

Chapter Fourteen

June 2015.

The Romanov Nobility Ball.

Romanov Nobility Ball Preparation, Detroit, Michigan.

Katarina and her daughter Mariya, both romantics at heart, had spent the past several days building dreams about the upcoming royal ball. Both had rented luxurious evening gowns that were beautiful and flattering without being immodest. The Romanov Nobility Ball Attendees' Guidebook, overnighted to them along with their official letters of admittance, advised that more-traditional evening gowns were appropriate and encouraged, and that modern, overly-revealing styles were at least frowned upon and in some cases could result in denial of admittance to the event. As required, George had rented a traditional black tuxedo. The guidebook advised that the music would be typical of the late Romanov Russian Empire, roughly 1850-1920, and would be played by a live orchestra. Traditional ballroom dancing was the required form, with an emphasis on the waltz. So George, Katarina, and Mariya had taken a crash course in ballroom dancing in their downtown Detroit condominium, taught by a private dance instructor personally recommended by Don Brown. Mikhail had arranged to drive down to Detroit from Nazareth, and stayed with his brother at the Cova rectory in Detroit on Thursday evening. The final dance instruction session, including Mikhail, took place at the Peterson's that evening, so that the two couples could fine-tune their style before appearing under intense media scrutiny at the Romanov Ball on Saturday evening.

By Tuesday, June 16, after the Sunday June 14 orchestral Mass, Mark felt well enough to join Mariya for their usual morning run on the Wayne State campus. After four miles in the June heat, they sat together on the grass beneath a shade tree, savoring the gentle breeze and sipping Gatorade. Mark told Mariya how Father Romanov, who normally never praised anyone following a performance, had telephoned Sunday evening to check on his well-being. Once he knew Mark was feeling better, Father had enthusiastically reported that Mariya's organ performance in the Haydn Mass had been absolutely outstanding. And Mikhail had done such an excellent job of replacing Mark for the Rheinberger organ concerto that Mark needn't feel bad at all about having been ill.

"I really missed being with you on Sunday," said Mark. "But I'm proud of you, girl. *No* one gets a compliment from Father Romanov! *No* one! And yet *you* did! You must have been fantastic! Do you even realize how much I love you?"

She put her arm around his shoulder, and fought back tears.

"Mark, there's something I have to tell you. On Friday I'm going to go to New York to the Romanov Nobility Ball, as Mikhail Romanov's date. My parents are going too. It's all rather sudden. Mikhail just invited us on Sunday."

"I see. While I was at home, sick."

She saw her beloved best friend, her joy and soul mate, the one who replaced the brother she never had, also begin to fight back tears.

"For Mikhail it's really a political trip. He's finally going to break into the social circle of Romanov nobility. My parents and I are just going along as props, because we're eligible as people with a royal heritage, and he needs our moral support."

"Well, I'm just a poor Polish graduate student," said Mark. "How am I supposed to compete with a Russian crown prince?"

"Mark, you *are* noble, in the *truest* sense of the word. And you have been my brother, my best friend, my companion and my joy, for all these years. I will always love you, and we will always be dear friends. I promise you that." She leaned her head against his, and tears began to streak down both their faces, as she continued: "But I do not know exactly what the future may hold for each of us, in terms of our vocations. We could easily choose to cling, each one to the other, as the one who is completely familiar, comfortable, and safe. Perhaps we could marry someday, and be blessed by God. But do we really know if that is His will for us?"

Now Mark began to sob openly. She knew that a part of his heart was breaking, so she cradled his head against her neck as she stroked his wild and sweaty curls.

"I'm not angry, Mariya," he said. "I'm just ... I don't know, exactly ..."

"Mark, we've loved each other since we were children. We never thought the day would come when time and circumstance would pull us apart. Neither one of us has ever really thought about not being together."

"Do you think you're falling in love with him, Mariya? Is he going to steal you away from me?"

"Oh, Mark! What can I say? I didn't go looking for him. He came to me, out of nowhere, when I was exhausted after my Kalamazoo recital. I didn't go searching out my royal genealogy either. That too came out of nowhere, when my parents suddenly announced I was a princess. And I never even dreamed of going to a ball just for nobility. All I ever thought I wanted was my Mark, and my parish, and my music. Now, it seems like my whole world is being turned upside down."

"Its okay, my love. Don't you know that, if necessary, I would even die to defend your happiness?" They sat in silence for a few moments, softly weeping. Then Mark continued: "It may even be that the hand of God is in this. And it may be that dying to myself is exactly what I have to do: sometimes, I have thought God might be calling me to the priesthood. But I never would admit it to myself, or anyone else, because I couldn't bear to think of losing you."

"No matter what, Mark, I will always love you. It could be that this New York adventure with Mikhail will prove to be a royal disaster."

"No pun intended?" quipped Mark, now smiling, and wiping away her

tears and then his. "God will show us each His plan for us. The only thing we know for certain is that it will include the cross."

They arose and walked, hand in hand, across the campus athletic fields toward the locker rooms. Duty was pressing in upon them, calling them to work and smile as mature young adults, even while their hearts ached. But Heaven was smiling upon them, with unimaginable blessings in store for each one.

Mikhail and the three Petersons were scheduled to meet at Detroit City Airport on Friday noon, at which time Don Brown's jet would fly them all directly to a private airport near New York City. A stretch limousine would then drive them directly to the Waldorf=Astoria Hotel, arriving by three o'clock Friday afternoon. They would be admitted directly to The Brown Group's three-bedroom condominium on the top floor. A private dinner would be served in the condominium, catered by the hotel. Brown Group security and hospitality staff would attend them throughout their stay. On Saturday morning a standard limousine would drive them to a Traditional Latin Mass in Manhattan at nine o'clock, and would then take them for a buffet repast at Don Brown's favorite breakfast club. At noon Mrs. Brown's private New York hairstylist would be waiting at the condominium for the ladies, accompanied by a barber to trim up the gentlemen. Then at three o'clock in the afternoon, a famous New York-based dance instructor, arranged by Don Brown, would assist the two couples with a final practice session of ballroom dancing in the privacy of the condominium living room.

The Romanov Nobility Ball would begin Saturday evening at seven o'clock in the Waldorf=Astoria Grand Ballroom, with formal entrances and introductions of each couple.

Dinner would follow at eight o'clock in an adjoining dining hall, with assigned seating. The family tradition sought to follow the rules of state dinners in the latter days of the Russian empire. Years ago the family had commissioned a set of chinaware, goblets, and wine glasses emblazoned with the Romanov double-headed eagle, and these were stored in a special wooden chest and brought to the hotel each year for the event. Attendees were seated according to rank, by couple, so that men and women alternated all around the table. Conversation was generally limited to those adjacent and across. The trustee of the throne would sit in the traditional spot for the emperor, in the center of the table. The heir apparent to the throne would be seated across from her. Marina was widowed, and her son Grigory was not formally courting, so mother and son would attend as a couple. The next persons in line for the throne, according to family records, would be seated adjacent to this leading couple, in descending order of rank, first to the right, next to the left, and so forth, and would be accompanied by their spouse or guest. Those family members and guests with no potential claim to the throne were relegated to the farther ends of the table. To preserve imperial tradition, each course was served to everyone simultaneously, and no one could begin eating until the trustee of the throne raised her

fork or spoon. She would then take care not to lay her utensil down until everyone had finished the course, because as soon as she did, all places would be cleared at once to make way for the next course. When dessert was finished, about nine o'clock, dancing would commence in the grand ballroom, and would continue until midnight.

The first two dances were reserved, in succession by rank, to the two couples currently closest to the throne. Each couple would dance alone, to a traditional waltz, while all others in attendance watched in admiration. Then the dance floor would be opened up for everyone. Each lady had been provided with a dance card, pre-printed with the name of each gentleman in attendance and his family rank if relevant. The ladies were expected, in the course of the evening, to dance with as many Romanov gentlemen as possible, and dance numbers could be promised beginning during the time of formal introductions before the dinner. The orchestra leader would announce the number of each dance, allowing a few minutes for couples to shift according to the commitments found on the ladies' dance cards. This encouraged all family members to maintain at least passing acquaintance with each other. The orchestra would be on break for fifteen minutes during each hour, and during this time the gentlemen would retreat into a men's lounge, and the ladies would retreat into a separate women's lounge, where they could greet new attendees and renew old acquaintances of the same sex. Once the orchestra stopped at twelve forty-five in the morning, there would be an open bar in the ballroom until three o'clock in the morning, and most of the attendees would stay the entire time to visit with others.

Cova Rectory, Friday Morning, June 19, 2015, Detroit, Michigan.

At nine o'clock on Friday morning, Father Kiril Romanov and his older brother Mikhail settled into the rectory study at the Cova, after a light breakfast in the kitchen. They were intent on sharing advice before the momentous events which were about to unfold. Within thirty-six hours, Mikhail would make his appearance on the world stage in New York City as the probable heir-apparent to the Russian throne. Eighteen hours after that, back in Rome, the Holy Father would lead the consecration of Russia as requested at Fatima, and the number of Catholic bishops in the world would be automatically diminished by the exact number who refused to cooperate fully. How quickly this would result in any obvious changes in Russia was for Heaven alone to decide. Father Kiril set down his half-empty coffee cup and looked his brother Mikhail in the eye.

"Mike, bro, you're going to make quite a splash. You realize, of course, that the media will lap it right up, don't you? I mean, if it was the same matronly heir apparent and her son that they have been reporting on for the last decade, it wouldn't rank very high in importance. A couple of inches on the seventeenth page in the *Sunday Times*, and a couple of photos in the society pages. But all of a sudden a dashing young decorated war hero appears, accompanied by a beautiful young woman with remarkable poise, and the press and the paparazzi will go gaga over the photo ops.

At least a front page reference, for sure, and maybe even one front page photo. Then a full page write-up with several more photos, on about page four, and a bunch more photos in the society pages. Maybe even a minor Op-Ed piece about old world monarchy. Big stuff, bro.”

“Sounds terrible. I prefer a quiet life. I’m only going because they threatened me.”

“Look, Mike, a lot of people are just going along in their lives on a planned trajectory, thinking they know just where’ll they’ll end up in twenty or thirty years. Then, out of nowhere, Heaven throws them a curve ball, and their entire life plan is turned upside down. It happened to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. It happened to me when I was finishing music school, and the parish offered me a scholarship to seminary.”

“You had a pretty serious girlfriend at the time, as I recall,” needed Mikhail.

“Yes, and mother was all set for me to marry her. Then I woke up one morning and suddenly thought to myself, ‘I know, I think I’ll be a priest!’ Remember how mother cried when I told her?”

“Yeah, but she didn’t cry because she was thrilled you were going to be a priest. It was because you weren’t going to marry the girl she had already selected as her new daughter-in-law.”

“But in the end, mother was glad I became a priest.”

“Yeah, that only took her about ten years.”

“Well, her life got turned upside down suddenly, too. See the point?”

“No.”

“The point is, your life is about to be turned upside down, Mike, and it may well be God’s will. Your future may not be anything like you imagined a year ago.”

“Kiril, I’m just trying to find a way not to get killed.”

“Listen, bro, there is someone who wants to meet you this morning, before you go. Around here we call him by his birth name, Father Jacob. He was very impressed with your singing and playing last Sunday, by the way. For the past few days he’s been joining me here about this time.”

“Look, Kiril, I don’t think ...”

“Good morning, my sons!” said the Holy Father, as he glided into the rectory office with his morning cappuccino in hand. In his black cassock he looked like a simple parish priest, but Mikhail knew who he would be, and therefore could recognize him despite the fake beard.

“Holy Father, I would like to introduce my older brother, Doctor Mikhail Romanov. He was the bass soloist for the Haydn orchestral Mass last Sunday. He also played the organ for the Rheinberger concerto, with just six hour’s notice.”

Mikhail fell on his knees. Nicholas pulled his Fisherman’s Ring out of his black cassock pocket and permitted Mikhail to kiss it, thus demonstrating his respect for the office of Peter.

“Please, my son, be at ease,” said Nicholas. “You have shown proper respect for my office, but I am only a man, and at the moment a rather

befuddled one at that. Your brother here, along with our mutual friend Father John Herald, has been of immense help to me, more than I can say. I seem to be going through a time when my whole life is suddenly being turned upside down.”

Mikhail glanced at Kiril, and rolled his eyes. No doubt Kiril had recently given the same spiel to the Holy Father.

“Let’s see, Professor Doctor Romanov, I believe ...” began Nicholas.

“Please, Your Holiness, just call me Mikhail.”

“Ah, yes. Well, then, Mikhail, please accept my sincere compliments on your superb musicianship. Your organ and voice performances last Sunday morning greatly uplifted me. I would never have guessed you were doing the Rheinberger on short notice.”

“Thank you, Holy Father.”

“Mikhail, please, I am here incognito. You must just call me ‘Father Jacob.’ I can’t risk having others here discover who I am. There could be great danger if my whereabouts should be discovered. Father Kiril has assured me you will be completely trustworthy.”

“Yes, Father.”

“But enough about me. Father Kiril tells me you are off to New York today for a great adventure. One to which he has given his blessing. By the way, doctor, your young friend Mariya Peterson is quite a talented musician, and a most dignified Catholic young woman. And a princess, too, I am told.”

Mikhail blushed.

“It has all happened rather suddenly, you see ...” he stammered.

“Much like the upcoming consecration of Russia. I doubt this is any coincidence, mind you. Heaven seems to be moving at breathtaking speed to bring about real change in Russia. We may feel as if we are helping to make it happen, but really we are all just spectators, caught up in the current of history and watching in wonder as Heaven moves to change the world.”

“Why, what did Kiril tell you, Father Jacob?”

“Oh, not too much. Merely that you are, beyond any reasonable doubt, the legitimate Romanov Crown Prince of Russia, and that you are about to make your appearance on the world stage – on the evening before I consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in union with all the Catholic bishops in the world. That’s all.”

“Actually, I never had intended to make anything of my family history. The world of princes and monarchs is long gone, and God saw fit to put me here in modern America.”

“Now think, Mikhail. The Pope is a prince and a monarch. Heaven is a monarchy where Christ is King and His Blessed Mother is His Queen, just as King David’s widow Bethsabee was queen in the royal courts of her son King Solomon. Monarchy is the natural form of government. Modern democracy is essentially an historical aberration, born out of mankind’s revolutionary rebellion against God’s established order, which by nature

is hierarchical.”

“We are not conditioned to think that way in America.”

“I dare say not. But there are still people who hope for the restoration of fallen monarchies, especially the Romanov family of Russia.”

“Yes. Apparently they don’t like the fact that I exist, because under their family rules I would be first in line for the throne, except that I am Roman Catholic and they can’t live with that. I have actually been threatened recently.”

“Yes, yes, Father Kiril explained it all to me. Of course they have threatened you, because there are some of them who have spent years being in love with the power and glory of the throne, which they believed was potentially theirs, and now they think you have come to steal it away from them. So they are desperately looking for some way to disqualify you.”

“Well, they found it, Father Jacob. They say I must either revert to the Orthodox Faith, or renounce the Russian throne and never return to Russia ... or die. I can never renounce the Catholic Faith, Father.”

“Of course not, my son.”

“And I don’t think it would be just to force anyone to renounce a hereditary title which by tradition and dynastic law ought to be God’s decision.”

“I fully agree, Mikhail.”

“You do?”

“Oh, yes. It’s obvious to me that these events – your appearance at this year’s Romanov Nobility Ball, and the Pope’s imminent public consecration of Russia – are occurring at one and the same time so the world will understand that Heaven has blessed Russia with a miraculous complete conversion. For Russia, too, the world is about to be turned upside down. It doesn’t just happen to people, you see. It can happen to nations too, when Heaven so decrees.”

“Do you think, if Russia converts, she will restore her monarchy?”

“Oh, I would think so. Monarchy is the normal form of government for a Christian Confessional State, because it reflects the very nature of Heaven itself.”

“And if Russia becomes a Catholic nation, then perhaps she will no longer demand that the new Tsar be Orthodox?”

“Exactly. Now you’re getting it. Personally, I’m foreseeing that the Russian Orthodox Church will probably come over to Rome *en masse*, much like many of the Anglicans did. But almost all of the Russian people will convert, in a very short span of time, and that is the miracle, promised through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which the world will not be able to deny or ignore. The doctrinal differences between Catholic and Orthodox believers are fundamentally political, not theological. I can foresee that the faithful could choose to attend either rite – the Roman Rite or the Russian Orthodox Rite – because they would both equally be Roman Catholic rites. Suddenly, a restored Russian monarchy would be able to function in either rite or in both rites, and all the while remain in perfect

harmony both with the Pope in Rome, and with the Russian Orthodox Church.”

“Wow. That could actually be a Heaven-sent way out for me.”

“Yes. That’s why I don’t believe it is any coincidence that these things are happening all at once. But to cooperate with Heaven to bring all these things to fulfillment, we need to ensure safe travels for you to New York, and then for ‘Father Jacob’ back to Rome. I’ll be flying out tomorrow morning in the same private jet that will be flying you to New York this afternoon. So, my sons, all three of us must go upstairs to the rectory chapel, and kneel together before the Blessed Sacrament, and pray the Rosary together. We need to ask Our Blessed Mother to intercede with Jesus, so that the Holy Angels will travel with us and keep us safe. There are great powers, both natural and supernatural, which would like to impede our travels and our temporal and spiritual objectives, if they could. The threat you received from the Romanov family should be the least of your concerns.”

So the three men left the study, and climbed the rectory stairs, to fulfill the Pope’s request. After they had prayed, Mikhail knelt once again to kiss the papal ring, and received a special Pontifical blessing, traditionally reserved for princes and kings who had the duty to assist the Church in shepherding the souls of their people home to the safe sheepfold of eternal salvation.

Kiril then called for a Brown Group driver, and sent his brother on his way to City Airport, and to the elegant world of the Russian royal ball.

Trip to New York City, Friday Afternoon, June 19, 2015.

Mikhail met George, Katarina, and Mariya at the Brown Group’s private lounge at City Airport on Friday at noon. The flight crew introduced themselves: Captain Michael, First Officer Gabriel, and flight attendant Rafael. Mikhail found these names reassuring, considering the Pope had just prayed minutes ago that the Holy Angels would keep him safe on his journey. In the event, the flight proved unremarkable, and by half past three o’clock in the afternoon they were settled into their bedrooms at the Brown Group condominium atop the Waldorf=Astoria hotel. One of the Brown Group attendants was sent downstairs to the Romanov Nobility Ball registration table, and picked up their four guest packets. These included elegant name tags bearing the Romanov double-headed eagle crest, and in the lower right-hand corner was a number indicating their family rank. The multi-page full-color program included a seating map for dinner, the names of those assigned the introductory dances at the beginning of the ball, and color face photos of each person attending, together with their name, position within the family or as a guest, their occupation, and their place of residence.

“Hey, look, mom and dad,” laughed Mariya, “it says here that there are one hundred and twenty people attending. On the guest roster, they gave you numbers one hundred nineteen and one hundred twenty. Way to go!”

“We’re just trying to follow the parable’s advice,” quipped George. “When you are invited to a dinner party, take the lowest seat, and then perhaps the host will ask you to move up to a place of greater honor. That’s better than taking the chance of being demoted in front of everyone.”⁵⁹

“Yeah, right, dad.”

“But it seems that you and Mikhail have not learned so well.”

“What?” Mariya shot back. “Mikhail and I are not even listed.”

“Yes you are, but not in the regular guest roster. You two are listed separately among the elite, here on pages three and four.”

Mariya flipped back to the front of the program. She had figured that, just as in a school year book, the individual listings and photos would be at the back. On page one was featured Marina Mikhailovna Romanov, listed as current trustee of the throne. On page two was Grigory Mikhailovich Romanov, her son, listed as current heir apparent of the trustee to the throne. Since Marina was widowed and Grigory was neither married nor formally courting at the present time, Marina was assigned place number one, traditionally the place of the monarch at the center of an imperial state dining table, and Grigory was assigned place number two, directly across from his mother. This was all in accordance with the past several years, and was as expected. But the surprise was this: on page three was listed Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov, listed as the only direct-male-line-of-descent heir of the Russian throne! A one-paragraph biographical sketch was included. He was assigned number three and was therefore seated at the right hand of Marina. On page four was listed Mariya Georgovna Peterson, European princess of full royal blood, and honored guest of Mikhail Nicholaevich. A similar biographical sketch was included. She was assigned a dinner place directly across from Mikhail, at the left hand of Grigory. On pages five through ten was the evening program schedule, and then on page eleven began the alphabetical listing of all the other guests, with small photos and brief biographical sketches, four to a page.

The schedule indicated that, following dessert and coffee, the family would sing two traditional hymns reflecting their prayers for the restoration of the monarchy. After dessert, everyone would move to the ballroom.

The first dance of the evening would be for the trustee of the throne, Marina, dancing with her son Grigory, her heir apparent. The second dance would be reserved for Mikhail and Mariya, giving everyone in the family a chance to get a good look at them. Then dancing for everyone would commence, and in the course of the evening nearly everyone would make or renew their acquaintance with almost everyone else.

“Dad, this is ridiculous. We’ve never even been here before, and now they’re making us big celebrities.”

“Well, Mikhail is the big celebrity, and you are his date,” said George.

“But you may end up like Jackie,” suggested Katarina. “When the Kennedy’s went to Paris, President Kennedy quipped that everyone really wanted to see his wife, and that he was merely the excuse for Paris to host Jackie as their favorite guest.”

⁵⁹ Luke 14:10.

“I don’t know if I can handle this,” sighed Mariya.

“Don’t be silly, my dear,” said George. “Earlier this month you played for the Pope on his birthday. He is a true world leader. These people only dream of being important someday.”

“Hey, what’s up, guys?” asked Mikhail, entering the dining room and picking up his copy of the program.

“You’re number three in there, Misha. And because of you, I’m number four.”

“What ...”

“Mom and dad are where I’d like to be. They’re last.”

“I don’t get it,” said Mikhail. “First they ...” But then he remembered that the threat he had received was kept secret from his guests. So he did not continue his intended remark.

“They what, Misha?” pressed Mariya.

“Oh, they acted like they were merely willing to tolerate my presence,” he extemporized. “Now they put me in a high place of honor. It’s just not what I was expecting.”

“Good thing we have one more dance lesson together,” said Mariya. “Listen, Misha, we’re both accustomed to performing on stage. You were fantastic on the organ and bass solos last week at the Cova. No one could imagine you only learned about being the organ soloist a few hours beforehand. You can pull this off equally well.”

“Only because I have a beautiful and graceful young woman to guide me across the dance floor,” smiled Mikhail, causing her to blush delightfully.

Armed with information about what to expect, they took their final preparations to heart. On Saturday morning at the Traditional Latin Mass, after preparing themselves through the sacrament of Confession, they each received Holy Communion. After Mass, they stayed and prayed the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary together before the Blessed Sacrament, being reminded through the Mystery of the Coronation that Heaven itself is a monarchy. They prayed for sufficient grace to represent themselves as good Catholics amid the staunch Orthodox Romanov gathering. They offered the Rosary for the Holy Father, knowing that he would be facing severe trials, both temporal and spiritual, as the Sunday evening consecration approached.

In the final Saturday afternoon dance instruction back at the condominium, they strove to perfect their waltz style, and the gracefulness of their movements together. Then they submitted to extensive professional advice and preparation concerning their formal attire, makeup, and grooming, provided by the Brown Group’s New York public relations staff. It seemed to George and Katarina that they were being prepared for a television or stage appearance. But they understood that, while it was their own duty to ensure proper preparation of their hearts and minds, it was for these professionals to add the exterior finishing touches that would fit them for the roles they were called upon to fill on this remarkable evening. George and Mikhail would be attired in traditional black tuxedos

with black tie and shiny black shoes. The tuxedos had been individually tailored for them during the previous 12 hours, and were an exact fit. The ladies would wear elegant evening gowns of silk, Katarina in red and Mariya in blue. Tailored for them over the past twelve hours, their gowns covered their shoulders, perfectly accentuated their feminine figures while remaining modest, and ended half-way between their knees and ankles. Very full, their gowns could billow out delightfully in the twirling motions of the traditional waltz. Both were adorned with diamond earrings and necklaces loaned to them by the Brown Group personnel from Theresa Brown's personal collection.

At six-forty in the evening, the staff finally pronounced Mikhail, Mariya, George, and Katarina ready to take on the Romanov world. As a final external touch, their official Romanov Nobility Ball name tags were precisely positioned and affixed. They were each served one shot of top shelf Russian vodka, and Mikhail offered a traditional Russian toast for protection by the Holy Archangels. Then, arm in arm, they crossed the top floor corridor and pushed the down button, intending to descend to the hotel lobby. But just as the elevator doors opened, Mikhail called a halt.

"Wait," he said. "We need one more toast. Very important."

So they returned to the condo bar, where he poured another round of the same exquisite Russian vodka, and then offered an extemporaneous toast, asking Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Cyril to intercede for the whole Romanov family, on behalf of Russia, in the course of this evening.

"There," said Mikhail, "I have given in, just a little, to my Orthodox past, calling upon saints common to both Orthodox and Catholics. Tonight, we must comport ourselves as worthy but innocent Russian nobles, knowing that powerful and evil forces will be arrayed against us. The last Tsar was an Orthodox daily communicant, who in his mature years was a man of personal holiness and tireless dedication to his people, but he became caught up in impossible circumstances engineered in the depths of hell."

"We can be sure that hell will be raging again tonight," said Katarina, "against the Holy Father, and against all those who dare to entertain even the dream of a restored Christian monarchy in Russia."

"True. But I believe we are sufficiently fortified and ready for our small parts. We've been to Confession and Communion, we've prayed the Rosary, we've practiced our dance moves, we've been spiffed up like movie stars on the outside by Don Brown's pros, and now we've had two shots of fine vodka with toasts invoking Heaven's aid and protection. Come, let us trust in Heaven, and descend into the fray."

The Romanov Nobility Ball, Saturday Evening, June 20, 2015, New York City.

As they stepped off the elevator into the crowded hotel lobby, bejeweled ladies in evening gowns and tuxedoed gentlemen turned to look, and many whispered together. Photographers were everywhere, and

flashes flickered constantly. Walking arm in arm, the two elegant couples smiled confidently and nodded graciously as they entered the ballroom and strode to their places in the lineup at the back, where numbers one through twenty-four were instructed to await their formal introduction and entrance. Soon everyone was seated, and precisely at seven o'clock the emcee, a well-known New York City television personality of Russian descent, mounted the podium and began the formal welcome to the Annual Romanov Nobility Ball.

"Noble ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 2015 Romanov Nobility Ball. Tonight are gathered here in New York City's Waldorf=Astoria Hotel the leading members of the House of Romanov. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you the trustee of the Romanov throne of Russia, Her Imperial Royal Highness Marina Mikhailovna Romanov, who is accompanied this evening by her son, the heir apparent to the throne, His Imperial Royal Highness Grigory Mikhailovich Romanov."

While Marina and her son Grigory proceeded down the aisle as a couple, to take their seats in the front row, the crowd clapped and cheered, but in the manner of a familiar routine, as if this had been done a dozen times before. Only a few photo flashes brightened the room. At the front, Marina and Grigory lifted their clasped hands, in the victory gesture of countless political running mates, and beamed at the crowd before taking their seats. The applause quickly subsided.

"Ladies and gentlemen," resumed the emcee, "I now present two very special newcomers to this year's Romanov Nobility Ball, who have come to New York City from the Great Lake State of Michigan. One is a true gentleman, a musician, military hero, and professor of medicine, who has only recently come to the attention of the family leadership. The Romanov Nobility Organization has officially confirmed that he is the only living direct-male-line-of-descent hereditary Romanov Crown Prince, Professor Doctor Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov. This evening he is escorted by the lovely young lady of the Russian royal blood, Princess Mariya Georgovna Peterson."

Mikhail and Mariya began their promenade down the aisle, arm in arm, smiling and nodding as they walked. The crowd leapt to its feet and cheered wildly. The photo flashes were incessant. As they reached the front of the room, the couple bowed with humility, smiled graciously, and then took their seats beside Marina and Grigory. But the crowd would not be silenced, nor would the photographers' continuous flashes cease. The emcee motioned for Mikhail and Mariya to stand up and once again face the crowd, this time blowing kisses to them in a gesture of affection, and again bowing with deep humility. Eventually, the emcee pounded his gavel and pleaded for order, so that the introductions might resume. The cheering finally faded, and then the series of names began as the remaining twenty most-prominent persons, from among the total of one hundred sixteen guests, were introduced in pairs, in rapid succession, each couple walking down the aisle to their seats at the front.

At twenty minutes to eight o'clock, Marina was called to the podium to begin a brief welcome speech.

Noble ladies and gentlemen, it is my special privilege to welcome each and every one of you to the 2015 Romanov Nobility Ball. Each year, our gathering here serves to remind the world that the Romanov family, deeply in love with Holy Mother Russia, stands ready and waiting to serve the people of Russia once again, in any capacity which the Russian people, under the guidance of Heaven, may someday confirm. We believe that Christian monarchy is the best form of government possible on this earth. We pray for a restoration of a truly Christian government in our Motherland. We have been delighted that, since July of 2010, largely through the encouragement of President Polzin, our homeland now celebrates a new national holiday: the Baptism of Saint Prince Vladimir, the once-pagan ruler whose Christian baptism on July 28, 988 marked the beginning of Russia as a Christian nation.

Tonight, we seek to re-create the elegance of the Romanov nobility, who for more than three hundred fifty years led Russia in her growth and development. The tragedy of the atheistic Bolshevik revolution, forcibly inserted into Russia from outside by anti-Christian enemies of the Russian people, martyred our saintly last Tsar, the Passion-Bearer Nicholas II, and enslaved our people for seven decades under Communist tyranny. Then, the possibility of a new Russian sunrise began with the sudden and miraculously bloodless end of the atheistic Communist rule. But the new republican constitution is only a copy of any other modern secular state. Russia is still deprived of the singular grace of a Christian monarch. We proudly proclaim, through our gathering here this evening, our hopes and prayers that one day Russia may be restored to the blessings of a Holy Christian monarchy, and quite possibly under the restored Romanov dynasty. Of course this is a choice that the people of Russia must make. A monarchy only operates properly when it is born out of the love of the people for a devout and selfless leader, one who has been chosen by Heaven and anointed by the Church. The true Christian ruler not only leads the people toward human progress in this world, but teaches them by example and helps them by decree to serve God faithfully in this world, so that they may be happy with Him, and with His angels and His Saints, in the everlasting world to come.

Through all the long years that I have been acknowledged by this noble organization as the trustee of the Russian throne, such has been my dream for Russia. It is the dream I have inculcated in my son Grigory Mikhailovich, who has long been expected

to assume my role once I am gone. Now, however, a new Romanov prince is entering upon the world stage this evening. He is an outstanding gentleman who has lived his life in quiet seclusion, and who did not seek to come to the attention of our family organization until just this year. We have substantiated his remarkable genealogy beyond any reasonable doubt. As the trustee of the throne, it is my duty to inform you that, according to the rules of the Romanov dynasty as they existed at the death of the last Tsar, Professor Doctor Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov, of Nazareth, Michigan, is the sole surviving heir of the Romanov throne, by an unbroken line of direct male descent uncompromised by any morganatic marriage. By the rules of the dynasty, he would normally take precedence over me and over my son Grigory, and would be acknowledged as the new trustee of the Russian throne.

Marina paused for a moment, allowing an unmistakable murmuring to spread throughout the crowd. When the desired degree of anticipatory tension was established, she resumed.

To repeat, normally Doctor Romanov would be proclaimed the new trustee of the throne – except for one thing. Noble ladies and gentlemen, I ask you now to please listen carefully. Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov was born and baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. But when he was sixteen, he and his parents began to frequent a Roman Catholic Church in Detroit, and before his sixteenth year was over, he freely chose to become a Roman Catholic, thus renouncing the Orthodox Faith of the Romanov Imperial dynasty.

Again, murmuring could be heard throughout the audience, this time much more vociferous.

Like any Romanov of the true royal blood, we have welcomed Doctor Romanov here this evening as our honored guest. But we have also informed him that, to preserve the precious credibility of our family with the overwhelmingly-Orthodox Russian people, he must make a choice. He must either renounce any claim to the Romanov throne, or he must revert to the true Orthodox Faith of our fathers. So I ask you, noble ladies and gentlemen, if you agree with me that Russia is, and ever will remain, a Russian Orthodox nation?

The crowd broke into applause, and many rose to their feet, as if they were at a political rally. Mikhail and Mariya remained seated in front, as did George and Katarina in the rear. But Marina did not allow this cheering to go on for long. She pounded the gavel and asked for silence.

Noble ladies and gentlemen, it is my duty and honor to introduce to you this evening's guest of honor, Professor Doctor Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov.

Marina returned to her seat, smiling at Mikhail with eyes like cold steel daggers. She motioned to Mikhail to rise and take his place at the podium. He was caught entirely off guard, as any introductory speech by him was not listed in the program, and he had made no preparation for such a moment. The crowd remained silent but attentive as he adjusted the microphone to his greater height. His military bearing, his humble dignity, and his uncanny resemblance to Tsar Nicholas II were not lost on the crowd.

Noble ladies and gentlemen of the Romanov family, it is a great honor to stand before you this evening. It is not a little disconcerting to follow such a beautiful and gracious leader as Marina Mikhailovna. Nor do I dispute the facts which she has told you about me. I am indeed the true Romanov crown prince of royal blood, by unbroken line of succession. Here in my native America, I am a professor of medicine, a former Marine officer, and a decorated war hero. By avocation I am a somewhat accomplished classical musician. But most important of all, I am a Roman Catholic. It has never been my belief that in becoming a Roman Catholic I ever ceased to be an Orthodox believer. In common with the great Filaret of Moscow, father of the Romanov dynasty; with Saint John Chrysostom, whose Mass is daily celebrated in Old Slavonic throughout the Orthodox world; and with Vladimir Soloviev, the most respected Orthodox theologian of modern pre-revolutionary Russia, who died a Roman Catholic while considering himself still to be truly Orthodox – in common with these great men I proclaim my conviction that to be truly Orthodox one must be in union with Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the Bishop of Rome, to whom Our Lord Jesus Christ gave the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore you should know that there is no possibility of my ceasing to be a Roman Catholic. But neither will I deny that I am truly Orthodox, nor have I ever repudiated the true Orthodox Faith of my youth.

Certain family members have asked me, for what they believe to be the good of this noble organization, to either publicly renounce my identity as a Roman Catholic, or else to renounce any potential claim to the Romanov throne and to never again travel to Russia. But I must inform you that I can do neither. For as a Roman Catholic, I do not consider that I have ever stopped being truly Orthodox. I do not know if there will ever be a restoration

of the Romanov monarchy in Russia, though I heartily agree with Marina Mikhailovna that such an eventuality could only shower great spiritual and temporal blessings upon Holy Mother Russia. I believe it is for Heaven to decide, not for me. A true Christian monarch must be chosen by Heaven, and must answer to Heaven. I will not presume to interfere in Heaven's prerogative. Instead, I will trust Heaven to guide and protect our beloved Russia. I will not renounce my potential rights to the throne. I will not be deterred from the medical mission trips which I am accustomed to make, three times each year, to the remotest parts of Russia. And I will not be deterred from the lecture posts which I hold at academic medical centers in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. But there is one thing I will do. I will look forward this evening to making your acquaintance as we eat, drink, and dance together as a noble family. May God be with each and every one of you, and may the Holy Archangels protect us. Thank you.

At first there was stunned silence. Then a few in the audience began to clap, and a few camera flashes lit the podium. Little by little, others took up the applause, until a respectable but subdued applause was offered. Most members of the audience were whispering with one another, trying to formulate a position on the controversy they had just witnessed. To break the awkwardness, Grigory proceeded to the podium and announced that the guests were invited to reconvene in the dining room in ten minutes, at their assigned places, for dinner.

As Mikhail and Mariya moved through the crowd of nobility, some greeted them warmly and introduced themselves with firm handshakes. Others pointedly moved out of the way, making clear that they desired to keep their distance from the newcomers. And one or two pointedly voiced their opinion that at this gathering only Orthodox believers were welcome, and that the young Catholic couple should consider leaving early. Mercifully, three chime tones soon sounded throughout the lobby, signaling that it was time to be seated for the dinner.

When all were at their places, Father Oleg, the elderly Romanov gentleman who was a Russian Orthodox priest, offered in Russian the traditional blessing for the beginning of a meal. Marina recalled that this meddlesome priest had publicly challenged her son, at the recent annual planning meeting, when Grigory had suggested that perhaps Mikhail would need to be stripped of his claim to the throne for the good of the Russian nation. Some people, she mused, just did not understand that rulers often have to operate pragmatically, bringing an unfortunate injustice upon one man in order to bring about a greater good for a greater number. Marina liked being in charge. When everyone was seated, she picked up her fork. Since she sat in the place of the monarch, this signaled to everyone at the dinner that it was now permissible to commence eating and conversing. Appetizers were already on the tables, and the servers immediately began

offering a choice of wines.

Mikhail was seated next to Marina, and across from them Mariya was seated next to Grigory.

“So, Professor, how are you enjoying yourself so far this evening?” asked Marina, launching the next verbal contest.

“I am deeply honored to be among such illustrious company, quite frankly.”

“But you must notice how everyone is watching you,” she prodded. “You are quite the spectacle this evening. Everyone sees you as an intruder and an upstart, and yet you sit in the third highest place of honor.”

Mikhail felt the beginnings of actual irritation, due to the game of insult and intimidation which she was obviously attempting to play.

“Madame, I am sitting precisely where I was instructed to sit. If you have a problem with that, I suggest you consult with the Romanov family leadership who planned this event. Oh, but that would be *you*, wouldn’t it?”

“Remember you are being watched, Professor.”

“Indeed. And *you* should remember that Princess Mariya, her mother Princess Katarina, and my princely self are all accomplished musicians accustomed to being stared at and judged while we perform the most complex classical works on stage. Tonight our performances may be of a different sort, but I can assure you we are quite at home in this element. Furthermore, I spent many years as a special operations officer in active theaters of war, and I am quite accustomed to answering threats definitively with measured and effective retaliatory force.”

“So I see. But then, what about Professor George Peterson?”

“Prince George is a well-known Professor of Psychiatry. He is widely published, and lectures internationally on the interface between science and faith in the practice of psychiatry. His lectures routinely engender strong controversy and heated debate, some of which is actually academic. But most of his opponents launch crude *ad hominem* attacks on his character, because they are shallow secularists who do not know how to directly challenge his arguments. You will find that Prince George, too, can hold his own tonight, I can assure you.”

“So then, you people will not easily be dislodged from your pretensions to have a place of honor among this noble family.”

“The question is, Madame, how will you handle this evening, and the coming media exposure which we will gain from tonight’s celebration? How will you handle being dislodged from *your* longstanding pretensions?”

Marina perceived that this newcomer displayed remarkable strength of character and solid self-assurance. His unflappability was worthy of a monarch. He was capable of firing back darts of truth that stung as much as the calculated half-truths she launched at him. In a certain way she was beginning to like him, because she respected those who could wield power and defend their interests with equanimity and poise. A part of her might even regret it if he should have to be formally declared disqualified from

the throne, as seemed to her increasingly likely. But, being a pragmatist, she knew that Grigory would not hesitate to act in the best interests of the family – and of herself and his own future throne.

The four newcomers all began to charm those seated in their vicinity, much to the distress of Marina and Grigory. Because the rules of the Romanov royal table allowed each person to speak directly only to those seated on either side or directly across from them, impromptu games were soon begun by means of which questions or comments for the four were passed down the table from person to person, and the four began to speak in loud voices so that those whom they could not properly address directly could nevertheless hear what they had to say. Some older, more-perceptive family members noted the mounting distress and restlessness displayed by Marina and Grigory as they progressively lost control of the dinner conversation to the four Catholic newcomers. It was plain to Marina that almost all those who had a chance to engage these new people in conversation invariably began to like them. For Mikhail, Mariya, George, and Katarina, the dinner hour flew by, and as they finished their dessert and coffee it seemed to them that the dinner had only just begun. But for Marina and Grigory, dinner had proved to be a very long ordeal, one which now seemed as if it would never end.

Finally, Father Oleg, the Russian Orthodox priest, called for everyone's attention, and offered the customary Russian prayer for the end of a meal. He then stated that it was time for the family tradition of singing two hymns together after dinner: "The Russian Hymn," and "God Save the Tsar." He announced that Prince Mikhail Romanov, this evening's pre-eminent guest, had agreed to lead the singing on the hotel dining room's three-manual pipe organ.⁶⁰ His beautiful guest, Princess Mariya Peterson, would play along on the concert grand piano. The words and music could be found at the back of each person's official program. Mikhail and Mariya stood up, and went to the small stage where the organ console was opened, and the Steinway concert grand piano was waiting. At the microphone, Mikhail spoke these few words:

Noble ladies and gentlemen, this evening we are seeking to recapture the elegance and grandeur of a lost world: the world of pre-revolutionary Christendom where governments were officially and actively Christian, a world in which many saintly rulers of vast empires were as much concerned with the salvation of individual souls as with the production of material goods or the amassing of earthly wealth and power. These two classic poems, set to the glorious tune known as *The Russian Hymn*, serve as a window on that world. By singing them we express our hope that

⁶⁰ In the real world, unfortunately, this noble 1931 M.P. Moller 3-manual, 44-rank pipe organ was removed from the Waldorf=Astoria hotel dining room in 1952. But in this story concerned with the restoration of tradition, the author chose to pretend that the organ had survived the post-World War II American "progressive" folly of ripping great pipe organs out of hotels and concert halls as if they were intrusive artifacts of a happily discarded past.

one day such a world may yet again be reborn. *The Russian Hymn* tune, commissioned by Tsar Nicholas I in 1833, was composed by Alexey Feodorovitch Lvov, a former military aide to the Tsar who ultimately became the director of the imperial court chapel choir in Saint Petersburg. This noble hymn tune was used by Tchaikovsky in his *1812 Overture*. It has long had two sets of words. The first poem, ‘God the Omnipotent,’ combines stanzas by two authors. Henry Chorley composed the first two verses in 1842, while John Ellerton wrote the third and fourth verses in 1870. The text is based on Apocalypse 19:6: ‘Alleluia: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, hath reigned.’ This hymn reflects our prayer for our beloved Motherland, the home of our ancestors. It acknowledges that, like all nations, Russia has sinned and needs to repent and return wholeheartedly to God. I will play the hymn through once, and then you may join in singing all the verses. There will be a brief organ interlude between each verse, to provide for changes in pitch and organ registration. I am likely to add a trumpet descant here and there. But whenever the grand piano joins with the organ, that is when you sing.

With that, Mikhail took his place at the console, and Mariya sat at the piano. Following the grand organ introduction, the whole Romanov family sang together as follows:

God the Omnipotent! King Who ordainest
Thunder Thy clarion and lightning Thy sword;
Show forth Thy pity on high where Thou reignest:
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

God the All-Merciful! Earth hath forsaken
Thy ways all holy, and slighted Thy word;
Bid not Thy wrath in its terrors awaken:
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

God the All-Righteous One! Earth hath defied Thee;
Yet to eternity standeth Thy Word.
Falsehood and wrong shall not tarry beside Thee:
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

God the All-Provident! Earth by Thy chastening
Yet shall to freedom and truth be restored;
Through the thick darkness Thy kingdom is hastening:
Thou wilt give peace in Thy time, O Lord.⁶¹

⁶¹ Referenced on August 13, 2010 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_the_Omnipotent! Public domain.

When the singing was done, Mikhail immediately returned to the microphone:

Thank you for your well-sung prayer. The second set of words, sung to the same tune, was composed by Vasily Zhukovsky in Russian, and was translated into English by an unknown writer. ‘God Save the Tsar’ was the Russian National Anthem, from 1833 until the tragic atheistic revolution of 1917. In praying for the Tsar, we pray not only for Russia’s former rulers who have passed on to the next world, and may yet be in their time of purgation, but we also pray for the future Tsars of Russia, for the office of the monarchy and our hope that it may be gloriously restored to lead the world back into a renewed Christendom. As we sing together, let it be our prayer. The first and third verses will be in English, with the second verse sung in Russian. The format will be the same as for the previous hymn.

Again, Mikhail provided a grand organ introduction, and then the piano joined in, leading the family as they sang these words:

God save the noble Tsar! Long may he live, in pow’r,
In happiness, and in true peace to reign!
Dread of his enemies, Faith’s sure defender,
God save the Tsar! O God save the Tsar!

Боже, Царя храни! Сильный, державный,
Царствуй на славу, На славу нам!
Царствуй на страх врагам, Царь православный.
Боже, Царя храни! Боже, Царя храни!

God save the Christian Tsar! Long may he live, in pow’r,
In holiness, and in Christ’s peace to reign!
Dread of Christ’s enemies, Faith’s sure defender,
Christ save the Tsar! O God save the Tsar!⁶²

At the conclusion of the singing, there was a moment of silence, and a good many family members could be seen wiping tears from their eyes. A moment of silence seemed natural, but then Mikhail and Mariya stood and faced the audience, and many leapt to their feet and began to applaud and to shout “Bravo!” So, the newly introduced prince and princess humbly bowed, and then quickly returned to their places at the table. Marina, looking somewhat subdued, stood at her place and announced that there would be a twenty-minute break for everyone, after which all were to convene in the grand ballroom for the formal beginning of the ball.

As the crowd filed out into the lobby, Mikhail and Mariya perceived a

⁶² Referenced on August 13, 2010 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_Save_the_Tsar!#Russian. Public domain. Third stanza altered by the author.

marked difference from before dinner. Couples were pressing in all around them, waiting in line to meet and greet them, and smiling with a warmth not seen earlier. Quite a few requested to be photographed with the new couple, some by press photographers and some using their own cameras. Others requested autographs on their programs. Not a few offered their business or calling cards, and extended invitations to come and visit them in their various places of residence, some in the United States, many in other parts of the Americas, and not a few in Europe. Many of them mentioned that they had family members who were Catholic, and that they tended to agree that the longstanding schism was primarily political not theological. A few reporters, noting the interest in the new couple, attempted to begin interviews, but were reminded of the rules of the evening: the press could photograph all they wanted, but interviews would not be granted until the next morning after ten o'clock in the Romanov family's special morning-after-the-ball press room.

The Waldorf=Astoria Grand Ballroom was an immense room with an ornate ceiling four stories above the floor. A series of small balconies projected out around the walls, at the second and third story levels. Flags were draped from each balcony, alternating between the black, gold, and white flag of the Romanov empire, and white flags bearing the unmistakable Romanov coat-of-arms with its double-headed eagle. On the stage at the front of the ballroom, an orchestra was set up, together with a Steinway concert grand piano and the console of the grand ballroom's magnificent 4-manual pipe organ.⁶³ The orchestra, which included strings, brass, woodwinds, percussion, and a gilded Lyon and Healy concert grand harp, was prepared to play the full range of classical and popular tunes typical of a European royal ball at the time of transition from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century. At the rear of the stage was a huge painted backdrop, used every year, depicting a Nineteenth Century European royal ball in the Alexander Palace⁶⁴ at Tsarskoye Selo just outside Saint Petersburg. The emcee's podium was placed at stage left, in front of the flag of the Romanov dynasty. The United States flag was properly displayed at stage right. Across one side of the vast room, a head table was set up on a raised platform. Here were seated the top twenty-four people in the family organization, with the most important persons positioned at the center and those of lesser status toward the ends, in the same order of rank as had been observed at the dinner table. The huge wooden dance floor filled the entire center of the vast ballroom, providing ample space for everyone to dance at once without being crowded. On the far side, opposite the head table, was a group of twenty round tables, each seating six persons, where the less-prominent family members and guests might sit between dances.

⁶³ In the real world, this grand 1931 M.P. Moller 4-manual, 76-rank pipe organ, like its smaller counterpart in the dining room, was removed from the Waldorf=Astoria hotel Grand Ballroom in 1952.

⁶⁴ The Alexander Palace, home of the last Tsar, will figure prominently in this story. It can be explored online at the excellent historical website "The Alexander Palace Time Machine," at <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace>.

In the back of the room was a refreshment table, decorated with models of famous Russian buildings, and supplied with dessert, coffee, candies, and fountains of chilled champagne and punch. In the back corners were two full-service bars. Small adjoining meeting rooms were provided as lounges, one for ladies and one for gentlemen, where they might retreat to renew acquaintances or discuss business and social opportunities. Press photographers were allowed free access only to the ballroom, and were provided with a third small meeting room as a place of rest and retreat.

Mikhail and Mariya found themselves feeling more at home among this crowd of strangers, many of whom had begun to warm to their presence. To them, it seemed as if the chime tones sounded all too soon, calling everyone into the ballroom for the beginning of the formal dances. The twenty-four leading family members took their seats on the raised platform, with Marina in the center, Grigory at her right hand, and Mikhail then Mariya to her left. When all were seated at their tables, the emcee stood at the podium and began the celebration.

“Noble ladies and gentlemen, tonight we observe many great traditions of the Romanov dynasty. Our fine Romanov Nobility Ball orchestra, consisting of professional musicians drawn mainly from the New York Philharmonic, is being conducted by Rostislav Gorsky, music director of the Mariinsky Ballet in Saint Petersburg. Please welcome to the podium our distinguished maestro!”

Appropriate applause ensued as Maestro Gorsky, in the glow of a spotlight, mounted the podium and took a brief bow. Then the emcee resumed.

“The first dance, according to long-established custom, is reserved for the current trustee of the throne, Her Royal Highness Princess Marina Mikhailovna, and her son, escort, and heir apparent, His Royal Highness Prince Grigory Mikhailovich. They have selected the beautiful waltz from ‘Sleeping Beauty’ by one of Russia’s greatest composers, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Noble ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the ballroom dance floor the dedicated leaders of the Romanov Nobility Organization!”

A spotlight from the rear projection gallery shone on Marina and Grigory as they rose from their places at the head table. Nearly everyone in the ballroom rose to their feet with cheering and clapping as the couple made their way to the center of the dance floor. Hand in hand, and beaming with broad smiles, they bowed in each of the four directions, and then positioned themselves to begin. The maestro raised his baton, and as the melodious strains of the Tchaikovsky waltz wafted through the vast room, the couple began to dance with perfect poise and practiced elegance. As they danced, photographic flashes brightened the room from every vantage point. Servers placed a champagne flute at every place, in preparation for the toast which would follow. When the music ended, Marina and Grigory once again bowed in all four directions, and the crowd broke into another round of applause with most standing to their feet. As they made their way back to the center places at the head table, the emcee announced a toast in honor of the couple.

“Noble ladies and gentlemen, I propose a toast to the honor of the

elegant lady who is our trustee of the Romanov throne, and to her son and heir apparent. May they be preserved in health and honor, and may the day soon dawn when they can assume their proper role as the moral and cultural leaders of our beloved Motherland!”

Glasses were raised, and as the toast was drunk, Marina and Grigory, shining in the light of the spotlight at their places, smiled and waved graciously. Then everyone took their seats to await the emcee announcement of the next dance.

“Tonight we also break with tradition, by honoring two guests who have never previously attended the annual Romanov Nobility Ball. Prince Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov, accompanied by the beautiful Princess Mariya Georgovna Peterson, will now be honored by a special dance to acknowledge Prince Mikhail’s apparent potential as the new trustee of the throne. As you know, some religious controversy surrounds this issue, but during tonight’s festivities we lay our differences aside and pay our respects to the possibility of an unbroken male dynastic succession preserved, as if by a miracle, by Heaven itself. In keeping with Russian tradition, they too have selected music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, the elegant waltz from ‘Swan Lake.’ I know that many of you have already begun to make their acquaintance, and now I ask you to warmly welcome to the dance floor His Royal Highness Prince Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov, and his beautiful escort the Royal Princess Mariya Georgovna Peterson.”

Now the spotlight shone on Mikhail and Mariya as they rose from their places at the head table, and began to make their way onto the dance floor. The crowd clapped politely, and with some degree of enthusiasm, but there was no standing ovation, and a certain number of persons pointedly did not clap at all. Following the example of the first couple, they held hands, smiled confidently, and bowed in all four directions. Then the maestro raised his baton, and the music began. Mikhail and Mariya knew they were being watched intently, as camera flashes flickered from all directions, and the spotlight followed them across the floor. But their intense preparation was now paying dividends, as they artfully and flawlessly recreated the elegance of late Nineteenth Century ballroom dancing. Their musical souls let the music guide them, and the audience, as they watched, became enraptured by the beauty and elegance of their performance. Clearly, here were two gifted musical artists, hardly interested in politics, who were stealing the show. If the two opening dances represented any sort of competition, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind as to which couple had won the victory. When the music ended – all too soon, it seemed to many – Mikhail and Mariya stood at the center of the floor, smiled enthusiastically, and bowed in all four directions. At first the crowd seemed to hesitate, as if they were not at liberty to let their emotions rule their hearts. But then a few brave souls, following the lead of Father Oleg, leapt to their feet with shouts of “Bravo!” and soon the entire room exploded with enthusiastic applause, continued shouts of acclamation, and a standing ovation by almost everyone. Mariya and Grigory, and perhaps half of all those at the head table, remained seated. Photo flashes were incessant while the

spotlight followed the newly popular young couple back to their places at the head table. Once there, they smiled and, hand in hand, bowed once again, and took their seats. Only then did the applause begin to subside.

“So, the military hero who saves lives by day and plays the organ by night is also a master of the dance,” said Marina sarcastically. “You two danced as if you had practiced for a Hollywood movie.”

“Why, thank you,” retorted Mikhail, recognizing that in her effort to be insulting she had actually rendered a real compliment. He felt sorry for her, sensing the deep emotional turmoil that this evening represented for her. She was accustomed to the unquestioned leading role in this noble family. Now suddenly he, an unknown upstart, had appeared on the scene and seemed poised to take the leading role away from her. But it was not something he had ever desired or actively pursued, it was something to which Heaven itself seemed possibly to be calling him. He decided that sincere kindness, in Christian charity, was the only appropriate response to her suffering and anxiety. So he decided to be a true gentleman, and to act like the nobleman he was.

“May I have the honor of the next dance, Your Highness?” he ventured. “Unless you have already promised it to someone else.”

There was just a moment too long delay, while she pondered the fact that, as trustee of the throne, it was her prerogative to ask the gentlemen to dance with her. But Mikhail would not know that, having never attended this function before. So she suppressed her initial irritation at this *faux pas*, and smiled at him.

“I would be delighted. Properly, as the Crown Princess, I am supposed to ask you, but now you have made that easy for me. As soon as the emcee announces the beginning of the general dancing, it will be our place to lead everyone onto the floor.”

Having learned from this the proper etiquette, Mikhail could not help musing that, since he was arguably the Crown Prince taking precedence over her claim to the throne, perhaps his invitation was no *faux pas* at all, but rather reflected a changing reality which she had yet to accept.

“Noble ladies and gentlemen,” began the emcee, “now it is time for every one of you to take the floor with your partner, for the beginning of our evening of dancing and celebration together. The next waltz will be a favorite classic from the Hapsburg empire, ‘On the Beautiful Blue Danube’ by Johann Strauss II.”

Marina and Mikhail stood up together, hand in hand, and, under the glow of the spotlight, made their way to the dance floor. Grigory took his cue and asked Mariya to dance with him, and they followed closely behind the leading couple. When the dance floor was populated by nearly everyone present, the maestro raised his baton, and the delightful music began. Dancing a traditional waltz was a sufficiently complex undertaking that casual conversation was not really possible. Ever the consummate politician, Marina smiled throughout, and nodded at others as they whirled past. Although Mikhail actually knew only a handful of faces, he smiled at everyone as well. Whether unwittingly or not, the two of them telegraphed

a message: there was going to be peace in the Romanov family. But whether peace in the family would come about by gracious submission of habitual power to Heaven's manifest will, or whether it would come as the eventual aftermath of a murderous plot hatched in secret in a locked room, was a question not yet answered.

When the music stopped, Mikhail thanked Marina for her company, and mentioned that he needed to start circulating among the ladies to see if any of them still had blank lines on their dance cards. Naturally, his name was already filled in on several lines on Mariya's card, including the last dance of the evening. Soon the music started again, and during the next several dances, Mikhail and Mariya began to make the acquaintance of various members of the House of Romanov. On the whole they found their new acquaintances to be quite cordial, respectful, and interested in learning about them. They began to feel that some were potential good friends. Finally, after a full hour of dancing, the emcee announced that the orchestra would take a twenty-minute break. Those who wished could retreat to the men's or ladies' lounges, or else mingle at the tables in the ballroom. Just before the emcee left his podium, Mariya climbed up the steps to the stage and whispered something in his ear. He nodded and smiled, and spoke again.

"Noble ladies and gentlemen, I have one more announcement. During the orchestra break, our new guests have offered to provide some background music for your entertainment. Princess Mariya and Prince Mikhail will perform a piano and organ duet of excerpts from the Nutcracker Suite by Tchaikovsky. It was originally transcribed by Tchaikovsky for piano four hands, but Prince Mikhail's brother Kiril developed a special transcription for piano two hands together with organ two hands and two feet."

The crowd laughed delightedly as Mikhail mounted the steps to join Mariya on the stage. This was an arrangement Mariya had performed with Father Kiril within the past year for the annual "Music by Candlelight" wine and dinner fundraiser at the Cova parish, and Mariya had faxed Mikhail a copy of the organ score just a few days before. He had found an evening or two to run through it on his Allen practice organ at home before he came down to the Cova on Thursday evening. He had tried to tell Mariya that he doubted it would really work out to do it at the ball, but time and circumstance now proved that Mariya had been correct. This was going to be an excellent means to share their talent and to warm the family to their presence, and he realized that Mariya had the makings of an excellent politician. She knew how to win people's hearts by generously sharing her goodness and talent with them, with neither timidity nor pride. He was not sure he even dared to think his next thought: that she was made for the role of a Tsarina, who would work behind the scenes to build him up in the eyes of the people.

By the time they had their music arranged, the organ registration decided, and began to play, many had begun filing out of the ballroom. But before long, almost everyone gradually returned, realizing that they were missing a rousing performance of some of the most delightful

tunes ever penned. They played for about fifteen minutes, and at the conclusion, those present stood and clapped enthusiastically, with shouts of “Bravo!” from various corners of the room. But as soon as the applause subsided, the three chime notes sounded, indicating the end of the break, and members of the orchestra began returning to the stage. Soon the dancing resumed, and Mikhail and Mariya continued making the acquaintance of Romanov family members as they danced through the evening.

At the second twenty-minute break, they each retreated to their respective lounge, where they could meet some members of their own sex and make more new acquaintances. In the men’s lounge, Mikhail was queried about his military history, his special forces training and operations, his medical teaching and missions in Russia, and how it came to be that such an accomplished man of science and war was also a consummate musician. A number of leading men in the family began to perceive that this newcomer was indeed a man of exceptional character, achievement, intelligence, and personal grace, possibly fit to be a Tsar. They would have to re-think what they had taken for granted for the past decade or more.

In the ladies’ lounge, Mariya, just eighteen, impressed the older Romanov women with her poise, maturity, and kindness. They inquired about her recent award-winning performance in Moscow at the *Soli Deo Gloria* festival, and wondered what it had been like for a group of Russian students to play for the Catholic Pope in Rome. They were also interested in how she and Mikhail managed to be so elegant in appearance, and Mariya shared with them the secret of Don Brown’s public relations staff assistance. The fact that the richest businessman in Detroit had come to their aid only enhanced the women’s impression that this young couple were no ordinary pretenders, but seemed to have the sort of grace and favor about them which typified those born to be royal leaders. By the time the break ended, both Mikhail and Mariya had each received several more invitations to visit the private estates of princely Romanov’s in various European nations.

As the orchestra once again returned to the stage, for the final session of music, Mikhail handed a note to the maestro, who was profusely complimentary about Mikhail and Mariya’s earlier performance of the Nutcracker excerpts. The note stated that, about midway through the final hour of music, Mikhail wished to be called to the stage where, as bass soloist, he would serenade his date, Mariya, with the love song “Somewhere My Love,” set to the tune “Lara’s Theme” from the 1965 film *Doctor Zhivago*. The maestro was informed that Mikhail had left a packet on the organ console music rack that contained the orchestra parts. Mikhail had done his own orchestration for small orchestra, in the popular-classical style of the 1966 Connie Francis recording, and had composed additional verses of his own poetry. The maestro was delighted, but as the dancing was about to begin, he barely had enough time to pass out the music and inform the orchestra of where the piece

would fall in the final-hour lineup. Orchestra members were seen to smile and nod in approval as they received the mysterious music sheets.

Without delay, the emcee announced the next dance, and the maestro's baton signaled the orchestra to play. For a third hour this evening, the elegant dancing of the lost world of imperial Russia was seen in all its splendor, whirling across the polished floor of the Waldorf=Astoria Grand Ballroom. By this time in the evening, most of the guests were more than a little tipsy, and there was an increase in laughter and merriment as the tempo of the waltzes picked up. Just when many of the guests felt they could not go on without a rest, the emcee announced an unscheduled intermission.

"Noble ladies and gentlemen, tonight a surprise has been prepared for you. At this point in the evening you all need a brief rest before the evening's final dances. Our guest of honor, Prince Mikhail Romanov, has asked permission of the maestro to serenade his lovely lady, Princess Mariya Peterson. Prince Romanov has provided the musicians with an original orchestration, which he himself prepared for this evening's performance. The maestro and musicians have kindly agreed, and so, if you will all take your seats for a brief period of rest, you will hear a beautiful rendition of the popular Russian-themed song, 'Somewhere My Love,' with additional verses composed by the prince for tonight's celebration. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to our stage the talented bass soloist, Prince Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov."

The spotlight followed Mikhail from his place on the dance floor, where his last dance had been with Mariya, up onto the stage, where he took the wireless microphone from its cradle on the podium and stood at stage center. He turned and nodded to the maestro, and the orchestral introduction began. Soon Mikhail's sonorous bass voice began the well-known lyrics:

"Somewhere, my love ..." ⁶⁵

After the standard well-known verse, there was a brief orchestral interlude with a change in key, and then Mikhail began a new verse, sung to the same tune, which he had composed for this very evening. As he sang, he kept his gaze fixed on Mariya:

Princess Mariya, you set my heart to sing:
 Love blooms and grows, fresh as the flowers of spring!
 This lonely prince, born to an ancient throne,
 Yearns but for this: that you will be his own!
 Princess, I would have you, my love
 Near me, to cherish our whole life through!
 Ancestral saints, out of the long ago

⁶⁵ Well-known words and tune are widely available online. Words by Paul Francis Webster. Sung to the tune "Lara's Theme" by Maurice Jarre, used in the 1965 motion picture *Doctor Zhivago*. Recorded by Connie Francis in 1966. The standard words and tune, which are copyright, are available online at several websites.

Smile on us now, praying our love may grow.
 Come waltz with me, now and 'til life is through.
 God keep our hearts, and keep me close to you!

Again there was an instrumental interlude, reverting back to the original key. Mariya, in her seat at the head table, was profoundly moved. Here, in front of this noble gathering, she had been serenaded by the very man who, by right of birth, should be numbered first among them. She had been impressed the previous weekend when she heard Mikhail sing the Haydn Mass, but was completely enthralled by the more casual artistry with which he sang this light classical-style popular work. Surely, she thought, he would have no difficulty winning a part on Broadway. Then Mikhail began a third verse, which he had composed for the very eve of Russia's consecration. It was meant to engender the imminent hope of Fatima's promise in all the Romanov family:

Someday the world will wonder in surprise:
 Heaven will grant Russia a new sunrise!
 Someday the Tsar will proclaim Christ the King,
 And Christian laws will make true freedom ring.
 Someday, Christendom will return,
 Someday, Russia will change the world:
 She'll come to us, out of the long ago,
 Fervent in Faith, noble toward friend and foe.
 'Til then, we'll pray for our dear Motherland:
 Christ keep her safe, in His own Mother's hand.

By the time the song was ended, Mariya was wiping tears from her face. She risked a glance at Marina, one empty seat away from her, and saw that she, too, was crying. Their eyes met, and in that moment a profound understanding passed between them. Marina had once been loved too, and had lost her beloved when she was widowed years ago. She was entering upon her eighth decade, and in beholding the youth and beauty of these newcomers to the ball, she was reminded of her own days of youth and happiness. Now, she saw her long-cherished hopes – that her son Grigory might become the next Tsar – slipping from her grasp, as these young newcomers won over the hearts of the family, not through intrigue and manipulation, but through a natural display of their noble character, exceptional talent, and innocent goodness of heart. She knew of no weapons effective against such an assault, and was beginning to be resigned to the secondary places which Heaven seemed to be suggesting for her and for her son.

Marina stood up and began to make her way to the stage, while Mikhail made his bow and accepted the adoring applause of the entire room. He blew kisses in Mariya's direction, and a second spotlight suddenly illuminated her face, revealing her to be shedding a tear or two

and blushing appropriately as a waiter presented her with several red roses and a romantic greeting card from Mikhail. As Marina mounted the stage, she strode briskly toward Mikhail, shook his hand while smiling and voicing her compliments, and then she briefly embraced him as a symbol of his acceptance by the Romanov family. She took the microphone in hand, and offered some comments of her own:

Noble ladies and gentlemen, tonight we have unexpectedly been treated to remarkable musical talent, provided for us by our two very special new family members. I believe their noble bearing has been evident to everyone. While Prince Mikhail was singing just now for his beautiful companion Princess Mariya, I could not help thinking that, for all of us, these new words to a familiar tune beautifully capture the hope of our hearts.

We are gathered here tonight because all of us long for the eventual restoration of the lost world of Christian Russia, a Holy Russia ruled and guided by a Christian monarch. We long for the elegance of the former royal courts, which provided an edifying reflection of the majesty and beauty of the Courts of Heaven.

Prince Mikhail's new words to this beloved song reflect the yearning we all feel for our long-lost love: glorious Christian Russia, Holy Mother Russia. Her former glory was completely hidden underneath the cold snows of atheistic communism, and the springtime of modern democracy in Russia so far provides only the faintest hope that the snows of secular government and godless culture may yet melt away.

All of us long for the summertime glory that will come only when a truly Christian Confessional State once again 'blossoms in green and gold.'

Ultimately we all hope to live in such a state once again, perhaps yet in this world and perhaps in Holy Mother Russia. But if we do not live to see it, we all have hope nevertheless. For in this world we are all pilgrims and strangers, seeking for a better country, that is Heaven. For our true citizenship is in Heaven, where Christ Our King will reign forever and ever.

When we meet vibrant young persons such as Prince Mikhail and Princess Mariya, we wonder if perhaps the warm winds of spring may already be blowing across the face of the cold snows of modern secularism. In our hearts we feel the promise of a new Russian sunrise, as if the restoration of Christian monarchy may be about to dawn upon our beloved Motherland.

When we see how devoutly Christian our young Catholic guests seem to be, we even dare to hope that the schism between our one true Orthodox Faith and the Catholic Church in Rome may yet be healed in our day. Let it be the daily prayer of every one of us, that we may live to see all these blessings come to pass.

Marina's voice was quavering as she finished her brief address, and for the first time that evening the weariness of her seventy years seemed evident to Mikhail. Ever the perfect gentleman, Prince Mikhail took Her Royal Highness Marina by the arm, and gently helped her down off the stage of the Grand Ballroom – and perhaps, down off the stage of future thrones and scepters as well.

Her time to envision herself and her son Grigory as the next Russian monarchs was now fading. As he accompanied her back to her place at the head table, he noted her newly slowed pace and slightly stooped posture, and he quietly thanked her for her profoundly moving comments.

All at once, the emcee announced the next dance, the maestro's baton began the next waltz, and the dance floor began to fill with whirling humanity. Mariya had several names left on her dance card before the final waltz that would be with Mikhail. So Mikhail took a break for a few minutes, and found a dark and empty meeting room down a vacant corridor where he could sit in seclusion for a few minutes and collect himself.

He remembered that the Pope was arriving in Rome this very night, where he would remain in disguise, hiding out in a place arranged by Father Herald, until the very hour of his appearance in Saint Peter's Basilica tomorrow evening. Then, at the central altar of all Christendom, high above the tomb of the Blessed Apostle Peter, and joined by all the Catholic bishops in the world, Pope Nicholas would consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

If the consecration were successfully completed, thought Mikhail, Heaven itself would not fail to fulfill its promise, and bring forth the Romanov family's long desired new era in Holy Mother Russia. Heaven had promised that, following the consecration, Russia would be converted, which could only mean that Russia would become a Catholic Confessional State.

And whatever role he and Mariya might have to play in that promised Russian sunrise was for Heaven alone to say. He thought of the Christian's proper stance: to emulate the Blessed Virgin Mary, the perfect Christian. "Let it be done to me according to Thy word,"⁶⁶ he prayed.

He also thought of the firestorm the Pope would face because of his obedience to Heaven tomorrow. And soon, if Russia converted and Mikhail should be involved in the formation of a new Catholic Christian state, he too would be persecuted mercilessly by desperate secularists all over the world.

Like Christ in the garden, he foresaw that he and Pope Nicholas were likely to become living martyrs, suffering immensely for the faith. He began to see that all the glamour of royal balls and state dinners, of bejeweled crowns and scepters, of palaces and parades, was but the superficial side of a monarch's life – something like Christ entering

⁶⁶ Luke 1:38.

Jerusalem to the acclaim of the throngs on Palm Sunday. But the real essence of a Christian monarch's throne was the cross: fulfilling the duty to resist when the devil would offer him the power and glory of this world, all the advantages that come to those who compromise, if only he would fall down and worship him.

So Mikhail foresaw that, when they came to take him and make him the new Tsar, it would be as when they came for Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. And so he also prayed, "Not my will, but Thine be done."⁶⁷ His soul was heavy, weighed down with awareness that the final conflict between the woman and the serpent was being waged even now, and somehow he was caught up in the very middle of it all.

Mikhail sighed a very deep sigh, the spirit within him groaning in prayers that he did not even know how to utter.⁶⁸ And when peace finally came over him, he was quite certain that it was because angels came, unseen but altogether real, and ministered to him.⁶⁹

Glancing at his watch, he knew it was time to thrust himself back into the life of the ball. As he exited into the darkened corridor, suddenly he was punched in the stomach and kicked in the knees. Instantly his classified military self-defense training self-engaged, and within ten seconds he was looking at two unconscious male figures, dressed entirely in black including black ski masks, sprawled on the floor beside him.

He stepped into a men's room, adjusted his coat and tie, combed his hair, and strode down the darkened corridor into the lighted foyer just outside the ballroom. He did not think these assailants were connected with the Romanovs. Most likely they represented the same dark forces that had ransacked the Peterson condominium before their recent trip to Rome. He decided to tell no one about the incident.

There would be only one or two dances left before the final waltz. As he entered the ballroom, a dance was just ending, and he found several eligible ladies in the place where those whose dance cards were not filled up could stand awaiting an invitation. It was now clear that many considered a dance with him a special honor, and the next two dances were over in a whirlwind.

Now it was time to find his Mariya. The final dance would be staged in succession, as announced by the emcee: first, Marina and Grigory would take the floor alone, then they would be joined by Mikhail and Marina, then by the remaining twenty from the head table, and finally by everyone. In no time, it seemed, it was all over, the music stopped, and the magic evening was ending. Many of the guests made a point of approaching Mikhail and Mariya to thank them for attending and to welcome them into the Romanov Nobility Organization.

In the course of this evening, Mikhail and Mariya had watched each other in the spotlight, displaying natural gifts of political *savoir-faire*

⁶⁷ Luke 22:42.

⁶⁸ Romans 8:28.

⁶⁹ Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43.

under intense pressure. Each was now much more certain of the other's fundamentally sound character, and was aware of a growing fondness for the other's companionship.

Retreating to their condominium together with Mariya's parents, they reviewed the evening over a nightcap, and then, after evening prayers, slept the peaceful deep sleep of faithful souls who had given all they had to give.