ANDREI TARKOVSKY:

THE COLLECTOR OF DREAMS



Layla Alexander-Garrett

"The book is, sincerely, GREAT."

DAVID ROBINSON

Layla Alexander-Garrett

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Glagoslav Publications

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THE COLLECTOR OF DREAMS
By Layla Alexander-Garrett

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THE COLLECTOR OF DREAMS

God preserves all, especially the words of reconciliation and of love, as if they were His voice.

Joseph Brodsky

I had an agonizing dream, the kind that leaves an utter void behind: the tyranny of silence, a gloomy sky, vapours rising in a smoke-like haze from the hillsides…. No air at all: it is absorbed by the unspeaking mist. At the foot of a malodorous volcano people mill about to no good purpose. Why are they here – stooping, fearful, agitated, malevolently dour, nervously spitting their damp tobacco onto the black loose earth, awaiting something? A corpulent lady, full of herself, is taking a seat with an authoritative air upon a spindly folding small chair, plaintively whining: "So, when are we starting!? When?... Oh when?..." Tearful shrieks fly by, without causing a flicker of emotion in the exhausted people. With indifferent curiosity they watch the gradual immersion of the obese body into the gray, leaden clay. Helplessly the body flails against the muck, yelping out obscenities, but her voice is barely audible: it is drowned out by the greedy, slurping of the sleaze. Exposed, her naked legs squirm in the dead air, tying invisible strangle-knots. Her helplessness evokes a burst of laughter. Irritated faces look at me reproachfully, and I back down. Why? With a kind of ecstasy, she tramples upon the dignity of each of us, but everyone keeps quiet: a voluntary, unspoken consent. I despise her coarseness and also remain silent. It begins to drizzle; the sky is like an inverted stinking abyss. Inescapable, filthy rain. Clothes and even people themselves swell up from the damp earth, shivering, as if buffeted by a squall. From far away the order to start shooting is heard; dozens of restless eyes search out the man capable of setting the dream-making machine in motion. With trembling fingers, the young assistant hesitatingly fiddles with her blue, pompom-topped ski hat that has slipped down onto the back of her head, as she hurriedly digs out a stack of photographs from her canvas bag: landscapes, panoramas.

She rummages through her pockets – something is missing; smeared rivulets streak her frightened face. I rush over to her – at her! I shout at her to put the photographs away, quickly. But she just keeps on digging around in her bottomless canvas bag, not hearing me. She cannot hear

me! Too late…. The photographs slip from her hands and the rain nails them to the earth. Perplexed, she angrily starts trampling them into the stinking, sticky core which avidly devours the long-awaited prey. Fear blinds reason, leaving only an animalistic grin of instinctive self-preservation on her face: stamp them into the dirt as quickly as possible, hide them, before someone stronger grabs her by the hand, as when she was a child, when accidentally her mummy's favourite teacup got broken (she'd broken it!)… the main thing is to cover up the traces! No witnesses, except for the shapeless shards. The first innocent crime. A second and third would follow, but by then all fear will have diminished. I try snatching the bag from her but she pulls free and runs off. Suddenly it strikes me like an electric shock that she leaves no footprints behind! The crowd that had formed around us dissolves and I shout after her: "Witch!"

She turns round and smiles, the kind of smile that certain types of people for some reason called *ill in the soul*; but after all, if your soul does not ache, you're not human. I run after her and to my horror I notice that I also leave no footprints behind me…. My heart skips a beat, even as my thoughts pulse all the louder: this cannot be, I'm only dreaming, I'm different, it's just the rain….

But it's not rain, there's no water here. I fling myself upon the ground, sliding feverishly along the smooth clay, trampled by feet. It seeps through my fingers, sticking. I grope around for the photos which one by one are withering before my very eyes. They are barely decipherable. They must be washed clean... along with my face, hands and nerves. Sadness and solitude shroud the world. Tears warm my frozen face, flow onto the photographs and wash away the dirt. Here's salvation – tears! Tears instead of rain, then all will be saved. A crowd gathers around. I joyfully prod the rescued photos with my muddy finger. People clamour in agitation, scrutinising me. For the first time I can see their eyes and in that moment I love them all. I no longer want to weep. 'Blue Hat Girl' shouts joyfully that the shoot has been postponed and everyone runs back. Strange people in a constant rush…. But however much you rush, you'll not coax any extra time out of God. There's no time to think... keep the photos safe – that's the overriding goal. I stay alone by the toxic puddle. I examine the salvaged photos that no one needs. Those treacherous landscapes. It's all wrong! All wrong! Then suddenly, instead of those disturbing landscapes, the contours of your face appear. I know that it's you – you're pensive, watchful, vulnerable, doomed even in moments of happiness…. A bird's astounded gaze…. The hilltops smoke, they devour sounds. Even the sound of tears falling cannot be heard.

Accursed, howling silence. The tears dry up, but I have to cry.

I have to go but I can't catch my breath. You watch me, breathing the warmth of my tears, you narrow your eyes, and those familiar arrows dash in all directions out of the corners of your eyes…. Just the way they did during that July downpour, when we were running past the chilled juniper bushes, shaking the heavy drops from them. The rain lashed our faces, but we just ran and laughed. You were holding my wet hand and shouting above the noise that poured forth from the heavens:

"More tender than tender
Is your face,
Whiter than white
Is your hand,
From the whole world
You are distant,
And everything in you
Is from the inevitable."

The wind of life, bringing happiness and suffering, was blowing over us, leaving us breathless: "Your hand in mine – what bliss…."

MEETINGS

… I beheld, as in a mirror, the world and myself,
And all else, all else, all else.

Vladimir Nabokov

"In the past I was a little bird,' announced my seven-year-old daughter, in a peremptory manner."

"You were an owl, and I was your baby owl."

"And what is the past?"

"The past", she was disconcerted at my not being able to understand simple truths, "is like a sackful of presents from Father Christmas. It's got lots of everything in it and it's huge – the more you take out, the more there's left in…."

When the film *Ivan's Childhood* was released, I was about the same age as her. Judging by the anxious sighs of the grown-ups, it was clear that this wasn't a film for children, and yet for some reason I thought that it was a fairy tale about some boy called Ivanushka and his magical childhood, full of evil dragons, captive princesses and those who rescued them. Like my daughter, at that age I still believed in Father Christmas.

At school, as was customary, cultural events were organized for us from time to time. The whole academic staff actively campaigned against our ignorance and universal and common worship with characters like *Fantômas*, *Fanfan la Tulipe* and all such imported 'cleavaged Lollobrigidas'. As an antidote to this 'Western trash', it was decided that we should be shown a proper home-grown, patriotic film for us to discuss during our subsequent history classes. The pupils, delirious in their freedom, dashed into auditorium, taking a gesture to settle down and making a din. The low-achievers bellowed, "Yippee! Filmie time!"; the average kids stamped their feet in unison; while the 'odd-ones-out' – the swots and the high-flyers – sat in the back rows, haughtily uttering forced comments: "War films are so boring..."The teachers flailed their arms at us, as if we were pesky flies, saying, "Settle down, you numskulls!"

A lot of war films were released – truthful ones and phony ones. There were also films about children during wartime, with tones of unalloyed condescension and sentimentality – qualities alien and incomprehensible to children.

The lights went out. In the pitch blackness a cuckoo called and the face of a boy appeared on screen, blinded by bright sunlight it gazed out at us through the woven rays of a spider's web, as if hearkening to the mysterious sounds of the forest. Here came the delicate snout of a nanny goat peeking out and a butterfly flitted over a blooming, fragrant field in like fashion, the boy soared above the ground, lightly touching the branches of trees and bushes, past the ravine, the well, the white dusty road along which his mother walked in a light-coloured summer dress, carrying a heavy bucket.

The boy bent down and drank cool water right from the bucket: he was impatient to tell her all about the cuckoo and the roots deep in the earth and the butterfly that was kissing the flowers and about everything all around him that excited him so, about everything that he loves so much and what he lives for. His mother understands him; he can tell her anything. The summer will last a long, long time, and Mummy's warm smile will be with him forever. A child's simple, carefree, perfect happiness, and then all at once, suddenly, out of nowhere, a gunshot! A scream: "Mama!" Death…. Along orphaned fields in the black smoke of wartime a destitute boy with un-childlike eyes plods along, hides in the ruins of houses, creeps past an abandoned mill, takes shelter in dead water. A child's exultation in being alive has been supplanted by hatred and a thirst for vengeance, by an unnatural existence. The sense of catastrophe, of paralysing fear, of helplessness is impossible to express in words. To utter it would mean finding a definition for it, comprehending a monstrous viciousness, the absolute evil of a war that dooms a child to suffering and destruction.

The anticipated stormy discussion of the film at the next history lesson did not take place. It was pre-empted by a single encapsulating phrase: "I hate fascists!"

The stunned amazement born of watching Tarkovsky's first film remained with me forever: it was as if someone had torn away my skin. At night dreadful scenes haunted my mind's eye, my imagination painted in the details that had been omitted from the screen – Ivan, sitting in a corner of his cold cell, like a tiny hounded animal. I could hear the creaking of the swaying hooks hanging from the ceiling, the clanging of the keys, the din of heavy doors opening, revealing the little boy staring into the faces of his executioners. I could find no rest from the thoughts that tormented me: why hadn't our troops charged in at the end and saved Ivan? Why must children perish because of the demented cruelty of adults? Why didn't the director defend Ivan? Like the country boy Van'ka in Chekhov's famous tale, I sat down to write a letter addressed 'to the village Mosfilm', to the film's creator, with a request, please change the boy's fate, even though I understood that in the monstrous

and overwhelming tragedy of that war, with its many, many millions of lives lost, the sacrifice of Ivan was not a unique case, by any means.

Gradually, though, the feeling of despair gave way to a certain faith in his salvation. What was the source of this faith in the existence of another, just world, where Ivan and all the other slaughtered children would receive their recompense for all their earthly suffering? I do not know: I had grown up in an ordinary atheist Soviet family where either we kept quiet about God or, if He was mentioned at all, it was always in a negative context. There was no Bible in our home, although both grandmothers observed Christmas and at Easter they had their festive bread blessed. Nevertheless, they were not about to dare enter into disputes with their offspring on the matter of God being no more than a myth of uncivilized ancient peoples, nor were they about to engage in unnecessary conversations of their own free will. Still, both generations agreed that *Ivan's Childhood* had a detrimental effect on children's minds.

"What a sad and unfortunate thought!" wrote Dostoevsky, "One must not keep or conceal anything from children under the pretext that they are very little and it is too soon for them to know." Could I have imagined then that the day would come when I would walk with the creator of *Ivan's Childhood* through Stockholm's frozen Djurgården ('Wildlife Park'), confiding in him the story of my naïve, unsent letters with their pleas for him to resurrect the boy Ivan. And that as I did so he would study me with that intense gaze of his, and scold me for my hesitation.

In Piter[1] on Vasilyevsky Island there was a fabulous cinema – the Kirov Palace of Culture. During the daytime shows, it featured trophy films about vampires, mummies and unrequited love. Concurrently with the vampires and mummies, it was the preferred abode of the Bohemian underground as well as of the occultists, Buddhists and clairvoyants, who were then very much in vogue. I lived not far from the Pribaltiyskaya Hotel and went to the Kirov Palace of Culture with my friends from the Academy of Arts. We had been raving about *Andrei Rublev* for quite a while already; we were over the moon with *Solaris*, and attired ourselves in the laced-up frocks and heavy knitted shawls associated with the trans-terrestrial Hari. An exalted sense of doom existed in relationships between the sexes to mirror the resignation that suffused the intimacies of the film's protagonists. Tarkovsky's name was surrounded in an aura of mystery and each one of us wanted in some way to become a participant in his creative vision to fit into his view of life – if only obliquely.

The parapsychologists insisted the director was drawing his inspiration 'from the astral plane'; the theosophists – that he was

1 The popular nickname for St. Petersburg, commonly used even during the years when it was renamed after Lenin.

channelling Madame Blavatsky; the disciples of Roehrich – that Tarkovsky was under the protection of the Shambala; and the painters bellowed that were it not for Leonardo da Vinci, Bosch, Bruegel and Paul Klee for good measure, there would have been no Tarkovsky to speak of! As for the literary set, of course, they had made up their minds ages ago: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Bulgakov – those were the pinnacles to which any self-respecting artist aspires, and let's not forget that Tarkovsky planned to film *The Idiot* and also *The Master and Margarita*.

Debates about 'the Tarkovsky phenomenon' drew in physicists and lyricists, psychologists and parapsychologists. Some found the films inspiring and redemptive for the soul, a tonic for their physical being…. In certain others they evoked indignation. This reflex had a simple name – it was called 'we don't understand Tarkovsky and assert our right, as the majority, to pronounce our verdict, namely that these are bad films and their director is experiencing a creative crisis'. Since we don't understand the work it must be bad; since we don't understand the work it means we have the right to persecute it. It was the typical Soviet reaction to anything deviating from Soviet norms. The main thing is it was a compelling argument.

In the summer of seventy-five a rumour swept through Piter that the Gigant cinema would soon be screening the latest sensational film – Tarkovsky's *Mirror*. Instantly, an immense queue formed outside this cinema. Those who adhered to the minority opinion about his work had but one cherished yearning – to hasten the moment when at last one is alone, face-to-face with the long-awaited film, when time itself shall grind to a halt and allow one to be transported into a world vastly different from that in which one's monotonous life takes its course; a world where one will sense that the true essence of oneself is better, purer, more meaningful and more profound. The revelation that there exists this man who feels and thinks, as one does, inspired hope; it gave wings, called to a life without fear and to a creative purpose freed from the compulsory backward glance. Each Tarkovsky film is not an act of passive contemplation, rather it is an active empathetic experience and the perception of being a part of world culture. As if by magic Tarkovsky summoned 'whichever century' he pleased and generated his own world.

In spite of the relative freedom of this Soviet period, how often one had to take extra care, leaving things unsaid and just keep quiet. Half-truths and palliative modes of existence were served up as the ineluctable norms of a socialist society. And suddenly there it was on screen: the stuttering youth who all at once 'loudly and clearly' declares: "I can speak!" This sentence was received as a curative injection that delivered up faith in oneself to the spirit. It was a sentence of reproach to our entire stuttering generation.

After the film, I made my way home with a friend from the Academy of Arts in a feverish state of euphoria. In the half-empty underground train, giddy and elated, we exchanged impressions, retelling each other scenes from *The Mirror*. The enchantment that the film we had just seen cast over me would not diminish – in fact, it would remain with me undiluted forever. Quite contrary to what might have been expected, I was overcome with a need to keep watching it over and over, revisiting it like a really good book which one longs to re-read, again and again, each time discovering new depths in it. Suddenly, I found myself bursting out with: "I feel as if I have known Tarkovsky for ages and I am certain I'll meet him someday!" To which my companion replied, not without a certain irony: "Why don't you just send your thought out into the cosmos – maybe it will respond." And then he added in the same breath, "Although, you know, they say Tarkovsky won't let anyone get close to him, least of all women…."

Ten years later the moment also came when I told Tarkovsky the story of that strange statement. "And there you have it, proof the cosmos responded…" he noted, with a smile. Just as the Eastern wisdom suggests to 'sow a thought and reap feelings; sow feelings and reap a word; sow a word and reap an action; sow an action and reap fate.'

Following the completion of *The Sacrifice*, I moved to England. At the London Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God and All Saints, I had the good fortune of meeting Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh. About him Tarkovsky had said in one of his interviews that the most important event in his life, which had left a profound impact upon him, had been his interaction in London with His Grace Anthony Bloom. For many years, on Thursdays, I attended Metropolitan Anthony's lectures – or rather, his discussions. Once I was asked to arrange an appointment for someone to see him but then at the last minute the person cancelled the request. "But His Grace will be waiting for him at the church!" I thought, mortified, and rushed over to the Cathedral. Metropolitan Anthony came in person to open the side door and, after hearing me out, countered, in the spirit of conviviality: "Well then, in that case, let you and I have a talk…. I have an hour's free time." It was semi-dark in the church. We sat down on one of the benches that lined the walls and he began to inquire about my life in London, my pursuits, my living. Noticing my unease, he quickly turned the conversation to his childhood, relating how upon his arrival as a little boy of about six in Paris from Persia for the first time in his life, he saw a bus and was very frightened by it. He grabbed his grandmother by the hand and shrieked with all his might, "Watch out! A self-roller! It'll crush us!"

All the tension I felt vanished instantly. His Grace's laughter was contagious and I could not contain myself no matter how hard I might try, so vividly did I imagine the scene. Lightly and easily, with just a

word or two, His Grace knew how to dispel anyone's distress, tension, awkwardness and lack of self-confidence. He was able to instil in others a sense of their own uniqueness and self-worth…. It is a capacity found only amongst the purest, most spiritually refined people.

Andrei Tarkovsky came to Metropolitan Anthony for confession. "At first he felt somewhat awkward, he even thought perhaps he should leave, but then he got used to me," His Grace confided with a smile. They sat together on the very spot where we were sitting. "He is a complicated human being, mixed up," said Metropolitan Anthony. Like many artists – seeking, flailing around, pulled in different directions, dissatisfied with himself, he wanted to change his life; it seemed to him that he was not living in the manner his soul craved. I asked what interested Tarkovsky. As it turned out it was the mystery of contemplative silence, the life-giving power of prayer. In order to hear a prayer within it is necessary to become quiet internally, to withdraw into oneself, to sink 'beneath one's own skin'. One has to learn how to listen to words, how to hear them and not merely to read their superficial meaning, because such unfathomable depths are to be found behind the beauty and harmony of words – after all, it was by the Word of God that out of nothing the entire cosmos was created. God's Word is what prayer is. They have creative power. Our world is not only created through the Word of God but also sustained by it, and that is why the seal, the imprint of Divine beauty and meaning, is indivisible from the Word itself. His Grace recollected that Andrei had also been interested in the Apocalypse.

The hour so generously and undeservedly allotted to me was running out. I had with me Metropolitan Anthony's book, *Encounter* – the transcriptions of his discourses – and as we parted he inscribed it to me.

Here's a curious detail: during our conversation I had the impression that His Grace had an excellent knowledge of Tarkovsky's work, yet recently I learned from father John that His Grace never set foot in 'cinematographic theatres' and had not seen even a single film of Tarkovsky's!

THE FIRST MEETING

Moscow, November 1981

I came to Moscow from Piter without a permit on the eve of the November celebrations. The festive capital in all its epochs was known for infecting all and sundry with its crazy, driven, purposeful intensity, its accelerated tempo and business-like agenda. Mornings were given over to museums: the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Oriental Art and the Tretyakov Gallery. Then followed meetings with friends: evenings were for theatre and only sometime after midnight did sedentary life begin in someone's cozy, inviting kitchen with the inevitable conversations until dawn – in a word, life at the pace considered normal for that capital. In English drawing rooms I heard on more than one occasion: "What on earth might there be to talk about till daybreak?"

'What on earth couldn't we talk about till daybreak?' would be the Russian equivalent of that same question. The English can understand what keeps a couple in love awake and cooing until morning, but for people randomly indulging in such behaviour… Whereas with us the flimsiest trifle can spark deep conversations about the meaning of life, and vice versa – the most profound ruminations can be summed up in the end with a racy joke. For us social interaction ultimately corresponds in its own way to a kind of profession of love. It is hard for a Russian to live alone, given that Russia is a cold place, whereas sharing your life with others becomes a warmer, merrier and safer way of carrying on. A certain Englishman I know once told me that when he spends too long away from Russia he feels himself beginning to moulder from lack of soulful contact, from indifference. Russia is a kind of generator where one travels to recharge one's batteries.

I had put off telephoning Tarkovsky until the very last day. My friend from the Academy of Arts predicted sceptically: "I told you, didn't I, that Tarkovsky refuses to see anyone, least of all women…. He is very selective…. He will say he's unwell…. Everyone's after him, don't you see?" "Most decidedly!" I was not keen on finding myself in the role of one of a woman 'after him', and so I promised myself, by way of tempting fate, that if he did not immediately pick up and answer the call I would make no further attempt. On the second or third ring I heard a somewhat withdrawn male voice answer, coughing ever so slightly. The ancients tell us that chance is Divine Providence. Today I couldn't begin

to imagine how differently my life would have turned out had he not been at home to answer the telephone….

Often, especially living here in the West, I catch myself thinking that Tarkovsky's name is, in fact, the key to understanding the inner world of a different person altogether. A striking phenomenon! And it never fails!

Upon introducing myself, I passed on the regards of my film-studies teacher, Örjan Roth-Lindberg, and his students' thanks for Tarkovsky's appearance at the Swedish Film Institute. In April 1981 Tarkovsky had been invited to Stockholm for the premiere of *Stalker* and it was there he had met Örjan, a man of rare erudition, charm, generosity and general benevolence. Interacting with him became a kind of release for Tarkovsky while shooting *The Sacrifice*. During the rare moments when we might get some free time, Andrei would ask me to inquire if we could visit him in Uppsala: "You know, I miss that Örjan of yours, see if we can look him up…."

Tarkovsky heard me out attentively, saying that it would have been a pleasure to meet me were it not that, regrettably, he was feeling unwell… I could hear my companion sighing sympathetically right next to me a "see, I told you so!" I wished Tarkovsky a speedy recovery and was about to hang up when, that very instant, I heard these words: "On second thoughts, are you free this evening?" My plans for that evening were to visit a cousin in Moscow, who was a lepidopterist, to look at his butterfly collection, as I duly informed him. "Turn down Tarkovsky!?" My friend tapped with his index finger on his temple. The gesture instantly brought me back to my senses.

"Do you know the Peking restaurant?" he asked.

"No, but I'll find it."

"It's next to the Mayakovsky monument. I'll be waiting for you there, at seven…."

Suddenly, I was struck by the thought that I had never seen Tarkovsky and might not recognize him in Moscow's bustling crowds, so I felt compelled to ask: "But how will we recognize each other?"

"Don't fret, I'll recognize you," he promised, and we said our good-byes until that evening.

Time ticked away with infinite languor; I had no desire to go anywhere. The anticipation of something momentous upstaged everything else, as joy gave way to despair, euphoria to terror that I might be late or get lost on the way. My friend's attempts to drag me out to see someone 'scintillating' – like Roerich at the Museum of Oriental Art or to someone who could telekinetically manipulate a magnetic arrow, or to Juna (a celebrated Moscow healer) – failed at every turn. He was also proposing that I drop into the conversation with Tarkovsky a story-

line for a new film about 'psychotronic weapons', but I flatly refused to 'drop' anything into our conversation. At Mayakovsky Square I parted from my companion: he went off to his visit with Juna and I went on to meet Tarkovsky.

Novembers in Moscow are really rotten, especially when you are too distracted to remember your gloves and are not, in fact, dressed for the season. Tarkovsky was running late. The cold was piercing, chilling me to the bone, but to step inside the Peking to warm up inside in the vestibule would mean having to deal with the doorman – the ubiquitous servant of Soviet law enforcement who might demand my identity papers. I was left with only one option – to stroll casually along the path defined by the Poet of the Revolution and the capital of China and freeze, peering inquisitively into the faces of passers-by. A voluminous, golden-hued handbag marked me out as a foreign tourist, and so I was constantly being accosted by blackmarketeers or by Georgians in their trademark, pancake-flat headgear, with persistent questions: "Change?" or "Miss, are you free for a date?" But I was waiting for a man who was supposed to be able to recognize me. A nagging thought kept popping into my head: "And what if he really is sick and doesn't turn up?" My doubts evaporated as soon as I caught sight of a lightly stepping figure, of a man also not dressed for the season, in a jacket and jeans, walking towards me.

He stood out sharply from the crowd with his distinctive, characteristic gait of a man with a purpose, in a hurry. One could palpably sense his discomfort in the crowd, his antipathy to it even, as he seemed almost to hide his face from unwelcome glances behind a strand of black hair falling across his face. Tarkovsky was not looking around; he was clearly heading straight towards me. "Forgive me, for being late..." he said with a barely perceptible smile, tossing back the unruly stand of hair from his eyes, like a mask. I was the first to offer my hand. "Are your hands always this cold?" he asked, and then answered his own question before I could: "It's a good thing – it means your heart is warm". Taking my bag from my hands, he noted playfully, "Are your handbags always this heavy?" "No, only in Russia," I replied, just as playfully. "Come with me, there's a place I know here, we'll warm you right up". "He's so prickly and so wonderful!" I thought.

We walked up to the filmmakers' Dom Kino. Having checked our coats into the cloakroom, we went upstairs to the restaurant. At the entrance the doorman rudely stopped us, demanding Tarkovsky show his membership card.

"It's high time you started recognizing your directors," Andrei pointedly remarked in a cold tone, rebuffing the man as he brushed past him with unmistakable revulsion. It was plain to see how offended he felt by the scene. Later in Stockholm at the Film Institute, where he

filmed all the interior scenes for *The Sacrifice* and where he was always greeted with casual warmth and acceptance, he would often remind me: "Remember how in Moscow they wouldn't let me into the restaurant in Dom Kino?"

The enormous, brightly lit restaurant was quite full. Tarkovsky had a rather reserved greeting for some, a careless nod for others and he breezed by yet others whose eyes had turned towards him. Even here amongst his colleagues he stood out in a most striking way: he was an outsider. His outwardly cold demeanour served as a kind of shield; it seemed as if, by adopting a defensive pose, he was attempting to resist the 'groundedness' of those around him. Some, without even bothering to disguise their curiosity, scrutinised us and whispered. Tarkovsky ordered a bottle of red wine and some hors d'œuvres. I declined to have dinner with him – I still had my planned trip to see my cousin, where there would be homemade delicacies laid on for me, with all kinds of marinades and confections.

Our conversation went nowhere. Andrei took offence that I would not join him in a drink, 'not even champagne!' After a pause, he said he had imagined me to look quite different, with dark hair. "That's because of my voice, people tell me that all the time," I answered. Andrei winced. The comparison of him to others cut him to the quick. It's a strange thing how our voices are sometimes capable of conveying, of exposing, our soul's and body's state at the time. It is possible to describe a person's outward appearance, more or less, but not their voice – like fingerprints, it is unique and indefinable. Tarkovsky had a tiny speech defect: he could not enunciate the letter 'L', but can that detail begin to impart a sense for the inimitable inflections, timbre, manner of speaking, the unexpected pauses, when he seemed to grow still, freeze up, as if listening to his inner voice..?

In addition to his films, I have some audio recordings of Tarkovsky's various public appearances. When I want to be alone with him, I walk over to the nearest park, Primrose Hill – in the 16th century, these were King Henry VIII's hunting grounds – I stroll along the paths and I play them back. Herzen wrote: "I lived in one of London's outlying backwaters by Primrose Hill, isolated from the whole world by distance, fog and my own will." The 'backwater' has been transformed since then but it is still possible to say, echoing Herzen: "The months went by without a word being uttered about what mattered most". Here was the hilltop, once covered by the yellow medicinal flowers of the primrose (*Primulaceae*) but now only the name remained, and that giant of science-fiction, Herbert George Wells, had his Martians land there. Also, according to legend, the first English Queen, Boudica, also known as Boadicea, was interred here. And here, again, the Druids converge from all over the land for the autumnal and vernal equinoxes.



Sven Nykvist and
Andrei Tarkovsky.



Andrei Tarkovsky and Layla.



Scouting for location. We clambered all over more than one abandoned factory in search of something striking. Stockholm, Autumn 1984.



During the pre-production period, autumn and winter of 1984, Andrei lived on the island of Djurgården at the intersection of Nordenskiöldsgatan Andreegatan. “My street,” he joked.





Author and playwright Layla Alexander-Garrett was born in Uzbekistan. She studied Russian language and literature, Tibetan Buddhism and film studies at Stockholm University. She is the author of a prize-winning memoir *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Collector of Dreams* and a photo album *Andrei Tarkovsky: A Photographic Chronicle of the Making of The Sacrifice*. Layla Alexander-Garrett has organized numerous charity concerts and art festivals, including Andrei Tarkovsky and Sergei Paradjanov festivals in London. She has also curated a number of international photo exhibitions.

The Sacrifice is Andrei Tarkovsky's final masterpiece. The film was shot in Sweden, during the summer of 1985. It turned out to be his final testament. Day after day, while the film was being made, Layla Alexander-Garrett – Tarkovsky's interpreter – kept a diary which forms the basis of her book *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Collector Of Dreams*. In this book the great director is portrayed as a real, living person: tormented, happy, inexhaustibly kind but at times unrelenting, conscience-stricken and artistically unfulfilled.

"This is an absolutely wonderful book! Certainly one of the best books I've read about the making of a film. And surely high on the list of the best books ever about Tarkovsky."

Mark Le Fanu, author, film critic

"This book contains priceless material for film lovers, experts and critics. The image of Andrei recreated in this book refutes the idea of him being a misanthrope. Here we see Tarkovsky being attentive and caring towards the people he likes. The Sacrifice – which was underrated in Russia – will henceforth be viewed more carefully and understood more deeply."

Marina Tarkovskaya, author, Tarkovsky's sister

"An absolutely unique testament. These memories are astonishing! They are surely among the best literary memoirs of Tarkovsky that we possess. They really make him come alive. Everything is so vivid, subtle, unvarnished and unadorned. When I finished reading this book I felt sorry it had come to an end."

Yuri Norstein, director-animator

"This is a marvellous book, whose sheer literary excellence remains intact in translation. It reads so easily and fluently, and yet every word and every phrase is so RIGHT, and the impressions of places and incidents and people so incredibly vivid and revealing. It is perhaps the closest we will ever come to understanding Tarkovsky's complex and elusive creative personality."

David Robinson, author, film historian

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