

Chapter Five

Wednesday, May 13, 2015.

Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Doctor Mike, as Mikhail Romanov was known, was feeling the pressure of a busy Internal Medicine office at four-thirty in the afternoon. The clinic was scheduled to close at five o'clock, but there were still three patients waiting to be seen. Nazareth, Michigan might be a sleepy little town, but it was just on the edge of the Kalamazoo metropolitan area; and the Romanov Clinic was just up the road from Borgess Medical Center, a regional trauma center and a teaching hospital for Michigan State University. Luke and Monica, his medical students, were beginning to learn that, in the trenches, practicing medicine was often far from glamorous. It was work. On many days, Doctor Mike would not care if he did not leave work until seven o'clock in the evening. But today was different: he planned on attending a special concert at Miller Auditorium on the campus of Western Michigan University. A young woman from Detroit would be performing a piano and organ recital, the repeat of a performance for which she had won an award in Moscow, Russia, just a few days earlier. Father Kiril, the doctor's brother who was pastor of the Cova in Detroit, had recommended to Mikhail that he attend. The young woman was a Cova parishioner; and her mother, Katarina Fyodovsky, was a world-famous organist and Chair of the Organ Department at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Doctor Mike finally managed to arrive at the auditorium just ten minutes before the program. On the stage was a Steinway concert grand piano, and the auditorium's unique movable pipe organ, housed in four huge cabinets on rollers and connected by cables to the three-manual drawknob-style console. Bouquets of flowers provided a feminine touch to the setting. At exactly eight o'clock, a disembodied bass voice began to emanate from the auditorium sound system.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to Miller Auditorium. Tonight's performance is a repeat of an award-winning recital performed one week ago in Moscow, Russia, by guest piano and organ scholar Mariya Peterson. In Moscow, at the Ninth Annual *Soli Deo Gloria* International Festival-Contest of Young Organists, Miss Peterson received the highest award in the category of combined piano and organ performance. At age eighteen, she is the youngest performer ever to win an award at the distinguished Moscow competition. Miss Peterson is currently a student at Wayne State University School of Music, pursuing a dual major in Organ and Piano Performance. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming to the Miller Auditorium stage Miss Mariya Peterson."

Mikhail was glad to be seated in the tenth row, to the left of center, where he would have a good view of both the piano and organ keyboards. Mariya

entered from stage right, walking briskly with a confidence surprising for her young age. She was dressed in an elegant yet modest shimmering red evening gown. Her red long hair, worn up in a traditional style that added to the maturity of her presence, perfectly crowned her beautifully sculpted face with its engaging blue eyes. Her upper chest and back were completely covered by a cotton shell beneath her gown, accenting her golden crucifix and miraculous medal. Only her lower legs were revealed, and her feet wore a tastefully feminine version of Organmaster shoes, also in red, designed for ease of playing the pipe organ's pedal keyboard. She was obviously an athlete, Mikhail noted, probably a runner. She smiled engagingly at the audience, took her welcoming bow, and then walked to the floor microphone.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am honored to be visiting Western Michigan University, and it is my delight to share with you several celebrated works which I prepared for the recent international organ competition in Moscow. My first piece, on the organ, will be ‘*Tu Es Petra*’ by Henri Mulet. The title is best translated as ‘Thou Art Peter.’ On Mulet’s manuscript he wrote, as a subtitle, ‘Thou art a rock, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ This showpiece toccata begins with urgent, pulsating chords, while a sturdy theme in the pedal undergirds them. The work builds in complexity until it climaxes with a stunning and glorious finale. To me it suggests the Church, beginning like a small mustard seed, and growing over the centuries until it fills the whole world with the blessings brought forth in Western and Eastern Christendom. Henri Mulet was born in Paris in 1878, and entered the *Conservatoire de Paris* at the young age of twelve. His father had been music director at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart – ‘*Sacré Coeur*’, *en français* – in the Montmartre district of Paris, so from a young age his soul was infused with the magnificent beauty of high Catholic culture.”

With that, she turned, mounted the organ bench, and without hesitation struck the opening chords.

Mikhail was no novice when it came to the pipe organ. He was as discerning as anyone in attendance that night. And what he was discerning was a very attractive young woman, who carried herself with dignity and poise and yet with striking modesty. Clearly she was not ashamed to proclaim truths about her Catholic Faith, even to a West Michigan audience that would be at most minimally Catholic. As she played, he felt his soul transported into lofty realms, where the glory of right order – hierarchy – was reflected in the very cosmos itself.

As soon as the rousing final chords of the Mulet masterpiece were ended, the audience leapt to its feet, offering a standing ovation, unusual for an opening work. Mariya smiled with animation and bowed with poise, yet her body language telegraphed a profound humility which Mikhail found powerfully attractive. She gave a similar introduction to each of the works she played, alternating between organ and piano. The audience was treated to a Tchaikovsky piano sonata, J.S. Bach’s monumental Toccata

and Fugue in D Minor for organ, and a Rachmaninoff piano sonata. The audience went wild with applause, demanding an encore. Mariya returned to the stage microphone and began to speak.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so very much for your enthusiastic applause. I am humbled, and so I will share my heart with you. There is one more work which I have prepared, Jehan Alain’s brilliant organ work entitled ‘Litanies.’ Jehan Alain was the son of an organ-builder, and grew up in a family of very talented musicians, including his famous youngest sister, Marie-Claire Alain. Jehan was a prize-winning student of organ at the Paris Conservatory. He began composing at age eighteen, and his compositions were among the most brilliant of the Twentieth Century. Unfortunately, in 1940, his promising career was cut short by his untimely death, as a decorated war hero, at the age of only twenty-nine years. We Twenty-first Century young people look back on the sacrifice of much of Europe’s youth, on the altar of so-called modern progress in World Wars I and II, and wonder in amazement at the horror of it all. But then, when we consider the holocaust of abortion in our own time, we have to wonder yet again how many Alain’s, Bach’s, Beethoven’s, and Tchaikovsky’s have been sacrificed on the altar of modern human selfishness called ‘a woman’s right to choose.’ ‘Litanies’ is a prayer in music, and I have committed to memory what young Jehan wrote on the manuscript: ‘When, in its distress, the Christian soul can find no more words to implore the mercy of God, it repeats, times without end, the same prayer of fervent faith. Reason reaches its limits, and only belief can chase its flight.’”

As she played the tentative opening phrases, and then progressed through the mounting grandeur of Alain’s work to the stunning conclusion of impossibly beautiful discord, Mikhail’s own musical soul was spellbound. He entertained the intriguing intuition that this young woman might be a potential soul mate. He had to meet her. He had to know her. He had to figure out a way.

After the resounding applause died away, the same disembodied bass voice that had welcomed the audience was heard once again, announcing that there would be a reception for Miss Peterson in the second floor foyer, and all were invited to meet the performer. She would be autographing copies of her first organ compact disc, available for purchase, which had been recorded on the W.K. Kellogg Auditorium’s unaltered 1932 romantic masterpiece Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ in nearby Battle Creek, and released on the Detroit classical label of Cova Productions.³⁹

Mikhail not only decided to attend the reception, but to make a point of being the last person in line.

About twenty people lined up to meet her, and most of them purchased a compact disc. Mikhail watched as she demonstrated remarkable maturity for age eighteen, handling the crowd with innate consummate skill. He could sense that she was exhausted, and yet was made of determination to fulfill her obligation to personally engage each person who wanted to

³⁹ In real life, a similar compact disc, featuring former Assumption Grotto Latin Mass choir organist Stephanie Nofar, was produced by Grotto Productions in Detroit. See “Nofar” in Discography.

meet her. Such character was rare in the modern world, he thought. It was a characteristic of old-world royalty who understood that their positions combined privilege with duty to serve selflessly. If this were Nineteenth-Century Europe rather than modern secular America, Mikhail mused, it would not be unreasonable to wonder if she might secretly be a princess.

Suddenly the last couple greeting Mariya began moving away. Just as she began to push back her chair, and sighed with relief, Mikhail rushed up to the table.

“Excuse me, Miss Peterson. Is it too late for one last admirer to meet you?”

“Of course not,” she smiled, though he could tell the smile was forced through her exhaustion.

“My name is Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov. I am a Professor of Medicine for Michigan State.”

“I am honored, Professor. So you are from East Lansing?”

“No, I teach medical students at Borgess Medical Center here in Kalamazoo. My office is out east of the medical center, in Nazareth. Miss Peterson, I have been altogether enthralled this evening by the musicality of your playing. Especially the Alain.”

“Why thank you!” she smiled.

“But I was also intrigued by your soulful rendition of the Tchaikovsky piano sonata. There is no possibility that you could actually *be* part Russian, is there?”

“You flatter me, Professor. But yes, my mother is Russian and my father is of Ukrainian descent. No doubt you are active in music, as well as medicine?”

“Yes, a bit. I sing ... and play, some. But medicine consumes entirely too much of my time these days, and in years past my military career demanded nearly all of my time. Alas, I have never even found time for courtship and marriage.”

“I don’t believe we have ever met, Professor. And yet somehow I almost feel as if I should know you,” she ventured.

“Well, I have a brother in Detroit who is a priest, and a highly respected composer and conductor. On occasion I have been the bass soloist in some of his choral productions.”

“Oh, of course! That would be my family’s pastor, Father Romanov! So then you come from a very musical family, something like the family of Jehan Alain. Which instrument do you play?”

“Organ mainly, and piano secondarily. And of course some harpsichord now and then.”

“Oh dear! Then you probably recognized all my wrong notes! And the haste with which I had to throw together the registrations.”

“I believe I counted a total of two wrong notes. Three at the most. As for the stop selections ... I have played this organ a few times myself, so I know its particular challenges ... and I thought your registrations were masterful. Quite creative, really.”

Mariya blushed. Something about this strikingly handsome athletic

bearded man with an intelligent artistic mind was threatening to sweep her off her feet.

“Your ring bearing a double-headed eagle intrigues me, Professor,” she ventured. “Isn’t that the crest of the Romanov dynasty?”

“Why, yes.”

“Last week in Moscow, I noticed that the Romanov crest seems to be making a rapid resurgence, popping up everywhere in the Russian Federation.”

“It’s a family tradition to wear this ring, to show respect for our family heritage. And it opens conversations with intelligent persons who know their history.”

“So ... are you one of *the* Romanov’s?” she asked.

“Well, yes. That’s what they tell me. But then I tell them that that, plus \$1.99, will get me a medium coffee at Biggby’s.”

She smiled, which encouraged him. And her eyes sparkled, which thrilled him.

“I suppose it had simply never occurred to me, that our dear Father Romanov might actually be a *real* Romanov. But then, he doesn’t wear the Romanov ring.”

“No, priests don’t. And Kiril is clean-shaven, so he looks different than the famous Romanov men of old. Whereas I do have this full beard, useful to hide behind when beautiful young women make me blush.”

“Nevertheless I can certainly see the resemblance between you and our beloved Father Romanov. But you know, Professor ... you actually do bear quite a striking resemblance to Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. Has anyone ever told you that?”

“Since I grew this full beard two years ago, it has been mentioned more than once, when people well-versed in Russian history notice my surname. But more often, people will say I look like George V, the former king of England.”

“Yes, but King George V was a first cousin to Tsar Nicholas II. People often mistook them for brothers, if not identical twins!”

“May I purchase one of your compact discs?” asked Mikhail, seeking to divert her attention away from himself. “And have it autographed?”

“Of course ... oh, but I just sold the last one, right before you came to the table. So I’ll send you one. There are plenty more at Cova Productions, in Detroit. Father Romanov assisted me with the production. So for his brother, it’s free.”

“But then can I still have it autographed?”

“Alright, free and autographed too! Do you have your business card, so I can know where to send it?”

“Of course.”

As Mikhail fished in his pocket for a card, he took a deep breath, and, against his better judgment, decided to take the plunge.

“Uh, Miss Peterson, would you care to go out for refreshments? Somewhere nearby? I know you must be exhausted, but I have so enjoyed making your acquaintance.”

Mariya was momentarily conflicted. It was true she was exhausted. She had planned to drive just ten minutes to her hotel downtown, sleep soundly, and then drive back to Detroit in the morning. Her parents, having heard her perform the very same program in Moscow, and having just returned to work after their trip abroad, had not accompanied her on this overnight trip. So they were not here to chaperone her. But she did not want to leave the presence of this fascinating – and attractive – Romanov gentleman. A professor he might be, but he had a striking military bearing, and a remarkable presence, almost like ... a king.

“Well, to be honest, I am tired.”

Mikhail’s heart sank.

“But I would be so pleased to visit with you longer.”

Suddenly his spirit soared, taking flight like the heart of an adolescent boy in love for the first time.

“I am staying at the Radisson downtown,” she continued, “and I believe there is an all-night café off the lobby. If we could go there, I would feel ... settled. In my own place.”

But she might *never* feel settled again, she feared, after having met this mysteriously unsettling man. And what if being with him should turn out to *be* her place ... for a very long time? How could she even be *thinking* such outrageous thoughts?

The ten minute drive in separate cars, from the Western Michigan University campus to the Radisson in downtown Kalamazoo, took Mikhail and Mariya down Michigan Avenue, past Saint Augustine Cathedral where Mikhail was bass soloist in the Latin Mass Choir and occasional assistant organist. The old Casavant pipe organ in the rear gallery had been rebuilt a decade ago, and now was an up-to-date three-manual instrument of fifty-eight ranks. Mikhail exulted when playing it, as its glorious sound reverberated thrillingly down the vast stone nave.

But the much more important updating, thanks to the forward-looking vision of the new bishop, had been the restoration of the traditional sanctuary at the front of the cathedral. This had entailed the removal of a stark modern wooden screen that had been built, sometime after Vatican II, to hide the magnificent old high altar which graced the front of this 1951 edifice. A huge marbled bishop’s chair had for many years thereafter stood in the rear center of the sanctuary, in front of the wooden screen and behind the modern new table-style altar. This arrangement had essentially put the throne of man in the very location where, since ancient times, the faithful had looked to find and adore the Blessed Sacrament, reserved on the high altar. Some said that the modern arrangement had made the sanctuary eerily reminiscent of a Masonic temple. The elegant gold-plated Tabernacle had been moved from the center of the old high altar to a side chapel, where it was obscured from view for much of the congregation behind a huge stone column.

Now, with the revival of the Mass of all time under Pope Nicholas (the “Tridentine” Mass), the Tabernacle was back on the center of the old high altar; a communion rail with kneelers was restored; and the bishop’s chair

was moved to a dignified position at the side of the sanctuary, allowing Christ (rather than man) to take the central place of honor. Mass could once again be offered “*ad orientum*,” with the priest and people together facing toward God, in the mystical East. The faithful could once again receive communion on their tongues, while kneeling at the altar rail, from the consecrated hands of a priest. And no matter where they sat in the cathedral, they could once again see and adore Jesus, in the Blessed Sacrament, reserved in the gold Tabernacle positioned prominently, front and center, on the old high altar.

The revival of traditional Catholic liturgy, adorned by the treasures of great polyphonic music spanning many centuries and the timeless beauty of Gregorian chant, had drawn a lively community of young and middle-aged people from the university and the city. The Sunday morning high “Tridentine” Mass at the cathedral was now the most-attended Mass in the city. Just as at the Cova parish in Detroit and Saint Thomas More parish in Chicago, orchestral Masses by the great Catholic composers were performed on high feast days a few times per year, sometimes celebrated by the bishop himself.

Mikhail knew that Miss Peterson, a parishioner at the Cova and herself a consummate musician, would be impressed by this progress. He would have to invite her to visit Saint Augustine’s the next time he was to sing the bass solo parts in an orchestral Mass. But wait: he hardly knew her. And already he was assuming he would be seeing her again. And again. He reminded himself that he was Doctor Mike the bachelor, who was accustomed to telling people that he didn’t even know how to date!

They parked side by side in the hotel garage, and walked together through the glass skywalk over the street. They quickly found a corner booth in the quiet wood-paneled café, which overlooked the lobby fountains from the second floor.

“If we were in Europe,” Mikhail began, “I would offer you dessert and a proper drink.”

“Yes. I have to remind myself I am no longer in Europe,” she said. “Here they say I am too young. But I’ll be content with decaf coffee and a rich dessert,” smiled the trim and gorgeous young lady.

“I’ll have the same. But still, a Russian man finds it awkward not to toast new friendship with even one shot of vodka.”

“No doubt. But being out late and un-chaperoned with an older man, it’s best if I remain sober, so that I can keep my wits about me.”

“You should know you have nothing to fear from me, Miss Peterson. It is the shy bachelor like me who trembles when encountering such feminine grace and beauty.”

She blushed, elegantly.

“May I inquire why such a charming gentleman as yourself has never married?”

Mikhail recounted the story of his military service, which had ended only two years ago. It had caused him to postpone any considerations of family life, and now it seemed that most women his age were already

married. And if they were single, all too often they had been divorced, so that he, as a devout traditional Catholic, could not consider marrying them. Mikhail was already thirty-five, and he didn't want to be accused of robbing the cradle. So he figured it was up to God to find him a wife, if He so willed.

"When a young traditional Catholic woman imagines marrying, she naturally thinks about raising a large family, as many children as God sees fit to give. She would rather have a husband who is mature and well established, who can offer security in a lifelong commitment to marriage and children. For us Catholics, romantic love is an added blessing, but not the essence, of the vocation of marriage. So you should never think that younger Catholic women of good character would not find you attractive, Professor."

"Then I may need that shot of vodka after all. Alcohol is quite effective as an anti-panic potion. But ... you are a beautiful young woman, Mariya. Surely you must have a young man whom you admire?"

"Well, I do have one dear friend, Mark, who was a child prodigy on piano and organ, and who is one of your brother's musical protégés at the Cova. He is a few years older than me, and is pursuing a Master's Degree in organ and piano performance at Wayne State, and is my running partner. We've grown up together at the Cova parish, and I love him as my best friend. I am an only child, and Mark and his five siblings have made up for that in my life. But I suspect he may actually have a vocation to the priesthood, though he never admits it to me. So I have not allowed our precious friendship to become a real romance. Nor do I want him to fall prey to the many young women at the university who would steal him away from me in a minute, if they could. He is very handsome and gregarious, with a certain wild streak, and many a young woman would like to snare him and quench any thoughts he might have about the religious life. Then too, I want the young men at school to leave me in peace until I clearly discern my own vocation. So our friendship has been very good for both of us. I believe Mark and I will remain dear friends in some manner all our lives, no matter where God may lead each of us."

"Alas, perhaps I should have been more like this Mark, and sought out a beautiful young woman like you while I still had my youth."

Mariya reached out and took his hand. He felt a thrill, mingled with terror.

"May I call you Mikhail, Professor?"

"Yes, please. Or Mike."

"Well then, I'll call you 'Misha.' The Russian nickname for Michael."

She looked into his eyes and smiled.

"Misha, I do not believe that we are meeting by chance this evening. Each of us carries within us a special grace: a European royal heritage."

"You too? Please, do tell me about it."

"Well, when we were in Russia last week, my parents had a private meeting with the Orthodox Metropolitan of Moscow. He had ordered research on their genealogy beforehand, and determined that my mother

is actually a Russian royal princess, and my father is a Ukrainian royal prince. Neither of them had ever realized that. They actually received an official Russian government report proving that I am full-fledged European princess of royal blood. Imagine that!”

I already did, Mikhail thought to himself, amazed at his previous perceptivity. Perhaps the grace of royalty *was* really real.

“I am not surprised at all,” he responded. “As I watched how you charmed the crowd at the reception, despite being exhausted, I thought to myself that only a princess could handle herself with such poise and grace under pressure, at the age of eighteen. I even imagined that you were a secret princess, posing as a commoner.”

“Oh, you did, did you? Well, I was thinking that you have a royal presence about you ... something like a ... king.”

Mikhail then told her the complex story of his Romanov lineage, just as he had recounted it a few days earlier to his summer term medical students, Luke and Monica, at his clinic in Nazareth.

“So then,” Mariya summarized, “you are the only living male descendant of a Russian emperor, by a direct male line uncompromised by any morganatic marriage? And by Romanov dynastic law that would make you the first in line for the Russian throne?”

“Yes. Except there is no throne anymore in Russia. It’s a democracy. I consider all that Romanov family squabbling over royal titles and potential positions to be unimportant. It is irrelevant in the contemporary world.”

“That’s probably just what they thought in Judea in the time of King Herod,” retorted Mariya. “Think about the story of Jesus, Misha. The Jewish nation had been conquered by Rome, and no longer had a reigning king of its own. But the royal line had continued, and both Mary and Joseph were of the house and lineage of King David. Tradition tells us that Jesus was in fact the heir to the throne, under the rules of dynastic succession in Israel. So it was true not only spiritually but literally that Jesus was born to be King of the Jews. The Holy Family were the forgotten royal family, in internal exile due to the Roman occupation of their homeland. They appeared to be only a humble carpenter in Nazareth, and his pregnant young wife, who were forced to travel to Joseph’s hometown, the City of David, called Bethlehem, because of a Roman census. The world took no notice of the extraordinary grace of the Incarnation by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin Mother, any more than it took note of the Holy Family’s true royal status. By divine Providence, they were brought to Bethlehem just in time for the birth of the Son of David in the City of David. So, while the birth of rightful kings may go unnoticed by the world, royal heirs are not forgotten in Heaven.”

“Well, some people on earth did notice,” said Mikhail. “The Magi came from the East, following a star which, according to the astrological wisdom of the time, announced the birth of the King of the Jews in Bethlehem. We modern scientists have trouble understanding that sort of story.”

“Nonsense, Misha! God set the stars in the heavens from the beginning,

just as He saw fit. And if He chose to write poetry in their positions and relative motions, which would make sense only at a specific time and place on planet Earth, then He certainly could have done so. That's not so hard to believe."⁴⁰

"Well, the man in power, King Herod, didn't like hearing about any newborn kings. He ordered the murder of all possible contenders, the Slaughter of the Innocents in Bethlehem. Apparently it can be very dangerous to inherit power by birth."

"Yes, and Heaven can protect its own chosen rulers. Remember how Joseph was warned by an angel? So the Holy Family escaped into Egypt, their travels financed by the gold brought to them by the Magi."

"True. And then an angel told Joseph when it was safe to go back home to Nazareth, after King Herod had died. But think about what Saint John wrote: 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' The Jewish nation of that day, except for a small remnant who became the first Catholics, rejected their King. Modern Russia is never going to accept a king, either."

"Not unless Russia converts."

"What?"

"Like in the Fatima promise. Do you know about that?"

"Not much. Didn't the Vatican issue some document saying that Fatima is now all in the past?"

"Oh, certain Vatican officials tried hard to create that impression, back in 2000. But a famous Italian journalist, who started out assuming those Vatican officials were telling the truth, performed a thorough investigation and ended up completely changing his mind.⁴¹ He exposed the Vatican 'party line' (that Fatima is all in the past) as an outright lie. Many of us traditional Catholics still think Heaven awaits the Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, by the Pope in union with all the Catholic bishops in the world. Mary promised that eventually it will happen. She said the Holy Father will finally do the consecration as requested, though it will be late, and then Russia will convert and a period of peace will be granted to the world."

"Why can't God just convert Russia any time He wants?"

"He could. But Jesus explained that He wants the whole world to know that Russia's miraculous conversion was brought about through Mary's Immaculate Heart. He wants the world to place devotion to Her Immaculate Heart alongside its devotion to His Sacred Heart."

"Truly that would be remarkable, to see Russia become a devout Christian nation. Yes, Holy Mother Russia might then begin to think about restoring her Christian monarchy. But for now I just think it seems safer to be living in a modern democracy, where no one cares whether I was born to be a king. Nobody in modern America is likely to threaten me because

⁴⁰ Seiss, Joseph Augustus. *The Gospel in the Stars*. (General Books LLC: 2009) 178 pages. Also see *The Star of Bethlehem*, DVD from Stephen McEveety (producer of *The Passion of the Christ*) with presenter Frederick Larson, Genius Entertainment, 65 minutes.

⁴¹ Socci, Antonio, *The Fourth Secret of Fatima*. See Bibliography.

I claim to be the Russian crown prince. No one even cares. No one except a few Romanov cousins, who might imagine that I want to stand in their way of claiming the fictional Russian throne for themselves.”

“Why, what do they say to you?”

“Nothing. I don’t even know them. They have an annual Romanov Ball in New York City, but I never go. I’m not at all active in those circles. They’re all at least nominally Orthodox, of course, and if I did go to the ball they would reject me as a possible heir to the throne.”

“You mean because you’re Catholic?”

“No, because I’m not Russian Orthodox. The Tsar *had* to be Russian Orthodox. Not Catholic, not even Greek Orthodox. In the Russian empire, the Tsar was the head of the national church. The bishops took orders from him. ‘Tsar’ means ‘Caesar,’ and Caesar was also pope.”

“But imagine how different that would be if Russia converted, to come back in union with Rome. I think you should go to the next Romanov Ball, and proudly hold your head up high as a Roman Catholic.”

“Perhaps your faith is greater than mine, Mariya.”

“No, it has been easy for me. I was born and raised Catholic, by two good Catholic parents. You must tell me all about your conversion, Misha. Next time we meet.”

“Next time?” asked Mikhail.

“Well, if you did ever want to see me again, there is a very good chance that I might say ‘Yes.’ You could come down to Detroit. Assuming my parents would approve, that is.”

“They’d never approve.”

“Don’t be silly. I can’t imagine them having any problem with Father Romanov’s very own brother.”

“Ah, but wait until they find out what an old man I am. Kiril is younger than me, remember.”

“You must come visit me, Misha. But now it is late, and I must say good night. I have to drive back to Wayne State early in the morning.”

A look of sadness crept across Mikhail’s countenance. Mariya squeezed his hand, and her eyes twinkled.

“Mikhail Nicholaevich, you know what people would ask about you, don’t you? I mean, if they knew you were born to be the crown prince of Russia.”

“No.”

“Why, the very same question they asked about Our Lord: ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’”⁴²

Mikhail laughed heartily, gave Mariya a chaste squeeze on the shoulders and a light kiss on the forehead, and bowed elegantly in the old world fashion.

“Good night, fair princess. Go with God, until we meet again.”

⁴² John 1:46.