hadn’t gotten anywhere. I was so tired and discouraged and in so much back pain, I did not think I could keep going.

Elizabeth took me by my shoulders and shook me gently. “Snap out of it, Anushka! You can do this! God would not have given you this task if you could not fulfill it. You may not be able to do this alone, but you and He can do it together. There is a verse in the Bible, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ Say that to yourself over and over. You can do it. You are doing wonderfully. Just hang in there. There is only a little ways yet to go.”

Her words calmed me. The next few hours are somewhat of a blur in my mind—I know that I ended up laboring for another six hours before it was time to push. Transition was especially difficult, as it seemed the contractions never stopped. I was so, so tired. I felt like giving up and I cried out to Jesus in the middle of one of my contractions. Then I felt a cool hand caressing my forehead and looked up into the eyes of my beloved Pawel. “Where did you come from?” I whispered.

“Hush now. You need your strength to push the baby out. It is almost time. Just a little longer and we will have our precious bundle of joy. Hold my hand, darling. I am here by your side.”

Having him there, beside me, gave me the infusion of strength I needed to start pushing when Elizabeth said it was time. She tried to get Pawel to leave, but he wouldn't and stayed by my side the whole time. Finally, after five hard pushes, I heard the most beautiful sound in my life. The sound of my baby crying.

“It's a boy! It's a boy!” Elizabeth was sucking mucous out of him with some sort of instrument and then she laid him on my breast. I was crying tears of joy and relief, and Pawel was laughing and crying at the same time. It was such a joyous moment.



“The baby is sleeping soundly now,” Elizabeth said. “He is healthy and beautiful. He weighs 3.7 kilos. That is very large for such a small woman as yourself. You did wonderfully, though. You need to eat well and rest and everything will be okay. I bid you goodnight.”

“Goodnight to you too,” Pawel said. “Thank you for your help. We couldn't have done this without you.” Pawel showed her to the door.

I smiled weakly. The baby had been washed and dressed and was now sleeping soundly in his little cot, with Magda watching over him and his doting grandma nearby. Pawel was sitting next to me, holding my hand and talking with me.

“I just received news last night that my request for leave had been granted. I was going to take the morning train here, but I got a very strong feeling I should leave as soon as possible. Some other officers were driving in this direction and leaving that night, so I hitched a ride with them and then caught a train the rest of the way. I can stay for three weeks.”

“I thought you were an angel when you appeared by my bed. I had just prayed and cried out to Jesus to give me strength.”

“I am no angel.” Pawel laughed. “But I am glad Jesus used me to answer your prayers.”

I was puzzled. Pawel believed in God, I knew that much, and he respected my deep faith, but he was not one to give Jesus the glory for things and did not seem comfortable discussing his faith openly in any way. I wondered what had changed in him and I asked him.

“The thought of war is a scary thing. It gets you thinking, you know. Anyway, we can talk about it more some other time. You are so tired, you need to eat something to regain your strength and then you need to rest.”

He kissed me and was gone to the kitchen to make sure the cooks prepared something for me. I closed my eyes and fell into a deep and restful sleep.

## **THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM**

Pawel had changed. I noticed it immediately upon his arrival home. It seemed that being in a situation where his money and position did not make much difference had done him a lot of good. He seemed more sober and less shallow. He also talked a lot more about the Lord, and finally confided to me that he had had an experience with the Lord while at boot camp, and since then had a hunger to learn more and to grow closer to Him. He had started attending a Bible study group that some very dedicated Christian soldiers had formed, and it seemed that the little time he had spent with them had done more for him than all the times we had read the Bible together. I guess that was because he now had a personal hunger for the Word and was truly “searching the Scriptures” rather than just reading the Bible because it was a nice thing to do. I was so happy that the Lord had answered my prayers for him to come to know the Lord in a personal way.

He had been given responsibility over about sixty men. The Polish Army’s intelligence in Germany told them that war was imminent. They were very short of well-trained officers, so they gave anyone who had a little experience big responsibility. He confided to me that the thought of war, along with being responsible for so many men’s lives had sobered him up.

We spent the next three weeks together. We read together, talked together, cared for our beautiful son, Pawel Jr., together. My milk came in just fine and the baby was a greedy little nurser. He spent a lot of time on the breast, and when he wasn't nursing, he slept or soiled his diapers. I was treated like a queen and waited on hand and foot by Pawel, Magda, Pawel's mother Ela, and Valeriya who came over to visit often.

When Pawel Jr., whom we started calling Pasha, was two weeks old we bundled him up and drove to my old home to show him to Papa. Papa was growing older and moved slower. He still refused to buy a car or have anything to do with one and didn't want my brother Adam or his wife riding in those "rattle-trap, new-fangled contraptions." Adam was secretly saving for a car but didn't have enough yet and was quite offended when I offered to help him get one. I figured I would wait until his birthday and then surprise him.

"Oh, my ptitchka. He is beautiful." Papa's eyes were moist. He had a soft spot for all his grandchildren, and he had a special way of making each one feel special. He was like a big old papa bear with all his bear cubs around him when they came to visit.

"He is more handsome than beautiful, I would say," Pawel interrupted.

"Oh, proud papa is speaking, I see. Every father would like to think his son is manly and strong. But look at him, dressed in a little white dress. He looks more like a girl." Adam was teasing him.

"Look who's talking. You don't have a son so you wouldn't know, now would you?" Pawel shot back.

"Enough, you two!" I was laughing and a bit surprised at Adam's outburst. He was usually so quiet around Pawel. I was happy they were finally warming up to each other. "He is beautiful *and* handsome. If you ask me, he is the most beautiful, handsome baby

in the world. But then, I am his mother, so I am supposed to think that. Everyone needs someone to think that about them." I nuzzled him closer and kissed his warm cheek.

"Well, I think you are the most beautiful woman in the world, and our son is the most handsome man."

Pawel and I kissed and Adam hid his face in mock disgust. "You are in a jovial mood, Adam. What has gotten into you?" I asked, laughing.

"Come into the garage. You have your new baby, and I have mine."

"Adam! You didn't!"

He only smiled and led the way. In the garage was a sleek, shiny, black car—the latest model of motor car for 1939—I really do not remember what it was called. He proudly caressed the top of it as he extolled its many virtues and benefits. I was a little disappointed that my birthday present for him had been spoiled and that I would have to think up something else to get him, but he was so happy, I couldn't help but be happy too. "What has Papa got to say about all of this?" I looked sidelong at Papa, who had followed us.

"Humph! As long as he takes me out for a ride every day, I supposed I could allow it on my property." He sounded gruff, but there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Why you..." Adam started laughing and we all joined in.

Papa turned to go and I walked with him. Pawel was holding Pasha and talking to Adam about cars—something which did not interest me in the slightest. I treasured this time with my papa as I hardly saw him anymore. "Have you heard from Jan recently?" he asked.

"Why yes, I heard from him the other day, in fact. He finished university, you know, and has accepted a position in a hospital in Brest. He is now Dr. Keroshiva.

It sounds rather grand, doesn't it? He will be closer to home if he lives in Brest. He is still into the whole communist ideology, although he doesn't preach it quite as much in his letters anymore. He and Eva seem to be happy. I pray for him every night. I hope someday he will see the truth."

"They have not had any children in all this time? That is amazing." Papa shook his head. He and Mama had so many, he could not understand how people could not have children.

"Not everyone is as blessed as you and Mama were," I answered quietly. I hoped that Pawel's and my love would endure and be as strong in our seventies as it was now, in our twenties, just as Mama and Papa's was.

Finally our visit was over. I was tired, little Pasha was hungry, and we had all had enough activity for one day. We said goodbye and hugged and kissed. As we were leaving I felt a feeling of sadness wash over me, but it was soon forgotten by more hugs and kisses, and the feel of the breeze in my face and the cool night air as we drove away.



The harsh tone of a ringing phone woke me in the middle of the night. It was two nights after our visit to Papa and the farm, August 2, 1939. Pawel got out of bed to get it, but someone had already gotten it. Soon there was a quiet knock at the door.

"Ma'am—it is for you," Magda's somewhat timid voice whispered into the darkness. I got out of bed and threw a robe on over my nightgown.

"Anja?" It was Adam and he sounded very upset. "Can you please come right away? It's Papa."

"What is it? Is he alright?"

"I don't know. I have called the doctor but I am afraid he might come too late. He collapsed just after dinner. I thought he was just tired and he insisted he

didn't need a doctor, so we just had him lay down and rest. That was a few hours ago. I went in to check on him just now and I ... I don't think he is breathing."

I gasped. A lump arose in my throat, but I couldn't get out a sound. Just then Pawel came up behind me. "Is everything alright?" he asked in a concerned voice.

"It is Papa," I whispered. "I think he is dead."

"Oh my God!" Pawel went and threw on his overcoat. "I will go now and see what is going on. No, you come too. Magda can stay with Pasha. He nursed only an hour ago, right? Let's go."

I nodded mutely. I was in no condition to make any decisions. I threw a dress and coat on over my nightgown and we were out the door in minutes.

Driving to Papa's farm, many thoughts went through my head. For some reason, I remembered very clearly Mama's deathbed scene and how right before she died, she had smiled knowingly at Papa and said, "I'll be seeing you soon." I hadn't thought much about that statement at the time, but maybe she knew. Then I was reminded of how much Papa and Mama loved each other and how happy they would be to be together again. No, I couldn't be sad for him—he was gone to a happy place, a better place, and he was with Mama now. The only ones I was sad for were myself and my son—that he would never know such a wonderful man as his grandfather. By the time we pulled up to the house, I was at peace.

The doctor had already arrived and declared my papa dead. He had died peacefully in his sleep, with a smile playing about his lips. I went in to say goodbye to him, but I found myself looking at only the shell of a man I had known to be my papa. Truly he was gone to a better place. I just needed to remember that whenever sadness threatened to engulf me.

We stayed a short while with Adam and his wife and then hurried back home to Magda and Pasha. As I cradled Pasha in my arms, the tears that heretofore had not come began to flow. Pawel snuggled up with me in bed and I wept.



Three days later, Pawel woke me with a big smile on his face. “Great news, darling. They have agreed to extend my leave until the end of August. That gives us nearly a month more together.”

I was overjoyed. The thought of Pawel leaving so soon after my father’s death was too much for me to bear. We talked in subdued tones about our plans for the next month. It didn’t seem right to be dancing for joy a few days after my father’s death, although I was so happy with the news. Pawel was determined not to work at all but to just spend time with me and the baby. His father was pushing him to get more involved with the family business, but Pawel felt it could wait until later.

“You never know what could happen with a war looming over us,” he said. “You and little Pasha are far more important to me than any business ever could be.” A few of my sisters had married very career-oriented men who were hardly ever home, so I was thankful my husband put high priority on spending time with us.

We had a simple funeral for papa. A few of my sisters attended, but a number of them were once again either in their final months of pregnancy or had just had babies and so were unable to travel or attend. Alex had been promoted and was too busy to attend. Jan was not there either, although we did not receive any word from him as to why he could not come.



“I love August evenings. They are so peaceful.”

“And mosquito filled,” Valeriya added, slapping a little bloodsucker on her stocking. We were sitting on the front porch chatting and enjoying the sunset. Pawel was in town getting a few things at the store.

“I wonder what happened to Jan? All of my other brothers and sisters either came or sent a telegram with their reasons for not coming and their regrets, all except for Jan.”

“I am sure he had a good reason. Why, speak of the devil ... who in the world?” Valeriya sat up with a surprised look in her eyes.

Valeriya did not use such expressions unless she was utterly shocked, and when I looked down the road leading up to the house, I was shocked too. For there, in the distance was a lone figure who bore a striking resemblance to Jan. He was walking with a slow, unsteady gait, his hair was a mess, his face unshaven and his clothes looked rumpled and unkempt. He bore a resemblance to Jan, but it couldn’t be Jan!

As he approached, the unbelievable became reality—it was Jan! “Jan?” I cried. He looked up at me with a weary smile on his face.

“What in the world happened to you?” I cried as I handed little Pasha to Valeriya and rushed down off the porch to meet him. “Is it really you, Jan?”

When I was close enough to hear him he replied, “Yes, it is me. Please, I am dying of thirst in this heat. Would you be so kind to get me something to drink first, and then I will tell you what happened to me.”

I thought I detected a whiff of alcohol on Jan’s breath, but thought it prudent to wait until later to ask him about it. “Of course, of course. Come into the house. Let’s get you cleaned up and get you something to drink. You must be hungry too! Come, come. You can borrow some of Pawel’s clothes. I think you two are roughly the same size.”



We hustled him inside. After giving him a cool drink of water, we got him into the bath and I rifled through Pawel's clothes for something that would fit Jan. After sizing Jan up a little more I discovered that Pawel was actually far heftier than Jan (though no one could call him fat—only more muscular) and therefore none of his clothes would really fit Jan. However, I found something that looked like it might work. Jan finally emerged from the bathroom looking clean and shaven, although the clothes looked somewhat like a sack on a bean pole and he looked rather pale and tired. I wondered what had happened to him to change him so.



“Mmmmm, now this is good. I haven't eaten food this good since Mama's cooking.” Jan was working on his third helping of ham with mashed potatoes and gravy. Ela Wyszynski looked on, pleased that he was eating so well.

“Doesn't your little wife ... what was her name again? ... cook for you?” Valeriya asked.

I thought I saw a shadow pass over Jan's face, but then it was gone and he simply replied, “Her name is Eva. She never learned to cook when she was young. She cooks all right now, I suppose, but there is nothing like the good, old, home-grown cooking that I was raised on.”

Ela Wyszynski nodded approvingly. She took a liking to Jan immediately and, being the smothering type, saw that he was in ill health and decided she would nurse him back to full strength. She really was a good soul, Pawel's mother, and she tried her best in her own way to be a good person, and showered love and attention on those close to her. She was not stuck up or overly sophisticated, as you would expect a woman of her standing to be. I was grateful that she

didn't shun Jan because of his ideology or his wife's background.

“So, you really are a doctor now. ‘Doctor Keroshiva.’ That sounds good.” Pawel had just entered the room. Although he registered surprise at seeing Jan wearing his clothes, he had the good manners not to mention anything. “Congratulations, although I suppose they are a little belated. How is your new job in Brest?”

“Taxing! I am exhausted. I am a new doctor, you know, and so they give me the worst shifts and things like that. It is a very prestigious hospital, though, with great opportunities for advancement, so if I play my cards right it won't always be like that.”

I looked at Jan, puzzled. It didn't sound like him speaking. I longed to know what had happened to the old Jan. The sensitive, caring soul that I had once known. All this “prestigious, play my cards right” talk just didn't seem like him.

“So,” I said, “you haven't yet told us how you got here or why you were walking up the road looking sort of like a...”

“Beggar?” Jan finished.

I nodded, embarrassed.

“I guess I did look like a beggar, didn't I? Well, to make a long story short, I was on my way here, but last night after getting off the train I was robbed of everything I had with me. I had planned to hire a cab to get me here and also to call from the train station to announce my arrival, but with no money that was well nigh impossible. It was late and the one policeman on duty didn't believe my story and sent me on my way. So, I spent the night in the train station and this morning I happened to bump into a Mr. Kazimierz. He said his mother was a good friend of yours, Anja, and he agreed to give me a ride part of the way, as he was headed in this direction. I believe his farm is about

twelve kilometers south of here. Anyway, I walked the rest of the way, which accounts for the dirty, bedraggled look I had when I got here. Thank goodness I didn't have much of value on me. I was traveling light."

Everyone nodded and clucked sympathetically. I was not sure what to make of what I heard. The story had certain integral flaws in it, and I resolved to talk to Jan about it more later and try to find out what really happened. By now it was late, we were all tired and Pasha was informing me in a very loud voice that it was feeding time. It would have to wait until morning.



"Jan, can I talk with you?" He had been with us two days now and seemed to be looking better and healthier. No one alluded again to his strange appearance seemingly out of nowhere, and he just slept a lot and ate a lot and sat out on the porch or walked in the nearby forests. I was dying to talk to him, but Pasha had very bad colic and was a very sad little boy, and I had been exhausted and just couldn't get away. He had finally seemed to calm down and after giving him to Magda, I was determined to go and find out the truth of Jan's experience.

"Sure, we can talk," he said, then sighed.

"I just have a feeling that there is more to the story you told us the other night than you said and I am wondering if you are really okay. Are you in trouble? What is the matter? I am concerned about you."

"Hey, who is the older brother here? Since when are you supposed to take care of me, little sister?" Jan said with a laugh.

"No, seriously, I am worried about you. Mama was concerned about you and before she died she—"

Jan raised his hand and cut me off.

"She never found out, did she?"

"Yes, she did. I do not know how, but she knew. She said you were in a dark tunnel and that, well..." I trailed off. I didn't know how much to tell Jan. I didn't want him to mock me. But then I noticed, to my surprise, that his shoulders were shaking. Was he crying?

"Jan, are you okay?"

He wiped a tear from one eye. "God, I feel stupid crying in front of you. You don't know what a mess my life is in."

"Tell me. Maybe I can help, or at least it may do you good to get it off your chest."

"Eva left me. She was unable to leave Warsaw because of her commitment to the Komsomol, but when I was offered this opportunity to work in Brest she pushed me to take it, even though we would have to be apart for a year. She is always pushing me to be successful and do well. She claims to believe in the communist ideology that all men are equal, but you wouldn't know it sometimes.

"Anyway, that is beside the point. I went back to visit her last week. I got two weeks off and wanted to surprise her. That is why I never got your telegram about Papa's death. So I show up at her flat and what do you know, she is going at it with some guy. I don't even know his name. It was a terrible scene. She blamed me for everything, said I didn't treat her the way she needed to be treated, that I was too concerned about myself and my career and had left her alone and she needed someone. And *she* had pushed me to take this job, even though I wanted to stay with her. Anyway, we haven't worked out what we are going to do, but we will probably get a divorce."

I gasped. Divorce was uncommon, almost unheard of in Poland, a strictly Catholic country at the time. "I suppose communists don't have a problem with divorce?" I asked.

He shook his head. “No. They don’t even put a lot of stock in legal marriage. From what I understand, children out of wedlock are becoming rather common.” He paused for a long while. “I don’t even know what I believe right now. I am so mixed up. Eva preached so convincingly of a new and better world that we were going to help to build. She convinced me that the tales of atrocities committed in the Soviet Union were just that, tales and not truth, but since moving to Brest I have heard some things firsthand, and at least some of them I am pretty sure are true.”

“How did you get here?” I asked gently.

“It’s rather unclear in my memory, actually. I know I got on a train in Warsaw that was heading back to Brest, but I was stone drunk. I think I was robbed while on the train and when I couldn’t find my ticket I was thrown off the train. The police wanted nothing to do with me and didn’t believe my story about being robbed. I had not one speck of identification on me, so I guess I can’t blame them. The rest of the story is true. I did hitch a ride with a Mr. Kazimierz—although I really am amazed that I bumped into him, of all people. You could say that it was a miracle for me to find someone who knew you and was willing to trust me and give me a ride in spite of my condition. I would almost have to say that God, or someone, was looking out for me there. I could have gotten thrown off the train at any stop, but it was one of the ones close to here. I guess I should be counting my blessings.”

“So what will you do now?” I asked gently. I did not want to preach at Jan. I knew for one that he would not take it well coming from his little kid sister. Two, he knew it all already. Gregory had spent long hours arguing doctrine and religion with him, and Mama and Papa had brought us up reading the Bible. This was a

decision he had to come to himself, without any help from anyone. It was between him and God.

“I don’t know. I suppose I will return to Brest and to my job and see what happens from there.”

“I will be praying for you. I have been praying for you, you know, every day. Mama told me to.”

He smiled slightly. “Dear Mama. I doubt that will do any good. Even if there is a God, I am not ready to believe in Him. I still think that there is another way. Just because communism hasn’t worked so well in the Soviet Union does not mean that it is defunct. Maybe it was just not put into practice right. I don’t know. I just can’t believe in a God I cannot see and Who does not seem interested in life down here and all the pain and suffering.”

“But it is not God’s fault that there is pain and suffering.” I couldn’t help but preach a little. I had learned so much since I last saw Jan, and I wanted to share it with him somehow. “It is man’s evil that causes it.”

“But God should put a stop to it. And since He doesn’t, I will!” Jan said. Then he abruptly changed the subject. “I do not want to argue with you, Anusha. I respect what you believe, but I just don’t know. I am not ready to make a decision yet.” With that, he kissed my forehead and walked back into the house. I stayed in the field for some time more, crying and praying for him.



Jan left us after a week of visiting. He was healthier in body, but his soul was troubled. I prayed for him harder than ever, for it seemed that was all I could do. Pawel and I spent the last two weeks of August together with our son. Sometimes when we were in the fields together or sitting on the porch watching the sunset I would again get a premonition of sadness. I did not

want to speak about it, for I wanted our time together to be a happy time, as I did not know when we would be together again. We spent a lot of time talking about what we wanted for our son. We both agreed that we wanted him raised to know the Lord, and that we hoped that he, or one of our children, would decide to serve the Lord in some way. We spent a lot of time praying and reading the Bible together as well. It was a wonderful few weeks, although tinged by sadness because of the death of my father and our impending separation. Finally the day came.

“I love you, my love. You are the best thing that ever happened to me,” Pawel whispered in my ear as we embraced one last time in the bedroom. Magda had taken Pasha after Pawel had bid him a fond farewell, leaving us alone together. “You saw me for who I was inside—you saw through the riches and the shallowness and the superfluity and loved me for who I really was. You do not know what that means to me.”

“I love you. You have been the most wonderful father and lover and protector that a woman could ask for. Oh God, I pray you return safely!” We embraced each other and poured out our hearts in prayer for each other. It was not very often that we prayed out loud, in front of each other, for we were not very practiced at doing so, but this time, mere words could not suffice, so we cast our burdens on the Lord and committed the keeping of our loved ones into His hands and then we embraced and were at peace, though tears welled up in my eyes.

“Don’t cry, darling,” Pawel said. “I want to remember you with a smile on your face.” His finger traced my lips. I nodded and smiled through my tears.

He picked up his bag and walked out to the waiting car. He kissed his mother and shook hands with his

father and then got in the car and drove away, stopping at the bend in the road to wave and blow one last kiss. My tears were unstoppable as his car went ’round the corner and out of sight.

## THE STORM BEGINS

“Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!”

I dashed out of my bedroom with Pasha in my arms and ran down the stairs to the breakfast room to find out where all the commotion was coming from. It was nine o'clock in the morning. I had slept in with the baby and so had missed the morning meal. Pawel's parents were in the room, along with Magda and a number of servants, all listening with white faces to the radio. It was September 1, 1939. The German Luftwaffe had crossed the Polish frontier. Germany had invaded Poland.

I sat down in the nearest available chair, dumbfounded. So it was not just a premonition that Gregory had had—war really was here, upon us. “But we are way to the east—it will take them a long time to get to us, with our brave Polish soldiers fighting them at every turn. They may not reach us at all.” One of the servants was getting excited and trying to bolster everyone's spirits. Pawel's father had survived the first World War and was more skeptical of that point of view. He simply shook his head.

“We must be prepared for the worst,” he said. Some of the servants were panicking. Magda was crying uncontrollably in the corner, on the shoulder of the head housekeeper, who was almost like a mother to her. I timidly raised my voice.

“Shall we pray for ourselves, our boys, and our coun-

try?” I was half Russian and half Polish and although I never felt I truly fit in to either country, I was raised in Poland and my husband was Polish, so I felt very Polish at this moment.

The Wyszyński household was not an overtly religious one and even though I, and now Pawel, had been working to change that, the thought of a prayer outside of church was considered somewhat out of place. But today no one objected, and so I prayed, timidly at first, and then more boldly, telling the Lord our concerns and fears and committing our lives, our loved ones and our country to Him. There was a hush over the room. Magda stopped crying and everyone was still.

“Well, prayer is good, but there are also some practical things that can be done,” Pawel’s father said immediately after I finished my prayer. He immediately began directing the servants to store food and water and other valuables in a secret room he had on the property. Not even I had ever seen this place, as it was kept a secret from all. It had been used to protect the Wyszyński fortune during WWI and now it was to be put to use again.

After the first day or two of hustle and bustle, preparing for any eventualities, everything became rather quiet as we huddled around the radio, listening and waiting to see what would happen next. It did not sound good. On the first day, Poland’s air force was destroyed on the ground. On the same day, swift-moving Nazi Panzer tank divisions smashed into Poland from three directions. The Polish army was the fifth largest in Europe but it was no match for the German tanks. The Germans were gaining ground very quickly and Poland was not able to put up much of a fight.

England and France demanded that Germany withdraw its troops. When Germany refused, England and France declared war on Germany. Within a week Great Britain was joined in the war by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and India. It was escalating very quickly. We

all wondered what action the Soviet Union would take, as we were right on its doorstep and anything they did would affect us drastically. We did not have long to wait.



“You have a letter from Pawel! You have a letter from Pawel! Quickly, open it!” Ela Wyszyński was frantic. It had been two weeks and we hadn’t heard from Pawel. Germany had invaded just one day after he left us and fighting had been fierce, especially around Warsaw, which was where he was, and we had no idea what had happened to him. I feverishly tore at the well-sealed envelope and with shaking hands, opened the letter.

*Dear Anusha,*

*I love you more than you know! Oh God, how I miss you! I cannot write a lot, for this letter must leave in ten minutes if it is to go with the train, but I wanted you to know that I am safe and will write more as soon as I get to my destination. I am being stationed in Siedlce, about 100 kilometers away from Brest. Hopefully far away from the fighting and closer to you, my love. My prayers are with you daily. How I wish I was there to be with you and protect you, but since I cannot be there, I have committed you to the hands of Someone far more able to protect and care for you than I ever could. I trust His Love will see us through this. I have a picture of you and our beautiful son beside my bed and I pray for you whenever I look at it. Hugs, kisses and more.*

*Yours forever,*

*Pawel*

*P.S. Please give my love to my parents and tell them I am safe.*

“He is all right. He is being stationed in Siedlce, away from the fighting.” I heaved a sigh of relief and tears started streaming down my cheeks. *He is all right! Thank God! Oh, thank You, God!* Everyone else started rejoicing too and we had a happier dinner that night than we had had in weeks.



“Excuse me, ma’am. There is a call for you.” Magda interrupted my thoughts after dinner. I was thinking about Jan and praying for him, wondering what had become of him—a Polish doctor, working in a Soviet republic, during a war between Germany and Poland that the expanding Union of Soviet Socialist Republics could easily become swept up in. I hoped he was all right.

“Thank you, Magda. Will you hold Pasha for me?”

I picked up the receiver and heard sobbing on the other end. “Hello, who is it?”

“Oh Anushka, is it you? May I come over? I am all alone here and frightened.”

“Valeriya? What do you mean you are all alone. Where is Igor?”

“He died last night. He ... well, you know he has been ailing for a long time. The doctor said his heart couldn’t take the strain of this week’s events, and it just stopped working. It was peaceful, you know, but I am so alone.”

“Oh Valeriya, why didn’t you call me sooner? I am always here. Please, come over immediately. Pack your things and I will send someone to look after the farm for you.”

I shook my head as I hung up. A lump arose in my throat. *Dear Igor—he was such a sweet, funny, unassuming man. He didn’t preach his religion, but he lived it and made friends of everyone he met. I wonder why. ... Maybe God knows who to take in His mercy before things get worse.* I shuddered at the thought of things getting worse. Up until now the war had not affected us too dramatically.

The banks were frozen, but due to Izaak Wyszyński’s distrust of banks, that didn’t affect us too much. His holdings in Berlin and Warsaw were most definitely gone, but being a wise man, he had spread out his investments, so although we would not be as wealthy as we once were, we could still live comfortably. We stayed in the house most of the time, watching and waiting to see what would happen next. Even though there was as yet no physical evidence of the war, if things continued as they were, we would soon have the Germans in our backyard. After all, they were fighting less than two hundred kilometers away in Warsaw.

Valeriya soon showed up at the door with a few belongings. She had lost her husband, her daughter was married to a German officer, and her son was in the Soviet Union somewhere. They had not heard from him for months. She felt very alone and desperately needed someone to be with her. I showed her to a guest room and stayed with her for much of the night, talking, reading to her, and keeping her company until she fell asleep. I then made my way back to my room with a heavy heart. Something more was coming. I did not know what, but before I fell asleep I prayed the Lord would give me, and all of us, the strength to face it.



“Warsaw has surrendered to the Germans! It can’t be! It can’t be!” It was Magda again. Dear Magda was quite an excitable creature, even in calm situations, so all this war business was almost too much for her. She was running around the house announcing it to everyone while she wrung her hands and cried.

“Hush child!” It was Marsha, the head housekeeper. “It is six in the morning. What everyone doesn’t know won’t hurt them for another hour or so. How did you get the news so early, anyway?”

“Oh Marsha!” Tears were streaming down Magda’s face.

“Henrik came and told me early this morning. He had been listening to the radio last night and heard the news.”

“That lazy boy! Why isn’t he in the army, fighting? What’s he doing at home listening to the radio?”

“Don’t say that about my dear Henrik!” Magda fretted. “He couldn’t go on account of his glass eye—you know that.”

“Shhhhhhhhhhh!!! You’ll wake the baby.” Now I was out in the hallway in my bathrobe and other members of the household had come out as well, all in various stages of undress and nightdress.

“What in Heaven’s name is all this commotion about?” It was Izaak Wyszyński. “I heard you all the way in the other wing. It had better be good, Magda.”

Magda looked down at her feet and started stammering and then started crying.

“Hush, hush.” Marsha came to her rescue. “Sir, she was a little overwrought at hearing the news that Warsaw has apparently surrendered to Germany.”

His face turned pale and he sat down on a bench in the hallway. Then he got up and strode down the hall and out of the door.

“Magda, did you actually hear this on the news, or is this hearsay?”

“Hearsay, I guess,” she replied, somewhat embarrassed for the scene she had caused, “although Henrik swears he heard it on the news. Oh, I don’t know. I was just so frightened. I have heard stories of what the Germans did in the last war ... all kinds of atrocities.”

“That is enough, child,” Marsha ordered. “We don’t want to hear those kinds of stories, at least not now. Let us be civilized about this. Let’s all clothe ourselves and then regroup around the radio and see if we can pick up some news about it. Alright?” She dismissed the rest of the servants. “I hope that is acceptable to you, ma’am?” Marsha asked, nodding at me deferentially. She was very

proper and treated me with the utmost respect. I felt odd receiving such respect from someone so much older than myself, but it was her way and I nodded back, smiling.



Magda’s news had been correct. On September 16 Warsaw surrendered to Germany. It was a sad day for Poland. I sat nursing my baby, wondering what that meant for us. *Will Pawel be coming back to me, now that the war is over? Is he all right? How will we live? Will the Germans take our farms and our livelihood?* So many questions. All I could do was pray. All of a sudden my prayers were interrupted with a distinct, sharp sound, sort of like a gunshot, then another, and then quite a few in rapid succession. I listened closer and heard a rumbling sound. *What in the world? Could the Germans be here already?* Then I heard screaming.

“Oh God, no! Not my love! Oh God! No!”

I looked out the window and could barely make out Pawel’s mother in the distance, kneeling over a body on the ground, weeping and screaming, while some men looked on, disinterested. They looked like soldiers, although I couldn’t tell exactly. One of them looked like he was carrying a gun or weapon of some sort.

I dashed out of my room and down the stairs. I handed Pasha to another of the servants as Magda was simply too jumpy to take him at a time like this. I ran as fast as I could out the door and towards the cluster of people who were gathered on the far end of our property.

From what I could make out, it looked like Izaak Wyszyński had been shot numerous times and was lying limp in the field that bordered the forest on the edge of our property. Blood was oozing out from around him, turning the grass a hideous red. Ela looked up at me, staring with vacant eyes. Ignoring the soldiers, I asked, “What happened?”

“Foolish, foolish man! I told him not to do this! I told him not to!” Ela was saying over and over. It was clear she



was not coherent. Then I looked up and noticed the stares of the soldiers standing nearby. There were no Swastikas on their uniforms. “Oh my God!” I gasped as I realized we were being invaded by the Soviet Army.

One of the nearby soldiers snickered and whispered something in Russian to the other one. I listened closely and could make out what he was saying.

“That fool thought he could stop the Soviet Army from coming on his land! Trespassing! Ha! I taught him a lesson!”

My blood boiled inside and with all my heart I wanted to take the gun out of his hand and kill him for his evil, uncaring heart. How could anyone shoot their fellow man in cold blood?—Especially a defenseless old man who was simply trying to defend what was his. I tried to compose myself, realizing that anger was useless at a time like this. Now someone was approaching them from the direction of the main road. I guessed that the rumbling was the sound of tanks passing as the Soviets worked their way into Poland. We lived not far from a well-traveled highway. The soldiers stood up and saluted. I guessed he was a ranking officer.

“Well, well, what have we here? Getting a little trigger happy, huh, Ivan? And what did this poor old Pole do to deserve such a fate?”

“He tried to stop us, sir. He attacked us!”

The officer burst out laughing. “Attack you? He is just an old man! Couldn’t you have just restrained him or something? Now we don’t know who he was and he may have been of some use to us. Do not get trigger happy! Boris, keep an eye on your comrade here, do you understand?”

“Yes sir!” Boris answered. He was a big brute with a close-shaved blonde haircut and bloodshot eyes.

“And you, Madam.” The officer switched to Polish quite easily, although with a thick Russian accent. I realized then that he did not know I understood Russian fluently,

and I thought it would be prudent for the time being to keep him ignorant of that fact. It could come in handy for us at some point.

“Yes?” I straightened up as he moved towards me.

“What is a lovely flower like you doing growing out in the wild? Have you no one to care for you?” His tone was soft, but I was totally disgusted by him. Although somewhat good looking, he had hard, uncaring eyes. “Perhaps she needs to be de-flowered—we are hardly into Poland and already such delicacies await us! Ahhh! This is the way to invade a country!” This he said in Russian to a fellow officer who had joined him and was now snickering.

“Well, no time for that now. We must be on our way, but I will keep this place in mind. It may be of use to us in the future.” He barked out some commands which I was unfamiliar with in Russian and his men left quickly. He then lifted my hand and kissed it. “Until we meet again,” he said with a sly smile. I stiffened and simply nodded my head. I hated him with all my heart, but did not want to end up like Izaak Wyszyński.

My whole body was shaking and my knees were knocking together as they walked away. I waited until they were out of sight and then I bent down over Ela Wyszyński, who was still sobbing over her husband and tried to coax her to get up. Finding it of no use, I ran back to the house and sent Marsha, who had been with Ela for years, to try to bring her back, with the aid of some of the menservants whom I sent for the body. It was clear that I now had to take charge or else everyone would be thrown into confusion.

As I gave directions I felt clear in my head and a strange peace came over me. *Surely the horror of all of this will hit me later*, I thought to myself as I went to my room for a moment’s respite. At the moment I simply felt as if I was an observer watching all of this unfold, not a participant. I couldn’t even cry. Then suddenly the realization of it all hit me, along with the sickening thought that Pawel was right

in the path of the invading Soviet army. Then I felt fear. I did not know what to do and for a moment felt frantic, as if all was lost and all hope was gone. I felt huge tear drops start to spill down my cheeks and my hands begin to shake. Then my eyes lighted on my Bible. I had been reading it earlier that morning. I picked it up and cracked it to Psalm 46. I started to read.

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled. Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.*

I felt peace flood my soul. I was reminded of the experience I had when I was in labor with Pasha and of the knowledge that there was a happiness waiting at the end of all of this, if only I could make it through.

*God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early.*

It was like the Lord was talking directly to me.

*Come behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth: He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder: He burneth the chariot with fire. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.*

It felt like I was being washed clean of the fear and distress I was experiencing a moment before. I resolved

that I would commit that Psalm to memory and quote it to myself any time I was tempted to fear. I knelt and prayed for Pawel, for myself and my son, for Pawel's mother and Valeriya, both of whom were grieving lost husbands and for all the servants and folks I felt responsible for. I prayed for the people of Poland and for all of those who were suffering. It was a precious time of pouring out my heart to the Lord. As I finished praying I was reminded that the Psalm I had received from the Lord would probably encourage our servants as well, and I resolved to gather everyone together to read it to them.

## VALERIYA

That first night passed uneventfully enough. The sound of bombs exploding and gunshots in the distance, along with the rumbling of tanks passing our village kept us awake for most of the night, but no one came near us. We all slept in our clothing, and I told everyone to pack a bag with valuables and clothing in case of emergency. We discussed evacuating, but came to the conclusion that with the Russians on one side and the Germans on the other, there was nowhere to go. We were trapped.

At five in the morning I was awakened by Marsha who said that Valeriya was asking to see me.

“Valeriya, are you awake?” I asked as I tiptoed into her room.

“Yes, my dear, I am here. How are you, my love?”

“I am fine. What can I do for you? It is so early, I was worried you were all right.”

“I am fine, I just have a feeling that I won’t see much of you anymore and wanted to say goodbye.”

I looked at her, wondering what in the world she was talking about. She was old, yes, in her sixties, which was the average life-expectancy for a farming woman at that time, but she seemed healthy. She hadn’t been ailing. I wondered what she meant.

“Don’t worry—I am not going to do anything to myself. The Lord told me this morning that my time was almost up, that I was going to be seeing my beloved Igor and your mama and papa very soon. I can give them your love, you know.”

“Wait a minute. The Lord told you? How? How did He tell you?” I was hoping this would all be part of her imagination. I needed her more than ever before.

“It is something I have learned as I have grown older. If you listen He will speak to you, you know, in the stillness of your heart. It is not an audible voice, sometimes only an impression or a picture or sometimes it is in words that start to form in your mind and then on your tongue, but He will speak to you if you listen. Lately I have spent a lot of time listening and I have learned so much that way. It’s so wonderful.” She sighed. It was a contented sigh. She seemed to be at peace.

“So ... what? Are you just going to die on me? I need you, Valeriya. You are all I have left right now. Please, don’t go just yet. You don’t seem ill. Maybe the Lord was talking about something else and you misunderstood Him?” I asked hopefully.

She chuckled. “You can’t fight some things, you know, and death is one of them. When it is your time to go, you know and you have peace about it. I feel it in my bones. I don’t know when exactly, I only know it will be soon and I wanted to make sure I said the proper good-byes. You have been more of a daughter to me than even my own daughter. How I had wished you would marry Gregory.” I blushed when she mentioned that name. “So you did love him? At least a little?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know. I did not think too much about it. I was engaged to Pawel and it just didn’t seem right. I think I could have loved him, though. He is a wonderful man. But I am very happy with Pawel.”

“Yes, I can see that. Gregory has his path and you have yours. Maybe someday your paths will cross once more. Who knows? Anyway, thank you for putting up with me and loving me and spending so much time with me.”

I started crying. I felt so silly saying goodbye in this way when I knew she wasn’t even dying. “You don’t need to thank me. We have known each other all these years. I couldn’t have made it without you, especially after Mama died. You have taught me so much about life, about God, about everything. Thank you.”

We embraced for a long while and then she closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. I tiptoed out of the room and asked Marsha to check on her in a few hours.



Magda came in the room later that morning to check on me and Pasha. Since Pawel had left I had moved Pasha into the bed with me. I knew that it was more proper for children to sleep in their own room, but I missed having someone to cuddle with and Pasha seemed to sleep better when he was with me, so I kept him. I gave him to Magda and took a bath, washed my hair and did my nails. It felt good to look good.

The things that Valeriya had said to me had stayed with me, especially about hearing from God. *Is it really possible?* I wondered. I didn’t think I would have the courage to try it. *After all, how can I know it is really Him and not just my own thoughts? Speaking of Valeriya, I had better see how she is.*

I knocked on her door and received no reply, so I gingerly opened it and tiptoed into the room. Her bed was empty, but the door to the porch off her room was open. I went out on the porch and there she was, laying in an easy chair, her Bible on her lap and her eyes closed, with a big smile on her face. I whispered

her name and she did not move. I touched her and she was cold. I checked her pulse and realized she was gone.

I broke down crying a little, but then remembered what she said. *I must get it through my thick head that death isn't a terrible thing for those of us who know the Lord. There is only Heaven to look forward to. Lord, help me to remember this, especially during this terrible time of war. I don't know who I will lose before all of this is over. Please help me to keep the vision of Heaven in my mind always!* I leaned over and kissed her one last time. "Say hi to Mama and Papa for me." I whispered through my tears. *I guess she really did hear from God. I guess it is possible.*

I went out and called Marsha. I gave instructions for some of the older, more trusted servants to carry her out and bury her along with Izaak Wyszyński. The priest in the town was fetched. I did not want a big deal to be made of it, not at this time, as the last thing people needed to be thinking about was death and dying. We had a simple ceremony where we read Scriptures and sang hymns. Ela Wyszyński was in her right mind again, although very sad. I went to her room later that evening after Pasha was asleep and talked with her, telling her of my experiences at my mother's deathbed and also Valeriya's. Izaak Wyszyński may not have been an exemplary Christian, but he did love the Lord and I believed that he was in a better place. She took comfort in my words and had me read the Bible to her until late in the evening.



One week later, I woke up early and was filled with a feeling of foreboding—a premonition, if you will, that something big was going to happen that day. I wanted to look presentable, so I went out of my way to dress nice, put on make-up and do my hair. I was glad that

my pre-pregnancy clothes fit once again. The stress of the last month had taken pounds off rapidly.

Once dressed, I read and prayed and waited for what the day would bring. I thought again about what Valeriya said to me and finally decided to try it. I didn't know how to do it, but then thought of Samuel in the Bible when he said, "Speak Lord. Thy servant heareth."

"Lord," I said timidly, "I don't know how to do this. I don't even know what I am supposed to say or what I am supposed to ask, but if You would stoop to speak to someone as lowly as me, I am here, listening." Then I stopped. What happened next was not anything that can be described. I did not hear a voice, I did not see a vision, I only got a strong impression in my heart that the day would bring difficulty, but that if I looked to the Lord, He would somehow get me through it. I felt comforted and at peace. Then I heard a commotion outside.

"Germans are here! Germans are here!" It was Magda freaking out again. I heard Marsha shushing her and a door slamming. I heard gruff voices. I peeked out of my window that overlooked the driveway and saw a number of Soviet vehicles full of men who looked like officers judging from their uniforms. They were speaking in loud, jovial voices, and one of them came up the steps and rang the doorbell and banged on the door simultaneously.

Marsha received them politely and had them wait in the foyer while she came and got me. Although Ela Wyszyński had recovered somewhat from her traumatic experience, she deferred all household decisions to me and told Marsha to consult me on things and basically shut herself in her room. I was glad now that I had dressed well. I shot up a prayer and went out to meet them.

“Good day, Gentlemen. What can I do for you?” I asked in Polish. I decided not to ‘tip my hand’ about my Russian origins just yet. I was met by a roar of laughter. I was not sure what they saw funny in that sentence.

“Good day, *gentlemen!*” One of the soldiers was mimicking my speech in Russian. “Did you hear that, Comrade? But we got rid of gentlemen and ladies in Russia! We are all equal!”

“Hooray!” A shout went up behind him. They seemed to be somewhat intoxicated, if such a thing was possible so early in the morning. Then I saw the officer I had met in the field when Izaak was killed. He pushed through the crowd and greeted me with a short bow.

“Please forgive these buffoons,” he said in his passable Polish. He waved his hand in the direction of the men who were still carrying on. “They are part of our Pleasure and Recreation Committee. I am sure they were given that job because of their love of pleasure. I have a great honor to bestow upon you.”

I raised my eyebrows. “And that is?”

“Your house has been chosen as the site for a recreational facility for officers of the great Soviet Army.”

“Am I supposed to be honored?” I asked, rather sarcastically.

The officer started to turn red and then checked himself and turned on the charm again.

“You have graciously been given the job of hostess to Soviet officers when they are on leave. I see you have ample space here for a large amount of men. Some changes need to be made, and I suggest we start on them at once. Oh, let me introduce myself. I am Colonel Yipsin. And you are Madam Wyszynski, I presume?”

“I am.”

“Where is your husband?”

“He has been away fighting the Germans. We did not know you were going to stab us in the back while we looked the other way.”

“Stab you in the back? Oh my! We have a feisty one here. Do you have any children?”

“Yes, one son, two months old.”

“Well, cooperate with us and all your needs will be taken care of. Here are my aides, Boris and Sasha. They speak enough Polish to communicate well. They will work with you to set up this place to be ready to receive officers in need of a break. You have two weeks to finish. I bid you good day.” He then spun on his heel and was off.

I stared mutely at Boris. I remembered him from the field. I did not like him at all. Sasha was a thin, gangly man with brown hair, streaked with gray and kind-looking eyes. I wondered what kind of man he was and whether he was in the army because he wanted to be, or if he, too, was somehow dragged unwillingly into this horrible war.

“Let us get to work,” Sasha said gruffly. “There is a lot to be done.”

## **RUSSIANS**

“Russians in my house! I will not stand for it!” Ela Wyszynski was going crazy. There was nothing we could do for her. She was crying and hitting the bed and tearing at her hair and her clothes. Her last vestige of peace and solitude was being taken away. She loved her house and took great pride in it and the thought of it being overrun by Russian soldiers, even if they were officers, was too much for her to bear. She had been unceremoniously informed by Boris that the master bedroom, which she had decorated so lovingly and carefully and which reminded her of her deceased husband, was to be divided into a number of smaller rooms for the “rest and pleasure” of the Soviet officers. He smirked as he said this, and one could only imagine what sort of pleasure he was talking about. Already, scared-looking girls from the village were being brought in and told that they were to work there. I put them to work scrubbing and cleaning and sewing, but deep down I wondered just what sort of work they would end up doing.

Ela Wyszynski was being moved out—we all were, in fact, into the servant’s wing of the house, into cramped quarters. Marsha was gently trying to bring Ela down with the rest of us who had already moved, but she was refusing. Boris had workmen outside the front door,

waiting for her to leave and was getting impatient. This had potential for becoming a scene.

I desperately shot up a prayer. It was quickly becoming second nature to me to pray for things—I wouldn't have survived without it. I suddenly realized it would be easier on her if we could somehow help her leave with dignity. "Mama," I whispered, "come with me. I have something to show you." She stopped crying and looked at me. She then dried her eyes and put on her bonnet and slowly got up and walked out of the room with me. We walked together downstairs, the servants following close behind with some of her belongings. The jewels and other valuables that weren't hidden in the secret vault were already gone—taken by one of the soldiers who claimed they were to be used for the "betterment of the whole." I sincerely doubted that. I quietly thanked God that they hadn't found the secret room. I hoped it would remain intact until after the war, as it contained what little was left of the Wyszynski fortune.

"What are you going to show her?" Marsha whispered in my ear.

"Nothing. I just didn't want her to feel as if she was being forcibly being taken out of her room. I wanted her to come by choice. I hope she understands that."

Marsha nodded.

When we got to the servant's quarters and she saw her new room she again started weeping like a baby. "I didn't want to be pulled out of my own room by those dogs. I wanted to go with dignity. Oh God! Why me? Why me?"

I put my arms around her and started singing an old hymn that Valeriya had taught me. It was a Protestant hymn, not one familiar to Catholics, but it spoke of comfort and God's undying love and it had a soothing effect on all of us. Ela quieted down and

listened. Finally, after a long while of singing, Ela stopped crying and quietly got into bed. We turned the lights low and left the room.

She was still fairly young—only in her early fifties and not in ill health, but it seemed the strain of it all and the emotional upheaval had caused something to snap. She became very much like a child who needed a large amount of love, comfort, and attention. I dismissed Marsha from all her other duties and asked her to care for Ela full time. This she did willingly, as she and Ela Wyszynski had formed a bond over the years and were fast friends.



"Comrade Wyszynski." I was still unaccustomed to being addressed like that, but that is what the Soviets called each other and Sasha always addressed me as that.

"Yes?"

"Tomorrow the first contingent of soldiers are coming for some recreation. We are depending on you to be the perfect hostess. Please us and we will continue to care for you and your family. But let me warn you here and now that we have little use for insubordination of any kind. Are we clear on this?" He seemed somewhat uncomfortable telling me this—it was more the type of thing Boris would say.

"I am offended, sir," I replied, "that you would imply that I could be anything but the perfect hostess. Now, if you will excuse me I need to check on the kitchen." At this point Boris walked in on the conversation.

"Where are those lovely wenches we picked up in the village? Make sure they are dressed nice tonight. Our soldiers need all the cheering up they can get. Some of them are far from home!"

I cringed. I was not sure what to do. I could play the perfect hostess, make sure the food was superb



and the house in fine condition, but I did not and would not be a part of making whores out of our sweet, innocent farm girls. I took a deep breath. "I am sorry, sir. I cannot be a part of that. It goes against every dictate of my conscience."

"And who ordered you to have a conscience?" Boris growled. "Listen, young lady, you have been given every kindness and courtesy. We have put up with your decadent ways simply because we were trying to be nice and the colonel has taken a liking to you, but we can get ugly very quickly if you don't cooperate. I am sure we could find some young woman dying to take your place, and I am sure we could find some nice work camp in Siberia for you and your son and your aging mother-in-law. Now go and get the girls dressed up."

I did not know what to do. On one hand I could not bear to have a part in traumatizing and hurting innocent young girls, but on the other hand I had my mother-in-law and son and all the servants to think of. What could I do? I curtsied slightly and turned on my heel and ran the other way as fast as I could. I was on the verge of tears. I did not know what to do.

"*The Lord told me...*" Valeriya's words rang in my ears. Could He tell me what to do, even now? I stepped into the linen closet, locked the door behind me and quickly and desperately prayed and presented my dilemma before the Lord and asked Him what I should do. I stopped and listened and waited.

*Agree with thine adversary quickly whilst thou art in the way with him. The time will come when you will have to stand firm in your convictions, but this is not it. Do all you can to protect and help and encourage the girls, but do not sacrifice your life or the lives of your loved ones over this.*

Along with that short message a feeling of peace soothed the fear that had gripped my heart and threatened to overwhelm me. If it was just me, I wouldn't have worried so, but I had my son to think about and the others, and that responsibility was weighing heavily on me. I knew that whether I cooperated or not, the Soviets would do what they pleased. I prayed and asked God to send me someone to help me. Just then I heard a familiar and well-loved voice in the hall.

"Anushka? Anushka, where are you?" It was Elizabeth Kazimierz.

I flung open the door of the linen closet and she must have had a fright, for she went pale and looked shocked for a moment. "Is this where they are making you sleep!?" she asked incredulously.

I shook my head and hugged her tight. It was so good to see her warm, reassuring face. "What are you doing here?"

"I have been told to report here to work. Soviet soldiers were going door to door today in the village, taking pretty girls and a few more matronly women as well. I was one of the matronly ones, I suppose," she answered jokingly.

"How can you joke in a time like this?" I asked. "Do you know what they are going to have those girls do?"

"You have to have a sense of humor if you want to stay alive," Elizabeth answered. "And, yes, I know what they want the girls for. I lived through another war, you know, and I was a young girl then. I know."

"You mean...?"

"Yes. When soldiers came to our home and threatened to destroy it and us along with it, my father bade me use my wiles on the captain. He took a liking to me, spared my family and took me with him. I served

them until the time came that they lost the war and had to leave our country and I was able to return home. Believe me, it was not a pleasant experience, but God gave me the grace for it. And, through it I met my wonderful husband.”

“Your husband was a soldier? In the German army?”

“No, he was in a prison camp that the captain based out of. We met there and fell in love. I was a privileged prisoner, of course, because of the services I provided and I was able to use my position to help the others. God made good to come of it. Remember...”

“I know, Romans 8:28. But how can good come out of all of this?”

“Wait and see, child, wait and see. In the meantime, I am here to help. We will rough this one together. Okay?”

I nodded mutely and hugged her once again. It was so good to have someone wiser and stronger than myself to help me. “How did you reconcile your terrible experience with being a Christian?”

“Have you ever read the book of Esther?” Elizabeth asked. “You should. God sometimes allows drastic measures in drastic situations.” Just then we noticed Boris eyeing us suspiciously.

“We had better get to work,” I whispered. Elizabeth nodded and we parted. As we went our separate ways, I thanked God for answering my prayers and sending her to me when I needed someone so badly.



“Calm down girls, calm down! It will be all right. Listen, I went through the exact same thing as you when I was around your age, during the last war. I understand your fear and your trepidation at doing something so unspeakable, so unthinkable. But look at it this way—in yielding to the Russians’ wishes you

are saving yourselves and your families from certain destruction. In that way you will be heroines. I have heard reports of the havoc they are wreaking in other towns, and I think the fact that we have complied with their requests has spared us and our town. So look at it like that.” Elizabeth was addressing a group of terrified young girls who had just learned what the Russian officers had in mind for them. She shared more of her experiences with them, just as she had with me, and then I led them all in a prayer and read a Psalm to them. Some of the more frightened ones had been sobbing in the corner, but the prayer and reading calmed us all somewhat.

“I do not know what lies ahead of us, but I do know that God will somehow see us through this,” I said to the girls. Most of them were wearing my clothes—my evening gowns and other more revealing outfits.

Boris had come in and inspected the girls and then informed them that they were to join the soldiers after dinner in the drawing room, to be there as companions and to participate in any activities they were asked to participate in. “Anyone who does not cooperate,” he said with a smirk, “will be punished—along with their families. And you, Madam Wyszynski, will be the hostess. You must join us at dinner and make sure everything runs smoothly. Do you understand? You will pay personally if there is any trouble.”

I nodded. What could I say? I retired to my room, which I now shared with Magda and Pasha, to dress. They had allowed me to keep most of my personal effects, except for jewelry, which they had taken the first day when they went through the house confiscating things that were of value. I searched through what was left of my clothes for something appropriate for the occasion. I came across the long, slinky, black evening gown that Pawel had bought me right before

I had found out I was pregnant. I had never gotten to wear it. Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought about my Pawel. I prayed for him whenever I thought about him, which was often. We hadn't heard anything from him in almost three weeks and for all we knew, he could be dead. The Polish army was not able to put up much resistance against the Russians as they were already paralyzed by the Germans. I fought to bring myself back to the present.

"Yes, this one will do," I said to myself as I came across another black dress in my closet. It was a long-sleeved, ankle-length black dress. It could almost pass for someone in mourning, but it had a high slit up one side and the neckline was somewhat low which made it passable as an evening gown. It would have to do as I would not give the Soviets the pleasure of being dressed up gaily at a time like this.

"Magda, would you mind doing my hair?" My black hair fell below my waist. It hung straight and long and Magda was an expert at fixing it becomingly. Magda had turned out to be a jewel with Pasha. She was a better nanny than a personal maid. Pasha, now a little over three months old, was in love with her.

"Of course. Come over here. Oh how I wish I had some of your exquisite hair ornaments to add in."

"No, simple is good. I do not want the Russians to think I am a whore! I am simply doing this job because I am forced to, not because I want to, believe me!"

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## COLONEL YIPSIN

"How very charming," someone said in a suave voice as I entered the room. I looked to the side and there he was again—Colonel Yipsin. He and a cluster of other uniformed men were standing in the corner of the room drinking brandy and other liqueurs and talking and laughing. Some of the serving girls were moving quietly among the men passing out drinks and appetizers before the main meal was to begin. I heard some occasional grumbles about the lack of vodka, but they were soon quieted when they tasted the quality of liquor that was available. We had been forced to raid Izaak Wyszyński's abundant store of fine alcoholic beverages for the occasion.

There had been fighting for three weeks now and the area we were in was for the most part fully occupied by the Russians. They had managed to occupy a good slice of the Polish border region, using it as a buffer between their homeland and the Germans. They were feeling pretty smug with their victory, and the liquor they were drinking was not helping the situation.

"Good evening, Colonel Yipsin."

"I really should call you Comrade," he answered in a low voice as he moved closer to me, "but you are far too beautiful for such a cold-sounding title, Madam Wyszyński."

“Thank you,” I answered without any feeling.

He took my hand and kissed it. “So, you are our hostess for the evening. I have been informed that you have quite a lovely bit of entertainment lined up for us.”

“I think dinner will be to your satisfaction. I have had the cooks prepare traditional Russian fare. I thought it might make you and your men feel a bit more at home,” I answered with a smile, all the while trying to ignore the real meaning of his question.

“I am sure. Just out of curiosity, how would you know about Russian cooking?”

“I had some Russian friends,” I answered simply. I still had not let on that I spoke Russian, although it was hard at times. I figured I could watch and learn a lot more by pretending not to speak it. And although most of the soldiers did not speak Polish, a number of the higher-ranking ones did, and others spoke German, which was a language everyone in our area knew some of.

Dinner went off without a hitch. Elizabeth had been put in charge of the serving girls, and she had done a good job directing them and setting up the dining area. I had never realized what a multi-talented lady she was.

After dinner the girls filed in. The men went up to them and chose whichever one they wished to converse with. Some immediately left the room with their companions. I caught the eyes of a few of the girls as they left and tried to give them a look of encouragement. My heart ached for them, but there was nothing I could do. I whispered a prayer for each one. Others stayed in the drawing room, talking or dancing with the men. I busied myself with directing the servants and watching over things in general, all the while trying to avoid Colonel Yipsin’s eagle eye,

which seemed to be looking at me whenever I turned his direction.

*What does that man want with me?* I wondered. He put down his glass of liquor and started walking my direction. *Oh Lord, show me how to handle this man, and please give me the grace to endure his presence.* I was immediately reminded of what Elizabeth had told me about Queen Esther. I had since read the book of Esther and was familiar with the story. *Oh Lord ... not that!* My heart ached even more for my beloved Pawel as the colonel sidled up to me and started talking in his smooth, low voice.

“You have outdone yourself. You definitely know how to throw a classy party.”

“This is not the kind of party I would prefer to throw,” I answered gently but firmly.

“Oh, and what kind of party *would* you prefer?”

“I am a Christian and some of the things happening here are not exactly what I would call moral,” I answered stiffly.

“Christian? Ah, of course, Poland is still so archaic in those matters. We will soon set you straight. Don’t you know that religion is the opiate of the people? It is great for *babushkas*\* and *dyevooshkas*\* who have nothing else to do but dream of unrealistic places such as Heaven, but for us thinkers, movers, and shakers, religion is nothing but that—a bad dream which must be forgotten about in pursuit of reality.”

“I am aware of the communist ideology,” I answered. “My brother is a member of the Communist Party here in Poland.” He raised his eyebrows in interest. I did not know if this was a good or bad thing to have told him, but I had already said it and now I couldn’t back

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\* *babushka*: literally “grandmother” but often referring to any elderly woman

\* *dyevooshka*: literally “girl”; sometimes used as a casual form of address, other times to denote a naïve young girl

down on my story. Anyway, I was trying desperately to keep him thinking about something besides intimacy with me.

“What is your brother’s name?” He queried.

“Dr. Jan Keroshiva,” I answered.

“Keroshiva? That is a Russian name, is it not?”

I gulped. I had let the cat out of the bag. “If you must know,” I said, “I am half Russian, half Polish. My father is Russian.”

“Interesting.” He grinned as he took another drink from the tray that was offered to him by one of the serving girls. “You are more mysterious than ever. Do you speak Russian?”

I nodded.

His face flushed a little. He and his aides had thought all this time that I did not understand Russian and had freely discussed things in my presence in Russian. It had been useful to know what was going on by eavesdropping on their conversations. I was sorry that my cover was blown.

“Well, then, you know more than we thought you did,” he said, switching to Russian.

“Yes,” I replied, also switching to Russian.

“Where is your brother?”

“I last heard from him a month ago. He was working in a prominent hospital in Brest. His wife is a Russian, and works with the Komsomol. I have been very concerned for his safety.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much for him. Doctors are in high demand and if he really is a member of the Communist Party and his wife with the Komsomol, they should be treated well by the Soviets.”

After a moment’s silence he added, “Your Russian is flawless. Do you practice it much?”

“I spoke it regularly with a dear friend who passed on just days after the Soviets invaded,” I answered.

“Passed on. Why do you say that? There is nothing to pass on to. ‘Death is a leap into the darkness.’ I believe a Russian poet said that, although I cannot recall which one.”

I smiled at this man’s attempt at intellectuality and then realized I had an opening to talk about my faith with this man. I tried hard to remind myself that one of the reasons he was so cold, so hard, was simply that he had been raised that way. He looked like he couldn’t be more than thirty-five, and if that was the case, he was only a small boy when the communists rose to power. He was raised on communist ideology. Probably no one had ever told him about true Christianity. I decided to try to tell him about my faith at every opportunity.

“How can you say that there is nothing after death?” I asked. “What would the purpose of life be if there was nothing but darkness at the end of it?”

He looked at me thoughtfully and did not answer. He took another sip of the alcohol that was provided and then took my hand. “You are so beautiful,” he said with a notable slur.

My knees started shaking and my stomach went into knots. “You didn’t answer my question,” I said, in a desperate attempt to change the subject.

He waved his hand in disinterest. “You are far too beautiful to worry your pretty little head with ideology and doctrine and religion. Dance with me.” This was more of a command than a request, and I found myself propelled gently to the dance floor before I could protest.

The music was slow and sensual. (One of the officers had seen to that.) The colonel put his arms around me and held me as close as I would allow and lost himself in the music. My heart was beating fast and hard and I started sweating. A nameless fear gripped me. *What if he tries to do more than just dance with*

*me? What do I do? Do I resist? Do I go along with it? Oh God, give me the grace and strength and wisdom to handle this situation. Everything within me cries out against this, but if this is what I must do to stay alive and to keep my son alive, You will have to forgive me and somehow make Pawel understand when and if he ever finds out.*

The colonel started moving his hands over my body. I stiffened and he stopped. I took that as an encouraging sign. *He doesn't want to force me, I thought to myself. He wants me to give myself to him willingly. That won't happen, of course, but at least it can buy me some time, perhaps? Oh God, I am not ready for this now. Please intervene.*

Just then a frantic Magda came rushing up the stairs carrying Pasha, who was screaming bloody murder. It caused a major disruption. Magda said that she had tried everything but could not quiet the baby. I thought that odd, as normally at this time of night he slept soundly, but then realized that maybe this was the intervention that I was praying for. Some of the officers seemed very annoyed at this interruption, and I was alarmed when I saw Boris heading towards Magda, looking very angry. I quickly begged leave from Colonel Yipsin and was delighted when he granted it. "For now," he added.

I hugged Pasha close to me and hurriedly went to my room in the servants' quarters to nurse him and to think, pray, and collect my thoughts.

*Lord, what do I do? I think I know what this man has in mind for me. I was so naïve as to think that just because I was a married woman that these men would respect that and keep their distance from me. I don't know what to do! I don't want to be unfaithful to my husband, but on the other hand I could be endangering my life and the life of my son, as well as Pawel's mother*

*and the servants if I resist his advances. Oh please show me what to do and give me the peace of knowing it is the right thing.*

I got quiet and waited. Again I was reminded of the story of Queen Esther. I picked up my Bible and started reading again. Here was a story of a woman who gave up her own desires to marry an old, terrifying king. She risked her life to save her people and was remembered through the ages for it. What I was being asked to do was not nearly as dangerous or horrible. Colonel Yipsin was not a bad-looking man and although I hated what he stood for with all my heart, I prayed that somehow God would help me see the man behind the mask, and that if there was any good at all there, to help me to find it. I was reminded of what Pawel had said to me about himself—that I had seen the man behind the superfluity and riches and seen his heart. I knew it wouldn't be nearly as easy as it had been with my beloved Pawel, but I determined that I would try to do that with Colonel Yipsin as well. I felt peace in my heart and knew that somehow, God would get me through this.

There was a knocking at the door and then Magda entered timidly. "You don't have to knock, it is your room too," I said softly.

"Colonel Yipsin is getting impatient and asking for you," she said. I looked at my watch. It was almost midnight. I had been reading and praying for almost two hours. I felt much more prepared for what was ahead than I had a few hours earlier. I handed a now sleeping Pasha over to Magda and brushed my hair, straightened my dress and made my way upstairs. My knees were shaking as he approached and my heart started pounding faster, but my mind was peaceful. I kept reminding myself that the Lord would see me through this and kept sending up prayers for strength and wisdom and even love. I felt it strange that I would

pray that I could love this man, whom I hated, but one verse that had come to me was “love your enemies.” And I knew the only way I could do that was through the supernatural power of God.

“Glad to see you have once again decided to grace us with your presence. Shall we?” I took his proffered arm and we went out on the balcony and down the steps into the formal gardens where Pawel and I had had our first kiss so many years ago. It now seemed like it was in another lifetime.

“You are even more beautiful in the moonlight,” he whispered as he tilted my face and kissed me. I recoiled at first but then realized that resisting would get me nowhere, so, with desperate prayers ascending to heaven, I returned his kisses. His passion mounted quickly and before I knew it he had caught me up in his arms and was carrying me to the summer house in the middle of the formal gardens. He was quickly being carried away with his passion, and I knew it would only be a matter of time before he finished things off. With every kiss of his, my ache for Pawel grew until I could stand it no longer and would have burst into tears. With all my heart I cried out to God to give me the grace to see this through without breaking down, and suddenly I had the strangest experience.

It was as if I was covered with a blanket of peace. My feelings and emotions, so very sensitive and highly charged a moment before, were slightly dulled. It was almost as if I was out of my body, a casual observer, as I watched myself make the right moves and give myself to this man. I found myself having a measure of compassion for him, understanding that somewhere, deep in his heart, there was a cry for love and someone to care for him. It was strange to feel compassion for someone I hated, but everything about this experience was strange.

He had not been with a woman for a while, it seemed, for he was quickly finished and once it was over, I was jolted back to reality. My first reaction was anger and disgust and a feeling of being totally violated. I wanted to burst into tears and run and hide, but I knew that would only anger or hurt him and there was nowhere to run and hide. He sat quietly, panting from his exertion. I covered my half naked body and sat and watched him. I desperately prayed for the strength to finish as gracefully as I had started.

He finally broke the silence. “Well, I have to go. It is late. You had best be getting some sleep as well. Good evening.” He seemed different than he had been earlier that evening, almost embarrassed or awkward towards me, not his usual proud, arrogant self.

I bid him good night and left the summer house and gardens as quickly as I could. Dear, thoughtful Magda had drawn a bath and as I soaked in it, I let my tears flow. The pent-up emotions of the evening, the disgust, the fear, the loneliness for Pawel, the strange compassion I had felt for this man that I hated—all that was washed away as I cried and prayed and poured out my soul to the Lord. I thought I would feel further away from the Lord after an encounter such as this—but instead He felt so close, so near, so tender and dear. I knew He did not condemn me for what had happened. Afterwards I was able to fall into a very welcome, peaceful sleep.



“The colonel was very pleased with your work.” Sasha was beaming. Being a bearer of good news seemed to suit him better than having to bring bad news, which was usually the case. I wished I could somehow get to know him better. I suspected that beneath his crusty exterior, he had a good heart. He was very guarded, though, and only occasionally let

on his emotions, mainly through his eyes.

I blushed. I wondered how much the colonel had said about what happened last night. However, Sasha didn't seem to know anything, and when I realized this I relaxed a little.

"There will be a pretty constant flow of officers through this recreational facility in the next months. I am sure it will be a lot of work. However, the colonel wished me to inform you that you will be allotted one day off every two weeks for rest for you and your staff. Just continue to perform satisfactorily and you will receive more benefits." With that he nodded stiffly and left the room with a crisp step.

"Oh that is wonderful! I thought it would be much worse, you know, being invaded by the Soviets." Magda was chattering on in exuberance. She was missing her time off with her boyfriend, who was now working in the Wyszyński gardens, and I am sure she was dreaming of a romantic tryst with him.

"They are only being nice to us because we are serving their purpose. One misstep and we will be on the train to the forced labor camps. Believe me!" I immediately regretted having said that to Magda, as I watched her face fall and tears begin to form.

"Are you serious?" she asked imploringly.

I resolved that I would watch what I said more in the future. "Hush child. It is all right. We will make ourselves invaluable to them. God has promised to keep us, so don't worry."

Magda perked up again. I have to say this for her. She was easily excitable and fell easily into despair, but at least she also easily snapped out of it.

I left Pasha with Magda and went to check on the other girls from the surrounding villages who had been part of the "entertainment committee."



"How are they?" I asked Elizabeth as she closed the door to one of their rooms behind her. They were being housed four girls to a room, in five rooms, which made for twenty girls.

"Some of them are still asleep. They will be all right. Don't worry about them. I am watching over them—and, most importantly, God is caring for them. They could have had much worse fates, you know. They need to remember this every time they are tempted to complain of their lot. And how are you?"

I blushed. I did not know what to say. Whenever I thought about what had happened the night before I felt a mixture of shame and relief—shame for what I had been forced to do and relief that it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I wondered if I should tell Elizabeth. I said nothing, but she must have sensed it.

"Colonel Yipsin is not a man you could refuse, darling. God knows that and He understands."

I broke down and cried on her shoulder. I had been okay the night before, but this morning I felt a fresh wave of anger, humiliation, and a whole jumble of confused emotions. I desperately needed someone to talk to.

"How did you know?"

"You would have to be blind not to notice such things. He has completely lost his head over you. You have an incredible advantage and could use it for good, you know. Just look at it as a task you must perform. Don't let your emotions get mixed up in it all."

"How can you be so chop chop and practical about something so personal, so emotional, so ... humiliating!"

"Pride is never a good thing," Elizabeth answered thoughtfully. I should have known enough by now to know that I wasn't going to get too much sympathy from Elizabeth. She had love in abundance for those around her, but she never let anyone feel sorry for



themselves or their lot in life. She always told others to look to the Lord and to count their blessings and today would be no different. At the time I thought she was somewhat heartless, but now, looking back, I see the wisdom in it all.

I went back to my room to think over what she said. She did have a point. I had an incredible opportunity to turn this situation to an advantage for myself, my family and who knows, maybe even for the good of this man, Colonel Yipsin. It was somewhat of a foreign thought to me and something that took me a while to get used to. It was one thing to be raped or forced against my will, quite another to actually hope to win favor with him and thereby protection for myself and my family. Would God allow that? Would it be something that could be permitted in a time like this? I did not want to sin against God. The Catholic Church had made saints out of women who were martyred for their faith rather than yielding to having sex with their captors, but now I wondered if they could have been of more use to God by giving in to their captors' desires and eventually, hopefully winning freedom for themselves to continue witnessing their faith.

I decided to pray further about the matter. I didn't know my Bible well enough to be able to think of any scriptural precedent, except for the book of Esther. I finished reading through it and then was reminded of the book of Ruth. I did not think it had anything to do with the subject but read it anyhow. I was astonished that Ruth actually slept with Boaz before she was married to him in order to gain his favor. Of course, Boaz was not an evil man, but from this I could see that there were some occasions when God allowed such drastic, unorthodox things for the safety or well-being of His people. I decided to pray and ask God what I should do.

I prayed and then opened my Bible and read:

*And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

I broke down crying and prayed again, "Lord, You know my heart. You know that I want to follow You. Please, show me what I am supposed to do and give me peace in my heart. Oh please!" I got quiet once more and then a still small voice spoke to my heart.

*Show this man that you care for him. This will be the most difficult thing you have ever done, for I know that you do not care for him. However, I care for him and I wish for him to have a chance to know Me, and you are the vessel I wish to use to bring this about. In so doing, I will bless you and protect you and your family. Do not fear. I will give you My peace to envelop you, just as it did last night. This will not last forever, only for a time.*

I was taken aback at what I was sure I had just heard and felt in my heart, as it seemed so contrary to what I had been taught and how I had been raised. However, I now felt the peace that I had asked God for and concluded that I would do as He said, however difficult it might be. I spent the next half hour praying desperately that the Lord would give me a measure of love, or at least tolerance for this man and remove the hatred I felt for him in my heart. At last, my vigil was broken with Magda bringing Pasha in to nurse.

## THE GENERAL

Colonel Yipsin did not come to call for a few days. I was not sure what his duties were exactly, but he seemed greatly trusted and respected. The next time I saw him, he was strutting like a peacock, wearing the uniform of a general. He had been promoted and was bursting with pride at his accomplishment.

“Congratulations, General Yipsin. It must be nice to hear people call you that.” I curtsied slightly and then continued watering the flowers. The Wyszyński household had been one full of plants and flowers and although it was no longer a cozy home, I had determined that the plants would not suffer for it and so took it upon myself to care for them.

“You are looking more beautiful than ever, Madam Wyszyński. May I presume that you are being treated satisfactorily?”

“Yes, thank you.” It was rather awkward speaking to him. I so badly wanted to give him the cold shoulder, to ignore him, but manners dictated that I speak to him, especially if I wanted to stay on his good side.

“And the officers? I trust they have not given you any trouble?”

“None at all. I find Russian men, or their officers at least, have good manners.”

“Ah yes, that is something we teach our children

in the Great Soviet Union.” His chest swelled again. I liked him even less when he was like this. He then launched into a tirade about the glories of the Soviet Union. It took every ounce of my will power to stay and listen with a smile on my face rather than to just turn and run away. Finally he finished.

“Before I leave, madam, I would like to ask if you would be so kind as to host the party to celebrate my promotion? I will have one day of leave the day after tomorrow. Would that be enough time? I will have Sasha fill you in on the details.”

I inclined my head to indicate that, yes, I would be willing. I wondered just what he would expect from me.

“Wonderful! Well then, I will finish touring the grounds and then will have to be going. See you the day after tomorrow.” He kissed my hand.

“Until then,” I answered. As he walked away I rushed to the bathroom and washed my hand. I couldn’t stand the sight of him, let alone his touch. It was all too much for me. I broke down crying in the bathroom and stayed there for some time. Finally I finished my cry and started to talk to the Lord.

“Lord, I can’t do this. I can’t stand that man. He is not bad to look at, but his personality, his pride, his arrogance, his smirk, his voice, his touch—I abhor everything about him. How can I do what I feel I should do, what I remember You telling me to do—to care for this man and show him that You love him—when I can’t stand his presence? Please give me strength!”

I stopped for a moment and waited and then the words came to me. *As thy days, so shall thy strength be.* I was not familiar with that verse. I wasn’t even sure if it was a verse, but it gave me peace as I realized that the Lord would have to give me the strength and grace for each situation when it came, not before. I

had been given enough grace to keep smiling and act civilly this time, and if it came to something more, the Lord would give me the grace for that as well. This thought calmed my troubled spirit and I dried my eyes and went back out to face the world.



“The dinner is almost ready and the dining room and drawing room are set up to receive the guests. Is there anything else you would like me to do?”

“Thank you, Elizabeth. I don’t know what I would do without you, especially since Marsha started spending all her time with Mama. I do have one last favor to ask. Would you ... well...” I blushed.

“Come on child, spit it out. What is it you want me to do?” Elizabeth smiled benevolently.

“Would you pray for me?”

“Of course! By all means! There is nothing wrong with asking for prayer when you need it. Haven’t you ever heard that verse, ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ?’”

“I suppose so. I just feel embarrassed to ask. You are always so strong and are always telling me to be strong.” I was starting to cry.

“I just don’t want to hear you complaining. But if you truly need help, don’t hesitate to ask, especially if it is prayer you need. I have lots of that, you know. It is my most powerful weapon.” Elizabeth said that with a smile and then she opened her arms and hugged me and prayed for me while I cried.

“There, there now. I know this isn’t easy. Don’t think that I don’t notice or don’t care what you are going through, dear. I do. Believe me, I do. I pray for you often. I just don’t think dwelling on the problems and negative is going to get us anywhere, that’s all. And really, if you think about it, we have it much better than some—than most, really. Because of the general’s

favor for you, it seems to me he has gone out of his way to impress you with his and his soldiers' civility. One of the girls told me that he has promised painful punishments to any soldier who harms or kills any of the villagers or girls here."

I nodded. I was so thankful for Elizabeth. I don't know what I would have done without her.

She continued, "You know, many a time I have also felt I could not go on. It is leaning on the Lord's strength and not my own that has seen me through. Have you ever read the verse, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness?'"

I just listened appreciatively with my head on her shoulder. It was good to know I wasn't the only one who was having trials.

"Okay! Enough lovey dovey!" Elizabeth went back to being her brisk, no-nonsense self. "Go and get yourself ready, and for God's sake, don't wear that formal black dress—you look like you are in mourning when you wear it. I am amazed you got anywhere with Colonel ... I mean General Yipsin wearing that last time. Please find something a bit more festive. Remember, you are doing this for yourself, your child, and even possibly your husband. He is most likely in Russian hands, you know."

I nodded and went to my room to get ready. As I ran my hands over my clothes hanging in the small closet that Magda and I shared, I once again came across the black dress Pawel had bought for me just before I found out I was pregnant. It was long and silky black with a halter top and low back. He said I looked stunning in it, but there had never been an occasion to wear it. I decided I would christen it tonight, not in honor of General Yipsin's promotion, but in honor of the memory of my loving husband, for whom I was doing all of this.

I put it on with a grim determination and had to choke back tears when I looked at myself in the mirror. Yes, it looked good on me, but it reminded me so much of Pawel, I could hardly contain myself. No, this would not be a good dress to wear tonight. Too many memories were conjured up by it. I would not be able to concentrate on the task at hand. I finally settled on a dark green party dress that looked festive enough for a party celebrating the general's promotion. Magda did my hair and make-up. After a whispered prayer and a parting cuddle for my dear little Pasha, I was ready for the evening.



"So far the evening has gone flawlessly," I whispered to Elizabeth during a break where I excused myself to use the ladies room. "The general is too busy talking to his guests to be too interested in me. They haven't even called for the girls!"

"Thank goodness. The girls are tired and deserve some rest," Elizabeth said. "I am finishing up in the kitchen now. The coffee and tea will be served in the drawing room and then I am going to close up shop for the evening."

"Thank you for everything, Elizabeth." Just then I heard my name being called and I rushed into the drawing room to find it empty except for General Yipsin.

"General, I am sorry I was gone so long. I just had to—"

He waved his hand. "Do call me Alexei. That is my name and I prefer it, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, General—I mean, Alexei."

"Would you mind terribly if I called you Anja?"

"I ... I suppose not."

He was getting closer to me and his voice dropped to low, sultry tones.

“What about the guests?” I stammered.

“Oh, they will be here in a moment, but I missed you and so came looking for you.”

“You missed me? And what am I to you?” I regretted saying that as soon as it came out. He was walking towards me now and I started slowly walking backwards. I glanced over my shoulder to see the wall coming closer. I was backing myself into a corner. *Oh Lord, give me the strength and grace for this*, I prayed to myself.

“I don’t know.” He stopped coming towards me and paused, as if in thought. “You are like a wild flower blooming in this decadent society. You don’t belong here, you know. You are not one of those rich, high-society people. Your spirit longs to be free. I see that in you.”

I was dumbfounded by what I heard from him. He could read me better than I thought. I never did feel like I belonged here amongst all this wealth and comfort. I was a simple farm girl who loved to roam free in the fields and never really wanted to conform. If it hadn’t been for my wonderful Pawel I would have been miserable in the society of the rich and wealthy.

“And you?” he continued. “What am I to you.”

I paused. *You are responsible for killing my father-in-law, for destroying my home, and for invading my country. What are you to me? You are nothing to me! I loathe you!* Those were my thoughts. I bit my tongue, however, and sent up a quick prayer and suddenly an unexplainable feeling of love and compassion for this man came over me and I found myself talking.

“You are someone who is also trapped—trapped in a world that was not of your making and not to your liking, but you make the best of it, and have been quite successful doing so. You fool everyone, even yourself much of the time, into believing that you are fully

devoted to your cause, but you know deep down in your heart that you have questions. Yes, Alexei, even you long to be free.” I took a deep breath. *Where did that come from?* I wondered.

He looked stunned, as if his breath was taken away. For a moment I thought I could see past the proud, confident man, and in his eyes I could see a longing, but it was quickly gone as he regained his composure and said, “Well, since we think we know each other so well, I suppose we should spend some more time together to find out if we are right or not. Don’t you think?”

I nodded.

Just then one of the serving girls came in with a tray of coffee and tea and our discussion was over. He waved the girl away, requesting liquor.

I realized that reaching this man would not be easy, and I silently prayed for wisdom as to where to go from here. The guests filtered in to the drawing room and the rest of the party went off without a hitch. Finally they were all either gone or retired for the night.



“I see you are exhausted from your efforts.” I nearly jumped to hear the general’s voice so close behind me. I had sat down on the couch after cleaning up and must have dozed, as I didn’t hear him coming. I gasped and sat up straight.

“I didn’t know you were there,” I explained.

He smiled and sat down beside me. “I have been thinking about what you said to me all night. Where do you get such insights? How do you presume to know so much about me?”

“I prayed and that is what God showed me,” I answered simply.

“You really believe all that God stuff, don’t you?” He almost sounded angry. “There is no God. Take my word for it.”

“But why? Why do you say that? Just because that is what you were taught all your life? Have you ever even tried to find out for yourself? Or are you just swallowing what you have been told all your life, hook, line, and sinker?” I was goading him now and he looked annoyed.

“If there is a God, He does not care about the world, and I hate Him.”

I was shocked to hear such a strong statement coming from a man who was usually so guarded about his feelings. Then I noticed the strong smell of liquor on his breath. *He must have been drinking all evening. He would have to be drunk to be talking like this. Well, maybe this is good. Maybe I can reach him better if he is drunk.*

“Why?” I asked. “Tell me about yourself.”

He slumped back in the couch for a few minutes and closed his eyes. I almost thought he had fallen asleep when he started telling me his life story.

“I was orphaned at the age of fifteen. My parents were Christians. They were killed for it. I was sent to a state orphanage and lived there for two years, until I was old enough to join the army. I know about God. I was taught to worship Him as a child. But the God you say you believe in did not protect my parents, even though they worshipped Him and loved Him enough to die for Him. They were traitors to the great communist cause, and I have had to fight the stigma they have given me ever since. Thankfully, I was given the chance to denounce them. Fate smiled on me and I was ‘adopted’ by a general who became like my father and my mentor. I was able to distinguish myself during the last war and was quickly promoted due to my skills and bravery. I have worked tirelessly for this promotion. No one ever gave me anything. I am the only person I can depend on. No God, even if

He does exist, cares about me.” He ended bitterly with his head in his hands.

I felt a great spring of compassion welling up in me. *So that is why he is so bitter, so proud. It is a mask to hide the hurt and the pain. Oh Lord, he needs You so much! He needs to know that You do love him!*

Then a still, small voice spoke to my heart. *Show him I love him by loving him for Me. That is how he will come to know My love—through you.*

*Lord, I can't initiate anything! I will yield to his advances if I have to, but I can't be the one to take the initiative! It is unheard of! It is despicable! I will seem to him like a common whore!*

But again the conviction came deep in my heart that I should do something to show him how much the Lord loved him.

I gingerly edged closer to him on the couch and put my hand on his shoulder. I started rubbing his shoulder and whispered, “I know you probably won’t believe this, but I know that God cares about you and He loves you.”

He just shook his head and stayed in his despondent condition. I edged closer and started to stroke his hair. He looked up at me in disbelief for a moment, and then started to return my caresses. We caressed and kissed for what seemed like eternity to me. The Lord gave me the grace for it, true to His promise, and I kept reminding myself that I was a tool in the Lord’s hands, to show this man that He loved him. Finally, to my surprise, Alexei pulled back from me and took my face in his hands. I saw that he had tears in his eyes.

“You are different from any woman I have ever known,” he said. “You really care about me, even after all I have done to you and your family and your home and your country. Why? What makes you different?”

I answered slowly. “I don’t have any love of my own to offer. Up until very recently I hated you—because of what you have done to me, my family, and my country, but God told me that He loved you and that He wanted me to show you that He loved you. I am loving you with God’s love. He is love, you know. He loves us so much, that even if there were only one of us He would have sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us. Jesus loves you. I don’t know all the reasons why He allowed your parents to die, but I do know that He promises that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God.’ I have found that to be true in my life so far.”

He shook his head. “I can’t believe that. I need time to think. I...” He was at a loss for words.

I did not know what to say either, and so just waited in silence.

Finally he took my hand, kissed it and excused himself. I slowly made my way to my room. My heart was full to overflowing with love. The hate and anger I had felt against him had melted and love and compassion had taken its place. *This must have been how Jesus felt when He was moved with compassion upon the multitudes. My heart is bursting to overflowing in a desire to show this man Jesus’ love. Oh, thank You, Lord, for taking away the anger and bitterness and giving me Your love. Please help the things that I said to him to take root in his mind and please do the work that I can’t do and bring him to You.* I felt at peace when I went to sleep, cuddling little Pasha in my arms.

When I awoke the next morning, General Yipsin and his entourage had already left.

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## COLONEL SOLZHYNESKY

Snow was falling softly and the ground was covered in white. My mind drifted back to the Christmases of the last years—they had been so different, so happy. I had thought I had problems because I didn’t know whether or not to marry Pawel and some internal struggles about the faith and beliefs of my friend Gregory and my brother Jan, but those problems paled in comparison to what I was experiencing now. *It is funny, how trouble that seems so large at the time in actual reality is so very small. I wonder if I will look back on all of this someday as lightly as I feel about past incidents.*

It was the Christmas of 1939—the first year of World War II. The Russians had invaded Poland from the east, the Germans from the west. The Polish army was now totally defeated, and my desperate letters in search of my husband had turned up nothing. All I could do was wait, pray, and do my best to keep on living and loving those around me who needed me—my son, my mother-in-law, our servants—who had become more like our family—and those from the village, who still looked up to those with the name “Wyszyński” and took courage from my faith.

“The people are here. We had best begin,” Magda said softly as she took Pasha from my arms. He was

a chubby five-month-old baby who loved to smile and laugh. He was in love with his nanny, Magda, and caring for him had grown her up as well.

“I am sorry. I was lost in thought about past Christmases in a happier time and place. It seems like so much has changed since then—and in such a short while.” I reached down and picked up my well-worn Bible. *Wouldn't Gregory be proud of me if he saw me now? A regular preacher is what I have become!* I shot up a prayer for him, wherever he was, and went out with Magda to our nightly prayer meeting.

It had all started with the girls who were being used as “entertainment” for the men. We were not always “open for business” or when we were, there was not always a full house, so I started reading the Bible and praying with the ones who could attend on a nightly basis. Word soon spread to their families, who also started attending.

Since the communists had entered the country, the local church had been shut down. The priest had died of pneumonia and no efforts had been made to find a new one. Our requests for a new priest were ignored, and I guess the people started coming to me simply for lack of someone else to go to. At first I recoiled at the thought of being a teacher when I felt I still had so much to learn, but with Elizabeth's help, encouragement, and prodding, I stepped out by faith and found that I learned and grew just as much as my students as we studied God's Word together, prayed together, and banded together for the strength we needed to carry on.

I was aware that any kind of meeting was officially banned and punishable by death or, at the very least, imprisonment, during this time of war. The Soviets were afraid of any sort of organized uprising, so we had to be very discreet. We held the meetings nightly, but

only three or four attended at a time and then went and shared what we learned together with others. I thought that maybe Sasha had an inkling about what was going on, as he once or twice alluded to the amount of visitors I received on a nightly basis, but he had said nothing so far. Boris had been transferred, thankfully, due to a number of army code infractions on his part. We all breathed a sigh of relief when he left.

We were kept busy and worked very hard throughout the day. Because of the war, we needed to be self-sufficient. All farms in the area were put to work supplying food not only for our village, but for the Soviet army at the front and its frequent visiting officers. My brother Adam's farm was relied on heavily because it was quite prosperous and although he hated being a part of supplying the Russian army, like me, he was trapped and so did what he needed to in order to survive. We were just thankful to have escaped massacre, which several of our neighboring towns and villages had not.

As I was on my way to the meeting, I saw Sasha passing in the hall. On impulse I stopped him and greeted him with, “Merry Christmas!”

He turned a little pale, but then his eyes grew misty and he whispered back, “The same to you, madam.”

I was taken aback by this show of emotion, as he was usually quite staid and formal with me and always called me “Comrade.” Again on impulse I said, “Sasha, some of my friends and I would like to meet together to sing some Christmas carols—which is a Polish tradition. Would you like to join us?”

I thought I saw a look of fear in his eyes, replaced once again by the misty-eyed look—perhaps one of nostalgia.

“No, no, I really could not. You really shouldn't be doing that either, madam, if you know what is good



for you. It is for your own safety that I speak. If one of the other soldiers should hear you..." He trailed off. It was clear he was not going to betray us, but he did not feel that all of the soldiers were to be trusted. I thanked him politely and left.

Sasha called after me, "Oh, madam, I have a letter for you. Please wait a moment."

My heart skipped a beat. *Could it be Pawel? Oh Lord, let it be from Pawel!* My hands were shaking as I took the sealed envelope from Sasha. There was no address, only my name on the front. I hurriedly tore the envelope open and scanned the letter as to who the sender was. My heart sank as I realized the hand writing was not familiar and it was not from Pawel. The letter read simply:

*Madam,*

*I regret to say that I have been re-assigned and will no longer be involved in the Polish campaign. I am writing this letter to take leave of you and to express my appreciation for your time and attention to myself and the soldiers in my command. I have thought about what you said to me. I cannot comment now, but suffice it to say that your kindnesses have given me much food for thought. I hope you do not forget me entirely and I hope that our meeting was as pleasant to you as it was for me.*

*Sincerely,*

*General Alexei Alexanderovich Yipsin*

*P.S. I have been looking into the whereabouts of a certain man and if I find him, I will try to send you word.*

My first reaction was to heave a sigh of relief. The Lord had told me that it would only be for a time and it had been shorter than I had expected. However, when re-reading the letter, I was puzzled at its tone and even its meaning. I finally realized that he was writing in a cryptic manner so that if anyone were to read it, which doubtless the censors did, they would not read anything into it other than a polite taking of leave.

I re-read the letter once again, asking the Lord to show me what he was really trying to say, and I was touched to see that I really had made a difference in his life and given him something to think about. It was the most humble tone I had ever heard him take with anyone in the time I had known him. I realized that the certain man was most likely Pawel or possibly Jan—both of whom I had mentioned to him, and was dying to hear from. I prayed that he would be successful in tracking one or both of them down. After reading the letter again I prayed for the general, that the things we had spoken about would stay with him and that somehow he would come to know and love the Lord.



"Magda? Magda, where are you?" I wandered around the house, but no one was to be seen. I had stopped in the library to read the letter and when I came out, all was quiet. It was evening, but not that early and I was wondering where everyone was. Our meeting place was a remote room in the west wing of the house that used to be a guest room. None of the soldiers ever went down there, as it was somewhat in disrepair, which made for a perfect place to meet, but when I made it there about fifteen minutes late for our meeting, no one was there. Now, as I came out of the west wing into the main area of the house, I was surprised to see the whole staff and all the girls lined up looking nervously at a bespectacled officer

who was inspecting them all as if they were a group of his soldiers.

“Oh, there you are!” Sasha moved quietly towards me and whispered nervously in my ear. “This is all quite unexpected. Colonel Solzhynesky has replaced General Yipsin, and this establishment is now one of his ‘concerns.’ This visit was meant to catch us unawares and I should say it did.” He paused and then added, “I would start praying right about now.”

I raised my eyebrows questioningly and was about to whisper something back when the colonel barked a question in Sasha’s direction. I realized that once again I could use my cover of being Polish but listening and understanding the Russian soldiers. Sasha knew I spoke Russian, and a few of the other soldiers might have known as well, but I had continued to speak Polish with everyone except General Yipsin, so there was a possibility that the new colonel wouldn’t find out, at least not right away. I listened closely to their exchange to try to get a clue to the new colonel’s personality. I did not like what I heard.

“What the devil are you doing over there whispering with that capitalist whore?”

*Whore!* I recoiled at the word. Somehow the word must have gotten out about our activities and apparently I had been given the blame for them. *Oh God, give me wisdom and faith.*

“Sir, may I present Madam Wyszynski. She has graciously been hosting recreational activities for the great army of the Soviet Union.”

“Recreational activities? And who, may I ask—or should I say, dare I ask—authorized such activities during a time such as this, a time of war?”

Sasha stammered and stuttered around for a few minutes and then managed to get out, “Colonel ... I mean General Yipsin, comrade sir!”

The colonel stopped for a moment, his face turning red, and spoke almost to himself. “I should have known, that scoundrel. Don’t look so shocked. I know he outranks me, but he has not heard the end of this. Such blatant disregard for our moral code is enough to get him a dishonorable discharge. Who gives a flying hoot if he is a war hero and beloved by his men? He has not heard the last of this!”

“And you”—he turned to face the quaking Sasha—“you have been privy to all of this and have been carrying out his commands and never said anything or reported it? This will be in a report to my superiors and you have not heard the end of this either. I hereby announce that this establishment is closed. Get rid of these girls. And that Madam, what’s her name?—Confine her to her room until we get to the bottom of this. Someone has been corrupting our Soviet troops and if she is at the bottom of all this, she shall pay.” He didn’t even bother to look in my direction, but rather nodded curtly and then was gone.

Most of the girls and servants did not understand a word that was said and looked on bewilderedly as the whole exchange took place. After the colonel was gone, Sasha gave some orders to some of the soldiers who were standing around stupefied at the turn of events. I had heard that soldiers who were assigned to guard our “establishment” as it was now called, were envied by others for the easy job and beautiful women, however, I was sure no one envied them now. The girls quickly scurried off to get their few belongings and return home. I thanked God that they were spared, at least so far, but fear was rising in my throat as I thought of what was in store for me and my little family if I was to be blamed for all of this.

*How can this be?* I wondered as Sasha apologetically led me to my quarters. *I stood up against General Yipsin.*

*I fought it and tried to stop it, but ended up reluctantly going along with it, thinking that in so doing I would save my family and this town. The Lord even showed me to go along with them! What did I do wrong? Why, Lord, is this happening?*

Romans 8:28 flashed into my head.

*Yes, even now there has to be a reason. There has to be some good to come out of this.*

“Forgive me, madam,” Sasha whispered. “I will do what I can for you, but I can promise nothing, as I am afraid that my life is also on the line here.”

“Surely it is not your fault, Sasha!” I exclaimed. “Your job, maybe, but not your life! What is he going to do? Execute us for prostitution?”

“It is more serious than you realize. We—you and I—are caught in a dangerous game, a quest for power. Men will do much for power, influence, and fame. And those to whom it is denied quickly turn bitter and hateful.”

He spoke cryptically, glancing over his shoulder every few seconds as if he was sure someone was going to jump out and arrest him then and there.

“I-I don’t understand,” I stammered. “What are they going to do to us? Why has our fortune changed so drastically and without warning?”

He shook his head and turned as if to go, then stopped, reconsidered, and turned back. “You may as well know so you can prepare yourself for what is ahead, but if anyone ever asks, you did not learn this from me. Do you understand?”

I nodded solemnly.

He took a deep breath and explained, “General Yipsin and Colonel Solzhynesky have been rivals for a good while now. Solzhynesky has been around much longer than Yipsin, but due to Yipsin’s character, his ability to excite loyalty and fervor in the troops, as well

as his ability to provide lip service to the Great Soviet Republic, and due to his heroic efforts in the last war, he has been quickly promoted. He and Solzhynesky were both up for promotion and Yipsin is the one who got it. This has made an already jealous Solzhynesky unbearably vengeful. He cannot take away Yipsin’s promotion, so he wishes to stain his reputation, and we are his perfect tool.”

“But why? What have we done wrong?”

“You don’t know much about the Soviet system, do you?”

I shook my head.

“We supposedly have morals and one thing that is not accepted is promiscuity—at least not the type we hosted in this establishment.”

I stifled a laugh. “You wouldn’t know it if you watched all those Soviet officers who frequented our establishment,” I burst out.

Sasha frowned a little and continued. “I suppose Yipsin felt secure enough in his power to flout the rules a little bit for the morale of the men, and his overseers chose to turn a blind eye because of his influence and his abilities. A man of his talent does not come along often.” It was apparent that Sasha admired the general immensely. “So anyway, as long as it was done in a hush-hush manner, all was well. After all, men are men, and men have needs.” He blushed suddenly, realizing he was speaking to a woman.

He cleared his throat and said, “To get to the point, as long as no one brought it up, it was okay, but it appears likely to me that one of the officers who came through here was reassigned to Colonel Solzhynesky’s command, and must have mentioned this place to him. Then, probably as soon as Yipsin had been promoted, the colonel likely requested a transfer to this area so that he could expose the general and use

this place to besmirch his name. I doubt that General Yipsin will get much of a punishment, as he has too many friends in high places, but it will definitely be an embarrassment to him.”

“And where do we fit in in all of this?” I asked suspiciously.

“We, my dear, are the scapegoats. Don’t you see? I will probably be dishonorably discharged at the very least, and you ... I don’t know what will become of you. Your nightly meetings have also been reported to the colonel, who is a very staunch atheist. I would start praying desperately right about now.”

I nodded affirmatively. I did not want this man to see the fear I felt.

Then I heard him whisper, “Pray for me too, if you can spare a prayer.”

I was touched to see this man who usually was so very guarded let down his guard a little. I promised to pray for him, took his hand, thanked him, and let him go.

Magda was in the corner rocking baby Pasha. I went over and took him from her with tears in my eyes. As I held him to my breast I wondered what would become of them. Magda had become like a sister to me over the last few months. She was still quite young—only eighteen, but the events of the last couple of months had grown her up immensely. We had grown very close. I desperately wanted to protect her and, of course, my dear Pasha, from whatever was ahead. An idea started to form in my head. I hated the thought of it. I tried to shut it out of my mind, but it kept coming back, stronger and stronger. I finally locked myself into our little bathroom to pray. When I came out, I knew what I had to do.

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## GOODBYE

Now comes the difficult part of my story, the part I do not like to re-live. The beauty of it, though, is that now all the trials and tribulations I went through seem like such a small thing, such a ... how do you say it? ... a “drop in the bucket?” compared to the wonders, beauties, joys, and rewards I have received for being a faithful servant of the Lord. Anyway, on with my story.

I sat up late that night cradling Pasha, singing to him and then, once he was asleep, writing a long, long letter to him telling him everything I could think of about his family, his heritage, the Lord, and most of all my love for him and the reasons behind the decision I was making. I prayed and hoped with all my heart that I wouldn’t have to go through with it, but I wanted to be ready just in case. Then, with a heavy heart I woke Magda and told her my plan.

“Magda, I love you dearly. You are like a sister to me. I know you love me and I do not doubt your love and devotion to Pasha.”

She nodded, somewhat sleepily. She obviously could not figure out why I had woken her so late at night.

I continued, “If anything should happen to me, which I am almost certain it will, I want you to take Pasha and go to Valeriya and Igor’s farm. It is so out of

the way that I don't think anyone will bother you there. See if you can get your boyfriend, Henrik, to join you. I know him. He is a capable and reliable fellow, and he is presently sitting on his hands in the village with nothing to do. Valeriya and Igor had a cellar stocked with food supplies, enough to last them a month or two, maybe more. Henrik knows where it is, as I sent him there a few weeks ago to check on the farm and he reported that it was intact. The pigs are rather skinny and the horses seem to have broken free and are roaming wild, but come back to the barn for their hay. You may be able to re-domesticate them."

Magda did not say anything, but just stared at me wide-eyed, with tears streaming down her face.

I was choked up as well and trying not to cry. "I love you Magda, and I know you will take good care of Pasha. Would you do that for me?"

She nodded vehemently and threw herself into my arms, sobbing. The dam broke loose and I started crying too. We wept in each other's arms for a long, long time.

"God forbid that this should ever have to happen! But if it does, I solemnly swear that I will love and care for dear little Pasha and return him to his father or you, if and when you return. He will always know what brave, wonderful parents he has. I will make sure of that." Magda pulled away from me with a look of solemn determination in her eyes. She was so unlike the little flighty, easily upset creature I had known when I first moved into the Wyszyński household. I marveled at how she had changed and grown through the adversity.

"And please teach him about the Lord," I interjected, still crying.

"Of course I will. You needn't have asked."

"Here is a letter for him, when he gets old enough. And here is a key."

Magda looked at me questioningly.

"It is the key to what remains of the Wyszyński fortune, in our secret vault. Mama Wyszyński is the only other person who knows the location, and she does not have a key. I am entrusting this to you with the stipulation that you only use it for the care and upkeep of my son and other members of my family and this household. I do not know who else to give it to." I then explained to her where to find the vault.

Magda was again overwhelmed with tears. "I will not let you down. I will not let you down." She wept and repeated that phrase over and over.

I took her in my arms again and we prayed and poured out our hearts to the Lord together. As the sun was rising, we both fell asleep.



The days passed slowly. I was not allowed out of my quarters, although Magda was allowed out to fetch food and drink and to take Pasha out for air. I pumped her for information of what was happening, but she could find out very little. I spent my time caring for Pasha and adding more to the letter I was writing to him. I wanted him to know me well. Finally, three days after I had been confined to my room I heard a convoy of vehicles pull up. I quickly went to the window and strained to hear what was going on outside. As I was listening, Magda dashed in the door.

"That evil colonel is back! He has a lot of soldiers with him this time. I heard someone say something about using this as a headquarters for the military here. They have let the servants go and he is bringing in his own, trusted staff. I don't know what they are going to do with us!"

"Let's pray and be ready for the worst," I replied. Now that it was upon us I did not feel fear, only a great need to pray. We desperately prayed together

and asked the Lord what we should do. We both felt that we should execute the plan we had prepared. So, with a heavy heart I watched Magda pack her last few belongings in a bag with Pasha's, then in order not to be conspicuous, she took a pile of our dirty linens and walked out with it towards the washroom, the bag hidden in the pile. She had pre-arranged a hiding place for it with Henrik, who said he would pick it up after dark and take it to Valeriya's farm.

When Magda came back she had more bad news to report. Ela Wyszynski had passed away in the night and they were even now burying her. In a way I was saddened, but I knew that she would be happier in Heaven with her beloved husband. I said a prayer for her soul, and from my bedroom window silently wished her farewell.

My thoughts were interrupted by a knock on my door. It was Sasha, looking very upset. "I am so very sorry, madam, but you are to be moved to one of our prison camps up north tonight. You will be told officially in a few hours, but I came to warn you. There is nothing I can do for you, but your son..." He paused, looking at Pasha who sat there gurgling.

Sasha had grown quite fond of the child and had at times even come in to play with him.

"I already have a plan for him. Do you think they will insist on taking him too?"

"No. They are not interested in him, or any of the servants for that matter. Don't tell me your plan. What I don't know can't hurt me, but I wish you success." With that, he was gone.

I turned to Magda with tears in my eyes. "Now is the time. You must go. I will pray for you and my dear Pasha every day. You don't know how thankful I am that I can leave him with someone I love and trust."

Magda started to cry but swallowed hard and nodded her head. She bundled up Pasha and then brought him over to me to say goodbye.

I kissed him, prayed for him and literally watered him with my tears. He grew very solemn, as if he knew something important was happening, and then at the end of my prayer he gave me the most beautiful smile. I never forgot that smile.

Magda again piled up dirty laundry, this time on Pasha and made her way to the wash house, not even looking back once. I threw myself on my bed and cried till I had no tears left. Then I got quiet and listened.

*When thou passeth through the waters I will be with thee and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. I will care for My own and your little one is safe in My hands. I have a mission for you and you will fulfill it. Lean wholly on Me and trust wholly in Me and I will see you through. I care for you and I love you. Not one hair of your head falls to the ground but I know.*

I breathed deeply and calmed myself and thanked God for His infinite love and care. I prayed again and committed the care of my son into God's hands and then got up, quickly bathed, washed my hair, packed a small bag with essentials for the prison camp, and prepared myself for this mysterious mission that God had for me.

## **PRISON CAMP**

The road was rough and bumpy and my back hurt from trying to balance on the bench against the back of the uncovered army truck. I had a blanket wrapped around me for warmth. The few other passengers were huddled together on the other side of the truck, all looking rather forlorn. The soldiers seemed to think I was some sort of security risk, as I had two soldiers on either side of me. My thoughts drifted to Magda and Pasha and then to my beloved Pawel.

Sasha had managed to slip me a note before I left, telling me that Magda and Pasha were safely off the property, and that as long as he was around, he would look out for them. It seemed that he was not going to be discharged after all, only disciplined with some sort of army restrictions for his part in the whole thing. I was to bear the majority of the blame.

My interview with Colonel Solzhynsky was very short and terse. He had asked my name and if I had any relatives close by. I told him no. I saw no reason to purposely implicate anyone else in this so-called scandal. He then rattled off the charges against me—corrupting Soviet troops, and espionage. I was shocked at the untruth of the charges, but he was not interested in my side of the story. He then presented me with a paper to sign, which basically was a confession, and a

statement renouncing my religion. He explained that if I signed it I would receive better treatment. I refused. He asked why and I explained that number one, the charges were false and number two, I could not commit to the Communist Party and its goals and ideals—and most importantly, I was a Christian and no matter what they did to me I would not renounce my faith. He was infuriated by that. He barked a few orders to the soldiers near him and I was herded at gunpoint into the back of one of the waiting transport trucks.

Now it was midnight and I looked above at the twinkling stars and prayed and lifted my heart to the Lord. Someone started whimpering at the other end of the truck. I wondered why they were taken. Some of the faces were familiar—folks who had attended our Bible studies regularly. I had heard that the colonel had started going through and “purging” our village, and many of the girls and their families had already been taken away, and those who hadn’t had fled for their lives.

The pain of separation from Pasha and the fear I felt started to overwhelm me. I began singing very quietly. When no one stopped me I sang louder, some of the hymns I had learned from Valeriya. All became quiet and I felt as if I was in a church. I felt the Lord so near and dear. Finally I was able to drop off into a dozing sleep. When I awoke at daybreak we were pulling into the camp.



The morning after I awoke in an unfamiliar bunk with the sunshine streaming into my face. I was disoriented and conscious of throbbing pain in my engorged breasts. I reached for my beloved Pasha and a sob arose in my throat as I realized he was not with me. Now it all came back to me—the humiliation of being stripped and forced to wash in front of all

those guards—mainly men—who were leering at me and the other women in my company. The miracle of being able to smuggle in my wedding ring, gold chain, and the pages I was able to tear out of the New Testament and stuff into my cheeks. I was afraid they would think I had the fattest cheeks of the century, but there was such a confusion that no one seemed to notice. Everything else I had packed in my little overnight bag was confiscated, with the exception of some blankets and sweaters, which I was told to keep close watch over if I wished to retain them, as they were in high demand in the camp, especially during this cold weather.

They had put us to work straightaway that first morning shoveling snow around the site and clearing pathways, as a fresh snow had fallen in the night. Having spent the night in the back of a truck the night before and only eating a crust of day old, black bread didn’t help matters much, and by nightfall we collapsed into our hard beds and fell fast asleep.

“Who are you?” I was startled out of my thoughts by a high, thin voice close by my head. I opened my eyes and looked to see a small girl of maybe seven or eight sitting beside my bed. She was dressed in a coat many sizes too large for her and had a stocking cap pulled down around her ears and almost covering her eyes. Her eyes were very large and round—and sad.

I smiled weakly before answering. “My name is Anja. Anja Wyszyński.”

“Will you be my mama?”

I was startled awake by this pathetic question from this small, thin little girl. “Why darling? Where is your mama?”

“They sent her away on the train. Papa went first, then my big brother Tima, and now all that is left is me and my little sister Dasha, who is too little to even



walk. My grandmama was taking care of us, but she is too sick now.” She said all of this matter-of-factly as if it was an everyday occurrence to be separated from both parents and left all alone.

I was horrified! I had never heard of such evil, such cruelty! Children at a prison camp, separated from their parents! Tears sprang to my eyes and in a fit of emotion I spread my arms and took her into them and hugged her and wept.

She only sat very still and let me hug her, wide-eyed and quiet. Finally she pulled away and asked me again, very matter-of-factly, “So, will you be mine and Dasha’s mama?”

I nodded and before I knew it she was off like a rocket and back again carrying her baby sister. I gasped to see a beautiful, small baby. She didn’t look much older than Pasha, although the little girl (whom I later found out was called Katinka) said Dasha had been born in the Spring, which would have made her older than Pasha. She was obviously undernourished, though, and that may have accounted for her smallness. She did not cry, but was much like her sister, taking everything in with a strange and solemn acceptance. I took her in my arms and she clung to me as if she had known me all her life. I felt my milk come in and although at first my mind fought against the idea, my heart yearned to take her to my breast and when I did, she sucked greedily and contentedly and then, after a long while in my arms, fell fast asleep.

As I lay there with that beautiful babe in my arms I lifted my heart to the Lord through my tears, asking Him to help me give these two, beautiful children all the love they needed, for as long as I could.

A blast of a horn woke me from my reverie. It was the guards coming through in search of able-bodied men, women, and older children to work in the camp.

I sat up and took the now-crying baby Dasha and Katinka in my arms and we sat huddled there until a guard approached us.

“Oh, another little mother. Let me see your muscles, little mother,” he said mockingly in Russian as he grabbed at my arm. He then took a better look at me and turned to his friend who was standing beside him. “We have a fresh little tart here. We should save her for later.”

I prayed silently and clutched the children tighter. A slight moan escaped Katinka’s lips, but she said nothing.

“You big oaf!” the second man said. “You can never do anything unless your little brain tells you to! Can’t you see her baby is ill? Leave her alone! The children will be motherless soon enough anyway. Give her some time with them at least!”

“You softy!” The first guard again turned to look at me and seemed to devour me with his eyes. “Okay,” he said with a relenting sigh. “I guess we can find somebody else.”

With that they moved on to another bedside and I could see them yanking a young boy out of bed. He couldn’t have been much older than twelve or thirteen. He was desperately thin and protesting in Polish that he was unable to do hard work, but they laughed at him and kicked him in the behind as they herded him out the door to work with the others.

When they were gone sobs shook my body! I had been so very terrified for a moment of what they had in store for me. I knew it was a complete miracle of God that I had been spared a humiliating, painful, and possibly life-threatening situation. I thanked God that Katinka did not understand Russian and did not know what the guards were talking about. She was frightened by them, but at least she didn’t hear the

part about her losing me soon, just when we had found each other. I wondered just how long I would last at this camp, and if I left, where I would be sent.

“Come and meet my grandma,” she said, adopting me then and there, without any further question as to who I was or where I was from. She grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the roughly constructed tin hut. I wrapped my blankets around myself, her, and the baby to keep us warm—and also to guard them from being stolen—and walked to another hut across the way, also laid out with wall-to-wall triple-deck beds made from rough-hewn wood.

On a bed in the corner lay a very old woman who looked like every ounce of life was drained out of her. She lay very still and silent, and only smiled a grim smile and put out her hand when Katinka walked up and said to her very loudly, “Look Grandma, I have a new mama! I shall never forget my first mama and shall always pray for her, but God has sent me a new one. Isn’t that wonderful?”

The grandma looked at me with tears welling up in her eyes and then heaved a heavy sigh. She closed her eyes and breathed her last breath. Then, she was gone.

“Grandma, wake up! Wake up! You told me to pray and that God would give me a new mama to look after me and Dasha—see He did! Wake up! Wake up!”

I took her aside and as gently as I could explained to her that her grandma was in Heaven now—in a place where no soldiers could hurt her, in a place that was warm with plenty of food and nice soft beds and lots of love and care. I didn’t know too much about Heaven myself, but I knew it had to be a wonderful place if Jesus was preparing it for us, as He had promised He was in the book of John, so I tried to comfort her with that. She looked at me uncomprehendingly at first,

and then tears welled up and she broke into violent sobs and clung to me for dear life. She must have cried for half an hour, when suddenly she stopped, looked at me and said, “I have no more tears left to cry. You are all I have left. Please never leave me.”

My heart felt wrenched as I did not know if I could promise that, but I nodded mutely and took her gently, and together we walked back to the hut I was staying in.

And so we became a family. Katinka turned out to be a very smart little girl, with good manners and a kind heart. Her parents had taught her well and she knew much about the Lord. We would pray and talk together. I told her all the Bible stories I knew and read to her from parts of the New Testament that I had ripped out of the Bible and smuggled into the camp. They had forbidden anything religious in the prison camps, so we had to be very careful. She especially wanted to hear about Heaven and we read all the passages I could find on the subject over and over.

And so the first two weeks passed. It was cold, very cold, and the food was scarce, but miraculously my milk supply was kept up, and little Dasha soon started showing some signs of health as she nursed much of the time and clung to me when she was not nursing. The guards did not bother me and I soon established a kind of routine with my little family.

And then the train arrived.

## **THE LONG TRAIN RIDE**

It was early in the morning in January. I was sleeping on one of the hard, bottom bunks in the far corner of my tin hut with Katinka and Dasha beside me. It was very cold and we were huddled together for warmth. Suddenly, I opened my eyes and was wide awake. A premonition had come over me—one that was not good. I felt no fear, but I knew that the trials were not over. I prayed and asked my dear, loving Savior what was in store, and as I lay thinking and praying, I drifted back to sleep and had the strangest dream. I saw myself packing the baby and Katinka in a crate and loading it on to something. People were screaming and crying around me and I was telling them to stay calm. I packed the crate with blankets and then I saw strong arms pick them up. My stomach lurched within me and then everything became a blur. I heard loud ringing in my ears and then a siren and children crying. All of a sudden I realized I wasn't dreaming anymore—Katinka and Dasha were crying and a siren was wailing over the camp. I heard the distant sound of a train's whistle, and suddenly realized that this was the premonition I had had. In my sudden haste to hush and comfort the children I did not have time to think about the strange dream.

“Mama, oh Mama, what will become of us? The train has come and they will take you away—I know they will!” Katinka, who had not cried a single tear since the day her grandma died was wailing and weeping in my arms. Dasha cried too, since her sister was crying. Some of the others in the room were yelling for them to shut up, and others were huddling fearfully together as they listened to the eerie sound of the siren wail. One teenage girl was sobbing in a corner. I was desperate to know what to do. I felt certain that Katinka was right—I would be sent on the train, and then who could know what would happen to these two precious little girls? Katinka might survive, but little Dasha didn’t stand a chance. In the two short weeks that we had been together we had become a family. I had already lost one family. I wasn’t about to lose another without a fight.

“Oh Jesus, show me what to do!” It was the heartcry of one very desperate. I felt a lump well up in my throat but could not cry as I sat helplessly and held my two children as they cried and listened to the siren wail. I heard loudspeakers blaring somewhere at the other end of the camp and felt panic arise in my throat. Suddenly, like a flash, the dream I had came back to me. It seemed too absurd. I couldn’t imagine why I would want to put the girls into a crate. Again I prayed desperately for guidance and again, the dream came back to me as clearly as if it had already happened in real life.

Suddenly, as if someone else was propelling me, I grabbed both the girls and all our belongings, which consisted of some extra clothing and blankets, and hurried out the door of the hut, which amazingly was not locked. The cold winter air stung my cheeks as I held them close. The siren stopped suddenly. It was still dark outside and except for the search lights and the distant sound of someone speaking into a megaphone

and the whistle of the train that was drawing closer, all was silent and still. I hunched in the darkness next to the hut, wondering why I was out there and what I would do next. I strained to hear the man speaking over the megaphone and realized it was a briefing to the Russian soldiers. I listened closer and heard them directing one company to get a group of able-bodied men to load the crates.

“Crates!—Okay Lord, but how?” By now the girls had stopped whimpering and were very still and quiet. I began making my way with them towards the noise and commotion, which I soon realized was where the train was now sitting on its tracks. I could make out ten freight cars that looked like they had seen better days. I hid in the shadows and watched as soldiers were loading what looked like supplies on to one of the cars. They were in large square crates—maybe a meter square. I looked around and saw a pile of empty ones in the corner. *Why would I want to load my children into one of those crates?* I questioned to myself. Then I realized that people were being loaded into the other freight cars. I cringed as I saw children being taken away from their parents, husbands being taken away from their wives, friends and loved ones being separated. There was a load of children being piled into one of the army trucks, all crying and screaming for their parents. My heart nearly stopped as I heard one of the soldiers say to the other in Russian, “Where is that healthy looking Polish girl that we just brought in a few weeks ago?”

“You mean the religious one?”

“Yeah! We are supposed to make sure she is on the train.”

“Isn’t she a mother?”

“Nah! She just felt sorry for a few urchins and adopted them. They’ll have to go with the other children to...” Then they passed out of hearing. I was surprised

that they knew so much about me and knew then that the Lord must have somehow protected me from them up until now. I also knew then that my only hope of saving my children was to take them with me somehow. I was hidden for the moment in the shadows behind the crates, but once the winter sun rose, there would be nowhere to hide in this barren camp. So hiding and escaping was out of the question.

“Katinka, look at me. They want to put me on the train.”

Katinka started to cry, but I held her head in my hands and shook her gently. “You can’t cry now, you must be strong! I am going to pack you and your little sister in one of these crates with some blankets. You are coming with me. I don’t know how, but this is what the Lord showed me to do. You must curl up small and be still as a mouse. Do you understand?”

Katinka nodded mutely, a tear trickling down her cheek. Miraculously, baby Dasha had fallen back to sleep and didn’t stir while I went and grabbed one of the crates, lined it with a blanket, and then put them both inside and covered them with another blanket. With a desperate prayer on my lips, I picked up my precious cargo and struggled with it in the direction of where the soldiers were packing.

“Oh, there she is! Hey you, girl, what are you doing over there? Are you out of your mind? Do you want to get shot for escaping or something? Is that it?” It was the coarse guard, the one who had contemplated raping me when I had first arrived. He let out a string of expletives which I won’t repeat and then hollered at his friend, the second guard, in Russian. “What is she doing with that crate? Although I must admit, she is strong. I like strong women.”

“Shut up! Now is no time for jokes!” I could tell that this other soldier was touched by the sight of the

people being loaded onto the trains and the children crying for their parents. He had a heart! I prayed that the Lord would use him somehow to help me. He came towards me as I continued to struggle with my precious cargo towards the train.

“Here, let me take that,” he said. He picked it up and right then Dasha moaned. He started suddenly and almost dropped the crate, but then stopped, seemed to think for a split second and then turned to me. “Do you know what you are doing?” he asked.

I looked at him narrowly and nodded slowly.

“Okay, I’ll load this for you.” And without another word he was gone with the crate, while the uncouth fellow had his hand on me and looked at me leeringly as he led me into a freight car a few cars down from the one that my crate was being put onto—which, unbeknownst to him, carried something much more precious than food and supplies.



It took the guards nearly three hours to load everyone up. From snatches of conversation around me I had gathered that this was some sort of temporary camp and now they were emptying it. We couldn’t leave until everyone was accounted for. All of the able-bodied adults and young people were loaded up—as well as some who didn’t look very able bodied. The very ill were loaded into army trucks and the children and very old were loaded into other trucks. I had no idea where they were headed.

Inside the railway car there were four-tiered bunks, just high enough to lay down in. They stacked people in like they were sardines in a can. I managed to get a bunk with a small window beside it. It had been sealed shut with cotton and glue, but I knew how to unseal it if it became necessary to get fresh air, and I was so thankful for the small favors from the Lord.

The narrow aisle between the bunks was covered with straw, and there was a hole in the floor on the far end that was for bathroom purposes. The lady beside me was sobbing quietly and I could hear other moans coming from around the car. The car was locked up tight once it was loaded, and it seemed that we were going to be left to ourselves during the trip.

I felt so helpless, knowing that my two dear little children were sitting in a cargo box in the supply wagon. All I could do was pray, and pray I did! I prayed desperately for them the whole time and also for the kind-hearted guard. I knew that it would be a total miracle if they were not discovered—or if they were, to be allowed to remain on the train.

Finally, with a lurch, the train took off and started slowly on its way, we knew not where. I kept praying and crying silently until I could pray no more and drifted off into a fitful sleep.



I was awakened with a sharp nudge. “You, woman, come with me!” It was the guard who had taken the crate from me. He sounded so different from what I thought had only been a few hours before. I was aghast when I looked out my small window and realized it was already dusk outside. I feared the worst as I wiggled out of my bunk and followed him shakily down the long corridor and out, in-between the railway cars.

Going from one car to the next was no easy task on a moving train, but I managed to keep up. He did not utter one word or look at me, and I was kept in total suspense as we made our way through one more, similar wagon and then into the supply car. There, to my surprise, was a group of officers sitting around a pot-belly stove. One of them had a balalaika and was playing some music and Katinka was dancing around and laughing. I heard Dasha crying and the soldier

(whom I found out was an officer by the respect he was given when he entered the room) announced in Russian, “I found this lady to nurse the baby. You, Oleg, give her the baby! I know you are attached to it, but give it to her anyway, just for a little while.”

Katinka gave a squeal when she saw me and started to run to me, but I gave her a stern look and with a God-given wisdom, which I knew was more than her years, she stopped in her tracks, gave a little laugh and ignored me. The nasty guard seemed to recognize me, but a hard look from the kind-hearted officer shut him up. I wondered what he had been threatened with to keep his mouth shut.

The officer who had brought me there pulled me by the arm over to a corner where sacks of flour were stacked. He nudged a young soldier and got him to build a little enclave where I could nurse the baby out of the sight of the other soldiers. Then he brought me Dasha. She stopped crying when she saw me and eagerly took my breast, which by now was very full of milk. She drank greedily for almost forty minutes and whenever the guards came to take her back she cried so loudly that they let her continue. Finally, she fell asleep.

The officer came back and said in a very quiet voice, “I will take the baby. No harm will come to her. You will come here daily three times a day and nurse her. Can she eat any food?”

I did not know that much about babies, but Dasha was about nine months old and I had heard Elizabeth talking about feeding babies of that age, so I answered that I thought she may be able to eat porridge.

He nodded and then took her from me and brought her back to Oleg, who took her with a great smile on his face and laid her tenderly down in the blanket-padded crate that had held her and Katinka. I was surprised to see such humanness, such warmth,

from these soldiers who until now had been so very heartless. They were humans, just like me, and had a heart, just like me. I realized that many of them probably had wives and children at home. They were only following orders, trying to stay alive so they could get home someday, to their families. My heart was filled with relief as I knew then that they would take good care of my precious little ones until such a time as we reached our destination. I did not know where we were going or what would happen when we got there, but I knew that the Lord had not failed me so far, and so why would He fail me now?

The officer (whom I later learned was named Fyodor) took me by the arm and made a show of roughly escorting me out of the railway car and through the other car, to my own bunk. As he was watching me get back in I turned to him and whispered, "God bless you!"

To my great surprise he answered back, "God bless you too." Then he turned smartly on his heels and left me marveling at the strange, miracle-working power of God.



Hours turned into days and the days turned to weeks as we rolled across the Russian steppe, through the Ural Mountains and then into the Siberian forest, the taiga. We often only traveled a few miles a day. There were many times when the rails were blocked by snowstorms and prisoners were taken out to shovel snow and clear the tracks. Other days, when we rolled into a town, the soldiers would get out to buy food and supplies and we would be left in the standing train, sometimes for hours, waiting for the train to start again. Thankfully, during those stops I was happy to see through my little window that Katinka and sometimes Dasha were taken out for some fresh air.

The railway car was cold, but because of the body heat generated by all the people in the car we were able to keep from freezing. As the officer had said, I was taken every day, three times a day, to nurse Dasha. She always took a long time and I took the opportunity to sit quietly and listen to the soldiers talk and try to figure out something about them and also about our destination. They did not know I spoke Russian fluently and I learned quite a few things while sitting there, listening to them talk.

The officer who had helped me, Fyodor, was a lieutenant in the army and had a young wife and four children at home. One time, when no one was looking, I saw him close his eyes and make a very small sign of the cross with two fingers, in the style of the Russian Orthodox Church. From this I gathered he was a secret believer. He did not join in on many of the coarse jokes and rough talk that many of the other soldiers engaged in.

Oleg, the young soldier who had taken to Dasha (and whom the other soldiers jokingly called "Mama Oleg") was married also and his wife had just delivered their first child, a son, whom he was eager to see as soon as his tour of duty in the army was finished. He treated Dasha with great love and tenderness, and I felt at peace leaving her with him. Nikolai, the uncouth fellow who had his eyes on me, enjoyed telling bawdy tales of his experiences with women. He apparently had spent much of his time in the army. He was an older fellow who had fought in the armies of the Russian Revolution in his early teens. It seemed that being exposed to so much ungodliness, destruction, and violence at such an early age had seared his conscience "with a hot iron" and even many of the other soldiers cringed at his talk of war, rape, pillage, and death.

I thanked God that Katinka could not understand Russian that well, although I noticed that as the days passed she was quickly picking it up. She spent a lot of time with her nose pressed against the one window in the car, looking out over the taiga in hopes of seeing a Siberian tiger, which the soldiers promised her ran wild out there. She never did see one, but it kept her occupied. Sometimes Fyodor took her on his lap and told her stories, and a few times when I was brought in by one of the guards, I saw them sitting together off in a corner and talking quietly together. Katinka was talking very animatedly in half Polish, half Russian, and he was nodding seriously and listening to what she had to say. I had no idea what they were talking about, as their conversation was drowned out by the dull roar of the train and the occasional whistle, but I prayed that she would in some way be able to witness to him or strengthen his faith.

I had hoped to be able to be a witness to those in my railway car, but talking had been expressly forbidden and we soon found out that although there were no guards in the car most of the time, there were informers who, for whatever reason, had agreed to listen and report on any slight infractions of the rules. Punishment for the offenders was swift and painful—usually in the form of a beating outside the train during one of the stops for water. One man was shot trying to escape. I prayed desperately about what I should do and felt that because Lieutenant Fyodor had gone out on a limb for me, I needed to do my best to stay inconspicuous and obey every order I could, for the safety and protection of my little ones.

However, I still had the pages from my New Testament, and so very carefully and quietly I circulated them. We were allowed to get up twice a day to use the bathroom facilities—a hole in the floor and a bucket of

water for drinking and washing—and this was closely overseen and rotated so that not everyone was up at the same time. It was during this time that I was able to secretly pass the pages to different ones who God had showed me in prayer would accept them quietly. I had many people pass them back to me in the days following with tears in their eyes and a “thank you” forming on their lips, although they did not make a sound.

I do not want to make it sound like it was easy. Believe me, it was anything but easy. I slept when I could on the hard, cold wood. They issued each of the prisoners one blanket, but many of the blankets were bug filled and we got bitten very badly. I was thankful I had an extra blanket. Some of the others in the car did not fare as well.

They fed us just enough to keep us alive. There was a bowl of very runny gruel in the morning and the same again in the evening, this time with a piece of coarse, black bread. As the days went by my milk supply started dwindling and Dasha started getting fussier. I finally mentioned this very gingerly to Lieutenant Fyodor. He seemed to take no notice, but the next time he came himself to get me. (He usually sent one of the other guards.) When we had made it out of our railway car and were balancing on the little platform between the next one, out in the freezing cold, he produced a bottle of milk and a wedge of cheese from inside his greatcoat and said, “Here, eat this quickly and tell no one.” Where he got these provisions, I do not know, but I ate it gratefully and as quickly as I could. He did this every few days, providing me with either cheese or sausage, and once even a small chunk of stewed meat, and through this, and the Lord’s miraculous keeping and saving power, I kept up enough of a milk supply to feed Dasha for the whole time we were on that train.



## **A WALK IN THE SNOW**

As I lay in the semi-darkness, staring out the window at the slowly passing scenery of white in great abundance, my thoughts were troubling me. *What will become of me and of the two beautiful girls that the Lord has entrusted into my care?* Then I was gently chided by the Lord. He was the One caring for them. How else could I explain the incredible turn of events that had brought them to me when they had become motherless, and then gotten them on this train with me, and that had brought them into favor with the guards? He had cared for them so far and He couldn't stop now.

So many times during that long hard journey, when I was left alone with my thoughts, I had to make a very conscious effort not to worry. I had so much to think about, so much to worry about—my dear husband, my beautiful Pasha, dear Magda, my brother Adam and his wife, my brother Jan, not to mention my sisters and their families, my two girls, and last but not least, myself. With so much time to think, it was easy to fall into the trap of worrying, wondering, and fearing the future. I found that my only hope, my only salvation, was to throw myself into the arms of my wonderful, loving, caring Savior. He became more real to me than ever before during that long, torturous

journey. If it wasn't for His love, His tender care, His reassurances whispered in my ear when I felt I could not survive the ordeal, when I felt all was lost, when I found myself sinking in the sea of despair, I would not have made it.

There were nights when I felt I would not survive. The cold was too bitter, the stench of human body odors was horrible. The aching in my limbs from the cold and lying in the same position in the small, cramped bunks was more than was humanly possible to bear. It was those desperate times—when I would throw myself at the mercy of Jesus, cast all my care upon Him and dwell upon Him, review His promises in my mind, picture Him in my mind's eye, pray and pour out my troubles, cares, worries, and fears to Him, and praise Him for His wondrous care, love, and mercy—that were the moments I treasured the most, as Jesus came through for me so wonderfully.

He lifted me out of my dismal physical state to a realm of the spirit and ministered to my spirit. It is almost as though He whisked me away and I was “caught up to the third Heaven” as the apostle Paul once said, where I was refreshed and renewed. I was given love, hope, comfort, encouragement, and strength. I always came out of those times with renewed strength and vigor. And though my body became more weary and worn, my spirit was refreshed, renewed, and strengthened. I honestly know that it was through those precious times with my wonderful Savior that I survived that long and awful ride—and all that came after it.

My thoughts were distracted by the train door clanging. I felt a tingling in my breasts as my milk came in. I wondered at the miracle-working power of the Lord to keep up my milk supply even in such terrible physical conditions. The guard did not say a word, only motioned to me, and we made our way in

the semi-darkness through the two railway cars and into the last car, where the now diminished supplies were kept and where the officers and some of the guards stayed.

The pot-bellied stove was roaring as usual, and I looked forward to this opportunity to warm up my limbs again for the next hour. By now the guards and soldiers (I found that not all the men on the train were soldiers—some were prison guards whose job was to transport prisoners) knew me well. They still did not know that I spoke Russian, but they were respectful of me and allowed me privacy to nurse the baby.

Katinka threw a wistful smile my way. I felt sorry for her, as she did look bored, but there was nothing I could do about it. She turned again and pressed her nose against the window pane and stared out at the blur of white nothingness—another snow storm was approaching.

“So, Comrade, aren't you happy to be going home? Your little Ninichka will be happy to see you too. You have been away so long, will she recognize you I wonder?” The guards were ribbing Fyodor and he looked slightly red in the face as they continued. “Just think, two more days if all goes well and you will be in bed with her making up for lost time like you always seem to do. How many children do you have now? Fifteen or something?”

“You big oaf! I only have four.” He was visibly red now and all the soldiers and guards were laughing.

“I on the other hand, do not need to worry about such things. I will just go to the nearest prison camp and find me a cute Polish girl to satisfy my needs. Although I have to say, they aren't as lusty as our very own Russian ones—too much of a Catholic upbringing.” He finished with a great guffaw. “You really should have held out for the carefree life! You poor thing, having

to wait until your tour of duty is finished to get some, when you could be like me and have a fresh sample as often as you like!”

“And often end up with a little ‘souvenir’ from them as well,” one of the younger guards piped in.

With that the crude guard stopped his comments and turned a shade red. In such close quarters it had been obvious to all that he was suffering from some sort of disease which made his “natural business” rather painful. I blushed in the corner and prayed that Katinka didn’t understand all this talk. What really fascinated me, though, was that it seemed that the lieutenant lived near to wherever we were going. I liked him and hoped that somehow he would continue to help us. A seed of hope sprang up in my heart as I sat and listened.

“We’ll be arriving in Novosibirsk tonight.” It was the engineer, who burst through the door somewhat winded as a gust of snow blew in behind him. “It is freezing tonight. The thermometer reads below forty degrees.” He rubbed his rough, red hands together and stood by the fireplace. “After that our trip is nearly over. We only need enough supplies to last us a day or two—unless this storm keeps up. Then we’ll get snowed in and will have to clear the tracks. That is an unwelcome thought.”

The guards and soldiers grunted eagerly as one of them passed out bowls of *borscht*<sup>\*</sup>. They continued their conversation.

“I hear they are building a new electric power plant near Krasnoyarsk. It should bring more life to the area.”

“In my opinion it will ruin the beautiful countryside.”

Heads wagged at this outburst by one of the younger guards.

“That is not very patriotic to Stalin’s great economic plans,” the engineer retorted.

The guard mumbled some weak apology and then remained silent. I wondered if someone would report his comment. I knew by now that there were informers amongst the guards and soldiers as well, as they could never be totally at ease among each other, but rather always guarded their comments and carefully qualified them. This one had obviously accidentally overstepped some boundary.

It seemed their whole system was run on fear. How my heart ached for them and I wished they could know the simple freedom of the love of my sweet Jesus. I wanted to say something to them, but in looking around the room, I knew there were some who would not believe and receive and would only get me and possibly my children into trouble. I resolved to pray that the Lord would somehow give me a chance to speak to those who were worthy.

“Alright, enough time spent suckling.” It was “Mama” Oleg who tenderly lifted Dasha out of my arms and kissed her, then retreated to a solitary corner of the car near the door I had come in. I felt a burden for him, and followed him there.

“Where do you live?” I asked him in a whisper as I bent down to straighten some of Dasha’s garments.

Oleg seemed startled to hear me speak Russian, but answered in an equally low whisper, “In Irkutsk—a few days journey by train from Krasnoyarsk. It is by the beautiful Lake Baikal. I have a son there whom I have never seen before. I will be on leave soon and hope to go visit them.” His eyes grew misty as he spoke and then, as if catching himself in some great indiscretion, he looked around nervously.

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<sup>\*</sup> *borscht*: a standard Russian soup, typically made with beets and other mixed vegetables

“I will pray for you,” I said to him quietly. “God bless you.”

Oleg did not answer, but quickly turned and tucked Dasha gently beneath a few blankets that made up her bed. Soon another guard was at my side to take me back to my bunk and I prayed that those few words would get Oleg thinking. I knew he had a tender heart and that there was room there, somewhere, for God. I prayed he would find Him.



I was woken out of a rare, sound sleep with the sound of jarring and screeching wheels. Once fully awake I realized that we had stopped and I heard shouting outside. I shivered and wondered if we had finally arrived at our destination.

The sky outside was pitch dark, but I could see through my dirty little window that it was clear and there were thousands of stars twinkling in the dark, inky blackness. We had stopped at Novosibirsk two days before to re-stock supplies. We were all confined to our bunks, but we did hear a shot ring out and heard later, through the whispered grapevine, that some unfortunate soul had tried to escape and been shot. Our travel after that had been painfully slow due to the great snowstorm that came up. Sometimes snow drifts blocked the tracks for miles and although sometimes a “snow train” came to help, the prisoners were the main ones used to clear the tracks. Thankfully, they used the male prisoners. My car, which held only women, was spared.

“Alright, you cattle! No more beauty sleep for you! Out of bed, you sleepy heads! There is work to be done and so little time to do it! You have been chosen to help make our Soviet Union great! *Davai!! Davai!!*” The guards and soldiers were going down the aisles of the railway cars, ripping blankets off of women who

were sleeping, yelling for everyone to get up. Women groaned and let out shouts of dismay.

“Alright you all, listen up!” It was one of the meaner guards addressing the befuddled crowd of women who were now squished into the aisle of the railway car. “We have a nice long walk in the snow ahead of us! There is no road to where we’re headed—not yet, at least! But your tracks will get it started. Now get moving! Take your blanket with you. You will need it! You will each be issued a coat and some felt boots for the walk. Now GET MOVING!” With that he grabbed a hapless young woman who was still in her bunk and roughly threw her on the floor.

I shivered as I wrapped my blanket around me, thankful that I had been wearing every item of my clothing when I had gotten on the train. I held back my tears as I prayed for Dasha and Katinka while being herded with the other prisoners out of the train. There was much shouting and arguing as the coats were passed out. They were all old and second hand, some in great disrepair and in all different sizes. People fought and argued over the better ones and there was a general scene of confusion for a little while. I thanked God that I had a fairly warm coat, but it was no match for this freezing, Siberian weather. I had only been out in the snow for a few moments and already I felt as if my toes were going to fall off.

I was given a fur coat that was fairly warm, although a few sizes too large. It looked like it had belonged to some aristocrat in times gone by, but had certainly seen better days. I wondered who it had been confiscated from. There was a large X painted on the front and the back of the coat. “To keep us from trying to escape in them,” someone had whispered. However, when I looked around in the darkness, it didn’t look like there was anywhere to escape to.

We were soon herded into more or less orderly lines and orders were barked out for us to walk as fast as possible, to not stop, and to not talk while walking. Thankfully, with a jeep of officers leading the way, and several groups of male prisoners ahead of us, the snow was trampled into a more manageable path for those of us who followed, making it not too difficult to walk on. However, occasionally someone would still sink through the path up to their waist, revealing that we were really walking on a layer of ice that had settled over an even thicker layer of snow beneath.

We stumbled out blindly, following a few lanterns. I turned to look back at the train and saw a sleigh pulled by a horse beside the supply wagon, with some people climbing inside. Someone was holding Dasha and I heard Katinka's little voice saying, "Where are we going?" in perfect Russian. I did not hear the answer, as just then a guard shouted in my direction and I quickly turned to catch up to the person in front of me. I felt a warm tear trickle down my cheek as I again prayed desperately, with all my heart, that I would see the girls again.

*They are in My hands.*

That was all I heard or felt, but that "still, small voice" gave me the strength I needed to go on at that moment. I trudged on with the others in the eerie silence, wondering where our journey would end.

We must have walked for hours, although I had no way of knowing the exact amount of time it took for us to walk the distance we did. I found out later that we had walked about twenty kilometers. Forging a path in virgin snow is no easy task and it took us around ten hours to reach our destination. About halfway through our terribly tiring journey—made the more tiring because of the fact that many of us

women had had no physical exercise or exertion for over a month—the sun rose over the snowy plain on which we were trudging. I wondered how anyone could know where we were going; it all looked so very much alike. Except for the scattered birch tree, all was silent and cold and white. It looked like the world had frozen and we were the only people left alive. We passed an occasional *izba*<sup>\*</sup>, looking lonely and deserted, obviously only used in the summer.

We trudged on. The girl ahead of me stumbled, and dropped through part of the path. She got back up, but was shivering uncontrollably. Finally she fell and could not get up. I screamed for a guard and finally someone came running. When he saw her he shrugged and said that we could help her if we wanted to, but it would be just as well to let her die in the snow.

"Freezing to death isn't so painful, you know," he said sympathetically.

But I was determined not to let her die there, so I picked her up and, along with a couple of other women whom I had come to know during the trip and had passed pages of my New Testament to, we carried her. This turned out to be a God-send, as the extra physical exertion warmed us and kept us from feeling the cold as badly as some of the others.

Finally, exhausted and drained of every last drop of strength we came within sight of the camp. I felt feverish with cold and exhaustion and wondered if I could even make it to the gates. There was a high barbed-wire fence, with watch towers every so often. Inside I could see long, low huts, covered with a blanket of snow, and a thin trail of smoke coming from a chimney atop each one.

"Welcome to your new home!" a sarcastic guard shouted.

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<sup>\*</sup> *izba*: a low-built log cabin

We stumbled through the barbed-wire gates and were herded into a low building on the outskirts of the camp. Just as we walked into the doorway and were greeted by a blast of warm air coming from a roaring fire, I fainted.

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## LYUBA

“Wake up! Wake up!” Someone was gently slapping my cheeks and sponging my face. “Wake up.”

I opened my eyes groggily and looked around me. A single, bare light bulb hung from the ceiling. I could not remember where I was or how I had gotten there. The girl speaking to me looked at me sweetly through a pinched, wan face with a somewhat yellow hue. She looked vaguely familiar, but I could not place her.

“Where am I? Who are you?”

“Thank God you awoke! You were about to be put in the ‘no hope’ section! They can’t afford to have people around here who don’t pull their own weight, you know!” She smiled and sponged my forehead again.

I was lying on a blanket on a hard bed. My own coat was rolled up under my head and I had a few scratchy, woolen blankets on me. I heard groaning and strained to raise my head and look around me. I was in some sort of infirmary or clinic. There were others on similar beds.

“Don’t you remember anything?”

I was drawn back to the thin girl who was sitting beside my bed.

“You saved my life,” she continued. “I had fainted in the snow on our long march and they told me you carried me all the way here.”

“That really happened? I thought I had just awoken from a nightmare.” My head was clearing and slowly it all came back to me—the long train ride, the difficult march in the cold and snow, rescuing the girl, the prison camp, and .... “Dasha and Katinka!” I bolted up out of bed. “What happened to them?”

“Who?” the girl asked with a slight laugh. “Hush! You must settle down. You have been in a coma for nearly two weeks and need to stay perfectly still.”

“Two weeks?” I fell back on the bed and let that bit of news sink in.

“Yes, they were going to get rid of you—no use to them you know, people in comas. But I was put to work here on account of my physical weakness and I covered for you—told them you had awoken several times already, but always went back to sleep again. I begged the doctor on duty, who has a good heart, to give you just two more days. They were going to move you out tomorrow morning if you didn’t wake up and stay up.”

I shook my head in amazement. I had been in a coma for two weeks! I did not feel ill, more like I had wakened from a long, deep sleep. I felt well rested. “I am well now,” I said as I shakily started to get out of bed, but almost instantly I collapsed as the room began spinning around me, and the woman lifted me back onto the bed.

“It will be a few more days before you are back on your feet. But if you can manage at least to stay awake and to appear coherent, you should be fine. By the way, my name is Lyuba. What’s yours?”

“Anja. Anja Wyszynski,” I replied. “Lyuba, that is a Russian name, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I am Russian,” she answered ruefully. “And you are Polish? But how do you speak such good Russian?”

“I am half Russian, actually. My father’s name was Keroshiva.” I answered. “But how did you get on our train from Poland?”

“Oh, they made good use of this train! They picked me up along the way, along with some other ‘incorrigibles’ as they call us.” She whistled softly as she picked up a bowl and cloth and straightened my covers. “Let me get you some food. You will need it, you know, to get stronger. We don’t have much, but I’ll see what I can do for you.”

I marveled at her strength and cheerfulness. Whoever this girl was, I wanted to know her better. She did not look much older than twenty, and I noticed she walked with a slight limp. Her mousy brown hair hung limp around her shoulders and her clothes hung on her frame like a sack on a bean pole, but she did not seem to notice her looks or grim surroundings. She said cheerful words to the other patients, and her very presence seemed to lighten up the room as she walked by. She soon returned with a bowl of hot soup and a large piece of bread. My stomach growled as I realized I had not eaten for so long.

“How did I survive this long?” I asked.

“I have been caring for you,” Lyuba replied simply, with a sweet smile.

“I have to ask this,” I said in a low voice. “Please forgive me, but, are you a Christian?” I knew it was not a safe question to ask, but I knew she had to be. She had that look about her.

“Funny you should say that. I was going to ask you the same thing. Yes. I am.” Lyuba smiled sweetly and I smiled back as we realized we had found in each other a sister in the Lord.

“Thank God! Then I am not alone here.” I sighed with relief. “Why are you here?”

“For being a Christian,” Lyuba answered simply.

Later she would tell me more of her story—how she had watched her parents killed, gunned down in front of her because they refused to deny their faith, how she had seen her home ransacked and then burned, and then how she had been taken, at the tender age of thirteen, to a Soviet orphanage, and how they had tried to “indoctrinate” her with the glories of the Soviet system. She never lost her faith, however, and the training, love, and care her parents gave her paid off.

She was a thorn in the side of the Soviet system, for wherever she was sent she witnessed and drew a following around her of others who wanted to know what made her so different, so loving, so sweet, and cheerful. Beatings and punishment did no good. Finally, when she came of age they threatened her with prison, but she would not stop witnessing. She was sent to prison and even in prison caused such a stir that they ended up shipping her here to Siberia. Her limp was the result of one of the many beatings she endured while in prison for preaching Christ. She was a true example to me of the verse, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, that I might finish my course with joy.”

Suddenly a thought struck me and I frantically fished around in my pockets until I found the treasure I was searching for. “Here, I have most of the New Testament, in Polish!” I exclaimed.

Lyuba nearly jumped for joy and had difficulty containing herself.

“How in the world did you get that in here?” she asked, then answered her own question. “Oh! God works in mysterious ways! Because you fainted, you were taken straight to the infirmary and never stripped and searched like the others!”

I felt around my neck and realized that I also still had my gold chain and wedding band hanging about my

neck. I shot up a prayer of thankfulness for the Lord’s wonderful foresight down to the very last detail.

“You must translate it for me and I will write it down! Oh, this is utterly amazing! Thank God!” She suddenly caught herself as she realized one of the other sick prisoners was looking our way. “We must be cautious,” she whispered. “There are so many who need to know about the Lord. We cannot tell them from isolation cells, so we must be prudent about how we go about it, but with the written Word as a tool there is so much we can do. I will start gathering bits of paper and pencil stubs from the doctor when he does his rounds.” I could almost see the wheels spinning in her brain as she made her plans. “Oh, this is wonderful.” She nearly bubbled over with joy as she got up and took leave of me with a squeeze of my hand.



My convalescence was slower than I thought it would be. I could not stand up for any period of time without fainting. However, it was a wonderful time in that I got to know Lyuba better. She was a dear soul who had suffered greatly but had held fast to her faith and had definitely “come forth as pure gold.” I felt I had suffered so little in comparison to what she had gone through. She was sentenced to work camps for life, with no hope of getting out, but she bore her sentence with such humility, such joy to be suffering for the Lord. She felt she was on this earth for one reason and one reason only, to bear witness for the Lord, and she did so in every way she could. Sometimes I cringed when I heard of her latest witnessing exploits, even sometimes witnessing to the guards. I prayed for her safety and also cautioned her to use wisdom. The Lord always protected her, though, and as she herself testified, she was never given any tests or punishments greater than she could bear.



Our evenings and every spare moment was spent translating the pages from my New Testament. I translated them into Russian and then she helped me get the grammar right. I knew it wasn't a perfect translation, but close enough. For her each page was like pure gold, as the only Word she had ever known was when she was in her childhood. Her parents had parts of an old Russian Bible. She knew many of the Psalms and almost all of the Gospel of John by heart, but had never even read many of the other Gospels and she was especially thrilled over the book of Acts and all the persecution Jesus' disciples had suffered. One time, after reading about Paul's sufferings she looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, I am so honored, so humbled to be counted worthy to suffer for His Name."

We wrote on scraps of paper and toilet paper, when there was any—on anything we could find. She scoured the office of the doctor and nurse who came in daily to see the patients and found a few pencil stubs which we used. When those ran out, we prayed desperately together for a pencil. I was humbled by her great faith, especially when the next day she came in beaming with a pencil that was whole! A brand new pencil!

"Where did that come from?"

"The doctor dropped it on his rounds. You know how he keeps a pencil behind his ear and another in his coat pocket? Well, the one behind his ear dropped. I picked it up and did not return it. When he finished his rounds he looked for it and concluded that he had dropped it in the snow. He did not seem concerned at all. *Vodka*, you know." She winked knowingly at me.

The doctor had a terrible drinking problem and was often drunk out of his mind while on his rounds. This was a help in some ways, as Lyuba helped him fill out his charts (the only way he remembered what

was what and who was who the next time he made his rounds), and she added little notes that I needed longer care and was sicker than I was. This made it possible for me to stay in the infirmary for nearly a month, during which time I worked feverishly on translating my New Testament pages. I had with me the books of Luke, John, Acts, half of Romans and the last few pages of Revelation.

Finally the day came when she could keep me there no longer. I looked healthy and although I was still weak, another very ill person was brought in and the guard who brought her took one look at me and said, "That damned doctor! I know better than to think you are that sick! You will vacate this bed and report to the work station tomorrow to be assigned a task. Understand?" He nodded curtly at the lone guard on duty, who was generally uninterested in his surroundings and wore a perpetually bored look, and proceeded importantly out the door to make arrangements for my transfer.

That evening, while waiting for the guards who were to transfer me, I gathered up my things and wrapped them in a piece of gauze that lay by my bed. "I know they will probably search me. Will you keep these for me and try to get them to me once I am settled?" Lyuba nodded and wiped a tear from her eye. We had talked about this—the camp was large and the prisoners from different sections were not allowed to mingle. There was no telling when we would see each other again, but I could not risk losing all the work I had done over the last month on my Russian Bible. I knew I was leaving it in good hands. As an afterthought I took off my chain with the ring on it and asked her if she could hide it for me as well. I did not know when I would need it, but knew the Lord must have had a reason for letting me keep it thus far.

## THE DECISION

The initiation to the work camp was not as bad as I had expected. I found out later that instead of a prison camp, which is usually held for the worst of the worst, we had been sent to a work camp, which although very terrible, was not nearly as horrible as some of the more famous gulags<sup>1</sup>.

Furnishings in the large bungalow to which I was assigned, after being searched and questioned as to my experience and life, were Spartan and uncomfortable. The beds were of rough, hewn wood and there were only straw mats to lay on. Thankfully, each bungalow had a large pot-bellied stove, which was always kept burning during the cold winter, and this kept the rooms tolerably warm. The camp itself seemed like it was hastily constructed, and there were numerous places where it would have been easy enough to escape from. The builders must have decided to rely primarily on heavy guarding and the sheer remoteness of the location to keep the prisoners at bay.

The schedule was brutal. We awoke at 4:00 in the morning, in the pitch black and freezing cold. There was a pail of melted snow for each bungalow of around forty prisoners, and each took turns washing

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<sup>1</sup> **gulag**: a network of prisons and labor camps to which (often political) opponents of the Soviet Union were sent

as well as was possible. Woe be to you if you were the last one to the bucket. I often risked catching a cold by washing with the snow while outside rather than waiting to use the water in the bucket. A whistle blew at 4:30, and we were marched in long lines through the freezing blackness to a communal dining hall where we ate porridge and sometimes black bread. From 5:30 in the morning till 6:00 in the evening we worked. Those who made their quotas were allowed a short, mid-day break for some more black bread or a potato. Boiled potatoes and sometimes some runny borscht with an occasional piece of cabbage floating in it was the meal of choice for dinner.

We were each assigned to work groups, the appointed leader of which was obviously in cahoots with the guards and would report our every move to them. It seemed to me that the leaders were the meanest, toughest ones of the bunch, often obviously hardened criminals who took great pleasure in tormenting those under them. These work groups were assigned to different tasks daily.

The camp was 80% men and 20% women. The women were in a different section, and while the men were sent off during the day for various forms of hard labor, the women were mainly assigned to the menial tasks of running the camp—preparing the food, cleaning and maintaining the camp, and also knitting for the soldiers who were fighting the war. I was told that during the warmer months almost everyone was sent out to hard labor, whether woman or man, as they had many building projects in the works in the area. There were great plans for the city of Krasnoyarsk, and we were to be part of those plans, we were told, through our labor. Each evening, from 6:30 to 8:30, we were forced to sit and listen to lectures full of Soviet indoctrination.

I barely made it through those first weeks. My

body was weak from lack of exercise and from the coma and fever I had suffered. At first I was assigned to kitchen duty, which thankfully was warm most of the time, but the work was endless and the leader of our work group was ruthless. She was a large, dark-faced woman who looked like she had been in prison most of her life. She had hard lines on her weathered face. Her hair was beginning to gray and her eyes were cold. I shuddered when she looked at me. Many of our team called her “the iron woman” behind her back. She drove us hard and would not allow us to stop our work even for a moment. We stood as we worked and by the end of the day, I felt as if I could collapse.

When I did have time to think, my spirit began to sink. I cried and prayed over my lost children and my desperate situation. I heard of some people who had been sent to camps such as these and were never heard of again—lost in the great, Soviet system. When I heard this, I despaired, as up until that time I had nourished the thought that I was a prisoner of war, and when the war was over (which I prayed for nightly) I would be sent home. This thought had helped to sustain me. So when I came to the realization that this was not necessarily the case, and that I could be here for the rest of my life, I was thrown into the pit of despair.

Because of my tiredness I neglected my special time with the Lord, and the loss of my New Testament pages also gave me an excuse to sleep as soon as we were allowed to. All these factors put together severely drained my spirit and after two weeks I felt as if I could not go on. One morning I awoke and before rising, prayed with all my soul for the Lord to somehow intervene and pull me out of the pit of despair I had fallen into.

As I stumbled into the dining room that same dark morning, I was startled to hear my name being called.

We were all assigned numbers, and I had gotten used to answering to my number when a guard called it. This was a softer voice than any of the guards', and when I looked around in the dim light I was delighted to see Lyuba! She beckoned to me and I quickly got my food and went to sit beside her. The eating hours were the only time prisoners were allowed to congregate or speak to each other freely.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" she began. "I have been praying I could find you!" I started as I looked at her face and noticed a very pronounced black eye. She didn't seem to notice and went on. "I just can't contain my zeal sometimes and keep quiet. I was put on 'muck duty' because of my zeal." As the sound of her laugh tinkled over the silence of those around us, consuming their meager portions, I shuddered. "Muck duty" was that of emptying the slop buckets and people's waste into a large slop wagon and then taking it out of the camp, and disposing of it. It was the worst detail you could be put on and usually reserved for those prisoners who were not cooperative.

"Oh, but there was such a wonderful plan to it all!" Lyuba continued. "I met the most wonderful girl! Her name is Olga and she is here for murder. She thought that there was no hope for her!" Lyuba's voice trailed off as someone else, a large, heavy-set woman in her forties, came and sat beside us. "As I was saying," Lyuba started again, "it was horrible. I shall be more careful in the future."

I looked at her questioningly, not comprehending what prompted her sudden change of speech. She barely nodded towards the large lady who looked very intent on her food. Lyuba then turned to her plate and started at it with vigor. She did not say another word, but before she left she slipped her hand into my coat pocket and I felt a small bundle, wrapped in gauze.

It was my Bible pages, necklace and ring. How she got it past the guards, I will never know, but I was so convicted, so humbled by her cheerful spirit in the face of so much suffering. Her humility, her zeal for the Lord and her cheerfulness, even in the midst of this suffering convicted me and I resolved to also do something for the Lord.

As I sat quietly finishing my food I remembered the words that the still, small voice had spoken to me when I was first made a prisoner about there being a special plan for my life and a mission that I had to fulfill. I lifted my heart to the Lord in prayer and said, *Here I am, Lord. Use me! Not my will, but Thine be done.*

It was as simple as that. My heavy, aching heart was soothed and touched by His loving Hand and I was renewed in faith and vigor. My body still ached, but my soul was at peace.



With a new determination I decided to seek out those who were worthy and witness to them. I was not sure how to go about this, as although I admired Lyuba's conviction and sincerity, I sometimes wondered at her wisdom and felt that if I could avoid suffering and yet still preach the gospel and be a witness I would rather it be that way. I resolved to pray about this matter and ask the Lord, as I was perplexed as to whether I should openly proclaim my faith, as Lyuba had obviously done, and be prepared to suffer the consequences, or if I should find another way.

I was secretly hoping the Lord would lead me to witness carefully and quietly. However, when I prayed that night before going to sleep, a verse was burned into my mind: *Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.* With this verse I saw myself kneeling to pray before my bed at night. I shuddered to think

of the consequences of this act and determined, in my half-asleep state, to pray further about it in the morning. With that I fell fast asleep.

That night I dreamed many dreams, but in all of them I was suffering for my faith in some way and being a witness all the while. I did not feel the pain, I only felt intense love for those I was speaking to and a great desire for them to come to know Christ. I awoke with these thoughts fresh in my mind. Later that day, during our mid-day lunch break I went to the crude outhouse and there prayed further. I feared that if I waited until nightfall I would again fall asleep while praying.

*Lord, what do you mean by this verse? What good will it do for me to kneel before my bed and pray at night except to get me caught and punished? Why would You have me do this when there must be other ways to be a witness of my faith in You? Please, please show me what I am supposed to do.* I again got silent and again, words came into my head. I was pretty sure they were from the Bible, although I did not recall committing them to memory at any time. They were, “Ye shall be taken before magistrates and kings for My Name’s sake. Fear not what they shall do unto you. Do not fear for what ye shall speak, for in that same hour ye shall be shown what ye shall speak.”

With these verses came a peace that all would be well if I followed the Lord. So, with some trembling in my heart, I resolved that night to make an open show of my faith.



There was low muttering and sighs throughout the bungalow as we all collapsed onto our beds in different stages of exhaustion. There were a few girls such as myself who had only recently arrived and were not used to the rigors of prison life. They were barely keeping up and literally fell asleep when their head hit the pillow.

There were others, however, who seemed quite used to it all and some were playing a crude game of gambling with stones in the corner, using small stores of items sent to them by relatives as money. There was no money allowed in the camps. However, those who had relatives (and who were not “politicals”) were allowed to receive mail and packages, which were of course carefully screened before being passed to them.

I swallowed hard and prepared to do what the Lord had shown me. I knelt before my bed and prayed. I poured out my heart in prayer, silently, with only my lips moving, and prayed as if it was my last prayer. I still did not know why the Lord wanted me to do this, only that He did. At first the muttering continued but slowly it ceased as a whisper fluttered around the room. When I finished praying and opened my eyes, all eyes were upon me. No one said a word to me as I got into bed and tried hard to fall asleep. My heart was beating fast and my stomach was in knots as I waited for whatever would happen next.

To my relief, nothing happened and the lights were soon put out and I fell into a welcome sleep.



The next morning I was avoided by all the women, although I noticed a few of them staring at me when they thought no one was looking. I wondered if there would be some consequences for my actions, and I didn’t have long to wait. As I sat down to eat, my work team’s appointed leader hovered over me menacingly. “So, you are a praying one? Didn’t anyone tell you that God doesn’t exist here? If you know what is good for you, you had better stop praying right quick.” She then strode off forcefully and I was left wondering what to do next.

The rest of the day went by without too much event, except that our team leader made sure to give

me the most unpleasant jobs and rode my case every second. I wondered if I was supposed to continue my public praying and when I prayed, I felt an assured *yes*—that it was accomplishing whatever plan it was that the Lord had.

I continued my nightly praying for a week with no one bothering me or molesting me in any way. Finally, one day as I stood in the food line for dinner, a small, timid voice behind me said, “May I speak to you for a moment?”

I turned around and saw a young woman, really only a girl of maybe eighteen or nineteen with dirty blonde hair and freckles on her face. She spoke to me in Polish and I nodded and directed her to the table I was going to sit at. We were alone and I told her to speak quickly.

“I watch you praying every night. Would you pray for me? I was baptized when very small, but...” She trailed off as someone else came and sat at our table. We stopped talking for a while and then, when we got up to leave she whispered, “My name is Christina.”

That was the start of my ministry of prayer. One by one women came up to me discreetly and requested prayer or wanted to talk about God. I started passing them sections of the New Testament that Lyuba and I translated. Ludmilla Gregorivna, the leader of our work group, was hard on me. I resolved to be a sample to her of the love of Jesus and went out of my way to be courteous and kind, loving and humble in all things. This was very difficult as she and those who had worked themselves into her favors went out of their way to make my life miserable in a thousand little ways. They had not abused me physically, however, and for this I was grateful.

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## PERSECUTION

*Dear Adam...*

I was trying to write a letter. We were allowed one letter every two months, and as I had just completed my first two months, I hoped this letter would be sent. It was now early April and although the temperatures had risen a little, our world was still covered in snow and ice.

I looked out the dirty window at the quickly setting sun and tried to figure out what to say in my letter. I had decided to write my brother Adam, since he was the only one I knew of who knew what had happened to me. I knew the letters were highly censored, and that things people had written in their letters had gotten back to them in unpleasant ways, and I was determined to be very careful with this one. My whole heart longed to know what had become of my dear Pasha and his father. I hoped I could somehow ask for information without alerting anyone to any details.

I did not know if Poland was still in the hands of the Russians, but if it was, there was no telling what they would do if they found my family. Finally, I finished what I believed was an innocent-enough-looking letter.

Dear Adam,

*I am fine. It is very cold here—much colder than Poland. I enjoyed meeting you and wanted to write to ask about your nephew, Pasha. He was so cute when I last saw him. I hope he is well. Please give your family my regards and send any news.*

Sincerely,

*Anja Wyszyński*

I prayed over the letter and brought it to one of the guards who directed me to a side room where the prison camp's office was.

"What is this?" barked the large, burly woman with a towering fur hat on her head. "A letter? A letter? Sweetie, you may not realize this, but you don't have such privileges." She hit me in the face and continued mockingly, "Politicals, and especially Christian politicals, don't get privileges, my dear. You think we don't notice what you do, but we do, oh yes, we do. We are watching you closely and don't you think you are getting away with anything." With that she cackled and ripped the letter in two. Then she ignored me and went back to her work, roughly motioning to the guard who brought me in to take me away.

I was stunned. It was so unexpected. Everything had gone so well up until then. I wondered what I had done wrong. I rubbed my hand against my stinging cheek as the guard pushed me back into my bungalow. Tears welled up in my eyes and I was about to throw myself on my bed and cry, when I noticed a silent, tenseness in the air. I looked up and realized that Ludmilla Gregorivna and her gang were advancing on me with menacing looks.

"Our shift has just been given the muck duty. Do you know why, little preacher girl? Do you know why? Because of you and the filthy lies you have been spreading throughout our bungalow! You are the cause of this! For the next week we are going to be freezing our butts off, stinking and filth encrusted because of you! We will teach you a lesson you will not forget!"

With that they were on me, punching, kicking and hitting. I don't know if you have ever seen women fight, but it is not a pretty sight and they have even less scruples than men. I was helpless as they beat and battered me. As I saw her fist coming down towards my face I cried out to Jesus and suddenly the world went black.

When I came to I was nearly naked in a dark, cold cell, just big enough for me to sit in with my knees pulled up to my chest. The walls were covered with a film of ice. My teeth chattered and my whole body shivered with convulsions. My first reaction was to scream, as I felt the pain of the bruises from being beaten. However, at the first sound of a noise from me, a heavy hand beat on the door of the cell and informed me that if they heard a word from me they would throw a bucket of cold water on me to calm me down. I bit my lower lip and my whole body shook with sobs. The next few hours were a blur to me. I was so low, so depressed, feeling I had failed miserably and that everything I had done was a mistake—why else would the Lord be allowing this to happen to me?

Finally, a fitful sleep fell over me. I had the most wonderful dream. I dreamt I was surrounded by angels. They were soothing me, comforting me, healing me, and encouraging me. They told me many things, which I did not remember when I awoke, but I awoke knowing that the Lord loved me, had not forsaken me, and was going to see me through this one way or another. I

resolved to praise Him and glorify Him for the privilege of suffering for His sake. I could not make a noise, as I did not want to risk being doused and then freezing to death, so I praised with all my might inside my heart. I praised Him for everything in my life that had led me up to this point. I praised Him for the privilege of suffering for His name. I praised Him for His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His great sacrifice for me. When I thought about all that He had done for me, I realized that what I was suffering was nothing.

When I ran out of things to praise Him for, I sang. Again, I could not make a noise, but I lifted up my heart to Him in song. Then I prayed. I prayed for everything I could think of. When that was over, I dozed fitfully and when I awoke, I did it all again. Time became a blur to me, as it was always pitch dark. There were rats and bugs that came into my cell and once a day a piece of black bread and a cup of water were shoved into a small slot in the bottom of the door for me. I do not know how I would have made it through if it was not for the loving, tender care of My Wonderful Savior who was there with me then, and in all my sufferings for His Name's sake. Finally, after three days and three nights, I was dragged out of my cell and into the office of the Commandant for the Woman's section.

"So, Comrade Wyszynski, have you come to your senses? Will you deny your faith, stop your foolish proselytizing and your violent behavior towards the other women and conform to the Great Soviet System?"

I realized that the fight was being blamed on me. As I stood there, praying silently for what to say in response, I studied my captor. Her voice was crisp and curt and she did not look me in the eye. She was young—maybe in her early thirties, and quite good looking and in shape for a prison overseer. She looked

hard and cold, like she had never known what it meant to love, or maybe she had known once upon a time and had closed herself off to all feeling and emotion.

Slowly and haltingly I answered, "I will do and have done my best to obey all the rules and regulations put forth to me. I wish to state for the record that I did not incite violence of any kind. I do not believe in inflicting violence upon any human being."

"I will be the judge of that," came the woman's cool reply. "Continue."

"However, nothing you do or say can coerce me to deny the One who is dearer to me than life itself. He gave His life for me and for you, He forgave all my sins"—I thought I saw her wince when I said this—"and He has a wonderful place prepared for me. You can kill me if you want to, but I won't deny His wonderful, loving presence. I will talk of Him to whoever is interested. I have a wonderful treasure. You cannot expect me to keep it to myself and not share it with others."

She looked up, into my eyes, and I was shocked at the hate and fear I saw there. "You will stop speaking of, of ... Him and you will conduct yourself as a good Soviet."

"But I am not a Soviet! I am Polish!" I answered helplessly. "And I am a prisoner of war!"

"Nonsense! You speak Russian fluently, and you are Soviet through birth. Your father was a Soviet citizen." She sneered at me. I was surprised at what they knew about me. "You are here on serious charges. You are a political prisoner charged with corrupting Soviet troops, which in time of war is considered treason. I don't know why you weren't put in front of a firing squad immediately. But, since you have been sent to me, I have been given the task to re-educate you—and re-educate you I will!" She stopped for a moment to let this to sink in.



I realized then and there that it would take an absolute miracle, an act of God, for me to get out of there alive. As my mind reeled at the fact that I was here for life as far as they were concerned, she waved her hand to indicate that the interview was over and I was led away.

I was walked down a long corridor and into another room where I was told to wait. Eventually, I was brought to a washroom and given some water to wash. Never has water been so wonderful to me as it was after three days and nights with only one cup of water per day. A bowl of hot soup was brought to me, and I never thought I would be as thankful for a bowl of hot soup as I was then. After that I was taken to a new bungalow and told gruffly to wait. As I sat and surveyed the unoccupied room (the inhabitants were all out working) I closed my eyes and prayed for the strength for whatever was going to happen next.

“So, you’re the little Christian girl that needs to be taught a lesson.” The voice was rough and raspy. The woman sounded as if she had smoked one too many cigarettes.

I looked up and was surprised to see a very beautiful woman looking down at me—at least I could tell she had once been beautiful. However, the years had taken a toll and there were wrinkles in her hardened face.

“Welcome to Natalya’s gang. We will make you feel welcome, I am sure,” she said sarcastically, adding, “so long as you play by our rules, that is.” She snickered, tossed her head, and walked out.

I was unsure what to do next, so I sat on a bed and waited. Finally, I drifted off to sleep, as tiredness from the three days in solitary confinement washed over me. I slept soundly for hours.



“I don’t know ... she looks rather pale.”

“Look at those hands—she is not used to rough work, obviously.”

I woke with a start to see a group of women gathered around me, all poking and inspecting me as if I was a piece of meat. I sat up and crawled backwards up on the bed till my back was against the wall. The beautiful woman whom I had met earlier and whom I gathered was the team leader of this group, stepped forward.

“Don’t be afraid,” she cooed. “You could have it a lot worse, you know. Although for a Christian, I don’t know if you could.” She let her words sink in as the women around me snickered.

I watched them closely, trying to figure out what was different about them. Many of the women I had bunked with before were Polish and were prisoners of war—with the exception of Ludmilla Gregorivna and her cronies. Most of the others were there for political or ideological reasons. But these women were more coarse, crude, and rough. I realized they were all Russian and with time I found that most of them were street-hardened criminals and prostitutes. I had never had much exposure to the evil things of the world, and I was definitely not street-wise, but I realized that they had put me in with the toughest gang of women in this camp—all confirmed criminals. I wondered what kind of work they were assigned to do.

“All right ladies, get some sleep. Tomorrow is another day.” The leader, Natalya, clapped her hands and they all walked to their respective beds.

“You are on my bed, girlie,” she then said to me. “You get to sleep on the floor.” She motioned to the rough, dirt floor, and as an afterthought, threw me a blanket. Then for good measure she kicked me as hard as she could, and the other women laughed as I flew out of the bed and landed on the floor. I crawled

over to a corner and pulled my lone blanket over my head. I did not kneel and pray that night. I was too tired, too scared, and too overwhelmed with all that had happened.



The women I was assigned to work with were not the mild, timid prisoners of war turned slave labor that I had been working with up until now. They were hardened criminals, all in for murder and things of that nature. They were assigned a variety of jobs, but I noticed that daily a few of them would be missing at odd times. These women had more comforts than the women in my old bungalow—warmer clothes and blankets, more access to writing letters, sometimes shorter hours, and better food, amongst other things. I, however, was not privy to any of these privileges. They treated me like their slave.

I continued to sleep on the floor, although there were empty beds and I had to wait on them hand and foot, do whatever they asked. The first few days I was there, I was exhausted mentally and spiritually. I was tempted to bemoan my lot, and my rebellious streak rose up in me, in not wanting to do what these horrible women asked of me. Many of their demands were unnecessary and some were downright stupid, such as to go outside and fetch three buckets of fresh snow for them, but being forbidden to wear a coat. I finally decided I had had enough after about three days of this and refused to do what they asked. This was a big mistake, as I was quickly set upon by three of the strongest of them, and beaten while the others cheered them on. The guards who heard the commotion only looked in and then walked away.

Afterwards I was thrown into a heap in the corner and the women went to the other side of the room to talk or do God knows what. As I lay on the floor,

whimpering quietly and nursing my bruises, I felt so low and forsaken. I thought I knew how Jesus felt when He said, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Funny as that may be, it was that thought that revived me. I realized that I should be honored to be suffering for Christ’s sake. I was reminded of Lyuba’s cheerfulness in her sufferings, and I prayed desperately that the Lord would help me to also suffer cheerfully for His sake. As I lay there in the quiet, the verse came to me from Proverbs about heaping coals of fire on the head of your enemy, and the other one about loving your enemies.

*No, Lord, I cannot love these horrible women! They are constantly blaspheming, taking Your name in vain, and they treat me like scum! How can I love them?*

However, again, the verse came to me: *Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that despitefully use you and persecute you.*

*Lord, I can of my own self do nothing. Please, oh please, help me. Give me the power to do Your will.*

With that I painfully lifted myself up and went outside, filled their buckets with fresh snow and brought it to them. They looked up at me, rather amazed to see me functional so soon.

“Masha, you didn’t hit her hard enough. Here she is again!” The room roared with laughter.

“But look, she brought the snow we requested! I guess the beating worked after all. We should do that more often!” Natalya sneered at me and waved her hand to indicate that I should leave them. I was depressed that this first gesture of humility and love from me should be taken so badly, but I knew that that was what the Lord wanted me to do, and I resolved to do it with all my heart.

## **ROMANS 8:28**

I was humming a tune as I slopped through the mud. Late April had brought warmer weather—still cold, but not freezing, and as a result, the whole camp was now one big mud puddle. There was planting to be done if we were to have food next winter, and now that the ground was thawing, everyone was sent out on work detail to start preparing the ground. Even the women I worked with, who were generally more privileged, were assigned to this task, and they grumbled about it each step of the way.

“Tanya,” said one girl with flaming red hair to her rather gruff-looking companion, “after all the favors we bestow on the guards, you’d think they would give us better treatment.”

“To hell with them,” came the reply. “They don’t care about us. They just use us and we use them as much as we can. This won’t last too long. As soon as the initial work is over, we will be back in our privileged position. They can’t live without us, you know. I heard it rumored that some top government official or general or something is coming to Krasnoyarsk, and so they are using us to make them look good. Full speed ahead with Stalin’s great economic plan.” She rolled her eyes sarcastically and then stopped and looked at me.

“And what are you smiling at? How can you be so happy? You have it twice as bad as the rest of us, and yet you are smiling. Why? Why?” She nudged me in the ribs and then took a hold of my coat and stopped me in my tracks.

Up until now I had been led not to witness openly to these women, but rather to be a sample to them of love. I had lost most of my New Testament when I was sent to solitary, as other women in the bungalow I was in originally had my papers. However, I still had a few small portions, which miraculously had survived in my underclothing, along with my gold chain and ring, which I kept hidden in a rotting piece of wood in the outhouse wall. I read what little Word I had and reviewed what I had committed to memory nightly and waited patiently for the Lord to show me what to do next. I sometimes felt as if I was doing a treasure hunt and I only knew the next step, that was all.

As I stood there, looking at this girl, I felt an urge, a “witness in the spirit” you might say, that now was a good time to start witnessing again. “I am happy because Jesus loves me and He gives me joy that no one can take away from me.—Not you, not your colleagues, not the Soviets.”

She let go of my collar and stepped back a bit. “Jesus! I thought you were over that! You aren’t supposed to say that word. You are working against the Great Soviet System.”

“That is sending you out into the cold fields full of mud to work,” I retorted.

She stopped to think for a moment and then called, “Masha, wait up.”

Masha turned and came back to where we were standing. I saw some guards eyeing us, but they did nothing.

“And what can your Jesus offer me that the Great

Soviet System can’t?” she asked sarcastically.

“Love, forgiveness, a new life, and eternal life in Heaven when you die.”

“Ha! You believe that crap? I should really report you. We were told to report you, you know, if you made another mention of this junk.”

“Shut up you two. We will all get in trouble if we continue this conversation.” Masha, the tough one with the flaming red hair, looked troubled.

“Think about it, okay? If you want to know if He is real, just ask Him. He can show Himself to you. I promise.” With that, we started off again towards the field, trudging in the mud.

Tanya and Masha did not say another word to me the rest of the day, and I prayed the whole day that somehow, the words I had said to them would sink in and they would come to know the Lord.



“Psst!”

I was awakened from a sound sleep by someone whispering in my ear. I jolted awake and then felt a hand clamp down over my mouth. “Don’t say a single word. Come with me.”

I was led in the darkness to a far corner of the room, where there were a few empty beds. I had attempted at times to claim one of them as my own, but I was always sent back to the floor, often with some sort of beating to remind me of my place, so I finally resigned myself to the fact that comfortable sleeping quarters were not for me, at least not for now.

“Listen, I need to talk to you.” As my eyes adjusted, I was astonished to see Masha sitting across from me. She was one of the tougher ones, who hung around and seemed to be quite close to Natalya. She was also one of the prettier ones and was often called away by the guards at their pleasure.

“I have been thinking about what you said all day. Can God really forgive me?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t say that so assuredly ... not until you know what I have done. I have murdered a man!”

“And?” I asked, looking as nonplussed as I could. I wasn’t very surprised. She looked capable of such a deed.

“And that is unforgivable. The church—my priest, said I would burn in Hell.”

“Your priest?” I was puzzled. This was Communist Russia and had been for quite some time. Most people of Masha’s age had long since been indoctrinated against any sort of religion.

“Yes.” She hung her head sadly. “My parents were devout Christians who suffered greatly for their faith when the new communist regime took over. My father was imprisoned and we—my mother and brother and sisters and I—were left without food, shelter, or clothing. All we had was what was on our backs. My mother trusted God to care for us, but being the oldest—I was sixteen—I could not understand her simple, childlike faith. I wanted to adhere to the Soviet system for help, but no one would hire me for even the most menial tasks because of my father and mother’s faith. Finally, against my mother’s pleas, I was forced to sell my body on the streets. I just could not believe that God would feed us—drop food out of Heaven, as my poor mother used to say. She is dead now, although she and my brother and sisters did live for quite a few years because of the charity of a good priest who took them in secretly and cared for them. I don’t know where my brother and sisters are now. My mother tried to convince me to come with them before she died, but I couldn’t believe in a God who did what He did to my family, and anyway, I was making more money than most people.”

She stopped talking for a moment, with a far-away look in her eye. I wondered what she was thinking about. Suddenly she turned to me. “You want to know why I did it, don’t you?”

“Did what?”

“Don’t act so naïve. Why I killed my lover. He was the first man who actually cared for me and it scared me so. He was kind to me and didn’t beat me or mistreat me and he wanted to marry me. I couldn’t handle it, so I left him. I finally came back to him, only to find him with another woman, and I could not stand it. I killed him in a fit of jealousy!” She broke down crying. “I killed the only man I ever loved.” Her silent weeping turned into convulsive sobs, as I gently reached out my arms and put them around her. She stiffened for just a moment, and then let herself go limp in my arms.

“Did you know,” I said in a low voice, “that God called King David—a great King of Israel who wrote the Psalms that are so often sung in the churches—a man after His own heart? And yet King David had a good man killed so that he could marry his wife. His was a great sin, but he also had a great repentance. God does not look on your sin—only your repentance. Of course there is hope of forgiveness and salvation for you.” I silently thanked God for quickening that example to me, as I had not known what exactly to say to her.

She pulled away from me, stopped sobbing, dried her tears and tried to put her front back up. “Well, this was all stupid anyway. I don’t know what got into me.” She almost turned to go, when I put my hand on her arm.

“Wait, don’t go,” I said.

She turned, looking startled that I would call her back.

“I don’t think we are finished here.” I shot up a desperate prayer as I could see the fight going on within her—the fight between holding up her pride and image as a tough, unemotional woman who was in control of her situation, and the desire to give in, to reach out for love and forgiveness. “We don’t have to be in a church or a cathedral or anywhere special for God to hear us. We can pray together right now—you can ask Jesus to forgive you. If you can accept Him into your life, it can be the beginning of a new life for you. Yes, even here, in this seemingly God-forsaken place, you don’t have to be forsaken by God. He is here for you always, and all He is waiting for is for you to reach out to Him and ask Him to save you, by His mercy and His grace. Won’t you try?”

Words cannot describe the transformation that took place that night, as Masha Fyodorovna gave her heart to the Lord and asked His forgiveness. I don’t think I have ever, in my life, seen a conversion as radical as hers was. She went from being one of the meanest, toughest prisoners, to one of the sweetest, most loving, giving, and caring people I have ever seen. She had a good background in the Lord and the Word, as her parents had taught her well, and slowly, as she hungered and wanted to learn, it all came back to her and she was able to use her knowledge and position, both as a favorite with the guards, and as a formidable personality in the prison, to bring many others to the Lord.

Because of the change in Masha, my position changed as well, and I was given more favor with the guards and with the other prisoners. There was a moral dilemma with Masha and some of the other girls, as they wondered if they should break off their activities with the guards because of their new-found faith. I struggled with this initially, but was then reminded of

all I went through in Poland, when I found myself in a situation where to stay alive and witness my faith I had to do things I would normally not consider doing and that were not “sanctioned” by the church.

I explained to them the things I had learned through that situation and we came to the conclusion that as long as our motives were pure—to keep favor with the guards in order to enable us to continue witnessing, as well as to witness to the guards themselves—it was better to keep things the way they were. Some of the more perceptive guards, however, couldn’t help but notice a change. Imagine our surprise when Masha returned one evening, beaming as she explained how she had witnessed to one of the guards and he had accepted Christ. We had to urge her to keep quiet to keep us from getting in trouble, she was so excited about it.

Masha became my close friend and followed me like a little sheep. She still kept up some of her tough front in the beginning with the others, but soon she just couldn’t do it and others saw the change in her. There were a few tense moments as she explained to her “inner circle” of friends—including Natalya—what had happened to her, and while not all of them accepted the Lord themselves, seeing her so happy, so free, so changed, was something they could not deny and not one of them reported to the guards or got us in any trouble. Through her and her friends, many more of the prison population were able to be reached, and now I understood the purpose the Lord had in bringing me to this very difficult and trying situation.



The days slowly got longer and warmer. The snow had all melted and much of the mud had dried up. The time spent preparing the fields for planting was not so very unpleasant and I was thankful to be able

to partake of the warm sunshine, the now green grass shooting up under my feet, the birds singing and the occasional specimen of wildlife that would scurry by, looking for food, or a mate. It was a welcome change from the grimness of the work camp and the freezing cold of winter. It gave me hope and sparked in me thoughts and ideas that had lain dormant for months. My thoughts went back especially to my loved ones—the ones left behind in Poland, and the two children I had brought with me, that were not mine, but whom I loved dearly. I also thought of my dear Pawel and prayed that somewhere, somehow he was still alive.

One night, after a long day in the fields, I was sound asleep when I had a most vivid dream. Pawel came to me. He looked radiant, beautiful, and more peaceful and serene than I had ever known him to be. He was dressed in white and he had a shining aura around him. We spoke for a long time and when I awoke, I could not remember many of the things he said, but I did remember one thing very clearly—a distinct but subconscious impression throughout the whole dream that he was dead—that he was visiting me from the spirit world. As strange as this may seem, it did not sadden me as I thought it would and should. He just looked so happy, so alive, and so much at peace. I couldn't dream of wishing him back into this cold, hard world with all of its troubles and pain.

I cried a little when I awoke, but only because I was sad for myself and for my son, Pasha, that he would never know what a wonderful father he had had! As I lay there, in the still of the night, pondering it all, another thing came back to me in a flash. He had spoken to me about escaping from prison. He said I was not destined to stay here forever, that my time to leave was at hand and that I should keep my eyes open for the Lord's leading.

This struck me as puzzling, as escaping was something I hadn't even considered. However, with the prospect of a lifetime of imprisonment, it did not seem too unappealing—just dangerous and scary. When I tried to analyze it, the impossibility of escaping and the danger of it was impressed upon me more and more, and I started to wonder if I had just imagined that part of the dream. I resolved to commit it to the Lord and leave it in His hands. I only asked Him that if it was indeed His will that I escape, that He show me very clearly, as I was not one to take risks and this definitely looked like a very big risk.

The next day I went out to the fields with the dream fresh on my mind. I felt very emotional and often felt tears welling up in my eyes when I thought of my beloved Pawel, but my mind and heart were at peace. I thanked God for the wonderful time He had given us together, however short, and asked Him for the strength for whatever was to come.

“Hey, you, Wszyński!” One of the rougher guards had called to me. I felt a welling of dread when he beckoned to me, as he was not known for his gentleness and took a liking in tormenting the female prisoners. I put down my hoe and went to speak to him. “There is someone at the main gate asking for you. You had better go back to camp.”

*Someone asking for me? Impossible! I know no one in all of Siberia! Who would be asking for me?* These thoughts and accompanying prayers for whatever lay ahead raced through my head as I started back towards the camp, accompanied by one of the woman guards. She did not say a word to betray who it could be or what they wanted.

When I arrived, I was taken into one of the front offices and told brusquely to wait. I did not have to wait long. To my surprise, in walked Lieutenant Fyodor

who had helped me on the train. I rose to greet him with a smile, but the sternness of his look stopped me and I sat back down.

“Thank you, that will be all,” he said with some authority to the guard who was with me, who promptly left the room.

As soon as we were alone, he said, rather coldly, “I have come to inquire about the children.”

I was taken aback. I had assumed—had hoped, that he would know where they were sent. “I-I don’t understand,” was all I managed to stammer out.

He continued with a half-smile lingering on his face. “I understand they have been taken in by a loving family and are well cared for. I have also come to understand that the family that has taken them in has turned out to be not-too-distant relatives of these two children, which is an amazing coincidence, in my opinion. They are happy to keep them and care for them. The question I put to you is, what is your relation to these children?”

“I-I am their adopted mother.”

“Legally?”

“Well, no.” I faltered. I felt as if I was losing the last thing that was even close to my grasp. I had entertained hopes of escaping and somehow rescuing the children. The thought of them growing up in this godless country, surrounded by atheism was more than I could bear. However, I didn’t feel I could, or should lie to this man, as I did not know how much information they had on me.

“Good. That will be all. Don’t worry, they are well cared for.” He arose stiffly and reached out to shake my hand. As I pulled my hand away from his, I felt a piece of paper in it. Instinctively I crumpled up the paper into a small ball and held it as inconspicuously as possible.

“Goodbye ... and ... thank you,” I managed to get out as he was leaving. I only had a moment before the guard was to return and I took advantage of that moment to stuff the paper down into my undergarments. I prayed I would not be searched and breathed a sigh of relief when a male guard arrived to escort me back to the fields. As a rule, male guards did not strip-search the female prisoners, although there were always exceptions to that rule.



I could not wait to see what was on that piece of paper, but it was not until almost three hours later, when we stopped for a break—to eat a crust of brown bread and drink some water—that I took myself to a far-away corner of the field and sat down under a tree to try to read it. I was wonderfully surprised by what I read.

*Dear Anja,*

*God bless you. I do not know what has happened to you in that horrible place, and I pray that I will be able to get this letter to you. If you are reading this, then my prayers have been answered and I have been able to see you. I would like to request your forgiveness in advance for the cold manner in which I will be forced to act while visiting with you. Because of my position, and my faith, I am forced to be very careful of my actions—they are constantly under scrutiny. Some people have found the bravery to come out and declare their faith and convictions and suffer the full consequences, but I am unable to do this. Unworthy as I am, however, I pray God honors the fact that I do believe and trust Him and do my utmost to raise my children to know and love Him. Perhaps one*



*of them will have the strength and courage I lack to be an open witness for Him.*

*After leaving you, I took the liberty to take the children you brought with you on the train to my own home. This turned out to be an act of Providence, for my two youngest children had died in my absence of some terrible sickness and I found my wife stricken with grief. Having two young children who needed love and attention to care for helped her to overcome her sorrow. Imagine our joy when, through conversations with Katinka we discovered that we are closely related. Her father was my first cousin and a close friend from childhood. We are newly settled in Siberia. Before the Revolution we lived in Belarus. We came here to escape the bloodshed, although it seems to have stretched its gory fingers everywhere.*

*I pray that you will be able to face courageously all that comes your way. With your permission, I hope to be able to keep and raise these dear children as my own. You are in our prayers.*

*Sincerely,  
A friend*

to Siberia and by a total and complete miracle unite them with their close relatives, then He could definitely be with them while they were growing up. I prayed for them, for their new, adopted family and committed them to the Lord, and I found peace in my heart that they were indeed in good Hands.

A prayer of thankfulness and praise welled up within me as I held that note close to my breast and thanked God for doing such a miracle and using me to bring those two children over thousands of miles to a safe, Christian home where they would be well cared for. Of course, their lives would never be completely safe, being Christians in a communist country, but I knew that if the Lord could bring them safely through dangerous and impossible circumstances all the way

## ESCAPE

“Masha,” I whispered in the darkness to the dear girl who had become my best friend in this horrible place, “are you awake?”

“Yes, sort of,” she moaned. It had been a long, hard day in the fields and she was not used to that sort of hard labor on a regular basis.

“Has anyone ever escaped from here and been successful?” I asked.

Her eyes shot open and she half sat up in bed.

“You aren’t thinking of escaping, are you?”

“No.” I hesitated slightly. “But I was wondering if it could be done.”

“I suppose it could, although I don’t know of anyone who has ever tried and lived to tell the tale. To be honest with you, I live better here than I ever did on the streets, and so the thought of escaping sort of escaped me.” She chuckled at her own wit. “Everything is different now, though.” She trailed off, lost in her own thoughts.

I had not told anyone of the visit or the letter I received, nor of the dream and visit from Pawel. I mulled over and over in my mind how I could escape and nothing seemed to present itself. True, we went out to the fields every day now, but we were very heavily guarded, and as if to erase any hope that I

could escape that way, just two days before a man had tried and had been shot in the back. Of course, now that I did not have to worry about the two children, escape would be easier, as before I would never have dreamed of leaving Siberia without them and it would have been very difficult to track them down. I once again committed this to the Lord and then drifted off into a dreamless sleep—the kind the Bible says belongs to the laboring man.

In the middle of the night, however, I awoke. My thoughts were clear and concise and a plan came to me, in great clarity. It seemed to make so much sense, at least up to a certain point. There were some things I could not reason out, and I realized that I would need a miracle to pull the whole thing off. However, there were some preparations I could make to get things going in the right direction. I sat up in my bed and mentally made a list of what I would need. Then I rolled over and went back to sleep.



“Masha, I need your help,” I whispered while Masha and I were in the fields hoeing the next day.

“No more crazy escape plans, I hope,” she whispered back. “It really is not worth the risk, especially since you are technically a prisoner of war and should be sent home once the war is over.”

“You and I both know that I will never be sent home. I am half Russian and have been accused of subversive activities and treason. The commandant referred to me as a ‘political’ and since I have had no trial, I assume there has been no sentence and they intend for me to simply get ‘lost’ in the great work camp system.”

She turned away and then looked back with tears in her eyes. “I will do whatever I can to help you. I will miss you though. I wish I could come with you.”

“Maybe you can.” I was suddenly excited with the idea that maybe I could have a companion in this dangerous endeavor. It seemed to bolster my faith and resolve. “Pray about it, okay?”

She nodded her assent to at least pray about it. A guard sauntered in our direction and our conversation stopped. We were unable to resume it until that evening, after everyone was asleep.



“So you want to get peasant’s clothes and go out the front gate when the milk truck comes? Impossible!”

The milk truck was a truck that came daily to transport dead bodies out of the work camp. However, once a week it also brought in a supply of milk, and because of this, it was named “the milk truck”. She was almost laughing at the seeming stupidity of the plan. It was true that the idea did not seem as feasible as it did when I had first awoken with it that night.

“How will you survive once you make it out the gate—if you make it out the gate? And as far as playing dead goes, you and I both know that the bodies are all accounted for and some days the prison guards will shoot every dead body or plunge it with a bayonet just to make sure they are really dead. It all depends on their mood. How would you know which day to go out? It would be like playing roulette! And how in the world will you get the clothes of a peasant?”

“Listen,” I replied, “this plan doesn’t make much sense to me either, but that is the direction I believe I received. I don’t really know if I will ‘walk out’ as you put it. I just feel that if I prepare, the Lord will guide me one step at a time. As far as the clothes go, that is where your help comes in. I need you to ask Boris to purchase those clothes for me. They have to be used, even tattered.” Boris was the guard she had converted and was witnessing to.

“And what is in it for him? He could lose his job or even his freedom or his life if he got caught or implicated in any of this. He may be a Christian, but he is a very new Christian and I don’t know that he would put his life on the line, even for me.”

I pulled out my gold ring and gave it to her. “This should be more than sufficient.”

Masha nodded mutely, shocked at seeing the ring, and obviously wondering how I had managed to get ahold of something like that.

“Will you ask him for me, please?”

Masha again nodded.

“Now, are you coming with me?”

She shook her head with tears in her eyes. “I prayed about it today. I was so hoping the Lord would tell me to join you. But I have the distinct feeling that while you are supposed to leave this place, my place is here, amongst those who I relate to and who relate to me, and whom I can continue to reach, using my influence. I don’t relish being in prison, but my position and my influence makes my life bearable, and if I can help lead others like me to Christ, my life will not have been in vain.”

We held hands and wept together and then, after a long, heartfelt prayer, turned over and fell fast asleep.



When the day came, I awoke earlier than everyone else. I had been praying and keeping my eyes and ears open for the last weeks, waiting for the Lord to show me exactly when I was supposed to attempt my escape.

Much to Masha’s surprise, Boris had been more than obliging and had supplied her with a decent, but well-worn change of clothes. Apparently they were his wife’s and she was more than happy to exchange them

for a gold ring, which he had never been able to afford for her. Thankfully, they fit me fairly well, although a little large. I had lost so much weight in prison, it was a miracle I was still fairly healthy. I still had my gold necklace, which I hoped would fetch a good sum and give me something to start out with for making my way away from this place. I had also been saving crusts of bread, which although very stale, if soaked in water or a little milk, would save me from starvation once I escaped. I knew there was a long, long way to walk before reaching civilization, and through clandestine conversations with guards and prisoners, Masha was able to determine which direction I should walk, using the sun and stars as my guide. She also gathered information for me of what plants and roots could be eaten safely and what couldn’t.

The prison camp had been built in the winter, when the bleakness and snow made escape impossible. The railroad tracks passed within twenty kilometers of the camp, but the nearest small town was nearly two days away on foot and would be difficult to reach without food and provisions. There had been surprisingly few escape attempts and none had been successful. One man had almost reached the city of Krasnoyarsk, but had collapsed from hunger and fatigue within a few miles of the city and been captured.

I felt an assurance in my heart that today was the day I was supposed to make my escape good. I hurriedly dressed in the peasant clothes, and then put my normal, prison clothes over them. I looked a little bulkier than usual, and hoped no one would comment on my appearance. I then got back in bed and prayed as the day dawned.

About half an hour later, the reveille bell sounded. As I prayed I wondered what I was supposed to do once I got away. How in the world was I supposed to make it

across the thousands of miles back to Poland, and how would I survive in the meantime? My gold necklace, I knew, would not get me very far, though it was a start. It all seemed so frightening. Even prison, with all its discomforts, seemed safer, especially to a simple girl like me, than the great unknown with all of its perils and dangers. I was almost tempted to call it off.

Thankfully, I remembered to pray and ask the Lord what to do, and I was assured, deep in my heart, that this was His plan, that He would make the rest of the plan clear to me as I went along, as long as I followed Him step by step. I was reminded of the verse, *I will send an angel before thee to keep thee in the way and to lead thee into the place which I have prepared*. So, armed with this promise I arose to face the day.

One thing I desperately wanted to do before leaving was say goodbye to Lyuba, who had been such an inspiration to me when I first arrived. I had already left the rest of my New Testament pages with Masha, but I did want to see Lyuba and thank her. I hadn't seen her or heard from her in weeks, although I was always on a sharp lookout for her. I worried about her health and safety. She had definitely fared worse than I when it came to suffering persecution, as she was placed with even rougher prisoners and given a harder time because of her long history of "rebellion" against the communist regime, whereas for some reason I was treated better. In retrospect, I realized the Lord knows what each of us can take and He only gives us what we can handle. Lyuba's reward is definitely great up here.

I hadn't seen her in weeks and I hoped to find her in the dining room (if you could call it that). I was disappointed when breakfast passed and once again there was no sign of her. I had precious little time between breakfast and when the prisoners were

rounded up to go work the fields, but I did have a few moments, so I wandered out towards the infirmary, in hopes of finding her there. As I was standing near the door, trying to think of a way to get in, the milk truck pulled up behind me.

Things happened so fast after this, I hardly felt I was in control or making myself move or even making any of the decisions. It seems I was driven by an outside source of power. I heard Lyuba call my name and I followed the voice around the side of the infirmary, hidden from the view of the rest of the camp, and there, much to my dismay, was a pile of dead bodies—those who had died in the night of one of the many sicknesses that were always going around the camp due to the weather and poor sanitary conditions, and others who had died of some of the less-than-humane punishments, which were doled out for offenses both real and imagined. And there, on the top of the pile, was Lyuba's body. A huge sob arose in my throat as I went up to her and studied her closer. A slight smile played about her lips and her pale, lifeless face looked like it was at peace. I studied her body for bruises and was relieved to see that it looked as if she had died of natural causes. I praised the Lord that she was now at peace, safe with Him and with her beloved parents forever.

Then I heard her voice. *"Trade places with me."* That seemed crazy and almost impossible, as for sure it would be discovered in no time. However, I knew I had heard her speaking to me, and so on the spur of the moment, contrary to all reason, I decided to do as she said. I looked around for where I could put her and I noticed a side door leading into the infirmary. When I tried it I was overjoyed to find it was unlocked. I stooped to pick up her lifeless body, and taking it gently in my arms, took it back into the infirmary, marveling

the whole time at the fact that no one seemed to be around—no guards, no nurses or doctors or anyone. I laid her body gently on an empty bed and found an old blanket to tuck in around her, hiding her face somewhat from view. She looked so peaceful, I could not grieve for her. Then, moving quickly and quietly, I went and laid myself on the pile of bodies, desperately praying for the ability to look and act dead. As soon as I was done, two men walked over.

“How many are there supposed to be, Igor?” said one gruff voice.

“Ten, I think,” came the reply. “Let’s do this quick. Thank God these all died last night—there is no stench!”

“Any guards around today?” I heard a female voice ask. “I don’t see why they insist on stabbing the bodies one by one. Can’t they tell they’re dead by looking at them?”

I held my breath, praying desperately for deliverance. I almost let out an audible sigh of relief when the one named Igor replied. “Nah. They’re busy this morning and told us to just move them along. They have been here since last night and nothing’s changed. They’re dead, alright.”

I was on the top of the pile and one of them grasped my shoulders, the other my feet and threw me easily onto the back of the now-empty milk truck. It seemed as if they hadn’t even seen me. I nearly cried out in pain as my back hit the truck and again as the next body landed on top of me. I felt suffocated as the remaining nine bodies were piled up around and on top of me, but thankfully, none of them were of very great stature, and they were all newly dead so the stench was not unbearable. I found a small hole to get air from and prayed for the grace to handle whatever would happen next, and also for wisdom to

know what to do once this truck got to wherever it was going. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, I felt the truck roll out and I knew I was on my way to freedom.



I lost track of time as I lay under all those dead bodies, fighting to breathe despite the heavy pressure I felt bearing down on me from all sides.

At last the truck slowed to a stop. I could hear muted sounds, but I felt deaf from having my ear pressed down on the bed of the truck while it was running. After a while I heard nothing and wondered what was going on. Then it struck me—they were digging a hole to bury the dead! I often wondered what happened to those who died in these camps—were their relatives allowed to claim the bodies? Obviously not. They did not spare much time or expense in disposing of them. I was sure they were digging one, mass grave. I continued to pray desperately, wondering how I would get out of being buried alive.

Finally the voices grew louder and I could make out the female voice amongst the men. I listened hard and realized she was berating them for drinking so early in the day. I had heard of the hard-drinking Russian men. There was a saying that a third of the men in Russia were hopeless drunks, and from what little I had seen, I could believe that. So it was no surprise that these men, especially those with such a thankless job as this, would be drinking so early in the morning. I continued to lie there for an unknown amount of time, listening as the conversation grew bawdier. Soon I heard the woman screaming a mock scream, followed by raucous laughter. I was starting to grow faint from the heat as the noonday sun rose overhead and the stench of death became stronger.

*Oh God, I can’t take this very much longer.*

Relief! They were lifting the bodies off of me now, one after the other. The pressure lightened and soon I was able to take deep breaths.

*Thank You, Lord! Now please show me what to do next!*

Soon the last body was lifted off me. I tried my best not to squint as the sunlight hit me. Thankfully it was already late afternoon and the sun was not too bright. I still didn't think I looked convincing as a dead body, but no one seemed to care. I realized just how drunk they were as they took hold of my arms, dragged me out of the truck, and then staggered the few meters to the grave. Without any ceremony they dropped me and I braced myself for a long fall. I was relieved when I only fell a little ways and my fall was cushioned by the others who had been thrown in the hole ahead of me.

I had fallen in face down and as I lay there perfectly still, I felt earth hit my back.

*This is it, I am being buried alive! What do I do now, Lord?*

I felt myself starting to panic and only calmed down once I started repeating the verses of comfort, protection, and deliverance the Lord had given me when He showed me to attempt an escape. *Lord, I could really use the angel that You promised to send before me right about now.* After my desperate prayer I got quiet and listened.

*Create an air pocket.*

The thought struck me from the blue. The body below mine had a bulky jacket on and I slowly, deliberately fumbled with it, making a small cave around my head. I was amazed that my movements hadn't been detected. The earth continued to pile up and soon I was almost completely buried. I had a little air from the space I had created around me, but knew it wouldn't last long.

Just as I felt the last bit of exposed skin be covered, I heard a voice that sounded like it was very far away shout, "Boris, let's go. I have had enough of this for one day."

"It's not completely filled in yet! What if wild animals happen upon this grave?" another voice slurred in response.

"Who cares?" It was the female voice, muffled, but very shrill. "That's what they get for being thrown in prison. Fools."

There was silence as I waited to be buried deeper, but nothing happened. I laid very still for a very long time until I heard the truck start up and with a roar it drove away. My air was quickly being used up and I knew that I needed to dig my way out of there fast.



You never realize how much you appreciate good, clean, fresh air until you have been deprived of it. When I finally managed to dig myself out of the grave, I laid exhausted on the ground, looking up into the sky that was now a deep blue twilight, and greedily drank deep gulps of air. I threw off my prison clothes and buried them, doing the best I could to cover up the grave again. I didn't want to leave any clues behind if I could help it. Then I found a clump of bushes and waited until it grew completely dark to begin my journey. I was amazed they had not discovered I was missing.

Now I searched the sky to see which way to go. I found the North Star and carefully plotted my course as I set out on shaky feet. I had not eaten or drunk anything all day. I fingered the bread in my pocket, praying that it would give me enough strength to get to Krasnoyarsk. In the meantime I desperately needed to find some water. I was so thirsty it almost drove me mad.

As I stumbled blindly in the darkness I prayed that I would find water soon. The taiga has a good variety of pine, birch and larch, as well as underbrush, but there wasn't much of a place to hide. I wanted to make as much headway as I could that night and knew that I wouldn't make it much farther without water. Just when my strength was about to completely give way I heard a rushing of water and almost stumbled into a small stream. I thanked God as I greedily gulped at the water and ate a small crust of bread. After this I felt refreshed and continued my journey through the night. I quoted verses to myself and prayed out loud as I walked along, fighting the urge to think about my utterly impossible situation, the wild animals that roamed the surrounding wilderness, or the pain in my body as weakness began to overwhelm me.

As the sun started to rise and my fatigue grew, I knew I would need to find a place to rest. I realized that although I was dressed as a peasant, traipsing through the taiga all night did not do much for my appearance, and I would need a good story to back up my looks.

I was wondering what my story should be when I came upon a clearing with a small izba out in the middle of nowhere. I panicked as I wondered where I would hide. There were no thick woods in the area and except for the underbrush and an occasional birch tree, I was completely exposed. Before I could think, I heard a yell and realized I had been spotted.

The yell sounded friendly enough and I could make out a peasant waving at me. He wore coarse clothing and was heavily bearded. He was out in what appeared to be a small garden, in front of the tiny, brightly painted cottage that he obviously called home. I wondered if he had a family, and how they survived the cruel winters out in the middle of nowhere in such

a small, weather-beaten house. I knew I had no choice but to speak to him, so I waved back, hoping and praying that a story would come to me by the time I made it to his house.

"Welcome stranger. We see so few people in these parts. What brings you here?"

"I-I..." I stalled for a moment as a wave of nausea and shivering passed over me. All of a sudden I started to see small black dots float in front of my eyes and the world started to spin, and then everything went dark.



I awoke disoriented. I could hear soft, muted voices and felt heat being given off from a corner of the room. I smelled borscht and for a moment I thought I was back in my old home, a small girl again, when I had been sick and my mother had pulled my bed close to the fire so I could be near her while she worked in the kitchen. I shook myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming and attempted to open my eyes. I saw a kind, female face close to mine muttering softly to herself. *No, this is not my mother, although she has a resemblance to her in some way that I can't explain.*

"Where am I?" I questioned quietly.

"You arrived on our doorstep and then collapsed. You have been here for two days without moving or eating or drinking. We thought you were going to die." The woman, who looked middle-aged, had a dark, weathered complexion and I felt her rough, leathery skin as she touched her hand to my forehead. "No fever," she muttered to no one in particular. Then she said, "Drink this. It will make you strong."

I grimaced as I attempted to down some sort of herbal brew.

"When you are well rested you can come and eat with us."



I nodded dreamily and then drifted back off to sleep.

I awoke later, although I don't know how much later, refreshed. My brain was clear and I realized where I was, where I had been and I marveled that I hadn't been found out yet, or caught up with by the prison guards, who must have discovered Lyuba's dead body by now and realized that I didn't show up for work. I wondered how hard they would search for me before giving up. I lay silently as I realized the small hut was empty. I prayed about what I would say and do. I had just finished praying when the door creaked open and the woman I had seen earlier stood in the doorway. I could see that the sky behind her was dark and the quaint, little cottage was lit by the fire in the fireplace.

"You are awake." she said in a pleasant voice. "You seem much more alert than you were the last time you awoke. I hope you feel better now. After all you have been through, I wish there was more we could do to help you."

*All I have been through? What did I tell them that I don't remember?* I started to panic but managed to regain my composure and reply. "I am so grateful to you for taking me in. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't come across you here."

"Don't mention it. We see so few people out here, we always welcome new faces. I am only sorry the circumstances of your coming are not happier."

Now I was really puzzled. As far as I knew I hadn't said anything at all to these people, and yet they seemed to know who I was and what I was doing here. I prayed that I would soon find out what I had said, so as to keep my story straight.

She looked at me thoughtfully, as though waiting for a reply and when she realized one was not forth-

coming she said briskly, "Well, I have work to do, but you are welcome to have a bite to eat." She produced a bowl of steaming borscht and a hunk of coarse, black bread. After the prison fare it seemed like a feast. I ate in silence as she scurried around the small hut sweeping and cleaning. I noticed that there was a curtain hung across the back of the cottage, and I figured that must be where their bed was. I had been laid out on a shelf over the fireplace, which I was to discover, was their own bed in the cold, Siberian winters.

"Do you have children?" I asked cautiously. In this day and age in the Soviet Union, no one liked answering too many questions—this I had learned in prison. But I figured this one was pretty harmless. Unfortunately it was not, as she seemed to wince when I said that and only shook her head violently.

Once I had finished eating I got up and went to wash up the dishes and make my bed. I determined to do something for these wonderful people to pay them back for what they had done for me. I just didn't know what to do.

I offered to help her with housework and she seemed grateful as she gave me a large bowl of peas to shell. We sat in companionable silence until the silence was broken by the roar of an engine. My heart stopped.

*They have come looking for me! And these poor, sweet people will be in danger as well for taking me in! Oh Lord, please, somehow get me out of this one!*

Soon there was a strong banging at the door and with a puzzled look the woman got up to answer. I hadn't seen her husband anywhere, and wondered where he was. My heart sank as my worst fears were realized. There, towering in the doorway was a prison guard.

"*Dobre viecher, Comrade,*" the man said politely. At least he wasn't pushing his way in.

“*Dobre viecher,*” the woman replied quietly. “What can I do for you, Comrade?”

“We are looking for an escaped prisoner. A woman. She has been escaped for a number of days and is dangerous. We have reason to believe that she has come in this direction. Have you seen her?”

The woman did not even hesitate. She turned around and looked at me and said, “Anushka, have you seen anyone around that seemed suspicious?”

I nearly choked as I realized she knew my name although I didn’t remember telling it to her. I shook my head, and prayed that I would look convincing.

“My daughter and I are here alone,” I heard her say to the guards. “You are welcome to search this place. My husband has gone into town and will not be back for a number of days. He may have seen something, although I will have to ask him when he returns. He did not say anything to me, though.”

The guard looked around the tiny place and must have surmised that there was nowhere to hide in that tiny cottage. I tried my hardest to look nonchalant as he gave me a long, appraising stare. Then he turned and said brusquely, “Thank you, Comrade, for your cooperation. If you do see anything or anyone suspicious you will report it, will you not?”

“Of course.” She smiled warmly and then offered them a cup of tea.

The guard politely declined and went his way. She came back to me and put her hand on my shoulder.

“Anushka?” I croaked out of my constricted throat. I had just escaped a terrible fate and the reality of the situation was just now hitting me.

She looked at me lovingly and I thought I saw a tear as she nodded her head. “My name is Simona Petrova Onopov. My husband and I buried our darling daughter, Anushka, only two days before you came to

us. She was not much older than you are, I think. She had been sick for many years, which is why she never married. I did not think I could bear her passing, as she was my only friend.” A few more tears slid down the rough, wrinkled cheeks.

I felt tears welling up in my eyes as I whispered, “My name is Anja Ivanovna Keroshiva. I was imprisoned by the communists for being a Christian—a ‘political’ is what they called me. I only escaped from prison a few days ago. Those soldiers were looking for me.” I did not know what she would do with that information, but I felt I owed her the truth.

She nodded. “I figured as much. I heard you praying in your sleep. I do not know much about Christianity, but I have always wanted to learn.” She fingered a cross hanging around her neck. “They closed the only church that was near enough for us to attend years ago, and since then I have only had my memories of what I was taught as a child to go on. I sometimes wonder if God remembers us, forgotten as we are, in this god-forsaken country.”

I smiled as I started to do what I loved most—speak of God’s love and care to this dear woman. As the evening wore on, her husband returned and we were up until late in the night talking about the Lord and His love and care. By daybreak they had both prayed with me to accept Jesus as their Savior.

I stayed with them for a few more days to allow time for the prison guards’ searching to end. I figured they wouldn’t waste manpower on searching for me forever. After I was convinced it was safe to start out again, I bid the couple a fond farewell. They loaded me down with food and supplies and even took me in their donkey cart to the nearest small town where they said I could get a train that would take me into Krasnoyarsk. They offered to give me money, but they

were so poor I declined to take more than the local train fare, as I was sure I could sell my gold necklace once I got to Krasnoyarsk. We parted with many tears and prayers and I boarded the ancient little train to Krasnoyarsk with a song of praise in my heart.

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## HIS MYSTERIOUS WAYS

It took four hours for the slow, rural train to wind its way into Krasnoyarsk. The train yard was busy and full of many tracks and many trains coming and going from all over Siberia. Krasnoyarsk was a large city and a lot of traffic went through it in both directions. On the small, rural train there had been no trouble with the conductor. I had simply given him a few kopeks for the train fare and that had been all, but I knew that on the newer, faster, cross-country trains people were required to show their papers which consisted of a passport, *propiska*\*, and sometimes other papers as well, giving you permission to travel or do whatever it was you planned to do. Every citizen of the Soviet Union was required to have these papers and carry them at all times. Being caught without your papers ensured you a prison sentence until you could produce them. As many folks were unable to produce them once they were imprisoned, going anywhere without papers was asking to be sentenced to a work camp, often for life. I knew that it was only a matter of time before I too would be asked for my papers and I wondered what I would say. I disembarked from the train and sat down near the train tracks, under the shade of a large, old tree, thinking and praying about what to do next.

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\* *propiska*: residential permit

I had dozed a little when suddenly I was jolted awake by a harsh voice demanding what else but my papers! I was disoriented and as I squinted my eyes and tried to collect my thoughts I felt myself being borne up by two men and dragged across the tracks to a train that stood waiting.

The men pulling me along were soldiers. They took me to an empty railway car, standing abandoned on the tracks and threw me in. The door closed with a sickening thud and as reality dawned on me—I was incarcerated once more—I wanted to break down and weep! As I sat in the semi-darkness of the empty car, I wondered what would become of me now.

I was thankful I had some food and a small jug of water on my person, as the time in the car seemed to last forever and the shadows were falling across the only window when I heard the door clanging and I stiffened, trying to prepare myself for whatever was to happen next. They only needed to hear me speak to realize I was not from around there and suspicion would immediately be aroused and they would look into things closer. It was bad enough, not having papers, but if they found out I was an escaped prisoner I would really be in trouble. I prayed desperately and tried to think fast, but all thoughts disappeared from my mind when I climbed none other than General Yipsin!

“I really do not know why you are wasting your time, sir! I don’t see how this woman, whoever she may be, is of any importance to you! Why...” The soldier’s speech halted as the general held up his hand, motioning him to be silent.

I thought I could see recognition register in his face. I did not know for sure if he recognized me or not, as it had been almost a year since I had seen him last, and I had grown so thin and gaunt that I figured most of my beauty, if I had ever had any, was gone.

“I wish to speak to this woman alone,” the general barked.

Obviously used to obeying his every wish without question, the soldiers who were with him silently left the railway car, closing the door behind them. We were left in the semi-darkness, staring at each other, in the silence and deepening shadows.

“Anja?” It was whispered, but I heard it.

I nodded. I had mixed emotions coming face to face again with this man. He had inspired terror and loathing in me when we had first met, and yet I had come to care for him as I had gotten to know him and his inner turmoil. I couldn’t say that I had ever liked him, especially since he was partially responsible for the mess I ended up in, but I could never bring myself to hate him and now, seeing a familiar face after so many months of feeling so alone was somewhat comforting. I felt tears welling up in my eyes as I prayed that the Lord would somehow touch his heart to help me.

“I heard what happened to you. Part of this was my fault. I ask your forgiveness.”

I was taken aback. Was this the same proud, haughty man I had been forced to lie with not even one year ago? I could tell it had taken a lot out of him to say that. I sat in silence, waiting to hear what he would say next.

“I was in the area inspecting some military installations and I was aware that you were being held in a work camp near here. I have followed you since your arrest. Up until now I have been powerless to help without endangering my position, but I was hoping I could figure something out. The things you said to me, when we were in Poland, have haunted me and I have not been able to get them out of my mind. I cannot say that I am a believer in the things you told me, but I cannot say that I don’t believe either. I am

still confused.” He shook his head as if to say he was disgusted with himself for this show of weakness.

I cracked a weak smile, hoping it would encourage him to go on.

“I went as far as wiring the camp to find out about you and was told that you had escaped, but that your clothing had been found strewn about with blood on it about 25 kilometers out of the camp. They surmised that you had been attacked and most likely killed by a wild animal.”

My mind raced—my clothing? Blood? I really had no idea how that would have happened. Then I realized that I had left my clothing in the shallow grave where I had been buried alive and that there was a very real possibility that wild animals had come, attracted by the scent of decomposing bodies, and that my clothing had been dug up and strewn around by them. I was amazed at the Lord’s plan in all of this.

“You have been declared dead,” he announced with great finality. “However, when I heard they had picked up a peasant girl with no papers near our temporary encampment here, I had the strangest feeling that I needed to see her for myself.” He paused. “And now I know why.”

He pulled some papers out of his pocket and then opened the door and with great annoyance in his voice, called out to the guards. “You need glasses, you incompetent imbeciles! Her papers are here and are in good order! This is a disgrace!” He waved the papers at them, and they hurriedly and with great embarrassment and muttered apologies climbed back in and escorted me to the door of the railway car. The general remained standing in his place a few extra moments. Then he followed with the papers, slipping them into the pocket of my tattered apron on his way out.

I felt myself thrust into the cool, night air and stood there digesting what had just happened, and wondering at the miraculous ways of the Lord as the contingent of soldiers, along with the general, disappeared into the deepening gloom.

I glanced down at the papers in my pocket.

*Come to Komsomolsky Prospekt number 29 tonight. There is someone I would like you to meet.*

The papers were a farce. They were not legal papers at all. They were blank, except for the above note. I realized the general had pulled a fast one on the guards, and they hadn’t bothered to check my papers as he had already announced that they were legal and in order.

*Lord, should I go? Is this a trap? But if it were a trap, why did he let me go earlier? And if I go, will I have to be indebted to this man and possibly be required to carry out his wishes, whatever those wishes might be?* Part of me wanted to flee this place as fast as possible, to get out of there while I had a chance, while I was declared dead and before the general had a chance to change his mind. I was afraid of putting myself into his hands, as the last time I had done so I had not fared so well. I finally put my fears out of my mind and got quiet and still, waiting for an answer. The peace I received that this was, indeed, a part of God’s plan, was the answer I was waiting for. I made my way to a public restroom in the train station and tried to somehow make myself presentable. Then, not wishing to once again be asked for my papers, I got directions and made my way on foot to Komsomolsky Prospekt 29.



“Welcome. The general is expecting you.” The butler seemed to be from days gone by as he opened the door to the rather shabby, run-down looking, large, stone building. It looked like it may have belonged to an aristocrat in the days when the czars ruled Russia.

I was dazzled, however, by the grandeur of what was inside. Towering ceilings, beautiful decorations and tasteful art adorned the walls of what I could only term a mansion on the inside. I was not too surprised, however, when I recalled the general’s somewhat decadent taste. *I suppose he can get away with this because he is a general*, I mused silently as I followed the butler down the marble hallway.

I was led into a room and was overcome as I realized it was a bedroom—with a proper bath and shower. It had been so long since I had had a bath, I almost couldn’t remember what it felt like. I also noticed there was a beautiful dress laid out on the bed. I almost turned and ran, as I also realized what a compromising position this would put me in, as a woman, accepting the hospitality of the general. However, God had brought me this far and I wasn’t about to take my fate into my own hands, so with a smile and a word of thanks I entered the bathroom and was soon scrubbing six months of dirt and grime off my skin.

I soaked in the luxury of the tub for what seemed like hours. Finally a knock was heard on the door and a discreet, feminine voice said that the general would like to see me, at my convenience. I quickly got out of the bath and dressed. I was pleased that the dress fit well enough, and also that it wasn’t too skimpy. It was a long, loose-fitting maroon velvet with short sleeves and a decent neckline. The only sexiness came from a rather high slit up one side. There were shoes to match and even hair things and a bit of rouge and lipstick, which I had all but forgotten how to apply. I finally

managed to make myself look presentable and opened the door to my bedroom to see the same butler waiting with a patient smile on his face. Without a word he started walking and I followed, heart pounding, into a large dining room.

The table was large and spread with every sort of delicacy. The two men at the table rose to greet me and I immediately recognized the general. I hardly gave the other man a second look.

“Good evening, General,” I said, greeting him as properly as I could. “Thank you for your kind hospitality.” I wasn’t sure how specific to get, as I had no idea what he had told the others about me.

“Welcome, my dear.” He gallantly kissed my hand. “I trust you are comfortable in your room?”

I nodded.

“Let me introduce a colleague of mine—someone I believe you know.”

I turned and gasped as I realized the man coming towards me with a beaming smile on his face was none other than my dear brother Jan.

I fell into his arms, weeping as we hugged and kissed. I could see the general from the corner of my eye, beaming down on us like a benevolent father or patron. He was obviously very pleased with my reaction.

We didn’t say anything—only hugged for a very long time. Then Jan guided me gently to a place by his side at the table and urged me to eat.

“We will have plenty of time to talk, Anusha.” Oh, it was wonderful to hear him call me that. “Eat now and get your strength.”

I must admit, I was famished, and so I dug in to the food, but not before asking Jan to tell me what had happened to him and how in the world he had ended up in the middle of Siberia.

“It is a long story, but much of it is thanks to you,” he said with a smile. He looked towards the general, who gave a smile and a nod. Apparently these two men were friends. He continued. “After the general left the Wyszyński estate he passed through Brest on his way back to Russia. True to his word, he looked me up. The hospital I had worked in had been bombed by a German raid. I was working in a makeshift tent, tending to Russian soldiers who had been wounded.”

“And Eva?” I asked, immediately regretting the question. A shadow passed over his face, but was quickly gone.

“She died in Warsaw. A bomb hit the apartment building she was living in. She didn’t have a chance.” He paused for a moment as if to collect his emotions and then continued. “General Yipsin looked me up and eventually found me, just as he had promised he would try to do. He engaged me as a member of his staff—every general needs a doctor on his staff. And as a card-carrying, loyal communist”—at this statement both men chuckled—“it was very appropriate. I have since been living and working with him, traveling with him wherever he goes.”

“Your brother has taught me a lot,” the general interjected. “We have had many interesting discussions on the topics that you and I spoke about when we were in Poland together.”

I wondered if my brother knew just what kind of “relationship” the general had had with me. I wasn’t about to tell him if he didn’t know, and if he did know, he obviously wasn’t too concerned about it, and at this point in time, that was enough for me.

“Neither of you ever seemed to agree with my views and beliefs,” I began, “so you must have spent a lot of time just agreeing with each other.”

“To the contrary,” the general continued. “You gave me much to think about, and apparently you gave your brother much to think about also, although he would never admit that to you. That’s how big brothers are.”

I looked questioningly at my brother, who gave me a sheepish grin. I turned back to the general.

“Now don’t get me wrong,” he continued. “If you think you have made a convert of me, well, I cannot admit that much. But suffice to say, I want to hear more. Your brother on the other hand ... I think he has converted back to his original faith. The prodigal son, I believe you’d call him.”

I looked at Jan in amazement.

“However, I think we have said enough for one night. I will bid you good night for now and give you time to speak with your brother in private.”

He turned to go, and then turned back. “One more thing—officially I am still a member of the Communist Party and anything you or I do or say to compromise that could have dire repercussions. I request that you keep my secret, and I will keep yours.”

“Of course, General,” I replied as he bowed deeply and left the room.



My brother and I stayed up late into the night talking. He had looked into the whereabouts of our family before leaving with the general and was able to report that Adam and his wife had survived the war so far and were still on their farm, although that area of the country was still very volatile and he feared for them.

Alex was killed in the war. As far as our sisters, nothing had been heard from most of them, except for Maria and her family. They had somehow managed to escape to France and were planning to emigrate to

the United States of America once the war ended. My best friend Katya had been killed by one of the many bombs that hit Berlin during the war. The war was still raging, and who knew how many would be dead by the time this was all over. It struck me as strange that the general would be here, in Siberia, rather than out on the battlefield. I mentioned this to my brother, and he simply replied that it was not a good idea to ask the general anything about his work. It was top secret.

I then filled my brother in on all that had happened to me. He wept, laughed, and sat transfixed as I told him of the miracles God had done for me. He said he had not heard anything from Magda, the dear girl who had kept Pasha for me, but that he could pull some strings and try to find out. He did not bring it up, but when I got to the part of my story where my husband Pawel came to me in a dream, Jan was amazed. He was very silent afterwards and then said, "That is amazing. Pawel *was* killed. I do not know exactly how, but I do know that he was taken captive by the Russians, and his name appeared on a casualty list we received of Polish officers. I didn't want to tell you this now, as I thought it would spoil our reunion, and I did not want to see you sad on such a happy occasion, but I guess God has prepared your heart."

"So is it true, Jan?" I asked gently, after a few moments of silence. "Have Mama's prayers for you been answered?"

He nodded and looked sheepish. "Yes. I guess the prodigal son was a good way to sum me up. Although there was no 'father's house' in the literal sense to return to. I am trying to make up for all the time lost now by witnessing my faith to those that I can. I knew the truth all that time, but I rejected it and that is why I went so far astray. I considered throwing away

my Communist Party membership and witnessing of my faith openly, but when the general invited me to become one of his staff, I realized I could do more good undercover.

"Of course, if it ever comes down to it and I am confronted, I will proclaim my faith and suffer whatever the consequences may be." He paused for a moment. "I don't know what you said or did to the general back in Poland, but I know you had an incredible influence on his life. He felt terrible when he found out you had been arrested, supposedly as a 'scapegoat' for his 'sins.' He wanted to rescue you, but it took him a while to find you and once he did, we were both trying to figure out how to get you out of prison without compromising him in any way. You did us a favor and got out all by yourself. The timing couldn't have been better."

"You have the Lord to thank for that," I replied. "He pushed me into it. It was not a risk I was prepared to take on my own." I yawned as I said that and we both looked at the clock and realized just how late it was.

"Good night, my little sister. You truly are a heroine, just like you wanted to be when you were growing up."

I gave him a tired smile and a hug and kiss. Then he escorted me to my room and for the first time in months I settled down on a comfortable bed with pillows and fell fast asleep.



"The general will see you now, Miss Keroshiva." It was the butler again. He was a polite man—a relic from another time, the time when the czar was ruling Russia and there were dukes and duchesses, princes and princesses, and a whole host of aristocracy.

I had been living with the general and his entourage for the last two weeks. To my pleasant surprise he had made no move towards me sexually, and his only



request was that I eat supper with him and my brother in the evenings. They were pleasant evenings and we talked for many hours about faith and God, things of the spirit and the Bible. He had many questions. He was an intellectual and could not quite bring himself to believe without proof, but he was so close to salvation. He was truly hungry and searching. I knew he was scheduled to return to Moscow soon, and I wondered what would become of me.

On his suggestion, I had gone back to my maiden name, Keroshiva, and he had had special papers drawn up for me in that name. In those days there were no computer records, and so many people in Russia had the same names that tracking me down by my first two names would have been almost impossible, especially since I had been declared dead by the prison authorities. It did not seem strange to anyone that I would be visiting my brother, so that was my story. No one asked too many questions, as I was there at the behest of the general. There were whispers abounding that I was his mistress, but that didn't bother me, as I knew it wasn't true. Apparently the general was well known in these parts as a ladies' man.

"Come in, my dear." The general rose from behind his desk and kissed my hand. He really did belong in another era, with his gallant manner. "I have sent for you to say goodbye. I have thought long and hard on how to take you with me, for as you may have guessed, you mean a lot to me and your company would be most refreshing. However, there is no way without compromising my security or your faith. For me to be openly associated with you would put you under great scrutiny. You are not a member of the Communist Party and to become one would mean denouncing your faith, something, I take it, you are not prepared to do?"

I nodded and smiled.

"And if you were found to be a Christian, it would endanger me and those around me. I feel at present I can do more good from my position than from losing my position and even possibly being sent to prison, or worse yet, killed. I know too much for them to just retire me and let me go. Thus I have given much thought as to what is to become of you, for I wish to help you in any way that I can."

He paused for a moment. "You have papers and you will have money. I have arranged for an account to be set up for you which will supply you with some money—not a whole lot, as I've had to siphon it from other budgets at my disposal that had a little surplus, but enough to live comfortably. I would advise you to try to leave Russia and try to get as far away as you can from Poland as well—possibly to the United States of America. That is the safest place for you at the moment. I am afraid that that is as far as my help can get you. Your brother knows the details of the account we set up for you and will also give you information on how to contact me should you need anything else. I wish I could do more for you. I know your brother has agonized over leaving my employ and staying with you."

"Which I have advised him against," I interjected. "I think he is in a position to do far more good than if he became an outlaw like me."

"And a very beautiful outlaw." The general paused for a good long while and then said with a wistful look on his face. "You mean very much to me, Anja Ivanovna, and if we lived in another time, another place, I would get down on one knee and propose to you properly, make you my wife and we would live happily ever after. But alas, it is not to be, and making you my wife would only cause pain for both of us."

I felt a stab of pain in my heart for him as he said this, for although I was truly not in love with him, I had come to care about him and understand him and it hurt me that he was hurting.

He shook his head, as if in an attempt to shake off the emotion that was threatening to overwhelm him. “So I must bid you goodbye. You may make a Christian of me yet, you know.”

I asked permission to pray for him, which he gave, and I poured out my heart in prayer for him, for his salvation, for his protection and safekeeping as well as my own. When I finished I could see tears in his eyes. He quickly arose, took my hand, and then escorted me to the door.

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## ENCOUNTER IN MOSCOW

The war was still raging, and Russia was in the middle of its own turmoil with Stalin’s purges still going on in every part of the country. But I felt better than I had in a very long, long time. I was free at last! The warm summer breeze blew in through my open window, and as I packed up the meager belongings I had acquired while staying with the general, I wondered what I should do. I had thought long and hard on the general’s suggestion to immigrate. I felt, however, that there was no way I could leave Russia and Poland without somehow finding my son. So I decided to head back to Poland to try to locate my precious Pasha.

Because the general had given me a special *spravka*\* which allowed me to travel freely, getting a train ticket was not too difficult, and I was relieved to find it was a number two train, which meant traveling in relative ease. (The higher the number, the dirtier and older the train.) I was able to afford a second-class ticket, which meant a sleeping compartment with two sets of bunks in it as opposed to hard, wood-backed benches in third class. The first-class section was kept for visiting foreigners, of which there were few, and other VIPs.

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\* *spravka*: permit

I prayed once again for guidance and, feeling I was doing the right thing, boarded the train one muggy summer evening. This far north, the sun didn't set until midnight and then rose again around 4:00 in the morning, so although it was nearly 11:00 at night, the sun still shone!

This return train ride was so very different from the one I had taken to get there. I had only spent six months in the work camp, but sometimes it felt more like it had been six years. My compartment filled and emptied at different stops, as people came and went. I was saddened by the fearfulness of the average Russian person. Everyone was afraid of everyone else. People were friendly and would strike up conversations, but you could always sense a feeling of carefulness, watchfulness, and fear that surrounded everything and everyone. At one point a raucous group of men arrived and played cards and drank vodka the whole time. They were traveling to a city in the Urals. I was so glad when they finally got off the train, as I feared for my safety. However, they never even seemed to notice my existence.

It had been seven days on the train. I knew Moscow was nearing, as the train stopped more frequently and people began to get on and off more often. It had been a long, lonely seven days. I spent a lot of time drinking tea from the *samovar*\* that was located in the front of the car and staring out the window at the beautiful countryside. I spent a lot of that time praying too, wondering what to do. I wanted with all my heart to leave Russia, to leave Poland, and to start life anew where there would be no possibility of harm or danger. However, part of me rebelled against this idea. I was Polish and Russian and the blood of both nations ran deep in my veins. I was a part of all this,

for better or worse, and I wanted to have a hand in trying to make it better—if nothing else, by spreading the love of God to all who would hear me in this very troubled time.

I thought of trying to witness to those in my train compartment, but I felt it would be better not to, as the woman who was in charge of our railway car was a tough old lady who didn't put up with any flak and was a very staunch communist to boot. I knew she would have no qualms about calling the police and having me hauled off to jail if she even got so much as a hint of the fact that I was a Christian. So, I prayed, thought, ate, slept, and bided my time.

I disembarked in Moscow, as that was as far as that particular train would go. I was about to go buy a ticket to get me to the Polish and Belarusian border when a very strong feeling stopped me, and I decided to wait a day or two. I had enough money on me for a modest hotel. The general had kindly given me the names of some hotels that would accommodate me on his recommendation, so after making some enquiries, I took a bus into town and found a hotel that would put me up for the night. I was so thankful for the papers the general had given me, as I was stopped twice and asked for them.

Because of my very good papers, and because of a small "gift" that I slipped to the hotel manager, I was able to get my own, small room. I slept well in my hotel, and the next day I took to the streets, wandering aimlessly, wondering why I was still in Moscow instead of making my way to Poland. I finally asked directions to a park and was told to take the *electreechka*\* to a park that was not far away. The famed underground system of metros was still in the building stages at the time and only one or two lines were open. The

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\* *samovar*: a Russian tea urn

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\* *electreechka*: electric tram

summer breeze was warm on my face, and I meandered through the park enjoying the well-kept greenery and finally sat down on a bench. I had only been sitting for a few minutes, when to my shocked surprise, I saw a familiar face coming down the pathway.

He was walking with his shoulders slumped and his head to the ground. He wore an old, tattered overcoat that reached down to his shins and his shoes were scuffed and worn. But I would have known that curly blond hair anywhere. I totally forgot all caution as I jumped up and exclaimed, “Gregory!”

He looked up with a start, and then looked behind his shoulder, as if to check if he was being followed. He continued walking slowly while eyeing me suspiciously. I was bewildered by his reaction. *Did he not recognize me? I am sure it is him! Oh my goodness, what if I'm wrong? How embarrassing for both of us!*

My eyes followed him as he disappeared around the bend. I shot up a prayer and decided to follow him, to see where he would go.

I felt like a detective as I trailed him. He walked for a long while. It seemed he knew I was following him and was trying to lose me. I wondered if he thought I was with the NKVD<sup>1</sup> or something. I had heard about the NKVD and the horrors and terrors they inflicted on suspected dissident Soviet citizens. Finally I guess he thought he had lost me and he slipped into a small café. I followed him inside and once he had ordered coffee, I went up to his table.

“Please forgive me for intruding,” I said before he could object to my presence. “You just look so much like an old friend of mine who I had lost contact with. You wouldn’t happen to be Gregory Igorovich Keroshiva, would you?”

He seemed to start at the name, and then looked down and mumbled, “I don’t have any friends that I know of.” He hadn’t denied the name being his. I sat down across from him and reached out my hand and touched his.

“Gregory, it’s Anja—don’t you recognize me?”

He looked up, a glimmer of recognition in his face, but then he shook his head and looked at the table.

“Anja is dead. They are all dead.”

“No, no, Gregory! Look at me!” I took his chin into my hand and gently pulled it up towards me. “I am Anja. I am not dead! The Lord delivered me from prison and by some miracle, brought me here to find you!” I saw tears forming in his eyes as he looked at me, hoping against hope that what I was saying was true.

“I don’t know what to believe in anymore. I am so tired, so hungry.” It was then that I noticed the deep lines on his handsome, rugged face, the dark circles under his eyes. He had apparently gone through a lot—maybe as much as or more than me, and right now was in desperate need of love and encouragement.

“Where are you staying, Gregory?” I whispered.

“Nowhere. I was released from prison yesterday and have been wandering around in a daze. I still don’t know why I was released. I wanted so much to witness, but I have been kept in solitary—they were afraid I would corrupt the other prisoners. They tortured me.” He trailed off into silence, and I tried not to imagine what had happened to him. They had definitely tried to break his spirit. “I never told them who the others were, though, and in the end, they let me go, although I don’t understand why.”

I understood now what was going on. Just as I had needed the love and care of the wonderful peasant family the Lord had led me to after my escape in order to recover from my time in the work camp, so Gregory

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<sup>1</sup> *NKVD: the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, a political office and forerunner of the later Soviet KGB, or secret police.*

needed some tender love and care to help him recover from what had clearly been a terrible ordeal. I put down some money for the coffee and took him by the hand. “Come with me, my dear.”

He followed meekly, not even asking where we were going, although often looking over his shoulder. Just to be safe, and to assuage his fears, I took a long, circuitous route, including changing buses a number of times and taking side streets, doubling back to make sure no one was following us, before arriving back at my hotel.

I announced to the front desk clerk that my husband had arrived, and although she looked suspiciously at this scraggly dressed man, our last names were the same, so she let me take Gregory up to my room. A part of me thought that it couldn't be proper for me to have him stay in my room, but as I thought of all the “improper” things I had done in the last year, I chuckled and decided that the situation definitely warranted a departure from propriety.

I led him to the communal shower room and took off his dirty clothes and began to warm up the water. I flinched at the raw wounds on his back. Obviously he had been beaten not too long ago. I gently washed the wounds and then left him to shower in private. He stood for what seemed like hours in the shower, letting the warm water soothe his skin and wash away the dirt and grime. Finally he came out of the shower and went and lay on the bed that I turned down for him. He was soon fast asleep. I sat watching him for a while, wondering at the amazing way in which God had led me to him. I then decided to go out and purchase some new clothing for him and some food and medical supplies for his wounds. When I returned he was still sleeping soundly. He slept for twenty-six hours straight!



After watching over him for hours, I fell into a fitful sleep on the couch beside the bed. I awoke to a sound of screaming.

“Gregory, Gregory, it's okay! I am here. You are going to be all right. It is just a bad dream.” I took him in my arms and he broke down weeping. He opened his eyes and began to talk to me.

“I wasn't strong enough!” he sobbed. “I signed the paper. They said they would let me go if I signed the paper and I did! I denied my faith! I denied my Lord! There is no hope for me now. I am going to Hell and all I have ever done was in vain.” His body shook in convulsive sobs as I held him close. I had never seen a man cry like this. I didn't know what to say. The thought of Gregory, who I had always looked up to as such a strong, faith-filled Christian doing something like that somewhat surprised me. However, I knew what it was like to be tormented until you feel every last bit of strength or faith you have is drained from you. I knew that many a time I almost came to that point, and it was only the grace of God that kept me from it. I didn't say anything but just held him and wept along with him.



The next few days were slow and painful as Gregory slept, ate, and recovered physically. However, mentally and spiritually he was in another world, one where I could not reach him, no matter how hard I tried. I brought up the story of Peter denying Jesus, and how he went on to become one of Jesus' most used apostles, but nothing was getting through to him. He was struggling in a pit, and he wasn't going to get out until he decided to reach out and grasp the help that was being offered. At the moment he was too busy beating himself up to even be aware of someone reaching out, trying to lend him a helping hand.

I spent a lot of those days praying. I did not have a Bible, so in the times when Gregory was sleeping soundly, I took to the streets in search of a place that sold Bibles. I frequented many a bookshop, only to be looked at strangely when requesting a Bible. I would return home footsore and weary, no closer to finding a Bible than when I started. I was desperate for one, as I was sure that if I could start reading to Gregory, somehow the powerful Words contained in that book would punch through the cloud that hung over his head and would help him, somehow, to see the light. I prayed desperately and was given an idea which I can only say was a divine inspiration.



“Comrade! What can I do for you today?” A middle-aged man with a pock-marked face and a dour expression was behind the counter of a large and imposing bookstore. The shelves were stacked high with books. The Russians put great stock in knowledge and learning, and as long as a book was not remotely religious, it was available and relatively cheap.

By this time I had somewhat expanded my wardrobe and I dressed myself carefully, trying to put across the air of a college professor or something of the sort. “Actually, I have a rather special request.” I motioned him to the corner and lowered my voice to a whisper. “I am doing extensive research for a new book. I wish to debunk the archaic, religious notions that held our country in its grasp for so long. However, I wish to do it from a historical and factual standpoint instead of relying too much on rhetoric. To do this, unfortunately, I will need to wade through the book known as ‘The Bible.’ Obviously, it has been nearly impossible to find this book. However, since you seem to be so well connected, I was wondering if you would know where I could get one.”

The man nodded, seemingly mesmerized by me. “That is such a wonderful task. Who is sponsoring your studies?”

I wasn’t quite ready for this one. “I ... well ... I aspire to be a writer, and although I work days at a factory, I am doing my studies at night.”

He nodded, sympathizing with my lack of funding. “Wait here, Comrade. I think I can supply you with what you are looking for.” He marched into the back and came out with a beautiful, leather-bound, complete Bible. It was rather large and unwieldy and in looking through it I could see that it was written in classical Russian, which I was not wholly familiar with, however, it was the Word of God and it was all I could do not to hold it close and jump up and down for joy. For his benefit I eyed it critically.

“How much did you say that would cost?”

My eyebrows shot up in dismay when he named an astronomical price. Even with the stipend the general had promised me, I would still need several months worth to pay for this treasure.

“Surely you don’t put that much value on this old book?” I motioned towards it with a wave of my hand.

“No, I see your point. However, this is a very expensive edition and it is very scarce, which explains why it is so very costly. I also have a paperback version which comes in three volumes. Would you care for that? I would imagine it would be more in your price range.”

To my surprise and delight the paperback version he brought out was much smaller and more inconspicuous. I praised God silently for this total miracle as I made my purchase.

“Oh,” he added as an afterthought, “I must check your papers and record your name and address. Of

course, for you this should be no problem, as you are obviously on a very important, scholarly mission, however, it is policy for anyone who purchases a Bible. To weed out the undesirables,” he said with a wink.

I sighed my best “ho hum” sigh, while inwardly my stomach churned. I hadn’t foreseen this and felt stupid for not having realized that this would very likely be requested. I was stuck now. I did not want my name on anything, anywhere.

I reached into my purse and started to fiddle around, acting as if I was looking for my papers, all the while praying desperately. All of a sudden the bell at the door rang and the man spun around. A look of delight spread over his face as he saw a well-dressed woman who smiled coyly and beckoned his way. He immediately rushed to her side, and I marveled at what the right female can bring out in any man, however ugly he may seem to be. He was practically charming as he fawned over her. I stood forlornly in the corner, a piece of white paper in my hand. I waited a while. Finally I cleared my throat.

He looked up, surprised, as he had obviously forgotten about me. He thought for a moment, glancing at the paper in my hand. Then he magnanimously waved me away, as if he was the king and I was his humble subject on whom he was bestowing a favor. Grateful and with a heart full of praise I departed from the bookstore with my precious treasure.

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## **NO CONDEMNATION**

I sometimes felt like I would go crazy cooped up in that little room with Gregory. I slept on the couch and since he was ill, he had the bed. There was not much to do during that time, so when I was not out combing the shops looking for basic food items and standing in long lines to get them, I sometimes would go downstairs to the small, smoke-filled lounge in the hotel and listen to the radio. I had explained to our very helpful hotel manager that our long stay was due to my husband’s illness. Thankfully, Gregory really did look ill and never wanted to leave the room, so they believed us. I was so glad they never asked to see his papers, as then they might have investigated further and discovered that we were not actually married. I found out later, though, that living together was not unusual in the Soviet Union at that time. In any case, no one asked and I did not volunteer any information.

The war was still dragging on and I wished desperately for some real news of the war, instead of all the sugar-coated communist propaganda that was broadcast on the radio. I wanted, most of all, to find out what had become of Poland, as then I figured I would have an idea of what might have become of Magda and my precious Pasha. However, nothing informative was forthcoming. I finally decided to write the general and

ask him. He had given me an address to contact him at, along with strict instructions as to how to write him, what to say and a code of sorts to use. I used this in my letter, asking him, in so many words, if it was safe to proceed to Poland. I mailed the letter on a wet, rainy day and then returned to the hotel to wait.

“Anusha! You are back! I always worry about you when you go out.” Gregory was sitting up on the bed, clothed and with a smile on his face—the first I had seen in ages.

“Gregory—you are looking so much better. What happened?” I looked down and noticed the Bible on his lap. He had devoured the Words from that book from the moment I set it down in the room. He had seemed to be searching for something and was determined not to give up until he found it. It was the first spark of faith or hope I had seen in him in ages. I had tried to broach the subject of his thoughts, but that received such a poor reception that I decided to leave him alone and give the Lord some room to work.

Gregory spoke and understood classical Russian—which is what that Bible was written in—much better than I, as he had been raised on it, and he was able to explain to me the things I did not understand. We had spent many hours studying the Bible, but I hadn’t seen this much joy on his face in any of those study sessions.

“Has the light broken through?” I teased. I kicked myself for teasing him about it, but he still made me nervous sometimes and the darndest things would come out of my mouth.

He ignored my comment. “Come, sit beside me. I want to read something to you.” He proceeded to turn to the book of Romans, chapter 8.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus; who walk not after the

flesh, but after the spirit.”

He went on to read the whole chapter, his face aglow.

“Anja, have you ever had it happen to you that a verse will just jump off the page and hit you and it is like a light has been turned on in your mind and heart?”

I nodded affirmatively. I knew. That was how the Lord had guided and spoken to me and comforted me so many times.

“Well, it hasn’t happened to me in a long time, but it happened to me today. I feel wonderful, like a weight has lifted off my shoulders. The Lord knows how desperately sorry I am for the horrible thing I have done in denying Him. I hope somewhere, somehow He will allow me another chance to speak up boldly for His name, but in the meantime I am not going to do anyone any good wallowing in my sins when Jesus died to save me from them. Look at the story of Peter.”

I smiled to myself. I had been trying to tell him this for weeks. I once again attributed it to the power of prayer, as I had finally given up trying to get through to him and had just presented him with the Word to study and then prayed for him. That had evidently done the trick. We sat together on the bed and laughed and talked for hours.



“Gregory, do you realize that we have been living together for nearly three weeks and in all that time you have hardly spoken a word to me about yourself? I have no idea what you have been doing, how long you have been in Moscow, if you have a wife or girlfriend—so many questions!”

He laughed again, this time a quiet, gentle laugh. “Oh Anja, you have so many questions! You haven’t changed in that way, have you?”



“Have I changed in so many other ways?” I queried, suddenly feeling self-conscious and not even understanding why. I reached up and brushed a stray tendril of hair from my face.

He shook his head. “No, in many ways you are the same girl I knew and loved.—There, I said it. But you have grown up in many ways and matured. I mean, face it, you were as innocent as they come.”

I tried to ignore his “I said it” and did my best to put on a horrified face. “And what do you think of me now? Have I totally lost my innocence?” I asked in mock horror.

“No, that is not what I mean, and I think you know it. And you definitely haven’t lost your naughty, teasing side. No, what I am trying to say is that the things that you have gone through have deepened you. You lived such a charmed life before, you had no notion of sin, suffering, or sadness. You have an understanding and compassion now that you couldn’t have had before because you simply could not relate to so many things. The girl I left behind has become a woman.” He paused for a long while, staring at me. “And a very beautiful woman, at that.”

My thoughts turned sober—to my beloved Pawel who I would not see again in this life, to my baby and Magda, to my family and all those I had left behind. “I am sorry I had to go through all that in order to become a woman. I should think there would have been an easier way.” I slowly traced the pattern of the colorful bedspread and felt tears welling up in my eyes.

“There are some things we won’t understand in this life. However, the day will come when all will be made clear to us. Remember the verse I just read you out of Romans 8? ‘For I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.’”

I gave him a smile. “Now this is the Gregory I knew!” I almost added “and loved” but that seemed just too intimate and I wasn’t ready for intimacy with Gregory. “You were always comforting me, not the other way around.”

There was a long, poignant silence. I finally shrugged it off with a laugh, all the while looking alarmed at the cow-eyed expression Gregory was giving me. I did not remember him ever being so emotional.

“The sun is shining and it is a beautiful day,” he said, perhaps to relieve the moment. “Summer will be over before we know it and I am sure you know that the winters here are hideous, although from what you’ve told me, not as bad as northern Siberia. Let’s go to the park.”



We took a modest picnic and strolled through one of the many parks that grace the city of Moscow. It was during the working day, so most of the people in the park were grandmothers and their not-yet-school-age grandchildren. Both parents worked in the “Great Soviet Society” and left their young offspring in the care of the grandparents until they were old enough for school. For the most part it was a rather tidy little arrangement.

We found a secluded spot, spread out a blanket that we took from the hotel room and munched on dark, black bread, ripe, yellow cheese and some sparkling wine that I had waited in line for hours for. We rounded out this meal with some pickles from the market and we were set.

We talked and talked until the sun went down. I updated him on all that had happened after he had left. At first I wasn’t going to tell him about all that went on with the general, but in the end I decided that since he had shared such a humiliating thing

with me, I should be willing to be just as open and honest. He took it all amazingly well. He cried a few tears when he heard about his parents, but at the same time, he was relieved that they were spared the worst of things. When I was finished I realized it had taken longer to tell than I had imagined it would and that we would need to start heading back so as not to arouse suspicion at the hotel.

“You know,” I said as we shook out the blanket and got ready to go, “we need to decide if we are staying in Moscow and if so, we need to find someplace else to live. The management have been rather sympathetic because of your supposed illness, and because I have ‘contributed’ to their establishment, but once they see you up and around, that cover is blown and we’ll need to leave before attracting notice. There is no way anyone could afford to just hang around in a hotel and not work without attracting notice.”

Gregory agreed with me that it was something we would need to pray about as soon as possible. As we strolled hand in hand towards the bus stop, I made him promise to tell me what had happened to him once we got back to our hotel room that evening. He said he would. Then, so as not to attract unwanted attention, we walked in silence to our hotel.



“I just don’t know where to begin.”

Gregory and I were sitting, facing each other in the fading daylight. We had brought a small meal up to our room and I was determined to find out about Gregory and what had happened to him since I had last seen him. He didn’t seem so thrilled to talk about it, but I persisted, and he finally relented.

“Just begin where you left us—for the Ukraine, and without ever telling me goodbye.” I gave what I hoped was an encouraging smile. “I worried about you so

much. Of course, that was before I really had a close relationship with the Lord and understood what you did and why you did it.”

Gregory proceeded to fill me in on the details of his life since we had last spoken. It had actually only been a couple of years, but it seemed like another lifetime, as so much had changed since that innocent spring day when we had sat together on the hill overlooking his parent’s farm and had spoken about the Lord.

He had gone to the Ukraine at the behest of a pastor who was imprisoned for his preaching. He took over a very dedicated group of believers. At first Gregory felt very inadequate, as he had never before had to operate in such a seriously dangerous situation, where one slip of security could be his last. However, what his flock lacked in spiritual guidance, they made up for in knowledge of security measures, so while they taught him the ropes of security—how to avoid being followed, how to explain things without lying, but without giving away unnecessary information, how not to appear suspicious to those around him, how to call clandestine meetings—he taught them the Bible and together they made a great team. He worked with them for nearly a year and was very successful with many people receiving the Lord and witnessing and the church growing.

When I say church, I don’t mean a building, I mean a group of people who know and love the Lord. They could hardly ever meet together to fellowship in one big group, but rather met in small groups, with meeting times and places scattered throughout the week. Gregory simply went from house to house, staying the night at whatever house or apartment was hosting the gathering for the next day. He was unregistered and, he hoped, unknown to the authorities. He did not go out at all by day, only by night, and members

of his church were the ones who fed and clothed him. His was a simple existence, as he had little more than the clothes on his back. However, he was content and thrilled to see the Lord moving so wonderfully, even in such difficult situations.

He had witnessed his share of miracles of protection, supply, and safety. Of course, there were times when persecution would come and sometimes out of the blue a father or mother, or sometimes a whole family would disappear. The believers would always take up a collection and do what they could for the remaining family members. Many prayers were prayed and tears were shed for those in bonds, and God worked through them to be a mighty witness, even in some cases winning their jailers to the Lord. Others were called to be martyrs and through their death, a witness was given. All in all, the Gospel was being preached and the underground church was growing.

Then real trouble came for their whole church, when the teenage child of a top Communist Party official received the Lord. She was not very wise and proceeded to tell her parents everything she had learned. She was a spoiled child, and not used to following instructions, and although she was warned and counseled, she did not use wisdom and discretion. Her father, who was a very active anti-religionist was furious and he decided to lay a trap, using his own daughter as bait. To this end he encouraged her and even pretended to show a slight interest. He then had her followed and before they knew it, the authorities raided the apartment building where Gregory was staying and he was arrested as the “ringleader.”

The girl “conveniently” faded from the picture, and although there were many arrested with him, Gregory bore the brunt of the matter, because he was the pastor and leader of the church.

The NKVD hoped that they could get information from him, as they were sure he had contact with other clandestine religious leaders and possibly with the outside world as well, as he had been raised in Poland and had recently been in Germany. So, they tortured him and attempted to brainwash him in order to get information out of him, or at the very least, to make him deny his faith. He went many days and nights without food and only small amounts of water, was kept in solitary confinement for weeks on end, sometimes naked and freezing. He was beaten and forced to stay awake for days at a time while guards took turns interrogating him and trying to make him “crack.”

He had withstood bravely, never giving them any information, and been a witness all that time—so much so that a number of his guards were going soft on him as they became secret believers. He attested to me that the Lord never gave him more than he could bear. Just when he thought he couldn’t take the suffering for one more day, something would happen that would give him the strength to go on. One time he was at a breaking point and that day he was “accidentally” put in the same cell as the pastor who had sent him the letter asking him to come in the first place. This man was a precious old saint who had suffered long for the Lord and had borne it bravely. They were able to encourage each other and pray together and draw strength together from the Lord. It was two days before their jailers discovered that they were together and once discovered, they were immediately separated, but not before they had “recharged” their spirits through encouraging each other in the Lord.

Then the communist official who was responsible for Gregory’s arrest (and was hoping to use it to further his career) came to see the “progress.” He was appalled by the lack of “success” and even more

appalled by the fact that some of the guards had quit their jobs since being in regular contact with him and now were reportedly professing Christians. He immediately arranged a transfer to one of the highest security prisons in Moscow. He had based a lot of his hopes of success in the government on this arrest and subsequent information gleaned and was determined to see it through.

“That was when I cracked,” Gregory said, with tears in his eyes. “The horrors they subjected me to are too terrible to speak of and I felt so forsaken and alone. I allowed myself to get my eyes off the Lord and on to my hopeless, helpless situation. What had kept me all along was keeping my eyes totally on the Lord. Whenever things felt too much to bear I would think of all He did for me and what He suffered and my suffering seemed so small in comparison. However, when I was transferred I allowed myself to take some of the credit—feeling I had withstood the most horrible test and that somehow I was strong in myself. They had been unable to make me crack. I believe that is where my downfall started. From then on things became more difficult, and because of that I became discouraged and started looking at the waves, you might say, instead of at the Lord, and finally, one night I broke.

“I honestly had nothing to tell that the authorities did not already know. I am thankful for that. I was purposely kept in the dark about other groups and although there were ‘coordinators’ in our group, their identity was unknown to protect others, so that if I was arrested, the authorities would go for me, but the priceless knowledge of the underground church would not fall into their hands, no matter what they did to me. When the authorities realized I really had no information, it became a rather embarrassing situation, as they had high hopes that I would be a

key to infiltrating the underground church, which was especially strong in the area I was in.

“After conferring together, they instead demanded that I deny my faith, promising freedom if I did. Sort of a way to ‘save face’ and get rid of me, I guess. At first I refused, but when they started beating me mercilessly, I felt they would beat me to death this time, as I was no longer of any use to them. I didn’t want to die and face the Lord when I felt I had failed so miserably, so in my fear, I signed the paper. The beating stopped, they threw me in a cell and a few days later they gave me my papers and a small amount of money, and I was released. I still don’t know why I was released so easily. I am sure it is only a matter of time before they find me and demand something of me. They will probably want me to spy on my brethren. However, whatever happens in the future, I hope and pray that I will have learned my lesson and that I can be a witness and testimony for Him until the very end.”

By this time we both had tears streaming down our faces. We had both come through very, very difficult times. The Lord had required much of us, but even so, He had given us the grace to overcome and He had taught us many things through our experiences. And He had forgiven us for our failures and shortcomings. Gregory had told me earlier that he thought I had matured and become a woman. Well, I felt the same thing about him. This experience made him a man—it taught him just how much he needed the Lord, it gave him humility that he did not have before, and it also taught him the wonderful power of the Lord’s forgiveness. We cried and embraced and then just lay in each other’s arms till we fell asleep.

## MISHA

When I awoke the next morning, the sun was streaming into the room and I was still in Gregory's arms. As I lay there watching him sleep, my thoughts went back to the conversation we had had the day before. I had always loved Gregory, and at one point had even considered marrying him instead of Pawel. Now he had all but told me that he was in love with me. It was left up to me now to make the next move.

Part of my heart ached. The wound of Pawel's passing and my world and family being torn apart was still deep and relatively fresh. However, I knew I could not survive if I lived in the past and wallowed in self-pity and emotions. I had kept many of my emotions at bay for the past year as there had been so many other things to command my time and attention—such as staying alive! But now that there was a relative peace, I found myself yearning more and more for my son, Pasha, and missing my husband desperately.

Gregory's presence brought me joy, and I knew that I loved him. It was not a passionate, romantic kind of love—although I could imagine romance growing from it. Rather, it was a mutual respect, a love that went deeper than infatuation. I could see myself growing old with Gregory, serving the Lord with him, and, if God willed, having his children. While on one hand that thought gave me joy, on the other, I somehow felt

it was unfaithful to the memory of my dear husband and to my son, whom I did not know if I would ever see again.

My mind and emotions were in a turmoil. I knew we had to decide soon what we were going to do. Gregory obviously wanted me to join him and stay with him. He hadn't proposed marriage, but I figured that would come with time. If I wanted to work with him, I would need to be ready with an answer for him. If I decided I could not marry him, we would need to part ways soon, as it didn't really seem right to me for us to just indefinitely "live together."

I quietly and slowly slipped out from his embrace. He stirred a little but did not awaken. I washed my face in the washbowl and slipped on my coat. We had fallen asleep in our clothes. I looked at my watch and realized it was very early—the sun had just risen. I shot up a prayer and decided to go for a short walk before the day ushered itself in in full force. I was trying to slip out of the hotel as quietly as possible when I heard a voice calling me.

"Comrade." It was Gallina, the front desk clerk—an older lady who was almost as wide as she was tall, with a stern expression and a personality to match. It was well known that ladies such as these reported directly to the NKVD any type of suspicious activity. Up until this point I had had her sympathy because of my husband's illness. Without ever lying, I said a few things which led her to believe he was wounded in the war, and this gave her even more admiration. However, now that she had seen him obviously recovered, we would need to think fast and concoct a believable story about why we were still there.

"Good morning!" I said cheerily.

She scowled. "This arrived for you this morning," she said, handing me a telegram.

With trembling hands I opened it. I noticed that the seal had been tampered with and wondered who had done that and why. The front desk clerk was definitely not above suspicion on that score. It was from the general. It was a terse, short telegram. It stated:

*PAWEL'S SITUATION UNSTABLE. WILL HAVE TO WAIT TO MEET. FAMILY REUNION AT LAKE BAIKAL LATER THIS YEAR.*

She looked at me as if she was trying to gauge my reaction to the information. I must admit, I was puzzled by the telegram. I thanked her and turned to leave. She called me back and lowered her voice.

"Two men were here just a minute ago looking for someone by the name of Gregory Keroshiva. I told them I had never met anyone by that name and they left. However, I have a feeling you may know him." She paused and eyed me knowingly.

I tried to keep a straight face, even as my heart dropped into my toes.

"I like you. You are nice, however there is something about you and your husband that doesn't seem to be exactly as you say. I don't believe, however, that you are a common criminal or a traitor, and therefore I did not give them any information about you—yet. But they are probably watching the building, so if I were you, I would find someplace else to stay."

With that she made a snorting noise and abruptly turned back to her papers. She left me bewildered, as all along I had thought she was hostile, and here she was seeming to act friendly and helpful. I absently thanked her for the telegram and turned on my heels. I was about to head straight back up the stairs when I felt a strong nudge to go the other direction. I desperately wanted to warn Gregory, so I shot up a prayer.

I felt very strongly that I wasn't supposed to show any kind of reaction in front of Gallina and go about my business as normally as possible, so I continued to stroll nonchalantly out the door, calling to Gallina that I would be back from my morning walk in about an hour. She stared at me as I left.

As soon as I stepped out of the building I noticed a government vehicle parked just outside the hotel and some men in suits conferring in the car. I wanted to warn Gregory, but there was nothing I could do to help except pray desperately. I stepped up my pace, glancing nervously over my shoulder to make sure I was not followed. I could not tell, though, as there were many people on the streets, heading to the train stations and bus stops, most of them on foot, all headed out to work. In the great Soviet Union, no one was unemployed. As I walked I looked around and noticed that no one ever made eye contact, no one ever greeted anyone else, there were no cheery good mornings or hellos. Everyone went about his or her business as quickly as possible and a feeling of fear and caution permeated everything. I had to fight to keep my mind stayed on the Lord, as that very same feeling of fear was now threatening to overwhelm me.

I walked aimlessly, praying all the while for Gregory, for wisdom and guidance in what to do next. I also pondered the telegram that the general sent me. The meaning of the first part was clear—trying to go to Poland and rescue Pasha was not a good idea at the moment. The part I wasn't sure about was the part about Lake Baikal, and I wondered if he put it in as a disguise or decoy, or whether he was actually trying to get a message across to me. I walked for a long time and finally reached the park Gregory and I had picnicked in the day before. I sat on a park bench and closed my eyes. I was at a loss what to do next.

*Stay where you are!*

It came to me so strongly. I knew I shouldn't try to return to the hotel, as much as I was worried about Gregory. It occurred to me that my presence, should my real identity become known, would be a terrible thing for Gregory. He had been released from prison and had not, at the present, broken any laws, except for staying in a hotel room with me without being registered at the front desk. Because we were not officially "registered," if they found Gregory by going door to door or by getting him when and if he exited the hotel, they would have no "proof" that he was staying there. However, if they found me and then asked around, my face was well known in the hotel, and God only knows what would happen, not only to me, but to the hotel manager who had agreed to help me and even possibly to the general whose name I had used to get the place to stay.

The day dragged by slowly. It was late summer and the days were long and languorous. The humidity was high and I soon found myself very hot and thirsty. I was thankful that I had my money in my coat pocket. In Russia, I quickly learned, you took money with you everywhere, as you never knew when a store would have something available. There was no such thing as coming back another day to buy it.

I took out my money now and counted it and was distressed to see how little I had left. I was planning to go to the bank to draw on the small allowance the general had arranged for me, but now I didn't feel that that would be a safe thing to do. I walked to a nearby group of stores and managed to find a jar of apricot juice and a small chunk of sausage. There was fresh, black bread in the bakery next door, and I purchased all these items and sat down in the park once again and ate.

I spent the day praying, thinking, dozing, and reading from the Bible, which I also had in the deep pocket of my coat. I tried mulling over the telegram I had received but the meaning still did not become clear to me.

I was only sure of one thing. The more I thought of Gregory being re-arrested or hurt in any way, the more I realized that I was in love with him and that he was the one I was supposed to spend the rest of my life with. I prayed desperately, fervently for his protection and that somehow he would be led to me. Then, when I felt I had prayed all I could pray, I waited.



“Dyevooshka, let me see your papers.” It was a policeman nudging me with his stick. I jerked awake and was startled to see that it was twilight. The park was empty except for a few stragglers heading towards home. Twilight in Moscow comes around 10:00 at night in summer. My heart sank as I realized where I was and why, and that Gregory had not come to find me here. I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out my papers. The policeman looked over them and grunted something to his partner. They pulled out some papers and looked them over and then shook their heads. I was kept in total suspense, all the while trying to figure out what my story would be, should they ask what I was doing on a park bench at that late hour. Finally they folded them back up neatly and gave them back to me.

“Thank you, Comrade. There has been a prison escape very recently and we are making random checks throughout the city. You may want to head home soon.” With that they walked off into the deepening gloom.

I heaved a sigh of relief and wondered what to do next. I was about to get up and head back to the hotel

as the suspense was getting to be far too much for me when I heard footsteps approaching. By now the park was in darkness, except for weak light afforded from the occasional street lamp and I found myself cold with fear, wondering who it could be and what they would do to me. The footsteps slowed down as they got nearer and I prayed desperately as I feared the worst.

I could make out the figure of a man and hoped against hope that it would be Gregory. I was overcome with relief as I recognized his shuffling gait. He walked straight past me, as if I didn't exist. I almost cried out his name, but something stopped me. He didn't acknowledge my presence, but shuffled on past with his head hanging down. He continued walking and less than a minute later, a woman with a long coat came sauntering down the lane. She eyed me suspiciously, but kept walking when I studiously ignored her and tried to look absorbed in my thoughts. It was only after they had both passed that I noticed a small, crumpled piece of paper on the ground beside the bench I was sitting on. I picked it up and smoothed it out. It was a short, terse note from Gregory.

*Come to the Protestant Church service this Sunday. I will find you.*

Seeing the ambiguous note with his handwriting broke a dam. All the emotions I had tried to fight against all day overwhelmed me, and I felt so alone and afraid. My breathing quickened and I started to panic as tears welled up in my eyes.

I was so happy just that morning. I had finally decided I loved Gregory and was ready to embark on whatever the Lord had for us. But what now? My mind was awl and I was ready to break down and start



weeping. Only the knowledge that there were still a few people wandering around the park stopped me.

*I have to calm down. I have to get ahold of myself.* I took deep breaths and tried to think. *Oh Jesus, what should I do? I have nowhere to go. I am so alone. Please help me. Please show me what to do.* I closed my eyes and composed myself and listened. Nothing was forthcoming as far as instructions, but a verse came to me.

*He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

*Lord, I sure need one of those angels right about now. Thank You.*

I inhaled and exhaled deeply as a certain peace came over me. Then another verse came to me.

*Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart.*

And so I resolved to sit back and wait for what the Lord would do.



As I sat and waited I tried to occupy my mind by watching the few people left in the park. There was a young couple a few benches down, obviously hopelessly in love, entwined in each other's kisses and oblivious to the world. Watching them reminded me too much of Gregory. I couldn't bear to lose him now, just when we had found each other. And so I turned to the others. By now the moon had risen and was quite bright and I could see quite well, along with the help of the occasional streetlight. There was a young woman sitting on a bench across the park. I wondered why she was there so late, and all alone. Then there was a drunk man weaving in and out of the pathways, holding a bottle of vodka in his hand and a cigarette in the other. He attracted my attention

because his hair was long—something very unusual. I watched him for a while and began to get nervous when he began making his way towards me. When he got to my bench, he sat down, obviously oblivious to my existence.

“Don't worry, you know. It's in His hands,” he mumbled.

I turned to him with a start. “Excuse me? What did you say? Were you speaking to me?”

He ignored my question and repeated what he had said. “It's in His hands ... in His hands ... in His hands.” He threw back his head and started snoring.

I was bewildered by what I had heard and wondered if the Lord was sending me a message through this drunk. As soon as that thought entered my mind, he awoke and seemed to notice me for the first time.

“Oh, you are a pretty one. You need a place to stay, don't you? Follow me. Follow Misha. I know where to take you.”

I hesitated, understandably. No woman in her right mind would follow a drunk home at midnight.

As if reading my mind he said, “It's okay. You'll be safe.”

For a split second I could see his eyes and they were clear and blue and deady serious and he did not seem drunk at all. Then his head lolled forward again and he began to sing some vulgar song. He got up and began to weave down the pathway, beckoning for me to follow. As strange as it would sound, I felt a peace about following him and so a few seconds after he started walking away, I began to follow.

I followed in silence, my heart beating in my throat. We walked for blocks, through darkened streets and up and down alleyways. I glanced over my shoulder more than once and was sure no one was following, as we were taking such an erratic route, even sometimes

doubling back to streets we had already taken. Finally he stopped in an alley and disappeared down a flight of stairs that went below the street, into the basement of an old apartment building.

I repeated the name of Jesus over and over for my protection and to ward off fear as I followed him into the shadows. When I got to the bottom of the stairs there was a short hallway with one door at the end. I looked and there was nowhere for someone to hide or come out the other side and yet ... there was no one there. I assumed he had gone in the one door at the end of the hall and so I went and gingerly knocked.

“Who is it?” A woman’s soft voice called to me from the door. I racked my brain to remember the name of the drunk.

“I am Misha’s friend.”

The door abruptly opened and there, in the doorway, was a woman. It was hard to tell her age, as at first glance you would say she was only a girl, but looking closer there were lines on her face, although whether they were from old age or just from hardship and sorrow one could not tell. She was fairly pretty, with dirty blonde hair drawn back into a braid. She was wrapped in a dressing gown that had obviously seen better days and her face was as white as a ghost.

“You knew Misha?” she whispered.

“Knew?” I was puzzled.

She nodded absently and beckoned for me to come in. I entered silently and surveyed the scene before me. She lived in the basement of an apartment complex. It was simple, with the most basic furniture. The faded purple, flowery curtains clashed violently with the striped sheet on the rumpled bed. The bed itself was obviously the living room couch during the day. Books and other knick knacks were scattered around and a few items of woman’s clothing were laid over

the backs of chairs. There was a door that was shut, which I assumed went to another room, probably the bathroom, and off to one side was a small kitchen. A silver samovar sat in a place of honor on a small side table, looking oddly out of place in this mess. I looked around and could see no sign of male occupation.

“Do come in.” The girl seemed to get ahold of herself. “Do you want some tea?” She ran her hand absently through her hair and stifled a yawn.

“No, thank you,” I said. I was wondering what to say next—how to explain my presence and hoping that Misha, if that was his name, would come out of the next room and help to back up my strange story of how I ended up on this lady’s doorstep.

She acted as if she had not heard me and while motioning for me to sit down, she rushed around and was soon back with a cup of tea. “I was already drinking tea, so it’s no trouble,” she said in response to my thanks. “I don’t sleep much. ... I didn’t know Misha had any lady friends. He was always somewhat of a loner.”

“I am sorry, you keep talking about Misha in the past tense. I don’t know what I am missing here, but the truth is that I had nowhere to stay tonight and I met Misha in the park. He offered to let me stay at his house for the evening and then led me here. If you ask him I am sure he will corroborate my story.” I still hoped that he would come out from the adjacent room and clear this whole thing up.

The girl looked at me like I was from another world. Then her body started to shake with laughter and she almost spilt her tea. I watched bewilderedly as her body shook violently and her laughing turned to sobs. Soon she was crying and weeping with such passion, I was taken aback. I felt like I was intruding on a sacred moment, so I bowed my head and prayed

silently for the wisdom to know what to do or say next. Finally she quieted down and sat for a long while, just staring at her now cool cup of tea.

“Misha died three months ago,” she said slowly. “I don’t know what you are doing here or how you got here, but Misha did not bring you here. He is dead.”

“Look, I don’t know what I am doing here either, but I know that a man who called himself Misha, with long, brown hair and very clear, deep blue eyes led me here. He was a little, well...” I paused, not sure how to say this.

“Drunk?” The woman finished the sentence for me.

“Yes.”

“Did you say he had long brown hair?” She picked up her cup of tea and her hand shook so uncontrollably that she had to put it back down.

“Yes.”

“Oh my God! Oh my God!” Tears started streaming down her face again and this time I felt compelled to reach out and take her into my arms. I held her for ages as she cried and cried. Finally she composed herself.

“I am sorry. I am so, so sorry! This is no way for a hostess to act.”

“I am not exactly the ideal guest, showing up uninvited at midnight,” I said with a small laugh.

“Oh, but you were invited. Misha invited you! And so you are my guest and as such you shall have the very best.” She jumped up and went into the back room—the one I was hoping Misha would emerge from. I followed, and was surprised to see two nicely made up single beds and a small bedside table with a lamp on it.

“Our bedroom,” the woman said by way of explanation. “I can’t sleep in it anymore, now that he is

gone. But you can and you shall.” She pulled back the covers on one of the beds to reveal clean, white sheets. “The bathroom is through that door. Most of the flats here share a bathroom and a kitchen, but I am lucky—I get my own.”

I muttered thanks. The sight of a warm, clean bed and the thought of a shower after spending the whole day in the great outdoors was very refreshing and soothing.

As she turned to leave she suddenly turned around again and held out her hand. “Svietlana Alexandrovna—that is my name. It is nice to meet you.”

I clasped her hand in mine. “Anastasia Ivanovna. The pleasure is all mine. Thank you again for your hospitality.”

She waved her hand as if to say “it is nothing” and then turned and left the room.

After a short, quick shower I dove between the clean sheets and before I knew it, I was fast asleep.

## THE INFORMER

“So who was Misha?”

I almost immediately regretted my question, as Svetlana’s eyes suddenly closed and she shook her head in sadness.

“Forgive me. That was insensitive of me.” I cradled my cup of tea and thanked God for this place of peace and rest. It was Saturday morning and Svieta and I were sharing a cup of *chai*<sup>\*</sup>, some homemade blackberry jam, and blini that conjured up memories of my childhood and mama.

“*Nyet*, you deserve to know about him. He appeared to you, so he obviously wanted you to know about him.” She got up and turned on the radio, tuned it to a classical music station and cranked up the volume. Then she returned to the couch, pulled her legs up underneath her and took another sip of tea. She took a deep breath and then began.

“Misha, or Mikhail Alexanderovich, was my brother. When growing up we were inseparable. He and I are just a year apart and were more like twins. We did everything together, shared our hearts and our feelings, our passions and ideas. Our father was killed during the Russian Revolution, and was a “brave hero” of the revolution. Misha was just born when this happened and I was only a year old.”

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\* *chai*: tea

I quickly did some calculations and figured she was somewhere in her thirties. She paused for a moment and then continued, “Our mother was never that thrilled about the ‘cause’ that had stolen our father at such a young age. She never really subscribed to communist philosophy, except out of love for our father. I was told she was vibrant and full of life before he died, but we always knew her as a quiet, morose woman who worked and made just enough money to support us and then came home, had a few drinks, made dinner and went to her room. She took care of us physically, but was more than happy to farm us out to pre-school, kindergarten, then state schools, with any after-school program that was available.

“I guess we were a constant reminder of our father, whom she had so dearly loved, and she just never stopped grieving. Because of our father’s heroism, we were made much of by some of the teachers and we joined the Young Pioneers, then the Komsomol, quite early on. We were ‘model students’ and did everything we were supposed to do, said everything we were supposed to say and moved up in the world to where we were offered memberships in the Communist Party when we were still in our twenties, which is very unusual. I never even stopped to think about why I was doing it. It was all in honor of my father and for his memory—something our mother drilled into us every day. It was all about father.” She stopped again, with a faraway look in her eye. I got a little nervous listening to this story, as I wondered where she stood now with her whole devotion to the communist ideology.

She shook herself slightly, as if to arouse herself from a daydream, and continued. “Misha did especially well. We were both recruited by the ... the...” She took a deep breath, as if contemplating whether or not to give me this information. Finally she lowered her voice

and whispered, “The NKVD.” Then, having said it, she seemed relieved and continued in a louder voice. “Yes, I was ... no, am still ... an informer.”

She must have noticed a stiffening in my body as she quickly went on to reassure me. “Don’t worry, if I was going to inform on you, I wouldn’t be telling you this, now would I? Especially when you have given me no information about yourself and I don’t even know your real name.”

I relaxed and she went on.

“Misha especially threw himself full time into his work for ‘the great Soviet cause.’ He was instrumental in some very high-profile arrests of traitors and the like and rose quickly in the ranks, despite his young age. I was not up for as much and took a simple job—that of an intermediary between the *dezhurnaya*\*—the ladies who sit and monitor the activities, comings and goings of the apartment complexes, and those above me, who are part of the NKVD. I was the eyes and ears of the local police ... still am, for that matter.” She said this almost as if she was talking to herself.

“Anyway, I am rambling here. As time went on he seemed to grow more and more unhappy. At first he drank only on social occasions, as no true Russian would be sober on such occasions. However, the drinking grew along with his job advancement and sometimes he would come home so drunk and miserable, I would beg him to talk to me. But we really couldn’t even talk to each other or trust each other any more, as we didn’t know where our loyalties were. It is horrible. Parents turn in children, friends turn in friends. More and more people are being shipped out to gulags daily—and for what? Some comment made in a time of distress, some misunderstanding, some grudge held by someone else.

\* *dezhurnaya*: woman who monitors the comings and goings of residents and visitors to her building, and reports them to the NKVD

“Misha started to realize this, I think, and became more and more disillusioned with it all as he saw how power was being abused, and just how little the ‘great cause’ really mattered to many of the people in power. I think even communism itself started to present some major flaws, and he was very conflicted in himself. He began drinking more and more, took sick leave from his work and just let himself go. His hair grew long and he didn’t take care of himself. Finally one day he went out drunk on a Friday night. He never came back, and his body was found in the lake by the park you said you were in last night.

“He had left a suicide note under his pillow, and in it had explained his disillusionment, his desire for something more, his feeling of being trapped. He said he had contemplated denouncing the Communist Party, but was afraid to do so for fear of the repercussions it would have on me. So, to protect me, he killed himself.

“I burned the suicide note, as he requested me to do, and his death was treated as an accident or possibly an unsolved murder, and soon faded into oblivion. But I have not been able to get these things out of my mind, and since then my life has been a living hell. I feel tormented by the lie we have lived, and yet, my search does not turn up truth. I even went as far as attending the church, but all they did was light candles and chant old Russian poetry. It was peaceful, but there were no answers there—just a lot of little old ladies finding comfort in something dead and past. There is no truth, there is no God, and I am lost ... lost!” She burst into tears and held her head in her hands.

“Svieta, God sent me here,” I said quietly.

“There is no God! Don’t tell me of God! If there is a God He wouldn’t have let my brother, my Misha, die.

There are too many horrible things happening in this world for there to be a God.”

“But you see, God gave man the freedom of choice. It is man’s fault that many of the things in this world are so horrible, not God’s. He could have made us all to only love Him, but there would be no freedom in that. After all, you can’t appreciate the light unless you’ve known darkness.”

Svieta continued crying and obviously didn’t really hear what I was saying. I realized that theological argument was not what she needed at this point. I went and sat down next to her on the couch and put my arm around her.

“Svieta, God loves you. Misha loves you too. He obviously came to me in the park and led me to you for a reason. Even if you can’t appreciate all my arguments and logic, can’t you see that? How, in a million years, could I have known that you had a brother named Misha who died three months ago? How could I have known that, when three months ago I was a prisoner in a work camp in Krasnoyarsk?”

Svieta looked up at me, some interest showing. I had shot up a prayer while she was talking to me, and I felt that the Lord wanted me to go ahead and give her my testimony—all the highlights of my search for the Lord and how I found Him and how He led and guided me to this point in my life and all He delivered me from. The telling of this story took the better part of the morning.

I finished with, “So don’t tell me there’s no God. I know He is real and I know He loves me and I know He loves you, because He doesn’t waste His people—especially here in this land. His people are rare, and if He allowed someone to come from the dead to lead me to you, then I *know*, without a shadow of a doubt, that He loves you.”

For the first time in hours, I saw Svieta crack a smile.



Day turned to night and finally, after hours of talking, answering her questions and reading to her from the Bible, Svieta prayed with me and accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior. She had an amazing transformation when she prayed. Her eyes shone, glistening with tears of joy as she exclaimed over and over, “I feel like a new person! The pain, the weight, it is all gone!” We embraced like sisters. She got quiet for a moment and then said, “Don’t you suppose Misha knows the truth now too? He was so desperate for it.”

I nodded. “I don’t know exactly how God and Heaven work, but I do know that I am a child of God, so if God sent Misha to lead me to you, I would think Misha is working for God now.”

Svieta chuckled and then looked up at the clock.

“Oh my, I need to get some dinner on! You know, I know where that church is that your friend—what was his name? Oh yes, Gregory—wanted to meet you at tomorrow. I have never attended services, but there is only one ‘approved’ Protestant Church in the city and I make a point to find out who does. I will take you there. If the authorities question me about being there, I can find some excuse. Hopefully we can get Gregory away from whomever is following him and hide him here until you both can escape.” She eyed me critically. “You look like you are about the same size as me. You can borrow something of mine to wear.”

We stayed up that night till 2:00 in the morning, talking, praying, sharing our hearts, and chatting like old friends.

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## CHURCH SERVICES

The bell was ringing defiantly, as if it was its right to ring out the message of the Lord in the midst of this godless regime. We were attending the only approved Protestant Church for miles and it was actually fairly crowded. However, I was saddened as I looked around and did not see any children, nor many young people. Most people were at least in their fifties, many much older. I was even more saddened when the preacher arose and preached a very secular text, with very little mention at all of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I noticed a few men in suits near the front row who for some reason did not fit in. Svieta explained to me that they were there to keep an eye on the preacher, who was also a member of the Communist Party, and make sure his message was “politically and ideologically correct.” You see, in theory there was supposed to be religious freedom in Russia, so they couldn’t just shut down all the churches, but what they did do was close many of them, and then supervise the preachers of the remaining ones and imprison all those who preached a true Gospel. Or they put their own men in as preachers, in a subtle attempt to wrest the Scriptures and destroy the truth of God’s Word and message. There were no young people or children

because it was illegal to proselytize or speak of religion to anyone under the age of eighteen.

We sat through a spiritually dry sermon. The part I enjoyed the most was the hymns, which were sung by a fairly young woman who seemed to really believe what she was singing. I thanked God that at least they couldn't change the words of those good old hymns, and there was so much truth packed in them. Throughout the service, my eyes searched the congregation, hoping to see Gregory, but I did not catch a glimpse of him. It was almost over when I finally saw him in the front row looking very nervous and out of place, alongside the men in suits.

After the service we hung back as the crowd departed and watched as he was escorted up to meet the preacher. The preacher took them to the back, where it seemed there were a number of offices. We realized we could not follow or make ourselves conspicuous, so we opted to wait outside in front of a nearby bread shop, where we could see all arrivals and departures from the church. We prayed and waited, not knowing what to do next.

I could tell that Svieta was relieved that the suited men were so intent on Gregory that they didn't even notice her presence. Some members of the church seemed to recognize her, but they only gave her a polite nod, as she was a *stukachi*<sup>\*</sup> and no one in their right mind made close friends with her.

The day wore on and my feet ached as I stood in my borrowed shoes and waited. We only broke our vigil to take turns to go in search of something to eat. I was about to call it quits when I saw him walking down the front steps of the church building, looking tired and defeated. He looked our direction only once and I prayed that he saw us. He turned, however, as if

he was going away from us, and then turned a corner and was gone.

I was about to walk away, tears brimming in my eyes, when Svieta held me back and told me to wait a little longer. Sure enough, about ten minutes later he approached from a side street and went straight into the bread shop and walked out munching on half a loaf of bread. He loitered by the shop, right next to us, but still did not acknowledge our presence. Finally he turned and looked at Svieta and she mouthed something to him. He nodded and walked off. I was mystified by the whole exchange.

"Come. We need to go now," Svieta said, gently taking my arm.

"But what about—"

"Hush. He will be fine." She guided me towards the *tramvai* stop and we boarded a tram in silence and went back to her apartment.

Once we got in the door she bustled around to get supper, while I nursed my aching feet. I tried to bring the subject of Gregory up again, but she refused to talk about it. Finally, when my patience was wearing thin, a knock came to the door.

"Gregory!" My mouth nearly dropped open in surprise when he came in, a beaming smile on his face.

"Oh, I missed you!" He opened his arms and I fell into his embrace. I had worried for him so, and missed him so much. The only thing that had kept me sane for the last two days had been Svieta's need for someone to talk to and share with her about the Lord.

"What happened?"

"There is much to tell. But first, tell me how you got here?"

I realized that he wanted to know if it was safe to talk freely in front of Svieta, so I gave him a rundown of what had happened to me from the time I left the

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\* *stukachi*: informer



hotel early Friday morning. When I finished he shook his head in amazement.

“God is so good,” he said. “When I awoke and you were gone I waited till past noon for you to appear. Finally I decided to go down and see if I could find you in the nearby shops or at the park, as I was starting to get worried. I left the hotel, only to be apprehended the moment I walked out the front door by a group of men from the NKVD. They were quite annoyed that I had been staying in a hotel without properly registering, and they were very rough in their questioning. Apparently I had been spotted with you and they wanted to know who you were and they proceeded to question me about what I had done since being released from prison.

“I tried to brush you off, to make them think that I was just in need of the company of a woman, after over a year in prison.” He stopped and blushed and then continued. “Anyway, after a few hours of hassling me and obviously not believing my story they proceeded to explain that they were willing to overlook my most recent indiscretions if I would take a job informing for them, posing as a member of the staff of the Protestant Church that we attended this morning. They informed me that they were upgrading my accommodations and proceeded to tell me to get moving. I don’t know if they questioned the hotel owner, but it is possible, and if they did, your general may be compromised, depending on how much the hotel owner values his life and freedom.

“It was late evening before I got my things together, and they worked out whatever needed to be arranged for new sleeping arrangements for me. I prayed you would be at the park and I insisted on walking through the park while I was waiting for them to work out the details, pleading a headache and the need for fresh

air. For some reason they bought it and that is when I passed you that note. The lady behind me was one of ‘them.’ They were very nice to me. I never committed to anything. I wanted to tell them to get the hell out of there and that I would never work for them or with them, but when I prayed about it I got the verse, ‘Agree with thine adversary quickly whilst thou art in the way with him.’

“Later, when I finally got some quiet time on Saturday, I prayed more at length. In fact, I spent the whole day in desperate prayer for you, for your safety, and for deliverance, and the Lord promised me that He would deliver me and that I would never spend more than a few hours in that church. Svieta mouthed the street name and number of her apartment to me and I waited until after dark, and until I had literally roamed the entire city and there is no possible way anyone could be following me, to come and find you. And so, here I am.”

We both praised the Lord, embraced and kissed. “Oh Gregory, I missed you so much. I love you, you know that?”

“Anja, not now.” He was visibly embarrassed as I turned to see Svieta standing in the corner with a knowing smile on her face.

“Oh don’t be embarrassed, Gregory,” Svieta said. “She definitely loves you and there is no shame in being loved, eh? Come on now, it is time to eat.” She proceeded to feed us a delicious three-course meal of different salads, meatballs on mashed potatoes, and then a very luscious cream torte with coffee.

That night, after sitting up for hours talking about the Lord, praying and making plans, Svieta and I went to sleep in the bedroom together and Gregory slept on the couch.



“Anja, I hate to say this to you,” Gregory said, “but there is a good chance that your general is compromised, especially if the owner of the hotel decided to talk. You never know, in this society, who is spying on who, and who someone is loyal to or not.”

“Information like that would be priceless for an enemy,” Svieta said thoughtfully as she passed me the jam for my tea.

“When we prayed last night, God was clear that He would take care of us,” I answered, “that no harm would come to us and that He had a job for us to do elsewhere. He said it would take a few days for things to fall into place. I am so tempted to try to figure that out, but I know from experience it doesn’t do any good to worry, so I am determined to trust on this one and enjoy this little haven from the storm.”

Svieta looked up with a smile. “I still can’t believe that you talk to God and not only does He listen, but He talks back to you and tells you what to do. You have to promise to teach me all you know in the time you are here. And of course, it goes without saying, you are invited to stay for as long as you want.” She tossed her head and started to clear the dishes.

Just then there was a knock on the door. “Quickly—take these.” She piled our dirty dishes into our hands. “And get into the bedroom. Get under the beds and wait until I tell you to come out.”

We rushed into the bedroom. My small frame glided easily under the bed, along with the tell-tale dirty dishes, but try as he might, Gregory did not fit. He finally pushed the bed away from the wall and slid in-between the bed and wall, covering himself as well as he could with a blanket. We waited with bated breath, praying for protection and wisdom for Svieta.

I could hear her on the other side of the wall talking with another woman, probably the neighborhood gossip. I breathed a sigh of relief that it wasn’t the police.

“Yes,” I could hear her saying, “I have had a guest over, but she is gone out shopping and won’t be back until later ... a cousin from Belarus.”

“Belarus?” the second voice was shrill. “Is that the famous Katarina you are always talking about? Oh, I am dying to meet her! I will just wait until she returns.” I marveled at the guts and rudeness of this lady.

“No, it is not Katarina.” She paused. “Okay, if you must know, she is not even a cousin!” I held my breath. “She is an old ... friend ... of Misha’s. She was unaware of Misha’s death and came to see him. ...” I heard her voice trail off. Soon I could hear sobbing and some soothing murmurs.

“Thank you,” came Svieta’s voice again. “I am so sorry, I really need to be alone now.”

We all breathed a sigh of relief when the front door closed with a thud and Svieta gave us the all clear signal to come out.

## **SIBERIA**

We stayed with Svieta for three more days, during which time Gregory and I rested, read, prayed, and ate some of the best food we'd tasted in ages. Because of her work and her Party membership, Svieta had a pass which allowed her to shop in special stores, which carried all kinds of delicacies, imports, and goods unavailable to the general public. The only reason her apartment had a shabby look was because she had let it go for the last few months, since her brother had died. However, now that she was once again embracing life to the full, she cleaned up the place and was planning to slowly redecorate, as funds allowed. She shopped for me and outfitted me with a very nice, basic wardrobe including shoes, warm winter boots and warm clothing, which I was lacking. I was very thankful for this, especially with winter approaching.

She also took Misha's clothes out of storage and we were thrilled to find that they fit Gregory perfectly. Between gifts from Svieta and the shopping she did for us we were set for the winter. The Lord's miraculous and wonderful supply never ceased to amaze us.

The evening of the third day Svieta came back laden with groceries and other goods and also bearing bad news.

“They are looking for you, Gregory. You disappeared right out from under their noses. I am sure you know that prisoners are not allowed to live in any big cities once they are released. Usually they have to live for at least ten years in exile. That applies especially to political prisoners,” she added as an afterthought.

We both nodded and waited for her to collect her thoughts and finish.

“Well, they were going to waive that rule because they thought they could use you to infiltrate the church and be another set of eyes and ears for them. They figured that since you had suffered imprisonment for your faith, you would be more trusted by the Christian community and therefore you would be privy to information that some of their other informants are not trusted with. I was gone all afternoon because I called in a favor from a colleague of mine and he got ahold of your file. Apparently they have decided that you are not trustworthy enough, seeing as you have disappeared again, and they are planning to give you two days to move to Siberia—to Irkutsk, to be exact. That is, if they can find you in those two days. After that you become illegal and will be arrested if caught. They are hoping you will turn yourself in after reading today’s *Pravda*<sup>1</sup>.” With that she held out the latest copy of the newspaper which had a notice in it describing Gregory and asking him to report to a certain address by a certain time the next day.

I was incredulous. “Can they do that? Can they exile him? I thought that was something the czars did.”

“Oh yes, they can. They do it all the time, sometimes officially, sometimes unofficially. And they are doing it now. I suggest you pray about what to do, as after tomorrow night you will not be able to leave the city

on a train without being arrested if caught and you definitely won’t be able to get a permit for travel.” With that she picked up a bag of groceries and walked off to the kitchen.

“Anja, we have some praying to do,” Gregory said as he took my hand and led me to the bedroom.



“It is settled then?” Svieta seemed impressed with our plan when we shared it with her the next morning over breakfast.

“Are you sure it won’t cause you any trouble or harm?” Gregory asked.

Svieta paused for a moment. “Honey, you won’t cause me any trouble. I will probably be hailed for finding Gregory and convincing him to turn himself in. However, my trouble is going to be when I tell them I am not going to do this job any more. That is when I am going to need prayer, as the outcome of that could go either way—and usually it goes the way of prison.”

“We will be praying for you, and you know that you are welcome to visit us any time.”

Svieta nodded. “Finish eating. You need to pack up so we can go as soon as possible.” She picked up the phone and dialed a number, leaving some sort of coded message. A few minutes later the phone rang again and we overheard snatches of her conversation.

“Yes, I found him ... I saw him wandering near our neighborhood. ... No, he does not want to tell me where he has been, but I have convinced him to turn himself in and to go willingly to Irkutsk. ... No, I don’t think he is dangerous. He seems to be suffering memory lapses—common after prison you know. ... No, I guess you wouldn’t know. ... Yes, yes. I have him here with me. ... Apparently so. ... Okay. We’ll be there in an hour if I can find a ride, otherwise it will take longer. ... No, that

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda*: literally “Truth”—the name of the former Soviet Union’s official state newspaper

won't be necessary. By the way, where is he supposed to live once he gets to Irkutsk? ... Oh, is that how it works? I always wondered. ... Okay. Nice speaking to you too. Good day." She rang off with a sigh.

"It is all arranged. Gregory and I will go to their office and we'll meet you, Anja, at the train station at 8:00 this evening. I believe the Trans-Siberian Express leaves around 10:00."

"What do I do if you don't show up?" I was worried about being separated from them.

"Wait until midnight. If we don't come by then, make your way back to my apartment as unobtrusively as you can. I will leave the key in its usual hiding place so you can slip back in unnoticed. I hope it doesn't come to that. God bless you."

We hugged, kissed, prayed, and then prepared for our journey.



Minutes turned to hours as I sat in the main Moscow train station, waiting, waiting, and waiting some more. I figured they might not make it by 8:00, but it was now 11:30 and I was really starting to worry. It was all I could do not to pace the halls. I had found an empty corner on a wooden bench and I was concentrating all my attention on the large, round clock which graced the wall across from me. It seemed to move so slow. I wondered if time had come to a halt.

All around me was a teeming mass of people coming from and going to all parts of Russia. At 12:05 I could wait no longer and, with tears forming in my eyes, I decided to go back to Svieta's apartment. As I was walking out of the station I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"He is in car number four on track seven. Hurry and you will make it. The train leaves in five minutes!"

It was Svieta.

"You can't be seen with him until the train is out of the city. He was brought here by a police escort," Svieta explained quickly. "God bless you. Please write."

I could see tears in her eyes as she formed a kiss with her lips. She then turned and scurried up to a small group of tired-looking policemen. One of them greeted her with some jest, which she pretended to laugh at.

I ran with my luggage as fast as I could to track seven and had to run alongside the train and be pulled up into it by a friendly conductor as the train gained momentum. Only after we were out of the station could I breathe a sigh of relief and then start looking for Gregory.

I soon spotted him in one of the compartments. It was a second-class carriage on a very nice, clean train. I was thankful we were traveling this way, as it was a five- to ten-day trip to Irkutsk and sitting on hard, wooden benches the whole way was not my idea of a good time. His compartment was empty, but I overheard the caretaker of our carriage speaking with the friendly conductor, explaining importantly how she was given responsibility for the passenger in compartment 405, to see him safely to Irkutsk. When I asked her where to go she assigned me to compartment 406. I settled in and prepared to once again take a long train ride to Siberia.

I enjoyed this trip much more than the last two, as it was now early autumn and the trees were changing color. There were brilliant displays of orange, red, yellow, and sometimes deep purple. The evergreens turned a deeper green, and I often caught a glimpse of wildlife scurrying through the underbrush to escape the approaching train.

I passed a few notes Gregory's way, and we decided to wait until we arrived in Irkutsk to openly associate with each other, as we didn't know what the caretaker

and conductor would report back to Moscow. Once when a guard was checking papers, he commented on the fact that we had the same name, and I just acted surprised and asked which car this other person was riding in. The guard confided to me that I wouldn't want to associate with him and I agreed.

It was so hard to be in the cabin next to my love and not be able to enjoy this trip with him. People came and went, but generally Gregory's car stayed empty. Mine, however, was soon filled up with a family also on their way to Irkutsk, which consisted of a morose-looking teenager who sat on the top bunk staring out the window all day, a typical man who loved to drink, and an older woman with a love for constant, meaningless prattle. It was rather tiring to spend the day in the compartment with them, so I spent much of my time standing in the hall, staring out the window, drinking cups of chai brewed in the caretaker's compartment in a large samovar.

I would sometimes make my way to the dining car just for a change, although I generally did not eat there. I hadn't had time to get any more money from the general, and I wanted to get word from him that it was safe before trying again, so I was rather low on cash. Thankfully, Svieta had stocked us up on food and drinks for the trip and so we did not lack. The dining car did not have much in it anyway, except for a seemingly unending supply of vodka which was eagerly consumed by the entire male (and sometimes female) population of the train.

I spent a lot of time thinking. It was heartbreaking to be once again going away from Poland, away from my son and my family, never knowing if I would be able to return. I heard rumors of the war escalating, but they were only rumors. Germany had not yet invaded Russia and although there was talk of war, for most people

it was only a dream, happening in a far-off country. I shed many tears and prayed many prayers and finally decided that since the Lord had obviously sent me back to Siberia and miraculously provided a way and a wonderful partner, He had a plan and I could either spend my time bemoaning my loss or get on with living. It was on this train ride that I wholly gave my son to the Lord, and decided to get on with my life until such a time as the Lord would see fit to return him to me, whether in this life, or in the next.

I was so thankful when the conductor came through early one morning announcing our imminent arrival in Irkutsk.



The air was crisp and definitely colder when I stepped out of the train. I looked sideways and was overjoyed to see Gregory disembark. He had kept mainly to his compartment on the trip, and now his papers were being given to him by the caretaker and she was directing him to some government building. The train station was large and looked rather deserted at this time of the morning. Gregory started walking towards the city, and I followed from afar, having to declare my papers and presence at the same government office.

Irkutsk is in the heart of Siberia—a meeting place of east and west, and the people there are a wild, woolly sort, with good hearts and tough spirits. They have to be tough, as with winter temperatures dipping sometimes as low as minus seventy degrees centigrade, it is not a place for the fainthearted. They have all carved a life for themselves out of this place. There are Siberians from the far north and east, brothers to the Eskimos and with the same Asian look to their features. Others are from nearby Mongolia. Still others, a great many others, are descendants of exiles from

Poland, Germany, and Russia, or more recent exiles as a result of the purges that had taken place since the communist takeover.

It was sparsely populated then, and the city of Irkutsk was quiet as we trudged through its streets, with Gregory stopping occasionally to clarify directions to the local government building. He arrived at the building at 7:00 that morning only to find it deserted. We both waited until mid-day, when it finally opened. Little did we know that, since we stepped off the train, both of us had been followed.



I waited while Gregory was in the office with a stern-looking official. Finally he came out and I went in. My business with him was swift, as I was basically just “checking in.” My papers were all in order and I was told that I had ten days to register the address of my new residence. I hoped we could find something in ten days. We finally concluded our business and stepped out on the street together at 3:00 in the afternoon.

“So, this is Siberia. I never would have dreamed...” Gregory did not finish his sentence, as we strolled hand in hand down a long, cobblestoned walking street. There were occasional vehicles, but all in all things were very quiet. We were on our way to the post office where I wanted to send a telegram to the general. We only had enough money for a few more days, and definitely not enough to live on. I needed to find out if I could get more funds from him.

Gregory had been given a pass to work, but the only kind of work he was allowed to find was the lowest, most degrading of tasks, with very little pay. He was not allowed to do any form of professional work. My papers allowed me to work on a more technical level, which would allow me to get a secretarial job or something of the sort. However, we didn’t know where

to start looking for a job or whether that was even part of the Lord’s plan for us. I shuddered at the thought of having to go work in a factory day in, day out. It all seemed like such a dead end, when what we really wanted to do was witness and start whatever ministry it was the Lord had for us here, at what seemed to be the ends of the earth.

We finally found a post office and I sent the general another cryptic telegram. I was told to return the next day to see if there was a reply. We went outside and then followed directions to a park which ran along the Angara River. We were told that the famous Lake Baikal was not too far away and resolved to go see it sometime soon. People were strolling in the park, making the most of the late summer sun, and children were playing. We made our way to a bench and sat down and prayed about what to do next.

“Excuse me, I couldn’t help but notice that you are new to this city.”

A young, teenage girl with a pleasant face and long, slender legs approached us.

We nodded our agreement to this statement.

“Do you need a place to stay?”

“Yes, yes we do,” I stammered in surprise.

“My name is Antonia Mikhailovna. *Ochyen preeyatna*\*.”

“Anja Ivanovna.”

“Gregory Igorovich.”

She smiled mysteriously. “My mother will be so pleased to meet you. Come with me.” She tossed her long braid and picked up one of our bags and started walking away. We followed, wondering what new adventure awaited us.

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\* *ochyen preeyatna*: Russian for “nice to meet you”

## THE DACHA

Antonia led us down the narrow sidewalks to a fairly new block of flats. She gave a cursory glance into the doorway and then motioned for us to follow her. I noticed the seat for the *dezhurnaya* was empty. “No need to excite suspicion or gossip,” Antonia whispered. We climbed five flights of stairs and entered a small, two-bedroom flat with a nice sitting room.

“Mother, they are here,” she announced.

Her mother was a tired-looking woman, and she looked oddly familiar, although I could not place where I had ever seen her before. “Alexandra Alexandrovna.” She held out her hand and smiled kindly. “It is an honor to have you in our home.”

“Anja Ivanovna Keroshiva.” I took her hand. “Thank you for having us.”

She smiled and looked relieved when I said my name. She then turned to Gregory. “And you must be Gregory?”

He was taken aback, but managed to stammer, “Y-yes. Have ... you been expecting us?”

“Yes. My brother told us you would be coming. Antonia has been watching at the train station for you for days now. We promised him we would take good care of you. It is an honor to meet you, especially after hearing all you have done for my brother.”



“Your brother? I don’t understand.”

“General Yipsin,” Antonia explained. “He speaks highly of you, and he is not an easy man to impress.”

“Yes, you have done so much for him,” Alexandra continued, “and for us as a family. We are deeply indebted to you. But enough talk for now. You must be tired and hungry. Antonia, show them to their room. I will have a meal ready in an hour or so. You may want to shower immediately, as the water usually turns off in about half an hour.” She smiled and turned into the tiny nook that served as the kitchen and I could smell the good things in store for us.

We were still bewildered by the whole situation, although we praised and thanked God for this miracle. After showering and resting we sat down to a feast of *zakuski*\*, followed by a main course of *piroshki*\* and topped off with a soft, luscious torte and tea.

We didn’t speak much during the meal. But as we were sipping our tea I could not contain my curiosity any longer. “Alexandra Alexandrovna, we are very grateful for the wonderful hospitality that you have shown us. I am curious, though, how you came to know of us and our plans to come to Irkutsk?”

“My brother, Alexei, has told us about you. We led very different lives although we were very close in childhood.”

“They are twins,” Antonia explained, interrupting her mother.

Alexandra gave her a withering look and then continued.

“His life has been much easier than ours and for many years we were estranged and did not even speak to each other.” She paused and took a sip of tea. “Alexei

told you about his childhood? About our parents?”

I nodded affirmatively.

“Well, their death made him bitter. I, however, chose to trust God for things I could not understand and while he denounced God and went on to make something of himself, I refused and have suffered the consequences.”

Now I understood the tired look—it was the face of a woman who had suffered much.

She continued. “I was denied any more schooling and worked at menial tasks. I finally met and married a wonderful Christian man. However, three years ago he was sentenced to life in prison for his proselytizing—‘working against the State’ they called it.” Tears welled up in her eyes.

“Please,” I broke in, “if this is too difficult then let us speak of it some other time.”

She shook her head. “No, I want to tell you. My brother was no help then. He did not care what happened to us, and I did not even know how to contact him at the time. We lived in extreme poverty and it was only the mercy of God that we survived. Finally, just when things were getting too difficult to bear, my brother showed up, seemingly out of nowhere. He arranged this flat for us here in Irkutsk and moved us here. He had changed so much I could hardly tell he was the same person. I finally got him alone and he told me that he had met a wonderful girl who had taught him the true meaning of love. He did not pontificate on that, but I believe he is in love with you, my dear.” I turned a deep crimson.

Gregory said, “Well, he can love all he wants, but she’s mine.” That broke the momentary tension and we all laughed.

Alexandra went on. “You got him thinking again about love, about God, about life, and made him reach

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\* **zakuski**: hors de oeuvres such as pickled vegetables, mushrooms, beet salads, cucumber salads, cheese and egg salads, sausage, bread.

\* **piroshki**: meat, cabbage, and potato dumplings

back to things that happened years ago—things he had been taught as a child. He doesn't profess to be a Christian yet, but the seed is definitely planted and is bearing fruit! ... And that is why we are so grateful to you and so indebted!"

"That is an amazing story," Gregory said. "However, it doesn't explain how you knew we were coming here. And how did he know about me?"

"He has his people. Spies, if you like. For example, you stayed in a place he recommended in Moscow, am I right?"

We nodded.

"Well, someone working there reports to him. Alexei didn't get where he is today by being ignorant. And anyway, he told me he sent you a telegram telling you to come to Irkutsk. So, ever since we heard you had left the hotel in Moscow we have been waiting for your arrival."

Antonia gave us a martyred look and said, "I have been watching the train station for two weeks now."

We could only shake our heads in amazement. We continued to talk late into the night, and we found that Alexandra was a very deep, committed Christian. She was connected with a group of secret believers who were in desperate need of a pastor or teacher. She hoped we would be willing to step in and fill the need.

Finally we were so tired, we had to excuse ourselves and go to bed. On the way to our room she stopped us. "Oh, I nearly forgot! He left this for you." She handed us a plain, white, sealed envelope. "You don't have to tell us what it says if you feel you shouldn't. One can't be too careful these days. We understand."

Antonia screwed up her eyes as if to say, "I don't understand." I felt sorry for her, as it was obvious

that we were being put up in her bedroom. I thanked her for sharing her room with us, and with that she softened and bid us goodnight.



"So, what does it say?" Gregory asked impatiently. I read aloud.

"My dear Anja. Do forgive me for continuing to meddle in your life, but I hope you understand that I am trying to atone for the suffering I caused you. You have been much on my mind and thoughts and dare I say, in my prayers.

"Please burn this letter upon reading it. I am entrusting it to my dear sister with whom I have recently been reunited after years of estrangement. That is also thanks to you.

"One of the perks of my job is a number of residences. However, there is one that is unknown to any but myself. It is a small dacha\* on the shores of Lake Baikal. I bought the land from a poor farmer and had it built in secret some years back as a place of retreat, should it be necessary. It is well stocked and has an ample vegetable garden, which I pay a local villager to keep up for me. It is yours for use as you see fit.

"My only request is that should there come a time when myself or my family would need to use it, that we would be allowed to seek shelter there with you. I will continue to give you a small stipend of money, although I am afraid that with the war effort stepping up, my budget has been slashed. You can go to an address that my sister knows and ask to speak to a man named Alyosha. He will be our contact and will work out the necessary permission for you to live there. Hopefully you will not be bothered and will be able to live in peace.

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\* *dacha*: a Russian cottage or house, often in the countryside or suburbs

“I pray that God blesses you. I hope to see you again, but if for some reason that is not part of the ‘Master Plan,’ then I send you many good wishes. Sincerely and with love, Alexei.”

There was also a P.S.: “Congratulations on your coming marriage!”

I didn’t read the last part out loud, as Gregory had not yet proposed and I didn’t want to embarrass him. We praised and glorified the Lord for working so mightily on our behalf. Then, with joy in our hearts and a prayer on our lips, we fell into a welcome, deep sleep.



I walked gingerly up the steps of an old, run-down building. It was located in an older section of town, with architecture that went back to the time when Russia was ruled by the czars. I wondered whether this was an office building or a residential building, and hoped with all my heart that this “Alyosha” would be in. A gruff, old lady was sitting in the entrance and harshly demanded to know my business.

“I wish to speak with Alyosha,” I whispered timidly. Gregory had told me to act as if I owned the place, but I felt my courage leaving me and I wanted to turn and run in the face of this formidable woman.

She tilted her head and looked at me narrowly. “Okay. Who may I ask is calling?”

I told her my name and she nodded. “First door on your right.” Then she lifted her ponderous bulk out of the chair she was sitting in and waddled off down the corridor.

I walked down the hallway and into a small room with no windows. It looked more like a closet than a room. I prayed that this wasn’t some sort of a trap. I sat down on the only chair and waited for about twenty minutes. I was starting to despair of anyone ever showing up when there was a knock on the door.

A middle-aged, balding man entered, looking somewhat nervous. “How may I assist you, Mrs. ...?”

“Keroshiva,” I finished for him.

“Ah, yes.” He smiled, looking relieved. “I am Alyosha. I would be honored to be of assistance to you in any way possible.”

I was careful in what I said, not wanting to say too much. “A mutual friend directed me to come to you, saying that you may know of a property that is available?”

“Yes, and the arrangements will be made immediately. I suppose you want to see this place, eh?”

I nodded.

“I will have my mother-in-law take you there.”

I silently hoped it wasn’t the same lady who had greeted me in the hallway.

“Is there anything else?”

“Yes, you see, a ... um ... small allowance that may be available?”

“Oh yes, of course! I nearly forgot. One moment please, I will get it for you.” He soon returned holding an envelope and then ushered me out of the closet-like room and introduced me to a small, prim-looking middle-aged woman. I figured his wife must be very young if this was his mother-in-law.

“Comrade Keroshiva,” she said with a smile, “very nice to meet you. My son tells me that you wish to see the dacha. I would be happy to take you there. I do hope that you will find everything to your liking. Follow me please.”

It took the better part of the day to get there, as it entailed catching a bus, a train, and then walking for a number of miles. We finally reached the dacha in the late afternoon.

“How will we make it back tonight?” I wondered aloud.

“Don’t worry, dear. We can always stay here for the night and return tomorrow. Alyosha knows to inform your husband—he is your husband, isn’t he?—if we don’t return.”

I had grown to like this brisk, no-nonsense lady on our trip. She reminded me somehow of Elizabeth. From our short snatches of conversation I gathered that she had been employed by the general, although she did not know him by name, to look after his dacha and have it always ready for anyone who would need to use it. She also supervised the tending of the vegetable garden, and I was very impressed to see neat rows of cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, beets, onions, and cabbage all nearly ready for harvest. There were also numerous berry bushes on the property, and I was reminded of my childhood when we would go berry picking, and my mother would preserve all the berries and vegetables so that they would keep through the winter. It actually was not that long ago, but now it seemed like another lifetime.

Unlike most dachas, which are used primarily as summer houses, this one was designed for year-round occupancy, should such a thing become necessary. Because of this it was well insulated, with double windows and a *fortochka*—a small window that is left open a crack to allow some air in during the winter, when all the other windows in the house are sealed shut. The house was small—just two rooms and a kitchen and it had an outhouse and a *banya*\*. There was also a shed for keeping animals, and a number of chickens clucked happily in a chicken house. I also found a large underground cellar that maintained a cool and even temperature all year round, and could be used for storing potatoes, carrots, beets, and cabbages throughout the winter.

The furniture in the house was sparse, but functional. There was a double bed and a couch that could be used as a bed in the bedroom, and all the couches in the combined living-and-dining room could double as beds as well. In a pinch we could fit quite a few people in this house. The tidy little kitchen was already stocked with basics—sugar, flour, salt, some spices, tea. There was a small water heater, which I was told could heat up to 40 liters of water at a time. However, it ran on gas, so it had to be used sparingly. There was running water, which was pumped electrically straight in from the lake. I wondered what would happen in the winter, when the whole lake would freeze over and made a mental note to ask about it.

There was one electric line, used for lighting the house and pumping water, but there was a wood-burning stove, and the abundance of forest all around meant that we would never lack for firewood. There were also fireplaces in both the rooms. It was not fancy, but it was a place where we could enjoy a peaceful life after all the trauma we had been through. I was thrilled!

I walked half a mile to the shores of the great, sparkling Lake Baikal and watched the sun go down behind the mountains. I felt I had come home.



We stayed there for the night and in the morning the woman introduced me to the villager who tended the garden for us. She also took me into the town and introduced me to the commandant. There was not much of a town to speak of, and a small general store which was the only one for miles around. I was told that the store sometimes closed for the winter, as this area was mainly populated in the summer, when people came out to live and work on their dachas.

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\* *banya*: outdoor bathhouse, usually a steam bath

Many Russians have a dacha. For some it is just a piece of land that they till, with a small one-room shack on it; for others it is a summer house where they spend their vacations every year. The dacha is somewhat of a status symbol in Russia, and for many it is how they survive the long winters, as they preserve everything they grow during the summer, and then during the long winters, those canned and preserved foods grace their table and provide them with vegetables, fruit, and variety.

With a heart full of joy I made my way back to Irkutsk to get Gregory. The trip back was shorter, as this time we were able to catch a ride with the shopkeeper, who was also the commandant, who explained that he drove into town three times a week for supplies and took whoever showed up with him in the back of his truck. I tucked away this knowledge for the future.

It took two days for Alyosha to work out the papers. We simply stated our decision to live in the small village that was near the dacha. Since we were not going to be living in the city of Irkutsk, the officials hardly gave us a second look and gladly gave us the needed *propiska*. I was so thankful for Alyosha's help, as he seemed to know the system and how to work with it and work around it as well. Two days later, after shopping for some necessities, we were ready to move into our new home. There was just one thing left to do.



“Anja, I don't know how to say this...”

Gregory and I were out walking once again by the Angara River. We were all ready to go, but due to our hostess' pleading, had agreed to stay one more night and attend a house-church meeting and be introduced to the group of believers that she fellowshiped with. The sun was setting and casting an orange glow on

the birch trees, whose silver branches contrasted with their now red and orange leaves.

“Anja, you know that I love you. I have been thinking. ...” He fumbled around in his pocket for a moment and then stopped walking and turned towards me. My heart skipped a beat. “Anja, will you marry me?” To my surprise he produced a small, plain, gold wedding band.

I did not need time to think of my answer. “Yes, oh yes! Of course I will marry you!” We kissed and embraced passionately and anyone watching us would have thought we were two teenagers in love for the first time. Then we slowly made our way back to the apartment.

We made our marriage official in a small ceremony that evening, with the others from the house church. The next day we went down to the wedding hall and were married legally. There were some frowns when they saw who I was marrying, as according to my papers (thanks to the general) I was an upstanding citizen, whereas Gregory was a convict. However, we didn't care and thankfully the civil ceremony was soon over, the papers signed, and we were officially man and wife. With joy in our hearts we headed to our new home.

## NADIA

“Anja, this is beautiful!” Gregory and I were holding hands, watching the sun set over the mountains that ring Lake Baikal. The sky was streaked in red and orange, with tints of pink and purple. The trees were all resplendent in autumn colors and there was such silence, such peace. All we could hear was the rippling of the tiny waves that lapped up on the shores of our own, private beach, and the call of some wild bird. We kissed and lingered until the sun set completely, leaving us with a glorious, star-filled sky.



The first weeks in our new home were busy. We had brought supplies for canning and preserving all the food from our garden. The old villager who had tended it for us came by daily to give advice and “supervise.” He was somewhat nonplussed about us taking over his special garden, which he had been well paid to keep up, but we offered to share the fruits of it with him and that seemed to satisfy him. We worked from dawn to dusk picking berries, harvesting vegetables, boiling down the berries on the wood stove, making pickled cucumbers, tomatoes, and storing the beets, carrots, onions, cabbages, and potatoes in the underground storage room. We were so tired by the end of the day that we literally collapsed on our bed and were asleep.

One evening Gregory moaned to me, “Anja, this is *not* a honeymoon! This is almost as bad as a work camp.” He had been out chopping wood all day and his muscles ached. We were sitting down to a bowl of steaming hot borscht and fresh bread. I was not a wonderful cook, but the basic skills that Mama had taught me came back to me now and I was experimenting with different recipes. There was a very small library in the village and it included a few cookbooks. I was able to get an idea of Russian cuisine there, as although Mama had taught me some Russian dishes, which she learned from Papa and cooked mainly for his benefit, she was a great lover of Polish food, and so I was now venturing into new territory, learning to use what was available here, in Siberia.

I laughed. “No, this is not even close to a work camp, and don’t you even pretend to complain about this wonderful place!” I leaned over and poked at him.

He laughed. “You’re right of course. I am not complaining. I am just missing you, that’s all.” He looked at me wistfully, with big, sad, puppy-dog eyes.

“Oh stop that. We’ll have all the time in the world when we are snowed in.” My eyes twinkled mischievously. “Speaking of snow, we need to stock up on—” There was a knock at the door.

“Hello?” I wondered who it could be. I opened the door and there was a young woman with a small child on her hip. She was wearing a long, flowing skirt and had a scarf on her head. I couldn’t tell her hair color in the twilight, but she looked fair skinned.

“Hello,” she said shyly. “My name is Nadia Pavlova. I wanted to welcome you to our village. Here, this is for you.” She held out a pie that looked freshly baked and smelled heavenly.

“Thank you so much. That is too kind of you. Please come in.” She peered tentatively through the doorway, no doubt wanting to get a closer look inside this house that many in the area knew existed but had never seen.

“No, you are eating. I did want to invite you on our mushroom hunt, though. Would you like that?” She smiled shyly again and I liked her smile. I hoped we would end up being friends.

“Yes. That would be wonderful.” We talked for a few more minutes and agreed to go out early the following morning.

When I told Gregory, he seemed pleased with the idea—a welcome change from chopping wood—and so it was settled.



“Look! I found more!” We spent the day together talking, walking, and finding mushrooms. Nadia was a clever girl and she knew exactly where to look.

“How do you know where to look? You are such a professional. I used to hunt for mushrooms with my father, but it has been years since I have done it.”

She smiled. “I grew up here. This is my home. These forests, these mountains, are my friends. My father is the commandant for this area and also the proprietor of the local store. I am sure you have been there?”

“Oh yes, I’ve met him. He has given us rides into the city.”

“Yes, he told me about you and suggested you and I meet. I have been so lonely here.” She stopped and looked wistful. “It would be nice to have a friend.”

She asked me a few questions about my life, which I answered truthfully, without giving away too much information. There seemed to be an unspoken rule in Russia that you didn’t pry too deeply into anyone’s life, even with your closest friends, as you never knew

what you might find that would end up hurting you and them. It was sad, as it seemed the whole nation was lonely for true friendship.

Gregory went off with Alexei, Nadia's husband, to hunt small game. He had done some hunting as a child, but it had been a long time ago and I teased him about it. He was determined to prove me wrong and was very pleased with himself when he returned with a few rabbits and a wild goose. It seemed like Alexei was a very nice, simple man, and he and Gregory were becoming friends.

We were very thankful for Nadia and Alexei's friendship as the winter came. They had lived all their lives in this place and knew how to survive. Their little house was smaller than ours and they had two children. They also did not have running water. However, they not only knew how to survive, but thrive in this wild, untamed environment. They gave us a list of things we should have on hand to deal with the elements, and one crisp, fall day Nadia and I went into town to shop for outer clothing for the Siberian winters, including the felt boots which are so important for staying warm in the deep snow. After trying places all over town and standing in long lines we finally got what we needed, and I think I was as pleased with our find as Gregory was with his rabbits and goose.

Gregory spent his spare time fashioning a sled that we could use, and we bargained some of the imported clothing items we had received from Svieta in Moscow for an old horse that we named Maggie. When the first snow fell we felt ready for a true, Siberian winter.



The fireplace crackled and let off comforting warmth. We were snowed in and it was minus thirty degrees centigrade outside, but we were content.

We had each other and we had made up for our lost honeymoon with hours spent in bed together, walks in snowshoes or rides in the sled when our dear, old Maggie got the urge to actually move. There was also work to be done. The pipes froze and we had to bring in snow and melt it in order to have water. There was wood to chop and food to cook, the house to clean and candles to make, and all the little things that went into living out in the middle of nature.

The majestic Baikal was frozen over and for the first few weeks, before heavy snowfall, you could walk out on the ice and look down and see the fish swimming many feet below you. It was breathtaking! I heard tales of some winters when the ice was so thick that train tracks were laid over it, and that trains actually ran across the ice during the coldest winter months. Then the heavy snows came and covered the ice and it looked like one, unending snowfield that stretched as far as the eye could see.

Small ice fishing shacks dotted the landscape, and sometimes Alexei would come to take Gregory ice fishing. He always returned half frozen, but bearing the makings of a feast.

We were talking quietly when there was a knock on the door. With much laughing and talking, Nadia and Alexei and their two children bounded in from the cold. The children were so bundled up they were unable to move, but they didn't seem to mind and their older son, who was three, launched into some exciting tale that his babushka had taught him. He and the baby girl were soon unbundled, and we all made our way to the table, to the feast I had prepared.

We had invited Nadia and Alexei over to celebrate Christmas. We even had a small tree, which I had decorated with whatever I could find. It was not the same as the Christmas trees I had had as a child, but



it was the closest thing to Christmas I had had in two years and I was grateful.

The Soviets had decided to continue celebrating Christmas, but they changed it so that there was no Christ involved. Instead, it was simply a holiday to celebrate the winter season, complete with “Father Frost”—the Russian version of Santa. There was a tree and presents and a celebration—a time that every child looked forward to, and three-year-old Sasha was no exception.

Gregory and I had prayed long and hard about how to introduce Christ to these dear friends of ours. We realized that we had to be careful how we conducted ourselves, as we did not own our house and were there due to the generosity of the general, and anything we did or said could end up reflecting on him. We didn’t mind dying for our faith, but we didn’t feel it was our right to make him die for our faith. Also, since the commandant of the village was also the store proprietor and Nadia’s father, we felt we needed to be doubly careful. We did not want to have another situation like the one that had landed Gregory in prison in the Ukraine.

We did do a lot of ministering, however, as Gregory or I, or sometimes both of us, made two- or three-day trips into Irkutsk every week or two to teach Bible classes, lead meetings, and minister to the flock in Irkutsk. We always stayed with Alexandra and Antonia. However, our hearts ached for Nadia and Alexei, as we wished we could share with them the Lord’s love.

We had prayed about it more than once, and had decided to decorate the top of the tree with an angel, thereby hopefully sparking some conversation about the real meaning of Christmas. So, using my Polish heritage as an excuse, we started discussing Christmas celebrations in other countries, slowly bringing it

back to the Lord. We were thrilled to find that Nadia was a secret believer and although her husband was not, he was tolerant and interested. We spent a long time talking about the Lord together, so long that the children drifted off to sleep on the couch. They stayed the night at our house and said fond good-byes the next morning.



There was a knock at the door. I knew it had to be Nadia. Since we had discovered we were both Christians and believers, we had become even closer. There is a kind of friendship that a shared faith allows that is incomparable to the shallow friendships of the secular world. Our conversations were more often on deep things, and we had been talking for a long time of how we could both be of more use to the Lord in our remote location. The night before I had hit upon an idea and had sent a message to Nadia with Gregory, who was going to the store for flour and some cheese that was supposed to be coming in, asking her to come see me when she had a chance.

“Come in.” We embraced and kissed and she pulled off her fur hood and fluffed her bangs. She had very long, white-blond hair. “Would you like some tea?”

We sat down and caught up on small talk. She told me about her children’s progress and about her husband, whom she was praying for to become a Christian. By this time I had told her my whole story and there were no walls between us. Finally I said, “Nadia, the Lord gave me a wonderful idea last night. You know how we are always bemoaning the fact that we can’t get out and do more for the Lord, especially in this extreme weather?”

She nodded.

“Well, there is something we can do. The folks in Irkutsk do not have a Bible. In fact, I have scoured the

city and have not been able to find a single Bible. The Orthodox Church may have one, but they wouldn't even let me in the door. I have never seen that church open. Anyway, we could get ourselves some paper and start copying books from the Bible, by hand, to give to the dear ones we meet and minister to. This old thing"—I held up the Bible that came in three booklets which I had paid dearly for in Moscow—"is not going to last much longer with all the handling it is getting. What do you think?"

Nadia was very enthusiastic about the idea. She said she would come up with an excuse to beg paper off her father, which at the time was in short supply. We began gathering what writing materials we had, and formulated a plan of what to copy and when to work on it. We decided not to tell anyone about our project, except for Gregory, as it seemed the written Word was even more feared than the spoken, and for good reason.

Nadia started coming over as many evenings as she could and sometimes during the day, when she could slip away while her mother-in-law watched her babies. We concentrated on the most important parts of the Bible, although it was so hard to decide what to do first. We copied the Gospels, the Psalms, Acts, and some of the Epistles and Revelations. We made little booklets, which we stored away to give to our dear friends and fellow believers in Irkutsk and the surrounding towns.

Nadia grew spiritually by leaps and bounds during that time, as we often started off copying a text and ended up discussing it. Each session turned into a mini-Bible class. I grew, too, during that time, but my growth was more noticeable. I was pregnant.

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## A BIG SURPRISE

I awoke one morning in June feeling large and swollen. I was seven months pregnant and definitely bigger than the last time, and I was hard pressed to find clothes to fit me. Nadia sweetly loaned me some of hers, and I was making do with what I could find and alter. I had experienced some morning sickness, but our healthy lifestyle and good food seemed to help, and I was feeling much better and stronger than I had in my first pregnancy.

Gregory was an attentive, loving husband. I still often felt pangs of sadness when thinking about my beloved son, but I also felt peace that he was in the Lord's hands. My husband had gotten a radio, and we diligently monitored the news broadcasts, trying to find out anything we could of the fate of Poland. There was not much information forthcoming, however, and we had to rely on word-of-mouth tales that were heard in the marketplace by those who had sons and fathers fighting in the war. It was so far removed from us, however, that we often did not think of it at all.

We had weathered the winter well, although supplies had run short by the end of it, and we welcomed the coming of spring. The countryside and the mountains came alive with wildlife; wildflowers bloomed and the sun shone. It was wonderful to be alive.

However, that morning, when I awoke, I felt a sense of foreboding and wondered what the day would bring. I noticed Gregory was gone, but I didn't think much of it, as he often awoke early to do chores. We had amassed a number of small animals—chickens, a pig, a goat, and a cow. In theory we weren't supposed to have our very own, private farm, but they did exist, especially way out here, and we were thankful to have been able to find these animals. Our goal was to become self-sufficient, as we never knew when we would be unable to get into Irkutsk for the things we needed.

I brushed stray hairs out of my face, washed up and dressed in the only tent of a dress that would accommodate my large figure. I waddled into the kitchen to make us breakfast when I noticed a small commotion outside our front door. Gregory was there, along with Alexei and Pawel Pavlovich—Nadia's father—and some other men from the village. They were talking excitedly, and I could sense some underlying tension. I opened the door and asked what was happening. I received one word as an answer. "War."

It was June 22, 1941 and Germany had invaded Russia. They were bombing Kiev and Sevastopol, and Russia was thrown into the war with a force that no one had anticipated. We were surely safe out here, in the middle of Siberia, but we all had loved ones in other parts of the country, and our hearts and our minds were on the suffering that would be caused by all of this.

"There will probably be an influx of refugees into this area. We should prepare for them and up our food production as much as possible to help with the war effort." Pawel Pavlovich was mentally working on a list of possible ways we could help Mother Russia. We had gotten to know him better and although he was the commandant of the village, he was also a

personal friend of the general and had great respect and admiration for him. He was a simple country fellow, and although he was definitely loyal to the Soviet Union, he did not have the more corrupt, evil tendencies that drove many of those in power. He simply wanted to live up to the ideals of communism, and since we were friends of the general, he accepted us and did not question our loyalties or our beliefs. We were very circumspect in our conversation with him, however, as we weren't sure if he was aware of our beliefs. If he was, he kept it to himself and for that we were grateful.

"They will also be drafting men into the army." It was Alexei who said this, with a look of foreboding on his face. The other men agreed with this. A sob arose in my throat, and they all looked somewhat embarrassed for distressing an obviously pregnant woman. With muttered sympathies they left Gregory and I alone.

It was only a matter of weeks before an announcement was circulated in our village, telling all able-bodied men to report to an office in Irkutsk on a certain day to join up. All the men in our village went, and after much agonizing in prayer Gregory decided to go also. My heart ached for Gregory as he took leave of me and I felt old wounds reopen. This was all too familiar, and I felt I would not be able to take the pain as I remembered another goodbye, also when I was a new mother, that ended up being a last goodbye. We said many prayers and cried many tears, asking God to somehow deliver him from the army, if that was His will. I clung to him so hard he had to pry himself out of my grasp. I stood watching the village truck disappear into the mountains with tears coursing down my cheeks. I felt so alone, I couldn't even pray.



“Oh Anja!” Nadia came running up the pathway leading to our house. I was still standing there, eyes glued to the road, as if solely through will power I could bring Gregory back to me. Nadia was crying too and she had Sasha in tow, and one-and-a-half-year-old Nina on her hip. Her voice broke me out of my reverie and I turned my attention to her. She definitely had it harder than me, as she had two little ones to care for, plus an aging grandma. We hugged and wept in each other’s arms.

Little Sasha couldn’t understand why we were so distressed. He had learned about battles and wars in the tiny village school and was perplexed as to why we would be sad about our husbands doing such an honorable thing as fighting to defend our country. Of course, he did not realize that his father would be gone for a long, long time, possibly forever. He held his mother’s hand, looking so brave, as he had promised his father he would watch over his mother.

We stayed together for the next three days, awaiting word from our husbands. No word came and finally Nadia returned home.



It was twilight. I had been standing outside, watching the sunset, as was Gregory’s and my custom. I was turning to go in when some movement caught my eye. I saw a cloud of dust coming up the small, country road. It was a truck. I hoped it was someone bringing word of what happened.

The truck stopped near the pathway that led to our house and I could make out two figures coming up the pathway. Then I heard a wonderful sound—the sound of my husband’s voice. “Anja! Anja!”

I ran as fast as my pregnant body could go down the pathway and was soon enveloped in Gregory’s arms.

“They wouldn’t take me. I didn’t pass the physical exam. Prison ruined my lungs, you know. I never thought that would be a blessing, but it is now.”

Behind him Pawel Pavlovich came up the path, more slowly and with less spring in his step.

“Alexei?” I asked.

He shook his head sadly.

“He was fit,” Gregory said, bitterly.

“I must go tell Nadia,” Pawel said, then he tipped his hat, turned, and walked off into the deepening gloom.

Gregory and I walked slowly, arm in arm, back to our house. I resolved to go visit Nadia as soon as possible and provide as much comfort as I could.



“Do you have to go just now?” I just didn’t have a good feeling about Gregory being gone, even though my due date was still a few weeks away, according to my calculations. I hadn’t seen any doctor, although Nadia agreed to be with me when I had my baby. Her mother had been the village midwife until she died. Nadia never did the job “officially” but she had a lot of experience, and we felt everything would be fine.

“Honey, I will only be gone for two or three days. If anything should happen during that time, you have Nadia and Pawel Pavlovich. You’ll be fine.” He needed to go into Irkutsk to get supplies, to get our allowance, and also to check on some of the believers that were having difficulty with many of their husbands and sons being called to war. He was taking produce from our garden and a cash donation that we had saved from the small allowance the general allotted us. We hadn’t heard from the general in months, but we continued to get the small allowance from Alyosha every month, and we figured he was just busy with the war effort. Since the Germans had

invaded, efforts had been made to conserve food and supplies. Rationing began, and everyone was issued ration cards for everything. Because we did not officially work, we were only allotted the smallest of rations. However, if you had a little cash you could sometimes get something that you needed on the black market. We were thankful that our little farm left us nearly self-sufficient.

We prayed and committed my pregnancy and safety to the Lord, and then Gregory left to Irkutsk. There was no ride available, as Pawel's truck was out of order, so he was going to have to walk the ten kilometers to the nearest train station and wait for the next train. He would be back in two days, maybe three.

It was midnight, early August, and the heat of summer. It was not such a hot day, but the humidity was high, and I was so grateful for the shimmering waters of Lake Baikal. We would go swimming daily in its icy waters and it kept us fresh, clean, and cool. The sun did not set until 11:00 at night and even then the sky had a pinky hue. Now, at midnight, I couldn't sleep.

I was sitting out on our front porch, gazing at the beautiful sky filled with glistening stars and thinking and praying, when I was startled by a rustling sound coming from the bushes that bordered our property. A feeling of fear coursed through me and I stood up and began backing into the house, thinking I would get my rolling pin to use as a weapon. I did not know how to use a gun, even if we'd had one. The only time we used a gun was when Gregory went hunting with Alexei, and then he would borrow one of Pawel Pavlovich's guns.

*He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.* The words of that Psalm of

protection, Psalm 91, went through my head as I slowly backed towards the door of my house, hoping to make it inside without incident. Then the rustling grew louder, and I heard a voice that sounded strangely familiar in the distance. "Are you done yet?"

"Nyet."

It was the voice of a young child. Whatever these people were doing on our property, they could not be dangerous. I heaved a sigh of relief and started off down the pathway to find out who they were and what they wanted.

"Who is it?" I shouted in Russian. I waited for a response and suddenly heard a whimper and the voice responded, "So sorry to bother you. We are looking for Anja Ivanovna Keroshiva. Is her house around here?"

"What do you want with her?" I wasn't sure if I should tell this nameless, faceless person who I was just yet.

Just then the small voice in the bushes said, "I am all done, Uncle Jan."

My heart stopped. "Jan?" I asked, tentatively.

"Anusha?"

It was Jan. *Uncle Jan? He must have adopted a child or something of the sort. That is just like something Jan would do.*

"Jan, it is me, Anja! Come, do come!" I waited impatiently as I heard some muttering and rustling and then, a few moments later, walking up the pathway came Jan and a little boy who looked like he was around two or three years old. I could not see too well in the darkness. However, I could recognize Jan and I was so thrilled to see him, I didn't pay much attention to the child. "You must be hungry and tired. Did you walk all the way from the train carrying the child? Where are your bags?"

Jan laughed. “As usual, you ask too many questions and do not give me time to answer them, little sister. But yes, we are hungry and tired. The only luggage we have is this bag on my back. It is so good to see you again.”

Once we got into the house and I lit the lanterns I turned my attention to the child. “Who is this handsome young man?” I asked.

With a funny accent and somewhat of a lisp the child replied in Russian, “Menya zavoot\* Pawel Wyszynski.”

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## MY FAMILY

Jan and I sat up almost the whole night talking, while little Pasha slept. I was in shock. I could hardly bring myself to believe that this beautiful little boy, who was now sleeping peacefully in my house, was my son—my long, lost Pasha! My heart was bursting with every emotion imaginable and my mind was awlirl.

“But how did you find him?”

“I begged leave of the general after he received your telegram. He was hoping you would try to emigrate to the United States of America or otherwise escape Russia and the horrors of a war that he knew would not be over soon. However, when he realized you would never leave without trying to rescue your son, he agreed with me that it would be much safer for me, a man with connections and a doctor to boot, to do it for you. I also worried about our family and wanted to go see if I could help them in any way. I traveled to Poland and after much difficulty, made it to our hometown.”

“How is everyone? How is Magda?”

He paused for a long time. “I don’t know how much to tell you of the story, because it is so sad. And look at you, in your condition...”

“Jan,” I said firmly, “they are my family and friends. I have a right to know.”

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\* **Menya zavoot:** Russian for “My name is...”

“Magda is in Heaven.” He paused as a sob arose in my throat. I motioned for him to go on. I didn’t want him to soft pedal the story for my benefit. He continued. “She and Pasha stayed hidden at Valeriya and Igor’s farm for months, with Henrik going out foraging for food and caring for what few of the half-wild animals they could find. After you were sent away, the new colonel, I forget his name, burnt the village and let his soldiers loose on a crime spree that is too horrible to recount. The ones who were sent to prison may have had it better. Many escaped into the hills, but many more...” He took a deep breath and sipped his tea and did not finish that sentence, but the look of anguish in his eyes told me the story.

“The Wyszyński vault was also apparently discovered and looted, though Magda had made at least one trip there for some notes and valuables that she kept hidden at the farm. It took a few months, but the Russians finally found the farm where they were hiding.” He paused again and looked at me searchingly. I nodded encouragingly, tears in my eyes. “They ... raped and beat Magda and left her for dead. They killed Henrik. Magda had hidden Pasha when she saw the soldiers coming, and once they left she somehow revived enough to take him and what little she had saved from the vault, and stumble through the forest and back roads, through a freezing rain, to our family’s farm. Adam’s wife had succumbed to some terrible sickness that winter, and he was living alone with his small daughter. The only way they stayed alive was by providing the Russian army with whatever they wanted. Some folks called him a traitor, but how can anyone judge how much a man can take? He is only trying to stay alive.”

“And Magda?” I tried to bring him back to his terrible tale.

“Magda deserved a medal. She somehow survived the trek, carrying Pasha, all the while dazed and wounded from her ordeal, and then collapsed on Adam’s doorstep. He nursed her tenderly, although how he managed to nurse Magda, watch Pasha and his daughter, and keep up with the farm, no one knows. When I arrived, she had been bedridden and slowly wasting away for almost a year. She rejoiced, however, that I was there to take Pasha to his mother, and she passed away peacefully in her sleep, after stating that her promise to you was kept and she could die in peace.

“I stayed with Adam for a long time after that, as he had fallen ill as well and was fighting for his life. I also wanted to give Pasha time to get to know me before we embarked on a long journey together. During that time I took some trips further into Poland to ascertain the fate of the rest of our family, but I was unsuccessful, and some of my journeys were nearly fatal. When I left, Adam had taken in another family with two women. They were helping him with the farm, and I hoped that he would find solace with one of them.” By this time we were both crying.

“And what of them since the German invasion?” I asked, still crying.

He shook his head. “I left before the Germans invaded, and I do not know what became of him. If he is in Heaven, he is better off than the poor souls who are suffering here right now.” We both became quiet and sat still for a very long time, absorbed in our thoughts.

Finally Jan roused himself. “But this is a time of rejoicing! I was so surprised to see Pasha alive, and not only alive, but thriving! He is a bit skinny, that is true, but nothing a bit of good cooking can’t fix! And he knows you are his mama. He was just very tired

and very shy. It may take him a few days to get used to you, but Magda read and re-read your letter to him every day since he started talking. He has also seen a few photographs of you. He'll recognize you in daylight."

I nodded. Dawn was starting to cast a grayish glow over the mountaintops when we stopped talking. Getting Pasha into Russia safely was a feat in itself, and the story would take too long to retell, but Jan had me spellbound for hours as he told me of their trials and tribulations, as well as the miracles and answers to prayer that it took to get them both here.

I asked about the general and Jan shook his head. "Besides all the difficulties of evading soldiers and bombs, there is another reason why it took me so long to get Pasha to you. The general is ill, and as I am his doctor, I had to spend a few weeks with him, trying to make him better."

"Will he live?"

"That, only God can say," was Jan's reply. "I promised I would return to him in a week. He is in an undisclosed location, and it is better for both of us that I don't tell you where, but as soon as I can I will return to see you and visit more."

"Can you at least stay until Gregory returns? He should be back in a day or two."

Secure in his promise that he would stay until Gregory returned, we embraced, kissed, prayed together, and retired for a few hours of sleep.



"Mama?" I was awakened by sunlight streaming into my face and an intelligent looking, brown-haired little boy shaking me.

It took me a minute to recall the events of last night. "Pasha?" I whispered.

"You my mama?" he asked in Polish.

"Yes, darling," I answered, also in Polish. I held out my arms and he came to me and snuggled beside me as I sat up in bed. I silently thanked God for this miracle, as tears coursed down my cheeks.

I fixed us all a hearty breakfast and we had a wonderful day. Pasha explored every nook and cranny of the farm and squealed with delight when we went wading together in the lake. Jan helped me with the chores and insisted that I stay off my feet as much as possible, for which I was thankful. I did rouse myself, though, to cook a nice meal for them and invited Nadia and her father to join us and celebrate.

The commandant was impressed that my brother was the general's personal doctor, and Nadia and her father were both amazed at the stories Jan told. Pasha found two friends in Sasha and Nina and they played happily together, chattering half in Polish, half in Russian. I was glad he would have someone to play with and learn Russian from. Both Jan and I agreed that we should teach him Russian as soon as possible in order to avoid difficult questions or problems.

There was also the problem of his registration, but when I asked Jan about it, he smiled and produced a birth certificate proclaiming him to be my son and that his name was Pawel Keroshiva. I was sorry he would not be able to carry on his father's name, but under these circumstances, I knew his father would understand.

"Goodbye and goodnight." Nadia had lingered to chat after her father and children had left.

I could not answer as I was doubled over in pain. I had been experiencing small stomach cramps all day, but didn't pay much attention to them in the excitement of the moment. Now I knew that it was time and I was going to have my baby soon. I could not have wished for any better help than Jan and Nadia's.





When Gregory returned two days later he was in shock as he was introduced to his new son and daughter.

“They are both beautiful,” he said to me tenderly as he held our precious baby girl in his arms and watched Pasha playing quietly in the corner. We named her Valeriya, in memory of Gregory’s mother.

“You don’t mind, do you?” I paused hesitantly. “I mean, that he is not yours?”

“He is yours and that makes him mine. I love him as if he were mine. I feel that my life is finally complete, Anja! God, I love you!” We kissed and cuddled with our baby daughter and soon Pasha came over to join the love-fest.

We decided to tell Pasha that Gregory was his father, as he had never known his real father. I hoped the day would come when I could tell Pasha the whole story, but for now we felt he had experienced enough trauma in his little life and needed as much stability as he could get. We soon grew very close as a family and so the summer came to a glorious end.

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## HOME AT LAST

“Pasha! Pasha!” I shouted. I waited for an answer and when one didn’t come I sighed and looked out over our front yard, where only moments earlier Pasha and Lera\* had been playing. “Where are those two rascals?” I wondered aloud.

I was eight months pregnant. The war was over and we had been enjoying a beautiful summer. Pasha was now eleven years old and Lera was eight. I never worried much about them, as the mountains and hills were home to them, as they were to my good friend Nadia.

Nadia’s husband died in the war and when her father died the winter after, she reluctantly took leave of us and went to live in Irkutsk with her sister and her family. We still saw her frequently, though, as she was an active member of the group of Christians that we met with regularly to feed and shepherd.

Gregory was often gone for more than a week at a time, traveling to nearby villages as an itinerant pastor. There was a little more freedom during and immediately after the war years, as officials were so busy defending and then rebuilding our country, no one had time to seriously hassle a small group of Christians. So we were left alone to witness, teach, and shepherd our small flocks.

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\* **Lera:** (pronounced “LYEH-rah”) Russian short form of “Valeriya”

We felt a sense of urgency, however, as we never knew when things would tighten up once more. The dear general had passed away less than a year before, after suffering for a long time from cancer. Before he died he officially gave us his dacha, so although our small allowance was gone we had a place to live, and the Lord provided for us between the food we were able to raise on our small plot of land and many times through miraculous means. We didn't live in luxury, but we were never hungry or without clothing. He always supplied. And, from tales I heard during the war, we thrived compared to many who suffered greatly from famine, disease, and of course, bombs and fighting.

The city of Irkutsk and the surrounding area had expanded greatly during the war, as much of the industry in the west of Russia had been moved to the east, out of the path of the invading German army. Also because of the war there was a large influx of people, refugees and those desperately needing a helping hand. Many times we took in needy families or helped to organize gifts of food and clothing to those in need, and because of this we were able to gain favor with the city officials. We were careful not to openly witness, and although I am pretty sure they suspected our faith, they looked the other way and so we were allowed to continue in peace.

I had not gotten pregnant for years after Valeriya's birth, and this baby was a surprise. It had been a more uncomfortable pregnancy than my last two—I put that down to the toll the years had taken on my body, but all in all it was a happy, peaceful time. A time of heaven on earth. It was the middle of summer, 1949, and I was calling the kids in to dinner.

“Pasha! Lera! Where are you?”

“Coming!” I heard a very small voice in the distance. I had to laugh as they came leaping and bounding

towards me, their faces smeared with dirt. They had been playing some sort of hide and seek game in the forest, complete with camouflage. I tried to look angry.

“Now you two wash your hands and faces and change your shirts! You're going to have to wash your own shirts out, you know! I am not your maid!”

“Yes, Mama,” they said, giving each other a knowing look from some secret, shared joke. Then they giggled and headed off to their little room to change.

Gregory had added another room to the house as the children had grown, and although it was hardly big enough for their two small beds and a little cupboard, it was theirs and they were proud of it.

Soon we were around the table.

“Mama, where's Papa?” Lera, who was very much a daddy's girl, always missed him when he was gone.

“He is still out visiting the next village, Milochka. But he will be back tonight.”

“Mama, do we have to go to school this winter?”

I sighed. We had gone through this many times before. I did not know enough to homeschool my children, and in fact, homeschooling was unheard of in Russia at that time. I had been homeschooled, but much of my mother's teaching was old fashioned and outdated, not to mention, in Polish.

When Pasha reached school age, the authorities insisted we send our children to school, and because we did not want to jeopardize our safety and the safety of the many people we were witnessing to, we finally agreed to do so after praying about it extensively. It was a small, village school, so we hoped it wouldn't be as centered on communist propaganda as the bigger Irkutsk schools. We wrestled over the persecution they would surely face in school and wondered how to help them through it, but the children decided the issue for us by deciding of their own accord not to become

involved in many of the communist activities, and by not joining the Young Pioneers. They received constant pressure and persecution at school about this and because of this did not have many friends. It was hard and they did not like school very much. I found I had to spend a lot of time with them, pouring the Word into them and encouraging them daily to combat the effects of school and to help them keep their eyes on the Lord and the Word, as otherwise they would get easily discouraged.

I was so proud of them. It was not easy to be a Christian and to suffer persecution for it, especially at such a young age, but they bore it so bravely and hardly ever complained. Summer was our salvation. It was a wonderful time to be together as a family and usually it was taken up with hiking, camping, working on our ever-growing vegetable garden together, taking care of the animals, taking clandestine witnessing trips, lots of Bible studies, and visiting with Nadia and her children. Nadia's children were in much the same boat, and they were really the only friends that Pasha and Lera had, and they would often come to our farm in the summer and visit, or Pasha and Lera would go to Nadia's house for a week or two.

"Mama, I asked you a question!" Lera's voice broke through my thoughts.

"Sorry. I was just thinking." I paused. "Honey, you know that I wouldn't have you go to school if there was any way out of it, but right now there isn't. The Lord is going to reward you though, you know that. You are such a faithful soldier and He has a crown for you up there. Remember the verse?"

Lera nodded and quoted, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven." She gave me a smile, and I knew she just wanted a little

encouragement to help her face the fact that school days were once again fast approaching.

"Mama, tell us your stories again about how you lost Pasha and found him."

I had told them a children's version of what the Lord had done for me and Gregory. Both of us knew that at some point persecution would likely come again, and we wanted our children to be prepared for it, and we also wanted them not to fear it, but to know that no matter what, the Lord would be with them and see them through.

"Sure I will, Sweetie. As soon as dinner and the evening chores are done I will."

The door flew open and in came my husband, panting and sweating heavily.

"Papa!" Lera flew out of her chair and into his arms.

He gave her a big kiss.

"Uck!" She wiped it away. "You are too sweaty!"

"I can't believe you all! Sitting inside and eating when you could be outside enjoying some of the last days of summer! Come on, let's go eat outside!"

"Nice to see you too," I joked, as he came up and kissed me on the ear. Then we all took our chairs and food and moved outside to enjoy our meal while watching the sun set over Lake Baikal.



Summer was over far too quickly. Soon the children were back in school and our new baby girl, Maria, was born. When she was just a little over two months old, Gregory came home one night with a serious expression on his face.

"Honey, I don't want to alarm you, especially since you just had a baby, but I heard some things in Irkutsk today that I think you should know about."

My heart sank. "What did you hear?"

“There is some kind of investigation going on into the affairs of our dearly beloved general. Apparently, before he died he announced his conversion to Christianity. This was not reported in the news, but I heard it from Alexandra. Suspicious people have been hanging around, asking questions and following her. Anyway, since his death there has been an investigation into his affairs and apparently we aren’t the only Christians he has helped. It seems someone is trying to undo any damage he may have done or any ‘taint’ he may have put on his name, and so they are doing a thorough investigation and tracking down those he helped and had contact with.”

“Jan!” I gasped. Since Poland had been given to Russia at the end of the war, Jan had moved back to Poland, where miraculously my brother Adam had survived the war and was now married to one of the girls from the family he took in. They had three more children together. Jan got a job as a doctor and was also secretly ministering in much the same way as Gregory and I were.

“No, I think Jan is safe, at least for the time being. I am worried about you.”

“Me?”

“Yes.”

“But, I don’t understand.”

“The only way the general helped you was through people who were loyal to him. What if someone wasn’t as loyal as they had pretended to be? Granted, he did a good job with your papers, but if someone really looked into it, they may come across a few inconsistencies.” He paused for a moment and then said thoughtfully, “Also, someone may know about the dacha, and since you and I are obviously Christians and have a history to boot, it may get us into a heap of trouble. People will ignore things that aren’t shoved in their face, but

if someone makes a stink, the local authorities will be forced to do something about it.”

I started to panic. “The children! Let’s send them away!” Tears formed in my eyes and for a second I forgot that the Lord had us in His wonderful, everlasting arms and would never forsake us.

“Honey, calm down. I think what we need to do is pray together, desperately, to find out what we are supposed to do. Okay?”

We fell to our knees and prayed, weeping and pouring out our hearts to the Lord, and then we fell silent, waiting to hear His Words of comfort, direction and guidance.

“Do not fear for yourself or your children.” The words came to me clearly, and I spoke them. “For what is life? It is but a vapor. It is here a little while and then vanishes. But I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. And fear not them which can kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. You shall be brought before kings and magistrates for a witness against them. But do not fear. For I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

We stayed on our knees silent for a while. Then I turned to Gregory. “Does that mean what I think it does?” I asked quietly. “Is our time come so soon?” I felt a strange peace in my heart.

“I don’t know,” Gregory said. “I felt something telling me that we should take Nadia up on her offer to send Pasha and Lera to her place for the winter holidays. They will be thrilled anyway.”

I nodded. We embraced and kissed and sat holding each other for a long time, both deep in thought. The temptation to fear and worry was there, and it continued to haunt me for days afterwards, and each time I had to

consciously envision myself putting each of my children and then my husband on the altar, placing them in the Lord's tender loving care. Sometimes I would not leave them there, but picked them up and walked off with them, only to have to once again put them on the altar and commit them to the Lord's care. I clung to the Lord's promises with all my might during those weeks when we were waiting to see what would happen.

We prayed again about leaving, but were only told to warn the others, set up contingency plans, and ordain other pastors so that the work could continue, should we be taken. We also prepared to get Pasha and Lera to Nadia's as soon as possible.

The night before they were to leave I was up late packing their things when I heard crying from their room.

"NO! NO! NO!" Pasha was crying out in his sleep. He was more sensitive spiritually than his sister and he often had premonitions. He also had bad dreams, which dated back to when he was very small. His traumatic past had affected him for years. However, after much prayer, love, and time, the nightmares ceased. Now I was surprised by the vehemence of his yell as I ran in to see what was the matter.

"Pasha, darling, wake up. It's me. It's Mama."

He looked at me through a sweat-soaked brow and sighed. "Oh, it was only a dream." He was still sobbing a little and Lera had woken up as well and sat up in her bed.

"I dreamt you were gone. They took you away. Oh, Mama, what are we going to do without you?" He broke down crying once more, and then Lera, caught up in the emotion of the moment, joined him.

I climbed into bed with him and motioned for Lera to join us. "Sweethearts, I don't know when God will call your Papa and I home. It might be sooner than He

calls you. But think of it this way, when Papa is gone on a trip are you sad because you think you might never see him again?"

"No," Pasha answered between sobs. "Just because we miss him ... but we know he's coming back."

"Exactly." I smiled, trying to stifle the tears I felt welling up in my eyes. "No matter what happens to me or Papa, we will always be with you because we all love Jesus and we will be together in Heaven. And if we go to Heaven first, we will be up there watching you and helping to care for you, and if you are really quiet maybe you'll hear us whisper in your ear."

Lera smiled.

"Please remember, Papa and I love you so, so much! No matter what happens, please remember that." By now I was crying, and they were comforting me. We cuddled and kissed, and then they got back in their beds, and I stroked their hair and sang the same hymns that Valeriya had taught me when I was a girl as they drifted to sleep.

We said a fond farewell in the morning and Gregory took them to Irkutsk, to stay with Nadia for the Christmas holidays.



Three nights later, after we were already in bed, a knock came at the door. It was a heavy-handed knock, and Gregory and I awoke and looked at each other. No words were spoken but we knew it was time. I clutched the sleeping Masha to my breast and cuddled her. Gregory had spoken to Nadia about the danger we were in, and she had agreed to care for our children should something happen to us. However, because she worked full time and barely made ends meet, she didn't feel she could safely take the baby. When we had prayed about it, the Lord had told us to trust, that she was in His hands.

Gregory answered the door and sure enough, there were men in black with guns and handcuffs. They treated us roughly. They did not say much, except that we were under arrest. They allowed me to take the baby with me, and we were driven off in the middle of the night to the closest prison to await trial.

Those days in prison were difficult, but they were not long, as our trial came quicker than we had thought it would. The accusations of being enemies of the State and spreading anti-communist propaganda were read to us. We were given papers to sign denouncing our faith and our so-called “crimes”—which we refused to sign. We were then told that because we were both previous offenders, and in my case, an escaped prisoner, there was no mercy and we would feel the full extent of Soviet justice. Life in prison.

I once again felt my stomach contract into so many cramps as I watered my baby with my tears and prayers and was forced to hand her over to a lady from the State Orphanage. I saw Gregory in passing, as we were being loaded into the back of a prison truck, and I mouthed the words I had said to him so many times. “I love you.” Then we were loaded into the back of a truck and locked in. We were handcuffed and our ankles were chained, but to our surprise we were put in next to each other. I laid my head on his shoulder as the van drove away. I started to say something, but I was immediately told to shut up or else, so we sat in silence, thankful to be together, our thoughts and prayers on our children.

We drove for quite a while, as I must have drifted off to sleep. I suddenly awoke to a low and distant rumble. We were sitting in the vehicle and it was locked from the outside. There was no way out. However, when I strained my eyes to see out the window into the darkness, I realized we were parked in the middle

of train tracks, and the lights of a coming train were bearing down on us. The drivers of the vehicle we were in were nowhere to be seen and I realized then that this was probably planned as an “unofficial” way to get rid of us and any knowledge we may have had of the general’s conversion.

“Gregory,” I said, “let’s pray.”

And so we prayed. There was nothing we could do, so we prayed. We committed our lives, our hearts, our children, our everything to the Lord, and then began to praise Him for the wonderful life we had had. We felt peace. When the train hit us, all I was aware of was a blinding flash of light and then a falling sensation, falling directly into the arms of my wonderful Savior. My pain was over, my troubles were ended, my tears were being wiped away. Even my fears for my children were gone, as I knew that they were in the Lord’s hands.

Soon I was reunited with my family, my loved ones, with Gregory, with Pawel, and was given a hero’s welcome. A large group of people I barely recognized came to me to thank me for helping them come to the Lord. I had always wanted to be a heroine, and now I knew that in the Lord’s book I was one! I felt only love, joy, and peace. I was home!

## EPILOGUE

“Mama, I am home!” Nadia called. Then louder. “Mama!”

“What?” A tired, angry sounding voice came from the kitchen.

Nadia’s long, black hair was falling around her shoulders, reaching down to where her mini-skirt hugged her upper thighs. Everyone wondered where she got her hair, as her mother’s hair was a light brown and her father was blonde. *Must get it from her grandmother*, the mother thought, although she was never too sure about that.

She now surveyed her teenage daughter with a critical eye and sighed. “How many times do I have to tell you not to wear those tiny skirts to school! It is not proper!”

“Whatever, Mama.” Nadia laughed. “You may have grown up in the eighteenth century, but this is the 1990s and everyone dresses like this.”

“It’s just not...” Her mother was at loss for words. “Oh, who cares?” she muttered, then added, “You look exceptionally happy today.”

“Yes, I am!” Nadia responded. Then she flung her backpack filled with her school books onto the small kitchen table and went to her room. They shared a three-room flat—one living room, and two bedrooms.

Nadia's father had left them years before and it was just her and her mother.

"Don't forget your homework!" her mother called after her, then sighed and went back to cooking dinner. *Raising a high-spirited teenager alone is just too much for anyone!* she thought bitterly, then said out loud to herself, "At least she has a mother to raise her!" She shook her head, as if to rid herself of whatever thoughts were plaguing her and went back to chopping vegetables for the salad she was making.

"Goodbye. I'll be a little late for dinner." Nadia was flying towards the door in a hurry.

"Now you stop right there!" The mother stepped out of the kitchen and blocked the front door with her hands on her hips.

Nadia gave a little frown.

"Mama, I am seventeen years old! Can't I go out with friends without you having to know where I am?"

"You are all the family I have!" her mother replied. "And you never know these days what kind of hooligans..."

"Yes, yes, I know," Nadia interrupted. "I will be careful. Anyway, these friends are great! They'll look after me."

"And who might they be?"

"Oh, they are Christians. I met them on the street the other day distributing these." She showed her mother a small piece of paper with a colorful picture on it. Before her mother could scrutinize it, Nadia snatched it back. "They are having a meeting in the Dom Pionierof and I want to go!" Nadia reached for the doorknob.

"Christians? No, absolutely not!"

"Mama, what are you afraid of? It's perfectly legal. Those 'dark ages' are over, thanks to Yeltsin."

"I don't want to hear about him. He is ruining our country!" The mother shook her head. How to explain to

her daughter that she didn't want her getting mixed up with a bunch of foreigners. *At least before Yeltsin I had a job that paid every month! Now I am lucky to be paid once every three months!* "If you have to be a Christian, can't you at least attend the Orthodox Church?"

Nadia rolled her eyes.

*My thoughts exactly,* the mother thought. "Fine, you can go this once. But after that, no more!"

Nadia smiled appreciatively and was gone. Maria's evening, however, was not a happy one.



One week later, all Nadia could talk about was the missionaries and how great they were, how they sang songs and did skits and preached a message that was so wonderful, and yet so simple that anyone could understand. She had even convinced her mother to let her attend another meeting, and now Maria was getting worried about her daughter.

Finally one night she decided to see for herself what was attracting her daughter so strongly, and so she crept into the back of the room while the meeting in the Dom Pionierof was in progress and began to watch the show.

*Nadia was right,* Maria thought to herself. *It is all almost too simple!*

A couple of men and women of different ages were doing a humorous skit about some young man who was sick and needed an operation. There was a funny, bumbling doctor and a flirty nurse. As it turned out, this young man was sick because his heart was full of things—things that needed to be surgically removed, including a house, a girlfriend, books, clothing, money, etc. In the end the doctor and nurse filled this young man's empty heart with a picture of Jesus, and so the skit ended to laughs and applause. She felt it was all just foolishness and that she had seen enough. She



was ready to leave when the singing started. The music was only a few guitars and the singers were far from professional. However, she always liked music, so she decided to stay and listen to the music.

She was moved to tears by the words of the songs, and something was stirred in her that she didn't even know was there. A yearning, a desire. She shook it off. *This is crazy! I should know better than to let myself get emotional over some crazy Christian music!* She left before the last song ended in order to avoid having to speak to anyone.

Nadia continued to attend the weekly meetings and Maria saw a marked change come over her. She became more loving and gentle. She started to insist on praying before their meals. She seemed more peaceful and more emotionally stable. Wonder of wonders, she was even more respectful, although she definitely didn't lose her spunky personality. Maria kept meaning to tell her daughter to stop attending those meetings and hanging around with those foreigners, but she could never bring herself to do it.

However, the last straw came when Nadia came home with a stack of those colored papers which, she announced to her mother, she was going to distribute on the streets and to her friends. They had a big argument that night and after Nadia had left her in tears, Maria turned to her bottle of vodka to get her through the night. She had been battling insomnia of late.

After hours of drinking and falling into deep despair, she broke down and started weeping. *God, if you are a God, please help me. I can't go on like this! I don't even believe You exist. You can't exist, or if You do, You don't care about me. How can You, when You let my parents die? Where were You when I needed you as a child, when I was lonely and an outcast in the orphanage because of something my parents had done? Where*

*were You when my marriage failed and my husband left me? Where are You now? Are You listening to me?* She collapsed, weeping, on to the couch.



The first rays of the sun were peeking in through the curtains when she awoke, feeling very clear and alert. She felt a soft hand caressing her head and she knew, at that instant, that she was not alone. Her mama was there with her. When she was very small and sad, she remembered her mama's hand stroking her hair. She never told anyone, as everyone would have thought she was crazy, and as she grew older it happened less and less. But now she felt it as strongly as if it was real. She said the words aloud, "Mama?" but no answer came. Instead her attention was drawn to one of the posters from Nadia's pile, which had obviously fallen off the table and onto the floor. It was a picture of a man and woman on a picnic blanket, with giant hands surrounding them. The title was, "Why Worry? You Are in His Hands."

She picked it up and read it. For the first time things seemed to come clear to her. She sat crying and reading, wondering if this was the answer to her prayer of last night. She was still crying and holding the poster when Nadia emerged from her room on her way to school. Nadia stopped and looked at her mother, realizing what had happened. She sat down and put her arms around her mother, and they both cried.

"Mama, there is a beautiful prayer on this poster. I prayed it and it made such a difference in my life. You should try it," Nadia finally said, breaking the silence. She looked at the clock. "Oh my! I am going to be late for school. I love you, Mama."

Maria didn't say anything but she gave her daughter a smile and wiped away a tear. Nadia reached into her pocket and pulled out a small tract. She

said hesitantly, “Here is something else that the missionaries gave me. I read it every day.” She looked embarrassed and suddenly turned and left.

Maria picked up the tract. It was titled, “Somebody Loves You.”

She called in sick for work and spent her morning reading and re-reading the poster and the tract. She finally realized that God did love her and had her in the hollow of His hand. She realized that her life did have meaning and although she had difficulties, God had guided her and cared for her all through her life. She wept as she prayed the prayer on the back of the poster, asking Jesus to come into her heart, and then she continued to talk to God, in a way that felt right, although she didn’t know if it was “proper.” She asked God to forgive her for her bitterness against Him for what happened to her parents and for her difficult childhood as an orphan. She thanked God for the care He had shown her in her life and for giving her a wonderful daughter and a good life, despite the difficulties she had growing up. She felt a weight lifted off her shoulders, and peace and joy filled her heart. For a split second she thought she saw her parents looking down on her, smiling.



She was right—Gregory and I were looking down on her and smiling through tears of joy as our third and youngest daughter, Maria Gregorievna Keroshiva prayed and received the Lord. Pasha and Lera, who had come Home to Heaven ten years before, both from an illness, joined us as we raised our hands in praise to the One who had kept and led us all our lives, and now was doing the same for our children, just as He had promised.

*Not one thing hath failed of all the good things that the Lord your God spake concerning you. All are come to pass unto you and not one thing hath failed thereof.*

