A WRONG COUNTRY. A MEMOIR OF A SOVIET WOMAN

 LARISA RIMERMAN

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SUMMARY

 PART I. POSTWAR CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN VORONEZH

1. Suddenly, I Have a Father.

One winter afternoon, running home after school, I met my mother’s friend who told me the stunning news: I have a father and he is a Moscow writer.

2. Meeting My Mother; Her Work in the Voronezh POW; Fate of the War’s Invalids

I met my mother when I was five. I didn’t like the young woman. Voronezh was a ruined city with a lot of invalids on the streets. My mother worked in the POW camp. My half-brother and I spent our time on the streets, without any care.

3.  Gulag and History of Our Family

The history of our family closely links to the Komi Republic, the place of Gulag. I have no idea why my mother’s family was living among the Komis- an indigenous tribe inhabiting tundra in Northern Russia. My future mother went to Leningrad at the age of 14. Vacations, she spent with her family, in Syktyvkar. Once, she met a man, a journalist. They fell in love and decided to marry.  At the registrar's office, she learned that he was imprisoned, as an “enemy of the people”. When my mother became pregnant with me, the KGB let them go to the Ural, to his parents. But in Moscow he left her for good.

4. Elementary School; the First Political Doctrine of the Soviet Children- Pioneer Organization

We all loved our young teacher with a big smile. My uncle went to one of the teacher-parent meetings and fell in love with her smile too and married her.

Pioneer organization was a boring business, with Lenin-Stalin slogans and learning about children’s political heroes like Pavlik Morozov.

5. Voronezh- Tale of Two Cities: Cultural City and My City of Factories

University, theatres, the banned poets and writers, such as Mandelstam, all that was part of the unknown city. My Voronezh was a city with huge factories, one of them being the Tire Plant, where my mother occupied an engineer position after the POW camp was dissolved.

6. My First Encounter with My Father

After two years of correspondence, I went to Moscow to meet my father and aunt. I came down off the train and didn’t see my aunt but saw an imposing man, elegantly dressed, smoking a cigarette. Only two of us were left on the platform. At last, my aunt appeared. We kissed and she brought me to this man, saying: “Be acquainted, Larochka, this is your papa.”

7. My Mother Got Married; Our Relationship

One Saturday evening, she surprised me with a sudden announcement that she was going to be married soon. On Sunday we met a man, old, puffy face, an unhealthy figure, a widower, her boss. And not a father -figure.

My relationship with my mother was difficult, a lot of reasons and causes.

8. Books I Loved

Books were (and still are) the passion of my life, from my early years. I preferred not to do my homework, but read my mother’s library French, English, American novels. I read even during my classes at the school. Balzac, Dickens, Dreiser, J. London- all were my favorites.

9. I Dream to Build Communism in Siberia

After reading about the Komsomol youth of 1930 who built the city of Komsomolsk in the Far East, I decided to join up the Appeal to the Komsomol Youth to build Communism in Siberia. Believing in Communism, I ardently wanted to go to Siberia. My mother didn’t believe in Communism (but didn’t tell me that) and was against it: I was not yet 16 and almost blind. So, against her wish, I went to Siberia. Work in Siberia became my awakening to all lies about Communism. A brief encounter with my father in Moscow

PART II. LENINGRAD UNIVERSITY

10. Entering University and Life in the Student Dormitory

Leningrad- Petersburg is the best place to study Russian Literature. Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky - all of them lived in the city and wrote about the city. Their heroes walked the same streets as I was walking.

The student dormitory is rather unpleasant—four girls in a small room and no privacy.

11. Running Away from University to a Godforsaken Town in Belorussia

One day, a shameful accident happened to me, and I quit university and took a train to some unknown town, where I worked as a factory worker for six months.

12. Returning to the University. My Political Education. My Infatuation with KGB Man

Banned “Voice of America” was our favorite. Reading samizdat-the self-published forbidden books was punished by the law, but we did it notwithstanding. During that time, I met a fascinating man, fluent in the French language, who knew by heart a lot of French poetry. He was a counter-intelligence officer, a KGB man. I was carried away.

13. Practice in Moscow. Tolstoy's Yasnaya Poliana. Last Year of University

Being in Moscow, I had two meetings with my father: first -wonderful, second – shameful.

In our last year of university, we understood that we have no future. With our best education in the country, we were sent to some remote villages to teach Russian Language and Literature.

PART III. VILLAGE SCHOOL AND LIFE WITH DRUNKARD BABA DUNIA

14. The village was poor and sad, exactly as in the poems of Blok and Esenin. My landlord turned out to be a drunk baba, Dunia. When she had fits of hard drinking, she even didn’t care about her suffering cow. One day I saved her life.  Sober, she was wonderfully caring.

15. Teaching in a village school was boring and poorly paid. But I amused my pupils with music records of Mozart and Tchaikovsky and art albums.

                         PART IV. LENINGRAD- “TO BE OR NOT TO BE”

16. Registration. My Father and Our Troubled Relations.

Government vetoed people living in cities, like Moscow or Leningrad (46 of them), if they were not born there. It became my problem after I returned to Leningrad. I asked my father to help me with the registration. As a popular writer, he had some social prestige, and he used it. With the help of the KGB and the Communist Committee, he got permission for me to live in that city. I perceived it as his atonement for his sins: I could not forgive my father for abandoning me even before my birth. I also didn’t have a lot of respect either for his novels or for him as a conformist to the Communist Party's criminal affairs.

17. Falling in Love; Marriage; Leaving Leningrad for a village

I fell in love, suddenly and happily. Despite his parents' disapproval of me (he is Jewish, and I am Russian), we married and left Leningrad for a village, where he got a doctor’s position with the apartment. After three years, with our newborn daughter, we returned to Leningrad, though it was extremely difficult to do.

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 18. The Decision to Leave Russia.

 It was August of 1979- the Exodus of Soviet Jews from the Soviet Union, thanks to American Government assistance. We decided to join. My Russian mother refused to give me permission, denouncing me as a traitor to our Motherland. A lot of drama and tears, but I left. Without knowledge of the English language but with excellent knowledge of American literature in Russian translation.

19.  EPILOGUE: THE TRAIN STATION “TORTURE”

POST-WAR CHILDHOOD and YOUTH in PROVINCIAL CITY VORONEZH

Setting: Soviet Russia, the provincial city of Voronezh.

Time: Post-war time of 1945 to 1957.

                                        Suddenly, I Have a Father

It is a splendid winter afternoon. School is over. I am rushing home eager to start reading "Sister Carrie." I love to read foreign novels from my mother's library while she is at work.

Suddenly, I hear my name:

- Laa-raa!

I stop. Aunt Tonia is on our local store's steps with an *avos'ka*(string bag) full of groceries.

- *Zdraste (*hi*)*aunt Tonia!

-Congrats!

-Congrats. With what?

-With your father!

Then:

- Oh, my God! I am so stupid! Your mother will kill me! Oh, my God!

- What is it, aunt Tonia?

- Don't tell your mother that I chattered away. I thought she told you…

- What are you talking about?

- Oleg found your father!

- *No*, it can’t be! My father was killed in the War…

No, not your father! Boris's father was killed.

I am confused. She continues:

-Your Father is a writer, and he lives in Moscow!

- He… is…a writer… in Moscow, I repeat, stunned.

- Yes, yes…. You can write a letter to him.

- I don't know him…

*- Nu*, what about it? He is your father!

 -Where I'll send my letter?

- Oh, it's easy! Just send it to Moscow, the Union of the Soviet Writers!

  She resumes her laments:

 -Oh, my God… don't tell your mother….

I came home, shocked. I have a father, and he is mine, but not Boris's! Why? What happened? What should I do? Then I sit at the desk I share with Boris and write a letter to some man, my unknown father.

I write that I am almost 12 (as if my father doesn't know my age), I live in Voronezh, I go to 6th grade, I don't like school, and I love to read. I stop. I remember- he is a writer. For us, children, it means something out of the world, something so unusual, not from real life. You take a book in your hands, open it, and read it, but you cannot even imagine who wrote the book; you think of it as a magical, divine thing. We never saw any writers in our Voronezh school! Does Voronezh have any writers? Or do all of them live in Moscow like my newfound father? Oh, maybe, I will live with him in Moscow! In my letter, I hint that I am ready to move to Moscow!

As aunt Tonia advised, I sent a letter to Moscow, to the Union of Soviet Writers, N. A. Asanov. And only now, it comes to me that my brother and I have different last names. I never paid any attention to our surnames, perhaps because he carries our mother's name. So, I have another last name, I have another father, and he is alive, and now, I have to wait for an answer from him, my father!

Truly, my mother is very upset that I already know about my ‘newfound father.’ She doesn’t want to talk about him and tells me nothing. I live in excitement, waiting for his letter. A letter comes- a short, impersonal printed response. He explains his printing for his hand in pain. He also promises to come to Voronezh as soon as possible. He wants to meet me, but he also needs material for a new book; possibly, he will find it in Voronezh. Besides, I cannot come to Moscow to live with him. His letter is a huge disappointment.  I expected my   Father would fly to me on the wings of Love!

At school, the news of my newfound father- a w*riter*in *Moscow* - soon became known. Gossip and whispers haunt me in every corner. I felt stares and gawks on my face, on my back, from every direction. Now, there is an explanation for my constant talk about books, my upturned head (from my heavy glasses, I guess), and my aloofness: I am different.

Several years later, my uncle, Oleg, explained the situation with my father. He met this man (who wasn't yet my father) in Syktyvkar, Komi ASSR, in 1937 as his sister Sonia's husband. Uncle Oleg, still a schoolboy, liked him a lot, as the whole family did. My father visited them often and even helped the youngest children with their homework. Of course, they were shocked when he abandoned his pregnant wife on the Moscow train and sent her alone three years later to his parents in Solikamsk. After empty promises to go to Solikamsk, he disappeared for good. They never heard from him again.

In the 1950s, they saw his books in libraries and bookstores. His novel *Volshebnyi Kamen'*-The Magic Stone- was adapted for a play and shown in all the theaters of the Soviet Union. My uncle was angry with my mother for never making any effort to find him and request financial support for his legitimate daughter; he was enraged that my father ignored my existence. One day he decided to send a letter about him to a simple but effective address: Moscow, Union of the Soviet Writers.

Uncle Oleg wrote about my father's shameful, unethical behavior toward his abandoned daughter. He didn't deserve the title *of Soviet Writer*because a*Soviet Writer is an Engineer of the human soul* (M. Gorky) and the *Teacher of the moral and spiritual values* of the Soviet people, especially the younger generation. That is to say- his letter expressed very high principles. He finished with the threat: if my father refused to support his daughter (me) financially, he (my uncle) would publish the story of the abandonment in *Pravda* (Truth), the leading newspaper of the USSR. In response, my father and his wife offered to take me to live with them in Moscow (which was my dream), but my mother turned down their proposal. Of course, I knew nothing about this dramatic and intimidating correspondence. Actually, I knew nothing not only about the existence of my father, I knew almost nothing about my mother either.

                                                           Meeting my mother

In retrospect, what is still in my memory: a train is slowly approaching the platform.  My grandma and I, five years old, are looking through the open window, and she says: *Look, look, Lorochka, there is your mama!* She points to a prettily dressed (in my childish imagination) young woman in a bright, fancy summer outfit, a little summer hat, fancy white socks, and heeled sandals.

*It is some auntie, not my mama,*I cry. I could not recognize my mother in this young unfamiliar

woman.  At first, I was calling her *Aunt Sonia*, later *Mama Sonia*, and then, I finally started to

call her *Mama.* But even when I agree that she is my mother, somewhere in the innermost of

my soul, she was a stranger to me.

It is the summer of 1945. The Great Patriotic War is over.

We live in the completely ruined city of Voronezh. The German and the Hungarian armies

destroyed 95% of the city on their way to Stalingrad. Our apartment is on the second floor of

the spare part of the building. There was electric power but no plumbing or running water.

Every evening we tote buckets of water up from down the street water pump, and every

morning we carry a slop pail downstairs.

We lived together: my mother, whom I still called Aunt Sonia, little Boris, introduced to me

as my brother (two years younger), and myself.

                                              Camp of the Prisoners of War

In the summer of 1942, the German and Hungarian Armies occupied the western part of

Voronezh and held it until January 1943. When the Soviet forces moved in, they placed

captured Hungarians and Germans in the Camp for Prisoners of War. My mother worked

in the Camp Documentation Department. The camp, situated on the outskirts of Voronezh,

was encircled by the walls. Inside the Camp were several two-story dormitories and a

bathhouse, a kitchen, a mess room, and a greenhouse.

I do not know when and for how long my mother worked in this camp.  As she explained to

me later, she could work in the Moscow POW camp but chose Voronezh for did not wish to

run accidentally into my father on some Moscow Street.

I remember that Camp very vividly.

The families of the staff were allowed to use the Camp’s shower rooms on certain days and at

certain time. I liked visiting the ‘enemies' Camp” because compared to the destroyed and

impoverished city, the Camp layout was lovely:  the freshly painted buildings, the flowers

between them, and the clean asphalt pathways.  The prisoners were working on the rebuilding

of Voronezh.

At the time, we thought that the defeated enemies inside the zone were much better off than

we, the victors. In their greenhouse, they had fresh vegetables.  They made fresh bread, but we

always went hungry.

(Now, when I write this story, I am not so sure who was eating the produce of their greenhouse.

Most probably, the echelon of Voronezh communists enjoyed the produce grown by prisoners.

The building of the military staff was outside the zone but very close to it. From the camp to

The staff building, prisoners walked free; relations between both sides were rather friendly.

My little brother occasionally visited the greenhouses. The prisoners loved the kid: they missed

their own children so much. Boris seemed to me mentally underdeveloped; I suspected that

inmates were giving him some smoking herbs, which slowed his mental development. Years

later, we discussed my theory, but he vehemently denied it, attributing it to my

imagination.  But I was still convinced that I was right.

When the Camp was disbanded, my mother received a present from a Hungarian prisoner, who

turned out to be an excellent copyist. It was two copies of the famous 19th-century Russian

painter Mikhail Shishkin. One painting was "Three Bears on the Tree," and another -"The Rye

Field." He copied both paintings in oil and the same size as the originals. They adorned

our modest apartment, and my brother’s wife still enjoys them.

Looking back, I remember the story of our school German language teacher, translator in the

Camp. She fell in love with a German officer, and somehow it became known. So, people

meeting the poor woman on the streets showered her with obscenities.

 My grandma didn't stay in Voronezh, and we, the little children, were left on our own. It was

a time when the kids were running around without any supervision. Many men didn't return

from war, and our mothers, left high and dry, were the only providers. We were street

kids for a long time after the War. We lived among the ruins, and we were the offspring of the ruins.

Some pictures of that time:

                                         Telega- Horse-driven cart

Boris and I are running after telega. A horse saunter lazily. I want to jump up on the cart; if a

driver does not scream at us, we will have a perfect ride. I help my little brother to climb up

and then try to do the same. But my leg gets caught in the wheel, and I scream from the terrible pain…

                                         Khleb da Kasha – pischa nasha.

                                          (Bread and Kasha are our food)

Kasha is left on the kitchen table in a big pot.

Before going to work, our mother cooks a big pot of millet kasha and leaves this food for the

whole day. Daily, we would roam the streets and then run to our apartment to eat the kasha.

Close to the evening, we have almost finished the whole pot. Seeing how very little was left

for mother, I became terrified. What would she eat when she comes home? Being five years

old, I found the solution: I just poured cold water into the pot. I do not recall my mother's reaction.

                                                  Behind the Building

I am plucking the dandelions behind our building. (I love Ray Bradbury's memoir *Dandelion*

*Wine*.) There was no backyard, only a strip of weeds, then a road, and across that road is my

future school, closed for summer. Three boys from our building are approaching

me. They are older than me. They ask me something. I do not understand, at first.

They want to see me naked. I obey them. I take off my little summer dress. It is not enough

for them; they ask me to take off my underwear. I do that too. They looked at my small body

and tried to lick it. Then they leave. I am perplexed and begin to cry. My dandelions wither on the ground.

PS. I am afraid only psychoanalysis could explain what happened there.  However, Sigmund

Freud was prohibited in the Soviet Union.

                                              The Invalids of the War

 We, the street children, knew our streets by heart. On all corners, we could see the armless,

 the legless, the double amputees on handmade wooden platforms– whatever was left of the

bodies, mutilated by the war. The invalids sit on the ground in any weather- rain or snow. Some

of them have medals pinned to their jackets. Their army caps are on the ground in front of them.

They beg for money. In the evenings, they are drunk, and they scream or fight. Occasionally,

someone sings drunken songs. Being drunk for them was the only way not to feel the misery

and the tragedy of their existence. This fixed picture of the helpless, crippled, pitiable invalids

of the Great Patriotic War had been seen through the whole Soviet Union. They saved their

country, but the country ignored them.

Recently I was reading “Gathering Evidence,” a memoir of Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard.

The similarity terribly struck me: "We passed hundreds of severely wounded war victims, many

of them almost totally crippled, unloaded at the railway station like tiresome, badly packaged goods."

Being a six-years girl, I lived in the same conditions in Voronezh as he, a teenager in Salzburg,

in 1944. Some two or three years later, after the war, Stalin gave a directive to clean up all the

big cities of all crippled by war, these "badly packaged goods.” The government sent them off

to the North of Russia, close to the Gulag camps. As I was told recently by one of my friends,

the Leningrad's government drove their invalids to the island of Valaam in the Northern Sea.

Moscow loaded their crippled veterans on a ship, gave them enough vodkas, and drowned them

in the river, as far away as possible from the capital. I have no idea where Voronezh sent its

invalids, but the city became “clean.” Is it hard to believe this story, but I do think it was true.

Russian history is shocking. For the Russian tsars: Ivan the Terrible -16 century, Peter the

Great- 18 century, and Stalin -20 century – these leaders are remembered for their cruelty.

Stalin refused to save his son Yaakov when the Germans offered to exchange him, a prisoner of war, for Paulus, their Field Marshal General, whom the Soviets captured in Stalingrad. This fact became the legend, he refused to exchange a “German General for a simple soldier.” Yaakov died in the German camp, but at least he was saved from the Soviet Gulag, where Great Lieder incarcerated all Soviet prisoners returning from Germany, proclaiming them “traitors.”

The Voronezh camp was disbanded in three years, and the lucky prisoners returned to their native countries. The camp's walls disappeared. The barracks became the dormitories for workers of the new Tire Plant. Unfortunately, nobody took care of the landscaping, so the beautiful flowers died, the grass became trampled, and the whole area, before long, looked colorless and decayed. We moved into a two-room apartment on the second floor of the former staff building where my mother used to work. The building was gray and gloomy looking. If my memory did not fail, only five families besides ours lived in our section of the building. The first floor of the second section became a movie theatre. The male dormitory occupied the second floor.

The movies were shown exclusively on Sundays. In truth, it was not a movie theater; it was only a ‘klub’ -one room for viewing the flicks, and it stopped functioning soon after opening. My mother felt utterly pleased. She could not tolerate all the noise from the crowd or the dirty ground in front of the entrance, littered with sunflower husks and cigarette stubs. We lived in this building for the next six years.

My Mother’s New Carrier

The former commander of the Camp, the colonel of KGB (of course, I wasn’t informed about this detail at the time), Ptashinsky, became the Director of the Personnel Department (also a KGB post) of the new Tire Plant and offered my mother (a good friend of his and his wife) a position as an engineer. But she didn't have an engineer's diploma and knew nothing about tires. No problem. First, she learned by heart all the stages of manufacturing, from the preparatory shop to the last- the output shop. So, she began working as an engineer in the Technological Department. My mother had an excellent teacher: an experienced engineer from the Leningrad Tire Plant. (Five years later, he became her husband and our stepfather.) Then, Ptashinsky sent her to Moscow to the Technological Institute to study by correspondence. Twice a year, she went to Moscow for the exams, and after five years, she received a diploma as a chemical engineer.

During these difficult times, our grandma came to Voronezh to aid her daughter with her children. Naturally, I was happy to see my babushka. I grew up with my grandma and couldn’t be emotionally attached to my mother. Though, when my grandma came to live with us, I changed 'Aunt Sonia' to 'Mama Sonia.' As a little girl, I don't remember any signs of warm feelings or tenderness from my mother. I don't even recall her presence in my childhood, no games, no readings, no walks together, no hugs, no kisses, no talks- her affection was never shown.

Why had she been so emotionally insensible? I do not have any answers. She was an enigma, a puzzle to me during my whole life. I still think about the mysteries of her past. She was so secretive; she never came out of her shell. In what capacity was she working in the camps? Was she hired as a civilian or a military servicewoman of the NKVD in Solikamsk and Voronezh? She never talked about Solikamsk, my birth town, or the camps around that town with its salt mines. Only once, when I was an adult, she revealed how she feared the prisoners transporting her in a boat on a lake with files of the documentation she was taking to the Solikamsk authorities. She spoke about this at the family gathering celebrating one of our political holidays, May 1st or November 7. The guest crowd was noisy and chattering; nobody asked questions. The more I ponder about her work in the camps, the more questions come to my mind and possible answers. No authority would send an employee with criminals without armed soldiers. That's quite simple. Only honest individuals could have been reliable, and they were the politicals. At once, they were trusted and considered the enemies. The stigma of political enemies was so strong that, as a young woman, my mother feared them, the helpless, innocent people.

Another question also worried me. Two kinds of people worked in the camps: civilians- doctors, nurses, secretaries, etcetera; and NKVD (later named KGB) of the Committee of State Security- people of different ranks. So, who or what was my mother? I never knew. What I do know is that working in the camps had a strong negative influence on her character and her life. She was afraid of the political authorities to the total loss of independent thinking. And she knew the punishment for free talking! The Soviet people always remembered the infamous saying: *Don't talk: the walls are listening.*

Tale of Our Family:

 Babushka – My Grandmother

 Religion… is the opium of the people

 Karl Marx

We pronounce 'ba-bushka' with stress on the first syllable. We love this word, its softness and tenderness; a child usually pronounces this word slowly; everything in a child's life depends on the babushkas. They save our childhood.

My babushka was with me from my birth, the closest being to me growing up. She was Orthodox Christian. In one room of our two-room apartment, in the front corner by the window, she had the icon of God and Mother Maria. Every morning and evening, I could see her whispering prayers on her knees in front of the icon. In her rare free time, she read the Gospel. She knew the book by heart. She went to church several times a year during the big religious holidays. It was quite a difficult trip for the 60-62-year-old, but looking like 80s weary woman. She had to change three streetcars, which were always overcrowded, noisy, and dirty.

Portrait of my babushka: always dressed in a long black skirt, a white blouse with long sleeves, a white headkerchief, and old shoes. Grey hair, hardly seen from the headscarf; worried face with two deep long wrinkles, rare smile; thin, wrinkled hands, always busy. Only aunt Tonia's always sudden drop-in could give her 20 minutes of respite. Tonia was the only woman I knew, who didn't work, which was so unusual at the time. She suffered idle talking, maybe because of her loneliness. (Later, my mother explained that this Jewish couple, colonel Ptashinsky had been her husband, couldn't have children because of Tonia's infantile uterus.) But I loved her chattering because, with it, she brought lightness into our musty life.

Regrettably, it is the only image of my grandmother I still hold - the old woman in Voronezh; her worries about us were endless: always cooking, washing, cleaning, and darning our old clothes. Her only time of rest was her tea- time. She loved freshly brewed, scoldingly hot tea with cheap gingerbread cookies. (I follow her tradition, drinking burning hot, freshly brewed tea, a legacy of my beloved babushka.)

I can only envision how hard it was for my grandma, the fragile, old- woman, in the overcrowded church on the religious holidays. All the people, including children, were standing during the whole service. Only one church worked in the big city of Voronezh, with thousands of parishioners. Stalin permitted the churches to be open throughout the Soviet Union during the War. He knew that soldiers on the Front-line were dying with his name on their lips, but in the Rear, the desperate people needed God to survive this terrible time of the War. Thus, from that time, churches stayed open all over Soviet Russia.

Our Grandma never talked to us, children, about God. I guess our mother prohibited any mention of God. Fortunately, she did not prevent us from rejoicing eating delicious Easter cakes. Everybody was baking fabulous Easter cakes on Lent, religious or non-religious, and their aroma permeated the whole building. My grandma's cake was the best. Also, everybody painted boiled eggs. The children played a game with painted eggs, "Egg Bump', we called it. You knock the rounded end of the egg against your opponent's. Whoever is left intact continues bumping his egg with the next person's egg. If your egg stays unbroken, you win the game and can collect all the broken eggs. Why did we like this asinine play?

Once, my practical babushka decided to improve our nourishment. She bought the suckling pig from her meager pension, placing it in our shed. In front of our building was built a continuous row of 16 sheds, according to our 16 apartments, to keep anything unnecessary. Our shed was empty; maybe this was the answer to fill it up.

The poor baby pig felt miserable. Babushka made me hold the small bottle with a dummy

for a pig to suck something liquid, but it was not enough, so she cooked some special food, but the unhappy creature refused it. I don’t recall how long this melodramatic continued, but my grandma understood that we would never have a grand pig for our food. One day she hired some man to finish her object of desire. I wasn’t present. But I ate the most delicious sausage filled with buckwheat, made by my babushka from the unhappy suckling. Our nourishment had been short leaved, but I still remember its marvelous taste.

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Once, my practical babushka decided to improve our nourishment. She bought the suckling pig from her meager pension, placing it in our shed. In front of our building was built a continuous row of 16 sheds, according to our 16 apartments, to keep anything unnecessary. Our shed was empty; maybe this was the answer to fill it up.

The poor baby pig felt miserable. Babushka made me hold the small bottle with a dummy

for a pig to suck something liquid, but it was not enough, so she cooked some special food, but the unhappy creature refused it. I don’t recall how long this melodramatic continued, but my grandma understood that we would never have a grand pig for our food. One day she hired some man to finish her object of desire. I wasn’t present. But I ate the most delicious sausage filled with buckwheat, made by my babushka from the unhappy suckling. Our nourishment had been short leaved, but I still remember its marvelous taste.

It is strange to me now when I write about my childhood: I do not remember anything of my mother. Only my first impression at our first meeting on the platform lingers with me. I do not remember how she looked or how she spent her Sundays. Maybe Boris, who had spent some time with her, remembered more? But I have no recollections of my brother, either.