

## The Smuggler

“There is a time to love, a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace,” said Anya, barely speaking the Scripture aloud but mouthing each word with careful thought. Her warm breath started to fog the train car window, making it hard to focus on the mountain peaks speckled with snow. The train whistled, signaling its closeness to Stalingrad. Anya started to breathe heavier as she thought more about where she was going.

“Am I mad?” She thought; “This is foolish of me... I can’t go on.” She worried. But there was no turning back to Kirov, and she was driven by conviction.

“Forgive me Lord,” she muttered under her breath. Anya turned away from the window and saw the glass door she had walked through hours earlier. She slid open the door, peeked out of her cell, and noticed each light down the hallway ominously flickering with each bump from the winding track; the light illumined only the fuzzy red walls and red buttoned cushions.

No man or woman had moved out of Stalingrad since the atrocities in the last year, and surely no one would want to enter the city. Stalin had ordered that no civilians be evacuated (he thought it would make the Red Army fight harder). Furthermore, Germany had sacked the city with aerial raids killing innumerable civilians and soldiers. Anya thought of each tragedy that Nickoli had told her. She reasoned within herself about her nation’s condition:

“The people are tired, tired of fear, tired of grief, tired of hunger. Why Lord? Why! Yet, they hunger all the more for restoration.” Anya was determined to continue. Continue to Stalingrad. Continue for, him... Anya’s eyes began to water, but she too a sigh, and sunk back into her red seat. She was warm in her black vatnik coat, but she felt a constant chill of grief for her lost Nicholi. But today, she felt strong, stronger than most days. Anya compiled her emotions together thinking, “I must continue for Nicholi. He would want me to do this.” She looked down

at the black bag with a red ribbon tied to its zipper. Anya unzipped the bag and observed the stack of black books just to assure herself of their presence. She zipped it back and started to tuck the bag under her seat until she noticed the letters. Anya clasped the two letters that she received only a month ago and held them to her chest.

The first was the Pokhoronka which read, *“Your husband, Lieutenant Nicholi Ivanov, fighting for his Socialist Motherland, loyal to his military oath, was killed on October 8th, 1942 in Stalingrad. Signed Lieutenant General Vasily Chuikov 64th Soviet division.”* Then she remembered the unbearable pressures of fear and loneliness that fully surrounded her; pain more than a twenty-year-old woman should feel.

Days after receiving the Pokhoronka, Anya received the second letter written in Belarusian from her husband. In a stirring of emotion, she trembled as she opened the bloodstained seal. *“Anya my love, do not fear, for God is with me. One more month of fighting, one more month until furlough, one more month until you’re in my arms.”* Anya paused with tears flooding, dismayed and feeling betrayed she thought,

“How could you God... How could you...” she continued to read...

*“Take heart my love, I will see you soon. Please, send the black bag with Brother Makhail. Have him meet me and Petrov, my new brother, on Nevskaya Street, on November 1st. Tell him we will be in building 23 like the other times he has come. Anyway, my beautiful one, I will soon tell you that I love you face to face. God be with you till we meet again my Anya.”* Oh, the bitterness of that day just weeks ago! No one was there to cry on. For her parents had disowned her in fear of the Union, and her underground church had all fled to Kazakhstan to witness to the deported Poles—including old Makhail and his family. All she could do that day was to pray, “Lord, I can’t go on... I am hopeless... Why God?!”

Immediately, Anya woke out of her trance by the screeching of the train tracks. She had arrived. She quickly put on her wool gloves and snatched her black bag from under her seat. In a flash, she slid open the glass door and walked down the train through each cart. The carts were not all personnel carts. Mostly, they were full of supplies of all different forms. Carts of produce, blankets, and meal rations. She quickly walked past the stack of black blankets rolled and stacked from floor to ceiling. The blankets are not for warmth...but for the bodies. Once outside, she saw the sun begin to settle under the landscape.

“Would he be there? I don’t have much time. I must be late.” she thought. Swiftly she scurried towards the center of town with the black bag in hand, observing the scars of battle that ravaged the city. She passed the bakery she once went to as a girl, but it no longer filled the city square with the fresh smell of pirozhki. The ceiling was no more, for it filled the second floor with rubble (Where the baker and his family lived). The front glass window that used to display the fresh bread, Blini, and tea cakes was shattered and contained no sign of food.

Boom! The bakery door burst open revealing a middle-aged soldier. Anya, still swiftly walking, almost ran into him.

“Stupid woman! Watch where you are going! Wait...Why are you here?” he demanded. He was a middle-aged man with red hair that was starting to grey. He staggered closer to Anya while she paused, still startled. Towering over her he stood glaring at her with bloodshot eyes.

“Oh, uh... so sorry sir, I’m just delivering mail for my husband,” Anya exclaimed respectfully. The soldier replied,

“Why would your husband send you here!? I saw you get off that train. He is stupid, you are both stupid!”

Now worried, Anya replied, "Sorry sir, I'll just be on my way." His bloodshot eyes were filling more with rage. Anya could see Nevskaya Street just ahead.

With slurred speech now he shouted, "You are not allowed here! There is a war going on you know! Come with me!" he demanded, almost grabbing her arm.

"No sir!" Anya outburst, "Sorry sir, I mean, I must bring this mail to the 64th division sir; please sir!" Anya pleaded. Pushing her back a little the soldier said,

"Ah, I see... You're just another prostitute..."

"No sir, I am Anya Ivanova! My husband is in the 64th division!" Smiling he exclaimed,

"Your act doesn't work with me woman. You're coming with me!" The soldier this time caught Anya's arm and began pulling her into the bakery, now seemingly, the soldier's quarters.

"Quiet now Pusik, no screaming," he said, as he held her arm more tightly dragging her just past the door. Disgusted, Anya threw the black bag through the door and used her free arm to sink four nails onto his cheek, scraping his flesh, and drawing a few drops of blood.

"Ahhhh!" he screamed releasing her arm. Anya bolted for the open door.

"I'm going to kill you woman! Anya ran through the door and swooped down to grab the black bag. She ran straight to Nevskaya Street holding the black bag close to her chest now.

"I'm going to kill you! Get back here!" the soldier chanted. But the threats dimmed as she turned left onto Nevskaya Street. "Where is building 23?" she thought. She looked left and noticed a red 26 sign. Tears of relief and disbelief at what had just happened were now falling from Anya's eyes.

"Twenty-five." She read zooming passed in haste. "Am I too late, will Petrov still be there?" Anya heard the roaring of a M-72 motorcycle not far behind her. She ran all the more quickly now, zooming past the twenty-fourth building with almost a full sprint.

“Twenty-three!” She exclaimed. She jumped up the stairs, thrust open the front door, and ran inside. It was dark. With only a glimmer of light coming from the other room. She slowly walked toward the light, breathing heavily, her heart beating, with heavy anticipation building inside her. A silhouette of a man met her at the corner of the room in the darkness.

“Who are you?” said the man. Anya hesitated, everything inside her screaming with fear. Her eyes became fountains as she wept bitterly. There she was, standing in the middle of the room, weeping tears that dripped onto the black bag. Anya spoke to the man in the corner with a trembling voice. Her speech was broken by her tears.

“I am... Anya... Ivanova... She wailed...”

"Take a deep breath ma'am, what is it?" the man said in a calming voice.

“I'm here to see... Lieutenant Petrov... I have this bag for him” she tearfully spoke.

Boom! The front door burst open revealing the old soldier. He staggered in the room while he wiped the blood from his face and simultaneously the flowing snot dripping out of his nose. His bloodshot eyes were lusting for all sorts of evils. Spitting on the floor he spoke aspirating each breath.

“I'm going to kill you woman!” He slowly drew his Tokarev TT-33 pistol from his right side. The man in the corner shouted,

“No Sokolov! Put away the...”

Bang, Bang, Bang! Anya's eyes opened wide as she gasped, slowly dropping the black bag, and spilling the black books onto the floor. She breathed,

“I see...Him... face to face.” She fell—falling into white robed arms that caught her, and lifted her upward.