

# The Curse of Rasputin

Story by S.P. Belov

Mr. S.P. Ossinin, a retired Chemical Engineer, was seated in his big recliner in front of the broad picture window of his comfortable home in Salt Lake City. The mellow fall was just beginning. A light breeze was playing with the elegant leaves of the big maple tree in the front yard. Many of the leaves had already turned golden.



*S.P. Belov with grandson, Matt Belov.*

Occasionally a strong gust would strip some leaves from their branches. Then they would glide peacefully and gracefully to the ground where they would lie among their brothers on the green grass. Ossinin, wistfully watched the leaves thinking that soon, he too would be shorn from the limb of life. He hoped he could end his life with the same grace and dignity as those beautiful golden maples leaves.

His thoughts were interrupted by the light steps of Diane, his favorite daughter-in-law, as she entered the room. She crossed the room and comfortably accommodated herself on a low stool by the big recliner. Ossinin with a smile, looked into her animated face. She had some letters and a Time magazine in her hands.

“Father, here is your mail, but not much today. By the way, tonight is your famous Shriner dinner so you won’t be having dinner with us. You may be late. Be a good boy.”

“My dear, we Shriners may, upon occasion, be play boys, but we are always good boys.”

Diane lightly touched his hand.

“By the way, in this issue of Time there is a notice of Prince Felix Youssoupov’s death. He was one of those who assassinated the infamous monk Rasputin.”

“My dear, Rasputin never was a monk. Among other things he was a horse-thief, but never a monk. Stealing horses in Russia was not a hanging matter then. Well, anyway, show me the Time.” The article was to the point. Prince Felix Youssourpov, 81, died in New York. He had taken part in the assassination of the infamous Rasputin.

Diane anxiously looked into the eyes of her father-in-law. “But father, with your fantastic life, you probably know something about Rasputin.” Mr. Ossinin lowered the magazine and for some time thoughtfully watched the maple tree. Yes, he knew a story about Rasputin but he had made a promise not to tell. However that promise had been made over half a century ago. All the participants had died a long time ago by violent means. Diane was helping him write his memoirs. She was interested. He would tell her Captain Saparov’s story:

### **The Secret**

We were sitting on the veranda of Prince Oldenburgsky’s magnificent palace in Gagri. It was in the early spring of 1918 and we were tired, hungry and dispirited. We were men of General Kornilov’s small unit of anti-Communist forces in the Caucasian region fighting the Red Army. The Reds had just finished shelling the palace and we were sitting among the debris. Captain Saparov had been slightly wounded in the head. There was still dry blood on his face. His brother Leonid Saparov, like myself, was a high school student in Sochi. We had both joined General Kornilov’s Caucasian forces and were under his command. Captain Saparov, had been an officer of the legendary “Caucasian Division” also called “The Wild Division.” As this division plays an important part in the story, I will tell you a little about it.

The Caucasian people were composed of many national groups, all united by their common origin and Mohammedan faith. They were all men of an ancient, proud and warlike race, superb horsemen on superb horses who at the beginning of the first war, volunteered to help their Tzar. Ten of their cavalry regiments formed a division commanded by Grand Duke Michael, the brother of the Emperor, Nicholas 11. Soon, the Caucasian Division became legendary among the Russians because of their exceptional bravery, loyalty and fierceness. They became known as “The Wild Division.” The officers of the best Russian families considered it a privilege to serve with them.

Now we were sitting on the veranda watching the sun set over the glittering waters of the Black Sea. We were all deep in thought. I was thinking about our plan to retreat during the night into the Caucasian Mountains to join the Georgian forces. This would be a desperate venture for a seventeen year old boy. Gradually a different plan was beginning to form in my mind. I would return to Sochi, see my grand dad, change clothes, get some money if possible and try to join my family in Samara Province. Captain Saparov sat seeped in his own thoughts. Leonid had been slumbering next to me, but opened his eyes as his brother began,

“Well, boys we are finished. We cannot hold out here any longer. We have to retreat. But something lies heavy on my mind. I have to tell you a story. I do not know why but telling it

will might relieve the tension. You must both promise never to repeat it unless all the persons are gone and no harm can be done to those still living. I do not know what Allah, in his wisdom, has destined for each of us, but I know there is some reason why I must tell you this story.”

### **Captains Saparov’s Story**

After the disastrous 1915 campaign of the Russo-German War in which we suffered appalling losses due to miscalculations by the high command, our Caucasian Division was called back for rest and recuperation. We were quartered in several Austrian villages, awaiting reinforcements of men and horses. Most of our officers were on leave. On this particular evening, a few officers on duty gathered in the regimental mess room, if that small Austrian cottage could so be called. The four of us, Lieutenant Prince Koodashev, Captain Bolgarov, the very young Caucasian Lieutenant Bogoochava, and I were playing “Preference.’ We were playing listlessly without actual interest, just to kill time. We were all waiting to go home on leave.

At the other end of the room hidden from us in a big, deep luxurious leather chair, sat Captain Ismail. Both the chair and the Captain were completely incongruous in that rather plain and unpretentious room. Even then, Captain Ismail was a living legend among this legendary squadron. Not only our government, but the Allied Governments had run out of decorations of bravery for him. Our men still talked with awe about him and his famous blade the “Goorda,” One of those rare and priceless ancient sabers more precious than gold. They still chuckle and nod their heads with the appreciation when they tell how, in a cavalry charge against the Fourth Austro-Hungarian Cavalry Division, he cut a Hungarian Hussar officer into two complete halves, starting from his right shoulder. Ismail sat so quietly that his presence might have been missed.

Our solace was broken by the sound of fast running horses. We dropped our cards and cocked our ears. In a few moments loud voices were heard outside, the door flew open and an officer accompanied by two orderlies came into the room. We jumped up, scattering our cards. There stood our best friend and *koonak*, Lieutenant Prince Alexis. Among the Caucasians *koonak* meant friend, brother and partner all rolled into one. A man would gladly give his life for his *koonak*, but to become one called for something beyond friendship. One had to go through certain rites to become a *koonak*. I cannot give you his correct name because his family is well known among Caucasians, but we called him “Alesha.”

### **Lieutenant Alexis**

After the affectionate handshakings, hugging and salutations were over, we led him to the table. An orderly brought us a round of tea. As Mohammedans, we do not drink wine, so in our mess room tea was served. Alesha sat at the table, smoothed his dark wavy hair and busied himself with the hot tea, which tasted good after his cold ride. We showered him with questions.

“How was the leave?”

“How were things back home?”

“How was life in Petrograd?”

I was watching Alesha. As his best friend and *Koonak*, I knew him too well and I knew something was wrong.

He was answering the questions readily enough, but at the same time something was bothering him. When the excitement was over, Prince Koodashev asked him quietly:

“Tell me, Alesha, are all these rumors true that we hear about this scoundrel Rasputin, about his influence on our politics, our military and civil life? We hear so many stories about his evil influence on the Imperial Family. Are they true or just malicious slander? With your connections you ought to know what is going on.”

The younger officer slowly lowered his eyes and stirred his already cool tea. The room became quiet. Slowly Prince Alexis raised his eyes again to meet the intense gaze of Prince Koodashev.

“Yes, Prince, they are true, and I fear the facts are even worse.”

But what is the source of his power over the Tzar and the Tzarina? Why is he there at the Palace? Why not just kick him out?”

“The reason goes back a long way. As you all know, our Tzar married Princess Alexandra of Hesse. The House of Hesse is cursed with the dreadful heredity disease of hemophilia, which affects only males. It is passed through the females, who themselves remain untouched. That is why Emperor Alexander 111 was so against this marriage. Emperor Nikolai Alexandrovich married only after his father’s death and against his dying wishes. During these last years the health of the little Grand Duke Alexis, who has inherited the disease, has been going from bad to worse. Sometimes his Highness has such severe attacks that the blood oozes slowly through his pores, marking the outline of his body in blood on the bed sheets. And the only man who can stop this is Rasputin, a notorious scoundrel and horse-thief. He holds the life of the Grand Duke Alexis in the hollow of his hands. Through this he wields tremendous influence over the father and the mother who deeply love their only son. But Rasputin is not satisfied with his personal influence over the throne. He is insatiably greedy and his ambition has no limits. He is so unspeakably vile that, according to very reliable military intelligence, he is now dealing with Germans to promote a separate peace provided he is given some huge reward.”

“What? A Separate peace? Never!” We were all very vehement about that. It was all too preposterous. We all jumped up.

From what I heard in Petrograd, don't be so sure, brothers. Prince Alexis said bitterly. But that is just the beginning. A day before my return to the regiment, my mother asked me and my wife Natasha to spend the evening with her. We sat in her quarters near the fireplace. The lights were low and we had a good dinner which made us comfortable and a little sleepy.

### **Doctor Klouchnikova**

My mother has had serious trouble with her health for years. She has diabetes so she prefers to stay at home as much as possible. We were enjoying pleasant small talk when the butler announced that Mrs. Olga von Haartman and Doctor Claudia Klouchnikova had come to call. I know Olga Nicholaevna von Haartman well. She was born Polejaeva. She is a very wealthy widow and mother's life long friend. I had also heard much about Doctor Claudia Klouchnikova, the one and only woman Professor of Medicine in Russia. She got her M.D. from the Sorbonne, and her Ph.D. at Lausanne. She is one of the administrators at the Institute of Experimental Medicine. Without her approval no medical preparations can be sold in Russia. She is about forty, with a figure that would launch more than ten thousand ships and with a face that would stop them all, but with eyes that would start them all over again. Her eyes are big, luminous and beautiful.

Like mother, Olga Nicholaevna has diabetes. Her distant cousin and bosom friend, Dr. Klouchnikova, now lives with her and treats her. She persuaded the famous Doctor, as a personal favor, to treat my mother as well. Mother greeted them affectionately and we followed suit. The Doctor went to the fireplace, sat on a low wide chair, picked up a bronze poker and absent mindedly gently stirred the coals. As usual, the conversation centered around the news at court. Rasputin had been banished from the Imperial Palace, but now had to be recalled to stop an extremely severe attack of hemophilia. His Highness was weak and bleeding. Her Majesty and Mrs. Anna Virobova, her most trusted friend, were constantly with the Grand Duke Alexis. I looked at the Doctor.

“Please Doctor, tell me, with all our advances in medicine, have we nothing against this dreadful sickness?”

Doctor Klouchnikova answered, without raising her eyes from the burning coals:

“No, Prince, so far we have nothing to successfully treat hemophilia, but the malady itself is not too dangerous.”

“But is not Grand Duke Alexis in great danger now?” my mother interrupted.

“He undoubtedly is,” calmly answered the Doctor, still not looking up. “But sometimes the danger lies, not so much in hemophilia, as in the specific and unique circumstances associated with the malady and the patient.”

My mother asked softly, "And what do you mean by that my dear Claudia?"

For a moment there was no answer. The Doctor continued to stir the amber coals.

"Do you remember, Princess, a certain Doctor Babmaiev who appeared a few years ago, tried to crash the Imperial gates, and then disappeared?"

"Yes," my mother answered, "but he was a charlatan, wasn't he?"

"That depends on your point of view," countered Doctor Klouchnikova; "As far as I am concerned, he was one of the greatest authorities on oriental medicine and still is today. We, in our conceit, under rate oriental medicine very much. He is probably a good friend of Rasputin."

### **Jen-Shen**

"Once I was interested in oriental medicine myself, and I ran into a very interesting root, well-known and highly prized by the Chinese. The name of this root is ginseng, or rather Jen-Shen. It resembles a man in that it has the appearance of a body with two arms, two legs, and a head. The more it resembles a man, the higher its value and cost. Actually, it is a most power aphrodisiac. It's action is a natural one, and without the dangerous post-effects of others in the field. In my opinion it has specific effects on the functions of the human body. One of these is to increase the blood pressure within the veins and to fill the capillary vessels temporarily with blood, which is most important for amorous, or should I say 'tired' men."

She raised her head and looked around with a mocking smile. "As the ladies present are married, I am not going to elucidate this point, but a specially prepared extract from this root may have even more powerful, and different effects, than the root itself. In a grown man the effect would be a pronounced increase of sexual activity, a tension which can be relieved in a normal and pleasant way. But suppose this specific tincture, or extract, is given to a sexually immature boy? What effect will it produce upon him? We do not know. It is hard to say. But I would expect a palpitation of the heart, fever, extreme nervousness and possible collapse. Now suppose this extract is administered to a boy afflicted with hemophilia?"

Bending even lower over the coals, the Doctor seemed to be more interested in the burning log than in what she was saying. But her story, her manner of speaking had us all spellbound.

"Probably it's effect would be more pronounced, maybe even to such an extent that the increase of blood in the capillary veins would be too much for the veins, and the blood would ooze slowly through the pores, leaving the outline of his body on the sheets." I stared at the Doctor in horror.

### **A Hypothetical Case**

“Well, Prince, I would like to present a hypothetical case. One upon a time there lived a very rich and powerful man. He had one, and only one son, whom he considered more important to him than all his riches. And this son was a sick boy, sick with dreadful hemophilia. His wife, a highly-strung woman, was also greatly devoted to her son. Normally he would have been more of less safe, and could have grown to normal manhood, if good care were taken, and he were under the constant supervision of experienced doctors. But fate decreed that the lady should meet a woman, a very wicked woman, greedy, unscrupulous and callous, who would in time become a great false friend. This woman was in contact with a doctor, very well versed in oriental medicine, and in possession of this extract Jen-Shen. Would it not be simple and easy for her to slip some into the boy’s food or medicine? Or to recommend to the parents, when their son became dangerously ill, a new man whom she would present as a “Sainted one” capable of curing their son? And would it not be easier to do this if the wife were inclined to mysticism by nature?

In desperation the parents would send for this ‘Sainted One’ and when this man came, the false friend would stop the administration of the poison and soon the boy’s health would improve. Would not the parents think him truly a sainted man with mystical gifts? A man with divine gifts and powers, the power of curing the incurable disease? Wouldn’t they believe in his prayers and perceive this as a possible miracle? “*Medicamenta non sanant*” had been the verdict of their doctors. “Medicine is helpless.”

That is how the blackmail could have started.

When true friends and relatives would try to open the father’s eyes to the real nature of this so called ‘Prophet,’ could be sent away. Then the accomplice would again administer the extract of Jen-Shen. The boy would gradually get worse until his life was in grave danger and the sainted man would be invited back. Once again the accomplice would stop the doses. And lo! after prayer, their beloved son would start to get well once more. Would not God Himself have answered the prophet’s prayer? Was not he the only man who could save the child’s life? Was not he falsely accused?

I could not restrain myself any longer. The scene she had described was much too vivid. I was raving mad and jumped up.

“But Doctor, why don’t you let this be known? Why don’t you do something about it?”

Doctor Klouchnikova looked straight at me and I received the full blast of her brilliant mesmerizing eyes.

“Let what be known, Prince?” She smiled bitterly, “and do what? Who would believe in my hypothetical case?”

No matter how angry I was, her response stopped me cold. I knew too well the conditions

at Court, the strength of Rasputin's clique and their influence on the Emperor and the Empress. The Doctor would not last a day if she tried to expose this infamous plot. I lowered my head under her mocking, pain-filled eyes.

She broke the spell by turning to my mother.

"Dear Princess, I really have to go. I have an important meeting. Olga, are you coming with me?"

I went to see them off. In the hall Doctor Klouchnikova extended her hand. Her handshake was friendly, strong and brief.

"My dear Prince, I am sure you have seen that prophetic opera 'Gotterdammerung,' by Richard Wagner?" She looked at me thoughtfully. I felt the dimly lit hall begin to brighten a little. Then she smiled and for a moment her luminous eyes penetrated into the depths of my very soul.

'Gotterdammerung, the twilight of the Gods.' What had she meant by that? Had we not made an earthly demi-god of the Emperor of all the Russias? Did she mean the end of the Empire and the fall of the Imperial House unless something was done to prevent it?

### **The Plan**

"Well, Gentlemen, I have told you my story, and I am sure it is evident to you as it is to me that an evil plot exists against the life of the little Grand Duke Alexis. In Petrograd no one can help for Rasputin's influence is too great. At the same time, the Grand Duke's health is at stake. It's either his life or Rasputin's. His Highness' health will not last long. Rasputin knows that and is trying to make the most of his opportunity. I simply cannot stand by and see His Highness deliberately poisoned. I am going to kill Rasputin and save Russia from this devil.

"No, no you are not!"

At this extremely tense moment an unexpected and calm voice was like a bolt from the blue. Captain Ismail, whom we had completely forgotten, left his deep chair and approached our table slowly.

"Captain, you doubt my word?" flared Prince Alexis as he glared at his commanding officer and friend.

"Easy Alesha," The Mingrelian came up to Alesha, put his hand on his shoulder and gently, but firmly, forced Alesha back into his chair.

"Listen to me first, and then you will understand why *you* cannot kill Rasputin."

Alesha, as though hypnotized by the steady dark blue gaze, his short burst of fury spent, obeyed the steady pressure of the hand. The captain turned to us.

“I heard your story.” He spoke in his normally low and emotionless tone. “I agree with you. Something must be done. Rasputin must be eliminated but not ‘killed.’ He is an enemy of the Empire and traitor but there are two reasons why you cannot do it. Suppose you go back to Petrograd, meet this devil and let him have it. What would be the result?” Captain Ismail took a chair, turned it around and holding the back in his powerful hands, rocked slightly to and fro.

“The answer of course is,” said Prince Koodasheve “that should a man of Prince Alexis’ importance and standing kill Rasputin, then all the rumor and dirty gossip will be proven true. Right now, as far as the rest of the Empire is concerned, it is only gossip. After that it would be fact and the honor of the Imperial Family would be besmirched. No! Under no circumstances can you Prince, be associated with the ‘elimination’ of Rasputin. I agree it must be done but not by your hands.

“Thanks, Prince,” Ismail smiled, “That is exactly my point.”

“Well,” Captain Bolgarov drawled “As you gentlemen know, I am not a bad shot and I am practically a nobody in Petrograd. I too agree that Rasputin must go and I would not hesitate, for even a second, to dispatch him.

“Thanks, Koonak, but if you do it, it will still be viewed as a political killing. You personally, have no quarrel with him. And there is a second reason, which applies to you as well Alesha.”

Young Lieutenant Bogoochavz started to say something, but the Mingrelian stopped him short in his native tongue. He stiffened to attention

“Yes Sir.”

To Lieutenant Bogoochava, this Mingrelian Captain was only one step below the Prophet Mohammed himself and the rest of the world was far down the line.

“Now men listen carefully and see that none of this gets out. Rasputin must be ‘eliminated’ but not in a way that might cast a shadow upon the Throne or the Empire. He must be eliminated because of what he is - a dirty drunkard, an unspeakable cad and a devil in human form. He will be killed in a drunken brawl for grossly insulting a lady. It is well known that when drunk, he simply cannot refrain from pawing a young and pretty girl, particularly a society girl. He may even go so far as to slip his hand under her dress and give a bare breast a none too gentle squeeze. So far he has gotten away with it. Some of his victims have been too traumatized to complain. Others have received valuable gifts for their silence.

We all began to see the Mingrelian's hard reasoning.

"We will handle Rasputin's elimination like a military campaign. We will work out all the details as if we needed to eliminate a particularly nasty Austrian machine gun nest. In the end it will be 'Goord' and I who will dispatch him.

"I completely agree Captain and I see your point. But you mentioned a second reason."

"Oh, the second reason," the Mingrelian said thoughtfully, "is much deeper and more personal. To kill a man in cold blood, no matter how evil he might be, would still be murder as you Christians view it. You would be sacrificing your immortal soul. Sooner or later you would be tortured by guilt and end up deciding to expiate your sin by spending the rest of your life in a thoroughly miserable, distant monastery. No, "Alesha" you are too good a man to spoil your life in that way. I am a Mohammedan and we have no idea of 'sin' as such. For me, Rasputin is an enemy, an enemy of my country. Having his blood on my hands will not bother my sleep. Saparov and I will dispatch the devil."

I looked up in surprise. "Yes Saparov, you are an important part of this plan and you will soon find out why!"

### **Taking Action**

The details of the plot were worked out. Captain Ismail and I would go to Petrograd with a letter of introduction to Princess Natalie, who knew all about Ismail and myself from her husband. It would be quite natural for her to show Petrograd to her husband's Commander and his best friend. She would introduce me to another lady and the four of us would have the time of our lives.

We knew that Rasputin frequented the famous "Villa Rode," a swanky night club, very expensive and very exclusive. In spite of prohibition in times of war, the wine, vodka and champagne flowed fast and freely. Some members of the Imperial Family, who also frequented the place, had made it sacrosanct, and above the law. As an honored guest, Rasputin had "chambers" permanently engaged. Chambers were private rooms usually consisting of a tiny foyer, a small ladies' room and a big room that might serve for dining or making love. We would engage such "chambers," as close to Rasputin's as possible. Ismail was to take his devoted Sergeant with him, who would make contact with some of the waiters. The waiters at Villa Rode were mostly Tartars, also Mohammedans. After visiting Villa Rode a couple of times to establish our patronage, we would wait until the sergeant found out from one of the waiters when Rasputin was expected. At that point, we would arrive and order food.

The "chamber" we would use consisted of a large foyer, separate from the dining room by a heavy, beautifully brocaded curtain. On the right there was a small ladies' room. A big mirror in the foyer allowed us to see the entrance door and the curtains from this ladies room. We

would deliberately keep the door ajar, so that with the curtain half-drawn, only the central portion of the big room would be seen.

At a signal from our sergeant, I was to have one of my dizzy spells which I have had since I was shell-shocked. In such cases I have to lower my head as far as possible, usually between my knees. I would suffer a couple of these spells, real and pretended, to establish them with the ladies. Naturally they would understand. So when Rasputin passed the door, I would have a spell. Ismail would have to take me into the ladies room and our women would be left by themselves. We knew that the sight of two pretty unattended ladies laughing the drinking champaign would be too much for him, particularly if he were high. He would not miss such a chance to paw a lady. We knew that Princess Natalie, would not stand for even the slightest liberty from any one, regardless of who he was. She would raise all the hell possible. Probably my lady, Lydia Pavolova, would also scream. What would everyone see? A drunk grossly insulting our ladies, of which one would be the wife of our commanding officer. What would we do?

“You have no choice!” Prince Koodashev said plainly. “In such a cause you would have to use your sword.”

“Exactly,” Ismail replied. “Normally in such cases one is expected only to cut sufficiently to draw blood, and not ‘draw’ the sword beyond the cut. Naturally it is not necessary to kill, but all Russia knows how extremely touchy we men of the ‘Wild Division’ are about questions of honor. Would it not be natural then, if in the excitement of the moment, I should not only cut, but make a deadly ‘draw’? Would it not be just too bad if my saber happened to be ‘Goorda?’ Rasputin would go to hell without ever knowing what happened!”

I would be court martialed. But if the judges should ask whether or not I knew it was Rasputin, I would answer that it made no difference. I had to use my saber. And the judges, all officers, would realize that I had no choice but to act in accordance with our code of honor.

Would the Imperial Family be involved. No. Why should they be? Rasputin would have been killed in a drunken quarrel, for grossly insulting a lady.

Naturally I will be deprived of all rights and rank and sent as a private to some infantry regiment; but that price is insignificant. We risk our lives daily for our country. No one would dream it was a plot. Nobody associates “The Wild Caucasians” with plots. The honor of our Emperor and his beloved family will not be touched by even a breath of scandal and our country will be saved from the influence of this devil.

A few weeks later Ismail and I went to Petrograd. All went exactly as planned. We had a glorious time. Princess Natalie did indeed introduce me to her friend, Lydia Pavlovan, who was just as charming as the Princess herself. On one particular night we had just returned from a party when we received urgent word from the sergeant that Rasputin was expected at the Villa

Rode and that according to the sergeant's information, he was as high as a kite.

It was not too difficult to persuade our ladies to conclude the day with a little farewell party at Villa Rode. The party proceeded gaily. We were served dessert, the corks of the champagne bottles had started to pop and the glasses were raised in merry toasts, when I saw the sergeant passing our half-opened door. He gave us the signal that Rasputin was coming.

Immediately I had one of my dizzy spells. Solicitously, and with apologies, Ismail took me to the ladies room, leaving the heavy curtain half parted. Through the crack in the door we watched their entrance in the mirror. Ismail was absolutely calm; I was nervous. I was mortally afraid of having a real attack! Suddenly we heard footsteps. A noisy, unmistakable drunken party was passing by. There was shrill laughter from a call girl, apparently in answer to a lewd jest. The party went by.

Sudden there was a scream from Princess Natalie, a resounding slap, a magnificent yell from Lydia and the snarl of a frightened animal. The gold curtain flew violently apart. Rasputin took one step and suddenly and incredibly swiftly, jerked his head up and looked straight into Captain Ismail's eyes. He hunched his shoulders. With his head still turned toward Ismail, his long hands dangling, he started to run. He did not run as a human but rather as an ape, leaning forward with knees bent and arms hanging out in front of him like two repulsive dead serpents. Under his whiskers his red vampire lips moved as if invoking some vile and potent curse. He was drunk, but he was fast just the same. In seconds he was gone.

I rushed to Captain Ismail. He still stood with the saber in his upraised hands, His face was livid. For the first time in my life I saw in his eyes, not fear but complete and utter bewilderment. After Rasputin had gone he began to move. He lowered his hand slowly and looked at it in disbelief. He slowly sheathed his blade as the ladies watched him with frightened eyes.

Later on I asked him what happened. He gave me a brief account: "I was ready in an instant. I was completely master of myself, but I had to let Rasputin take a step or two to have room for the final draw. At that instant he looked into my eyes and my arm turned to stone. I simply could not feel it. I could not move it. I was too stunned to follow him. That was all.

### **Twilight of the Gods**

By the time the Captain had finished his story it was dark. For a while we still sat, spell-bound by the tragedy revealed to us. A tragedy of our country that had affected all our lives so dramatically. In the darkness I heard Captain Saparov take several steps and then turn back toward us.

"Yes, Rasputin was eliminated but not as we had planned. He was murdered in exactly the way we had tried to avoid. Now his name and that of the imperial family have been

permanently linked and the proud Double-Headed Eagle of the Imperial shield has been forever tainted.

And now, after the fall of the Imperial House, I have additional proof that Doctor Claudia Klouchnikova was right. Since Rasputin's death, the health of Grand Duke Alexis has gradually improved. He has not had any more serious bleeding spells. He is reported to be a normal youngster for his age." We heard Captain Saparov's bitter voice in the dark.

Suddenly the quietness of the night was broken by a series of angry, yellow-red flashes followed by the derisive laughter of a machine gun. It was time for us to go. Warily we collected our rifles. Cautiously and in single file we shuffled off into the night.

"Gotterdammerun, the twilight of the God. Hell!" said the Captain, "It is the end of the gods and those who served them."

Yes, I thought marching into the darkness. Our gods are doomed and Russia with them.

### *Editor's Notes*

*Grandfather wanted his book published. In an effort to help him, I sent the manuscript to several publishers only to discover there was little interest in this family history. I also looked into self publishing but soon discovered the cost was prohibitive. The experiences of youth always set the stage for what happens later in life. Zuka's story is an interesting case study in survival and adaptation. The winds of change blew grandfather from Russia to China to the U.S., then back to China where he settled his young family in Tsingtao, a cosmopolitan resort city on the Yellow Sea, between North Korea and Shanghai.*

*The Belov's fled to Australia when China fell to the communists. When grandmother Claudia died in Brisbane, Serge and daughter Catherine, who was born in San Francisco on June 21, 1932 and had U.S. citizenship, returned to the States. Son Peter, born shortly after the family moved to Tsingtao, could only claim Chinese citizenship. It took some time before he was able to join them. Catherine married Blackshere Morrison Bryan IV, the son of the superintendent of West Point, in a ceremony at the academy in New York. Catherine and Morrie had three children, Morrison, Claudia and Catherine Ann. Morrie was killed in the war in Viet Nam.*

*I met Pete Belov, in a Washington D.C. while attending American University in the fall of 1961. We dated for several months, then returned to Utah and married on August 21, 1962. The marriage lasted five and a half years and produced three sons: Brian, Dean and Matt Belov. Pete spoke seven languages and had traveled all over the world. I was a farm girl from central Utah. Consequently, there were many cultural, social and religious differences which caused problems in the marriage. Father Belov retired to Sandy in the fall of 1967 about the time Pete and I divorced. Pete moved to Colorado and remarried. He and Mary had a daughter, Katherine Claudia or K.C. Belov. Later, the family moved to California. I married Thomas A. Stokoe seven years after the divorce and continued my close association with Grandfather Belov.*

*I asked my friend Sally Beaty, an English professor at Idaho State, to help him with his book in the summer of 1972. She offered many suggestions and made numerous corrections. Grandfather died on June 30, 1977 without finishing the project. The manuscript gathered dust for the next quarter century. In 2002, I developed a web page and posted numerous family histories. At the request of my grand daughter, Alexandra Morgan Belov, Tom and I edited "Saturn" so it could be included. I added subheadings, pictures, and an epilogue and editorial notes to bring this family history up to date. I included three stories that were not part of the original manuscript. It is with great pleasure that we are finally able to publish grandfather's memoirs. I hope The Steps of Saturn will give others a better understanding of the Russian Revolution from a White Russian perspective.*

*Note that in the west, Russian noblemen were called Boyars. Grandfather used the terms "Barin" and "Barina" which we did not to change. Bougoulma was a town located between the*

*Volga River and the Ural Mountains. Belov means “White” in Russian. People from the north were called white Russians, or Belorussians to distinguish them from other nationalities. Grandfather used aliases in all his stories, usually “Ossinin,” a family surname.*

*Catherine Kluichnicov, Zuka’s mother, was born Aug. 18, 1880 in Kazan, Imperial Russian Empire. She died July 25, 1955 in Tsingtao. Her father was Benjamin Kluichnicov and her mother was Catherine Doubinin of Oak. Peter Matthew Belov, Zuka’s father, was born June 23, 1875 in Kazan and died September 11, 1954 in Tsingtao, China. His parents were Matthew Belov and Anna Ossinnin (which means Aspen.) It was Anna’s maiden name that grandfather used most often in his written work. Zuka’s three Belov grandsons and two great grandchildren are pictured below, from left to right standing: Matt, Brian and Dean. Brian’s children, Andrew and Alexandra are seated.*

*Diane Stokoe, May 12, 2002*

