

Konstantin
FEDIN



EARLY JOYS



A NOVEL



**FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW 1950**

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The unity which I strove to achieve while working on the novels *Early Joys* and *No Ordinary Summer* comprises the most diverse phenomena.

The novels contain over thirty characters, not to mention incidental personages. Perhaps not all of the thirty exert great influence on the development of the action as a whole, but all of them are essential to the separate scenes from which I hoped to build a general picture of the epoch.

I chose two periods sharply contrasted in morals, in the tempo of living, in the nature and significance of historical events. The first was 1910, a period of reaction in prewar tsarist Russia (*Early Joys*); the second was 1919, when the civil war was at its height and the revolution entrenched itself by conquering the White armies of Denikin and the interventionists headed by the French and the English (*No Ordinary Summer*).

Through the lives of individuals I have tried to portray two worlds: dying tsarist Russia and the rising Land of the Soviets, whose new and unprecedented social system vanquished the old.

The historical theme determined the role played by each of the characters and which of them should hold the centre of the stage at any given moment. The historical theme further decided the question as to which of these two novels should predominate in the mind of the reader. *No Ordinary Summer* surpasses *Early Joys* both in depth and sweep.

In the first book, a picture of the morals and daily life of old Russia are presented against a background of provincial life which in almost every aspect is stultified by the century-old traditions of petty-bourgeois society, with gendarmes and state officials jealously guarding tsarist laws. The life of provincial intellectuals is taken up by lazy dreaming, and obscure though pretentious discussions having little to do with the struggle to improve the life of the masses. But this struggle was being waged. It was being waged deep down under the surface, hidden from sight. It banked on the future. It prepared the way for the coming fight for the happiness of the labouring man.

In conceiving the canvas as a whole, I naturally conceded a relatively small place to the under-

ground revolutionaries in tsarist Russia. The supremacy of the reactionary forces was almost complete at that time, and Russia's finest people either perished or were forced to conceal their activities. But two characters of the first novel introduce the reader to those forces which later were to play the leading role in history. One of these characters is the metalworker Pyotr Ragozin, who participated in the revolution of 1905 and served a term of exile. The other is the young boy Kirill Izvekov, son of a schoolteacher. It is he who represents the revolutionary thinking of the most progressive people, and it is he who embodies the basic idea of the entire literary work.

Then came another historical period. The October Revolution broke the chains binding the workers and peasants of Russia, and the revolutionaries moved up into the front ranks of history.

The novel *No Ordinary Summer* explains many details from the biographies of the main characters of *Early Joys* and further develops situations which could not have been fully unfolded in the first novel without violating the exactness of the perspective. In the second book I introduce a new character in the person of Dorogomilov, whose purpose it is to show the reader in retrospect the path trod by Ragozin in tsarist times and

to show the sweep of the underground work carried on by that professional revolutionary—in a word, to reveal what earlier was hidden from the eye.

The old world was shaken to its foundations by the Great October Socialist Revolution. It was my desire to show the tremendousness of this historical event through the psychological changes it wrought in all my characters, both great and small. The same social circles which figured in the first novel are met with in *No Ordinary Summer*, but under entirely different circumstances.

It is as though the characters have changed places: those who were brought to trial by the tsarist court, now bring to trial the enemies of the new life. Court officials of the old regime hide from the vengeance of the people; gendarmes seek refuge in dark corners; merchants try to hoard remnants of their former wealth; the petty bourgeoisie submit to the inevitable. Some people join the Red forces as a matter of principle, others out of fear. Some are overjoyed by the victories of the revolution, others tremble before them. And above the din and strife can be heard the firm, confident, powerful step of the victors—the armed workers and peasants of Soviet Russia with the Bolsheviki in the vanguard.

Of the various characters in this novel, through whose lives I have tried to draw a general picture of the year of 1919, first place is accorded to the builders of the future, the creators of Socialism and Communism. The fact that the Communist Party played the main role in defeating counterrevolution is a great historical truth. It is in the light of this truth that the characters are depicted during those most difficult days of civil war. This historical truth tells us of the inestimable service to the people rendered by the heroes of that time, of the decisive importance of the Stalin plan for defeating Denikin, and of the great master-builder of our victory—Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

It is through Izvekov and Ragozin that the main theme is presented—the theme of history, the theme of the future which has become the present. But they are not alone in giving expression to the central idea of this work. It is likewise expressed by Annochka, whose love for Kirill leads her to join her life with his; it is expressed by Dibich, the former tsarist officer, who later contributed all of his knowledge and ability to the cause of the Red Army; it is expressed by Dorogomilov, and by the soldier Ipatiev, and the sailor Strashnov. But perhaps it is expressed to an even greater extent by the youngest characters of *No Ordinary*

Summer—the children to whose portrayal I devoted much love and effort.

In attempting to create a unity out of the innumerable phenomena comprising an epoch so great and so significant for the future of our Soviet Land, I drew my aim and my inspiration from the fulness of life itself, with its infinite diversity, its contradictions, its clash of emotions, its joy, and its suffering.

Konstantin Fedin

June 2, 1949

**DEDICATED
TO NINA FEDINA**

EARLY JOYS



* 1 *

A BAREFOOT GIRL of about nine was jogging an infant up and down in her lap, hugging it to her and trying to stop up its wide-open mouth with a sop of chewed bread wrapped in a rag. The baby squirmed, turned its head from side to side, and drew up its little bare legs to its stomach, sobbing convulsively.

“Oh, shut up!” the little girl burst out crossly at last. Laying the baby on the stone flags of the steps, she stood up, smoothed her crumpled print frock, leaned against the sun-warmed wall of the house with her hands behind her, and an air of saying: “Scream yourself sick, go on—I shan’t even look at you!”

It was at the end of Easter Week, when the celebrations were over, but the street still had the jaded, weary charm of the spring holiday and something of regret that it was nearly all over, and a consoling thought that the very end had not yet come and there might still be a chance of a spree. From the bank of the Volga below, wafted through the crooked lanes of wooden houses, rose the wailing of a drunken song, now fading into silence, now bursting out afresh, and rising to such a pitch that all other sounds seemed trifling—the concertina with its timbrels far out over the water, the chaotic chiming of church bells and the busy hum coming from the wharves.

The pavement was strewn with crushed shells of Easter eggs—raspberry red, azure, magenta and the dull yellowish tan produced by boiling them in onion skins. It looked as though the public had freely indulged in the chewing of pumpkin and sunflower seeds, and in the munching of filberts and walnuts, and sucking of caramels: the wind blew