

Chapter Twenty-Four

September 9-19, 2015.

Great Lakes Cruise Aboard the Standart, Don Brown's Yacht.

The Detroit Yacht Club on Belle Isle in the Detroit River was a venerable private club founded in 1868, just after the Civil War. The historic Mediterranean-style clubhouse, designed by the same architect as the world-famous Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, had opened in 1922 and retained the elegance and charm of that era. Facilities included indoor and outdoor swimming pools, and tennis and handball courts. The club sponsored off-site athletic programs including bowling, kayaking, golf, shooting and hunting, and alpine and cross-country ski trips. Members enjoyed access to dining rooms served by award-winning chefs. The elegant ball rooms, where wedding receptions and business meetings were held, normally had to be scheduled one to two years in advance. The yacht club had long been a center of Detroit high society, and its membership rolls had included virtually every famous business and civic leader in the past century and a half of Detroit's storied history. Its harbor had been ranked as the best in Detroit, and was among the finest boating facilities anywhere on the Great Lakes.

Don Brown, celebrated Detroit businessman and philanthropist, had built a special slip at the Detroit Yacht Club to accommodate the four hundred fifty foot Standart, the largest private yacht in the world. The slip was just a short distance from his historic Belle Isle mansion, overlooking the Detroit River. A full-time crew of sixty, housed in thirty crew staterooms, were needed to operate the yacht and to maintain the world-class service provided to every guest on board. The Standart was based in Detroit from mid-April to mid-October, and moved for the other six months to its winter home in Monaco. There, Don had a modest waterfront condominium, but tended to spend most of his Mediterranean time on board.

Tuesday, September 8, 2015, the day after Labor Day, was a day of brilliant sun, calm waters, and perfect temperature. The crew of the Standart were upbeat and excited as they worked preparing the huge vessel for its next Great Lakes cruise, which departed the following afternoon. Like most Americans, the workers generally expressed a firm belief in the superiority of representative democracy, and yet were thrilled at the thought of entertaining European royalty. Except that these royals were Michiganders of European descent. (Or were they Michigianians?)

On Wednesday afternoon, the day of departure, Don Brown held a news conference on the porch of the Detroit Yacht Club. The lawn between the clubhouse and the Standart slip was littered with bouquets of flowers and signs and hundreds of well-wishers, much like the displays outside the Romanov Medical Clinic in Nazareth and the Peterson condominium

in Detroit on the night after the Romanov Nobility Ball. While the cruise guests arrived in chartered limousines, and could be seen waving to the television cameras as they boarded the *Standart*, Don Brown was interviewed by a leading news anchor. This plan provided privacy for the guests, who were thus shielded from intrusive reporters.

Once everyone and their luggage was settled on board, Don Brown and his wife Theresa held a farewell meeting in the *Standart's* ballroom, where they mingled with all the guests, made certain they were comfortable, and expressed their regrets at not being free to accompany the guests on the cruise. They did hope to meet up with the guests at the two planned balls, the first on Mackinac Island, and the second at the end of the cruise in Chicago.

As soon as the Browns departed the *Standart*, the gangplank was retracted, and the whistle blew. The guests lined the top deck and waved at hundreds of well-wishers on the lawn of the Detroit Yacht Club, as the massive ship began to move out of her slip and into the swift current of the Detroit River. Soon the Belle Isle shoreline and Detroit city skyline began to fade, as the *Standart* moved up the river, with the Michigan shore to port and the Canadian shore to starboard.

Within an hour the water widened and the Detroit River opened into the broad expanse of Lake Saint Clair, about 25 miles in circumference. At its northern end, the waters narrowed once again as the *Standart* proceeded up the American-Canadian international boundary in the middle of the Saint Clair River. After passing beneath the international Blue Water Bridge between Port Huron, Michigan and Sarnia, Ontario, the *Standart* entered the southern tip of Lake Huron, one of the five Great Lakes that surround Michigan and constitute the largest collection of fresh water on the planet.

The plan was to cruise slowly through the huge lake on Wednesday night, all day Thursday, and Thursday night, and to arrive at the Port of Alpena by Friday morning. There would then be an excursion inland to a private hunting preserve near Hubbard Lake where the Brown Group had a corporate membership.

On Wednesday evening there was a formal dinner in the grand dining room to welcome all the guests. A string quartet and harpsichord provided background music. Mikhail and Mariya mingled after dinner, visiting various tables, and then joined George and Katarina in the master suite for drinks by the fireplace. The lake was relatively smooth, and the evening air was cool but pleasant. Mikhail and Mariya donned light jackets and, hand in hand went for a stroll on the upper deck. At first, the enormous yellow half-moon was just rising in the east, but within thirty minutes it had ascended enough to assume its normal size and white brilliance in the clear night sky. By now the lake was almost as calm as glass, and a gentle warm offshore breeze combined with the wavelets lapping at the hull to create a perfect romantic atmosphere for a courting couple to share their hearts. Mikhail and Mariya made their way to the bow and sat, arm in arm, on a bench overlooking the water ahead, a trail of glittering moonbeams

leading across the water directly to their position.

“Mikhail, my dear, I can’t believe I am actually here. In May, I went to Moscow as a tourist, and was completely surprised when the Russian government informed us that my mother and I are royal princesses, and my father is a royal prince. Now it is September, just four months later, and I am sitting in the moonlight on the bow of the world’s largest yacht, arm in arm with the Romanov crown prince of Russia and not wanting to be anywhere else. It all seems impossible.”

“The chain of events that brought about the preservation of the royal line in your ancestry was obviously miraculous. In the tumultuous times following the viciously anti-noble Bolshevik revolution, the chances were infinitesimally tiny that secretly royal persons, while successfully hiding their true identity from the enemies of the dynasty, might also manage to meet and marry others of equal station. And yet it happened in your family. Surely this is proof of Divine Providence, and of Our Lady’s special care for Her protectorate, Holy Mother Russia.”

“The same was true in your family, Misha. When your father Nicholas went to New York to study at Julliard, he met and married a royal princess without even knowing yet that he was himself a royal prince. Surely we can see the hand of God in that, for that marriage, mistakenly thought to be morganatic at the time, served to preserve unbroken the Romanov dynasty’s male line of descent. And because of that, your claim to the throne rightfully takes precedence over the female line of Marina Mikhailovna.”

“Many people would say that such coincidences are impossible. But they happened. And every day I thank God for the many miracles that aligned to bring us together.”

On Thursday the sky remained cloudless, and the brilliant sun sparkled on the calm waters. In late morning, the yacht stopped, and an opportunity for water sports was announced. The motor launch was put in the lake, and various guests took turns at water skiing and wake boarding. Mikhail and Mariya took a spin on a pair of the Standart’s jet skis. What most caught her eye was the Brown Scapular which he kept tied around his neck in such a way that it could not come off even when he went swimming or took a sudden spill off his jet ski. Mikhail was a man’s man, who was not ashamed thus to show his profound devotion to Our Lady, and his trust in Her promise to save any Catholic from hell who dies wearing the scapular.

By mid-afternoon, the yacht resumed cruising, and after dinner there was traditional ballroom dancing with a disc jockey playing a few old classics from the 1890’s to the 1920’s, and then favorite oldies from the 1950’s to the 1960’s.

On Friday morning the Standart docked at the Lake Huron port of Alpena, in the northeastern quadrant of Michigan, and a land excursion was announced. Mikhail and Mariya, George and Katarina, Vladimir and Olga, and Kiril and the captain rode in the Standart’s large SUV to a remote private hunting preserve off Hubbard Lake. The club had an exemption from hunting season and license rules, and for a fee one was allowed to

shoot wild game that was expertly managed. Mikhail shot a buck deer, which was dressed out in the woods, and then taken to the club's meat processing hut. The processed venison meat would be delivered to the Standart kitchen before departure on Sunday noon.

On Saturday, the group took a tour of northeastern Michigan on the Standart's eight Harley-Davidson motorcycles. They visited the historic lighthouse at Harrisville, ate lunch at a rustic lakefront family restaurant in the quiet farming town of Lincoln, and circled large, sandy-bottomed Hubbard Lake before returning to Alpena. Mikhail was thrilled by the white birches, plentiful in northern Michigan, which reminded him so strongly of rural Russia.

On Sunday morning, the Standart chapel was opened onto the dining room, so that the guests and staff could attend Mass. At ten o'clock Father Kiril offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Traditional Latin Rite, and Mariya played the small dining room pipe organ with Mikhail serving as cantor. Eight singers from the Cova Latin Mass choir also performed polyphonic Latin classics. After Mass, a buffet-style brunch was served at noon, as the Standart lifted anchor and got underway, with an overnight stop planned at Point Aux Pins on Bois Blanc Island. Mikhail loved the reason the French explorers had named the island "White Wood" – its vast forests were filled with Russian-like white birches.

On Monday noon the Standart entered the harbor on Mackinac Island, the world-famous state park preserving Nineteenth Century charm. Motor vehicles (other than fire and ambulance) are banned from the island, except in winter when snowmobiles are allowed for permanent residents. Horse-drawn vehicles provide all usual services, and bicycles are very popular. A collection of Victorian-era "cottages" (that most people would call mansions) had been built by wealthy families in the late Nineteenth Century, on high bluffs overlooking the Straits of Mackinac.

The straits connect Lake Huron to Lake Michigan, dividing the State of Michigan into two peninsulas, separated by five miles of water, but connected by the Mackinac Bridge, a landmark suspension bridge built in the 1950's. Mackinac Island is accessible only by public ferry boat, private yacht, or private airplane.

Upon the arrival of the Standart, the guests disembarked and toured the shops of old downtown Mackinac Island, while horse-drawn wagons carried their luggage up the hill to the Grand Hotel¹¹⁷, a world-famous seasonal destination that had frequently hosted conferences of world leaders. Tonight the hotel had been bought out by the Brown Group, which was hosting a private ball in honor of Mikhail Romanov. Business and political leaders from the Midwest and numerous members of the Romanov Nobility Organization had been given rooms, along with the entire guest list of the Standart. A twenty-five piece live orchestra from the nearby Interlochen Arts Academy would provide ballroom dancing throughout the evening. The usual five-course dinner, included with

¹¹⁷ www.grandhotel.com

one's room and served in the hotel grand dining room, would precede the dancing, with live music provided by a string quartet. Waiters, who mostly came annually from the Caribbean for the well-paid seasonal positions, were dressed in starched uniforms and wore white gloves. They exuded a pride in their service which, combined with the historic hotel itself, transported hotel guests back to the world of the late Nineteenth or early Twentieth Century.

The Grand Hotel opened in 1877, financed by a consortium of railroad companies needing suitable accommodations for well-heeled travelers visiting the unspoiled beauty of northern Michigan. By the 1890's, the immense wood-frame hotel's white-columned front porch – still the longest in the world – became *the* place to meet on the island. Its romantic story continued to unfold uninterrupted, as the hotel became a national landmark and persisted determinedly in operating with the furnishings and style of service typical of an earlier, more relaxed era. In 1980 the Grand Hotel was featured in the motion picture *Somewhere in Time*, starring Christopher Reeve, Jane Seymour, and Christopher Plummer. Always improving, the hotel won an award in the early Twenty-first Century for a unique environmentally friendly air conditioning system. All one hundred seventy rooms were cooled by cold ground water (endlessly replenished by nature on the island) that, once hot, was then recirculated to warm the outdoor swimming pool. The list of famous personages to have stayed at the hotel included United States Presidents; many foreign heads of states, both elected and royal; international celebrities in fields as diverse as cinema, music, athletics, and literature; and a great many of the world's wealthiest individuals. But this would be the first time a Russian crown prince had ever been an honored guest. And it would be the first time that a great many members of the Russian Nobility Organization had made their way north to this elegant hotel, as a group, for such an event.

Five of the hotel's best top-floor rooms, which projected out over the front porch atop the huge white columns and provided a panoramic view of the water, were assigned to Mikhail, Mariya, George and Katarina, Vladimir and Olga, and Kiril. An additional two dozen similar rooms were assigned to Marina Mikhailovna Romanov, Grigory Mikhailovich Romanov, Don and Theresa Brown, and leading Michigan political and community leaders. The Michigan governor, who was in residence at the nearby summer Governor's Mansion, planned to attend the ball. All told, there were more than three hundred guests for the dinner and ball, all required to be attired according to standard hotel policy: elegant evening dress for the ladies, and black tie (preferred) or at least suit coat and tie for the gentlemen. Mariya and Katarina wore the same elegant but modest silk gowns and diamond jewels as at the Romanov Ball in New York, causing many of the Romanov's to rejoice in this October re-creation of that magic June evening in New York.

The dining room was arranged in a fashion similar to the Romanov Nobility Ball in New York, with a head table on a raised platform,

where Mikhail and Mariya sat alongside Marina and Grigory. What was wonderfully different was that the grace of religious conversion recently showered upon Russia also seemed to have extended to the vast majority of the Romanov nobles in exile. There was now an enthusiasm among the Romanov's for Russia's future as a Catholic Confessional State, preserving the Orthodox Rite and, soon, restoring the Christian monarchy. It no longer seemed academic to discuss who was first in line for the throne, and there was almost universal consensus among the Romanov's that Mikhail was God's chosen man.

As the evening of elegant dancing unfolded, Mikhail and Mariya thoroughly enjoyed every dance. Each Romanov partner they encountered strove to make them feel warmly welcome and honored. Dancing with secular American politicians, however, was a different experience. Mikhail and Mariya could sense a certain fundamental disdain that every convinced believer in modern democracy would feel when face to face with a potential royal pretender. The reaction felt when dancing with businesspeople was somewhat intermediate: they felt the same deep disdain for royalty as potential rulers, but the businesspeople were fascinated by the idea of Russia reorganizing herself, and were excited about possibilities to expand their small and medium-sized business models into the new nation.

By half past eleven o'clock, the final dance was over, and many guests began drifting away to their rooms. In the morning, Tuesday, Father Oleg Romanov was going to offer a weekday Orthodox Mass in the hotel ballroom, and the Catholics would all walk downtown to Sainte Anne's Catholic Church¹¹⁸ for daily Mass. The reunification of the two Churches was already underway, but it would take time before the faithful grew accustomed to visiting either rite, as available, when traveling.

By midnight, Mikhail and Mariya had found their way to the Cupola Bar, on the upper balcony level of the hotel's immense two-story rooftop cupola. From their table for two beside a front window, as he sipped Black Russian coffee liqueur while she had coffee, they watched the light of the full moon dancing on the calm waters of the straits. Behind them, an antique Tiffany cut glass chandelier, about ten feet tall, sporting multicolored glass flowers and candelabra bulbs, was suspended from the ceiling above but extended down below the level of their balcony floor. In the back corner, a pianist provided soft romantic music.

"Finally, we have some time for each other!" said Mariya. "In some ways, it is more stressful to attend a ball where everyone accepts us, than it was in New York where we were actively courting the Romanovs' favor."

"That's because, already, many people are looking for ways to ingratiate themselves to the probable next Tsar and Tsarina of Russia. We are no longer just private individuals; now, already, we represent the Crown."

"Still, tonight was thrilling. One would have thought it was 1910 once again, and Nicholas himself had come to America to dance the night away

¹¹⁸ www.steanneschurch.org

at The Grand Hotel. Many people commented to me on how much you remind them of the last Tsar.”

“Nicholas would have felt very much at home here, as northern Michigan bears a great resemblance to rural Russia. Perhaps we – uh, I – shall not feel so homesick living in Russia, when I can so easily pretend I am back in my home state.”

“These few days on the water have helped me to think deeply, and with clarity,” said Mariya. “You don’t have to keep pretending that we are not thinking we will be together for all our lives.”

“Things are developing at breakneck speed in Russia. And, it would seem, in the romantic life of the Russian crown prince.”

Mariya smiled at him, and reached across the table to take his hand. Immediately a photographer’s flash startled everyone in the room. Mikhail glared at the young man as he dashed down the back stairway into the lower level of the Cupola Bar, probably planning to email the photo to a media syndicate for the next-day’s gossip pages.

“Our days of privacy in public are very nearly gone,” said Mikhail. “But I have arranged for one last adventure that will be out of sight of the spying paparazzi. Would you come with me now, on a moonlight carriage ride? I have an open horse-drawn carriage reserved, out in back of the hotel, for twelve-thirty.”

“What a sweet idea, Misha. On the night of a full moon!”

“We have to exit the hotel through the loading dock, and the carriage will meet us right there when I contact the driver’s cell phone. That way we won’t be followed.”

“It really has started, hasn’t it, Misha?”

“I’m afraid so. The whole world is now watching this cruise of the Standart.”

After a brief stop in their rooms to get ready, with less formal clothes and jackets for the cool September evening, they descended to the basement in the service elevator and found their way to the loading dock, by Mikhail’s prior arrangement with the hotel manager. Mikhail texted the driver, and in two minutes they were seated in the carriage with a wool blanket over their legs. The clip-clop of the horse’s hooves on the paved street, the slight breeze off the water, and the brilliant orb of the full moon high above created a magically romantic setting. The carriage took them northbound up the hill on Cadotte Avenue, then east on Huron Road behind Fort Mackinac and down along the East Bluff, a ridge from which the moonlit waters could be seen all along their route. Fireflies winked in the wooded glens behind the open lawns, and the glow of warm candle-lights in the windows of the Victorian-era mansions stirred in both their hearts a desire for hearth and home.

“Mariya, this is the moment I have been waiting for. I suppose it cannot wait any longer.”

As he spoke, he reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew a small box wrapped in shiny white paper and a golden ribbon.

“I am a miserable old bachelor, who squandered his youth on music

and medical school and war. You are a young princess, magnificent in beauty and radiant in your prime. I do not pretend that I feel in any way worthy to ask you this. But, my love, I must know. Will you marry me?"

Tears welled up in Mariya's eyes, as she smiled at Mikhail, and took his hand firmly in hers.

"Of course, silly. I thought you'd never ask."

"Then, as a token of my promise to love you only and always, will you accept this small gift?"

Mariya's hands trembled as she grasped the little package, and struggled to untie the golden bonds that seemed to say she would need to struggle to fully grasp what her heart desired. As the clip-clop of the horse's hooves continued, Mariya opened the little box, and gasped in astonishment as she beheld an ornate golden ring, finely crafted with elegant detail, and studded with larger and more numerous diamonds than she could ever have imagined. On the outer band were engraved the Russian words for "Princess Mariya."

"It is hardly worthy of you, my princess. But it means that I will promise to love you until the day when death must part us."

"Misha, I too will always love you. There is no doubt that God has brought us together, and that our vocation is to lead both our home and our ancestral nation by right example. We are called to be a beacon of hope to millions of ordinary couples, who need to believe that, even in this world, it is possible to live together in love and faith until death."

"Mariya, I am so relieved that you have said 'Yes'! I really thought you would say that you cannot be sure, that there is too much pressure now, with the press beginning to breathe down our necks at every turn."

"As long as I can be beside you, my dear Misha, I can face the world."

For a few minutes they sat arm in arm. Both experienced a profound peace, as one important aspect of their future lives now seemed settled. They both hoped that the security they felt at each other's side would ever strengthen them when misfortune loomed before them, or when danger surrounded them.

"I have asked the driver to bring us down into the far end of town, and to come back along the main street to stop in front of Sainte Anne's Church. We will be there in a few minutes. The driver is the parish maintenance man, and has a key, and he will let us in to pray."

"And of course that is all coincidence, that this particular man would just happen to be our driver."

"Of course."

"Well, it is a wonderful idea, Misha. We have made a promise to one another tonight. Now we need to storm Heaven, asking Our Blessed Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, Her Most Chaste Spouse, to obtain for us the grace we will need to fulfill our vocation."

As they rode, doubling back along the East Bluff and then descending onto Main Street by way of Franklin Street, Mikhail recounted the history of the little church in which they would soon kneel together. Roman Catholicism had come to the Straits of Mackinac through the self-

sacrificing labor of Jesuit missionaries. In 1670 Father Jacques Marquette brought a band of refugee Huron Indians to the safety of the secluded island. A year later, they moved to the north shore of the straits, where they founded the Mission of Saint Ignatius Loyola, today known as the town Saint Ignace, Michigan. The first Sainte Anne's Church on the island had been a log cabin, but the current white wood-frame gothic-revival structure was built in the 1800's and had been carefully preserved.

Despite some modernization including the addition of a new table-style altar for the New Mass, the church still had an intact sanctuary with the old ornate high altar suitable for the Tridentine Mass. And it still retained a partial altar rail, making possible the traditional posture of kneeling for Communion received on the tongue. Ornate side altars honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph had also been preserved. On the curved ceiling high above the altar was a tasteful modern mural of a smiling Saint Anne – standing beside her seated Daughter, the Blessed Virgin Mary, on a cloud overlooking Mackinac Island – and holding her Divine Grandson, the Infant Jesus. A small organ in the rear choir loft had been installed several years ago. It was an antique two-manual pipe organ long since removed from a small Catholic church that had been closed, and had been obtained through the Organ Historical Society's organ clearing house. It had been refurbished in Vladimir Romanov's Detroit organ shop, and then installed in Sainte Anne's Church by his work crew. The summer concert series on the island, and the popularity of weddings in the church, had both increased the demand for a suitable instrument. The gradual restoration of traditional church music and Gregorian chant under Pope Nicholas, finally beginning to implement what Vatican II had recommended, had also been a factor. The return to Catholic tradition had been greatly facilitated by the new, accurate English translation of the New Mass that had gone into use in Advent 2011.

Soon the carriage came to rest in front of the historic church, at a position overlooking the harbor. The lights of the immense Standart glowed softly, and her white hull, resting in the peaceful water, shone quietly in the moonlight. The driver led Mikhail and Mariya up the steps, unlocked the door, and switched on the spotlights to illuminate the high altar and the two side altars. The red sanctuary lamp glowed, indicating that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the tabernacle.

"I'll lock you two inside, so no one will be able to disturb you," said the driver. "But I do think we completely fooled the press tonight. The doors will open from inside, and when you come out, I'll secure the church before we head back."

Now alone together, Mariya and Mikhail both blessed themselves with holy water from the font at the rear, and then genuflected before the Lord Jesus present in the Tabernacle on the high altar. Then, hand in hand, they slowly approached the front of the church, and took their places in the front pew, where they knelt to adore Christ's Real Presence, and to lift their hearts and minds Heavenward. The moonlight shone through the stained-glass windows just enough for them to discern the images of

symbols from the life of Christ. Mikhail suggested that they pray the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary together, mediating on five early events in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, beginning with the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel, and ending with the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, teaching the elders of Israel. Mary's visit to Her cousin Elizabeth; Jesus' birth in Bethlehem; and Jesus' presentation in the temple when He was forty-days-old, came in between. Both Mikhail and Mariya pondered how they too, in accepting their vocation to marry, would be undertaking to bring forth children, one of whom would be born to be king.

After the Rosary was complete, they each moved to a side altar. Mariya went to the left side and knelt before the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She realized that, from the perspective of Christ in the Tabernacle, Mary was at His right hand, the proper place of honor for the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Mariya pondered how Mary, too, had been young, by the standards of Her day, when called to become the Mother of a King. But unlike Mary, Who had made a vow of perpetual virginity and so would be the Mother of only the one Child conceived in Her womb by the Spirit of the Most High, Mariya would marry a man with whom she would hope to have many children, children whose vocation would be to worthily lead a Christian nation as Grand Dukes and Grand Duchesses, and one of whom would someday become the next Tsar. Like Mary, she would spend her life preparing her children to fulfill their roles, and being a worthy helpmate to her husband the Tsar. In all the privilege and grandeur they would enjoy, they would be called to set a high and right example before their people, to give hope to all that, in a rightly-ordered Christian society, enduring love and commitment is possible, and even usual. Mariya prayed that her Blessed Mother, Queen of Heaven and Earth, would intercede for her in the Courts of Heaven, in order that, by grace, she might be found worthy of her role as a Christian queen upon earth.

Meanwhile, Mikhail moved to the right side of the church, and knelt before the altar bearing a statue of Saint Joseph, Foster Father of the Child Jesus and Most Chaste Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He pondered how Saint Joseph must have known, through all the hidden years in Nazareth, that the young Woman he protected and loved, and the Child Whom She had borne, were, like Joseph himself, of royal blood of the house of David the King. Like Joseph, Mikhail had lived his life up until this time in a world that did not welcome a man born to be king. Just as Joseph had first taken the family on the flight into Egypt, and then, after an angel assured him it was safe, had returned quietly to the hamlet of Nazareth; so Mikhail's parents had at first hidden their real family name, and then when it seemed safe they had adopted their true Romanov name, but had still remained hidden in Detroit. And then, suddenly, the time had come for Mikhail to be revealed to the world, just as Jesus had finally, at age thirty, begun His public life. Jesus had felt strong reluctance to perform His first public miracle in Cana. No doubt He longed to pretend that He could continue in His sweet life, with Mary His Mother, in the

family carpenter shop in Nazareth. But time and circumstance forced Him to heed His Mother's intercession for the hosts of the wedding, and in so doing He revealed Who He was. Likewise, Mikhail had enjoyed his daily life in Nazareth, Michigan, as a little-known Adjunctive Professor of Medicine, and sometime assistant organist and bass soloist at the cathedral. But for him, too, time and circumstance had brought those quiet days to an end, and now he knelt, asking the intercession of Saint Joseph, to help him fulfill his role as a father, not only to the children whom God might send him, but to an entire nation now basking in the warm glow of a new dawn of faith.

Suddenly, as they both prayed, their organists' hearts thrilled when the little pipe organ began to play *The Russian Hymn*. Both looked back at the organ loft, and smiled when they saw the silhouette of Vladimir Romanov at the organ. He had come to serenade them on this night of their betrothal. Probably a plot worked out with his brother Mikhail, thought Mariya. As the strains of the glorious hymn filled the church, both were stirred with dreams of Christian Russia, rising from the ashes of its atheistic nightmare as the brightness of the new Russian sunrise unfolded. When the hymn was done, Vladimir launched into Mariya's favorite short work by J.S. Bach, *Nun Danket Alle Gott* ["Now Thank We All Our God"]. Both Mikhail and Mariya felt their souls soar Heavenward, filled with joy and thanksgiving to God, for the great blessing which had occurred this night. Next, Vladimir played J.S. Bach's *In Dir Ist Freud* ["In Thee is Joy"], which likewise thrilled their hearts, this being Mikhail's favorite short work by Bach. Finally, Vladimir played a Romanov family favorite hymn, *Crown Him With Many Crowns*. The words were penned by Matthew Bridges who, like Blessed John Henry Newman, was a member of the Anglican Oxford movement and eventually became a convert to the Catholic Faith. Mikhail and Mariya both sensed that Vladimir was honoring them in view of their own future crowns, while reminding them that every Christian king or queen, in taking up the crown, also takes up the cross. Indeed, every married couple, as king and queen of their own home, likewise take up the Cross of Christ and sacrifice themselves for one another and for their children.

When the music stopped, Mikhail and Mariya left their respective places of prayer and contemplation, genuflected before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and then met Vladimir in the rear of the church where they embraced him as he offered his hearty congratulations. Soon, the happy couple was back in the carriage, warmed by the blanket, and again viewing the immense yacht, the *Standart*, floating in the still water in the moonlight. They watched Vladimir, ever the outdoorsman, ride up the street toward the hotel on horseback. It was now almost two o'clock in the morning, and the downtown street was completely deserted. No photographers lurked behind pillars or just inside doorways. They both felt glad that Tuesday morning Mass at Sainte Anne's Church would not be until eleven o'clock, so that they could have sufficient rest – though Mariya wondered if she could really sleep. Of course she would wake

her parents and spend an hour with them, showing them her new ring and telling all about the moonlight ride and their prayers in the church. That way, her mother Katarina would not be able to sleep much for the rest of the night either, and it would be fair.

On Tuesday morning, breakfast had to be completed in the Grand Dining Room by ten o'clock, so that they could keep the required one-hour fast before Mass. Often, Mikhail and Mariya fasted from the night before, to keep the custom of an earlier time, but today they were famished and Mass would be late. Everyone in the Standart party had been instructed to have their luggage down to the lobby before leaving for Mass, and after Mass they would proceed directly on board the Standart, where lunch would be served soon after they got underway. Their destination would be Beaver Island, in northern Lake Michigan, where they would dock for two nights, spending the entire day on Wednesday exploring the town on bicycles, the vast island on motorcycles, and the inner sand dune heights on foot. This time, they would all sleep on board the Standart, since the island offered no elegant accommodations in the little harbor town of Saint James.

On Thursday the Standart departed the Beaver Island harbor in the morning, for an afternoon arrival in Charlevoix. There, the pier channel would take them inland to the harbor, and then another channel would take them farther inland onto large and beautiful Lake Charlevoix, famous for its sandy bottom and considered by many to be the most beautiful lake in the world. Lakes in northern Michigan grow cold by September, but on Friday there would be a "polar bear" water skiing outing on the Standart's motor launch, and a Friday night stay in the harbor at Boyne City on the east end of the lake.

On Saturday the Standart sailed back out onto Lake Michigan, and docked at Traverse City in the west arm of Grand Traverse Bay. Mikhail and Mariya were scheduled to perform on Saturday evening for the music students at the world-famous Interlochen Arts Academy, set on an isthmus between two lakes in the north woods, fifteen miles southwest of Traverse City. Many world-famous musicians had performed and taught there, but never a Russian crown prince. They would be performing the excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, arranged for piano two hands and organ two hands and two feet, which they had performed together at the Romanov Nobility Ball in New York City. Mariya would also perform four of the piano and organ works from her Moscow and Kalamazoo recitals, and bass soloist Mikhail would perform a romantic Russian song or two, accompanied by many of the same Arts Academy orchestra players who had played for the ball at the Grand Hotel.

On Sunday, after Mass on board, the Standart departed Traverse City, heading south past the Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes. The yacht docked that evening in the harbor at Ludington, where there would be a beach excursion on Monday, and climbing of the immense sand dunes at Ludington State Park.

Early Wednesday morning The Standart departed Ludington and

anchored off South Haven in calm waters. The afternoon was spent on a walking tour of the quaint Victorian resort town, with a bus excursion to a local winery in Fennville. A sunset dinner cruise on Lake Michigan was held aboard the Standart. After dinner, Mariya thrilled the guests with a performance of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, "The Tempest".

On Thursday the Standart docked in Benton Harbor / St. Joseph, and there was a dinner excursion for Mikhail and Mariya and their families to Tosi's Restaurant at Stevensville, a famous destination restaurant for Chicagoans coming around the south shore to the Indiana and Michigan dunes. George and Katarina were stirred with memories of dining there years ago, in the early days of their courtship and romance.

At one o'clock on Friday morning, The Standart quietly left the port of Benton Harbor, for a crossing of the southern end of Lake Michigan to arrive at the Chicago Harbor in mid-morning. The harbor was a calm expanse of water enclosed by man-made breakwaters of piled rocks. It could accommodate only one yacht as large as the Standart, by prior reservation. A crowd of at least two hundred well-wishers stood near the dock, with placards to welcome the Russian Crown Prince Mikhail and his new fiancée, Princess Mariya. The harbor was in the museum district at the southern edge of downtown, placing it only a short ride from the Chicago Hilton Hotel where the next Romanov Ball was to take place Friday evening. A similar crowd of well-wishers was gathered outside the hotel, shouting warm greetings as Prince Mikhail and Princess Mariya and their party disembarked from their limousines.

The Chicago Hilton Hotel, the twenty-eight story, one thousand forty-four room flagship of the Hilton Hotels chain, was built in 1927 as the Stevens Hotel, and was at that time the largest hotel in the world. It suffered bankruptcy during the Great Depression, and served for a number of years as a United States Air Force barracks housing ten thousand troops. After World War II, Conrad Hilton bought the hotel in 1951 and named it after himself. The Normandie Lounge was fitted out with the wood paneling from the famous steamship of the same name. The largest guest suite, a two-story penthouse of five thousand square feet, had been occupied over the previous half-century by a great many of the world's rich and famous.

Most of the Romanov's who had attended the ball at the Grand Hotel a few nights earlier would be in Chicago tonight. The Illinois governor, the Chicago mayor, the Russian Consulate for Chicago, and prominent politicians and businessmen from the Tri-State region would also attend.

The evening's festivities began with a formal dinner in the Waldorf Room. In traditional Romanov family style, a head table on a raised platform accommodated Mikhail and Mariya, Marina and her son Grigory, and the leading guests of honor. Behind the table, on a large red banner, was the modern Russian Federation coat of arms, still featuring the Romanov double-headed eagle bearing a crown topped with a cross, and holding orb and scepter (hints of past and future monarchy) in its talons. A Hilton podium was placed at the left front corner of the platform, beside

the tricolor Russian flag of white, blue, and red. At the conclusion of the dinner, the Illinois governor and the Chicago mayor delivered master politicians' typical remarks, welcoming everyone to the Great State of Illinois and to Chicagoland, the Windy City.

Then the Russian Consulate announced that Mikhail was to be honored with a certificate of full Russian citizenship, by Executive Order of The Honorable Vasily Alexandrovich Polzin, President of the Russian Federation. The order cited three reasons for the honor: First, Doctor Romanov's record of distinguished academic service as a regular Guest Lecturer in Medicine at the University of Moscow and the University of Saint Petersburg. Second, Doctor Romanov's record of distinguished service to the people of Russia as the organizer of a series of medical service expeditions to medically-underserved communities in several of the most remote areas of Russia. Third, Doctor Romanov's unique heritage as the undisputed heir, according to the last version of the Romanov dynastic laws, to the Russian throne – in the event that the people of Russia should choose to restore the Russian monarchy and Romanov dynastic rule. Doctor Romanov was born a citizen of the United States of America, yet of the most distinguished of all possible Russian ancestry. He had demonstrated a selfless dedication to serving others, both in the United States and in the Russian Federation, and had thus shown himself to be uniquely worthy of the honor of citizenship in the Russian Federation.

Now, therefore, President Polzin had declared that Doctor Romanov would be permitted to hold dual citizenship in both the Russian Federation and the United States of America, excepting only that if he should someday choose to move permanently to Russia and to assume hereditary powers of leadership, he would then be expected to formally renounce any foreign citizenship. The Consulate presented Mikhail with a certificate, encased in a black leather folding cover bearing the Russian Federation seal with the Romanov double-headed eagle.

The audience cheered enthusiastically for the American small-town doctor who, in all probability, would eventually become the new Russian Tsar. Marina Mikhailovna Romanov, previously the heir-apparent until Mikhail's existence had become known and investigated by the Romanov family, made a few fitting comments, indicating her acceptance of and admiration for Mikhail as the previously hidden but rightful heir to the throne. She called upon all noble Romanov's who loved Russia to unite behind Mikhail as the man obviously chosen by Divine Providence to lead their Russia into the new Christian century. Marina concluded by asking Mikhail – whom she had forewarned a week previously – to kindly address the gathering. Dressed in a tuxedo, and sporting the neatly trimmed full beard and mustache that made him appear so strikingly similar to Tsar Nicholas II, Mikhail now approached the podium. He paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts as he scanned the audience. When he began to speak, his sonorous bass voice resonated musically throughout the huge dining hall, and his presence projected at once both profound humility and kingly dignity.

“Distinguished officials, honored Russian nobility, and ladies and gentlemen: I stand before you tonight, humbled by your warmth, and wondering who I am to be standing in this place of honor. Tonight my heart is filled with music and joy, because of the beautiful and talented young princess who has honored me with her companionship this evening. I would like to take this opportunity to announce to you, and to the world, that during the recent Great Lakes cruise of the world’s finest yacht, the Standart, Princess Mariya Peterson of Detroit, of the European pure royal blood, accepted my proposal of marriage, and is now engaged to wed the unworthy Crown Prince of Russia. No date for the wedding has yet been set, but it will not take place until some months after the upcoming December referendum in Russia.”

He motioned for Mariya to stand up and join him beside the podium, and together Mikhail and Mariya held hands, smiled, and waved as the enthusiastic and adoring audience stood up to clap and cheer. Press photographers’ flashes brightened the room, as if offering a display of fireworks. There was stomping of feet and clanging of glasses, as the audience called for a first public royal kiss. Once that joyful duty had been fulfilled, Mikhail motioned for the audience to be seated, and resumed his address.

“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your warm welcome. Only a matter of weeks ago, I was an ordinary physician and teacher in the quiet hamlet of Nazareth, just outside Kalamazoo, Michigan. I had always known that, in theory, I was the legitimate Crown Prince of Russia, but I had also believed that such a title would never have any practical significance on the contemporary world stage, at least not during my lifetime. Now, suddenly, the world is watching Russia with amazement. Over these past three months we have all seen the daily television news reports. Since the consecration of Russia by the Pope in June, the Russian people have exhibited a miraculous change of heart. We have all witnessed countless impromptu sidewalk interviews, conducted live, with random Russians from all walks of life, and from cities and villages all across the vast expanse of the Russian Federation. Nothing like this has been witnessed in modern history.

“For the first month, the Western press was giving out that these events were obviously planned and staged. During the second month, the world news media tried mentioning Russia as little as possible. But for the third month now just ending, public enthusiasm in Russia for a complete restructuring of the nation, and the persistence of this profound conversion of heart among Russians everywhere, has become impossible for the global press to ignore. The secular humanist academicians have been at a complete loss to explain how this can be possible. Those of

us who are believers, however, have no problem understanding what has taken place. Our Lady of Fatima, in response to the Holy Father's obedience to Her simple request first made in 1917, has obtained for Russia a most singular grace: Russia has been converted by Heaven. The painful schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church has been healed. Russia remains Russian Orthodox, yet now she is also Roman Catholic. And, God be praised, Holy Mother Russia appears to be on the fast track to becoming an Orthodox Catholic Confessional State.

"Russia, once the militantly atheistic nemesis of every Christian believer in Europe and America, has suddenly converted. Suddenly, one is hard pressed to find on the streets of Saint Petersburg, or Moscow, or Perm, or Vladivostok, a Russian man or woman who does not express the desire to return to church, and to learn how to order his or her life and thought according to the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Catholic Church. Russians want their nation to be officially Christian. Within the borders of Russia, even those minorities who adhere to the Muslim or Jewish religions admit that under Christian rule they will be treated with justice and respect, and have little to fear, since Catholic doctrine forbids forced conversions and encourages loving kindness as the best means of evangelization.

"Russians are suddenly admitting openly that modern 'democracy' is inevitably nothing but a façade for plutocratic oligarchy. Democracy can function well at the local level, but never at the level of a region or nation. Russians are now clamoring for a restoration of Russia's Christian monarchy. They see that tyranny can occur under any form of government, when power seeks to array itself against the Lord God, and against His Anointed Christ. Russians want a Christian king to lead them in serving Christ.¹¹⁹ They want laws that encourage Christian virtue and discourage or even punish vice and evil. They want decentralized government, with local democratic rule, and businesses on a human scale, all united on a regional and national level by a Christian monarch who stands above politics and money, and works for justice and for the long-term common good.

"Russians are also calling for an end to the domination of the world economy by American 'funny money,' the so-called 'Federal Reserve Notes' which have no intrinsic worth at all, and are therefore known as 'fiat currency.' Lest you think me unpatriotic, my fellow Americans, let me remind you that the Constitution of the United States specifies that only Congress has the power to coin money, and that the Founding Fathers intended that the unit of money would be a specific weight of silver, at a

¹¹⁹ Lucas, *The New Cold War*, pages 120-121. See Bibliography.

specific purity, which the original Coinage Act called a ‘dollar.’ For more than a hundred years you have lived under the tyranny of a privately-owned, unconstitutional central bank which has, in effect, stolen your government – and your savings – away from you. Gradually, our central bank removed all precious metals from monetary circulation, and by 1971 the United States dollar no longer had any real worth at all. Russians are realizing that, through the Bretton Woods Agreement put in place at the end of World War II, this sort of corrupt ‘funny money’ system has been exported by the American financial empire to all the modern developed nations, including the post-Communist Russian Federation. ‘Fiat’ currency systems are nothing but elegant Ponzi schemes requiring an endless increase in debt that can never be repaid. They favor the already-rich and the well-connected, and, over time, effectively enslave the common people. Russians are now calling for honest money, the money that is taken for granted in the Sacred Scriptures. Russians demand a medium of exchange that holds its value over generations, currency which guards and protects the welfare of the common man. History has proved that gold and silver work best as honest money.

“Russians are expressing their weariness and anguish over a hopelessly broken social system. The Russian divorce rate of seventy-five percent exceeds even the fifty to sixty percent divorce rate typical of developed Western nations. And from the liberalism that begets rampant divorce stem all the social evils of immoral lifestyles; cultural suicide through contraception, abortion, and euthanasia; meaningless education without any foundation in Truth; and a secular materialism that denies the human soul access to the only nourishment it truly needs and craves, the Bread of Life, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Russians see that any once-Christian nation that turns its back on the laws of God will gradually self-destruct. There is a new hunger in Russia for truth and righteousness, both in individuals and in the social structures by means of which men work together for the common good. There is a new desire among Russians to once again take up the cross, to live lives of noble sacrifice in doing good for others. Russians want to build up a new Christian world, in the same way the Catholic and Orthodox missionaries of the past two millennia built Western and Eastern Christian civilization upon the noble foundations of ancient Greece and Rome. Russians want to rebuild Christendom beginning at home in Russia, and they hope the whole world will eventually decide to join with them.

“In about two and a half months the Russian people will go to the polls and officially declare whether they wish to restore their Christian king; whether they wish him to be autocratic under Christ and His Vicar on earth, or whether they prefer to bind him by the imperfect wisdom of men through a written constitution;

and, whether they wish that king to be me or some other man. I did not go seeking the position in which I now stand; I was born to it, by the Providence of God. And if Heaven sees fit to call me to that noble station, to be the next Christian Tsar of All the Russias, I intend to do my best – by the grace of God and with daily supplication to Heaven for Divine Assistance – to serve God by serving that great nation of His Christian people, Holy Mother Russia.

“As an American patriot who proudly wears the Purple Heart as a badge of my service to my beloved native land, let it be known that never will I harbor ill will, or wish anything but good, upon the United States of America.”

The audience, stunned and silent up to this point, suddenly erupted in loud cheering, and rose to their feet. Mikhail waited until they quieted down a bit, and then continued.

“As the hereditary heir of the Romanov throne of Christian Russia, I pledge, if I shall be asked by the Russian people to ascend that throne, to make Russia a blessing and a beacon of hope to all the world. I pledge to spend my days as Tsar helping Russia to do good, and not evil, to all men and to all nations, both great and small, both Russian and non-Russian. Ladies and gentlemen, may God bless each and every one of you. May God bless the United States of America, the dear land of my birth. And may God bless Holy Mother Russia, and make her to become a very great and special blessing for all mankind, both now, and for countless generations to come. Thank you.”

Again the audience leapt to their feet, cheering wildly, and nodding with animation. They were struck by the difference between this man who spoke from his heart, telling the truth as he saw it, and the career politicians to whom they had been accustomed all their lives. Perhaps there *was* something to this notion of royalty, this idea that there could be a class of Christian men chosen by God and born to rule, and able to bring about good precisely because, embracing the Faith of Jesus Christ, they did not shrink from carrying the cross.

Now it was time for the Chicago Romanov Ball of 2015 to begin. The emcee announced that everyone was invited to move into the Grand Ballroom, a Versailles-inspired room worthy of a European palace, with colonial French oil paintings, ornate twenty-two-carat gold leaf moldings, huge mirrors, and ten French brass and crystal chandeliers. The Grand Ballroom had hosted kings and queens and every United States President since F.D.R. Don Brown had hired players from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to provide the live music, with an emphasis on Russian and Viennese waltzes.

In accordance with Romanov family protocol, Mikhail and Mariya began the first dance alone, and then were joined part way through by Marina and Grigory. Each successive couple was announced by the emcee as they entered the dance floor: the Governor of Illinois, then the Mayor of Chicago, then the Russian Consulate for Chicago, and then several prominent politicians and business leaders. Finally, all were invited to dance, and the entire dance floor was filled with elegantly attired, waltzing couples. Mikhail and Mariya once again noted, as they danced through the evening with many different partners, the American commoners' deep fondness for royalty, just as long as they did not actually seek to reign; the businessmen's interest in opportunities to expand into the new Russia; and the Romanov family members' genuine warmth and welcoming toward the future royal couple.

After the ball, Mikhail and Mariya and their families found their way to their block of rooms on the executive floors of the Chicago Hilton Hotel. They slept the sleep of ecstatic dreamers, and did not have to arise until mid-morning. After a ten o'clock private daily Mass, offered by Father Kiril in the Traditional Latin Rite in a hotel meeting room, they enjoyed brunch in the magnificent Normandie Room. Then in the early afternoon, they were driven to a small private airport, where they boarded the Brown Group jet to fly back to Detroit City Airport, out of view of most of the press and the adoring but intrusive public.

On board the plane, Mikhail was suddenly disturbed to notice the following article on the front page of the Saturday morning *Chicago Tribune*.

Russian Consulate Assaulted, Hospitalized

The Assistant Ambassador of Russia to the United States, stationed in the Russian Consulate in Chicago, was assaulted last evening en route from the Chicago Hilton Hotel back to his official residence in the North Michigan Avenue mansion district. After presenting a certificate of Russian Citizenship to American Mikhail Romanov (the current pretender to the Russian throne), the ambassador left the hotel in his Bentley sedan. One block from his residence, he was forced to stop for an apparent emergency street construction project, which appears to have been a roadblock set up by his assailants. After being dragged from his car, he was severely beaten, and has been admitted to the trauma unit at Holy Cross Hospital. He is expected to fully recover. He was not robbed, and police say they are at a loss for any motive.

But Mikhail had no difficulty discerning what moved such men: the dark powers who controlled the current world monetary system were threatened by talk of a Christian Kingdom with honest money and justice for the common man. It would soon be time to implement adequate security for all those he loved.