Book

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The Tsarina’s Daughter

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The Tsarina’s Daughter

Ellen Alpsten

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Ded

For my mother, who believed it all to be possible, but did not live to see it happen

Also my Dad, who BELIEVES IN ALIENS

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CAST OF CHARACTEtRS

Elizabeth’s family

Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova, daughter of Tsar Peter the Great and Catherine Alexeyevna, Catherine I of All the Russias.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich Romanov of All the Russias, Elizabeth’s grandfather and the second Romanov Tsar[[2]](#endnote-1)

Tsar Peter the Great of All the Russias; also known as Peter Alexeyevich Romanov, batjuschka Tsar, Peter I. Elizabeth’s father.

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| Ev new | Ev old |

Catherine Alexeyevna, a serf, former mistress and now wife of Peter the Great, later Tsarina Catherine I. of All the Russias. Elizabeth’s mother

Evdokia Lopukina, Peter I.’s first wife, mother of the Tsarevich Alexey, formerly Tsaritsa of All the Russias.

Tsarevich Alexey, Peter and Evdokia’s son and original heir, Elizabeth’s half-brother

Peter Alexeyevich Romanov, “Petrushka” Alexey and Sophie Charlotte’s son. Tsar Peter I. of All the Russias, Elizabeth’s nephew.

Anna Petrovna Romanova, “Anoushka,” daughter of Peter the Great and Catherine Alexeyevna. Elizabeth’s sister.

Regent Sophia Alexeyevna Romanonva, Peter the Great’s half-sister, Elizabeth’s aunt

Tsar Ivan V. of All the Russias, Peter the Great’s half-brother, Elizabeth’s uncle

Tsaritsa Praskovia Ivanovna, Ivan’s widow, Elizabeth’s aunt

Tsarevna Ekaterina Ivanovna, daughter to Tsar Ivan V. of All the Russias, Elizabeth’s cousin

Tsarevna Anna Ivanovna, daughter to Tsar Ivan V. of All the Russias., Duchess of Courland, later Tsarina Anna I. of All the Russias, Elizabeth’s cousin

“Christine,” born Elisabeth Katharina Christine Princess of Mecklenburg, daughter of Ekaterina Ivanovna, later adopted by Tsarina Anna I. of All the Russias and styled Crown Princess, Tsesarevna and Regent Anna Leopoldovna of All the Russias, Elizabeth’s niece.

Tsar Ivan VI of All the Russias, Ivan Antonov, infant son to “Christine,” the Regent Anna Leopoldovna of All the Russias, Elizabeth’s nephew.

Anthony Duke of Brunswick, husband of “Christine,” the Regent Anna Leopoldovna of All the Russias and father to Tsar Ivan VI

The Duke of Courland, husband of Tsarevna Anna Ivanovna

Charles Leopold Duke of Mecklenburg, husband of Tsarevna Ekaterina Ivanovna and father to “Christine,” the Regent Anna Leopoldovna of All the Russias

Karl Duke of Holstein, marries Tsarevna Anna, “Anoushka” Peter and Catherine’s daughter

Augustus Prince of Holstein, a cousin to Karl Duke of Holstein, engaged to Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova

At the Russian Imperial Court

Prince Alexander Danilovich Menshikov (Alekasha), a general in Peter the Great’s army and the Tsar’s trusted friend

Princess Daria Menshikova, wife of Menshikov

Princess Maria Menshikova, daughter to Menshikov, and finance to Tsar Peter II of All the Russias, “Petrushka.”

Feofan Prokopovich, Archbishop of Novgorod, confessor, and advisor to Peter the Great

Prince Alexis Dolgoruky, godfather to “Petrushka,” Tsar Peter II of All the Russias

Princess Katja Dolgoruky, daughter of Prince Alexis Dolgoruky, later engaged to Tsar Peter II of All the Russias, “Petrushka”

Count Peter Andreyevich Tolstoy, courtier and confidant of Tsar Peter the Great of All the Russias and Tsarina Catherine I of All the Russias.

Alexander Borisovich Buturlin, an officer of the Preobrazhensky Regiment, lover, and supporter of Tsarevna Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova

General Ushakov, Head of the Secret Office of Investigation

Maja, the harelipped maid of the Ivanovna family

Semyon Mordvinov, a sailor who carries letters between Anoushka and Elizabeth from Gottorf Castle to St. Petersburg

Prince Avram Volynsky, Russian Ambassador to Persia

Prince Antioch Kantemir of Moldova, Russian ambassador to London

The Europeans

Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony—Peter’s ally and interim King of Poland

Stanislas Leszczynski, King of Poland

Maria Leszczyńska, daughter of Stanislas Leszynski, Princess of Poland. Wife of Louis XV. and Queen of France

Louis XV. King of France

Jean-Jacques de Campredon, French Ambassador to Russia

The Duke of Liria, Spanish Ambassador to Russia

D’Acosta, a Portuguese Jew, and jester of Peter I, Catherine I, Peter II, Anna I and finally Elizabeth of All the Russias.

Liebman, a Jew and Court Jeweler to Tsarina Anna I. of All the Russias

Jakob Schwartz, an Austrian spy, cellist, and music-, and dance-teacher

Count Moritz von Lynar, Saxon envoy, and lover of “Christine” , the Regent Anna Leopoldovna of All the Russias

Julie von Mengden, Baltic baroness, Imperial nurse to Ivan VI. and lover of “Christine,” the Regent Anna Leopoldovna of All the Russias

**Andrey Ivanovich Count Ostermann, original German name Heinrich Johann Friedrich Ostermann**, Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of the Tsars and Tsarinas Peter I

Catherine I, Anna I as well as the Regent Anna Leopoldovna of All the Russias.

Count Melissimo, an Austrian diplomat and engaged to Katja Dolgoruky

The brothers Loewenwolde: Baltic aristocrats and soldiers in the Izmailovsky regiment

Ernst Biren, a groom and stable-boy, also known as de Biron, Count de Biron, Duke Biron of Courland, Regent of Russia: lover and advisor to Tsarina Anna I.

Margarete de Biron of Courland, Birons wife

Charles, Peter and Hedwig de Biron of Courland, their children

Jean Armand de Lestocq, French aristocrat and Tsarevna Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova’s physician

Mrs. Rondeau, wife of the British Ambassador to Russia

Alexander LeBlond, a French architect, and landscaping artist who planned the grounds of Peterhof, the summer palace of Tsar Peter the Great.

At Kolomenskoye

Illinchaya, the childhood nurse of the Tsarevny Anoushka Petrovna Romanova and Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova

Evgeni, the falconer of Tsar Alexis of All the Russias

At the Pecharsky Monastery

Abbess Agatha, a friend of Tsarina Catherine I of All the Russias

Vasilisa, the cook

Alexis Razum, Razumovsky, a Ukrainian shepherd and Soloist at the Imperial Choir of Tsarina Anna I. of All the Russias, Elizabeth’s lover.

In your end lies your beginning. No man shall disappoint you as a woman will. An angel will speak to you. The lightest load will be your greatest burden.

—Prophecy of the Golosov Ravine

Section-Prologuw

Prologue

In the Winter Palace, St. Nicholas Day

December 6, 1741

My little nephew Ivan is innocent—he is a baby, and as innocent as only a one-year-old can be. But tonight, at my order, the infant Tsar will be guilty as charged.

I fight the urge to pick him up and kiss him; it would only make things worse. Beyond his nursery door, there is a low buzzing sound, like of angry bees ready to swarm the Winter Palace. Soldier’s boots scrape and shuffle. Spurs clink like stubby vodka glasses and bayonets are being fixed to muskets. These are the sounds of things to come. The thought spikes my heart with dread.

There is no other choice. It is Ivan, or me. Only one of us can rule Russia, the other one condemned to a living death. Reigning Russia is a right that has to be earned as much as inherited: he and my cousin, the Regent, doom the country to an eternity under a foreign yoke. The realm will be lost; the invisible holy bond between Tsar and people irretrievably torn.

I, Elizabeth, am the only surviving child of Peter the Great’s fifteen sons and daughters. Tonight, if I hesitate too long, I might become the last of my siblings to die.

Curse the Romanovs! I in vain try to bar the prophecy, which has blighted my life, from my thoughts. Puddles form on the parquet floor as slush drips from my boots; their worn, thigh-high leather soaked from my dash across St. Petersburg. Despite my being an Imperial Princess—the Tsarevna Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova—no footman had hooked a bear skin across my lap to protect me against the icy wind and driving snow while I sat snug in a sled; I had no muff to raise to my face in that special graceful gesture of the St. Petersburg ladies, the damy. My dash toward my date with destiny had been clandestine: snowfall veiled the flickering lights of the lanterns and shrouded the city. Mortal fear drove me on, hurrying over bridges, dodging patrolled barriers—the shlagbaumy—and furtively crossing the empty prospects, where my hasty passage left a momentary trace of warmth in the frosty air.

This was a night of momentous decisions that I would have to live with, forever. An anointed and crowned Tsar may not be killed, even once he is deposed, as it sets a dangerous precedent. Yet he may not live either—at least not in the mind of the Russian people or according to the diplomatic dispatches sent all over Europe.

What then is to become of Ivan?

I feel for his limp little hand. I simply cannot resist—never could—nuzzling his chubby, rosy fingers, which are still too small to bear the Imperial seal. We call this game a butterfly’s kiss; it makes him giggle and squeal, and me dissolve with tenderness. I suck in his scent of the talcum powder blended for his sole use in Grasse—vanilla and bergamot, the Tsar’s perfume—taking stock for a lifetime. The men outside fall quiet. They are waiting for my decision that will both save and damn me. The thought sears my soul.

In Ivan’s nursery, the lined French damask drapes are drawn. Thick, potbellied clouds hide the December new moon and stars, giving this hour a dense and dreadful darkness. During the day, the seagulls’ cries freeze on their beaks, the chill of night grates skin raw. Any light is as scarce and dear as everything else in St. Petersburg. The candle sellers’ shops, which smell of bees’ wax, flax, and sulfur, do brisk business with both Yuletide and Epiphany approaching. On the opposite quay, the shutters on the flat façades of the city’s palaces and houses are closed, the windows behind them dark. They are swathed in the same brooding silence as the Winter Palace. I am in my father’s house, but this does not mean that I am safe. Far from it—it means quite the opposite. The Winter Palace’s myriad corridors, hundreds of rooms and dozens of staircases can be as welcoming as a lover’s embrace or as dangerous as a snake pit.

It is Ivan or me: fate has mercilessly driven us toward this moment. The courtiers shun me: noone would bet a Kopeck on my future. Will I be sent to a remote convent, even though I do not have an ounce of nun’s flesh about me, as the Spanish envoy, the Duke of Liria, so memorably described it? I had once been forced to see such an unfortunate woman in her cell; as intended, the sight instilled a terror that would last me a lifetime. Her shorn head was covered in chilblains and her eyes shone with madness. A hunchbacked dwarf, whose tongue had been torn out, was her sole companion, both of them shuffling about in rotten straw like pigs in their sties. Or perhaps there is a sled waiting for me, destination Siberia? I know about this voyage of no return; I have heard the cries, seen the dread and smelled the fear of the banished culprits, be they simple peasants or a Prince of Russia. By the first anniversary of their sentence, all had succumbed to the harsh conditions of the East. Maybe a dark cell in the Trubetzkoy Bastion, the place nobody ever leaves in one piece, will swallow me; or things will be simpler, and I am fated to end up face down in the Neva, drifting between the thick floes of ice, my body being crushed and shredded by their sheer force.

The soldiers’ impatience is palpable. Just one more breath! Ivan’s wet-nurse is asleep, slumped on her stool, resting amidst his toys: the scattered pieces of a Matryoshka doll, wooden boats, a mechanical silver bear that opens its jaws and raises its paws when wound up, and a globe inlaid with Indian ivory and Belgian émaille. One of the nurse’s pale breasts is still bare from the last feed; she was chosen for her ample alabaster bosom in Moscow’s raucous German quarter. Ivan is well cared for: Romanov men are of weaker stock than Romanov women, even if no one ever dares to say so. I celebrated his first year as a time of wonder, offering my little nephew a cross studded with rubies and emeralds for his christening, a gift fit for a Tsar, and put myself in debt to raise an ebony colt in my stables as his Yuletide present.

Ivan’s breathing is growing heavier. The regiment outside his door weighs on his dreams. As I touch both his sides, his warmth sends a jolt through my fingers, hitting a Gold in my heart. Oh, to hold him one more time and feel his delightful weight in my arms. I pull my hands back, folding them, though the time for prayers has passed. No pilgrimage can ever absolve me from this sin, even if I slide across the whole of Russia on my knees. Ivan’s lashes flutter, his chin wobbles, he smacks his pink and shiny lips. I cannot bear to see him cry, despite the saying of Russian serfs: “Another man’s tears are only water.”

The lightest load will be your greatest burden. The last prophecy is coming to pass. Spare me, I plea—but I know this is my path, and I will have to walk it to the end, over the pieces of my broken heart. Ivan slides back into slumber, long, dark lashes cast shadows on his round cheeks and his tiny fists open, showing pink, unlined palms. The sight stabs me. Not even the most adept fortune-teller could imagine what the future has in store for Ivan. It is a thought that I refrain from thinking to its end.

Beyond the door utter silence reigns. Is this the calm before the storm my father taught me to fear when we sailed the slate-colored waters of the Bay of Finland? His fleet had been rolling at anchor in the far distance, masts rising like a marine forest. “This is forever Russia,” he had proudly announced. “No Romanov must ever surrender what has been gained by spilling Russian blood.” In order to strengthen Russia, Father had spared noone. My elder half-brother Alexey, his son and heir, had paid the ultimate price for doubting Russia’s path to progress.

Steps approach. My time with Ivan, and life as we know it, is over. I wish this were not necessary. There is a knock on the nursery door, a token rasp of knuckles; so light, it belies its true purpose. It is time to act. Russia will take no more excuses. The soldiers’ nerves are as taut as the springs in a bear trap. I have promised them the world: in a night like this, destinies are forged, fortunes made and lost.

“Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova?” I hear the captain of the Imperial Preobrazhensky Regiment addressing me. His son is my godchild, but can I trust him completely for that? Suddenly, I feel like drowning and shield Ivan’s cradle with my body. In the gilt-framed mirrors I see my face floating ghostly pale above my dark green uniform jacket; my ash-blonde curly hair has slid down from beneath a fur cap. On a simple leather thong around my neck hangs the diamond-studded icon of St. Nicholas that is priceless to me. They will have to prise it from my dead body to get it.

I am almost thirty-one years old. Tonight, I shall not betray my blood.

“I am ready,” I say, my voice trembling, bracing myself, as the door bursts open and the soldiers swarm in.

Everything comes at a price.

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Spring 1723

Eighteen Years earlier

We had gone to Mother’s palace in Kolomenskoye, as always when we needed safety, solace, and strength. Ever since my elder half-brother, the Tsarevich Alexey, had died, Mother had struggled to give Father, the Tsar Peter the Great of All the Russias, an heir to the world’s largest and wealthiest realm. A couple of weeks prior to our departure, she had been delivered of yet another still-born son.

It was a relief to leave St. Petersburg shortly after Easter: I had hardly known my half-brother, as Alexey had been eighteen years older than I. It felt differently about Mother’s recent misfortune. Still, we had celebrated Easter, the most joyous and sacred of Russian holidays, as usual, by handing out brightly painted eggs to all the courtiers and wishing them well: Christ had risen. While our own plates remained as good as left untouched, we watched them feast on kulich, a sweet, yeasty dome-shaped bread, and pashka, a custard made of cheese curd, almonds, and dried fruit.

When I stepped out of the Winter Palace shortly after dawn, I felt like drinking the cool spring air, to chase away any memory of the long, stuffy, dark months of winter and the atmosphere of dread and sorrow that lingered inside. Morning slid into the dawn light as smooth as a dove’s wing, offering us a first glimpse of the sunrises of summer: a hazy blend of mauve, mustard, and mother-of-pearl. The ottepel,’ or great thaw had begun and already, winter’s stark handover from day to night was beginning to fade; the harsh contrasts softening. No change in Russia comes about easily, not even the shift in the seasons. The ottepel’s strength shocked us anew, year after year, as it made rivers swell and tore open the earth. Our jaded spirits lifted as snow and ice receded, the light lingering longer day upon day for the span of a cockerel’s crow. Sunshine warmed the frozen earth and thawed the frost and rime from our veins, stirring the blood, quickening the heartbeat. The spring winds scattered seeds over the land, bringing with them the promise of fertility; they blew the cobwebs from our minds, rousing Russia from its drowsy stupor.

My sister Anoushka, who was older than me by a year, and I knew Mother’s palace of Kolomenskoye well. We had spent the first years of our lives there, before our parents were married, and each of us was proclaimed Tsarevna, an Imperial Princess. Mother, the Tsaritsa, had always accompanied Father where ever he went, be it in the field of the Great Northern War against Sweden—a struggle for Russia’s survival, which had weighed on our country for almost two decades—or on his travels to the West and all over Europe.

Despite being the Tsar’s daughters, at Kolomenskoye we roamed as freely as peasant children. Our nurse Illinchaya let us run bare foot in the red dust beneath the poplar trees, wearing loose, plain dresses, and fed us soups and stews, staples of a Russian peasant kitchen. Under her watchful eye, we visited the dove cotes of the Tsar’s falconer and reared kittens in spring and picked berries in the forest or swam in clear lakes in summer. We foraged for mushrooms in autumn or played hide and seek in gigantic heaps of rustling leaves. In winter, we went ice-skating and tobogganing, or built igloos and once even a portly snow woman, which looked suspiciously like Illinchaya herself. She had laughed so much at the sight, she coughed and wheezed. Come the evening, she climbed into bed with us—“Come here, my little doves, and tuck your beaks beneath my wings!”—and told us old Russian fairytales, all set in Kolomenskoye, which we were told teemed with evil spirits, beautiful maidens being abducted and strong, young men who saved them. “This is old earth. I have seen these things happen myself,” Illinchaya declared and crossed herself with three fingers, signifying the Holy Trinity of the Russian Orthodox Church.

“I did not get to say good-bye to Father,” I said, as Anoushka and I walked to the carriage. She shook her head at me in a silent warning, her gaze searching the windows of the Tsar’s apartment in the upper reaches of the Winter Palace. The curtains were still drawn; Father slept on after emptying at least two or three bottles of vodka on his own in the evening. A Chamberlain’s bare belly would serve as his pillow. Only the warmth of flesh on flesh kept his demons at bay: he feared sleep ever since Alexey’s death.

“Nobody has seen Father since Mother was brought to bed last, Lizenka,” Anoushka reminded me, calling me by my pet-name. “He had hoped so much for a son. Russia needs an heir. The Old Believers blight his life.”

The Old Believers hated the Tsar for his reforms and the change he had brought to Russia: his ideas touched on every aspect of our private and public life, altering the way we ate, dressed, coiffed, spoke and lived and furnished our houses, as well as re-organizing the administration, academics and the military—starting from the system of conscriptions to founding a navy. Father had twisted the country’s head like a doll’s face, making the people look from the East to the West. His son, the Tsarevich, had been himself the leader of the Old Believers. When my half-brother had been accused of high treason and sentenced to death, the unthinkable had happened. Driven mad by disappointment and fear for the future of his realm, Father had executed his only son and heir with his own hands. Ever since, all mention of Alexey was forbidden.

“I need him,” I said, my voice small. Could I not simply sneak up into Father’s rooms to take leave? No.

“Russia needs him more. Careful, Lizenka. Think of how he treats little Petrushka.”

Petrushka was Alexey’ s young son. Father removed the boy—his only grandson—from his and our lives, tearing our nephew from the family as he would twist a tic from behind his mongrel dog’s ear. Petrushka should not be a pawn in the Old Believers hands. Any chance of him, a traitor’s son, ever ruling, had to be eradicated. No wonder that nightmares plagued Father: the wardens in the Trubetzkoy bastion, where Alexey had died, swore that the Tsarevich’s soul had fled his body in the shape of a crow. The Tsar had called open season on the hapless birds all over his Empire. Farmers caught, killed, plucked, and roasted them for reward. None of this helped him: silently, at night, the bird would slip into his bedchamber. In the cool shadow of its ebony wings the blood on the Tsar’s hands never dried. It could be horrid to witness: he roused the Winter Palace with his screams. Only Mother could soothe him then.

“Let us hope he will be better when we see him in June, to celebrate his names-day,” I said. I was unable to link the terrifying authority of the Tsar, who was tortured by his deeds, to the warm and embracing father, on whose knees I had climbed so his dark, bristly mustache tickled me—“Come here and pull my whiskers’, Lizenka!”-, who had taught me how to lathe a timber plank—“If my hands are busy I have the best ideas!”-, or tack a boat, the force of the winds delighting him: “Keep your head down and hold the rudder tight!”

“Come time, he shall accept God’s will, as always. Now do not dawdle. Get in.” Anoushka pushed me inside the carriage, a gaily painted little house on wheels. Mattresses layered with thick polar bearskins and embroidered velvet cushions had been spread copiously for our comfort, but I loathed the journey: several arshin of ice and snow melting in the thaw had turned the roads to bog. Kolomenskoye lay a good six hundred versty away from St. Petersburg, which would take us only three or four days in the freeze while sitting in big, comfortable sleds, instead of up to two weeks as it would do now. The rivers were swollen and the barges leaky, while the roads were pockmarked with treacherous potholes and deep, muddy ruts. Inside the carriage we bumped into each other like hams dangling in the flue of a smokehouse. Normally these mishaps would make us laugh aloud, shoving each other even harder, breathless with laughter after taking tumbles. Now, though, we sat up again, resuming our former places, sighing, but otherwise in silence. Father had sent his favorite Portuguese dwarf d’Acosta along to amuse us. But after an ill-judged jest in which the imp had shoved a cushion underneath his shirt, moaning and arching his back like a woman suffering from birth pangs, Mother’s lady-in-waiting had slapped and gagged him. D’Acosta cowered in a corner, bound like a chicken for market, cheeks bulging and eyes watering. By the third day, the gag was no longer necessary: he sat as silent and sullen as any of us—Mother, her lady-in-waiting, Anoushka, and me.

As any dacha along the road still lay deserted, we slept in inns. D’Acosta relished using his whip to chase grown men off the gigantic flat oven—whose steady heat warmed the room, roasted the pork and poultry, dried the clothes, and served the inn-keepers family for a bed at night—clearing space for our party. We rarely had our own rooms but stretched out on the rough benches or bedding rolled out on the soiled straw.

“Why can’t we sleep beneath the stars and cook on an open fire? That is what spring means to me,” I whispered to Anoushka one night, curling up close, my body tightly pressed against hers.

“You will have to wait for Kolomenskoye for that,” was the answer. “Mother needs to rest and try to forget her cares. Once she is more settled, you can do whatever you want.”

“I wish!” I giggled, then lay in silence, hoping to feel less sick in a while after yet another supper of kasha—a millet porridge salted and greasy with bacon—or some fermented cabbage, the sauerkraut that innkeepers invariably offered us. At the end of winter, the storerooms and larders were emptying fast, and people scraped the barrel literally. For me, this was yet another reason to look forward to the bounty of spring. It provided Russians with delicacies such as fish, pork, poultry, caviar, mushrooms, berries, and honey, while new crops of rye, wheat, barley and millet allowed for our variety of breads, little pastries and pancakes such as pirogii, pelmeni and blintshiki. At least we moved on quickly: in an inn we could easily change horses. D’Acosta took his pick from the stables, never paying.

What belonged to any Russian, first and foremost belonged to the Tsar.

“After everything that has happened, this will be good for us,” I said, as the six strong horses harnessed in single file before our carriage crossed the vast park surrounding Kolomenskoye, and an endless number of carts followed. They were laden with stout chests secured with chains and locks, holding all our belongings: furniture, rugs, china, crystal, bedding, and chandeliers. The Tsar’s palaces stood empty during his absence, as the risk of fire ravishing them, or else thieves burgling them while the guards lay in a drunken stupor, was too great to leave them fully furnished. Next to our wagon train roamed livestock—cows, goats, chicken, and sheep—to supplement the needs of the Kolomenskoye kitchen. Red dust billowed underfoot, suffusing the last pale rays of the setting sun. Our throats were parched, as the dust passed easily through the mica panes of the ancient carriage’s doors, settling in our pores, eyes, mouths. Hopefully Illinchaya, who now acted as a housekeeper for the palace, still had some of last year’s elderflower cordial left to blend with fresh cool water from the estate’s spring. It was so deliciously refreshing I would have liked to bathe in it.

“Why are you saying this?” Mother looked worn, I noticed, from both her recent blood-loss, exhaustion from the journey; and more. Her beauty, which had once caught Father’s eye, when she was a serf and washer-maid and he the young and belligerent Tsar, had turned lacklustre. The slanted green eyes were dull, her full lips were bloodless, and her maid had struggled to coif her dark tresses, which hung limp.

I sat up defiantly. “We should not silence our sorrows. Feofan Prokopovich told me that it swallows the soul. And isn’t he the Archbishop of Novgorod and the wisest priest in Russia, who always gives Father best counsel?”

“Lizenka is right,” Anoushka chimed in. “We must not fear. We know how much Father loves us all, despite of what he did to—”

Mother lay a warning finger to her lip, reminding us that Father had forbidden to speak Alexey’s name, ever again. “Silence protects, too,” she said. “Least said, soonest mended.” Then, though, her eyes lit up. “Feofan Prokopovich has told me something, too.”

“What did he say?” I asked.

“Come the day of reckoning, I shall have given the Tsar an heir for Russia.” She crossed her arms defiantly, her fingers brushing the deep scars on her lower, inner arms. When I had first seen these gashes some weeks ago, after Feofan Prokopovich had hastily blessed and buried my still-born brother’s small corpse—much too small to go into the earth like that, alone—the wounds’ frightening precision had terrified me. “Why could God not leave me this son?” Mother had wailed, lying in her bed. “Why did he not take another, Anoushka, or you, Lizenka? You are only—girls.” Her lady-in-waiting had ushered me out, whispering: “It is unbearable. The Tsaritsa has lost so much blood that the doctor has forbidden her any further pregnancies. There will be no more son. Pray for her Majesty, Tsarevna Elizabeth.”

“As you say, Feofan is the wisest man in Russia. So not all hope is lost,” Mother pushed Anoushka and me for an answer that should ease this greatest of her worries.

“Of course not. You will give father an heir. We will not stop believing this, whatever happens,” Anoushka said.

“You know what Father says: never give up!” I added.

“My girls. I love your spirit,” Mother said, a hint of pride in her brittle voice.

“Guess, where we get it from,” I said and gently took Mother’s hands so that they no longer cradled her womb.

The carriage rattled on toward the house: finally, we had arrived! The poplar trees growing all around Kolomenskoye were in blossom. The wind-born seeds—the Pukh—billowed in clouds like a snow in spring and hazed the air. It settled like a halo over Mother’s and Anoushka’s dark tresses, as I poked my head out of the window and quickly ducked: the horses kicked up mud and loose stones that could take out an unwary traveler’s eye.

“I can see Kolomenskoye,” I shouted, delighted. “God, it’s been so long. Look! Just look–”

Anoushka and I scuffled for the best view. Moscow was a jumble of brightly painted wooden houses of every size crammed around its thousand churches and their spires. The city coiled around its dark and brooding heart, the Kremlin. Somewhere, a church-bell was always giving tongue in Russia’s former capital, calling for hours of devotion in a long service or else honoring a saint, rendering conversation impossible. The city had grown as rampant as a weed over the centuries, the stronghold of Rus, the territory from which our great country grew. By contrast, in St. Petersburg—Father’s shiny new “paradise”—every street and canal had been carefully planned, copying the best features of cities he had seen and admired on his travels in the West. The itali0an envoy called it “a kind of bastard architecture, which steals from the itali0an, the French and the Dutch.” Palaces, mansions, and houses with elegant, flat facades were strung like pearls along the Neva’s embankments and the dozen man-made waterways. Crossing the city’s streets on a stormy day was like a steeple chase: the wind dislodged any loose tiles, sending them crashing down, narrowly avoiding people, or not, as they ran for their lives, tripping and falling on the uneven, sloppily laid cobblestones.

Kolomenskoye, however, arose as if from an ancient dream: my grandfather Tsar Alexis, the second Tsar of All the Russias in the Romanov line, had built the palatial hunting lodge above the River Moskva. It sat on a ridge like the colorful crest to an undulating wave of green parkland, forests, brooks, and ravines. The ground floor with its stables, storerooms and pantries was built of timber and now crumbling wattle and daub, a mix of bleached clay, sand, and dung. Behind its tiny windows—mere unglazed gaps—, the servants would huddle together with the livestock, bodies and breaths mingling. Bundles of boiled moss still filled cracks in the rendering here and there, but the flaking patches of tar would not keep out the cockroaches this summer. Also, the walls urgently needed new whitewash to prevent wasps building their nests. On the first floor, where we would live, light and a steady stream of draft flooded the house’s rooms through its countless big, ill-fitting windows with proper glass panes, the timber surrounds brightly painted. Yet Kolomenskoye’s roof was the house’s crowning, messy glory, despite its myriad missing slates. It was inspired by the different shapes and styles of roofs throughout All the Russias: be it rising like a staircase, bulging out like onion-shaped Byzantine cupolas, lying hipped and deep-drawn like a Polish cap, or, a finishing touch, piercing the late afternoon sky with sharp spires as pointy as needles

Even Mother pressed herself up to the window: “I love this place especially,” she said. “It was my first own house. When your father gave it to me, I was not yet even his wife. He wanted to reward me for your safe arrival, Anoushka. And just a year later, you were born here, Lizenka, on the day of the big parade after Poltava—”

“-when Father and Russia celebrated his victory over the Swedish devils, under the December stars, born with my feet first, and Illinchaya who brought you chicken-broth to help you recover your strength paled with fear at this sign, while Father threatened to flog and flay her but you pleaded for her life, saying she should not be punished for helping you survive such a difficult birth,” I rattled off. I had heard the story so often that I knew it by heart.

For the first time in what felt like an eternity, we all laughed together—even the dwarf d’Acosta forgot all callous jesting, slapping, and gagging—just as the carriage pulled up in Kolomenskoye’s gravelled courtyard.

2

Clouds of flies descended upon the ponies’ sweaty bodies and steaming heads, settling in black, shiny clusters around their eyes and nostrils. Stable boys swatted them away before lifting off the animal’s heavy tack and leading them away to be rubbed dry, fed, and watered. The coachman wiped his face and eyes clean before climbing off his box; with a sigh he curled up his stiff body beneath the carriage door, and we followed Mother in treading on his back. Once on firm ground, Mother’s lady-in-waiting steadied her by her elbow, while Anoushka and I stretched our arms and stamped our feet. Servants hurried toward us from the house and supplicants already hung around the high, porticoed entrance, chanting their vows of submission, and reaching out to press upon her scrolls containing petitions, which they had paid someone good money to write for them. It was customary for the Tsar and his family to hold public audience upon their arrival in any of the palaces they owned throughout the realm: here they sat in judgment over neighborhood issues, such as boundary disputes or alleged theft of livestock, listened to suspicions about the involvement of sorcery in the cases of fire or famine, granted or refused demands for bigger estates together with the serfs—unfree peasants—attached to them. We heard the people crying out for Mother to heed them: “Tsaritsa!” “Little Mother listen to me–” “No, me first. My eternal devotion—”

“Take the scrolls,” Mother ordered her lady-in-waiting. “I shall decide upon them later once you have read them to me. Believe me, I know how they feel.” Despite Mother’s rise from illegitimately born Baltic serf girl to Russian tsaritsa, she was still illiterate. Father and she had met in his military camp, when she was a Russian prisoner-of-war. We loved to pester her with questions about that moment—What did you wear when you met father? What were his first words to you? When did you know that he loved you?—though her answers remained evasive. The lady-in-waiting collected the papers from pleadingly outstretched, unwashed hands, gathering the petitions in her bunched-up skirt. Before d’Acosta followed her in, he imitated the supplicants, bowing and cowering, before showing them his tongue, and cartwheeling inside the house.

Anoushka and I lingered, while our carriage and the carts were unpacked. The servants moved about like an army of ants; the maids with their arms laden with covered baskets and the men loading the chests onto their backs, muscles straining underneath the threadbare linen of their shirts. The afternoon sun warmed my face, and my body steadied itself after the lurching carriage ride. Now that Mother was safely inside the house, I felt myself bubbling over with joy and anticipation, as if a lid had been lifted from a pot of boiling broth.

“Where is Illinchaya?” Anoushka looked out for our childhood nurse. “Do you think she will already have heated the bathwater?” She tugged on her Persian shawl of soft, embroidered cashmere that was looped around her narrow shoulders and over her flat chest. Illinchaya had on Father’s orders always treated us children to a weekly bath: the copper tub had been filled with steaming water scented with rose-oil, and we battered each other mercilessly with sponges, splashing and screaming, playing Russian and Swede meeting on the battlefield of Poltava. As Illinchaya was nowhere to be seen as yet, Anoushka turned to check on her case of books: spring brought a bevy of merchant ships to St. Petersburg, laden stem to stern with exciting wares such as china, fabric and, yes, novels.

I answered: “Surely. I also hope she has made her special stew—cauldrons of it! Kolomenskoye bacon is better than anywhere else’s and Illinchaya is not as stingy as father’s cook. She cuts it nice, and thick. Will you come with me to the stables first? A cat is bound to have had a litter. Perhaps there is a kitten I can take to bed with me.”

“I will have no smelly little thing in my bed. And you’d better stop this nonsense,” Anoushka warned me, but laughed all the same. “Very soon, you will have to tend to someone other than a kitten in your bed. Do you think the King of France will enjoy sharing his silken sheets with a hissing, scratching ball of fur?”

The King of France. I rolled these words in my mind like marbles, feeling myself blushing, which enhanced my already high color. Father had offered Versailles my hand in marriage when I was a child. It seemed a perfect match—young King Louis XV and I were of similar age—but France would give no firm answer, letting us wait, and hope. This silence worried me less than what the jester d’Acosta had told me: the dwarf swore that Louis wore more paint than any lady at my parents’ court, as well as acres of lace in his jabot. I checked my unlaced, dusty cotton dress, which was crumpled from the journey and fell loose and comfortable to my feet but clung flatteringly in all the right places thanks to my ample cleavage. Surely it would not withstand the scrutiny of the young King of France and his Versailles courtiers, who were said to change their clothes five times a day. Why not swap tailors, if they were so unhappy? At least the dress’ cornflower blue color flattered my eyes and my blonde curls, which were braided and wrapped around my head for travel. My maid kept my hair shiny and luscious by a regular treatment with egg-yolk, camomile, and beer. That was not my only beauty remedy: a blend of kefir from the steppes and preserved lemons, which Mother ordered from Italy, ensured that our skin was soft and clear. Perhaps Louis would not need quite so much face paint if he tried it, too?

“Better a small and smelly kitten than a big, hairy man. I would be scared to death to be in bed with him if he were like that,” I giggled nervously. “What might he wear?”

“A nightshirt?” Anoushka guessed.

“What? Like mine? Silken and lacy?”

“Well, it might be a different nightshirt. Men are different, aren’t they?”

I hesitated. “They ought to be. But different in what way?”

“I don’t know,” Anoushka admitted.

“Well, I shall stick to kittens, until Father has a firm answer from Versailles,” I shrugged, pretending not to care. In truth, the years of silence that had passed since my portrait had been sent to France were insulting, although the painter Caravaque, who also took Anoushka’s likeness, had been besides himself with compliments: “Mon Dieu. Your eyes are as lively as a bird’s!” “That skin, that bust, that golden hair—just marvelous! Merveilleux-!” We had copied him and skipped through the corridors, chanting MonDieuMerveilleux. Even the French envoy to Russia, De Campredon, was in favor of the match: in his letters, which the Secret Office of Investigation read and resealed, he described me as “Christianity’s most lovely princess,” possessing “The warmth that made the Tsar marry her mother,”—which was to me a rather puzzling comment.

Anoushka’s smile lit up her normally serious face: “No news is good news. In the end, the beautiful princess always gets her knight in shining armor.”

I was grateful for her uplifting words. What should I do without her once I left for France? “In your books, yes. But does it happen for real?”

“You surely don’t doubt it. Things tend to go your way, Lizenka. Almost magically so. You know that. I can read your thoughts.”

“Ah. So, what is it I am thinking right now, then?”

“You are wondering if Grisha the blacksmith’s big bellow are still in the stables. The ones we used as a seesaw?”

I held up my hands. “You have won. But I can’t play on them on my own.”

“Are you trying to corrupt my immortal soul?”

“Yes, sinful as I am,” I giggled, and snapped my fingers at her maids. “Take the Tsarevna Anoushka’s books to our rooms. The latest love-story from Italy must wait. First there is some urgent bouncing on bellows to be done.”

“It will destroy my hair-,” Anoushka moaned.

I lunged to ruffle up her dark straight hair, which had been braided and rolled in coils at the sides of her head. “There. No need to worry now. All done,” I kissed her cheek, and pulled her along.

We crossed the vast vegetable garden that lay between the kitchen and the stables. Onions, leeks, turnips, beetroots, and cabbages grew among a lavish carpet of weed that spoke of seasons of casual neglect: everywhere, clover and daisies blossomed already, and the bees were busily taking advantage of every minute of the longer days, gathering pollen for the delicious Kolomenskoye honey I loved to spoon in thick dollops on my kasha. I breathed in deeply, enjoying the fresh air. Come spring in St. Petersburg, the Neva flooded its banks and all the blossom of the scented plants that Father had ordered far and wide from France to Persia could not blot out the musty smell that reigned once the water receded. It blended with the whiff of rotten market leftovers and clotted blood on the gallows, which as a warning to the Russian people were habitually situated on all the busiest squares and crossroads.

“What is this?” I asked, stopping at a big stone just outside the kitchen door. At the back entrance to the palace the cook welcomed deliveries during the day, while at night thieves among the household servants sold off their loot.

“That is where the kitchen maids whet their knives. Look, the stone is all chipped and pock-marked,” Anoushka told me

“I know that,” I said impatiently. “But why is there a plate with pancakes and sour milk set on top of it?”

“Already hungry again? Hold yourself back,” Anoushka teased me. The thick pancake was dripping with honey; just add a sprinkle of nuts and it would be perfect for me after the long hours on the road!

“You should have some, beanpole!” I countered, and we started to tussle together, giggling.

“Yes, girls, hold yourselves back! This is an offering.” Mother appeared on the kitchen threshold; her pale cheeks were already flushed with faint color now that the endless lurching was over. She lacked all airs and graces, moving about as casually as if she were still a serf living in a tiny Baltic isba, owning nothing but the clothes on her body. “Don’t you know that the Domovoi rules the woods of Kolomenskoye?”

“The Domovoi?” I asked, still eying the pancake, and remembered one of Illinchaya’s fairy stories. “The spirit of the woods?”

“Yes. His heart breaks with every tree that is felled. Imagine the forest that had to give way for Tsar Alexis to build Kolomenskoye here. Illinchaya wants the Domovoi appeased,” Mother said. She was smiling at the housekeeper’s belief in old myths and fairytales. Seeing her like this, my mood soared: Mother would surely be able heal here, and she might even have another son, despite the doctor’s gloomy verdict.

“Indeed! I appease all spirits!” Illinchaya appeared behind Mother. “Kolomenskoye is old earth and alive with them.” My heart leaped when I saw her. Despite the years that had passed, and in which Anoushka and I had turned from little girls to young women, our childhood nurse she seemed unchanged. Her cheeks were red-veined, and her broad face flushed; she seemed out of breath from climbing just two or three shallow steps. Her clothing brazenly defied Father’s laws. He had ordered all Russians to dress in the style of the West, even though such clothes were tight and uncomfortable and their thin, cheap cloth was not woven to withstand our weather. Illinchaya wore a long-sleeved linen blouse and a traditional apron dress, the wide, warmly quilted sarafan, which she had adorned with intricate floral embroidery. The patterns were like a secret language in Russia. The women of each family had their own, filling long winter evenings with perfecting that beautiful craft, while sitting around the warm oven, chatting.

“Old earth alive with spirits?” Anoushka said, her face flushed. “Oh, I remember your fairytales about the witch Baba Yaga, whose house is built from chicken bones! It rests on three pillars and spins with the sun. Then there are the Leshy, mischievous rascals, who lead people astray with their prophecies—”

“These are not fairytales,” Illinchaya frowned.

“Old earth? What rubbish,” laughed d’Acosta, suddenly appearing from behind Mother, as always sliding in and out of places in the blink of an eye. “Silly superstitions, invented to torment the peasants’ so as to squeeze the last kopeck from them.” He raised his caterpillar eyebrows at Illinchaya and made the coins rattle in his pockets, like a bear-baiter taking wagers at a spring fair.

“Silence, imp,” Illinchaya scolded. “I must properly greet the Tsarevny!” She curtsied deeply to us, kissing our fingers, and pressing the back of our hands to her forehead, while murmuring blessings; her ruffled cap, which covered her white-blonde hair, brushed my wrist. She rose, smiling broadly, showing her dozen or so remaining teeth: “Anoushka Petrovna and Elizabeth Petrovna: welcome back to Kolomenskoye. It is for the saddest reason that you come—may God have mercy on another of your brothers’ little soul—but the house, and all of us, greet you with love and loyalty.”

Anoushka and I swapped a quick glance—normally, noone dared spell out Mother’s misfortune in having buried six sons altogether, some straight after birth, others living just a couple of years. Yet Illinchaya’s years of service and utter lack of malice excused a lot, and so we rushed forward to embrace her.

She clapped her callused hands and spread her strong arms, exclaiming: “Finally! The day you moved away from Kolomenskoye, to be grown up and important, you took my soul with you. Oh, I might burst with joy!” Then she clamped us in an embrace like a vice, and we had to struggle free, giggling, as we had done as little girls, when her affection had grown too much for us to bear. Illinchaya dabbed at her narrow, light blue eyes, which spouted tears. Like many Russians of Finnish descent, she was almost uncannily pale and fair. “How tall and beautiful you are. If my eyes do not recognize you any longer, my heart always will. Soon, I pray, I will cook a feast for your weddings.”

“Oh, I wish that could be so,” Anoushka said, shyly eyeing Mother, who smiled enigmatically and answered: “Who knows what the future holds for my lucky girls.”

At that I could not stop my eyes from welling up in tears. Mother turned to me, surprised: “What is it, Lizenka?”

Anoushka put her arm around my shoulders, full of silent understanding.

“I am just so glad that we are all together. All will be well again. I know it,” I cried, before we all began to sob and embrace: Anoushka and me, Tsarevny of All the Russias, my mother, the Tsaritsa, and Illinchaya, the cook, holding each other close, while d’Acosta sunk on the stone next to the pancakes, lamenting out loud in the fashion of his Mediterranean people, bleating away, all snot and tears, his funny little face scrunched up.

Already, the magic of Kolomenskoye’s old earth wove a bond of ease and simplicity between us, a thousand threads to its loom, sanctified by our shared sorrow and suffering. Our tears were as much of an offering to peace and friendship as the pancakes on the whetting stone had been. Mother was right—we were lucky to be back here. For how often in life do pancakes, honey and sour milk suffice to appease an evil spirit?

Authors note

Author’s Note

The sixteen years from 1725 to 1741, between Peter the Great’s death and the palace-coup of his sole surviving child Elizabeth, count among the most complicated in the Russian history, which is rich in complications indeed. The country—the world’s largest and wealthiest realm—was torn apart by various opposing forces. Many of Peter the Great’s reforms had been devised, but were neither skilfully implemented, nor fully achieved. For the two years of her reign, his successor Catherine I. preferred a policy of alliances and treaties, keeping the Empire in a fragile balance. Both their opponents—the Old Believers—came to power during the brief, three-year long reign of young Tsar Peter II, who succeeded Catherine I. Before their influence could fully reverse Peter the Great’s reforms, his niece Anna I. was crowned Tsarina of All the Russias. She and her ambitious lover Ernst Biren gave Russia’s Westernisation an altogether different spin, placing the realm under a decade of German governance, the so-called cursed age of the Bironyshkchina. At Anna’s death, Ernst Biren, the former groom, soi-disant de Biron, appointed Count of Russia, Prince of Russia and the sovereign Duke of Courland, was actually briefly appointed Regent of Russia for Tsar Ivan IV, an historic fact I omitted for the sake of simplicity and the novel’s structure.

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Elizabeth Petrovna Romanova, Peter the Great’s only surviving child, seized power in a palace coup and declared herself Tsarina of All the Russias on the morning of 6 December 1741.

The reigning infant Tsar Ivan VI was imprisoned in the Schlüsselburg, where he lingered for more than two decades. During a conspiracy to reinstate him at the beginning of the reign of Catherine II “the Great” of Russia, he was stabbed by his guards. His parents and siblings were kept under house arrest; once released and allowed to leave Russia, they were unable to resume a normal life. Elizabeth ruled Russia for twenty years as a contemporary of Frederick the Great in Prussia and Maria Theresa of Austria.

Count Andrej Ivanovich Ostermann, a priest’s son from the German town of Bochum and Vice Chancellor of Russia, was condemned first to be broken on the wheel and then beheaded; yet true to her promise never to sign a death warrant, Elizabeth spared his life while subjecting him to the horror and humiliation of a mock execution. His only sign of emotion on the scaffold was a slight tremor in his hands as he readjusted his wig. He and his family were exiled to Beresov in Siberia, where he died six years later, in 1747.

Ekaterina (Katja) Alexeyevna Dolgoruky survived her banishment to Siberia. In 1741, Elizabeth appointed her as a lady-in-waiting. In 1745, she married Lieutenant General Count Alexander Romanovich Bruce. She died of a cold in 1747.

Ernst Biren, the groom turned Count turned sovereign Duke of Courland, escaped the jaws of the great She-bear of Russia: Elizabeth recalled him from Pelym in Siberia, offering him an estate and serfs. Biren re-emerged in 1762 when the Germanophile Peter III of Russia summoned him back to court. In 1763, Catherine II “the Great” of Russia re-established him in his Duchy of Courland. The last years of his rule there were just, if somewhat autocratic. He died in his palace in Mitau in 1772. The princely family of Biron of Courland prospers to this day.

Moritz Karl Count Lynar was about to commit to being the full-time lover of Regent Anna Leopoldovna—Elizabeth’s cousin Christine—when Elizabeth’s coup cut short his ambition. His link to Russia remained: the descriptions of him as an “utter fop,” worried about his fair complexion, impregnating countless women and always clad in pastel shades, are taken from Catherine the Great’s diary. Lynar died childless.

Julie von Mengden, a Livonian baroness, was the lady-in-waiting and lover of Christine von Mecklenburg, the Regent Anna Leopoldovna and engaged to Count Lynar to hide their scandalous ménage à trois. She devotedly followed Regent Anna Leopoldovna (Christine) into house arrest and imprisonment but was released by in 1762. She followed her lover to Denmark.

Alexander Borisovich Buturlin, Elizabeth’s supposed first lover, is here merged with Alexis Shubin, another of her passionate affairs, who was first brutally maimed, then stationed in Kamchatka. At her accession, Elizabeth recalled Shubin; he lived a long, prosperous life on a vast estate. Buturlin went on to be a general in her army.

The characters of the Prince Alexis Dolgoruky, the godfather of Petrushka—young Tsar Peter II—is an amalgam of several princes of this vast, conniving family, which was as good as extinct by Tsarina Anna Ivanovna and Count Ostermann. Added to his character was the Prince Mikhail Golitsyn, who actually suffered as a birdman in a cage for the better part of a decade, and who was the groom at the famous Ice Palace wedding. His crippled Kalmuck wife and he had several children together.

Jan d’Acosta was a Portuguese Jew and court jester, “thanks to a funny figure, knowledge of many European languages and a gift to make fun of all and everything (common to the Jewish tribe),” as the historian Shubinsky writes. D’Acosta’s fate beyond Anna Ivanovna’s reign is unknown.

Jean-Armand de Lestocq: the French physician and adventurer went on to wield enormous influence on foreign policy during Elizabeth’s early reign. In 1748, however, he was accused of plotting in favor of her nephew. Lestocq was tortured and sentenced to death. Elizabeth, however, spared him and had him exiled. Only upon her death was Lestocq restored to his estates and allowed to return to the Russian capital.

Despite supposedly secretly tying the knot with the love of her life Alexis Razumovsky, a former Ukrainian shepherd, Elizabeth remained officially unmarried and never had children. Instead, she named her German nephew, Karl Peter von Holstein, Anoushka’s son, Tsarevich. He abhorred Russia and would have preferred the Swedish Throne; as a staunch supporter of Frederick the Great, he was happy to be engaged to a young German princess: Sophie Frederika von Anhalt-Zerbst. Elizabeth baptized her in the Orthodox faith as Catherine Alexeyevna. She was later to usurp her husband’s throne and to rule Russia as Catherine the Great.

The Golosov Ravine located near the Moscow River and the former tsarist palace of Kolomenskoye has several springs and a brook running through it. It is home to a neo-pagan shrine and associated with legends about time travel and magical woodland creatures.

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Acknowledgments

The Tsarina’s Daughter had a bog pair of shoes to fill. If it takes one author to write a novel, it takes a global village of an outstanding team of publishers, editors and agents to make Elizabeth’s development from ingenue to a woman who does not shy back from taking a hard—if not the hardest!—decision come to pass. So many people were involved making me write the best novel I can! Many thanks to everybody involved at Curtis Brown: my agent, the amazing Alice Lutyens, for whom nothing is ever too much and who always finds the right encouraging word, while keeping her eye on the pie, as well as tech-savvy and fun Sophia Macaskill and the energetic Foreign Rights Team at Curtis Brown: Sarah Harvey and Jodi Fabbri. In New York, I am grateful to the elegant and capable Deborah Schneider of Gelfman Schneider / ICM Partners for her patience and belief in The Tsarina’s Daughter. My gratitude goes to the team at Bloomsbury London—my intuitive, passionate and wise publisher Faiza Khan, who is as much in love with strong women and the early Romanov era as I am, as well as enthusiastic and organized Managing Editor Lauren Whybrow and the eagle-eyed copy editor Lynn Curtis. Also, I know that once more Philippa Cotton, Laura Meyer and Rachel Wilkie will do their PR & Marketing magic for “my girl” Elizabeth. In New York, thank you to the team at St. Martin’s Press, above all Charles Spicer with his knack for adding conflict and drama in a manuscript, Sarah Grill for her steady, spirited support and Dori Weintraub and Marissa Sangiacomo for their haute couture attitude to Marketing and PR. Thank you, too, to Literary Scout Daniela Schlingmann, a woman of the first hour, for spreading the word further. Thank you to the Petersham Writers Circle, in particular my fellow author Emma Curtis, as well as Editor Patrick Newman, who reliably keeps the “Germanometer” of any first draft as low as humanly possible. Last but not least thank you to my sons Linus, Caspar and Gustav, who adopted Elizabeth Petrovna Romanov as their honorary sister for more than a year, even though they are yet to read one of my novels. Thank you, Tobias, for stoically taking any quips about “lots of method writing happening in this household!”

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1. General test

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2. Here’s an endnote with confusing stlyes!

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   A nice dedication [↑](#endnote-ref-1)