

Chapter Seven

May 2015.

Waldorf=Astoria Hotel, New York City.

Although the new Waldorf=Astoria⁴⁹ Hotel on Park Avenue in New York City was not built until 1931, the grandeur of old world elegance remains much in evidence throughout the famous landmark edifice. The current hotel, and its 1890's Victorian predecessor which was razed to make way for the Empire State Building, have long served as the preferred temporary New York residence for world politicians, celebrities, and royalty. Its magnificent décor and furnishings, reminiscent of a European royal palace, always provided the ideal setting for any New York meeting concerned with the history and restoration of monarchy. Among Romanov nobility living in exile in the West, it had been a tradition for decades to assemble once a year in May, at the storied hotel, as the Romanov Nobility Organization. The agenda included an annual update of the official records of the Romanov family, and the finalizing of arrangements for the annual Romanov Nobility Ball which was held each June in the Waldorf=Astoria Grand Ballroom, following a nobility dinner in the Grand Dining Room. The annual ball was open only to recognized members of the Romanov nobility, spouses of members, and a few unmarried guests of single members. Such guests had to be of documented royal lineage, and had to be approved by the organization prior to the ball. Reporters and news photographers from major world news organizations were allowed, of course, since the family valued the publicity created by the event. It was hoped that the annual Romanov Ball – much like the occasional state visit by a British monarch – could help to revive public nostalgia for the high culture of old world nobility.

On Saturday morning at ten o'clock, a series of exceptionally dignified ladies and gentlemen began to assemble in a private parlor at the hotel. Some stepped off the elevators, coming from their rooms upstairs. Most of these had flown in on Friday from major cities in Europe and the Americas. A few were arriving in chauffeured limousines, from residences in greater New York City. But the majority arrived in middle class style, in taxis or airport vans, since most of the Romanov nobility were no longer possessed of any great wealth. What they did possess was a priceless lineage: each of them could trace their genealogy through unbroken royalty, in each successive generation, back to the Romanov dynasty which ruled the Russian Empire for more than three hundred and fifty years. All of them, with one officially documented exception, had to admit to morganatic marriages in their past. Such unions, between a royal person and a commoner, permitted the retention of royal titles and certain social privileges, but resulted in the forfeiture of any potential claim to the Russian throne.

Each year the Romanov Nobility Organization meeting was chaired by

⁴⁹ This venerable hotel uses an = sign instead of a hyphen in its two-word name.

those members accepted as having the highest royal rank. For nearly two decades, the accepted trustee of the vacant throne was Marina Mikhailovna Romanov. She had been born in exile in Spain, and her father had been the only publicly known male dynast of the Russian throne to contract an equal (non-morganatic) marriage after 1917. Since he had been unaware of any other credible pretender, he had designated Marina as the official heir. At age 16, according to dynastic law, Marina Mikhailovna had taken the oath of loyalty to the Russian Fatherland, and had become Trustee of the Russian Imperial Throne. Later, she had entered into an equal marriage with a Prussian royal prince, who converted to the Orthodox Faith and became an official member of the Russian Imperial House, with the title of Grand Duke, prior to the wedding. Marina had studied at Oxford University, and was fluent not only in Russian, but also in English, French, and Spanish. She was conversant as well in German, Italian, and Arabic. Since Russia had become a free republic, she had been giving speeches indicating her readiness to respond to a call from the Russian people, but that she would never wish to impose monarchy on the Russian people against their will.

Marina's son Grigory Mikhailovich had also been born in exile in Spain. His baptism, in the Russian Orthodox Church in Spain, had been attended by the kings and queens of Spain and Bulgaria, with the king of Greece as his godfather. Grigory spent his childhood in France, became well grounded in the Orthodox Faith, and completed college in Madrid. He then studied at Oxford. An athlete and avid game hunter, Grigory had visited Russia many times, and took great interest in the Russian military. At age sixteen, he had taken the dynastic oath before the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Grigory was accepted as Marina's heir apparent, and as long as he avoided a morganatic marriage, there would be no known impediment to his inheriting, upon Marina's eventual death, the position of trustee of the throne. Most people in the modern world considered such concerns irrelevant, since the Romanov dynasty was swept from power in the inferno of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. But until 1991, no one had believed that the amoral and atheistic Communist regime in the Soviet Union would suddenly yield up its power, without a war, and formally dissolve itself on December 25, Christmas Day in the West. The Russian Federation had suddenly been born in peace, and efforts to gradually create a modern democratic state were well underway. Now there was emerging discussion, in various Russian circles both internally and abroad, of one day restoring the monarchy. Generally, it was expected that any new Tsar would serve as a moral and cultural leader, under a democratic constitution much like the monarch of Great Britain. So, with each passing year, the exercises beginning on this Saturday morning, concerned with preserving the integrity of the Romanov dynasty, seemed to be increasingly relevant. In December 2010, Marina and Grigory had made a five-day pilgrimage to Rome to visit historic Orthodox churches. While there they had met with Pope Nicholas VI and discussed the need for Catholic and Orthodox

Christians to cooperate in the face of threats from modern-day secularism. The pope had praised the Russian Imperial House for its efforts to foster a spiritual revival in Russia, just as he had been calling out for a spiritual revival in once-Catholic, now-largely-secular Europe.

Marina Mikhailovna's jet black hair, fair complexion, and striking blue eyes had made her beautiful in her youth. She had once stood five feet eight inches tall, and had been trim and erect when she married her prince. Now in her seventies, she struggled against the obesity that was a familial trait in her branch of the royal line, and her posture had become slightly stooped. She tended to wear loose-flowing gowns that would hide her actual figure, and tonight she was dressed in a red and white dress, very full, and white shoes.

Grigory also had thick and curly jet black hair, and retained a youthful visage because his hair line showed no sign of receding at all. He too had blue eyes, and a dark heavy beard though he kept his face clean-shaven. Like his mother, he struggled against the familial tendency toward obesity. In his twenties he had been trim and athletic, but now in early middle age genetics had triumphed, and his profile revealed a substantial girth. Nevertheless he was a handsome man with immense self-confidence, and easily displayed the social graces expected of royalty.

The usual order of business began with a quick review of new membership applications, and a voice vote of approval for the lot. This would be followed by a similarly hasty review of any new applications to attend the ball, or to bring suitable guests, with another voice vote approving them all. Then, after a coffee break, there would follow a long discussion of ideas for the theme and arrangements for the upcoming dinner and ball.

Normally, new applications for membership were more than welcome, since the burden of proof of eligibility rested with the applicant, and the moderate annual membership dues were much needed for the operation of the organization. Also, sales of Romanov Ball tickets generated more than twice the revenue needed to cover the cost of the event, and the excess was remitted to popular charities in order to build public goodwill for the family. New members attending the ball tended to improve the charitable ratio substantially, since the operating costs were largely fixed.

Normally, then, the annual meeting was more social than political. But this was not to be a normal year. The family leaders had been acutely aware for the past two years of the existence of one additional man who could be a potential legitimate pretender to the Russian throne. He had come to their attention when he was discharged from the United States Marines with a Purple Heart, and when questioned had acknowledged to the media that his Romanov family name was indeed that of *the* Romanovs. Until this year he had expressed no personal interest in participating in the Romanov Nobility Organization. But just two days before the meeting, Marina Mikhailovna had received an overnight letter from him, expressing his desire to attend this year's Romanov Ball, and to bring as his guest a young woman whom he reported to be a royal Russian princess in exile.

This letter had shocked Marina, who had imagined that her son Grigory's role as crown prince was forever undisputed and uncontested. There were several other new applications, and a voice vote approved them all. Then, instead of moving on to applicants for the ball, Marina announced that an unusual matter of great importance had to be addressed. She asked that the lights be dimmed, and started a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov."

"Dear distinguished members of the noble Romanov family," she began, "this year we have encountered an ordinary request with potentially extraordinary ramifications. Therefore I find it necessary to apprise you fully of the facts in great detail."

The next slide showed a picture of Mikhail, in full military dress, receiving a Purple Heart award as he shook the hand of the United States President.

"Doctor Romanov, the new applicant you see here, grew up in Detroit, Michigan, under the family name of Petrov. The family spoke Russian at home and English in public, so he is completely bilingual. When he was sixteen, he graduated from high school – a *Catholic* school, mind you – as valedictorian. Up until that year his family had used the last name of Petrov, which had been adopted by their ancestors after the 1917 revolution as a protection against enemies of the nobility. But when he was sixteen, Mikhail's parents legally changed the family name back to Romanov. Mikhail then went to Wayne State University, where he earned a music degree in piano, organ, voice, and composition, with high honors. By age twenty he entered medical school on a full scholarship at the United States military health sciences university in Bethesda, and by age twenty-six he was a medical officer in the United States Marines. He also trained as a Marine special operative, and served two three-year tours of duty in war zones, one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. Ultimately he was wounded in a serious but non-disabling manner while rescuing others, and was discharged two years ago as a decorated war hero – the scene you see here."

The next slide showed Doctor Mike in his physician's white coat, stethoscope around his neck, smiling with a clean-shaven face.

"This photo was taken from the public relations materials of Borgess Medical Center, a Catholic Hospital in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from two years ago when Doctor Mike Romanov, as he is known, joined the staff as a Professor of Medicine. The medical school at Michigan State University in Lansing sends one fifth of their upper classmen to Borgess for their clinical rotations, and Doctor Romanov is one of the local instructors. He also operates a private medical clinic in the nearby little town of Nazareth, named for a former Catholic girls' college which is now closed."

Next was a slide depicting Doctor Mike with his new full beard, and dressed in a tuxedo.

"This photo was taken from the program booklet for a performance of Mozart's Coronation Mass at Saint Augustine Roman Catholic Cathedral in Kalamazoo, in which Doctor Romanov was the featured bass soloist.

You will not fail to notice, now that he has grown a full beard, that he bears a striking resemblance to our last Romanov Tsar, Nicholas II, as well as to the Tsar's first cousin, King George V of England."

Murmuring began to sweep through the meeting hall, and continued to escalate until Marina was forced to slam her gavel on the podium and call for order.

"Dear family, your concern is well founded. What you are looking at may indeed be a problem for us. Reportedly this man is able to prove by professional genealogical research that he is the only living male direct descendant of a Romanov emperor. His family carefully guarded their identity in each generation, but he can show that, through amazing twists of fate, there have been no morganatic marriages which would undermine his potential claim to the throne."

"Perhaps we are not talking about fate, but rather divine Providence," suggested Father Oleg, an elderly bearded Romanov who was an Orthodox priest.

"No," countered Marina, appearing not a little flustered, "because at age sixteen he changed not only his name but his religion. He and his parents apostatized from the Orthodox Faith of our fathers and converted to the schismatic Roman Catholic Church. For this reason, we suggest that he has forfeited any rights to the Russian throne, for the Tsar *must* be Russian Orthodox."

Father Oleg raised his hand, but was ignored.

"In addition," added Marina's son Grigory, "this Doctor Romanov has served in the United States military. Because of the increasingly belligerent incursions of the United States military into central Asia, seeking to establish puppet governments and permanent military bases, most Russians would be highly suspicious of such a man."

A middle aged family member raised his hand, and was acknowledged by the chair.

"Good morning. I am also known as 'Doctor Romanov,' and I practice medicine at the Moscow Polyclinic. I know this man. For the past two years, he has come to Russia three times per year at his own expense, for an entire month each time, organizing medical teams and then going into the remotest areas of Russia where he and his team provide care to Russia's most neglected and impoverished citizens. He has also become distinguished as a uniquely effective guest lecturer in the medical colleges both in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. I imagine that kind of dedication to our fatherland would sit well with most Russians."

"All the more reason why he is dangerous to our cause," retorted Marina. "The devil himself can appear as an angel of light.⁵⁰ Some will vehemently oppose him and others will focus on his superficially impressive achievements. A controversial man of this sort could easily throw the delicately emerging interest in restoration of the monarchy into complete disarray. Many will begin to say this kind of controversy is

⁵⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:14.

precisely why hereditary monarchy is best left relegated to the past. I will therefore open the floor for discussion about how this organization might best proceed, given these difficult circumstances.”

Three hands shot up at once, in three corners of the room. Some older family members, who had attended the Romanov Nobility Organization meetings for many years, recognized these first three eager commentators as close associates of Grigory. All three men expressed, one after another, variations on the opinion that Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov posed a serious threat to the interests of the Romanov Nobility Organization and to the ideal future of Holy Mother Russia as an Orthodox monarchy. Essentially, each one suggested that it was expedient that this one man should be disqualified by formal vote of the Romanov Nobility Organization, so that the Russian monarchy should not perish forever. Then others began to take their cue from these first speakers, and a mounting consensus seemed to be developing. It was suggested that the future of the monarchy would be best protected if this new pretender should be declared permanently ineligible for the Russian throne. Finally, it seemed to Marina that more than enough comments had been heard, and that it was time for a vote. Her gavel came down on the podium, and the meeting was brought to order.

“Dear family, the time for open discussion is hereby ended. Now it is time for us to follow established custom, and put this momentous decision to a vote. My son Grigory will now review the rules for voting.”

“Good morning,” began Grigory. “This ballot will be secret. A ‘Yes’ vote will indicate that the voting member agrees as follows: for the good of the beloved motherland, the family, and the future monarchy, this new pretender shall be ruled forever ineligible for the Russian throne. A ‘No’ vote, should any be cast, would be against taking any definitive action now to defend the future of the Russian monarchy. The ballots are being distributed. Once they have been marked, they are to be folded twice and deposited in the ballot box in the front of the room. Please do not put your name or any other identifier on your ballot.”

“Excuse me!” shouted Father Oleg, the elderly Orthodox priest, rising to his feet. “It is never permitted to do evil, even if we think that good may result.”

Grigory glared at him, a shocked look on his face.

“Father, perhaps you did not hear? The chair has closed any further discussion of this matter!”

“I stand here to speak for a Higher Authority than the honorable chair,” retorted Father Oleg. “It is Heaven’s prerogative to choose, through the previously established Romanov laws of dynastic succession, who shall be God’s next anointed ruler of Holy Mother Russia. The evil of illegal interference in the process will bring down God’s wrath upon this noble family. Most modern Europeans and Americans subscribe to the made-up modern belief that power comes up from the people, by means of an imaginary ‘social contract.’ But that is actually a demonic idea, because it turns things upside down from God’s real order. No, in reality power descends from the throne of God, through His chosen ruler, and then to the

people. The method of selecting the ruler could be a democratic vote, or it could be hereditary monarchy as in imperial Russia. But whatever law of selection is in force for a dynasty must be followed until it is properly altered by the next ruler. And note this well: once in power – and thus vested with the divine mandate to rule according to Christ’s law and teaching – the ruler must answer to God first, and only then to the people. Therefore, as God’s priest, I warn you: this noble family should fear to intervene in the existing dynastic selection process. Such flouting of both the dynastic law and God’s prerogatives could bring down the House of Romanov forever.”

“You have certainly had your say, Father Oleg,” said Grigory. “In view of your uninvited comments, I find it necessary to ask the chair to reopen discussion, before the actual vote takes place.”

Marina nodded, and several family members stood up and spoke, one after another, in reply to Father Oleg. The oldest members of the family noticed a distinct pattern, which escaped the notice of many younger members: those who defended Grigory’s preference for disqualifying Mikhail Romanov were either divorced and remarried, living together without a marriage vow, practicing homosexuals, or career financiers in the higher echelons of powerful Western banks. The general tone of their comments was that one cannot take religious superstition too seriously, and in today’s world one must be pragmatic. Soon enough the discussion was ended by the chair, and the vote was taken. The ballots were counted three times, and the vote was an exact fifty-fifty split.

“Brothers and sisters,” said Father Oleg, rising to his feet once again without seeking permission from the chair. “The House of Romanov is now perilously close to bringing down the judgment of God against it. But may such a catastrophe never come to pass! As we stand together at the edge of the infernal abyss, I am compelled to suggest a compromise position. Let me suggest that if Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov will publicly revert to the devout practice of the Orthodox Faith, then there is no reason to eliminate him as a pretender to the throne. It would appear that he has many excellent qualifications to become the new Tsar. Alternatively, if he will publicly and in writing renounce any and all rights to the Russian throne, then he could be left alone to live out his life in America; but it would be best in that case to ban him from ever returning to Russia, lest a faction in his favor should emerge.”

“The chair acknowledges the compromise suggestion, Father Oleg, and agrees to another vote,” said Marina.

“But,” interjected Grigory, “let it be understood that in this ballot, a ‘Yes’ vote agrees that if Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov refuses both reasonable options – either to revert to Orthodoxy, or to voluntarily and graciously renounce the throne – then he will have shown himself an enemy of Holy Mother Russia, and for the greater good he will be forever disqualified, by consensus of this noble organization, from any eligibility for the Romanov throne.”

A second vote was held, and again the ballots were counted three

times. This time a sixty-percent majority favored the new compromise position, and Marina quickly ruled that a final decision had been reached.

“The chair announces that implementation of the decision will be handled by Grigory Mikhailovich,” said Marina.

“A private emissary will be sent to Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov,” said Grigory. “The emissary will inform him of the choices this noble organization has seen fit to grant to him. The respective consequences of each choice will also be made clear.”

“Mikhail will be permitted to attend this year’s Romanov Nobility Ball,” said Marina, feeling that she could mitigate the guilt she felt about the emerging plan to strip this man in Michigan of his divine right to the throne. “He will be permitted to bring a suitable guest of proven royal descent. It is to be hoped that during the ball, all of you will seek to impress upon him the collective wisdom of this noble family. By your help perhaps he may be brought to understand the reasonableness of renouncing the throne, or at least of reverting to the Orthodox Faith of our fathers.”

“The deadline for his decision will be set at thirty days after the upcoming ball,” said Grigory. “That will give him time to think. If he cannot come to reason by then, today’s final decision will be announced and implemented, to protect the interests of my – uh, the throne.”

The gavel dropped upon the podium, announcing that it was time for the traditional coffee break before beginning plans for the ball.

During the coffee break, a hurried impromptu meeting was held in a locked hotel room. Three rogue members of the Romanov family declared their conviction that, if Mikhail Romanov rejected both the Orthodox Faith and the opportunity to formally renounce his right to the throne, then he deserved to die. They felt that a mere family declaration that he was ineligible for the throne would still leave the family vulnerable to accusations that Grigory was a usurper.

They felt it was more expedient for one man to die for the nation, rather than for the Romanov dynasty to risk permanent rejection by the Russian people.⁵¹ And so they agreed that, when the private emissary would be sent to Mikhail Romanov in Michigan, he would add one minor detail to the official Romanov family decision. If Mikhail refused either reasonable option – reversion to Orthodoxy or voluntary public and permanent abdication – then he should not be surprised if an unfortunate fatal accident should happen, making his childless existence come to an early and abrupt end. Grigory would then once again be the undisputed heir to Marina’s trusteeship of the Russian throne.

The three members all swore a pact of absolute secrecy, since they knew that neither Marina nor Grigory would ever agree to their murderous plan. One of them suggested an ideal street thug to send as the messenger to Mikhail, and the three agreed to convince Grigory to use this man, without telling Grigory about their death plot.

⁵¹ cf. John 11:50.