

TO LEAD A HAPPY LIFE:
A STUDY OF WOMEN'S PROBLEMS IN THE SOVIET UNION
AS PRESENTED IN CONTEMPORARY SOVIET WOMEN'S FICTION

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Russian
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 1990

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express sincere appreciation to Professor John Beebe for his diligent assistance in the preparation of this thesis at every stage of its development. Without his help and encouragement, this thesis would have been much more difficult to write. I would also like to thank Professor Frances Cogan and Professor Albert Leong for all of their editorial comments which helped to make the text flow more smoothly. Finally, even though they can not read my final thesis, I thank all of the Russian women who were so willing to share their lives with me and to help me to better understand what it is to be a Soviet woman.

APPROVED:


John Fred Beebe

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Kristine Lynn Dudley for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Russian to be taken June 1990

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In their short stories, contemporary Soviet women writers present a variety of common problems that Soviet women encounter in their lives. The problems studied include the following: daily life pressures, the importance of marriage and relationships, career versus family, single women, divorce and infidelity. The way that women choose to deal with the issues affects their ultimate happiness. Women writers realistically portray the lives of Soviet women in their fiction, and seek to enlighten and influence their female audience to adopt new attitudes and to seek solutions to their problems.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

'Happiness' is one of the key words in Russian cultural mythology. It is not joy, not the state of being satisfied or reassured, it is something else, something which everyone writes and speaks about, towards which people strive and about which they write poems, but which never comes to anyone...¹

What does happiness mean for the average Soviet woman? The answers clearly are as different as the women who seek it. For some, happiness means a good family and a decent husband; for others, it means a two-room apartment. Still others dream of simply having nice clothes and more free time, while others hope for a better future for their children. However, the big problem in Soviet society facing women is not what happiness is, but how it can ever be attained. The task is not an easy one, and few women ever achieve the sort of life that they envision as being a happy one. Women are continually faced with many problems in Soviet society, and their ability to deal with them effectively greatly affects their ultimate happiness.

¹ Tatiana Tolstaya "In a Land of Conquered Men Who is the 'Soviet Woman'?", Moscow News, No. 38, 1989, p. 13.

The various problems that are common in women's lives have become the subjects of many short stories written by Soviet women writers. Using their fiction as a way to study women's lives and problems is very effective and can provide a very realistic picture of contemporary society. Where sociological sources tend to be written from a third person perspective of an outsider peering into Soviet life, female writers speak from experience and can offer first hand perspectives on the hardships that women endure. In the past Soviet fiction tended to present unrealistically happy lives; now it portrays women who are painfully familiar. Gone are the blissfully happy marriages and the portraits of great worker mothers who have it all. The heroines that are found in the pages of women's fiction are "contemporary heroines, intellectually free, though emotionally vulnerable; economically independent but forever insecure; torn between the instinctive urge to build a nest and a conscious desire to be in the mainstream of life outside it."² The reality of these stories can be confirmed by reading sociological sources, by talking with Soviet women and by simply looking at life in the country.

However, the authors of these stories are not simply trying to paint an accurate picture of Soviet women's lives.

² Xenia Gasiorowska "On Recent Happiness in Soviet Fiction," Russian Literature Triquarterly 9 (1974), p. 484.

They seek not only to present various problems, but also to help lead women to see where possible solutions to them might lie. They do this by presenting attitudes that vary from the typical Soviet norm. The result is that women are made to question some of the values and attitudes that they hold and to see that different ones could help them to become happier people.

This thesis seeks to present some of the major issues that affect women's lives and their ability to find happiness. I read approximately forty short stories initially, and then, based on which problems they dealt with, I chose around twenty. Because no one problem was dealt with in more than three or four stories, I decided to choose six major issues to focus on instead of just a few. This way I could include a wide range of stories and authors and I could present a more realistic picture of the number of pressures that are placed upon Soviet women.

In order to clarify the reality of the lives and situations presented and to show how the authors' attitudes at times vary from the social norm, a brief sociological sketch is included at the beginning of each section. These introductions are based on readings from various sociological sources, interviews that I conducted with women in the Soviet Union and from my own personal observations and experiences in that country. Because I treat the

stories as sociological sources, I feel that the situations in them need to be clearly explained or the reader might not understand the importance of the characters' dilemmas or actions. This accounts for why some of the narratives are retold in detail.

The problems to be discussed are the following: the pressures and frustrations that women face in their daily lives, the importance of marriage or a relationship with a man for Soviet women as well as the pressure they feel to marry; the problem of trying to balance a career and a family or trying to choose between the two; the problem of being a single woman in a society where women are looked down on if they are not married; the problem of deciding whether or not to end an unhappy or unfulfilling marriage; and finally the problem each woman has deciding whether personal happiness and love should take precedence over family and an obligation to them when a married woman falls in love with another man. The various ways that the authors approach these problems and how each woman deals with them differ greatly. However, one thing remains consistent in every case: Soviet women lead very difficult lives and unless they can come to terms with the conflicts they face, they will find it very difficult to ever achieve the happiness that they all seek.

CHAPTER II

DAILY LIFE

The most universal problem in Soviet society that all women must face is the stress of daily life. Because of the lack of conveniences, life in the Soviet Union is very difficult for women, and "everything seems to demand more effort than it does in the West."¹ An already difficult life of working and running a household becomes even more complicated because of the number of inconveniences that women must contend with daily. The Soviet system of the planned economy "has a clear tendency to complicate a simple life in every possible way, to pressure and to disorganize. This is exactly why traditional women's work in Soviet society is, essentially, a never-ending...struggle."²

Every day women are forced to struggle with many inefficiencies that make their lives harder than necessary. Public transportation is crowded, stops are far apart and commutes are long. Lines in stores are long and worsen

¹ Marvin Walker, The Waking Giant (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) p. 179.

² Alla Sariban, "The Soviet Woman: Support and Mainstay of the Regime," trans. Rebecca Park in Women and Russia, ed. Tatiana Mamonova (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p.207.

because of the outdated system of waiting in three separate lines to make one purchase. Stores are empty and shopping becomes a sort of hunting-and-gathering mission that involves going from store to store. No prepared foods such as frozen dinners, canned soups, ground meat, etc. are available, and so all cooking must be done from scratch. This process is slowed even more because of the lack of electrical appliances. Apartments are small with twelve meters of space allotted to each person. One-fourth of all Soviet families still live in communal apartments, where a kitchen and bathroom is shared with as many as six other families.

Housework consumes around two to three hours of a woman's day every day. While most women have vacuum cleaners, they do not have dishwashers, washing machines or dryers. Everything is done by hand. They also receive little or no help from their husbands. Most men have learned from tradition that housework is demeaning and undignified. While they will sometimes help with the children, make small repairs and do some of the shopping, the cooking, cleaning, washing and most of the shopping and childcare remain the woman's responsibility.

Women often complain about how they must do everything themselves, but they will quickly offer excuses and justifications for the lack of help they receive from their

spouses. Galina Anatolievna, a literature professor, has difficulty finding time to do research along with her daily housework. She says that she would like more help from her husband but cannot ask that of him "because he is busy too. He is the head of the literature department, is writing his doctoral dissertation and is a member of a number of organizations. He doesn't have time for extra housework."³ Iulia Borisovna talked of how much time women spend on housework, but when asked how much she would expect her husband to help, she responded, "It is a woman's duty to do the housework if the man provides materially. It is more important that he help out with kind words and do something when he feels like it."⁴

These daily stresses are compounded by the general frustration that is found in society. Everywhere people are unhappy and it shows. Salespeople curse their customers and show no patience. People in lines and on the public transportation push and yell at each other. Just being in contact with society becomes an extra strain "because it is psychologically difficult to deal with the pervasive

³ Interview with Galina Anatolievna, Leningrad, USSR, 26 October and 17 November, 1989.

⁴ Interview with Iulia Borisovna, Leningrad, USSR, 21 November, 1989.

dissatisfaction with life that affects every person you deal with."5

However, women are expected to endure such stress and remain feminine. A woman is supposed to be kind, charming, tender, patient, caring, self-sacrificing and beautiful. Women strive to fit this role, and their femininity gives them a strong sense of identity and self-assurance. However, it is not easy "to be 'soft, calm, patient and beautiful' when one has to struggle with a double work load, stress, long lines, lack of merchandise, preoccupation with the children, and a difficult financial situation."6 Women realize that this sort of perfection is almost impossible to reach, but they still torture themselves trying to attain it. The gap between their ideal and what is actually possible in reality is simply too great to fill, though, and this causes a great deal of stress, guilt and unhappiness for women.

The myth of femininity also contributes to a general passivity among women. They all agree that they are faced with an unfair situation, but few see any real way to change it. Too many things must happen for real changes to occur, and with so many other social and economic problems looming

5 Galina Grigoryevna and Svetlana Sonova, "Interview with a Career Woman," in Women and Russia, p. 17.

6 Carola Hansson and Karin Linden, Moscow Women (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 191.

over the government, it seems that their needs are not at the top of the agenda. "The total certainty that one can change nothing is characteristic of the Soviet people."⁷ Therefore, the solutions that women seek are temporary ones of having a grandmother available for childcare, connections to help with shopping, etc., but they offer only limited answers to these problems. Women simply "do not have the time, the strength, or inner psychological reserves to think of anything other than the immediate, the close at hand, and the day-to-day,"⁸ resulting in women who approach their lives with a sense of resignation and endurance. They believe that the best thing that they can do is to be patient and to continue to hope that someday life will actually become easier.

This passivity is also the result of a long tradition of seeing suffering as redemptive. It has been a recurrent theme in Russian literature, and women take a certain pride in their strength of overcoming such difficult situations; men certainly would not be able to do so. There is even a Russian proverb that states: "Women can do everything; men can do the rest."⁹ Francine Du Plessix Gray says in Soviet

7 Sariban, "The Soviet Woman: Support and Mainstay of the Regime," p. 212.

8 Ibid, p. 209.

9 Francine du Plessix Gray, Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 47.

Women Walking the Tightrope, that she has talked to many women who actually claim to prefer to remain exhausted, to continue complaining and to keep their husbands out of the kitchen, where they do not belong. They feel that it is their duty to run the house and be the head of the family. They know that they are grossly overburdened, but at the same time, they pride themselves on their strength. As one woman puts it, "We take such pride in surviving [our lives]"¹⁰

However, many times things do not get any easier, and life still continues to drag on. In these cases it is hard to keep hoping and not lose faith. In the stories "A Bad Mood" ("Plokhoe Nastroenie"), "Fire and Dust" and "A Week Like Any Other," three women are presented who, when faced with daily pressures, find it hard to keep hoping for a better future. Their lives are hard, and they most likely will not get any easier.

Natalia Baranskaia's "A Week Like Any Other," written in the 60's, was one of the first stories in Soviet literature to deal with the tread mill of daily life. Although it was written twenty five years ago, little has changed in women's lives, and it still offers realistic situations. Its heroine, Olga, has the all too typical tasks of trying to juggle her family, her career and her

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

sanity. Her inability to cope with the double burden leads her to feel guilty about being a failure as a wife, mother and worker. Her situation is not as bad as some women's, though. She has a good job that she loves which provides her companionship and the chance to go out at noon to shop. The women help each other out by rotating the duty of shopping. One person goes out at noon to get groceries for everyone else, which angers the other shoppers. "Are you buying for a restaurant...And they complain that they have no money,"¹¹ sneer the other people waiting in line. Olga tries not to hear them. She is also lucky to have a nice apartment, two children she loves and a comparably good husband. While he does not do half of the housework, he does help with the children and cooking sometimes.

Yet despite all of her "blessings" Olga still feels pangs of depression and uncertainty about her life. One morning after oversleeping and while rushing around, she thinks for a second, "Hell, what a life!" But, then she immediately reproaches herself: "Nonsense, Olga! Life is good. You have an apartment in a new house. Kostia and

¹¹ Natalia Baranskaia, "A Week Like Any Other", trans. George St. George in Our Soviet Sister by George St. George (Washington DC: Robert B. Luce, 1973), p. 242.

Gulika are fine kids. You have an interesting job. Dima and you love each other. Wonderful."¹²

But, everything is not wonderful. Olga rides an hour to work on cramped public transportation and is late almost everyday. She constantly rushes everywhere, hardly having a moment's rest. The most frequently repeated verbs in the story are "run" and "fly". Because of her children's illnesses, she missed 78 days of work last year. She and Dima can never go out because they do not have anyone to take care of their children. Also, not being able to get much housework done during the week, Olga must spend the entire weekend working and Dima does not really sympathize.

Olga is overworked and exhausted, but no one sees it. She knows she is tired, but tries to blame it on the birth control pills that she takes. When she does become upset and cries, she reproaches herself for her behavior: "Now I am already ashamed. What has come over me, anyway?"¹³ Her outbursts are a normal reaction to such great stress, yet she does not even allow herself those normal releases of tension and simply continues going on. As a result, Olga begins to feel discouraged about her life and questions how she ended up in such a situation. However, Olga does not recognize what it is exactly that disturbs her, and

¹² Ibid, p. 238.

¹³ Ibid, p. 251.

therefore, she does not contemplate any way of making her life better. She refuses to give up her career, and Dima is not about to help her out more. Her children will keep getting sick, the metro and buses will always be crowded, and lines will forever stand in the empty stores. Therefore, Olga's life will stay the same, and she will live it out week by week.

Larisa in Viktoria Tokareva's "A Bad Mood" ("Plokhoe nastroyenie") is another working mother who comes to some depressing conclusions about her life after a disturbing incident one afternoon. What happens to her exemplifies the typical frustrations encountered daily in Soviet society and the pressure that women place on themselves to be perfect in the face of such stress.

One afternoon Larisa takes her daughters to the doctor because they are sick. After waiting for hours in a crowded waiting room, they finally see the doctor and then are free to get their coats and leave. Larisa discovers to her horror that she has lost the claim tickets for their coats. The coat room attendant refuses to let them have their coats, and after an unsuccessful search for the tickets, Larisa offers to pay her to get their coats back. The woman coldly refuses, and the other women waiting in line become very irritated with Larisa. No one sympathizes with her or imagines what they would do in such a situation. After

talking with the woman in charge and further searching, Larisa is told by the coatroom attendant that she will have to wait until the office closes. Whatever coats are left once everyone has left she can take. It is four o'clock, and the office closes at eight o'clock. Her daughters are crying and hungry, and because it is the middle of winter, they cannot leave without their coats. The woman's insensitivity and the fact that she believes that Larisa would take someone else's coat infuriate her. Larisa had remained relatively calm throughout the entire ordeal, but she finally loses all patience, "and what happened after that was what happened in physics labs during experiments when two spheres come together and there flashes a discharge."¹⁴ As a result of her blowup, Larisa gets their coats back and somehow avoids being arrested.

However, Larisa is very upset by what she did and wonders how she could have acted so:

How is it that she, a young woman from a good family with a doctorate, a mother of two children, who understands literature and music well, just got in a fight like a juvenile delinquent at recess and was almost sent to jail.¹⁵

¹⁴ Viktoria Tokareva, "Plokhoe nastroyenie" in Nichego osobennogo: Povesti i rasskazy (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1981), p. 70.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 71.

Larisa's actions are clearly out of character for her. However, what she is forced to endure is also completely unreasonable. Her reaction is only normal under such circumstances, yet Larisa still sees it as extremely inappropriate.

Though this event was not particularly meaningful, it serves to remind Larisa of how hard her life is and what she is forced to contend with daily. Her life is boring. She is married to a man she no longer loves and has two children to care for; it will be a long time before her life begins to get any easier--at least thirty years. Those thirty years would consist of long days that would "fall on the top of her head like a single hard drop...There was essentially no where for her to go. And even if there were someplace, it wouldn't matter."¹⁶ So, Larisa sees herself as trapped in this monotonous and stressful existence and like Olga, she sees no way of changing it.

In Tatiana Tolstaia's "Fire and Dust," (Ogon' i pyl') Rimma is another woman who loses hope that her life will ever get better. She comes to this realization after many years of patiently waiting for happiness. The expected happiness never comes, and Rimma is left not only with the same life that she has always had, but also with the

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 72.

knowledge that she will continue to live as she previously has. Suddenly her life becomes a trap that has no escape.

At first Rimma fully believes that something better will come. Her life seems to be "not quite real, it was life in anticipation, lived out of a suitcase...no, something greater, something completely different, overwhelming, and grand clamored and glittered up ahead."¹⁷ All she has to do was wait long enough and her happiness will find her. There is no need to do anything. However, it is precisely when people do nothing that their lives fail to improve. Rimma does not see this, though. She looks at her friends and their lives and just knows that hers must somehow turn out better.

For Rimma happiness means that her father-in-law will finally die, and she will have the luxury of owning their entire apartment. She plans on redecorating the extra room, so that everyone will envy her for having such a stylishly decorated apartment. Happiness for her also means that her husband Fedya will finally defend his dissertation, and her children will go to school and become cultured. When happiness comes, everything will suddenly change for the better.

¹⁷ Tatiana Tolstaia, "Ogon' i pyl" in Na zolotom kryl'tse sideli (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1987), p. 97.

However, Rimma's plans are suddenly thwarted when she learns that her father-in-law intends to marry an eccentric woman named Pipka. This means that when he at last dies, his room will belong to Pipka and not to Rimma. Her happy future just does not seem to be arriving:

...for the first time something in Rimma cracked--she looked around and saw that time kept flowing on...Fedya was not so handsome anymore, and the children had learned bad words on the street, and old man Ashkenazi coughed and lived on...¹⁸

Yet, Rimma cannot understand where she went wrong. There must be a reason why her life is dragging on without any results.

As time goes on, she sees her friends getting what they want, while she still has nothing. She stops thinking about how she will decorate the extra room in the apartment and does not even hope for it any longer. While she still has her husband and children, these are poor consolations:

...it was all over, life had shown its empty face, its matted hair and sunken eyesockets...and [there was] the whole vicious stream of years to come, not yet lived but already known, through which she would have to drag herself as through dust covering a road to the knees, the chest, the neck. And the sirens' song, deceitfully whispering sweet words to the stupid swimmer about what wouldn't come to pass, fell silent forever.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 103.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 108-109.

Rimma realizes that her life is nothing more than it ever was and never will become greater. She is not destined for great happiness, but instead meant to live in a grimy communal apartment with her children, Fedya, who never does finish his dissertation, and the old man who lives on and on, coughing incessantly. She does not have any nice things or any good friends; she never gets to go to the South as she dreamed of, and her life just keeps dragging on.

Rimma might have been able to be happy had she done something to improve her situation, but she waits idly. Once she realizes that things will not get better, she is too discouraged to try to make any changes. Her acceptance of such an existence and her attitude that she must trudge on through life before it can end are all too typical among Soviet women. Fatigue, disillusionment, and the fact that changes often come slowly or not at all under the Soviet system help to lock women into these grim existences. For them, there seems to be no way out, and many times there is not. Fortunately, such disillusionment usually comes later in life. While women are young they usually have hope that they can somehow build good lives for themselves, despite the difficulties of living in Soviet society. For them happiness seems to be attainable, and the main prerequisite for it is marriage.

CHAPTER III

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Marriage or at least having a lover is viewed as an essential part of a happy life by many Soviet women. Even though they have the opportunity to gain financial independence and social status for themselves through their work, they still place tremendous emphasis upon the importance of sexual relationships.

Women marry at earlier ages than women do in the West. In 1978, 33.2% of the women marrying for the first time were under the age of 20 as compared to 25.6% in 1966. ¹ This is a reflection of the fact that in 1967 the length of military service for men was cut from four years to two years, and they were returning to civilian life at age 20. Therefore, more women began to marry at earlier ages. Though the current trend is to marry between the ages of 21-23, this is still considered young by western standards. (In 1988, the median age for American women marrying for the first time was 23.6 years.²) Those who do not go to universities marry

¹ Jo Peers, "Workers by Hand and Womb-Soviet Women and the Demographic Crisis," in Soviet Sisterhood, ed. Barbara Holland (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 132.

² 1990 Almanac. 43rd ed., p. 809.

even younger. It is not uncommon to hear teenage girls discussing how they are going to find a husband, something that most American teenagers would never worry about.

In the Soviet Union where living together is not possible, marriage offers a solution to the problem of finding a place to be alone. Most young couples live with the husband's parents, which is also financially convenient. But, one can imagine the problems that might arise with two women in one kitchen. Such family disputes coupled with unrealistic attitudes about what marriage should be like cause almost half of all first-time marriages to end in divorce.

So why do women continually place such great emphasis on the need to get married when there are so many problems associated with it? The answer is that society places tremendous pressure on them to pursue a relationship, for without relationships there would not be families, which society needs for stability and a steady birthrate. Women are constantly made aware of their material status in Soviet society. When people meet who have not seen each other for a while, the first question that is asked is, "How are you?" The second question asked is, "Have you gotten married?" If the answer is yes, then the response is always extremely positive, for marriage is considered a big step in life for any woman no matter how educated or independent she may be.

But, should the answer be no, people wonder why she is still single. An unmarried 25 year old man is a good catch. But, an unmarried 25 year old woman must have something wrong with her or else she would be married or at least engaged. In Soviet society, "some form of marriage, past or present, loving or utterly loveless, is a cornerstone of social and professional respectability."³

The fact that the Soviet government supports and encourages formal civil marriage to the highest degree also places heavy pressures upon women to marry.⁴ In order to be considered "morally stable," a person must be married. Implicitly then, the lives of unmarried people must be "bad, abnormal and either 'immoral' or 'incomplete'."⁵ Soviet people, by nature of the system that they live under, continually have to fill out all sorts of forms and applications, all of which make a woman highly aware of her marital status. Having to write "not married" on these papers makes her feel degraded and ashamed. Writing "divorced" makes a woman look better than never having been married. The same holds for the internal passports that all citizens carry with them at all times. There is an entire

³ Du Plessix Gray, Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope, p. 54.

⁴ Ekaterina Alevandrovna, "Why Soviet Women Want to Get Married," in Women and Russia, p. 34.

⁵ Ibid, p. 34.

page set aside for recording a person's marital history and having this page left blank for too long is embarrassing.

Parents also place particular pressure on their daughters to marry. Iulia Borisovna, an unmarried teacher, spoke of how mothers feel that when their daughters get married everything is in order. "If she is not married, then a big part of her life is missing. The earlier she can marry, the better it is for her parents."⁶ This is especially true of the generation of women who grew up after World War II. The great shortage of men and abundance of women made it very hard to find a husband and even more emphasis was placed upon it. The daughters of these women are often told that they must marry no matter what, and they fear not being able to find a man. Furthermore, since brides typically go off to live with their husbands' parents, a married daughter usually means one less financial burden for her parents.

The end result of all of these pressures is that women are left with a distorted and unhealthy view of the importance of marriage. Instead of wanting to marry to enrich their lives and build on already existing personal happiness, Soviet women desire marriage as a way to affirm themselves to others and to make themselves feel whole.

⁶ Interview with Iulia Borisovna.

Being single "is regarded by many women as a humiliating status and as a demonstration of her inferiority."⁷

No matter how successful a woman might be on her own, she always feels incomplete without a husband. Marriage is a matter of prestige and self-affirmation, something that is needed for a sense of well being. According to Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope, the government bred anxiety to rush into marriage is evidenced in a striking new feature of the Soviet press that was unheard of before glasnost; "Wanting to Get Acquainted" columns have appeared, and the ratio of women to men placing these ads is 20 to 1.⁸

Thus, women pursue relationships with incredible fervor and will often go to great lengths to get a man. Many times they will stay in what they know to be an unhealthy relationship even if there is not a chance of marriage in sight, because it is better in society's opinion and in a woman's own mind to at least have a lover if she cannot have a husband. The stories "A Dismal Fate" ("Temnaia sud'ba"), "Mania," "Between Spring and Summer" and "Nothing Special" all present women who become involved in relationships that

⁷ Vladimir Schlapentokh, Love, Marriage and Friendship in the Soviet Union (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), p. 77.

⁸ Du Plessix Gray, Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope, p. 56.

for one reason or another do not or cannot work out, and explain why they choose to remain in them.

Liudmila Petrushevskaia, unlike most female authors, seems to disapprove of the importance that women place on relationships and marriage. While she still views marriage as a desirable institution, the pressures placed upon women to enter into it are portrayed negatively. Both her stories "Mania" and "A Dismal Fate" show this pressure that society places on women to become involved with men.

Mania, whose real name is Marina, is an unattractive thirty year old woman who becomes involved with a colleague at work. She does not seem to be comfortable with the relationship, however. Having never had a lover, she had grown accustomed to being alone. She also did not have to do anything to try to improve her looks, since she had no one to improve them for. Once Mania finds a male friend, she simply does not know what to do. She "would have been happy to do something, but it was as if she got confused..."⁹ The relationship progresses, they get engaged, and then when Yuri is transferred to another job, he quietly leaves. Mania is left alone and everything is as it was previously.

⁹ Liudmila Petrushevskaia, "Mania," trans. Helena Goscilo in Balancing Acts, ed. Helena Goscilo (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 257

However, the reader never knows how Mania feels because the story is written in the third person. What the reader does see is how Mania's colleagues feel about her and the relationship, since it is told from their perspective. Throughout the story, they place very strong pressure on her to try to find a man. Once she does, their opinion of her greatly improves. At the beginning of the story before she is involved with Yuri, the reader hears only of how unattractive Mania's frizzy golden curls are and how she refuses to take their advice to change her hair style. Once she becomes involved with Yuri, however, they speak of Mania as being "a kind, hard-working girl, faithful and devoted to a fault..."¹⁰ It is strange that such a nice person had been overlooked. Just the fact that she has been noticed by someone else affects the way that her co-workers view her.

Once her co-workers see that her relationship is destined to fail and that she will be hurt, they make no attempts to warn her. In fact, they gossip about the relationship, predicting how it will end. It is common knowledge to everyone that Yuri becomes very close to people quickly, but then as he gets to know them, he becomes disillusioned and breaks contact with them. It is only a matter of time before he becomes bored with Mania. But, he might stay with her despite his boredom because he

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 257.

"passionately yearned to have children from a healthy woman."¹¹ So, Mania may be able to get him to marry her because of that, even if he does not love her. In her colleagues' eyes this would be better than being alone.

Throughout the entire relationship, Mania timidly walks around like a lost soul wearing her fur cap indoors, not knowing how to act or what to say. When the two become engaged, her demeanor does not change at all. Yuri introduces her as his fiancée, everyone likes Mania and congratulates them, yet she fails to act as a woman about to get married would. The reader is left wondering if she is in the relationship because she loves Yuri, or if she is just doing what everyone thinks she should do. Her behavior does not indicate love, so it must be assumed that she has succumbed to social pressure.

When Yuri leaves, she calmly parts with him in an unemotional, cordial good-bye, and it is her co-workers who seem more disappointed than she does. Everything ended exactly the way they thought it would, and this leaves them "with a sense of inconclusiveness, an expectation of something greater. However, nothing greater happened."¹² So, Mania's co-workers, deprived of the chance to interfere

¹¹ Ibid, p. 258.

¹² Ibid, p. 260.

in her life, are left to find some other source of gossip or to wait until Mania finds another man, if that ever happens.

Petrushevskaja's other story "A Dismal Fate" ("Temnaia sud'ba") also presents a woman who becomes involved in a bad relationship simply because she is tired of being alone. In her eyes, it would be better to at least have some sort of a lover, than to have no one. She is a single thirty-some year old woman who sets out "to once and for all put an end to her loneliness"¹³ by getting her mother to leave the apartment for an evening, so that she can bring home a man from work. He is middle-aged, fat, unhappy with his spouse and life, and has nothing to offer her, except for the fact that he is a man. They drink coffee, eat some cake, chat and then sleep together. When he leaves, she does not even see him out, and he does not seem to notice. Petrushevskaja writes that "generally there was nothing good about the way that they came"¹⁴ to the apartment. The protagonist herself regards the whole affair not joyfully, but "with dark despair in her soul."¹⁵ However, she nevertheless sleeps with him fully knowing that it means nothing to him.

¹³ Liudmila Petrushevskaja, "Temnaia sud'ba" Neva, no. 7 1987, p. 87.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 87.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 87.

The woman does gain something from this shallow liaison, though. She wins the right to say that she has a man. No longer does she have to be the lonely woman in everyone's eyes, and she immediately makes her new status known. The next day at work she anxiously asks a colleague who is divorced if she has found a man yet, knowing very well that the answer is no and that the woman will be embarrassed to say so. Her husband had left her, and she "lives out her shame by herself, not letting any of her girlfriends into her empty apartment and not telling anyone about anything."¹⁶ The woman knows very well that she herself used to hate such questions, because they reminded her and everyone else of her humiliating single status. But, once she has the chance to say that she is no longer single, she immediately disregards other women's feelings and places the same sort of social pressure on them that was placed on her. When her colleague politely asks in return if the woman has a man, she proudly responds that she now in fact does.

Yet, she knows that he is not hers. She realizes that she has now fallen into the typical role of the other woman, waiting around telephone booths, not knowing where to call, accepting her lover's indifferent behavior towards her and knowing that he is the object of the affection of many other

16 Ibid, p. 88.

women. However, she is happy because at least she has someone. No longer will she have to feel inferior and humiliated. But, Petrushevskaja makes it clear that what this woman is willing to do, just to be viewed as acceptable in society's eyes, is far more degrading than remaining single. However, she cannot see this. All this woman knows is that to have some sort of relationship, even a poor one that will never bring her happiness, is better than being alone. Therefore, although she knows that "a dismal fate lay ahead of her...she had tears of happiness in her eyes."¹⁷

In Nina Katerli's "Between Spring and Summer", another young woman who becomes involved with a married man is presented. Alka pursues her relationship with a married middle-aged man despite the fact that she knows there is no future to it. Yuri has made it clear to her that he has no intention of leaving his wife and children, and, in fact, he does not even love her. He is condescending and laughs at her for being too romantic. When she is with him, Alka feels stupid and tongue-tied, not the way a woman should feel with someone she loves.

However, Alka is quite willing to put up with all of this in order to have a lover. A married man is better than no man at all, and with all of her girlfriends already

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 88.

married, being single is embarrassing. Alka also never believed that she would be able to get a man because she is not pretty or smart. She was "the skinny beanpole...who people always said had that stupidity, which [was] worse than thievery."¹⁸ Therefore, Alka feels lucky that she even found a man who would have her. In her eyes marriage is not that important. She claims that she is happy with the current situation, and that she would not trade it for the happiness that her mother would rather see her have. "For her, happiness is the Marriage Palace and a wedding with a thousand guests in the Orbita Cafe."¹⁹ But, Alka rejects these traditional values not because they are unappealing, but because she knows there is no chance of them happening with Yuri. It is easier for her to be happy with him if she convinces herself that marriage is not what she desires.

Alka in fact really does want to get married. She accuses her own father of being under his wife's thumb, when she really is talking about Yuri. Her father realizes "that she [is] shouting from pain".²⁰ Alka knows that Yuri will never leave his wife and marry her, and since she loves him, how could she possibly be happy about that? She herself

¹⁸ Nina Katerli, "Between Spring and Summer," trans. John Fred Beebe and Regina Snyder, in Balancing Acts, p. 240.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 240.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 234.

even admits in a letter to him that "if it were for [his] sake, [she] could happily scrub and wash and learn to bake pies. If..., but that will never be, and there's no point in complaining."²¹ Therefore, in order to have a man, Alka settles for less. She stays with Yuri, fearing that she could not get anyone else, consequently setting herself up for being alone. Most likely, Yuri will eventually end their relationship, and then Alka will be in the same position that she would be in if she left him herself. However, it is better to be alone later than now, and at this point in time, that is what is most important to Alka--not to be alone now.

Viktoria Tokareva, on the other hand, presents a radically different conception of the role of relationships in women's lives. Unlike Katerli and especially Petrushevskaja, she believes that love is the basis of happiness for women, and that without it a woman cannot really lead a full life. Therefore, if a woman is to be really happy, she must be in a relationship. Yet, even Tokareva believes that there is a point where a woman can go too far in the importance she places on a relationship. When a woman begins to lose her own identity and allows her entire world to revolve around another person, then the relationship has become destructive instead of positive. In

²¹ Ibid, p. 254.

her story "Nothing Special," Tokareva presents the epitome of the devoted and self-sacrificing woman. By filling the story with irony, Tokareva shows the extremes that love can go to. Because the protagonist places love above all else, she loses her identity, and the positive force of love becomes a destructive one.

Margo lives her entire life "in a state of permanent readiness to meet her happiness and to accept it joyfully without recriminations for its tardiness."²² This happiness which she awaits always comes in the form of a man, and she goes from relationship to relationship expending all of her energy on them. Her first two relationships end for reasons beyond her control; her first lover had to return to the United Arab Republic because of political reasons, but she is left with a son. Her second lover, who treats her terribly, is killed in an accident. It is her third relationship that completely consumes her. In it she believes that she has finally found the mystical happiness of which she has dreamed for so long.

Ivan Petrovich becomes the object of Margo's undying love. He is a doctor, and they meet when she is brought to the hospital barely alive after the accident that killed her second lover. As Ivan bends over her, she notices how nice

²² Viktoria Tokareva, "Nothing Special," trans. Helena Goscilo, in Balancing Acts, p. 50.

his beard smells and realizes that even before death she is thinking of love. Galina Anatolievna feels that this is a sign of a true woman and that it also shows how important love is to Margo, if it is in her thoughts as she approaches death.²³ However, contrary to Galina Avatolievna's opinion, I feel that Tokareva views this negatively. The whole situation is presented ironically, and Tokareva wants to show the absurdity of the value that Margo places on love and attraction. After all, her lover just died, and she is already attracted to a new man.

Ivan quickly becomes the center of Margo's world and the very basis for her identity. She begins to identify herself with Ivan. When this happens, she knows that she is in love:

That was the beginning of love, when one 'I' started becoming identical with another 'I'. When Margo's 'I' didn't wish to exist independently, becoming part of Ivan Petrovich's 'I'.²⁴

Margo's love for Ivan is her existence, and while she thinks that there is hope that he will love her, she is elated.

However, when Margo begins to realize that Ivan probably will not love her because he is married, she is shocked into seeing the reality of the situation. She admits to herself that she really is "a pallid, underpaid,

²³ Interview with Galina Anatolievna.

²⁴ Tokereva, "Nothing Special", p. 54.

single mother, semi-invalid, without parents, and without even a lover."25. Who would want her? Having a lover allows Margo to ignore the painful truth and to become a different person in her own mind. Without one, she simply cannot be a full person, after all "Margo was so constituted that she could think of herself only in connection with someone else."26 As a result of placing such importance upon a relationship with a man, Margo loses control of her life. She relies on another person to make her happy and in turn, deprives herself of any independence that she might have.

When Margo learns that Ivan does in fact love her and intends to leave his wife, her love for him and the importance that she places on their relationship almost paralyzes her. She fails to be able to even think on her own. Not being able to do anything while they are apart, she sits and counts until Ivan returns. When he refuses to allow her to sit outside the operating room door while he works, she responds, "I'll wait for you here. I'll count to a million." Ivan says, "Don't count. Work on something. Find something to do."27 But, Margo already has something to do, and that is to love. This love, however, stops her

25 Ibid, p. 58.

26 Ibid, p. 59.

27 Ibid, p. 71.

from being a person, and even Ivan sees it. He realizes that their love has taken over Margo's life in a destructive way. Thinking of Margo sitting and counting, he knows that "she wasn't living but was marking time. And he realized that he had crippled...her soul."²⁸

After he has a heart attack, Ivan decides to stay with his wife and to not further complicate his life. Margo, however, awaits him patiently. She believes that someday he will return, because if she thought he would not come back, it would be impossible to go on. Thus, Margo lives in a state of eternal expectation. But, what will happen when she realizes that Ivan is never going to come back? Or will she never admit that and just go on living in denial? Either way Margo is doomed to live an unhappy life. If only she had something else to live for then all would not be lost with Ivan's departure.

It seems clear that Tokareva cannot possibly have intended such a weak woman to serve as a model for how women should be. Margo has nothing to offer other people as a result of the distorted value she places on love. She cannot even be a good mother to her son because of this obsession. However, both Galina Anatolievna and Marina Georgievna disagree with this. They feel that Tokareva intended Margo to be the model of the altruistic,

²⁸ Ibid, p. 73.

unconditionally loving woman. Marina Georgievna views Margo negatively and says that most women would too. Yet, she believes that Tokareva views her positively.²⁹ Galina Anatolievna feels that Margo's life represents true happiness. She is full of hope that Ivan will come back to her, and this resolve to await happiness is better than constantly searching for it.³⁰

Helena Goscilo explained to Dr. Beebe why there is such a discrepancy in opinions. Tokareva does not view Margo positively and intends to present the extreme value that some women place on love and relationships. She uses irony as a device to show this. However, her irony is misinterpreted by most Soviet women because of their personal feelings toward the author. On a number of occasions, Tokareva has made derogatory comments in the press about women, comparing them to dogs. Because they have been offended by her, women now believe that Tokareva thinks that women should be spineless creatures who live only for other people. Therefore, her ironic stories are often read as being serious, this giving an incorrect interpretation of her message.³¹ Thus, Tokaerva indeed intends to present Margo as an extreme model of a woman who

²⁹ Interview with Marina Georgievna, Eugene, Oregon, February, 1990.

³⁰ Interview with Galina Anatolievna.

³¹ Interview with Helena Goscilo by Dr. Beebe, March, 1990.

places too much importance on love and relationships with men. While she still feels that women need love relationships in order to lead full lives, they must also have something else besides their husbands and lovers, or they risk losing everything should a relationship fail. Margo's pursuit of relationships is not wrong. Allowing her relationship with Ivan to take over her life is, however, undesirable. By looking to and relying on one person for happiness, women fail to pursue their own lives. Consequently, they in turn deprive themselves of the chance to live and to find the true happiness that they desire and that might otherwise be attained if they allowed themselves the opportunity to seek it.

CHAPTER IV

CAREER VERSUS FAMILY

Given the importance of marriage in women's lives and in Soviet society, women quickly encounter another problem: how to combine a family with work. The way in which a woman chooses to balance these two very important elements in life greatly affects her ultimate happiness.

Virtually all women outside of Central Asia and the Caucasus are either employed or full-time students, making up three-fourths of all doctors and teachers, three-fourths of all engineers and one-half of all students, to name a few occupations that they dominate.¹ The reasons why women work are numerous. The greatest force driving them to seek employment is probably economics. Women are plagued by the problem of their husbands being paid insufficient salaries, and those women who would prefer to stay home are not able to in most cases. Two salaries "are essential to support a family above what even Soviet economists would consider the poverty level."² The desire for financial independence is

1 David Willis, Klass: How the Russians Really Live (New York: Avon Books, 1985), p. 169.

2 Hansson and Liden, Moscow Women, p. xi.

another economic factor that makes work necessary, especially if a woman plans on seeking divorce.

Work also fulfills a number of social and psychological needs for a woman. It is a source of both personal status and satisfaction, providing an identity and a career for those women who choose to take their work seriously. As Iulia Borisovna states, "work allows a woman to express herself and to show to herself and to others that she can do something."³ It also gives women the opportunity to interact socially, as well as the chance to escape the pressures of family life. Most women when asked if they would rather stay home could not imagine the prospect of being cooped up in a small Soviet apartment isolated from the outside world. Soviet society offers little to do during the day, and with little part-time or volunteer work available, women tend to regard the boredom associated with being a housewife as "spiritual death".⁴

Finally, women feel that they have a social duty to work for the betterment of society. People who do not work are regarded as parasites, and while being a housewife is not parasitism, there is a certain stigma attached to it. Communist propaganda clearly "emphasizes the duty to work."⁵

³ Interview with Iulia Borisovna.

⁴ Hedrick Smith, The Russians (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 175.

⁵ Ibid, p. 174.

A 1960's film entitled "Let's Live 'Til Monday" gives a perfect example of this attitude. When a high-school girl writes that her goal in life is to be a wife and mother, she is reprimanded by her teacher and told that that is not enough. She must also work. Therefore, often times even the best mothers who are satisfied with their families feel a twinge of inadequacy if they do not work.

True career women, however, are not the norm in the Soviet Union. The majority of women find it too hard to compete with men who do not have the worries of a household and children and who are free to devote all of their energy to their work. In order to achieve a good career, women must usually sacrifice their families and children, which many of them are unwilling to do. As one woman interviewed in Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope said, "...we want to write our theses, but we also feel we should be making pirozhki."⁶

While women feel this need, desire and duty to work, they also continually speak of the importance of children and a family. For most, it outweighs everything else. They see motherhood and marriage as their main goal in life, the basis of their personalities and their very identity. "A woman is first of all a mother and a wife, then a teacher or

⁶ Du Plessix Gray, Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope, p. 90.

a doctor or a scientist,"⁷ states Galina Anatolievna. A woman who becomes too career-oriented loses some of her femininity, and thus something as a woman. Motherhood and marriage are the major preoccupations of women, and they are the main things that distinguish them from men. The idea of not having a family is foreign to most women, and they view it as a tragic event: "If a couple already in their forties haven't heard the sounds of children's voices in their home, life is meaningless, period."⁸

While these views are in part the result of hundreds of years of family tradition and culture, this "maternity complex" is greatly the product of Soviet propaganda. Women are indoctrinated with a radically moralized notion of motherhood, which preaches that "the greatest good that nature has intended for woman is for her to fulfill her purpose as a mother"⁹ The act of having children ceases to be simply natural. It becomes tied to the state politically and socially, as women contribute to building a strong socialist society. Women who opt not to have children are viewed as unnatural, anti-social and egotistic. Feats of motherhood are encouraged, with "hero mothers" of multiple

7 Interview with Galina Anatolievna.

8 Hansson and Linden, Moscow Women, p. 15.

9 Natasha Maltseva, "The Other Side of the Coin," in Women and Russia, p. 11.

children being rewarded with medals and small monetary contributions, though large families are an exception to the Soviet norm of one or two children. (According to Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope, only 18% of Soviet women practice any form of birth control. Of this 18%, only 5% use a reliable method. As a result, there are five to eight abortions for every live birth. This includes unofficial abortions performed by private doctors.¹⁰)

Given the importance of both work and family, women are left with the decision of how they will combine the two. Some choose their careers over having children, while others choose children over a career. Most, however, opt for having both, and then are left to try to successfully juggle the combination. The effects of these choices on women and their happiness is the subject of four stories.

The choice to not have children is very serious for any woman, especially in Soviet society. The reasons for deciding to do so are as varied as are women, but often it is a decision of opting for a career over a family. The stories "The Wall," "Raraka" ("Raraka"), and "The Road to Aktanysh" all feature protagonists who decide that having a career is more important than everything else. The realizations that they come to concerning this choice are

¹⁰ Du Plessix Gray, Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope, pp. 15 & 20.

different for every woman, but in every case the authors make the same point clear; a mistake was made, and women will never receive from their careers what they could have experienced through children.

Iriada Alexandrovna of "The Wall" and Kira of "Raraka" are both very serious and successful career women who have nothing other than their careers. In both cases, this does not seem to alarm them at first. For Iriada, "work had always taken first place, with everyday life second."¹¹ She is a strong, self-assured woman who dives into her career, allowing it to become her main identity and happiness. At first, she had intended to have children, not necessarily because she wanted them, but because she was married. If she had a husband, it was reasonable to assume that they would have children. But after three years, she began to wonder why she should do so. Iriada was not anxious or disillusioned; she just could not see any advantages to having children. She was over thirty, in charge of her department, her ideas were being used at work, and children would just hold her back. She and her husband at first simply did not discuss the subject, and then they outright avoided it. And so "they had no children--well and good."¹²

¹¹ Galina Shcherbakova, "The Wall," trans. Helena Goscilo in Balancing Acts, p. 112.

¹² Ibid, p. 113.

Iriada even feels sorry for women with children. A woman does not have to be smart to have children; that is the easy part. On the contrary, a woman needs to be smart to see what a burden it is to have them. What could possibly be the advantage to that? Children "bleed you, suck you dry, and you're supposed to love them!"¹³ No, she certainly was better off without those kind of children. Besides, she had her career and her husband.

However, it becomes clear by the end of the story that these two things are not really that much. Her marriage with her husband is awful and has been for years. They had started off so well together, but then they lost something somewhere along the line--where or what it was she does not know, and now it is too late to change anything. Viacheslav drinks constantly, and the two hardly say a civil word to each other when they do speak. Her career is stronger than ever, but Iriada is panicked by the idea of growing old. She realizes that she does not "have to die for there to be nothing left of [her]. Why die? To leave work, to retire, was enough."¹⁴ What will happen to her when she retires? Everyone will forget her; someone will take over her office, and things will go on as before without her. There will be no evidence that she ever lived. If she had children there

¹³ Ibid, p. 114.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 116.

would be, and she would have something to live for after her retirement. However, Iriada fails to realize this or at least to openly acknowledge it. She is left knowing that once her career ends, she will face a dismal and lonely future.

In the story "Raraka", Kira faces the same fate as Iriada once her career ends; however, unlike Iriada she is fully content with her life. Tokareva juxtaposes her life with the life of her childhood best friend, Larisa, in an attempt to show which woman chose the right way to live. Kira is a talented piano player who devotes her life to music, practicing eight hours a day, not because she was highly conscientious, but because nothing else interested her. Larisa, also a musician, devotes her life to love and wants nothing more than to be a wife and mother.

Thirty years later the two women meet again. Both women have become what they wanted to be. Kira graduated from the Moscow Conservatory and was a laureate of all the international musical competitions. She had travelled world wide, but had yet to go to Australia. Larisa had married a military engineer and had three children. Both women are very happy with their respective lives. So, who is correct? Whose life is better?

In Tokareva's view, it is Larisa who has truly lived and Kira who has not. Larisa chose the talent of love and

with it built a strong, loving home for her children. Kira questions how Larisa can devote her life to them and experience nothing else saying, "Children are for a long time. All your life you will be looking at their stupid faces, and you won't see anything else."¹⁵ But Larisa responds, "What am I not seeing? Honolulu? I can see that on t.v."¹⁶ When Larisa asks Kira why she got divorced, Kira says her profession divorced them. She plays the piano all the time and does not have any time for a family. But what is she playing for? Is her career really important enough to justify sacrificing a family for it? Larisa proves this point by saying:

Well, you are an idiot! Just think:
France, America...but if you fall ill,
there is no one to give you a glass of
water....The French listen to your concert,
clap and then everyone goes back to their
homes. But, you--you go back to an empty
hotel room. That's interesting! ¹⁷

Kira is a very talented artist, and her music brings joy to other people. But, what will she have when her career is over? What will happen when she has accomplished everything she wanted to? Tokareva makes it clear that while Larisa is not a renowned person, she is a great woman,

¹⁵ Viktoria Tokareva, "Raraka", Nichego osobennogo: Povesti i rasskazy, p. 32.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 32.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 33.

whose life is just as important if not more than Kira's because she is a mother. At the end, Kira finally goes to Australia, as she had dreamed. The Australians love her performance, and she bows for a long time. Then everything is as Larisa said it would be: the Australians go home to their families, and Kira returns to her hotel room--alone.

In "The Road to Aktanysh" Anna Mass presents yet another woman who chooses a career over having children. However, unlike Kira and Iriada, she discovers that she made a mistake and has a chance to change her fate. Lida is a geologist and loves her career. While on expedition, though, she comes to realize that it is simply not enough. At one time she had thought it would be. She felt sorry for her girlfriends from the institute who had quit their jobs to take care of their babies; they envied her for having the excitement of geological expeditions. After all, what had they studied so hard for, if they were just going to sit at home?

However, now the tables are turned, and it is Lida who envies them. Her girlfriends have returned to their previous jobs, not having lost a thing, and they also now have the riches of children. She could have a seven year old son or daughter if she had done the same thing, but she did not. She and her husband are alone and would probably stay that way, since she is almost too old to have children.

Their marriage is falling apart because her husband wants a child and understands that there most likely will not be one. They have a two-room apartment, have paid off their debts and Lida has begun studying for an advanced degree, but for what? For whom had they worked so hard?

Then Lida discovers that she is pregnant and is filled with a new joy and hope. She realizes that all her life she had been searching for what she thought was happiness only to find that she had ignored the only thing that could give her happiness--a child. No matter what she accomplished in life, she would never be happy if she did not fulfill "the most important law. The law of continuation of the species. The law of life."¹⁸

Lida's feelings exemplify perfectly the "maternity complex" that most Russian women feel. Motherhood is the most important role for them and the greatest deed they can do for society. Without children a woman can never be truly happy. But, does becoming a mother necessarily guarantee happiness as Lida so deeply believes? Her visions of future bliss and joy are very naive if she thinks that everything will simply fall into place. Does she plan to end her career and devote her life to her child, or does she plan to continue working? Would she be happy staying home when she

¹⁸ Anna Mass, "The Road to Akyanysh," trans. Mary Fleming Zirin in Balancing Acts, p. 270.

loves her career so much? If she does work, how does she think she can successfully balance the demanding career of a geologist with the needs of her child? Lida does not realize that what lies ahead of her is a series of difficult decisions and a very complicated life. If she can handle everything efficiently, then she might be able to achieve her romanticized idea of happiness, but it will take a tremendous amount of work.

"A Business Trip Home" also by Anna Mass seems to pick up where "Road to Aktanysh" leaves off. Tanya is another female geologist, and Mass shows the results of her failed attempt to balance her career and her family. The consequences are poor relations with her son, guilt and an identity crisis.

Tanya's career puts her in the field on expeditions six months out of the year. Her husband, also a geologist, is gone with her, and so their son, Seriozha, lives with Tanya's parents. When she comes home to the city she must suddenly make the transition from the role of geologist in the Far East to mother and wife living in the city. Both roles are so completely different and the shock is always so sudden that Tanya begins to feel an identity crisis:

I thought about my two dissimilar lives
that were proceeding along parallel lines.
From time to time I had to throw a little
bridge across to enable me to cross over
from one life to the other.... And I had
the sensation that two separate people--

not doubles, but totally dissimilar individuals--really ought to merge into one.¹⁹

However, Tanya cannot merge the two parts of her life because of the fact that one is completely uninvolved with the other. Her being a geologist has nothing to do with her being a mother. She loves her career, and in the field she feels more feminine, more successful than she does when she is under the constant pressures of city life. But, she also loves her son and her parents and feels happy when she is with them. Her inability to decide which role is more important and the need to leave her son in order to pursue her career causes her to experience strong feelings of guilt.

Guilt is probably one of the most common emotions felt by Soviet working mothers. They are told time and time again by the state that "the material conditions exist for women to have both a rewarding job and a happy home life."²⁰ But, when these do not appear, women are left feeling guilty for their failure. Soviet women also have a clear idea of what a good mother should be: caring, devoted, patient, loving, supportive, etc. Above all she should always be there for her children, but for a career woman this is not

¹⁹ Anna Mass, "A Business Trip Home," trans. Jerzy Kolodziej in Balancing Acts, pp. 37-38.

²⁰ Mary Buckley, "Soviet Interpretations of the Woman Question" in Soviet Sisterhood, p. 19.

always possible. Galina Anatolievna spoke repeatedly to me about the sense of guilt she feels about not devoting enough attention to her son because of her teaching career.²¹ The gap between what is expected and what is possible is too wide to be filled. Tanya cannot fill it either, and she is left feeling shame and bitterness for Tanya, the mother.

The guilt that she feels is not unjustified, however, for real damage has been done to her relationship with her son, as a result of her being gone so often. She makes "attempts to enter his world, but [is] less and less able to do so with each passing year."²² She does not even really think about him as a mother thinks about her son, but as she thinks about any boy in general. When she returns home he does not even seem happy to see her. Their conversations are strained and unnatural, and any "on looker might think that a journalist was conducting an interview with a Pioneer from some school."²³ (The Young Pioneers is a group for young children that starts their socialist education.) Tanya truly wants to be a mother to Seriozha, but she knows she cannot. She lost that right long ago, and now it is almost impossible to regain it:

I wanted to comfort Seriozha, but

²¹ Interview with Galina Anatolievna.

²² Mass, "A Business Trip Home", p. 36.

²³ Ibid, p. 43.

how? What did I know about him?
 He has his secrets, which he has no
 desire to share with the woman sitting
 next to him, this so-called mother
 who lives two parallel lives and
 knows nothing, nothing about that
 unique, that most important life
 which she herself once created and
 which now has become alien to her. 24

In trying to have both a career and a family, Tanya loses what she knows is supposed to be the most important to her, and what was once the most important to her. So many women are unsuccessful in trying to have both a career and family because it is such a difficult task in Soviet society. The line between how much time must be given to both is very fine and often impossible to see. Therefore, women are left with the difficult decision of how to combine the two or if they should combine them at all. There are no guarantees that happiness can be achieved. But, one thing that is clear in most Soviet women's eyes is that a woman is better off having a family and struggling to balance it with her career, than to be left alone without anyone.

24 Ibid, p. 48.

CHAPTER V

SINGLE WOMEN

In a society where the social pressure to marry is so strong, it is surprising how many women remain single. According to the 1979 Soviet census, the figures are as follows:

<u>Status</u>	Age: <u>16-24</u>	<u>25-49</u>	<u>50-up</u>
Never Married	41.5%	3.7%	1.9%
Divorced	1.9%	7.7%	3.4%
Widowed	0.2%	3.4%	26.7%

The average percent of women who are single is 27.2% of the population. These women fall into three main categories: women who have never married, divorced women and widowed women. With the pressure to marry being so strong in Soviet society it seems contradictory that there would be so many women that remain single. These women definitely do feel this pressure on them. In some cases they simply refuse to give in to it. But in many cases, women cannot do anything to meet society's demands, because they just cannot find a man to marry. Since more women have begun marrying at later ages, this accounts for the high percentage of single women

1 A.A. Isupova and N.Z. Shvartsyera, ed., Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naselenia 1979 goda (Moscow: Financi i statistiki, 1984), p. 206.

from the ages of 16-24. They fully plan on marrying, but do not want to give up their independence right away.

There are also some women who do not want to marry at all; however, in Soviet society they are definitely a minority. They reject the traditional institution of marriage, saying that they can pursue their professional lives better without obligations to a husband. According to Vladimir Schlapentokh, this negative attitude is higher in the Baltic states and Western Russia than it is in the Southern Moslem republics, where large families are a strong-rooted tradition.² It has been suggested, though, that the anti-marriage sentiments are much more common in men and in women with feminist orientation. Other women who adhere to this viewpoint often are women who would like to marry, but can not find anyone to marry. After having been "initially forced to live alone, many single women adapt to the situation and may even become opponents of marriage, either sincerely or as a justification of their situation."³ Therefore, it becomes difficult to discern how many women are truly against marriage and how many just say that they are because they cannot get married.

² Vladimir Schlapentokh, Love, Marriage and Friendship in the Soviet Union, p. 136.

³ Ibid, p. 134.

The largest group of never-married women are those who want to marry, but cannot find anyone. Many women say that it is difficult to meet men because they work in places where women dominate the work force. If women are single-mothers, their lack of free time and the inopportunity to go places to meet people decreases their chances of meeting available men.

Women also have begun to demand much more from their future spouses. More educated women often will opt to stay single than to settle for less than what they want. According to Love, Marriage and Friendship in the Soviet Union, a review of ten thousand letters sent to Literaturnaia gazeta in 1976 showed that no less than one-fifth of the unmarried women said that they had had the chance to marry but chose not to because their suitors failed to meet their demands.⁴ (It should be noted that Literaturnaia gazeta is a publication read mostly by the intelligentsia, thus indicating the likelihood of these respondents being highly educated.) This seems to be contradictory to the pressure to marry described in chapter II. It is to an extent. These women are not immune to the social pressure to marry, and they certainly do feel it. But, just because there is pressure to do something does not make it right. Educated women have begun to realized that

4 Ibid, p. 209.

it is ridiculous to marry just anyone simply to make society happy. They are holding out despite intense pressure which does not wane. However, the uneducated working class women still do support the social pressure to marry and usually do so at the first opportunity.

Divorced women many times do not remarry because they have been disillusioned with marriage. In 1979 of the women who divorced at a young age (under 30), only 41% remarried, versus 48% of the men.⁵ A large portion of these women also remain single because just like women who have never married, they cannot find a suitable partner to marry. Widowed women, on the other hand, refusing to betray their love for their late husbands, will often not remarry.

Society regards single women in one particular way-negatively. Outside the circles of the intelligentsia, it is still a considerable stigma to be a spinster and to never have experienced marriage or children, explains Francine Du Plessix Gray in Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope. The word for old maid is a much stronger pejorative in the USSR than it is in any other developed nation.⁶ The hardest judgment definitely falls upon women who have never been married. As previously stated, women who do not marry are

⁵ Ibid, p. 135.

⁶ Du Plessix Gray, Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope, p. 54.

looked down upon, regardless of the reason for their single status. If a woman is single, then there must be something wrong with her. Unmarried women also are pitied, because they are missing what other people consider to be a happy life. Divorced and widowed women do not suffer condemnation to the extent that unmarried women do, because they have been married at least once before. Therefore, people know that there is not anything wrong with them. Yet, divorced women did get divorced, so something had to go wrong somewhere. It is expected, though, that divorced women will marry again. Since most women are widowed at a later age, they do not feel the same pressure to remarry, and society tends to sympathize with them for having lost their husbands and being left alone.

Because single women make up a significant portion of the population, it is not surprising that they are the subject of a number of stories. These women range from divorcees to widows to older women who never married. Through their stories, the authors show that while society may not agree with the idea of a woman being single, they still ought to give these women the respect that they deserve. They are real people each with personal and situational reasons for remaining single. Though the authors still feel that marriage and family life are very important, they also show that for some women, single life

is better. Just because a woman is single does not mean that she is a bad person, and also does not mean that she is desperate to find a husband.

The most positive portrayal of a single woman is in the story "The Mother-in-law" by Anna Kozlovskaja. Granny Pelageya is a widow whose husband died during the war. She raised their son by herself on a collective farm and did a very good job of it. Being perfectly happy with her life, she says the following to a neighbor:

Why should I complain to the Almighty?
 ...I've got everything I could possibly
 wish for, Lyuba. A son who's got as far
 as his Master of Science degree, then my
 grandson Vadim whose marks are always the
 best you could wish for. God has seen fit
 to keep me healthy as well. 7

Granny Pelageya is completely content with her life, and the idea of a second marriage never enters the picture.

Despite the fact that she is single, everyone seems to hold the highest regard for Granny Pelageya, because she is such a good, strong woman and mother. When her apartment building is being demolished, she does not want to interrupt her son's lifestyle by moving in with him. However, when she knows that her help is needed by him, she drops everything to come to his aid. Such is the case when he falls ill while living in Siberia. He had moved there after

7 Anna Kozlovskaja, "The Mother-in-law," trans. Katherine Judelson in New Voices, ed. Yuri Lopusov (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1985), pp. 114-115.

the break up of his marriage, which greatly upset his mother. Hearing that he is ill, Granny Pelageya quickly packs and moves to Siberia in the middle of winter. She had a deep grudge against her son's new wife because she loved her first daughter-in-law; yet being a strong woman, she is able to give her second daughter-in-law a chance. The two end up becoming great friends.

Granny Pelageya runs her son's house and does all the housework, enabling the two young scientists to study. When they break up, it is Granny Pelageya who is responsible for getting them back together. She also mends her sons relationship with his son. She is clearly the epitome of a good mother. She might have been just as happy had she remarried, but her life does not seem to be lacking anything because she did not. It would definitely be a mistake to look down on such a fine woman simply because she is single. She deserves to be respected, and because of Kozlovskaja's portrayal of her, she is.

Irina Velembovskaja also portrays an equally strong woman in her story "Through Hard Times". Pania is also a widow who lost a very good husband. She does not dismiss the idea of remarriage, but also does not think too much about it. Her life is not as easy as it was when she was married, and because of financial problems, she takes a job as a mail carrier. She fights off mean dogs, carries heavy

bags of mail and even once has to defend herself against a gang that tries to steal her money. One night while making her rounds, she sees a man strangling his wife and intercedes. It is the head injury that she receives during the struggle that puts her in the hospital, and it is in the hospital that she meets Curly.

Curly is a married man with whom Pania first becomes friends and then with whom she falls in love. She likes feeling needed again and even catches herself daydreaming about what their life would be like together. However, when Curly asks her to spy on his wife and tell him if she is having an affair, Pania stops herself. She realizes that "in her shoes another woman would go without hesitation. She would use the chance to catch a hussy with her lover and then report back to the husband. She would even add some details of her own."⁸ But, what good would that do? Curly would leave his wife, but then he would look at Pania with hatred, for she was the one who told him. No, she could not lower herself to that level to get him. Besides, if he really loved her, he would not have asked her to do such a thing. So, Pania decides that "she was stronger than that....At least she had been in love for three days."⁹

⁸ Irina Velembovskaia, "Through Hard Times," trans. Joseph Kiegal, in Balancing Acts, p. 138.

⁹ Ibid, p. 138.

Pania remains a strong character because of her decision, and she proves that not every unmarried woman is just waiting for the first chance to find a husband. She values her self-respect more than having a man. Had she chosen to pursue a relationship with Curly, she probably would have ended up unhappy. So, Pania rejects society's norm of pursuing a relationship and maintains her dignity, which is more important.

Nadezhda Mikhailovna in Natalia Baranskaia's "The Kiss" is another woman who refuses to give up her self-respect and independence for a man. After divorcing her husband, she worked and raised her daughter alone. Now her daughter is grown, and Nadezhda Mikhailovna is used to the independence and control over her life which she immensely enjoys. She has had relationships with other men, but none ever worked out. It is only when she resolves to remain single that she finds an equilibrium.

Yet, when she meets Viktor, she cannot help but think "how good it [would be] to abandon oneself into such strong, firm and reliable hands."¹⁰ They kiss and he says that he will call her. He does not call at first, though, and Nadezhda is very distraught. She is upset with him because he is a typical man, and she is upset with herself because

¹⁰ Natalia Baranskaia, "The Kiss," trans. Wanda Sorgente, in Balancing Acts, p. 1.

of her reaction. She feels dumped, even though she had not wanted a relationship or asked for one. She knows that she is an attractive, successful woman, and the fact that someone she hardly knows can rock her equilibrium angers her.

But, when Viktor does call, she hears herself agreeing to have him over for dinner, though that was not really what she wanted. She turns down an invitation from her daughter to come over and prepares the dinner. While getting ready, she starts to think about how she knows nothing about this man. Maybe she likes him now, but what about later?:

What if after spending the night with her, he suddenly says that he intends to move in? Or the other way round: he'll disappear one morning and never come back. But before leaving her, he'll become inattentive and forgetful, while she'll be suspicious and jealous.¹¹

She would worry about her age and lose the independence she had worked so hard for. Why should she let a total stranger interrupt her life and rob her of her happiness? Once she puts the finishing touches on the table and contemplates taking some valium, she decides the entire thing is absurd. She leaves and goes to her daughters to have a nice evening.

It is possible to say that Nadezhda is just afraid of becoming involved in a relationship and by refusing to take

¹¹ Ibid, p. 5.

a chance, she denies herself possible happiness. Since she has had so many unsuccessful relationships, she has reason to be suspicious. By remaining single, she saves herself the pain of a possible bad relationship and preserves her independence, self-respect and happiness. She is in fact happy with her life, so why should she try to change it, just because society would like to see her married? She has worked so hard to get where she is. She owes it to herself to do what will make her the happiest, and for Nadezhda that is living on her own.

Finally, in Tokareva's "A Coincidence" ("Stechenie obstoiatel'stv") Auntie Klava is presented as a woman who never married and who turns down the chance when it is offered to her. Unlike the other women in the stories, Auntie Klava is not very happy. She lives alone, has few friends and little to do. Nothing ever turns out for her. She is the type of person who can never fall in love with the right person, who, if she gets sick, will have complications, and who, if she stands in a line, watches the product sell out right in front of her. People look down on her because she is a little old maid. While standing on the bus, (she was always the only person standing) a young girl looks at her as if to say, "Isn't it boring to be so fat and to wear such a silly hat."¹²

¹² Viktoria Tokareva, "Stechenie obstoiatel'stv" in Nichego osobennogo: Povesti i rasskazy, p. 95.

Yet, Auntie Klava once fell in love. She loved a man named Edik, whom she chased as fast as he could run. However, he stopped running eventually, and they became engaged before he went off to the war. She never heard from him again and assumed he was dead. Edik did not die, though. He just did not write to her.

One night after all those years, he calls Auntie Klava wanting to see her. Edik finally wants to marry her. His wife died, and he does not want to grow old alone. But, he is not the same person she used to love. Edik is different, and Auntie Klava does not like the person he has become. If she married him now, she would betray her past love to him, and she would betray herself. She had wanted a certain person for a husband, and though Edik was that person, he no longer could be her husband, because he had changed. Like all of the other women, Auntie Klava is also better off staying alone, even when her life is not very happy. She chooses her self-respect and pride over a husband and again shows that not all single women will marry at the first chance they get.

CHAPTER VI

DIVORCE

Given the number of marriages that fail each year in the Soviet Union, it seems that women might be better off remaining single. In Soviet society divorce is extremely common. Where previously women tended to stay in unhappy and unhealthy marriages, they are now using divorce as a way to find happiness. Almost one-third of all marriages end in divorce, and in large cities such as Moscow and Leningrad, the figure rises to one-half. According to Women, Work and Family in the Soviet Union, one-third of all divorces take place early in the marriage, with one-third happening during the first year and another one-third during the first five years.¹ The fact that women are seeking divorce more and more is reflected in the statistic that 70% of the time divorce is filed by women.²

The reasons for the extremely high divorce rate in the USSR are numerous. A list of the most common marital

1 A.G. Kharchev and M.S. Matskovskii, "Changing Family Roles and Marital Instability," trans. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, in Women, Work, and Family in the Soviet Union (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), p. 198.

2 Schlapentokh, Love, Marriage and Friendship in the Soviet Union, p. 208.

problems in Soviet families reads like a list from any other country: incompatibility, alcoholism, infidelity, loss of former affection, love for another person, sexual problems, etc. These problems have not changed in years. One particular Soviet problem that accounts for many divorces is the fact that many young people marry too quickly. When they get to know each other, they find that they are incompatible. According to Vladimir Schlapentokh, 71% of divorced couples had been acquainted with their spouse for less than a year before marriage. Of those couples who remain married, only 39% of them had known each other for less than a year before getting married.³

Society's view of divorce has relaxed during recent years. What was once unacceptable, especially for women to initiate, is now seen as a perfectly acceptable way to solve the problem of an unhappy marriage. No longer are divorces the exception. As a result, society has adopted a tolerant and casual attitude toward them which has, in effect, also changed the way people view marriage. When divorces were not as common, marriage was regarded more seriously. But, with the new relaxed attitude, people feel that if worse comes to worst, and a marriage cannot be salvaged, then it can just be ended.

³ Ibid, p.

The ease with which divorces can be obtained has helped to foster this casual attitude. If two people "mutually agree to divorce and have no minor children [they] can obtain a divorce certificate from their local registry office (ZAGS) at a charge of 50 roubles."⁴ If one partner contests or there are children, then "the dispute must go to a court which can try to reconcile the couple and postpone the proceedings for up to six months in order that a reconciliation may be attempted."⁵

Another reason why women have begun to initiate divorce more often is that they are not as terrified of the idea of being without a husband. Since almost all women work, they are financially independent. This allows them to break from their husbands and not to fear being in financial dire straits as a result. However, most women assume that their single status will be only temporary. Because marriage is so highly regarded, most women fully intend to remarry. Many want to do so as soon as possible, and marriages often appear to become interchangeable. Not nearly as many women remarry as think they will, though. As previously cited, only 41% of the women versus 48% of the men remarry.

⁴ Peer, "Workers by Hand and Womb" in Soviet Sisterhood, p. 133.

⁵ Ibid, p. 133.

Clearly, the gap between divorces and second marriages is large.

Women have also become less willing to tolerate bad husbands than they were in the past. With women's educational level rising, a new image of the ideal husband has also emerged. Women desire mutual love, happiness, and husbands who help with the housework and child care, who listen to them and who are their friends. The previous idea that it is better to tolerate a man's drinking, abuse, laziness and other bad habits in exchange for at least having a husband is going out of style. Authors and directors have reinforced this idea of getting rid of bad husbands by presenting women who end their unhappy marriages to seek personal happiness as heroines.⁶ However, the problem still remains that there is a gap between what women desire in an ideal spouse and the reality of what they usually are left to marry. Most Soviet men do not fit the mold of the ideal husband and do not intend to try to. While good men do exist, there are not enough of them, and so women often end up with something less than what they wanted. Therefore, these marriages often times end in divorce.

⁶ Schlapentokh, Love, Friendship and Marriage in the Soviet Union, p. 208.

Finally, the fact that Soviet families are small has also led to an increase in divorces. The average family consists of one or two children. Yet, the more children a family has, the less likely it is that the parents will divorce, according to Women, Work and Family in the Soviet Union.⁷ Children cement a family together, and the fact that people are having fewer of them and having them later in the marriage, also causes more divorces. It is much easier to end a divorce when a couple has no children. Since a large proportion of divorces happen during the first few years of marriage, having no children makes it even more likely that a couple will divorce.

The fact that couples do not live with their in-laws during their later married years also contributes to more divorces. Where living with in-laws in fact increases marital problems during the early years of marriage, having elderly people in the household later on in the marriage actually tends to stabilize the family. The reason for this is that once the in-laws have retired, they have lots of time to help out with housework and childcare, lifting this burden from busy working mothers and making their lives easier. During the early marital years, however, the in-laws are still working and have no time themselves to do

⁷ Kharchev and Matskovskii, "Changing Family Roles and Marital Instability" in Women, Work and Family in the Soviet Union, p. 199.

housework or care for grandchildren. How these duties are to be divided is a source of extra conflict that puts strain on young marriages.

There are still some women, however, who even when faced with an unhappy marriage, choose to remain in it instead of seeking a divorce. The reasons why a woman would decide to do this vary from person to person, but there are a few common ones. Fear of being alone is a big reason. Many women fear that they will not be able to remarry, and this fear of the unknown seems much worse than staying with an unsatisfying spouse. Because of the strong emphasis placed on marriage in Soviet society, for some women taking the risk of remaining unwed seems to be a worse threat than remaining unhappy. Not only do women fear being unwed, but they dread the thought of their children growing up without a father. Many times they feel that a bad father is better than no father at all, and therefore, "if a father is essential, one may have to live with a man one doesn't love to keep the family intact."⁸ Finally, if a woman is financially dependent upon her husband, then the option of divorce becomes almost impossible.

In fiction the reasons why women choose or do not choose to divorce their husbands are the same as they are in reality. The authors all share the consensus that it is

⁸ Hansson and Linden, Moscow Women, p. 20.

better to get out of an unhealthy marriage than to try and endure it if it is unsalvageable, because no good will come of the situation in the end. Female writers tend to focus more on this problem of the fear of ending a bad marriage than on actual divorces themselves. The stories "Such a Nice Girl" ("Takaia devochka"), "The Happiest Day" ("Samyi shchastlivyi den'") and "Nothing Special" all feature women who want to end their marriages, but for some reason have not done so. Only the story "Between Heaven and Earth" presents a woman who is actually divorced.

The main character in Liudmila Petrushevskaya's "Such a Nice Girl" is an unnamed woman who is trapped in a terrible marriage. Her husband Petrov, constantly has affairs with other women and flaunts them to his wife. The first time she learned of his infidelity she was crushed and almost threw herself from a third floor window. However, then she grew used to the idea and realized that Petrov would not leave her. He knows that she would not register out of their one-room apartment, and if he is to ever get a two-room one, he needs her. Therefore, she has no reason to fear him deserting her.

When he is not involved in an affair, Petrov stays home in the evenings and is a decent husband and father. He helps her with their son, Sasha, and they even enjoy normal marital relations. But, she always knows that he will find

another woman, and the cycle will start up again. Finally, when Petrov does leave to live with another woman, instead of allowing him to go, she panics, feeling that she "is losing everything, the whole world."⁹ For her, though, Petrov is her whole world, and she feels that if she gives him up she will lose everything she loves. These fears are what keep her tied to Petrov.

Most of all she fears her son Sasha growing up without a father. Even though Petrov is not the best father, he still loves his son and spends time with him. Sasha needs a man around, and she knows that he would miss a man's ways, voice and presence. Right now Sasha loves his mother and will love her unconditionally, but once he discovers that it is she who deprived him of his father, he would leave her. She realizes that this fear is "the very worst wound for [her], and that perhaps it was precisely because of it that [she] continually clung to Petrov."¹⁰

She also knows that Petrov leaving means that she loses not only her husband and the father of her child, but also loses "the hope of a two-room apartment, that [she] had so passionately longed for and which [she] had even seen in dreams."¹¹ In a world that is devoid of nice things, a two-

⁹ Liudmila Petrushevskaja, "Takaia devochka" in Ogonek, No. 40, 1988, p.11.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 11.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 11.

room apartment is a luxury that many women would love to have. The opportunity of obtaining it makes it worth staying with Petrov. But, without him, there would be no apartment. Even worse, she and Sasha would have no place to live at all. She would be a single-mother and with that would come all of the negative social connotations and judgments. It is definitely better from her point of view for Petrov to come home. Let him continue his affairs, but at least he would be there for Sasha, and they could still get the two-room apartment. That is definitely better than total absence.

Therefore, she talks her best friend Raisa into convincing Petrov to come home and he does. The woman is only to learn that she has been further betrayed. Petrov has been sleeping with Raisa. This changes nothing, however. She will endure any humiliation to keep her marriage together and preserve what she holds as important. Therefore, she remains trapped in this unhappy existence, resolved to settle for much less than what she deserves. Resolve and endurance are very common characteristics of Soviet women, which while they can help women to survive the difficult situations they face in society, can also lead them to believe that they are incapable of changing their lives.

Nadezhda in "Nothing Special" by Viktoria Tokareva is another woman who suffers from this apathetic acceptance of her life. She too is trapped in a miserable marriage but does nothing to change the situation. At age 55, Nadezhda knows that her life offers nothing and holds little to look forward to. She is married to Ivan Petrovich, a doctor, and he all but hates her. He maybe even hates her. Their marriage is horrible, and it is possible to say that Nadezhda had put herself in the position for an unhappy life long ago.

Ivan and Nadezhda married because she was pregnant. She made no demands on him, and he could not leave her once he knew she was carrying their child. However, he did not love her. The only grudge he had against her was that "she was not the one. Yet, she wanted to take her place."¹² Perhaps Nadezhda hoped that Ivan would come to love her, but he never did. His resentment grew into hatred, and both ended up miserable together.

However, instead of taking action to get out of such a bad situation, Nadezhda does nothing except feel "sorry for herself, for her life, devoid of affection."¹³ She wants to start over, but knows that she is too old. No one would

¹² Viktoria Tokareva, "Nothing Special", in Balancing Acts, p.60.

¹³ Ibid, p. 61.

want her. So, she goes on in her miserable existence resolved that nothing can be done no matter how unhappy she might be. Besides, she is no worse off than any of her friends. No one else was happy, and "that meant that she was like everybody and could go on living."¹⁴

However, this fails to make her situation better or right. It just shows that the problem of women being unhappy and failing to do something to change their lives is widespread. Nadezhda and her friends do not see this though:

They [seek] evil not within themselves but around them....Neither one wanted to admit to herself or to the other that she was not in her proper niche. It was too late to set anything right. A ruined, twisted life. ¹⁵

This certainty that their lives cannot be changed traps Nadezhda and other women like her. Divorce is not considered because it is not even an option where they are concerned. They chose their lives, and now they must suffer the consequences. This can only lead to endless misery.

Tokereva presents a very different woman in "The Happiest Day" ("Samyi shchastlivyi den"). She too is unhappy in her marriage, but unlike Nadezhda, she is not willing just to accept an unhappy situation. She wants to

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 61

divorce her husband, but hesitates because of her daughter and also because their marriage is not intolerable. While she and her husband do not get along, they also do not hate each other. Her daughter Lyalya says that "they rarely argue, but that is because they hardly ever see each other. When papa is home in the evenings, mama isn't. And vice versa."¹⁶ Lyalya's mother complains of her husband not helping her enough, and of him not earning enough money.

However, the main reason she wants a divorce is not because she is truly unhappy with what she has, but because she feels that there must be something better. She wants happiness. If she is not content with her marriage and cannot resolve the problems, then the best solution must be for her to leave. She would have done so earlier, but she wanted Lyalya to have a stable childhood. Lyalya, however, does not agree that her mother is unhappy. On the contrary, she is very lucky and should be thankful for what she does have:

Where have you ever seen anyone who is 100% happy? You work across the street, love your work and everyone respects you. You have a place in life. That's already 50%. I am a good child. Healthy and mature. That's another 45%. You are healthy-1%. There you already have 96% happiness. Only 4% remains. But, where have you seen

¹⁶ Viktoria Tokereva, "Samyi shchastlivyi den'" in Nichogo osobennogo: Povesti i rasskazy, p. 167.

100% happy people? 17

Lyalya has a point. Very few people are ever 100% happy. Maybe her mother should consider her life better than what most people have and just accept the fact that it would be very hard to obtain the remaining 4% of happiness. Perhaps her marriage is not so bad. But, at the same time, if she is willing to remain in an unfulfilling marriage out of fear of ending up in a worse situation, she is in fact guaranteeing unhappiness for herself. She already knows that she is unsatisfied with her husband and has not been happy with him for a long time. That will most likely not change. Accepting the situation and refusing to change it puts her in the same position as Nadezhda and the woman from "Such a Nice Girl." Therefore, if she really is unhappy with her husband, then the only way for her to improve her life is to seek a divorce from him.

The only story that presents a divorce is Tokareva's "Between Heaven and Earth." The reason for its cause is a very common one in the USSR--marriage at an early age. While Natasha is waiting for her plane to Baku to meet her current lover, she remembers her first marriage. They married when she was just 18, and he was 20. Their marriage lasted for only eight months. Natasha attributes their problems to such a sudden marriage and the fact that they

17 Ibid, p. 169.

had nothing in common, except mutual attraction. Once their "passion subsided, their river became shallow, the bottom was exposed, and on the bottom was all kinds of garbage and worthless junk."¹⁸

Once they realized that their relationship had a shallow basis, constant arguments followed. Nadezhda felt that since she was very beautiful, her husband should treat her accordingly. He, however, refused to worship her beauty, since it was only temporary. Only love and fidelity were forever, and Natasha was still too young to understand this. The main problem was that "he was a husband for future maturity. He didn't quite suit her right now but then, later, he'd be just right. But at eighteen it's impossible to think about later."¹⁹ So, being unwilling and unable to work things out, Natasha divorced her husband. She naively believed that it was all right to throw away her marriage and start over again without any second thoughts. After all she was young. "Then it seemed that everything was still to come and that everything lay ahead."²⁰

Natasha's casual attitude toward divorce is very common, especially among young women. They often feel that

¹⁸ Viktoria Tokareva, "Between Heaven and Earth", trans. Helena Goscilo, in Balancing Acts, p. 273.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 274.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 284.

if a first marriage does not work out, then the best solution is to end it quickly instead of wasting time trying to work it out. They believe that they can go find a new husband to replace the first one, even though they speak of a shortage of good men. However, they assume that they will somehow overcome this problem and find a new man despite the odds against it. Natasha also believes that this is what she will do too. Finding someone else to marry would be quick and easy. "All she had to do was go outside and shout: 'I want to get married!' And immediately crowds would congregate and form a long line."²¹ Natasha soon finds that her self-confidence is very naive. She is not the only woman looking for a husband and happiness, and very few women actually end up finding the perfect person. While it is possible to find men to marry, it is very hard to find someone worth loving.

Natasha does end up finding happiness, however, and as a result of her previous experiences, she learns that a relationship must be taken care of and worked at if it is to endure. When faced with the opportunity to end her current relationship, she does not do so. She knows from past experiences that it is unlikely she will find happiness twice.

²¹ Ibid, p. 276.

Natasha is lucky, for many women never do find happiness or better husbands. While Tokareva is not saying that women should stay in unsuccessful marriages because they might end up being alone, she is emphasizing that they should consider trying to work out their marriages before they are ended. People need to take a more serious attitude towards marriage before they enter into it and then work together to make it last. If this were done, then fewer divorces would occur. Conversely, as she has shown in her other stories, when marriages cannot be worked out, a woman is better off alone than with a bad husband.

CHAPTER VII

INFIDELITY

One of the major causes of divorce of Soviet society is infidelity, and women are having extra-marital affairs more often than one might imagine. Besides having simple casual affairs, women are falling in love with other men when they already have families of their own. How a woman chooses to allow these relationships to affect her marriage and her life can play a big role in determining her ultimate happiness.

Infidelity used to be something that men did to their wives, while it remained unacceptable for women to do the same. In Moscow Women, a woman interviewed admits that "there's hardly a man who can manage to be faithful. That of course goes for my husband as well."¹ But when asked how he would respond if she were to have an affair, she responds that "it would devastate him. He can't even imagine me becoming interested in another man."² However, today more and more Soviet women are being unfaithful to their husbands.

¹ Hansson and Liden, Moscow Women, p. 171.

² Ibid, p. 171.

There are a number of factors that have led to this increase in frequency of extra-marital affairs. One is that a moral relaxation has occurred. While marriage still assumes fidelity, what was previously viewed as immoral is now being viewed more often as a normal development or consequence in marriage. With women's personalities continually being developed and enriched as a result of having a career and more contact with other people, the double standard of allowing men to pursue affairs, while women must remain faithful, is being rejected. Many women admit that the majority of their friends have at one time had an extra-marital affair. (When trying to discuss fidelity during my interviews, women were often reluctant to do so, and would speak of it only in a general sense or how it affected other women's lives. If a woman's husband were present, the subject was not discussed, even in general terms. They seem to feel that if they discuss it in front of their husbands, even if they have not had an affair, they will somehow be viewed negatively.) The fact that most women work also puts them in contact with many men, and thus, they are provided with the opportunity to meet men who are their equals. Their spouses are invariably compared to these men and, often, their colleagues seem more interesting.

Soviet couples also often vacation separately, which increases the frequency and likelihood of infidelity. This occurrence is the result of state planning, and many times spouses cannot get the same month off, thus being forced to vacation separately. However, when asked their preference, less than one third of Leningraders polled by Vladimir Schlapentokh, wanted to vacation with their marital partners. No less than half of the respondents wanted to vacation alone. These statistics increase as the level of education of the respondents rises too.³ Furthermore, many Soviet spouses spend their leisure time away from their spouses, thus increasing the chance of infidelity further.

When an affair has begun, it is considered in the poorest taste to make the relationship known. Only the best of friends are informed and under no circumstances are these people allowed to inform the spouse of the partner's affair. This need to lie is made simpler by the very structure of Soviet society. People are required to lie all of the time to their bosses, colleagues and others; thus, it becomes simpler to lie to one's spouse.

However, while the frequency of infidelity has definitely increased, there still remains a negative attitude towards purely casual affairs. What is more

³ Schlapentokh, Love, Marriage and Friendship in the Soviet Union, p. 108.

acceptable is a romantic love affair. In a 1979 survey, 40% of the respondents said that they consider it acceptable for married people to engage in sex outside of marriage with people that they like. In the U.S. 73% said that it was always wrong.⁴ (In newly published surveys, now around 97% of Americans say that it is always wrong to be unfaithful. However, because more recent figures cannot be obtained about the Soviets' attitudes, the older figures are used for the sake of comparison.) When Soviet women were asked, many felt that a woman has the right to seek love outside of marriage if she is not happy with her spouse, and if she falls in love she should be allowed to leave her husband in order to pursue her happiness. "Why should a woman stay with her husband if she no longer loves him? It is more honest to leave him."⁵

But, what happens when a woman has children and a husband who is not a bad person? Should her pursuit of personal happiness and her new found love be allowed to take precedence over her obligation to her family? While women emphasize the need to find love, they at the same time feel that it is wrong for a woman to abandon her children in order to pursue her own happiness. To do so, she will have to bring a lot of pain to many people, and thus, before an

⁴ Ibid, p. 116.

⁵ Interview with Marina Georgievna.

extra-marital affair begins, the effect of it needs to be considered. A woman has the right to be happy, but she should decide if she is actually unhappy in her marriage or just bored and desiring a distraction from life's reality. Is a chance at happiness worth the pain that she will bring to her husband and children? Is it worth taking her children away from their father or leaving them in order to pursue a new relationship? A mother is expected to place her obligations to her children above everything else, and a wife is supposed to value her marriage. But, if a woman is not happy with her husband shouldn't she have the right to pursue a better relationship? These are some of the questions that women are forced to face when they fall in love with another man.

Clearly concerned about the turn in the moral tide and the casual attitude being taken towards marriage, Liudmila Uvarova and Viktoria Tokareva have both written stories that deal with the issue of infidelity and a woman's obligation to her family. They present three different women who when confronted with the same decision about entering into an extra-marital affair, choose different courses of action.

Liudmila Uvarova's story "Midlife Crisis" ("Sumerki posle poludnia") is the story of a woman who falls in love with another man and leaves her husband and children for him. From the very beginning, it is clear that Uvarova

disapproves of Kuzia's actions. She is a perfect example of a bad mother and wife. Not being able to cook, keep house and write her dissertation, she leaves her daughter and husband to run the household. She even wants to put her son in a boarding school so that she will not have to pick him up daily. She is also an emotionally immature woman whose emotions go from one extreme to the other very quickly, and it often seems that she is the youngest in the family, needing a lot of care.

The man she falls in love with is a distant relative of her husband's who is very much his inferior. Her children dislike him immediately, naming him "fig tree," which according to Galina Anatolievna is a common symbol of disorder in Russian literature.⁶ He is a very shallow person, and when he begins flattering Kuzia and buying her expensive gifts, she quickly falls in love with him. Her decision to leave her family follows soon after.

She turns to her daughter more like a friend and tells her that she is leaving them. When her daughter cannot understand or condone what she is doing, Kuzia becomes very upset. She is not distraught about leaving, but rather that her daughter judges her instead of being happy about her new found happiness. Even her tears seem insincere to Lyalya:

It suddenly seemed to me that she was

6 Interview with Galina Anatolievna.

acting. It was as if she was observing herself from the side and watching with great pleasure her own suffering. I even almost said to her, 'You're such an actress, Kuzia'.⁷

Instead of feeling compassion, all Lyalya can do is feel sorry for her mother, because Kuzia does not feel sorry for her family. She is leaving them, without really thinking twice about it and is assuming that they will do just fine without her.

In fact, they do quite all right without her. The children have a wonderful father who takes much better care of Lyalya and Arkashka than his wife ever could. However, they all suffer a lot because of Kuzia. The father hides his pain and refuses to let anyone feel sorry for him. Arkashka does not want to have anything more to do with his mother, and Lyalya who is unable to stop loving her mother wavers between feelings of love and hate.

Kuzia stays away for a long time and then comes to see her children so that she can ease her guilt. If she knows that they are all right, then she can enjoy herself without any worries. But what she finds is that they are still upset with her for leaving. Kuzia cannot understand how her own daughter fails to be glad for her finding happiness. But, how can Lyalya be happy, and why should she be? Her

⁷ Liudmila Uvarova, "Sumerki posle poludnia" in Ot mira sego: Roman, povesti, rasskazy (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), p. 18.

mother left them and turned her back on her obligation to them as a mother without thinking about how they might be affected. Her own happiness is more important than theirs, and she even denies them of their right to be angry with her.

When Kuzia leaves after her visit with them, Lyalya and Arkashka stand at the window and wonder if she will turn around to look back at the house that used to be her home:

Does she guess that we are standing
and watching her as we always watched
her before? Or has she already forgotten
to think about us and quickly is
hurrying off to her own new home?...⁸

A truck pulls up obstructing their view of her. When it pulls away, she is already gone, so they never know if she looked back. But, it is safe to guess that Kuzia probably did not.

Had she taken her children with her, Kuzia probably would not have been viewed so negatively. Most women who leave their husbands assume custody of their children, which is accepted by society. To leave one's husband and at the same time desert one's children is seen as being not only extremely selfish and egoistical, but also as being contrary to a woman's basic nature. Uvarova makes it clear that what Kuzia chooses to do is unacceptable.

⁸ Ibid, p.65.

Uvarova's other story "Love" presents Maria, another woman faced with the same choices as Kuzia. However, she is a woman with a conscience and instead of blindly following her heart, she contemplates her choices. Fillipov is a man she meets while on a business trip. Both of them are happily married with children, but they fall in love despite that. Neither of them had ever done anything to hurt their spouses before, and when they realize the situation they are in, neither one of them knows what to do.

Instead of being happy that they are in love and have found each other, they realize how their lives have suddenly been turned upside down. In order to pursue their love and be together, they will have to destroy the lives of the people they love the most. Fillipov says of his wife, "It's awful. It's not her fault in any way." Maria replies, "I wish Feodor were guilty, too. Of something, anything. Even the most stupid little thing."⁹ But, neither of their spouses did anything wrong, and Maria and Fillipov just happened to fall in love. Now that they love each other, they will have to decide if what they have justifies ruining their spouses' lives, or if they are better off just trying to forget about each other. However, if Maria and Fillipov really are in love, will they be able

⁹ Liudmila Uvarova, "Love," trans. Regina Snyder, in Balancing Acts, p.85.

to be as happy as they previously were when they know that they now love each other? Realizing the choices that they will have to make, they both admit that it would be better if they had never met.

Maria returns home, and Feodor meets her at the train station, flowers in hand. She knows that she must tell him. What they had "was real, without counterfeit, without pretense..."¹⁰ But, what Maria had with Feodor is gone, whether she stays or not. Their relationship has changed, and what was once good can no longer be. A betrayal has come between them, and Maria knows that since she must tell Feodor, he will suffer regardless of her decision. She too will suffer and so will Fillipov and his wife and children. Love, which is supposed to bring the ultimate happiness, has brought more pain than joy. Realizing all of this, Maria cries, Feodor guesses everything, and her decision is never known.

However, whether or not Maria leaves her husband is not important. Uvarova's main point is that it is a very serious action when a person chooses to enter into an extra-marital affair even without the intent of destroying a family over it. It will cause a lot of pain, and the marriage will never be quite the same again as a result. Therefore, Uvarova emphasizes that people must decide if

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 87.

personal happiness is really worth seeking when it comes at the expense of the suffering of innocent people and all parties involved.

In "Between Heaven and Earth", Viktoria Tokareva presents a woman who, unlike Kuzia and Maria, decides that the obligation she feels to her lover Kitaev is stronger than her attraction to a young man. She meets the young basketball player while flying to meet Kitaev in Baku. The two feel an instant attraction for each other. Natasha had never experienced such feelings before and cannot believe she feels such strong passion for a person she just met. However, "everything that was happening between them seemed natural, and even the only thing possible."¹¹ They talk, share a kiss, and then despite her overwhelming desire for the basketball player, Natasha gets off the plane in Baku and goes to Kitaev, much to the basketball player's surprise.

Natasha's feelings for Kitaev are calm compared to her passion for the basketball player. Kitaev's kiss "didn't reach her heart, but stayed on her lips."¹² However, she loves him and is happy with him. After her first marriage, she discovered that it is not easy to find someone to love

¹¹ Viktoria Tokareva, "Between Heaven and Earth", p. 279.

¹² Ibid, p. 283.

and be happy with. In fact, it is very hard. Everyone is "busy searching for happiness, but few find it. At most dozens...or even hundreds..."¹³ But, when Natasha fell in love with Kitaev, she managed to fall into that elite group of people who actually do find happiness. After searching for it for so long, it would be a great risk to throw it away for a chance at passion and excitement. Perhaps, Natasha would be happy with the basketball player, but she would have to hurt Kitaev in order to pursue this new relationship.

The obligation that she feels to him is greater than her desire for passion. Natasha says that "people and obligations are intertwined with each other, as are the earth and the trees."¹⁴ A person cannot pull up a tree without planting a new one or else a gaping hole will be left in the earth. The same thing holds true for obligations to another person. They cannot just be chopped off at whim expecting that no repercussion will follow. Natasha did that with her first marriage, but she was young then and everything was ahead of her. But, now that she is older, there is a lot at stake for her to just end a good fulfilling relationship with Kitaev in hopes of attaining passion that probably will not last.

¹³ Ibid, p. 276.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 284.

In the past Viktoria Tokareva would probably have sided with following romantic love, says Galina Anatolievna.¹⁵ However, with so many women choosing to follow their hearts and disregard their obligations to their husbands and children, it is clear that Tokareva and Uvarova have adopted the other side on the issue of infidelity. Not only women, but men too need to reexamine the meaning of marriage and to decide what value it holds in their lives. If a more serious, moralistic attitude were adopted, then there would be fewer divorces and more people might end up being happy with their own spouse instead of forever searching for the ideal mate.

¹⁵ Interview with Galina Anatolievna.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

After having discussed these six problems and the short stories that deal with them, it is clear that the attitudes of female writers differ in many ways from those typically held by Soviet society. While women writers still hold family and children as being sacred and all-important, single women are not regarded as inhuman. Women are encouraged by female authors to hold out and wait for a good husband, instead of succumbing to society's pressure to marry at all costs and at the first opportunity. Female writers frown upon society's moral decay and promiscuity, and encourage women to uphold their obligations to their children and husbands by not engaging in extra-marital affairs. While women are in no way encouraged to stay in unhappy marriages, women writers urge Soviet women to carefully think over a divorce before initiating it.

The difference in attitudes on such major social issues is not coincidental. Women writers purposely present these alternative and moralistic views on Soviet life as an attempt to enlighten and influence Soviet women. The readers see themselves in these stories. They also see how

the all-too-typical Soviet tendencies to passively endure unhappiness, to escape unsatisfying marriages through infidelity or to stay with a bad partner are not helping women to lead happier lives. Apathy is not a solution. Half the problem in Soviet society is that people feel powerless and helpless to make any real changes in their lives. They accept their unhappiness with a sense of fatalism. However, Soviet women must realize that they are not doomed to unhappy existences. They can improve their lives, even if these improvements are only small. But, first they must believe that they can and be willing to try.

If women are to ever attain the happiness that they so desire, then new solutions to their problems must be sought. By presenting alternative attitudes towards Soviet norms, female writers force women to question their lives and how they deal with their problems. The authors do not presume to provide women with the answers of how they can lead happier lives, since they themselves do not know what these solutions are. They will not be found quickly either. However, imaginative and fresh thinking can lead to creative ideas, decisions and actions. Therefore, as a result of beginning to think about and question their lives, women are more likely to find new and better solutions to their problems.

Women's writing is but one factor that is helping to enlighten and influence society. Alone, its effect would not be very strong; but when combined with the other forces of glasnost and the hopes of perestroika, the results are encouraging. As a result of the changes that are beginning to take place in the Soviet Union, women are now more hopeful of eventually becoming happier people. They are not so willing to accept blindly their fates and are beginning to seek new solutions to everyday problems. While their lives are far from ideal, women have begun to believe that change is possible. Therefore, the fiction of women writers depicts more than just a portrait of Soviet life. It portrays a new and better way of life for Soviet women.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your daily schedule like? For example what did you do yesterday?
2. Do you work? Do you like your work? Why did you choose your profession?
3. Do women have any problems at work that men do not have?
4. Are there typical women's professions in the USSR?
5. What role does work play in your life?
6. Who's work is more important--yours or your husband's?
7. Do you think that men and women have the same goals in life?
8. How much time do you spend on housework each week? How much time does your husband spend on it?
9. How much free time do you have each week? How much does your husband have?
10. What is the average age of marriage in the Soviet Union? Why do people get married at early ages? Is there pressure to do so?
11. How do people view single women? Single men?
12. What are the main reasons for divorce? How does society view divorce?
13. What do you want in a husband? Is it realistic to find such a man?
14. Do you have any children? How many children would you like to have? Could you imagine your life without children?
15. How long did you stay home with your kids after they were born? If it was possible, would you have preferred to stayed home with them instead of returning to work?

16. What should a good mother be like?
17. What should a good father be like?
18. What is the ideal woman like?
19. What does equality mean to you?
20. Which women's problems are the most important right now?
21. What sort of changes would you like to see take place?
22. Do women discuss women's problems together?
23. What are your dreams? Do you think they can be realized?
24. How common is infidelity? Why does it happen? How does society view it?

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