5 – NOVODEVICHY CONVENT AND TRETYAKOV GALLERY

Wednesday, 20 June

Regrettably, this was our last full day in Moscow. I was now beginning to enjoy our stay here, and had more or less got used to the city and its ways. This morning we would be brought to one of the fortress-like monasteries that had once formed a protective belt around the south of Moscow; in the past they had been outside the city boundaries, but now they were in the more modern suburbs. The one we would visit was the Novodevichy or New Maiden Convent – the same one that we had seen in the distance a couple of days previously. Situated in the southwest of the city, it was only about a mile or so from our hotel.

The weather was rather gloomy and overcast this morning. Although Walter had paid extra for this tour, he decided to skip it and do some shopping. After breakfast I bought three more Fujichrome films, which luckily I found for sale in the hotel's Beriozka shop. I saw no more of these films during our stay here.

At ten o'clock we boarded our coach for Novodevichy. This morning we had a different guide: a small young lady with fuzzy hair. Like some of the other guides, she tended to be rather taciturn, and her manners were not always the best.

Novodevichy Convent, Moscow

We soon reached the convent; in the gloomy light, the fortress walls looked rather menacing, and the buildings inside appeared to be rather dead and run down. As we stood in the grounds, close to a cemetery, our guide began to tell us about the place. It was almost deserted except for a few old women; it was dark and the atmosphere was heavy.

We were told that the New Maiden Convent is the oldest convent in Moscow. Situated on a peninsula, it is surrounded on three sides by the Moskva river. It was named 'new' as a Maiden Convent had already existed. It was founded in 1524 by

Vasily III. To commemorate his liberation of the town of Smolensk from invading Poles in 1514, he ordered a cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of Smolensk (named after a famous icon) to be built here. It was completed in the following year. Its style of architecture was based on a cathedral in the town of Vladimir, a former capital.

The Church of the Transfiguration

In the convent there are fourteen buildings in all, and there is one active church, the Church of the Assumption, which was built in 1685–87. The rather unusual though attractive structure over the main gateway is the Church of the Transfiguration, which had been built in 1687. Another ecclesiastical building is the Church of the Intercession; to our left could be seen its tall bell tower, said to be the most beautiful of its type in the world. Unfortunately it was now surrounded by scaffolding.

Convent building, Novodevichy Convent

Beside the gateway was a red and white building. This was where Peter the Great's half-sister Sophia had been moved after she had lost her power; like many other women sent to this convent, she had been forced to become a nun. Peter also sent his first wife here after he had tired of her; Ivan the Terrible had sent many women here.

We were told that the walls dated from the 1590s – the time of Boris Godunov. Napoleon tried to destroy the convent in 1812, but the story goes that a nun managed to stop the fire.

Our guide now drew our attention to the little cemetery nearby, and told us that many of the Decembrists (the rebels of 1825) had been buried here. Many other famous Russians had been buried here, including Nikita Khrushchev. While standing under the shade of some trees, we were shown the bust of a hero of 1812, Denis Davydov, which had been placed over his grave.

The Church of the Assumption, Novodevichy Convent

We were now given some time to wander around the place, and were told to return to the Cathedral of Our Lady of Smolensk, which we would be brought into. Most of us headed for the practising Church of the Assumption, which was quite elegant and had a fine flight of covered steps up to its entrance. However, we discovered that it would be closed until 5.30 p.m. I decided that, if I had time later in the day, I might take a stroll down to this church and have a look inside it.

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Smolensk, Novodevichy Convent

The interior of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Smolensk, which had been turned into a museum, was very elaborate and rather overpowering. The cathedral was lit by

electric lights in hanging chandeliers, and sections of the building had been blocked off by scaffolding, for parts of it were being renovated. Large and colourful frescoes, first painted in the sixteenth century, covered every inch of the walls and pillars. It was this feature that made the place look rather fussy and cluttered. A grave image of Christ looked down at us from the main dome high above our heads.

At ground level, a very tall and elaborate iconostasis with shining gold doors and decorations stood before us. It had been made at the end of the seventeenth century in what is called the Moscow Baroque style. Our guide now explained the meaning of the various icons, and gave us the names of the different rows of icons, starting from the top:

The Forefathers row, depicting various saints;
The Patriarch row;
The Deesis row, depicting an image of Christ at the centre. The image is placed within a red diamond shape, symbolizing royalty, and also within a dark green circle, symbolizing eternity;
The Festival row of square icons, depicting various religious festivals;
The Patron row, where the patron saint is always depicted second to the right from the central doors.

Our guide told us that a copy of the icon depicting Our Lady of Smolensk had been substituted for the ancient original, which very sensibly had been placed in a museum.

We spent quite a while here gazing at the frescoes and the icons, while matronly old women paraded around and kept their eyes on us. Although photography was forbidden, I tried to take a picture when nobody was looking. By comparison with a practising church, this cathedral – although magnificent and interesting – felt rather clinical and more like a museum.

Also in the main body of the cathedral were two large stone sarcophagi, one of which contained the remains of Sophia, Peter the Great's sister. In a small side room, we saw an interesting display of ecclesiastical robes.

Eventually we left the convent and returned to the coach. We now discussed what we would do next. According to our schedule, we had been given time to do some shopping, but only a handful of people were interested. A man wanted to go to the Lenin Museum in Red Square, and an elderly lady wanted to see the Tolstoy Museum. As I wanted to return to the Kremlin, I put up my hand for the Lenin Museum.

A compromise was reached: for the people who wanted it, there would be shopping for fifteen minutes in a local Beriozka shop, then we would be driven to Red Square. The shopping expedition took a little longer, but we were soon off, heading for the city centre. The coach stopped at the Lenin Museum and our guide told us that if we wished to visit it, we would have to find our own way back, for it was now time to bring the others back to the hotel for lunch.

I hopped out with the man and his wife, then left them. As I approached Red Square, I saw the long queue that wound its way out of the Kremlin grounds, past the Eternal Fire, round the corner into the square, and eventually ended at Lenin's mausoleum. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, it moved forward. It now struck me as being rather unusual that our guides had not organized a visit to the mausoleum; on the contrary, they had positively discouraged us from going, pointing out that queuing would take up far too much time.

As I walked past the queue and made my way to the entrance of the Kremlin, the sky cleared and the sun shone brightly. This was just what I needed for some good photographs! I now decided to dispense with lunch and spend my time revisiting the

Kremlin. At an easy pace I rambled into the square of cathedrals and took my time about composing pictures and changing lenses. By now most of the tourists had returned to their hotels for lunch, and so there were less people around; many of them were Russian. A girl asked me where she could find a certain palace, but unfortunately I could not fully understand her. How I longed to speak Russian fluently! I realized that I would have to return some time with a better knowledge of the language.

The Uspensky Cathedral and the Palace of Facets, the Kremlin

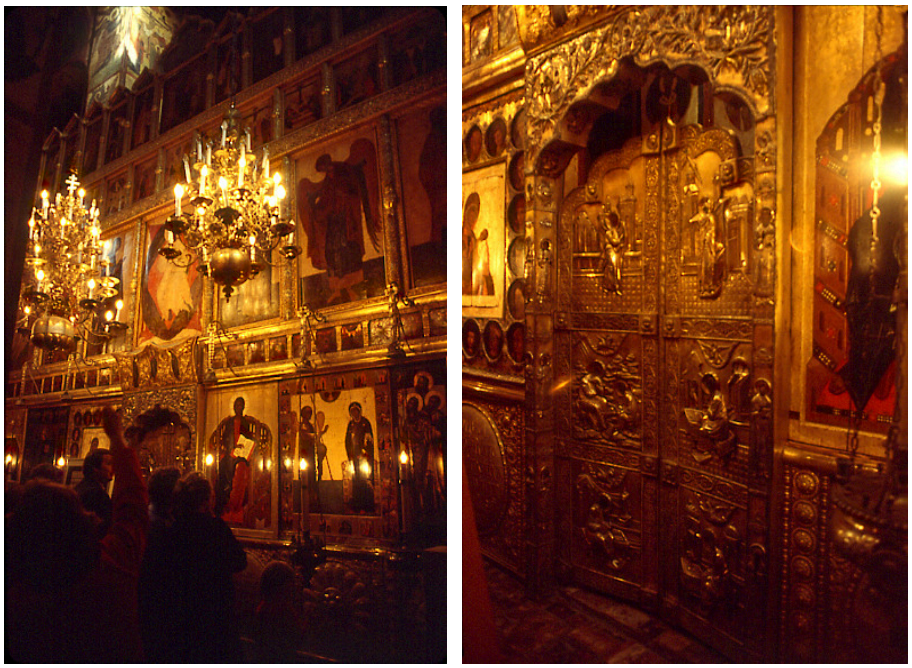
As I wandered around the square, I noticed that three of the ecclesiastical buildings were open to the public – not one as our guide had stated. It turned out that I could visit the Cathedral of the Annunciation, the Church of the Deposition of the Robe, and the building beside the belfry. After I had taken all the photographs that I needed, I joined the small queue that led to the *kassa* or ticket kiosk. Behind me stood an elderly man clutching a string bag; all he had in it was a newspaper. I noticed that the paper was very much off white, and that the printing was very coarse and poor. In front of me a little boy, who looked quite oriental and was dressed in an ill-fitting suit, fidgeted. A girl, who was also in front of me, asked the elderly man to keep her place while she skipped off somewhere.

When I reached the little kiosk, I deciphered the notices and watched other people buying tickets. There was a standard 'museum-cathedral' ticket that cost twenty kopecks; I asked for three. Guessing that I was a tourist, the lady asked me in German, 'Für eine Person?' ('For one person?') to which I answered, 'Da'.

Clutching my tickets, I made my way over to the Cathedral of the Annunciation and entered the little wooden porch that had been constructed outside the white walls. A lady with a red armband sitting at a desk tore a piece from one of my tickets. I was then approached by a pleasant lady who, speaking in broken English, asked me where she could buy a ticket. I told her where to go, but when she glanced in at the cathedral, the lady at the desk waved her in, indicating that she did not need to pay any money. The lady who had spoken to me called to her husband and they went inside together. Having witnessed this, I realized that I could possibly have done this and saved myself the bother of queuing!

Walking through a cavernous gallery, I entered the cathedral proper, which was small though very tall. Over the intricate doorway was a small balcony; presumably this had been used by the royal family as this had been, in effect, their private chapel.

Like the interiors of the other churches that we had seen, this cathedral was dark and decorated with numerous frescoes; dozens of mournful-looking saints peered out from dimly-lit corners. The central section, like the cathedral that we had seen this morning, was lit by electric candles in gold chandeliers.



The iconostasis of the Cathedral of the Annunciation, the Kremlin

The next feature to catch one's attention was the magnificent iconostasis, the doors of which were made of chased silver. This large structure glistened in the dull yellow light. According to a notice that stood in front of it, and which was translated into English, the Deesis or Intercession row had been painted by the artist Theophanes, while the Russian painters Prokhor and Andrei Rublyov had executed the Festival row.

I felt a tremendous sense of achievement having managed to get inside this cathedral. The décor here was very rich and seemed to have an edge on the other church interiors that we had seen. I stood here for several minutes, taking it all in. Eventually I left; as I went out, I noticed that a handrail had been affixed to the painted wall in the gallery. Although it seemed quite out of place, no doubt it was there to keep people away from the delicate murals.

I then crossed the square to the fine Church of the Deposition of the Robe – my favourite. At the door, I presented the lady with another one of my tickets, and entered. Inside, I discovered that the walls had been whitewashed and that this part of the building had been turned into a small museum of religious art. As the walls had cracked here and there, special instruments had been pushed into the cracks to measure their expansion. On display was a collection of icons, made of wood, that were carved in bas-relief. Some of them were very small and extremely detailed; the larger ones were painted, but the small ones had been left plain. These fine works of art dated from the seventeenth century. Also on display was a large patriarch's crozier, which had a very detailed carved wooden top.

Going through a door, I now found myself in the main body of the church which, I discovered, had been well preserved. Although it was tiny, it was just as decorative as

any of the other churches that I had seen. The frescoes had been painted in 1643, and the paintings on the iconostasis in had been done in 1627 by Nazary Istomin. The church was very beautiful and almost empty of people.

Delighted to have seen this little gem, I left and crossed over to the building beside the Belfry of Ivan the Great where, I discovered, there was an exhibition of articles from Iran and Turkey. I gave my ticket to a lady who waved me in to the left, for one had to follow the prescribed direction, which was clockwise. If people dared to turn in the wrong direction, they would be noisily reprimanded and commanded to follow the signs. The whole scenario struck me as being quite laughable. The local people, in their usual submissive way, would bow to the authority of the old crone on duty and, without any resistance, would do as they were told. Also present here were some very oriental-looking people who must have come from some eastern corner of the vast former empire. I was quite taken by a lovely-looking slim girl, who was being shown around the exhibition by her stout mother; both were speaking Russian. I noticed that these oriental-looking people carried themselves with more confidence and were inclined to smile more readily, whereas the pure Russians rarely smiled.

I went around this exhibition of swords, shields, horse-riding equipment and elaborate rugs quickly as I was not particularly interested in what was on offer here, then left.

I now scouted around the backs of the cathedrals, where I had not been before. To the extreme north of the square I found the delicate pink Church of the Twelve Apostles (Sobor Dvenadtsati Apostolov). This had been built between 1656–85 by order of the Patriarch Nikon as an example of what he wanted by way of traditional architecture, for he had obtained an edict banning the popular steeple church and had ordered the return of the dome, five of which were to be placed on the top of every church to be built from then on. Unfortunately, this attractive church was closed to the public and, like some of the others, was surrounded by scaffolding.

Next I walked behind Uspensky Cathedral, then along the side of the Palace of Congresses, until I came to a yard where I found some soldiers unloading guns from a lorry. Something told me that I probably should not have been here.

The Terem Palace, the Kremlin

I now found myself at the back of the Terem Palace, built in 1635–6 for the Tsars by a group of Russian architects. As the place had a number of very colourful roofs – red, white, yellow and brown – I took a photograph of them. I had often caught

glimpses of these roofs from Red Square, and had wondered what building I had been gazing at.

The Arsenal and the Trinity Gate, the Kremlin

I then left this area and found my way to the Trinity Gate. Satisfied to have seen everything that I could see within the Kremlin, I mentally bid the place adieu and headed for the exit.

I now set my mind on finding the Tretyakov Gallery. The original plan was that I should return to the hotel for lunch, meet Walter and go the gallery together, but I was determined not to waste any time now. I knew that Walter had a map and that, if he really intended to go to the Tretyakov, he would find his own way there.

On I marched, crossed the bridge over the Moskva river, then continued along Bolshaya Polyanka street. At last I came to a turning to the left, then a turning to the right, believing that I was on the correct road, but found that I was back in the narrow side street that I had walked along during the previous evening. A lady pushing a pram appeared and I asked her in Russian where the gallery was. She told me to continue down the street, take the second turn to the left, and I would find it at a turn to the right. I followed her directions and finally found myself outside the gallery, the presence of which was clearly indicated by the number of tourist coaches parked along the narrow street where it was situated. Having seen a photograph of it before, I was prepared to see a rather odd-looking building, and it certainly did look strange. It had been built in the early 1900s in the so-called 'Barbaric' style; the orange and red façade of this highly unusual gallery would not have looked out of place in Disneyland. It must have been one of the ugliest buildings in Russia.

I was able to go straight up to the *kassa* – it was obviously too late in the day for a queue – and buy an admission ticket from an elderly lady. As I had observed in other places, the ticket kiosk here was placed quite a distance away from the entrance and not inside it, thus necessitating two queues, for the ticket had to be checked by another elderly lady at the entrance.

The interior of the gallery was rather dark and a little tatty; the paintings were not very well lit, and many of them that had glass acted like mirrors. The place, founded by the Moscow art connoisseur Pavel Tretyakov in 1856, was quite crowded. Most of the people were locals, and many of them were being shown around by guides. I encountered several school groups as well; I kept getting in their way and was often pushed to one side by a guide when they gathered around a notable painting. I was

quite surprised to see so many young people here who were genuinely taking an interest in the paintings, and were stopping to examine them closely. In fact, there were people of all ages in the gallery: small children, school groups, families, university students, couples, and also middle-aged and elderly people.

I was quite enchanted by the selection of paintings, especially the ones that I had seen in books and now saw in reality. So many of them were evocative of rural Russia of the past, and therefore were very pleasing to behold. Others were quite humorous.

Following the arrow that indicated the start of the exhibition and the way to go, I found myself in a high-ceilinged room in which the earliest Russian art painted in the European style was displayed. These paintings had been done by Peter the Great's 'fledglings', whom he had sent to Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century in order to study art. Here I saw several portraits painted in muted and dark colours by artists such as Ivan Nikitin (1688–1741) and Feodor Rokotov (1735–1808); their subjects were various wealthy and important people including Catherine II and her lover, Grigory Orlov. There were also busts carved in white marble by Fedot Shubin (1740–1810), including one of the aforementioned Orlov, and others by Feodosii Fedorovich Shchedrin (1751–1825).

Portrait of Prokofi Akinfiyevich Demidov, by Dmitry Levitski, Tretyakov Gallery

In another room I stopped to look at a large portrait of a rather comical looking character, Prokofi Akinfiyevich Demidov, painted by Dmitry Levitski (1735–1822), known as the Gainsborough of Russian art, which indeed he was. Another work of his was a fine portrait of Catherine II in her old age.

Next I found a collection of prints of Saint Petersburg, with descriptions underneath in French and Russian. Among this collection was a print that I had seen before in a book: a picture of Catherine II in a garden with her dog, which was based on a painting by Vladimir Borovikovsky (1757–1825); I saw this in the following room along with many other fine examples of the artist's work.

In another room I examined a collection of rather large miniatures and, in another, paintings by Fyodor Matveyev (1758–1826). Next came the school of landscape painters: small gems by Sylvester Shchedrin (1791–1830), which included several lovely views of Capri, and a picture of wine merchants in a very familiar spot that I

had seen previously in a painting in the National Gallery of Ireland. Another painting by this artist that I liked was one entitled 'New Rome'.

After these I saw some portraits by Orest Kiprensky (1782–1836) and Vasily Tropinin (1776–1857), including a fine self-portrait by the latter. Tropinin wore round spectacles and looked a little dotty!

The next room was large; half of it was devoted to the superb paintings of Karl Bryullov, the first all-round painter in Russia, who lived from 1799 to 1852. I was enchanted by his famous work *The Rider*, a fine small work entitled *Italian Noon*, which depicted a lady picking grapes, and a superb portrait of A. Lanchi. However, his masterpiece, *Last Day of Pompeii*, did not impress me. In the other half of the room were studies and sketches by Alexander Andreyevich Ivanov (1806–58) – most of them for his large and impressive *Christ before the People*, which hung on the wall. I sat down here, had a rest and studied the painting, a reproduction of which I had already seen in a book.

Alexander Andreyevich Ivanov: Christ before the People, *Tretyakov Gallery*

The next painter of note that I stopped to study was Pavel Andreyevich Fedotov (1815–52), a disillusioned army officer who depicted his satirical views on life. I loved his paintings because of their exactness and detail; his sense of depth and colour was superb. I enjoyed studying his most famous work, *An Aristocrat's Breakfast*. His *Cautious Bride* (a painting depicting a proposal), was funny. *The Jolly Cavalier* also caught my eye.

Next came an artist whom I really enjoyed because of his even greater detail and clearness: Vasily Perov (1834–82), whose pictures of Russian peasant life seemed to encapsulate the heart and soul of the countryside. His view of life was quite satirical; in one painting, a very large and majestic Orthodox priest sat guzzling food at a table while a ragged beggar and a little boy looked on pitifully, waiting for some leftovers. Another vivid work depicted children playing with a troika (a horse-drawn sleigh) in the snow. There were also several portraits by him.

After this I gazed at more scenes of peasant life by painters such as Konstanin Apollonovich Savitsky (1844–1905), Vassily Maksimov (1844–1911), Alexei Korzuzhin (1835–94), and Vladimir Makovsky (1846–1920).

Next came works, painted in more subtle colours, by the artist Nikolai Nikolaevich Ge (or Gay), 1831–94. His large painting, *Peter the Great interrogating his son Alexei*

at Peterhof, was dark and mysterious, and had a slightly Dutch look about it. His excellent portrait of Leo Tolstoy, painted in 1882, was quite large.

I now came across another excellent portrait, this time by Ivan Kramskoi (1837–87), who had been the head of the Society of Wandering Exhibitions.

Vasily Polenov: Moscow Courtyard, *Tretyakov Gallery*

In another room was a series of very large and striking war pictures by Vasily Vereshchagin (1842–1904), and some small gems by Vasily Polenov (1844–1927) that depicted dreamy country scenes. One in particular caught my attention because of its immediacy: a medium-sized work entitled *Moskovsky Dvorik* (Moscow Courtyard), which had been painted in 1878. I stood riveted to this painting, wallowing in the calm sunny scene with its farmyard, its stretch of grass in the foreground, and a white and gold church in the distance. What other painting, I asked myself, could depict the atmosphere of a lazy summer's day in the Russian countryside more aptly than this one?

Valentin Serov: Girl with Peaches, *Tretyakov Gallery*

Next came one of my favourite Russian painters, Valentin Serov (1865–1911), whose work came close to the free expression of the Impressionists. He made his

mark at the age of twenty-two with a work that I now gazed at in admiration, not having seen it before: *Girl with Peaches*. His portrait of the artist Maria Nikolayevna Yermolova standing beside a mirror, a dramatic work painted in greys and whites, was nearby, and I sat down to gaze at it. Also in the room was his fine picture *Girl in Sunlight*, and a delightful portrait of a boy, Mika Morozov.

I then saw some of the huge works by the Slavophile artist Viktor Vasnetsov (1848–1926), whose paintings I found rather heavy and clumsy. His scenes from ancient Russian history were depicted in a very Victorian manner.

After these came the pleasant country landscapes of Isaac Levitan (1860–1900), which I quite enjoyed looking at. However, I did not care much for the work of Vasily Ivanovich Surikov (1848–1916), whose large paintings also depicted reconstructions of Russian historical scenes.

Ilya Repin: The Religious Procession in Kursk Gubernia, *Tretyakov Gallery*

Now came my favourite paintings: those of Ilya Repin (1844–1930), no doubt one of the greatest Russian painters. However, much to my surprise, his works now came as something of an anticlimax – maybe this was because his colours and subject matters were just that little more sober and restrained. However, I gazed in delight at his huge and famous work *The Religious Procession in Kursk Gubernia*, which was full of interesting detail and vigour. This painting summed up Russian society as it once had been: the miserable and invalided peasants, the well-fed members of the clergy, and the smug and well-dressed officials, all of whom were taking part in an annual Eastern Orthodox cross-carrying procession. His portrait of the great author Tolstoy was full of feeling, as was another work that depicted a huge, furious woman. Another one of his famous works entitled *The Returned Exile* or *They did not Expect Him* caught my attention and I spent some time examining and admiring it. A more gruesome picture depicted the murder of Ivan the Terrible's son. However, I liked Repin's portrait of Glinka, the composer.

During my tour around the gallery, somebody slapped me on the back; when I turned around, Walter grinned at me. When he and another lad named Mark had

realized that I was not returning to the hotel, they had decided to go to the gallery on their own. They had taken the metro, which had left them quite a distance from their destination. As they had started their tour at the wrong end of the gallery, they were going in the opposite direction from me and therefore going back in time! Shortly afterwards we departed and I entered the section where they had started their tour: the modern school.

Ilya Repin: The Returned Exile (They did not Expect Him), *Tretyakov Gallery*

As I was quite tired by now, I just walked through the rooms at a brisk pace, following the arrows to the exit. I only stopped to look at one or two paintings that took my fancy. The only ones that I liked were by an artist named Abram Efimovich Arkhipov (1862–1920), and a painting entitled *The Resevoir* by Victor Borisov-Musatov (1870–1905) – a dreamy and rather melancholy work.

As I marched on, I noticed that all the Russian people in the gallery were doing likewise; not one of them stopped to look at the modern Soviet depictions of large-muscled workers or the many portraits of Lenin. Was it because they, like me, had seen enough, because it was too near closing time, or because (as I suspected) they had seen too many of these images in the past?

I left the building at six o'clock and walked out into the fresh air feeling tired, hungry, but happy. I now felt that I had seen Moscow properly, and was satisfied that I had at last managed to visit this important art gallery.

I then walked quickly to a bus stop beside the Kremlin and waited for the number two trolleybus, which would bring me to the hotel. As I waited, a drunk, with his shirt open down to his chest, quietly staggered about, trying to pluck up enough confidence to walk past a policeman. After a minute or so, a trolleybus came along and stopped. I hailed it in the usual manner by holding out my hand, but discovered afterwards that this was unnecessary as the driver halted at every stop. It was not too crowded inside, despite the fact that it was probably rush hour. I watched how a lady got a four-kopeck ticket from a dispenser and then punch it using a little machine beside the window, then did what she had done. Shortly afterwards, a Russian man who could not get near the puncher passed his ticket to me and asked me to punch it for him, which I did.

I eventually made my way along the shaky old bus, which soon filled up, and sat down on the front seat. It was obvious that these buses were built on the basic and sensible principle of transporting people from one place to another with no trimmings, for this ancient bus was most certainly not designed for comfort. As more space had been allocated for standing than for sitting, the bus soon filled up until it was absolutely packed. From my vantage point in the front seat, I noticed that the driver had stuck up a photograph, cut out of a magazine, of a pretty girl's face.

We travelled at good speed, and soon were approaching the familiar ugly hotel.

When I crossed the bridge and entered the hotel, I went straight to the dining room. Here I was met by our guides, who light-heartedly reprimanded me for being late, and explained that the time for dinner had been changed to 5.30 p.m. When I admitted that my lateness was entirely due to my own fault, I was told that I might or might not get something to eat.

I now sat down and nibbled at the appetizers which, as usual, were already on the table. This was a custom that I did not care for, as the appetizers were often left there for quite a long time, with flies hovering around and landing on them. Just as I began eating, the little old Russian lady in our group arrived with another Russian lady and called a waitress over to our table to order their meals. When the waitress arrived with the food, I apologized and explained that I had returned very late. Moments later, she returned with the rest of my dinner. I expressed my thanks and tucked in.

While the three of us ate, the waitresses then began to set some of the tables for a banquet – possibly for another wedding. After I had finished eating and was leaving, I was surprised to see bowls of ripe fruit: apples, oranges, and grapes. I was puzzled when I saw this, for we had been told that there was a general shortage of fruit in the Soviet Union, and because of this, we had been given very little fruit – often none at all. Also missing from our diet were vegetables; all we ever got were large chunks of cucumber, chives, a few leaves of lettuce, and some sort of pickled fruit or vegetable that tasted quite nasty.

Outside the dining room, the guests were assembling in their finery. I met Walter in the shop, and together we went up in the lift to our room. As we were both feeling quite tired, we spent the evening watching television, writing and, in general, unwinding.

It had been an interesting day; I now felt that I had seen Moscow to my satisfaction, though no doubt there were other places to be visited – maybe at some time in the future.

Thursday, 21 June

Our last day in Moscow began by being rather cloudy, but it brightened up a little later. We had our breakfast at 9.30 for the last time in the huge high-ceilinged restaurant. Afterwards, Walter and I went to the shop, where I bought a little book containing good photographs of Moscow for about three roubles. We then strolled outside and sat in the park in front of our hotel for about an hour, then returned to check our luggage, which was being brought down from our rooms. Nobody wanted their suitcases to be mislaid; the six people in our group whose luggage had gone missing were still without their belongings. One girl had been going around in the same black blouse and skirt, in the heat, over the past few days.

We were due to leave for the airport at eleven o'clock, but did not set off until half an hour later, for not all the cases had been brought down; Walter's and mine were among the last to appear.

We now drove up to the Kremlin and then turned southwards. We followed such an extremely devious route that Walter and I believed that we were heading for another airport. However, we eventually arrived at the same place as before, and were brought to an empty lounge that had the word ‘Intourist’ displayed over the door.

As before, we saw rows of white Aeroflot planes lined up outside, but there was hardly anybody in the airport. Fortunately we did not have to wait long; we went through the customs control and walked outside to the airport bus. Because we were about to travel on an internal flight, I was expecting something really dreadful, and so was quite amazed when we were driven up to a large comfortable jet – the type in which we had flown to Russia. As before, the members of the crew were efficient but unsmiling. Our guides regretted that we would have nothing to eat until about four o’clock.

Having fastened our safety belts, which had been left very loose, we set off at about 1.30 p.m. and soared up into the heavens, heading for our next destination: Leningrad.