# • AMERICA

THE Russian painter Briullov said: "Art! It is 'a little'. A little bit not like that—and it is not Art." Even when time passed and I remembered Cindy far back in the past, I did not get weary of this Gift of Fate. She could be called the Common American Girl. The body proportion, the hair style, the manners. A little more, and everything would have looked like an advertisement. But a little invisible border remained. Cindy knew its limits. The free manner of her addressing others at first surprised me. A little more and Cindy would have appeared loose and even vulgar. But the next moment she would drop words as if nobody there was capable of understanding her, shake her paws like a cat, dance attendance almost condescendingly. To talk to her was surprisingly easy but unexpectedly difficult. She would understand everything from half a word but would suddenly turn a conversation in an unexpected direction. She would understand what I was telling her but would draw from my words the meaning she wanted. Not necessarily what I wanted. She astonished me by her feminine spontaneity. And suddenly it would all turn into an American business monologue. Sometimes she seemed to me estranged and unreachable. But I did not even have a chance to think that an irremediable mistake had occurred. Cindy had a sharp intuition. She would suddenly be transformed like a warm sun shining through the clouds. I will never forget her in those moments: in my embrace was a delicate, boundlessly affectionate being.

And along with this was in her a masculine principle, maturity and hardness. Sometimes it seemed she was much older than me.

Then I caught up with her in the alley and everything became clear. She put her head on my chest and rubbed her nose on my chin and said: "Yes, me too."

Although I did not say anything to her, she looked at me attentively as though for the first time. "Goodbye, my god." And she went away.

"CINDY!"

"Indis!" She invented this play on words and wanted me to call her Indis. She liked it. But there was nothing Indian about her. In answer to my perplexity, she said: "In me, there is all India. You are in me."

We were so different but our difference did not make any difference. At least it seemed so to me and, yes, to her also. Perhaps that was why I loved her more than life itself. We were so different, and it did not matter. I thought it a pity that there was no god to thank for this happiness, for this happy, first love.

"Cindy! Indis!" This is an echo of my past youth. She still lives in me.

I was surprised what different bodies we had. Her shoulders round, and mine straight: give or take --the Indian god Rama, hands down to the knees, palms congenitally bent to the sides, fingers bent inwards. A dancing Rama. And her hands were like the neck of a swan. My thighs were those of a man but still there was in them something of the round thighs of my mother. And Cindy, a lady among ladies, had in her body outline something of a boy.

We were so different. Against my black body, hers seemed blinding white. "You really are Krishna," she said kissing my chest. "White mixing with black and the field yields harvest . . . ," I thought aloud. She kept quiet. She did not want a child but I longed for one. This was so natural: to want a child from the one you love. But she was right: what would we have done with the child? How would we feed him? I myself was like a child for her. Earnings came after half of a year and the stipend from the foundation another year later.

But at that moment everything seemed complicated. For the first time, we did not come to an understanding, and for the first time drifted apart.

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I CAME back home tired, but full of the feeling of freedom regained. "Well, Cindy," I said, "now it is time to get the visas." She shook her head and said out of context: "We are going to have a child."

A better gift I could not have received that day. And I could not at all understand her next words: "We will not have the child." "Why? He will see the world, he will be born free of oppression, of prejudices . . ." "Keep quiet," she said tiredly. "I don't want this child."

I still tried to explain. May be she was worried about the financial part, but everything was in order there. But she repeated like a parrot: "We are going to have a child. The child we will not have."

At last I understood the meaning of her sinister words. I asked her directly:

"You do not want a coloured child?" She answered: "Yes."

So that's what it was. Losing the battle at the office, America was throwing a challenge to me at home. I restrained myself for the sake of Cindy. For the sake of everything I held sacred, I restrained myself. Before me was sitting a woman who was dearer to me than life, my life, but not this woman who was now gleaming in her. Everything there was in me, from my pride of the Brahmin and of all my country, was roused and ready to strike out in a violent fit of anger. "Cindy," I said with all the gentleness possible. "Listen, Cindy. To kill him means to kill me, kill you, both of us. Think, he will be like you or maybe like me. He will see flowers and stars. He will be a philologist or a chemist. He will love you, love me. And will some day love someone like you. He should not die, Cindy!"

She sat covering her face with her hands. She then said in a strange voice: "It is easy for you to talk like that. Flowers, stars . . . He will be 'coloured'. That's it. How will he live? Did you think about it? And what will I do with a coloured child? Give it to an orphanage? Even Mother, my mother, will not agree to look after him. He will be 'coloured'!"

These words were like slaps on my face. But I nevertheless controlled myself. "Listen, Cindy, we are going to a country where there are no whites and no coloureds. There, all are equal. There, the dignity of a person is not in his colour but in his personality . . ."

She waved her hands: "This I do not know." "But after all the child has a father and he is not poor. Why are you talking as though I am already dead?" She took a deep breath and shrugged her shoulders: "I don't know, Ram . . ." I embraced her, saying meaningless words. She quietly cried. "Well," I said at last, "we will leave it at that. I must visit Joe. I will be back soon and we will finish the conversation."

In New York, I saw a sealed door. Neighbours said that Joe had died. At that moment I was stricken by the premonition: "She will kill the child." Not fully listening to the talk about Joe, I threw myself into the car and rushed to New Haven. Cindy was not at home. She showed up after a day and, seeing her face, I understood that the child was no more.

Leaving the house and the cheque book for her, I moved into a hotel.

I LEFT America on a bad autumn day, like that day many years back when I met her. I did not blame this country for my unhappiness. I was myself responsible for it. Looking at the Statue of Liberty, I could not resist imagining that its rays were caricatures of carrots. Banished

to the island of immigrants, the colossus symbolised one of the gods of this civilisation—Hypocrisy.

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# • SOVIET UNION

WITH me it happened otherwise. My new family was formed at a time that was very difficult for me as it was for Russia. The civil war, devastation and hunger were still fresh in the memories of people. The country was getting back to itself like a person after a serious illness. It was getting well, overcoming weakness on the way. A few years after my coming here, draught and poor harvest hit the Povolzhe region on the Volga. Many died of hunger, others migrated from their native places. A village girl orphaned in the famine found the strength in herself to reach Moscow, started working and gradually got used to the big city. It was just like what happened to me when I went to Madras. But I was forced to go to the big city because of an absolutely different hunger—the hunger for knowledge. I arrived there with all that school and Father could teach behind me. She was illiterate and yet, the similarity of our fates, I think, made her understand me when we met. And it happened that we made a family. During the years of our life together we did not quarrel even once, and this is surprising, considering that ethnically, on the level of education and in the fields of interest, we were very different people. But we had one main thing, that which the Russians call 'counsel and love'. And I am grateful to her that she helped me to get used to this country, to start speaking and thinking in Russian. Only at difficult moments did I relapse into Telugu or Sanskrit. So much depended on her in my life in those first years, when our home was like 'the house in seven winds'. Somebody always visited us, would come and go. These were scientists, friends from Indian and other sections of the Comintern, my colleagues living in the other Republics, and we had to find place for everybody, feed them and create the atmosphere for communication. It is surprising how she found strength for everything and remained jolly. Later on, when she got badly sick, acquaintances and relatives remembered her earlier infectious laughter. Looking at her other people too would start laughing.

Unfortunately, hunger does not go without leaving its mark. After the birth of children, her health was undermined. Dreams of higher education had to be abandoned. But she took upon herself all the cares of the family. And then other features appeared in her - softness and calmness. To our Indian acquaintances she seemed to be an incarnation of the ideal Indian wife.

I REMEMBER the day the War began. It was a sunny summer Sunday. With all our family we were at the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition. It was such a quiet day! Our daughter was playing and running along the flower beds, and I thought that happiness is so imperceptible, and I have been, it appeared, happy for so many years now. At that moment loudspeakers started speaking. Noticing our state, our daughter came running and pressed herself to me. 'What will happen now?' my wife asked. I looked at other people. Other women were putting the same question to their husbands. 'The same will happen to us as would happen to others, Katya," I told her. She understood everything as she should and did not cry in front of me, when I went to Voinkomat. Then I understood that she finally connected me to this country. Now I was ready

not only to defend my home, my wife and daughter, but my country, its honour and freedom. The hope of the world and of my India.

We did not wait for the War to come, but it came all the same unexpectedly! Every time my thoughts go back to its beginning, I ask myself: why did the hordes of Hitler's followers attack our country at the end of the night, in the hour when people sleep peacefully? The answer comes as if by itself. In the night because this hour is very convenient for attack. Not only people sleep at this hour but a large part of the army. But was it really that Hitler wanted to save the lives of a few German soldiers and gain victory shedding little blood? Some years later, the flooded metro of Berlin demonstrated the degree of Hitler's love for his people. Then why was the attack made so meanly? I think it was because Hitler was scared. He knew that these people were used to fighting and would fight unlike Europe whose conquest was a standing joke. Facing Hitler was the Soviet Union. Hitler was afraid and that was why he counted only on the blitzkrieg. And he could not do without attacking because the very existence of the Soviet Union was making his dreams of world supremacy unrealisable. He had to win the war by any adventurous step -- or die. There was no other way for Hitler but to attack Russia, and from the first days of the war he practically had to hold the line, in spite of the visible successes, to defend himself from the exhausting resistance of Russians.

As a scientist I agree with Academician Vernadsky: I understood that Hitler and German fascism were historically doomed. Vernadsky said the Fascists went against the basic laws of human evolution and that was why they would for sure be defeated. I knew it would be so, but what price would we have to pay for this victory?

As an Indian I then sharply felt that Russia was the only obstacle between the Fascists and defenceless India. Defending Russia, I was saving my beautiful Motherland from destruction and death.

*". . . WE often remember your papa, Dear Lilavati, more often than before. Not because he was our Telugu teacher, our guide, our 'guru'. It is clear that such a soul force was in this great person that he will forever live in those who came in touch with him. I don't know why, but I remember the summer we worked with him in the country house - translated the Telugu novel. It was the cruel history of the invasion of Hindustan by Aryans. Great brutality and great bloodshed is quite a modern phenomenon as per the cry against Fascism, against militarism and against war. I could not combine then the precision of narration with the artistic manner of a writer, and it is astonishing how your father helped me in this. He - I cannot find a different word - enacted, literally portrayed, the contents of the book. He had an inherent artistic sense of a high order. And also it was naturally combined with the rational perception of a scientist. At the very first meeting his words seemed to be amusing: 'As far as I remember, three thousand years back . . .' After a minute, captivated by the richness of his narration, the interlocutor could not get away from the feeling that Gobind Ram indeed lived 3000 years back. The seriousness of narration was accompanied by an artistically bright play-acting. This was not even play-acting. It was simply of his nature. He was on the whole a natural person, almost as if he was in communion with Nature. He was close to it in the same way that it was close to him. I remember the picture of the evening when we just finished a chapter of translation. On the lawn before the house a stone path lead to a small, branching pine tree, and all over the lawn, like moonlight in blue twilight, were white bells. And near them your papa, bright and happy with the beauty of these flowers and the evening. A part of this wonder was himself, standing and almost swimming. White flowers, blue twilight, the top of the pine tree, all in the last beam of light of the setting sun. I remember the edge of the sky transformed from pink to crimson, lilac, dark violet, dove*

*blue . . . The earth grew velvety-black and, like the white moth, the bells trembled on their stalks. Your papa was standing and looking at the darkness. 'Everything began like this. With the play of sunset, with stars and with flowers. Too bad this is not in the novel. I almost feel like adding it myself. As far as I remember, we were as we are now from the times of the Cro-Magnon if not earlier. And still we can not get along - quarrels, wars . . .'*

*"Once he showed me some slides he'd brought from Estonia, and again I saw wonderful sunrises and sunsets. I am afraid it would sound banal but I thought then: 'What a wonderful sunrise and what a beautiful sunset this person has . . .'*

*"Thanks to D'iakov! Without him, we probably would not have, for many more years, known your wonderful father. Recently there was a memorial conference at the Academy on the death anniversary of Alexei Mikhailovich. Warm words were said and the question raised: "To what should we relate such a noticeable rise of interest in our country in the study of India and Indian culture in recent years?" Besides the main long-term factors were also remembered such 'catalysts' as D'iakov, Ramayya and Svyatoslav, son of Nikolai Roerich. Had these persons increased our interest in India because they themselves were unusual persons and the way of their life was unusual? We came to the conclusion that this was not the reason. Come to think of it, none of these - Ramayya, D'iakov and Svyatoslav Roerich - were unusual persons. But they developed their natural gifts more fully. And even in their unusual fate, a motif of human nature shows through. From it alone comes the urge for mutual understanding, for friendship of peoples, for strengthening ties between peoples. From it comes their love for India as sincere as their love for Russia."*

*". . . YES, this is true, he was not just a scientist. It is obvious that he was an artist at heart. He was sensitive to beauty in anything—although as a scientist, he naturally put the beauty of thought above everything. Though to the end of his days he remained an Indian, European culture was grasped by him naturally and simply. It was he who attracted my attention to the books of Anatole France. Till this day I love this writer above all, and for this writer also the beauty of thought was above everything. Reading* Thais, *one of the most beautiful and intellectual books of France, I remember how Papa loved it and read it, again and again.*

*"You know, Svetlana Ivanovna, I can be biased in some way and, as he would say, may embellish something. Now I want to talk about how good he was, how sweet, how kind, though all this is painful to recall. I cannot get used to the fact that the telephone rings and it is not his voice: 'Hello, Baby . . .' And my daughters remember him all the time. Recently the younger remembered how he brought a single rose, placed it in a tall flower vase and asked: 'Beautiful?' She is used to the Russian plenitude of bouquets and asked: 'But why just one?' And he said seriously: 'You see, this way other flowers do not distract you from perceiving its beauty in full. If you want, you can later mix it with others.'*

*"Lately I often see him in dreams. He, joyful, lively, and I, a little child. We are walking on the street of a town in the Caucasus, and at the end of it are the mountains, seeming at arm's stretch. 'Papa, let us go there, it is very close!' He laughs: 'Well, let us go!' And we travel endlessly and the mountains are still so close and yet so far. Or in the dream it is as if he comes back from work and lies down on the sofa to rest. And I get on his belly and say: 'Tell me about India.' He laughs and I feel his strong abdominal muscles. And he talks and talks . . . About India, he could speak endlessly.*

*"Or it is the idyll in the evening that I dream of. The whole family is gathered, sitting at the table. Rembrandt colours. Papa like Ganesa, the elephant. Mama is bustling about with plates, and even our tomcat gets up from a nice nap, stretches himself and sits listening to what the master of the house is saying.*

*"It really was like that. But that dream about the mountains I had once again, in a different way. We are walking, and the mountain is still in its place, but it seems to have receded even farther. I am asking: 'Papa, why?' 'Because, Baby, these mountains, there, at the end, are my mountains. From beyond them I came, and I am going back to them. You keep walking - step by step, you will also reach them some day.' I look up and he is no longer there. I am holding a flower in my hand - it is a rose. Red, beautiful. Then suddenly it gets dark and I understand that night has fallen."*