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opening extract from

Rubies in the Snow

written by

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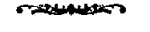
Cast your mind back, to the early years of the 20th century. To Russia. An endless country of icy wastes and dusty plains, of silvery birch trees and black earth. A country of extremes. Of unimaginable wealth and unspeakable poverty. Of excess and hunger. Of culture and cruelty. A country ruled for nearly 300 years by one family, long accustomed to power and privilege – the Romanovs. And born into that family is a girl, an ordinary sort of girl in many respects, but one swept up by extraordinary circumstances. Accompany her as her world fragments and shatters...

Rubies in the Snow is a work of fiction, inspired by the life of Anastasia Nicolaevna, youngest daughter of Russia's last Tsar. The main characters are real; the facts are true.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Nicholas II – Tsar of Russia
Alexandra Feodorovna – the Tsarina
Grand Duchess Olga – daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra
Grand Duchess Tatiana
Grand Duchess Marie
Grand Duchess Anastasia
Alexis – the Tsarevich



Alexander Avdeev – head of the guards at Ekaterinburg
Alexander Kerensky – Prime Minister of the Provisional Government
Alexander Nikolsky – deputy commissar at Tobolsk
Andrei Vasilievich Shuvalov – wounded officer in Anastasia's hospital
Ania Vyrubova – the Tsarina's closest friend
Aunt Ella (Grand Duchess Elizabeth) – the Tsarina's sister
Aunt Olga (Grand Duchess Olga) – the Tsar's sister
Colonel Kobylinsky – Commander of the Guard at Tsarskoe Selo
Count Benckendorff – Grand Marshal of the imperial court
Count Fredericks – Chief Minister at the imperial court
Countess Hendrikov – lady-in-waiting to the Tsarina
Dr Botkin – court doctor
Fat Orlov (Prince Vladimir Orlov) – official at the imperial court

Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich – son of Grand Duke Pavel the Tsar's uncle
Grandmama (Marie Feodorovna, Dowager Empress) – the Tsar's mother
Igor Leontich – soldier in the 4th Regiment at Tobolsk
Irina (Grand Duchess Irina) – daughter of the Tsar's sister Xenia
Ivan Ivanovich – soldier in the 4th Regiment at Tobolsk
Ivan Mikhailovich Kharitonov – the imperial family's cook
Ivan Petrovich – wounded soldier in Anastasia's hospital
Jacob Yurovsky – member of the Bolshevik Secret Police
Lenka (Leonid Ivanovich Sednev) – footman to the Grand Duchesses
Lili Dehn – friend of the Tsarina
Maria Pavlovna – daughter of Grand Duke Pavel
Monsieur Gilliard – Alexis's tutor
Mr Gibbes – English tutor
Nyuta (Anna Stefanova Demidova) – the Tsarina's maid
Orchie (Miss Orchard) – the Tsarina's old governess
Our Friend (Grigory Rasputin) – a starets or Man of God
Prince Felix Yusupov – Irina's husband
Pyotr Vasilievich Petrov – literature tutor
Shura – Anastasia's maid
Sovanna (Sophia Ivanovna Tyutcheva) – governess to the Grand Duchesses
Trina (Mademoiselle Schneider) – governess to the Grand Duchesses
Uncle Misha (Grand Duke Michael) – the Tsar's brother
Uncle Willy (William II) – the German Kaiser
Vasily Pankratov – commissar in charge of the imperial family at Tobolsk
Vasili Vasilevich Yakovlev – Bolshevik commissar

1911



June 18th, Tsarskoe Selo

Today is my birthday. I'm ten. It's also the first day of this diary, a present from Papa and Mama. My name is Anastasia Nicolaevna. Well, in fact my full name is Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicolaevna, but I don't like the Grand Duchess part. Sometimes I'm just called 'the imp'.

I have three sisters – Olga is seventeen, Tatiana is fourteen and Marie is twelve. And then there's Alexis, my brother – he's seven and he's the Tsarevich because Papa is the Tsar. Papa says that diaries are a good habit and he writes his every night before going to bed and Mama says that Great Granny, who was Queen Victoria of England, kept a diary every day of her life and besides it should help with my spelling, which is atrocious.

My other presents – a drawing book, watercolour paints, a tennis racket and a photograph album.

June 19th

This is how my day goes (it's nearly always the same) – after breakfast Dr Botkin comes to give us our daily examination, then we have lessons from 9 o'clock till 11, then we walk in the park with Papa for an hour, then there's another lesson before luncheon. After luncheon we go outside for exercise till 4 o'clock, then we have tea with Papa and Mama, then more lessons, or piano practice or sewing until dinner at 8 o'clock. After dinner Alexis goes to bed and we girls do embroidery while Papa reads to us. I go to bed at 9.30. And I haven't mentioned church and confession. So you can see I'm extremely busy – I hardly have a single minute to write this!

June 21st

I'm going to describe our home (actually it's practice for my composition for Mr Gibbes, who teaches us English). We live in the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo. It's yellow and white and it was built by Papa's great great great grandmother, Catherine the Great, who was Empress of Russia more than 100 years ago. There's an enormous park all around, so big that you can walk for hours and not get to the edge. Our Cossacks ride around outside the railings all day and all night.

In our wing of the palace Papa and Mama's rooms are downstairs and us children are above. There's a new

elevator so Mama doesn't have to use the stairs. Olga and Tatiana share a room and Marie and I share another. Alexis has his own. Marie and I have flowery wallpaper with butterflies along the top, which we chose ourselves. I have 29 icons above my bed. That's two more than Marie.



June 23rd

This morning we had lessons on the terrace as it was so hot. We did arithmetic and geography (my worst subjects) with Sovanna, who's our governess. I was very happy when I heard Papa whistling for us to come and join him for our walk. Mama had a headache so she wasn't at luncheon. Father Vasilev – he's our confessor – came into the dining room as usual, to say the blessing in front of the icon. I don't awfully like Father Vasilev – he looks like a great black crow and his voice is all raspy and rusty as if it needs

oiling and he goes on and on when you're starving. We had soup and fish. In the afternoon I climbed trees with Alexis, even though he's not supposed to in case he falls and gets ill again. Luckily Mama didn't know.

June 26th

We had tea today with Ania in her little house in the park. Ania is Mama's best friend, though she's quite a lot younger. Mama says she had an 'unfortunate marriage' – her husband wasn't quite right in the head – and now she lives here and we see her all the time. She looks like a potato and she always agrees with everything Mama says. Sometimes I think she's a bit silly, but she's very kind to us.

Our Friend was there too – his real name is Grigory Rasputin, but Mama likes to call him 'Our Friend'. He doesn't look particularly nice – his hair is all long and greasy and his clothes are always dirty – but he's actually a starets (that means a Man of God and we have lots of them in Russia), in fact a special kind of starets. He's also jolly good at telling stories. Today we had the one about the humpbacked horse.

June 27th

Marie and I still have to have cold baths every morning, even though Olga and Tatiana don't any more and Alexis is let off. Cold water is good for us apparently. And we still have camp beds and no pillows, like Papa used to when he was a boy. This morning I got into trouble with Miss Orchard – we call her 'Orchie' – for not making my bed.

In fact I'd tried to make Marie make it for me – often Marie will just do things for you, but this time she wouldn't.

Orchie used to be Mama's governess when she was a little girl in Darmstadt, which is in Germany. Now she's very old so she doesn't actually teach us, she just bosses the other tutors and nannies. I don't see why I have to make my bed, but Mama says that, even though Papa's the Tsar, that's no reason not to be able to do simple things like making one's own bed. She says that she was taught to make hers by Great Granny and she was very shocked when she came to Russia and realised that Russian ladies didn't know how.

Orchie and Mama think that one should have occupations for every moment of the day and Orchie's always saying 'idle hands make mischief'.

June 30th

Yesterday we had a fancy-dress party. I went as a chimney sweep. This morning I went to my English lesson with Mr Gibbes with my face still all blackened with coal dust and with my gold ladder (for climbing chimneys). Mr Gibbes looked a bit surprised, but he didn't say anything – he just asked me to read. Then Mama and my sisters came in and Mama screamed and said 'Go and wash at once, Anastasia!' So I did and Mr Gibbes went on with the lesson. I kept my ladder with me though. This evening we walked to Znamenia, our favourite church, for mass.

July 1st

The first day of the month so I got my pocket money. I get nine dollars every month, but I have to give two dollars to charities. Mama has pains in her legs and her head so she's been lying down all day on her sofa. I sat with her after tea and drew her a picture. Everything in her room is mauve. Personally mauve makes me feel a bit sick, but it's Mama's favourite colour. Her room always smells delicious though, of lilac and lily of the valley. Mama says she loves lilac because it reminds her of Papa and when they were first engaged to be married in Coburg and he used to bring her a big bunch of lilac every morning.

July 3rd

Alexis is a very odd boy. I found him lying on his back in the park looking up at the sky, so I asked him what he was doing and he said, 'I love to lie and watch the clouds moving. Who knows how long I'll be able to do so.' He means because of his illness I suppose. While we were getting ready for bed Our Friend came and said prayers with us.

July 9th

I wish we didn't always have to wear the same dresses and I wish they weren't always white. At least we can choose our sash. Mine is usually blue, my favourite colour. It's boiling hot. This afternoon Tatiana, Marie and I swam in the big lake, around the children's island. Alexis knocked his elbow on the bookshelves in the schoolroom yesterday,

and now it's all swollen and purple and bent, which means that it's bleeding inside. He's been in bed all day and Mama is sitting with him.

Just now I found Shura, my maid, talking to Alexis's nanny in the corridor outside Alexis's room. They were saying things like, 'Oh, poor little boy, what a terrible thing, and him being the heir, and they say the doctors can't help him' etc. And suddenly (I couldn't help it) I burst out, 'Don't talk about the Tsarevich like that! There's absolutely nothing the matter with him! You don't know anything!' They both looked very embarrassed and Shura kept apologising, so I forgave her.

July 11th

Mama asked Our Friend to come and see Alexis, because his arm has been hurting terribly. Our Friend sat with him all evening. Then he came into Mama's sitting room and told us that Alexis had fallen asleep and we weren't to worry. Today Alexis is better! Dr Botkin says the bleeding has stopped. It's all because of Our Friend. Mama is smiling again.

July 13th

Aunt Olga came for lunch. She's Papa's youngest sister and she's also my godmother. She was talking to Tatiana in Mama's sitting room and I kept asking her to come and listen to me practising the balalaika and she said, 'Don't be so provoking, Anastasia. Can't you see I'm talking to Tatiana?' while Tatiana kept sighing and rolling her eyes at

me in that superior way she has. When I asked Aunt Olga again she gave me a slap, on my cheek. Then she put her hand over her mouth and said, 'Oh Anastasia, I'm so sorry. Please don't cry.' I could feel my face getting hotter and hotter, but I said, 'I absolutely never cry.' Which is nearly true. Later she came and looked at my drawings.

We're going to Livadia, our palace in the Crimea, soon. It's my favourite place in the world – in fact we all love Livadia and Mama says she feels better there than anywhere else.

July 17th, on the train

We've been on our train for nearly two days. Papa and Mama have one carriage and we have another. Papa has a special contraption on his bath to stop the water sloshing out when we're going along.

When we stopped yesterday, for exercise, Tatiana, Marie, Alexis and I (Olga wouldn't come because she wanted to carry on reading her book) borrowed some silver trays from the pantry and tobogganed down a sort of sandy bank. It was nearly as good as snow. Then Fat Orlov – he's one of our court officials – had a go, which was really a very funny sight as he's so fat now that when he sits down he can't see his knees. His legs stuck in the air and we all had to help pull him up when he got to the bottom of the bank.

Ortino, Tatiana's bulldog, snored last night and kept us all awake.

July 20th, Livadia

I think the Crimea is the greenest place I have ever seen and it definitely has the most delicious grapes! Our palace is right on top of the cliffs and it's brand new and all white, like an enormous lump of sugar. Marie and I can see the sea from our beds – in fact you can see the sea from almost every room in the palace.

There are no lessons because it's the holidays – hurrah! This afternoon we walked with Papa in the woods and picked berries and mushrooms. Papa made a little fire and cooked the mushrooms in a pan. Then we ate them. Delicious!

July 22nd

Marie and I practised tennis in our room till Orchie told us to stop.

July 29th

Alexis was extremely naughty at lunch. He went under the table, which he often does, and took off Countess Hendrikov's shoe. Countess Hendrikov is one of Mama's ladies-in-waiting – she's 28 and she's a spinster. Papa told him to put it back on at once, and he did, but he'd put a very squishy strawberry in the toe and she screamed! He wouldn't apologise.

Alexis is quite spoilt – he isn't punished nearly as often as we girls. I think people feel sorry for him because of his illness, or maybe it's just because he's the heir. After lunch Papa took Alexis for a little walk. When I asked him if

Papa had given him a talking-to he said, 'Oh not really, he just said that when I'm tsar I'll have 150 million people looking up to me, so I'd better learn some manners.' It's quite hard to believe that there are 150 million people in Russia.

July 31st

Today we all went to Ai-Todor, which is Aunt Xenia and Uncle Sandro's house, to have tea and play with my cousins. Aunt Xenia is Papa's sister. On the way we drove through little white villages and lots of Tartars – that's what the people who live in the Crimea are called – came out and rode beside us. They have very dark skin and they wear strange clothes – baggy trousers that go in at the ankles and very bright coloured shirts, a bit like people in *The Arabian Nights.*

I've got seven cousins. Irina is the eldest, a little older than Olga. She's very shy and extremely pretty – she's got black hair and great big dark eyes and white, white skin. And then there are six boys, who are generally very badly behaved. They started a big game of 'Catch the Thief', but Mama wouldn't let Alexis join in as they're so rough. I know Mama is just desperate to make sure Alexis doesn't hurt himself, but sometimes I think she treats him too much like a baby. Later, Misha, one of my cousins, asked me what was wrong with Alexis and I had to say 'nothing', because Papa and Mama say we must never talk about it. Then Misha said, 'Well, why's he such a girl then?' I hate Misha.