



*Klara Volarić (Ed.)*

# The Istanbul Letters of Alka Nestoroff

**MEMORIA.** FONTES MINORES AD HISTORIAM IMPERII OTTOMANICI PERTINENTES

Edited by Richard Wittmann

*For Matilda Ružić (October 5, 1955 – March 9, 2015), in memoriam*



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Volume 1

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## Editor's Preface

Alka Mažuranić Nestoroff (1878 – 1971) was the wife of the Bulgarian diplomat Minčo Nestoroff (1868 – 1943), who served as First Secretary of the Bulgarian embassy in Belgrade, Istanbul, and Berlin from 1904 until 1914. They met in Belgrade in 1905 where Alka was staying with a diplomatic couple who introduced her to the diplomatic circles of the Serbian capital. They had two children: Hristo (1907 – 1969) and Thea (1913 – 1924).

Alka was part of the distinguished Croatian family Mažuranić. Her grandfather Ivan Mažuranić (1814 – 1890) was *ban* of Croatia, the most senior government official of the Croatian province in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and author of *The Death of Smail-aga Čengić*,<sup>1</sup> while her sister Ivana Brlić Mažuranić (1874-1938) is still considered to be the best Croatian children's writer, four times nominated for the Noble prize in literature. Their father Vladimir Mažuranić (1845-1928) was a distinguished Croatian lawyer and politician, a member and President of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, while their mother was Henrietta von Bernath Lendway (1842 – 1919). In addition to the above-mentioned Ivana, Alka had two more brothers Božidar (Darko, 1879 – 1952) and Želimir (Željko, 1882 – 1941) Mažuranić.

During Nestoroff's diplomatic service, Alka regularly sent letters to her family in Croatia. The letters formed part of a collection assembled under the title "Diplomatic Memories". Written in Croatian, with French and German phrases interspersed as was characteristic of the Croatian elite, the letters have been preserved as around 70 pages of type-written text.<sup>2</sup> Thirteen letters have survived, of which nine were sent from Istanbul where Nestoroff served from 1907 until 1911 three letters from 1907, five from 1908, and one from 1909. The letters are generally five to seven pages long<sup>3</sup>. They were never published but are kept as part of the family heritage by the Ružićs, the direct descendants of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, in Villa Ružić in Rijeka, Croatia. In addition to letters, the family collection, which today is open to the public<sup>4</sup> consists of thousands of books which Ivan Mažuranić and his brothers collected, their personal effects as well as belongings of the other persons who were connected to this family, including Minčo Nestoroff. The collection includes his diploma and transcript from Robert College in Istanbul, various medals as well as documents and photographs

1 The rings of Smail-aga Čengić were given as a gift to Ivan Mažuranić by the Montenegrin vojvoda Đorđe Cerović. He was the son of Novica Cerović, the Montenegrin duke who killed Smail-aga. The rings are now part of the family heritage collection in Rijeka. An English translation of the book was rendered by J. W. Wiles as *The Death of Smail Aga*; (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1925).

2 The typescript appears to be a copy made by the author herself of the original letters in manuscript form. Some editing or alterations may possibly have occurred in that process.

3 As an editorial decision we have chosen to include in this publication two earlier letters from Belgrade (1905) and Sofia (1907) as well as three letters sent from Berlin (1912/13), which as a prelude or by way of reflection provide invaluable insights into events and individuals of importance in the Istanbul letters.

4 Cf. <http://www.villaruzic.hr/>.

from his diplomatic career. Especially valuable are photographs from the Russo-Turkish war taken on the battlefield.

In these letters Alka Mažuranić experiences Istanbul from what Edward Said would have termed an Orientalist perspective. Alka, as a member of senior diplomatic circles, approaches the city and its inhabitants from a superior position, reproducing the stereotypes of the era's mainstream European travel literature and printed tour guides. According to her, Istanbul was amazing and breathtaking, but dirty and backward (no electricity, telephones etc.) with strange houses and countless street dogs, which spread disease and were the only real cleaners of the city. Kurds, as cheap manpower, are portrayed as savages and the Turks were not significantly different. Sultan Abdul-Hamid II is described as a cruel despot responsible for the Armenian massacres of 1895/96, who "looked like a monkey." Alka had a few Armenian acquaintances who survived those massacres and she describes their experiences in the letters. As a wife of a diplomat, she attended the Sultan's Muslim Friday Prayers. She vividly relates these Friday ceremonies where "fat Turkish ministers were running after the Sultan."

Furthermore, Alka describes the life of the diplomatic circles in Istanbul, the foreign diplomats and their wives, the ceremonies, and the many formal dinners. She occasionally speaks about political topics, but generally is more interested in the everyday life of Istanbul than in the political situation. However, from the beginning of 1908 she starts to mention the Young Turk movement and comments on Enver, the later Enver Pasha, as a "good looking and elegant young man" whom she met in Belgrade. She does not refer much to the Young Turk revolution, but instead to the counter-revolution and deposition of Abdülhamid in 1909, which she describes in the greatest detail. The house of the Nestoroff family was situated in Nişantaşı, close to the military academy, so Alka directly witnessed the events there.

Overall these unpublished letters are a valuable historical source, which can be mined for insights into numerous fields, including diplomatic, cultural and everyday life, urban or woman's history, just to mention a few. They vividly portray Istanbul and its inhabitants at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, they are not just interesting from this aspect; the fact that they were written from the perspective of a young Croatian woman pertaining to the elite circles makes them an even more unique source.

In the midst of the production of this volume I regret the sudden loss of Matilda Ružić. I remain ever grateful for her support in this publication of her aunt's letters. I also extend my thanks to Theodor de Canziani for giving me access to the archival materials. Their kindness in allowing me to incorporate these most interesting diplomatic memories into the Orient-Institut Istanbul's *Istanbul Memories* research project is much appreciated.

*Klara Volarić, Istanbul, June 2015*



## Custodian's Archival Note

### The Nestoroff Heritage at the Mažuranić-Brlić-Ružić Foundation-Memorial Library and Collection

At the Villa Ružić in Rijeka, Croatia, is preserved the unique memorial collection, library and archive of the Mažuranić, Brlić, Ružić, Demeter, Badovinac, Bernath-Lendway and other families that were linked by kin connections. This foundation represents an axis of political, social, cultural and artistic life of both Croatia and Central Europe. This unprecedented place today carries many functions: it is a home where family members lead their everyday life, but it also serves as a museum and cultural monument that found its place in the list of the Croatian Cultural Heritage. The family lineage includes many distinguished names: Ivan Mažuranić – the governor of Croatia and a poet; Antun Mažuranić – the linguist; Matija Mažuranić – the traveler; Dimitrije Demeter – the theatrologist; Alfred von Bernath Lendway – the inventor; Vladimir Mažuranić – the lawyer and historian of law and member of the Yugoslav, Polish and Czech Academies of Sciences; Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić – a poet and a writer, the first female member of the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences and also the most-translated Croatian writer ever. These are all personalities who form part of Croatian culture, science, art, and history.

The connections of this family to the culture of the Orient, the Ottoman Empire and Turkey are manifold. Ivan Mažuranić wrote during the romantic nineteenth century his widely known piece *The Death of Smail-aga Čengić* in which he described the death of a Turkish notable in Herzegovina. His brother Matija, after returning back from Istanbul where he built canals and bridges, passed through Bosnia and wrote the first modern Croatian travelogue *A Glance into Ottoman Bosnia*, which was published in 1844.<sup>1</sup> This travel account was published in Turkish translation in 2011 under the title *Bosna'ya Bir Bakış*. After many translations, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's 1913 novel *The Brave Adventures of Lapitch*<sup>2</sup>, which was inspired by her nephew Hristo Nestoroff (Alka's son), was finally translated into Turkish under the title *Çırak Hlapiç'in Olağanüstü Maceraları* in 2014. Very interesting is also the heritage of Alfred von Bernath Lendway, the chemist, inventor and participant in the Russo-Turkish War who left an amazing collection of war photographs from this period. On the other hand, Theodor de Canziani with the cooperation of the Croatian-Turkish Friendship Society published a monograph on the "Turkish house" in Rijeka and on the diplomatic relations between this Croatian town and the Ottoman Empire.

1 Matija Mažuranić: *Pogled u Bosnu, ili kratak put u onu krajinu, učinjen 1839 – 40: po jednom domorodcu*, Zagreb: Tiskara Ljudevita Gaja, 1842. English edition (transl. Branka Magaš): *A Glance into Ottoman Bosnia*. London: Saqi Books, 2007.

2 Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić: *Čudnovate zgrade šegrta Hlapića*. Zagreb: Hrvatskog književno-pedagoški zbor, 1913. English edition (transl. Theresa Mravintz i Branko Brusar): *The Brave Adventures of Lapitch*. New York: Henry Z. Walck Inc., 1972. Turkish edition (transl. Zinnur Ameti): *Çırak Hlapiç'in Olağanüstü Maceraları*. Istanbul: Nesin Yayınevi, 2014.

Finally, the Nestoroff heritage counts many documents, letters, graduation diplomas, photographs and manuscripts. Especially valuable is the original type-script collection “Diplomatic Memories”, which Alka Alexandra Mažuranić Nestoroff (1878 – 1971) wrote on the basis of letters, postcards and photographs. Since the death of Alka Nestoroff all her intellectual heritage has been kept by the Mažuranić-Brlić-Ružić Foundation. The key figure of this collection is Alka’s husband Dimitri Minčo Nestoroff (1868 – 1943) who, in addition to his diplomatic service in the city, was tied to Istanbul through his education at the prestigious Robert College. Of Greek ancestry and born in Kazanlık in [today’s] Bulgaria, he played a significant role as the secretary of the Bulgarian Tsar after which he started an impressive diplomatic career in Belgrade, Istanbul and Berlin. After the First World War he continued his diplomatic activities in Zagreb until his death in 1943. The couple had two children, Hristo (1907 – 1969) who spent his earliest childhood in Istanbul and Thea (1913 – 1924) who was born during their diplomatic stay in Berlin.

With great joy Matilda Ružić, the niece of Alka Nestoroff, was looking forward to the very first publication of the “Diplomatic Memories” but her illness and untimely death intervened. In her honor and with the great effort of Dr. Richard Wittmann of the Orient-Institut Istanbul and Mrs. Klara Volarić, after more than one hundred years we will be able to witness the world which is gone and depicted through the eyes of this lady of the high diplomatic society. We hope this publication will widen our views and connect people and cultures of the world.

*Theodor de Canziani,  
Custodian of the Mažuranić-Brlić-Ružić Memorial Library and Collection  
Director of the Mažuranić-Brlić-Ružić Foundation*



*Alka Nestoroff on her birthday, 17 April 1971, at the window of the Mažuranić residence, 5 Jurjevska Street, Zagreb*



## **The Istanbul Letters of Alka Nestoroff**

## Belgrade, 7 II 1905

For my loved ones only!

You're right: this is going to be a letter for the whole family.<sup>1</sup> Everything will be told in one sitting, and then I'll leave it to you to forward the letter on to all those whom – in spite of my best intentions – I do not have time to send direct news to myself. And I think about them so much! Especially about Aunt Cenika to whom I kindly ask that this letter may be given along with a kiss on her hand from me.

I often think that it would be so wonderful if you could only see me in my current leisure without a single serious worry on my mind, except only to enjoy more of what is offered here, even spontaneously to me, with open arms<sup>2</sup>.

Tinka and Lujo welcomed me heartily, just as they were welcomed at our place on 5 Jurjevska Street<sup>3</sup>.

They have settled me in a small room, which is separate from their apartment and where I have all the comfort I need for resting, sleeping, and writing letters.

Actually I am living right next to Tinka, so her entire apartment is at my disposal. It is a beautiful apartment, spacious with many surprising mistakes, however, in the division of the rooms. The kitchen is small and dark; the baby room is more or less bright; the maid's room is cold and located somewhere at the end of the apartment. The anteroom, Lujo's room and the living room, on the other hand, make up a separate charming group of rooms next to Tinka's bedroom. The dining room, in a manner of speaking, has no walls, too many doors and is dark. My room overlooks some poor courtyard that is always full of different kinds of trash from the neighboring apartments. Belgrade's specialty is building everything haphazardly<sup>4</sup> without any order or taste. Despite these constraints, Tinka arranged the apartment very nicely and in good taste, though with too many colors<sup>5</sup>. The living room, in particular, seems to me to be too intense<sup>6</sup>.

There is an easel<sup>7</sup> in the apartment with an unfinished portrait of Tinka. As for Marko Murat, who's in charge of painting this portrait, he's a very interesting person from Dubrovnik about whom I sometimes laugh so hard that it makes me cry. The portrait

1 Ger. *es soll ein Familienbrief werden*. The information in the footnotes is provided by the editor of this volume and by the series editor. Our thanks to Christopher Reid who corrected and improved our English.

2 Fre. *à bras ouverts*.

3 The family home in Zagreb.

4 Fre. *pêle-mêle*.

5 Ger. *mit viel Kunstsinn – aber zu viel Farben*.

6 Fre. *très criant*.

7 Ger. *Staffelei*.

will be austere and the exchange between the painter and the model is highly conventional. E.g. Tinka wants Marko to enlarge her modest solitaire diamonds on her ears in the portrait at all costs<sup>8</sup>. Marko categorically refuses such embellishments and says: “I paint only what I see. Put bigger solitaires on your ears and Marko will paint it precisely as he sees it”. Tinka has already confronted him with an ultimatum: “You will either portray me how I want you to or I will not sit for you anymore!” Usually he would then take the picture, slam the door and leave without saying goodbye. In a day or two, he would come back again under some pretext. A new painting session would then follow again and new humorous quarrels would ensue about the color of Tinka’s hair, lip size and Tinka’s behind<sup>9</sup>. I am curious who will win out in the end. Tinka insists that Marko will give in while he swears that he will paint solitaires the way he sees them, which also goes for the beautiful nose of Donna Tinka. She can be angry as much as she pleases.

When they are ‘in love,’ Marko is a daily guest. He sketched my and Tinka’s head very nicely and now I am curious to find out to which one of the two of us he will give this draft. Marko and I are very good friends. He shrewdly praises my mental and physical virtues in Dubrovnik’s style in order to provoke Tinka. Then she claims that he is in love only with her. He amusingly defends himself and I nearly die of laughter! Listening to the quarrels of the two combatants is not worth my time!<sup>10</sup>

The atmosphere<sup>11</sup> in the house – even without Marko – is full of jokes and laughter. The children are also charming. Marica is sweet and good natured, Xenija stubborn and very intelligent. They are both musical. Rosina Albori, young Lujo’s cousin, who is both beautiful and serious, raises them strictly Catholic. Children learn well – for Xenija this means when she wants and if she wants. She is always difficult when we eat together. She eats so slowly that when we finish the lunch she is still on her soup. Because of this, her shoulders are occasionally struck with a long thin switch during lunch. Lujo tries to discipline the ‘little devil’<sup>12</sup> in every possible way, but the ‘little devil’ resists and resists – and goes on her own merry way<sup>13</sup>. She’s going to be a hard case. The children learn languages incredibly fast. They will be multilingual. When she is in the mood, Xenija is really funny. She reminds me in everything she does of not just Katica, Mam Mara, Lujo, etc. but often of all Kopačevs. She is pretty even when she is in a bad mood.

It seems obvious from speaking with Lujo – especially during lunch – that he would be very happy if the Pope were to invite him to the Vatican. Is this likely? No, not really.

8 Fre. *à tout prix*.

9 Fre. *bouton*.

10 Fre. *Ça vaut la peine d'entendre les ripostes de deux combattants!*

11 Ger. *Stimmung*.

12 Fre. *corriger le petit diable*.

13 Fre. *va son train*.

However, because both Lujo and Tinka are optimistic by nature, all their wishes seem possible. Lujo indeed has great connections in Italy, and the greatest one with the Pope. As you know, he was the groomsman at the engagement and wedding of the Montenegrin Princess Jelena with [Italian King] Viktor Emanuel. He used the occasion to establish close ties with the Vatican and the Italian court. I believe that a recent trip across Europe with his pupil Prince Aleksandar afforded him even more intimate connections at the Italian court. Queen Helena (sic) is the sister of Aleksandar's deceased mother.

As I can judge, his current position as the tutor of Prince Aleksandar is not ideal. I hear from Tinka that Lujo is more akin to a lion tamer in a menagerie. Aleksandar is talented but short-tempered and lacks discipline. His temper needs a strong military hand to calm him down. The worst thing is that the heir Gjorgje and Aleksandar hate each other like true people of the Balkans. The latter is so impulsive that he will become a danger to society. Their quarrels are a daily occurrence!

Miraculously, little ten-year old Pavle is developing marvelously in this wild atmosphere. He is the son of the King's brother Arsen Karagjorgjević and the sweetest boy you can imagine. Kind, handsome and with fine manners, very artistic, an excellent pupil, and the King's favorite. The Princess Jelena also adores her little cousin, as well as her aunt, Lady Nenadović.

I met all these people in turn. At the first audience with the King, I met old Lady Nenadović, who was present instead of the early deceased mother of Princess Jelena. Nenadović embraced me very kindly. King Petar – with his unattractive appearance – gives the impression of a serious French-educated man who is well versed in Croatian and Serbian literature. He told me: "I am so glad that I can welcome the granddaughter of the great Croatian poet of 'The Death of Smail-aga Čengić'<sup>14</sup>".

After the King's audience, Princess Jelena received me in her charming apartment. Jelena is not beautiful, at least not to my taste; she, too, is Serbian in type – dark, clearly too dark. She resembles her father. Apparently her mother Princess Stana Petrović was very beautiful and unhappy. Gjorgje would be handsome and pleasing to the eye if there was not something unattractive about his face. Is it savagery, the heredity of "black Gjorgje," or completely raw nerves? Time will tell. Aleksandar – whom I have seen privately at Lujo's – is weird, if nothing else. In one instant, he is charming and smart and then suddenly – and always at the wrong time<sup>15</sup> – he turns his nose up at you so you have to wonder about the source of his imbalance. Lujo is really working hard on him. Everyone says he has been successful because the boy is definitely not stupid. Still, there is so much about him that is disagreeable that I personally would not like to be subject to his caprices.

14 Ivan Mažuranić: *The Death of Smail Aga* (English translation by J.W. Wiles). London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1925.

15 Fre. *mal à propos*.



Princess Jelena complains to Tinka about her brothers, who torment their father. When she invited us for a cup of tea two weeks ago, she literally said these words to me: “There are clashes between my two brothers on a daily basis. Poor Dad. He has so many worries, especially when it comes to Gjorgje.”<sup>16</sup> Based on what I’ve heard, I understand that the trip through Europe also had a medical purpose. It seems many things are not right with the younger Karagjorgje. They have consulted with doctors in France and Italy.

If someone were to ask me whom I prefer at the Serbian court, this is what I would reply: Most of all an aunt of Princess Jelena, the old M<sup>me</sup> Nenadović; then little sunshine Prince Pavle, Jelena and the King. Gjorgje and Aleksandar are certainly not in this group. Little Pavle is such an extraordinary kid – another race, another upbringing. His mother is the Countess Demidov, a Russian estranged from her husband who made her unhappy. Arsen is the poor father, although he is on good terms with his brother. The most cordial link between two brothers is little Pavle.

As you can see, I know quite a bit about what’s going on. My social circle is large. I move among the diplomatic corps under Tinka’s guidance. Of all the legacies, the house of the German ambassador von Heyking is the most interesting. It is not because of the ambassador, who is anything but interesting. Indeed, he is a textbook example of a miser!<sup>17</sup> The most surprising thing is that he played a romantic role, even a tragic one, in the life of an amazing woman. He and M<sup>me</sup> von Heyking met in China. She was the wife of the German diplomat von Pulitz, and von Heyking was in China then, too. It was love at first sight!<sup>18</sup> What happened afterwards remains a mystery.

People mention poison, jealousy, Pulitz’s sudden death, etc. etc. Naturally, von Heyking was moved to do something, and after some time he married the widow Pulitz and took custody of her three children. The daughter is now my age and she often visits Tinka to play music with her. She is a melancholy soul, sentimental and surely anything but happy in the atmosphere she lives in. God only knows what is going on in the mind of this strange soul and what she thinks about the events in China? There is such a disparity between her and the interesting appearance of M<sup>me</sup> Heyking.

I was impressed by her and her Chinese home. She is a well-known German writer. Her novel “Briefe, die ihn nicht erreichten”<sup>19</sup> has received great reviews and has been added to the list of the best German literary works. M<sup>me</sup> Heyking gave her leather-bound book to Tinka as a present. If only she would do the same for me!

16 Fre. *Il y a journellement des scenes entre mes deux freres. Pauvre papa, il a tant de soucis, surtout avec George.*

17 Ger. *Švaba* [colloq.; *Ein Schwabe*] – *wie er im Buche steht!*

18 Ger. *Liebe auf den ersten Blick!*

19 Elisabeth Heyking: *Briefe, die ihn nicht erreichten*. Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1903.

At Heyking's soirée, I met the lovely first secretary of the Bulgarian embassy, Nestorov<sup>20</sup>. He spent seven years at the court of [King] Ferdinand [I of Bulgaria]<sup>21</sup> as his personal secretary. He finished his studies at an American college in Carigrad<sup>22</sup>. Besides English, he speaks excellent French – and from our language and the Bulgarian language he created a special language, which he calls the Serbian language.<sup>23</sup> He originates from Kazanlik. He spoke a lot about the court and the “Valley of the Roses,” which is, as everyone agrees, the pearl of the Balkans. His parents, who seem to be wealthy people, live there. In Belgrade, he witnessed the dreadful murder of Aleksandar Obrenović and Draga Mašin. I was very interested in his stories about Draga, whom he knew well, and he was often her guest before she married the King.

Tinka has invited “Hektorov”, as she usually calls him [Nestoroff], for a cup of tea. The military attaché Gančev and his young wife are expected to come as well. She is a small woman and very rich, very cultivated and highly intelligent. Tinka likes her and also feels sorry for her because apparently Gančev is very insensitive and rude to her. Lujo claims that Raja – which is the name of M<sup>me</sup> Gančev – is the daughter of a wealthy Russian Jew, but I haven't been able to confirm this. It seems, in any event,<sup>24</sup> that something is wrong in this young marriage, although both of them praise their little son who is one year old.

After a very delicious late evening dinner<sup>25</sup> was served in a darkened room with candlelight, I spent a very nice evening at the Germans. Just imagine that Lujo and I sang a few Italian arias by general request and with great enthusiasm!

M<sup>me</sup> Heyking was wearing some peculiar dress with even more peculiar scarves. I was astonished. She read a few pieces from her novel. What diction – Lujo was greatly amused! Next to this interesting woman, her daughter just looked sad. She is a very blemished<sup>26</sup> version of her mother: dreary and without charm. Apparently she is engaged, but even marriage does not make her happy. Poor creature!

Last Saturday, we had dinner at the Italians, Marquis and Marquise Guicioli, a kind and cheerful old couple who have very good relations with Tinka and Lujo. I also met at the ball two elegant and young Serbian girls, the daughters of General Grujić. They have lived with their father for a long time outside of Serbia, mainly in Russia, espe-

20 Alternative spelling of Nestoroff.

21 King Ferdinand I of Bulgaria was born in 1861 as Ferdinand Maximilian Karl Leopold Maria of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha ruled from 1887 to 1918.

22 Slavic name for Istanbul. Editorial note: Place names pertaining to Istanbul or its quarters, as well as Turkish terms have been kept in their original forms in the text, with the modern-day Turkish equivalents displayed in the footnotes.

23 Fre. *langue serbe*.

24 Fre. *en tout cas*.

25 Fre. *après-souper*.

26 Ger. *verzeichnet*.

cially in St. Petersburg. One of daughters, Leposlava, charmed me with her appearance and self-confident air. Both sisters are good conversationalists. I am sure that they would delight the Upper Town in Zagreb. One of these days, Donna Tinka and I plan to visit them. They are running the household without their mother and they are doing an excellent job. Every Wednesday, they receive the diplomatic corps. Tinka claims, I suppose rightly so, that they make a mistake when they distanced themselves from the locals who do not appreciate them doing this. They are not rich and even the most in-love diplomat does not look just at the girl, but also at her wallet.<sup>27</sup> Leposlava is now 22 years old and together with the wife of the Bulgarian Minister Hizov – a 20 year-old Montenegrin (he will soon be 50). They have the two most attractive appearances in Belgrade's society.

Four days ago, with Tinka, Rosina Albori and the children, I was at the lunch of the Russian ambassador. He is quite an old ruin, but the obvious protector of Lujo and his family. I have the impression that he does a lot for the little girls<sup>28</sup>. Gubatsov is very charming and treats me with respect. Nevertheless, he can be moody and unpleasant with his friends. I almost do not believe, however when I look at his mild Slavic face. But who knows?

And now something, which will interest you: It is about me. Although I did not wish for it to happen as it did. As usual, it started with jokes and laughter, and then I was trying to get out of an unpleasant situation. Lujo's friend and man of the court, Major Miloš Vasić, whom I often encounter in the company, had the bad idea of matching me with [...] I have no idea how it occurred to him to offer me his hand. I asked Tinka to explain him once and for all that I was thankful to him, but also that I did not have any intention of marrying outside of my homeland. He reacted very discreetly and went on a trip. At Tinka's he left his photograph for me and a nice bouquet of flowers as a 'sign of deep admiration and eternal friendship'.

Yesterday Tinka told me that she had already written about this to Mum and I am just happy that I did not offend a man who, after all, is not guilty for simply being alive and having unfulfilled wishes! May God be with him! Lujo and Tinka enjoyed this unpredictable intermezzo of my mundane life in Belgrade. Tinka being the eternal prophet wants to know everything in advance – even that there will be more intermezzos of this kind before I leave, but with a happy ending.

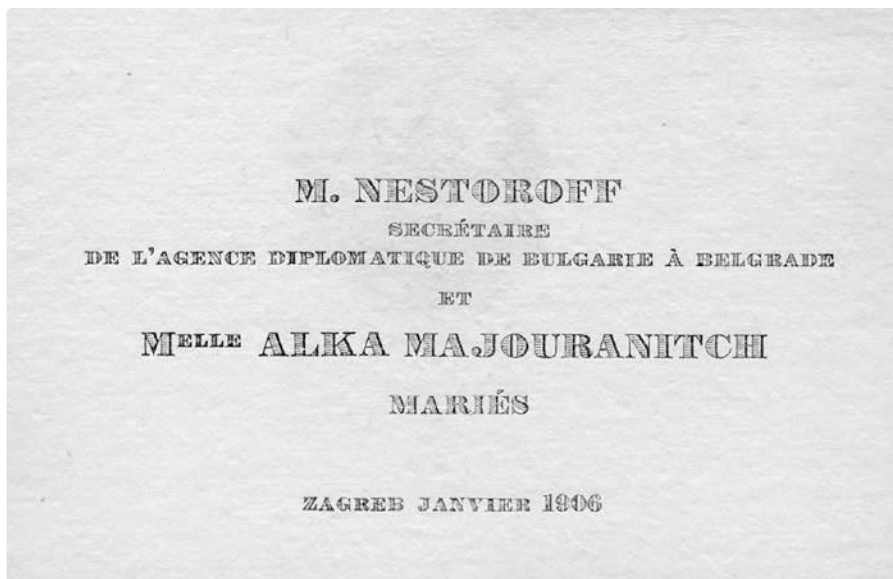
I will repeat my longer descriptions of the Belgrade Court in the family epistle. I essentially adjusted to my new environment so well that when I go with Tinka to Jelena or to the King for lunch<sup>30</sup> or to the ball, I feel like I've always lived like this and

27 Srp. *budelar*.

28 Fre. *qu'il fait beaucoup pour les petites*.

29 Fre. *a eu la mauvaise idee de me faire la cour avec*.

30 Fre. *déjeuner*.



*Wedding notification card*

watched without further ado how King Petar eats roasted meat with a finely chopped onion while leading an elegant conversation, and moreover apologizes with French manners because he is in the company of two beautiful ladies. I wonder: Does this onion really need to lie chopped like this at the court's table? [It's the] Balkans!

Belgrade is not the city of my dreams. Horrible cobblestones, houses built haphazardly, tasteless cafes, and luxurious shops – it does not present a picture, which is pleasing to the eye or the heart. The location of the town, however, is breathtaking. Topčider and Kalimegdan would be much more attractive without all those people walking around. I would dress them all in old folk costumes so that they, the town and the surroundings maintain their beautiful history. I would not wish to live in Serbia permanently. The dialect is harsh and I still have not become accustomed to their “e”! Be that as it may, I feel wonderful at Donna Tinka’s place, just as she feels at ours.

Hugs to all and goodbye<sup>31</sup>, gratefully yours,  
Alka

<sup>31</sup> Srp. *doviđenja*.



*Alka & Minčo Nestoroff on their wedding day, Zagreb, 1906*

Sofia, 12 VIII 1907

My dear Mummy,

Here I am writing a few notes to you before I leave the Bulgarian capital and sending you greetings from Tinka, Lujo, and myself. The children are sleeping – thank God – so I hope that I can stay a bit longer at this beautiful desk of Donna Tinka's.

So far, my dear Mummy, I have been spared any feelings of homesickness. If only it would stay like this. As you know, until now every more significant change of location and home has been really difficult for me! I am afraid that when I embark further east it will happen again, so that in Carigrad I will have to struggle again.

Minčo's letter was waiting for me here. He praises the new nest where he will settle with his wife and son. He writes that our house is located in the nicest and sunniest part of European Carigrad. The quarter is called Šišli-Nišantaš<sup>32</sup>. The windows of the apartment look out onto the Sultan's palace and the Bosphorus. Across the street there is a military academy with a spacious yard and lots of green. The promenade, which I especially need for the little one, runs beside our house down to the sea. It is called the Promenade des Ambassadeurs, and a surprising number of different embassies pass here on foot, by carriage, or on horseback<sup>33</sup> to enjoy the sun and the fresh air. Pera, the European part of the city, is somber, tasteless and noisy. The diplomats mainly live in Pera. Strangely enough, Minčo has not mentioned the dogs. Have they disappeared? Perhaps there are no dogs in Nišantaš, which would indeed be a pleasant surprise. In my first letter from Carigrad, I will let you know about the dog situation as well as the hygiene, in reference to which Darko has told dreadful stories. I sincerely hope it was a joke rather than an actual description of the apparently thousands of lepers who can be seen on the streets. If this was the case three or four years ago, then I don't believe the conservative Abdul-Hamid has cleaned the city of the poor lepers or the dogs. All this awaits me in the most unusual and the most beautiful city under the skies.

I cannot imagine such a big city – full of strangers, no electricity or phones, and with hordes of half-wild dogs on the streets! However, I hear that these dogs are the only cleaners of Carigrad's dirty streets, so for now<sup>34</sup> let them live!

I do not understand how Minčo managed to set up furnaces and hang paraffin lamps in the rooms with the help of two new helpers who would gladly run back home. You should know that in Carigrad every tenant sets up his furnaces by himself and that he moves with the furnaces into his new apartment as soon as he moves out of the old one. These heaters, when they are bought, are ready-for-use. They are small but very

32 Šišli-Nišantaš.

33 Ger. *hoch zu Ross*.

34 Ital. *intanto*.

beautifully decorated and mainly made from white enameled plates. The floors are constructed from soft wood and coating which looks nice even without carpets. There is a water supply, but water is not potable and it is distilled even for washing one's face. This is the advice of the diplomats. I need to be careful even then taking a bath, especially when it comes to my little child, which is what my little traveler counts as. I will figure out everything that needs to be done when I settle down in the Orient, which – hopefully – is not too far off.

Everything that I am writing is based on Minčo's report, and in a week, with God's help, I will send you a detailed letter with my own observations. I plan to travel with Tereza and the little one the day after tomorrow. Lujó reserved a sleeper<sup>35</sup> to Carigrad. I feel very welcome in the house of Donna Tinka and Mister Lujó. It was indeed essential that Tinka and I took a trip together with the children. I will briefly describe to you our fortunes and misfortunes on the way from Belgrade to Sofia. From Zagreb to Belgrade everything went according to plan. We occupied the whole first-class wagon undisturbed. Hristo's behavior was exemplary, and Marica and Ksenija took great care of him. Tereza watched over the baby like a hen and I cannot say that she looked out of the windows once, even at the stations. I am sure she could be like this for a month, showing interest in nothing except her little protégé.

A young attaché of the Bulgarian agency was expecting us at the Belgrade station. Because Tinka wanted to take a rest in Belgrade and then continue our travels during the night, the Bulgarian rented two rooms in a hotel and thoughtfully took care of our numerous pieces of luggage and bags, which will be waiting for us at the station. Moreover, he promised to reserve again the whole first-class wagon for our journey to Sofia. Oddly enough, this night train does not have a sleeping car<sup>36</sup>.

Our departure from Belgrade turned out to be quite problematic. The children went berserk! Our boy does not want to get into a bed that is unfamiliar to him; neither does he want to get into the bath, and he screamed as if someone had set him on fire. The girls were laughing, going crazy, jumping on the bed and getting beat for it by their mother. After a while, everything turned silent and the two of us fell into a deep sleep in the middle of the day. I dreamed of being back in Zagreb, so when I woke up I was confused about where I was and why I was sleeping in these strange modern beds next to the napping Donna Tinka.

The trip from our hotel to the station under Bulgarian guidance went better than we expected. Tinka and I, brimming over with health<sup>37</sup>, cleaned and relaxed took our children and checked in the luggage and bags at the station. Indeed, we got settled in the imperial train and thanked our young diplomat for his valuable help. Despite all

35 Fre. *wagon-lit.*

36 Fre. *wagon-lit.*

37 Fre. *et moi pimpante de santé.*

his charm, warmth and kindness he had finally had enough of us, the children and all those bags he had had to count and carry to the train. This was my impression and it was probably correct.

Our journey from Belgrade to Sofia was marked by our first impression of leaving the last bastion of the West and moving towards the East. We were comfortably situated in a completely empty wagon – Tereza and the children were placed in a larger compartment while Tinka and I moved to another one. After we stowed the luggage where it belonged, we helped the children undress and prepare for bed, which we also did ourselves. After chatting and trying to anticipate what was waiting for us in our new, unfamiliar home, we went to bed wishing to fall asleep.

We had barely closed our eyes when we heard Ksenija’s pleading and animated voice: “Marica, you’re hitting me!” The next moment we heard the calm voice of the always sensitive Marica: “Mummy, she pricks me and wants to enter my nose”.<sup>38</sup> This was then accompanied by a loud scream from my son and the droning voice of Tereza, who was trying to put him again to sleep. We both got up and went to see what was going on in the adjacent compartment.

Tereza was sitting in her nightdress next to Marica and holding Hristo on her lap. Marica wanted to step with her bare feet onto the dirty floor, but Tereza refused to allow her. As Marica had failed to obey, both girls in the end were crying for their mum’s help.

When we entered, there was a sight to behold! The pillows underneath the children’s heads were full – believe it or not<sup>39</sup> – of very active and fat bedbugs. As if we had waved a magic wand<sup>40</sup> the bedbugs started to race to see which one would escape faster beneath the pillows, sheets, and blankets! Because I do not want to prolong the description of this Balkan adventure<sup>41</sup>, I will only say we spent a sleepless night with the children on our laps fighting for survival!

At dawn, we reached the Sofia train station<sup>42</sup>. Lujo and his younger friend from Dubrovnik welcomed us with flowers.

After the children had taken their baths and were ready for nice clean beds, Tinka and I rinsed their faces and tried to calm them down. We then went sightseeing in Lujo’s kingdom.

38 Fre. *Maman, elle me pique et veut entrer dans mon nez.*

39 Ger. *sage und schreibe.*

40 Fre. *Comme par une baguette des fées.*

41 Bul. *Balkaniada.*

42 Bul. *Sofjiskata gara.*



Everything seemed much more beautiful than I had expected. But the ungrateful<sup>43</sup> Donna Tinka attacked poor Lujo for not having taken this or that out of the boxes. I tried to calm them both down with a joke and laughter and proved somewhat successful. On Sofia's boulevards, Lujo shared his impressions with me with lots of humor. The prince had received him very cordially and asked him a lot about Minčo and me. Lujo took charge of the prince's library, which he needs to arrange and expand. No doubt he will do an excellent job, that is, if he takes the work seriously. However, he envies me for going to Carigrad. I have impression that he does not plan to stay in Sofia. He has a restless spirit and an even more restless wife. Minčo will be very embarrassed if the prince finds out about Lujo's intention. Minčo recommended Lujo, so if Lujo disappoints the prince the prince would resent Minčo in the true "Bourbon-style".<sup>44</sup> It seems that because of the prince's generosity, Lujo managed to settle his complicated financial affairs. And, as Dad knows, they were complicated indeed.

My stay in Sofia will not involve Sofia itself. The day after we arrived, I caught a flu, which worries me more because of the children than myself. Things are even worse because Tereza feels sick as well. If we don't recuperate soon, we might become Lujo's patients. My little boy is behaving remarkably well. Tinka says that when Tereza and he are all dressed up in white, they are the only clean parts of the park.

Tinka seems to be annoyed by everything here, including the huge apartment and the new local staff. I would not like it if some local Sofian<sup>45</sup> were to hear her yelling and complaining about everyone and everything here – simply out of a habit to disagree with people<sup>46</sup> – because Lujo gets her not to speak like this in front of the staff.

I have to admit that she is very adept at imitating sellers on the streets who offer pastries and the corner-shop vendors<sup>47</sup> who sell meat. It is completely "*alla turca*" and unfortunately Tinka has an amazing gift for imitation. God forbid if news of this were to spread around the Bulgarian capital. The ladies of Sofia's high society already do not like her much because of her verbal aptitude which is more dangerous than an animal's bite. Her reputation as "Madame Sans-Gêne"<sup>48</sup> reached Sofia a long time ago. The Balkans have special loudspeakers and sound moves rapidly from one town to another. I do not know how I am going to be received. I will follow the advice of M<sup>me</sup> Rizov: "say little

43 Fre. *Mais l'ingrate*.

44 Fre. *en vrai Bourbon*. This expression seems to refer to the act of making something very obvious by an ostentatious and public display. We are indebted to Alexandre Toumarkine who drew our attention to Chateaubriand's proverb "*savoir mourir comme un Bourbon*" [knowing to die like a Bourbon], which attributes this behavior to the style in which the "Sun King" Louis XIV of France publicized his own death.

45 Bul. *Soffjot*.

46 Fre. *seulement par habitude de contradiction*.

47 Tur. *bakkal*.

48 The French expression *Madame Sans-Gêne* may refer to the nickname given to the woman soldier Thérèse Figueur by Napoleon I of France, or – perhaps more likely here – to Catherine Hübscher (1753 – 1835), the wife of Marshal of France François Joseph Lefebvre, whose life has been dramatized in the 1893 play of the same name by Victorien Sardou and Émile Moreau.

or nothing at all and always be aware that you are not in Europe.<sup>49</sup> As for the Prince, I am sure he will welcome me kindly. I hope that I will go to a reception with Minčo very soon in my nice attire, which I also prepared for my first receptions in Carigrad.

Based on the little I have seen, Sofia is a very beautiful city. It is all gardens and greeneries. The houses are very impressive, too. Nevertheless, Lujo thinks that none of the houses have been built properly and lack all comfort. It is strange to see empty cafés during the day when in Belgrade everything is full. Even in Zagreb. Bulgarians are hard-working and fixed on intimidation<sup>50</sup>. The men are Tatar types, although kind and gentle, and the women are mostly small, dark and completely European in style<sup>51</sup>! I do not think that our Lady Nohav would succeed with her Viennese salon here.

The cathedral is absolutely amazing, a beautiful monument to the liberator, the Tsar<sup>52</sup>, but the food – with all the sheep fat – completely nauseating!<sup>53</sup> Tinka and I suffered mainly<sup>54</sup> in the first days. We sprayed the entire apartment with perfume,<sup>55</sup> because we were convinced that sheep or its products had reached our beds! We decided that even the ice cream had a sheep flavor. Lujo laughs at me because Carigrad is the homeland for sheep and dog smells. Minčo wisely kept to himself and did not say anything because he also enjoys eating grilled lamb cutlets<sup>56</sup>.

I'm sneezing and coughing and waiting for Tereza to infect the little one and then the three of us, and – thanks to our hospitality – the rest of the house. If I feel better tomorrow, who knows, maybe we will depart immediately for the East?

I have mixed feelings about Carigrad: on the one hand I am eager to go, but on the other I am nervous because I do not know what I am going to find in the city of 'One Thousand and One Nights'. Luckily, I have a shoulder to lean on whenever I want – your son-in-law, my dear Mum, who by now is anxious to see us at the Carigrad train station. I am kissing Dad's and your hands and you will soon receive word from Turkey, where we are expecting you!

With gratitude,  
Alka

49 Fre. *parlez peu ou pas du tout et pensez toujours, que Vous n'êtes en Europe.*

50 Fre. *à faire peur.*

51 Ita. *alla franca.*

52 Russian Tsar Alexander II.

53 Ger. *Brechmittel.*

54 Fre. *en gross.*

55 Fre. *eau de Cologne.*

56 Fre. *une côtelette de mouton grillé.*

## Carigrad, 20 VIII 1907

My dear Mummy,

Thanks to you and Dad for your letters, which made me enormously happy. I am already experiencing the first symptoms of homesickness, no matter how much I fight against it. I have no doubt that there is no remedy for me. As always, I will have to surrender to it, and hopefully – as always – find my way out of it. This is one of the most incredible ailments! If it were accompanied by some disappointment in our new surroundings, then more power to it!<sup>57</sup> But it infects you when you are satisfied and find yourself in pleasant surroundings, which makes no sense to me. However, I've been fighting against it since the beginning, so there is hope that I will find my way out of it soon. I do not think it will be like it was in Belgrade, or God forbid, in Trieste, where I thought I would go crazy, resulting in my immediate return home. Now this really isn't my fault and neither is it the fault of this magnificent city, where I will gladly live as soon as I get accustomed to all my surroundings.

I hope that my postcards have been arriving on time. I send them every day. I put Austrian stamps on them so that you can later transfer them to Ivan Kapistran, the philatelist of our house and grand-scale collector<sup>58</sup>. I want to tell you more about us here at the border of Asia Minor and about your youngest grandson, how he feels without you here, surrounded by the dogs of Carigrad.

Mummy, did you receive the hand drawn postcard<sup>59</sup> from the Hagia Sophia? It was drawn in front of me by the very nice secretary of the Russian embassy, Prince Gagarin, who accompanied me to Stamboul and took me to this marvelous church-mosque. I have no intention of describing it to you now. Numerous excellent pens have done it before me, and continue to do so today. Still, my admiration could be compared to that of the most sensitive tourists, foreigners, who enter into this remarkable building for the first time. Suffice it to say that I examined it from top to bottom, in every possible way and I felt so tired afterwards that I did not continue on with our planned city tour. My guide, the aforementioned secretary, was very sad that I left him without a prior warning<sup>60</sup>, but then again he started to laugh when he witnessed my first 'Turkish-style'<sup>61</sup> conversation with the coachman who did not understand a word I said. He replied in the Carigrad version of French, which is as similar to classical French as our kitchen German<sup>62</sup> is to Goethe's poetry. It is a long and rugged road from Stamboul to our house. When driving on Carigrad's typical cobblestone

57 Fre. *à la bonne heure*.

58 Fre. *collector en gros*.

59 Fre. *avec effigie*.

60 Fre. *sans crier gare*.

61 Ita. *alla turca*.

62 Ger. *Kücheldeutsch* (colloq.; *Küchendeutsch*).

pavement, you barely make it home alive! I had encountered these sort of cobblestones before in Belgrade, when Tinka and I, walking through the Kalemegdan Park on our way home, broke the heels of our shoes at almost the same moment!

In my postcards, I only briefly described my journey from Sofia to Carigrad. Actually, it went smoothly and without bedbugs, thank God! My son behaved wonderfully, slept marvelously, and woke up just two to three stations before Carigrad. Even this time, Tereza did not show any signs of surprise or appreciation. She passed through a tunnel for the first time like she passes from one room to another. She also saw the sea for the first time, but was neither surprised nor scared.

I was so excited when we entered Carigrad, although everyone says that it is best to see Carigrad for the first time on board a ship. Minčo has also repeatedly mentioned how he first went to Robert College in the early morning, while the sun was still rising. When he entered the shipyard, Carigrad was filled with sunlight. Still, to me, even entering Carigrad on land was an unforgettable experience. I forgot to mention that I left Sofia quite sick. Tereza and I sneezed simultaneously at least a hundred times until we reached the Turkish border. Today, both of us are in full health. The little one was not sick and luckily we were able to leave our hosts in Sofia in good health as well.

I will briefly describe to you one completely Oriental intermezzo, which we experienced immediately after we stepped into the city of all imaginable wonders.

At the station, Minčo waited for us with the two guards<sup>63</sup> from the legation. He had the highest regard – and even more admiration – for his male heir<sup>64</sup>. Minčo had left him behind in Zagreb when he was in diapers, and now Minčo sees him in white dress with his dense blond Russian haircut, varnished little shoes and his face like a little rose and dark eyes, which you, mummy, are the most proud of – probably because he inherited them from you. Thank you! In a word: what a beloved child!<sup>65</sup> However, this “beloved child”<sup>66</sup> does not recognize or pay attention to his legitimate father! He turns away from him and goes to his Tereza. Here we have man against man so we will see who will tame whom. This is not a dangerous fight. Nonetheless, as soon as the heir<sup>67</sup> celebrates his first year I think a much better pedagogue than this unmoved<sup>68</sup> Tereza will have to take him by the hand. Frankly, she gets on my nerves with her proverbial passivity<sup>69</sup>.

63 Tur. *kavazs* (modern spelling: *kavas*).

64 Bul. *otrok od muški pol*.

65 Fre. *quel amour d'enfant*.

66 Fre. *quel amour d'enfant*.

67 Bul. *otrok*.

68 Fre. *impassible*.

69 Fre. *A vrai dire, elle me tape sur les nerfs avec son impassibilité déjà proverbiale*.



PHOT. ABDULLAH

PANCALDI, - CONSTANTINOPLE

*Hristo Nestoroff as a one-year old boy, Istanbul, 1907*

Still, let me return to the tragi-comical intermezzo, which is so typical of this country where I am going to live. It all happened at that very Carigrad train station, where I took my very first step on Turkish soil.

As you know, I packed my three huge suitcases to the brim with clothes and dresses. Following Tinka's advice, I added all my jewelry to one of them – you know, the biggest yellow one with two levels<sup>70</sup>. In Sofia, I handed over all three suitcases as checked luggage<sup>71</sup>. The guards went with the luggage tickets to pick them up and place them into the carriage which waited for us in front of the station and which was supposed to depart after us. Shortly thereafter, one of these guards returned with two carriers<sup>72</sup>, i. e. Kurds upon whose shoulders my two heavy suitcases rested with incredible ease – as if they were empty or made of aluminum! I never saw such frightful faces like those of these two Kurds! I instantly remembered that they were guilty of the horrible slaughters of Armenians. They did it – one is told – by the decree<sup>73</sup> of the Padishah. And, judging from their faces, it looks like they cannot wait to do it again. Instinctively, I stood before Tereza and my son to protect them, but Tereza was emotionless as always and the little one waved happily to the Kurds!

At that moment, I heard a terrible noise and quarrel in loud guttural tones with two even more terrifying carriers pulling and carrying away some huge dirty package in an old shabby carpet. They were sweating and cursing and calling on some ragged fellow for help. This ragged fellow, who had a huge wound on his forehead, stood aside serenely, chewing his tobacco and not responding to the commotion and cursing of the Kurds. I will never forget how vehemently Minčo yelled at the carriers in Carigrad's Turkish jargon and was explaining something to the guard and the Kurds with his hands and legs. Nonetheless, they continued to quarrel, although I had no idea why. The station officers even came, whom the guard had obviously sought, and they all produced an incredible clamor while turning and looking at this package, full of poor dishes, tatters and bags. Suddenly, one of the officers pointed to the writing on the package. It was the same as the writing on my luggage ticket from Sofia. [What a] scene!<sup>74</sup>

To make things even more mysterious, none of the station officers knew who actually took my suitcase or where it went. Imagine, this suitcase contained my finest dresses and jewelry! Minčo and the officers were running across the station, while I was placing Tereza and the little one in the carriage and witnessing my first disaster on Turkish soil.

70 Fre. *à deux etages*.

71 Ger. *als Mitgepäck*.

72 Tur. *hamal*.

73 Tur. *ferman*.

74 Fre. *Tableau!*

I have to admit, I was in a fatalistic mood. In my heart, I had only one wish: to go to my new place and remove myself, Tereza and the child from this horrible experience caused by the dreadful carriers.

A short time later, full of shock, I again heard a terrible noise and maniacal crying. I noticed someone who was even more dreadful than the carriers. I will never be able to forget the appearance of this person ran to the shabby package while yelling, moving hands, pushing the Kurds aside and finally sitting on the package, screaming even louder. The scene was so fantastical and incomprehensible. Later I saw officers coming, guards – and my lost luggage. Minčo took out his wallet and gave the Kurds a reward. Luckily there was no Sultan's decree for the slaughtering of Europeans. I now noticed for the first time that even Kurds can smile – all completely relaxed and at ease, just like back home<sup>75</sup>.

I have to say that I did not understand anything. Only when we were home did Minčo tell me exactly what had happened. That ragged giant Turk with the dirty *fez* on his head took my suitcase because of a mistake made by a clerk in Sofia. When he noticed the mix-up at the train station in Carigrad he alarmed everyone, screaming that he wanted his baggage back, even if he needed to go to the Sultan himself, and that the devil could take my baggage because he did not care about it.

So you see, I encountered my first miracle when taking my first step in this land of wonders – and horrors. A poor looking Asian did not want the infidel's<sup>76</sup> treasure but instead he sought to recover his poverty. No matter what it looks like, his poverty is his and he did not want to give it away. Minčo has convinced me that I will encounter all sorts of wonders on Carigrad's streets. One Thousand and One Nights indeed!

Now let me tell you a few things about my apartment. This is also special issue. It may not be great, but it is clearly at least as good as living in Carigrad allows for. We live in the house of some Greek man who built it in one of the most beautiful parts of Carigrad, far away from foul-smelling and unappealing Pera. You can see the room organization on the card, but still this description alone does not allow to imagine what the apartment needs in order to be appropriate<sup>77</sup>. As I wrote to you already, we took the rooms without a furnace and the kitchen without an oven; the floors were soft, so we had to use 146 meters of parquetry just to cover them. The wash room is without a bath and the toilet is – *alla turca*! We have spent a lot on paraffin lamps and candles for the chandelier – but the furnaces, bath, oven etc. can all be easily sold upon our leaving. The furnaces are charming, white of enameled plates and tastefully decorated. The biggest problem is the furniture, because you don't know where to put it. There are practically no walls! It is a sort of a glass house with a beautiful view on

75 Ger. *ganz gemütlich wie bei uns Zuhause*.

76 Tur. *kaur* (modern spelling: *gavur*).

77 Fre. *à la hauteur*.

the Sultan's palace – and the sea! Across the street, military cadets train under the supervision of German officers. This is very interesting for our little one because he enjoys soldiers, commanders, and the dogs that are driven off by a Turk specifically hired for this task.

As you can see, Šišli is thus also full of dirty and poor dogs as in the other parts of Carigrad. My small hope that there would be no dogs in Nišantaš already proved futile on our way from the station to the apartment. Hundreds of dogs were laying in the streets and enjoying the sun from Pera all the way to Šišli! It is not exactly an attractive sight. These mangy dogs who often exhibit wounds inflicted by their co-sufferers neither move for pedestrians nor for carriages or trams. People usually just step over them; coachmen try to drive around them, while officials are posted along the tram lines with a stick in their hands to shoo away the dogs, but often without success. When one group of dogs goes away, another instantly reappears!

Still, I can forgive Carigrad for the dogs. But I cannot forgive the slaughtering of sheep in the middle of the streets! Once slaughtered, they are placed on the walls of the shops, like “the women of the scary Uncle Bleue”<sup>78</sup>. Every day, my little one walks par la Promenade des Ambassadeurs to the sea with Tereza, without the stroller just on her strong hands. Strolling along the promenade in a baby stroller would be cruel given the state of the road. The two of them, clean and tidy as they are, are the only white spots in all of Nišantaš and Šišli. Muslim ladies<sup>79</sup> in their dark veils and resembling dark ghosts stick out in an eerier way<sup>80</sup> among all the dogs and turbans on the streets.

In the coming days, I will begin with my first social engagements and ceremonies. Madame Gešov expects me at her house at the end of the week<sup>81</sup>. She told me this through Minčo. I am curious to see what my Mistress looks like, and even more curious to know whether she will be a pleasant superior? I was frequently told that this alumna of the famous St. Petersburg Institute is a pleasant person, and I'm happy that she looks forward to meeting me having heard so many nice things about me from Bosiljka Rizov. I will try to please her, if for nothing else, then for Minčo's sake. Her husband, Minčo's master, is very nice and a trusty diplomat, but he is also sickly and unpredictable. They have three children, of whom I am going to meet only the thirteen-year old Katarina and Teodora, who attends Carigrad's Notre Dame de Sion, which is an excellent Catholic school. It is said that the younger daughter is charming. The son attends a grammar school in Sofia. Unfortunately, the other members of our legation are not worth mentioning, at least as concerns the wives of our diplomats.

78 Once more, we are indebted to Alexandre Toumarkine for his suggestion that “the women of the scary Uncle Bleue” probably refer to the 1892 novel by Jacques Lermont (pseudonym of Madame Soboleska (d. 1903): *Les cinq nieces de l'oncle Barbe Bleue*. Paris: Société d'édition et des publications Librairie Félix Juven, 1892.

79 Tur. *Hanim*.

80 Ger. *unheimlicher*.

81 Fre. *m'attend pour la fin de la semaine, chez elle*.



This will be enough of chit-chat for today, Mummy. Tomorrow, I will already send you a traditional postcard about our health report. You see, my dearest ones, since I overcame my homesickness, I have started writing long letters again. Don't forget us! Hugs to Ivana, to whom I will write a separate letter, and then to dear Naco, the children, Željka and to that Casanova in Pula, Darko. Kissing the hands of you and Dad, gratefully yours,

Alka

### Carigrad, [no day or month] 1907

Dear Mummy and Dad,

Believe it or not, but I had an amazing experience in my own apartment. It happened so suddenly that Anuška, our Hungarian cook, almost fainted. As for me, I could barely keep the dignity of a diplomat's wife<sup>82</sup> when I personally managed to accompany a leper through the stairs to the way out. Despite Alija, who is usually a very reliable concierge, this poor disfigured beggar managed to come into the anteroom of our apartment and confronted Anuška. Her panicked scream frightened me so much that I left the little one alone on the floor of the room and ran into the anteroom to see what was going on.

Believe me, the sight of this miserable one was more dreadful than you can imagine anywhere in Europe. I had previously met them [such beggars] on the bridge in Stamboul in passing<sup>83</sup> and gave them charity while taking all possible precautions<sup>84</sup>, that is, without closer contact with them. But now there was a man standing in my home who was approaching me on disfigured legs and whose face no longer resembled a human face. He offered me his leprous hand, whispering words in a low voice, which I could not understand – God knows what language that was! I have no idea how I managed to find the strength to put into his hands some alms and to accompany him down the eighteen stairs on the way out! My legs were shaking as I entered the bath in order to protect the household and myself from this terrible disease.

Tereza met him [the beggar] at the entrance as she was returning from the neighborhood grocery shop. This encounter succeeding in accomplishing what a tunnel, the sea or any of those wonders that we saw on our trip from Zagreb could not: it shook her out of her phlegmatic mood! Distraught, she ran into Hristo's room and kept screaming that she had met the "Unholy" incarnate at the doorstep. She prayed

82 Fre. *la dignité d'une femme de diplomate.*

83 Fre. *en passant.*

84 Fre. *avec toutes les précautions possibles.*

under Hristo's cross, convinced that this poor man was indeed the devil himself, but not ours – the Turkish one, with a *fez* on his head! She [Tereza] alarmed the whole house. Alija sits, even today, at the entrance lost in thought – he still cannot remember how all this happened.

Luckily our Armenian doctor Hekimian, a fine old gentleman, convinced Minčo that his wife will not become leprous because leprosy is not as contagious as people think it is. There are colonies of lepers in Stamboul who eat food scraps together with the dogs, which the people of Carigrad throw out their windows onto the street. I saw with my own eyes a leper who fought over a dirty slice of bread with a dog! These scenes are especially frequent at the big Stamboul Bridge. Aside from Galata, this is a central gathering place for all kinds of beggars.

I went down from Pera to Galata in the cable railway, which – miraculously – functions perfectly well. They told me it never got jammed, unlike the jammed car we experienced. I will never forget when, at one of the jams of our cable railway, we all climbed up on the small stairs. I was fifteen and it was an extraordinarily exciting event for me – less so for you, of course, since you are a lady in everything except when it comes to sports.

Galata is indeed so dirty, suffocating and foul-smelling that there is no force in the world that could make me go there again. It is the Jewish-Greek-Turkish part of the city. There are lots of shops with specialties, but God forbid that your survival depends on what they offer you to eat! Jews are living like in a ghetto. Three families live in one smelly room divided by dirty rags. Here, you cook, eat, sleep, kiss, hate and die. God save us! These Jews even come to Nišantaš. You can see hanging on their shoulders some old bag in which they collect old clothes. They yell in all the jargons of the world, wear ragged belted tunics<sup>85</sup> and *fez*, and sidelocks hang down both sides of their face. It is said that some are wealthy among them and that they send their sons to study in Europe, without increasing their own standard of living in Galata.

It is all One Thousand and One Nights, although this does not exactly resemble the most beautiful stories that Sheherazade had told. I would also add that at the Grand Bazaar<sup>86</sup> where you buy fruits, vegetables, poultry, fish and eggs, and sometimes even clothes, shoes, *fezzes* and this jumble<sup>87</sup>, you wonder how we and they stay alive given this horrific lack of hygiene. Besides, cholera actually never remains in Carigrad. Last month, on the upper floor of our building, a man was allegedly (as I cannot confirm this) taken to hospital with all the symptoms of the Asian cholera. When we mentioned

85 Tur. *kaftan*.

86 Fre. *le marché de Carigrad*.

87 Fre. *pêle-mêle*.

it to others in our circle, no one was surprised or upset. The official interpreter<sup>88</sup> of the Russian embassy told me the following: “This illness afflicts only them [the locals]. We foreigners are generally spared.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, except for one sad case among the diplomats (Count Drašković), no one can remember the last time someone got cholera, typhus or leprosy.

Let it be a consolation for you at home that we foreigners have the possibility to avoid the Grand Bazaar<sup>90</sup>. We are able to supply ourselves with much healthier food products from a more hygienic facility. We do not drink water at all, only tea, tisane or lemon water. We have a water supply line, but it has everything but clean water! There are days when we distil it even for the kitchen. Asia is Asia, but I am glad to be here and luckily do not have homesickness.

As for dad, tell him that the red surmullet prepared in the Greek fashion is delicious! Or perhaps this is the “blood of Leonidas or Demeter” in me speaking? For the followers of Demeter I know they mainly ate sangalija, meatballs<sup>91</sup> and fish, whereas for the hero Leonidas they must have slaughtered oxen, which we don’t have here. We don’t even drink cow’s milk. I frequently encounter black Asian buffaloes carrying their burden over Carigrad’s horrible cobblestone. Buffalo milk is excellent for my hero Hristo, who slowly started to walk.

The buffalo’s milk is dense and yellow, but we got accustomed to it and like it. Its yoghurt is especially tasty. They sell it in large pots, which are hung on an iron stick. They carry them like a cross on their shoulders. They sell this yoghurt yelling: “*jaurt, jaurt, freski jaurt!*”<sup>92</sup> This is their special jargon, which is composed of different dialects and foreign expressions that they usually corrupt. They sell sheep tongues in the same way, shouting: “*linguo cervello, cervello linguo,*”<sup>93</sup> while housewives set down baskets in which the seller places his goods. Accompanied by incredible verbiage, this basket goes back to the customer, who then throws money wrapped in paper – and the quarrel then continues.

Marquis Campo-Sagrado visited me this week and brought special jaurt prepared by his Turkish cook. The Marquis is an old gentleman and he says this yoghurt is his elixir of eternal youth. He is the Spanish ambassador and a grandee. Unfortunately for him,<sup>94</sup> I have not noticed that this elixir has any effect. I still have time to struggle with getting younger, thank God.

88 Tur. *dragoman*.

89 Fre. *Cette maladie est leur spécialité. De nous les étrangers elle ne saurait que faire et elle nous fait.*

90 Fre. *le marché de Carigrad*.

91 Tur. *çufte* (modern spelling: *köfte*).

92 Malapropism from Ita. *fresco* = fresh.

93 Malapropism from Ita. *lingua* = tongue, and Ita. *cervello* = brain.

94 Fre. *Pour son malheur*.

The ambassador is a great “Don Juan” and his wife has been absent for years. She is a princess by blood<sup>95</sup> and according to the Spanish court ceremonial she is the first in the diplomatic corps<sup>96</sup>. However, since our doyenne is the wife of the German Ambassador von Bieberstein, she is also the first lady of our corps. An embarrassing situation is avoided because of the marchioness’ stay in Madrid for the time being. Who knows, perhaps she is a fugitive for matrimonial reasons? Concerning conversation and appearance, the Marquis is the real aristocrat. He does not feel embarrassed because he is deprived of his wife’s influence. He is more worried about his investments, so – with a cane in his hand – he reminds me of Ferdinand of Bulgaria. He poses and charms you, while at the same time you have the feeling that he is more astute than intelligent, this Marquis Bernardo de Guirios.<sup>97</sup> He has represented Spain at the Porte since 1898. I met him when I first visited the Austrian embassy. At the dinner of the Austrian diplomat Baron Giesl, the Marquis sat to one side of me and, to the other, I was entertained by the witty first secretary of the Austrian embassy, Count Badeni. I think that both of them are known by their reputations as womanizers and first-class daredevils<sup>98</sup> – one old and married and the other young and unmarried. And, as Lujó would say, both of them are courting me. I have a solid spine<sup>99</sup> that does not bend so easily! It is not exactly virtue, but in cases like these, it’s a safe defense!

It is peculiar how natural I felt at the Austrians. They all accepted me warmly, as if I were still a subject of [Emperor] Franz Joseph! The Countess Pallavicini is English, and the wife of Baron Giesl is one of our kind (a Marširević). Giesl speaks Croatian perfectly, as does their thirteen-year-old son Vladimir.

Both Countess Pallavicini and Baroness Giesl are very kind to me, but they still somehow seem unrefined. Their outfits are old fashioned, tasteless, and their physiques are not exactly graceful. However, both of them welcome me warmly, stand up for me, and make me – undeservedly for sure – great compliments. Minčo finds “Madame Sans-Gêne”, as Baroness Giesl is called here, very likable and Minčo is equally likeable to her as well. She is at any rate more likable than Countess Brandis, the wife of the first secretary of the Austrian embassy and former Countess Janković, whom I know from Zagreb’s balls. She seems unprincipled and is the only one who acts arrogantly. Madame Giesl does an excellent imitation of her and claims that for Countess Brandis proper wives of the diplomats begin with only “star-cross medal” holders<sup>100</sup>. As she is

95 Fre. *une princesse pur sang*.

96 Fre. *dans le corps diplomatique*.

97 Fre. *Il pose, il vous charme et au même temps vous avez le sentiment qu’il est plus ruse qu’intelligent, ce Marquis Bernardo de Guirios*.

98 Ger. *Draufgänger*.

99 Fre. *Mon épine dorsale est bien construite*.

100 Ger. *Sternkreuzordensdame*. Since the 17th century the *Sternkreuzorden* has come to denote a medal of honor in the shape of a star on a cross, which was created exclusively for Catholic female members of the higher echelons of Austrian nobility.

the only one who has a “star-cross medal”, we are all to be cast off as insignificant<sup>101</sup>. I know her husband from Belgrade and he is neither bright nor interesting.

Everyone is expecting the Horthys<sup>102</sup> with great anticipation. They should be joining our company any day now. Without exception, everyone has nice words about her – her charm and attractiveness. Darko spoke a lot about her from [the Istrian town of] Pula. I hear that Nikola Jelačić came with Admiral Horthy as the personal adjutant of the commander of the Austrian steamer “Taurus”.

You can imagine how anxiously I’m waiting for him to bring me news from my homeland! I am already planning a small lunch in his honor. I know that sheep fat is as nauseating to him<sup>103</sup> as it is to me. So, I will prepare him meet with lard. We have put this matter to rest<sup>104</sup>, and, like all Europeans, we cook [meat] with oil. However, for Nikola, who as a real [Bosnian from] *Zagorac* would die if he were to see meat cooked in oil, we will prepare it on lard. Ivana sent me a wonderful Croatian wine, so we are going to feast with a drop of our domestic wine.

I still have not gotten used to the never-ending fires in Carigrad. The way they announce them is just terrible. In the middle of the night you are woken by the stereotypical howling of the dogs and similar howling from the night guards, who announce the fire in the respective neighborhood. The dogs then just go mad! We keep one ear to the ground to assure ourselves that the fire is far from us. As soon as we hear “There is a fire in Galata *seraj*”<sup>105</sup> or some other part of our neighborhood, we turn around in our beds, close our ears and try to sleep. We keep rocks, which is our war ammunition, by our windows. If the barking does not stop after the night guards leave, then Minčo and I nastily throw stones at the dogs. They become still for a second, but then their concert<sup>106</sup> starts again before you even manage to return to your bed. Usually our war finishes at dawn, when the dogs calm down. This only means that they have cleaned Šišli’s streets. Our little hero sleeps through the night, and contrary to the dogs, he awakens with the first ray of sunshine. I think this is because of his long nap during the afternoon. Around six in the evening, he goes with Tereza to the seaside, fresh-bathed, fed and dressed-up. He has already become a celebrity: completely unknown people approach me on the street and ask if I am the mother “of this charming baby in white”<sup>107</sup>. I will write more about him in tomorrow’s letter. Now, I need to write to Aunt Cenika. Her care for me and the little one really touched me. I will write to Ivana after I cross the sea to Asia. I cannot wait to say that I have been to the other continent. We will be

101 Fre. *quantité négligéable*.

102 Fre. *le couple Horthy*.

103 Ger. *Brechmittel*.

104 Lat. *ad acta*.

105 Tur. *jangonvar Galata seraj* (modern spelling: *Yangın var Galatasaray[da]*).

106 Ita. *concerto*.

107 Fre. *de ce charmant bebe en blanc*.

accompanied by the interpreter of the Russian embassy<sup>108</sup> and M<sup>me</sup> Carp, the wife of the Romanian first secretary. I know her from Belgrade. She is small and perhaps neglected [by her husband], but very nice and cheerful. Minčo will go with me to Robert College so that I can meet his former professors. I am looking forward to it.

Anyhow, to sum up: I'm having a nice time, I feel good, and I am happy! With kisses on your hands and greetings, gratefully yours,

Alka

**Carigrad, 7 XII 1907**

Dear Mummy,

Yesterday, in Nikola's honor, we celebrated the traditional Saint Nicholas' day in the middle of Carigrad. There were golden sticks and four handmade Santa Clauses<sup>109</sup> arranged by the table in the Croatian-Bulgarian style. With cyclamen and red roses<sup>110</sup>, which looked like they were just picked in Rozova Dolina [in Bulgaria], and with Primorje's rosemary and laurel – the three of us from our homeland sat together to celebrate Nikola's saint's day. Roasted ham with *mlinci*<sup>111</sup>, Croatian wine, and excellent cake "*Grintava Margareta*," which is Nikola's favorite dish<sup>112</sup>, all had our mouths watering and filled our hearts with joy. Nikola talked a lot and finally started to sing – if not exactly like a nightingale, then at least loud and clear. Hristo was lost in his sweet dreams, not even imagining that Saint Nicholas would be bringing him bags full of sweets, which came only for him from Zagreb! This morning was thus spent in excitement and unsurpassable joy!

I am so glad that Nikola is in Carigrad. When we meet at different ceremonial dinners and occasions we look forward to our pleasant conversations, just the three of us in our house without walls in Nišantaš<sup>113</sup>.

I met his superior, Admiral Horthy, his very nice wife and wonderful children only a few days ago at Giesl's evening party<sup>114</sup>. Horthy spoke nicely about Darko, or "the knight in shining armor"<sup>115</sup>, as he calls him. He spoke to me a great deal about Darko's

108 Tur. *dragoman*.

109 Ger. *Krampus*.

110 Cro. *rdeće ciklame*.

111 A traditional North Croatian pasta dish.

112 Ger. *Leibspeise*.

113 Nišantaši.

114 Fre. *soirée*.

115 Ger. *den schwarzen Ritter ohne Furcht und Tadel*.

by now famous conversations, successes with women etc. etc. M<sup>me</sup> Horthy was very surprised that Darko did not mention to her that I would be in Carigrad. I think M<sup>me</sup> Horthy is the new star in the high society of Constantinople<sup>116</sup>. It seems that Count Badeni cruelly abandoned her, showing his affections to M<sup>me</sup> Martin. They say that she is now jealous of the beautiful Hungarian. M<sup>me</sup> Martin is the daughter of the Greek diplomat Arguropolis and the wife of the French embassy's secretary. I know her from Belgrade where she got married in two churches. As the wife of a practicing Catholic and a French diplomat she married first in the Catholic Church and then (like Minčo and I) with the crown of flowers on her head, according to the Eastern-Greek rite. This caused a great sensation. I was Tinka's guest and we participated in both wedding ceremonies.

M<sup>me</sup> Martin is an attractive woman but M<sup>me</sup> Horthy has much more charm. The latter is slim and tall, the mother of four children and she comes across as a young and very hot-blooded<sup>117</sup> woman – by all means, she makes quite an appearance. The old Marquis Campo-Sagrado will now have someone to bring Spanish lilies to in the middle of winter. He even brought them to me!

Dad asks me if I have adjusted fully to the new environment. Yes, dear Dad, I have and I am happy at this periphery of Europe bordering on Asia. These poor wounded dogs, which regularly force Minčo get out of bed every night, actually put me to sleep. While they fight it out under my window and howl with might and main<sup>118</sup>, M<sup>me</sup> Nestoroff takes her nap<sup>119</sup> as if to the soothing sound of the mandolin. However, Tereza, this unemotional Tereza, Anuška and my husband bombard them with stones every night. Anuška secretly assaults them in the Turkish fashion<sup>120</sup> with all of the left-over food, so I think that the grateful dogs must feel obliged to sing her a serenade. Anuška is a cook par excellence and more tolerable than Rosa. Rosa has a devilish way about her, but nobody is handier than she is. Everybody in Nišantaš coddles our little Hristo. Sometimes Minčo tries to exercise his pedagogical skill on him – but it's doomed to fail in light of the overwhelming female influence!<sup>121</sup>

I've mentioned already that we heated all eight rooms yesterday. It is cold, humid and damp like in our place at this time of year. We only have single-glass windows and thin walls. The little white furnaces are wonderful and look beautiful like in a fairy tale. Though fuel is of poor quality, these beauties do not mind: They readily adjust to every kind of rotten wood that we use. However, with the oven things are different. Anuška deserves to reach heaven because she manages to cook all sorts of delicious

116 Fr. *dans la grande société de Constantinople*.

117 Ger. *rassig*.

118 Fr. *à qui mieux mieux*.

119 Fr. *fait son somme*.

120 Ita. *alla turca*.

121 Ger./Fr. *alles scheitert an der weiblichen force majeure!*



Andrej Nikolajević Mandelstam, dragoman of the Russian embassy in Istanbul, Istanbul, 1908



meals – from our specialties to the demanding pie<sup>122</sup> and cakes. Life is expensive in Carigrad – but nice and interesting. God willing, I will remember it until my old age. Given our Croatian coastal lineage, there is hope I will live to a hundred years old, as well as my husband! So, my dearest, who and what could replace this beautiful Carigrad weather? Once we are back home, we will sit in a corner and reminisce about it! A week ago, I was with my mistress in the Russian embassy. There was the luxury-loving and half-senile old ambassador Zinoview, and with him two sisters, Greeks from Carigrad, who are there to entertain him. This makes you wonder about the notion of the bighearted Russian soul.

I met the Russian diplomatic personnel with lots of well-off and lovely people. Their dragoman Andrej Nikolajević Mandelstam – who is a bachelor, an eccentric, a scholar, and one hundred percent Russian, even if he is Baltic – interests me. Rumor has it that without his brains the entire Russian embassy would go to hell. He invited us for a private lunch at his pigeon loft,<sup>123</sup> as he calls his flat at Pera.

He expected us at the door and took us to the apartment, which is grandiosely decorated with flowers in the Croatian and Bulgarian colors. The interior is very peculiar – half genius and half tastefully furnished and luxurious. In the attic he has a dovecot made from glass. One of his pigeons was given the task to bring me weekly salutes from his master. Minčo finds this eccentric, but I am interested in him and his pigeons. He works and writes a lot. He is a poet and a politician and, above all, a philanthropist.

I've become better acquainted with M<sup>me</sup> Gešov. What to say about her? I'm perplexed by the fact that she is so nice to me. Andrej Nikolajević [Mandelstam] told me all sorts of funny anecdotes about my mistress for whom apparently a man worthy of admiration has to be at least a tsar, sultan or king. Allegedly, she pardons the Padishah from any guilt – but let us hope she is not taking advantage of him always. At the end of the day the master is the master, so if he hires Kurds to slaughter poor Armenians, who knows why he did it and who has the right to interfere with his affairs?

Before the main vacation really starts, my employer, M<sup>me</sup> Gešov, will introduce me to the harems of great Turkish dignitaries. It will be very interesting to visit Turkish homes, which are slowly becoming Europeanized. In order to not break with tradition too suddenly, everything has been modernized as much possible given that there is no electricity, phones or good potable water, and that there are bars on women's windows and affluent eunuchs. The luxuries are oriental, but the modern Turk – even if he has a harem where numerous European maids, governesses, teachers and female companions<sup>124</sup> reside – only has one actual wife, who is educated, musical, usually

122 Fre. *vol-au-vent*.

123 Fre. *dans son pigeonnier*.

124 Fre. *dames de companies*.

pretty and has been reared in the best European institutions. When going out, this woman covers her face with a dark veil. She never ventures out alone, but is always accompanied by other women – indeed, not even her husband, father, or any other men accompany her. When a modern Turk organizes a dinner or *soirée*, his wife is only present and dressed in the finest Parisian garb when he is very close to the other men and their wives. This sort of modern Turk will thus introduce his wife to diplomatic families only under the condition that there are no strangers.

It will be very exciting to visit the harem of traditional Turks, and my primary hope is to meet Abdul-Hamid's women of the harem. This is quite presumptuous, even if there are cases in which wives and daughters of diplomats have sat next to Hamid's favorites or daughters. We are regular guests at the Friday prayers, which we attend every week. Unfortunately, we did not see much of the harem, besides the daughters and women parading in court carriages. Their faces were covered in a white veil, unlike other ladies,<sup>125</sup> who were covered in black. In the Sultan's pavilion, where we were guests on Friday, Abdul-Hamid served us an incredibly delicious meal. There were specialties like wonderful cold stuffed vegetables<sup>126</sup> and sweets, for which even gourmets shed tears when they leave Carigrad.

Every Friday, the Sultan drives himself to his mosque in order to pray to Allah. He drives a four-in-hand accompanied by his favorite son Aziz, a handsome boy who is around sixteen or seventeen years old. The carriage is open and behind it trot the Padishah's fat and slim dignitaries, gasping for breath with the *fez* on their shaved heads. What a weird oriental scene!

When he passed by the diplomatic pavilion, the Sultan kindly saluted those who were present. As much as I could notice in the middle of such a commotion and rush, the Sultan seemed to resemble a monkey or, better said, an ugly, thin, little, long-nosed and long-handed black Jew. He is an awful Semitic, dangerous type. Rumor has it that Abdul-Hamid keeps his brother, who is a potential heir to the throne, all tied in chains in an isolated palace in Asia Minor. Allegedly, this brother was planning a coup d'état against our Sultan, who wants his son Aziz to be his heir. Abdul-Hamid's mother was a cruel, despised woman, and apparently Jewish. I've heard stories about her viciousness.

The poor prisoner Prince Mehmet is not her son. Apparently, Abdul-Hamid killed his daughter with his own hands because he suspected her of being connected to the plotters. God knows how much truth there is to these stories. However, it is enough that we know for sure that Abdul-Hamid was the initiator of that dreadful slaughter of more than 30,000 Armenians from Carigrad and its surroundings. Mandelstam

125 Tur. *hanumas* (modern spelling: *hanım[lar]*).

126 Tur. *dolma*.

calls him “the monster,”<sup>127</sup> while M<sup>me</sup> Gešov, of course, [refers to him] as “His Majesty the Sultan”<sup>128</sup>.

As soon as I find the time, I will write to the rest of our family. However, you can expect to receive daily reports on your grandson and our household. Christmas will be here soon. We will be staying with family<sup>129</sup> and with Nikola. New Year’s will be celebrated at the Austrians; the other, Orthodox, New Year’s at the Zinoviews – with a grand ball and Russian luxury!<sup>130</sup> Hugs to all and kissing the hands of you and Dad,

Your grateful,  
Alka

### Carigrad, 20. I. 1908

My dear Mummy and Dad,

I hope that you all received our 1908 New Year’s greeting cards. Minčo and I have read bundles of in-coming letters; Nikola has read some of them, too. We are delighted that we are able to receive them in good physical and mental health, especially because they bring lots of good news.

The New Year had an auspicious beginning for the Nestoroff couple. We welcomed it with a gala reception<sup>131</sup> at the Austrian embassy, where we spent the festive evening with Stauss’s waltz, a quadrille, and a rich cotillion, which I danced with Count Deym. His wife is so beautiful that I can almost say that her beauty surpasses all the other beauties I have had a chance to meet in our society. I do not know much about her personally, because I’ve never met her and, oddly enough, little is ever said about her.

Brandis’ wife arranged the quadrille and all the other dances a bit pretentiously, but with enough precision and appeal. The buffet was excellent and our “connoisseur”<sup>132</sup> Nikola was completely bound to his table with a glass of good wine. Horthy and his wife appeared with the entire suite from the steamer “Taurus.” On this occasion, I met Darko’s friend, navy lieutenant<sup>133</sup> Barth. He is a lovely young fellow who has just arrived on the “Taurus.”

127 Fre. *le monstre*.

128 Fre. *Majesté le Sultan*.

129 Fre. *en famille*.

130 Fre. *grand bal, luxe russe*.

131 Fre. *en gala*.

132 Ger. *Kenner*.

133 Ger. *Schiffsleutnant*.

We welcomed midnight with champagne and danced until two in the morning. We returned to our warm home accompanied by unpleasant weather. We had never had so many dogs “serenade” us as they did this night! It seems that they also welcomed the New Year in a festive mood with an abundance of discarded food.

Minčo and I concluded that, for us, 1907 had passed with God’s protection and blessing.

The elders from Kazanlik contacted us. Unfortunately, as much as grandfather Hristo is in good health, Mother Teofanije is not doing so well. It seems she suffers from a heart condition and, sadly, I don’t think there is much of a remedy for her.

As you can read from my daily reports, our little guy is now standing courageously on his feet. However, as he grows stronger, so does his opposition to Tereza. It seems that he responds so instinctively to her passive attitude that from time to time he wakes her up from her dreams. The less she reacts to this naughtiness, the more he becomes active and loses control of himself. Minčo constantly tries to impose a stricter regime on him. As for me, I think it’s too early to replace such a faithful and trustful servant just because she spoils a six-month old child. Our little guy is developing marvelously under her guidance and there will be plenty of time to seriously think about her replacement.

I will try to remember the Orthodox New Year, which we welcomed in the Russian embassy. Four days have passed since then and the weather is still such that you do not have the strength to go outside. We have taken shelter in our vitreous “refuge” and welcome guests here from time to time. These are definitely the bravest of souls, because they do not fear strong winds, fog, getting mugged, or even the smell of wet dogs, which my nose cannot bare!

In this wet and half frozen weather Minčo and I left our embassy at Pera (the Gešovs were on vacation) for the first time in sedans chairs<sup>134</sup> to go to the Russians to celebrate the New Year with them in the old style. Minčo was in full dress<sup>135</sup> with all his decorations on his proud chest, and I wore my gala pink dress with diamonds around my neck and a proud and expensive feather headdress<sup>136</sup> in my hair. With me wrapped in fur and Minčo attired in his dressy diplomatic raincoat – who could have possibly matched this?

We were supposed to go dressed up like this – I in the first sedan chair and Minčo in the second one. The night was pitch-black; there were no stars or moon in the sky and the cobble stones of Carigrad were frozen. We were advised not to take the carriage because we would hardly make it to the embassy with such badly shod horses unaccustomed to ice.

134 Fre. *dans des chaises à porteurs*.

135 Fre. *en grande tenue*.

136 Fre. *aigrette*.

The road from our embassy to the Russian embassy is quite complicated and hardly passable even when there's nice weather. Nevertheless, we decided to rent sedan chairs and take a shorter route with skilled carriers in order to get to our Russians more quickly and safely.

However, as you shall hear, it was an absolutely adventurous undertaking. My sedan chair – surely a beauty in its time, as I could tell from the poor lamp swinging right to left that some Asian carried after me – was now merely a sad shadow of its past. The velvet seat had been chewed by rats or moths; the glass on the windows was broken and papered over, the roof was patched together in the crudest way and all its adornments were almost completely missing. However, as I was full of enthusiasm and dressed to the nines, I proudly sat in this old “junk” and waited to leave.

The group of Asians, who were to be our carriers later on, was not attractive at all and they were nervously talked to each other while standing at the side. I am sure they argued about their pay. Shortly afterwards, I felt that my sedan chair being forcefully lifted up like a pergola<sup>137</sup>, which had lost its proper equilibrium. Two huge and strong Turks with wooden shoes on their feet ran off with me into the night, not bothering to wait for Minčo – who was still arguing with the Asians.

In vain, I begged them using all of the Carigrad jargon to stop and wait for the other sedan chair. They ran faster and faster through these unknown and God-forsaken little streets, lively talking to the third Asian who ran behind with the lamp.

Fear crept into the usually brave heart of Leonida's descendant. My imagination started to run wild: Where are these dreadful Asians taking me through this poor quarter? I tried more than once to communicate with them in Turkish and Western tongues<sup>138</sup> and to offer them the treasure of the Sultan to just to go back to where we started.

In vain – they kept yelling at each other, while their wooden shoes echoed into the dark night. I got angry at myself, put my feather headdress<sup>139</sup> in order and recommended my-self to God. After all, why should not everything turn out well?<sup>140</sup> And so, full of fatalism, I leaned back onto the worn chair and waited to see what these Turks would do to me.

Everything turned out well, my dear Mummy, and we welcomed the Orthodox New Year in lovely company and in excellent spirits.

137 Tur. *chardak* (modern spelling: *çardak*).

138 Ita. *alla turca, alla franca*.

139 Fre. *aigrette*.

140 Fre. *A qui bon perdre la tête?*

The sedan chair adventure inspired Andrej Nikolajević to compose a poem and the skilled painter Gagarin to draw an illustration. I will send you both poem and the drawing as soon as everyone who went to the Russians' gets to see them.

Actually, I was right: The Asians were in fact arguing about their pay. It seems that mine had accused Minčo's of interfering in their business. They did not want to let the others steal work from them and so they decided to run off with my sedan chair. Because they ran so fast with this "junk" we arrived quite early. So, instead of being sold in an Asian harem, I ended up sitting comfortably next to the fire with the infidel's<sup>141</sup> husband and one of his sons.

A more skillful plume than mine is needed to evoke the richness and beauty of this New Year's Eve. And the kindness of the hosts towards the guests – you should have experienced this yourself<sup>142</sup> – is something I'll never forget!

All the rooms were full of roses, and all the walls were in velvet and decorated in the style of "La France" rose. There were gifts, too – lovely calendars with golden covers and small jewels for the ladies. That night, I had yet another pleasant and memorable experience. According to the Russian custom, on that day a big cake was to be served in which a coin was placed coin as a good-luck charm. The ladies cut the cake using their own discretion<sup>143</sup>. The person who cuts her slice and finds the coin in it is declared the New Year's Queen. Because I was seventh or eighth in line, I cut out only a very modest slice of the cake. But there it was on the plate – the coin! It was so big! On my way home, they decorated my carriage with roses.

"The Queen of 1908" does not request much<sup>144</sup>, only that 1908 may be as happy as 1907. With some anxiety and lots of nostalgia I said good-bye to the latter.

Tomorrow the Carps<sup>145</sup> and Darko's friend Barth will visit us – Barth and our Nikola Bužimski. If the weather is nice we will go to Pera or to Stamboul for shopping. Nikola wants to buy Persian carpets, and M<sup>me</sup> Carp is a specialist in bargaining at Turkish bazaars. This little Romanian is not a breathtaking beauty, and yet she is always surrounded by a swarm of gentlemen. It seems that our Nikola will not lonely! M. Carp – small, inconspicuous, well-behaved<sup>146</sup>, the son of one of the first diplomatic families in Romania – makes for a better official than an attractive husband.

141 Tur. *kaur* (modern spelling: *gavur*).

142 Ger. *dies müsste man selbst miterlebt haben*.

143 Ger. *nach Gutdünken*.

144 Fre. *La reine de 1908 ne demande rien de plus*.

145 Fre. *le couple Carp*.

146 Fre. *petit, insignifiant, très bien élevé*.

Minčo has shared with me very interesting things about the diplomatic communication with the Turks. He is convinced that the Sultan is preparing another surprise, which [Minčo believes] passive and quarrelsome Europe deserves. Yesterday, he visited yesterday the German von der Goltz Pasha, who possesses all the virtues and faults of his nation. He plays an important role in dressing up the Turkish army, but even in political terms.

This week, Minčo and I intend to visit the Bulgarian exarch Josif. He is ill but a very intelligent priest. On New Year's, Minčo went to mass at the Bulgarian church. It is a fascinating church, located at the top of Carigrad and made entirely of iron. I plan on visiting it.

I was also at Notre Dame de Sion to visit little Teodora Gešov. I like everything there, except the fact that it is somber and plain. Little Teodora is delightful. I brought her a box of sweets and it was lovely to see how she shared it with her classmates. The Gešovs are about to return from vacation. So far, I am quite happy about the pleasant relations between Gešov and Minčo, and M<sup>me</sup> Gešov and me<sup>147</sup>. I hear that there will soon be changes in our corps. It's been mentioned that Prince Ferdinand will probably come here.

Soon I will write more. Why has Ivana not written? I would like to hear how the children are doing and read her humorous letters from that blessed town on the [river] Sava, which is so welcoming to friars and...! But I don't want to be spiteful. I spent so many wonderful days there in my early youth with dear Naco and my sister-poet.

Yours gratefully,  
Alka

**Carigrad, January 1908**

My dear Mummy,

The message you sent me through this artistic – but a bit odd – couple, the cellist Stano and his wife, arrived all right. I was worried about Ivana. I would guess that the cause of her despondency must be the provincial atmosphere around her. I blame the Slavonian nest she has to settle in – but she has no choice. Nonetheless, my first youthful memories about Brod's vineyards are so lovely that I always happily remember them, along with good-hearted Naco, as good as the day is long, and broad-minded as the Slavonian plain from which he descended. I am glad whenever I hear something about him.

<sup>147</sup> Fre. *et moi*.

Whenever I think about the environment in which Ivana – created for a flight to the universe – has to live in, it makes me sad. I invited her to come here for a month or two, but she seems to be very busy with the household and cannot leave until she resolves the issues concerning the servants and children. Indeed, these are pressing matters, which sometimes fray your nerves, even if they are ultimately trivial. I'm glad you informed me through Stano that, besides her despondency, Ivana is not seriously ill. When I return here from Zagreb in autumn, Ivana will join me whether she is willing to or not.<sup>148</sup> Regarding the children, they will be sent as usual to good old Mum!

When I am back underneath our old roof again, to me the dearest in the world, I hope to encounter Darko, Ivana and Željko there. It will seem to all of us like we never even left!

Three days ago Stano gave a concert here. I tried to promote him and fill the concert hall. Unfortunately, things did not go as I hoped. He is unknown here and his appearance defied any attempt to publicize it. His poor “better half”<sup>149</sup> is very kind, but she must be one of the rare modest women in Great Britain.

Indeed, Stano performed excellently. I am enclosing the program of the performance in this letter. At the end of the concert he played a composition that was dedicated to me –the former fifteen-year old teenage girl!<sup>150</sup> It was so well received that he had to play it again. The next day, he had lunch with his English “lady.” Nikola and a young very musical Bulgarian couple who were returning from Asia Minor stayed for lunch, too. I cannot say it was very enjoyable. Minčo, who is usually very hospitable, failed this time completely. Nothing in the world could catch his interest, not even his compatriots!<sup>151</sup> On top of it – in a defiant mood – my son behaved in an utterly Balkan manner! He was responsible for giving flowers to the ladies and saluting them accordingly. Instead, he gave the flowers to me, and turned his rear-end towards the guests.

Of course, this was yet another reason to question his governess. I also decided that we should replace Tereza before this autumn with a more competent instructor of the little spoiled brat. It will be all the easier to do then because Tereza's daughter has asked her to come home, and she also wants to leave.

I beg you my dear mummy, please start putting out your feelers right away for an experienced helper!<sup>152</sup> I am sure there must be someone who – in addition to her ex-

148 Lat. *nolens volens*.

149 Slv. *boljša polovica*.

150 Cro. *Bakfiš*; from Ger. *Backfiſch*.

151 Fre. *Tout ce monde ne l'interessait pas et avant tout ces propres compatriots pas!*

152 Ger. *Strecke schon jetzt die Fühler aus nach einer erfahrenen Kraft*.



cellent pedagogical virtues – would like to see the land of the Padishah, pashas and *begs*<sup>153</sup>, so I will not have to worry about dealing with her embarrassing homesickness later on.

I introduced our cellist to the Gešovs. He played at M<sup>me</sup> Carp's who joined him on the piano. Last night our artists went via Sofia and Belgrade to Zagreb with many recommendations from Minčo and me. Between you and me, four days of taking care for our kind artists was nevertheless<sup>154</sup> enough for me. If they intend to come here again – which they do – it would be great if they could let me know one month in advance. It will then be much better for them and less stressful for me.

About eight or ten days ago, a young Levantine, Mlle Decosta delightfully sang Italian arias at my place, accompanied by the attaché of the Russian embassy. My piano was put into action for the first time in Carigrad. It survived its transport from Belgrade to here incredibly well – only a few high tones are damaged. The same evening came Dr. Štiepotiev with his wife, both of whom are very musical. He is the director of the Russian hospital, which is four blocks away. He is strange – but his wife is even stranger. I do not know how to describe her. She reminds me of a female fakir, starved and shriveled to the bones. I have a feeling that they are keeping secret some tragedy, which somehow forms a strong bond between this completely incongruous couple. Štiepotiev is a short, ordinary, burly man, unusually silent and, if I am not mistaken, not very intelligent. M<sup>me</sup> Štiepotiev, on the contrary, has noticeably penetrating eyes, which somehow compensate for the face's complete absence of any female charm.

I visited the Štiepotievs. The hospital is not large, but it is well kept. It is a clean refuge for patients who here lose touch with the Orient and become truly well cared for Europeans. I encountered M<sup>me</sup> Štiepotiev in the tiny patients' room. She was comforting a little invalid, while holding him on her skinny lap. I was impressed to see such gentleness towards children from this female fakir, who is usually indifferent towards everything around her. Indeed, I have never met a more peculiar and more intriguing female creature than this emaciated Russian. I am sure her husband knows her the least of anyone. Nevertheless, I feel this couple is connected by some tragedy, of which we don't know. I will ask Andrej Nikolajević what he knows about it. This mysterious couple even caught Minčo's attention, who is usually uninterested in examining other people. Still, he speaks humorously about Dr. Štiepotiev, whose exceedingly unattractive appearance he doesn't like. But M<sup>me</sup> Štiepotiev has really touched him<sup>155</sup>! It is as if he pities her without knowing the reason or cause.

153 The Ottoman Turkish term *beg/bey* originally designated a tribal chieftain, as is the case in many other Middle Eastern and Turkic languages. Since the 19th century its meaning has become wider as a polite address of males, similar to the English "Sir" or "gentleman".

154 Fr. *malgré tout*.

155 Ger. *hat es ihm angetan*.

I have not written you much about my strolls through the city. I have sent the guides to Dad, where you can find every detail worth describing. I do not wish to compete with their descriptions because I can only confirm them, and would rarely want to revise them. As for the walks I take on my own, they are not worth mentioning. As it happens, I find myself in the dirtiest quarter which does not offer any gradual transitions from the most modern parts of the city to the dirty ones. There are a lot of disparities and they jump out at you without any warning. When you cross the streets in the busiest parts, it is not unusual to encounter Turkish grocers<sup>156</sup> cutting a poor ram's throat with their sharp knives! The "executioners" are especially popular among our wretched and hungry dogs, which greedily follow the cruel ceremony, hoping to gain some miserable benefit for their stomachs. I was shocked when I witnessed this awful scene for the first time, so now I am very careful when passing through Carigrad's suburbs – God help me!

Sometimes experienced and well-adjusted diplomats join me in my roaming. Then this walk becomes instructive, allowing me to enter more deeply into the Turkish quarters of Carigrad.

M<sup>me</sup> Carp also enjoys walking with me. She is young and alive and I am always happy to be by her side. She has the devil in her, but it is not mischievous. It is a very pleasant devil!<sup>157</sup> She has two little sons. Both resemble their father, who adores them. "Madame-Sans-Gêne" (that is to say Baroness Giesl) has excellently described how M<sup>me</sup> Carp nonchalantly manages the household, while at the same time making a cuckold of her husband. She is around 28 years old and does not know what it means to be frustrated. Our nobleman Nikola from Zagorje openly courts her in front of all the ladies in our society. I think she would be a perfect artistic subject for a gypsy – not overly beautiful, but also not as ugly as a Romanian gypsy.

Our household became richer for one more member – a Greek cook who carries the famous name Leonidas. Anuška has felt ill recently, but without any symptoms of true illness. In order to help her recuperate, we will temporarily replace her with our Leonidas, who has excellent recommendations. He makes extraordinary delicacies; nevertheless his roast and cabbage<sup>158</sup> cannot be compared with Anuška's. Minčo already has his eye on him, because this week he caught the cook staggering half-drunk on the stairs. For Minčo, nothing can be worse than lacking self-discipline and soberness. Because I have absolutely no alternative, I will keep him on the job for another month or two until Anuška completely recovers. I give her the famous yoghurt of our Spanish grandee, which he sends to her personally in cherished memory of the last Székely goulash he ate at our place!

156 Tur. *bakal*.

157 Fre. *Des diables très plaisants!*

158 Ger. *Kohl*.

I met the Gešovs' older daughter Kata and their son Stefan. Kata is a miniature mother with little sense of individuality, while Stefan is an unremarkable and obese boy<sup>159</sup>.

Gešov can be unfailingly attentive to Minčo and me – everything is going really smoothly with our demanding employers. I do not want to jinx it!

As for politics, I hear that a storm, which is luckily still far away is in quiet and insidious preparation. How Oriental. It is spoken a lot about the Young Turk movement, which is led by officers from the general staff<sup>160</sup>. Enver Bey is always mentioned in this context. I have to say I first met him in Belgrade at the Turkish ambassador's. As I can recall, he is a handsome and elegant young man.

The upcoming days will be very interesting because of our big outing: M<sup>me</sup> Gešov and I plan to visit the Grand Vizier's harem and later other more modern Turkish interiors. I will describe you everything in a detail.

It seems that Minčo will soon be going to Sofia. The Prince called on him. I am sad because I won't be able to join him. M<sup>me</sup> Gešov needs me to help her around our legation. Lately, lots of Bulgarian intendants have been coming here, so receptions, lunches<sup>161</sup> and dinners are our daily routine. The legation is not big, but is much better staffed than e.g. the Serbian one. Nenadović is appointed as ambassador and because he is an old bachelor, dear old M<sup>me</sup> Nenadović, his mother, helps him lovingly around the embassy. I am very pleased to encounter her here because in Belgrade we actually became friends.

I do not know if I wrote to you about our trip to Asia Minor by boat? In case I haven't, I will describe on the first occasion how I spent it in a nice cosmopolitan company, with quite a storm and thunder on the funny old-fashioned paddle steamer!

I send my regards to everyone. To dear Aunt Cenika, I kiss her hands, to Hanika etc. etc., kisses from little Hristo and compliments from Minčo and me. I kiss the hands of you and dear Dad. Gratefully,

Alka

159 Fre. *un gros garçon sans importance*.

160 Ger. *Generalstab*.

161 Fre. *déjeuners*.

Carigrad, March 1908

Dear Dad and Mum,

I cannot tell you how happy I am that all the news from you and my homeland are tremendously positive. As much as I am spoiled by all of you from “Our Beautiful”<sup>162</sup> because there is not a day in which I do not receive a thick pile of mail from Zagreb, I still think of you constantly – with or without the mail. I am sure that sometimes subconsciously chimes ring in your left ear and you remember us, somewhere beyond the woods and seas.

As I can see, my cards and letters come promptly. These are my morning greetings after I’ve checked that my son is ready to start the day. In his kingdom of toys, where he is the sole ruler, he welcomes me with joy<sup>163</sup>.

We woke up rested, strong and healthy even though we violently bombarded the dogs last night and listened apprehensively how the night guard screamed a warning about a fire in our own neighborhood.

Youth means joy, my Mummy, and as for old age – if God will grant it to us – we will support it with the canes of our memories so that it will be more tolerable.

I enclose the photos of my one-year old celebrant. Of course, Tereza fusses about them, stating they do not resemble our boy at all.

I leave it to your judgment if you’ll see the photographs the way I do. I like them. I do not mind the grumpy face of our celebrant who vehemently refused to stand next to me. I can hardly find anywhere such a desire for freedom in such a little child as is our “hybrid”<sup>164</sup>. He can barely walk! Minčo interprets this freedom as connoting a lack of discipline, whose cause lies in Tereza’s apathy. I agree with him wholeheartedly. Tereza’s educational methods are everything but ideal. However, our boy is developing superbly by her side and her dedication has no bounds. I have to have a different personality, and not the one that I inherited from my ancestors, if I were to dismiss Tereza and thus deny her love and dedication to my boy. If God permits, I will come to Zagreb this summer, so we will solve the “Tereza issue” together.

Please let me know, Mummy, if you liked the photographs. If only you knew how poor-

162 Croats refer to Croatia as “Lijepa naša” (Our Beautiful) which are the first two words of the 1835 lyrics of the patriotic song “*Lijepa naša domovino*” (Our Beautiful Homeland), which first started to be performed as the Croat people’s anthem in the 1860s and has held an official status in Croatia since 1972 where it has become the national anthem with Croatia’s independence in 1990.

163 Ger. *wo er Alleinherrscher ist*.

164 Ger. *Mischling*.

ly your grandson treated the Turkish photographer, you'd be surprised that he did not react in the severest fashion. I do not know how he [your grandson] freed himself from my arms, ran to the stand on which the photo camera was installed and kicked it with his leg. Luckily, Minčo caught the camera, but the stand fell on the stout and exposed head of the photographer.

I'm surprised that the photographer met everything with good humor, and also that Tereza screamed in panic, something about "devils going around in this un-Christian atelier".

Minčo has placed his wife and son in a nice silver frame. At the moment I am writing to you, I am staring at this hat on my head in which I was celebrated my first success<sup>165</sup> in Carigrad's diplomatic salons, and I think about how my future descendants will react with laughter to this "tube" on my head in a hundred years' time. Probably just as we reacted when we were children and saw the hats of our grandmothers. We thought they must have been for a masquerade. For example, the drawing of our grand-grandmother Fedreczy with some particularly hilarious hat on her head convinced Darko that it was some sort of adornment of Indian haunTERS for scalps.

Notwithstanding, under this hat, which was immortalized by the Turkish photographer, I had a wonderful afternoon. The Russian dragoman took me on his carriage on the most beautiful tour of Carigrad.

For a long time, we had been waiting for a warm day so that we could go to Carigrad's sweet waters at the "earthly paradise"<sup>166</sup> – he keeps referring to it.

Finally, a nice sunny day materialized last Saturday, so Andrej Nikolajević organized a trip, which will remain one of the most wonderful memories. We travelled for quite some time, not always on the best of streets, until we finally reached a beautiful thicket like I had never seen before.

It is a gorgeous wood with a charming winding path, which overlooks the sea. Streams of sweet water run between the trees and disappear in the sea. The silence is only disturbed only by the sound of the water and you can feel the scent of wood and flowers in the air.

Furthermore, this "earthly paradise" has something else which makes its name entirely appropriate. In the shadow of the thick branches of wood, amorous nightingales sing. With the so-called beauty of angels' voices, there are hundreds of these Turkish *bulbul*<sup>167</sup> which sing here at "The Sweet Waters of Europe"<sup>168</sup>!

165 Fre. *succès*.

166 Fre. *Le paradis terrestre*.

167 Modern Turkish: *bülbül*.

168 Fre. *aux eaux-deuces de Constantinople*.

Andrej N. took out the album of French poetry and stopped the carriage under some dense tree – and along with the song of a little singer, he recited the French verses.

He is a scholar, and though somewhat eccentric, he is an outstanding poet. He claims that he sings only at “The Sweet Waters of Europe” where he often goes alone to listen to the nightingales and the sound of the sweet water rushing into the sea. The Slavic blood in me found equally made me a devotee of Carigrad’s paradise on earth. I’ve decided to persuade Minčo to join me in this paradise. There will be no beautifully sung verses, but I am sure that even without them we will listen to the nightingales and admire the miraculous chirping of Turkish *bulbuls*.

My first trip to the kingdom of nightingales was enhanced by a group of Turkish ladies who came uncovered with their private boats, sat under trees and melodiously chatted, laughed and sang. This was a great competition for the little nightingales! Without these beautiful ladies, and with all the *bulbuls*, this thicket would not have been a complete earthly paradise.

I looked at them from a distance because it would not have been appropriate to approach them with their male escort. Who knows, maybe it could have been dangerous? At a short distance from this group sat a giant black man – I am guessing a eunuch, the keeper of the honor of – also nowadays modern – Turkish women.

It is strange how male Turkish speech sounds so unmusical and guttural, but, on the contrary, it is a pleasure to listen to it from the mouth of these young and educated Carigrad ladies. With Hungarians the reverse is true. It is horrible to listen to how loudly a Hungarian woman says “prau-genau” in the Tatar language. On the other hand, I have to confess that when I was listening to actors (not actresses) on the stage in Budapest, they made musical wonders in their language. I believe that Atilla’s command had its special charm, but I doubt that poor Ildike developed her charm when she spoke Tatarian.

The last few days we have been preparing to pay a visit to one part of the Bulgarian colony in Carigrad. It is very spread out, but not very attractive. Unfortunately, I feel quite out of place because I am poor in gallant Bulgarian conversation. Bulgarians in Turkey are extraordinarily conservative. They do not even want to hear about using another language when a Bulgarian visit is in question. They praise Croats a lot, but they hate their brothers the Serbs. This is the proverbial love for one’s brother!<sup>169</sup>

Yesterday, it was very pleasant at Carps’, where there was recitation and music. After tea, we continued to revel in the nicely decorated cafeteria of the “Hotel Pera.” Hungarian gypsies played and delighted a diverse public full of spirits<sup>170</sup>. I always notice

169 Fre. *L’amour fraternel déjà proverbial!*

170 Fre. *avec grand élan.*

the gallant movements and proud faces of every Arab I see. Because of the fine structure of their bodies, flawless faces and fiery eyes, Arabs remind me of the famous full-blooded Arabian horses.

Nikola and Minčo quickly disappointed me, however. They both closely interacted with the Arabs and claimed that their strong faces did not mirror their souls. Savage, hypocritical, skeptical and very often – with all the fuss around and about them – they were very ordinary and simple minded<sup>171</sup>. This, at any rate, was the impression of Minčo and Nikola, but they are both not competent to make such judgments. I tend to believe that they both had the misfortune of encountering bad examples of this race. Besides, neither of them recognizes a priori any other continent apart from Europe. So how could they possibly recognize Arabs as a “noble race.”

It seems like it will be a serious occasion when the parliament opens – it is not even certain when this will happen – that Arabs will come in their folk costumes and make a speech only in pure Arabic. I think it will be a momentous scene for us Europeans to see one completely Oriental parliament made up of different Asian deputies. I wonder how many gold decorations, deep bows, guttural speeches and eyes that do not reveal a soul will be there in one room?

Mummy, you ask me how I manage with my quite capricious and even more eccentric employer? Until now, thanks God, wonderfully. It is not only my merit. M<sup>me</sup> Gešov is enormously charming and helpful to me. I think she is glad that I enrooted so fast in the society, which welcomes me everywhere so nicely. Nevertheless, it is not always like this. For instance, there are even in our corps arrogant members who are frustrated and sometimes against their will look distant and stilted. This kind of people regularly disappears from the social scene and they do not receive anyone or only those whom they find necessary. I get out of their way, but often this sort of grouchy character sympathizes with me and calls me often.

I meet few rich Levantine families. One rich Armenian, very beautiful, though not so likeable, described me her horrible tragic experience, which she lived through the slaughter of Armenians. In front of her eyes the Kurds rented by Abdul-Hamid slaughtered her father. Her mother and herself were wounded badly but they survived. She has shown me a deep bruise on her neck, made by a Kurdish sharp knife. Andrej Nikolajević survived one of the slaughters in Carigrad. He said that for eight days the whole city stank of blood. 20,000 Armenians were slaughtered.

Despite the tragedy with the Armenians, they have neither high culture nor natural intelligence. There is something unwelcoming about them. Just as some features of Jews are not likeable or appealing. Undoubtedly nations without their own state that

171 Fre. *très commun et simple d'esprit*.

are tolerated and tortured become unlikeable and dangerous for the state in which they live. Abdul-Hamid leaves them alone so that they can become rich, and when they do, he hires Kurds. They enjoy doing this job because the Sultan's agents rob the houses of the dead. Andrej Nikolajević claims that this is Europe's fault, because it favors Turks for political reasons and modernizes and arms the Turkish military. Von der Goltz Pasha receives decoration after decoration, and Turkish cadets march as their Prussian teacher has taught them. How will this play end? We shall see.<sup>172</sup>

I always intend to describe to you impressions from my lonely walks through Carigrad. I am not the bravest person, so when I go out by myself, I keep to the more civilized parts of the city. Except for the stereotypical dirty, poor and wooden houses in the suburbs of the city, everything is just as it has been described by hundreds and hundreds of travelers or tourists. I have nothing further to add or describe, this is not appealing, but it's the Orient!<sup>173</sup> It seems like everything fell asleep in this town – there is little construction and what has been built is so tasteless that it spoils the uniqueness of the Orient. Usually Greeks are the ones doing the building. The Turks, however, do not value their luxurious, mostly wooden-made castles, so the façade is often neglected and ruined. Gardens are all walled up, making it hard to take a look inside. The most troubling flaw of the city is its lack of electric illumination, an electric tram and, in all, a lack of any modern comfort.

It is terrible when one must deal with these paraffin lamps. It's as if they have a devil inside them. You clean, you sweat, you cut and are nice to this miserable circle-shaped burner<sup>174</sup>. But just when you think you have done everything perfectly, there comes the stereotypical syringe, in which smoke and nasty soot are spewed out and the cylinder goes to hell. The most horrible moments are when guests are arriving and your lamp simply will not work. It blows out smoke, dirties the furniture, blackens hands and nostrils, and smells of everything but perfume.

I immediately cancelled the order for Tereza's paraffin chandelier. Now, the only paraffin chandelier is in my son's room – the most luxurious but also the most expensive illumination, twelve candles in a gilt chandelier. Thus, the little prince can indeed live like a real prince with his governess.<sup>175</sup> You can experience such adventures with paraffin lamps in all homes, whether the modest ones or the house of the grand vizier. Unless they have replaced the lamps with candles. God only knows how many thousands of candles burn in Yildiz Palace.

It is also hard not having a telephone because the distances are great. After the death of Abdul-Hamid, Carigrad will lose its current design. The dogs will vanish and skyscrap-

172 Ita. *vedremo*.

173 Fre. *ce n'est pas attractif mais c'est l'Orient!*

174 Ger. *Rundbrenner*.

175 Fre. *le petit prince a la chance de vivre en véritable prince avec sa dame de compagnie*.



ers will show off their hollow Americanized domes. Thank God that this will not happen here very soon. Although no one knows for sure, we all feel that these poor dogs will meet their end. There are more dogs in Carigrad than *fezzes*. Just imagine how hard it is for me to even contemplate it, especially the visible modernization of the town. But, it cannot be avoided – that’s it<sup>176</sup>. It’s inevitable, just as it’s inevitable that Minčo and I will get old and our Hristo will have to shave his moustache and beard.

I’ve written too much and will have to leave off discussing my strolls around Carigrad for another time. I’ve seen a lot. Some sights have impressed me and here and there I have had fun encountering the local population.

Marquis Camposagrado constantly supplies me with his special yoghurt made from the milk of buffaloes that are specially fed and which is only sold to him. I am happier to receive the accompanying flowers than this overly fatty yoghurt which, for the record, I give only to my two Bulgarians. This old restless gentleman<sup>177</sup> and womanizer<sup>178</sup> is a very pleasant conversationalist<sup>179</sup>. His French vocabulary is so melodious, rich and full of beautiful expressions that they should be written down lest they are lost to oblivion. It is said that he is an excellent poet and a terrible diplomat. But people tend to say many things without real justification. The last time at the *soirée* of military attaché Holms, our “*Grande*” suddenly became sick. He began to shake uncontrollably, but the old man soon regained consciousness and gallantly kissed the hands of his beautiful Samaritans. The next day he sent us a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

I’ve heard that there will soon be a big dinner at the old Russian ambassador’s residence. I’m sure it will be a glittering and splendid affair. The French and the Italians are also planning to organize some sort of garden party at their summer residences near the sea in Therapia<sup>180</sup>. It will be a good idea to check my wardrobe and decide which group we should join on the deck of the old steamer that travels between Stamboul’s bridge and Therapia. I hear there will be lampions and a tombola, and the younger male members of the diplomatic corps are preparing a surprise for the ladies. It will be my first visit to beautiful Therapia, about which I’ve heard only good things. I will write to you about it afterwards in detail.

I have sent you a couple of good guides to Carigrad, including Claude Farrère’s novel *L’homme qui assassina*<sup>181</sup> and Pierre Loti’s *Les désenchantées*.<sup>182</sup> Both writers had spent some time in Carigrad and each wrote about it in his own way, giving their impressions of Carigrad’s atmosphere and of Turkish families.

176 Lat. *punctum pausa*.

177 Fre. *grand seigneur*.

178 Ger. *Damenfreund*.

179 Fre. *causeur*.

180 Tarabya.

181 Claude Farrère: *L’homme qui assassina*. Paris: Ollendorf, 1906.

182 Pierre Loti: *Les désenchantées: roman des harems turcs contemporains*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1906.

I hope that you are all together now before Easter and further hope that you celebrate it in good health. I suppose Darko, too, will stop by for a short vacation and that Ivana will also visit you for a day or two. I must not think about it because my longing for home is too great, although I am surrounded here with blessings, beauty, and kindness.

I hug you all, especially dear Aunt Cenika, whom I have so much to thank; and hugs to our old Hanika and the servants around her, with Tomaš coming first and foremost. All the best for Easter, my dearest, and kissing your hands. Gratefully yours,

Alka

**Carigrad, 3 May 1908**

My lovely Mummy and dear Dad!

My daily reports are so full of everything that occupies my heart or that concerns our little family circle that I really do not have much to add in this epistle from the Bosphorus to the Sava. Thank God we are alive and well and we do often think of you.

I suspect that Minčo also wrote you without my knowledge. I also suspect that most of the letter refers to individual qualities. With all the love for me, my dear Mummy, I doubt that you will accept this as impartial personal description of your youngest daughter without some revision. Minčo is never a good witness when it concerns me. As much as I am grateful to him for the flattering description of my qualities, I am afraid that I deserve only a small amount of his praise. As you see, I have been taken under God's care and that of my husband, so God forbid I squander it through my own fault!

The weather is so wonderful here. I look through my translucent apartment with its 28 windows on the silver part of the Bosphorus and the palace of our odious Padishah. About this Yildiz Palace, I've heard lots of stories – they're often awful and often impressive. Two Fridays ago – after the Sultan's procession to the Friday prayer<sup>183</sup> – Minčo had the opportunity to see the palace as part of the diplomatic corps. The Sultan received them after the prayer at the mosque, first in one of the pavilions called "Tatim-Hane" and then in the company of the Sultan's suite. They looked around the Sultan's glamorous halls and parts of his residence.

The palace arises from the middle of the glorious clusters of trees, plantations and pavilions as the masterpiece of Allah himself! From the palace – that is to say, from

183 Tur. *selamlik*.

the numerous halls filled with Oriental treasure, jewelry, gold and alabaster – Abdul-Hamid leaves through – it is said – secret paths to his harem. The harem is spread throughout the parks and gardens, and it cannot be glanced even by the foreign female eye. This would profane the property of the cruel.

All the windows of these pavilions are interconnected with bars and under the windows stand the eternal giant black-eunuch guards, all of whom will end up – if it ever comes to a revolution – burned at the stake or hung. These wretches are also vicious spies and faithfully perform all the monstrous orders of their master.

Have ever seen a photograph of Abdul-Hamid? I see him every Friday when he passes besides the diplomatic loge on the way to the mosque to pray to Allah for a long life and his mild despotic rule.

Driving past to the diplomatic pavilion, the Sultan regularly salutes those who are present, and the diplomats reciprocate the greetings. Inside the pavilion an amazing meal is served. It is an extraordinary spectacle! After the Padishah's gala carriage with all the decorations march or run his ministers according to the good or bad disposition of the Sultan, who sometimes forces them to gallop! Those unfortunate souls, they have to run over the small hill and they disgrace themselves if they fall behind the wheels of the carriage. Since they are more or less advanced in age, well fed, and wear *fezzes* on their heads and heavy decorations on their chests, the scene is pathetic, comical, but – most of all – repugnant.

Minčo claims he was impressed by the appearance of Abdul-Hamid amidst the luxuries of the Yildiz Palace. The little man resembles more a monkey than a human being, and adding to this all he has a distinctly Jewish face, unsympathetic to the extreme.

Last Friday after the selamlık, in the company of M<sup>me</sup> Carp and Andrej Mandelstam we went to Skutari<sup>184</sup>, a small town in Asia Minor. Minčo waited for us in the legation. We went down from Pera to Galata and then to the harbor where the four of us embarked on some small run-down boat on wheels. Boats like these are the only transportation available to the nearby harbors.

Skutari is – like most any other – smaller Oriental town not especially original. There is nothing about it to marvel at and, even less, to admire. Nevertheless, I was proud of my – however modest – crossing from one continent to the other. We have sent a lot of postcards to you from Asia Minor. I'm hoping you'll get a sense of where we went and what we experienced.

184 Üsküdar.

In the evening, we returned quite exhausted to Carigrad. M<sup>me</sup> Carp and her Russian had gone home before us. M<sup>me</sup> Carp had a guest and it was Mandelstam's duty to return her alive and well into the arms of M. Carp, who was waiting for her at Stamboul's bridge. After our pleasant companions had left, I had the idea to return home on one of those many uncomfortable Asian kayaks (sic). I was drawn to them because they reminded me of all those wonderful gondola trips on the Canale Grande! A good husband never refuses whatever his wife desires<sup>185</sup> – even against his better judgment! And so there we were in the kayak of very questionable cleanliness and even less comfort.

But, as soon as we departed, a strong wind picked up and the sky filled with clouds. The waves were getting higher and swinging our kayak just to spite me. Our behatted heads where one moment at sea level, the next above it. Minčo held onto his brand new authentic Viennese “*žirardec*” hat more and more intrepidly, while I clutched my “Florentine hat” hitched with a long hair needle, with both my hands.

I do not know how it happened, but it was very sudden: Like a flying dragon, my Florentine hat with its needle and a tuft of my hair soared into the air. Then – out of a sense of marital solidarity, I suppose – Minčo's Viennese “*žirardec*” took off as well and then fell together with my hat into the Sea of Marmara. Hence my dream to visit another continent ended in a tragicomic finale.

We arrived home ragged and wet. I was prepared to look at it from the humorous side, and my husband from every other side. I quickly forgot my Florentine hat, but the loss of the “*žirardec*” inspired Andréj Nikolaević to compose a song with the title “Return, my beautiful hat!”<sup>186</sup>, which soon became a hit among our closest friends.

I just remembered that I have never told you about one of my son's customary and agreeable walks in the “Taxim” garden, which is kept in surprisingly good order. According to Tereza, there is not a single man who does not stop next to the stroller of our boy wondering whose pretty baby this is! It is just her imagination, I tell her. She has not learned a single word of Turkish yet, and even less Greek, or “*alla franca*.” Nevertheless, this does not stop her from summing up in her rich Zagreb vocabulary all the alleged conversations she had with the passersby who praised the beauty and charm of her little protégé.

I've noticed lately how much she misses her daughter. I comfort her by telling her that in July she will go with us to Zagreb. It is easier for her now to think that she will soon be with her family. I have not mentioned to her my intention to take on a stronger helper for my Hristo with knowledge of an international language. However, I assume that she herself would not want to go so far from home anymore. She

185 Fre. *ce que femme veut un bon mari ne refuse pas*.

186 Fre. *Reviens mon beau chapeau*.

deserves all my recognition and gratitude. It would be strange if she would not already sense this.

A couple of days ago we spent a very pleasant evening at the “Tokatlian,” the nicest hotel in Pera. It is as if a magical hand had transferred it here from Paris or Beč. Alongside this wonderful hotel, there are ugly modern buildings, dirty little stores, Asian restaurants, and hundreds of disgusting dogs. Only society with a big wallet come to the “Tokatlian.”<sup>187</sup> The prices are horrendous. Minčo and I were guests of Marquis Camposagrado. He wanted to come with me at any cost<sup>188</sup> to this little corner of a fake version of Europe.<sup>189</sup>

The food was excellent: a menu with caviar, champagne, a wonderfully prepared fish and pineapple cream – all befitting a Spanish *Grande*.

Whenever I meet this old and always charming bon vivant, I marvel at his excellent French. Any French spoken today could not compete with the superb eloquence of this old aristocrat. He spoke and recited anecdotes in this superb manner in a salon à la M<sup>me</sup> Recamier. Such salons do not exist today and there are no longer beautiful ladies who are willing to listen to poetic and philosophical discussions, e.g. that of a Chateaubriand. Our Marquis, with his already legendary taste,<sup>190</sup> would be a marvelous figure or model for a depiction of those times. In a few days, he will go to Therapia like all the other diplomats.

During the dog days of summer, which will come soon, some of the diplomats and the Turkish aristocracy will move to the beautiful island of Prinkipo,<sup>191</sup> some to the upper Bosphorus villages of Therapia or Benjuk-Dere,<sup>192</sup> where most have beautiful summer residences. Diplomacy usually sticks to Therapia, but we, my dear Mum, are going to 5 Jurjevska Street this summer, to sit under our chestnut tree!

I still plan to go on a trip with M<sup>me</sup> Carp and Nikola to the “Sweet Waters.” I am convinced that nothing in the world will put Nikola or M<sup>me</sup> Carp into such a poetic mood<sup>193</sup> like the one I had during my first trip to the *bulbuls* of the “Sweet Waters of Constantinople.”<sup>194</sup> My “*Zagorac*” will sit under the tree without poetry, yet with hundreds of nightingales singing, and he will listen with pleasure only to the frivolous gossip of the lovely little Romanian. I’m sure of something else as well: If I could read the thoughts of Nikola and Mrs. Carp, I would probably discover something like this:

187 Srp. *budelar*.

188 Fre. *à tout prix*.

189 Fre. *talmi-Europe*.

190 Fre. *avec sa gouste déjà proverbiale*.

191 Büyükkada.

192 Büyükdere.

193 Ger. *Stimmung*.

194 Fre. *des eaux-douces de Constantinople*.

“My dear Alka, we love you from the bottom of our hearts, but it would be so nice if the water took you straight down to the Bosphorus for just an hour or two!”

We had a very interesting literary evening at the Russians. Unfortunately, except for the poems of Mandelstam, all the poetry and prose was read in Russian. I did not understand a great deal of it, but do not doubt that there were some nice parts which would have been worth understanding. Mandelstam promised me that he will take the opportunity to translate some of the nicer poems for me, which are still unpublished. I'm delighted that I will be able to send them to Ivana. Indeed, Mandelstam is a scholar, lawyer, diplomat and historian, all in a seriously scientific manner. However, he has recently composed some nice lyric poems, which he dedicates “to the lady of my heart”<sup>195</sup> – which does not always mean the same person.

I do not know if Dad will have the opportunity to meet him and appraise him in person. This is indeed my hope, as it is his. He does not know Croatia, but he does know all the other Slavic countries. He was in Macedonia during dangerous maneuvers and left there with a beautiful and gracious impression of the Bulgarian population.

We have had an impossible amount of work since the Gešovs left. Rumors have it that we are not safe here in Carigrad. Events follow one after another, but they no longer seem to be strongly connected. It is as if the younger, open-minded, and foreign-educated officers have all vanished. They are nowhere to be seen. Apparently an unsuccessful putsch took place. Horrible and highly disturbing stories circulate about this or that young officer. It was said that one of them was sent to march in public with all his decorations and a heavy stone tied to his leg. He drowned in the Bosphorus, under one of the windows of Abdul-Hamid's palace. The Padishah is so unpopular here that these horrific stories cannot be trusted. Nevertheless, the slaughters of the Armenians give anyone the right to think of him as a man without a conscience, an unbending and cruel despot.

We have been here at your place without Minčo, who does not have a vacation this summer, for a month and a half. Find me a new caretaker and maid, if you can. Roza is a handsome woman, hardworking, and skillful, but across the street there is unfortunately a military academy, which makes her frivolity seem unmatched. She will easily find a place in any diplomatic household and she also does not want to leave Carigrad anyway.

Our cook – the boozing Leonidas – will be Minčo's majordomo. He is very capable until he gets drunk. Minčo swears he will cure him when Leonidas stays alone with him. Poor Leonidas without wine, rum and brandy? Indeed, I do not think the world has seen the likes of anyone who could force Leonidas to stay dry!

195 Fre. *à la dame de son coeur.*



*Alka, Hristo & Minčo Nestoroff, Zagreb, 1908*

My dearest, write often. Ivana's letter is full of humor, Darko's full of adventures, Željko is quiet ...

We hug you all, I kiss the hands of Aunt Cenika and yours, dear Mum and Dad. I am gratefully yours,

Alka

### Carigrad, 9 September 1908

My Mummy,

We had a wonderful journey from our white town to Carigrad. We had no troubles at the borders and we arrived here in the morning of September 6. The sunrise, the Bosphorus, Carigrad – an amazing picture, to which any painting by the most skilled painter cannot be compared.

Minčo waited for us at the train station, seemingly happy that a group of three different female creatures had arrived together with a little naughty boy and the undisputable prospect of disturbing the peace and quiet of the “glass house”, which had been under male command for so long.

Our handyman,<sup>196</sup> poor Greek Leonidas – who had undoubtedly met a few dry Sundays under Minčo's watch – welcomed us with a blissful face and full of good hope for a less rigorous future.<sup>197</sup> Today, the bottle of rum is under the kitchen table and our Greek has been cheerfully whistling since dawn.

Fišika and Slava, who transferred to the Bosphorus just like that,<sup>198</sup> show neither much interest in the Orient nor any signs of homesickness. Fišika does an excellent job taking care of the boy, but her attitude towards Slava and the Greek is quite tart, as it was in Zagreb towards Olga and Tomaš. Any lessons from me will not do any good, but it seems to me that Slava and Leonidas will take effective measures to bring her on the right path. Minčo attributes only good qualities to Fišika, which is the opposite of how he treated poor Tereza, for whom he did not even acknowledge the qualities she did possess.

I don't know what to make of my son. Can you imagine that he forgot everything that surrounded him before we came to Zagreb? He runs like crazy from one room

196 Fre. *La bonne à tout faire*.

197 Fre. *pour l'avenir moins rigoureux*.

198 Ger. *mir nichts, dir nichts*.



to the next, from the hall to the kitchen, and then again to the living-room. He asks about everything – “Where are we? When will we go to Carigrad?” – and makes such noise and puts up such a protest when Fišika tries to put him to sleep. The third day has gone by like this, with only temporary lulls. I am afraid that he may become sick. Perhaps he was removed too suddenly from the quietness of the Upper Town and the shadows of the big chestnut trees to travel to the dogs, the sea, and the screaming and shouting coming from the street.

Minčo looks skeptically at all this and occasionally mumbles: “What a spoiled child!”<sup>199</sup> Obviously, he is having a hard time keeping his hands off him!

Thus, my Mummy, you see that everyone experiences this returning – or again, this first coming here – in his own way. Anyway, we remember our stay there in the old home on Jurjevska Street and all of you with gratitude.

I found the house to have a kind of tasteless male orderliness. Today, the vases are full of flowers, the pictures are in their spots, and the furniture has been returned to where it belongs. Slava is certainly the future upright leader of this place – but only in the future. Currently, my heart cries out for Rozika.

Tomorrow, I will start paying the round of visits, although I would prefer not to. It is strange. As much as I enjoy being here in this attractive cosmopolitan society, which always treats me kindly, from time to time I would also like to just crawl into my own home without any obligations – in the small circle of my relations<sup>200</sup> – finish the day tranquilly. It is clear to me that I could not live like this for a long time. I also can feel that proclivity in my spirit, inherited from my grandmothers and fathers, which will necessarily drag me into solitude once I become old. A lonesome elderly person<sup>201</sup> with only some little grandchild pushing me back into the world...

Minčo informs me about new political developments, the consequences of which will soon become apparent. Very soon Prince Ferdinand will liberate himself from the chains that linked Bulgaria to Ottoman suzerainty and declare himself the “Tsar of all Bulgarians.” A visit from the [then] Tsar and Tsarina Leonora to the Sublime Porte has already been planned. As this could happen soon, Minčo and I will perhaps go to Sofia for the celebrations. If the Tsarist visit to Carigrad takes place, then there will be a great reception here, too. How fortuitous that I was able to position myself so well that my family will also meet the Emperor couple.

The Tsarina’s marriage intrigues me. People say she is not beautiful, is of the same age as the Tsar, and that their relationship is a relationship of reason and not of the heart.

199 Fre. *Un enfant gâté!*

200 Fre. *en petit comité.*

201 Ger. *Eine einsame Alte.*

I've heard that the coronation is going to take place in Trnovo and not in Sofia. Minčo knows Trnovo very well – it is a place full of tradition and history for the Bulgarians.

Yesterday, the strange Štiepotievs unexpectedly appeared at our doorstep and caught me managing the household. Dr. Štiepotiev, if I am not mistaken, has some odd sympathy for me, which I've done nothing to deserve.

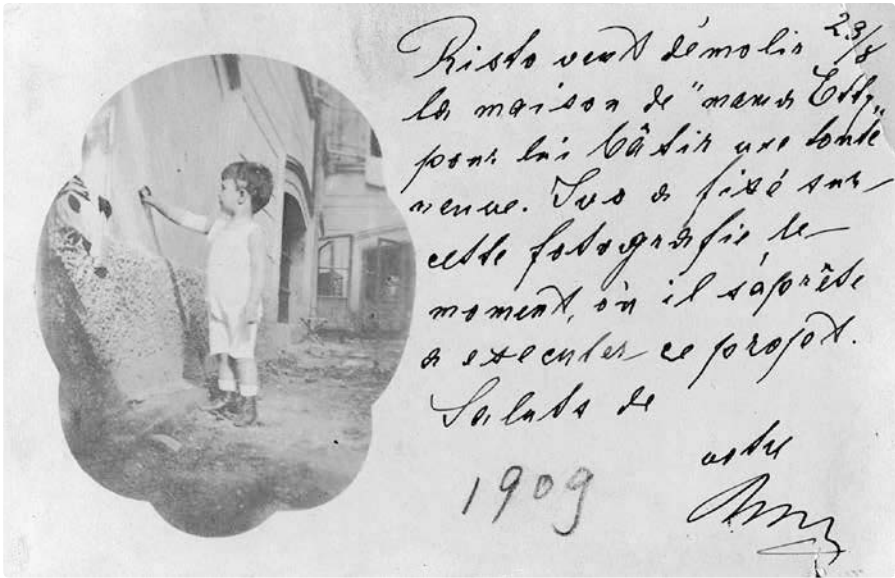
He is a peculiar fellow – he's anything but attractive, but full of self-confidence and without any sense of irritation. The poor M<sup>me</sup> Štiepotiev is grateful for every kind word that I habitually extend to her. I am struggling to find some of our Russians to resolve a mystery for me: How did this strange couple come to the Bosporus, completely incongruous in appearance and character. Who is she? Minčo and I are convinced that she is the one who secretly manages both of their fates and keeps the hospital in such good order. He is far inferior to her and her mental capacities.

I have not come across Nikola upon my return to Carigrad. It seems that the Horthys also will not grace our cosmopolitan circle for very long. They are both very charming and so are the children.

The Marquis sent me flowers from Therapia as a welcome present. He will not return until the end of the month since he is plagued by the gout. The Austrians have already returned. Tomorrow, I will go first to M<sup>me</sup> Giesel to hear the news first hand. Then I will serve as the female adjutant of M<sup>me</sup> Gešov, who has very kindly invited me to accompany her to the Turkish ladies and then to Exarch Josif. I find both of these ideas appealing. I have heard many good things about the exarch, who unfortunately suffers from a serious heart disease. His religious-diplomatic mission in Carigrad is not easy. Notwithstanding this, he enjoys the reputation of a skillful diplomat and protector of his followers in Carigrad. He is very pious, tolerant, popular, a brave fighter for the faith, and does not let himself be distracted from carry out his duties.

I will write you about my experiences at the harem, with the pashas and viziers, and from the Exarchate.

Minčo would like to take me to Robert College before our diplomatic season starts in order to see his longtime home and school. As a few of his teachers are still there, he would like to introduce me to them. If they judge my merits based on my English, I'm doomed! Minčo has assured me that most of them speak excellent French or German, which is to say as badly as I speak English. I do not know if this should be a comfort to me or rather an embarrassment to both me and them? I don't know what evil spirit induced me to fight so vehemently against learning this language! I would like to make up for it now, but I really cannot find the time. There are occasions when the day seems just too short and my daily and social duties time-consuming. Fortunately, this frustration is only of a short duration and soon I bravely move on to other challenges.



*Hristo Nestoroff draws on the wall of the Mažuranić residence at 5 Jurjevska Street, Zagreb, 23 August 1909*

There have been many changes in the Sultan's attitude towards the army. Actually, as soon as he introduces milder regulations, the Padishah will already have democratized a bit. God knows what he has hiding in the bushes ... The atmosphere in the empire is very forboding. There are rumors about a big organization, which is formally being organized from outside Carigrad in Turkish Macedonia. The names of Tefvik Pasha and Enver Bey are mentioned – the latter is a general staff<sup>202</sup> officer whom I met in Belgrade. He has left a positive impression as a gallant and handsome young officer.

Von der Goltz Pasha – he was once mentioned at the Germans as an excellent officer. God knows what this "Swabian"<sup>203</sup> is up to, highly decorated as he is, and apparently spoiled by Abdul-Hamid. Opinions about his mission and role in Carigrad differ.

Count Badeni, the eternal critic who, under the mask of Don Juan, conceals thoughts and perspectives completely unlike those anyone might presume. Minčo does not like him – everything annoys him about this aristocrat. To tell you the truth, I consider him to be an entertaining Austrian and, if it weren't for Minčo's antipathy, I would enjoy his company as a cheerful and funny Austrian officer.

202 Ger. *Generalstab*.

203 *Švaba* from Ger. *Schwabe*, here meaning "German".

Andrej Nikolajević, who is often at our place, is not on good terms<sup>204</sup> with this Austrian, so he completely agrees with Minčo. How could I not concur with these two so insightful husbands, one of whom happens to be my husband?

I received the happy news that Nikola will stay at the Taurus. Our “*Zagorac*” is one of those whom I would like to have around me to drive away the homesickness,<sup>205</sup> which today unmercifully torments me.

At this moment your grandson has broken a small Sèvres vase, a keepsake of Princess Marija-Lujza and her sympathy for her young Bulgarian language teacher at court. It is no one’s fault, and we all feel very sorry about what happened.

How are you doing at home? How is Hanika’s leg? How has it been with Olga’s sharp tongue? I write to Ivana, and Darko at Pola. I hug Željko, and kiss the hands of you and Dad.

Gratefully yours,  
Alka

**Carigrad, May 1909**

My dear Mummy,

Because of the trying atmosphere of the last days of April and first days of this month, I have found neither the time nor opportunity to contact you. Today is the first day that I have been able to take advantage of the offered services of the kind postman at the Austrian post office in Carigrad. I sent a wire this morning and – if I manage to finish this letter – I will send it promptly.

First of all, my dear Mummy, we are all together, although I’m still trying to recover from the past few days. I am sure that as soon as the results of the ugly scenes, which are still around us disappear, everything unpleasant will become a forgotten memory. I pray to God that everything is indeed behind us!

At the military academy, which is across from our severely damaged building, the gallows from which the first victims of the movement were hanged can still be seen. These were poor and seduced young students of Islamic law and theology.<sup>206</sup> Here and there, we still hear the sound of the rifles, flare ups, and people running on the street below our riddled, glassless windows!

204 Fre. *au froid* (correct: *en froid*).

205 Fre. *le mal de* (correct: *du*) *pays*.

206 Tur. *softa*.

Two weeks ago, Minčo and I survived this burst of violence in the main street of Pera. Like champion runners and running hand in hand, half dead and without breath, we managed to arrive at our embassy. Someone shouted: “Run! The army is coming! They are shooting!” and immediately after followed a wild commotion of people, horses, carriages, dogs, screaming and shouting in all languages of the Orient and Europe! People were pushing, falling, and treading on each other without any mercy. All of them began to run – God knows why – in an instant<sup>207</sup> towards the suburbs of Pera.

I am convinced that I would have succumbed to this stampede if it had not been for the strong hands of my husband, which carried me more than they were holding me. Notwithstanding this, I lost both heels on the harsh cobblestone of Carigrad and I arrived home safe and sound<sup>208</sup> hoping it was the last time I had to run on Carigrad’s dreadful cobblestones.

I have to say that I am convinced that the worst is behind us. An unpleasant lingering echo<sup>209</sup> may remain with us somewhere in our souls, but this, too, will pass soon. I was really uncomfortable sleeping in the Russian hospital. We missed our nice, sparkling clean<sup>210</sup> bed at home, although there are not enough kind words to express our gratitude to Dr. Štiepotiev for this friendly refuge in hard times.

I will try to tell you as much as I can about the background of everything that has happened over the past weeks in Carigrad. Of course, there were other reasons – a background<sup>211</sup> besides the one I came up with in my not politically inclined head. However, even a blind hen sometimes finds a grain of corn and so my amateurish musings cannot be considered completely unfounded.

Abdul-Hamid made a mistake as soon as he started to consent to the advice of von der Goltz Pasha, whose task was to train modern officers in Turkey after the German model. Obviously, Wilhelm was intending to use this modernized army as part of the German aspirations towards the Balkans.

At the same time, the other European powers produced secretly behind a political veil dissatisfied and foreign-educated young officers who were put under the command of aggressive senior officers hostile to the Sultan.

It has been some time since we first heard about the “Union and Progress” organization, whose main office was in Macedonian Turkey and Asia Minor. This Union has become considerably more popular recently. Von der Goltz could observe that some

207 Fre. *ventre à terre*.

208 Fre. *saine et sauve*.

209 Ger. *Nachklang*.

210 Ger. *blitzblank*.

211 Ger. *Hintergrund*.

young officers distanced themselves from German propaganda. One evening at a dinner at the Austrians – shortly before the events in Carigrad – there were whispers about the alleged slaughter of young officers who were found in the barracks.

The Padishah organized this slaughter with the help of fanatical and also bribed young Orthodox students of Islamic law and theology<sup>212</sup> and Carigrad's loyal garrison. We've all been waiting for a political volcano to erupt ever since!

We waited with bated breath to see if the Young Turk union would manage to enter Carigrad on time. The lives of not just the Turkish population living in the city, but also those of all foreigners here depended on their armed entrance. This proved to be true after the third day when the Young Turks entered the town. On this occasion, 20,000 well-paid soldiers loyal to the Sultan were disarmed and entire golden coins were found in the pockets of these wretches. I watched them for hours as they passed through the street under my broken windows with their hands tied, and looking pale, brutalized, and dirty. The winners – our saviors – were chasing after them.

This parade of convicts was especially appalling when it came to the rows of naked eunuchs and dignitaries. Innumerable heavy decorations were put on their bare chests, attached with needles!

Believe me, Mum, while looking at this parade of the undoubtedly cruel men of the Sultan, who were ready to commit any and all crimes ordered by their master, I despised these winners, who were no less able to restrain themselves from acting cruelly toward the defeated enemy.

Abdul-Hamid will most certainly flee the scene. He escaped with the larger part of his harem to Salonika. Rumor has it he behaved miserably – crying and begging for mercy and promising everything just to let him go to his residence. His brother Mehmed-Reşed, who was in chains for decades, will now succeed him on the throne under the name of Mehmed V.

Whoever hasn't seen it for himself cannot imagine the beauty of Carigrad and all its shores now under the rule of the new Sultan. Mehmed delivered all the residences and Abdul-Hamid's treasury into state hands. He moved into Dolma-Bagçe<sup>213</sup> Palace, which from now on will be the Sultan's official residence. Furthermore, the mosque to which Abdul-Hamid went for decades every Friday to pray to Allah will be demolished! The new Padishah already went to prayer at the church-mosque of the Hagia Sophia.

212 Tur. *softas*.

213 Dolmabahçe.

I am convinced there is no human being with heart and soul who would bemoan the fate of those who are cruel. We only have the right to ask ourselves: Will the new modern regime change the Muslim soul, the Turkish mentality? The Young Turks plan to remove the *fez* from the heads of the men and the veil from [the faces] of the women. Bravo,<sup>214</sup> if all the Asian cruelties will be swept away along with them ... We are allowed to have our doubts.

Minčo was present at the first public appearance of the new Sultan at the Hagia Sophia. It was a completely Oriental spectacle! He described the Padishah like this: “The head of a sheep, bulky, fat, without any special features, without intelligence.”<sup>215</sup> Can he rule for long? Again, we are allowed to have our doubts. Apparently he is old and sick – a man without his own will, without initiative. The harsh slavery he endured made him into an amorphous mass, which will have to be controlled by a strong will. As for Tevfik Pasha, it is said that he is a capable diplomat. In any case, he has our gratitude, because without him, we would have been victims of Abdul-Hamid’s vicious plan. Instead of the poor theology students,<sup>216</sup> we would now be hanging from a thin rope.

God only knows if we are still in the middle of an upheaval. The majority of the people do not believe that with the appointment of the new Padishah the spirit of revolution has passed. Asia is still in turmoil. The Islamic law scholars<sup>217</sup> are more numerous there, where they’re fanatical, organized, and Orthodox. Politically, we may now be facing enough of what I have come to expect. At least, that is how I see it.

We will now return back to our everyday lives, which will be of more interest to all of you and, at the end the day, it is straightforward and factual experience without any speculation. We must have worried you all – without any intention on our part. When I visit Zagreb, everything will be far away for me and all the events I experienced will just be memories, though clearer and more ordered. For now, I will write about everything that happened in bohemian disorder, just to get this letter done and send it off to you.

During the first two days, which were the hardest, I stayed without Minčo, but with the little one, Fišika, Slava and Leonidas, who this time was completely sober. The guns were located in the courtyard of the school and turned toward Yildiz [Palace], while the Sultan’s guns, on the contrary, were turned toward Pera and directly at the military academy.

My vitreous refuge had already lost one of its windows on the second day. Luckily, the Sultan’s soldiers fired clumsily, too high and with old-fashioned arms. Some projec-

214 Fre. *À la bonne heure.*

215 Fre. *Tête de veau, gros, gras, sans caractéristique, sans intelligence.*

216 Tur. *softas.*

217 Ara. *ulama.*

tiles flew over our house and did not even explode. In fact, it was the shotguns that destroyed our windows and the ceilings of our rooms. The bullets coming from the street went right into the ceilings. Nikola, who was at our place at the time of the upheaval, energetically organized our passive defense, placing us on the floor with our heads next to the walls of the rooms. Hristo and Fiška were placed in the dark chamber<sup>218</sup>, the only place in our apartment surrounded with thick walls. He protested, but soon fell asleep on Fiška's lap. I will not mention here in writing what Fiška was sitting on ... guess if you like ...

After the first shot blew out the glass of one of our windows, I witnessed a sad scene: From the floor above us, a young Armenian came to us with a child in her hands. She threw herself down at my feet and begged me to hide her in our apartment. Her husband was travelling in Asia Minor and she was completely alone with the child. Sobbing, she told me that as a little girl she had survived the slaughter of her compatriots, which Abdul-Hamid's mafia had implemented on their master's order, and which was carried out by horrible raving Kurds. She moved to the side the collar of her dress and showed me a long scar on her neck. While one butcher was cutting the neck of her father, the other was hitting her mother with a mallet. When they had finished with her parents, both Kurds threw her onto the street with a deep cut in her throat.

That same night, a young Catholic priest saw that she was still breathing, took her and, in the middle of the night and all this danger, carried her to Notre Dame de Sion. Nurses took care of her, raised her, and then she got married. "Madam, I am scared, hide me in the name of God! – He [Abdul-Hamid] will attack us Armenians again!" I comforted her and settled her and her daughter with Fiška and Hristo, where she calmed down a bit.

The heavy shooting carried on until late at night. Nikola left us around noon. He managed to slip through the fighting with a revolver in his hand and reach the "Taurus." The "Taurus" was damaged soon afterwards – the ship's chimney was hit so hard that it fell into the sea.

Yesterday Nikola told me about the experience of a sailor who was ordered by Horthy to go down to the water and locate the spot where the chimney had fallen. He returned greatly disturbed by what he had seen in the sea near Yildiz Palace: a horrifying group of festively dressed officers with decorations and stones tied to their legs. The current of the sea had swung their bodies, with empty eye sockets, backward and forward – it seems that this was the first disturbing act of the fish and crabs that swarmed over the drowned bodies!

218 Lat. *camera obscura*.



When Nikola, Horthy's first adjutant, was not on the Austrian ship but at my place as the guns from Yildiz Palace marked the beginning of the revolution, diplomacy was indeed caught off guard and ill prepared for what was going to happen next. No one except the advisers Dr. Otto and Mandelstam knew that the devil had "taken the hindmost" and that we were in the middle of great unfolding events. Even von der Goltz could not have predicted this move of the Asians. For instance, when he saw that the Young Turks were advancing, he put all his confidence in the Sultan's "Muslim League" which had its main headquarters in Adana. We have seen where this got him ...

Nevertheless, let me return to our apartment and the events that took place there.

The very first evening of the revolution, Dr. Štiepotiev succeeded in making it through and took us to the hospital, which is only a few blocks away, but affords more safety than our house. The hospital is an unappealing old building, but it is solidly constructed, so it bears more of a resemblance to a fortress than a hospital. As we witnessed yesterday, none of the Sultan's artillery managed to break through the hospital's walls. One bullet entered the wall of the room where we were settled, but did not penetrate it. M<sup>me</sup> Štiepotiev took the young Armenian and her child to her place and did everything she could to comfort her.

The night was filled with the sound of gunfire. Except for Hristo and the little Armenian girl, no one slept for two nights and days. We did not even change our clothes.

Personally, I was very afraid for Minčo, who did not come to our place until the third night with an armed escort. It was Leonidas who angrily replaced the fugitive gatekeeper and told Minčo where we were.

On the third day of the upheaval, during a cease of fire, Minčo, Slava and I went to our deserted home. We found it unlocked, but, strangely enough, no one had entered it. Except for the damaged walls, broken windows, hundreds of holes in the ceilings, furniture, china and glass, there was no other damage. Besides this, the floor was dirty, full of broken glass and dust. However, the biggest mess was in the living room.

The shots completely destroyed the chandelier and the piano's two paraffin lamps, and paraffin was all over the carpets and the parquetry. We are still struggling to remove the oil stains from the living room carpet. There is no dry cleaning in Carigrad and we currently do not have enough cleaners for this huge exhausting work.

And here we are already, spending the eighth day between our destroyed home and the Russian hospital. The weather is warm and dry and because in two rooms – strangely – the wooden shutters remained unscathed, we moved the boy into his room yesterday with Fišika, which was completely free of rubble and glass.

Minčo and I remained the appreciative night guests of the Štiepotievs. The Armenian's husband returned from Asia Minor. He was full of horrible impressions about his return journey. He saw Adana lying completely in ruins. He had heard of the horrible slaughter of the Christian population. It seems that more than 2,000 Christians were murdered. The last criminal act of Abdul-Hamid!

I listened to all of this in horror. A lot of it will stay with me forever as an unpleasant memory. I am unable to relax because of all the things I have seen, heard, and experienced.

Besides the poor theology students,<sup>219</sup> about whom I wrote to you already and whose bodies were kept by young cadets right across from my windows, there were other scenes of wounded and dead soldiers and dreadfully tormented horses and dogs.

Believe me, the abuse of these animals is one of my most difficult memories. A beautiful horse lay on the street next to our doors for two days in its mortal struggle. The doors were kept under Turkish guard and for two days no one was allowed to exit onto the street.

Dr. and M<sup>me</sup> Štiepotiev still bring us food from the hospital. A destroyed home cannot be put back together so fast! Our lives are very complicated and uncomfortable. We all are completely worn out already. Only our son enjoys the sound of firing guns, which has not completely stopped, and he marches through the apartment with a little gun on his shoulder. It's not easy to take away a gun or trumpet from him!

Fišika and especially Slava acted like true heroines. During the most intense period of gunfire, Slava would look through the window bars. She calmly announced: "It does not matter where a person dies. If I am meant to die from a Turkish bullet, why not die here instead of been moved to a hospital and having to sleep next to Fišika...!"

The love between Fišika and Slava is on thin ice! It has been like this since we first came to the Ottoman Empire. I do not really mind this covert war. It is quiet, respectful, and free of arguments.

My dearest, this epistle has become too long and is poorly organized. I have very freely entered details, which will need to be changed later. However, everything will be much clearer when we speak in person.<sup>220</sup> As soon as I am able to, I will leave with Fišika and the boy to our quiet and peaceful homeland. By then, the political situation will have taken a positive turn.

219 Tur. *softas*

220 Fre. *de vife voix*.

At the outset, I mentioned to you the failure of the Germans' plans with regard to the Turks. I do not know how von der Goltz ended up going down this blind alley, but no doubt he completely underestimated Tevfik Pasha and the Young Turks and overestimated the sincerity and loyalty of the Sultan's adherents. I begin to realize that, without having inherited a true Asian soul, there is no possibility for us to see these things!

You have no idea what a wonderful woman M<sup>me</sup> Štiepotiev is! I don't know how we would have made it through all of this without a nervous breakdown if it were not for her warm Christian charity toward every one of us. Even Dr. Štiepotiev, usually a dull man, touched us with his manner towards us and the poor wounded ones who were lucky to come under his care. It is the great Russian soul as Minčo says!

Minčo is staying in Carigrad as the dispatcher in the embassy. Gešov is pretty ill and will take an extended vacation. Tomorrow, I intend to go to our legation in Pera, and to M<sup>me</sup> Gešov who, as snobby as she is, cries for the bloody Abdul-Hamid! She's probably the only one in Carigrad who is doing so! She's now sorry that her [medal for] "compassion"<sup>221</sup> – as well as mine – is now useless!

I know that all the embassies have passed through days that were more or less difficult. I know that those personnel who had the time to leave for Therapia practically did not feel the revolution. I do not understand how some parts of Pera and Stamboul remained untouched by the upheaval. Apparently, life went as usual there, though I cannot believe it. In Galata, the Jews added to the misery of what happened with their innate shifty instincts. In their dirty buildings, they hid money and gold in thousands of dirty unapproachable hiding places, skillfully located under the floorboards. When the burglars came in order to take advantage of the present situation and entered a few Jewish apartments, they found only crammed beds, rags and sick persons, children and elderly women who were scared to death. In a fit of madness, they burned several cottages and took the lives of their miserable prey. Later, however, they clashed with a Young Turk military patrol and paid with their lives.

This time, my Mummy, I am returning home as an "interesting family member"<sup>222</sup>. Although I do not have any brave acts to report, there were moments when I felt deep in my heart that there was some blood left in me from the "hero of the Thermopylae" and of the "Primorzen."<sup>223</sup>

I hug you all, I think of you all!

221 Tur. *şefkat*. Literally meaning "compassion", the term here seems to be a shorthand for *şefkat nişanı*, the "medal for compassion", which was created by Sultan Abdülhamit II for women only.

222 Ger. *als ein interessantes Familienmitglied*.

223 In German this term denotes an ancient Croat tribe, see for instance Arthur Achleitner: *Aus Kroatien: Skizzen und Erzählungen*. Leipzig: Eckstein, 1920.

Prepare me the room without rubble, without shards of glass, and without oily stains on the floor. I'm looking forward to my dear old home.

Gratefully yours,  
Alka

**Berlin, 10 VI 1912**

My dear Mummy,

Here are the attached documents and a letter I promised. By way of introduction, I can say immediately at the beginning: it was wonderful! As you will see, I was everywhere, and it was a great effort for a woman who had an operation on her appendix almost ten days ago.

Today, my dear mammy, if I may – in private<sup>224</sup> – be immodest, I would say that I am resting on my laurels. In front of me on the desk is a gift<sup>225</sup> from the “Tsar of All Bulgarians,” and therefore my Tsar as well – and with whom I, together with my husband and son as well, share everything which is good, because there is no evil in our community.

The Tsar gave me a necklace<sup>226</sup> made of platinum and diamonds and a big amethyst in the middle. Here, I'm drawing it for you, poorly, in a quite accurate size in order to help you visualize it. At the moment, Minčo is at the station to accompany a German and Bulgarian escort, the Tsar and his family who are returning to Sofia. I am sure that M. will also receive “a keepsake for dear Nestoroff,”<sup>227</sup> because this time it cannot be a new decoration. I wrote six months ago that M. was given a higher-level decoration than he should have actually received based on his rank. So, there is no possibility that he will receive a higher decoration again. I also let you know that the Germans had also decorated him – which it seems M. appreciates and I certainly have no objection.

All this news is put at the beginning of the letter because I know you will gladly read it “like good news from a far-away daughter.”<sup>228</sup> Dad will also appreciate it and the entire circle around you, if they are interested in these things – Aunt Hermina for sure and Minka especially. Nada will soon interpret<sup>229</sup> for you the Tsars' days. Very soon,

224 Fre. *en famille*.

225 Fre. *cadeau*.

226 Fre. *collier*.

227 Fre. *un souvenir pour ce cher Nestoroff*.

228 Fre. *comme bonne nouvelle d'une fille lointaine*.

229 Ger. (Austria) *Dolmetsch*.

Par ordre de Sa Majesté Impériale le Sultan,  
le Grand Maître des Cérémonies a l'honneur  
d'inviter Monsieur Nostoroff,  
Premier Secrétaire de la Légation de Bulgarie  
à venir dîner au Palais de Dolma-Bagtché,  
le Lundi 24 Avril 1911. à 7 h. du soir  
En Uniforme

Invitation to a royal gala dinner at Dolmabahçe Palace, 24 April 1911

she will describe to you everything in detail, much better than I can do in a letter. I am becoming weary and a bit sad, because my handsome boy will soon go to see you with Fišika and Nada – and without me!

After my operation, Professor Grunert prescribed me a long period of rest at some bath or at Semmering. Minčo will not accompany me. Because Gešov is absent, he will lead the business.

On the first day of the Bulgarian imperial family's arrival (Friday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of this month), there was a gala reception from the side of the highest officials and our diplomatic personnel. I was not present there following the doctor's recommendation. Two car rides in one day and the recent hardship would be too strenuous for my sutured bowels. The weather was sultry, and adjusting to the court's presence is not the easiest thing to do even for people with the best intentions. And then: the eternal standing around in a circle<sup>230</sup> and at attention<sup>231</sup> while conversing with the Kaiser. His

230 Fre. *cercle*.

231 Ger. *Habacht*.

فی ۱۱ نوبتہ سنہ ۱۳۲۷

CONSTANTINOPLE  
24 AVRIL 1911.



Potage pois frais  
—  
Beurek  
—  
Bar sauce Caviar  
—  
Poularde de Bresse Forestière  
—  
Caïlles vertes en Belle-Vue  
—  
Sorbet Saison  
—  
Double d'agneau à la broche  
Salade  
—  
Asperges en branche  
—  
Pilaw Amberbou  
—  
Crème Coulommière  
—  
Dessert



نارہ بزیہ پوربایسی  
بورک  
لورک بالقی  
منطاری طازووه  
قوانغالی پلیریرچین  
طوردکی غرایت  
قوزی کبابی  
صداط  
قوشقونماز  
بیلیمی عنبر مو بیلاوی  
میوهی قرما  
میوه ر شکرط

Menu of a royal gala dinner at Dolmabahçe Palace, 24 April 1911

nervous pale-blue eyes are never completely full of trust, so you do not know where to look while you are answering his nervous questions. But – at least in all the cases when I had an opportunity to hear Wilhelm speak – the Kaiser was undoubtedly polite. Unfortunately, my Greek-Slavic soul always seeks more warmth, even from someone like the German Emperor. It seems that he completely lacks [such warmth], but at least the crown princess has it. Charming, beautiful, attentive, and with the medal of Catherine the Great on her chest, this German Protestant had a completely Russian appearance. While waiting for Gešov and the legation of the imperial family, Minčo was immediately noticed by the Tsar, who approached him out of protocol and saluted him with the stereotypical salutation which he always employs when he sees Minčo: “What a pleasure to see you again, my good, dear Nestoroff.”<sup>232</sup> In addition to the Bulgarian legation and the highest-level German officials a group from the Bulgarian colony came to greet the Tsar at the station.

M<sup>me</sup> Gešov – due to her unfortunate arrogance – was just in her place<sup>233</sup>. You will hear in detail about it from Nada. In the evening of the same day at 8 o'clock, there was a big gala dinner<sup>234</sup> in Potsdam. From the attached plan, you can see the marvelous place I was assigned to at the table. I bought a dress<sup>235</sup> worth 1,500 Marks. I got my hair done by the first Berlin coiffeur and my appearance would have made my family proud. Everyone was exceedingly kind to me and, because I know the whole court, I did not have to be introduced.

I do not know how and why – whether it was deserved or undeserved – but I was approached and honored in grand style!<sup>236</sup> The Germans and our court seemed to compete over who could compliment me the most! Minčo was all smiles about his wife “and his younger daughter,”<sup>237</sup> my dear Mummy. And what does Dad say? In his conversation with me, the Tsar praised Minčo “for having chosen a distinguished Croat as his wife.”<sup>238</sup> He spoke to me for a long time, and Gančev said that to Minčo as well that the Tsar was speaking in superlatives about him and me. I will leave to Nada to report all the compliments that Minčo received for me because I do not wish to be immodest.

The table at Potsdam was grandiose. The one at Abdul-Hamid's had too much in gold and marble, and with all its Oriental richness, it was on par with the one at Potsdam concerning taste. The cutlery was silver from the time of Frederic the Great and it shined discreetly throughout the open halls under a chandelier with 20,000 candles! I was sitting next to Grand Admiral von Tirpitz on my right side and I had Count Eulen-

232 Fre. *Charme, charme de vous revoir, mon bon, mon cher Nestoroff.*

233 Fre. *à sa place.*

234 Ger. *Galatafel.*

235 Fre. *toilette.*

236 Fre. *en gros.*

237 Ger. *hat gestrahlt über seine Frau und seine jüngere Tochter.*

238 Fre. *d'avoir choisi une distinguée Croate pour femme.*

burg on my left side. I already knew them both. The conversation was charming, and with Tirpitz most intriguing. He knows Dalmatia and the [coastal littoral] Primorje and speaks Croatian excellently. It seems that his continuous stay on our Adriatic coast was not just an innocent sojourn under blue skies. Let Nada retell my conversation with him to dad – he will be most interested.

We continued to stand as we listened to the imperial speeches. The high-tenor timbre of the Kaiser's voice is not impressive. The Tsar speaks much more forcefully, although a bit priggish or, better said, artificial. The Tsar likes to pose a lot; he is one-hundred-percent Bourbon<sup>239</sup>. He inherited very little from the Coburgs. After dinner, we dispersed through the different halls – like the separate men's and women's quarters in a Muslim house<sup>240</sup> – ladies together, gentlemen together. The Empress<sup>241</sup> was not here, but was charmingly represented by the young Crown Princess Cecilia.

Gančev, Anastasev, and I first took advantage of our court references with Tsarina Eleonora. I think she must have special intellectual qualities since Ferdinand picked her as his wife and, in terms of appearance, she does not make much of an impression. She may be handsome, but her voice is manly and her face is everything but beautiful. Her stature is tall but not graceful, and she is completely distressed by [what is going on in] the Balkans. Because her life is dedicated to the sick and the poor, she showed sympathetic interest in my operation, constantly repeating: "What imprudence to exhaust yourself the way you do after only ten days of recuperation! I would count myself happy to learn that you have not suffered from your excessive sense of duty."<sup>242</sup>

I cannot say she has won me over but everyone claims she is very noble and does good deeds. Nevertheless, I cannot understand how Ferdinand could take her for a wife when he is a man of taste and an expert<sup>243</sup> on women's beauty. God only knows what interests led him to make this decision. Rumor has it that Eleonora Reuss was extraordinarily modest when she took care of the sick and was wounded in the Russo-Japanese War, and that she herself endured a harsh illness and still feels the effects of it. I remember from Carigrad how she lost consciousness on two occasions due to overexertion and her severe husband. As a conversationalist,<sup>244</sup> Ferdinand has all my sympathies, and besides, if he sympathizes with someone from his followers, he stays friends with him for good<sup>245</sup>. Minčo, for instance, who lived next to the Tsar for seven years is living proof of this. Ferdinand, a great Bourbon<sup>246</sup> and a Catholic,

239 See above , footnote no. 44.

240 Tur. *selamlık*; *haremlık*.

241 Ger. *Kaiserin*.

242 Fre. *Quelle imprudence de Vous fatiguer comme Vous la faites, après dix jours de convalescence seulement! Je serais heureuse d'apprendre que Vous n'avez pas eu souffrir de Votre trop grande vigilance.*

243 Ger. *Kenner*.

244 Fre. *causeur*.

245 Fre. *à toute épreuve*.

246 See above , footnote no. 44.



ROYAUME  
DE  
BULGARIE

Constantinople, 25/7 juin 1911.

N° 526.

Twille de Route.

Monsieur M. Nestoroff, premier  
secrétaire de la Légation de Bulgarie  
à Berlin, se rendant à son poste, ac-  
compagné de sa femme et de son enfant  
âgé de 3 ans et demi, les autorités admi-  
nistratives et militaires des pays amis sont  
priées de lui accorder libre passage et  
de lui prêter aide et appui en cas de  
besoin.

Le Ministre Plénipotentiaire de  
Bulgarie:

MK Sarafov



wanted Minčo's and my wedding to be held in a Catholic church in his presence in Sofia. He cannot forgive Bishop Salis for requiring so many obligations from me when an Orthodox priest just put everything ad acta and without any requirements married us in an Orthodox church. He knows Salis and Zagreb, that clean and pleasant city<sup>247</sup>. He writes his speeches in the Croatian orthography in order to read them more easily. This was his own discovery. He knows a few verses from "Čengić-aga" by heart and he quoted them with an excellent accent. This will interest Dad. Tirpitz also speaks of Ivan Mažuranić as the "chancellor and viceroy" of Croatia. His accent is better than our German Hudemann's. At least it was before he went to Russia. I hope to see Huda soon in Berlin, i.e. when he comes with mother to the doctors.

Let me return to describing the festive days. With the crown princess, I spoke most of the time in German. She and others claimed that they could not discern that I am Croat, and not Austrian, because of my perfect accent and fluent speech! Everyone at the court praises Princes Boris and Kiril, and Viktoria-Luise, the only daughter of the Kaiser, calls them "cute"<sup>248</sup> oder "sweet"<sup>249</sup>. She is not a beauty but is definitely full of vitality and charm. She babbles constantly like a harmless little bird – without ceremony and sometimes very sincerely. The Kaiser adores the girl, but I would not say the same is with true for the sons. For example, just at this moment the crown prince is serving a punishment under house arrest<sup>250</sup> Prince Eitel's wife is a real heavy "Germania". Quiet, serious, and almost sad I would say. Perhaps there is a reason for this – I do not like Eitel. He looks like a real buster<sup>251</sup>.

I know that you, my dear Mummy, would like to hear something more about the dresses<sup>252</sup>. Cecilia had the most gorgeous one. The white with the "Grand Cordon"<sup>253</sup> over the chest looked marvelous on this woman of royal bearing. Our Bulgarian ladies, although small and too ornate (especially Anastasevica), looked well and were, as Minčo claims, the best<sup>254</sup> of what Bulgaria can offer in this class.

The Tsar and Gančev – two friends for life<sup>255</sup> – I do not like them when they're together. Gančev must have charming and interesting qualities, but you don't want to be near this person!<sup>256</sup> He is a real Asian towards his wife, which gives one a very unpleasant impression of him and of her as well because she tolerates it. Apart from

247 Fre. *cette ville si propre et amiable*.

248 Ger. *niedlich*.

249 Ger. *herzig*.

250 Ger. *Hausarrest*.

251 Ger. *Bursch[e]*.

252 Fre. *toilettes*.

253 The cordon or broad ribbon designates a high rank in certain honorary orders.

254 Fre. *la fine fleur*.

255 Fre. *deux amis à toute épreuve*.

256 The Serbo-Croatian phrase *daleko mu kuća* literally means "let his house be far away".

that<sup>257</sup>: both are very kind to me and he praises me so much that I do not even want to listen to it anymore. I think that poor Raja must have had some adventure in Russia that Gančev knows about, so it is even more horrible that he embarrasses Raja in this name whenever he feels like it. His boys are amazingly competent, but I am afraid as passionate as their father. They already speak three languages and the oldest is only eight years old. They are nice, although Fišika does not like them. She claims they are “too rough for our beautiful boy”<sup>258</sup> (and this is our little Hristo, whose hair Minčo let cut “*alla turca*” without my knowledge – though I would not exactly say that he has become his victim<sup>259</sup>!).

At eight in the evening there was a reception at our legation. I was nervous and had quite a bit of the jitters because of Gešov who, if she is not in charge, is quite unpleasant. I also knew the Tsar does not particularly like her or her husband. However, everything went well. At the beginning of the reception, the Tsar took my hand and led me to the one corner of the salon, where we conversed for over an hour. He was in an extraordinary mood and complimented “his dear and old friend Nestoroff who made the praiseworthy choice of choosing you as his champagne of life”<sup>260</sup> He spoke seriously with me, but Nada will report to you about it. I am not sure if I exactly understood his plans with Minčo. I hope I did.

There was also a charming play at the theatre. I sat in the loge behind the Tsarina, who had an imperial necklace<sup>261</sup> around her neck. My *šefakat* medal was shining against a beautiful and elegant white dress. In the loge were the Kaiser, the Tsar, the Crown Princess, Boris, Viktoria-Luise, Kiril, the Gešovs, and the Nestoroffs; behind me was Bethmann-Hollweg and all the court ladies and gentlemen. They were playing “Der grosse König”. It was lovely!

After the show, there was no stiffness; everyone participated in the conversation with everyone else. The Kaiser was in a very good mood the whole time<sup>262</sup> – which is rare for him. He is unpredictable and changes moods from one hour to the next.

We returned tired to our lovely home and first thing I did was to hug my little freshly trimmed boy in his beautiful room. Minčo and I also discussed my conversation with Ferdinand and Wilhelm. It is strange how both of them showed an interest in the Croatian situation, especially the Tsar. He asked me about the events during Count Pejačević’s reign, and then about Cuvaj<sup>263</sup>, the needs of the people, and the “nice and

257 Fre. *au reste*.

258 Ger. *zu roh für unseren schönen Buben*.

259 Ger. *Beute*.

260 Fre. *son cher et vieil ami Nestoroff, qui a fait un choix louable en Vous choisissant pour sa champagne de vie*.

261 Fre. *colier*.

262 Fre. *tout le temps*.

263 Slavko Cuvaj held the office of *ban* (viceroy) of Croatia-Slavonia and royal commissioner for Austria-Hungary from 19 January 1912 – 21 July 1913.

interesting Croatian villages and folklore"! He is interested in everything – in science and the arts. However, I carefully avoided politics. This visit to Berlin (I know that he and the Kaiser are not admirers of each other) – God knows what is cooking!<sup>264</sup> If I more carefully monitored the events and the situation around us, God knows where would it lead?! On leave the Tsar told me: "Madam, I am happy that I can register you among the most charming young women in my legations in Europe."<sup>265</sup>

I did not go to the train station. The Tsarina told me through her court lady Mlle Vera Hacaneff that she does not wish me to tire myself and that she also wishes me well.

I also want to highlight one interesting episode during Vera's stay here. Vera had to do some errands for Bulgarian ladies in Berlin and she asked the Tsarina to grant her three free hours. The Tsarina approved this request but also asked what she plans to buy. Vera confessed she had an errand from Minister M.'s wife to buy her an elegant dressing gown<sup>266</sup>. The Tsarina replied to this: "A dressing gown for a respectable and elegant lady could only be a warm housecoat in winter and something made of light material in the summer. Its use will be restricted to walk to and back from the bathroom, or – in case of sickness – to go from one bed to another"<sup>267</sup>. A healthy and respectful woman "would not know what to do with an elegant dressing gown. It must always be replaced by a blouse and a skirt. I cannot imagine seeing any of my ladies in a dressing gown!"<sup>268</sup>

Vera got the afternoon off and she spent it at my place. I think the Tsarina is right, but I also think that Princess Reuss forgot that ladies from the Balkans have only recently ridded themselves of trousers and veil. Thus, she could restrain herself from making comments about the "elegant dressing gown for a lady of style from Sofia"<sup>269</sup>.

I am back to my usual health, thank God, although everyone advises me to go the Semmering-Kurhaus. Two years ago, I spent two lovely months there, so I will gladly obey to their advice. It is only hard for me that Minčo never finds time for a vacation, and he should.

I am sending you Nada, Fišika, and my naughty little boy to Zagreb. I cannot say

264 Fre. *Dieu sait quel en sera le but!*

265 Fre. *Madame, je suis heureux de pouvoir Vous enregistrer parmi les plus charmantes jeunes femmes de mes legations en Europe.*

266 Fre. *élégante robe de chambre.*

267 Fre. *qu'une robe de chambre pour une dame comme il faut et distinguée ne peut être qu'un sort du lit en hiver chaud, en été en étoffe léger. Il lui servira très bien pour les quelques pas du lit au bain et retour, ou pour – en cas de maladie – (de) s'en servir en changeant de lit.*

268 Fre. *ne saurait que faire d'une élégante robe de chambre. Une blouse et une jupe la remplace[nt] toujours et je ne voudrais la voir sur une de mes dames.*

269 Fre. *élégante robe de chambre pour une mondaine de Sofia.*

that I will part from them easily. I am sorry that Nada is coming home with her stomach upset and Hristo without his little “mane”. I hope that Nada is not seriously ill and that my son’s hair will grow and he will be beautiful again – which is something he couldn’t care less about. I know that you and Dad are very proud of your Bulgarian grandson, who, besides beauty, will also have a great memory. He is five years old and he, so to speak, knows his Kačić<sup>270</sup> almost by heart. He is less fond of languages, which Minčo regrets. He is young, so I hope that he will overcome this fault – but then again hundreds of others will appear, which also will have to be overcome. However, it is a duel of “giants” so, I will be surprised if Minčo wins faster than I suspect. He is sure of it – I am skeptical. What do you think, my Mummy? And Dad?

Both Nada and Hristo look forward to seeing old mam and dad. Fišika longs for the garden, but she is afraid of Tomaš and Olga. She respects you, dear Mummy, but she does not judge Ivana, Darko and Željka on their virtues, but according to how they act towards her protégée. Because all of them act wonderfully, they are delightful, smart, noble<sup>271</sup> etc. She speaks like this and I let her, because those who would teach her to think differently have not been born. The viewpoint from which she judges people is absolutely original. I am afraid that she will become ill again during the trip, so I’ve asked Željko to host them in Beč for a night, just in case Fišika needs to rest.

If I go to Semmering, I will visit you and take my little one to Berlin. Minčo is not going anywhere this summer. It seems to me that the Balkans have gotten stirred up, God forbid! The Germans need the Bulgarians. At least that’s my impression. I think it is also because of this that we witnessed the pompous meeting of the Kaiser and the Tsar.

Minčo insists that I have allergies only if he is next to me. It is really like this! Nada will tell you everything in detail.

I kiss the hands of dear Dad and you. I salute you all from my heart and am grateful to you.

Alka

270 Andrija Kačić Miošić (17 April, 1704 – 14 December 1760) was a Franciscan monk, who acquired fame as a Croat poet.

271 Ger. *Herrschaft*.

Berlin, 28 III 1913  
Uhlandstr. 40/41

My dear Mummy, dear Dad,

I am holding on my lap – still quite weak – a little dark girl who will be baptized in the coming days at home and we'll give her the name of Minčo's mother. Her name will be Theophanie – Thea. Our wise man Hristo claims she will be very smart because she has huge eyes and dark hair. These are the criteria according to which he judges the intelligence of his ten-day old sister!

Minčo telegraphed you about her arrival on this planet – and I see in your letters that she was greeted with great joy. This news was a great shock for you. I managed to keep it a secret in order to save you, my dear Mummy, from many months of fear, waiting and other unpleasant difficulties, which would have unavoidably preceded the arrival of this little creature to this world. My first delivery was very difficult, but this little Berliner came with laughter and pleasant conversation, with an ideal nurse, and with our dear doctor, who patiently sat next to my bed from eight in the morning until noon! Our Thea was saluted by the first days of spring. Her arrival was complicated by the illness of our boy, who had angina. There were difficult moments for all of us and we struggle even today to help him stand on his brave feet again. He's weakened a lot and the little girl as well, due to her nervous mother. Things have stabilized here, but we are concerned about you, my dear Mum. Your sickness worried me during the whole period of my pregnancy, even more than my own difficulties. Now Ivana has let me know that everything was much worse than I had heard, and that I had been spared by you from any and all bad news. M<sup>me</sup> von Hasenfeld, who was appointed to me during the last four months, succeeded in keeping me away from any worries and bad news – no matter where they came from. Until five and a half months ago, I went on walks with my son every day. The first two months [of pregnancy] were horrible – but it later got better and better.

Now, when I hear about your illness and I struggle with my own issues, I wonder why I did not leave everything and return to Zagreb. My desire to surprise you, however, kept me here in my Berlin harbor. Now that I can read from Ivana's letter, it was all a secret known to everyone<sup>272</sup>. What a pity<sup>273</sup> – only when everything is behind us, and as you wished a little girl now decorates our family circle.

As soon as we are done with the baptism (M<sup>me</sup> Anastasov is the godmother) and when I have regained my strength a little and Hristo has completely recovered from his sickness, I will go with Fišika and the children to Zagreb. If you approve, I will hire

272 Fre. *"un secret du Polichinelle"*.

273 Fre. *tant pis*.

a maid in Zagreb, and leave Ida and the cook to Minčo. They are both very good and loyal and I am sure that without me everything will go smoothly.<sup>274</sup>

I think my strength has deteriorated a lot, so I will go to Semmering once more. I don't know if I will encounter the same pleasant company again from last winter, but I am in correspondence with a few diplomats who intend to go for a month up to the hills and they have invited me to join them. And so, I will go with them, and not they with me. Women always manage to obtain what they want<sup>275</sup> – and I don't wish to follow them, but I have nostalgia for Semmering.

Of course, this is all an option and depends on the political circumstances. Minčo will stay behind to lead the Berlin legation during Gešov's absence, while I'm at Semmering. If there are harsher conflicts in the Balkans, he will have to go to Sofia. It seems to me that the Balkans might burst. I am afraid of the East in these unsecure times as I am of the Unholy himself! As for me, the roots of the devil must either be in Asia or in our blessed Balkans.

I had a wonderful time in Carigrad and even Abdul-Hamid could not take the charm with which this city on the Bosphorus radiates. All those bloody and dreadful events, which I have witnessed, could not erase the charm of a journey to the "Sweet Waters of Constantinople"<sup>276</sup> or a stay at Therapia, or a journey on those old little steamboats to Asia Minor or to the island of Prinkipo. When we have to leave Berlin, it will be with a sad heart, but my nostalgia for Carigrad is eternal. Nevertheless, the devil was born somewhere near this marvelous city, if not in the Balkans itself!

There are lots of those devils who could reach my shelter as well so I am afraid that there will not pass much time without dreadful fighting in your vicinity.

Because of this: We must recover so that we can stalwartly wait for the blow, no matter from which direction it comes! Especially you, our dear Mummy, recover soon because without you and your energy we would all fall apart before it is our turn.

How is our garden now in the spring? How are your brave triplets under Olga's patronage? Will the fight between her and Fišika flare up again?

The baptism will be a ceremonious affair – the whole legation with a few Russians [will be there]. An Orthodox gathering!

My nerves are frayed due to this long isolation from the world and life. Now I feel better because my boy runs through the room and the little one is gaining weight. Today,

274 Ger. *tip-top*.

275 Fre. *Ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut*. French proverb, literally: "What woman wants, God wants it."

276 Fre. *aux eaux-douces de Constantinople*.

Minčo will write to you again. His letters are always more vivid than mine. You will see how much in love he is with the little girl. “How could he not be?” says the proud mother.<sup>277</sup>

If only one of you had some good news to share. Željko has not responded. Darko has been silent for the past two months. What will he say about the children?<sup>278</sup> Ivana writes a lot about hers and that she will soon visit you. And Nada? What will she say about the new female member who appeared so suddenly in your big circle of grandchildren?

I hug and kiss you all, and I kiss your and Dad’s hands. With God’s help, we will see each other soon. Gratefully yours,

Alka

277 Ger. *sprach die stolze Mutter.*

278 Ger. *Kinder.*



*The Istanbul Letters of Alka Nestoroff* afford the reader with a rare glimpse into the cosmopolitan world of Istanbul's high society and foreign diplomats during the last years of peace in the Ottoman Empire leading up to the Balkans Wars and World War I. Alka Nestoroff, née Mažuranić, the granddaughter of the Habsburg governor of Croatia and the wife of a Bulgarian diplomat to the Sublime Porte, regularly sent letters from Istanbul to her parents and extended family in Zagreb. These were written from the perspective of a well-educated young woman from the Balkans, whose privileged background and position in society afforded her access to the leading circles of the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire.

Alka Nestoroff is a keen and eloquent observer of everyday life and the conviviality among the capital's multiethnic and multilingual residents, even though her account also includes some untenable essentialist ethnic characterizations. Her letters contain an invaluable trove of information on everyday life in the Ottoman capital, including the scenery and architecture, its street dogs, and the latent danger posed by the numerous fires in the city. These letters are published here for the first time; as a self-narrative they provide a fascinating eye-witness account of the turmoil and temporary breakdown of civic order in Istanbul surrounding the Young Turk Revolution in July 1908.