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TRAPPED IN "BLACK RUSSIA"

Letters

JUNE-NOVEMBER 1915

BY RUTH PIERCE

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TRAPPED IN "BLACK RUSSIA"

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"BLACK RUSSIA"

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I

June 30,
1915.

Dearest Mother and Dad:—

There is no reason why this letter should ever reach you if you consider that it's war-time and that I am in Russia. Still, the censor may be sleeping when it comes along, or I may find a way to slip it over the border under his very nose. I always have a blind faith that my words will reach you somehow.

I am in Russia—without Peter. Don't be frightened, dearests. I came with Marie, and we will go back to Bucharest together in a week. Only a week in Russia. Oh, if the top of my head could be lifted off and let out everything I want to tell you.

We had no difficulty in crossing the frontier. The little Roumanian train took us over a river, and all at once we were out of the make-believe country where the stage always seems set for *opéra-bouffe* There were no more pretty Tziganes, with [Pg 2] disheveled hair and dirty, bare breasts, to offer you baskets of roses and white lilies. There were no Turks in red fezes squatting in the dust, hunting among their rags for fleas, and there were no more slender peasants in tight white-wool trousers and beautiful embroidered shirts. Everything, just by crossing a river, had grown more serious and sober-colored and several sizes larger. Pale-blue uniforms gave place to dingy olive-brown ones.

A porter took care of our luggage. He was exactly what I expected. He wore a white smock with red and blue embroidery at the neck and wrists. His reddish beard was long and Tolstoyan. We followed him into the big, empty railway station, and there a soldier took away our passports and we were left waiting in the *douane*, behind locked and guarded doors, together with a crowd of bewildered Jews and Roumanians.

"It isn't much like the Roumanian frontier, is it?—where the dreamy-eyed official visés your passport without looking at it—he's so busy looking at you," Marie observed.

"No," I replied. "This is Russia. I am in Russia," kept going through my head, and I [Pg 3] felt like Alice in Wonderland, trying to adjust myself to new perspectives.

"I hate getting back here," Marie went on. "It was too good to be in a country, if only for a little while, where they took things easily. If I'd stayed a little longer, I believe I could have laughed myself and felt in a personal relationship toward life again."

That's what I was glad to get away from. You get too personal if you stay in Roumania long. Roumania gets to mean Bucharest, and Bucharest the universe. As I sat waiting in the *douane*, I felt like puffing out and growing to make room for Russia inside me.

We waited hours.

"Can't you hurry our passports?" Marie asked an official. "We want to leave on this train."

The official raised his shoulders helplessly.

"*Seichas*," he replied.

"What does that mean?"

"Presently—immediately—never," Marie replied in exasperation.

The train we were to have taken for Kiev left without us, on tracks twice as wide as those of the Roumanian toy railroad. Only a courier with a diplomatic pouch got on. [Pg 4]

"It's like that here, always," Marie said. "No system, no economy of time, or anything else." Suddenly she began to laugh. "Everything gets on my nerves as soon as I get into Russia."

We left late in the afternoon. The air in our compartment was hot and stale. When we opened the window, the wind blew in on our faces in parching gusts. But it was grateful after the smells of cabbage, soup, tobacco, and dirty Jews that we had been breathing for five hours in the *douane*.

We sat by the window, cracking dried sunflower seeds, and looking out at the steppes of Little Russia. The evening shadows were already lying in the hollows of the fields of ripening wheat, but the late sun still reddened the crests and the column of smoke from our engine. Frightened larks rose from the tall grain. We passed patches of dark woods, scattered thatched huts. Along a road came a man and a woman in peasant dress. The train seemed to slow up on purpose to let us have a glimpse of them through a thin, fine powder of golden dust, in their dark homespuns, with patches of red embroidery on the white sleeves and necks of their blouses. They [Pg 5] carried a green box between them. Once we passed through a wood of pale-green birches with thin silver stems. It was a relief to see lines going up and down after the wide, level lines of the steppes.

And then it grew dark. A sense of sadness filled me, and I was glad when the conductor lighted the lamp and made up my berth. We lay down as we were, all dressed, and the train rushing and swinging along deadened my mind and feelings.

I was wakened by the conductor's twitching the covering back from the light. Our carriage had broken down and was going to be side-tracked.

Then began the most restless night I ever spent. We bumped along in a third-class carriage, and descended to wait for an hour or more on the platform of some little crossroad station. We sat on our bags till our spines cracked with fatigue. The men smoked one cigarette after another. As far as I could see stretched dark fields lighted dimly by thick stars, with a wind blowing out of the darkness into our faces. No one spoke. Down the tracks a round white headlight grew bigger and bigger. The noise of [Pg 6] the approaching train filled the night. We scrambled into another third-class carriage and sat on some more hard, narrow seats for an hour or so.

At last the dawn came—a square of gray light through the train window. Almost every one had fallen asleep. How pallid and ugly they looked with their mouths open and their heads lolling forward!

At ten we changed for the last time before Kiev. The carriage was not divided up into compartments, but was open, with rows of seats and an aisle down the center, like our trains in America,—only there was an upper story of seats, too. I stretched out and went to sleep. When I woke the carriage was filled. Marie and I occupied one seat together.

Opposite us sat a fat, red-nosed man, with a fur cap, though it was summer. Between his legs was a huge, bulky bag. When the train stopped, he put a pinch of tea in his little blue enameled teapot, which he filled at the hot-water tank that is at every Russian station just for that purpose. He pulled out of his bag numberless newspaper packages and spread them out on the newspaper across his knees—big fat sausages [Pg 7] and thin fried ones, a chunk of ham, a boiled chicken, dried pressed meat, a lump of melting butter, some huge cucumber pickles, and cheese. With a murderous-looking knife he cut thick slices from a big round loaf of bread that he held against his breast. He sweetened his tea with some sugar from another package, and sliced a lemon into it. When he had finished eating, he carefully rolled up the food again and put it away, and settled back in his chair. With great deliberation he took out of his vest pocket a little black box with bright flowers painted on the lid. He fingered it lovingly for a moment, then he took a pinch of snuff, closing his eyes in ecstasy and inhaling deeply. He did this three times and blew his nose vigorously. Then he put the box away, brushing off the gray grains of powder that had fallen down his vest front. All day long, every time the train stopped, he refilled his little blue enameled teapot and repeated the ceremony, even to the last grain of snuff.

Across the aisle sat two priests, unshaven and unshorn, in wide black hats, their long, greasy black hair falling over the shoulders of their dirty gray gowns. They [Pg 8] spent the day in prayer and eating and drinking. They were evidently bound for Kiev on a holy pilgrimage to the Lavra.

In the seat above the old man who took snuff lay a young woman, propped on her elbow. Every time I looked at her she was laughing, pressing a pomegranate seed

between her lips. Her hands were very thin and white. Her face was long and thin and framed by short, clipped hair. Every now and then a young officer came up to her and took her hand, and asked if she wanted anything. She answered him indifferently, but when he went back to his seat, her eyes followed him and rested on him with the long, narrow look of a watchful cat.

At noon and night we stopped at railway stations for our meals. After Bulgaria and Roumania it was bewildering to see the counters laden with hot and cold meats and vegetables and appetizing *zakouskas*, and thick *ztchee* soup, and steaming samovars for tea. Through the open windows came refreshing puffs of wind. At the restaurant tables sat officers, rich Jews, and traveling business men—nothing much in it all to suggest war. Always, on the station walls were bright-colored portraits, in heavy gilt frames, of the Czar and Czarina and the royal family. And always in the corners of [Pg 9] the room were ikons with candles lighted before them at night. The train always started before people had finished eating. At supper, one of the priests almost got left and had to run for it, a piece of meat-pie in one hand, the other holding up his flapping gray gown.

After sunset, more and more officers and soldiers about. At stations, orderlies elbowing their way through the crowd to secure seats for their officers; officers shouting to their orderlies; officers alone or with their families, arriving with valises and bundles and pillows—enough equipment to meet any eventuality.

Another night to get through somehow, sitting bolt upright in a car thick with tobacco smoke and smelling of stale food and soldiers' boots.

Once we stopped for an hour out in the fields. Marie and I opened our window and stuck our heads out of doors to breathe the cool air. Extra cars had been put on during the day, and we could see the long curve of the train behind us, with the red squares of the lighted windows. There was a movement of troops, and soldiers occupied every inch of space. We could hear them singing soldier songs in parts, [Pg 10] with pronounced rhythm and unutterably sad cadences. Some one played their accompaniment on a *balalaika*. Back and forth under our train window a woman paced restlessly. Never shall I forget the soldiers' singing to the *balalaika*, and the woman with her white face in the darkness, and the millions of stars so very far away.

The second morning, about eight, we pulled into Kiev. Our train was so long that we had some distance to walk before reaching the station. As we approached, I saw a crowd of people being driven into baggage cars. I was so tired and confused by the journey that I didn't distinguish who they were at first. When I got close to them, I saw that they were thin-faced Jews in clothes too big for them. The men looked about them with quick, furtive movements, a bewildered, frightened look in their dark eyes. The women held their shawls over their faces, and pressed against their skirts were little children. A stale, dirty smell came from them all. I overcame my disgust and looked more closely. How white the faces were, with purple sockets for the eyes, and dried, cracked lips! No one seemed to have any personality. One pallid face was like [Pg 11] another under the stamp of suffering. Gendarmes with whips kept them on the move, and struck the leader when there was any mix-up that halted the procession for a moment. The Jews seemed to shrink into themselves under the lash, sinking their heads between their thin, narrow shoulders, then pressed forward again with frantic haste.

I heard the clanking of iron, and into a separate baggage car I noticed the gendarmes were driving a group linked together with heavy iron chains. I was horrified! I had the persistent impression of passing through an experience already known—"Where have I seen this before?" went over and over in my mind, and I felt a dread that seemed the forewarning of some personal danger to myself. I was so very near such terrible and hopeless suffering. What kept me from stepping into that stream of whip-driven, helpless people?

"Who are they?" I asked Marie.

"They are Galician Jews whom the Government is transporting into Siberia."

"But why?"

"Because the Russians don't trust Jews. Whole villages and towns in Galicia are emptied and taken to Siberia by *étapes*—part of the way by marches, part in baggage [Pg 12] cars."

"In this heat?" I exclaimed. "But hundreds must die!"

"Not hundreds—thousands," Marie replied.

"Does it do any good?"

"No. But this present Government is very reactionary and the persecution of the Jews is part of its programme. You know, it is always under the reactionary Government, which is pro-German, that the pogroms take place."

We had got into a droshky and were driving through city streets. Women from the country were bringing in milk. People seemed to be walking about freely enough.

The Jews with their bowed necks seemed far away—as though, after all, I had read about them in a book. Could I have elbowed them and smelt them only a few minutes ago?

I was in Russia. How sweet the morning air was! We were climbing a cobble-stoned hill. Institutska Oulitza. Here we are! And we stopped at the Tchedesky Pension.

Good-bye for now. Armfuls of love from

RUTH.

July 5, 1915. [Pg 13]

Darlingest Mother and Dad:—

We have been in Kiev several days. Our passports have been handed in to the police station to be viséed and put in order for our return trip to Bucharest. They say a human being in Russia is made of body and passport.

Kiev is full of color. It is framed in green trees that hide the ugliness of modern buildings and seem to lift the gold and silver domes of the churches up into the air. And how many churches there are! Kiev is in truth a holy city. Late afternoon, when the sun shines through the dust of the day and envelops the city in golden powder; when the gold and silver domes of the churches float up over the tree-tops like unsubstantial, gleaming bubbles, and the bells fill the air with lovely, mellow sounds,—then I can truly say I have felt more deeply religious than ever before in my life. Yet, suddenly, I see the woman who climbs Institutska Oulitza every evening on her knees. She is dressed in black, and deeply veiled, and every evening she climbs the hill on her knees. At first I thought she was a cripple, but, on arriving at the top of the hill, she rose to her feet and walked away.

"What is she doing?" I asked Marie. [Pg 14]

"Oh, a penance, probably, that the Church has imposed on her."

And then the churches and their domes grow almost hateful to me. I think of the Russian peasants with their foreheads in the dust, and the greasy, long-haired priests I see on the streets.

Yet I don't know—perhaps the priests don't really matter. After all, there must be something in the people's hearts—a belief—an idealism—a faith in God that keeps them loving Russia, dreaming for her, and able to dream again after they've seen their dreams trampled on. No, the priests and their autocracy don't matter. The people believe, and that's the important thing.

We went out yesterday afternoon to the Lavra—the stronghold of Black Russia. It is a monastery on the edge of the town, overlooking the Dnieper and flanked with battlemented walls to withstand the attacks of the infidels in olden times. From all over Russia and the Balkans pilgrims go there to visit the catacombs, where many church saints are buried, their bodies miraculously preserved under red and gold clothes—so the priests say.

The road leading to it passed the barracks, where we saw young recruits drilling. [Pg 15] They were learning to walk, and their arms swung stiffly and self-consciously, and their legs bent at the knees and straightened again like the wooden legs of mechanical toys. As they marched, they sang wonderful Russian soldier songs. They appeared to be about twenty-three or twenty-four, as though they had got their growth, and were tall and broad-shouldered—not at all like the batch of Austrian prisoners we passed a few minutes later, and who looked like pathetic, bewildered children, beardless for the most part, and in uniforms too large for them. They shuffled along in a cloud of gray dust under a metallic sun. Some were slightly wounded in the head or arm, and were supported by their comrades. As I passed, I encountered certain eyes—frank, gray eyes that reminded me of Morris. The long, white, dusty road became tragic to me, with the prisoners in their worn blue uniforms, and those who were about to die, singing in the distance.

We met bullock-carts crawling into town, coming from distant villages, with fresh vegetables for the markets. The peasants walked by the oxen, prodding them with [Pg 16] short sticks. There seem to be so many men here of military age, yet not in the army. It isn't like other countries, where every one but the Jews is in uniform. Russia has so many men. They say five million more could easily be raised if they had the officers and ammunition.

We reached a high plaster wall, with little booths built under its shadows, where pilgrims bought souvenirs of the Lavra—gaudy ikons, colored handkerchiefs and shawls, beads and baskets.

A group of pilgrims entered the gate in front of us, all from the same village, evidently, for the women's dresses resembled each other's in cut and embroidery, and a few of the younger women's were even dyed the same color, as often happens in wool of the same shearing. In spite of the heat, the men wore sheepskin coats and fur caps, and the women's skirts were thick with petticoats. Some of the women led children by the hand; others carried babies in their arms, poor little mites, with faces covered with sores, and eyes red and blinking as though they were going blind. They all bent and kissed the hand of the priest who sold candles under the covered arched gateway, and then they passed into the open square surrounded by the monastery [Pg 17] walls. There was a sort of garden here; all the grass worn off by the countless pilgrims who had visited the shrine, but with trees in whose shade the peasants rested when their sins had been forgiven. Some lay curled up on the ground, fast asleep; others sat with their legs spread comfortably apart, eating bread and meat; and others drank thirstily from the well, or let the water run over their tired feet.

Facing us was the church with its gold domes blindingly bright against the blue sky. We followed the pilgrims and entered the chapel, where everything suddenly grew hushed and dark, with a strange odor—a mixture of thick, sweet incense and melting candle grease, and smelly, perspiring peasants.

The pilgrims bought candles and lighted them, and knelt on the flagging before the altar. Behind an elaborate railing the lustrous jewels and gold of the vessels and crucifixes glowed richly in the dim light. Priests in gorgeous vestments were going through some church ceremony. Their deep chanting filled the church. They knelt and rose, and finally, by a mechanical contrivance, something was raised in an inner [Pg 18] shrine, and a priest took off a cloth of crimson and gold, and uncovered a wonderful gold cup encrusted with jewels. I leaned against a pillar, watching the kneeling peasants, and over their bent backs the mystery and richness of the altar glowing with jewels and only half disclosed by the tiny pointed candle flames flickering in the darkness. The Lavra is one of the two richest monasteries in Russia. Its wealth is fathomless. It has lent emperors treasure with which to fight the infidels, and on returning from holy wars the emperors have brought it back to the church increased a hundred fold by royal gifts of jewels and loot.

We went out into the blinding sunlight again, and down a long flight of cloister steps to the catacombs.

A priest was selling bottles of a white liquid.

"What is it?" Marie asked.

"Holy water," the priest replied. "It is not for your kind." But he took the kopecks of an old peasant woman. "Rub it on your joints and it will cure their stiffness," he said to her, with a cynical smile.

Three fat priests sat at the entrance of the catacombs, selling different-sized candles. [Pg 19] The very poor peasants, who came barefooted, could only afford the very thin tapers, while the rich villagers, with heavy, well-made boots and much embroidery on their clothes, bought candles as thick as a man's thumb, and sometimes two or three at a time, which they held lighted between their fingers.

A short, fat priest, his face dripping with perspiration, led us through the catacombs. He would wipe the sweat out of his eyes with the sleeve of his dirty gown, and point to the saints' tombs with the big iron key he carried. I was pressed close to him by the crowd of peasants behind. The smell of his greasy body and the powder of dandruff from his long hair on the shoulders of his gown, the malicious way he looked at me as though to say, "You and I know that what I'm saying is rot, but it must be said to them"—it was indescribably disgusting.

We wound through narrow, dungeon-like passages with the cold, damp smell of an unused cellar. Now and then, through barred windows in the stone walls, I caught glimpses of tall forms lying in a row, covered with dingy red and gold cloths.

"Here lie nine brothers who lived for twenty years in this cell. Their only food was [Pg 20] bread and water three times a week. As you see, they had no room to stand upright in, and were always pressed close to each other."

The peasants peered through the bars wonderingly.

We passed a body stretched out on a stone ledge.

"This holy saint cured the blind," the priest continued in a sing-song voice. "He lived in a cell too small to lie down in. For twenty-two years he never opened his mouth. His body, like the bodies of all the holy saints in these catacombs, is preserved without a sign of decay under this cloth." A peasant woman lifted her little boy up to kiss the edge of the dirty red pall. The pale flame of her candle flickered and the melted wax dripped on to the cloth. The woman wiped it off quickly, and glanced in a frightened way at the priest. But he turned away indifferently and went on.

We saw the bust of a man buried to his arm-pits in the floor. I would have stumbled

over him, but the priest caught my arm.

"This is a holy saint, who, for twenty-five years, stood as you see him, buried in the earth to above his waist. He never spoke and only ate bread and water twice a week." [Pg 21]

I looked at the peasants. Their faces were scared and white. A few hung back with a morbid curiosity.

"Come, come," the priest called impatiently. "Keep together. Some get lost here and never get out again."

I had heard of three pretty peasant girls who had mysteriously disappeared in the catacombs.

"Ouf!" The priest unlocked an iron door and we came squinting out into the daylight again. He held the door open and mopped his face as we filed past him, snuffing our candles. The pilgrims kept theirs.

Outside, some of the peasants clustered about the priest and asked him questions. As I glanced back over my shoulder, I saw the circle of round, inquiring faces with their look of unbounded confidence.

We went around back of the monastery to an open plateau overlooking the Dnieper. The river curved like a blue ribbon, and we could see the three pontoon bridges for "military reasons." On the low bank opposite were the soldiers' white tents laid out in regular squares. A ferry-boat was carrying some soldiers across the river. The sun flashed on the sentries' bayonets along the bank. [Pg 22]

I heard the whine of a hand-organ. An armless beggar was turning the crank of an organ with his bare feet. The plateau was fairly alive with beggars, hopping about in the dust like fleas. Some were armless; others legless. They swung along at our heels on long, muscular arms, with leather on the palms of their hands, or dragged distorted, paralyzed bodies that tried to stand upright by our sides.

In the white, hot sunlight squatted an old man with a white, pointed beard so long that it lay out on the dust in front of him. In his arms he held a book done up in red cloth. He was blind. If you put a coin in a tin cup he wore round his neck, he would undo his book and open it, and by divine inspiration read the holy words of the page in front of him.

A row of seven blind women lined the exit. They began to whine as we approached, and stretched out their hands gropingly. The eyes of one woman had completely disappeared as though they had been knotted up and pulled back into her head. Another's bulged like a dead fish's, with that dull, bluish look in them. Another's lids were closed and crusted with sores, flies continuously creeping over them, but apparently she was indifferent. The seven blind women sat in rags and filth. Shall I ever forget them in the burning sunlight, with their terrible eyes and greedy fingers and the whine of their voices merging into the tune of the hand-organ? [Pg 23]

When we left the monastery, a group of wounded soldiers were just entering. With them was a woman in a man's uniform. Her hair was curly and short, and her chin pointed. Her feet looked ridiculously small in the heavy, high, soldier's boots, and in spite of a strut her knees knocked together in an unmistakably feminine manner. But the men treated her quite as one of themselves. One soldier, who had had his leg cut off up to the thigh, supported himself by her shoulder. I have seen several women soldiers in Kiev, and they say there are many in the Russian army.

It is strange, seeing these things without Peter. I expect to go back to Bucharest with Marie and Janchu within a week. There Peter will meet us. I wish he were here now. [Pg 24]

So much love, my dearests, every day and every night from

RUTH.

July 20,
1915.

Darlingest Mother and Dad:—

Before dawn this morning I was wakened by a shuffling noise from the street. It was not soldiers marching. There was no rhythm to it. Marie and I went to the window and looked out.

Behind the dark points of the poplars, in the convent garden across the street, the sky was growing light. The birds were beginning to sing. The air was sweet and cool after the night. And down the hill was passing a stream of people, guarded on either side by soldiers with bayonets. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes to look more closely, for there was something ominous in the snail's pace of the procession.

They were Jews, waxen-faced, their thin bodies bent with fatigue. Some had taken

their shoes off, and limped along barefooted over the cobble-stones. Others would have fallen if their comrades had not held them up. Once or twice a man lurched out [Pg 25] of the procession as though he was drunk or had suddenly gone blind, and a soldier cuffed him back into line again. Some of the women carried babies wrapped in their shawls. There were older children dragging at the women's skirts. The men carried bundles knotted up in their clothes. They stumbled and pitched along, as if they had no control over their skinny bodies; as if after another step they would all suddenly collapse and fall down on their faces like a crowd of scarecrows with a strong wind behind them. Some had their eyes closed; others stared ahead with their faces like dirty gray masks, with huge bony noses and sunken eyes. The procession showed no sign of coming to an end. It crawled on and on, and a stench rose from it that poisoned the morning air. The sound of the shuffling feet seemed to fill the universe.

"Where are they going?"—I whispered to Marie.

"To the Detention Camp here. They come from Galicia, and Kiev is one of the stopping-places on their way to Siberia."

"Do they walk all the way here?"

"Usually. Let's shut the window and keep out the smell."

I went back to bed. I felt so safe, with Janchu sleeping in his crib in the corner. The [Pg 26] creeping, submissive procession seemed a dream. It was incredible to think of only the wall of a house separating our security from those hundreds of fainting, persecuted Jews!

We are still here—waiting for our passports to be returned. Of course no mail from you has been forwarded to me here, as Peter is hourly expecting me back. I am cut off from all I love most in the world. The Russian frontier takes on a new significance once you're inside it. I hope you don't forget me. Sometimes you seem millions of miles away—and then I look in my heart and find you there. I love you.

RUTH.

July 25,
1915.

The Tchedesky Pension is full of Poles—refugees from Poland and the wooded Russian provinces.

Pan Tchedesky himself was formerly an enormously wealthy landowner near Kiev. He loves to tell how he drove through town behind six white horses. Gambling ruined him, and to pay his debts he sold one acre after another to the Jews, who cut down [Pg 27] the timber and ruined the land. Of course, where there are no trees the rainfall is scarce. The crops dried up, and finally Pan Tchedesky and his wife and children were forced into the city. There remained enough of his former property to start a *pension*. The rooms are full of the remains of his splendor—heavy gilt mirrors, thick, flowered carpets, a Louis XVI set in the drawing-room, upholstered in faded blue brocade.

Pan Tchedesky is a memorial of his own life; a relic suggesting an earlier opulence. He is big-framed, but his flesh is shrunken, as though the wind of conceit were oozing out of him day by day. His cheeks and stomach hang flabbily. His blond mustache is getting thin and discloses his full, sensual lips. His hands are thick and soft, always stained with nicotine. He lives in constant terror of his wife, and all the pockets of his coats are burned full of holes from his hiding his cigarettes in them when he thinks he hears his wife coming. I have never seen her, but she is the invisible force that keeps the *pension* running, and controls her husband by her knowledge of his past failures.

"My wife is an executive woman—very executive," he says, shaking his head [Pg 28] sorrowfully.

The bills are made out by her. Occasionally he intercepts the maid carrying her back the money, and extracts enough to pay a small per cent of his I O U's, which allows him to continue gambling with his guests. His moist, soft fingers tremble as he holds the cards, and he infuriates every one by his erratic bidding.

A guest slams his hand down on the table and calls Tchedesky a name.

Tchedesky's whitish, livid cheeks shake, and his lips open uncertainly. But he must be discreet. He does not dare offend his guests, for he wants to play with them again, and he must not let his wife know that he is gambling. So he begs pardon in a whisper.

There is a pretty maid in the *pension* called Antosha. She has light, frowzy hair, and a round, full figure. The other maids are jealous of her. When she dresses up to wait on the table at dinner at three o'clock, she wears a cheap pink silk waist and long gilt earrings, and two or three little rings with blue and red stones. Her wages are fifteen roubles a month. One day I saw Tchedesky kissing her on the neck. Very white and [Pg 29]

shaken, he came to me afterwards and begged me to say nothing about it to any one.

He has terrible scenes with his wife, who is hysterical and grows rigid. He stays up with her all night and uses it as an excuse to get a morphine injection for his own nervousness next day. He is quite courteous and frankly loves women and food and money. I feel as though, if I poked my finger into him, he would burst like a rotten potato.

There is the Morowski family from near Cracow. Pan Morowski's brother is in the Austrian Chamber of Deputies, but he and his family are Russian subjects. They have been here in Kiev for some months now. For seven days he and his eldest daughter remained while the Russians and Austrians fought for their farm. The rest of the family had been sent into Kiev, but these two had hoped that by staying they might preserve their farm from being plundered and burned. The Austrians had sacked their neighbors' houses. The Austrian officers' wives had followed in the wake of the army and had taken the linen from the closets, and the ball-gowns, and the silver—even the pictures off the walls.

Lovely weather it was. The girl said you would hardly realize there was war, [Pg 30] sometimes. The gardener would go out and straighten the trampled flowers. The carts of wounded would pass regularly, stopping occasionally for water or tea. They would say the fighting had passed on. And then, suddenly, the crack and boom would approach again, shaking the house walls—the little uncurling puffs of smoke against the blue sky—the gray-blue uniformed Austrians hurrying past in retreat. No carts of wounded any more. There was too much hurry to bother about the wounded.

Russians in possession again, and Russian instead of Austrian officers quartered at their house. How much more polite the Russians were—so much more gallant and kind-hearted! They didn't treat you as though you were a servant—"Do this. Do that." They brought some of their wounded to the farm, and Miss Morowski helped nurse them.

But at last the father and daughter had been obliged to leave with the Russians. How furious the Russians had been—so depressed and discouraged when the order came to retreat. There had been no fighting round there for several days, and suddenly the [Pg 31] news came that the whole army was retreating. Why? They said there was no ammunition. So the father and daughter left their property in the care of the gardener and his wife, who were too old to move. How terrible it had been to abandon this ground that so many Russians had died to win! No ammunition. Waste—mismanagement—graft.

Those in Petrograd should think more of their country and less of their own pockets. The unquestioning courage of the simple Russian soldiers! Every one ready to die—and yet nothing to back them up. It was disheartening.

"The Russians gave us a place in a cart, and we left in utter confusion—soldiers, motor-cars, cattle, wounded, with the Austrian cannon rumbling behind us."

"Were you frightened?" I asked. We were speaking French together.

"Not so frightened as sad. I was leaving my home. All my life I had spent there excepting for a few weeks in the winter when mother used to take us to Cracow for the balls. I hated to leave my beautiful party dresses hanging up in the closets. I know some Austrian woman will wear them. And I can't bear to think of our house [Pg 32] burned! We have had such jolly times there, hunting and riding and visiting the neighbors. You don't know life on a Polish estate, do you? I can tell you there is nothing so charming in the world."

Pan Morowski is a handsome, full-blooded man, and plays bridge all day either in the *pension* drawing-room or at the club.

His wife is small and nervous, and you can see that her main object in life is to marry off her daughters well. She has three daughters, pretty, fresh girls, who are fond of reading, and perfectly willing to read only what their brothers permit them. Every day I run across one or two of them in the circulating library in the town, and always try to get them to take out a forbidden book. They are convinced that Bourget has sounded the depths of feminine psychology. "Isn't it mean!" they cry. "If only our brothers would let us read more of his wonderful books!"

Sometimes, in the evening, we sit out on the balcony, and the Morowski boys come in to talk to us.

"Aren't you ashamed to treat your sisters in this Oriental way?" I ask.

"The less they know till after they've married, the better for them. A young girl [Pg 33] should be pure in every thought." And then they begin to make love to us.

There are two brothers who have taken refuge in the Tchedesky *pension*, with a collection of servants. Their house was burned under their eyes, and their property is now in the Austrians' hands. The eldest brother, Count S——, is very handsome and

aristocratic, with a cherished gray mustache carefully twisted upward, and soft, brown eyes, which he uses with advantage. Evidently the Romantic poets influenced his youth, and he has found the melancholy Byronic traditions the most effective for his ends, since he continues the attitude.

"He is very sad," his brother whispers a dozen times a day. "Of course his experiences these past months have been frightful for one of his nature. I am not so sensitive. But *he* has always been this way. Sometimes I'm afraid. Our other brother died insane."

Count S—— affects to believe that the Germans can do anything.

"They are devils! What can we do against them?" he cries at dinner, combing his mustache with the little tortoise-shell comb he carries in his vest. [Pg 34]

He never forgets his soda tablets after eating.

His younger brother is round and red-faced, with twinkly blue eyes. He limps, and follows his elder brother round like a faithful dog. The slightest thing amuses him. Indeed, he laughs at nothing at all. He kept the books on his brother's estates and he brought them with him in his flight. They are his pride and joy. Sometimes he brings them into the drawing-room after supper, with photographs of the property. There are pictures of boar hunts, and huntsmen on horseback, with wolf-hounds in the snow, and the tenants merry-making and the house and different sections of the property, and the horses and dogs and cattle. I look at them night after night. They love to live over again their life in telling me about it.

Among the servants with the S—— brothers is an old woman, a kindly, slack one, who rarely goes out, but observes the passing life from her windows. She wears a short, loose wrapper and petticoat, and scuffs about in list slippers.

Then there is a young girl with shy eyes and quiet, womanlike actions. We often see her peeking through a crack in the door when Janchu is naughty. [Pg 35]

And then there is Sigmund, a sly, goody-goody child of six or seven, whom the old woman treats like a son, and whom the eldest S—— brother has adopted as his heir. He plays with Janchu. The brothers adore him and take him to Koupietsky Park, and watch him when he plays in the *pension* garden. We have heard that he is Count S ——'s illegitimate child, and that the old woman is his mother. It seems quite probable when you think of the life on a big Polish estate—the loneliness, etc. These three people live together in one room. The samovar is always boiling and some one is always drinking tea there. The brothers share an adjoining room, but they are usually with those in there, who constitute all that remains of their former habits.

Pan A—— lives in the *pension*, too. I am told that he is typical of a certain kind of Pole. He is a turfman, with carefully brushed side-whiskers dyed coal-black, and hawk-like eyes. He wears check suits, and cravats with a little diamond horse-pin. His legs are bowed like a jockey's. He was the overseer of a big Polish estate and has made a fortune by cards and horses. His stable is famous. He has raced from Petrograd to London. Now, of course, his horses have been requisitioned, and he lives by his cards. Cards are a serious business to him. He will not play in a room where he is apt to be interrupted. Occasionally, his wife, a hard-faced woman with tight lips, comes to the *pension*, between the visits she makes to friends in the country. Pan A—— pays no attention to her except to treat her with an exaggerated politeness at table; and she, on her side, concentrates on the young men in the *pension*. After dinner he always hands her a cigarette first, out of his massive gold case, encrusted with arms and monograms and jewels. [Pg 36]

"It's curious, is it not?" he says, handing me the case. "My friends have put on their arms and monograms and mounted the jewels as souvenirs."

Generally, he goes to the Café François with a tall blonde woman, the wife of an Austrian. Her husband and son are fighting in the Austrian army, but she came to Kiev with the Russian General who occupied her town. Now her protector is at the front, and she goes about with A——.

A—— is cynical. Women and horses and cards make up his life. In a conversation he feels his audience as if it were a new horse he is learning to ride. He goes as near the danger line as he dares. He has no breeding, and spends his money extravagantly. [Pg 37]

K——, the last comer at the *pension*, is a journalist. He has no race or polish, and the rest rather despise him for having none of their landed traditions. He is lean and brown, with a razor-like jaw and a twisted, sardonic expression to his lips. His face is cruel. At Warsaw, where he was working, he was thrown into prison time after time on account of the radical, revolutionary character of his articles. He is well known for the strong, intellectual quality of his work. The reactionaries fear him. The slipshod Russian way of handling things gets on his nerves. His eyes get like steel when he talks about it. Russia's corruption and the German advance—ammunition willfully miscarried—guns sent to the front without ammunition, and ammunition sent that

doesn't fit; and the soldiers obliged to fight with their naked fists!

He has sent me Chamberlin's "Genesis of the Fourteenth Century." We discuss it after dinner. It's interesting, though Chamberlin sets forth an idea he tries to prove at all costs. Read it, if you haven't already. [Pg 38]

How terribly I miss you. Why do I write of Pan Tchedesky and the Morowskis when I only want to be telling you how I love you and miss you? But it is almost unbearable to write you a love-letter. So many miles are between us and so many months still separate us. Over a year more to be lived through. No. I must keep to decaying Polish gentlemen and exiled noblemen and trust you to know that every word in this letter is a love-word to you, telling you I hold you so close to me that you are one with me in everything I think or do.

July 27,
1915.

Darlingest Mother and Dad:—

It is very hot, and food is unappetizing. The drinking-water must be boiled, and inevitably we drink it lukewarm. It never has time to cool. There is fruit sold on the street, but we are warned against it on account of cholera. There is already cholera and typhus reported in the city. So we thick vegetable soup with sour cream, fried bread with chopped meat inside, cheese noodles with sour cream, etc., all Polish cooking. And we drink *kvass*. [Pg 39]

"What do you think of Bulgaria, now?" Count S—— asks me gloomily, after dinner.

"I still think she will go with Russia," I reply. "In every Bulgarian house I've ever been in there is the picture of the Czar liberator. A Bulgarian regards a Russian as of his own blood. Bulgaria gave Russia her alphabet, and the languages are much the same: only the Russian is richer in words and expressions. Why, there is a Bulgarian, General Dimitrief, holding a high command in the Russian army. When I left Bulgaria there was no talk of her going with Germany. 'We will never go with Germany,' I've heard over and over."

"But there is a strong German party?"

"Yes, and they're being paid well. If England and the Entente only took the trouble to understand the Balkans. Germany has sent her ablest men to Sofia with unlimited credit. The English representatives offend by their snobbery."

"Do you think they'll go in at all?" S—— persists.

"Probably they'll be forced in, in the end. But the people don't want to abandon their neutrality. They're making money. They're recouping after the Balkan wars. Bulgaria has had nothing but wars and crises for the last five years." [Pg 40]

"They say there are already German officers in the Bulgarian army."

"I don't believe it's so. The Bulgarians are very independent. If they went in I think they would command their own army."

"But this war is not conducted along Balkan war lines," K—— said amusedly.

"No," I agreed. "You know more about the situation now than I do. I can't even read a newspaper. All I know is the spirit of Bulgaria when I left."

"Isn't Bulgaria's Government autocratic enough to declare war without consulting the people?" K—— continued.

"Perhaps—unfortunately. The Bulgarians say, 'We have a wonderful constitution, if the Czar would only use it.'"

"The papers to-day already speak of Bulgaria's treason and ingratitude," K—— observed.

I was angry. "In Bulgaria, some think Russia doesn't want them to go in on the Entente side. They think Russia wants to make a Russian lake out of the Black Sea, and a Russian province out of Bulgaria. They say Russia is the obstacle to their having joined the Entente months ago." [Pg 41]

"She will go with Germany," Count S—— insisted fatalistically. "Everything is going Germany's way."

"No—no—no!" I cried.

"Of course she will go where she sees her advantage," said K——.

"All she wants is to fight for Macedonia before the close of the war. Certainly, it isn't too much to ask if she allows the English and Russians to cross her territory to get at Turkey. The war will be shortened by months if she goes in with the Entente, and Turkey in Europe will be finished."

I know you'll laugh, Dad, and think my pretentions to a political opinion presumptuous. My hope is that I'll know more when I'm older!

Love to you all. Think of me, won't you? Don't let *miles* make any difference.

RUTH.

II

[Pg 42]

July 30.

It is confirmed that Warsaw has fallen! Every one is very much depressed. What can stop the Germans? Some one speaks of the forts of Vilna and Grodno, which are supposed to be impregnable. But what about the forts on the Western front? What do forts amount to nowadays? The strongest walls are razed by the Germans' big guns!

"The Germans do just as they like—nothing can stop them. In the beginning the Kaiser said he would sleep at Warsaw," Count S——nbsp;says gloomily.

"And he said he would dine in Paris," some one else remarks.

It is funny how much pleasure Count S—— takes in every foot of land the Germans capture. When he talks about the war, he seems to take a perverse pleasure in accenting their inexhaustible munitions and men and the perfection of their whole military organization. "We have men, but we are children." At every German victory he shakes his head. "I told you so." "I've said from the first—" "There is no limit to [Pg 43] what these *cochons* can do." He seems glad to see his prophecies come true; probably, because he has seen his own security destroyed, he feels the safety of the whole world shaken. A hundred times he has said: "There isn't a foot of ground that belongs to me any more. For a man of my age it is a terrible thing to see your life-work wiped out all of a sudden." Only a world destruction could come up to his expectations now.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, we spoke about the fall of Warsaw. What would the Germans do to the city? Some spoke of German frightfulness in Belgium. Pan K —— thinks Warsaw will be treated leniently, as Germany wishes to enlist the German sympathizers. Still, most of the Poles in the *pension* are horrorstricken. They see the Germans marching through the streets, and they see the flames and shuddering civilians. I can see the Germans' spiked helmets in the room.

"The English must start an offensive. England lets France and Russia bleed to death before she sheds her own blood." There is much talk of England's selfishness.

Something is wrong somewhere. Every one seems skeptical about the Duma. [Pg 44]

I wish I could read the Russian newspapers.

I feel as though I were watching a fire—a neighbor's house burning down. I am excited and curious. Suddenly, I wonder how far the flames are going to spread, and I feel panicstricken. Good-night, dear ones. You in New England seem so far away from this European fire.

RUTH.

July 30,
1915.

Darlingest Mother and Dad:—

To-day I went to the Jewish detention camp with the wife of the French Consul here. She called for me in her limousine. As I think of it now, it was all so strange—the smooth-running car with two men on the box, and ourselves in immaculate white summer dresses. The heat was intense, but we were well protected. Through the windows we saw others sweating and choking in the dust of the hot streets.

"I'm afraid I've brought you here on a very hot morning," said Mme. C —— apologetically.

In spite of my curiosity I believe I felt a distaste of the detention camp on such a day. [Pg 45] A crowd is always depressing, and doubly so in the heat. But we stopped at a door cut in a high board fence, and passed by the sentinel into the enclosure where the Jews were penned in awaiting the next stage of their journey.

Hundreds of faces turned toward us; hundreds of eyes watched our approach. There were old men with long, white, patriarchal beards flowing over their dirty black gowns; there were younger men with peaked black caps and long black beards; and there were women who had pushed back their black shawls for air, and who held

sore-eyed, whining babies listlessly on their knees. Bits of old cloth stretched over poles afforded shade to some. Others tried to get out of the burning sun by huddling against the walls of the tenements that enclosed the yard on three sides. The ground was baked hard as iron and rubbed smooth by the shuffle of numberless feet.

As we approached, the Jews rose and bowed low. Then they settled back into their former immobility. Some stared at us vacantly; others lowered their eyelids and rubbed their hands together softly, with a terrible subservience. If we brushed close to one, he cringed like a dog who fears a kick. Yellow, parchment-like faces, all with [Pg 46] the high-bridged, curving noses, and the black, animal-like eyes. I was as definitely separated from them as though tangible iron bars were between us. We seemed to be looking at each other across a great gulf. "They are human beings," I said to myself. "I am one with them." But their isolation was complete. I could not even begin to conceive the persecution and suffering of ages that separated us. "All people are born free and equal," indeed! I turned away.

"This camp is run on communistic principles," Mme. C—— was explaining. "The Jewish Ladies' Benevolent Society provides a certain amount of meat and vegetables and bread, which is cooked and served by the Jews themselves. Here is the kitchen." We spoke French among ourselves, which seemed to put us farther away from the dumb, watchful Jews behind us. "If it wasn't for us, they would starve. The Government allows them eight kopecks a day. But who could live on that? Besides, most of the Jews here pay the eight kopecks to the overseer to avoid his displeasure. He makes a good revenue out of the blood money."

Two rooms in one of the houses had been converted into a kitchen. A dozen or so [Pg 47] Jewish women were paring and cutting up potatoes and cabbages and meat into huge soup-boilers. They were stripped to their shirts, and their bodies were drenched with sweat. They curtsied to us and went on preparing dinner.

A blast of scorching heat puffed out from an open oven. Two women, with long wooden handles pulled out big round loaves of black bread and laid them on a shelf to cool.

The warm fragrance of cooking attracted some white-faced Jewish children. They edged into the kitchen and looked up at the food, their eyes impenetrable and glittering like mica. A woman cut up some bread and gave them each a piece, and they slunk outdoors again, sucking their bread.

"The food is scientifically proportioned to give the greatest possible nutriment," Mme. C—— said.

We went out. After the kitchen heat the air of the courtyard was cool.

"This is the laundry. A certain number of the Jews here wash and iron the others' clothes. They are kept as clean as possible."

The laundry was gray with steam. A dozen or so women were bending over wash [Pg 48] tubs. Like the women in the kitchen, they were stripped to their shirts. The wet cloth stuck to their sweating bodies and outlined their ribs and the stretch of muscles as they scrubbed and wrung out the clothes. When the water became too black, some young boys threw it out of doors, and the women waited for the tubs to be filled again, their red parboiled hands resting on their hips, in the way of washerwomen the world over.

We crossed the mud before the wash-house, on planks, and went into a house across the courtyard.

"This is the tailoring establishment," Mme. C—— continued. "The tailors among them mend and cut over old clothes which we collect for them, so that every Jew may start on the next stage of his journey in perfectly clean and whole clothes. My husband and son complain that they will have to stay in bed, soon, I have taken so many of their suits of clothes.—And here are the shoemakers."

We looked into the adjoining room, where the cobblers sat cross-legged, sewing and patching and pegging shoes.

"It's very hard to find the leather. But it is so important. If you could see how they [Pg 49] come here—their feet bleeding and swollen and their shoes in tatters. And many of them were rich bankers and professors in Galicia and Poland, used to their own automobiles like the rest of us. I think I would steal leather for them."

The workers were different from the waiting Jews in the courtyard. Perhaps it was work that gave them importance in their own eyes, and took away that dreadful degrading subserviency—degrading to us as much as to themselves. The whirring noise of the sewing-machines, the click of shears, the bent backs of the workers, and the big capable hands, formed by the accustomed work! The trade of every man could have been known by his hands! My heart was warm toward them.

"It's splendid, I think," I said to Mme. C——.

As though she guessed my thoughts, she replied, "They are grateful for being allowed to work."

"For being allowed to work." Those words damn much in the world. What hindrances we erect in the way of life!

And I looked out into the courtyard again, at the apathetic faces of the waiting Jews. [Pg 50] Waiting for what? The white, dead faces, with the curved noses and hard, bright eyes, all turned toward us. Were they submissive or expectant, or simply hating us? They say the Galician Jews turn traitors and act as spies for the Austrians. But surely not these. What could these broken creatures do? How near death they seemed!

The courtyard burned like a furnace. The shade was shrinking from moment to moment. The heat rose in blinding waves. I was sickened. The courtyard smelled of dirt and waste and sickness. It was unreal—the whole thing unreal: those working at usual, necessary tasks as well as those furtive, watchful ones in the burning sunlight. Death was in them all.

I went out into the courtyard, walking slowly in the scorching heat. There was no shade or coolness anywhere. My attention was drawn to a pregnant woman who had evidently been sitting in a thin strip of shade by the fence; but now the sun was beating down on her bare head. She sat with her arms hanging along her sides, the palms of her hands turned upwards. A baby hardly a year old twisted fretfully on her [Pg 51] lap, fumbling at her breast with a little red hand. But she looked steadily over the baby's round head, a curiously intent expression in her dark eyes, as though she were looking at something so far away that she must concentrate all herself on it so as not to lose it from view.

Near her a man leaned against the fence. He was red-headed, and his unkempt hair and ragged beard flamed in the sun. A rope tied round his waist kept up his loose trousers, and his shirt was open, disclosing a hairy chest. Where his skin showed, it was unexpectedly white. He kept plucking at his chest, smiling idiotically.

"Is he insane?" I asked Mme. C——.

"Yes. He's that woman's husband. He went out of his head on the road. They say he was raging that his wife was obliged to walk in her condition. Well, he's happier than she is, now."

Under a canopy made from an old blue skirt lay a sick boy. His face was like a death-mask already, the yellow skin stretched tightly over the bones of his face, and his mouth unnaturally wide, with parched, swollen lips. From his hollow eye-sockets his eyes looked out unwinking, as though his lids had been cut off. He held himself [Pg 52] halfway between a reclining and an upright position. No normal person could hold himself that way for long, but the sick boy kept himself motionless with maniacal strength. The flies hung over him like a cloud of black cinders. One of his friends attempted to keep them away with a leafy branch which he had found, Heaven knows where! I could see no other sign of green in the place. As we passed, I noticed the branch sweep back and forth over the sick boy's face, touching the skin. And still the fixed stare continued, uninterrupted—that blind gaze straight out into emptiness.

At the farther end, an opening between two of the tenements led into a garden. This space, too, was crowded with waiting Jews.

"But where do they sleep?" I asked. "Is there room for all those people in the houses?"

"No," Mme. C—— replied; "not when so many come through as came this last time. But fortunately, these summer nights are fine; earlier, we had much rain, and you can picture the suffering. Then there was no shelter for them at all. They were simply herded into a pen, and many died from the exposure. Now, however, we have made [Pg 53] conditions better for them."

There was more reality here in the garden, where there was a suggestion of growing grass and a thin leaf shade. The Jews lay on the ground as though trying to get some coolness out of the earth. Up and down the paths walked several spectacled men, who were brought up to me and introduced as Professor So-and-So, and Doctor So-and-So. They were constantly trying to get in touch with friends in Kiev or Moscow or Petrograd, or colleagues in medicine or other sciences, or relatives who could help them. They worked through the society. By the payment of certain amounts they could bribe the overseers to let them stay on in the Kiev detention camp, or even have the liberty of the city. One man, a rich banker from Lvov, had been officially "sick" for several months, but as his money had almost given out he was in danger of being sent on to Tomsk in the near future. He lived in the hospital, where he had better quarters and food. These professors and doctors, men of wide learning and reputation, who are recognized as leaders in their professions, and are constructive, valuable forces in society, were herded together with the others, and will be allowed [Pg 54] to disappear into Siberia, where their minds and bodies will be wasted, their possible future activity to count as nothing.

A man in a soiled white coat came up, looked us over with little blinking pig eyes, and addressed a few words to Mme. C—— in Polish.

"That is the overseer," Professor A—— said to me in English. "He takes every kopeck away from us. But he is no worse than the rest. All along the way it is the same thing. One is bled to death." He shrugged indifferently. "We most of us could have gathered together a little money. But what will you? It was all so sudden. We had no time. Here we are, *en tout cas*. And after all, in the end—"

I might have been talking with the professors on the campus of their own university. They exerted themselves to be attentive and entertaining, as though they were our hosts.

One doctor said to me in French, "I have seen your wonderful country. It is amazing. I would like to see it again. I have been asked to lecture. Perhaps, after the war—"

He broke off abruptly. In a flash the end of his life came up to me. His work and [Pg 55]
ambitions, and then the cleavage in his career; the sharp division in his life; the preparation of years, and then, instead of fulfillment, an exile to a country where life was a struggle for the bare necessities of the body—food and shelter. I looked at his hands—thin and white and nervous. What hideous, despairing moments he must know!

I asked him a question. His eyes blazed suddenly.

"Do not speak of these things! They are not to be spoken of, much less to *you*." He looked as though he hated me. "I beg your pardon, I am nervous. You must excuse me." He went away hurriedly.

"Poor chap!" Professor A—— said. "It is hard for us all in this heat. And, yes, some of us have more imagination than others."

A man in uniform came into the garden. He walked to a tree in the center, and stood in the shade, a long sheet of paper in his hand. There was a stir among the Jews. Those lying down got up and approached him. The women, with their children, dragged themselves nearer. Every one stopped talking. The apathy and indifference gave place to a strained attention. There was a kind of dreadful anxiety on every face [Pg 56]
—a tightening of the muscles round the eyes and mouths, as though the same horrible fear fixed the same mark there. I have never seen a crowd where personality was so stamped out by a single overmastering emotion. The gendarme began to read in a sing-song voice.

"What is he saying?" I whispered.

"The names of those who are to leave this afternoon," Mme. C—— replied.

The garden was absolutely still except for the monotonous voice and the breathing of the crowd. Oh, yes, and the flies. It was not that I forgot the flies, only their buzzing was the ceaseless accompaniment to everything that happened in the camp.

"How horrible this is!" Mme. C—— observed. "They all know it must come, but when it does, it is almost unbearable. It is truly a list of death. Many of them here cannot survive another stage of the journey in this heat. And yet they must be moved on to make place for those who are pressing on from behind. In this very crowd were five old men who were killed on the way here, by the soldiers, because they couldn't keep up with the procession. How could these civilians be expected to endure such [Pg 57]
hardships? They are townspeople, most of them having lived indoors all their lives, like you or me."

"Like you or me." No, no. It was unbelievable. I could not put myself in their place. I could not imagine such insecurity—that lives could be broken in the middle in this way.

"How useless it all seems!" I said.

"Useless. You think so?" Mme. C—— took me up. "Do you realize that whole Galician towns have been moved into Siberia this summer? Part of the way on foot, part in baggage cars, where they stifled to death in the heat and for lack of water and food. One carload wasn't listed, or was forgotten by some careless official, and when it was finally opened it was a carload of rotting flesh. The bodies were thrown into the river by the frightened official, but a soldier reported him and he was court-martialed. One crowd of several thousand was taken to Siberia. They reached Tomsk. Then the Government changed. What was the need to transport these Galician Jews? the new Minister argued: a useless expense to the Government: a waste of money and time. Let them go back to their homes. So the Jews were taken back over the same route, [Pg 58]
many more dying on the return journey, in the jails, and camps, and baggage cars, or by the roadsides. They found themselves once more back in their pillaged towns, with nothing to work with, and yet with their livelihood to be earned somehow. They began to dig and plant and take up the routine of their lives again. They began to look on themselves as human again. The grind of suffering and hopelessness began

to let up and they had moments of hope. And then the reactionaries came into power with their systematic oppression of the Jews. Back to Siberia with them! This in midsummer heat. I saw them as they passed through Kiev for the third time, a few weeks ago. Never shall I forget them as I saw them last. The mark of the beast was on them. You couldn't call them living or suffering or martyrs any more. They were beyond the point where they prayed to die."

The gendarme had finished his list. The tension relaxed. Some of the Jews settled back into their former apathy; others gathered in excited groups, pulling their beards and scratching their heads; still others walked up and down the paths, restless, like so many caged animals. [Pg 59]

A man and a woman with two children approached the gendarme deprecatingly. The man asked a question, indicating the woman and children. The gendarme shook his head. The man persisted. The gendarme refused again, and started to move away. The man detained him with a hand on his arm. Another man approached. He spread out both hands, his shoulders up to his ears. All three men spoke Polish in loud, excited voices.

"What are they saying?" I asked.

"The gendarme has just read the names of the woman and children who are to leave this afternoon. The father's name is not with theirs. Naturally, he wants to be with his wife and children to protect and care for them as best he can. If they are separated now, they can never find each other again in Siberia—if they live till they get there. The third man is alone. He is willing to give up his place to the father. But the gendarme refuses. 'His name is written. Yours is not. It is the order,' he says."

The gendarme now left the garden. The woman was sobbing in her husband's arms. He was patting her hair. The children hung at their mother's skirt, crying and sucking their fingers. [Pg 60]

August 12, 1915.

Dearest Mother and Dad:—

They say there was no ammunition at the front. No shells for the soldiers. They had nothing to do but retreat. And now? They are still retreating, fighting with empty guns and clubs and even their naked hands. And still, trainloads of soldiers go out of Kiev every day without a gun in their hands. What a butchery! Can you imagine how horrible it is to see them march through the streets, swinging their arms and singing their stirring songs,—tall, able-bodied men,—while the beggars, cripples from the Russo-Japanese War, stand whining at the street corners.

There seems to be no doubt about the enemy within the gates. How can the soldiers give their lives so patiently and bravely for a Government whose villainy and corruption take no account of the significance of their sacrifices. The German influence is still strong. They say German money bribes the Ministers at home and the generals at the front.

There is great distrust of the Czarina and the Monk Rasputin. The latter was a serf in Siberia, and now has a malignant, hypnotic influence in the Russian Court. If he is refused anything, he falls on the floor in a fit and froths at the mouth until he gets what he wants. The Court ladies have to lick his dirty fingers clean, for he refuses to use a finger-bowl at table. Take this for what it's worth. At any rate, there is much talk now of the Germans working through this disreputable creature. [Pg 61]

I asked a Russian if there could be a revolution.

There seems to be no hope. Russia, apparently, lacks the coördination and singleness of purpose necessary for one. And so many unseen influences are at work. There is no agreement among the people as to what they want. Each faction is secretly encouraged to war against the other in order to weaken each other and blur the reason and end in the people's minds. Besides, of course, nothing can be done as long as the army can be used to crush any demonstration against the Government. But if I were a Russian, all my hate would be directed against the traitors of my country, rather than at the Germans, who, after all, are political enemies. I would carry a gun against those who sell my country and make capital out of her suffering. [Pg 62]

In every newspaper there are accounts of enormous graft by Ministers and companies under contract to the Government for military supplies. One case was translated to me the other day. Some men high up in the Government took over a contract for a certain number of cavalry saddles and bridles. They sold it to the Jews, making a tremendous rake-off. The Jews, to get any profit, were obliged to furnish poor material. At the trial, where some officers were testing them, the bridles broke in their hands like paper and the saddles split into ribbons.

Then there was a sugar factory in Kiev, whose owner wrote to the Minister of the Interior, I think it was, and offered his factory, only asking an estimate of the approximate amount of sugar the Government would need turned out each day. No answer was made. The owner wrote again. Still no answer. He went to Petrograd himself to find out why the Department paid no attention to his letters. The Minister informed him his letters had lacked the required war-tax stamps and had been [Pg 63] turned over to the proper authorities, who would speedily proceed to fine him for his evasion of the law.

I went up to a military hospital to-day. I wonder how I can write you about it. The insignificance of personalities—whether any one lives or dies seems to have no importance. Just life seems to matter any more, and the forward movement of humanity—at least, you must believe the movement is forward in spite of the horror of mangled bodies and destroyed minds; otherwise, you would go mad, though you are outside of it all. How the proportions of things are twisted after going through a hospital. Things that counted before don't seem to count any more. You take refuge in generalities to get out of your mind a look you have seen in a soldier's eyes.

It was an improvised hospital,—some building or other turned into a place to receive the hundreds of wounded that are pouring into Kiev every day. It was a big room, with rows and rows of beds, and in every bed a man. One man was wounded in the back, and his breath whistled through the open hole like steam through an escape valve. His face was wound in white bandages. Others were there, dying from terrible [Pg 64] stomach wounds. One man's head moved from side to side incessantly, as though he could never again find comfort on earth. Some moan. Others lay absolutely motionless, their faces terrible dead-white masks. Their bodies looked so long and thin under the sheets, with their toes turned up. It was indescribably terrifying to think that human beings could go through so much and continue to live. I was more frightened than ever before in my life. The smell of blood—the closeness of the hot sick-room—flies buzzing about. I saw brown varnish-like stains on some of the white bandages. The indifferent, business-like attitude of the nurses infuriated me. But, of course, they can't be any other way and deal with it all.

I can't write any more. But is there any excuse for this?

RUTH.

August 10, 1915.

Lately, our conversation at table has been suppressed by the appearance of a young woman whom the rest suspect of being a spy. She is dark, and never utters a word. All through dinner she keeps her eyes on her plate. I said something in French to her [Pg 65] the other day, but, apparently, she did not understand. Across the table, the Morowski boys laughed at me. I suspect that they, too, had tried to speak to her, for she is pretty, and had been snubbed like me. I don't know how the idea of her being a spy got round. She may have been sent here to keep her eyes on the Polish refugees in the *pension*. Her room is in our corridor, and this morning Marie saw, through the open door, Panna Lolla and Janchu talking to her. It appears that Janchu had been inveigled in by bonbons, and Panna Lolla had gone in after him. Panna Lolla said the young woman was so lonely. She is a Pole and wants to leave Russia. She hates it here. But she has no passport. She showed Panna Lolla an old one that she wants to fix up for the police authorities. But she can't speak Russian, and is very frightened. She asked Panna Lolla if she knew any one who could write Russian. Marie forbade Panna Lolla to go near the woman again. It is just as well, for Panna Lolla likes excitement, and is capable of saying anything to keep it going.

III

[Pg 66]

August.

Darlingest Mother and Dad:—

We were arrested four days ago—and you will wonder why I keep on writing. It relieves my nerves. Ever since the *revision* Marie and I have gone over and over the same reasoning, trying to get at why we were arrested. To write it all out may help the restlessness and anxiety and—yes—the panicky fear that rises in my throat like nausea. Life is so terribly insecure. I feel as though I had been stripped naked and turned out into the streets, with no person or place to go to.

It was four o'clock, and we had just finished dinner. In an hour and a half we were leaving for Odessa. All our trunks and bags were packed, and our traveling suits brushed and pressed. Panna Lolla was crying at having to part from Janchu, and

mending some stockings for him. He was asleep. Marie and I were sitting in our little salon, rejoicing that we should be in Bucharest in a few days where there was no war and we could speak French again. War—blood-tracks on the snow, and cholera and typhus camps under a burning sun. To shut it out for one instant and pretend that the world was the way it used to be. What a heaven Bucharest seemed! [Pg 67]

And suddenly the door of our apartment opened. Six men came into the room, two in uniform, the other four in plain clothes. It never occurred to me that they had anything to do with me. I thought they had mistaken the door. I looked at Marie questioningly. There was something peculiar about her face.

The four plain-clothes men stood awkwardly about the door which they had closed softly behind them. The two men with white cord loops across the breast of their uniforms went over to the table on the right and put down their black leather portfolios. They seemed to make themselves at home, and it angered me.

"What are these people doing here?" I asked Marie sharply.

She addressed the officer in Polish, and he answered curtly.

"It's a *revision*," she replied.

"A what?"

"A *revision*," she repeated.

I remember that I consciously kept my body motionless, and said to myself, "There is nothing surprising in this. There is nothing surprising in this." Everything had gone dark before my eyes. My heart seemed to stop beating. [Pg 68]

Marie laughed and the sound of her cracking, high-pitched laugh came to me from far off.

The officer said something to her, and she stopped abruptly as though some one had clapped a hand over her mouth.

"What did he say?" I managed to articulate. My own language seemed to have deserted me.

"He says it is a matter for tears, not laughter."

Her voice was sharp and anxious. I was relieved at the spite and vanity in his words. They made the situation more normal. I felt myself breathing again, and my stomach began to tremble uncontrollably.

I kept my eyes where they were, fighting for my self-control. So many terrifying thoughts were trying to penetrate my consciousness. I tried to shut out everything but my realization of what I was looking at. I kept my eyes glued on the officer's boots; shiny black boots they were, that fitted him without a crease, with spurs fastened to the heels. I shall never forget the stiff, red striped trouser-legs and those shiny black boots that didn't seem to belong on the body of a living man, but on the wooden form of some dummy. [Pg 69]

Janchu began to cry from the bedroom, and Marie got up to go to him. Quickly a plain-clothes man with horn-rimmed spectacles slipped in between her and the door. The officer, who had now seated himself behind the table, raised his hand.

"Let no one leave the room," he said in German.

"But my baby is crying," Marie began.

"Let him cry!" And he busied himself pulling papers out of his portfolio.

Soon Janchu, seeing that no one paid any attention to him, toddled in and climbed into Marie's lap. He sat there sucking his fingers and looking out at the roomful of strange men.

An army officer entered and spoke to the head of the secret service. He wore a dazzling, gold-braided uniform, and preened himself before us, looking at us curiously over his shoulder. When he had gone, the head told us that we were to have a personal examination in the salon of the *pension*.

A secret-service man escorted each of us, and we walked down the corridor, past the squad of soldiers with their bayonets, and into the salon, where we were delivered into the hands of two women spies. They undressed us, and we waited while our clothes were passed out to the secret-service men outside. Panna Lolla tried to twist herself up in the window curtains. Marie and I grew hysterical at her modesty, looking at her big, knobby feet and her fiery face, with her top-knot of disheveled red hair. We were given our clothes again, and went back to our apartment. [Pg 70]

The rooms were in confusion. All our trunks and bags were emptied, one end of the carpet rolled back, the mattresses torn from the beds. The secret-service men were down on their knees before piles of clothes, going over the seams, emptying the

pockets, unfolding handkerchiefs, tapping the heels of shoes; every scrap of paper was passed over to the chief, who tucked it into his portfolio. I watched him, hating his square, stolid body that filled out his uniform smoothly. His eyes were long and watchful like a cat's, and his fair mustache was turned up at the ends, German fashion; in fact, there was something very German about his thick thighs and shaved [Pg 71] head and official importance. As I have learned since, he *is* a German and the most hated man in Kiev for his pitiless persecution of all political offenders. They say he has sent more people to Siberia than any six of his predecessors. They also say every hand is against him, even to the spies' in his own force.

I trembled to spring at him and claw him and ruffle his composure some way. Instead, I sat quietly, my hands folded, and watched the spies ransacking our clothes. I began to feel a sharp anxiety as to what they would find. It was all so mysterious. What were they looking for? At one moment it was ridiculous, and I felt like laughing at the whole affair; and then the next, the silence in which the search was conducted, the apparent dead-seriousness of the spies' faces, the deliberation with which the chief turned the bits of paper over in his hands and scrutinized them and put them carefully away, struck me with a cold, sharp apprehension. I had the sensation of being on the very edge of a precipice. I felt as though the world were upside down and the most innocent thing could be turned against us. Every card and photograph I [Pg 72] tried to catch a glimpse of before it went into the black portfolio. And suddenly I saw the letter about the Jewish detention camp, which I had forgotten all about. I saw the close lines of my writing, and it seemed as though the edge of the precipice crumbled and I went shooting down. A cold sweat broke out over me.

"But why are we arrested?" I heard Marie ask in German.

"Espionage," the chief answered shortly.

"But that is ridiculous. We're American citizens."

No reply.

"Can we leave for Odessa to-night?"

No reply.

Marie stopped her questions.

"What money have you? Come here while I count it," one of the spies said to me. He slipped me one hundred roubles on the sly, before turning the rest over to the chief. I held it openly in my hand, too dazed to know what to do with it, till he whispered to me to hide it. "You may want it, later," he said.

"Frau Pierce will go with us," the chief said, closing his portfolio; and I understood that the *revision* was finished. "Frau G—— can stay here under room-arrest, with her [Pg 73] little boy."

He spoke to no one in particular, but addressed the room at large, his face impassive, and his voice without an intonation. The spies stood in the midst of the tumbled clothes, watching us silently, ominously. Janchu now crept up into Marie's lap again. As a matter of course, I went into the other room and changed into my traveling suit.

"May I take my toilet things?" I asked the chief.

"Ja."

"You'd better make a bundle of bedclothes," the spy who had given me the money whispered to me.

I rolled up two blankets and a pillow with his help.

"I'm ready," I said. "May I send a few telegrams?"

"Certainly, certainly." The chief's manner suddenly became extremely courteous.

I wrote one to our Ambassador in Petrograd, one to Mr. Vopicka in Bucharest, one to the State Department in Washington, and one to Peter. I wrote Peter that I was delayed a few days. I was afraid that he might come on and be arrested, too. My hand did not tremble, though it struck me as very queer to see the words traced out [Pg 74] on the paper—almost magical. My imagination was racing, and I could see myself already being driven into one of those baggage cars bound for Tomsk.

"Keep your mind away from what is going to happen," I said to myself. "You will have time enough to think in prison. Things are as they are. You are going to walk out of this room, just the way you've done a hundred times. Are you different now from what you've always been? Keep your mind on things you know are real."

I tried to move accurately, as though a false move would disturb the balance of things so that I would walk out of the room on my hands like an acrobat.

Suddenly, the chief, who had been talking in a corner with the other man in uniform,

wheeled about.

"Frau Pierce may stay here under room-arrest. Good-day."

He clicked his heels together and bowed slightly. His spies clustered about him, and they left the room.

All at once my bones seemed to crumble and my flesh dissolve. I fell into a chair. Marie and I looked at each other. We began to laugh. "We mustn't get hysterical," we said, and kept on laughing. [Pg 75]

The room was so dark that we looked like two shadows. Panna Lolla had come after Janchu and taken him into Count S——'s room. We imagined the excited curiosity of the rest of the *pension*.

"I'll wager that woman was a spy, after all."

"But why—why should *we* have a *revision*?"

"Anyway, they couldn't have found much. We'll be set free in a few days," Marie said.

"They found my letter about the Jews," I replied.

"What letter? Oh, my dear, what did you say?"

"I forget. But everything I saw or heard, I think."

We began to laugh again.

"Will they send our telegrams?"—"Will Peter come on?"—"What shall we do for money?"

The room was pitch-dark except for the electric light from the street. We heard the creak and rattle of the empty commissariat wagons returning from the barracks. We fell silent, feeling suddenly very tired and lethargic. [Pg 76]

"Where is Janchu? It's time for his supper," Marie said, without moving.

I started out of the room to call him, and fell across a dark figure sitting in front of the door. He grunted and pushed me back into the room.

"I want Janchu," I said in perfectly good English, while he closed the door in my face.

"There's a spy outside our door," I whispered to Marie.

Panna Lolla came in with Janchu and turned on the light.

"There's a man outside our door, and two secret-service men at the *pension* door and two soldiers downstairs," she whispered excitedly in one breath. "No one can leave the *pension*, and they take the name and address of every one who comes here. And that woman *was* a spy. Antosha saw the chief go into her room and heard them talking together. And she left when they did."

I lay all night, half asleep, half awake, hearing the street noises clearly through the open windows. I cried a little from exhaustion and nerves, and then controlled myself, for my head began to ache, and who knew what would happen the next day? I had to keep strength to meet something that was coming. I had no idea what it was, but the uncertainty of the future only made it more ominous and threatening. That letter—In the darkness I saw the chief's watchful, narrow eyes, and the horn-rimmed spectacles of the friendly spy, and the stuffed portfolio. [Pg 77]

Later.

Nothing has happened yet. We have our meals brought to us by Antosha, who tries to comfort us with extra large pickled cucumbers and portions of sour cream. We are allowed to send Panna Lolla downtown for cigarettes and books from the circulating library. Thank Heaven for books! With our nerves stretched to the snapping-point and a pinwheel of thoughts everlastingly spinning round in our heads, I think we should go mad except for books. It is very hot, but my body is always cool and damp, because I can't eat much, I suppose, and lie on a *chaise longue* motionless all day long. I can feel myself growing weak, and there is nothing to do but sit and wait.

Marie and I go over and over the whole thing, and finish at the point where we began. "But why?" We think it may be because Marie came to Bulgaria to visit me and brought me back here, and now we want to leave Russia together. The papers say that Bulgaria already has German officers over her troops. But I can't believe it. She is too independent. They say that she will certainly go with the Central Powers. That, too, is inconceivable. Perhaps, however, if it is true, and already known by the Russian authorities, the secret service is suspicious of our going back there, and of Marie's intention of sailing home from Dedeagatch, via Greece. What else could it be? How this uncertainty maddens us! Yet we are thankful for every day that passes and leaves us together. What will happen when they translate my letter? *Bojé moy!* I hear a step outside the door, and my heart simply ceases to beat. [Pg 78]

Pan Tchedesky to-day tiptoed into our room when the spy was having his lunch. He whispered to us that he had seen the English Consul, Mr. Douglas, and told him about our case. He begged us not to be discouraged, and to eat. He said that he almost wept when he saw our plates come back to the kitchen, untouched. How [Pg 79] flabby and livid he looked, his vague, blurred eyes watery with tears! Yet we could have embraced him. He is the only person who has spoken to us.

The sun is golden on the old convent wall across the street. The convent is empty during the summer. Only the richest Court ladies send their daughters there to be educated, and the Dowager Empress visits them when she passes through Kiev. The trees in the garden are gold and green in the late afternoon sun. A little bell tinkles musically.

Below in the street some passing soldiers are singing. How fresh and strong and beautiful their untrained voices are. I wonder if they are off to the front, for each one carries a pack and a little tea-kettle swung on his back and a wooden spoon stuck along the side of his leg in his boot. Where will they be sent? Up north, to try and stem the German advance? To Riga? Where? The Germans are still advancing. Something is wrong somewhere. And still soldiers go to the front, singing. They are thrown into the breach. I can't help but think of the fields of Russian dead, unburied. [Pg 80] Who has a chance to bury the dead on a retreat? There is nothing "decent" in it. Yet they say the retreat is "orderly." I wonder what that means?

At night when I try to sleep, I see the map of Russia as if it was printed on my eyeballs. It is so big and black with a thin red line of fire eating into it. America seems millions of miles away. I wish I could touch you just for a minute. If I could only feel your arms about me for one moment. The only way is not to think beyond this room and this minute.

RUTH.

August.

Dearests:—

Peter is here. Last night, about nine o'clock the door opened and he rushed into the room. I got to my feet on impulse, and then tried to brace myself and control my disordered reason, for, of course, I believed myself delirious. He stopped by the door long enough to throw down his suitcase, and in that instant I struggled fiercely to disbelieve my eyes. I was fighting myself. My legs trembled. But when I fell, his arms were around me, supporting me.

"Is it you? Is it you?" I don't know whether I said the words out loud or not, but I [Pg 81] remember feeling the muscle in Peter's shoulder and wondering if I could have gone out of my head as much as *that*.

"What on earth has happened to you two?" he said at last.

"Let me sit down," I said, feeling suddenly very sick and faint, and a black spot in front of my eyes expanded all at once and shut out the swaying room.

"Why didn't you come to Bucharest?" he asked again.

"How white and thin you are. Isn't he, Marie?" I observed, the blackness gone from my eyes.

"Please answer me. What is the matter? You both look sick."

"We are under arrest for espionage," Marie and I suddenly burst out in chorus, and we both began talking as fast and as loud as we could.

"That's all right. I'll fix things for you," Peter reassured us when we stopped at last, out of breath. I suddenly wanted to hide him so they wouldn't get him as well as ourselves. He was so self-confident. What did *he* know of how things happened over here? He was talking and acting like a rational human being, which was sure proof [Pg 82] he was in no position to cope with the Russian Secret Service. I felt a frantic desire to get him out of the room and make him promise that on no account would he admit he knew us.

"You must go at once," I whispered. "There's a spy at the door. If he sees you, they'll arrest you, too. Please go, go at once." And I tried to push him away.

"You poor things," he said, laughing. "There's no need to be frightened like this. Of course I won't go. Why should they arrest me?"

"Why should they have arrested us? Oh, you *don't* know." My teeth were chattering.

"Now, look here," he said seriously. "You've been alone and scared, and I'm sure you haven't eaten anything for days. Now, don't think about this any more. I'll get you out in no time. Have you a cigarette, anybody?"

I sat back, and my body stopped shaking. Everything seemed very still. I had the distinct thought, "What is to come, will come," and I drew a deep breath that seemed to come from my toes. It was enough Peter was here, after all.

We talked till three in the morning. Peter had gone to Bucharest to meet us, and when we didn't arrive, he took the first train to Kiev. I began to believe in his bodily presence. Before he left to go back to his hotel, I had regained my conviction he was a match for even the Russian Secret Service. [Pg 83]

Can you imagine how we feel to-day? We go tottering round the room, taking things up and putting them down again, in a nervous anxiety to *do* something. We chirp the rag-times popular in America two years ago. We feel as though we were just recovering from a sickness, with a pleasant bodily weakness like a convalescent's in the springtime. Peter brought me a bunch of red roses when he came over this morning. I am writing this while he is seeing Mr. Douglas, the English Consul.

So much love to you from

RUTH.

September.

Darlingest ones:—

It has been three weeks since our arrest, and to-day is the first time we have been allowed to leave the room and go outdoors. We are still under house-arrest, but we can go out in the garden, while two soldiers guard the entrance. Isn't it ludicrous? A gendarme came last night and announced with ponderous importance that we were to be permitted the liberty of the garden if we gave our word of honor not to try to escape. We signed two red-sealed documents, and so we can go into the garden while two soldiers with bayonets look to it that we don't go any farther. [Pg 84]

Peter had to bully me into leaving my room this afternoon. I didn't want to get healthy. I had grown so used to the proportions of our rooms I hated to make the effort to adjust myself to any others. But Peter came back from his daily round of visits to the English Consul, and the Army Headquarters, and the office of Kiev's civil governor, and produced from his coat-pocket a rubber ball. We were to play ball out in the garden, he said. So, after some persuasion Marie and I went out into the garden with him. How weak I was. My legs trembled going downstairs, and I was exhausted when I reached the benches in the garden.

Janchu, seeing us, ran up joyfully and took his mother by the hand. "This is my mother," he said in Polish, looking around proudly at the other children who were playing there.

Every one looked at us curiously. A head appeared at every window in the big stone apartment house. I saw the two women spies who had undressed us. They were evidently employed as servants in some family, for one was ironing and the other fixing a roast for the oven. They, too, looked out at us. I felt hot and indignant and, yes, ashamed as though I had been guilty. I wanted to hide. I felt inadequate to life. People were too much for me. People—people, the living and the dead. What a weight of life! I could hardly control my tears. Weakness, I suppose, for the soles of my feet and my fingertips hurt me as though my nerves were bared to the touch. [Pg 85]

I looked up over the garden-wall. The tree-tops were yellow. While we had been locked in our room, the season had changed. Autumn was upon us. I shivered. There was a lavender mist over the city dimming the radiance of the gold and silver church domes. How beautiful Kiev was! The church-bells were so mellow-toned; and the children's shrill laughter and cries as they played in the garden. But it tired me. Every impression seemed to bruise me.

Peter bought some little Polish cakes, and we had hot tea to cheer us up—three and four glasses of tea. [Pg 86]

Good-night. Sometimes, when I think of you, I don't see all of you, but instead a particular gesture, or I hear an inflection of voice that is too familiar to be borne. Now I see mother's hands and they are beautiful.

RUTH.

September.

Dearests:—

Every day now we go out into the garden. We play ball and play tag in the wind to get warm.

There is a private hospital at one end of our apartment house, supported by a wealthy Polish woman. Two or three times a week she visits the patients, young officers who go out into the garden with her and kiss her hand and talk and flirt. She

sits on a garden-bench surrounded by her young men, a big woman in black, with a long black veil, talking vivaciously, using her hands in quick, expressive gestures, patting their cheeks, leaning forward to give their hands an impulsive squeeze. When she laughs, which is often, the black line of a mustache on her upper lip makes the white of her teeth whiter still. The days when she isn't there, the convalescents flirt with the nurses. There is nothing horrible about this hospital. The patients are only slightly wounded, and wear becoming bathrobes when they lounge round. [Pg 87]

The window-ledges of the rooms are gay with flowers. Almost always a phonograph is going, "Carmen," or "Onégin," or "Pagliacci." Sometimes, Peter and I one-step to the music on the pavement outside, and the officers and nurses crowd to the windows and clap and cry, "Encore!" Often, after sundown, when the children have gone indoors, and we go out for a walk before dinner, we see a patient with a bandage around his head, perhaps, but both arms well enough to be clasping a pretty nurse in them. They laugh and we laugh. There is no cynicism about it. It's bigger than that, it seems to me.

Into the garden come many street musicians. They play and sing, and showers of kopecks rain down from the windows. Two little girls came a few days ago. They were Tziganes, barefooted, with gay petticoats and flowered shawls and dangling earrings. Their dark hair was short and curly. One of the children played a *balalaika* and sang in a broken, mournful voice that did not at all belong to her age. The other —who wore the prettiest dress, yellow, with a green and purple shawl—danced like a little marionette on a string, not an expression in her pointed, brown face, but every now and then accelerating the pace of her dance, and giving sharp, high cries. Then, suddenly, they stopped in the middle of a measure, and held out their aprons for money. A window on the ground floor opened and a very pretty woman leaned out. I have seen her many times. She is Polish, the daughter of a concierge, and now the mistress of a young Cossack, who is leaving shortly for the front. She has heavy, pale-yellow hair, wound around her head in thick braids, and she wears pearls, opaque like her skin. She beckoned the little girls into her room. They went eagerly. Soon I heard them singing there. [Pg 88]

When we were with Dr. ——, from the Red Cross hospital this afternoon, a soldier came up to us and saluted. He was a miserable-looking creature, in a uniform too big for him. His face was unshaven, his beard gray and sparse, and his eyes red and blinking and full of pain. He slouched away again in a moment, his eyes staring down at the sidewalk under his feet. [Pg 89]

"What did he want?" I asked.

"He wants brandy. He's leaving for the front to-morrow, and he asked me to write out a doctor's prescription so he could get a little brandy. Poor fellow. It was impossible, of course, but I'd have done it gladly. He said he'd been wounded and discharged, and had to go back to the front and leave his family, helpless, again. The second time must be so much worse than the first. You know what it's like out there."

RUTH.

September.

Darlingest ones:—

At last I have heard from the letter about the Jewish detention camp. The English Consul came to our rooms yesterday afternoon and said he was to act as interpreter for the head of the secret police. I was to be ready to answer his questions about eight o'clock that night. He told me to keep my temper and say as little as possible.

Shortly before eight the Consul and the chief came round together. We all sat down. I was quite calm. So often I had created my own terror of this moment that when it came I met it with relief. I even felt a sense of superiority over the chief of the secret service. I don't know why, I'm sure. Perhaps because I was no longer afraid of him. It was as though I had stuck my head under a pump of ice-cold water. I felt very clear-headed. I had a curious feeling that things were as they were and nothing I could say could change them. [Pg 90]

"Are you a Jew?" he asked me first.

"No."

"Is your mother or father Jewish?"

"No. There is no Jewish blood in our family." I thought of Dad's Quakerism and smiled. I wondered what he would have said if he had been there.

"Then why have you such sympathy for them?" He looked at me narrowly, as though he had me *there*.

"Because they are suffering."

"Tck." He clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth in the most skeptical fashion.

He took up my letter, translated into Russian, and went through it. The whole thing was a farce. I answered the questions he asked me, but they didn't get us anywhere. [Pg 91] Of course, everything I knew about the Jewish detention camp I had written in my letter. All I could do was to repeat what I had said there. And when he asked questions like, "Who said five old men had been killed along the way?" or, "How did you know throwing the bodies into the Dnieper had brought cholera into Kiev this summer?" I could only reply, "I was told it." "Who told you?" "I forget."

When he got up to go he said:—

"This letter makes your case a very serious one. Of course, we can't have such things as that published about us. Have you ever written before?"

I said, "No."

"You aren't reporting for any journal?"

I assured him it was only a letter I had written my mother and father.

"It goes out of my hands to-night. I shall hand it with a report to the Chief of the General Staff."

"When shall I hear from them?"

"They will let you know as soon as possible. It's unfortunate you should have written it. Otherwise, I could have settled the matter myself. As it is, it is a matter for the military authorities. Of course, such a letter written in the war zone, at a time like [Pg 92] this—" He stopped himself. "Good-night. Good-night." He clicked his heels and bowed himself out of the room.

"Ouf!" we all said.

"Mrs. Pierce, promise me you won't put your pen to paper again while you are in Russia," the English Consul said, smiling.

"But isn't it ridiculous—absurd—disgusting!" I said.

"People are sent to Siberia for less," the Consul said. "But don't be frightened, Mrs. Pierce. It will come out all right."

"Of course. But when?"

"*Seichas*," he replied, smiling.

"*Seichas.*" How I hate the expression. "Peter, you'd better cable for some more money. Heaven knows when we'll get out now," I said.

Peter sends love too. We are hungry for news from you, and we picture greedily the piles of letters we shall find waiting for us in Bulgaria. I try not to be anxious about you—But I wake up at night and this silence of months is like a dead weight on my heart.

RUTH.

IV

[Pg 93]

September.

Dear ones:—

The Germans are advancing. Nothing seems able to stop them. And every day brings new refugees from the country. They come in bewildered, frightened hordes and pass through the city streets, directed by gendarmes. They do as they are told. There is something dreadful in their submission and in the gentle alacrity with which they obey orders.

The other day we were waiting on a street corner for a line of the refugees' covered carts to pass. Suddenly, a woman, walking by a horse's head, collapsed. She sank on to the paving-stones like a bundle of dusty rags. People stopped to look, but no one touched her. The refugees behind left their carts and came up to see what had halted the procession. They, too, stood without touching her—peasants in dusty sheepskins, leaning on their staffs, looking down at the woman who had fallen out of their ranks. A gendarme elbowed his way through the crowd. He began to wave his arms and [Pg 94] strike his boot with his whip, and shout at the weary-eyed, uncomprehending peasants. At last, two of them tucked their staffs under their arms and, leaning down, picked up the fainting woman. They carried her round to her cart and laid her down

on the straw, her head on the lap of one of her children. For a moment the child looked down at her mother's white face, so strangely still, and then, terrified, suddenly jumped to her feet and her mother's head fell back against the boards with a dull thud. The children huddled together, crying. A peasant whipped up the little horse, and the procession began to move on.

There seems to be a horrible fear behind them that never lets them halt for long. The Germans—After all, they are human beings like the Russians. They, too, have their wounded and dying. People here speak of special red trains that leave the front continuously for Germany. These red trains are full of human beings whose brains have been smashed by the horrors of war. The German soldier is not supernatural. Then I think of those terrible red trains rushing through the dark, filled with raving maniacs, of men who have become like little children again. And yet when you hear, [Pg 95] "The Germans are advancing! They are coming!" the German army seems to take on a supernatural aspect, to become a ruthless machine that drives everything before it in its advance, and in its wake leaves a country stripped of life—all the people and cottages rubbed off the face of the earth.

People here in Kiev feel the same terror of the German advance. Can nothing stop it? A panic has swept over the city that makes every one want to run away and hide. They crowd the square before the railway station and camp there for days, waiting to secure a place on the trains that leave for Petrograd or Odessa. For three weeks Peter has been waiting for his reservation to get to Petrograd. Our case drags on so. He wants to see the Ambassador personally. But the trains are packed with terrified people. Men leave their affairs and go down to the square with their families and baggage. They sleep on the cobble-stones, wrapped up in blankets, their heads on their bags. It is autumn, and the nights are cold and rainy, and the children cry in discomfort. I have seen the square packed with motionless, sleeping people, and in [Pg 96] the morning I have seen them fight for places in the train, transformed by this unbearable terror of the Germans into beasts that trample each other to death. And when the train goes off, they settle back, waiting for their next chance. Perhaps some are so much nearer the station, but others are carried away wounded or dead. Who knows what they are capable of till they are so afraid?

My dressmaker's sister was a cripple. Fear had crept even into her sick-room. When Olga came to try on my dress, she fumbled and pinned things all wrong in her haste. I spoke to her sharply and asked her to be more careful. Then she burst into tears and told me about her sister. It appeared her sister was afraid to be left alone. Every time Olga left the room, her sister caught at her dress and made her promise not to desert her. She thought of the Germans day and night. She cursed Olga if she should ever run away and leave her to them. A few days later, Olga came again. She was so pale and thin it frightened me, and she didn't hurry nervously any more when she fitted me.

"What is it, Olga? You are sick," I said.

"My sister is dead. Last Saturday, it was late when I left you, and I stopped on the [Pg 97] way home to get some herring for supper. I was later than usual, and when I got home I found my sister dead. She had died from fear. She thought I had deserted her. She had half fallen out of her chair as though she had tried to move. How could she think I would desert her ever? Haven't I taken care of her for fifteen years? But it was fear. She has been like one out of her mind since they have been so near Kiev. What will they do in Kiev? They say the Germans are only two days' march away!"

All day the church-bells have been ringing for special prayers. I went into one of the churches in the late afternoon. It was dark and filled with people who had come to pray for help to stop the Germans. There were soldiers and peasants and townspeople, all with their thoughts fixed on God. I cannot tell you how solemn it was. All the people united in thought against the common menace. Women in black, soldiers and officers with bands of black crêpe round their sleeves, square, stolid-looking peasants, with tears running down their cheeks. They knelt on the stone [Pg 98] flagging, their eyes turned toward the altar with its gold crucifix and jeweled ikons. The candle-flames only seemed to make the dimness more obscure. And the deep voice of the priest chanting in the darkness: all Russia seemed to be on its knees offering its faith as a bulwark against the Germans. When I turned to leave, I came face to face with an old woman. The tears were still wet on her cheeks, but she was smiling.

"Kiev is a holy city," she said. "God will protect the tombs of his holy Saints." And she brushed by, paying no more attention to me.

There are placards in all the banks, offering to give people the value of their jewels and silverware.

Extra pontoon bridges are thrown across the Dnieper, ready for the retreat of the Russian troops. Though there are lines of trenches and barbed-wire entanglements before the city, no effort will be made to defend it, as it would probably mean its destruction. I wonder what the Germans will do when they get here? They are human

beings, but I can't help but think of Belgium, and then I am sick with fear. At other times, it seems the one way to bring our affair with the Secret Service to a finish. [Pg 99] How strange it will be to have no longer a Russian army between the Germans and Kiev. No more a wall of flesh to protect us. Poor soldiers, without a round of ammunition, fighting with naked hands. They will cross the Dnieper to one side of the city, crowding, fighting, falling together. And the German cannon driving them on, and crashing into the city, sometimes, wiping out whole streets of townspeople. And then, the gray lines of the Germans running into Kiev. The thousands of blue-eyed Germans and their pointed helmets and guttural speech taking possession of everything.

As we came down the hill to-day, we saw great vans drawn up before the Governor's mansion. Soldiers were loading them with the rich furnishings of the house. Evidently, the Governor had no intention of letting *his* things fall into the Germans' hands. How strange it looked—the feverish haste with which the house was being emptied!

At the station a special train was waiting to take the Governor's things to a place of safety—and the crowds were waiting to escape with their lives! [Pg 100] Now every one with any sort of a boat that will float is making a fortune taking the terrified townspeople down the river. There are, of course, horrible accidents, for the boats are overcrowded. One completely turned turtle with its load of men and women and children. And yet the Governor's things must be removed to a place of safety.

Aeroplanes scout over the city every day, and at night you can see their lights moving overhead in the darkness. Sometimes they fly so low that you can hear the whir of their engines. For the moment you don't know if they're Russian or enemy ones.

And all night long high-powered automobiles rush up the hill to the General Headquarters, bearing dispatches from the front.

I lie in bed, and it is impossible for me to sleep. It is as if I were up over Kiev in an aeroplane, myself. I can see millions of Germans marching along the roads from Warsaw, dragging their cannon through the mud, fording streams, with their field kitchens and ambulances, moving onward irresistibly toward the golden domes of Kiev.

You seem far away to-night. Only I love you. I can't love you enough. [Pg 101]

RUTH.

October.

Darlingest Mother and Dad:—

This afternoon I went up to the English Consulate with Sasha. As we turned the corner we saw a long gray procession of carts crawling down the hill toward us. I stopped and watched them pass me, one after the other, crowded over to the side of the road by the usual traffic of a busy street. Peasants walked by the horses' heads, men in dusty sheepskin coats, or women muffled up somehow, their hands hidden in the bosoms of their waists for warmth. They stared ahead with a curious, blind look in their eyes, as though they did not realize the noise and movement of the city life about them. How strange it was, the passing of this silent peasant procession by the side of the clanging trains and gray war automobiles!

"Who are these people?" I asked Sasha.

"They must be the fugitives," she replied. "Every day they come in increasing numbers. I have heard the Kiev authorities are trying to turn them aside and make them go round the outskirts; for what can a city do with whole provinces of homeless [Pg 102] and hungry peasants?"

"You mean they are the refugees who have been driven out of their homes by the enemy?" I asked.

"Yes. By the Germans and Austrians."

The carts jolted slowly down the hill, the brakes grinding against the wheels, the little rough-coated horses holding back in the shafts. Sometimes, where there should have been two horses, there was only one. The others evidently had been sold or else died on the way. Only one small horse to drag a heavy double cart crowded with people and furnishings. One little horse looked about to drop. His sides were heaving painfully and his eyes were glazed. "Why don't they stop and rest," I thought. "Why does that man keep on? His horse will die, and then what will he do?"

"What do they do when their horses give out?" I asked Sasha.

"What can they do?" she replied. "What did they do when they were forced to leave their farms and lands? They bear it. The Russian people have a great capacity for suffering. Think of it—what this means now—hundreds and hundreds of thousands of [Pg 103]

people made homeless and sent wandering over the face of the earth. Think of the separations—the families broken up—the bewilderment. A month ago, perhaps, they had their houses and lands and food to eat. They were muzhiks. And now they are wandering, homeless, like Tziganes. Ah, the Russian people were born into a heritage of suffering, and to us all the future is hidden."

I kept my eyes on the endless procession. Some of the carts were open farm wagons, piled with hay, and hung with strange assortments of household utensils. Frying-pans and kettles were strung along the sides, enameled ones, sometimes, that showed a former prosperity. Inside were piles of mattresses and chairs; perhaps a black stovepipe stuck out through the slatted sides of the cart. The women and children huddled together in the midst of their household goods, wrapped up in the extra petticoats and waists and shawls they had brought along—anything for warmth. The children were pale and pinched, and some of them had their eyes closed as though they were sick. If they looked at you, it was without any curiosity or eagerness. How pitiful the indifference of the children was! [Pg 104]

Sometimes the carts were covered with faded cloth stretched over rounded frameworks like gypsy-wagons. There, the old *babas* sat on the front seats, eyes like black shoe-buttons, with their lives almost finished. They seemed the least affected by the misery and change. They occupied the most comfortable places, and held the bright-colored ikons in their arms—the most precious possession of a Russian home. Perhaps a dog was tied under the wagon, or a young colt trotted along by its mother's side.

It was as though there had been a great fire, and every one had caught up what he could to save from destruction: homes broken into little bits to be put together again in a strange land.

An open cart broke down in front of us. The woman got out to help her husband. She had a round, pock-marked face, as expressionless as wood. She wore a bright shawl over her hair, and a long sheepskin coat, with the sleeves and pockets beautifully embroidered in colors. It was dirty, now, but indicated she had been well-to-do once. She limped badly.

"Good-evening," I said. [Pg 105]

"Good-evening, excellency," she replied civilly.

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

"My feet are blistered from the walking," she replied. "I take turns with my husband."

"Where are you from?"

"Rovno."

"How long have you been on the way?"

"Many weeks. Who knows how long?"

"And where are you going?"

"Where the others go. Somewhere into the interior."

The procession had not halted, but, turning out for the broken-down cart, continued uninterruptedly down the hill. Every now and then the peasant looked up anxiously.

"We must hurry. We mustn't be left behind," he muttered.

"What do you eat?" I asked the woman.

"What we can find. Sometimes we get food at the relief stations, or we get it along the way."

"Do the villages you pass through help you?" I persisted.

"They do what they can. But there are so many of us."

"Can't you find cabbages and potatoes in the fields?" I asked. [Pg 106]

The woman looked at me suspiciously for a moment, and did not reply.

"Why do you want to know these things?" she asked, after a silence. "What business is it of yours?"

"I want to help you."

"Help us." She shook her head. "But I'll tell you," she said. "I did take some potatoes once. It was before the cold weather. I dug them out of a field we passed through after dark. No one saw me. My children were crying with hunger and I had nothing to give them. So I dug up a handful of potatoes in the dark. But God saw me and punished me. I cooked the potatoes over a fire by the roadside, but He kept the heat from reaching the inside of the potatoes. Two of my children sickened and died from

eating them. It was God's punishment. We buried them along the road. My husband made the crosses out of wood and carved their names on them. They lie way behind us now—unsung. But perhaps those who pass along the road and see the crosses will offer up a prayer."

"I will burn candles for them," I said. "What were their names?"

"Sonia and Peter Kolpakova, your excellency. You are good. God bless you!" And she kissed my hands. [Pg 107]

I looked at the three children who were left. They sat in the cart silently, surrounded by the incongruous collection of pots and pans, and leaning against a painted chest. The chest was covered with dust, but you could still see a bunch of bright-painted flowers behind the children's heads.

"Poor little things," I said. "Are they cold?"

"It's hard on the children," the mother replied stolidly. "They can't stand it as we can. We are used to trouble. We know what life is. But the children—they are sick most of the time. They have no strength left. What can we do for them? We have no medicines. Have you any medicines?" she asked, with a sudden, hopeful glint in her dull, wide-set eyes. "No?" Her face regained its impassivity.

Her husband straightened himself, grunting. He had finished tying the broken wheel together with rope.

"Come, we must be moving. Hurry, or we'll be left behind," he said, going to the little horse's head.

The woman climbed back into the cart and took the youngest child in her arms. A feeble wail came from the dull-colored bundle. Her husband turned the horse into the procession again. [Pg 108]

Still the carts were coming over the hill, gray and dusty, with the peasants and their wives walking beside the horses' heads. What a river of suffering! What a smell came from it! And automobiles and tramways rushed by.

Is this the twentieth century?

October.

I delayed mailing my last letter, so I shall tell you about another glimpse I've had of the refugees. Yesterday, as we sat drinking tea, we heard the rumble and creak of heavy wagons outside the *pension*. The noise reached us distinctly in spite of the windows being hermetically sealed with putty for the winter. At first we thought it was the regular train of carts that climb Institutska Oulitza every evening at six o'clock carrying provisions to the barracks. But the rumble and creak persisted so long that I went to the window at last to see why there were so many more carts than usual.

There was a procession of carts, but instead of going up the hill in the direction of the barracks, it was descending the hill, and instead of soldiers in clumsy uniforms, peasants in bell-shaped sheepskin coats walked by their horses' heads, snapping the long lash whips they carried in their hands. I recognized the covered gypsy wagons and the open carts with their bulky loads. It was too dark to see distinctly, but I knew they were refugees by the strings of kettles along the sides of the carts, which caught the electric light in coppery flashes. And in the open wagons I could see the pale disks of faces. As I watched, the procession came to a stand-still and the drivers collected in little groups under the white globes of the street lamps. I went outdoors and crossed the street to them. [Pg 109]

I approached a group of three men.

"Good-evening," I said.

"Good-evening, Panna," they replied.

"Have you come far?"

"Far? I should say we've been two months on the road," replied the best-dressed man of the three. He had fur cuffs and collar on his long sheepskin coat, and his boots were strong and well made.

"Can you tell me where we can get some tobacco?" he asked. [Pg 110]

I directed him down the street a little way. He took a piece of silver from a leather purse he wore round his neck, and gave it to one of his companions, who left on the errand. The other man went round to the tail of the cart and took down two bags of grain for the horses' supper.

"Good horses you have there," I said, to say something.

"Yes, indeed; the best horses a man ever had; less good ones would have died on the road long ago. I bought them for fifty roubles apiece, and I wouldn't take two hundred and fifty for them to-day. But, then, they're all I have left of back there." He spoke in a quiet voice, scratching his stubby, unshaven face, absent-mindedly.

"Is he traveling with you?" I asked, pointing to the man who was slinging the grain-bags round the horses' necks.

"Yes. I picked him up along the road. His horse had died under him and he counted himself no longer a human being. What was he, indeed, with nothing he could call his own in the world any more? I let him come along with me. I had extra room. So I let [Pg 111] him come along with me." His voice had no expression in it.

"But haven't you a family?" I asked.

"I have three children," he replied.

"It must be hard to take care of children at such a time as this."

"God knows it is," he replied. There was a sudden desperate note in his voice. "It's a woman's business. But my wife died on the way. A month and a half ago—soon after we started. It seems soon, now, but we'd been long enough on the road to kill her with the jolting and misery of it."

"Was she sick?"

"She died in childbirth. There was no one to take care of her, and nothing for her to eat. I made a fire, and she lay on the ground. All night she moaned. She died toward morning. The baby only lived a few hours. It was better it should die. What was ahead of it but suffering? It was a boy, and my wife and I had always wanted a boy. But I wouldn't have minded so much if the little wife had lived. It's hard without her."

The man returned with the tobacco and the three peasants lighted cigarettes. All was quiet. I heard nothing but the champing of the horses as they munched the grain and [Pg 112] the whistling of the wind through the poplars in the convent garden.

"Kiev is a big city—a holy city, I've heard. Many from our town have made a pilgrimage here," the rich peasant observed.

For the moment I'd forgotten where I was. Now I heard the city noises; the footsteps grinding on pavements; the whistle and grinding of trains. And the lights from the city reddened the mists that rose from the Dnieper.

The carts in front began to move on.

"Where are we going?"—"What are the orders?"—"Is there a relief station here?" every one cried at once.

"Good-bye. A good journey," I cried.

"Thank you. Good-bye."

The men stepped out into the road again. I watched cart after cart pass me. The women looked straight out between the horses' ears, and showed no curiosity or wonderment at being in a big city for the first time in their lives. Strange sights and faces had no significance for them any more.

I ducked under a horse's nose and went indoors again.

There is something shameful in our security. We have shelter and bread. We can only [Pg 113] feel life indirectly, after all. We are always muffled up by things. And America. A pathologic fear clutches me, for how will it all end?

My love to you every minute.

RUTH.

October.

Dearests:—

There seems no beginning or end to my stay here. How strange it is to look back to July and remember the long, hot days and the languorous nights when, in spite of the war, people walked in the gardens and listened to the music and drank punch out of tea-cups, pretending it was tea. The still, starlit nights of July.

I remember a dinner Princess P—— gave at Koupietsky Park a few nights after my arrival in Russia. Everything was so new to me. Our table was set out on the terrace, overlooking the Dnieper, with the music and stir of people in the distance. An irresponsible joy filled my heart as I looked down at the black, winding river with its shadowy banks and the fantastic shimmer of lights on the water. The city lights [Pg 114] crowded down to the very water's edge; then the drifting red and green lights of steamers and ferry-boats moving on the black, magic stream, and beyond, the flat

plain, silent and mysterious, with, over the horizon rim, the thunder and clang of war. But war was far away those first days I was in Russia. I hardly thought of it.

The dome and square walls of a monastery were momentarily whitened by a wheeling searchlight, and high up against the dusky, starlit sky was printed a shining gold cross. Women's dresses glimmered in the darkness like gray, widespread wings of moths, and laughter came from the curve of the terrace overlooking the monastery garden.

"My child, there are tears in your eyes; how pretty!" the Princess cried, taking my hand in hers and stroking it with her small, cold fingers.

There were other Americans present beside myself, and I knew the Princess loved one of them. It was to make him jealous, I knew, that she held my hand in hers throughout dinner. She, herself, hardly ate anything, only smoked one cigarette after another. There were all sorts of *zakouski*, stuffed tomatoes and cucumbers and queer [Pg 115] little fishes in oil, and pickled sturgeon and mushrooms, and salads and caviar, and there was *kvass* to drink,—deep red,—and a champagne cup served in a teapot, and cigarettes all through the meal.

The Princess was middle-aged and wanted to appear youthful; so she dyed her hair blue-black which was harsh for her pointed face, and wore costly, too elaborate clothes from Paris. But her body showed delicately round under the laces and chiffons, and she was quick and light in her gestures like a bird. Her husband, who had been twice her age, had died, leaving her large estates and much money. Now she moved about Russia with a maid and a wee little dog and numberless trunks, frivolously seeking her pleasure. Her eyes were black and glittering, and her mouth red and thin and flexible. She had caressing, spoiled ways with every one from the American whom she called "Meester" to her chow dog, and all she asked from any one was amusement.

"I like Americans," she said with shameless flattery. "So much I like them. The women—*and* the men. I shall go to New York after the war, and you will show me [Pg 116] your famous cabarets, and—what do you call it?" She appealed to "Meester."

"Broadway—good old Broadway," he replied indulgently.

"Ah, yes. B-r-r-oadway. And I will dance all night. I dance magnificently. Is it not so, Meester? Yes, I will go to New York and become just like an American."

After dinner we went to a wrestling-match, and "Meester" took the Princess, radiant and vivacious and paying all the bills, back to the Continental.

Since July war has come nearer Kiev. The hospitals are full of maimed and wounded soldiers who fought to defend Russia. They made a bulwark of their breasts. It was as though one single giant breast, hundreds of versts broad, thrust itself between the Germans and home.

And it is winter now. The days are short with an icy, gray mist from the Dnieper, and flurries of snow. There is a shortage of coal, and we sit shivering in our apartment. We drag the covers off the beds and wrap ourselves up in them while we read books from the circulating library or play three-handed bridge. The wind rattles the windows and streaks the panes with snow and rain. But however dirty they get, they [Pg 117] must remain unwashed till spring; for they are sealed for the winter with putty, and you can open only one small pane at the top. The apartment is darker than ever. Not once does the sun shine into our rooms. We see the sunlight in the street, but the dark shadow of the building lengthens minute by minute, stretching itself across the street and reaching up over the convent wall like the smothering black hand of a giant, till only the tips of the cypresses and poplars in the gardens are red in the late sunlight.

At tea-time we go to "François's" or to some other little sweet-shop, in order to get warm. There, we drink glass after glass of weak tea and eat little Polish cakes, and look over the English and French periodicals.

It is dark when we go out into the street again, and the air is frosty. The officers wear short gray coats, braided and lined with fur, and fur caps. The women are muffled in seal and sable, which make the skin look clear and white and their eyes brilliant. Even the peasants wear sheepskin coats, bell-shaped and richly embroidered. Marie has winter clothes, but the warmest thing I possess is my [Pg 118] traveling suit I wore here in June, which has been getting thinner and thinner ever since. My feet, in low summer pumps, are swollen and burning with chilblains. I must get some high shoes when our next money comes. You see, that is the trouble. We are promised our passports from day to day, and, expecting to go at any time, we try to get along with what money we have, and wait to buy clothes till we get back to Bucharest. But our passports are not given us and our money gets low. We are waiting for money now, and, of course, a cold snap has set in just when we can't possibly buy anything. Peter's summer suit hangs on him in folds. The heaviest iron couldn't crease it into even temporary shape. When we went to the cinematograph

last night he wore Marie's black fur coat to keep from freezing.

"Look at that man," we heard a woman say in the street. "He's wearing a woman's coat!"

Yes, we go from café to cinematograph and try and keep warm.

I've never liked moving pictures before. Here they are presented differently than in America. Some of the plays I've seen have the naïveté and simplicity of a confession. [Pg 119] Others interpret abnormal, psychopathic characters whose feelings and thoughts are expressed by the actors with a fine and vivid realism. There is the exultation of life, and the despair, the aggression and apathy, the frivolity and the revolt. The action is taken slowly. There are no stars. You look at the screen as though you were looking at life itself. And the films don't always have happy endings, because life isn't always kind. It often seems senseless and cruel and crushes men's spirits. I wish we could have these films in America instead of the jig-saw puzzles I've seen.

October.

There is a gypsy who sells fruit at the corner of Institutska Oulitza, a woman so enormous that she resembles a towering mountain, and her customers look, beside her, like tiny Russian toys. Every one looks at her curiously, and I have seen several gentlemen in fur pelisses, with gold-headed canes, stop and speak to her. In the morning she wheels up her cart by the curbing and polishes the pears and apples with the end of her shawl till they shine. Then she piles them up in red and yellow [Pg 120] pyramids and waits for customers, her hands on her hips. Everything about her is crude and flaming and inextinguishable like life itself. Her scarlet skirt lights up the whole street. It floats about her, and when she bends over to serve a customer, you can see the edges of green and yellow and pink and brown petticoats underneath as her overskirt tilts up. The lines of her body are brutal and compact. Her dark, mulberry-colored shawl is stretched tightly across her full bosom. Her eyebrows meet over her nose in a heavy, broad line like a smudge of charcoal, and her nose is spongy, and her lips swollen and red from taking snuff. She holds her black and silver snuff-box in her hand or hides it away in a pocket in her voluminous skirt when she serves some one. Her fingers are covered with rings and she wears yellow hoops in her ears. I am repulsed as well as attracted. She is like a bold, upright stroke of life, and then I see her crafty eyes and notice how, in spite of her size, when she moves it is with the softness and flexibility of a huge cat.

Peter went to Petrograd to-day and he will stay there till he gets our passports. He [Pg 121] would have gone a month ago, but first came the panic from the German advance, and then the railways were used only for military purposes. Now, Marie and I are alone, waiting for a telegram from him.

V

[Pg 122]

October.

To-day, the chief of the secret service came and told us all political prisoners were to be sent on to Siberia. He told us to make a small bundle of necessary things and be ready to leave at any time. With Peter in Petrograd! I asked him where we were going and he shrugged his shoulders. I went to Mr. Douglas, who has wired Peter. Also, he is going to see the chief and try and keep in touch with us. We won't leave till the last moment. But already many of the hospitals have been moved, and certain prisoners. I suppose I must destroy these letters to you. But I will wait till the last moment. I want so much for you to get them and know what has happened, because I shan't see you, to tell you with my voice, for over a year still. I have written so fully for that reason.

A few days later.

We are still here, and there is more hope in the situation. There is a persistent report in the papers, and it is repeated in the streets and houses, that the Germans have [Pg 123] been stopped by Riga and Dvinsk. Large bodies of troops are moved through Kiev, day and night, for the front. Regular train service is suspended by this movement of troops.

Huge vans pass through the city, carrying aeroplanes to the aviation field outside the barracks. Once we saw a wrecked one being sent to be repaired. A troop of small boys followed it, looking curiously at the broad, broken wings and the tangle of steel framework.

Guns are arriving, too. We see them being carted through the streets. And early this

morning we heard cannon. Our first thought was of the Germans, and we lay in bed, stiff with fright. Later, we heard they were the new cannon being tried out before being sent to the front. They say that fresh ammunition has been received from Japan and America. All trains are held up to let these trainloads of guns and cannon and ammunition go tearing over the rails to the front to save Russia. And just in time. I see the open cars packed and covered and guarded by soldiers. I lie in bed and hear the whistle and shriek of the trains in the night, and I imagine row upon row of long iron-throated cannon staring up at the stars. [Pg 124]

The Czar has arrived in Kiev for a conference at Headquarters. He came during the night, and no one knows when he will leave. There was no demonstration, and the police break up any groups of more than three persons in the streets.

A dozen or so Japanese officers passed through Kiev, too. They were bound for the front, escorting their guns and ammunition. How curious they looked beside the big, naïve Russians. They were like porcelain figurines with impenetrable, yellow faces, mask-like, and tiny hands and feet. What a finished product they appear, and yet they go to the front and observe the latest methods of warfare and multiply their merchant marine while the rest of the world is spending itself.

October.

I went to a military hospital to-day. It was up on a hill, a huge place, formerly a school, I think, with a broad piazza where the convalescents walked in their gray bathrobes. Inside were rows and rows of cots, and on every cot a wounded man. It appeared that a fresh batch had arrived from the front, and the doctors were just finishing with them. There was a foul smell of blood and sweat and anæsthetics, and the light came dismally through the dirty window-panes, showing dimly the rows and rows of pale, weary faces on the thin pillows. Sometimes the gray blankets came up to the chin, and the man looked dead already, he was so dreadfully still, with his closed eyes and waxlike face. Another moaned continuously, moving his head from side to side—"Oh, oh—Oh, oh." His eyes were open, and hard and bright with fever. Several had their heads wound with strips of bandages. You would hardly have known they were human. Two or three were blind, with the bandage only round their eyes, and it was strange to see the expression their hands took on—workmen's hands with stubby fingers, now white and helpless-looking, and picking at the cover aimlessly. [Pg 125]

A nurse told me how an officer who had been blinded and was about to be discharged and sent home, had committed suicide the other day. In some way one of his men, who had been wounded in the arm, had been able to smuggle in a revolver to him. The officer killed himself in the middle of the night. [Pg 126]

"I don't suppose he knew whether it was day or night, and took a chance that no one was looking," I said.

"I think he knew it was night," she replied. "He could tell by the others' breathing. I was night nurse. He was dead before I reached him. The soldier gave himself up of his own accord. He will be court-martialed, of course, though every one knows he did the best thing. He said to us, 'He was my captain. He ordered me to get the revolver, and I only obeyed orders. I would do it again.' We had a hard time the rest of the night to quiet the men."

In a small room to one side were six men gone mad. They were quite harmless and lay quietly in bed. Besides having their reason smashed to bits by the horrors at the front, they were badly wounded. I was ashamed to stand there looking at them. What was I? Suddenly, one of them, a young boy surely not more than twenty-one or twenty-two, caught sight of us, and he fixed his eyes upon us in a curious, concentrated way as if to assure himself we were real. And then, all at once, abject terror leapt into his eyes. His mouth opened and the cords of his neck stood out. He threw both arms before his face as if to ward off somebody or something. He began to scream out quick, unintelligible words in a high-pitched, staccato voice. I looked fearfully at the others to see if his terror would be communicated to them. But they were apparently oblivious of each other, wrapped up in their separate lives and experiences. One middle-aged man, with a rough, reddish beard, was smiling mildly and smoothing the sheet as though it had been somebody's hair. We left the room, leaving the nurse to calm the screaming man. I thought of the terrors and fears and memories in that room: the snatches of memories pieced together that made up the actual lives, now, of those broken men in there. [Pg 127]

"Are they—do they suffer?" I asked the doctor.

"No. They don't seem to realize that they are wounded and suffer the way normal people would with their wounds. The only thing is, they all have moments of terror, when it's all we can do to quiet them. They think the wall of the room is the enemy moving down on them. I guess they went through hell all right, there at the front!" [Pg 128]

"Will they get better?"

"We can't tell. We have a specialist studying just such cases. These men seem pretty well smashed, to me."

In one corner lay a young man propped up with pillows. A nurse was holding his hand. His eyes were looking at her so trustfully. He hardly seemed to be breathing and his face was bloodless—even his lips were dead white. And as I looked, he gave a little sigh, and his eyes closed and his body sagged among the pillows. The nurse bent over him and then straightened herself. Quickly she arranged a screen round the bed. When she walked away, I could see she was crying uncontrollably.

"Is he—?"

"Yes. He's dead," the doctor replied. "He's been dying for a week. He was terribly wounded in the stomach, and there was nothing we could do for him. It was a repulsive case to care for, but Sister Mary had full charge of it. She sat with him for hours at a time. In the beginning, to encourage him, she bought a pair of boots he was to wear when he got well. For days, now, he's been out of his head and fancied she was his mother." [Pg 129]

And life presses as close to death as that—while I was looking at him, he had died. I just managed to reach the door before I fainted.

October.

The Governor of Kiev has been removed. He was too cautious. It was a bad example!

VI

[Pg 130]

October.

Darling ones:—

There is the most careful avoidance of any official responsibility here in trying to find out where our passports are, and who is to return them. We have already unraveled yards of red tape, and still there is no end. Of course, ever since Peter came he has followed a schedule of visits—one day to the English Consul; another day to the secret police, then to the Military Governor, the Civil Governor, the Chief of Staff, and back, in desperation, to the English Consul. There is an American Vice-Consul here, but he is wholly ineffectual, since he has not yet been officially received. His principal duty consists in distributing relief to the Polish refugees. Mr. Douglas, the English Consul, is our one hope, and he is untiring in his efforts to help us. If we ever get out, it will be due to him. The English Government is behind its representatives here in a way that the American State Department is not. Partly, I suppose, this is because America has no treaty with Russia, on account of the Jew clause. At any rate, you might just as well be a Fiji Islander as an American, for all the consideration you get from officialdom. [Pg 131]

Did I write you about the naturalized American Jew in the detention camp? He had come back to Galicia in the summer of 1914 to see his sister married. After the outbreak of the war, he was refused permission to leave the country, and when the wholesale clean-up started, he was deported with the others. The day I visited the detention camp he had just arrived, and, knowing we were Americans, he tried to secure our aid. He had managed to keep his American passport, and brought it out to us to prove his naturalization and to strengthen his demand to be set free as an American citizen. The overseer, hearing his excited voice and seeing us examine a large sheet of paper, came up. He looked like a butcher, in his dirty-white linen coat, his legs planted apart, his hands fingering his short whip. The way in which he joined our group and made himself one with us, without so much as by your leave, was disturbing. The cool self-assurance of even a petty Russian official is sinister. They are straw men to your reason, but hard facts if you bump up against them. Our curiosity flagged, conscious as we were all the time of his unblinking ferret-eyes on us, and we showed a certain alacrity to return the passport to its rightful owner. When we were handing it back to the Jew, the overseer thrust out his hand and said, "Let me see it." [Pg 132]

There was nothing for the Jew to do but hand it over. The overseer could not read a word of English, of course, but from the big red American seal he could recognize it as an official document.

Suddenly, he tore it in halves, and as the Jew tried to grab it out of his hands, he cuffed the Jew down, and continued deliberately to tear it into tiny bits.

"I am an American and that is my passport," the Jew cried.

"That's what I think of an American passport," the overseer replied, looking us over with incredible impudence as he walked away.

The rest of Russian officialdom must regard American rights in much the same way, since it is four months now that we have been detained.

I went to the headquarters of the secret police the other day with Mr. Douglas. It is located in the opposite end of the town, down a quiet side street—an unobtrusive, one-storied brown house that gives the impression of trying to hide itself from people's notice. It is reached by a narrow, stone-flagged path, crowded in between two houses which block its view from the street. There are four windows in a row on the front façade, all with the curtains drawn. These four blind windows add to the secretive appearance. Over the front steps the yellowing leaves of a lime tree rustled in the wind and detached themselves one by one. [Pg 133]

We rang the bell. While we waited, I was conscious of being watched, and, glancing up quickly, I saw the curtain at one of the windows fall back into place. The door opened a crack, and a white face with a long, thin nose, and horn-rimmed spectacles with smoky glass to hide the eyes, peered out at us furtively. Mr. Douglas handed the spy his card and the door was shut softly in our faces.

In about three minutes the door was opened again, and a gendarme in uniform ushered us into a long room thick with stale tobacco-smoke. He gave me a chair, and while we waited I looked about at the walls with the brightly colored portraits of the Czar and the Czarina and the royal family, and the ikon in one corner. "Give up all hope all ye who enter here." [Pg 134]

The room was silent except for the scratch of pens on paper. The secret-service spies sat at long tables, writing laboriously, and smoking. They all wore civilian clothes, and I recognized most of them. I had passed them on the street or sat beside them in restaurants, and three had come with the chief to arrest us. I wondered what they were writing. Some one was being betrayed or ruined. That was how they lived. I looked for the mark of their calling on them, but at first they appeared an ordinary crowd, pale, with a thick, unhealthy pallor, as though from an indoor life. Their suits were poor enough,—worn threadbare,—and their fingernails were dirty. Furtively they glanced up at me and examined me curiously, and then gave quick, frightened looks on either side to see if their comrades had observed their interest in me. What a mediocre, shabby crowd, with their low foreheads and dead-white skin and dirty linen, and, yes, the stamp on them that made them infamous! It was as though their profession affected them the way that living in a close, dark room would, stupefying and making them bestial. [Pg 135]

And then the chief came in, accompanied by two spies with black portfolios under their arms. When he saw us, he grew white with anger. He looked like a German, spurred and booted, with square head and jaw and steel-like eyes and compressed, cruel lips. He was the only well-dressed one in the crowd, but his livery was the same as theirs. He was their superior, that was all, and how I loathed him!

"He's angry because we were brought in here," Douglas whispered under his breath.

The chief turned his back on us.

The spies scribbled away furiously, their noses close to their paper, not daring to look up.

We were taken into another room, a small back room, bare except for a table and sofa and a tawdry ikon in the farthest corner. And there we waited fully fifteen minutes in absolute silence. How silent that house was, full of invisible horrors! The headquarters of the secret police—why shouldn't it be terrifying when you think of the men and women who have been brought here in secret, and their existence suddenly snapped off: secret arrest, secret trial, or no trial at all, and then a secret sending-off up north, out of the reach of the world! What strange abortions of life this Government brings forth! Is it curious that thinking men and women, who have lived apparently well-regulated lives, suddenly throw bombs at a minister in a railway station, or at an official as he drives to the palace in dress uniform, with jeweled decorations on his breast? I ran my hand over the faded sofa-covering, wondering who had sat there before me. [Pg 136]

Suddenly the chief came into the room, closing the door carefully behind him. He was quite calm again.

"What do you want?" He looked at Douglas.

Douglas explained how anxious we were to get out of Russia, how we had insufficient money for cold weather, how my husband's business called for his immediate presence, and so forth, all of which we had gone over at least three times a week since my arrest, and all of which was a matter of complete indifference to the secret police. They had failed to find any proof of espionage, which was their charge against us, and my letter, their only evidence, had been passed on and was snarled up somewhere in official red-tape. Now they washed their hands of me. [Pg 137]

"We can do nothing. It is out of our hands." He was extremely courteous, speaking

German for my benefit. "It is unfortunate that Frau Pierce should have written the letter. I was obliged to send it on to the General Staff. You should have a reply soon."

There was nothing more to be said. Douglas was conciliatory, almost ingratiating. My nerves gave way.

"A reply soon!" I burst out. "I'm sick of waiting. If we have the liberty of the city, surely there can't be anything very serious against us. It's an outrage keeping our passports. I'm an American and I demand them." I was almost crying.

"You must demand them through your Ambassador, meine Frau."

I knew that he knew we had been telegraphing him since our arrest and my impotence made me speechless with rage. Douglas took advantage of my condition to beat a hasty retreat.

As we were going through the doorway, the chief said carelessly, "By the way, how did you happen to find this house?" [Pg 138]

"I have been here before," Douglas replied.

"Thank you. I was only curious."

I could feel the spies' eyes on my back as we went down the path.

"Mrs. Pierce—Mrs. Pierce, you must not lose your temper that way."

"I don't care!" I cried. "I had no way to express what I felt."

"I know," Douglas agreed thoughtfully.

We hailed a droshky and got in.

"I have a friend—a Pole," said Douglas. "For no reason except that he was a Pole, they made a *revision* at his house, and among other things took away every calling card they found. They made a *revision* then on each one of those people whose names they found. Though they found nothing incriminating in his possession, they make him report every day at the police headquarters. A year ago he was a giant in strength. Now he is a sick man. The uselessness of it. Nothing was found against him, and yet he is followed and watched. What are they driving at? They are wearing him to the bone with their persecution." He shrugged his shoulders and laughed [Pg 139] suddenly. "Come, Mrs. Pierce, you can do nothing against them. But let me tell you what I will give you. It is a German helmet that a friend of mine brought from the Riga front. You can put it in your room and blow beans at it!"

October.

"Passports—passports, who's got the passports?" It's like a game—or *la recherche de l'absolu*. And it isn't as though you could hop into a cab and make the round of visits on the General Staff, Civil Governor, and the rest, all in one day, or even all in a week. Nothing so efficient and simple as that. What is an official without an anteroom? As well imagine a soldier without a uniform. And the importance of the official is instantly seen by the crowd waiting on him. Soldiers and Jews and patient, unobtrusive women in black wait at police headquarters; generals and ladies of quality crowd the anteroom of the General Staff. For days the faces vary only slightly when you enter and take your accustomed place. Patient, dull faces that light with momentary expectation on the opening of a door, and relapse into depression and tragic immobility when the aide walks through the anteroom without admitting any [Pg 140] one to the inner office.

I gained admittance to the Military Governor the other day. He is the successor of that over-cautious governor who moved all his household goods during the German advance, and was then relieved of office. His palace, set back from the street behind a tall iron fence, is guarded by soldiers with bayonets, and secret-service men. I laughed, recognizing my old friends the spies.

Upstairs, the Governor was just saying good-bye to Bobrinsky, former Governor of Galicia, and we stood to one side as they came out of an inner office, bowing and making compliments to each other. Gold braid and decorations! These days the military have their innings, to be sure! I wonder how many stupid years of barrack-life go to make up one of these men? Or perhaps so much gold braid is paid for in other ways.

The Governor was an old man, carefully preserved. His uniform was padded, but his legs, thin and insecure, gave him away, and his standing collar, though it came up to his ears, failed to hide his scrawny neck where the flesh was caving in. He wore his [Pg 141] gray beard trimmed to a point, and inside his beaklike nose was a quantity of grayish-yellow hair which made a very disagreeable impression on me. All the time I was speaking he examined his nails. When he raised his eyes finally, to reply, I noticed how lifeless and indifferent they were, and glazed by age. I could see the bones of his face move under the skin as he talked, especially two little round bones,

like balls, close to his ears.

"I have nothing to do with the case. It has been referred to the General Staff, I believe. You will have to wait for the course of events."

He turned his back, went over to the window, and began to play with a curtain-tassel. An aide bowed me to the door.

Outside, the anteroom was crowded with supplicants. It was his reception hour. The murmur of whispered conversations stopped when we appeared. Every one rose, pressing forward to reach the aide. Some held out soiled bits of paper; others talked in loud, explanatory voices, as though hoping by sheer noise to pierce the crust of official attention. But the aide took no more notice than if they had been crowding [Pg 142] sheep. He pushed through them and escorted me to the head of the staircase. Down I went, boiling with rage.

Dearest Mother and Dad:
—

I am just back from the General Staff, where the mysterious rotation of the official wheel landed me unexpectedly into the very sanctum sanctorum of the Chief of the Staff, and to see him I had to wait only five hours with Mr. Douglas in the anteroom! Mr. Douglas has just left me to go to his club, exhausted, ready to devour pounds of Moscow sausages, so he said.

The anteroom of the General Staff was as Russian as Russian can be. I suppose I shall never forget the dingy room, with its brown painted walls and the benches and chairs ranged along the four sides of the room, and the orderlies bringing in glasses of tea, and the waiting people who were not ashamed to be unhappy. In the beginning Mr. Douglas and I tried to talk, but after an hour or so we relapsed into silence. I looked up at the large oil paintings of deceased generals which hung about the room. At first, they all looked fat and stupid and alike in the huge, ornate gilt frames. But after much study they began to take on differences—slight differences [Pg 143] which it seemed that the painters had caught in spite of themselves, but which made human beings of even generals.

There was one portrait that I remember, in the corner, a general in the uniform of the Crimean War. He looked out at you with green eyes, like a cat's. The more I looked at him, the more he resembled a cat, with his flat, broad head and slightly almond eyes and long mustache. His cheek bones were high and his jaw square and cruel. He settled into his coat-collar the way a cat shortens its neck when it purrs. He, too, was purring, from gratification, perhaps, at having his portrait painted; but, wholly untrustworthy himself, he distrusted the world and held himself ready to strike.

Another portrait was of a man who might have been of peasant origin. An inky black beard hid the lower part of his face, but his nose was blunt and pugnacious, and his eyes were like black shoe-buttons sewn close together. He stuck out his stomach importantly, and the care with which his uniform and decorations were painted strengthened the impression that he had made his career himself and set the highest [Pg 144] value on the insignia that stood for his accomplishment.

Well, I made up characters to fit the portraits, and the time went on. There were three entrances to the room, through which aides and orderlies were constantly appearing and disappearing. The room filled up with people and smelt of oiled leather and smoke. The women did not move from their chairs, but the men got up and stood about, talking in groups. I began to feel that I had known these captains and majors and lieutenants all my life. They looked at me curiously, and if they knew Mr. Douglas they asked to be presented to me.

"How do you like Russia?"

They spoke French. I looked at Mr. Douglas and smiled.

"Very much."

They were pleased.

"Ah, you do? That is good. Russia is a wonderful country and its resources are endless. But it is war-time. You should see Russia in peace-time. There is no country in the world where one amuses one's self so well as in Russia. But first we must beat the Germans."

They all begin that way, and then branch out into their particular line of [Pg 145] conversation.

There was a woman near me, her mourning veil thrown back, disclosing a death-like

face. Her features were pinched, and her pale lips were pressed tightly together in suffering. She had been waiting surely three hours since sending in her card, and all that time she had scarcely moved. Sometimes I forgot her, and then my eyes would fall on her and I wondered how I could see anybody else in the room. In comparison to her all the others seemed fussy or melodramatic or false in some way. Suffering was condensed in her. It flowed through her body. It settled in the shadows of her face and clothed her in black. Her gloved hands pressed each other. Her eyes stared in front of her, full of pain like a hurt beast's. She sat as though carved in stone, dark against the window, the lines of her body rigid and clear-cut like a statue's.

At last an aide came toward her, spruce and alert, holding a paper in his hand. She rose at his approach, leaning on the back of her chair, her body bent forward tensely. He spoke to her in a low voice, consulting the slip of paper in his hand. All at once she straightened herself, and a burning expression came into her face. One hand [Pg 146] went to her heart, exactly as though a bullet had pierced her breast. Then she gave a sharp cry, and hurling her pocketbook across the room with all her strength, she rushed outside.

Every one dodged as though the pocketbook had been aimed at him. A young second lieutenant picked it from the floor and stood twisting it in his hands, not knowing what to do with it. People looked uneasy and ashamed as though a door had been suddenly opened on a terrible secret thing that was customarily locked up in a closet. But the uncomfortable feeling soon passed, and they began to talk about the strange woman and to gossip and play and amuse themselves with her sorrow. A crowd collected about the aide, who grew more and more voluble and important each time he repeated his explanation of the incident.

Shortly afterward, Mr. Douglas and I were admitted to the Chief of Staff. The walls of his office were covered with large maps, with tiny flags marking the battlefronts, and he sat at a large table occupying the center of the room.

When we entered, he rose and bowed, and after waving me to a chair, reseated [Pg 147] himself. He was rather like a university professor, courteous, with a slightly ironical twist to his very red lips. His pale face was narrow and long, with a pointed black beard, and a forehead broad and high and white. While he listened or talked, he nervously drew arabesques on a pad of paper on the table.

"I have your petition, but since I have just been appointed here, I am not very familiar with routine matters." Here he smiled slightly. "Yours is a routine matter, I should say. How long have you waited for an answer—four months? We'll see what can be done. I have sent to the files and I should have a report in a few minutes."

An aide brought in a collection of telegrams and papers, and the chief glanced through them. Then he looked at me searchingly and suddenly smiled again.

"From your appearance I should never imagine you were as dangerous as these papers state. Are you an American?"

"Yes," I replied; "and I assure you that I am dangerous only in the official mind. I have no importance except what they give me."

"Mrs. Pierce is an American and unused to Russian ways," Mr. Douglas said [Pg 148] apologetically.

"Well, your case has been referred to General Ivanoff, and I will wire him again at once. If you come back next Thursday I will give you a definite answer."

We went out. It was a gray winter day, with a cold wind from the river, but I felt glowing and stimulated and alive, seeing the future crystallize and grow definite again. You can't imagine the wearing depression of months of uncertainty.

"That Chief of Staff is the first human official I've met," I said to Mr. Douglas.

"Give him time, give him time," Douglas replied. "Didn't you hear him say he was new to the job?"

I write such long letters and all about *things*. But I want you to see with me so we may share our lives in spite of distance. Armfuls of love to you, my dearest ones, from

RUTH.

November.

The Dowager Empress came to Kiev to-day to visit a convent that she has under her protection. The Christiatick was very animated, with curious crowds lining the [Pg 149] sidewalks and fierce-looking gendarmes who snapped their whips and made a great fuss about keeping the people in order. The trams were stopped and officials rushed up and down the Christiatick in huge gray automobiles. It was bitterly cold, and the waiting people grew restless. At last a feeble cheer started up the street and swept down the lines as a big car came tearing down the middle of the street. I caught a

glimpse of an elderly woman in black—that was all.

I went home. All the way up the hill I walked beside a "crocodile." How pathetic those convent children are in their funny little round hats, all so much too small, and their maroon-colored dresses with the shoulder-capes to hide any suggestion of sex. Their noses were pinched and their lips were blue from waiting in the cold to see their "protector." They were at the age "between hay and grass," narrow-chested, and long-legged like colts. They climbed the hill stiffly two by two, their eyes looking meekly at the ground. Three sisters kept them in line.

At home I found a summons from the police to appear with Marie at the local police bureau to-morrow at nine, to receive our passports. I telegraphed Peter through Mr. Douglas. Now that our affair is settled, I feel no emotion—neither relief nor joy. [Pg 150]

THE END

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1. Minor changes have been made to correct typesetter's errors and to make the use of hyphenated words consistent; otherwise, the transcriber has made a diligent effort to be true to the original text.

2. For ease of navigation, the transcriber has added a Table of Contents that did not appear in the original book.

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