



1

OLGA

SHE WAS MY NANNY, and though I spent lots of time with her, it's hard for me to recall her face. I guess it's because I never remember her smiling. Her scowl made her face look like a cooked prune. But I did admire the precision of her grooming—especially the flawless way in which she coiled her long pigtails around her head.

Her protuberant eyes told me that she was on a terribly serious mission—to keep me as neat and perfect as possible by keeping her steady, critical eye on my activities, and reprimanding me whenever the opportunity arose. Good manners were, among other things, the foundation of perfection. So were keeping quiet when adults were talking, tucking a

napkin under your chin when eating, chewing every little bit thoroughly, eating everything on your plate, never sticking out your tongue, or picking your nose. The sight of crumbs anywhere offended her. When I ate jam buns, the merest speck would be instantly wiped from my lips. I tried very hard to follow all her directions, but still she was not pleased. When I paused and chewed slowly, she sang a quiet incantation: a bite for me, a bite for you, a bite for your baby brother. But then she'd still complain, "Why are you eating so slowly? It's taking too long for you to eat. You have the manners of an aristocrat."

She was fastidious in all her work with me and never allowed other household help to enter her domain. She spent lots of time cleaning or tidying, washing or pressing my dresses and sorting big taffeta ribbons to match dress colors, scrubbing my room, mending my laundry or stockings, even tidying the porcelain doll's clothes.

One of the most serious activities was the weekly bath. Large galvanized pots of water sat on the coal-and-wood stove used for cooking and baking. One of those water pots was now heated for my bath. She poured the hot water into a galvanized tin tub and tested for the correct scrubbing tem