

His brother's keeper

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Part 2

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“How can they fail to understand that vice is only alluring when it is beautiful and hidden, when it wears the mask of virtue?”-Anton Chekhov, A Nervous Breakdown

On March 21st, the pale sun started its slow climb north, but spring would not come to St. Petersburg for months. The winter of 1908 had been especially cruel, and the city lay buried in snow, its pastel palaces whipped by polar wind and draped in early darkness. The Neva, a sheet of crumpled ice trapped between granite bands, stretched like a used carpet before the Winter Palace; not yet had the pistol-like reports, which signaled tale cracking and collision of escaping floes, been heard through its lofty windows. In her fine home in the center of town, Countess Marina de Hayden, who was to be married in one month, waited for the return of the sun and its promising warmth for, she wrote, her soul, too, was crushed by ice.

Inexorably, the grim days passed. Her mind fixed only on her impetuous lover, Count Nicholas Yusupov, Marina drifted like a shade through the preparations for her lavish wedding to another man. Dutifully she admired her ivory satin gown with its long train, accepted gifts and invitations, and went about town with her fiancé, Count Arvid Manteuffel. Undeterred by prophets who saw only tragedy in the union, the Count proceeded with military precision toward the altar with his prize, the ravishing Marina, fastening a collar of diamonds securely around her neck.

As was his habit, Manteuffel continued to spend nights with his circle of Guardsmen friends who, in time-honored fashion, squandered their hours on cards, fast horses, and gypsy women who sang and danced for them in fashionable island restaurants. That Arvid abandoned her on those evenings came as further torment to the conflicted Countess who found them irresistible opportunities to see her lover at his own circle of amateur actors. As impulsive and undisciplined as Nicholas, Marina rushed “with joy” to plays and suppers given by the group, nervously listening to Felix Yusupov whose “under-handed intrigues stimulated the affair...which amused him extravagantly” (1) and waiting for the moment when she would be alone with his brother.

One opportunity came at an event that had all the trappings that her young, unfinished mind could wish for. At the Michael Theatre, a sumptuous Boris Gudonov was presented for the Imperial Family, members of the Court, and all of St. Petersburg's

diplomatic corps. “The boxes sparkled with diamonds,” wrote Marina, although the jewels were dull compared with scintillating Nicholas who led the polonaise with Mathilde Kschessinska, the prima ballerina of her day and the Emperor’s former mistress.(2)

Although Arvid accompanied her to the performance, he unwisely left her alone at the supper that followed. A gay affair, the sort of thing she loved and he did not, the party ended with Nicholas singing in his splendid baritone voice:

“I am so in love with those eyes
“Those beautiful eyes I adore.
“But only my head knows the secret
“And the name of the one I adore.”

Taking his cue, Felix whispered into her ear, “Didn’t I tell you? He’s mad about you.”(3) Marina, who absorbed his words like blood on snow, was quite ready when Nicholas appeared next on the scene, asking if Manteuffel was coming for her. No, she replied, perhaps one of her friends would take her home. It was a gifted performance by them both, and of course Marina found herself in the Yusupov limousine making herself “as small as possible in the corner” while a fiery sun rose over the city, and the chauffeur drove on and on. At the door of her home, Nicholas took her hand and, turning it gently over, kissed her palm. The next night they met again at a second performance of Boris, but to Marina’s chagrin neither Felix nor Nicholas spoke much to her and both left early. “My castles in Spain crumbled. I felt horribly alone,” the bewildered girl wrote.(4)

Two days before her wedding, Marina- plagued by foreboding and a strong migraine—followed tradition and entertained at a *soirée d’adieu*, the farewell of an unmarried girl to her friends. Again, Nicholas avoided her but Felix, in leaving, taunted, “So your little romance is over. That explains my brother’s mood. Perfectly.” (5)

Unable to confide in her mother or her sisters, Marina went slowly to bell where she lay staring at the icon of the Holy Virgin.

“The Saint’s eyes expressed infinite pity,” she wrote. “Mother of God, don’t desert me! Did she hear me? I prayed again for a miracle.” (6)

Like most things in Russia, miracles are slow in coming and often occur without warning. Tea-time is also an unlikely hour for supernatural intervention; however, as she was expected to do, Marina went to Irina Lazarev’s the next afternoon, for Felix had told her he would be there and so, she prayed, would Nicholas, whose patron saint was known as the Miracle Worker.

Earlier in the day, her father had blessed her with an icon of the Virgin of Kazan which, according to legend, had saved Moscow from destruction by various invaders and had the disturbing habit of disappearing and reappearing at critical moments. An omen perhaps that she traveled with celestial protection? As her

situation grew more desperate, Marina looked for signs and portents everywhere, even at Irina Lazarev's tea. And it was here, in the Countess's grand salon with all her intimate friends around her, that Marina began to doubt her senses, and it was at this moment that her account of what followed and Felix's version diverge ominously.

Marina writes that, despite the festive atmosphere and the presence of her friends, she again felt abandoned and unhappy. Nicholas had not come. Felix had. Seizing the opportunity, he drew her into the study. "His eyes sparkled with malice."

"I have a brilliant idea, Marina! Let's go to supper tonight at Contan, just the three of us—you, Nicholas and I - in a private room. You can't refuse this little party which may be our last. When you're married it will be hard to find an occasion to meet like this. I've spoken to my brother and he is delighted to be able to see you once more."

"What madness, Felix!"

"Not so bad as you think Doushka! I've thought this through carefully, and you won't run a single risk. It will be easy for you to sneak out when everyone is asleep, and my car will be waiting at your door. I give you my word no one will know a thing. Later you can tell your husband about the escape himself. He'll be the first to laugh. Come now, Marina, a little pluck!" (8)

Obsessed with the desire to see Nicholas and beguiled by Felix's promises, Marina threw prudence to the prenuptial winds. It was a decision "for which I paid cruelly, one which ruined my life and the lives of others," but follow Felix she did, back into the salon where Countess Lazarev was serving.(9)

Hours later, as she prepared to go, Nicholas arrived and, rushing up to her, asked why she was leaving so soon. "Till tonight," she assured him. "it seems that we're dining together." "This is the first I've heard of it," he said, his face hardening.

"Felix will tell you all about it," Marina said,(10) and went to her waiting car.

Whether Marina and Felix had become silent partners in a deadly *folie à deux* or whether he led her on for his own nefarious reasons is unclear. Each blames the other: Marina: "My enemies, later on, accused me of having planned this clandestine supper, organized by Felix, the evening before my marriage. The fact that I had accepted my father's blessing was, in their eyes, proof of a cynicism and perversity without precedent." (11)

Felix: "Nicholas was in despair (about Marina's impending marriage); the girl wept and declared she would rather die than marry a man she did not love. I found out that she had asked Nicholas to have supper with her for the last time on the evening before the wedding. Having failed to persuade Nicholas not to go, I decided to go with him to the party." (12)

A third voice, that of Jacques Ferrand in his estimable **Les Princes Youssouppoff**, says:

“On the evening of her marriage, she (Marina) went to a clandestine dinner in a private room at a fashionable restaurant at the invitation of Nicholas Youssouppoff.... Torn between her duty toward her future husband and his family, her passion for Nicholas, who urged her to break off the engagement, and confused by the influence of Felix Youssouppoff she found herself in a state of depression.”(13)

From whose hectic mind this invitation issued remains a mystery and, although Felix’s account of what followed again differs markedly from Marina’s, there is little doubt that he was, at least, an eager participant if not provocateur. And, unlike the ruined girl, Count Felix acknowledged neither responsibility nor guilt for its consequences. Until the day he died, a haunting portrait of his brother occupied a conspicuous place over his bed. Since his death it has disappeared. (14)

Who was this young Prince who, at the age of twenty-one, stood one body removed from the rights of primogeniture? He was an immensely wealthy nobleman, the owner of inherited property, money and titles. A man of some cultivation and impractical education, little interested in politics and less in military service or professional life, an arrogant and easily bored dilettante, a homosexual alternately fond of his older brother and envious of his superior place in the family and in society, Felix has also been described as a “gentle, sweet, almost shy young man,” whose “manner was in harmony with his [beautiful] appearance.” (15)



Felix

Kind to animals, impeccably bred, superstitious, egotistical with a streak of Youssouf ruthlessness running strong in his veins, Felix had both the ingenuity and the time to turn things to his advantage.

“Rich, attractive, young and the center of an admiring social circle,” says Rene Fülöp-Miller, “Felix had everything he could possibly want...and yet for him this state of perpetual happiness, which held nothing more in itself, which held out no promise of new experiences, which could offer him no further secrets, attractions or excitement, was one of intolerable boredom and emptiness. He was shut up ‘in his prison of disconsolate boredom.’ In a world of unending pleasure, there remained no other outlet from his spiritual prison but crime. To commit a crime and once more taste a new, still unknown excitement, was a dream like a prisoner’s dream of freedom.” (16)

Fülöp-Miller wrote tellingly about the days prior to Yusupov’s murder of Rasputin in 1916, which Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna says left him “intoxicated and self-satisfied with his role.”(17) In the years following Rasputin’s death and the 1917 Revolution, however, Felix demonstrated remarkable courage, determination and generosity, taking seriously his role as Yusupov scion, dutiful father, and member of the Imperial Family.

But in the period immediately following Nicholas's death, it is perhaps his own words that picture him most accurately. He had just come back from a walk through Arkhangelskoye's grounds, reveling in its splashing fountains, finely raked walkways, and luxuriant gardens that stretched as far as the eye could see. Work would soon begin on the mausoleum in which, it was supposed, Nicholas and ultimately, other family members, would lie. As Felix admired "the statues and lawns and the splendid house which contained such priceless collections," he "realized that all this would some day be mine and that it was only an infinitesimal part of my fortune. The idea that I would one day be one of the richest men in Russia went like wine to my head.... Wealth, splendor, and power: I could not imagine life without them. Mediocrity and ugliness filled me with horror." (19) It was indeed as Marie Pavlovna wrote a quarter-century later: "Felix adored luxury, to which cause he would give his human soul. He was a man of great contrasts."(20)

And, for a fleeting moment, Felix confronted himself. Stopping in the great portrait gallery, he examined the painting Serov had done of him several years earlier. "Serov was a remarkable psychologist and excelled in bringing out the character of his model. On the face of the young man before me I could read vanity, pride and selfishness. How could it be that I had changed so little after the terrible ordeal we had all been through? How could I be the same headless egoist? I was seized with such loathing for myself that for a moment I thought of committing suicide."(21)

But, of course, Felix did not kill himself. Instead he decided on a life of service to the poor. Whether inspired or contrite, Felix traveled to Moscow where he visited squalorous, disease-ridden slums and charity hospitals and where, in short order, he found himself "staggered by the immensity of the task." (22) For solace he turned to the Empress's sister and his mother's confidante, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna (Ella) who, after her husband's death, had formed her own religious order of which she was the Abbess.

"Finding her alone one day, I confessed to her all the facts of my private life of which I supposed her to know nothing. She heard me in silence, and when I had finished she kissed me. 'Don't worry,' the Grand Duchess said. 'I know more about you than you think.... Anyone who is capable of doing so much evil is also capable of doing much good if he sets about it in the right way'."(23)

Invigorated by the gentle Ella's words, Felix plunged into a new project that took him out of the slums and back to Arkhangelskoye which, he proposed, he would turn into an artist's colony with homes on the property for painters and sculptors. Further, he would open the estate's vast collection to the public and damn the local river, flooding the fields and turning them into lakes. He had similar grandiose plans for other Yusupov houses in Moscow and Petersburg, none of which came to fruition. While he built his castles in the air, he resumed a questionable relationship with the handsome, epicene Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovich, cared for his still-distraught mother, and experienced an uneasily nocturnal vision of his dead brother, in which a radiant Nicholas stretched his arms out to him, then vanished.

The unending torpor of his life finally drove the Prince to finish his education and, complete with a retinue of servants, horses, dogs, and wardrobe he went to Oxford where, for three years, he fitfully attended classes but devoted more time to riding to hounds, attending operas, balls, country weekends, and relishing the company of a handsome Scotsman who “was extremely good looking and rather like a Hindu prince.”(24) The two young men shared connecting flats which Felix decorated in late Oscar Wilde.

Russian society in the early years of the century was everywhere. Ambassadors of impeccable pedigree occupied government mansions, national artists of great repute graced the stages of London, Paris, and Vienna. Russian rich traveled abroad for wardrobes, jewelry, and amusement. Word of Felix’s style of life was not late in reaching his mother who, on his return from Oxford, suggested strongly that he marry and settle down. He was, after all, a man of immense wealth and position and was now in his mid-twenties.

Obediently, Felix revived his old friendship with the beautiful but shy and introverted Princess Irina Alexandrovna, niece to the Emperor, and the most sought after young woman in all of Russia. Between himself and Irina, he wrote, “there existed perfect harmony”(25) and an official announcement of their engagement was rapidly made despite Felix’s notorious forays into homosexual adventure and cross-dressing, and his continuing contact with Grand Duke Dimitri who, in Felix’s description, seems a resounding image of himself: “Attractive, tall, elegant, well-bred, with deep, thoughtful eyes...he was all impulses and contradictions’, he was both romantic and mystical.... At the same time he was very gay and always ready for the wildest escapes...but the weakness of his character made him dangerously easy to influence.” (26)

His mother, “proud and ambitious,”(27) was thoroughly satisfied with the match which linked the Yusupovs irrevocably with the Romanovs, and made her last appearance in public at the splendid wedding that linked the two families.

Before his marriage, however, Felix seems to have suffered another spiritual crisis and, in 1913, went to an ancient island monastery in the White Sea with Grand Duchess Elizabeth, where he sought the answer to the “mystery of life.” He soon discovered that, although Ella arose every morning at five to pray, he preferred to rise later, then go fishing. He wrote long letters to Irina complaining that he could not sleep because of the clanging bells and the screeching seagulls. Set upon by vermin that “bit without mercy,” appalled at the weak tea and thin bread, and long-haired, unwashed monks, Felix devoted much of his time to listening to the chanting of the holy men, looking out at the vast expanse of water, and begging Ella to assure him that marriage with Irina was the proper thing to do.(28)

To the Princess he also seems to have appealed for reassurances, his letters eerily echoing Nicholas’s last words to Marina:

“In the evening I read and think of you. I can’t live without you, little inexperienced, headstrong Irina! We think alike, you and I, and we are not like the others. They don’t understand us, but we understand each other. I believe we met by a sixth sense, and I know we will be happier than anyone else because of our common thoughts and actions known only to us in sacred secrecy.”(29)

Searching his soul for an answer to his moral dilemma, Yusupov did not experience the epiphany he sought and returned to the capital city thinner but no wiser. He and Irina were married on February 22, 1914, she led to the altar on the arm of Emperor Nicholas.

One can only imagine Felix’s ambivalence as his honeymoon train left the Petersburg station bound for Paris. “As the train moved out, I saw Dimitri standing on the platform by himself - a lonely figure.” (30) Fortunately, someone had the good sense to put his beloved dog Punch on board

among the profusion of roses that filled the newlywed’s coach, but as Felix wrote, after his marriage, his relationship with the forlorn Grand Duke, to whom he devotes so many ardent pages in his book, was never the same.

Stability and propriety were far from Yusupov’s mind in the spring of 1908. Late in April, a reckless wind blew through Petersburg, sending its fractured floes downstream and its blue water over the quays. The frosty moon had lost its ominous halo, and the night air hinted at fresh intrigues and countless possibilities. For Marina de Heyden, this last evening before her wedding was one of upheaval and torment. Carrying the icon her father had given her, wearing the diamond necklace Arvid had fastened around her neck, and besotted with Felix’s challenging words, she retreated to her room, waiting for the house to grow still, for her mother to sleep, for the servants to retire. She washed her face in cold water, arranged her hair, and removed her necklace. Then, dismissing Nastia, she crept downstairs and slipped out into the deserted street.

Felix was waiting with his car.

“Ah Doushka,” he said, “the first thing you must do is take off your cloak. I’ve brought you one of my mother’s. This way you won’t risk being recognized.”

Aghast, Marina took the cloak Felix urged on her. It was a garish piece of clothing - bright green velvet embroidered in gold with an enormous mink collar designed to hide the young woman’s face. Aside from being supremely ugly, the cloak seemed hardly the type of thing the impeccably tailored Princess Zenaide would wear. As Marina put it: “In those days, women approaching fifty would be seen only in discreet colors.”(31)

And, of course, the jade green cloak attracted all the attention Felix knew it would. As he and Marina crossed the vestibule of Contan’s, knowing glances and mock salutes from the rowdy Guards officers withered her. Among them she recognized two close friends of Arvid.

Quickly, she slipped into the private room that Felix had arranged and threw the cloak on a chair, looking about her with anguish. It was a commercial room hung with taupe tapestries and furnished with a rose-colored sofa. On one table stood a cheap vase filled with faded flowers. It reeked, she wrote, of false intimacy.

Felix was busy ordering champagne.

When the waiter had gone, he said,

“I’m sure Nicholas is already here,” and, handing her a menu, told her to write a few words on it, telling his brother they had arrived and asking him to join them. Without thinking, Marina did as she was told. “Dear Count, I am waiting for you in room five. Marina.”

While Felix ran off with the message, the frightened girl went to the mirror and tried to tidy herself. In place of Arvid’s necklace, she wore a large diamond brooch which, Nicholas told her later, made her look like a pathetic teenager.

She drank one glass of champagne and, haunted by the cloak she had thrown down, was about to take another when the door flew open and a furious Nicholas rushed in.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded.

Astounded, Marina could say nothing.

“You must go home immediately. I’ll take you.”

The cloak caught his eye. “Whose is this?”

“Your mother’s. Felix brought it for me.”

“Where is yours?”

“in the car- ”

“Don’t move. I’ll get it!”

But Felix, with the timing of Stanislavsky, burst into the room followed by a group of hired actors. For Marina and Nicholas, it was too late.

Fixing his brother with a dark look, Nicholas said, “You’ve always had strange ideas, Felix, but since we’re all here now we should at least have something to eat.”

Unable to leave alone, afraid to run again the gauntlet of officers, and still mesmerized by Nicholas’s presence, Marina watched while the table was set, wine poured, and one of the actors, already a little drunk, rose and began to speak, looking directly into Marina’s eyes. He was, she was certain, performing at Felix’s behest:

“My friends, we find ourselves tonight in the midst of a great drama. This young lady will marry a man she doesn’t love. Her presence here attests to that. Not only does she not love him to whom she will be wed in a few hours, but she loves another!” And, turning to Nicholas: “This man is you. Help me to save this child who you love too!”(32)

In the silence that followed Felix’s laughter stopped. Nicholas was as white as death. When he finally found his voice, he said slowly, “I was determined to take Marina home to avoid scandal, but without knowing it you’ve spoken the truth.”

Marina dried the tears that rolled down her cheeks. And when Nicholas approached and asked, ‘Will you marry me, Marina?’ she said yes quickly.

Suddenly Felix, for whom this melodrama had taken a nasty turn, jumped up. “Are you crazy?” he cried. “Our parents will never accept this marriage. The scandal! Are you dreaming?”(33)

Dryly, Nicholas answered, “This little dinner you’ve arranged so well and in such style you will have to answer for tomorrow, my poor Felix. You will have to present our parents with a *fait accompli*. As for Manteuffel, I’ll see to him when we return from the priest’s.” (34)

Marina reports that she clung to his sleeve, but before he left the room he embraced her and said caustically, “I’ll be back or you in a moment, *mon petit*. Meanwhile, Felix will keep you company.” (35)

When the door closed, Felix “sprang toward me, his eyes sparkling and fixed on me like an avenging angel.” (36)

In an implacable voice, he said, “This joke has gone on long enough. You cannot marry my brother, Marina. Understand this well. He doesn’t love you. He has never loved you. He loves someone else. This game he plays is pure Don Quixote (37)...your ‘marriage’ is over. Nicholas keeps his freedom, and as for his head, it’s taken. You must give him up, and as for your marriage to Manteuffel, it’s become impossible. Feign sickness if you must avoid a scandal that will threaten us all!”(38)

“Felix’s eyes burned through me. I have never seen such evil eyes as those that stared at me except the blind eye of a beacon” (39).

The rest of the evening played out in the finest tradition of Grand Guignol: the tormented lovers manipulated by a conjurer, two high-born families caught in his machinations, a spectacular wedding rising with the next sun. To take part in such high melodrama must have come easily to the Yusupov brothers, and for Marina the part of *ingénue* fit like a kid glove.

Marina reports that as she fell to her knees under Felix’s blistering attack, Nicholas rushed in with her coat, urging her to get up and come with him. Suffering a change of head, Marina declared that she wanted to go home, that she must marry Manteuffel in a few hours. Felix had slipped away, and the restaurant was closing. With the actor’s help, Nicholas carried Marina to a waiting

limousine and together they took the exhausted girl to the actor's apartment. In moments, Felix reappeared with Marina's fur-draped, tousle-haired mother, who rushed her out and into another car that took them to the de Heyden house as another weary sun rose over the city. While her mama upbraided her, Marina could hear only Felix's voice whispering, "Nicholas doesn't love you. He loves another...."

What accounted for Felix's change of heart? After weeks of insinuating himself into this brother's affairs (creating a not unwelcome rift between Nicholas, the favored son, and his father), after countless hours spent whispering intrigues into Marina's ear, after the fulsome evening he had just created, Felix, the giddy matchmaker, had lost control of his players. What he had intended as a prank which, at most, infuriated his family and propelled his brother into another unseemly affair, had suddenly exploded into a scandal which would stain the Yusupov name and bring misery to his adored mother. That his role in the disaster would become known was a given. The kitten that had amused him so excessively had become a tiger whose tail he held between his delicate fingers. To whom could he turn before they were all devoured? Certainly neither his father nor his mother. Only Marina's mother could deliver her from the calamity he had set in motion, and it was to Countess Alexandra he went for help-to a woman just slightly declass  and considerably below the Yusupovs in rank. And there is no reason to doubt Felix's account of the tearful reunion between mother and daughter, although both time and place differ markedly from Marina's recollection. Dawn was breaking as the Countess hurried her daughter out the door, Felix delivering the coup de grace by helping Marina back into the cloak he had insisted on taking from her earlier that evening.

At home, overwhelmed by fatigue and pounced upon by her frantic mother, her governess, and her sisters, she wanted only to sleep but a ringing phone in the hall startled her awake. It was Nicholas begging her to break her engagement and escape with him.

"Let me come to you, Marina!" he begged. "I'll explain everything to your mother. I'll go to see Manteuffel. Be brave. Everything will be arranged!"

"My heart stopped beating," she wrote.

"I forbid you to go to the Count," she said. "I've decided to marry him."

"Marina! Think what you're doing...."(40)

She put down the phone and did as her mother told her. She went to dress for her wedding. It was seven o'clock in the morning.

Of this bizarre evening, Felix writes only:

"At the restaurant...Vova (the actor) was among the guests and, after he had drunk a good deal, he launched into an impassioned speech and exhorted the lovers to place their love before any other consideration....When the weeping fianc e begged Nicholas to elope with her, I rushed off to fetch her mother. When we got to the restaurant

where the party was being held, mother and daughter fell into each other's arms. I took advantage of this to get Nicholas away. I practically had to drag him home.”(41)

On April 23rd, 1908, Marina rose after only an hour of valerian-induced sleep. Mechanically she met with her hairdresser, her maids, her mother, and her sisters, red-eyed from crying. What would become of them if Marina caused a scandal even greater than their father's? Certainly their chances of marrying into the first rank would lessen; linked to an adventuress, they would become pariahs.

Writing of her marriage Marina's tone becomes somber and filled with portent. Arvid, “Molded into his white uniform,” waited for her at the altar surrounded by twenty-four attendants. She was pale as death; her hand in his icy and shaking. Her legs trembled. She looked for Nicholas in the crowd. (42)

There were three hundred at the ceremony and reception, including members of the Imperial Family and the “finest flowers of Petersburg Society.” (43) Among the guests was General Khan de Nakhitchevan, Commander of the Horse Guards Regiment, and a man who would play a fatal role in the events that destroyed the lives of the bride, the groom, and the lover.

Marina devotes less time to the splendors of her wedding than she does to the sinister happenings that plagued the day. A large candle set in silver and decorated with orange blossoms—a necessary element in an Orthodox wedding—had been overlooked by Arvid, the Protestant. When Khan Nakhitchevan was asked by the Archbishop to fetch one from another priest, he was told it could not be done because that clergyman was conducting a funeral mass. The other candles in the Cathedral, Marina recalled, “guttered ominously, throwing macabre shadows over the sumptuous service. ‘Holy God, what evil omens,’ whispered a voice at my side.”(44)

At the reception that followed, Nicholas appeared and disappeared in the crowd like a phantom. She felt faint, but practical Arvid assured her it was only the incense from the church that continued to bother her. Outside, a final blow was delivered when an icon, carried by her cousin, was dropped and rolled away toward the carriage. Retrieving it from under the prancing horses, a policeman handed it to Marina, murmuring, “Lord Jesus!”(45)

Gratefully, Marina was returned home to change into her traveling costume and to prepare for a honeymoon with her new husband.

Of all this *Stürm und Drang* Felix wrote only:

“The marriage took place the following day, and the couple left for Paris on their honeymoon.” (46)

He could not know that after Marina had slipped into her blue serge suit, after her luggage was stacked at the door, Nicholas, bareheaded and frantic, dashed up the

steps. After a “sublime” embrace, she warned him that she was waiting for Manteuffel.

“If you love me, leave before he sees you!” Nicholas said.

Before he went away, he made the frightened girl promise to write to him; then he vanished, leaving her to her mother.

“I can’t leave, Maman!” she cried. “Save me! Tell Arvid I don’t want to go with him!”

But the Countess delivered her daughter to her husband, and together they set off for the station. After lowering the window and breathing deeply and noisily, Arvid turned to his bride, asking sharply. “I believe you saw Nicholas Soumarokov on the stairs. May I know the reason for this strange visit?”

“He came to pay his respects to Maman.”

“In the future,” he replied, “you will distance yourself from all these people I disapprove of. Above all, I detest such theatrical demonstrations.”(47)

Surrounded by friends and her family, Marina Manteuffel entered the train, followed by the Count. As it pulled away, one of the Horse Guard officers smashed a bottle of champagne against the side of their car.

Certainly the wedding night of Marina and Arvid Manteuffel must pass into the records as one of the strangest episodes in their marital life. Having left Petersburg for Paris, bride and groom went to their separate cars to dress for dinner that they spent with friends, a banker and his wife. Unnerved by the long and treacherous day, an exhausted Marina drank so much champagne that she grew sleepy and retired to her car where, despite Arvid’s scowl, Nastia, her maid, helped her undress and get into bed. As she fell asleep, thinking of Nicholas and their “first kiss that had happened only hours ago,” she heard the connecting door open, felt Arvid lean over her bed and brush her damp brow with his mustache. “Then the door closed again, softly,” Marina wrote, “and I fell into a deep sleep.” Whether Marina and Nicholas had become physical lovers before her marriage or whether it remained an intense but platonic relationship is not known. It is generally assumed that they shared a sexual passion for each other and, if this was the case, Marina must have known that the experienced Arvid would discover that she was not a virgin. All the next day, as the train sped toward Paris where Marina had convinced herself Nicholas would be waiting, they both slept, occasionally in their own beds, occasionally with Marina curled up at the foot of Arvid’s bed where he too “feigned sleep.”(48)

This somnolent state continued in Paris, the city of lovers. Arvid kept to his rooms at the Scribe. He was sick, he told his bride, and had called a doctor. While he slept, Marina and Nastia hired a carriage and went out along the Champs-Élysées. The young lady found Paris “happy and carefree.” She visited the theatre where Sarah Bernhardt

starred in *Dame aux Camélias*, went to Montmartre, waited with her maid for her husband to recover. On the fourth day she found that he seemed embarrassed in her presence and that a great cloud had descended upon them. Despite her nightly prayers, Arvid kept to himself, claiming either fatigue or illness. Desperate, Marina, living now in a world of “fantasy and fever,” thought she was losing her mind. She cabled her mother. She also cabled Nicholas.(49)

Nicholas, Felix writes, had “resumed his normal way of living, which completely reassured my mother, but I, for one, was not deceived by his apparent indifference.” (50)

The family was, apparently, unaware that not only had Nicholas received the frantic cable from Marina but had also seen her mother and amid another flurry of telegrams the two had decided to leave on separate trains for Paris. “The Russian Opera Company, with Chaliapin, was then giving a series of performances in Paris. My brother suddenly decided to attend these performances. Our parents, suspecting that Chaliapin was merely an excuse, tried to dissuade him. But nothing could hold Nicholas back.”(51)

The morning of her mother’s arrival at the Gare du Nord, Arvid “decided to get up,” and they shared the first breakfast of their married life. Marina had, already, decided to leave him and hurried off, telling him she was going to see a milliner, but went instead to the railway station and waited for the express from Petersburg. “Words cannot describe the marvelous feeling of security I felt when I saw Maman step from the train,”(52) she says.

However, Countess de Heyden did not bring the consolation she expected. After taking rooms at the Meurice and demanding her daughter return to her husband, she went to him directly, promising she would urge Marina to reconcile. That her vow was empty must have been clear to the desperate mother, for on her way out she picked up Marina and Nastia’s things and returned to the Meurice where Nicholas was expected that night. As an old lady and a new writer, Marina de Heyden Manteuffel Tchitchagoff became expert in dancing with time. When it suits her, she waltzes languorously through an evening at the Imperial Ballet where all eyes were upon her. She is equally adept at skipping through half a night when her affair with Nicholas was either rekindled or set ablaze for the first time.

His descent from the evening train is described in words formerly reserved for the careering descent of Zeus from Mount Olympus when he spied a pretty mortal. Ignoring the crowd, Nicholas threw himself toward her, rushing, rushing, until they were in each other’s arms. Into a red taxi they fled and through a torrential rain they were driven to the Meurice, “shy and silent in our happiness.” (53)

Marina next describes her lover in more mundane and more telling words. His bronze eyes smiled at her under dark brows in the bathroom mirror. She watched as he washed his hands, combed his hair, then turned to embrace her with a joyful smile.

Skipping down the stairs, hand in hand, they paid a visit to Countess Alexandra, to whom Nicholas spoke warmly, assuring her that he would love and protect her daughter and “would arrange things” with her husband. (54)

After these convenient lapses, Marina returns to real time. After a lavish dinner, she accompanies Nicholas to the opera where he did indeed have tickets for Chaliapin in Boris Godunov. All Russian society was present including the Ambassador and, Marina writes, “not even a bomb could have produced the commotion that our arrival did.” Again, all eyes were upon the blonde countess and her highborn lover. “Let them talk,” Nicholas told her. “When you’re my wife, they’ll have to come to terms with their hypocrisy.” (55)

During the second act, Marina was victim of another of the preternatural occurrences that seemed to haunt her. The diamond necklace which Arvid had fastened around her neck only months ago and which she had had the bad taste to wear had vanished. Searching in vain, Nicholas calmed her with quick words: “Never mind, *Malenkaia*. It attracted too much attention anyway. I’ll buy you another.” (56)

Years later Marina, still naive, wonders why-later in the evening-supper guests at Maxim’s took her for the Prince’s mistress. Again, quick to comfort her, Nicholas promised to marry her the next day. But the next day brought neither orange blossoms nor an end to the melodrama starring two of Petersburg’s favorite actors. It did bring an angry Manteuffel to Marina’s door demanding they leave immediately for his home in Livonia. When she told him that she would never return to him, that she loved Nicholas and that they planned to marry, Arvid stopped her flood of words with an up-raised hand.

“Tell Count Soumarokoff I await him this afternoon at the Scribe.” (57)

It was, perhaps, at this point that an acrid farce played out among society’s darlings took a dark and dangerous turn. For months, fiancé and lover had sidestepped each other, behaving like gentlemen, each confident of his own ultimate success. For her part, Marina had behaved with exquisite indiscretion, blind at the age of nineteen to the havoc she was wreaking. Her mother, terrified of another scandal that would surely destroy the family, could only wring her hands, cry, and believe whatever Nicholas promised. Those who could have prevented the mayhem that was to follow did nothing; those who could do little did less than nothing. It would be several days - until the arrival of Princess Zenaide Yusupov, a force to be reckoned with-that the storm continued to brew.

Manteuffel received Yusupov with complete dignity and reserve, but his demands were unequivocal. Marina and her mother would leave Paris immediately and spend the next year at their Yustila estate. After one year he would consider a divorce.

Reassured by such a refined, reasonable man, Yusupov agreed, promising Marina that a year would pass quickly. Then they would be man and wife. Marina, who had listened adoringly to her lover recite Hamlet, must have wondered if he wouldn’t make a better Macbeth than the melancholy Dane, for it seemed always to be “tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow.”

And regardless of what had passed between the two men, she did not leave Paris with Maman; instead she and Nicholas resumed their affair, passing time at Cagier where she was rewarded with a pearl engagement ring and a ruby and diamond pin, and in “luxuriant gardens under radiant skies” recalling, happily, their times together, and, less happily, Felix. (58)

Ultimately, the evening at Contan arose, and when Marina asked whether Nicholas was angry with the role Felix played, he told her:

“Your famous ‘green cloak’ was nothing more than a costume from a fancy-dress ball. Felix is infatuated with disguises. The cloak belonged to a little demi-mondaine and unhappily for you it was recognized.”

“Felix promised me that it belonged to your mother and I believed him,” she answered.

“If Arvid learns that his wife was disguised in a cocotte’s cloak your brother is in great trouble!”
“Believe me,” Nicholas said, “Felix risks that every day.”

“Why then did he go looking for my mother at six o’clock in the morning?”

“Felix isn’t very brave. The farce had lasted long enough, and this finale wasn’t on his program.”
(59)

While Marina and Nicholas were enjoying the last of their halcyon days Felix was racing toward Paris on the Petersburg Express. “They sent me to Paris so that I could keep an eye on him,” he writes. “When I heard that he had been meeting with the young woman again, I telegraphed my parents to join me.” (60)

Although Felix claims that Nicholas “remained hidden” (61) Marina describes their first meeting at which Felix greeted her warmly, admiring her pearl ring and the fine fabric of her dress. Happy to see them both, he promised to join them for dinner at Maxim’s. Later, in more intimate surroundings, she listened again as Nicholas recited lines from **Hamlet** and Felix, in a periwinkle-blue dressing gown holding his bulldog Manon (the name of Nicholas’s former mistress) under his arm, warned him that their father and mother would arrive later that night.

“Now this will be a unique reunion,” Felix said. “Manon and I wouldn’t be there for anything!” (62)

Of the proceeding days Marina writes wistfully. They were the happiest of her life, so filled with passion and beauty that she wished they would never end. She gave “Nicholas the very best of myself and his returned love lifted me to the heavens.”(63)

Never again would she meet such a man.

Nor had she met a woman like his mother.



Called by some a fairy-tale Princess, Zenaide Nikolaievna seemed, true to legend, to be followed by evil spirits that were said to punish the Yusupovs for their conversion from Islam to Christianity. As a young girl she suffered the death of her mother and of her sister who was said to have killed herself. Her brother Boris died in infancy. As a profoundly religious yet superstitious young mother, three sons died before Nicholas was born, and now at the age of forty-seven the still-lovely Princess was speeding through the night toward an unfolding tragedy that would mark her for life.

Zenaide

Born to incalculable wealth, renowned as one of the great beauties of her day, gracious to a fault and as delicate as a winter garden rose, Zenaide eluded attempts to describe her true nature.

Neither the most talented painters and photographers of the day nor those who write about her captured the essence of this remarkable and complex woman.

Written descriptions run to type, rhapsodizing over her exotic Byzantine beauty, her dusky complexion and black hair, her deep blue eyes and regal yet modest bearing, yet failing to mention the unflinching gaze of those cobalt eyes or the firm set of her perfect jaw.

Although the glorious Zenaide professed to care little for jewels, dressing with elegant simplicity, she had one of the world's finest and largest collections which included the forty-one carat Polar Star diamond, sparkling tiaras, ropes of flawless pearls, and several dazzling pieces that once adorned Queen Marie Antoinette. Yet, as one observer wrote, it was not the splendor of the gems but "the way she wore her jewels that made them appear so brilliant." (64)

In her drawing room at the Moika Palace, crystal bowls overflowed with uncut sapphires, emeralds, and rubies, decorative pieces that added sparks of color to the sumptuous rooms.

Taught as a child to be a perfect hostess, fluent in several languages; and born with inestimable grace, Zenaide and her husband Felix Felixovich entertained on a grand scale in all of their many palaces. Christmas at the Moika was an event *le tout Pétérsbourg* relished, Zenaide having shopped in Paris for "bright, colorful, strange and foreign gifts" for her friends. (65) Easily serving two thousand for dinner, presenting Europe's greatest entertainers in their private theatres where she herself danced and acted with great skill, and often receiving the Imperial Family at balls, the Princess and her family occupied the highest pinnacle of Russian society. Certainly they were more loved than the Romanovs, "No house was closed to them. They had no social limits," and exerted enormous influence, Zenaide's opinion, specifically "carrying tremendous authority." (66)

Through this gentle, lovely lady ran a spine of steel and a quiet determination to have things her way. Early on she insisted on marrying Count Sumarakov-Elston, then a mere officer in the Horse Guards, despite her father's opposition and the knowledge that she could have married any young prince in the Empire or abroad. Elston, a reserved, levelheaded, somewhat dull man, was poor at managing money and although Zenaide professed to be ignorant of the value of her properties, she was seen scurrying between the Moika Palace and the building next door that contained the business offices. (67)

She also had her way with her two sons. Often absent, Elston had a distant relationship with the boys, although in later years he and Nicholas became closer. For Felix he had little use. Vulnerable and affectionate, Zenaide spoiled them to the point of complete indulgence, failing to instill any form of discipline and unable to refuse them anything. Eager to make good matches for them and sure of their position in the world, she rejected Countess Marina out of hand but was inordinately proud of Felix's marriage to Princess Irina, the Emperor's niece. Felix and Nicholas were, in a sense, her sons, and it was this blind devotion to them that was, perhaps, their downfall and hers.

In Paris, where Zenaide had sent the fox to guard the hen house, any semblance of rational thought had disappeared. Marina, aware that the Princess and her husband were bearing down on her, rushed off to Mme. Freya, "the best known clairvoyant of the period." From among the shadows the mystic whispered:

“Your husband wears a uniform. Although he is handsome, you don’t love him. Trouble awaits, great trouble. Beware of his anger.”

“Will I remarry in a year?” Marina asked.

“I see you married to another uniformed man, but not for several years. Your life is tragic, Madame, and about it I wish to say no more.”

To Nicholas, the anxious and pragmatic lover, who asked if she saw him alive at the end of the year, she said:

“It depends.”

“Does a duel threaten me?”

“To live you must avoid it!”

Smiling, Yusupov said, “That is out of the question.”(68)

Strangely, Felix was also busy with fortunetellers. He went first to Mme. de Thebes, who warned him that a member of his family would be killed in a duel. Whether his subsequent visit to Mme. Freya preceded Marina’s we do not know but, according to his memoir, she told him much the same things, adding, “In a few years you will take part in a political assassination and will go through a terrible ordeal which will end in complete victory for you.” (69) Apparently, forewarned was not forearmed for Felix, for events continued to spin out of control.

Fifteen days from the date of her marriage, Marina Manteuffel was told that the Princess Zenaide Yusupov had arrived in Paris and wished to see her. Of this, Felix writes nothing, but Marina does:

“From the moment of their arrival, Nicholas’s parents were adamantly opposed to our marriage. All of Petersburg was whispering vile things about us and the Princess was furious. She had decided to talk with Amid and to cable father to come immediately. As she walked down the long hallway to her apartment, Nicholas held my hand and tried to make me brave. When we entered, the Princess was standing. Politely, she asked us to sit down. Would we like tea? No, I said, and sat awkwardly before her. Her now grey hair, beautifully waved, fascinated me. It gave her stern face a young appearance with the clear, chiseled features of a Botticelli, and I remembered accompanying Maman to one of the Princess’s “days” in her sumptuous rooms at the Moika. Despite all her grace and charm this beautiful woman seemed as cold as ice.” (70)

On a signal from his mother, Nicholas left the room, and Zenaide spoke:

“My son has told me about his conversation with Count Manteuffel. I don’t find your husband’s words pleasing at all, but your place is with him. Divorce is out of the question! As for Nicholas, believe me, he will forget you in a month. My son is passionate, but his love affairs don’t last long. Remember, I have the pleasure of

knowing him longer than you.”(71)

Frightened by this torrent of angry words from such a gentle woman, Marina could only stammer that she would indeed leave Paris in a few days, and her promise seemed to mollify the Princess. With nothing now to fear, she called Nicholas back into the room, calmly asking where they would dine that evening. Marina, confused by this sudden change of heart, understood later that Zenaide wished, at no price, to meet her son and his mistress in public and rejoiced secretly in her victory.

If the Princess, determined to protect the honor of her family, believed she had stamped out the flames of scandal that were raging at her door, she was mistaken, for Petersburg society had ignited it with incendiary gossip. Letters came to the Count: the press happily fanned the flames. Arvid read in a contemptuous voice to Marina who, at his request, had reluctantly agreed to meet him again. “Affair in a Paris Hotel.” The bride ran off on her wedding night. The outraged husband had chased after the lovers. (72)

“And that’s not all. My father writes that all Baltic aristocracy knows about your secret soirée the night before our wedding. You’ve blackened our name, and I demand that you leave Paris tomorrow.... My honor has become a joke!” (73)

Against her husband’s fury and the mounting hysteria in the Petersburg press, Marina could only threaten weakly, telling him her father was on his way and that she had seen Princess Zenaide, with whom she had reached an agreement. But she knew “that it was now necessary to leave Paris after having seen the anger of my husband. Father, Arvid, the Court and all of Society had come together against us. Did we have the courage to fight them?” (74)

It had become a deadly chess with the queen securely installed, guarded by the knight and a bevy of pawns. Marina and Nicholas had run out of moves and, after a last night together and a flurry of promises and tears, Countess Manteuffel powdered her nose and rode in a taxi to the *Gard du Nord* where her husband waited to put her on the train back to Russia.

“At some distance from the station,” she later wrote, “Nicholas embraced me tenderly and shook my maid’s hand.”

“Take care of her for me, Nastia” he said.

“He opened the door,” Marina recalled, “and walked briskly down the sidewalk. I watched him through the little window in the back, but he didn’t turn.”

At the station, Arvid hurried them onto the waiting train, handing Marina a bouquet of roses as any well-bred husband should and as he had done through all the days of their courtship. “Put them in Maman’s compartment,” she told Nastia. (75)
Then the train rolled out under a full moon.

While Marina and her mother sped toward home and away from Princess Zenaide's inequities, her "incompetent, heavy-handed" Uncle Paul arrived in Paris to negotiate with the Princess.(76) Marina's father had thought better of intervening, and Paul, Marina's last choice to play the role of ambassador, went daily to Zenaide, but no amount of discussion softened her position. Rumors, travelling swiftly along telegraphic lines, through the mail, and in the press, had already suggested that the Yusupovs should transfer Nicholas's ancient princely title and inheritance to Felix. Such a travesty was unthinkable; Zenaide refused to listen.

Whether it was her intransigence or the rapidly mounting tension between Nicholas and Manteuffel that brought the issue to swords' point for the first time is hard to calculate, but soon all Paris and all Petersburg knew that after Marina's departure, Manteuier suddenly and without additional provocation challenged the Prince to a duel. Swords were chosen, the date fixed, and then as inexplicably as it had been arranged, it was annulled, the seconds declaring the motives insufficient, sending the indefatigable Paul back to the bargaining table at the Meurice.

While her husband and lover circled each other like wary wolves, Marina settled back into her childhood bedroom, with its rose-colored walls and pretty cretonne curtains, feeling "divinely comforted" despite the failure of her uncle's mission. She writes in her journal that she hears from Nicholas daily and that he sends her roses which fill every corner of her room. Her father treats her with contempt and refuses to listen although she assures him that things will resolve themselves before long. To her promises her father says: "It's clear, to my chagrin, that you don't understand at all the seriousness of what you've done. Yesterday I saw Her Majesty who expressed her profound sympathy and her desire that this affair ends as quickly as possible. Never, in the history of Russia, has the Court known such a scandal."

To this, Marina responds defiantly by asking Nicholas for a picture of himself, "and I have sent him mine, a photograph taken with Arvid the month before our wedding I cut Arvid out and told Nastia to burn it." (77)

However, Marina's idyll was cut short. Although her mother "suffered cruelly" from their fall from grace, Marina, with the naiveté and vanity of youth, decided one radiant summer morning that it would be good to take a carriage ride across the Neva and through the Islands, with their great stands of trees and riles of blooming flowers. The distraught Countess insisted they go at a time when they were least likely to meet others, and they set off across the bridge to the Petersburg Bois de Boulogne at a spanking trot. As they moved along the gravel paths of Krestovsky Island, where the proud estate of Prince Belosselsky stood and where the St. Petersburg Yacht Club commanded the western-most view of the sparkling Gulf of Finland, a covered carriage drawn by lathered horses approached at a gallop, then stopped beside them.

“When a soldier in white summer uniform saluted us,” Marina recalled, “I recognized at once Grand Duke Boris. I didn’t dare look at Maman, but I felt in my head that this kind Prince brought happy news. A telegram from Felix!” It read:

“Catastrophe! Your husband knows about the green cloak. Grave consequences follow. Urgently beg you to tell your father the cloak in question belonged to my mother. I count on you. Destroy this message.

Regards,
Felix.” (78)

“I did not destroy the message,” Marina wrote, “but I hurried to Papa’s house and tried to reassure him that the accursed cloak did belong to Princess Yusupov. Papa was satisfied with my explanation and quickly sent a telegram of reassurance to Arvid.” (79)

Leaving nothing to chance, and truly frightened for the first time, Marina replied to Felix’s cable:

“Dear Felix:

“I implore you not to come back to Petersburg with Nicholas at this time. Explain this to your parents. Let Nicholas stay abroad until autumn. This is absolutely essential. This is not an idle request; it is serious....

“Do you understand that all is known here, for instance, our supper on the eve of the wedding, my correspondence with Nicholas, your arrival in Paris, our lunch and dinner together and our visit to the theatre, and the fact that Mama went away leaving me alone with you. These facts were so distorted and exaggerated and people are saying such horrible things that my head is in a whirl.

“My father said, ‘I expect you thought you could hide everything...only by telling the truth can you stop these rumors. You know perhaps that the Tsar has learned about it, and I had to tell him everything I knew’.

“Think! They are telling stories in town about how I lived with your brother and other horrid things. They say I dishonored my husband, his name, my family, and that your brother dishonored his family and behaved extremely badly. Of course all this is untrue, but it isn’t easy to prove it and if Nicholas should arrive and come to know about the scandal, he will not be able to avoid a duel. My husband is coming here with his family. His regiment is taking a major part in this and will instigate a duel, and it will all end very badly. All the officers know about the restaurant. They are furious with Nicholas and say the honor of the regiment is at stake.

“As they are sending me away from Petersburg any day now, for God’s sake keep your brother from coming here. By then tongues will cease to wag and all will be forgotten by fall.

“Please tear up my letter and don’t tell anyone I wrote to you since, in general, I have no right to write to you. Should it get around, there will be more needless misery, of which there is no lack.

“Be sure to write soon,

“All the best,

“Marina (80)

For Felix and Nicholas, still in Paris in the midst of the gathering storm, Arvid’s discovery that his young wife had been disguised in the cloak of a common demi-mondaine and smuggled into a restaurant, were again irreproachable grounds for demanding satisfaction. Felix, never completely stable and occasionally “given to fits of temporary insanity,” understood finally that the farce he concocted just weeks ago had led its principal players to the brink of disaster. (81) Only Marina’s appeal to her angry father and his to Manteuffel again defused the explosive situation.

Felix takes a rather bland view of the tempest:

“One day the husband came round to see us. He told us that he and Nicholas had been reconciled, he said that he considered his wife mainly responsible for what had occurred, and that he was going to apply for a divorce. We were greatly relieved that a duel had been avoided, but were still very anxious about the outcome of the divorce proceedings.”(82)

Spring drifted toward summer. The northern days lengthened, the sun hovered just above the horizon, never setting. The Neva ran swift and clear into the Gulf. Petersburg’s parks and gardens burst into bloom, its pink and yellow and pale blue palaces shining like jewels along the rivers and canals. Soon the de Heydens would close their house on the Fontanka and go to the Yustila estate for the remaining months of fine weather, but now, with neither husband nor lover in the city, harangued by her father, wept over by her mother and so demonized that she could not walk along the river as she liked to do, Marina ran again to a *voyant* to learn what her uncertain future held.

The mystic, who had “a bird’s face and feverish black eyes,” studied the dregs of coffee in Marina’s cup. “Not good, not good,” she intoned. “I see two men...each with a pistol in his hand. One, two, three, four! One falls dead. Sad, you are so sad.”

“Which one?”

“The one wearing grey.”

Since all of Petersburg knew of the scandal, the voyant’s prediction was hardly inspired, and Marina assured her that, although a duel might have taken place, it had been annulled and the parties reconciled.

“I hope you’re right, Madame,” said the crone and disappeared (83).

Marina’s fascination with psychics, born of fear and boredom, was rampant in Petersburg society. From the Winter Palace to the Yusupov Palace and down through lesser mansions and estates, royalty and nobility clung to visions emanating from tea leaves, coffee cups and sweating palms. To her astonishment Marina learned that even her father, “a very religious man,” and her uncle Baron Knorring has, in desperation, visited “Felix’s Polish mystic” in an attempt to find their ways through the tangled web of events she had spun.(84)

Increasingly agitated, a confused Marina looked forward to the family’s removal to Yustila which she remembered so fondly, and to an escape from the intrigues of the capital and the machinations of her bombastic Uncle Paul who had returned from Paris, empty-handed.

Within days of their departure, Paul brought devastating news. Goaded by letters he continued to receive from Petersburg and by the word of a “witness,” Manteuffel had again been driven to the point of mayhem. This witness was said to be in possession of the infamous Contan menu on which Marina had written her invitation to Nicholas, and this alone compromised not only her honor but his as well. Despite efforts to dissuade Arvid, the Count was on his way home. The time and place for the duel had been fixed: at the Krestovsky Island estate of Prince Serge Belosselsky, July 5th, 1908, at dawn.



The Krestovsky Island estate (courtesy Jacques Ferrand)

After Paul finished, Marina’s father demanded to know to whom she had given the men after having signed it.

“To Felix, to give to his brother. He must have lost it, for Nicholas assured me he had never seen it.”

“In the deep silence that followed,” Marina later wrote, “we heard only the frantic darting of a hummingbird.”(85)

Now any hope of an amicable settlement was lost; to find ways to again annul a duel impossible. If Marina believed her departure for the country would extinguish the fire that had begun to smolder on her doorstep she was mistaken, for within hours a cable arrived from her husband:

“Returning to Petersburg. Please delay your departure for Finland. Manteuffel” (86)

And despite her fear and dire warnings from the servants that he had come to kill her, Marina met with the Count for a last time. Seated side by side in the green drawing room, she heard him speak in a tone reserved for strangers, his eyes clear and cold. Politely asking after her health, he lit a cigarette and stood abruptly.

“I’ve come to say goodbye,” he told her, turned on his heel and hurried out of the house and down the street without looking back. Watching him through the tall windows, Marina suddenly realized “how cruel I was in his eyes.” (87)

Had he come to say a formal farewell to his wife and to his marriage, or had he come to say a more desperate goodbye knowing that a duel that might take his life had now become imperative?

The next morning Marina and her mother, their retinue of servants and pets, left Petersburg for Yustila where the versatile young lady immediately found safe haven among the blooming roses and slept soundly, dreaming of Nicholas’s return.

Her mother, too, was not without resources. Having formalized Marina’s separation from Manteuffel, she replied at length and in a familiar tone to a letter she had received from Nicholas Yusupov, daring to criticize, however obliquely, the conduct of his mother, Princess Zenaide:

“Vyborg, Yustila
“1908

“My Dear Count:

“I was very pleased to receive your letter and to know how things of mutual interest are with you. We have been living in total ignorance as all was concealed from us. Rumors that went round the city were so contradictory that it was impossible to believe them. I have always regarded you as a gentleman...and am very glad that I

was not mistaken despite the fact that your behavior is condemned by all.

“I fully understand how difficult it is for you to act otherwise because of your parents. Although others have tried to convince them that Marina will return to Count Manteuffel, this is not true. It would be better for them to know that this will never happen...and the sooner this matter is over with the better.

“Yesterday she had a long talk with Father...who is now quite sure that his daughter takes a serious view of the matter, and he promised not to stand in her way and not to persuade Count Manteuffel that she will return to him.

“Poor Marina has to put up with much from her family, especially from Father, who daily tries to instill in her how she has brought shame to her family and was even considering going to a psychiatric worker with a view to placing her in a residential sanitarium....

“From the time Marina left Paris, she has become unrecognizable, so sad and melancholy and nervous. She avoids speaking to me and prefers to be left alone. Leaving you has been a heavy blow to her, and I see now that she has really come to love you. I am certain this is not a childish love.

“At this moment they are all gathering at Petersburg-count Manteuffel, his parents, Baron Traubenberger, and Count Dimitri Heyden (Marshal of the Nobility). Every regiment has remained dissatisfied with the protocol established thus far...and have demanded that Count Manteuffel explain how things stand, although the seconds concluded that the whole matter does not touch Marina’s honor. Nevertheless, society is not in her favor and she is strongly compromised.

“I have been thinking a lot about you, my dear Count. I can imagine how difficult it has been for you to endure your family’s anguish. I am sorry for the Princess with whose great sorrow I so sympathize. Only God knows what I have endured! Not a moment’s peace. I have been pecked to death!

“It will give me great pleasure if you will write to me again. I am sure that everything will remain the same between us. I shake your hand.

“Sincerely,

“Countess A. Heyden.” (88)

As events moved toward disaster in Petersburg, Nicholas prepared to leave Paris. He cabled Marina:

“Paris, 18 June.

“Our plans have suddenly changed. My parents, Felix and I leave tonight for St. Petersburg where we “have an affair to settle.” Plan to see you Monday, 23 June. We will, both of us, have to leave Russia for some time. Nastia should pack your things. I love you, my dear, mon petit. In great haste,

“Nicholas.” (89)

Another arrived on its heels dated the 20th:

“Have arrived. Letter follows. Will be in Yustila Monday. We shall leave immediately for Paris. Wait for telegram tomorrow. Nicholas.” (90)

Of course, with Nicholas came Felix.

While Marina strolled among the roses and drifted through calm waters in her canoe waiting for Nicholas to fetch her, men, whose sole purpose it was to see that it did not happen, gathered in Petersburg. The Countess’s letter to Nicholas warned him of this ominous conclave, but his decision had been made and resolutely he marched into the eye of the storm.

Among those waiting for him was the man he had wronged, Arvid Manteuffel, his father Count Ernest Manteuffel, proud Baltic noblemen who demanded Yusupov’s death, and the Horse Guards Tribunal of Honor commanded by General-Major Khan Nakhitchevan. Although the elder Manteuffel would have preferred his son breach the gentleman’s Code of Honor and shoot Yusupov without benefit of formalities, the matter was submitted to the members of the Tribunal, who over-ruled Manteuffel and proceeded with the ritualized violence that had claimed the lives of some of Russia’s greatest men.

Word spread through Petersburg like fire and to her horror, Princess Zenaide was among the first to learn of it. Felix writes:

“One day he (Nicholas) told me that the duel was to take place very soon. I immediately warned my parents and they sent for him. He managed to reassure them by stating quite positively that nothing would happen.” (91)

Zenaide, already unnerved by her days in Paris and superstitious to the core, had a more sinister reason to fear the duel.

Felix wrote:

“It was then I heard of the strange fate which has pursued the Youssouppoff family since its earliest days: in each generation all the heirs but one die before reaching the age of twenty-six. My mother had had four sons, of whom only Nicholas and I survived. She had never ceased to fear for each of us in turn” (92)

Born in February of 1883, Nicholas would turn twenty-six the next year. But neither Felix's intervention nor Nicholas's diplomacy could divert the storm that was bearing down on them.

Once set in motion, the rules that governed duels were as carefully choreographed as any ballet conceived by the great Russian masters. All were matters of personal animosity, often involving the honor of a lady or the regiment to which one of the principals belonged. Since the reign of Peter the Great it had been prohibited and since the decrees of Nicholas I it had become illegal, although once again the rules were softened when Alexander III tacitly permitted dueling in the military. None of these proscriptions, however, prevented dueling from taking the lives of countless officers, gentlemen, and two of the country's most illustrious poets. Pushkin and Lermontov. Denounced and banned by the Church as a "detestable" practice, "the ruin of the soul" both homicidal and suicidal, the target of a recently convened Anti-Dueling League which "had the warm sympathy of the Czar of Russia" and considered by most Western countries as anachronistic and barbaric, dueling, nevertheless, had become "idealized images from cultural memory," which some insisted maintained moral and social order. Not all duels ended in death, but death resulting from a bullet wound or sword thrust could be a long and painful one and such a great fear that seconds were often successful in negotiating an apology and a settlement. If not, the survivor could be charged with murder in a criminal court and excommunicated by the Church, although this was rarely done.

No doubt that Manteuffel's grievances were infuriatingly real, and that efforts had been made to avoid a lethal confrontation. Indeed, the erratic course of events leading up to their final meeting strayed notoriously from the Code of Honor, which imposed inflexible restrictions on the conduct of the principals before as well as during the exchange. Presumably the conflict, the insult, the challenge, choice of weapons, time and place, and the encounter itself all followed in close order. Continued variance from this code indicates ambivalence on both sides of the invisible line: Manteuffel, no matter how outraged, must certainly have been reluctant to confront and possibly kill the admired scion of the powerful Yusupov clan. Nicholas, on his part, knew well the adored and significant place he held in his family, and his loving attachment to Marina would seem to work against a wish to die at the hands of her betrayed husband whom he barely knew.

Events seem to swirl relentlessly around the two men determining their subsequent moves almost without their participation. Once the Horse Guards Tribunal decreed that Manteuffel's grievances were uncontestable, Commander Khan Nakhitchevan, through Marina's father, submitted the decision to the Emperor, "who did not oppose it."(93)

Although the Emperor was Colonel-in-chief of the Horse Guards, the offended regiment, he was also sworn to uphold the civil and criminal law of the land and on many occasions had made it clear to his family that no Romanov was exempt from it. The

case was no longer a formality which would satisfy the honor of Manteuffel's regiment with shots fired deliberately into the air; it had become a grave and mordant matter.

Time-honored pads were assigned. Seconds and referees were charged with the duty of insuring that the affair, if it could not be reconciled, was conducted with integrity and with propriety. One or two friends were chosen to accompany the principals to guarantee fairness and to provide moral support. A doctor was required to attend the wounded. Occasionally, a member of the city police force was also present. Each and every member of this *tableau mortelle* pledged not to reveal what took place on those dusky fields though few ever remembered this promise for long.

Nor could such an event be kept from volatile Petersburg society. Each officer of the Horse Guards was privy to the challenge. The Emperor had failed to intervene. The Manteuffels, the de Haydens, and the Yusupovs were aware of what had become a tragic inevitability. To Princess Zenaide the curse that seemed to haunt her family through the generations now loomed large over the yellow palace on the Moika.

Perhaps it was the whispered notion that the duel itself was a mere formality that kept those who might have prevented it from doing so. Perhaps the two men would, as the Code allowed, meet, face each other, and shoot into the air, or if it were a duel to first blood, the aggrieved might inflict a slight wound on his opponent. In either case, honor would have been satisfied and the encounter ended.

At this moment Marina was in Yustila waiting for Nicholas. Although her father was presumably the courier who took the news of the duel to the Emperor, she remained ignorant of the whirlwind that was gathering across the Gulf of Finland. The messages she received from Yusupov could mean only that the duel had been averted or that it would be an exercise of etiquette, after which they would run off to Paris and resume their lives among the geraniums in the Bois.

While Marina was living out the last days of her childhood, Felix, aware of the ferocious storm bearing down upon his family and of the part he had played in its inception, raced to stop it. Finding two notes on his desk on Saturday evening, July 4th, he read them rapidly. The first was from his brother, urging him to join him for supper at Contan's where they had met secretly with Marina only three months ago. The second was from his mother, asking him to come to her as soon as possible.(94)

Hurrying to his mother's rooms, he "found her seated before the mirror while her maid brushed her hair for the night." Her eyes were radiant with happiness.

"I had a talk with your brother this evening," she said. "All the rumors of a duel are pure inventions, everything has been arranged. You can't imagine how happy I am. I dreaded the duel because Nicholas will be twenty-six in a few days." (95)

The accuracy of Felix's recollections of these hours is suspect, for Nicholas would not turn twenty-six until the following year. When he wrote those lines, Yusupov was sixty-five; Zenaide had been dead a dozen years. Perhaps it was his failing memory at work, or perhaps it was that a sense of drama still ran strong in his veins. He continued:

"I kissed my mother, who was weeping for joy, and went off to the restaurant where I was to meet Nicholas. As I did not find him there, I searched the whole town for him and returned home more anxious than ever. What with the clairvoyants' predictions and my mother's revelations (about the Yusupov curse) I was wild with anxiety.... A prey to the gloomiest thoughts, I finally fell into a fitful sleep." (96) Clearly history had escaped the young man. Everything he had conspired to hide—the clandestine dinner, the inscribed menu, the green cloak, his secret meetings with the lovers in Paris—all had come to light. Should his brother die at the hand of Manteuffel what burden of guilt would Felix carry?

And where had Nicholas gone? Felix assuredly knew where to look for him and, not finding him, had gone home. But at some point during that long, white night, Nicholas had indeed returned to the Palace and, sitting at his desk, had written his last letter to Marina. Since he, hours earlier, had urged his brother to meet him for dinner, then failed to arrive, it is odd, according to Felix's account, that Nicholas did not come to his rooms or had not had a note sent to him when he knew that, within a few hours, he would face Manteuffel with a pistol in his hand.

And, if the duel were a mere formality, simply "an affair to settle" as his earlier letters to Marina indicated, not worth waking his brother over, why did he pen those final anguished and anticipatory lines to Marina. Only a man who believed he was going to his death could write:

"By the time this letter reaches you I shall be dead.... It is now five o'clock. In two hours my seconds will come to take me away, and I will never see you again....I do not fear death, but it is hard for me to die far from you without seeing you for the last time. Farewell forever. I love you."(97)

The letter, written on yellow paper bordered in black, was delivered to Marina by her Uncle Andrei. Nicholas had left it on his bureau. His father found it there and gave it to Andrei.

On that Sunday morning, Krestovsky Island lay under fine drizzle. The sun hovered at the horizon; only a false night had fallen. The gravel drives where summer carriages rolled were empty and the gardens quiet. A closed coach could make its way easily and secretly across the bridge from the city and disappear into the birch trees that grew in thick stands over the verdant island. The waters of the Gulf lapped at Krestovsky's shores. Cawing black-birds circled, muting the sound of wheels, the whispers of men.

Light rain continued to fall through green, leafy boughs and over the lush flower beds, but Krestovsky Island had a more sinister past than its lacy marks and gardens revealed. Although much of the island, summer home to both the aristocracy and

bourgeoisie and owned in its entirety by the Belosselsky-Belozerskys, was carefully tended, there still existed mites of wild, uncultivated land. Far from the inquisitive eye of militia and the public, duels were often fought in small clearings where shots would not be heard and where this ancient ritual could reach its deadly conclusion in secrecy.

It was not to one of these hidden arenas that Nicholas Yusupov was driven, but to the estate of Prince Belosselsky-Belozersky, member of one of Russia's oldest and most noble families. Although Prince Serge was, along with other members of his regiment, away on summer maneuvers at Krasnoye Selo, the estate was easily accessible to the public who often came to view matches on the large, manicured polo field. It was here that Nicholas Yusupov confronted Arvid Manteuffel.(98)

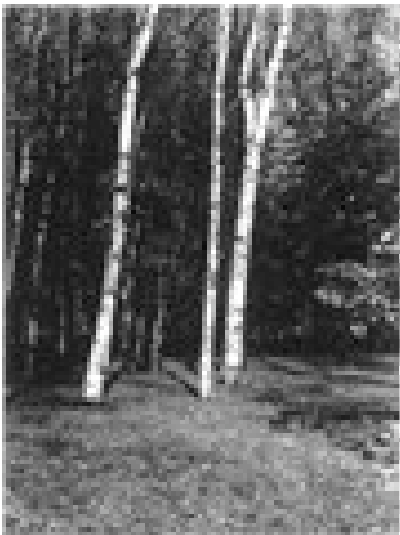
It was just before eight as the small caravan of carriages rolled up to the dewy expanse of greensward. First to alight were the Prince and the Count, followed by their seconds, who offered a choice of silver dueling pistols to Yusupov, then to Manteuffel. Standing at a distance were the other observers and a surgeon.

At the signal, standing thirty paces from his adversary, Yusupov shot into the air. Manteuffel, nervously grasping a revolver moist from the mist, fired at Yusupov and missed.

"Fifteen paces, gentlemen," said the referee.

Moving forward and turning, Nicholas again fired into the air, some said at a circling raven. Manteuffel took careful aim, and while Nicholas's arm was still raised toward the sky, shot him through the heart. The Prince died instantly.

Manteuffel fled. Back to Petersburg they drove him, to his Regimental Club. Once inside the distraught Count cursed his fellow officers for having made him a killer. Returning to his quarters, he changed his civilian clothes, leaving his uniform scattered on the floor then hastily crafted a letter of resignation. When it had been delivered to the Regiment-Adjutant he immediately left Petersburg for his Baltic estate.



The body of Nicholas Yusupov was borne slowly back to his home where his family still slept. Through the door it was carried and up the marble steps to the immense foyer. To the right were the rooms of his father, to the left, those of his brother, and upstairs the suite where his mother lay sleeping easily in the belief that all danger had been avoided. It was to his father's apartment they took him a bloody stretcher and laid him down.

*A clearing on the island
near the Belosselky-Belozersky estate
(courtesy Alexandra Akhmedova)*

Only Felix has left an account of what happened in the yellow palace when the servants awoke the family:

“I was awakened by my valet, Ivan, who gasped: ‘Come quickly. Something terrible has happened....’ Gripped by a dreadful foreboding, I jumped out of bed and rushed to my mother’s rooms. I met several of the servants on the staircases; their faces were distorted with grief; none of them would answer my questions. Heartbreaking sobs came from my father’s dressing room. I entered it to find my father standing pale as death before a stretcher on which my brother’s body lay. My mother was kneeling beside the body and seemed to have completely lost her reason. We dragged her away with difficulty and laid her on her bed. She called for me when she grew calmer, but when she saw me she took me for Nicholas.”(99)

Of this terrible Sunday in July Marina knew nothing. It was not until the next day that the curt message came from her father telling her: “Count Manteuffel killed Count Nicholas Soumarokoff-Elston in a duel. May his soul rest in peace.”

“Not Nicholas!” the young woman cried. “No, no, not Nicholas!” (100)

It was not until she saw, on the front page of the evening paper, an announcement bordered in black, that she grasped the truth of what her father had written:

“The Prince and Princess Youssouppoff and Count Felix Soumarokoff-Elston share with you the news of the sudden death of their son and brother, Count Nicholas Soumarokoff-Elston.”(101)

Years later, Marina’s mother told her that her reaction to the indisputable news was so severe that she feared she had lost her mind.

On opposite sides of a summer-blue sea, two women grieved; the mother and the mistress. Always delicate, Zenaide’s collapse was complete; doctors warned the family that she might never recover entirely. Slowly awakening from a profound stupor, she would not allow Felix to leave her side, and watched from a deep chair as the body of her eldest son was carried into the family chapel. After a funeral mass, the Yusupovs received an exhausting and endless procession of friends and relatives, then the

desolate Princess made herself ready for the journey to their Arkhangelskoye estate where Nicholas was to be buried in two days.

The Arkhangelskoe estate (courtesy Greg King)



While Zenaide mourned the loss of her son and heir, Marina recovered more quickly and with greater determination, announcing to her mother that she would leave immediately for the short trip to Petersburg. Still obsessed with the idea of seeing

Nicholas and proving to herself that the news was true, she left Yustila wearing the same black suit she had worn in Paris.

Petersburg was in shock, the facade of the Moika Palace draped in black. Refusing to go to her father, Marina stayed with family friends and it was there that her Uncle Andrei joined her, asking sympathetically what it was she hoped to do.

“To see him. To know if this is true!”

“Impossible, my dear child,” he told her. “The body is in the chapel, and their door is closed to you. The Princess is mad with grief and won’t leave the corpse. They have had to delay the services, for she won’t allow them to close the coffin.” (102)

Perhaps counting on Felix’s friendship and his penchant for the unorthodox, Marina told her uncle that he might let her in, and Andrei agreed to deliver to Felix any letter

she might write.

Desperate to see her lover and relying on Felix to help her, the Countess wrote:

“Dear Felix,

“Forgive me for writing to you. You will not be angry and refuse to hear what I have to say to you, if not for my sake, then in Nicholas’s memory. Felix, I came here to pray at the coffin. I was forbidden to come, but I could not obey. I knew that I could not attend the Requiem services, and I also know that I won’t see his grave as it will be at Arkhangelskoye, but I was hoping that I’d see him late at night when your parents won’t be there.

“His death was kept from me and they were afraid to tell me at once, and I arrived too late - the coffin was already sealed. But, Felix, I must kiss the casket and stay in town until such time as they carry him away to Moscow. You must understand this, Felix, and help me. Arrange something even for one hour at night when everyone is asleep at your home. Help me to get into the chapel. Pity me, Felix, and do this for me and for your brother if you loved him.

“Understand that I was the closest thing on earth for him. You do not really know how we loved one another. God knows how we loved one another. Everything you do for me you will be doing for him. His spirit will be with us for forty days and he will know what you have done and God will bless you for it. If you have a heart do this in his memory.

“Then again, Felix, there are articles which nobody but me should have as they only mean something to us both. I beg you to find them and give them to me. This will fulfill Nicholas’s wishes. They are my letters which came after his death-any others he probably burned-the photograph of me if he hadn’t had time to burn it, a locket in the shape of a heart containing a lock of my hair, a talisman in the shape of a round coin, his old bathing wrap, a straw hat which I bought for him in Paris, a black brush with which I brushed his hair, a handkerchief, a pair of stockings, one suit (possibly a brown one), an old leather cigar case, a cultured pearl pin which he and I ordered from Paris, old slippers, a book from Apukhtin from which he taught me to read with great feeling, and finally a photograph of himself.

“All these things are sacred to me. Do not deprive me of them. I received one letter he wrote to me before his death from my father. A lovely letter, Felix. If you had been able to read it, you would have understood what we were to each other and forgiven me.

“May God give you every good thing in life.

“Marina .”(103)

Andrei delivered the letter to Felix. The only response came from his father, who told Andrei that Marina should leave Petersburg as soon as possible. He did, however, give him the yellow letter bordered in black that Nicholas wrote to her on the morning of his death and a small box containing a medallion that the mystic, Madame Freya, had given him. It had been found around his neck when he died “on the green grass of Krestovsky Island.”

Curiously, Marina’s version of the letter is a shadow of that found in the Yusupov Archives:

“Dear Marina,

“Sunday, five o’clock in the morning.

“They are coming to look for me in one hour and all will be over. My poor little girl, when I am no longer there they will pelt you with mud and stones. Defend your heart against their class, *ma malenkaia*.

“How happy we could have been. I love you.

“Nicholas.” (104)

The news, of course, could not be kept from the world press, and a day after the duel **The Times** of London carried four occasionally inaccurate paragraphs from their Petersburg correspondent:

“Another fatal duel between members of the St. Petersburg aristocracy occurred this morning. Count Nicholas Sumarokoff, elder son of General Prince Yusupoff, was shot in an encounter with Count Manteuffel, of the Horse Guards. The duel was fought on the suburban estate of Prince Belosselsky-Belozersky, the same spot where Prince Murat recently met and shot the brothers Plehn....

“The motives of the encounter are known to all St. Petersburg society. Count Manteuffel only a few months ago married Countess Marie Heyden, daughter of the Tsar’s Naval Aide-do-camp. Following upon a scandalous disclosure in which Count Nicholas and Countess Manteuffel figured, the unhappy husband tried to commit suicide. This domestic tragedy, the scene of which was Paris, has now had its denouement in Petersburg....

“The Yusupoffs are among the wealthiest Russian aristocratic families. The Prince commands the Chevalier Guards...”(105)

The following day, the same reporter dispatched news of the services:

“All the Grand Dukes and the whole of St. Petersburg society attended the Requiem service for Count Sumarokoff at the Yusupov Mansion. The late Count was a keen sportsman and a gifted musician and dramatist. He recently graduated in the faculty of law at St. Petersburg University, and would have obtained a commission in the Chevalier Guards this autumn.... Count Sumarokoff and Count Manteuffel were bosom friends till the tragic occurrence in Paris a couple of months ago.

“St. Petersburg society, while appreciating the motives of the encounter, which was aggravated by the fact that the event in question occurred during the Manteuffels’ honeymoon, at the same time deplores the tragic end of a promising young nobleman and feels deeply for the bereaved parents. The old Yusupoff title will pass to the surviving son, Count Felix.”(106)

Turned away by Felix, and with no chance of either attending the mass or stealing into the chapel to see Nicholas for a last time, Marina took her small treasures and went back to Yustila where she could only imagine the services at the country estate where Nicholas was being laid to rest: “the black robes of the clergy among the fresh, green leaves, the Princess bowed down with grief, the stiff, straight figure of the Prince and the angelic profile of Felix.”(107)

Marina saw clearly. The body of the young Prince was taken to Arkhangelskoye and buried. Not long after his death, plans were drawn and building commenced on a large and stately family mausoleum in which all generations of the family would be entombed. It was never finished, and Nicholas’s grave was despoiled during the October Revolution.

*The Yusupov mausoleum,
Arkhangelskoe (courtesy Greg King)*

When Count Nicholas Soumarokov-Elston, Prince Yusupov, was consigned to the earth and the curtain was rung down on this tragedy, the other principals scattered.

Marina continued to consult with psychics, failed to recover her health, and eventually spent three months in a Finnish sanatorium chosen by her father. Eventually she was released and although she wished to return to Russia, she learned that Princess Zenaide refused to live in Petersburg for fear of encountering her. Wrote Marina:



“The wishes of Zenaide were sacred.” (108) And so she traveled. To Switzerland, to Italy, to France, to London, stopping wherever she chose and finding that, in some cities, her notoriety preceded her.

Finally, in 1914, she returned to Russia for the first time in six years. Months after her arrival. Felix married Princess Irina Alexandrovna, and “the ambitious dream of Princess Youssouppoff was realized.” By summer, Russia was plunged into war, but Petersburg society continued its dizzy dance toward destruction, Marina doing her part by forming an intense and carefree “romantic idyll” with Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovich, who two years later, would aid his friend Felix in the murder of Gregory Rasputin. After his departure for the Front in May of 1915, Marina, not one to waste time, married, the following June, Michael Tchitchagov, Captain of the Lancers Regiment, Empress Alexandra’s Own. Of this marriage, Marina says little. She says less about the son she had with Tchitchagov in 1920. That marriage ended in divorce.

With the Revolution, Marina left Russia for the last time. Her hatred for Felix, who she believed, was guilty for her unhappiness and his brother’s death, remained undiminished. In 1960, in a letter to an unnamed baroness, she still refers to him as her “fierce enemy” who played “a fatal part” in the tragedy.(109) Countess Marina de Heyden died in France in 1969 at the age of eighty.



Marina de Hayden in old age

Princess Zenaide Yusupov retired from society after the loss of her beloved son. She no longer entertained, lived most of the year at her palaces in the Crimea, and was seen in public only once—at the wedding of Felix and Irina—dressed in pearl gray satin and smiling faintly, with “an ineffable look of sadness in her still lovely cornflower eyes”(110) She refused to acknowledge any officer in the Horse Guards Regiment ever again.

In the last year before the Revolution, Zenaide did seem to recover some of her former spirit and determination when she tried desperately to rid the Imperial Family of Rasputin's influence. When her overt appeals to the Empress failed, she fell into a vague conspiracy with Felix which ended with the death of the peasant in 1916.

Perhaps Zenaide's most peaceful moments were spent at Arkhangelskoye, where Nicholas lay buried. As she wrote to Felix, "The grave is well-tended and there is an impression of calmness, brightness and consolation. Arkhangelskoye under the snow is very beautiful." (111)

The Yusupovs left Russia in 1919. Zenaide died in Paris in November, 1939, eleven years after her husband's death. Her passing was little noted in a world plunged into another great war. Observing that the Princess had been very rich and very beautiful in her youth, **The New York Times** said: "Princess Zenaide Youssouf of died in a Russian boarding house for the aged." Of her long and passionate life, they reported only that she was "mother of Prince Felix, who slew Rasputin." (112)

Count Arvid Manteuffel returned to Petersburg after a self-imposed exile in Livonia. He was apparently surprised to find that society's sentiment which had formerly supported his position, had turned against him. He remarried in 1910, and according to Marina, called for her on his deathbed in 1931. She did not reach him in time and was left wondering why he wanted to see her after all those years.

"Regrets.... Remorse... Pardon?" she asks. (113)

Krestovsky Island, where the murderous duel took place, is now a sportsman's paradise, filled with tennis courts, yacht harbors, amusement parks, and jogging paths. Where the Belosselsky estate once stood, an enormous stadium has been built; the polo field is gone, too. Though the city of St. Petersburg has slowly evolving plans to rebuild the old house, now, of the original buildings, only the Chapel of St. John remains.

And that leaves Felix, who was indeed granted the princely title that would have gone to his brother and who would have inherited the vast Yusupov fortune had not the Revolution destroyed that dream. Too well known for his murder of Rasputin and too little known for other moments in his life, the young Prince continued to exercise his penchant for adventure. After the family's removal to the Crimea in 1917, he made several audacious trips back to Petersburg and Moscow to recover family treasures from under the acquisitive eyes of the Bolsheviks. When the Revolution spread south to the Yusupov villa, he again demonstrated remarkable courage and quick-wittedness in the face of great danger, on one occasion turning aside a home-invasion of Red sailors by offering his expensive watch and charming them with

spirited singing and guitar-playing.

With the final exodus of Russians from the Crimea in 1919, the remaining members of the powerful Yusupov clan hastened aboard the British cruiser HMS Marlborough for permanent exile abroad. In the ensuing years, Felix, Irina, and their daughter, lived largely in Paris, trying their hand at couture, appearing at charity events, writing memoirs, and selling paintings and jewels (including the famous Peregrina Pearl, valued at 250,000 Swiss francs in 1953) when things became difficult. With funds derived from such sales, Felix and Irina were able to live comfortably if not on a grand scale, and to aid other émigrés in distress. Today, their granddaughter, Madame Xenia Sfiris, and her family live in Athens. Xenia, whose house is filled with mementos, has become involved in the restoration of the Yusupov Palace on the Moika. Now it is a museum, concert hall, and theatre, open to the public.

Felix died at his home in Paris in 1967, Irina three years later. They are buried side-by-side in the cemetery of St. Genevieve-des-Bois where Princess Zenaide also lies. In October, 2000, President Vladimir Putin, on a state visit to France, paid his respects to the many Russian expatriates who are interred there, a graphic illustration of turbulent history come full circle.

A man of contrasts, Felix often found his intrigues gone astray. If, in the murder of Rasputin, he hoped to empower the Dynasty, he only hastened its demise. If in his impetuous dalliance with the lives of his brother, Marina, and Arvid he hoped to provide temporary amusement for himself, he lived to see the shattering results of his pernicious meddling.

Perhaps neither Marina nor Felix ever saw things clearly. But Prince Nicolas Lobanov-Rostovsky, exiled member of one of Russia's oldest houses, wrote:

“The two protagonists of this drama, Countess Marina de Heyden and Prince Felix Youssouppoff, were not rewarded according to their merits. The Countess, victim of a tragic love, was forced into temporary exile, then final exile following the Russian Revolution. Felix Youssouppoff's future was brilliant: studies at Oxford, success in London society, and in the reflected glory of the *Ballet Russe*. Heir to a fabulous fortune, he married the niece of the Emperor, a match devoutly hoped for by his mother, Princess Zenaide. Life was a bed of roses. In his peculiar decision to murder Rasputin, Felix Youssouppoff only attacked one of the many manifestations of a monarchy in decline and not its roots...the Communist Party was unleashed and the Revolution of 1917 exploded. Aristocratic Russia was driven abroad, and Marina de Heyden had to earn her living like the others. Felix Youssouppoff went easily into exile where the remains of his fortune promised him an idle life.”(114)

Source Notes

- 1 . Ferrand, 217.
2. de Hayden, 98.
3. Ibid, 100.
4. Ibid, 101 .
5. Ibid, 103.
6. Ibid, 107.
7. Literally “soul-mate,” but otherwise “dear, honey” etc.
8. de Hayden, 110.
9. Ibid, 111.
10. Ibid, 112.
11. Ibid, 112.
12. Yusupov, 111 .
13. Ferrand, 217.
14. Information from Dr. Idris Traylor, Ph.D., to author.
15. Fülöp-Miller, 338.
16. Ibid, 334.
17. de Hayden, 265.
18. Arkhangelskoye was the principal Yusupov estate in the Moscow Region, situated on the banks of the Moscow River.
19. Yusupov, 115.
20. Ferrand, 225.
- 21 .Yusupov, 115-16.
22. Ibid, 124.
23. Ibid, 123.
24. Ibid, 148.
25. Ibid, 162.
26. Ibid, 86.
27. Katkov, 200.
28. Yusupov, 164-66.
29. Letter from Prince Felix Yusupov to Princess Irina Yusupov, Yusupov Collection, State Historical Archives of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg Archive.
30. Yusupov, 175.
- 31 . de Hayden, 115.
32. Ibid, 111 .
33. Ibid, 117-19.
34. Ibid, 119.
35. Ibid, 119.
36. Ibid, 119.
37. In which the Don takes a peasant girl as a lover and imagines her to be a high-born lady. From Felix, a scathing insult.
38. de Hayden, 120
39. Ibid, 121.
40. Ibid, 126.
41. Yusupov, 111.

42. de Hayden, 128.
43. Ibid, 128.
44. Ibid, 129.
45. Ibid, 129.
46. Yusupov, 111.
47. de Hayden, 130.
48. Ibid, 130-31.
49. Ibid, 133.
50. Yusupov, 111.
51. Ibid, 111.
52. de Hayden, 136.
53. Ibid, 137.
54. Ibid, 140.
55. Ibid, 141.
56. Ibid, 146.
57. Ibid, 145.
58. Ibid, 147.
59. Ibid. 148.
60. Yusupov, 111-12.
61. Ibid, 112.
62. de Hayden, 150.
63. Ibid, 151.
64. Buchanan, 181.
65. Serge Obolensky, 21.
66. Katkov, 198-201.
67. Information from Dr. Idris Traylor, Ph.D., to author.
68. de Hayden, 151-53.
69. Yusupov, 112.
70. de Hayden, 154.
71. Ibid, 154.
72. Ibid, 1 55.
73. Ibid, 1 55.
74. Ibid, 156.
75. Ibid, 1 56-57.
76. Ibid, 157.
77. Ibid, 157.
78. Ibid, 158.
79. Ibid, 159.
80. Letter from Marina de Hayden Manteuffel to Prince Felix Yusupov, Yusupov Collection, State Historical Archives of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg Archive.
81. Correspondence between Princess Zenaide Yusupov and Prince Felix Yusupov, Letter of November 3rd, 1916, published on the Alexander Palace web site of Bob Atchison:
(<http://-alexanderpalace.org/palace/lettersyussupov>)
82. Yusupov, 112.
83. de Hayden, 160.
84. Ibid, 160.

85. Ibid, 161 .
86. Ibid, 161 .
87. Ibid, 161.
88. Letter from Countess Alexandra de Hayden to Prince Nicholas Yusupov, June, 1908, Yusupov Collection, State Historical Archives of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg Archive.
89. de Hayden, 162.
90. Ibid, 162.
91. Yusupov, 112.
92. Ibid, 113.
93. Ferrand, 217.
94. Yusupov, 112.
95. Ibid, 113.
96. Ibid, 113.
97. de Hayden, 168.
98. Some historians insist the duel took place in Finland, where there were no laws against dueling. However, members of the Belosselsky family confirm that it did indeed take place at their estate.
99. Yusupov, 113-14.
100. de Hayden, 165.
- 101 . Ibid, 165.
102. ibid, 166.
103. Letter from Marina de Hayden Manteuffel to Prince Felix Yusupov, July, 1908, Yusupov Collection, State Historical Archives of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg Archive.
104. Letter from Prince Nicholas Yusupov to Marina de Hayden Manteuffel, July 5, 1908, Yusupov Collection, State Historical Archives of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg Archive.
105. The Times of London, July 6, 1908, 11.
106. Ibid, July 7, 1908 13.
107. de Hayden, 168.
108. Ibid, 169.
109. Letter of Marina de Hayden, 1960, in the Atlantis Magazine Collection.
110. Buchanan, 184.
- 111 . Letter from Princess Zenaide Yusupov to Prince Felix Yusupov, Yusupov Collection, State Historical Archives of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg Archive.
112. How It Feels to Be Shot At, by Walter Winans, in **The New York Times**, August 23, 1908, 6.
113. de Hayden, 239.
114. Ibid, 311-12.

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Arkhangelskoye Museum: [http://www, Mtlsetlm.nl/nltlsetlnfarcllanRelskoe](http://www.Mtlsetlm.nl/nltlsetlnfarcllanRelskoe)

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