man in his mid-seventies who expected to die at any minute. "The Emperor cannot see that the candles have already been lit around my coffin," he remarked on his appointment, "and that the only thing required to complete the ceremony is myself." He likened himself to an old fur coat that had been packed away in camphor and was being taken out now merely for the occasion. He was cynical, read French novels and watched "Piccadilly weepers" at the theater, and was often found asleep in his office. The court marshal, Count Paul Benckendorff, said that the tsar "neither wanted nor expected him to do anything."

To appoint a half-dead premier in a stable country would have been remarkable. To do so in turbulent Russia, menaced by foreign war and internal revolution, was utter folly. It was shared by husband and wife, and by the starets. For Nicholas, Goremykin seemed an ideal, a throwback deep into the autocracy of the previous century. "I am a man of the old school," Goremykin said without shame, "and an Imperial Command is for me a law. To me, His Majesty is the anointed one. . . . When the decision of such a man is made . . . his faithful subjects must accept it whatever may be the consequences. And then let God's will be done." This attitude delighted the empress, who called him Old Man with affection. "He sees and understands all so clearly and it is a pleasure speaking to him," she said. Goremykin's wife was an admirer and visitor of Rasputin's. She supplied him with boiled potatoes delivered from her kitchen with such speed that they had no time to get cold, and with fish soup, apples, and croissants. "She knew how to cook potatoes ten different ways," Simanovich said, "and in this way she really won Rasputin's favor."

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Rasputin and Prince Andronnikov worked closely together. The prince sent flowers and candies to Vyrubova, while Rasputin's flattery of Goremykin was underpinned by pamphlets Andronnikov wrote in French and Russian to praise the premier's policies, and by gifts of cigars and pheasants. An "infinite number" of requests were satisfied. Distillers and sugar manufacturers won state subsidies, bankers were given oil concessions, civil convictions were quashed together with "appointments, transfers, pensions, awards from all the institutions, and so forth."

The starets moved into a new apartment at 64 Gorokhovaya ulitsa. Simanovich and his contacts paid the rent. The street was in the western section of the city, running from Admiralty Square to Zagorodniy Prospect. The dull brick facades were streaked with dirt and soot, and it had a dark air to it; the long overcoats worn by plainclothes police agents were called Gorokhovoyo coats. The murderer in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot*, Parfyon Rogozhin, had lived in one of the suviving old buildings on the street, a large, gloomy, three-story house, dirty green, hiding in a dark corner, with thick walls and few win-

dows. Newer apartments had been built since for tradespeople, successful clerks, and minor officials.

It was handy to the railroad station to Tsarskoye Selo, and Number 64 had two entrances. The building had double doors on the street leading to a dank courtyard. The main staircase led past the doorman and the concierge's room up to the apartments; a back staircase led discreetly from the courtyard. The common parts smelled of cabbage, hot sheep's cheese, and black tobacco. Rasputin's flat, Number 20, was a walk-up on the third floor. It had five rooms and a kitchen. The hall led into an anteroom and a corridor with rooms off it. On the street side there were a dining room and Rasputin's bedroom and bathroom. He rarely used the bathroom, preferring to go to a bathhouse across the street.

No one was admitted to the bedroom when Rasputin was not alone there. It was a room, a police agent said, that could "tell many tales . . . disheveled petitioners of the lower classes ran from the room screaming, cursing, and spitting, while attempts were made to pacify them and get them out of the flat." Okhrana agents were posted outside the concierge's room and in the street, from where they had occasional glimpses of Rasputin's activities. Akulina Laptinskaya, Rasputin's "secretary" who helped him move into the new apartment, liked to entertain him in the bedroom with the curtains undrawn. "Owing to the absence of blinds," an agent noted, "her erotic exercises with Rasputin presented an attraction for the street." On the courtyard side was the large room used for receptions. The furniture was heavy and bourgeois, stout wooden chairs, overstuffed sofas, a wooden table. Here he held court. His study was next to it, the kitchen, and the rooms of his daughters and maid. His telephone number was 646-46.

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The mood in the city changed during Lent. "Absolutely no one wants war or adventure," Count Benckendorff wrote, "but the feeling that war is inevitable has grown and grown in all classes." Men in long brown coats scattered yellow sand on the sidewalks and set bonfires to thaw the ice. In late March the frozen river broke with cracks like pistol shots, and icebreakers churned through the blocks of ice. Then, at last, the guns fired from the Peter and Paul Fortress, and its commandant met the city governor in midstream to proclaim the river open to navigation. Tugs towed landing stages to fix in position on the docks for the passenger steamers. It was spring.

Rasputin hoped to celebrate by seducing a provincial lady, Vera Alexandrovna Zhukovskaya, who had come to Gorokhovaya ulitsa seeking spiritual advice. She was shown into his study by the maid-mistress Dunia. A bed was against the wall covered by a shabby silk coverlet, a washstand next to it, and a

lady's writing desk, with some pencils and dirty pens and a gold watch with the double-headed Romanov eagle engraved on it. A table and two chairs were in the middle of the room. A lady's vanity table with a mirror was in front of the window. A large photograph of the altar of St. Isaac's Cathedral was next to it, pinned with ribbons—she remembered that the khlysty also put ribbon-encrusted icons next to windows.

Rasputin came in. He pulled up a chair opposite her, close enough for him to put her legs between his knees. "What good things have you to say to me?" he asked. She replied that there was little in life that was good. He stroked her face, and replied, "Listen to what I am going to say to you. Do you know the psalm 'From my youth up the lusts of the flesh have tormented me; Lord Jesus Christ do not condemn me therefor'? Do you know it?" She said she knew it very well.

He pressed her knee firmly and told her he would explain. "I tell you that people may sin up to the age of thirty; but then it is time to turn to God, do you see?" he said. "And when you have once learned to surrender your thoughts completely to God, you may sin again, for that is sin of a special kind—do you follow? And as far as sin generally is concerned, you can be freed from it again by repentance. Only repent of everything, then everything is good again." He asked her to go to communion. She refused. He began stroking her hands and shoulders. She would not understand his words, he said; she had to be convinced by deeds. "Only come to me often, little honeybee, love me and then you will understand everything. Love is the most important thing." As long as she was a stranger to him, she would ignore his words; once she loved him, all would be clear. He kissed her on the corner of her mouth, so rapidly and simply that she could not object.

The telephone rang. He went to answer it. "Now I shall not let you go again," he said when he returned. "Once you have come to me you will not escape again! Understand clearly, I will do nothing to you, only come, my juicy cherry." He asked her for her telephone number. While she wrote it down he squeezed her shoulders and whispered into her ear, his breath warm: "Well, and what more have you to say to me?" She was repelled and pushed him away. "I came to you so that you could give me advice," she said. "You know well, don't you, where the truth is and where sin is?" He told her about his friendship with Grand Duchess Militsa—it was a name he dropped often—and how she also asked about sin and did not understand it.

"Only he commits sin who seeks sin," he said. "But in him who merely passes through it, sin has no part. If you like, I will show it all to you. Go next week to communion, and then come to me while you still have Paradise in your soul. Then I will show you sin, so that you will not be able to stand on your feet!"

"I don't believe that," she gasped, feeling remote and incredulous. He whispered, like a magician, his mouth open with lust: "Do you want me to show you?"

He had gone far enough; in an instant he changed and his eyes became "kind, friendly, and passionless." He asked her gently and with assumed surprise, "Why do you look at me like that, my darling?" He kissed her with "priestly dignity." In place of the khlyst—insistent, lascivious, seeking out weakness—she saw an honest peasant with meek eyes. He got her to promise that she would return on Saturday evening.

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On Saturday she was shown into the dining room, crowded with women and a nervous young man in a morning coat, von Pistolkors, whose pregnant wife gazed at Rasputin with devotion. Madame Golovina acted as hostess and kept the conversation going. Her daughter, Munya Golovina, wore a thin silk dress and a white hat with violets; she also had a look of submissiveness. Vyrubova was there, big, full-figured, and blond with a bright red, sensual mouth and a face that was "equivocal, deceptive, and at the same time seductive." The Grand Duchess Militsa sat with her hands in an ermine muff; she was dark, her black eyes sad and lifeless, and she was silent.

Rasputin passed the women boiled eggs from the mess of food on the table—tarts, bowls of fruit, peppermint cakes, black bread and gherkins, a bottle of wine. They grasped them eagerly. Vyrubova passed him some bread and gherkins, which he ate with his hands, wiping them on the tablecloth before pawing his guests. He talked spasmodically about the church and the clergy—"I cannot exactly swear that I love them particularly but there are believers even among them"—and warned them that Olga Lokhtina was coming. She had missed the way, he said, and broken away with Iliodor, but he was sorry for her—"the mad bitch."

She arrived on cue, "improbably bright, broad, pale pink, puffy, disheveled, absurd," shrieking, "Chr-i-st is ri-s-en!" She wore pleated skirts of different colors that swooped like wings as she staggered around the room. Beneath them she had a pair of old boots Rasputin had discarded. She wore a Siberian wolfskin cap, which Rasputin had also worn, and one of his cast-off red peasant blouses. Little bags were strapped onto her shirt, with scraps of food and old gloves that had belonged to him. Her face was covered with veils pinned with gaudy ribbons; only her "delicate, sad, and beautiful mouth" could be made out.

She had brought Rasputin a cake—"white outside, black inside"—which he tossed back onto the table. At his rejection she took his head and kissed it wildly, stammering, "Oh my dearest . . . vessel of all blessing. . . . Ah, you

lovely beard. . . . You delicious hair . . . me martyr . . . you my adored one . . . my God . . . my beloved!" Rasputin, half-choked by her embrace, snarled at her: "Away! Satan! Away, you devil, you monster!" She redoubled her incantations: "And yet you are mine, and I have lain with you. I have lain with you. . . . You are my God! I belong to you and to no other. . . . However many women you take, no one can rob me of you. You are mine!" Rasputin snapped at her—"I hate you, you bitch, the devil is in you"—and threatened to break her jaw. It had no effect. "I am happy, happy, and you love me," she said, her ribbons and frilled skirts shaking. "Soon I will lie with you again." He pushed her, and she shouted: "Now, strike me! Strike me, strike me!" She was frenzied; the onlooking women felt chilled and afraid. When Rasputin hit her on the chest, she tried to kiss the spot, but her chin prevented her and she ran around kissing the air, kissing her hands, and kneading her breasts. Eventually she calmed down and lay on a sofa.

When Zhukovskaya asked Rasputin why he insulted the crazed woman, he replied—kindly again—that she had deserted the church. The other ladies had remained silent, their eyes veiled from the hysterical scene, though their faces were red and their breath came in gasps. Then Madame Golovina turned to Lokhtina, saying, "I cannot understand why you deliberately make Grigory Efimovich angry." Lokhtina demanded soup; she said she had eaten nothing all day and had given the last of her money away to her chauffeur. Munya Golovina fetched her a bowl of soup. Rasputin told her to take it away, but she persisted. "What are you doing?" her mother asked her. "Why do you anger Grigory Efimovich?" Her daughter whispered, "Mama, please let me alone, say no more about it."

The telephone rang at intervals, and Rasputin left the room to answer it. Lokhtina resumed her masochistic wail: "Carry me off, beat me! Insult me as you like, spit at me. . . . And now I will lie with you, I will lie with you immediately." Munya Golovina cleared the dirty dishes as though she were a maid. When Rasputin was called to the telephone again, Lokhtina took advantage of his absence to slip into his bedroom. He rushed in after her, and the ladies listened to the sounds of blows and screeches. When Lokhtina reappeared her veils were torn; Rasputin was breathing heavily, and he wiped his sweating face on the sleeve of his cornflower blue blouse.

Madame Golovina complained that the tension was making her ill; she would need bay rum drops to revive her. The room was thick with sex, hysteria, religious longing. It was clear to Zhukovskaya that those present "must either depart or shriek, fall into convulsions, and smash things." Vyrubova rose first, and the others followed her to the hall. Rasputin made the sign of the cross over them and bade them farewell. As Vyrubova took his hand and kissed it, Zhukovskaya noticed that she moaned and the whole of her body trembled.

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At the beginning of April the imperial family left for a two-month visit to the Crimea. War tensions were growing; Nicholas was hundreds of miles away from his capital, with no reliable radio link, dependent on communications by post and courier. Spiridovich attributed this irresponsibility to Alexandra's state of "extraordinary nervousness," which could be relieved only amid the gardens and relaxed family life of the Livadia Palace.

Rasputin joined them, staying at the Hotel de Russie in Yalta. The visit turned into scandal. He bragged of his intimacy with the family to the hotel staff. Newspapers remarked that Vyrubova's carriage was often seen outside the hotel. Tourist shops did a roaring trade in Rasputin postcards. Nicholas, irritated, suggested that the starets collect his daughters from St. Petersburg and spend the rest of the summer in Pokrovskoye. He agreed. After he left Yalta, Khioniya Guseva came looking for him. When the hotel told her he had already gone, she set out in search of him.

His daughter Maria was now fifteen. She played little games with men when she was bored. She telephoned numbers at random. If a man replied she chattered away to him, telling him that she adored him and arranging a rendezvous on the steps of the Hotel de l'Europe. She would giggle from across the street as the man paced up and down waiting for his mysterious admirer. At the end of May a man played a reverse trick on her. He rang her up, asking for her by name and telling her that he was hopelessly in love with her, and requested a meeting. She told him that she could not see him because she was leaving for Siberia with her father. The caller asked her carefully for the date of her departure.

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Maria left St. Petersburg with her father on June 4 for the four-day journey by first-class sleeper and river steamer to the village. As the Trans-Siberian reached the Urals, a British Royal Navy battle squadron steamed past the imperial yacht *Standart* and moored in the Kronstadt naval base. The British had long viewed Russia as the land of whip and exile, but the threat of European war and fear of German strength had persuaded them to ally with Russia as well as France. The visit was a sparkling affair. Eight hundred guests were invited to a ball aboard the battle cruisers *Lion* and *New Zealand*, which steamed up the Neva to the Nicholas Bridge. The young grand duchesses, returned from the Crimea, stole the hearts of the crews as they clambered around the gun turrets. Alexandra met her nephew Prince George Battenberg, who was serving aboard the cruiser, but she did not allow the girls to stay on for the ball. It was a "white night," when the summer sun scarcely slipped below the horizon and turned the smooth, gray waters of the Neva to gold. The linden trees were out, the fields filled with bluebells and cowslips. Guests were greeted by an arch

on the gangway of HMS *New Zealand* with the word *Welcome* in huge letters; the mayor of St. Petersburg proposed a toast: "To the finest navy in the world." The supper was abundant, the champagne half frozen to the Russian taste; the ship's band played dance music. After the warships left the family began its summer cruise along the Finnish skerries.

Aboard the steamer *Sokolovsky* on the river from Tyumen to Pokrovskoye Maria Rasputin was approached by a "dark gentleman" who introduced himself as Davidsohn. He came from the Jewish ghetto in Vilna and was now a journalist on the popular daily *Birzhevye Vedomosti.* He admitted that it was he who had telephoned her, and that he was determined to follow her home. She did not much care for him and was not pleased when she saw him disembark at Pokrovskoye. He lay low, however, while the Rasputins caught up with friends and local gossip.

CHAPTER 16

# *"I've Killed the Antichrist!"*

Two killings were being planned. Two thousand miles to the west, on Sunday, June 15, 1914, in the Russian calendar, the heir to the throne of Austria and Hungary drove in a motorcade through the streets of Sarajevo with the province governor. Archduke Franz Ferdinand had been watching army maneuvers in the Bosnian mountains. He was wearing the braided blue tunic and green-feathered cap of an Austrian cavalry general. Sarajevo was a provocative place to wear such a uniform. Bosnian Serb nationalists were set on expelling the Austrians and linking up with independent Serbia. A bomb was thrown as the motorcade neared the city hall. It hit the back of the archduke's automobile but exploded behind it. A young Serb from the Black Hand terrorist group was arrested as he ran away.

The archduke, badly shaken, interrupted the mayor's welcome. "To hell with your speech!" he shouted. "I come to your city and I am welcomed with bombs." He left at once for the governor's mansion. The driver of the lead car forgot the route, and the motorcade was briefly stalled. Another Serb, a nineteen-year-old student called Gavrilo Princip, stepped out of the crowd and fired what diplomatic incompetence and territorial greed transformed into the first shots of the First World War. The archduke's wife, Princess Sophie Chotek, was hit in the stomach. The flowers on her picture hat caught in the strappings of her husband's tunic as she sagged onto his chest. "Sopherl! Sopherl! Don't die. Live for our children!" the governor heard him moan. He remained sitting erect, but the governor saw a stream of blood pumping from his neck. He was carried into the governor's mansion as waiters proffered glasses of chilled

white wine on silver salvers for the reception that was to be held in his honor. "It's nothing," he said, and died.

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The following day, June 16, was soft and balmy in Pokrovskoye. Rasputin spent the morning trotting some newborn colts in the farmyard. He went to church with his wife and children. He was in excellent spirits as he ate a big meal of fish for lunch. He amused the table with tales of how he liked to offer raw country vodka with a kick like gasoline to pompous officials in St. Petersburg. They felt obliged to drink it; he said he called it Rasputin's revenge. After lunch Maria went to a friend's house to show off some snapshots she had taken in St. Petersburg.

What followed next was recorded by the deputy prosecutor of the Tobolsk district court. At around 3:00 P.M. a postman brought a telegram to the house. Rasputin "made up his mind to send a telegram in reply and, coming out of the gates into the street, called for the postman." A woman standing by the gates, identified as Khioniya Kozmishna Guseva from the city of Syzran, Simbirsk province, bowed to him and begged for a coin. Her face—"of repulsive ugliness, her nose was crushed and misshapen"—was covered by a shawl. "You shouldn't bow," Rasputin told her kindly. "Taking advantage of the moment," the prosecutor continued, "Khioniya Guseva drew a sharp dagger out of her coat and struck Rasputin in the stomach." The knife entered the lower abdomen, and Guseva drew it upward to the navel.

As she pulled out the knife for a second thrust, Rasputin stretched out his hand with a coin. Confused, she took it and dropped it. Rasputin picked up a stick lying on the ground and hit her over the head. Angry villagers seized her and threatened to drown her in the river. "Let me go!" she yelled as they beat her. "I've killed the Antichrist!" Holding his entrails in his hand, Rasputin staggered back to the house. The prosecutor measured the distance; it was 108 steps, and Rasputin moaned as he ran: "Oh, what a pain I have." His wife swept the remains of lunch off the table in the kitchen and laid him on it. His son, Dmitri, rushed to the post office to send telegrams alerting the Tobolsk governor to the murder attempt and asking Dr. Vladimirsky, the best surgeon in Tyumen, to gallop to Pokrovskoye at once. Maria rushed back to the house, almost fainting as she saw a large pool of blood turning brown in front of it.

The door was banged as she helped her mother cut away her father's breeches and blouse from the area of the wound. She opened it to find Davidsohn. She knew in an instant, "like the burst of a skyrocket," why the journalist had flattered her over the phone, why he had wanted to know the date she was traveling, why he had been on the steamer . . . why he was now at the house. He had a story to write; he wanted to see for himself that the victim was

dead. It was never established whether Davidsohn was a part of the conspiracy; certainly he had wind of it. Maria slammed the door in his face and shrieked, "Haven't you done enough?"

It was after midnight when Dr. Vladimirsky arrived in a troika with three exhausted horses. Rasputin refused ether and was conscious as the doctor cleaned the abdominal cavity and stitched the ripped intestines. He clasped a cross and muttered prayers. The doctor was in a dilemma as he prepared to transfer his patient to Tyumen at first light. If he drove fast on the pitted road, the bouncing might reopen the wounds and the patient could bleed to death. If they traveled the seventy miles slowly, the delayed shock could be fatal.

Vladimirsky called for the five fastest horses on the Rasputin farm. The starets had loved horses since he was a boy, and the cash from admirers he had invested in them now helped to save him. Three were harnessed to the troika, the two spare horses allowing the doctor to change them every hour. Rasputin was laid between Maria and the maid Dunia so that their bodies cushioned his from the shocks as the troika careered along the trakt. He slipped into a coma, coming around once to mutter, "He must be stopped, he must be stopped." Maria thought he was referring to Nicholas and the threat of war, or so she wrote later. The journey took six hours.

The starets was critically ill for ten days. Skillful medical treatment helped—the empress gave Vladimirsky a gold watch in gratitude—but Rasputin's great physical and mental toughness were crucial. His body absorbed debauchery; it withstood the knife wound.

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Connecting the murder in Sarajevo with the attempt in Siberia became part of the Rasputin legend. Maria claimed that, in muttering the words "he must be stopped" as he lay semi-conscious on the troika, her father had foreseen the coming war and sought to warn the tsar to keep Russia neutral. How could he have known of events in the Balkans? Maria claimed that the telegram he had received moments before the stabbing was from the empress, bidding him return to St. Petersburg because of the archduke's assassination. The archduke died shortly after noon Central European time the day before the stabbing. It is known that Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany was informed of the killing aboard his yacht *Meteor* three hours later. Alexandra was on the imperial yacht *Standart* several miles off the Finnish coast. It is technically feasible that she received news of the death as promptly, weighed its implications, and radioed a message from the yacht for transmission to Pokrovskoye by telegram. But Sarajevo was not yet feared as a prelude to war; the tutor, Pierre Gilliard, who was on the yacht, reported that Alexandra's only concern was with Alexis. The boy had twisted his ankle as they boarded the yacht. The ankle swelled as it hemor-

rhaged, and Alexis wept as Gilliard read to him to distract him from the pain. Rasputin's instant precognition of war was almost certainly an invention.

It was a convenient one, however, for it offset the new scandal caused by the stabbing. Guseva was at once identified as a former prostitute and an admirer of Iliodor. It was also said that she had been Rasputin's lover, that he had spurned her, and that she had tried to castrate him by stabbing him low in the stomach. The newspaper *Russkoye Slovo* claimed that she was the sister of a terrorist named Grigory Zaitsev, who had been arrested for murdering a policeman in St. Petersburg in 1907. Taking him to Siberian exile the following year, his convict convoy passed through Pokrovskoye on its way to the holding prison in Tobolsk. He was allowed to meet his sister, who was staying with Rasputin. The starets offered him money; he refused to accept it and rebuked Rasputin for his lewdness and bad influence. He tried to convince his sister to walk out on Rasputin, the newspaper said, but she remained faithful, "and it was only a few years afterward that she recalled the words of her brother and made up her mind to kill Rasputin."

There was no doubt that it was Iliodor who had encouraged Guseva in her murder attempt. He fled from his village immediately after he heard the attempt had failed. Disguised as a woman he slipped over the border to Finland; once he was safely out of Russia, he admitted his involvement. Guseva herself told police interrogators that Rasputin was a heretic who raped nuns. She said that she wished to punish the "false prophet," both in revenge for the fall of Iliodor and to kill "the khlyst in Rasputin's person." The authorities did not want her to repeat such accusations in open court in front of the press. There was no question of her standing trial for attempted murder. Instead she was declared insane and committed to an asylum in Tomsk. Relatives who tried to have her released were told that doctors had found unmistakable symptoms of "psychological disturbance and exalted religiosity."

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The public was not totally robbed of scandal, though. Davidsohn filed a sensational account of the wounding for *Birzhevye Vedomosti.* Another journalist, signing himself S. P., wrote an account of a surreal interview in Rasputin's hospital ward in the daily paper *Russkoye Slovo* that caught the starets's vivid phrasings, the restlessness of his mind as it darted between subjects, the philosophizing and cunning. The staff put him into a white hospital gown. He met Maria Rasputin outside the ward. She refused to let him in, so he asked if he could see Akulina Laptinskaya, who was also nursing the patient. It was a sensible request. She was amenable to rubles; the investigating commission was to characterize her as "a sly and calculating woman, who demanded money from visitors."

Laptinskaya came to the door of the ward. The journalist noticed her tranquil gray eyes; she had the transparent shadow of a knowing smile on her face. He asked to see the patient and explained that he had come all the way from St. Petersburg. She hesitated—rubles passed hands—and agreed. The ward was all white. The bed was covered with a fiery red satin blanket. Strong, bony fingers played with it. Rasputin's head lay feeble on the pillow. He stretched out a hand. "Hallo, sit down," he said. "Here's my wife and my father."

The father was thickset, shaggy, clumsy. He looked awkward in his white hospital coat; he reminded the journalist of linen aired on an elm stump. Praskovya Rasputin had a sad, withered face. The journalist thought she had the kind of eyes the wives of celebrities—artists and writers—have; they share the grief of the failures and the troubles of hard labor but are not able to share the joy of success.

"I was in Pokrovskoye," the journalist said. Rasputin's fingers started to move restlessly and swiftly, as if they were spinning a web. He dropped his head to one side and looked at his visitor slyly, showing the whites of his big, light eyes. The eyes were blue, the color of a flax field in blossom. "Eyes of a woman," the journalist noted. "Sinful eyes. Eyes of Jean Baptiste by Leonardo da Vinci."

"Like the village?" the starets asked, holding out his hand in the journalist's direction and pecking at him with a long finger.

"No, I didn't. People live better where I'm from."

"In Russia!" Rasputin snorted. "The muzhik in Russia is not a muzhik but a martyr. In Perm province, it's all right." Perm was the closest province across the Urals. "But no farther. They eat potatoes out there. Our muzhik eats white bread."

"Filling, but dirty," said the journalist, who was no admirer of Siberia. "Cream with cockroaches. Shit in the yards up to one's knees. They say you can't stay for long in the yard here calling out your cow: cow dung gnaws around your legs."

"Dirt," said Rasputin. "Princes come out of dirt. Sow oats in the dirt, and you'll become a prince. All Russia, my dear, comes out of dirt. All Russia is out of dirt. Cockroach. . . . How can you do without a cockroach? It whispers, whispers, whispers . . ."

Rasputin showed the whites of his eyes, the whites only. His face was pale. He raised his eyelids and looked at the journalist sharply, piercingly, turning a lock of his beard with a finger. "Dirty you say, my dear . . ."

"And two floors," the journalist said of Rasputin's house in Pokrovskoye. "What do you want two floors for if you live on one with an empty chamber?"

"My dear, you can't live on the first floor," Rasputin said, indicating his wife. "Praskovya Fedorovna here has five cows, and thirty sheep, and a pig with sucklings, and hens. . . . And what about the chamber? Let the chamber be

there. A guest comes. Joy comes with him. Let the chamber be there for guests. Shit. . . . Throw your cleanliness into shit and trample on it. Chamber. There's a chamber . . ."

He closed his eyes and was silent for a moment. He went on in a different, calm voice, without rambling.

"This thing that happened to me. The stick was small, the knife was big." He started to tell how the Noseless One had assaulted him; that is what local people were calling Guseva, because of the way syphilis had disfigured her face. "The stick was small. . . . I keep close to the fence. And I hold the wound. I'm afraid to let it go, I hold it with my hand. . . . And she follows me with the knife. The way I see it, I'm not going to make it. Then I look down and see a chip on the ground—a small stick lying there. I pick it up and I touch her lightly with it on the shoulder. She gets scared and backs off."

His head dropped back on the pillow and he looked sideways, craftily. "The knife was as big as that. Her hand trembled. See?" He demonstrated. "She approaches me and I give a *pyatachok*, five kopecks. Alms. Her hand trembled. Otherwise . . . You can defend yourself with alms. The stick was small."

Laptinskaya signaled for the journalist to go. Rasputin started looking for something. "This *pyatachok* . . . she threw down the *pyatachok*," he said. "Threw it on the ground, right there. Conscience. That's conscience. She threw the *pyatachok*. A boy found it and brought it to me. My *pyatachok*. Came back to me. Here—where is it?—my *pyatachok*."

He rummaged around under the blanket. He looked angrily at Akulina. She smiled amiably and arranged his pillow.

"Here it is," Rasputin said triumphantly. "She dropped it. And she dropped the knife, too . . ."

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Alexandra was told of the murder attempt aboard the *Standart* the day after it happened. Gilliard noticed unusual excitement among the retinue. A colonel told him that a woman had knifed Rasputin in the stomach and that the wound might be mortal. There was a great commotion; "people whispered no end, mysterious meetings took place." The whisperings stopped immediately at the approach of "anyone supposedly belonging to the Rasputin circle"—by that Gilliard meant Vyrubova or the empress and her children. The prevailing hope on the yacht was that the starets would die and the family would "at last be set free from this pernicious creature." They were not convinced, however. Gilliard said they thought that "the soul of this cursed muzhik was sewn on his body" and that he would live.

That did not include the empress, of course. She sent a stream of telegrams from the yacht to the Tyumen hospital. They were all more or less the same,

Gilliard said: "We are frightened by the war that threatens us. Do you think it might start? Pray for us. Encourage us by your advice." The Austrians were threatening Serbia, and Berlin had sided with Vienna. Alexandra was deeply worried that her birthplace would soon be at war with her country of adoption. Nicholas shared her yearning for peace; "one had to see him," Gilliard wrote, "to understand what tortures and moral trials he had to suffer."

Rasputin's early replies were ambivalent. "Do not worry too much about war," he cabled the empress from his sickbed on July 3. "When the time comes you will have to declare it, but not yet, there'll be an end to your troubles." He was noncommittal on July 6: "My dears, my precious ones, do not despair." As Alexandra's cables became more desperate, he shifted against war. "I believe in, I hope for peace," he cabled her later in the day. "They are doing wicked things, we are no part of it, I know how you suffer, it is very hard to be apart from one another." As he sent this message, the *Standart*'s summer cruise ended. Alexis, still in pain from his ankle, was carried gently ashore in Nagorny's arms.

The following day, the *Standart* lay to off St. Petersburg to await the arrival of French President Raymond Poincaré aboard the battleship *France*. Over lunch Nicholas chatted with Maurice Paléologue, the French ambassador, about the Serbian crisis. The tsar said that he did not believe that Kaiser Wilhelm wanted war. "If you knew him as I do!" he said. "If you knew how much theatricality there is in his posing!" The battleship steamed slowly toward them in a silver light, her wake white against an emerald sea, shore batteries firing salutes that merged with the thunder of the "Marseillaise" and the cheers of spectators on an armada of pleasure boats. A state banquet was held for Poincaré that evening in the Peterhof Palace.

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The Zaria, the army's summer review, was held at the Krassnoye camp outside the capital two days later. The weather was cloudless and intensely hot, and the tart scent of forest fires hung in the air. Ambassadors and their families were present, and Meriel Buchanan listened to the chatter on Paris fashions—wider skirts and no sleeves, trying unless one had pretty arms—and complaints about dishonest cooks and the price of vegetables. "I wonder after all what an army is for," a woman said. "It's so immense, isn't it?" An officer looked up at her. "Just a toy for kings and emperors to play with, Madame," he said. "Rather dangerous toys," she replied.

The capital was airless when the guests returned from the review. Riots had broken out in the Vyborg slums, and some barricades had been thrown up. The manager of a big factory was shot by a terrorist. Cossack patrols were out on the streets. The windows of a streetcar were smashed. Kaiser Wilhelm thought Russia was in "the mood of a sick tomcat." The thud of hooves came closer, and

horsemen with sloping lances rode by, rank after rank, weary and dusty, sent directly from the review into the city as a precaution against insurrection. Buchanan recognized one of the officers, a boy she had danced with during the winter, and he saluted her and called out a laughing good night before he and his horse were swallowed by the twilight haze.

Poincaré left on July 10. He gave a farewell dinner aboard the *France.* Alexandra exchanged pleasantries with Paléologue. "I'm glad I came tonight," she said. "I was afraid there would be a storm." The ship's band struck up an allegro with brass and drums. She put her hands to her ears; with a "pained and pleading glance" she pointed and said, "Couldn't you?" The ambassador signaled to the conductor to stop. The royal party transferred to the *Standart* as the *France* raised steam. Paléologue and the tsar watched the battleship and its escorts speed westward, their wakes sparkling across a calm and moonlit sea. Nicholas again reassured the ambassador that Kaiser Wilhelm had no stomach for adventure and that the only wish of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria was to die in peace.

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He was no better a judge of emperors than of men. While he was speaking Austria gave Serbia an ultimatum. It said that the archduke's murder had been planned in Belgrade and carried out with a revolver supplied by Serbian officials. It demanded the dismissal of anti-Austrian officials and the suppression of all Serb nationalist groups and anti-Austrian propaganda. Austrian officials were to be granted free access to investigate the murder. Serbia was given forty-eight hours to reply. The text reached Serge Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, at 10:00 A.M. on July 11. "It means war in Europe!" he exclaimed.

Sazonov warned the tsar by telephone that the brutal Austrian note must have been worded in agreement with Berlin. The Serbs could not conceivably comply with it; the note was a prelude to military action. Sazonov added that the Germans were "certainly in the most advantageous position owing to the supreme efficiency of their armies." They wanted a war because they thought they would win it.

Nicholas was not impressed. A few minutes later the finance minister, Peter Bark, had an audience with him. "He said he thought Sazonov was exaggerating the gravity of the position and had lost his nerve," Bark recalled. The tsar told him that no one wanted to start a general European war over the Balkans. He thought it unlikely that the note had been sent after consultation with Berlin; "the German emperor had frequently assured him of his sincere desire to safeguard the peace of Europe." The cabinet was less optimistic. The same afternoon it decided that, if Austria refused negotiations with Serbia, Russia would mobilize four military districts in the hope that this would warn off Vienna and not provoke Berlin.

Rasputin was well enough to sit up in bed and write. He was now fully alert to the danger of war—the only senior politician to share his insight and foreboding was Sergei Witte, long out of office—and accurately foresaw disaster. He was not a pacifist in the sense of rejecting all war, but he sensed that the particular war in prospect, against the Germans, a people he admired, would prove a cataclysm. He sent a scrawled, misspelled letter to Nicholas, headed by a cross. "My friend, I saw again—a terrible storm menaces Russia," he wrote. "Woe, disaster, suffering without end. It is night. There is not one star . . . a sea of tears. And so much blood. I cannot find words. The terror is infinite. I know that all want war of you. . . . You are the tsar, the father of your people. Do not let fools triumph. Do not let them do this thing. If we conquer Germany, what will become of Russia? When I think of that I see an awful martyrdom. Russia drowned in her own blood . . . Grigory."

Nicholas did not reply. He continued the royal round of prize givings and hospital visits, and played tennis and canoed with his daughters. On July 13 he received the master of the horse of the court of the obscure German dukedom of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who had come to fulfill his traditional obligation to inform the tsar that his duke had died; Nicholas gave him lunch. The tsar was not alone in this apparent indifference; Kaiser Wilhelm took a short cruise on his yacht. The joint roles of chief executive and monarch were difficult to reconcile. Neither Nicholas nor Wilhelm truly controlled the slide toward hostilities. Rasputin was to claim that, had he not been in a Siberian hospital ward, there would have been no war. Nicholas did not want war either; but he was driven by his ministers and generals, by Russia's tradition as the protector of Slavs, and by the timetables of mass mobilization.

Rasputin's tantalizing hypothesis needs two ifs, not one; *if* he had been in the capital, and *if* his influence over the tsar had been conclusive. The first did not occur. He was not in St. Petersburg; even had he been, the second is unlikely. The impulses to war were too strong. For all his bluster—"Serbia must be disposed of, and that right soon!"—Wilhelm was as much in the hands of his generals and officials as Nicholas. In Austria, Franz Joseph was eighty-four, tired and freighted with tragedy; his son Rudolf had committed suicide in a love tryst at Mayerling in 1889, his wife, Elizabeth, had been stabbed to death by an anarchist in Geneva ten years later, and now the murder of his heir, Franz Ferdinand, had precipitated the crisis. His chancellor was so set on war that, when the Serbs made an unexpectedly humble reply to the Austrian ultimatum, he hid it.

On July 16, though white flags were flying in the Serbian capital, the Austrians began shelling Belgrade across the Danube. Rasputin cabled Vyrubova: "Let Papa not plan war because war will mean the end of Russia and yourselves and you will lose to the last man." Vyrubova told the tsar, but she admitted that he took little notice of it. Nicholas was, however, doing his best to slow

the stampede to war, sending telegrams and a personal envoy to Wilhelm begging him to restrain the Austrians. The cables between the cousins maintained a family gloss—the two monarchs remained on "Willy" and "Nicky" terms—but Berlin had little interest in compromise. The pressure for Russia to aid its fellow Slavs in Serbia was overwhelming.

Sazonov saw the tsar at 3:00 P.M. the following day. The foreign minister told him that the order to mobilize could no longer be postponed; the tsar showed "extreme loathing" for war and was visibly irritated. "Think of the responsibility you advise me to take," he said. "It would mean sending hundreds of thousands of Russians to their deaths." Sazonov persisted; he said that the Austrians and Germans were hell-bent on enslaving Russian allies in the Balkans, and that Russia was being reduced to "pitiful dependence" on the whims of the Central Powers. Nicholas agreed to general mobilization. A message was sent from the Central Telegraph Office in St. Petersburg to all points of the empire: "His Imperial Majesty orders colon the army and navy to be placed on war footing stop to this end reservists and horses to be called up according to the mobilization plan of the year 1910 stop." Red cards ordering men to mobilization points were nailed on signposts.

At midnight on July 18, Count Pourtalès, the German ambassador, delivered a German ultimatum to Sazonov. Russia was to reverse the mobilization order within twelve hours or face the consequences. Pourtalès gave the Russians extra time. He did not return to see Sazonov until shortly after 7:00 P.M. on July 19, but he carried orders from Berlin to declare war even if the Russians proposed further negotiations. After he had delivered the declaration, the ambassador looked out of Sazonov's window at the soaring Alexander Column and the oxblood bulk of the Winter Palace, and wept. Sazonov rose and embraced him. "So the die is cast!" the French ambassador, Paléologue, wrote in his diary. "The part of reason in the government of peoples is so small that it has taken merely a week to let loose universal madness!"

Nicholas and his family were at vespers as Germany declared war. Gilliard was struck by the tsar's exhausted look; he wrote, "The features of his face had changed, and the small bags which appeared under his eyes when he was tired seemed far bigger." In church he prayed that God would still spare his people war, "his whole being absorbed by religious feeling, simple and convinced." Alexandra, at his side, had the sad expression of suffering the tutor had seen when she was nursing Alexis through a bout of bleeding. They returned to the palace at 8:00 P.M. Before going in to dinner Nicholas went to his study, where he read Sazonov's report of the German declaration. He had a short telephone conversation with the foreign minister. He appeared in the dining room—Alexandra had been about to send Tatiana to look for him—and told the family the news. Vyrubova found the empress weeping hysterically in her bedroom

later in the evening. "War!" she cried. "And I knew nothing of it! This is the end of everything!"

Shortly after 9:00 P.M. the tsar met his ministers and the British and French ambassadors. He went to his bedroom after midnight and drank a cup of tea with Alexandra. A servant knocked on the door at 1:30 A.M. with a telegram from the kaiser, imploring him not to let his troops cross the German frontier. Six hours before the Germans had declared war; now the kaiser was suggesting that Nicholas could still avert it. He read Alexandra the telegram. "You're not going to answer it, are you?" she said. He replied that he would not. "I felt that all was over forever with me and William," he said. "I slept extremely well. When I woke at my usual hour, I felt as if a weight had fallen from my mind. My responsibility to God and my people was still enormous, but at least I knew what I had to do."

A grand levee was held in the Winter Palace on July 20 to read the manifesto of war. Alexandra turned up the brim of her hat to give the crowds a rare glimpse of her face. A Te Deum was sung by the court clergy. An intensely mystical expression crossed the tsar's face as he prayed, Paléologue thought; Alexandra's breast was thrust forward, her head high, lips crimson, eyes glazed—when she closed them her livid face made the ambassador think of a death mask. All fell to their knees to receive the tsar's blessing. The enthusiasm was boundless. The tsar was mobbed as "highborn ladies, the reserved as well as the exuberant, old and young" rushed forward to catch a glance from the tsar, to touch him, to kiss a fold of his uniform. When he stepped onto the balcony to show himself to the crowd, the ourrahs—the deep-throated, echoing Russian hurrahs—seemed to shake the palace walls. Foreign diplomats climbed on top of their cars on the edge of the square to get a better view. In the depths of rural Russia, the liberal Pavel Miliukov wrote, "eternal silence reigned."

The next morning Count Pourtalès and his staff left St. Petersburg on a special train for Stockholm. The military plenipotentiary left his Stradivarius violin behind in the rush. The imperial rooms at the Finland Station were kept open for them; a senior foreign ministry official ensured that they departed unmolested. Their embassy did not escape so lightly. The mobs who had thrown up barricades a few days before transferred their hatreds from the Romanovs to the Germans on July 22. They burst into the building, tore down tapestries, smashed precious busts and statues from Pourtalès's private collection, and pulled down the famous bronze horses from its roof. The *St. Petersburger Zeitung* and the *Herold,* the capital's German-language newspapers, disappeared, and the favorite German restaurant, Leinners on the Nevsky, closed its doors. Later in the month Nicholas issued a ukase changing the city's German-sounding name to Petrograd. Ambassador Paléologue thought this "a little puerile"—he

wondered what would happen if the French changed the name of Strasbourg "and all the other bourgs in France"—but he thought that the collective soul of Russia was showing itself more strongly than at any time since Napoleon's invasion a century before.

On July 23 news came that Britain had declared war on Germany; the red, white, and blue flags of Russia, France, and Britain floated together above the city. The mood was triumphal. "It has been a splendid time," the London *Times* correspondent Robert Wilton wrote on July 25, "and I think these people are out to win. They are now our fast friends for ever." The Duma committed itself unconditionally to the war. Nicholas, for the first and last time in his life, praised it lavishly. "The State Duma has shown itself worthy of its position," he said, "and has truly expressed the will of the nation, because the whole Russian people feels the insult Germany has caused it. I now look on the future with complete confidence." He named his cousin Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich, the giant husband of the Montenegrin Anastasia, commander in chief. Alexandra and Rasputin railed against the appointment of their ex-friend. Pettily, the empress insisted that the tsar should not bid the grand duke farewell at Petrograd's Warsaw railroad station when he left for the front on August 1.

It seemed a crusade, a "duel to the death between Slavism and Germanism." Ninety-six percent of the reservists answered the tsar's call to the colors. Guards officers, foreseeing a victory parade down the Unter den Linden in Berlin, wondered whether they should pack their dress uniforms. Napoleon's invasion, the wars against Turkey and Japan had all been over inside eighteen months. The Russian high command's twin war plans, A and G, like the corresponding German Schlieffen plan, anticipated a result within months. Cheeky and confident postcards were sold of Kaiser Wilhelm as a miserable tomcat:

*Uncle Fritz has gone quite barmy,*
*Wants to have a boxing match!*
*So who leads the German Army?*
*Willy Whiskers—stupid cat!*

A few were more prescient. Rasputin feared calamity by instinct and Peter Durnovo, a former interior minister, by reason. In a brilliant analysis, later found among the tsar's papers, Durnovo listed Russian weaknesses: "Insufficiency of war supplies," his litany began. "Far too great dependence on foreign industry . . . inadequate strategic railroad network . . . rolling stock insufficient for colossal demands of a European war . . . heavy artillery far too inadequate and there are few machine guns. Expenditures beyond Russia's limited financial means . . . military disasters and shortcomings in supply inevitable."

He moved on to the terrifying consequences of a long war: "Nervousness and spirit of opposition," he wrote. "All the blame will be put on the government. . . . socialist slogans, capable of arousing and rallying the masses . . . division of all valuables and property. Army having lost its most dependable men, and carried away by a primitive peasant desire for land, will find itself too demoralized to serve as a bulwark of law and order. . . . The intellectual opposition parties, lacking real authority in the eyes of the people, will be powerless to stem the popular tide, aroused by themselves, and Russia will be flung into hopeless anarchy." The paper was stunningly accurate; it was ignored.

On the road between the new Petrograd and Tsarskoye Selo, amid an endless line of ammunition wagons, field kitchens, ambulances, and gun limbers, Paléologue noted a departing soldier and a woman—young, delicate, a red and white scarf around her fair hair, a blue cotton sarafan drawn in at her waist by a leather belt, an infant at her breast—fixing each other silently with "mournful, loving eyes." The ambassador wondered how many men would return. Witte, mortally sick with a cerebral tumor, returned from summering in Biarritz convinced that tsardom, "this insane regime . . . this tangle of cowardice, blindness, craftiness, and stupidity," would not survive the test of war.

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At first the war had "one joyful as well as unexpected consequence," Gilliard said; it removed Rasputin to the background. He was back from Siberia at the end of September, almost recovered from his wound, though he continued to have stomach pains for the rest of his life. But he paid few visits to the palace. In the thrill of war his warnings seemed outdated. Alexis's ankle mended, and the boy was in good health through the winter. The tsar was preoccupied with news from the front; Alexandra was recovering from the shock of a war that had made enemies of her closest relations.

Rasputin was at the palace on October 17. A rare entry in the *Kammerfurier* recorded that he met Nicholas and Alexandra "at 9 1/2 in the evening." Maria Rasputin remembered it as the only occasion when the tsar was cold with her father. Rasputin told the tsar that the only victors in the war would be the ghouls of death and hospitals for the blind and maimed. When it was over crippled veterans would roam the cities and ghettos and villages, despised by those for whom they had fought. Tears streamed down his face as he spoke. The tsar said nothing but slowly sipped a drink. The empress looked pained but made no comment.

The starets was right; Durnovo's predictions were well grounded. A chronic shortage of shells and machine guns developed at once. "With his sly look, his eyes always gleaming watchfully under the heavy folds of his eyelids," Paléologue wrote of the man largely responsible, the war minister, Vladimir Sukhom-

linov, "I know few men who inspire more distrust at first sight." The tsar agreed that Sukhomlinov's looks were against him, "but," he wrote, "he is an excellent minister and I trust him entirely." This drawing room soldier, "scented, pomaded, with gold chain bracelets on his white wrists and a secret twist to the pale lips between the short gray beard," spent much ingenuity in maximizing his expense account to keep his wife, thirty-five years younger than himself, in parties and clothes. He had last fought against the Turks, in 1878, boasted that he had not read a military manual in twenty-five years, and held that machine guns and rapid-firing artillery were cowardly. He was so lazy that, after preparing a mobilization plan during the first Serbian crisis two years before, he left for a vacation on the French Riviera. "Why not?" he told his critics. "A mobilization doesn't have to be conducted by the war minister in person." He and his wife were friendly with Rasputin and Alexandra, however. His job was not in jeopardy even when reservists reporting to their depots found only enough .299-inch rifles for two men in three, and some were not issued boots. Signals units had no wire for field telephones, and communications were forced onto radio. Because there was also a shortage of code books, many radio messages, to the joy of German intelligence, were in clear.

The Russians consistently outfought the Austro-Hungarians. Smashing fifteen Austrian divisions, which fled in panic crying, "*Kosaken kommen!*" "The Cossacks are coming!" they rapidly captured Lemberg in Galicia. Austrian officers taken prisoner accepted parole and dined in Russian messes, telling their hosts that they wanted no part of German aggression. The Russian press wrote that the campaign was all but over; against Rasputin's advice, Nicholas visited Lemberg to celebrate its return to its old Russian name, Lvov, riding streets gay with bunting to a thanksgiving service in the cathedral and a gala dinner. He slept in the bed reserved for the Austrian emperor, Franz Joseph, but the visit was not a success. Although Nicholas shared his wife's belief in the loyalty of his peasant-soldiers, he was too shy to approach them in the uniformed flesh. The army was "cold and indifferent" to him. The new governor, a third-rate former hussar officer, conducted a witch-hunt against the Galician Catholics, and they were soon as hostile to their fellow Slavs from Russia as they had been to the Austrians. "Our Friend would have found it better," Alexandra wrote to Nicholas, "had you gone after the war to the conquered country." Rasputin feared that it would soon be won back.

He was correct. The Austrians, demoralized, riven by cross-nationalisms, were one thing. The Germans were quite another. They were better equipped and better led than the Russians, who were frequently obliged to face them, not at a time and place of their own choosing but in response to pleas from the distant French and British. Within a month of the outbreak of war, the Germans were within thirty miles of Paris. To ease the pressure on their allies, the Russians attacked with two armies in East Prussia.

The First Army under General Rennenkampf was to drive southwest parallel to the Baltic coast, drawing the bulk of the German forces, while the Second Army under General Samsonov moved north out of Poland. Samsonov made slow progress in difficult country. When his men broke into the small town of Allenstein, they cheered because they thought they were in Berlin. Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the formidable German generals facing them, feared the two armies would link up and trap them. But radio intercepts of uncoded signals gave them the exact dispositions of Russian units and their objectives. The information was so priceless that the Germans kept asking "anxiously over and over if we should believe them." Aerial reconnaissance and telephone calls from local inhabitants—the Russians had not bothered to cut the lines—confirmed that the Russian commanders were unable to coordinate their armies' movements.

As Samsonov drank a toast to his "victory" in Allenstein, the Germans cut into his flanks. His men floundered in marshes and forests of sixty-foot pines. They had few maps, and the Germans had burned signposts between the villages. They milled on sandy tracks, deep and powdery, which German shells threw up into a choking dust. Their own artillery was silent for lack of ammunition. Samsonov tried to ride out of the trap with his chief of staff and a few officers. "The enemy has luck one day, we will have luck another," he said. He fell behind the break-out party in the thick woods. They heard a single shot; he killed himself in shame at losing his army. Only fifty officers and 2,100 men of his Thirteenth and Fifteenth Corps escaped; he had lost 110,000 men in four days.

The Germans named their victory Tannenberg, in revenge for a fifteenth-century defeat the Teutonic Knights had suffered against the Slavs nearby. Then they turned on Rennenkampf. In his Twenty-eighth Division, companies were stretched out in rows with their officers after rapid-firing artillery caught them, "as if they had been frozen into those poses in which they met death"; trenches six feet deep were filled with dead and wounded Russians. Rennenkampf fled back across the border in a car; in contempt his staff called him Rennen ohne Kampf, "running without fighting." He left 145,000 men of the First Army behind him, dead, wounded, or captured.

News of the disaster reached Petrograd, "stilling the music, the cheers, the gay self-confidence." The skies turned leaden with fall. Mobs took vengeance on German bakeries and shops. The music of Beethoven and Bach was banned from concerts. The synod outlawed Christmas trees as a German custom. Alexandra shared the loathing. She said that Germany had become "a country I did not know and had never known" and feared that the "monstrous" kaiser would avenge himself on her by sending her brother to the Russian front, but more than ever the Russians thought of her as German.

The wounded came back in streams. The empress trained as a nurse with her elder daughters and Vyrubova. "We have an amputation in the big hospi-

tal," Alexandra wrote on November 20. "My nose is full of hideous smells from those blood-poisoning wounds." She had met gangrene; five days later she saw death. "We were occupied all morning—during an operation a soldier died—the first such time it happened," she wrote. "The girlies were brave—they and Ania [Vyrubova] had never seen such a death. . . . It made us all so sad as you can imagine—how near death always is."

She did not forget to mention Rasputin. "Once more the hour of separation has come—& always equally hard to bear . . . when you are gone . . . a bit of my life gone," she wrote to Nicholas after he left to review troops in the Caucasus. "You always bring revival as our Friend says . . . comforting to know His prayers follow you."

The Friend was making the most of his relations with Goremykin. The premier set up an infirmary for wounded soldiers. Simanovich persuaded the banker Dmitri Rubinstein to make a donation of 250,000 rubles to it. In return Rasputin introduced the financier to the premier. In due course Madame Rubinstein was appointed an honorary president of the infirmary, and her husband was able to boast of his intimate connections with the government. He made a point of telephoning Goremykin when he wished to impress a visitor, asking after his wife's health and having a chat so trivial that his closeness to the premier could not be doubted. Word spread quickly, and Rubinstein used his reputation in share ramping. He bought a majority of stock in the banking house Yunker & Co. He then held a ball—making sure that Goremykin and Rasputin were present—to which he invited a Kiev sugar baron, Lev Brodsky. After he had seen Rubinstein "talking like pals" with the premier and the starets, Brodsky was persuaded to buy several million rubles' worth of overpriced stock. Rubinstein, Simanovich said admiringly, "knew how to put himself forward."

CHAPTER 17

# *Party Time in Moscow*

No balls, no music, no officers in gala uniform greeted the New Year," wrote Meriel Buchanan. "The men we danced with last year had lost their lives in East Prussia or were fighting in the Carpathians." Women with dull, heavy eyes read the casualty lists posted on shop windows. The empress now rose at seven, instead of noon, and busied herself comforting the last hours of "unknown solitary men" from obscure regiments. She strung innumerable icons and knitted comforters, for she wanted each man in the immense armies to have something made with her own hands; "but almost no one knew this."

Rasputin's fall from grace with the tsar was temporary. On the afternoon of January 2, 1915, Vyrubova was traveling from Tsarskoye Selo to see her father in Petrograd when the train jumped the track. Her legs were trapped in wrecked radiator pipes, and a heavy steel cross-beam fell on her face. She was admitted to the hospital unconscious with severe leg and spinal injuries. The doctor told Nicholas and Alexandra not to disturb her. "She is dying," he said. "She cannot live until morning." Occasionally the patient muttered for Rasputin to pray for her.

A telephone call from the palace alerted Rasputin in the late evening. He telephoned Prince Andronnikov for an automobile and was driven to the hospital. He entered the ward, bowed to the tsar, and went over to the bed. "Annushka, do you hear me?" he said. She opened her eyes. "Grigory! Grigory!" she cried. He held her hand and prayed. "She will live, but she will always be a cripple," he said. With that the tsar's head of chancellery, Alexander Mosolov, said,

"he tottered from the room and fell outside in a faint, from which he awoke in a strong perspiration, feeling that all his strength had gone from him."

Mosolov was no admirer of the starets and had no reason to exaggerate his powers. It is not possible to judge whether the intervention was lifesaving; but at the least it restored the patient's will to regain consciousness. Vyrubova did live, and she was indeed crippled, though, with the help of crutches, she recovered sufficiently to negotiate the winding stairs up to Rasputin's apartment with agility. The apparent miracle, much to Simanovich's relief, restored the starets to the tsar's favor.

Rasputin came close to death himself four days later. He was almost run down by a troika driven at him at full gallop along the Kamennoostrovsky Prospect. Okhrana security men caught its occupants and found that they came from Tsaritsyn. It was said that they were Iliodor's agents, intent on murder. Although they were expelled from the capital, no charges were preferred against them. From now on the alarmed Okhrana men kept full notes on Rasputin's movements and contacts.

The starets celebrated his escape with gusto, mixing business with large helpings of pleasure. His consumption of wine and Madeira became wilder. His daughter said that he drank more to deaden the continuing pain from his stomach wound. There is an element of truth in this—after one drinking session the Okhrana reported that he was "sick all day"—but his constitution was strong and his recovery rapid. The drinking was part of a general descent into wilder living, a growing sense that indiscretion could no longer harm him. His sexual appetite was always voracious; it fed now on increased opportunity, on power and ready access to cash. It was also better documented in the "staircase notes" taken by his Okhrana minders.

Several visits with prostitutes to his favorite bathhouse on Rozhdestvenskaya Street were recorded. After one of them, feeling exalted, Rasputin cabled Vyrubova: "I could not be with you in body, I send you joy with my spirit. My feeling is a divine feeling. I send an angel to console and comfort you." On January 12 he took 250 rubles from two peasants who wanted pardons. One had been sentenced for belonging to a sect, the other for forging promissory notes. On January 16, while Vyrubova's sister was visiting him, an agent saw him "take the prostitute Tregubova on his knee and murmur something." Maria Sergeyevna Ghil, the wife of a captain in the 145th Regiment, slept with him on the night of January 17–18. In the morning he was given 1,000 rubles by a banker and merchant, Moisey Ginsburg. The bribe was for help in getting a contract to supply coal to the navy.

Simanovich arranged a party in the Gorokhovaya apartment on January 26, paid for by people whose release from prison Rasputin had helped to arrange. Four unknown men and six women attended, the agents reported;

one of them was carrying a guitar. The party was noisy; they sang and danced into the early hours. Two days later Rasputin's wine stocks were replenished by Lev von Bock, a state councillor who owed him favors. On February 12 he visited Prince Andronnikov, returning home at 4:30 A.M. with six men, all drunk. They stayed up singing until 6:00; "in the morning, Rasputin didn't receive anyone for he slept."

Boxes of cigars and pheasants were sent to Goremykin for the premier's seventy-fifth birthday. Rasputin played games with his minders. On February 19 he visited the apartment of Nikolai Solovyov, a senior synod official with a young wife, Elizaveta, with whom he was having an affair. When he left the apartment with two ladies, he outsmarted the Okhrana men by jumping into a motor taxi. The next sighting was at 3:00 A.M. when he returned home alone. Two days later he partied with Evgeniya Terekhova, a twenty-three-year-old gentlewoman, in her rooms in the Severnaya Hotel on Znamenskaya Square. He left the next morning. He visited Vyrubova in her cottage in Tsarskoye Selo, where she was recovering well from her injuries. He was back on February 27, going to the Alexander Palace to bless the tsar on the eve of his departure for a visit to the Austrian front. Nicholas wrote later to Alexandra that he felt a "special peace of mind" after the blessing.

Huge orders for supplies and services were being placed by the military. Simanovich and Andronnikov made sure that Rasputin exploited his royal contacts. On March 10 Evgeniya Ezhova, the wife of a businessman from Klin, near Moscow, visited his apartment. She wanted his help in landing a two million ruble contract for supplying linen to the army. It seems that she obtained it, for shortly afterward she moved from rooms in the medium-rated Severnaya to a suite at the luxury Astoria Hotel. After midnight seven men came and stayed until 3:00 A.M. "They screamed, sang songs, danced, made noise, and, all drunk, together with Rasputin went somewhere," the staircase watchers noted. He was back home at 10:15 the next morning. The agents followed him later to Pushkinskaya Street, where the twenty-six-year-old Vera Tregubova kept an apartment. She was a high-class call girl who claimed to be a music student at the conservatory. The two were seen going into a bathhouse.

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As they sported in the steam room and cold pool, Austrian officers were raising white flags on the battlements of Przemyśl. The great fortified city, surrounded by concentric rings of trenches and strong points, guarded the approaches to the Carpathian Mountains. Though the Russians were so short of shells that it was a court-martial offense for an artillery officer to fire more than three a day, they had succeeded in encircling it with bayonet charges. Scurvy broke out in the besieged city. After the last horses had been slaughtered for their meat, the

Austrians destroyed their ammunition dumps in an explosion heard fifty miles away. They prepared to surrender.

Nicholas was at army headquarters, the Stavka, at Baranovichi, midway on the railroad from Brest Litovsk to Minsk. Railroad cars were drawn up in a fan shape in pinewoods outside the town, guarded by Cossacks with long Russian bayonets on their rifles. The cars served as offices, map rooms, mess, and dormitories. In his commander in chief's coach, Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich had laid rugs and bearskins. A hundred icons hung on the walls. The headroom was too low for the Romanov giant, and the doors had scraps of paper hung on them to remind him to duck.

A forest clearing was a far from ideal spot to supervise a front that stretched from the Baltic to the Carpathians. The headquarters of the German Oberost, by contrast, were in a palace at Posen, where Ludendorff could relax with his officers over dinner and cigars before returning to his rooms to work into the early hours. The Russians stopped work before an early dinner. Their coaches baked in summer and froze in winter, although the stove in the grand duke's office so overheated it that the tsar could not "endure it above one hour." Strategy was discussed around a sandpit where sections of the front were modeled in clay and sand. Here the grand duke outlined plans for armies by tracing lines with his walking stick. Wireless communication was crude; the field telephone network was little better. The only certain way of sending orders for six million men was to use a messenger.

The grand duke ran panting across the clearing to tell the tsar of the fall of Przemyśl and the capture of 120,000 Austrians. A Te Deum was sung in a little wooden chapel built in the pines. It was packed, Nicholas wrote, "with officers and my splendid Cossacks. What beaming faces!" He presented the grand duke with a viceroy's golden sword, its hilt shining with diamonds, and inscribed "*Pour la libération de Galicie.*" It was the high point of Russian fortunes in the war, and of Nicholas's relations with his tall cousin.

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Later in the month Rasputin went to Moscow to fulfill a vow to pray in the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin. He had made it while recovering from his wound in the hospital. He left Petrograd on the night train on March 24, shortly before a woman named Varvara Nishchenko visited him. She left a message promising him two thousand rubles if he obtained the discharge of her uncle, a colonel, who had been called up for duty from the reserve. For all his declared, and genuine, patriotism, Rasputin was heavily engaged in the lucrative business of obtaining deferments and soft billets far from the front. Rules, and shame, were for others.

He arrived in Moscow the morning of March 25. He went from the train to have breakfast with an admirer, Maria Arkadyevna. She had promised to in-

troduce him to a friend, Anna-Elena Frantsevna Djanumova. Elena was an attractive woman of thirty-five, the wife of a wealthy Moscow merchant, whose elderly mother had been exiled to Siberia from Kiev. Although Russian born, the mother had remained a German subject and was suffering from the anti-German hysteria. Maria Arkadyevna—Elena discreetly avoided using more than her first name and patronymic in her account—assured Elena that Rasputin would be able to fix her mother's case.

She rang Elena: "Rasputin is here. Come and have breakfast with us." Elena was there by noon. She recognized Rasputin immediately. He wore a white silk embroidered shirt over his trousers. His deep-set gray eyes struck her. "They pierce you as though they want to feel to the very depths of you," she wrote. "They look so shrewdly, so persistently, it makes you feel ill at ease." She noticed that he used the familiar *thou* to everyone, old and young. He leaned toward her with a glass of red wine and said, without any preliminaries, "Drink." Then he said, "Take a pencil and write." Other guests handed her pencils and pieces of paper. "Write," he said. She began to write.

"Be glad at simplicity, woe is frantic and wicked—even the sun is not warm for the woeful," he dictated. "Forgive me, Lord, I'm sinful, I'm earthly and my love is earthly, too. God, do wonders and restrain us. We are Yours. Your love is great, do not be angry at us. Send humility to my soul and the joy of beneficial love. Save me and help me, God." All the guests looked on respectfully. Intelligent people, shrewd and reliable in other respects, suspended judgment on Rasputin's banalities; turning dross to gold through force of mind was one of his characteristics. "You're lucky," an old lady whispered to Elena. "He paid attention to you at once and he loves you."

"Take this and read, read it with your heart," Rasputin told her, pushing the paper back to her. He liked the word *frantic;* it went with Elena's patronymic, Frantsevna. It became his nickname for her, Frantic.

The talk turned to the war. Rasputin was in boastful mood. "If they didn't niggle me, there wouldn't be any war," he said. "I wouldn't allow the tsar. He obeys me and I wouldn't allow him to fight. What do we need the war for? Anything may happen."

After breakfast the guests moved to the drawing room. "Play 'Along the Roadway,' " Rasputin said suddenly. A lady sat at the grand piano and began to play. The starets got up and began to sway to the rhythm and stamp his feet in their soft leather boots. He broke into a dance, moving lightly and easily. He floated about the room "like a feather," approaching the ladies to entice a partner from their circle. One of the ladies could no longer restrain herself and floated to him with her scarf in her hand. Elena saw that nobody was surprised, as if dancing at midday was common. It ended as abruptly as it had begun.

"That's enough," Rasputin said, turning to Elena. "You came here on business. Well, let's go, speak up, what d'you want, sweetie?" They went to an adja-

cent room. Elena explained her mother's problem. He became thoughtful. "Your affair is difficult," he said. "You can't even mention the Germans these days. But I'll talk to *her*"—he pronounced this word after a pause with particular stress to make it clear he meant the empress—"and she'll talk to *him*. Perhaps something'll come out of it. And you must come to Peter to me. You'll find out there."

Saying good-bye to Maria Arkadyevna, Elena asked her to visit. "Why don't you ask me?" Rasputin butted in. "I'll come." Elena mumbled that she'd thought he would be too busy but invited him for breakfast. "All right," he said. "We're gonna visit the Moscow lady." Elena noticed that he always stressed his *o*'s—*M-o-O-sc-o-w*—in a melodious drawl. She went home in a confused state. So this was the real sovereign of Russia, in a peasant blouse. The racy melody of "Along the Roadway" sounded in her ears, while, she wrote, a "bearded figure flashed before my eyes and tassels of a blue sash fluttered. . . . Deep-set eyes persistently pierced me and I did not know what to think."

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The following morning, March 26, 1915, Elena was woken by the telephone. It was Maria Arkadyevna with her buoyant laugh. "Rasputin spent the night in my apartment, and he's been agitated since early morning, getting ready to come to your place," she told Elena. "He came to me to ask for perfumed pomatum, *p-O-matum*, you know, with an *o*. And scissors for his nails. When I ask him what for, he says, 'We're going to the dark beauty.' Now you ask him for whatever you want. He'll do anything. Use the situation."

Elena rang up her closest friends to ask them over. She explained, "Like myself, they all wanted to have a look at this weird celebrity."

Rasputin came at 1:00 P.M. in a crimson silk Russian blouse, "merry and complacent." He talked a lot, skipping from one topic to another. An episode from his life would be followed by a totally unconnected dictum, topped off with a sudden question to someone present. Sometimes he seemed not to be paying any attention. Then he would stare and say abruptly, "I know what you're thinking about, my dear." He always seemed to guess right.

He spoke about Siberia and his family. "See my hands," he said. "Because of hard labor. A peasant's labor is not easy." He stretched out his callused hands, the veins swollen. Self-satisfaction inflected in his voice. It seemed strange to talk of peasant life at a table set with crystal and silver. The telephone started ringing. Someone asked him to come for a dinner party with Gypsy entertainers that a group of rich Siberian merchants had arranged for him.

Maria Arkadyevna was worried. "You promised to go," she said. "They're waiting for us."

"I'm not going anywhere," Rasputin replied. "I'm OK here, with the little ladies. Tell 'em I won't come."

Arkadyevna was so upset that red flushes appeared on her face. "It won't do," she said. "People have organized a feast for you. Everyone is there waiting for you, and you aren't going. You promised. You've got to go."

"Tell 'em I won't come," he repeated. "I've got to leave a word here for everyone to remember me by. Give me some paper."

Arkadyevna asked Elena to go into a different room and implored her to help change Rasputin's mind because she had promised to bring him with her. Finally, they succeeded. "All right, I'll go, though I'm OK here," he said. "Well, ladies, take these."

He handed out scraps of paper. He wrote on Elena's: "Don't avoid love—it's a mother for you." To another lady, he scrawled: "God loves those with a pure heart." Elena's maid Grusha had been looking at Rasputin with avid curiosity. She was rewarded with her own note: "God loves those who labor and everyone knows of your honesty."

He walked to the hall and was handed a rich fur coat with a beaver collar and beaver hat. One of the ladies remarked how splendid his coat was. "The dentists gave it to me," he said, referring to recent and successful influence peddling. A group of Jewish dentists had been convicted of forging professional diplomas that gave them the right to live in Petrograd, where Jews were normally denied residence permits. The convictions were quashed after Rasputin appealed to the tsar.

He kissed all the ladies when he left; "it was his usual manner when greeting or saying good-bye."

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It would have been better if Rasputin had stayed with the ladies. Instead, he went to the Yar, the smartest nightclub in Moscow. He arrived, already drunk, at 11:00 P.M., with a merry widow, Anisia Reshetnikova; a Moscow journalist, Nikolai Soedov; and a young woman the police could not identify. The party had a private room and were joined by the publisher of the *Moscow News of the Season.* Rasputin ordered a Gypsy chorus to sing to them, and he danced the russkaya. As the British secret agent Robert Bruce Lockhart watched the cabaret in the main hall, he heard a fracas coming from the private room. "Wild shrieks of a woman, a man's curses, broken glass and the banging of doors," he wrote. "Headwaiters rushed upstairs. The manager sent for the police. . . . The cause of the disturbance was Rasputin—drunk and lecherous."

Rasputin had tried to seduce one of the women in the party. Frustrated, he smashed the mirrors in the room. He pointed at his embroidered blouse and told the singers, "It's a gift from the 'old woman,' " adding that she had sewn it for him and that "I do with her what I want." The journalists present knew full well that the "old woman" was the empress. Challenged to prove he was

Rasputin, he unbuttoned his trousers and waved his penis at the waiters and onlookers. When the police arrived he told them that he was protected by the tsar. They reported that his behavior was "sexually psychopathic; he was baring his sexual organs and carrying on a conversation with the singers; giving them handwritten notes, such as 'Love unselfishly.' " When the police dragged him away, Bruce Lockhart reports that he was "snarling and vowing vengeance."

huge cock (the Horror)

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Rasputin was unrepentant when Elena saw him off on the Moscow-Petrograd express on March 29. He was standing by a first-class carriage surrounded by women. Elena elbowed through the crowd, "under the cross-fire of curious and derisive eyes." He embraced her. "Come to Peter with me, Frantic," he said. "I'll do everything for you, only come. Remember, if you don't come nothing will be done." He kissed everyone who had come to see him off and was gone.

As news of the Yar scandal got out, it was assumed that Rasputin was finished. Russians are tolerant of public drunkenness, but they expected the reference to the "old woman" and the penis waving to inflict terminal damage. He continued, unabashed, in his old ways. He had crossed the line, and he did not care. The first thing he did on his return to Petrograd on the morning of March 31 was send a telegram to Elena: "Gratifying treasure spiritually with you kisses," it read.

Then he set about gratifying himself, the Okhrana log recording that, on April 3, he "brought a woman to his apartment at 1:00 A.M. who spent the night with him." As the couple slept the German troops were loaded on trains that would take them from France to the Russian front. At Easter, Rasputin prayed ostentatiously at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in Petrograd. At the front Russian troops flew great banners above their trenches proclaiming that "Christ is Risen." Each man was given ten eggs and eight Easter buns.

On April 9 Simanovich arranged for Rasputin to go to a party at the house of Alexis Filippov, editor of the financial newspaper *Stock Exchange Day*. He spoke with businessmen and stockbrokers eager for tips and contracts until he became incoherent with drink. He did not get home until 6:00 A.M. A week later he met his old friend Martian, the father superior of the Tyumen monastery. They went to visit an acquaintance, Vasily Pestrikov, who was not at home. Undaunted, the two holy men went on a spree with Pestrikov's son. They sent for a guitar player and sang with him. Rasputin danced with Pestrikov's housemaid.

At the front of General Radko's Third Army in Galicia, the sheep that normally grazed between the lines were gone. No-man's-land was two thousand yards wide in many places, and shepherds brought their flocks to the grass while

Russian troops from the country swapped jokes with them. Nobody connected the absence of sheep and shepherds with German preparations for attack. The tsar shared the optimism. He was inspecting men sent to Odessa and Sevastopol to prepare the invasion of the Bosporus and Constantinople. They were to be landed on the European side of the Bosporus while thousands of tons of burning oil were dumped in the straits to be carried into the harbor of Constantinople by the current. Nicholas expected to annex the city. The Italians declared war on Austria on April 13, confident that the Russians had broken the Habsburg empire; Rasputin returned to his apartment "dead drunk" at 2:00 A.M. The French and British had by now noted that a number of German divisions had disappeared from their front. They warned the Stavka of a "sledgehammer blow" that the Germans were preparing in Galicia. Russian reconnaissance parties reported that German troops were now stiffening the Austro-Hungarians on the southern front.

At 3:00 A.M. on April 19, the sledgehammer struck. For four hours, 1,500 guns poured 700,000 shells onto Third Army. It was the greatest artillery barrage of the war to date. Ten shells fell on each pace and a half of front. The few Russian guns had not been moved for so long that the German gunners destroyed them in the predawn darkness. A British military observer, Bernard Pares, was on a hill behind the Russian line. He watched an uninterrupted, ten-mile line of enemy fire. "The Russian artillery was practically silent," he wrote. "The elementary Russian trenches were completely wiped out and so, to all intents and purposes, was human life in that area."

German officers watched the barrage without taking cover; there was almost no return fire. At 1:00 P.M. their shock troops advanced in waves; they need not have bothered to fix their bayonets. One Russian division was reduced from 16,000 men to 500. "Here and there," the German war diary reported, "loam-gray figures jumped up and ran back, weaponless, in gray fur caps and fluttering, unbuttoned greatcoats, until there was not one remaining." By nightfall the Germans had taken Third Army's second trench line and were in open country, "sweeping the unwieldy enemy before them in the exuberant joy of the attack."

Reserves, thrown in by Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich, were hurried into gaps in the line without rifles with orders to collect weapons from the dead and wounded. They had no training in taking cover and lay exposed to German shell fire until they were killed or wounded. Companies of 250 men that Pares visited were reduced to 40 survivors. "You know, sir, we have no weapon except the soldier's breast," they told him. "This is not war, sir, it is slaughter." When they fell back to the San River, they found they could not dig trenches or build bunkers because corrupt officers had sold the spades, barbed wire, and entrenching timbers to civilians. With bayonets fixed to empty rifles, they fell

back and prepared to defend Russian soil against the first invaders to penetrate it since Napoleon.

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Rasputin's malice was added to the commander in chief's other problems. Many Russian Germans had been exiled to Siberia in the spy frenzy of the war. Simanovich was running a profitable sideline getting permission from the Stavka for them to return. The fixer petitioned Nicholas Nikolayevich once too often. The grand duke cabled him from headquarters: "Satisfied for the last time. If new petitions are sent you to be exiled to Siberia." Simanovich went immediately to Gorokhovaya ulitsa. Rasputin cabled the grand duke suggesting that he visit the Stavka to see him. He got a definitive answer by telegraph three hours later. "If you come I'll have you hanged."

The starets was furious. "From that time he bore the thought of revenging himself on Nicholas Nikolayevich at the first opportunity," Simanovich said. He rebuked the starets for making an enemy of the grand duke, "threatening our position," and stirring up hatred against himself. "People like me are born once in a century," Rasputin snapped back proudly. "My power cannot spread everywhere, but I achieve all I need."

Over the next days, Simanovich noticed Rasputin's "strange behavior." He ate nothing and drank Madeira heavily. He was silent and often jumped up as if trying to catch someone with jerky movements of his hands, threatening with his fists: "I'll show him! . . . I'll get him!" It was clear to Simanovich that he was going to "revenge someone." He would spend a whole day like this, going out in the evening to the bathhouse with an Okhrana agent, coming back at 10:00 P.M., looking very tired. Without saying anything he went into his study and wrote something on a piece of paper, which he carefully folded. He then went into his bedroom, put the paper under the pillow, and got into bed, falling asleep immediately. It seemed like sorcery to Simanovich, who had seen him do it before and asked what was on the bits of paper. "I put down my wishes," Rasputin replied, "and they come true while I sleep." He added that he had notched his wishes on a stick before he had learned to write and that thus he had prevented many misfortunes.

The next morning he woke relaxed and amiable. He grated the note in his fingers until it crumbled and threw it away. Then he said, smiling, "You can rejoice, Simanovich. My strength won." Simanovich said he did not understand. "Well, you'll see what will happen in five or six days," Rasputin replied. "I'll go to Papa and I will tell him all the truth." He picked up the telephone, and Simanovich listened to him place a call to the palace. He got through to the tsar's office right away; the palace switchboard had standing orders to connect him immediately.

"What is Papa doing?" he asked the aide-de-camp.

"He's busy with his ministers," the young officer replied.

"Tell him that I have a divine message for him." The aide's response to this modest claim was not recorded, but the tsar duly came through on the line. "What's happened, Father Grigory?" he asked.

"I can't tell you over the phone," he said. "May I come over?"

"Please do. I also want to talk to you."

Rasputin was driven to the palace and was received at once. He recounted what had happened to Simanovich and told the tsar that he had had a "divine appearance" during the night. This had informed him that in three days Nicholas would receive a telegram from the commander in chief to say that the army had rations enough only for three days. He sat at the tsar's desk, filled two glasses with Madeira, and insisted that the tsar drink from his glass while he drank from the tsar's. When they had taken sips, he mixed the wine in one glass and told the tsar to drink it. Having completed these mystical preparations, Rasputin said that the tsar should not believe the grand duke's telegram. The army had sufficient food. Nicholas Nikolayevich wanted to sow panic and disorder in the army and the country so that he could retreat under the pretext of food shortages. He would then occupy Petrograd and force Nicholas to abdicate. The tsar was shocked, or so Rasputin reported to Simanovich. "What am I to do?" Nicholas asked. Rasputin replied: "He wants to exile me to Siberia, but I'll send him to the Caucasus."

Three days later the cable advising of bread shortages in the field arrived from the grand duke at Stavka. The shortages were real enough, caused by transport bottlenecks; there was not a scrap of evidence that Nicholas Nikolayevich was plotting a coup. However, Simanovich wrote, "It was enough to seal his fate. Nobody could dissuade the tsar that the grand duke was contemplating a march on the capital to overthrow him from his throne." It would take a little longer, but Rasputin was fertilizing the ground for his vengeance.

CHAPTER 18

# *Vengeance*

Rasputin met the empress frequently at Tsarskoye Selo, traveling to Vyrubova's cottage by train or in a chauffeur-driven car from an army motor pool provided by Sukhomlinov at the war ministry. He was a regular sight in the town. He often looked the worse for wear, a workingman's cap pulled down over his eyes, "dirty and unkempt." He had the trick, however, of sobering up rapidly. On April 26 Dmitri Rubinstein rewarded him for his help in stock ramping by throwing a party for a dozen people. Guitar playing and dancing were heard from the staircase until the early hours. Rasputin was summoned by the empress in the morning. He had hardly slept and was badly hungover. Baroness Vera Kusova urged him not to go in such a state. She was the wife of a cavalry officer, who the Okhrana reported "wanted to get a better position for her husband and struck up an intimate acquaintance with Rasputin into the bargain." "He'll spoil the whole thing," an agent reported her as saying. "Our elder has become spoiled." After an hour's catnap he set off fresh enough.

His confidence in his hold on the empress became strong enough for him to wedge his visits tightly between carousals. On May 9, drunk and horny, he sent the caretaker's wife from his apartment block to fetch him his favorite masseuse, Utina. She failed, and Rasputin staggered to the rooms of a dressmaker who lived on the staircase. "Why don't you come to me, Katya?" he pleaded. When she refused he told her, "Come to me in a week and I'll give you fifty rubles." He saw the empress the next morning. The tsar was proving uncooperative on some plan, possibly the replacement of the commander in chief;

on his return Rasputin cabled Sabler at the synod: "My dear, we talked to Mama there and agreed that it is not simple to disturb our ruler." Then he brought a prostitute to his apartment and locked her in a room until, as the Okhrana men noted, "the servants released her."

He worried for his safety. Word came from his wife that a stranger had arrived in Pokrovskoye. On May 12 he sent a telegram to the governor of Tobolsk, saying: "A suspicious man has been living in Pokrovskoye for three weeks now one time he says he's from Moscow then—from someplace else." He made sure that the governor took the matter seriously by telling him to reply to Vyrubova in Tsarskoye Selo. He narrowly avoided a beating two days later. He went to an apartment on Malaya Dvoryanskaya at 5:00 P.M. At 10:00 an agent across the street saw a woman enter an unlit room in the apartment. She soon ran into a lit room where two men were sitting. The agent then saw Rasputin dash out of the darkened room into the hall, apparently alarmed; he snatched his hat and coat and fled into the street without putting them on. The two men ran after him. Rasputin jumped into a horse-drawn cab while it was still moving. He stood up in it all the way to the Liteiny Prospect, turning every now and then to make sure that nobody was after him. Then he got out of the cab, calmed down, and walked home.

Simanovich, who had good access to intrigues through his gambling clubs, feared another assassination attempt. Maria Rasputin had become engaged to a young Georgian cavalry officer, Simeon Pkhakadze, who asked his prospective father-in-law to a party at the house of Count Tolstoy on Troitskaya Street. Most of the people present were drunk. Suddenly Rasputin saw Pkhakadze draw out his revolver and point it at him. He stared at him and said, "You want to kill me, but your hand won't obey you." Pkhakadze was stunned and fled as the guests panicked. Rasputin turned, left the room, took his fur coat, and went home. The young captain went to his rooms and shot himself but survived. Rasputin was jumping up and down, as he always did when in high spirits, when he next met Simanovich. "Well, the danger is over now," he said. "The attempt has been made. Pkhakadze, of course, is no longer my daughter's fiancé. He'll go home now." Simanovich, convinced that the captain had been given leave from his unit as part of a military plot to kill the starets, told him that the danger was greater than ever.

Later in the month Rasputin accepted a trio of commissions. Ignati Manus, a corrupt Petrograd banker who the French ambassador thought was a leading German agent, was supplying Rasputin with the services of Vera Tregubova. On May 26 Rasputin, drunk, was seen getting out of Manus's automobile with the prostitute. He kissed and stroked her before retiring to his bedroom. Still unsatisfied, he went again to the seamstress Katya's rooms. An engineer, Mendel-Emmanuel Neiman, asked him to arrange a pardon for an eight-month prison

sentence he was facing for having attempted to bribe his way out of military service. Rasputin assured him that his petition had been handed to "himself," meaning the tsar. Dolina Mikhailovna asked for Russian citizenship to be arranged for a ready-to-wear clothing magnate from Moscow called Mandl, whose stores had suffered badly during anti-German riots.

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A vast catastrophe was engulfing Russian Poland. The Germans were forcing their way toward Warsaw, inflicting such terrible casualties that corps were reduced to "miniature regiments." Almost half a million troops had been lost since the start of the enemy offensive. "The Germans expend metal, we expend life," a Russian corps commander said. "They go forward . . . we only beat them off with heavy losses and our blood, and are retreating." Nicholas was briefed on the crumbling fronts on a visit to the Stavka. "His hands trembled," the industrialist Putilov, who was with him, recalled. "He seemed particularly impressed when, myself deeply affected and scarcely able to restrain my tears, I spoke to him of the troops' unswerving devotion and love for their tsar and motherland."

There were worrying signs that this devotion did not extend to the empress. Muscovites rose to protest the slaughter. For three days they roamed the city setting fires while the police stood by. They hurled Bechsteins and Bluthners, grand pianos and uprights, from the windows of the city's finest music store. Crowds in Red Square yelled that the war and interior ministers should be hanged. More ominously, they demanded that Alexandra should be sent to a convent for the duration of the war and that Nicholas should abdicate in favor of Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich. They moved on to the Convent of Mary and Martha, which Grand Duchess Elizabeth had founded after the assassination of her husband. She had once been popular in Moscow; now they described her in the same terms as her sister Alexandra, Ona Nemka—"She is German."

A story about her had made the rounds earlier in May. She visited a hospital after the arrival of a fresh contingent of wounded Russians and German prisoners. Some of the prisoners were lying on the floor because the wards were full. The grand duchess ordered the matron to put the Russian soldiers on the floor while the Germans took their beds. "The Germans are used to culture and comfort," she said. "The Russians won't feel the difference." It was untrue; the grand duchess was a notably humane woman who denied that she had so much as seen a prisoner. But the crowd believed the story; they shouted, too, that she was harboring German spies and her brother, Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse, in the convent. She met them at the convent gate and invited them to search. The first stone had been hurled at her—"Down with the German

woman!"—when troops arrived to drive them off. As they went, they shouted Alexandra's name and chanted, "*Niemetzkaya bliad,*" "German whore."

When police opened fire on looters, they screamed, "You have no ammunition to fight Germans, but you have lots to kill Russians." It was a telling insult. General Brusilov still held Przemyśl, taken at such cost on the Galician front; but he pointed out that it was no longer a fortress in the technical sense, since its guns lacked any ammunition. At most 6 prewar regulars were left alive in companies of 250 men; five or six original officers were left in his regiments. "In a year of war, the regular army had vanished," he wrote. "It was replaced by an army of ignoramuses."

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Rasputin was aware that a full report of the incident at the Yar—indecent exposure, brawling, threatening police officers—had been made by the Moscow police prefect. He was safe only while the compromised Nikolai Maklakov remained as interior minister, and there were signs that Maklakov's hold on his office was slipping. It was time for another tactical retreat to Siberia. "Grieved long to get home," he cabled his wife on June 1. "Annushka is in trouble will be operated on they don't let her out." The reference was to Vyrubova, who was waiting for an operation on her crushed foot. In the evening he got drunk with Manus and went to the seamstress's room again. On his way back he pestered the caretaker's wife on the staircase, asking her to kiss him. She freed herself and rang his doorbell to have his maid lead him back into the apartment.

He left for Siberia the following day, shadowed by two Okhrana agents. The Russians abandoned the Przemyśl fortress. The defeat was a further blow to Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich, already weakened by Rasputin and by the Moscow rioters' calls for him to be made tsar. The empress was envious of his height, his popularity, his image as the only strong Romanov; the comparison with her "little hubby" was hard for her pride to bear. Given her outrage at his threat to hang her Friend, Rasputin and Vyrubova easily persuaded her that the commander in chief was already speaking of himself as Nicholas III. As Rasputin changed trains in Moscow, she wrote to the tsar of her loathing of "N," for Nikolasha, the grand duke. She was not inhibited by the fact that her husband was his cousin's guest at the Stavka. "I have absolutely no faith in N.," she said. "Know him to be far from clever and having gone against a Man of God, his work can't be blessed or his advice good. . . . Russia will not be blessed if her sovereign lets a Man of God sent to help him be persecuted, I am sure." She rarely used Rasputin's name in letters, preferring "Friend," but she did so now. "You know N.'s hatred for Grigory is intense," she added.

She returned to the fray two days later. "N's fault and Witte's that the Duma exists, and it has caused you more worry than joy," she began. "Oh, I do not like

N having anything to do with these sittings which concern interior questions, he understands our country so little and imposes upon the ministers with his loud voice and gesticulations. I can go wild sometimes at his fat position. . . . Nobody knows who is Emperor now. . . . It is as though N settles all, makes the choices and changes. It makes me utterly wretched." The letter dripped with thoughtful malice. It invoked her husband's nightmare memories of Witte and 1905; it damned the grand duke with arrogance and lèse-majesté; it ridiculed—"his fat position"—and it mercilessly exploited her position as the "wretched" wife. And it was all manifestly untrue. The grand duke was touchingly loyal to his diminutive cousin. His knowledge of "our country" was infinitely broader than her own; he was a soldier surrounded by ordinary Russians, she an Anglo-German isolated from all but one, Rasputin. That, indeed, was the rub. He was the only Romanov whom Russians liked and respected. With Rasputin's eager endorsement the empress set out to undermine the commander in chief at the climax of the German assault.

Nicholas was in no state to resist her. "I am beginning to feel my old heart," he complained to her. "The first time it was in August of last year, after the Samsonov catastrophe, and again now—it feels so heavy on the left side when I breathe. But what can I do!" What he did do was take cocaine, which he said cleared his stuffy nose and restored his energy. Alexandra wrote back that she hoped that "the cocain [*sic*] helped well." She said that she was finding it difficult to sleep because of stomachache but that a hot water bottle and opium helped. At the front Russian artillery was firing on its own men. A battalion had been ordered to attack a German position with uncut wire and machine guns at Opatow. The survivors lay in shell holes in no-man's-land. When they began to wave white flags, Russian gunners were ordered to open fire on them.

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The Trans-Siberian Railroad dropped Rasputin in Tyumen on June 6. He stayed for a night at the Tyumen monastery with his friend Martian, the father superior, who gave a dinner party for him, inviting local worthies and their wives. The Okhrana agents reported that Rasputin was perceptibly drunk after dinner, and that Martian was complaining that he was drinking the monastery dry. The following day Rasputin went with Martian and his maid-mistress Dunia to a scenic spot for a picnic. They rode monastery horses—Rasputin had been a good horseman since he was a small child—and took a parcel of fresh cucumbers and half a pail of wine. Then he left for Pokrovskoye.

On June 11 Rasputin held a party for villagers at his house. "He had a few drinks," the agents reported, "wound up the gramophone, danced, and incoherently joined in singing." He started bragging about his influence peddling. He said that he had gotten three hundred Baptists released from punishment

for sectarianism; he was meant to get a thousand rubles from each of them but had collected only five thousand rubles in total. He also said that "when I was at the tsar's last time," he had persuaded Nicholas to defer the next draft of new troops until the autumn, after the harvest was in.

It was an empty boast. The losses in June were so great that the government was proposing to call up even the second category or *ban* of men aged over thirty-five; the second *ban* had only been called up twice in Russian history, in Napoleon's 1812 invasion and the Crimean war in 1854. Thousands of conscripts were arriving at the front in a state of shock. Those with rifles often did not know how to reload them. "Many had never seen a railroad car before, and the long ride down seemed to have unbalanced them in some peculiar way," an officer wrote, "for when they arrived they were little short of demented." Their officers hardly knew what to do with them. "Keep a heavy guard over them until we go into action," an officer advised a colleague. "They will be the first meat."

The man most responsible for the shell shortage, the war minister, Vladimir Sukhomlinov, fell at last. One of his protégés, Col. Sergei Myasoyedov, had been hanged in secret for treason in February. When the news was leaked in March, the war minister's reputation was savaged. Myasoyedov had been dismissed twice from the army before the war, when his extravagance, loose-living friends, and visits to the Second Reich—he had stayed several times with the kaiser at his hunting lodge—led to accusations that he was in German pay. Sukhomlinov had intervened to have him returned to duty. The yellow press revived the charges at the beginning of 1915, and the colonel was arrested on a double charge of pillage and espionage. While serving on the Prussian front, he had sent a relative a lamp and a picture. This constituted the "pillage," though he maintained that he had bought them. As to espionage, he was said to have received ten thousand rubles from the Germans. The money was never traced, but the colonel was shot. The war minister's pretty and promiscuous young wife had been linked with the dead colonel; she was now "coupled in none too pleasant a way with certain well-known German agents."

When it was discovered that Sukhomlinov had turned down a French offer to supply shells, with the airy assurance that "there is nothing to worry about," the tsar could no longer protect him. He was dismissed in June, though Nicholas at first allowed him to keep his apartment in Tsarskoye Selo and to remain at court. This caused such an outburst of public fury that he was arrested and convicted of espionage. The examining magistrate showed the secret police general Vassilyev the "convincing proof" of his guilt. It was a postcard addressed to Sukhomlinov's wife. It was sent from Carlsbad by a prewar acquaintance called Altshiller. The message read: "It's raining in Carlsbad, the roads are bad, so long walks are out of the question." Vassilyev said that this was hardly overwhelming evidence.

The magistrate retorted that the reference to bad roads and no walks obviously covered up something else—"the devil knows what the man meant!" At the trial the prosecutor failed to establish that the war minister had received any large sum of money. Nevertheless, Sukhomlinov, the man who had mobilized the Russian armies less than twelve months before, was found guilty and imprisoned. His replacement was Gen. Alexis Polivanov, able and respected but no admirer of Rasputin. "Forgive me," Alexandra wrote to her husband, "but I don't like the choice of Minister of War Polivanov. Is he not our Friend's enemy?" His card was marked before he was behind his desk.

The casualties were felt deep into Russia. "Getting empty in the villages," a peasant told Bernard Pares with a kind of cheery objectiveness. The man said his three brothers had all been killed at the front. The first two were there long enough to distinguish themselves. He said of the third, "Him they put up like a sheep!" Another British observer, Gen. Alfred Knox, visited a village where twenty-four of the twenty-six men called up had been killed. Nicholas Nikolayevich admitted that "training is beneath criticism"; that, in Alexandra's eyes, was a characterization he shared. Her letters became near-hysterical. "I loathe your being at headquarters," she wrote the tsar on June 12, "listening to N's advice which is not good and cannot be—he has no right to act as he does, mixing in your concerns. All are shocked that the ministers go with reports to him, as though he were now the sovereign. Ah, my Nicky, things are not as they ought to be and therefore N keeps you near to have a hold over you with his ideas and bad counsels."

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If Rasputin could not defer the draft, his importance was underlined to his fellow peasants when a steamer with the governor of Tobolsk arrived on its regular run. The starets went aboard and persuaded the governor to drop a fine of fifty rubles imposed on a Pokrovskoye peasant for building a house without a permit. Strolling through the village, he told the secret police agents that three ministers "adored" him—Prime Minister Goremykin and Prince V. Shakhovskoy, the trade minister; he did not name the third—and that he knew Nicholas Nickolayevich very well. He said that the grand duke would have given Russia a constitution in 1905 had he been able to, and that he would soon get his just deserts.

The starets was in a poor state on June 13. Memories of the near-fatal stabbing came back to him. A lady had gone to his neighbor Natalya the evening before. She had asked about Rasputin and then added that she would like to stay in Natalya's house. When this was refused she left the village. Natalya told Rasputin of this mysterious woman the next morning. He at once sent a man to find her. She could not be found. The agents noticed that Rasputin became very nervous and described the ladies he knew in Alexandra's circle, appar-

ently frightened that she was checking up on his behavior. In Tsarskoye Selo, Vyrubova was also out of sorts. She wired Rasputin: "Got a feeling like something terrible is about to happen miss you wrote to you bless me. Anna."

In fact, it was the tsar who had ordered an investigation. As Rasputin had feared, Maklakov had been dismissed. His successor was Prince Nikolai Shcherbatov, an able man who said he found the interior ministry in "such a muddle as I could not reconcile myself to." Rasputin had no hold over him; although the empress would start agitating for his removal within six weeks, for the moment the starets was vulnerable. One of the prince's first acts was to order General Dzhunkovsky, his assistant and the Okhrana chief, to produce a complete report on Rasputin and the incident at the Yar in Moscow. Dzhunkovsky was exposed to the full Andronnikov treatment—a flattering letter, gifts of an icon and a Bukhara cloak—but in vain. He took advantage of an audience with Nicholas over the Moscow riots to brief him on the starets. "I reported to the emperor about Rasputin, about his behavior at the Yar, and offered a paper concerning the pernicious nature of his influence that was drawing Russia to destruction," he later testified. "I asked the emperor's permission to continue my investigations. He said, 'I not only give you permission but I also ask you to do it. These reports should be made only to us—let us keep it between us.' "

The tsar had left on June 10 for the Stavka, where he was exposed to more criticism of Rasputin. Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich first let fly at Rasputin for his debauches. As he became angrier he moved on to more sinister ground—German agents had access to Rasputin; the peasant knew everything that was being done at the Stavka through the empress. "I never knew about any of this," the tsar said. "I could never have imagined." The grand duke then suggested that Alexandra come to the Stavka to be shown the Okhrana file. "Put an end to him," he urged. "Resolve the matter within the family." The tsar agreed.

Rasputin was keeping in close touch with the empress. She wrote to Nicholas on June 13, telling him to write at once "if you have any questions for our Fr[iend]." Two days later she indicated that Rasputin felt trouble was being stirred behind his back—"he regrets you did not tell him more"—and forwarded a direct message from him: "Pay less attention to people; use your own instinct." The Dzhunkovsky report was an ill-guarded secret, and Rasputin had gotten wind of it from his numerous contacts in the secret police. The empress was alerted. She read a copy of it, at first weeping, then in a fury when she found that her favorite nephew had seen it. "My enemy Dzhunkovsky," she wrote to Nicholas, "has shown that vile, filthy paper to Dmitri. . . . Such a sin; & as tho you had said to him, that you have had enough of these dirty stories & wished him to be severely punished—ah, it's so vile. . . . If we let Our Friend be persecuted we and our country shall suffer for it. . . . I am so weary, such

heartaches and pain from all this—the idea of dirt being spread about one we venerate is more than terrible. Ah, my love, when at *last* will you thump with your hand on the table & scream at Dzhunkovsky & others when they act wrongly—one does not fear you—and one must—they must be frightened of you. . . . If Dzhunkovsky is with you, call him, tell him you know he has shown that paper in town & that you order him to tear it up & not to dare speak of Grigory as he does & that he acts as a traitor. . . . Oh my Boy, make one tremble before you. . . . You are always too kind & all profit. It cannot go on like that."

Rasputin knew what was up. "Well, your Dzhunkovsky's had it," he told the agents in Pokrovskoye. He was correct. Prince Shcherbatov soon received a note from the tsar: "I insist on General Dzhunkovsky's immediate dismissal." In everyone's view it was Rasputin and Alexandra who had done the insisting; the general testified later that Nicholas "did it under the influence of the tsarina." His replacement, Vassilyev, was in no doubt that it was a poor career move to take on the starets. "To tell the truth," he wrote of his predecessor, "he appears to have been rather tactless in his behavior." The new man, who had full access to Rasputin's daily movements from his agents' notebooks, was committed to staying dumb.

Rasputin's mood lifted. On June 17 Father Martian and Rasputin's protégé Varnava, the bishop of Tobolsk, came to visit him in a carriage. Varnava had proved as unpleasant as the synod had feared when Rasputin had forced through his appointment. He had developed into a pogrom lover, baring his teeth through his beard when he hissed the word *Jew* in his strident sermons. His insults were so crude, so tasteless that they excited his audience; he called his many enemies—liberals, fellow churchmen, the intelligentsia, foreigners—"bloodsucking kikes." He had, the synod complained, "soon turned his diocese into a private domain of Rasputin." He was "rude with clergymen subordinate to him," moving them from parish to parish at Rasputin's whim. His sister, the wife of a petty clerk at the synod, was well informed on church politics; "simple but dexterous, clever and highly devoted to her brother"; both were classified by the commission as "tentacles devoted to Rasputin." Varnava had taken a leaf out of Rasputin's book; Stankevich, the Tobolsk governor, complained that the bishop was helping people evade military service by selling them exempt positions in the church.

The clerics brought two kegs of wine with them. They got merry with Rasputin. The steamer from Tyumen called at Pokrovskoye the next morning. A Jew unknown to the agents, but thought to be a businessman from Perm, was aboard. He spent the forty-minute stop at the village talking with Rasputin about obtaining army contracts. Rasputin's wife and Dunia took the steamer for a shopping expedition to the city. While they were away he sent a brief telegram to keep in touch with Vyrubova: "How's health, kisses." The women returned with Elizaveta Solovyova, whose intimacy with Rasputin had been

noted in Petrograd in February. The new parish priest, Father Sergei, whom Rasputin had had Varnava appoint, came to pay his compliments and kiss his hand. At 8:00 P.M. the agents saw Rasputin come out of his house with a red face, "apparently drunk," with the pretty Madame Solovyova. "They took a carriage and drove deep into the forest," the agents noted. "They returned after one hour, he was very pale."

The starets had more fun on June 28. Patushinskaya, an officer's wife from Yalutorovsk, came to see him. When he staggered out of the house, she held him under one arm while Solovyova supported him under the other. He was fondling Patushinskaya "over the lower part of her body," the agents said. "During the day the gramophone played and he was very cheerful, drank wine and beer." The ménage à trois came to an end the next morning, when Solovyova got a telegram from her irate husband ordering her to return to Petrograd. Rasputin consoled himself with Patushinskaya, walking around the yard holding her and singing.

On June 30 he took a morning swim in the river and went to the wife of a neighbor, Deacon Ermolai, who read the psalms in the village church. His mind was not on clerical matters. She was waiting for him at the open window of her house and spent half an hour with him. "He visits her almost daily with intimate purposes," the agents noted. In the afternoon Patushinskaya received a telegram from her husband commanding her to return to Yalutorovsk. Before she left on the steamer the agents saw her "voluptuously kiss Rasputin on the lips, nose, cheeks, beard, and hands."

The ability to remain on good terms with husbands he was cuckolding sometimes deserted the holy man. When Elena Patushinskaya's husband objected to the affair, Rasputin had him transferred to Odessa, where he shot himself. In general, though, the husbands accepted their lot, and the phenomenon was well enough known—Rasputin made no attempt to conceal it—to add credence to the rumors of his liaison with the empress.

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After a short trip to Tobolsk to see Varnava—the agents did not travel with him and there is no record of the conversations between the two—Rasputin welcomed Ivan Ivanovich Dobrovolsky and his wife, Maria Semyonovna, to the village. Dobrovolsky was approaching fifty, a corrupt and obese state councillor with a sinecure as an inspector of colleges. His wife was twenty years younger. The morning after her arrival on the steamer, she played the piano while Rasputin applauded and stamped his feet. Then he began embracing her—"not being ashamed of his daughters' presence," the agents wrote. They did not bother to mention the patient Dobrovolsky. After that Rasputin with Dobrovolskaya and the children "went out into the fields, sang songs, ran about, and Rasputin played ball games with them."

Deacon Ermolai was equally long-suffering. On July 7 Rasputin and Dobrovolsky were invited to lunch by the villager Arapov. The agents watched as Rasputin "left the house drunk and visited the wife of the psalm reader Ermolai." He returned home but would have gone to her again had the maid Dunia not asked him not to. He told her "to go to hell" and took a walk in the rain with the agents. He started to talk about the war and how his objections to it had been seen by some as treason. "Last year, when I was in the hospital and rumor had it that the war was about to begin, I asked the tsar not to fight," he told them. "I sent him about twenty telegrams. . . . They even wanted to hand me over for trial. The tsar was informed, and he said that 'these are our personal affairs and can't be tried.' "

He visited Patushinskaya later in July, taking his two daughters and the Dobrovolskys and Ermolais with him. They settled down around Dobrovolskaya as she played the piano in the steamer lounge. At Tyumen they took a train for Yalutorovsk. Patushinskaya was at the station to meet them in a carriage with two horses. She let Rasputin into her carriage while the others took cabs. At her house they were welcomed by her husband. Three husbands were now present—the deacon Ermolai, the fat state councillor Dobrovolsky, and the army officer Patushinsky—and Rasputin was fucking all their wives. They must have known; the Okhrana agents certainly did. At 10:00 on the evening of his arrival, they saw Rasputin jump out of a window onto the terrace of the house. Patushinskaya slipped through another window into the courtyard, "made a gesture to Rasputin, and they both disappeared into the dark."

At noon the next day, Rasputin took a carriage ride in the forests with Patushinskaya and his daughters. When they came back the daughters went into the house while Rasputin and Patushinskaya went to an empty summerhouse in the gardens. It was a charming little place; the servants told the agents that it had housed exiled Decembrist revolutionaries almost a century before. Perhaps it reminded Rasputin of his pseudo-rape by the general's wife. The couple spent twenty minutes there. Rasputin left the next morning with his daughters for the train and steamer trip back to Pokrovskoye.

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On July 23 Warsaw, the hub of Russian power in Poland for a century, fell to the Germans. Nicholas was overcome with grief and humiliation when he broke the news to the empress and Vyrubova. "It cannot go on like this," he said. The Russian retreat turned into a rout. "Creeping like some huge beast," a Russian general wrote, the Germans had turned their heavy guns onto his positions until they had obliterated them. "Then the beast would cautiously stretch out its paws, the infantry units, which would seize the demolished trenches." The poet Vladimir Mayakovsky howled with anger at the fate of the infantryman:

*You can't*
*Simply cannot*
*Bury him alive*
*In trenches and dugouts—*
*Murderers!*

As they fell back the Russians torched the towns and villages and forced their miserable inhabitants to flee east with them into Russia.

The scorched earth policy suited the Germans. They found shelter enough among the ruins; they had no civilians to provide for, and the Russians often ran about setting fire to haystacks but left the growing crops intact. Senior officers loaded their mistresses, furniture, even "cages filled with canaries," onto trains while more than a million refugees stumbled beside the track and through the fields. They were emaciated. When they came across an army field kitchen, the men tore basins of food from each other while women with starving children at their breasts trampled each other to snatch at gray hunks of stewed pork. In these shambling columns, twenty miles and more in length, a British military observer glimpsed vignettes—"two carts tied together and drawn by a single miserable horse, one family driving a cow, a poor man and his wife each with a huge bundle of rubbish tied up in a sheet." When he asked them where they were headed, they did not know.

With them the refugees brought epidemics and panic. "Unburied corpses are strewn along the road," the cabinet was told. "Everywhere there is carrion and an unbearable stench. This human mass is spreading over Russia like a vast wave." Spy fever and pogroms intensified. Jews were hanged on trumped-up charges; their shops, synagogues, and houses were looted. Black Hundred newspapers accused them of "sending their gold to the Germans; this tainted gold has been found in airplanes, coffins, barrels of vodka, and breasts of duck and mutton." It was, a Jewish deputy complained, "naught but an ignoble lie, invented by men who are trying to cover their own crimes." The French ambassador warned that the Jews should be treated well, because "there is in the United States a very large, influential, and wealthy Jewish community who are very indignant at your treatment of their co-religionists." It was, he said, "to no avail." As to politics, Wilton wrote to the London *Times* on July 31 that "we may have a situation too serious for anything less than a dictatorship, if not worse." The bureaucracy was "on the verge of complete breakdown. . . . The authority of the government is fast slipping out of its hands."

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Rasputin arrived at Petrograd at 10:10 A.M. on the same day, summoned by the tsar. He was met by Nikolai Solovyov, the synod member whose wife the starets

had fucked in the forests of Pokrovskoye earlier in the month. He saw Nicholas at the Alexander Palace on August 4. He realized that an interrogation over the Yar incident and an immediate return to Siberia were in the cards; he had already sent two identical telegrams to his wife and to Patushinskaya: "See you very soon, we kiss you." The audience was not recorded, of course, but Vassilyev, who owed his promotion to his predecessor's ill-judged handling of the affair, was naturally curious. He asked Rasputin about it the next time they met.

"He confessed, without any more ado, the sin he had committed in Moscow," the secret policeman wrote. He used his standard line, that to sin was human, and that God understood and forgave. "What would you have, my dear man?" he asked Vassilyev. "Who is innocent before God is also innocent before the tsar." Nicholas was angry that Rasputin had referred to the empress—"the old woman"—during his drunken ramblings at the Yar. Rasputin lied, denying that he had made any reference to the imperial family. They also discussed the commander in chief. Rasputin urged that the grand duke be dismissed and that the tsar himself replace him. He later boasted that he had "sunk Nikolasha" at this interview.

He had, nevertheless, come close to a fall, and he knew it. He left Petrograd on the first train the next morning. Vyrubova and her sister Alexandra Alexandrovna von Pistolkors picked him up at his apartment in a limousine from the imperial motor pool and dropped him off at the station. They stayed in the car rather than risk being spotted on the platform. The agents noted other less discreet admirers who were there to wave him off: Tatyana Fyodorovna Shakhovskaya, a twenty-six-year-old princess; the infatuated Baroness Kusova; a swindler, Miller; the cuckold Dobrovolsky and his wife.

The contrition Rasputin had expressed to the tsar the evening before lasted long enough for the train to pull out of the station. The agents watched him chatting with three unknown ladies in the carriage. When they left the train at Kamyshlov, he got down onto the platform to say good-bye to them. They introduced him to the army officers who were meeting them. They talked about the Guseva stabbing and something about a hospital. The agents heard one of the officers, a lieutenant colonel, mutter to another: "It's quite clear that the fellow has hypnosis in his eyes."

Rasputin was in a petulant mood with the Okhrana men when the train moved on. Solovyov had been seen meeting him when he had arrived in Petrograd. The new synod procurator, Alexander Samarin, a well-respected Moscow nobleman, told Solovyov that such conduct was unfitting for a member of the synod. "Solovyov had a bit of trouble from Samarin for meeting me at the station in Petrograd," Rasputin said. "But Samarin isn't going to be procurator of the synod for long." He glared at the agents and said, "Wasn't it you who reported my meeting with Solovyov?"

"It's none of your business," the agents told him.

"Who else can it have been?" Rasputin said. "The emperor asked about this report and said—perhaps the agents informed on Solovyov. So I said to the tsar—I dunno, maybe it's them. Well, I'm going home, and I don't know myself how long I'll stay there—a week, perhaps longer, it depends how matters stand." He said that the tsar had offered him his own carriage to go to Siberia, but he had refused the offer. "Once I was coming back from Tsarskoye Selo to Petrograd, and around midnight I saw one of you agents hiding behind an elevator," he said menacingly. "If I find out who he is, he's gonna have a bad time."

On August 6, as the train crawled toward the Urals, the Germans overran the last Russian strong point in Poland, the fortress of Novogeorgievsk. It had a garrison of 100,000 men with 1,600 guns, but a German patrol had captured the chief engineer and found accurate plans of the fortifications among his papers. "We are being wiped out," the defenders radioed as the Germans systematically destroyed them. "Everything is being swept away, everyone is in panic." A solitary pilot flew out of the ruins to announce that it had fallen. Polivanov told the cabinet that "the army is no longer retreating—it is simply running away." Worse followed. "No matter how badly things are going at the front," the war minister said, "there is another still more terrible situation that now looms before Russia. I feel obliged to inform the government that, when I presented my report this morning, His Majesty told me that he had decided to relieve the grand duke and take over the supreme command of the army himself." Rasputin's vengeance was closing in on Nikolasha.

Rasputin arrived at Tyumen on August 8 and stayed overnight with Father Martian at the monastery. He took a single first-class cabin on the 11:00 A.M. steamer for Pokrovskoye the next morning. He was out to celebrate. Two hours upriver he came out of his cabin drunk. He started talking with ten soldiers who were aboard and gave them twenty-five rubles to sing to him. After a few minutes he went to his cabin and returned with a hundred rubles. He asked them to sing louder and started joining in the choruses. The singing had been going on for an hour when he took the men to the second-class dining room to treat them to a meal. Russian soldiers were beneath society, forbidden to enter first- and second-class compartments on trains, barred from theater stalls, not allowed to enter restaurants and cafés. Civilians addressed them in the familiar, *thou*, as they would a child or pet. On steamers they were restricted to the lower decks. The steamer captain ordered them out of the dining room.

Angry, Rasputin went with them. He made them form a circle, placed himself in the middle, and conducted their singing. His high spirits returned. He gave them another twenty-five rubles and paid fifteen rubles for them to have the third-class dinner. He went back to his cabin, emerging from it to complain that he had lost three thousand rubles. He then returned to his cabin, reap-

pearing twenty minutes later drunker than ever. The agents became alarmed. "He visited third class and had a quarrel with a passenger called Raszumovsky," they noted. "The latter was about to give Rasputin a thrashing, but it passed off peacefully. Then Rasputin quarreled with another merchant from Tyumen—Mikhalev. The deeds of the Tobolsk bishop Varnava were mentioned, at which Mikhalev spat and left." After that Rasputin lurched around the ship until he came across a waiter, whom he called a "swindler" and accused of stealing his three thousand rubles. The waiter asked some passengers to be eyewitnesses on his behalf and complained to the captain, who said he would report the incident to the police in Tobolsk. Rasputin went back to his cabin, opened the window, and slumped with his head on the table, muttering while the curious passengers "feasted their eyes on him."

"Why not take off his hair and shave his beard with some clippers?" one of them suggested. Another laughed. "Rasputin, may your reputation as a holy man last forever." The agents hurried into the cabin and shut the window. At 6:00 P.M., as the ship steamed past the unchanging riverbanks in the yellow heat, Rasputin fell to the floor. He was still there when the ship arrived at Pokrovskoye at 8:00. The agents asked the captain to send two crewmen to help them with Rasputin; the four of them dragged him off. Rasputin's daughters and his brother-in-law Raspopov turned up at the landing stage with a cart and carried him home.

He was up at 10:00 the next morning. He asked the agents what had happened on the steamer trip, "gasping constantly and wondering how he could have gotten drunk on only three bottles of wine." He was worried that word might get out to the tsar. "See, fellow," he told an agent, "it's not good the way it happened." He referred back to the Yar incident. "Dzhunkovsky was dismissed, and now he probably will think it's because of me and I don't even know who he is," he said. "Your guv'nor will be sacked soon, as well." The agents asked, "Which one?" "No, I dunno what his name is," Rasputin said, and changed the subject.

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Fury over Rasputin's influence, the headlong dismissals that followed his threats, spilled over into the press. Maklakov had used wartime censorship to slash out any reference to him. Shcherbatov, knowing that his own time was short, allowed several attacks to be printed. On August 15 the liberal paper *Birzhevye Vedomosti* ran this headline: HOW COULD IT HAPPEN? Signing himself Lukian, the writer asked how a "dark parvenu" had mocked Russia for so long. He said that those who tolerated him made up a "core of evil . . . whose treachery and vacillation have become common gossip. . . . It is a style of 'all things are possible, all things permitted.' . . . In such a world not even Rasputin

seemed unusual. . . . We have reached the point where nothing surprises us anymore, not even Rasputin. No one even realized the disgrace. Simply an effort was made to silence the press. . . . Yet what was there to exaggerate when the naked truth was worse than any lie?" Two days later *Vechernee Vremya* ran a piece suggesting that Rasputin was opposed to the war and working for a "German party."

On August 19 Varnava sent warning from Tobolsk via a priest, Father Nikolai, that the episode on the steamer had been reported to the police and was by no means forgotten. Rasputin spent most of the day with Ermolai's wife, having packed the deacon off to church. The unwelcome news was given to him in the evening. The Tobolsk governor was about to have Rasputin arrested by administrative order to serve three months in prison for drunkenness and dissolute conduct. Only Varnava's intervention was preventing the arrest from being carried out. Rasputin spat and asked, "What do I care about the governor?"

Indeed, he had little reason to. The press campaign merely strengthened him. Alexandra used the articles as a whip with which to beat Shcherbatov, and to convince her husband that he must at once declare himself commander in chief if his authority was to survive. On August 20 Nicholas and Alexandra made a rare visit to their capital. They knelt at his father's tomb in the Peter and Paul Cathedral and then drove to the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, where they prayed for guidance before the icon of the Virgin. They dined with Vyrubova at the Alexander Palace; the tsar was to meet his council of ministers later in the evening. He was nervous, and Vyrubova took a small icon from around her neck and pressed it into his hand. As the meeting dragged on the two women peered in through the French windows from the balcony, watching the foreign minister, Serge Sazonov, argue passionately against the tsar's decision. All the ministers present were in agreement. The administration would be paralyzed if Nicholas removed himself to the Stavka, two days' railroad ride from the seat of government. The blame for fresh military defeats would fall on his head. It was no moment for the autocrat to play soldiers.

The ministers did not mention that the influence of Rasputin and the empress would increase greatly in the tsar's absence; it was understood by both sides. "I did not dot the *i*'s or mention any names, and indeed there was no need to," Sazonov said of his pleadings with Nicholas. "The tsar easily grasped the unsaid meaning, and I saw how distasteful my words were to him. It was painful to me to refer to the dangerous part that the empress had begun to play since Rasputin gained possession of her will and intellect." Nicholas did not contradict him, but, he wrote, "as I spoke he seemed to recede farther away from me till at last I felt that a deep gulf lay between us." Nicholas heard them out, sitting bolt upright. He gave his fatalism full rein. "He replied that he felt it

to be his mission and his duty to assume this responsibility," the agriculture minister Alexander Krivoshein told the London *Times* correspondent Robert Wilton. "If it was written that he and his dynasty should perish . . . well, it was written, and he could not alter it." In two days he would leave for the Stavka. He clutched her icon in his hand, Vyrubova said; when he returned he was sweating.

The following morning eight of the thirteen cabinet members met in Sazonov's rooms at the foreign ministry. They signed a joint letter of resignation to the tsar. "Yesterday at the meeting of the council, we unanimously begged you not to remove Grand Duke Nicholas from the High Command of the Army," it said. "We venture once more to tell you that to the best of our judgment your decision threatens with serious consequences Russia, your dynasty, and your person." The irreconcilable differences within the government, it said, were "inadmissible at all times, and at the present moment fatal." The letter was handed to Nicholas on August 21. He left for the Stavka the same evening. He refused to accept the resignations, but Alexandra would drive all those who signed the letter out of office.

She wrote her husband a triumphant letter to read on the train. "I cannot find words to express all I want to—my heart is far too full," she began. "Never have they seen such firmness in you before, proving yourself the Autocrat without wh. Russia cannot exist. Forgive me, I beseech you, my Angel, for having left you no peace but I too well know yr marvellously gentle character. . . . I have suffered so terribly, & phisically [*sic*] overtired myself these 2 days, & morally worried (& worry still till all is done at the Headquarters & Nikolasha goes) only then shall I feel calm. . . . You see they are afraid of me & so come to you when alone—they know I have a will of my own when I feel I am in the right—& you are now—we know this, so you make them tremble before your courage & will. God is with you & our Friend for you. . . . His holy angels guard & guide you. . . . Sleep well, my sunshine, Russia's Saviour."

Sensing catastrophe, Sir George Buchanan sought the empress out in a last-ditch effort to persuade her that no man could run both an empire and a modern war. "You will win not laurels, but a crown of thorns," the court chamberlain warned the ambassador. Alexandra told Buchanan that the tsar's place was with his army in the field. "I have no patience with ministers who try to prevent him doing his duty," she said. "The emperor is unfortunately weak, but I am not, and I intend to be firm." Her face was set and cold, and she dismissed him with "haughty displeasure, barely giving him her hand to kiss."

The Romanov clan was beside itself with fear. Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich visited the dowager empress, his aunt. "I found Aunt Minnie terribly despondent," he wrote in his diary. "She believes that the removal of NN [Nicholas Nikolayevich] will lead to N's [Nicholas's] inevitable ruin. She kept

asking, 'Where are we going? Where are we going? It isn't Nicky he is sweet, and honest, and good—it's all her doing. . . . She alone is responsible for all that is going on. It was not my dear boy who did this!' " She was reminded of the times of Paul I, "who in his last year began removing everyone loyal, and our great-great-great-grandfather's sad end haunts her in all its horror." Paul was strangled in a palace coup.

The tsar confirmed that the deed was done on his arrival at the Stavka. "Thank God it is all over, and here I am with this new responsibility on my shoulders!" he wrote to Alexandra, telling her that he had read and reread her letter and that it had put him at peace. "Nikolasha came in with a kind, brave smile, and asked simply when I would order him to go. I answered in the same manner that he could remain for two days." The empress knew her man; she feared that backsliding would follow any delay in getting the grand duke safely posted away to a consolation command in the distant Caucasus. "Get Nikolasha's nomination quicker done," she fired back. "No dawdling, it's bad for the cause." The tsar complied. The grand duke was dispatched immediately, not even allowed leave in Petrograd on his way.

Thus, a tsar, who had led no more than a company as a young man, and whose knowledge of weapons systems was limited to the horse and saber, took responsibility for the six million men of a whipped and bleeding army. From the rear his imperceptive and unbalanced wife reassured him that she and her Friend were in control. "Do not fear for what remains behind," she wrote. "Don't laugh at silly old wify, but she has 'trousers' on unseen. . . . God will give me the strength to help you . . . & you have Grigory's St. Nicholas to guard & guide you." The spectacle, a British observer wrote, was "amazing, extravagant and pitiful . . . and one without parallel in the history of civilized nations."

Who was to blame? "The loathsome Rasputin," Robert Wilton wrote privately to London, "played no small part in suggesting the tsar's mystical motives for taking up the High Command. Rasputin always works in the same way. He tells the empress that he has had a vision that certain things must be done. . . . The empress then retails this stuff to her husband and the trick is done. It reminds one of . . . the Byzantine court."

CHAPTER 19

# *"God Opens Everything to Him"*

Alexandra now careered into politics with manic energy. She dominated her husband in letters, the cajoling and bullying stream of words and dashes and underlinings filling the black leather suitcase in which he kept them. Her views were simple, and ruthless. The autocracy must be preserved at any cost, "for Baby's sake." She despised constitutions, "parliamentarists," the "rotten people" who demanded a government responsible to the Duma, and the cities that bred them. She wanted them hanged or otherwise disposed of—a "strong railway accident" would do. She had cut herself off from other Romanovs. She believed in God, the dynasty, and "the people," of whom Rasputin was the divine manifestation.

She was proud of the power her husband's absence gave her. "I am the first Russian empress since Catherine the Great to receive the Ministers," she boasted to him. Women in Russia were stronger in character, decisiveness, and temper than their menfolk, Ivan Turgenev thought. Another writer, Somerset Maugham, was struck by "the aggressive way in which [Russian] women treat men. They seem to take a sensual pleasure in humiliating them in front of others." Maugham found Russian men "femininely passive, they cry easily." It was a phenomenon that all applied to Alexandra and her husband.

The empress's relation with Rasputin became one of partnership. She provided policy, and he supplied her with politicians, and justification. She had an acute eye for the slightest liberal tendency; when she saw it she was pitiless in destroying it. Her quarry included those who had begged her husband not to leave for the Stavka, some of the most able and respected men in Russia—the

foreign minister, the synod procurator, and the ministers of the interior, finance, education, and agriculture. Her contempt for politicians included monarchists. Alexander Guchkov was the leader of the Octobrists, the most right-wing of the major parties, the son of a Moscow tycoon, vigorous, with alert gray eyes, a man who had fought with the Boers in South Africa. He was a royalist and a natural ally, a conservative who stood for landed and industrial interests, but he was a Duma man. "My own beloved darling," Alexandra wrote as Nicholas traveled to the Stavka. "Guchkov ought to be got rid of, only how is the question, war-time—is there nothing one can hook on to have him shut up? He hunts after anarchy & against our dynasty, wh our Friend said God would protect."

She needed a reason for such wholesale changes, and a list of replacements. Rasputin gave her both. His enmity—though she always expressed it in reverse, as the hatred of the intended victim for her Friend—was ground enough for dismissal. "God opens everything to Him," she wrote. Likewise, to enjoy the blessing of the starets was sufficient recommendation for the newcomer. Did Rasputin not have "a wonderful brain—ready to understand everything"? Her campaigns could take several months, scores of letters, but she was, utterly, persistent.

Rasputin was vulnerable to the holders of three key posts. The synod procurator was responsible for church discipline, and the chief of police presided over a network of agents and informers. The interior minister was in many ways the most powerful figure in the cabinet, with broad control over the police and censorship. The three incumbents were hostile; they, or their predecessors, had reported harshly on his conduct. Dzhunkovsky, the errant policeman, went first. Alexandra had the others targeted within a week of Nicholas's departure. She began with the procurator. "Samarin seems to be continuing to speak against me," she wrote on August 25. "We shall hunt for a successor." He was dismissed within days, a fate shared by his successor, Volzhin, when he showed reluctance to meet Rasputin.

Next she turned on the interior minister. Prince Shcherbatov's tolerance of press criticism of her Friend was intolerable. She wrote to Nicholas on August 29 to urge him to replace the prince with someone who knew what was expected of him. "Have a strong & firm talk with him," she said. "Put the position of our Friend clear to him from the outset, he dare not act like Shcherb[atov] and Sam[arin], make him understand that he acts straight against us in persecuting & allowing Him [Rasputin] to be evil written about or spoken of." The new man must "listen to our Friend's councils."

Such a person, she suggested, was Alexis Nikolayevich Khvostov, the Nizhni Novgorod governor whom Rasputin had looked over four years before and thought too young to be prime minister. He was now forty-three, his frock coat

stuffed with flesh, his gluttony matched by his venality. He had matured into an extreme reactionary, a Black Hundred supporter who had taken the precaution of cultivating Prince Andronnikov, and through him Vyrubova and Rasputin. Alexandra thought him a "man without petticoats," a strong figure who she assured the tsar "is very energetic, fears no one & is colossally devoted to you." She found "his body colossal . . . but the soul light and clear." For good measure he had promised to "do all in his power to stop the attacks upon our Friend."

That was the empress's opinion. The tsar checked him out with his uncle, the decent and competent justice minister A. A. Khvostov. "This is a person absolutely inexperienced in this work, one who by character is absolutely unsuitable," the elder Khvostov wrote of his nephew in a confidential note to the tsar. "This is a man who is very far from stupid, but who cannot be critical of his own instincts and judgments. He is inclined to intrigue . . . and in all probability will try to become Premier; in any case all his activities in the office of minister will not be devoted to work, but to considerations which have nothing to do with it." Nothing positive could come from appointing him interior minister; indeed, the justice minister wrote, "I expect harm." The character reference was wholly accurate; it was ignored. Alexandra insisted that Khvostov be appointed—the name means "tail" in Russian, and she called him "my Tail" or "my honest Tail" in her letters in English to Nicholas. The tsar gave way before September was out.

The new minister's first decision was to appoint Stefan Beletsky as his deputy and director of the police department. Beletsky struck Bernard Pares, who knew him personally, as a typical professional police official, resourceful, a man of the world, but "not an honest man." Neither he nor Khvostov suffered any illusions about Rasputin, whom Beletsky thought a "scandalous personage." From now on a great number of Rasputin's notes asking for favors were addressed to him. Beletsky testified later that many of them were for exemptions from military service or for subsidies, and he agreed that they were illegal. He was also well aware that Rasputin demanded sex as the price of his favors. He testified that he saved one respectable petitioner after the starets had forced his way into her bedroom, and that another, reduced to hysterics when Rasputin refused to help her unless she submitted to him, was raped when she did not.

Both men later plotted to murder the starets, but for the present they needed him as the Friend at court. Tired old Goremykin, the premier, was no obstacle to them. They drew up a political program—well spiced with invective against Jews, Masons, liberals, and socialists—that they knew would win Alexandra's approval. Prince Andronnikov pointed out that Rasputin's assistance would be essential. Beletsky arranged to pay him a retainer of eighteen thousand rubles

from the secret police funds to which he had access. Vyrubova was enlisted to help. The prince told her that he would be acting, after a fashion, as Rasputin's business manager. She arranged an audience for Khvostov at the Alexander Palace. The empress was impressed by his flattery and devotion to autocracy. "I yearned to see a real man at last," she wrote to Nicholas, "and here I see and hear him." Khvostov thought her "clever and brilliant."

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In Siberia, Rasputin was involved in an affair of blessed bones. He had never tolerated personal slights; he now extended this intolerance to his protégés. Bishop Varnava was not content with the status Rasputin had won for him; he had set his heart on becoming a metropolitan. An outstanding event in his diocese would help him achieve it. The means was Ioann Maximovich, a priest forcibly sent to Tobolsk two centuries before by Peter the Great to baptize Siberian Tartars; his remains were preserved in the crypt of the cathedral. Varnava wanted his predecessor beatified. He had sent a box of petitions to the tsar calling for Ioann to be ranked among the saints; on examination it was found that most of the signatures were in his own handwriting. The tsar passed the request to the synod. Aware that Varnava was more concerned with self-promotion than sainthood, it did nothing.

Varnava had taken the preliminary step of opening the coffin the year before. He did not, however, unwrap the body to see whether God had seen fit to preserve it and thus qualify it for beatification. The synod ordered him "not to open the face and parts of the body of Ioann." Rasputin's presence gave Varnava the confidence to flout the synod in August. The bishop, aping Rasputin, sent a series of flattering telegrams to the tsar. "Thank you, Right Reverend, for the prayers for me and my soldiers who love Christ," Nicholas replied. In another cable, to Alexandra, Varnava said that he had seen a cross appear in the sky. "I congratulate you on this vision and believe that God has sent you this sign to uphold visibly with love his devoted ones," she responded. She was not certain that it was a good sign—"crosses are not always," she wrote—but the essential of involving the rulers was achieved.

On August 27 Varnava proceeded with the glorification of Ioann Maximovich in the Tobolsk cathedral, in open defiance of the synod. Rasputin was present. The following day they met the inevitable outrage by claiming the support of the tsar. Rasputin sent a cable to Stankevich, the Tobolsk governor who was investigating the drunken incident on the steamer. "The tsar's heart will be comforted in the hands of God in front of the Saint Ioann Maximovich who responds to the prayers of the doleful Grigory Novy," it read. Varnava wired the synod that, in response to the tsar's permission to honor the saint locally, "I together with clergy of the parish sang glorification to the metropolitan Ioann of

which I humbly inform your holiness and await further instructions." He signed it "sinful bishop Varnava." A ciphered telegram from Stankevich to the synod confirmed: "First glorification sung. . . . Not only the people but most informed people see this as apotheosis."

Support from the empress was swift. She cabled Varnava on August 29: "Let there be glorification of the saint to assist the tsar in his hard tasks. Alexandra." With this telegram as insurance, Varnava and Rasputin left Tobolsk for Pokrovskoye to wait for the synod's fury to break. On August 31 a cable arrived from the synod summoning the bishop to Petrograd to explain himself. He and Rasputin composed a rambling telegram to send to Nicholas. "Stavka, The Emperor," it began. "Glorification sung the people rejoiced wept the right reverend informed him demand him immediately I ordered now we go to pray . . . God with us over the whole orthodox army. Your hand is paradise. Bishop Varnava. Grigory Novy."

The defiance infuriated churchmen and laity alike. "The whole of Russia is talking about it," Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich wrote. "Priests everywhere are preaching to the people the kind of thing I would not dare whisper in my sleep." The hostility and the threat of a court case preyed on the starets. On September 6 he took a walk with his two agents. "You know, fellows, the soul mourns, it even makes me deaf," he told them. "Sometimes there's peace in my heart for a couple of hours, and then it's no good again."

"Why's it like that for you?"

"Because, guys, bad things are happening in this country," he replied, "and the darned papers write about me, make me very nervous. I'll have to defend myself in court."

He remained edgy. A family row broke out in Pokrovskoye on September 9. Efim Rasputin appeared and started bawling his son out. Rasputin jumped up from the table and "like a madman pushed his father into the yard, threw him down to the ground, and started to hit him with his fists." Efim cried out, "Don't hit me, you scoundrel." The agents intervened to part them by force. The father's eye was badly bruised and swollen shut. On his feet again the old man scolded his son in even fiercer terms. He dragged up his continuing affair with the maid Dunia. He threatened to tell the world that the only thing his son was good for was "feeling Dunia's soft parts." After that the agents had to pinion Rasputin to stop him from attacking his father a second time. He pulled himself together enough to send two telegrams, one to Tsarskoye Selo and the other to the Stavka. He was becoming bored in Pokrovskoye and wanted Nicholas to allow him back to Petrograd.

His son Dmitry had been called up for military service. Rasputin could not ask Nicholas or Alexandra to arrange a deferment; it was a service he provided for others, at a price, but he could not do it for his son without appearing un-

patriotic. He told the empress that his son would serve, referring to himself as "Abraham sacrificing Isaac." In practice, he had his own means of ensuring that Dmitry remained a thousand miles from the front. He took the boy to Tyumen on September 10. His wife went with them. They met up with Patushinskaya, who placed Dmitry in the Seventh Company of her husband's regiment at Yalutorovsk, safely tucked away from the Germans in Siberia. They spent the night at Father Martian's monastery. Rasputin stayed put while the others went into town. "I know lots of people in Tyumen, but I don't have the time to see them," he explained to Terekhov, one of the agents. Terekhov thought the real reason was that he was frightened something could happen to him in the street. "Rasputin sidles," Terekhov noted of his awkward gait. "It looks as though he injured his side during the fight with his father."

Varnava had gone to Petrograd and made a heated appearance in front of the synod. He was ordered to attend a further session on September 10. He failed to turn up and was missing from the apartment where he was registered as staying. The following day he sent a messenger to explain that his mother was seriously ill and that he had left for the provinces to be with her. This was a lie. He remained in Petrograd, hiding in Prince Andronnikov's apartment. From here he wrote a rambling, hysterical letter to the tsar, describing synod members as "bloodsucking Beilises"—a reference to a Jew falsely accused of murdering Christian babies and drinking their blood—who mocked Rasputin. "It was a torture over me I could not stand it," he scribbled. "I said why do you want to muddle me and scoff at me for I am a Bishop of the Orthodox Church and the procurator adds that I am friendly with Rasputin and all these bishops burst out laughing and I, excuse me, Great Tsar, said that I am not afraid of you traitors so long as the Great Tsar Nicholas II reigns so he will defend me and will not allow you bloodsuckers to offend me I wept and left. . . . The poor saint Ioann Maximovich his glorification met suffocating gases of malice from the spiteful synod anarchists he was not spared. Religious feeling of the people violated so as to torment the Tsar and Tsarina." Many would have read the letter as evidence of insanity; to Nicholas it revealed a religious soul.

Varnava also cabled Rasputin asking for help. Rasputin responded with a flattering cable to the tsar from Pokrovskoye on September 17. "Ioann Maximovich glorified himself with wonders," it rambled. "It is no good our fathers objecting—they delay too long—God blessed your intention your word is peace and goodwill for everybody and your hand thunder and lightning will conquer all. Grigory Novy."

It worked. The synod prepared a critical report on the absent bishop. Nicholas split hairs to defend him, saying that the bishop's "local glorification" of Ioann Maximovich was permissible even if the saint did not meet the requirements demanded by the synod for "all-Russia glorification." In a note in

the margin of the report, the tsar concluded that the synod, recognizing the bishop's "passionate fervency," should judge his actions "with pardon and love for the sake of the church."

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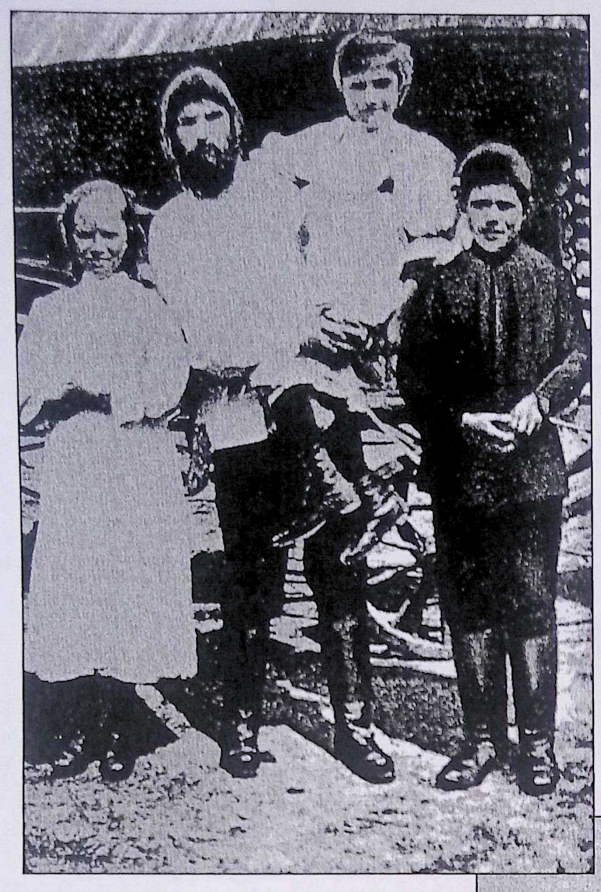
It would have been bizarre at any time for Rasputin to pursue the tsar over a two-hundred-year-old corpse, on behalf of a semi-literate bishop with a fetish for being photographed in coffins. To do so when Nicholas had the high command of armies that were daily suffering thousands of fresh casualties was grotesque. A new call-up of two million men was under way. "We have lost something like five million men (I am not exaggerating)," Robert Wilton was writing to London. The war committee of the Duma was complaining that artillery, machine guns, and ammunition were short, that trenches were inadequate, that "neither bravery, nor competence, nor military worth" influenced the choice of commanders.

Nicholas enjoyed himself at the Stavka. "Thank God it is all over," he wrote to Alexandra when he assumed command. "I feel so calm—a sort of feeling like after the Holy Communion." With the German advance the headquarters had been pulled back to Mogilev. The city was set on hills above the east bank of the Dnieper River, almost five hundred miles south of Petrograd. It had a pretty cathedral, a governor's mansion once used by Napoleon's marshals, four horse-drawn tramlines, and a shabby hotel, the Bristol. The petty routines of military life comforted the tsar, and he ignored the larger picture of the war. He enjoyed the absence of politics. "I do not read the newspapers here," he said. "My brain is resting here—no ministers, no troublesome questions demanding thought." He liked to hold parades, at times within range of German guns, for he was not a physical coward; he awarded St. George Crosses by the thousand, and once solemnly promoted all those present at a ceremonial dinner.

He did not know that one of his best generals, Brusilov, found him unsuited to command "by reason of his ignorance, inability, utterly flaccid will, and lack of stern inner character" and that Brusilov thought those who had urged him to come to the Stavka—the empress and the starets—"are not better than criminals." He did not sense that he was awkward with the men, that "he did not know what to say, where to go, or what to do." He believed that he was loved. "The proof—the numbers of telegrams which I receive from all sides, with the most touching expressions," he wrote to Alexandra on September 9. "The ministers, always living in town, know terribly little of what is happening in the country as a whole. Here I can judge correctly the real mood." The only places where he admitted he was unpopular were Petrograd and Moscow, and he mocked them as "two minute points on the map of the fatherland."

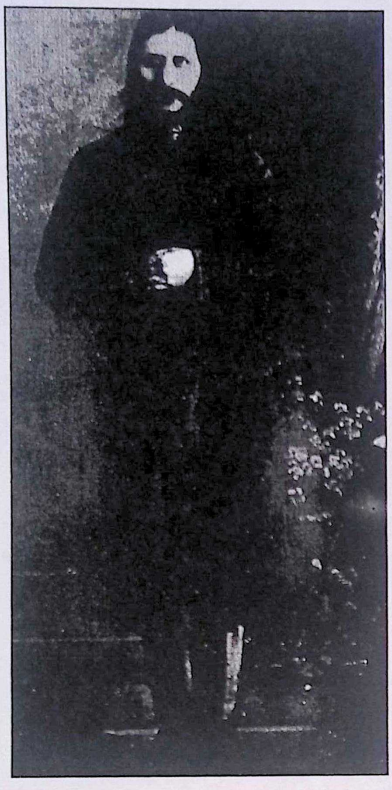
The enemy relied on the restless, probing minds of Ludendorff and Hindenburg. As to the Russian supreme commander, he said of himself that "the heart



A devoted father: Grigory Rasputin in Pokrovskoye with his children, Maria, Varya, and Dmitry.



In peasant dress, Rasputin with fishermen on the banks of the Tura River in Siberia. He helped them bring in their nets and taught them psalms; other accounts had him "holding strange ceremonies with girls in forest deeps, weaving crosses from boughs."



Rasputin, photographed shortly after he first arrived in St. Petersburg. He was already a full-fledged—if strikingly young—holy man, or *starets*.



Rasputin (left, wearing peasant boots beneath his robes) with two powerful allies acquired in St. Petersburg in 1903: Bishop Hermogen (center) and the fiery, charismatic monk Iliodor (right). As evidence of his sexual excesses mounted, though, they turned on him.



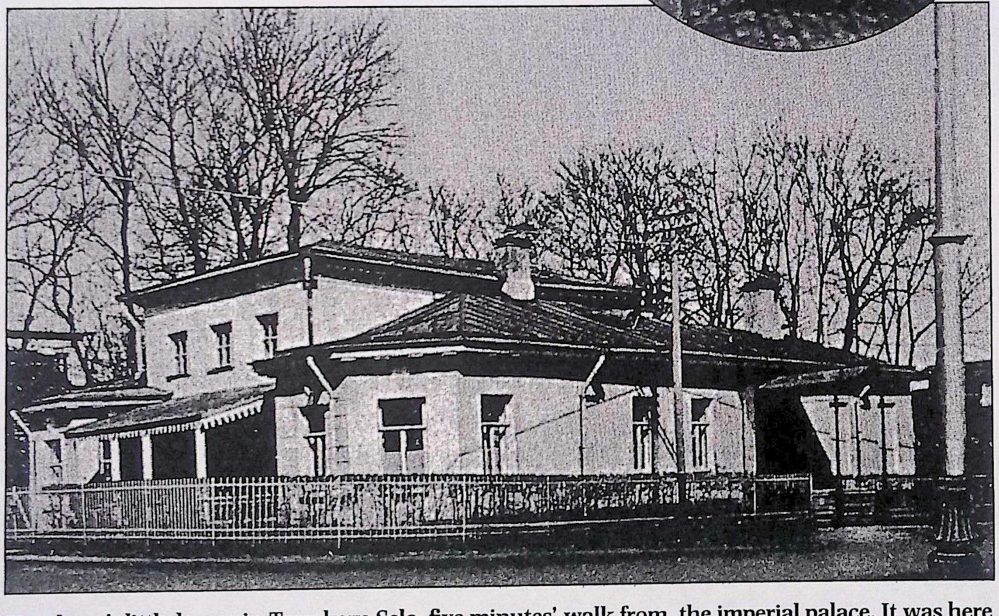
Father Ioann of Kronstadt, a mystic close to the ruling Romanovs. "My son," he told Rasputin, "I can feel your [illegible] God's house. The divine spark is within you."



Dubbed "the crows" for their striking black hair and raucous chatter, the grand duchesses Militsa (left) and Anastasia (right) were instantly infatuated with Rasputin. Seeking to extend their influence at court, they performed the fateful introduction of Rasputin to the tsar and empress.



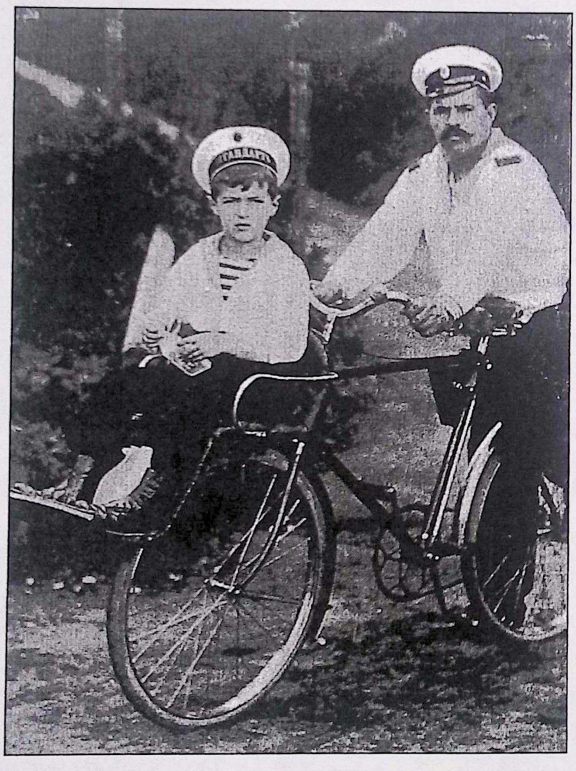
Anna Vyrubova, "completely enslaved" by Rasputin and the empress's most intimate friend, was the key link between them.



Vyrubova's little house in Tsarskoye Selo, five minutes' walk from the imperial palace. It was here that Alexandra most often met with Rasputin.



The tsar and empress with their children, 1913. From left: Olga, Marie, Tsar Nicholas, Empress Alexandra, Anastasia, Alexis, and Tatiana. The children wrote of Rasputin as their "dear, sweet, unforgettable friend."



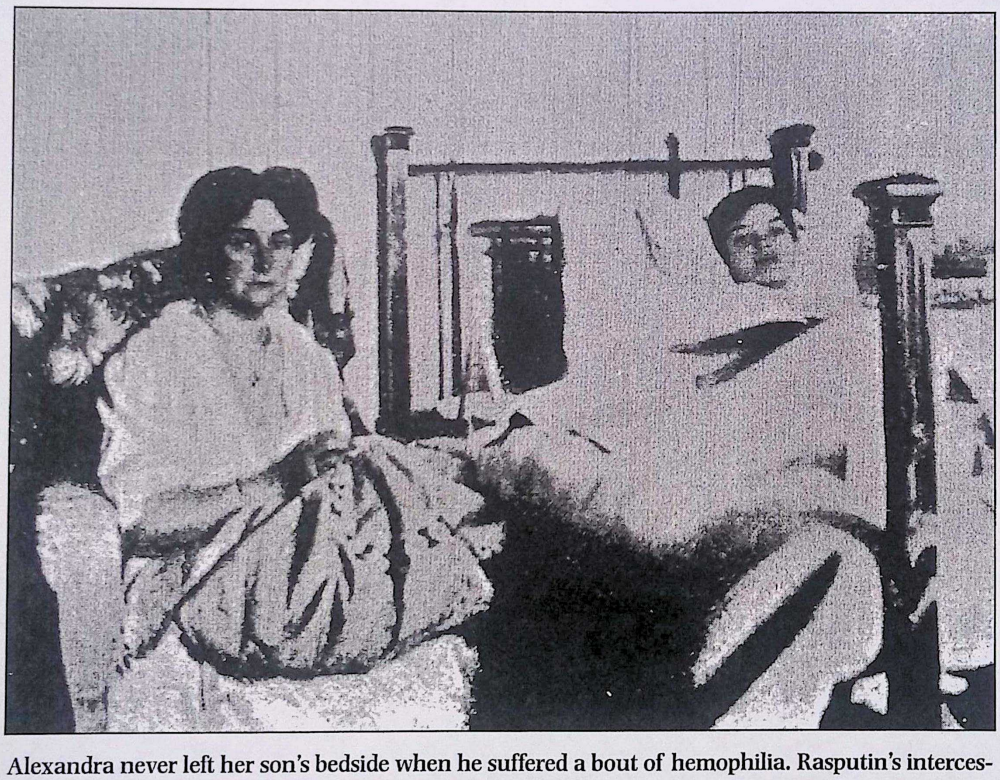
Alexis, the hemophiliac heir to the throne, with his sailor bodyguard Nagorny, assigned to protect him from falls and carry him when he tired.



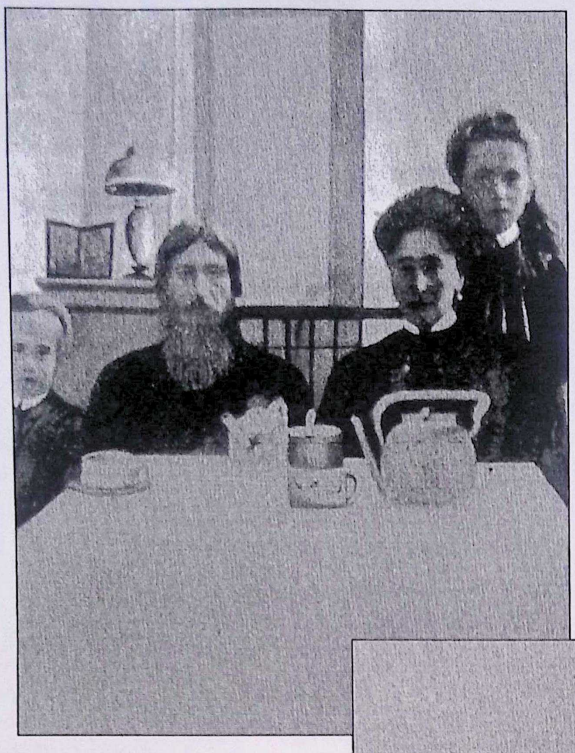
A study in sorrow: Empress Alexandra. Proud and unbending—"a will of iron linked to not much brain and no knowledge," the court grand marshal said of her—she despised society, and it her. When a letter she wrote to Rasputin was stolen and published—"I wish only one thing . . . to fall asleep forever . . . in your arms"—her many enemies seized it as proof that she was having an affair with the Siberian peasant.



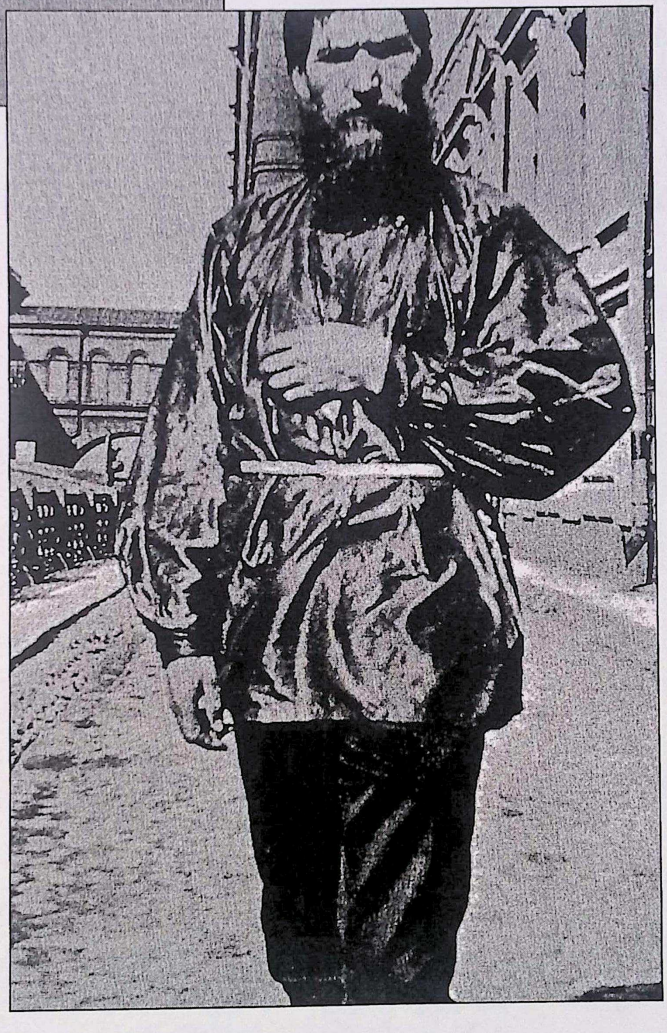
Agents of the Okhrana, the Russian secret police, in Paris at the time of the investigation into Dr. Philippe. The French pseudo-doctor was the first "holy man" to influence the empress. General Rachovsky, the Russian counterterrorist chief in Paris, described Philippe as a charlatan; the tsar had Rachovsky dismissed for his pains.



Alexandra never left her son's bedside when he suffered a bout of hemophilia. Rasputin's intercessions for the child—in person, by telephone and telegram—were followed by swift recovery. Coincidence, perhaps; the empress ascribed it to God.



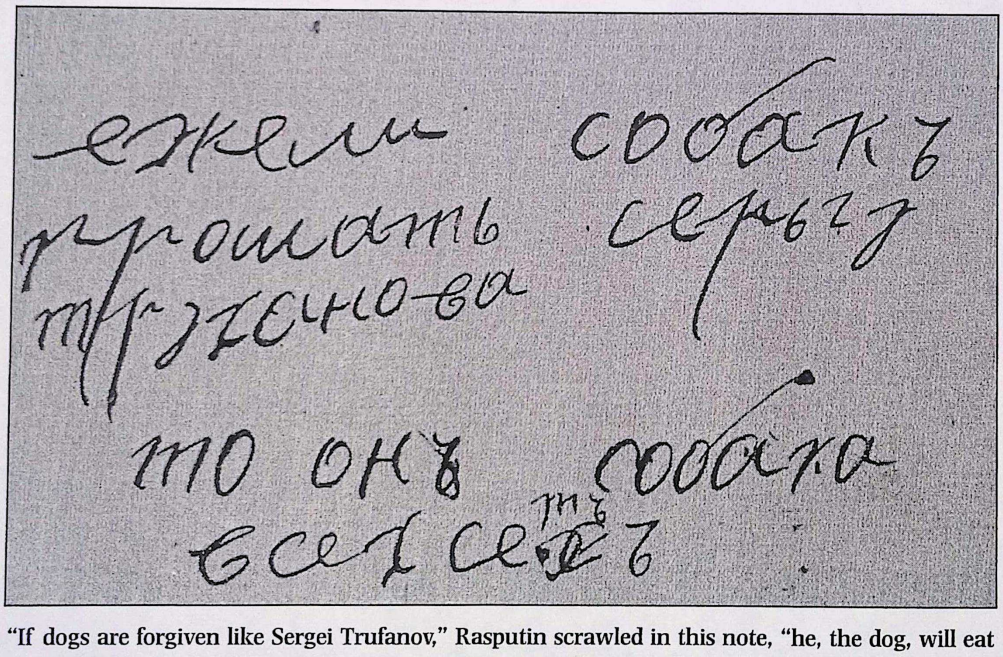
The only picture of Rasputin with the empress, apparently taken over tea at Anna Vyrubova's cottage, may well be a fake. Nicholas and Alexandra were at pains to prevent any record being made of Rasputin's visits.



Rasputin poses in St. Petersburg shortly before the war. He still wears a peasant tunic, but the material is silk.




After an attempt on his life in 1914, Rasputin was sketched recovering in his hospital bed. He has written: "What will tomorrow bring? Thou art our leader, O God, how many thorny paths there are in life!"




"If dogs are forgiven like Sergei Trufanov," Rasputin scrawled in this note, "he, the dog, will eat everyone up." Sergei Trufanov is the monk Iliodor, Rasputin's ex-friend and would-be murderer. When he was defrocked, he resumed his original name.

The tsar and his giant cousin Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich (right), commander in chief of the Russian army at the start of World War I. When Rasputin asked if he could visit headquarters, the grand duke wired back: "Come and I'll hang you."





Infantrymen kneel at the front as the tsar blesses them with an icon. At the urging of Rasputin and Alexandra, Nicholas dismissed his cousin and made himself commander in chief in 1915. The [illegible] be handed out Georgiy Cross medals. "Tsar with Georgiy."



"Utterly false, two-faced," a cabinet colleague said of Boris Stürmer, whom Rasputin and Alexandra maneuvered into office as prime minister in 1916.



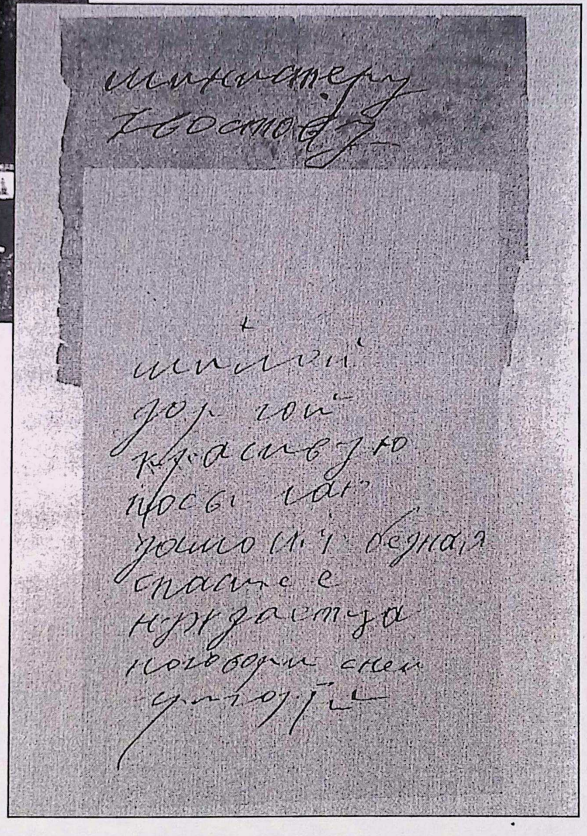
The most powerful post in Russia, that of interior minister, was filled in 1916 by Alexander Protopopov. He resembled "an excitable seal," showed symptoms of syphilis, and was "certainly not quite sane." Alexandra championed him; Rasputin remarked approvingly that the new minister's honor "stretches like a piece of elastic."

The corrupt metropolitan of Petrograd, Pitirim, owed to Rasputin his elevation to the most influential position in Russian Orthodoxy. "I begat him," Rasputin boasted. Pitirim's appointment by the tsar outraged the faithful and further sapped the prestige of the throne.

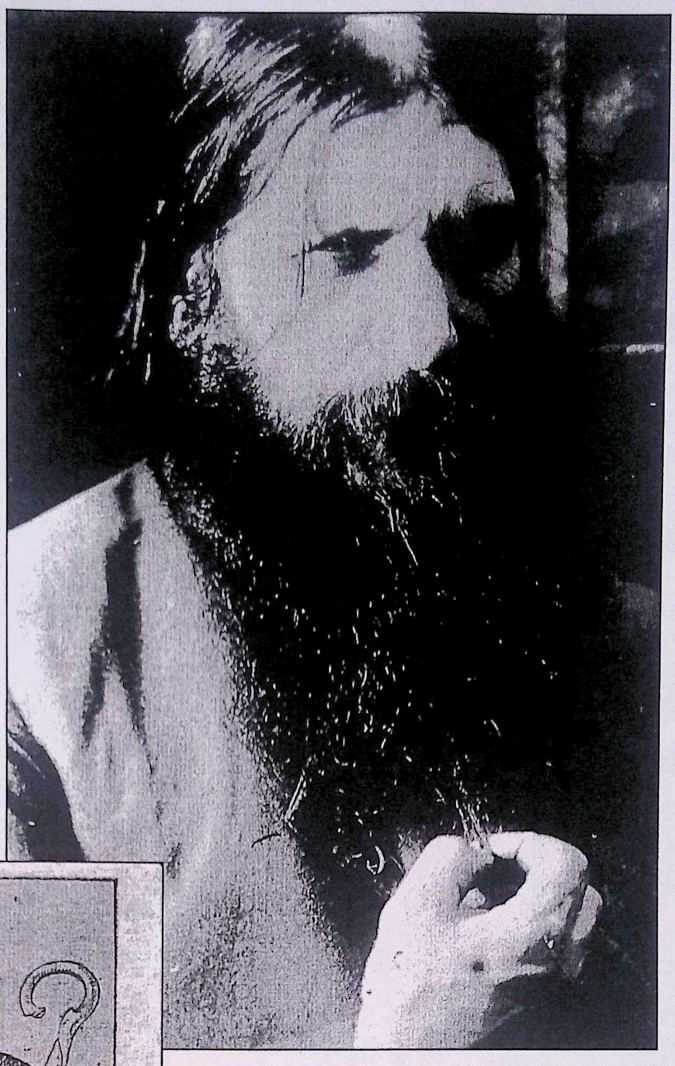




"A stool pigeon, spy, sharper, swindler, chiseler, forger, and ruffian": thus the French ambassador described Ivan Manasevich-Manuilov, who cultivated Rasputin and introduced Boris Stürmer to him as a possible prime minister. When faced with prosecution for fraud, he threatened to expose Rasputin's dealings with Stürmer. The charges were dropped.



A note Rasputin wrote on behalf of a petitioner, in this case to Alexis Khvostov at the interior ministry. "My dear, dear fellow," he scribbled, "I am sending you a beautiful girl. She is poor—she is in need, speak with her, Grigory." It is typical of scores of kindly acts.



Rasputin in 1915, nearing the height of his career. He regained the tsar's confidence after Anna Vyrubova had been given up for dead in a railroad accident and he "miraculously" restored her to consciousness.



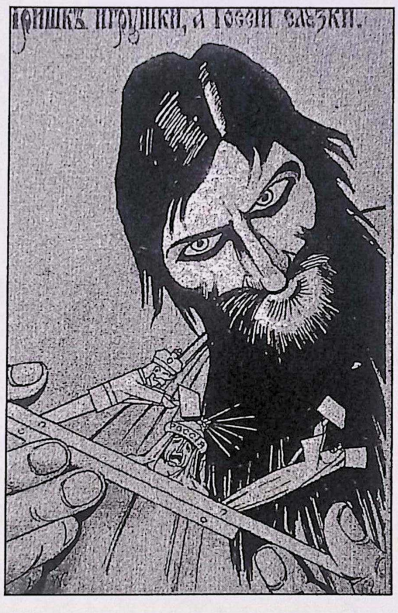

A playing card in illegal circulation in 1916 shows Rasputin, bottle in hand, as tsar with Nicholas beneath him. Thousands of copies were run off on underground presses.



The tsar dances to Rasputin's tune in a mocking cartoon. Newspapers were forbidden to mention Rasputin's name or to print his picture. Of course, this merely increased the public appetite for scandal. "Rasputin, Rasputin, Rasputin," a Petrograd lady complained. "It was like a refrain. It became a dusk enveloping our world, eclipsing the sun."



A caricature headed "Russia's Ruling House" shows Nicholas and Alexandra in Rasputin's grasp. The special-sections archive of the secret police had boxes of such cartoons, many of them showing the empress and Rasputin in lewd poses.



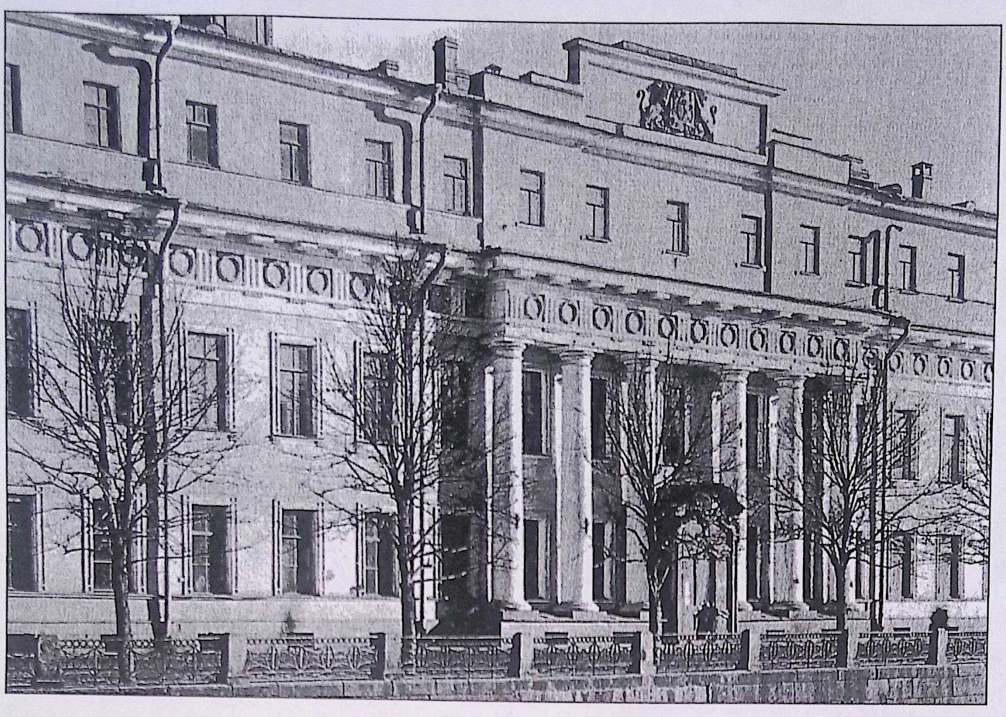
Marionette man: Rasputin uses puppets of the tsar and Metropolitan Pitirim to beat weeping Russia about the head.



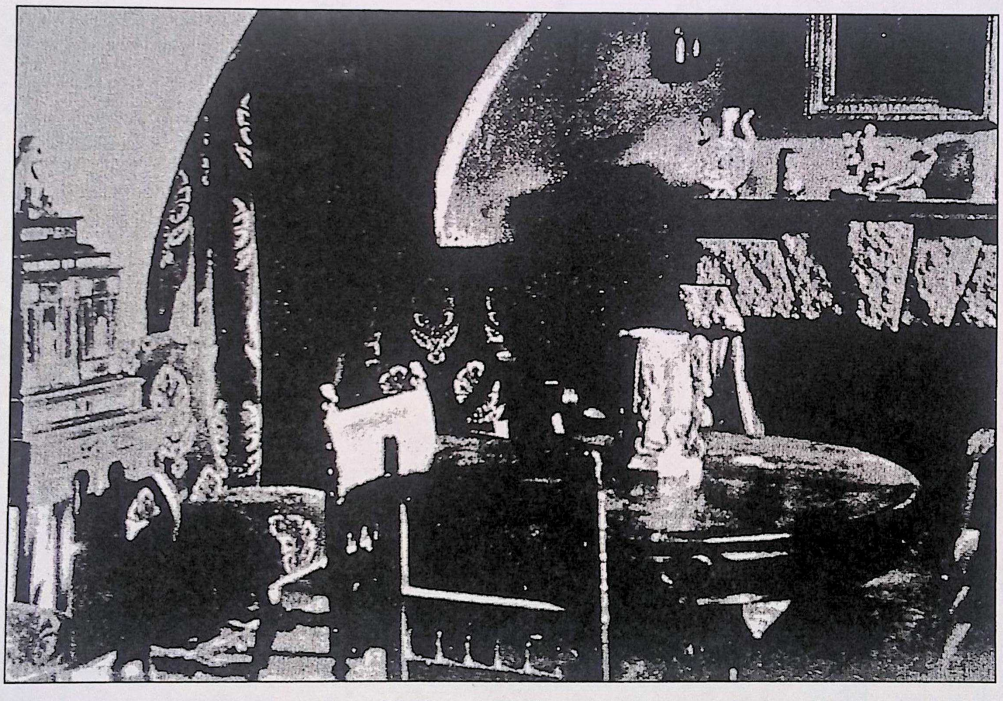
Admirers surround Rasputin in his Gorokhovaya apartment in Petrograd, 1915. Anna Vyrubova is the third standing woman from the left. Mikhail Rodzianko, a leading politician, was horrified to find that he "recognized many of these worshipers from high society."



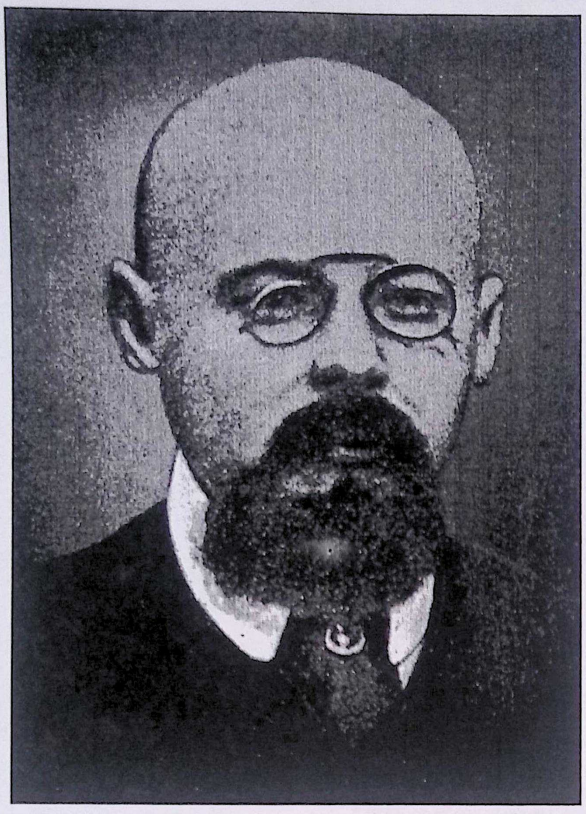
Felix Yusupov, Rasputin's murderer, is seen here with his wife, Irina, and their daughter in 1915. He is wearing his military cadet uniform; in his death throes, Rasputin ripped off one of the epaulets.



The Yusupov palace on the Moika Canal in Petrograd, to which Rasputin was lured for his murder.



The basement room in the Moika Palace in which the murder began. Yusupov fitted it out with a bear rug, cozy curtains, and a fire, to put Rasputin at ease.



So reactionary that "the only thing further Right was the wall," Vladimir Purishkevich gave the Duma speech condemning Rasputin as a "filthy, depraved, corrupt peasant" that inspired Yusupov to plan the killing. Purishkevich joined the plot.



The police photograph of Rasputin's body. An autopsy found alcohol in the body but no evidence of poison. The three bullet wounds were consistent with the killers' own accounts; the bruising to the head was caused by blows from Purishkevich and Yusupov. A small amount of water was found in the lungs, suggesting that Rasputin may not have been clinically dead when his body was dumped into the Neva River.

of the tsar is in the hands of God." He liked the view from his rooms in the governor's mansion over the Dnieper to the water meadows and stands of beech and chestnut. He rose at nine, had a morning briefing from his chief of staff, Gen. Mikhail Alexeev, and examined the neat flags on the maps in the map room. At three he went out for a drive along the river in his Rolls-Royce. After dinner he played dominoes and watched films, romances and American detective serials. It was a pleasant, gentlemanly existence with the occasional echo of war—he slept on a hard camp bed and reminded himself that he must not complain, for "how many sleep on damp grass and mud!"

Alexis was with him, the boy wearing the uniform of a private soldier and sharing his father's bedroom. "It is very cosy to sleep side by side," Nicholas wrote to Alexandra. "I say prayers with him every night. . . . he says his prayers too fast, and it is difficult to stop him." The boy was sleeping well—"as I do"—in spite of the bright light of his icon lamp. He woke early, sat up in bed, and talked softly with his father. "I answer him drowsily, he settles down and lies quietly until I am called." Nicholas thought that the pale boy "gives light and life to all of us"; his lunchtime prattling to visiting generals and diplomats "is pleasant for them and it makes them smile." The smiles covered astonishment at the presence of a boy in this place of war; a sickly boy at that, who caused a Guards offensive in Bukovina to be delayed for a fortnight because he was ill but insisted that he review the guardsmen before the attack. Nicholas was proud of the eleven-year-old's conduct. "I shall never forget this review," he wrote to Alexandra. "The weather was excellent and the general impression astounding." She was proud, too. "Minds will be purified & they will carry the picture of you & yr Son in their hearts with them."

It was touching, loving, but it was not war. Neither could Alexandra's interference qualify as government. It was so frantic that she complained that she could not get a response quickly enough by letter. "Why won't we have a telephone run from your room to mine?" she wrote. "It would be fantastic & you could tell me good news or discuss a question. . . . We would try not to pester you, since I know you do not like to talk—but this would be our exclusive, private conversation, & we would be able to speak without concern that someone was listening in." As the summer heat drained away and the leaves outside her boudoir turned gold and red, she hammered on at the accursed "parliamentarists," hinting that she wanted Guchkov murdered. "A railway accident in wh he alone wld suffer wld be a real punishment fr[om] God," she wrote. "Show yr fist . . . be the master and lord; you are the Autocrat & they dare not forget it, when they do, as now, woe unto them."

She said that she had enemies everywhere—spitefully, she warned that Nikolasha and his "clique" in Caucasian exile "will try to continue making messes"—and reminded her husband of the need for their Friend. She sent a photograph of Rasputin and one of his combs to Mogilev on September 15. "Re-

member to keep the Image in yr hand again & try several times to comb yr hair with this comb before the sitting of the ministers," she wrote. A stuffed fish on a stick followed. "He used it first and now sends it to you as a blessing," she said.

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Rasputin complained to an agent in Pokrovskoye that he wanted to return to Petrograd, but "Vyrubova is not allowed to invite me." He received an anonymous letter on September 19 that frightened him. Whoever had written it knew that he was in contact with the tsar in Mogilev. "Grigory, our motherland collapses, they want to sign a disgraceful peace," it read. "As you receive ciphered telegrams from the Stavka, it means that you have great influence. Therefore we ask you to make ministers responsible to the people so that the state Duma meeting on September 23 can save the motherland. If you do not do this, we will kill you without mercy—we will not hesitate like Guseva did. It will be carried out, wherever you are. The lot to kill you fell on us and there are ten of us." It was unsigned.

His renewed pleas to Vyrubova succeeded. Rasputin left Pokrovskoye on September 24 for the four-day steamer and train ride to Petrograd. Elena Djanumova was waiting for him there to see if her mother's exile could be lifted. Over the summer he had urged her in telegrams to go to the capital—"Bringing joy with the light of love and I live with this Grigory"—which otherwise made no sense. Her friend Maria Arkadyevna assured her that they were indeed meaningless, except to admirers, who kept them in expensive caskets like sacred texts and for whom "the darker is their meaning, the better."

A voice with the familiar drawling *o*'s telephoned her at the Severnaya Hotel: "Well, is that you, Frantic? You're in Peter, but didn't visit me? Why so-o? Come at once." A man friend at the hotel, a Monsieur Ch, offered to drive her over in his car. He much wanted to meet the "almighty starets," the local slang for Rasputin. Elena told him to wait in the car while she asked if he could come up. Rasputin flew into uncontrolled fury when she mentioned him. "You've come from Moscow with a man," he bellowed, his pupils dilating. "Nice one. Came to ask me about a petition and brought a man with you. Couldn't part with him. So that's what you are. I won't do anything for you. I've got little ladies of my own who love me and indulge me. Go, go."

He ran to the telephone and spoke in a nervous, shaky voice: "Dusenka, darling, are you free now? I'm coming to you. Are you glad? Well, wait for me, I'll be right there." He hung up and gave Elena a smirk. "I don't need Moscow women, don't need them," he said. "Peter women are better than Moscow women." She rushed from the apartment in tears, vowing never to see the "crude muzhik" again.

She was back the following day with Ch; Rasputin had called her to apologize, meek, gentle. He asked Ch to come up from the car. "Let me take a look at

this one," he said, "the spark that set the forest on fire." He kissed the man when he came up the stairs and sat him down for breakfast. Then he drew Elena's maid aside, to complain in tears that Elena was surrounded by "hawks," his expression for men: "I want to help her, but let her be with me, not with others."

It was a bravura performance. "By God, Madam, it was so curious," the maid told Elena. "He speaks so plaintively and the tears keep dropping. Why are you so upset? I ask him—I felt so sorry for him. And he says: 'Pity, my dear, such pity'—and beats his chest. I felt so sorry for him, Madam, so sorry." Elena found something so primitive in Rasputin, so alien to polite understanding, that it was impossible to be angry with him. He asked her to come back on Sunday.

He was holding court for women admirers in the dining room. Elena was meeting almost the full harem. The room was hot and heavy with scent, and she had an impression of silks, dark broadcloths, sables, diamonds, and aigrettes in coiffured hair, counterpointed against the white scarf of a Sister of Charity and the threadbare clothes of an old woman. The nursing sister was Akulina Laptinskaya. The elderly woman was A. G. Gushchina, a lonely person to whom Rasputin showed real kindness.

"This is my most beloved, from Moscow—Frantic," he said. He sat her next to Akulina Nikitishna, called Kilina by all, the pretty and frivolous daughter of the commander of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Tea was poured. Elena was about to help herself to sugar when Kilina took her glass and said to Rasputin, "Bless, Father." She explained to Elena: "When the Father puts in sugar with his own hands, it's God's blessing." Everyone held their glasses out to him. Dunia came into the room; Elena described her as an "elderly maid" and thought that she was a distant relative of Rasputin. The ladies told her to take a rest, they would do the work.

A "striking brunette, a baroness," began to collect the dishes. This was probably Vera Kusova, the officer's wife eager to advance her husband's career. Another lady, in a violet velvet dress and sable tippet, washed the tea things. A plump young blonde, simply dressed, jumped up to open the door when the bell rang. She was introduced as Munya Golovina; her mother, an important-looking old lady, was also in the room. Munya acted as a maid in the hall, taking fur coats and helping visitors off with their galoshes. "The samovar has boiled away," Dunia said to her. "You should add water and put on some more coal." Munya grabbed the samovar and darted off to the kitchen. A corpulent lady in a gris de perle dress, her stoutness concealed by soft folds of crepe de chine, went with her; this was probably L. V. Miller, the wife of a rich merchant, whom the agents described as "middle-aged and lopsided, still with pretensions to be attractive."

Kilina began to sing "Wanderer," a haunting folk song. Others caught the air of melancholy and began to sing psalms, Kilina catching the high notes above Rasputin's light bass. The doorbell rang. A messenger brought in a basket of roses and a dozen embroidered silk shirts, the gift of a lady. The singing stopped for a moment, and Rasputin gave a little homily. "One's got to subdue oneself," he instructed. "One's got to be simpler, simpler, nearer to God. All these ruses of yours aren't needed. You're all so cunning, my little ladies, I know you all. I read your souls. Too much cunning."

Then he began to sing again, the folk song "Russian"; he danced. A woman came in, in a white linen dress of strange monastic cut, with a white cowl pulled almost over her eyes. The twelve gospels, with crosses on the binding, hung from her dress. Someone whispered to Elena that it was Olga Lokhtina.

"At the father's, one has to behave as in church, with grandeur," she said sharply.

"Leave them alone," said Rasputin. "Let them have a good time."

Guests were beginning to leave. They kissed Rasputin's hand; he embraced them and kissed them on the lips. "Dried crusts, Father," they asked. He handed out bits of stale bread, which they wrapped in perfumed handkerchiefs. After whispering with some of them, Dunia came back with two parcels wrapped in newspaper. It was Rasputin's dirty linen. The ladies asked for it. "The dirtier the better," they said. "It's got to have sweat." Munya Golovina helped them on with their galoshes. One of them protested. "Father teaches us to be meek," she said and, taking a foot in her hand, put on the overshoes.

On the staircase Elena asked about Lokhtina, the woman in white. "She is the wife of a general and a former admirer of Iliodor," she was told. "Now she worships Father as if he were a saint. Lives the life of a hermit. Sleeps on boards, puts a log under her head. Her relatives beseeched Father to send her his pillow so she wouldn't torture herself like that. Well, she consented to sleep on his pillow. A saint-woman." As she walked into the dark street, Elena felt she had escaped from an insane asylum.

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She was back, nevertheless, the next lunchtime in a final effort to have her mother's exile quashed. Princess Shakhovskaya, a striking, raven-haired beauty in a nurse's uniform, was in the dining room. She was twenty-six and was married to Prince V. Shakhovskoy, whom Rasputin had recommended as trade minister; she had followed the starets for four years. The police were aware that Rasputin had been sleeping with her—"he calls her 'my duck' and she kisses his hands and feet," they reported—and so were the capital's writers of satirical verse. The prince, aware that his position depended on the starets, ignored both the affair and the lampoons.

Rasputin was eating fish while the princess peeled potatoes with the most exquisite fingers Elena had ever seen, long and delicate with mother-of-pearl nails. He took the potatoes carelessly, without looking at her or thanking her. She kissed his fingers, sticky with the fish he piled on his plate. He brought Elena a copy of his book of meditations on his journey to the Holy Land; the preface had a photograph of him lying disheveled in bed after Guseva's attack. He scribbled on the front page: "To my dear simpleton Frantic to remember me by, Grigory."

The princess wanted him to go to his study, to give her some confidential advice. He did so with ill grace. They were back in a few minutes. He was angry; she had tears in her eyes. She kissed his hand and left. Elena asked him why he was so unkind to the princess. "I loved her so much once, but I don't love her anymore," he said. Elena asked him if he could make men ministers. "No big deal, why not?" he replied, and took her into his study to discuss her mother's petition. "I'll do everything for you, my dear one, but you also have to humor me and obey me," he said. "A promise is a promise. If you do things my way, the affair will be settled. If not, nothing will be done."

She said she had to return to Moscow. "All right, then, the affair will wait too. You come back and you'll be with me. We'll do everything." His eyes burned; something fettered her movements, and she could not flee. She was saved by the maid, who shouted through the door, "Telephone from Tsarskoye." Elena left and went straight to the station. That evening the agents saw Rasputin bringing back an unnamed woman to his apartment; she left in the early hours.

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The starets was careful to give the empress a different account of his nights—sleepless, filled with somber insights into the fate of Russia. Alexandra faithfully passed them on to Nicholas. She wrote on October 10 that the starets foresaw a food crisis and had dreamed of its solution. "He says that you must give the order that wagons with flour, butter and sugar should be allowed to pass: there are to be no other trains for 3 days. He saw the whole thing in a night vision."

All passenger traffic was held up, causing such chaos that it did not return to normal for six days. The food supply was indeed in a critical state. Peasants were hoarding their grain because they had no reason to sell it. The goods they had bought before the war—plows, stoves, harnesses, water pumps, clothing—were no longer being made by factories, which had converted to war supplies. The army was taking the lion's share of freight traffic; locomotives were scarce, for they had been built and repaired in Warsaw, and Warsaw was lost. The railroad minister, Rukhlov, was a Black Hundred reactionary who drove out senior staff who did not share his politics. Inflation arrived at a gallop; by August 1915 the cost of a basket of thirteen basic foodstuffs was up 150 per-

cent over its prewar level. The poor were hungry. Rasputin's instincts were sound, but his vision did not include preparation. No food stocks were moved to the railheads, and the freight trains ran fast but empty. The minister, "appalled by the frightful disorganization of the railways," fled to a spa in the Caucasus to take the waters.

Unabashed, Alexandra continued to bombard the tsar with Rasputin's advice. Much of it was personal and vindictive. The empress reported that he was "very grieved" at Trepov, the transport minister, "as He knows he is against Him." The starets criticized a new stamp duty scheme by the finance minister on the same ground. He recommended the dismissal of Goremykin as premier, adding that the tsar should wait until he had seen if the elder Khvostov, the justice minister, measured up as a successor. Khvostov did not; Alexandra wrote that when Rasputin saw him, he treated him "as if he was a petitioner." After a ninety-minute meeting she said that the starets recommended the tsar delay a decision on the premier "according to God."

Though he remained against the war—"Our Friend was always against the War," the empress wrote, "saying that the Balkans were not worth fighting about"—he had visions on military strategy. He demanded an advance on the front near Riga, "prompted by what He saw in the night. . . . He says it is necessary, begs you seriously, says we can and we must." He told the empress that he had seen Russian troops enter Constantinople in another vision; "He dictated to me," she wrote to the tsar, "walking about, praying and crossing Himself, and about Rumania and Greece and our troops passing through." In politics he suggested that the tsar pay a surprise visit to the Duma. The empress reassured her husband that this involved no softening toward the parliamentarists. "He loathes their existence, as I do, for Russia," she added. Rasputin was shrewd enough to know that some contact had to be maintained with Duma members; with cruel insight he thought of them as "dogs collected to keep other dogs quiet." The visit duly took place.

Sometimes Rasputin was so overwhelmed by his own thoughts, Alexandra said, that "He cannot exactly remember one of them . . . but He says we must always do what He says."

CHAPTER 20

# *The Idealists*

Rasputin escaped standing trial for the drunken outburst on the steamer, though Beletsky and Khvostov pressed him for an explanation. "He maintained to us that he was not drunk, that he did not annoy women and passengers, but they provoked him to a scandal," Beletsky later testified, "that the captain of the steamer took their side for reasons of principle because he was a liberal, knowing that he was Rasputin, and that it was entirely under the influence of the captain that the steward made his official complaint against him, which the police did not want to report." He claimed that he had joined up with the soldiers because they were going out to shed their blood for the country, and that he felt it was his patriotic duty to entertain them.

It was ingenious—the slur that the report was a liberal plot to discredit the government and the throne, the bathos of doomed soldiers on their way to the front—and Beletsky noted that it had convinced the palace. Beletsky himself did not believe a word of it. He checked with Father Martian, who confirmed that Rasputin was "very drunk and annoyed the public." Rasputin and Vyrubova were clamoring for Stankevich, the Tobolsk governor, to be sacked for wishing to prosecute. As the price for the affair being dropped, Beletsky insisted that Stankevich be promoted to governor of a more important province. Rasputin agreed, on condition that he could name his own governor in his native Tobolsk, where "he must have his own man."

He was not frightened into discretion. Returning to Gorokhovaya ulitsa "absolutely drunk" at 1:00 A.M. on October 14, he shouted at the woman doorkeeper that she had taken a twenty-five-ruble bribe from an unnamed govern-

ment minister. "He wanted to bury me," he yelled, "but he's buried himself instead." The wife of an ensign lying wounded in a Petrograd military hospital visited him on November 3. She wanted Rasputin to make sure that her husband would not be returned to the front line when he recovered. On her way out she told the doorkeeper what a weird person he was and described how she had been welcomed. "A girl let me in and led me to his room," she said. "I saw him for the first time. He said: 'Undress and go in here.' I undressed and went with him to a room, the first from the front door on the left. He hardly listened to my request but started to paw my face and then my breasts and he said: 'Kiss me, I got to like you.'

"He scribbled a note for me and started to pester me over again: 'Kiss me, kiss me, I like you.' He wouldn't give me the note. He said: 'You make me angry, come back tomorrow.' "

Agent Terekhov asked her if she would come back the next day.

"No, to come to him means to bribe him the way he wants," she replied. "I can't do that, so I won't come."

Khvostov knew that the imperial favor he enjoyed depended on keeping such stories out of the newspapers. "The interior minister has done everything to charm his enemies and disarm them," Robert Wilton reported privately to London. "He has been 'hail fellow, well met!' with all members of the Russian press. He went round to call on all the editors." He planned to muzzle them by floating a media company on the stock exchange. The shares would be offered to the public, but Okhrana secret agents supplied with special funds would acquire majority control. The company would buy up newspapers, printing plants, newsstands, advertising agencies, cinemas, and even telephone companies. The new owners would then suppress all mention of Rasputin. The scheme collapsed because it was too complex. That it was also illegal was of no consequence to a minister who Witte said "took the prize for rascality, being a man for whom the law does not exist."

An easier way of keeping the starets out of the press was to remove him from the capital. Khvostov and Beletsky drew up an itinerary for a tour of provincial monasteries. They arranged for a large supply of Madeira and a number of priests to accompany him. The priests demanded so many promotions and perks for escorting Rasputin that Beletsky said he "blushed for them." Rasputin refused to go.

He needed a minder. Beletsky found an ideal spy-bodyguard in a general of gendarmes, M. S. Komissarov. The general's career had foundered after he had openly incited pogroms in 1906; his sin was not Jew-baiting, which was government policy, but lack of discretion. Since then, as he later testified, he had been used by the interior ministry for all manner of espionage and dirty tricks. He had, for example, stolen and deciphered correspondence from foreign em-

bassies; he boasted that the interior ministry knew what was happening in foreign policy before the foreign ministry did. He had also supplied bodyguards for senior officials.

Beletsky gave him a squad of Okhrana men and briefed him carefully. The general was to prevent Rasputin from becoming involved in public scandals; if he failed, witnesses were to be bought off. He was to stop the starets from making unexpected trips by citing the danger of assassination. Before Rasputin made his regular morning telephone call to Vyrubova, the general was to pass him details of favors requested by Beletsky and Khvostov for forwarding to the empress; in return, all Rasputin's petitions to the interior ministry would be granted where possible. Finally, the general was to keep Rasputin alive, and to collect any evidence that would strengthen their hold over him.

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Komissarov's men came from the Okhrana's external service. The secret police maintained two agencies to spy on revolutionaries. The Internal Agency relied on informers within the groups, what Vassilyev called "secret cooperators or assistants drawn from the ranks of the enemy." As well as workers, prostitutes, and students, the secret police chief boasted, they included "respected party leaders and even members of the Duma." These informers were acquired through fear, greed, or malice. The threat of punishment—the noose, forced labor shackled to a cart in an east Siberian mine, imprisonment in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, in a cell with iron-bound doors and double sentries—loosened lips.

Some collapsed as soon as they were arrested, Vassilyev noted, while others needed the secret police "to use their most skillful persuasive powers" before they could be induced to cooperate. Others volunteered to inform, either "in a fit of rage or spite . . . if they felt insulted, slighted, or betrayed" by their fellows or "answered bluntly that they were doing it for money's sake." The general said that the Internal Agency had a system of "inner supervision" of Rasputin, developed by Komissarov, which "penetrated as far as the tsarina's alcove." Spying on the tsarina ran well beyond the purview of the secret police. "I couldn't stay in the dark when such a mysterious and enigmatic trump card as Rasputin loomed on the political and court horizon," Komissarov said to justify his lèse-majesté. "He had to be deciphered clean." The inner supervision came across "the most fantastic suppositions of cynicism and pornography" but little concrete fact.

The real effort was made by the agents of the External Agency. Their official duties were to provide discreet security for Rasputin at street level—they were armed—and to report immediately if they got wind of any plot to assassinate him. In practice they treated him exactly as they had been taught to treat a ter-

INTERNAL AGENCY

rorist. They shadowed and noted his movements and contacts. They were an elite. Only a thousand existed to cover all the Russian empire; of these a hundred were on duty in Petrograd. Six of those were on regular daily assignment to Rasputin, an indication of the Okhrana's intense interest in him. They were full-time professionals, trained at a special school run by Eustraty Myednikov, the chief of the Moscow Okhrana. He liked to recruit former army sergeants and corporals. They had the necessary discipline and courage for work in which days of boredom could suddenly, if their quarry turned on them, be transformed into moments of extreme danger. The agents had to be "politically and morally reliable," Vassilyev wrote, "honest, sober, bold, adroit, patient, prudent, obedient, and of good health." Recruits from minorities with potential revolutionary leanings were barred. "Individuals of Polish or Hebrew descent," he added, "were, on principle, excluded from any kind of employment in the External Agency."

Vassilyev described their duties this way: to "keep an eye on suspicious characters in the street, theaters, hotels, railway trains, and similar places of public resort" and to "discover all possible detail concerning the mode of life of such persons and the company frequented by them." The agents had to be familiar with the city they were posted in, particularly with its "drinking saloons, beer gardens, taverns, and houses with an access to two or more streets." The last included Gorokhovaya ulitsa 64, with its front and rear entrances. They disguised themselves as porters, doormen, caretakers, newspaper sellers, soldiers, cabmen, and railroad officials. They had to know the taxi stands and fares for droshkys and motorcars, the railroad timetables, the uniforms of garrison regiments. During his training period the rookie agent had to hand in a daily report to show that he had grasped these essentials. His political reliability was tested by other agents, who sought his confidence and made provocative remarks to see if they could draw a response. He belonged to the agency; though he might be married, it was "always regarded as rather an unfavorable circumstance if he showed any excessive devotion to his family."

Rasputin's minders allowed themselves only a professional interest in the stream of women who called at his apartment. They interviewed the prostitutes and maids; ladies were recorded only by name and length of visit. They never referred to Rasputin other than by his code name. Agents were instructed to give their subject a "nickname . . . short and characteristic, suggested, if possible, by some striking peculiarity in the exterior of the suspect." In deference to Rasputin's long black hair and beard, they nicknamed him the Dark One. The external service had its own store of uniforms and clothing. The transport section ran a pool of horses, cabs, and motorcars. Agents were trained to handle horses and cabs like born droshky drivers and to acquire "a perfect mastery of the droshky man's mode of speech" so that they did not

The Dark One (A little?)

stand out at a cab stand. The daily reports on Rasputin were rarely short of detail on his droshky rides; the drivers were either agents or informers. Money was kept on deposit at all railroad stations "for the purpose of allowing agents of the Okhrana to undertake journeys at short notice or no notice at all." When Rasputin set off for Moscow or Tyumen, an agent went too.

Four agents were always on duty at Gorokhovaya ulitsa, three at the front door and one by the gates. There was also a concierge at the doorway, a yard keeper and a doorkeeper by the gates. "Because they have nothing else to do, the agents play cards all the time," Rasputin's neighbor Blagoveshchensky, a clerk in the synod office, wrote. "Sometimes they go up to the second floor, where one of them stays, and sometimes one of them climbs to the third floor, where there is a bench next to apartment 20. He stays there on duty." The agents were well known both to their subject and to others in the house; according to their moods, both Rasputin and another neighbor, Neistein, joshed or sneered at them. Rasputin was aware that his conduct outside the apartment might be recorded. Vassilyev said that he was "frankly nervous" whenever he was summoned to Tsarskoye Selo by Vyrubova; the agents "testif[ied] that whenever he knew he was about to meet the tsarina he became extraordinarily excitable and ill at ease." This jittery state, the secret police chief said, was doubtless caused by fear that word of his excesses had reached the palace.

It is unlikely, though, that Rasputin realized the full extent of the surveillance. Vassilyev's men were skilled in streetcraft. They knew how to use side streets to hurry ahead of their quarry. If a direct confrontation was unavoidable, they avoided any eye contact; it was through their eyes that they would be recognized again. To see which apartment Rasputin entered in a block, an agent would race up the attic stairs and count footsteps to see which floor he visited. His mail and telegrams were intercepted; a list of people whose correspondence interested the agency was supplied to the post and telegraph office. The Okhrana had "black cabinets" whose job was to steam open envelopes and copy or photograph the contents before returning them to the mail. These agents, Vassilyev said proudly, "acquired such a flair that they would open letters not written by people on the list and discover things."

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Rasputin had silenced prying clerics in Siberia with Varnava's appointment to Tobolsk. The death of the metropolitan of Kiev created the opportunity to extend this protection to Petrograd. He first had the Petrograd metropolitan transferred to Kiev. On November 12 Alexandra told the tsar that he insisted that Pitirim, the bishop of Georgia, was the "only suitable person" to fill the vacancy in Petrograd. Pitirim was as gross as Varnava; he was suspected of being a homosexual and a thief. As bishop of Tula and later Kursk, he left the admin-

istration of the diocese to a deacon, Mitrofanych, with whom he had "relations disapproved of by both the church and the law." The two stole and sold the plate and other treasures from the bishop's palace and vestry; Sabler later testified that Mitrofanych had bought a country estate for ten thousand rubles with his share of the booty. Pitirim patronized suspected Podgornovs, followers of the khlyst pilot Stefan Podgorny, who had established arks in Kursk and Kharkov. He "became so popular among them that they claimed that they saw aureola around his head and almost ranked him among the saints." The scandal forced his transfer to another diocese, where he took up with a young priest named Osipenko. Pitirim had met Rasputin before the war and shown himself to be subservient and useful.

Such was the man whom the starets wished to become the most powerful figure in Russian Orthodoxy. The new synod procurator, Volzhin, whose predecessor, Samarin, had only recently run afoul of Rasputin, warned the tsar that the appointment would outrage the church. Pitirim's name did not appear on the list of suitable candidates prepared by the synod; Nicholas crossed out the name of the bishop of Riga, the front-runner, with his own hand and wrote in Pitirim. Volzhin resigned; he was replaced by Rayev, another of Rasputin's creatures, whom Simanovich described as "old and completely insignificant, with a wig, and very comical."

It took little time to put the new metropolitan to work. Pitirim visited the fixer Ivan Manasevich-Manuilov as soon as he arrived in the capital; the two discussed a mutual contact, a mediocre provincial governor called Stürmer, as a possible new prime minister. Pitirim also arranged the rehabilitation of a close friend of Rasputin and Vyrubova, Isidor Kokolov, a bishop who had been stripped of his see and banished to a monastery as a simple monk for homosexuality. With Rayev's help Kokolov became father superior of a monastery in Tobolsk, close to the like-minded Bishop Varnava. Pitirim's "secretary," Osipenko, proved equally malleable. Beletsky soon realized that he could be bribed, giving him three hundred rubles from police department secret funds.

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At the front, the Russians were striving to hold the Germans west of Riga. The *Times* correspondent Robert Wilton saw the aftermath of a counterattack. The fighting took place in a wet swamp that had frozen. The marks where the Russian infantry had lain formed ice-crusted pools; around them were craters twenty feet in diameter, where German eleven-inch shells had fallen. Company commanders were ensigns who had left school in the summer; battalions were led by captains. Wilton found Russian losses to be "more terrible than anything we knew or even suspected." One regiment, the 130th, had attacked with 2,400 men. Some of the 225 survivors were badly frostbitten. The young sol-

diers conscripted in August found conditions "very trying. There is no warm clothing and very little straw. They have to sleep on the bare ground in the trenches."

The supply problem was easing as industrial production picked up. Wilton reported that the real crisis was in morale, and that was worse in Petrograd than at the front. "Internal politics," he wrote wearily, "have sunk into a slough of reaction." Nobody knew why the "fossilized premier" Goremykin survived; the foreign minister, Sazonov, described his boss to Wilton as a "medieval survivor organically incapable of comprehending modern conditions." The only decisions seemed to be made by "the female head of the Court and Rasputin. . . . The censorship is becoming daily more oppressive, and every minister seems to be a law unto himself. Things could not be worse, alas!"

By now Rasputin had what Simanovich called "his own council of ministers . . . more practical and positive than the tsar's." It consisted exclusively of women. Old Madame Golovina was the president, supporting Rasputin by her name and authority in society. Her daughter Munya was his intermediary with the higher clergy. Vyrubova helped nominate ministers. The lady of court Nikhitina was in touch with the prime minister. The pretty Lili von Dehn provided contacts in the palace, where she was a maid of honor; she never spoke to Rasputin when he was in the palace, but they often met in the apartment of Kushina, another of his mistresses, who held "merry, intimate parties" for him. Akulina Laptinskaya was Rasputin's intelligence service, supplying him with the latest gossip and rumors; unknown to him, she also supplied news of his movements to his enemies for a fee.

Nominating ministers involved finding them. This was not easy, for Rasputin's knowledge of bureaucracy was limited to despising it. "So he constantly turned to me with requests to name suitable persons for this or that ministerial post," Simanovich said. It was an onerous task. Sackings followed appointments so rapidly that "many of our candidates, knowing the unstable character of the tsar, declined the offers." The pressure was intense, since the tsar "often telephoned Rasputin demanding that he immediately name a candidate." Rasputin would ask him to hold the line, then turn to Simanovich. "We need a minister," he would cry. Everyone in the apartment threw in suggestions while the tsar "was waiting holding the telephone at the other end." Once, while the tsar was on the phone, Rasputin said, "We need a general." Simanovich's son Semyon, who was in the room, suggested a contact called Volkonsky, not a general but a Duma functionary. Rasputin passed on the name, and the astonished Volkonsky became a deputy interior minister. Rayev's only qualification to head the synod was his chairmanship of the "Scientific-Commercial Unit," which, despite its high-sounding title, was a front for one of Simanovich's gambling clubs.

If a choice was particularly difficult, Rasputin turned to Manasevich-Manuilov, the journalist who had interviewed him in 1912 after the Iliodor scandal. He was a small man, elegant, suit impeccably cut, head erect over stiff collar and bow tie, with a bold, oval face, stern and perceptive eyes, and a chill but sensual set to the mouth. Although Rasputin would always make time to see him, he did not appear to exploit the intimacy. He was calm, he did not brag. He smiled often, and kept a distance. There was good reason for the reserve. Beneath the elegance, wrote the French ambassador, who knew him well, was "a stool pigeon, spy, sharper, swindler, chiseler, forger, and ruffian."

Manuilov was the son of a provincial Jewish merchant—at various times he practiced Judaism, Lutheranism, and Orthodoxy—and he owed his advancement to the patronage of Prince Meshchersky. When he took up with Manuilov, the prince had introduced the provincial boy to the best tailors, and to the secret police. Informing and spying came easily to him, and he had taken over in the Okhrana's Paris bureau after General Rachovsky had been dismissed for criticizing Dr. Philippe. He betrayed intelligence secrets to revolutionaries, stealing documents from the office safe with a counterfeit key, and betrayed revolutionaries to the Okhrana. In 1904 he photographed the Japanese cipher at the Japanese Legation in The Hague and was rewarded with an Order of Vladimir. Returning to Russia in 1905, he collected thirty thousand rubles from the industry ministry to reopen workingmen's libraries, which had closed during the risings. He embezzled all but seven thousand rubles of it. Stolypin threw him out of government service. "I am a vicious man," he said. "I love money and I love life." The war suited him. He specialized in extorting money from banks, and in helping and then blackmailing men trying to evade military service.

Manuilov was a natural partner for the nomination machine. He dined regularly with Rasputin, Manus, and Beletsky, and attended Prince Andronnikov's salon. "Of course, he would offer his own people," Simanovich said, but neither he nor Rasputin resented it. Business was business. There was enough to go around, and the tsar appeared to be happy. Simanovich claimed that Nicholas told each new minister that "Rasputin is a messenger of God. . . . Never in my life did I have such love and confidence in anyone as in Rasputin." The notes Rasputin scrawled to ministers often contained the phrase "I will tell the loving one." This implied that he would talk to the tsar on the subject. "A minister on such occasions regarded Rasputin's request as an order of the tsar," Simanovich claimed, "and put a corresponding resolution on the note."

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If there was exaggeration in this, and there is ample evidence that the tsar did not share his wife's total trust in the starets, it was nevertheless taken seriously

by the diplomatic corps. Petrograd was a top-caliber posting for ambassadors and foreign correspondents. None had the slightest doubt of Rasputin's importance. Maurice Paléologue, the shrewd French ambassador, thought it critical to meet the starets and sound out his views on the war. Keeping Russia in the war was a mortal matter for the French and British, for if the Russians sued for peace, more than a hundred German divisions would be freed to fight on the Western front. Paléologue dismissed the more lurid accounts that Alexandra and Rasputin headed a "peace party" that was in secret negotiations with Germany. He remained deeply suspicious of the embezzlers and cardsharps in Rasputin's entourage. "He is the distributor of German subsidies," he said flatly of Manus. "He secures the relationship with Berlin, and it is through him that Germany hatches and maintains her intrigues in Russian society."

The ambassador made a careful note of his meeting with the starets. "Brown hair, long and ill-combed," he wrote, "a black, stiff beard; a high forehead; a large, jutting nose; a powerful mouth." He found the whole expression of the face to be concentrated in eyes of a strange brilliance, depth, and fascination. Their gaze was at once "piercing and caressing, ingenuous and astute, direct and remote." Those eyes. People disagreed on their color—Paléologue thought them flax blue, others steel gray, emerald, yellow, viper green, red—but all sensed their strength. They talked about the war. At first Rasputin condemned it for the sufferings it piled on the Russian people. "There are too many killed, too many wounded, too many orphans, too many ruins, too many tears!" he cried. "I know villages, large villages, where everyone is in mourning. . . . And those who come back from the war, in what a state, dear Lord! Crippled, maimed, blind! . . . For a space of more than twenty years only pain will be harvested on Russian soil."

It was not the talk that Paléologue wanted. He argued back that it was terrible, yes, but an indecisive peace, a peace of exhaustion, would be a crime against the dead. It would risk internal catastrophe. To his surprise, Rasputin agreed. "You are right," he said. "We must fight until we are victorious." The ambassador was intensely relieved. He said that he knew people in high positions who had told him Rasputin was trying to persuade the tsar to end the war. The starets gave him a suspicious look, scratched his head, and said, "There are fools everywhere." He went on to say that Kaiser Wilhelm was inspired by the devil, but that God would abandon him one day and "he'll crumple up like an old shirt that's thrown on the dung heap."

Rasputin had reversed his views to please the ambassador. In fact, he was opposed to the war—"in his opinion," Simanovich said, "any kind of peace was better for Russia than war"—and he admired the Germans. But it was beyond his powers to influence war and peace. He had no official post, no staff, no direct control of policy, and none of its implementation. He did not govern Rus-

sia; what he was doing, with the empress and their appointees, was so rotting the country's morale that it was becoming ungovernable. The distinction was acute, and it was one that his intelligence fully recognized. Rasputin rarely became involved in political arguments; when he did, as with the ambassador, he retreated. Instead of confronting him, it was easier to ruin a man by dropping a word to the empress.

Rasputin had his ideas, though, and they had a rugged honesty. Above all, as Simanovich said, he "always remained a peasant stressing his muzhik, uncouth nature in front of people who regarded themselves as mighty and superior to all, and he never forgot the millions in the Russian villages." He had as little time for the Allies as he had for the war. At a party a guest asked him why he sympathized with the Germans and hated Englishmen and Frenchmen. He was drunk, Simanovich says, and answered unexpectedly: "I cannot like the French, because I know they don't like me," he said. "They are republicans and revolutionaries, and they think I'm funny. I can only work with monarchists. Monarchists should never fight with each other. They can always get on well. Therefore Russia should reconcile with Germany as soon as possible."

When he was warned that it was dangerous to talk of peace, he exploded. "I'm not afraid of anything!" he yelled. "No one has the right to kill people. There are people who are agents in money dealings and the sale of land. I want to be such a go-between in peace. Even Papa says I'm right and we should remain neutral." He was not impressed when he was told that "Papa" had vowed to fight until the last German had left Russian soil. "The tsar can say that," he said. "He owns his own word. He can give it, and he can take it back. He's the tsar and he can do anything." He praised the German colonists who had settled in Russia under Catherine the Great. He was impressed that they drank coffee as well as tea, a sign of wealth. "A Russian likes German goods," he said. "German merchants have good products, and they look after the customer in every way. Germans know how to work. If a German war prisoner gets to a Russian village, women try to have him in their house because he's a good worker."

He was pro-American, too; a fair number of peasants had relatives in the States and received money from them. "Many poor immigrants have become rich farmers in America and were happy with their big wages," Simanovich commented. "America seemed a fairy land for a poor Russian peasant. Rasputin therefore liked America, and he advised living with America in friendship and peace."

A deep-dyed reactionary when it came to the autocracy, Rasputin was liberal elsewhere. He backed land reform and wanted manor houses turned into schools. He complained that serfs had lived better than modern country folk. "They got food and clothing," he said. "Nowadays a peasant gets nothing and he has to pay taxes. His only cow gets taken by the bailiff and sold at auction.

Peasant kids run around naked until they're ten. They get wooden clogs instead of boots. There's not enough land. . . . Life stops in the villages." His passion for railroads went further than making love on them. "They're afraid that railroads will spoil the peasants," he complained of landowners. "That's shit. With railroads a man can look for a better living. Without railroads a Siberian peasant has to stay home because he can't walk all through Siberia." He despised noblemen, if not their wives. "Noblemen have too much," he said with socialist fire. "They don't do anything themselves, and they stop others from doing anything. If an educated person appears, they cry that he's a revolutionary and mutineer and get him locked up. A peasant isn't allowed to have an education. This master's policy won't lead to anything good."

Rasputin was also sympathetic to minorities. Simanovich said that he favored Polish independence—"they are the same Slavs as Russians and they must feel themselves right"—and civil liberties for Jews. Simanovich was a Zionist and owned a small strip of land in Palestine, where he dreamed of retiring. Rasputin shared his attraction to the Holy Land. At moments in 1915 when they tired of "our unhealthy and dangerous life" in Petrograd, they discussed moving there. All that detained them, Simanovich claimed, were "the goals we had set for ourselves. Rasputin wished to conclude peace, and I thought about equalizing Jews' rights." Simanovich insisted that the Jewish question must come first. "If we could solve it," he said, "I might get so much money from American Jews that we would have enough for the rest of our lives." Ingeniously, he suggested that Rasputin's departure for Palestine would be such a relief to the establishment that he could use it to win concessions. "I presume that the palace circle and the nobility will agree to equal rights for Jews if thus they can be freed from you," he said. "I'll take the money and share it with you. It'll be enough for the two of us and our families."

Rasputin was more realistic. "Papa doesn't want peace," he said. "He doesn't even want to hear about the Jews. His relatives won't allow him to grant a constitution. More than once I said to him: 'If you grant a constitution, you'll be called Nicholas the Great.' . . . He's afraid of everyone. When he talks to me in his study, he looks around to see if anyone is eavesdropping. I insisted that my peasants be granted a constitution. But the rich don't want it. . . . The fact that Papa won't allow himself to be persuaded is a great trouble. As soon as I'm away he forgets his promises. That's our misfortune."

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Were these, as it suited Simanovich to suggest, really two idealists set on helping their fellow men? Certainly Rasputin had few of the prejudices that marked the Russian stereotype. He was fond of Simanovich, giving him pet names, Simochka and Simoniki, and a ring inscribed "To the best of Jews."

The treatment of Jews, "against whom everything was permitted, everything was possible," was indeed a moral disgrace; it was, Witte wrote, transforming them "from timorous creatures into bomb throwers, assassins, brigands—revolutionaries—willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause." Eight hundred thousand Jews had been driven from the combat zones, their shops and synagogues looted, hanged on false charges of espionage.

The two would-be idealists had unpromising material to work with. The tsar was almost casually anti-Semitic, so natural was his inherited contempt. The war was used as an excuse to increase restrictions; all publications in Hebrew characters were banned and correspondence in Yiddish prohibited. Alexandra shared her husband's views. When she was in Germany in 1910 seeking treatment for her heart, her brother recommended that she see a leading specialist from Frankfurt. In the atmosphere of *zhidoedstvo*—kike-eating—she did not want to be treated by a doctor who, however well known, was a Jew. She went instead to a local gentile doctor, who did her no good. Rasputin himself associated with Black Hundred pogromists.

Yet there is evidence that he tried—and sometimes tried hard—to fight bigotry. The Siberian had a strong streak of compassion, and, for all his venality, Simanovich was sincere in his Zionism. The two often acted in concert to help individual Jews. They arranged residence permits, helped petitioners to practice legally in the law and medicine, and had fines and exile orders quashed. They put much effort into sidestepping the numerus clausus that restricted the number of Jewish students in colleges and universities. Simanovich said he was besieged every day by "trains of young Jews" seeking entry to Petrograd University. Rasputin wrote standard notes for them to take to ministers and professors. "Dearest minister," they ran. "Mama wishes that these Jewish students learn in their motherland and that they should not be forced to go abroad, where they become revolutionaries. They have to stay at home. Grigory." The reference to the empress—Mama—usually meant that the students were admitted despite the quota. Simanovich used his expertise in setting up gambling dens under academic-sounding titles to establish the "Agricultural and Hydrotechnical Institute," a front that enabled hundreds of Jews and Christians to have their military service postponed until they had finished their nonexistent studies.

The pair also fielded many requests by Jews who wanted to travel outside their domicile or settle in Petrograd and Moscow. Simanovich exploited a loophole that gave rights of domicile to craftsmen and apprentices. He used Rasputin's reputation to get a foothold in the Petrograd Craft Bureau, which handled such cases. As a jeweler, he also appointed his own "apprentices"—in reality "actors, writers, teachers, et cetera"—and kept a few unused worktables in his apartment to maintain the fiction. In other cases Rasputin arranged for peti-

tioners to register as members of the Petrograd governor's staff, which gave the right of domicile in the capital.

The starets invariably made his peasant supplicants "doubly welcome, thinking nothing of keeping much more fashionable people waiting," seldom refusing them money. He was equally generous with Jews and Poles, insisting that "the blood of the minorities is precious." Even if he had not slept after a night's drinking, he would appear at ten, bow low, look at the crowd, and say, "You've all come to ask me for help. I'll help you all." He "never thought twice" about whether a petitioner was worthy of his help. He said to those sentenced by courts, "The conviction and the fear experienced are punishment enough." He liked to humble the powerful. "Dear generals," he told senior officers waiting to see him. "You are used to getting priority. But there are Jews without any rights here, and I must deal with them first. Come on in, Jews. I want to do everything for you."

There is evidence that the empress's anti-Semitism softened during the war. In one letter to Nicholas, she complained of the treatment of a Russian Jew in her hospital who had returned from America the moment war broke out to enlist in Russia. He had lost his right arm at the front and had been awarded the St. George's Cross. "He longs to remain here & have the right to live wherever he pleases in Russia, a right the Jews don't possess. . . . One sees the bitterness & I grasp it . . . one ought not to let him become more bitter & feel the cruelty of his old country." Nicholas replied that "I have made a note on the petition of the wounded Jew from America: 'to be granted universal domicile in Russia.' " But the success was limited to individual cases. There were no legal reforms. "The tsar is afraid to give Jews equal rights," Simanovich quoted Rasputin. "He's sure he'd be killed if he did."

CHAPTER 21

# *Two Weeks in the Life of Grigory Efimovich*

Title:- Saint Satyr

The satyr and the saint mingled with each other by the moment in the fall of 1915. Elena Djanumova returned from Moscow on November 24 to plead with Rasputin for her mother. He had bombarded her with telegrams in her absence: "Bringing joy with greetings honoring with calmness," "Indulging my treasure firmly spirit with you kisses Grigory." Some of them were such apparent nonsense that she thought the telegraph office had jumbled the words; when they were retelegraphed, they were just as incomprehensible. Djanumova came with a friend, whom she called simply Lyolya. The Okhrana agents identified her as Galina Fyodorovna Filippova, age twenty-nine, the wife of a hereditary honorable citizen. She risked losing her fortune in a complicated family lawsuit. Her lawyer had advised her that Rasputin was the best bet to help her; she was a striking blonde with sly blue eyes.

The women put up at the Russia Hotel and phoned Rasputin at Petrograd 646-46. He asked them to come over right away. He liked Lyolya; he sat on a sofa with her and put his hand on her knee. He took them out to dinner in a private room at the Donon Restaurant on the Moika. He wore a beautifully tailored peasant's cloth coat with a brocade lining. His eyes wandered over Lyolya, but he was restrained and well behaved. He spoke about Siberia and its grandeur and invited them to visit him there in the summer. "We'll be fishing," he said. "I'll treat you to honey like you've never eaten before. Flowers in Siberia smell so sweet." He got the car to drop them back at their hotel and went on somewhere else.

Elena noticed the Okhrana men trailing them. Komissarov's agents were remorseless appendages, but Rasputin did not resent them. He got on well with

the gendarmerie general, a beefy, coarse man with a sharp eye for humbug and a hard drinker. At first the starets had tried to mount a pious smoke screen during their regular chats. "Stop the holiness, talk sense, and have a drink," Komissarov said. Rasputin was delighted and began taking his minder with him to nightclubs and the Gypsies. The general amused him, and he picked up the bills. As to the agents, they gave him protection, and he knew he needed it.

"It's no surprise," he explained when Elena asked why he was followed. "I've got a lot of enemies. I'm sort of an eyesore to people. Would be glad to have me done in. But—try and do it!"

"They love you very much in Tsarskoye, and they protect you?"

"Yes, they do, both he and she," he replied. "He loves me even more. How can they not love me? If I'm not there, there won't be them, there won't be Russia. . . . You think I'm giving myself airs, Frantic? No, my dear one, I know what I'm saying. Everything will be as I say."

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Rasputin had a hard day with petitioners on November 26; he asked Elena and Lyolya to join them. Some sat in the dining room, while others milled in the hall—priests, students, ladies of the world, monks, officers from crack regiments, all seeking favors. The starets invited individuals into his study, darting out from time to time to embrace a lady, pat a man on the head, or make a telephone call. The ladies sighed with ohs and ahs and said how sorry they were for him.

"How Father works, he gives so much to people."

"And everybody reaches out for him, he makes everyone warm, he's like a sun to everyone," Laptinskaya said, pacing the dining room.

"They tear him to pieces, they don't give him rest, they torture the father," the ladies wailed.

Vyrubova came at 1:00 P.M. with a big portfolio. She was treated unceremoniously; everyone called her Annushka. She headed straight for the study and came back with a pack of petitions. She glanced through them and put them in the portfolio. Rasputin came out of his study and threw himself on a chair, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Can't stand it anymore," he complained. "So many folks have come. Received them since morning and still they keep coming."

Vyrubova comforted him. "I'll help you, Father. I'll see some of them. With some of them I can solve their problems without you." She took over in the study.

Elena had received a telegram that her niece Alisa was seriously ill in Kiev with scarlet fever and diphtheria. "What's the matter with you, Frantic?" Rasputin asked. "You're so sad, what's on your heart?" He led her into his bed-

room. She made a sign to Lyolya to follow her. "Comfort Lenochka, Father," Lyolya said. "Think how unhappy she is, her niece is dying." There followed "something strange," which Elena could not explain.

Rasputin took her by the hand. His face changed; it became like a dead man's, yellow, waxen, immobile. He showed the whites of his eyes and jerked her hand. He said hoarsely: "She won't die, she won't die, she won't die." He let go of her hand, and color flushed back into his face. He carried on talking as if nothing had happened. The telephone kept ringing. New petitioners arrived with flowers and cakes.

When Elena returned to her rooms, a telegram from Kiev was waiting for her: "Alisa is better her temperature has fallen." Rasputin called at the hotel later; he had turned down an invitation to a dinner party, he said. Elena thought that he was drawn like a magnet by Lyolya. She showed him the telegram. "Was it really you who helped?" He answered firmly: "But I told you she would be better."

"Well then, do what you did last time and perhaps she'll recover entirely," Elena said.

"Silly one, do you really think I can do it?" he said. "It's not me. It was from above. And it can't be done again. But I said she'd recover, so why do you worry?" Indeed, letters kept coming for Elena from Kiev. Alisa was making a perfect recovery. As with the tsarevich's illness at Spala, Rasputin was many hundreds of miles away from the patient when he predicted a recovery that followed at once. Alisa's doctors, like the tsarevich's, were astonished; her mother, like Alexandra, thought it a miracle.

Rasputin had recovered from the strains of healing and was in a lusty mood two days later. He spent the night with Princess Stefaniya Semenovna Dolgorukaya in her suite at the Astoria Hotel on the Morskaya. This was risky; the princess was the wife of a gentleman of the emperor's bedchamber. He was equally free with the mistresses of politicians. The following evening he was visited by a Madame Leikart, who wanted him to intervene in a business affair on her husband's behalf. He asked her to kiss him; she refused and left. He was not frustrated for long; that night he enjoyed Nadezhda Ivanovna Voskoboinikova, a young widow and the kept woman of Sen. Vasily Nikolayevich Mamontov.

No word of these activities appeared in the press. Alexandra was delighted with Khvostov's efforts, as well she might have been, for the fat young interior minister had much to conceal. Rasputin was drunk for most of December 1915. He was also working at a gallop. *Proizvil*, arbitrary and high-handed actions by the bureaucracy and the police, were the greatest grievance in Russia. Few were immune; many petitioners—government officials in frock coats, offi-

cers in spurs, Polish refugees, nuns, bankers, messengers, peasants, fine ladies in dresses by the couturiers Paquen and Ducet—filled Rasputin's hall and anteroom, straining to catch a glimpse of him when the door into the dining room opened. A large sideboard, with a bronze lamp under a large glass shade, stood against the wall, stocked with wine bottles, plates of fried fish, jams, and tea, and baskets of flowers. A rocking chair was by the window.

A clerk from the banker Manus tried to push to the front, but Rasputin stopped him and turned to two young girls. "Well, my doves." He smiled at them. They asked for help in their education. He peeled off some ruble notes and handed them to the girls. He ignored the banker's clerk—the man was pushing a receipt book in front of him—and wrote a clumsy note to Vladimir Voyeikov, the palace commandant at Tsarskoye Selo. He scratched a cross beneath the name and the letters *Kh V*, for "Christ is Risen." Then he scrawled: "My dear and valued friend, do it for me. Grigory." He folded the note carefully, handed it to the girls, and gave them his hand to kiss.

He chose an old peasant from Saratov province next. He had come on behalf of a man called Gavrilo Shishkin, who had been sentenced to prison for fraud, and begged Rasputin to use his influence with the tsar to get a pardon. The peasant undid his shirt and extracted a bit of newspaper, unfolded it, and took out 250 rubles. He handed them to Rasputin with a petition. Rasputin pocketed both, made the sign of the cross over the peasant, and told him he would deal with the matter. Evgeniya Terekhova, a rich businesswoman, followed the peasant; she held a petition in her elegant gloved hand, asking for a contract to supply underclothing for the war ministry. "Yes, yes, my dear, I will do it," he said, stroking her breast and smiling at her while she kissed his hands, then left with a look of triumph. A bald officer with gold pince-nez introduced himself as Sublieutenant Makasov, but a shabby civilian with a greasy hat elbowed him aside and told the starets urgently that he was a village teacher, that he had suffered an injustice at the hands of his director, that he—Rasputin cut him short but promised to write him a letter of introduction to the education minister.

A pretty brunette waited timidly, her eyes red with tears, holding a letter from a Moscow friend of Rasputin's in her cheap gloved hand. She was called Maria Alexeevna, and she wanted help in getting her husband's sentence of administrative banishment lifted. Many men—leftists, anarchists, Jews—were being exiled beyond the Urals. Rasputin asked her to wait in a little room off the kitchen. He returned and talked to the officer. An old widow in a poor coat and round hat said that she was destitute and at her wit's end. Rasputin dipped into his pocket and gave her the 250 rubles he had just received on behalf of the fraud Shishkin.

A young man gave him a sheaf of banknotes; he handed them out to the peasants among his petitioners. An influence peddler named Pogan, a frequent

visitor, introduced an engineer, Mendel Neumann, who wanted a pardon from the tsar from an eight-month sentence. Rasputin confirmed that he would bring the case to the tsar's attention. He greeted a bathhouse attendant whom he knew, a wizened man with thinning gray hair, went into his study, and reappeared with a note. It was addressed to the local prefect of police. "My dearest friend, please excuse me," it ran. "Help the poor bath attendant. Grigory." The telephone rang constantly—Vyrubova, Sister Akulina, or Rasputin himself answered it—and messengers with presents of fruit and flowers and wine kept the doorbell jingling. Dunia reminded him that Maria Alexeevna, the girl with the exiled husband in Siberia, was waiting alone for him. He smiled and went to her.

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The women whispered to each other as he went to the room; a "peculiar smile" played on their lips. It was a narrow room with an iron bed with a foxskin cover, a gift from Vyrubova, icons hung with ribbons, pictures of the tsar and empress, and biblical quotations on the walls. It was the place where he initiated novices in redemption from sin. Some women had left happy; some stormed out, their dresses awry, to complain bitterly of insults to the agents on the staircase. After a short time Maria Alexeevna came out of the room; eyes scanned her minutely for clues and found her "more sad and frightened than before." When Rasputin reappeared his "hair clung untidy and rumpled to his temples," and he was breathing heavily, evidence to the onlookers of payment in kind.

The interlude was brief—as usual a few minutes sufficed him—and Rasputin returned to the waiting petitioners. He blessed two nuns from Verkhoturye, where he had learned his trade from Makari, and promised to help some peasants who complained of a rapacious landlord. A fat banker from Kiev, accompanied by a servant carrying his fur cape, requested a private audience; a messenger from Baron Ginsburg gave him money and asked him to sign a receipt. The sculptor Aronson sat in the dining room; he had been commissioned to do a bust of the starets and was waiting to arrange a sitting.

When Elena and Lyolya appeared, Rasputin's women became agitated and angry. The starets had ranted about the irritation these "haughty devils" had caused him by their resistance. He took a phone call, from Tsarskoye Selo, and laid siege to Lyolya again. He demanded that they have a tête-à-tête. "Don't let your soul dry up without love," he told her. "The soul darkens without the light of love and the sun won't bring you joy and God will avert his face. Love is paradise. . . . I want you—and this comes from God and it is sinful to turn Him down. I am deprived of my strength without love. . . . Give me a moment of love and my strength will grow and"—here he grew crafty—"it will be better for your petition." The two Moscow women found, they said, that, although "we

don't believe him and regard him critically," he paralyzed their will and gave everything around them an aura that was "so unusual and it attracts." They returned to their hotel.

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Rasputin sent a colonel's wife and singer, Madame B, to visit the hotel the following morning. She reproached Lyolya for torturing Father. "We are all indignant at seeing his sufferings. Why don't you consent to belong to him? Is it possible to turn down such a saint?"

"Does this saint need sinful love?"

"He makes everything holy, and whatever you do with him is holy," the colonel's lady said without a second thought.

"Would you consent?"

"Of course," she said matter-of-factly. "I've belonged to him, and I regard it as the greatest bliss."

"But you're married, aren't you? How about your husband?"

"He knows about it, and he regards it as a great happiness," she said. "If Father wants somebody, we regard it as a great bliss—both we and our husbands, those of us who have husbands. We all see now how tormented he is about you. I made up my mind to tell you everything and to ask you on behalf of all the admirers not to torture the holy Father anymore, not to turn down the bliss."

The Muscovites answered her sharply; she left offended and perplexed.

Rasputin came himself in the evening. He sat with Lyolya on the sofa, not letting her go.

"What a shame," Elena said. "They think you're a saint, but you incline her to fornication. It is sin, isn't it?"

"Am I a saint?" Rasputin answered. "I'm more sinful than anyone. But there's no sin in that. In fact, there is no sin. Man invented it. Look at the animals. Do they know what sin is?"

"Animals don't know what sin is because they don't know God."

"Don't speak like that," Rasputin snapped. "There is wisdom in simplicity but not in knowledge."

Lyolya changed the subject to her petition: "All you do, Father, is promise, but you don't do anything."

"You don't do anything for me," he replied. "All you do is use cunning. Give me a moment of love and your affair will go along smoothly. If there's no love, there's no strength in me and no luck. Just like with Frantic. I love her too much, would like to help her with all my heart, but nothing comes out without love."

Lyolya left the room. Rasputin paced nervously. His face became rapacious; the eyes burned. He wanted an excuse to get Elena out of the suite. "You've got wine?" he asked her. "What have you got?"

"We have some white wine."

"No, you know I drink only Madeira," he said. "Listen, Frantic, slip out to my place. Tell Dunia, she'll give you some."

It was midnight, and there was a strong frost. Elena refused. "But I'm telling you that you will go," he said. "If I send you, you must go." He looked at her steadily; "sparkles of fury burned and skipped in his eyes." Perhaps it was the look he had used on Stolypin and Rodzianko, the attempt at hypnosis. Elena looked away and cried out: "Don't forget yourself. I'm not your servant, and I won't run your errands."

Lyolya ran back into the room. Rasputin slowly composed himself and, suddenly, embraced Elena. "Don't be cross, Frantic," he said. "I did it on purpose. I wanted to test whether you love me. If you loved me, you would obey me. You'd go in snow and at midnight. My Peter[sburg] ladies wouldn't have turned me down. Each would have gone with joy. But you, perhaps, don't love me." Soon he left.

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On December 3 Nicholas set out with Alexis on the imperial train from the Stavka to inspect the southern front. The boy had a heavy cold, sneezing so violently that he started to bleed from the nose, a most dangerous condition for a hemophiliac. His tutor, Pierre Gilliard, fetched Dr. Fedorov, who was aboard the train, but the bleeding was difficult to control and the boy's temperature began to rise.

Rasputin rang the Muscovites to invite them to a dinner party, boasting that ministers would be present. They refused and were glad to spend an evening in peace. They were dozing off at around 1:00 A.M. when there was a pounding on the door. "Open it, hurry up, my sweet ones," Rasputin roared. "We're waiting. I've brought a minister with me." Eventually the knocking stopped. Elena learned that the officer in the room opposite had saved them. He had come to investigate the noise and recognized Rasputin and "Minister Kh." He stared at them; the minister became embarrassed and persuaded Rasputin to leave. "Minister Kh" was Khvostov.

At 3:00 A.M. Dr. Fedorov woke the tsar and asked him to order the train to steam directly to Tsarskoye Selo. The boy's condition had deteriorated. The train had to be stopped several times the following day to allow Fedorov to change the plugs he had inserted in the heir's nose. The boy was cradled in his berth by the giant sailor, Nagorny; it was too dangerous to allow him to lie full length.

In Petrograd, Rasputin was on a spree. The Muscovites avoided him by getting the hotel doorman to say that they had gone to the theater; the doorman said Rasputin was angry and swore at them. He consoled himself by visiting

Elizaveta Evgenyevna Svechina, the young wife of an army officer. This was a potentially dangerous rendezvous, since Svechina's husband was a colonel at the Stavka and thus uncomfortably close to the tsar. Rasputin left at 2:00 A.M. with Maria Markovna Yasininskaya, a twenty-eight-year-old married to a man rich enough to afford an apartment at 104 Moika, a close neighbor of the Yusupovs. The couple took a motorcar to the Villa Rhode in the Novaya Derevnya district.

They were refused entry because of the late hour. The Okhrana had arranged for Rasputin to have the use of a private dining room, well away from prying eyes in the public areas. Rasputin was furious that—as the restaurant's single most important client—he should be treated without respect. He kicked the door and tugged at the bell cord. It came away in his hand. When a policeman intervened he gave him five rubles to keep quiet. The couple then moved on to Masalsky's Gypsy Choir, a block away. They stayed with the Gypsies until ten the next morning. After that, "heavily drunk," they went to Yasininskaya's apartment on the Moika.

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His admirers were worried about Rasputin's disappearance. Kulina Laptinskaya rang the Russia Hotel to see if he had slept with the Muscovites. She was surprised at Elena's indignant denial. "Were it so, it would be happiness for you," Laptinskaya said. "He left yesterday—said he was going to you, didn't come back, so we're thinking: the Moscow lady consented to accept the bliss. But you take offense. Where is he? Petitioners are waiting for him."

Kulina rang back at midday to report that Rasputin was back from the Gypsies. He had a bad hangover. His admirers sat silent in the anteroom—Elena had joined them—while the sound of breaking glass came from the dining room. He came in with a bottle of wine in his hand, pale, his hair stuck to his forehead, eyes gloomy. He poured some wine into a tea glass and told the colonel's wife to drink it. She reminded him that she was singing in a concert that evening, and that he had promised her that ministers would be in the audience. He told her to drink it anyway. Then he telephoned Beletsky. "My good little lady gives a concert tonight," he told the police director. "Look out, don't refuse and make sure you come." Then he rang Khvostov, employing the same peremptory tone: "Look out you don't miss my little lady's concert."

A priest was sitting by the wall. He listened to the telephone calls with surprise and respect; a starets who ordered ministers about was a power indeed. "What a good night I've had, Priest," Rasputin said. "A pretty Gypsy was singing, and she sang so good—'I'm coming, coming, coming to my dearest one.' "

"Those were cherubs who sang to you. Angels in the skies," the priest said. Elena thought he was mocking the starets but realized he was serious. "Angels in the skies. Angels sang in their glory."

"I'm telling you, Priest, a pretty Gypsy she was, a young one."

"Cherubs, cherubs are singing to you with their heavenly voices," the priest kept saying.

Rasputin grinned and went out to the petitioners. He came back with a pretty young girl, a refugee from the lost Polish provinces. "I'm looking at you, and you are so pretty," he said. "The little nose, and the teeth—but I don't love you, I love these Moscow women. They've tortured me to death. Had to drink all night long because of them." He became maudlin. He went to the kitchen and began smashing plates again. Even Dunia, who normally treated him with robust good sense, was silent. Munya Golovina was frozen. They did not see a drunken peasant, Elena realized, but "an infuriated God."

The telephone rang. Rasputin was asked to come to Tsarskoye Selo immediately. The heir had "swooned away" twice during his journey, and Gilliard thought the end had come. Alexandra was crying and praying as the boy was driven slowly from the railroad station to the palace. His little, pointed face had a "waxen, gravelike pallor," Vyrubova wrote, as he was carried with infinite gentleness to his room and laid on his small white bed. His blue eyes looked out from his blood-soaked bandages with "pathos unbearable." Blood poured down his face each time the doctors unwrapped his nose. Science could do nothing; "in despair," Vyrubova said, "the empress sent for Rasputin."

His women urged him to go to a bathhouse to sober up before he went to the palace. "You know my horses, they'll carry you like birds," one of them said. "First we'll drive in the sleigh, and you'll feel better in the frost. And then I'll take you to a bathhouse. You know it always helps." Rasputin consented. The women brought clean clothes. He dropped his trousers and changed in front of them; they helped him into fresh boots. Munya Golovina helped him stand upright as they put a fur coat on him. He started to sing merrily and snapped his fingers, "I'm coming, coming, coming to my dearest one," the Gypsy song of the night before.

The sleigh ride and the bath had sobered him by the time he caught the train for Tsarskoye Selo. "He came into the room," Vyrubova wrote, "made the sign of the cross over the bed, and, looking intently at the almost moribund child, said quietly to the kneeling parents: 'Don't be alarmed. Nothing will happen.' Then he walked out of the room and out of the palace. That was all." The boy, who had been whimpering with pain, fell asleep. He was well enough to sit up in bed the next morning.

On his return to Petrograd, Rasputin rang Elena to invite her to dine with the Gypsies. "The intoxication was gone," she noted. "He was cheerful and lively." She turned him down, and instead he met up with a lieutenant colonel, Nikolai Semyonovich Ezersky, and a Gypsy singer, Varvara. He had arranged for charges brought against Varvara by a Kiev court to be dropped, and in re-

turn she "sang songs during his orgies and entertained him in other fashions." Ignoring the scene he had made two days before, he insisted on returning to the Villa Rhode. His party was asked to leave when the restaurant closed at 2:00 A.M. He slept with Varvara.

Elena was with him when the palace telephoned again. "Alyosha [Alexis] is not sleeping? His ear aches? Call him to the phone," Rasputin said, gesturing for silence. The tsarevich was put on the line. "Why, Aloyshenka, are you burning the midnight oil? Hurts? Nothing hurts you. Go and sleep. Your ear doesn't hurt. It doesn't, I'm telling you. Sleep. Sleep right now. You hear me? Sleep." Fifteen minutes later the palace rang back. The boy's ear no longer hurt, and he was sleeping.

"He fell asleep just like that?" Elena asked.

"Why not?" Rasputin said. "I told him to."

"But his ear hurt."

"I told him it didn't." He spoke with a calm confidence, as if nothing else could have happened.

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Elena left for Moscow, her honor intact and her petition unanswered. Lyolya stayed on in the hope that Rasputin would intervene in her lawsuit. He sent Ivan Osipenko, the bribable secretary to Metropolitan Pitirim, to collect her from her hotel and take her to a dinner party. She did not know where she was going, but the Okhrana agents reported it as the apartment of a financier, Andrey Knirsche, on Pesochnaya ulitsa. It was a smart affair, with Gypsy singers and a Russian choir. Rasputin was lively, drank heavily, and danced. He took Lyolya to a corner every now and then, talking to her about a "moment of love."

After dinner a young man asked her to accompany him on the piano. Rasputin followed her with gloomy eyes. When she finished she sat with the singer on a sofa. She heard Rasputin's voice: "So that's what you are!" He demanded pen and paper. "I'll write everything about you to Frantic," he said angrily. "She'll understand, and she'll be sorry for me." A politician called Alexander Protopopov, who was standing nearby, brought him a sheet of paper.

He sat in an armchair and scribbled a letter. "Here, take that to Frantic, to my simpleton," he said. "She's not the kind you are, she's not a tart." It read: "Sweet dear my Frantic angry at you don't send me sly ones my sweet one don't send them she's for others give me someone simpler. Come to me I feel like I'm with you. Tears drop. Heart moans. In joy with you. Grigory." With that he told Lyolya that she could leave. At 2:00 A.M. an Okhrana agent reported that he could see Rasputin dancing through a window. Rasputin returned to his apartment at seven, supported by two unknown men, "dead drunk."

He returned to the Villa Rhode for a gala Gypsy evening a few days later. Some young civilians and officers at a table took offense when he asked a lady in their party to dance. The officers jumped to their feet, so Simanovich reported, and unsheathed their swords. Rasputin jumped away and fixed them with his "awful stare." He cried: "You want to have done with me!" They were silent. "You've been my enemies, but you're not anymore," he said quietly. "You've seen that my power won. . . . You don't have any power anymore that you can turn against me. Go home." They did so. There were other occasions on which people set on attacking Rasputin apparently lost their nerve when he confronted them; the incident with his daughter's fiancé was one. His powers were not magical—they did not save him from Hermogen's fists and Guseva's knife, nor would they prevent his eventual murder—but his force of character was an effective deterrent to some who wished him harm.

He had avoided a beating, or worse; he had drunk several cases of Madeira; he had slept with at least six women, and failed to sleep with two; he had received and helped several hundred petitioners; the tsarevich and the little girl in Kiev had pulled through. Rasputin's fortnight was busy.

IV

CHAPTER 22

# *"They Are Certainly Going to Kill Me, My Dear"*

Rasputin welcomed 1916 by singing in his apartment until four in the morning. At Tsarskoye Selo the empress was sick and stayed in bed. "Mama doesn't feel good so she lied all day," the tsarevich confided in his diary. Rasputin came home drunk at 1:00 A.M. on January 2. Later in the day he went to Tsarskoye Selo, where Vyrubova had opened a convalescent home for wounded soldiers. Khvostov and Beletsky, she testified later, "each sent me a sealed envelope by courier with 1,000 rubles." The catering was provided free by Adolph Rhode, the owner of Villa Rhode, who had grown rich on Rasputin's carousals. Prince Andronnikov sent flowers and candles. The financier Manus gave her 200,000 rubles in all; the banker Rubinstein's wife sent 50,000, and Simanovich presented her with exquisite silver vases. It was unclear whether the gifts were for the infirmary or for Vyrubova herself; she said later that her friends wanted to secure her future after the railroad accident.

The partying and drinking—the agents described Rasputin's various states as "drunk," "dead drunk," and "absolutely drunk"—continued at a reckless pace. Maria said that her father deteriorated after the mistress-maid Dunia left for Siberia to tend her ill mother; with nobody to restrain him, he "began seeking relief from his torment in the sort of wine, women, and dancing found in the less inhibited cabarets." He complained to an elderly petitioner, bent with arthritis, that his capacity to heal had dimmed. "I am sorry, babushka, I cannot do it," he told her. "The Lord has taken my power from me." He crisscrossed the city in carriages, cabs, sleds, and a variety of motorcars, hired, borrowed from the court, lent by automobile importers. The agents planted informers among

the drivers on the Gorokhovaya rank and kept a car themselves, but the starets sometimes gave them the slip.

Rasputin's name day, January 10, began with a brilliant morning. "Why, there is sun for our Friend," the empress wrote. "That is lovely, indeed it had to be for him." Maria Sergeyevna Ghil, the wife of a captain in the 145th Regiment, had spent the night with him and did not leave his bed until eleven. He followed peasant tradition with a name-day visit to bathhouse and church. Presents from businessmen and from Beletsky's secret funds arrived by cab and messenger. The agents logged pictures, carpets, sofas, chairs, and gold and silver ornaments that he later took to Pokrovskoye. Vyrubova lunched with him and passed on greetings from the imperial family. His drinking began in earnest when she left, helped by the state councillor Daniel Kornilovich Klionovsky, who brought ten bottles of wine. "They played the harmonica, guitar, and balalaika," the Okhrana men reported. "They danced and sang songs and then, later, prayers. The guests left at 2:00 A.M." When the agents checked the apartment, they found the visiting cards of their superiors Generals Komissarov and Globichev attached to some of the presents.

Rasputin was taken by car to a party hosted by Count Tatishchev, a leading banker, at the Hotel de l'Europe on the evening of January 13. The agents loitered outside until the cold drove them away at 2:00 A.M. Rasputin staggered home at seven, "absolutely drunk," supported by Metropolitan Pitirim's secretary, Osipenko. He was much the worse for wear—"he broke a large pane of glass in the gates of the house, and his nose was swollen for he must have fallen somewhere"—but he pulled himself together enough to visit Vyrubova with the financier Rubinstein at Tsarskoye Selo in the afternoon. A change of prime minister was looming, and he was warned that the palace had received a report that he had been misbehaving. They had a long conversation. He was in a difficult mood when he returned home in the evening. "One of you said to somebody that a lady sat on my knee," he complained to Okhrana agents. "It's bad saying things like that. You are here for my safety, but you inform on quite different things."

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The business of the new premier was difficult. Goremykin was now so senile that his foreign minister, Sazonov, complained, "*Il est fou, ce vieillard.*" Rasputin was hard-pressed to name a successor and discussed it with Simanovich, who in turn approached Manuilov for advice. From a starets to a gambling den operator to a former catamite who lived off the spoils of betrayal—such had the selection process for high office in a mighty empire become.

The choice fell on Boris Vladimirovich Stürmer, whom Manuilov had discussed with Metropolitan Pitirim in the fall, a corrupt reactionary in his mid-

sixties whose white beard, pink cheeks, and watery blue eyes gave him the "jovial appearance of a false Father Christmas" but whose oily manners, moist red lips, and crafty smile the French ambassador found were "curiously repellent and filled one with an instinctive and profound mistrust." Simanovich made no bones about why he had been chosen. "Manuilov recommended us Stürmer as 'an old thief and crook,' " he wrote, "and guaranteed that Stürmer would satisfy all our wishes. We bargained with him for a long time. His nomination took place only after it seemed to us that he was prepared enough."

Rasputin prepared the ground with the empress. "Sweety, are you seriously now thinking about Stürmer?" she wrote to Nicholas. "I do believe it's worth risking as one knows what a right man he is." She followed up by stressing that "his head is plenty fresh enough and he very much values Grigory wh [*sic*] is a great thing." He was "excellent and honest" and a true believer in "our Friend's God-sent wisdom." The appointment was agreed on while the tsar was at Tsarskoye Selo. "How glad I am that you have got Stürmer now to rest upon," Alexandra wrote to him on January 16 as the train was taking him back to the Stavka. Nicholas agreed: "I am going away this time with greater peace of mind."

They had "unlimited confidence" in their new premier. Rasputin naturally shared it, though his was based on the expectation that Stürmer would prove "an old man on a string," as he put it. Almost every other Russian regarded the appointment as proof that their country had taken the decisive step into the madhouse. Stürmer had been in public life for forty years. He had the reputation of being easily bribed and the nickname Bully of Tver, after the unfortunate province where he had been governor. He had no experience of central government beyond a brief spell in an interior ministry department with a staff of less than a hundred. His own justice minister now described him as "utterly false, two-faced, and not particularly intelligent." Another colleague said that he debased the language, for "the word *liar* is inadequate to describe him." A third said that "Stürmer was about as suitable as the last person I could think of." Manuilov himself agreed, saying contemptuously that his protégé was "finished at fifty, constantly dozing."

Stürmer's true colors were soon on display. He slipped a resolution establishing a secret fund of five million rubles for his private use into the pile of papers that his cabinet colleagues routinely signed at the end of meetings. The education minister, Count Pavel Ignatev, noticed it by chance. "What's this?" he asked. Since the five million were charged to the war ministry, Ignatev pointed the paper out to Polivanov. "Look at this," he said. "Do you need this?" The war minister denied any hand in it and asked the new prime minister for an explanation. Stürmer mumbled that it was for "espionage expenses," at the tsar's special request. Polivanov insisted that the fund was "utterly impossible." The

scowl he earned made him feel that his future was bleak. "After that," he said accurately, "I had the distinct feeling that my days in office were numbered."

Rasputin lost no time in playing with his puppet's strings. Agents followed him on January 21 as he headed alone for 36 Basseinaya ulitsa, the apartment of a twenty-five-year-old actress, Ekaterina Fyodorovna Orlova. She was one of Manuilov's kept women—he pimped for powerful contacts—who was having an affair with Stürmer. "According to information gathered in a secret way," the agents reported, "there were present Manasevich-Manuilov and the chairman of the council of ministers B. Stürmer." Manuilov now described himself as Stürmer's "secretary." His apartment had an imposing reception room, from which he pretended to telephone direct to ministers to impress those he was blackmailing, always careful to call his payoffs "loans." He visited Paléologue, scenting a French subsidy to keep Russia in the war. The ambassador found that he had been indicted on multiple counts of fraud and blackmail in 1911; the charges had been dropped as a "question of expediency" since they revealed his links with the secret police. Grandly, Manuilov introduced himself to the ambassador as the premier's private secretary with special responsibility for the security of Rasputin. "What a title to our respect!" Paléologue hissed as he left.

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Rasputin celebrated Stürmer's appointment in style, returning home at 7:30 A.M. singing songs in the street. The number of his petitioners increased with the fresh evidence of his power. "Three to four hundred people would call on Rasputin daily," an agent wrote. "I saw uniformed generals, students, schoolgirls asking for financial support." He tried not to turn them away empty-handed, and they added to his soaring expenses. To his lavish entertaining, his use of prostitutes and expensive Gypsy singers and musicians, were added more mundane bills, for the rent on his apartment, school fees and clothes for his daughters, remittances to his wife in Siberia, the constant use of the telephone and cabs. He often had trouble with the telephone—he complained that people would ring him up and curse him—but thought it more confidential than the telegraph, not realizing that Komissarov was tapping it. He dined out every day, and a night's amusement at the Villa Rhode cost the better part of 1,000 rubles. He was drinking several bottles of wine and Madeira a day, and he had acquired a taste for fresh fruit and sturgeon.

Though the interior ministry was giving him a monthly remittance of 5,000 rubles, some $2,000 at a time when factory hands were making $25 a month, and many of his bills were picked up by others, Simanovich complained that Rasputin's "grand living and carousals" meant that this was never enough. He relied on Simanovich to top it up whenever necessary with the cash he procured for influence peddling. Rasputin showed no interest in where

the money came from; "he accepted my favors," the fixer wrote, "but never asked about the motives." Many of these rubles he gave away; had he not, Simanovich said, "he could have saved serious money." When the banker Ginsburg called, Rasputin made him turn out his pockets and hand around the contents. He would send petitioners on to other millionaires with a note to give this or that sum. "By nature," Simanovich said, "he had a kind heart."

On Ash Wednesday the empress invited Rasputin to join the family for the service in the imperial chapel. "How happy I am that we took communion with Him!" she wrote. It was a singular honor, which the gossips soon transformed into a khlyst orgy where the pilot Rasputin indulged in "fervors" with Alexandra and her daughters. The surveillance teams, concerned at the increase in public malice, were finding it difficult to keep up with their quarry on his nighttime expeditions; he was sometimes driven in an automobile so fast that they could not shadow it. The car was supplied on Stürmer's orders from the war ministry motor pool.

Vassilyev made sure that he received a report at police headquarters each morning with a detailed list of "all persons who had appeared at Rasputin's quarters the day before and of all the people he had visited." Visits to ministers and to Vyrubova in Tsarskoye Selo were often omitted as too sensitive to commit to paper. As to the palace itself, as noted earlier, only three entries in the *Kammerfurier* journals, the official court record, bore Rasputin's name. One records "Their Majesties" receiving "Grigory Efimovich Rasputin" in the evening of October 17, 1914. The other two, on April 23 and September 5, 1916, state that "Her Majesty" received him at 9:20 P.M. and 9:45 P.M. respectively. These were oversights—the tsar had given instructions that Rasputin's visits were not to be recorded—and give no indication of the true number. The journal, however, confirms that Rasputin's protegés had ready access to the empress; Varnava and Metropolitan Pitirim, Madame Pistolkors, the admirer Baroness V. I. Iskul, Golovina, Laptinskaya all had a string of audiences with her. The visits, Vassilyev said, "rare in 1914, take place more often in 1915 and, finally, reach a peak in 1916." Twice a month Vassilyev himself prepared a special Okhrana report in a single copy for the tsar's eyes only; it contained minute detail on the discovery of secret printing presses, safe houses, arms, and the like, but Vassilyev was too canny to compromise himself with references to Rasputin.

Some raw reports by the surveillance team survive. Each is prefaced by the date, the address, Gorokhovaya ulitsa 64, and the subject's police code name, the Dark One. Name, age, marital status, and address of fresh contacts were noted whenever possible.

They indicate the frenetic scale of the comings and goings in Rasputin's daily life. The report for February 8 is exhausting simply to read:

> Knirsche left Rasputin at 1:00 A.M. Two unknown gentlemen drew up in a motorcar at the same time. Knirsche went back into the apartment with them, and they left at 2:00 A.M. Solovyova came at 10:00 in the morning; soon she left. At 10:10 Munya Golovina came, left after one hour. At 11:50 Tatyana Shakhovskaya [wife of the trade minister] came, left after fifty minutes. Simanovich came at 12:00, left after ten minutes. Sandetskaya came at 12:10, left after ten minutes [Klavdia Amvrosievna Sandetskaya, age twenty-six, wife of a captain, Rasputin's admirer, Zakharyevskaya 9]. At 12:15 came a chorister from Afonsky Monastery, Derevensky, who said that the previous year a scribe of Alexandro-Nevskaya Monastery had read in the newspaper *Kopeika* about Varnava and Grischa. The passport clerk at the monastery listened to him reading out the passage and asked, "When will there be a revolution in Russia?" Derevensky asked what the revolution would be about. To which the passport clerk replied: "The Romanovs would not reign anymore and then they would throw down this filth, Varnava and Grischa."

The agents noted that the scribe was now a priest, and that the passport clerk's name was not known; otherwise he would have been identified as a potential dissident.

"At 12:40 an unknown clerk in military uniform came in a motorcar number 3," the raw report continued. "At 12:50 he left with the Dark One. In the yard two volunteers were waiting for them. The Dark One said that he would join them later. The Dark One left with the clerk, and supervision missed them." The war ministry car was too fast for them. They had made sure that the driver was an informer, however. "According to the chauffeur," the report went on, "they went to the Nikolayevskoye cavalry school and to the Polish church on Torgovaya ulitsa. At 1:50 P.M. the Dark One returned home with the clerk, who left after ten minutes. Senator Mamontov came at 1:35 P.M., left after thirty minutes [Vasily Nikolayevich Mamontov, sixty-five, councillor and senator; Voskoboinikova, Rasputin's admirer, was his kept woman, Furshtadskaya 12]. At 1:40 P.M. Gaar and Bazilevskaya came, left after one hour and twenty minutes [Lydia Platonovna Bazilevskaya, twenty-eight, daughter of a major general, divorced from Maltinovsky, an engineer, Rasputin's admirer]."

As usual Simanovich put in several appearances. "At 2:00 P.M. a man in military uniform came for the second time with Simanovich in a motorcar No. 5064, left after twenty minutes. At 2:15 a lady came, wife of an officer of the Izmailovsky Regiment, lives at Izmailovsky Prospect in a government house, left after one hour, forty-five minutes." The agents never reported whether a woman had sex with Rasputin, confining their observations to whether there was laughter or singing. Simanovich was soon back: "At 3:40 P.M. Simanovich came for the third time, left after thirty minutes. At 4:10 P.M. Knirsche came,

brought what looked like several bottles of wine, left after forty minutes. At five in the evening came Chervinskaya, stayed for thirty minutes [Natalia Illarionovna Chervinskaya, forty-eight, wife of a nobleman, sponger in the family of Prince Andronnikov]. At 5:10 came Solovyova. At 6:20 Simanovich came for the fourth time, stayed for one hour. At 6:45 Reshetnikov came, stayed for thirty-five minutes [Nikolai Ivanovich Reshetnikov, fifty-seven, hereditary honorable citizen, Morskaya 39/12 Astoria Hotel]. At 7:20 in the evening came an unknown lady. At 9:20 in the evening Turivich came for the second time, left after twenty minutes. Dobrovolskaya came at 9:30 in the evening. Turivich with husband came at 10:10. Knirsche came at 11:20, stayed for twenty minutes."

The agents appended a note to the report: "At 8:15 in the evening five women arrived—according to the cabman, from the Ofitserskaya ulitsa," it ran. "At ten in the evening they sang songs, played the piano, and danced. There were about twenty-five visitors but the Dark One would not receive them." The report was signed by two agents, Terekhov and Svistunov.

The following morning, Rasputin received ten separate visitors—the agents carefully logged their names and license plate numbers—before taking his customary steam bath in the early afternoon. As he did so Nicholas was paying the unprecedented visit to the state Duma that Rasputin had suggested two months before. He was nervous, he "could scarcely force his voice out of his throat" as he spoke, but he was rewarded with spontaneous hurrahs. It was the last moment that his people, or at least their elected representatives, accorded the tsar such respect; when Stürmer, his premier, rose to address the Duma, he was met with contemptuous silence. Another seven individuals called at Gorokhovaya ulitsa in the evening.

On February 10 Rasputin saw fifteen people in addition to the usual crowd of petitioners; they included "stock exchange sharks and swindlers," a general's wife, the corrupt Manuilov, a messenger from Beletsky, and Lydia Vladimirovna Nikitina, the daughter of the commander of the Peter and Paul Fortress and a maid of honor to the empress.

Six Okhrana men—Terekhov, Svistunov, Popov, Vasily, Ivanov, and Grigory, the cream of the service—kept a twenty-four-hour vigil over this period, but the sheer volume of Rasputin's contacts was threatening to swamp them. There were disturbing references to visits by "unknown men" whom they did not have the time to identify. Rasputin shared their uneasiness; he was overheard muttering about "an attempt on my life" as he walked to the bathhouse.

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His placemen now headed the church and the government—"I begat Pitirim and Pitirim begat Stürmer," he boasted—but Rasputin feared for his life. So did Alexandra. She no longer trusted the interior minister she had so lavishly

praised. "As long as Khvostov is in power & has money and police in hands—I honestly am not quiet for Grigory and Ania [Vyrubova]," she wrote to Nicholas. Rasputin's relations with Khvostov and Beletsky were soured by their attempts to keep their association with him secret. Rasputin knew why—the relationship would further tatter their reputations—and he resented it. He took to telephoning their wives when he was drunk, calling them by their first names, and sending messengers to their apartments when they were entertaining to announce that they carried important messages from him. He nicknamed the plump Khvostov Tolstopuz, "Fat Belly." For his part the interior minister blamed Rasputin for having had Stürmer made premier, a position he wanted for himself.

Obliquely, Khvostov hinted to Beletsky that it was time to do away with "all the filth." By that he meant killing Rasputin. Beletsky discussed it with Komissarov, who warned the police chief against getting entangled in a deed from which the interior minister would run as soon as it was done, leaving the blame to fall on him. Komissarov suggested humoring the minister by proposing fictitious murder plans with obvious flaws, which Beletsky could then point out. A pseudo-plot evolved in which a car would be sent for Rasputin, inviting him to the house of an anonymous woman admirer—the flattery would surely work—with the car breaking down in a dark alley. Okhrana agents, dressed as vagabonds, would jump into the car, strangle Rasputin, and dump his body in the Neva. Beletsky told Khvostov of the plot but warned that the police agents might be traced back to the conspirators. The minister agreed but said the murder must take place—he waved a Browning pistol and said he had a mind to do it himself—and without delay. Beletsky next claimed that Komissarov had arranged to have Rasputin waylaid and severely beaten when he left a dinner party. He neglected to tell the minister that he had informed the intended victim of this; on the evening in question Rasputin stayed at home and told a journalist that a "minister who has kissed my hand" wanted him dead.

Frustrated, Khvostov went directly to Komissarov. He offered him 200,000 rubles from the government's secret funds to dispose of the Siberian. He suggested that the police officer use poison, to be put into a crate of Madeira, which would be sent to Rasputin as a gift from Rubinstein. This would involve the financier, whom Khvostov also wished to harm. Komissarov went to Saratov, where he had been police prefect, to get poison from a friendly chemist. He returned—Khvostov sent him a telegram when he dallied—with a variety of bottles supposedly containing a range of poisons. Khvostov was delighted, Beletsky unnerved. Komissarov reassured the police chief that most of the "poisons" were no more than medicines from his wife's bathroom; he had glued the labels on himself after looking up names in a book on dangerous

drugs. One poison was real, however, and Komissarov proved its effectiveness by putting some into a saucer of milk used by Rasputin's cat. The cat died in agony, much to Rasputin's distress. He blamed the poisoning on Prince Andronnikov.

The cat, however, was the only victim. Khvostov despaired of the police duo and contacted Boris Rzhevsky, a yellow journalist "incapable of keeping faith with anyone," whose soiled services he had used as provincial governor. Rzhevsky was a regular guest at the influence-peddling salon of Baroness Evgeniya Rozen, a woman of expensive tastes and "no visible means of support whatsoever." Her salon was renowned for its "never-ending orgies and drunkenness." In the afternoon she entertained grand dukes and duchesses, generals, admirals, and ministers. After dark came courtesans, publicists, actresses, and Rzhevsky. Through the baroness Rzhevsky had maintained contact with Iliodor; he had obtained further letters between the empress and Rasputin and was threatening to publish them in the hope of being paid off. Khvostov suggested that he use Iliodor to organize a fresh plot and that he visit the ex-monk in Norway. Iliodor was continuing to rant against Rasputin from exile. He had written a pamphlet called "Rasputin the Holy Devil" and dreamed of dropping copies over the Russian front lines from an aircraft.

Beletsky had Rzhevsky followed to the Finnish frontier, where a gendarmerie officer deliberately barged into him. The journalist lost his temper, and while he shouted at officials—he told them that he was on a secret mission for Khvostov—his papers were searched. He was allowed to continue to Norway, where Iliodor assured him that his surviving disciples in Tsaritsyn would kill the starets. Beletsky meanwhile unearthed evidence that the journalist was stealing Red Cross donations and passing them to his mistress. Telegrams from Iliodor were intercepted, demanding cash to help his men get from Tsaritsyn to Petrograd. Confronted with this on his return to the capital, Rzhevsky gave Beletsky details of the murder plan.

Thoroughly alarmed, Khvostov had Beletsky appointed governor of Irkutsk, deep in Siberia. Beletsky, a lachrymose man, wept bitterly when Khvostov told him of his unwanted "promotion"; the minister laughed heartily and said that he should have made sure of killing Rasputin. Beletsky retaliated, giving Rasputin and Vyrubova details of the plot, which were passed to the empress; he also outlined Khvostov's murderous intent in an off-the-record interview with the editor of the *Stock Exchange Gazette*.

Rasputin was rattled. On March 1 he visited Spiridovich at Manuilov's suggestion to beg for protection. He dressed himself up in a blue blouse, wide velvet trousers, and high boots, scrubbed his hands and washed his hair. He needed to make a good impression. He told the head of palace security that he was surrounded by murderers and that Khvostov was out to kill him. He

begged for palace security men to guard him in place of the Okhrana agents. The general said that he had none to spare. The starets also complained that Stürmer was pressing him to return to Pokrovskoye. "I won't go, not for him or anyone," he said. "They'll kill me on the way, my dear. That's for sure. And even if they don't murder me, they'll exile me so deep that even the tsar won't be able to find me."

Then he cheered up. "It's all right. He's finished!" he said of Khvostov. "The tsar has already asked the old man [Stürmer] to give him four suggestions for interior minister. . . . I telephoned Papa today. . . . To make sure he doesn't see Fat Belly. . . . He's an intriguer. . . . This murderer must be chased out. Murderer. Murderer." He gave Spiridovich a fixed look. "They are certainly going to kill me, my dear," he said. "And you're all going to die too. And they will kill Papa and Mama as well. You understand, old chap, all, all, you'll *all* be killed."

Rasputin's intelligence was accurate. Khvostov, desperate at the turn of events, prepared a dossier of agents' reports highlighting Rasputin's womanizing and drinking. He also gave a press interview claiming that the starets was close to the "pro-German party" and that he was an agent of "world espionage." As interior minister he was able to relax his own censorship orders and permit his remarks to be published. They did immense damage, for they seemed to confirm salon rumors that the empress and the starets were stabbing the Russian army in the back by leaking military secrets to the enemy. Khvostov then submitted his compromising material on Rasputin to the tsar, who was briefly in Tsarskoye Selo. "The emperor listened to the report grudgingly," he testified later. "He walked over to the window pretending that he found the view interesting."

Far from saving the interior minister, this act finished him. Nicholas invited Rasputin to the palace to fast and take communion with him. "The tsar embraced him," Khvostov testified he was told by Father Vassilyev, the tsar's confessor. "He said: 'We shall never part.' Rasputin replied: 'I've got to leave and I came to say good-bye.' The emperor answered: 'We shall never, never part,' and drew out a paper—my resignation." Khvostov's resignation was announced on March 3. The tsar left for the Stavka the next day. "I'm desperate that we recommended Khv[ostov] to you," the empress wrote to him that afternoon. "This thought leaves me no rest. . . . The devil has got into him, there's no other explanation!"

His portfolio was given to Stürmer, who now combined the offices of premier and interior minister. On paper he was the most powerful figure in Russia since Stolypin; in practice he was the creature of those who had made him. As to Beletsky, the confidential interview he had given the *Stock Exchange Gazette* was published in full. The murder plot was laid out for all to read; Beletsky wrote a letter to the editor confirming that the account was accurate. The scan-

dal—the interior minister plotting with a defrocked monk to kill the royal favorite—seemed a throwback to the intrigues and court stranglings of the dim past. Beletsky was dismissed, and the offer of the Siberian governorship was withdrawn. He and Khvostov were to meet again, in a Bolshevik prison cell as they awaited execution.

For once the vileness the affair had dredged up from the heart of government left Alexandra at one with the country. She felt fouled. On March 5 she wrote to Nicholas that she could find nothing to stimulate her: "No great authors already since a long time & in no other country either," she said, "nor celebrated artist, nor composer—a strange lack. Machinery & money rule the world & crush all art; & those who think themselves gifted have ill minds." Her depression was matched by the poet Mayakovsky, who was writing:

> *When all are distributed through heaven and hell*
> *Conclusions will be drawn about this earth—remember well*
> *In 1916*
> *the beautiful people disappeared from Petrograd.*

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A "hideous and dirty tangle of gossip" was rolling around the starets. The Okhrana special sections archive had boxes of newspaper clippings, lewd cartoons, obscene pamphlets, and intercepted letters. The stories writhed their way to the front and the Stavka. The senior military chaplain, Georgiy Chavelsky, was so concerned that he sought an audience with Nicholas. "I spoke about the rumors of Rasputin's closeness to the tsar's family," he later testified, putting as delicately as he could the street stories that Rasputin was fucking Alexandra nightly and selling the secrets he gleaned from their pillow talk to the Germans. "I spoke about his great influence in nominating people to high government positions, in arranging contracts and deliveries for the army. I said the army was rife with rumors that he was giving away military secrets, which he might have known because of his closeness to the tsar's family. I said agitators were using it to undermine tsarist prestige."

Nicholas listened attentively without interrupting, Chavelsky testified. Then he said simply: "I've heard all about it."

Simanovich was equally disturbed at the "filthy rumors," which "even the tsar's relatives and high dignitaries were engaged in spreading." Alexandra was aware of them; she received a "vile anon. letter," reading the first four lines of it before ripping it up. Simanovich warned Rasputin that he would be a "lost man" if he did not put a stop to them. His warning had little effect.

"What do you want from me?" Rasputin shouted at him. "What can I do? Is it my fault I'm slandered like this?"

"It's intolerable that rumors are spread about the grand duchesses because of you," Simanovich replied. "You ought to realize that everyone pities the poor girls and that even the tsarina is being drawn into the dirt."

"Go to hell," Rasputin said. "I've done nothing. People should realize that nobody fouls the place where he eats. I'm at the tsar's service, and I'd never dare do anything of the sort. What do you think the tsar would do to me if I had?"

"It's all because you're forever chasing women. Leave them alone. You can't let a single one pass you by."

"Is it my fault?" Rasputin objected. "I don't rape them. They come to me of their own free will so that I'll put a word in for them with the tsar. What am I supposed to do? I'm a healthy man, and I can't resist it when a pretty woman comes to me. Why shouldn't I take them? I don't go looking for them. They come to me."

Vera Zhukovskaya noticed that Rasputin was drunker than ever when he invited her to a party on her return to Petrograd. He was talking to four Caucasians and a lady when she was shown into the apartment. She heard the words "concession" and "stock exchange" several times, together with "putting pressure" on people. Rasputin said he would deal with the business the next day, took her arm, and led her down the stairs. An official car was waiting for them; the driver saluted Rasputin.

They were greeted by a fat little woman at a house not far away and led into a dining room. Their host, an old man in a coarse pilgrim's coat, hurried up to them with bottles of port and asked Rasputin to drink it before his Madeira arrived. He drank glass after glass until the hostess brought in a steaming dish of bream. He ate the fish with his hands and put big lumps on Zhukovskaya's plate. His host began to discuss church politics with him and asked about Pitirim. "He's a good fellow who will find his way about," Rasputin said. "Pitirim belongs to us." Then he demanded music and champagne. Two balalaika players came into the room. Rasputin danced and sang:

*Drink to the last drop,*
*Only lose not your head.*

He insisted that Zhukovskaya keep up with him—"drink, my little bee"—as he danced and drank, feet flying in polished boots, torso rocking in a mauve silk blouse.

At length he sank onto a sofa, breathing heavily. He spoke of revels in Siberia. "All day we fell trees, such trees," he boasted. "Three men could not get their arms around them. And when evening comes we make a fire in the snow and sing and dance till midnight. That's the life, I tell you." He was too drunk to prevent Zhukovskaya from slipping away. On March 11 he consoled himself for

her escape by visiting the apartment of the prostitute Tregubova. From there he went to a bathhouse.

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Spurred on by Rasputin and Stürmer, Alexandra was set on bringing down Alexis Polivanov, the war minister. She was interfering freely in military affairs, Polivanov complained, dashing off advice from Rasputin on food supply, transport, fuel, and other "subjects of which she has no idea." She begged for the exact dates of operations so that Rasputin could pray for their success. She pushed for naval appointments, drawing a rare rebuke from her husband; "an excellent man," Nicholas agreed of a naval officer she recommended for an important seagoing command, but one who "has not been on a ship for many years." Her letters quoted Rasputin's approval for being rid of the "revolutionist" war minister: the Friend wanted Polivanov removed because he stood for a responsible ministry, which would be "the utter ruin of everything."

On March 13 she wrote: "Lovy mine, don't dawdle, make up yr mind, it's far too serious, & changing him at once, you cut the wings of that revolutionary party; only be quicker about it . . . hurry up Sweetheart, you need Wify to be behind pushing you. . . . Promise me that you will at once change the M of War, for your sake, your Sons & Russia." The letter crossed with one from Nicholas in which he announced: "I have at last found a successor for Polivanov." Alexandra added a postscript to her letter: "O! the relief! Now I shall sleep well."

"All the ministers will feel relieved," Nicholas echoed her. Stürmer, perhaps, and the empress and Rasputin; others were appalled. The British observer General Knox thought Polivanov "undoubtedly the ablest military organizer in Russia." Equipment supply had improved greatly during his tenure. All frontline units had their full complement of rifles, Knox noted, machine guns were up to a dozen per regiment, and most infantry divisions had three dozen field guns with adequate shells. His successor was Gen. Dmitri Shuvaev, who admitted tearfully to Knox that he was not up to the job. He was "a nice old man," Knox found, with "no knowledge of his work, but his devotion to the emperor was such that if . . . His Majesty were to ask him to throw himself out of the window, he would do so at once." Polivanov—honest, hardworking—did not even rate the normal compliments tossed to dismissed ministers; Nicholas wrote snidely that he found him "insufficiently authoritative."

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Despite his fears Rasputin did leave for Pokrovskoye, on March 14. He was in Siberia for Easter. "During the evening Bible I thought so much of our Friend and how the bookworms and pharisees persecute Christ," Alexandra wrote to

Nicholas. "It was thus that the Pharisees persecuted Christ. . . . How true it is that a prophet is always without honor in his own country. But what reasons to recognise it: how often His prayers have been answered. . . . He lives for his Sovereign and for Russia and it is for us that He suffers such persecution." She had a letter from Siberia the next day. "Our Friend writes with great sadness of how, because He is far from Petrograd, many will go hungry this Easter. He gives so much to the poor. He gives them the last kopeck he gets and He brings divine benediction to those to Whom he gives."

Pornographic letters between herself and Rasputin were now in free circulation. They were fakes, but these genuine letters, with their capitalized pronouns—normally used only for God, Christ, and the tsar himself—might have caused greater outrage if they had leaked. This was not lust; it was blasphemy.

The poet Alexander Blok, watching the celebrations outside St. Isaac's Cathedral in Petrograd, was overcome with the feeling that old Russia—all of it—was doomed. There was no Easter solemnity in the air. He watched a pack of little urchins swarming unchecked over Falconet's magnificent equestrian statue of Peter the Great, the symbol of the city. They hung on to the horse's tail, lit cigarettes under its belly, and sat on the serpent it was crushing under its hoof. "Total demoralization," he wrote. "Petersburg finis."

On Easter Sunday, Russian troops were attacking the Germans in Lithuania to relieve pressure on the French at Verdun. The enemy found the Russian assaults "conducted, as usual, with the utmost bravery and determination and with complete disregard of loss of life." Fog shrouded the battlefield during the day, and at night the frosts were so severe that the men had to hack themselves from the frozen mud at dawn. The Stavka had deprived them of heavy artillery support and aircraft. The Germans counterattacked. Lying in the marshy ground with a few flooded trenches for shelter, the Russians were shelled and gassed from a range of four hundred yards. After five hours no battalion had more than a hundred survivors. Seven officers of the Smolensk Regiment were left from the thirty-five who had opened the assault. Yet they fell back no more than a mile and a half, bivouacking in the mud and blood. Each night the Germans could hear them singing the Easter hymn "Christ is risen from the dead, conquering death by death." In the Alexander Palace the empress wrote: "Christ has risen! My own sweet Nicky love, On this our engagement day, all my tenderest thoughts are with you." She was wearing his favorite brooch.

She begged Nicholas to send a telegram of Easter greetings to Pokrovskoye. The tsar complied. Even from Siberia, Spiridovich reflected, Rasputin remained in a "communion of ideas" with the rulers; indeed, absence seemed to give his influence on them "a mystical and more powerful character." When Alexis had a painful hemorrhage in his ear, Alexandra asked Vyrubova to telegraph the starets. "Christ is risen," he replied. "In the most radiant joy, know that the Church is invincible and we its family have joy in the Resurrection of Christ."

The empress sent the cable on to Nicholas at the Stavka with her own note: "Yesterday hearing the gospels I was struck so vividly of Grigory and the persecution He endures for Christ and our own sakes. Everything had a double significance and I was so sad you were not beside me."

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In mid-April, Meriel Buchanan was waiting to cross the street near the Nicholas Bridge. The winter of 1915–16 had been the most persistent for years. The ambassador's daughter was working as a nurse in a British-sponsored clinic, and wounded soldiers were still shivering under piles of blankets in the unheated wards. The street was blocked by carts and trams, their bells shrilling, while horses skidded in the yellow, half-melting snow. Her nurse's flannel kerchief blew across her face in the bitter wind, and she put a hand up to pull it down. An izvoshchik, drawn by a shaggy white horse, stopped in front of her. A black-bearded man sat in it, a fur cap pulled down over his long, unkempt hair, a bright blue blouse and high boots showing under his fur-trimmed greatcoat. His eyes, "pale grey, deep-set but amazingly brilliant," stared at her.

She stood motionless under his gaze, her veil flapping about her face, "held by a sensation of helplessness so intense that the hand I had lifted dropped to my side." The policeman on the bridge waved the traffic on, and he was gone. She gave a little sigh of relief, shaking herself "as if with that movement I could rid myself of something disturbing and repellent." She heard two women on the sidewalk confirm what she already knew—"Did you not see the two men in the other izvoshchik just behind? They were following him to see that no harm came to him; they say he has a special guard now when he goes out, and well may he need it, if all the tales about him are true." Rasputin had returned to Petrograd.

Between revels—"Rasputin was driven to the Hotel Nord and spent two hours in the apartments of the courtesan Evgeniya Terekhova"—he continued to help individual Jews. Simanovich handed him the case of Madame Lippert, the wife of a Jewish doctor who had been captured by the Germans. She was highly excited when she arrived at Gorokhovaya ulitsa; "being received by the tsar did not excite people as much as calling on Rasputin." When Simanovich asked him to take the case up with Sazonov, the foreign minister, Rasputin was visibly embarrassed. "He'll chuck us out," he said. "He's for the war and I'm against it." The foreign minister was hostile; Simanovich said that Rasputin rarely asked favors of his enemies. He agreed, however, to make an exception.

He seated himself at a table to write a note and screwed his face up with effort. "Dearest," the scribble read. "Help the one who is pining in German captivity. Demand one Russian against two Germans. God will help in salvation of our people. Novykh-Rasputin." Madame Lippert saw the foreign minister the

next day. He read the note and handed it back to her. "Keep it," he said, not wishing to be compromised. "Tell Rasputin that I would have satisfied your request without it." She was told that six wounded Russians were already waiting for an exchange, and her husband would have to take his turn. She said that he was too old and weak to wait. Sazonov said he would try to go through the Red Cross.

A week later nothing had happened. Rasputin was acutely aware of his importance, Simanovich said; "he did not like it if his prestige began to sway." He dashed angrily to his desk and wrote to Sazonov: "Listen, Minister. I sent a woman to you. God knows what you told her. Cut it out! Have things settled, then everything will be fine. If not, I'll beat your ribs. I'll tell the loving one about you and you'll go flying. Rasputin."

Sazonov was not amused when Madame Lippert returned. "What!" he yelled as he read the note. "Am I to allow an old fox like Rasputin to write me letters like this? If you were not a lady, I'd have you thrown out." She asked to have the note back. The foreign minister refused. She threatened to go directly to Rasputin and noticed a change in Sazonov's attitude. "Let's forget it," he said. "I was beside myself. Pay no attention to it. Tell Father Grigory that it was only a joke." She was upset. "You'd better tell him yourself," she said, picking up Sazonov's telephone. "You know pretty well that he changes ministers like gloves." She rang 646-46, got Rasputin on the line, and handed the receiver to Sazonov. "You've sent me a strange letter, Grigory Efimovich," he said. "Are you angry with me?" "What do you mean?" Rasputin said. "I'm not to blame. You offended me. I advise you not to play dirty tricks. We'd better be friends." Sazonov took the advice. A fortnight later Dr. Lippert arrived in Petrograd, but the foreign minister would not last much longer.

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Rasputin went to Moscow on May 23. He stayed with the Reshetnikovs in Devichye Pole, where Bishop Varnava was also staying. Madame Reshetnikova admired religious celebrities, and her houseguests had included Ioann of Kronstadt and Iliodor. Elena Djanumova was there. She found Rasputin had grown thinner since she had last seen him. His face was longer and more lined, though his eyes were the same. Varnava followed Elena and Rasputin to a corner. "Oh, Grigory Efimovich," he said with a sly smile. "I'll tell your Fedorovna how you're paying court here to your ladies." It was an unsubtle double entendre; the empress was Alexandra Fedorovna, Rasputin's wife was Praskovya Fedorovna. Rasputin told him to "cut out the twaddle."

Varnava asked her name. "Elena?" he said. "That means your name day is in three days. You should donate something to God's church. Perhaps you've got a carpet you could give to the church."

Rasputin took Elena into the dining room. Varnava followed. "Show you a pretty lady and you're gone," the bishop said. Rasputin scowled at him. "Hear what Varnava just stuck in?" he asked Elena. "He envies me. He's artful, I don't like him." She invited the starets to dinner. She bought Madeira and hors d'oeuvres from Eliseyev's delicatessen and ordered fish soup to be sent to her apartment. Rasputin came at 7:00 P.M. with a Georgian officer who had been assigned to guard him.

Rasputin was sarcastic about Varnava during dinner: "He doesn't like me, that one. His eyes are so shifty." After the meal he said he wanted to listen to the Gypsies. They went to the Yar. Everyone recognized Rasputin from the scandal the year before. The party were shown to a private room; several fresh Okhrana agents arrived to shadow them. A Gypsy choir with the famous singer Nastya Polyakova appeared. Rasputin ordered fruit, coffee, cakes, and champagne. He drank heavily; the only visible sign was that his eyes reddened, his face paled, and the wrinkles showed more clearly. Polyakova sang:

*Oh once, and once again*
*And many times more . . .*

"Well, my dear ones, let's be alive," the starets said, jumping up and singing along in a loud voice. "Now, Nastenka, let's have a drink. I love Gypsy songs. My heart leaps with joy when I hear them." Polyakova glared at him, and the choir was unfriendly. Elena was told that the Gypsies had suffered as a result of last year's episode—police investigations, unpleasantness—and they wanted no repeat. Rasputin was indifferent to the hostile looks. "Now, my favorite song," he said. "Hey, 'Troika, Fluffy Snow.' " He began conducting the orchestra, head thrown back, pale, eyes half-closed. He sang: "I'm coming, coming, coming to her . . ." Other people, Moscow industrialists, some Englishwomen from a military mission whose eyes were bulging, begged to join the party. Thirty people had crammed into the room when someone suggested going on to the Strelna nightclub. There was no bill to pay; a waiter explained that the tab had been picked up by a municipal official.

They were given a large room at the Strelna with windows overlooking the winter gardens. People began climbing the palm trees to see Rasputin. He ordered champagne for the choir. The singers got noticeably tipsy; they cried and laughed and sang: "We shall drink for Grischa, dear Grischa." Rasputin began to dance wildly when they played "The Russian." The tassels of his crimson belt, locks of black hair, his soft and shining boots, all flew. Gypsy women danced with him.

The Okhrana agents, their eyes on Rasputin, failed to notice two army officers who came into the room. One of them sat next to Elena. "What do they

find in this man?" he asked with a sneer. "It's shameful—a drunken muzhik is dancing, and everyone likes it. Why do women stick to him?" Dawn came. The municipality of Moscow settled the Strelna bill too. The party drove out to a restaurant in the country to watch the sun come up. It had a big garden with lilacs in blossom and a summerhouse. The birds sang; the spring air was clean after the smoky nightclub. "What paradise, what beauty from God," Rasputin said. He ordered coffee, tea, liqueurs.

The army officers had come along; they were whispering to each other. An Okhrana agent asked them to leave. There was noise and a scuffle. Shots, screams, and whistles followed. Elena was pushed into an automobile. Rasputin was shoved in next to her, protesting. He was gloomy as they were driven back into Moscow. "My foes don't like me," he said and fell into a sour silence. The agents told them later that the army officers had been arrested. They had said that they did not intend to kill Rasputin, only to beat him up. His face went yellow when he was told this; his nerves were on edge, and he looked old.

Later in the day he went missing. The Georgian officer told Elena that most of the Moscow Okhrana was out looking for him. He reappeared at her apartment. "I've got a new lady with me," he said through her bedroom door. "Want you to meet her. She's good." Elena was resting and refused to receive them. Rasputin went on to a reception given by a general's wife. One of the guests was a countess, a refugee from the lost Polish provinces who suffered a hysterical fit. Rasputin patted her on the back, but she was immune to his normal calming influence. "Can't stand these eyes," she cried. "They see everything. Can't stand them." She was left in a bedroom. Several of the ladies said that they wanted to be photographed with the starets. They went off to a studio, and pictures were taken. He refused to ride back in the car. He took a horse and carriage, his hair blowing in the spring wind. The agents followed in another carriage. They were relieved when he took the train back to Petrograd; he had not slept for two days.

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Rasputin saw the empress straight off the train. She passed on four questions that he wanted to be put to the tsar, on the Duma, a new governor for Petrograd, the food shortage, and the Union of Towns, a municipal body that was agitating for a responsible government. There had been a fifth, Alexandra wrote, but she had forgotten it. Rasputin met her again at Vyrubova's cottage on June 11. Again he listed his requests. He wanted the ex–war minister Sukhomlinov to be released from jail and Vyrubova to accompany the empress on a visit to the Stavka; he did not want streetcar fares to be raised, or the synod to approve a potentially hostile federation of municipal dioceses.

Rasputin's neighbor on the Gorokhovaya staircase, the synod clerk Blagoveshchensky, took some notes on "GER" over the summer. Between June 7 and 14 he wrote of many visitors arriving from morning until late evening. Most were ladies, girls, and Sisters of Charity; the men were fewer but still numerous. Whenever the apartment door opened Blagoveshchensky saw a line of people sitting in the hall; "when there is not enough room some of them sit on the bench at the door on the landing." Most of the women "are very elegantly dressed, the last word in fashion, not quite young, of Balzac age." There was a large number of "fresh pretty girls, very young" too, who always impressed the clerk "by their seriousness when they walk along the yard to see 'him' or climb the stairs—they think something over and are very concentrated, as if they're up to something serious." Some of the men were "non-Russian types"—he meant Jews—but there were also "reliable gentlemen of Russian origin, apparently of some position."

Rasputin ate in the kitchen. " 'He' sits in the middle, one side—a dark gentleman in the role of 'his' secretary"—Rubinstein—"on the other, a simple woman, village type, in black dress with white kerchief on the head, Ioannite-style." This was Dunia. They all ate soup from the same bowl with wooden spoons. While he was receiving guests Rasputin often went to the kitchen to take fruit—oranges, apples, strawberries—and other food into his study. " 'His' kitchen is right opposite mine," the clerk noted in his diary, "so that I can see everything clearly, but in the evening they put down the blind."

On June 15 Blagoveshchensky was writing up his diary in his study and listening to "a sort of bacchanalia" next door. The sounds came clearly through the wall. Rasputin was having "a drinking bout on the eve of his departure to his native land." Many guests had come during the day. They were very cheerful, and their number swelled in the evening. "They dance and sing," the clerk noted. Musicians arrived at midnight—"a string orchestra, ten to twelve persons from some pleasure garden, like Villa Rhode or Bouff"—and played tunes from operettas accompanied at the end by "wild dancing." A baritone sang Georgian songs. After noisy applause the "Song of Prophetic Oleg" was repeated three times, with ad-libs to the verses, in the style of a comic theater, and cries of "Wishing you health."

The kitchen window was left open, and the blind was not drawn. Blagoveshchensky could see the guests going into the kitchen to get food, fruit, wine—"mostly these were ladies and girls, all in high spirits, red faced, unduly cheerful." The clerk noticed that the servant, the "Ioannite girl," sat while the ladies did the washing up and cleaning. The carousal went on into the early hours. At the end the clerk made out separate drunken voices, a person dancing, and applause. "Apparently, 'he' let himself go and danced solo," he noted disapprovingly.

CHAPTER 23

# *"For Their Sakes, Go"*

While Rasputin was in Siberia the empress took a trip with her daughters and Vyrubova to Mogilev. Rasputin had wanted to go with her—he was worried that the tsar was drifting out of orbit—but General Alexeev, the senior Stavka officer, declined. Alexandra brought the general an icon as a gift from Rasputin, and took up his refusal as she walked with him after dinner. She asked him what he had against the starets. "Nothing, Majesty, personally I have never met him," Alexeev replied. "Then why do you prevent his coming here? He gives the tsar such comfort. We owe him so much. Twice his prayers have saved Alexis from death." "Majesty, the voice of the people is the voice of God," he said. "It is not possible for me to allow the presence here of a man whom the people and the army think ill fated."

The empress bade him a cold adieu. She hated with the same furious totality that she loved. She loved few, and Alexeev now joined the many she hated. When she heard a few weeks later that he had cancer, she reveled in his sickness. "God sent this illness to save you fr[om] a man who was lossing [*sic*] his way & doing harm by listening to bad letters & people," she wrote to the tsar.

It was at best eccentric to entertain four beautiful young women and their mother at a high command in wartime. Nicholas, however, was happy to have the diversion—he thanked Alexandra for "bringing me life and sun in spite of the rainy weather"; tender and loyal after so many years, he said that "when I meet you, having been parted for long, I become stupidly shy, and only sit and gaze at you"—for doing so took his mind away from the disintegration of his government. The agriculture minister found it impossible to get the tsar to con-

centrate on real problems such as the food crisis. "He kept interrupting me with the everyday trivia that interested him . . . how the weather was, whether the flowers were out," Alexander Naumov said shortly before resigning. "Like the neurotic who preserves his equanimity only until some vulnerable point is touched upon, the emperor, clearly exhausted . . . preferred to think about lighter and happier things."

Strikes escalated, transport was in chaos. The prices of flour and fat were up 260 percent over prewar levels; the cost of meat had more than tripled, salt sextupled. Internal dictatorship, General Alexeev wrote in a top-secret report, was the sole means of preventing anarchy. He suggested that all civil power be placed in the hands of one man, a supreme minister for state defense. This man would "unite, lead, and direct by his will alone the activities of all ministries and all government and civic organizations." The idea attracted Nicholas. He would retain military power as supreme commander, while the "dictator" would rule behind the front on his behalf. The man he had in mind was—Stürmer; Stürmer, friend of the empress and the empress's Friend, Stürmer, the five-million-ruble swindler, "low, intriguing, and treacherous," "a man on whose word no reliance can be placed." That was what the Allied ambassadors thought of him. Russians despised him far, far more.

Secrets were no longer kept. The Duma president Mikhail Rodzianko got hold of a copy of the report. He had already warned Nicholas that Rasputin was a direct threat to the dynasty. He now turned on Stürmer, the protégé, over coffee at a private dinner for ministers and Duma men. "You spend your time trying to discover an imaginary revolution," he accused the prime minister. "You organize monarchist congresses, persecute public organizations, provoke endless intrigues which paralyze administration, and deliver the country into the hands of self-seekers. . . . Bribery, extortion, plunder are growing on all sides." Then, without using a name, he moved on to Rasputin. "Persons who deserve the gallows continue to remain in high favor." The other ministers were restless with embarrassment, but Rodzianko was not done with Stürmer yet. "You should realize that you are neither beloved nor trusted by the nation," he boomed on. "In your senseless search for a bogey revolution, you are murdering the living soul of the people and creating unrest which sooner or later may breed an actual revolution."

Rodzianko hastened to the Stavka to warn the tsar against any thought of a dictator, least of all Stürmer. "What measures would you propose for setting affairs in the rear in order?" Nicholas asked him. "Grant a responsible ministry," he replied. The tsar said he would think it over. He did not. "It goes without saying that Rodzianko talked a lot of nonsense," he wrote to Alexandra. "Of all the foolish things which he said, the most foolish was . . . replacing Stürmer." Far from sacking him, the tsar had a stunning promotion in mind.

Intelligent, cultivated, and able, Sergei Sazonov had been foreign minister since 1910. Trusted by the public and the Allies, he suffered the fatal flaw of loathing Rasputin. The empress also suspected—rightly—that he favored a responsible ministry and Polish autonomy. Both of these, she said, would compromise "Baby's future rights." She campaigned relentlessly against him. "Long-nosed Sazonov . . . is such a pancake," she wrote to Nicholas. "Wish you cld think of a good successor to Sazonov—need not be a diplomat. . . . Stürmer always disapproved of him as he is such a coward towards Europe and a parliamentarist—and would be Russia's ruin." Nicholas gave way in characteristic style. He saw Sazonov at the Stavka and appeared to agree with him over Poland. Sazonov was taking a short holiday in Finland at the end of June when he learned that he had been dismissed. His deputy minister was in tears when he begged the British ambassador to persuade the tsar to reverse the decision. "I cannot exaggerate the services which Sazonov has rendered the cause of the Allies," Buchanan cabled Nicholas. There was no reply.

Sazonov was replaced by Stürmer. In the five months since Manuilov and Rasputin had brought him to Alexandra's eye, the "honeyed and furtive" nonentity had acquired the great offices of prime, interior, and foreign minister. Although he now dropped the interior portfolio, he combined the other two. He fancied himself in his new diplomatic role. He hung three paintings in his office, of the great European congresses of Vienna, Paris, and Berlin, with space for a fourth, which he told visitors was reserved for the great postwar Congress of Moscow, over which he would preside. "How fine it will be at Moscow! How fine it will be!" he congratulated himself, repeating his sentences by nervous habit. "God grant it! God grant it!"

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On his return from Siberia, Rasputin was pleased enough to see Sazonov gone. He was not so happy that Stürmer had acquired another office without his help. He disliked the distance that Stürmer kept from him. "I'll do for him," he threatened. Manuilov, who used them both, tried to maintain friendly relations between the two. He secretly arranged meetings at night in the Peter and Paul Fortress through Lydia Nikitina, Rasputin's admirer and the daughter of the fortress governor, for Stürmer was terrified of any public association with the starets. Stürmer even denied to Klimovich, the director of the police department, that he knew Manuilov. When Klimovich gave the premier a copy of Manuilov's police record, Stürmer shook his head and said, "Yes, yes, what a scoundrel! A fine gentleman!" Yet Klimovich testified later that he had seen the two chatting and smoking cigarettes together, and that he was paying Manuilov a salary of eighteen thousand rubles a year on Stürmer's direct orders.

Rasputin was also angry that the justice minister, Alexander Alexeivich Khvostov, had replaced his fat nephew as interior minister. The uncle was ill and tired. He did not want interior, the most exhausting post in the cabinet. "How did you dare to do me this dirty trick?" he asked Stürmer when he was pushed into it. Khvostov disliked Rasputin and was honest, a combination that troubled the starets.

It did not, though, dampen his spirits. On August 3 his neighbor Blagoveshchensky was kept awake by an all-night drinking bout. He estimated that it involved forty people and a Gypsy choir. "They all sang and danced from nine in the evening until 3:00 A.M.," he wrote in his diary. "In the end, everyone was drunk, particularly 'him.' " He drank all day from August 6 to 9—he "pestered the servants in the yard, thrust himself kissing on them"—until, to his neighbor's relief, he returned to Siberia. Alexandra had hoped to go to Tobolsk to visit the shrine to St. Ioann of Tobolsk, illegally beatified the previous summer by Bishop Varnava. Instead she sent Vyrubova and Lili von Dehn, and asked Rasputin to go with them.

Public feeling against the starets was now so strong that Dehn thought it dangerous to advertise the trip. They left Petrograd, however, in a blaze of publicity. "Wires were sent in advance all along the line to announce our advent, and crowds thronged the stations to catch a glimpse of us," she wrote. They traveled in style in a special saloon carriage attached to a Trans-Siberian train. At Tyumen they took a steamer for Tobolsk, arriving at dusk to find its churches and houses sharply silhouetted on the hills above the black river. The governor and Varnava met them, and they were quartered in the governor's mansion. They visited the new saint's tomb the next day and attended a special service in the cathedral.

On the way back Rasputin insisted they stop at Pokrovskoye and meet his wife, whom Dehn found a "charming, sensible woman." He said that he wanted the tsar and tsarina to stay with him in his house. "But it's too far," Dehn said, shocked. "They must," Rasputin said, and added, "Willingly or unwillingly, they will come to Tobolsk and they will see my village before they die." After his murder, as prisoners of the revolution, they did. The little party moved on to Ekaterinburg; it was to be the death place of the imperial family, and Dehn said that, as soon as she got off the train, "I felt a sense of calamity. We were all affected: Rasputin was ill at ease, Anna perceptibly nervous." They visited Rasputin's old mentor, Makari, at his fowl-infested hermitage in the woods of Verkhoturye. He fed them bread and cold water, and they slept miserably on the mud floor of his hut. The ladies were glad to return to Petrograd. Rasputin followed them on September 7.

Rasputin returned to unpleasant news. Manuilov had been arrested by Klimovich on Alexander Khvostov's orders. He was charged with extorting a large amount from a Moscow bank and with selling exemptions from military service. A honey trap, using ten thousand rubles in marked notes, had been laid for him. When the bait was taken, Khvostov told Stürmer that he had "an interesting piece of news which at first will probably frighten you, but later will please you." Stürmer threw his arms around his interior minister and denounced Manuilov, his self-styled secretary, as "a blackguard and a blackmailer." But he was not pleased; he was terrified. Manuilov made it clear that he would implicate both Rasputin and the premier at his trial. Stürmer had Klimovich dismissed without reference to Khvostov, who was then relieved of his own post. When he bade good-bye to Stürmer, Khvostov said, "It is the first time that I leave you with a feeling of sincere pleasure." Russia had no interior minister.

Another of Rasputin's circle was in deep trouble. Dmitri Rubinstein was accused of spying for the Germans. The financier had bought up all the stock in the Anchor Insurance Company, which specialized in factory insurance, and sold the company to a Swedish firm at a large profit. As part of the deal he sent plans of all the factories insured by the company to Stockholm. Many were plants engaged in the war effort. All mail and couriers were searched at the Swedish border with Russian Finland. When the plans were discovered Russian military intelligence believed it had stumbled on a giant espionage ring. Rubinstein, the Friend's friend, was imprisoned and faced probable execution. The affair was headline news across the country.

Worse, Simanovich and Rasputin had introduced Rubinstein to Alexandra as a confidential banker. She had used him to transfer money, via Sweden, to needy friends and relatives in Germany. Rubinstein's role, Simanovich said, was "very ticklish and dangerous and he carried out the tsarina's commission with great craftiness and won her gratitude." It was indeed sensitive, for transferring funds to enemy nationals was a hanging offense. Rubinstein's connection to Rasputin and the empress was common knowledge. He had assiduously used Rasputin's name, and the claim that he was banker to the royal house, to impress investors on his stock-ramping schemes. Rasputin did not charge Rubinstein for his help in influence peddling. Instead, with typical generosity and disdain for cash, he sent a stream of petitioners on to Rubinstein's offices and the financier rewarded them with salaried but fictional posts in his bank.

The empress, Simanovich said, was "very much afraid that her relations with Rubinstein might become known, which would have set off an unheard-of scandal." She tried to get the military to drop the prosecution, but the senior officer responsible, General Ruzsky, a "great enemy of the Jews," refused. Afraid that she would be able to get his release from prison in Petrograd, the

general had the banker transferred to the Pskov penitentiary. Rasputin took Rubinstein's wife to Tsarskoye Selo to visit the empress in her infirmary. "Calm down and go home," Alexandra told the hysterical woman, promising to intervene with the tsar. Rubinstein, however, had set up his bank with capital from the Voyeikov brothers, one of whom, Maj. Gen. V. N. Voyeikov, was palace commandant. The bank had run up huge losses, and the brothers were 800,000 rubles out of pocket. For this they blamed Rubinstein, and they connived with the military in Pskov to keep him locked up.

Scandal had almost lost its power to shock; by the late summer of 1916, the country was close to catatonia. The self-seeking adventurers in high office, the *Times* correspondent Robert Wilton thought, were now copied in all walks of life. The whole of Russia "seems to be engaged in a whirl of plunder," he wrote. "Every man is trying to rob his neighbour to the utmost of his capacity. . . . Never was there a time when money could be earned so easily by nefarious methods." The collapse in vital areas such as food supply, he wrote, "has, I fear, gone beyond all remedy." A friend who had just traveled through Siberia told Wilton that it was overflowing with food. In Petrograd, in one of the greatest wheat-growing countries on earth, white bread had disappeared. There was no sugar, little milk or butter, and no meat beyond scrawny chickens.

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Pogroms were in the air, and spy mania was universal. Vassilyev met senior government officials who told him that two aides of Kaiser Wilhelm had been seen walking down the Nevsky Prospect with their coat collars turned up; they wanted to know what sort of an Okhrana he was running that allowed such men to stroll unmolested through Petrograd. Radio stations were scented out everywhere. The Germans were said to run regular flights by Zeppelin airship to a forest clearing near Petrograd to land fresh agents and to carry others back to Berlin for debriefing. "It was such idle gossip," Vassilyev wrote wearily, "that gave rise to the parrot cry, soon in everybody's mouth, 'Things cannot go on like this!' "

Anyone with a German name, or who had worked for the Germans, was suspect. Russian journalists who had been correspondents for German newspapers were banished to Siberia, though Vassilyev agreed that there was not a shred of evidence against them. He noted that life was intolerable for unfortunates with the surname Kaiser. The privileges of German Baltic barons at court had long been an issue; when Prince Menshikov, known for his wit as well as his catamites, was once asked what favor he would like, he replied, "I'd like to be promoted to be a German." The war, and the stories of enemy atrocities, added fresh venom to attacks on leading court figures—the German-born empress herself, Count Fredericks, the head of the imperial household, and others

with German names: the chief court marshal, the adjutant general, the master of horse. On the Baltic coast the towers of country houses belonging to Baltic barons were reported to be signal stations for the German fleet; the observatory of an amateur astronomer near Riga was ransacked separately by the police, army, and navy.

Inevitably, Prince Andronnikov was the next of Rasputin's circle to be suspected of spying. The prince was spending immense sums on high living and his lovers. "I cannot even approximately define the amount of his expenses," his valet Kilter later testified. "My wife used to bring almost every other day 1,000 rubles to him from the Russian-Asian Bank. She received the money by check. He paid 600 rubles a month for his apartment. Not a single day passed without guests coming for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. People used to come in groups, not caring whether the host was at home or not." The Okhrana received reports that all this was paid for with German money. When Andronnikov was investigated by the Rasputin inquiry commission the following year, no proof of treason was found. The commission was satisfied that he was too flighty and self-obsessed to be a thoroughgoing traitor. He had no political ideals; like Rasputin's, his opinions of politicians were based on his personal relations with them. "If they ignored him or he quarreled with them, he discredited them in every possible way," the industrialist Alexis Putilov testified. "If they were good and kind to him, he praised them left and right."

Nevertheless, the pro-German myths surrounding the empress and Rasputin and his circle were widely accepted and immensely damaging. It was even suggested that Rasputin had engineered the loss of the Royal Navy warship *Hampshire*, which struck a mine in the North Sea while bringing General Kitchener, the British war minister, on a secret visit to Russia. It is true that Rasputin was pleased—"our Friend says it is good for us that Kitchener died, as later he might have done Russia harm," the empress wrote to Nicholas—and true that the Germans were grateful to him for the demoralization and scandal he bred. There was no evidence at all that he was in their pay, or of the existence of a "German camarilla" at court. But hard fact in the sullen cities was in yet shorter supply than food.

The drifting scum of gossip was unnerving the empress. "Why does Grigory stay in Petrograd?" she asked Lili von Dehn. She half-wished he would return to Siberia; though, she said, "we can't possibly discard him, he has done no wrong." At Alexandra's suggestion Dehn visited Rasputin at his apartment. He was having tea, and she asked him for a private word. He took her into his room. To her irritation, Laptinskaya went with them. "Grigory, you must leave Petrograd at once," she told him. "You can pray for Their Majesties just as well in Siberia. You know what is being said. For their sakes, go."

He seemed ready to take the hint—"I'm sick and tired of it all, I'll go"—but Laptinskaya raged: "How dare you try to control Father's spirit! I say that he

must stay. Who are you?" Rasputin then said, "Perhaps you're right. I will stay."

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Rasputin was thus in Petrograd to welcome the new interior minister. Alexander Protopopov came from Simbirsk, a city that sat quietly above the mile-wide Volga, its courtyards and cherry orchards overgrown with grass, a place where "here and there someone sticks his head out of a window, looks around, gaping in both directions, spits, and disappears." It had produced the revolutionaries Kerensky and Lenin, and Oblomov, the symbol of Russian lethargy in Ivan Goncharov's eponymous novel. Protopopov had little in common with any of them. He was the "typical noble in debt who is always prepared to do anything that is wanted," a compulsive busybody with "a finger in every pie," and his opinions veered at will between the liberal and the reactionary. He came from the gentry—his father owned a large cloth factory in Simbirsk—and had trained as a lawyer. He was small and neurotic; his "wild bright eyes shifted all the time"; with his sleek hair he was said to resemble "an excitable seal."

His behavior hovered between eccentricity and lunacy. Although the charitable attributed his obvious ill health to a progressive spinal disease, he was almost certainly syphilitic. He had first met Rasputin the previous winter through Peter Badmaev, a practitioner in Tibetan herbalism who was treating him for leg ulcers, hallucinations, partial paralysis, and other symptoms of advanced syphilis. Badmaev was quite as extraordinary as his patient. He was a Russified Buryat Mongol who had gone to St. Petersburg in his youth to study orthodox medicine before abandoning it for Tibetan cures. Tibetans used plant extracts and animal secretions as medicines and were skilled at osteopathy, massage, and hypnotism. Badmaev developed a thriving practice; when he converted to Orthodoxy he was well enough known at court for Alexander III to stand as his godfather. He prescribed powders as specifics against cholera. His popular "herbal infusions"—with names like French perfumes, Elixir du Tibet and Lotus Noir—were probably laced with heroin. Rasputin said they made the deepest concerns "seem like petty trifles . . . You'll become happy, so-o ha-appy, and s-illy that you won't worry about anything."

Badmaev suggested to Rasputin that his patient—then a deputy president of the Duma—would make an excellent minister. Rasputin assured Protopopov, with "much giggling and simpering," that he would find him a portfolio. Simanovich approved; "we had his promise to do something for the Jews," he claimed. Alexandra duly took up the cause at the beginning of September. "My own Sweetheart," she wrote Nicholas on September 7. "Grigory begs you earnestly to name Protopopov. . . . You know him & had such a good impression of him—happens to be of the Duma (is not left) & so will know how to be with them. . . . He likes our Friend since at least 4 years & that says much for a

man." In the same letter she showed mounting irritation with Stürmer, who was failing to see Rasputin and was thus "a big act" who had "lost his footing." She had not changed her views on the Duma—it was still full of "rotten people"—but she thought Protopopov's appointment as interior minister would "make a great effect among them & shut their mouths."

At first Nicholas hesitated. "Our Friend's opinions of people are sometimes very strange," he replied on September 9. "All these changes make my head go round. In my opinion they are too frequent. In any case, they are not good for the internal situation of the country, as each new man brings with him alterations." He knew his wife's meddling was dangerous—he apologized nervously: "I am very sorry that my letter has turned out to be so dull"—but he gave way the next day. "It shall be done," he wrote.

Alexandra was delighted with her Friend's new find. Far from thinking Rasputin erratic, she felt that his worldliness compensated for the protocol-induced limitations of her own and her husband's existence. "He will be less mistaken in people than we are—experience in life blessed by God," she assured the tsar. Rasputin and Simanovich took Protopopov to Vyrubova's cottage and introduced him to the empress on September 21. She spent ninety minutes with him and found him "very clever, coaxing, beautiful manners, speaks also very good French & English." She was frank with him; she told him that she found it difficult to trust people, and that she expected him to obey. "I am no longer the slightest bit shy or afraid of the ministers and speak like a waterfall in Russian!!!!" she boasted to Nicholas. "And they kindly don't laugh at my faults. They see I am energetic & tell all to you I hear & see & that I am yr wall in the rear . . . eyes & ears." She reveled in her power, her vigor restored, in command; had not her grandmother stamped her name, Victorian, on an epoch? Nicholas acknowledged her role in his reply on September 23. "It rests with you to keep peace and harmony among the ministers," he wrote. "Thereby you do a great service to me and our country." In Protopopov she served catastrophe.

The new minister was hopelessly compromised. As Rasputin remarked, his "honor stretches like a piece of elastic." He was heavily in debt. Simanovich bought out his promissory notes for 150,000 rubles to prevent his being declared bankrupt. "Protopopov promised to give me back this sum after his nomination out of the secret funds of his ministry," Simanovich said. Some of the promissory notes, together with others from grand dukes and ministers, were found in Simanovich's apartment after the revolution.

Protopopov met Rasputin regularly if clandestinely at Gorokhovaya ulitsa, coming late at night, wearing false spectacles, "stealing through a back door, with raised collar so as not to be recognized by his own detectives." His "lascivious girlfriend," Madame Lunts, an attorney's wife, was also a frequent visitor.

Rasputin deeply impressed him. "Confidential interpreter of events, judge of the people," Protopopov testified later. "Great influence upon the tsar. Upon the tsarina—enormous. . . . Anyone else approaching the tsar would have been confronted by the will of the tsarina, while Rasputin not only had her support—but obedience, Vyrubova's worship, and the love of the tsar's children." Vain himself—although he was a civilian, he wore the uniform of a gendarmerie general, with high boots and a dress belt he had designed—he was awed by the "care and attention" the empress paid to Rasputin's appearance. "His silken shirts were embroidered by her," he testified. "She gave him the golden cross on a gold chain he wore around his neck, and the clasp had the tsar's letter, N. He talked to them firmly and with confidence."

The new interior minister was put to work at once to free the Friend's friends. He dined with the empress at Vyrubova's cottage on September 25. Madame Sukhomlinova, the voluptuous young wife of the ex–war minister, had visited Rasputin several times to plead for her husband's release from prison. The starets had agreed to help; whether she paid him in kind is not known. Alexandra now took a large sheet of paper and wrote to the tsar asking him to order the release of Sukhomlinov and her banker Rubinstein. "Protopopov quite agrees with the way our F[riend] looks upon this question," she wrote. "Write this down to remember when you see him and also speak to him about Rubinstein to have him sent quietly to Siberia. . . . Prot[opopov] thinks it was Guchkov, who must have egged on the military to catch the man, hoping to find evidence against our Friend. Certainly he had ugly money affairs—but not he alone."

The two were released. Graffiti was daubed on walls in the cities: "Traitors defend Traitors." For good measure Protopopov also had the charges against Manuilov dropped and banned all private meetings of civic organizations. The hopes liberals had in him were dashed within days of his appointment. "A man who works with Stürmer, frees Sukhomlinov, whom the entire country considers a traitor, liberates Manuilov, and persecutes the press," cried Pavel Miliukov, leader of the Constitutional Democrats, a renowned historian who had taught at the University of Chicago, "cannot be our friend!"

CHAPTER 24

# *A Tragedy Played in a Brothel*

At Donon's smart restaurant, the former premier Vladimir Kokovtsov dined with the industrialist Alexis Putilov and said that revolution was in the wings. Putilov disagreed; it was much worse than that. "We're heading for anarchy," he said. "There's a vast difference. Revolutionaries reconstruct. Anarchists destroy." The owner of another top restaurant, Alvin Juin, was arrested for spying. "The regime is finished," an observer wrote. "If the spy hunt has been taken into the kitchens of the Maxim's of Russia and an innocent French patriot taken for a German spy, then anything is possible."

The journalist Konstantin Paustovsky went to the backwoods town of Yefremov to find out what provincial Russia was thinking. The stands of spruce were slashed scarlet by the autumnal sunsets, and the air crackled with early ice crystals. Idiot beggars sat on the church steps, and "white ticket men" exempted from army service idled in the streets. Paustovsky's hotel had two other guests, a fortune-teller, Madame Troma, her fingers metallic with cheap rings, and "Princess Greza," in fact a man who wrote an agony column for cheap magazines. An enormity of hopelessness lay over the land like the smoke from the villages. "It was as if no one, anywhere, expected any happiness," he wrote. "Everyone, languishing, was waiting for the drama's denouement."

On his estates the writer Ivan Bunin was surrounded by peasants who "grow more furious every day." He sat on his bed and waited for them to burn down the house. They had already stolen his horses. The editor of the magazine *Kolokol*, returning from the villages, reported that everyone was "hawking around the prophecy which Grigory had often uttered to Their Majesties: 'If I

die or you desert me, you will lose your son and your crown within six months.' " The governor of Tula province warned Protopopov's interior ministry that "such terrible times have set in that I don't know how to cope. . . . I am sitting on a powder keg."

Visitors to the Stavka observed the tsar's sunken cheeks. "He can't continue this way much longer," the grand marshal, Paul Benckendorff, told the tsar's physician. "He is no longer seriously interested in anything. . . . He goes through his daily routine like an automaton, paying more attention to the hour set for his meals or his walk in the garden than to affairs of state." Alexandra, who spent a few days at the headquarters, sensed the tsar's isolation among the professional military men. "You are so lonely among this crowd—so little warmth around," she wrote on her return on October 12. She was sure that Rasputin could lift his gloom. "A touch of His on your chest would have soothed much pain," she went on, "and given you new wisdom & energy from Above—these are no idle words—but my firm conviction. . . . I know too well & believe in the peace our Friend can give & you are tired, morally, you cannot deceive old wify!"

The average tenure of a minister was less than six months; in a year there had been five interior ministers, three war ministers, four agriculture ministers, three justice ministers. The changes came so fast that a right-wing Duma man, Vladimir Purishkevich, wrote a doggerel on "ministerial leapfrog":

*You'll see your minister uncrowned*
*Within a month—or rarely two.*
*By minutes now we count their term.*
*They go and leave a sulfurous smell;*
*Only Rasputin still holds firm.*

Purishkevich noted in his diary that new appointees no longer bothered to move into the government apartments their positions entitled them to. They were unlikely to survive long enough to make the furniture transfer worthwhile.

Protopopov recklessly insisted on meeting the Duma leaders. "We do not want to talk to you," they told him, "a man who received his appointment through Rasputin and freed the traitor Sukhomlinov." He retorted that he was the tsar's creature and proud of it. "I am the personal candidate of the sovereign, whom I now have come to know better and to love. All of you have titles, good positions, connections. . . . I have nothing besides the personal support of the sovereign." But his colleagues thought him mad; he kept an icon in his office and held long conversations with it. Peter Bark, the finance minister, thought him a "pitiful figure" but allowed him one talent—"he can talk with-

out end." His offices were full of people with "appointments he did not keep, and urgent current business fell into chaos."

Rasputin was at the center of the whirlwind—"the most talked-about man in Russia"—and it was blowing him off his feet. He was degenerating with drink and exhaustion. "He would repeat certain words in a fever," the journalist N. A. Teffi wrote. " 'God, prayer, wine,' mixing everything up, confusing things, could not understand himself, tortured himself, had convulsions, threw himself into the dance despairingly, with a cry on his lips." It was as though he were "plunging into a burning house"—the house of Romanov. He did not care; he seemed to have written himself off. "The fools don't understand who I am," Teffi quoted him. "A sorcerer, perhaps. . . . They burn sorcerers, and let them burn me also. One thing they do not realize. If they do burn me Russia is finished. They'll bury us together."

Rasputin was afraid not of death, Simanovich thought, but of his fall from power. He was insecure and uneasy and "tried to comfort himself with belief in his 'power.' . . . Tortured by doubts and troubled about the future, he turned to me for friendly advice and support." Simanovich kept the starets busy with a million-ruble sugar scandal. A Kiev sugar plant owner, Ziv, had been arrested with two other businessmen for selling a large amount of sugar to the Germans, which had been shipped via Persia. The military authorities wanted the men charged with treason and hanged.

Rasputin agreed to help. Ziv said he would pay whatever was necessary and made a down payment of fifteen thousand rubles to cover Rasputin's carousals at the Villa Rhode. Simanovich contacted Nikolai Dobrovolsky, a lawyer and the synod procurator, who was heavily in debt to him. He was thickset, narrow-minded, corrupt, and influential, a perfect choice. "He liked money very much and did favors for gifts," Simanovich recalled. "For me, therefore, he was very valuable. Petrograd in general was full of such people." When the army refused to drop the charges, Rasputin and Simanovich promised Dobrovolsky the post of justice minister. They appealed to Alexandra for a pardon and arranged an audience with her for Dobrovolsky. The lawyer claimed that the sugar had been delivered to German buyers in Persia before the war and that the businessmen had no idea of how it had gotten to Germany. It was a thin story—why should a German buyer have wanted sugar delivered via Persia before the war when it could have gone direct from Kiev to Germany by freight train?—but Alexandra forwarded the appeal to the tsar. It was effective. The treason charge was dropped, and the businessmen pleaded guilty to a technical charge of speculating in sugar. Dobrovolsky duly became justice minister, but Rasputin's reward to him was posthumous. By then the starets was dead.

Despite the success Rasputin was right to feel vulnerable. His enemies—a host, "Rights and Lefts, churchmen and revolutionists"—were gathering. A new Duma session opened on November 1. Pavel Miliukov led the debate. On his arrest Manuilov had claimed that the large amount of cash found on him had come not from the Germans but from Stürmer. He said it had been given to him from secret funds for buying off various journalists and for "swelling the personal income of the prime minister." Miliukov read out this testimony, adding that, according to Manuilov's figures, "a sum of 400,000 rubles has found its way into Stürmer's pockets from mysterious sources."

He then produced a bundle of German newspapers, quoting their crows of delight at the dismissal of Sazonov and his replacement by Stürmer. The same newspapers, he said, were delighted at the appointment of the "idiot" Shuvaev as war minister. It was a standing joke that Shuvaev, after a stormy cabinet meeting, had said, "I may be accused of stupidity, but not dishonesty." Miliukov now bellowed, "Is this stupidity, or is this treason?" He then, as *The Times*'s man Robert Wilton put it, "belled the principal cats." He said that Russia was effectively being ruled by Rasputin, Stürmer, and—he quoted for effect in German from an enemy newspaper, the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse*—"die junge Kaiserin," Alexandra. He asked of each name if this resulted from "stupidity, accident or treason." In each case, Wilton said, "the whole assembly howled its answer, 'Treason!' "

Wilton learned that most of the cable he sent to London was "burked by the censor." The verb meant "to murder by smothering," after the modus operandi of the nineteenth-century Edinburgh serial killer William Burke. It was impossible to burke all Russia; the inflammatory speech, with its illegal mention of Rasputin, circulated in millions of duplicated sheets, selling for a ruble each.

The Romanov clan converged on Kiev for the wedding of the tsar's sister Olga to a cavalry captain; as Rasputin had predicted when he first met her in 1907, her earlier marriage had ended in divorce. The dynasty was in peril; it was the sole topic of conversation. The family agreed to send Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich to see the tsar at the Stavka. The grand duke was liberal enough for the family to call him Monsieur Egalité; he had spent much of his life alone in his palace writing an enormous biography of his ancestor Alexander I. He was a mystic who had already foreseen his own death—"on a dark, warm night, a few paces from the ponderous graves of my ancestors"—and felt it his duty while he was still alive to urge the tsar to grant a responsible government and so to remove the influence of the empress and Rasputin.

The tsar wrote to Alexandra on November 2: "My precious Nikolai M has come for one day; we had a long talk together last night, of which I will tell you in my next letter—I am too busy today. God preserve you, my dearly beloved Sunny, and children. . . . Eternally your old Nicky." He was being deceitful. He

was badly rattled by the family message. He did not know what to say to Alexandra about his talk, so instead he sent her the letter the grand duke had brought with him.

"You have told me many times that you can trust no one, that you are being deceived," it read. "If this is so, the same phenomenon must also hold true for your spouse, who loves you ardently but has been led astray thanks to the malicious and utter deception of the people who surround her. You trust Alexandra Fedorovna, which is understandable, but what comes out of her mouth is the result of clever juggling and not the actual truth." It warned against her "constant interferences and whisperings," predicted an imminent "era of assassination attempts," and concluded by calling for "the much desired ministry responsible to the Duma."

Alexandra's counterattack was furious. She replied on November 4: "I read Nikolai's & am utterly disgusted. Had you stopped him in the middle of his talk & told him that, if he only once more touched that subject or me, you will send him to Siberia—as it becomes next to high treason. He has always hated & spoken badly of me since 22 years . . . during war & at such a time to crawl behind yr Mama & Sisters & not stick up bravely . . . for his Emperor's wife—is loathesome [*sic*] and treachery. . . . Wife is your staunch One & stands as a rock behind you." He replied the next day, shamefaced and again deceitful. "I am so sorry that I have upset you and made you angry," he wrote, claiming that he had been too busy to read Nilokai's letter and that the grand duke had never mentioned her in their talk. "Had he said anything about you, you do not really doubt that your dear hubby would have taken your part!" The tsar's family could threaten him with renewed revolution; it was his wife who excited in him true terror.

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The country was cracking rapidly now. "If there is trouble the troops I am told will refuse to fire," Sir George Buchanan cabled London. The ruined economy would bring revolt, the ambassador said, and "it will begin not with the workmen in the factories but with the crowds waiting in the cold and snow outside the provision shops." The lines started in the freezing predawn. It was said that in each one there was a German agent, a woman like all the others, with a brown or gray or black shawl clasped to her chin, who whispered through blue lips to her neighbor: "Why should we put up with this? Why does Russia not make peace? Germany is ready to end the war. . . . The Little Father [the tsar] is so far away from us, what does he care? And the empress is German at heart and has betrayed our armies again and again. . . . Let us get rid of the Romanovs."

Rumors of coups "blew in on every breeze and floated out on every tide." An Okhrana report said that "the industrial proletariat of the capital is on the

verge of despair." The agency warned that inadequate diet and unsanitary lodgings, cold and damp, and a soaring death rate had already prepared the ground for "the wildest excesses of a hunger riot." It predicted "thousands and tens of thousands of victims." Workers in the Vyborg and Narva districts shouted, "Down with the war! Give us bread!" Cossack patrols were out in force in the city, with whips, sabers, and carbines, carrying trusses of hay on their saddles so that they could ride their wiry horses for twelve hours at a stretch. In isolated incidents the horsemen were stoned. A rumor spread that they had responded by opening fire on the mobs; "there was a tremendous panic among the stockbroking public." Machine-gun sections were posted the next day, and the uneasy calm was restored. Wilton added a handwritten postscript to a letter he sent to London on November 7: "I hear that banners inscribed 'Down with the Romanovs' have been found in workmen's houses."

The price of bread was now increasing by 8 percent a month and that of meat by 28 percent. Few workers still ate eggs, meat, sugar, or fruit; they made do with watery gruel and bits of bread. Firewood and coal were so dear that families had to choose between warmth and near starvation. The city had been largely lit and heated by Cardiff coal; German warships had cut off supplies. A trickle came through from the Donets mines, far to the south. Thieves raided the coal cellars of the rich. "The sharks are working their gigantic jaws," the *Stock Exchange Gazette* wrote of the speculators, Rasputin and Simanovich's clients. They held huge stocks of wheat, sugar, cotton. They had cornered the market in drugs, forcing the price of aspirin from 1.5 rubles per kilo before the war to 200. Quinine was up from 4 rubles to 400.

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Something had to give. Stürmer was the obvious target, universally despised and now without the backing of the empress and Rasputin. He was dismissed on November 9. He was replaced by Alexander Trepov as premier, with N. N. Pokrovsky as foreign minister. Both were honest conservatives; neither liked Rasputin. Worse news followed. Trepov asked the tsar to get rid of Protopopov. "I am sorry for Prot[opopov]," Nicholas wrote to the empress on November 10. "He is a good honest man, but he jumps from one idea to another, and cannot make up his mind on anything. . . . They say that a few years ago he was not quite normal after a certain illness." Rasputin could survive a hostile premier—had he not seen off the great Stolypin? The interior minister, with his control of the police and the press, was another matter.

Alexandra was not well. Her heart condition recurred, and she sometimes took to her wheelchair—with Rasputin gaunt and exhausted, and Vyrubova on crutches, the principal actors around the throne were a battle-worn trio—but she came to Protopopov's defense with fierce energy. "Don't go and change

Protopopov now," she replied on November 11, claiming that the minister was "quite as sane" as anybody. "Remember"—this on November 12—"that it does not lie in the man Protopopov or xyz, but it's the question of the monarchy & yr prestige. . . . Don't think they will stop at him, but they will make all the others leave who are devoted to you one by one—then ourselves." It would be a hard fight—the Duma "are impertinent brutes . . . it is war with them"—but "a man of God is near to guard you safely through the reefs."

Protopopov survived. He gave up on the food crisis. Sixty thousand railroad wagons filled with fuel and food lay under snowdrifts, waiting for locomotives that never came. The drafts had emptied the villages. Prisoners of war and contract laborers from Persia and China were brought in. "Their distribution was accidental," Protopopov admitted later, "without plan and with no particular accounting." The Supreme Power, he said, "ceased to be a source of life and light. It became the prisoner of stupid influences and stupid forces." The army was worn out, the cities starved. "No one was happy," he testified.

The men at the front were "colorless, expressionless, endless." Under "the mask of servile submissiveness," a trooper warned, "lies a terrible anger. . . . Just strike a little match and everything will go up in flames." Individuals had responded with desertion and self-mutilation, the severing of a trigger finger with a bayonet, the shot into the foot. Now came the first mutinies of regiments. Some demanded boots and warm clothing before they would move; others said that they would hold the front but not attack. "Take us and have us shot, but we just aren't going to fight anymore," one company cabled the Stavka. Wild rumors circulated at the front. Fresh cemeteries were being opened in which to dump the bodies of hunger victims in the cities; bread now cost a ruble a loaf; the empress and Rasputin spoke to Berlin each night by radio; the government had paid the Germans a billion rubles to kill every peasant in Russia.

There were stories—persistent, believed—that Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich was plotting to advance from his Crimean semi-exile to Tsarskoye Selo with four Guards regiments. Nicholas would be forced to abdicate, and the empress confined to a convent. Alexis would be proclaimed tsar, with either Nikolasha or the tsar's brother Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich as regent. In both versions the coup would begin with the murder of Rasputin. The Romanovs, the writer Dmitri Merezhkovsky thought, had reduced Russia to "the fifth act of a tragedy played in a brothel." His wife, Zinaida Gippius, wrote in her diary: "People are dying like flies. . . . Young, old, children, all the same. Stupid ones, clever ones—all are stupid. Honest men, thieves, all are thieves—or else they are mad." The atmosphere was charged, neurotic; "the most frightening and crude rumors are disturbing the masses." At the Stray Dog, the cellar bar for the capital's artists and writers, the poet Anna Akhmatova, in a black dress

with a yellow scarf on her shoulders, lamented through the smells of vodka, tobacco, and sweat:

*We are all sinners, we are all whores*
*How sad we are together.*

"Those evil fumes of Petrograd!" Nicholas railed at the Stavka. "One can smell them even at the front. And it is from drawing rooms and palaces that the worst emanations come. What a misfortune! What a disgrace!"

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Alexandra alone showed confidence. It was the result, the court marshal Benckendorff thought, of "a will of iron linked to not much brain and no knowledge." Rasputin acted as her "amulet," he thought. He tranquilized her. She knew that she was hated, but that was only by "the corrupt and godless society" of Petrograd, which "thinks of nothing but dancing and dining." They were jealous of her, she rationalized, "because they know I have a strong will and when [I] am convinced of a thing being right (when besides blessed by Grigory) do not change my mind & that they can't bear." The Russia that mattered, village Russia, loved her. She was quite convinced of that. Her mailbag proved it.

Scores of letters and telegrams arrived in her mauve boudoir each day. The writers were apparently simple folk who loved her and who blamed the country's ills on the grand dukes, the errant politicians, the godless intellectuals. She asked her rare visitors—mostly, now, intimates of Rasputin, Vyrubova, Lili von Dehn, Pitirim, Simanovich—to leaf through them. She was consoled daily, she wrote, by knowing from her mail that the "whole of Russia—the real Russia, poor, humble, peasant Russia—is with me." She felt herself truly a Russian, as if, mystically, Rasputin had made her one. "I stand up for yr cause, Baby's and Russia," she wrote to Nicholas. "Yes, I am more Russian than many another and I won't keep quiet. . . . All my trust lies in our Friend, who only thinks of you, Baby, and Russia." All that was needed was strength and God, and she had both. "I have no fear," she said. "Let they [*sic*] scream."

But the loyal letters were fakes. They were being forged by an Okhrana department on Protopopov's orders. The same department was paying men to demonstrate with banners praising the autocracy. The British correspondent Arthur Ransome watched a band of "scallywags" emerge from a police station with flags rolled up around sticks. The men unfurled them, marched around the city for an hour, and returned to the police station to hand in the banners and collect their pay. The Okhrana intercepted genuine correspondence from the provinces and kept it locked in a "black room." It showed none of the happy

patriotism the empress was receiving. "Horses and livestock have been taken, there's no one to plow and nothing to plow with," a writer from Irkutsk complained.

The Duma deputy Vassily Alexeyevich Maklakov thought that a psychiatrist was needed more than a politician. A disease was loose, wasting the dispositions of centuries, destroying belief in the tsar, in his power, in its divine basis. This catastrophe in the innermost depths of the Russian soul, he said, was being carried out not by evil revolutionaries but by the Supreme Power itself, "maddened, drawn by ill fate, condemning itself to absolute emptiness, depriving itself of its last foothold." The dynasty was no longer a mighty historical force but a "hollow trunk of oak, eaten by mice, dried-up inside," waiting for a final tremor to fell it.

"Mystical and sexual perversions" ran to the top of Petrograd society. Even Alexandra's beloved village Russia was now infected. "God knows how it found out so soon what every cook or yard keeper in Petrograd knows," Maklakov said. But it knew, and it did not torment itself with intellectual talk about pathology and psychosis. "It appreciates events with one word," he said. " 'Treason.' The betrayal of Russian people to the Germans. This is the horror of the imminent revolution. It won't be a political revolution but a revolution of wrath and revenge of the dark lower classes, and it will be spontaneous, convulsive, chaotic."

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On November 19 Vladimir Purishkevich rose to his feet in the Duma. He was a Jew-baiter, a prime mover of the Black Hundreds, a believer in autocracy and the divine right of the tsar, founder of the Union of the Archangel Michael, so reactionary that "the only thing further right was the wall." He was short, bald, and energetic, a wit and satirist who circulated his doggerel on opponents—as well as photographs of Rasputin and his admirers—in thousands of copies. He sometimes wore a red carnation jutting from his fly buttons. In 1905 he had paid thugs to rampage against Jews and democrats. In the war he had become a one-man patriotic center, organizing hospital trains, canteens, and delousing units. He named his good works for himself, emblazoning one TEAROOM OF STATE COUNCILLOR PURISHKEVICH in letters eight feet high.

Purishkevich had dined with the tsar at the Stavka a fortnight before. The generals and staff officers had begged him to speak to Nicholas: "Point out the pernicious role of Rasputin. Don't spare the colors." He was sickened that they were too cowardly to tackle the monarch themselves. He told the Duma that only public pressure could save the dynasty. He said, "There burns in me an endless love for my country and . . . a deeply loyal love for my sovereign." But a tocsin had to be rung, a warning given, not the lowly tolling of a provincial bel-

fry but the peal of the Ivan the Great bell in the Kremlin. He savaged the stupidity of the censors, the "marauder-profiteers," the "ministerial leapfrog." He mocked Protopopov and Prince Andronnikov "and others who make infamy of Russian life." Then he spoke of the "filthy, depraved, corrupt peasant" on whose every word the empress hung. "All these evils stem from those dark forces, from those influences," he cried, "which are headed by Grischa Rasputin." He urged the ministers to "go over there, go to the tsar's Stavka, fall at his feet," and assure him that the "crisis at home cannot continue, the multitude is muttering in its wrath, revolution threatens, and an obscure muzhik shall govern Russia no more!"

Watching from the gallery, deeply impressed, was Prince Felix Yusupov.

CHAPTER 25

# *"Vanya Has Arrived"*

Prince Yusupov had been thinking of killing Rasputin for more than a year. He was an unlikely assassin, but the times were unlikely; a golden boy, heir to the greatest fortune in Russia, one of the best-looking men in Europe, married to a niece of the tsar, whose own beauty and breeding made her a natural snare for Rasputin. The prince wore the olive uniform and white belt of the Corps of Pages, an elite officer training school. Most of his fellow cadets were still in their teens; Felix was twenty-nine, and had no intention of going near the front. He was playing at soldiers, as he had played all his sweet life. In murdering Rasputin, a friend said, he was "acting out a scenario worthy of his favorite author, Oscar Wilde." He was a fop, an idler, a salon decadent, but the observant noticed a quality of menace in him. "You have God in one eye," the ballerina Anna Pavlova told him, "and the devil in the other."

His great-great-grandfather Prince Nicholas Yusupov, a favorite of Catherine the Great and an acquaintance of Voltaire and Pushkin, had founded the family's colossal wealth. His mother's prewar annual income was 1.3 million rubles, equivalent to a ton of gold. There were thirty-eight Yusupov houses and estates scattered across Russia, few of which he had seen. The main Moscow palace, one of three, had been built by Ivan the Terrible, and Felix got a thrill of horror from imagining the ghosts of the chained wretches who had died in the subterranean passages that linked it to the Kremlin. In the Crimea the family owned 125 miles of Black Sea coastline so rich in oil that peasants used the surface deposits to grease the axles of their wagons. The highest mountain on the coast had been given to his mother as birthday present. The family had two

private railroad trains, one for use in Russia and the other, kept at the frontier, for the narrow-gauge railways of western Europe.

Felix had little interest in visiting these possessions. He was happiest in Petrograd, in the family's 1760s palace, which fronted the limpid waters and stone and iron bridges of the Moika Canal. Its ocher and white facade was faultlessly classical and restrained. The interior was exquisite. The main ballroom—there were three—was large enough to accommodate an orchestra; the colonnaded picture gallery had paintings by Tiepolo, Rembrandt, Rubens, Velázquez, Fragonard, and Watteau. The furniture in the petit salon had once belonged to Marie Antoinette, the crystal chandelier above the sweep of the main staircase to Madame de Pompadour. A superb Moorish room, with mosaic and a fountain, was inspired by the Alhambra. A Louis XV theater in miniature had gilded boxes and tapestries. It was here that Felix had started dressing up, pretending to be his ancestor Prince Nicholas, a famous debauchee who kept three hundred portraits of his mistresses and traveled with a menagerie of monkeys, dogs, and parrots.

The Yusupovs were eccentrics. Felix's grandmother devoted her life to collecting stamps and snails, which she stomped on, convinced that crushed snail made a perfect fertilizer for her rose gardens. His father found a dirty, foul-smelling dwarf on a fishing trip and made him Felix's tutor. On Sundays the dwarf wore a dinner jacket and yellow shoes. Arabs, Tartars, and Kalmyks in traditional dress added to the color of the servants' hall at the Moika Palace. One servant was employed solely as a lamplighter. When the palace was electrified Felix watched with glee as the man drank himself to death with boredom.

Felix cultivated his own oddities, primarily transvestism. When he was twelve he dressed up in his mother's clothes, borrowed a wig from her hairdresser, and amused himself standing with the prostitutes on the Nevsky Prospect. He told the men who accosted him that he was already spoken for. He did so in French. At home he liked to irritate his mother's friends by speaking to them in Russian, a language the older generation of aristocrats hardly knew. From the Nevsky he progressed to the fashionable Bear restaurant, where he enjoyed trying to lasso the heads of his admirers with a string of his mother's pearls. Visiting a theater in Paris in drag, he was amused to be ogled by the lecherous Edward VII of England. In 1908 his elder brother was killed in a duel and he became sole heir.

Felix had flirted briefly with the left; it gave him the chance to dress up as a beggar and visit the slums. On close inspection, however, the dark people did not please him. "All around us the dregs of humanity, both men and women, lay half-naked, drunk, and filthy," he wrote with patrician disgust. "The unfortunate wretches quarreled, copulated, used the filthiest language, and vomited all over each other." He took a valet, chauffeur, housekeeper, and macaw with

him to Oxford. His skill with disguise enabled him to pass off his bulldog as a baby to evade British quarantine laws. In 1914 he married the tsar's niece Irina. The empress disliked him; she had heard of his transvestite escapades and thought him depraved. She was particularly unhappy that he was very close to her favorite Romanov, the young Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, whom she thought of almost as a son. Felix was inseparable from him, and she felt he was a bad influence.

Felix's interest in politics was trivial. He had, however, an aristocrat's disdain for the peasant in Rasputin, and a monarchist's contempt for the damage Alexandra was causing to the throne. These traits combined with his love of self-drama to make him, beneath his spoiled and languid charm, a very dangerous young man. His hostility was encouraged by his parents. His father had had to resign as governor-general of Moscow after the excesses of the anti-German riots. The tsar was warned that Yusupov senior had become a "megalomaniac of the worst kind," who was turning Moscow into his own satrapy; the dismissal was one of Nicholas's better decisions. The Yusupovs, however, blamed it on the "pro-German camarilla"—that favorite, foggy, and hate-filled phrase of 1915 and 1916—of Rasputin and the empress. The family anger deepened when, after Felix's mother, Princess Zinaida, criticized the empress during an audience, Alexandra dismissed her from court with this icy farewell: "I hope never to see you again." Through the hot summer of 1916, Zinaida sent her son letters from her Crimean estates with coded messages in which Rasputin was "the book" and the empress was Valide, a mocking use of the Crimean Tartar word for "great mother." "Nothing can be done unless the book be destroyed and Valide tamed," she wrote him. Yusupov took on a fresh disguise, savior of the motherland.

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He had easy access to Rasputin through Munya Golovina, who had originally introduced them before Felix went to Oxford. Munya had invited Felix to her mother's house in the early fall; she said that Rasputin very much wanted to meet him. Felix was struck by the change in the starets. He had become fat; his face was puffy, and he was wearing an embroidered silk blouse and velvet breeches. His "offensive familiarity and insolent assurance" made him still more repellent to the prince than he had been seven years before.

Felix complained about his health, saying that he was suffering from an intense fatigue, which doctors could not treat. "Doctors don't know anything," Rasputin told him. "My dear fellow, I can cure anyone, for I work in God's own way. . . . You'll see for yourself." They met several times, both at Gorokhovaya ulitsa and at the Golovinas' house. Once, Rasputin attempted to hypnotize him as part of the cure. The prince felt heat was pouring into him "like a warm current" as his body became numb. "All I could see was Rasputin's glittering eyes,"

he said. "Two phosphorescent beams of light melting into a great luminous ring." A "merciless struggle" was being fought between Rasputin's personality and his own. Though the prince prevented Rasputin from getting complete mastery over him, he could not move until the starets ordered him to get up.

Or so Yusupov claimed; the murderer had good reason to demonize his victim. The prince also alleged that he met "seven shady-looking men" in Rasputin's apartment, four of them "distinctly Jewish," the other three "fair and curiously alike"—implying Germans—whom he was certain were "a gang of spies." The spy story has no credible basis. It was later established that several Russians, most notably the exiled Lenin, had dealings with wartime Berlin; nothing has emerged to link Rasputin, or the empress, with German agents. Nor, although there are claims of hypnotic attempts by Rasputin from Rodzianko and others, and many accounts of his troubling stare, is there conclusive evidence that Rasputin hypnotized anyone, successfully or not. The only reliable reference is from Spiridovich, who wrote that Rasputin paid a few visits to a teacher of hypnosis in St. Petersburg in 1913; the motive appears to have been the professional curiosity of a starets, and he soon lost interest in the subject.

Though he said that he felt "polluted each time I met him," Yusupov continued to visit Rasputin. The starets's daughters met him—"an exquisitely tailored young man . . . faintly repellent, a languid manner not usual in young males"—when they came back from a shopping expedition. They laughed when Felix picked up a wineglass and drained it from the spot on the rim where their father's lips had touched it. "He's got ice in his eyes," young Varya said. Maria asked why he had come. "He has a problem and he needs me," Rasputin said, nodding when she asked if he would come again.

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The prince, inspired by the Duma speech, telephoned Purishkevich and arranged to meet him in his apartment at 9:00 A.M. on November 21. He said that he wanted to talk about Rasputin, who had become an "embarrassment"; the peasant's disappearance would end the "satanic power which envelops our sovereigns." They spoke for two hours, the politician noting the conversation in his diary.

Yusupov warned Purishkevich that speeches would accomplish nothing; the tsar had an intense dislike of any attempt to put pressure on him. There was only one answer: "Eliminate Rasputin." Purishkevich thought that easier said than done. There were no resolute men left in Russia. The government, he said, which might do such a thing, and even do it skillfully, "is controlled by Rasputin himself." Yusupov agreed that the government could not be counted on. But there were men in Russia, still, who could be relied on.

"D'you really think so?" Purishkevich asked.

"I'm certain of it," Yusupov replied. "One of them stands before you at this very moment."

The politician was about to tell his visitor to stop making jokes when he realized that Yusupov was in earnest; he was prepared to kill. He offered his hand; the prince shook it and told him that he had two others in the plot. "Come to visit me if you happen to be free this evening," he said. "Then you can meet them both." In such a well-bred, carefree way, the two men, who had not met before, became conspirators.

Purishkevich went to the Yusupov palace that evening. He was astonished to meet Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, Alexandra's favorite nephew, whom she was thinking of marrying to her eldest daughter, Olga, a good-looking boy of twenty-six, with a weakness for drink but beautifully mannered, sympathetic, kind. With him was a Captain Sukhotkin, a convalescing officer of the elite Preobrazhensky Regiment, which had just suffered terrible casualties on the central front. They talked eagerly over dinner. They planned to lure Rasputin to the Moika Palace, using Yusupov's beautiful young wife as bait. They would poison him—there was a police station opposite the palace, and they were worried that shots would alarm the police. Purishkevich agreed to get the poison from his close friend and physician Dr. Lazovert. They discussed disposing of the corpse by taking it to the front by train and dumping it as a battle casualty. When that seemed too complicated, they decided to carry it out of the palace to an automobile, weight it, and sink it under the frozen Neva. They gave themselves four weeks. Rasputin was to die on December 16, a Friday.

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The tsar made a brief trip from the Stavka to Tsarskoye Selo. Rasputin met him at Vyrubova's cottage; she found Nicholas "depressed and pessimistic." Heavy storms were cutting food deliveries to Petrograd, and some battalions at the front were reporting shortages. As Rasputin left the cottage the tsar asked him for his usual blessing. "This time it is for you to bless me, not I you," Rasputin replied. It was natural for Vyrubova to suggest that her idol prophesied his own death in this manner, but other evidence from his daughter and Simanovich suggests that he was in a particularly nervous and uneasy state.

On November 27 Purishkevich bought heavy lead weights in a street market. With Dr. Lazovert he toured the city's bridges, looking for a convenient place to dump the body. They found an area under the Petrovsky Bridge linking Krestinsky and Petrovsky islands where the flow of the river around an arch was preventing the water from freezing. Lazovert bought a chauffeur's heavy coat. The conspirators met again on Purishkevich's hospital train on December 1. Yusupov reported that he had mentioned a meeting with Princess Irina to Rasputin, who seemed eager. They thought of a cover-up. After the killing they

would telephone the Villa Rhode and say that they had been expecting Rasputin to come to the Moika Palace but that he had not arrived and would he please come now. They also agreed on a secret sentence to summon each other by telephone on the night of the murder: "Vanya has arrived."

The enterprise was amateur; the alibi was flimsy, the reconnaissance perfunctory. Purishkevich, the wild man of the far right, had one of the best-known faces in Russia. Leading politicians did not make a habit of buying lead weights in the market; he might have been—he was—remembered. He also talked too much. At the beginning of December he spoke with Vasily Shulgin, a proudly whiskered and patriotic Duma deputy.

"Remember December sixteenth," he said.

"What for?" Shulgin asked.

"I will tell you . . . I may tell you this. . . . We'll kill him on the sixteenth."

"Who?"

"Grischa!"

"You will kill him—nothing will change," Shulgin said. "Everything will remain the same. . . . By killing him, you won't do any good. It's too late!"

Yusupov was also indiscreet. He wrote a coded letter to his wife and his mother, who were in the Crimea, speaking of a mighty blow he was about to deliver for Russia. "Thank you for your insane letter," Irina replied. "I could not understand the half of it. I realize that you are about to do something wild. Please take care and do not get mixed up in any shady business." He also discussed the plan with the Duma deputy Maklakov, who refused to join the plot because he was due to make a speech to the Moscow Society of Jurisprudence on December 16 and did not want to let the lawyers down. He suggested beating Rasputin over the head with a club and running an automobile over the body. He lent his own blackjack to Yusupov.

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Alexandra remained confident that firmness would avert any crisis. "Show to all that you are Master & your will shall be obeyed—the time of great indulgence & gentleness is over—now comes your reign of will & power, & obedience they must be taught," she wrote to Nicholas on December 4. The tsar, in fact, was so withdrawn and robotic that it was widely believed he was taking herbal concoctions supplied by Rasputin to sap his will. Yusupov claimed that Rasputin told him he was using Badmaev's medicines to treat the tsar, lacing his tea with them so that "his heart is filled with peace, everything looks good and cheerful to him."

In family desperation Alexandra's sister Ella went to Tsarskoye Selo from her Moscow convent to convince the empress of the "horror" of the situation, but they parted for the last time at the railroad station in silence. Rasputin was

aware of her visit. He was nervous—he knew that Ella wanted him exiled and the empress locked up in a convent—and he scribbled notes and put them under his pillow for "vengeance" before going to sleep. He put her hatred of him down to his opposition to the war. "The tsar dodges and weaves and is ready for neither peace nor war," he complained to Simanovich. "Mama wants peace, but all she does is weep. Ella wants war, although she's German she sets everyone against Germans." He was greatly relieved when Alexandra sent her sister packing.

Violence was in the air. There was a run on books about the strangling of Emperor Paul and a sudden increase in the number of people visiting the room in the Michael Palace where the killing had taken place. In the Yusupovs' Moika Palace, workmen were whitewashing the walls of a basement room, carrying oak chairs and tables down the narrow, winding staircase, and laying a great rug of white bearskin to make it a cozy and relaxed place for Felix to entertain his guests. Red vases were placed in the wall niches, and a fine Oriental armoire of inlaid ebony stood in a corner, with a silver and crystal cross upon it. Purishkevich was delighted when he saw the cellar magically transformed into "an elegant bonbonnière." The prince had exquisite taste.

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The first rumors of approaching murder reached Simanovich at the Fire Club, a gambling club he ran in Countess Ignateva's house on the Champs de Mars. The chairman of the club board had been Tomilin, the city governor of Pskov; Simanovich paid people with prominent names "huge salaries" to act as figureheads. Tomilin had transferred himself—the pay was huger—to the nearby National Club, taking two clerks called Ivan and Alexis with him. Simanovich had not objected because they would enable him to find out what was happening at the rival club.

Ivan came to him to say that there were mysterious meetings at the National, where a lot was said about Rasputin. Alexis sometimes worked in the room where the meetings were held. Simanovich gave him 500 rubles and told him to ask Alexis to find out as much as he could. Alexis reported back that the meetings were chaired by Purishkevich and were attended by Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, Prince Felix Yusupov, and some young officers. "They spoke a lot about Rasputin in these meetings," Simanovich said; the name of the English ambassador, Buchanan, and those of the tsar and tsarina were also mentioned.

Simanovich took Alexis to see Rasputin, who confirmed—not surprisingly, after the Duma speech—that Purishkevich was his enemy. One of Simanovich's assistants, Evsey Bukhshtab, was friendly with a doctor who had a venereal disease clinic on the Nevsky Prospect and was treating Purishkevich. Bukhshtab offered the doctor a large sum to find out Purishkevich's plans; his

patient was known to be talkative. After an injection of salvarsan, a compound of arsenic used in the treatment of syphilis, Purishkevich lay on his couch. The doctor casually mentioned that Rasputin was a great misfortune for Russia and that it would be better to annihilate him. Purishkevich assured him that Rasputin would soon be done for. "You'll see what'll happen in the next three days," he told the doctor. Alarmed, Simanovich passed the information on to the empress.

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On December 10 the tsar wrote to Alexandra about a planned offensive in the Danube region and his plans to prorogue the Duma on December 17 and reconvene it on January 19. Reopening the body would prove that the government and the country could work together. He had discussed the plan with Trepov, the new premier, who, he said, was "quiet and submissive and did not touch upon the name of Protopopov. . . . I went to pray before the icon of the Mother of God before this conversation, and felt comforted after it."

On December 12 Rasputin had dinner with Vyrubova and the empress, who wrote to Nicholas to reassure him that he could rely on Rasputin's "wonderful brain—ready to understand everything." The following day Rasputin asked Simanovich to deposit several thousand rubles in a bank account in his daughter Maria's name. He was depressed; he said his soul was in torment.

Alexandra was furious when the tsar's letter about the Duma arrived on December 14. She wanted the Duma prorogued, period. To recall them in January, she replied, meant "nobody goes home & all will remain, fomenting, boiling in Petrograd. . . . Love, our Friend begged you to shut it . . . & you see, they have time to make trouble. . . . Be Peter the Great, John [Ivan] the Terrible, Emperor Paul—crush them all under you—now don't laugh, naughty one—but I long to see you with all those men." Nicholas wrote back—he signed himself "Your poor, weak-willed little hubby"—that the date for reassembling the Duma had been proclaimed and thus could not be altered.

The same day, December 14, Rasputin took a walk through Petrograd with Munya Golovina and visited St. Isaac's and Kazan cathedrals. He went on to Tsarskoye Selo, where he met the empress at Vyrubova's cottage. The empress thought it odd that he had taken a walk. "He never goes out since ages, except to come here," she wrote to Nicholas, but she was pleased to report that on his stroll the starets had received "not one disagreeable look, people all quiet." He seemed to have recovered his spirits. "Says in 3 or 4 days things will go better in Roumania & all will go better," she said. In the evening he wrote a long letter, sealed it in an envelope, and put in Maria's desk. "Don't open it until after I am dead," he told his daughter. Simanovich was not alone in urging Rasputin to leave the capital. Trepov offered him 200,000 rubles and a monthly remittance

to return to Siberia. Rasputin reported this colossal bribery attempt to the empress, neatly claiming incorruptibility for himself and undermining the premier in her eyes.

Simanovich told Rasputin on Thursday, December 15, that the situation was so grave—conspirators were about to kill him, and "then it will be the turn of the tsar and tsarina"—that drastic steps had to be taken. The tsar "must give you up," he said. "Only with this offering can the impending revolution be stopped. When you are not there anymore, everybody will calm down. You set the nobility and all the people against you." He made a suggestion to soften the blow: "Tell Papa and Mama to give you one million English pounds. Then we can both leave Russia and move to Palestine." Simanovich said that they would be able to live peacefully there. "Also, I'm afraid that something may happen to me," he went on. "I now have many enemies because of you. But I want to live."

Rasputin paced the room. He called for wine; it appeared that he wanted to drink himself into a state of clairvoyance. He drank two bottles of Madeira. "What you say I'll keep to myself," he said, speaking quickly, his eyes shining. "I won't tell the tsar of your talk. It's too early." He thought further. "Noblemen are against me," he said suddenly. "But noblemen don't have Russian blood. Their blood is mixed. Noblemen want to kill me because they don't like a Russian muzhik standing near the Russian throne. I'll show them who's stronger. . . . I'll send my muzhiks home from the front. Noblemen can bite as much as they like."

"Grigory, you may be killed today or tomorrow," Simanovich said. "Better listen to my advice and make yourself scarce. Otherwise there's no salvation for you." The telephone rang. Rasputin took the call. An unknown woman's voice asked, "Can you tell me when the funeral service for Rasputin will take place?" He had complained of anonymous calls. "You'll be buried first," he answered viciously, and hung up.

"See, they're burying you already," Simanovich told him. "Listen to me. Forget your fantasies. I don't want to argue with you anymore. I'll tell the tsar, tsarina, and Vyrubova everything. Maybe they'll teach you what to do."

"Listen," Rasputin said. "I'll drink twenty bottles of Madeira tonight. Then I'll go to a bathhouse, and then I'll go to bed. When I fall asleep, divine instructions will come down on me. God will teach me what to do, and then nobody'll be dangerous to me. And you go to hell." After he had drunk a "pretty portion" of a case of wine, he went to the bathhouse; he came back later and went to sleep without saying a word.

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The following morning, Friday, December 16, Simanovich found Rasputin in the "strange condition" that "marked crucial moments in his life"; others

might have thought it a hangover. A large kitchen basin with Madeira stood in front of him, and he polished it off in a single go. Simanovich asked him whether he felt his "strength" coming on. "My strength will win, not yours," he snarled.

Simanovich visited Protopopov to confide his fears. The interior minister thought them groundless. "I'll take care of the affair myself," he said. "The tsarina ordered me to see to it that Rasputin doesn't leave home today. All the measures have been taken. Rasputin has promised me on his word of honor not to leave his apartment tonight. There's nothing to worry about." Simanovich was reassured and returned to Rasputin's apartment. Vyrubova was there, with Nikitina and others, limping about on her stick, remonstrating with him about the strains of late nights and heavy drinking. "I'm like a horse," Rasputin told her.

The guests began to leave. Simanovich locked Rasputin's boots, fur coat, and hat in a cupboard. Osipenko, Pitirim's secretary, promised to stay in the apartment. The Okhrana agents outside the house were under orders not to let Rasputin into the street, Simanovich said, but the starets "outwitted us all." He gave the agents money and persuaded them that he was going to sleep. They believed him and went to a restaurant. He dined on fish and black bread with honey. After dinner he took Maria into his bedroom and showed her a bundle of banknotes, about three thousand rubles, which he had set aside as her dowry. Before the girls went to bed, Maria read aloud from the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Protopopov visited the apartment at 10:00 P.M. to make sure his orders had been carried out. Rasputin was already in bed. He asked the minister to tell Osipenko to go because his presence was unnecessary; the minister did so. When he said good-bye to Protopopov, Rasputin said, "Listen, dear. I am master of my word. I gave it, but I can take it back."

At midnight Rasputin telephoned Simanovich and said: "The 'Little One' has come, I'll go with him." He liked giving people pet names; he would not tell Simanovich to whom this one referred.

"For God's sake," Simanovich exclaimed. "Stay at home, or they'll kill you."

"Don't worry," Rasputin replied. "We'll be drinking tea, and at two o'clock I'll telephone you." He hung up.

CHAPTER 26

# The Dead Dog

The police were first alerted to the possibility of a crime by a uniformed policeman, Vlassiyev, who was on duty close to the Yusupov palace. Vlassiyev later made a statement to a gendarmerie lieutenant colonel, Poppel. "On the night of December 16 I was standing at my post at the corner of Moika Street and Maximilian Lane," the policeman declared. "At 4:00 A.M. I heard three or four shots in quick succession. Judging by the sound, they appeared to have come from the right side of the German church on Moika Street." He went to Post Bridge and shouted across the canal to Constable Yefimov, who was on duty outside 61 Morskaya Street, to find out which side of the canal the shots had come from. Yefimov yelled back to say they had come from the Moika Street side.

Vlassiyev went to Number 94, the Yusupov palace, and asked the gateman what was going on. The man called out that he had heard nothing. Vlassiyev, craning to see through the railings, made out two men, "bareheaded and in loose smocks," crossing the courtyard toward the gates. He recognized Prince Yusupov and his steward Bushinsky. The policeman asked Bushinsky about the shots; the steward replied that he had not heard any but that perhaps someone in high spirits had been shooting in the air to amuse himself. Vlassiyev said he thought Yusupov also said that he had heard nothing. Both men disappeared inside the palace; Vlassiyev took a good look at the courtyard, could find nothing suspicious, and went back to his post.

About a quarter of an hour later, around 4:20 A.M., Bushinsky asked Vlassiyev to come into the palace because his master wished to speak to him. He led

the policeman through the marbled entrance and across to the prince's study. Yusupov was accompanied by a man Vlassiyev did not recognize, with "close-cropped reddish whiskers and a mustache of the same hue." He was wearing a green cloak with the epaulets of a councillor of state.

The stranger asked the policeman if he was an Orthodox Christian and a patriot who loved tsar and country. Vlassiyev nodded agreement. When the stranger asked him if he knew him, he said no.

"Have you ever heard of Purishkevich?" the stranger asked.

"Yes," the policeman replied. "I've heard of him."

"I am he. And Rasputin, you've certainly heard of him, haven't you? Do you know him?"

Vlassiyev said that he did not know the starets, although like everyone else he naturally had heard of him.

"This Rasputin has just been dispatched," Purishkevich told him. "If you love the tsar and your country, you must keep silent about the matter and not say a word to anyone."

"I understand, sir!" Having given that assurance, Vlassiyev was allowed to return to his post. It took him twenty minutes to break his word. At about 4:40 A.M. the district police commander, Superintendent Kalyaditsh, passed by on his rounds. "I reported exactly all that had taken place," Vlassiyev declared. The two policemen returned to the Yusupov palace.

At the entrance they found an automobile with its engine running. They asked the chauffeur whom it was waiting for. "For the prince," he replied.

The superintendent told Vlassiyev to note who used the car and resumed his tour of inspection. "Before very long Prince Yusupov left the main entrance and drove off in the direction of the Potseluyev Bridge," Vlassiyev declared. "I waited for some time longer in front of the house, and, as I saw nobody else, I went back again to my post."

At 6:00 A.M. the superintendent returned and took the constable to Colonel Rogov, the divisional superintendent. They gave the colonel a full report. Vlassiyev then went home. Since he had seen no evidence of anything amiss, he thought that the conversation with the "strange gentleman" in the prince's study was "an attempt to put me to the test," to see if he knew what was expected of a policeman. He noted that neither the prince nor the other gentleman showed any trace of excitement or confusion, other than that Purishkevich spoke "very rapidly." He could not say for sure whether either of them was drunk.

The evidence of the second policeman, Yefimov, differs concerning the automobile. Vlassiyev mentions one car leaving the palace with Prince Yusupov in it shortly after 4:40 A.M. Yefimov also heard only one car, but he timed it much earlier, at shortly after 4:00 A.M. In his deposition Yefimov said that he heard a

shot at 4:00 A.M., with three more shots in quick succession three or four seconds later. He thought that they had been fired on Moika Street, somewhere around Number 92. "After the first shot," Yefimov declared, "there was audible a half-suppressed cry, as if uttered by a woman." He heard no other noise.

A "short time after" a car came down Moika Street in the direction of the Potseluyev Bridge; he did not see it stop anywhere. He reported the shots by telephone to the headquarters of the Third Kazan Police District. Then he headed off to where the shots had come from, meeting Vlassiyev on the Post Bridge. He told Vlassiyev that the shots had probably come from 92 Moika Street and returned to his post. He had nothing further to report. "Apart from the motorcar already mentioned," he said, "no motor vehicle of any kind passed along Moika Street till between five and six in the morning."

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A policeman on the beat might accept Purishkevich's remark that Rasputin had been "dispatched" as merely bizarre; higher up the ranks alarm bells were ringing furiously. Colonel Rogov at divisional headquarters was worried enough to place an early morning call to Gen. Alexander Balk, the Petrograd city police chief. Balk, realizing it was a matter for the secret police, immediately telephoned Vassilyev, who lost no time in calling Protopopov.

The interior minister and the secret police chief agreed to set up an urgent investigation under Gen. P. K. Popov, the commander of the gendarmerie corps. Vassilyev personally ordered Popov to make a careful search of Rasputin's apartment and "to confiscate at once all compromising documents" that might be found there. By this he meant intimate correspondence between the empress and the starets. Vassilyev said that none was found.

The police were soon at Gorokhovaya ulitsa. Maria Rasputin made a statement that she had left the apartment at 7:00 the evening before, returning at about 11:00 P.M. As she was going to bed, she told the police, "my father said to me that he was going to pay a visit that night to the 'Little One's.' " She explained that her father always referred to Prince Yusupov by that nickname. "Soon after I went to bed," she concluded, "and therefore I do not know whether Father really went to Yusupov's."

No car tires crunching on the snow, no glimpse of a tall and slender man in evening clothes, no premonition of death, no "Farewell, Papa." Maria's bald statement to the police on the morning of December 17—that she had been in bed asleep when, if, the car came calling for her father—clashes with the intimate and detailed recollection she published years later. Simanovich is no more reliable. He claimed that he spent a sleepless night waiting for Rasputin's telephone call, and that it was he who woke Maria to tell her that the "Little One" had murdered her father.

Maria could give the police no further leads. They did better with the caretaker at the Gorokhovaya apartment house, a man called Korshunov. His statement was detailed and polished. It suggested that he was an experienced police informer, which was normal for staff in blocks where important people lived. He told them that he had been on duty the previous night, standing in the street in front of the gate. Toward 12:30 A.M. a big automobile had driven up. The body was painted military gray; it was a convertible with a waterproof hood and mica windows. It came down Gorokhovaya ulitsa from Fontanka Street and stopped outside Number 64. The driver looked rather older than his passenger, with a normal-size black mustache, a black coat with a lambskin collar, a fur cap, and long tan gloves. The passenger was a gentleman Korshunov had not seen before. He stepped out, and Korshunov asked him whom he wished to see. "Rasputin," he replied.

The caretaker opened the gate and showed the man to the main staircase, but he said he would take the back stairs. Korshunov could tell by the confident way he moved that the man had been in the house before. After about half an hour the man left the house with Rasputin. Korshunov described him as about thirty years old, of average height, well built, with a little black mustache. His description of the man's winter clothes tallies with Maria Rasputin's recollection; Korshunov described "a long reindeer coat with the fur outside, a black cap, and long boots."

It was a fair description of Yusupov. A much better one—everything but confirmation of the name—came from Rasputin's maid Yekaterina Ivanovna Potyomkina. Her police deposition said that very few visitors had called on her master the day before, and that all of them were known to her. At 11:00 P.M. the children—Maria, Varya, and Rasputin's niece Anna—went to bed while Rasputin himself sprawled on his bed with his clothes and boots on. When Potyomkina asked the starets why he had not undressed, he said, "I've got another visit to pay yet." She asked to whom. "The Little One, he's going to call for me," Rasputin replied. She did not know the Little One's name, but she did know that he was married to the Grand Duchess Irina Alexandrovna. She had seen him in the apartment twice before, on about November 20 and about a week earlier. He had used the back stairs both times.

Rasputin told Potyomkina to go to bed, but she went first into the kitchen. He came in to ask her to help him do up the buttons on his blue shirt, "the one embroidered with cornflowers." The bell at the door leading to the back stairs rang. She heard the visitor ask if there was anyone around. "Nobody is up," she heard Rasputin reply. "The children are asleep. Step in, my dear." As they walked past to the drawing room, Potyomkina pushed the kitchen curtain aside. She caught a clear glimpse of the visitor's face. It was "no other than the Little One—that is, the husband of Grand Duchess Irina." She described him as

"tall and lanky, with a thin face, straight nose, dark hair, no beard, dark rings under the eyes."

She was already in bed when Rasputin left with his visitor. He whispered to her that he had bolted the front door and would use the side entrance.

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While Potyomkina was being interviewed, Munya Golovina contacted the police. Rumors that something had happened to Rasputin were already circulating: the ballerina Tamara Karsavina had been woken early in her apartment by her maid, who said that the milkman was claiming that Rasputin had been "done in" at the Yusupov palace, a block away. Golovina had called Yusupov to ask if he had seen the starets. The prince told her that he had not set eyes on him. This denial, in flat contradiction of the Potyomkina statement, convinced Vassilyev that he was dealing with murder.

Maria Rasputin telephoned Vyrubova during the morning to say that her father had not returned after leaving late with Felix Yusupov. Vyrubova walked from her cottage to the Alexander Palace. The empress was writing a letter to Nicholas. She was concerned about both her own and Alexis's health; he had been suffering an upset stomach. "Heart is not famous & don't feel well," she wrote. "The moral strain of these last trying months on a weak heart of course had to tell . . . the old machine broke down. . . . Has Baby's 'worm' quite been got rid of? Then he will get fatter & less transparent—the precious Boy!" She was "puzzled" when Vyrubova told her that Rasputin had gone to Yusupov's to meet his wife; she knew her niece was still in the Crimea. Protopopov telephoned the palace soon after. He reported that the duty policeman outside the Moika Palace had rung the bell after hearing shots and was told by a drunken Purishkevich that Rasputin had been killed. The same policeman had seen a military automobile without lights driving away from the house soon after the shots. This was all the interior minister knew. It left Alexandra deeply anxious.

Protopopov also telephoned Vassilyev several times during the morning. He reported that the empress was in touch with him, desperate to know what was going on. The secret police chief convinced Vassilyev that Rasputin was almost certainly dead, and that the Yusupov palace should be searched in an effort to find the corpse as speedily as possible.

A police detachment soon discovered large bloodstains on the steps leading from the courtyard to the palace basement. Yusupov explained that the blood had come from a dog, which one of his guests had shot during the night after becoming fuddled with drink. He showed the police the dead body of a dog that had been shot with a revolver; they thought it too small to account for the blood. The palace caretaker could add nothing to the information already given by the two beat policemen. He had heard some shots in the night, and the prince had spoken with the constable; that was all.

Yusupov's servant Nefedov struck the police as shifty and concerned to cover up for his employer. He said that the prince had told him to prepare the dining room for two or three guests. He and the butler Bushinsky kept watch at the front door by turns. When Nefedov came back on watch at 11:00 P.M., Bushinsky told him that Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich had arrived and had gone to the dining room. The two stayed on duty in the small anteroom by the front door until about 4:00 A.M. The prince had told them that they should not go into the dining room, since there would be ladies present; the two heard doors opening and closing, and a gramophone playing. That was all. It was not unusual; the prince had given parties before at which no servants were present.

Around 4:00 A.M. the bell rang and Nefedov went to the prince's study. No guests were present. Yusupov ordered him to go down to the courtyard and see if anything was amiss. Nefedov found the courtyard quite normal. A few minutes later the prince rang again and told him to look more carefully, because a shot dog was lying in the courtyard. Nefedov went into the yard of Number 92 and found the body of a dog near the railings. He picked it up and brought it into the prince's garden. "It is lying there now," he told the police.

He had cleared up the dining room that morning, Nefedov said, and "everything was just as it should be." He noted that there were enough empty wine bottles to assume that all the guests had been drunk; "the prince himself was rather tipsy." He said that the dead dog had been one of the prince's ordinary watchdogs.

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It was time now for Yusupov to be interviewed by the officers on the scene. The prince told them that he had first met Rasputin at Munya Golovina's house five years before. He did not like him. Then he had met him again, in November, and gotten on better with him. Yusupov told the policemen that he was suffering from chest pains, and that Golovina had advised him to go to Rasputin, who had many cures to his credit. He had gone with her to see the starets at the end of November.

Some of Rasputin's suggestions—that he should go to the Gypsies and have a pretty girl cure his pains—struck Yusupov as lewd and unpleasant. However, simply by circling his hands around the patient, Rasputin did seem to bring the prince relief from the chest pains. When the starets began discussing the prince's beautiful wife, and asking if he could meet her, Yusupov said that he gave an evasive answer while resolving never to let Rasputin into his house.

In the meantime, Yusupov continued, he had decorated new rooms at 94 Moika Street. Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich suggested that he give a small party there. The two decided to invite Vladimir Mitrofanovich Purishkevich and some officers and society women; Yusupov would not give their names to the police, he said, for fear of embarrassing them. The grand duke arrived for

the party around 11:30 P.M., with the rest of the guests coming soon after. "We drank tea, played the piano, danced, and finally we dined," Yusupov said.

The meal was interrupted about 1:00 A.M. by the telephone ringing in Yusupov's study. "It was Rasputin," the prince said in his statement, "insisting that I go with him to the Gypsies." Yusupov told him that he already had company and asked him where he was calling from. He could hear women's voices in the background and thought that Rasputin was either in a restaurant or with the Gypsies. Rasputin did not reply and hung up.

Yusupov said that he returned to the dining room and had a good laugh with his guests about Rasputin's call. They thought about all going on to the Gypsies, then thought better of it. The party broke up at about 3:00 A.M. The guests left by the side gate. Suddenly, the prince said, he heard a shot fired in the courtyard. He rang for Nefedov and asked him to investigate. The servant found nothing, but when the prince went down to the yard himself, he saw the body of a dog lying by the railings.

He heard footsteps in the street and saw a man in a gray uniform overcoat speeding away. He was tall and slim; more than that Yusupov could not see because the light was dim. When he came back into the palace, Yusupov asked Nefedov to remove the dog and telephoned Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich to tell him about the dog. The grand duke said that he had killed the dog; "he said it was just a silly prank," Yusupov said, "and that I was not to think any more about it." Yusupov sent out into the street for a constable and told him that a friend had just shot a dog. Purishkevich was present and also spoke to the constable. Yusupov could not hear all he said, but he remembered that Purishkevich was "all the time gesticulating wildly."

At about 4:00 A.M., Yusupov said, he had left the house and was driven in his motorcar to the palace of the Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, his mother-in-law and the tsar's sister, where he was currently living. "This morning I spoke on the telephone to Munya Golovina, who asked me where Rasputin was," his statement continued. "I replied that I did not know anything of his whereabouts, for I had not seen him, but had merely spoken to him by telephone." Golovina said that Rasputin's servants were saying that he had called for Rasputin at his apartment at about 1:00 A.M. "This, however, is a mistake," Yusupov asserted, "for neither by day nor by night was I there."

He had been told that Purishkevich had said something about Rasputin's death. Perhaps he had; "but during the night Purishkevich was very drunk." Yusupov concluded by saying that the people who had planned the murder—if murder it was—had intentionally arranged it so that there was a spurious link between the killing and Yusupov and his party.

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Vassilyev was "on tenterhooks" waiting for a copy of Yusupov's statement. But this was not the expected confession; it was "an involved and highly improbable story, which was in glaring contradiction of all that we already knew." Although news of Rasputin's disappearance was all over Petrograd long before noon on December 17, there was still no body. Vassilyev was sure that it was murder, and that Yusupov was involved, but without a corpse some of the many people who telephoned him thought it might be an abduction. At 5:00 P.M. a supposedly secret telegram—it was soon leaked to the press, including the *Times* correspondent Robert Wilton—was sent to all police stations to discover the movements of the automobiles that had come up to the prince's palace during the night and the one that had removed Rasputin's body in the early hours. At the same time numerous police patrols were dispatched to the islands and the suburban districts.

The empress scribbled a note to Nicholas in pencil during the afternoon. She lay on the couch in her mauve boudoir. The room was full of flowers and the scent of the log fire. Vyrubova and her four daughters were with her. "We are sitting all together—you can imagine our feelings, thoughts—our Friend has disappeared," she began and then referred to Vyrubova's meeting with Rasputin the day before. "Yesterday A. saw Him and he told her that Felix asked Him to come to him at night, that a motor would collect Him so as He could see Irina. A motor, a military one, came to take Him with two civilians, and He left. This night a great scandal at Yusupov's house—great gathering, Dmitry, Purishkevich, etc—all drunk. Police heard shots. Purishkevich ran screaming to the police that our Friend was killed. . . . Felix pretends that He never came to the house he never invited him. It was, apparently, a trap. I shall still trust in God's mercy that one has only driven Him away somewhere. Protopopov is doing all he can. . . . I can't and won't believe that He was killed. God have mercy. . . . Felix came often to him lately. Come quickly. Kisses, Sunny."

That night Grand Duchess Olga wrote in her diary, "Father Grigory has been missing since last night. They are looking everywhere. It is terribly hard. The four of us slept together. God help us!"

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At 1:00 P.M. the following day, Sunday, December 18, some workmen crossing the Petrovsky Bridge saw bloodstains on the parapet. A policeman was called; he reported to his station that he could see blood on the parapet and pier of the bridge. A superintendent sped to the bridge and spotted a lone brown boot on a ledge on the bloodstained pier. A man was lowered on a rope and brought it up. It was rushed to Gorokhovaya ulitsa. Maria Rasputin recognized it at once; so did the Okhrana agents who shadowed the starets.

The murderers telephoned the empress during the afternoon. Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich asked for permission to come to tea at 5:00 P.M. Pale and thoughtful, the empress refused him. Yusupov then rang the palace switchboard to ask permission to come to the palace with "an explanation" for the empress. Alexandra refused to speak to him. He tried several times to get through to Vyrubova. The empress would not let her speak with him either. She told the switchboard to tell him that he should send his explanation in written form. "In your name I order Dmitri forbidden to leave his house till yr return," she wrote to the tsar. "Dmitri wanted to see me today, but I refused. Mainly he is implicated. The body is still not found. When will you come?" Nicholas cabled from the Stavka: "Am horrified and shaken. In prayers and thoughts I am with you. Am arriving tomorrow at 5 o'clock."

When Vassilyev was told of the discovery of the snow boot by General Popov, he wondered what had gone through the minds of the murderers as they sped to the bridge in their elegant motorcar with a corpse in the back. Were their thoughts patriotic, of saving their country, or merely of how to escape justice by disposing of the evidence? Strange nightmares hung over the frozen capital, a reporter on the newspaper *Birzhevye Vedomosti* wrote, for "bloodshed is always horrible and smoking blood is always poisonous"; in the depths of night "shots ring out in a dead garden, secret cars hurry across the city carrying corpses and live men."

The river was dangerous to search, because it had only fully frozen over in the past few hours and the ice was thin. Vassilyev contacted the harbor board to get divers. They searched the bottle green waters for an hour without success, until an old riverman who knew how corpses traveled with the currents told them where to look. They investigated a pool in the ice 250 yards downstream from the bridge. "They first saw a fur coat, hairs coming through the ice," the reporter wrote. "There was a lot of blood." The arms and legs of the corpse were tied with cords, and it showed evidence of multiple wounds.

It was the Siberian.

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"Ania [Vyrubova] is staying with us, since Mama is afraid for her," Olga wrote in her diary that night. "We have finally learned that Father Grigorii [*sic*] was killed, probably by Dmitri, and thrown from the bridge by the Krestinsky [island]. He was found in the water. No words can say how hard it is. We sat and drank tea, and the whole time we felt Father Grigorii was with us."

The corpse was taken in a military ambulance three miles out of the city to a veterans' home on the Tsarskoye Selo Road. It was frozen and had to be thawed before an autopsy could be carried out by Professor Kosorotov. He found three bullet wounds. One bullet had entered the left side of the chest and

traversed the stomach and the liver. A second had struck the right side of the back and entered the kidneys. The third was fired into the head and penetrated the brain. The first two shots had been fired while the victim was upright, the third when he was on the ground. The third shot appeared to have been the cause of death, although there were traces of water in the lungs, suggesting that Rasputin may not have been clinically dead when he entered the water. There were multiple contusions on the body, mainly on the head. The brain matter smelled of alcohol. The professor found twenty soupspoonfuls of grayish brown liquid in the stomach, which also smelled of alcohol. There was no evidence of poisoning. The corpse was dressed in a blue blouse with a cornflower motif. A small gold cross inscribed "Save and Protect," and a platinum and gold bracelet, with the tsar's monogram *N* and a double-headed eagle, were also found on the body. These were later reclaimed by the empress.

The body was laid out by Akulina Laptinskaya, the Sister of Charity, with the sideline in selling Rasputin's secrets, at the orders of the empress. She spent much of the night washing the corpse and its wounds and dressing it in fresh clothes before it was placed in a casket. A crucifix was put on the breast, and Akulina placed a note in Rasputin's hands. "My dear martyr," it read, "give me Thy blessing that it may follow me always on the sad and dreary path I have yet to traverse here below, and remember us from on high in Your holy prayers! Alexandra."

CHAPTER 27

# *Confessional*

The police investigation was swift and competent. They knew, almost immediately, the identity of the guilty; but they were prevented from interrogating them in depth or from charging them. Alexandra's orders for Yusupov and Dmitri to be placed under house arrest were illegal—she had no such powers—and bitterly resented by the rest of the Romanov clan. "This means open revolt," Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich exclaimed. "Here we have the war, with the enemy threatening us from all sides, and we have to deal with this sort of nonsense. How can they not be ashamed to stir up all this fuss over the murder of such a filthy good-for-nothing!" The scandal was already prodigious. The tsar did not contemplate adding to it with the arrest of men closely related to him by blood and marriage.

There was to be no trial. In its absence the accounts of the murderers have been accepted as filling in the detail missing from police evidence. They were little inhibited by guilt, for they felt their deed had served their country, but both Yusupov and Purishkevich had high opinions of themselves and were open to exaggeration. They also felt it their duty, as a prince and a gentleman, to deflect attention from others involved in or supporting their deed.

Yusupov wrote that he spent the greater part of December 16 completing the furnishings of the cellar. It was built of dark granite, with two small windows and a vaulted ceiling that gave full headroom only in the center. After dark, red plush curtains and a fire gave it warmth. A samovar bubbled cheerfully on the table. Rose cakes and wineglasses were laid out on a sideboard. He told the staff that they were to remain in the servants' hall unless he rang for them. Lazovert worked on the automobile they were to use. He painted out the

red emblem *Semper Idem* that identified it as belonging to Purishkevich's medical services. Purishkevich passed the day at the Duma, writing letters and chatting on the telephone. Lazovert collected him in the car at about 11:00 P.M. Purishkevich brought a heavy Sauvage pistol with him. Dmitri came separately to the Moika Palace at the same hour.

The doctor put on rubber gloves and carefully ground crystals of potassium cyanide into powder. He sprinkled this liberally into the cakes. He also dissolved three decigrams of cyanide into a few drops of water and poured it into two of the wineglasses. Four centigrams was a lethal dose. When he had finished Lazovert tossed the gloves into the fire. That was a mistake, for the room filled with the acrid stench of burning rubber. Lazovert then put on the chauffeur's coat Purishkevich had bought earlier and drove Yusupov to Gorokhovaya ulitsa. The prince went up the back staircase. Rasputin answered the door himself, saying, "No one is up, the children are asleep, enter, Little One." The prince was struck by how good he looked, the preparation he had put into meeting Princess Irina, his hair and beard freshly washed and combed, the blue blouse immaculate. He felt a pang at the "despicable deceit" of inviting a guest to his own murder. "What had become of his second sight?" he thought. "What use was his facility for reading the thoughts of others if he was blind to the dreadful trap that was laid for him?" Like a lamb, then, a lamb in fur coat and beaver hat and size sixteen snow boots, Rasputin followed Yusupov down to the automobile.

At the palace Yusupov took Rasputin across the marble entrance hall and down the steps to the cellar. "You know how I am being slandered," Rasputin said. "Remember how Christ was persecuted. He too suffered for the sake of truth." Or so Yusupov said that he said, conveniently, for it branded his guest as a blasphemer; admirers, not Rasputin himself, compared him with Christ. Rasputin heard a gramophone upstairs playing the hit song "Yankee Doodle Dandy." "What's this?" he asked. "Someone giving a party?" The prince replied that his wife was entertaining a few girlfriends. She would soon be down.

He gave the starets an unpoisoned biscuit. At first Rasputin refused the offer of the poisoned cakes. When Yusupov pressed him he ate two of them. Cyanide has a bitter almond scent, but he made no comment. After a little he said he was thirsty and asked for tea. The prince offered him wine—Yusupov wine from the family estates in the Crimea—but Rasputin said he preferred Madeira. Had Yusupov studied his man, he would have known that. He persuaded him to have a glass of unspiked wine and then, by dropping the glass, gave him one with poison in it. He drank. Nothing happened; Rasputin merely complained of "a tickling in my throat."

Rasputin amused himself by playing with the many drawers in the ebony cabinet. Yusupov, waiting for him to collapse, said he would check on when Irina was coming and excused himself from the cellar. His fellow conspirators

were huddled at the top of the stairs, playing and replaying "Yankee Doodle Dandy." They had to be kept out of sight; had Rasputin seen Purishkevich, who had attacked him so savagely in his Duma speech, he would have realized instantly what was afoot. Lazovert was so unnerved by the failure of his poison—so he said—that he fainted and had to be revived in the snowy garden. The secret police chief, Vassilyev, claimed that Lazovert, overcome by conscience, had substituted soda or magnesia for the cyanide. Another explanation for the failure of the autopsy to find poison is that a corrupt drug manufacturer was selling the army medical service placebos instead of genuine pharmaceuticals. A third, and the one favored by Yusupov, was that the Dark One was protected by the forces of evil.

When the prince reappeared in the cellar, Rasputin noticed a guitar case. He asked Yusupov to play to him. "Play something cheerful," he said. "I like listening to your singing." Yusupov sang Gypsy songs. They had been alone together for two hours; the murder was becoming a marathon. The hen party excuse was wearing thin; Felix was embarrassed and frightened. The upstairs crew had become restless and noisy, and Rasputin heard them and asked what was happening. Yusupov left the cellar to investigate. Grand Duke Dmitri said he was tired and wanted to leave. "We can't leave him down there half dead," Purishkevich said. He thought they should "stake their all" and descend together to shoot the starets. The prince said that Rasputin would be alarmed if he saw them all. He took Dmitri's Browning revolver and went back to the cellar.

Rasputin sat at the table with a drooping head. His breathing was labored. "My head is heavy and I've a burning in my stomach," he complained. "Give me another glass of wine. It'll do me good." He swallowed a glass "at a gulp" and revived. Despite his cargo of cyanide, he suggested Yusupov go to the Gypsies with him. "All our thoughts belong to God," he said. "But our bodies belong to ourselves." Yusupov said it was too late. Rasputin played again with the ebony cabinet. "Grigory Efimovich," Yusupov said, "you'd far better look at the crucifix and say a prayer." Rasputin seemed to realize what was to happen; he looked at the prince gently, resigned. Yusupov said later that he feared that the "supernatural powers" protecting Rasputin might render a bullet harmless. But when the starets started making the sign of the cross, the "dark protecting power" dissolved. "My arm grew rigid, I aimed at his heart and pulled the trigger," Yusupov recalled. "Rasputin gave a wild scream and crumpled on the bearskin."

The others now rushed down. They lifted the body from the bearskin to prevent the blood from staining it. Rasputin's face twitched in spasms as the blood soaked into the blue blouse. The body then went still. It was about 3:00 A.M. Lazovert examined him and pronounced him dead. The plan was now for Captain Sukhotkin to put on Rasputin's coat and beaver hat and to be driven by Lazovert with Dmitri in Purishkevich's automobile, to suggest to any watching

police agent that they were taking Rasputin home. In fact, they would drive to Purishkevich's train, where Rasputin's clothes would be burned while they returned to the Moika Palace to collect the corpse and dump it in the river.

As they set off Purishkevich and Yusupov relaxed over cigars, confident that they had saved Russia. Yusupov went back to the cellar to reexamine the results of his night's work. The body fascinated him; he was alone with it for perhaps half an hour. Something strange may have happened during this time—the Duma deputy, Maklakov, said that he subsequently had an "unusual conversation" with Yusupov about the murder, adding cryptically, "I imagine he remembers it well, but I will say nothing about it." Maria Rasputin claimed that Yusupov had tried to seduce her father on one of his visits during November and raped him at his death; Simanovich maintained that Yusupov had visited Rasputin to be cured of homosexuality, and that during the therapy Rasputin "made him lie down and then lashed and hypnotized him." There is no independent evidence to support either statement. By his own admission the prince held the body's wrist, could detect no pulse, and began to shake it with rage. The corpse stirred and opened "green viper eyes." With a roar Rasputin rose and rushed at him. "He sank his fingers into my shoulder like steel claws," Yusupov recollected. "His eyes were bursting from their sockets, blood oozed from his lips." As he tried to strangle him Rasputin kept repeating: "Felix, Felix." Yusupov tore himself free, leaving one of the epaulets of his cadet uniform in Rasputin's hand, and ran up the stairs.

Purishkevich described Yusupov as "literally faceless" with terror, his "lovely large blue eyes" bulging, as, "virtually oblivious of me, seemingly out of his mind," he fled into the main part of the palace. Then the politician, too, saw a "terrible reality." Rasputin, who had lain dead in the cellar half an hour before, had climbed the stairs and was running across the snow-covered courtyard to an iron gate that led into the street. "I couldn't believe my eyes," Purishkevich said. "But a hard cry, which broke the silence of the night, persuaded me. 'Felix, Felix, I will tell everything to the empress.' " He took out his Sauvage pistol and fired, the shot echoing in the night. He was a good shot—he practiced regularly on the Semyonovsky Guards' pistol range—but he missed. He fired again as Rasputin closed on the gate. He missed again. "I bit with all my force the end of my left hand to force myself to concentrate and I fired a third time," he said. "The bullet hit him in the shoulders. He stopped. I fired a fourth time and hit him probably in the head." He ran up and kicked Rasputin as hard as he could with his boot. Rasputin fell into the snow and tried to rise but could only grind his teeth. "This time, I was certain that his swan song had been sung and that he would never rise again," Purishkevich wrote in his diary a few hours later. For good measure Yusupov appeared with a rubber club—probably the blackjack he had borrowed from Shulgin—and beat the body.

Both men's accounts of the actual killing are confirmed by the autopsy. The wound found in the left side of the chest corresponds with Yusupov's original shot to the heart, and those in the right side of the back and the head to Purishkevich's shot at the shoulders and his "probable" hit in the head. Professor Kossorotov also found contusions consistent with Purishkevich's kicks and Yusupov's clubbing.

After dealing with Vlassiyev, the policeman who heard the shots, Lazovert and the others drove back to the palace at about 5:30 A.M. The body was wrapped in a shroud—variously linen, a blue curtain, a rug, canvas—and was driven off at high speed north, toward Petrovsky Island. All the conspirators were in the car except Yusupov, who was exhausted. It took them two efforts to hurl the body over the low parapet. They forgot to attach weights to the body, and the telltale boot was left on the ice.

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"Something has to happen"—it had become an all-Russian saying. Such were the accounts of those who achieved it. There were others; persistently it was said that ladies were present in the palace at the time of the murder. In his police statement, if not in his later books, Yusupov himself said that he had given a small party, with Dmitri and Purishkevich, and some officers and society women whom he refused to name. The conspirators were at pains to clear all others of involvement in the killing. Purishkevich took great care to emphasize that the young Romanov was innocent of murder: "Thank God that the hand of the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich is not stained with this dirty blood. He was only a spectator, that's all. Pure, young, noble, regal youth, so close to the throne, cannot and must not be guilty even in such a highly patriotic deed connected with the spilling of someone's blood, be it even Rasputin."

Policeman Yefimov gave evidence to his superiors within a few hours of the event that he had heard a cry from the palace, "as if uttered by a woman." The servant Nefedov said in his police statement that when he cleared up the dining room the following morning, he found "everything was just as it should be." He confirmed that he had been told ladies would be present at the party, as they had been at previous parties; the debris of mixed company is different from that of a stag party—lipstick on cigarette ends and glasses, a smell of perfume—and it is unlikely that an experienced servant could have mistaken the signs.

Yusupov also referred to the presence of ladies in a letter he wrote to the empress on the day after the murder, which corresponds closely to his police statement recorded by Vassilyev. "Your Majesty," he wrote. "I hasten to fulfill your command and tell you about everything that happened in my house yesterday so as to throw light upon the terrible accusation I was charged with. On the occasion of housewarming on the night of the sixteenth I invited a few

friends for dinner, among them some ladies. Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich was also there. Around 12:00 Grigory Efimovich telephoned me and invited me to go to the Gypsies. I refused, saying that I have a party myself and asked where he called from. He answered, 'Isn't it a bit too much what you want to know?' and hung up. While he spoke I could hear many voices. That's all that I heard of Grigory Efimovich that evening.

"Returning to my guests, I told them about my conversation on the telephone, which elicited tactless remarks from them. You know, Your Majesty, that the name of Grigory Efimovich is rather unpopular in many circles. Around 3:00 A.M. people started to depart, and, having said good-bye to the grand duke and two ladies, I went to my study with the other guests. Suddenly it seemed to me like a report [gunshot] was heard. I called for the servant and ordered him to find out what it was. He came back and said, 'A report was heard, but nobody knows where it came from.' After that I went out into the yard myself and asked the yard keepers and policeman who had fired the shot. The yard keepers said that they had been drinking tea in the lodge, and the policeman said that he heard the report but did not know who made it. Then I went home, called for the policeman, and telephoned Dmitri Pavlovich to ask whether it was he who fired. He laughed and answered that leaving the house he fired several times at a dog, and one of the ladies fainted. When I told him that the shots had made a sensation, he answered that this could not be so because there was no one around.

"I called for the servant and went out to the yard and saw one of our dogs lying dead near the fence. Then I ordered the servant to bury it in the yard.

"At 4:00 A.M. everybody left and I came back to the palace of Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, where I live. On the following day, that is, this morning, I learned about the disappearance of Grigory Efimovich, which is being connected with my party. Then they told me he was seen with me last night and that he left with me. This is a downright lie, for my guests and myself did not leave my house all through the night. Then they told me that he [Rasputin] said to someone that one of these days he was to go to meet Irina [Irina Alexandrovna, Yusupov's wife]. There is some truth in it for, when I saw him last, he asked me to introduce him to Irina and asked whether she was here. I said to him that my wife was in the Crimea but that she could come [back] on the fifteenth or sixteenth of December. On the night of the fourteenth I received a telegram from Irina in which she wrote that she'd fallen ill and asked me to join her brothers, who leave tonight. I cannot find the words, Your Majesty, to tell you how I've been shocked by what happened and how outrageous are the accusations against me.

"I remain, deeply devoted to Your Majesty, Felix."

The empress was unimpressed, replying in pencil, "No one has the right to indulge in killing. I know conscience gives no rest to many as not only DP

[Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich] has been mixed up in it. I am surprised by your communication to me."

Simanovich visited the Moika police station on the morning after the murder with Bishop Isidor, another Rasputin protégé. He claimed that Rasputin was killed during a real party in the palace, at which ladies were present. He was told this by Vera Koralli, a ballerina and a cousin of Yusupov, who claimed she had attended the party with two of Yusupov's brothers-in-law. When Rasputin arrived in a reception room, a brother-in-law, who had been hiding behind the curtain in the hall, fired and hit him in the eye. Rasputin fell, and "everybody fired at him and hit him in the eye, only Vera Koralli refused to do it and she cried, 'I don't want to shoot.' " The body was then taken down to the cellar. Rasputin revived, dragged himself out to the courtyard, and was trying to escape to the street when he was betrayed by a barking guard dog. He was then caught by Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, his arms and legs were tied, and he was taken by automobile to be thrown, still living, into the icebound Neva.

Robert Wilton, the London *Times* man in Petrograd, also mentioned the presence of women—though demimondaines, high-class courtesans, rather than society ladies—in his account of the murder. He obtained his story from police officials and from reporters on *Novoye Vremya*, who had excellent police contacts. His original story was censored, but he kept the notes he had written up on the day after the murder and sent them in a letter to Wickham Steed, the *Times* foreign editor, on December 20.

In Wilton's version Rasputin, his tongue loosened by drink and the prospect of an orgy, revealed government secrets at a party hosted by Yusupov at which courtesans were present. He was invited to commit suicide as a final act of patriotic redemption but turned the proffered revolver on his hosts before himself being shot. The conspirators—Wilton mentioned the sons of the late Grand Duke Constantine as well as Yusupov, Dmitri, and Purishkevich—had "decided to 'remove' Rasputin because they regarded him as the cause of a dangerous scandal affecting the interests of the dynasty and of the Empire. So many persons being in the plot rumours were bound to leak out, and as long ago as Monday last it was reported that Rasputin's death might be expected hourly." Wilton claimed that Yusupov had often invited Rasputin to the Moika Palace to pump him for information on the "doings of 'August Personages,' " the use of initial capitals indicating that this meant the tsar and tsarina.

Rasputin was asked to a party at the palace on December 16, together with a number of courtesans. Under the influence of liquor he "gave away not only his own secrets but also the secrets of all the Ministerial and other political changes that have so much incensed Russian public opinion within recent months, notably the dismissal of Sazonov, the appointment of Stürmer and the successive and persistent failures to introduce a stable Ministry and internal re-

forms." At about 2:30 A.M. Rasputin was told that he would have to die. "A revolver was placed in his hand," Wilton wrote, "but he flatly refused to commit suicide and discharged the weapon some say in the direction of the Grand Duke Dmitri. The bullet smashed a pane of glass thereby attracting the attention of the police outside." The butler told them that a distinguished guest had practiced target shooting.

"Hardly had the police officers left the palace," Wilton continued, "when a motor car drove up along the Moika canal quay and stopped near a small footbridge almost facing the palace." Four men were seen to alight, their faces covered "by some black substance." As soon as the passengers had left the car, the chauffeur turned off his lights "and putting on full speed made off along the canal." This scene was witnessed by an Okhrana agent named Tihomirov, who had been detailed by the police department to look after Rasputin. Tihomirov presumed that the "masked or disguised men" were robbers, since they had entered the palace by a side door in the back part of the garden. The agent hurried across the canal to the police station and telephoned a report to the Okhrana.

A further commotion followed. Two women were carried out of the palace; "they were offering resistance and were refusing to enter a motor car and were doing their best to force their way back into the palace." The car whirled off down the quay with them. An inspector drove off in pursuit. "It was impossible to overtake the fugitive car on account of its enormous speed; it carried neither number nor lights," Wilton wrote. "The policemen who came to the palace were informed that two ladies belonging to the half-world had been misconducting themselves and had been asked to leave." The affair seemed to be at an end when four shots were heard from the little garden fronting the wing of the palace. "Once more the alarm was sounded in both police stations and again detachments of police appeared at the palace," Wilton wrote. "This time an official wearing a colonel's uniform came out to them (his identity is not yet established) and announced in categorical fashion that within the palace was a Grand Duke and that H.I.H. [His Imperial Highness] would explain everything that was necessary in person to the proper quarters. After such a declaration the police inspector . . . returned to his official duties, leaving a patrol on the opposite side of the Moika as a measure of precaution. The servants assisted by the chauffeur, in the presence of an officer who was wearing a long fur cloak, carried out what looked like a human body and placed it in the car. The chauffeur jumped in and putting on full speed made off along the canal side and also promptly disappeared."

When the police returned to the palace, they were met by Yusupov. He told them that they should "draw up a report as to the killing of Rasputin. At first this announcement was not accepted seriously in view of all the strange occurrences of the night, but the police officials were invited to come into a

chamber of the basement and were there shown the spot where the body had been lying. They saw a pool of congealed blood, and traces of blood were also visible on the snow in the garden. In answer to the question as to where the body was, the prince replied that the body was 'where it should be.' He declined to give any further explanation."

Wilton added to his story a day later, this time accounting for the dead dog. During the carousal at the Yusupov palace, he wrote, Rasputin was asked if he would get three new ministers appointed. For this he would receive half a million rubles. He replied, "Why not?" Purishkevich said, "But we want three scoundrels to enter the ministry!" "What of that?" Rasputin replied. "Have I not appointed others?" Then the starets was told, "So you confess that it was your work and that you betrayed Russia. We sentence you to death. Take this revolver and shoot yourself." Rasputin "took the weapon and fired it at the company but missed them and hit a large dog that was in the room. Then Purishkevich and the others shot Rasputin."

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The lack of a formal investigation, and the absence of a trial with evidence, witnesses, and cross-examination, made it inevitable that the Rasputin rumor mills would grind as furiously after his death as before it. The official statement issued to newspapers after the discovery of the corpse was so brief—sixteen words plus a dateline—that it incited speculation. Wilton cabled it to London, adding thirteen days to the Russian date of December 19 to fit the Western calendar of his British readers: QUOTE PETROGRAD MORNING 1 JANUARY NEAR PETROVSKI BRIDGE WAS FOUND BODY GRIGORY RASPUTIN CLOSE TO BANK STOP JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES CARRYING OUT INVESTIGATION UNQUOTE.

The official background briefing, which the censor passed for transmission, was bizarre. "Body which bore mark [of] several bullet wounds in head [and] chest was very much disfigured," Wilton was allowed to cable. "Feet tied [and] hands had evidently been similarly pinioned but when flung [into] river rope broke and arms outspreading remained frozen [in] that position." The myth was thus encouraged that Rasputin's body had frozen as if it had been crucified. Wilton was also told that "immediately after being extracted from under the ice . . . the body was taken to the mortuary in the Peter and Paul fortress where it remained all day. It is expected that the body will be taken to his native village in Siberia for burial."

These falsifications—the body was taken to the veterans' home outside the city and it was to be buried at Tsarskoye Selo—were probably deliberate. The interior ministry did not want the body to be the focus of any demonstration; hence the canard that it was in the fortress, the best-guarded site in the city. It was also easiest to distance the royal family from the affair by suggesting that the burial would take place in distant Pokrovskoye.

There is a symmetry, a pleasantness, to the idea that Rasputin amused himself with ladies at his last party; as he had lived, so he died. In his death, as in life, Rasputin offers choice and little certainty. Simanovich no doubt felt that this was the way his friend would have chosen. No Okhrana agent reported Rasputin attending any evening or nighttime engagement without women being present. Uniformed policemen, palace staff, and Yusupov all mentioned women. Wilton, who had become a near neighbor of Rasputin after *The Times* moved its offices from Potchtamtykaya to 4 Gorokhovaya ulitsa, had collaborated with experienced Russian journalists.

But certainly the murderers tally over the character of their victim. There, in the accounts of Yusupov and Purishkevich, is the energy, the refusal to submit, the force of a soul that unnerved armed men, the love of good times and Gypsy music, the flash of lust and its philosophy—"our bodies belong to ourselves . . ." There is the knowledge, sober and perceptive in his agony, that the peasant-colossus he had made of himself, in whose presence Russia quivered with awe and malice, depended on another. It was Alexandra who gave his power its flesh and sinew—those last in extremis words, "Felix, Felix, I will tell all to the empress . . ." And there, too, is the rage for life—even as it was being poisoned, shot, and beaten out of him.

CHAPTER 28

# *Finis*

He was buried at 9:00 A.M. on Thursday, December 22, in the grounds of a small chapel Vyrubova was building in the imperial park at Tsarskoye Selo. The weather was frosty and fine, the morning sky a clear, metallic blue, and the snow sparkling. Lili von Dehn attended, bringing her memories of the healing of her son Titi. She stopped her carriage on the road and walked across a frozen field toward the chapel. Planks had been put on the ground as a footpath. A police motor van was waiting near the open grave.

"I heard the sound of sleigh bells, and Anna Vyrubova came slowly across the field," Dehn wrote. "Almost immediately afterward, a closed automobile stopped and the imperial family joined us." They were dressed in black. The empress carried white flowers; she was pale but composed until the oak coffin was taken from the police van and she began to cry. The court archpriest read the service. The tsar and the empress threw earth on the coffin. Alexandra handed around her flowers, and they threw those in too. The imperial limousine left for the Alexander Palace, and Vyrubova got into her sledge for the drive back to her cottage. Dehn spent a moment looking back at the snowy fields and the bare walls of the unfinished chapel as her carriage sped her away.

After Rasputin's death, as before, no witness told the same tale. In his diary, in which for decades he had accurately noted the day's events and weather, Nicholas wrote that Rasputin was already in the ground when the family arrived. Dehn's touching scene—the brave empress weeping only when she saw the coffin emerging from the makeshift police hearse—was invention. "At 9 the whole family went past the photography building," the tsar wrote that evening,

"and turned right towards the field, where we assisted at a sad scene: the coffin with the body of the unforgettable Grigory, murdered on the night of December 17 by monsters in the house of F. Yusupov, had already been lowered into the grave. Father Alexander Vasiliev finished the eulogy, after which we returned home. The weather was gray with 12 degrees of frost. . . . In the afternoon took a walk with the children."

Technically, the murder changed nothing; psychologically it changed everything. It did not, as the killers hoped, restore the dignity of the throne; and Alexandra's influence was untouched, for she kept her nerve while the tsar retreated into nervous collapse. Her mauve boudoir and her telephone beneath a picture of Marie Antoinette remained the focal point of government, and, when ministers came to report to the tsar in his study, she listened from his dressing room. In a broader sense, however, the death was what Russians call *perelom*, the great turning point. It left the rulers utterly exposed. To assault Rasputin was to assault the throne, and two of those who had done so were Romanovs by blood or marriage; the chains of loyalty that still bound those of lesser rank were snapped. Centuries of convention had protected the tsar and empress from outright defamation by all but the boldest and most reckless subject. Blame for catastrophe had been heaped on Rasputin; he had been their lightning rod, deflecting hatreds and contempt that now had no target but themselves. Rasputin had been their glue, too; he was "their mainspring, their toy, their fetish." If he could be taken from them, so could their power. And the penalty for lèse-majesté, certain death or torture under previous tsars, was suddenly seen as little more than a slap on the wrist. Although the empress had shouted "Hang them!" the murderers were simply sent away—Yusupov to his estates in the Crimea, Dmitri to join the army staff in Persia. Purishkevich took his hospital train to the front, where the military police kept watch on him.

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On New Year's Day the tsar received the congratulations of the diplomatic corps in Tsarskoye Selo. A burst of bitter cold greeted 1917. The windows of the carriages taking the ambassadors to the palace were impenetrable with frost, and the horses were smothered in ice. A courtier asked Maurice Paléologue if he did not feel that "now we are on the very brink." The Frenchman thought they were over it. "I am obliged to report," he cabled the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, "that at the present moment the Russian empire is run by lunatics."

The tsar had left unfinished business at the Stavka; with General Alexeev on sick leave, nobody was in effective supreme command of Russia's armies. Nicholas did not return to Mogilev for two months. He closeted himself in the Alexander Palace with Alexandra and the children. He abandoned his mornings to petty projects, replacing German court titles—Kanzler, Ritter—with

Russian ones; he walked in the afternoon, and in the evening he played cards and watched movies, *Madame du Barry*, with the guillotines and blood of revolutionary France, and the spiritualist thriller *Mysterious Hands*. His eyes were flat, his face thin and lined. Alexandra remained defiant, but the tutor Gilliard found that "her shattered face revealed how much she suffered. The pain was tremendous." Vyrubova was with her continuously; the empress insisted that her friend move out of her cottage to the Alexander Palace for fear she too would be murdered. Her other comfort was Rasputin's ghost. "He is still close to us," she wrote.

Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* played at the Mariinsky Theater with Smirnova as première danseuse. Her arabesques were no more fantastic than the stories passing from lip to lip in the stalls; Alexandra would be taken to a convent, a famous fighter pilot, Captain Kostenko, would crash his aircraft on the imperial limousine. "We are back in the time of the Borgias!" an Italian embassy counselor whispered in the intermission. Grand dukes, Romanovs, were overheard plotting to force the tsar to abdicate in favor of the tsarevich and a regent. Alexandra conducted her own plots; her sights were set on the too-liberal Trepov. The prime minister was replaced by an ill man of seventy, Prince Nikolai Golitsyn, a "good-natured Russian squire and an old weakling," who protested that he was "utterly incapable" of doing the job. For good measure he warned Nicholas that officers in Moscow regiments were openly threatening to proclaim another tsar. Nicholas ordered him to accept. "The empress and I know that we are in God's hands," he said. "His will be done!" The education minister, Count Pavel Ignatev, loyal to Nicholas for thirty years, begged to resign his post so as to be spared "the unbearable burden of serving against the commands of my conscience." He had no reply for a week. Nicholas then let him go, with no word of thanks.

The dead starets had promised Nikolai Dobrovolsky the justice ministry for his help with the German sugar scandal. Simanovich said he "supposed that he would fulfill all my wishes in gratitude" when the empress steered him into the office, but he supposed wrong. Dobrovolsky refused to have the banker Rubinstein released when he was rearrested. Protopopov was brought in to help and had a furious but fruitless argument with Dobrovolsky over the telephone. The problem was that the new justice minister knew very well "how the tsar values the instructions of the deceased"—Rasputin—and felt immune. "Under such circumstances," Simanovich said, "I decided to resort to my old and tested method—a bribe. Protopopov agreed." The interior minister thus connived in the corruption of the justice minister. Madame Rubinstein drew 100,000 rubles in cash from her bank. Her husband was discharged from prison into a sanatorium.

None of the Rubinstein bribe money made its way to Rasputin's dependents; Simanovich claimed but failed to aid his dead friend's children. Maria

Rasputin said that her father left no more than 3,000 rubles—some £300 or $1,400 at the exchange rate of the day—a pittance compared with the millions he had helped others make. Her dowry, which he had been keeping in his desk, was missing. It was left to the empress to send 30,000 rubles for each of the three children from her private privy purse.

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The Okhrana was still functioning. It spread rumors—that Rasputin had been buried in an obscure monastery in the Urals—and it collected facts. On January 9, the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, it calculated that 300,000 workers had come out on strike. In Moscow a Red banner was raised in Theater Square for the first time in the war. On January 28 it predicted that "events of extraordinary importance, fraught with exceptional consequences for the Russian statehood, are not beyond the hills." The number of troops in the capital, 170,000, was a record, but many were shell-shock victims from the front, reservists, and agitators drafted into the army from factories for troublemaking. Even the Cossacks were draftees, not volunteers. The Okhrana found them to have "much raw, untrained material, unfit to put down disorders."

The warnings fell on the deaf ears of Protopopov. He busied himself by day replying personally to the torrent of toadies and petitioners who had sent him Christmas and New Year's greetings. By night he communed with the ghost of Rasputin at séances. With Prince Kurakin, a hook-nosed necromancer, he was locked "in secret conclave for hours every evening, listening to the dead man's solemn words" and passing them on to Alexandra. He was to deny later that he had succeeded in raising Rasputin's spirit but agreed under cross-examination that he had told the empress that he had, because it made her happy.

The tsar's childhood friend Sandro—Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich—visited him and Alexandra on February 10. He brought a letter he had written to them: "We are living through a most dangerous moment in Russia's history. . . . Everyone senses it: some with their mind, some with their heart, some their soul. . . . Certain forces in Russia are leading you, and consequently Russia as well, to irrevocable ruin. . . . The government today is the organ preparing the revolution. The people do not want it, but the government is taking every possible measure to create as many dissatisfied people as possible and is succeeding completely at it. We are assisting at an unprecedented spectacle of revolution from above, rather than below." The analysis was accurate. He tried to discuss it at Alexandra's bedside—she often took to her bed now. "When you are less excited," she said in a voice hard with anger, "you will admit that I knew better." Nicholas said nothing; he chain-smoked.

On February 14 ninety thousand came out on strike, led by workers from the giant Putilov engineering works. The garrison was restive. "You shouldn't be fighting here," a group of ensigns yelled at policemen. "They ought to send

you fatsos to the front." The Duma reconvened that day. Revolution was so tangible that Vasily Shulgin, the monarchist deputy whom Alexandra so hated, felt that the debaters were drained of all emotion by futility in the face of the approaching terror. "Behind the white columns of the hall grinned Hopelessness," he said. "And she whispered: 'Why? What for? What difference does it make?' " A small helping of potatoes, fifteen kopecks prewar, was hard to find at eight times that price. There was panic buying of dry rusks for hoarding. Restaurants laid off their orchestras. The temperature dropped to twenty-two below zero.

In the morning of February 20, Nicholas told Golitsyn that he was preparing to proclaim that he would grant a ministry responsible to the Duma. In the evening the prime minister was recalled to the palace; the tsar said that he was leaving for the Stavka and that no announcement on a new ministry would be made. Nicholas had spoken with the empress during the afternoon; she had not given up on autocracy. Golitsyn sensed that Nicholas was not going to the Stavka. He was running away there.

He did not escape his wife's twin obsessions. "Our dear Friend in another world prays for you too, now even closer to us, but I would so love to hear His consoling & heartening voice," she wrote him on February 22, adding a lecture on autocracy: "Lovy, be firm, because the Russians need you to be—at every turn you show love & kindness—now let them feel your fist, as they themselves ask. So many of late have told, that we need the knout. It's strange, but that is the Slav nature. . . . They must learn to fear you, love is not enough. Tho a child adores his father, he must fear his anger. I embrace you tight and hug your tired head. . . . Feel my arms hold you, my lips press tenderly to yours. Eternally together, always inseparable."

"Be firm, lovy, don't let them cheat you out of what is yours"—it was so close to the first note she had written to him, twenty-two years before, in his diary, at the deathbed of his father. As to his "adoring children," his people—Ambassador Paléologue was told that if the tsar appeared in public, in Moscow at least, they would boo him. The empress they would tear into pieces.

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The children came down with measles on February 23. "Well now, Olga & Alexis both have measles & Olga's face is all covered with rash. Baby suffers more in the mouth—a bad cough and sore eyes," the empress wrote to her husband. "They lie in the dark." That day, a Thursday, was International Women's Day. In midmorning women in the Neva Thread Mills heard demonstrators outside demanding bread. "Into the street! We've had it!" the mill girls shouted. They walked out and threw snowballs at the windows of the neighboring Nobel machinery works to bring out the men. They linked arms with them and

marched off. After the lunch break workers in the giant Arsenal munitions works came out in large numbers when marchers banged on the gates and windows. The afternoon was warm and snow melted. The demonstrators boarded streetcars, forced the motormen to stop, evacuated the passengers, and overturned them. By early evening they were on the Nevsky; mounted police and Cossacks dispersed them with whips and sabers, but they re-formed when the horsemen cantered off. The Okhrana men noticed that the agitators working the crowds did not bother to hide their faces by pulling their caps down over their eyes, as they usually did. They were becoming bold.

At the Duma a young Socialist lawyer called Alexander Kerensky spoke of starving women "for whom hunger is becoming the only tsar." He called for someone to do "what Brutus did in classical times"—an open call to murder the caesar, the tsar. Alexander Protopopov was driven home late at night down the deserted Nevsky, its yellowing snow lit by a brilliant searchlight on the Admiralty spire. He was in a mood of morbid euphoria; he thought the government was winning. "The day of the twenty-third was not all that bad," he wrote in his diary. "Several policemen were injured; but there was no shooting."

On February 24 Alexandra wrote to the tsar: "Strikes now in Petrograd—80,000 workers have struck, lines of the hungry have formed outside the bakeries. Not enough bread in the town." She said she hoped Kedrinsky, as she called the Duma man, would be hanged. Nicholas sent Alexandra and Alexis honors from the king and queen of the Belgians. He thought of his son—"he will be so pleased with a new little cross!" During the morning a crowd of 2,000 was cornered by Cossacks. Many were women. "We have husbands, fathers, brothers at the front!" they cried. "You too have mothers, wives, sisters, children." The horsemen were ordered to charge; they rode by the edges of the crowd, which greeted them with hurrahs. A Duma deputy asked himself what was happening when demonstrators cheered Cossacks. By later afternoon the police estimated that 200,000 were on strike.

Alexandra wrote again in the evening. "There were riots yesterday, on Vasilievsky Island and Nevsky Prospect because some poor people stoned a bakery, tearing Filippov's bakery to pieces & the Cossacks were called in." Filippov's, so famous for its cream tarts and chocolate cakes—sacked. "At 10 went to see Ania [Vyrubova] (she probably has measles too). . . . Am going from room to room, from sick bed to sick bed." Nicholas wrote again, too, more relaxed: "My brain is resting here—no Ministers, no troublesome questions demanding thought, I consider that this is good for me, but only for my brain. My heart is suffering from the separation." He played dominoes in the evening.

On February 25 Mikhail Rodzianko went to see Premier Golitsyn and demanded his resignation. Golitsyn showed him a decree disbanding the Duma, which the tsar had signed before he left for the Stavka for use at any time. "I am

keeping this for emergencies," the old man said, but both men realized that the Duma would pay it no attention; it was too late for that. The Cossacks were now fraternizing with the crowds. "It's a movement of hooligans, boys and girls running around shouting about no bread—just to stir up excitement," Alexandra wrote, calmed by Rasputin's spirit. "If the days were very cold, they would probably all be sitting at home, but all this will pass & calm down." They were not boys behaving badly, but soldiers, and from regiments that had saved the dynasty in 1905. During the afternoon the officer commanding a mounted police unit near the Nikolaevsky railroad station was shot dead by a Cossack. A cavalry squadron, still loyal, transferred from Tsarskoye Selo, killed nine demonstrators on the Nevsky. Police snatch squads were still able to make arrests, but the crowds sometimes rescued those arrested. Police were frequently beaten; some changed into civilian clothes or wore army greatcoats for disguise.

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On February 26 Nicholas suffered excruciating chest pain during morning service. It covered him with sweat. Later it disappeared, "vanishing suddenly when I knelt before the image of the Holy Virgin." He was warned by the war ministry that soldiers were refusing orders to fire on the rioters. Some were going over to the revolutionaries. Nicholas sent a telegram to General Khabalov, the garrison commander. "I command the disorders in the capital end tomorrow," it read. "They are impermissible in the difficult time of war with Germany and Austria. Nicholas." Then he took a walk. Khabalov was not amused. The rising could not be put down by telegram. "When people said, 'Give us bread,' we gave them bread and that was an end to it," he said of happier days. "But when inscriptions on banners read, 'Down with the autocracy,' what kind of bread will calm them?"

Alexandra remained confident. "They say it's not like 1905 because everyone adores you & only wants bread," she wrote to Nicholas. She went to pray at Rasputin's grave in the early afternoon and wrote later, "It seems to me that it will all be all right. The sun is shining brightly—I feel such peace at His dear grave. He died to save us." As she wrote, at 3:30 P.M., ambulances were racing down the Nevsky to the Catherine Bridge to collect the dead and wounded shot by the training unit of the Pavlovsky Guards; through the center of the city, gunfire sounded like "the dry and regular fall of hail." At six in the evening other Pavlovsky Guardsmen set off to persuade their comrades to stop killing demonstrators. They shot dead a policeman who tried to stop them; when their commanding officer, Colonel Eksten, caught up with them and ordered them back to barracks, they slashed off his head with sabers. A detachment of Preobrazhensky Guardsmen disarmed and arrested the mutineers; nineteen of

them were sent to the Peter and Paul Fortress to await court-martial and execution.

Princess Leon Radziwill held a glittering party in the evening—her house ablaze with lights, lackeys in powdered wigs. The city governor thought the crisis was over; loyal troops had produced "brilliant results." Others were not so sure. The premiere of Lermontov's *Masquerade,* with its mournful requiem to the poisoned heroine in the last act, was playing to a small audience at the Alexandrevsky Theater. "Are we witnessing the last night of the regime?" Maurice Paléologue's companion asked him as the ambassador drove home. An Okhrana agent, Limonin, thought everything hung on shaky military units; "if the troops turn on the government, then nothing can save the country," he reported.

On February 27 Volynsky Guardsmen formed in full battle order for morning parade. During the night they had held a meeting and decided not to act as "executioners" anymore; they determined to "join the people." They greeted their commander, Captain Lashkevich, with a "Hurrah!" in place of the normal and docile "At your service." They told him that they would not fire on the people and asked him to leave. As he crossed the parade ground a shot rang out, and they watched the captain "suddenly fling his arms wide and crash to the ground facedown into a snowdrift."

To avoid the firing squad, the men needed to spread mutiny far and fast. They moved to the parade ground of the Preobrazhensky Guards and brought out the battalions drilling there. Officers and NCOs were seen "stooping close to the ground, crouching in ditches, past heaps of garbage and behind stacks of wood, running and crawling." They were fleeing from their own men.

A stenographer at Okhrana headquarters, taking down a report of the mutiny, was so amazed that she logged it in the wrong century, as 9:00 A.M. on February 27, 1817. By 10:00 A.M. there were ten thousand mutineers on the streets. At 11:30 the U.S. ambassador, David Francis, called the foreign ministry to ask for a guard to be put on the embassy to protect officers who had fled inside it. An official said he would ring back. He did not do so; this was the last American communication with the imperial foreign ministry. Alexandra ordered an icon to be paraded around the palace corridors during the morning, with prayers chanted for the sick children. Her valet heard a soldier mutter, "You trample on the people and you carry idols about."

At 1:03 P.M. her nerve cracked. All her adult life she had propped up the autocracy; her political philosophy enshrined in the three words, *pas de concessions.* "Concessions essential," she cabled Nicholas at the Stavka. "Uprising continues. Many troops have gone to the side of the revolution." Nicholas did not reply. He took his normal postlunch walk on the highway running along the Dnieper toward Orsha.

The law courts burned; the crowd cut the firemen's hoses. Alexander Kerensky—unhanged despite the empress's wishes—hurried to the Duma. Troops broke into the Kresty and Litovsky prisons and freed the inmates; three dozen women convicts in prison gowns came out of the Litovsky and shuffled off through the snow in their carpet slippers. Policemen were routed out and murdered. "I saw on our street a man white as a sheet, being pulled away," a schoolboy wrote. "He wore a *shinel*, a police greatcoat, and a *papaha*, a gray fur hat. . . . He was taken away and shot just around the corner." The secret police chief, Alexis Vassilyev, who had gotten on so well with Rasputin, telephoned his own headquarters from his apartment and ordered the staff to leave. He and his wife escaped on passports made out in false names. Alexander Protopopov fled from the interior ministry. He took with him a briefcase with memorabilia—letters to and from the empress, police photographs of Rasputin's corpse.

In the early evening the American naval attaché, Captain McCully, reported that he had seen a cavalry regiment riding quietly away and "abandoning the city to the mutineers." In the Catherine Hall of the Tauride Palace, a soviet—the first since 1905—had been formed. Dirty and disheveled mutineers announced themselves before it to cheers: "We're from the Pavlovsky . . . the Litovsky . . . the Sappers . . . the Chasseurs . . . the Finnish." The regiments had gone.

Nicholas dined at Mogilev with his chief of staff. Grand Duke Mikhail telephoned; the tsar refused his brother's call. The chief of staff, Gen. Mikhail Alexeev, took it instead. The grand duke begged for the cabinet to be dismissed. Nicholas refused. He said he would leave for Tsarskoye Selo on the imperial train at 2:30 A.M. The suite train did not get under way until 5:00 A.M. on Tuesday, February 28; the first train, which steamed out an hour earlier, was a decoy. An hour later the diarist Nikolai Sukhanov, sleeping in the Tauride, was woken by soldiers noisily cutting Ilya Repin's famous portrait of Nicholas out of its frame with their bayonets.

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A unit of loyal bicycle troops held out against the mutineers until midmorning on February 28. When its commanding officer ordered a cease-fire and walked over to the crowds pleading for his men, saying that they had fought only at his orders, he was shot through the heart. Thieves with army trucks looted tons of coal from the mansion of the tsar's ex-mistress, the ballerina Mathilde Kschessinskaya. The Astoria Hotel was sacked. No cabs or streetcars ran. Fashionable ladies who had to travel went in low peasant sledges sitting on straw in the bottom. Alexander Protopopov was rounded up and brought to the Tauride, his face "hopelessly harassed and sunken," his mustaches trembling; though the crowd froze with hatred when it spotted him, he was protected.

Youths climbed the fronts of drugstores and shops that supplied the Romanovs and threw the double-headed wooden imperial eagles and monograms onto bonfires. Maurice Paléologue came across one of the famous "Ethiopians"—one, in fact, was an American black called Jim Hercules who spent his holidays in the States and returned with jars of guava jelly as presents for the children—who had guarded the doors to the tsar's study and the empress's boudoir, in scarlet trousers, curved shoes, and white turbans, shuffling and crying in civilian clothes. A count muttered to the ambassador of the mutineers: "They've seen many things they ought not to have seen. They know too much about Rasputin."

Nicholas woke late aboard his train and breakfasted at 10:00 A.M. In each successive province the governor turned out at the main railroad station to pay his respects as the train passed through. From Vyazma at 3:00 P.M. the tsar sent a telegram to the empress saying that he was "sending many troops from the front" and that the weather was marvelous.

Trucks filled with mutineers reached Tsarskoye Selo during the afternoon. Alexandra had been busying herself with the measled children and Vyrubova. "I kept seeing her beside my bed," Vyrubova recalled, "now preparing a drink, now smoothing the cushions, now talking to the doctor." In the evening the local garrison mutinied and threw open the local prison. There was a skirmish with a palace patrol in the park. Alexandra went out with Maria, cheered the defenders, and brought groups of them in to have tea and get warm. The noise of songs, music, and shots drifted across the park from the town.

After midnight, the tsar's train was halted at the small station of Malaya Vishera, ninety miles from the capital. An officer who had fled on a railroad trolley warned that the next station up the line was in the hands of mutineers. Nicholas was woken and agreed to backtrack to Pskov. He reached there at 7:00 P.M. on March 1.

In the early hours of Thursday, March 2, Alexander Guchkov burst into the Duma committee room. A young landowner had just been shot dead next to him in his automobile, for no better reason than that he was wearing an officer's uniform. It could not continue, Guchkov said. Nicholas must abdicate. Vasily Shulgin agreed to accompany him to Pskov to persuade the tsar to step down. The two got into Guchkov's bloodstained car and drove to his house, where they scribbled out a draft act of abdication. They drove on to the railroad station and ordered the stationmaster to make up a train—a locomotive and a single carriage—for their journey to Pskov.

Alexandra wrote to Nicholas on March 2; she did not know where he was, but she had two Cossacks sew the letter under their trouser stripes and try to find him. She was still fighting a constitution. "I wanted to send an aeroplan [*sic*]," she wrote, "but all have vanished. . . . My heart breaks from the thought of you living through all these tortures & upsets totally alone—& we know

nothing of you, & you know nothing of us. . . . Clearly they don't want to let you see me so above all you must not sign any paper, constitution or other such horror—but you are alone, without your army, caught like a mouse in a trap, what can you do? If you make any concessions, under no circumstances are you obliged to honour them since they were obtained in ignoble fashion." That was what Rasputin had so often said, that the tsar could give his word and take it back, like a little boy who crosses his fingers when he makes a promise. She told him that the children were sleeping peacefully in the darkness, though the elevator no longer worked. She felt that "God will do something. . . . The two movements—the Duma and the revolutionaries—are two snakes & I hope they bite each other's heads off, which would save the situation." They did so, too late.

Then she came back to Rasputin. "PS," she wrote, "wear His cross, even if it is uncomfortable, for my peace of mind."

Nicholas took soundings from his army commanders. Unanimously they recommended that he abdicate. During the late afternoon he had a heart-to-heart talk with Dr. Sergei Fedorov, his personal physician. He said that he would retire to the Crimea and devote himself to educating his son. The doctor doubted that a man who had abdicated would be allowed to bring up his son. The tsar was startled. He raised his son's health. Rasputin had assured him that, if Alexis lived to seventeen, he would be healthy thereafter. Fedorov told him gently that—Rasputin's miracles apart—Alexis could die at any time. "Then I cannot be separated from Alexis," the tsar said. "It is beyond my strength." He began to cry; then he took afternoon tea. Guchkov and Shulgin's train arrived at Pskov at 10:00 P.M. The platform was lit by blue lanterns. They walked over to the drawing room car of the suite train, hung in green silk. They explained why the monarch must abdicate. "Literally no one supported the tsar," Guchkov wrote. "Total emptiness surrounded the throne." A fresh copy of the act of abdication was typed out. Nicholas signed it in pencil, indifferent to it all, "as others are when they scribble notes in pencil to a friend or make a list of dirty laundry." Varnish was coated over the signature.

After the empress was brought the text of the abdication message; after she had said, "No, I do not believe it, these are all rumours, newspaper slander"; after she realized that her pride, her majesty, her life was as murdered as her Friend—then at length she collapsed, and whispered in French: "*Abdique! Abdique!*"

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It was over. It took only a week for the revolution to obliterate the mortal remains of Grigory Rasputin. His body was exhumed on March 9 by members of an antiaircraft battery stationed in the imperial park at Tsarskoye Selo. The

task was overseen by an artillery officer, Klimov. Rasputin's face was found to have turned black, and an icon was found on his chest. It bore the signatures of Vyrubova, Alexandra, and her four daughters. The body was put into a packing case that had once held a piano and was driven in secret to the imperial stables in Petrograd. The next day it was loaded onto a truck and taken out of Petrograd on the Lesnoe Road.

Eight men were aboard the truck. Koupchinsky, a representative of the Duma provisional committee, which was emerging as the revolutionary government; V. Kolotsiev, a captain in the Sixteenth Lancer Regiment; and six student militiamen from the Petrograd Polytechnic. They signed an affidavit saying that they burned the body at the roadside near the forest of Pargolovo, "in the absolute absence of persons other than the signatories."

It was, perhaps, inevitable that even this final accounting for Rasputin was untrue. Koupchinsky later admitted that he had been ordered by Alexander Kerensky, soon to be head of the new provisional government, to rebury the corpse at an unmarked spot in the countryside. But the truck broke down on the Lesnoe Road. A crowd gathered. They forced open the packing case, looking for gold, and discovered the corpse. Koupchinsky decided to burn it on the spot. His men cut down trees for a pyre, doused the corpse in gasoline, and set fire to it by the roadside.

The ashes were lost to the wind and the mud.

D. T.

I did not know if this fantast had been overseen by the Maestro or the Kopf.

CHAPTER 29

# *After the Deluge*

The empress had wanted Alexander Kerensky hanged. But her life and those of Rasputin's circle were safe for the eight postrevolution months in which he and the moderate provisional government remained in power. True, there were arrests and investigations. Nicholas and Alexandra were held in the Alexander Palace. Kerensky visited them and found them far from monsters. The tsar he rated "a pleasant, somewhat awkward Colonel of the Guards, very ordinary except for a pair of wonderful blue eyes." Alexandra was made of sterner stuff, "a born empress, proud and unbending, fully conscious of her right to rule." Vyrubova was held in less pleasant surroundings—a cell in the Peter and Paul Fortress—and was subjected to the medical examination that found her a virgin.

Otherwise the family was untouched; these first revolutionaries had proudly abolished the death penalty. In August 1917 Kerensky transferred them from Tsarskoye Selo to Tobolsk, partly for their own protection, for the Petrograd region was becoming dangerous. The train that took them to Tyumen, on the track Rasputin had so often traveled, carried the flag of the Rising Sun and was marked "Japanese Red Cross Mission." Kerensky did not want the Romanovs freed by monarchists or murdered by extremists; rural Russia was becoming a place of lynch law and arson, "turning into a Texas," the newspaper *Rech* reported, "into a country of the Far West." As the riverboat *Rus* taking them from Tyumen to Tobolsk steamed past Pokrovskoye, the family came on deck to look at the village and Rasputin's unmistakable two-story house, fulfilling his prophecy that they would see his home before they died.

In October the Bolsheviks seized power in a coup d'état. The country slid into civil war. In April 1918, Nicholas and Alexandra were transferred from Tobolsk to Ekaterinburg. The rivers were still frozen, and they were taken in carts along Trakt 4, a journey Rasputin had driven many times. The road, Alexandra wrote, was "perfectly atrocious, frozen ground, mud, snow, water up to the horses' stomachs, fearfully shaken." They stopped for a noon rest in Pokrovskoye; Alexandra noted that they "stood long before our Friend's house, saw His family and friends looking out of the window." The children joined them later by steamer. In the summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks began to execute every Romanov they could lay their hands on. Grand Duke Mikhail, the tsar's brother, was shot in June and his body burned in a smelting furnace. Nicholas and Alexandra were murdered in Ekaterinburg, together with Alexis and their four daughters, Dr. Botkin, three servants, and Anastasia's pet spaniel, in July. The killers found that each girl had an amulet with Rasputin's picture on it. A day later Grand Duchess Elizabeth, Grand Duke Serge Mikhailovich, and the three sons of Grand Duke Constantine were beaten and thrown, still living, down a mine shaft at Alapayevsk; a peasant heard them singing, and when the bodies were recovered by Whites, the injured head of one of the boys was found to have been carefully bandaged with a handkerchief. In January 1919 four more grand dukes, including the liberal historian Nikolai Mikhailovich, were executed in the Peter and Paul Fortress. This confirmed his own prediction that he would die close to the tombs of his ancestors, who lay in the nearby cathedral.

Some Romanovs escaped. Dowager Empress Marie, together with her daughters Grand Duchesses Xenia and Olga, were evacuated to the West aboard a British battleship. The dowager empress returned to her native Denmark. Xenia settled in Britain. Olga died in a room above a barbershop in Toronto, Canada, in 1960. The tsar's first cousin Grand Duke Cyril escaped to France, where he declared himself "tsar of all the Russias" and held court in a Brittany village until his death in the American Hospital in Paris in 1938. Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich, Alexandra's despised Nikolasha, died in Antibes in the south of France in 1929 and was accorded full military honors at his funeral by the Allies.

Rasputin's actual and would-be assassins had mixed fortunes. Khvostov and Beletsky were shot in the Bolshevik Terror after sharing the same condemned cell. Purishkevich died of typhus while fighting for the Whites in southern Russia during the civil war. Felix Yusupov lost his colossal fortune when he fled into exile, but his coffers were replenished by a $375,000 defamation action against MGM for the Hollywood movie *Rasputin and the Empress;* he died in France in 1967. The Moika Palace became a trade union rest home. Grand Duke Dmitri was saved by his exile to Persia. In 1926 he married an

American heiress in Biarritz; he was a champagne salesman in Florida in the 1930s. He died at age fifty of tuberculosis in Davos, Switzerland, in 1941. Iliodor went to New York, became a Baptist, and worked for a time as a janitor in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Building on Madison Square. He died in the United States in 1952. Guseva, the instrument of his attempt, was released from a mental asylum after the revolution; her subsequent fate is unknown.

Rasputin's daughter Maria became a lion tamer, touring the United States before settling in Los Angeles. Anna Vyrubova fled Petrograd for Finland, where she died in 1964 at eighty. The tsar's onetime mistress Mathilde Kschessinskaya ran a ballet school in Paris for thirty years and lived into her nineties. Her St. Petersburg palace, which was used by the Bolsheviks as a headquarters, became a shrine to Lenin. The ballerina Tamara Karsavina, who had recognized Rasputin instantly by his eyes, married a British diplomat and died at age ninety-three in London. Prince Andronnikov was shot by the Reds. The tutor Pierre Gilliard became a professor at Lausanne University.

With poetic justice, the once-disgraced Bishop Hermogen replaced Varnava as bishop of Tobolsk but was arrested by the Bolsheviks in 1918. Although his flock raised 100,000 rubles for his release, a band of Red Guards flung him into the Tura River—not far from Rasputin's Pokrovskoye—and drowned him. Metropolitan Pitirim was replaced in Petrograd by Bishop Veniamin, who was himself shot by the Reds. Rasputin's old adversary Bishop Antony fled to Yugoslavia, where he presided over the Synod of the Russian Church Abroad.

Of the politicians, Boris Stürmer and Alexander Protopopov were shot by the Reds. Old Goremykin was caught by a mob in 1918 and strangled. Sukhomlinov fled to Finland in a sailing boat, showing more initiative than he had in office, and went to Berlin. His pretty wife left him for a Georgian officer, and both were shot in the Red Terror. Alexander Guchkov, Mikhail Rodzianko, and Vasily Shulgin, Alexandra's loathed "parliamentarists," fled into exile—although Shulgin returned to survive years in Soviet prison camps before dying at age ninety-eight.

In his last days—so Simanovich claimed—Rasputin wrote a final and extraordinary document. He titled it "The Spirit of Grigory Efimovich Rasputin-Novykh of the village of Pokrovskoye."

"I write and leave behind me this letter at St. Petersburg," it began.

> I feel that I shall leave life before January 1. I wish to make known to the Russian people, to Papa, to the Russian Mother, and to the Children, to the land of Russia, what they must understand. If I am killed by common assassins, and especially by my brothers the Russian peasants, you, Tsar of Russia, have nothing to fear, remain on your throne and govern, and you, Russian Tsar, will have nothing to fear for your children, they will reign for

hundreds of years in Russia. But if I am murdered by boyars, nobles, and if they shed my blood, their hands will remain soiled with my blood, for twenty-five years they will not wash their hands from my blood. They will leave Russia. Brothers will kill brothers, and they will kill each other and hate each other, and for twenty-five years there will be no nobles in the country. Tsar of the land of Russia, if you hear the sound of the bell which will tell you that Grigory has been killed, you must know this: if it was your relations who have wrought my death then no one of your family, that is to say none of your children or relations, will remain alive for more than two years. They will be killed by the Russian people. I go and I feel in me the divine command to tell the Russian Tsar how he must live if I have disappeared. You must reflect and act prudently. Think of your safety and tell your relations that I have paid for them with my blood. I shall be killed. I am no longer among the living. Pray, pray, be strong, think of your blessed family. Grigory.

Simanovich says that he passed the letter to the empress, pleading with her not to show it to the tsar. She later returned it to him. He showed a facsimile of the letter to the historian Sir Bernard Pares while living in exile in Paris in 1934. Pares ran the letter verbatim in his classic work, *The Fall of the Russian Monarchy*, which was published in 1939, mentioning how he had come to see it but adding, "I cannot vouch for anything further." The prophecy is pitilessly accurate—Dmitri was a Romanov, Yusupov a great noble, the future held Red Terror—and the letter appeared to confirm Rasputin's powers of precognition. Did he write it? It is measured and properly punctuated, the sentence structure and meaning are clear, it does not race off at tangents—in short, it bears none of the hallmarks of the meandering and staccato style of Rasputin's known scrawlings. "He spoke an almost incomprehensible Siberian dialect," Lili von Dehn remembered, "he could hardly read, he wrote like a child of four." At best, he dictated it.

The investigating commission that sat after the revolution found no hard evidence that Rasputin was a khlyst. It excused his visits to the bathhouse with women on the ground that mixed bathing was common in parts of Siberia. The "night orgies" with harlots and petitioners were established. The affair with the empress was not. The commission looked carefully into the rumors of "intimacies in higher circles, especially those circles through which he had risen to power." It drew a blank.

The run of negatives can be extended. He had no one killed. Those who tried to kill him escaped with their lives; so did those who succeeded. He was not venal. He could have made millions of rubles; he lived in a rented apartment in the capital, and his only real estate, the Pokrovskoye house, was not the lair of

a fortune hunter. In a society riddled with prejudice, he was not a bigot. He was not a German spy; he was not—so many nots, but this the most important—he was not a demon. At his worst he was spiteful, self-important, and dissolute. The spite came from the fear that enemies would destroy the power he so loved; the self-importance from the extraordinary journey from the medieval obscurity of the Siberian backwoods to the modern condition of superstardom; the dissolution—dependent on the observer's own moral stance—from inner depravity or love of life.

He was, at his best, humane and perceptive. The throngs who climbed the staircase on Gorokhovaya ulitsa benefited from innumerable acts of kindliness. When he could, he healed. He had immense charisma—"spiritual force," "magnetism," "hypnotic strength" they called it then—and few pretensions. At a time of warmongering he had the insight to realize its dangers. Most of his political preferences—peace, land for the peasants, rights for minorities, slogans successfully used if not practiced by Lenin—were the only realistic alternatives to revolution. The exception was autocracy. It made him; and those who wished to preserve it destroyed him.

They did so because they held that his excesses—the elevation of the corrupt to the highest positions in the state and the church, the drink, the women, the endless surf of scandal—tainted the throne and demoralized the nation. In truth the throne tainted itself. Concessions were torn from it, and slyly reversed. The tsar, his cousin Wilhelm said, was suited "to be a country gentleman growing turnips"; would that he had done so. Privately loyal and decent, in public he was vacillating, petty, treacherous to his best ministers, constant only in his jealous mistrust of men with character. He paid his lip service to Rasputin, the empress obliged it; after the murder his aide General Voykov remarked that "I did not once observe signs of sorrow in His Majesty, but rather gathered the impression that he experienced a sense of relief." It was true to type.

As to the empress—the scarlet woman in mauve, the wellspring of reaction, the hysteric with the will of iron—she and Rasputin locked characters. Without her he was no more than a fashionable starets. Without him she was a creature of the vapors, the weak heart, the hours in bed, the neurasthenia. With him she was the tigress—cancer as divine retribution for opponents, the knout as a political prescription. She needed him, she was devoted to him; it was a love story, without the sex, the empress and the shaman. It helped to prepare Russia for revolution and a further half century of the knout, one wielded by Lenin and his progeny with incomparably more venom than any tsarist.

But Russia, polite Russia, helped, too. It had taken the measure of Alexandra from the moment she arrived in St. Petersburg behind a coffin, proud, distant, and politically deranged. Like Rasputin, it knew that Nicholas "lacked

insides." Why did it allow them to ruin themselves, and the country? Because it lacked insides itself? Did it despise Rasputin for himself, or as an impertinent peasant? The fear of Siberian exile, or disgrace, does not wholly explain how the empress and Rasputin were able to defy grand dukes, bureaucrats, nobles, senior army officers, and the other props of the autocracy for so long. The latter knew the country was rotting long before it collapsed; perhaps the truth is that they felt themselves rotten, too, and knew their loyalty had crossed the line that demarcated it from cowardice.

"He has never been bad to me and he did not do anything wrong to other people," Simanovich wrote. "He could not be blamed for Nicholas being a weak tsar. He helped thousands of people with my assistance and thanks to his kindness saved many people from poverty, death, and persecution. . . . In my opinion, Rasputin was more honest than all the people who assembled in his apartment." And, he could have added, than many of those outside it.

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