

Tatiana Romanov: remember the GOOD times

I always looked forward to the start of a new year. When new beginnings were a new experience, a choice, a goal. New beginnings. Now I hate the words, as I am led into that room, told to stand in a line, with family on either side. A firing squad is assembled in front of us, eleven in total. The world becomes dark but all I see is light, as the bullets rain down on me. I feel no pain, only warmth and peace –

At the beginning of the year 1917, the snowdrops had just bloomed. I would run out every morning like always and see Papa out for his morning walk. Each day went like clockwork. Wake up, see Papa, breakfast, class, lunch, class, read, dinner, bed. It was all I ever knew. I never saw the outside world apart from the street I travelled down to greet Papa in the mornings. I never knew what was going on. That my family was losing their country, or that we even ruled one at all.

I thought I knew that past so well, and saw it as a darker time than at the beginning, but I was so wrong. The dark days have just begun, and the happy days were that past, I just didn't know it yet...

23rd of February. Morning. I ran down those stairs I knew so well, past my siblings and straight to the door, ready to greet Papa. The door was locked. Papa never came. I remember screaming and yelling, begging Mama to tell me where he was. Of course, the answer was always the same.

"Papa's away darling. He'll be home soon, I'm sure of it." The fact is, she wasn't sure and every day would look a lot darker than the previous.

He did return, but it wasn't a happy reunion. All the warmth seeped from the house, replaced by an angry chill that spread until it was more like living in an ice palace than a humble abode. The world froze and sat for a rest, like it had given up on him, like the rest of us. Mama argued with him all the time he was there. Shouting. Screaming. Swearing.

That visit resulted in our taking off to an isolated place. Mama said it was a better place. Bigger. Prettier. Happy. There were bad people in the world and she was keeping us safe. But, why would the bad people come after us?

And so, the shadow of bad times followed us. It became a wild beast that took a new identity nearly every minute, and my constant questions of curiosity would be answered with silence. May. No-one shared a resemblance with their past selves. After ten house moves I wasn't sure where home was, I didn't know who I was. My belongings were swapped numerous times and what made me was gone.

I would never see Papa again. His was a ghost himself in a house of people. His voice in another room kept him alive. I always caught occasional words passed between him and another, a stranger; - abdication, flee, Lenin, Bolsheviks, exile, United Kingdom. I was too young to know what they meant then. I daren't tell Mama. I had already heard her asking whether we were moving to Britain and she had once told us to start learning to speak English properly for some reason, but it was soon forgotten altogether.

August. I was told quietly by my mother that we were to go to Tobolsk in the Urals. I remember asking if we were running away from something. She said that we have been running for a long time, with no escape.

The house was situated in wilderness. It was foreign to me. A refuge for seven months. Every day many people would come and go to the house, all wearing the same grim faces and 'all of them important' said my mother. I was confused with what was happening and a sad, silent atmosphere had fallen over the household which made me feel like I was losing my life already. We were being chased by ghosts and shadows, as we never saw whom we were running away from.

I am still waiting. Waiting as 1918 brings a new year, waiting as our food portions get smaller and smaller, waiting as we say goodbye to ten of our servants as we can no longer afford to pay them, waiting to know why I am here and waiting, for them.

We move once again. It is the 30th of April and the town of Yekaterinburg. Our final destination; Ipatiev House. It is different here, the way we are handled and treated. I know we are imprisoned here. I can feel it. Guards walk the length of house, keeping us in.

17th of July 1918. I was woken up at 02.00 and led down to the half-basement room at the far end of the house...

My whole life is whizzing through my head as I stare at the eleven men assembled before me, all dressed similarly in a grey subversive uniform aiming fire-arms at my family and myself. I stare in shocked silence as one man calls the orders for the execution. If anything, this moment in time hurts less than I had always thought it would. It is as if I am a light and someone decided to turn me off so I can no longer feel, see or hear. The moments of impact when the bullets hit me feels like a wave of wind pushing me back, slowly and then all at once. But I feel nothing and I see only white, a white pure light that seems safe and for once in the last year, peaceful. I may not understand what my life was on this earth and it is way past confusing. But, who does understand? We are what we are on this earth and, once through it, there is no going ba –