

GIRL TERRORIST'S ESCAPE FROM A RUSSIAN PRISON

A Fellow-Prisoner Writes the Thrilling Story of Tolya Rogozinnikova's Flight and Subsequent Execution.

(The following account of the last days of Tolya Rogozinnikova, the Terrorist girl who escaped from prison and later assassinated the prison official Maksimovsky, was written by Elena T., another girl revolutionist, who was in the same prison.)

I DO not know whether it is possible to describe Tolya in simple, ordinary terms so that you could at once picture her to yourself, see and hear her, as she leaned back so strangely—as though she were soaring in the air, and as she laughed, her long, dark, half-loose braids fell back and quivered. I was always afraid when she laughed like that, for it seemed to me that her soul would not be able to hold out—and that she might break down.

We lived right next to her, in the adjoining cell. And it seemed to me that her cell was filled with warmth, with kindness, joy, sorrow, and anguish—with all the ebbs and flows of the soul.

Whenever I felt so depressed that I did not want to speak to any one I would press my head against the wall of her cell, and it seemed to me that a wave of warmth and kindness came from her cell into my soul. Late at night, before going to sleep, Tolya's voice would resound strangely in the dark of the night: "Take up the telephone."

I would stand up on the tabouret and pull the cord by which our windows were connected, and read the note she would send me. Her note, written on a narrow strip of paper, contained but a few words. But I do not know where she found such tender, caressing, warm words. They gave me courage, they cheered me and made me sleep peacefully.

I had a number of painful days in prison. Everything seemed to me unnecessary and far removed. I wanted to master my own sorrow and suffering. During those days I did not go out for the usual walk, nor did I come over to the window to speak to my comrades. One evening I heard some one calling Tolya softly, asking her to lower the "telephone" in order to transmit something to me. I was sitting on the window, but for some reason I was irritated because I would have to take up the "telephone" and answer. Suddenly I heard Tolya's voice, filled with joy.

"My dearest! Thank you, thank you for sending flowers to Elena." I was also filled with joy. My sorrow had vanished. It now seemed so trivial. Tolya's words and laughter cheered and braced me.

At first Tolya used to run out for the usual walk; happy as soon as she came out into the open air and light. She played, jested, and made friends with everybody. It was hard to speak to her lightly; she made every one speak to her truthfully. She knew how to absorb the life of other people's souls when they talked to her.

Then, little by little, Tolya changed. No one noticed that Tolya had ceased to laugh. Everybody was so accustomed to Tolya's laughter that he continued to hear it even when it resounded rarely. She stopped coming out for the evening, and only seldom sang in the evening. At first it was but necessary for any one to ask her, and she would sing for hours her favorite songs. Even the inspector used to ask her in his bass voice: "Comrade Tolya, sing the song of 'The Sleepless Nights'."

She stopped singing and when she was asked even by her most intimate friends, whom she could not refuse, she would beg in a quivering voice, telling them that it was really very painful for her to sing. Her voice now reflected infinite sorrow and suffering instead of joy and merriment. One day she told me that she had received and the things she loved, and that she was looking over her past life. I felt that a change was coming over her soul. We thought that she had suddenly realized the terrible fate that was awaiting her—the twenty years of imprisonment as a galley slave—that she began to long again for her piano, for her friends who were free.

But to her prison was only a temporary evil, and, as we learned later, she never gave a single thought to the twenty years of imprisonment to which she had been condemned. One day, while we were enumerating those who had been sentenced to the galleys, and some one mentioned Tolya's name, she expressed surprise and said firmly:

"No, I shall never go there!" I think it was her will power and her faith which always gave her the courage to accomplish whatever she undertook. Only her nearest friend, whom Tolya had called sister, knew that in addition to her awakened yearning for freedom, another voice had grown up and developed within Tolya's soul—a voice calling her to a joyous and free death.

I was always wondering how Tolya, who loved her mother so dearly, who loved her music so passionately, left her home to join the revolutionary movement. Only now I learned of her indomitable will power. Now Tolya resolved that she must be free, for the sake of the cause. And before she knew how she could attain her end, she did not doubt for a moment that she would soon be free. And when she spoke of her resolution which had taken possession of her, we forgot that we were still in prison. Her self-confidence hypnotized her so that she regarded her escape from prison as a mere trifle. And yet I had but very little faith in her plan, for I knew the conditions that awaited her at the insane asylum from which she wanted to escape. When she began to question me about the details necessary to carry out her plan, it seemed to me such a terrible undertaking for such a nervous and high-strung girl that I did not want to supply her any information. She waited, made other inquiries slowly, and devised her plans in the meantime.

Suddenly one evening, after the visiting hours were over, she refused to answer any questions. I called her through the window several times. Finally her sister, whose cell was next to Tolya's, on the other side, replied:

"Don't call Tolya. She is not feeling well."

When it became thoroughly dark outside, and the electric lights in our cells had been turned off, I heard a faint knock on the wall of Tolya's cell and the "telephone" stirred slightly at the window. I pulled it and took down a letter. Tolya wrote me that she had commenced to carry out her plan; that after the visiting hours she cried all afternoon, refusing to answer the inspectors' and



The Inspectors Who Watched Her Through the Door Did Not Suspect Her of Shamming Insanity.

the physician's questions, and that she would commence to feign insanity on the following day. She asked me to write her all I knew about the hospital of "Nicholas the Miracle Worker," but not to speak to her, and to communicate with her very cautiously, because the inspectors were already watching her. Her note was calm, but firm; she wrote that she was confident that all would be well, and that she would soon be free.

She was still ignorant of a great number of details, but she felt that it was time for her start, and she lost no time. Now I understood that I had no right to dissuade her. Before me was no longer a nervous little girl, with indefinite plans. Tolya had developed and grown up suddenly, and she seemed to go firmly and steadfastly toward the light which she saw clearly, and it was evident that no obstacles on the way could stop her.

On the following day the entire prison was agitated and all the prisoners were whispering. All knew that something was wrong with Tolya. The inspectors who watched her through the little holes in the doors saw how she was weeping all day long, and when they entered her cell she pushed them out and refused to take any food. All heavy things were removed from her cell, and a constant watch was kept over her. The inspectors, and especially the physician, endeavored to find out in private conversations with us whether we knew anything about the causes of Tolya's illness. But somehow they did not suspect her of shamming in-

sanity. At first it seemed to me that she was overdoing it, but later I was convinced that she was guided by the instinct of a clever artist which dictated her every move and step.

But the thing I feared most in Tolya's plan was her stay at the asylum, where even healthy and strong people often overstep the boundary between the normal and abnormal.

The entire prison was in a state of nervous expectancy. Aside from myself and S. (Tolya's sister), no one knew that Tolya was shamming. Even we, who knew it, also felt depressed. Several times we were permitted to open the little windows in the door of her cell to look in.

But Tolya kept playing her role, even though she knew that we were looking. She stared at us with wide-open eyes and smiled so that we were seized with horror. The inspectors felt so sorry for her that they forgot all formalities and consented to let us take her out into the yard for a walk, but she would make a few steps and run back to her cell. She later explained that it was easy for her to feign insanity when strangers were around, but in our presence she was unable to continue her role.

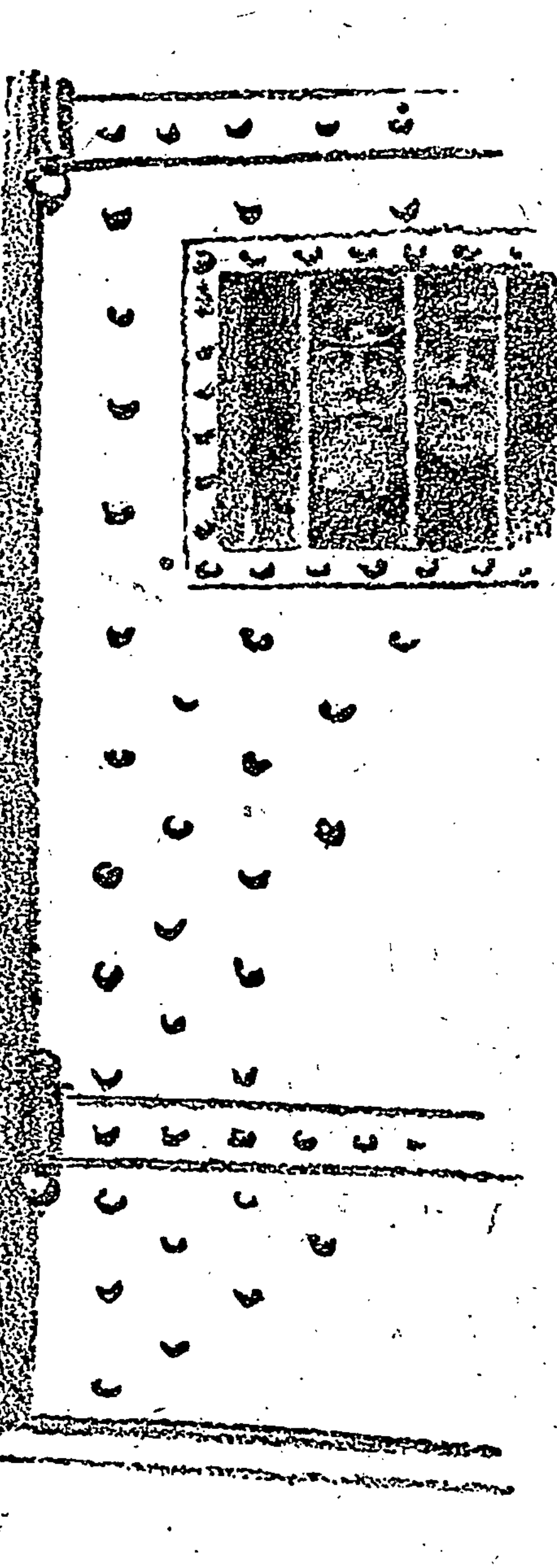
During the first two evenings we succeeded in transmitting to her notes over the "telephone" and some food. But on the third day the "telephone" at her window was removed. And it seemed to me that it was the first wave that broke away from the shore and swept out into

the open sea. We had been so accustomed to our "telephones" that we felt as if we were holding each other by the hands while we spoke.

A few times we were not sufficiently cautious. At night we knocked on the walls softly. I realized that it was a blunder, but Tolya replied that she was not certain whether she was feigning illness or whether she was really ill. I asked her several questions, the address of her relatives, and other trifles. The woman physician heard the knocks on the wall of Tolya's cell. She came in to talk with me, and offered her services. "But as I had strong doubts about the value of her services, I made believe that I failed to understand her instructions, and told her confidentially that Tolya had made several efforts to knock on the wall by force of habit; that I tried to make out what she wanted to say, but could not understand her incoherent construction of words and sentences."

On the fourth day Tolya was removed to the hospital of "Nicholas the Miracle Worker." We did not expect that she would attain her end so rapidly, before experts had examined her. It seemed to me that Tolya was having her way through her sheer will power.

The woman physician related to us that Tolya was laughing on the way to the hospital, that she spoke to the soldiers, and kept repeating something about a "red carnation." This was meant as a message of greeting to her sister. She knew that the woman physician would



followed. We tried to think of Tolya by day and night, to be with her in our thoughts all the time. Sometimes we received notes from her, and we felt that there was nothing to fear for her, that she would come out victorious by force of her will power. We marveled at her power, which knew no walls. It seemed to us that she was no longer our Tolya, the dear, amiable little girl, that she no longer belonged to us, but to all mankind—that she had become a human symbol, a powerful, pure, loud symbol, calling to mankind, like the names of the great heroes and heroines of history. Tolya knew no terrors. A bright light illumined her road, and she was guided by inspiration.

In the insane asylum she lived simply and calmly, as though she were singing a favorite song. She began to love her and new comrades with all her soul. She wrote us that she was glad that she found herself among these suffering people, the most unfortunate on earth, and that she learned to love them. She was happy because she gave them at least a little joy; she spoke to them and sang to them.

We knew very little about her life in the hospital; we were cautious, and made no inquiries, for fear of hindering her escape. One day we learned during the visiting hours that the day for the escape had been set. We passed that day in a state of intense agitation. On the next day, when we thought that all was lost, S. was called to the window and was informed that the comrade who had come to see her was not admitted by the authorities.

"Did he bring me flowers?" she asked. "Yes; he was waving a bunch of red carnations," she was told.

That was a sign that Tolya had escaped. I could not restrain myself and she shouted so that all the prisoners heard: "Tolya is free!"

We received several letters from Tolya. They contained but few details about her own life, but we felt that the bonfire was growing ever brighter, and that soon it would break out into a great, joyous light that the song of freedom was grow-

was no more. She had grown into a strong personality.

Finally a cheerful letter came to her sister, notifying us that within a few days we would get cheering news.

A few days later the inspectors told us that the director of the prison department, Maksimovsky, was assassinated, and that the prison administration caught the assassin. She was recognized as Tolya Rogozinnikova.

Two days after that we learned that Tolya was executed.

Tolya was released from prison shortly afterwards. I made inquiries among those who saw Tolya during the last days of her life.

They told me that her plan to escape from the asylum was upset at the last moment. But as there was no time to lose, she hastily made new preparations on the following day. She confided in another woman who learned to love Tolya during the short time she was with her in the same ward, and the other woman began to simulate hysterics to distract the attention of the nurses from Tolya. Tolya walked over to the nurse at the door of the ward, and told her firmly that she had planned to escape the day before, that her scheme had miscarried, and that it was of the greatest importance that she should be free. The nurse opened the door and Tolya ran out. She left the prison hospital dressed as a very fashionable lady. At the gate a carriage was waiting for her, and one of the guards helped her board the carriage.

But she left the hospital much later than it was agreed upon, and the man who was to meet her on the way waited for hours on the same spot. His presence there began to attract attention. He walked away to one of the neighboring streets, and thus missed Tolya. She reached the house where she was to pass the night after midnight. The people no longer expected her there. When she knocked at the door an old woman shouted and scolded her for rousing the people at that hour. Tolya remained alone at night, penniless. She resolved to go to Lesnaya and pass the night in



The Nurse Opened the Door and Tolya Ran Out.

tell us about it. And the red carnation was to us a symbol of freedom.

Then a month of painful expectancy

ing ever louder and stronger, and that resound. Tolya, the little girl we knew, the last great joyous outcry, would soon be silent.

By a happy coincidence she met the comrade who had waited for her all day long and who thought that she must have failed to make her escape. They hired a carriage and went to another house, where Tolya could pass the night. But the driver for some reason became suspicious, and was about to turn them over to the police. They jumped off and ran back to the park. Tolya's comrade told me that there were many spies on the street at the time, and that he could understand why they were not arrested. According to the man who accompanied Tolya, the girl behaved in a carefree manner; she spoke loudly about various trifles, laughed and sang, and that may have baffled the spies.

In the park, at the institute, a detective came over to her. It was the same man who had first arrested her, and brought her to the Secret Police Department. She recognized him at once, and he apparently also recognized her, but went to telegraph to his superiors, calling another spy's attention to her. Tolya rushed through the bushes, and miraculously managed to escape again. Then she entered a house belonging to strangers. They sheltered her until, a few days later, she left for Finland.

She dyed her hair, put on a very fashionable costume, and crossed the frontier together with another comrade. She flirted with the officers they passed, sang light songs, laughed, spoke loudly, and thus reached Finland in safety.

I talked to many people about Tolya, and every one who spoke about her brightened up with a peculiar smile, full of love and joy mingled with sorrow.

They recalled how she went to her death, laughing, rejoicing at the sun, as the children she met on the way.

All spoke of her as of a girl "woven of light, enthusiasm, and power," as of a fairy, as of a song.

The older comrades were opposed to letting her go to her death; they urged her to rest, to look around and reconsider things.

Such strong men as Trauberg were opposed to it. But on seeing Tolya, they understood her and no longer interfered with her.

What would have happened to her if they had stopped her, if they had hindered her from staining her end with a song on her lips? What would have happened to her if she had lived through those painful, dark years that followed the uprising? But no one asks such questions about Tolya.