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Preface

I WANT TO TELL YOU some (historically) true love stories, of one kind and another, from around the time of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. They are all memorable stories, worth repeating. They all involve Russians and Anglo-Saxons; in most cases, the love affair enabled a Russian woman to leave Soviet Russia, thereby saving her from persecution, a slow death in the gulag, or simply execution. (The name *gulag* for the Soviet slave labour camps derived from the acronym of the Main Administration of Corrective-Labour Camps and Colonies.) I have chosen these stories, among the thousands from this time that might be told, because I am interested in the people involved, both those who are, or used to be, very well known, and the less familiar faces. Then, long after choosing the stories, I started to find extraordinary connections between them.

Although most of these stories have been told before, often in fragments and in different places, there is also a great deal in this book that is quite new. Nowhere will you find so much about the Krylenko family as in Chapter 2. No one has ever devoted more than a few lines to Natasha Duddington, whose life occupies Chapter 3. Hugh Brogan's biography of Arthur Ransome does not mention Lola Kinel, who is the heroine of Chapter 4; as her autobiography ends with the mid-1930s, what I tell of her subsequent years is quite new. No one has ever told the story of Lev Karsavin's great love affair in the context of his sister Tamara's life. And so on.

Some of the leading Bolsheviks are also involved in these stories. This turns them into real people rather than cardboard symbols of oppression and torture. The kindest of all the big-name Bolsheviks

turns out to have been Maxim Litvinov; he figures in the first and last of my stories. Of all Stalin's pre-Revolutionary comrades and post-Revolutionary colleagues, he was the only one to escape the purges of the 1930s. That he was married to an English woman cannot be taken as the sole cause of his preservation, for he was not unique in this: Yakov Peters – Bruce Lockhart's respectful jailor in 1918 – had also married an English woman, and he was executed in the late 1930s just like all the other old Bolsheviks.

As I said, my interest is in the people rather than the politics of this time. I want to know how the couples met and fell in love and how they managed their bi-cultural partnership. The women all became exiles, and enriched the culture of their adoptive country at the very moment when the cultural values of Tsarist Russia were being almost totally extinguished by Marxist materialism. I find it striking how much literature played a part in their stories. It was often through literature, mainly novels, that they learned of their partners' culture. My second and last stories are about women who were active in translating books, making the riches of one culture available to readers in another. And then, these were educated people and several of them wrote their own account of this time.

That some of these stories have been recorded in writing by the persons involved accounts for differences in the way I tell them. With the benefit of a first-hand narrative, I can offer – with luck – more insight into their experience. On the other hand, I have invented nothing. Whenever possible, I have drawn on multiple sources, combining several versions into the one that seems to me to be the closest to the truth, insofar as we can know it.

The great disadvantage of this approach is that, unlike invented stories, which come with a plot, a clear beginning, a middle and an end, real life stories are plotless and have no clear boundaries at all. There's nothing one can do about this: that's life.

To appreciate these stories, we need to know the context. So my first chapter sets the scene, with relevant episodes from the time of the Revolution. (Since there were three revolutions in Russia at the

beginning of the twentieth century – in 1905, in March 1917, and in November 1917 – I have reserved the capitalized form for the last of them, and lower cased, usually with a qualifying date, the previous ones.) I speak of ‘episodes’ in the Revolution because it requires a massive tome, such as Richard Pipes produced, to detail the Revolution and its aftermath. Pipes ended his narrative with the assassination of the Tsar and his family. For the purposes of my stories, I have included the civil wars up to 1923, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed.

A word about terminology: throughout this book, I have called the Party that seized power in the Revolution ‘the Bolsheviks’, although I am aware that on 6 March 1918 Lenin decreed that they were henceforth to be known as the Communist Party. The reason for my choice is quite simple: the change of name was a highly successful attempt at whitewashing. Communism was an admirable ideal, dissociated in the eyes of the world from the violence of the Bolsheviks and the state capitalism that they practised. The name stuck; the violence continued, and the capitalism that it masked continued unabated.

The conventions for transliterating Cyrillic to English have evolved steadily over the years. Maxim Litvinov, for instance, was still called Maksim Litvinoff in the 1940s. I have used the forms most commonly found today.

This choice causes some oddities: for Russian speakers, the name of Princess Marie Gagarin should be written *Gagarina*, but her printed memoir is signed *Gagarin*, and I have left it that way. Similarly, Tatiana Tchernavina signed herself *Tchernavin* in English.

The Russian pronunciation of the first name *Elena* causes some sources to transcribe it *Yelena*, and I have followed them. Max Eastman always referred to his wife as *Eliena*; I have retained his spelling for her name.

Even English (or in this case, Scottish) names can be problematic: Robert Bruce Lockhart, whose famous love affair features in Chapter 6, is frequently referred to as ‘Lockhart’, even though his

surname was actually 'Bruce Lockhart' (unhyphenated). When convenient, I have called him just 'Lockhart' too.

At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Latvians were called *Letts* and their soldiers *Letkish* troops. I have used *Latvian* without regard for the old names. Place names have also changed a good deal since the beginning of the twentieth century. Saint Petersburg was renamed *Petrograd* in 1914 (to avoid the Germanic *-burg* suffix), and then it became *Leningrad* after Lenin's death in 1924. It reverted to *Saint Petersburg* in 1991. For the sake of simplicity, I have used that name throughout (abbreviating the *Saint* to *St*), irrespective of the date. All other proper names are in the form most commonly found today.

Tsarist Russia used the Julian calendar, which was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in western Europe. The Bolsheviks brought their country into line by dropping the first thirteen days of February in 1918. (Russia still celebrates major feasts like Christmas according to the Julian Calendar.) I have used New Style dates throughout, while continuing to call the 'October' Revolution by its traditional name, even though it took place in November by the New Style calendar.

I have listed my sources at the end of each chapter – immediately before the reference notes – which strikes me as most convenient for the reader. And I name only the sources I refer to or quote from. A list of all the books, articles and websites I consulted would have taken far too many pages. All the books listed were published in London unless otherwise indicated.

I have done my best to find suitable photographs of these people. Good ones, of a size and quality to print in a book, are hard to find. So there are relatively few illustrations in this book, except in the chapter about Tamara Karsavina, of whom a great many pictures were made.

Here then are my stories, written for your pleasure and mine, each reflecting different expressions of love. They are dedicated to the faceless multitude of those who did not survive the Bolsheviks.

Acknowledgments

A number of kind people have helped me with this book. I am particularly grateful to Sebastian Garrett; he not only provided information about his grandmother, Natasha Duddington, but also offered most useful corrections to all the chapters. His cousin Katya Aron scanned the picture of Natasha for me, and his son Tim scanned letters by Gordon Craig in his possession, which he kindly permitted me to quote from. Philippa Parker generously shared information she had found on Jack Duddington's divorce case. John Duddington, Katya Aron, and Barbara Thacker also provided information, as did Dr Anil Gomes, Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at Trinity College, Oxford, and Associate Professor at the University of Oxford.

Finding anything about Ursula Cox proved disproportionately time-consuming compared to the tiny role she plays in the book. Of those who offered help, Jane Norwich, with her skill in genealogical searches, was the most successful; and Sarah Watling put me in touch with a descendant of Ursula's Olivier cousins. Jason Nargis, Special Collections Librarian at the University Libraries of Northwestern University, copied several of Ursula's letters for me.

Helen Rappaport told me of Michael Welch's interest in Anglo-Russian marriages, and he was most generous with his time. He put me in contact with Yuri Totrov, who very kindly shared with me some documents relating to William Hicks.

Andrew Foster, the great authority on Tamara Karsavina's life and career, generously allowed me to read his transcriptions of the letters that she and Benjie Bruce wrote to Valerian Svetlov during her separation from her husband. While they helped me to understand Tamara, I opted not to make any direct quotations from them.

Christoph Irmscher, Provost Professor of English at Indiana University, and author of a biography of Max Eastman, kindly allowed me to quote Eliena Eastman's 'Will' from his website.

Lesley Chamberlain, author of *The Philosophy Steamer: Lenin and the Exile of the Intelligentsia*, answered questions about her book. Ekaterina Shatalova patiently fielded my questions about Russian language and culture, and helped with my research by directing me to Russian websites that I would not have found for myself.

Laurence Bristow-Smith obligingly read a draft of the book and sent me his comments.

Finally, though, the mistakes and defects you may find are mine alone.

I am grateful to Oliver Garnett for permission to quote from the books by David Garnett and Richard Garnett.



The second edition incorporates information that arrived only after the book had been published, in particular the portrait of Natasha Duddington and the group photograph with Ursula Cox, Lenochka Goncharova and Elena Ertel (aka Lola). I have taken this opportunity to make some small corrections.

Our weak intelligentsia souls are simply incapable of conceiving abominations and horrors on such a Biblical scale and can only fall into a numbed and unconscious state.

— Semyon Frank on the Russian Revolution*

* Quoted by Chamberlain in *The Philosophy Steamer* (p.45) from Philip Boobbyer, *S. L. Frank: The Life and Work of a Russian Philosopher*, p.116.

2 Eliena and Max

THE FIRST MAN to be placed in charge of Trotsky's new Red Army by the Bolsheviks was Nikolai Krylenko (1885–1938), a mere ensign or *praporshchik*. As he was to play a central role in Soviet Russia for twenty years, and was a major influence in my first love story, I need to tell you something of the Krylenko family.

Vasili and Olga Krylenko were born in the early 1860s; they were Russian, but they moved to Poland before 1900 after Vasili's socialist sympathies cost him his job teaching natural science in a Russian university. Having six children, two boys and four girls, he needed a decent income and ended up as a tax collector in Lublin, a most unpopular job (for the Poles deeply resented their Russian overlords) in which he nevertheless managed to make everyone love him. He lined his home with books of science and literature, especially poetry, in three or four languages. His daughter Eliena recalled that 'kindness and tolerance, sympathy with one's fellow men, a love of beauty, a love of life, [and] a thirst for knowledge' were the values that he tried to instil in his children. His wife Olga was equally idealistic, but completely 'absorbed in the one divine, all-encompassing, ultimate event – *the revolution*.'¹

Their elder son, Nikolai, took after his mother, as did their eldest daughter Sophia; both were active in the 1905 revolution in St Petersburg, where Nikolai – studying history and literature at the University – was already a member of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. The other children were more like their father: the second son, Volodia, became an engineer, and the second daughter, Vera, studied music and became a pianist.

In the crackdown that followed the 1905 revolution, the third and fourth daughters, Eliena and Olga, aged eleven and nine, could only look on aghast as their world collapsed about them. Because of Nikolai's political activities (and probably Sophia's too), their home was ransacked by the Okhrana, the Tsar's security police, and all their precious books were destroyed. Their vehemently non-political sister Vera was jailed in Lublin. Although their father had taken no part in the revolution, he was sent to a small rural town, eighty miles from the nearest railway station, where he rapidly became depressed and committed suicide. In St Petersburg, Nikolai and Sophia managed to escape arrest. Having made her own way home, Sophia travelled on as far as Paris and then to Liège, in Belgium, where her brother Volodia was studying at a mining and engineering school.

As the repression eased, Nikolai came out of hiding and returned to St Petersburg. For the next twelve years or so, his life was a dangerous game of snakes and ladders: he would be arrested for his political activity, imprisoned or exiled, and then climb again for another round. He managed to complete his arts degree at St Petersburg in 1909, and immediately began to study law. Conscripted in 1912, he was discharged (for political activism, of course) the following year. After working very briefly as an assistant editor on *Pravda* while liaising with the Bolshevik faction in the Duma, he was again arrested – still in 1913 – and exiled to Kharkiv; he later claimed to hold a degree in law from there. Early in 1914, he fled to Austria to escape re-arrest. When the First World War broke out in August that year, he was obliged to move on to Switzerland, where he got to know Lenin and became his favourite chess partner. Lenin sent him back to Russia to help rebuild the underground Bolshevik organization. In November 1915, he was arrested in Moscow as a draft dodger; the following April, after a few months in prison, he was sent to the South West Front.

A year later, after Order No 1 was issued, Nikolai (with the lowest

commissioned rank of ensign) was elected chairman of the *soviet* of his regiment and then up, step by step, until he was chairman of the *soviet* of the 11th Army. The key to his success was the skill with which he addressed his fellow soldiers. Arthur Ransome declared:

I have never heard any orator listened to by a Russian audience with such absolute attention as by this elderly ensign Krylenko. . . . He is a finished artist as an orator, this little genius, for he could hold an audience of simple Russian soldiers breathlessly interested for an hour and a half while he put before them the whole complex political situation.²

But he was obliged to resign almost immediately, for there were not enough other Bolsheviks in the *soviet* at that level to support his opposition to the Provisional Government. So in June 1917, he became a member of the Bolshevik Military Organization and was elected to the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, at which he was elected to the permanent All-Russian Central Executive Committee. Arriving at the High Command HQ in Mogilev, he was arrested by forces of the Provisional government and imprisoned in Petrograd, where he remained until mid-September.

In another throw of the dice, Nikolai then helped the leading Bolsheviks prepare the October Revolution. At the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets, held the day after the coup, he was made a People's Commissar (minister) and member of the triumvirate responsible for military affairs. His oratorical gifts had carried him through.

After the fall of the Provisional Government, Kerensky fled and Nikolai Dukhonin stepped in as acting Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Army. Within days, the Bolshevik leaders ordered him to stop the fighting and open negotiations with the Central Powers. Dukhonin flatly refused, maintaining that such an order could only be issued by 'a government sustained by the army and the country'. Lenin's response was typical: he took everyone short by going to the nearest radio station and announcing that Dukhonin had been dismissed and that Nikolai Krylenko was now

Commander-in-Chief of the Army. It was Nikolai who arrested his predecessor. Unfortunately, he then stood by and allowed his men to bayonet and shoot Dukhonin in a horrific scene fortuitously witnessed by Captain George Hill and described in his book, *Go Spy the Land*.³

There was one more turn to go – for the moment, at any rate – in this game of snakes and ladders. Lenin and Trotsky soon realized that an army with a chain of command elected by enlisted men (of which Nikolai was – understandably – a keen supporter) was not effective; in March 1918, acting on a suggestion by Trotsky, Lenin and the Bolshevik Central Committee agreed to create a Supreme Military Council. The entire Bolshevik leadership of the Red Army, including Nikolai Krylenko, protested vigorously and eventually resigned. The office of the ‘Commander in Chief’ was formally abolished by the Central Committee on March 13 and Nikolai was reassigned to the Collegium of the Commissariat for Justice. From May 1918, he was Chairman of the Revolutionary Tribunal of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. In 1922 he became Deputy Commissar of Justice and assistant Procurator General of the USSR, serving as the chief Procurator at the show trials of the 1920s and as the Commissar for Justice in the 1930s. (Although the Russian title ‘procurator’ is often translated as ‘prosecutor’, it was a post in the Russian legal system with no equivalent in Anglo-Saxon countries. The procurator’s primary role was to supervise state organs and ensure that they properly applied state measures within the prescribed legal limits.)

In Russia, trial by jury had been introduced by Tsar Alexander II in 1864 as part of his democratic reforms that had included the emancipation of the serfs three years earlier. Nikolai quickly put an end to this system, which was not re-introduced for more than seventy years. He argued that the needs of the Party took precedence over any question of guilt or innocence; people should be tried in accordance with the Party’s political guidelines, and he wrote a number of books expounding this thoroughly Marxist

notion. He was an enthusiastic exponent of the Red Terror, exclaiming, 'We must execute not only the guilty. Execution of the innocent will impress the masses even more.'⁴

Nikolai became notorious the world over for his specious arguments. On 23 June 1918, he famously explained that there had been no discrepancy between the execution of Admiral Alexei Schastny and the prior abolition of the death penalty by the Bolsheviks in October 1917 since the admiral had not been condemned 'to death' but 'to be shot'. Nikolai is of course the principal villain of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. He is quoted on the first page: 'In the period of dictatorship, surrounded on all sides by enemies, we sometimes manifested unnecessary leniency and unnecessary soft-heartedness.'

So where, in this abysmal system, is the love story that I promised you? For that, we must come back to Nikolai's sisters. We left Sophia in Belgium; after numerous adventures, she ended up in Moscow, running the office that supervised the tribunals on behalf of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee. (Nepotism was common among the Bolsheviks: they trusted family first.) I don't know what became of Vera, the pianist. Olga, the youngest (and prettiest) of the sisters, became the secretary to Lev Kamenev in the Politburo. (He was married to Trotsky's sister.) And Eliena worked as Maxim Litvinov's secretary in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. She had studied law at St Petersburg University, graduating at the very moment when the Bolsheviks – with her own brother foremost among them – abolished the legal system she had spent years studying. Although she dearly loved – and admired – Nikolai, she was never a member of the Communist Party. On the contrary, she dreamed – inspired by the stories of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer that her father had read to her when she was a little girl – of living in America. And at the Genoa Conference in 1922, to which she had accompanied Litvinov, she met the American who made her dream come true.

They actually met a little way along the Ligurian coast from

Genoa, at Santa Margherita. The Conference, convened at the instigation of Lloyd George with the aim of solving all the world's problems, had opened on 10 April. Both the Russians and the Germans were feeling badly treated by the victorious Allies, who were insisting that the Bolsheviks should honour the debts incurred by Imperial Russia (which they refused to do) and preventing the Germans from acquiring the natural resources they so badly needed to rebuild their country. At the suggestion of Litvinov, diplomats from those two countries met secretly in the Imperial Palace Hotel in Santa Margherita. Within a week they had signed the Rapallo treaty that facilitated trade between Germany and Russia. So while Chicherin (the Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs) was at loggerheads in Genoa, his deputy in Rapallo achieved the breakthrough that Lenin and Trotsky had been seeking for over a year. It was quite a coup for Litvinov.

One evening, Max Eastman, waiting in the lobby of the hotel to go up and interview Chicherin, whom he naively thought of as 'a minister from Utopia,'

saw one of the secretaries come downstairs with a skipping step, her hand sliding lightly along the banister. She was not exactly pretty, but looked so jolly, with her short nose, twinkling grey eyes and tiny front teeth, that I watched her with a feeling of reminiscent mirth. She seemed like the girls back home – not too awfully foreign. (Maybe I was a little homesick.)⁵

The following day, he ran into the girl in the hotel garden.

She was standing all alone under a kumquat tree, weeping and eating kumquats. Before I could find an expression for my feelings, or quite decide what they were, she exclaimed:

'These tears are not for you!'

I couldn't help smiling, but managed to answer: 'I never dreamed they were.'

An embarrassed silence followed, which I broke finally by saying: 'Even if I can't dry your tears, I might help you eat the kumquats.'

She laughed without ceasing to cry, and reached up with a graceful gesture to pick one for me.⁶

It was not exactly Adam and Eve and the apple, and they did not make love ... yet.

Max Eastman was an American writer (of two dozen books, in various genres) and poet, a socialist who had edited the progressive, literary and political periodical called *The Masses* during the nineteen-teens. After America's entry into the First World War, the magazine's anti-war stance caused Max to be accused of obstructing the draft; he was tried twice under the Sedition Act, and acquitted both occasions, but *The Masses* had to close. Well known as a humorist, he complained that under the Wilson administration, 'you can't even collect your thoughts without getting arrested for unlawful assembly.' Max and his sister Crystal, the leading socialist feminist of the day, responded to this intimidation by launching a fresh magazine, *The Liberator*, with many of *The Masses*' contributors and the same socialist stance. It printed reports from Jack Reed (*Ten Days that Shook the World*) and Lincoln Steffens ('I have seen the future and it works') on the Russian Revolution. H. L. Mencken called it 'the best magazine in America', and it sold 60,000 copies a month. In the end, Max felt he had to go and see for himself the new society that was emerging in Russia, and left *The Liberator* in the hands of faithful contributors. Although he had said, long before, that when the revolution came, there would be 'great evils and wastefulness and graft and scandal and vituperation – and something to kick about all the time, just as there is today',⁷ he was deeply romantic at heart and 'expected to find a band of social engineers rationally employing the scientific principles of Marxism,' in accordance with the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848.⁸ It took him many years to realize how completely mistaken he had been. By the 1950s he had become deeply conservative, although still thoroughly independent in his opinions: he roundly condemned the war in Vietnam, and was a lifelong atheist.

There was another reason why Max went to Russia: he was