

Chapter Twenty

Thursday Evening, July 16, 2015.

Three Weeks after the Consecration.

The Royal Eagle Restaurant at Saint Sabbas Russian Orthodox Monastery, Harper Woods (northeast Detroit), Michigan.

The posh Royal Eagle Russian Restaurant⁹⁵ in northeast Detroit was an operation of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified Russian Orthodox monastery.⁹⁶ Situated in the near northeast suburb of Harper Woods, Saint Sabbas was an old-calendar monastery following the Russian Typikon. Its beautiful traditional church was filled with elegant iconography written by local experts, and was surrounded by peaceful gardens with ponds and gazebos which afforded the best possible atmosphere for a place of spiritual refuge and retreat. The restaurant, managed by an in-house Russian chef trained in Eastern Europe, permitted diners seated at quiet linen-covered tables to look out upon the monastery gardens through tall arched windows. The dining room, dedicated to Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra, was graced with large portraits of the last Romanov couple to rule the Russian empire. And, in a monastery setting, it seemed particularly fitting to honor these Passion-Bearers who were declared saints by the Russian Orthodox Church. Above the dining room fireplace, a silent video monitor displayed scenes of Moscow's architectural treasures. The dinner menu reflected an eastern European theme, with such dishes as Chicken Kiev, Bulgarian lamb kebobs, and a mixed platter including potato pancakes, homemade sausage, stuffed cabbage, pierogi, and sauerkraut. *Hour Magazine*, Detroit's guide to the metropolitan region's finest, noted that The Royal Eagle made it seem as if a bit of old world Russia had been transplanted right into suburban Detroit.

It was to just such a setting that Mikhail had felt it was appropriate to take his new love Mariya for a romantic dinner and conversation. They had been talking every day on the telephone, many times on some days, and had been rapidly growing both in their fondness for one another and in their sense of being called to a joint and very unique vocation. Romantic cards and little gifts had been exchanged several times, and Mikhail had made trips to Detroit every weekend and at least once each mid-week. Mariya had long resisted allowing her cherished friendship with her beloved Mark to blossom into a romance, fearing that might cloud the issue of their true vocations. But she had felt strangely free to follow the romantic lead of her heart with Mikhail, and in the process suspected her own vocation was unfolding before her.

The restaurant manager had provided them with a sheltered corner,

⁹⁵ <http://www.theroyaleagle.org>, link verified November 22, 2010.

⁹⁶ <http://stsabbas.org>, link verified November 22, 2010.

behind a screen, but both Mikhail and Mariya were growing accustomed to their loss of anonymity. To reduce the tension in the dining room, they had circulated and greeted those dining at other tables, mostly Russian Americans who were only too aware of the identity of the attractive young couple. Then, when everyone was satisfied with having met them, Mikhail and Mariya settled into the quiet of their own table, and began a multiple-course dinner for two, specially prepared for them by the chef.

“How long has it been since we met?” asked Mariya.

“It was the night of your recital at Miller Auditorium in Kalamazoo. That was in mid-May, and now it is mid-July. So about two months, I’d say.”

“Two and a half months ago I was a typical American college student, traveling to my mother’s native Russia for the first time in my life. I was all worried about performing in the organ competition, and was enthralled with the architecture and history of the Romanov dynasty so evident in the Kremlin. I was a young tourist. It was a lark, and then I would return to my real life as a music student at Wayne State. Then they added on the performance for the Pope’s birthday, so I flew to Rome with my parents, and felt that I was starting to grasp how the old world is fundamentally different from modern America. But I still thought I would return to my real life as a student, with my best friend Mark.”

“And then?”

“And then the Assistant Dean of the music school pressured me into doing a repeat of my Moscow performances in Kalamazoo. That was my fatal mistake.”

“Fatal? Why?”

“Because! That was the night I met you. And then my whole world got turned upside down.”

“It was that bad?”

“Okay. Well, right-side-up, then. But everything changed all of a sudden.”

“Would it surprise you if I were to tell you that I feel just the same way?”

“But you’re older. You’ve been through things.”

“Music school, medical school, residency, wartime service, and now private practice. Throw in some part-time organ and voice work. But I have not been through a romance, my dear. I have kept so busy in my life that I have never taken the time to fall in love before. I always intended to, mind you. But always next month, or next year.”

“What made you change?”

“You did. You were irresistible from the moment I laid eyes on you during your recital. I could not stop thinking about how I could manage to meet you and get to know you without scaring you away because I was such an old man.”

“But you don’t seem old at all. You’re in perfect physical condition, and a part of you seems like a scared teenage boy.”

“Not just *seems*, Mariya. A teenage boy – that’s right about where I left off in developing the romantic side of me. People look at me and see me as a thirty-five year old retired military tough guy, but inside I’m as scared and insecure as a seventeen year old boy trying to get up the courage to ask a girl he desperately admires for a date.”

“That’s what is so lovable about you, Misha. You and I are really just two kids trying to make it though their first romantic experiment with ‘going steady.’”

“By the way, Mariya Fyodovsky Peterson, I’ve been meaning to ask you: would you go with me and be my steady girl?”

“Of course, silly,” she smiled. “How long did you have in mind? Through the fall semester? Or all the way until summer vacation? Or for the rest of our lives?”

“Are you proposing to me, you young liberated American girl?”

“Yes. I’m proposing that we should start talking about whether you should be working on figuring out whether and when to propose to me.”

“Wow.”

“Well, romance is great, but Catholics have to use their head as well as their heart when they begin to think about keeping steady company with a member of the opposite sex.”

“Now you’re even bringing up sex,” laughed Mikhail. “How is a scared boy like me ever supposed to deal with today’s liberated women?”

“Like I was saying, we have to use our heads to guide our hearts. It’s easy to be attracted to an adorable person like you, Misha. But the question is whether our vocation is consistent with that attraction.”

“I guess I’ve probably been attracted to a number of women,” admitted Mikhail. “But, as you say, I always repressed my feelings because it never seemed like the right thing, it never seemed like it could possibly be my vocation.”

“How about now?”

“Now, I’m terrified. Everything about you seems exactly right, Mariya, and all of a sudden I can’t see any escape route for myself. I’m captured, disarmed, defenseless, and there is no hope of escape. I’m a prisoner and I love it!”

“You’ve got it bad, Misha. I’m so glad. Because a lot has happened in the past two months that seems too good to be true. It’s almost like a fairy tale. I met this impossibly handsome and intelligent and talented older man who seems very youthful, and who just happens to be a crown prince. I have only recently been informed that I am a princess. He falls in love with me, and takes me to a fairy tale ball in New York where we dance the night away and steal the show and end up all over the television and newspapers ever since. I begin to dream of spending my life with him, and then I sense that, if we don’t watch out, we will end up as a king and queen, living in a royal palace and ruling over a Christian nation.”

“It does sound a bit like a fairy tale, I admit. But that is what the human heart is made for. Life in this world is always full of heartache,

pain, sickness, and sorrow. But life also provides glimpses – foretastes, if you will – of that perfect world that is to come, when God will wipe away our tears, and we will truly live happily ever after.”

“My parents say that those who make their love endure for a lifetime do it by always looking at things on a higher, spiritual plane. Even while they are temporarily angered, or irritated mightily by some imperfection in their spouse, they continue to see, in their hearts, the fundamental love and goodness and faithfulness that their spouse possesses. They realize that it is just the same for their spouse, relative to their own faults. They are committed to growing old together, to being faithful until death, no matter what it takes. And so it ends up becoming surprisingly easy, the more so the longer they stay together, because each new trial or setback becomes an ever-smaller portion of their overall life together.”

“They’re probably right. The purpose of marriage is not fundamentally to make the partners happy.”

“Misha, you and I know what our Faith teaches us. The purpose of marriage is the procreation of children, and the rearing of them in the one true Faith so that their souls may have hope of Heaven. Any happiness which the spouses may share in that project is an added blessing, but is entirely secondary to the fundamental purpose.”

“Every husband is called to be a king in his own household. But that does not mean he gets to lord it over everyone and order them around for his own pleasure. No, to be a king is to have a vocation to serve, to sacrifice oneself for the welfare of others. A Christian king fears to take the throne, because he knows it will mean taking up the cross. Saint Paul wrote, ‘Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered himself up for it.’⁹⁷ It is in sacrificing himself daily for his family that a real man, as head of his household, will find the happiness which endures.”

“Saint Paul also instructed wives to be obedient to their husbands, just as the Church is subject to Christ. A woman who has a faithful Christian husband, who is constantly seeking to sacrifice himself for her and their children, will be truly happy in obeying such a man, just as our souls can only be truly happy when we are obedient to God.”

“So, Mariya, I want to begin asking if we might have a vocation together as husband and wife. Neither one of us can answer that with certainty just yet. But we can be openly discussing it, even while we seek the guidance of Heaven.”

“Yes, Misha. Humanly, I would already love to marry you. But we must seek spiritual direction, and we must pray, and fast, and wait upon God.”

“The stirrings in Russia are already most amazing. Even CNN shows Orthodox and Catholic churches crammed with people, and reports that in Russian cities many extra Masses have to be added to accommodate everyone. Orthodox and Catholic priests are being flown in from other

⁹⁷ Ephesians 5:25, DRV.

countries, to help with the seemingly endless long lines of people wanting to go to confession, most of them for the first time in years. And there is already public discussion at high levels about restoring the monarchy, as a logical part of establishing an officially Christian government. Foreign reporters are almost speechless as they interview Russians at random on the streets, and find that they are concerned about reforming their lives, practicing the Faith, and doing what they can to cooperate with reordering their entire society according to the social teachings of Christ and the Church. Average Russians now talk about wanting to reclaim the glorious Christian traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia, no longer as a stubborn separatist empire, but rather as part of the universal Church based in Rome. So, there is every reason to believe that you and I will come under increasing public scrutiny, and that our quiet private lives will soon come to an end.”

“I could escape all that by declining to marry you, Misha. Then the press would forget about me. I could still marry my Mark – if he would have me, after all the hurt I have unavoidably caused him by spending so much time with you – and retreat into a quiet life somewhere in a Detroit suburb.”

“Yes, but you would have to make certain *that* is God’s will, just the same as if you *do* agree to marry me! Obstinate refusal of one’s true vocation and insisting upon another often results in enduring unhappiness. We have seen far too much of that in certain women, and in certain men with the disorder of same-sex attraction, who obstinately insist they have a vocation to the priesthood even though the Church has always plainly taught that they do not.”

“Our lives are not our own, Misha. While that is true for everyone, it seems to be doubly true for those who can foresee a vocation to lead a Christian nation. We would have to be like a father and mother not only to our own children, but to the nation as well.”

“That’s why Christian kings and queens, like priests, are assigned two guardian angels instead of the usual one.”

The waiter interrupted their conversation, exchanging their traditional Russian “Tower of Basil” salads for the main course: a trio of Bulgarian lamb kebobs, lemon-roasted Alaska salmon, and chicken Kiev, with appropriate accompaniments.

“Misha, how will we find the time to collect ourselves, and to determine the course that Heaven is asking of us? I am beginning to feel as if world events are accelerating, and soon I – we – will be engulfed.”

“Someone very good has already thought of that. Sometimes I think he is my third guardian angel. Do you know Don Brown, the auto-parts magnate?”

“Well, I don’t *know* him. He’s famous here in Detroit. He’s one of the richest men in the world, and he says he wants to give away his entire fortune for Catholic causes before he dies. Right now his big project is building tuition-free Catholic schools for inner-city Detroit. Those who

can pay something do, and those who can't attend anyway.”

“Right. Formerly he was the mayor, and before that he was an NBA star. But most importantly, he puts his Catholic Faith first in everything he does. And recently he has been working behind the scenes with my brother, at the epicenter of world-changing events.”

“You mean Father Kiril?”

“Yes. Mariya, can you keep a secret? Something the Vatican has thought it best not to disclose just yet? But which you, as a potential Russian Tsarina, should probably know?”

“Of course, Misha.”

“Where do you think the Pope wrote his proclamation ordering the consecration of Russia, the thing that unleashed this whirlwind that is changing our lives and the modern world?”

“The papers said it was in some remote monastery in Italy. They had telephoto pictures of him walking in the garden.”

“Yes, that's what they said. But do you know it wasn't Nicholas you saw in those pictures?”

“What?”

“No, it was his identical twin brother, Fredrick, posing as the Pope to divert media attention.”

“Why?”

“Because Pope Nicholas was here at the Cova for a week, in disguise. He needed a quiet retreat where no one would find him.”

“Wait – you mean that ‘Father Jacob,’ who was always accompanied by Father Belarus? He didn't look much like Nicholas ... or did he? Oh my, you mean I played the Mass for the Pope!”

Mikhail laughed, and now his eyes twinkled.

“He was quite impressed with you, Mariya. He told Kiril you were a fine musician, and a most dignified young Catholic woman.”

“Did you meet him when he was at the Cova?”

“Yes, just once, at the rectory. The day he told me he did not think it was any coincidence at all that, just before he returned to Rome to do the consecration, he should happen to meet the true crown prince of Russia. He took it as an added sign from Heaven that all would be well.”

“My parents met him in Rome on his birthday, and had a private audience with him. And *they* did not recognize ‘Father Jacob.’”

“Remember, he pretended to speak very little English?”

“Mom did say she felt like she knew that priest from somewhere ...”

“Anyway, Don Brown made it all possible for His Holiness. He offered his private jet for the transportation, and his security detail for the Pope's protection. And now he is offering his private yacht for you and me to go on a romantic cruise, from Detroit to Chicago, so we can ‘collect ourselves,’ as you said. A cruise will be perfect, because everywhere we go on land, now, people are beginning to recognize us.”

“I get sea sick on boats sometimes, Misha. Especially if the waves are big.”

“Not on the Standart, you won’t. It’s the largest private yacht in the world. Don Brown gave me a private tour this week. It is docked near his mansion on Belle Isle.”

“Wow.”

“When Don Brown designed the new Standart, he was inspired by the last royal yacht of Russia, of the same name, which was the most magnificent royal yacht ever launched. The English royal yacht *Britannia*, now a floating museum, is only four hundred twelve feet long, and the United States Presidential yacht *Sequoia*, retired in 1977 but now a national historic landmark, is only one hundred four feet long. Don Brown’s Standart is four hundred fifty feet long, and is furnished like a five-star hotel.

“On the outside it appears as sleek and modern as any contemporary yacht, except for its old-fashioned teakwood motor launch. Its mechanical and communication systems are state of the art, and it has wireless Internet and cell phone service throughout. But its interior décor was designed to emulate the traditional elegance of ships from the turn of the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century, like the original Standart and the Titanic.

“It boasts a royal-style dining room with two fireplaces. A two-story ballroom, which can double as a theater, has a stage that can accommodate an orchestra of twenty-five players including a Steinway concert grand piano and a gilded Lyon and Healy concert grand orchestral harp. In the rear of the ballroom is a two-manual pipe organ, specially braced – by Vladimir’s Detroit organ shop – for a sea-going vessel. Opening off the ballroom is a small traditional-style Roman Catholic chapel, with the Blessed Sacrament reserved on the antique high altar, by special permission of the Archbishop of Detroit. When closed it serves as a private adoration chapel, and when opened up to the ballroom it can accommodate everyone on board for Mass. There is a large wood-paneled library with a fireplace, filled with traditional Catholic classics and computers with Internet access, and comfortable reading chairs and writing tables.

“On a lower floor is a modern fitness center, a handball court, and an emergency medical suite. On the upper deck is a one-eighth-mile running track, a tennis court, a lap pool, a hot tub, a sun deck, and a helipad. The four luxury guest suites all have separate living rooms with private balconies, wet bars, and full private baths, and the master guest suite has all those features but adds a private dining suite, a grand piano, and a private study with a fireplace. The yacht also contains twenty standard double staterooms for guests, all with private full baths, and on a lower deck thirty double cabins for up to sixty staff and crew members.

“Formal old-world decorum is maintained on board at all times. The crew and service staff are all uniformed. A traditional Catholic dress code is enforced. All invited guests receive a pamphlet well in advance outlining the rules, and the yacht carries a large stock of appropriate formal and informal clothing and swimwear in all sizes for those caught unawares. Don says that people who cruise on his yacht feel like they have returned

to the elegance of pre-World War I Europe. What he especially enjoys hearing, he says, is that instead of feeling stifled by all the tradition and rules, they feel uniquely free. Men feel more like men, and women feel more like women. And they feel that the staff, who are all Catholic, and come from many nations, seem more like family and friends than typical employees.”

“But if Mr. Brown wants to give away all his money, why does he live in a mansion and keep a huge yacht like that?”

“He and I talked about that the other day. Don quoted Heinrich Pesch,⁹⁸ the great Jesuit economist, who helped develop the Catholic concept of Distributism as a pro-family, pro-community alternative to the harsh materialism of capitalism and communism. Pesch said that luxury is a relative concept. He argued that there is a proper, dignified luxury that is appropriate to a person’s station in life. The ongoing and quite proper progress of mankind toward a higher and more refined culture, and an increasing beautification and nobleness of life, confirms this. Highly-developed civilization increases dignity and glamour, and adds richness and good taste to life. Unlike the pagan Diogenes, who lived in a barrel and dressed in rags, the Christian seeks to have simplicity of soul and purity of spirit, but accepts material blessings consistent with his place in society, provided they are not obtained through unjust deprivation of others.

“Don points out that his mansion and yacht are both like small communities, where a large number of working people are employed in dignified surroundings, and are paid living wages in exchange for their honest service. He says what makes it work so well is that they are all Catholics, most of them members of his parish at the Cova, and so they all share a unified vision of their purpose and mission. Years ago, some of them were unemployed and on welfare, or trapped in minimum-wage jobs where they were treated with no respect. Now they understand that the mansion and the yacht are used for others: to entertain and educate people of influence, and to reward those who have served the community well.

“Don only sails on the yacht for vacation twice a year, two weeks in July on the Great Lakes, and two weeks in the Mediterranean in the winter. The rest of the time, it is providing reward cruises to those who have served the community with honor and dedication. The teachers and staff of his Catholic schools get to take their families for a week each summer. There are a couple of cruise weeks for religious to go on vacation. And sometimes Don will host world leaders at the mansion or onboard the yacht, as a way of getting their ear to listen to Catholic principles.”

“That’s very impressive. And how did the Tsar use his yacht?”

“Much the same, actually. Two weeks each summer for family vacation, and the rest of the year the Standart was kept busy with state functions.”

“Misha, do you know much about the original Standart?”

⁹⁸ Pesch, Fr. Heinrich, S.J.: *Ethics and the National Economy*, page 65. See Bibliography.

“Okay, just a bit of history, then. Russian history. The original Standart⁹⁹ was ordered by Tsar Alexander III in 1893 and was launched in 1895, after Alexander’s unexpected death from kidney failure in 1894. It was 420 feet long, and was outfitted like a floating royal palace, with teak decks, mahogany paneling, crystal chandeliers, and a full crew of servants. It was manned and operated by an elite corps from the Russian navy, and was escorted at sea by naval vessels for protection. Alexander’s son Nicholas II added an Orthodox chapel, since he and his family went to Confession, heard Mass, and received Communion daily.

“Each June, the royal family would go on a two-week cruise along the coast of Finland in the Baltic Sea. They would go ashore on remote islands where they could spend the day in privacy, swimming, picnicking, and hiking. Sometimes Nicholas would show up in person unannounced at private coastal estates, and respectfully request permission from the gentleman of the house to use the tennis court.

“Of course, when World War I broke out, the Standart was dry-docked, only two decades after it went into service; and after the revolution it was stripped and converted into a military ship used for laying mines. In the 1960’s it was scrapped, and no longer exists.”

“So in its day it was as magnificent as Don Brown’s yacht, and was used for purposes very similar to how Don Brown uses the new Standart.”

“Of course. The royal yacht was a place for entertaining foreign heads of state, and for bestowing honor upon those who served the nation well. And who knows, perhaps one day some future Tsar will revive such customs.”

The waiter arrived to ask if they were ready for dessert. He presented them with a tray of tempting delicacies, including chocolate mousse with berries, crème brûlée, dark chocolate lava cake, and crepes with raspberry filling. Both being natural athletes who were trim and fit, they did not hesitate to indulge. But when Mikhail ordered American coffee, the waiter momentarily winced, just enough to cause Mariya to laugh.

She then also ordered кофе американский [“cof-yeh Am-yer-ee-kan-ski”], pretending that by ordering it in Russian she could mitigate the offense of being so flagrantly un-European. They both knew that a European restaurant in America can’t survive long without serving American coffee in large cups with several free refills, and they were calling the chef’s bluff.

“That will be my first official edict as the new Tsar,” whispered Mikhail, feigning a look of regal imperiousness and taking pen and note pad from his pocket. “American coffee will be always available in all the royal offices, with unlimited refills. Everything else can be traditional Russian. But no modern kingdom can possibly be properly governed without American coffee for the leaders.”

Mariya laughed out loud, and her eyes twinkled.

“I can already see why the Russians might be skeptical about placing

⁹⁹ Described online at <http://www.yachtstandart.com/standart-mainframe.htm>, link verified March 26, 2011.

an American on their throne.”

“Well, we can expect to be interrogated extensively, both by friends and adversaries. And it will all be published, for the entire world to ponder.”

“Misha, when can we go on this wonderful cruise?”

“Don and I are thinking that just after Labor Day will be the best time. On the Great Lakes, summer doesn’t really set in until July when the lakes have warmed up, and then they retain their heat and keep things lovely until late September.

“Labor day this year will be Monday the seventh of September. We will set sail up the Detroit River on Wednesday the ninth, crossing Lake Saint Clair, and by the weekend we’ll be at Alpena on Lake Huron. We will visit a private hunting club in the northeastern Michigan wilderness, where I plan to do some shooting, and we’ll go touring on the Standart’s fleet of Harley-Davidson motorcycles.

“Then on Monday we’ll dock at Mackinac Island, in the straits where Lake Huron joins Lake Michigan. On the island, no motorized vehicles are permitted, so we will go by horse-drawn carriage from the boat dock to The Grand Hotel, the world-famous historic white-columned hotel boasting the world’s longest porch.

“Don has arranged for a Tuesday evening formal ball with a live orchestra playing waltzes, just like at the Romanov Nobility Ball. Most of the Romanov’s have been invited, in fact. Leading politicians and business people are also invited, and Don has bought out the entire hotel, which was easier to arrange during mid-week.”

“How magnificent! But ... another royal ball so soon? People will begin to think we are an item.”

“Who can tell, perhaps we will be, after a few days at sea together.”

Mariya blushed, beautifully.

“Now wait ‘til you hear the rest of the agenda,” Mikhail continued. “On Wednesday, which begins our second week, we will set sail for Chicago, stopping off at Beaver Island for a day of hiking and cycling on Thursday, and then on to Charlevoix for the night, where we will water-ski on sandy-bottom Lake Charlevoix on Friday.

“Some say it is the most beautiful lake in the world. On Saturday we’ll dock at Traverse City, and drive the fifteen miles out to the Interlochen Arts Academy, where you will repeat portions of your organ and piano performance from Moscow and Kalamazoo. It’s already been announced to the students there.”

“Oh I will, will I? And what will you perform?”

“Excerpts from Tchaikovsky’s ‘Nutcracker’, arranged by Kiril Romanov for four hands and two feet – you on piano and me on organ, like we did together in New York.”

“But no solo for you?”

“Oh, I may also sing a popular Russian-themed love song, also recently heard at a certain ball in New York, if I can find anyone to accompany me.”

“I see.”

“Yes, and then we set sail for Ludington on Sunday after Mass on board, arriving Monday. We can climb the huge sand dunes at the state park there. Tuesday night we will dock off South Haven, and on Wednesday we’ll take a day trip to a local winery. Then on Thursday we’ll dock at Benton Harbor and have dinner at your parents’ favorite restaurant, Tosi’s, in Stevensville. Early Friday morning we will set sail for Chicago, arriving on Friday afternoon.

“From the Chicago Harbor we will be transported by stretch limousine to the Chicago Hilton Hotel for another royal ball, again arranged by Don Brown, with an orchestra playing waltzes. A number of Romanovs and leading Chicago dignitaries will attend, including the Governor of Illinois, the Mayor of Chicago, and the Russian Consulate for Chicago. Our party will all stay at the Chicago Hilton Hotel Friday night, and then on Saturday afternoon Don Brown’s jet will fly us back to Detroit.”

“You don’t think these royal ball photo ops are designed by Don Brown’s public relations people as obvious backdrops for any special press conferences, just in case we have anything to announce, do you?”

“Not a chance!” laughed Mikhail. “Don and I would never dream of such a plot. A romantic ten-day cruise on the Great Lakes in the world’s largest private yacht hardly seems like an obvious scheme to sweep a young girl off her feet.”

“Uh huh. And what will my parents say when their eighteen-year-old daughter is whisked off for ten days – and nights – on a world-class yacht with a dashing former Marine war hero?”

“Hopefully they will say ‘Yes’ to Don’s invitation for them to come along with us. My brothers are coming along too. Vladimir will bring his wife Olga, while their six young children stay with friends from the Cova homeschool enrichment program. Kiril will say daily Mass for us. We’ll have formal meals together most of the time with both our families. Your parents will get the master luxury suite, and the other four luxury suites will be assigned to you, Vladimir and Olga, Kiril, and me.

“The twenty guest staterooms will be occupied by singles and couples from the Cova parish whom Don wishes to thank for their dedicated service to the parish. His household staff are organizing a two-week homeschool camp for their children at Camp Sancta Maria¹⁰⁰ up in Gaylord, which is unoccupied after Labor Day. The children will have daily Mass, and outdoor sports activities including horseback riding, intermingled with their homeschool study sessions.

“So we will sail the Great Lakes in the company of our families and good friends from my family’s parish, which is also your two brothers’ parish. Good company and private time together when we want it. By the time that trip is over, I will be defenseless against you, Misha. Then you’ll pop the question and I won’t be able to say ‘No.’”

“There is no legal drinking age enforced on board a private yacht at sea. Hopefully that will help to lower your resistance, and impair your

¹⁰⁰ www.campsanctamaria.org

judgment just enough.”

“We are going to be praying every day for Heaven’s guidance.”

“There will be daily Mass and Rosary on board. And priestly consultation will be available at all times.”

“Can I trust the advice of a priest who is your brother?”

“No. He may reveal too many things about me, since he will be bound to look out for the good of your soul. So probably I won’t stand a chance of convincing you to marry me.”

“It’s God Who has to do the convincing, Misha. So far, I think He’s already made a big head start.”

“Now, don’t terrify me before we even set sail, young lady.”

The waiter grunted slightly as he poured Mikhail’s fourth cup of American coffee, and Mariya’s third. Mikhail indicated that they were finished except for an after-dinner shot of vodka for him, and sparkling grape juice for her, to toast the end of their evening.

Soon the youthful couple were back in Mikhail’s BMW and on their way downtown to the Peterson condominium. Once home, Mariya enthusiastically recounted the exciting news of the upcoming cruise to her parents. Given the intense press scrutiny that they were all beginning to experience, there was no chance that either George or Katarina or Mariya was likely to encounter any opposition from important superiors at their respective universities for their sudden September absence.

If anything, their emerging popularity in the public eye would only be good for the reputations of their already-well-respected schools. And if insanely jealous colleagues who were not their superiors should become disgruntled, well, that was all in a day’s routine at any university on the planet.