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The Shadow of Lillya

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Lillya shut her eyes and squeezed them tight. She imagined every muscle and limb of her father's favorite black stallion, and like she did as a young girl, took off like Pegasus flying. The faster the horse went, the clearer her past became, until it was as real as the struggles of her days. The planets parted, the stars scattered, and a trail of her memories were left in the shadow.

Chapter 1

St. Petersburg, Russia ~ 1916

The sparkle from the jewels sewn into the gowns, draped around necks, and held in place by bezels on the tiaras of the courtly ladies' heads was almost blinding. Giant crystal chandeliers swayed to the beat of the music, while six-foot-tall marble vases filled with leaves of palm the size of an African elephant's ear stood guard, eavesdropping on every conversation.

A drunken frenzy inspired the orchestra to play faster and faster. The loose limbs of the dancers on the ballroom floor looked like trees in a hurricane swaying up and down gyrating in circles then shaking like dogs just pulled out of a frozen pond, they wiggled until they collapsed from exhaustion.

Lillya caught a glimpse of a mysterious man with deep penetrating eyes. He was standing quietly in the corner of the room observing the aristocrats. Her eyes barely met his but when they did for just a split second it was as if the fiery tip of an arrow quickly entered and left her body. Lillya let out an unexpected “Aah” Loud enough to draw Anton’s attention but soft enough to hide it from anyone else.

Lillya had heard stories of this man the healer who had caught the attention of the Czar and Czarina and she didn’t want anything to do with him.

A count poured a pitcher of drink down the front of a duchess’ finely stitched dress and then without any sort of inhibition he started to lick it. Soon he was under her dress. The duchess unfolded her fan as though she were blushing in mock embarrassment. The count popped his head out, quite content with himself, and addressed the crowd, not noticing the man in the corner. “Do you know what secret I found under there?”

The guests shouted back, “No!”

The count smiled, then winked and said, “The Empress doesn’t go to the hospital to help the soldiers. She goes because the czar no longer satisfies her. She’s taken on a lover. I hear it’s a healer, but who? Who could it be?” He said again as if to challenge the crowd. Then he grabbed the drunk duchess’ hand and started dancing once again, knowing he had left one word on the lips of all in attendance, “Who?”

Lillya watched as the mysterious man in the corner, left the room.

“We don’t have to stay, my dear,” Anton whispered in Lillya’s ear. “We’ve shown ourselves. We can go now.”

Curious as to the goings-on at court Lillya later discovered that this man yielded more power than she had imagined. He would influence the future of her dear Russia and be at the heart of many rumors.

Lillya Xenia Englehardt Vronsky was not quite as anxious as her husband to depart. “Dance with me,” she said unexpectedly. “You know everyone loves to watch you. You are the best dancer in this ballroom,” Lillya told her husband.

“Besides we need to stay informed, now more than ever,” she smiled through her teeth. She knew he knew she was right, but she was also aware he had no stomach for such affairs. It pained him to watch men and women he had once respected throw away their dignity so easily as if it were an old scrap of food and simple to replace. However, Lillya knew Anton Vronsky would not refuse her.

Russia and St. Petersburg were fighting for their lives. “Millions of soldiers have died,” Lillya thought to herself. “And all the upper class can think about is overindulgence, intrigue and lies.”

As if he were able to read her thoughts, Anton whispered, “When they count their money and jewels tomorrow, I hope they tuck some of it away. One of these days the tables could turn and where will they all be then?” Anton did not say this to

scare her. He simply wanted her to have a more realistic idea of how the people outside of their class felt. What was their level of aggravation and frustration and underneath that, anger? He had a unique perspective, that of a common man who had been brought into the folds of high society. With one eye he read the aristocrats and with his other eye the people who came to his circus and the vendors from whom he bought food and trinkets most every day on the street.

Born to be the heir of the most famous Russian family circus and having come from a long line of high-wire walkers like his father, Dimitri Vronsky who owned the circus that was located near the Bolshoi. Every day of his life from boyhood to the day he turned the circus over to his own son, Vladimir, Anton mixed and worked with the people who filled his family's bleachers. His circus made the crowds laugh and scream. Yes, Anton felt certain he had a broader view of the temperature of the world and such matters. He had married into the upper class but could still see the world through the eyes of the people. With that in mind years earlier, before the 1905 revolution and before he turned gray, Anton and Lillya passed on their legacy, the Vronsky Family Circus, to their son who now lived in America with his wife and four daughters. For this, Anton was glad, for he knew they were safe. Now Anton only had to focus on his wife, and that was enough. The palace, Lillya noted, had recently adopted a frugal existence. Still, the message they were trying to send seemed to have little to no effect on the upper class, nor

did it dictate their actions. The aristocrats, simply put, did not want to see, feel, or accept the rage and growing anger of the people just outside the palace doors or in the streets where they shopped, or in front of their homes. Even though they could see a dark cloud was rising above them, they continued to spend enormous sums of money frivolously while the population was feeling the pangs of war and hunger and this opulent ball was just one example.

As times got worse, Lillya and Anton moved onto her family's estate. They now lived with Lillya's father, Yuri Engelhart. It seemed to be the right thing to do and a natural fit. He loved good alcohol, fine fabrics pasatorial paintings, exotic food and most of all fine horses. He valued athleticism and people who did the best that they could at whatever it was that sparked their passion. He enjoyed watching his grandson Vladimir when he was a child, learning all the feats he would need to know to lead and run the family's circus that would be his destiny and made Yuri wonder what they really thought about his estate and all that had come with it by birth. But Yuri enjoyed the world that his daughter had become a part of, and on afternoons when he had nothing else to do, he would visit the Vronsky Family Circus, sit in the bleachers, and watch the dancing bears and elephants and tigers all learn new tricks, and he was fascinated. "It takes so much more skill," he said to his daughter Lillya, "It would take me a lifetime of learning patience to do what they do. I so admire the talents your son is inheriting."

In later years, long after Lillya and Anton stitched a life together, to the extent that Yuri had enjoyed Anton's circus, equally, Anton surprised himself by the way he so easily adjusted to a life of leisure living with Yuri.

<Date or reference to the revolution needed to place this in historical time. This sounds like it follows the 1917 revolution.>

Still, sometimes of late, Lillya had to admit that it felt as if the world around her was crumbling especially in regard to Russia, her home country, the country she loved with all her heart.

Russia was battling with itself both inside and out and it wasn't long before news began to trickle in about; arrests of friends, other wealthy aristocrats, some, who just like Lillya and Anton, had attended the ball not even three months past. The uncertainty of their future began to haunt her and she found herself staying up late into the night trying to wash the nightmares away. She remembered each one and could repeat them all at will with incredible detail and skill similar to the concentration it took her when creating her own fine needlework. Fear ran up and down her body again and just as it had the night before, and she witnessed herself tripping over a small log and landing in the middle of a big mud puddle. She couldn't get up by herself. The mud was like glue and she couldn't escape. She was vulnerable and unable to protect herself. "Which army would eventually come to get them?" she wondered. She found it almost impossible to come up for air and

she thought she would die. Then a man with a familiar demeanor came down from heaven to visit her and he wrapped his arms around her and told her not to worry because he would save her. Day to day night by night it seemed as if she tried out different dreams to see how they would fit just as someone else might try on an overcoat. She would feel it and smell it and use different voices to better understand it. Would it be the Reds or Whites that would ultimately come and take them away? She tried to keep her immense fear to herself and would remind herself that fear only breeds more fear. News continued to find its way to their door, and none of it was good.

Protests and scuffles between the political factions became more violent. Every couple of days it seemed someone they knew vanished, and soon Lillya and Anton were forced to face the truth. “St. Petersburg has gotten too dangerous for people like us,” Anton finally told his wife. “We can’t hold off any longer.”

Lillya was in agreement with her husband. She felt bad, for Anton was only guilty by association, and as her husband, love bound him to protect her. Many of Lillya and Anton’s friends were being forced to clean toilets, while some had simply disappeared. Had they been captured, or had they escaped?

Lillya’s family was not a so high up rhe the aristocratic laddder, but they were all well-liked and they each had a special talent that could not be replicated. Her father’s gift was to be good at most everything he tried, but most of all he was kind

and he was charming. Still, Lillya realized that had she not been married to Anton she might have already fallen into one of those categories and none were very appealing. “You’re right,” she said to Anton and her father over dinner. “I understand, it’s time for us to go.”

The weeks before their departure, her father and Anton planned and plotted. “It’s good that you could see so far ahead, Yuri,” Anton said after Yuri reviewed his idea of sending Lillya and Anton off to their cousin Michael and the favors Michael owed him. “He’s a good man, but one needs a little more than goodness during these times to get someone to risk their life.” So, it was decided and Lillya had her own reasons to follow suit. Besides her father, Anton loved her more than anyone and both would give their own lives to save her, so she had no reason not to trust their plan.

Until that day, though, Lillya decided to appreciate every minute and every pleasure that she had been afforded during her life; besides, riding her favorite stallion to try to take her mind off of what was about to happen seemed like a smart thing to her.

“Am I grayer than I was last week?” she asked her husband. They all seemed to grow older in that short period of time, more than she had imagined possible. As they came up with the details of their plan, it became clear her father would stay behind.

“I insist! Our old workhorse, Sophie, is exactly the kind of horse I will need, and she won’t attract attention. Sophie and Timur are my choices and Anton can choose a horse to pull our cart. That’s enough. Any more and we’ll have thieves outside our campfire waiting for the fire to grow dim so they can jump in and take what is ours.”

The day of their parting came like any other. The sun rose, they ate their breakfast together, and joked as if they would be doing the same tomorrow. But as the hour of their departure neared, their emotions began to take over.

Lillya heard her father searching through his favorite room. “Not this one.” And he broke the bottle. She knew better than to join him at this moment. He had a right to release his feelings in private. Lillya reflected on the many hours her father had spent throughout the years categorizing, arranging and rearranging this room. She wondered if her old father would be walking as well as he did for a man his age if he had not had the determination each day to walk up and down the stairs to his cellar to dote on the many bottles that made him so happy.

Minutes later she heard her father express a very satisfied, “Yes.” She quickly moved away from the door. She didn’t want her father to think she had been listening.

“We’re going to have a little something before I send you off,” he said when he climbed back up the stairs. “Can’t let you go without warming you up a bit first. Tell that husband of yours to come inside.”

When Lillya and Anton entered her father’s study, he was opening an ungodly expensive bottle of Massandra Sherry that had once been a part of the Czar’s private wine collection. Uncorking it like the expert he was, he poured three glasses. He refused to make a toast, for there would be no solemn goodbye, instead he lit his pipe and sat back in his old leather chair to better enjoy the smell of his tobacco. Lillya had enjoyed watching her father perform this ritual since she was a little girl. Next would come a soft, high, gurgly sound, the sound of her father imploring his tongue to fall into place and his lungs to pull in just the right amount of air to kidnap the scent of the wine’s bouquet.

Without saying a word, they were all aware of the placement of the sun. They had decided they would depart before sunset, the time of least recognition.

Anton went back outside to check on the horses. He also wanted Lillya to have a few moments alone with her father. They all knew that this was very likely the last time they would see one another in this physical lifetime.

Lillya had passed on the stallion and her favorite mare. She told her solid workhorses that they would soon be the ones leading the way Lillya heard her father and Anton approaching from the front door. She knew it was the front door

because of the peculiar sound the front door made. It reminded her of the racket of the cricket chorus in the field nearby.

Over the many years she had lived in this home she had come to recognize the creaks and squeaks and sound of every wood plank in each room of the house and the distinctive way each door sang to her when it opened and closed. It was as if they had created and learned anew their own language. “It makes the house friendlier,” she told her father when she was only a young woman. Some nights she joked with her father telling him that she had begun to understand what they said.

About to say something she held her breath. She felt a strange sense of foreboding. But why wouldn’t she? She was leaving the place that held so many memories from her childhood until now. They knew their reality their entire way of life was going to vanish. It seemed unfathomable. In a way, they felt detached even though they found themselves right in the center and all that was happening. In their minds they were simply players on the stage of life.

Lilly leaned in to give her father one last kiss but he touched her shoulder to stop her.

“I have something to give you, Lillya.” Her father said. “I should have done this years ago, but I didn’t have the courage. It’s wrapped in a small, ordinary maid’s towel so if a thief sees it they’ll think it holds no value. Inside are answers to the

many questions I know still linger. Put it someplace safe and if you can, keep it to yourself.”

Lillya lifted one corner of the package to see what was inside. It was her father’s journal. “Some of the pages are soiled, but it’s all that you’ll need” he told Lillya. “Now go. Finish getting yourself ready. You are not a young girl anymore, and don’t worry about your old papa. I’ve had a good life and more than any other person, it was you who brought me joy, and that son of yours. Oh, how I miss him.”

Anton walked back in the house and her father kissed Anton on the cheek and grasped both his hands.

“Take care of my daughter as you always have,” he said to Anton. “Remember, you are to head toward the Ural Mountain range then go to the town of Kungur. It is near Perm.”

“Perm. That’s where Natasha is from,” Lillya reflected silently.

Her father continued. “You will go to the lower part of the town. On Kittarskaya Street is the Uspenskaya Church. Your mother’s cousin Michael is friends with the priest,” he said. Then he glanced at Lillya the same way he had when she was a child to make certain she was listening. “He is expecting you. The priest and his church have received large donations for this service,” he went on to say. “The church has places where you both will be able to hide together, safely in plain

sight.” Yuri slowed his speech wanting to drag out each word, not wanting this conversation to end. “Michael has many trustworthy friends. Besides, in doing this he is paying back an old debt.”

“Thank you, Papa. I promise we won’t forget. I love you!”

Staying behind was surely a death sentence, but he had decided there was not a better nor more fitting place for him to die. He had never needed such a big house nor so much property. It had been passed down to him as all property got passed down to the firstborn male. It was all he had ever known. And now he had a lifetime of memories and was too old and formed in his habits to start anew. He loved his estate, the wine and the horses and he had always taken good care of the families who lived with them. There would be no goodbyes. Instead two short French phrases rolled off his tongue. “À prochaine fois” and “Je t’embrasse très fort.” Then he did his best to smile. However, that was the day everything changed. Lillya could feel her father’s eyes on her back, but she did not dare turn around for fear that all the courage she had gathered up to have the strength to go would evaporate into dust and she would run back to him, wrap her arms around his neck and never let go.

How would all of this conflict end? Where would this revolution of the soul go and where would it take the people and the country she loved? How would they ever be able to fix all that they had blindly broken? Was there any goodness left floating in

the sky tucked underneath a big fluffy cloud? Or a place on earth where peace and truth reigned? Had kindness disappeared? What would happen to her father and Anton and her son Vladimir? What would be left for the children and where would they go? The Russia she knew had been fading away, breaking up bit by bit, disappearing before their eyes and in its place all that was left was confusion and poverty, laced with violence and fear. Sadly, what she had hoped would only last weeks, turned into months and years.

Childhood Days- Before the storm ~1860

Chapter 2

“It’s mine,” Natasha said, and she grabbed the necklace right out of Lillya’s hand.

“You know that’s not true. It was a gift from the Duchess herself. That’s what my grandmother told me.” However, Lillya’s grandmother was really a great aunt who thought her dead younger sister’s daughter would need one and it was a role she had been training for and one she thought she could fulfill.”

Lillya didn’t see her grandmother often; she lived in Moscow and traveled to other parts of Europe frequently with her husband from whom she inherited her title and royalty. Nonetheless Lillya was sentimental about the old woman, more so than most others in her life.

“It’s only because your mother died and me and the old one are your only true friends.” For a second Natasha felt bad for saying something so hurtful, but Lillya

took Natasha's guilt and used it against her and in this moment of weakness she tackled Natasha and pinned her down on the floor. After a few minutes they both got tired and Natasha gave up.

"Okay, here it is." Laughing she handed Lillya the simple heart-shaped ruby necklace. Remembering her place, she lifted Lillya's long golden wavy hair and spun it into a bun on the top of Lillya's head, then added a deep red rose from the garden that was conveniently in a vase nearby. She put the flower in Lillya's hair to top off her masterpiece. Then she clasped the lock closed and let the necklace fall down Lillya's front where it rested just above her chest.

"Now turn around so I can see how it shines almost as brightly as your eyes. But it's not nearly as beautiful as you," said Natasha. Lillya just smiled. She was used to these sorts of easy compliments from Natasha.

Another maid walked through the door. "Will you please prepare a bath for Lillya?" Natasha asked. Then she watched and waited until the bathwater was poured, the maid knowing that Natasha had almost full authority to ask for whatever she liked when it came to Lillya. The maid delicately removed Lillya's clothes and helped her slip into the tub.

Lillya admired Natasha's composure and self-assuredness. She never brought up money or that by social class she was far above Natasha's station, for she liked and respected her too much to do something so cruel. They had grown up together.

Natasha was more like a sister than anything else. Lillya couldn't remember a time when she didn't know Natasha. As far as she was concerned, they had shared most everything since birth. Still, as they grew older, their difference in stature and how society would judge them would become more apparent, for Natasha would remain forever the server and Lillya the receiver.

Sometimes Natasha, as much as she loved Lillya, couldn't stop herself from getting a bit fed up with her situation, and she would find herself becoming a bit manipulative. Natasha would search for a way to turn the tables and on more than one occasion, she almost had Lillya convinced that by being poor, Natasha was the wealthy one. Like the beautiful summer day when Lillya's father Yuri took Natasha shopping, even though Natasha knew most everything that they would buy together would ultimately end up on Lillya, Natasha knew that Lillya would see it as a way for one of them to spend more time with her father, garnering his attention. Being the same size as Lillya worked for and against each of them depending upon their mood and generosity of spirit. Recognizing their similarities, when Yuri wanted to buy something special for Lillya and he wanted to pick it out himself, Lillya's father would often arrange for Natasha to have the day off. This way he wouldn't have to interrupt Lillya's studies and Natasha got to spend an entire day by herself with Lillya's father. And if he bought Lillya a new blouse, he purchased a smart-looking scarf for Natasha along with a lovely belt so they each got to show

off something special. But for Natasha, the best gift she received on her days spent with Yuri was the silent permission he gave her to converse freely, show off her intelligence, wit and humor, and every smile that Yuri gave her in return was more than enough reward for her. If she had been rich, she would have been stuck at home like Lillya with the tutor, memorizing her lessons instead of spending the day with the best seamstress in all of St. Petersburg.

Natasha was beautiful like Lillya, and they shared a similar slant of the nose and a distinct dimple on their chins. Both girls could not believe their luck to be so similar in both spirit and looks. They were close in age and often pretended they were twins. Natasha was skilled like Lillya, but in different ways. She had a photographic memory and could remember everything Lillya had ever read to her, every classic, every poem. She could recite what she had heard almost word for word. She excelled in history and even learned to speak French just by sitting next to Lillya during her lessons. French, the language of the aristocracy, slipped off her tongue easier than it did her patron.

Natasha's mother was a housekeeper at a nearby estate and they moved to St. Petersburg from Perm when she was barely three. Her father, well they never spoke of him and Natasha had come to the conclusion that she was better off that way. It allowed her to design the father she wanted. Only she needed to believe it was true,

and she could keep him to herself and continue living her life, and nobody bothered her or disagreed.

Natasha visited her mother every Sunday. A woman would come from the estate where her mother worked and would dress her in the clothes Yuri's personal maid had laid out for her, but when she arrived where her mother worked no matter how beautifully or elegantly she had been dressed she would be sent to the back door where where her mother and the other help entered and her mother would greet her with a big smile. She had been instructed many years prior to never enter through the house from the main entrance.

Natasha loved her mother, but over time Sunday became her least favorite day of the week. But still it gave her the one thing she knew Lillya wanted and yearned for but did not have, a mother.

Natasha worshipped Lillya and taking care of Lillya and being her friend became Natasha's "raison d'être." And her rewards came with pretty clothes, good books and education, very unusual for anyone of her class. Most of the time she felt privileged to have been given such an important job. It made her feel a step above the other maids, and she was.

Lillya's father Yuri was a tall handsome man who stood out from across a room.

However, what made him special to Natasha was his ability to see what was special about her, and the way he quietly encouraged her by allowing Natasha to sit in on

Lillya's tutoring sessions and make certain she was not disturbed. Lillya could have objected, but she enjoyed the company and later she had someone to discuss that day's lesson with who could remember it almost word for word.

Lillya stood up in the tub. The maid was waiting with a towel to dry Lillya off and prepare her for evening's supper. She undid her bun and took out the lily Natasha had put in her hair and she shook her big mane. It was almost as thick as a horse's tail. Drops of water splattered across the room, leaving pools of water on the floor. Petra and Dimitri Vronsky from the famous Vronsky Family Circus were coming to their home to show her father a young mare they thought would be good for breeding. "They'll be staying for supper," her father announced earlier.

Lillya had never been to the circus and she was curious. She had been brought up to believe that you only went to the circus if you had been invited to watch the performers at the palace of the Czar. It was below them, but recently her father had changed his mind. As he got to know Dimitri better, he found himself growing fonder of the man who was a master on the tightrope and a wizard when it came to horses. Dimitri was well educated and very clever, besides being strong and brave. All qualities Yuri admired, he enjoyed Dimitri's dry wit and sense of humor. "The man says what he thinks and doesn't stop himself from expressing what he really

feels. Most men are afraid of what other men might think, but this makes him courageous in my eyes.”

Lillya started talking excitedly while the maid was drying her off. “Papa says when Mr. Vronsky touches a horse something magical happens. He knows which ones to choose. It’s as if they speak to him,” she told Natasha.

Natasha was fumbling through Lillya’s drawers.

“What are you looking for?” she asked.

“Got it!” and Natasha pulled out a simple gold necklace to complement Lillya’s ruby, along with a matching bracelet.

“Now that’s perfect,” she said, feeling quite satisfied with herself. “They’ll be here within the hour, we must hurry.”

A blue-green gown with gold threads was waiting on Lillya’s bed, but first they had to fix her hair. “If you move any slower, they’ll find someone to replace me and then what would you do?” Natasha teasingly barked.

“Papa would never replace you. I couldn’t live without your company,” Lillya replied. “I’d have to go on a hunger strike.”

Natasha smiled because she knew Lillya was telling the truth.

Looking out the window Lillya saw the Vronskys coming up to the house from the stables. “Papa’s got a smile on his face. He must have liked what he saw. Looks like he decided she’s the one.”

Lillya quickly walked down the stairs into the Parlor where the Vronskys and her father had just been poured drinks and the help was serving caviar. Her father seemed to be quite taken in by the couple. Her father rarely grinned and only showed his poker face to strangers, but on this occasion, he could barely fit all the happiness he felt inside of himself.

Petra's petite figure was dressed in a bold royal blue and her dark shiny hair blended with streaks of amber, yellow and gold was pulled back and wrapped into a perfect twist. Her smile was bright and warm and would disarm any soldier she came in contact with. Yes, any man determined to do battle with her, would surely lose and fall to her feet.

Petra had a relaxed natural way about her and she did not notice her effect on men. She would casually throw her head back to get her hair out of her eyes and laugh as if she were the only one in the room. She clearly loved her life and her husband most of all.

"Our daughter Lillya is the horsewoman of our family and she is going to love your horse!"

"Lillya, this is Mr. and Mrs. Vronsky from the famed Vronsky Family Circus," Yuri said.

"Your father has told us much about you," Mr. Vronsky interjected.

Lillya for a moment wbecame speechless as her father continued to brag about her with a great sense of pride.”He says you can an already ride standing up. That’s a great accomplishment andt says much about your character.”

“I find if one is balanced and is not afraid and speaks kindly to a horse she knows quite well, that most anything is possible,” Lillya shylyreplied. “That is with practice, of course.”

“I must agree,” Petra Vronsky replied. “I have seen tricks on horses that would stump a magician.” Lillya instantly liked her. She found it easy to talk with Petra and imagined they had much n common and would have been friends in another lifetime.

A butler called them in for supper. Lillya caught a glimpse of Natasha at the top of the stairs and was happy she was listening in. She wished that she could call Natasha down to join them, but they both knew their place. She would have to share the evening with her later.

Biting into a Cornish hen, she admired their cook’s ability to add just the right amount of paprika on top of it and dole out to each person a perfect serving size of rosemary potatoes. Lillya soon forgot about Natasha, savoring each bite and morsel of food, especially the conversation.

She let her father take the lead, remembering they had company, for it might have sounded rude for her to ask the questions she wanted to know the answers to

immediately. Finally, they got around to the subject Lillya was most interested in hearing about, the circus. She was besotted by a story Dimitri told about their tigers Midnight and Satin. They were recently given to the Vronskys from a Prince from India after he saw their circus perform for the Czar and his children on the lawn of the Winter Palace. Dimitri said, "I was rehearsing one afternoon when all of a sudden I heard a tremendous amount of commotion. I stopped to see what was going on. When I went out front there were five royal carriages. The one in the middle had the names Midnight and Satin painted on both sides in beautiful colorful calligraphy. I stood there dumbfounded.

By now Petra was outside next to me."

"Yes," Petra agreed.

"Holding Petra's hand, Dimitri continued," I inched in close to the carriage. A man in formal Indian dress handed me a letter and said, "This is a gift from the prince. You must have made quite an impression!"

"Inside the gilded cage were two tiger kittens, playing with a big ball of yarn. The representative continued to say that they had been abandoned on the prince's estate and that the prince himself had personally nursed them back to health. So, what was I to do," Dimitri asked, "but to humbly accept them?"

"I used to go inside their cage and play with them until they got too big," Petra said. Lillya's ears perked up even more when Petra mentioned they had a son who

walked the high wire and was also a notable horseman. She got chills just thinking of anyone walking across a wire fifty feet up in the air, for only Natasha knew that Lillya became afraid of heights if there was not something solid between her and the ground. A horse was solid, so she had no problem standing up on the back of a galloping roisenback. “Anyone can do that, but to walk a wire, why that is magnificent.” Petra could see Lillya was mesmerized by the glint she saw in her eyes that became similar to the glint in her own eyes when she first saw Dimitri perform his act. Both Lillya and Yuri could not hide their fascination.

Later that night Lillya shared the events of the evening with Natasha, and did not fail to say “Oh, and did I tell you, his mother mentioned they have a son who walks the high wire?”

“I wonder why they made no offer of an introduction. They didn’t even tell me his name. They simply said he was talented and had a playful sort of personality. They should know that I’m old enough to meet their son.” Lillya went on. “Thank goodness for Papa though. By the end of the evening he decided to put his stallion with their mare. Then he promised the Vronskys that we would attend their circus sometime soon.”

“After all, our horses are going to bring our families together,” Lillya’s father said to the Vronskys as they were leaving.

Lillya’s father had no idea how true his words would become.

New Chapter <After the 1917 Revolution>

Keeping a secret is much harder to do when your audience is already mistrusting.

No one seemed to tell the truth. The trick was to be able to sense true from the false and learn to interpret a constantly ever-changing code. The White Army was made up mostly of Russia's armed forces, members of the upper classes, and soldiers from other nations. They didn't like one another, and they certainly weren't unified. At least that is what Anton told Lillya. Then the Reds had Trotsky, Lenin, and Stalin, who were in competition for ultimate rule and would trip one another up any chance they got, of course for the good of the cause. But then again

Lillya thought, “Even my father was not completely truthful until he handed me his journal. Or one could say he told the truth with great omissions.” This leather-bound book would speak more intimately to Lillya in her father’s voice, more than he had his whole life. The flames drew her into herself and got her thinking of the large townhouse where she and Anton had lived when Vladimir was still young. She reminisced about its gigantic fireplace and she wondered if those striking flames from so many years prior were trying to tell her something and she hadn’t been listening. Then a spark from the fire made a loud crackling sound and shook her back to the present. In the distance, she could hear horses galloping and she wondered if they were white or red, or perhaps Czechs? They were fighting a world war on the Russian front, but soon their army found themselves intertwined in a civil war as well.

Her ears followed the sound of the riders while her mind ran in circles until eventually she landed where she began. “Maybe they are just like us; people on the run and hiding?” Still, she held her breath until they passed.

The cruelty of both sides had become well known. Lillya knew that their lives could easily fall into the whimsy of a handful of soldiers. And their fate would be decided by what kind of night or day these soldiers had had. If the soldiers had had a good day they might only take your food and horses. On a bad day, they would also shoot you and not think twice.

Lillya thought about the journal her father had given to her. She was anxious to read it. She was having a hard time falling asleep. The abandoned cabin they were in was cold and dark. Still, she and Anton were grateful for the cover from the wind. Lillya watched Anton's stomach rising up and down and every once in a while, he would make a funny little squeaking sound through his nostrils. Trying not to make any noise while making sure he was asleep, she put his handkerchief lightly over his nose to lessen the sound and quietly slipped her thumb and her index finger into the bag that carried her belongings, including now her father's journal, wanting to be able to read even just a little corner of truth before she said her nightly prayers, and goodnight to, parents, husband, her loved ones in America and then she would set her mind and point it to a happy place so that when she awoke the following day she could start it without any discoloration from the day before .

"Just a few words and I'll put you right back," she toyed with herself and the journal as if she were making a bargain with God. Anton's snoring became much louder and deeper even though he was a light sleeper. She didn't want to risk waking him, nor did she want him to catch her reading a journal he knew nothing about. Her father had asked her to keep it to herself and that's what she intended to do to the best of her ability. But Lillya soon came to realize that when one finds

themselves in the middle of a revolution with no end in sight, they should avoid making promises for they are not easy to keep.

Lillya could see Anton's legs becoming restless and soon he would open his eyes. Lillya got shivers up and down her spine. But she wasn't certain if this chill was because she felt embarrassment and guilt that she would be discovered reading a book of secrets that for the time-being her father had asked remain between just the two of them or had she simply gotten a chill from sleeping in a drafty old cottage. Either way for now she would hold her father's secrets to herself. She wrapped his journal quickly back into the maid's towel and threw it in her satchel.

Anton rubbed his hands over his eyes. Then he shook his right leg several times and next his left, made a sudden jerky motion as if he had not been sleeping at all and then sat up.

"What are you doing my dear?" He said in a clear authoritative voice, "Tomorrow is a big day. You're going to need your sleep." Noticing Lillya was shivering, he came over with a blanket and gently laid it on top of her making sure he had covered her feet then he bent down and gave her a kiss to remind her he was watching over her.

“Thank you my sweet,” she replied and closed her eyes. “The journal will be there in the morning,” she whispered to herself. Then nodding to Anton, she said.

“Perhaps if I keep my eyes closed and think sweet thoughts I will sleep.” But before she knew it, small rays of sunlight were finding their way into the cabin and they were planning their day.

The horses she had heard earlier were now off in the distance frightening someone else. Lillya took a deep breath and let out a sigh of relief. Her husband had done what he could the evening before to keep her warm and protect her from the unknown danger lurking in the woods.

Anton handed her a large cup of tea to help her greet the morning and when he was through, he covered the fire with a large pot to suffocate and put out the flame.

“If we hurry, my dear, I believe we can reach Kungur before sunset.” But by the look on her face she let him know he was going to have to be more enticing and seductive than that to get her to give up her blanket for the cold and unknown.

“I can almost smell the faint taste of leather off in the distance.” Lillya could smell what her husband was talking about but decided it could only smell that delicious to someone who was making money from it. He added, as if he were describing a freshly frosted cake, “That is what has made Kungur so famous. It’s on the tip of my nose. Can you smell it?”, he asked Lillya. Trying to engage her senses.

Anton repeated his words once more, hoping this time like a happy fisherman he

would see his catch at the end of his rod when he lifted it out of the water. “Maybe Kungur will satisfy my craving.”

“Yes,” Lillya responded, “Kungur.” Then she paused for several seconds, put on a grin that almost matched his, “Isn’t that the last stop before nowhere?” Lillya and Anton both burst out in laughter.

“I guess it’s not so bad. At least we’ll be on the west side of the mountain range. Think of our Czar and his family; they’re on the Eastern side in Siberia with five million square miles of nothing but isolation, ice and snow,” Anton went on now that he knew he had her attention.

“We should be grateful. We’ll be near Perm where there is a decent Opera, and I hear they grow watermelon in the summer,” Lillya said in a voice that could almost pass as joyful while under her breath she was pondering the thought, “Could Natasha be there?”

“Perm Province is large,” Anton continued. “Remember we will be at the mercy of others. This is not a vacation, Lillya.”

Lillya had never been to Siberia, still all Russians had heard stories of the place and found ways to romanticize the rough life it took to survive with its many unique qualities, but most shuddered with fear at the thought of being forced to live there. Some compared it to a batch of stew where a little of everything was thrown in until it became something new. European prisoners of war mixed with native

Aboriginal tribesmen and they sometimes spiced the pot by throwing in a Russian Jew or political exile. Then there was the Trans-Siberian Railway; workers from around the world populated that path for over 15 years while they built it.

For a few minutes Lillya had given herself permission to daydream. Every once in a while, as Anton spoke, she caught a glimpse of her old self. The teenage girl who galloped through the woods like a streak of lightning while standing upright on the back of her father's favorite stallion.

***(The following segment comes later, mention of carriage house and Gretta.)

Afraid to pull the journal completely out of her bag, Lillya squinted, trying to follow a soft ray of moon light that entered the carriage house through the cracks from the small scratched back window door with the green and brown stitched curtain Gretta had made in the bright shining day light.

Lillya wondered where it would one day all lead. She found herself and Anton getting more and more entangled in this mess and she became that much more determined that she would find a way out. "I will see my son and his wife and children before I leave this earth behind. I will see the equestrian Ann Marie Heart and maybe her children, too. I will have grand conversations with our scholar,

Lucky, watch Spade carry on the family tradition and walk the high wire, and Diamond will sparkle, I'm sure just as she does in the photographs Vladimir and Belle had sent me. She must be a star in her own right by now. Yes, Lillya became determined that she would see her granddaughters and get to know Bella, Vladimir's wife. Each night Lillya would prop herself up after Anton fell asleep once she had discovered the spot that gave her the best light. Then she would read in secrecy until her eye's hurt and looked like small slits. Eventually the chill from being outside would override her curiosity. However, on one such occasion just as she was about to close the journal, the name Michael popped out. Lillya could barely contain herself. What would she find she wondered?

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New chapter-childhood*****

Born the daughter of a maid, Natasha couldn't help but feel that she had been misplaced. Her quick wit was apparent to anyone who met her, and it seemed impossible for her to keep it entirely to herself. She recognized how lucky she was to have been placed in Yuri's household on this beautiful estate and to have become Lillya's best friend.

Lillya's father Yuri was very generous, and on some deep level, Lillya saw that he felt bad for Natasha and his compassion made her love him more. He left books for her to read, under her pillow. Each time Natasha found a new book she would devour it, staying up late at night until her eyes got weary and she could no longer lift her head.

Thinking about her station in life only got her depressed so she focused on other things, like pleasing Lillya and Yuri.

Lillya and Natasha became inseparable and Natasha hoped it would never end.

Lillya, not one to look too far down the road, did not see that life would eventually take them down different paths. Though Lillya's father Yuri knew that day would come. In the meantime he believed he was doing something good. He gave Natasha a good home where she could be educated, challenged, and cared for, and he gave his daughter a best friend and confidant, whom she could love and trust.

Lillya's mother had been ill as long as Lillya could remember, though once in a while the doctors would let her come home. When they did, everyone would be on pins and needles waiting for the moment the symptoms of her anxiety would begin again. She would shake and sweat just a little bit and that would last for several days. The nurses would wipe her brow and try to keep her comfortable and calm her down with smelling salts and herbs. By the fourth night they would wrap her tightly in a blanket to keep her arms pinned so she couldn't hurt herself.

Lillya would toss and turn on those nights. She would sing herself to sleep while trying to focus on songs that made her happy, ones with happy lyrics and melodies that uplifted her. She prayed that her power of thought could be strong enough to override her mother's demons and bring about a happy ending.

Both girls knew what would happen next. Natasha would pull her covers down and quietly make her way to Lillya's bed, Lillya would open her blanket and let Natasha in and in the morning they would awake with their arms wrapped around the other.

Lillya's mother, Angelina, wouldn't shout or cry, even though sometimes they wrapped her so tightly she could barely breathe. Where she was going would be more comfortable for her and bring her one step closer to her life's purpose; to be god's messenger as was written in her name, but she kept on wondering, of what?

In the middle of the night, Natasha and Lillya would hear the carriage wheels approaching, the clop, clop of the horses' hoofs as they got nearer. It was impossible to interpret the commotion that was taking place, the low humming mumbles of her father and the doctors. A groggy reply in response from her mother, who earlier had been given something they called opium. All Natasha and Lillya knew was that it was strong and made her mother Angelina agreeable and sleepy. Angelina's doctor, speaking through his mustache and beard was discussing something with the other doctors and Lillya's father while the rest of the crowd, that included secretly Lillya and Natasha would wait for the verdict as if each hair on his mustache represented an opera fan and everyone in the theater would be silent waiting to hear what the verdict would be, "Stay" or "Go" but her father already knew and so did Lillya and Natasha. They would be taking her to the spa in Odessa where she could rest, and hopefully get better and one day return to the family for good.

The entire process usually only took five or six weeks. At first everything would be wonderful, and Lillya would get very excited and almost believe she might have a mother. But even by the age of five or six, the more it happened, and it did, again and again, Lillya began to recognize the signs. She could read her mother's body language.

The headaches would start, then she would join the family only for lunch, then she would lock herself in her room for the rest of the day. Soon she wouldn't retreat from her bedroom at all, nor receive any visitors, including Lillya. Then, almost like clockwork, the sweating and shaking would begin and the following day Natasha would hand Lillya a note when she opened her eyes for the day ahead, but the flowers next to her bed told Lillya all that the note would say. Natasha stood ready with Lillya's robe and slippers and together they would enter her mother's bedroom. The bed would be made as if no one had ever been there, and Lillya would defend her mother's actions by repeating to Natasha what she had heard all her life: her mother Angelina had a special job and she was off being a messenger for God, and then Lillya, like her mother, would think, for what? For whom? Lillya would ask her Grandmama, when she saw her and they were alone, where her mother had really gone. Grandmama would say, "she's with the doctors back at the hospital trying to get better for you." At least that was a partial truth. But then one morning her Grandmama came to their house dressed head to toe in black. Lillya did not have to ask. Her father, not grasping Lillya's comprehension of the situation, told her that her mother decided to visit God during the night and she found it so peaceful and delightful that she missed the one train back home. Flowers came and filled the house and Lillya laid some on her mother's grave as Lillya stood bravely next to her father with Natasha holding her hand. Later her

Grandmama handed her a note. I found this in your mother's room. It simply said, "tell my daughter to have a good life. We will see each other again when the angels call for her many years from now." Years later Lillya waited for her mother in the dark, but she never came.

New Chapter ~ 1918

"Perm Provence is large," Anton recited. "Remember we will be at the mercy of others. This is not a vacation."

Lillya had never been to Siberia, but all Russians had heard stories of the place and at times found ways to romanticize the rough life it took to survive with its unique qualities, but mostly they shuddered with fear at the thought of being forced to live there. Some had compared it to a batch of stew where a little of everything was thrown in until it became something new. European prisoners of war mixed with native Aboriginal tribesmen and they sometimes spiced the pot by throwing in a Russian Jew or political exile. Then there was the Trans-Siberian Railway; workers from around the world populated that path for over 15 years while they built it.

For a few minutes Lillya had given herself permission to daydream. Every once in a while, as Anton spoke, she caught a glimpse of her old self. The teenage girl who galloped through the woods like a streak of lightning while standing upright on the back of her father's favorite stallion.

She and Anton had been on edge long before they had left Petrograd, a name she couldn't get used to, the new name of her beloved St. Petersburg. She had forgotten what it was like to have no reason to hide. And, oh, how Anton hated being the one assigned to hold her kite string.

Anton had gathered a large stick at the beginning of their journey and he marked it each morning to keep track of the days and time. Without it, they would have gotten lost.

"Just one more long, grueling day," Anton thought as he marked the twig for what he hoped would be this last time. "If I'm right, by day's end we will finally be able to give that wife of mine a rest." Having no one to talk with he had become quite conversant with himself and the horses he tended to as well.

Lillya rarely complained. Still, she had to admit to herself that she was looking forward to sleeping in the same place, the same bed for more than one or two nights and she would be happy to let her guard down a bit wherever it was that they settled when they finally settled and to wherever it was the stars and destiny led them. Then she gave one giant yawn, said a quick prayer, and got down to the business of the day. Soon, she would be able to spend hours tucked away with her father's journal, unraveling secrets she was positive she would find. Just thinking about it, made her feel guilty.

l remembering seeing the name Michael, a chill ran up and down her spine. He was taking a big risk by hiding them. Maybe her father Yuri blackmailed him or perhaps Michael was indebted to return a big favor? All in due time she thought, smiling at Anton. Enough of their life had been torn apart. She wasn't so certain that her father had done her a favor by giving her his journal.

Anton recognized that smile in Lillya's eyes however he knew it was safe not to ask her what it meant.

For a while she had forgotten how tired her feet and legs had become, not to mention her swollen ankles. She thought about her son Vladimir and his family.

"Does he look like his father? Do any of his girls resemble me perhaps in spirit?"

Lillya missed her son horribly and she cursed her country and all of its stupid political factions for the reasons he lived so far away and for the pain that she felt from never having held any of her granddaughters, but Anton had been needed in the early years by his parents and of course Lillya had her father Yuri. She recited the names of Vladimir's children. "Let's see, Ann Marie Heart, Spade, Diamond Claire, and Lucia Akinsya Club. The last child was named after herself, as her full name was Lillya Akinsya Engelhardt. Akinsya had come from Lillya's great-grandmother, and she liked thinking there was an old Russian name that she wore, too, floating around in that young country, the United States.

They had taken a short stop so Lillya could stretch. “If all goes well tonight we’ll be sleeping in Kungur.” Anton repeated once more. Then with hopeful eyes he handed Lillya the reins of the sturdy workhorse she had ridden all of these months. She was a far cry from her father’s stallion. She could see a small supply of hopefulness in Anton’s eyes. Things were about to change. “If we are lucky we will arrive around dusk.”****

Lillya smiled at Anton. She was thinking of her cousin Michael. She had a vague recollection of him. She met him once as a child and he had left quite an impression on her like a map in her memory. She could only have been four or five because her mother was still alive. They had a simple lunch together and he did not stay long after the meal. She remembered that day clearly because Natasha had sat next to her and her father Yuri and put the guest of honor between Natasha and Lillya’s mother.

Lillya remembered Michael was very distinguished-looking with salt and pepper hair and he had a mustache that he waxed and wore turned up. He seemed serious, but then he’d tell a joke and no one laughed harder than him, and his smile would suddenly grow twice as big. Then he would cough as if he were choking on his own joke and laugh as if it was too big for even him. As a young girl she found him very mysterious. She caught her father sometimes whispering his name. He

was her mother's favorite cousin and therefore there was an air of myth that surrounded him for no other reason.

"He's going to be very old," she said to Anton as he reset the bridle on her horse. It had somehow gotten twisted along with her thoughts. Then suddenly a horrified look covered her face. "Think of the shock he'll have when he sees me!" Up until that moment she had forgotten about how much older she had become, too. But then she remembered that all her cousin Michael would have to do would be to look at her jaw and the small dimple in the middle of her chin and her painterly nose with the perfect slant. "Somethings don't change, she smiled.

She wore the family crest just like every other proud Englehardt. Yes, her cousin would believe she was who she claimed to be. He'd be able to see it in her face. She wore it as clearly as the statue of David rested his chin on his hand contemplating the woes of the world.

New Chapter - Childhood

Her arms stretched out wide, the wind on her face, she spoke softly to her horse, Pluto Gaetano, a gift from the Czar, her cheeks blushed bright red. She couldn't contain her excitement and with her hand covering her mouth to block the sound. She howled to the chipmunks, rabbits, squirrels and all the animals of the forest. Lillya had grown tired of being so secretive. She wanted the world to know what they had accomplished. Her horse prepared himself. He knew what was coming and he made an effort to keep an even, steady pace. He imitated her breath as if they were a part of one another. Then she stood upright on Nicholas, her horse's, back, and counted to eight, nine, ten. When she reached the number ten she came back down again. Rocking steadily forward, she was grinning from ear to ear. "Good boy," she said to horse as she released the pressure in her knees. They came to a slow steady trot, then she nestled her head into his neck, feeling all of his muscles. "I'm so proud of you Nikki! I have an apple in my pocket. I brought it especially for you." Then she gave him a hug. Suddenly she got a feeling that they were being watched; as if a hunter was looking at its prey. "Good boy," she said softly to her horse again. "We're not alone," she mumbled under her breath, but instead of being frightened, she suddenly became very bold as if it were a statement of herself. "Who are you and why are you in my woods? I declare you announce yourself!" There was not a sound except for some rustling in the bushes. Then she caught a

glimpse of a young boy who she believed worked close by. “Not again,” she said just loud enough for him to hear.

This was the third time the boy had come to watch her ride. He had to have woken up very early to do so as she rode every morning between eight and nine. She decided he must be very shy otherwise he’d have introduced himself, so she shouldn’t punish him too badly. Besides she had recently shared her new trick with her father.

Lillya didn’t get too close, Natasha said he was smitten by her command of horses and also her horse. “You are well beyond average in every way,” Natasha said.

“you will mesmerize many others, I just know it!”

“Mesmerize,” Lillya liked that word.

Then she became a bit angry. He knew who she was, but he was still a mystery to her.

Lillya circled the boy with her horse. The boy followed her with his eyes as if she were a crystal ball. Spinning in circles as fast as she could. Still he did not move, he just seemingly grew dizzy. He was frozen.

“Next time plan on introducing yourself,” she yelled to the boy and then she galloped off in the direction of home.

“Who is this boy and what does he want?” Then she smiled, realizing she enjoyed the mystery.

Lillya began humming to herself. She liked to hum. She liked the way it felt. The vibrations massaged her insides which always got a little jumbled up between her equestrian tricks and the feelings she was having for a boy she had never met. It also helped to pass the time and before she knew it, Lillya was back at her father's stable and the stable boy had taken hold of the reins of the magnificent stallion.

Lillya couldn't get the image of the boy in the woods out of her mind. "Maybe he won't come again," she thought. Then she found herself hoping she was wrong. As much as he angered her, he intrigued her twice that amount.

Lillya excelled above all the other girls her age in her ability when it came to riding, but she had one thing that she kept as a secret that was an embarrassment to her. She had a single large mole in the middle of her back that was shaped like a heart. Lillya felt as if she had been marked when it came to love, but she didn't know for what or why. When she was a child she and Natasha would try to rub the mole away, but as she grew older she had to come to terms with the fact it wasn't going away. "Yes, God has a plan for me," she would say to Natasha, the only person who knew. "This way he will know for certain how to find me when he is ready and be certain I was the one."

Lilly never met anyone besides Natasha who could replicate her own spirit.

Natasha was proud and pleased, but it was hard for Natasha, being so smart, to be

stuck in a lower station in life where nothing was expected of her. She could play the piano and speak French but no one wanted to hear what she could do besides Lillya.

To allay her frustration with people not treating others well or wanting to understand their own god given gifts, Lillya rode every day. It was the only way in which she filled her spirit after her mother passed away. She took out one of her father's horses and she rode him hard. Day by day she honed her talent. By age twelve she had earned a reputation as a daring horsewoman. Her father had to close his eyes when his young daughter practiced gymnastics on her horse behind him. Natasha, too, had some questions left unanswered. Like, "Who is my father and why was my beautiful, wonderful mother born into the station of a servant?" Deep questions for young girls with the world in front of them.

Natasha tried not to think too much about the future. She believed she was living her best life now, and Lillya was unwilling to admit that eventually they would be forced by society to go their separate ways and develop separate lives.

New Chapter ~ 1918

After sleeping in abandoned shacks along the way to Kungar, Lillya dreamed of spending an afternoon in a comfortable chair next to a window. Basking in the indulgence of not having to travel every day, she imagined what it would be like to have her body clean again and not have to look for a river to jump in. They had all known that they would have to travel during the summer, for the winter in Kungar would be the coldest weather she had ever known. She laughed when she thought of all the pretty dresses she had left behind, and wondered about Alexi, her dressmaker, who was now probably sewing buttons on officers' uniforms from whichever army had grabbed him first. There wasn't much in the way of choices these days. Life sort of happened to everyone and we all had to find some way to wade through the muck and sludge that slowed us down or took us to someplace we never would have chosen to go. But our feet made us stay, they were like quicksand in dirt, and they were forced to accept these unfamiliar boundaries. However, for Lillya, Kungar actually sounded exciting, for she was tired of living in fear and wanted to feel as if she had some control over her life and her destiny.

She wished she could express all of her thoughts to Anton, but he was already frightened for her and if she did, she was afraid they might scare him even more. Being a noble man, Anton set very high expectations for himself and he would not budge or lower them to make them easier. Sometimes Lillya would tease him about his moral code, but deep down inside there was no one she would trust more with her life if she had to put it in someone else's hands. She knew he felt a huge commitment to protect her, even sometimes from herself. **(insert example)** Now, once too often, he would find himself pulling the kite string again and again.

"I understand that there is no time for pleasure today," Lillya said to Anton as she bent down to pick a poppy from a field close by. The rain and unusually warm weather had sent everything to distract her. A golden summer breeze was working its way in and would push her all the way to Kungar, she thought. "Let the wind blow me and all our baggage away," she said teasingly to Anton. "Blow me into the unknown," she continued. She could feel the string in Anton's hand yanking her back to the ground. "If only one of my father's stallions could magically appear, even for ten minutes, but I can't afford to think like that, still sometimes I can't help myself." Lillya quieted down. She couldn't blame Anton for their predicament, so she continued urging the workhorse forward, kicking the dirt and muck aside, learning to appreciate the poppies from afar. To pass the time she imagined a little house in Kungar that she would decorate and call home. The first

thing she saw was a large stone fireplace that rivaled the one in their townhouse in St. Petersburg, but that was long ago and she knew her thought was too big. But most of all, this little house in Kungar would be a place where she did not have to worry. “If times weren’t so bad we’d still be at my father’s estate. But for now, I need to reconcile that I can be happy with a little hint of sunlight caressing my face and not feel the need to run every time a horse approaches.” Her nose picked up a foul scent, she realized it was herself. She was certain she was wretched by now and Anton was too kind. Lillya smiled as thoughts ran through her head, scattering like children on a playground. “Maybe our scents have blended with each other’s until now we don’t know whose is whose.”

“Lillya, where have you been?” Anton asked, knowing quite well the answer. “We need to stay very alert today and not lose sight of one another even for a minute. I know it’s very hard and not in your nature darling, but today you must listen to my commands. I promised your father I would get you to Kungar and Michael in safe condition. And I’m not about to prove myself wrong. So I’ll need your help.”

“Don’t worry, my dear,” Lillya said with a wink. “Don’t you know I always listen to you?”

Anton started to laugh with his deep belly laugh that put a smile on her face.

“Okay, my dear, what direction do we go from here?”

“We want to go northeast. Let me get my compass out.” He reached into his pocket and took out the trusty compass that had once been his father’s; the one he had counted on since he was a young boy. Lillya believed in it, too, for it had gotten them this far.

“Why don’t you tell us, my dear,” Anton said.

Lillya tied her hair back in a bun, pretending it wasn’t even there, and then said to her husband Anton, “Turn left. I too can smell the leather from the Kungar factories getting near.”

Lilly and Anton knew so much depended upon what would happen this day. Would Michael and his friends be there looking for them as her father had promised, Lillya wondered. Or would he have taken her father’s money and found he had better things to do than wait for a cousin he hadn’t seen in forty years who had nothing to offer him but trouble and stories from the past? Anton questioned whether Michael’s loyalty was strong enough and whether he was brave enough to show up at the church every night for weeks on end, waiting for his cousin and her husband to arrive, when he hadn’t seen her since she was a child. Anton prayed that he would recognize her. But with the dimple in her chin and her perfect slanted nose Lillya had no doubt that this Englehardt would recognize another.

Drenched in the last of what could be called summer sunlight, they continued toward Kungur. A sly smile appeared on Lillya's face. Anton didn't want to know the reason why. He could feel his wife's heart pounding harder the closer she thought they were to their destination. Wrapped up in his own thoughts, he was caught completely off guard when suddenly, a boulder came rolling down the hill aimed right where they were walking. Luckily, Anton had quick reflexes and was used to acting on instinct just as he had been taught to do since childhood. He urgently grabbed the horse's reins and pulled them hard and quickly got them out of the boulder's path. Lillya didn't know what was happening until she felt Anton give her shirt a swift tug, changing her direction and speed and she suddenly heard the sound of a giant boulder rolling past her. When it was over, she froze and stood there shaking. It took a minute or two for her to register just how close she came to dying. Anton had just saved her life. Standing next to Lillya, he was shaking, too. The boulder had gotten very close to its target unless it had just been a fluke of nature, but Anton had to think of himself as a soldier leading the cavalry, and his job was to deliver precious cargo safely, without a scratch if possible. Anton didn't really want to know who or think what was behind this close call, their near mishap. He wanted to make light of it and didn't want Lillya to become more frightened than she already was. Putting on his best face, he looked at Lillya with a grave expression and said to her "Man can plan all he wants, but Nature is a force

that has its own mind and it is always going to do what it pleases and will roar as loud as it wants and cause as much havoc and hardship as will fill its stomach.”

Lillya replied, “But luckily, my dear, I have you. Nature doesn’t know the will and the force I have at my side!”

Anton had simply reacted. He hadn’t had time to think. Lillya slowed her breathing and began to normalize. Silently, her composure returned, and her blue eyes (**refer Circus**) began to sparkle and color returned to her cheeks and one could see the natural beauty of her youth. She wanted Anton to know she had relaxed. That they could go forward. Anton, wanting to break the hardened air that had entered the circle that surrounded them, decided to tell a joke. Lillya loved that he was trying to make a joke during such a serious time. For only moments before, getting to Kungar could have been the least of their worries.

Anton knew how to focus more than anything else. Nothing could break his concentration when he had somewhere to go and something to do, and in this moment it was to see a smile on his wife’s face. So he continued. The Austrian clown Leo told him a funny story. Amused, Anton smiled to himself when he realized the coat Lillya was wearing had once been Leo’s wife’s coat. He had talked to Anton about the art of illusion and how sometimes it could be more powerful than the truth. And he spoke about a clown who had tried to win the one and only position with a circus, but the circus had advertised that they were

looking for a clown who could ride a unicycle and they were interested in no others.

The clown was so determined that even though he could not ride it, he bought a unicycle and made it very visible to the owners. And because they saw the bike, they did not question whether the owner knew how to ride one. He had only used it as a prop, an illusion, so he would appear more useful so the circus would hire him. But in reality, his finest skill was sticking a mop between his legs and running around in circles as if it were a donkey who had lost his mind and didn't know which way to go. Mimicking a costumed mop to look like a donkey got more laughs, anyway. With a unicycle one needed skill, a mop you just needed imagination, to be able to move your limbs and be funny and give the audience room to laugh. That's what jokes are about. Giving the other space and time to find something funny.

Lillya, not wanting to admit that she had been shaken, suggested that they stop for a short period of time. They could sip some Bergamot citrus tea just like the czar would be doing at this hour had he not been summering on the other side of the mountain range where they would soon take refuge. Anton, fearing that the large stone could have come from a misplaced soldier out for revenge, or simply wanting to steal their horses, urged Lillya on by talking about the boar they might eat that night, the feast they might have.

“A safe place where I can read my father’s journal, without drawing attention to myself,” she thought. In her mind she was going over the directions her father had given them.

“Enter the back entrance of the church when the parishioners are leaving after the evening service is complete. In all that commotion it is less likely anyone will notice you. Still, you must be very careful.”

They had fared fairly well. Their supplies had lasted and soon they would be among friendly company and have the underground support of a nearby church and a few of their most trusted members would help them to hide. Just thinking of it, Lillya started to feel the butterflies in her belly. She could barely wait to be around trusted company and sit at a proper table, drink wine and converse. Simply allowing these thoughts brought back memories of her father, and she wondered if he was still alive. Her father, she suspected, would be in his study waiting for the soldiers’ arrival, and whether they be the red or the white he would let them know, it was his patriotic duty to give up his estate to and for the people. Then if they were red he planned on shouting “Comrade,” and if they were white, he would offer up his very best wine.

Her father knew nobles that kept 300,000 serfs. “What family needs such excess?” Behind closed doors Lillya recalled a conversation with her father earlier that year. “They got too greedy,” he continued. “And now if they leave, they most likely

leave with nothing. If they are lucky and smart they hid some of their family jewels. One necklace could buy them passage to America and keep them alive. I hope you didn't send every last emerald and ruby to the States and remembered to keep a few for yourself and Anton." She listened attentively but said not a word. Lillya found solace in knowing their affairs with the circus and their home had been settled before their world turned completely upside down. Thank goodness Anton and her father were forward-thinking men. Together they had made arrangements for her son Vladimir, in the United States, more than enough to assure the legacy of his family and the circus.

Anton came from a long line of circus people and he had inherited his family's circus which was located near the Bolshoi in St. Petersburg, but that was many years ago. He had since given the circus to his son, who took the circus from Russia to Europe, then made a home in the southern United States traveling from one town to the next. But it was Lillya, it was her pedigree the armies would be most interested in. She was the reason they were running.

Anton and Lillya tried not to think about what had just happened. The boulder that fell had scared her, but Anton was sure-footed. Even so, he wondered, was it a random act of violence, was it some bored kid playing some sort of game or was it a displaced soldier from the red or white army hoping that if he brought back several horses and two prisoners that he might once again return to their good

graces? Lillya could see the thoughts jumping around in Anton's head but she knew better than to ask him, for it would only stir things up and make them feel worse. They should just be grateful that nothing happened to them or their horses or even the displaced boy; after all she had a son and would hope that any mother would look at these almost children and think of their own progeny as well when making decisions. So she quickly changed the subject and surprisingly found herself speaking of Donatalia, the daughter of her old friend Katya from whom she had learned this tea recipe. Katya was the first person who had ever made it for her oh so many years ago. For just a few seconds she could see this young girl dressed in her New Year's best, trying not to have the son of their hostess notice she was counting her forks and spoons. Trying very hard to act grown up. She could see Donatalia unable to contain her excitement as Anton told one story after another. Anton was in rare form that night, Lillya remembered. Standing in the open so close to where the boulder could have so easily taken her life. Anton didn't know if his joke of the clown had worked, but something he had done or said he was certain had triggered the smile that now appeared on her face. Lillya brought herself back to where they were standing and to that exact moment in time. Visions of ice castles and princesses and elephants carrying a cage disappeared when she heard her husband's voice break through the chatter that was going on in her head.

“I think it’s time we get back on the horses,” Anton said. “We’ve indulged in too much time already.”

“You won’t find any disagreement here,” Lillya answered back. “I’m more than ready and my feet are, too.”

New chapter Lillya and Natasha getting older

Yuri could hear giggling coming from Lillya’s room. Lillya had convinced her father to put another bed in Lillya’s room for the night so she and Natasha could live out their dream of being sisters. Lillya’s father had begun to worry because he knew the truth of their situation, that their class difference would very soon become a problem. He could shelter them as children but soon it would not be so easy. Natasha would not be invited to any of the parties and events that Lillya would attend, and he assumed that after a while it was going to bother Natasha to

dress up her best friend to go to parties while she had to stay home and clean up the mess they made in the process of getting dressed. But the one thing Yuri didn't take into account was just how left out Lillya felt when all the girls would talk about their mothers. They would chatter about outings with their mothers, going for tea or to the seamstress with their mothers. She really missed Angelina and really wished Angelina's special job had been to just take care of her. Did the angels really need her so badly?

Soon winter would be over and Lillya's father had arranged a grand vacation for the coming summer. He had decided that they would go to France. Besides the glamor of being in France, Lillya knew that not too many girls her age were given this opportunity and that it gave her something they did not have, even if they all had mothers, but sadly, Natasha would not be coming with them. Her father had explained that she would have a young French girl helping her with the language, her clothing, the culture, her manners, and by the end of her time there, he told her she would know the difference of what was good or bad, for the French were the trendsetters of the world. What they said set the bar for everyone else.

Quietly, Yuri had thought it a good idea to begin to separate the girls without them understanding it was planned. He didn't really like the idea himself, but culture and class systems were going to dictate all of their lives and so he thought taking his daughter on an extended vacation might be a good start. He could think of no better

or kinder exciting idea than this. Yuri went on to bait Lillya, knowing her love of horses, “There’s a very famous cavalry school in the Loire Valley, in the town of which we will be staying, Saumur.” Then he winked at her and finished, “If you mind your manners and are very good, perhaps I will find a way to arrange a tour for you?” He knew when he said this it would heighten his daughter’s curiosity and then she would do almost anything he wanted.

“Boys and horses and a famous riding academy,” Lillya silently thought. “Hmm.” She had to be careful not to let the smile in her eyes take over her face. “Tell me about this journey you have planned for us,” Lillya smiled mildly. Yuri had rented the east wing of a Chateau in the southwestern part of France from a man named Sergei who also had a great interest in horses and cultivated a small grape vineyard from which he made his own wines. “The Chateau was built by a famous architect. Sergei will be able to tell you the story in more detail, but unlike many of the homes in that area, this one is full of light. Sergei loves to paint when he has the time, and light is important to him, as is being on the water,” Yuri went on. “There are very few characteristics one’s house needs to have in order to qualify as a true Chateau. Here is that one exception.” Yuri paused and held his breath until he was certain Lillya was sitting on the edge of her seat, her body all tense waiting to hear about something large dramatic, exotic and extraordinary. “This has to be wrong,” she thinks.

“The house must rest on the Loire River or one of its tributaries,” Yuri finally spit out with much certainty.” Yuri always felt more disappointed in himself when he disappointed his daughter. “Its beauty has attracted many artists and many nobles have been drawn to the area like magnets.

“King George of France found its beauty so intoxicating he moved the entire capital of France from Paris to the Loire Valley. Besides, all the nobles that were already traveling to the region during the summer and spending their vacations there. He just made it a little easier for them to do so.”

“I believe Sergei had his house fixed from top to bottom in the late 1860s, so it is up to date.” Yuri smiled, “You’ll like this; it still has a small moat and a drawbridge.” Yuri continued, “I’m told it has Belgian and Flemish tapestries covering many of the walls, and many other beautiful pieces of art, including some of his own paintings.” He sighed for a minute before continuing, “I think it sounds like a picture from one of your favorite fairy tales,” Yuri told his daughter. You’ll like it! But best of all, he has an unusually fine stable of horses. I believe the location will appeal to your imagination, heart and soul. There are a number of castles in this region. They were built as fortresses a long time ago, when they were needed to keep the gentry safe. But now they are used to house very wealthy families, and their horses are used for breeding, races, and contests; pleasure, not fighting. You’ll see.” Then he turned around as if he were planning to move on to

something else but couldn't stop himself from going on. "Some of my favorite grapes are grown there." Yuri stopped for a moment, "I wish I could just count to ten and we'd be there."

In late March, before their scheduled trip to France, her father finally got around to making a date for them to go see the Vronsky Family Circus. Lillya was beside herself.

"I can't believe how excited I am," Lillya said to Natasha. "I'm finally going to see that son of theirs that no one has introduced me to. They're not going to get away with that tonight, I'm going to insist they introduce us and if I like him I'm going to make Papa promise to invite him to see our stables. I'm told his name is Anton. Can you imagine going out with a boy that walks a high wire!"

That night Lillya wore her favorite blue lace dress with a blue and yellow scarf to match. It was the color of the sea at sunset with embroidered golden threads running through it and burnt orange threads intertwined to accentuate the gold that looked like the sun setting on the sea. She hoped her father would like Anton as much as she thought she would. "Maybe he'll invite him over to ride next Sunday?" She loudly mumbled to Natasha, trying to swallow a bite of her dinner at the same time. She could barely keep her food down her. Butterflies were flying so rapidly in her stomach, fluttering at such a pace, she didn't know if she could keep

her composure. It was if her stomach was their designated migrating ground, only all the action was not between one tree and then another, but instead inside of her. They were hitting the wall of her insides so hard and fast she thought one might escape through her belly button.

When Lillya got nervous Natasha liked to tease her, but this time Natasha understood the importance of this event for Lillya and decided she could goad her some other time about something else.

The circus tent was teal blue and burnt orange with a big bright gold sign that lit up the sky and it read, the Vronsky Family Circus. Located near the Bolshoi, everyone in St. Petersburg knew where to find it. Dimitri and Petra Vronsky had arranged a special parking place where Yuri and Lillya might park their carriage. Petra and Dmitri seemed to be almost as excited as Lillya and Yuri. They knew that if Yuri and Lillya spoke highly of the circus, more aristocrats and members of the upper class would follow their lead. It would also help to keep them in the good graces of the Czar and Czarina. Escorted to the best seats in the house, front row and center, that had been draped with a beautiful purple fabric that was adorned with stars and hearts of gold and deep ruby reds. Lillya noticed all the eyes in the big top tent were staring at her and she couldn't help but admit to herself that she liked it and was glad she had taken the extra time getting dressed for the event. Caught in a

web of her own thoughts, when the tigers entered the arena she smiled at the foolishness of thinking she could possibly outshine the natural beauty of their coats. They were wearing the most striking silky fur she had ever seen and the audience seemed to agree for their attention quickly and naturally turned from herself to them. Her eyes had become fixated on the circus and nothing else, and she had an instant uncontrollable pining to want to be a part of it. “What magnificent creatures!” Lillya said to her father, poking his elbow until he listened to her. She already had a special affinity for them, having heard Petra speak of them at dinner. “Their names are Midnight and Satin,” she said to him as if she had been the only one who had heard the conversation. And just at that exact moment their trainer brought them within a breath of their proximity. Midnight opened his mouth as if to show off his prize-winning sharp teeth. Satin, attached to Midnight, came so close to them that Lillya felt as if she could almost touch her. And quicker than she could process what had just happened, in walked the elephants. Lillya had never seen such big creatures. And at the top of one of the elephants, dressed in purple satin, was Petra, whose arms, though long, were impossible to wrap around the big elephant’s neck. After several tricks and a roar of applause from the audience, Petra quickly changed clothes and entered the ring playing a flute while standing upright on her horse’s saddle with a big red feather plume popping out of the thick satin deeper red headband. Lillya smiled at her father. Petra’s outfit was a

bit risqué but she was so brilliant in her moves and the way she commanded her horse that no one could refer to her as cheap or inappropriate. They could only stare at her in amazement and awe.

Then the moment arrived. Twenty-five feet up in the air was the boy she had admired from conversation. She had never seen him. A little shorter and stockier than she had thought for such a position, but seemingly kinder and cooler than she imagined possible for someone about to embark on such a treacherous feat. Her heart started to rattle and shake so loud she was afraid her father might hear it. By the time he started juggling plates and had walked to the other side, she was already on her feet ready to give a standing ovation. Realizing how anxious she must look, she sat down. That night when the circus ended, Petra Vronsky arranged a little table to be put into one of the smaller tents and invited Yuri and Lillya to join them for some Schnapps, Vodka and pastry. The tent had a nice golden glow that comforted Lillya. Still, she was a bit nervous and her father knew it. “Only a sip,” Yuri reminded Lillya. “Just wet your lips.” Earlier, Yuri had teased Lillya, saying that he had told Petra they couldn’t come because it would be too late for his daughter. Lillya turned beet red and just about burst until she realized her father was joking.

It turned out Lillya was the opposite of shy when it came to Anton Vronsky. Her tongue wiggled and wagged one sentence, paragraph, page after another. “He was

so easy to talk to,” she told Natasha later that evening. “I’ve never talked to someone as smart as he that was close to our age. I think I might be in love.”

Natasha had a pot of chamomile tea waiting for their return, knowing she would have to calm Lillya down. “Why are we going to stupid France,” Lillya said later that night to Natasha. She knew she didn’t mean it. Any girl would give her eyeteeth to have a summer in France, walk the Champs-Élysées, visit the Cadre Noir in Saumur, live among the castles most others would visit, for the Loire Valley was known to have some of the largest and most beautiful Chateaux in the world. “The one summer I would want to stay home, father insists we go, and he’s not about to change his plans!” Natasha could not feel sorry for Lillya. Oh, how she wished she could go in her place. But that night when Lillya closed her eyes, the only one she could see was Anton. Hypnotized by his confidence and talent, he was throwing one plate and then another higher and higher.

Natasha could hear Lillya tossing and turning. She was excited and happy by Lillya’s excitement and joy but she couldn’t help think about where all of this might leave her. Was this the beginning of what she knew one day would come? What she had been so fearful of coming? And Lillya would turn 16 while in France, without Natasha by her side.

The next morning when Natasha went downstairs to get Lillya’s breakfast, she noticed that flowers and a note had already been dropped off for Lillya, she could

only guess who they were from. But just then, Yuri walked into the kitchen. An unusual thing for him to do. He had noticed the flowers, too, and could only imagine what Natasha was thinking.

“You know these are not from Anton,” Yuri told Natasha. Almost feeling he was betraying his daughter, he whispered, “These are from Petra.” This made the two of them even more curious.

Yuri followed Natasha up the steps with Lillya’s breakfast, the flowers and the note. When they walked into Lillya’s room after first knocking and Lillya saw the flowers on her tray, before she had a second to open her mouth, Yuri blurted out, “Isn’t this lovely? You got flowers and a note from Petra.” You could see the disappointment immediately cross Lillya’s face. However, all three in attendance, including Lillya, knew that if anything was to go any further it would have to start with the parents, and in her case it would have to begin with the boy’s mother.

“Why don’t you open the note, my dear,” Yuri said as Natasha handed her some fresh juice. “Dear Lillya,” it read. “Dmitri and I and Anton were so pleased to have had your company last evening. We know that when it comes to animals, you love horses most of all, so I hope the circus did not bore you.” Lillya interrupted and looked at her father and Natasha and said, “how could anyone be bored by the circus, it was the most fabulous show I have ever seen.” Lillya paused for a second and went on, “I could have given each of them two standing ovations! They were

magnificent, weren't they Papa?" Natasha coughed into her hand then picked up the note and said politely, looking at Lillya and Yuri, "May I continue? There's more." Petra invited Lillya to go riding with her. Lillya could pick out any horse she wanted from their stable to ride that day. And she wanted to know if Lillya could be available to ride two days from the current day. Lillya's head was about to burst once more and before Yuri could express his thoughts, his daughter penned a short note saying yes, yes, yes!

Lillya couldn't wait for the day to come. She played games with Natasha and let Natasha win just so Natasha would keep playing and she could keep herself occupied. She picked flowers and arranged them in beautiful vases, then brought out her watercolors and painted in a little sunroom off of the kitchen until the light left the sky and she could barely see. When it got too chilly, she continued to paint the pictures through the dining room window close to the large stone fireplace. Mostly, she was certain she would see Anton again. Each time she thought of him, chills rippled like a cool spring stream up and down her spine.

Natasha helped Lillya get dressed for Petra. She put on a beautiful pale yellow dress that had a scarf that went with it that was stamped with purple orchids. Lillya loved orchids. For Anton she would have Natasha gather flowers from the gardener in the greenhouse and put the flowers in her hair. About to walk out the door to grab some air so she would look fresh when Petra's carriage arrived to take her to

their stable, a rider unexpectedly approached the house asking for Lillya. He was carrying a note. It was from Anton. "Dear Lillya," it said "I am sorry, but I have been called away to answer business directed at my father. I'm sorry we will not have a chance to formally get together before I leave. Today is the day I have to go. I'm afraid it may be some time before we have another opportunity to exchange thoughts and ideas. My mother has explained to me that you will be leaving for France before my return. I find it sad that timing could get so in the way of discovering who you really are. This may be quite forward of me, but I'm wondering if you would meet for a few minutes right now? I know it won't be for very long." The expression on Lillya's face completely changed and she began to read silently, keeping the words from Anton between only the two of them. "Could you meet me in five or ten minutes behind your father's barn? I can't bear the thought of not speaking to you without getting one word in right before I lose you to the horses and boys of France."

Lillya then looked at Natasha with pleading eyes, then showed her the note. "Will you help, Natasha?" Lillya asked. Natasha, knowing Lillya's stubborn streak, and that Lillya would go with or without her, nodded her head yes.

Lillya's father was back in his library working away, so Lillya had a short window of time to do as she pleased, but she knew she'd better move fast. Natasha ran to grab Lillya's hand and together they quickly ran behind the barn paying no

attention to the stable boys. Several minutes later, Lillya could hear footsteps coming up from behind. Trying to remain calm, she took a breath and then three others. Natasha took both her hands into her own and just that action alone helped her heart retain its normal beat. Not knowing what to say when Anton arrived, she simply remained silent. Lillya and Anton shyly embraced. Lillya knew his thoughts. She knew he would wait for her while she was in France. Quickly, he kissed her on the cheek, a typical French greeting, but his lack of words told her everything. Then he turned towards her with a big smile on his face, jumped on his horse and left.

Lillya tried to take a step forward but almost fell back. Then she looked at Natasha and said, "It's a good thing I don't walk the rope." Natasha started laughing and gathered Lillya's things and together they headed back toward the house. Lillya's head was spinning. "He kissed me," she whispered. "He kissed me!" When Petra's carriage arrived she was much more silent than she would have normally been. Her head was somewhere else as she played that last scene with Anton over and over as if they were rehearsing the final scene of a play in a theater. Petra, a smart female, sensed the feelings behind Lillya's demeanor and said to herself, "I have no doubt my son had something to do with this."

New Chapter

The scare with the boulder left both Lillya and Anton tense. They didn't have much farther to go, but anything could happen. Anton tried to remind himself of this each step that they took and tried to remind Lillya too, without being too pesty. He told her, "Probably only four or five hours more to go before we arrive at Kungar." Kungar was their final destination, for now at least. Still, he didn't want to get Lillya's hopes up too high. The closer they got, the harder their journey seemed to become. It felt almost impossible. Lillya didn't know time could move so slowly. But looking at the sun and the way it was positioned in the sky and the speed they were traveling, Anton felt fairly certain they would make it. Besides, he couldn't bear the thought of his wife sleeping outdoors for one more night.

Lillya had put on a good face. She didn't want to show Anton how frightened she had been by many of the obstacles they encountered along the way, especially the boulder. Yet she couldn't stop her mind from thinking what could happen if they were found out. (***) She felt guilty for having gotten Anton into this upper-class cauldron of trouble(***). She thanked God for having made her a woman(***)(for

the worst that would happen to her would be prison, but a man would most likely be sent to the front lines and certain death.

“Besides, what would they want with me?” ***) Lillya had created numerous internal conversations with many imaginary people since they left. It made sense since there was nothing to do but to walk and talk. Each step they took was bringing them closer to a new life, like it or not. However, Lillya had made up her mind to make the best of it. “What else can I do?” she said. Out of nowhere, a bolt of lightning lit the sky and thunder shook the earth****. She tried to think of what horrible deed had been done to make God so angry. She was certain it was a man’s doing.

“We don’t need this,” Anton said out loud, seeming to try to make up for the mishaps of his gender as the ***rain fell like pennies from the sky. In big circular drops that could have passed for cherries.

Lillya was upset because the rain was ruining the game she had had made up to keep her mind occupied. She liked to guess how many steps they had taken, since the last time she added them up, but for now the rain was rinsing them away. The footsteps had been witness to their journey and the rain was erasing the evidence of all her hard work. So instead she found herself becoming transfixed by the sounds of the little bubbles that were popping underneath her feet as the rain made its way into the earth.

It felt childlike making up games like this, but she had to find a different way of dealing with time and learning patience along the way. Now the stakes were too high to be playing make-believe. For the gameboard her father and the other men set up made there no time for frivolity, this was life and death!

Anton knew he had no choice but to trust the plan that Lillya's father had set up for them with Lillya's mother's cousin. By now they were in too deep and no one else, friends or relatives, seemed to owe her father a bigger favor, a favor of the magnitude of what they'd be asking someone to do. Walking in the rain, the sound of the little bubbles continued popping under her feet. When Anton had estimated they were about an hour from Kungar and the church, Lillya reached into her bag and pulled out an old scarf to tie around her head. She'd be able to tuck her hair inside of it, covering up most of her gray and helping her to disguise her true identity. They started to see other travelers on the path going in the opposite direction. Lillya wondered why they were leaving, but didn't dare try to venture into any sort of conversation or recognition more than a nod.

Testing his memory, Anton began to recite Yuri's instructions to the church. "You will go to the lower part of the town," her father continued. "On Kittarskaya Street is the Uspenskaya Church. Your mother's cousin Michael is friends with the parish priest." He repeated them over and over until finally the church came into view.

Both became more cautious as they inched in closer to their final destination.

Lillya grabbed her husband's hand, unable to anticipate what could happen next.

The congregation was chanting a familiar song from Lillya's childhood (find name of song). Lillya was about to whisper something to Anton when he put his finger to her mouth, signaling her to be quiet. "Shhhh" he said to his wife. "We must stay very quiet, my love. Michael will find us."

Lillya bit her tongue. Anton motioned for her to stay put. He wanted to check out their surroundings.

Lillya wasn't too pleased. Happily, Anton returned a few minutes later with news. "There's a big brush of blackberry bushes close by." And he pointed to the left where there was an old gardening shed. "I think that will provide some cover this time of day," he said after seeing a questioning look in Lillya's eyes.

"The hymn, the one they're singing, I sang it as a girl." She smiled, hoping to lighten the mood. "It was our closing hymn. No time to deliberate. I think we'd better get ready the congregation will charge through that front door very soon."

*****add material

Anton and Lillya found their way to the blackberry brush by the shed.

"Do you think Michael will be here tonight?" Lillya asked.

"I don't know, my love, but if not he will have sent someone in his place. Don't worry. He's going to take very good care of you. Of that I am sure!"

Anton had tried to keep his own questioning to himself, afraid that the power of doubt would prove him right.

“Anyway, there is no turning back.” Anton said softly. He noticed an old beggar out of the corner of his eye. The beggar nodded in recognition. Anton just ignored him.

Anton gave Lillya a peck on her cheek to assure her. “Everything’s going to be fine,” he whispered and squeezed her hand. Wanting in some way to acknowledge how far they had come, Lillya lightly kissed him on the lips.

Lillya’s and Anton’s intimacy did not stop the beggar from coming closer. The old man motioned to Anton, wanting them to move closer to him. But Anton and Lillya stayed put. For a second, Lillya drifted to thoughts of her son Vladimir. She wondered how many obstacles he had had to cross to make his new home. And for a second; for a minute would be too painful, she imagined her granddaughters, whom she had never had a chance to meet.

“How horrible,” Lillya thought, “that men and politics break up so many families by starting wars.” But when thinking of Vladimir, she felt a sense of satisfaction, for she believed they had done what was necessary to secure that he and his family were safe.

The people from the church scattered. A few went behind the church where Lillya and Anton were. Lillya heard some coughing from behind. She jumped and made a

small jerky motion. Hoping no one noticed her, she turned only to see the beggar.

Lillya decided to pay him no attention. Her sights were on someone else.

The parishioners out front of the church were seemingly starting to scatter and a pain of fright mixed with abandonment kicked her in the belly. The beggar, the only one vying for their attention, became annoying.

Anton whispered into Lillya's ear, "He might have had other things to do tonight. It's not as if he was given a specific date of our arrival. He's probably been outside this church the last three nights and decided to take a break, and didn't want to appear more religious than he is? Anton tried to reassure his wife. "We'll wait a little longer, but if he doesn't show up tonight, don't lose faith, my dear. Your father would never put a plan in motion that involved your life without almost 100 percent certainty that it would work out. If necessary, we will have to go back into the forest for one more night."

Anton could see the sadness on her face; the disappointment of no reward, when suddenly the parish priest approached them with the beggar at his side.

Without wasting a breath, he introduced himself, then instructed the beggar to take over the reins of Anton and Lillya's horses and to follow him. All Lillya and Anton knew was that they needed to listen. The parish priest was the key to their future. They walked down a dark, small dirt lane and eventually stopped in the back of a carriage house that looked like all the others they had passed, only this one had a

small cross embedded in the wooden door, allowing them to enter the premises.

Lillya noticed a small lantern lit in the window and a strong green vine that was growing up the sides of the structure as if to frame the building like a painting.

Lillya took a step back to take in the broader view. Upstairs looked to be a place where people could sleep and live and downstairs was clearly a place to rest their horses and belongings. “We can talk inside,” the priest said softly. “And pardon me, by the way, my name is Nikolai.” Finally, Anton and Lillya knew the name of the parish priest.

“You will be quite comfortable here and out of the way,” the priest continued.

“Still, always take the back road when you are coming and going. Your cousin Michael will come here in the morning with his wife Gretta and my wife Helena.

His house is down the street, but you will be safer here, staying with me in our home,” he said directly to Anton. “No one would dare question or disturb the parish priest. Your husband will be known as my cousin,” he continued saying.

Lillya had not realized before now, seeing the priest in the soft lantern light, how young he was. “How brave is he,” she thought, “for helping his friend Michael’s family.”

“There are some clean blankets on the bed,” he said when they had climbed the steps and entered the door to what would be Anton and Lillya’s new home. It was small and simple, but clean and cozy, and it had one small window with a table and

chair in front of it that would gather the southern light. Lillya smiled when she saw it. Anton, seeing Lillya happy, smiled too. “There is fruit and bread and a hard piece of meat that you can cut. We weren’t quite certain when you’d arrive. Michael will be happy to receive this news. I will see you in the morning.” Anton thanked the priest, gave the beggar some change and went back upstairs to help his wife settle in.

New chapter

“My dear, you’re quite a rider. I knew you were talented, but I didn’t realize you were better than me,” laughed Petra. Lillya and Petra were returning the horses to Petra’s groom. The groom spoke out, “You rode ‘em hard, Miss Petra. He’s going to need a good brushing today.” He winked at Lillya, “You didn’t have anything to do with this, did you?”

“No, I would never ride a horse so hard.”

“Oh no, not you,” the groom said with a smile.

Petra looked at Lillya and the groom and started to laugh.

“I think, Ivan, there might be a new member to the circus one day soon.” Ivan, besides being a groom by day and overseeing the stables, got to perform at night swallowing fire. Yes, he was the fire eater and loved learning new tricks, but he practiced those far away from the stables and simply talked to the horses about his accomplishments but never showed them what he could do.

Lillya was flying as high as a kite when she got back home. She barely said hello to him when she ran up the stairs about to burst, yelling for Natasha. “His mother’s amazing!”

“Calm down, Lillya, calm down. I’m certain she’s wonderful, but we have all night to discuss her.”

Lillya, with a sullen face, walked out. Terribly disappointed, Natasha didn’t seem to take her crush on Anton as seriously as she did.

Natasha was playing with the nightclothes in Lillya’s closet and was deliberately making a lot of noise to cover up the sound of Lillya’s happy voice. Lillya had been gone all day enjoying something while she had stayed home cleaning out the bathtub. She knew it was her duty, but when would that change?

But in truth, Natasha had actually had quite a bit of fun while Lillya was out, but she didn’t want Lillya to know it. For a few moments it was better, Natasha thought, for Lillya to think that she had stayed home lonesome and bored, but it was far from the truth. Lillya’s father Yuri wanted to surprise his daughter and had hired one of the best French seamstresses in all of St. Petersburg to make some new dresses for his daughter to take to France, and the seamstress had asked for one more fitting. Instead of sending Lillya, her father sent Natasha.

The dressmaker, like anyone dealing with the upper crust of Russian society, spoke only in French to Yuri, assuming Natasha, a maid, would not know a word of the aristocratic language spoken amongst themselves, meant to help separate the working classes from the elite. Natasha smiled when Yuri winked at her, for with

her photographic memory she had memorized all of Lillya's studies throughout the years, including her almost perfect French accent.

For several hours Natasha could almost believe this was her life, that of the mistress and heiress instead of a handmaid. The dressmaker and Yuri left the room to discuss fabric and prices. Natasha caught a glimpse of herself in a large silver plate and gave herself a big smile of approval. Yuri returned with fabric in one hand, but in his other hand he now carried a box filled with jewels.

You can pick one for yourself he told Natasha and one for Lillya.

Out of loyalty and love, Yuri noticed she pick the nicest piece for his daughter

By the time dinner was through, both Lillya and Natasha had let go of their artificial disappointments in the other. Besides, Lillya would be leaving for France in one week's time.

Natasha knew that she would be missing her best friend. And Lillya felt the same way, too. Natasha was like her sister and she couldn't imagine being without her for any length of time and she couldn't get Anton off her mind. "He was so bold," she thought. He came to my father's home, asked me to meet him secretly and gave me a kiss."

Without a mother to help raise his daughter, Lillya understood that her father had become more open-minded than many fathers. He wasn't trying to hold himself up as the example of Russian society. After all the sadness he had seen his wife

endure, he wanted nothing more than happiness for his daughter. Educated by some of the best French teachers in all of St. Petersburg, she had been tutored and raised to fit into society, and therefore Natasha secretly believed, so had she.

He branded her with his lips, Lillya reflected on Anton. She couldn't get the feelings and what they meant off of her mind nor wash it away. She wanted some distraction. She wanted some laughter and fun.

Natasha felt a bit worried for Lillya because she could read Lillya's sparkling (**check w/Circus. Green?)**green eyes and they were saying trouble. Lillya had no inkling of the foreshadowing Natasha saw because she was at a point and an age in which nothing was taken too seriously and little was more than a game until it wasn't.

(talk about the French influence around 1875 – architecture, artists and philosophers) **figure out their best transportation option from St Petersburg to France)

The French had infiltrated Russia with their art, their dance, their drama and their food by now. Although the Russians were getting stronger in their dance it was hard for anyone to beat out the French, but it didn't stop everyone from trying. Her father set up reservations on an ocean liner (what kind of ship would it be?) Yuri's planned trip was suddenly in competition with young love and he found himself describing the beauty of where they would be traveling as if he were a famous French painter wanting to entice a museum or a buyer. "One of the most famous Chateaux in the Valley: Chateau de la Chance. It sits on the bank of the Layon River and was built in the 11th century and flowers and artichokes line the river, as do beautiful grape vines that are later pressed into some of my favorite wines."

"Mmmm," Lillya said with a big approving smile on her face. Yuri knew he would not have to work very hard for his daughter's approval on where they would be going and with whom they would be staying.

The difficulty would be in separating his daughter from Natasha and this new blood and excitement she found jiggling inside her senses. She could see that her father was even more excited than she to be taking this trip. It was the place he felt he belonged more than anyplace other than his own home. He saw the land, its rich beauty and perfect soil, as a part of him, a part of himself. It was in his blood, the marrow of his bones, and this connection acted like a carrier pigeon, programmed

to always bring him home. But while Lillya's mother was still alive, she made him promise that he would never abandon their Russia and he would always do whatever was necessary to keep Lillya in Russia, steeped in Russian culture and heritage.

Lillya was overwhelmed by the stories of the beauty and largeness of these French castles her father described and the many others that had been built in this region. She had seen wealth before, but the way her father described the natural passion and joy these people seemed to possess, they sounded magical.

The French had influence in Russia from art to architecture and became the standard bearers on what was considered good. So any young Russian girl would be more than thrilled to be able to experience the culture and be able to say that she walked the Champs-Élysées in Paris and say it was more beautiful than she could have imagined. Even though their destination would be Saumur, Yuri knew that he had to plan their transportation to include a short stay in Paris, too.

There were two ways of luxury travel between St. Petersburg and the Loire Valley, and Yuri decided he would indulge his daughter in both. They would take a luxury suite in a steamship to the Loire Valley, passing through the Baltic Sea and then going around Denmark, eventually landing in the French Port of Bordeaux. There he would have a caravan of stagecoaches waiting to take them to their final

destination of Saumur, France, home of the famed equestrian academy, the Cadre Noir.

The steamship was quite entertaining, but Lillya preferred land over sea. Her stomach gurgled constantly and her father carried a bucket and walked beside her, but she enjoyed herself nonetheless and enjoyed daydreaming in her suite.

With each breath Lillya took, St. Petersburg seemed to be farther away and their house in St. Petersburg, which had always been considered large, would soon feel small.

Lillya and her father arrived at the Chateau d' _____ just as the women were finishing airing out the rooms one after another one more beautiful than the other. Exotic lanterns adorned the home with their tulip fresco engraved flowers that later Lillya discovered let off a deep dripped oil of golden yellow that in its center almost looked orange. Tulips seemed to be in every room and on the grounds they were going to inhabit.

Lillya couldn't help but think about the story of the man who swallowed a tulip bulb, not realizing its worth. Lillya felt sorry for the man who had been made a fool of.

There was laughter echoing from the dining room when Lillya and her father arrived. Then two little boys who were playing tag and hide-and-seek using large marble statues and a giant marble vase to shield themselves came tromping in. They had no idea that their playground was at all unusual until their father walked in and reminded them to mind their manners. “Silence!” he barked. “I promised your mother I’d teach you to behave.” Yuri and Lillya found the situation funny. Sergei, the children’s father, had wanted to make a nice impression on the father and daughter who had come such a distance to rent the east wing of his Chateau for the following few months. Still, he knew his boys had charm enough to win over any crowd, let alone that of a tired teenaged girl who had been cooped up on a ship for days, no matter how luxurious their suite was. “What’s that dirt you have on the bottom of your pants and on your shirt?” their father asked. “I’m certain Vanya will be quite disappointed – she put a lot of care into dressing you this morning.” But clearly the little boys carried no guilt or fear. Sergei winked at Vanya as she entered the room. Having heard Sergei, she chimed in, strengthening their father’s case. “Yes, your father’s right, you make me so sad that I could almost cry.” Vanya exaggerated her movements and the tone of her voice to pretend she was quite serious.

Taking Vanya seriously, Aleksi and his little brother Stassi apologized. And from this opening moment, Lillya knew that these two sweet boys would liven up her stay in France.

Lillya smiled and said hello, then followed her new handmaid Anika up the stairs where a bath had been drawn and was waiting for her. The water had been heated in big cauldrons over the fire and was mixed with ice cold creek water from behind the house to get just the right temperature. While she was bathing, Anika pulled out little sacks of lavender that she had made in anticipation of Lillya's arrival. After putting them in each of Lillya's drawers when she removed Lillya's clothing from each of her suitcases, she smiled with a look of great satisfaction, for this was the first step towards helping Lillya not only speak French but smell French like all the other girls in her class.

Lillya figured Anika was probably only ten years older than herself, and even in her work clothes you could see she had a nice figure.

When speaking French, Anika's vocabulary and the way she put her words together – was far superior to her own facility of the language. Someone had taken the time to educate her, for she spoke English and Russian too. Clearly Anika was more than a handmaid. "I could learn a few things from these French girls, especially this one," Lillya said to herself.

Lillya made it a part of her daily routine to ask Anika questions about herself, such as if she was married or had a boyfriend. And Anika made a point of teaching Lillya the finer points of escargot, duck cooked in plum sauce, but mostly how to carry the scent of lavender wherever she went. Every night, Anika put out a bowl of lavender and little bags to the side, for Lillya had become fond of making her own little bags, and if she didn't get around to it, Anika made certain there was one in each of Lillya's drawers when she woke up in the morning. "Now you'll smell like a real French girl," she would smile, and Lillya couldn't help but smile back. Anika slowly introduced her to all of the different rooms in the house. One sitting room with a big oak desk and stained glass cut windows was dedicated to the style of Peter Carl Fabergé, a Russian jeweler of French descent. The artist, unable to replicate the exact working of this famous artist, decided to make a wall clock and titled it "For Fabergé Time Will Tell It All". It reminded Lillya of St. Petersburg. The east wing of the Chateau, thought Lillya, "Father and I will live quite well here."

Though many miles from home, Anton became the picture Lillya saw when she closed her eyes at night. "Anton had somethings special," Lillya wrote Natasha, and she imagined the crowd cheering as he tossed plates into the air with each step he took. It sent chills down Lillya's spine, but Lillya had large ambitions of her

own. She was a daring young woman and boys sought out the chance to catch a glance of this special girl.

Anton cursed his parents privately for sending him away just as he was meeting the one girl that he thought could make him happy.

There were many boys who had much more to offer than Anton Vronsky, as far as society was concerned, but Lillya's fear of heights when she saw him at the top of a rope made her want him more, for he had conquered her greatest fear. Lillya and her father would be gone a long time, and she wondered if some other girl might capture his imagination in her absence. Natasha had reassured her that would be impossible. "There's no one more interesting or talented than you!" and she believed it, so Lillya did, too.

And then there was the food. Escargot and pheasant and later the pear tarts. How would she describe all of this to Natasha? Oh, how she wished she could come, too. How would she explain the temperament of the people or why they serve so many courses in one meal? And breakfast, they call it petit déjeuner. Why, according to Papa, there is nothing small about it.

"Oh," thought Lillya, "it's so different!"

With all this beauty, luxuries, and delicious foods, it doesn't seem to calm the people from getting high-strung or having passionate arguments in all their

conversations right in the middle of dinner. “Not because they are angry, but because they feel strongly about something,” her father explained.

“They seem to have an uncanny internal clock to tell when the raspberries and crème brûlée is about to be served, because they are always smiling by the time dessert is in the air,” her father continued. “They don’t seem to fight, really, they just value good, hearty conversation.”

***FILLER STUFF and educated people and papa seems to be a pro at this. They love hearing him speak. I think some of it has to do with his Russian accent. He speaks French very well and is well versed in poetry which he throws in to show off. I think he might be having too much fun already.

“Sergei and his family have owned their chateau for several hundred years. He and his wife are letting me ride one of their prize horses for the duration of our trip. I can’t believe I have gone so long without talking about my horse, beautiful stallion, Whisper. I’m going to explore some new trails with Papa I’m sure I’m going to have many adventures while I’m here.” **** END

Lillya began to imagine what the next months might bring and the more she thought of the present, the smaller the past became. It’s not that she loved Natasha a lesser amount, it was just that there were so many new things around her to think about and the culture was so different that she couldn’t help but get engaged.

She had been told he was given his name because of the way he galloped down a path always quiet and smooth. And they liked the sound of this English word and its translation, too.

In the Loire Valley you could actually smell the land as it flew off of his hoofs.

Yuri and his friends sat in the library and drank and played cards at night. Lillya was certain he was having a good time. “I wonder what kind of life he leads when we’re asleep at night in St. Petersburg,” she wrote Natasha. “I think he’s too handsome and probably too full of life to have kept to himself all these years. I wonder why I never gave him credit for being more than a father. To me he’s just Papa. But for the first time, I’m seeing that he’s more than that to others. And I guess it’s only in this land of romance and passion that I can even think about my father in this way. It just makes me question everyone, even myself.”

Kungar Chapter Arrival (cont)

Anton was already out taking care of the horses when two women approached the carriage house gently knocking on the door. “My name is Helena,” one said.

“Nicolai is my husband and I’ve brought you a few things for the house. With me is Gretta, your cousin Michael’s wife,” and with that Lillya smiled and opened the door. The women kissed Lillya on both cheeks as was the custom, and Lillya responded by introducing herself.

“Why, I would have recognized you anywhere,” Gretta smiled. Michael is right - an Englehart wears their family crest on their face,” and the three women laughed.

“We came to help you get settled in. I know it is not what you are used to and last night had to be difficult and somewhat confusing, but we have all had to adjust to the times,” Gretta sighed. “I also brought you some bergamot tea, Helena smiled.

It’s our way of saying prayers for our county and the czar and his family and it reminds us of better days. And, it’s our way of welcoming you.”

Gretta was tall and very striking-looking with thin lips and a long dark brown mane of wavy hair. Lillya was surprised how little gray she for had for a woman of her age. Helena was much plainer, but pretty in her own way. Lillya’s eyes lit up the

morning sky, which was beginning to change its mood from blue-gray to a crisp golden orange. Greta pulled out some delicious-looking morning biscuits. Lillya caught the scent of fresh baked grains and the smell of cinnamon.

“You know, I met you as a child. I was younger than you are now. Michael, my Michael, had quite a crush on your mother. He thought the world of her. Yuri, your father, took it in stride. I think he was used to it. “Oh, I’m sorry. I’m speaking to you a single woman forgetting that the mother is always the mother. Your mother was quite confusing. No one felt they could compete with her in any way. My husband made a fool of himself sometimes.”

“This is going to be a happy reunion,” Greta jumped in.

Lillya smiled, wondering, though, how Michael’s wife really felt about taking such risks with their lives and and Lillya began to think about all the secrets her father had obviously kept. What secrets would his journal reveal about them all? This woman who was Michael’s wife, a cousin by marriage, whose name was Margretta Villanova until she became an Englehardt. Could she be the key? What she did not know?

“Let me boil some water for us to steep the wonderful black tea you brought us.”

Greta pronounced.

“My husband and Michael should be here soon.” Helena broke in.

“And Anton is anxious to meet you both.” Lillya added.

Margretta's nickname was Gretta. Older than Lillya, she still had maintained a good sense of humor and zest for life and love even though she, like Lillya, had lost much of what she'd thought would be hers. Lillya could see that these women might become new friends. Oh, how happy Lillya was to hear voices other than her own and Anton's. She loved her husband dearly, but she was in need of other companions and the sound of stories, laughter that only other people could bring with them and in return they could retell interesting stories and events their circus employees and entertainers had shared with them. Surely, they had enough interesting stories from the circus to last most people two lifetimes. Unfortunately, with strangers, that's what they would have to share, but who knew what the future will bring? Both she and Anton needed to hear the sound of opinions even if it only gave to them the source of conversation and debate between the two of them later, when they would find themselves alone at night.

Tonight, they would gather in conversation. Perhaps one day soon they would even help her in their search for Natasha.

By the time Nicolai and Anton returned to the house, the women were chattering away. Anton, so happy that his wife was engaging animatedly in conversation, handed her a small bouquet of wildflowers he had picked along their way back.

The women were talking about a celebration they wanted to have that evening. “I thought you might like these, my dear,” he said as he handed them to Lillya.

Anton and Nikolai began to store the goods they had collected and the women slowly began turning the carriage house into a home.

Michael walked through the door, the main attraction as far as Lillya was concerned. Lillya found him surprisingly jubilant especially considering their situation. Not an ounce of fear showed on his face. Not a clue that he could be involved in a scheme of hiding aristocrats.

“Lillya,” he smiled, as if it had only been months since they last saw each other “it’s been too long and how is that father of yours? He was always my favorite relative. But then again, he was the one who won the heart of Angelica. Quite a feat. She truly was an angel on earth! Born to do things we couldn’t even understand.” Lillya tried to take it all in without showing her feelings. She gave him a brief, sad, recent history of her father and tried not to tear up too much.

“I like to think that he’s still at home, walking his horse, carrying a bottle of his favorite wine at his side, there with Stephano his houseman to keep him company and to listen to his stories at hand. But truthfully, I don’t know if he is alive or dead. And Lillya welled up as if she were a ten-year-old girl and it greatly embarrassed her. “I believe the creaky sound of the old wooden floors in our house

must be helping to keep him company. And he's very good at having conversations with himself."

"But today is a joyous occasion. We must be grateful for these moments we have," Michael said in deep reflection. "No one knows how many more we have left or what tomorrow will bring," he said thinking of all of the friends he had lost, while remembering the reasons he should to remain in a grateful frame of mind.

"You are right cousin, I Lillya promise not to be so solemn at dinner tonight." And with that Lillya gave him her best Engelhardt smile.

"The parish priest, Nikolai, is a generous soul, and he has been paid well to maintain it. However, no one is truly safe. That said I think you should be comfortable, certainly much safer than if you had stayed with your father." Lillya got pangs in her belly at the mention of her father. I hope you'll send my regards to him when the opportunity allows. He is a good man who has had to rise above much sadness, your mother, but you and I will have plenty of time to talk about that another time. It upsets Gretta and right now you want her on your side." Lillya didn't quite understand what her cousin meant. She took a deep breath.

"Nikolai and I have established a very loyal congregation and he has told them that his uncle was coming to stay for a while, so people will welcome you with open arms and not apprehension, gossip or mystery."

Lillya opened the windows to get some air inside the house and to blow away some of the intrigue and mystery. A nice swift breeze came through and sprinkled the scent of Kungar leather, that had slipped in through the cracks.

“It’s been a long hard journey” Lillya finally said, I look forward to hearing stories about my mother. I was very young when she passed away. For now, though, I believe I need a nap.”

Michael kissed her on both cheeks as did the priest’s wife and Gretta. He and Anton hugged a deeper hug than normal for they knew within this gesture they had made a promise to take care of one another’s family. A gesture from where there was no turning back. If one got caught aiding and abetting the enemy the other one did, too.

Lillya wanted to feel worthy of the favor her father had asked. She felt quite sure that her father had already fulfilled his end of the request many years prior for, he was not one to ask others for help. Except his houseman Stephano to whom he had been paying a lofty monthly sum and more.

What is the secret they are both keeping? Lillya wondered about her father and Michael.

“He must have something on her cousin. But what? She closed her eyes and tossed and turned her way to sleep.****

New Chapter

Hervé Laurent Fleury was a plain sort of fellow that had worked all his life to make himself big. If he was given a lesson that would normally take two hours, he would take four to six hours of study to make certain when called upon that his answer would be perfect. His dress was always impeccable, and he studied the dictionary so in conversation he could throw out a word or two to display his intelligence and aptitude.

Laurent, as most people called him, also loved horses and he worked just as hard to become a master at that as he did with everything else. When he wasn't studying to perfect his person or appearance, he was at the chateau of a captain at the Cadre Noir who had discovered this overachiever of a boy in an orphanage nearby and decided he would be a very good worker.

There was never a son and fatherly relationship among the two, but a deep respect of each one's skill when it came to horses, and so the man kept Laurent on and clothed him and fed him and one day suddenly surprised him with a scholarship to the famed academy.

Laurent took this opportunity like he took everything else; seriously, and thus he rose in the ranks until it was clear that some day he would equal his patron savior. However, one day while training the horses, his patron savior had a heart attack and died, leaving Laurent nothing but himself and his position at the academy, for which he was grateful. Laurent showed a very bright future ahead of him. The only thing missing was love and a wife. Then one day, while riding in the woods near the creek, he saw a streak of lightning ride past him. Not certain what it was he returned to the exact same spot the following day in case the mystery decided to repeat itself. Being the kind of person who left little up to chance, he observed his surroundings like any good soldier would. He noted to his left stood a large tree that had been damaged in a recent storm and behind it a patch of beautiful wild roses that had found a home amongst the dandelions and brush. But the greatest impression of all was the scent of the flowers that lingered in the air and the sound of the water rushing behind him.

The next morning when he returned, a beautiful girl with shiny golden hair and emerald eyes, dressed in bright red silks was standing upright on her horse's back

and she flew past him like a flaming arrow with a gigantic smile on her face carefree and happy. She blew him a kiss. Laurent almost fell off his horse!

“She’s the most wondrous creature I’ve ever seen,” he moaned over and over to himself. “I must meet her,” he exclaimed!

Having to work overtime, which for years had been no problem for him, that weekend Laurent sadly went to do his duty and fulfill his obligation at the academy. He had been given the job of showing yet another wealthy man around the academy. “Don’t they see enough horses?” Laurent sighed to himself out of fear that if he didn’t return to that exact spot this morning the girl would think that he wasn’t interested, which could not have been further from the truth. Still, he took pride in his work and appearance for by now it was who he had become. But when the wealthy man arrived, a man from the academy approached Laurent to let him know that the man had brought his daughter. “He says she is very interested in riding, so you might need to slow your pace and cater it a bit toward her as I believe that is what would make this man happy.”

Just at that moment, a swirling girl dressed in yellow, gold, and red entered the stable with her father.

“This is Yuri _____ and his daughter Lillya.” The squint in Laurent’s eye examining if what he was seeing was the truth could have told one hundred tales.

Every fantasy he had ever had seemed to come real when he saw this girl.

Laurent took several breaths, then escorted Yuri and Lillya into the manage where stood some of the most beautiful horses Lillya had ever seen. Although the cadet was very distinguished-looking, he seemed a bit tongue-tied at first until he began to display the very French upper crust form of horse ballet of which he was a master.

Lillya’s father whispered to her, telling her that very few horsemen around the world knew this special art as well as this cadet did.

Laurent knew that this was his time to shine. The girl certainly would be captivated and would have difficulty keeping her eyes on anyone or anything else other than him. “Thank you, father,” Lillya whispered back to Yuri. “Coming here has been worth it if only for this.”

Yuri, feeling quite pleased with himself, asked the cadet if he would like to come over to the Chateau where they were staying and go riding with he and his daughter sometime soon.

Laurent could not believe how lucky he was to have been the one chosen to give Yuri and Lillya the tour, and he quickly obliged. The rest of the day, Laurent could do nothing but brag, which was not his usual custom. “Did you see that girl?” he

asked every cadet he could talk to. “She’s going to be my wife,” he repeated over and over.

Lillya, when she got back to the Chateau, immediately ran to the stables of their neighbor and took out Whisper the horse she had been given to use during their stay

“You are going to learn some special tricks this summer,” she smiled. For the rest of the afternoon until almost sunset Lillya schooled the horse until Yuri made her come back inside. “I’m going to see Laurent tomorrow, and you can’t say no, Papa.” And he knew she was right. “He’s going to teach me this secret art of horse ballet that very few men know. Just think what the aristocratic women will do when I show them this!” Yuri didn’t want to think about it because his daughter was a force to be reckoned with when she made up her mind.

Lillya could barely contain her excitement. She had heard of the fine art of dressage and had actually seen one master once with her father when he took her with him to pick out a stallion. There was a French man with a beautiful -----horse the color of chestnut stallion who had been taught this almost sacred art. Lillya knew how privileged she was to have been able to tag along with her father and she knew better than to pester him or his invitation would vanish as quickly as it had appeared. “You will look, listen, and observe and be quiet,” her father said, “and nothing more. Are you able to do that?”

For days before, she practiced the art of silence, the most important and difficult one for her. So, when Laurent came along four years later and she was four years older, Lillya felt that she was more than ready to be schooled by him and by this time she had become a masterful rider herself.

“Don’t get too serious with this Laurent,” her father said after several days. And then he reminded her that she was in France to perfect her French and to get to know lots of French girls and boys, not just one. “Don’t worry, Papa. He doesn’t think of me that way. Besides he’s very polite and has never tried to force himself on me.” But Yuri knew men and he knew that they didn’t always say what they truly thought.

“You know that I’ve gone to all the dances I’ve been invited to, and when I get home I’m going to set my intentions on Anton Vronsky. He’s the person I want to marry!” Lillya liked to get her father all riled up. But it was true for Lillya. Ever since meeting Anton, she could think of no future better or brighter than being in a circus, and she had never met a boy more exotic or kind. “No, father, no worries about me staying in France and marrying Laurent. That would put me a sea and an ocean away from you and the man I will one day love. I couldn’t bear being away from the two of you, let alone Natasha! I like him very well, but he’s not the one for me, you’ll see.” And she said goodnight, thinking about Anton while counting her horse’s steps, because if she could she wanted to do this art as perfect as him.

Since coming to France, Lillya had gotten into the habit of borrowing Whisper, their neighbor's stallion every morning. She also got into the habit of seeing Laurent daily. She was surprised to discover in herself that there was something about the French that made her feel free and all warm inside and it wasn't just because she was living in the middle of a vineyard or that her father let her sip wine at meals as she watched the others drink by the carafe. Lillya felt French passion seemed to be a happier passion than the daunting sadness described in most Russian stories, paintings, music, dance and poems. It made her want to be more free, and sometimes with Laurent she found herself becoming someone else, a girl less shy and more expressive than the girl she had been all of her life. Yes, she still rode like lightning and could light up the nighttime sky, and there were many from the opposite sex both old and young taken by her, but she had held herself back. When she was with Laurent she could see in his eyes that he was falling deeply in love with her without telling her or expressing any words. Lillya began to frighten herself, for in this foreign world she was beginning to feel this way too. Then one evening, as he helped her off her horse, his hands got tangled in

the garlands in her hair and as he gently pulled them out, he found his hands lightly touching her face and surprising not only her, he leaned in and kissed her. Then he pulled back and looked into her eyes and could see that she liked it and wanting her so badly he did it again, only this time for twice as long. “Will you be mine?” he asked her. “We can spend our lives riding through the breeze and dancing on the shore. I promise you will be happy for it is all that I want in this world.” Lillya was shocked and excited at the same time. No man had ever spoken to her like a grown woman before. So enamored by the moment was she, she sighed, “Yes, my love, yes, yes!” But by the time the second “Yes,” slipped off her tongue, Lillya could already feel the gravity of her actions and yet she was conflicted by how tingingly she felt inside. And Laurent, hearing her breathe and putting his hand on her chest to make certain that the pounding heartbeat was hers, went from a knight to becoming a king, for the young woman he just kissed could be nothing less than a queen.

When they left to part their separate ways home he kissed her again; just long enough and hard enough to make her question herself and she left him dizzy and confused.

When she returned to the Chateau, her handmaid could tell something was wrong just in the way Lillya was avoiding her father. She immediately asked for a bath, almost demanded it, as if she wanted to wipe something off of her. The handmaid,

trying to be nice to Lillya, instead made her cry. “Pourquoi pleurez-vous?

Dites-moi,” she asked. And she spilled her story of her infatuation with Anton and her embarrassment of getting carried away with Laurent. “How will I ever be able to explain this to the man I believe to be my true love? He pulled out this blue velvet box before I left, and he slipped it into my own pocket. I didn’t know what to do. It all happened so fast.” And Lillya began to cry even more. “I’m afraid to open it by myself. Will you stay here while I do?” and her handmaid nodded a simple yes reply with her head.

Unbeknownst to them both, Yuri had followed Lillya in, and when he could hear that she was upset, he stayed outside her door and listened to her as she cried her heart out. Wishing he could wrap his arms around her like he did when she was a little girl. Instead he did the only thing he felt a good father could do. He walked next door, apologized for pulling Sergei from his dinner and they went into the library where they could have some privacy. And they talked father to father.

Yuri said not a word to Lillya and better than that he asked no questions. Yuri did what he felt he should do to not throw dirt on either the young man or his young daughter. But as the morning sun began to peep its head through the panes in Lillya’s bedroom, a groggy headed young woman was put into a carriage with big feather pillows where she was served breakfast dumplings as her father said his

goodbyes to Sergei and they pulled away as suddenly as they had arrived. Soon they would be in Paris and on a train to St. Petersburg as if they had never gone. Lillya never saw Laurent again, but he saw her. However, she remembered the many mornings and teachings he had so freely given. She pictured herself on top of Sergei's horse Whisper and in her head went over the ballet step by step that Laurent had taught her until it became a part of her, because even in her present state of mind, she was not so far gone that she was unable to see, its value to her in the world.

On the long trip home when she was certain she was all alone she opened the box that Laurent had so gently placed in her pocket. Inside was a short note that read "To Lillya, the flame of my life. You sparkle brighter than any emerald or ruby. May this always be yours and you be mine."

Years later, Lillya passed the brooch to her good friend Katya, a beautiful ballet dancer, as she felt it was better to have it out of her hands. Katya, in turn, gave it to her daughter Donatalia, a very talented young ballerina who Lillya could still imagine when she shut her eyes the way Donatalia looked in her light lavender gown*** (make certain the dress color doesn't conflict with book one) the night she danced with Lillya and Anton's son, son Vladimir on the lawn at the Winter Palace for the Czarina Catherine). Donatalia's father was so proud and happy. The only true sadness was that Katya had passed away and was not able to join in

the celebration. Lillya could understand how Donatalia felt for at occasions like this she still missed her mother, too. Still, Lillya was certain they were there with them, giving Donatalia the ability to fly each time Vladimir lifted her in the air as if she were only a feather.

*****END OF SECTION OR BOOK*****

To be expanded upon with two other books to follow

New Chapter

Lillya and Anton were welcomed by the congregation in Kungar in a friendly, quiet sort of way. No one wanted to get too close or ask too many questions. Everyone held the same belief that the less they knew the better off they would be. There were limits they all had silently agreed upon and it was those limits that kept them

safe. Less knowledge was the key to safety. And Lillya didn't mind, she actually appreciated having a little peace.

Anton, on the other hand, needed to keep himself busy, so he spent most of his days helping Nikolai do construction work for those unable to mend their houses themselves. Michael did not join them, instead he used age and money to get him out of the work he still felt he was above, but he donated to the cause by buying many of the supplies they needed and overseeing the finances of the church. On random afternoons, though, he would come and spend time with Lillya. "Your mother had what they called a third eye. Did you know that? She could see inside other people by focusing on it, or at least that is what she told us and it made our afternoons and evenings more entertaining. It could have just been a perfectly placed mole on her forehead, but your mother enjoyed being exotic, so we all believed it because then it made us knowing her more exotic, too. Your mother's family had an Indian woman as a caretaker and your mother loved to get lost in the many imaginative stories she shared. When she was eight, her parents took her to Thailand. She must have told you this story. All she could talk about when she returned home was how she rode an elephant whose name was Namaste."

"Yes, I do remember that story, for when I was six she gave me a painting of an elephant she said looked just like the one that she had met. She swore it could have

been Namerse's twin. She added a third eye to the painting of this elephant she gave to me so that he could watch over when my mother was no longer at home."

For a moment Lillya drifted some place far, far away in the past, but then she remembered her father's journal and the mystery she was trying to solve, and knew she had work to do and she came back to life.

Lillya understood, for she was targeted in a similar yet different way. Lillya had a mole on her back shaped like a heart and that always marked her as different. And set her apart.

They had been in Kungar for about three to four weeks. Lillya was losing track. Now that they were in one spot, Anton quit making the marks on his stick to keep track of the days, and they were settling in. The three couples spent most of their time together and liked to joke about that first awkward evening together, their celebration, and getting to know one another.

They recalled the table on which they dined had vases full of wildflowers, each vase more colorful than the one before it. Anton had made certain to pick only flowers that he thought would please his wife. Michael brought with him their very best bottle of wine and a bottle of vodka he had been saving that had once lived in the cellar of the Czar Nicholas. Michael liked to think that its scent could make its way across the Ural Mountain range as the Czar sat down to dinner with his wife

and children. The thought of this, even for a fleeting moment, gave him hope that the world he had known still had some life. In soft tones they toasted the czar and his family to be certain the neighbors or anyone passing by could not hear them. He hoped would at least get a whiff of its scent and somehow find its way across the Ural Mountain range, where he and his family had been taken as prisoners. Michael liked to think that when he opened the bottle and toasted the Czar and his family, that somehow the Czar and his children would feel less alone. But everything had to have a sense of discretion, for fear of the unknown and what their neighbors really thought and believed. Gretta brought a casserole with potatoes and carrots and chunks of good beef. Nikolai's wife made special cookies that were sweetened with honey and cinnamon and a hint of cardamom. Best of all, they brought to the party their true selves, which they felt safe to display, even if it wasn't wise to do so, they needed to let go of their fear. The alcohol and the sweets had created a dreamlike quality, one that she hadn't experienced since leaving her father. They had had to wear worry as if it were an overcoat. She started to relax and said a silent prayer, recognizing how much better they were from the majority of people, for there were many, many who were suffering.

Nikolai and his wife did their best to be good hosts. It was hard to be discreet. This was a reunion, a special occasion. There had been so much planning and preparation for Anton and Lillya's arrival that it was hard not to be giddy and full

of laughter. A familiarity swept through the air. You would never have believed that they were just getting to know one another or get reacquainted. If you had passed by the carriage house that night you would have thought they were exactly who they were portraying to be, old friends and relatives.

Michael pulled out his bottle of wine. Lillya almost felt at home when she saw the label. Her father had that exact same bottle. She wondered if Michael knew it and was silently making a toast to him and St. Petersburg. Just for that act alone if the wrong person had seen it, it could probably have meant imprisonment. But instead of drinking the wine in hand-cut crystal glasses, they drank it in mugs that were used for cheap beer, then Michael quickly hid the empty bottle and pulled out an empty bottle of beer that could be lying on the table should someone unexpected appear. The more they drank, savoring these delicate tastes, the happier the clan became. For no one knew from one minute to the next what their life would be like so they had to learn to appreciate every good moment that came, and not take anything for granted.

Michael's workshed, and the parish's, too, kept more than shovels and gardening tools. Sometimes Gretta would ask him what he was doing out there, and he would answer, "Just thinking of you, my dear."

Each spring, Michael planted a special flower to represent the qualities he found endearing and beautiful in his wife. How bright and shiny they made everything else appear around them. He had grown sunflowers that summer because of their beauty and openness, and how they seemed to always welcome anyone who looked at them. He knew that bringing Lillya and Anton to Kungar would ultimately be hard on his wife, but he owed this to Yuri. He was repaying an old debt, one long overdue because their presence, unbeknownst to the others, brought much more than anyone knew, and Gretta was going to need to find a way to be welcoming and generous even though one would cause her pain without her knowing this.

When Lillya woke up the next morning after their grand welcoming celebration, thoughts of Perm and Natasha were floating in her head. She knew that for now it was best to keep those thoughts to herself. These people whom she barely knew were taking big risks in trying to keep her and her husband out of grave danger. She couldn't make any decisions without thinking of their welfare first. However, when she closed her eyes later that first afternoon, the voices of famous opera singers each reaching out with their mouths wide open, their tongues relaxed, were singing their favorite arias in the direction of the city of Perm where the relatively new

Opera House in Perm lived. The trajectory of their voices seemed to rise over the sunflowers opening up the sunflowers smile. Lillya smiled back at them. They gave her a route in which to escape for several hours each day and music always brought her joy.

Lillya did everything she could to keep her business at home and not to go out in search of anyone. She worked at making the cottage house comfortable, and the flowers Anton brought her each day helped. She only hoped he wasn't taking them from other people's gardens. She understood how important a particular flower might mean to someone. Lillya was dying for a fast stallion to ride. One that she would hoot and holler from and could be free. She let Anton represent them. After all, Anton had spent a lifetime entertaining people and he was highly qualified. But both Lillya and Anton kept their circus skills to themselves to help protect their identities, not wanting to jar any memories, for lots of people went to the circus yearly and they knew Anton and Lillya's history.

Gretta stopped by most mornings with a special treat, and Lillya would unwrap the treat while Gretta watched her. She loved the way Lillya wore happiness on her face.

Gretta was finding it hard to dislike Lillya. They both loved music, and Gretta often came in the morning with her fiddle in hand. They would sing old Russian

folk songs such as _____ to each other. And sometimes they discovered the harmonies in a song and that always brought them closer together, like it or not. About once a week they would create competitions just to keep their brains active and to challenge the other. It was a good game for both of them. One game they often played with the six of them. Nikolai's wife Helena usually could outpace all of them.

They put all the letters in the alphabet into a bowl and each person would pull one out and their partner would be their secretary as they proceeded to name every song they could think of whose title began with that letter. That was part one of the game and whoever won that segment got to be the first couple to choose which couple's songs they would sing the first verse of and whoever got the most points got a bottle of Michael's finest vodka and if Michael and Gretta won, they would be owed a present from either Lillya or Helena that they had hand-stitched, such as a pretty wall hanging, initials on their socks, etc. There were always good presents to be had.

Lillya found Helena to be reliable and Gretta good entertainment and well-cultured. By the time Gretta and Helena left for the day, Lillya knew she had about thirty minutes if she hurried to peek into her father's old journal, for soon Anton would be home. The one thing she valued during these days in Kungar was yes, the company of these two women. She had been able to lay her worry out on

the table and bake it into a pie or a cake and make something sweet out of something sour and distasteful.

“Anjelica was not always the angel she appeared to be,” her father wrote, “but at the time we met she was everything I wanted. She loved horses and animals and it was clear she had the ability to tuck away her wilder side for the people and things she found to be important. I never dreamed she would get so sick, but how she loved our Lillya more than herself. Her world revolved around that child.” Lillya didn’t look in her father’s journal in any sort of chronological order. Some days she read a portion about his past and other days she read a portion that he wrote while it was happening in the present tense.

One day after Gretta and Helena left, she pulled up something quite unexpected.

“Still there is something I need to share with her. We don’t like to keep secrets from one another and I have a big one I am holding from her about my cousin Michael.”

Lillya just about dropped the journal. Wanting to do nothing other than read this book, she was quite disappointed when she heard the sound of Nikolai’s wife getting closer.

Nikolai’s wife had been very kind and did everything she could to endear herself to Lillya and bait her into telling stories of the past. Lillya, wanting friendship and a conversation, became easy prey. She even told Helena about a boy she met in

France when she was a girl and how he taught her the art of dressage and how that simple act of teacher and student changed her life, and that of the circus', too.

Lila could hear Helena's footsteps getting closer. Lillya knew she had to tuck the journal away for now and hope it didn't get found between now and the next time she would have a chance to look at it. She found it interesting that the parish priest and his wife had put so much of their lives at stake for complete strangers. She was grateful, but still found it worrisome. "Don't priests do good deeds?" she asked herself, trying to figure out each person's motives. But as she read more of her father's journal, she began to realize that Michael didn't just like her mother, she was beginning to think he loved her mother and had hoped it would be himself who married her. Lillya was beginning to believe that love was moving Michael forward, and after a while she understood the confusion that Gretta felt as she put it all together, too.

"What motivated Helena, or did she just get pulled into this like an object in a storm that gets blown away and then has to make where they land their new home?"

Lillya quickly stuffed the journal in her bag. She wondered, too. She understood Michael wanting to help his cousin and his cousin's daughter, but she wasn't quite

so certain of what drove Helena; wasn't so certain of her motives, and she felt horrible for having those thoughts about someone who'd been so good to her and was probably saving her life. Luckily that day, Helena had just come to drop off a shawl she had finished knitting. "I made this for you, Lillya. I found the perfect emerald green threads and yarn to put together something I think is perfect for you. It will keep you warm on chilly evenings and if it's too heavy to carry when you depart, you can just leave it here and we'll get it to you another time, in better times I hope. Perhaps I'll be able to see that wonderful estate Michael has talked about so often and ride one of your stallions."

Lillya was taken aback by the shawl's beauty. Some of her favorite colors: teal, blood orange and yellow gold. Helena asked Lillya if she would want to go to the river with her. "I find it calming, and I am able to daydream and imagine what it was like for us before all of this craziness. We don't have to stay long, just long enough to feel good and the river run through our bodies." And they both laughed.

"Do you think that will happen before I die?" laughed Lillya. She hadn't wandered too far away since they arrived. All those days of walking miles and her feet and legs were sore from all the effort she had put out. But without Anton looking out for her, she was not confident in Helena's ability to provide safety, so she made up an excuse; that she was writing a journal of her escapades. "One day I

will share these stories with you and maybe the world.” She smiled. “Maybe another day. I love the water and how calm and free it makes me feel.”

Helena left, but not before leaving a watermelon and a few pears behind, all prized gifts in Kungar. Lillya looked at the clock. She saw she had just a little more time to write and wanted to put it to good use, so back to her father’s journal she went and this time she turned to a page at will. Surprisingly Michael’s name was right at the top:

“Michael might be getting himself into trouble.”

.****Chapter Change

Lillya saw the rest of France mostly when looking out the window of the train. Her father had gathered her so quickly, she had no time to put her thoughts together. He had already made the decisions for her. All Lillya wanted was to be in the loving arms of her best friend, but she didn't know if she could face her. She had made so many mistakes, she believed.

"What must Laurent think? I never meant to hurt him this way. How will I explain this to Anton when I get home, or get the words out to tell Natasha the truth?"

Lillya lay in solitude on the long, expensive journey back to St. Petersburg. She didn't know what to say and she wasn't interested in much of anything, even the wonderful food laid in front of her, not even her favorite desserts. Her father tried to bait her with profiteroles and Poire Belle Hélène, but even that was useless. He couldn't get that saddened look off her face. She carried a book with her everywhere and used it as a prop when she sat down so others would think she was occupied and unavailable for conversation. All day and night long she stared at the clouds or the passing landscapes absorbing nothing but her thoughts and her days in the Loire Valley and Laurent.

Yuri was disappointed that the trip of a lifetime he had planned for his daughter fell so flat. A steamship from St. Petersburg to Bordeaux and then on the way back, a first-class train with four days in Paris; museums and dining, the Champs-Élysées... Four days in Paris had turned into one. He had never seen his

daughter so upset. His daughter was mixed-up and confused and Yuri blamed himself for not watching over her more carefully and getting too caught up in his own world. Lillya cried off and on the entire way to St. Petersburg and upon her return accepted no visitors, not even Natasha. She asked another handmaid to draw her baths, one that she knew would never have the nerve to ask her questions about herself.

Then one day when they had been home for one week, Lillya called no one and went into her closet and dressed herself. She then went to the stables alone and picked out the horse she thought would be best. She groomed and primped the handsome stallion, was very meticulous with her actions and whispered to him the entire time. Soon the horse was rubbing his nose against her chest and making happy whinnying sounds. She did this three mornings in a row and by the end of the third day it was as if Lillya and the stallion had become forged as one. Everyone was interested but no one interfered with her ritual they just waited; her father, Natasha, the stable boys all curious to see where it would go, what Lillya had in mind. "At least she's doing something," her father said to Natasha. Natasha, somewhat hurt by Lillya's actions, felt as if she had been pushed aside, angry and upset by Lillya's selfishness, Natasha gave no answer to Yuri's comment. She just nodded.

Each morning, they waited to see what she would do next. On the fourth morning, she saddled the stallion her father called Bruno, the one she felt could listen and understand her wishes. By now they were bonded, and he was sensitive to her voice and movement. She grabbed his reins, jumped on the horse and asked the stable boy to open the gate. She gave the horse a swift kick and off they went.

Lillya told the horse all that she had to say. She rode him hard and fast and soft and gentle pouring out not only what was on her mind, but where she expected to go and what she hoped they would accomplish together. And when they returned to the stables, she brought the stallion back out to the ring and she walked with him, letting him cool down as she continued talking to him in a low, calm voice. Later, she told Natasha that she was just explaining to him what they were going to do and what would be expected of him.

Natasha didn't want to imagine what could have occurred to have put Lillya in this state, but in this particular moment she seemed cool and at home with herself.

Lillya knew what she was meant to do.

"Something must have gone very wrong on their trip, but what?" Natasha wondered, later that same day, but truly she already knew. "It had to be a man."

Her father Yuri told everyone to leave her alone. “She’s fine. She’s just in an inward state of mind making major life decisions. Everyone deserves that, don’t you think? Let her be.” And they all did.

Two weeks later, Lillya called to her father from outside the stable and asked him to join her. “Papa! I want to show you something!” Surprised by now to hear her voice asking for his attention, this caught him a little off guard. As he walked toward his daughter, he thought about how she had spent weeks hidden away in her room and at one point had gone to the extreme of having her food left by her door. She even drew her own bath and dried her own self off.

“I’m coming,” Yuri replied. Suddenly, as Yuri got closer to the rink, a bell went off and things began to make sense. Intuitively, he knew what his daughter had been doing. Moments later he saw it with his own two eyes, and what had started out as a small grin turned into a gigantic smile on his face. His daughter was sitting on top of Bruno, slowly going through the horse ballet exercises that Laurent had taught her. He started to clap and gave her daughter a standing ovation that he realized she would have to get used to. “My daughter is probably the only young woman in all of Russia who knows the secret art of dressage.” Yuri hugged his daughter. That comment Lillya had made in France circled the thoughts that were now chirping in his head, “Can you imagine what the aristocratic ladies of St.

Petersburg will do with this?” Lillya had said. And for the first time in maybe a month, he saw his daughter happy and content.

Lillya suddenly he had an appetite. “I’m starving!” She smiled. “Let’s go eat some breakfast.” She broke out in a huge Englehardt grin that practically took over her entire face and it reminded Yuri of his love and duty for his daughter.

“That was an amazing trip that I will never forget,” she told her father. “Do you think Natasha could draw me a bath?”

All of the aristocrats left the comfort of their palaces, wanting to get a glance of this daring young rider who had somehow been schooled in an art they were all dying to learn. The men didn’t know what to do because no respectable man would ask a woman about anything important, especially about horses and riding. Of course, they had always considered themselves best, but there was no denying this girl was special and she had something they wanted. So the men begged their wives in private to pursue lessons from Lillya in riding. They wanted their wives to get close to her, for Lillya was becoming a sensation. When the Czarina invited her over to sip lemonade and play cards with her, it became It would be the beginning of Lillya’s own coronation.

It had all been done discreetly so the men could save face, but Yuri could see how differently aristocratic St. Petersburg reacted to his daughter. Even though they had been previously well-regarded, they were now a part of an inner circle that before this they could never have dreamed to be in. Lillya could do what she wanted, and she did, by way of seeing Anton, who was not of her class, but Anton could not be put in a class, for he was different from anyone else, and the acceptance of that relationship from inside the Palace walls afforded them the opportunity and gave them permission to love.

In the beginning, Anton believed he would no longer have a chance to be the one to court Lillya. He didn't believe that luck would be on his side this time around, but he was smitten and wasn't going to give up. Petra, Anton's mother, could read Lillya's interest in circus life, and encouraged her son to stay steady, as steady as he was walking the wire. "She'll come around, Anton, just give her time. It's you she wants to be with. There's no one else."

The aristocrats, wanting to see Lillya and learn what they could, while keeping their husbands happy and proud, because by now the husbands had learned the art from their wives, and the circus was no longer below their status. Even the Czarina had given her nod of approval. And so the aristocrats followed her to the circus and they stayed for the entire show. Anton and his family, who were already

famous, became more famous, while Lillya became an international sensation, and when he got down on one knee and proposed, the whole world was waiting to receive them, and the presence felt like shooting stars.

But as her luck grew, bitterness in another began to take hold, for all that he had dreamed and thought would come true had gone to someone else. His heart and his soul would never be the same. And as his bitterness grew and festered, it could not be moved or changed.

NEW CHAPTER

Michael has met someone; a woman I should say, and he can't seem to get her out of his mind. He thinks about her all day every day. Angelica says she can only bring complications and trouble to him and our family. She is upset with him, which he can hardly bear. It's Angelica's handmaid, and she says he's doing this to make her jealous. He's come up with tricks so he can find himself alone with this woman. I knew that it would not last so long, but you can't blame the girl wanting to better her situation. Today the woman told him she was pregnant. She's a smart one, too she made a point of telling him in the place where she knew Angelica would be able to overhear their conversation. And of course, she knew Angelica

couldn't leave her fate and that of a baby's in only Michael's hands to figure it out himself.

Angelica and Michael had always had a special bond, but Yuri had always believed that Michael did not deserve Angelica the way that he did. From the time they were children, Michael and Yuri had been thrown together, being close in age when they attended family functions and had remained competitive throughout their lives even when playing games. But in reality, nothing was ever really a game to them, it was always who could do it better. In Michael's eyes, Yuri had ultimately won the jackpot – the prize of all prizes. He had only been with this other woman to try to make Angelica jealous, but it hadn't worked.

“He's my best friend, I can't not help him,” Yuri wrote in his journal, wrote. “But how? What do I do to make things right for all involved?” But that seemed like an impossible mission. how

The handmaid (***) look for name in earlier part of book or come up with some name and we will name her.) s fo proceeded to be sent to another house of a distant cousin where she stayed in hiding until she gave birth. Then they would deal with what would be done next. But when Angelica and Yuri saw the child for the first time, and when they held her in their arms and saw her sparkly eyes squinting and smiling back at them, and that Englehardt nose and chin, they knew this child were to anyone had to be kept close. They couldn't betray the secret of

her birth or who her birth parents. It would have brought too much pain and embarrassment down on her and the rest of the family and she would have been mocked and teased and set up with bad marks before her little life began. At least she would have a chance to make her own way without the burden of being a bastard. Mom held her in their arms and then Michael saw her too, it was clear they couldn't just give her to anyone. "She's family," Angelica reminded all of us. So I found myself a key player right in the thick of their scheme; one that came out of good intentions but would one day blow up like cannon in our faces. Angelica called it "the best answer to a bad situation."

I know Lillya, if you are reading this now, you are more than curious, you are also furious that I could have kept this from you for so long. I'm sorry, but I swore to your mother and your cousin Michael that I would never say a word. The baby's mother was set up in Perm where she was only expected to do light housework as she was nursing. When the little girl turned three, it was decided she would come to me and I would be her unknown guardian and caretaker.

Although anxious and curious to see the name of this girl, and see if she knew her, All that Lillya had absorbed had left her very tired and as much as she wanted to continue, she found that she could not read another word. Tonight what she wanted most was a good sleep. She had dug deep enough for one day. The rest

would have to wait Besides, if she did not come to bed soon, Anton would get worried.

The baby was smart and alert and seemed to be able to mimic perfectly whatever myself or Michael would do. Angelica also wanted the baby to be taken care of and not just given to anyone, so she approved of Michael letting this woman and her child live in our house in Perm until the baby got older. However, the more days she spent in our presence, the more attached we all became, and so I vowed to myself that I would set up a situation where the handmaid and this baby could remain. I don't know how we came up with the name, I don't remember what it meant to Michael or the handmaid, but we began to call her Natasha. If ever my daughter Lillya reads this, she will be both angry and pleased at the same time, for her best friend is truly her cousin, but the child stands a chance at a better life if no one knows this, otherwise she would just be thought of as the bastard. If we had made this public simply for spite, Michael would have lost everything, especially his wife Gretta whom at the time he was engaged to. Gretta had already gone through the difficulty in accepting that her soon to be husband had always wished that Angelica was his. Now he had a child with her maid. In order to make peace and not cause a huge family scandal or bring shame on an innocent child, Michael asked me for a favor and I could not say no!

Lillya was shaken, almost going into spasms. Here she was, an older woman – a grandmother herself, and she never had known this. How could my father have done such a thing and not told me? That must be the secret my father’s been keeping. All these years. Lillya became so full of emotion she was like a hot air balloon full of scattered emotions. Wanting to find its way about to burst. Lillya wanted to pick things up and break them, she was so angry. All the years she had spent with her father and Natasha. “I wonder if Natasha knew?” she said to herself. “How could they have done this to me? How could they have done this to her? Propriety, what does that mean? What sorts of promises to you keep for a lie, and why? I hate them in this moment. But I know the moment will pass,” Lillya thought to herself. “Oh, this caste system has caused too much pain and suffering and is not of any use.” She tucked the journal back into her bag, cried herself to sleep until Anton came back to the carriage house later that same day.

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NEW CHAPTER or ***

Lillya spent her time being very solitary those first months after she returned from France. Anton was beside himself with frustration. He had counted on a lot of

things, but not this and not with Lillya. He wrote her notes and called upon her father asking if he might have the pleasure of her company. He hoped her father could be more persuasive, but he got the same answer as the rest of the boys and friends had gotten, even Natasha. Lillya, simply put, had her father tell everyone that she was engaged in a project that required all of her attention, but it would not last forever. And to Anton she had her father add she would be free soon and she looked forward to seeing him.

Finding it almost unbearable to have Lillya so close but at the same time so distant, Anton left flowers daily by her door and short notes to not take up too much of her time and he let her know how much he missed her. Still, as difficult as it was for him, he had been trained since childhood to be a patient man and his life in the circus taught him to count and breath and sing his favorite songs over and over to calm himself, to keep his brain still and remain pointed on a single destination. It was how he made it to the other side when walking the high wire, and if it worked in that capacity it should work in every other, he assumed.

Lillya remained quiet for weeks. She believed if she wanted something badly enough, it would come to her. The only person she spoke to was her father and then only at breakfast and the rest of the day she whispered commands to her horse determined to stay pointed. And Anton focused on his long-term goal of proposing and marrying the most extraordinary girl he had ever met. Lillya. Yes, she was it

for him! Word began to spread. The secret Lillya had been perfecting was about to surface. Her timing seemed to be just right. She had stayed away long enough to be missed but not so long that she was forgotten. This was the year when all girls of a certain class were waiting to be introduced to their future suitors and soon to be husbands and there was no one poised to make a bigger splash than Lillya.

Petra, Anton's mother grew more respectful of Lillya and more curious as well.

"This is one smart girl. I wonder what she is up to? I'm not certain if I did you a favor by introducing you, but I believe you will never be bored. "She seems as if she could fit in anywhere. She will keep you on your toes, of that I am sure. The girl knows what she wants. She's no ordinary girl." She told Anton. "So you can't treat her like the others."

Petra encouraged Anton to invite Lillya to something she knew Lillya could not refuse, even if she wanted to. Something Petra could see was brewing in Lillya's soul and she decided to take full advantage. Carl Magnus Hinne's who had created quite a fortune and was known to be rather extravagant had built a circus in St. Petersburg. Anton who had been looking for another gifted rider had hired a recommendation that had come from one of his cousins. At the last minute the man's wife decided she couldn't leave her family and now Dimitri was left with a cancelled starring act that would attract top dollar and no one to fill it, but Petra saw things differently.

“Dear Lillya, my family invites you to join us in the circus riding rink to display your skill for the world to see.” signed Anton.

Lillya’s father Yuri and her best friend Natasha had been waiting and hoping that Lillya would share her letter with them, and this time she was too excited to keep it all to herself, and she did. “They’ve invited me into the circus.” Lillya said as she came running towards them.

In that one moment, Natasha knew what she had feared would happen one day was about to become real. Lillya loved Natasha, but she loved her horses and her riding more than she loved Natasha or herself for that matter.

“With your permission.” Lillya remembered that good manners would take her further down the path, cross the bridge she knew she wanted to take, and land where she was meant to be, but to get there she knew she had to defer to her father and ask for his permission. Yuri knew he had no choice he could see it was his daughter’s destiny, and though concerned, he was actually thrilled that his daughter had an opportunity to pursue a dream.

Yuri, concerned for Natasha’s welfare, the next day went to see Natasha’s mother, who still worked at a nearby estate but whom he had not seen in several years.

“I think you’re going to need to move if you want to stay close to Natasha.” Yuri said to Natasha’s mother. “Lillya will be moving on and Natasha is going to need something to hold on to and a reason to wake up. “Perhaps I can arrange jobs for you both in estates by the sea? Natasha has always loved the water.

“It’s not going to be easy separating these two,” said Natasha’s mother. “your daughter has been the best part of Natasha’s life, but I’ll do what you think is best because up to now you’ve been right all along. I thank you for your years of generous hospitality. Where do you think we should go, after the summer?” she asked.

“Let me put my mind to this,” Yuri said, a little uncertain of what would really come next. “But you will both have good homes and jobs. Lillya has no idea what the next step for her really means.” It’s going to be difficult for both of them.

Out of respect, Lillya addressed her reply back to Anton through Petra.

“Dear Petra, please tell Anton I will come to the circus this Friday. I would be honored to ride with you in the rink that night. Would it be possible to schedule my

performance after Anton does his so I might watch? Thank you for this kind invitation. I will see you Friday at 5.

Word spread quickly and the Vronsky Family circus had to open an extra set of bleachers and two extra sections special box seats and they felt rather certain would still have troubles fitting everyone in as a note had arrived before Lillya had even left saying the Czar and Czarina would also be attending. They were not going to miss something as exciting as this. The Czarina was already thinking about lessons for herself. Unbeknownst to Lillya, a career was being established before her first act and a reputation was built that would follow her the rest of her life.

Lillya whistled the entire way back to her family's estate. she felt a little tight in her bones and had a sense that something bigger than what she could imagine had begun. A big ball was rolling down a hill picking things up while still gathering speed.

Natasha was beside herself with excitement and couldn't wait for Lillya's return. "What will we be up to next" she wondered.

The soft low whisper that Lillya had been keeping private while perfecting this secret had suddenly become a roar. The women at the palace were all interested in what Lillya would wear, the men and the czarina were interested in her hands and her feet, for the empress knew that no one would dare try to outdress her.

Lillya couldn't leave the estate until the early afternoon of the show. What began to spread through St. Petersburg that th and figuring out the best costume Lillya could wear. Lillya once again preferred violet like the tulips that used to grow in her mother's garden. They could not to fit everyone in. The best street performers lined the entrance hoping to catch the attention of the aristocrats who had begun to show their love of the art by hiring many of the same performers outside the building to their parties. The circus in Russia given the history of the country was still rather new and people were working hard to demonstrate their worth and earn a high place in the thoughts of the dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies, princes, and kings. That night Anton not only did his usual act, but he added something special when he finished walking the wire he went to his platform, put on a clean bright white shirt and he walked to the platform on the other side upside down on his hands. Then he got to the end, put on a tuxedo jacket that was neatly pressed and waiting for him and then he took his bow. And then he introduced his mother and Lillya. The crowd roared for them both as they circled the ring doing acrobatic tricks. And although Lillya was capable of doing all the same tricks as Peta, she did not want to overshadow her in the show an she rolled off her horses back and applauded Petra as she circled the ring standing upright on her horse's back. When Petra dismounted, she took Lillya's hand and brought her to the center of the ring and applauded her, then everyone in the building got up and bellowed their love of

the two and when Anton joined them and gave Lillya a big kiss, and she did not mind.

“This is the girl I am going to marry!” she whispered to Petra, but Petra and Lillya already knew this.

CHAPTER OF LILLYA OLDER FILL IN***

Lillya’s reputation had proceed her to the rink. Was she really going to be the next sensation at the Palace, or was this just something that would last for hours?

Neither she nor the people knew the answer. But the women with the encouragement of their husbands believed that she possessed the knowledge of the secret art form that they had been dying to learn. Now they had to figure out the best path to her stables and her riding rink without being conspicuous. The men would come to Yuri and Lillya’s house as if they just happened to have time to watch their wife as Yuri’s daughter gave her riding lessons. Lillya did the usual stunts, taught the women the usual lessons of safety; how to ride with their English saddles and sidesaddles, how to exercise their thighs and push into the horse’s ribs as they went up and down, trotting their way around the ring. As they improved, they would canter and jump low cavalettes maybe a foot and a half high or so, and when they finished cooling down in the rink, they would hold their horses’ reins

and bring them into the stable where the most important five minutes of the lesson took place. It was at the very end that she taught them the lessons of the horse ballet. She had two stallions that had become particularly schooled and were more likely to behave while Lillya worked, teaching them the art of dressage. The men were very discerning, and the women, it was the most fun that they had had with their husbands since courtship. Just as the men desired their wives, they desired learning this art equally as much and the women didn't care that their husbands were using them, for they got what they wanted. Their home was happier, and they were using less laudanum to calm themselves down

Lillya and Anton rose to the heights of society and the Vronsky Family Circus soared and profited. The Czar and Czarina invited them to dine and lavished the circus with two lions to complement the two tigers they had already sent. One was named Biscuit, the other Trudy; names they had heard Americans calling one another. They all found it rather odd, but accepted it without question because the lions would draw in a larger audience, and they came with a good story. They both knew that good stories are never lost on an open ear.

On the night of Anton and Lillya's wedding, people danced in the streets. What she wore was kept a secret. Many were told she wore her riding clothes and special pants that the Czarina had made up for her that gave her more traction on the horse.

Yes, Anton had won the key to Lillya's passion, but one person was missing, the one friend she thought she could never live without, and it broke Lillya's heart in two.

New Chapter:

Lillya and Anton spoke silently to each other as they had to address what Lillya had discovered. How were they going to deal with the truth about Natasha and her heritage? Right now, they both had to agree that Natasha was safer by not being associated with them. But, oh, how Lillya wanted to scream, "She's my cousin and she deserves much more!" But did either of them deserve more? The Reds would disagree. If they had not, Lillya and Anton would not have to be hiding and fearful of their lives, their destiny, their future. Nikolai recognized the rift that had gone up in the carriage house, even though they continued playing cards and games in the evenings and told each other stories that made them laugh. There was this unanswered question lingering before them, and at some point, they were going to

have to answer it. Greta kept more to herself. This was a painful subject for her, for the man that she loved and had planned to marry as a girl had already fathered a child with someone else. Even though no one knew that this had taken place, she knew, and she had carried this secret with her for decades. It had finally broken loose and it was no longer hers alone to carry. Helena continued to try to be the peacemaker amongst the six of them, always with a smile, always trying to make the best of their situation. Sometimes, the officers would find a way inside Nikolai's church, making certain he included a service that was nonreligious that looked away from God. Then, by contrast, the men who believed and fought for the opposite side were fighting to hold onto their wealth while the other men's families were starving. It was a complex time. The lines seemed to be formed and drawn and seemed as if it should be easy to decide where one stood, but nothing was easy, because as they each gained a little something, they each lost as much as well. Lillya got shivers up and down her spine every time the soldiers would come to torment them, thinking that they were just one of the bunch of followers of God and if they had to choose between White and Red, the Reds felt certain that they would be the ones they would choose to be on their side. But Lillya didn't really feel like they had a choice. They were all born into a certain lineage and had been raised according to that lineage. It was frightening. Lillya would hear stories from friends about how one's sister or brother had been kidnapped in the night and sent

to the front lines, forced to battle their brothers or fathers on the other side. But the six of them kept on, through the ice-cold winter of near-Siberian temperatures and struggle. and seeing the first blossoms of the following spring, the women by no were more like sisters – sisters who loved and argued. They didn't necessarily agree with one another all the time, but they knew to save themselves. Each of them was needed in their own way. Then one night it happened: Anton and Nikolai were tending some of the parishoners; helping them with their chores, the ones that were too difficult for them to do themselves, and Michael had stayed home that night, feeling too tired to do any more work, while Greta and Helena had gone into the main house to check on yet another pie they were baking along with a stew filled with potatoes and leeks that they would eat later. Lillya thought that Anton and Nokaolai had finished early and then she heard the footsteps of horses approaching. She was a little bit concerned because usually the two of them made more noise and would be talking and laughing yet this time she only heard the footsteps. The steps leading to the front door of the carriage house began to squeak and still there was no sound of talking and laughter. Lillya froze and opened her mouth, but she was unable to get a sound out. She began to shake right at that moment. Three tall healthy young soldiers that clearly wore the colors of the Red jumped through the front door which had been left open and grabbed Lillya by the throat. The youngest of the three men threw Lillya in a chair but then decided that

questions were better asked in private because clearly she was waiting for someone to join her and it would be much easier to get the information they wanted to get from her if she were by herself rather than them having to fend off who knows what, how many, or how old. The only question that they asked was “how well do you ride? Can you still get that old body if yours on top of a house or do we have to carry or pull you in a trug?” Lillya looked at them and realized she had no choice but to go along with what they said for if she screamed, she knew her Anton and Nikolai would come running to save her as would Greta and Helena and maybe some unknowing parishoners. She knew she couldn’t do this to the others. For Anton it would be certain death, so she kept her mouth sewed tight and only did what they asked or said. Still, she had a pretty good idea as to where she would ultimately land, but she didn’t know what they would do in the meantime and how they would treat her along the way. They took her horse but left the others that they found in the carriage house below. They knew that whoever the horses belonged to, they would come after them once they realized that Lillya was missing, but the horses that Lillya and Anton had been using were old workhorses that could not stand up to the stallions the soldiers were riding. As a matter of fact, they had Lillya ride on the back of one of their horses and eventually let the workhorse run free on its own because it was only going to slow them down and put their own lives in danger. Lillya said not a word, for she knew why they had come and what

they wanted. She was to be an example of those who did not stand with the people even if they did not stand with the White as well.

When Anton reached the house not soon thereafter, Lillya heard the echo of his yells and could feel the pain in his heart. Her heart broke in two as she not only loved this man but had adored him for all these years and she didn't know what to do except to not draw attention to him and bring him closer to an ill fate because if the soldiers got to him it would most likely be the end of a love that had been nurtured for years and Lillya couldn't bear the thought of having done that to him.

[They stuffed a handkerchief in Lillya's mouth, took her hands, and tied them to the back of her, and let her know in no uncertain way that she would be dead if she tried to get away. Thinking very quickly, Lillya, her only chance of survival was to go with them. She couldn't scream or yell. She tried to fight, and bit one of the officers. Somehow, they had found out who she was and the family she came from – that her mother had been an aristocrat and her father the wealthy owner of a large estate. And although her husband had owned the circus and they had all appreciated it when they were young, they had to take a stand now and let them know what the challenge was. Lillya found herself, the next morning, with her

hands tied behind her back and one soldier making some tea for both she and another one. Funny thing was, they made a tea out of bergamot. Lillya wanted to bring to their attention that bergamot was the tea of the Czar and if they were fighting everything he represented, they should not like this tea. They kept blindfolds on her. She kept asking about what their decision was, and what they were going to do with her. She didn't ask about Anton because, if she was lucky, they didn't know about him.]

NEW CHAPTER

Vladimir, Lillya and Anton's only child, was born on a cold, rainy night. The wind howled, almost as if it was singing a tune addressing the gods and goddesses, praying that everything would be all right. Lillya not only suffered the pain of childbearing but she suffered the anguish of believing this might well be their only child. She had heard childbearing could be quite painful, but she had had a strong threshold for pain. But in the process of the birth, as much as she loved the thought

of being a mother and couldn't wait to do the job, she had made a decision that one heir was all they needed. But she did not let the pain get in the way of building a strong relationship with her son, for she believed him to be a remarkable young man with unusual talents and was the kind of boy who could touch the insides of who he was and is and make a prize out of anything small or big. Lillya adored Vladimir, loved to watch him walk the wire which he learned as a child from his father as it was the duty of every Vronsky man, especially the heir, to follow in the tradition of the circus. Vladimir was always jumping on logs, walking across nature-made bridges that seemed to be bothersome to others, but were exactly what he loved. He once saved a child from drowning and another from fear when the boy's house had caught on fire and Vladimir went where none of the other boys would venture near. To save the boy, he climbed up an old tall tree that had one large branch that extended to the window where the boy was trapped and screaming, and he walked across the branch and told the boy to calm down; that everything would be safe, and he would be at home soon. It was in Vladimir's blood to want to save people, and this time he did. A lesson he remembered well later in life. but Lillya in the empty nights and moods behind and in front of her often thought of the numerous nights she and Vladimir would sit by the gigantic fire in their living room play games of cards she had taught him. Even in the cold she could feel the warmth of her son's love for her.

As a boy, Lillya's son liked to sing and dance and make up stories and every once in a while, he convinced his friend Donatalia to make one up as well. But his other favorite pastime came from the boy himself who loved to tell stories and embellish the truths of what had happened for he knew he could capture people's imaginations with his words and the color of his language. When he was seven, Lillya saved a letter he had written her, for he had just learned to write and yet already she had something to put in the collection that would over the years bring her great delight.

Dear Mama, he wrote, soon I'll be ten and he tried to spell out the Imperial Theatrical School. Even as a young boy, Lillya had to help him with his spelling though she knew that would be hard for any ten-year-old. She found it rather funny that he could come up with these big ideas and discover a way to make them come true, but he couldn't spell the words of what he was doing. (give example) He was a bright boy, she was certain of this, and one that was empathetic to others and that made her happy. She liked boys that had more girlish intuitions and she couldn't wait to see what would come next out of him. The country was becoming unsteady and yet she couldn't bear the thought that her own people could destroy themselves simply out of greed and she cried at the anguish it would bring about but at night when she rode her stallion with the wind blowing through her long wavy hair, and

she could hoot and holler as if she were a farmhand, the release of her true feelings put a smile on her face for she was a determined girl who would honor the love they gave to one another for, in her mind, he was a king.

He was fearless and Lillya respected and adored him not just because she and Anton had made a beautiful child, but because he had the manners and the fortitude to do something amazing, at least that's what Lillya thought. She felt good about having handed him the circus and looked forward to his letters that didn't come often now that he was a family man and a businessman as well. But every couple of months she would find an envelope that came from a stranger who had gotten the envelope from another stranger and somehow it had made it into her hands and into her circus home. She loved getting letters like this, telling her about ---- The last letter she got from him brought her happy news for he talked about his old childhood friend and the daughter of her friend Katya, Donatalia Petroskaya.

Dear Mother, Vladimir wrote,

***INSERT NOT ORIGINAL

February 1

Lillya knew where she would be going. The closer they got, the more familiar the smalls became. Even though the country was in the middle of a revolution, the water and the flowers still smelled the same. The familiar scent Lillya had grown up with and known since birth. The men were tough, strong, and steady and let her know that they meant to do what they were doing. She was bound and tied and represented her class; the class these men were determined to blow apart. She was frightened, but she kept her fear in place, for being afraid was not going to do any good for anyone. She knew that Anton had to be frantic; even if he was about to be sent to the front lines, he would be more afraid for Lillya than for himself. She

wished she knew where he was and what they might have planned, if anything, after all Anton was still a circus man. They put a bandana over her eyes. She found that rather silly as everyone in Russia knew where she would be taken. So she played games with the light, or lack of light. And she would squeeze her eyes really tight until stars and clouds appeared. She still needed to see the truth of her situation, but she knew that would come very soon. She could hear the water dripping from pipes and could feel the dampness in the cavernous stone walls that surrounded her when the man opened the prison door. She put her hands up and let the palms of her hands touch the stone. She wanted a better sense of her surroundings. She knew she needed to know exactly where she was placed in this prison. She didn't know if she would ever be able to use the information or if it would do any good, but she felt it was a smart thing to do. She figured out very quickly that there were about [GET PHOTOS OF PRISON] thirty steps between each prison door. She could hear the men and women mumbling, but she didn't look to see who they were. It was enough to accept that she was where she was. Stripped down by a female prison guard, she was put into a uniform that made her look like everyone else. They were trying to take away her identity. It was part of the war they were fighting. She didn't know what would happen or what she would be called upon to do the following morning, but for now they put her in a cell by herself and expected her to be able to sleep. Her nerves were on edge, her stomach

was gurgling and upset. The echoes of the other prisoners made it impossible to find peace and relax, let alone sleep. Their whispers seemed to bounce like a ball from wall to wall and they grew louder the later they got into the night and she couldn't shut it out. The next morning, she was served a small bowl of something - she didn't know what it was or what it could be. She didn't want to think about it; it certainly didn't come close by any means to Elena's cooking in Kungar or the biscuits Greta would make her or the fish her husband would catch for her. Every once in while someone would yell out to let everyone else know they were still alive. Lillya had never been alone before. She had always had her father, Natasha and later of course Anton, and she felt very alone. In the past, she had a house full of people whose job was to care for her. The strange man in the cell next to her was whispering and humming and to Lillya's ears sounded sorely out of tune. She wondered how long she was going to have to listen to this and to begin with she found out... all day. She was taken for a walk by one of the women guards who told her she may not like the food she was being served but she should eat it because she wasn't going to be getting anything else. Lillya took Anton's lead of counting the days when they were counting the days it took to get from St. Petersburg to Kungar - Lillya began to count the days she had been in the prison at St. Petersburg, oh she had dreams. She wondered if her horse was still in the pasture, whether their gardener or caretaker or her father's companion had stayed

on, would he have been able to? She wondered who was still living and who was dead? Most she hoped were in hiding like herself, or had they been unable to give up their obsession of always being noticed because this time it would not have a pleasant ending, most likely, and cared for first. how many people and who were living on their estate - all these thoughts filled her days. What did they plan to do with me?, Lillya wondered. Her imagination was too vast and she really didn't want to think of all the misfortunes they could have planned for her. Cleaning toilets, she could handle. It would be a joy, considering what else they may have had in mind. So she spent her days in a locked-up cell with ten minutes of exercise and possible cold, cloudy weather when she went outside. The captain from the cavalry stopped in to see her one day. She could not imagine why. But it turned out he had heard the rumors of his prisoner, Lillya, and how she could make magic on a horse's back. He wasn't very friendly or kind, as a matter of fact, he stuck a pistol to her head and demanded she follow him out to the barn where all the horses were kept. He told her to pick a horse; that they were both going to ride. Lillya became extremely fearful and asked him where they would be going. He didn't answer her but kept on walking forward. Lillya sensed that she was in trouble and that she had only one choice and that was to do as he said if she wanted to live. He shot a bird overhead that was flying by, just to let her know he meant business and he had one of the boys in the barn saddle up the horse and when he was through, he handed

her the reins. "Come," he said, and she did. They entered a quiet part of the barn, more isolated than any place she had seen thus far, and he said one word, "Teach." Lillya was rather confused. A captain in the Red Army asking her to teach him an elitist form of horse art, but that was exactly what he was doing. His name was Paul Blatsky. He was married to a French woman named Brissetta. He kept it very impersonal, He was actually cold and rather mean to her, but she knew he was drawn to her knowledge as long as she could show him something that meant something to him, she would survive. Captain Blatsky came when he could. He didn't have any set schedule and he never told her exactly what he wanted and exactly what he would give to have it. It was silent but understood. Lillya knew she could not mention this to anyone, which made it more difficult for her among the prisoners. She was too old for them to assume he wanted a physical relationship, but they all wondered what did she know that would make the captain desire to spend hours with her? For Lillya, it was the only time she felt free. The wind when she rode felt like soap and water was being poured down her back, even though she would ride until she was in a wet sweat, she felt clean and sometimes even hopeful. She didn't really want to imagine, what the other aristocratic men and women were being forced to do, for it was too awful. If she could ride, cleaning toilets would be a joy. She wasn't afraid of hard work, unlike the other aristocratic ladies. She was stronger and less frightened than most of the other women she knew. Her years

with the circus had made her stronger and more open, less afraid of approaching the unknown. Determined and strong-willed, she wasn't going to let her age and the wear and tear on her body stop her from dreaming and finding a way to change her situation. Lilly was strong and she had no intention of giving up. Being where she was did nothing but inspire her, She was going to find Anton, go to Natasha's cave outside Perm, and see her grown-up grandchildren and her loving son.

Whatever it took, she was going to make this happen. She was a force to be reckoned with when she got something on her mind and had made an internal decision to follow her dream. ** and find her way home to her family.

Hopefully, Anton would be there, too. She had no intention of having her epitaph say, "Lillya died in a cold stone wet prison." She was going to live and she was no longer bound to the rules that would make her

The strange man in the cell next to her continued whistling horrible songs, humming out a tune and just didn't stop. If the Reds wanted to torture someone, Lillya was certain they had found the way. But these men believed that her station at birth gave them the right to punish her. It didn't matter who she was, what she was like, or what she had done - just being born into the upper class made her fair bait. For days she was just getting acclimated to the present. The past made her too sad to think about, and the future seemed impossible. Every once in a while, Lillya

thought she recognized a familiar face - someone whom she may even have possibly seen in the ball at the Winter Palace that seemed like worlds away but in reality was probably only months or maybe a year. She quit marking the notches on the wall, for they became too many to count and she felt lost in the numbers. Sometimes the men and women would put out a twig to see if they could trip someone just for their own entertainment. Lillya found it cruel and unnecessary. She didn't expect to be having fun in prison; she expected to find a way out, but had no clue as to how to make that happen. Then one afternoon, she noticed a woman staring at her - one of the guards. She couldn't figure out what the woman wanted, but eventually she was motioned to come forward. She did, the woman yelled at her and Lillya got upset, "Why did she call me over if she was just going to yell at me?," but as she was leaving, she noticed an apple in her pocket; something that she hadn't had before. She couldn't even imagine what the apple tasted like because it had been so long since she had had a piece of fruit - something fresh, something juicy, something cold. She couldn't wait to get back to her prison cell although she didn't know how she would eat it and not be noticed, so she put it in her top right pocket and tried to have her breasts cover it. She was afraid of getting caught, but could not turn down this gift, and slowly over the day and night she nibbled it. The next morning, the same guard who had yelled at her the day before happened to be assigned to keeping Lillya in line out in the prison

yard. And when Lillya left to go back to her cell she found half a pear in her opposite pocket, this was the most exciting event that had occurred to her since she got to the prison - someone was being kind to her, or was it kindness?

NEW CHAPTER - YOUNG LILLYA – insert Natasha piece

Natasha threw a fit when she found out what was going to be happening; that she was going to be leaving the only home that she really knew, and even though she was a servant that had been hired to take care of Lillya and keep her company, Lillya had become like a sister to her and was family. Yuri was family, too. Lillya was off cavorting on some sort of picnic with her new best friend Anton, the man she swore she was going to marry, and Yuri had sent her on an errand to go to the estate where her mother was working. Natasha hated this part of Sundays, when she had to go visit her mother. It had nothing to do with loving her mother or not; it was just that she had moved down in life whenever she saw her, reminding her that she was merely a servant in the end. She hadn't seen her mother lately. Her mother just kept to herself, as far as Natasha was concerned, and it was nice to see her mother, she thought, but she didn't like spending too much time there; she preferred being on the estate with Lillya and Yuri where she had free rein and was looked upon by the other servants in a higher regard because with Lillya, Natasha could do most anything she wanted. When she got to the house where her mother worked, she went along to the back door as she was always told she had to, and when they opened she saw three suitcases. It was very confusing to Natasha - Who would leave three suitcases at the door, she wondered, and where would they be going? She wondered to herself, imagining what it would be like to take a real trip. When her mother got to the door, she was dressed in a nice long dress

that was olive green and double-breasted at the top with big beautiful gold buttons. She gave her daughter a kiss, and instead of inviting her in, she told her to take one of the suitcases, that she was going to need help. This made no sense to Natasha, but she did it anyway. Soon a carriage came up the long driveway to the main house where her mother had a room, and her mother looked at Natasha and told her to get into the carriage. "Where are we going and what do you have in mind?" Natasha started to feel a little frantic and disoriented, for nothing her mother was doing made sense. But her mother got a certain look on her face and Natasha could tell that she meant what she was about to say. "I'm leaving," her mother said, "and you're coming with me." Natasha looked at her mother as if she were nuts. What did she mean by this? Her mother said "It's time for you and Lillya to be separated. It's time for you to build your own life, and today's the day we're doing it." Natasha had nothing of hers packed and more than anything, emotionally, she couldn't imagine a life without Lillya in it day-to-day. They had been together since they were children. How could her mother yank her out like this? And as they drove down the long driveway, at the end of the driveway was Yuri, Lillya's father. He had packed up Natasha's other things and had them ready for Natasha's mother to pick up. He gave Natasha a kiss on both cheeks and told her she would always be looked after and she shouldn't worry, but today was the day that both she and Lillya had to grow up and accept each of their own stations in life and move on. "I know this is going to be difficult," Yuri said, "Lillya, I'm sure, is going to throw a fit when she comes home and finds you not there, but it needs to be done. I've got positions for both you and your mother in Odessa. You will be near the sea and well taken care of. Now, I don't want to prolong this because it will be painful for both of us. I appreciate what you have done for my daughter, but she needs to move on in life and it's time

for you to move on in yours.” And a baffled Natasha got back in the carriage and rode off. She couldn’t hold back the tears that were streaming down her face. She couldn’t have been more shocked. It was as if someone had blown her out of a cannon, expecting her to find justice and a reason for their actions, and that they were expected to be okay by her and clearly they were not. She started yelling at her mother, “How could you let this happen? How could you let him do this to us? Lillya’s really going to be angry - he’s going to be sorry. I thought he was my friend.” Her mother took her hand and slowly patted her head of hair, trying to calm her daughter down. She didn’t like the situation any better than Natasha did, but she knew they were lucky to have a patron such as Yuri looking after them, and they had been given a position and enough money that they would survive. And if they needed more, Natasha’s mother was certain that Yuri would send it. So Natasha went on to Odessa, heartbroken and sad, feeling betrayed by the one person she had most trusted in life. She had never thought about her leaving; she assumed that she and Lillya would be bound together for life, but she understood now that Yuri had never meant it to be, that he had some idea about Natasha but he hadn’t thought it through completely, and now the day had come for her life as she had known it to end and it would be time for her to plant new seeds and discover who she was as an individual and what she was meant to do and see. They got to a new house that Yuri has set up and it was a house where just she and her mother could live. She had never done that before, her entire life she couldn’t remember when she and her mother had actually been together for more than two or three days, but they were set up to take care of some children at a nearby house and at night they would come back to their own. Natasha cursed when she wasn’t in the presence of her new masters. She made life as difficult as she could for her mother, hoping that she would

change her mind and send Natasha back to the time when she was happy, but a week had passed and there was still no sign of her mother changing anything about their new situation and then two months, six months and a year, Natasha was still ranting and raving.

Lillya, on the other hand, threw a fit as well, but it didn't last as long, for she had the distraction of the man she loved, Anton, and a new position in the circus which kept her busy day and night. Because of the Czarina's acceptance and Lillya's place within the palace and the aristocrats, he could accept his daughter working - actually he was proud of his daughter because she had become an equestrian rider whose skills were sought throughout the country and his daughter was happy, though she missed her Natasha horribly. There were certain times when Lillya would be going to an affair and oh, how she wished Natasha was there to help her pick out a dress, get the right flowers for her hair, and encourage her, for Natasha had such a high opinion of Lillya that it gave Lillya a higher opinion of herself. And over the weeks and months she felt bad, but she found herself missing Natasha less. Her father had told her that Natasha's mother had gotten a job in Odessa and was going to be leaving, and it was only right that her daughter was able to come with her. He let Lillya know that he had checked out the situation to make certain it was safe and was one where both Natasha and her mother would thrive, because Lillya needed to have the certainty that they would be all right. She felt a little guilty because her sorrow had turned to delight, now that Anton was with her both day and night. Petra and Lillya had formed a solid bond, and Petra become more of the mother Lillya never had. Now that Lillya had this new prominent figure in her life and someone who expressed love and warmth towards her, Yuri had actually begun to think that the decision he

had made was one that would be best for both Lillya and Natasha and he actually felt a little puffed-up for thinking he was so smart and that he had done a good thing. He had taken care of Natasha most of her life and made certain that for a person of her station that she had been given an education as well and that she would have the tools to be worthy of good positions as an adult and as time would move on, but Natasha did not see it that way. She felt betrayed And she swore she would not get close to anyone else ever again because she never wanted to feel this kind of hurt again.

NEW CHAPTER

Peter Paul Prison, the fortress, was famous throughout Russia. It was built in the late 1770s and was meant to protect the people of Russia from invaders that wanted to do her people harm. The fortress was never used for defense. It was built by Peter the Great, who wanted to construct on the Neva Delta a capital city that would inspire and put St. Petersburg in the position of being a great modern capital and the fortress established Russia as the greatest power in Eastern Europe. However, the Bolshevik government used it as a prison and a place of execution.

The man with the voice who constantly sang out-of-tune voice and pounded out annoying rhythms with his hands by hitting his cot with any sort of piece of tin he could find, continued to annoy her, on purpose she suspected. He wanted an adversary it appeared to help him pass his time. Lillya did not understand why he would pick her. What had she done? During the night the prisoners sang out different outmelodies with their own words to get simple messages to the others. It could be as simple as taking a hymn they sang in church, one that every one knew, and a man or woman or man or woman whaling out their name and telling the others they were still alive.

During the night the guards couldn't help but get a little sleepy themselves and things that would never get by them during the day sometimes went unnoticed in the night.

Let people know that they were alive and where they were, on the night of the sweet pear, a sweet message came out of him, "She's my daughter," he sang. "She's my daughter," he sang again, "She's my daughter." Later in the evening another verse came out, "Trust her, trust her, she's my daughter," and Lillya recognized that the man had been put into place to help her. All these months she had been cursing

him. Later that same day, the woman came again to take Lillya for her walk out into the courtyard and she jiggled some keys that she had in her back pocket and whispered in Lillya's ear, "One night, when you least expect it, your door will be open and it will be time for you to leave. There will be someone waiting for you - I can't tell you now who it will be, but my father recognizes your importance and has arranged a way for you to go and not be seen." Lillya shivered and started to cough. It was hard for her to take in what the girl was saying and believe it could be true. But then, she had nothing more to do than to better her circumstances, which couldn't have been much worse. And even if these other underground soldiers would use her for their own ploy, it was better than spending her days and nights in the Peter Paul Prison all alone and she would be able to see the moon and stars and maybe find Anton, or her father, and even Natashas.

That night, a potato was put into her pocket and the man's daughter, whose name was Blinka, handed her the potato and told her she should try to barter it that night. Lillya was caught and didn't know whether she had done the right thing or not, but if she didn't have faith in Blinka, who could she have faith in? and she needed someone strong to help guide her way out. Blinka made certain that Lillya was left outside by herself, supposedly to pay for her crime, and it was shivering cold that night and Lillya did suand not such TUE BLOODED ONE AT THAT. ffer but when she got back to her prison cell, Blinka left it open. She told Lillya to count to

a thousand as best as she could because by then she would be gone and her father would be left to lead the way. But by now, Lillya had come to trust him. She knew she was on an adventure, one that had thrown her off-course. Whether it would be good or bad, she didn't know, but this was the day that was marked for her and this was the day she would go or stay there and suffer and lose self-respect.

ORIGINAL

Lillya recognized the smell of St. Petersburg air. She knew all along that the soldiers would eventually take her there. She was a symbol and nothing more, and she knew it. The men who were tying her up knew she had nothing more to offer than representation of being an aristocrat. The ride from Kungur had been more emotionally exhausting than physically exhausting and each step she took she knew would take her further away from Anton. Of this, she was very sad. She had been preparing herself for several years, so what was happening now was not such a big surprise. She knew the day would come and it would be more than a goodbye with her father or their old way of life. She agreed with the Reds on many levels for she could see the greediness of her own class and couldn't understand how they couldn't see that they were creating their own destruction. She counted steps as she had done on her way with Anton to Kungur, wondering if they would match up. She was blindfolded all the way. She listened to the boys' conversations with one

another. For that's what they were -- simply boys. Boys who wanted to feel they had made their mark, cast a difference in the way and how their people, the Russian workers and peasants, could live their lives. She wondered how their taking her was going to make any difference to the world that these young soldiers wanted to create for their people, but right or wrong, she knew they had to do it, just to seek or believe they had sought justice for their own class, which had been punished by the nobles and they wanted the nobles to know that they had taken enough. Lenin, Stalin had all set out to seek power for their fathers, brothers, mothers, friends and neighbors but the greed of their own hearts, she felt, was going to be their rise or downfall just like the rest. She smelled the air as it began to smell like her father's estate. She knew they couldn't be far and recognized that she would soon be meeting the company of many that she knew because the only place they could be taking her right now was Peter Paul Prison.

"Pray for the martyrs of the revolution," she heard people saying and it got louder and louder the closer they got. Rumors of the Peter and Paul Fortress had spread across the country. It was the place where they took those that did not carry their beliefs, where many prisoners of the upper classes were jailed and humiliated to cut them down a notch or two. ironically, it was located directly across from the Winter Palace where Lillya had once been celebrated and admired. In a weird way

that gave her strength that she never expected reminding her who she was and still was inside. Listening to the soldier announcing their arrival, she had to steady herself to take the next steps without showing the fear that she felt inside. She wasn't as calm as she tried to appear to be. Click clock, click clock – she could hear the sounds of soldiers approaching. For a second the sound of the horses approaching reminded her of all the wonderful equestrians she had met along the way in the circus and before. She even felt a little piece of Herve Laurent fly by her and she wondered where he might be in the world and was he still the terrific horseman he had been.

It was easy right now to let her mind wander to Circus days and wished she was able to have contact with her son Vladimir. She wondered how their circus was doing. Circus had grown up and the American Circus's like the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey had really made a splash. Their circus had been more skill and athletic then showing off large tamed lions and tigers. In this moment she had a sense of what those animals must have felt being led inside their cages, unable to run or escape or find a way out. In an undescribed way she felt as if she were doing penance for all the harm their animals had been through, not so much with their circus because Anton and his family had had very strict rules as to how the animals were to be handled. But suddenly she felt bad about the many homes they must have broken up, and she didn't understand why she had never seen this before. She

had always felt she was in a higher place in the animal kingdom and if she treated the animals with respect, she wasn't doing anything wrong. However, in a few moments she would be like all the rest. Her freedom was about to disappear. She did not know if she would ever see her family again or even the stars at night. She would have no one to rely on. She had never really been alone. Here she was an old lady, a grandmother she thought, and she had never had to fend for herself. She had always been given everything. Now she was like everyone else; she would be given the exact amount of food that the other prisoners were allotted and soon she believed she would be scrubbing toilets like the rest of them dressed in the same dirty garments, eating the same uncooked hard potato hoping a scrap of bread would be left that she could use to barter, later.

Anton had sheltered Lillya from the street and the people who roamed them. He didn't think or know that she had learned a lot about street life by just watching him. For the time being she would be unable to make her own choices, used as a symbol of what society couldn't accept and really, neither could she, but they were raised to believe that they were born with a place already designed where they would belong and be expected to follow undefined rules. It was a matter of luck as to how one would spend their lives who and what they could become and who they were and what they could do. She had no choice but to be anything other than who she had been raised to be. She kept thinking of Anton. He had been born to be in

the circus, not tied up in this mess with her. Nikolai and Helena she presumed would be ok and Michael would have bought himself and Greta out. She was the one that they wanted, the one that would make a statement and if Michael could give them money, well, for now that would be enough. Her blindfold still on, tighter than it had been since she had left Kungar, meant to incite fear and taunt those that were brought to the prison and the soldiers who wanted to seek justice for all that they had lost and given up or never had. When they opened the door to the prison, the stench almost made her pass out and she could hear drops dripping from drains of one sort or another, but she didn't know where they were coming from. This was the beginning of a new life for her. Her old life was scattered somewhere in the dirt that she was walking on and her spirit was alive even though she didn't know where it belonged or where it would end up. What would happen next, she wondered.

The foul odor was sentence enough, she thought to herself. The little bit of food she had in her stomach started to rise to her mouth and she found herself bent over, letting out every ounce of bad meat, bread, pig's feet she had eaten along the way and it kept on coming and wouldn't stop until she was bent over in pain. . Men and women were calling out to her from behind iron gates, and thick stone

walls. trying to figure out who the new prisoner could be. and the soldiers encouraged other soldiers to get close enough to frighten Lillya, but not hurt her. They had to be able to show her off first! And fear rose in her body just as they wanted it to. She felt like a volcano about to erupt. Their goal was to intimidate her, and they did. Lillya wanted to cry but she refused to give them that satisfaction..She was going to have to be strong and it began here.

“ How can I be so close to home and have it all so different? This is not the St. Petersburg I have known and loved. These are not the same people I have known and loved all my life. Then she took a deep breath, counted to 10 and walked in using the cold hard wet rock to guide her way. What she discovered was a series of winding stone passages. And she tried to count each stone get a sense of where she was, the direction and how far she was from the door to the outside; her freedom. She wanted to know this. Finally the inmates GOT TIRED OF HEARING THEIR OWN VOICE and they stopped. stopped. They talked amongst themselves for several minutes, then opened the door and pushed her into a cell that was as dark as the blindfolds they had when her eyes were covered. She had been trying to hold her breath hoping to avoid the putrid smell, but that was useless. She called out “Is anybody home?” she asked the guard to show she had not lost her humor entirely. She could hear the water dripping and echoes of all the strangers that together made one sound. The bittersweet note that would ring in her ears for many

days and weeks and months to come. She didn't want to give the soldiers the feeling that just by catching her, finding her, they had won the war between them. She forced the pain to go away if only briefly and stood very proudly with a sincere look upon her face that she was not afraid even if that wasn't the truth. For she was determined that she would make the best of a horrible situation and find a way out but she had no idea with whom or how it would take place.

The prison door slammed behind her and all the little noises she heard along the way to reaching what would be her final destination there for the night seemed to echo and get louder. A cacophony; an orchestra of delusion and pain for everyone had their own idea as to who to blame and what would be taken away and what would remain.

She felt like a child once again, hiding in the stables of her father's estate in the dark, unable to see the invisible creatures that would frighten her later, as she tried to sleep, knowing that she could not. In the far-left cell from where she was placed, an old gypsy woman was singing a song about love and pain. As sorrowful as her voice could become, she continued on. Lillya found herself secretly admiring her because she told the truth and shared her feelings. Gypsies were not very well-received most anywhere, but in this case, the Reds had put them and filed them in the same way they had their aristocrats. Lillya was later to find out the

woman's name was Rosa. Rosa was curious about Lillya, for she appeared different than many other aristocrats Rosa had come in contact with. Even in this darkened state, Lillya had more of a feeling for life than the others, who just took their imprisonment as defeat. Rosa kept to herself, and the prisoners would walk in sets of ten at different times in the middle of the prison. Lillya thought about Peter the Great, and wondered how he would feel about his fortress being used in such a way, but she devoted her mind to not focusing and concentrating on things that she couldn't control, but instead on seeing relationships that she might develop and find a way out of there. Lillya did everything she could to keep from vomiting up what little was left in her stomach. Not even a thin mattress could be found, and the officers spat on her. She didn't think her cell could get any darker, but then night came. Stripped of her clothes, she was given dirty garments in their place and all jewelry that she had on was confiscated. The solitude was the worst of all. Lillya knew she was alone; she just didn't know how many years, months, days, hours, that would be true for her. Then, out of nowhere, she heard a dark, deep voice, "I can see you've never been here before." Afraid to be silent, but more afraid to talk, she curled her body on the cot, hoping not to make any noise, thinking that if she was very quiet, he would think she was no longer there. She knew her thoughts were not rational, but she didn't want to believe her situation and the man continued. "I heard you were coming. You have no worries. We may not eat so

well, and the boys can be a little rough, but they don't put you in the same category as some of the others. You're lucky your husband owns a circus. Who does not have happy thoughts of visiting it as a child? I myself ran away once, wanting to join the circus." Lillya shivered in her corner and did not say a word. He could be a plant for all she knew, and then where would that lead her? "Don't be afraid of me," the man continued. "You have to trust someone within these walls." Lillya tried to shut out the voice. She didn't want to hear what he had to say. It was too much for her to take all in one breath. A shiver went up her spine.

Cupping her hands over her ears, trying to cut out the noise of both the drops from the pipes and the stranger who was seemingly in the cell next to hers, thoughts and voice. She couldn't believe how thin the cot was that they gave her. She didn't know how they could consider it a bed. She lay down first with her eyes open so they could get adjusted to the dark and then she shut her eyes curious as to what she would see. At least she didn't have the blindfold on any longer, although there was as little to see now with her eyes open as earlier there was with her eyes covered and her hands shackled. She was afraid, but she didn't want to admit it. She had to

be strong, and this time she had to be strong for herself. She could think of no one else at the moment – her friends and family in Kungar would all have to be doing the same. She started to imagine, in the dark, herself riding her father's stallion, the wind in her hair once more, reminding her how strong she had always been and how brave and strong she was now in this present moment. Being in prison was certainly an obstacle and not a pleasant experience, but she had things yet to accomplish, people she needed to see – Natasha still being the main one. She wondered what things might be like for her when the next light came. She was curious as to what her routine would become and how she would live day-to-day – what they would feed her and how bad they would treat her. Would she ever see Anton again?

Lillya found her stomach starting to disappear. She thought of the good meals they had cooked in Kungar and how her stomach had been getting big. The days passed and she believed weeks and months did, too. When she first got to the prison, she followed Anton's example of their journey from St. Petersburg to Kungar by making notches on her prison wall so she might know what day it might be and how long something had actually taken her, but after a while she got confused and she just gave up altogether. What did one day mean over another? She found it

useless, and that frightened her because she didn't care. She knew she would never get out of there, so she had to do it to give herself inspiration and a reason to leave.

The exercise ground had a couple of trees and Lillya had ten minutes of fresh air a day. Lillya was able to wash once a week and always left with a chill that lasted through the night. Served hot water and black bread and was grateful. Lillya prayed every night but as time passed, she became uncertain for whom and whether it was for death or life. But then one day a female guard left her an extra piece of bread and the following week a piece of fruit. Eventually they began to converse and slowly Lillya found there was a spark of life still inside of her. But one day a nasty prison guard who had not an ounce of heart left in his soul, discovered the female guard handing her an apple. Lillya wasn't allowed outside for one month and if that wasn't enough the female guard who had been so kind disappeared. Things calmed down again and Lillya was given five extra minutes in the courtyard and eventually she got to be outside in both the morning and afternoon. The man in the cell next to her continued having one-way conversations with her, but she remained steadfast in not answering, believing it could only lead to trouble. He continued talking, for he had no one else to hear him, and he had much to say about what was going on in their country. He used to carve little pieces of driftwood that one of the soldiers would bring to him and for a short

period of time each day, he was even trusted with a knife to make the faces and the legs and arms out of these little pieces of wood, and he gave them to the soldier to take home for his children to play with, and they developed a friendly relationship. Lillya listened to what the man would say to the soldier, and after some time, realized that the man had a motive to his mission. A woman guard, sent to clean Lillya once a week, watched this interaction grow. Then one day, she brought them an apple and split it in two and, without Lillya ever saying a word, they were bonded into ... Soon, Lillya found her voice as well. She had gone without speaking to practically anyone ever since she had arrived. She discovered that she had more in common with this woman in the prison than she could have imagined. Their biggest bonding taking place over horses and riding and ... Her name was Julietta, and they developed an actual friendship, and to her great surprise, one afternoon Julietta met her at the prison gate, Lillya believing she would be going on her typical morning walk, but instead there was Julietta's horse, bridled and saddled. Julietta took the reins and handed them to Lillya. Many others in the prison looked on in disregard, but for those ten minutes, Lillya flew through the streets with Julietta right behind and the smile on Lillya's face was almost bigger than the horse itself. She didn't know that she could be happy again and thought that it would have been impossible, but here was proof that it wasn't. When Julietta had Lillya all to herself, she stopped and took Lillya aside and handed her a note

that could be kept only between the two of them and outside the prison. Turns out that Julietta's father had once run the popcorn, candy, and concession stand at Dmitri and Petra's (Anton's parents) circus. So, unbeknownst to Lillya, Julietta had known Lillya through her parents all of her life and she remembered the good deeds his parents had done for hers and for her person, letting Julietta keep some of the costumes that had been made for circus acts – bright colors: red, purple, fuschia, gold, like the colors of some of the most beautiful flowers, dahlias, and Julietta played with these outfits and they made up much of what her family could not offer her. Dmitri and Petra sought her father's opinions, and she remembered her mother telling her how the respect they had shown her father helped him to grow and become a better man and if their Lillya was in the prison, Julietta knew it was her duty to find a way to get her out. This was the first Lillya had heard from Julietta; the first time she had reason to believe she might have a way to help find Natasha and Natasha's cousins' cave.

Then one night she found her cell door unlocked.

(save filler for later)

and like Lillya, at the Cadre Noir with Herve, when she watched him practice his lessons, so did the aristocratic men of St. Petersburg watch their wives. The women had gotten more attention from their husbands then they could have imagined and had the biggest smiles on their faces their aristocratic friends had ever seen. If this young woman could get a crowd so excited by this can you imagine what will happen when her secret gets loose.

Everyone was chattering about both Lillya and Anton. Slowly the other interested boys let go of their hold as it became clearer and clearer that despite their wealth and aristocratic good looks, Anton held the key to Lillya's passions

New Chapter

William brought over a new deck of plain playing cards, nothing fancy or prestigious like the Chas Goodall and Sons cards he and Yuri used to carry in their back pockets most everywhere. He thought it would help them pass the time while doing something fun and familiar. Seeing them, Anton couldn't help but reminisce having taught his son Vladimir to play and how much he loved the game. Many afternoons of his childhood had been spent playing cards with his father. And sometimes Lillya would join them. Those were happy times and sometimes he would drift and allow his memories to hang like clouds over his head as he had missed him all of these years he had been in America, terribly. But as he laid out four queens, he reminded himself that they had been saved from this suffering and they were safe! All four of his queens, his granddaughters and his son and his wife Bella were safe and not having to deal with this craziness.

Lillya could see Anton going someplace far away and nudged him as they were in the middle of a game and not alone. She did not begrudge him these thoughts, no sometimes she was jealous. Anton could see the past so clearly at times she wished that she could jump inside his head and live there.

Gretta had brought over a pie that was filled with meat and vegetables that they would eat later. This was a time they had dedicated to fun and frivolity as the rest was mostly filled with work and worry. Even Nikolai joined them and played

cards. He had deemed them a blessing as they helped to take his parishoners and put them someplace merry. It was seldom that laughter was heard except during these special nights and hours. Why, just the day before members of the red army had come into the church and were notating the names of those who were praying. Nikolai pretended to be busy cleaning the altar and just nodded his head trying not to engage in conversation. This time it worked.

Lillya loved to see how each of them looked with a smile on their face. She could see them that way when they were young or how they must have looked in better days.

Lillya recognized that she had become a master of disguise. If her years had taught her something, it was how to look like someone else. However, it wasn't hard to do as these days she barely recognized herself. When she saw her reflection in the nearby creek, hardship, time, and sadness stared back at her. They had taken their toll. The wrinkles on her face had dug in deeper and made a permanent home. She named the most pronounced ones after female mythological characters. One she dubbed Athena, for her intelligence and wisdom, another Demeter, for her power over food and plants and her connection to the afterworld. The deepest crease became Aphrodite, because it was her memories of love that sustained her. Accompanied by these goddesses and great determination, she found the strength each day to keep on living.

Lillya was a late owl and would fall asleep long after Anton. Most nights she stayed up late, long past the time Anton fell asleep, so she could sneak into her father's journal and learn more about him, his thoughts and their family. During the day she usually did things with Helena and Gretta. She was easily accepted by those she met, but she had disguised herself in this instance as a woman who spoke very little and was not very sociable with others. She had a fence the parishoners thought that kept everyone but Gretta and Helena out. It's not that she didn't like the others or that they disliked her. 'she had built a block around herself because she knew if she started talking in easy conversation her disguise would be shattered.

After a while she sometimes felt a misjudged sense of security. She began to find some peace in not moving and the similar grind of each day tied her down and left her quiet. The candle that had shined so brightly all these years seemed dim and she was having trouble finding her way and figuring out what she still believed in. She wondered about her father. She imagined he had become as fragile as a piece of old parchment paper, that if not carefully treated would crumble and vanish. Truthfully in her heart she believed he was probably dead for in a way she had always thought it was her who kept him alive. She gave him his *raison de etre*, Lillya said not a word about Natasha to either Gretta or William, but after time she became clear as to the type of man her cousin truly was and who her father became

as a result. A lot of anger festered in her older body when she thought back to the missing element of her childhood. She had not needed to be an only child nor lavished with such presents. There was a part of herself that had begun to hate herself for being how she had been and for treating Natasha as the hand maid that she was but shouldn't have been.

She tried to go inside both her father and William's heads at the time, and then she remembered that she had to include her mother for she was culpable too. But when she thought of her mother, she knew her mother was the voice of reason, and what they had done had saved Natasha being put in an uncomfortable position for life.

This way no matter how difficult it was on Lillya, it enabled Natasha to be free.

Then one afternoon Gretta came to the carriage to sew with Lillya and later they decided to take a walk. Before Gretta's arrival Lillya had been reading snippets of her father's journal and had quite come out of that world when Gretta came knocking on Lillya's door.

For a while they laid down the pants and shirts that both William and Anton had that needed to be mended. Both pretended to have normal conversation but there was something that had come between them that neither had been able to speak about. After several hours of sewing they prepared themselves for the outside, each more silent than normal.

Breathing the fresh air, Lillya opened her eyes wider more awake and aware of her feelings. Gretta stared back at her with a look of longing as if she had eaten her words and wanted to spit them out. Finally, she did.

“You know,” she said looking at Lillya as if she believed Lillya would be aware of what she meant when she said this, and Lillya did.

“Yes, I do,” Lillya said solemnly.

“And you have not told William this. Am I correct?”

“Yes, I have kept this to myself. I would say something, but I believe you know most of the story. I am sorry you have suffered so, it would bring anyone pain. It’s hard to imagine your forgiveness, but for me she became the person besides my mother and father and Anton to whom I loved most and counted on more than anyone else. She was my best friend, so my thoughts are mixed. Still, I want you to know I have sympathy for you though I don’t believe that is what you look for. I can’t tell you how I know this, but it has recently been brought to my attention and I assure you I was shocked, but in a way, I wasn’t. There has always been an unusually close bond between myself and Natasha and now I think I understand why. I think she might be in Perm and I would like to try to find her, but I know that would open more wounds for everyone I believe but me so I’m uncertain whether to be selfish or leave things as they are?”

Gretta responded, “We are grown now, Grandmothers and Grandfathers, but I’m not sure if the pain has lessened or if it will be worse.”

“For now I will keep it to myself,” answered Lillya, and they continued their walk in the woods in silence listening to the animals and birds talking to one another trying to measure how they truly felt about the situation but unable to share their thoughts for the wound had just opened and was too new to know how they could live with it again.

For weeks after, Lillya felt like a train that had come to a halt and rusted over. She could barely move and when she did she felt like an old piece of equipment that had lost its meaning and ability to do what it was brought on this earth to do.

The three couples continued to keep each other occupied but a sense of uncertainty seemed to linger in the air. No one seemed to be quite sure as to where they stood.

Helena tried to keep everyone happy. She laughed even at the smallest joke and always tried to bring something good to the table whether it be food or attitude.

Anton just took it as the anxious feeling folks get after being cooped up in a small space staring at the same walls having the exact conversation night after night, not wanting to face the fact that they had come to a state of boredom brought on by their untruthfulness with another. It was as if everything was stuck. But how could they break loose. Finally, Lillya opened her mouth and just blurted out, “I’m going to look for Natasha.” William’s face turned white with shock, Gretta’s face turned

red in anger and betrayal, Anton knew he would stay by Lillya's side no matter what she did. Nikolai gave a look of seriousness knowing that Lillya's venture could lead to trouble for all, and Helena just stood there with a quizzical look, utterly confused not understanding what was happening. It was said, the secret that had been lingering and being carried on the backs of family loved ones and friends had gotten too heavy and there was now no turning back.

"When did you find out and how?" asked William.

Silence struck the carriage house like a bolt of lightning.

Anton stood with a look of surprise wondering, "what is my wife talking about and why didn't I know?"

Lillya looked at Anton with a face full of guilt.

"I'm sorry she said, but I made a promise, one that I can no longer keep."

"I don't understand, Anton said again.

"If you will be patient with me and just listen, the truth will be revealed," Lillya went on.

"Perhaps I should be the one who tells this story as I am the one that caused it,"

William intervened.

"If you don't mind, I'm going to leave," said Gretta. And she silently walked out the door, no goodbyes. She just put on her coat and left.

Lillya knew she had opened a box that had been closed for years and before examining the contents, like an old musty box, filled with cobwebs would have to be gone through and thrown away before they could see what was there.

Helena looked at Nikolai hoping for some look of recognition, that he would have a clue as to what had just occurred, but he looked as unknown as she. Lillya could see she was looking for an answer and broke in.

“To my knowledge, she said, he knows nothing.

William broke in and began to speak. Lillya could tell by the look on his face that each breath he took caused more anguish and the pain just permeated his body and got deeper and deeper and went to the past through all that had transited and what had been done and how he hadn't seen his daughter since she was a young girl and how she had never known him as “father.” Then he looked at Lillya almost pleading for forgiveness. I'm sorry he ended. We did what we thought best and he sat down on the chair next to him and didn't say another word until Anton spoke.

“I hate to say this my darling,” Anton said to Lillya, “but in this political climate it is better that no one know, especially Natasha.”

Lillya in her heart had known this, but being so close to Natasha, being in Perm made it so difficult to accept. She so badly wanted her near and to have one last opportunity to love her like a sister, or a cousin, and declare her as hers.

The truth was out. There was no more to say for now.

William looked at Nikolai and Helena. "I must be a big disappointment to you." He said.

"We all can be, but it is up to all of us to do what we can to correct our mistakes. It is not a time to be selfish rather it is the time to put your best foot forward and learn to become the persons we've always hoped to become."

And with that William walked out the door to try and find Gretta.

New Chapter!

Lillya and Anton unwrapped their many presents one more grand than the other. In some ways it embarrassed Lillya to be surrounded by such grandeur, but the nobles didn't stop. They awarded Lillya with horses and pieces of art from around the world and many times fine bottles of wine and vodka that came from the czar himself, some of which she insisted on sharing with her father. Her notoriety had spread but she could not imagine it crossing a continent, but it did. Little did she know it had made its way to the Cadre Noir and into the ears of her once admirer who by now was so boiled over in anger he would have been unrecognizable to her. He had nothing but smiles and happy thoughts when she had known him as a

girl now he spit fire with most every word especially when news reached him that she had borne a little boy named Vladimir.

He thought about the gypsy woman in the woods that day long ago remembering how his body had been drenched in sweat and he had become delirious. “Did I let her make a curse or was it just a dream?” he often wondered, but then how could he explain the serpents skin resting next to him when he opened his eyes? That day had become such a blur in his mind that he had become unsure, so he washed it out of his thoughts as much as he could. Still, whenever he came upon travelers who had been in St. Petersburg he wasn’t able to stop himself from asking if they had gone to the famed Vronsky Family Circus and had they seen the famous equestrian, Lillya, perform her act and when they said yes for a minute or two he imagined her as he had seen her that first day in the woods in the Loire Valley galloping standing upright on her horses back and he would be taken once again by her beauty and talent. Then reality would strike him again and he would start spitting out words of how Lillya wasn’t as good as she or the people thought. She like that circus was only an illusion. Then he would stomp off leaving whoever he had been talking to completely baffled and confused.

As Lillya and Anton’s child grew older Lillya’s first and only French boyfriend began hearing rumors of her boy, Vladimir. Like his father Anton, he had followed in his father’s footsteps and become an expert at walking the high wire. He had

also been given the prestigious opportunity of attending the Imperial Theatrical School, maybe the most famous schools of its kind in the world. All opportunities he felt should have been bestoyed upon his son, the one he didn't have. But she would get what was due her, he always thought. And when a rumor came to him in the form of a secret note tucked under a silver tea pot with biscuits and flowers surrounding it he thought justice had been served. Lillya had taken a bad fall and the unborn child that she had been unaware of but nonetheless was growing in her belly died. The doctor's comment. Anton was told, "thank goodness she gave you a boy before all this trouble."

Anton didn't know what to say or think. He loved his son, but he also knew he would have equally loved a little girl, especially if she were as pretty and sweet and talented as his Lillya. Anton was just happy he didn't have to make these decisions or uphold these ancient ridiculous rules of inheritance.

Vladimir was handsome and charming. He had a swagger a kind of presence when he walked. A composure, people seemed to focus on him just as he focused on the steps he took crossing the wire to the other side. He was almost magnetic. All the girls were drawn to him at the school they all fell hard for him.

One special girl, whom Lillya would have adored him to choose was her dear friend Katya's daughter, Donatalia, a very talented ballerina who also attended the Imperial Theatrical School, and like her mother had been, she too was also at

the top of her class and would one day be a prima ballerina. However, she was three years younger than Lillya's Vladimir.

It was a very sad story. Lillya felt a special affinity towards this girl for like herself, Donatalia had lost her mother, Lillya's friend, at an early age; much too young for any child! Perhaps that was one reason why Lillya felt closer to Donatalia than many others. They were bonded by the trauma they had each experienced.

***Liking the girl, while at the same time feeling a sense of kinship with her, as they both had experienced terrible losses at a young age, Lillya would go out of her way so that Donatalia would feel less alone and know that she had another woman she could talk to besides her father's partner's another woman she could talk to besides her father's partner's wife, Mary of Savannah, who had been especially kind to Donatalia that first summer. She would invite Donatalia to do things mothers and daughters would enjoy doing together; after all, Lillya had borne a son, but she still liked sharing many girlish things with someone who appreciated her sensibility and friendship.

Lillya could tell by the way Donatalia fidgeted with her hands whenever Vladimir entered the room or spoke to her that the girl had a crush on her son. And she could tell by looking at Vladimir and the way he responded to Donatalia that it was probably true for him as well, but three years was a big difference at that age. Vladimir was getting ready to graduate from The Imperial Theatrical School, and Donatalia hadn't even struck her middle stride. Donatalia was reaching up to the stars, wondering when she'd catch one, while Vladimir was already shining like one. But it didn't stop Lillya from enjoying the offered friendship her son and Donatalia kept, thinking that their crush was unknown to others, when to her it was perfectly clear.

The Czar and Czarina requested that Lillya's son Vladimir and her friend's daughter create a special performance for them and present it on the lawn of the Winter Palace. It would be a private spectacle. Everyone would know about it, which would create a buzz of excitement, but few would be invited to see it. It put Vladimir in an enviable position among his peers and Donatalia, well, just the sight of her became unbearable to many. Girls had spent years waiting for a chance to be chosen to become the "prima" dancer at the school just like Donatalia had waited, too, and she shared with Lillya her

dreams that one day she would represent her county, Russia, like Anna Pavlova or Agrippina Vaganova. Then Lillya remembered that day in the coffee shop when Donatalia's mother told Lilly about the conversation she had with her daughter in this exact same spot about the tea for the Czar and all about Bergamot, the dangerous path the men would travel through China and take just to please the Czar and Czarina. She had heightened her nose and its ability to remember a scent and how special was its flavor and that of the delicate cardamom seed when it fell out of its shell. Like the stories Lillya would later tell. The aroma of her tales was always potent and undeniable. They were the kinds of stories people liked to pass on.

The torches had been lit. Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich started by playing the melody to the empress' favorite song, ---- on his famed flute and everybody began to politely roar and clap their hands. Then the Czar signaled the sign of silence with his hands. Not a sound could be heard other than the sound of their breathing. Anton and Lillya had provided several courtly clowns and two fire-eaters to make the evening more memorable and exciting while the Grand Duke Sergei played a lively melody and the circus tigers Midnight and Satin jumped through hoops

The audience seemed as nervous as she had felt before remembering the story of the tasty pot of tea. Lillya walked out onto the lawn with Anton and was seated next to the Czarina, and when she saw her son walk over to Donatalia and take her hand, soaked in Vladimir's smile, she knew at once that she had been blessed, when the Czarina smiled and nodded her approval. A nod like this from the Palace would open many doors, for not only the children, but for the parents as well.

At the first touch of Vladimir's hand touching hers found Donatalia was no longer fidgety and afraid. Handsome Vladimir, already well known, especially to young people whose hearts he had already won, was there to rescue her and lead the way. Then, like a magician surprising a crowd by pulling a rabbit out of a hat, out of nowhere he took his first step. Astonished by the perfect fluidity of her movement, Vladimir was hypnotized by her ability. The way she picked up each leg and walked, and he watched as she took each step and slowly drifted into what he referred to as the otherworld, for she was gifted in ways he had never witnessed before.

Donatalia and Vladimir moved like butterflies, free in their motion, like young Roman gods and goddesses, telling their story. Little did any of them know what the future hold.

NEW CHAPTER

Lillya was not so secretive anymore about her father's journal. It was clear it was not for anyone but her and the stories it had to tell were written down for her and for her alone. Things at the carriage house got a little more comfortable and routine once again. The teapot's whistle had been heard and its steam was given a way out. Gretta, Lillya and Helena took walks most every day and actually discovered some joy and laughter in their getting to know one another. Helena was the most thoughtful one of the group. She naturally thought of others first. But she was very careful and watchful over what was hers and what she felt she deserved to claim as

hers to stay hers and no one else's. They didn't broach the subject of Natasha very often. She was the written off-limits part of their discussions and conversations. Actually, surprisingly enough to Lillya, Gretta ended up being the most curious, maybe because she had given up the most to stay married to her husband. Every once in a while, she would walk into a room that would fall silent upon her entering and she was rather certain that they were doing this not to hurt her, but to protect her. Then Helena would come over with a big pot of tea and some cardamom cookies and hope that her offering would bring about peace. Nokolai gave his prayers to his parishoners on a daily basis and though the climate in the country had gotten worse, no one seemed to ask very much. William went on oblivious to anyone's feelings but his own and Lillya tried to turn the workhorse she and Anton had brought with them into a "real" horse, missing her riding desperately and all that she had once been. Her identity of herself had become quite blurred. Helena sometimes brought a new friend over to the house whose name was Lana. Lana, not knowing the wall that had been forged between the other three, sometimes left them frozen. The found freedom that Lana innately had none of the others could share in because for them it was as if a giant spider had trapped them in his web and left them wrapped in the lie that had started many years before; and it had become so twisted and ugly that like the spider strengthening its trap, binding them to a life they now had to let go of. How they

would get out of it, Lillya did not know. She approached Nikolai to encourage a private conversation amongst just them two, but when she did, she discovered a layer of anger that she previously had been unaware existed. It made her pull back slightly recoil and lighten their conversation. In those brief moments, Lillya had decided Nikolai wasn't as safe as she had taken him to be. Suddenly the search for Natasha became that much more inparative.

Lana always brought laughter and fun with her but she also came with a certain set of restrictions put upon the other the three other women. Lana's husband, Anton reminded Lillya, didn't wake up worried every morning that someone could take his wife for haaving been born into nobility , talent, beauty, and wealth. She was much more inconsequential and relevant to what was going on in her country, whereas Lillya represented an existence that caused men to fight and give up their lives.

Every once in a while, Anton needed to share a joke and laugh with his wife, add alittle levity to their situation so she would knoq that the man she loved still existed. It was important to both of their well-beings for him to see her smile and tthat she see him smile , too. "It's not your fault," he often had to tell her. Then he would grab her hand as if they were still teens and ogether they would go went down to the creek and splash and play in the cold sparkly blue refreshing water. Their teeth chattering when they got out, they would grab a blanket and dry

each other off. Anton would smile taking in the beauty of his wife and he would tell her over and over, “everything will be fine. You just washed away all your trouble and the fish have gobbled them up.”

Lillya never quit loving Anton’s attitude and spirit. He was her life line to the world, her rock and savior. The trip to the creek only allowed them several minutes in the water, but Lillya cherished those moments as if they were dipped in gold. To be in but still, they were refreshing and helped to wash away her sorrows and past sins. Sometimes, they jokingly referred to it as their family’s baptismal, for Lillya would swim over to Anton and tell her deepest secret of the day and he would gently and lovingly push her head back into the water to wash any bad thoughts she had away and she in turn would do the same for Anton. They wondered what Nikolai would think about them acting as the high priest and priestess of their own lives, but it was a way for them to feel clean not only in their bodies but their thoughts.

Lillya and Anton worried sometimes that Nikolai might draw them into conversations that were better left unsaid. Cutting out just about everything that had meant something to her, her whole life before Kungar, it was harder than Lillya had expected. She didn’t know how to break her identity as what she had done had been what had colored her past and made her different. She was a flower lost in a dark forest, trying to find the last ray of sunlight that was the key to the entrance of

what she had taken to be her life, but now this was real, this was her reality. She was no longer the girl riding upright in her saddle or the one the aristocrats sought to teach them dressage. She wasn't sipping lemonade on the lawn of the Winter Palace with the empress, she was stuck in a small carriage house with the same people day in and day out and she had to force herself sometimes to be grateful. Sometimes she repainted her image of herself inside herself so she could be someone else and find happiness and what was now the truth for her. Helena felt sorry for her because she could only dream of the life that Lillya had led and even dreaming of it was more than she could imagine for herself. But the three women stuck together, took their daily walks, laughed at the same jokes over and over, planted watermelon and artichokes in the summer, and saw the seasons pass from one to another. It had become boring, but it was a boredom they could live with and one they actually treasured because if it was not for this, Lillya felt quite certain, she would have joined the ranks of many of their friends. Her mind wandered, wondering what had happened to many of the people that had gone to that last ball that she had attended with Anton. Where is the duchess now that so freely let the Lord under her skirt while dancing and eating and gorging their bellies, their minds, and their bodies with food, sex, and indiscriminate love? The court had tried their best to help the aristocrats realize that their indulgences were only going to hurt them, but that was more than the court could see or want to see,

and so they went on with their orgies and unrestrained behavior. This civil war between the Reds, the Whites and everyone else who had gotten involved in this fight knew it was based in economics, power and wealth and the way out would be for each of them to be less greedy in all of the above, but Lillya believed it seemed impossible for any of these strong-headed men to come to the same conclusion, see the truth, wear it, and dare the consequences.

New Chapter

Audrey: FILLER STUFF MAYBE FOR LATER IN BOOK?

The light reflecting off her pupils and the deep emerald green that surrounded them, unlike the rest of her exterior sparkled like that of a young girl after her first kiss and revealed that the rumors that had once been spread about her, were probably all true.

The fire with the cast iron caldron on top, spit out flames. They would need them to stay warm and have the soup she was making from weeds she collected that morning and a bone she had stolen from a dog.

Tonight Lillya would sleep once again in an abandoned cabin with two women she had met along the way. If only she hadn't been such a familiar face, then she could have traveled by train or boat, but unfortunately, now it was too risky.

It was safer to travel in numbers. Besides she wouldn't be staying long, none of them would, she told herself.

After gathering more wood for the night and eating what could barely be dubbed as supper, Lillya prepared for a long uncomfortable night. The sofa that would double as her bed, had springs popping through the worn fabric that were just annoying enough to wake her up no matter whatever side she was laying on. Still, as she had

found out the night before, it was better than sleeping with the mice that were scurrying across the planks on the floor below.

Things hadn't turned out as she had imagined, but she spent little time feeling sorry for herself. She had witnessed horrors and here she was still alive holding onto a dream that fueled her body when it had nothing else. However, she did take comfort in knowing her husband Anton, was not here to see her in this predicament.

She grew up surrounded by the upper class and several relatives had married into the aristocracy.

Many of No, she would keep a low profile, and keep on going. She needed to find Natasha. Natasha would know what to do, but she kept that thought to her self.

Her father she had imagined had become as fragile as a piece of old parchment paper, that if not carefully treated would crumble and vanish. It became clear as they came up with their plan, he would stay behind and she thought about all the faces they had known and lost with a great sense of sadness.

***Lillya placed more logs on the fire before curling up on the sofa. There was a distinct chill in the cabin and the women each took turns through the night

attending the fire so they wouldn't freeze. Lillya tossed and turned, then she heard an owl outside the window. "It must be a _____ owl just like the one that lived in the tree outside my bedroom when I was a girl. This led her to think of her father for he would imitate the owl when he came to say his good nights to her and his hoot hoot hoot always made her laugh. "Some owls live to be ____ years old. I wonder if the old owl is still alive? He might be the only one that remains." She smiled because the owl came to say goodbye then night they left on what her father had named, "her adventure." But the owl knew better and came out early that evening and he lift his wing and hooted a fair thy well.

She was a master of disguise. If her years had taught her something, it was how to look like someone else. However it wasn't difficult these days as she barely recognized herself. Hardship, time, and sadness had taken its toll. The wrinkles on her face had dug in deeper and made a permanent home. She named the most pronounced ones after female mythological characters. One she dubbed Athena, for her intelligence and wisdom, another Demeter, for her power over food and plants

and her connection to the afterworld. The deepest crease became Aphrodite, because it was her memories of love that sustained her. Accompanied by these goddesses and great determination, she found the strength each day to lift her right foot up and put it in front of the left. Then repeat the motion with the opposite leg until it resembled walking.

Chapter 2

Lillya's memories kept her going; that and the secret she shared with Natasha. Similar to the town where Natasha was born, Perm, on the western side of the Ural mountain range, their secret was well hidden in obvious plain site. It did not pass Lillya that Kungur was near Perm, the town that Natasha had called home. Lillya was determined to find Natasha once she and Anton got settled and she wouldn't stop until she knew that both she and their secret were safe. Then come spring she would plant the sorts of vegetables that grow near the mountains and

come the warmth of summer she would shed her heartache and in the dirt she would bury all but her own memories, even the ones of Anton that stopped her from moving forward.

On this night like many she dreamed of memories of her friend.

Chapter

Lillya loved the night, for she was not limited by the physicality and realities of the day. At night she could go wherever she wanted to go, and her subconscious was in

charge. To her knowledge her conscious self had very little to say about it and each night came with a surprise.

Tonight

The cold air in the cabin hit her nostrils like smelling salts and she began to awaken.

Lillya started to blink her eyes but she wasn't quite ready to get up. She pulled her coat that had fallen off her during the night back on top of her. It was a cheap but warm coat her husband had bought for her before they left from one of the carney's who in return received a gift more than ten times the coats monetary value in return. The carney didn't ask Anton, why? He simply knew not to turn his back on a good deal.

Lillya looked out the window but it was still dark. Then she heard the rattling snore of one of her roommates that sounded like a volcano erupting and realized it wasn't just the cold that had woken her up. It was nearer to sunrise, but she still had some time before anyone would expect anything from her.

Lillya lay quietly on the sofa and shut her eyes once again. The erupting sounds of the woman snoring represented inactivity in the cabin, and was actually welcome once she had admitted to herself that sleep was over for the night, but it did not

mean she couldn't remain where she was and let herself day dream and return to her childhood.

Chapter 5

The path to Perm was a clear path unlike later years when it could not be found on any of her maps. The directions she followed were simply the description Natasha told her as teenager and much must have changed since then. Lillya wondered if the shack where she was headed even still existed and what made her think that all these years later Natasha would be waiting. Still as children Natasha made her memorize the directions to her house, the one her great uncle on her mothers side promised to leave her.

“Perm is on the western side of the Ural Mountain range on the Kama River. I’m told its’ the prettiest river in our country. Our winters are very cold so be certain to pack your warmest clothes but in the summer be ready for the heat for it gets very hot. Now repeat after me. From the Opera House When you enter the town look for the new opera house. Everyone knows it. From there you will head toward the

mountain range and tell people you are looking for the home of Peter Palitov, the miner. Each person you ask will get you a little closer to his shack, which is located a short distance from his cave. My uncle is a miner.” This will be our meeting place should you ever need one. No one would ever suspect it or come to look for you there.”

“Natasha you’re being silly.” Lillya said.

“You never know what life will bring you, if you are ever in danger you must go there. I will be waiting for you. There is that unspeakable bond between us, I will know.”

Sometimes Lillya had to pull herself from the past. One of the women who had spent the night with her last night decided that she was going in the same direction as Lillya. Lillya was not too pleased, but she didn’t own the forest or the roads and she couldn’t stop the woman from following her. The woman, whose name was Trina would have her uses. She was a good shot and unlike Lillya.

Katrina couldn’t tell Lillya exactly where she was going and why, but the same could be said for Lillya. So in silence they both headed toward the Ural Mountain range Lillya in front with Katrina not far behind her and for now that was good enough.

Lilly didn't have the slightest interest in befriending Katrina, the less she knew, the better. Lillya didn't trust her but then again she had come to trust no one so Katrina was in the company, every one in Russia except Natasha.

Lillya tried to leave Katrina behind several times that first day. But Katrina was nothing, if not cunning and after awhile Katrina began to chip away at some of the stones that made up Lillya's wall, besides as much as she didn't want to admit it, Lillya was lonely. She had always had her father, Natsha or Vvladimir.

"It's easier traveling with Katrina," she began to tell herself, but still she couldn't quite reconcile the uneasy feeling she had in the pit of her stomach. Everyone she ever loved was dead or had vanished. She thought about Natasha and wondered if she was now the wealthy one between them. Natasha's status of maid would serve her better than pampered dilatant who mingled with the nobles and whose great aunt was close friends with a Dutchess and whose uncle had married a widowed baroness. No in this new Russia Lillya's past was something better to keep to herself. She pretended to be Natasha only with a different name, and tried to remember all that she learned about the lower classes who now ruled post revolutionary Russia. However Natasha was tutored like herself by the most notably tutor's of St. Petersburg. Her father had insisted.

Lillya Xena Akinsya Engelhardt was born to a family of great attention. Her father Yuri had inherited the family land and houses and had turned them into a very lucrative estate producing grains, collecting horses for breeding, and a wine cellar that captured the imagination of the most avid collectors. He married her mother Alexandra when she was only 17 and he 20, long before any one, even Alexandra had any inkling of her being sick.

Lillya who had a proper education, in her present predicament listened attentively to Katrina's speech trying silently to imitate each and every nuance, the way she strung her phrases, what subjects or verbs she omitted. In her present disguise she purposely spoke incorrect Russian and filled her speech with the words that only peasants used. Just like them, Lillya couldn't help who she was born too and she did her best to appear as someone other than who she really was. It had become another challenge for the notorious Lillya. "Learn to speak as horribly as you can," she told herself.

Katrina was not very forthcoming herself. She spoke in half truths herself but Lillya found it hard to fault her as her stories seemed to be more truthful than her own. Katrina said that her father worked in St Petersburg and she had been the daughter of a blacksmith, working class. "Business is business," Katrina said her father used to say. "As long as they pay that customer is good enough for me." Then one day a red sympathizer showed up at the shop at the same time as a white

sympathizer and they got into an argument. Young boys and not very good shots when they both drew their guns she was later told, they both missed. However a bullet hit the cast iron pot over her father's fire, boounced off of the pot and went directly through her father's heart killing him on the spot. Both boys blamed it on the other and got into a fist fight before realizing the trouble they could be in and when they heard the policeman whistle they both went running in opposite directions. "No one wanted to take responsibility for the death of the beloved blacksmith," Katrina said. "He was known to be on the side of the paying customer and tried to serve both sides professionally with regard. He was well liked by all." Katrina finished, wanting to add the phrase, "even by your father," but of course she did not.

Lillya assumed an identity that closely resembled Nataha's story. It was the one that she knew best. She was familiar with maids for they had served her all of her life. She took her middle name and used it as her first and borrowed the surname of her favorite butler, Borkovich. Yes, Borkovich was much better than Engelhardt for there was only one Engelhardt in St. Petersburg and he certainly didn't work the fields or clean out the barn or manage the horses. Lillya's new identity, came from months of planning with her husband and father. The evening she left her childhood estate, her heart kept on beating, but everything else seemed to have gotten lost except for her memories.

Lillya smiled at the memory of Anton Sr.'s disguise. They had been planning this for months and after a while her handsome proud husband grew into the man that would do what ever he had to to save her life. Up to this point the soldiers both red and white had let them be. They weren't really aristocrats or nobels. They just associated with the upper reaches but he knew it wouldn't last forever. After all the Englehardt's and the Vronsky's had been very well known in St. Petersburg, considering her family history, that she had been a notorious horsewoman, and she married the famous tight rope walker Anton who had inherited his families circus. "No, too many people know who we are in St. Petersburg. I'm sorry my dear, we have to leave." Anton and her father broke the news to her one Sunday afternoon while she was in the garden. It's not as if she didn't know this was coming, but each day that they put it off was a good day as far as she was concerned. It had been hard enough letting go of her son and never having had the opportunity to meet his wife and family. "Now you want me to give up our home and my father too," she told Anton that night. Though she had known for some time that they no longer had a choice.

They would have to look like different people. Lillya's hair that had always been neatly coiffed and folded close to her head she unpinned and wore it long and wild

as she had as a girl. Anton grew his hair long too and wore a beard down to his chest and covered half of his head with a farmer's hat.

In her satchel she carried several memories of the past; a letter from Anton Jr. mailed to Borkovic, and the journal her father had given her wrapped in an old maid's towel that was now just a rag but looked like the one Natasha used to use.

Better to think good thoughts Lillya reminded herself pulling herself back into the present, and she took out a simple scarf Natasha had given to her as a birthday present and let her hand roam the outside of the jour

because he wore it every day and it fell off of his head, as if just for her the day the Red Army told him to get on his horse, that he was now one of them. They charged their campsite one morning as Anton Sr was making coffee. They called him old man and they playfully kicked him. He didn't speak much. "What do they want with an old man?" Lillya wondered while hiding in the bushes. Finally they got him to mount and it was then she understood. They shot him in the back. It must

have gone straight to his heart for he fell off his horse and hit the ground. Then the soldier laughed.

“I could tell by his hands that he was one of them,” he told one squeamish boy.

“And besides” he continued, “his horse will serve us better than he would have. He gave up his life for the cause. We each must serve as we can.”

Lillya stayed in the bushes until sunset and didn’t make a sound even as they dragged her husband Vladimir’s body and threw it in the river.

“Xenia,” Katrina laughed when she was alone. “Oh how I and most every girl I knew wanted to be her when she was young. She has no memory of me. I was just a dirty child helping my father shoe her father’s horses in their barn.”

But Katrina remembered how Lillya would sparkle when she entered the barn.

Katrina knew Lillya wasn’t true royalty, but her family was close enough.

Sonja had heard rumors of Lillya’s affair and oh how she wished they were friends and she could hear the story from the lips of Lillya, but for now she would just have to find happiness in knowing that the legend of that story was sleeping beside her at night.

**Lillya placed more logs on the fire before curling up on the sofa. There was a distinct chill in the cabin and the women each took turns through the night attending the fire so they wouldn’t freeze. Lillya tossed and turned, then she heard an owl outside the window. “It must be a _____ owl just like the one that lived in the tree outside my bedroom when I was a girl. This led her to think of her father for he would imitate the owl when he came to say his good nights to her and his hoot hoot hoot always made her laugh. “Some owls live to be ____ years old. I wonder if the old owl is still alive? He might be the only one that remains.” She smiled because the owl came to say goodbye then night they left on what her father

had named, “her adventure.” But the owl knew better and came out early that evening and he lift his wing and hooted a fair thy well.