

Retracing The Echoes

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For the children

Retracing The Echoes

Preface

Lilly was a principal dancer with Isadora Duncan in her Russian school. She grew up in the Soviet Union in the troubled years after the Revolution. Diana grew up in London of Italian background and is a doctor working with deprived children in many parts of the world.

As their paths cross in London, Russia and Spain we retrace the echoes of their childhoods, divergent yet resonant and through their stories we explore the emotional traumas of youth and the pains of growing up.

Whatever our ages, we are all still children inside, we can all still feel childhood pain and we can empathise with those troubled children in our society. - Yes, we can all do that - but some of us are more detached from that experience, more shut off from our children than others. Some of us cannot or will not hear the childhood voice within.

These pages are a plea to us all to listen to that child and to value the child in each and every one of us....

This story is about some special children who lived through the Revolution and grew up as their new society was simultaneously developing and finding it's way. But in truth we are all special children and we are all still seeking a way....

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Retracing The Echoes

Chapter I

She wanted to start with her mother ... "I owe her a lot - I loved her so much - but I will never forgive her two things, bringing me back to Russia, and not finding a taller man! All my life I've prayed to be two inches taller - I would have liked myself so much better. Ah, she was like you, my mother, idealist, and head-in-the-clouds. She never lost hope, never, to the last she thought such wonders were just within reach Idealists! Huh! Do you really think your world will ever come? ... Revolution broke things down, Russia needed evolution, not revolution, practicality, not your silly dreams"

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The sun-baked terrace in Majorca made an incongruous setting for our conversations - talking of Russia, revolution, cold and hunger, while surrounded by the stigmata of capitalism - half built tourist apartment blocks, passing glimpses of bikini clad frauleins with their overfed bodies overflowing the boundaries of their over stretched garments. English beer-guts and lager-glazed eyes.

We too, an odd couple, so distant in experience, so divergent in opinion, and yet strangely close in empathy. Lilly, almost eighty, Jewish, Russian, English, a child of the Revolution, craving stability and peace. And Diana, half her age, Italian, English, Irish, child of a war bride, born in peacetime and wanting to turn the world upside down - Can ideological revolution ever blot out social injustice?.....

Left to right; right to left

I saw a little boy of five playing with his mother and older sisters

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"Simple Simon says 'touch your toes'",
Squeals of laughter, "Yes I did it first!".

"Simple Simon says 'Touch your right ear'".

"You're out!, You're Out! Mum, he touched the wrong ear!".

"NO; I didn't, I touched the same one as you!"

"But you're facing me, you idiot! That's your left one".

Tears of frustration. "But it's not fair, I DID get it right, didn't I mum? Tell her she's wrong!"

... Children are confused by sides, but they are taught quickly enough - taught or indoctrinated?

'Don't use your left hand, write with your right'- John Lennon wrote 'In his own write' - perhaps we were not ready for his freedom of thought?. Even in our so called modern society, there are ripples of hidden fear about such basics. I well remember my aunt, in Italy, when I was a child of six or seven, speaking in hushed tones of a man who lived opposite, 'Il mancino'. I imagined a hunch-backed pervert, lying in wait for young children, eager to grasp them with his dirty left hand and do what? 'Mancino' - local dialect for 'Sinistro', left handed. there was nothing wrong with the poor man, he was just different.

It is the differences which we are taught to fear, the differences which place us left and right; communist, capitalist; Jew, gentile; Catholic, Protestant. But the unblemished child somewhere within us has no such fear, sees no differences, feels only similarities, echoes of themselves in another human being.

It would be revolution indeed to teach our children to rejoice in differences and praise excellence, rather than extinguish free thought in a grey world, or take polar positions in a black and white world.

Perhaps we are all politically dyslexic. But whatever the ideology, is it not just a luxury of the men at the top? An 'ego trip' in which they may be proved right or wrong at the expense of those lesser mortals on a lower step of the ladder - political cannon fodder.

And those on the lowest rungs of all are the children - unseen sufferers - paying an uncalculated price. Wartime children, evacuees whose currency was loss of family bonds, loss of education, loss of culture. Vietnamese children caught briefly in the flash of a journalist's camera when seared by Napalm. African children starving while armies find tactical reasons to delay famine relief. Rumanian children dying of AIDS and rejected by parents forced to bear them for political ends.

These are the horror stories, painted in high relief, but as children, we are pawns in other chess games. Our lives programmed to carry out certain moves. Our parents and grandparents orchestrating and orchestrated by the game.

So it was for Lilly - taken from her home to build a new Nirvana, with Mossy, Freddy, Mussia and others -children from whose pioneering spirits a new culture would spring, phoenix like from the ashes of old Russia .. And was my child also a post war hope of a new society .. and did we dash that hope or fulfil it with the sixties, flower power and swinging London? Do children ever fulfil their parent's expectations or will they identify and fulfil their own in a new found spirit of spontaneity? This will surely be our true hope for the future.....

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"You see, I think I would like to start with my mother ..."

Yes, Lilly. I suppose that's where we all have to start. At the good breast and the bad breast, nurturing and taking away, smothering and rejecting. This is where the echoes begin - mother's pain, mother's fear reflected on her child. Mother's hopes to fulfil, mother's hurt to redress. Such a task for a child - too much for a lifetime - the echoes will resound on our children's children.

Perhaps our echoes resonate, Lilly. Every feeling is an echo of something felt before. Maybe that's where the empathy begins, where our lives are in tune?

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"You see, I would like to start with my mother .. " She adjusted her sun dress and brushed lingering cake crumbs from her lap to the delight of nearby ants. She giggled, a girlish, high pitched trill, "Just look at them, so quick! They're falling on the food like we did as children, ... what a country this is .. enough food even for the ants".

"I'm going to tape some of this Lilly, The glare from the paper is hurting my eyes."

"Yes, I will start with my mother. Her name was Lisa Dichovskaya. She was born in Ukrainia .. The Jewish people all lived in very backward places, especially in Russia, but she came from a really charming place called Nicolayev.

She was born there, with quite a substantial family. There were three girls and two boys .. that's right, she was one of five, although a couple died, that I know, my grandmother told me about that, but ... funny enough, the date of her birth we never knew, that she kept a secret, for reasons that, well, she will only know. I think it's just because attractive people do things like that, that's my opinion.

It was unusual, but my mother's family, and even her grandparents come from what was at the time, a well to do background. They never emigrated, you see they never did as the ordinary other village Jewish people, who often had to run away. They were good people ... Yes they were good people, although my grandmother had secrets too You see she had been married before, to a bank manager. Someone forged a cheque and he was blamed, so he ran away to America to escape the scandal ... But his wife stayed behind .. Oh such bad luck! Over and over again my family missed an opportunity to go to America. ...Well she married again - I don't know if this was strictly legal - but she married a widower who was prominent in the synagogue - he had a shop. The five children were Isaac, Lisa, Peter who was in the Russian army, Luba and the youngest was Clara.

Her brothers were book-keepers and she had an apprenticeship, at first it was in Odessa, she was training .. she wanted to be a dressmaker, at the time it was quite a profession, but she wanted to be a first class dressmaker.

My family were advanced in their own way at that time so it was natural that they should be revolutionaries. They used to gather there, that's what my mother told me. As Jewish people, they looked forward to the Revolution. They thought it would be a new society for the Jews, that it would bring equality .. I think they confused Marx and Moses, you know .. Moses created the ten commandments, a rule for living .. and it works, the simplicity of it is so beautiful. It is common sense. I can't really believe that there is a God as such .. a..."

"- So you believe it was Moses, not God, who put together the ten commandments?"

"Yes. Moses was the greatest man living in this world - there won't ever be another".

"So Moses 'created' God to put some belief and some constructs into their society?"

"There are forces controlling the world and he made sense of them - we are not worshipping a person .. but admiring him, yes.

Now Marx was altogether different - I think he was an impostor - a false prophet really. I think he was not such a good man - he had problems with his family and he more or less lived off a rich friend Engels who supported his writing and publishing .. But the Jews followed him - when the Kapital came out, they all thought that this was a way out of their problems, the persecution, the killings, the Pogroms. They thought he would take them to the promised land .. Yes, I am sure they confused him with Moses.

So they were revolutionaries and my family hosted the secret meetings; even so, such a terrible tragic event did happen there. One of the sisters, she was the beauty of the family, as they were gathered there by the table .. there was a revolver lying there, and we, .. we never knew the actual truth, a man picked it up and said point blank to her, her name was Luba, "I'll kill you" and he killed her on the spot. That was a fact you know, inexplicable but true, he just killed her on the spot. That was the story as my mother told me, ... they never went to the police - they dare not because they were all underground people. So eventually one of the brothers, Isaac, the eldest brother, had to run away and he went to Belgium first, .. he managed to escape and my mother followed very shortly afterwards. And from Belgium they went to France, to Paris and that's where really she finished her apprenticeship being a dressmaker, she learned a lot there in Paris."

"And what year was that when she arrived in Paris?"

"Well, I was born in 1913, so .. we don't know, .. it must have been .."

"So Lisa went to Belgium and then to Paris where she spent four years .. "

"No, No, .. not four years .. she was there three years, or maybe even two? No, three, certainly three. She adored Paris, she really adored it. She came to London because many times she

was out of work .. it was impossible to find employment. The fact was that if she was ever sick, she lost her job and so she decided to move to England where work was easier to find. She came over on - I believe there was one day, a national holiday, when you could come into England without a passport - so that's what she did. .. What was my uncle doing there? Her brother? He managed to do engineering work, that's how he got on, being an engineer. he stayed there for quite a few years but she definitely made up her mind to come to England to find employment, which she did. Because of her apprenticeship and finishing in Paris, she managed to be fixed in a very good house .. there were fashion houses that used to work for, how shall I say? ..well, they had customers from a type of people who could pay well for quality. She used to earn what was an enormous amount for that time .. but she got married. I could never know why, when she worked for that particular firm earning so much money, but she did marry my father".

"When did she get married?"

"Oh it must be '10 or '11, '10? ... it must .. no it must be '09. 1909 because when I was three she decided that the abuse, .. that men take too many liberties with women. She was also, she was earning a lot of money and she had this independence .. I don't know if it is any good or not to have independence because she broke up the family. She whipped me away and decided that she can do very nicely without him. That's when I was three. I was born 1913 in April, April 18th."

"Aries"

"Yes, Aries"

"Same as Sean and I. My son and I are only three days apart in our birthdays. So you and I are both the same star sign, I was born thirty four years after you, on the third of the fourth."

"You see, people are sometimes ignorant, they don't open their minds. They scoff at these things - but I think we are alike and you are the sister that my daughter, Leonora never had."

"... So you were in the east end of London and your mother took you off where?"

"She had a friend, a friend who .. she had three sons and a daughter .. and by the way, in the end I married the son, I married one of the boys. Yes, she had three sons, .. well of course, I don't remember myself, but my late husband used to tell me that when I was a tiny little girl, they used to stand round the tub and watch me bath and they thought it was absolutely wonderful. So he knew me at the age of three.

My mother's friend, Katie her name was, she was Katie Isaacs, she had a remarkable life as did my mother, I mean there was such a lot of intermingle. My mother was so very forward; she loved dance very much .. I mean she would never miss a concert with Caruso .. she would never miss Anna Pavlova and of course, she had seen Isadora Duncan many times. She'd seen her in Paris and in London and she always thought - that is a dancer of the future. So you see she had ideas.

Yes, all those ideas .. But I don't know; I would never forgive her that she cut me off from my father .. that I must confess .. because I thought it was a wrong thing to do. I was never convinced that he had ever done anything wrong towards her and she just left him and took me away, It was not like it was for you when you left your husband, you would not want Leila to see him, that was a totally different circumstance; but for my mother, and for me it was a wrong thing to do. You know I always wanted to see him, through all my life time, I wanted to see my father."

"Did you not see him?"

"Never and I don't even remember .. she never let me use his name - I heard it was Lotterbach. That's an Austrian name - so maybe he was originally from there, like my son in law; incidentally his family is Austrian - but of course I didn't know these things as a child - she would never, never talk about him. She had this obstinacy in her, you know, she was a very determined person without a doubt - you can see ... she kept a lot of things secret ..."

Chapter II

"I should imagine a year lapsed, because I must have been about four and a half, when this particular person who my mother knew suggested that he open a little boarding school Of course, she had to think about how to fix me .. It was a couple, he was a violinist and his wife played the piano - so they also had this artistic streak in them. My mother thought it was a splendid idea ... it was in Lincoln that little boarding school"

" You were very young to go to boarding school at four?"

"Well, yes. But my mother was very determined you see, and she had little time for me. ... I loved my time with them in Lincoln, I was so happy there. Their name was Shapiro and they had a daughter, Kitty and a son Basil. Kitty's father played in the cinema at night so I remember seeing Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford with them. I shared a room with a girl called Esther who had freckles and there was a dog called Prince.

I was there up until the time when the revolution came in Russia. Then she thought - 'It's time' - you know she must have missed her family after all; she was here by herself, because one brother was in Paris and the rest of the family was still there in colonial Ukrainia. I think she always missed them, personally I think every Russian person always has this yearning to go back. Good or bad they have this urge, don't they..

So although I did really well at my little boarding school, I was taken away. They did tell her I had a talent for dancing, and I played the piano when I was four and a half. They told my mother that she should not neglect me, that she should give serious thought to my talent and she thought that splendid ... However our fate was decided when my mother's friend Katie met with a man called Muscat.

Katie had a house and she rented off rooms to make things go. Her marriage to Isaacs was so misfortunate right from the start, it had broken down, he was a gambler and gave her a very difficult time. Oh she was a very beautiful woman, my auntie Annie - I called her Annie although her name was Kate - and this Muscat fell in love with her. He was a prominent communist and they were all connected with

Lenin in Highgate. The whole party, you know was formed in Highgate".

"Where did the name 'Muscat' come from originally?"

"Muscat used to rent a room. He was a lodger and he was a party member. He wasn't English at all. I don't know his nationality .. he must have been Russian because he spoke Russian - I mean, after all he was Jewish - we come from Jewish origin all of us.

Well, with Muscat being a party member and all the meetings in Highgate, of course this was a powerful influence. My mother was a revolutionary, although she never belonged to the party, I must say that, and this Muscat was such a very good looking man - I remember him well. Just at the time when Lenin left, Muscat proposed to Auntie Annie that they follow him back to Russia and take her three children. She had, as I told you, three sons and a girl. The girl refused, she said she was not going to a country where she had no idea of what it was like and she was really frightened, but the boys of course went with their mother. They went off in 1917 to Leningrad , St Petersburg, and stayed with Lenin. The oldest son guarded his office. This was just when the revolution was coming, there was fighting, fighting all the time in 1917, but all the same, Auntie Annie went there, and she kept contact with my mother somehow..."

"How old would the sons have been then?"

"Roughly they were .. the youngest was six years older than me, the middle one was nine years older and the eldest was eleven years older than me"

"So the oldest one would be about sixteen then"

" Yes, Barney was about sixteen, quite right. I was still at this boarding school until three years lapsed and then she came to collect me and I was very, very upset because I loved it there. Oh, she said 'We are going away'. She packed all my little clothes .. she dressed me most beautifully, I must say ... It's amazing, you know but I've always loved beautiful things and that never left me all my lifetime. I think she put the seeds in me. Even through the bad times, I still held on to that. ...

Yes, I hated to leave but I remember she said 'We are going away - we're going to a country where it's going to be a great future and you're going to meet with all of my family'."

Lilly sighed deeply and momentarily let her body sag as she cast her eyes downwards. A sad old lady sat before me, her eyes brimming with tears. The transformation was brief; with a shake of her head she resumed the straight back pose of the dancer and with a Duncan style flourish wiped an aberrant tear from the corner of her eye. She gazed into the distance - almost looking through the Mediterranean scene - ignoring the sun's attempts to return the sparkle to her eyes that were viewing a very different vista.

Is it painful to remember, Lilly? Not the scene, not what happened. But your mother, my mother. You trusted her.. we are taught to trust our mothers but so often they let us down. I suppose she believed it - the promise of a bright new future, and so you believed it for her. But was it a lie?

".... Well, I was a little bit interested at the time, but not greatly so - I wanted to stay in Lincoln - it was all I really knew.

I remember the journey on the boat, I met up with girls of my age, and boys, little ones, little children. We were sitting on the deck and we had a very rough crossing and then the train journey I remember fairly well.

I think it left .. could it be Southampton? I'm not really sure - but we came .. we must have come to Cherbourg .. yes, it must have been there. I was six; I must have been about six and a half - I was old enough to remember that."

"And it was a very rough crossing?"

"Oh terrible; they were all laid down. I never knew that I was such a very good sailor, I was the only girl who walked about. Funny enough I took notice of a young girl there whom I liked very much, Cecilia, and we were friends for many years afterwards ... Yes, her name was Cecilia. By coincidence she also entered the school. Her father was a writer and he was in Russia, her mother was English. When we arrived, she was to meet her father for the first time. ... You

know, you meet up with such people .. it was a time for such meetings .. It's unbelievable really... All pioneering spirits, starting a new life - involved in something very exciting which they must have all dreamed about ..

Well, our journey in the train was most uncomfortable, dreadful absolutely. I vaguely remember that I had to lie on a hard .. They slept on boards and that's how we travelled but my mother said 'Lilly, you can't!' .. my mother got a kind of piece of an old pillow case, she stuffed it with something so hard! .. Imagine, I had led a comfortable life, my bed in Lincoln was so soft - I couldn't stop thinking about it.

We must have travelled about three days until we got to" Her voice trailed off searching for memories. "....I remember sausages, they were hanging on top of a chimney which was in the centre of that carriage. It must have been winter time because it was cold."

" So they had one of those stoves in the centre of the carriage?"

Yes, right in the middle. I remember that so well. And we had sausages hanging there. But I never felt the need of food so much as when we were in Moscow. When we arrived, they whipped us up and they gave all the immigrants a building; an old hospital which they never disinfected and there must have been about three hundred of us. But I want to tell you something .. they all had to sign before we left because we were all British, all the children were British born. That they take all responsibility because the British government never wanted us to go. They knew what the parents were taking us to."

"The British government made the parents sign?"

"They did. A disclaimer. That we don't regret and they told the parents that they take all responsibility because they were taking us to a country that, honestly, that was in a state of chaos. .. That's putting it mildly , my dear, compared to what I experienced when we arrived.

As I told you, they put us in this dreadful hospital with tight rows of beds and they separated the women from the men and the children. the facilities there were so awful It was terrible, ugly and sordid. But I remember a woman there, blonde and beautiful - her

beauty stood out, but then I always did take note of beauty. She refused to let her children suffer. She was adamant that they should not die and she said she was going back. She said 'I don't care what my husband is going to do, I am not staying in this country' - despite the disclaimer and everything she took her two youngest and went back to England - we never saw her again but her husband stayed with the two older boys, Phillip and John, strangely enough I remember them very well because when they eventually did move us out to a flat, they were in the same flat sharing with us. That's what they did you see. They would take a flat away from a family and put all the family in one room and then each of the other rooms would have another family placed there. So we had a room next to them and we had a communal kitchen. Anyway it was some time before they moved us and until then we just had to survive somehow in that dreadful place.

... I remember those rooms with sinks that were stretched out like long rows where they did the washing ... and the women were forever washing children's clothes .. and you always heard 'Oh my poor child is so ill' .. and the next day that child died. The children died there like flies. Next to our bed, you know in one of our wards where the women used to be with their children, there was a German family. I remember there were Germans and Americans, people seemed to have come from all over the world, there were English too, but I don't remember any French .. anyway this woman next to us, she was German and she had a little boy and a girl. the girl's name was Erika. She was sitting there, such a beautiful little girl, and the next day, she dies! She was ill and died ... one day I saw a rat on our little table .. I will never in my lifetime, ... do you know, I never did forget it .. wherever you went, whatever you did, when you washed, there were always rats running about. ... Just think about that ... What the parents did to us .."

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Lilly stirred slightly as the ubiquitous smell of boiling cabbage assaulted her nostrils. 'No, I can't wake up, NO dream, come back! .. Please, please, please, ..please let me go back to sleep' She closed her eyes tighter and fighting a losing battle against her raising consciousness, comfortingly rocked her body gently in the bed - simulating the sway and jolting stop-start of the double decker.

It was like magic. There was Lilly; a princess in her fairy coach, riding high above the London traffic; gesturing to her subjects; the treasures of Oxford street laid at her feet. Her new boots squeaking with delight as she pointed and stretched her toes; the tickling warmth and comforting smell of the little fur collar on her coat; ... and the doll .. oh the doll! How she held her close, the starched white lace of her dress and those blue china eyes - the very best in Selfridges.

It had been like a dream - but was it only a dream? One moment sitting in the front parlour in Lincolnshire, practising her scales with Kitty; leading a happy ordered existence with the Shapiros who always seemed more like an adoptive family than owners of a tiny private boarding school. .. And the next moment - along comes a mother you hardly know; who bundles you up and whisks you away to an absolute land of enchantment - toys, clothes, wonderful food - Christmas and birthdays all rolled into one -

"Lilly!" the sound of mother's voice shattered the illusion..

' No!; Go away! - There's nothing to wake up for; let me sleep' she thought as fragments of dream fell away leaving dangerous gaps where reality crept through.

'Why did she do this to me? .. Why did we leave that magic world? .. Where are we?? . Why did she take me away from Lincoln .. For this!?'

The trip to Oxford street had been wonderful, but as an auspicious start it was not fulfilled by subsequent events. In fact, it seemed as if everything had been downhill from then on.

'Just wait and see, Lilly' Her mother had promised. 'We're going to a new country - somewhere where everything is new and exciting - there are so many opportunities - we can build a new world and you can be part of it!'

There was not much to pack - a small bag each - everything would be provided for in this brave new world. then a train to Dover or Southampton and the sea - endless, rough cold sea; towering waves; bitter wind. Thank goodness for the new coat - God how that coat had to last!

"Lilly! Go and get washed"

'Oh no; time to get up ... Slowly, I won't open my eyes yet' She sat up, wriggling her toes and flexing her fingers to relieve the stiffness of the cold night. She allowed her senses to tune in gradually, unable to take the full onslaught of her situation.

She stretched; .. and recoiled as her hand brushed the rough canvas of the adjacent empty bed. 'Oh, Erika, Erika. Why did you leave me? Your face was so cold when I touched you yesterday - you were pale, so white and your dark eyes didn't see me - will they carry me out like that someday? I told them you had stopped coughing and they covered you with the sheet and took you away. .. Are you going to get better? Oh, Erika, Mamma says you died because you didn't eat enough - but you ate the same as me - and you had the same pain in your belly that only goes when I'm asleep - Is that the start of dying? - will my face go cold too, like the ice on the window?'

"Lilly!"

Chapter III

"My mother used to take me out for walks, to get organised. They were pressing to fix us somehow - what was going to happen? There were dead horses lying everywhere, there were people sitting on pavements, you know, these old peasants, most of them were peasants in Moscow .. and they used to be half dead. Children begging.

There were some places where you could buy privately. People used to buy these little white buns. They used to call them 'Piraschin' - you know, they were like buns. I said to my mother 'Do you think I could have one' - in a little voice because I almost did not dare to think of it - I was so hungry that I cannot describe it, so she bought me one. I had to really eat it so slowly because I didn't want to lose the taste of it, that's how you felt.

I told you before, she dressed me very well because I had a fur coat, a monkey coat with a little tie up and a fur hat and high boots. The kids there walking about who were free, well you could call it 'free' I suppose - Oh there were so many children. There were the Besprisornik - the dispossessed children - walking the streets, ...so many children, ...hopeless, they used to shout at me 'Borjoui, Borjoui' They thought I came from the upper class and I just couldn't understand what they were saying and I was asking my mother, 'What are they pointing at?' 'That's nothing, Lilly. Of course this all looks very, very terrible but everything will be all right, everything will settle in it's place' which it never did.

I remember once turning to my mother and saying 'Why did you bring me here? What is the point? We lived such beautiful lives, and to come to this!' I just could not understand my mother - I just could not. But she only said 'Remember, Lilly, this is just a beginning, here we have a very great future' But I could only see destruction and it took a long time before there was any improvement. I really think I would have died if it had been left to my mother - Oh yes, she was very resourceful, but it was Aunty Annie who kept me alive - every day she sent her youngest son across Moscow on the tram to that place where we were all dying. Every day he came to me with a bowl of soup - otherwise I would have perished, I know it.

But then as spring came and the government thought they must do something for the children, they sent us off somewhere in the country. Little girls and boys, we stayed in, they call them Dachas, a big kind of wooden place, and we stayed there until the parents came to collect us.

They were always trying to send the children away from Moscow - to camps and Dachas - they were afraid we would all die. It was so dangerous in Moscow. No food, children foraging in the street. There were different gangs trying to survive. One was the 'Papringunchi' - the jumpers. they lay in the snow wearing white sheets so you wouldn't see them and they had springs on their feet and they would suddenly spring up and rob you when you passed. There were such terrible rumours - another gang threatened to spit on you and give you syphilis if you didn't give them your food and money, or your boots. I had nightmares about them. Even later, when I was at school, I was still afraid of all the tales people told and if I had known then about Mossy and Freddy, Aunty Annie's boys, if I had known what happened to them on the summer camp, I would never have gone to the Dacha - I would have begged my mother, 'Don't let me go!' So often I said 'Why did you bring me here, why?' Even she did not know, appreciate everything that happened, I think. But you see, she never looked at it logically, she believed it would be all right in the end - even later, even in the very bad times, even with Stalin, she still believed.

But when I think of those boys do you know that when they came back to Aunty Annie - a year they were missing - when they came back she didn't recognise them - didn't know her own children - and she had to cut some of the clothes off them ... but their feet ... that makes me cry ... do you know that she had to soak their feet for hours, their socks had almost grown into their poor feet and they were full of maggots! Imagine, dear what they went through"

"Fa pena, quanto mi fa pena!" - Truly I could only respond in the language of my childhood - child to child - "I feel their pain".

"At least, for me at the Dacha, life was a little better. They fed us a little better. I don't know how it was done, who was in charge, I have no idea at all. All I know is everything was somehow worked out in a peculiar way. You know, when you are so young, you don't really understand what's happening. At least we had more food. The girls

and boys were fed on soups and the parents of the children took turns cooking, they used to come and cook. My mother eventually arrived and she took me away saying 'Lilly, well everything is more or less fixed now. I've found you a school where you're going to be, as I wanted you to be, a dancer'. She never asked me if I wanted to or not, but she said 'I want you to be a dancer and there has arrived here a very well known American dancer. Her name is Isadora Duncan and she is opening a school'

* * * * *

"Mossy, it hurts"

"Don't think about it - just keep walking" he replied, turning his head away from his younger brother to hide the pain in his eyes. The throbbing in his toes had stopped and he could hardly feel anything at all below his knees. At least his ears didn't burn so much , now that he had found some rags to wind around their heads - wasn't it strange that cold air could burn like that? The wind mercifully had been weaker but now, as the rediculously short day drew to a close, it began to intensify and bite through their inadequate clothing. "Let's make for the trees".

They stumbled on. Worn shoe-leather that had stretched and grown with them over the past year threatened to crack in the cold. The path was icy and rough where stones broke through the early snow. it had drifted on the open ground and against the forest edge. Beneath the trees clear patches showed darkly silhouetting the pallor of the wood.

As they entered the forest the last rays of sunlight faded completely and left them blindly moving forward, groping for branches, tripping in piles of leaves and scratching their faces on twigs reaching to them like bony fingers wickedly gouging their skin.

Freddy moved closer to his brother clutching at his arm for fear of being lost for ever in the dark. Silent tears made tracks on his dirt caked face as he tried to be brave and not let Mossy see he was crying. A mist of ice crystals enveloped them as the wind blew snow out of the branches. In those temperatures dislodged snow does not slump to the ground but rather seems to hang in the air reassuming particulate form before falling once more to earth.

The wind blew a hole in the clouds and the moon shone through illuminating the scene. "Mossy, look! Ghosts! - ghosts all around us - quick hide - Mossy hide!"

Mossy shivered - fear moving him where the cold now left him unmoved. The Siberian forest was that particular type of overgrown Birch known as silver fir - Gaunt pale trunks rose narrow and willowy to a canopy in the sky - their silver spectral forms mirroring the moonbeams.

"I don't think they'll touch us Freddy, They're just trees"

"Yes, Just trees in the day-time, Moss, but at night I think maybe they do come alive"

"Well, if so we've not done anything to hurt them - maybe they'll leave us alone."

"I wish I never broke any twigs off, I could have hurt one - it might break my arm"

"No, Freddy. Don't be silly - Don't think about scary things - we have to get to a house or we'll die. Keep walking, keep on - we must"

"I can't look at them Mossy".

"Close your eyes and hold my jacket. I'll lead you. Don't look."

It had started as a summer camp. The first band of young pioneers to be taken away for the long summer days of 1918 - The first summer of peace since the Revolution - or so it was thought. It had been a special privilege for two London born Jewish boys to be included in this group, a privilege earned in Highgate by their mother and her lover Muscat hosting the prerevolutionary planners, and by their brother now employed as guard to the homecoming Lenin.

How could it have gone so wrong? Fighting broke out between red and white Russian armies - the one hundred children, dispersed and cut off from their lines of support were left wandering, living on their wits and many did not survive.

The boxing gloves saved them. A Christmas present with a very special destiny. One of the last presents given to them in England.

Mossy thought a bit of friendly sparring would be fun at the Dacha. He wanted to teach Freddy a few Jack Dempsey style moves - little did he know what those moves would prove to be! When the fighting broke out it was everyone for themselves - the meagre food supplies and summer clothes became the property of the strongest. Any weakness brought out the primitive pack instincts of the disintegrating group. Survival of the fittest the weakest going to the wall - all the macabre cliches of a 'Lord of the flies' existence.

The starving brothers postured and shadow-boxed, were never seen without their protective necklace of boxing gloves hung around their slender shoulders. Thus they maintained an illusion of toughness - not to be meddled with - and while there were weaker pickings, other's pockets to be looted - their tactic worked.

With the passage of time their toughness became a reality. Their soft limbs became wiry rods of iron, their empty bellies tough receptacles of anything remotely edible, their pale English faces weather worn and stained; their inseparable clothes bound to their skin - added to by whatever came their way.

Scrounging and foraging became their way of life -had there ever been another? - Freddy gleaned every minuscule discarded cigarette butt, extracted the tobacco and then traded it for bread. They sang and danced to entertain the soldiers - remembering tips from the Buskers they had watched in Leicester square - so long ago... Sing for your supper .. Sometimes a peasant farmer took pity and let them sleep in an outhouse or filled their stomachs with scraps from their table. They grew accustomed to saving ever crust of stale bread in a little bag tucked under their jackets.

The summer had been easier. Berries of all kinds to be gathered in the forest. But winter came early and suddenly, sealing up earth's bounty out of reach of tired blistered fingers.

"I think I can see a little light, Freddy. Hold on, maybe they'll let us shelter."

The glimmer grew to a narrow shaft piercing the night. Now they could see railings, and a wrought iron gate - it was obviously the home of somebody of importance - maybe from before the Revolution

- at least there must be someone there - someone who may take pity
- someone who may help.

"Oh, Mossy, maybe they'll have some food." Freddy's surge of excitement and hope mustered his last element of strength and he lunged forward reaching the iron gate first. He pushed it open with his bare hand - and screamed as the frozen flesh tore from his fingers
.....

"They don't understand, how can they understand?" The red army soldier spoke slowly and wearily as he bound Freddy's hand with scraps of linen. "These children don't understand the frost, they cannot survive out here".

"Just look at him swallowing that soup as if he had never eaten in his life" replied his companion. "Steady, now.... Slowly, or your stomach will cramp - take it easy".

"I've seen too much of that - I can't look any more. Before the Revolution we were starving sometimes. Now , with the Revolution, we are still starving and the children are dying - how did these two survive? I will never know. Tomorrow an army train is leaving for Moscow - make sure they are on it ..."

"Mossy ... don't forget the bread for Mamma." Freddy clutched his little bag to his chest as sleep overcame him in the heat of the kitchen. "Mamma can't sing she needs the bread ...".

Chapter IV

"The truth was that my mother never knew that Isadora Duncan would ever be invited to Russia. But if she had not, I would have been settled in the big theatre, the Bolshoi, and I should have been a ballet dancer.

That was her idea, that's why she took me to Moscow, for that purpose - well, that was part of it, but when she heard that Isadora Duncan had arrived and she'd seen her and knew that she was definitely a dancer of the future, she had no hesitation in putting my name down.

My mother loved dance but there were so many mothers trying to get their children into dancing. Three hundred entered for the examinations.

The school had been given a small..., well, we call it a Sabyat, it's really a mansion. I wouldn't say it's in the heart of Moscow, but it's more or less central. The name of the street was Prichistinka and that mansion belonged to the old prime minister, his wife was a very well known ballet dancer. I don't remember their name now..., yes I do, it was Balachov - she was Balachova. Of course, being of the ruling classes, they fled at the time of the Revolution and they left the mansion empty.

Lenin had set up an arts council at the time, - remember we came a few years after the revolution - and they managed somehow to form a council, the head of it was Lunacharski. He was well known, and in the council there was also Krapotkin. He was Count Krapotkin but they all belonged to the revolutionary party because they helped to make the Revolution and it was they who invited Isadora to come and gave her this beautiful mansion.

You see they had a vision of this new form of dance. I suppose it symbolised the new society, the spirit of the new Russia Yes, They said that Ballet was of the Tsars, linked to the past and was for the rich ... but Isadora's dance was for the people. Yes ballet for the elite, dance for the people"

"A celebration of the Revolution?"

"My dear, ALL the revolutions - the French too! You should have seen when she danced the Marseillaise, the Carmagnole we used to call it, although that really was a slightly different song originally. Her dance WAS revolution - and she felt like that even before the Russian Revolution you know. In St Petersburg in 1905 the intellectuals wanted democracy - the people were starving and Isadora was there when the peasants were shot asking for bread. She immediately made a dance to commemorate the deaths.

She was not afraid to stand out - to show how she felt and what she believed. Her dance was a vision of fluidity, freeing the body and giving grace to the revolutionary movement.

But Oh!, the most moving performance - they were all so stirred, when we danced the Internationale - even Lenin himself jumped up and shouted 'Bravo, Isadora, Bravo!'

I can still see so vividly - first Isadora runs across the stage leaping with a red scarf - she backs off, is shot and crumples to the ground. The next girl takes the scarf and runs on and gets shot but the following girl takes it up from her until all are shot. We then rise from the dead and show how the spirit of freedom cannot be destroyed ..

And so it was all down to Lunacharski. Lunacharski was the head of the arts council, he really invited Isadora, and Krapotkin .. you've heard of him. They gave us the mansion in Prichistinka ... Yes, the street was Prichistinka .. but it has changed now, .. I know that ... "

* * * * *

..... 'Yes, Lilly, it has changed' I thought as I pushed open the swinging glass doors at Krapotkinskaya metro station. The blast of cold air beat me back after the warm staleness of the tunnel. I pulled my coat closer and adjusted my Astrakhan round my ears. There would be a queue - only half an hour if I was lucky - before I could pay my 5 kopeks for a swim.

'Pyat' yelled the cashier and my group of a dozen women rushed over to the door of changing house five. Layers of clothing later we emerged under a plastic flap out into the vastness of the Moscvá swimming pool - swimming lake would be more apt terminology.

My companions wore shower caps often with rollers and pins in their hair. We swim as far as we can one way and then retrace our strokes, that's the formula for finding the way back to entry chute five. Mostly we swim blind in winter - the mist where warm water meets cold air cuts visibility down to a few feet, and then the snow gets in your eyes ...

Swimming I can think clearly - the world blotted out by the warm fog - floating with a primaevial lightness, an amniotic ease of movement ... at the interface of air and water, cold and warmth. Just me and the water - so that my mind is free to be with you - children of a previous generation, we are all children in the water ... my overweight companions gracefully free as the water releases them from the effort of everyday movements.

... Free for forty five closely timed minutes from the rigours of Moscow city living, of queues, of empty shops, of forbidden restaurants, patched clothes, cold and having to eat what you can get - it's easy to say 'look at those women, doesn't anyone advise them to eat a healthy diet?' Have you ever tried to plan your health diet when today there is bread and cucumber, tomorrow some cheese, last week maybe you travelled to Domodedovskaya in the suburbs and found sausage.

Well, Lilly, maybe not so much has changed. Yes, the street is called Krapotkin street now and do you remember that beautiful cathedral on the corner by Krapotkinskaya - 'Hram Hrista Spasityelya' they pulled it down - yes, I know it was a masterpiece of beauty but Stalin destroyed so much. Mussia told me that she could see it from her window, clean sparkling white stone and those golden decorated towers, one central dome and four corner towers, five bell towers. She said she loved to hear the bells chiming every morning and the local children loved to play in the cathedral garden - a beautiful stretch of flower beds and walks stretching down to the banks of the Mosca river. When it was demolished, nobody was warned - one day workmen arrived and strung a makeshift fence around it. Then there was the sound of falling masonry. ... Falling stone, children wailing with fear and disbelief, .. and the bells kept clanging, clanging, as if they were howling with grief. It was taken down stone by stone and the swimming pool made in it's place - the biggest heated swimming pool in the world - to the glory of the Soviet Union - but now the damp from the water is causing problems in the Tretyakov art gallery - they are afraid that other treasures will be lost.

Now some are even talking of pulling up the pool and reconstructing the cathedral at vast expense - a poor nation clutching at straws of the past.

I walked past the school today. You can still see the grandeur of the building even under the decay. I stood back against the other side of the street and tried to imagine Isadora draping herself across the wrought iron sill - and I saw your room - the window at the side - I almost saw you and little Mussia, your faces pressed to the pane - then someone closed the shutter.

It's an office building now, something to do with the security of diplomatic services. ... I stood a little longer and took some photographs ... It was getting cold and I decided to move on .. anyway I think Slava was watching me, despite my decoy in the pool .. I just had that feeling, you know , it's not so common in Russia now, but every so often ... you can never be sure ...

"Now I must tell you about the examinations, the auditions for the school.

You must realise it was like a different world entirely. It was a beautiful place. The staircase was marble and there were beautiful ornaments on the stage. The walls were done all in tapestry and the ceilings had such fantastic paintings and engravings. Outside everything was drab, no colour, no life and inside such splendour.

The first day they put little tunics on us and then took us into the blue hall. The rooms were so big that they had managed to make two halls, a red one for visitors and a blue one for dancing. There was blue carpet, blue drapes, velvet and silk. My first impression - it was unbelievable, I was dreaming, I had died and gone to heaven - and there on the stage in these long silk robes, stood Irma and Isadora and funny enough, when I looked on the two of them, I thought Irma was Isadora and Isadora was Irma. That's how young Isadora looked to me - isn't it strange? And that's how I always remember her, she had such a sweet face, Isadora.

Irma was one of the pupils of the first school, she had a first school in Germany. Irma was twenty one."

"What was her second name?"

"Well, Isadora gave her 'Duncan' because when her first school was formed, Irma was taken to the school and left on the steps at the age of four - she was an orphan really. When the school disintegrated, Isadora had a quarrel with all the girls. Well, they parted and only six girls were left so when the invitation to Russia came Isadora gathered them all and said 'Who would like to come with me?' Five refused and only Irma went with her.

From the moment we entered the school we always went in pairs and so it was with Isadora and Irma. So Irma was twenty one and Isadora was forty, ..no forty two .. let me see, we can count the years .. she was killed when she was forty six and that was in 1927 ... so you can easily ...

When I entered the school - after all it was coming towards autumn - I was turned seven. As we entered in our tunics she sat us all down and they played music. All our exercise music was

Schumann. We were divided into groups of thirty for the auditions. There were so many people, we had to be broken up. I always remember she made us stand and hold our hands across our chests and listen to the music... feel the music before we did anything else. After that she started showing us the movements which we followed and Irma helped too. Such graceful fluid movements.

I think that was why my mother wanted me to dance, the grace, the movement. She always regretted not having that ease of movement, being limited by her body, being stiff in her old age. I can thank her for that, I can move"

Lilly jumped lithely to her feet, arabesqued and laughed.

"Not bad for my age! My doctor doesn't understand. When I have a pain, an ache, he gives me tablets - but I do my exercises and I feel well."

"If I can move half as well as you when I'm your age, I will be more than happy. ... So tell me, you were chosen out of three hundred children?"

"Yes. We all came to the school for one month. We had certain days when we came and days when others came who we never met. We all came about four times a week during that month. Isadora wanted to see which children would respond to her training. After that we had a woman that spoke English. There were so many immigrants there, many English children - she said 'When you come you'll be given tickets. The blue ones will be the ones that will not be taken on and if you get a pink ticket you will be taken in'.

After our examinations, I got a pink ticket and so did my friend Cecilia who I had met on the boat - and another friend, Lyeta. She took in fifty at that time, although they did not all stay. At first we had some boys too, but they left because this wasn't like ballet. Isadora never managed to find movements to combine a boy and girl together. We then began our real training and gradually dignitaries and prominent people would come and watch the lessons, observe what Isadora was teaching us.

But Isadora, to me, she was like a goddess. I think children say that first impressions are very strong impressions. But with Irma, ...I was never really impressed by her at all .. she was, well ... I thought

she was ailing, she was twenty one and looked much older than her age, ...but Isadora looked beautiful.

And her kindness to the children you could always sense. The way she used to stand us. She might say 'Sit down' or 'Stand up' or 'Children, listen to the music, put your hands there, get to know the music and try to express yourself'. Now that, my first impression of Isadora, never left me, all the years that I knew her, for her softness and her charm ... Oh she was so charming, when she walked; when she talked to anybody; when she approached you; ...it was always continuous, it was never kind of ... there were never any rough movements, it was always flowing. It was how she portrayed music, exactly in the same manner as she was in everyday life. It was remarkable. And what is so strange is that whenever anyone writes about her, books, articles .. nobody actually wrote what she was like. It's only when you are with a person, like we were; when she taught us dancing and she was with us a lot - because she adored children, she really did ... we could see that."

"You know, really, when I look back, it WAS a different world; entirely different from what Russia actually was, and that's how it continued. You lived in entirely different surroundings from what was going on. You never took notice of politics. I know they tried desperately, the outsiders always do, to get us involved, but we carried on living in a sort of capsule."

"So you lived there all the time?"

"Yes. The children who were taken on were boarders. We lived there and everything was organised for us. We were woken in the morning at seven o'clock and we were taken to the gymnastics room for one hour. Then after that we were thrown under cold showers - we were literally thrown under because we were so terrified. None of us ever had colds, never. After that we had breakfast and then we had studies. Of course it wasn't a high school, nevertheless Russian, geography and arithmetic were very high on the agenda, I can tell you that. And on top of that there was English and French that we had to learn. After lunch, summer or winter, we went to bed for an hour and then more practise.

We slept in two big dormitory rooms, twenty to twenty five children in a room. It was marvellous. Such a big house as I told you. The wallpaper in our bedroom - it was silk! Can you imagine! There were so many rooms. There was a corridor leading to Isadora's and Irma's rooms. Then we had a Napoleon room with a very big painting of Napoleon's entry in the hills before Moscow. It stayed for some years - then someone removed it.....

Downstairs there were servants rooms and we had a special Turkish bath and the shower rooms. Then you went through a vestibule to the winter gardens - it was completely partitioned off and there were statues, marble benches with satyrs playing the flute and beyond that was the summer garden. So we had plenty of room to move about, plenty of places to explore.

Really it was a beautiful existence. We learned about classical music, we had discussions and we were taught to appreciate beauty and harmony. And I loved books ..we read so widely ..."

"I do think it a shame that young people don't read so much nowadays. When I was a child I used to lose myself in books, often to my mother's annoyance - the books were like a cocoon that blotted everything out. It's important to be able to enter a fantasy world sometimes, especially if childhood is not such a happy experience. It would be nice to believe that children were happy enough not to need the illusion of a fairy story, but unfortunately that would not appear to be the case - maybe children get their adventure stories from television and films now but these more visual forms of entertainment don't leave so much room for the imagination - it's all on a plate".

"Of course the literary tradition is different in Russia. Even poor people read in the Soviet Union. They learn and recite poetry, they know the classics - not as in England. In Russia people fall upon books and devour them and so did we - we were privileged in learning the arts."

"Who paid for your education? Was it free?"

"Well, at the beginning the government did subsidise a bit, but as a couple of years passed, Isadora had to do something about it. So she formed a group of fourteen of the best girls. I was one of them. We joined her for performances and made money to keep the school going.

I remember the first performance that we danced with Isadora was at the big theatre. It was Beethoven's seventh symphony. We never had big parts then because she did most of the dancing; but in the second movement we used to fly out from one end. I don't know if you know the second part , but it is very flowing music - dum dee dum di dee diri di dee - and that's when we used to fly out - one and two out so fast and we came back whenever the music repeated itself. Isadora always said that when you repeat the music, you repeat the movements. That was very important in her teaching.

When we used to come up to her after the performance, or at other times too, she would kiss us all. I always ended up with lipstick all over my face. She was so gorgeous. She adored children and we

loved her - how could they write such rubbish about her as they do...?!

I was nine then and we made a trip to St Petersburg - it wasn't called Leningrad yet - and we stayed at the Dyetskya Silo - a palace. It was so beautiful and the sheets were all initialled N and A; Nicholas and Alexandra, the Tsar and Tsarina. We were given good food there and it was so surprising for us. We were enchanted because we were so hungry in Moscow. Oh, the hunger was unbearable and I used to even dream about it. I dreamed once that I was eating paper, brown paper, and I thought 'why does it taste so good?'. Isn't it awful that we could be like that?

Of course there was the black market and Isadora got things sometimes from France, she had a French maid. But usually we had malt, because of lack of vitamins, and then every day cabbage soup and buckwheat - there was so little. Every so often I would try to go and see my Aunty Annie. I told everyone I had this beautiful Aunty living nearby, she was auburn and did look so beautiful to me. We would run away from the teacher and see her and often she would give us something to eat. You see she was with Muscat and he was a 'big nob' in those days so they had so much more than the others.

In St Petersburg we danced to Rachmaninov, such fast music ... and he came to play for us at school.

Lunacharski used to come every day to watch our practise and see how we were progressing. He used to comment on my looks and that of my friend Lyeta. She was ash blonde and I was very dark - the contrast was striking. He always used to stop us and stroke our hair, which was long. At school they used to call me the fly in the buttermilk 'Mucha v smetanya' because I was the only dark girl in the group.

Soon we got another regular visitor, the poet Esenin. He was in love with Isadora but he pestered her, he followed her everywhere. He was half peasant, half scoundrel. He would drink too much and wander round the school drunk.

Isadora had a naivete about her, sometimes I think everyone was feeding off her. She really had no interest in wealth. She was a very sensitive, loving person."

"Perhaps, since she adored children, Esenin was like another child to her."

"Yes, I think so, there was a kind of innocence in her love affairs - she was not wanton and promiscuous as she is so often portrayed. And she had so much tragedy in her life - her daughter Deidre by Gordon Craig, the actress Helen Terry's son, and then a beautiful son Patrick who was the child of a singer - they were wrenched from her so tragically when her chauffeur drove them into the Seine. Why, why, why should such a thing happen to someone who loved so much?

Of course that was a time for tragedies ... it was not only Isadora who suffered. Families were being torn apart, lost their homes. People were starving. There was despair. But you know, Russians have always had a hard time, they are a people who have suffered. You can hear it in their songs - such beautiful songs - but have you ever heard a happy Russian song?

I told you that families were moved into one room in a flat and the previous occupants were dispossessed . Well, I came to understand the tragedy of that even at school. One of my friends, Tamara, a strikingly good looking girl and wonderful dancer - her father Lubanovski was a famous surgeon at the time of the Revolution - They lived well, they had nice clothes. But with the revolution they lost everything; there was also a certain jealousy, a demoralisation of those who had been something before ... they were moved into a cellar with rats. It was damp and unhealthy. Lubanovski went mad and died ... he couldn't take it".

"I think sometimes we underestimate the importance of personal space. We all need physical space to live in and also emotional space in which to be ourselves. When we lose our homes and are forced to live in cramped conditions it is often the lack of privacy, the lack of individual thought that can be more oppressive and more difficult to cope with than the physical overcrowding. And I suppose that in those early post revolutionary times, the developing new state had to encourage uniformity of thought, compliance to the communist ideal in order to survive the hardship and turmoil. So there was also loss of personal space with regard to individual opinion and self expression - No wonder Lubanovski could not survive".

"But that was not the first tragedy to strike the family, nor the last. Before they were moved, they were sitting to a meal with their young cousin when a servant dropped a stack of plates in the next

room. The young boy died of a heart attack with fright. He thought he had been shot!

Tamara also suffered. She developed tuberculosis from the conditions in that cellar and she died of the consequences at an early age ... such a loss!

TB was common then - with all the hardship, malnutrition. Irma was ill .. you see, I knew she was ailing from the moment I saw her. They brought in a nurse to care for her and her daughter came to join the school. She was Maria Mussovsckaya - we called her Mussia. When she came to the school Isadora said 'I will give you six months and if at the end of that time you have not lost that poker back, I will send you to the Bolshoi!'

Isadora wanted fluidity, not rigid poses like the ballet. She said that ballet was artificial; ... that the movements stunted growth; that femininity was suffocated by the ballet. - I think that was the way she felt about society as a whole really - Isadora wanted movement which encouraged growth and womanly curves, opening up the chest, allowing the breasts to develop. Look at the photographs of ballerinas and compare those of us as teenagers ... we look like young women .. not angular posing skeletons!

So Mussia learned to move and she came into the school and became my best friend. She was then the youngest and I was slightly older."

* * * * *

"Dianuchka, Dianuchka, come in quickly. .. Please I must show to you I must tell to you there is so much it is so good to see you! But you shall tell me you come today ... I would say my Rosa to buy me something". She stumbled over her words as she embraced me so hard there was a danger that her feeble arms would snap.

"It's OK Mussia. Don't worry. I've only come to see you .. the food isn't important." I tried to lead her gently to a chair.

"When you come, you telephone to me, then I shall prepare my English. I think 'Now, remember, speak English, not Russian' my mind prepares for you".

"OK, I will next time."

"OH, take off the coat, I must help you."

"No. I will hang it by the door to let the snow drip off. I've left my shoes there .. you sit down and I can make the tea when we want it. I know where everything is. .. Now, tell me what happened."

"You see, Diana, look .. I can walk a little better. I go to the door, to the kitchen. I walk a little faster."

Yes, I had noticed a slight improvement. Mussia's feet were shrivelled by an arterial disease caused by her years of chain smoking. Six months ago she had been in hospital ... they had recommended amputation - for a dancer! 'Oh NO. Don't let them Mushkin!' It's an obscene thought - total despair, an end to creativity ... The thought conjured up for me the same futility which I felt on visiting the Moscow Music Museum - the graveyard of so many ethnic instruments, so many forgotten songs and harmonies Dance is a celebration of life, Music is the resonance of life - Can we place life in a Museum to remove the pain of experiencing it?

Is it possible to preserve notes, music like some frozen moment in time? With cases of endlessly vibrating imprisoned strings, falling

on deaf ears. Worse still, the nightmare idea of those poor withered feet, stilled by age, placed in some perspex cube or dusty shelf. Labelled 'Here was a dancer -These feet sang for Isadora, Lenin, Sun Yat-sen'.

'Oh, No Don't let them Mushkin!'

"It is all this doctor Chumak. .. I see the television .. I look .. and this name, I say, 'I know it! ... I know his father, his uncle'. They see me dance when I was young and we became very good friends. Then they go to America. ... But here is the son .. he is doctor, on television every day. I write him. I say 'you do me very good'. I watch at six o'clock in the morning. He tell to me - 'put water in a bottle by the bed and a wet..' .. how do you say? .. where is your malinki knigi?"

I reached into my bag for the little book - my Russian, English dictionary - "Sheet?"

"Yes, yes. I have wet little sheet on my legs. Then he look at me and he say the pain is gone and ... it is true ... it is gone!"

"Well, that is marvellous, Mussia. I am so pleased you are better". I had heard of the television hypnotherapists and faith healers - they enjoyed a tremendous following. Literally hundreds of thousands of Soviets tuned in to their broadcasts, went to their special stage shows, a sort of Billy Graham, Elmer Gantry and Jesus Christ rolled into one. But in a time of desperation, when medical care is all too often inadequate, drugs scarce and payments requested on the side, who can scoff if depressed, disillusioned and lonely old women derive some support and hope from such people.

I suppose the Russians have often looked to faith healing when all else failed. Was that really the root cause of all this disorder, all this hardship? The Tsarina looking desperately for a cure for her haemophiliac son - turning to a dirty, debauched, self styled monk with hypnotic eyes? If Nicholas had been stronger, had opposed his wife, had not allowed her to be influenced by a scoundrel; would he have won the respect of the nobles, the intellectuals? Would he have been able to introduce the beginnings of democracy as he was urged to do by his cousins in other states. Would Russia have been spared Revolution and civil war If Alexandra had never met Rasputin? ...

Mussia gave the word petite new meaning. Despite her infirmity she demonstrated inner grace and lightness of movement reminiscent of a hummingbird. Her eyes shone and sparkled as we spoke.

"You know, yesterday I had another surprise. I see on television my father's desk. Remember I sell it for money for my medicines. .. Now a woman, she buy it, she is writer for the newspapers and they know it was a very special desk - so it was on television."

"Mussia, you must be careful. Don't sell these things. Some people will try to swindle you. ... You have so many valuable things from your father. How they survived from before the Revolution, I do not know, but your father was a great man, a lawyer and these presents he was given over the years - the inlaid desk - those hand painted plates -unique, exquisite. I have not seen anything like them outside a Museum.

Don't let those dealers into your flat.

You know that everyone in the Soviet Union is after a fast rouble nowadays. You can't trust people like you could a few years ago. .. When I first came to Russia twenty years ago, people were poor, but reasonably content. You could walk the streets safely, the metro was clean and a pleasure to ride on.

Now I am appalled at the change. I get jostled by drunks early in the morning. I get nervous riding the metro late at night. .. Everyone is clawing after a little bit of something from the west. .. They look outward all the time, wanting ready made western success, thinking how they can get out, get a job abroad. Not looking at how they can improve the Russian society from within. I saw a cartoon at the airport - it said 'Will the last comrade to leave the country, please turn out the lights!'.

There seems to be no respect for people in Moscow any more."

I thought of the forced intimacy of the metro train with sweat mingling bodies lurching and swaying as you're shot through a deafening void to unpronounceable destinations. 'Stanzia Kuznyetsnoye Mouvst' - A seat at last. 'Azdarojneya!' - mind your backs!

"Coming to see you today, Mussia, I was wedged between a sleeping drunk and a Wagnerian matron who seemed to be transmitting her shock-waved obesity to me with each stop of the train. ... And level with my eye line was a bulging paunch fighting

free of it's sweaty, clinging shirt. An old fellow with trousers patched with wrong coloured thread and those incongruous medals that they often wear which looked to be grappling his overworn coat in their last campaign? I supposed he lived alone....

Then the drunk fell forward, jerking himself awake and proudly flashing his 'Purina Dog Chow' T shirt. ... I just can't believe where some people get these things. A friend of a trader must have won them in a dog show.. And is now trying to rip Muscovites off by selling them as western fashion. .. Just another cooperative sick joke ...

No, Mussia, don't let them into your flat".

I thought of my grandmother in Italy, small, frail, the same age and build, walking hesitantly after her broken hip.

"Mussia, I don't say these things to frighten you, or to nag you ... I am concerned for you because I am very fond of you and when I go away and we don't see each other for such a long time and I am so far away .. I can't protect you. ... I suppose it was like that with my grandmother too. When I was little, I always had to leave her behind. Every year I saw her standing there at the gate, waving goodbye with tears pouring down her cheeks. And my mother cried, and we all cried, and they used to say ' don't cry, don't cry'. So one year I tried very hard not to cry .. and I was pleased I managed not to. and as we drove away, I said to my mother, 'Look, I managed not to cry'. And she was so angry and called me heartless - I couldn't understand - I was very young. She said it then and other times - 'You don't have a heart, they took it away and put a stone in it's place'. I wish I had been hard, then it wouldn't have hurt so much. The trouble is I'm too soft ... Can children ever win? I never got on that well with my grandmother, maybe she sort of blamed me for taking her daughter away from her - but you remind me of the good parts."

.. Yes, maybe that's what I'm looking for .. the good parts ... retracing the echoes of the good feelings that get swamped in childhood pain. "She was born on Christmas day".

"Da, like me! But now my birthday is 7th January, old Russian Christmas. You know I lose two weeks of my life, because I was born when Lenin changed the calendar, first babies of the revolution calendar .. one of them was me .. my father tell me so!"

"Yes, and my grandmother was a bit of a revolutionary too. She was the local school teacher and she was the first woman in the

district to drive a car, first a pony and trap and then a car, to the village school. But last year she was badly tricked by a salesman who made her pay a lot of money for a hearing aid that didn't work. ... People living on their own are easy prey to people like that. .. Don't let them in unless there is someone here with you Mushkin."

"I know, my daughter she say me the same and Lyena my daughter, daughter also"

"And I am sure Lilly would tell you that too."

"Oh, Lilly. Yes, I know. Lilly say me 'be careful'. She say me 'Don't smoke' - But I do smoke. What do I have. ... I have nothing .. I do nothing. .. I do not go to the street any more. So I smoke a little too much, I drink a little too much, .. you know .. " Mussia flicked her index finger at the side of her neck in the Russian gesture of a drinker. "Just a little vodka, a little cognac, when my Lyena get it me. ... Not so much now, I am old now. It is so, so difficult to change,... Oh, if you had seen me when I was young! Ulanova came every night to see us ... every night she watched and she could not believe how I dance. When I go 'Tschoo, Tschoo, Tschoo, round and round, so fast!"

She twirled her fingers in an explanatory spiral, then tipped her chin ceiling ward and flourished her arms above her head.

"She not understand how I do it. I spin round and round - but I look up, and I never fall. But I tell you, Diana, I work so hard. At night I draw circles on the floor of the stage and I practise, practise, practise, round and round. So I know it. And I spin and spin but I never fall.

She wanted me to teach her - but they never understand Isadora and Duncan dance, they always too ..too stiff, they no understand Isadora, when she dance, she is music. She not pretend, not act music, she is music .. If music die, Isadora die ... I really think so. ... They try to copy .. Oh, yes, the ballet now has Duncan - but they never ... How you say..?" She snapped her fingers impatiently.

"Admit it?"

"Da, you understand .. they never admit it" She laughed and provoked a fit of smoker's coughing.

Mussia and I enjoyed our conversations, mixed Russian, English, gestures and all mode of communication. It is strange how the old often seem to communicate better than the young. .. Maybe they are closer to being children again, allowing spontaneity of their emotions to show through .. Perhaps it is a pity that nowadays they are not listened to enough - not as in ancient times when the elders of the community were revered for their knowledge. Now everyone is in such a rush, they have no time to listen to the old, and they too quickly dismiss them as out of date, ...has beens with nothing worthwhile to say.

"OH, Dianuchka, when we talk it is tsircus, tsircus .. I forget so much my English. You know I learn it a little in the school, but then I learn so well in America. ... When we go on tour with Irma - Lilly have told you - but now why do I forget! In America we dance in New York at the Metropolitan Opera house. In the newspapers they called me Mooseya - like an animal! Irma was so angry!ÿ

Chapter VII

The Pitztza place is closed tonight and so are the two bars. Barred to delegation ridden restaurants; I'll defy the salmonella to invade my chicken rissole. And I scuff my feet in the grease as the woman opposite picks her teeth with a fork - God! Does she have to do that? Amazing what you'll eat when You're hungry. At least I'm not some Stalin starved Ukrainian - but don't the peasants eat in the capital city?

* * * * *

"I think we might go out to eat tonight. Let me take you to a real Mallorcan restaurant in Palma. They have a dish called 'Sopas Mallorquinas' which is vegetables, meat and bread - like a stew - it is really good and very filling. I just love eating good food. After all those years in Russia, I will always appreciate good cooking - Not that my mother and grandmother cooked badly, they did very well considering what they were using - but there were so few supplies of food."

"Lilly, I don't really know if much has changed in Moscow. Last summer I thought it was bad enough, food was so scarce, but by October it was noticeably worse. I suppose housing must have improved - Moscow has increased in size so much with all the housing developments - but the flat I stayed in was so small. I shared a little room with two teenagers; one slept on the balcony in summer, the husband and wife slept on the living room floor at night and the old grandmother had the only bedroom with a real bed."

"People adapt themselves to all sorts of circumstances - after all we did have white bread and my grandmother did make fish on Fridays and it was always covered over with a wonderful white cloth. So they survived. We had bread and butter but no delicacies. No cheese. Very little meat. It was rough at home, but better than at school.

At the school we were always hungry. I never knew food could be so attractive. We had millet, but mainly buckwheat. It should be stewed with meat or pork. The Russians are very fond of minced

meat but of course we did not have any - so usually we had buckwheat on it's own; or soups, cabbage soup. The food was very, very poor. A plate of watery soup and a plate of buckwheat. Sometimes my mother brought me some eggs for the week and then I would have an egg with my breakfast. The best treat we ever had was when there was an egg and a little sugar, we would beat it up and make 'oggle goggle' we called it - rather like your Zabaglione - The girls parents did bring food occasionally. Apples sometimes - of course oranges we never saw in Russia; they never knew what they looked like. I would say that the food problem in Russia was always there; they always had problems, even before the Revolution, but after the Revolution it was absolutely awful."

"Was the food much worse in winter?"

"Well, of course, then we had sour cabbage. Sour cabbage is put in cabbage soup. I detested it. The taste is very, very strong. I can't stomach it now. I can eat cabbage cold, on it's own, but I can't stand it cooked."

"It does seem, sometimes that there is cabbage with everything - the first time I went to Russia I was eating what I thought was an apple turnover, and as I bit into it, I realised that it was full of cold cabbage - it was a shock! But I should have realised because, to my friends, apples are like gold dust. I feel ashamed sometimes when I think of the windfall apples that I threw away at home, we had lots of apple trees in the garden, and to see the apples that they keep in Russia!

When I went to lecture at one of the big medical Institutes in Moscow, I was given a special treat of an apple with the skin all brown and pitted. It was something special to them, but in England it would not have been eaten. It would have been thrown out. I told my children they should learn a lesson from that - like Pinocchio. I was brought up on that story, it's Italian, you know. Although imagine my surprise when I saw it in a child's room in Moscow, going under the name 'Burattino' written in Russian by Tolstoy! Apparently he blatantly plagiarised the book and published it under his own name pretending it to be his own work - amazing - but they do that sort of thing with western authors in the Soviet Union. - Anyway it definitely is Italian! .. Do you remember the part when the father is in prison

starving and Pinocchio wants the apple peeled and cored, but then when he is really hungry, he loses his fussiness and begs to be allowed to eat the peel and pips. Hunger is a great leveller. I ate everything in Russia, there is no such thing as choice. I even learned how to pickle the cabbage and I did it once when I came back, but, to my shame I must admit we didn't eat it in the end!"

"The peasants have different ways of preparing pickled cabbage. When they make sour cabbage, with salt, they like to put an apple in it. It does improve the flavour. My grandmother did it like that. They put lots of things in preserves. If it had not been for these peasant ways of preserving food, we would not have survived the winter. Forget shops, there was nothing there, and the black market. Some things, yes, you could get black market but mainly we survived on peasant food from the countryside. People came from the nearby country districts to sell some produce. The shops have never had anything much and if something arrived you could queue all day for it."

"What about the kiosks?"

"Well, yes, the kiosks had little things - when we went home, my mother would give me twenty kopeks for the tram but instead I would walk and with the money, I would buy a tiny little bit of halva and I would eat it so slowly - I made it last the whole way. There were some things in the kiosks, as the years passed it did get better while Lenin was still there, and he did start up some private enterprise.

Of course, when you are a child you don't take notice of why there are shortages and the politics and so on. You know, I often heard people talking about Trotsky and I thought that was one person! I didn't understand politics and I remember once I overheard someone say that in 1933 there would be a Jewish parliament. Then, to me, 1933 felt a hundred years away - but you see the Jews did believe in the Revolution - they thought Trotsky would help, but he was a disappointment, he never faced the anti-semitism, the Jewish problem - and he was the first to invent the concentration camp. I could never understand the Jewish, Christian problem. After all wasn't Jesus a Jew? He was a revolutionary; he was a communist and the rich Jews didn't want his revolutionary ideas - so they had him killed by the Romans. To my mind Christians are a Jewish sect

really, a splinter group - so why deny your origins? I don't understand it.

Anyway, to return to our story, I can say that things did get slowly better - and of course then became catastrophically bad again with Stalin. But I do remember I would walk miles to get my little piece of halva. At school we never had sweets. Of course the Russians love ice cream but we did get real ice cream, made with eggs and cream and so on - real ice cream. This we had after our concerts sometimes. When they had a special concert there would be a kiosk with ice cream just for the concert goers - it was private but our director would arrange that after the concert, any remaining ice cream would be brought round the back entrance and the girls would be able to have some - it was pure delight.

I suppose the diet was very bad but we did stay fairly healthy because of the routine of the school and of the beautiful surroundings. Not like Tamara, in her rat infested cellar. I did get ill once or twice. I caught Malaria in the Dacha when I was nine and that often came and gave me terrible bouts of shivering. It was finally cured by Dr Frischkopf who lived in our block with, would you believe, sunflower drops - yes, 'patsomichni kapli'. It took a year to shake it off but these drops did the trick.

But once I was very ill. I caught a cold and started to cough terribly. We had a nurse, Mussia's mother, and she took my temperature - it was very high. Well, my mother found out and somehow took me away from the school and left me at Aunty Annie's place. She nursed me, she had food of course and she did not work as my mother did, so I was well looked after. I was there about three weeks. It turned out I had pneumonia and they had to use all the old remedies. They put these things on my back .. "

"Leeches?"

"No, not leeches .. the glasses.."

"Cupping."

"Yes, cupping. We didn't have leeches, or drugs. They didn't call a doctor. It is amazing how these things, these old remedies were used and did seem to work."

"True, but I wonder how often people recovered despite them rather than because of them. My mother had pneumonia in the war and she had leeches on her back. There were no antibiotics then and my family was hiding out in the Appenine mountains - still she survived!"

"Yes, and I survived - she put the hot glasses on my back. I was about ten. I was very ill but, thanks to Aunty Annie, I did recover."

"I suppose your grandmother knew these remedies too?"

"Well, I suppose she must have done, but the conditions at home were so crowded, she could not take care of me. You see my mother, when she returned to Russia, she did not take me down to Nicolayev. She had things she wanted to achieve in Moscow; a lot of peoples felt that way, they flocked into Moscow - that's why there was so much trouble with housing - so many people looking for a good life - and what did they find? Nothing - chaos!

When they moved us from the hospital they put us in this flat with six rooms and six families. We had a big bench, no bed. It was awful. The people who had the flat beforehand, the owners, they were given one room in their own flat. Everywhere there were paintings and the owners were not allowed to touch anything - they were not allowed to move any possessions into their allocated room, everything must be shared. I suppose there must have been some kind of inventory, some inspection, when it was decided how many families and what they would be allowed to keep. Don't they even show something like that in Dr Zhivago? I remember we had a very big painting in our room and strangely enough it was of a Jewish prayer. I think that he might have been..., but she, the wife definitely was Jewish. He was a very nice man, he was Georgian, not Russian and she was a charming woman. That painting was amazing. When we sat to eat we could see the candles on the Jewish candelabra in the painting and they were glowing, like as if they were really alight. It was certainly outstanding, but it did disappear eventually, possibly to a Museum.

We had one toilet and one bathroom and one small kitchen - imagine, six families sharing one toilet - I am so grateful for Isadora Duncan having a boarding school where I could sleep Even later we

only had one bed, a table, two chairs and a sort of wooden trunk where my mother kept all her belongings - but that was for three people and some of the families were bigger! Remember too, we were not unique - everywhere across Moscow flats were being divided in the same way. Six families where there had been only one - so you can see from that how the population changed!"

"So the original family, what happened to them? How did they cope? Did they have any choice?"

"They were not asked. They just took the rooms. Rooms were allocated but the family, they were very nice about it - they knew there was no other way. Even I, at that time, survived by saying to myself, always, this is only temporary. Things will change. I am not going to remain here."

"I suppose that is something that was lost in time - that sense of purpose, of holding on and waiting for change. There is a certain hopelessness in Russia. People doing the same job day in day out, year in, year out and knowing that they will never be paid more for doing more, will never achieve anything by working harder, being more productive, being more efficient. At first there were those who strived for a better Russia, but after so many disappointments .. There needs to be a light at the end of the tunnel. Now the situation has turned around, these joint ventures and Perestroika ideas have given them a taste of the west and commerce, and they cannot cope with that either, because all they see are the rewards that other companies can achieve, they want them but cannot be competitive, cannot work for them. Communism has stunted their growth in the real world. Instead of being good communist children wanting to share the treasures they can strive for together, they have become passive consumers like baby birds opening their beaks in the nest and waiting for the goodies of the West to come tumbling into their gullets."

"I cannot understand that really. I always wanted to better myself. So I convinced myself that things would get better. So the owners of the house had a Georgian name, Milzayam. And then there was Phillip's family - remember his mother had gone back to England. Then there was an American man who had married a

Russian girl Nastia, she was very friendly with my mother. She was a woman who was always in doubt - how was she going to please her American husband? She was young, pleasant but lacked confidence really. He hardly spoke Russian, he was an immigrant but my mother used to say to Nastia 'Don't worry, everything will be all right. You will do the right thing, you will please him'. Always the eternal optimist, my mother. 'Everything is going to be wonderful'.

My grandmother eventually resigned herself to the fact that I was there, I existed and that I was the daughter of her daughter. You see, she had never accepted me. Because she had other grandchildren, real Russian Jewish grandchildren and I was different. I was born in England. I was a bit of an outcast really, my father was Jewish but he wasn't Russian. When I arrived I could hardly speak Russian - I had to learn. It was difficult being of a different culture, a different language. Maybe that was why my mother understood Nastia and her doubts with an American husband. I suppose it was the same for your mother - could she please her English husband? Would her daughter be accepted in England, or back in Italy? I am sure all mixed marriages have the same doubts, but yet my mother was partly right - there can be such an enrichment too - such appreciation of another way of life. I couldn't see it then. I never really wanted the Russian part, I wanted to go home to England; and my grandmother made it plain she never wanted me. But, want me or not, there I was!

My grandmother came up to Moscow from the country after my mother settled. At that time she had just two children left in Nicolayev, aunty Clara and uncle Peter. They could not come to us, we had no room, but Peter was a party member so he was given two big apartment blocks to look after and he had a room in one of them with Clara.

I remember one day I came back from school and my mother brought me into our room and said 'Lilly, meet your grandmother'. And she was sitting there - an old lady whom I had never seen before, wearing a scarf. I was terrified. I ran away and stood behind my mother and she said 'Don't be afraid, Lilly. This is your grandmother'. But all I could think of was that in all the fairy tales, the old woman in the scarf was a witch - it was a shock to me. My grandmother never forgave me for that. She disliked me immediately because I was a foreigner and then, when I did not go to her that day

- that was something unforgivable. We did get over that partly as time went on but I must say that we were never friends, never friends.

She was an impressive woman. When she moved into the flat everyone found her so. She would go downstairs and sit in the doorway sometimes on her little stool and not one person dared pass her without saying 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon'. She was neat and tidy - in fact, spotless. I was proud of her for that. She always kept to rule. Every Friday gefilte fish on a white napkin; everything always in it's place. Whereas my mother was really so Bohemian. There was a contrast there. But despite not getting on with my grandmother, I think I have taken after her in many ways - perhaps as a reaction against the disorder which my mother brought with her. I wanted stability - my grandmother was an island of order in the chaos we lived in, a sort of oasis. But, funny enough, I still somehow always thought of her as a witch, with that scarf."

"I suppose grandmothers do have a sort of mysterious power about them. It is strange anyway to think of someone actually being your mother's mother. ...

I always thought of my grandmother as a potential witch. It's like she had power to do good and be nice, and at the same time tremendous potential to do harm. As children we are open to all sorts of influences and get manipulated by those subtle covert messages that can make us believe the world is a frightening place and cut away at our self confidence. It's as if the little scared child inside our parents pushes all it's fear onto us. And where did that fear come from? Those messages did not come out of our parents spontaneously, they were passed from the previous generation; so our grandparents do have the power to transmit devastating injunctions to their descendants. I suppose that's it - transmission rather than creation most of the time - will I also be condemned to transmit unwanted messages to my children?. Perhaps modification and deletion is possible at the end of the day. My grandmother I think of her as being like a little primaeval time bomb.

... She was, or rather still is, small and hunched and wears black and shawls - of course she is over ninety now, but still going strong. When I was little, she used to tell me all these stories about the witches in the district - how they would strip naked at night and cover themselves in grease and then turn into cats or get magic

powers to fly around. She seemed to know all their tricks, so I imagined she must be one of them."

"Oh, my goodness, the stories we are told as children - do you think they are meant to entertain us or to frighten us out of our wits. I remember at the school, we used to have a famous actress from the Mali theatre, you know mali means small, as opposed to the Bolshoi, the big theatre. Well..., this actress came once a week on Saturday evenings to read to us and tell us stories. Often she would read poetry or tell us Gogol's stories. I will never forget when she told us Gogol's 'V'. The king of the elves has eyelids which reached to the ground. Gogol was, I think, rather obsessed with devils and he did write rather strangely. In England people think he only wrote 'The Government Inspector' but they should try reading 'The Nose' or 'Nyevsky prospect' but in 'V' when he shouts to the devils to lift the eyelids I was terrified! I could never sleep after she had come. Mussia and I would lie awake, listening for every sound like the poor soul who is frightened to death in the empty church...

I suppose we were afraid quite often in those days - It was a frightening time for children."

"Especially when you don't understand what is happening to you and when things go wrong and you see your family miserable - you can begin to feel it's somehow your fault. I know I did when my mother seemed so unhappy in England. I thought having me tied her to a country she did not like."

"Well, yes, that is true, but that was not how my mother felt about Russia. You see she felt that about England, she did not want to be trapped there and so I was completely unplanned, and I would say an unwanted child. She did everything not to have me, lifted heavy sewing machines, everything possible. But then she just took me and left; she decided, child or no child, she would not be stopped. She never loved my father; the marriage was just to help with her loneliness. Actually she was still in love with a Russian teacher whom she had left behind. She did have the odd affair though. I remember a man being around when we were in lodgings and my mother saying 'Shall I marry him, Lilly?' I said 'No!' and she did sulk for a few days, but not for long. She and Annie were not lucky in their marriages. Isaacs had thrown acid in Annie's face when Muscat arrived - he was

a dreadful man. But you see... with my mother there was always this optimism and this drive - Oh, yes. She was like you. - And I did feel that it was down to her - it was her responsibility that we were in Russia. She took me there..... I suppose I did blame her although of course it was a hard life for her despite her optimism and I suppose she was afraid too sometimes .. maybe she was afraid secretly that her dream would not be fulfilled, that she would be disillusioned ... but that, she never showed. She was afraid though sometimes when we walked the streets and there were these gangs that I told you about. But it did get better. The dispossessed children were rounded up and they gave them schools and places to live - like boarding schools - well, orphanages, I suppose.

Our school was very progressive and we invited the Besprisornik children to come and see concerts or to come and dance with us. We realised that we were privileged and we tried to share some of our good fortune. There were so many children, orphans of the revolution, but it is the same in any war."

"At least in Russia some attempt was made to rehabilitate them and keep them in the community - I don't think England can be so proud of it's record on that score - shipping thousands of orphans to be used as cheap labour in Australia and Canada after the war, cutting them off from their culture and any vestige of family."

"Yes, often sent without even a record of their names. Well, in Russia they were made to feel part of the new society, they were 'pioneers' - we all had to be 'pioneers', to wear the red cravat and parade twice a week. I played the drum and it was so big, it weighed me down, but Padvoiski, our leader, used to urge us on. It did give us a spirit of belonging to something - although often I did not know quite what that something was"

* * * * *

Yes. How many of us spend our lives chasing after some unattainable goal? The revolutionaries seeking a new order? Lisa with a vision of a future for her daughter brought to the turmoil of a foreign land? Perhaps all mothers dreaming of a better future for their children, a way of becoming more than a 'good-enough-mother'? Perhaps we are all caught in the madness of 'Nyevsky prospect'.

Nyevsky prospect - the Leningrad thoroughfare where Gogol's young man glimpsed a fair young maid - a vision of loveliness never beheld before. Drawn as a moth to a candle, he followed her from boulevard to street, to alley, to a dimly lit doorway and cold garret where, on finally drawing near to her, his dream shattered with the e realisation that she was a prostitute, a woman of the night. Demoralised, he retreated to his rooms, fell into a deep sleep and dreamed of his beauty. On waking, he lost her to the cold light of day He tried to recapture her in sleep, taking drugs to sleep longer. He only lived in his dreams and gradually, as they took over ... his dream that was his life ... became his death.

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Chapter VIII

The first day, I walked. It was the hospital in Piragovskaya where they did the investigations. The street where aunty Annie used to live and Tanya still lives there, strangely enough, next to the big cathedral, in the same block of flats. She married Barney, the oldest brother and they spent some years in England, on the south coast - was it Eastbourne?

They were forced to leave in 1928 soon after their marriage. Stalin threw all the foreigners out but Tanya was Russian so they returned. Why did they come back? Magnet-like Moscow pulled them all back - and it would have been all right if the promise of a new future had not been destroyed by that little Georgian maniac.

Poor Barney, he was only seventeen when he left Highgate with Lenin. He dutifully guarded the cabinet in St Petersburg and lived in the palace until they moved to Moscow to the flat by the river. But duty is not repaid when your master is discredited, when allegiances change - exiled to Eastbourne with his young bride, but returning to help his adopted country through troubled times, his reward was to be dragged out of bed in the middle of the night, to be arrested and confined in a concentration camp. Just because someone in the block wanted his flat and invented a story about his being a spy.

Barney had kept the name 'Isaacs' although his brothers had wanted to expunge all memory of their hated father and assumed the name 'Muscat' - this saved their lives when the authorities failed to tie up the family name.

So I walked along your route, Lilly, in your footsteps as you nibbled your Halva, leaving the tram stop behind and treading wearily through the dust.

Underfoot it seems that Moscow is always either mud, slush or dust. I used to wonder where all the mud came from in the centre of the city, but when you see how the flats are built, it is hardly surprising - sites just left with piles of rubble and earth banked up just where it fell when the foundations were dug - no landscaping, no shrubs no gardens - just earth with whatever will grow on it. There's no money for anything fancy, no borough council erecting vandalised

playgrounds, no landscaped 'keep off the grass' dog toilets, just waste ground.

I suppose the flats were thrown up quickly with the good intentions of providing housing for the masses but some construction is so rough that living in them is a nightmare, like the stairways where the cement blocks have shifted so that as you walk downstairs, each stair slopes upwards! ... Or the Kruschev flats that have very low ceilings and get desperately hot in summer - built with the idea of sandwiching an extra floor into a block without increasing building costs...

There was no ice cream today at the marojenay kiosk near the school but I found a little halva at the soyuspechat - how did you manage to make it last? I couldn't keep it going to the end of the road - but then I am spoiled by our western gluttony and swamped by our consumerism.

When we took the English children to Pushkin square all they could see was the newly opened Mac Donalds - an American travesty. Obscene queues twice round the square and nobody looking at such a famous writer and poet - except the usual pigeon on his head. Can the world really be saved by an American burger?

Everywhere it's hard currency this, hard currency that - Oh yes, if you are just a tourist, a fleeting visitor doing Moscow today, Kiev tomorrow, staying at the Intourist with the excreta of your culture especially imported - what do you know of children in hospital with no drugs to use on them... , couples with no contraceptives fearing unwanted childbirth or repeated abortions, black market coffee (sometimes), and families with little to eat? A demoralised society trying to keep up a pretence?

The incongruity of it all struck me one night walking to the 'Rossia' hotel; past the artists scraping a living with tawdry copies of golden domes. An American assailed me with "Gdye Krasnye ploshad" In perfect English, Russian, phrase book - page one. "Round the corner mate" - at least he tried. ... Another bunch of Americans humming the dying swan - it's as if they are seeing Moscow 'Intoured' in a Baskin-Robbins cocoon. ..you can only get a cornet at the Rossia with hard currency .. no double chocolate chip for the rouble toting plebs.

.... And when they are filing past Saint Basil's walnut-whipped rioting domes, does anyone tell them that they put the artists' eyes out to keep the building unique? Do they care for the prisoner who

died in Siberia, exiled for stopping Stalin's demolition plan? Was it worth it for this?

As I entered the lift I noticed the pimp watching his girls with their smart only-the-best no 'Gum' or 'Tsum' clothes and Chanel clouding the healing black eye. ...I suppose it's one way of getting valuta ... Will he remember to turn out the light?

Maybe I shouldn't be so cynical - after all my children were much the same - "How do you say 'what flavours do you have' Mum?" - "You don't in Russia - you just take the flavour of the day and are thankful to have any". They got used to it eventually, we all do. Even I overdosed on shopping when I finally came home. I had forgotten what it was like to see shops where you could buy something and not just admire a plastic rose in an empty case of long forgotten merchandise.

Yes, Lilly, I found it hard. And there are really no comforts, no luxuries to pamper yourself with, to try to keep going, to keep working. And the lack of communication - not being able to telephone home - when I was there without the children, I missed them terribly, not knowing when I would see them again.

I find that when I am away it is the difference in time rather than in space that creates the distance. When we are in a different time zone I sleep while they are awake and I can't imagine what they are doing, can't try to telepathise my thoughts about them.

....Yes, time is definitely the absolute. It is strange though how time affects you sometimes. That summer, when I was lonely, so homesick, I was walking through this rather drab housing estate on my way home to my friend's flat. All the windows were open and I could hear Beatles music wafting down, just the music that I used to listen to in the sixties when I was growing up. The music that I played at home the first time I came to Moscow. ... I was really taken back twenty years ..it was like being in a time warp.

On Leila's birthday I tried to ring - eventually a crackle and I could hear her voice -

"Mum, I got honours in my Ballet exam".

"Wow, that's great, Lelly - and good luck for the modern".

"When are you coming home?"

"Soon, Leila, soon I hope it's soon ..."

Is it a coincidence that she is at stage school too? Or is that another echo? - If we were in Moscow at your time, I certainly would

have sent her to the Duncan school - I imagine I would have acted much like your mother, Lilly. Except for the boarding - I would have missed her too much.

Of course, I know it must have been much harder for you in those days than it was for me in the eighties but when I see the old people - those like Mussia, and Tanya - those who have lived through it - they suffered as young people because they had a dream of the future but for them things are still the same, no easing of the hardships, no rosy senior citizenship.

I visit Tanya, old and halting, confined to her little flat, lonely with few creature comforts - and I see a proud, caring woman, with impeccable English, cultured, educated - whose husband was torn away from her - and these are thousands like her that I will never meet.

I see Mussia, struggling to get money for her medical care - calculating her little ration of tea and sugar which she is allocated for serving the state so long as a dancer.

Have we failed these children of the Revolution?

Mussia, I couldn't bear to see you in that hospital - old beds and worn mattresses just about staying together. Your one plate and one base metal spoon, licked between courses and coveted from the other patients (prisoners?). The little square of bread that was your daily ration, the plate of plain buckwheat, the glass of 'compote'. Yes, I know, that - a little jam or fruit on boiled water, I have made it on many a cold evening when there was no tea. Compote and buckwheat - I expect you were better fed at the school.

I wanted to take you away, to take you to England to be treated, to bring you drugs, disposable syringes to protect you against AIDS - but what could I really do? What's the point - I can't even put a drop of comfort into an ocean of need.

When I visited you last summer in the polyclinic the scene was pathetic... The overheated bus grated to a halt with its propped-open radiator gasping dust soaked air. It coughed out the weary visitors. Swollen footed old folk fumbling and heaving at precious fruit-filled buckets. I suppose they were ensuring the dying a last supper they never had in life. I almost cried as I saw the small, paper-wrapped treasures clutched in those gnarled fingers. Strangely, all the visitors seemed old and wore drab, faded, re-washed cottons matching their sad, faded, relined faces. It made you wonder ..watching as they climbed those care worn stairs with their halting

breath ... it made you wonder who would go first, the visitors or the visited ...?

Chapter IX

"Isadora adored beauty and grace and she did try to communicate this feeling to us - although of course she found it very difficult facing the hardships of Moscow. She lived on the ideal of Russian life but could not cope with the reality of it. So she would keep going away to France, to 'recharge' herself and she would leave Irma in control. Irma would teach us a varied programme but could not communicate with us like Isadora did.

Isadora had such simplicity in her approach, she made you see beauty in speech, movement, surroundings and the environment of the school. It certainly did that to me - I had pride in my body, pride in my environment, self esteem. I think she would regard that as a foundation against snobbery - her attitude was, as it is in the Soviet Union even today, that artistic pursuits and manual or clerical work have the same inherent value. Anyone can do anything - it is no loss to have to turn your hand to a trade. Anyone can achieve what they want to achieve. Nowadays there is too much promotion of violence rather than promotion of beauty.

Isadora was relaxed and comfortable with beauty and it says a lot for her influence, for her love of us children, that despite the horrors around us, we had the most beautiful upbringing we could ever hope for. We came from mixed backgrounds, different races - but we developed into beauties and we believed in ourselves."

"Lilly, I so often wish that more young people could believe in themselves. It is difficult enough for children from what we might call 'good families' to grow up with a sense of worth and confidence, there are so many knocks in life that put a child down, so many adults, teachers trying to 'score' points off a child and bullies attempting to boost their own self confidence by leaning on someone weaker. But the deprived, abused children that I work with, the children who have been robbed of maternal love, the neglected children - they so often grow up feeling that the neglect was due to something they did or failed in, that they somehow deserve to be treated badly, that they do not deserve something better. And when you feel worthless, you will

find plenty of people around that will reinforce that feeling for you, people who will lean on you, make you feel you have to be nice to them to earn some love and affection, and those are the very people who will let you down, drag the rug from under your feet and make you feel that your role in life is to be used and abused.

It takes a lot of strength to break out of that mould. I have felt that way myself and my family was nothing out of the ordinary, so imagine how devastating it must be for say a girl who has been in care, in an institution, who has a baby when she is very young - how can she give that baby love and affection when she has none for herself, when she is empty inside? I keep hoping that we can instil some sense of self worth and self respect - sometimes when I talk to one of my young patients, it is so frustrating to see what a good, loveable person they are, with the potential of a fulfilled life before them - but they cannot see themselves like that, not without a great deal of help But to begin with very young children, with the right attitude and the right form of education, we can make new moulds and raise happy, confident children who, like you, Lilly, believe in themselves."

"Well, that was certainly the gift that Isadora gave me - an appreciation of the world and of myself.

It may sound pretentious to say so, but I feel strongly that Isadora created a revolution in movement - she opened the windows to freedom - and all they write about are silly little love affairs! ... Bah!

Of course the Revolution did to an extent destroy culture - people wanted freedom of everything and ended with freedom of nothing .. but Isadora did try to bring music and dance to the people. She wanted to bring a poetry of movement into an ordinary person's life - she tried to teach factory girls grace and poise .. she was not elitist. We mixed with all walks of life, as I told you, the local orphanage too.. we made everyone feel welcome. In summer we would go to the local park and take tunics and try to teach the local children to move, How to skip, how to run, how to polka. Isadora really encouraged that. She sometimes came with us, she urged us to be pioneers, to march with our comrades, with our cravats, with our drums. Anything that would help to 'permeate' society with our views, to be able to spread the message. At our matinees, we invited people on stage to encourage them to do as we did - to free their bodies.

But I think it was a waste of time - She was too advanced in some ways - the world was not ready for her. The Russians never really understood her - but in a way, they never fully understood classical music. The Bolshoi used Tchaikovsky and music specially written for the ballet but were unable to portray a wide classical repertoire.

Do you know that when Isadora met Pavlova, she felt sorry for her - being so restricted within ballet. She thought she was underdeveloped, on a poor diet. Isadora ate everything .. and enjoyed it! She enjoyed life."

"She obviously enjoyed her body and delighted in it's movement. It would be wonderful if all of us could grow up enjoying our bodies and accepting their various shapes and physical differences rather than trying to all fit into a common mould. After all, you and I are quite short and although at times we have wished to be taller, it is no use making ourselves unhappy striving for something that can never be. So many problems stem from rejection, children rejected by parents, feeling worthless and then rejecting themselves.

We are beginning to understand now how self rejection can actually bring about a range of physical diseases, including the autoimmune diseases which are in fact self rejection on a cellular level - amazing that our minds can influence the very make up of our cells! But perhaps the most graphical example of self rejection is seen in anorexia nervosa - when the young sufferer actually starves her own body, almost wanting it to fade away and disappear. The 'thin dancer' or sparrow like ballerina complex encourages this sort of abuse of the body - but often the seeds are sown by actual abuse, sometimes sexual, and the anorexic is continuing the abuse, attempting to annihilate the offending body which allowed itself to be a 'guilty' victim. It is as if she is killing the sexual being, the womanly body which let her down, and is retreating back into the asexual child - so she loses so much weight that her periods stop and her emotional and psychological retreat becomes a physical reality."

"But you see, I believe that Isadora's philosophy of dance was to encourage our full natural development, not hinder it. She was so underestimated. When people tried to make films and ballets about her, nobody bothered to actually see what she did, to ask us, they only put forward their perception of how they would have liked

her to have been. Merle Parke got it wrong in my opinion; Martha Graham went barefoot like Isadora but concocted a strange system of movement .. you can't call it dance! ... There is no fluidity.

Isadora 'portrayed' music - brought it to life - 'If the music repeats, you have to repeat the movements'. We used to fly and jump in the air ... the whole dance was so light, with such grace ... such vitality.

I don't think Isadora ever realised that she had opened a school of such uniqueness because her whole aim was based on knowledge and beauty and that just seemed natural to her. Material things were of passing importance, they were not her ultimate aim. Music comes from heaven .. how we humans tune into it, I don't know. .. Writing comes from observation, but music comes from heaven. Isadora based her movements on Greek statues, on the beauty of Apollo. She created future woman."

"It is wonderful to think that here we had a group of women; your mother with her 'suffragette' ideas; the emerging emancipation of the new Russia; Isadora with her revolutionary ideas of dance and movement, .. and yet they were not afraid to love a man; they were proud of their femininity; they promoted the beauty and grace of the female body. Isadora drew strength and power from her sexuality. Whereas nowadays the sad thing is that so often we feel that to compete in a man's world, to succeed in business, in science, we must become like second class men - instead of first class women. And there is even the implication sometimes that if you are a successful woman - that you cannot be attractive, feminine, .. in fact could surely not want to be sexually involved with a man - that you are probably proudly lesbian anyway. Perhaps that is why people have wanted to write titillating garbage about Isadora - to reduce her, and women like her, to the level of their most frivolous affairs. Perhaps they are unable to cope with the fact that an emancipated, slightly outrageous, left wing dancer could actually enjoy life, enjoy her loves, and be proud to be a desirable woman."

"Oh, Yes. I am sure that creativity and dance must be part of the curriculum of all schools. Girls must know how to move with confidence and pride.

The problem is that here people are afraid of criticism, they feel threatened by differences, they have so little confidence.

In the school I was the only Jewish girl, but we took no note of such differences, and we had fun , we were made to feel that it was right to enjoy life and to enjoy learning.

At Christmas Isadora would bring an enormous tree .. often there were parties and we did special plays. ... We heard music all day and that was wonderful. Isadora used to have evenings when she would bring people to the school and she would show off her girls. We would sing and dance. A famous song writer Grichiniakov used to come to sing with us and compose revolutionary songs. Then there was this strange character who used to come and posture in the dining room to teach us the male physique - how we laughed - but it was serious really, an educational visit .. He called himself 'Besmertni', that means 'without death', he thought he would never die .. and he wore a tunic and Grecian sandals, .. yes, summer and winter always a tunic and Grecian sandals ...how he survived the cold I will never know ... maybe he really was besmertni!

I remember one of the girls, Natasha, she slept in the bed next to me .. she was not a very good dancer but she kept a diary and she wrote poetry rather well. She would drive me mad at night, waking me up and saying 'I have things on my mind'. ..'Go to sleep!' I would say, but she continued. One night she was reciting poetry to me and I reached behind my head where there were drapes to pull over my ears .. and my goodness!, these enormously heavy drapes and a brass rail fell on my head and knocked me out. I remember that as I came to, I was saying 'Call my Aunty Annie, tell her I need food because I've been concussed'. Any excuse was good to get food .. I was so hungry!

Of course we did get up to mischief sometimes, all children do. After Irma and Isadora went to bed, we would get up and play ' Kasaki i Rasboviki' - Cossacks and villains - a form of hide and seek. One night I hid in the big travelling basket where the drapes were stored and nobody found me. Then Isadora and our director came in and sat on the basket, so I was trapped! Eventually they left and I managed to creep out.

We were taught to behave well, our English teacher taught etiquette also and the French teacher was very strict. We were not allowed to make a sound when she was around. The Russian teacher Marie Viktram commanded great respect ... as we heard her footsteps in the corridor we cleaned the board and got her chalks ready.

A very good pianist, Oborin, taught us piano. He never married although he was a very handsome man. His mother was terribly upset by this but we heard that he had been seduced by a very famous pianist who taught him in the conservatory. I say seduced, it seems strange to speak of boys being raped, but I suppose rape would be a more accurate word."

" Girl or boy, the significance of the act is the same, the sexual gratification of an adult, at the expense of a child who is too young to consent or is old enough to refuse and is unable to do so. I think it is sometimes worse for a boy because, as you say, we don't tend to talk about boys being raped. A patient once said to me 'Girls get raped, not boys; how could I tell anyone what had happened to me? What would they think of me? It took away my manliness'. Fortunately in that case, he became a social worker and used his experience positively in protecting children in the same position as himself; often though the opposite occurs and despite the pain and humiliation, the abused become abusers, trying to recover their sense of power by repeating the degradation of a child very like themselves."

"It was the same with Tchaikovsky. He seduced so many young boys - he was eventually forced to poison himself when the parents found out. I thought he was a great man; so did most people I suppose, and the parents of the children sent to him as pupils but he used those children; abused them sexually. At that age we don't expect adults to betray children .. teachers are in a position of trust and we need to be able to trust them - not expose children to corruption."

"Yes, Lilly. But how often do teachers, parents, even priests abuse that trust? These people have no boundaries and leave the weaker, innocent victims wondering what boundaries actually exist in the world. And who bears the guilt, blame and shame of these events?

Lately we have even had a professor of paediatrics condemned for child pornography and I know of a senior children's doctor, a consultant paediatrician, who has been abusing his patients and students for years - he has just been indicted because one girl told her boyfriend of what he had done years previously - but how many victims kept silent, how many years has he been showing the world

what a wonderful man he was while all the time he has been living off the fear of those weaker than himself. It makes me so angry to see the lives of children and the young ruined in this pernicious, cowardly way - These people get away with it because the victims are afraid, feel guilty and are implicated in the act. After all, a child being made to do something by an adult does not know what it implies, what it is, until he has done it - and then it's too late - they are involved. Even being made to look at a pornographic picture somehow ties you with the act - how do you know what that picture represents until you look at it? And once your eyes have taken it in, no amount of repulsion or disgust can cancel it out - you are there, you are part of it - you are guilty - That's how these inadequate men and women avoid the truth and use their victims as a shield.

Just the opposite of the self worth instilled by your school; by those such as Isadora who were comfortable with their sexuality. These people instead instil self loathing and a sense of worthlessness, they take away all sexual confidence. If only such victims, such children could realise that - that they are not responsible for someone else's inadequacies and that they can rise above these devastating experiences.

I suppose that as young dancers, with Isadora, you must have been exposed to some unwelcome attentions?"

"Not very much really. I think mostly it was innocent admiration. Once or twice I was a little worried but mainly we were protected. There was a man called Bill who tried to kiss me in America - he was twenty and I thought him so old - but I ducked and avoided him - I was terrified. And of course Lunacharski used to stroke my hair - but Russians are like that, demonstrative, you will have noticed the way they always give you flowers, kiss your hand ..

The only real problem we had was the big scandal with our director, Schneider. I was young and innocent and I did not have any idea about what was happening. The first I knew of trouble was when one morning we woke to find water running from the bathroom - we ran to see what was happening and there was Irma, with all the baths and basins overflowing and all of them full of Schneider's clothes!

Schneider came from a Jewish family who had been allowed to live in Moscow before the Revolution. They were converted to Christianity - otherwise it would not have been allowed - remember there was a lot of prejudice and anti-semitism before the Revolution.

His family were in the clothing business and he was the only boy - he had seven sisters. Perhaps they were originally German - anyway he was Russian but he spoke German and he became a reporter on arts.

When Isadora arrived he asked if he could organise the school and so he became our director and arranged the concerts. The man had always been a womaniser and it was common knowledge that he had an affair with Geltser - the great ballerina after Pavlova. Geltser was also Jewish incidentally. But as soon as he met Irma, he married her, she was twenty one.

It was three years later that he was found in bed with one of the older girls who he had been making advances to. Marusia was only sixteen and she entered the school at the age of twelve, at the beginning. She had been recommended by an official, Volin, who had spotted her in her home village of Dresden - the Soviet Dresden, not the German one - and he felt that she was suited to the type of dancing.

Irma threw Schneider out and called a meeting of the parents. It was decided that he must marry the girl and this he was forced to do despite his protestations about marrying someone from a peasant family. They were given a room in the school where they lived as husband and wife and she continued to dance. The other girls were very angry at this - you see there were six older girls and although they had some preferential treatment, they resented Marusia being allowed to stay.

This caused big problems later when we went to America - Irma did not want Schneider to come and Marusia came on a limited contract - and they both caused such problems back in Moscow. But when we returned to Russia it came out that Schneider had molested other girls and he was eventually put in prison - so you are right - the truth often stays hidden for a long time "

Chapter X

"It was soon established that fourteen girls - the six older ones and eight younger ones led by me, would form the main troupe who would 'dance for our supper'. We had a series of concerts in Moscow and Leningrad and then ten of us had more extensive tours organised by Schneider.

By that time I was one of the only girls left from the beginning. Many of the immigrants had left, their parents wanted them to go to ordinary schools. One day I asked my mother 'Can't I go to the other school with Cecilia?' and Isadora walked by - she said to my mother 'No, all the rest can leave, but not Lilly. Lilly is my best dancer; I will never allow her to leave'. So on these big tours I was one of the youngest, there were four of us all aged thirteen or thereabouts and the six 'big girls' - but Isadora always singled me out.

It seems awful to say so, but the highlight of these tours was to be able at last to get out and sneak into a restaurant. On the Volga there were the old boats left over from the Tsar's time and we ate wonderful things on the river - for once we even had a choice of food! Outside Moscow, further from the immediate influence of the Revolution there was more food available and people were running restaurants and guest houses for travellers, so there was some food in the country."

"I suppose there was the same problem of distribution Lilly. Even now I am appalled how disorganised the Soviet Union can be, a country so full of natural resources, fertile farmland, forests, mineral wealth, can still have people starving. When you go shopping and find some washing powder, you don't buy what you need for the week - because next week there may be none, so you buy for several months and hoard it - that of course makes the problem worse, but what else can you do - sometimes it seems as if all the sugar is in Leningrad, all the flour in Kiev, all the potatoes in Odessa and the soap in Vladivostok - no ability to distribute - and in some places food being dumped because it has gone rotten in the wrong place. They tell me that some of that is sabotage - to stop people believing in

Perestroika; that the hard line right wingers are wanting to disillusion the public, to discredit Gorbachev's ideas. But, as far as I can see, things have been much the same for the last seventy years."

"Yes, they have. I saw that. Otherwise how was it that in Moscow we even had the Americans baling us out with food - you know there was the A.R.A., the American relief organisation - I don't know how official that was, or if it was the Marxists, I don't care - they fed us! They sent maize grain and once we had white bread. How was it that in Moscow we needed foreign aid to keep alive and on tour, on the Volga, in Siberia, there was food in abundance!

The first big tour started in 1926. Isadora was planning a world tour and was preparing us for it by giving us extra French lessons - incidentally, did you know that before the Revolution, the Russian upper classes did not speak Russian at all, they spoke French. There was this tradition, this link between Paris and St Petersburg. Anyway we studied extra French because we were to meet Isadora in France. The idea was that we would first do a tour with Irma and Schneider - this was just before the scandal broke, of course, , to go to Siberia and accross to China and then we would meet Isadora in Paris ... no, Nice, she was in Nice ... and go on with her to America.

Well, it was while we were in Shanghai, on our way home from China, in 1927 that we heard of her tragic death. We could not believe it! To me, I had lost a heroine, someone I modelled my life on, and that is quite a devastating thing at that age - for a girl entering puberty and looking forward to womanhood".

"Yes it is important to have a woman to model yourself on in adolescence. In reality mothers are often too distant as flesh and blood women so that all we can relate to is the child bearing mother ideal rather than the sexual woman that we are becoming. And what other models are we given? There is the Madonna figure for Catholic girls I suppose, totally unattainable and emphasising the taboos against 'real' womanhood. And then there are images such as the sex kittens or Marilyn Munroes which are supposed to be deprecated. Mother, Madonna, Whore is that the choice? How does a developing young girl fuse these three images? Perhaps it is only with a heroine such as Isadora, loving, maternal and sexually fulfilled, that one can pass through puberty and keep one's self esteem. So, yes, I can see that her death at such a time could have had a devastating effect".

"And to die in such a manner! It makes me shudder to think of it - that she should be driving, wearing one of those flamboyant scarves that she always wore, and the scarf entangled itself in the car wheel and strangled her tragic, just tragic!

As I told you before, tragedy seemed to haunt us. When we were in America we had a big party hosted by Theresa who had been one of the six girls from the first German school. All six girls were there, everyone seemed to go to America in those days! Theresa had married a Russian American and everyone was there including Isadora's brother Augustine. He was blind, but married with a handsome son, Patrick - Incidentally Irma would have loved Marusia to have stayed with Augustine's son - she so wanted to get her settled out of Schneider's clutches - she used to hope that someone else would seduce her ... Anyway, to get back to my story .. Tamara, my beautiful friend met an Indian at the party, you know, an American Red Indian I mean, and he read her palm and told her that she would die young - she was fourteen at the time. We called Tamara 'pepper and salt' because she was so spicy, so vivacious and of course she laughed it off - but soon after we returned to Moscow, she did die!

Then there was Marsha, or Maria, whose husband died in the war. She immediately had an affair with a pilot who killed her and committed suicide - a sort of Mayerling plot! And my friend, Shura, Alexandra, died young of an infection, she was a very good dancer and beautiful. Esenin used to call her 'Chyepuhka' as a joke - it means nonsense, something nonsensical, but it was a word he applied to a lot of things.

But, anyway, we did not find out about our tragedy until we were in China, so we did enjoy our tour up to then. Some of the journey, some of the things that happened are difficult to describe. They tell like a fairy story and I seem to be 'name dropping' all the time. But I did meet these extraordinary people - and they affected my view of life - affected all of us in some ways. When I returned to England in '46 I read Dr Zhivago. Pasternak had just finished it about then, it had been difficult to get hold of, he was not published much in fact, I believe he first came out in Italy."

"Yes, that's right. My mother had an Italian copy of his work when she came to England."

"Well, when I read it, it made me laugh a little inside because so many of the scenes, so much of what he described, was as I had seen, as I had lived through the trams in Moscow ... and do you remember the train journey? Those people, like the fanatics who drove the train and the revolutionary - what was his name? - you know, the part played by Tom Courtenay in the film .. they did exist, I met people like them. It was someone like that who murdered the Tsar and his family. You know that they would have left, he wanted to abdicate and to be exiled to Europe. They did not need to die. There were many people leaving by train through Siberia, to Harbin and out through China."

"Do you think the Tsar believed he was being taken out that way?"

"Yes, I think so - they stopped them and made them stay in a town called Ikatterinasburgh .. that was the old Catherine's Burgh ... you find it spelt different ways depending on the translator. It is in the Urals, just in Asia. And there this petty official who had charge of them decided to take things into his own hands and had them shot. They took us to see the room. I felt terrible. The room had not been touched - apart from removing the bodies, of course - there were bullet holes high up where the adults had been shot and bullet holes low down where they killed the children - pathetic. Why kill the children? Such beautiful children they were."

"I suppose they wanted to blot out all memory of the family .. children carry their parents genes, and their parents memories - there is no such thing as childhood innocence when it comes to war. There was some kind of very deep primitive fear, a sort of fear of contamination of the new society, .. it was almost as if they were ridding themselves of a virus, sterilising, .. removing all trace and memory of the Tsars. The name had such memories and such atrocities attached to it over the years that it did not matter that the present Tsar was not so cruel, not such a despot. How else can you explain not just the killing, but the destruction of the bodies, no trace, no grave ... nothing left.

But now it seems that things are turning full circle in Russia. When you were young the children such as yourselves were forced to see, to witness the atrocity, the expurgation of the Romanovs. Then

for many years, people wanted to forget, felt ashamed of such gratuitous violence. The house was pulled down, the cellar filled in. People were not supposed to know where it happened. The town changed its name, it became Sverdlovsk, a closed city, but I have visited it many times and now the site of the deaths is pointed out - people want to learn from their history, they want to know the truth, not selected memories. There is an open space marked with five trees. I walked on the spot with my friends. We organised an exchange of school children from the town. It is the children who can understand the past and make a better future.

This year Sverdlovsk became an open city, the May day celebration had the usual communist and trade union factions - but followed by an 'alternative' demonstration, dissidents and royalists. They are applying to change their name back to Katterinasburgh. A blue, white and red royalist flag appeared on the site of the murders, followed by a stone cross and flowers.. and now there is talk of erecting a church on the site .. Yes, history turning circle again .. Is it a coincidence that Boris Yeltsin, the influential liberal is from Sverdlovsk? I wonder how many people in the west realise that this is the same town where the Tsar was murdered?"

"Russia is growing up perhaps? Unfortunately their Revolution brought a lot of misery and the revolutionary ideas spread to China. But when we were there it was not communist yet. We performed in towns across Siberia, such expanses of unspoiled countryside, such lakes - have you ever seen Lake Baikal? I don't think another lake could compare to it - we stood by the banks and the water was so blue and transparent - it was crystal clear and so very , very deep. I hope the pollution problem never reaches that area, although now one can never be sure."

"It sometimes seems we are poisoning and ruining every drop of water on the planet. Even the Aral sea is gradually disappearing, imagine that! I haven't seen Baikal myself but I have a friend who was born near there. He describes how wonderful it was when he was a boy - apparently the water is so deep that it stays at a constant four degrees centigrade - that is the temperature at which water is at its densest you know, fascinating! The problem in that region now is being caused by logging - all those pulped trees that fall through our letter boxes each morning as junk mail - they are causing the biggest

environmental problems in Siberia. You see, they have to log on the edge of the rivers because of the problem of transportation. This means that there is a bare patch around each main river which is subject to erosion. The small tributaries are blocked by the workings and the trees are no longer there to provide a filtering system for the melting snows. The result is that when the snow melts, the water runs down in great torrents and fills the river in a rush, causing flooding and wearing away the banks. Disastrous!

There are a few attempts at conservation and recycling in Russia, but like so many Soviet ideas, they flounder on beurocracy. I like the idea that if you hand in five kilos of paper, you get a voucher to enable you to buy a good book. OK in principle, but often, like in the bottle recycling they say, 'Sorry, we can't take your paper or bottles because we have no boxes to store them in!' The bottle recycling idea did not come from any concern for the environment though, the miners who were supposed to obtain silica for the glass works decided that it was too hard a job and refused to work, so no silica, no glass, no vodka bottles. This year if you want to buy vodka, you must take back an empty bottle in return - that is if you can find a shop with any vodka to sell!

Well, at least in those early days of Valodia's boyhood, and in your time there was some untouched purity, some innocence in nature - Russia has grown up and become corrupted perhaps - even to the extent of the water supply - it seems symbolic of the times. Pure ideology giving way to a corrupted society."

"The communist idea of sharing can very quickly become 'I want what you have'. But as we travelled through Siberia it was less touched by the Revolution and the further East we went, the more that was so. We travelled the whole length of the trans Siberian railway - right to Vladivostok through Harbin in Manchuria. Often we would meet white Russians going the same route, you could tell the difference even then.

I remember in Harbin walking through the boulevards, kicking up leaves. It was autumn 1926 and I had a wonderful feeling of freedom. We did a concert in Harbin to earn money for clothes and for the next leg of the tour. It was like that in those days, hand to mouth. Nothing left over. We never had any money ourselves, but Irma bought us coats and a pair of shoes because my sandals had

worn through. In Moscow there were no clothes and no shoes even if you did have the money."

"Same again, Lilly. Last summer I was in Tsum just wandering around while I ate my ice cream - you know the one they sell in the doorway there is the best in Moscow. This day I queued for ages, it was chocolate, and while I ate it I wandered round the store. It's funny how you go through the motions of window shopping, even when there's nothing there. Anyway, suddenly there was a flurry of excitement. People rushed by nearly knocking me over and on the second floor there was this enormous crowd of people. Apparently some boots had arrived from Hungary and everyone wanted to buy. The problem with that sort of thing is that often there is such a crowd and no one wants to lose their place, so you can queue for something - not even knowing what's being sold. Apparently one of the advantages of being a doctor in the Soviet Union is that your patients tip you off about when the next consignment is coming in so you save a lot of time not queueing in the wrong places."

"Well, that's how it was then too. .. From Harbin we continued to Vladivostok and then on to Shanghai in a Russian boat called 'Erevan'. The whole trip was amazing. After the drab surroundings in Russia, China was so alive, so colourful. In Shanghai everything seemed to hang down in the streets, lanterns, clothes, flags, chimes. We just could not get over the beauty and dress of the Chinese. The China we saw was not the China you see nowadays. The women were beautiful with dark hair, buns, fringes, but nicely styled. They wore silks, cheongsams with embroidered dragons. And such colour, such colour."

"Colour seems very important. You've frequently mentioned the lack of colour, as if Russia, with the Revolution had become grey, colourless, perhaps with just a little Revolutionary red. Was that psychological, do you think? A greyness of the mind?"

"Possibly, to some extent, but it was reality too. Russia was drab. China was alive and colourful - but of course after the Revolution, the same happened to them. Look at them now, on television if you see the Chinese, in China I mean, not abroad, but in

China itself - they all look the same, men and women - all in their Mao style uniforms."

"No individuality - A lot of industry but no creativity."

"How can you lose such vigour? I don't know. The young women were smart and to some extent westernised - but the older women clung to tradition - have they lost that too I wonder?"

There were so many women with tiny little feet - I couldn't understand that at the time, although later it was explained to me that they bound them as children to stop them growing - it was considered beautiful. Again an example of children suffering for their parents ideals The other strange thing - in fact horrifying - was the number of people who had no noses. This was apparently because so many Chinese had syphilis!"

"That's true; syphilis destroys the nasal bones and the nose collapses. On X-ray they get what looks like, and is termed, a 'worm-eaten-skull', sounds horrible! When it happens in congenital syphilis, it gives a 'saddle nose'. You can get a similar appearance in leprosy - I saw a patient once who had a plastic nose that he fitted over the gap, but of course they did not have such things in those days. Nowadays the way to destroy your nasal septum is to snort cocaine - one vice replacing another - it would have been opium then, I suppose."

"Funny you should mention it! When we were on the boat from Shanghai to Hanko there was this strange smell and I could not understand what it was - I was thirteen at the time - but there was a row of old people on the boat smoking and the smell came from them. Our nurse told me it was opium.

There were a lot of things wrong with China of course. It seemed a marvellous place to us but there were injustices, there were harmful traditions.The opium, the poverty of the common people, ...It was supposed to be socialist, but a sort of socialism which made no sense at all to me.

When we stayed in Shanghai, we had little money so we were in a sort of guest house run by a woman and her son. She had no husband. They were European, I think Jewish. It was an old narrow building - a terrace. There were no toilets, no running water. We had

a little screen in the corner of the room and there they would put a bucket of some kind, and you went there .. to the toilet. Not very sanitary, but as young girls, we made a joke of it."

"Well if the toilets in Russia were anything like they are today, I doubt you noticed the difference! Our children were horrified when we took them to Siberia - the big hotels and some of the flats are reasonably furnished but the public toilets and the ones in the Hotels .. you can hardly call them 'conveniences'! The kids had a worst toilet competition - it was won by the 'bog' in the garage on the Europe, Asia border - I won't describe it but I think it was the only one we didn't manage to use! To be honest, I prefer the holes in the ground that we use in the Dachas."

"It was only after we left that guest house that we were given little leaflets by our director telling us about Syphilis - we had to be very clean, wash our hands and be very careful about using toilets. We did not know this was a venereal disease... so we were terrified of catching it. .. We thought it was in the air, a germ like a cold bug.

There were a lot of injustices towards women also in China at that time. Men having several wives. I tell you, I would never share a man! ... And then the women with tiny bound up feet, we felt for them ... you can imagine as dancers how we felt about their restriction of movement.

When Irma saw this, she made up a dance called 'The Liberation of the Chinese women'. We danced it in bare feet - we did anyway but the contrast was important between the binding and our bare feet. We used Mozart's Turkish march, which was the only time we used any Mozart music for dancing. We had cymbals and other instruments added and we all wore blue silky dresses split right up the side in Chinese fashion so that we could move easily. It was a very clever performance - Irma was a talented choreographer - and the audiences loved it.

The other injustice which struck us was the Rickshaws. At first we refused to get in them. .. It was horrifying that a man should pull a little cart, like a beast of burden. We would not use them. But then we were told, 'Look, these men depend on such rides for their livelihood. Isn't it better that they pull a couple of young girls rather than a big fat man?' .. So then we agreed to get in .. but it was an awful experience - degrading.

In China the theatres were open plan with no scenery and no curtains. The stage was round in the centre of an enormous hall and there were braziers at each corner burning coke. It was terribly cold. These enormous families would come to see us... perhaps sixty people together, children .. and so many wives, grandparents all came and loved to see us dance. We were very much a success. We tried to go to European restaurants while we were in China because we found we could not eat Chinese food It was quite extreme I think then, not like the Chinese restaurants in London or Europe. There were even some Jewish restaurants and we went there because all the girls loved Jewish food.

After Shanghai we took the boat to Hankor. The passage took four days and was quite frightening. We had to stay off the decks near Nanking ... there was talk of fighting and revolution. We made our own food below decks. Bacon and eggs and beans the whole time.

Hankor was incredible. It surpassed all we had seen before. As the boat docked Mrs Sun Yat-sen came to greet us wearing a sable coat and hat. We thought she was a princess, she was so striking, ...so regal. Her husband had died by then, so we did not have the chance to meet him, but her brother Chiang Kai-shek came to see us frequently.

We were taken to the palace, each of us had our own servant and our own waiter! .. Imagine! A personal waiter to give you food! The food in the palace was western. Porridge with cream, toast, marmalade, ... marvellous. There were, of course many English people settled in China and they influenced the aristocracy , the ruling classes. We were bewildered at first by the palace. ... Such a contrast with what we had come from. ...It was a large Gothic building ... hundreds of rooms, awesome really.

It was in Hankor that I succumbed to the dreadful cold on stage and developed a second bout of pneumonia. I was looked after very well in the palace although I was confined to bed for three weeks. I was so lonely all the time, I could not quite understand why, but the girls would not visit me. They occasionally came to the door and opened it a crack and would peep in cautiously and say 'How are you, Lilly?' but when they went off to performances, it was so quiet there. I was scared stiff in that enormous place with no one to talk to, so I would ring my bell and a Chinese servant would come in and press his hands together and bow and say 'What would you like

Madam?' Well I didn't really want anything, just to talk or some company, so I would have a think and then say ..'Perhaps some hot tea' and in a few minutes, it would be there. After I recovered I asked the girls 'Why didn't you come to see me?' and they said 'But Lilly, we thought you had syphilis and that we would all catch it!

My mother had a premonition that I was ill. She dreamed that she was carrying me on her back through a market with raw meat.A very bad omen. Dreams are very important to Russians they are a superstitious race. My mother was worried that she had not heard from me for some time so she wrote to the director and he told her that I had been ill - but by that time I was gaining strength. ..In fact, as I recovered, I would sneak out of my room and explore the palace. I went on the roof, up to the pinnacles and imagined I was Peter Pan because I had seen an old silent film of Peter Pan when we were in Shanghai."

"Superstitions and omens are difficult to explain. The Italians are very superstitious too - we have little gestures and amulets against the evil eye - like the coral horns you might have heard of. Sometimes drivers hang a red plastic copy on their windscreens. And dreams are very important. I have a book my grandmother gave me called 'Il grande libro dei sogni' - the big book of dreams - and I used to look up the meaning of my dreams every morning - I suppose, now that I work in Psychotherapy, I am still doing the same - perhaps I fool myself that now my interpretations are based on science and Freud. ... But where does superstition and religion and faith meet? I often have premonitory dreams, particularly when someone in the family is going to die. When I was pregnant, I was asphyxiated by leaking gas and I was saved because my husband dreamed that his grandmother told him to wake up and rescue me. When my son was born .. he was delivered on that very grandmother's birthday - was that a coincidence?"

"There was another omen in Shanghai. The woman who ran the guest house had an enormous mirror on her stairwell. It crashed to the ground one day and smashed. The lady was distraught - such bad luck - but perhaps it heralded Isadora's death? I don't know ... One can make too much of these things. When you are young you don't want to hear of bad omens. You just want to have a good time!

The strangest part of China was Tamsin. It was a very European town. In Shanghai there were different quarters, English, Chinese ... But in Tamsin it was just like being in Europe - Not like China at all. There were English and French streets, a big theatre and concession shops, but the houses were detached suburban houses with European families. I met a family there who had a daughter a bit older than me but who looked as if she could have been my sister. They took me to their home, gave me clothes, it was like my birthday - not that I had experiences that sort of birthday since we left England. ... By coincidence, they came to see me when I was touring in America. The girl was married then - but strangely, I don't remember their name.

It is odd how people crop up in the most unlikely places We met Eugene Chen - the premier of the Philippines - Isadora created such wide interest, such a differing public - there were four Chen children - Sylvia, Lolanta, Percy and Jack. .. Later they came to Russia too and settled in the Soviet Union. Jack Chen eventually married one of our original girls - she had left the school when the other immigrants did and returned to New York, where we met her again on tour. She came back to Russia with us and married Jack - Lucy Flaxman was her name.

Our tour ended in Peking. I can only remember endless Buddhas, so many Gods, the forbidden city. Really it was so breathtaking that it swamps my memory. It's all confused. .. But I do remember that we had to be careful. There were rumours of revolution and it was dangerous to walk the streets.

Going home we could not get a boat from Shanghai - we needed to go to Vladivostok to take the trans Siberian railway and we were in a hurry because we had just heard about Isadora's death. The passenger boats were all full. I think people were trying to get away - they were afraid of the unrest. Eventually we managed to get a very small Russian freighter to take us - called the 'Indigirka'. It was quite a long, rough passage - all the girls were laid out - they were all sea sick. Just as in the boat that took us from England, I was the only one unaffected - the only one on my feet. At least I got my own back for Hancor!"

Chapter XI

"On the way back to Moscow, we nearly lost everything.All our hard earned clothes, costumes, scenery. Everything was packed in big wicker baskets stacked in the carriage with us. We travelled third class but we had some makeshift bunks, with rough mattresses on them.

At one stop, half way across Siberia, I was dozing on my bunk and the others went out to stretch their legs. Schneider said, 'Now look, Lilly, you keep an eye on the trunks ..keep watch while we go out'.

Well, I fell asleep and woke to the ding - ding - ding of the train stopping and terrible yells outside. The baskets had gone but Schneider realised immediately and got them to stop the train - It was like a scene from one of those Italian westerns."

"Sergio Leone?"

"Yes - you know, the one where he makes the train stop so that he can ride out on his horse? ... It was like that. Schneider leapt out of the train onto a horse and trap and shouted 'Follow that cart!'. We could just see a cart with our belongings fading away in the distance.

Well, when he caught up with them, he yelled, 'Give up or I shoot!'. He had a very large key in his pocket and he made it stick out as if he had a gun under his jacket. ...They jumped from the cart and ran off leaving our possessions behind.

So, although I did feel that I had let the girls down, I could not stop laughing at the sight of our director brandishing a key and acting the hero - it was so funny!

Back in Moscow we were allowed to go and see our families. I was so proud of my shoes -red leather and shining with polish. I had a warm coat and a scarf, long white socks and a hat with a pom-pom.And we had these boots - soft soles we used to call them - they were made of translucent sort of yellowish plastic.... you might have seen Wellington boots like that. We needed waterproof shoes ... It is so muddy in Moscow in winter. All of us girls had the same. My mother was pleased to see me and I was happy to see that things had improved a little for her while we had been away.

Isadora's best friend, an American lady, Mary Detsy, was waiting for us at the school. She came to explain what had happened. ...So far we had just heard a word or two on the radio. She said that she had tried to stop Isadora going out that night - she said 'It's so close this evening Isadora. Why go out? Stay here'. She had an uncomfortable feeling about it. But you see, Isadora's biggest fear was to grow old. She did not want to die old and infirm .. she was afraid to lose her ease of movement. So, maybe by dying the way she did .. although it was tragic and such a loss for us, for music, for dance, ... for the world. Maybe it was the right thing for Isadora - she was spared what she saw as the pain of old age.

Mary Detsy stayed with us for a while, as we prepared for America. She had been with us before, we liked her and found her very entertaining. She was a very creative woman - not a dancer, but she had made dress designs for Isadora.

One stunningly elegant dress she made from the simplest design. Two metres of pure silk, folded in half, with a vertical slit each side for the arms and a horizontal slit just short of the fold for the neck. This was tied with a wide belt so that it hung loosely draped over the shoulders and the extra material at the back formed a sort of hood. All her designs used expensive materials. ... Raw silk was her favourite for Isadora. She bought cloth for her in Paris.

Soon after our return, the impresario Sol Hurok, came to speak to Irma. Isadora had approached him to arrange the American tour. Isadora was really American, well, from Irish ancestors, although she loved Europe and considered herself European - she felt more appreciated in Europe, I think. But she had this ambition to show us to America - to really dazzle them with our performances and show the Americans what could be done. .. So we did feel that this was something we should consider after her death, to keep her spirit alive.

When Hurok came to see us, Irma signed the contract straight away and within a very short time we were on our way again! It did take us some months to prepare and to rehearse our repertoire - we learned a lot of Chopin and two symphonies, Shubert's sixth and ninth .. the ninth was my favourite...

This was the period in 1928 when all the English subjects had to leave Russia. Aunty Annie and her boys had retained their British passports, so they left - Barney with Tanya and Mossy, who was twenty four left first. .. Then Annie and twenty one year old Freddy followed.

We had a big party in the country to say goodbye. It was so sad. ... But we somehow knew we would meet again, ... and we did meet up in France on a couple of occasions. When we were working in America, we used to take holidays in France .. once about half way through the tour in 1930, and once at the end in '31. We stayed in a place called Penchentrain - I think that was the name ...the same place where the Ayatollah lived in exile before he went back to Iran - before they had their revolution!

We did do concerts in Paris - Chopin and Mazurkas - we had a special repertoire for the French because they were not fond of Tchaikovsky. ...But mainly we rested in France.It was a haven of tranquillity. We played, we ate, we slept and we ate again. Irma had to pay extra for our pension because we were eating too much!

Freddy came out to meet me in France. He was very fond of me but I was taken with a French boy, Pierre at the time and I didn't really want to see him so I hid in a trunk. The girls were looking for me everywhere and eventually found me and pulled me out. They nearly killed me for mistreating him. He took us all out for a meal and we got through trays and trays of food - it all disappeared in five minutes. we ate like horses. Freddy thought it all extraordinarily funny. He wanted to walk with me afterwards. He was a very shy young boy and so he didn't really manage to say what he wanted to say .. and I didn't help him at all - I didn't really want to know.

Oh, I was hard on him , I know, and rather cruel I suppose. But then teenagers are. I had known him as a child. I didn't want things to change between us - I didn't want such seriousness. I didn't know what I wanted.

Actually the thought of marriage and seriousness frightened me. I remember when I was about ten years old we went to a Dacha; a charming little summer house in the Caucasus. Our director bought us some pretty embroidered dresses and wide brimmed felt hats - I couldn't stop standing in front of the mirror and looking at myself. While I was admiring my hat I heard a conversation drift up through the open window. The voices were telling a tale of someone who had recently married and then, almost immediately died ...so I thought 'Marriage must be a very serious problem!' That idea stuck with me subconsciously even when I was older.

Those times in the country, they really kept us going when we were young. We did perform of course, We performed dances and concerts but we also had holidays in the country. The Caucasus were

my favourite. We usually slept all in one room, but when it was very hot our beds were all put out on the wooden veranda at the back of the Dacha. I loved it there. ... I loved Ukraine, Crimea, Georgia ... going to these wonderful beaches by the black sea. We did have some good times. And in the south everything was so much more alive, people were happier, they had enough to eat. In contrast, Russia itself was barren, I saw peasants with scurvy ... I don't know if they had scurvy before the Revolution, because it was before my time, but they were certainly suffering from malnutrition after the Revolution.

Moscow in 1928 was not a good place for us to be. The Bolshoi were so restrictive, so uncooperative and Irma lost patience with them. She wanted to move us. The big theatre were always like that, a law unto themselves. ... Wanting to cling to old ways - not seeing the promise of the future. I think it was a bit like that with the Revolution - people of vision, with intelligence started things off and then the petty ignorant people after their own gain, diverted the original aim. Lunacharski was an arts minister with ideas but the Bolshoi always resisted them. Gelzer herself was dreadful - she kept dancing till she was over sixty but would not let young dancers perform - such jealousy! Self seeking, ... not looking to the interest of the art form. People felt strongly about this but to no avail. There was even a brave demonstration when two young dancers threw themselves to their deaths over the balcony of the Bolshoi - they dashed their brains out in the stalls to draw attention to the injustices. ... A revolutionary gesture."

"So, once again the young are used, .. suffer for the Revolution, but gain no rewards from it. Is there ever any lasting benefit to be passed to future generations of children, I wonder?"

"If there is, I haven't seen it.

.... We finally left in the winter of 1929. We were so unprepared for the journey. My mother patched up my coat to make it look a little nicer, with a little bit of fur round the collar. The clothes we had bought in Harbin did not last us long, they had very hard wear for two years and all the time we were growing.

Something strange happened quite suddenly just before we left for America. - We all suddenly seemed to grow up! One minute we were children, the next we felt like young adults. ... One night we

decided to go to the cinema to see Conrad Wade - a German film, subtitled as they all were in those days. ...All we had were a few German films. We could not get into the first house, but one of the girl's uncles was the manager and he let us in free to the late show. It finished at midnight and we had to walk all the Boulevards back to the school and crept in, .. but of course we did get it next day! They said 'How could you stay out so late' and we said 'But we're grown up!' ... but we didn't repeat the escapade.

We managed to restock our wardrobe in Riga. The Baltic states were not part of the Soviet Union at that time. .. Irma bought us hats and shoes to make us look a bit more presentable for Europe. Riga was an enormous surprise for us. More impressive than China in a way, because it was European and unexpected. .. Gothic buildings, and such richness. I seem to be saying that about a number of places, I hate to repeat myself but I suppose the drabness of Russia was so penetrating that, like the hunger, the contrast struck you everywhere. Riga prepared us for Paris in a way. We passed through Paris very briefly, really just because Irma wanted to see Lisle - her best friend from the German school.

I just remember going across Paris in a Taxi, leaning from one window to another, trying to see more lights, more people - and Lisle was sitting with her long thin legs stretched across the middle - so fair, so pale.

The boat left from Cherbourg - the 'Coronia', Cunard line. .. How different it was from the boats we had travelled on before. I had slept previously with a threadbare old grey blanket ... it was rough and chafed your skin. On the boat we had two blankets each! One blue and one camelto remember this after sixty years ... you see I must have been impressed! They were so soft, we had to keep touching them. ... And monogrammed towels and sheets, and the bunks were so comfortable.

There were two girls to a cabin and our steward was nearly falling over us - he couldn't do enough for us. Coming from austere Russia - it was like the palace at Hankor all over again - and we were only second class! Irma was first class but we did have our main meal in the evening with her.

The evenings, they were quite something. We used to sneak out onto the balustrade above the ballroom and watch the dancers, the women dressed so wonderfully. We saw them foxtrot ... and you

know they were so tall! They were so tall and elegant compared to us - and so well groomed. It was like peeping in on Cinderella's ball!

Just before we arrived in New York Tamara came up to us and said - 'You four little ones', we were fifteen, 'You're not going to be allowed to land'. Of course she was joking ... but, you know, they didn't let us land! When the customs came, they put us through various tests. They turned our eyelids inside out to see if we had trachoma ... but we four were under age. The other six with Irma and our nurse, they were allowed into New York but it was just before Christmas and there were not the necessary officials there to give us entry permits - because of our age. So they put us on Ellis Island for three days.

We were so worried ... what was happening? ... where were the others? ..what were they doing? But they treated us very well, gave us good food and they gave us Christmas presents, manicure sets, socks, a whole variety of things ... they were very generous.

When we finally were allowed into New York we were spellbound, . the Statue of liberty, .. the Skyscrapers .. just impossible to describe. They took us to a hotel on eighth avenue - the 'Alamac' - we girls were there and Irma was at the 'Astoria'. Eighth and ninth avenues were in the process of being built then. I don't suppose the 'Alamac' exists any more but it was luxurious for us. Every room had a bathroom. The sheets were changed every day - we could have baths twice a day and it was so warm you could even open the windows in January!

Hurok gave us a dollar each and let us loose in Woolworths. There was nothing in the store over ten cents so we bought ten items each, stockings, scarves, make up .. amazing! Later many shops encouraged us to patronise them - for publicity I suppose - they would invite us in and give us discounts.

Our first concert was in the Manhattan opera house. We danced Schubert, Shumann's music for children and Chopin. I think we did take America by surprise, .. they loved us. I do regret that I was so young and didn't fully appreciate how important what I was doing could be. That sixth symphony was very rigourous, very difficult. We had to divide the dancing, it would have been too exhausting to dance the whole. The second movement was danced by the older girls, then we did the scherzo - and finally Isadora had put in a red Indian sort of movement. If you listen, the music lends itself to that and it was so appropriate to the American audience. Our

concert in Carnegie hall was a fantastic success. With Chopin's butterfly - Tara ra bum bum bum - so fast - we took them by storm.

In New York, I discovered that I had an aunty Tanya. She was my mother's cousin. She lived in Brooklyn above a little drug store which she ran. Her sister had married my uncle - cousins did sometimes marry in those days - so she was related to me twice. ... She used to make me laugh until I cried. She used to say, 'You know Lilly, I was so stupid - I should have married your uncle, he was for me and not for my sister - she never suited him, but I did'. She was never very happy with her husband - she did tell me that. So many of the marriages I heard of seemed unhappy then - the exception was Barney and Tanya. She was not Jewish and her parents opposed the marriage - but I never saw a happier couple. ... But my American Tanya, she was unlucky in love. She was so funny ... I think she would have liked me to marry her son, but I never was keen on him. What struck me then was how well they lived. They were all working people, but whenever her nephews visited her they had cars, they had possessions we would never dream of in Russia - including a fruit bowl on the sideboard, full of fruit - can you imagine?

There was a film running in New York of Roman Navaro, 'Pagan Love Song'. We begged our nurse to let us go. Irma had forbidden us to go to the cinema because we were supposed to rest - we had our Carnegie hall concert that evening - so we said 'Please come with us, then we won't get into trouble - and anyway Irma will never know'. So we went inside - and there was Irma sitting next to us! We were badly caught out but she smiled and she didn't say anything.

Afterwards we often went to the Cinema. I loved Ronald Coleman and Dolores del Rio but I never liked Greta Garbo, she was not feminine, I thought her false and I never liked her as an actress. I liked women to be soft, charming - not hard and masculine. ... And I sometimes liked to go on my own - I enjoyed the film all to myself - it was a luxury. I liked going shopping like that too - choosing on my own, without the influence of the others. When you have always lived on top of other people, a bit of independence is a luxury.

Soon everywhere we went we heard cheers of 'Duncan dancers, Duncan dancers!' they called us the 'Isadorables' too. In Detroit it was overwhelming. There were young students who threw roses onto the stage and, after the show, they carried us shoulder high from the theatre to the hotel. They were so moved by our

performance, by our revolutionary songs - they were not communists, but they were stirred by the music, by our dancing. In Detroit too I saw my first radio. Well, at first I thought it was a car accessory actually, because it was in Mr Ford's car - yes, Mr Ford's original Ford - he put his cars at our disposal. In America they were amazed that I knew so much music without ever having seen a radio!

The thing about being somewhere like America - in what I would call splendour, being successful, being feted, meeting famous, prominent people - the thing is that you become immune - yes, you remember leaving your family, your friends, ... but you do forget the devastation which you left behind, the dreadful conditions."

"You have nostalgia, but your memory is selective. That's the thing about bad experiences, our memories try to blot them out, but they are still there underneath., influencing our lives whether we like it or not. It's like that with pain too. Merciful forgetfulness - if we remembered pain I don't think a woman would ever have a second child. Forgetting is a sort of natural anaesthesia - although it is frightening to think sometimes, when we have an anaesthetic, is it just making us forget pain? Did we really experience the pain, say of an operation? And suppose one day we remember ...

With emotional pain I suppose we forget the experience but remember the hurt. The healing process is meant to make you remember the experience so that you realise why you are hurt - understand the source of your pain - I wonder sometimes if that is a good or bad thing. May it not be better sometimes to emphasise the good times, to keep looking through the rose coloured spectacles and to give children good experiences to cancel out the bad - rather than dredge up forgotten scenes. Is there a value in remembering how you starved in Russia, rather than just gorging yourselves on American ice cream?"

Chapter XII

"Our problems began when Marusia returned to Moscow, returned to Schneider and the schemers set up a rival school. We were not aware of that at the time. Marusia went back after six months and we toured the United States for nearly a year longer.

We were awoken from our American dream very abruptly. One day Irma assembled us all in her hotel room and told us that the Russian government had given us an ultimatum - either we go back to Russia, or we never see our parents again. Of course, all the girls wanted to return immediately but Irma's attitude changed. ... Her face hardened and she pulled a dollar from her bag. She called us fools and said 'Look girls, this is all that counts. We have a contract in Hollywood, we are going to teach the film people'.

We were horrified! We had thought we should teach factory girls. ... We were indoctrinated, brought up as pioneers, ... pioneers for the people, for revolution and for music and dancing. We were not materialistic.

Irma approached us the wrong way. We were after all children - She misjudged the situation and had become too distant from us. We just could not take all this in.All we knew was that we had to go home.

In fact, a lot had gone on behind our backs. Irma had broken her contract with Hurok and wanted to go to California - she did go to Santa Barbara and set up a small school. Hurok informed the Russian government that Irma was not giving us girls any money ... which was true! I wonder how much she made, we never saw any! So anyway, the Russians obviously said we must go home.

Then of course, we could not get home. We had no money! We were nine Russian girls aged from fifteen to nineteen, stranded in New York.

People were kind. Americans were generous and gave us things. We were taken one day to a shop and we all bought fur coats - they were rabbit - to prepare us for our journey. There was a benefactor but we never found out who it was. We were so naive letting Irma hold all the money.

Hurok had to pay for the boat. We travelled to Paris on the 'Isle de France', but when we arrived we found that nothing had been paid for ... the fares were to Paris only. We decided to appoint Tamara our

spokeswoman, she was the oldest, and we went to the Embassy and then the station and persuaded them to let us have tickets to Riga and pay at the other end. I'm sure you couldn't do that nowadays!

We used our wits. In Riga we did four concerts on our own and made the money for our fares. The audiences were mainly young people.

At the Russian border the customs took most of our things away ... so depressing ... no rewards to show for our journey, like it was all for nothing ... We finally arrived at Byelorussia Station. Everyone was on sledges. It was a hard winter. Moscow looked like a little village swamped in snow. ... It did not have the 'command' of a capital city. It looked smaller, darker, even more insignificant than I had remembered. My mother came to meet me on a sledge and I said to her 'Why didn't you warn me? How could you let me come back to this! You must be mad not to tell me never to come back!'

She had a new flat, near the centre in Petrovka. This time it was eight families in eight rooms. Four stoves in the tiny kitchen, one for every two families. The smell of cabbage again. There was a naked thing lying on the kitchen table - it looked like a skinned cat. 'Oh it's rabbit Lilly, you'll see it is nice, you will like it better than chicken!' I never did, but then there was no chicken for comparison. You needed to know someone who knew a farmer just to get a piece of pig's fat.

Things were so much worse. It was not just my memory. I had come back to starvation. I think that was when things became more depressing for me. Knowing I had come back - to what? That things were not going to improve."

"It's the hopelessness that becomes overwhelming, Lilly. When you can say to yourself, look, I'll put up with this for so long because it will get better. .. When your sacrifice, your effort is an investment in your future, or your children's future, you can put up with adversity, you can survive. And maybe that's why women sometimes seem to be able to take so much suffering .. because they don't dwell just on the here and now, they are looking to the next generation.But when you see no future, or someone takes your future away ... despair pushes hope aside."

"And how could my mother bring me to that? How could I raise my children in that barren world?"

Lilly's voice trailed off.. she shuddered as if to shake off the past and pull herself together.

"Yes, it was and is barren but despite that there is a certain feeling of belonging there - we have both left something of ourselves behind in Russia - I sometimes feel that I am visiting myself in Siberia. It is the sad child in me, the deprived child that I see in those I meet there and I come away understanding myself better ... and perhaps appreciating the other side, the happy side that can enjoy herself despite adversity. ...But at that age, you must have felt full of despair for the future.

What did you come back to? What of the school? Was there anything left of your life before America?"

"The school had been dissolved by Schneider and he made the pupils join Marusia's troupe. The government told us we need not have returned from America because there was another Duncan group. Imagine how we felt! Anyway, there was a big argument and we joined forces. We had to accept what we considered to be inferior dancers but we flatly refused to work with Schneider.

We had a new director, Basamov, although Schneider refused to move out of the old school building - anyway later he went to prison so it made little difference.

We all lived separately from then on and got together only for concerts. We were a working troupe then, no longer a school.

One of our first concerts was in Leningrad and by chance we met the then deposed Lunacharski. He said 'You should never have come back. You must be quite mad to return to this! We have a five year plan of destruction here and everyone involved in the Revolution has been thrown out'.

.... You see, we left under Lenin and we returned to Stalin. He was becoming powerful and Lunacharski said he would destroy the arts. The contrast was terrible. Where there had been improvement before, everything was destroyed.

Leningrad was a little better than Moscow - it always managed to retain something of the past. We stayed in a hotel with circus people and it was not so bad. Lunacharski managed to arrange a few concerts for us which we did for peanuts. But later we learned that we could do some concerts on the side - 'Haltourki' they were called. We earned twenty times as much for them. Everyone in Russia is doing

that all the time - everyone is out for what they can get despite their ideals. We were ignorant of these business deals, we were so young, but we learned by survival. ... We became what you now call 'street wise'.

We did nearly have an opportunity to return to the big theatre when a famous tenor Kavslowski wanted to put on Orpheus with us dancing in the underworld - but as usual the Bolshoi management would not allow it. They never changed."

Chapter XIII

"I was seventeen when we first returned from America. Freddy and Mossy came to visit and Freddy wanted me to go back to England and marry him. I wanted to wait. I didn't have a passport. I could have had a British passport because I had been born in London after all. I remember as they left Mossy said 'Come on Monkey face get on the train, come back to London!'. He always called me Monkey face.

The Russians would not give me back my birth certificate or passport. They said, 'You live here, you're Russian, you'll stay!'.

Barney was back with Tanya living once more in Moscow. He wrote and told Mossy that they would not let me leave and Mossy wrote back, 'Before you shake your dog, I'll be in Moscow'. .. I think he meant shake it's tail, but never mind, the sentiment was there.

One day I came home after rehearsals and my mother said, 'Guess who is waiting for you'. It was Mossy!

There was at the time a friend of my mother who had a son Gregory, Grisha, and he hung around me all the time. But Mossy came every day to see me and I began to realise that he was falling for me, he was getting guey eyed! I told Gregory, but he started pleading with me. ... I couldn't stand it. I said 'Please, leave me alone. Leave me to make up my own mind'.

Mossy used to walk me to concerts to protect me, but one night, while I was in my dressing room, Gregory burst in and chased me round the room. The girls had tried to warn me but he took me by surprise. ... I managed to get free and I ran downstairs to Mossy. I was shaking and I just fell on him. Fortunately Mossy was a very sensible person. He went upstairs and spoke gently to Grisha and said 'Leave her alone, be a man, you are an attractive chap and you will soon find a girl but you can't force yourself on someone, it doesn't work that way'.

A few weeks later Mossy told me he was wanting to start a new page of his life - so he asked me to marry him. We married on my nineteenth birthday in 1932 and I continued to dance for another year. Although Moss thought I was getting too tired working such long hours and that I should stop. .. So, for a while I became a housewife. - that's until I met Tanya and she said I was looking very suburban. I was invited to join a small troupe, there were six of us, Mussia,

Tamara, Valya, Shura and Lyena and myself. We danced together for quite a while.

In 1937 Barney was arrested. I was pregnant at the time and Leonora was born in 1938. They kept Barney in the concentration camp for nine years. When he was released he had cancer. ... So many of them got cancer from the camps. I don't know if it was the malnutrition, or because they were made to mine where there were radioactive materials, Uranium and so forth - or if it was just the atrocious conditions, the cold, the hopelessness of the gulag. So many never came back at all. The world seemed to have gone crazy. ... So many arrests. .. So many deaths. And it was all for lies. They called them the 'enemies of the people'. Mussia lost her brother Oleg, Lyena lost her father Fedorov, Shura's husband was taken -he was a film producer then - he was force marched and beaten to get him to the camps"

It is different in Russia now, Stalin and the hard liners have given way to Perestroika - whatever that may be. But walking down Gorky street one can feel the double standards, the illusion of new Russia - even in the name - on one side of the street the old name - Gorky Street, the discredited Bolshevik name, and on the other side the new, old label Tverskaya - the street you would have walked down before the Revolution, before all the names were changed to Heroes of communism. They haven't even bothered to change all the labels, I suppose they think it will all change back again someday.

It was all the same to me as I tried to ignore the blister wrapped in my reused, restuck, last band aid. I limped past the 'Won't take you anywhere' Taxis and 'can't sell you anything' shops and thought of how you were starving, always starving. And then a fleet of Troikas - the official cars that keep the double standards going by having their own traffic lane - seared, barracuda like down the central reservation, scattering the frightened minnows that were battered Ladas, - almost Fiats - wiperless, handleless, tape held together. And I thought ... Keep hoping, Chelavyek.

Chapter XIV

"We were in Uzbekistan when the war broke out, the great patriotic war they call it in Russia. I had been afraid of being away from the family, trapped at that time, six thousand miles away. It is a nightmare to feel cut off from your family, your origins - and not being able to do anything about it"

"Yes, I can understand that - it is like being cut off from part of yourself, especially if you have left a daughter or son behind. We need to be able to move away from the centre, to explore the world but we also need the security of knowing that we can return at will - and that our home is secure during our absence.

Have you heard of Bowlby? He came up with the idea that children, in order to develop and become confident adults, need to be able to explore the world from a safe base. In other words the toddler crawling into the next room after a fallen toy needs to know that mother is still there waiting for him. I think we act like that all through our lives - we need to judge the right physical distance and also the emotional distance between ourselves and our 'base'.

Physically, I have felt this on travelling far away to Russia and other countries. But the most vivid example I had was in Western Australia, in Perth. There distances are so great, you feel sort of in touch with infinity and the remoteness is tangible and somehow oppressive. I went out on a boat to an Island off the west coast. The sea was rough but, like you, I am a good sailor. However on this occasion I was overwhelmed with the feeling of isolation - I realised that there was nothing between me and Antarctica in one direction, that to the west the nearest land was somewhere around Cape Town and to the east there was nothing but desert. The feeling of being cut off from all I knew, and from my reference points was intense. Maybe that's how people feel when they die away from home?

It is as if we drift farther away, the umbilical cord becomes stretched thinner and our hold on humanity becomes more tenuous ... until the fear of total aloneness drives us to turn back - to get closer .. whereupon the terror of suffocation and annihilation forces us away again. The dilemma of life is trying to find the balance.

So, yes, I can imagine what it was like being in Uzbekistan, so far from Leonora and Mossy and hearing that your home could be destroyed by war!"

"Oh it was one of my worst fears realised! ..We had gone there for a concert tour. It was a six day journey by train but our manager asked if anyone wanted to go by air. I wanted to spend another six days with my family so I agreed to try it. I had never flown before and I was the only one to go on the plane, the other girls were afraid and took the train. But they arrived exhausted. It took them two days to recover. I arrived fresh but a little shaky.

We had only been there a few days preparing our concert when we heard Molotov broadcast on the radio - we were at war with Germany! Well, from then on it was panic. I said we must go home at once or we will never see our families again. We managed to get rail tickets but it took two weeks to get back to Moscow. It seemed the whole of Europe was running, trains were chaotic, all communication broke down.

When I got back I just packed everything in the house, tablecloths, clothes, I tried to take whatever I could to use as barter. Mossy was not in the Army because he had contracted typhus when he was a child and it had affected his heart, but his job was important so they asked him to stay in Moscow. He would join us later.

I decided to go east and try to get as near to the Chinese border as possible. I had my mother, Mossy's mother Annie, and I picked up Leonora from Tanya's where she had been staying. Marika, a strange girl who lived in the same block insisted on coming too. She had been married to a very handsome man and had a child when suddenly she fell in love with this little ugly man - I never liked short men, I suppose my father was one - and she left her husband and child and went to live with him - next to Tanya in the country.

We all went together in the train, two ... three .. four days we kept travelling. Through a bombardment when we wondered if the train could survive.. But we did get through somehow. Peasants came and sold us food when the train stopped. And at least we kept our sense of humour - a laugh goes a long way when you're hungry.

We were heading for Kazakstan. After four days we reached a prosperous looking village called Chardayaka. We found one room with a peasant family. ... We had three beds and we settled there. I wrote to my husband and he said ' Lilly, if you are settled there, stay there until you hear from me'.

We did stay for a while but then we had to move on, keep finding safer places. We learned to barter, to save everything. Buy

salt from one place and exchange it for bread Well, we survived the war.

After the fighting was over we returned to Moscow. It had not fared as badly as some cities, for instance Kiev had more or less been completely destroyed. But times were naturally very hard. ..Rebuilding lives, families trying to get back together"

"Valodia told me a story about the bed bugs in Moscow after the war. Apparently the old wooden houses that constituted the major part of the living space in Moscow were alive with bed bugs. However, the superstition is that when people are feeling good about themselves or are pulling together as they do when fighting a war, the bed bugs live in harmony with the peasants and give no bother. When depression set in at the end of the war and people lost their sense of purpose, felt despair about their future, then the bed bugs multiplied and made life a misery. The government responded by bulldozing a great number of the old wooden houses to make room for the concrete apartment blocks which give such a dull appearance to Moscow today. When the wooden houses were demolished the bed bugs ran riot and for approximately five years after the war people living in central Moscow could hardly get a night's sleep, they were bitten mercilessly!

Moscow never seemed to quite be able to cope with biting insects. I think because the new buildings were put up so hastily with so much scrub land around and the land being so wet and peaty. In the suburbs the mosquitoes are out in force as soon as the snow melts. I firmly believe that there are two things indispensable to a traveller in the Soviet Union - toilet paper and insect repellent. Once I ran out and had to resort to that awful green paste made of herbs that they use."

"Oh it is pretty dreadful stuff, but it works at least! .. but, you know there were plenty of lice after the war too yes, it was a depressing time ... But, luckily for me, there were also some strange quirks of fate in those days. To my surprise, in 1946 I managed to get a passport and we prepared to leave.

The Russians believe that you assume the nationality of your father and since my father was Austrian, they decided to regard me as Austrian. ... I was then so pleased that my mother had not married that red headed country school teacher that she had been so in love

with. She may have had a marriage of convenience - but at that time it was convenient to me. Unfortunately Mossy had taken Russian nationality so that he could stay with me, but had we known And had I thought it through, I could have taken my mother out perhaps on an Austrian passport. Anyway, Mossy did have an important job so he decided to stay and settle his affairs before trying to join me.

The embassy tried to put us off from going to England. Europe had been ravaged by the war and we were told it was in chaos - 'You don't know what you are going to get yourself into, where are you taking that little girl?'

Leonora was seven years old - nearly eight - about the same age as I was when people said the same things to my mother - where was she taking me? To what?

We left on a cargo boat. There were only five men, myself and Leonora. The sea was mined and the water very rough. The boat was thrown around like a matchstick. It was very difficult to travel in those days and almost impossible to obtain documents - I don't think you can ever realise how lucky we were to get away.

We believed Mossy would eventually follow - I never knew that as soon as we left he was arrested for signing the papers giving Leonora permission to leave. For five years we heard nothing. The waiting was so painful, so inexplicable. I had letters telling me 'Forget about Mossy, stay where you are, don't try to do anything for him'.

Only later did I hear that he had died in prison after five years he died of a broken heart....."

* * * * *

Today I walked down to the sea, Lilly. ...the bay beneath your villa. There had been a storm and the waves were unusually high for Majorca. There was even a water spout gyrating out at sea, ... I've never seen one before so close up.

Every time I walk down to that bay it looks so different ... sometimes sand; sometimes rocky. Last time it was covered in thick dead seaweed a couple of feet thick so that you sank in it's soft sponginess as you walked. Today the waves had washed the weed away, sucked it back into the depths, and fresh rocks had been exposed, the ground was hard, unyielding underfoot.

It stops you in your tracks, looking at the sea, ... what it can do in an afternoon. The awesome power of a waterspout, of a wave.

When I was a child, when I was lonely or felt unloved, rejected, when I sensed the pain of childhood, I would walk by the sea, feel the water round my feet ... I would feel in touch with infinity, with some primaevael source of power, something which reduced all petty inconveniences and hardships into insignificance.

Most people look at the sea pounding the shore and only see waves coming in, coming in, ... but look closer and we can see the current pulling out. Each force has it's opposite, equal and opposite, creating and destroying.

We may have our revolutions, our wars, our visionaries and our suffragettes charging full pelt to squeeze us into a new mould for society, for our world ... but, like the sea, humanity has a tendency to turn full circle. The oppressed become oppressors, the abused become abusers, the nouveaux riche exploit the nouveaux poor.

I thought of you, Lilly, as I walked along the seashore. I thought of you and your mother braving the sea on your way to a new life - and of you and Leonora buffeted by the waves in the cargo ship - completing the circle.

How will it be for me? How will my circle close?

How did you touch me, Lilly? A generation apart and yet the child in you speaks to the child in me.

Have you noticed how distant sounds can sometimes be heard clearer than those close at hand? I was walking along the cliff top and the wind was blowing so that I could not hear my companion's voice, but the sounds from the valley came to me quite distinctly - memories are like that, echoes from the distant past are more intense, more meaningful. So it is with our memories, Lilly. Echoes of childhood sear deeper into our souls.

Can we put aside the trappings of adulthood, the millstones we collect to stifle spontaneity, creativity and love of life, and believe that we, Isadora's children can move gracefully through life rejoicing in the freedom we find together?.

Together we can retrace our echoes and reach those special children, which are ourselves, the child within who accompanies us on life's journey, who we ignore at our peril, and whom, cherished, brings love and enrichment to our old age.