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Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
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Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow  
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist  
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Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Moltke  
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Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht  
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# **The Genius**

Margaret Horton Potter

# Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Margaret Horton Potter

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-7389-0

[www.tredition.com](http://www.tredition.com)

[www.tredition.de](http://www.tredition.de)

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TO  
MY BROTHER  
EDWARD CLEMENT POTTER



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# THE GENIUS

## THEMA

Hark, ye Great, that withdraw yourselves from the Multitude!  
*Loneliness* is written for your word. Alone shall ye strive to solve the riddle of Creation.

Seek ye help of them that have gone before? Ye shall find it not. Dream ye of sympathy, of praise, from those that watch your work to-day? They shall give ye rather mockery. Finally, would ye leave to your children legacies of wisdom that shall be as gold unto them? Lo! Such desire, also, must be vain.

Dowered of Vision, Power or Wantonness, ye shall not escape this scourge of Fate. Alone shall ye cut your way through the rock of Destiny up to the High Place of Restitution. Yea! Solitary shall your labor be. But out of solitude cometh, in good time, that Understanding of the Law that all, at last, must seek — and find.



## PROLOGUE

### THE ANNUNCIATION

In the Western world of the revised calendar it was the evening of January twelfth. In Russia it was New Year's night, of the year 1840. The year was twenty-three hours old; for the bells of the three churches in Klin had just chimed eleven times. But in "Maidonovo," a country-place of the Gregorievs just outside the town, the mistress of the house, Princess Sophia, had not yet gone to bed. She had been alone in her bedroom for some time, and was now on her knees before a little shrine presided over by a great, golden ikon, with its flaring colors, and stiff, Byzantine figures of Mary and the infant Christ. There, before the World-Mother, knelt the loneliest of unhappy women: daughter of an old, impoverished Muscovite house, and wife, by necessity, of Michael Gregoriev, a man of millions, chief of the Third Section in Moscow: an official after the heart of the Iron Czar, and of Satan, his master, too.

For nearly an hour the Princess had knelt on a heavily rugged floor, her eyes lifted to the face of the Virgin, her lips revealing, in those whispers that had become part of her life, the ever-living anguish of her heart. She was in her thirty-third year, poor creature: had known now sixteen years of married life—sixteen years of revelation, of repulsion mental and physical, of misery not to be told. One by one her little illusions, fancies, hopes, and, with them, all the graces of her youth, had fallen from her, till there remained but a shadowy, faded creature, holding, in the depths of her bruised soul, just one more desire, one final hope, of which the very possibility was by this time all but extinguished.

Yet it was of this hope she was speaking to-night to that distant, shadowy Mary, who, her confessor had told her, can always understand and always pity. Here, in the chill silence of her lonely rooms, while the wide world without grew stiller and more still under its pale covering, the wife had gathered her last resolution together, and dared a demand of those High Immortals whose contact with humanity had ended so long ago. They had hitherto been pitiless enough with her; though this she would scarcely acknowledge even

in her feeble rebellion. But she should ask them, at last, to make her a tardy restitution.

Sophia was unaware that her wish was a selfish one. It seemed so natural a thing she asked; and her mind, poor lady, was all upon herself, there being no other soul to think for her. That the helpless life she longed for would be ushered into a dreary world, too dark for bright innocence to face, never occurred to her. Her outlook had grown strangely one-sided during the past long years of constantly weakening defence.

"Mary-Mother – protect me! I have waited very long. I have done all Thy will. I have kept the fasts: have made my confessions and been absolved. I have striven so long for strength to endure—all that has been given me to endure! I have not avoided any pain, or abuse, or disgrace. I have borne without complaint all the isolation of *his* life, till my very family shuns me. Oh, Thy hand has lain heavy upon me, but I have not complained! Therefore, in this New Year, I come to Thee, Holy Mother, with my wish. Grant me, I beseech, that which has been given so many times to others! Give me at last a companion in my life: one that cannot leave me. Thou, holiest of women, intercede for me! Make me one with Thee! Give me, too, a child!"

Once more, and over and over again, did the frail woman make her request: so many times, indeed, and at last so fervidly, that her excitement grew, and tears came. Little by little she drooped towards the floor. Her face shone wet in the candle-light; and she clutched at the little shelf below the ikon, where a handful of flowers stood in a silver vase between the candles.

The minutes crept by. The few other lights in the big room burned low, flared, flickered, and went out. There was a vast, muffled stillness in the snow-filled air. The first night of the New Year was nearly dead. As the light in her room grew ghostlier, Princess Sophia's voice became gradually incoherent, dropped to a vague whisper, and finally ceased. She slid gently from her knees to a sitting posture, her head resting against the wall, under the little shrine. And then her eyes fell shut. She slept.

For a quarter of an hour there was no sound in the room. The last candle before the ikon at length followed the others, wavered high

for an instant, and then went out. Yet, strangely, the room was not left in darkness. On the contrary, in the corner by the door had appeared a soft, misty radiance which, second by second, grew visibly more luminous. Far over the snow-fields came the clear chime of bells, ringing the midnight hour. As their echoes died, the Princess, without moving her body, opened her eyes again upon the form of a woman who had emerged from the mist and now stood near at hand, looking down at her.

Tall she was, and classically robed, this visitor. Her face, shaded by a drapery of dove blue, was as fair as sculptured marble. But there was a fire of deep compassion in her dark eyes, and her mouth was curved into the gentlest smile. The great pity in that wonderful face stirred Sophia with a sudden pang of joy; and it was long before her gaze moved from those features. But when they did, her lips parted in a faint cry; for she saw that the Mary-Mother was not alone. Her left hand was clasped by that of a child: a tiny, shadowy shape, sweet-faced and slender-limbed. Looking, Sophia's breath came fast; and leaning forward instinctively, she held out her arms. At that gesture, the stranger and her charge came forward a little more, and the holy woman spoke:

"Sophia, I come to answer your prayer, bringing with me the soul of your child."

The Princess bowed to the floor.

"Your eyes behold a little, lonely spirit, that is to be given into your care. Guard it and guide it; for the way of its life stretches far, and is difficult and long. Your paths meet for but a few years: for you are yourself nearing the end of your unhappy journey; and during these last years, comfort shall be given you. Look, then, upon the face of your son."

Swiftly the little spirit left the protecting shadow of its holy guide, and paused beside Sophia. She would have clasped the shadowy body in her eager arms, but a sense outside herself forbade this, and she could only gaze searchingly into the gentle, childish face.

"Thou art mine? — my son?" she whispered, softly.

The little creature looked up at Mary-Mother and then, at once, returned to the sad mortal at its side. The little face brightened with a smile, and the lips formed the dear word, "Mother!"

Then, immediately, darkness had fallen. The visitors from afar were gone. Sophia lay upon the bare floor beneath the ikon, fast asleep.

In a few moments the door from the hall opened hastily, and a woman's voice whispered in frightened haste:

"My lady! Khazyaceka! His Excellency Prince Michael is coming up-stairs! He is almost here!"

## CHAPTER I

### THE CZAR'S BALL

After the night of what she came gradually to call the Holy Dream, the years passed more swiftly, with less of inward tumult, for Sophia Ivanovna Gregoriev. It was now the close of the year 1851; and the reign of the Iron Czar was wavering towards its dark end. Meantime the son of the chief of the secret section in Moscow was eleven years and three months old: a straight-limbed, quiet child, the son of his mother. And all Sophia's recent life, that life which had entwined itself wholly about the promised babe, was mingled the inexplicable strangeness of her dream-memory. To her, New Year's night had become a sacred time; and she loved to keep a vigil through it in her own, lonely way. This year, however, it was to be marked in a different manner. For Michael Gregoriev had planned that, on the first night of 1852, he, and perforce his wife, should make a final effort to obtain that social recognition which had never been the accompaniment of his political advancement.

At this time—as, indeed, to-day, there stood, in the south-central part of trans-Moskva Moscow, only two private buildings of any note. One of these was the low-spreading palace of the Governor; the other that of Prince Michael Petrovitch Gregoriev. The first had stood in its gardens for a century and a half. The other was nearly fifty years older. The dwelling of the Gregorievs was at some distance from its stately neighbor, however; for it stood on the south-east corner of the Konnaia Square, approachable by carriage only through the Serpoukhovskaia. Its surroundings were of the humblest sort; for it was a long way south of the Merchants' quarter, and so far from the sacred precincts of the Kremlin that the voice of Ivan Veliki had melted into an echo ere it reached the Gregoriev gateway.

It is certain that neither age nor environment made this old place less grewsomely interesting: this ancient dwelling of a family whose unsavory annals were lost in the gloom of Tatar rule. The Gregorievs were closely bound to the gloomy stone pile; and would dwell there, in all probability, as long as their line continued. Michael, the present Prince, was loyal to his house. Yet its situation

was one of the greatest of crosses to this man, who had known and cast away many a heavier burden during his career. Remote as he was from the fashionable districts, there was neither man nor woman in the city, from the proudest house in the Equerries' quarter to the outskirts of the Novaia Andronovka, but knew and shuddered, agreeably, at the Gregoriev reputation.

It was not strange, then, that the affair of New Year's night had become the sensation of the season. For on this night Prince Gregoriev had vowed a triumph over the massed society of the Mother City. He intended to accomplish now what his wedding with a daughter of one of the oldest and most honored families had failed to do: what no use of his unscrupulous power could force, what all Moscow society, for once banded unanimously together, had sworn he should never accomplish—enter their ranks, the ranks of the old nobility of the Empire.

By New Year's morning, however, the numbers were admitting, bitterly, their defeat. Once more Gregoriev was about to achieve the impossible. Eighteen years before, Moscow society had defeated him, superbly. At the time of his marriage to a daughter of the Blashkovs, the question of his admission into the "court circle" had been violently agitated. But at that time even his prospective father-in-law had not had the hardihood to suggest an informal presentation of this man to his Majesty. Nay, it was the bride, pale, pretty, sensitive Sophia, who, when it was seen that she had no slightest influence over her dread husband, had been, not, perhaps, without a sigh, dropped from their acquaintance by her former associates: nay, by her very family, all save one sister, a girl younger than herself.

For eighteen years, then, the Gregoriev palace had stood in its isolation, echoing only to the revelry that money can always obtain. For eighteen years its master, buying what the world had to sell, had been secretly planning to obtain what was not for sale: had faced, unmoved, an isolation which, to a nature less strong, would have been unbearable.

Now, at last, he was about to win. His amazing intrigue had succeeded. Its results were for the eyes of all men. For Moscow society had been suddenly *commanded* to his house, to a ball, given on New

Year's night, in honor of his Imperial Majesty Nicholas I., who had decided, by his appearance, to honor the house of his subject and immediate servant.

It was eleven o'clock on that night of nights; and the bed and dressing rooms of the Princess Sophia were lighted to suffocation with smoking candles. Two maids and old Másha, general factotum of her mistress, were bustling importantly from one room to the other, bearing to her, piece by piece, their mistress's burden of jewels. At her dressing-table, pale, still wearing, as always in public, her mask of emotionless impenetrability, sat Sophia. Her neck and shoulders, which, according to the rigid etiquette of court-dress, were fully exposed, were white, and, considering her extreme slenderness, surprisingly round. A broad collar of sapphires and diamonds clasped above an Oriental necklace of pearls, successfully hid whatever there was to betray the too-visible marks of the "certain" age. On her head she bore the oddly becoming kakoshnik, which, in her case, was set with a triple row of superb diamonds. The face below this gleaming structure, the delicate, weary face, robbed of its customary frame of smoothly banded yellow hair, looked more sharply pointed than usual, but surprisingly pretty. For there was actually a fire—whether of pleasure, expectancy or nervousness—in her gray eyes; and there had come a delicate flush to the usually pallid cheeks. Sophia was, indeed, living with her dead to-night. Dreams of the old days held her in a kind of spell. The woman of memories—memories of a brief youth, a swiftly blighted flowering of life—had for once been forced back to a forgotten theme. And she found, recalling the days of her first balls, that the customary bitterness of contrast had suddenly disappeared. There was much that was new in this present situation: she was alive to sensations unfelt for years. There stirred in her heart what she was only to define after it had gone again: that which for most people forms the great staff of the inner life: on which she had been so long unaccustomed to lean—the great Phoenix, Hope.

At length they had fastened the last pin in her veil, the last hook in the heavy gown of cloth of silver. The maids stood off from her a little, whispering. But she herself remained motionless, gazing absently into her quaintly framed old mirror, lost in one of those reveries that her servants had learned not to disturb. The pause had

lasted some five minutes when the door opening into the outer hall opened, vigorously, and the Princess started suddenly up, her face changing pathetically, a look of dread painfully contracting her features.

As their mistress rose, the three women shrank instinctively backward. To one understanding it, the act was pathetically familiar. An instant later, however, the Princess cried out, "Caroline! It is you, then?" and so turned deathly white and reeled a little till old Másha came to her support.

"Sophie! You are not ill—*to-night!*" The new-comer, who had spoken in French, halted near the door, an expression of dismay on her face.

Madame Gregoriev, however, laughed faintly, and the color began to creep back into her cheeks. As old Másha left her to hobble briskly out of the room, she continued, "No, no! I am perfectly well. It was only that you—startled me a little. I—I thought it was—Michael Petrovitch."

Once more the face of the other changed, but she said nothing as she came slowly forward, examining her companion the while with a critical eye. She was the Countess Dravikine, Sophia's younger sister, who, a year or two after Sophia's misalliance, had herself married remarkably well: a young diplomat of the capital, already high in the graces of the official world, and destined to rise steadily, through the clever management of his wife. The Countess Dravikine fitted her adopted world extremely well. She was a woman whose one tender sentiment was that which she held for the sister of her youth. Otherwise she had, not entirely without justice, been called heartless. She was, in any case, admirably adapted for the life she had chosen. And strife social and political, as well as every move in the great game of state intrigue, were as the breath of life to her. She had not come through the fires unsinged. There had been, nay, still were, whispers about her in her world. But they were whispers such as heightened rather than tarnished the brilliance of her reputation. For, whether wrongly or not, her name had more than once been linked with that of the Iron Ruler himself. This may or may not have been the reason for her presence to-night in Moscow, whither she had journeyed to stand beside her sister at the anticipated triumph.

But whatever her motive, no one could deny that the evening would gain by her presence. Here, beside her glittering sister, she was superb, in her magnificently poised maturity, the voluminous gauzes of her Paris gown floating like clouds about her: the numberless opals in her hair and at her breast only continuing the delicate coloring of the green-and-white costume that was as unusual as it was becoming to her *chic* ugliness of feature. But to-night, for perhaps the first time in her life, Caroline Dravikine was more interested in the costume of another than in her own. She was determined that her sister's appearance should be even more perfect than hers. And to this end she went over the other's toilet detail by detail, only ending the silent scrutiny as Másha reappeared with a slender glass of wine for her mistress.

"Eh bien, Sophie, — yes! drink the wine. If you will not rouge you must keep what color you have! — the sapphires are not in the least too heavy. They have done you up very well. Sonya!" turning to one of the maids, "catch up that curl over the right ear of the Princess. It spoils the effect of severity that suits your face so well. So. Et maintenant, ma chère, renvoyez vos femmes de chambre. Je veux causer avec vous en particulier."

Sophia complied with the request: the maids, with the simple familiarity of the Russian serf, taking their dismissal reluctantly. But Madame Dravikine held them all in awe, and before her they did not dare the protest that their Princess might have listened to. When the sisters were alone, they crossed the room together and seated themselves on a great sofa upholstered in a beautifully faded old brocade, made before the birth of the great Catharine. And while Caroline, mindful of her fresh gauzes, sat upright, like a bird poised for flight, her sister lay back, wearily, crushing the veil of her head-dress against a heap of pillows.

There was a moment's pause; then the Countess began, resolutely: "Has Michael Petrovitch seen you yet?"

"Oh no! He has not come up-stairs. I hope that he will not, Katrelka! He — he would not be satisfied, you know."

"Sophie! Sophie! sometimes I cannot wonder that the man is a terror in your life! Satisfied with you! Ciel! If Alexis Vassilyitch expressed dissatisfaction with a toilet of mine, I should not speak to

him for a week. No! I should get him into such difficulties with the ministry that he would come to me on his knees in three days! I tell you again, Sophie, that you must assert yourself! Tell me —"

"Stop, Kasha, stop! I am too tired for all this just now. Say what you will to-morrow. You know the thing is a great strain. Tell me only this: Are you quite sure that his Majesty will come? Do you believe it possible that at last everything is to be right — that we are to have Moscow — our old Moscow — here again?"

Having with some little self-control waved aside the unusual rebuff of Sophia's first words, Madame Dravikine listened to the last with a smile, a trifle self-conscious; and in spite of her sister's look — a stare that suggested coldness, the expression remained with her as she answered: "Yes, at last you are safe, dear. You see — I am here from Petersburg; though it has meant leaving Nathalie with her nurses, and Alexis Vassilyitch to spend every night at the yacht-club at baccarat. Besides, Moscow always bores his Majesty; and even the Czarevitch isn't with him this time, you know."

"Caroline, I wish —" Madame Gregoriev's hesitating voice trailed into silence. She knew that it was scarcely the hour for remonstrance of that kind. After a moment she began again, "Do you remember how many years it is since we were all at home together, in the Nijny Kislovsky? I should hardly be able to name over the old families now. All the leaders of our day — Madame Apúkhtin, Princess Osínin, the Dowager-Countess Parakoff — they are all dead. It is the wife of the younger Smirnoff — Alexander married a dancer who cannot be received — who keeps up the name. Eugen married Olga Lodoroff. She was a child when I was married. She wouldn't remember me at all now. But we have had not one excuse. They are all to come. Kasha, I am happy to-night! Think —"

"Of course, Sophie, they are coming. One would think you a parvenue, absolutely, to hear you!" broke in Caroline, sharply, still smarting a little at her reading of that unfinished sentence.

Sophia colored at her sister's appellation, but had no time for rejoinder; for at this moment an inner door was pushed gently open and a boy entered.

Sophia rose, hastily. "Ivan! You were asleep two hours ago!"