

8 MARCH
THURSDAY

[1]

Nikolai spent sixty-six days at Alix's side in the contained stillness of Tsarskoye Selo, by his presence easing her immeasurable grief over her loss. (Fortunately, the winter lull at the front had permitted this absence from GHQ.)

Troubled, restless, and grief-stricken, Alix had communicated to Nikolai her sense of an impending stretch of disasters and misfortunes that would not be overcome quickly.

There was another disaster as well: the poor man's death had drawn a line of misunderstanding between Nikolai and Alix. They had always had different views of Grigori, his essence and significance and the extent of his wisdom, but Nikolai had never insisted on this, sparing Alix's feelings and belief. Now, though, Alix could not forgive her husband for not handing the murderers over to justice.

When on 30 December, at GHQ, during a military council with the supreme commander about the plan for the 1917 campaign, the Emperor was handed a telegram about Rasputin's disappearance and possible death, he was, in a sinful way, privately, actually rather relieved. After all the anger that had built up, he was tired of listening to the endless warnings, revelations, and gossip—and now, all of a sudden, this object of public hatred had himself vanished, in some fatalistic way, without the Emperor having to make any effort whatsoever, without an agonizing conversation with Alix. It had all passed—of its own accord.

He took an artless view of things! He couldn't imagine that almost immediately he would be forced to abandon both this military council, which had taken so long to organize, and GHQ—and rush to be with Alix for a full two months—and earn a hail of reproaches: his indifference to the elder and deliverer's fate had led to the very possibility of this murder, and not only that, he had no wish to punish the murderers!

Half a day later, he himself was embarrassed that he could have felt relief at someone's death.

Indeed, murder was murder, and the long harassment and evil tongues had progressed to poison and gunshots—and there were no mitigating circumstances whatsoever for not putting them on trial. But the fact that the prick's sting had issued from such proximity, from among the grand dukes

and even soft-spoken, gentle Dmitri, whom he had raised practically as a son, beloved and spoiled Dmitri (whom he kept at GHQ and would not send to a regiment), rendered the Emperor powerless. The more inexpressible and blood-related the offense, the more powerless he was to respond.

What monarch had ever landed in such a fix? His only buttress was the distant, mute, and invisible Orthodox people. Whereas all the spheres close to him — educated and godless — were hostile, and even among men of state and government servants one saw very few who were zealous in their work and honest.

Even the hostility inside the dynasty itself was striking. Everyone detested Alix. Nikolasha and the Montenegrin sisters had for a long time, but even his Mama had always been against her. Even Elizaveta, Alix's own sister. And naturally, his Lutheran Aunt Miechen had never forgiven Alix her fervent Orthodoxy and on the occasion of the heir's illness had laid the groundwork for her own sons, either Kirill or Boris, to seize the throne. Then there was the string of unmaskers that had appeared this fall and winter among the grand dukes and duchesses, who had lectured the imperial couple, with rare effrontery, as to how they were to be — as had Sandro, once upon a time Nikolai's close friend, when they were young. Sandro had gone so far as to say that the government itself was bringing on a revolution and a government was needed that was to the Duma's liking, that apparently all classes were hostile to the throne's policy and the people believed the slander, but the royal couple had no right to drag their own relatives into the abyss. Even his brother Georgi had echoed the same: unless a government responsible to the Duma was created, we were all going to perish. Grand dukes could think of themselves. When things were going bad for them, they could go to Biarritz and Cannes. A sovereign did not have that luxury.

Now he was ashamed before Russia that the hands of the emperor's relatives had been stained with that man's blood. But so stifling was the dynastic condemnation all around that he could not find the firmness in his breast to respond with a legal blow. Even his Mama had asked him not to open an investigation. Nikolai could not find in himself the ruthless will to prosecute them harshly under the law. Given the gossip that had arisen, any ordinary legal action might be interpreted as personal revenge. All that Nikolai could bring himself to do was to exile Yusupov to his estate and Dmitri to Persia, but Purishkevich — nothing even happened to him; he boarded a hospital train for the front. Even these mild measures were met with mutiny by the dynasty, a hostile collective letter from the entire large family of grand dukes and duchesses, and Sandro came and shouted right at the Emperor to stop this murder case.

How utterly they forgot themselves. They no longer considered themselves subject to the state's judgment or God's!

But then Alix breathed fury, saying that Nikolai had been criminally lenient toward the murderers and his weakness would ruin both his realm and his family.

An unprecedented, prolonged tension, an unremitting resentment, had lingered between him and Alix these two months at Tsarskoye. Nikolai tried to yield and oblige in any way he could. He authorized all the special arrangements for the murdered man's body: a guard and burial right there in Tsarskoye, on Anya's land. Hiding away from everyone, as if they were hunted pariahs in this country and not its Tsars, they buried Rasputin at night, to torches, and Nikolai himself and Protopopov and Voeikov were his pallbearers. Nonetheless, Alix was not entirely mollified, and a heaviness remained in her heart. (She now took lonely walks to grieve and pray at his grave. Malignant people spotted her and sullied the grave in the very first days. A permanent guard had to be posted until a chapel could be raised over that spot.)

So passionate and insistent were Alix's reproaches of his weakness and incompetence as Tsar that Nikolai's faith in himself was shaken. (Not that it had ever been solid since he was young; he considered himself a failure at everything. He was convinced that even his trips to see the troops, trips he loved so, would bring those troops military failure.) Even little Aleksei, who was not yet engaged in adult matters at all, exclaimed in grief, "Papa, are you really not going to punish them? They hanged Stolypin's murderer, after all!" Indeed, why was he so weak? Why couldn't he summon the will and decisiveness of his father? Or great-grandfather?

Especially after Grigori's murder, the Emperor could not agree to any concessions for his opponents and society. They would think that it was because he'd been freed from that influence. Or see, he was afraid of being killed, too.

During these hard winter months, under his wife's reproaches and coming to his own senses, Nikolai decided on drastic steps. Yes, now he would be firm and insist his will be carried out! He removed Justice Minister Makarov, whom Alix had not liked for a long time (and who had been indifferent and sluggish at Rasputin's murder), and Prime Minister Trepov, whom she had objected to greatly from the very beginning, saying he was cruel and alien. As Prime Minister he appointed dear old Prince Golitsyn, who had helped Alix so much in prisoner-of-war matters. And he had stood up for Protopopov. Later, just before the New Year, he shook up the State Council, replaced some appointed members with more reliable ones, and appointed Sheheglvitov State Council President. (Even in this refuge for worldly-wise, honorable dignitaries, the Emperor had lost the majority and had no influence. The appointed members as well as those elected were playing the liberal game here, too, more and more ruinously.) Moreover, he intended to move at last to decisive governance and defy public opinion, no matter the cost. He would even intentionally select as ministers individuals

whom so-called public opinion detested—and thereby demonstrate that Russia would accept these appointments perfectly well.

It was high time for a bold step. In December, congress after congress raged—the zemstvo, the towns, even the nobility—competing to be the loudest in defaming government and Tsarist power. Even Minister Nikolai Maklakov, once a favorite of the Emperor, whose reports had always been a joy for the Emperor, and with whom working had been inspiring, but who had been dismissed under pressure from Nikolasha, had now written most loyally that these congresses and all the hooting in the press had to be understood correctly, that this was the beginning of a direct assault on the state's authority. Maklakov presented a memorandum from some loyal men regarding how to save the state, and Shcheglovitov sent another just like it. These loyal men had plenty of nerve, so why had the Emperor lost his?

And now from many other sides, even from Uncle Pavel, news had come in that throughout the capital, even among the Guards, people were talking openly about preparations for a coup d'état. In January and February, the Emperor had been nurturing the thought of a preventive strike: bringing back his best, firmest ministers, dissolving the Duma now, and not reconvening it before late 1917, after the Fifth had been elected. He had already instructed Maklakov to compose a formidable manifesto dissolving the Duma. Which Maklakov had already composed and submitted.

However, as always, debilitating doubts flooded the Emperor. Need there be an escalation? Need the risk be run of an outburst? Wouldn't it be better to let matters proceed peacefully, run their course, and ignore the bullies?

What about the coup? That was all just talk. No Russian would agree to a coup in time of war, not even the State Duma. Deep down everyone loved Russia. And the Army was boundlessly loyal to the Emperor himself. There was no true danger, so why provoke a new schism and resentment? Among the names of the conspirators, the Police Department had submitted such prominent ones as Guchkov, Lvov, and Chelnokov. The Emperor wrote that public figures were not to be touched, especially in time of war.

Never before had such an aching loneliness been felt around the Tsar's family as after this ill-starred murder. Betrayed by relatives and slandered by society, they retained only a few close ministers, though they, too, were hated by society all the more. Even loyal, close friends like aide-de-camp Sablin were few and far between. With them they spent Yuletide, winter evenings, and Sundays at sparsely attended dinners and teas, sometimes inviting a small orchestra to the palace, sometimes a movie. In addition, they had their inimitably diverse outings in the Tsarskoye vicinity, and even a novelty: snow motorcars. In the evenings, Nikolai read aloud a great deal

to his family and solved puzzles with his children. Although since February the children had been falling ill.

Alix spent those two months nearly prostrate, as if she herself were the deceased. She learned and knew almost nothing other than Grigori's death, and her loyalty to her sorrow was more and more of a reproach to Nikolai every day.

The family was Nikolai's favorite milieu, and he could have spent a couple of years this way, in untroubled seclusion. He did not miss a single mass, he fasted, and he took communion. However, due to his proximity to the capital now, he could not entirely avoid affairs of state administration for those nine weeks. During one of those weeks, a conference of allies opened in Petrograd. Nikolai had no desire to appear in that hubbub, so General Gurko acted as the senior figure from Russia. On the other hand, the Emperor was thoroughly fed up with the length and harshness of Gurko's reports. (But he did have to receive the conference delegates at Tsarskoye — and Nikolai tensed and agonized terribly that they might also start advising him on domestic policy.) Every weekday, the Emperor also received the few ministers and prominent figures he especially liked, and with considerably greater pleasure.

However, whether because the funeral note did not abate in their home all those weeks and the headaches and sobbing over the murdered man dragged on, every man has his limit, and at last Nikolai was drawn to the straightforward and unconstrained life at GHQ, which also meant no ministerial reports. A few days before, Mikhail had arrived at Tsarskoye from Gatchina (his wife, a lawyer's daughter, already twice divorced, was neither allowed in nor recognized), and he had said that dissatisfaction was mounting in the army. Why had the Emperor been absent from GHQ for so long? Somewhere the rumor had even popped up that Nikolasha was once again going to take on the Supreme Command.

Could that really be? It was drivel, but dangerous drivel. Truly, it was time to go. (Here, too, was the unfortunate fact that his previous stay at GHQ had also been brief. He had spent his name day with his family at Tsarskoye and had not returned to GHQ until 20 December, and on the 31st was called back by Rasputin's death, and there he had been until now.)

But it was far from easy to beg leave of Alix. She failed to understand how he could abandon her in this grief when new assassinations might follow. They agreed that he would go for just a week, or even less, so that on 14 March, that unhappy anniversary for the Romanovs, the day of his grandfather's assassination, he would return to Tsarskoye and they would once again be together. This time she did not let the heir accompany his father because he was coughing for some reason.

Nikolai consoled himself with the fact that he was leaving the Tsaritsa under the protection of Protopopov, who assured him that everything had

been arranged, there was no threat in the capital, and the Emperor could travel calmly.

Once the departure was decided, the weight of reproach that had divided them for two months suddenly fell away. Alix warmed and brightened, delved animatedly into his issues, reminded him not to forget whom in the army he should reward and whom replace—and viewed Alekseev's return to GHQ after his long illness with particular mistrust and distaste. What was the point? He shouldn't. He was Guchkov's man and unreliable. Decorate him and let him take an honorable rest.

But Nikolai loved his hard-working, unconceited old man and didn't have the heart to dismiss him. He couldn't possibly say that; it would be too awkward. Was he linked to Guchkov? Well, Gurko, in the very same position, now in Petrograd, according to a dispatch from Protopopov, had met with Guchkov. And he was linked to the Duma. (And ten days before, during a report at Tsarskoye, he had burst out in a voice like a trumpet at Jericho: "Emperor, you are destroying your family and yourself! What are you preparing for yourself? The rabble will not stand on ceremony. Dismiss Protopopov!" Never before had there been one so frenzied near Nikolai, and he alone repented having agreed to take him on.)

Yesterday, after noon, Nikolai was riding to the train station—as always to the bells of the Cathedral of Our Lady of St. Theodore. Both he and Alix were inspired by the ringing of the bells. On the way, they stopped in at the Church of Our Lady of the Sign to make their reverences.

Just then the sky cleared, and the vivid, frosty, and joyous sun promised a good outcome for everything.

A pleasant surprise awaited Nikolai in his compartment (actually, this was their custom): an envelope from Alix placed on a small table next to his travel kit. He began reading avidly, in English:

"My very Own precious one! With anguish and deep pain I let you go—alone, without sweet Baby's tender companionship! Verily God has sent you a terrible hard cross to bear. I can do nothing but pray and pray. Our dear Friend does so in yonder world for you—there he is yet nearer to us.

"It seems as though things are taking a better turn—only, my Love, be firm, show the master hand, it's that what the Russian needs. Love and kindness you have *never* failed to show—now let them feel your fist at times. They ask for it themselves—how many have told me: 'we want to feel the whip.' It's strange, but such is the Slav nature: *great* firmness, hardness even—and warm love. They must learn to fear you—love is not enough. One must play with the reins, let them loose and draw them in . . ."

The whip? That was terrible. That was unimaginable, unspeakable—not even to be threatened. If *this* was the cost of being emperor, then he could do without being emperor at all.

To be firm, though—yes. To show an imperious hand—yes, in the end that was essential.

“I hope that you can come back very soon. I too well see how ‘the screaming mass’ behave when you are near. Duty calls, just now, *more* here than there. So do be home in ten days. Your wall, your wify remains guarding here in the rear.

“Ah, the loneliness of the nights to come—no Sunny near you—and no Sunshine, either.”

Oh, my dear! My treasure! . . .

How his heart was eased that once again no clouds lay between them. How this fortified him emotionally.

As always when traveling by rail, Nikolai took pleasure in reading, which he found relaxing and refreshing, this time in French, about Julius Caesar’s Gallic War; he was in the mood for something far afield from contemporary life.

It was cold outside, and somehow he didn’t feel like moving, and he didn’t leave his car at all for the entire journey.

Nikolai had noticed more than once that our tranquility or its lack depends not on remote, albeit major events but on what is happening right where we are. If there is no tension in the environment, in the immediate hours and days, then one’s soul brightens. After his Petersburg cares of state and without distressing official papers, it was quite glorious to lie in the train’s dear rocking and read, with no need to see or talk to anyone.

Late that night he reread his favorite, the marvelous English story about Little Boy Blue. And, as always, tears came to his eyes.

Documents – 1

TO HER MAJESTY. Telegram.

GHQ, 8 March

Arrived well. Fine, cold, windy. Am coughing rarely. Feel strong again, but very lonely. Thoughts always together. Miss you awfully.

Nicky

TO HIS MAJESTY

Tsarskoye Selo, 8 March

(in English)

Well, now Olga & Aleksei have the measles. Baby coughs very much and eyes ache. They lie in the dark. Our meals we take in the “red room.” Can imagine your awful loneliness without sweet Baby. So sad he and Olga can’t write to you, as must not use their eyes. . . . Oh my love, how sad it is without you – how lonely, how I yearn for your love and kisses, precious treasure, I think of you without end. Do wear the cross sometimes when making difficult decisions, it will help you.

. . . Cover you with kisses. Ever

your very Own

 SCREEN

In the plundered Petersburg sky,
 scraps and tracks of it between the overhangs of the joyless fac-
 tory roofs—

the sun has broken through. It's going to be a sunny day!

The drone of voices.

= A warm day even. Scarves pulled back from women's heads,
 mittenless hands, no one huddling or hunching over, they
 bustle about freely

in line, forty or so people,

at a small shop with one small door and one small window.

Extricating himself from the small door is someone who has al-
 ready bought something. Each person, first one, then an-

other, is carrying two or three loaves of rye bread,

big, round, well-kneaded, and baked, with a dusting of flour on
 the bottom—

oh, so many being carried away!

So many being carried away, and so few left! Before you can
 squeeze in, your eyes peer over shoulders or from the side
 through the window:

*"Lots of white, women, not that that's any good to any-
 one. But the rye's running out! No, there'll be none left
 for us."*

*"Folks say as rye flour's been banned altogether and
 they won't bake it no more. There'll be a pound of
 bread per snout."*

"Where'd the flour go?"

*"The Tsaritsa's floggin' it to the Germans, they've got
 nothin' for their bellies."*

The women, angry voices, drone on worse.

A sensible old man with an empty sack under his arm:

*"And there's nothing left to feed the horses. They're not
 letting oats into Petersburg. And a horse, if you keep it
 on bread, it's twenty pounds a day, no way less."*

And out of the small door, a woman. She spreads her arms wide
 on the threshold: They say they're out.

The next three start going in at once, not that you can squeeze in.

A woman's shrill voice starts screaming:

"What about us? We waited for nothing?"

A scarf slips, but hands are free. Eyes search: do what? throw what?

= Ice shard, chopped off, a chunk at the pavement's edge
Frozen on? No, no, it'll come up.
She grabs on to it and throws overhanded like a woman, with
both hands—

whomp!

= And the little window just – crash!

A ringing.

to little pieces!

= The salesclerk bellows like a bull, from inside, through the shards,
and out of nowhere comes a second chunk! Hit, miss—
everything starts spinning! the commotion! People try to dodge
through the door, but that many won't fit.

A general roaring and banging.

They throw whatever they find through the broken window,
right on the street. We don't need anything: white rolls!

candles!

red cheese wheels!

smoked fish!

bluing! brushes! laundry soap! . . .

And all of it on the ground, on the beaten snow, underfoot.

* * *

An excited hum.

= A sweeping crowd of workers throngs down the brown workers'
avenue.

Added to the throng is another throng from a side-street. Lots of
women; they're the angriest.

A crowd of several hundred pours in, itself not knowing, nothing
is decided,

past a single-story factory workshop.

People peek out, through windows, through window vents. To
them then:

"Hey, ammo man! Quit working! Join us. Bread!"

They linger alongside and try to persuade them:

*"Quit, ammo man! As long as there're lines—what
work? Bread!"*

For some reason ammo man doesn't want to, even moves back
from the windows.

*"Oh you, dimwit bitches! Hey, have you got your own
shop or something?"*

"Every man for himself, is it?"

A thickset old workman comes out on the stairs, hatless.

*"Regular hooligans you are, eh? Everyone's got his own
head. It's our own bins you think we're assembling
shells for?"*

A piece of ice at him:

“Your own head?”

The workman grabs his head.

A guffaw.

= Throng of adolescent workers.

They’re off! Like on the attack!

And in the wide-open factory gates—what can you do with a
horde like that?—they run around the guard, spin him
’round,

run around the policeman—

Eee! through the factory yard!

Eee! through all the doors and all the workshops!

Voices from a children’s chorus:

*“Quit working! Come outside! . . . Everybody out-
side! . . . Bread! Bread! Bread!”*

= The guard grapples to close the gates,

to pull the gates’ tall, strong halves together,

while half a hundred hale workers are running in from out-
side—

with all their strength!—

it creaks,

and one half tears off its hinge, its corner scrapes as it leans atilt,
now everyone who wants, go on in.

The policeman puts his hands on one

but he gets it with a stick. A stick!

The drone of voices.

* * *

= Bolshoi Prospect on the Petersburg side. The five-story buildings
look fused, unyielding, lined up in order of size. Straight as
an arrow.

All the buildings are fancy—balconies, ledges, and decorated
surfaces. And not a single tree anywhere. A stone canyon.

Downstairs is Filippov’s bakery, magnificent. Three double
plate glass windows and, behind that, pastries, cakes, pret-
zels, and fluffy loaves.

A young petit bourgeois man brandishes a crowbar,
people run away from him, protect their eyes,
how about like **that**?

Crash! the plate glass.

And on to the second.

Crash! the second.

And the crowd pours into the store.

- = And inside everything is lacquered and properly fitted out, not like in ordinary shops.
Some nice black bread? It's crowded in here. But the fluffy loaves!
And the pretzels! So white! And sweet! . . .
Is this what you don't want? A stick strikes the glass counter!
Is this what you don't want? A stick at your cakes!
The genteel public staggers back, aghast.
The salesclerks are nowhere to be found, they've fallen back.
Smash the white! Smash the sweets! If we're not eating, you're not either!
Don't rile us, you devils! . . .

* * *

Ringing,

- = from the Finland Station down a side-street, a streetcar makes its way through the hubbub of excited people in the street.
A small group of workers is standing around, looking like bullies. They curse:
 "Where're you shovin'? Can't ya see?"
The streetcar conductor is standing on the front landing behind the window, like an idol, turning the long lever in his box.
A bright idea! One worker jumps up to him, onto the front landing—
Don't you understand Russian? Kicks him aside,
tears that long lever off his box—
and showing the people from the step, shakes the long streetcar lever
over his head!—
And gaily hops off.
They saw! They understood! They liked it!
The streetcar comes to a halt. It can't move without that lever.
It looks out through the three front windows,
and the conductor in the middle, his forehead on the glass.
= The whole crowd is laughing!

* * *

- = And on Nevsky, what a nice, frosty, sunny day for a stroll! A few dashing sleighs glide by. With sleigh bells!
So many people on the sidewalks, including the most genteel: ladies with their purchases and maids, officers with their batmen. All kinds of ladies and gentlemen. Lively conversations, laughter.

It's somehow even too dense on the sidewalks. In the street, all decorous, no one hindering the cabbies and streetcars, but on the sidewalks they squeeze together—not strolling but pushing forward to the demonstration.

Ah, here we have the petty bourgeois, and the workmen, and the common women, every stripe, pushing into the fancy crowd, and this in the middle of a workday, on Nevsky!

But the genteel public doesn't disdain them, and so together they sail along, like a single fused body. They've come up with something entertaining; the faces of young men and women students beam. The crowd isn't breaking anything, it's sailing together down the sidewalk, faces both pleased and mischievous, and mournful voices, as if they're burying someone, like an underground moan:

"Bread . . . Bread . . ."

They've appropriated it from the women workers, transformed it into a moan, and now all together, more and more broadly, even those who never put rye in their mouths, and yet they moan sepulchraly:

"Bread . . . Bread . . ."

But they titter with their eyes. And laugh openly, and taunt. Petersburg's inhabitants are always somber—which makes the gaiety that's come over them even stranger.

Little boys run to the edge of the street, where they march and drum and horse around:

"Give us bread! Give us bread!"

- = Here and there police details along Nevsky. Worried policemen. Where there are mounted police, too. There's nothing you can do, you can't find fault. It isn't an infraction. A foolish position for the police.

* * *

- = And down Nevsky, down the Nevsky arrow shining in the sun, in the line of receding streetcar poles—these streetcars, for some reason these streetcars are too close together, there's some obstacle, no getting through: A string of them, lined up. The public is looking out the windows like fools and doesn't know what's next. One front landing empty. Another empty landing and a front window smashed. While down the street go five young bucks, workmen or petty bourgeois, carrying five control levers—long ones!—brandishing them like weapons, to general laughter. From the sidewalks the genteel public laughs!

- = Seeing this, an assistant police officer,
without fuss, quickly cuts through the crowd—
walks confidently, as the authority, and doesn't much look to ei-
ther side,
he's not expecting anything bad, and if he is, then he's brave,
he reaches to take a lever away from one man—
when another lever strikes the back of his head—
and twice!
The officer spins around and drops, unconscious, there, under-
foot. Gone.
- = The genteel Nevsky public laughs and laughs! So do the female
students.

* * *

- = The ribbed cupola of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan.
Its famous square between the arches of the classical arcade
is jammed with people, still with the same cheerful appeal and
plaintive wail:
 "Bread . . . Bread . . ."
They like this game. Grand fur hats, bowlers, stylish ladies' hats,
simple kerchiefs, and black peaked caps:
 "Bread . . . Bread . . ."
- = And along the cathedral's sides stand the dragoon details on
their noble, imposing steeds.
And their officer, dismounted, speaks to a high-ranking policeman,
leaps into the saddle, gives an order
not too loudly—the crowd can't hear—
and the dragoons move off in groups of six, at a round pace, and
so stand in groups of six in one place, and another,
they're riding onto the sidewalks! Straight at the public!
The horses' heads and chests rise up like cliffs!
and they themselves are even taller!—
but they aren't angry or shouting, and they're giving no orders—
they're just sitting there, in the sky, and coming at us!
- = There's nowhere to go, people of all estates scatter, dash off in a
wave—
away from the square, into nearby passageways,
through front doors and gateways. Some collapse into a snowy
pile. A whistle from the crowd.
And the horses step proudly through the empty places.
But as soon as they ride away—the crowd returns to these places
and sidewalks.
The rules of the game! No one is angry at anyone. They're
laughing.

- = But alongside the Ekaterininsky Canal, on the far side of the Kazan Bridge—
 half a hundred Cossacks, young bucks from the Don—with lances.
 Tall! Well built! Frightening! The dashing, menacing Cossacks scowl from their steeds.
 A high-ranking official drives up to an officer:
“I am Major General Balk, the city governor of Petersburg. I order you to disperse this crowd immediately, at full gallop—but without the use of weapons! Clear a path for wheeled and sleigh traffic.”
- = The officer is quite young and inexperienced. He looks awkwardly at the city governor.
 Awkwardly at his detachment. And listlessly, so listlessly, it’s amazing they move up at all, let alone at a full gallop, but they do move
 at a walk, their lances pointing straight up,
 at a walk, their steeds’ hooves slipping on the slippery pavement, across the wide bridge and down Nevsky.
 The city governor gets out of his motorcar and sets off alongside them. He walks alongside them—and unable to restrain himself, himself orders:
“Full gallop!”
 Do Cossacks really take orders from an outsider, and one on foot at that?
 Well, the little officer sets his horse at a trot.
 So the Cossacks, they do, too.
 But the closer they get to the crowd, the slower they go . . .
 Slower . . . This is not scaring them . . . Their lances all straight up, not pointing forward.
 And before reaching them, they halt altogether. The joyous roar of thousands!
 the crowd roars with delight:
“Hurrah for the Cossacks! Hurrah for the Cossacks!”
 This is something new for the Cossacks, hearing this from city dwellers: “hurrah!”
 And this in the Cossacks’ honor. They beam.
 And pass on by the two Konyushennaya streets.
- = But the crowd hasn’t come up with anything:
 the rally hasn’t started, there’s not a single leader—and all of a sudden an ominous clatter,
 frightened faces turn to the side:
 = from Kazan Street, skirting the cathedral and the standing streetcars in a large arc,

louder clatter!

a mounted patrol, a dozen or so men—but at a gallop! A gallop!
 Fanning out, though without baring their swords—at a
 gallop!

- = Convulsed fear! And without waiting for them!
 The crowd runs, scatters in all directions—
 as if blown away! Nevsky is clear—all the way to the Duma.
- = They never do bare their swords.

[3 ']

(THE BREAD NOOSE)

Through the great, earthshaking Duma speeches of November 1916, through the palisade of hasty inquiries, protests, clashes, and new elections, the State Duma never did take up the food question, which in any case was too particular for politics in general. In mid-December, a certain Rittikh was appointed the new interim minister of agriculture. He asked for the floor and respectfully apologized to the Duma for not yet having had time to consider the matter and for being unable to report on measures. They scolded him as they would any government representative, but rather lazily, for they themselves expected nothing to come of their own Duma discussion if it was too specific. Yes, the food question was important, but in the *general*, not the specific, sense, and thus the main flame of politics escaped the Tauride Palace, which was fettered by Duma procedure. Rather, the main flame of politics roared up first here and then there as it ran through society, and even more so in Moscow. There, three congresses had been scheduled for late December, all three on the topic of food: the Food Supply Congress itself, and congresses of the Union of Zemstvos and Union of Towns (to say nothing of all the other concurrent public meetings, as the joke then went: if the German outdoes us at technology, we'll beat him at meetings).

The food supply was discussed with a quaver in the voice. The government didn't dare forbid the Food Supply Congress, although both the government and those assembling understood that this wasn't about food, that Russia had always been supplied with food even without us and it would somehow continue to do so. No, it was about those assembled discussing first and foremost the *current moment* and somehow expressing themselves more sharply about the government, and in that way *shaking things up*. (The previous revolution had shown that this could be achieved only through continuous shaking.) Knowing all this, too, the government this time summoned up the courage to forbid the other two congresses before they even began. City heads, zemstvo figures, and eminent merchants who had gathered from all over Russia crowded the sidewalk on Bolshaya Dmitrovka, but the police wouldn't let them into the building. While Prince Lvov was drawing up the nonadmission document, zemstvo representatives whispered quietly and slipped away to other premises on Maroseika, where they "got down to business," that is, once again, not the boring food part but general considerations of the *political moment*. In a prepared but undelivered speech, Prince Lvov wrote: