

Chapter Nine

Wednesday, June 3, 2015.

Romanov Medical Clinic, Nazareth, Michigan.

It was late afternoon on a busy Wednesday in June at the Romanov Medical Clinic in Nazareth, Michigan. Doctor Mike had been getting somewhat bogged down, because his medical students, Luke and Monica, despite their eagerness to help, actually doubled the time it took to get each patient seen. That was the price of good medical education. On his computer, Doctor Mike scanned the remaining patients. The next one was a new male patient, who would probably take forty-five minutes. There would be a discussion of his chief complaint, and then a review of his medical history while performing a general physical exam. Blood tests would be ordered, but then the nurse would take over and Doctor Mike could begin his charting. He decided to excuse the students from this last new patient, despite the fact they would learn a lot by attending. Instead, he would assign each of them to see one of the two remaining follow up cases. That way, each student would only have to write up one easier patient, and there would still be hope of getting out of the clinic by six o'clock.

Doctor Mike picked up the chart from the wall pocket outside the door of Exam Room Three. Doctor Alexander Petrovich Kuznetsov, the new patient, was a forty-one year old married Caucasian male, newly arrived in Kalamazoo, with a Ph.D. in Russian history, who was planning to teach at Western Michigan University. He needed ongoing care for his mild hypertension, and had been referred to the clinic by word of mouth. A simple and straightforward case like this would not take long. So Doctor Mike entered the room confidently. Seated on the exam table was a dark haired, trim and fit Caucasian male who appeared to be about forty years old, unusually muscular, with prominent scars across his left cheek and right forearm. There was a diamond stud in his left ear lobe. Doctor Mike thought he looked more like a Russian mafia thug than a professor of history. Strange world.

“Good afternoon, Professor Kuznetsov. Говорите ли вы русский язык? (Do you speak Russian?)”

“Да, но я предпочел бы английский. (Yes, but I would prefer English.)”

“Okay, then. I am Doctor Mike Romanov, a specialist in Internal Medicine. I don't believe we've met before.”

“No.”

“And you've come to see about your blood pressure?”

“Yes, and one other matter.”

“Okay, but let's take one thing at a time. The nurse checked your pressure a few minutes ago, and it was 108 over 70. That's pretty good control, especially for being in a new clinic. Let's see ... your weight is ideal for your height with a muscular build, you don't smoke, you only

drink socially, and you exercise daily. That's all good. You take lisinopril 20 mg and hydrochlorothiazide 25 mg each morning, correct?"

"Yeah."

"Well, then, your medicine is working well for you. Any side effects?"

"Only a little dizziness, if I get up too quickly after I bend over."

"You've learned to live with that?"

"Yeah. It's no big deal."

"Great. I'll order a battery of blood tests to make sure your system is tolerating the medication without problems. Complete blood count with differential, chemistry panel, and cardiac lipid profile. But you'll need to be fasting for fourteen hours in order for some of those tests to be accurate. Can you fast after supper tonight, and come back tomorrow morning before you eat anything?"

"Sure, doc."

"Good. And what other matter concerns you today?"

"Your future."

"What?"

"You are in great danger, Mikhail Nicholaevich Romanov. I have been instructed to warn you."

Doctor Mike suddenly felt as if he had been punched in the abdomen. Memories of desperate moments in the war zones momentarily flashed through his mind. But almost immediately, his special forces training brought him back into complete self-control.

"Perhaps you are not really a professor of history, sir?"

"Not at the university, no. But I could tell you some real interesting history. About what happened to other men who refused to show respect for my employers."

"Yeah, well let me tell *you* something, punk. Up until two years ago I was a special operations Marine with classified training in martial arts and self-defense. You think you are strong, but I can take you down off that table and in ten seconds have you permanently disabled."

"Hey, doc, cool down, man. I never said *I* was going to hurt you. I'm just here to pass along a warning. From some very important people. People who don't like to get their hands dirty, and don't like to get their names in the news connected with anything shady."

"Okay, I know what this is about. When I was in Afghanistan I turned in those three Air Force pilots who were running drugs back to the mainland, using body bags and coffins stolen out of the back of my field hospital. You probably work for some politicians who get paid off to protect the dealers those pilots were supplying. Right?"

"Wrong. This has nothing to do with drugs."

"What, then?"

"Dancing. And religion."

"Look don't mess with me, punk. I'm in automatic attack mode right at the moment."

"It's a message from the Romanov Nobility Organization. Uh, just

certain members, actually. The organization wants you to know you are welcome to attend the upcoming ball in New York, and to bring your lady friend and her parents too. A lot of them want to meet you.”

“Okay, so they sent you?”

“Well, let’s just say certain members sent me, on their own. Ones who have a better than average understanding of what it takes to defend a dynasty. See, they don’t like it that you are Catholic.”

“What business is that of theirs?”

“They know all the details about how you could claim to be the first in line for the Russian throne. But the trouble is you are not Orthodox anymore. That could do real damage to the Romanov family reputation over in Russia. The Tsar *has* to be Orthodox.”

“Well you can tell them I haven’t been planning to claim any thrones anytime soon.”

“Well, that’s good, as a matter of fact, ‘cause the family voted that if you just wanted to forever renounce any claim to the Russian throne, publicly and in writing, then you can be left alone. But you can never go back to Russia again, either. The family can’t risk having people over there getting to know and like you any better.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then you have to become Orthodox again, in case the throne gets reinstated and people start to say you are first in line.”

“And if I also refuse that?”

“Then the family will strip you of any rights to the Russian throne. They just held a vote on that. But certain family members want you to know that you should be very worried. You never know when a person is going to have an unfortunate accident, and wind up dead.”

“Wow.”

“So what’ll it be, doc? I have to tell something to the people who sent me.”

“Tell them I will humbly accept their gracious invitation to attend the Romanov Nobility Ball, and to invite the young lady, and her parents, whom I named in my recent letter to the organization. Naturally, I can’t say yet whether they will agree to go. As for the rest, that will take some time to decide.”

“Yeah, well, they said you’d probably need some time. You’ll get up to thirty days after the ball to tell them your final decision.”

“I’ll be talking with many of the Romanov’s face to face at the ball. So tell those ‘certain members’ of the family that they don’t need to send any more punks posing as patients.”

“If they have to send any more punks, doc, it won’t be to talk to you.”

After the clinic closed and the medical students were sent on their way, Doctor Mikhail Romanov telephoned his little brother, Father Kiril Romanov, at the Cova down in Detroit.

“Kiril, this is Mike. I think I’m going to need some advice from a

good priest.”

“I’m always here, Mike. Listen, why don’t you come down to Detroit this weekend? I’ll talk with you all you need, but I also need your help. We’re doing Haydn’s ‘Mass in Time of War’ this coming Sunday, and we already had the dress rehearsal with the orchestra, and now my bass soloist has to back out due to a personal emergency.”

“I’ll do it for you, little brother. We did the same Mass at Saint Augustine’s not more than a year ago, so I can brush up on the bass solos pretty easily.”

“Mike, what’s going on?”

“I heard Mariya Peterson play here in Kalamazoo a few nights ago. She is incredibly talented for her young age. And beautiful.”

“Mike, we wouldn’t be thinking about robbing the cradle, now would we?” Kiril chuckled.

“Like I said, Kiril, I need to talk with a good priest. I’ll come down Saturday morning.”

“Meet me Saturday noon for lunch at my office in the rectory, Mike, and we can talk all you want.”

Mikhail figured he’d save the news concerning the threat until he was actually with his brother.