Uncertain Weights and Measures

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ABSTRACT

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Uncertain Weights and Measures is a novel set in 1920s Moscow, where the principal character curates a collection of elite human brains, one of which is Lenin's. It is from an unspecified later perspective that Tatiana L-- narrates the years 1920 – 1930, years in which she lived in Moscow and eventually became the director of the historic Pantheon of Brains. This museum, otherwise known as the *Institut Mozga*, housed the collections of the first neuroscientists, Drs Bechterev, Burdenko and Vogt and was open to the public between 1928 and 1930. While some of the characters, such as the doctors, are based on historical figures, others, such as Tatiana and her husband Alexandr P--, are my inventions.

Tatiana, and the museum itself, embodies one of the central paradoxes of the early Soviet regime. She believes that history determines human development and that a new type of human being will be born out of the ideals of the Revolution; yet, she also believes that individual genius exists. It is a conflict between Marxist determinism and Romantic individualism. For Tatiana, this conflict manifests in two ways: in love and in work. The novel is her attempt to reconcile these contradictions in herself and in her memories of 1920s Russia. Primary concerns are the intersections of neuroscience and propaganda; memory and history; love, emigration and melancholy. The central theme is that totalizing systems like Communism, rationalism and positivism fail us by denying irrational elements of the human spirit.

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1.

Of all the things that I have weighed and measured in this life, there is nothing that has so stubbornly resisted my attempts at understanding, as love. Last night, a frost wove an intricate pattern across the window so that this morning, I cannot see the street below. I know that it is busy with pedestrians and shopkeepers though I cannot see them. White fern leaves etched their way across the pane, building upon one another in ceaseless expansion such that they are now an opaque screen of feathered ice, a pattern with no apparent beginning and no conceivable end. This window faces northeast. It gets so little warmth during the day. Only a small patch of the fern frost will melt and blur before the sun rounds the corner and leaves my desk and the papers on it grey. Someone has brought me a cup of tea. It sits there, steaming. Beside it, there are two pots: one with more tea, one with boiling water. And a bowl of quince jam, to sweeten the tea. The cup is stained from all the previous cups of tea it has contained.

My name is Tatiana L--- and many things have happened in my lifetime for which I would like, now, to make an account, though I know, even as I am about to begin, that I am bound to fail. As I sit here in this small, white room, I thumb through the history of an institute—*Institut Mozga* it was called—for which I worked many years ago. Beyond this history, my possessions are few: two photographs taken on two weddings separated by a period of twenty-two years—the first is of my parents and the second is of Sasha and me; one cake of soap, on a dish; a toothbrush and a comb; two shift dresses, one sweater, several pairs of woollen socks, seven pairs of undergarments; a knife, fork, and spoon, a plate and cup, a kettle and burner; a pencil and paper; and a set of dominoes which I play, from time to time, with those who visit. All these things fit in the small cabinet beside my

bed or on the desk at which I am presently seated. In my life, I've lived well, more or less, but always I have had a penchant for asceticism and it is a relief, if I am honest, to live this way now.

My father was from a wealthy family—his aristocratic pretensions necessitated fine tea sets, a servant even when we were at our poorest, and that I be educated after the style of the Europeans, *très bien, très bien.* My parents married for love. My mother's face is so soft in this photograph that, when I first saw it, I did not recognize her. Perhaps it hardened over the years with the stress of disputes with my father that later subsided when she, I realize now, no longer bothered to convince him of anything and decided, instead, to secretly rebel and then, later, to leave us all together. I look at this photograph often and wonder what became of them. On nights when my father got dressed up to go to the English Gentlemen's club (did he ever speak English?) on Tverskaya or to meetings with other professors (he studied soil science), my mother took me to Bolshevik meetings in what were, then, underground clubs. I don't remember other children at the meetings. When the revolution came—I was fifteen at the time—my mother left us.

It's us or them, said my father. By *them* he meant the Bolsheviks.

Despite the fact that my father was never really the same after she left, I admired her for it. Despite the fact that I admired her, I cannot say I loved her.

In the days after she left, my father taught me how to listen through the walls. He knew, then, that *his type*, by which he meant anyone who was a Menshevik, would not last. Any unchipped glass would do. He moved the furniture away from the wall, and pressed the glass to the wall and his ear to the glass. I watched his face, waiting for a sound to register there. In the main room the wall was cement and too thick for any sound

to pass at all. When he put the glass against that wall it clinked loudly and when you put your ear to it the only sound you heard was air and the muffled din of the ear cupping the bottom of the glass. In the office, the wall was thin. The glass seemed to slide into the wall and the way it knocked against the wall made us certain that our neighbours could hear our attempts to hear them. We got better. This was what he meant when he said, in the office, the walls have ears. I got so used to the idea that someone was always listening to me that it would surprise me, now, to think that no one was listening to me at all. When I hear the click of the dominoes in the room next door, I am comforted.

Sometimes I stand up and stretch and consider the opaque window before me and the grey light it casts on my desk. I walk to my bedside table and turn on the electric light, then I stretch my back by straightening my legs and lowering my torso to the floor, but I am not as flexible as I once was, so I rarely get far. I sit down again. When I first found myself here, I had, on my left knee, a terrible bruise. It can take weeks for a bad bruise to disappear. It is long gone, now.

From time to time, I open the flimsy history of the institute, the pages of which are now dog-eared and soft. According to the anonymous author, the mandate of the *Institut Mozga* was to explore the evolutionary development of the brain. Photographs taken in the 1920s and 1930s substantiate the author's speculations. One of the administrators, the author doesn't say who, had a dog—an East European Shepherd, I believe. His name was Franz, the first name of Dr. Mesmer, founder of animal magnetism in Europe and hypnotism worldwide, and this because that dog had the most transfixing gaze. When he died, he too, became part of the collection. The museum was reconfigured, says the booklet, in 1945, at the close of the war, once the museum's

collection had been returned from Kazaan. The only picture of the museum is of that room, but it is a lecture hall, so it is an error. When I ran the institute, the collection was held in a grand salon. The booklet says nothing about Lenin. Likewise, it says very little about Dr. Vogt, and nothing at all about me. It is a small white booklet, not even big enough to have warranted a binding—it is stapled down the centre and forms a little tent now, as it sits there, open on my desk. *Historya Institut Mozga*.

There were two openings for the institute on Bolshaya Yakimanka; to distinguish them, we called the first an inauguration and the second an opening. The first happened before winter had gotten inside our bones. It was October 1927. Doors opened at five o'clock. The boulevard was lined with trees whose denuded branches reached up like metal rakes to the sky. When people came inside, they brought gusts of cold with them. They shook out of their coats and rubbed their hands together to warm up. The entrance was warm and bustling. The vermillion walls were painted with golden tulips and azure fleurs de lys. The entrance narrowed to a hall in which hung a series of portraits, mostly scientists, of course. At the end of the hall was a niche that housed a large portrait of Lenin. Beneath his portrait were several permanently lit red candles. The hall gave onto the grand salon.

Since five o'clock, I had stood near enough to the door to feel the cold when it opened and closed.

Welcome, Comrade, I said to every new arrival. Come in!

Thank you, they said. Or, with a nod of their head before they removed their hat, a stately, Comrade. Sometimes they said nothing, and drifted past.

They didn't see me as much as I could see them. I surveyed them, seeing in all of them variations of a single feeling: a feeling of inquisitiveness, of curiosity, of the voyeur. Journalists, scientists, and politicians and their wives. The journalists had come from around the world. They wrote for *Meditsinksii Rabotnik, Der Tagesspeigel, Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *The New York Times* and *Pravda*.

Dr. Burdenko arrived in uniform, his olive green eyes matched his tunic. Everything about Burdenko was round: his belly, his cheeks, his prematurely bald head, his wire-rimmed glasses. Yet there was something sharp about him. He always wore a tie, and later, once he'd come back from the Great War and been awarded the Order of Lenin, he was always in military uniform. His hands were quicksilver. Even before I saw him conduct a surgery I knew how precise he would be. When he smiled, one often felt mocked or condescended to. I wanted to be like him.

He stepped into the vestibule and stopped, removing his coat before approaching me directly.

Comrade L---, he said, congratulations on your appointment here, this is a fine institution. You're lucky to be working with Bechterev, he said, though I wonder how often you see him.

He handed me his coat then marched down the hall towards the grand salon. I followed him, passing his coat on to our concierge, Mikhail, before slipping behind the counter. I perched on the three-legged stool.

Two journalists, also men, arrived, both doffing their hats in unison and speaking loudly as if no one understood French. We did. Only one of this pair was French; the other was American and I had met him before. The foreign journalists, they always

arrived together. They moved around the city in packs, staying in the same hotels, having sex with the same circle of friendly Russian women, and forming singular, neat opinions for export to their countries. The one I had met was named Walter. I watched him and wondered if he would remember me, but he walked past without noticing me, and so he didn't notice that I turned my head to watch him walking down the hall, laughing and clapping his friend on the back.

I had met him several years before in the lineup to see Lenin's body in the dark winter of 1924. That was the winter we remembered for its strikes and famines and peasant revolts and it was the year I'd married Sasha, against the better wishes of both our families: we dared them to be wrong. 1924 was also the year I began to work with Bechterev on what was finally coming to fruition: his institute, the Pantheon of Brains. Walter was someone I watched for almost a full day before we spoke. The strange circumstance of our meeting was the death of our heroic leader and the public mourning that persisted day and night despite the cold.

What I remember from then, for a reason I cannot explain, was his gray fedora and the way he moved out of time with the crowd, slowing every once in a while to undo his coat and reach into a breast pocket. Sometimes I passed him when he slowed, so I saw how he pulled out a notepad and a pen and noticed how he marked his place in his notepad with two elastic bands: one held together those that he had taken, and the other, presumably, held together the remaining blank pages. He would jot down something and then replace both pen and pad in his breast pocket and re-button his coat. He was able to do this while walking. All these things I remembered, though years had passed since last seeing him.

I remember them now, as I sit here at my desk, because of the mood of the man. He was lean and confident and, it appeared to me then, good. I had the impression, then, that he was a simple man, and this was an impression I maintained until the one of the last times I saw him.

Occasionally, he asked someone a question. Usually he would point to something—a building, a bridge—and then listen closely to the response. It seemed to me that, when he listened, he was hearing something other than what was being said. How to explain. His face was not the face of someone receiving information. He was not learning facts, even though, from his gestures, I gathered that his questions were fact-seeking. His face did not get bright with sudden comprehension or illumination. Often it was the opposite, it clouded over or softened, like he'd seen something the speaker didn't know. I saw why people talked to him. He was a generous listener, and his Russian was good enough for him to be understood, but lousy enough that he elicited a kind of care.

How strange it is that Walter seemed to appear in moments when I most would have liked Sasha to have been with me. I see this now, I see that Walter was never anything more than a replacement for Sasha, and that then, this made me love him to the same degree that, later, I came to despise him. Oh, but this will take some time for it to become clear. Sasha refused to involve himself with any recognition of Lenin, though he became less and less likely to explain himself in this way.

Walter and I first spoke because he asked after the Toy Museum and whether or not the theatres would be open for the rest of the week. I'd never been to the Toy

Museum, I said, and as for the theatres, I don't go. But would they be closed? he asked. Yes, I said.

He had clear green eyes that seemed blue when the sun hit them.

In the very faces of the line, I saw an entire world mourning. A peasant and his two young sons had been walking from their farm near the western steppe since hearing the news. Diplomats from France. Orphanages. Groups of workers. Whole communal apartments had come together, bringing their petty arguments with them. Reporters from the United States, Great Britain, France, Denmark, Switzerland. Nurses. Young Pioneers. Priests. People from the Caucasus. Medical students from St. Petersburg. Secretary's unions. Teachers.

On the night of the opening, I thought, All those people lined up to see Lenin's body lying in state, and now they will come here. More and more people poured into the entrance, but none were peasants.

I watched the women on the arms of their men. Their faces were flushed from the cold. They wore trim dresses and had their hair cut in bobs. The men wore tunics. A few women wore red lipstick. Most were not so garish.

Walter said he was trying to understand the city, he wanted a landmark like the mountains in Geneva or the Eiffel Tower in Paris. St. Basil's would do.

He was the first American I had ever met.

I asked him about the border. What was it like? I said.

The border is unmarked. We didn't know we were in Russia until the train stopped at a shed, 10 miles across the border. We got off the train and were given instructions about what we were permitted to bring to Russia. One fur article, one cake

soap, one-fourth pound tobacco, two pairs galoshes. Nothing else. I had a collection of Teddy Roosevelt letter's—do you know who he is?

Of course.

But they were taken from me. Some salesmen I met planned to sell perfume here, but the duty was so exorbitant, they both crossed the tracks to wait for the next train back to Warsaw. They had silk socks, too, but we were told Soviet women don't wear socks. Is that true?

I blushed.

I thought he might drift away after that so that he could pull out his notebook and record some pithy observation, but he didn't. The line advanced slowly. Though the boulevards were wide by the university, once we rounded the northeastern corner of the Kremlin walls, the streets were narrow.

The majority of the guests had arrived, but I stayed in the entrance, remembering.

At points, the cacophony seemed too much. The Pioneers had begun to sing songs and, because by that point we'd all been through at least some form of Sovietized education, we knew the songs by heart. Many from the crowd joined in. At one point, we began a folk song, the title of which I forget, but I remember us singing, *And the Red Sea seethes*, and how our voices were suddenly doubled when another crowd that was as large and as diverse as ours, joined in for the next lyric*, But the shore is dark and cramped*, and then the next*, Oh, how my heart aches to remember*. In the power of our joined voices, we realized that there was not one line, but two. Our line came from the southern part of the city; theirs came from the east.

The lines merged in the intersection of Nikitskaya and Rewoljuzzi.

The sun sets so early in January; we were in darkness by five o'clock. Our eyes adjusted with the setting of the sun, and when the oil lamps were lit, they seemed brighter, almost, than the sun. We were walking in the middle of the street, passing in and out of the orbs of light that spilled from those lamps.

The noise seemed louder in the dark, but I know this was just because we could see less. What snow there had been on the ground had been swept away by the thousands of feet filing through the streets. What remained were slick patches of ice and gravel. Despite this, children were being towed in slides over the gritty surface. On snow, the sound of a sled in tow is peaceful, lulling. On ice and grit it is a vexing sound. A mausoleum was under twenty-four hour construction; dynamite was being used to loosen the frozen ground. The explosions reverberated across Red Square and into the city streets.

When we got to the boulevard in front of what was once the Hall of Nobles, the line bled into a crowd. All around me, there was the shifting black of the moving crowd and the singularity of the place we were moving towards: the bright entrance and the pitchy silhouette of the guard that granted access to the mourners. Soon enough, a new pattern was imposed upon the crowd and we were directed into lines that traversed the boulevard in single-file loops like film that had sprung from its canister.

The rhythm of our waiting changed. We moved steadily in order to keep warm: if we could not step forward, we rocked from side to side. The sound of cupped hands being blown into. *Wshooooooo.* The folk songs rumbled low and melancholic. When the wind whipped up or a sled passed by, I couldn't hear the songs at all.

Outside the Hall of Nobles everything was sound and activity and movement. Inside, it was so quiet I felt as if I must have gone deaf. The plush red carpet at my feet. The light so white I couldn't at first see. And the smell. Like a forest. Boughs and wreaths of pine hung from every column we passed. The columns reached up high to touch the clean, vaulted ceiling. In the subsequent room was Lenin's bier.

Guards in khaki uniforms directed us further down the corridor, as if we might otherwise lose ourselves. We were permitted to enter one by one.

Through the door, it was like the darkness inside a wardrobe on a bright day. Walking towards a corpse makes you enormously conscious of time. What is the feeling of that time? I think it is something like hope, not hope itself, but its relative. It's a wish that the thing one needs to feel and consider and share will surface at the precise moment that one comes to stand in front of the dead body. As much as possible, the hope is for an alignment of the fullness of your feeling with the appearance—for one last time—of that person's face. This is even truer if you've never been so close to that person before. And, having never seen him before, having never before known that it was he who had made sense of this world, of this country, of these people.

When I saw him I cried just the way I needed to cry—violently and all at once.

If others cried, I did not hear them.

He looked less dead than any dead person I had ever seen. Peaceful. He lay under a glass coffin, which was so clean it was as if it were not there at all. A red woollen blanket covered the lower half of his body. Both arms were bent at the elbow, his hands—one in a fist, the other palm-down—lay across his belly.

I heard a young voice ask, Can he breathe in there?

No, said an older woman, probably a nanny, he doesn't need to anymore.

This, I thought. This very moment, is mourning.

We streamed out of the building past all those still waiting to go in. I looked at how the light of the entrance cast their faces in deep contrasts like masks from the ancient theatres that captured a single character: the stoic, the mourner, the victor. They were waiting for something to happen, they had somewhere to go, whereas me, I had nothing.

No doubt my aimlessness at that moment was what allowed me to react when I heard someone yell out, Miss!

It was the American, and he was making his way towards me. People were drifting all over the square. When he reached me, he wiped his forehead with a handkerchief and then suggested we have a glass of tea.

Tonight? I asked.

Why not? he said.

I didn't know. If he had been Russian, I would have refused. An American man was different. Weaker, probably, than a Russian child. It was one part constitution and one part history: it seemed, then, that no other nationality had the resilience of the Russian. The few Americans I had met were idealists who had come to see the new world we were creating. I thought Walter would be the same.

We left the crowds behind and walked up Tverskaya. Normally, Tverskaya is bustling no matter what time of day. Even at night, sleighs and taxis troll the street, their drivers pestering those on the sidewalks for money or amusement or both. But on that night, silence claimed the street. We walked past the dark windows of Moscow's most expensive stores and turned onto a side street, where he was staying. All the city

boulevards were strung with lights which made night walking especially wonderful. Our faces slipped in and out of the warm orbs of light that emanated from each little globe. The stores had closed early on account of Lenin, but some of the storefronts were still lit. We passed fur shops and bakeries and many *remont* shops whose signs were nothing more than an image of whatever they repaired: watches, suitcases, boots, and so on. Walter and I seemed to walk at the same pace. Maybe this was because we were about the same height, or maybe it was because of the peculiar way every step he took implied a pause. Like he was waiting, midstep, for me. Waiting so that when our feet met the ground they would do so at precisely the same time. It was a bit like dancing.

We were almost at his hotel when he admitted that it would be impossible to have tea: his hotel had no kitchen and he had yet to purchase a way to heat water in his room. He suggested cognac instead.

Had I known then what I know now about the nature of sex and love, I mightn't have gone up. In my mind, our visit was pure innocence, a natural thing, a curious thing, and something which would exist outside of time and the real life I had with Sasha. Sasha spent time with other woman and I saw no reason I couldn't spend time with other men, especially since the very reason for me being with Walter at that moment was because Sasha had refused to visit Lenin with me.

His room was on the second floor, which was also the top floor. He had a window, a single bed, a commode, a tin washtable and a small desk. On the desk there were three books standing upright as if they were the beginning of a library. He also had a small lamp. Lined up on the windowsill, in increasing size, was a teacup, a glass and a single bottle of cognac. He rinsed the glass and cup at the washtable; the faucet squeaked

when it was turned. As he organized himself, I looked out the window onto the street we had walked: the strings of lights glittered.

Only the small window opens, he said, gesturing to the trap window above the other. Under the transom, there were two windows, both of which had been sealed shut for the winter.

He was different from Sasha in that he was calm.

He sat on the corner of the bed and I sat on the chair that went with the desk. One of his books was an English-Russian dictionary. We looked up words together. *Kápta,* I would say, Map he would say. We had to sit beside each other in order to see both words, both alphabets. *Most*, I would say, *bridge*. *Peka*, river. In the double windows there were double reflections, so when I looked at the window it seemed that four people were drinking cognac and reading the dictionary, not two. We sat in silence when we could not think of a word, and it was peaceful. There is something intoxicating about the desire to communicate. We were like mutes, gesturing at each other and laughing when one gestured *to drink* and the other responded *to sleep* to which I said No. I left before eleven because of Sasha and because our doorman didn't have enough keys so we had to be home before the doorman went to sleep. Walter and I hadn't seen each other since.

When I think of it now, as I pace my white room, I can hardly remember the Walter I met then, in 1924, for my memory of him is so overshadowed by the man he became and the lies that he told, which I will recount when the time is right.

In the vermillion hall of the institute, several minutes had passed with no new arrivals, so I slid off the stool and straightened my dress. Mikhail assumed my place

behind the desk, and I walked down the hall to the grand salon, from which emanated the mingling notes of chatter and a string quartet. I hadn't noticed the arrival of Dr. Luria and Tsoiloskovsky, but they were there, as was Segalin, the neurologist who studied the pathology of genius. Luria always looked composed, but Tsoiloskovsky and Segalin both had something mad about them. Segalin, especially, seemed to move around the room like a wasp at a late summer dinner. His laugh was loud and unapologetic: it was out of proportion with the otherwise constrained conversations of the rest of the crowd.

At the institute, I worked with Dr. Bechterev and he had a German counterpart, Dr. Vogt, a neurologist who had spearheaded research into the brains of criminals and of the different races. He was a well known hypnotist as well. Vogt had arrived from Berlin on the morning train, looking as sharp as ever.

An enormous chandelier warmed the ivory walls, baroque mouldings and gold-tipped ornaments of the grand salon. Underneath the chandelier, the brains were arranged in a semi-circle. When I looked into the grand salon, the plinths towered over the people, some of whom had already taken their seats. I heard Segalin laugh. The largest group was gathered at the top of the circle, where Lenin's brain was displayed.

In the back rooms, behind the entrance way, behind the vermillion hallway graced with portraits, and behind the grand salon with its mirrored doors, was a small research space and a good place for me to work. Glass cabinets filled with neatly labeled specimens lined the long, dark wall of the main laboratory. We had several specimens of the human ear into which dyed waxes had been injected so as to better mark the pertinent features. The labyrinth of the ear, for example, was dyed a deep black; the arteries were dyed red. The blood vessels running along the crura of the stapes, and traversing the

membrane stretched over the space between them and had been filled to their minutest branches. There was a heart whose superficial absorbents had been distended with quicksilver. The skin from the hand of a gouty patient had been so prepared as to show the small veins blocked with chalk-stones. Several specimens injected with scirrhous growths and encephaloid masses displayed the following mystery: diseased organs have no veins. Arteries, yes, but no veins. Hence the mystery of circulation in diseased structures is a point of important study at this very moment. Endless beautiful preparations lined the glass shelves, casting their shadows on the specimens beneath them, which cast their own shadows on those beneath them so that the bottom row was all darkness and dust. What few specimens we had from the ocean scuttled about on that murky shelf there. Some specimens prefer the dark. They degrade in the light. But none of this was visible that night.

No single person seemed to be speaking loudly, yet the room buzzed with chatter and laughter. Many of the scientists in attendance had harvested the specimens themselves. Though I had worked on the collection for three years, I was a junior scientist and just beginning to feel I belonged. In addition to cataloguing our burgeoning collection, I had assisted with the indigo dyes. Once, in the laboratory, the tiniest drop escaped the dropper. I cleaned it up without removing my wedding ring; later, when it was itching, I removed it to find a deep purple band around my ring finger, as if I'd been permanently bruised in just that spot. I always removed my rings after that.

Suspended in formaldehyde, all the brains appeared to float in their glass displays. The liquid was clear, but viscous, the specimens did not rotate once placed inside so that each was displayed in the same way—the frontal lobe protruding, the left side facing the

wall, the right side for display. Lenin's brain had been damaged by the shooting or by his strokes—we weren't sure just what had been the cause—and so it needed to be displayed on a specific angle to hide the dead, black tissue. The other brains were displayed on the same angle so that the choice appeared aesthetic.

Each case sat on a plinth and each plinth was labeled with the names of the brains' owners and about each of the brains a description had been written, detailing its distinctive characteristics. Certain plinths had shelves into which we placed documents or objects illustrative of the owner's life: musical scores for Borodin and Rubenstein, poems for the writers, decrees and speeches for the politicians. Occasionally, we had a photograph, and, in the case of brains whose key aspects were more visible on a cellular rather than a structural level, microphotographs of pertinent histological sections. What very few of us knew, but many should have suspected, was that the display cases held but models.

Dr. Vogt wore a tailored, dark gray three-piece suit; his glasses hung on a chain around his neck. He stood at the podium and cleared his throat to get everyone's attention. When he spoke, he leaned onto the podium so that its pedestal cocked forward.

We have microtomed ten thousand slices of Lenin's brain, said Dr. Vogt, every tenth of which has been treated with an indigo stain and studied using methodologies developed by Drs. Bets, Rossolimo, Bechterev, and others in the field. Our research has led to seminal victories concerning the material substrate of Lenin's genius.

I stood at the back, so that I could see everything all at once. My eyes drifted along the blank cream-coloured walls and the neo-classical moldings that sectioned the walls into neat rectangular segments. Above the moldings and cornices, there were angels

holding lyres, bare-breasted women, and a few historical figures, Pushkin among them. The group had gathered in front of Vogt. Some were taking notes. Others were whispering. Some members of the politburo had arrived, as had Drs Sarkisov and Sapir, both of whom had worked with Vogt in Berlin at his institute there.

Vogt nodded at them and continued: Unlike the subjective whims of individual psychological assessment, he said, cytoarchitectonics is superior because it is metrical and, therefore, objective. The mental substrate of Lenin's genius has already been proven in incontrovertible terms: in layer III of the cortex and in many cortical regions deep in this layer, I have seen pyramidal cells of a size and number I've never before seen.

I stood to the right of Bechterev, whose thick arms were tightly crossed over his thick chest and as I heard the announcements about the discoveries in the third layer of the cerebral cortex of pyramidal cells of a size never before observed and in a number never before observed, all I could see was the way the fat flesh of Bechterev's right elbow bulged in the unforgiving folds of his navy wool tunic that appeared too small and too hot for a man of his temperament. He had no patience for announcements. By then, I knew him well.

By then, I had been working with Bechterev for almost ten years. At first, as a student, then later as a tutor, and now as an assistant. In the lab, I was cataloguing. I loved the paperwork. I loved cleaning the glass jars with boiling hot water and steel wool. I loved sterilizing them and readying them for specimens. I loved the wavy thick vapour of the chemicals and the way they shimmered as if in a heat haze. I was cataloguing a biologist's collection. Each item required its own jar and its own kind of display. The bones of the wrist, for example, needed a small platform and tiny pins. Sometimes, glue.

The bones themselves needed to be prepared with a lacquer. Once I had placed the little platform in the jar, I would use tweezers to arrange the bones, which, already glued, had to be placed quickly in order for them to fuse together. On the jar I would write the type of bones, "human wrist," the name of the donor, "Victor Oshanko, aged 43," his profession, if known, "baker, thief," the date of the donation, "October, 1904," and a catalogue number written in red ink. Later I had a typewriter with red ribbon for this task.

Because of their metrical character, Dr. Vogt said, brain architectonics has an advantage over methods like individual psychology, which is based primarily on subjective assessments. Since architectonics can ascertain the size of the cortical regions involved in certain mental capabilities, in cubic centimeters, and their relative share of the total available cortex, in percentage, it provides objective criteria for evaluating, though only *post mortem*, the individual characteristics of a brain. As such, our findings with regards to V.I. Lenin are at once conclusive, in that there can be no disputing the measurements thus far obtained, and introductory, as it is without doubt that there is so much more to be discovered.

Whereas bourgeois education was based on abstract knowledge and sedentary book learning without any connection to practical experience, our pedagogy fused together scholarship, praxis, and the most advanced forms of production in order to advance new forms of embodied knowledge and thought. I thought of the institute as a factory-university.

I watched as the reporters and wives and scientists nodded and whispered and attended to Dr. Vogt's gestures. I remember the nervous excitement of that night. We were part of the new ways. The potential raced inside me, inside all of us.

When it came time for everyone to leave, I wondered again if Walter would remember me, but he didn't.

After closing the institute, Bechterev and I ordered pickled herring and a carafe of vodka at a nearby alehouse. We had seen the guests leave for their homes or for other drinking holes, but Vogt and the others were too intent upon impressing one another and I needed only to impress Bechterev. With any other superior, it might have been inappropriate for me, a young woman, to have been out drinking as late as I was, but it was different with Bechterev and everyone knew it. His wife once told me that he fell asleep over his manuscripts at night and received his first patients of the day at 8 am, at home. His only fault, if one could say he had one, was that he over-worked. His wife and children probably saw him less than I did. Yet, they saw the part of him that I almost never saw. They saw him when he wasn't working, and when he wasn't talking about work.

On the plank stage of the alehouse I'd often watched small pieces of theatre or musical ensembles, but that night the stage was empty but for a gramophone sitting on a chair. The backdrop was a curtain upon which had been painted a sad scene: rolling hills and, in the distance, a ruin whose crumbling tower seemed to disappear into the faint, pink sky. That night, red political banners were leaned against the backdrop, so that the green hills puckered strangely. The gramophone spilled out a dreary concert which could barely be heard over the din.

When I first met Bechterev I never would have imagined I could so casually pass an evening with him. He was so imposing and his reputation intimidated me. Remnants

of these feelings remained, but they mingled with the comfort that comes with an accumulation of shared experiences. In any case, it wasn't me he needed to intimidate; his competitors were Pavlov and Vogt, not me. I was just a student to him, which meant he was always kind. The truth was that he had become a kind of father to me, almost as soon as my own father had ceased to fulfill that role. Blood was thinner than affiliation, as they said.

He sat at the table as if it were too small for him.

Where's Sasha, said Dr. Bechterev.

A barmaid noticed we had no glasses. She clinked them down on the table as she walked by.

Vlad, I said. You know I can't bring him to these things.

They had met before. It had not gone well. Dr. Bechterev had hosted a small dinner party in his Moscow apartment. In addition to Sasha and me, Dr. Bechterev had invited another of his students, Alexander Luria, a man who would later become instrumental to my survival. I remember the conversation well. It was, perhaps, the earliest sign of something amiss between Sasha and me. He had been quiet for the whole night, watching. Brooding. To say he was jealous would be to simplify it. He was not jealous or possessive, by nature, but his discomfort with Dr. Bechterev was palpable. It was over tea and a honey-drizzled zapekanka—the honey is from the Altay region, said Dr. Bechterev, proudly—that Sasha started in with a question he seemed to have been considering for quite some time.

Anything, said Bechterev, ask me anything.

A golden-coloured vodka had been served. It tasted like sweet caraway.

I want to know your opinion on the practice of hypnotism, said Sasha.

Why? I asked. This was what Sasha did when he felt as if he did not belong. Where some people stay quiet, and others adapt, Sasha attacked. It was the side of him that needed to mark his territory; it was the side of him that encountered rules as obstacles and mores as fetters. Aggression was an allergic reaction, something he could not control.

Dr. Bechterev noticed Sasha's tone. The carafe was almost empty. He emptied the remaining drops into my glass before responding.

Yes, said Luria, and say, in addition, tell us what you think of the séance. I went to one in Paris. The Curies are very involved in summoning the dead and such.

Luria and I were the same age and had followed much the same educational path, yet he was from the small city of Kazan and this made him seem younger, more naïve.

Hypnotism, has, unfortunately, become a derogatory word, said Dr Bechterev. Mental suggestion is more appropriate to the procedure we use today. As for the séance, this is nothing but entertainment.

But does hypnotism work? asked Sasha.

It is a diagnostic and curative tool. It's been known to remedy diseases both physical and mental, diseases that the rest of pharmacopeia has been ill equipped to address.

But does it cure people? said Sasha.

That's what he's saying, I said to Sasha.

That wasn't a real answer, said Sasha to me.

Success or failure can be reduced to one single factor, said Bechterev. The patients must be motivated. I know of a case where two hysterical married people were already well improved from the treatments they'd received, but they nagged each other with autosuggestions, and, in consequence, went away uncured.

So, it doesn't, said Sasha.

Do your colleagues practice it? asked Luria. I've heard it's popular in Germany. Perhaps you know, having visited yourself.

It isn't a panacea, I said.

The practice has not been without controversy, said Dr. Bechterev. Dr. Dubois slags hypnotism and suggestion while in reality he actually practices suggestion from alpha to omega, only in slightly different form.

And Dr. Vogt? I asked.

Yes, Dr. Vogt has an established practice.

I would have thought, said Sasha, slowly pouring himself a drink from the refreshed carafe and then filling everyone else's glass as well, I would have thought that your ilk would have outlawed it, or, at least, rejected it on the basis of its interference with the mind.

As I said, said Dr. Bechterev, the practice has not been without controversy. What does Freud have to say about it? he asked Luria.

I believe he has rejected it, sir, said Luria.

That night, the Americans had launched a dirigible over Long Island. It had taken a moving picture of a solar eclipse that had lasted for four minutes, casting the entire state of New York into a temporary night, which meant that both we and the Americans were

experiencing night at the very same time. The dirigible was easier to discuss than mental suggestion.

The last toast of the evening was Bechterev's: Friends, let this not be our last drink together!

Yet, if my memory serves me correctly, they never drank together again.

The vodka and herring arrived. The herring was whole, served on a plate with pickled onions and oil. The vodka came in a carafe, which clinked against the two glasses when the waiter set them down on the table.

Sasha is at home, I said.

Yes, said Bechterev. A private life is not so bad, he said.

Normally I would have understood his comment in political terms and, normally, I would have bristled because the private life was a thing of the past, a thing too bourgeois, a thing too capitalist. But Bechterev didn't think like other people, and he didn't ask questions other people asked.

I wouldn't put it in those terms, I said. It's more like keeping my different interests separate. Sasha isn't interested in neurology, and he doesn't know how to talk to politicians.

I see, he said.

I think it might be suffocating to work and live with your husband or wife, I said.

Cecile and Oskar manage fine, said Bechterev, but they never had children, which means Cecile could continue to research.

Our table tilted if we leaned on it. When we poured our first glasses of vodka, the liquid spilled over the rims. Bechterev ran his index finger through the clear puddle and licked it clean.

The room was full of off-duty Red Army soldiers whose athleticism made me feel old and lacking in vigour.

I straightened up in my chair and said, Test me!

You don't need it, he said.

Just a few, I said.

Mendeleev, he said.

Such an easy start! I said. His periodic table left gaps, gaps that were predictions of future discoveries and, when the anticipated elements were discovered, his genius was recognized. The elements were later discovered by-

L. F. Nilson, said Dr. Bechterev, in 1879, with ekaboron which was later called scandium.

What an ugly name! I said.

That's true, said Bechterev, laughing.

We talked like that for a while, about the musicians, the scientists and Lenin, about their salient differences, about how dominant left frontal and parietal lobes typified the scientist's brain whereas musicians manifest an overdeveloped anterior of the gyrus temporalis superior, and all of them, a complexity of convolutions unseen in the average brain. Our glasses and plates, once used, became part of a miniature exhibit. The carafe was Lenin, the glasses formed curves on either side of the carafe and the plate of herring—now littered with thin semi-translucent bones—was a display case for future

additions to the collection. Many were planned; some were hoped for. Bechterev, for example, had already willed his brain to the collection.

When the waiter arrived with another carafe, there was no obvious place to put it. We put the full carafe where the Lenin carafe had been and the empty carafe beside it. Lenin still had his place, but now we had space for future additions to the collection.

Did you know Rubenstein? I asked.

No, said Bechterev, but I knew his brother.

Rubenstein worked with Sasha's supervisor, I said.

Sasha was older than me by several years. When we met, our age difference had seemed more significant, now it seemed less so. We met in the early 1920s, at a bookstore that no longer exists. At that time I was a student. I was curious about everything and very, very proud. I was proud of my country, proud of being a woman and of the honours I had received as a student—working with Bechterev was one—and certain that we were on the cusp of new discoveries. We were the Enlightenment and the French revolution. We had read Locke and Rousseau. We were constructing new men and new women through systems and technology and art.

The best place for conversations about everything, really, was at Osorgin's bookstore on Nikitskaya. The owners were writers. Yuly, who managed the inventory, had translated Schopenhauer into Russian, and Boris, who usually worked the cash, and who was a historian and Dostoyevsky specialist. None of them were very skilled in business. The Osorgins lived in the back room. The place smelled like potatoes most of the time. It is the only second-hand bookstore I have ever been in that did not smell of

dust. I am allergic to dust. Rachel, Osorgin's wife, was always in the back room preparing one thing or another. I didn't like talking to other women about women's things, though, so I don't think I ever spoke to her. The smell of potatoes got into the wool of our coats. Everyone who went there smelled the same when they left. Sometimes we ate dinner in the back room. Then Mrs. Osorgin—I never called her Rachel—added special things to the meal—nuts, butter, small chopped onions.

The bookstore had no sign. Either you knew where it was or you didn't. The entrance was several steps below street level. The tobacco place next door had a glowing green lamp in its window; when the snow shrouded the entrance on winter afternoons you just had to look for that blur of green to know you'd arrived. If you knew to look, that is.

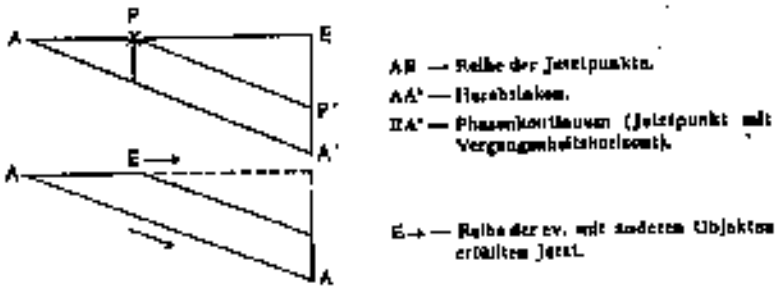
We went there to know about the world. The prices were so cheap the books were practically free. Books arrived, some said, by the truckload or by sleigh, stolen by the Bolsheviks or taken from abandoned homes. We weren't Bolsheviks ourselves, but we weren't against them either. As for the shop, everyone paid a small membership, so we were members rather than customers. If we wanted new books, we'd steal them from the stores on Tverskaya. If we wanted to understand the new books, we'd bring them to Osorgin's. Sometimes we'd propose a section for the wall.

Bechterev got up from the table to go to the bathroom. It had gotten very busy since we'd arrived. Every table was full. People leaned against the walls. The gramophone had stopped playing its dull concert. The manager was on stage, fiddling with it, trying to make it start up again. I doodled on an unsoiled napkin while I waited for Bechterev.

In contrast to every other space in the store, there was one bare wall upon which, every week, Osorgin would quote a new passage or draw a new diagram. One week it would be Freud, another it might be Bertrand Russell. In my notes from that period, I have copied out whole paragraphs and diagrams. Like the following:

Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it? This question, which at first might not seem difficult is one of the most difficult that can be asked. (Bertrand Russell, 1912).

Or this image, which I still don't understand.



And yet, I still feel that I should know this. It is Husserl's conception of time, memory, the flow of it all and the pressure the past puts upon our present. Perhaps I understand it better than I think. Time moves in the direction of A to E. As we move forward in the comfort of linearity, our understanding of time is punctuated from beneath the surface as P surges up, it is a song from the past or a scent (like Linden flowers in Berlin), or a sound, and yet, we continue thinking of time as progressive, forward moving.

It often seemed like Osorgin—a small man, tufts of gray hair, glasses—was joking with us. In his silent way. He'd put Russell up one week, then Kant or Tolstoy the

next. Sometimes a citation from the Talmud would appear. Then we'd write our own comments all around it, like we were Jewish scholars from ancient times. Maybe it was because I was so young, or maybe because I saw Lenin, Marx, and Engels everywhere else, that I didn't register their absence in the bookstore.

All manner of new things were revealed to us there, and it wasn't just in the books. The owners were writers. Yuly, who managed the inventory, had translated Schopenhauer into Russian, and Boris, who worked the cash, was a historian and Dostoyevsky specialist. None of them were very apt in business. Often it was so cold in there that you could see your breath. Then someone, usually one of the students, would roll up his sleeves to chop some wood for the stove.

Some of the students were real hangers-on. I distinguished myself in a variety of ways. First, I always went to the store alone. And when I got there, I didn't talk to anyone. I always went to one of two sections: Science or Travel. Baedekers for Benelux, the Ukraine, maps of Petrograd (already out of date), *The United States (with Excursions to Mexico, Cuba, Porto Rico, and Alaska)*, from 1909. The guides always came with a variety of maps; sometimes they even came with floor plans for museums. Once I found a stereoscope guide for Moscow. It came with maps covered in strange triangular lines that beamed out from specific points—they were to indicate the range that one could see through the stereoscope image with which, I guess, the maps originally came. It was written in English, so I couldn't read it, and I doubt many other people could, either. But sometimes useless books like that appeared in the store because the owners felt badly for the people who needed the money so much they had to sell all of their books. I kept hoping a guide to Oceania would appear. That was the place in the world that was the

farthest from where I was. Sometimes I opened the map of Germany and traced my finger up and down the Rhine. No-man's-land, I would think.

It was a December afternoon when I met Sasha.

I was standing in a nook, my shoulder leaning into the bookshelf, my body positioned so that I could watch people around me and read at the same time. I can't remember the exact title, but I do remember the heft of the book and the fact that I had been re-reading the same sentence for quite some time. The author was talking about Einstein's light clock. There was a diagram. Underneath the diagram, the author said that the light clock was the simplest of explanations of time, yet I re-read and re-read in an agitated way because, simple or not, I could not understand.

Hey Jack! someone said.

I looked up and saw a slight man walk down into the shop. The door closed behind him, but not before I saw the feet of several pedestrians walk by. The man was being loud in a bookstore, I thought. He removed his ushanka. Black hair. Sticking up everywhere. He pushed his friend. Jack. Who didn't say anything. Who kept reading. The loud one looked around the store, but there was only me, Boris, and Mrs. Osorgin to look at. He went to stand in front of the stove and I thought, I'm cold, too. But when I went to stand in front of the stove I was suddenly so hot. I was smiling to myself in a stupid way.

Maybe I was still pretending to read the book on the clock. I think we stood there for a while. But it can't have been because, when an explosion happened outside and the windows imploded and the shelves around where Jack was standing collapsed and when he grabbed my hand and pulled me out the back room, his hand was still cold.

Boris had thrown a pot of tea on the samovar. Mrs. Osorgin was yelling at him: For God's sake Boris, get some water! But there wasn't a fire yet—wouldn't I have stayed to help if there was? The three of us ran together. The door slammed behind us and we ran down the little back street, past a crumbled building that might once have been a home but was now filled with dirt and brick and piles of sand and in which, one afternoon, through a frame that once would have had a window, I'd watched a young man comb his hair over to one side. At some point we stopped holding hands. Our footsteps were gritty echoes that jumped off the cold wet walls of the narrow street. Already, I felt like I knew something about him, as if the way he grabbed my hand told me all I needed to know about him. Like that he was good. And that his hand was strong and didn't let go until everything was okay. And that once his hand let go, I wanted him to hold it again. As we looped back to Nikitskaya, we slowed and came to a stop; we were just down the street from the front entrance to the bookshop. I was about to go back to the shop to see what had happened, but one of them said, Are you crazy?

I didn't think I was, but apparently I shouldn't go back just yet.

Let's go get a drink, said the one who had held my hand, the dark haired one with a soft hand who was loud and got cold in bookstores.

Everything's closed, I said.

I know a place, he said.

I can't, said the one called Jack and he left us like that, facing each other, on a December night in 1921.

Osorgin's was a place that lived, momentarily, between eras. The bomb exploded like a marker in time. That the bomb had not been intended for Osorgin's was of little

importance: that the neighbouring synagogue was the principle target was indication enough that it was time for the store to move on. The bookstore that once featured tidy worlds upon tidy worlds, worlds that unfolded, like a natural thing into smaller and smaller subsections so that Travel contained South Asia which contained the Himalayas which contained both mountaineering and the Buddhism was gone and with it, an access to a world that extended so far beyond our borders that it was, for me, the fount of imagination itself.

The next day, I returned to the store to see what remained. From the level of the street, I looked down at the entrance. The front window had been blown out and, with the wind, wisps of ash and charred paper seemed to shush out of the blackened interior like a dragon coughing up its breakfast. There was no one to be seen.

When I think of this incident now, now that I am far away and can assess with the wisdom of time passed what has happened, I see the destruction of Osorgin's as the beginning of an era of destruction. The image of the black ash and the gaping interior, the charred books that must have been sodden for certainly someone must have tried to put the fire out, all of this stands now as a symbol of what was to come, though nothing since then materialized in quite the same way—it was the only time the destruction and loss was real and it happened before I knew just how much more we would lose. To say what more I felt as I stood there, looking at the black mess, would be disingenuous for those feelings cannot be put into words--the loss was too great. For me it was the beginning of a sadness that crept into every aspect of our lives. For Sasha, it was a symbol of threat and, for a time, that made him alive with adrenaline until it took its course and exhausted him.

On our first evening together, Sasha had already decided that I was dangerous. He lived near the art school and I, as I have said, lived in the Arabat. These were separate worlds. One was the world of the bohemians and one was the world of the aristocrats. He was a bohemian, son of wealthy landowners. I was a scientist, and though I had grown up in a bourgeois world, I had my mother to thank for my proletarian credentials. She did that one thing for me, several years later, when she gave me her name and an address south of the Arabat, where the factories were being built at an unprecedented rate. Because of this one final collaboration, my parents had provided me with the education I needed (bourgeois) and the credentials (proletarian) to go to university. Sasha wanted only to make art; I wanted to discover things. Already, that night, he knew that how I would discover things was the opposite of how he would make things and it was because of that, he later explained, that he tried to keep our worlds separate: he tried to keep me in the Arabat and away from his home. That he tried to keep us apart only made me want us to be together.

He said he lived above a bar and he said we were far from there and yet it happened that at the end of the night we found ourselves in a bar where the woman behind the counter recognized him. Minutes later, a man came in with his dog and Sasha knew him, and knew the dog, too. I wasn't so surprised, then, when we fell out of the bar into the street and walked up it a little way and landed on a door that was his. He pulled me into him and we kissed and laughed and kissed again and he had a look on his face like he'd lost the game, but he'd wanted to, or was glad to have done it, like it was on purpose, and so there we were, at his door and we went in together.

You're trouble, he said.

The sky was deep blue and cloudless when Bechterev and I left the alehouse. The air was an invigorating cold. We walked past the former homes of merchants and priests—now bathhouses or workers' clubs. All the court's weavers used to live in *Zamoskovorech*, I said, as we walked, probably to remind Bechterev that I was walking with him, though on the pretense of telling him about my city since he was from Leningrad. Bechterev's pace was brisk and determined, so that even though we had no set destination, he walked as though the point of arrival was just ahead, a pace I tried to match. Black birds flying overhead signaled our proximity to the river.

When the wind began to gust and the birds pierced the sky, their dark shapes disappearing into the darkening sky, we stopped in a different bar. Perhaps it was the walking or perhaps I had mentioned Berlin by way of Dr. Vogt's *Das Neurologische Zentralstation*—which I thought brilliant whereas Bechterev thought it bold—but one thing or another led to Bechterev recalling a time he walked through the streets of Berlin—it was before the cities were overrun with cars, as they are now, he said—with a woman, a mathematician named Sofia K and her lover, a man whose position had become suddenly precarious in Germany, as he was French and the war had broken out. The story unfolded with remarkable precision. I had the feeling that Bechterev had allowed me into the hidden recesses of his mind so that I might see all of its working parts and some of its hidden hopes, too. The French man had once been the Director of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures and had, thus, been a key figure at Breteuil on 28 September 1889 for the deposition of the metre and the kilogram—

referred to thereafter as the international prototypes M and K—in a secret vault that concluded an underground network of rooms. The series of rooms was strung like a chain of pearls beneath the surface of the earth, each room lay deeper than the one previous, each door locked with a key unlike the last, so that access to the deepest room at the end of the series required not one key but seven. It was there, in the seventh room that the vaults and the Universal Comparator (which had been used to cut the metre to a previously unimagined precision) were found. What had led to this achievement was the critical capacity of a single man, a chemist named Monsieur André Dumas, who had determined that the revolutionary metre, conceived of at the height of the Jacobins' Reign of Terror, was neither strong enough nor sufficiently invariable to serve as the prototype for the world's measures. Further to that, the revolutionary metre was based upon a fantastical ratio that imagined the length of the metre to be the equivalent of one ten-millionth of the distance between Paris and the North Pole or one ten-millionth of a quarter of the earth's circumference—Bechterev couldn't remember which—but in any case it was a measurement that we could not deign to approximate in 1889, a century after its creation, nor even now, said Bechterev, looking at me, that I have lost my youth and its attendant qualities. Bechterev's eyes glistened and I could not tell if they watered from sentimentality or the weariness of age, or both. Monsieur André Dumas proclaimed that the modern metre escaped the romanticism of the revolutionary metre: it was, he said, "neutral, decimal, international." According to the description given by the French man, the international prototypes M and K were ceremoniously laid upon beds of velvet after which the meters were sheathed in protective tubes and the kilograms nested in triple glass bell jars. With the layering of the bell jars, the gleam of light they reflected

got ever brighter and, by the third jar, the dark figure of the kilogram beneath them was lost as though it were, already, a relic of a lost age of certainty. This was the last the French man saw of the original international prototypes for after that they were encased in large brass cylinders, and no one has seen them since. He did say that the originals were buried alongside six witnesses, six identical international prototypes, and that it was against these witnesses that a further thirty standard bars were measured, one bar being produced for each of the international delegates in attendance. Once the international prototypes had been laid in their vault, said the French man, I was handed the two keys needed to lock the brass cylinders, then a third to bolt the inner basement door, and then a fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh, for locks on the subsequent doors, each of which was handed to me in separate sealed envelopes and which, upon their use, were taken by a deputy to be dispersed among three of us—myself, as Director of the International Weights and Measures, and two other men, the General Guard of the National Archives and the President of the International Committee, thus ensuring that those rooms would never again be opened but in the presence of all three.

Remarkably, said Dr. Bechterev, the very same technology that was used to cut the metre to a precision never before imaginable was used by neurologists to microtome the brain. What I take from the story, now that the fate of Dr. Bechterev is, without doubt, the very same as so many others that suffered at the hands of our leaders is that he must have, in some way, known what his fate would be. What else could be the reason for his lamentable emphasis on that lost age of certainty? Perhaps I am reading too deeply—loss has a tendency to colour things, as we know—but it occurs to me now that Bechterev wanted me to know just how much we stood to lose. Perhaps he wanted me to know just

how much I needed to protect, to hide, as it were, in a hidden repository where no single soul held every single key. At least, that is what I think now, but I could be wrong. That night in Berlin, he said, the night was darker than any I've since experienced due to the black blinds that prevented all light from escaping the windows, but like here, nothing could be done to prevent the river from reflecting the stars.

When I walked home on the night after the opening, the stars shone brightly and the streets felt safe and clean. The moon hung low in the sky. I stopped at the peak of every bridge to see the white ribbon of moon rippling across the black river. When I got home, I stood beneath the window to the room I lived in with Sasha.

We'd moved in there shortly after we married. Sasha said it was either now or never, and so, we did it. He understood me like no one else ever has. It wasn't anything I've ever tried to articulate and certainly not a thing I could explain to someone who hadn't seen us together because it was a feeling, a complicity and a knowledge of each other that preceded who we became. How to describe it? My love, he would say, and I'd look at him and he'd have nothing more to add, and then I'd keep working, but smiling, too. Before we lived together, I'd fall asleep thinking about him and wake up thinking about him. Of how every part of my body remembered him, as if the space around my body was thicker with memory of how his hand had slipped past my waist and crawled up between my arms to intertwine with my hands and like that I was enveloped by him. He said, your hair is five of my favourite colours, and I knew from that that he loved me because my hair is just black.

The day we were supposed to take up the key from the concierge we stood outside the apartment and looked at each other, both afraid, but laughing, and it was the best that nothing made sense. We were lucky because our room had a balcony and it was out there that we sat, most nights, smoking cigarettes and sharing moments from our day. He studied people, always looking for idiosyncrasy: the tough guy walking down the street who pauses to pluck a perfect fluffy snowflake from the air, the diabetic woman who stands on the street corner asking for food and then refuses it on account of her malady. Even then, Sasha knew things in a way that I could not deign to understand—he knew the pathetic patterns of human love and was brave enough to love me regardless.

I want to be what you want me to be, he said then, but I'm not going to you, you know.

Why not? I asked.

Because we never are.

I stood beneath the window.

Sash! I whisper-yelled. Sasha! The sound of his name was like the wind whistling through the trees. I threw rocks.

The light came on so I knew he was coming down to open the door. The concierge only stayed awake until eleven at night, after which he locked the building with the only existing keys. Sasha had to let me in through the window to the downstairs kitchen. I had opened it for him before and knew that the insides of the window were thick with cooking oil and fat. Only Mr. Bonner, who lived above us, ever cleaned the windows, but he'd been ill, and so the windows were filthy.

A dark shape moved behind the window. Then it opened and Sasha's face appeared.

I'm not coming out there, he said.

I know, I whispered. But could you pass me a chair to stand on?

The legs of the chair came through the window, guided by Sasha's hidden hands.

I took the chair from him, stood on it, then, once I was sitting on the window sill, pulled the chair back in to pass to Sasha, who was waiting inside, wearing only shorts and woollen socks. In his silent efficiency—he was almost never efficient—I could see that he'd been worried. He shut the window as soon as I was off the ledge and replaced the chair at the table once I'd stepped off of it. He padded out of the kitchen and down the hall, his shoulders pulled back, as if he were in the military, though he was the furthest from it. I knew I should not laugh, but a snicker escaped my lips and he turned, quickly, as if about to say, So you think it's funny, do you? But, when he turned, he looked down at his feet, the socks slipping away from his toes like dogs' tongues on a hot day. He turned back and kept going, but I'd seen him smile.

The photograph of us does not have a frame. I prop it beside the photograph of my mother and father. The photograph has a white border that has, with time, turned cream. The glossy surface bears the mark of my fingers in the corners, one of which is particularly worn so that it curls forward. In the photograph, our bodies face the camera, but we are looking at each other. Even our eyes are smiling. Now, when I look at this photo, I try to remember the sound of his voice, but I cannot.

2.

My life with Sasha was my other life. It wasn't private, but it was separate, and it was separate, I think, because I was young and unable to assimilate the various parts of me. Who I was depended entirely upon place. At the labs and at the institute, I was articulate, a *politikon zoon*, or political animal; I was a trained researcher, and I had knowledge and skill at my fingertips. At home, which was my inside self, I had a life with Sasha that seemed almost hermetically sealed off from the rest of my world. It was as if we spoke our own language.

At first, it was like I had a secret. And it was like Sasha had a secret. And it was a secret we wanted to tell each other so badly, but couldn't. And then when we told each other, we said the same thing, and then it was *our* secret and we didn't tell anyone else. No matter where we were, we had that secret between us, and no one else needed to know a single thing. This lasted for a long while after we met that night, and then, suddenly, it was summer.

And we were spending all our time together.

Being with him immediately changed my perspective of the world. No longer precise, no longer aware, no longer externally engaged, I barely noticed when the wider world of buildings and bridges and boats blurred, as if out of focus, and in my myopia I only heard Sasha's voice, smelt Sasha's smell, felt Sasha's hand. I was wholly incapable of discernment—all I knew was love.

I had become a technician by then and knew my tasks like the moon knows her orbit. In the daily cycle of organizing, labeling and cataloguing the specimens, I drifted away into a pure haze of missing so that the workday was just one long interruption from

my real life with Sasha. As with all things, this feeling faded, but by then I had become Bechterev's assistant, Sasha had graduated art school, the civil war had ended, and the strange years of the New Economic Policy had begun. For all his idealism, said the Mensheviks, Lenin's gone mad and made this country capitalist. It's temporary, said the Bolsheviks. Like hell it is, said the old Socialist Revolutionary Party. So, leave then, said the Bolsheviks. In those NEP years, time unwound. People could say what they thought. In those NEP years, we could buy fur stoles and flapper dresses, *foie gras* and French perfume and the only thing everyone could agree on was that we hated the NEP men because they were the only ones who could afford the stoles and dresses and finery. We didn't admit that we were jealous. We did say we were disgusted. Lenin had his first stroke in 1922. By the time he died in 1924, Sasha and I had gotten married.

He noticed things about me that I'd never known. I walk with my head down, watching the street all the time. Do you always do that? he asked. And when I am reading, I say some of the words out loud. Or I laugh. Hmmmm, I say. What? he'd ask. What did you read? And I would tell him some small thing: the structure of the atom is like the planets…all the little pieces orbit around the nucleus, as if around the sun. Beautiful, he would say. And then I could think of it that way—as an aesthetic object—and not as I had—as a scientific fact.

These were the first years of university, the growing up years, the discovery years, the in-love years. That was when just thinking of him made me flush. That was when I forgave him his idiosyncracies, when I forgave, too, his politics. I thought of him and his opinions as quaint. I could even say I loved him for the very disregard he had about his appearance, his flippancy regarding politics, his traditionalism.

Sasha was the most sensitive person I had ever met. He grew up on a farm. One day their cat gave birth to a litter of kittens. Sasha spent the whole afternoon with them, watching them move blindly (their eyes were still shut) to the nipple and then curl away into deep sleeps, and then move back to the nipple to suckle again. When his father found out about the kittens, he took Sasha for a walk out to the fields. The father said nothing, but when they were at the outer edge of their land, he handed his son a shovel.

Dig the deepest hole you know how, he said and walked back towards the family home.

Sasha was only seven at the time; the hole he dug was less than half a metre deep. He was worried his father would be angry with him for being slow, so he didn't stop digging until his father returned.

This will do, his father said. He had brought a basket with him.

Sasha heard a tiny mew.

His father opened up the basket and poured the kittens into the hole.

Now cover them up with that dirt, he said.

That was Pyotr, the man who left for war and never returned, and I hated him, even though I'd never met him.

My school was the same school my father had taught at, at one time, but not the same location. Instead of being in the centre of the city, I was all the way along Pirogowskaya at Second Moscow State University. He was at the art school, the one near Gosbank; I can't remember now what it was called. V-something. Wchutemas, maybe.

All of the art students had studios. His was in an old mansion that had been divided and subdivided so many times, going inside it was like entering a maze. The

walls were so thin that we heard whispering in the studio next door. An elevator had been installed, but it never worked.

The first time he took me there was early in the summer of 1922. We had been to the theatre for the first time and had bought marzipan for the first time too. I remember feeling extravagant. The theatre was once free but with NEP it was suddenly expensive, even for students. I had worn one of my mother's dresses, though I had even considered getting one made. In the theatre, some NEP-men had eaten oranges in their balcony seats and our mouths yearned for something as sweet, as juicy, as fresh. The smell of the oranges wafted throughout the theatre. I saw more than one head turn to look at them. NEP had made us envious.

My mother had been smaller than me, so her dress held me too tight. When Sasha and I got to his studios, I had to take every single step up the stairs. Normally, I would skip steps because I liked leaping.

He shared his studio with three other students. Each student occupied a corner of the room, so the room had four distinct aesthetics. One corner was full of sheet metal, nails, screws, bolts, and rusting machinery. Another was draped in silks and cottons, another was piles and piles of paper, as if it were an archive and not a studio space. Sasha's was the cleanest. He had one single canvas on an easel, a small cot pushed up against the window, and a small desk upon which sat a hotplate, a kettle and two teacups without saucers. He put the kettle on to boil for tea.

I'm sorry that I don't have any chairs, he said.

I don't mind, I said, and sat down on the cot.

Where are your paintings? I asked.

They are in a show, he said.

Why didn't you tell me?

I was going to, he said, I was going to tell you about it tonight.

When the water boiled, he brought the glasses, tea pot and kettle over to a box, which had been inverted and placed as a table beside the cot. We did not talk. At one point, we heard voices in the hallway, and then someone went into the studio next door.

Who is it? I whispered.

Jack, whispered Sasha. He sleeps in his studio.

We were sitting right next to each other and by being so quiet and so close and by knowing we shouldn't be loud, it was like we were in the theatre again.

What is his real name?

I don't know, said Sasha. I've always just called him Jack. Not even the professors know his real name, he said.

Jack had read every Jack London novel ever written; if he could have, he would have told people he had been raised by wolves. He was brusque, sharp, and solitary, but not loyal, not like a real wolf. He didn't think of the pack. Jack and Sasha had been best friends since their first year at art school. Jack, I soon realized, loved Sasha like he was an extension of himself. When Jack looked at Sasha, he saw what he wanted to be. If anyone had been raised by wolves, it was Sasha, not Jack. I didn't like Jack because I didn't like fake wolves; I didn't like fake anything.

That was the first time Sasha and I slept together. We lay on his cot, his inspiration cot, he called it, because he lay there whenever he couldn't figure out what to do next. A painter can't remove a brush stroke, he said. So he would lie down and close

his eyes until some feeling, a niggling thing, would say it was time and then he'd get up and tackle the thing again. What else did he do while he was lying there? I asked, but he just smiled and kissed me; he tasted like marzipan. The cot was like one they might've had in the army—metal piping made up the frame and a cross-hatch of coiled wires supported the discolored cushion. It whined with our weight. If we wanted to lie on our sides, there could be no space between us, which meant we couldn't look at each other. With me on top or him on top, we could see each other smile. When we moved against each other there was the sweet risk that we might fall. Sometimes I had the sure impression that when my hand touched his chest it could, somehow, melt into him, so that I'd be inside him for a moment. We kept a playful balance because we were young and our bodies were taut and strong and quick. When I straddled him and he sat up a little so that I could pull off his sweater, I pulled a little too hard and the cot gave up and collapsed to the floor. Then we really could do anything and Sasha said, If we're going to fuck things up, we might as well fuck everything up, and so we fucked all night and came away the next morning with cuts and scratches from where the springs had come unhinged.

I loved the sexual freedom of that time, the feeling that everything about the city was exerting itself, everything was so demanding and physical. I could push against the city and it would push back. The cats in the alleys screamed all night long. From my diary, June 1922:

There is an element in every occasion of sexual excitement which seizes the imagination as though for the first time. This is written by a man.

That a man had written that was clear because it leapt to excitement without even the mention of what happens before. And what happens before is essential to what happens after. Sometimes I tested him. How badly did he want me? It had to be *me* that he wanted. It could not be the thing, the act. It could not just be sex. What I wanted: the taste of *his* skin, the changing colour of *his* blue-grey-blue eyes, Sasha, him.

I remember the feeling I had then: the sharp divide I felt between what we had before sex and what we had after. Before sex was the moment when the air was not punctuated by the pulse in the groin but by a vague visual image that involved neither of the would-be lovers but instead, an idea. As if lovers were kissing on a screen, but it was not a real kiss, just an idea of a kiss. Then there was the beginning of the now. Of the sudden awareness of the lips, the groin, of the mind so curiously open to the idea of him. In the now we forgot about too-thin walls, about impropriety.

With him, I felt my most electric. He knew how to loosen my hair from its ties without pulling or tearing the strands and he closed his eyes when he kissed even my shoulders so I knew he wanted me most of all. This was why I trusted him. I trusted him enough to hold him tightly and enough to keep my eyes open and waiting for when he'd look at me. And I knew that he would name the moment he opened his eyes "now," and I would think, "after."

We wanted the same things, the exact same things. Our marriage went against the wishes of his mother, who didn't like me then and doesn't like me now, and my father, whose reasons were more opaque and who left Russia shortly after we wed.

I remember Sasha and me walking one day through a park. It was sunny and there was a pond and kids all around and I said to Sasha, or maybe I just said it to myself, I

said, If I was one of those kids looking at me right now, I'd want my life, this very life, this very love. If I didn't have what I have now, I'd be jealous of me.

I probably didn't say it out loud, but I remember thinking it and now, even as I think back to that moment, nothing seems truer as a representation of that time. We were real life happiness. When I wrote to my father, I said, I've never been so happy, and I hoped he'd get the message and that he'd be happy because I was.

One morning—this was after we were married—we woke up and I asked Sasha if had dreamt anything.

I don't think so, he said. I didn't wake up in a sweat and I didn't wake up with an erection, so if I did dream, it can't have been that bad or that good.

With his friends, they always talked about art: the sublime, lines, the depth of the black acrylics they'd gotten imported from France, and so on. Because I had nothing to say about cross-hatching or sculpture, I could not participate in these conversations. But I observed them intently.

If they weren't talking about art, they were talking about "the game."
At parties, Sasha, Jack, and their friend I despised—Elisa—would pile on top of one another—three of them, sitting on one single arm chair!—and watch everyone else at the party, to decide who played and who didn't. Jack was a short, slight man with curly hair the colour of dirt. His shoulders rolled forward and, in doing so, emphasized his concave chest. Everything he said was in compensation for his weak body. In the summer, Elisa wore dresses that did not fit and no undergarments. When she leaned forward, which she did often, you could see the little points of her breasts trying to hide themselves in the cloth of her dress that was, at that very moment, too far away. In winter, she wore

stockings, which couldn't be found anywhere at the time. I still don't know how she got them. She had long black hair and hardly ever spoke. When she did speak, it wasn't to me. I thought that all of the men were in love with her. She was that kind of beautiful.

Sasha said I didn't play the game. He said that was why he liked me. He and Jack did play the game and, it seemed, so did every other person at parties that they'd like to fuck. He never explained it to me, but I figured it out. It was about desire. It was about being able to enter a room and make everyone there want you. It was about believing you could do that. Believing they (whoever they were) wanted you. And then it was about how they couldn't have you, no matter how hard they tried.

I play the game, I said.

No you don't, said Jack.

In the fall of 1922, I was starting to understand why Sasha's friends hated me. It was because they hated change. It was because they had lost their place in the world—in the universities, in politics, in the professions—and they thought people like me were to blame. It was because I belonged and they didn't and since they felt like they didn't belong anywhere in the city. Their only consolation was that, at least for a time, they had each other, and they had their studios, and with each other in the small safety of their studios they belonged, and I didn't. They all studied at VKhUTEMAS, the art school founded by Lenin in 1920, and although the intention had been to inaugurate a revolutionary aesthetic of art-as-production as opposed to art-as-art, the majority of the students continued in the pre-revolutionary arts. Only those studying under Rodchenko were part of the Metfak cadre and these students were the object of ridicule for all the rest

since Rodchenko's dream of the artist-craftsmen or the artist-constructor had little obvious practicality for anyone in the arts or not. Sasha was a painter. By 1922, Rodchenko had declared that painting was dead. Art for art's sake was a bourgeois preoccupation, as was the interior life of the individual, as were any efforts at ornamentation or any forms whose purpose did not serve to create the new Soviet culture, or so said Rodchenko, and I agreed, though not in front of Sasha.

But, I am getting ahead of myself, for there was a time when their world, Sasha's world, made promises—of vigor, of creation, of clarity, of production—that I believed.

On this night, we were drinking in Sasha's studio. We'd borrowed chairs and crates from the other studios, so everyone had a place to sit. Elisa sat on the cot between Jack and a man I'd seen before at Komsomol meetings, but never amongst Sasha's friends—Dimitri was his name. Elisa was saying that the bookstore owner, Osorgin, had disappeared.

What about his wife? I asked.

Her too, she said. Yuly, Boris, everyone. They sent them to Leningrad, she said. Then they put them on a boat, along with thousands of others, and off it went, to Finland.

Who were the other thousands? asked Peter.

People like us, said Jack.

What are we like? I asked.

You're not like us, said Elisa, giving me a hard look.

But who were they? said Peter.

They were people on a list, said Elisa. Religious scholars, artists, philosophers, scientists.

I wondered if my father might have been on that boat. No doubt, if he wasn't, he would have liked to have been. For the others, they mightn't have had a choice, but father did, and he wanted to leave. I still think that. The boat Elisa was talking about would later be called the Philosophy Steamer and Sasha would wish that he could have been on it, too. Peter had asked how Elisa knew, had she, for example, read about it in the newspapers.

Don't be naïve, said Jack, looking at Peter first, then at me.

Peter and I had studied together at MGU, I always thought this was what made us outsiders with Sasha's friends. Eventually Peter and Sasha became closer friends than we had ever been. Eventually, I realized it was only me who was the outsider.

I got my jacket and went out into the hallway. The marble steps continued upwards to another flight, so I climbed up to the landing so I could sit there and think in the dark. I couldn't believe Osorgin was gone. I thought of all the books I'd read in his little shop and of the wall and of Rachel and even though I'd never liked her, I felt bad that they were gone. I didn't feel bad for them, mind you. If they were gone, it was because their old fashioned ideas, their pieties, their customs, were outdated. But, I knew I'd miss the books. I'd meant to take Rima to the shop, but never had. I thought of Rima then and wished she were there, because if she were we could have talked about Osorgin and I would have told her all about the shop and in so much detail so that it would have been like she had been there. I would have told her about the wall.

Rima was my best friend, but we saw each other less and less. When we were younger, we were inseparable. We must have been seventeen or eighteen when we first met. She taught me about sex. She lived in the dormitories because she was from the

countryside. I lived with my father. She had fallen in love at the end of our first semester with a student from Paris—a man more leftist than anyone living in Russia, even Trotsky. There is one evening that I always return to when I think of that time for no other reason than because it seemed like every other night, only grander. From the dormitory party, we spiralled down the stairs and out into the tangle of trees that hung wet and low over the area behind the building. Our feet marked unsteady paths in the gravel. We saw a chair placed in the middle of a muddy patch and went over to sit on it, encasing our party shoes in dirt and grass. It was the three of us. We moved around each other like bubbles in a boiling pot. The walk along Pirogowskaya seemed to take forever. I kept saying to myself—but it's only an hour to the café and only fifteen minutes to the park—let's stop at the park, I'd say. But we'd already passed it. They passed it before me. They were walking ahead of me because I liked to lag behind and when I did decide I wanted to catch up I realized that Rima's drunken hand was in his pants and so I greeted the people who walked past them and then past me with laughter and songs. I got sick before we made it to the café and said goodbye to Rima and Jean-Pierre or Jean-François or Jean-Luc or Pierre-Luc, but they didn't hear me.

From my spot on the landing, I heard someone open the door and watched as Jack walked past the foot of the stairs. I sucked myself back into the shadows of the landing, my feet tucked beneath my skirt. His shirt was rumpled and he walked slowly, as if he were exhausted. He continued down the hall and I heard him drop his keys, then pick them up, then argue them into the lock and then open his studio door and close it. The hall was quiet again, so I readjusted my legs and undid the top buttons on my boots. I pulled my cigarette case out of my skirt pocket. I wanted to have a cigarette in case

someone saw me. I thought it would make it seem as if I just liked to smoke alone. The party spilled out into the hallway; I heard Elisa's voice and then Dimitri's. She was berating him for something he'd said, but he made no excuses. They walked in front of the steps and Dimitri looked up at me, but said nothing. They went downstairs.

I lit a cigarette.

Sasha came out and stood at the foot of the stairs with his hands on his hips for a minute before he looked up in to the dark and saw me. Jack came out of his studio and yelled at Sasha: Why'd you invite that jackass?

Sasha had already taken a step up towards me, but he stepped back down and into the middle of the corridor to face Jack. Jack stopped in front of Sasha with his back to me. Jack was holding a bottle.

Come on, Jack, take it easy, said Sasha.

You know he's with her, said Jack.

Stop worrying about it, said Sasha. They've left, anyway.

So why'd you invite him.

He's working with Moholy-Nagy. I like his work.

Bullshit, said Jack.

You're drunk, said Sasha.

You invited him to get back at me.

You're being ridiculous.

You're riding his coattails. He'll help you move up. I'm just a drag.

You're being a drag right now, that's for sure.

If you think Akhmatova is a thing of the past, you're dead wrong. Moholy-Nagy is a fucking charlatan, that guy. He's an individualist in Germany and a collectivist in Hungary.

It's not about that. We're not going to fight about Akhmatova, said Sasha, and the reason we're not going to fight is because we agree about her, so this fight isn't about poetry or art.

Sure it is. I can't believe you're siding with those faggots.

And we're not going to fight about Elisa, either, even though I know you want to and the reason we're not going to fight about her is because we don't disagree there either. You want to fight because you can't have her, but fighting me isn't going to bring her back so you better do something else.

Sasha turned to face me then and took a few of the steps.

Come on, Sasha, said Jack, let's go back to the party.

There is no party, now, said Sasha, looking back at Jack, and, I'm gonna see about my girl, now. You'll have to be a man and deal with this yourself.

Sasha took the steps two at a time until he was beside me. Jack raised his eyes up to me for a stinking second. I hated that guy. He walked back to the party.

After Elisa reported that Osorgin and the others had gone missing, Sasha started to get afraid. After that, the game they talked about changed. For a while, I still thought it was about sex, but now I realize it must have been something else.

In those days, Komsomol meetings were like a weekly dose of adrenaline. *My* people were there. This was before the institute took half of my time and Sasha took the other half. When I think of it now, it's clear that the museum eclipsed the party, but then I thought of them as essentially one and the same. They were both part of the scientific project of building our future. As the museum required more of me, I had less to give to the party, but I did not see them as contradictory; indeed, for the first few years, they were not. I can't say with any certainty when I stopped attending the Komsomol meetings, but I do remember one night in particular, when it felt less like a place I should be.

We met in a worker's club, in the rectory of a former church. The room felt makeshift, as if its purpose could be just about anything. A poster of Lenin was tacked to the wall, and beneath it two volunteers sat behind a folding table on which was placed stacks of literature and new posters. There were two stacks of unfolded chairs sitting beside them.

All of the other chairs had been pulled out into rows. In the front row there were some empty spots. All of the chairs in the back were full, and plenty of conversation was taking place. We were waiting for a speaker to arrive. The meeting was taking place in the neighbourhood, so I recognized pretty much everyone who came through the door. I had saved a seat for Rima. When she arrived there would be a total of four women in the room. The other two were full-fledged Bolsheviks, and they were older so I felt too shy to speak with them, but I watched them as they readied the stage for the speaker.

One of the local vagabonds was named Tobias. I saw him every day. Everyone in our district, Chamowniki, did. If he wasn't in front of the statue of Bukharin in the park,

he was beside the café or on the bench in front of the grocer in between. His silver-white hair grew in thin wisps. He had dark blue eyes, a thin, drawn face, and shoulders that fell forward. Sometimes he brought his kopeks into the local businesses so that they could change them for rubles.

That night, he came in wearing nothing but a shirt he held around his bony hips. He walked up to the front of the room, and yelled up to the women on the stage:

Hey comrades, hey ladies, I need a drink!

Get outta here, they said.

I could see his ribs. His back was dirty and he had been in a fight.

Be good to a fellow comrade, he said.

They ignored him.

He sat down next to me. Lady, he said, Lady, buy me a drink.

He smelled like body odor and piss.

I can't, I said, there's nothing to drink here.

Come on, Comrade Lady, please.

I just looked at him, but there was nothing I could say, and even if I could have said something, there was no space for me to say it because he had begun talking. He told me about a ship he once saw when he was a little boy at a port on the Black Sea. He spoke with an intensity, as though his words were water in a burst dam. I let them wash over me, but I'm not sure why. Curiosity or guilt, or both.

My father was in the navy and took me to the Black Sea once, he said. His ship was so enormous I felt like it might swallow me whole. I'd feel afraid of it, he said, so I would run away from it. As he spoke he rushed his hand along the bar, his fingers leaping

and pouncing like his legs might have. He narrowly missed my glass. His body got so close to mine I had to turn away because of the smell. He said he'd run down the slippery lengths of the wharfs and up the plank to the good, solid, shore from where he could eye the ship as a whole.

I saw over his shoulder that Rima had arrived.

From a distance, he said, I could get it. I could really get the whole thing—the funnels, the masts, the black blinking potholes—I could really master it. Then I'd run back to the ship and peer into the windows, examine the rivets, touch the cold, black, side of the ship.

Why are you telling me about this? I asked.

If we don't talk about boats, he said, we'll have to talk about death. I am dying, he said, and stood abruptly.

Everyone is dying, I said back.

Rima came over to us. She was looking for some sort of signal from me.

How could you reach it—the ship—if it was that big? I asked.

There are things which cannot be explained, he said.

Comrades! he said, addressing the entire room. He reached his arms out as if he were a famous orator. Be well!

Rima took his seat.

Meetings like those felt like being a part of something really big. Most of us were young, and I knew a lot of them by name. We had been at rallies and parties and I believed in what they were doing. I believed that we were doing the same thing, and the single same thing we were doing was re-creating our world. It sounds so abstract and

foreign to me now, but I remember the belief I had in abstraction then. Science and Art were the same thing; they materialized the revolution. The factory and the laboratory, they were the same. They were places of experimentation. And all of this was the place for the new man. When I heard new man, then, I included myself. Later, as I became less able to stomach the sexual comments and the delegation to insignificant tasks, I refused the party, but not the doctrine. The doctrine was right; it was the workers who were wrong. That's how I explained to myself what happened when people used party membership as an excuse not to work. And it happened a lot. Workers came in with their fists clenched, full of fire and jargon and ready to do anything, but it was like their activism was a rite of initiation and not a thing they believed. On that night, we had gathered as a study group. Perhaps it was Engel's speech on Historical Materialism, or Marx's Philosophical Manuscripts, but the incident with Tobias had upset the balance, and no one seemed to want to study. I saw Dimitri again that night.

You're an artist, I said. You're friends with Sasha.

Yes!

He had the broad back and strong hands of a sculptor.

But you're part of Rodchenko's group, I hear.

Metfak, he said. Yes: an unenviable elite core, or so they say.

Why unenviable? I said.

Oh, because we don't know how to paint sets or make beautiful objects.

What do you do then?

Think about things, basically.

Things?

Art as revolution. That sort of thing. Want a drink? he asked.

This was before I'd even considered sleeping with anyone but Sasha.

Oh, but I am digressing. The *Historya Institut Mozga* records that in 1927, just following the inauguration of the institute, Dr. Bechterev fell ill and died. I was busier than I'd ever been. The days passed like minutes. My world was small and intense. The exhibits were finished, the research was ongoing and we were preparing for the first All-Union Congress of Neurologists and Psychologists; once that was over, we would celebrate Christmas, and then we would open the institute to the public.

Although we did not know it then, 1927 proved to be the height of our acquisition of knowledge, or at least, self-knowledge. We saw a future world with clean streets and healthy people and an a strong intellectual system of sciences and maths—it was the "real scientific possibility" that Trotsky had talked about—and good leaders in whom we could trust and to whom we had access—it was because I knew what it would look like, that I could see past what was happening around me. For many years, the city map produced that year was all we had. Even now, they tell me, no new map has been made. Streets that have been built since then exist only for those who live on them; visitors always visit 1927 Moscow. 1927 Moscow is a good place to visit.

We did not want to waste time. Time was like a thing we had, something valuable, something we were collecting, and we did not want it slipping through our fingers or getting caught up in cracks. Not wasting time meant that every moment was full. The motion of the arm was a two-second-long dance. If it jolted or thought too much it was wasting time. Movements should not think. They should be. I wonder now, if our

desire to fill every moment was a fear of what the future would be. Did we know, then, what was on the horizon? When we fill our present moments with a desperate condensation of remembered images and sounds, are we not trying to stave off death? Do we do this because we know that death is near? I think so. Perhaps it was not even that death was near, but that death was in us already. This meant that life was that much more. And like with the biomechanics of motion, which we choreographed to make elegant, our films and our writing became elegant too.

The changes began in 1925 when, at a conference, literature was silenced in favour of factography. Pudovkin's *The Mechanics of the Brain* exemplified factography as did Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. We were establishing the order. We didn't know, or I didn't know, that the establishment of order is the most imaginative, fulfilling part of any new society. The orders imagined in those mid-twenties conferences were about our ideals and nothing more. They were us imagining ourselves the best we possibly could. What could we be? What did we imagine? Who was the We? It was anyone who was thinking; it was anyone who was in attendance; it was anyone who showed up. And so many of us were virgins. We had never been fucked before.

When I replace the *Historya Institut Mozga* on the desk in this white room it is always a gesture of profound satisfaction because I know more than they do.

At the end of every day, I always turned off every light but one. The remaining light would shine over top of one of the display cases, and I would stand in front of the exhibited brain and test my memory. What I remember now are the dark curves between each fold. Contrast, shape, and texture were what appealed to me most. Our research

would result in the victory of materialism in the area where metaphysics and dualism are still strong, or so Semaschko had said. When Lenin's brain was first extracted, it had been squishy, like dense black bread that had been soaked in water. Kozhnevnikov's had been harder: the consistency of cooked squash. Now they were all hard, like beets. When I used to stand in front of the specimens like this, late at night, the defining characteristics resounded in my head like words from a foreign language: the sulci of the third category, a complicated convoluted aspect, the gyrus temporalis. I rarely thought of the specimens as men and women who have lived lives, because I had not known them. The exception was Lenin who, though I had only seen him when he was dead, had seemed more alive to me than anyone else for much of my life.

Our conclusions were incontrovertible and easily summarized: the intellectual capacities of scientifically minded men are often visible *post mortem* in the frontal and parietal lobes, the density and dimensions, and the shape and number of the third category sulci. The architectonic structure of a brain could be observed as easily in a slice of the brain as in the entire organ and the differences between one another could be reduced to millimeters and grams. Once measured, all of the brains were microtomed, dyed and catalogued according to the cellular and cytoarchitectonic characteristics of each.

Sasha said that the beauty of the collection was in its repetition. He'd come to the institute rarely, and only when he knew everyone else would be gone. He didn't believe in what we were doing, but didn't want to fight about it with anyone but me. It's so hypocritical, he'd say. It's scientific, I'd say. Where is the science? he'd say and I'd walk

away because I'd already explained it thousands of times. He'd chase me then and, more than once, he'd find me and we'd fuck in former pantries and once on a table in the lab, in short, in places we shouldn't have been at all. Several years later, I realized there were other infractions Sasha committed at the Institution, but by then, I forgave him. In fact, I was grateful.

Though there were many lessons to be learned by comparing the architectonics of the musician's brain with that of the scientist's, I never once saw a visitor view the brains in anything other than the order specified.

Except for Sasha. Who never did anything in the order specified.

It was Christmas time, and Sasha wanted to walk the streets to see the tinsel in the trees and the lights strung along the street and the people, laughing and oblivious in the early winter light. Sunday was the only day of the week that was free of meetings and work and so, on a day that was not too cold, a day when the snow had just begun to fall, we walked along Tverskaya, looking at all of the shops. It was a fashion district at one time; the porcelain vases, furs, silk gloves and hand stitched boots and purses were all remnants of an earlier time.

The way Sasha walked down the street was as a man who knew he belonged. He knew the names of the shops, their owners and what products they specialized in. His favourite was *Un Air de Provence* owned by an old friend of Sasha's mother, Michel. By virtue of his connection to Elena, I disliked Michel immediately. Originally from a small town in France, Arêche, he had come to Russia before the revolution, married a woman from Moscow, and never left. It was more difficult now to import things from abroad, so

the lavender soaps and lilac perfumes he sold cost more than we earned in two months. It was the duty, said Michel, that drove the prices up. Sasha spoke to him in French. They sang their words. When Sasha began to speak to Michel, I stopped listening and started watching. We become more observant of others, I find, when we do not know what they are saying. Michel stood behind a glass counter, but was bent forward, his arms outstretched, so that they made a triangle underneath his head. Sasha was on the other side of the counter. He was wearing his fur hat. He had unbuttoned his wool coat and loosened his scarf. His hands were in the pockets of his coat, but he was gesturing with them all the same so that the pockets of his coat darted out and relaxed in turn.

I walked around the shop but did not feel I could touch anything. The soaps and perfumes smelt like a place I didn't belong. We had a word for such things: poshlost. When we said that word, we emphasized the judgemental consonants, the "p" and the "st." These were things created for the sake of being things. They had no use. That they were useless was, actually, their very point. There were small boxes full of note cards, vases full of plastic flowers, porcelain statues and matruska dolls, a whole collection of miniature musical instruments: beguiling objects, all of them. Each little bourgeois fetish more cloying than the next. It was a side of himself that Sasha rarely showed me, a side I thought he wanted to leave behind, a side of him that was his mother, and he rarely saw her anymore, or so I thought.

Yet there was a part of me that desired these beautiful things. Wasn't it true that art and science and politics belonged together? Wasn't it true that a think of beauty was also, then, a work of art? Not all these things were wrong, I saw. Not all these things were examples of poshlost. I saw a pair of silk gloves so fine they caught the light in

pools of white and silver. When I dared dot my finger on each of the fine, perfect buttons, the pools of silver–white shifted, like bright mercury. The stitching was so delicate. They felt like separate things from a separate world. I thought of the time and attention it had taken the workers to make these things. I inclined my head to see the pools of light flow back and forth. Surely a thing like this could be an exception. Not for me, I thought, not for me with my friends, I thought, but for a person, some other person. Perhaps for some other person these gloves could be art.

I heard Sasha laughing, again, and looked through a Christmas display, all glittery with tinsel and stars, and over to the counter. I was embarrassed to realize that Sasha and Michel had been watching me.

We left the store soon after. The clean, cold air swept away the lavender fields.

Several days later, in the midst of the Congress, of which Dr. Bechterev had been elected Honourable Chairmen and at which, on the afternoon of December 23, he himself had presented on recent research concerning defense reflexes, he died. The *Historya* records his death, but makes no comment on what led to it.

On Christmas Eve, just as I was packing our things to go to the dacha, someone came to the door. I remember that Sasha answered the door. The telegram was for me. I opened the telegram quickly, thinking it would be news from my father. It said the following:

Dr. Vladimir Bechterev died of unknown causes on December 24 in Moscow stop

I read the words on the page but did not understand their meaning. I fell into our chair.

Sasha! I said. What does this say?

He took the piece of paper from me. He read the lines twice and then looked at me.

It means that Vladimir is dead, he said.

But I don't understand, I said. He gave a talk yesterday at the conference! What will happen to the institute? What will happen to his family?

Sasha lifted me up out of my chair and held me. It was then that I realized I was shaking.

You will be okay, he said.

He sat me on our bed and covered me in blankets. I pulled my knees up to my chest. We had a small hotplate in our room, the one that had once been in his studio, and on this he placed the kettle. I sat in silence, watching him. He did not know what to say. He did things instead. He set a small table in front of me. He poured us glasses of vodka and, when the water had boiled, he filled a water bottle with it. He unwrapped my blankets and placed the water bottle on my feet because he knew they got cold. He put on a sweater, as if he were getting ready for a long period of stillness, and then he sat next to me and it was then, with him still, that I realized I had been sobbing the whole time.

What did he do? I asked.

Nothing, said Sasha. He didn't do anything.

But he must have, I said.

No, said Sasha.

There was no funeral.

We left for the dacha the next day. When we arrived at the train station, the platform was empty. Sasha went to sit on a bench to wait. I stood in front of him, occasionally looking at myself in the window behind him. A blackbird had gotten into the station. I saw it fly in the open door. I heard a woman cry out. I saw the bird's outstretched wings rushing towards me. It crashed into the window. I saw the smear it left on the window after it fell to the floor.

Everyone in Sasha's family had left for Europe, everyone except his mother. His father, Pyotr, had left long ago. The brother and sister lived in Belgium and Paris. So it was just Elena who remained. Everything about her was colourless: her wheat hair, her wisteria eyes, her translucent skin. To look at her was to feel cold. Her home was far enough outside the city to have escaped communalization. Sasha had been raised by his grandmother and a nanny, Natasha, who was an Old Believer. I wonder if she stayed *because* she was an old believer. Natasha's people had been persecuted for centuries for refusing to adapt to instituted reforms and now the same was true of Elena. Even after the children had grown, Natasha had stayed. The two seemed to cohabit without speaking. Natasha was younger than Elena by a decade or so, and stronger, too. It was Natasha who went to the town to get what they needed; it was Natasha who managed the home. It was warm if Natasha stoked the stove; they ate if Natasha cooked. Natasha's body was round and robust, her cheeks flushed as if she contained her own source of heat inside her belly. Little stove. Whenever we visited, Natasha welcomed us immediately, but Elena needed time to adjust to our presence. Elena's eyes softened when she watched her son; she

didn't look at me. I think she regretted not having raised him; she followed him through the house as though she were chasing earlier years of his life, time lost.

Because there were no small children around, I did not think about giving gifts. I did not want to be burdened with sentimental things, and I did not want to burden anyone else with them either. I had no real feelings towards Elena, and though I liked Natasha, I saw no need to give her anything either. My gift to Sasha was that I had come with him to see his mother. I assumed that the revolution had made their relationship as difficult as it had made mine with my father.

One night when Natasha and Elena had already gone to sleep, Sasha and I stayed up. Sasha had spent the day chopping wood, and like a child who knows no limits, he piled the fire high with wood so that it sparked and roared and transformed the normally bleak room into a cozy chalet. He pulled the sofa close to the fire and spread blankets and pillows on the wooden floor. We made love and then, after, pulled the blankets up over our bodies and, on small marble board, played an unskilled game of chess. When I had taken all of his knights, but before I'd trapped his queen, he pulled a slender box out from behind one of the pillows on the sofa.

Bribery won't get you out of this mess! I said.

Wait until you open the box before you say that, he said.

But Sasha, I said, I didn't get you a present.

Then you'll have to play well enough to make me think I'm winning, he said. He moved the chessboard aside. The pieces wobbled when they were set down, but did not move.

The slender white ribbon tied around the box came undone easily. Lying inside the box, the white silk gloves I had seen in the store on Tverskaya.

You shouldn't have! I said.

It's just a small thing, he said.

But we don't have money for things like this!

Put them on.

My hands were rough and cracked from the chemicals we used in the lab, but when I slid them into the gloves, I could imagine they had never done a day's work. I traced my right hand fingers along my left hand, then left wrist, then left forearm, it was like nothing touching nothing. Silk against silk. No friction at all. They were so beautiful and fit so well, that it was almost impossible to take them off. In the light of the fire, they looked like fresh cream.

Sasha watched me. His face was soft with happiness.

I should take them off, I said.

No! said Sasha. You look beautiful like that, he said. Let's keep playing.

When I let him win the game that night, I justified it to myself by saying that I had stopped playing and a different me had taken over. The different me was the me who would have liked a life of wearing silk gloves. The different me was a woman who did not want to work. The different me was a me who did not believe in things. The different me did not know what was right.

Later that night we went for a walk in the snow. The only time we had alone was when his mother was sleeping. When she was awake, I tried to pretend I did not exist. She preferred it that way. The snow crunched beneath our feet. It was icy, so it sparkled

in the moonlight. We walked quietly, so our steps echoed loudly against the dark pine forest as we walked up towards the hill. At the top, the wind came in gusts, but we stayed there for a while, looking across the valley to the other houses, some still lit with warm fires, others asleep for the night. I wondered if, in those other places, people were singing and dancing. I thought of my parents and how, even if they had been there, we never would have sung, we never would have danced. But they were gone. And now, so was Bechterev. My last walk in the moonlight had been with him, and now the weight of responsibility was on me. I hunched down, my knees bent up against my chest so that I could hug them and rock back and forth on my feet. Sasha went off to the tree line to pee. I wondered what Bechterev might have had to say about the gloves.

No need for concern.

When had he said that?

I stood up suddenly. It seemed as if I had just heard someone say that to me but I hadn't. The hilltop was empty; Sasha was just reemerging from the trees.

No need for concern.

It was the sound of his voice, the sound of his voice from when?

And then I remembered. It was from when he had hypnotized me.

Bechterev had just returned to Moscow to give a series of lectures at a conference. A conference that was a starting point for our work with the Germans, perhaps a result of the Rapallo Treaty. Yes, I think that must have been it.

I remembered watching the minute hand on the clock slide in behind the hour hand. The clock became a barometer. The atmosphere was thick. The walls were white.

Shelves hung off the walls and, like water bags about to burst, sunk in the middle under the weight of all the books. It was eleven minutes past eleven.

The office was dusty and lined with books and the occasional glass-encased specimen, including one I had seen before: a jar upon which was written Mortification of the Hand and the number 1248. The fingers grazed the inner curve of the jar and the wrist was nestled in the crook at the bottom of the jar, along which lay a few dislodged hairs. The skin was blackened or a greenish-gray and it had, in parts, blistered or become completely detached like the blistering of distemper paint. Next to the mortified hand—Bechterev had once told me that it was the hand of a labourer, sawn off to punish him for some petty theft—an eyeball drifted about in a smaller jar, and next to that, the skeleton of what appeared to be a small rodent scurrying across the floor of a bell jar it would never escape.

Sasha had been there because, as Bechterev said, professional hypnotists never hypnotise patients without the presence of a third party. I remember watching Sasha as he watched the doctor who was pacing around the room and speaking quickly, as he was wont to do.

Hypnotists never achieve a 100% rate of hypnosis, said Bechterev, on account of the mad.

His hands touched everything so that the tops of his bell jars and other displays all shone irregularly where fingerprints had wiped away the dust and permitted a strong glare.

I was sitting on a hard-backed chair, my hands resting upon my thighs. When I leaned back in the chair, it creaked loudly and I felt as if this were a moment of no return.

There had been an awkward silence between Sasha and me before we arrived, but of course nothing could be sorted out before the meeting and as I considered the practice of mesmerism utterly farcical, I was unconcerned.

But the creak of the chair and the words he said.

It was as if it divided me. There were three parts of her. There were three of me. There was Tatiana, who had, with the squeak of the chair, slouched off to the corner of the office to peruse the bookshelf and play with the strange objects that were stored there. The doctor was telling her to close her eyes and he had begun to count backwards.

He said, In this state of tiredness you will feel like you are dreaming. And you can feel that you are utterly receptive to my voice and trustful of your surroundings. And you have felt this way before and you will feel this way again. And in this state you will allow your mind to still itself, to gather together its energies and to focus upon one singular point of concentration, any point at all.

The third Tatiana had left the room altogether. She was in the process of climbing up the side of the building in the impossibly gymnastic feat of gripping the ivy and finding footholds in the occasional chipped brick and the window ledges and then all the way up to the roof where she could grip the under area then she could swing her leg up onto the roof beside the gables and then climb to the peak at which point this bold Tatiana began to hum quietly, a song her mother sang to her when she was young but for which she had never learnt the words. She was very cold up there, there was a dark wind.

And the Tatiana at the bookshelf was watching me. She watched my head bend forward and my hair fall. And she stood next to Sasha and said, Don’t worry. But, Sasha

was tense. The doctor was standing next to me. He was a big lap coat and puff of wiry hair. And he leaned over me.

He said: In just a minute you will wake up again, and when you wake up you will no longer be able to see anyone in the room but me; if you hear other voices, you will imagine them to be on the radio, so far away will they seem. You may not be able to respond to other voices, apart from mine.

I relaxed into the chair; my hands fell open and down at the side. Sasha stood up straight. The doctor kept talking. What was the doctor saying? I tried to think, tried to concentrate. He was saying "diagnostic." He was.

But I was looking at the river from the gables and I was singing. I never sing.

I stood next to Sasha, and heard myself speaking. No. I saw myself speaking. I saw my lips move. I saw them forming words. What were they saying? What was I saying?

Because the doctor was asking a question.

Sasha leant forward, and again I said to him, Don't worry, but he never listened to me.

What was the question? I saw him writing. The doctor was writing. And I don't know what it was that he was writing, but he turned to me and said: No need for concern, and it was like he knew that I was actually in the corner of the library, next to Sasha, or was he actually speaking to Sasha.

I was humming on the rooftop.

Was that why I couldn't hear?

And then Sasha came to stand next to the part of me that was sitting there, all slumped over. And the doctor said to him, I could read his lips, they said, Don't.

And Sasha stepped away.

And the doctor spoke to me again, and I heard a word or two. I started to climb down from the rooftop. And it was a lot harder to find the places to step as I was coming down. I could not see where to put my feet. The footholds, so invisible. The window ledges, so far away. And yet, the ground came closer. And soon I saw the window to the doctor's office. And I didn't come in just yet, but I heard the counting.

The doctor was counting, One-Two-Three, and I knew I had to hurry.

My feet were tingling, and the doctor said, No need for concern, and the way he said it was so slow and sure, like No. Need. For. Concern. No. Other. Doctor. Could. Ever. Treat. You. With. Suggestion. You. Are. Not. Suggestible. Four –Five –Six.

I lifted my head and felt a lot like I had had a very nice sleep. My hands were so warm and relaxed and I felt as if it were morning and that the heat had been on all night and that I might have had a hot bath.

But there was a wind still, and Bechterev said, No need for concern, though when Sasha said, Let's go, it's cold, I realized it was Christmas and that Bechterev was dead.

3.

Every morning in the spring of 1928, Sasha went to the construction sites to see if there was work. There had been no work for such a long time. There had been no supplies for such a long time. Nothing was open. No bookstores, no grocers. All we did was line up for ration cards then line up for flour and sugar, and while we waited we talked about the Ukraine: there was so much food there, the markets were full of vegetables and breads and eggs and cheeses.

The Museum of Public Hygiene was being built, and he worked there often. Everything was done manually. I watched by the construction site once. There was an inclined ramp of scaffolding that ascended alongside the outer wall of the building. Wagons and wheelbarrows transported materials to the top, waste to the bottom.

One morning he met Marco. Marco had just gotten out of prison, if I remember the story correctly. Yes, it was something like that.

Sasha had asked him, What were you in prison for?

Scrapping, Marco said.

How long were you in there for?

Five years, he said.

Must have been some kinda scrap, said Sasha.

That day the two of them were working on the roof. They went to the top of the building, with a fully loaded wagon in which Marco had stowed something. When they got to the top, Sasha said, What you got there?

Why work when we could drink? said Marco.

Why work when we won't get paid? said Sasha.

So they sat down on the wagon and drank for an hour or so, telling stories of the places they'd never travelled—the Persian Gulf, the women; darkest Africa, the white women; Oceania (Hey! That's my place, I remember saying, Well it was a joke, said Sasha, 'cause we've never been anywhere). Marco pissed off the roof and almost hit some pedestrians. Marco said that once he'd pissed off the roof at a party only to have two girls come in off the street demanding he pay them for having pissed on them. He gave them his remaining vodka and all was well.

You don't learn, do you, said Sasha.

Nothing bothered Marco for long. Later, they went inside the building which was, at that point, nothing more than cement floors and support beams. Marco whistled when they went inside.

Better stop whistling soon as I put up these walls, otherwise you'll lose all your money, said Sasha.

Of course, he didn't stop whistling. Marco didn't have any money.

Sasha never really told me what happened the last afternoon he worked there. But it was not so difficult to imagine how it would have come to be. Perhaps it was the end of the afternoon. Maybe Marco had brought the wagon up, for the last time that day. Perhaps walking back down seemed ridiculous. So they would have gotten into the wagon and set it on a course down the ramp, which wouldn't have seemed like it had much of an incline after all, and was well enough protected, with railings every few meters or so, and it went slowly at first, of course, until they'd, the two of them, rounded the first corner, and it sped up. Second corner, they could see the Kremlin walls and the

sky, third corner someone probably yelled, Get the fuck off that thing, and fourth. And around. And around.

Until they were going damn fast.

And then around and around they were yelling, and whatever it was they'd been drinking suddenly made them drunk. He said that, I remember. And he said he thought they'd gotten the hang off it. Marco was strong. Sasha said Marco could grab on somehow, like a superman, like a man who scrapped real good, to the corner supports.

And they'd swung around and down to the next corner until it was so fast he couldn't grab on any more and off they went flying, and the building wasn't so tall that it mattered, but off they went, through the thin railing of wooden slats, and Sasha broke his knee in the fall, and was home for a month afterwards, barely able to walk.

So he began to paint at home. I'm returning to my art, he said. The far corner of our room became his work space and though he left the windows open all day long, the smell of the oils seeped into every article of clothing and seemed, almost, to soak every paper and book with smell of turpentine. I found oily linseed shadows on notebooks and fabrics throughout the room and sometimes down the hall into the communal kitchen. On dish towels. On the cover of Akhmatova's *Anno Domini*. On me.

In that month-long period when he could not walk, I never saw a single painting.

The paints were mixed. The oil, as I said, was everywhere. But he hid his canvases behind a sheet and when I finally peeked, they were all blank.

And yet he spoke about his work with passion.

Over dinner, one night he said: I am working with concepts of dimensionality. A metallic aesthetic. I'm looking for the shiniest metal I can find.

What about copper pipes, I suggested.

No. Too curved, he said. I want flat surfaces, he said, or apparently flat surfaces that seem two dimensional, but for a barely perceptible warp. He cocked back in his chair.

Why? I asked.

Because it's sublime, he said.

And I knew I wasn't supposed to know the meaning of the word sublime, but I did.

But what about the material, I said. Why metal?

It's not about the material, he said. It's about the idea.

What is the idea?

That all reflection is distorted, he said.

Do you believe that, I laughed.

Of course, don't you?

I didn't, then, even believe that art was about ideas. I didn't, then, even realize how deeply we were disagreeing. It was marginally better when we spoke about my work.

After Bechterev died, Sarkisov came to me to say I had been appointed director of the institute. Bechterev had, apparently, asked that I replace him and so, though the state did not give him a funeral, they did respect this wish. I have often wondered why they chose to honour that wish and now I cannot help but think it must have been because they thought me weak. Then, I thought I had been chosen because I was a good Soviet. I

worked more than I ever had before. Yet the institute hadn't even opened its doors to the public and already we had lost our way. The reporters of just a few months prior returned, looking for statements, but most seemed uninterested. I felt lost.

I thought I knew how to run the institute. I thought this because I had been running it with Bechterev. Without him, I realized I didn't know anything at all. I had never locked the front door. The doorjamb was slightly askew. The bolt did not line up with the lock unless the door was lifted slightly while it was being closed. Because I did not work in the laboratories, I did not know the names of all of the technicians, nor where the microscopes, paraffin, slides, and dyes were stored, nor did I know that Bechterev had augmented his collection since the inaugural event in November.

With all visitors, I described our principle discoveries, starting with Bechterev's detailed study of Mendeleev's brain, whose weight was average at 1570g but showed strong development in the left frontal and parietal lobes. By contrast, the composers Borodin and Rubenstein showed a highly developed anterior part of the left gyrus temporalis, which explained their musical genius, and through comparison, Mendeleev's modest musical capacity. The novelist Ivan Turgenev had a brain that weighed in at 2021g, though the size did not seem so prodigious when displayed. Visitors would be instructed to follow the semi-circle, concluding, that way, with our principle exhibit, Lenin's brain, and Dr. Vogt's preliminary conclusions. The sequence became imprinted in my mind and seemed to adopt, over time, an irrefutable logic to the order, as if our collection illustrated stages of human development such as Plato, Machiavelli, or Hegel might have posited had they lived in the twentieth century. This was how we saw Russia, then, as a twentieth century zenith, and the institute made manifest this order.

Of course, there was also the matter of Bechterev's brain. Because I did not fully realize then what I realize now—that Bechterev had been killed—I did not realize that his was the first in our collection that had been harvested as a result of violence.

It was not immediately clear what had happened to Bechterev. Cardiac arrest was suggested, and we left it at that. But Bechterev had donated his brain to the institute, so we were well positioned to notice any irregularities. It requires a clarity of purpose to be able to oversee the microtoming of a loved one's brain. A capacity to distinguish mind from brain, spirit from brain. And a clarity about our intention to educate. I went to work every day by eight in the morning, and left at about six in the evening. If the weather was awful, I left earlier; if it was calm, I stayed later. Though Sarkisov coordinated the research with the museum, it was left to me to oversee the museum itself. I spoke to school groups, the media, foreigners, and nationals. At that time, the research institute was housed in the back rooms of the institute, rooms that had formerly been the library, den, and dining hall of the mansion. The plush carpets, paintings, and chandeliers had been removed. The books had been taken from their shelves. What remained were the ornate moldings and the high ceilings from which now hung lamps that cast bright lights on the rows of tables, now covered with microscopes, paraffin, glass slides, jars, and the strange obsessions of the various scientists who worked there: one had a portrait of his dog, another had a small collection of the bones of the feet, rearranged so that they looked like the headless skeleton of an unknown animal whose name changed with his mood.

That spring, it seemed to rain for months on end. The sky was dismal and gray and the only thing we had to look forward to was summer.

It later emerged in a conversation I had with one of the institute's security guards, Mikhaíl Iványch, who had worked at the institute in both its Yakimanka and later its Obukha locations, and who is among those forgotten observers of history whose testimony is barely acknowledged and practically never recorded, that Bechterev had hastily left the institute on the evening of the 23rd with his medical bag in hand, headed in the direction of the Kremlin, which, as I have noted, was but a short walk away. When Mikhaíl, who was friendly with just about everyone, had asked whether or not he ought to wait for the Doctor's return, he'd said, no, not to worry, that he would return to his apartment immediately following a quick visit he had to make and then he said, in what Mikhaíl took to be a strange tone of voice, that it appeared some illness of the mind may be assaulting the Georgian. Such candor was typical of Bechterev and this may very well have been what killed him. Stalin evidenced, even in those early days, clear signs of a paranoic mind. Bechterev, it would appear, had made the mistake of sharing this information with Stalin's personal physician.

Even before hearing Mikhail's version of what happened that night, the fact that illness struck and killed Bechterev within less than 24 hours, that inadequate treatment had been prescribed, that the postmortem examination was so limited (only the brain was extracted), that he was hastily cremated and later so summarily erased from the records, all indicated that his death must have been violent. Yet, it wasn't until speaking with Mikhail that I understood who must have been responsible.

The night Mikhail recounted these events to me, I walked home alone. Constant rain had made the park sodden and gloomy. At that time of year, the body has lost all memory of heat. On the way home I heard a struggle coming from the bushes.

Instinctively, I turned to look and just as quickly I turned back to the path, but I'd seen a woman lying on her back and a man standing over her, looking at me. It wasn't fear I felt, then. It was horror. I kept walking.

A few minutes later, a different man intercepted me. Then I felt fear.

Did you see anything back there? he said.

No, I said. Nothing.

I kept walking. He followed.

It is a mark of stress, or a mark of history, that there are times when, to walk alone, and to be followed, is to be immediately aware of three potentialities: robbery, rape, murder. Fear reduces our capacity to imagine to those three options only.

For years, the image of that man standing over that woman haunted me.

I stopped walking alone in the park.

By the spring of 1928, my relationship with Sasha was not going well at all. It didn't help that the state made it impossible for him to find work, as he was classified as part of the despised *lishensty* class, a class of *former people* (former exploiters, former landlords, former aristocrats), but what made it worse was that I had come to see him this way, too. I had no sympathy for him. Our disputes erupted with no explanation and what we did to resolve them only made them worse; our solace came from elsewhere, our sex too. A fight could begin with no real reason and when it ended, we'd explain the beginning by the end. The worse was around the time of Labour Day. I remember because I remember the parades has left the streets littered with candy and broken bottles. I remember that Sasha entered the apartment first. One lamp had been left on; its

incandescent bulb flickered an orb onto the small table. I thought to blame him for wasting energy but thought, Why bother? Sasha lit a cigarette and offered me a drink. I remember sitting there, hunched over the table, so very cold suddenly. And then, out of nowhere, Sasha put his hand into my pocket and stretched his fingers out to caress the top of my hip bone. But there was a violence to it.

He yanked his hand away.

He had my father's pocket watch.

I remember watching him, realizing how terribly wrong something had gone. I felt like a cat backed into a corner, and I watched him unroll the watch chain in his fingers, looping one end of it around his index finger so that he could let it unfurl and thus dangle right before my very eyes. What an ugly grimace on his face. He brought his other hand level to the watch, and with a slight push, sent it rocking back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.

It was about Bechterev, I thought. It was about the hypnotism.

I meant to snatch the piece from him. But he pulled it up higher, just out of my reach. I lurched further. I caught it, and pulled so hard upon the watch that it rocketed towards me. It hit the table with a hollow clunk and then slid out onto the tile floor where it burst open and confettied the floor with golden wheels, miniscule studs, a series of springs and ratchets and toothy wheels and microscopic balances.

I fell to the ground and tried to sweep up all of the pieces. Sasha came around the table as if to help me but he was careless and trod upon the watch hands. The outer larger ring was rent and the watch face itself was smashed, a tiny white bruise swelling across the glass surface.

Stay away from me, I shouted. For the first time in our relationship, I cried. I cried in an awful raspy way.

Leave me alone, please, I cried.

He stepped back and stood still with his back to me, facing a wall, as though he were a child being punished, but I saw his right foot step back and heard the smash of his fist flying into the wall. If it hadn't been a new wall, a listening wall, a wall constructed with second-rate materials by poorly paid workman, in short if it hadn't been for partitioned apartments, then Sasha might have broken his hand. The wall cracked and splintered at the point of impact. And I might have pitied him if there had been any energy left at all, but there wasn't. There was nothing. He opened the door and slammed it shut behind him. It all felt impossible in the way that things did then. In the era of first times, nothing can be repaired.

When the door shut, I focused upon the floor. My sight was blurred, my hands scoping across the gritty chalky surface of the floor, the occasional small stone, piece of dried food and the occasional hairspring or pallet, filaments of gold and silver that glinted against the chisel gray of the floor.

I don't know how long I was like that, separating filaments and golden cogs from dust and small pebbles, when I heard the footsteps in the hallway that stopped in front of our door.

The door did not open. No one knocked.

Sasha? whispered a man's voice.

I stood, put the pieces of the clock in my pocket and opened the door. Marco. He was wiry and athletic and towered over me, yet I never felt intimidated.

He's stepped out, I said.

No problem, I can wait for him.

I don't know where he went, Marco, I think he won't be back for some time.

What's going on here? Now, I see, those are some red eyes you've got there, and dust on your pants and your hair everywhere, he said. He was kind enough to stay in the doorway; other friends of Sasha would have barged in.

Everything is fine.

You need help finding him. I know where he is if he's upset. I'll take you there. Then you can talk.

No, no. I am absolutely fine, a little tired, I'm just about to go to sleep.

You need a drink, you need to find your husband, you need some fresh air. Come on beauty, he said, get your coat and leave this mess for later.

Marco was my favourite of Sasha's friends. He didn't judge me like the others and I believed him when he said he loved us both and wanted to help. I thought he might be the best part of the day, the part that would make sense, and that being outside, too, would change things.

We left the building together. It was warmer outside than it was inside in the way that summer evenings are, but it was only spring.

We always go to the same place, said Marco, we always go to the same place to sit and think and sometimes to see the sun rise.

The dawn teaches you unexpected things, he said.

We walked down Pirogowskaya in the middle of the street. Marco balanced on the street car tracks. We walked to the end of the line, to where the buses turned around and to where there never were passengers waiting, or at least none that I had ever seen, as the end of the line was right across the street from a monastery, which was, improbably, still in operation.

You come here? Where?

Behind the south wall there, he pointed, there's a little garden shed. We sit on the roof.

He laughed at me then, but didn't say anything, and I didn't know why he was laughing.

What will we drink?

I've got something in my bag.

And Sasha will be here?

Likely, or else he'll be here soon. You're lucky the bars are closed, otherwise we'd never find him.

It was so dark there. The street lamps did not come out that far, and as we walked along the stone wall of the monastery in the damp grass and the unnaturally warm night, my eyes adjusted slowly to the dark. I began to see details in the wall I had missed at first. The dried-out vines from the previous summer. The irregularity of the stone. When we rounded the corner, the dark mass of moss creeping up the wall like the slow movement of the earth's original continents before a single clock had ticked.

At the shed, Marco jimmied the door and went inside, coming out seconds later with a stool to which he gestured, saying, Go on, so I stood on the stool, grabbed onto the

ridge of the roof and clambered up. The roof was flat and made of thick wood timbers that had been worn smooth by the weather.

I leaned back down, my stomach on the roof, my fingers curled over the edge and my head looking down: Are we allowed to be here?

Best place for sorting things out, he said, his voice straining on the *best* as he hoisted himself up.

I remember it seemed as if we were sitting atop a raft because of the way the oblique light of the moon lit up water in front of us, making it seem like a vast mountain lake, not a small city reservoir. The surface rippled as if a thousand water boatmen were crossing the waters. Beyond that, the rail lines glistened and beyond that, the dark curve of the river and beyond that what looked like empty field from here but what I knew to be the cemetery. This was the quietest place in the city.

I'm not sure we should stay for very long, I said, though I remember wishing I could stay forever.

He sat down, took a bottle from his satchel and unscrewed the top. He tipped it to his mouth and I saw the flickering river of clear liquid flow from one end of the bottle to the other, then back. He lowered the bottle and handed it to me.

I had never drunk from a bottle.

He placed a cigarette in his mouth. He lit a match and cupped his hand around the cigarette so his hand and lower face were a deep, soft orange and then he shook out the match and all that was left was the flare of the glowing ember. The fading ember glided down to where he rested his hand on top of his knee.

I took a small sip from the bottle and the liquid skipped past my tongue as if it had no flavour at all or as if my throat were suddenly the place for taste buds because there, along the back of my throat and then all the way down to my heart, I felt the cool burn of the vodka and then after it was gone, the memory of it finally claimed the tip of my tongue. I felt my cheeks flush and I set the bottle down between us, propped against his bag.

What happened tonight? asked Marco.

I thought of the swinging pocket watch and the way Sasha looked at me in that long, hateful moment.

I pulled my knees up to my chest and hunched over them, resting my head on my arms. Like that I could look out at the water, or press my face to my knees and see only the shadowy folds of my skirt.

Could I have a cigarette? I said.

I didn't want to need help. Marco handed me his cigarettes and took a drink while I removed one.

When I put the cigarette in my mouth, he lit it and his hands glowed orange again.

Before I met Sasha, when I was alone and more vulnerable to the world, people had concerned themselves with whether or not I would marry, with whether or not a smart woman like me could find a complement in the world: in short, with the most personal things of my life. I remembered a time I went shopping for a dress with Rima. We decided—it was unlike us—to go into the fashion district on the other side of the city—near the bridge—where all of the shop owners were French. We were the only two in the store. It was one of the more run down stores, but they had beautiful glass lamps

whose oil reflected the double flames, radiating honeyed light throughout the room. Racks and racks of old dresses made it almost impossible to move and even more impossible to avoid the two saleswomen—a mother and daughter. Rima was besieged by the daughter, and I by the mother.

When I retreated to the dressing room to try on three dresses, the mother stood outside the room, hovering with her hunched back, her false teeth, her beady eyes, her cigarette with the dangling ash. I drew the curtain and slowly undid my dress. I slipped it off my shoulders, first one, then the other. I stepped out of my own dress and into a dusty dress I could never wear. Before I had even pulled the dress up to cover me, the old women threw open the curtains demanding to know how it fit, if I liked it. I was so angry. I could not respond. The woman zipped up the back of the dress and spun me so that I stood, dazed, facing the mirror in the small space.

C'est parfaite, said the woman. You should buy it, it's perfect for you.

I stared at myself, at my meagre breasts barely visible beneath the worn silk.

Look at yourself, said the saleswoman, Look at yourself, she said, and say, I love you, I love you, I love you.

What? I said.

Do it! I love you, I love you, I love you.

Leave me alone, I said. I pulled the curtain between myself and the woman and tore the dress from my frame. I put on my own dress and rushed from the store. I walked a whole block before I remembered Rima, and then I had to walk back.

I felt Marco's hand resting on the top of my back. I butted my cigarette out on the roof, then tossed it down below. He began to press the flat of his thumb into the muscles

on either side of my spine, pushing them upwards. I relaxed a little, and let him. I watched the water.

I know a lot about him, said Marco.

What was different now was that the sky was so dark and the water boatmen were making their way across the ocean towards a new life of adventure and discovery and the railway tracks were glistening with the promise of foreignness and beyond that the past was under the ground, and no one could tell me what dresses to buy.

I don't know, I said and looked at him for the first time. Yes, we had spent time together, but never alone, and here I saw that he was a caring man. He had dark, dark eyes that sparkled with the moonlight and he was patient.

He's a good man, you know.

He broke my father's pocket watch. He hates the man I work with. He was taunting me.

But do you love him?

Of course!

A quick answer always means its opposite.

That's ludicrous.

You can love him in a way, but maybe it's not the right kind of love.

I wanted him to say something easier.

Don't take offence, said Marco. All loves are not the same.

I straightened my back and Marco's hand fell back to the roof. I took another drink and thought about the shape of the rocks that made up the wall that supported us. My back was cold where Marco's hand had been and I wished it was still there.

But why was he angry? asked Marco.

Because he's jealous of the man I work with.

That's not why.

If that isn't why, then I don't know.

This is what you need to think about.

I knew he was right.

Why was he angry, then? I asked.

He's angry because the world around him has changed, because he was born into a family that promised wealth and security with a little bit of work, and now he's got to really think about who he is and what he is doing and he doesn't want to do that. He's angry because you know what you want and he doesn't. He's angry because he disappoints his father. And, the fucked up thing is that the one thing apart from you that makes him feel better is his mother, and she's insane—

She and I don't get along.

She's in love with him.

I said nothing, at first.

What does this all mean to you, then?

He paused and squinted to watch a bird fly along the length of the tracks, heading west.

Nothing. Honestly. Nothing. I'm just trying to help.

I'm not sure that's what you're doing, I said, but I didn't know quite what I meant.

It's just a theory some of us have is all.

Us.

Peter, Jack, me.

So that's what you all talk about? I thought it was something more respectable, like art, politics, but it's just about each other? And this is the way you propose to help your friend? And his wife, in a difficult moment, a moment that does not reflect a general malaise, just a moment of difficulty, this is how you propose to help?

Nothing came out quite the way I wanted it to. A flock of birds sailed by. I heard their wings flap against the cold air. Beneath them, the cemetery, train tracks and reservoir seemed mean and unforgiving. The birds seemed to have lost the formation I'd noticed just minutes before. I imagined them dropping away from one another, losing their way, falling to the ground, one by one, isolated and away from the group, alone and without their natural guides. It was unfair, I thought, the way we created false lakes, like this one, lakes that are stagnant, unmoving, a black pit into which the birds might dive and never resurface.

I think it has started to rain, I said.

I moved to the edge of the roof, my feet dangling down. I looked back at Marco.

He slid down beside me, and we looked down at our feet for a bit, the ground below out of focus.

No one can ever know a person, and no one can ever know the inside of a love, I said.

I know, he said, looking at me. I felt an energy between us, a feeling I wanted to deny. It was the accident of his hand placed close to mine. I leaned towards him and his arms enveloped me and he felt so strong and certain and smelled like pine and I told

myself it was nothing and kept telling myself that even when he put his hand on my leg and slid his fingers around my inner thigh and pulled me closer to him so my legs were apart and I lifted my face to his and he kissed me hard and I him. His lips were cool and wet. I closed my eyes and thought of Sasha and even felt that this was for us, that I could be with Marco and it would be a thing that would make me want Sasha more, like I would reach for him again because, in that moment, I was with Marco and wishing for Sasha and it was the first time in too long that I wanted Sasha and so I said to myself that this was good. Marco's leg pushed between my thighs and his arm looped beneath my back. I pushed myself farther along the roof's smooth surface so that Marco now hovered over my waist and when Marco's hand slipped under my skirt he could feel my anticipation. It was like his mouth had always known how--with what rhythm and with what pressure and with what speed—to go down on a woman. When we kissed again, his mouth was salty and warm and my whole body relaxed as if after a long cold winter it had experienced warmth for the first time. When Marco said to me, Sasha mustn't know about this, I said, I know.

We sat up, and I felt exactly right. We found the edge of the roof again and looked down.

Marco brought his feet underneath him so that he was crouching. He leaned onto his right hand and kicked off, dropping to the ground. From there, he held the stool for me.

Go down backwards, he said, it's easier.

When I got home, the balcony door was still open and the curtain was twisted around itself like a piece of thick rope. I crossed the room to close it, feeling pieces of the watch like grit underfoot. I looked out the window. I wanted him to come home that night. When I went to the bathroom, it was occupied and I waited at the door in a familiar way, thinking it was Sasha. When the neighbour we all called Uncle Gregory opened the door, a ratty towel clutched with one hand around his hips, his steamed-up glasses in the other hand, I looked away.

I swept the floor of our flat clean, emptying the dustpan full of tiny cogs and springs into the garbage without ceremony. Then I watched the ceiling for hours, tried to count the patches of peeled paint, tried to burn their irregular forms in my mind. There was a moment that night when I heard the door at the end of the hall open and shush closed. I propped myself up on my elbows. Footfalls approached our door and there was no time to think of what I most wanted to say or whether or not I ought to feign sleeping.

Next door, the deadbolt retracted.

I lay back down. I watched the play of shadows on the curtains, listened to the building sleep, wondered if people dreamt any more these days.

In the morning, a metal crate being pulled across the courtyard woke me. I had slept in my clothes.

Even now, in my small white room, I lay awake wondering when Sasha will return. In the mornings, a pigeon frequents my windowsill. She coos tenderly, pacing the length of the sill, then darts off. The rituals of pigeons are the same in every country. While she walks the length of the sill, I walk the length of my room. Lately, I have been

counting the number of strides it takes me to do a simple task such as cross the room to fetch a book. By *strides* I mean the sort of ambulation that makes noise due to the swift heel meeting with the hollow floor boards. Five strides is what it takes to fetch the book, but they must be preceded by two, quieter steps, in which I gain the momentum needed to stride. I always stop at the fifth stride because, no matter which direction I take, unless I were to take a circular route, I would hit a wall. Circular striding is an ill-advised activity.

For several nights, Sasha didn't come home. Perhaps it was for simple want of company that I started listening through the walls using the technique my father had taught me so long ago. It made me feel like I knew about the people around me. I listened to the opera singer. She sang only arias and only at night. Her husband left for work at 5pm every day and after that she would start singing until 7pm when her brother came home. If he came home later, she would sing later, but the later he came the more drunk he'd be, and the later it was, the more horrible it became to listen to what happened once he'd slammed the door. The husband was home by midnight or 1am, so things often improved then. When the husband and wife talked, I couldn't distinguish the words. I knew they were talking because the wife's voice, even when it whispered, was like a song and so her whispers lilted and laughed through the walls. Sometimes, I thought she was crying, but even that was beautiful in its way. When the brother was there, and the three of them were talking, I heard every word, but they didn't talk about anything at all.

Sasha stayed away a long dark week, and then, one night, he showed up at the institute. He was on his way to Rima's. It was like we knew we were supposed to want to

be together, but all we wanted was to be apart. He loosened his scarf and took off his hat. We didn't know what to say to each other. He was tensed up, like a feral cat. As he was leaving I said, Have a nice dinner at Rima's.

He made a face.

What? I said.

Forget about it, he said.

The scarf and the hat were screwed up in a ball under his arm.

What?

Rima is a terrible cook.

I guess sometimes she adds too much oil.

It's not just that, he said, everything is tasteless.

I think she knows she's not a fabulous cook, I said.

She *prides* herself on her cooking, Tatiana, he said, unwinding the scarf from the hat and shaking it, then, because the ice pellets had begun to melt.

Well she's an amazing baker, I said.

No she's not! he said.

I always thought she made great cakes, I said.

The other day she made cookies and gave them to Kolya for us—they were essentially inedible.

Oh, I said.

But, he said, I guess everyone has their talents, mine being to complain. Are you coming to dinner? he asked.

In a bit, I said.

He shook the scarf again so that dirt and water were kicked off, then he wrapped it tightly round his throat. By the time he left, it felt less like we were repelled by one another, and more like we were tired of being so tired.

The buzzer to their apartment didn't work so when an older woman arrived with a key, I followed her inside. In the lobby, the old woman asked me whom I was visiting. When I told her it was Rima and Yuri she nodded in what I took to be an approving kind of way. They lived on the fourth floor. The elevator was out of order. My shoes were wet from outside. They slapped loudly against the marble stairs for the first few flights but quieted as they dried. I don't know why, but as I was climbing the stairs I thought about the broken elevator. It was fairly new, so it didn't make sense that it would be broken. I had heard of people squatting in the spaces at the top of elevator shafts once the elevators stopped working. When the elevator got repaired, if it ever did, the squatters would lose their home. As I climbed the stairs, I imagined the couple living on top of the elevator shaft in a little electrical hut whose floor had holes through which the elevator cables could pass. I envisioned the sudden lurch of the elevator cables rolling into gear once again. The couple in the hut would panic. The elevator would come up, inexorably, and the two would see their deaths upon them. I was almost at Rima's floor when I realized it wasn't a couple in the electrical hut, it was two brothers. Just as the elevator was about to send its spikes up into the hut, the younger, more agile brother escaped. Sometimes I saw movies like that in my head.

I rang the door to Rima's hallway.

I heard a door inside open, then the yapping of her dog, Marksena, and the shushing sound of Rima's slippers against the tiles in the hall.

She opened the door and smiled.

I followed them down the hall and into the apartment. Rima's brother, Kolya, was standing in the doorway. Kolya's shoulders were as wide as the doorframe.

Kolya grinned at me. His forehead shone green beneath the fluorescent light in the hall. He stepped aside.

Would ya look at that, he said as I walked past, Our little scientist with nothing to say.

Hello, Kolya, I said, as I stepped out of my boots and tiptoed over the melting snow and dirt that had gathered in the vestibule.

Sergei was hunched on a stool by the window, smoking. Anna sat on the couch, reading. Sasha had yet to arrive. I tried not to feel surprised or hurt.

Sergei looked at Anna every few moments and the way he did made me know he loved her and she didn't know or else did but didn't love him back. She stood with her arms crossed across her small frame. Anna probably thought they were friends, but he probably knew they would never be friends, even though he'd keep trying because it hurt so much it was better than feeling nothing at all, which was probably how he felt whenever he wasn't around her. I perched on the edge of the sofa that was closest to Sergei. The rest of the sofa was empty, but I hated being trapped in the middle of a couch, like sitting on a tram next to someone unpleasant. I never was much for small talk.

The room was bigger than the one Sasha and I shared. Kolya lived with them and Rima was expecting a baby. Kolya had the room next to them—a closet really, especially

for a man that size—and Rima's parents occupied the third. Even for that number of people, the space was generous. Yuri was a junior party member.

Marksena ran circles around Kolya's legs.

Rima was standing at her hotplate, her left hand on her hip as her right stirred the pot.

Kolya was a manager at a herring plant. He brought herring to dinners, as if this were an act of generosity and not a sign of his pilfering. He was much older than Rima; old enough to have stories from the war, for example, though no one knew how many of them were true. He never talked about battle, but I had heard him talk about a camera he'd made at that time. The finder was from his father's old rifle; the lens was a magnifying glass. The camera body was made of cardboard. He thought it proved a spark of genius, I think. That night he told Anna about it. His voice filled the room like a speech at a rally; everyone had to talk over him. It had occurred to me that his voice was so loud you couldn't understand what he was saying unless you were partly deaf.

I sat for a few minutes watching the room. Then I felt odd. Like I should speak but had nothing to say. Sergei hadn't said anything either, but he'd finished his cigarette and the conversation we weren't having seemed hostile, suddenly.

I went to stand next to Rima. Beside the burner, there was a sink so deep a small child could bathe in it. It was not hooked up to any water. Both the burner and the sink were illegal, but Yuri had lost the argument over it when he'd moved in.

While Rima cooked, I set up the table in the middle of the room. The dog had been sleeping underneath it; when I moved the table he woke up and started to yap. I cleared it of books, pens, clips, empty glasses. When I was finished, I went back to stand

next to her. I tasted the soup, salted it, and turned down the temperature. Rima knew what I meant.

Watch the soup, will you? she said to Anna.

Anna looked relieved to have an activity and peeled herself off the wall. She maneuvered herself around Kolya. She was the kind of woman who, when faced with someone political would feel poorly educated and when faced with someone who abhorred politics, someone like Sasha for example, she would fidget then too, like whatever political affiliations she did have were indications of her tiresome nature. She was a suspicious person; more than anything she suspected herself of being a fraud.

We went down the hall to the kitchen. I lit a cigarette. We stood in the hall, just outside the kitchen door, passing the cigarette back and forth, not talking.

In one of the apartments, someone was singing opera. Or they had a gramophone. It was probably the former.

The kitchen was filthy. A single electric bulb hung from the centre of the room. Our shadows spread over the countertops and into the drawers, the position of the light ensured that no where we looked could be lit by its glare.

The old woman who had let me into the building was in the kitchen. A cup of tea and a small notebook on the table. She had been dozing. Her age-spotted hands folded under her round belly, her slippered feet planted squarely on the floor. She looked up when we came in.

Haven't seen you for a while, she said to Rima.

That's true, said Rima, looking for the plates in the cupboard. How many are we, Tatiana? she asked.

The old woman fumbled her hand on the notebook and pulled it closer to her. Her hand shook slightly and I thought she would be better off if the book were more substantial; that way it could act as a paperweight in her fluttering hand.

Five now, but six with Yuri, I said.

It's odd how rarely we see one another, said the woman.

Is it? said Rima. Let's get eight settings, she said to me.

It must be that revolution of yours; your husband must keep you very busy, said the woman.

Rima had gathered all of the dishes. I put the forks and knives into the glasses and took them down the hall.

Goodnight Mrs. Bonner, said Rima.

In the hall, Rima balanced the stack of plates on her hip and leaned against the wall.

Well, you look tired, she said.

It's the institute, I said.

That's not all, she said.

We're fighting, I guess.

You're lives are too entwined. You need other people around to make it work, she said.

We have you and Yuri, I said. And he has Jack and Peter.

Other lovers, she said.

Sasha would never, ever accept that.

Maybe he'll have to, she said.

I thought he'd be here already, I said.

We said nothing for a few minutes. In one of the apartments a radio was turned on. In another, a baby cried. Rima shifted her weight and the plates shifted too, clinking.

At dinner, Anna sat in a corner next to Kolya. Mismatched bowls and dishes steamed in the centre of the table; we served ourselves. Yuri came home while we were eating and sat in silence. We talked about children and the new nurseries, marriage and the new divorce laws.

After dinner, Sergei was first to get up and go to the window, where he lit another cigarette.

Where's your Alexandr, Anna asked me.

At his studio, I said.

Can you help me clear the table, Rima said to Yuri. She put the water onto boil and put cups on the table.

I gathered the plates, scraping them clean, piling them, and piling all the cutlery on top. Yuri sat down and poured a round for the table.

Can women ask for a divorce? asked Rima.

Yes, they can. Anyone can, said Yuri.

If the woman leaves, said Kolya, does she pay the man support?

You're a beast, said Rima.

To the savage age! said Kolya.

Anna poured the second round.

Men pay for the support of the children and the mother; the state pays for everything else, said Yuri.

Anna raised her glass, and everyone followed suit.

Say something, said Kolya.

To divorce, said Anna.

I thought I would leave after dinner, but Kolya pulled back a cloth that had been draped over a shelf and revealed a phonograph. I knew it was there. Rima and I had listened to a record on it before, but only when Yuri wasn't home. Sergei stood behind us all, his arms crossed as if he were uninterested. Yuri looked at Rima; I thought you got rid of that thing. Rima shrugged. Yuri was the kind of Bolshevik that wanted to rid the home of any little luxury. Rima was not.

Rima! said Yuri.

Let her be, Yuri, said Koyla, clapping him on the back. We've had this little machine since Rima was a girl. It was brand new when we got it and now it's just a little relic of our Papa from before the war.

Come on, love, said Rima. Just a little dance.

We pushed the table and chairs back against the wall. In a small apartment, it doesn't take much to make a party. Yuri was outnumbered.

I can't remember the moment the music began, but I remember how it felt. Like a summer's day, somewhere else. Humid. Kolya swung Anna, so all you could see was her skirt spinning round. Kolya could really move. You'd never know it. A trumpet and trombone wrapped their legs around one another. The bass floated down a river, then the trumpet took to dancing and then so did the trombone. Rima and I held each other at the

waist, rocking back and forth. There were three cylinder records like that, and one other- an American Christmas song. The notes of a xyolophone being struck by a child. Rima and I danced like that for a while; only Kolya knew how to change the cylinders.

The apartment windows sweated with condensation. Everything was different for a night, like we'd travelled far away together and had no immediate plans to return. I knew that I was part of something important at work, and I knew that I had dear friends. There was only Sasha that did not fit. I could not see where he would be in the future, but it occurred to me that night that he mightn't be with me. The music slurred around inside us all.

I didn't notice when Sasha, Jack and Marco arrived. At one moment my arms were draped around Rima's soft waist, and the next, I was spun against the wall that was Sasha. If I could have rejected him, I would have. But I couldn't. Our friends danced around us, pushing us closer, demanding that we reunite, ignoring the way we tried to keep our distance, the way we tried to keep the anger between us, as if it were a real, physical thing. I saw in their efforts a kind of hypocritical support, something I was hardly articulate enough to refuse. The music kept playing. Though the songs were never longer than four minutes, the last one felt interminable. The clarinet flirting inappropriately. It was a black man's music. From a racist country—that was one of the reasons we despised America—a black dark song that upset the order of the world. It took so much energy to refuse Sasha that at some point I gave up and allowed myself to be pushed against him. Everyone cheered. I had the uncomfortable feeling of having lost a competition and yet it was a kind of giving up that was totally familiar. If there is one thing that was always true with Sasha, it is that his body always felt right. I could smell

the cigarettes he'd been smoking. Sasha looked me in the eyes. I wanted to ask him why and I wanted to forget the whole damn thing. When I looked over his shoulder, I saw Marco and Jack. Marco smiled at me.

The song ended and I was sweating. I poured myself a drink of water and went out onto the balcony for some fresh air. I shut the door slightly, to suffocate some of the sound. I could see Kolya standing on the couch. His voice dominated the room. I heard the lines of poem by Gastev. Kolya always recited the same poem about the blast furnace and the factory sirens and the workers as machines. That evening had so many working parts.

When I came back inside to see how Sasha was reacting, he was gone and so was Jack. Where did they go? I asked Marco.

Outside, he said.

I went to the balcony to look.

The night was green, black and silver. At first I saw nothing but china ink darkness and the random bright glare of a moonlit puddle. But then two little fireflies glowing bright red, then dulling. The movement of their arms, the hunch of their backs, brooding. I made out the silhouette of Sasha's tensed up body. To look at him, one would think he was cold, but I knew he wasn't. I went back inside, took my coat and put on my shoes, and went down.

Sash, I called from the entrance.

I saw him look over at me.

Sasha, what's happening? I said.

Shhhh, he said.

The two of them walked over.

Night, Tatiana, said Jack, tossing his cigarette onto the pavement and going inside.

We left. We crossed the courtyard and I looked back at Yuri and Rima's balcony, but all I could see inside was the ceiling brightly lit and the rubber plant on the top of the bookshelf. If they were dancing still, I couldn't see them. If they'd found a new record, I couldn't hear it. Our footsteps echoed between the buildings. Sasha was quiet. The night felt thick with things. Sasha was unavailable to me. His head hung low and his hands were stuffed into his pockets. I wanted to reach out to him, but I knew if I touched him, he might implode.

It was a long walk.

When we got home, he said we couldn't go inside.

Why? I asked.

Because I have something to tell you, he said, and I don't want to do it inside.

Because you don't want me to yell?

No.

Because I'll yell out here, too.

He pinched my elbow and pulled me across Pirogowskaya and into the park. I knew that somewhere in the dark bushes, that man I always saw was sleeping.

I'm going to leave, said Sasha.

I stopped walking.

We can't stay still, he said.

What kind of leaving? I said, catching up to him.

I'm leaving the country.

Is that what you were talking to Jack about? Why, Alexandr? We are fine here.

I want you to leave with me, but I will leave regardless.

We walked on, in silence. It had started to rain, but under the cover of the trees we could stay relatively dry. There were no lights in the park. The only sound was the rustle of the trees. The blacks were carbon, velvet, and oil.

Why? I asked.

Because I'm not safe and no one with my family background will ever be safe here again and because I can't do anything here. Every opportunity I ever had is gone. And because Peter is missing and if they can get him, they can get me. If they want him, they want me. I remember thinking about the kinds of jokes Peter often told while we were working on some monotonous thing in the lab—cleaning slides, for example.

How do they deal with mice in the Kremlin? he'd say.

I don't know.

They put up a sign saying "Collective Farm." Then half the mice starve and all the rest run away.

What a shame that a joke could get you in trouble. I can take a joke. Now, I can. Back then, though, I thought I was too smart for jokes.

Just one more, he'd say. Three men sit in a jail in Lubyanska. The first asks the second why he has been imprisoned, and he says, Because I criticized Trotsky. The first man responds, But I am here because I spoke out in favor of Trotsky! They turn to the third man who has been sitting quietly in the back, and ask him why he is in jail too. He responds, I'm Trotksy, said Peter.

Trotsky wouldn't have been in Lubyanska like that, I'd said.

You seem like an intelligent person, Tatiana, he'd said.

Peter had been, right, of course. Within a year, Trotsky would be exiled, and like that, the jokes became real. Yet, for all I could remember, I could not, at that moment, picture his face. What did his face look like? I could not remember. How strange to think he'd been imprisoned for telling a joke. Oh, but I'm confused, I think, for that wasn't what Sasha said at all, was it?

Under a tree, I stopped and asked, How do you know Peter is gone?

We know.

He must have done something, I said.

I thought you would say that, he said.

In my head, I mimicked Sasha. *I thought you would say that, I thought you would say that, I thought you would say that.* So I didn't say what I thought he might have done or why I thought he might have done it.

It's not possible to leave, just like that, I said.

It is possible, said Sasha. Jack knows a way.

Jack.

You could come, he said.

We walked on in the blackness, past the mean shadows of trees, past the silent occupants of the park. Not talking. Our footfalls on gravel. We walked towards the morning, walked towards the dead gray light that seeped into the park at the end of the path. At the exit, we came to the end of the tramway line. It was like a graveyard of

trams. All night they stayed like that, their antennae folded above them in angular misshapes like giant, desiccated insects.

I realized there was so much more I wanted to know about everything. And I knew by looking at him, at his body all compressed in silence, that he wouldn't tell me anything else.

He didn't do anything, said Sasha.

When we got inside the sun was rising, slow and white. We went to bed and held each other, my hand on his heart, its rapid beat. Sasha thought he was in danger. I thought he'd done too little to warrant any such concern. His fears, I thought, were a sign of arrogance. Back then, I thought the state only concerned itself with those who posed a real threat to the future and so, for that reason, their imprisonment was justified, necessary. Sasha did not paint and Sasha did not work and Sasha did not think enough for him to matter that much, but I could not say such a thing, and, secretly, did not want to.

Later, Rima told me that once everyone had left, Yuri lugged the phonograph to the balcony and pushed it over the railing. It stayed, smashed up beneath their balcony, until spring.

Don't you touch it, he told her.

The days passed strangely then. I walked around the city hungry because it felt right to know why my stomach ached, to know why I was dizzy, to know. At night I would get home late. I would make tea and let the water drain the tea leaves of every last trace of tannin; I would drink the tea black, then, with nothing to sweeten it.

One night, not long before he left, I came home to find Sasha already deep asleep. He was lying on his back, his mouth gaping open and, when I looked more closely, I saw a gash through his eyebrow, a dark swelling around his eye and a purple welt across his cheek. I knew what must have happened. A group around him, maybe a policeman, and at least one friend. Jack. Jack would have said something someone didn't like and rough hands would have pushed him, separating Jack from Sasha. Was it Jack? Then Sasha might have said something else, and a punch in the eye. Maybe he fell. I looked at his hands. The sharp tracks of dried blood across his palm. Someone helped him up. Jack was punched again, maybe, and then the two were thrown from the group by a man who was both violent and compassionate: expelling them and thus preventing them from facing more blows. They ran.

I went back to the kitchen to reheat the kettle. I filled a small bowl and brought it back to our room with a clean rag. Perhaps I was rougher than necessary; I cleaned the grit from his hands, the blood from his face.

He groaned, but did not wake. Or woke, but said nothing.

We slept stiffly that night, neither wanting to fall into the divide between us; we slept hanging onto the respective edges of our bed. In the morning, when I looked at him, still sleeping, I had the sudden impression that he was nothing to me.

I looked at him as I had looked at countless people of his type in the streets: the selfish, spoiled rich who had lived their whole lives eating *madeleines* and *macarons* from France and now wanted pity from those of us who worked. His swollen face deserved another smack, but nothing would make him learn. I looked at him and could not find, anywhere in me, pity. He was too velvet skinned, too puffy, too unwrinkled.

His canvases, still blank, sat in the corner of the room. I opened the balcony doors and let in the cold wind blow over Sasha. I went back into our room and picked up all of his canvasses and threw them off the balcony.

What the hell are you doing, he cried, struggling to sit up in bed.

When I left, I had the impression that when I locked the door I was locking him away from me, and that eventually I would have to free us both.

I walked along the river that morning. I looked at the frozen ice and saw movement, saw ice as liquid, saw the slow shifts and changes, the ripples in the surface that said it was not still.

I thought of Sasha as being out of date. He was only a few years older, but everything about his upbringing had prepared him for a time that would never ever exist. He had no social awareness. Sometimes I would think about his plan to leave Russia and think, that's just like him, such a fucking individualist. I would think that our society would be better without him.

The summer of 1928 assaulted us. A Moscow summer should be the best time of year, but that summer was scorching and dry. For one week, the forests outside the city burned, and dark smoke billowed into the city as though it were the end of time. Through the layers of thick cloud whose colours ranged from dark plum to burnt orange to a dense and dangerous gray, the sienna sun crossed the sky. Old people died from breathing soot. When I washed at the end of the day, the white basin streamed with blackened water as my face and hands came clean.

That was the summer that Stalin became First Secretary. That was the summer that the first of the show trials were held. And it was the last summer I had with Rima.

It seemed that she looked pregnant all of a sudden, but of course, it was hard to notice, in those days, when the body changed shape, especially when one dressed as Rima did, as most party women did then, in loose-fitting shifts that gave nothing away. Until suddenly, they did. Her shifts clung to her stomach. Her hands held her belly, tracing it the way pregnant women do.

I don't want a screaming child, she said, but I knew she was happy.

So, you'll put it in a nursery. That's what they do these days, I said.

Ship it off for a few years so the nurses can raise it, right?

It's a possibility, I said. Now isn't the time to stop working.

Exactly, she said.

When we talked about Sasha, Rima was equally pragmatic.

He can't stay, said Rima, one night. Take one look at any playground in any Moscow schoolyard.

Why? I asked.

Because, she said, if you watch them for long enough you'll realize that the children are learning more about the Soviet system than we ever could.

So they should, I said.

Perhaps, she said. During their breaks they coordinate trials. Of each other. If games come to a draw, they decide who won based upon whose father holds a higher position in the party. Children write reports denouncing their classmates.

This isn't new, I said. Don't you remember doing that? Writing letters to the Tsar about your teachers, your classmates?

I'm not saying someone will denounce him, she said, but he's right that he isn't safe.

I imagined Sasha dead. Death was something that had become strangely familiar to us. I'd seen dead bodies so many times I stopped noticing, no longer felt my stomach turn, it was like when they died they become nothing to me. I'd heard of soldiers who thought it'd be better for Russians to kill one another than for them to kill foreigners just because it would free up some land for those who remained. Men who murdered their wives just because they'd been nagged one too many times. A shortage of coffins to such an extent that the coffins could be rented. The body would be put inside, the coffin nailed, loosely, shut, and on top *please return* scrawled so that the box wouldn't get buried.

We don't apologize for doing things we believe are right.

This building with the white room makes so very few sounds at night. The electric heater, sensing cold, clicks on. If it has been warm for some time, a summer, say, the click of the heater is followed by the smell of burnt dust. Sometimes I hear voices. If they are next door, they are muffled, if they are in the hall, they echo. Overnight, in the corner of my window, the autumn leaves pile up. In the morning, I count how many have appeared. They are like the flysheets that announced Lenin's death so many years ago. I wanted to keep a flysheet as a record, but what did I want to record? My presence,

perhaps. I tried to take them home, but the frozen paper was of poor quality so they disintegrated and tore once warm.

Christmas of 1928 was lonely. On the day we ought to have been celebrating, Sasha pulled all of the books out of our bookshelves and dispersed them into piles on the floor. I heard him pull the latch on every glass window and then heard it rattle when he let it close. By mid-morning, the entire apartment was covered in books.

What are you doing? I asked.

Don't worry about it, he said, not looking at me.

I left the apartment and walked through the city. The streets, at least, were empty. I passed by Rima's apartment and wondered if she'd had the baby. They would be at Yuri's dacha, I thought, and didn't stop. I found an open store and bought marzipan for Sasha—a small peace offering.

The books were back in place by the time I returned. We ate a simple meal and Sasha was grateful for the marzipan at the end of the day.

4.

Sasha left me on the evening of January 12, 1929 which meant that by the time I was ready to declare him dead, I could walk the streets with people who were mourning someone who was dead for real—walked the streets in a sea of mourners because, at that time, we mourned Lenin's death for a full week every January. I came home to our apartment to find him waiting for me. He had put a flower in a vase and had put the vase on the table. The curtains were drawn.

I am sorry, he said.

For what? I asked.

For leaving you.

I hadn't registered his suitcase until that moment. It was badly packed. A small piece of cotton had been caught in the latch.

I don't care either way, I said.

We faced each other squarely, neither of us moving or softening.

I'm sure that isn't true, he said.

Don't be.

I need you to help me with this, he said.

I thought Jack was helping.

I can't do it without you.

You don't need to go.

I do.

In winter, there were always a few nights when the temperature dropped below negative twenty degrees. The cold killed the homeless. There were not enough shelters to sleep all of the city's homeless, and some of them wouldn't have slept in a Soviet shelter even if there had been space. There were mornings that I walked through the park by our house afraid of every mound in the snow. Afraid it was a man or a child. Too afraid to look closely to find out. Eventually the snow would melt or the body would be taken to the city morgue. If no family member appeared, the body would be cremated.

Jack knew this.

And I knew who slept in the park. I knew the shades of their blankets as they shifted and shivered beneath them. When they talked to me, I couldn't ignore them. This was one of my weaknesses. That was why I talked to Tobias in the bar, and it was why I noticed when Tobias looked so close to death.

The best lies are mostly true. That's how we remember them.

I saw Tobias alive one more time. I was in the grocers. He came in with a pile of kopeks and wanted to change them for a gold chervonetz. His eyes were normally a bright crystal blue, but that day they were watery and pale. And he had a cough, a cough that started deep in the smallest parts of the lungs and ravaged up through every breathing part of him until he doubled over and, finally, spit.

I have none, said the grocer, as he handed Tobias paper rubles instead.

Several weeks passed and no Tobias.

By early February, the bright yellow of the flower Sasha had left deepened. The petals became thick and striated, like wood. And then, overnight, the whole flower went to seed. All of the petals fell off and a pile of seeds equipped with hundreds of tiny filaments that could have been caught up in the wind or upon the wing of a bird or on the underbelly of a dog drifted into a sad pile of potential on the dust of our desk.

On the morning that the seeds fell, I dressed in black and walked along Pirogowskaya.

I went from hospital to hospital and in each place descended to the morgue with the same question. Have you seen my husband?

In each of the hospitals, I was asked to describe him.

A thin man, I said, with white hair. Seemingly homeless, but he came from somewhere, I said. With dark blue eyes.

Finally, I found Tobias.

When the mortician removed the white sheet from atop his body, I looked down at that man who had come into the bar—stinking and demanding and the loneliest man I'd ever seen—and I began to cry.

Yes, that is him. Alexandr Lev Pavlovich.

For months afterwards I had the following recurring dream. I dreamed my heart was not muscle and blood and flesh and pumping but a cave-like bone like the pelvis of a whale inside which I could stand upright and barely touch the roof, and I could yell out I and it would echo back as if I were in a magnificent outdoor amphitheatre. It was like being inside an operating theatre. From all sides I was surrounded. The sharp points of infinitely long needles stabbed me. Some were so sharp that their points were invisible,

and they stung deeper parts of me when they were this sharp. Then, I would wake up thinking of Sasha, of how he had, inside him, an ocean.

I knew I had to tell Sasha's mother.

She served tea when I arrived. Though the house had once been beautiful, it was starting to decay. The paint was peeling and the walls were cracked. In the monochrome of the room, there were three instances of pure white. Drifts of it in the chiffon curtains that shrouded the window, in the glare of the snow captured in a few glass frames on the wall, in the miniature squares that appeared in Mrs. Pavlovna's eyes each time she turned towards the window.

The biscuits were stale.

It was the first time I had ever sat alone in a room with her.

We sat stiffly in our chairs, facing one another. Her face was marked with age or pride. I had never been alone with her.

Well, she said sharply, as though it were an order.

I am very sorry to have to come here under these circumstances, Mrs. Pavlovna, I said.

She set down her tea and folded her arms in her lap.

I'm here with bad news, I said.

Well, get on with it, she said.

Alexandr is dead, I said.

Don't be foolish, she said.

I sat quietly.

She poured me another cup of tea and got up to get herself a drink of something harder. She stood in front of the bar. The mirror in front of her reflected the ceiling that was dark with shadow but for a small orb of orange cast by the single lamp that had been lit for my visit. She took a glass from the hutch and filled it with cognac. The bottle clinked heavily against the glass. She stood with her back to me, holding the drink in her hands. I imagined that she could have been in front of a fire, warming herself.

I looked towards the front window. Outside, the snow drifts were white and gray. It was getting dark. The wall to the right had once had a heavy cross hung there. I had stared at it so intently in the past that now, even with it gone, I could still see its dark outline.

She turned back towards me, her wheat face.

You'll have to arrange a funeral, then, she said.

Yes, I said, though this hadn't occurred to me yet.

He's been cremated, I said.

Because it took you that long to find him, she asked, or because of your beliefs?

I didn't answer.

Never mind, she said.

She returned to the settee and sat on the edge.

I'll speak to the priest, she said after a long pause.

No, I said. The ceremony must take place in the city.

It isn't a ceremony, she said, it's a funeral. He will be buried next to his father.

Pyotr wasn't his father.

Don't be insolent.

Natasha came in to clear away the tray of biscuits. We said nothing while she was there. I looked at my hands. They were so dry. The chemicals in the lab stripped my skin. When we were alone again, she stood up, straightened her skirt and said, alright then, arrange it for Saturday afternoon, and have someone meet me at the train. Jack will do.

5.

The ceremony took place in Sokolnitschya cemetery in the northern outskirts of the city. I took a taxi from the Funeral Commission, the urn of a strange man's ashes on my lap. The weight of it was accusatory.

At the Commission, I had read a pamphlet outlining the new procedure. It specified that the cremation ceremony called for order in the crematorium and demanded *complete silence, no shouting, smoking, or spitting on the floor*. Ashes weren't to be kept in houses, though museums were fine, and they could be dropped from a plane or scattered from mountaintops, if so desired.

I later realized that it must have cost someone—Jack? who?—a lot of money to bury the ashes in a cemetery. The cemeteries were full. And expensive. Shallow graves often indicated a clandestine burial, which might further indicate—during the typhus epidemic, for example—that several bodies had been buried in the one plot. It happened a lot during the civil war, less so now.

As we drove through the city, the windows steamed up so that I could not see where we were. The driver wiped the windshield every few minutes with a rag he kept on the dash. When he took a turn too quickly, the rag slid out from of his reach.

It was raining. The taxi was draped with boughs of fresh pine. From inside, I saw how they flopped with each pothole: each rut launched a synchronized spray of droplets that would land in unison on the windows and then shimmy, silver and gray, down.

At the cemetery gates, an appointed deputy and two assistants were waiting for me.

Comrade L---, I presume, the deputy said, once I had closed the taxi door.

Yes, I said.

He smiled and tucked a piece of paper into his pocket.

Over the deputy's shoulder, I saw Rima and Yuri, Marco and Jack, Kolya and others. They stood in two distinct groups, as they had when Sasha and I married, but now the division revealed not just lines of friendship, but political loyalties. To the right of the groups, standing so still I almost didn't notice her, Sasha's mother watched them. Dimitri skirted around me to Jack and Marco. One by one, he grabbed their faces and kissed them on each cheek, then slapped his arms around them with an intensity that said he did not know that Sasha was still alive. Jack and Marco did not trust him.

Later, I noticed the others: two professors from the VKhUTEMAS, the art school, some of Sasha's co-workers, and other friends of his I hadn't seen in years. Apart from his mother, there was no one from his family. I wondered why.

Once the assistants had taken the urn out of the taxi—it weighed as much as the man, despite its small size—I joined our friends.

Rima had been crying and I had the inappropriate impulse to ask her what had happened, to console her. Yuri's arm was secure around her. It felt like it was the first time I was seeing them together. She said the things to me that one says; I felt that my face was so void of feeling that sooner or later it would be obvious what had happened. If it wasn't obvious, would it be because they thought I was cold?

Thank you, Rima, I said.

The deputy started down the cemetery's central path. Dark gristly pines lined the paths. Their branches masked the full extent of the cemetery. Rima and I walked behind

the assistants who were behind the deputy. The assistants carried the urn between them as if it were a small child just learning to walk.

In the Soviet ceremony, there were no hymns to be sung. As we walked, the only sound was that of our feet landing, displacing, and abandoning the wet gravel pathway. The small stones were mostly black and grey, but some were almost white so they resembled small teeth or shards of bone.

The urn was heavy. The men set it down for a moment to adjust their grip. We paused beneath the dark trees.

The cemetery might have been grand at one time. Now all the largest and most stately monuments were broken. Easy to topple in the night, I thought. Some of the broken pieces of angels and crosses had been tidied up into little mounds of limestone. Others had sunk into the earth and were slowly taking on the rough dimensions of ancient ruins. Ravens perched atop the remaining monuments.

The deputy turned down a smaller path that had once been inlaid with stone. Now it was so overgrown that the hard soles of our shoes made no sound at all. At the end of the pathway, the stone wall that enclosed the cemetery had been built into a columbarium.

The deputy stopped at the end of the path and the assistants set down the urn. We formed a semi-circle around it. Mrs. Pavlovna stood to my left, Rima to my right. The deputy stood with his back to the columbarium. Some families had paid for elaborate designs and pithy epitaphs. Others had not.

The deputy pulled a small book from his breast pocket. His right hand cradled the book while his left removed a slip of paper that marked the required page. The book fell open and stayed that way comfortably, as if it had never been opened to any other page.

Today we honour the contributions made by Comrade Alexandr Lev Pavlovich to our beloved Fatherland, said the deputy.

I remember thinking, with regards to the deputy, that kindness must soften the face to the same extent that meanness ages it. The way he spoke was calm.

We will continue in Alexandr's good works. He leaves behind his wife, Tatiana, his mother, Mrs. Natasha Pavlovna, and many admiring friends. As we continue to forge ahead, we must not allow grief or false hopes to blind us to the importance and value of the day-to-day struggle. We honour his memory by dedication to the future.

He raised his face to the group and said that anyone who wished to speak should do so then.

Yuri began. He stepped forward, slightly, so that the perfect arc of our semi-circle became jagged, gap-toothed.

Your Sasha, he said, looking directly at me, was someone I respected. I will mourn him without embarrassment. He stepped back took Rima's hand.

A professor I had never met spoke. Alexandr had a prodigious imagination for form. We often discussed his pieces in his studio while he was a student. He was a boy becoming a man. He was on the verge of great things. The future will be poorer for his absence.

Marco quoted Marcus Aurelius, and with each speech, a new portrait of Sasha emerged. I saw that he had been respected. Sometimes I heard what people said but could not make meaning of their words.

At one point I looked past our group and watched a man in a worn overcoat walk by carrying a modest bouquet of red carnations. He was so unassuming that I knew he did this regularly.

Dimitri recalled a moment we'd all witnessed: on the night of our wedding, Sasha got so drunk that he stood on top of a table and yelled at the top of his lungs: Moon! Moon, you are being cut through and through by a swordfish cloud! Look! Everyone Look at The Moon and the Swordfish! He was a wild man, said Dimitri.

Jack was the last to speak.

I quote one of our most beloved poets when I say to you, dear friend, that this is the point of departure for infinity.

It was just like Jack to do something like that. Even then he had to prove himself, and even then he had to say Fuck you to the country and to the ceremony and to all of us present. Blok had written that line in reference to the port of St. Petersburg out of which Sasha had certainly sailed not too long ago. It wasn't about death; it was about Europe.

The assistants shooed a starling from the designated niche. The urn was heaved up to the edge then rotated by quarter turns until it was in place; with each turn, the steel of the urn scoured the rough concrete of the niche. The sound hurt my teeth.

The Deputy reminded us to recommit ourselves to the demands of the day, to give thanks for the contributions made by our fallen comrade and to refuse the pull of nostalgia when we thought of him.

There is no happiness but in the common ways, said the Deputy. He stepped aside to allow the assistants to lift the stone in front of the urn. They set it in place and tapped at the corners until the sound changed from hollow to dull. The stone had been set with an image of Sasha taken from our wedding photo. He looked dapper and happy. The image had been printed onto a porcelain plate that was about the size of a woman's compact.

Go now, said the Deputy, towards the future that will be earned through the dedication and sacrifice of millions of comrades whose unflinching efforts make us proud to be Soviets.

He went on: Alexandr Lev Pavlovich was an ardent patriot. His works will not be forgotten.

It was another man's funeral; I wondered if Tobias would have appreciated the Deputy's words. At one point Marco looked at me, as if wondering why we had used the Soviet ceremony. Everyone knew Sasha was no Soviet.

The Deputy refolded his paper which was now so damp it did not crinkle when he slit it into the leather-bound book of ceremonies. *The Soviet Ceremonies*, it was called.

The group slowly disbanded. Jack and Marco left immediately; Marco tried to catch my eye, but I pretended not to notice. Those who remained by my side—Dimitry, Rima, and Yuri—did so out of loyalty to me and grief for Sasha. For my part, I stayed because of guilt. When the last three had left, I walked right up to the tomb.

I am sorry, I said, because under the trees and in front of that tomb, I knew how much of my life that far had been nothing but a feeble approximation of truth. Truth did

not reside, I decided, in the common practices. Oh, but that wasn't what he had said, was it? It was happiness, he'd said, not truth.

It had begun to snow. The group walked ahead of me, forging a wet black path through the thin layer of white that had accumulated while we buried Tobias. I watched the easy silence they shared.

The cemetery was empty. Where I had seen the occasional mourner before, now I saw no one.

Quite unexpectedly, the day seemed to be coming to a close. It was still early afternoon, yet the sky hung low and dark.

The group walked past the guards and through the cemetery gates. I thanked the Deputy and followed.

When I looked behind me I saw that Sasha's mother had hung back, as though she could not cross the threshold and re-enter the ordinary day. The gates framed her small black figure. She was pitiable. She had not cried, and it occurred to me that I had been unkind.

I walked back to stand beside her.

She was watching another family that I had not noticed and that, from the road, was out of sight.

The men wore crisp black coats and hats; the women held umbrellas. They began to sing a hymn I had heard many years before at the death of my grandfather. Despite myself, the refrain crept into my mind. The coffin was nailed shut, the sound familiar to the walls and trees of the place. The group stepped back in one single motion, leaving four men to lower the coffin into the grave.

We watched the priest toss the earth into the grave, heard the dull thud.

Mrs. Pavlovna turned to me. I did not recognize the expression on her face.

I'm very sorry for your loss, I said. I meant it.

Don't be silly, she said.

She looked me in the eye.

I paid for his passage, she said, I'm only surprised he told you he was leaving. If I'd known you knew, I wouldn't have come today.

I was stunned.

She pulled herself up straight and said in a slow way, You were never the same breed.

The spit in my mouth turned sour, suddenly. So this was why she had come to the funeral, I thought. To get back at me for having stolen her son.

I've wasted too much time on you already, I said.

I wanted to slap her or pull her hair or spit on her long black dress or predict her bitter future, but I did none of those things. I looked her full in the face and felt a small smile sneak across my lips. Her face stayed cold and unfeeling, as though any expression of emotion would be an admission of defeat.

I walked away.

The snow started to fall in thick sheets then. Though I don't remember cold or wind, I do remember an overwhelming sense of blindness. I was walking in the direction of the friends I had known for years, but I could not see them and they could not see me. If I veered in the wrong direction I would step onto the road, or perhaps I'd go in the opposite direction and it would be accidental. A swirl of wind cut through the snow and I

caught sight of them, huddled together. Cozy. I felt I didn't deserve them, but also that they mightn't deserve me. I felt that the only way I could see them again, love them again, dance with them again, would be if I told them the truth.

Moon! You are being sliced through and through by a swordfish, I thought.

I couldn't tell them. To tell them would have been asking too much. It would have been selfish and I had been too selfish already. I knew I could not disappear that day, could not drift away like I needed to, and so I joined them.

But it was our last time all together.

I never spoke to Mrs. Pavlovna again.

6.

What a strange time that was, as I think about it now. When I pick up the wedding photos on my desk—both are annotated with dates, September 1899 for my parents and May 1924 for Sasha and me—I notice that my handwriting has changed. Then it was so much smaller. Each letter had the same axes; each letter took the same space. There were no unexpected loops. No extended tails on any letter. No collisions between them.

Not even two days passed before I began to rearrange our apartment. It was Sasha who enjoyed these things, not me, so I had barely paid attention to where things went and why he'd placed them where he had. Now I looked at our space anew. There was no feasible way to rearrange the furniture: the desk just barely fit against the wall by the balcony window, the sofa bed, similarly, could not be moved. The bookshelf that lined the remaining wall had been nailed in place long before we had arrived. Glass windows, on hinges, protected each section of the bookshelf. By pulling on a little handle, the windows hinged up until they were parallel with the shelf above it. The window then slid into the recess, granting access to the books. I hadn't helped when Sasha ordered the books at Christmas, so I started now, to assess his work. I opened up each segment, I ran my fingers along the spines of each book, I wondered which ones had been read most recently and which ones had never been read at all. All of the sections opened easily except one.

In the section where Chekhov's works were stored, the door refused to slide all the way back. Something was in the way. I removed the books one by one until I could see all the way to the back of the shelf. A piece of black cloth encased a series of hard

objects that clicked against each other as I pulled them out. I lay them on my lap and untied the black cloth. I can hardly express the melee of feelings that washed over me when I saw what was contained inside. Specimens stolen from cabinets I myself had catalogued. He had stacked them according size. The smallest was a standard glass slide three centimetres by eight centimenters. The sample was a follicle of hair, though the label was torn and illegible. He had stolen four lantern slides: all of them photographs of the blackened edge of Lenin's brain. Placed together, they comprised four quadrants of the black space, creating the eerie impression that the void had, indeed, been captured and given physical dimensions in the photographic process. My first thought was that it was an insult to my work, but I dismissed that thought almost immediately. Didn't someone say that imitation was the highest form of flattery? But what was he imitating, precisely?

At first, I continued in the weekly rhythms I had slowly established for myself. I rose every morning at six am and dressed in the same items—gray skirts and white tunics and gray sweaters that I wore every day. I walked down the hall to prepare myself tea and warm the biscuits. Uncle Gregory had gotten thinner, and had, likewise, adopted a routine from which he never seemed to waver. Most people thought he was an informer. By now we were adapting to the existence of this new class of state employee. He always woke before me and if there was nothing else I could thank him for, there was the fact of the brazier already having been warmed and the kitchen curtains having been opened. When we spoke, it was inevitably about machines, of which Gregory was unusually afraid, having, he said, known a friend whose hand had been swallowed up in the relentlessly rolling platform of a printing press, the roller of which was so heavy and so determined

that it had crushed every last bone in his hand and left a mark upon the page which he had, grotesquely, insisted upon keeping. When Gregory told me this story for the first of many times, I recognized immediately that his friend must have had a sense of humour about it all, but, it was clear, all the same, that Gregory did not consider it funny, or ironic, and so I learned not to smile at the thought of that poor flat-handed man who had never recovered from the accident. For the whole year that I maintained my room in the apartment, the year, that is, before it was subdivided again, I saw Gregory every day. He was either sitting in the kitchen, his small, poorly clothed frame hunched over a warm cup of tea or he was coming down the hallway, towards me, as if in an attempt to catch up to me before I had a chance to leave. But, I studied his habits and knew that he could not be up for long, that is to say, could not have had his cup of tea for long before he would inevitably need to pad down the hallway to the bathroom, thus liberating the kitchen.

At the institute, we had been reduced to only six employees, but old colleagues of Dr. Bechterev maintained contact with me. Dr. Luria, who had studied motor reflexes like Bechterev had and had maintained a correspondence with Freud (unlike Bechterev), was one. Dr. Segelin, a man of a more unusual temperament, was another. Dr. Luria worked at the university, but he brought his students to the institute often. When he gathered them around one of the specimens he spoke about the person first, before he talked about their brain. I never saw him speak about Lenin's brain. He mostly gathered his students around the brain of Sofia K, the mathematician who had died in Stockholm within a week of having been appointed to her post as professor at the university there.

Had he been in love with her? I wondered. Rubenstein and Borodon were other favourites. Sometimes he would forget a detail and would say, Comrade L--- could you please point out the sulci for my students? and I would join them and feel like I was a student again because I was closer in age to the students than I was to him. When they came for visits, I floated around until he called me over, and then I didn't leave.

When Luria brought students to visit, he always brought a copy of Segalin's *Europathology*, which had been published between the years 1925 and 1928, and was dedicated to the support and protection of geniuses who, Segalin thought, suffered most deeply the maladies of any given age. In 1925, he proposed a new branch of medicine which would protect the routinely exploited and abused class of people known as geniuses, a field that would be called *aesthetic medicine.* Geniuses suffered persecution whenever their creative innovations contradicted the tastes and wishes of the powerful, exploitation by editors, resellers, agents, and they tended to live in poverty, dying early as a result of their inability to adapt to social and economic situations. Media corrupted them and bourgeois tastes demanded pseudo-art, prostitute art, and clowning, performances without which they would starve. It was the duty of the enlightened Soviet age to protect real geniuses by, first, distinguishing them from fakes and then by providing institutional help that would ensure their well-being and, thus, the well-being of the state. In his journal, Segalin set out diagnosing Russian writers of renown; his analyses were, like ours, postmortem, but the objects of study were literary, not physical. Segalin read assiduously and with a clinician's eye. Because of Pushkin's irony, Segalin waffled: was he a cycloid who suffered hypomaniacal states or an erotoman with hypertrophied gonads? With others, he was more certain. Gogol was also hypogonadal

and schizophrenic. Dostoyevsky had hysterical epilepsy. Nikolai Tikhonov was a psychopath. Alexander Blok, an epileptic. Tolstoy, affective epilepsy. Jesus Christ, paranoic with an asthenic constitution due, perhaps, to his petty bourgeois background. I devoured each issue and then hid it because otherwise I thought it might get lost. Over the three years of the journals' publication, I developed a strong attachment to Segalin. I became convinced that the journals were an elaborate plea for help and they stirred in me strong feelings of tenderness, even love.

Early in the Spring of 1929, the year Sasha left, I began to see him everywhere. Sometimes, it happened in crowds, and sometimes it happened when I was alone. One morning, walking towards the centre of the city, I was looking east, across the river, I saw the funnels and cables and towers and glass-walled structures of the Moges power plant.

Don't you see, said a voice I recognized, don't you see that it's the buildings that are moving, not us?

This was the first thing he said to me, once he was gone.

Sasha.

What is still, is us. What is moving, is that movie there—it's slow, but if you look closely you'll see. See? he said.

See what?

We stopped, though a part of me wished I could keep walking.

Watch the cross on the southeast corner. Look at the glint on the transept, look at how the dome appears to surround it, enveloping it.

I knew what would happen, of course.

We started walking.

I looked to my right again, and it appeared that the cross had moved—behind it now was sky. The cross looked fragile now, like it was about to fall off an edge.

I know what you mean, I said, watching the cross shimmy farther and farther towards the ledge as we walked forward.

7.

Are you still married? That was the first thing Walter said to me. It had been two years since I'd seen him at the opening of the institute, and five since we'd read the dictionary and drunk cognac in his little room on Tversgoi. It was the Spring of 1929, and the warm weather buoyed me up for the first time in months, making me cheeky.

No, I said, but I didn't expand.

We ordered cheap vodka and I let him pay.

I'm glad, he said, but didn't go on either, which was for the best, because I think if he had said something typical, I never would have seen him again, and I'm glad, now, that I did spend more time with him, because he had things to teach me, and I him.

We were sitting in the very front of a café, which meant we were the furthest from the stage. Our chairs were right against the windows, but thick black curtains had been drawn because the windows were too thin to prevent the cold from seeping in. The curtains were practically symbolic, though, because the only warm place in the bar was up by the stage, where the spotlight and the crowd produced its own heat. Against another wall, there were bulletin boards stacked against the back of the wall and two remaining stacks of chairs, one of which was at a strange angle either because the chairs had been hastily stacked or one of the supporting chairs was broken. It looked like the kind of art that Sasha hated. On the stage, an amendment was being made and we were soon going to vote on something, but no one seemed to be listening.

Are you still married? I asked Walter.

Officially, yes, he said.

Someone took to the stage. From where we were sitting, we could only see the man's head and how he swung at the microphone hanging from the ceiling.

Don't touch it! yelled someone. The microphone oscillated in front of the would-be orator. When it came close to his face, he yelled out, Man! and it boomed out but faded, as the microphone swung away.

Someone else got onto the stage and steadied the microphone.

Man! said the voice again.

As an animal, he said, he has not evolved by plan but spontaneously, and he has accumulated many contradictions….

It was Trotsky's speech; we'd heard it before.

We can construct a railway across the Sahara, we can build the Eiffel Tower and talk directly with New York, but surely we cannot improve on man. But we can!

What happened to your wife, I said to Walter.

Nothing, he said. She's in America, still, probably working to improve her finger wave.

What's that? I asked.

Nothing important. I mean, really, nothing important. That's why I left.

The speech was over and the room got louder. Evidently, some people had been listening and now they were talking over one another so everyone had to yell to be heard.

It's meaningless, though, isn't it? yelled Walter. Marriage, I mean. It's just another form of possession, he said, looking at me as if my response would make or break his conviction.

In that look, I recognized why he wanted to talk to me. He wanted to be something else, something easier or better than what he was, and he wanted to do it through me. I'd seen that look before. Walter had that male readiness about him, a preparedness for privation, a willingness, even, and this in a way that is most common to men, I think, who need to starve to feel most alive. Women, on the other hand, need to lose something or someone. Being around him was like getting younger.

Have you been in Russia all this time? I asked.

No, he said. But I've been back at least twice a year and now I'm here for an extended post.

Any particular assignment?

The new leadership, he said, and I'll be traveling around, looking at the situation of the peasants in particular.

Oh, I said.

I guess you ended your marriage, too, he said.

He died, I said, and felt a wave of righteousness sweep over me, the feeling of having won and yet it was wrong. I felt he deserved it, though. Deserved it because he thought he had the right to know everything, and he didn't. It wasn't fair that he would know everything about me.

I'm sorry.

Don't be. We would have divorced anyway, I said, and wanted to smile because it was just so enjoyable to be so wicked to this man. There was no real reason to be so wicked, but I was because I wanted him to feel uncertain. I didn't want him to understand

what it meant to be who we were, to have been through the revolution, to be revolutionary still. I wanted him to remain foreign. This, in part, because I liked him.

Oh, I said, don't feel bad. We all lose people sometimes. You lost your wife in a way, and I lost my husband, and here we are and it's 1929 and the world is electric and we can send messages all over the world and get messages back and the deprivations and sadnesses are just to make us better people, just to make us stronger.

On the tram ride home, a man sat down heavily next to me and I knew without looking that it was Sasha. I turned to look out the window. When we passed through patches of darkness—under bridges or in the shadow of cathedrals—the window became a mirror.

When I loved you, I said, looking at the two of us in the window, did my face look strange?

I was never sure if you loved me.

Because I think my face looks different when I love. I think I look lost, I said.

I never saw you that way, he said, But I see what you mean.

I thought you never saw me that way.

I think I see it now.

Oh, I said.

The electric current in the tramlines must have gotten crossed because we lurched forward.

You're not allowed to be a ghost, I said, turning to him. You're not dead.

He didn't say anything, but he didn't leave.

It must have been late in 1929 that Luria began what would become one of his most famous cases. The subject of his study was a man he would later refer to only as S. I knew his name, because I met him on several occasions, but he shall be S. to you. S. had been introduced to Luria on the recommendation of a friend of S.'s employer, a prominent newspaper editor. S. was working as a low-level reporter at the time and his editor noticed that every morning, when the reporters were assigned their tasks for the day, S. never took notes. The assignments were complicated: the reporters were told the names of sources, addresses, leading questions and any pertinent background information, and nothing was repeated. The editor filled notepad after notepad with these assignments so that he wouldn't lose track. He thought S. was being insolent, but he returned every day with full reports of the murders, robberies, just as instructed. After the morning meeting one day, the editor called S. into his office. When it emerged that S. didn't take notes for the simple reason that it distracted him from remembering, the editor understood that an uncommon man was sitting before him. S. could remember everything he was told. Furthermore, when the editor pressed him about why he never wrote things down, S. said that he hadn't even realized that the other reporters were writing things down. S. didn't know, then, that there was anything unusual about his capacity to remember.

It took less than a year for Luria to decide that there was no limit to either the capacity or the durability of his subject's memory. For a whole year, Luria read list after list after list to S., in the hopes of finding some sign of weakness. But S. could recall,

without error, lists of objects, no matter how random, and their sequence, no matter how lengthy.

I first met S. in the summer of 1929. I remember because I had walked to the research centre and I was embarrassed by the sweat stains beneath my arms, stains I endeavored to hide, especially from Luria who, being my same age, would know other women my age and would, thus, compare me to them. I wasn't vain. I just wanted to be professional, like a colleague, and not just a former student of Bechterev's. Luria had, by then, started medical school, and I'd be lying if I didn't admit to feeling a little jealous.

The white, rectilinear exterior of the building belied its decrepit interior. Beyond the initial set of double doors, two guards sat smoking. One sat atop the desk, the other behind it. Behind them, thousands of coat hangers hung from three long frames that filled the entire foyer. Only two coats were hung there. They took my jacket, and it became the third.

Is no one here? I asked the guards.

Just you, Professor Luria and his patient, said the one behind the desk.

And the lab technicians, said the other.

Oh, and the doctors assistants, said the first, but they don't leave their coats here.

They indicated the general direction I was to walk—over there and up the stairs, or something equally vague.

The halls, by their echo and by the lighting, which was oddly greenish and seemed to lose power as one moved towards the back of the building, seemed like caves or tunnels bound for the centre of the earth. It had rained earlier in the day so I was

surprised by the lack of coats. Signs indicated the auditoriums, offices and laboratories lay behind the doors I passed.

Luria's office was at the end of the hall on the third floor. The door was open, spilling natural light into the poorly lit hall. I stood in the doorway for a moment. Luria was at his desk and S. was sitting in a chair facing Luria, so his back was to me. Luria looked up and motioned for me to come in. S. turned to look. What struck me first about his appearance was the ashy pallor of his skin and the ways its oily surface reflected the light pouring through the window. Though S. remained seated, his eyes darted up to meet mine in swift acknowledgement of my arrival.

Getting up from his chair, Luria came to the front of his desk saying, Tatiana is the one of I've been telling you about, the one who runs the *Institut Mozga* that you like so much.

With a dead artist husband, said S.

Luria blushed and looked at me, hoping, I think, that I wouldn't react.

Yes, I said. That's me.

A brief silence ensued, but Luria motioned that I should sit in the remaining empty chair and went out into the hall to grab another, saying that it was easier than maneuvering it around the desk.

Now that I was inside I noticed how much cooler it was and wished I'd kept my jacket.

Well then, said Luria, once seated, Let's show her what we've got, shall we?

S. treated the question as if it were rhetorical and didn't answer. Luria, I realized, looked exceedingly tired.

Go ahead then, said Luria, give us the first list I gave you, it was on a Monday, in this office, over a year ago.

Actually, said S., the first series was in your apartment. You were sitting at the table and I in the rocking chair… You were wearing a gray suit and you looked at me like this, and then he tilted his head to the left and adopted a quizzical expression.

Yes, said Luria. Right you are.

I wondered how Luria felt to see himself mimicked so unabashedly.

Now then, continued S., I can see you reading from a list. It began with an accordian, then a hard-boiled egg, then a red flag, five children, a lock of blonde hair like that from a child, a man's finger nail…

The truth of the matter is that Luria continued on, but I cannot remember all the things he listed and the way he recited the items—in an unrelenting drone—made me think that the items themselves meant little to him. He kept his gaze fixed on Luria until I spoke to him directly.

Tell me, I said, How do you do it?

Now S. smiled for the first time.

I recognize a word not only by its image but by a whole complex of feelings that it arouses. A word can taste, or smell, or have a weight or a texture. Or its very sound can cause a slight tickling in my left hand or I might sense something oily slipping through my fingers. When that happens, I simply remember, without effort.

Perhaps you could explain how the process works with numbers, suggested Luria.

Take the number one, said S., this is a proud, well-built man.

And two? I asked.

Two is a high-spirited woman; three a gloomy person (why, I don't know).

What about numbers of several digits? I asked.

Well, he said slowly. You see, seven is a man with a moustache. Eight is a very fat, fat woman—a sack within a sack so for the number eighty-seven, what I see is a very fat woman and a man twirling his moustache.

It's really wonderful, I said.

S. grinned.

To me, it seemed that S. was a true archive. A living, breathing collector and that his gift was so astonishing, he needed to be protected somehow. When asked how he remembered such lists in the precise order in which they'd been given, he said, by walking.

Meaning? I asked.

I take a mental walk down a street I know very well. Tsverskaya used to be a good one, but not now, not with all the changes. But what I do is walk from one place to another. It happens easily, and more often than not, the walk becomes dream-like in a way and the impossible happens: I begin in Moscow and, without realizing it, end in the town in which I grew up, Torskok.

Outside, a cloud must have covered the sun because the light on the window was suddenly dull. The sudden darkness seemed to waken S. from a sort of reverie and Luria suggested we have a cup of tea. S. declined, saying he needed to be home to care for his mother as he was the only son of six who had remained unmarried and so the responsibility fell to him. He stood abruptly and, taking his hat from the rack behind the door, said goodbye.

His steps were soundless in the hall, but after a minute or so I did hear him exchange hellos with a woman whose singsong voice tripped back to us, magnified.

Luria gathered his coat and we walked down the hall in silence, though I was sure I could hear the click-click-click of dominoes being stacked.

Outside, the sun warmed our faces.

Luria lit his pipe and said, Let's walk a bit.

The building was at a high point in the city, so it was only natural to drift down to the river.

We crossed the bridge and went down the hill on the other side to the small park where a bench was waiting for us.

He's an astonishing case, I said, once we were seated.

Luria crossed his legs and drew two quick puffs from his cigar.

The problem is, said Luria, that he utterly lacks the capacity to interpret. He thinks like a young child, in concrete images that are associative, thematic, almost like poetry, yet whenever I've shown him a poem he cannot get beyond the surface images. He's so caught up in the superficial meanings of words that he cannot deal with their intended metaphor.

I lit a cigarette and took a drag. Every so often, a slight breeze nipped up from the river, but still we were warm.

What troubles you about this? I asked.

Isn't it obvious? Nothing means anything to him.

Is he bothered by it?

Oh, I don't know, said Luria quickly, and then slower, it's just that the more time I spend with him, the more I am aware of a profound sadness about him. It's like he is waiting for something, some great thing.

And you think it is meaning that he's waiting for, I said.

Yes.

But, in our own way, I said, taking another drag, we're all waiting for that same thing.

But he'll never have it, said Luria.

Will we? I asked.

And what's worse, said Luria, is that his immediate images haunt him for hours. You know, the types of images that ought to fade, like the swirl of smoke above my pipe, or the reflections off the river, the way they dance, or even the curve of the bridge, all these things stay with him, indefinitely. His whole mental world is like a junk-heap of impressions.

Some children tumbled down the hill into the park and started throwing stones into the river. I tried to imagine what it would be like to hold on, forever, to the image of the perfect splash erupting out of the flowing river just as the rock plunged in, but it slipped away.

On the walk back to the institute I passed Sasha. He was leaning casually against a fence. Look at the light, he said, isn't it beautiful?

When I got back to the institute, Walter was waiting for me.

I wasn't too happy about it. Walter had begun to grate on me. Even though I liked the attention he gave me, I knew that there was a point on the horizon that was quickly approaching, a point where I would realize I didn't like him and then I would have to tell him I couldn't see him anymore and then I'd go back to being alone, but more alone than before, because while I'd been spending time with him, I'd been spending less time with others and so, if I stopped seeing Walter, there was no chance of the emptiness he left being filled by anyone else. Since I knew it was coming, I had to be strategic about our visits: no more than once a week, and only under circumstances I controlled. If enough outside stimuli were involved, I would be less likely to notice his lacks, and therefore I could keep the point of no return at bay.

He was sitting in the armchair in the entrance. He would have gotten cold every time someone entered, I thought.

I've been waiting since four o'clock, he said, getting up.

Was I meant to meet you? I said.

No. But I thought you'd be here.

I usually am, I said, removing my coat. Did you come for a reason?

I can't come to say hello? He took my coat and hung it on the coat tree.

Might be better to call, you know, since I do have work.

Right. Well, it was about work, so, you know, I thought you wouldn't mind.

My work? Or yours?

Both. I wanted to interview you.

I laughed. We'd walked through the grand salon and into the back room where I started to boil some water for tea.

You already did interview me, I said.

Not about Dr. Bechterev, he said.

What about Dr. Bechterev? I had no plans to discuss with him, or with anyone, what had really happened the night Bechterev died. I put out one cup and one saucer and one spoon.

I want to know about the hypnotisms.

Some of the employees were leaving because it was five pm. They had families to get home to. I walked back towards the entrance so that Walter would follow.

It'll have to be another time, I said. There's a meeting tonight and I'm sick.

You don't seem sick.

Another time.

Next week? he asked, once we'd arrived at the door. At the same time, and you'll promise to be here?

He left then, which was a relief, and I locked the door behind him. Then I sat in the armchair, still cozy from the warmth of his body, and thought.

After a few minutes, I remembered that the kettle was on, so I stood and wandered down the hall into the grand salon, where only one light was still lit. I did not feel alone. I felt as if I had walked into the salon behind someone or in front of someone and that we had been courteous to each other, allowing the other to go first through the doorway. I knew that I was the only person left in the building. Yet, I simultaneously knew that Sasha stood beside me.

This is a nice church you have here, he said.

Don't, I said.

I've always loved the lives of saints, he said, and I felt him drift towards the musicians' brains. I was never crazy about Borodon, he said. But Rubenstein was a genius. These are good Soviet saints, he said.

They aren't saints, I said.

Sure they are, he said. These are holy relics, he said. We pilgrims come to worship them, he said.

Stop it, I said.

Don't say it's about science, he said.

Were you not listening? I said. We have found out about the dominance of the frontal cortex in the minds of analytical thinkers, the predominance of the small sulci in-

But how do you know? he asked.

We know because we see it, I said.

But, an iceberg lies beneath the surface and is mostly invisible to us as we float upon the oceans of this world, and like this we risk being struck, like the Titanic, and sunk to the bottom of the sea with our lovers and our children, draped at long last in the pearls and perishable satins, not to mention the sea shells or perhaps the timbers of a poorly navigated lifeboat that was crushed beneath the bow of the sinking ship because it was pulled under along with us, imagine, you and I, so there we are, at the bottom of the sea, and all that because we did not see what lay beneath the surface.

But that's it, I protested. We are seeing precisely that, that thing beneath the surface.

No, he said, this sliced up object, is not what is beneath the surface. Where is the blood? Where is the life? What we see here is an iceberg that has melted and that is hardly the same, he said. This, he said, is a place of worship.

Perhaps it is language that is failing us now, I said. In any case, I have never seen the ocean.

I crossed the grand salon and slid open the door that hid in the panels. There was a wall that consisted only of mirrored panels, which meant that guests were distracted by themselves and parties looked fuller than they were. No one suspected that the mirrors were actually doors and that behind the doors, we had the laboratories and that in the laboratories we had the real brains and the real specimens.

8.

It occurs to me now that I may be the only living individual with a copy of Segalin's journals. Of course, I do not have them with me. I was forced to hide them, along with other things, things that came into my possession via Sasha but that I later recognized as needing protection in, perhaps, the same way that Segalin recognized, too late, the importance of protecting the geniuses of our time. Though understudied by neurologists, Segalin's diagnoses must now be recognized as a symptom of the time. In 1929, Segalin published an issue of *Europathology* dedicated to the pathology of Tolstoy and, though the issue advertised a subsequent issue, it was the last to be published. Segalin and Bechterev had worked together for the Eugenics Bureau of St. Petersburg and had, as such, distributed copious questionnaires to members of that cities intelligentsia. It is no exaggeration to say that thoughts of Segalin plague me for it seems more than likely that his studies and his alliances led, as they say, to a death foretold. Of course, nothing has been confirmed, but the coincidence of his sudden disappearance and the canceling of his journal by none other than Semashko, the People's Commissar of Public Health, forced me to reconsider the future of the *Institut Mozga*, a future which no longer seemed so certain.

A series of long, thin, wooden tables at which nested a chair or two each were the desks for all of the research assistants. We had once had many, now we had few. Glassware—mostly watch glasses and Petri dishes—littered the disused tables so that they gleamed unevenly with the light cast from the overhanging lamps.

At the end of the laboratory we kept our most light-sensitive specimens in a one of the hundreds of drawers that lined the wall. The drawers were of varying sizes and made a pleasant, wooden *shrrrr* when slid open and closed. The small brass handles cast shadows on the white labels that read: Bechterev, 1927; Lenin, 1924; and other such things. I often opened and closed them, just to hear the sound of the drawers. If the drawer was empty, it was just the *shrrrr, shrrrr*. If the drawer contained something, it was *shrrrr, clunk, shurrr, clunk*, as the object inside shifted. I felt as if these objects were part of my own history, relics of my own life. I had brought them into this place, labeled them and made them cohere, and now it seemed conceivable that someone might separate them, might ruin the order that had been established. What had happened to Segalin was not right.

It happened that one of the drawers was looser than the others. Where the other drawers required an initial tug to pull them open, one of the drawers slipped open with no protest at all. I had forgotten this idiosyncrasy. It happened on an afternoon that I pulled it open so quickly that the small glass slide—no more than the length of my thumb—slid to the end of the drawer and slipped out. It would have broken into thousands of pieces had I not caught it, its keen edges pressing into my fingers and palm. Once there, it seemed careless to return it to that faulty drawer and so I slipped it into the fold of my pocket.

I had given little thought to how and why Sasha had started his own small collection in our home. It had taken me until that very moment to realize that what Sasha had been collecting was evidence. He had been protecting the collection. He had anticipated its dissolution. This was how I began to follow in his steps; this was how I started to add to his collection.

Piece by piece, I removed parts of the collection and hid them at home. A slice of the microtomed brain of an elephant, one of my favourite of the mammalian brains because of its five-petaled structure so similar to that of a buttercup and perhaps the reason (or perhaps coincidental) for that name being so common among their species, but I also stored (this was how I viewed it, not as stealing) the withered optic nerve of a blind man from Siberia, the severed hypothalamus of a patient and several slices of Lenin's brain which clearly showed signs of necrosis—a black void into which litres of blood might have flooded during one stroke or another or perhaps had slowly eroded as a result of syphilis.

At home I would remove the slide or jar and would hold, ever so briefly, the object up to the light so that I could admire the workings of disease and decay. With Lenin's brain, I thought about the passageways that would have been filled with blood, and thoughts and images of violence and moments of passion, and then I put the slide down on the table and, then, without thinking, I took a knife to the gummy label which identified the slide as slide # 1301 taken from Vladimir Illyich Lenin on January 22, 1924, and pressed the knife through the label making it tear and pucker and thus rendering it illegible. I removed *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Dreary Story* and a thick collection of Chekhov's early plays, none of which had been successful: this allowed me all the room I needed to extract the enrobed objects from behind the books. Each time I removed my burgeoning collection, I looked at each object tenderly. Each of the lantern slides, for example, captured one quarter of the black necrotic form. I held them up to the light, too. They would not degrade. I passed the slide slowly before my eye so that what I saw was the living room lamp, then the wooden edge of the slide, then the green-black

shore, with a deep green-black living room lamp in it, then the wooden edge of the slide, then the living room lamp once again, now seemingly imprinted with that same form, though now the shore was red, and floating. It was a limited collection, but it was my very own. I could not have articulated, then, why those objects—those slides, those mounts, those photocopies—belonged together, and yet they did. Who can understand the collector? Not even the collector herself. The coherence can only be found later, by someone else. Or, perhaps, by ourselves, later, when we have become a different version of ourselves.

Several weeks had passed when, one afternoon, Walter reappeared and insisted I come outside. The weather had suddenly turned warm the way it does in Moscow. One day it is winter, then it is spring for less than a week and then it is summer. He had borrowed a Model T from a friend and insisted that I let him take me out in it.

I'd never been in a car, so I relented and said he could take me out on the weekend.

I'll pick you up early on Saturday, he said and jumped into the car.

The interview was a pretense, I realized, because he left, satisfied, and didn't come back until Saturday.

He picked me up early in the morning before the cicadas had woken to the heat of the day. We drove out along Tvertskaya, past the train station and past the end of the city until we were in dacha country, their red and black roofs poking out of the forest. I felt

terrifically liberated. The noise of driving was so loud that it was impossible for us to speak. The car jolted along the potholed road.

These cars aren't made for anything but city driving, said Walter.

Kids sauntered along the side of the road. At crossroads, they sold fruit and brightly coloured animals made of sugar. Farther out, there was a park. A few cars lined the street so we parked behind the last one and then walked through the entrance, past a former mansion, now gallery, and along one of the many pathways that led to the river. Small gazebos dotted the park and, in every one of them, it seemed, there was a bride.

The path led along the escarpment and gave us a good view of the picnicking families, the traipsing brides and entourages, and, behind the winking leaves of a single row of birch trees, the river and the bobbing heads of a few swimmers. The pathway, newly wet from the rains, was slippery. Walter tramped ahead; I lagged behind, watching the brides, unable to dismiss the images of Sasha on the day of our wedding, nor the attendant feeling of loss that seemed to drift up the river bank and into the folds of my dress and the strands of my hair so that the whole park seemed inescapably melancholic despite the growing warmth of the day. The gay laughter of children. I slipped my hands into the pockets of my dress and was startled to find the slide I'd hid there just the night before. Having just closed my hands around its keen edge, the heel of my shoe pitched into a muddy puddle and I slipped and fell. Walter turned in time to see my hands thrown up, but I was on the ground in seconds so by the time he'd returned to my side I was sitting in a pile of wet grass, the broken slide having cut my hand, though not seriously.

You're bleeding! he said.

It isn't serious, I said, and it wasn't, just a small scratch. Let's go down to the river so I can clean my hand.

He was standing above me, holding my hand. It's a clean cut, he said, but what cut it?

I didn't want him to know about the slide, so I said I didn't know, but he looked around on the grass and saw, in moments, the glinting of the glass slide. Still holding my hand, he leant over and picked up the slide, its two pieces still glued together by the sample inside.

Why did you have this in your pocket? he asked, turning it over in his hand.

It was a mistake, I said. I was transferring it and must have gotten distracted.

He pocketed the pieces and leaned down to put his hand around my waist, as if that would help me.

Up you get, he said.

I shifted out of his reach and stood up.

We walked down the wooden steps towards the bank. I walked to the shore to clean my hand. There were families floating in the river, their bodies partially submerged. The water was clean and refreshing, not silty and warm like it would be later in the summer. I watched an old couple sit on the bench in front of us. The wife was as remarkable for her frailty as he was for his heft. The husband was bald as if he'd been bald his whole life, having shaved his head because it made him look strong. His body was tanned and, though old, still muscular. They sat on their bench and removed their outer layers. They held hands and walked towards the river, slowly getting in as if the

river were very cold, which it didn't appear to be. At first the only sense of feebleness in him was revealed in his shorts, which no longer fit.

When they were in the river, they became agile youth. He splashed her and romped around, she tried to keep her hair dry by doing the breaststroke out of his range, but he lunged towards her and his bulk caused small waves to nip at her chin and then he swam towards her and though she tried to escape him she couldn't and he got to her and picked her up in his arms, almost lifting her out of the river, he was still that strong, and she said, No, don't! I just had it set! and he pretended to drop her but didn't and they laughed though she hit him on the arm like she had been doing her whole life.

I returned to sit with Walter. He had spread out a blanket and, on a make-shift platter of oiled paper, he'd placed several cheeses, salamis, and a wedge of halvah.

We sat in silence. I was afraid Walter was thinking about the slide, afraid he'd want to know more and would ask, and I'd have no adequate answer, but afraid too, that he'd want to know more but wouldn't ask, and so would come to his own conclusions about why it had been there. But there was no explanation. Not then at least.

Did Bechterev ever hypnotize you? asked Walter.

No, I said, Of course not. It's a medical procedure, I said, more slowly.

Oh, he said. I thought you might have been curious to try. You seem curious. Aren't you curious, he said?

You Americans have strange ideas about us, I said.

But haven't you heard of the Russian Nightingale? he said.

No, I said, taking a napkin and pressing it to my cut palm.

She's the opera singer who everyone said committed suicide just days before being hired by the Metropolitan Opera in New York, but who the police decided might have been hypnotized by a so-called Professor. Otto was his name.

Zinaida Jurjewskaya, I said.

Yes! he said. He looked at my hand, but said nothing. I raised it above my heart.

And we also had the case of a woman who challenged the medical school at Harvard—have you heard of Harvard? he asked.

Of course.

Anyway, she had hypnotized sled dogs in New Hampshire.

Hypnotism was hardly a central part of Dr. Bechterev's practice, I said.

And it's rampant all over Europe, he went on. Judges here use it to elicit information from witnesses, German police using it to find missing persons, the French improve their, shall we say, intimate life.

I didn't want Walter to see me blush, so I looked again at the river, squinting, though the sun wasn't so bright it was necessary. Every time he ate something, the paper crinkled audibly.

The wife was the first to come out of the water. He followed her, stepping through the reeds on the shore. He cursed the silty bottom of the river whose depth was deceptive and changeable. She asked if he wanted help and offered her hand. He gruffly refused, though his arms were held out in uncertain preparedness, as though he anticipated falling. She said, watch your balance. He pulled his leg out of the mucky bottom and onto the cement pathway, placing his long arms on either side of the one stabilized knee in readiness for the next step. She stood to his side, her hand hovering over her shoulders, in

the posture of helpfulness but she was watching something else up on the hill. He launched his other leg up and the force of it threw him out of balance and his whole body lurched forward. His arms didn't have time to react as he would have liked them too, and so he plunged forward, as if in slow motion, his head leading the way towards the cement.

Watch! yelled someone, and the wife looked down, her husband now on his hands and knees, one hand pushed to his forehead which was bleeding, though not badly.

Two men stood up and put their hands under his arms to help to his feet and to the bench, but his wife, it seemed, was embarrassed and stood only to the side, feigning interest in something happening on the hill. Once he was seated and then men had walked away, she joined him on the bench and chastised him before undoing their bag to find a small kerchief. She shook it vigorously, then pressed it to his forehead. His hands, knees, elbows, were covered in gravel and his feet were still slicked with mud. He wanted to go back to the water to clean off.

No, she said, Enough of the river.

But he didn't listen and hoisted himself up. He was in front of me when he did this and so, when he lost his balance again and bent forward to steady himself on the bench, I saw that one of his balls had escaped the confines of his shorts. For as long as he was steadying himself on the back of the seat, I could see the round shiny ball, hanging just below the tired elastic of his swimming trunks, stuck between his leg and the rest of his penis, which, thankfully, was still properly contained. I don't think anyone else saw. Like a sea animal poorly equipped for movement on land, he pushed himself back into the river and was content and dominant once more.

I looked back at Walter and said, casually, that I should probably return that slide to the collection.

But it's broken, said Walter, it's useless.

On the return trip, Walter said he had recently been taken to tour the Kremlin and had, because of his foreigner status, or perhaps because of his flattering journalism, been granted access to Lenin's former offices. For the first time, I wondered what, precisely, he said in his newspaper reports. Before, they had seemed an abstract idea, but on that bumpy drive home, I wondered what exactly they said. Occupying one entire wall and using miniature incandescent bulbs which lit up successively, was a wooden relief map of Russia and Western Europe. When the handle next to the map was cranked, the little bulbs lit up in all of the places that Lenin had ever lived as it traced Lenin's movements from the time of his birth, in the order in which he had lived in them. Yet, said Walter, the apparatus works poorly, as many places light up all at once.

At the end of that long day together, as we were returning to the city, our backsides sore from the poor quality roads, Walter asked me to join him for a drink.

I should get home, I said.

But you live so far away, he said, and I'm tired of driving. Let's get a drink.

I resented being trapped like that. We were coming down Tverskaya. More and more people filled the streets the closer we got to the centre of the city.

I can take a tram from here, I said. I've done it before.

No, no, said Walter, I'll take you home.

I didn't say anything.

It was slow going in the centre of the city, and the frustrated contests between carriages and cars at every intersection mirrored the tension in the car. I would have been more comfortable in a tram. I could have looked at the people around me, at least. I couldn't look at Walter because he was being silent and silence only meant one thing—he was pouting. We drove past Red Square and down to the river.

You should get your things together, said Walter.

Everything I had was in a single leather bag.

When we arrived at my apartment, Walter kept the car on and reached in front of me, his body so close I felt trapped. When he pushed open the door, it was almost as if he'd pushed me out of the car itself. I dropped to the ground and stood there, dumbly, without anything to say.

It's not like you'd have had to fuck me, said Walter. We could have just had a drink, he said, all civilized and such.

I backed up a little, so that I was beneath the canopy of trees.

Russian women! he said. Honestly!

He pulled the door shut and lurched away.

9.

Over the years, one by one, the lights on the chandelier had burnt out. That they didn't burn out all at once must be due to some mystery of circuitry. We didn't immediately try to replace the lights and when we finally did, they were no longer stocked in Moscow, such items considered too bourgeois for Soviet taste. When the bulbs were finally shipped to us from a supplier in Paris, we had ordered too few to make a dent in gray light then cast in the formerly bright room.

If I could have made the room bright again for one last time, it would have been for November 1929, when Dr. Vogt returned to Moscow to hold another press conference regarding his research into Lenin's genius.

I wasn't there when Vogt arrived. According to Luria, who had been there to receive him, Vogt arrived early and in a state. At the border, it seems, the guards took all of the equipment he had brought on account of there being no clear documentation about its purpose. Several boxes of slides, the microcopies of exhibits that he'd planned to return, several bottles of indigo dyes and some paraffin had all been taken. I'd never known Vogt well before, but in my mind he was a formidable rival to Bechterev and therefore as strong, as willful. But he was shaken.

Luria had escorted him, he later told me, through the grand salon and then the laboratories and into one of the disused sitting rooms where he'd poured them both a generous serving of cognac. That was where I found the two of them when I arrived with Walter in tow. We hadn't seen each other since that last day in the park, so when he turned up, begging me to join him for lunch, I'd agreed. I expected him to apologize, but he didn't.

At first it seemed that Vogt had calmed down, but he soon announced that he wanted to reacquaint himself with the collection since he would, he said, be speaking to its significance later in the day. By then our staff was so diminished that I had absconded with key specimens with a feeling of absolute impunity. But Vogt knew the exhibit as it had been in 1927 as well as anyone else alive and I was suddenly terrified that he would recognize the gaps. Vogt got up and walked back towards the labs with Luria, Walter, and me behind him. I thought of dropping the glasses but was sure that I would have been left alone to clean up.

In the lab, Vogt peered into the drawers and pontificated about the work they'd been doing in Berlin.

At *Das Neurologische Zentralstation* he said, we've set up a eugenics lab and are making headway correlating architectonic features with the races, much like, he said, you've been doing here with the geniuses.

Walter had, the whole time, been watching me and I suddenly remembered that he'd seen me with that first slide. The realization showed on my face before I was aware enough to hide it. Our eyes met and I knew that he knew.

Where are the lantern slides of the necrotic tissue? Vogt asked me. I did those preparations myself, he said to Luria.

Did you say they'd been taken to Luria's office, said Walter, for cleaning?

Luria looked at Walter, then at me, but said nothing.

Yes, I said. I'm sorry, Dr. Vogt, I should have arranged to have them here in time for your visit.

Vogt waved off the suggestion and continued pawing around the lab, so I realized his intention was not scientific, but egotistic. If he could satisfy himself that he did, indeed, remember the 1927 exhibit, he would have little else to say.

Later that afternoon, Vogt delivered a speech to a modest gathering of reporters. There were no politicians and no scientists beyond those immediately connected with the institute, which is to say, myself, Luria, and our technicians. Specially made electric bulbs had been inserted into the casings around each exhibit so each one glowed. The back wall of the salon now contained the exhibits on evolution. With the chandelier almost completely burned out, the exhibits were the main source of light.

Our research has led to seminal victories concerning the material substrate of Lenin's genius, he began. Unlike the subjective whims of individual psychological assessment, he said, cytoarchitectonics is superior because it is metrical and, therefore, objective. The mental substrate of Lenin's genius has already been proven in incontrovertible terms: in layer III of the cortex and in many cortical regions deep in this layer, I have seen pyramidal cells of a size and number I've never before seen.

You'd think, said Sasha, that it was 1927.

I know, I said.

Since architectonics can ascertain the size of the cortical regions involved in certain mental capabilities, in square centimeters, and their relative share of the total available cortex, in percentage, it provides objective criteria for evaluating, though only *post mortem*, the individual characteristics of a brain. As such, our findings with regards to V.I. Lenin are at once conclusive, in that there can be no disputing the measurements

thus far obtained, and introductory, as it is without doubt that there is so much more to be discovered.

Vogt concluded by saying, Our brain anatomical results show Lenin's associative powers to be so remarkable. He was, in short, a *mental athlete*.

As in previous announcements, Dr. Vogt did not provide any visuals for the audience other than the mold that had been made of the brain itself. Whereas other brains were discussed in collaboration with photographs of histological sections or with detailed summaries of the weight, size, or relative percentages of one lobe to another, no such quantitative information was ever provided. It did not, at first, occur to me what significance this had. Now, as I think about it, I realize that Dr. Vogt did not believe what he was saying. A shrewd man, he knew how to present information that appeared, to the general public, to be scientifically based. Yet, to protect his reputation, he could not go so far as to provide concrete figures, which would have had to have been altered for them to have been as momentous as needed.

Vogt announced that an additional thirteen elite brains had been added to the collection including Armenian composer Aleksandr Afanasevich Spendiarov, physician and politician Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bogdanov, publicist Ivan Ivanovich Skvortsov-Stepanov, the recently deceased neurologist Grigori Ivanovich Rossolimo, as well as the institute's own Vladimir Bechterev. This was the point when I started to tally just how many of the brains had been obtained as the result of violence. Rossolimo and Skvortsov-Stepanov had both died of natural causes. Only two years after Bechterev's death, we suspected poison, though it was only when his remains were studied before burial that we were sure. As for Bogdanov, his death was his own doing. An artist and activist in the

early 1920s, by 1928 he was the director of the institute of Blood Transfusion—the first of its kind in the world—and it was in the process of conducting an experimental transfusion on himself that he died. In any case, what was clear with Vogt's speech, in the absence of new material and in the verbatim repetition of what he had said in 1927, was that Vogt had never expected to discover anything at all.

The project was pure propaganda.

When I finally admitted this to myself, it was with resignation. It was too late to be indignant.

I did wonder, and do wonder, to this day, what prevented Walter from exposing me. Knowing what I know now about his character, there is not doubt that protecting me served his own interests in some way, but I do not know how. The best time I ever spent with Walter was the very first evening we shared and this, I see now, was because of the atmosphere of grief and the fact of our inability to communicate on even the most basic level. This gap allowed us to imagine, ever so briefly, something else. The more we knew of one another, the more we disappointed not only each other, but ourselves.

Eventually, my only contact with the outside world was with those who came into mine. Whereas before, I might have gone to the confectioner's store on Pyatnitskya, my mouth salivating in anticipation of the sweet treasures there—chocolate coated cheeses, sugared plums—it was as though the winter of 1930 got so deep into my being that I could no longer face the city. I had heard of the arrests in the Government House and perhaps its proximity—it was only a few blocks away—intensified a part of me that always felt safest when alone. Yet, one can hardly be sure of these things when looking back: Did the arrests begin then, or did they begin later, it is impossible to say. It was the

coldest winter on record. Mikhail took up the errands, standing in the interminable lineups. For my part, once my apartment was appropriated and partitioned, I began to sleep in the former dining-room which had a strange draft as though its medieval style had brought with it the chill of that era.

When people came in, their shoes caked with snow or dust, depending on the season, I watched them closely. What were they thinking as they looked at the architectonics of the brains of Rubenstein and Borodon, and would they have noticed a single difference between those two had they not been able to see that, in comparison with that of Mendeleev's, the anterior part of the left gyrus temporalis superior was far more developed in their brains than it was in the scientists. Indeed the fact that Mendeleev's showed any development at all was regarded, by the authors of a study conducted in 1909, as evidence of his modest musical talent. What such studies had failed to mention was that Borodon, celebrated composer, and one of the *moguchaya kuchka* had been a chemist! We are uninterested in accomplishment; only genius stirs us.

Of all the bitter ironies, the most vile was that we had, like Mendeleev, designed our pantheon with gaps, that is to say, at the end of the arc of brains we displayed a series of empty jars awaiting future donors. These were intended to symbolize our hopes for continued displays of genius within the Soviet population and though they were unlabeled, those of us who worked at the institute knew from the day we opened that the three on display were intended for Kalinin, Stalin, and Mayakovsky. Had the institute remained open, such allegiances would have become laughable. As it was, they were simply forgotten. Mayakovsky shot himself on the evening of April 14, 1930. His brain

was extracted quickly and without his family's permission, his body cremated before they even arrived to say goodbye.

The famed *Moguchaya Kuchka* were a product of the Sovietization of musical style. Of the five, only Mily Balkiriv was a professional musician. By profession, Borodon was a chemist, César Cui, a military engineer, Modest Musogsky, a civil servant, and Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, a naval officer. But I am losing my way.

If it was Bechterev's biggest disappointment that Tolstoy's family had refused to donate his brain to the collection, mine was the gap that could only ever have been filled by Tchaikovsky. It is not surprising that his family refused given that the composer had, in life, been terrified of losing his head, so afraid that he had developed an unusual style of conducting that required the use of one hand only as the other was permanently occupied with the task of maintaining a grip on his chin in case his head should, suddenly, detach. The only family member to show any interest in our institute was his brother, but to have exploited what appeared to have been a deep-seated animosity between the two siblings—it was known in musical circles, for example, that Tchaikovsky's final symphony was referred to by his brother as *La Pathetique*—seemed crass. We settled on only Borodon and Rubenstein, two distinct poles of Russian classical music, one towards the folk and one towards the conservatory, neither of whose music is much listened to today.

Tolstoy, at the height of his career, when all his family was in good health and finances were of no concern, apparently fell into a deep depression because of the prospect of everyone dying and becoming nothing more than—and these are his words—

worm food. Did Tolstoy's family refuse to donate Tolstoy's brain because they knew that what we were doing was creating something from nothing?

Within a year, the investigations into the architectonical characteristics of the cerebral cortex were terminated and the doors to the institute were closed. I was given no warning. Vogt probably knew at the time of his announcement in November, but I found out in March 1930 that the Academy of Sciences had taken over the institute and thus, my role was terminated.

I always entered the institute through the courtyard by a side entrance. The courtyard was protected by a wrought iron fence that separated us from the street. Normally, the gate was well-oiled and opened easily, even in cold weather. But on this day, the gates were locked. The first sign of something amiss. I continued along the street and up the steps to the main entrance. My key would not enter the lock. Ornate engravings covered the front of the door, so when I knocked, my knuckles rapped into the sharp wood unevenly. I knocked for several minutes, but no one responded. I walked back down the front steps and walked to the corner of the building, but there was nothing to see. I walked back to the main entrance and knocked again. I pressed my face to the line where the two doors met and yelled, It's me! Let me in! There was no response.

I sat there, on the front steps, for hours. I watched every passerby, looking for an explanation. Perhaps he thought I had left, and indeed, I was about to, but at about one o'clock in the afternoon, I heard the lock unbolt and turned around to see Mikhail, stepping out onto the landing.

Mikhail! I said. Why didn't you answer the door? Why has the lock been changed? I made to walk past him, but he held out his hand.

Madame Comrade, he said, No.

Oh, the way my blood ran hot then was something incredible.

How dare you say no, I said. What's this about?

Madame Comrade, he said, the institute is closed.

On whose order? I yelled.

I can't say, he said.

If it's closed, why are you here?

Because I'm the concierge, he said. And I work for the Worker's Club now.

Just like that, I said.

It's the same job, he said.

It's not the same job! What happened to the exhibits?

Comrade Tovstukha took care of them.

He doesn't know anything about this project! Where is Luria? Has anyone contacted him?

You have to leave now, said Mikhail. There's nothing to be done.

How long have you known about this?

I have to shut the door now, he said, retreating behind the damn heavy doors, and you should go, he said. You should go quietly.

The door was pulled shut, then, and I knew, from his tone, that this was the last I would hear from Mikhail and that this was, perhaps, the kindest thing he'd said to me.

I walked away, down towards the street corner and thought. Like everyone, I had heard the rumors that the deputy director of the institute, Ivan Pavlich Tovstukha had had

a second permanent position as a secretary to Stalin, a post known as Secretary of Semi-dark Affairs. But that was all hearsay.

I was unaccustomed to the crowds on Bolshaya Yakimanka but I walked, nevertheless, down the main street to the Kremsky most. Park Kultury had been constructed recently, and I went in for the first time. An accordian and a balalaika played behind the trees. Inside the park, skaters glided around a statue that spouts water in the summer months. The music made the weather feel warmer. I watched the skaters pass me in a passive way. One of the skaters was watching me. He skated slowly, and seemed sad. Suddenly I realized it was Aleksandr and he was looking at me every time he passed. Sasha! I yelled out, and all the skaters slowed down their circles, so they seemed no faster than those walking in the park. The pack of skaters rounded the statue again, like a flock of birds that banks together as if of a single mind. A whole crowd was gathered, but I could not see Aleksandr anywhere, nor could I step out onto the ice because I knew I would slip and fall. Falling on ice leaves the worst kinds of bruises.

The fact is that I am still so young as I write this. Perhaps too young for a story of this sort, or perhaps just the right age: young enough to record the questions without attempting the answers. When we are young, we need books because they provide us with answers; when I am old, perhaps I will see that books with questions are equally important. And so, I write because I want to know how it was that something we thought would be so good became so bad. How was it that Bukharin, whose ideals were more extreme and more attractive than Lenin's, could shut his eyes and close his heart to hearing that a friend of his was being tortured because of a poem he'd written against

Stalin? How could a man of Bukharin's intelligence and sensitivity have been perverted in such a way? How could he have become so cold? These are questions I still have.

I realized that I, like so many others, had to leave. Before doing so, I met one last time with S. He was resistant to the idea of meeting me alone, so I said that Luria would be there. I lied. It was to be a message to Luria, but one he would not know I had left until the timing was right. By then, S. had begun what would be a long and successful career as a mneumonist. He would perform in theatres and cabarets and opera houses all over Russia.

That day, we sat opposite one another in Luria's office.

Hello S. I said.

Comrade L---, he said.

S., I said, I would like you to remember a series of objects, but they are challenging objects and their order and details must not be forgotten.

I could see from his regard that he was unimpressed with my admonishing. He had, in the period since I had seen him last, become confident.

The Northern Corridor, I began, then a parallel office.

Give me a minute, said S. You must pause between items.

Did you get those two, I said.

Yes.

Four lantern slides, I said.

He looked at me intently and said, Go on.

A wet specimen of the parietal lobe, I said.

What colour? asked S.

Grey, I said.

Go on.

Sixteen journals published between 1925 and 1928.

Go on.

A photograph of Bogdanov's thigh.

S. paused and I could tell that he was ordering things, placing them on the walk to Torzkok. Go on, he said.

One logbook containing reference to Dr. Bechterev.

Can you simplify that, said S.

An autopsy logbook, I said.

Go on.

A poet, I said.

Go on.

There isn't anything more, I said.

It's hardly a challenge, said S.

It isn't meant to be, I said.

I asked him to recite the list to Luria only when Luria asked him to do so.

What for? he asked.

It will illustrate another aspect of your memory that has, as yet, been unexplored, I said.

Oh, he said.

But it will be years before you will be asked to recall this list, I said.

Fine, he said.

He left then, with his hat in his hand. He had gained weight or stature or something.

10.

It was in a sort of dream that I organized my affairs to leave Russia. I had never before written to Sasha, but now I wrote to my colleagues in Berlin and implored them to find him, implored them to tell him I was, now, finally, going to leave. At the ministry they told me the cost for a passport was two hundred and thirty rubles, but in the lineup I had heard that for artists the cost was not more than fifty. For the first time in my life I wondered if I had not, all along, been an artist, and wasn't that what Rodchenko had promised, or was it Mayakovsky, when he said, no, not said, when he stipulated that what the future needed was the artist-scientist-industrialist? Hadn't I been that? When I asked about the reduced rate, the terse man said that the reduced fare had existed for a six month period beginning in late 1926 and that after that it had been abolished. The regular fare was required and not just that: a visa, too, which was an additional cost and was to be procured at the Foreign Ministry which was, to my good fortune, nearby. I offered up a photograph of myself. It had been taken in 1916 and, in it, I stood with my fellow Pioneers. I was wearing a wool coat and yet, with the wind and the slow shutter speed—it was a dark day—the hem of the coat had moved and was, as such, out of focus. My face was a perfect likeness, I said to the terse man, but he insisted I procure another photograph. That was the word he used: *procure*. I was suddenly aware of a tenderness in my left knee and I realized that standing on it was causing it to ache so I sat down on the chair that happened to be right beside me. A bruise had appeared there, a dark and blotchy patch that seemed unusually malleable when I pressed my finger into it too hard. A postcard arrived from Berlin and on it Sasha had scrawled the date—3 May 1930—and the following message: *watch for whales in the sea, listen to the singing in the hof when*

you arrive, we'll float along the canals of Berlin soon. The image was of a pocket watch exactly like the one my father had once owned and the stamp was of a train locomotive rushing into a wintery landscape that was not dissimilar to the train I boarded, close to midnight, at the station in Moscow, bound for Leningrad. I had been warned by more experienced travellers not to be alarmed when I arrived in Leningrad into a train station that was the exact replica of the one I had left the previous night. On the train, a woman, whose features I cannot now recall, was kind enough to bring me a pot of tea.

Perhaps it was the exhaustion of the sleepless night or the stimulation of the new city, but I cannot, now, recall the details of our departure from the port of Leningrad, though I imagine that it must have involved us standing on the bow, waving to the people below and perhaps it was cold and surely the sky was clear.

Perhaps it is of no real consequence that I did say goodbye to Luria, though he didn't know that I was leaving. We met on the shore of the Mozgwa to watch the sun set over the Kremlin on the opposite side of the river. Park Kultury howled behind us. Moscow's first ferris wheel had been installed.

Did you hear, said Luria, about the telescope.

No, I said.

It's a man named Hubble--he's discovered that the universe is expanding, he said. The galaxies are hurtling away at an increasing speed and so it's only reasonable to surmise, he said, that the night would get darker and darker as time goes on.

Why's that? I said.

Because as the stars recede there will be less light in the night sky tomorrow night than there is tonight but the loss of light will be so gradual that it will be years before we realize just how bright the sky was tonight, if we are able to remember it at all.

I only left once the sun had set. I walked along the pathway that followed the turns of the river. With summer, the trees that hung over the pathway had grown tremendously so that they hung so low I had to brush them out of my face as I walked. Occasionally, I crossed paths with people. That anyone else might walk on that path surprised me every time, and this because I could not seem them approaching. Sometimes I heard them coming because they were talking. I never saw them before we were upon each other. In the space between the dark leaves, I saw faces, though, and eyes. Black eyes, like Sasha had. When I decided, instead, to walk along the breaking wall, I had to look down for risk of falling in the river. When I paused and looked up I felt certain that the night had become blacker.

As we were passing through the Gulf of Finland, we passed many islands, all of which had lighthouses that blinked at us with varying frequencies. I had bought a small map when I was in St. Petersburg. Yet, the map did not distinguish between those islands that were natural geological formations, and those which had been built by my country as forts over the past several hundred years. Whenever I could find him, I asked the Chief Steward for our precise location and then found it on the map. I traced our passage every minute of the day. Every island we passed brought to mind a story I'd read once. Three men had been abandoned on an island and when, finally, a boat passed them by, the oldest of the men yelled insults at the crew of the ship, so they left them there, stranded. I peered through the ship's telescope, trying so hard to find them, but I all I could see was

the sea. I would start at the railing, which appeared like an endless bleached road, and would swing out across the gray-blue-green-gray sea until its surface was broken by a rock, then, another, then the white shock of sand and a tree line. Sometimes the island was so small, or I was moving so quickly, that I would pass it over without registering the change.

We slipped between the islands like silent witnesses. The waters were calm and at their most enchanting just after the sun had set, when they were reflected the deepening blue of the sky becoming night. I have always loved the blue we call midnight. The islands became silhouettes. If there was no moon, they disappeared altogether. Perhaps we were invisible to each other, or perhaps they saw us, because they knew our path, whereas we didn't see them, because we'd never seen them before. The magic of this trip displaced, like an object dropped into a basin of water, my feelings of leaving. For as long as I could look out at something new, I could evade my feelings. Yet, they were there in my dreams, which became, at that time, violent and angry.

One morning I was sitting in the starboard café. I was eating my breakfast when several young men trustled through saying, There's a whale starboard! All around me, breakfasts were abandoned as they rushed to the starboard observation deck. So many people moved all at once that I could not permit myself to do the same. I was afraid that the boat might capsize due to an unequal distribution of weight. Water was a beautiful fearsome thing to me then. The chandeliers seemed, already, to hang on a slight angle. When the door to the starboard deck opened and I saw all their bodies—men and women in dresses and suits with their small boys dressed as small men and the girls as puff balls of lace and silk and then the door fell shut and latched the way only ship doors do, that is,

with finality, well in those brief episodes I heard the shouts and awes and the little boy saying, Lift me up, Papa, and the mother saying, No.

I put down my cup and decided to provide a counterbalance. I walked to the other side of the ship. It was deserted. The long line of the white rails, the endless grey of the deck, everything was harkening towards infinity. I could hear swells of laughter coming from the other side of the ship, the sound distorted and dull from having passed through the glass shelter that separated my side of the ship from theirs. I walked along the deck, my hand tracing the railing, my eyes trained on the sea. The sky had clouded in the night. It was a herring sky, I'd heard a man say of this sky, once. A good sign for fishing. The crescent ripples of the clouds liked like a sky teaming with silvery fish.

I was nearing the stern and the wake of the ship was billowing out behind us. The water was black and grey and green gray and rippling. Little mirrors flashed at the boat. If I had seen myself in a mirror, then, what would I have seen? Had I become a traitor, like Sasha? I was so engrossed with the changing surface of the sea that it took me more time than it should for me to register the uniformly sleek gray oblong that had surfaced just parallel to the boat. Then the whale exhaled a great spray, inhaled, and dove.

Berlin is a city of canals. I had left a city of canals and arrived in a city of canals and I had never been in Venice. The only connection I had in Berlin was with Dr. Vogt and his wife Cécile. They had left town for the country when I arrived, but a neighbor granted me access to their apartment just off of Freidrichstrasse. The first time in a place is always the most vivid. I was surprised by the sumptuousness of their apartment. On the walls there were what seemed to be thousands of pictures in big and little frames, all

of them reflecting the light from various angles as if there were just as many eyes watching my clumsy movements amongst the ferns and velvet chairs and phonographs.

It did not take long to find him.

Alek …..ovich had been scrawled beside # 2, so I knew that he lived in the front. He had rarely locked our door, so imagined the same would be true here, in his new life.

I went through the front entrance, the second set of doors, and into the *hof*. I sat down upon the wall that divided this *hof* from next door. I listened. All above me, in a geometry of glowing squares that sang and clinked with the activity of people living their lives, were the windows of the *hof*. The Strauss that echoed out from one life grabbed hold of the pots and pans of another and made the couple in the apartment on the second floor start laughing. Or, they laughed, and the needle was placed on the record and it started to spin out the sounds of the cabarets on the streets I had just passed by. Each apartment had two windows. A women put out a cigarette on the ledge of one window, then walked to the adjacent window where she leant out and unfurled a towel so that it billowed like a flag at the back of a ship. A group of friends came out of the Eastern *hof* laughing and talking. I waited there for a long while. Above the *hof*, in the small square of sky that I could see, the moon appeared for a brief moment. Its light made the wall of the opposite apartment glow white. Then it was gone. Clouds gathered above, blotting out all of the stars, and then left. When all of the windows were dark, I went back into the front lobby.

I went up the half flight of stairs to his apartment. I swung open the door into a small corridor, one side of which was stacked with boxes. A few shirts and coats hung from a rod above; I brushed past these as I walked into the single room. His bed was

nothing but a mattress on the floor; he was sleeping. I looked around at the furnishings—a chair beside the window, a single set of shelves upon which were folded some sweaters, pants, and a small row of books. There was a photo of us taken years ago on the day we got married, sitting on the top row of the shelf. The hem of my coat is blurred, due to the wind. The windows had no curtains so the bold moonlight poured over the floor. The sound of him breathing was so familiar that I felt instantly tired, as if, for the first time in years, I might be able to sleep a full night without dreaming the athletic dreams of gymnastics and questions and absences. I removed my coat, bag and shoes. He lay the way he'd always lain: on his side, one arm under a pillow, the other against the bed, his legs hidden beneath the blankets that had slipped down to his waist during the night. I crouched down, pulled the blankets up and climbed in beside him. He was so warm. My arm fit around his body as it always had, my hand knit into his, my mouth at the top of his spine, my legs curved into his. I whispered small things about my trip: the fjords of the Scandinavian coast line, I saw the sea, Alekandr, and it was beautiful, and I came to find you, and I love you still, and I felt that he heard me in the depth of his sleep. I felt the soft of his hands, the delicacy of his fingers, and caressed, so softly, the fine hair at the base of his neck, damp with midnight sweat.

I lay there next to him for several hours. I remembered every detail of him. And then, as the sky began to lighten, as the stars were slowly extinguished, I stood up again. I put on my coat, bag, shoes, and walked back out into the hall and into the *hof* and when I pulled the door shut, the door clicked and I was in this white room and Dr. Segalin was sitting there at a desk that I knew would be mine, and he was smiling, calmly.

So this is where you've been? I said.

He kept smiling and said, Yes.

Somehow, he said, this place was saved from all the cuts and closures.

So maybe the authorities read your journals after all, I said.

Maybe, he said.

Since that moment, I have spent most of my days, perhaps all of my days, in my room. We can leave whenever we wish, but I am one of those creatures who likes to dwell, so I stay. Sometimes Dr. Segalin plays dominoes with me, but the click-click of the tiles always irritates me, eventually, and I have to stop. He knows that when I don't want to play dominoes anymore, I also don't want visitors anymore either, so he leaves.

Luria visits less often, but he sends packages, and that is how I found out that Walter had been nominated for a big American prize. I wasn't sure if it was for fiction or for journalism. The truth was that I'd forgotten what it was that Walter actually wrote, but my memory lapse didn't last and I remembered that he'd been a journalist. The big American journalists awarded him the big prize based on his reports from the Ukraine, but, later his reports turned out to be lies. No one was starving, he'd said. No one at all.

It is only at the end of a task that one can see it for what it has been. In this way, it is only now, as I ready myself to put down my pen, that I can see that what we were searching for—meaning in production, meaning in exhibition, meaning in order, meaning in revolution—was doomed from the very start. How much memory has to do with an incessant worrying of images, smells, phrases, sentiments from the past, and how much it has to do with the unbidden surging upward of such recollections like flashes from the void (as Husserl would have us believe), I do not know. As I try to concentrate on the period in which all these things happened I can only hear dogs barking outside and, in my

mind, the increasing darkness of the *grand salon* in which the lights stopped brightening the jars in which we kept the brains, or I should say, the replicas, all this due to that chandelier whose expiring lights made the room darker and darker and more oppressive with each passing day.