

# Diary of a Bolshoi Potato Dancer

by Con Chapman

*"The Bright Stream," a ballet by Dmitri Shostakovich set on a collective farm that featured dancers carrying 5-foot-long potatoes, was forced to close after a bad review by Josef Stalin.*

The Boston Globe



Dear Diary:

Today is the audition for "The Bright Stream," and I believe I am in tip-top shape to win the prize role—potato carrier! To train, I have been hauling rocks up the stairs to my apartment—I would use potatoes but there are none, the greedy *kulaks* in the Ukraine have made tater tots of them all! Perhaps if I win a *prima* role and catch the eye of General Secretary Stalin I will get a ground-floor one-bedroom apartment, instead of the tiny--but entirely adequate, don't get me wrong!--studio I share with the *corps de ballet*. It is a good thing we must all stay so thin!

Remember to buy celery stalk for communal meal tonight.



*Serves twelve*

Diary Dearest:

I think things went well, but one can never tell. Ludmilla Zinoviev, she of the huge knee-caps, paraded about with the giant tuber as if it were a delicate baby, instead of the glorious fruit of collective agriculture that it is! I began with a sprightly *pas de bourrée des saucisse sans doute*, which I then developed into an *arabesque fondue allongée*. You don't think that was too thick and starchy, do you? Maybe I should have started with something green-like *une chasse à les haricots vert*.

Mikhail is getting on my nerves-Trotsky is so wonderful, yadda yadda yadda. I think he is still smarting from the review in which Brilliant Genius of Humanity Stalin panned his bluebird *pas de deux* in *Sleeping Beauty*.



My Little Paper Friend-

I am so excited! I am to carry *la pomme de terre grand*, while Ludmilla must be content with her humble beet! This I am

sure will put me in a positive light with Coryphee of All Dancers Stalin, most glorious fan of the ballet!

Mikhail is to be a flax plant, an important raw material for textiles and linseed oil. Pardon me if I am not impressed.



Diary-

I sense envy on the part of Ludmilla during rehearsals. She says I am beginning to resemble my potato. Well, she would eat better if she wasn't such a pickle-puss about the collectivization of agriculture! She should not spend so much energy questioning the Great Leap Forward and instead work on her *jetés derrières avec temps levés*!

Tomorrow is opening night-please do *not* wish for me to break one of my legs!



*"I want you to represent a salad fork."*

O Dearest Diary-

We have had a smashing success! Everyone loved how we deflected their thoughts from the scurrilous rumors of a government-instigated famine in the Ukraine with a veritable cornucopia of terpsichorean appetizers! Father of Nations and Cobbler of Damaged Toe Shoes Stalin is to attend tomorrow night.

I have had it with Mikhail and his importunities. At the after-party I put him in his place by saying "Is that an erect annual plant in your codpiece, Mr. Flax, or are you just glad to see me?"

Diary-

I don't know if I can write this through my tears. Ludmilla tripped me-I am sure it was on purpose!-causing me to drop my potato, and in the early edition of Pravda Stalin described "Bright Stream" as "a tendentious ratatouille that is too frivolous for the New Soviet Man and a waste of good produce."

I am told I will be re-assigned to a cafeteria steam table at the tractor plant in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, to serve over-cooked carrots. This, to me, is the end—I cannot imagine a bunch of lunch ladies *en grand jeté*.

*Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collections "Vegetables Say the Darndest Things" and "Dance Fever."*

