EOTISA

THE ROMANCE OF CATHERINE AND POTEMKIN



CATHERINE II
Marble bust by Shubin, 1791.

The Romance of
CATHERINE
AND
POTEMKIN

by

Jerome Dreifuss

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(Founded in 1770)

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FOREWORD

THIS book has come about because of newly discovered letters from Catherine to Potemkin, which Mr. Karl A. Bickel located in Moscow. There is, so far as I know, no other work devoted mainly to Catherine the Great and her lover, Prince Potemkin. He is generally conceded to be the greatest and most important of them all and, as a rule, occupies the most space in works which discuss Catherine's lovers.

Books devoted mainly to Catherine naturally do not attempt to give as much importance or as many facts concerning Potemkin as this one does. I have obtained most of my material on him from Russian and German sources mentioned in the bibliography.

Some of the incidents used are hard to prove historically and are regarded by some authorities as unproved hearsay. Nevertheless, they have not been disproved. An example is Potemkin's meeting with Catherine at Troitska. As discussed in the appendix, he may really have married Catherine secretly, as some think. In the newly discovered correspondence she frequently calls him her "husband." Perhaps this is why the czarist régime suppressed it.

I am indebted to my friend, Monte Bourjaily, for the idea of writing a biography about Catherine and Potemkin. I am grateful to Dr. Avrahm Yarmolinsky, of the Slavonic Language Department of the New York Public Library, for the assistance he gave me when I researched there.

Last, but by no means least, I am deeply in debt to the tireless, courteous, and kind people of the staff of the New York Public Library who never failed to make every effort to place the facilities of that magnificent institution at my disposal.

JEROME DREIFUSS.

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

En Route to St. Petersburg, 1743

IT was bad either way. If she opened the windows of the carriage she would freeze. Closed, they stifled her; but since the Princess Johanna Elizabeth, of Zerbst Dornburg, preferred stifling to freezing, she and her fourteen-year-old daughter, the Princess Sophie Auguste Friderike, suffered the latter discomfort.

If the mother had turned her handsome, hard face toward her daughter she might have noted that the child looked ill. But her gaze was riveted on the torn red damask upholstery opposite, and her small but unpleasant mouth was pressed into a firm line.

"A frightful country! Miles and miles we've driven in this carriage without sign of a road. Not even wagon ruts! Barbarians, that's what they are. No such thing would ever happen in Holstein."

She spoke in German, in a manner which compelled instant dislike of her personality. One knew her immediately for a fussy, meddling, and selfish woman.

Fike, for that was the girl's nickname, made no reply.

Johanna Elizabeth banged upon the roof of the carriage relentlessly until the driver opened a small aperture and looked in. His face was bright red with the cold; his long bushy beard, traditional with his calling, glistened with droplets of ice and hoarfrost.

"Are we getting near Riga?" she cried shrilly in German.

"Yes, Highness," he answered in Russian, touching his mittened hand to his forehead. The aperture snapped shut.

"Pfui, his breath stinks!" exclaimed the Princess, holding her muff before her nose. "Every single driver in this country smells of that beastly vodka. Every single one of them has been drunk."

Outside, Colonel Vokheikan, the equerry, turned to the driver next to him.

"What did the nuisance want this time?"

"I don't know, I can't speak her language. I just say

'yes,' and breathe in her face when she raps for me. She's a nice-looking woman."

"A hell-cat!" snapped Vokheikan. "Why do you think I'm sitting out here with you? I ought to be made a general for escorting her and the daughter to Petersburg. Wait till she runs into the Empress. Then you'll see the fur fly. The Empress'll make her eat dust."

The driver laughed, drained a quarter of a bottle of vodka and flung the empty flask away. The equerry pulled at some brandy from his own flask and gabbled on.

"Her daughter's a likeable girl. Not bad-looking, just plump enough. I hate them skinny. Real German-looking. The Grand Duke Peter will like that. He's always raving about that beloved Holstein of his. Curse it, anyway! The Empress should have married and had a good Russian child of her own. She's the daughter of Peter the Great, isn't she? Now the best we can get is this God-forsaken nephew of hers, a foreigner from Holstein!"

"Yes, and now they're bringing another foreigner as a bride for him."

The equerry flushed and became angry. He grasped the hilt of his sword as if to strike the driver.

"Ssh! Not a word, or, by God, I'll cut you in two! They are travelling incognito. No one is supposed to know till we reach Riga."

"No, no, Highness, of course not; I was just surmising. Here, have some of my vodka . . . save your brandy."

The driver slapped the bottom of a bottle of the liquor with his open palm and the cork popped out. He passed it to the surly equerry, who drank greedily.

"If they ever knew I let such a secret out, I could be sent to Siberia."

"I should never tell."

The driver lashed at his horses with practised hand. The new welts were neatly laid beside the ones he had last raised on their rumps. The springless carriage bumped mercilessly over the uneven terrain.

Inside, Johanna Elizabeth looked at Fike.

"What is the matter, are you ill?"

"I think it is that drink I took, that *kvas*."

"Then why did you take it if you knew it would make you ill?"

"But if I'm to be a Russian princess, why shouldn't I try their national drinks? A peasant in the last inn told me everybody in Russia drank it."

"It is filthy stuff—water that has lost its wits. Oh, to have such a daughter! Everything happens to me! I work my fingers to the bone to arrange this wonderful marriage for you . . . see Frederick the Great, correspond with the Empress, everything, and then, then, you ungrateful child, right when we are almost in sight of Riga, ready to be officially greeted, you make yourself sick so that the Empress will be displeased and send us all back home!"

"No, mama. Really! No one will realize it. You shall see, I'll behave perfectly."

The driver chuckled as Johanna Elizabeth's shrill German trickled through the roof of the carriage.

"There's your hell-cat."

"I can hear her."

The carriage blundered on. The sun was setting, and in the distance the houses and spires of Riga were glinting like a trayful of jumbled jewellery.

Both men could hear the little princess crying now. Neither spoke for a time.

"I don't think she will make much of an empress," said Vokheikan.

"You never can tell about women," said the driver.

Fike sat on the window ledge, next to the Grand Duke Peter. For some time he had been babbling stupidly and disconnectedly to her about a lady he said he was in love with, a Countess Biron. Why, how could he love such a creature? She was a small, deformed little hunchback, neither pretty nor interesting. Fike gazed at her own reflection in the tall mirror across the long *salon*. . . . No, she was not beautiful; but she was attractive. Her eyes and her figure were very nice. . . . Then why did the Grand Duke keep talking about the Countess Biron all the time?

She looked at him. He put his finger to his lips to signify that she should not let the Empress, who was at the far end of

the room talking to her mother, know what he was up to. He was making an articulated toy soldier march up and down the window-sill, and hiding his childish nonsense from Elizabeth's sight behind the folds of her dress. . . . This was a curious man she was to marry. Although he was sixteen, he played with dolls, talked the most boring nonsense, grimaced and made noises. Besides, he was very ugly—thin, pallid, with a sickly, pinched face and stringy hair.

She thought vaguely that he reminded her of someone, and suddenly a frightened exclamation passed her lips.

In Anhalt Zerbst on a walk with her governess, she had seen a boy with the same shambling gait, the same silly expression. He was going down the street, and on his shoulder he had a wooden gun. He was playing soldier, just as Peter so often played it. People ran after him and made fun of him. Fike had asked her governess what was wrong with him, to be told that the boy was feeble-minded. Peter was just like him. Peter was feeble-minded. This was the man she was to marry. This was her Grand Duke.

Lies. Everything her mother had told her had been a lie. The grand Palaces were built of wood ; they looked well on the outside and were shabby inside. Water ran down the walls ; the roofs leaked ; the doors didn't close ; the windows didn't open. The furniture, carted from place to place, had been smashed and broken. They had tables without chairs and chairs without tables. Horrible rats ran around and scared her so. Peter had hanged one for eating a toy soldier.

The Grand Court of Russia ! Lies. Nothing but lies. Tears came to Fike's eyes when she thought of her mother's deception.

That first State banquet, when she had been introduced. Ugh ! The same dirty cutlery for the whole meal. The footmen banked ten deep behind each chair, who looked so grand in their gorgeous liveries, spat on your plate, wiped it with a dirty napkin, and handed it back to you. Even if it *was* a solid gold plate, it was awful to eat from.

Fike shuddered. She felt dirty. Everyone was infested with vermin, even the Empress. Now she herself was.

She thought of Stettin, with its scrubbed floors, good stone houses and neat little streets ; and she felt a terrible longing.

Out the Palace window she looked at a gloomy grey sky hanging over muddy puddles which passed for streets. In place of Holstein's trim gardens, here was a swamp.

Still, there was the Empress across the room, talking with her mother. Elizabeth was wearing a small diamond crown which glittered beautifully in the candlelight. At home no one burned so many candles. She did look wonderful. The Czarina. Autocrat of all the Russias! To rule that vast domain. . . . To have all that power. . . . To make everyone bend to your will!

"Fike, come here!"

It was the Empress calling. Fike jumped from the window sill and hurried across the huge room.

"And you, Peter! Stop playing with those idiotic toys, or I'll take them all away from you!"

"But Your Highness——" he quailed.

"Speak Russian to me, not German, you fool!"

Fike glanced at her mother, who had turned red and angry. She could see that the Empress was in a high temper also; she had finished a large decanter of her favourite strong cherry brandy, and because the next was slow in coming, her irritation had mounted.

"Pour me a glass, fool!" she roared to the lackey who finally brought it.

Fike silently watched her drink it, and waited. Yes, she must be drunk. Elizabeth drank as much as the soldiers did at home. Yet, even though she was drunk, there was regality about her. So many ladies of the Russian court drank to excess. Fike felt a loathing for liquor at that moment; it was to make her very abstemious all her life.

"Now, my child, you will listen to me." The Empress Elizabeth wiped her lips with the sleeve of her gorgeous cut-velvet dress.

"But Your Highness——" Johanna Elizabeth began to interpose.

"Silence when I am talking! You have made enough mischief with your intrigue and your wagging tongue, madam. You would do better to hold it and to mind your own business instead of Frederick the Great's. And you, Peter, if you don't stop making those idiotic faces behind my back—I can

see them plainly in the mirror—I shall have your tutor Brummer beat you. . . . Now, what was I about to say, Fike? Oh, yes, I was about to tell you what is going to be done with you."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Fike curtsied, and the Empress looked pleased.

"First, I will have you baptized and inducted into the Russian Orthodox Church."

"But the child's father, Your Highness, expressly forbade her leaving the Lutheran faith."

"Well, he is a fool. Fike, do you agree to join our faith?"

"Gladly, Your Highness."

"Good! We shall give you a new name. It will be Catherine. . . . Do you like it?"

"Very much, Your Highness."

"Good! After that, you and the Grand Duke will be married." The Empress turned to Johanna. "And right after the wedding, madam you will pack your things and leave Russia. That is all."

A tall middle-aged man, bearded and handsome, entered the room and approached the Empress. She rose unsteadily and gave him her arm.

"Ah, dear Razoumovsky, thank God you have come! I'm so weary with all this State business."

They started out of the room, holding each other intimately. Suddenly the Empress turned and yelled at Fike, across the floor: "Oh, yes, Catherine! See to it that you have many men children. The only reason you are here is to give us a male heir to the throne!" With that she swept out of the room in long mannish strides.

Johanna curtsied, and so did Catherine. Peter whispered in her ear: "He sleeps in the same bed with her. I bored a hole in the wall and watched them a whole night. It was very funny and silly."

When Catherine was alone with her own mother, Johanna broke out.

"Why did you say 'yes' to everything? Why did you turn against your own mother?"

Johanna talked on and on. A faint smile played about the girl's lips. For a fourteen-year-old, she looked very mature.

Her mother's words rained upon her, but they had no effect. She was thinking. . . .

There was Catherine the First, and then there was Anne, and now there is Elizabeth. This is a country where women can rule, where I can. I shall be Empress of all the Russias. I shall become more Russian than the most Russian of them : I shall be of their faith, live their lives, eat their food. I shall speak and read and write their language. Their philosophy shall be my philosophy ; their desires shall be my desires. I will be patient ; I will wait. I will suffer in silence, but in the end I will be autocrat of all the Russias. . . .

" Fike, you are not listening to what I am saying ! "

" Every word, mother dear ; and from now on, don't call me Fike. You had better get used to calling me Catherine."

CHAPTER TWO

IT had been a terrific day ; and now, as she lay propped up in the ponderous State bed with its heavy red velvet counterpane and thick bullion silver lace, Catherine sighed from exhaustion. She thought she would cast aside one or two of the four thick deep pillows behind her head ; and decided against it. No, it was the Russian style, and she would adhere to this custom as well as to all the others.

The State marriage ! Her baptism and confirmation in her new faith, the Russian Orthodox Church, had been imposing beyond her imagination ; but this wedding transcended all. The Chevalier Guards, with their solid silver helmets and breast-plates ; the thousands of soldiers, each like a brightly coloured stick ; the waving, yelling crowds. . . . Who would think there were so many people in the world ?

And the church ! Every single speck of it covered with bright paint and gilt, all its nooks and crannies jammed with ewers and basins of solid gold and silver, crusted with gems. Surely the very gates of Heaven could not be finer than the golden, ruby-studded altar. And candles ! No matter where one looked one saw them. Big ones in huge candelabras, flickering ones before richly decorated icons ; and then rows and rows of them, like a neatly-planted field of stars, all held in the hands of the throng in the church.

She had done well. She had said those long, difficult Russian responses to the Metropolitan in a high, clear voice without a slip. From the corner of her eye she had seen the Empress smile and nod her head approvingly. Elizabeth was fanatically, superstitiously religious ; for that matter, so were most of the Russians. This business of incense, genuflection, crossing, singing, praying and icons seemed a trifle absurd to her, but since they all believed in it so devoutly, she would too. It was such a simple matter ; and it brought such results.

Take Peter . . . grimacing, making his idiotic squeaking noises, sticking out his tongue at the Metropolitan as he placed the marriage crown on his head. People saw him ; they hated him for it. Most of the people in the church must have heard that gargling sound he made when the wine was offered to him. The fool ! Some day he would regret it.

She had gone out of the church, white, her head bowed,

her eyes red with weeping. Elizabeth had seen the tears, so had Razoumovsky, and Bestchucheff and all the other dignitaries. Weeping meant so much to the Russians ; even strong men wept. And her mother had always scolded her for it.

Her mother. . . . That clatter in the courtyard an hour back must have come from her carriage. Gone. . . . Elizabeth had kept her word.

Catherine had a strange, fearful feeling when she realized she was now alone with these curious, half crude, half polished people. The men spoke elegant French and made low bows ; and then spat upon the floor. The ladies wore the latest Paris dresses ; and unashamedly picked lice from each other's hair in public. They served the rarest foods ; and then used but one spoon for the marmalade, which was passed from one person to the next, down a table for sixty. She was to be all alone now with such people.

But had her mother helped any ? No ; trouble and hatred was all she had caused. Why, she had almost ruined everything ! . . . And then to accept the two bolts of blue and silver cloth, which Elizabeth had presented to her when she was ill, without saying a word of thanks. . . . It was just as well ; in the end she would learn to get along without her.

Where was Peter ? The maids of honour had left at least an hour before, sniggering and giggling. . . . He could not be eating and drinking with his gentlemen all this time. . . . She half rose to go to the door, then stopped. It would be foolish and fatal for the bride to fetch her own lord on the wedding night. She would have to wait ; it could not be long with him now.

She smoothed down her elaborately embroidered silken night shift. The Russians had curious customs indeed—passing the shift from hand to hand, at the bridal table, to see that it was clean. In the morning, a lady-in-waiting had told her with a giggle, it would again be inspected for tokens of virginity.

" Needless to say, they're always there," she had added.

What would the Lutheran pastor at home think of these Russians if he saw and heard them ?

She heard shambling steps outside her door. They were

those of a man in boots, from which the spurs dangled. . . Peter !

The door opened and he stood framed in it, the light from the next room full upon him. He was a horrible sight. His wig was dirty and awry, his uniform was half buttoned, and his sword dragged between his legs. Far from attractive when she first met him, he was now a ghoul from the ravages of small-pox, which had attacked him during their engagement.

He belched hollowly and steered a difficult course for the huge bed, where he threw himself down, boots and all. Then, slapping her on the buttocks, he said thickly : " Move over ; give me room."

Catherine had already shrunk back to the edge of the bed. Peter blew out his breath loudly, and then began a prolonged roar of laughter.

" Elizabeth Vorontzoff is drunk ! I drank the sweet bitch under the table."

And again he laughed.

On her wedding night, before her chamber door, he had spent the hours with his latest mistress ! A bushy-haired, slant-eyed, ugly girl, who swore like a trooper, spat when she spoke, and was rarely sober.

Tears of chagrin and anger came to her eyes.

" G'ni'," he mumbled, and began to snore. He tossed about, and his spurs ripped jagged rents in the beautiful coverlet.

For hours Catherine stared out of the window and waited for Peter to sleep off the Burgundy he was so fond of. The sight of the stone, square courtyard outside did little to cheer her spirit.

Peter moaned, yawned, stretched his arms, and suddenly sat up wide awake. He tossed two of the thick pillows to the floor with irritation, turned, and struck at his wife.

" Wake up, you ! I want to talk."

" I have been awake all night."

" Oh, yes. Um." And then he began to laugh.

" What are you laughing about ? "

" About . . . in the morning . . . when our servants come in and find us both in bed together. They will think it is so funny."

"No, they won't. We're married; we should be in bed together."

"That's what so funny. Why should married people sleep together? It's less comfortable. Why does the Empress take Razoumovsky to bed with her? What pleasure can there be in that? I think it's all very silly."

She stared at him in wonder. She knew very little herself, except what the peasant maid had told her. And then there was that time when she had been with her young and handsome uncle and felt an odd desire. She had said she wanted to marry him, and mother had scolded her for no reason at all. But Peter! Surely he must be teasing; this must be his kind of joke.

"But the Countess Biron and Elizabeth Vorontzoff, they were your mistresses?"

"Oh, yes; they are madly in love with me."

"Then . . . they must have slept with you."

"Slept with me? What for? That's all foolish business."

He turned on his side away from her; he seemed bored by the turn of the conversation.

"But haven't you ever . . . felt anything, Peter? I mean . . . a woman and a man . . . they . . . you understand . . . I can't explain it."

She was on the verge of tears. What a strange husband. Even men like Peter should know such things, should feel them.

"Oh, that," he said, suddenly. "Bah! It never bothers me, and it never will. The soldiers back in Holstein used to tell me about themselves and the village wenches; but me, I was never troubled."

He seemed neither worried nor ashamed. On the contrary, he appeared proud of himself.

"But children, Peter! We must have children. That is the only way."

The Grand Duke's eyes and mouth rounded with surprise.

"Really?"

"Yes, Peter."

He thought for a moment seriously, and then a happy, foolish smile suffused his face.

"Well, in that case, Catherine, we just won't have any."

And with that he plopped his head on the pillows and fell fast asleep.

Catherine stared out the window for a long time. The bedclothes became for her a series of hot, distasteful coils. Over and over again in her mind she heard Elizabeth bawling out to her :

" See to it that you have many men children. The only reason you are here is to give us a male heir to the throne ! "

For a long time she wondered . . . wondered, and racked her brain for an answer.

None came.

Time made a bitter present to Catherine. For ten long years no answer came, ten years in which all the minutes were hours.

Peter found new delights. He made life almost insupportable for her.

" What is the matter with this girl ? " thought Elizabeth. " Is she remaining childless to spite me ? Well . . . I shall make her sing a different tune."

The Grand Ducal couple found themselves given over to the exasperating guardianship of the Choglokoffs. Mme Choglokoff, with her annual birth of a baby, was somehow supposed to inspire a like fecundity in Catherine. All she managed to do was to make life still more impossible for the young Grand Duchess by throwing a wall of irksome prohibitions about her.

M. Choglokoff, an obese and disgusting person, forced his unwelcome attentions on her every time his wife's back was turned.

Catherine became subject to fits of hypochondria. If she could only be taken out of herself ! If she could only write ! But how was that possible when writing materials were forbidden her, when an occasional letter could be smuggled in or out only with the greatest difficulty ?

There were servants and ladies-in-waiting she could turn to for companionship. She did ; and found that those with whom she became intimate disappeared from the Palace.

What had happened to the Chernicheff brothers, Zachar and Andrew ? She and Peter had become so fond of Andrew, to whom Peter playfully referred as her fiancé. Zachar's

discreet courtship by means of mottoes had been so amusing. . . . Then one day it had suddenly turned exciting when he broke into her bedroom. She had forced him to leave. Now she was sorry she had made him go. If Zachar should force his way in again, perhaps . . .

Things were dull without the Chernicheffs about. All she had now were her books : her beloved Voltaire, her Rousseau, and the other writers of the French school. They were a godsend in this bleakness. They educated and informed. Let the rest of the court read novels, she would have none of them.

But even these friendly books palled. She ached for human companionship, and thought often of the Chernicheffs. To what dreary place had Elizabeth exiled them for being kind to her ? To dreadful Siberia, or to some small country estate far removed from the Court ?

What was this strangeness she felt when she met girls of her own age ? There seemed to be no *rapport* between them and herself. Was her youth being trampled on and robbed ?

Bitter furrows were ploughed in her soul, and in them strange seeds sprouted blooms rare in one so young. Blooms of patience, judgment, and self-reliance.

There were no bright flowers of life and love till Sergei Saltykov came. Young, handsome, a member of one of Russia's oldest and noblest families, he boldly broke through the circle of circumstance hemming her in. Through him, she belatedly began to receive the things which should be hers.

CHAPTER THREE

St. Petersburg, 1753

SERGEI SALTYKOV shifted on the sofa. His position beside Catherine had been *intime*, in a casual way. Now he was briskly circumspect.

It pained her to note how abruptly he had ceased to caress her. It brought the belief that he had not been sincere.

Saltykov cleared his throat in an impatient manner and carefully patted the ruffles of his shirt into place.

" It's getting late, my dear. I had better be going."

He left her side and stood before a mirror, combing his black, wavy hair into place with a comb from her dresser.

She said nothing, but looked at his image in the glass. Ruefully she reflected that he was indeed a handsome man, and then bit her lips and felt her eyes fill as a bitter memory of him came back to her. She was thinking of that time some months back when she waited three hours in the rain for him, in vain. Even now he was deceiving her.

" My dove, the guard will be changed shortly and then it will not be so easy for me to slip out ; and if our good friend Mme Choglokoff should find us—la la—the usual fireworks."

She made no answer, but he could hear her finger-nail scratching meditatively on the satin damask couch.

" Stop making that hideous noise ! You are doing it merely to annoy me, Catherine."

She ceased the scratching, as if she were some sort of machine and he had automatically shut her off. He glared at her with open irritation as she stared at the elaborate floral design in the French carpet.

" Well, go into a sulk if you wish. You women are all alike —Grand Duchesses and peasant girls."

He strode about the room, and with a great to-do helped himself to a pinch of snuff from one of the boxes which were always lying about the place.

Irked by her silence, he passed it to her.

" Some snuff, Catherine ? "

She merely shook her head.

" Oh, for God's sake ! You disgust me ! I told you why I couldn't come last night. Count Roman Vorontzoff took me to a meeting of a Free Lodge of Masons. I couldn't leave right

in the middle of the ceremonies without arousing suspicions. You women don't realize or understand the importance of such things."

He came closer to her as he spoke. She rose, went to a table, and noisily mixed herself a glass of gooseberry juice and water.

". . . And then they all started drinking and playing cards, and I simply had to join. . . . And then it was too late; and so I couldn't come."

He watched her as she drank silently.

"Well, have you lost your tongue?"

She set the glass down with a clink.

"You could have sent me word. I waited and waited all night."

"There was no one I could send."

A lie; she knew it. He had forgotten her.

She decided to act.

"Sergei! It's happened again."

He looked at her in a puzzled manner.

"I'm going to have a child."

His attitude was callously brutal. "Oh well, it will probably be like the first two, a miscarriage."

"Not this time, Sergei; I waited. I've kept it from you, from everybody, till the last possible moment. Yesterday the midwife examined me, and said this time I would conceive. Now you know why I waited for you all last night; now you know why you've hurt me."

She broke out crying. With a heavy impatient sigh he sat down beside her and pulled her head on his huge chest.

"There, there, dear," he said mechanically; "how could I tell? If I'd known that, it all would have been different."

She clutched him with unabashed ardour.

"They are going to send you away from me, Sergei!"

He pressed her head close to his chest and let his fingers play soothingly among the soft dark hairs at the nape of her neck.

"No, they can't do that. I won't let them," he said hollowly. The relieved look on his face belied the tone of his voice, but, luckily, she did not see it.

"There is nothing you can do, dear, dear Sergei. Do you

remember when we first met? All we could do was to exchange looks and glances."

He nodded and gazed at her, wondering why she no longer appealed to him as she had then. She was really every bit as attractive; then what made her so tiresome, so boring to him now?

He found himself doing what he often did in her presence: he half listened to her, half toyed with his own thoughts. She was telling him of the time Mme Choglokoff had suddenly relaxed her vigilance and allowed Catherine to become more intimate with him. It was all done, she confessed to him, so that she might be impregnated. Now even Elizabeth had become convinced of Peter's impotence. Saltykov's child would be palmed off to Russia as being fathered by Peter.

". . . And instead, I fell in love with you. You are the first man I ever loved, or ever will love, dear, dear Sergei," she was saying.

Oh, but the girl was repetitious! She told him that every time he saw her. Here she was reciting the whole tale of their relationship as if he did not know it as well as she did, better even, for he had been approached secretly on the matter long before she even suspected anything might happen. Perhaps living with Peter, and being forced to read all those heavy books to pass the time away, had made her such a bore. She reminded him of a dull school-teacher, with her heavy, pointed lessons and her sad jokes. Leon Narishkin, the self-appointed Court clown, with his obvious humour, was really her type. If he had only been physically attractive to her, she might have chosen him instead of himself. How Saltykov wished she had.

"They will send you away to Sweden, or Germany or some country far off, and I shall never see you again."

"We must be brave, dearest; we must bear up."

To her his tone was false. It was difficult to realize that this man, on whom she had lavished so much love these past few years, had lost interest!

"Yes, we must be brave; we must bear up," she said, wondering whether she spoke for him or for herself alone.

Dimly they could hear down the corridor the advancing tramp of feet and the challenges as the guard was being changed.

"I'd better go."

He kissed her lightly and tenderly on the forehead. It was like the way she kissed her aged aunt good-bye—the one with a houseful of pets—before she left for Russia.

"Yes . . . you'd better go," she said slowly.

At the door he turned, blew her a graceful kiss and said, "Good-bye. No, *au revoir, ma chère.*"

French was becoming the fashion in the Court; he smiled as he tossed the phrase at her. She wanted to speak, then felt she would surely burst into tears; and so she merely smiled back and waved her hand as he slipped out the door.

She knew, when he had gone, that many years would pass before she would see him again, if she ever would. Short sobs left her as she rang for the servants, and mechanically she told the maid who entered to undress her.

"Her Royal Highness is crying; is she troubled?"

"Just undress me, please."

She could not talk about this now. The maid knew, and without a word began loosening the heavy stays of her brocade dress. She knew more about Saltykov than the Court; there were few secrets between her and her mistress.

Suddenly Catherine sat down, threw her arms about the girl's strong shoulders and sobbed without restraint. The girl petted her lightly and murmured a soft stream of Russian endearments in her ear. The two were very intimate, but restrained themselves in public lest Elizabeth separate them.

As Catherine cried she thought of the time a few years back when this same maid dashed into her room and tore from her hands a knife she was trying to plunge into her heart. Her sobs abated as she thought of that past silly business. Life . . . Peter . . . Elizabeth . . . the Court. . . . Everything seemed impossible then, and she had wanted to end it. Or did she just tell herself they were impossible? She had taken a long time with that knife; she must have been lying on that couch at least a half-hour before she tried to stab herself. Besides, it was a dull thing with a brass blade, and could scarcely have penetrated her thick corset. She had let out a little cry, too, so that the maid outside could hear; and the girl had rushed in and torn the knife away. They had a good cry, and swore eternal secrecy about the affair.

Something that was curiously, strangely pleasant had pervaded it all. Her moods, her gestures, the tones of her voice, the drama of the whole thing . . . It seemed all planned, acted, like the business and lines of a play ; and it was thrilling to do.

Far back, in the very last row of seats in the vast auditorium of her mind, a lone voice cried : " I am mourning my great, my only, my last love ; and it is very sad and beautiful, and even, perhaps even a bit enjoyable." She stilled the voice ; it was annoying and spoiled everything. The tears burst out afresh.

" It was Sergei," the maid soothed. " To treat my Katusha so ; to make her cry her beautiful blue eyes out."

She slipped a nightdress over her mistress, turned back the covers on the huge bed, and said, " Is there anything else, Highness ? "

" No, Marie."

" If you cannot sleep, I shall stay here all the night."

She had not thought of that ; no, of course she could not sleep . . . with such a sorrow.

" There is no need for you to lose your rest and sorrow with me, my dear. I will stay alone."

Catherine opened a drawer and pressed a ten rouble piece into the girl's hand. For a long time the maid refused, but finally Catherine commanded her to accept it, and with brimming eyes the girl knelt at her feet and kissed her hand.

" Some day you will be Empress, and then you will have the faithless wretch knouted and sent to Siberia," she said consolingly as she left.

The candles out, Catherine sat up in bed, thinking. In the next room there was a crashing sound, accompanied by drunken laughter. Peter had come home from one of his beer-drinking, pipe-smoking evenings with his Holstein officers. She heard him crack a whip and then fling open the door of his secret dog kennel in the spaces between the walls of his room and hers. Elizabeth would make life very unpleasant for her if she discovered that Catherine had connived with him to let his dogs hide there. She sighed ; one may become used to anything. Even the overwhelming stench of the hounds no longer annoyed her.

They whined pitifully as Peter barked his guttural German orders at them. The whip slashed them, and they howled. Almost mechanically Catherine put her fingers to her ears. He had beaten them almost all day; did he never tire of maltreating them?

There was a sharp snap as he slammed the panel shut, and she could hear the whip drop to the floor. Piteously the animals whined themselves to sleep; her husband was either too drunk or too tired to torture them as much as usual.

There was silence for a while, and then suddenly the sounds of a fiddle being scraped without regard to melody, rhythm or reason assailed her ears. The insane concert would be a question of minutes or hours, depending on the caprice of her husband. The noise might have driven an ordinary person wild; Catherine never budged. Years of listening to it, of being married to Peter, had hardened her. She was even able to let her thoughts wander upon other things as the hideous caterwauling went on.

Yes, Marie was right; if she were Empress she could have Saltykov knouted and sent to Siberia. Elizabeth had had the Countesses Bestchucheff and Lapookin receive fifty lashes each; their tongues were cut out; and then they were sent to Siberia, merely for being more beautiful than she herself was!

She shuddered. No; she had loved Sergei; and once he had loved her. Perhaps she still was very fond of him, although it was rather hard to love someone who did not reciprocate. Love was something which did not seem to last like a flower that budded in spring, bloomed in summer, and faded in autumn. Then came a bitter winter with nothing but bare branches; that was what lay ahead of her. . . . Her eyes filled with tears.

In the other room Peter slammed his violin down on a table, and there was a little peace. He had probably fallen to playing with his toy soldiers or marionettes.

But after winter there was always spring. . . . New flowers, new autumns, new winters. . . . Over and over again the thing went in cycles. Was that the way it was to be for her?

The memory of Andrew Chernicheff, an officer of the Guard whom both she and Peter had been fond of, came back to

her. He had been tall and handsome, too, and one night had wanted to come into her room. She wondered now whether she should have permitted him to. . . . And there was Zachar, his brother, with whom she had exchanged mottoes. Elizabeth, of course, had found out, and had the Chernicheffs exiled. She wondered where they were, what they were doing this night.

Yes, she could have Sergei knouted. She could have his beautiful nose slit and then make him trudge the long, sad trail to Siberia, when she was Empress. But no ; she wouldn't. There was something cruel and horrible about that, something like Peter's beating his dogs because they were dogs, because they barked instead of talked, and could not use a fork and knife. To punish Sergei for what he had done would be to punish a human for being human. . . . That she could never do.

The door between her room and the next burst open and Peter entered.

" Wake up. I want you to make some new notes for my Summer Palace ! " he bawled.

It was too much. This night she could not humour his boring whim about that eternal Summer Palace where all were to dress like monks and live in the most nonsensical houses. He would plan and tear up untiringly, and this senseless diversion of his had gone on for years.

" Not to-night, Peter. I am very tired . . . and ill."

" That makes no difference ; this is important."

She knew how to handle him from experience.

" Ssh ! I can tell you something which is important—more important."

" Aha, Catherine. What have you up your sleeve now ? You are wise ; you are my brains."

He sat upon the bed expectantly.

" We are going to have an heir," she told him.

Peter's pock-marked face turned white and then red. There was a slight froth at his lips.

" Impossible," he shrieked ; " you whore, your dirty whore ! "

He tried to grasp her, but she held him off easily. Horseback riding had made her strong, and he was sickly.

" I'll tell the Empress. She shall hear of this ! "

"She knows already, and approves. An heir is wanted. And Peter, you had better say nothing or she will send Countess Vorontzoff away from the Court. How will it look to have her here while I am in labour?"

For a moment he fumed. Then with the sudden change of mood so common with him, he altered entirely.

"Yes; that is so. Oh, you are wise, Catherine. I do not know what I should do without you. You are my brains. I shall become a father!" He started to leave the room, then suddenly called, "But I will tell everybody that I had absolutely nothing to do with it!"

There was a clinking and clanking in the next room, and a moment later he returned, sloppily dressed in his uniform and wearing his sword. At the foot of her bed he pulled the blade from its scabbard and brandished it terrifyingly.

"Put that thing away and go back to your room this instant, Peter!"

"No; a soldier's place is to stand guard at the foot of his wife and child's bed."

With that he began to pace back and forth stiffly, in his beloved military manner.

"Get out of this room, Peter."

Stiffly he paced back and forth.

"Get out of this room, or I'll not hide your toy soldiers and marionettes in my bed next time the Empress comes."

He looked startled and frightened. "All right, all right, Catherine," he wailed, "you never let me have any fun. You wait till I become Emperor; I'll get my own back."

He left, and the stillness of the night was broken only by the clatter of an occasional droshky driving over the badly cobbled street outside. Catherine nestled on her pillows. She began to feel sleepy, clutched one pillow and softly kissed it. As sleep stole upon her she wondered dreamily if it was Saltykov's face she was kissing . . . or a baby's.

CHAPTER FOUR

1754

CATHERINE lay propped up in bed and studied her face in the hand mirror. *How thin she had become in the last two weeks ; how sickly she looked !*

She shuddered as she recalled the events of that time. She had suffered the tortures of bearing her first child. Half conscious, only half hearing what those about her were saying, she knew it must be the devoutly desired Paul the First, for shortly after the birth, bells rang all over the town and cannon boomed incessantly. For days on end the racket continued, while she was left on a bed of pain, neglected, insufficiently covered in the unheated and draughty room, without a soul to answer her cries. A serf woman would have received better treatment than she.

Of course, anything was possible with the erratic and often unfeeling Empress ; but despite all the bad treatment she had suffered at Elizabeth's hands for ten long years, Catherine never anticipated such cruelties.

Elizabeth had snatched the child from the midwife's arm the moment it was born. She displayed it hurriedly to those who crowded the room, so that all could see it was a boy. Then, bundling it in swaddling clothes, she left the place without a word or thought for the infant's mother ; and in her wake followed the entire entourage, leaving Catherine alone, in pain and completely unattended. In that state she had remained for days, her cries for assistance unanswered. All that mattered was the heir to the throne ; the mother's job done, no one paid further attention to her. She was fortunate if some lackey, passing by and hearing her cries, thought to bring her something to eat.

The door burst open and her maid Marie entered. Forgetting all the honour due her mistress, the simple girl threw herself upon the bed and embraced her.

" For days I have been trying to get to you, but the guards permitted no one to enter. Highness, it is a wonder I find you alive."

The maid washed her and dressed her hair. Catherine learned of her son : How Elizabeth had bundled him in heavy woollen garments and placed him in a crib lined with black fox skins, and how the sweat had rolled down the poor infant's

tiny brows. Elizabeth's oppressive attentions had almost killed the child. For a while no one was permitted to see the baby at all ; Elizabeth shut off her distant wing of the Palace, and no one knew what went on. To-day she was emerging with the child. She was to stop by Catherine's chambers, give her a brief glimpse of the child, and then go on to the church.

Peter had been almost constantly drunk. Congratulations poured in on him from every side, until finally he had screamed, " I had nothing to do with it ! " They decided it best to keep him drunk.

The sounds of a procession making its way down the hall could be heard.

" The Empress ! " Marie said hoarsely, and after a few hurried touches to Catherine's hair she fled.

Catherine began to weep silently. She was going to see her baby, her own flesh and blood, Sergei's child. For weeks she had not had sight nor sound of the infant ; she had not even put it to her breast when it was born.

The doors were flung open and people began to crowd into the room. Courtiers holding candles, priests swinging censers and holding gaudily painted religious banners, guards, soldiers, a conglomerate mass of writhing colour which Catherine's feverish eyes could not distinguish. It looked like a bed of bright mad flowers. Out of it one dark, purplish black bloom, its petals tipped in white, grew and reached towards her. It swirled before her eyes and resolved itself into the figure of Elizabeth, wearing a dress of purple velvet, and in her arms holding the infant Paul.

" Here look at him and be quick. I don't want him to catch cold."

Catherine gazed at her child ; and then a cry of terror broke from her throat. It was thin and scrawny, and from its yellowish white skin the veins distended horribly. The skinny arms looked like a plucked chicken's wings.

A feeling of revulsion swept over her. She closed her eyes and pushed the swaddled infant away.

" What's the matter with you ? Have you lost your mind ?"

Catherine gazed into the livid, puffed face of Elizabeth ; it was alight with fury. Quickly, nervously, the Czarina's teeth were biting her lips.

Instinctively, without the slightest process of thought, *Catherine said to the Empress :*

" He's not mine ! "

For a moment Elizabeth reeled. She drew in her breath sharply and put her face close to Catherine's. There was a snarl on her lips ; she breathed in staccato bursts. Catherine smelled the ever-present odour of cherry brandy and sickened. The Empress obviously wanted to say something, but the words would not form. Very suddenly, she straightened up and quitted the room ; and the others turned to follow.

Elizabeth had said no word, but her behaviour was a tacit warning that Catherine should never repeat the statement. What had made her cry out : " He's not mine ! " At the very first glance she felt that the infant was not of her womb, not of her affair with Saltykov. Such a child would have had the look of soundness, of sanity ; but this man-child was sickly from within. In his little feeble cry she sensed the madness which lay in Peter, who was not responsible for him. Then from whence came this rottenness which cursed the Romanoffs ? Not from her ; not from Saltykov.

For days Elizabeth had kept the babe and herself from the gaze of people. Was Paul I, for whom even now chants rose from the church, a changeling ? A child of the Empress, made by Razoumovsky or another one of her lovers ? Elizabeth was a Romanoff, and she had the strain. Did she herself conceive, and substitute her own flesh and blood for Catherine's ? Was that the reason for her behaviour when she had thrust the child away as not her own ?

This she knew : she would be forced to play a part. Well then, she would. It was all in the business of being the Grand Duchess.

A grimmer, more resolved look came over her face than had ever been there before. More than ever, now, she knew she must think of herself first. Her own destiny, her own future, these mattered more than any other thing in the world. She must never forget that.

CHAPTER FIVE

1761

STANISLAUS PONIATOWSKI watched his servants pack his belongings and stow them away in boxes. Each one was roped and locked, and, what was most important, sealed with a large, red, impressive seal. It would prevent theft. The Russians had no qualms about stealing, but they would never break a seal. To them such a thing was holy.

In the grate a file of letters and papers glowed red. The grey ashes curled, detached themselves, and the flakes drifted up the chimney. Poniatowski leaned against the mantel. His tall figure drooped, his beautiful, cameo-like face hung, and his long delicate hands were lifeless at his sides. Even to his most ignorant servant, it was evident that Poniatowski was in despair at leaving Russia for his native Poland.

"Is this the book. Master?" one of them asked, holding out a red morocco-bound volume locked by a sturdy gilt hasp.

Poniatowski held it closely before his large, tender eyes, and nodded. Cursed by poor sight, he found everything a few yards away vague and indistinguishable. Now, with his own memoirs—the reflection of the most beautiful period of his life—in his hand, such emotion welled up in him that he could hardly see at all. He seated himself at a table where the light was strongest, and taking a golden key from a chain about his neck, opened the book. Slowly, he began turning over the pages.

1755! It seemed years back, and yet it seemed but yesterday. He was just twenty-two then, and had come along to the court with Sir Hanbury Williams, the English Ambassador, as secretary. He wondered if he would have left Poland, and his doting, humdrum mother, proud of belonging to the petty Polish nobility, if he had known it was all to end like this.

Joys there had been, such as few men had ever had. And now this sorrow broke over them like a great wave. It would recede, but would it leave traces of what had been? He feared not. There was a slight tremble of his lips as he came to one page. He remembered how he had felt when he had written those lines.

Sir Hanbury had been eager for him to meet the Grand Duchess Catherine, and had used all his wily powers of intrigue to arrange things. It was all some stupid political business; gaining her favour for England and Prussia, as he remembered. Peter III couldn't be dealt with, Elizabeth would have none of the Englishman, and so they tried Catherine. He himself was to be the bait; Catherine was susceptible to a handsome face and a good figure. He had them both, plus education and refinement. Sir Hanbury had done a great deal for him, he was under great obligations, and there was no alternative but to accept the plans. How he loathed intrigue! How he feared what might happen when he fell out of favour! Siberia—that was the place where the first ladies of Russia sent their discarded lovers. And there in his memoirs he saw his own writing: "Gazing at her I forgot there was a Siberia."

He read on: "She is five-and-twenty, and has just recovered from her first childbirth." He looked up from the book, fumbled for his handkerchief and blew his nose. That line made him think of Catherine's second childbed, when the Grand Duchess Anna was born. Poor mite, she had soon died. Perhaps it was just as well; if she had taken after him, her father, she would never have liked the coarseness of this Russian Court.

Holding the book against the window so that it could catch the last light of the day, and almost burying his head in it in order to read, he went on: "She is at that perfect moment, which, for women who have beauty, is generally the most beautiful. With her black hair she had a dazzling whiteness of skin, the colour of the eyelashes black and very long, a Grecian nose, a mouth that seems made for kisses, hands and arms perfect, a slim figure, rather tall than short, an extremely active bearing, and nevertheless full of nobility, and the sound of her voice agreeable and her laugh as gay as her humours——"

"I should burn that, too, Stanislaus, if I were you," a voice spoke over his shoulder.

He snapped the book shut, whirled around and saw the dried face of Sir Hanbury Williams.

"No!"

Williams shrugged his shoulders, leaned his ivory-headed stick against one of the bare tables and dropped heavily into a chair.

"If they should find it, my dear Stanislaus, and it had anything of our business in it, I warn you it wouldn't go awfully well for either of us. And if anything happened, our friend, the Grand Duchess Catherine, would be able to do very little for either of us." He shifted about irritably. "I had so counted on the Empress' dying when she had that last convulsion, but the old girl hangs on with a grimness that's positively shocking. You'd think with all the drinking and whoring she's done they'd have given her one of their magnificent State funerals long ago."

Poniatowski put his finger to his lips and nodded toward his servants.

"Oh, they can't speak English. Everybody is ignorant in this God-forsaken country. Lord, I'll be glad to get a bellyful of good roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, instead of this everlasting herring, mushroom, and *kvas* they've got here."

If Williams thought he was fooling Poniatowski, he was mistaken. Stanislaus knew that his talking was just a screen for his real feelings.

"You've been to see Bestchucheff?" he asked.

Williams' face sank.

"Yes," he said slowly; "it's no good. He tells me he and his friends are out of favour completely. To-day he received orders to travel to his country estate—and you know what that means here. He left right after I spoke to him. And since he and his whole crowd were our friends . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and did not finish the sentence. Then he began to speak tersely: "We'd better separate. You get to Poland; it's your home, you'll have friends, all that. I'm going to Sweden. It's near here, and there I'll wait. It might all blow over, and in that case I'll let you know. You never can tell about these Russians; to-day they adore you and kiss your boots, and to-morrow they send some flea-bitten serf to tell you that they are ill and can't see you."

Poniatowski barely listened. The last hope was gone. He walked to the window, and by dint of squinting and straining his inadequate eyes he was able to make out the outlines of

the Winter Palace. *She* was there now, and he could not go to her.

"I'll never see her again, Sir Hanbury."

"Oh, come now. You're not even thirty. You're young; there are lots of others."

"Not for me. She was my first . . . and my last."

Sir Hanbury said nothing. Before any other youth he might have laughed, but this boy was different; he really meant what he said. Too soft, too simple and ingenuous, to do the work he had picked him for. Perhaps he had made a mistake. Should he tell him that in the end Catherine would have tired of his devotion, that she had a failing for the more ruthless type? No; it would only make him feel worse.

"I little thought, Stanislaus, when I brought you here you would fall in love so deeply. As a matter of fact, I've quite fallen in love with her myself. But I'm old and ugly now, she'd have none of me. But if I were your age I'd——"

"You'd what, Sir Hanbury?"

Why tell him? He would fight if he were a young man again, and die if need be. Yes, he'd even run the risk of making it uncomfortable for Catherine. But why tell Stanislaus? The boy wasn't a coward, but he lacked tough fibres. Williams smiled when he thought how Poniatowski had had to argue with his mother the last time he had to visit Poland because trouble in Russia made him leave the country. The old lady had disapproved of her son's consorting with the Grand Duchess, and pretty nearly succeeded in keeping him at home.

"I think of so many things, now that I am leaving her . . . little things she'd said and done. And then she's so capable and clever. I never told you about the time Peter had me arrested, and she got me free without a scandal."

"No, good God! I never heard of that."

"One night I slipped into the Palace by the secret way, disguised. The pickets did not pass me; instead, they brought me to Peter. He swore that I had come to endanger his person. He was all for having me arrested and knouted to death. What could I say or do? I knew that our enemy, Elizabeth's lover, Shuvalov, had put him up to it, filled his empty head full of that story, hoping to get rid of me that way. Well, when Catherine heard she went straight to Elizabeth

Vorontzoff, Peter's mistress, and pleaded with her. I'll never know what she said to her, but at any rate the Vorontzoff woman worked on Peter, and I was let off. Not only that; he made me dine with him and his disgusting wench. Then, like the dog he is, he went into Catherine's room, hauled her out of bed and made her sit down at table with us in her shift. She carried it off, and of course so did I; and when his ghastly party was over, he reeled off one way with Elizabeth Vorontzoff and waved me and Catherine to her room. Not once after that did we have trouble till now. She's a marvellous woman; there'll never be another like her. . . . Now you know why I feel as I do."

Here a servant came and told Poniatowski everything was in readiness and the carriage waiting. He slipped into his fur-lined pelisse, and faced Williams.

"I don't care what happens, Sir Hanbury, I'm going to stop and say good-bye to her. I can't leave without doing that."

"No, you mustn't. You'll get into trouble."

"What does that matter to me now?"

He started down the stairs. Williams darted after him and held him.

"No, no, you young fool. In God's name, don't."

"Do you think I give a damn what may happen to me or to your withered old carcass?"

"I'm not thinking of myself, you ass."

"Then who?"

He had to tell him. There was no way out.

"She's with somebody. . . . I saw him go in the same way you always went," he said slowly.

Poniatowski seemed to fold up, and he staggered back a few paces. The firm resolve was all gone as suddenly as it had come.

"Who is it?"

"Gregory Orlov. A nobody, just a captain in the artillery. Ignorant fellow. Barely able to write."

It seemed a long time before Poniatowski understood what the words might mean.

"I heard that," he said hollowly; "but I just couldn't believe it."

"She still loves you, Stanislaus, and not this lout." Williams placed his hand on his shoulder consolingly. "She has to pretend, don't you understand? There was a lot of indignant gossip flying about because she had taken you, a Pole, as a lover. Remember, she's not a Russian herself. She can't even speak or write their cursed language decently. That's why she's taken up with this Russian Orlov fellow; as a sop to them, that's all."

Hatless, wrapped in his pelisse, with the candle in the sconce casting its light about him as he stood leaning at the turn of the stair, Poniatowski's pale, fine face was racked with despair. He wanted desperately to believe what Williams was saying; he had to believe in something when the whole world had been jerked from under his feet.

"Yes, I suppose that is so. After all, she is the Grand Duchess and soon will be Empress, with Peter. How can she stop to think about me? Even if she wants to, she can't; she has a duty. I'll try my best to forget her . . . but I never shall."

Williams told him to write her, that he had arranged for a means of holding correspondence with her. It cheered Poniatowski; he had thought that avenue also closed. He smiled wanly as he said good-bye. Williams watched him go down to the street and heard him say to the driver in a tired voice, "Toward Poland." He watched the carriage till he could no longer see it. He wanted to make sure that Poniatowski was surely gone. Then he hopped into his own and ordered himself driven to the British Embassy. There was no time to be lost now; he had to be going himself.

As he drove by the Palace he noticed that the lights were burning brightly. Out of one of the gates strutted a tall man dressed in the uniform of an artillery captain. There was something infectious about the insolent manner in which he walked and the arrogance with which he seated himself in a waiting carriage. That Gregory Orlov chap, undoubtedly. Yes, probably all the stories about her being madly in love with this nobody were entirely true. He was the type of man who would attract her.

Poor Stanislaus, it would break his heart. Shame. He was too damned decent for her.

CHAPTER SIX

1762

WHEN the Empress Elizabeth died, Catherine donned a long loose dress of heavy black *crêpe* trimmed with ermine. The Russian people admired her for wearing such deep mourning, which was precisely the effect she desired. The dress also hid the fact that she was pregnant with the child of Gregory Orlov, the son to be named Bobrinsky.

Peter swaggered about in a military uniform of Prussian cut, and had his soldiers also outfitted in the stiff uniforms of the troops of his god—Frederick the Great. The people despised this disrespect, for Prussia was unpopular in Russia. The soldiers cursed the new Czar under their breaths.

Elizabeth was laid out in state in a huge room. For six long weeks, according to custom, her rotting corpse was to be exposed to public gaze, so that all could see that she was indeed dead.

Each day, Catherine came and knelt reverently at the bier, weeping and praying. Each day she kissed the hand and lips of the unpleasant, weeks-old corpse. The public saw, and was pleased.

When Peter came he would pace up and down with his long, nervous strides. He would grimace and show impatience with this falderal. People saw him also, and were displeased ; and so was Peter. He wanted to be drilling his troops. Real troops now, not the ingenious mechanical ones his strange brain had devised, nor the few Holstein regiments and cadets he had received. He was Czar now ; his power was absolute, and he could do what he wanted. He wanted to have fun parading regiments, beating the soldiers, spectators, and his favourite negro, Narcissus. He wanted to call all the nobles names. He wanted to ally himself with Frederick the Great, his hero. He wanted to fight the Danes, for Frederick's sake. . . . This confounded corpse was a nuisance, and he showed his impatience.

Catherine kneeled and prayed and placed a crown on the head of the dead Empress.

Peter issued ukases, all sorts. That gentlemen might hunt foxes ; that the ill-fed, badly-cared-for sailors of his fleet, who were all deathly ill, must get well ; that everyone in the Court

would be unmarried and re-married again, according to his fancy. He even promulgated a few noteworthy reforms. The ukases came and went from day to day, hopping about, like his mind. People looked at each other with despair ; but what could one do ? He was the Czar.

Catherine remained reticent. She kneeled and prayed ; and on the day of the funeral conducted herself with great dignity and decorum and was overcome by sorrow.

Peter thought the funeral was a joke, and had a great time. Count Sheremetiev, who carried the end of his long cloak of State, had a very hard time with him. Peter would walk slowly, then suddenly run, and out would fall the end of the cloak from Sheremetiev's grasp. The dignified old noble would race after Peter madly and grasp it, only to have the same performance happen again. The whole procession was made a mockery by Peter's behaviour.

Peter visited Ivan III, a pretender to the throne. He was the great-grandson of Czar Ivan Alexeivitch, the elder half-brother of Peter the Great. Born in 1740, he was only a babe when his mother, Anne, ascended the throne to rule as regent for him. The revolution which placed Elizabeth on the throne imprisoned his mother and him with her. Since he had been six months old he had spent all his life in a dungeon cell under the closest guard.

Later, in the early part of Catherine's reign, a second lieutenant of the Smolensk regiment, one Mirovitch, was to make an attempt to release him from his imprisonment in the fortress of Schlusselberg. Mirovitch hoped to set him on the throne, but the plan was frustrated by the two officers who kept constant guard over Ivan III. They followed instructions which had been given them in the event any such attempt should be made, and stabbed the young man to death. Mirovitch was tried and executed for treason. Whether he perpetrated his rash scheme on his own, or whether he was prompted to it by Catherine's advisers to create an excuse for Ivan's death, was never known. It is said that Mirovitch felt sure he would be pardoned and rewarded. Catherine was never proven either innocent or guilty of complicity.

When Peter saw him, Ivan was pale, with sickly looking reddish hair and an imbecile mind that had resulted from the

horrors of his existence. People began to talk. It was bruited about that Peter intended to have him follow him on the throne; that he planned to recall Saltykov and make him admit that Paul I was illegitimate; that he would divorce Catherine and make her parade the streets with a placard, "Mother of the Bastard"; that afterwards he would have her head shaved and put her in a nunnery or perhaps the new jail he had ordered built for Ivan. Elizabeth Vorontzoff, his mistress, would then become the Empress.

Catherine must have heard all this. If she did, none knew. She wore her mourning and was a silent recluse. To her came the Princess Dashkova, Elizabeth Vorontzoff's sister and leader of the intelligentsia, with plans of a revolution. Catherine listened, said nothing, and smiled. Dashkova took her silence for consent, and busied herself. To Catherine came Count Panin, fat, easy-going, and clever, the governor of her son Paul. "Let us put him on the throne," said he, "and appoint you as regent." Catherine listened, said nothing, and smiled. Panin took her silence for consent, and stirred himself in his lazy way.

To her came Alexei Orlov, eldest brother of Gregory, her lover, and leader of the five Orlov brothers. A livid scar, received in a duel, marred his features and gave him a terrifying look. Physically the strongest man in Russia, he could break bits of iron and crystal in his bare hands, and in Italy once split an apple in his hand with such force that he laid open an Italian nobleman's cheek with a flying fragment. The Italian screamed, but Alexei Orlov never bothered to beg pardon. He was not given to saying such things, or very much else for that matter. He was a man of action. Catherine loved and adored the handsome Gregory, but she feared and admired Alexei, who was a tower of strength. She even gave herself to him on occasions, for he was an overwhelming sort of man.

To her he came with plans to start a revolt in the already discontented regiments, with schemes for bribing and persuading officers to unite in her favour, with ideas for capturing Peter. And to him Catherine must have listened and made answer without smiling. The others, pawns, would help in the game; but the Orlovs were the big pieces.

At a big State banquet, Peter demanded that all drink a toast to Frederick the Great. All did but Catherine. Before the entire assemblage he leaned across the table and bawled at her, " Dura," which in Russian means fool, and is a word only a coarse driver of a droshky might call another. Tears came to Catherine's eyes at the insult ; she turned to the noble sitting beside her and told him to tell her a funny story, so that she could laugh.

The guests said nothing, of course ; but all looked at Catherine with pity and sympathy. And Alexei Orlov gained a few more powerful adherents to his scheme.

It was an hour or so before the sun would rise to light up the day of June 27, 1762, at Peterhof. A hired droshky drove from St. Petersburg towards the Palace at a fearful pace. It bore a lone, grim-lipped occupant, Alexei Orlov. Only once did he have to tell the driver to make the twenty-nine versts in a hurry. Swirls of dust, blue-white in the moonlight, plumed out behind the carriage.

A half-mile before the gates the droshky halted. Alexei hopped out, and with quick strides walked to the Palace. He entered a pair of open french windows and strode across a room where the Empress Catherine was sleeping. He wasted no time in formalities but shook her roughly by the shoulder.

" Matushka, wake up ; it is time."

" What ? " She rubbed her eyes.

" They have arrested Passek, one of our conspirators. So far he has said nothing ; but if they torture him he might."

He turned his back as she stepped out of bed and slipped off her nightdress.

" Hurry. We are going to St. Petersburg now to mobilize the regiments."

She slipped into her things as quickly as she could. He turned round while she was still half dressed. Alexei Orlov had no respect for her prudish quirks.

" Don't take so long, Matushka ; there's no time to lose."

" Where's Grisha ? "

" Gregory is with Prince Bariatinsky, following my orders."



PRINCE G. A. POTEMKIN-TAVRICHESKY
Marble bust by Shubin 1791

" But why didn't he come out here to get me ? "

" Because I'm handling this affair, not my brother. Oh, button that cursed dress in the carriage."

" But my hair——"

" The devil take it."

He almost dragged her the half-mile back to the carriage, threw her into it and bawled to the driver, " St. Petersburg ! And in better time than we made coming out ! "

" But the horses are spent, Your Highness."

" I said—in better time ! "

The animals whinnied in pain as the whip was laid on them, and dashed off. Silently they drove into the dawning day. On the way they met a carriage carrying Catherine's hairdresser, up at this early hour because his mistress was an early riser.

" That's my hairdresser coming, Alyosha."

" You don't need him. Tell him so."

Catherine bawled the order at the surprised man as they whirled past him.

In the town they met Gregory Orlov and Prince Bariatinsky driving in a carriage. Gregory leaped out and greeted his mistress effusively.

" Don't waste time with such things, either of you. Matushka, get in Grisha's carriage. The horses are fresher ; ours are dead."

" They should be," exclaimed the driver. " They have made the twenty-nine versts in an hour and a half, after driving out there."

Alexei glared, then flung a bag of money at him with terrifying force.

" The Princess Dashkova and Count Panin know and are up," Bariatinsky informed Alexei.

" Good. You people drive to the Ismailov Regiment. Count Kyril Razoumovsky should be there by now. The men adore him as commander, and he adores you ; it ought to be easy to have them swear allegiance. I'm off. I'll meet you there."

With that he flung himself into a droshky and disappeared.

" For a Russian, your brother is so vehement and quick," Catherine remarked to her lover. Gregory felt like grasping

her hand, but forbore. He knew she loathed such demonstrations of affection in public.

They stopped at an old church and Gregory dragged out a bedraggled priest with an unkempt beard.

" We will need this old fellow," he bawled.

The poor man, his robes flapping on his skinny frame, his cylindrical hat askew, and the huge crucifix shaking in his nervous grasp, felt no easier when he recognized the lady in the carriage as Catherine. She kissed his filthy hand respectfully as he sat beside her, and it bolstered his courage a little ; but the vodka which Bariatinsky offered him was of more substantial help, and the priest mustered up courage to kiss his sovereign's hand.

The carriage rattled on to the Ismailov Regiment. Alexei, already there, had everything in readiness. The men cheered the Empress. Alexei bundled the old priest out of the carriage and spoke hoarsely in his ear : " Swear this body of men in allegiance to Catherine, the ruler of Russia. And none of your long prayers—be quick."

The old priest obeyed hurriedly, and Alexei then plumped him into the carriage.

" Driver, go to the Nevsky Prospect." He turned to Catherine. " Matushka, next we line up the Preobazhensky Guards."

They arrived to find the men all lined up. A young subaltern, of fine bearing and with a handsome face, from which one eye squinted very markedly, rode up and down before his men. At the approach of their carriage he let out a shout, " Long live Catherine, Empress of All the Russias ! " He drew his sword, and the men took up his cry. It echoed throughout the regiment.

Catherine heard the cry as she stepped from the carriage. It pleased her greatly, and she smiled broadly. The young man wheeled his horse and drove straight to the Empress, to the complete astonishment of the Orlovs and the rest of the party. He dismounted before her, swept his hat from his head in a grand gesture, and kissed her hand.

" Your Highness, your hat lacks a plume. Be gracious enough to accept mine," he said, plucking his own out and offering it to Catherine, who accepted it.

" Thank you ; and what is your name ? "

"Empress, the name is Potemkin, Grigori Alexandrovitch Potemkin. At Your Majesty's service."

Gregory Orlov spurred his horse forward in the direction of Potemkin. His brother's strong hand restrained him and the beast.

"But the insolent nobody, Alyosha——"

"Quiet, Grisha; we can't start a scene before all these men, and at such a time."

"But he's pushing his way in, the insolent nobody."

"I know; and we can't stop him. That's why he's doing it. . . . I'll take care of him later."

Potemkin's stallion seemed not to wish to leave the Empress's mare. It cavorted, plunged, and did capers for a long time before he succeeded in riding it off.

"The pushing climber," thought Gregory, forgetting completely that but a short time back he himself had been nothing better. She had hardly noticed him when he had come to the court acting as a guard of honour for the visiting Prussian Count Schwerin in 1759. Only his loudly-touted affair with the beautiful Princess Kourakine, whose affections he stole from Count P. J. Shuvalov, cousin of Elizabeth's favourite, made him known to her. She was curious to meet the dashing, wild central figure of the scandal. It was not long before she did so, for his lodgings were across the way from her Palace. She liked him immediately. He had a definite devil in him; where Poniatowski caressed her, he slapped her about till she was black and blue. He adored risks, vodka, lots of women, but dropped them all, temporarily, when he met Catherine. He made love to her forcefully, dangerously, and openly. She loved him for it. His splendid physique and handsome face aroused her passions. She forgave him his many transgressions. For ten years she was destined to do so.

Young Potemkin finally managed to make his horse leave the side of the Empress. Carefully, to the last detail, he had planned to make this impression upon her. From the look on her face he knew he had succeeded, but his own expression betrayed nothing.

The priest was brought forward; he held up the cross and did his hurried mumbling. The Preobazhensky Guards had sworn fealty to Catherine.

Off the party clattered to the Semionofsky Regiment, which hesitated an instant before capitulating and then declared allegiance to her. Next, all went to the Kazan Cathedral, and there blessings were bestowed and the priest kissed Catherine's hand. In the excitement the old priest was lost. Alexei shoved him aside; he no longer needed him. After what seemed a sufficiency of religious ceremonies, Gregory cleared a way for Catherine, handed her into a carriage and ordered it to the Winter Palace.

"Panin and little Paul are to meet us there. Alexei says to show yourself on the balcony with your son. The crowds will like it."

Catherine nodded and said nothing for a while.

"That was a nice young man, that Potemkin who gave me his plume. He impressed me very deeply."

Gregory spat on the carpet of the carriage with irritation.

"Oh, I'll see that he gets a cornetcy, or something, for his trouble, Katusha."

"No, Grisha, you will make him an under-officer, at least . . . and yes . . . give him four hundred serfs besides."

"What!"

"Yes; and put it down before you forget. I assure you I won't."

Gregory scratched the note down on a sheet laboriously.

"You seem to think a lot of this Potemkin fellow, Katusha. He deserves no more than the rest."

"Never mind," replied Catherine, and ended the conversation.

There were crowds and cheers when they reached the newly built Winter Palace. The ovation thrilled Catherine; she ordered the doors thrown open to the populace, and all loyal subjects were permitted to enter and kiss her hand. It was a stroke of genius which endeared her to the mob.

The ever-present urge within her to get things down on paper, no matter how dully expressed, rose up. She must record these days' events; and very suddenly she thought of Poniatowski. How inadequate he would have been in such a situation! She looked at the Orlovs, bulking large in the crowded room. Soldiers were trooping in and out in a steady stream, kissing her hand. Dear Stanislaus, alone in Poland,

pining away. He had been lovable and sweet. She must let him know everything, even this. She would write, " The least soldier of the guards on seeing me said to himself, ' That is the work of my hands.' "

On the day which Catherine had spent attending to so many important things, Peter had been enjoying himself at Orianienbaum. With him were Elizabeth Vorontzoff and a bevy of the loveliest ladies in the Empire, whose husbands wandered disconsolately about the grounds while their wives were forced to pay court to the Emperor and his platonic mistress.

The next day this strange group set out for Montplaisir at Peterhof, where Peter was to meet Catherine. The place presented a strangely deserted appearance. No servants answered the knocks on the doors. Peter dashed through the empty corridors with his long flying strides, bawling out his wife's name. He looked everywhere, even under the bed. Catherine had disappeared.

A workman arrived with a load of fireworks, without which no festival was complete, and from him Peter learned what had happened. The labourer told him calmly how the troops had revolted, and then plodded off to set up fireworks which no one would ever watch.

The ladies and gentlemen of his party lolled on the grass and strolled about while Peter stood at the side of a stone balustrade conferring with his advisers. Long, sonorous pronunciamentos and ukases were issued to his erring wife. Vorontzoff dashed off with one ; he did not return. Shuvalov went off with another. He also vanished, as did Trubetsky, who followed him. Finally, when Peter learned that they had made themselves willing captives to the Empress, he sent no more.

Scouts brought him word that Alexei Orlov, flying ahead like the eagle his name signified, had come alone. Behind him were all the regiments which had gone over to Catherine. Gone were the hated Prussian uniforms, and in their place they had donned their old Russian outfits. At their head, in a borrowed uniform and astride a white horse, rode Catherine as a Colonel of the Life Guards ; and at her side was the

Countess Dashkova, also in a uniform, and Gregory Orlov, in command.

The weak little king, who had made such a fetish of the military, found his Holstein Guards without ammunition, and himself without the courage to fight. At four in the morning he attempted to flee to Kronstadt in his yacht. He was turned back when he announced himself to a guard, who yelled back: "There is no Emperor, only Catherine the Second." Peter fainted dead away and the yacht retraced its route.

Closer came Catherine and her troops, and poor Peter trembled at the thought of battle, though battle and fighting had been the passion of his existence. Catherine demanded his abdication, sending a draft for him to copy. General Ismailov returned to her with the signed document written in Peter's own hand.

It was also Ismailov who whispered in Peter's ear that if he entered a carriage with Elizabeth Vorontzoff he would see them both safely across the border to Holstein. When Peter passed the gates of Oranienbaum he was stopped and roughly separated from his mistress by Alexei Orlov and some other Russian officers.

They brought him to the Palace. At one end of the Palace Catherine was sitting talking to her Grisha. At the other, in an empty room, Alexei, the giant, took the puny little Czar in one hand and tore the clothes from his back with the other. When he was through, Peter stood in his bare feet and shirt tails, a sorry little figure, shivering with cold and fear, and openly ridiculed by the soldiers whose duty it was to protect him. Alexei went through the pockets of the Emperor's clothes, jingled the loose diamonds he was wont to carry there, and slipped them in his own.

Probably Catherine knew that at the other end of the Palace her husband was being disgraced. She could not forgive his feeble mentality; yet years later she would condone the dreadful insanity which was to come over Gregory Orlov, in whose arms she rested. For almost twenty years Peter had made her life a hell. When he had become Czar he had plagued her in a thousand little ways, such as depriving her of the fresh fruit and snuff she so greatly enjoyed. He had

humiliated her in large ways, by public insults, by making her live in a wing of the Palace while Elizabeth Vorontzoff was installed in the room next to his own.

Her hand ran through the curly hair of her lover. It served Peter right ; he deserved a taste of his own medicine.

There was a knock on Catherine's door, and a lackey admitted the fat, waddling figure of Count Panin. Tears were in his eyes, which were red from crying. Gregory moved to leave Catherine.

" No, stay, Grisha ; I want to have you hear this. You must busy yourself in affairs of State, dear."

" Ach ! That sort of thing bores me."

" Sit down. . . . Yes, Panin ; what did my husband have to say ? "

" Oh, Empress, never send me again on such a pitiful errand. The poor man grovelled at my feet. He kissed my hands, cried pathetically."

" That was to be expected. What did he say ? "

" He said that if he had to choose a prison, he would like to go to Ropscha."

" Good."

" He said he would like to have his dog and his violin and his negro, Narcissus. And . . ." Panin hesitated.

Catherine became irritated. How bungling Panin seemed to be ; how very sly he actually was. . . . So he wished her to be regent for Paul ! Regent, indeed ! He would soon learn who ruled Russia.

" And what else, Count Panin ? Go on, I grant him those things you mention."

" If it please Your Majesty, he begs that you allow Elizabeth Vorontzoff to go with him."

" What, is he gone completely mad ? " She strode furiously about the room. " What will people say about me, if I put my husband in prison with his mistress ? *No !* He will absolutely not have that woman ! "

Panin bowed and prepared to leave. Catherine's burst of temper left her ; a sly, shrewd look came into her blue eyes, and she clasped her hands as an idea occurred to her.

" Oh, Count Panin ; there is something else. Have my husband taken to Ropscha right away. Put him in a carriage

with Bariatinsky, and let that young Potemkin boy sit on the box on the way out. Oh, yes—and put the prisoner in complete charge of Alexei Orlov."

"Alexei Orlov!" The inscrutable Panin showed his amazement. Catherine nodded affirmatively and he backed out of the door.

Gregory turned on her angrily.

"Alyosha will go wild if you set him to guarding that worm at Ropscha. He'll hate it; there's no telling what he'll do. He wants to be in Petersburg."

"My dear Grisha——" She laid an arm on his shoulder, but he roughly pushed her away to the divan.

"Don't 'dear Grisha' me, Katusha. Why did you give my brother this disgusting job?"

"Sometimes, darling, you really are too rough; and some day I shall get angry when you hit me," she said as she went to the mirror to arrange her head-dress. "Also, Gregory, you still have much to learn about a great many things . . . human nature, for instance."

"Oh, bother with that! Why did you send Alyosha?"

"Because, my beloved," she went on calmly, "I consider him the best man for my purpose."

Alexei Orlov slammed his cards down on the table with such force that it sounded like a pistol shot. Bariatinsky and Passek, who were playing with him, looked up.

"Six mortal days we've been guarding this white worm, and I'm damned tired of it," roared Alexei.

The others said nothing, but their looks showed agreement.

"I even had his damned special bed carted here for him."

He took a heavy china mug in his huge hand and crushed it. It was an awe-inspiring performance.

"What good is the little squirt, anyway? He's half dead with the diarrhœa now."

"Those are just the kind that hang on forever, the sickly ones," Passek ventured. "He's perfectly happy with his damned fiddle."

"That fiddle drives me crazy," Bariatinsky exclaimed. "Yes, and the dog and negro, too!"

Alexei became very quiet and advanced to the table,

" Gentlemen, I suggest we do our prisoner a signal honour this evening. Let us invite him to dine with us, and have him drink a toast with a very special type of brandy I carry in case of emergency."

Alexei's suggestions were always popular; the others nodded.

When Peter entered, his eyes were glowing. They slapped him on the back and made him feel at home. Now, he thought, was just the time to ask for favours.

" I wish that when I have necessities to do you would not have the soldiers in the room, Orlov. That I cannot bear."

" Of course, Your Majesty."

" And may I walk in two rooms now ? "

" Certainly. Outside if you like."

" If Elizabeth Vorontzoff were here, I would be quite happy."

" Come, a toast to the lovely lady," said Alexei, pressing a glass into Peter's hand.

Peter drank half the glass, and then with a look of horror suddenly shrieked : " Poison ! God, you've poisoned me ! "

They tried to make him drink a second glass, but without success. Wildly he called for milk ; and with a wink in his eye, Alexei sent a soldier off, ostensibly in search of it.

The three men sat down and regarded their prisoner. Sweat was rolling down his pock-marked face and his eyes were starting in terror.

" He takes a long time," said Alexei with a significant pause. " The soldier with the milk, I mean."

In the corner, held by two soldiers, the faithful Narcissus crouched and gibbered.

At last the soldier entered and announced with a straight face that there was no milk in the country for miles around.

" What a pity," said Alexei. " Never mind, Your Majesty, I know a very simple trick which will effectively relieve you of your pains."

He picked up a napkin from the table and advanced slowly towards Peter. The quaking man screamed once, and then Orlov's great hand reached out and grabbed him by the chest. Round his neck went the napkin in a quick flip, and rapidly it was twisted into a knot. Peter's eyes popped. His

face turned blue, his breath rattled and flecks of foam came to his mouth. His legs sagged and he dropped to the floor. Orlov's great knees pressed heavily against his puny chest, and the ribs crunched. The huge hands circled his skinny neck and contracted slowly. There was a final rattle, one shake, and the body lay still.

The dog whined. Narcissus moaned. Alexei Orlov rose and wiped the sweat from his face.

"It is surprising how much energy that required."

"Yes," remarked Bariatinsky, "I would never have suspected it."

There was a silence, and then Orlov called for a paper and pen. It was brought in.

"I will now write a letter to the Empress, explaining that a regrettable catastrophe has occurred, and begging her forgiveness."

"Yes, yes," said Passek, looking distinctly worried as he gazed at the blackening face of the dead Czar.

"I think the hectic, excited note would be best; don't you, Prince Bariatinsky?"

"You know best, Orlov. I leave matters entirely to you."

"I am flattered at your trust in me, dear Prince," Alexei said, and then sat down and wrote.

When Alexei Orlov arrived in St. Petersburg that night his clothes were travel-stained and his expression weary and worried. Now that it had happened, fears began to creep in. Women were an unknown quantity; one could never tell how they would react. This Catherine, the new Empress of Russia, was no Elizabeth, nor the Anne of his boyhood. She was more intelligent, a little harder to fathom.

They told him that she would see him in her closet, alone. As he followed the lackey his misgivings grew. The door was thrown open and he saw her standing, silent and solemn, in the centre of the room. He entered and it closed behind him. There was a moment's silence. If the woman would only speak. She said nothing, but merely flipped his letter on the table, the one he had sent on before him, which told of Peter's death. Impulsively he rushed across the room, threw himself at her feet, and found himself frantically kissing her hand.

"Matushka, forgive me, forgive us."

She was stony.

"It all happened in a moment . . . we were angry . . . I can't explain. And then it was over. He was dead."

She sighed, sat down, and looked at him for a long time before she spoke. "He was very trying. We are all human, and sometimes lose control of ourselves. I cannot punish any of you for being human."

Alexei rose.

His worry was over.

"And still I am sorry it happened, deeply sorry. Did he suffer?"

"No, Matushka."

"Possibly he is happier dead."

"Oh, yes. And then, too, it is best for you. To have a relative of Peter the Great about would have menaced your claims to the throne."

"How can you say such things, Alyosha, and he just dead? God rest his soul."

She crossed herself and so did he.

"I think, Matushka, there should be no news about it to-night. A public announcement to-morrow, or the next day, possibly."

"Yes, that is wise."

"And the body—we must display it even though it is not very sightly."

They discussed this detail, and he finally convinced her that it must be done. The Russian people would think Peter still alive if the corpse were not publicly displayed. White cotton gloves would cover the scrawny hands where the blood had oozed through the pores. The blackened face, and the swollen lips—well, that could not be helped. Doctors could perform a post-mortem and lay the cause to his heart, or to anything else they pleased. Soon he finished his talk with Catherine and took his leave, cautioning her to appear in public as if nothing had occurred. She nodded; she would do so as soon as she had dispatched an important letter.

Left alone, she began to wonder. It had been a long time . . . All those years of Peter and Elizabeth. Stettin seemed something dim and misty now. She recalled the entries in her memoirs in which she had girlishly vowed that she would

rule. Now, with Peter dead, she was safe. Of course there was Ivan, but he was in prison and easy to eliminate. Paul, her son, if he was her son, was still a boy, and there were all sorts of ways of keeping him under her thumb.

Yes, it was all clear and open. She had reached her goal; but now that she had, she experienced an empty feeling. . . . A vague indefinable want of something.

There was something she had meant to do. Oh, yes—Poniatowski. The fool, sending a courier with a letter saying that now she was the Empress he would come back to her. That would ruin everything. She must put him in his place immediately before he caused any trouble.

She sat down before her writing-table, took up a gold pen and wrote in a clear hand on her expensive gold-edged note-paper.

"I must walk straight ahead. I must not be suspected," she penned, knowing he would understand what that meant.

Then she wrote on, telling him of Peter's death, how it had resulted from having a small shrivelled heart. She next found herself writing to him concerning the details of the revolution, and saying, "The under-officer Potemkin behaved very intelligently, bravely and actively."

Odd, how she kept thinking of that clever young man.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER ONE

Chizhevo near Smolensk, September, 1739

DARYA VASILIEVNA POTEMKINA had never seen such a heaven. It was so blue, so shiny, like the one painted above the altar in the church. Yes, even the stars in it, bright and gleaming, were like the ones there.

She was unaware of any ground around her. It seemed as if she were standing on air, very high up, so that she seemed to be unusually near this heaven.

"I could speak to St. Nicholas, or even God," she said to herself; and then suddenly felt terrified at uttering the sacrilege. She hurriedly crossed herself, devoutly and countless times, but it was too late. Already there were low rumbles, as of approaching thunder. The shiny blueness was disappearing, turning grey, and the incredible gold stars melted away alarmingly.

Darya Vasilievna wanted to run, but some shapeless power held her rooted to her high and formless spot. Now black and incredibly solid clouds were rolling in on both sides of the heaven. She found herself gazing in fascinated horror. Slowly, surely, with torturing inevitability, they rolled towards each other, obliterating the dull-grey sky. Darya Vasilievna felt a relentless tide of fear rising in her. She began screaming; but no sound came forth.

Now the rushing clouds touched, and blinding yellow streaks darted and writhed like a stew-pot of live snakes. There was a moment's blackness, followed by a crash such as Darya Vasilievna had never heard before. It sounded just as if the world had smashed full tilt into heaven's stone wall and shattered it into bits.

Darya Vasilievna and the entire universe trembled, and then there was a roaring, hissing sound as a round aperture opened in the sky to reveal the sun. It looked like one of those rare fruits called oranges, which she had seen served at a banquet given by her rich and distant relatives, the Samoiloffs. Darya Vasilievna gazed at it. She had never seen the sun so small. Then it seemed to be growing and coming nearer . . . on and on, bigger and bigger, louder and louder.

The heat grew intolerable. Sweat poured from her in rivers, and there was a mounting pain within her that ached beyond the limits of belief. The sun was now almost upon her ; she shrieked with terror. On it came, till it was before her face. Darya Vasilievna screamed, tried desperately to ward it off. It dropped, fell into her lap, and then she felt it burning in her womb.

Darya Vasilievna awoke and found the greyish, unwashed bed-sheets twisted into a knot, and the torn feather quilt upon the floor. Outside the wind howled at its old enemy, the night ; tauntingly it blew snow into the blackness. Breathing in heavy gasps, Darya's glazed eyes watched the eddies of snow whirl against the panes and creep through the cracks, Her hand moved to her abdomen where the first frightful pains of labour were beginning.

" If God wants children, why does He make it so hard ? " she wondered.

She rolled her head on the four high-propped pillows, and her cheek touched a cold wetness on the slip. With great effort she ran her hand over her face and body and realized that the sweat and heat of the sun were not a dream. Summoning all her strength, she tumbled from the bed to the floor and wrapped herself in the quilt. Then she crawled on her hands and knees to the door, shivering as a cold draught bled upon her through the crude, uneven gap at the threshold.

" Help, help ! " she gasped, clawing at the boards.

It seemed ages before her little daughter answered her cries.

" Tell Ivan . . . to take the sled . . . drive to the inn . . . get your father . . ."

" Yes, mamma."

The child's voice showed fear as her mother gasped instructions to her through the locked door. For two years now her father had locked her mother in her room and carried the key.

" The key . . . he must unlock . . . tell him . it is time . . . the midwife she . . . hurry."

Darya heard her daughter's little feet scamper over the creaking wooden boards, heard her slapping Ivan's bearded face to wake him, and then crossed herself.

The God to whom she was so devoted found a moment to spare for her. He permitted her to faint.

The holder of the local liquor monopoly looked across the room to the table at which Major Potemkin and his thin, hawk-faced cousin were sitting. He spat on the floor and with his boot slowly smeared the saliva about.

" God," he said to Sherov, the merchant ; " the big, puffy snob. I get angry just looking at him."

Sherov dumped two large spoonfuls of gooseberry preserve in his tea and answered in his gentle manner : " Truthfully, Illitch, I do not miss the major. I think he is stupid. He bores me."

" You would think he was the Empress Elizabeth's favourite, the way he sits there," the other went on wrathfully. " Major ! Pooh ! I know for a fact that he commanded nothing but a ratty little garrison out in the steppes, and never saw action in his life. I'll wager he hasn't got three hundred serfs. Those he has got are a half-dead, sickly lot." He leaned closer to Sherov and whispered hoarsely into his ear : " They tell me he has borrowed up to the hilt on that mean little estate he lords over ; that's barely his own now."

Sherov stirred his tea quietly and inhaled the odorous steam.

" Sherov, is it you he's mortgaged it to ? "

Sherov drank his tea. Watching him, the liquor contractor could tell nothing.

Major Potemkin drank his sixth large glass of vodka with a gargling sound, wiping the beads of it from his moustache with the back of his hand. A grim, brutal expression crossed his bloated red face, and he brought the empty glass down with such a bang that it smashed. Sergei Potemkin, his distant cousin, jumped like a startled hare. The major never even glanced at the shattered fragments lying about his hand, which, in some miraculous manner, was not even scratched.

" The dirty bitch," he growled ; " this is no child of mine she's bearing. And the two brats of daughters she's had aren't, either." He paused moodily a second, and then brought his huge fist down with such a crash that the candle at the end of the long oaken table jumped. " If I could only lay my

hands on the man ! I'd twist him in two." He tore open the collar of his military tunic and fingered a key which hung about his neck. " I've locked the whore up, and still she betrays me," be bellowed to Sergei.

Sergei Potemkin merely sniffed and took a delicate sip at his drink of hot tea, honey and black pepper. He wished for another glass of the warming drink ; but since the major was putting away so much vodka, for which he would probably have to pay, it seemed better to forgo it. Thank God, he was not drinking French brandy ; that was so expensive.

Sergei let him grumble and went on with his meditations. A glimmer of a smile flickered over his rapacious face. What a mess there had been when the major had married Darya Vasilievna, and she found his other wife still living. The old fool. To fall in love with the pretty widow of a dead relative and marry bigamously. He was lucky that the first one was soft enough to go into a nunnery when she heard Darya was with child. Very lucky, to have things smooth themselves out that way.

And now that he had her, and was thirty years older than she was, he was always thinking she went with other men. The old blowhard was still virile and didn't realize it. Well, it was a wonder that he would be, after such a life.

Yet, if the major thought all her children were bastards, he certainly would do nothing to make him change his mind. He would leave nothing to Darya and the so-called bastards, then, and the estate would fall to him.

Sergei Potemkin clasped his hand lovingly about the warm drink and sighed as he meditated. The major would not live much longer, and then it would all be his. The sooner he died the better ; if he kept on beating and starving his serfs as he did, they would be no good for work at all. Sergei considered a trifle of leniency, now and then, a good investment.

The door was suddenly opened by Ivan, the major's serf. He cast a frightened glance at his master, and virtually prostrated himself on the floor of the inn. The man's sheepskin cloak was in tatters, and he was blue with cold.

Sergei shook his head dolefully. That sort of thing did not pay. Why, the serf was half dead already !

The village priest, followed by the round little midwife,

with her thick woollen shawl about her head, entered. Ivan closed the door and waited in the howling cold.

The priest advanced to the major. He was an impressive man, with his cylindrical black hat and long black beard. A huge golden crucifix swung on a chain which reached down to his middle.

Sergei Potemkin stared at him. This was a curious priest indeed. As a rule they were such a drunken, worthless lot; but this man seemed to take his duties seriously.

"I have come, Major Potemkin," the priest said, "because Darya Vasilievna is in labour."

"Spewing forth a bastard!" the major roared at him.

"Silence! Over and over she has confessed to me under the most holy of oaths that this is not so."

"She lies. Lies!"

The priest stared piercingly at the major before he spoke.

"If she does, then she will burn everlastingly in hell for having said so under oath."

"Well, she lies anyway," the major mumbled, and turned his head.

The priest held his hand forth.

"Major Potemkin, give me the key to her room."

"No; I'll be damned if I will."

The priest's large black eyes blazed. His hand shook with anger as he grasped the golden crucifix and held it squarely before the major's face.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I command you to give it to me!" he proclaimed.

With something akin to terror the major gazed at the cross; and then with a convulsive movement he tore the key from the chain round his neck, and flung it across the room. The midwife, huddled near the doorway, pounced upon it. Without a word the priest turned and went through the door she had opened for him, and the woman followed immediately after.

Major Potemkin waddled to his feet and shouted at the closed door.

"I still say she lies, and I say that you are a filthy dog and a dirty son of God!"

He picked up Sergei's glass of tea and smashed it against the door. People ducked the flying fragments.

"Bring me French brandy!" roared the major; "bring me two bottles of it!"

Sergei Potemkin put his head on his arms and groaned.

It had not been an easy birth, and the old midwife was tired. Darya Vasilievna rolled restlessly on her bed. There had been so much pain there did not seem to be much room for more. Was that why it hurt less now? Suddenly she began to weep uncontrollably.

"There, there, do not cry," the old woman crooned. "The worst is over now; and you have a fine son. You should be happy."

"He will not believe it is his. Nothing can make him think so."

The new-born infant cried. It was an irritated, angry cry, shrill and unpleasant.

"Oh," said the midwife, "one can hear that he will be a devil."

"Like his father," Darya Vasilievna added, and pushed the child away as the midwife tried to put it to her breast.

"Now, now, you must not. You have not even looked at him."

She forced the child upon the mother, holding it up so that she could see it.

"Ugh! it is ugly. It has a squint; it is the father all over," Darya Vasilievna wailed.

"He will grow up tall and handsome. I have seen many born in my time who looked ugly and then grew up to be tall and handsome."

"He is cursed; he has a squint."

"No, that is lucky."

"No, midwife, he is cursed. Before he came, I dreamed a terrible dream. The heavens blackened and then opened and the sun rolled down upon me. Then he was born."

"Merciful Heavens!"

The midwife crossed herself many times and kneeled with the babe before an icon of the Holy Virgin. The guttering candle burned fitfully as she mumbled her prayers. Then she turned to the mother.

"It is a sign, a sign from Heaven!"

" What sort of sign ? Speak ! Don't frighten me with your silence."

The midwife took on an awesome pose.

" What is the child to be baptized ? "

" Grigori Alexandrovitch Potemkin. In God's name, tell me what does the sign mean ? "

" Grigori Alexandrovitch Potemkin . . ." The midwife paused as she rolled the name off her tongue. " Yes, that is a good name ; in every way fitting."

" Fitting for what ? "

The midwife advanced to Darya Vasilievna's bedside with great solemnity.

" Child, I have never misinterpreted a dream. What you have seen is a sign from God Himself ! Your son will conquer the earth, rule all Russia, be great, great beyond all belief ! "

She crossed herself, and Darya Vasilievna, greatly awed, did likewise. The baby cried, and she put him to her breasts. Fear and pain left her face, and one saw that it had beauty.

CHAPTER TWO

St. Petersburg, 1757

ALL twelve of the University students were lined up in the great room of the Palace. They looked like little soldiers, with their university uniforms and their twelve bright, gold medals all pinned on their left breasts. One of them stole a surreptitious look at his and gave it a quick brush with the sleeve of his coat. It had been well worth the hard work getting those medals for excellence in studies. Now they were rewarded with a trip to the grand city, with fêtes given in their honour, as well as an audience with the Empress Elizabeth herself. They were all mightily awed by the glories of the Court, the examination by the nobles, the speech of the Empress. All of them, save Grigori Alexandrovitch Potemkin.

He was dazzled, but it did not fluster him. Rather, it stimulated him. The richness, the luxury, the appalling extravagance of the place went to his brain like wine and spurred him to exceptional efforts.

No fumbling answers came from his lips when the questions were asked of him. Effortlessly he stood out above the others. Greek, Latin, Religion, History; he let the courtiers fire away and gave them replies in a strong voice, amazingly rich in authority for a boy of his age. To their amused jibes at his brilliant sallies he answered with a wit which made them laugh in commendation.

Now someone was talking, telling the boys how far learning and work would bring them in the world.

"Tosh," thought Potemkin, "the man lies. These men, here, are fools barely able to read and write. The way to succeed is to be handsome and a soldier, to charm women, to intrigue, and grasp power."

On and on the noble spoke, enamoured of his own words. The students shifted with uneasiness, all save Potemkin. His mind was far off. He felt no fatigue, no boredom; he was too much within himself.

This life was what he wanted. It was all settled now; his yearnings had crystallized. People could laugh at his boyish bravado as much as they pleased. He was going to be a favourite; he was going to rule, lead armies, declare war and make peace. He would have diamonds, palaces, everything.

He stole a glance at his little golden medal and smiled. This was number one. His decorations would run into hundreds.

"My dear young friends, let me give you this advice——" the man was saying, but Potemkin heard nothing.

He thought of his cousin, Grigori Matveyevich Kozlovsky, who had taken him into his home as his own son after the death of his father. How Kozlovsky had laughed one day when they were walking along the banks of the river Yauza, and he had told him he would some day tear all the old houses down which lined it and build himself one long, magnificent palace. He could hear Kozlovsky saying, as he delighted in his godson's precociousness: "My Grisha will either become a very great man or he'll lose his head." Well, he would keep his head. He needed it to become great.

He looked with contempt at the boy standing next to him. The chap had laughed at him when he had said that some day he would become a Minister of State and issue orders, or perhaps a bishop ruling priests. Time would tell.

In the room were dignitaries of the Church in gorgeous robes, and he regarded them coldly. He sighed and decided not to be one of them as he had first intended. After all, what were they? Mere mongers of religion, chanters of hymns and prayers, performers of ritual. That was all very fine and fascinating. But where was the power? Even the Metropolitans of Moscow and St. Petersburg had to take orders from the higher nobles.

The speech-making was over. They all filed to the throne, kissed the Empress's hand, and then were taken to an anteroom where they could be alone. Freed of the restraints of the Court, the youths romped madly, jumping on the chairs, rolling on the rich rugs, and pulling at the elaborate draperies. Potemkin stood alone, thinking moodily.

"Still dreaming of being the great man?" the youth who had stood next to him taunted.

Potemkin disdained to answer. The question was repeated, and slowly Potemkin asked: "Tell me, Alyosha, who was the pretty girl with the blue eyes—the one sitting next to the Empress?"

Alyosha roared with laughter.

"Listen, fellows! The great Grisha wants to know who the beautiful lady sitting next to the Empress was!"

The cackles and jibes which greeted this sally did not annoy Potemkin. Alyosha advanced and prostrated himself before him with mock dignity.

"Oh, great and good Prince, be advised that she is the Grand Duchess Catherine; and be also advised that she did not even see or know of the wonderfully-powerful Grigori Alexandrovitch Potemkin. It was Andrew Cherniecheff, the fine, tall, handsome officer, whom she was looking at all the time."

The boys laughed, but Potemkin paid no heed. "Fine, tall, handsome officer" were the words which stuck in his mind.

Studying was a waste of time; it would bring him nowhere.

He dropped luxuriously on a sofa and gazed at the ceiling with vacant contentment. The boys crowded around him in a ring. Their laughter died; it was poor fun teasing him; he did not react.

"Well, Prince Potemkin, is there anything Your Highness desires?" Alyosha asked.

"Nothing, at present."

"Nothing?"

He smiled, turned his head from them, and went to sleep.

1760

The bishop made sucking noises as he ate his sterlet soup and drank his *kvas*. The lackey had shown Potemkin in and the young man eyed the bishop greedily as he ate. He adored sterlet soup; perhaps the bishop might ask him to share it.

The prelate ate for a while as if unaware of the young man's presence and then looked up, wiping small remnants of fish from his long beard.

"Ah, so it's my young and brilliant friend, Potemkin."

Potemkin knelt and kissed the ring on the bishop's hand while a hurried sign of the cross was made over his head.

"You're growing very handsome, young man, in spite of your squint."

Potemkin winced.

"I hear the ladies cannot resist you. What is worse, you can't leave them alone. Dear, dear, ever since you've been a shaver that's been your failing. You do it too much; it's unhealthy. You should become a priest, be forced to marry, and settle down. Here, come and eat with me."

Potemkin accepted with alacrity. Both men feasted wordlessly on sterlet soup, *kvas*, black bread and raw turnips. To watch Potemkin gorge one would not think he had just left a most satisfactory meal. Pepper vodka was set out when everything in sight had disappeared. The bishop drank liberally without apparent effects. Potemkin toyed with his glass; his mind had to be clear.

"Come, come, young man; what brings you to see me?"

"The love I bear you, Holy Father."

"Very nice. But you are always wanting something; what is it?"

"I wanted your blessing also," Potemkin said innocently.

"Yes, of course, but—— Say, Grisha, why aren't you at the University?"

The young man drank some of the burning liquid before replying.

"I was expelled."

"Expelled? But it is almost impossible for a member of your class to be expelled. Your morals must have been rotten enough to smell to Heaven itself, Grisha."

"No, no, Holy Father. They said it was for laziness, not studying, and missing classes."

The bishop began to scold and to speak about his hopes for Potemkin in the Church, but Potemkin interrupted and launched off into the impassioned speech he had rehearsed in his mind before the visit. In moving terms he declared that the Church was not his destiny, but that the Army was his real career; this was why he had neglected his studies. He spoke so well and so beautifully that at the end the bishop was entirely convinced.

"Well, Grisha, I suppose you are right. And it was wise to come and talk to me about it."

"There is something else I would ask of you, dear bishop. In 1755 my relatives had me entered in the Horse Guards. I was an infant then, but you know the custom. One rises in

the ranks without doing any service at all; in 1758 I was promoted to be a sergeant, in '59 to a lieutenancy. Soon I shall be a captain."

"Splendid; excellent work."

"I want to join my regiment now at St. Petersburg."

"Do, and God's blessing go with you."

". . . And for it I need five hundred roubles. Will you, in the goodness and charity which is in your heart, lend them to me, Holy Father?"

The bishop demurred. It took a half-hour's pleading to make him come round. As he reluctantly counted out the silver coins, he said, "Remember, now, Grisha; you have sworn a holy oath to repay me as soon as you are able."

"Oh, I shall; I swear it."

Potemkin grabbed the bag of coins, kissed the bishop's hand hurriedly, and left the room in such haste that the poor man was astonished.

Outside a carriage waited for him. He jumped on its hard seat and shouted to the driver, "All right; St. Petersburg—and fast."

"You have money for the fare?"

"Yes, you evil-smelling goat; here."

He patted the bag of coins, selected a raw onion from his capacious pockets, and began gnawing on it moodily as the carriage jounced off.

Repay the money? To that old drunken fool? Potemkin contracted debts; he did not pay them. Besides, the old devil had referred to his squint.

CHAPTER THREE

1762

POTEMKIN did nothing notable in the army after entering it. With the rest of the officer class, he made a very good thing out of his position. Money, which was issued to him for supplies and dire necessities for his men, went mainly into his own pocket. The soldiers were forced to beg or steal what they needed. In using the men's funds for his own purposes, Potemkin was guilty of no crime ; the practice was universal. Later in her reign, Catherine was even to think a certain major a fool because he actually gave his men the funds allotted for their welfare.

Drill, and all the other regulations of army life, had little interest for Potemkin. Apparently he was destined to be as undistinguished as his father before him. Then came the revolution which placed Catherine on the throne, and Potemkin awoke from his two-year lethargy. During the exciting days of the revolt he became an active and energetic person.

But after he had escorted Peter to Ropscha, he returned to St. Petersburg an almost lifeless being. He slammed the door of his room with a bang, tore off his clothes, and threw them on the floor. Donning a greasy wrapper, and keeping on his spurred, bespattered boots, he flung himself on a silk-covered couch, the wrapper open and exposing his naked, hairy body. It was none too appetizing a sight ; he was not overfond of the famous Russian baths, and like everyone else in Russia he endured vermin. He lay spread-eagled and flat on his back, with a draught blowing across him for two days. During this time he scarcely moved and did not eat at all.

To those who entered his room he made absolutely no answer. He merely stared at the ceiling like a corpse. People paid little attention ; he was given to such tantrums. He might lie this way anywhere from a few days to a matter of months. Acquaintances, for he had no friends, merely shrugged their shoulders and said, " Hypochondria." His condition excited little pity, for he was anything but a lovable person. Arrogant to the point of being continually rude ; cold to a degree which made a nod of recognition from him a matter of comment ; moody so that he went off in long

sulks ; insulting, dishonest, disagreeably ambitious, completely unreliable—there was little to like about the fellow, and few cared how he felt, or why.

While he was idling in this manner much happened in Russia, and he missed it all. Peter's body had been exposed to public view, and many who kissed his dead lips found their own painfully swollen. If there were rumours of murder no one voiced them vehemently. There was much talk about Gregory Orlov and the Empress ; gossip had it that they would soon marry. From subdued Court gabbling the chorus rose and swelled until it became the topic even of such lowly beings as lavuschniks, people who operated small shops in the basements of the finest nobles' houses. Catherine tentatively put forth a feeler amongst her advisers, and was told that Catherine II could be Empress of Russia, but not Mme Orlov. It was a rather bitter blow to a lady who had had a stern Lutheran upbringing. She must henceforth live in technical sin ; she would be permitted lovers, but not a husband. Catherine's sigh about her unwedded state was soft and short. Another Russianism ; so be it. She issued her first ukase ; it was read aloud to the people on the streets to the roll of the drums. It forbade them to discuss affairs which were none of their concern ; that is, Catherine and Orlov. The ukase was obeyed.

Since Potemkin lay in the throes of his periodic melancholia, he never kissed Peter's poisoned lips and never heard the drums roll to announce the reading of Catherine's ukase. For two long days he lay in solid despair. A voice inside him said over and over : " The Orlovs have won ; you have lost."

All had gone for naught. He had left the house of the bishop, two years before, confident that life in the army would bring him to his cherished goal. The army ! Drab years of undistinguished routine service he scarcely bothered to perform. Monotony speckled only by women, who ranged from Chinese to wives of the generals. His mind reviewed regiments of wildly assorted thoughts. The sharp tramp of brilliant orgies, of hopes and dreams of future greatness, was followed by the scuffling steps of depressing legions of despair. He thought of the relatives who had suffered his long unwelcome visits to their homes until they could no longer abide

him. He recollected over and over the melancholias of the past, and knew there would be hosts of them to come in the future.

For two days there had been an endless parade of such introspection. Time became non-existent; his body, the room, the world, everything material vanished.

Then a faint consciousness of self began to return to Potemkin. The first manifestations of it were hunger. Stretching forth his hand to the table beside the couch, he grabbed a fistful of broken sugar from a bowl and gobbled it. Outside the door his servant could hear the rhythmic crunching sounds, when they stopped he entered and placed a filled bowl wordlessly beside the depleted one. He did not speak to Potemkin, who gave him no sign, but went on mechanically with his crunching. After six large bowls of sugar had been disposed of he stopped and lay in a state of mental blankness. He spent the whole third day in this manner. On the fourth he rang his bell and the servant entered.

"*Kvas*, turnips," were his orders, and the first words he had uttered in all this time.

The servant departed and returned with a bucket-like beaker of the effervescent non-alcoholic malt beverage, and a large dish of raw turnips, peeled and salted.

Potemkin made his first extensive physical effort in four days. He raised himself, lifted the huge beaker of *kvas* to his lips and drained it at one draught. Then he fell back on the couch and crammed the huge pieces of turnip in his mouth and masticated with loud crackling noises. The servant stood beside him replenishing the *kvas* and turnips as the occasion demanded. Incredible quantities of both disappeared down the gullet of his master, and yet he gave no sign of dismay or surprise. The performance was one to which he was fully accustomed; for Potemkin the normal was the extreme, and he knew it.

Until the sun of the fourth day set, Potemkin lay there on his couch absorbing his *kvas* and turnips. His hair was matted, his body fetid with the odour of sweat, and in the thick bristle of his unshaven face traces of his unbalanced meal lingered.

He made his second statement in the period. Pointing to the window, which had been open all the while and allowing chill blasts to blow across his huge body, he said, "Close."

The servant closed the window; Potemkin immediately rolled over on his belly and snored stertorously. The door was shut, the blinds drawn, and the lights extinguished. Potemkin then slept some forty-odd hours. At the end of that time he awoke and rang his bell.

"A woman—one that plays and sings," he demanded.

The servant went out to the nearest brothel and secured a a gipsy girl with the desired attributes. Tremblingly she was ushered into the presence of Potemkin; he waved her to the edge of the couch. "Play, sing," he ordered. For three hours she played and sang while Potemkin lay on the couch with a completely expressionless face. Her voice became husky and she pleaded for a rest. He shook his head and made her go on singing until no sounds came from her throat at all. Then he had her play until she fainted from exhaustion. At that point Potemkin rang the bell for his servant.

"Undress her; place her beside me."

The order was followed and the man left.

The next day, when he answered the bell, he found the girl still naked, crouched in a corner and crying bitterly. Potemkin curtly ordered her taken away. She begged piteously to be paid.

"Yes, pay her," Potemkin said; but his servant noted that his right fist was clenched, a signal which meant that she should not be recompensed. She was thereupon bustled out of the room and into the street, where she stood weeping and cursing, her clothes clutched around her.

Later that day a letter sealed with the Imperial seal arrived, and the servant set it beside Potemkin. For four full hours he did not turn his head even to glance at it. Finally he looked and noted that it came from Catherine. Two hours later he opened it and read it.

The contents advised him that he was rewarded with a colonelcy, four hundred serfs, and a mission to Stockholm. After that he spent a day vacantly staring at the ceiling. His expression and demeanour had not changed, but his thoughts had. He saw himself rising higher and higher; visioned splendid palaces he would own; fancied himself surrounded by cringing courtiers and harems of women; fingered enormous collections of gems he would own. These thoughts were

ideas he had had in his infancy. The last time he had diverted himself with them was the night before the Preobazhensky Guards had revolted and sworn allegiance to the Empress. All that night he had laid awake and planned the behaviour he had so punctiliously carried out the following day.

The letter was tangible proof that his plans had succeeded. Catherine had noticed him ; he had broken through the line of Orlov brothers who surrounded her. He glanced at the document and noted that it was signed by Gregory Orlov. A trace of a smile flitted across his thick, sensuous lips. It was the first expression on his face in a whole week.

The smile soon left and he went on with his dreams. . . . He would have all the honours, all the power, all the glory. He required patience and thought ; and for a full day he did nothing but tell himself these things.

Then he summoned his servant and sat up. He ordered a huge bowl of his favourite sterlet soup and with it consumed large loaves of black bread, two salt ducks, a ham, and four bottles of Tokay wine. Again he slept, and again he called for women. This time five came, and for two weeks orgies of unbridled lust took place, during which time he never shaved, washed or put on his clothes. After that he dressed and went to church, praying steadily for two days and one night. He remained standing, as is the custom in the Russian Church, during that whole time ; and never once ate or drank. At the conclusion of his prayer he threw himself prostrate on the dirty floor before a very holy icon of St. Nicholas and lay there for hours in the most complete abjection. When he rose, Potemkin was refreshed, and he looked with renewed interest upon the world once more.

CHAPTER FOUR

1763

ALEXEI ORLOV sat on a richly upholstered satin chair, with his feet cocked on the exquisite inlaid desk just arrived from France. His eyes roved over the rococo and effeminate furnishings which cluttered the room.

Gregory certainly had changed. So he, too, had fallen for the French vogue ! He even managed to speak the language very badly. So Catherine was trying to educate him, to make the fine gentleman out of him ? The French Ambassador who had called him the perfect blockhead was right. Alexei aimed at a red rose woven in the expensive Aubusson carpet, spat, and missed by three inches. It irritated him all the more.

Outside there was a steady banging. Serfs using axes, which served them also as saws, planes, hammers, chisels, or any other needed tool, were making the usual terrific din attendant on building construction at that time.

" What the devil are you having built out there, Grisha ? "

Gregory wrinkled his classic nose, poked his large hand among the variety of Russian hors d'œuvre or *zakuski*, till he found the salt herring he wanted. He gobbled it noisily and drank an entire tumbler of vodka to wash it down.

" An observatory," he explained. " You know—to look at the stars. Katusha thought it would be nice for me. You know how pregnant women are ; you have to humour them. She wants me to become educated, to mix in affairs. Why, to-day she made me sit down and write a letter to some fellow named Rousseau, to invite him here. He's some sort of a Frenchman."

Gregory sucked fresh, unpressed caviare from a large spoon, munched salted mushrooms, and washed the combination down with repeated gulps of the vodka.

" She's wasting her time teaching you anything. You're dumb . . . an idiot."

Gregory glared at his brother. Usually he relished a fight. He was a man who threw plates of jam in the faces of visiting plenipotentiaries, who almost slaughtered a crew of lackeys sent by Count Shuvalov to thrash him for stealing his mistress, the Princess Kourakine ; but Alexei was a different story. Gregory was very far from being a weakling, but Alexei was

terrific. Besides, the five Orlovs stuck together and never fought among themselves.

"Dumb, eh? An idiot, eh? I'm the biggest man in Russia."

"Until your Katusha throws you out."

"She adores me, she's mad about me; she'll never throw me out."

Alexei turned his back upon him. Gregory thrust a large miniature of Catherine, with a frame of diamonds around it each as large as a hazel-nut, in his face.

"There's an honour none of her lovers have ever had! It proves what I say."

Alexei glanced at it and growled. "Bah! The thing flatters her."

"All her pictures do; she likes them that way." Gregory was mollified. "Have a slice of this pine-apple, Alyosha; it comes from my own green-house."

Alexei picked up the pine-apple, glanced at it a second and then flung it at a rather lachrymose painting of a young man playing a mandolin. The fruit destroyed the painting and splattered the wall.

Gregory shrugged his shoulders.

"Too bad; it was the first pine-apple of the winter season."

"Fool; you and your pine-apples! You'll be glad to get porridge with linseed-oil on it, if you keep behaving the way you do."

"Why, Alyosha?"

"Perhaps you don't realize that everything we possess depends upon your staying in Matushka's good graces; that Panin, and Dashkova, and the rest are always intriguing to get us out. You'll go too far with her one of these fine days, and then we'll be through."

"Nonsense, she loves me; besides, Bobrinsky is our son, and we will have another child soon." He laughed.

"She'll have a miscarriage, that's what, if you don't stop beating her."

"Beating's good for her. It makes her respect me."

"That's true; every woman should be beaten once or twice a week. But if you are going to thrash the Empress, have the sense to hit her on the buttocks, or some other place

where it won't show. At the reception last night everyone could see the welts when she wore that low-cut dress."

Gregory was contrite.

"You are right, Alyosha; to-morrow night I shall be careful."

"And another thing. Don't be so open about the whoring you do in this city. You forget you're the Empress's favourite . . ."

"But Alyosha, my Katusha doesn't mind at all! She knows that I go with other women."

"I know; but it looks bad. After a while she will become vexed. I hear Senator Mouravief caught you with his wife; and when he complained you tore off his breeches and spanked him so that he's had to sleep on his belly these last three nights."

Gregory roared with laughter.

Alexei scowled.

"Well, did you know that he told the Empress?"

"Oh, that doesn't worry me. Let him complain; all the husbands do. She never does anything."

"No? Well, she gave him land in Livonia to keep him quiet. That shows, Grisha, that she may be getting a trifle tired of this sort of thing. Don't go too far with her. She stands an enormous amount, God knows; but if you push her too far, we're finished."

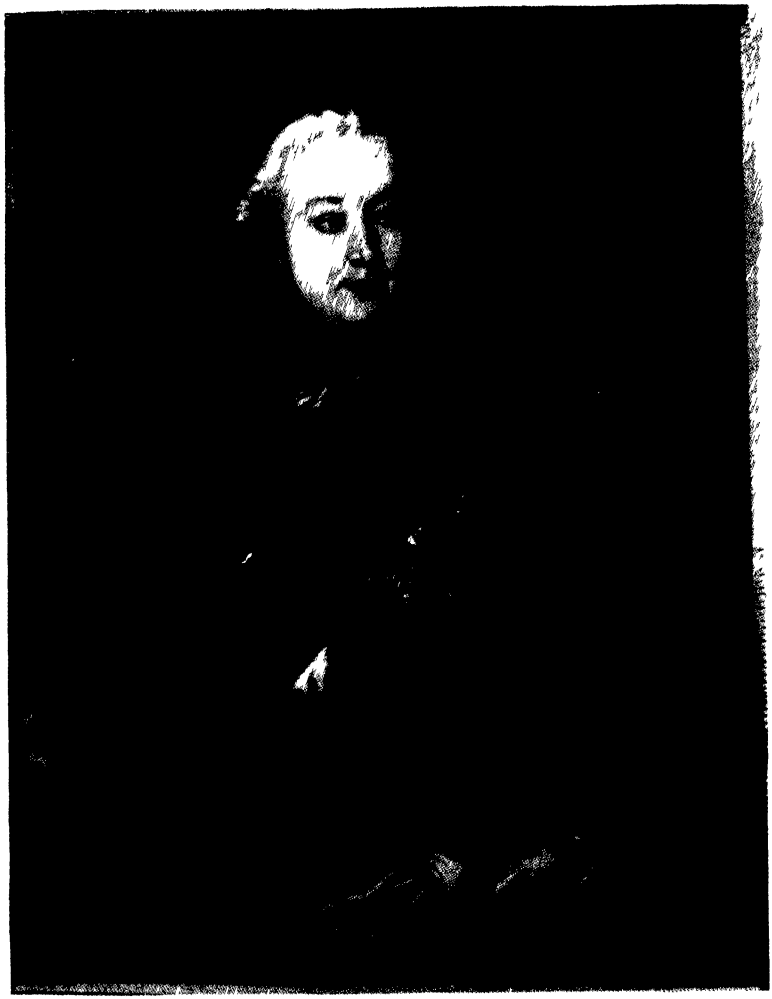
"You're needlessly worried, brother. You know she wouldn't be ruling if it weren't for us. She's eternally grateful. You killed Peter for her; she's got to be good to you. Made you Admiral of the Fleet, didn't she? And look at me, I'm a Prince. Look at all the land, jewels, serfs, palaces and everything we're getting. Besides, she loves me, and I love her. I really do, except when she's boring and talks to me like a teacher."

"Perhaps, my dear Grisha, she may be slightly bored by *you*."

"Oh, no; I fascinate her."

"Yes? So does this Potemkin upstart, whom you were so exceedingly clever as to introduce into Court."

"I only brought him in to amuse her. He is a marvellous mimic, isn't he? Remember that day I brought him, when



COUNT GREGORY ORLOV
Catherine's lover Portrait by Torelli

she spoke to him and he answered her in her own voice? I thought she would die laughing."

Gregory laughed, but Alexei looked grim.

"Yes, the young man is *too* amusing, *too* clever, to suit me. I never liked him. That day of the revolution, when he gave her his plume, I suspected he was trying to get in her good graces; and now I know he's aiming higher. She speaks to him in French, and he has the insolence to reply in Russian. I told him that was impolite, and he had the nerve to say that a Russian subject should speak to his sovereign in Russian! He will attend all the little parties at the Hermitage, now. With no fear at all he sits right next to Catherine when they play cards; and last night the squirt had the audacity to squeeze her hand under the table!"

"No! He didn't dare!"

"He does anything; his insolence charms her."

Gregory paled and gasped, "No!"

"Well, ask Narishkin, or Countess Bruce, or any of them who were there while you were sleeping with some worthless baggage."

"I'll kill him, Alyosha! I'll break him in small pieces and feed him to the wolves!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort. If you kill him, she'll hate us, say we're jealous, and never forgive us. She'll surely fall in love with him, then; and he'll be dead, and we can't fight a dead man."

"Then what will we do?"

"We'll destroy him . . . *intelligently!*"

Gregory nodded dumbly, his mouth open.

"Of course, dear brother; you know best—whatever you say."

The Empress saw that it was ten o'clock, and rose from the card-table; she rarely stayed up past this hour. The gentlemen playing with her rose also, but the ladies remained seated. The select parties given at the Hermitage for her most intimate friends forbade any Court etiquette under penalty of a small fine, which went to charity. The Austrian Minister had awkwardly been calling her Catherine, for the Hermitage rules banned all formal titles. Potemkin, unflustered by the use of

familiar names, said good night to her with perfect ease. Gregory Orlov glared at him, but a stern chiding look from his brother made him substitute a pleased smile.

The Empress left the room on Gregory's arm and went towards her chambers. The guards before the door of her room opened it and admitted them both into her waiting-room. In the chamber the maids could be heard bustling about, preparing the bed. It should have been ready long before, but she was so lax with her servants that they took enormous liberties.

Alone with her, Gregory took her in his arms and kissed her roughly, as was his fashion. His powerful arms pressed the stays of her corset till she gasped.

" No, be careful, my Grisha—the child."

He relaxed slightly, kissed her and then poured a stream of soft endearments in her ear.

She smiled, kissed him softly, took his face in her hands and said, " You are the handsomest man in all Russia, the dearest, the most beautiful and the wisest. I could not live without you."

His amorousness increased, but she stopped him with a sigh, reminding him of the midwife's warning to be careful.

" Go to one of your other mistresses, Grisha."

" I only love you, Katusha ; I swear it." He crossed himself and kissed a small icon, framed in diamonds and rubies, that stood on the table.

She told him she believed him, kissed him as if he were a little child and sent him away. The maids came in to undress her, but on an impulse she stopped them and wrote out a short note on her personal gold-bordered stationery. She opened the door to find the four lackeys in their cubicle playing whist.

" Will one of you please deliver this note to Prince Gregory Orlov ? "

The men looked up and then turned back to their game. They knew it was one of the countless love notes she was always sending out to him, unimportant things not worth bothering about.

" Pavel, you will please deliver it . . . for me."

" Oh, I can't, Highness ; this is a very important hand."

Catherine coaxed Pavel and finally he agreed to go, first stipulating that she play his hand for him, pay his debts if she lost, and give him the winnings if she won. She meekly consented, sat down and took his hand. Her lackey partner did not scruple to grumble about a misplay she made.

Gregory slowly walked through the covered way which led back to the Hermitage. With the Empress gone, the squabbling which usually took place had increased in volume. Narishkin had probably ceased his clowning. . . . Gregory sniffed with disgust as he thought of him. He wondered what Catherine could see in the man's buffoonery, his facetious peddling of trinkets, his heavy witticisms, and those dismal concerts he staged with her in which both wailed like cats. Potemkin, at least, was really witty and interesting, much as Gregory despised him.

Now that he had left Catherine, Gregory felt relieved. To have appeased her would have been a bore. It did seem strange that a woman of such an amorous nature should be uninteresting to him. That was what Saltykov had said about her ; and Saltykov knew her when she was really very pretty. Those stale jokes she cracked ; those platitudes. She was always trying to make him learn things, to enter politics. He neither cared, nor was fitted for such endeavour. That sort of thing was for Alexei. He began to wish it was Alexei she loved rather than himself. Then he would have no obligations at all.

He caught the sparkle of the large diamond buttons on his coat as he passed a mirror, and felt a sense of shame for his thoughts. She had just made him a present of the gems . . . and now he was thinking ungratefully about her. Katusha really was most generous, most understanding, and so easy to get along with. He had no right to think of her as he did. He did love her. She was a dear, dear friend, the finest woman he ever knew. All the rest did not matter.

Gregory stepped into the room of the Hermitage and found the party breaking up. It had been a rather special event, for that evening had been Bobrinsky's name day. Catherine had had a prize for the card play, a crystal bowl full of diamonds. Winners scooped up a spoonful for each hand they

won. The ladies were rather viciously accusing each other of scooping the best as Gregory entered, and he noted that Potemkin had dipped his hand into the bowl and helped himself freely when the others were not looking.

"I have managed to persuade the dear Colonel to play a few games of billiards with us," Alexei said as Gregory entered. He was all smiles and fawned over Potemkin, whose manner toward him was openly contemptuous.

With exaggerated courtesy the two brothers left with Potemkin, escorting him to their own carriage. It was a magnificent equipage, its fine wood gilded and painted, and had been especially built for Gregory in Germany, where all people of fashion ordered their carriages. On its box a magnificently costumed serf acted as footman, and hitched to the vehicle was a span of six scrawny horses, strung together by pieces of rope. Two frozen lads in soiled uniforms were asleep on their backs, pinched little boys, blue from constant exposure to the cold. For five hours they had been perched on the bony backs of the horses, waiting for the brothers Orlov to emerge. When the sad animals were driven over the cobbles, it would be their function to shout pedestrians and other carriages out of the way, using all the profanity at their command. The driver who sat next to the gorgeous footman was a fat, filthy individual dressed in what seemed to be a huge wad of rags bound round with a rope. He wore the traditional long beard of the *isvostchik;* it was fringed with hoar-frost from the loud, wet, odoriferous breaths he snored into it. Beneath the box of the beautiful carriage there protruded a most unsightly bundle of hay for the horses. The poor animals were doomed to stay in their hempen harness until they dropped dead or their terms of service ended.

The Orlovs and Potemkin could see no incongruity in the handsome carriage with its fine footman, and the harness, the driver, the boys and the steeds. It was a Russian custom to buy a fine carriage and then save money by hiring cheap horses and a peasant driver.

Alexei himself did Potemkin the extraordinary honour of handing him into the peach-coloured satin interior of the carriage and tucking a priceless sable robe about his feet. When all three were comfortably seated, they rode off. The

two brothers talked amiable nothings with their guest, even though Potemkin had so far not deigned to indulge in the politeness of replying. Finally a silence on all sides ensued.

Potemkin broke it.

"I am well aware why you invite me to go with you. You are afraid of me. I am rapidly gaining the favour of the Empress; you Orlovs are losing it. I accept your gracious attentions in that light; be assured they will earn you nothing but my increased contempt."

Alexei slapped his own thigh a resounding crack.

"Hah! Droll, droll. This Potemkin is indeed a wit."

He laughed, and Gregory joined him.

The carriage finally stopped before Gregory's Palace. It was brilliantly lighted by a prodigious number of candles; the Orlovs apparently were doing everything in their power to ingratiate themselves with their guest. Potemkin sneered at them with contemptuous amusement. So far he had said nothing more than the few words uttered in the carriage.

In the billiard room Potemkin waved to Alexei to play first, and then to Gregory to follow him. When his own turn came, he insolently dropped his cue butt end first on Alexei's toe. Then he calmly brushed aside the balls on the table and said, "I am not interested in playing. The table is bad; the players are worse."

Alexei and Gregory now made no attempt to hide their anger.

"The Colonel is pleased to be insulting," Alexei said ominously.

Potemkin shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not necessary for an incoming favourite to be gracious to those who are about to be discarded."

Alexei's knuckles went white around his cue. But suddenly he dropped the stick, lashed out with his huge fist, and struck Potemkin a terrific blow on the eye, the good eye, the one which did not squint.

A cry more of surprise than of pain broke from Potemkin as he clapped his hand to the eye. Blood spurted copiously from between the clenched fingers as he turned and ran stumblingly from the room. Through the great corridors and *salons* Potemkin ran; and over their polished floors dripped

the trail of his wavering progress as, nauseated by the shock, blindly he fled from the house of his enemies.

Alexei followed him briskly, ten yards behind. Gregory bewilderingly came after his brother ; it had all been so quick, so sudden.

The Orlovs stood on the steps of the Palace and watched Potemkin reel into a carriage that was waiting for hire. When it was out of sight they turned back into the house, and the serf guarding the front door closed it behind them.

Alexei had a servant pour him three glasses of champagne. He drank slowly and deliberately, without a pause. Then he gobbled elaborate pastries, licking his fingers delicately while Gregory watched, great perplexity on his countenance.

" What made you hit him so suddenly, Alyosha ? " he finally asked, after a long silence had passed.

" It's very simple. The man insulted me."

" But he did that all evening ; and didn't you make me promise to bear with his insults ? "

" True, but, of course, there is a limit. The billiard room, besides, was a place where one could be insulted in decent privacy."

" Then it was all planned, Alyosha ! "

" Yes, yes, Grisha. I see Matushka is improving your perception."

He flung himself into a chair and took deep draughts of champagne.

Then he snickered.

" I wonder, my dear Grisha, how enamoured our dear Empress will be of a man who is half blind in one eye,[1] and who, I am fairly certain, will never see out of the other ? "

1764

The early summer air was warm and balmy. The sun gave everything a golden light. In the fields grain stood tall and the birds chirped incessantly. The open *calèche* whirled along the road sending out a long white plume of dust behind it.

[1] Historians generally accept the story that Potemkin lost his eye in a quarrel with the Orlovs during a game of billiards in which he boasted of his favour with Catherine. His nephew, Samoiloff, and a few others claim that a quack peasant doctor put a poultice about his head for a headache and ruined the sight of his eye. Others state that it had a blemish and he gouged it out himself. He himself kept the truth hidden.

Alexei Orlov rode backwards with his arms crossed, and scowled. Gregory, with one arm about a chubby, cherry-like serving-maid, sung lustily in a rich baritone. He kept time to the tune by squeezing the girl's round breasts with the arm which encircled her.

She laughed.

" Tell me where we are going, dear Prince."

" I have told you, little pigeon, to rescue a hermit, a man who has hidden from the world for eighteen long months."

" Bah ! " Alexei spat.

" And why can't I come with you ? "

" Because, my little teapot of love, you cannot."

The carriage stopped before a villa. Gregory hopped out, reached in, and as if the girl were a parcel, picked her out, kissed her lustily, and made her promise to wait for his return.

The carriage went on, Gregory singing happily while Alexei growled.

" God ! I thought she'd forgotten him. I put her off over and over again. She still wants to see him, insists upon it. There's no way out now."

Gregory interspersed his singing with flute-like whistling. It annoyed his brother intensely.

" Idiot, stop that noise ! Don't you realize that we've been sent like two lackeys by Catherine to fetch this scum Potemkin?"

Gregory nodded and burst into song.

" Don't you realize what this means, you fool ? She's very much interested in this man ; she hasn't forgotten him."

Gregory finished his song in a glorious burst of sound, looked at his brother and said, " Ah, that wench was good enough to eat, Alyosha."

On the outskirts of the town they hit a rather lonely-looking house. A section of it, on the second story, had the shutters drawn. Gregory glanced up from the carriage and smiled as he said, " Oho, our shy little dove must inhabit the darkened portion."

The men left the carriage and Alexei pounded on the door of the house in his usual battering-ram manner. A serf admitted them ; but when told they wished to see Potemkin, advised them that his master was ill and would see no one. Gregory disdained to answer the hapless servant, but in a

spirit of play gave him such a shove that he flung him across the room. The brothers then ascended the stairs. At Potemkin's door a faithful manservant sat guard. Gregory picked him up as if he were a babe and tumbled him down the stairs. Alexei, finding the door locked, put his shoulder to it and in a moment it flew open. Both men peered inside. The room was in total darkness save for a small rushlight burning before an icon, and in front of it was Potemkin, kneeling.

He was a changed person. In the eighteen months during which he had stayed away from the Court he had allowed his beard to grow. His hair was long and matted, and he was dressed in a monk's robe.

"Ah," exclaimed Gregory, "then what we have heard at Court is true, dear brother! Potemkin wants to be a saint, or at least a monk. Look, we have disturbed the holy man at his devotions."

Potemkin turned around. His face was pale and deathly from his long confinement. A startling change was the patch which he wore about his eye. It was black and large, and was looped about the head with a wide black band.

"Go away. Leave me. I want only to be left alone."

"Grisha and I would be glad to. I assure you it is neither idle curiosity nor solicitude which brings us here. The Empress has sent us after you; we are to bring you back to Court."

"Yes," assented Gregory cheerfully; "and what is more, she told me to look at that famous eye of yours, about which there is so much talk."

Potemkin backed away as he advanced towards him. Alexei grasped him, and Gregory, without any further ceremony, tore the patch from his eye. Both brothers gazed at the disfigured spot. Potemkin slowly covered it with his hand as he turned from them.

"Alyosha, what we have heard about his eye is true. I thought he might be shamming. The poor man has met with some unfortunate accident."

But Alexei was in no mood for jesting. He thrust the patch back in Potemkin's hand and told him to prepare himself for an immediate return with them.

Potemkin took the patch. Some of the terror and despair in him seemed to leave, and he gazed at Alexei, who finally turned from him. Nothing was said, but Potemkin knew he had won an unwitting victory. He knew Catherine had not forgotten him, that here was his revenge. The very man who had caused his great despair was sent round to fetch him back.

In the long dark months, almost as galling as the loss of his eye, his disfigurement, was the knowledge that Alexei Orlov had beaten him at his own game of intrigue. On the night of his misfortune he had been outwitted and galled like an ignorant peasant. He had been made a fool.

Now his enemy had lost by the mere passing of time. Courage and energy flowed back to Potemkin. He had come out the victor.

Without a word he turned on his heel and left for his bedchamber. The door shut behind him, and Gregory looked at his brother's anxious and troubled face.

"What worries you? Do you think he will tell Katusha what happened?"

Alexei thought a moment before replying. Gregory became a trifle nervous waiting for him to speak.

"No; he will not tell. He has too much pride. That does not worry me."

Gregory shrugged his shoulders, threw open a window and let the sunlight into the room. He went on with his singing.

In the next room Potemkin surveyed himself in the glass. He adjusted the patch with great care. For a moment he stood silent. His servant, who anticipated his wishes almost before he voiced them, stood discreetly in back, waiting to hear what clothes his master would order.

For minutes Potemkin stared at his image in the glass. Then, in a flash, he realized he looked best as he was. In his bearded, long-haired, pale and dishevelled appearance, with his patch and his monk's robe, he was a character. He could act a part before a woman, a part which would thrill, move, and excite her. If he dressed in fine raiment, shaved, washed, and all the rest of it, he would merely be a man who had for long months hidden himself away from the world in fear and despair.

Without a word to his servant he re-entered the room,

walked past the Orlovs and down the stairs. They looked out the window and saw him waiting in their carriage. Puzzled at first, there was nothing they could do but follow him. As they drove back to the Court, Potemkin and Alexei were silent. Gregory sang until he was hoarse. When the carriage stopped at the villa where he had dropped off the girl, bidding Potemkin a pleasant good-bye, and assuring him that Alexei would be glad to escort him back to the Empress, he moved off towards the house, paying no heed to Alexei's repeated calls.

At Court, Potemkin's face tightened as he faced the curious stares of the people. Sensitivity of his disfigurement developed then and there ; it was never to leave him. Years later, an unfortunate officer who had also lost an eye was ushered into his presence ; Potemkin nearly killed the man because he took it to be an insult. People learned that it was unwise to look into his face lest he take offence.

This first day in public was a horror to him, until he finally saw Catherine in private audience. Her first glance at him could not conceal her shocked surprise, but she was a consummate actress and covered her reaction quickly. She behaved as if nothing important had happened. About his eye she said nothing at all. In business-like fashion she told him that she had granted him several petty but lucrative appointments. He was made an overseer of uniform-making, a deputy of the Tartars and other heathen tribes. Lastly, Catherine had appointed him to the Table of the Holy Synod as her personal representative to the Church ; it was the most important office of the lot.

Gravely he thanked her, bowing low and kissing her hand. He said not a word about himself, about what had occurred ; but his every gesture, and the few words he spoke were drenched in tragedy of the deepest theatrical dye.

Catherine walked with him to the door. He looked at her gravely before he took his leave. There was a flash of something across her face which showed how deeply she was moved. Her blue eyes became tearful and she chewed at her lips.

" We have missed you here," she said. " Come back."

Few words ; but as he kissed her hand he realized just how much they meant. When he left her he smiled faintly.

It was the first time he had done so in eighteen months.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jassy, 1773

POTEMKIN'S recall to the Court by Catherine was not to mean rapid advance to the post he longed for. Just as she was forced to spend ten long years as the wife of the Grand Duke Peter, so he was to spend ten long years in the army. For him, as for her, those years were destined to be weary and fruitless. What had helped Catherine to buoy herself through them was the hope that she might some day rule Russia. What helped buoy up Potemkin was the hope that he would become Catherine's favourite and be able to rule the land with her.

His service with the army during this period was so utterly lacking in distinction that history would record nothing of it. When the first Turkish War broke out in 1768, Potemkin seized the opportunity to write his Empress a most theatrical letter in which he begged permission to serve his country. He went off under Prince Golitzin, who later managed to palm him off on General Rumantzoff, one of Russia's most distinguished military commanders. Rumantzoff, in turn, managed to get rid of him by appointing him courier to Catherine. This was precisely what Potemkin desired; it enabled him to keep in contact with her.

There was one thing he knew he must never neglect: he must keep himself before Catherine. During those ten years he managed to maintain correspondence with her under the most unfavourable circumstances. He bribed her librarian and her secretary, Yelagin, and through them obtained permission to write to her. For years the correspondence between the two was purely one-sided. She read his missives with delight and interest, but made no reply. After a while Catherine, herself a demon letter-writer, succumbed to Potemkin's *billets-doux* and sent replies. His missives read so well and so easily that she was unaware of the time he had spent on their composition. She admired the classical allusions, the Latin, Greek, and French phrases, with which he so aptly filled them. But most of all she adored the manner in which he made love to her on an ever-increasing scale of boldness.

This was no soft, deer-like Poniatowski. Potemkin was a Russian wolf-hound who carried on in the face of all dis-

couragement. True, he would often flag and go into sulks; but a word of cheer from her would always pull him out.

The First Turkish War dragged its way through the hot summer of 1773. The heat was torture to the soldiers, who were forced to wear their heavy uniforms. Those serving under Potemkin made little complaint; in comparison with others, he was very lenient toward the common soldiers. He took their side against the officers to such an extent that he endangered discipline. He cared little; the army and what went on in it did not interest him. Most of the time he loafed about, feigning illness.

The sun had at last set and brought the men some relief from a gruelling day. Outside of Potemkin's luxurious tent a young soldier picked at a *balalaika*. Popoff, Potemkin's faithful secretary, had stationed the young soldier there with instructions to play. Popoff knew better than any man what pleased his master.

Potemkin appreciated the gipsy style of singing and playing. Long before any other Russian he valued the land's native music; through him it was popularized.

The young soldier began humming in a rich vibrant voice. He had been instructed to sing a song named "Kaskoria Tebe Vidal." Inside the tent Potemkin reclined luxuriously on his couch and listened:

A soon as I beheld thee
Thy lovely eyes captivated me;
Yet I trembled to say "I loved."
To thee love subjects every heart,
Chains them to you with flowers;
But, oh, Heaven! what torment
To love one to whom I dare not declare it;
One who can never be mine!
Cruel gods, why have you given her such charms?
Oh, why did you exalt her so high?
Why did you destine me to love her and her alone,
She whose sacred name will never pass my lips,
Whose shining image will never quit my heart?

The song, drifting into the tent, affected Potemkin, who had been lying in his usual naked state for some days. The song was very dear to him, for he himself was the author of its words and music. It was obvious to all that Catherine was

the exalted and unapproachable lady. The song had got about, just as Potemkin had devoutly hoped it would.

Catherine finally heard it. The music she did not appreciate, for she was completely tone-deaf; many times she had silenced orchestras at theatrical performances she was attending. The words of the song, however, more than pleased her. She was now in her forty-fifth year, and it tickled her fancy to know that Potemkin, ten years her junior, was in love with her.

The party of the Orlovs hated and feared him; Panin was against him. He had lost an eye over her. The odds against him seemed hopeless; and yet he wrote a song like this about her.

Living with Gregory Orlov had become more unbearable for her each day. His brutalities were offensive and his dissipation had passed the point of her endurance. His once handsome face had become red and bloated from the life he was leading. His virility, so recklessly abused, had suffered.

Besides Bobrinsky, he had given her two daughters, whom, like his son, she could not acknowledge. Mlle Protassof, her chief lady-in-waiting, was bringing the girls up as her nieces. The fact that Orlov was the father of these children always made Catherine forgive him much. She had long yearned to live with him as a wife in practice, if she could not do so in fact; but there was a breaking point, and she had reached it. The love Potemkin had been professing for ten long years no longer was a straw to grasp at, but a boat with all sails flying.

Yet Orlov seemed to lead a charmed existence. Panin plotted his overthrow; Potemkin intrigued against him; Catherine had become disgusted with him; and still he stayed in power. She still felt love for him. To her he was "the handsomest man of the day," and had "good looks, intelligence and heart and soul."

In 1771 a plague of smallpox had broken out in Moscow. At Panin's suggestion Gregory Orlov was sent to eliminate it and to bring law and order to the stricken city. Sending him to Moscow was the sliest sort of death warrant. Only his luck, his robustness, and the cold weather had saved him. The plague lifted, he had restored order and returned to Catherine a hero and a forgiven lover. Next, she sent him

off to Forchany to make peace with the Turks whom Russia was fighting. He had rolled off in a carriage worth a million roubles, with a train of twenty-four liveried servants. His parting with the Empress had not been auspicious, because he had insisted on taking with him one of her most attractive ladies-in-waiting. That favour she had refused.

He had thrown plates of jam in the faces of Russian generals and knocked Turkish envoys' heads together, and consequently had turned out to be a poor negotiator of peace. Gregory did not care. It was the only way to deal with such people, he had declared as he swaggered about Jassy in the famous coat of diamonds which his indulgent mistress had given him.

At last in 1772 it looked as if Catherine had reached the final limits of her patience. Potemkin's hope rose. The fruit for which he had patiently waited all these years was ready to fall—but again he had been outwitted. Panin put forth Vassiltchikoff, a young man of good looks, good family, and good manners; Catherine conceived a violent physical attraction for him.

Potemkin had fallen into a fit of despair. He was sure all his carefully laid plans had gone for naught. The long slow years had passed, only to have Catherine choose the first attractive man who was placed before her.

Meanwhile, Gregory Orlov had awakened to the danger which threatened him and had begun a famous breakneck ride from Jassy to St. Petersburg; but at Gatchina he was stopped. There he had been asked to resign his many offices. He had sent word to Catherine that if she wished to get rid of him she must dismiss him. He was given permission to travel for his health, thus gaining the distinction of being the first of her lovers to receive his disgrace in this delicate manner. He had disregarded the order and been threatened with imprisonment at Ropscha, where his brother had killed Peter. Gregory had sent word to Catherine that whenever she should visit him in his prison he would be delighted to entertain her there. She had asked for the return of the famous miniature of herself, which he constantly wore. He had sent her the valuable frame but kept the picture, telling her she would never receive it from him.

Catherine had begun to waver; she could not help loving this man. She had sent him, as a token, a roll of newly minted gold coins. He had tossed them to a friend. To those who were pressing her to get rid of him she had exclaimed, "You have banished him from my Court, but you will never banish him from my heart."

Then Vassiltchikoff had begun to bore Catherine. Potemkin, who had informers at the Court, had heard and plucked up courage. At that time he began to use what in later centuries was to be known as publicity. Rumours began to fly about that he had gone into solitude because of a broken heart. He let it be known that he contemplated entering a monastery. Catherine had heard; and sent her friend, the Countess Bruce, with a message that he should be of good cheer, that his hour would soon come.

Potemkin had waited—and then again was crushed by defeat. Orlov had forced his way into her presence, and at the sight of the man she had capitulated. She presented him with fifty thousand roubles and an elaborate silver service. Worse still, Potemkin learned that she had restored him all the offices he once held.

Since that time he had lain in his tent listlessly, a crushed man. He scarcely ate; he took no interest in anything. Popoff, who had weathered many of his sieges of melancholia, recognized this one as the worst of all. As a last resort, to awaken some spark of life in his master, he had stationed the young soldier outside the tent to sing Potemkin's song. The *balalaika* tinkled on, the singer hummed the introductory refrain.

"Stop him, Popoff! I don't want to hear it."

Popoff stilled the voice. He tried to reason with Potemkin, to cheer him up; but all his efforts were useless. The arrival of the courier from Tsarskoe Selo in St. Petersburg, with a letter from the Empress addressed to him, roused no interest. Popoff pleaded with him to open it and read it. Finally he consented and listlessly began to read:

GENERAL AND CHEVALIER,

I know that you are so busy with military duties that you have no time to read letters, and although I don't know yet whether your bombardment has been successful, I am nevertheless certain

that whatever you undertake is due to your intense desire to serve me personally as well as our country. But since I, on my side, want to save all brave intelligent people in my realm, I beg you not to expose yourself to danger needlessly. On reading this letter you will probably ask yourself a question ! Why was it written ? I can answer this in the following way : It is written so that you can have confirmation of my thoughts about you, for I always wish you well.

CATHERINE.

P.S.—Tell Brigadier-General Paul Potemkin I thank him for the way he has defeated the Turks.

A changed Potemkin bounded from the couch and spoke crisply to Popoff :

" Go to General Rumantzoff ; tell him I want leave of absence to go to St. Petersburg immediately ! "

" Immediately ? What grounds, General, shall I give for your request ? "

Potemkin smiled and tapped Catherine's letter in the palm of his hand.

" Should the General ask you, Popoff, say to him that I have just received a letter from the Empress, in which I can plainly read that she wants me to come to her ! "

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER ONE

1774

POTEMKIN'S carriage rattled along the road to Tsarskoe Selo, the immense, dreary Palace begun by Catherine the First, finished by Elizabeth, inhabited by Catherine the Second, and neglected by Paul, her son. Listlessly he gazed out the window at the empty desert country surrounding the Palace, which was itself built on a swamp. They were nearing the grounds now ; on either side of the road were posts from which hung large oil lamps. In all there were eleven hundred of them, and they had become famous throughout the country. A gang of serfs was out trimming, filling and lighting them, an arduous and extravagant task performed wherever Catherine held Court.

In the formal and rather tasteless gardens, arches, monuments, columns and pyramids reared their ugly forms. Potemkin's lips curled in disdain as he saw them scattered about the gardens ! Catherine's taste was obviously bad. A new arch, of huge proportions and poor location, drew from him an audible snort. It commemorated Gregory Orlov's conquest of the smallpox plague in Moscow.

To Potemkin it also marked the end of the Orlovs. This time he had vanquished them. The family had lost its power ; Gregory was definitely banished from the presence of the Empress. True, it had been a handsome banishment ; he was to receive an allowance of 150,000 roubles a year, and a gift of 100,000 roubles outright accompanied his orders to travel. Besides these considerations he was allowed the use of any of the Empress's houses near Moscow, was given the privilege of dressing his servants in the Imperial livery, a house at Troitskaia Pristagne, a magnificent silver service, and all the furnishings of his private apartment at the Palace. Catherine promised her former lover 4,000 serfs ; but such was her affection for him that at the last moment she offered 10,000 and let him select them personally.

For a time he was to be unhappy away from her presence. But soon his own cousin, Mlle Zinovief, came into his life, and he fell in love with her. Catherine overrode the protests of the Church against the consanguineous marriage, and he

finally made her his wife. When she died of consumption, he lost his mind and fell victim to hideous lunacies. With these Catherine, alone of all the Court, had patience and understanding. Such was her love for the man who put her on the throne, who was in all but name her husband for the ten best years of her life, and the father of her children.

Potemkin felt gay, for he knew that with all these beneficencies his rival was indeed out of the way. They were the consolation prizes that Catherine heaped upon her discarded lovers. Had not Vassiltchikoff fared very well in a more modest way?

As for the arch to Gregory, that eyesore would not remain long to annoy him. Like the mausoleums to defunct pet dogs, with which it was surrounded, the swamp would slowly absorb it.

The carriage turned up the driveway and drove past cupolas, little houses, minarets, artificial islands on small lakes, and all sorts of stone trumpery. Additions and novelties of all sorts were in the process of construction. Suddenly there was a swish and a whir, and piercing feminine screams broke out as two young maids of honour took a wild ride on the coach hill, an amusement device of graduated hills down which little cars sped at breakneck speed. Catherine, now forty-five, rarely used the contrivance, but enjoyed watching her young people amuse themselves on it.

Potemkin looked at the two young girls as they alighted breathless and thrilled. Some serfs came and pulled the little cart back for a second ride. Potemkin threw himself back in the seat with irritation. He had taken a ride on the coach hill once, and it had bored him.

He contemptuously spat out the clove of garlic he was chewing, and took to gnawing his nails, a persistent habit which had robbed them of their whites. The linen cuffs of his uniform were spotless, as was his uniform itself. His hands and face were grimy.

As they approached the Palace itself, Potemkin gazed at it with more than casual interest. This time the place was to be his home. He was pleased that it was built of stone instead of the makeshift wooden construction of Elizabeth's day. The gilded ornaments glinting in the afternoon sun hurt

his solitary eye, but he delighted in knowing the richness and splendour they foretold, richness and splendour which at last were to be his.

His face flushed and his heart beat faster as they actually drew up to the Palace door. He was going to meet Catherine. This time it would not be as a clever and amusing person attached to the Court, but as a man destined to be closely intimate with the woman who was its head. All these long years he had sighed in her presence, written notes drenched with love, circulated stories of his hopeless longing for her. And now here he was. It seemed as if the hope of this present moment had been with him all the thirty-five years of his life.

With great pomp and ceremony the major-domo met him at the door. A veritable army of lackeys, servants, guards, officers, ladies-in-waiting, nobles and others were gathered in an impressive array. From the tail of his wandering eye Potemkin saw the gathering; secretly he was profoundly impressed, outwardly he was bored. The carriage door was opened smartly, steps were placed alongside it to make alighting easier. Everyone stood tense and anxious, waiting for the great man to appear.

Then Potemkin received one of those sudden, startling notions which were to endear and to infuriate, to vex and to please, to arouse Catherine and keep her interested in him for many a year. He decided to stay in the carriage until he felt good and ready to descend. For one solid hour, the eagerly awaited, long-expected Potemkin sat in his carriage and stared at a button on the upholstery. People stood; their bones ached; they shifted their positions a trifle; but they kept absolutely silent.

Why this meaningless and inconsiderate action? Eyes looked at each other and asked the question. There seemed to be no sense or reason in it.

But there was. Potemkin was a master of effects and of the dramatic. He had sprung the inexplicable and the unexpected. He knew that Catherine must be wondering why he sat in the carriage and why they all stood reverently waiting. That was what he wanted; the creation of wonder and interest in all, from the lowest serf to Catherine herself.

Others merely passed through the doors of the Palace. Potemkin was making a glorious stage entrance.

He waited until he reached the breaking point, until he felt sure that all those waiting would think that he was liable to stay there for weeks and months. Then he suddenly jumped up and left the carriage. It was the perfect finish for the action. Everybody was just as surprised when he left as when he kept them waiting.

He allowed himself to be ushered through the long *salons*, many of them more than a hundred paces in length. Every room was richly filled with the most elaborate and costly furnishings. Catherine would have none of the broken tables and chairs of Elizabeth.

The lavishness of it all was exciting to Potemkin, for he felt it was partly his now. But the pleasure within him showed on his face as intense disgust. Not once did he smile ; not once did he deign to make a reply or acknowledge the salutations of those who knew him. Then, to everyone's amazement, he smiled and nodded to one of the lackeys who functioned in the Hermitage at Catherine's parties. The poor fellow's surprise was exceeded only by that of the nobles.

Coming to the quarters where Catherine's maids of honour slept, the procession halted. The doors of the apartment occupied by Mlle Protassof, the chief maid of honour, were thrown open and Potemkin was ushered into the room. His indifference gave way to great surprise. He had expected to be ushered into Catherine's rooms. By the time he realized that she was not present the doors had closed on him, and he was alone with Mlle Protassof.

The two exchanged looks which were anything but amiable. Protassof, a lady in her late forties, wore her usual expression, a scowl. Her complexion was dark and blotchy. Her dress was badly cut, none too clean, and on it Potemkin could see pinned in a prominent spot a huge brooch with Catherine's miniature on it.

Potemkin was more than surprised to see Mlle Protassof still about Catherine. She was a relative of the Orlovs and had been introduced to the Court by them. Her temper and disposition were famous for their bad qualities, and Catherine referred to her as " My Queen."

Surely with the fall of the Orlovs this termagant should have gone into the discard. Catherine, however, disliked discarding anyone, no matter how incapable or unpleasant. Protassof, together with her cook, renowned as being one of the worst in Russia, stayed with her till her death.

After a long, dismal silence she finally barked, "Tea?" and pointed to a tray set out on a low table.

Potemkin grunted "No," slouched into a chair, picked his nose and then gnawed at a raw turnip he had in his pocket.

Protassof took snuff, stifled the sneeze and then solemnly had her tea.

"Where's the Empress, you filthy old cow?" Potemkin ripped at her.

"Ill, swine."

"You lie."

Protassof shrugged her shoulders and munched a sugared cake with slushing noises, for most of her teeth were missing. She wiped her hands on her dress, rang for a lackey, and had the tea things removed. When he had gone she took more snuff, snapped the cover shut, and spoke.

"Now, General, I will say all I have to say. Because her Imperial Highness is ill, I am supposed to entertain you."

"You? You loathsome monster, you couldn't entertain a——"

"Perhaps not. But such is my duty."

"Where the devil's the Empress?"

"Ill, you ass. Are you deaf? I told you."

Potemkin glared at her a few moments and then whirled his chair about so that he sat with his back to her.

So he was going to be put through the same rigmarole as Vassiltchikoff! Catherine had instituted a regular procedure for her lovers. First they were invited to tea by Protassof, then Catherine would drop in casually, say a few words and leave. During that period she threw Protassof a signal to indicate whether she was to go further in her duties. If the aspirant impressed Catherine, Protassof invited him to stay for dinner, and then for the night. The next day Protassof made a report to her mistress of the lover's qualifications. If a few weeks elapsed and Protassof had not contracted a disease as a result of the trial, the lover would then receive a physical

examination from the Court physician, Dr. Rogerson. On passing this he would be accepted.

Potemkin sat with folded arms and fumed. It was an insult and an outrage for him to be subjected to this business. He could understand it with Vassiltchikoff, but not with himself. Since Catherine knew him so well she did not bother to appear, merely using the well-worn excuse of illness. For hours not a word came from either party. Potemkin had at last met a complete equal in sulking ability.

Finally he rose and looked at her with a wry face. Already she was being called " L'Éprouveuse " (the proving ground). Over thirty men were to display their prowess to her, and have it reported back to Catherine, but her life apparently was charmed, for she reached a ripe, healthy, and dour old age.

Looking at her, Potemkin knew there was no way out of this situation but to submit.

" All right, L'Éprouveuse ; let's get to bed and have it over with," he said as he opened his collar.

Potemkin wandered about the room in high dudgeon. The fragments of a beautiful crystal bowl lay on the floor in eloquent testimony of his mood.

Dr. Rogerson, the Queen's physician, had quit his presence some hours back. The poor Englishman did not know what to make of this man whom Orlov had called Cyclops. He had been sent to him on the Empress's orders and had examined him. When he told him that he was a perfect physical specimen, instead of being pleased, Potemkin roared at him. He shouted that he was no stud bull, and would not be examined in such a fashion. He inveighed against the close watch which had been kept on him since his demonstration with Protassof, protested about the two solid weeks when his footsteps had been dogged and he had not been permitted to see anyone. When he had finished his roaring at the doctor, Potemkin thrust a letter into his hand and bade him take it to his mistress. Then, grasping the little doctor by the seat of his breeches and the collar of his coat, he had thrown him out of the room.

In the time which had passed since Dr. Rogerson's hurried exit, Potemkin had whiled away the hours with a continuous round of cursing, punctuated by furious pacings up and down

his room, and by the occasional smashing of some fragile object.

Potemkin was demonstratively angry for several reasons. In the first place, he really did feel angry. In the second place, he was putting on a tremendous show of it so that Catherine would know all about it. And in the last place, anger was the appropriate sauce for the meat contained in the letter he had sent Catherine. In his note he had very calmly written that since she was so particular about whom she had for a lover, he also was particular about whom he took for a mistress. He did not cherish the idea of intimacy with a woman who had had the affections of countless men, and in the two weeks of solitude which she had forced upon him he had reached the conclusion that it might perhaps be best to let matters go. In other words, he felt it wise to decline the proffered position of aide-de-camp to Her Majesty.

As the hours trickled away, he began to wonder whether he had not overplayed his hand. He had thought out every step of the way so carefully ; had he erred ? He decided he had not. The time to find out who held the whip-hand in this sort of business was before it began, not after everything was finished.

Vassiltchikoff had with her been a veritable bird in a gilded cage. He was constantly under guard and could go nowhere without a pass from his mistress. He was denied the society of all women. Every request of his was silenced by a present of some ten thousand roubles.

Potemkin fancied no such existence. He would be at least an equal, if not a superior. He was no popinjay, no male concubine.

Still, it would be fearful if she decided not to have him at all under such circumstances. He was just about to fling himself on the couch and go off into a long introspective spree when a lackey came from the Empress with a letter. He did not feign impatience this time, but tore it from the man's hands and ripped it open.

It was perhaps one of the most remarkable documents Catherine had ever written. Humbly and contritely it begged Potemkin to consider her as his mistress. In a plain, meek style it told the story of her marriage to Peter, of her affairs

with Saltykov, with Orlov and Vassiltchikoff. She did not scruple to dodge any issues. She spoke quite frankly of her relations to all these men. She mentioned the time the affairs lasted, what she thought of her former lovers and what they thought of her. At the close of the long letter she swore that this was the whole story of her love-life, and begged him to believe it and urged him to accept her favours.

It was more than he had expected or had dared hope for. He read the letter slowly and thoughtfully, concealing from the lackey whatever emotion he might feel, for he knew Catherine would surely question the man about every move he had made. When he had finished the letter he called Popoff and told him to file it away.

The lackey stood waiting and finally mustered up the courage to address Potemkin, "Her Royal Highness is awaiting some reply, General Potemkin."

Potemkin flung himself upon the sofa, and dipped his hand into the bowl of sugar which stood constantly by it. He munched a few pieces loudly, and then, with his mouth still full, said thickly :

"Tell her I'll come over, but that she will have to wait. I'm tired after Dr. Rogerson's examination."

CHAPTER TWO

1774

CATHERINE had by this time worked out her system of favouritism to perfection, and Potemkin found himself in its meshes. All her previous love affairs had been unsatisfactory to her for one reason or another ; she had therefore instituted a regimen which would spare her as much heart-break as possible.

There was nothing unusual in the Empress having a favourite. Elizabeth had had three, and Catherine I one, while Louis of France had his Pompadour and bore as best he could that lady's meddling in the affairs of government. Catherine not only bore her lovers' meddling in the government, but actually insisted upon their doing so. This, Potemkin was more than willing to do.

He had been in power for a few weeks now, and was finding his life as favourite a trifle tedious. The appointment as aide-de-camp to Catherine was a mere technicality ; with this title he would be free to be in her presence always, without inviting observation or reproach.

His first pleasure in his private apartment at the Palace had quickly palled. At the beginning there was deep satisfaction in realizing that he had supplanted Gregory Orlov, who had given up its tenancy because of him. He had enjoyed re-furnishing it to suit his own taste, and the great expense involved was borne by Catherine. It was a thrill to know that none but he had the use of the private staircase that led from his quarters directly to those of the Empress.

Now he found himself becoming dissatisfied with the place. He had always been a restless person, given to changing his abode with his whim. It was the nomadic strain in him, the same strain which was to be found in all the old Russians. It irked him to find himself confined to the same suite of rooms, to have all his movements watched, to be refused permission to come and go as he pleased.

When Catherine retired at ten, he was required to give her his arm and retire with her. Speech with other women was prohibited, and he was not allowed to dine out when they were present. He attended Catherine at all parties, balls, operas, theatres and excursions of pleasure. While it was very flattering to have her talk to him incessantly right through

the three acts of a play, and to have all the audience see and be impressed by this mark of distinction on her part, it was unpleasant to realize that such would be his fate and duty for a long time to come.

Catherine's adored grew exceedingly restive under these restraints. He took refuge in melancholic moods, pleas of illness, bursts of temper, and other similar demonstrations. His mistress worried. She wrote him notes, pleaded with him, hovered over him like a mother and thought of him all the time. Observing the effect he had created, Potemkin did not change his tactics. He might try Catherine to the point of riling her, but never to the point where she might lose interest in him. To make a contrast to his mood he would suddenly become all tenderness, all attention. He would flash with the witticisms and clever turns of thought she so delighted in. At such times Catherine would become so grateful that tears of joy would flow from her eyes.

The initial present of 100,000 roubles he had received, as well as the monthly stipend of 12,000, he squandered rapidly. His elaborate household and gorgeous clothing did not satisfy him. He wanted honours. Catherine showered upon him every one that Russia could offer, save the Grand Ribbon of St. George: to gain this he had to command a victorious army. She secured all the worth-while European decorations for him, except the Garter, which England refused to give to her lovers, and the Golden Fleece, which Austria gave only to Roman Catholics.

He longed to wear a miniature of Catherine in a frame of diamonds over his heart, as Gregory Orlov did. He badgered her for a year, and finally got it. One year later Joseph II of Austria made him a prince of the Holy Roman Empire.

He made his orders a source of income. If he left off wearing some nation's decoration it signified that that country was out of his favour. Potemkin would then receive a handsome cash present and all would be serene.

He loved jewels and Catherine loaded him with them. Diamonds were the vogue. When he died he had 1,174,877 roubles' worth ($1,503,765) of them.

A new idiosyncrasy developed in Potemkin. He would polish his jewels with a brush while people talked to him. He

found that it was very distracting to people who had audiences with him, and so he indulged in the practice frequently.

Catherine gave him at least thirty-seven thousand serfs and he was to own at least double that amount later on. Castles, houses, money were all to be his ; he would simply draw upon the treasury. Once Prince Viazemsky held up a demand of his for ten thousand roubles, first asking Catherine whether or not he should pay it. She told him with irritation, " He must want it, give it to him."

The desire for power and money, for valuable things, and for position, had always been fierce within him. Now it became insatiable. He was constantly demanding something of Catherine. It became a positive mania and she yielded to it with little protest.

Catherine had known Potemkin since the day of her ascent to the throne, but it was only after she had taken the man as her lover that she began to learn of his foibles and traits. More and more she came to realize that she had taken unto herself a man of desires, of cravings and lusts. His appetite for foods would cause him to send high-ranking officers scurrying thousands of miles for a melon, a certain type of cucumber, a bowl of his favourite sterlet soup, a puff pastry or a dish of cherries. His desire to please his mistresses made him send important officers to Paris, in the heat of battle, for a wagon-load of perfumes or a pair of embroidered slippers. His craving for novelty and entertainment would cause officers to ferret out two men who could do a certain gypsy dance, or a man who knew by heart the amazing intricate Russian religious calendar, with its daily saints' days dedicated to scores, and sometimes hundreds of male and female saints.

Now, at the beginning of his career he was already indulging his fancies. Having heard that St. Petersburg boasted of an unparalleled chess player, he hired the man, giving him the sole duty of playing for Potemkin's amusement.

He had been spending the day indolently lolling on his couch, drinking *kvas* and gnawing raw onions, and watching this master player, whom he had pitted against one of his serfs. By dint of liberal application of the rod, this serf had been transformed into an admirable chess player ; serfs could

be transformed into almost anything at all by this simple means. To Potemkin's credit it must be said he seldom used it. His respect and humanity for the underdog were as great as his arrogance and discourtesy to the well-connected and highly bred; and as a result, his servants, like Catherine's, took great advantage of him.

Since the very early morning his room had been crowded by courtiers come to pay respect to the new favourite; through him, and him alone, could access to the Queen and favours from her be granted. There were foreign dignitaries, ambassadors, people with petitions for all sorts of things waiting in the room. All stood silently and patiently.

Potemkin paid absolutely no attention to them, apparently oblivious of their existence. Never glancing in their direction, he focused his squinting half-blind eye on the chess board, where the master and the serf were engaged in a prolonged, intricate, and very slow game. Potemkin preferred to watch rather than play; it required less effort.

His immobility was broken only by a facial tic of recent development, by the occasional gnawing of his finger-nails, or by a loud sonorous belch resulting from the *kvas*-and-onion combination. The solitary garment he wore was his old and greasy robe, which lay open with charming *naïveté*. His feet told eloquently that his acquaintance with the famous Russian bathhouse had been of no recent date. They were shod in a pair of kicked-out leather slippers most serfs would disdain to use. His hair was matted and snarled. His bare legs, visible through the robe, were plainly bowed in shape.

A lackey from Catherine's chambers below elbowed his way through the patient but exhausted throng. The highest dignitaries in it waited on Potemkin as the lowest servants, and were proud of the privilege. They poured him his *kvas*, retrieved the slippers which constantly dropped from his toes, and replaced them tenderly. Potemkin paid them no heed, nor rendered them the slightest thanks.

Neophytes amongst the crowd let out exclamations of surprise when the lackey pushed himself without any ado into Potemkin's presence and bawled, "General, the meeting of the council has been waiting for you in her Imperial Highness' closet."

Potemkin pretended not to listen, and the man repeated



CATHERINE II
Portrait by Rokotov.

the announcement. Potemkin waved his hand at him with slight impatience and mumbled, " I'm not going."

The lackey shrugged his shoulders and trotted off to come back in a few moments with a request from Catherine that Potemkin give his reasons.

Without taking his eyes from the game he said, " My answer will be found in the first Psalm, first verse, of the Bible."

On the floor below, Potemkin's reply created astonishment. Catherine's face tightened and showed anger. She opened her mouth in dismay, disclosing the fact that her front tooth was missing ; then suddenly she roared with laughter. Between chortles she managed to say, " The man is marvellous, a genius, the greatest wit of his time. He will be my greatest protégé, gentlemen."

Panin and Besborodko, Potemkin's enemies, were among those present. They were at a loss to understand her outburst and finally Catherine advised the fat and wily Panin to look up the first Psalm, first verse, in the Bible. Smiling against his will he read aloud, " Blessed is the man who goes not in the council of the ungodly."

Some minutes after Potemkin sent his reason down to Catherine, he suddenly jumped up from his couch, brushed his way through the crowd, and made for the private staircase which led to Catherine's apartments. He dashed in through the secret doorway in her room and stood there before the startled gaze of the council, which had gone on with its business without him. It was not only the suddenness of his appearance which startled them, but also his *déshabillé* before the Empress. His appearance had not been improved any by the loss of a slipper on the stairs.

The members of the council turned to look at Catherine. Her face was a deep crimson under the white powder and bright rouge. She opened her mouth, but she was too outraged for the words to come out.

" Matushka, throw these pigs out. I must speak to you . . . alone."

Catherine's lips twitched. She reached for the snuff-box on the table ; it was mislaid, as usual. Besborodko offered her his. The silence was deathly, and all save Potemkin were tense. Catherine took some snuff, spilling liberal amounts of it on her dress. After this she found her voice.

" Yes, General Potemkin ; I shall ask everyone to be kind enough to leave us, for what I shall have to say to you must be said when we are alone."

Panin and Besborodko exchanged glances and smiled. The Empress's remark was unmistakable in its import ! Potemkin was out of favour. They left the room silently after making their Russian bows to the right, left, and forward. It was the style used by men, but Catherine employed it herself ; stiffly, with great composure and dignity, she made the bows to them. The only sound came from Potemkin as he gnawed his onion.

Left alone, Catherine turned on him. Her wrath was terrible, but her voice even.

" Sir, how dare you come into my presence in this fashion ? "

" I don't understand, Matushka."

He flipped his robe innocently.

" You don't understand ? Well, let me tell you that your appearance is positively disgusting. This time you have gone too far."

Potemkin looked surprised, came up to her and laid his hands on her shoulders, towering above her medium height.

" Matushka, you wound me ; you hurt me. I sat upstairs thinking after I had sent you my message. ' My beloved needs me,' I said to myself. ' I am leaving her with those wolves, unprotected and alone. Is that the way to act with one who has been so good to me, and whom I love so much ? ' I jumped up, and came down as I am. That is all, Matushka."

As he spoke her anger rapidly cooled. It was evident that he was the complete master of her emotions. He took her in his arms and kissed her long and fervently ; and she submitted to his caresses, redolent as they were of sour-smelling *kvas* and pungent onions. There were tears in her eyes.

" Forgive me, Grisha, for having lost my temper."

" Of course, Matushka. But promise me you will never criticize me again for such a thing."

" I promise, Grishenka."

They fondled each other and he half led, half carried her towards her bed. She protested, saying she wished to wait till evening ; but her objections were of no avail. With his own hands he began clumsily to disrobe her. It was an awkward job, and he tore the stiff silver cloth dress in impatience.

" I couldn't wait, my angel, my love, my everything. Council or no council, I had to come to you . . . now."

" Matushka," he said softly, " I would like to be president of the College of War."

She looked at him with surprise.

" But Chernicheff is president ! "

" I know. Dismiss him and appoint me instead."

" I can't do that."

His attitude changed completely ; his eye glowered at her and he roared in terrifying tones that the lackeys could hear in the hallway.

" I insist and demand it ! "

" No."

" Very well then, I shall leave ! I shall quit this disgusting place. It is evil. I shall become a monk."

With that he left her side and strode across the room to the private staircase. Catherine ran after him in her bare feet and clung to him.

" No, no ! Don't leave ! Please ! Don't you see, Grisha ? It is impossible for me to dismiss Chernicheff like that."

" Nothing is impossible for you. You are Empress."

" But he helped me gain my throne."

" And so did I ! "

She shook her head in dismay and sighed.

" All right, Grishenka, have it your way. I shall make you vice-president."

" No ; president."

" But . . ."

She could not finish but sank into a chair and burst into tears, moaning over and over how people were always taking advantage of her and how hard her lot was.

Potemkin recognized acting when he saw it. He slumped in a chair and gnawed his nails while she wept. After much thought, he spoke.

" All right, Matushka, let me be vice-president. I will make it so unpleasant for him that he'll resign."

Catherine ceased crying. She was happy he had agreed ; she felt she had won over him. He took her in his arms and kissed her, and they sank once more on the bed.

CHAPTER THREE

1775

THE monastery at Troitza harboured a most distinguished penitent, and apparently as deeply religious as he was penitent. For the past three weeks now, he had shut himself up in a small stone cell, living on roots and water and praying incessantly. For hours on end he would lie prone on the cold, damp stone floor before an icon of the Virgin. His genuflections, his signs of the cross were endless. He wore the coarse, cowled robe of the monks, and his feet were bare. In no wise did he differ from them except that he had not shaved his head. He was a most holy man, indeed . . . and also, he was Prince Potemkin, who, since his appointment by Joseph II as a prince of the Holy Roman Empire, was rapidly becoming known simply as " the Prince."

That he should engage himself in such religious fervour was not surprising. Priests had educated him ; a bishop had loaned him money to start in life. His strongest allies were members of the Church. Religion, what in Russia was called the Old Faith, intrigued him. He would argue and dispute about it for hours—usually with his Generals. With priests in his retinue he argued military tactics.

On his many journeys it was rare for him not to stop off to inspect the churches he passed. He would either make his devotions or examine them intently. He was interested not only in the Russian Orthodox Church, but in others as well. He introduced the Jesuits into Russia and helped them build their churches. Even the despised Jews interested him, and among his entertainers were a group of very learned rabbis. Their heated disputes over questions he would set before them gave him great pleasure.

He had always been deeply religious and as he grew older his faith grew stronger and stronger. Always, through the whole of his life, there was the Church, with the seclusion of the monastery, waiting for him. When the burdens of his hectic life grew too great, that was where the escape lay. In his fits of melancholia and ennui, the Church was the one shining light, the only hope.

For that reason, after months of excesses and the greatest luxury, it was natural to find him at the Troitza Monastery living the humble, hard life of a monk.

The abbot of the monastery came down the corridor and halted before the cell of his distinguished guest. He waited patiently until the Prince had finished his devotions. Then Potemkin turned, knelt before him and kissed his hand. The abbot gave him his blessing.

" I have word from the outer world, dear Prince."

" I do not care to hear from the outer world, Holy Father."

" It comes from Popoff's man. He says to tell you that the Empress has set out to make a pilgrimage to our monastery."

The effect of this information on the penitent was astonishing. In his excitement and obvious joy he actually clutched the abbot.

" Good ! Excellent ! God be praised ! And she comes alone —without Panin, or Besborodko, or any of my enemies ? "

" There are only two ladies-in-waiting and her servants."

" God be thanked, my prayers are answered."

Potemkin crossed himself and knelt before the icon in his cell. Suddenly he turned to the abbot and in a voice of authority, quite out of place for one in a religious ecstasy, he said, " Now, you know my instructions, just what to say, just how each one of you is to act, when she comes here ? "

The abbot bowed in reply.

" All right then. See that everything goes off perfectly."

With that, Potemkin became the man of religion again, and prayed industriously for the smooth working of his plans.

Catherine had paid her devotions to the holiest icons in the monastery. Reverently she kissed the shrines holding relics of most holy saints. Provisions and gifts had been made, and a large cash donation given to the abbot. At eventide, mass was said and she attended.

The effects of all these devotions were cumulative. Catherine, always of queenly bearing, seemed to soften, yet without losing her autocratic dignity. At the close of the mass a young monk came up to her softly and said that the abbot wished to see her in private. Down the stone corridors they went until they reached one which led to the courtyard. Here the monk halted and said that the abbot wished to speak to Catherine alone, without her followers. Quietly she signed for them to go, and then she followed the monk.

In the courtyard she found the abbot. The hood of his drab robe was back, and his shaven head took on a luminosity in the twilight. His long white beard gave him a venerable and imposing appearance, and in his hands he held a golden crucifix which glinted in the dying sun. On either side of him stood a monk; their downcast eyes and clasped hands showed that they were at fervent prayer.

Catherine approached the abbot, knelt and kissed his hand and he, in turn, knelt and kissed hers. The monk who had guided her there left.

"You sent for me, Holy Father?"

The abbot nodded his head slowly and said, "Yes, Catherine, there is something I must tell you for the good of your eternal soul and for the salvation of Russia and its most Holy Church."

The two monks crossed themselves and so did Catherine.

"I have asked you here, Catherine, so that you will repent of your sins and be saved before it is too late."

The Empress looked a trifle surprised but did not interrupt.

"For years now, you have been living in open adultery. You have been consorting with men against the edicts of the Holy Church. The Church cannot approve an unblessed union, and the Autocrat of all the Russias is above neither the Church nor God. Even the humblest of its worshippers must marry or separate; even so, Catherine, you must do the same. If you do not do one or the other of these things, there is nothing before you save the blackest perdition. The fate of such sinners as you is to burn eternally in unending torment in the hottest fires of hell. I beseech you, therefore, to repent before it is too late."

While the abbot spoke these solemn words a figure in a monk's garb emerged from a cell and crossed the courtyard. In the dusk it was difficult to recognize any faces; but as the figure approached, Catherine dimly perceived through the opening of the cowl which went about the man's head a black patch over an eye.

The figure knelt and kissed the hand of the abbot, who continued speaking.

"He who has sinned with you, Catherine, has seen the error

of his ways. All these long weeks he has fasted, clothed himself in sackcloth and strewn ashes on his head ; yea, he has repented."

" Indeed, Holy Father, I have," mumbled Potemkin.

" Therefore, Catherine, do you the same."

It was growing so dark in the courtyard that it was difficult for them all to see each other, and Catherine made little effort to conceal her broad smile. She knew the man expected her to speak, but she merely bowed her head humbly, and waited for what she felt sure must eventually come.

At last Potemkin spoke.

" Yes, Catherine, the Holy Father has convinced me of my sins. The path now lies clearly before me ! I must give you up for the good of my soul. We have been wicked, we have been flouting God."

He paused and waited for her to remark upon his decision, but Catherine steadfastly maintained her unbroken silence. It nettled and disconcerted him.

The abbot stole a glance at the repentant sinner, as if wondering what to do next. One of the praying monks sniffed and made a scraping sound on the courtyard stones as he shifted his feet. Potemkin's tone was almost wheedling as he resumed.

" The Father Abbot has told me that marriage would surely win us forgiveness of our sins. We could be joined in holy wedlock quietly in this consecrated place."

He sighed, waited a brief instant, and then went on.

" Yes, I suppose that is impossible. Farewell, then, my beloved. There is nothing left for me now but to join this holy order and become a monk."

Catherine would have laughed aloud, if not for the astonishing self-control she always possessed. These were the words she had been waiting to hear. The man really thought he could inveigle her into matrimony with this little farce ! His impertinence amused her, but the thought that he could for one moment believe her stupid enough to succumb to the scheme vexed her.

Besides, there was Panin. If Madame Orlov could not rule Russia, then Madame Potemkin could not either. Grishenka was amusing as a lover, but to be tied to him until death

parted them was too much. His vagaries, his tempers, his personality, so intriguing to her in a lover, were potentially distasteful to her in a husband. And he was an unsightly being, with one eye, bowed legs, a tic, and a bad complexion. In the Chevalier Guards there were so many handsome men, younger men, less demanding, and all eager to love her. What a satisfaction there was in knowing one could change, that one was free to choose as long as one wished. Marry Potemkin? By no means!

And as for God and His hell, perhaps there was such a place . . . and perhaps there was not. Only when one died would one know. She felt she was a long way from being dead.

While thoughts like these flashed through her brain, her voice was all contriteness and sincerity.

"Holy Father Abbot and dear Prince, I have heard your words, I have listened to your counsels, and I agree that you are right."

Potemkin did not move, but the abbot could not resist lifting his head in pleased surprise. "Thanks be to God," he mumbled, and made the sign of the cross.

"Yes, we have sinned and we must repent. Religion should come first in our lives. Before God we are all equal, all His children.

"Grishenka, religion has touched your heart and prompted your conscience. Who am I to interpose, to put myself in the way of such a noble and great force? No, I cannot hold you back from what is right and good, from what God tells you to do. You must serve a mistress greater than myself, Holy Mother Church!"

She paused an instant to note the slight convulsive twitch that ran through the kneeling Potemkin and then went on.

"Yes, my dear Grishenka, my beloved Prince, my irreplaceable right hand, I shall miss you more than you can ever know, as you spend your life in these dim cloisters. There will be many times when I shall long for your presence and cry silently as I lie awake in the still night. But I shall have the solace of knowing that you have at last found happiness, that you have won divine consolation in the arms of the Heavenly Father. God bless you and keep you, amen."

She made the sign of the cross, faced about with great dignity,

and left the courtyard. Potemkin jumped to his feet; his wrath was tremendous and magnificent. The abbot and his monks shot him a frightened glance and fled, leaving him alone in the blue-white moonlight. He stood still for minutes, fuming and biting his nails, unable to give voice to rage. Then he shook his fist in the direction Catherine had taken, and shouted in a voice so deafening that it penetrated the thick stone walls and interrupted the holy men at their prayers.

"The dirty bitch, the harlot, the strumpet, the ungrateful whore!"

Did Potemkin actually make her his wife later on? When Lanskoi, one of her lovers, died in 1784, rumours were bruited about that Potemkin took advantage of her grief and persuaded her to marry him. Do a series of unpublished letters from Catherine to Potemkin, recently released by the U.S.S.R., give these rumours basis?

The notes are passionately intimate ones which confirm history and shed some new lights on Catherine. In them, every now and then, she refers to Potemkin as her husband. To quote from them, "My husband, my prophecy then has come true; abuse of the power you have acquired over me does me harm and removes your own desires further from you."

Sometimes, almost fearing to put the word on paper, Catherine simply wrote, "H." An extremely *intime* note, the sort a wife might write, reads, "My soul, my dear, my priceless one, my dove. I have a slight diarrhœa, but otherwise I am well, dear sir, my friend, my dear h [usband]."

Pet names in strings, the "caressives" of Russian grammar, were ordinary usage. Still, "husband" was unusual in such a connotation.

Was it only a pet name, or was it fact? Did Potemkin gain his wish as he gained all others? Was he really Czar of Russia with Catherine?

CHAPTER FOUR

1776

POTEMKIN went into one of his long sulks after the failure of his scheme to marry Catherine. He was a very poor loser, and when anything went wrong he became the small boy who takes refuge in his moods. For a while the thought of becoming a monk did appeal to him, but after a few days of singing hymns and reciting prayers the thought of such a sparse, unrelieved existence began to pall upon him. Catherine knew he was still at Troitza ; but if she felt sorry for him or was in any way aware of his state, she did not let him know.

During his devotions, dreams of sterlet soup, of beautiful women, of servants and nobles waiting upon him, of people prostrating themselves before him, of power and of glory, all would come to him. He began to notice his surroundings and thought of becoming an archbishop, or perhaps head of the whole Church. He would lose much, of course, by entering it. After becoming the head he could go no higher ; and once in it he would have to stay. Still, there was much to be said in its favour. He would have his escape in religion, yet still be able to live magnificently and to enjoy the society of women. He began to think of asking Catherine to appoint him an archimandrite.

Grigori Alexandrovitch Potemkin, Archimandrite of the most holy Russian Orthodox Church ! He pictured himself in heavy golden robes encrusted with gems. He saw himself with a priceless golden crown, such as the high priests wore, on his head. He visioned the crowded church and the humble worshippers standing through the masses he conducted. The speculation gave him a glow, which passed when other thoughts wafted through his mind.

He would miss a great deal. To be the Empress's favourite was an enviable thing, especially if one enjoyed its power while holding it. He was no Vassiltchikoff.

Shortly after he had assumed office, Vassiltchikoff had written someone a letter in which he said, " The footing on which Potemkin stands is very different from that on which I stood. I was but a kept girl. They treated me like one. They wanted me to see nobody and I was not allowed to go out. Whenever I asked for anything I got no reply whatever. And

when I thought I should like the Ribbon of St. Anne I spoke to the Empress about it. Next day I found bills to the value of thirty thousand roubles in my pocket. My mouth has always been closed in this fashion, and I was sent back to my quarters. As for Potemkin, he gets what he wants. He dictates his wishes. He is the master."

But that was at the beginning of the affair, when Catherine had written to her friend, Baron Grim, ecstatically about Potemkin : " I have sent away one of the handsomest but also one of the most boring of my citizens. And I don't know myself how it happens but his place was taken by one of the most amusing and delightfully original persons of this iron age."

The Prince felt uneasy. Catherine's refusal to marry him indicated that those times were passing. Not that he was by any means completely out of favour ; Catherine still liked him, but not with the fervour she once displayed. The caprices he indulged in did not now amuse her as much as formerly. More and more often was she given to drinking her large glasses of cold water. Her interest in her animals grew, and she lavished increased care on the dogs that Dr. Dimsdale, who had vaccinated her, had brought from England. They slept in miniature beds on real mattresses in the same room with her. She gave too much affection to a new pet, a tame white squirrel he had bought her. She spent a great deal of time in an aviary she had built, a huge cage the size of a room, in which hundreds of beautiful birds sang. Gardening, which she called plantomania, occupied her often. But what was most important, she rested her eyes for long stretches at a time on the beautifully modelled faces and the stalwart figures of youths in her military service.

Potemkin, for the second time in his life, reached the decision that the Church would have to get along without him. He decided to go back to the Court in a leisurely way. There he was politely and cordially received by his mistress. No mention was made by either party of the fiasco at Troitza. No unpleasant words or actions took place between the couple ; but still there was a certain indefinable cooling off. Potemkin, who had made his life work the study of Catherine, noticed it first. Those in the Court became aware of it only when Catherine herself realized what was happening.

Rumours began to fly about. Ambassadors wrote to their governments dispatches with the most minute details of the scandal, for a change of favourites in Catherine's régime was a change in government. There would be new people to bribe, new favours to be paid for, new sympathies to be aroused, new people to cultivate.

The largess which Potemkin demanded for even the most dilatory attentions began to slacken ; foreign decorations were a little harder to get ; the crowds which paid him court thinned out a trifle, and some even whispered while they stood and waited upon him. High officials began to resent being called vile names, and took offence at his cuffings and slappings.

Potemkin was hardly a fool. He was keenly sensitive even to the most minute changes. Clouds did not have to gather, low rumbles of thunder did not have to sound, the trees did not have to rustle in an uneasy breeze to tell him a storm was brewing. The Prince was his own barometer. He felt the pressure in the atmosphere, and made preparations.

He had friends and also a remarkable ability for intrigue. When Rumantzoff came back from the treaty of peace with the Turks, beside him in the carriage sat one Zavadoffsky. That Zavadoffsky should have accompanied him may have been mere chance ; but it also may have been due to a little skilful arranging on Potemkin's part. One thing was certain : the delicate-featured, tall, likeable youth was attractive to Catherine. He was faintly reminiscent of the departed Poniatowski, now rewarded by Catherine by being made the unhappy king of Poland, a kingdom which she and Frederick the Great ruthlessly partitioned like a pie whenever they were hungry for more land. Potemkin knew that after his stormy petrel self, the dove-like Zavadoffsky would attract by mere contrast ; yet he did nothing whatever to prevent their meeting. Much to Catherine's surprise, there was no explosion from her lover when she appointed Zavadoffsky as her secretary. But when gifts from her began to pour on Potemkin in an ever-increasing stream, the time became ripe for action. He knew his Catherine : when she became too generous it was because her conscience was troubling her and she was laving its wounds with largess.

She had fallen in love with Zavadoffsky; of that there could now not be the slightest doubt. Potemkin asked for leave of absence, giving as excuse his wish to go to Novgorod to inspect some troops under his command. It was granted, and he went. Though he had removed himself from the scene, his informers kept him well posted. As Catherine's affection for Zavadoffsky grew, so did a strange and unexplicable illness come over the Prince.

The Empress was caught between two conflicting emotions; she found herself loving one man and feeling sorry for another. She tried unsuccessfully to centre her attentions on one of them. As time went on, her love for the youthful Zavadoffsky increased, and so did the guilt she felt about Potemkin. She lost weight; she worried.

Finally the natural urgings within her, very strong indeed for a lady of forty-seven, settled matters. Zavadoffsky was exposed to Mlle Protassoff's dubious charm and to Dr. Rogerson's medical scrutiny; the apartment with the secret staircase to Catherine's chambers was filled by Zavadoffsky while Potemkin was away. There was the ritual of the hundred thousand roubles in the drawer, the appointing of a new aide-de-camp—and then Potemkin returned.

He said little, but settled in another apartment of the Palace. Catherine found this arrangement somewhat cramped. With exquisite tact she suggested to her erstwhile lover that he seek a new abode. She presented him with a palace at Anitchikoff, completely furnished, and with the inevitable large and heavy silver service.

Even with Potemkin in other quarters, thoughts of him weighed heavily upon her. With charming thoughtfulness of his erratic health, Catherine sent him a suggestion—tantamount to orders—that he travel. Servants of the Prince bustled industriously to pack his elaborate belongings. Carriages were prepared and waiting at the door. They waited a whole day for the Prince; but when he did appear, it was not in his travelling clothes, but in his richest suit. Glittering with diamonds and decorations, he directed that a barouche be hitched up. When it came he said, "To the Hermitage," and entered.

Popoff and the other aides looked startled. The Hermitage!

He could not go there! He was a favourite in disgrace, and the Hermitage was only for those of the select inner circle. None but very old friends like Alexei and Gregory Orlov, or the reigning favourite, were admitted. Still, the Prince had ordered them, and they were there to obey.

Potemkin completely ignored the astonished glances of the lackeys when he arrived at the Hermitage. He paid not the slightest heed to the gasps and stares of Catherine's guests in the game room when he boldly entered it. The bickering and scrapping which generally went on stopped instantly. All save the Empress stared at him in dismay as he stalked into the place. Gregory Orlov, who had rushed back to the Court when he heard that Potemkin was in disgrace, let his cards fall out of his hand.

In his easiest and most insolent manner, Potemkin crossed the room. He made directly for the table at which Catherine was playing. Only Narishkin, Gregory Orlov, the Countess Bruce, and others in the most select intimacy with the Empress played there.

Potemkin pulled out a vacant chair next to Zavadoffsky and sat down. Catherine glanced at him for a few seconds. Then she picked up the deck of cards beside her, and dealt him a hand. Potemkin nodded thanks and arranged it. The Empress picked up her own hand, glanced at it and then at the Prince, and finally broke the tenseness in the room.

"You have always played luckily, my dear Prince," she said.

Potemkin smiled and made a bid, and Catherine smiled in return. Gregory Orlov made a throaty sound; disappointment, so heavy that it came near to illness, overcame him. He turned to the Empress and mumbled, "I wish . . . I beg to be excused . . . I am not well. I feel . . . Your Majesty . . . that there is no place for me here."

Tears were in his eyes. He kissed her hand fumblingly and then, without a word to the rest, stumbled from the room

Potemkin watched him go. There was something reminiscen about the man's exit. It made him think of the stumblin retreat he had made from Gregory's billiard room many year before.

The play went on at the tables after Orlov's leave-taking

but it was subdued and quiet. Dramatic things had occurred and people itched to discuss them ; but such gossip could not be indulged in while the Empress, Zavadoffsky and the Prince were in the room. All the players were a-tingle with the thought of the bombshells they would drop when they left.

Zavadoffsky, who loathed gambling and card playing, found it hard to concentrate. He felt as if the ground had been taken from under him. Yesterday, he had been the acknowledged favourite, in the kindest graces and most ardent embraces of the Empress sitting beside him. To-night, the discarded favourite had returned and was told that he " always played luckily." Zavadoffsky began to worry, and thought of all the friends who had backed him for the position. He had promised them all favours, and he himself had dreams of rising. Since he had become the favourite of the Empress, people had talked to him of power and glory ; and the even tenor of his ways had been changed. He fancied himself another Potemkin, with riches and honours. He glanced at Potemkin, sitting beside him and raking in the unset diamonds which were used as counters and wondered whether all his dreams were to crash.

The intricate machinery of a French enamel clock began to whir. Animated figures on it moved through complicated gyrations, and a tinkling bell struck ten times. Catherine finished her hand and rose. All rose with her, and Zavadoffsky offered her his arm to escort her back to her chambers and there await her pleasure.

Potemkin stepped forward simultaneously, and Catherine offered him her hand to kiss. He did so and then spoke in polite but very firm tones.

" Your Majesty will grant me the favour of a few moments' audience alone ? "

The entrance of the Prince had been a great enough shock for all, but this impertinence was beyond belief. Catherine looked at him with mild surprise, and then softly agreed to his request. In his most assured manner he offered her his arm and escorted her back to her closet, leaving the assemblage and the amazed Zavadoffsky staring after him.

Back in her chambers, Potemkin himself closed the door firmly and ordered lackeys and guards who might eavesdrop

out of earshot. Then he turned on Catherine. Now there was no humbleness in his manner; they were alone and equals. She was a woman and he was a man, and he dominated.

"Sit down and listen to what I have to say to you!"

Catherine pawed about in the pockets of her dress for her snuff box and could not find it. Finally she took some of the loose powder which generally was spilled into them, and snuffed it. Potemkin walked up to her, and the huge bulk of the man coming upon her forced her to sit down.

"So you're tired of me, and want to get rid of me, eh? All right, I don't mind. You want this Zavadoffsky person to live in my apartment? All right to that also. I hope he doesn't find it as confining as I did. But I want you to understand this: I'm no Vassiltchikoff, no Poniatowski, no Gregory Orlov. Don't think you can give me a palace, a pension, a silver service, a few thousand serfs, and say good-bye to me. Oh, no! Realize this, Katusha: Potemkin is not one of your male hackneys, no paramour you can engage and dismiss whenever you feel so inclined.

"Don't forget, I wear the orders of most of the civilized countries in the world. Next to Rumantzoff, I am the highest general in your army; and he'll go out soon or I'll know why. I am your chief Minister of State, I hold one position of power after another. You think you can take these offices away from me! Well, Katusha, unless you are a bigger fool than I think you are, you won't. You can't do without me, and you know it. There's no one to take my place."

She looked at him quietly, deeply impressed.

"You and I are made for each other. Together both of us rise; separated, both of us fall. I give you most of your ideas, I fight your battles——"

"That's not true, Grishenka."

"Don't interrupt me; it is. Why, you're so soft you can't say 'no' to any man! Look at the way you dithered about before you dismissed me! I had to go away and make it easy for you. Every time you want to be rid of somebody you have to come to me. I have to do all the unpleasant work for you."

"I managed for myself before you came, my dear Prince."

"Yes; but you were lucky, that was all. As times goes on, it grows increasingly harder for you. There's the Panin faction,

there's Besborodko. There's the Orlovs ; there's Zavadoffsky's friends ; and don't forget the Grand Duke Paul. He's the real claimant to the throne, and you know it. How did you get your place ? By an *opéra bouffe* revolution. Overnight he can snatch it from you in the same way. You haven't treated him any too well, and it's been me, all along, who's kept him under thumb. Now you want to get rid of me. All right, go ahead ; but God help you, if you do ! "

At the mention of her son, Catherine rose. The blood left her face and it was obvious that she had been frightened by the Prince's words.

" I never said, Grishenka, that you were to be deprived of your offices. I meant you to keep them."

" You did nothing of the sort. Don't lie to me ; I know you, Katusha, better than you know yourself. You're keeping me now because you know you need me. I'm frank enough to admit that I need you every bit as much."

He came to her in a more softened mood.

" My dear, don't you realize that, together, you and I can be great ? Physical love may be over between us. That cannot last forever with people like us. But something greater, more lasting can go on now, without its interference. Have your Zavadoffsky, and I'll have my mistresses ; that should not matter between us. Katusha, I have dreams and hopes. I want Catherine II to be Catherine the Great. I want to make her so. I want to get the Crimea for her. I want to gain what's left of Poland. I want to get even China for you !

" We'll build cities, ships, roads, universities, factories, everything to your glory. Our armies will conquer the world. Let me rule Russia, for you and with you."

She was under the spell of his words. He waited a moment before he said, " And can your pretty Zavadoffsky do all this for you ? "

She rose, elated, and held his hands in hers.

" No, never ; never, my dearest Grisha, my soul, my genius ! Only you could."

" You are happy at Anitchikoff ? " she asked after a moment.

" Oh, the place is all right, but the furnishings are abominable. I want new ones."

" Certainly, my dear. How much will you want ? "

He thought for a moment. He could ask for money to refurnish the place, pocket it and still keep everything which was there.

"Eighty thousand roubles."

"You shall have them to-morrow."

She was easy this evening. He might just as well have asked for more. An idea came to him.

"You gave Zavadoffsky one hundred thousand roubles. I insist that you give me the same."

"But I always give that sum to a new favourite."

"That makes no difference. From now on, no favourite must ever receive anything without my receiving a like sum. That goes from now on, no matter how many lovers you take. And incidentally, hereafter I shall select them for you. You can't be too careful of whom you take. Send the extra hundred thousand with the eighty thousand to-morrow."

She hesitated, but he looked so firm that she yielded. He kissed her hand respectfully and went towards the door.

"Now I'm going ; I'm very tired this evening. Shall I send Zavadoffsky in to you ?"

Her head was whirling, She felt depressed at the power this man had over her, and at the same time she felt a tremendous strength in his friendship. Sending him away had put a vague fear into her. Now she knew what it was. She needed him to lean on. She felt friendless in this vast country, where pitfalls yawned whenever she took a step. With Potemkin to guide her, she felt safe.

He waited for her to answer.

"Well, do you want him ? He's probably worrying his head off wondering what's happened."

"Yes, send him to me, please."

He left, and she dropped to her couch.

Zavadoffsky would be soothing after this wild man.

BOOK FOUR

CHAPTER ONE

1776–1785

BEING the favourite did things to Zavadoffsky's gentle character. It formed two new traits in him, ambition and arrogance. Both of these traits belonged also to Potemkin, who despised anyone else who attempted to display them.

At first it was in simple things that Zavadoffsky began to make himself impossible. One day, when he and Catherine were attending a lecture at the Academy of Sciences, a German professor of renown contradicted a statement which Catherine made. She admitted she was wrong, and was grateful for the correction. She was so zealous about learning, in fact, that she asked Zavadoffsky to return to the hall and convey her thanks. Greatly nettled, the official lover complied ; but later he used his influence to hound the poor pedagogue out of both the Academy and his lodgings.

He was made head of the loan bank and given a commission to found schools all over the country. Despite Zavadoffsky and his influence, a few worthy people did manage to get on the board of the commission and some good was accomplished.

These positions, however, were not enough for Zavadoffsky ; he decided to ally himself with the Orlovs against Potemkin. Gossip had it that they were due to return to power and that Potemkin was in the eclipse. Gossip erred. Potemkin was as strong as ever. He would have none of Zavadoffsky's machinations, and in short order Zavadoffsky was out of favour.

On July 8, 1777, the disgraced favourite found himself writing his friend, Count S. P. Vorontzoff, the sad news.

" I'm as unhappy as your conclusions are true. Bitter is my fate, for my heart is full of suffering and cannot stop loving. Obeying the wish of the one whose faithful subject I shall remain till the end of my days, I am leaving for the country. This is supposedly a leave of absence for a week, but can I believe anything like this ?—I entreat you, do not condemn her. Love and be attached to her if only because she will

always remain dear to my heart. I do not feel injured. I love her as much as I ever have, and when my passion ceases, gratitude will takes its place."

Zavodoffsky's words were prophetic. He never married; he, like Poniatowski whom he so greatly resembled, really did love Catherine. Ten years later he was still in love with her and unwilling to marry a beautiful girl who was devoted to him. He removed to the country and there founded a famous military school which became the West Point of Russia and lasted till the end of the czarist régime.

Like Poniatowski, he was a misfit. The Court and Catherine, who did not want men with fine natures, had no place for him. Only once did he act like Potemkin; that was when he allied himself with the Orlovs. This one attempt spelled his dismissal. He would not have lasted long in any case, for while he loved Catherine her pleasures bored him, and he bored others for that reason.

He was not a grasping sort; Catherine spent only 1,380,000 roubles on him for the eighteen months during which he was in favour. A piffling sum, when one considers that she spent 92,820,000 roubles on all her men, 50,000,000 of which were spent on Potemkin.

Potemkin's relations with Catherine were for years to be the fuel for gossip and rumour. People were always speculating on whether he was in or out of favour. If a few angry words passed between him and the Empress, his downfall was predicted. If she made him a present or sang his praises, more power was attributed to him. Sir John Harris, the English Ambassador who cultivated Potemkin's friendship in order to win favours for his own country, wrote long letters to his superiors, carefully detailing every degree of warmth and cold which took place in their relationship.

To be sure, the Prince's hold on her was not absolute. Often he despaired, as he so easily could, and thought he was due for opulent oblivion like the rest of the lovers. Once he liquidated his possessions and estates—even paid debts—feeling sure that he was finished; but he came back. Sometimes it was a simple matter of feigning illness or a bit of intrigue which returned him to Catherine. Sometimes it was his knowledge of her: his ability to flatter her pride, to inflame

her ambitions, to play on her ideas of glory. In the end it was what she herself said of him :

> " Bold mind, bold spirit, bold heart,
> He is cleverer than I,"

which held him to her. He wasted her money, vexed her with his dilatoriness ; and most often he was incapable and absurd in the way he did things. She still had faith in him. He made things seem the way she hoped they were, and that was all she desired. The stage director's illusion, achieved with lighting, make-up, paint, canvas, and the rehearsed business and lines of actors, was eminently satisfactory to her, for she was a consummate actress and desired nothing more than a good show she could believe in.

Catherine arose at the crack of dawn, generally about six She wrote till nine and then she drank her famous coffee, for which one pound was boiled to make five cups. If the servants were not about, and often they were not, she lighted her own fires and dressed herself.

Not so the elegant Potemkin, whose palace across the way connected with hers by means of a covered passage. Rarely did he arise before noon, and if anyone was allowed at his bedside or toilet it was a most unusual favour. In his audience rooms there would be a milling mob waiting to see him, to have boons of all sorts granted ; for while the lady across the way was the Empress, he did most of the ruling, and before his palace doors there would be many more carriages waiting than before hers.

All the tedious efforts people made to see him were in vain. He would slip out of his room and through the covered passage to Catherine. His adjutant would then announce to the throng that he had left. A groan would arise and there would be an exodus to Catherine's palace to catch him there.

Always a great traveller about the country, his peregrinations now became as imposing as his power. At each post station officials would await him, sometimes for days. One never knew when he would arrive. Cities sent out delegations to greet him, as if he were in truth the Emperor. But he always stayed in his carriage while fresh horses were brought. Then he feigned sleep and never spoke a word to a soul.

His habit of dishabille had become the fashion. He even travelled in this manner, and at Mogilev alighted from a sled at seven in the evening wearing his dressing-gown and no trousers. During his three days there he never changed his costume, even for dances, dinners, and balls. Mogilev did its extreme best to amuse him, but failed.

Though he had all the power he still wanted all the titles. He wished to be Duke of Courland, King of Poland, and Governor of Lapland. His mistress contrived that he did not get these honours, and it made him unhappy. His bickerings and quarrels with her over such things often made her cry, and he would leave saying she was stubborn and obstinate. Always there was a reconciliation. He knew that in the end she was the Empress and had the power. It was a stone wall he would only break his head on. He realized that she was no fool. In her way she was as clever as he, even though she declared he was the wiser of the two.

His power grew greater and greater. His suite was like that of a ruler or an Oriental potentate. When he dined at the houses of the highest nobles, they waited on him as if they were common servants. When he so desired, he dressed in the greatest splendour, literally encrusted with diamonds.

He more than surpassed his boyish dreams. Yet at this period he said : " I wonder could a man be more fortunate than I have been. All my wishes have been fulfilled—all my desires gratified—as if by magic. I have sought positions of great responsibility—I have held them. I wanted orders—they have been showered upon me. I loved gambling—I have been privileged to lose incalculable sums. I liked to entertain —I have entertained magnificently. I wanted to buy land— I own as much land as any man could wish for. I wanted to build houses—I have been able to build palaces. I have always been fond of jewellery—no private individual in the world has such a collection of jewels as I have. In short I am overwhelmed with fortune's favours." After delivering himself of these sentiments he rounded off the speech nicely by smashing a priceless bit of porcelain and then locked himself in his room to brood. He reached heights of favour the like of which have been rare in history, and still he brooded, still he suffered from melancholia. Now more than ever before.

He was a very poor manager; he could not even run his own palace. Strangers would enter through the unguarded doors and wander through the vast halls for hours before encountering a servant; and then the fellow probably would be unable to give any information concerning his master. Ordinary water might not be obtainable, but there would be floods of vintage champagne in the household.

Nevertheless, Catherine relied on him. He was consulted in all her plans. He already was coming to the point where he would direct all things concerning the army. It often would be in the most miserable shape, but as long as he made it work to some slight degree Catherine was satisfied with him.

Perhaps it was simply because she made up her mind to be satisfied with him. The Comte de Ségur, Ambassador from France, who was much in favour, stood in awe and wonder at Catherine's jumbled government, with its prodigious waste, inefficiency, and lunacies. Once he asked her how she managed to reign. He recorded her answer:

"It is quite simple. I laid down for myself a set of principles, and a plan of government and behaviour, from which I have never deflected. Once my will is expressed it never changes. Everything here is steady. Every day is like the previous one; as one knows what to rely upon, no one is uneasy. Once I've given a post to anybody he may be sure of keeping it, unless he commits a crime. In that way I remove all food for bickerings, reportings, quarrels, and rivalries. Nor do you find any intrigue here. Since the only aim of intrigue is to drive out persons in office in order to take their place, that kind of shuffling would be quite aimless in my kind of government."

"But," questioned the perplexed Ségur, "supposing you appointed the wrong man to the office, then what would you do, Your Highness?"

"I would keep him. It would be my fault and not his, since I chose him. Only, I would find work for one of his underlings while he would keep his title and his place."

If Catherine dismissed Potemkin she would have to take someone else. Whom? The Orlovs? Besborodko? Panin? All save the last were swindlers like Potemkin. Panin seemed to be an exception to the rule that all the Court was dishonest. Potemkin's dishonesty did not trouble her. She knew as well

as anyone else that the nobles at her receptions picked the pockets of strangers from other lands—and those of their own friends, for that matter.

As for inefficiency, waste, graft, and the rest of it, they were all equally as bad as Potemkin—save Panin again. He had the virtue of not being subject to bribes, for which Catherine considered him silly.

It was really useless for her to seek elsewhere for someone who would not have Potemkin's deficiencies. To make a change would mean taking someone whose faults she did not know. At least she knew Potemkin's.

And he was inspiring. He could make things dramatic and imposing. He did spread the fame and glory of Russia abroad, and in doing so increased her own name.

More than that, he was expert in something in which she was still trying to perfect herself: he did know the Russians and how to deal with them. Every now and then an apprehensive shiver ran through her when something made her remember that she was a German, ruling Russia. She had made herself Russian and done very well, but a complete metamorphosis was impossible. Where she failed in this respect, Potemkin was strong. More and more, as time went on, she grew to feel that his hand was keeping her on the throne. He overawed people. The Russians believed in him, much as they despised him; and believing in him, they believed in her.

So she let his enemies come to her, with their tales about him. She either would not listen to them, or flatly repudiate what they told her.

He had increased her Empire, enriching it with the whole of Crimea without making a war against Turkey. To do it he made an alliance with Germany, declaring the Crimea a free state. The alliance incidentally broke his enemy Panin's heart, for Panin would have none of that country. Next he had Vassiliesky and Konstantinoff, two of his cleverest agents, work on the Khan, Sahim-Gueray, who had been appointed regent of the country. They softened him with presents, taught him to eat at a table instead of on horseback—the Tartar style—had him ride about in a berlin, live luxuriously and in other ways sapped his virile Tartar ways. When he was ripe, they bribed his relations to revolt against him and start

a civil war. Potemkin, who was waiting, immediately entered with his troops. He made the befuddled Khan provoke the Turks by having him demand Otchakov of them. The Turks replied quite succinctly. They cut off the head of the Khan's envoy. Catherine, who worked hand in glove with Potemkin, became solicitous and she, too, insisted on helping the Khan in his trouble. She insisted upon entering the Crimea in order to attack Turkey. Once within its borders, her troops swarmed all over and Potemkin gobbled up the country. He promised the Khan a pension of eight hundred thousand roubles a year, and so bought him off. Catherine, at his behest, then demanded the country from Turkey.

The Sublime Porte—or ruler of Turkey—naturally protested ; but Catherine had just made her peace with Sweden, and he found Potemkin at the Turkish frontier with seventy thousand men, and Prince Repnin behind him with forty thousand more. The Turks disliked this show of arms. They sighed and gave up the Crimea to Russia.

Why, then, should she give up her erstwhile lover ? Had he not, without a single battle, won her a vast continent containing a million and a half subjects ?

She loved to read the newspapers—and especially one printed in Hamburg. Potemkin, knowing of her interest in them, did something succeeding generations were to ape. With bribes he had favourable and laudatory copy prepared ; and lo, when Catherine read the prints she found her first Minister of State and herself praised magnificently. She knew her Potemkin, and realized that he had been at work. The results, however, were favourable publicity ; and that was all she craved.

Moreover he had made good on one important boast : all over the world people in high places began to speak of Russia and of Catherine. Men like Lyall and Storch took trips to the country and wrote books about it and the woman who ruled it. Prints of her were sold everywhere. Her face became known throughout the civilized world. Catherine " the Great " was coming into being.

But Potemkin, the man who lay on his couch for days in a seeming coma, was wide awake. He knew that everything he did depended on the caprice of a woman, and he knew full

well that the secret of success was to flatter her. "Here we never look forward or backward and are governed solely by the impulse of the hour," he once told Sir John Harris, the English Ambassador. "A good and faithful subject never can tell how to regulate his conduct. If I was sure of being applauded when I did good, or blamed when I did wrong, I should know on what I was to depend, but these discerning faculties are wanting, and, if the passions are flattered, the judgment is never consulted."

Harris knew that he was thinking of Catherine when he spoke in this strain, and fearfully asked him if anything unpleasant had happened.

"Nothing more than what I am every day used to," replied the Prince; "but I shall soon be in another light, and then, if my conduct is not approved, I will retire into the country and never again appear at Court."

The arrangement made on the historic evening when Potemkin had forced his way into the Hermitage held good. He was Emperor with her in all but name. He was lover emeritus who had passed on to greater duties, leaving, as they had both agreed, the more obvious functions to others—others, as he had warned, who were selected by him. Physically they were all attractive to Catherine. Mentally they were dolts.

This was precisely what Potemkin desired in Catherine's lovers. They bored her after a while, and she dismissed them, which was perfectly agreeable to him. The shorter their stay, the less chance to gain power. Besides, with each new lover he received one hundred thousand roubles as a minimum. Once when Catherine was angry with him, she presented him instead with a diamond-studded, gold toothpick in a case, a mere thirty thousand roubles' worth. So terrible was his wrath that she promptly paid him his usual fee, and was the wiser for knowing that in the bargain she had been out of pocket thirty thousand roubles for the toothpick.

All of Europe gasped at this woman, who took one man after another without any shame, and saw nothing wrong in it. Her conduct encouraged similar behaviour in all the ladies in her Court. There was scarcely a woman who was without her lover; and they changed them as frequently as Catherine changed hers. In Moscow there was even a Physical Club, a

noble bagnio where couples met naked in the dark, picked each other by lot, and acted as passion dictated. Even the Protassof touch pervaded this exclusive club, for the women could examine new men applicants and blackball them if found wanting.

Such things shocked Catherine, who was very prudish. Once she became furious with De Ligne, the Austrian Ambassador, when he told a very mild story in company. For generations men and women had used the Russian baths together in complete innocence; Catherine made them separate.

But such opinions did not in any way affect her personal life. She had her lovers in abundance and became the scandal of the world. Zoritch followed Zavadoffsky. Zoritch was tall and handsome, lasted one year, and then left Catherine, financially a much better man.

Rimsky-Korsakoff, born plain Korsak and not to be confused with the composer, came next. He also was tall and handsome, and a great dandy. Catherine gave him enormous sums to spend in decorating his person; and because he loved music, provided him with an orchestra. What was more, she dutifully attended many concerts with him.

His only claim to fame might rest on the famous library he ordered of Weitbrecht the bookseller.

"Give me large folios for the bottom shelves, medium sized ones for the middle ones, and small ones for the top," he said to Weitbrecht when asked what books he desired.

However, Potemkin's library was even stranger than his. He desired the most expensive one in the world, and so he had Russian, French, and English notes, and even rolls of gold coins, bound up in book form. Boasting that he had the most valuable books in the world, he would pull down one of his fascinating tomes and prove that he was right.

After Korsakoff was found in a very compromising situation with the Empress's intimate friend, the Countess Bruce, he was dismissed and Lanskoi took his place. Lanskoi was twenty-two years old when he entered office in 1780, and the Empress was fifty-one. Four years later he died, the only lover of Catherine to lose favour in that manner.

She mothered Lanskoi so much that many people thought

their affair was purely platonic. Others said that the ageing woman was physically repugnant to the attractive, really pretty youth, and the drugs he took to stimulate himself for her brought about his death.

He entered her service the owner of five shirts, a recipe for a punch (equal parts of Tokay wine, rum, and pineapple juice), the clothes he wore, and nothing else. He was sweet, charming, and not very bright. He had no enemies because his mental inclinations and equipment did not permit him to enter politics. There were often rumours that Catherine would dismiss him, but he was so pathetically devoted to her that she never had the heart to.

Though he died, of what the doctors diagnosed as an infectious disease, Catherine nursed him against their strict orders. He died in her arms and she was inconsolable. For three days she refused food and drink and cried incessantly. All affairs of State were neglected while she took to her bed for three months. Finally, after others had failed, Potemkin forced his way into her bedroom. He had a good cry with her, consoled her, and brought her round again.

Catherine had her thirteen recognized lovers, and an uncounted number of rumoured interlopers like Alexei Orlov and Valerian Zubov.

Potemkin, however, had hundreds of mistresses. His affairs varied. Some lasted for years, some less than an hour. They were not neatly chronological, as Catherine's were. One cannot go from one mistress to the next as one can with Catherine's loves.

Potemkin's seductions were extremely diversified. His mistresses brought him beautiful virginal children ; deflowering them would appeal to him as a novelty.

He had five nieces and slept with them all. Even profligate Russia was shocked at this. The scandal irked Catherine, but she did nothing about it. Potemkin even forced her to make them all, ironically enough, maids of honour.

His sexual craving, like all his other lusts, was excessive. His interest in women was never platonic. The fact that they were married never bothered him. Most of the husbands were delighted if he seduced their wives, for it meant a reward for them. His officers scoured the country for mistresses who

would please him. If they succeeded, a promotion would be their reward.

He was easily the greatest Don Juan in all Russia. Few and far between were the women who did not succumb to his blandishments. Women of all kinds, colours, and nations were his. They followed him on his travels like a harem. In war or peace, winter or summer, he always had his staff of mistresses with him. Yet he was not happy with them. Did they love him, or did they love his power, his money, his favours? He could never be sure.

His behaviour towards women was scarcely chivalrous. It was generally indecent in public, and always of a highly immoral character in private. Husbands who objected to such treatment of their wives did not dare do anything about the matter. Fear of the Prince was too great.

If he desired a woman, he stopped at nothing to get her. Competition was wiped out completely. Prince Piotr Mikhailovitch Golitzin—conqueror of Pugachev, who, claiming to be the dead Peter III, started a rebellion against Catherine—was unfortunate enough to be in favour with a beautiful thirty-six-year-old widow whom Potemkin admired. Potemkin contrived to get Prince Golitzin out of his way by having a henchman of his, Shepelev, challenge him to a duel and kill him. Potemkin got the lady and Shepelev received a rather puny reward: the hand of Potemkin's niece, Izmailova Englehardt, an extremely homely girl to whom her uncle gave the pet name, Hopeless Hopelessness.

On another occasion, Potemkin's overtures to a Polish noblewoman were frustrated because of her admiration for Major Shcheglovsky. By the simple process of exiling the major to Siberia, Potemkin caused her to pay more complete attention to himself.

Barbara Englehardt was probably his most outstanding mistress. She was the favourite of his quintet of nieces, to all of whom he made love successively. He called her Barbe, Branitzkia, and Barinka. She was highly educated, as were all his nieces; he sent them to St. Petersburg for that purpose. When the affair began she was twenty and he thirty-eight. They separated often, and made up just as many times.

He found her a trial, for she was just as quixotic as he,

just as grasping, just as vexatious. Barbara was the one person who could give him his own medicine ; he swallowed it, but gagged plentifully. Every caress from her cost him dearly. She badgered him for favours for relatives and friends ; and then sold them. Her sisters emulated her example : they made a regular business of recommending men to their uncle for State contracts, and then levying huge commissions for themselves.

Nevertheless, he always found himself turning to her from his other loves. Of his love for her it was said that he combined the pure tenderness of a father, the passions of a lover, the slavishness of a weak-charactered husband. This half idealistic, half passionate feeling she also had towards him. As years went on he called her his daughter and she referred to him in her letters as " papa."

In 1779 she married Prince Sergei Feodorovitch Golitzin. Gossip had it that she found the letter of another mistress in Potemkin's pocket and did it out of pique. What is more likely is that Catherine complained about the scandalous affair between uncle and niece ; and Potemkin, who was not then in the Empress's good graces, arranged the marriage and announced it the following day with tremendous pomp.

Strangely enough, Barbara made a model wife, lived to a ripe old age and was the mother of ten sons and nine girls, all of whom gained good positions through the efforts of their illustrious granduncle.

Next, there was Prascovia Potemkina, the wife of a relative. He loved her so distractedly during the second Turkish War that he let all important business go for her sake. She was twenty-five and he was fifty, and the passionate letters he wrote her were like those he wrote to Barbara. Yet even she was not alone in his affections. While he made love to her he also had affairs with the Countess Potocka and the Princess Dolgurukia. When Prince Dolguruki, the husband of the latter, became angered at Potemkin's attentions to his beautiful wife, Potemkin in a towering rage grabbed him by the cordons of his orders and shook him violently, roaring that he had made Dolguruki and he would break him, that he would do with him as he pleased. With that he marched off with his wife.

Madame de Witt, a beautiful adventuress; his attractive nieces Nadiejda, Catherine, and Tatiana Englehardt; and Madame Guibald (who is supposed to have stolen from beneath the Prince's pillow a memorandum for a neutrality pact Sir John Harris gave him, so that Harris's enemies could add damaging notes) are some other mistresses of whom history knows.

He never seemed to have a surfeit of them; his harem was always being replenished. His love affairs never made him happy. Most of his mistresses used him for material gain, although few were as frank as the lady who wrote him: "*Souvenir pour mon ange*: Dear little cupid, soft little cheeks, haven't you forgotten that you lost a hundred and fifty roubles to me, that you promised me an embroidered caftan, pomades, a pot full of roses? Please, life of mine, send these things if you don't want me to pester you, if you want me to kiss your dear little soft cheeks. Comfort me, my soul. Send me these things with a messenger."

Their constant demand for rewards ran him into a vicious circle. He plagued Catherine for favours and money, and his mistresses plagued him for the same; what he took from her, he gave to them. There was a kinship between Catherine and Potemkin on that score, but with this difference: on the whole she enjoyed it, while he must have loathed it, or he would not have changed his mistresses so often.

Real love, real satisfaction from love, were not his. In all his hundreds of escapades there is no evidence that a single woman bore him a child. His two years with Catherine were without issue. Who knows but what the love relationship with the Empress might have been longer if there had been?

He must have known himself to be sterile, and it must have been a contributory cause of his unhappiness. Perhaps, too, it was the very thing which made him strive for the high pinnacle he finally attained.

CHAPTER TWO

1785

AFTER Lanskoi died there was a spell of about a year during which the thought of another lover was repugnant to Catherine. Then the memory of his death dimmed and she began to feel the need of new companionship.

Potemkin, who took care of such matters for her, arranged the business. He sent Momonoff and Yermoloff separately to her on trivial errands so that she could make a selection between them. Listlessly, she had picked Yermoloff.

Perhaps it had been his unusually fair colouring, his pale pink lips and light grey eyes which had made her take him. His appearance had made her think that he would be a peaceable, tractable person to have about.

What he had said and done, for the past few months, proved him to be nothing of the sort. Now, as he stood before her, gesticulating forcibly with his pale white hands and waving his shock of blond hair from side to side as he spoke, she knew that she had taken on a trouble-maker.

"Madame, you see that I am right," he was saying. "My news is confirmed: Khan Sahim-Gueray has been murdered. I am positive that our fine friend Prince Potemkin is mixed up in this business. He sent the Khan to Moldavia, on some trumped-up errand, didn't he? It is very odd, Your Highness, that the Khan should be seized in Moldavia, conveyed to Rhodes by the Turks and ordered strangled by the Sublime Porte. . . . Yes, the Prince has been very clever with that poor man. First he makes him regent of Crimea, gives him no powers, and then has him killed off!"

Catherine sighed. She could almost hear Besborodko and Alexander Vorontzoff rehearsing this speech with Yermoloff. How that man loathed her Grishenka, who had got him his position! For days, now, Yermoloff had been dinning the Crimean business into her ears. She was sick of it; and yet what he said seemed to be absolutely true. Potemkin had been guilty of the most flagrant deceits. She resented being cheated to such an enormous extent. He was making Catherine the Great seem a fool in the eyes of the Court and of the whole world . . . and all this after she had simply loaded him with honours and rewards for the work he had done

there. She had given him the domains the Princes Lubomirsky and Saphieha had possessed in Podolia and Lithuania; she had made him Governor of Tavrida (the Crimea), Grand Admiral of the Euxine, given him a magnificent palace in St. Petersburg, called Tavritschefsky in honour of his achievements, and given him the surname of Taurian, not to mention gifts of jewels and money."

She looked at Yermoloff and hated him as much as she did Potemkin for having made her think these thoughts.

"I am not distressed at the death of the Khan," she said. "It gives us a free hand in the country; and if the Prince engineered it, well and good."

"Yes, Madame, that is well; but you forget that he asked you for a sum of from three to four million roubles to give to the Khan as compensation for relinquishing his sovereignty to Russia. Furthermore, the Prince got the advance of two hundred thousand roubles as payment of this year's pension to the Khan. Where has all that money gone?" He snickered. "Into the Prince's pockets, of course! The Khan never saw a kopeck of it, but I'll wager the Engelhardt sisters have!"

Catherine said nothing. What was there to say? Yermoloff had reasoned correctly: Grishenka must have done precisely that. She gazed out of the window and saw the mausoleum of her beloved Lanskoi gleaming new and white in the sun. Her lips twitched and tears welled in her eyes. How different he had been than all the rest! Quiet, shy, and sweet. He was like a son; she missed him. This Yermoloff, jealous, ambitious, envious, and plotting, disturbed her. Irony of ironies that such a person should be Lanskoi's successor!

"Strange, Madame, that we have been denied the pleasure of the Prince's company all these long days. It is possible that he fears you might question him too closely about the huge sums he has drawn from the treasury and which he says he has been spending on building up the Crimea. Where are the wonderful roads he is building through the country, his famed city of Cherson, his fleets, his cities, his forts, his industries, universities, and the Lord knows what else? I begin to wonder whether any of them really exist."

Catherine coloured, but Yermoloff went on fearlessly.

"You know of the colonists he persuaded to go there as settlers. They left Switzerland, France, Germany, Austria—all the places on the Continent—lured by his golden promises. He would give them money, clothes, cattle, land, seed, everything needed to start farming and settling in the new country. And when they came, what happened? You know only too well: he kept every single solitary kopeck himself, and let them beg for charity in the streets. The poor wretches hungered and died. By a miracle, a few hardy ones have managed to survive all these hardships. Yet this monster of selfishness, this Prince of Tavrida, has given them no roofs over their heads, no warmth for this bitter winter; and they are freezing to death."

She fumbled about for her snuff-box and Yermoloff gave it to her. She resented the attention; she was now growing very nearsighted and was too vain to wear the strong glasses she required to see.

He spoke the truth, and she loathed hearing it from him. From anybody. Potemkin had caused this. He had at last gone too far.

"He tells you always that he spreads your glory, that through him you shall be Catherine the Great. Madame, even now the ambassadors from the lands whence these poor immigrants came must be writing home telling of these cruelties to their people. Will you then be known as Catherine the Great? Or as Catherine the Tyrant, the Heartless, the Unjust?"

Anger bridled in Catherine at these words. There was too much in them not to be hearkened to. Potemkin had deceived her in the very things he swore he would do for her.

She poured herself a long glass of cold water and was about to drink it when a lackey announced Potemkin himself. She banged the glass back on the beautifully inlaid table with such force that it splashed all over.

"Oh, so at last our brave Prince has summoned the courage to make an appearance before Your Majesty! What tricks has he up his sleeve now?"

"I don't know, but I shall get to the bottom of all this and find out."

Yermoloff smiled slyly and spoke softly.

"Why don't you propose, Madame, that he take you on a tour through the Crimea, that he show you all these marvels he has erected? Then you would surely know whom to believe, the Prince or myself."

Catherine listened grimly and bit her lips. Even though this idea must have originated with Besborodko, it was a good one. She told the lackey to show Potemkin in, and Yermoloff went to the secret door leading to his official apartments downstairs.

"You have no desire to meet the Prince, Yermoloff?"

A flush came to his pale face.

"I think it would be better if Your Majesty spoke to him alone."

He opened the door, then paused. "I would advise you most strongly, Madame, to demand that he take you on a tour of inspection through the Crimea." Potemkin's ponderous footsteps were heard outside and Yermoloff fled hastily.

There was a time when Catherine would have had a certain pleasure in wondering whether Potemkin would appear before her in a blaze of glory or in *déshabillé*. On this day he had bedecked himself in his showiest orders. His hair was combed, his face freshly shaved, his cherry-red velvet boots were spotless.

She had no eye for these things. When he advanced to kiss her hand she literally stabbed him with it. He gave it a vicious peck and flung it from him. Then, before she had a chance to deliver her prepared reproaches, he burst out in a flood of speech that virtually blew her across the room.

"Angry at me, eh? Ready to give me a talking to? I don't want to hear a single word of it. I know it already; you've been listening to that swine Yermoloff and the other two pigs he grunts with, Besborodko and Vorontzoff."

"Grishenka, I want to know about Khan Sahim-Gueray."

"What do you want to know? You know everything already. Did I plot against him? Perhaps, perhaps not. It doesn't matter. He was no longer of any use to us, and a possible source of harm. So I eliminated him, as any wise man would."

"And what about his subsidy and pension?"

"I have it, and what's more I intend to keep it. Who got you the Crimea, anyway? I did! Then why should you give the money to that Mohammedan dog, who no longer counts? Do you mean to tell me you are not happy to know that after all I have done for you, after all I have been to you, that I have managed to get the money for myself? You should rejoice!"

His sudden logic took her aback. There seemed to be no way in which she could reason against this man. After all, Grishenka was right. Any member of the Russian Orthodox Church was better than a heathen, and he had done a great thing for her.

"Well," she faltered, "perhaps that's so. The matter is trifling—I don't care to discuss it. What is more important is all this money you have been drawing from the treasury to improve the country. I receive no news from you; you just draw it and spend. Where is it going to, what are you doing with it?"

"What I think best, Matushka."

"Your answer is too vague, Grishenka."

"No more vague than the accusations of my enemies. I have been in that country, lived there, travelled thousands of miles in *kibitkas* without stopping except to change horses. I have conquered the rebellious tribes. I am building the cities. You have told me to do this, and I am doing it in my own way. I will brook no interference or meddlesome questioning. Has Yermoloff been there? Does he know what I am up against? Perhaps you would prefer that he take over the matter?"

"You speak, my dear Prince, as if you had done well in the country."

"Extremely well; no man alive could do better."

"You seem quite certain."

"Because I am positive, Madame."

"Well, my dear Prince, I am given to doubts. Perhaps it is best that you dispel them for me."

"It is best, and I will gladly do so."

"Then why not arrange to take me to the Crimea on a tour of inspection?"

The words exploded before Potemkin. It was the last thing



PRINCE PLATON ZUBOV

Catherine's last lover Portrait by Lampi.

he had expected to hear from her, and he knew her too well to think that she was speaking idly.

She must have sensed his dismay, for she went on quietly and with great dignity.

" Surely, my dear Prince, you have nothing to fear ? There is nothing to hesitate about, if what you say is true. I should think you'd be eager to show me the wonders you have performed."

He was thinking furiously. Should he put her off by telling her that she could not stand the rigours of the journey ; that her legs, swollen and sore with varicose veins, would make such a trip torture to her ; that she was, to be blunt, too old for such things ? No ; to tell her that would be fatal. She loathed being reminded of her physical disabilities and despised her years.

Then he had one of his audacious inspirations. It was the sort of idea which made him *the* Prince in a country where there were dozens of them. He *would* take her ! He would take this apparent instrument of his destruction from his enemies and use it to create a triumph for himself.

" Take you there, Matushka ? I will be glad to. I shall make it the most glorious event of your reign. It will be no tour of inspection ; it will be a march of triumph. You shall be crowned Empress of the Tavrida. You will travel on new roads, as fine as the ones the Romans built. You will head one long pageant of splendours and wonders. Where there was only a desert, new cities, palaces, gardens, fortresses, industries, fleets, and universities will bloom before your eyes. I shall make the nights bright as day for you ! "

As he spoke he lost himself in visions, already beginning to believe in them himself. He saw magnificent scenes in his mind's eye, processions of elaborate barges down the Dnieper which would rival Cleopatra's down the Nile. The cities sprang up, the towns blossomed.

Catherine, listening, told herself not to heed his inflammatory words, but soon she found herself carried away by them, as she always was.

He had clasped her in his arms as he did in those days when they had been lovers ; he spoke with a soft, alluring tenseness that drew her to him.

"Katusha, darling, my life, my love, my very soul, it will be a spectacle the like of which the world shall never see again! All Europe shall know and hear of it. We'll invite De Ligne, Ségur, all the ambassadors from the most powerful countries on the Continent. We'll astound them so that they will be at a loss to describe the wonders that they will see. . . . Take you through the Crimea, my Catherine? It is the dearest wish of my life! . . . And when the tour is ended, the whole world will realize that the city I am building there for you, the city which will be called 'Ekaterinoslav' ('Glory of Catherine'), is well and nobly named indeed!"

She was speechless with joy and pleasure. She forgot entirely about the colonists who had died because of him. For moments she could do nothing more than embrace him and mumble pleadingly that he forgive her for having thought evil of him.

"When shall we start, Grishenka? Soon, I hope, soon."

He became serious, paced back and forth. His dreams were fast crumbling before this suggestion. He must put her off, delay her as long as possible.

"In a year perhaps, Katusha. Maybe two, three."

"Oh, but that is eternal! Why wait that long? Make it months, instead."

"Months, my dear! Do you realize that the Crimea is a vast country, covering thousands of square miles? If this is to be the trip I want it to be, the preparations I intend to make must be huge. I shall need time to put them through. When you come into this new paradise, I want everything finished, everything built. Remember, the rest of the world will watch us; we can't do this half-way! Of course, if you are in a hurry you could go on a tour; but then it will have to be a quiet affair, something that will be mere routine, without any artistry. Such a thing will never increase your fame abroad; but if that's the sort of trip you wish, you have but to command! You are the Empress; I, your humble subject."

He knelt before her and kissed the hem of her skirt. She raised him up.

"No, my Grishenka, do it your way. You know best.

You are wiser than I am. You are the cleverest, most brilliant man in my Empire ! "

His eyes were wet with tears as he kissed her hand.

" I shall need money, vast sums."

" Take them. Spend them. I don't care what Yermoloff and the rest tell me."

Potemkin's face darkened at the mention of his enemy's name.

" Yermoloff ! . . . There is but one alternative : you must dismiss either Yermoloff or me, for so long as you keep that white Negro, I shall not set foot in the Palace."

" But, Grishenka, you cannot mean that ! "

" I am deadly serious. I will have no opposition ; you must choose between us."

" But—give me some time."

" No, you must make up your mind at once."

Catherine sat down and burst into tears. Potemkin walked to the window and gazed at the sun setting on Lanskoi's tomb. Her tears did not move him ; he knew she could cry at will, and he felt like telling her to save her energy. Besides, he was certain she did not love Yermoloff.

He turned around.

" Well, have you made up your mind yet ? It shouldn't take you that long to decide. . . . Or do you perhaps believe that your white Negro could plan a better trip through the Crimea than I could ? "

She rose and sighed before speaking.

" Oh, all right ; have it your way. I'll dismiss him, but I don't know what I shall do without someone."

" I'll send Momonoff around to you to-morrow."

" To-morrow ! "

" Yes ; why not ? I have decided that Yermoloff will be dismissed to-day."

" But give me a week, a few days ! "

" No, he goes right away, or I shall go ; and that is final."

He brought her pen and paper from her writing-desk.

" Write. I shall dictate."

She looked at him helplessly and appealingly, but he paid no attention.

" Address it to your white Negro."

When her quill had ceased scratching the salutation, he dictated :

" Being always mindful of your welfare and health, we have decided that for the sake of the same it is best for you to travel . . . er . . . on the Continent . . . er . . . for one year. You are to leave on this journey immediately."

She wrote and looked at him. " Is that all, Grishenka ? "

" Yes. Just sign it and give it to me."

He stood over her and watched her sign. When she had finished he picked up the sheet and held it close to his single squinting eye. Then he folded it.

" May I say good-bye to him, Grishenka ? "

" You may not. I shall have him leave immediately without seeing you."

" But at least let me take the order to him, dear."

" Quite unnecessary. I know the way to his rooms and can save Your Majesty the trouble."

He opened the door to the secret stairway and left for Yermoloff's apartments.

One of Catherine's small pet dogs scampered up to her. It stood on its hind legs and waved its paws, knowing it would receive the bit of sugar it begged for. She took it up in her arms, and it licked her cheeks lovingly.

" Oh, my pet, my sweet innocent ! " she murmured. " Never love a man too much. You believe in him beyond all reason then ! "

CHAPTER THREE

January, 1787

IT had always been easy for Catherine to forget unpleasant moments with her Grishenka, just as it had always been easy for her to remember and to rejoice over things he had done which delighted her. The stormy afternoon when he had caused her to dismiss Yermoloff had vanished from her memory. The next day he had sent Momonoff to her with some paintings. She sent him back to Potemkin with a note saying that the outlines were good but the colouring poor. It was rather difficult to forget the pastel-shaded Yermoloff for a while.

Momonoff was not strikingly handsome, but he was more intelligent than the rest of her lovers had been. He came from an excellent family. He was thirty years old and Catherine sixty.

As a gift he sent Potemkin, who was distantly related to him, a large teapot made of solid gold and bearing the inscription: "We Are More United by Ties of the Heart than of Blood."

He proved to be rather unhappy in his position of lover. As one writer observed, "He lived with the Empress like a slave, the weight of whose chains was not the less pleasing for being gold." A contemporary wrote, "Some of the favourites contrived to distinguish and dignify their degraded functions. Potemkin by making himself to all intents and purposes an Emperor, Zavadoffsky by making himself generally useful in the administration of the Empire, Momonoff by making it clear to everyone that he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself."

He was given to sulks, moods, and general churlishness. The Empress tried to rouse him from them by casting her seasoned sixty-year-old glances on others, but they proved ineffective. In the midst of Catherine's interminable card games he would produce a piece of chalk, and on the green, felt-topped table draw caricatures of people, while she patiently waited for the not very gifted artist to finish his work before the game proceeded. It amazed the rest of the players, among whom might be Joseph II of Austria and other visiting notables; but Russians knew how indulgent Catherine was with her lovers and were not in the least bit dismayed.

Momonoff amused himself by being as extravagant as he possibly could. Aided by the experienced Potemkin, he drew on the royal coffers so diligently that in five months they were depleted. Catherine called the treasurer before her to reprimand him. The man said nothing, but produced a set of vouchers for sums paid out to Momonoff and Potemkin ; and the Empress had nothing further to say.

Yermoloff's advice that she go to the Crimea to see with her own eyes how Potemkin had cheated her had completely slipped her mind. She had other things to worry about : how to keep Momonoff happy, and how to run the country. Potemkin, on his part, had forgotten that she had insisted on making the tour to check up on him. He turned the idea over and over in his mind as he lay supinely on his rich couch, surrounded by his mistresses, the chess players, the servants, the courtiers and all the rest of his magnificent entourage. He planned and played with the idea. It became a great stunt, a magnificent carnival, a pageant of pageants thousands of miles in length. More than that : it became *his* idea. While Yermoloff, the author of the play, gathered dust in his enforced seclusion, Potemkin, the director, rewrote it to suit his own fancy. The tragedy changed its plot completely and became a drama of glorification, Catherine's and his.

With his stage manager, one Tutolmin, he went over the territory. (He was to dismiss Tutolmin later because his abilities interested Catherine.) Everywhere there were dreary deserts, tundras and waste lands. It was an empty stage. There were neither lights, settings nor actors for his play.

He ordered.

There were to be roads, roads as great as those the Romans built, where his carriage had bumped and jounced over virgin ground. The route selected was to be the easiest and most comfortable for Catherine.

The country was bare of population ; then there must be people inhabiting the land. From the north, folk who had made that country their land for generations found themselves ruthlessly driven south, for reasons they never knew. Families were separated, hundreds perished, so that Catherine could have a chorus of happy, smiling villagers to set her off as she

drove over roads newly made for her. It must be a prosperous land, a great land ; therefore it must have cities.

The director ordered.

One on that hill where the view is fine, a town by this river, a port by this sea. At his command Cherson, Kanevo, Kremenschug, Ekaterinoslav, Inkerman, Karasoubazar, and other cities rose. Aleshin, on the left bank of the Dnieper, would look good across the way from Cherson. In October, 1786, he commanded it built, and in April, 1787, it was there.

Fifty thousand men worked in the swamps to build Cherson. They suffered, sickened, and died. More and more of the humans called serfs were poured into Cherson and the other cities, to starve, to sweat, to go through torment, and to perish. Up, up went the cities, all settings for Catherine to see, to act in, and to admire.

Fleets were launched, gardens bloomed, great trees stood where there was bleak monotony before. Palaces appeared in places no one thought any habitation would ever stand. Furniture was built, cloth was woven, paint was mixed to decorate them. Barges were built to travel down the Dnieper. It was discovered that the river was too shallow for them. . . . "Blow up the rocks with gunpowder," ordered the great director.

The year 1786 saw him one furious bundle of activity. He was everywhere, commanding the impossible, stopping at nothing. . . . And in spite of all he had to do, he kept up a diplomatic correspondence, had his fingers in the activities at home, listened to new orchestral selections especially composed for him by Sarti. He could still play chess, seduce a virgin, dash off a note to Catherine, be furious with the vexatious Branitzkia, and hateful of General Rumantzoff, who was abler than he was.

Lying silent in a melancholia, he would rise in the middle of the night, order an open *kibitka*, and drive thousands of miles under the bitterest conditions, living only on raw onions. Then he would stop and rest. Suddenly something would enter his head again. He would order the carriage, and then have it wait six months while he toyed with another notion or a new novelty or mistress.

Originally, there was plot to the pageant in which Catherine, a superb actress, was to play the leading role. She was to

be crowned Queen of Tavrida and declared Protectress of the Tartars. To support her there were to be six archbishops and the Metropolitan of the Russian Church, a large body of clergy with its huge court, and all attendants. Triumphal arches were to be erected everywhere, with devices and inscriptions on the approach to Cherson. Catherine was to be drawn in a triumphal car, receive a crown of laurel and be applauded by huge mobs. Six regiments of cavalry, six regiments of infantry, a fleet of galleys on the Dnieper, all beautifully embellished and decorated, were to furnish a military and naval display appropriate for such an occasion. Seven million roubles were to be spent on coronation gifts alone.

But alas, this theme had to be eliminated. In the Crimea there were skirmishes between the Tartars and the Russians which seriously endangered such a show. The coronation ceremony scene, with all the gaudy clergy, was dropped. The procession scene was blue-pencilled out, and the army and navy put to a more desperate purpose than display. All that was left was the meeting between Joseph II, King of Austria, Poniatowski, new King of Poland, and Catherine. That, and the formal procession-taking of Cherson and the Crimea.

His show now had but a skimpy plot, but Potemkin was determined that it should go on. He beat his drums louder and pitched his ballyhoo higher to hide the deficiency; he made it a pageant with no plot but with a purpose. It was to be more than a glorious junket for Catherine to revel in; it was to be for display, for publicity and for aweing the other countries of Europe. They were all to awake to the existence of Russia. They were all to know that Russia was preparing to grow larger again, that Turkey and the City of Constantinople were soon to be a part of Russia. This was a dream, called the Greek Plan, which Potemkin had nurtured in the bosom of Catherine. She had had her second grandson named Constantine in expectation of this happy event. The child had been brought up with Greek nurses, taught the Greek language, and educated for this one purpose. To please the Empress, the ladies of the Court affected Greek robes. The vogue became Grecian. Thoughts went back to the very ancient days when Greece ruled the coveted land and maintained a Greek Catholic Church on its soil.

Potemkin negotiated and intrigued, planned pacts with Germany, allied himself with Austria. One aim of the show was to frighten the Turks. Everything was arranged so that Catherine's and his dream might come true.

And what of Constantine, the little grandson for whom all this was arranged? The disappointing little boy, together with his older brother Alexander, caught the measles and had to be left at home. His father and mother, the Grand Duke Paul and his wife, naturally were not asked along.

Catherine wanted all the publicity she could get, and so she invited the men who would be most likely to spread it. The English Ambassador Fitzherbert was asked; De Ligne of Austria and Ségur of France, who were to write so entertainingly and illuminatingly, were invited. Narishkin, her grand *écuyer* and general cut-up; Shuvalov, the grand chamberlain; her maids of honour, favourite friends, nobles of the Court and, of course, the favourite Momonoff, all went.

All were told that the party was to be given by her. They were not to provide anything at all. She would take care of everything for them. She even saw to it that every one of them received thick, expensive fur pelisses to keep warm.

On the evening of January 18, 1787, Potemkin had things ready to raise his curtain. The word was given and they started. There were fourteen carriages and two hundred sledges in the train. At each post there was waiting a change of five hundred and sixty horses; all were hitched with great dispatch. Catherine's carriage, almost a house, was completely outfitted with a table, books and all necessities for whiling away the time on the journey.

The Prince de Ligne, awed by it, wrote, "I still fancy that I am dreaming when I recall that journey in an enormous coach large enough for six people, quite a triumphal chariot, in fact, studded all over with precious stones and drawn by sixteen horses of the Tartar race. I sat between two persons, on whose shoulders I would sink, at times, overcome by the heat. I would be startled by such snatches of conversation as these between Catherine and Joseph:

"'I have thirty millions of subjects, I am told, counting only the males.'

"'And I twenty-two,' replied the other, 'I counting all.'

" They made imaginary conquests of towns and provinces as if that were nothing at all whilst I kept on saying :

" ' Your Majesties will receive nothing but worry and misery,' to which the Emperor would reply, addressing himself to the Empress, ' Madam, we treat him too well. He has no respect for us.' "

Everything possible had been done to make the journey comfortable and luxurious for Catherine. For months serfs had been in the woods, felling huge trees and dragging their heavy trunks miles to the new roads ; there they had arranged them in huge piles, closely spaced. On the night of the 17th, men stood by, and as word reached them that her entourage approached, they set the piles on fire, turning the night into bright day.

Despite them, it was bitter cold. The large traditional beards of the drivers froze hard as stone. The serfs in the villages lining the route were made to stand for hours beside the road so that Catherine could see her people when she drove by. Some were frostbitten, some died of the cold waiting for her to come. All the time the huge logs lay piled beside them ; but they were not to blaze till Her Majesty passed by.

The first objective was Kiev. On the way there they passed through sparsely settled portions of Russia. There the villages were poor, the people desperate, and the country not prosperous. The old, the sickly, and the crippled were made to stay indoors. The others were coached to cheer, to shout, to be gay and merry, so that their Empress would be pleased. Outwardly it was an imposing show and she enjoyed it, feeling a glow at being such a beneficent ruler. At each boundary appeared a new governor, who escorted the Empress to the limits of his province. Always the agents or assistant directors of Potemkin went ahead to see that there were fresh crowds to cheer the Empress. She adored seeing them, saying, " The eye of the master fattens the horse."

The party rose at nine in the morning, drove till two, when they had an elaborate midday repast, and then drove on till seven, when they ate again. At these places the finest linen and china would be left behind, used but once. In the real towns, at the start of the journey, Catherine was well lodged in the homes of the wealthy nobles who lived in them.

Sometimes, in small villages, they put up in the homes of the better class farmers. The fresh fine horses, frequently changed, and whipped so that they strained in the traces to escape the cruel lash (which the Russians were such artists in wielding), dragged Catherine's heavy, gem-studded carriage forty miles a day.

Arches, crowds, bustle, colour, excitement, balls, fêtes, parties, entertainments, and plays, all these brightened her journey. From such pompous pleasures it was pleasant for Catherine to change to simpler ones. To her carriage she would invite De Ligne, Ségur and other friends. They would tell stories, attempt to teach her to write poetry ; and when she made deprecatory remarks about herself would swathe her in the flattery she adored.

On to Kiev they went in this fashion. If the travellers thought they had seen wonders, they were in for a surprise. This was merely the overture to the performance. The house lights had dimmed, the asbestos curtain had risen and the hit songs were being played.

The director, as was proper, had not shown up at all. He was supposed to meet them at Kiev. With his personal appearance the show would really begin. The curtain would rise and disclose his play : the new land he had built for his mistress.

They passed through Smolensk, the town where Potemkin was born, on their way to Kiev. The Prince did not join in the great reception held there for Catherine. He preferred to wait till a dramatic moment arrived, till she set foot on the territory he governed. In his place, his two nieces, now married to Polish nobles, the Princesses Branitsky and Skavrowsky, greeted the Empress.

Finally the Prince himself arrived, accompanied by the Prince of Nassau-Siegen and the Prince de Ligne, who had gone ahead to meet him. The moment that he came all doubt as to who was the leading light in this affair vanished. He gave a brilliant series of entertainments. Full Court was held once a week ; grand balls and concerts were given alternately every day. Stupendous displays of fireworks were shot off, one set piece costing forty thousand roubles alone.

He wore his most gorgeous uniforms and jewels, dazzling

the whole city. Suddenly he would rush away to his own quarters, tear off all his finery, and loll about in his greasy dressing-gown with his mistresses, play chess or chat with Ségur—while notables stood about quietly and respectfully.

Everyone lived in the greatest luxury. Ségur wrote, "An elegant villa residence was assigned me and I found it equipped with everything I could desire. The Empress has supplied me with a butler, valets, cooks, footmen, coachmen, carriages, postillions, costly plate, the finest table linens, porcelains, and the choicest wines—everything, in short, that was necessary to the maintenance of a stylish household. She has strictly forbidden her people to allow me to pay for anything, and from the beginning to the end of the journey we have absolutely no expenses except for the presents we have thought it right to offer to the owners of houses allotted to us."

On May 1, 1787, there was a terrific cannonade in the city of Kiev, for the ice of the Dnieper had broken. Drawn up at the quays were seven magnificent galleys. The most luxurious one, called the *Dnieper*, was Catherine's ship ; and one very little inferior to it, called the *Bog*, was Potemkin's. Drawn up after the galleys were eighty vessels of various sorts, all gaily decorated. Catherine's galley headed into the stream, followed by all the rest.

Each boat was manned by a gorgeously costumed crew. There were twelve musicians on each galley. The cabins were decorated in gold and silk. There was a large bedchamber aboard each one, furnished with a huge bed covered by the finest Chinese silk. There was beautiful mahogany furniture aboard each ship ; rare and costly ornaments were everywhere.

Small boats heaped with flowers, singers, and entertainers scuttled back and forth between the galleys. No other boats were on the Dnieper but this fleet of Catherine's, for the Prince had ordered it closed to all traffic.

On the banks there was a show which was destined to go down in history. Beautiful flocks of cattle, tended by peasants in artistic costumes, met Catherine's delighted gaze as she went down the river. The party passed groups of happy people dancing folk dances on the green and waving garlands of flowers. Regiments of fire-eating Cossacks would suddenly

dash up at bends of the river, go through intricate cavalry manœuvres and disappear as suddenly as they came. There were beautiful arches, Roman temples and colonnades in lovely spots. Pretty little villages lined the banks regularly.

Here Potemkin reached the heights of genius as a showman. He became the greatest impresario of his age. Long after he would be dead and forgotten the famous Potemkin villages would be talked about. The whole show on the river's banks was nothing but a theatrical performance of a scope never before and never after attempted.

His dancers were serfs specially trained for the purpose. They would do their bit as Catherine's galley went by, and then be rushed down the stream ahead of her to appear again, in new costumes and new steps. The same was true of the regiments of soldiers, the same men gave many different performances in various uniforms. The arches, Roman temples, colonnades, and even the villages were nothing but theatrical scenery. It would be hurriedly set up by the villagers as Catherine's boat came round the bend ; some would wave from their canvas-and-wood windows, others stood in the doorways of homes which were simply fronts and nothing more. As the boats disappeared, the pseudo-happy and prosperous villagers would gather up their scenery and dash off, to appear again further down the river in slightly different arrangements.

Catherine was overjoyed. The great man in the boat following hers looked on at his handiwork in a bored fashion. De Ligne, Ségur, and the others were not taken in by the show on the bank. They knew scenery when they saw it ; they spotted familiar faces which appeared again and again.

There was gossip and gabble. Did Catherine actually believe that this fraud on the bank was real ? Was she merely pretending it to be so, to save her face ? Did she recognize it as a show and appreciate it as such ? Did she, perhaps, admire it as a gorgeous forecast of the future of the Crimea ?

As for the Prince—did he really believe that he was duping her with this pantomime ? Did he think that covering up all the defects of his work in the Crimea by this hocus-pocus would make her believe the land was flowing with milk and honey ? Or was he doing it merely to show Catherine something novel which he realized she would enjoy ?

No words passed the lips of the unpleasant man on the *Bog* which could give any clue. The lady on the *Dnieper* was in such raptures it was hard to say whether she was doing some of her own excellent acting, or really believing the eyes she asserted she had worn out in the service of her country. No one ever discovered definitely whether her Grishenka had taken her in or not.

At Kanief the boats drew to the bank. It was gorgeously decorated; there was glitter and splendour. A burst of triumphant music rang out in honour of King Stanislaus Augustus of Poland. He came on board the galley *Dnieper*, doffed his royal title, and temporarily became Count Poniatowski.

As he came up the be-ribboned gangplank he tripped slightly; was it his intense near-sightedness, or anxiety? He was keeping an engagement with a lady of whom he had thought many times during the past twenty-three years, and whom he had not seen in all that while. He had waited three months at Kanief to see her, and spent three million roubles for the occasion—all to have the pleasure of her company for a scant three hours.

He saw a woman grown plumper, with snow-white hair and a highly rouged face. Her eyes were still darting, and very blue.

She saw a sensitive man, with a sad, weary expression. His hair had greyed, and lines seamed his face, but he was still very handsome.

Catherine was overcome with emotion as Poniatowski came towards her and bowed low. She grasped the arm of her Momonoff to steady herself. Momonoff mumbled to himself with irritation. He loathed this man she had once loved and who affected her so deeply. She had succeeded at last in arousing his jealousy, and when she least desired it.

The Empress could see, as her old friend approached, that his eyes were wet. She knew, then, that he had found her just as he had pictured her all these years. To him she still was beloved. She took his arm, and to the surprise of everyone the couple retired to her cabin, the one in which Momonoff's bed was openly placed beside his mistress's.

For a full half-hour the two remained below. On deck all

wondered what they were talking about. Was he still declaring his love for her? Was he asking her to spare the kingdom which she had given him and which she, with Germany, was ruthlessly partitioning? Was he pleading for an end to the cruelties which the Russian soldiery had practised on his defenceless people when they ravaged his lands? Perhaps it was nothing so important as that. Perhaps they were merely having reminiscences or a good cry over days of youth which were gone forever, for mistakes which could never be rectified?

Catherine and Poniatowski could hear the angry tread of Momonoff's feet on the boards above them as they talked. Before he had been jealous, now he was angry; he felt his affections had been usurped by a has-been.

On the *Bog*, Potemkin reclined contentedly. He felt luxuriously happy. Rumantzoff had been forgotten. The Orlov faction, persistent but futile, no longer troubled him. His show was getting a wonderful hand. The reception to Poniatowski had gone over nicely and he felt well disposed toward the King of Poland. Potemkin never viciously ruined any man; his power gave him the chance utterly to destroy many, but it was only very rarely that he used it in this way.

Something about Poniatowski touched him. The man reminded him of a hurt bird.... A lackey came and announced that the elaborate banquet prepared on another galley in honour of the King of Poland was ready. Potemkin slipped into the sable cloak held out to him, stepped into a richly embellished boat manned by costumed rowers who pulled gilded sweeps, and was taken over to the galley. There he met Catherine and the King of Poland, and noted with some amusement how Momonoff frowned and scowled through the meal.... He decided to get rid of the fellow; he had held the position long enough. He was tired of Momonoff's face. Besides, when a woman reached her sixties it was bad business to let her become too attached to one man.

The banquet was over and Poniatowski near-sightedly fumbled for his hat. Catherine found it and handed it to him. He took it and then said, his lips trembling, "Ah, Madame, you once gave me a much better one!"

Her old love had arranged an elaborate ball in her honour,

but all his attempts to persuade her to attend it were in vain. She firmly refused to accept his invitation, reminding him that it was still her custom to retire early. The rest of the Court went, and the next morning she was on her way down the river.

Poniatowski could not persuade her to stay another twenty-four hours.

They went down to Krementchuk and there Potemkin had a surprise for her. He had built her a palace, constructing everything in it to suit her particular fancy and taste. The place had been a perfect wilderness, and yet a completely equipped structure was there when she came. More wonderful still was the fact that it was entirely surrounded by an English garden, a thing which she adored. Potemkin had even had huge trees transplanted at fearful expense.

She praised him in French verse to Ségur and de Ligne, in Russian prose to his enemies ; and in her letters and memoirs she prated about the marvels of this man. The works he had performed at Krementchuk were real. This was no thing of painted canvas ; the whole could be touched and lived in. For Catherine he earned complete vindication here, reached the zenith of his career. He had twelve thousand crack cavalrymen drawn up and go through manœuvres for her. His best regiments paraded, and Catherine was loud and long in her praises of him.

Ségur was moved to write, " He has ability as if by a miracle to cope with every obstacle, to overcome nature, shorten distances, deceive the eye as to the dullness of the sandy plains, the mind as to the tedium of the long journey, and to give a semblance of life and fertility to the barren desert."

The fleet moved on, anchoring only in the most picturesque and lovely spots. On May 18 they reached Kaidak, where the Austrian Emperor, Joseph II, was waiting for them. Catherine went ashore with Potemkin and his nephew and Branitsky to meet him. They kept the affair very secret, repairing inland to the lonely house of a Cossack. They had brought no servants with them, and the three nobles had to play cook for the two rulers ; between them they concocted a miserable repast to satisfy their hunger.

The trip next took them to Ekaterinoslav, the city which

Potemkin had built in Catherine's honour. Ségur, who had been invited so that he would spread favourable publicity about the trip, wrote in the small hours of the night :

" They begin everything here but never finish anything. Potemkin soon abandons tasks which he begins with such enthusiasm. None of his projects mature and are followed up. At Ekaterinoslav he has laid the foundations of a capital he will never inhabit and of a church as large as St. Peter's in Rome, in which, I dare say, no Mass will ever be said. The site which he has chosen for the new city which is to be called after Catherine is a hill with a beautiful view, but without drinking water."

To-day there are plains where Potemkin dreamed of Ekaterinoslav, and a modest church stands where he visioned one which would eclipse St. Peter's in Rome by being a foot longer.

From Ekaterinoslav they went to Cherson, the city which Potemkin said he had been building for such a long time. He had been careful to create the appearance of bustle when Catherine got there. The stores were stocked full of merchandise, all of which was bought on credit and never paid for. Wagon-loads of what seemed to be grain, and was more often sand, were driven into the town. There were rows of houses, often without roofs, doors or windows. Many buildings were just fronts. All was hastily thrown up and would not stand inspection. Potemkin gambled that Catherine, with her swollen legs, would not walk around very much, and he won. People had been trained to act as if they were very busy. In the market-place there was much staged haggling, and people played at keeping store, all for the benefit of Catherine.

The Emperor Joseph was met again. This time he travelled incognito under the name of Count Falkenstein. A sixty-six-gun man-o'-war was launched and a frigate of forty guns was sped down the ways to impress him. There was an imposing fleet of ships in the harbour, which some said were merely merchant-men, dressed up as naval vessels.

Catherine was introduced by Potemkin to her first American Negro, Miranda. He had fled from slavery in Havana to New York, then to Canada, next to Constantinople, and was now in Cherson. The Spanish chargé d'affaires demanded his custody. Catherine refused to give him up and recommended

him to foreign courts when he left her realm. Miranda ended up a French general.

It was a strange anomaly. She showed kindness to this one slave in Cherson, but paid no heed to the thousands who had perished in building the city.

She sat on a throne in Cherson which Potemkin had built for her at a cost of forty thousand roubles. The palace she lived in had just been finished on her arrival and the beautiful gardens which surrounded it had only been transplanted in time. When she left, the palace was never again occupied and it fell into ruins.

She acted as if she believed it all and believed that it would last for eternity. But did she believe it? Ségur, the critic at Potemkin's show, said, "Cherson, too, is badly placed; it is surrounded by pestilential marshes, and fully-loaded vessels cannot come into the harbour. A vast amount of trouble has been taken to make everything look impressive while the Empress is here, but all the marvels will disappear when she has gone."

Nor was Ségur a lone dissenting voice. Joseph II also was a bad press. He remarked once, at the laying of a corner-stone in a city, that he had had a most enormous day, adding that Catherine had laid the first stone of the town and he had laid the last.

Running out of the town there was a huge arch with the words, "This Is the Way to Byzantium," in large letters. That Byzantium would not be so easily reached was soon made plain to Catherine: on the Turkish shore across the city were anchored four Turkish ships, barring her progress through the Borysthenes. They could not do much, but they did anger her.

"Do you see?" she said, pointing at them; "one would suppose the Turks had no recollection of Tschesme." She referred to the sea battle in which the Russians had decisively beaten them.

Nevertheless, the proper hatreds for the coming war with Turkey were being fanned into flame. Joseph II was persuaded, much against his will, to side with Russia at this time. He sent troops to fight in the war, and so one material gain for which the trip had been planned was put through.

By way of Perekop the party made its way into Baktshiserai, the capital of the late Khan of the Crimea. There Catherine sat on the throne he had formerly occupied, and lodged in his palace in great pomp for several days. Potemkin staged a pyrotechnical rendition of the eruption of Vesuvius for her one night, and also amazed her with the new road which he had caused to be built over the mountains to the river Katcha.

They went next to Inkerman, where Catherine lived in a palace especially built for her. Here, too, there had been nothing in the country at all but sandy waste two years before. Now, when night had fallen, Potemkin took Catherine aside. He looked weary and tired ; the strain of his undertaking had been telling on him.

" Grishenka, I am worried about your health. You look ill. You have been doing too much. You must take care of yourself . . . how shall I ever get along without you ? " she said to him.

The Prince said nothing. A silent, surly man most of the time, he had grown even more close-mouthed on this trip. He took her arm and led her to a bay-window, separated from the rest of the throng in the room. A heavy rich drape hid the view from the window. When she had seated herself in the chair he offered her, he suddenly whisked the drape aside.

Down below lay an impressive view of the harbour, and in it was a new fleet of ships—the famous Euxine Fleet which Potemkin had caused to be built and equipped in two short years. Before that there had been nothing. No town, no fortress, no inhabitants, just barrenness.

The Empress gasped in astonishment as she saw the wonder. The Prince made a sign to a lackey to hang a light in the window. Instantly the cannons on the ships roared in full salute as the fleet passed in review.

Tears came to Catherine's eyes. She was overwhelmed and could not express herself. Her hand sought her lover's, and pressed it. He knew she approved of him thoroughly.

What matter that the ships were built of green wood and were not seaworthy ? What matter that the crews were starved and completely incompetent, and that it would all

dissolve into nothing after she left? At present she was seeing a superb spectacle, beyond all credibility. They were eight hundred leagues from St. Petersburg in a newly conquered country, and Potemkin had performed a miracle.

The Prince was not satisfied with this demonstration. He had her driven to the shore-line. There a galley which had been built especially for her, in exact reproduction of the Sultan's, waited; and in this superb vessel she made a tour of the harbour.

From Inkerman they drove on through solitary tracts of land from which the wild Tartar tribes had been driven. In this country the Prince was endeavouring to induce peaceful farmers to settle. Since he had swindled the immigrants whom he induced to come, he now had wild ideas of settling the land with foreign convicts, and of forcing one thousand serf girls into marriage with them to populate the country. These fanciful schemes were doomed by Besborodko, who managed to persuade Catherine not to put them into action. Potemkin was furious.

In this land the Queen slept in huge silken tents, and ate wonderful meals of costly viands which Potemkin had shipped into the desert so that she would not want for anything. They passed fields, orchards, and groves he had planted along the route. Wild Tartar horsemen rode up to the gem-studded carriage, yelling and brandishing arms.

The Emperor of Austria became frightened, but Catherine knew that Potemkin had huge detachments of soldiers nearby, and this was just another demonstration to impress her. In fact, she bore everything stoically and courageously, even a fearfully rough ride on which her Grishenka took her and her party to view what he thought was an exceptional wonder: her first sight of two Angora goats.

They came to Karasoubazar. That night the Prince called at the Empress's tent and urged her to come out and see the wonders of the evening with him. She took his arm and slowly made her way through the field on her heavy, painful legs. She was an old woman now, and because the hour was late for her she looked every bit of her age. Potemkin, who was spending his splendid constitution recklessly with excessive dissipation, looked more than his age. There were rings under

his eyes ; his complexion was splotchy, his face puffy, and his one squinting eye was bloodshot and bleared.

They walked until they came to an open space. Above, millions of stars twinkled their homage to Catherine, the Empress of all she could see. In the distance, darkly blue in the night, she made out the outline of five high, conical hills. Suddenly at a signal, unknown to her, five huge lines of coloured fire flared up on these mountains. For miles the lurid bands of flame wound their way through the bare hills. Then, on the largest of them all, a hundred thousand rockets burst and spelled Catherine's cypher.

In a land where fireworks were used on all occasions, Potemkin had just shot off the greatest display there had ever been.

It was now the twenty-second of July, and the heat in the Crimea was rapidly becoming unbearable. The party turned towards Tsarskoe Selo again. By way of Krementchuk they went to Pultava. Here, quite suddenly, two huge armies met and engaged in an exact reproduction of the famous battle in which Charles the XII of Sweden had been completely routed by Peter the Great. Every bit was faithfully reproduced, some of the soldiers even wearing the actual uniforms of those who had taken part in the conflict. It delighted Catherine and Joseph of Austria, whom it helped persuade into an alliance with the Empress in the coming war against the Turks.

At Pultava Potemkin came to the Empress and made a request that he had made many times during the trip.

" Give me the Crimea for my own. I want to be king of this country, Matushka."

Catherine smiled and let him storm. She had seen this country and the marvels he had done in it, and now she wanted it more than ever for herself.

" No, Grishenka, I shall not give it to you. The Crimea is a ring on my finger," she told him ; and gave him, instead, a present of one hundred thousand roubles.

Potemkin was unhappy as he left her. He had failed to get the Crimea for himself ; and also he had not been able to persuade her to give up Momonoff.

The trip was now through for him. The excitement, the

joy of planning it, was over. He never revelled in past memories. He only longed for new things to have ; and being denied them, he sulked and was more unhappy than he had ever been.

He left her at Pultava, and she went on to Tsarskoe Selo by way of Kursk and Orel. It had been a long trip for her, longer than those who had been on it had anticipated. Many times they had been in actual danger, for the ships on the Dnieper were badly manned. Many times there had been delay and unpleasantness on the road. Yet, everything considered, the whole journey had been surpassingly marvellous. The whole world was talking about the Crimean trip. Good or bad, it was talking, and talk would make Catherine known.

It had been an amazing thing, and her name would be coupled with it forever. Yes, her Grishenka had done well. It was likely now that there was to be no longer a Catherine the Second, but a Catherine the Great.

And so pleased was she with all that had happened that she ordered gold medals struck, with her profile on one side and a map of the route they had taken on the other. These she presented as a lasting and tangible memento to all she had invited on the trip.

Catherine had taken more than ten million roubles from the treasury for pocket money, and it had not been enough. The millions it cost Potemkin to stage the Crimean trip were never known, for when the final curtain had been rung down and the lights dimmed there were many who would never be paid what was owing to them. Many had even died to make it possible, and they could never be paid in any currency at all.

People who had witnessed the great pageant spoke of it long, long after the applause had died down and after the director had forgotten he had ever staged it. They remembered that in each town they had visited, twenty-five of the finest houses had been commandeered. They recollected that to travel 350 versts, 10,480 horses, 5,040 drivers, and 9,636 saddles were required. They thought of the sumptuous boats which went down the Dnieper and all the rest of it, and never forgot their experiences to their dying days.

In the Crimea the hot summer sun blistered, and the cold

winter winds howled as the seasons passed. The roads which Catherine travelled, the roads which were to last as long as those of Rome, disappeared the moment the wheels of her carriage and the hoofs of her sixteen horses had traversed them. The splendid palaces, in which she had spent a night, shed their paint and gilt ; the roofs leaked, bats and birds nested in their magnificent halls, and they soon fell into ruin and decay, so that not a single vestige of them was left.

It seemed as if Nature desired the country to be a waste land. As soon as the disturbing hand of man had removed itself from the soil the wonderful flowers and the laboriously transplanted trees and shrubs died ; and the waste land once more came into its own.

The Tartars who had made their obeisance to Catherine, and who had accepted her large gifts of money to build temples and print the Koran, soon rebelled and joined Russia's enemy, the Turks.

Nothing remained of it all save here a champagne bottle tossed into the desert by a drunken valet, there a plate of priceless porcelain out in the sandy wastes, where Catherine had eaten at midday and not bothered to carry back the ware.

BOOK FIVE

CHAPTER ONE

1787–1788

THE Prince de Ligne, Austrian Ambassador to Russia, used to twit his vexatious friend, Prince Potemkin, about his love of medals and orders.

They held a childish fascination for Potemkin. If there were any in existence which he did not own, he was unhappy. He still sighed for the Garter, which the English were so loathe to bestow ; and he yearned for the Order of the Golden Fleece, which could be given only to Roman Catholics. But more than these he wanted the Grand Ribbon of St. George, a Russian decoration which was missing from his almost complete collection. To wear this bit of splendour one had to have the command of an army and gain a victory.

Potemkin lay on his couch clad only in his dressing-gown, and thought about the glittering Grand Ribbon of St. George. His niece Barbara was picking lice from the hair of his chest, and the beauteous Princess Dolgurukia delicately performed the same operation in the matted, unwashed locks of his head. He popped a clove of garlic into his mouth, munched it with a handful of sugar, and then belched sonorously. The ladies paused a moment in their labours and then went on. All was quiet till the Prince heaved a large and odoriferous sigh in the direction of his niece.

" What is wrong, beloved ? " she asked.

He merely gnawed at his nails, thinking of the Ribbon of St. George and how it would look round his neck. Barbara waited for him to speak, and then impulsively kissed him. She had been very tractable all that day, for he had just granted her sons appointments in the army and signed a series of contracts on which she stood to reap handsomely.

" Light of my life, my soul, is there anything I could do ? "

Potemkin looked into the impossibly beautiful face of Dolgurukia. Round her neck there glittered a necklace of enormous diamonds and rubies he had just presented to her. The corner of his mouth jerked up several times in a nervous tic, and he sighed full in her face. She did not blanch, merely smiled. He turned from her and spat out a fragment of nail

he had managed to gnaw from his thumb, then picked up a diamond-studded epaulet from a table and with a small brush began to clean it. The ladies went on searching for vermin.

For half an hour the Prince brushed at the epaulet. Spotless before he began, it was impossible for him to increase its brilliance. . . . To wear the Grand Ribbon of St. George one would have to command an army and win a victory. What a bore ! What effort was involved ! What blood would have to be shed—and he loathed the shedding of blood. Thousands of troops would have to be levied from the serfs. They would have to be outfitted and trained. It meant going down to the Crimea and travelling great distances. If only a war wasn't so irksome to wage !

The great man of Russia sighed and groaned at these thoughts and shifted his huge bulk, now grown pale and flabby from constant dissipation.

There was no help for it. He must have the Grand Ribbon of St. George. . . . He made up his mind to start things in motion for the second Russian-Turkish War.

It was very easy to convince Catherine that a war with Turkey would be ideal. For years the Prince had kept on saying that it would be a fine thing indeed for her to extend her kingdom farther to the west. How wonderful it would be for her to see her grandson Constantine sitting on the throne in Constantinople ! More glory to Catherine ! The greatest monarch on the face of the earth !

The Empress was very eager to work with the Prince on this excellent project.

Joseph II of Austria was not as enthusiastic as he had been about entering a war, but on the Crimean trip he had given his word that he would, and now there was no help for it but to go in.

The Turks still remembered the vast armies which had gone into the Crimea for the Empress's trip. If war came, they stood to gain nothing but the right to keep their land. To fight did not appeal to them, and the Sublime Porte made all possible efforts to avoid the disaster which Russia relentlessly pushed forward.

In the Black Sea the Russians had won the right to trade freely. Now they began doing everything in their power to

annoy the Turks in the conduct of their business. Protests were made to St. Petersburg. No attention was paid.

Bulgakov, the Russian minister in Turkey, made himself as impossible as he could. He demanded immediate answers to things which were pending, in order to create affronts. Difficulties which could be easily settled were made as unpleasant as possible by him. Things became more and more intolerable for the Turks. The English urged them on to fight, promising that they and the French would back them.

Finally the patience of the Sublime Porte, ruler of Turkey, gave way. He clapped the annoying Bulgakov into prison, and on August 18, 1787, declared the war on Russia for which Potemkin so greatly longed. Austria allied herself with Russia. Sweden, Russia's immemorial enemy, saw a fine chance to attack her, and made suitable preparations. England and Prussia wished the Turks the best of luck, but did no more for them. What remained of Poland started an insurrection against Russia. England and Prussia gave that unhappy country moral—but no other—support. Joseph immediately reaped an unpleasant reward. Hungary and Brabant, part of his own domain, saw an excellent chance to begin an insurrection that had been simmering for some time. They revolted.

In St. Petersburg Catherine was all smiles. Bells tolled constantly, cannons boomed, people crowded the streets rejoicing. The vodka shops did a rushing business. Talk of war was on every tongue. Throngs filled the many churches, hymns were sung by the beautifully-trained Russian choirs. People prostrated themselves before the relics of saints, and kissed the holiest icons. Bishops prayed that God give Russia victory.

In the Crimea Tartars prayed to Allah to give the Turks victory. Their devotions were performed in new mosques which Catherine had erected for them. Devotedly they thumbed Korans which she had printed for them. With money that she had presented they purchased guns and ammunition. If Catherine was disappointed that the people governed by Potemkin were using her largess to make common cause with the Turks, she did not show it.

Whom should she pick to prosecute the war?

Rumantzoff had been in charge of the army for years ; he was the only logical man to command it. Potemkin had always envied him his ability. There were no potent Orlovs to harass him any more, but the capable and efficient Rumantzoff was a thorn in his side. During the Crimean trip he arranged matters so that when Catherine came to Rumantzoff's city of Kiev she found it in deplorable shape. Potemkin had cut off supplies and money. He made certain that Rumantzoff's men would get no showy uniforms ; when they paraded before the Empress they made a sorry appearance. The Empress, though she knew the general's value and ability, grew to dislike him more and more as time went on. Every complaint he made against her Grishenka nettled her. Unconsciously she felt it to be a complaint against herself and her judgment. Every time Potemkin found some new way to make life miserable for Rumantzoff she felt vindicated and happy.

Suvarov was another general she could rely on. He was a logical man to command the army. The soldiers adored him, for he was one of them. He ate their coarse fare, and lived their life, holding his infested shirt to the heat of the fire with theirs to rid it of vermin. On the Crimean trip, when Catherine showered her gifts on all her favourites, she turned to him, her most colourful and brilliant military commander, and asked him what he would have. All Suvarov wanted was to have his room rent paid. Catherine found that he lived in a hovel costing one and a half roubles a month.

He was growing old now, but his wizened, skinny frame was tough and wiry from sharing the hardships of his men. In all his battles he rode with them to the very front on a sorry nag, his sword drawn, his shirt-tails flapping wildly, yelling and screaming like a demon. To him the field of death was the breath of life.

Then there was Prince Repnin, another logical man to command her armies. He was astute, clever, experienced, and reliable. She knew his qualities, for he had served her long and well.

If any of these men should not please her, she could logically have chosen Kamenskoi from others among her subjects. Russia had an enormous noble class whose sole occupation

was war. From its large numbers there were many commanders she could have picked.

Then there was her Grishenka, her clever, witty friend whom she called her genius and protégé. She loved to write to her favourite correspondent, Baron Grim, extolling Potemkin's wisdom and telling him that the Prince was her pupil, the very brightest of all her lovers. She had known him intimately for thirteen years now, and was aware of his caprices, his unreliability, his dilatoriness and his obvious deficiencies as a military commander. He was not a logical choice as the leader of her armies—and still she chose him in preference to Rumantzoff, Suvarov, Repnin, Kamenskoi and the rest.

The Prince had used his friends, gained the influence of Joseph II, applied his own persuasive powers on Catherine, and had succeeded. Glimmers of reason and sense told her to take Rumantzoff, but in the end Potemkin made her act and think the way he wanted.

All the able generals found themselves under him and subject to his orders. The army in the Kuban had to obey his command, and so did the one in the Crimea. Potemkin, who knew nothing at all, relied upon the knowledge of Repnin and Suvarov. The great Rumantzoff found himself lord of a weak body of men who amounted to nothing more than a small observation corps. This was too much for him to bear. He had spent his whole life in the army. Now Russia was engaged in her greatest conflict ; but war or no war, he could not abide this insult to his years of service and integrity. He resigned, to Potemkin's great and undisguised joy.

Had Potemkin become an enemy Rumantzoff had grown used to and needed in his life ? Did he really admire the Prince ? When Potemkin died and Rumantzoff heard the news, he burst into tears. To people who were amazed at his behaviour he said : " Why are you astonished ? Potemkin was my rival, but Russia lost in him a great man, and our fatherland a patriotic son."

Catherine liked to make herself believe that her lovers were exceptional beings. She told herself she was fortunate in knowing them, that Russia would benefit by them. Since Potemkin was her prize, not to pick him after all these years would be to admit defeat.



PAUL I

Marble bust by Shubin, end of eighteenth century

And so, that a woman's pride might not be hurt, and a man's foible satisfied, Russia was destined to destroy its horses cattle and produce to the point of exhaustion ; to deplete the treasury till it was bankrupt ; to lose shamefully and needlessly, in a ghastly carnage, the lives of thousands upon thousands of her sons.

At the beginning of the year 1788 Prince Potemkin, now, among many other things, commander-in-chief of all the Russian armies, left for the front. He did not ride at the head of his troops on a mettlesome horse. His horseback-riding days had ceased long since, when he had left the Preobazhensky Guards. He rode only in the most comfortable carriage he could procure, though De Ligne, Repnin, and others tried to persuade him to adopt a horse as a more military mode of travel. De Ligne bought him a gentle horse which would set him off nobly. He accepted it but drove in his berlin, with a lovely mistress at his side.

At Ekaterinoslav, well behind the lines and far from the seat of war, Potemkin set up his quarters. The first thing he did was to make himself really comfortable. He lived in a house provided with every luxury he could wish for, and his harem of some fifty women was nicely established within call.

To secure complete quiet and isolation from the fatiguing war, the Prince conveniently had a toothache which kept him in his quarters for eight days. He passed his hours of supposed torment pleasantly at chess, cards, billiards, and with his mistresses. When these pleasures palled, there was always a huge orchestra ready to give a concert for him.

His highest officers performed strange military duties indeed. They dashed over the country-side at furious speeds to bring him back huge silver tureens of his favourite sterlet soup, or melons, or cucumbers, or wagon loads of perfumes for his mistresses. Other dignified and highly placed authorities performed the functions of valets de chambres.

All these gentlemen were more than willing to carry out such services for the Prince. Military efficiency and bravery on the field of battle counted for very little. Flattery, abjectness, bringing a new mistress, and proficiency at billiards or chess were the sort of things that won rewards and promotions

from the Prince. Even a tailor who made a good-looking suit for one of the Commander-in-Chief's ladies received a commission.

He still treated those in the highest places with disdain, still slapped the faces of princes when the sight of them annoyed him. The common soldier, however, won his serious consideration. Years before, he had promulgated reforms in the army, for which the men were exceedingly grateful. They no longer had to go to the needless expense of wearing their hair in powdered curls. The irksome task of whitening the leather in their accoutrements was cut out. The floggings and forced marches were abolished. Cumbersome side arms were eliminated and the bayonet substituted. Clothing was re-designed with an eye towards comfort and climate.

But he really was no benefactor to his troops. Huge sums which were supposed to be spent on the army dribbled away on his own pleasures so that the men were often clad in rags or clothing unsuitable to the climate. Because the whims of the Prince and his mistresses came first, whole regiments were without shoes, fuel and food in the dead of winter.

The Prince's leniency towards the men destroyed all discipline in the army, to the horror of those foreign officers serving in it. They wrote bitterly about this state of affairs to their various governments. This lack of morale might be bad for Russia, but it was good for Potemkin. He knew that if the men revolted, they would turn on their officers and towards himself, leaving him in full control of the country. As long as he had the army he knew he was safe.

A soldier's lot was a hard one. Service in the army was for life, with no leave of absence ; and the men never saw their loved ones once they were recruited. They rarely received their miserable wages, and then usually in depreciated paper roubles. Money given to their officers for their welfare seldom reached them.

Treatment was so cruel that of ten thousand men levied from a district, only eighteen hundred generally survived to join the regiment. The food was atrocious. At Bender the bread killed sixty men in every regiment. Potemkin made no provisions for the winter, and hundreds perished daily from the cold. The wounded died for lack of medical supplies.

To Catherine, who wrote him inquiring about these conditions, he replied : " You must have patience and hope in God. Christ will help you."

The Empress was lucky indeed to receive this pious reply from her Commander-in-Chief. Most often, five or six weeks would go by and she would receive no reply from him at all. Then she would send couriers to him begging for news from the front. In St. Petersburg or Moscow, she would pace the floor distractedly on her painful legs, her eyes brimming with tears, real tears. Her face would be distorted with worry and anxiety, but the man at the front went his round of pleasures serenely. He had achieved the position he desired ; nothing else interested him at the moment.

Irritated as she was by this laxness, she was on the whole quite pleased with him. De Ligne, who was fighting with the Austrians under Potemkin, wrote everyone in St. Petersburg that the Prince had sunk into one of those long lethargies in which he engaged in no activity whatsoever, and that he needed stirring up. He did not write to Catherine, but in his memoirs he noted disconsolately : " If I had chosen to write only in praise of the Prince and his operations I should have received showers of presents, in diamonds and serfs. Catherine would have been very well pleased if I had deceived her ; it would have been more convenient for her to believe that all was going on well."

There was nothing wilfully cruel about Potemkin's attitude towards the men. His philosophy and his life had made him unconsciously callous of them. Often he would berate Suvarov for the huge losses he suffered in action. Many times he would cry and pray for them. Sentimentally he was completely devoted to them. In practice he was too lazy to stir himself, too selfish to sacrifice the lightest whim in their behalf.

His kindnesses to them, ironically enough, did them more harm than good. All his reforms in dress and punishment were abolished by the militaristic and mad Paul, who came after Catherine. Paul made their lot hard indeed for the few remissions Potemkin had given them.

The Prince often hesitated to have the soldiers lose their lives in an assault on the enemy. His qualms made him delay until the Turks, often, were more strongly reinforced ; and

thus a greater slaughter was generally inflicted than if he had not hesitated in the first place.

He was a strange military commander indeed, and the Prince de Ligne was driven frantic by him. De Ligne had received an appointment as a general in the army in October, 1787; and since nothing very exciting was happening he decided to give a large ball to which he intended to invite all the beautiful women in St. Petersburg. On the eve of the party a courier from Potemkin dashed up with this message: "The army may perhaps be under the walls of Otchakov. Five thousand Turks have been killed by Suvarov at Kinburn. The Turkish fleet is retiring. Start at once."

De Ligne, eager to arrive before Potemkin had ended the war, drove day and night through the most horrible weather and country to arrive on time. When he arrived Potemkin had a very embarrassed air about him, and De Ligne found the war lord dejected and unhappy. Everything had gone wrong. He declared he was outnumbered and had no provisions. God alone would save him from the Turks.

"Where are they?" asked De Ligne.

"Everywhere," the Prince replied with a wide, sorrowful wave of the hand.

The fire-eating De Ligne looked everywhere for the enemy, but could not find them. There seemed to be none of the oppressing forces which Potemkin told him of. De Ligne pleaded, begged, and argued with him to take Otchakov; but nothing would move the Prince. For five long months there was the most complete inactivity. De Ligne plagued Potemkin for two weeks for a plan of attack which he might show his Emperor, Joseph II; and after constant badgering all he could get out of him was the vague assurance that he would attack in all directions.

There was more to Potemkin's obtuseness than sheer lack of interest. He felt that the war was entirely his own. He did not in the least intend to share its glories with anyone else. He was entirely lacking in a sense of patriotism. The Russian-Turkish War was by no means being fought for the good of his country; it was fought for the good of Potemkin. When generals not under his command, or not obsequious to him, were defeated he was delighted. When the Swedes beat a

Russian fleet which was not under his control, he rejoiced. De Ligne and Joseph II were to get no glory and no spoils. He would go to any lengths to make things difficult for them, and it mattered not how Russia fared as a result.

De Ligne fumed. In July, 1788, he wrote, " Sometimes we have no bread, only biscuits and macaroons ; no apples and pears, but pots of jam ; no butter, but ices ; no water, but every kind of wine ; no wood for the kitchen fire, but logs of aloes to burn for perfume."

He waited and waited for the man he thought was his friend and ally to come through with a military idea ; and at last he was rewarded. Potemkin, with his flair for the dramatic, conceived the idea of forming the Israelowsky Regiment. It was unique in that it was composed solely of Jews who lived in the ghettos and were not eligible for military service in Russia.

The Israelowsky Regiment was a joy to De Ligne, who had little enough to brighten his existence in the inactive camp. He wrote, " We already had a squadron whom I delighted in for their long beards, which reached to their knees, on account of their short stirrups ; and the fear they were in, on horseback, gave them the appearance of monkeys. The anxiety they felt could be read in their eyes, and the long pikes, which they carried in a most comical manner, made them look as if they were trying to imitate the Cossacks. I don't know what cursed priest persuaded our Marshal (Potemkin) that a corps of Jews was contrary to Holy Scriptures."

Potemkin, deeply religious as he was, would not go against the wishes of the Church, and the Israelowsky Regiment never saw service.

Denied this diversion, Potemkin turned literary. The Empress had been sending strings of piteous notes to him, and to those who knew him, asking for information about conditions at the front. Potemkin never bothered to answer her ; instead, he tried his hand at writing graceful madrigals to the ladies of his camp, or at translating the church history of the Abbé Fleur.

The Turks were at Otchakov, calmly digging in for a long siege and strengthening their fortifications. Potemkin diverted himself by scribbling philosophical essays on scraps

of paper. " Europe is in such a perfect mess that I think it is a good time to reflect on the state of world affairs," he wrote—and then went on to outline for a good two pages how every single nation on the Continent was suspicious and jealous of its neighbour, how each was armed and trying to pounce on the next, how grudges and hatreds were making them flame into war. At the end of the discourse was a grand peroration : " We are called to arms and I join the fray. Without ceasing to become a spectator, I become an actor in the play. In my opinion all that is taking place is nothing more than a kick in an anthill. Are we anything better ourselves, poor mortals that we are ? "

Full of disgust at Potemkin's inactivity, De Ligne finally left his camp to go to Repnin's. A fortnight after his friend departed, Potemkin besieged Otchakov. He had waited till De Ligne was gone so that he would surely receive no credit. The whim was to cost thousands their lives and to cause untold suffering among the rest.

While Potemkin was making life unbearable for De Ligne, and by his delays brightening the chances for the Turks, Catherine herself was engaged in a war of her own in Russia. The Swedes had seized this moment as an exceptional opportunity to attack the Russians ; and with half of Europe cheering them on, they menaced Frederichsham.

Potemkin's policy had been to keep Sweden in a feeble condition. By intrigue he had managed to counteract the influence of the French, whose policy, in turn, was to help put the Swedes into as strong a position as possible. But in 1788, while Potemkin was busy fighting the Turks, Gustavus of Sweden engineered a revolution and, greatly to the surprise of Count Osterman, the Russian Ambassador, won it and became king.

Potemkin met the situation with his usual methods. He bribed the provinces of Sweden to revolt, and instructed Osterman to make himself as much of a nuisance as possible. Osterman followed instructions, made fun of the new King Gustavus, and managed to throw the Swedish Senate into revolt.

Sweden demanded his recall and Catherine sent Count Andrew Razoumovsky in his place. Razoumovsky managed

to make himself every bit as unpleasant as Osterman. The Empress hoped by such tactics to keep Sweden in such a state of ferment within her own borders that she would have no chance to bother with Russia. Much to Catherine's amazement, Gustavus declared war upon her.

He would have been willing to make an immediate peace if she had recalled Razoumovsky, but Count Chernicheff, the head of the navy and a member of the council, drummed up an intense war spirit against Sweden. This was an opportunity for him to win some glory, and Chernicheff did not like to let the chance go by.

Gustavus marched against Frederichsham with the hope of breaking through to St. Petersburg. The Empress found herself with a few regiments of guards and some invalid soldiers. She sent wild calls to Potemkin for troops, but her requests were futile. He had no intention of giving up any of the men under him. In the first place, he rarely gave up anything he controlled. Secondly, he had no intention of lessening the chances of his own victory by increasing Catherine's. Thirdly, he reasoned, quite correctly, that a little diplomacy with Sweden would have settled the whole matter, at least temporarily. With the Turks defeated, he would then march on Sweden and gobble up that country.

He therefore paid no attention to Catherine's desperate calls, pretending that the few soldiers she had at her disposal were sufficient to handle the situation.

Things grew dangerous. In St. Petersburg the boom of the Swedish cannon could be plainly heard. People removed to Moscow, where it was safer. Catherine, who was anything but a coward, remained calm and stayed where she was. Her own bravery stiffened the morale of everybody.

If Potemkin had been in her place, it is more than certain that he would have fled to Moscow. The sound of cannon was unbearable to him and made him extremely nervous. Once, the soft silence of his harem down in the Crimea was shattered by a cannonade. He sent an indignant note to his artillery commander, General Pister, asking what the noise was about. " Tell the Prince," Pister replied, " that the firing is occasioned by the Russian-Turkish War."

The booming guns of the Swedes sharpened Catherine's

wits. She managed to sow discord amongst the Swedish troops by bribing them and their officers. She scraped the pot of her military reserves. She had General Michelson collect the very old and the very young recruits and even the household guards, and managed to defeat the disorganized Swedes at Hoagland.

At Frederichsham, Swedish officers, bribed by the Russians, told their troops that Gustavus was violating their rights by waging an offensive war without the consent of the states of the kingdom. They promptly laid down their arms, and Russia had an easy victory.

On the sea, Admiral Grieg managed to commit fewer blunders than his enemy, and defeated the Swedes in a big naval engagement. The war thus victoriously concluded, Catherine wrote Potemkin rather excitedly asking him what he thought of her successes. The Prince, still dawdling before the walls of Otchakov, disdainfully remarked that he thought very little of this " old woman's war." Catherine swallowed the rebuke and said no more about it.

Meanwhile her " genius " had begun to lose confidence in himself. Since Otchakov did not fall of itself, and since the few sorties he had made upon it were not very successful, Potemkin's courage began to fail, and despondency to creep up instead. His mind ran back many years and he saw himself in a dim room with a bandage about his head. At that time he had thought of entering the church and dropping all the cares of the world. Now, when he found himself not immediately successful, he again thought longingly of entering it. The simple, bare life at Troitza Monastery seemed infinitely preferable to the cares and burdens of a military commander. When he had taken over this function he had visioned himself only as a victor. The possibility of defeat shattered his courage, and all desire for military glory left him.

When his Sebastopol fleet was destroyed in a storm he wrote the harassed Empress, " I have become unlucky. Everything I undertake fails.—The Sebastopol fleet has been destroyed by a storm.—God is striking us, not the Turks. My sickness is another blow. I have neither brains nor spirit. I beg you to give the command to someone else. I am almost dead and all the favours and estates I have received from you

I place at your feet. I want to end my life, which I don't think is going to last much longer, in solitude and anonymity.—God knows what's going to happen. I'd give up everything and remain a simple man, but that I am devoted to you. God is my witness."

The thought that he might have to give the Crimea back to the Turks filled him with fear and hypochondria. Catherine had to drop everything and come to his rescue. She knew that much of the letter was a passing fit of melancholia, and wrote him, " You're as impatient as a five-year-old. The activities entrusted to you demand unwavering patience. Good-bye, my friend ; neither time, nor distance, nor anyone in the world can change my thoughts of you."

He cheered up some when Suvarov won a victory for him at Kinburn. Potemkin, of course, took the credit for it, although he did write and thank the old general, an unusual thing for him. Everyone thought he would follow up this victory with an attack of his own ; but he remained inactive, as always. When Catherine wrote to ask him the reason for his inaction he replied, " If it meant the sacrifice of my own person only, be assured I would not delay a moment ; but the safety and the preservation of so many precious lives forces me to take the right steps."

More than this the Empress could not get out of her favourite. He went into a sulk and was not heard from for weeks. Despairingly she wrote, " If the Prince only knew how heavy my heart is he wouldn't torture me with such long silences."

On May 10, 1788, he lost courage all over again. This time he wished to leave the Crimea and wrote Catherine, " May God grant us health, but I will repeat now my former idea that since we have no formidable fortresses, nor a strong fleet, it would be better for us to leave and, after allowing the enemy to enter, throw them out." This letter was shortly followed by another in which he declared his love and his willingness to lay down his life for his fatherland and Christianity. The letter touched Catherine very deeply, and when he offered to go into battle at the head of his army she refused to permit him to sacrifice himself.

Rumours flew about that he lacked courage, until finally

Potemkin decided to prove their falseness. Dressed in his most brilliant regimentals, and adorned with his showiest decorations, he passed slowly before the cannon of the enemy. They opened fire while he took his stroll, and an officer beside him had his leg shot off at the thigh. When the wounded man screamed in pain, Potemkin coldly asked him, " Why do you cry out ? " The officer said nothing and died the following day. To those who expressed amazement at the fire of the enemy, he said, " Did you think they would not shoot at me ? "

The officers in camp who knew Potemkin, and who understood him, recognized the act for what it was : bravado, not courage. But courage of the ordinary kind did not interest Potemkin. It had to be dramatic and different, the sort of thing that would, to his director's mind, " play " well. Strolling in an exposed position so that the enemy might snipe at him was spectacular. He knew that word of it would spread through the camp. If he had led his troops into battle, little would have been said ; it would have been simply what was expected of the commander of the Russian Army.

About death he was a complete fatalist. He felt that he would be called when his time had come, and not before. On one occasion he decided to inspect a new type of gunboat anchored before Otchakov to shell the city. His orders had been bungled and no skiff had been made ready to row him out to it. He watched from the shore as the gunboat demonstrated its powers successfully. A few moments later, a train of powder, left lying on the deck and carelessly covered with a sail, caught fire and blew up the ship, killing all hands. Potemkin would certainly have been destroyed with all on board. With much confidence and devotion he said, immediately after the catastrophe, " Did not Heaven entertain a particular regard for me and watch night and day for my preservation, I should have shared their fate."

Potemkin's God could be dealt with in precisely the same way as a savage's. From God came his power, his luck and his wealth ; God also was responsible for the cantankerousness of the Turks and for his own failures with them. He, Potemkin, had nothing whatsoever to do with any of these things. Everything was left in the care of his assistant, God.

When the siege of Otchakov had first begun, various

military authorities told the Prince that the town should fall in anywhere from three weeks to a month at the most. Their opinion was an affront to his dramatic sense.

What, simply get right to business and take the town? Why, it was well-nigh impregnable, a Gibraltar! Only the world's greatest military genius, only a Potemkin, could take Otchakov! Earthworks must be thrown up. Prodigious preparations must be made! When all was done in the usual fashion of splendid show and little worth, the Prince felt better.

Time went on. The seasons rolled by. November came, and Potemkin again wrote the Empress disconsolately that he wished to retire. This time she replied that if he did, she would take it as a personal affront.

Potemkin had one hundred and thirty-five huge cannon and twenty-one mortars specially cast for the siege of the town. Their size was unparalleled. Hundreds of horses had died dragging them to the field of battle, but when they were ultimately fired they never breached a single wall of the town. When the final assault took place, the soldiers had to go over the walls with scaling ladders at terrific cost of life.

This artillery, under the command of one General Miller, was typical of the condition of the Russian Army. Its mismanagement would have been comical had it not been so costly in human lives. Officers on leave were often never able to find their regiments again since no records of troop movements were kept. Assignments were made to distant posts which never existed or which had been wiped out in the Pugachev rebellion. General Miller's artillery was staffed entirely with his sons, nephews and friends. All experienced men were dropped. The only practice the soldiers had was to shoot off blanks on festival occasions. They would aim horizontally at board castles conveniently set up a short distance away, and thus provide entertainment for the guests.

General Miller's artillery opened fire on Otchakov and made a great deal of noise—but caused little damage. Very shortly after the bombardment had started they ran out of powder, and an officer was sent hastily to Kiev to get some more. When he arrived he found that the officer in charge of it there had sold it privately. The scandal caused the officer

to commit suicide. Fortunately, another magazine of powder was discovered. But while this was being weighed out, it was found that the lock on the magazine had not been well closed, and much of it had been lost. Everything had to be stopped while the lock was repaired, and much precious time was wasted while the artillery stood idly by.

Finally, on September 30, 1788, everything was set for the bombardment. For forty-eight hours the cannons fired at Otchakov. The officers in charge had no training in handling the guns, and nothing but an outmoded textbook to guide them. One ball landed in Otchakov, and two bales of goods were set afire in the market-place. The Turks contemptuously returned the fire with a single bomb, which landed amongst the Russians and exploded with considerable damage.

While all this noise and offensive smell of powder took place, Potemkin was far away in Elizabethgarod. It was after receiving the news of the bombardment that he wrote his letter to Catherine asking her to accept his resignation.

But he stayed on.

October came and it grew bitter cold. The ink froze in the ink-wells. The soldiers suffered horribly. They had inadequate clothing, many were without shoes, there was little fuel and hardly any food. Miserable and starving, they dug themselves rude huts of mud and huddled together. From one hundred and fifty to two hundred of them died daily from these hardships. Even the officers begged for food.

Potemkin felt very sorry for everyone, but did nothing except live in luxury. Prince Repnin had to spend sixty thousand roubles of his own money to care for the men under him.

Everyone awaited Potemkin's word to go into winter quarters. No word came. As a result, one-third of the army perished.

The Russians suffered some defeats. They lost a small island, and General Maximowitsch was captured by the Turks. They decapitated him and displayed his head in the town.

It grew colder and more horrible for the men. On December 5 all the wood in the barracks gave out. Everyone thought that Potemkin would order a retreat to winter

quarters, and resume operations in the spring. If the Turks had been aware of these conditions and had attacked, the Russians would have been decimated. But Potemkin's unbelievable luck still held ; the Turks made no move.

The artillery went into action. This time it did manage to hit Otchakov and set parts of it on fire. The Turks felt certain that this was done to cover a retreat.

Ten days later, on December 17, the holy day of St. Nicholas, Potemkin at last ordered the long-delayed attack. He had waited for De Ligne to depart and for the lucky day to come. St. Nicholas was one of Russia's favourite saints, and Potemkin liked the dramatic effect of storming the town on his day.

Under Repnin the troops went across the frozen Liman and attacked the town where the walls were weakest. Potemkin was far away in his tent with his mistresses. He did nothing more than offer a few prayers to God for victory and feel very anxious over the outcome.

The attack lasted the whole day and the slaughter was fearful. Finally Otchakov fell. The town had been promised as a prize to the desperate soldiers, and they fell on it like beasts. The women were raped, the houses were pillaged and burned. All males were tortured and put to the bayonet, babies' heads were bashed against the walls of the town, and children were tossed in the air and caught on the swords of Cossacks. The town's garrison of eight thousand was massacred. Twenty thousand inhabitants of Otchakov were butchered. The Russians lost nine thousand men in storming the town. The wounded died by the thousands for lack of medical supplies. Officers sent to Little Russia at their own expense for drugs and bandages which Potemkin had failed to supply, but they arrived too late to save the lives of their men.

Snow fell and the regiments were without shoes. Twelve divisions of cavalry were left without horses after sixty thousand of the animals had perished in the campaign. The surviving inhabitants were driven out in the snow and cold. Without food and shelter, most of them died by the wayside.

The snow was deep and the ground frozen, making burial of the dead impossible. On the frozen Liman they piled the frozen corpses of the Russian soldiers, stiff, like long faggots

of wood. Spring would come, and then the Liman would thaw and the ice break. Down would go the bodies of the Russian soldiers, now piled neatly in the criss-cross stacks. Pell-mell they would float in the rushing spring freshets to the sea, and in the bed of the river would drop their cherished copper scapulars, with the rude chasings of Christ, or the Virgin, or holy St. Nicholas, on whose day they had died.

A fat little priest, fuddled with vodka, his long filthy beard glistening with drops of ice, unsteadily made his way from pile to pile, blessing the dead and making the sign of the cross. He hurried, for it was bitter cold and a hot meal awaited him.

Sleigh bells merrily rang out across the ice. Nearer and nearer they came, and now the scamper of horses' hoofs rang out in the chill clear atmosphere. The air was sunny and brisk, marred only by wisps of smoke rising from ruined Otchakov. Everything was refreshingly white except for blackish bloodstained spots where men had fallen on the clean white snow. The soldiers who were piling the dead looked up from their work and breathed on their numb, frozen hands. They could hear peals of feminine laughter.

Round the bend, at a spanking clip, came a procession of beautiful sleighs. The people in them wore rich fur pelisses and were bundled in sable lap robes. A soldier holding the stiffened, stone-hard feet of a corpse dropped it as he distinguished the people in the first sled.

"The Prince!" he cried and drew up rigidly to attention.

At his words the other men straightened up and saluted. The sled swept close by, but Potemkin did not see them. His little party had come out for a new diversion: to admire the Turkish corpses lying here and there on the snow and ice.

The adorable creature at the Prince's side had just pointed out a most amusing group of them, and he had turned his gaze in that direction. Naturally he missed seeing the burial squad.

It was warm and cosy in Potemkin's camp, and the room was heavy with the odor of aromatic woods which burned in the fireplace. Beautiful women were grouped about him, but for the moment he was wearied of them. Chess absorbed

him. His private chess player had a new opponent, and the game was intricate and interesting.

Colonel Bauer was announced . . . and Potemkin lost all interest in the game. Bauer back already? It did not seem possible. The man was his favourite courier, dashing at top speed to all parts of the world on errands for the Prince; but it was nine hundred miles to St. Petersburg, and the fellow could not possibly be back already!

Bauer entered, travel-stained and dusty as ever, and even more tired and worn than he usually was. The ladies on the floor moved aside so that he could pass.

"How long did it take you to reach St. Petersburg, Colonel?"

"Four and a half days, Highness."

Potemkin made no comment, though the record was amazing.

"You delivered my message of the victory safely to Momonoff?"

"Oh, yes, Highness; and he took it to the Empress immediately, who very graciously rewarded me for my zeal. She gave me a golden snuff-box set with diamonds, a thousand ducats and the command of a regiment."

Potemkin frowned. He hated to see others rewarded by Catherine. He preferred to give rewards himself and place the recipient in his obligation.

"What rewards has the Empress given to the others?"

Bauer motioned to a soldier, who brought up a box. The ladies crowded around to see. For Repnin there was a gold-hilted sword set with diamonds and a gorgeous plume set with brilliants to be worn in his hat. Potemkin had to smile when he saw the same plume for Suvarov, the man went about in rags and rarely wore a hat. What would he do with such a jewel?

"What have you for me?"

Bauer motioned again and a soldier came in carrying a larger box. Leaning over from his couch, Potemkin flung back the heavy cover. On top lay a letter addressed to him in Catherine's own hand. Hurriedly he read:

"You have shut up everybody's mouth, and with this happy event you have one more opportunity to show the greatness of your soul to those who so blindly and light-mindedly judge you."

Verses which followed were written in Russian. . . . Written by a woman who could not manage the language even for decent prose, thought Potemkin. He scanned them with amusement :

They fell, they fell with noise and fury,
The man on horse, the man on foot,
The cavalry and the fleet,
And then with a mighty din
Otchakov itself fell.
The Dnieper and the Bog roar his praise,
The magnificent waters of the Dnieper will flow
into the sea with a greater roar
Because of him.

Fearful stuff . . . she could not write at all ! He crumpled the paper, let it fall to the floor, and rummaged in the box. There was a bag of one hundred thousand roubles . . . the usual amount. He waved to Popoff to take it out for him. Another case held the first of the golden medals struck off to eternalize his glory ; briefly he glanced at them and let them drop to the floor. He picked out a heavy marshal's truncheon made of gold and crusted with diamonds, and twined around with a laurel wreath made of gold. He glanced at it and tossed it aside.

" The soldiers will each get a silver medal," Bauer said.

Potemkin made no reply ; he was trying on a Spanish hat made of satin, to which was attached a golden crown studded with gems. The women clapped their hands and uttered little cries of delight. The Prince glanced into a mirror a cavalry general held before him. It looked rather different, this Spanish hat, quite becoming, in fact, and a new idea.

Suddenly he tossed it aside. He did not want all these baubles, money and silly verses. He had fought this war for another reason. Ah . . . there it was, down at the bottom, the Grand Ribbon of St. George ! Bauer took it and held it up so that he could see it. It was beautiful, with its diamonds and other stones sparkling as it swung back and forth.

The women crowded around to look at it.

" It cost the Empress over sixty thousand roubles," Bauer told them.

" Hand it to me," Potemkin grunted. He snatched it from

Bauer, put it around his neck and looked at himself in the mirror the cavalry general held before him.

The Grand Ribbon of St. George ! At last he had it !

The diamonds and rubies of the order sparkled. The stones affected all those in the room. The women's eyes glittered and the kneeling cavalry general smiled so that his teeth showed. There was a poised silence, broken only by the rustling of satin as the Prince stirred on the couch.

He looked at his reflection again. How often he had pictured himself wearing the Grand Ribbon of St. George ! How often he had anticipated the elation and joy wearing it would give him !

No such feeling thrilled him now.

Once more he peered into the mirror, hoping to rouse some sensation of pleasure and satisfaction. . . . Nothing. All he saw was just another order about his neck, just another gem-studded piece of jewellery.

He sighed aloud.

The bother and aggravation of waging a war, then, had yielded him no satisfaction ! The Ribbon of St. George had been a symbol of the beginning of satisfaction and the ending of desire. It had failed.

He allowed the decoration to slip from him and drop to the floor. Gnawing his nails, a vacant gaze in his eye, he looked a picture of misery. All stared at the Prince, wondering what the man expected. Could nothing make him happy ?

" I want something, need something, and I don't know what it is," he said to himself. " Is it more power, more riches ? "

He speculated silently and then shook his head in answer to his own query.

Perhaps, he thought, his desire was to have Momonoff out of office. He pondered and sighed again. . . . No, that did not seem to be the answer.

He fell back on the couch and groaned.

He *wanted*—that was all he knew. He wanted something dreadfully, torturingly—and he could not tell what it was.

CHAPTER TWO

1789

THE great man's magnificent sleigh glided over the snow easily. They had rung their church-bells for days before he came and for days after he left. They boomed their cannon. They stood for hours quaking in their boots waiting for his sleigh to pass, and when he came they lay prostrate on the ground till long after he had passed from their view. Speeches had been delivered, all lauding the conquering hero. Local dignitaries strutted about importantly, ordering preparations for the Prince's passing through their domains. Mothers decked their daughters' hair with seed pearl and diamond crowns, powdered their faces and rouged their cheeks, hoping the Prince might spy them and take them as mistresses.

But none saw the Prince. Moodily he stayed in his sled. When crowds pressed about he feigned sleep, and they held their breaths lest they disturb him. On and on it drove to St. Petersburg, bearing the Empress' favourite back to her.

Once when it came to a church he ordered it stopped. A great crowd was there, a huge canopy with a throne had been erected for Potemkin. Footmen hopped down from their high perches and opened the gem-studded doors of the sled. A high army official carefully placed some steps before it so that its occupant might descend with ease. A yawn was heard through the glass windows of the vehicle, arms were seen stretching, and finally Potemkin emerged.

His feet were shod in wide raspberry-coloured velvet boots. As he stepped down from the sled his magnificent sable coat parted and displayed a rich silken lining. About his neck was a white silk scarf. His face was unwashed, unshaved, white and pasty. His hair was a tangled mop.

He stood blinking in the harsh light of day, sniffed and ran the back of his hand across his nostrils. Then he fumbled in his pocket and brought out some loose snuff and garlic. He snuffed and munched contentedly for several minutes without paying the slightest attention to the governor of the province, who had obsequiously sidled up to him, touching his hand to his forehead and bowing repeatedly. There was not a sound save the fretful pawing of the horses' hoofs. All of the crowd were turned towards him, either bowing, or, in the

case of the women, curtsying. He looked nowhere and everywhere in vague, sleepy curiosity . . . and then very suddenly mounted the red-carpeted steps towards the throne.

The little governor behind him opened his lips and grinned. The Prince would do him a great honour. He would sit in it. Then a pang of disappointment shot through him as Potemkin passed it by, gazed around lazily, and then turned and went back to his sled. There the governor resumed his bowing and scraping.

Potemkin put his hand out wearily towards a lackey who held out a golden salver neatly piled with sliced salted raw turnips. He grabbed a handful and munched noisily. Little fragments of the vegetable sputtered from his mouth as he glanced at the governor and said thickly :

" Not a bad church."

Then he entered the sledge. The door slammed, the whips cracked and the cavalcade was off.

Long after the runners of his sleds had cut their tracks in the clean white snow the town talked about the Prince. All the mothers swore that he had eyed their daughters. All those he had passed by minutely described his dress and actions. Men stopped combing their hair and shaving ; it became a fashion. A special mass was said at the church, and the bishop was so delighted that no serfs were flogged for two days. The governor gave a grand dinner and was the cynosure of all eyes. The Prince had spoken to him ! He stood up unsteadily at his place while all applauded.

" He spoke to me, most graciously. All those standing near me heard. ' Not a bad church,' he said. . . . Just like that, ' Not a bad church.' . . . What a day in my life ! St. Michael be blessed and praised for this."

As they neared St. Petersburg the crowds grew larger. Cannons boomed and bells rang. In the city itself mobs pressed against the endless lines of soldiers standing stiffly at attention to honour the conqueror of Otchakov. The British officers who had witnessed the siege shook their heads in wonder ; in their country this man would be hanged. Germans standing with them said nothing, merely pressed their lips to suppress grins. Frenchmen shrugged their shoulders

and said to each other, " They are Russians. What can you do ? "

Potemkin had left his carriage now and was being drawn in a triumphal chariot to the Hermitage. The din was terrific, and as he neared the edifice he wet his cold parched lips in nervous recollection. Thirteen years back (an unlucky number) he had driven to this same building and had been dealt the famous hand of cards by Catherine. . . . He sighed as the gilded chariot rode on. Thirteen years ago there had been none of this, but he had been well and strong then. He looked sick now, and felt bad. A gloomy foreboding surged within him. . . .

They made way for him as the chariot stopped before the Hermitage. It was a signal honour for him to be lodged there. The doors of a beautifully decorated room, especially prepared for him, were opened and he entered. He had hardly been divested of his coat when a lackey announced the Empress.

This was indeed a surprise, and an unusual mark of esteem She was calling on him before he had had a chance to pay his respects to her !

Catherine came to the door and bowed stiffly and gravely, in the Russian fashion of men. Potemkin did the same, and as with slow dignity she entered the room, he fell on his knee and kissed her hand.

" Rise, my Prince. Rise."

He rose and looked at her. It had been a very long time since they had seen each other and both had changed greatly. Catherine had grown old. There were many lines and wrinkles in her face, lines and wrinkles which court painters very carefully left out of their portraits of her. She wore a little lace cap now, in the fashion of older women

She had meant to speak to him when he rose, but she was shocked by his appearance Until coming close to him, her shortsightedness had prevented her from seeing how badly he looked. His pallor was almost deathly, his solitary eye was lustreless, and beneath it was a heavy dark ring. His hair was patchy and dead looking, his hands flabby and puffy. Nor did the scowl which came to his face when he spied Momonoff improve matters.

Catherine pulled herself together and smiled.

" Grishenka, my god, my genius ! You have conquered, covered yourself and Russia with glory," and then she impulsively threw her arms about his neck in an embrace, so that all in the room could see her welcome of him.

A disturbing tremor ran through Potemkin's body as she did it. There seemed to be something missing from the former relationship between them. He stared as, in returning her embrace, he realized what it was. She had done him all this honour really to convince herself and her Court that she still trusted him, still relied on him and still loved him.

He bit his lips. He felt her doubts of him before she herself was aware of them.

A few days later his fears were verified. Automatically she found herself asking Zakhar, one of her courtiers, " Tell me, is the Prince popular in St. Petersburg ? " She asked, even though she herself had heard the acclamations and seen the crowds. Zakhar, whose tongue was sharp, smiled.

" Only with God and with you, Madame," he said.

She was growing older, but her energy was still abundant and tireless. She counted that day lost in which she had not written something. While Potemkin had been away to the wars and she had managed to defeat the Swedes, she worried about him, and kept the nobility contented. Somehow she found the time to write a play. It was a satire on the King of Sweden, and was in her opinion the crowning event of her literary career. On it she had lavished more patience, labour, and thought than she had on any other script.

The production had been delayed until the Prince's return. She wanted him to be guest of honour at its premier at the Grand National Theatre, where another of her plays had had a long run with a profit of twenty-five thousand roubles.

For the new play, special music had been composed by Martini. The ballet (whose members were all serfs specially trained for that purpose) cost twenty thousand roubles to produce ; and the scenery, decorations for the house, and the costumes had cost forty thousand roubles in themselves. It was to be the most elaborate of her productions and she was on edge for her Grishenka to see it and to flatter her about it.

Potemkin managed to get hold of the script beforehand.

After reading it, word reached her ears that he was not in favour of it, since it would only provoke Gustavus of Sweden and lead to more trouble with that country. A tale-bearer, whom Potemkin could rely upon to repeat his comments in her ears, said, " I give you his very words, Madame, ' I am neither a judge nor critic, but I wish the Empress would have chosen any other amusement.' "

She said nothing, but Potemkin had the satisfaction of knowing that the performance at the Grand National Theatre was to be cancelled. Only after he left to go back to the front did she give her play, and then in the privacy of the Hermitage before a selected small audience.

But if he had his way with her play, he was not to have it in other things. He wanted Momonoff out of the picture. He tried everything from plain badgering to threats, but he could not budge her. She would not dismiss her favourite.

He was just as unlucky with another cherished notion.

Catherine was getting on in years and her health was steadily failing. Potemkin had begun to look with fear upon an individual who heretofore had only merited his open contempt : Paul, Grand Duke of Russia, Paul of the monkey-like face, the turned-up, hook-like nose ; Paul, who differed from his supposed father in that his second wife bore him sons and daughters. Catherine, before his marriage, had made sure he was not sterile by fostering an affair between him and a beautiful Polish widow who bore an illegitimate child.

These thirteen years past, Paul had been very miserable, and the cause of his misery had been Catherine and Potemkin. The former had been willing to inflict it and the latter to devise it. While Catherine squandered millions on her lovers, she gave her supposed son and daughter-in-law (his first wife died and he remarried) barely enough to establish themselves properly. Often they were in want. When they toured the Continent, spies followed them and reported every move they made. When they sought to obtain news from home, Potemkin had the couriers arrested. Like his presumed father, Paul had the small mind's delight in military show. He begged his mother to let him serve in the Turkish War. With Potemkin she arranged things so that he was shunted to the Swedish front, kept from all activity, and treated so poorly

that he returned home in despair. Potemkin snubbed him and insulted him before the envoys of all the European nations. Paul and his Grand Duchess were invited to few of the parties that were given. Alexander and Constantine, his only sons, were taken from him at birth by Catherine, as he was taken from her by Elizabeth.

Potemkin looked at this warped, ugly, and neurotic man and had fears for the future. If Catherine were to die and Paul to become Tsar it would go hard with him. Potemkin felt that he would be certain to go to Siberia, as had other favourites when a new régime came in. He could expect little mercy from a man whom he had tormented for so long, whom everyone but Momonoff shunned. Momonoff alone having the temerity to be civil and decent to him.

The Prince wished to assure his own future against the revenge which he felt certain would fall upon him when Paul became Tsar. He asked Catherine to grant him the provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia, over which he wished to rule as king. He had already asked for the Duchy of Courland, for Poland, and for Morea as provinces to be placed under his rule. These requests had never been granted; Catherine considered these lands, as she considered the Crimea, the " rings on her fingers."

This time, however, he was most insistent about Moldavia. He and Catherine had many talks about the matter, and as time went on hard words flew between them—shouted, angry words that went through doors and were heard in corridors and then repeated throughout St. Petersburg, words which reduced the white-haired and bright blue-eyed old lady to tears, and made the unhealthy, clammy face of the Prince turn red in splotches. In spite of all Potemkin's efforts, the true German came out in Catherine : she remained stubbornly obdurate, and Potemkin got no provinces.

Yet, they had their moments of peace, when things went on as of old. In these moments Potemkin advised her about the Swedish War, counselled her in all affairs of State, and even went so far as to effect conciliations in the quarrels that sprang up between her and Momonoff.

As the snow melted and the spring came, Catherine grew uneasy. She disliked Potemkin's staying in St. Petersburg and

wished that he would leave the town. It was spring, and time to resume the war, which had been suspended during the winter. Still Potemkin dallied, until pressure was brought to bear and he finally left for his Jassy quarters on May 6, 1789.

Here he established regal quarters and concerned himself mainly with polishing his jewellery, buying flowers for his mistresses, and arranging elaborate fêtes and parties. The Countess Samoylov, the Princess Dolgurukia, and the Princess Gagarina interested him most, until he fell madly in love with the young wife of a relative—Praskovia Potemkina. The affair lasted until his death, concurrently with others that he had.

The days passed easily for him, mostly in eating elaborate meals. One day he might wear his elaborate uniform as Hetman of the Cossacks ; the next, he would don the costume of the simplest soldier, as a lesson in frugality. When he wore the soldier's uniform all his generals would hastily follow suit.

Catherine began to chafe under this inaction, and he finally bestirred himself enough to order the taking of Killia. The carrying on of the war was of little interest to him now. It was a chore which he left to his underlings.

The armies advanced towards Bender and laid siege to the town. Negotiations between Potemkin and its authorities took place before any attempted attack, and the city capitulated to him. What happened and what was said was in private. The foreign officers in the Russian Army were scornful of such peaceful and bloodless victories. The word bribery was on everyone's tongue . . . but Potemkin was pleased. It was the sort of victory he relished. It was also profitable for him, for Catherine sent a crown of emeralds and diamonds, a hundred and fifty thousand roubles in paper, another hundred thousand in gold, and three honorary medals with his profile on them.

Ismail put up a more stubborn resistance. The taking of the town was of no great interest to the Prince, but the charms of a notorious adventuress, Madame de Witt, were. She told his fortune with cards one day and predicted that Ismail would be his within three weeks. The Prince smiled and beckoned to Suvarov, who was standing by him.

"I can tell a better fortune than you, dear lady," he said; and then turning to Suvarov, he went on, "Take it in three days."

Suvarov carried out the orders and Ismail fell within the desired time. Over fifteen thousand men gave their lives to make the Prince's prediction come true. The Prince never even left Jassy to go to the barracks before the town. He stayed in his luxurious camp throughout. After Ismail fell he decided to have a look at it, but when he heard that the roads were bad he changed his mind.

"I would see there ten thousand people who have lost everything, while I have only one fur coat to give away," he explained.

More and more his interest in the war dwindled. It even affected his servants. His laundress would not pull her eight-oxen team aside on the open road to let a British colonel pass. "The servants of Potemkin are higher than colonels or generals," she calmiy observed.

Military or naval engagements with which he had no connection annoyed him. When the Austrians, Russia's allies, were defeated, pleasure was his only reaction. When the Prince of Nassau Seigen's fleet was defeated by the Swedes, Potemkin was delighted. He did not care for Nassau Seigen.

The victories he was winning were crushing to Russia. Her best men were rapidly being decimated. The country itself was becoming impoverished. Potemkin had been given sixty-five millions to spend on the war, and of that sum he had accounted for only thirty-one millions. The treasury was depleted and the Dutch bankers would not lend. In short, hard times had at last come.

None of these trials greatly troubled the Prince. There was a more important and obnoxious development.

The Russian Court lived on gossip. There was none more appetizing to its members than that which concerned the Empress's favourites. Rumours about Momonoff had been flying freely. He had been unfaithful to the Empress, it was said—a heinous offence, than which there could be nothing more disgraceful. Potemkin heard of it and dashed off a note post haste. "Spit on him, Little Mother," he advised, but

Catherine was too vain to take heed. Momonoff, the man she had nicknamed "Little Red Coat," unfaithful to her?

But the rumours were persistent and she began to consider things. "Little Red Coat" had complained of head colds so often of late when she desired his favours. After all these years with her he had suddenly developed religious scruples about their relationship. Perhaps it would be best to test him.

She called him to her. Grimly she heard his slow steps coming up the private stairs to her room.

"I have a bad cold," he said as he entered. "I wish you wouldn't insist on disturbing me. Besides," and he waved a crayon caricature he was making of Suvarov, "I am busy, as you can see."

"Oh, it's wonderful, my Little Red Coat. Who is it of?"

"Anybody can see who it is. Suvarov, of course."

"Why, yes, yes! How stupid of me."

Unmollified, he sat sulking in a chair opposite her. She paused and then, smiling, went on.

"I have been thinking a great deal about your future lately, my Little Red Coat, and I believe it is time that you were married."

Momonoff's jaw dropped and his pencil clattered to the floor.

"Now there is the Countess Bruce's little girl. True, she is only thirteen and you are past thirty, but in these marriages of convenience such things are of no importance."

She paused.

"Besides, a very young bride would put up no great objections to our continued pleasant friendship."

Momonoff's face had gone white. He fell to his knees and scrambled over to Catherine.

"No, no, Madame, I implore you! I beg of you! No!"

"But why not?"

"Because I am in love! Forgive me! For these last six months I have been engaged."

"Engaged! You—you——"

She walked up and down the room as quickly as her legs would permit her, and drank a large glass of cold water. It calmed her.

"Who is the woman?" she said grimly.

"The Countess Sherbatof. Oh, Matushka——"

"Keep still! I am very angry. Not only do you become secretly engaged while in my personal service, but you have the effrontery to choose one of my maids of honour to be your wife. And without asking my permission!"

"I love her, I love her so," Momonoff sobbed.

Catherine walked up and down, muttering.

"God alone knows what immoral goings-on there have been between you! You must be married at once. At once, do you hear? Get up!"

Momonoff, shaken and white, rose. The Empress tore a diamond ring from her finger.

"Here, give this to your bride. It is your engagement ring. Tell her that I shall write out an order for ten thousand roubles to her, the usual gift I make to all my maids of honour when they marry. Tell her also to be prepared to have me dress her for the wedding, which will take place to-morrow morning.

"As for you—you shall have one hundred thousand roubles, three thousand serfs and a palace in Moscow, completely equipped. And there you will live. You are forbidden the city of St. Petersburg. You go to Moscow right after the wedding!"

Momonoff scuttled down to his apartment, thanking God that Catherine had let him off so easily. It was true, then, that she was indulgent with her lovers. If he had only had the courage to speak to her before! He might have been out of her sight after the Crimean trip.

The next day the Countess Sherbatof, white as death, stood in her wedding dress. Catherine kneeled at her feet and draped its beautiful train with a practised hand, for she sewed exquisitely. The dressmaking Empress, her mouth full of pins, glanced up and looked in the glass at her own old reflection. She appeared even older, next to the reflection of Countess Sherbatof, a tall girl with lustrous black hair and deep blue eyes. The Empress tightened her lips as she took a pin from her mouth to go on with her work.

On a sudden impulse she jabbed the pin deeply into the bride's thigh. Sherbatof let out a cry of pain.

"Keep still! How can I get you ready when you move about and scream like that?" the Empress said, feeling better than she had in twenty-four hours.

The couple were married and right after the wedding left for Moscow. There Momonoff told his wife many intimate things about the Empress, and the lovely looking girl told others. One night six very burly women broke into the magnificently furnished palace the Empress had given the couple. The women turned out to be men, and Cossacks, at that. Without a word they bound up Momonoff and made him stand with tears in his eyes while they stripped his wife and beat her with switches till the blood flowed. Then they departed, the last one lingering only to say, "The next time that either of you does not hold his tongue, it will be Siberia."

Momonoff took his sobbing wife in his arms and consoled her as best he could. Who had sent these fiendish intruders? Catherine? No, it could not be the Empress, for she was still writing to him, believing he loved her. Potemkin? The Prince hated him; but would he do this? Some other enemy?

He never found out, but all talk about the Empress ceased between the pair from that time on.

Potemkin felt happier. Momonoff had at last been disgraced. But—the very day he quit the Empress's service, another had come in.

His name was Platon Zubov.

BOOK SIX

CHAPTER ONE

1789

ALL through the night the servants worked cleaning Momonoff's private apartments in the Palace at St. Petersburg, removing the last vestige of his occupancy to make ready for the new incumbent.

The servants accepted their Empress's foibles with a shrug. To-day one man, to-morrow another ; it made little difference whom she had, so long as the man was easy to deal with and generous. There were many nobles who would have you knouted to death for waking them up fifteen minutes too early in the morning, or for dropping a dish. They hoped that this new man she had taken that afternoon would not prove one of that kind.

An old lackey without a tooth in his head sniggered as he related the news. He had served Catherine for many years and she had kept him on for sentiment's sake.

" It doesn't take our Little Mother long to make up her mind once she's set on an idea. Right after she sent off her old lover she runs into this Platon Zubov. He's some relation of the Saltykovs, I hear. Anna Narishkin, the daughter of the Matushka Empress's friend, Lev Narishkin, had been pushing the young man forward for months. . . . Well, the Narishkin woman should get something out of it."

" How did she meet him ? " asked a young peasant girl who was on her hands and knees waxing the floor.

" Why, as soon as the Empress disgraced Momonoff, who should she meet but this Zubov fellow ! ' You will be my aide-de-camp,' she said. You know what that means. . . . And so you all have a new master."

In the hall outside people could be heard approaching. A great show of industry suddenly took place in the favourite's apartments. A lackey opened the door and admitted two men. The relationship of brotherhood between them was evident on their faces. The elder, Valerian Zubov, a handsome man with a strong, ruthless face, entered behind his brother Platon, whose features were of a more refined cast. Platon's figure was trim and lithe, his features delicate and sharply chiselled. The eyes moved quickly and

piercingly, the nose was just a trifle too long, the mouth thin and hard.

Catherine's old lackey, who had been sitting on the window seat, slid off silently and stood up as straight as he could. His lips twitched and a tremor ran through him. Something about Platon Zubov's face and bearing frightened him. He could not help but think of a cunning ferret the moment he laid eyes on the man.

The girl who was waxing the floor looked at him with blank astonishment. He was young ! He looked no more than twenty-two, and the Empress was sixty !

" What are you all doing here ? I've a good mind to have you all knouted ! "

None of the serfs dared utter a word. They knew instantly that they had a brutal man to deal with in their new young master.

Platon walked up to the old lackey.

" You ! You don't belong here." He turned to a guard who had entered. " Take this wretch outside and see that he is given a hundred lashes."

The old man trembled as the guard stepped forward and laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. A hundred strokes of the knout was death.

" Wait ! " Valerian called, striding over to his brother and pulling him to a far corner of the room out of earshot.

" You young fool, do you want to spoil everything ? Can't you see from his uniform that he's in Catherine's service ? "

" He has no business in my apartments."

" That doesn't matter. You know how sentimental she is about her servants. If you have him flogged she'll never forgive you. Have patience till you're sure. Our good friend, Prince Potemkin, still can reach her ear."

" Bah ! She never even asked the Prince's permission to choose me, and what's more, she is not going to send him the usual consolation gift of a hundred thousand roubles."

" Yes, I know all that ; but for the present we must go lightly. Give the old horse a chance to get used to you, and be careful not to give the Prince a single opportunity to say a word against you. How many times must I tell you to make him believe you are friendly toward him ? We can all be rich

beyond our wildest dreams . . . if we do this thing right. Don't lose your head ! "

An unpleasant little smile played about Zubov's face and his eyes glittered with pleasure.

" Yes, Valerian, you are right. The sudden excitement of being here has probably gone to my head."

He gave a delicate little wave of his small, feminine hand and the guard released the aged lackey, who scuttled out of the apartment as fast as his old legs could carry him. Then Platon went to the drawer of the table and opened it. Inside was an envelope addressed to him. He broke the heavy seal on the back of it and counted the ten thousand roubles it contained. Valerian walked over to the pretty peasant girl, who was waxing the floor industriously. Platon slipped the money into the inside pocket of his carefully tailored silk coat.

" The usual sum, in the usual place . . . all according to time-ordered custom, Valerian."

The brother looked up from the girl.

" Eh, Platon. . . . Oh, yes, the ten thousand. Good."

" There will be more, much more, for all of us."

" There had better be ! You know how father is ; he can never get enough."

Platon's face clouded at mention of his father. He remembered how his parent, when vice-governor of a province, used to burn down the factories whenever he had not balanced the books. He made an annual six thousand roubles in the process. Nothing seemed to stop that man. He would be voracious, now that his son had become Catherine's favourite. His eldest brother, Nicolay, would be tractable. People thought well of him and he wanted no more than his due. Brother Alexander was a stupid fool . . . a few lucrative posisitions would quiet him. His sister, a soft-hearted, tender thing, wanted little. Catherine had written of her, " She often failed in an assignation with a lover to go and relieve the distressed."

Platon looked at his brother Valerian. It paid to be friendly with him. He was helpful, but at the same time he would make him know who was in control.

" Father will do as I say."

Valerian shrugged his shoulders.

" Platon, I want this wench who's waxing the floor. Let me use your bedroom."

Platon looked at the girl for the first time.

" Certainly, Valerian," he said with a smile, " after I've had my fill of her ! "

He motioned to the girl to rise to her feet. Trembling with fear, she followed him, while the rest of the servants worked on, not daring to look up.

Valerian threw himself violently into a chair. As the door shut on Platon his features relaxed and a smile crossed his face. Why shouldn't Platon share the girl with him ? It was no more than fair, really. The evening before, after Platon had satisfied the old Empress, he himself had silently entered her rooms and had the honour of her ageing favours. They had not been very delightful, it was true ; but it amused Valerian to know that he was sharing the lofty mistress with the Imperial Favourite.

1791

The courier from Catherine dashed through the streets of the town of Jassy and stopped before Potemkin's house. He was ushered in quickly, for Potemkin had been waiting to hear from the Empress. His flabby, moist, and sickly hands shook slightly as he took the note and opened it.

" We are living in expectation of your arrival at every moment," she had written, " I am very sorry that you are sick. The child——"

The Prince snorted. " The child " . . . she always called Zubov that. Well, she was in truth old enough to be his mother. Three times old enough to be that.

He forced himself to read further.

" The child has charged me to kiss you on the lips if you should arrive in his absence."

Potemkin snorted again. " Kiss him on the lips " ! A kiss of Judas !

" We thank you for the Italian and Swiss views," the letter went on. " Pray make a rapid recovery and come to see us. In ten days' time or so we shall be inseparable here in town.



AN IMPERIAL STRIDE

Original English caricature of Catherine II It was occasioned by her unsuccessful plans to take Constantinople in 1791 Below are the monarchs of Europe

Adieu, mon cher ami, je vous embrasse, et je desire beaucoup de vous voir, parce que je vous aime de tout mon coeur."[1]

Potemkin bit his lips, and a worried look crossed his unhealthy face. Words, words! The letter did not mean what it said. She would *not* be glad to see him. She loathed having him come to St. Petersburg. What a fool he had been to stay away for a year and a half! Zubov was in solidly with her now. She was always writing him long tales about "the child." She never ceased to marvel at what a genius he was.

The Empress was an old fool. Didn't she realize that Zubov was unfaithful to her right and left? That he was in love with the sixteen-year-old bride of the Grand Duke Alexander, and walked about sighing his love for her?

Potemkin tore at his matted hair in an agony of despair. He should have been firm. He should have left Jassy immediately for St. Petersburg when she took Zubov as her lover. If he had been there he might have been able to make her give him up. Because he was away she had refused to heed his demands.

All those letters from her declaring her love for him, declaring that Zubov was a child, her son, all those marks of esteem and notes from Zubov himself, he should have known them for the false things he suspected they were. He should have known it all the moment she withheld the consolatory gift she always made him when she took a new lover.

He cursed himself for the blunder he had made with Valerian. He had sent him back to St. Petersburg with the news of the taking of Bender, thinking she would prefer him to his brother when she laid eyes on him. He had been a fool not to realize that all the time Valerian had acted as a spy in Potemkin's camp for Platon.

Why, she had even given Valerian the Cross of St. George almost for the asking, and he had had to fight a war!

Platon now had the effrontery to ask Catherine for her miniature! The scoundrel wanted to wear it, an honour only he and Orlov had achieved! . . . And it looked as if Platon Zubov would, also.

Potemkin sat down at the table and drummed his fingers. He could not bear to remain a moment longer in Jassy.

[1] The letter quoted is a newly discovered one from the correspondence between Catherine and Potemkin.

"We leave for St. Petersburg immediately."

"But why so suddenly?" the beautiful Praskovia Potemkina asked him.

"I am going there to have a tooth[1] drawn," the Prince said grimly.

1790–1791

The Prince had always been very superstitious. He believed in omens and portents thoroughly: that was God's way of getting in touch with him. The Lord, Potemkin felt, was specially concerned with him and would in his own subtle way advise him. It was therefore highly disturbing when, after making the pun on Zubov's name, he actually began to suffer from a severe toothache. There was more than the pain of the thing to plague him. The aching tooth was an ominous sign.

The Prince lay on a bed of pain and moaned. Most people had little sympathy with him. He often feigned illness for various reasons. It was hard to believe that he really was ill. Toothache, besides, was a most common ailment from which both high and low suffered. There were few nobles past middle age who had an adequate number of teeth, let alone a full set. Catherine herself was missing a number of her front ones, though the Court painters were careful not to record the sad fact.

The Prince lay back on his couch and re-read the letter he had written to Catherine concerning Zubov.

"I don't know anything about these rumours; they are ruining my health. I don't eat and I don't sleep. I am worse than a baby and everybody notices my condition. I can't go to Cherson in spite of the fact that it is very necessary. But all this is nothing. Just tell me that you are well."

He thought for a moment after reading the letter, and then impulsively folded it and sent it off to her. Let her think what she would about it and its abject tone.

Not until March of 1791 did the nagging toothache, so wickedly reminiscent of his rival Zubov, permit him to travel to St. Petersburg to deal with him.

His trip to the city this time was as glorious as the last one, if not more so. Catherine had the roads mended specially so that his progress would be easy and comfortable. Again she greeted him effusively, and again she lodged him in splendour

[1] In Russian "Zubov" means tooth.

at the Hermitage. A palace had been built for him adjoining her own, and decorated at a cost of six hundred thousand roubles. She presented him with a field-marshal's uniform laced with diamonds worth two hundred thousand roubles. The Senate was made to lead an ovation glorifying his heroic acts. A huge pyramid of granite was ordered erected in the courtyard of his new palace, and on it were to be graven all his victories and great deeds.[1] Furthermore, the Queen saw him every day, counselled with him, and feted him. Despite all this, he was unhappy.

Always there was Zubov, he of the ferret-like face. Zubov, who went hunting and stopped in the road tying up traffic so that none could pass till he had decided to move. Zubov, who held a court at which hundreds stood patiently for hours, day after day. Zubov, who had aged ambassadors and diplomats make his coffee. Zubov, who mixed in politics openly and without fear of Potemkin. Zubov, whom Catherine kept calling her genius. Zubov, who had youth, health, and looks. Zubov, whom he snubbed and treated rudely and who did not care. Zubov, who smiled at him disdainfully, almost pityingly. Zubov, always Zubov.

What he had feared about Catherine a few years back was now true. She no longer seemed to love him, no longer feared him. In any trouble she could turn to her "child," her "genius," her Zubov.

These favours, these honours, these ovations, what were they? Nothing but a blind. He saw through them clearly. He became aware of the actress behind them. Did she in truth think that by showering rewards upon him she could fool him into believing that her sentiments were as they had always been? Never. The more she gave him, the more he knew she was losing interest in him.

Did she really think that he would be taken in so easily? Those couriers along the route who raced back to report his progress as he drove to St. Petersburg were more than honorary. They gave Zubov definite information as to what he was doing. His old enemy, Besborodko, had received permission over Zubov's protest to greet him. In the few moments he had with Besborodko, who was now his ally, he was made

[1] It was never put up. After he died, Catherine forgot all about it.

aware of the power this hated Zubov had gained over the Empress.

What did all this dazzling public display mask? Frightened and desperate, Potemkin tried to make friends with the man he had hounded for seventeen long years—Paul. The Grand Duke merely smiled grimly and put a pinch of snuff up his short and almost deformed snub-nose, and Potemkin left him. The Prince gathered his senses together and decided that he would be as of old. He bellowed at Catherine, and found that he could still awe her to a degree. To Zubov he was less than decent. He openly incurred his enmity by making his father return lands he had stolen from a friend of his. At a dinner in the Hermitage, where Catherine had invited him and Zubov to the same table, hoping for some reconciliation between the two men, he had the pleasure of a strange and costly revenge against him.

Catherine had promised her Zubov an estate at Mogilev, forgetting that she had given it to Potemkin. Zubov plagued her for it. At the dinner Catherine asked Potemkin what he wanted for it. Potemkin, guessing why she wished to buy it, caught the eye of a man named Golinsky, who was dining with them.

"Matushka, I cannot sell you this estate."

"But why, Grishenka?"

"Because," Potemkin said, looking at Golinsky, "I have sold it to Golinsky."

"That is perfectly true, Madame," Golinsky replied and winked at Potemkin.

Potemkin was forced to hand over a huge estate to Golinsky for nothing, but he did not care. He had managed to spite the odious Zubov.

The Empress had always been susceptible to the graces of young men. Now, in her middle sixties, she was more susceptible than ever to Zubov's charms. But this was not the only breach between her and Potemkin. Politics also entered into the situation.

The Turkish War was still going on. Potemkin was eager to continue it for the pleasure he got out of it, and because he believed a little more war would bring about a more advantageous peace for Russia. Catherine and Russia were tired of

war. Austria had left Russia and made a separate peace with the Turks at the death of Joseph II. What peace negotiations had been attempted with the Turks had not been successful. Prussia had become unfriendly and there was a break expected. England was on bad terms with Russia. The French Revolution worried Catherine so much that she exiled the first revolutionary writer Russia had, Radistchev, to Siberia. There was trouble with Poland. The peace made with Sweden was not advantageous to Russia. Finances were in a deplorable state. The young courtiers and the old were on poor terms with each other.

Potemkin advised with Catherine on these matters. Soon their conversations would turn to arguments, and Potemkin would shout and swear, finally storming out of the room and slamming the door so that the windows rattled. Catherine would remain seated in her chair and weep till her eyes were red. Now she wept tears she really felt. Much as she loathed it, she did feel the age which was upon her. She longed for the peace which comes with the crowning years of life, and all she received was bitterness and strife.

" Let her wail, she's very capricious," Potemkin would say after one of these outbursts. But always he made up with her in the end. She did have the upper hand, and he realized it.

During all these occurrences there were parties and fêtes. Outwardly the show was amiable, but gradually people began to realize the true state of affairs. She might praise him in public, but her inflections and demeanour belied her words. She gave functions in his honour, others followed suit ; but true feeling toward the man she glorified was lacking. The Prince attended gloomily.

He retaliated by giving parties of his own. Feast days and holy days came along ; he refused to let such things interfere with his plans and gave parties anyway. He tried to lose himself in rounds of pleasure, to no avail. His attitude of mind remained the same. He told everyone that he would not last the century. They laughed at him, tried to cheer him up, but it was no use. His melancholia persisted. The spell which he was now suffering far exceeded any he had ever experienced in his whole life.

He could go no higher than he had gone. He could only

lose now, and that was precisely what was happening. The thought of it was slowly killing him.

Tiring of the endless round of parties, he sought solace in solitude. He thought back on Troitza and again longed to be a simple monk, with no cares save those of his immortal soul and God.

One night a new diversion intrigued him. He called for a square of black velvet and had it placed on the table before him. For some hours he had been absently playing with his loose diamonds, pouring them from hand to hand in the same manner in which a child plays with dried peas. Now he placed the precious gems in a little pile and watched them gleam like little living things on the black velvet. The stones fascinated him; they took him into another world, where he could momentarily forget his cares.

Night after night, for hours on end, he would play with the diamonds. At first he would lay out the stones in circles, squares and other simple figures. As he grew more practised, he essayed more intricate designs. The game began to charm him. One night, when his cares seemed more heavy than usual, he tried his hand at a landscape. As he was in the midst of making it, he happened to glance at it sideways. It suddenly assumed a striking resemblance to the profile of the dead Gregory Orlov, whom he had vanquished so long ago! He swept the stones away with his hand, and saw Zavadoffsky. He brushed them away again and there was Korsakoff. No matter what he did, the lovers of Catherine, dead or disgraced, appeared in the designs the stones made. . . . He called loudly for a lackey and ordered the diamonds taken away. He could no longer bear to look at them.

"Shall I have them weighed, Prince?" the man asked, thinking that such information might divert him.

"Yes, anything you like."

The servant carried away the cloth and the stones while Potemkin paced up and down. Was he destined for the same fate as the others? Polite banishment by orders to travel, orders which he had ignored fifteen years back? Would he be exiled from the Courts to a life on some estate, like Zavadoffsky and the rest? Would he rest under a tomb before Catherine's window, like Lanskoi? A tomb which was settling in the swamp?

The servant returned. Potemkin looked at him blankly as if he had never seen him in his life.

"What is it?"

"Prince! Prince! Think of it! Your loose diamonds weigh over two pounds!"

"Yes . . . good . . . you may go," the Prince replied dully. He had heard the man but had not understood what had been said to him.

He must do something, achieve something, to win Catherine back. Without her he was lost . . . dead.

He began to think back to his earliest days. Why had he succeeded so far? What had he done to bring him where he was? He had reached the very top. There was nothing more he could ask for in the land except actual Czardom. He knew Catherine would not give him that if she would not grant him Moldavia for his own.

He racked his brains and began to realize that it had always been the daring, the spectacular, the beautifully staged thing which had brought him success. His love-making to her, his return to the Hermitage when she had banished him, his unexpected flare-up when Yermoloff had denounced him for his work in the Crimea, the Crimean trip, the costly but dramatic siege of Otchakov. These were some of his high spots. For the past few years he had been away from Catherine and she had learned to do without him. She was growing old and the memories of past glories and excitements he had created for her were fading. He must do something which would startle her all over again, something which would make her realize that in all of Russia she had none like him.

He beat his head in desperate thought. Then it came to him.

He would give a fête in her honour. Not an original idea, to be sure; there had been many extravagant fêtes given her by him and others. For that very reason he made up his mind to give her still another. This fête would be the most elaborate and costly Russia or any other country had ever seen. It would be a fête to end all fêtes, one that should link his name eternally with the word.

Potemkin had many gorgeous possessions which awed the people easily. The most astonishing of them was his palace in St. Petersburg. Catherine had given it to him as a gift at the

beginning of their friendship. Later on, Potemkin, as was his wont, sold it back to the Government for four hundred and sixty thousand roubles. After the victory at Otchakov she again presented it to him and named it the Tavrida in honour of his exploits in that country.

During his second ownership it had been enlarged. A gang of fifteen hundred serfs worked day and night under torch-light to finish it. For the main part, it was a one-storied structure with wings extending into the streets. The main portal was huge and domed and two stories high. The rooms inside it were immense. The principal *salon* was a hundred paces in length and lined with double colonnades of colossal pillars. There was a gallery for an orchestra and a great organ. It contained a theatre with a seating capacity of fifteen hundred. The hangings, ornaments, furniture, and embellishments were the most costly and extravagant which could be procured. It had a covered winter garden in which all sorts of rare plants were made to bloom by means of an elaborate heating system of concealed flues and heated leaden pipes running through the earth. In this garden there was a grotto with thousands of mirrors so cleverly placed that they threw off countless reflections to make the place seem magical. In the centre of this garden was a statue of Catherine surrounded by emblems cut out of Carrara marble.

Potemkin decided to use Tavrida Palace as the place to give his fête for Catherine. To provide for it, the shops of the town were ransacked until they were bare. Boat-loads of foreign wines and delicacies were imported. He requisitioned all the candles St. Petersburg could furnish to illuminate the party, and then sent to Moscow for more.

The various huts and shacks which surrounded the palace spoiled the view of it, and Potemkin ordered them all levelled ; in three days they were completely gone and not a trace of them remained. For the first time the true splendour of the building showed itself. The Prince ordered a huge ornamental gate erected in front of the Palace. On it were paintings of his victories, flags of all nations, and paintings of Catherine.

For more than a month there were daily rehearsals for the party under his direction. Each of them was a magnificent event in itself. He had hired the greatest talents in Russia and

the continent for the fête. A huge orchestra of three hundred musicians was rehearsed in pieces specially written for the occasion. Money meant absolutely nothing. He spent more than seventy thousand roubles for candles, more than eight hundred thousand for horse hire.

Besides the Empress and the members of the royal family, he had invited all the nobles of the first five degrees of rank, the foreign ministers and ambassadors, high Church officials and other dignitaries. Everyone in Russia ached to attend. Nothing else was talked of in St. Petersburg. The date scheduled for it was the Thursday of Holy Week, but Potemkin delayed the fête, for one reason or another, till most people despaired of ever attending it at all. Finally, in May of 1791, it took place.

People began to gather early in the morning. The day dawned cold and clear, but later it darkened and became rainy. Many stayed away, for rumours began to fly around that those seen about would be seized and drafted for military duty. It was probably a trick of the Prince's to keep the crowds from becoming too great. Despite it, hordes of people thronged about the Palace to witness the gala event.

By three o'clock in the afternoon the invited guests began to arrive and in a short while the street was jammed with carriages and people. In a few hours the traffic tangle radiated from the Tavrida Palace in all directions.

For the general populace there had been placed high piles of clothing, pyramids of all kinds of eatables, fountains to run with both red and white wine and barrels of vodka. Cossacks and guards armed with whips and sabres paraded in front of this bounty to keep off the populace till the signal for them to help themselves was given. All were waiting for the arrival of Catherine, who was supposed to get there at five. A trumpet was to blow then, and the people would be permitted to help themselves to the Prince's gifts. But Catherine, using a woman's prerogative, was late. In the meanwhile all were surging and pushing in front of the Palace. A little dog barked, someone in the impatient throng cried out, and there was a mad stampede. People fought, pushed, bit, and kicked. The Cossacks used their cruel whips and sabres indiscriminately on old and young, women and children ; but nothing could stop the greed of the mob.

In a trice the food, clothing, and liquor disappeared. Bread was stepped on, meat flung about, more was spoiled than could be eaten. Hundreds of hands reached to seize the garments and ended up by snatching bits of rags. The wine and vodka satisfied the thirst mostly of the cobblestones. Only a few benefited by the Prince's goodness. When the materials of his benevolence had disappeared, the people retreated to leave on the pavements the bleeding, broken corpses of the trampled, the sabred, and the whip-lashed. These the Cossacks bundled out of the way so that they would not be seen when Catherine came.

At seven, two hours late, she arrived and the Prince himself met her at the door. There were many at the fête who had seen him in his most glorious raiment, but even these gasped when they saw him now. He was clothed in scarlet and gold and so covered with diamonds and jewelled orders that he literally gleamed. So weighted was he with jewels that his hat, which was also loaded with them, was carried for him on a cushion by an aide-de-camp.

The Prince led the Empress through his garden, which had been miraculously transformed. On all the trees and bushes there hung strange fruits made of blown glass. On the ground there were melons never before seen by human eyes—these also were of glass. Each of these fruits was lighted by a candle ; and Catherine, seeing them twinkle in the darkness, thought she was in a fairyland.

Potemkin gave her his arm to escort her up the steps of the Palace. Eighty footmen, all newly costumed in light blue, with heavy solid silver ornaments on their uniforms, were drawn up at the entrance. The mighty orchestra struck up a march in her honour, and an elaborate masquerade began.

The Empress sat down and watched a quadrille danced by twenty-four girls and boys of the nobility dressed in Grecian costumes. They were all in white ; their girdles and scarfs were decked out in rubies and other precious gems. The value of the costumes was ten million roubles. Catherine beamed as this dance went on ; for her two darlings, the Grand Dukes Alexander and Constantine, were in it. The quadrille lasted fifteen minutes, during which time Le Picque, a famous musician, gave a solo.

The company then filed into the next room, which was lined with gorgeous draperies especially woven for the occasion. Here they saw a huge artificial elephant studded with gems and attended by a Persian. The Persian struck a bell and a curtain parted on a theatrical entertainment consisting of two ballets and a dramatic representation, all of impressive quality.

While this went on, three hundred men were kept busy elsewhere for a solid hour and a half just lighting candles. When the entertainment was over the company passed into rooms which looked as if they were ablaze with coloured fire : the reflections of the candles were sent everywhere by mirrors placed all over the walls and ceilings.

A table whose service consisted only of gold or silver had been set for six hundred. There were not seats enough for all. Most of the men were forced to stand, and many had to wait on the ladies, despite the enormous number of servants who were there to serve the Prince's guests. Food and drink in every conceivable variety were to be had in any quantity the guest could consume. Potemkin himself served Catherine, but she insisted that he be seated ; and only after continued urging did he consent to do so.

Ten o'clock was her bed hour and it was now drawing on towards midnight. She had greatly honoured him by staying up so late. His interest in the magnificence he had himself created made him lose all sense of time. He forgot Platon Zubov, who had come with Catherine. At twelve she rose from the table, having eaten but little and merely having sipped her wine, in accordance with her invariable custom. All rose to do her honour, falling back to make way for her as she went toward Tavrida's huge portals. The Prince walked respectfully and silently at her side. The Empress had smiled at him and said her thanks softly. He knew that she had enjoyed the fête and been thrilled by it, but there was something lacking. Catherine was not saying to herself, " This has been done by my Grishenka, my adored, my genius." Reading her thoughts, he felt her saying only, " The Prince has given me a remarkable fête which will be talked about for a long time."

He drew his breath in sharply and bowed his head as he realized that its prime purpose had failed. Catherine was still

indifferent to him. As they passed through the great hall the orchestra struck up the strains of a new hymn which had been composed in her honour. Catherine stopped, moved by the thought the music conveyed. She turned to the man who had laboured for months to make this one resplendent night a visible testimonial of his regard for her. Her eyes were wet with tears.

Something within Potemkin seemed to break. He wanted to tell her many things. . . . That he still loved this old woman, loved her as he had when he first saw her and lived with her. . . . That the fifteen years which had come after, in which she had had her lovers and he his mistresses, had not changed him in the constancy to her. . . . But the words stuck in his throat. He fell to his knees and took her hand in his, covering it with kisses and wetting it with his tears.

" Matushka, Matushka," he sobbed, " this will be the last time—the last time—I will be able to do this."

Never had the premonition of his approaching end been more vivid to him than at this moment.

Catherine motioned to him to rise, and she publicly embraced him. Her arms about his huge chest, aglitter with orders, felt comforting and motherly. They remained thus for a few moments, while she purred softly in his ear, " My dear Grishenka, my poor dear Grishenka."

Then she turned and stepped into her waiting carriage.

Catherine's carriage rolled over the cobbles and the Empress sat without speaking to Zubov beside her. He was vexed and angry at having to leave so early.

In her mind there was a parade of the adventures and spectacles she had gone through with Grishenka, whom she felt sure was still standing in the doorway of the Palace she had given him. This fête of his had been a most magnificent thing.

Little did she realize that he had not settled for a single part of it, and that he was to die leaving the astounding debt behind him for her to settle. The Queen was to pay for her own party.

Potemkin stood in his doorway and watched her carriage long after it had disappeared from view. Behind him, in the reaches of Tavrida, his fête went on noisily, destined to do so till day broke.

The eighty footmen in light blue and silver stood like statues

while he gazed out into the street. The aide-de-camp standing by his side and holding the gem-laden hat stiffly before him had trickles of perspiration running down his brow from the effort. The Prince was oblivious of him and to all that went on.

It was the end. He had made a final gamble and lost.

"My dear Grishenka, my poor dear Grishenka."

That tone! The way she had said it!

Why—the woman pitied him!

CHAPTER TWO

THE fête was over, the guests long since departed. The servants had removed the glass fruits from the trees and the decorations from the walls. Life became more normal at Tavrida.

The Prince stayed moodily in his room. Those who were in his employ for the longest time had never known him to be so melancholy ; and he had lived a life of such spells. It was almost impossible to be near him.

Doggedly Potemkin lingered on in St. Petersburg. The snows had melted, the spring had come. It was the time to go on with the war, a war he himself could end, but which he stubbornly refused to bring to a close unless he were granted the province of Moldavia. Going to his headquarters at Jassy was of no interest to him. Something strange which he hated and feared, which pained him intensely, drew him, kept him inexorably in St. Petersburg. He had to be near Catherine. He had to suffer the experience of watching his career crumble day by day.

It was fiendishly subtle. Catherine was still gracious. She dined with him in his Palace and invited him to the Hermitage. But in little ways she constantly managed to make him realize that he no longer was as much in favour as he had formerly been. Derzhavin, the poet, noted that Catherine praised Admiral Chichagov fulsomely for routing the Swedes at Revel, precisely because it would provoke Potemkin's ire. There was no open break, nothing was definitely stated to him, but daily he grew to know that his presence in the city was undesirable.

He was fully aware that in the Court there was grumbling and mumbling against his lingering in St. Petersburg. Murmurs of it reached his ears and maddened him. He ate less than ever, slept hardly at all, and looked more and more the dying man he predicted he was. Over and over he declared that he could not survive the century. He tried to plan new moves, but was unable to think of anything. Only one thing occurred to him, to stay stubbornly in St. Petersburg because everyone, including the Empress, desired that he should leave.

The summer began, yet Catherine's lover emeritus still stayed on to see Zubov's prestige daily wax greater while his waned. Finally Catherine decided it was time to tell Potemkin

point-blank that he must go. It was past the middle of July. She cleverly saw it would be hopeless to expect the Prince to leave of his own volition. When she asked her advisers to tell the Prince that he must depart they all refused. She turned to " the child," and asked him. Zubov wet his thin lips and mumbled something about his thinking it more gracious if she were to tell Potemkin herself. Catherine said nothing, ordered her carriage, and drove over to the Tavrida Palace. On the way she kept thinking it was indeed wondrous that this man whom she herself had made could be unmade only by her. All of Russia still feared him despite his loss of favour. Even the Empress, as she was ushered into his Palace, felt apprehensive of what she must tell him.

They told Potemkin she had called on him and he appeared before her. His hair was straggling, his patch askew, his face ashen, and his clothing in disarray. He knelt and kissed her hand.

" Matushka, I did not expect you. My poor house is honoured."

She seated herself and they both talked trivialities while she sipped a tall glass of her favourite beverage, currant jam dissolved in water. At Potemkin's side was a golden salver with the invitable sliced turnips. Now he no longer wolfed them in handfuls. He fingered the bits of crisp hard vegetable, nibbling at them despondently and letting them fall in his lap or on the floor. He looked vacantly at her while they chatted. They felt like two strange people. Potemkin eyed her so mournfully that she had to speak to him with averted gaze. Finally she came to the point of her visit.

" I . . . er . . . I've come to tell you, Grishenka, that it is time you left the city."

" Then you do not wish me here with you ? "

" No. Please don't misunderstand me ; we are always pleased to have you here. You know how the child delights in your company, and I don't have to tell you my own feelings, my dear. You must know them after all these years."

" Yes . . . yes . . . of course, Matushka," he said slowly.

" But you forget there is a war going on. Your place is at the front with your men."

" They do not need me. I long only to serve you. Get rid of this Zubov, Matushka, before he destroys you——"

"Grishenka!"

"I tell you for the last time to send him from you."

"I won't talk to you about that."

"All right, then perhaps you will speak to me about Moldavia."

"You know my mind on that. You cannot have it."

The Prince looked at her with surprise. She had never seemed so assertive before. There was a finality in her voice that brooked no gainsaying. She rose.

"Now you have heard me, my dear Prince. I command you to leave this city and take your post in the army. Perhaps it will interest you to know that yesterday Prince Repnin defeated the Turks decisively at Machina——"

"The dirty little Martinist priest![1] Who gave him orders to?"

"I did. Yes, in two months that he has been at the front without you, he has accomplished more than you did in the whole three years of the war, and at a trifling cost of men and money."

"You lie, Madame!"

Her bright blue eyes were blazing. She was so angry she disregarded the insult.

"Do I! Prince Repnin has defeated the Serkasier Betal Bey. The Turks have begged for an armistice of us. Repnin has captured their prophet, Elijah Mausur, and broken their morale. The Grand Vizier is now seeking peace and I am giving Prince Repnin *carte blanche* to negotiate it."

Potemkin's senses reeled. He could not believe she would favour Repnin to such an extent, efficient Repnin, whom he despised; Repnin, whose couriers he used to arrest when they brought him messages and whose dispatches he did not deign to answer till Catherine begged him to.

"He? You are letting him negotiate the peace?"

"Yes."

"By God, I will not permit you to. How dare you let anyone beside me negotiate a peace?"

"You forget yourself, Prince Potemkin. Catherine is still autocrat of all the Russias, and you are her servant!"

[1] The Martinists were a secret society, with an elaborate ritual, which flourished at that time. Repnin was an ardent devotee of the cult. It still exists, but not as extensively as in the eighteenth century.

Potemkin breathed stertorously and made no reply.

" Yes, Prince Repnin is negotiating the peace ; but he is doing it badly. The terms he is arranging are not decisive enough to suit me. You will therefore travel to Jassy and see what you can do about the matter."

Potemkin waited for her to finish. When he spoke his voice was low and quivering with the anger he fought to suppress.

" Now I know why you were so glad to have me here. Now I know why you honoured me so with balls, and fêtes, and odes and God knows what else. That despicable little child of yours, that rat-like Zubov you've got, wanted me in town so that while I was away from the front Repnin could do as he wished. Isn't that the truth ? "

All the queenly dignity in Catherine came to the fore.

" Yes, Prince Potemkin, it is the truth. And while you spent your time arranging a fête for me, Prince Repnin won me a war. I suggest that you arrange the peace for it."

" I will, immediately."

He bowed and left the room, slamming the door so violently that the windows rattled and the cut crystal pendants on the chandelier tinkled musically.

Catherine heaved a sigh and slowly walked to the door, opening it herself. She had a sorrow for her Griskenka, but no tears this time.

At five o'clock in the morning of the following day, which was the twenty-fourth of July, 1791, Potemkin left for Jassy.

All through the gloomy ride there Potemkin thought of Repnin and concocted ways in which he could vent his spleen upon him. When the carriage arrived at his quarters Potemkin burst in and confronted him.

" You little Martinist priest," he bellowed, " how dare you undertake such things in my absence ? Who gave you any such orders ? "

Repnin, who usually quailed before him, looked him squarely in the eye.

" I have served my country. My head is not at your disposal, and you are a devil whom I defy."

Potemkin raised his hand to strike him, and then lowered it. Repnin sneered at him and walked out of the room.

On the plea of illness members of the Russian Court escaped many obligations. The Prince was often conveniently ill. He signalled this event as a rule by wearing about his head a cloth saturated with eau-de-Cologne. His servants and those who knew him were not apt to take it too seriously. They knew it was merely his way of denoting that he did not wish to be disturbed.

The Cologne-soaked cloth now was a daily accessory to his dress, and it needed no second glance from those about the Prince to see that it was no piece of subterfuge. The man was desperately ill.

On his way to Jassy he had stopped off at the town of Galatz to attend the funeral of his old friend, General Wurtemberg. He strolled out of the church, his head bent, saddened by the loss of his comrade and the doleful services he had just attended. With a lazy wave of his arm he called for his carriage and then slouched down the steps as a vehicle rolled up. He grasped a handle, and was about to enter it when suddenly he cried aloud in horror. He had almost climbed into the hearse.

"It is the end, the final presentiment! Death awaits me," he wailed.

None could comfort him. God had spoken to Potemkin.

From that day he grew steadily worse. His favourite niece, Branitzkia, heard how ill he was and raced from the city to be at his side. Catherine learned of his condition and purchased an entire apothecary shop and sent it out to him. With it went her two most experienced physicians, Tinmann and Masset. They used the cure for every ill suffered at that time—bleeding. Out flowed the life blood of the Prince. Superstitiously the doctors hoped that the evils within him would flow out with it. They tried persuading him to take the noxious and fiery concoctions of the apothecary shop, but he refused all their worthless draughts.

He had his own cure for a fever—a thorough sousing of ice-cold water before an open window. When the doctor advised a light, easily digested diet, he sat down and wolfed part of a smoked dried goose from Hamburg, large slices of hung beef, a whole ham, three or four fowls, Danzig liqueurs, klourka, hydromel, *kvas*, and several bottles of assorted kinds of wine.

After this he managed to stuff down a breakfast. It seemed as if the man was bent on eating himself to his grave.

The chills and fever persisted, and in Galatz on the night of October 15th he felt gravely ill. The Prince called for the last sacrament, which was administered to him twice. Frantically, now, he clutched his religion, of which De Ligne had once said that he did not love God so much as he feared the Devil. The Archbishop Ambrussi and the Metropolitan Job came to his side to console him. He said, " I doubt if I will get well. So much time has passed and I don't feel any better. God's will be done. . . . Pray for my soul. Remember me. You, my spiritual teachers, you know that I never wished evil to anyone and to make a man happy was my sole purpose."

With the administration of the sacrament and the consolations offered by the two men of religion, he felt relieved and, quieted, and dozed fitfully.

His birthday came. A special courier brought him a letter and a fur coat from Catherine. He cried when he read her note and said that he would never have the happiness of seeing her again. Soon after, a strong paroxysm seized him and the doctors worked on him for nine hours. During that time he could not recognize a soul. His hands and feet were like ice and his complexion changed from deathly white to fiery red. By strong measures the doctors finally brought him to consciousness. When he could speak he said feebly, " Take me to Nikoliaeff ; at least I can be in my dear Nikoliaeff."

It was the city he had taken much pleasure in building, and he wished to go there before he died. Branitzkia, sitting at his bedside, pressed his trembling hand and nodded to those about him to follow his instructions. Outside, the large retinue of servants and aides bustled to carry out his request.

The sick man pettishly kept asking the time and if things were ready. When the dawn came through a foggy, dismal day, he insisted on being off. Branitzkia and the doctors begged him not to travel in such inclement weather but he demanded that they leave. They lifted him gently to an arm-chair and carried it out of the house to his huge, elaborately decorated, six-place coach. With great difficulty they placed Potemkin inside. He cried in agony as they moved him.

Breathing heavily, with a cold sweat pouring down his face,

he leaned out the window gasping for breath. Branitzkia dabbed his fevered face with a handkerchief soaked in eau-de-Cologne. Feebly the Prince waved to his faithful secretary, Popoff, who stood outside. Popoff came to him.

" A letter . . . write a letter for me."

Popoff signalled to his assistant for a writing block and a pot of ink. With great effort Potemkin dictated.

" Little Mother : I have no strength to bear these tortures, the only thing left for me is to go away from this city and I am ordering them to take me to Nikoliaeff. I don't know what will happen to me. Your true and faithful subject."

He nodded his head to indicate he had finished and Popoff held the block out to him. Branitzkia took the quill and put it in her uncle's hand. She closed his fingers about it and was about to move his hand to make the signature when he summoned up enough strength to shake her off. Tremblingly, with sprawling letters and many blots, the Prince signed ; and then pausing for a long time to think of something to say, he added in a wavering line, " The only thing is for me to go away." The pen dropped, left a streak, and the Prince fell back in the carriage.

The wheels of the carriage creaked, the harness strained. A horse whinnied and blew its breath out on the frosty, foggy morning air. The drivers yelled commands, the whips lashed at the animals, and the train of carriages bearing the Prince, Branitzkia, Prince Golitzin, doctors, servants, officials, and others moved slowly on. Far ahead, almost lost in the fog, were ten tall mounted Cossacks acting as a convoy. Slowly, so slowly that only thirty versts were covered in seven hours, Potemkin moved on.

Potemkin was going away. Just going somewhere. All the fifty-two years of his life he had been going somewhere, dashing restlessly from one thing to the next. Always he was trying to escape boredom, ennui and mediocrity. Always when he arrived at the object of his search, it was to find only great disappointment.

In Galatz he had felt there was death. He felt it grimly stalking the house where he had lain so ill. There, a vast, leaden-grey cloud had settled on everything, blotting out the world and his sense of it. He had to leave that house and its

baleful host. He had to go somewhere else, somewhere where there was newness, life. Nikoliaeff! That must be the place where it existed! His own Nikoliaeff, which he had seen grow from the mud and straw huts in which the serfs lived and died as they built it. Nikoliaeff was *his* city, the diamond which glistened when he had his fullest powers. There he could certainly escape the dreadful host, which at Galatz the Archbishop Ambrussi and the Metropolitan Job had shushed away from him just in time.

" Go, move, travel! Flee and you will surely outrun death, Grigori Alexandrovitch Potemkin. . . . My dear Grishenka, my poor, dear Grishenka."

Ah, then Catherine was there in the coach with him!

" Matushka! Matushka! You have come to me. All the way from the city, you have come to me."

Branitzkia placed her hand on his arm. He screamed. It was Zubov, little Platon Zubov, the child. Now he had long, sharp, tiny teeth, just like a ferret, and he was ready to bite.

Then, suddenly, the face faded and he saw it was his adored Barbe. She took his weeping head upon her firm round bosom and he became quiet.

" I have seen her, Barbe . . . the Empress . . . and she is coming. She is riding to be with me."

" Of course, of course. But rest."

" Yes, rest . . . that is good . . . I am getting rest . . . at last."

Through the fog couriers dashed. The Prince had sent them off. They went in all directions, bearing orders, getting a melon, a lucky icon, a charm, a peasant who worked miraculous cures, anything and everything. One courier had a dispatch case, and in it there was a letter to Catherine, written by Popoff, and signed by the Prince.

They reached the first station. The governor was ready to receive the Prince with great pomp. There were soldiers standing at stiff attention. There was a band. An arch had been erected with words in praise of the Prince. Bright bunting twined the columns of the house. The gaudy show contrasted oddly with the sad faces of the entourage. The smiling governor looked anxious and rushed to the carriage. He recoiled when he saw the face of his distinguished guest.

"Hot! . . . It is suffocating . . . hot!" Potemkin gasped.

"Have him carried out, you fool," cried Branitzkia.

The startled governor scuttled back to the house on his bandy legs and shouted orders. Soldiers came out bearing a couch. As best they could they removed the grunting, red-faced, sick man.

"Hot . . . suffocating . . . hot," the Prince moaned over and over. He tore desperately at his collar, already completely loosened. He turned his gasping mouth toward the wide-open windows, through which the bitter Russian autumn rushed. Then at eight in the evening his fever died down. The tired retainers received their first chance that day to eat.

At two in the morning there was a bellowing cry, as if from some great animal in pain. The doctors and Branitzkia rushed to the Prince's room.

"Away! We must go, leave this place. Hurry!"

Bustling, rushing, stumbling, people hitting furniture and falling all over each other in the darkness. Make ready, depart immediately.

The Prince had seen it. Death. It was in this place also. Had caught up with him again.

Be off, journey, ride on, Potemkin, you great traveller; outdistance Death.

Again the laborious process of carrying the great man out of the house, the man whom all thought of as being the Emperor of Russia in everything but name. Gently as possible they lifted his huge bulk and laid it in the carriage.

The air was frosty. The sky was a noticeable midnight blue, and everywhere stars shone brilliantly. Down the steps of the post station, hurriedly bundled in a sable pelisse, rushed the faithful Branitzkia. She had left her family, her home, everything, to be near her uncle, the man to whom she had been far more than a niece, far more than a mistress.

The whips slashed again, the drivers cried out, plumes of steamy breath eddied about their long unkempt beards, and once again the caravan rolled on. Going, just going, for a man who could not die peacefully, for whom even the terrible procedure of death itself left no rest.

Ten versts farther on, the Prince's carriage stopped and the piercing cry of Branitzkia was heard above his groans. The

cavalcade stopped. The physicians and Prince Golitzin tumbled out of their carriages and rushed over. They found Potemkin writhing in agony, his hands tightly clasped about an icon of Christ, while tears rolled unceasingly from his eyes.

"My God, my God, my God," he murmured over and again in a maddening, monotonous threnody.

Finally he ceased speaking, breathed a little and said more calmly, "Now, that's all; there is nowhere to go. I am dying. Take me out of the carriage. I want to die in this field."

Over the sharp, stiff stubble of the newly-harvested wheat they laid a rich fur rug, and at one end of it they placed a pile of soft damask pillows for his head. They brought him there and covered him with his sable pelisse. Branitzkia stood by, her body racked by sobs and wails.

The doctors crowded around him and he clutched one feverishly by the sleeve.

"Doctor, doctor, in God's name, save me and I'll give you half my kingdom!"

The medical man shook his head, reached for an icon which a kneeling officer was holding before the dying man, and said, "Take this. Here is your only Saviour."

Potemkin grasped it and wailed, "I don't want to die! Dying is hard. I must live. There are so many, many things I must do. Christ God, hear my prayers! Save me. Save me."

The sky was blue and cloudless now, and the sun, cheerfully pink and warming, was beginning to rise. On the crest of a hill far away a group of serfs was already out tilling the fields. An old woman was hitched to a plough like a draught animal, and she pulled it doggedly, without complaint. She was taking the place of her husband and son, who had fallen at Otchakov and died because their wounds could not be dressed. Years back their rigid corpses had been laid out stiffly on the Liman to await the spring thaw, and Potemkin had passed them by on his sleigh.

The dying man lay on his rug writhing in agony, fighting death, loathing it; refusing to meet gracefully an end he could not escape. For him there was no rising sun, no brightly blue sky, brighter than the one his mother saw in her dream before he was born. For him the night was swiftly falling.

All about him in a ring stood the Cossacks at a respectful

distance, guarding the great man. Near him were his friends and his niece. Their continuous sobbing was a fitting hymn of exodus for him. Suddenly he stretched, breathed deeply. It was just as if he were about to awake and rise. There was a rattling sound and he collapsed.

The doctor, who had been rubbing his head with alcohol, ceased his ministrations. He bent down over the Prince's heart, felt his pulse and then removed his hat and made the sign of the cross. All crossed themselves. A priest mumbled a prayer. Golitzin took the arm of Branitzkia and led her back to her carriage. She sobbed as if she would never be consoled. Years later she said with a smile, " He lived on gold and silver, but he died on grass."[1]

Four brawny Cossacks, members of a people whom Potemkin had subdued and subjugated, came with a litter and placed his body on it. They lifted him and carried him back to his carriage. One of the four stared with fascination at the patch which covered the dead Potemkin's eye. To stare at it while he was living would have been certain to arouse the Prince's mightiest wrath. Now one could safely do so.

The Cossack looked about. He was safe, no one was noticing him. He lifted the patch curiously to see what was beneath it. He had often wondered. All he saw was a hideous jumble of meaningless, scarred flesh. He nudged his comrade.

" Look ! "

The other man peeked and grinned.

Over the cobbles of St. Petersburg's streets clattered the horse bearing the courier with the letter written in Popoff's hand. He went straight to the Palace and they ushered him immediately to Catherine's presence even though she was busy with Zubov. He was getting her signatures to some contracts

[1] Modern medical science, on reading of the various symptoms of Potemkin's death, guesses that what he actually died of was malaria caught in the marshy country he drove through. His dissipation and excesses had so weakened him that he was in no condition to weather the onslaught of such a diease. In addition, worry over Zubov had so broken his morale that he had no will to get well.

In fact, most authorities believe that Zubov had more to do with his death than any other thing. Potemkin could not bear defeat, and Zubov's aggression was such a severe blow that any stimulus would have been the provocation of his death. Malaria happened to be effective.

from which he would reap richly. To his annoyance she laid aside the documents and read the letter.

" The Prince is very ill, Platon," she said and passed the note to him.

He skimmed through it.

" Nonsense, Madame. Merely his usual hypochondria."

" Nevertheless, I feel I must write him a cheering note."

She reached for her gold-edged paper and put on her thick spectacles.

" But I beg of you, Madame, to sign these contracts first."

For a moment the Empress hesitated.

" No, child. I really must get this letter off to Grishenka. It will cheer him up."

Zubov sighed with displeasure and then went to a window to gaze at a pretty woman walking in the garden below. Catherine scratched away. The courier waited. She dusted her note with golden sand, read it through, sealed it and handed it to the courier. He bowed and left, to ride like one pursued in his anxiety to deliver a letter its recipient would never read.

CHAPTER THREE

1791

WHEN they brought Catherine the news that the Prince had died she stood up rigidly.

The Prince no more in this world ! Her thoughts circled madly about an empty core. The world burst and went black. Her physicians rushed to her and bled her, and after a long time she recovered consciousness.

" Grishenka, where is Grishenka ? " she whispered.

Dr. Rogerson sighed and turned toward Zubov, who spoke for him.

" You must be brave, Matushka, he is no longer with us."

" Grishenka gone ! "

Again she lapsed into unconsciousness, and again they bled her while Zubov cursed them.

When she recovered consciousness he was again at her side. She took one look at him, sighed, and lapsed into unconsciousness again.

" This last time she is acting," he thought as he watched them crowd about her bedside again.

Hours afterwards she recovered sufficiently to have Dr. Rogerson leave her. She remained in the room alone with Zubov. Again and again she would burst into tears and reminisce about Potemkin, while Zubov listened patiently and made appropriate cooing remarks.

" There is no one who can take his place," she said sorrowfully. " He had an extraordinary mind, had character and a kind heart. He was good even to his enemies. He could not be bought. He was my pupil, he was a genius."

"There, there, Matushka, I shall be your pupil. I shall study and follow your precepts," Zubov said as he took her hand.

" Yes, child ; I believe you will. You are a genius too."

Zubov smiled. There was nothing to stop him now. The more he commiserated with her on the dead man, the better she liked it.

There were few mourners for the Prince. His nieces and a few retainers were about all. Those who had been with him were flocking over to Zubov's palace. Through the window he could see their carriages crowding the streets. . . . There was his father's. . . . Well, he would soon have done with him ; he was going too far. And as for Valerian, Platon knew of his

intimacy with the Empress. Good. Valerian was just saving him that much extra trouble.

Catherine was writing. Zubov glanced up and surmised that it must be to Grim. How she adored pouring out her woes on paper to that man, and how patiently Grim read everything she had to say! Platon sidled up to the writing desk and looked over her shoulder. Sure enough, there she was saying, "His death is like the blow from a sledge-hammer. Potemkin was my pupil, my friend, well-nigh my idol."

The maids-in-waiting were getting out mourning for Catherine to wear. Her eyes lighted when she saw it.

"Ah, that is good, good," she said, for though she detested it, she took comfort in showing her dead lover respect.

Amongst themselves, the maids and lackeys chattered.

"Remember when Lanskoi died and how she acted then? We thought she never would get over it."

"This time it's not so bad. She's taking it very well."

"I think she's putting it on. That's why she's staying in her room, so people won't see how she looks. Of course she misses him and all that, but it was wearing pretty thin at the end, let me tell you."

For fifteen hours she remained in her closet with Zubov. It took them all that time to make a distribution of the offices of Prince Potemkin.

Outside, in the halls of Tsarskoe Selo, the Grand Duke Alexander strolled. He had always been an honest youth, and he said his mind, "There is one scoundrel the less. I love and value my grandmother to the highest degree, but I love my country more, and for it Potemkin was a dangerous person."

"The Prince is dead."

That was on everyone's tongue. It meant a change in government. "Zubov, see Zubov, the 'platonic lover of the Empress,'" everybody sniggered. No one liked Zubov, even those for whom he did favours. Potemkin had something admirable about him, Zubov lacked it.

To Zubov's face, however, all were exceedingly polite. He held his Court and became so powerful that none dared move. His pet monkey capered about amongst the generals, tore their

carefully dressed wigs from their heads and committed other disgraces. They stood still and bore the indignities without a word. They dared not risk the wrath of Zubov, who was now wearing the diamond-set miniature of the Empress and who seemed able to do anything he liked with the old woman.

When Zubov died, not many years later, at the age of thirty-five, he was to have a more colossal estate than Potemkin ; and he was to gather it all in the few years left of Catherine's life. Still, the shadow of Prince Potemkin hung over him like a blight. As late as 1820 he wrote his overseers, " Although I had conquered him half-way, I was not able to get him out of my way completely ; and it was absolutely necessary to, because the Empress would meet his desires half-way, and Potemkin is the chief reason why I am not twice as rich as I am."

Meanwhile there was the business of burial. They took his body back to Jassy and removed the heart. This they buried with great pomp in the city where he was born. Then they went to Cherson, which he had built ; and in the small cathedral there they gave him the Czar's funeral which Catherine had ordered for him, but which she did not attend. Six hundred men were required for the ritual, and the Archbishop Ambrussi, who conducted the service, was so impressed with the occasion that he was scarcely able to speak.

Architects were set to work designing a magnificent marble tomb which Catherine had ordered to be raised over her friend. It was destined to remain a dream on paper, like so many of the architectural fantasies of the man whom it was intended to honour.

Shivering on the cold steppes while he worked at his easel was the famous painter, Kazanov, taking notes of the spot where Potemkin died. He had been commissioned by Barbara to make a painting of the event so that it might be immortalized; he had already completed a profile painting of Potemkin in his coffin. It, mercifully, did not reveal his sightless eye ; the only other painting of him, made at the command of Catherine a few years back, also omitted the disfigurement.

On the same steppe they were digging an excavation for the erection of a memorial column which Barbara had commissioned. Serfs were putting up a simple house for the caretaker of the project. Soon he would die and there would be no

one to watch the only monument to Potemkin, standing out in this lonely spot. The weather would ravage it, and before a hundred years passed, time and the elements would have done their work. It crumbled to nothing and only the field remains.

A tractor, driven by an earnest young peasant who puts his trust in a man named Lenin, to-day turns over a furrow where Prince Potemkin breathed his last.

Pending completion of the tomb which never rose, they laid him in the floor of the church in Cherson. When Paul ascended he took his revenge on his enemy by levelling the simple marker of the spot and sealing the door. Soon all sense of where his remains might be was lost, and rumour had it that his bones either had been buried in the pauper's ground outside the town, or thrown in a ditch. To allay the legend, they searched and tore up the floor many years later. A coffin came to light when they pried up the lid. About the neck they found a heavy golden chain attached to a frame of diamonds as big as a man's thumb. The frame went round the miniature of a smiling, pleasantly round-faced lady, the late Catherine the Great.

In St. Petersburg, gentlemen in soiled wigs who nibbled the ends of their finely pointed quill pens mumbled astonishing figures as they went through lists of the estate. They found in cash 2,611,174 roubles and ½ kopeck, and guessed the total value was well over 50,000,000.

There were 3,500,000 borrowed from the State without sign of a return, in spite of all the wealth. There were debts of 19,000 roubles for droshky fares ; 38,000 for flowers ; 700,000 roubles to a banker. Debts, and still more debts—and Catherine paid them all, the whole 2,000,000 of them, despite the fact that his estate could easily have settled them.

(A doorman named Fazi, from whom Potemkin had borrowed 1400 roubles, had been paid by the Prince himself years back. It was a debt which Catherine forced him to settle. Poor Fazi had saved all his life for the sum, and one day the Prince casually demanded the loan of the money. Fazi had to give it to him. When Fazi badgered him for the return of it Potemkin refused. It looked serious for the doorman, for the Prince had an unpleasant way of sending his more pestiferous creditors to Siberia. Fazi, however, went straight to the Empress with his story and she forced the

Prince to repay him. Potemkin, furious at having to pay a debt, returned the money to Fazi in copper kopecks. The coins filled two rooms of the poor man's house and cost him very dear to exchange for less bulky money.)

The astonished accountants went on with their work, writing their results in a neat, precise hand. They gave this labour more care than any other they had ever tackled in their careers, for the executrix of the estate was none other than Her Majesty. The great man had died intestate and without issue, and so it was decided to divide up his estate amongst the heirs, who were his cousins.[1]

One man was listing his 1285 paintings, almost all presents from Catherine and including canvases by Van Dyke, Raphael, Rubens, Leonardo da Vinci, and Titian.

"The late Prince had very good pictures, I must say," the accountant observed to the man working beside him. "They tell me all these were the finest painters. They should be . . . look at the prices he paid for them! Here's one by a man named Rembrandt. 'Head of An Old Man,' they call it. Imagine, he paid 200 roubles for such a thing!"

"That's nothing. Here's 9000 roubles to paper four rooms."

"And I find his jewellery is worth 1,174,817. And look, an epaulet for 400,000 roubles!"

On and on they went, adding figures for many days, continually astonished by the items they were putting down. Catherine went on paying the debts as they brought them to her. She wanted to show her gratitude to the man who had protected her, advised her and made her great.

There was one debt she could not pay for him, although the Treaty of 1792, just concluded, mercifully stopped further expenditure. Money, ships, cannon, destruction of property, time might settle these items after she was dead. But there was one debt Catherine could not square for the Prince:

To The Russian-Turkish War

Killed in Battle:	
Austrian Soldiers	130,000
Russian Soldiers	200,000
Turkish Soldiers	330,000
Total chargeable to Prince Potemkin	660,000

[1] Pylyaev mentions that in 1892 they had not as yet succeeded in spending it.

BOOK SEVEN

CHAPTER ONE

1796

CATHERINE lay awake and stared at the oblong calling-cards of light which the moon had sent through the the windows and placed upon the ceiling. There was a barely perceptible whirring sound, and then the tiny bells of one of Catherine's intricate clocks tinkled out the tune of a minuet and struck two.

Two ! She had been lying awake since she had retired, and that had been at the customary ten. Perhaps it was the glass of Madeira that Dr. Rogerson had been making her drink for her health's sake. Really, it didn't seem to help her any. On the contrary, it seemed to disagree with her.

These doctors ! Did they really know what they were doing ? Or were they simply guessing and experimenting ? Rogerson hadn't helped her legs. They still hurt her. Standing through the long Russian Mass, in fact, was a torture.

Age and its ills, what a nuisance they were ! All these nobles having to demolish staircases and put up inclined planes for her to tread when she called on them. Some even levelled the terraces in their gardens so that she could get about easily. It was touching and gratifying to know they were so solicitous of her comfort, but at the same time it hurt to know that one caused all that trouble. Did they notice that when she walked with Prince Platon Zubov she had to lean heavily on his arm ? No, no, assuredly not. Her " child " was so clever, he could conceal that from them.

And that Admiral Ribas, with his cold sea-water foot baths. His treatment really seemed to help her for a while. Then, like everything else, it failed. If she could only be cured everything would be fine. There wasn't a thing the matter with her. She ate well, even though all her teeth were gone ; and it was no shame to lack those ! What person sixty-seven years old had his teeth ? She slept well, barring this night. (It was surely Dr. Rogerson's Madeira.) She was absolutely sound, except for that fit she had had last August. And who wouldn't have a fit under such circumstances ?

The huge bed's wooden slats creaked as she rolled her ball-like bulk about in it, thinking of King Gustavus of Sweden.

The impudent seventeen-year-old puppy ! To refuse the hand of her beautiful fourteen-year-old granddaughter, the Grand Duchess Alexandra ! Oh, the humiliation of it !

The whole Court, the foreign ambassadors, and the ministers, the Grand Duke Paul and his wife, and her grandsons, the Grand Dukes Alexander and Constantine, and their wives, everybody, in fact, had been there to see it. Little Alexandra looked radiant in a bridal dress she had put on for the occasion, the formal announcement of Alexandra's marriage to Gustavus. And there in the other room was Gustavus, with his ministers and Besborodko, Zubov, and Zubov's ally, Markoff.

She remembered how the crowded room waited . . . waited for them to emerge. How people at first stood silent and expectant, then shifted from one foot to the other as the minutes passed and grew into hours. How she kept smiling and cracking jokes and talking to this person and that, affably and amiably, until finally Prince Zubov had come out with a desperate look on his face.

Hurriedly he had whispered to her the astonishing news that the boy King had stubbornly held out his principles and would not sign a document guaranteeing Alexandra's privilege to practise the rites of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sweden. Nor would he provide the necessary conveniences and persons to enable her to do so.

" Madame, I cannot budge him ! Markoff and I think you should fight Sweden," Zubov said in a low voice.

" Fight them ! Are you mad, Platon ? "

" But the honour of Russia is at stake, Madame."

" Honour—yes, to be sure ! But how can we fight when there is no money in the treasury, and none to be borrowed ? No ! No more wars."

Zabov sighed.

" And don't make such sounds ! In front of all these people ! No one must hear about this, understand ? Smile, the way I do."

Zubov attempted to smile but failed. He was no actor, like Catherine.

The Empress let her gaze fall on the Grand Duchess Alexandra. The young girl looked at her appealingly and sensed something was wrong. Alexandra was very much attracted to Gustavus, and in her sphere a marriage with a person one really cared for was a rarity. Her eyes filled with



ENGLISH CARICATURE ON PAUL I

Circulated in 1799 at the time of Suvarov's march against the French revolutionary army. In this caricature Paul is seen stamping on the torn banner of revolutionary France bearing the motto "Long live equality."

tears. Catherine looked at her and the sudden realization came that she had failed, that the thing would be talked about all over the Continent.

The little Swedish King had refused her. What a blow to her prestige! She felt heat and a tremor throughout her body. The room melted and ran . . . and she was aware only of Zubov and Markoff holding her and someone calling for Dr. Rogerson.

She had been ill a day and then it had passed. Why, she was even well enough to attend a ball two days later and snub the King of Sweden! That had given her pleasure.

If only her grandson, the Grand Duke Constantine, hadn't spoiled everything. The impudent scamp, to say to the King of Sweden (of all people!): "Do you know at whose house you are? That of the greatest whore in St. Petersburg."

She snorted as she recollected the naughty boy's words. The ungrateful wretch! And after all her love and devotion, after she had worked so hard to build up a Greek Empire for him to rule. She was sure she had done the right thing when she had him arrested. That would teach the young man a lesson.

Catherine shifted in the bed and gave a little sigh of pain. Her legs ached so when she moved them. The devil take them! But for them she was as good as she ever was.

Perhaps if the Prince had been alive she would not have thought about the Swedish king so long a time. Things were different when he was with her. He was so clever, so brilliant—a genius. What would he have done in such a case? He certainly would have brought the affair to some successful conclusion. . . . Strange how she always kept thinking of him when in such predicaments. Lately she actually felt he was near her. Yesterday she had almost asked a lackey to get Prince Potemkin; there was something she wanted to ask him. Yes, he had been a very great man. She must not delay building that tomb for him any longer. It would be nice to erect before the Tavrida Palace that stone pyramid, carved with his achievements, which she had promised him.

The Tavrida Palace . . . there never would be another fête like the one he gave her there. The extravagant dear had brought up all the candles in St. Petersburg! . . . And that Crimean Trip! Glorious, perfectly glorious. That had really started getting her talked about, made her Catherine the Great.

It was silly to lie awake thinking about Grishenka this way. It only made her feel old and alone. She had her "child," her Zubov. He was still young. He could not become a second Potemkin overnight. He was learning, he was working hard and he would achieve greatness also.

If only Platon wouldn't vex her so. Why did he always steal glances at the young ladies-in-waiting? There was horrid gossip about his being in love with the Grand Duke Alexander's wife. It was so very humiliating to have people talk about the boy that way. Almost as bad as the time when Momonoff was in love with that Sherbatof woman. (By the way, how was he now? Did he miss her? He must realize now what a fool he had been to be unfaithful to her.) If Platon was unfaithful, she would . . .

Catherine coughed hollowly and reached for a glass of boiled water which stood beside the bed and sipped it.

. . . Nonsense, he was not unfaithful to her. The boy loved her. She could see it in his eyes, in the way he spoke and acted. All that was love. She had always been attractive to men. She still was a handsome woman. A trifle stout, perhaps, but that was no disfigurement. Who wanted to be thin?

The idea of that painter doing a portrait of her with a wrinkle in her face! Such a man should be punished. It was a fortunate thing that he had painted it out before she issued an order of banishment against him. What would people say if they saw such a monstrous thing?

Of course Zubov loved her. Of course he did. Didn't she have him followed, and hadn't the lackey who shadowed him told her that Zubov dined alone? The lackey was to be trusted. One *had* to trust him. If one couldn't trust one's own servants, whom could one trust?

A drowsiness overcame her and she heard the chimed clock faintly playing its minuet and striking three.

Minutes passed and she slumbered off, undisturbed by Zubov's light footsteps as he returned to his apartment from his evening's pleasure.

At six she awoke. Her maid brought her her strong black coffee, and she drank four cups and fed the sugar and cakes to her dogs.

The maid thought the Empress was wonderful for her age. Sixty-seven! No one would think it. With all her troubles and

the things she had to do, she never worried and was always happy. That must be the secret of her vitality.

"And how did you sleep last night, Your Majesty?" she asked.

"As I always do, my dear. Like an angel."

The Grand Duke Paul snored loudly because his nose was short and snubbed and he was given to breathing through his mouth. Beside him slept the Grand Duchess Marie Feodorovna, his second wife and mother of his many children. His plump, plain, and very efficient German spouse had long since grown used to his snoring. The couple were of very domestic inclinations and very happy. Perhaps it was their mutual misery which attracted them to each other. Being the wife of the son of Catherine was no easier than being the lady's son. From her accession Catherine had been in constant fear that he would take the throne from her. Prince Potemkin had allayed those fears by suppressing Paul. Now that he was dead Prince Platon Zubov carried on this work. Somehow the Empress did not place as much faith in her new favourite's ability in this direction, and she feared her son more than ever.

The Grand Duchess shivered slightly as a draught seeped through the cracked pane. Gatchina Palace, the Grand Ducal residence, left much to be desired. It badly needed repairs and refurnishing, but nothing could be done by its royal occupants, for Catherine allowed them a very meagre allowance, less, really, than they required to run the place.

The Grand Duchess snuggled in the somewhat soiled quilt which covered her, instinctively seeking more warmth. She dreamed she was living in a fine palace like Prince Zubov's or any one of the Empress's favourites. The dream ended very abruptly when she realized that she was married to the Grand Duke.

Paul trembled in his sleep. Something unearthly plucked him and pulled at him. He screamed as he felt himself flying through the air. Paul saw his wife on the ground watching him go. She called to him imploringly, stretched her arms out towards him. People grew smaller and smaller. Sweat stood on his brow, and then suddenly he grew calmer. The gates of heaven, white and shining, were in the distance. Slowly they grew more and more apparent as he neared them. There was a sudden flash of light and he woke up with a start.

He sat up in bed, backed by four huge pillows, in the Russian style. On the wall opposite he saw his dim reflection in the mirror. For an instant he regarded his homely visage in the glass.

He looked much worse without his wig, he thought. Then the dream came back to him. He had never had such a vivid dream. He must wake his wife and ask her what it meant. Marie always knew about everything. She was wonderfully clever.

The Grand Duchess must be dreaming also. She moaned and shivered. Paul touched her and she gave a frightened cry, opened her eyes and stared at him in terror.

"What are you frightened of? It is I, Paul."

"Oh, you scared me so! I had such a terrible dream."

"So did I; that is why I woke you. I dreamed that some strange force was pulling me to heaven."

The Grand Duchess sat up hurriedly and faced the middle-aged Duke.

"What, Paul? That is just what I have been dreaming!"

"You have! How did it end? I woke up as I neared the gates. Tell me, what happened to you?"

"You woke me up as I felt myself flying through the air."

They both said nothing for a few moments. Then Paul crossed himself, and the Grand Duchess did likewise.

"This is very extraordinary," he said after a while. "It is a portent. We must remember this night, my dear. What day is it?"

"November the fourth."

He kissed her, yawned, and went back to sleep. She lay back on her high pillows and stared at the ceiling, unable to sleep. Lying thus, some hours later, she heard a carriage come dashing up the driveway. She awoke the Grand Duke as steps were heard in the corridor. It was Nicholas, the eldest of the Zubovs. Nicholas, highly esteemed by many, was one of the few persons in the Court with courage enough to be friendly to the Grand Duke. In a moment he was in the room.

"Your Highness! Wake up! It is Count Nicholas Zubov."

"Eh? Nicholas! At this hour!"

"Yes. I have come to tell you that the Matushka Empress has had a fit and lies dying. I drove as quickly as I could all the way from St. Petersburg when I heard the news. Dress and come downstairs. I have a carriage waiting."

Hurriedly Paul put on his clothes, taking small excited dancing

steps to show his joy. His wife's eyes filled with tears of gladness and the couple embraced each other. How long they had waited to hear this news! This, then, had been the meaning of their dreams.

Down in the carriage Count Zubov awaited them. As Paul came out of the portals of Gatchina, followed by his wife, Nicholas noted a change in the man. There was a stiffness, an arrogance about him. Already he had become a Czar, and his mother had not gasped her last! A swift thought flashed through the sagacious Zubov's mind. What manner of Emperor would this man make?

He stepped out of the carriage, knelt and kissed Paul's hand in token of his respect. Paul smiled. When he was Czar people would have to show their respect as they did in days of old. They would have to climb out of their carriages when he passed, and lie face down, flat on the ground.

The three entered the carriage and drove on towards St. Petersburg. In the distance they could see the vehicles on the road.

"Everybody is going to the city," the Count told them. "Everyone is sending couriers. The Grand Dukes Constantine and Alexander have sent theirs. Almost all the Court officials have. Even the chief cook and chief fishmonger have sent couriers."

"But you must tell us everything, dear Count. The Grand Duke and myself want to know all the details. What a calamity, what a catastrophe! How did it happen?"

"Well, the Empress went to bed the night before last after playing cards at the Hermitage with the usual group. She seemed in excellent spirits and even joked with Lev Narishkin, who was dressed as a peddler trying to sell her trinkets. News had come that the King of Sardinia had died, and the Court was to go into a short mourning on account of it. She twitted Narishkin and reminded him that his time had come. You know how he fears death."

"And to think that Her Majesty's own jest should turn against her," the Grand Duchess said.

Paul grunted. The Count coughed delicately and the Grand Duchess's eyes gleamed as he went on.

"She went to bed that night at the usual hour. She had a slight colic, it is said, brought on by too much laughter. Perhaps it was the Madeira which Dr. Rogerson made her drink. She always claimed it disagreed with her.

"She awoke the next morning at six, as usual, and her maid claims she had a good night's sleep. She had her coffee and fed her dogs and then sat at her writing-table and worked on her history of Russia——"

"Alas! The work will never be finished now," the Grand Duchess said.

Paul grunted, and Count Nicholas Zubov went on.

"Then she received my brother, the Prince, and they talked. She asked to be excused and went into her room. He waited and waited for her to come out, and becoming anxious, sent her old lackey in to see her. The lackey went into the room, but as she was not to be seen, he came out and informed the Prince that she must be in the water closet. They waited a long time, with growing anxiety. Finally they entered and knocked on the door of the closet. There was no answer. They tried it and found that she had fallen in a fit, and that her feet were against the door. With great trouble they extricated Her Majesty and laid her out upon a mattress."

"Merciful heaven!" the Grand Duchess exclaimed.

The Grand Duke grinned as he reflected on the irony of the situation. The stool of the closet had been constructed from the former throne of Poland. Catherine had put it to this purpose as a sign of the final degradation of that unhappy country.

"Dr. Rogerson was sent for immediately, of course. The Empress had been bled, and there was a little improvement; but Dr. Rogerson says there is no hope. It is the end."

The carriage drove on, and as it made its way through the streets of the city people heard that it carried Paul. Way was hurriedly made for the despised man.

The Palace was thronged with crowds of people of all stations, waiting to hear the doctor's bulletins concerning the Empress. When Paul made his entrance they fell away like wheat under a scythe. He smiled as they showed their obeisance to him. He had waited a long, long time for this moment!

All the things his Nemesis, Potemkin, had promulgated would be abolished. Every living favourite of the Empress would be flogged and sent to Siberia. He had said this often and he meant to do it now. The army would be changed back to what it had been under his father, Peter III. No one would be allowed to wear round hats, insignia of free thinking.

Paul made his way up the stairs while people bowed before

him. At the landing he met Platon Zubov. For hours Zubov had been sitting in the corridor. His face was white and drawn. People had stayed away from him as if he had the plague. Not even the lackeys had heeded his piteous cries for water. On seeing the Grand Duke, he threw himself on the ground and embraced his feet, sobbing. Paul smiled grimly, and then, much to everyone's surprise, said, "Rise, Prince Zubov. Do not disturb yourself; be assured of my good will towards you."

Platon Zubov's jaw dropped. He covered the Prince's hand with kisses.

Paul walked on and people began to mutter among themselves hurriedly. Someone pressed a pitcher of water and a glass on the bewildered Prince Zubov. Others gave him a seat. No one could understand the Grand Duke's action. There was no explaining it, just as there would be no explaining the capricious acts of his reign.

As they neared the Empress's chambers they saw Count Alexei Orlov coming out. He was old now, but his frame was as huge and powerful-looking as ever. His face was thin and pale, for he had risen from a sick bed, where he was taking the terrible treatments of the sorcerer Erofeich. All that day he had neither eaten nor drunk. Ill, grief-stricken, and without the protection of Catherine, he was still a mighty man. People gave way before him respectfully. Thirty-four years had passed since he had placed Catherine on the throne, and in all that time no one had been able to break him. Not even Potemkin, whom he had defied and condemned to the Empress.

He had been the doer of deeds for Catherine, no matter what lovers came after him. When the false Empress Tarrakanoff had entered pretensions to the throne, it was he who went all the way to Italy and won her affections; he who had made her embark fearlessly upon his vessel and there made her a prisoner.

Paul could not bear to look upon the face of the man he believed had murdered his father. He fixed his gaze on the diamond-framed miniature Alexei wore on his chest. It was the same miniature Catherine had given to his brother Gregory. As his father's murderer came near him, Paul involuntarily retreated one step and bumped into Count Nicholas Zubov, who was standing behind him.

Three short years later, Nicholas Zubov was to strike the first blow which would end in Paul's own murder.

CHAPTER TWO

ALEXANDER NIKOLAIEVITCH RADISTCHEV looked up from the paper on which he was writing an essay about the indestructibility of the soul. Outside his rude hut the wind howled across the Siberian wastes. It came through a chink in the window and made his solitary candle flutter fitfully. He was weary of his work, and thought perhaps it might be better to go back to his studies in natural history or sociology.

Six long years. . . . It was hardly believable that he had been exiled to this desolate country so long ago by Catherine. He smiled. Perhaps he was lucky to be alive. Some told him that it had been Russia's victory over Sweden which made Catherine grant a general amnesty. Another rumour had been that Prince Potemkin had influenced the Empress in his behalf.

The Prince was dead, so they said. He wondered whether the Empress was still alive. . . . Whether Novikov,[1] the philanthropist and writer on economics, education, and politics, who had been arrested with him, was surviving his confinement in grim Schlusselberg Fortress. Novikov was an old man, and it would go hard with him. The fact that he was friendly with Paul would not make it any easier for him.

Perhaps Siberia's torments were to be preferred to those of Schlusselberg. At least he had a certain amount of freedom. Radistchev sighed and ran his hand through his beard. He was forty-seven, but hardship had made him look more than his age.

He wondered now whether he should have regretted writing his little book, *A Trip from St. Petersburg to Moscow.* He had guessed at the time that it would get him into trouble. He had taken the precaution of mentioning no names and of having the action take place in a dream. It was written anonymously and had been printed by himself in the privacy of his small house. All to no avail. The book had fallen into Catherine's hands.

He had written the work in the first person, as a sort of imaginary dream of a voyager between the two Russian cities. In a dream he saw a monarch surrounded by evil advisers,

[1] To Paul's credit, one of the first things he did on ascending the throne was to release Novikov with honours. He was a champion of the people and was arrested when at the time of the French Revolution Catherine suffered what to-day would be termed a "red scare."

and saw that monarch oppressing the people. Serfs were made to work in the fields every day of the week without rest, and were treated worse than the cattle they drove. Politics were rotten clean through. Judges were bought, there was no justice. Caprice, favouritism, and bribery brought a man rewards. Merit and hard work meant nothing. Innocent peasant girls were despoiled by their owners and given the venereal diseases their lords had reaped in the course of their own excesses. Honest people were robbed of their property by corrupt officials.

Radistchev thought of the things he had written in his book and wondered whether he had said enough. It was clear to him now that Catherine had purchased with favours the allegiance of the nobles of a new and upstart type. She did not pay ; but the serfs and Russia did. The land was robbed and wasted, the people were mere chattels to be bought and sold at the master's whim. Things had been bad under Peter I, but under Catherine they had been worse. It was a step back into darker ages.

Her display of religion, her prayers in churches, and her public manifestations of piety were as nothing. At heart she had no charity. She believed only what she wished to believe. Her people must be happy ; had they not danced and sung all along the trip through the Crimea ? Radistchev wondered if she knew that Potemkin had ordered them to dance on pain of death, and that Zubov must have done likewise when she travelled. Surely she must know something of the truth. Still, she preferred to act as if all were well, because it was easiest for her that way.

She had pretended, played at being the enlightened Empress. It flattered her ego to be known as such. Every one of her schemes for the amelioration of the people's lot had come to nothing. Six long years of reflection in this dreary waste land had brought him to the realization that she soon grew tired of doing things for the people. If the nobles complained at a ukase she might issue to ease the people's lot, she let it drop.

And her Nakaz, or Code of Laws. He had read it carefully. At the time it had a reminiscent tinge. Now he knew that she had stolen it all from Montesquieu's *L'esprit des lois* and Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pere,* without giving either of these

authors credit for their work. He wondered how she could have spent six months at it. She had called a congress of five hundred and sixty-four people to codify the laws. The whole thing had turned out to be a fête of windy speeches.

Radistchev wondered whether it was hatred against Catherine or reason which made him think that she had accomplished nothing.

He felt she was more interested in what people thought of her than in what she accomplished. She concerned herself more in creating effects than true reforms. It was all false, all show. There was nothing sincere or very honest about her. As long as everything in her immediate vicinity was pleasant she made herself believe that everything else in her empire was.

When he had travelled on the Continent receiving his education, foreigners had spoken jestingly of Russia as a country where the sound of cudgels and knouts beating on humans never ceased. It had angered him to be told that, but now he knew it to be literally true. Even to Catherine's tone-deaf ears the sound must be ugly.

The "Great" . . . That was what they were calling her now, the "Great."

He wondered how the title ever came about. Starting from some indefinable source it had grown till it became natural to couple it with the name of Catherine.

"Catherine the Great." Who had coined that name? Most likely some monarchist historian in the pay of the Crown. Perhaps Potemkin, who was always flattering her by publicizing her glory.

Radistchev could find no definite answer. He knew only that the seed was dropped on ground eager for it, and the flower of her "greatness" bloomed quickly.

The "great" what? . . . Mistress? She had had a baker's dozen of lovers, if one did not count some few like Narishkin, Besborodko, and others who had been tried for a day, a week, or a month, and found wanting; and if one did not consider Alexei Orlov or Valerian Zubov or other interlopers.

No, she was not great. She might be extraordinary, unique, surprising, amazing, odd, remarkable—any of those things—but great, never. She had neither the soul nor the spirit nor the bigness of mind for that.

The room was cold, and Radistchev rose and walked up and down the dirt floor, swinging his arms vigorously to keep himself warm. He began to wonder how many years of his life there were before him in this nightmare of a country from which there was no escape.

To spend one's life in this solitude for having written a book ! A book which the people for whom it was written could not read, because under Catherine the oppressed classes had no chance to be educated.

Radistchev sighed. It was ironic to have written it, ironic to have suffered without doing any good.

He pillowed his head in his arms on the bare table and gnawed his lips in agony of thought. It was rare that he gave way to such despondency. His studies had kept him from thinking such things. To-night he felt an awful depression stealing over him. It left him slowly and there came to him a feeling of strength and a glow of achievement. He remembered being told by a fellow exile, lately come to Siberia, that though almost all the copies of his *A Trip from St. Petersburg to Moscow* were destroyed, a few were left and these carefully read behind shuttered windows with dimly lighted lamps. A liberal group of intellectuals had laboriously copied out the whole work by hand and passed it on. Through him a new movement was beginning.

He felt a peculiarly thrilling elation. His work had not been in vain. For it he was enduring what any man who dares to speak the truth, who has the courage of his radical convictions, must suffer. And he had the honour to be the first.

Long ago, when Radistchev was a young man, he had translated Mably's *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce* into Russian. He remembered now that he had written into his preface of the work, " The injustice of the ruler gives the people their champion." He wondered now, on this cold and lonely evening, whether he had come near being such a person.[1]

[1] By many to-day Radistchev is accepted as the first revolutionary martyr in Russia. Some grant the honour to Pugachev, who rebelled against Catherine and was executed. However, it is fairly well ascertained that Pugachev brought on his rebellion for selfish reasons. He rallied the people with the story that he was the Emperor Peter III and that the death of Catherine's husband was a fiction. Though he did rally the discontented serfs to his standard, it is more or less certain that if he had overthrown Catherine their lot would have been none the easier. He craved the luxury and dissoluteness of her court, and as a matter of

fact, started one of his own which aped hers. Radistchev, on the other hand, wrote his book for purely unselfish reasons. At the time he did so it was a most courageous act, and his thought and humanity were far in advance of his day. So revolutionary was his work that not until 1905 was it permitted to be printed and distributed in Russia. There is a German translation of this interesting piece of revolutionary literature, but unfortunately none in English.

Under Alexander I, the grandson of Catherine, Radistchev was given a pardon. He was given a small government position and then appointed to a commission to work out new laws. It was to be another one of the liberal gestures so beloved of the rulers of Russia. Radistchev, however, took his work seriously and proposed far-going actual reforms. The chairman of the commission, Count Zavadoffsky, finally reprimanded him severely for his radical ideas and threatened him with Siberia. This threat, together with the knowledge that he would never change his opinions, evidently made life intolerable for him. It was almost certain that he would sooner or later be forced to endure exile. Horror of this probably caused Radistchev to take his own life on September 13, 1802.

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN Catherine had been found in her fit they had hastily thrown a mattress on the floor and carried her to it. There she had remained in a coma, with staring, glassy eyes. She breathed stertorously with a rattling, rasping sound. The doctors kept wiping off blackish foam which frothed about her lips. Her limbs were entirely paralysed. They moved only in convulsive jerks caused by reflex action.

People crowded about her, did things and said things as if she had no control of her senses at all—as if she were already dead. Catherine would have smiled if she could. She heard, saw, and thought very clearly.

"Death," she said to herself. "So this was death and this was dying."

It was not at all what she had imagined. It was a sort of slow going away of the functions. Yet it had all happened so quickly. In the evening she was her usual self; in the morning she arose, dressed, talked to Prince Zubov; and then death came to her like an unexpected, frantic courier.

How did it happen? She had left her "child," and then there came a space of blackness where, try as she might, she could remember nothing till she found herself lying on the mattress. That seemed ages back. Seconds seemed so very long and precious now. She remembered how she had tried to move her legs and found, to her surprise, that she could think of the act but not accomplish it. She had felt it was just as good. Her legs had pained her, and now she felt that she had none at all.

She remembered trying to move her arms and finding she could not. Her head, too, refused to function. There had been a terrible fright after that. She had wanted to cry out, to speak to all those people who surrounded her, to fat old Mlle Alexeiev, one of her principal waiting women. She tried desperately to speak, but could not. All she could do was to hear and see Mlles Protassof and Alexeiev sob as if their hearts were breaking.

She saw Dr. Rogerson, grim, dour, and gruff as ever. He was not crying, but intent on the bandage he was applying to her arm where she had been bled. She could feel someone

wiping her mouth and wetting her forehead with a handkerchief soaked in eau-de-Cologne. It felt very soothing.

" Her Majesty is better, but there is no hope."

Dr. Rogerson said it as if she could not hear. A surge of terror went through her and she heard a choking, gasping sound she herself must have made.

Dying . . . she was dying !

No !

There was a monotonous, mumbling sound, and she looked up. The Metropolitan Gabriel was chanting the prayers for the dying.

Yes, it must be he, she could see his long white beard.

She recognized the beautiful, elaborately embroidered golden vestments he wore. She had embroidered those robes herself. They were among the finest she had ever made. She felt a wave of sorrow when she knew that she was never again to embroider such robes.

It soothed her to hear the Metropolitan chant ; it took the fear of death away. She had never believed much in the Russian Orthodox Church. Of course, one had to make a show of religion for the sake of the people. They expected it. Now, there seemed to be something in the ritual which she had never noted before, a peace and quiet for which she had waited ever so long.

After all, millions of Russians believed in their religion ; there must be something to it. And Grishenka—he had been so devout. Grishenka knew so much, he must have been right in this thing too.

Strange . . . Grishenka had died and now she was doing the same thing. If only he were here to help her, to counsel her on dying. No, she must work that out for herself. It came to everyone, this dying business, and it had to be met alone.

Soon she would be seeing Grishenka. Or would she not ? Where would he be ? In hell ?

Grishenka had done many things which must be painful in the sight of God. There was that officer—what was his name ? Oh, yes. Shcheglovsky—who had the affections of a Polish noblewoman he fancied. Grishenka had had him exiled to Siberia so as to be rid of him. She should have released

Shcheglovsky after the Prince died. She had meant to so often, and had forgotten. Would God be angry at her for having neglected him?

Perhaps God had merely sent the Prince to purgatory, and not to hell. After all, Grishenka had always meant well, was really kind. The sins he had committed were only human, not vicious. The Prince had been dead five years now. No doubt his term in purgatory must be up. Then she *would* meet him. It would be such a happy reunion.

But perhaps she must go to purgatory, too. After all, she had lived in sin. There had been Lanskoi and Zavadoffsky and many others. But God must know that she had not meant to sin. She had been unfaithful to Peter III, but God knew he was not a man; and she had to sin for the sake of Russia. And God must know that she had wanted to marry dear Gregory Orlov, who must be with the angels now. The Russian people would not permit her to marry Gregory. She had been blameless. God must know that the sin was not upon her.

God must see all those people about her weeping and sorrowing. Would people act thus when a sinful or wicked woman died? There was poor Prince Zubov, her child, lying prostrate at her feet and crying, "Matushka, you cannot, you must not, leave us." The boy must love her, for only love could cause such pitiful grief.

She heard sounds and a low, respectful voice at the doorway.

"I am sorry, Your Highness, I cannot permit you to enter."

Ah, that was the voice of Count Saltykov, a member of the same family as her former lover.

A shrieking, high-pitched, demoniacal voice sounded a few moments later.

"I demand that you permit me to pass. Do you hear me? I demand it!"

That was Paul. . . . No, no, she did not want him to enter the room. She wanted to cry, "Keep him out. I do not want to see him. He is to stay out."

But she could say nothing.

She looked imploringly at her grandson, the Grand Duke Alexander, who had risen to greet his father. She wanted to

tell him with her eyes that Paul was not to come in; but Alexander was not looking at her.

Paul came in and knelt by her side. He took her hand, raised it to his lips and kissed it. Then he crossed himself and said a prayer. Behind him his fat German Duchess was also praying.

Horrible, disgusting, as if she were a corpse already.

"Get out. Leave me. You are no son of mine. I hate you. I disown you. Do you hear? You shall never rule Russia. Alexander shall rule in your place. Yes, your son, your eldest son, whom I took from you, turned against you, even as they took you from me and turned me against you."

Nothing. Nothing. She could not say a word. She could only lie there, helpless, and breathe heavily like some winded great beast.

She saw Paul rise and leave her side. Where was Zubov? He had gone. People left her as if Paul was already a Czar.

She looked about her, frightened that she might be left alone. No, there was Narishkin, Protassof, Alexeiev, and dear Alexander. People were still faithful to her.

It was getting hard to see clearly now. She concentrated on Alexander. He would rule after her, just as she had educated him to. It was good to know now that she had been so careful, had spent such pains selecting his tutors, going over his lessons and correcting his papers.

Alexander would rule. She had left a ukase to that effect, setting Paul aside and putting Alexander in his place. It was in good hands, Prince Platon Zubov's. He would see that it was carried out.

She heard the crystal pendants of the chandelier above her head tinkle. There must be people upstairs.

Above her, the white-faced Zubov handed Paul a decree. The Grand Duke's face twitched and he wet his lips as he read it.

"So," he said, "my mother wanted to set me aside. It is a good thing she cannot talk, and it is a good thing you gave me this."

With great care he tore the paper into the tiniest fragments.

Then, carefully, he brought them to the fire and watched them consumed by the flames.

In another corner of the room the Grand Duchess Marie was busily engaged with a group of people. He looked up at her. . . . So she was making herself important. . . . Thinking she was the Empress. Well, there would be no more women ruling Russia. He would see to that. He strode angrily over to her.

". . . let me see, I think they should play a dirge, and a platoon of cavalry should precede the clergy," she was saying. Feeling his presence, she turned. " Oh, Paul, I am so glad you have come. The arrangements for the funeral, my dear."

Paul took Marie's arm. Really the woman was admirable. She thought of everything.

Catherine now felt she was going into a very heavy sleep. She wanted to keep her eyes open, but could not.

" She is sinking."

She heard the words dimly. That was Rogerson's voice. She could recognize his bad French accent any time. Even when she was dying.

Curious, indeed, to know everything that was going on. It was just like the old days, so very long ago, when she had first come to Russia and used to feign sleep in her bed chamber so that she could hear the gossip her maids-in-waiting told each other. . . .

No pain, either. Not once had she felt any pain at all. That was a sign. That must mean that God had believed her to be a good Empress to her people. . . .

There was a horrible rattling sound and a sigh as the breath left her body.

Dr. Rogerson knelt over her breast and felt for her pulse. There was none. . . . His immediate thought was of England. He could go home now and get a decent cut of roast beef. Peculiar things one thinks of at such a time.

" The Empress is dead," he heard himself saying.

There was a sound of wailing and sobbing. He heard the priests pray. The word passed outside to the throng as if it had flown on air. One could hear the bustle and murmur caused by the news.

Rogerson folded Catherine's hands across her breast and closed her dead eyes. He looked at her dead lips, and smiled faintly. He had to, for they were smiling a very satisfied smile back at him.

The huge reception-room in the Palace had been draped in black and hung with funeral emblems. On a bier covered with a huge catafalque lay the body of Catherine, so that the public could see her and mourn for her according to the Russian custom. For days crowds of nobles had stood in line and kissed the dead Empress's hand. The body had been there for several of the six weeks it was to remain. The duty of paying final respect had become far from pleasant.

Beside Catherine's lay another coffin. It was closed, and on top of it rested the crown worn by the Czars of All the Russias. Paul had had the body of his father, Peter III, exhumed. The rotting plain coffin in which he was buried had been pried open and the grisly remains exposed. They had then been transferred to a sumptuous coffin. It was to be a double funeral. He meant to have his father and mother buried side by side.

People were horror-stricken by the idea. But he was the Czar now, and his commands had to be obeyed.

It was night, and the room was empty except for the few officers of the Chevalier Guards who stood on duty guarding the corpse. Most of them dozed, but one young lieutenant standing near the catafalque seemed alert. He looked about as if awaiting someone. After a while he spotted the shadowy form of a girl gliding through the dusk.

"Tatiana," he called softly.

"Sergei."

He put forth his hand and led the girl behind the catafalque. There they clasped each other in a lover's embrace.

"Your dear little white hand, Tatiana."

He covered it with kisses, then suddenly stopped.

"What is this you're wearing—a ring?"

"Jealous, Sergei? I swear to you it comes from no man."

"No, I am not jealous, Tatiana. But you must tell me what ring it is. I must know. It is most important."

"Silly; it's nothing. Merely a mourning ring for the Empress."

"Just what I thought. Take it off. Take it off, immediately.

"But why?"

"Because His Majesty, the Emperor Paul, has forbidden them."

Her eyes opened wide in terror. She took the ring off her finger and slipped it into her bosom.

He took a ring from his own finger and put it on hers.

"Here, wear this till I can get you one that fits."

She looked at it curiously, trying to read the inscription in the dim light.

"But what sort of ring is this?"

"The Emperor Paul has decreed them. All must wear them. Can't you see the inscription? It says: 'Paul Consoles Me.'"

THE END

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