

Chapter Three

Wednesday, May 6, 2015.

Romanov Medical Clinic, Nazareth, Michigan.

Between the southwestern Michigan cities of Battle Creek and Kalamazoo, beautiful Gull Lake sparkled in the afternoon sun. The lake was the site of cereal magnate W.K. Kellogg's country estate, the manor house of which was now used as a retreat house for Michigan State University. The estate's vast forests now served as a biological research preserve for the university. Just a few miles west of Gull Lake was the quiet little town of Nazareth, site of the former Nazareth College, a Catholic girls' school that was once operated by an order of Catholic nuns. The old college grounds had become an extension of the Michigan State presence at Borgess Medical Center, which in turn was situated further west at the northeast boundary of the City of Kalamazoo. The road from Nazareth to Kalamazoo was dotted by the private medical offices of the physicians and surgeons who were engaged in the part-time teaching of medical students and residents from Michigan State University College of Human Medicine. One such office, adjacent to the grounds of the former Nazareth College, was known as the "Romanov Clinic." An ornate wooden sign, mounted on two posts on the clinic lawn, read thus: "Capt. Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov, M.D., USMC (Ret.) – Family Practice."

Inside, Doctor Mike Romanov, an Adjunct Professor of Medicine, was introducing himself to two nervous third-year medical students, Luke and Monica, who were about to begin a summer clinical rotation in Family Practice in his office. Luke, age twenty-three, was from New York City. His plain-faced, intelligent nerd's head with large round glasses always seemed somewhat incongruous with the tall and muscular athlete's body to which that head was attached. His full head of floppy hair, incorrigibly curly and brown with a definite red hue, was always just a bit too long so that it framed his face as if a rock star's wig had been tossed onto a math-whiz/science-nerd/computer-geek's pate. Luke came from a working-class background and had been the first in his family to enter professional school. As a former altar boy, he exuded a quiet, manly self-confidence, being solidly grounded in his Faith and knowing with certainty Whom he served. Monica, age twenty-four, was from Battle Creek. The daughter of a Kellogg Company vice president, she came from money and wore clothing with labels that few medical students could afford. She was confident but caring, assertive but sensitive, and had a profoundly Catholic spirit that intuitively sensed the profound worth and dignity of every soul she met. Gifted with good looks and a tall trim figure, one could not help expecting her to have had a past career as a model. Her hair was blond, her eyes blue, and her complexion was tan and perfect.

Once they were seated and provided with coffee, the professor began to introduce himself. He had been informed, by the Catholic chaplain at Borgess, that both students were active Catholics. And the Michigan

State University Assistant Dean had disclosed that they were both high academic achievers. Armed with these insights, Mike decided to share more than the usual personal information with these particular students.

“My name is Doctor Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov, but around here everyone calls me ‘Doctor Mike.’ I was born in Detroit way back in 1981 – no mental math, please – where my late father Nicholas was a piano professor at Wayne State music school. My late mother Maria was a fulltime homemaker. We spoke Russian at home, and English in public. I attended Detroit Catholic Central High School, which by then had moved out to the suburbs, in Novi. Back then, my parents were Russian Orthodox, but there was no Orthodox high school available, and they figured Roman Catholic was the best alternative. I lettered in hockey and rugby, and graduated in three years, at age sixteen, as valedictorian. Because of our father’s musical interests, our whole family became involved in the famous music program at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church in Detroit, commonly called the ‘Cova.’ And, through the influence of the outstanding priests there, my whole family converted to the Catholic Church when I was sixteen. That led to my interest in the ‘King of Instruments’ – the pipe organ – something that was unknown in the Orthodox Church where the music is all *a cappella*.²⁰

“Anyway, at age sixteen I began undergraduate studies at Wayne State University School of Music in Detroit, majoring in organ performance and voice. My home-taught Russian exempted me from the foreign language requirement, so I managed to squeeze in a minor in pre-med basic sciences.”

“Did you win a scholarship?” asked Luke, thinking like the impoverished medical student that he was.

“Not exactly. Since dad was a professor, I was granted free tuition for my undergraduate years. But to afford medical school, I accepted an ROTC commission in my junior year. At age twenty, I went to the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, where I completed my M.D. degree and Family Practice residency on the fast track in six years.”

“Wow, that was fast!” observed Monica. “We don’t have any option like that at MSU.”

“The military was anxious to get medical staff out into the war zones, of course. So I also trained on weekends with the Marine Corps, and became a medical officer in the Marines special operations forces upon residency completion, at age twenty-six.”

“And what did you do in your *spare* time?” quipped Luke.

“Well, in my spare time, I was an occasional assistant organist and bass soloist at Saint Luke Catholic Church in McLean, Virginia. They have a fantastic music program there, which almost rivals the music at ‘Fatima Cova’ in Detroit. In my last year of residency, I was the organist for a compact disc of two lesser-known concertos for organ and orchestra,

²⁰ *A cappella* (literally, “in the manner of the chapel”) is an Italian musical term meaning “vocal only, without instrumental accompaniment.”

by Joseph Rheinberger, recorded and produced at the parish.”²¹

Luke and Monica felt awed by his accomplishments. But, although Doctor Mike did not hesitate to freely mention his many striking talents and endeavors, he did so in a matter-of-fact manner that reflected his fundamental humility. Doctor Mike considered his talents as gifts, and his abilities as mere tools, useful helpers in his life’s vocation of serving God, and of loving and serving his fellow man for the love of God.

Perhaps, thought Luke, his own patron, Saint Luke “the most dear physician,”²² had felt something like that too.

“With the Middle East wars raging,” continued Doctor Mike, “I was immediately posted overseas, and served two extended tours of duty: three years in Afghanistan, followed by three years in Iraq. In war zones, one learns a lot of medicine very quickly, but in horrible circumstances. After just a few years, one feels profoundly drained. So, two years ago, when I was offered my first option to retire to civilian life after being wounded on the field of battle, I gladly took it. I am proud to have served our country.”

“But do you really think those wars are just?” asked Monica.

“Well, our previous Holy Father, Leo Alexander II, made clear that he did not think they were just. But all great world empires inevitably become militarily over-extended, and I don’t suppose America will prove to be any different than all the empires that came before.”

“So weren’t you really ‘selling your soul’ to pay back for your free medical school?” challenged Luke.

“That’s why I was grateful to be a physician rather than an infantryman. It is always just to save life and to heal, even in the midst of an unjust war. And it is an American tradition to treat the wounded enemy, who may be brought into our field hospitals, the same as our own wounded. But you have a valid point, Luke: if I had been a volunteer soldier carrying a weapon in wars that Pope Leo Alexander II had declared to be unjust, then mere blind obedience to the ‘legally constituted authority’ might not have been sufficient justification.”

“Most of our professors, even the Catholic ones, know very little theology,” said Monica. “It seems you have given some serious thought to these matters. That’s impressive.”

“Yes. Well, of course my little brother is a very strict priest. So I always have to ‘be on my moral toes.’ Anyway, now I am here at Borgess, doing Family Practice and teaching eager young students such as yourselves.”

“Is that a Purple Heart medal, in the shadow box on your wall?” asked Luke. “Maybe you weren’t an infantryman, but you must have been brave.”

“I was wounded trying to save soldiers in the field,” said Doctor Mike. “Shot through the chest, but nothing vital was hit. So I have no residual disability. My guardian angel was with me that day.”

“Wow, that’s impressive. And – just curious – what do you do in your

²¹ In the real world this thrilling compact disc was produced by Naxos with organist Paul Skevongton. See Rheinberger in Discography following Bibliography.

²² Colossians 4:14.

spare time *here?*” teased Luke.

“In my spare time, which I actually do have here, I am occasional assistant organist and occasional bass soloist for the Latin Mass Choir at Saint Augustine Cathedral, in downtown Kalamazoo. In fact, we have one final orchestral Mass coming up, for the Feast of Corpus Christi, and then we go on vacation for the summer. We’ll be doing the Haydn ‘Mass in Time of War,’ or ‘Paukenmesse.’ I’ll arrange to make sure you are both off-call for the Mass, if you’d care to come.”

“I’d love it!” smiled Luke.

“Doctor Mike, are you married?” asked Monica.

“No. I’ve been so busy, you know, and military life wasn’t really conducive to romance or family life. And now all of a sudden I’m thirty-five and probably looking ancient to any young woman who isn’t already married herself! I’m not much good at dating either, I fear. So, I guess it’s up to God whether He ever wants me to find someone suitable to marry.”

“If you looked around, you’d find yourself supremely eligible, I’m sure,” quipped Monica.

“Indeed,” replied Doctor Mike, appearing possibly just a bit flustered.

“Tell me about your little brother, the strict priest,” asked Luke.

“Ah, yes, my little brother Kiril, two years younger than me. Kiril also went to Wayne State, of course, on free tuition. As an undergraduate he majored in composition and piano performance. But then he went on to Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, on a scholarship from our parish, and became a priest. He is quite traditional in his Faith, and I can tell you that he struggled mightily with the liberal, modernist influences at the seminary. He chose to say his first Mass at ‘The Cova,’ his home parish, in the Traditional Rite of Mass, also known as the Tridentine Mass.”

“Wow!” exclaimed the students.

“So, when the Archbishop’s Council of Priests heard about that, they pressured the Archbishop to exile Kiril to Saint Jude’s, the remotest little parish in the diocese, in a small farming town north of Detroit. I imagine they thought his traditional preaching and liturgical practices would thus remain marginalized.”

“Was that what happened?” Monica asked.

“For a while, yes. Although he turned that little Saint Jude Church – the patron saint of hopeless causes – into a magnet parish for those seeking traditional liturgy and great Catholic music. Then suddenly a priest possessing great musical talent was needed to replace the ailing Monsignor at ‘The Cova,’ which was inner city Detroit’s most vibrant parish by virtue of its outstanding traditional Catholic music program and preaching. And there was no priest to be found in the diocese who could fill that position credibly, except for the still-youthful Kiril. So, the Archbishop called him up in person, without even consulting his Council of Priests, and ordered Kiril to leave the small rural parish and take over as pastor of ‘The Cova.’

“Ordered him?” asked Luke. “Why not just offer it to him?”

“The retiring Monsignor at ‘The Cova’ knew that Kiril was too humble

to agree to such a plum position if he were asked to decide. So he had advised the Archbishop not to give Kiril any choice. They both knew he would be obedient. So now Kiril continues the tradition of great Catholic music at ‘The Cova,’ which many consider to be the most liturgically traditional and authentically Catholic parish in the archdiocese. There is a high Extraordinary Mass every Sunday, with Gregorian chant; and with a talented choir, accompanied by pipe organ, singing the great Latin classics of Christendom. On a few high feast days, Masses by the great Catholic composers are sung with organ and orchestra. The professional quality choir, which he directs, has recorded a number of compact discs of little-known composers who deserve to become more widely appreciated.”²³

“So, you respect your little brother!” observed Luke.

“We remain very close. Both to each other, and to our youngest brother Vladimir, who runs an organ building and restoration firm in downtown Detroit. Our three older sisters are all married, have moved to distant cities, and have their own families to keep them busy.”

“Doctor Mike,” interrupted Monica, ever the observant female student, as she studied his wall full of diplomas. “I notice that on your high school diploma your last name was Petrov, but then on your undergraduate and medical school diplomas your last name is Romanov. Is there an interesting story there?”

“Actually there is. Though I very seldom tell it. It has to do with our family’s descent from the Romanov dynasty of Russia. My ancestors kept this fact a carefully guarded secret throughout the early post-revolutionary years, when such a connection could have meant danger even to those exiled far from Russia. We don’t think it matters much to keep it secret anymore.”

“You mean you are a descendant of the Russian royal family?” Monica asked.

“Well, yes. Romanov family genealogists have actually determined that I would be, by direct male descent of noble parents on both sides in every generation, the first in line for the Romanov throne. Except that there is no throne. Plus the fact that, as a Roman Catholic, I would be disqualified. The Tsar had to be Orthodox.”

“Still, it’s a fascinating lineage,” Monica responded. “The forgotten world of princes and princesses and royal palaces strikes a haunting melody in all our hearts – an attraction to a lost world of nobility, civility, and refined culture. Do we have time to hear the whole story?”

“Well, if you don’t mind staying quite a bit late for rounds this afternoon, I suppose we can run through it. Is that okay with you too, Luke?”

“By all means, Doctor Romanov!”

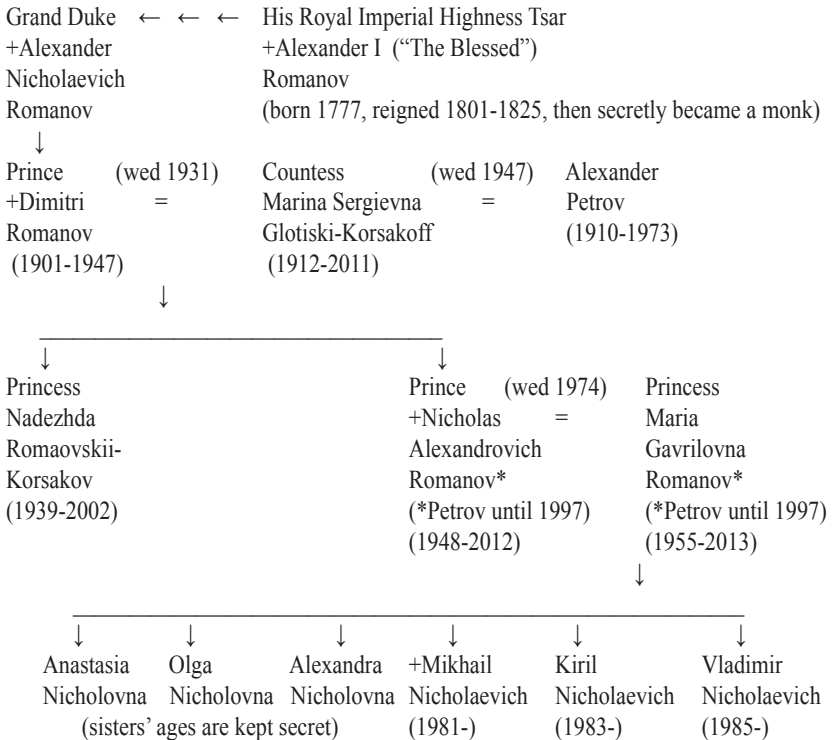
Doctor Mike opened his desk drawer and pulled out a folded chart,

²³ In real life, the beautiful but little-known compositions of Paul Paray, Catholic composer and former maestro of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, have been recorded at Assumption Grotto Church in Detroit, and produced by Grotto Productions. See “Paray” in Discography.

opening it up to reveal a very detailed family tree. In the background was a large shadow-image of the Romanov double-headed eagle. (A portion of the chart is reproduced below.)

A Portion of the Detroit Romanovs' Family Tree

Note: The symbol + indicates the heir to the Romanov throne.



“Now of course Tsar Nicholas II perished under the Bolsheviks in 1918 with his entire family, none of his children yet being married, and so he died without any direct heirs of either gender. Here you can see that Prince Dimitrii Alexandrovich was a direct male descendant of the royal family line, from Emperor Alexander I, through the line of Grand Duke Alexander Nicholaevich. Of course there were various other male descendants of emperors, but in every case they either died without surviving male heirs, or they married a non-royal person so that their children were legally ineligible to inherit the throne. There was only one exception, and for a long time it was kept secret.”

“This is starting to sound like a romantic novel,” noted Monica.

“In 1931 Prince Dimitrii Romanov (1901-1947) married Countess Marina Sergievna Golitski-Korsakov (1912-2011). Their publicly

acknowledged daughter, Princess Nadezhda Romanovskii-Korsakov, was born in 1939. However, Nadezhda married a commoner, and so her children forfeited any rights to the throne. Thereafter, it was widely believed in European royal circles that the last Romanov male heir had died without any male issue born of two royal parents. Talk began about tracing the future pretender to the Russian throne through a female line, something which was only allowed, under dynastic law, when there was no longer any surviving direct male heir.”

“Modern feminists taking over?” quipped Luke.

“Not at all. Catherine the Great ruled Russia famously after just such a dynastic event. But here’s the well-kept secret. When Dimitrii was dying of injuries suffered in a motor vehicle accident in 1947, he being forty-six and Marina being thirty-five, she was already pregnant by Dimitrii. He foresaw that if Marina bore a son, that son could continue the Romanov dynastic line. So Dimitrii, mortally wounded but still of sound mind, signed a notarized document, attesting to the legitimacy of his future child by Marina, who would enjoy full rights of dynastic succession. Dimitrii left the document in Marina’s custody, to be revealed if and when she saw fit. She kept that information secret for many years.

Marina remarried within six months, to a Russian commoner named Alexander Petrov. In those days when Romanov royals were widely dispersed in exile outside Russia, the details of her personal life remained quite private, so her child was assumed to be the offspring of her new husband and therefore not a legitimate pretender to the Romanov throne. That child was a son, born in 1948, and was named Nicholas. Now Nicholas was actually (though secretly) the rightful heir to the Romanov throne under the rules of male primogeniture. In 1974, Nicholas, not yet having been informed by his mother of his royal status, nevertheless married a full princess of an Eastern European royal ruling house in exile. Marina realized that this couple could thus continue the male line of succession unbroken, but kept her secret for a while longer.”

“And so, what became of this Nicholas?” asked Monica, clearly fascinated.

“Nicholas was born in 1948, grew up in Detroit in the Orthodox Church, and was raised by his mother Marina and his presumed father Alexander Petrov, a piano professor at Wayne State. Nicholas Alexandrovich Petrov became a very talented pianist and composer, and went to New York City in 1966, at age eighteen, to study at the Julliard School of Music. He graduated with high honors and stayed on at Julliard to teach until 1980. During those years in New York City, Nicholas providentially met and fell in love with Maria, who as we mentioned was an Eastern European princess of a full royal house in exile. Her royal status meant that, if she married a royal Russian, her children could potentially inherit rights to the Russian throne. Nicholas courted her in the early 1970’s, when they became formally engaged. At that time, Nicholas still had no idea that, like his beloved Maria, he was a royal person.”

“So Maria thought she was marrying a commoner,” noted Monica.

“Yes. Now, here you can see that Nicholas and Maria were married in 1974, he being age twenty-six and she being age nineteen. They married in the Russian Orthodox Church in New York City, in what was assumed by her family to be a morganatic marriage.”

“So they got married in Morgan’s attic?” quipped Luke. “I thought you said they got married in a church.”

“Clever but insolent,” laughed Doctor Mike. “No, ‘morganatic’ was a dynastic legal term for a marriage between a fully royal person and someone who was of lesser standing – either minor royalty, or a commoner. The children of a morganatic marriage would still be considered minor royalty, but they could not inherit any rights to the throne.”

“So, royals could pay a high price to marry just for love,” sighed Monica.

“Yes. Now after the honeymoon, in 1974, Nicholas and Maria elected to settle in Detroit. Alexander Petrov, Nicholas’ presumed father, had died in 1973, and Nicholas was invited to fill Alexander’s chair as a piano professor at Wayne State University. Five years later, in 1979, at age thirty-one, Nicholas was informed by his mother that his biological father was actually the late Prince Dimitrii Alexandrovich, who had left a notarized deathbed attestation to Nicholas’ Russian dynastic rights, and that their real family name was Romanov. Nicholas and his wife and mother all understood the potential implications, and felt it best to keep this a closely guarded family secret for the time being. So, Prince Nicholas and Princess Maria lived in Detroit, and had three daughters followed by three sons. Our older sisters are Anastasia, Olga, and Alexandra. The oldest son and crown prince (myself), named Mikhail, was born in 1981; the second son, my brother Kiril, was born in 1983; and the third son, our youngest brother Vladimir, was born in 1985.”

“So, when did your family begin to use the Romanov name openly?” asked Monica.

“When I graduated from high school in 1997, my parents were still using the family name Petrov. As Catholic converts, they knew they would be unwelcome in the solidly Orthodox ‘Romanov Nobility Organization.’ So they eventually decided there was no real need to keep hiding the family name. They went to court, proved their lineage, and legally changed the family name to Romanov. And that’s why my undergraduate and medical school diplomas have the different last name.”

“Wow! So you are a real Russian prince!” exclaimed Luke. “Actually the crown prince!”

“Yes, arguably. And if I am lucky, that (plus \$2.99) will get me a small Starbuck’s latté,” quipped Doctor Romanov.

“Well, I’m from New York, Doctor Mike. And every year in the *Times* one reads about the Romanov Nobility Ball taking place at some posh hotel. Last year, I think it was at the Waldorf=Astoria.²⁴ Have you ever been to those balls?”

²⁴ This venerable hotel uses an = sign instead of a hyphen in its two-word name.

“No. You see, since I’m Catholic, the Romanov family would never consider me as a legitimate pretender to the throne. In 2011, when my grandmother Marina was ninety-nine and terminally ill with cancer, but still of sound mind, she met with the Romanov Nobility Organization and laid out the evidence. That caused a great disturbance, which was kept out of the press, because the presumed male heir-apparent – through his mother’s female line of descent – had long been groomed as the heir-apparent to the Russian throne. Since he is Orthodox and European, whereas I am Catholic and American, the family decided to quietly ignore my impeccable direct male lineage, and to continue to hold him forth as the next-in-line after his mother.”

“Surely they tried to disprove your mother’s claims?” asked Luke.

“Yes, they did. In 2012, certain Romanov family members paid off my barber to give them a fresh sample of my hair. They also hired a private espionage firm to obtain a tissue sample from Prince Dimitrii’s mausoleum, using a drill and a fiber-optic camera. Then they had DNA analysis done at two universities, one in England and one in Moscow. Unfortunately for them, the analyses both proved with ninety-nine percent certainty that I am the grandson of Prince Dimitrii Alexandrovich Romanov.”

“So then, couldn’t you show up at the Romanov family reunions if you wanted to?” frowned Monica. “After all, *they* proved you are one of them.”

“Oh, I could still go and dance at the Romanov balls, and they would gladly take my money to give to charity in the family name. But there would be a great awkwardness about it. So I prefer to just quietly live my life, and forget about all that royal pomp and ceremony. It’s a lost world that is never going to come back.”

“Well, do you ever go to Russia?” asked Monica.

“I do travel there, about three times a year for a month each trip, and I have a great many good friends there, in both Catholic and Orthodox circles. I am on the visiting medical staff of major clinics in both Moscow and Saint Petersburg, where I lecture. I also oversee some volunteer medical projects which seek to serve poor Russians in remote interior areas, where help is desperately needed.”

“But I thought Russia was a powerful modern nation,” said Luke.

“Sadly, almost twenty percent of hospitals in rural Russia still lack running water,” replied Doctor Mike. “Russia is militarily great, but still suffers from the devastation wrought by seventy years of Communism and atheism.”

“And don’t they still persecute Catholics over there?” asked Luke.

“Catholics often think so. But from the Orthodox perspective it is not persecution. The Russian Federation tries to acknowledge those few religions that are truly traditional within its borders, and for Christianity that means, for them, the Orthodox Church and not the Catholic Church.”

“It’s all wonderfully interesting,” noted Monica. “But maybe we’d better go make rounds?”

“Yes, by all means. They’ll be accusing me of spinning fairy tales of princes and princesses instead of teaching you medicine.”

As they headed out the clinic door to ride to Borgess Medical Center in Doctor Romanov’s BMW, Luke, who had minored in European History, made a mental note of the striking resemblance between his new professor and the most famous Romanov, Tsar Nicholas II. He also noted that when Doctor Mike started the engine, the BMW’s hard-drive resumed playing in the middle of a Tchaikovsky piano concerto. Mounted on the dashboard was a small Orthodox-style icon of Saint Michael the Archangel, the doctor’s patron saint. And on the center console was a well-worn Rosary.

Luke and Monica each decided this would be an exciting summer. Who else among their classmates would be learning medicine from a man who was born to be a king?