



Russian Blood

Alex Shoumatoff

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In the early 1980s, Alex Shoumatoff became curious about his roots. Both his grandmothers were in their 90s, and with a sense of urgency he collected their stories and reminiscences about their life as White Russian aristocrats, which was unceremoniously put an end to by the Bolshevik Revolution; how they "got out" and made new lives in America. The narrative he went on to assemble, which "compares favorably with Nabokov," one critic wrote, brings to life the langorous Turgenevian existence on an estate in Little Russia, of an exceptionally erudite and cultivated family of artists and natural scientists in the final years of the doomed tsarist empire; the failed attempt of Kerensky's provisional government to convert the absolute monarchy to a constitutional one; the 1912 expedition to Tibet of his great-uncle, a celebrated lepidopterist, who was looking for new species of alpine papilios; the early years of Igor Sikorsky's fledgling emigre aircraft company on Long Island; the death of FDR, while sitting for a portrait by his grandmother in Warm Springs, Georgia; the escape from the Gulag of his great-aunt; and a host of other poignant events and marvelous characters.

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