

He never knew when his father would blow pipe smoke into his face. No, Der Alte was a nicer man.

And indeed, they sat there long after Adi had tasted all of the spoonful of honey and felt happy with Der Alte's old hand resting on his knee.

After a considerable part of an hour had passed, he began, however, to feel less comfortable. Would his father begin to wonder where he was? Yet, when he stirred, Der Alte said a few words which aroused the same sense of surprise as turning a page in a book and right there before you is a nice picture.

"Do not tell this to anyone," said Der Alte, "but I am trying to make one little bee very happy. I have asked this bee to live by itself close by me. I will tell you. I keep it in the kitchen."

"Does it try to talk?"

"It can make sounds. For certain!" Der Alte smiled. "But no, dear boy, I do not try to encourage this little bee to speak our language. That is certainly too much to ask. I just try to make her happy. Which is not so easy. Because now that I have selected her, she must live alone in a small queen box I use for her even if she is not a queen."

"My father says that bees live only for other bees. They are—" he searched to remember the expression—"they are dedicated to the community."

"Your father is correct. Yes. Bees live in a hive. They do not seek to live alone."

"Even if they are fed good things all the time?"

"You are the smartest boy I know. You are full of understanding. I did want to see what would happen if I were to select one bee and keep her warm and most well-fed, and think about her all the time with all the good feeling that is in my heart. So, when I go into the other room, I take care to speak to her. That is twenty times a day. She cannot comprehend what I am saying. But I want her to know that I am thinking of her. Sometimes I even take her out of the Queen box."

"Doesn't she fly away?"

"Oh, no. I prevent such a possibility." He touched the boy's head tenderly. "When I remove it from its little box, it jumps around, it is so merry, but it knows it must not try to fly."

"Does it have no wings?"

There was a pause. "No longer does it have wings."

Adi knew. No need to ask. Such a mix of good feelings and bad. His happiest feelings were trying to lift themselves above the bad ones. He asked now to look at the bee in the little box.

It was little and frisky and jumped about in excitement when Der Alte opened the box. Indeed, it hopped onto the tip of the old man's finger which had been dipped into honey.

"I do not know how much more will happen," said Der Alte. "What I am attempting is difficult. I see little chance for success. But how wonderful if I can brighten the feelings of this little creature. After all, before my intervention, she was insignificant. Can I lift her now to a level her sisters cannot attain? I feel for her. She is so lonely. She misses the horde. She is loneliness itself. But I am ready to try to bring the sweetness of relief. That can come only when terrible loneliness is replaced by well-being. Yes," he said, nodding his head most profoundly.

"Oh," said Adi, "I hope you are able to do that. It is so sad to be lonely. Sometimes I, too, am lonely. So, I know. But I feel afraid for this bee. Will it die?"

"Sooner or later, it must. It will. But I would like to see if I can make her happy for a little while."

"Yes," said Adi, "I understand. You love this one."

"Maybe," said Der Alte. He sighed. "Next time you visit, we will see if I have made progress."

Is Der Alte entering his senility? No! This outlandish pursuit of "well-being" for one isolated bee, an obviously stupid procedure—particularly after it has lost its wings, is not without purpose. For the Maestro, that is. The oddest experiments reveal much to us. Freaks can be a fount of information.

I will say one outcome became clear. Our wingless embodiment of loneliness died before Adi saw her again. What is also to the point: Der Alte and Adi had tears in their eyes on the boy's next visit and were closer than ever. Count on it. Der Alte had decorated a small matchbox to serve as a coffin for the bee, and the old man and the boy then laid it into the earth under a spoonful of dirt.

healthy. While a few dead bees lay on the lowest platform of the good hive, a tumble of minuscule carcasses was on the floor of the other.

Of one, just below the warm nest, Alois, by way of the robber bees, had found a great deal of surface humming in this second colony. It worried him. Now, even to extinction, food droppings were visible near the hive entrance, and many of the brood cells were empty. Had the queen died? He did not really know how to locate the she was, after all, only a bit larger than her own worker bees, smaller, indeed, than the drone.

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Early in March, a week arrived that brought the sun to Hafeld every day. The hives began to stir, and the hardiest of the winter bees came out to forage. It was likely that the queen was now laying eggs out of her well-kept stores of semen from fornications consummated high in the air last summer. Now, one hive began to weigh more each morning. That worried Alois. The other should be doing as well.

He decided to open the top of each Langstroth box and look in. Whereupon, he discovered exactly what he had been fearing. The two colonies might have sat on the same bench through the winter, but it seemed as if that was all they shared. One was thriving, the other could not be termed

healthy. While a few dead bees lay on the lowest platform of the good box, a tumble of miniscule carcasses was on the floor of the other.

Of late, just before the warm spell, Alois, by way of the rubber tube, had heard a great deal of restless humming in this second colony. It worried him. Now, open to examination, fecal droppings were visible near the hive entrance, and many of the brood combs were empty. Had the queen died? He did not really know how to locate the lady—she was, after all, only a bit larger than her own worker-bees, smaller, indeed, than the drones.

He would have been dispirited, but his acumen had also been confirmed. He had not worried for too little. It looked like one or another dread disease that could lay task to a hive.

So Alois decided that the remaining bees of this colony had to be gassed in order to protect the good hive. He was ready to call on Der Alte for assistance but decided that he would not. His winter-long worries had engendered their own kind of fortitude.

He chose a Saturday. Adi and Angela, home from school, were his assistants, and the process was not difficult. He took a small cake of sulphur, part of the equipment he had purchased five months ago, lit it, and left it to

smoke on the floor of the bad hive. The entrance was plugged, the hive lid at the top was laid on again, and the gas did the job quickly enough. When Angela began to weep over the death of the poor bees, Alois sent her inside. But Adi watched, sitting beside Alois on an adjoining bench, his eyes alive in response to his father's lecture. "In nature," said Alois, "there is no mercy for the weak. Your big sister is silly. To become so upset!"

"I am not bothered," said Adi.

"Good," said Alois. "Now, let us go and empty this box and clean the combs."

Adi found himself thinking of Der Alte's one lonesome bee, now dead, and that did bring tears to his eyes.

But, of course, there was no comparison. He blinked back those tears. It was clear to Adi: Der Alte had loved one little bee, but the sick ones here in this bad hive dirtied the place where they ate and where they slept. No comparison.

That night, by way of a suggestion from the Maestro, I prepared a small dream-etching, simple enough to be installed by the best of my local Hafeld agents. It was a repetitive dream in which his father asked Adi to count each

and every one of the dead bees. To make sure of the number, Adi was told to lay them out in rows, one hundred to each row—a tedious dream to be certain, and in the morning, he was almost late in leaving for school since it took many minutes to awake. All the same, he was proud of the high number he had managed to count in the dream. There had been at least forty rows of one hundred bees, all laid out on an immaculate white cloth. He had not realized until now that he could count to four thousand. No one else in his class would come near. His only regret was that he had not finished his dream. There had been many more mounds of dead bees to count.

Here, I would warn the reader not to make too much of the gassing nor the body count. It is not to be understood as the unique cause of all that came later. For a dream-etching, no matter how artful, leaves but a dot upon your psyche, a footprint to anticipate a future sequence of developments that may or may not come to pass in decades to come. Most dream-etchings are not unlike the abandoned foundations one can see on the outskirts of Third World cities. Left to molder for lack of further funds, they lie there, excavations on a scraggly field.

It would be a gross mistake, then, to assume that this dream-etching determined all that was to follow. I assure you we would be the first to applaud if matters were that simple.

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The good hive was another matter. It was thriving. The weight of the colony increased each week, and the honey comb began to fill up. From his books, Alois had learned that each of these miniscule cells was capped with wax by the worker bees only when the water content in the honey had been reduced to less than 20%. To blow off each surface water, the hive had to fan their wings for hours every day. Alois felt intoxicated all over again by the dedication of his newborn creatures to such never-ceasing chores. To sweeten his mood, the first honey was also ready, and now his bees were capping the cells—just as they were supposed to!

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Out in his white garments with the big box-like white veil over his head, protected by his gloves, Alois began to feel as if he was acquiring a bit of real technique. It was, after all, not so simple to pull combs out for examination, then slide them back again. He certainly didn't want to be such a lummoX as to squash his Queen if she happened to be moving around in the area. Indeed, the confidence he gained from these results took him over to Der Alte's hut long enough to purchase a new Queen to replace the lady who had been gassed in the other Langstroth box.

Der Alte even gave him a lesson on how to spot the present Queen. It was not too difficult when she was laying her eggs into empty cells, for she would be followed by a retinue who hovered over each deposited egg long enough to discharge their own enzymes onto the larva. "Magical fortifiers," Der Alte was quick to say.

Alois had to submit to the lecture but he returned with not one but two new queens, (both impregnated in the past year). One would establish a colony for the box that had been fumigated, and the other was to be installed in the one Alois had built himself last Fall. Some of his combs of new brood together with combs of new honey would now be transferred to the two empty

boxes. All three would now be partially filled, and that was also to the good. Each colony could now build wax cells for their new brood and storage cells for their new honey. If he had lost one colony to gassing, he would soon be able to consider himself the master of three, all flourishing—could that be? Of course, he had had to lay out good money to be able to speak of such success.

All the same, he began to feel a cautious optimism. This spring might yet prove good to him. April had come. Flowers were sprouting, the walnut trees, the oaks, the plum trees, the beeches and cherry trees, the maples and apple trees were in bloom. There would be a host of flowers in the meadow.

He liked to sit by his hive boxes with Adi beside him, the boy carefully covered and veiled in an outfit Klara had put together. Father and son now delighted in keeping watch at the entrance to each hive where guard bees stayed on post. Every last bee who came back with pollen and honey was carefully sniffed by one of the guards before she could enter. On occasion, Adi would begin to hoot because the guard would drive a visitor away. "Look, Father," he would say, "she doesn't smell right."

Yet, with all these incoming riches, Alois still kept serving food to the colonies. "Now we feed them honey," Alois told the boy, "so they will make

even more honey." Five trays had already filled with combs in each of the three hives. And three queens were working in three separate hive boxes to deposit their eggs in cells, and the foragers were flying missions from morning to dark. Each forager would return with its load every few minutes, and then was out again. Alois had read that it took forty thousand such voyages to accumulate two pounds of honey.

Sometimes he would look at the old bees who had lived through the winter in the good box. They were easy to notice. They were battered relics with frayed wings, worn-out from over-use. The hair was gone from their bodies. Still ready to forage at the beginning of this season they were now expiring. Each morning a team of new-born worker bees would collect whichever bodies had fallen to the ground floor of the box and sweep them from the guards' entrance, then off the ramp. Alois could hardly mourn their passing. Young stock was taking their place. He felt as if he had finally begun his venture into apiculture. The new bees would be his, not Der Alte's. He did not dwell on the fact that all three of his queens had been fertilized a year ago, and so, in that sense, were Der Alte's children.

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Given a splendid morning in May, with a host from each of the three colonies in the air, Alois began to notice a pattern in the movement of one bee. This scout—or whoever she was—kept making figure-eights in the air.

"She is signaling to the others," Alois said to himself. "She is trying to show them something."

He was right in this observation, he knew it, because a good number of other bees had joined the first, and off they flew toward the head of the meadow. On the other side of that rise, as Alois soon discovered on his walk, wildflowers had sprouted overnight. The bee he had observed was indeed a scout.

An old lust came back then. If there was one thing Alois had always wanted from life even more than a new woman, it was to be the discoverer of a new concept, something so startling and so valuable that his name might even be honored across time.

The desire still resided in him. It gave him considerable happiness to think that he had just discovered a new concept by the use of his eyes alone! He had seen what he would call a signal-dance. One bee was looking to bring others to a place where flowers full of nectar were waiting. Bridesmaids, you could say, all lined up to be deflowered by the wedding ushers. But these hard-working foragers could not be called ushers. They were girlies, making love to flower-girlies. A joke, but his own joke, and he enjoyed it. In none of the books he had read so far had he seen any mention of this little dance, this wig-wag in the sky. He was twice afraid to mention it to Der Alte, once—because for all he knew—it might be already an established concept among apicultural cognescenti, or, to the contrary, if brand new, might not Der Alte know better than himself just where to publish the observation?

Alois did permit himself to entertain the hope that Alois-Junior might yet use his intelligence to work well for his father's ideas. Yes, let the son

become as worthy as the father! How much Franz Josef had wanted that. Sorrow came to Alois at the thought of the Emperor's pain in the hour he learned that Rudolph, his own Crown Prince, had died at Mayerling after perpetrating a murder and suicide, or double suicide—whatever it had been?—with his young mistress. What a blow for the good man, the Emperor-father. And tragedy for Sisi, the beautiful Empress. How she must have loved her son Rudolph.

These sad thoughts had a curious effect. They left Alois feeling so full of enterprise that he decided to visit Der Alte and ingest a little instruction on how to locate the Queen bees.

Der Alte was certainly skillful—it had to be said. He opened one of his hives, scanned the racks, located the Queen, reached in with a bare hand, and grasped her wings carefully and most delicately between thumb and forefinger. "In a few years," he said, "you, too, will be employing this approach to capture, but for now, I will show you a safer method." Of course, he proceeded then to discourse on all the methods and modes of discerning just where the queen might be, whether depositing eggs, or fertilizing them one after another in their new cells, or, sometimes, resting in her court.

"Once located, it is simple," said Der Alte, "to capture our Lady."

"This, as I understand," said Alois, "will be most necessary when I look to collect my honey."

"Exactly," said Der Alte. "That is a time when you are moving many frames, and scraping the wax covering away from the honey cells. A careless move can crush the queen. So,"—to Alois' annoyance, Der Alte wagged a finger at him—"so," he repeated, "we do not go first for the honey, no, we locate the Queen like the good fellows we are, and then we use this queen-catcher, this glass." He took up a glass tube with a flat concave dome at one end. "This is what you lay over the queen," he said, "and then you slip a little queen-cage"—he held up just such a small flat container, two inches long—"underneath and blow the queen right into the cage, punkt! Now she is safe. She can stay in the cage until the honey has been removed."

We can be certain that Alois practiced catching the queen. Indeed, he spent an afternoon apprehending and releasing each of his three beauties, finding them, putting the flat dome-like end of the tube most carefully over one or another, and then blowing her right into the little queen-cage.

movement of the clouds. Soon after, he had to run back to strip the tarpaper away for the sun was out again and the day had returned to warmth.

During one more freezing cold spell, he caught a cold. That offered a collateral worry. Was it impossible that one of his "children" might also catch a cold? In sympathy with the overlord? He shook himself. Such nonsense!

There it occurred to Alois that this return of his fears might not be entirely silly. What if it were a reflection of how he felt about the condition of his true health? Was he coming nearer to his -15- It was the worst thought to have.

His imagination now entered a sphere he had never allowed himself to

approach. Alois' fine spirits waned with the loss of warm weather. A cold spell arrived, cruel to the expectation aroused by early spring. Alois now girded himself for all his gains to be lost by this out-of-season chill upon the earth.

An old axiom returned to him. Johann Nepomuk used to say, "Spring is the season that will betray you most" and here certain that religion was there

sure. So there were days when he came close to exhausting himself through the to-and-fro of removing tar-paper from the top of each hive, only to put it back again if the light at high noon might go dim in the sky, so abrupt was the

movement of the clouds. Soon after, he had to run back to strip the tarpaper away for the sun was out again and the day had returned to warmth.

During one near-freezing cold spell, he caught a cold. That offered a collateral worry. Was it impossible that one of his Queens might also catch a cold? In sympathy with the overlord? He scolded himself. Such nonsense!

Then it occurred to Alois that this return of his fears might not be so silly. What if it were a reflection of how he felt about the condition of his true health? Was he coming nearer to his end? It was the worst thought to have. His imagination now entered a matter he had never allowed himself to approach. All through the years, so far as he could remember, death had not seemed threatening to him. A dull end to a good life, maybe, but nothing to do with hell.

Now, however, one damn question was following another. What if death was not as he had assumed? He had been certain that religion was there for a very good practical reason. It couldn't be simpler—you had to keep the weak and unruly in order. But a man of pride (such as himself) could do as he chose.

Now, he was feeling panic of a new sort. His heart took a leap at the thought, one fearful leap as if his chest had been pummeled. Could guilt be real?

Poor Alois. He was now there for the taking. No Cudgel would bother to protect him. I could have the tried-and-true pleasure of appearing to him in a dream. I would offer an impersonation of a guardian angel. I did not even have to be present. It might be easy enough for the best of my three agents to bring it off.

But to what end? Would Alois be worth the maintenance?

The sober fact, which we do well not to ignore, is that people of Alois' age are rarely a prize. Their utility is limited. They are too fixed in their nature to warrant much molding, whereas flexibility is what we look for in exciting new clients. Their aims must be redirected with ours.

On those special occasions when we do choose a man or woman over fifty, we look for a serviceable warp in their psychic framework that we can employ for a specific purpose. Repetitive irritations are one example. A mean old lady who keeps asking everyone whether they want something to eat when

she knows that they don't, can unhinge a good family. They grow uneasy at their increasing desire to smother her with the nearest pillow.

Alois, however, was too average a human product. There was little need to pick him up now. Milk runs would be enough. Let my agents hover just above his dreams.

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Early in May, the weather turned warm again, and many of Alois' wounds
healed. In part he had already recovered some of his good spirits by cleaning
and oiling the tools he had brought in the fall from Der Alte, and this chore he
performed in much the manner of a good soldier who takes his rifle apart in
order to oil it and put it back together again.

My three agents, having little to report, filed their latest
communications with him of his tools and did this so thoroughly that I grew
tired of their enumerations of pollen brushes, hatching cages, bee-smokers, a
water sprayer, a waxing box (whatever that was) a hive-tool, even a honey-
strainer made by Alois himself out of beech-wood. And then there was a spar-

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Early in May, the weather turned warm again, and many of Alois' woes eased. In part he had already recovered some of his good spirits by cleaning and oiling the tools he had bought in the fall from Der Alte, and this chore he performed in much the manner of a good soldier who takes his rifle apart in order to oil it and put it back together again.

My Hafeld agents, having little to report, filled their latest communications with lists of his tools and did this so assiduously that I grew irked at their enumerations of pollen feeders, hatching cages, bee-smokers, a water sprayer, a mating box (whatever that was!) a hive-tool, even a honey-stirrer made by Alois himself out of beech-wood. And then there was a spur-

wheel embedder for preparing the foundation of the insertable frames, as well as a capping fork—a slew of details which provided no interest for me.

Klara, in contrast, knew how to make better use of spring in Hafeld. She was not always counting how many of the brood nests were filled with new pupae, nor was she worrying about the temperature within the hives. Now that it had turned warm on a second wave of sun and undulant air, she was ready to loosen some of the knots that had coagulated in her limbs that winter. "God, too, is taking His rest," she said to herself even as she drew in a breath of air through the open window of her kitchen, and then, on impulse, with much left to do in the house, she picked up Paula, four months old, and went out into the meadow. The loveliest of silences prevailed, wholly without sound, no, rather it was a silence that took in the lightest caress of air, and she could even hear the swaying of the grass in the field, and all but hear the curtsies of the flowers. It was as if the sum of these tender sensations was there to contain the silence of these hills. "Listen to how quiet it is," she said to Paula, "listen, little angel, and you will hear the flowers whisper." And, indeed, it seemed to her as if the nearest ones had heard what she said, for

indeed they began to incline toward her, the most cheerful little daisies she had ever seen.

The breeze had not been enough to cause a stirring in these wildflowers. She knelt in the grass, the infant in her arms, and spoke to the daisies, "You are beautiful, all of you," she said, and, yes, there was no mistaking, these flowers were moving for her. They were doing a dance, the tiniest dance. "Yes, Paula," she said, "these flowers love you and love me because we like them so much. Is it not so, you little dears?" She was ready to vouch for this (although to whom?—certainly not Alois) that they had heard her, and indeed, they bowed delicately as if she had been waiting on them. "Yes, they are little princesses," she said to Paula, and had to laugh at herself for feeling—was this pure madness itself?—for feeling that the daisies were not only dear to her, but that she was dear to the daisies. "Oh, I am one big silly," she said aloud. But she could not help herself. She still believed that these white petals were listening. The balm of the air was like love, yes, exactly like the love she felt for the four-month-old in her arms. Klara's body was returning to her, or so it felt. The old poked-out, wounded, bruised and stupid body of all the winter months since Paula had been born, now felt sweet with the beginnings of true

repair. She told herself that it was Spring, and nature herself was enjoying a party. How could it be otherwise? Each breath was full of balm. God was near and He was in the air, her Good God, full of radiance. Yet, the air was at peace. Could it be that God was resting on His laurels? And so He deserved. He deserved so much. She wanted to pray to Him then, but did not know how since she did not wish to ask for anything at this moment, merely to praise Him for being so good, and that was better done in church. There, everyone else would be doing the same so it could be understood as humble, not vain, whereas here she was all alone with Paula and the flowers, and full of such happiness. For she was thinking of all the young boys and girls of her childhood and of those rare occasions when they would romp and play just like these sweet crazy bees flying around the house now and so happy to be out in the sun after living in a dungeon all through winter, crazy now with the joy that they could turn somersaults in the air, free of all duties, free of their tasks for a little while. Indeed, like Paula they were new to sunshine.

And Klara thought of the years to come when Paula would be ready to play, and that left her full of love for little Edmund who was so kind to the baby, the only one of the children who was. Angela couldn't really care

(although she was dutiful enough) and Adi was a worry—once she had seen him pinch Paula's cheek hard enough to make her cry. Klara had spanked him for that, one sharp slap across his little seat, but she wouldn't do it again in any kind of hurry. For who would think? He had glared back at her—the prince of princes, so strong a look that she had to use all the strength of her eyes to stare him down.

It was too beautiful a day to think of that moment of misery—so intense it had been—no, she would rather thank God for having given her so sweet a baby, a daughter who would yet grow up, so she knew, to be her own good sweet best friend. And she even said as much aloud to Paula. "May the angels hear me," she whispered to her child before she turned back to the house and her duties.

BOOK VII

THE CORONATION OF NICHOLAS II

If I am to remain the reader that I was as a protagonist. Moreover, I will remain Adolf Hitler's guide for decisions to come, and so his future development will, to a great degree, be dependent on mine. Since the eight months in Russia from late 1895 to the early summer of 1896 became a serious element in my development as a high devil, I was considerably more ready afterward to foresee the outcome of large events—which is an instinct that only the highest devils are able to develop. Needless to add that by the 1930s, Hitler had developed similar talents. What I learned about Russian Grand

Dulst over my eight months in Russia later proved convertible to my understanding of German customs. While such gentlemen are usually more powerful to influence than royal figures, they prove equally vain, and Adolf's developed gifts were able, when necessary to play to such men's vanities.

I also learned how to manipulate the will of the people. I speak of the blind will of the people. When properly incited, they are eager to enter the ranks of the mad. It need not be debated whether this was of use to Adolf.

I also learned a good deal about -1- his strengths and his increasing weakness. In 1942 a decision had to be made whether to activate the gas

If I am now ready to disrupt the narrative by my move to Russia, I would also remind the reader that I, too, am a protagonist. Moreover, I will remain Adolf Hitler's guide for decades to come, and so his future development will, to a great degree, be dependent on mine. Since the eight months in Russia from late 1895 to the early summer of 1896 became a serious element in my development as a high devil, I was considerably more ready afterward to foresee the outcome of large events—which is an instinct that only the highest devils are able to develop. Needless to add that by the 1930s, Hitler had developed similar talents. What I learned about Russian Grand

Dukes over my eight months in Russia later proved convertible to my understanding of German tycoons. While such gentlemen are usually more powerful in essence than royal figures, they prove equally vain, and Adolf's developed gifts were able, when necessary to play to such men's vanities.

I also learned how to manipulate the will of the people. I speak of the blind will of the people. When properly incited, they are eager to enter the ranks of the mad. It need not be debated whether this was of use to Adolf.

I also learned a good deal about God's strengths and His increasing weakness. In 1942, a decision had to be made whether to activate the gas chambers in the concentration camps—a daunting move even for Nazis, but Adolf was ready. God would not be equipped to punish him. Certainly not at once!

If there are readers who still will say, "I don't care for this. I want to go on with what is happening in Hafeld," I do have a reply. "That is your right," I can tell them. It is now your book. You are holding it in your hands. So, feel free, if you must, to ignore Russia. Just turn to page _____. Adolf Hitler's story will pick up again right there. It is just that you will learn less about devils and a good bit less about me."

-2-

The beauty of the spring day when Klara felt so happy holding Paula, happened to coincide (even to the hour) with the Coronation of Nicholas the Second. Indeed, the same early summer warmth was in the Moscow air. Even after I came back to Hafeld in June, this fine period continued across much of Europe, and these long sunny days were compatible with my recollections of the Coronation and the days that followed.

As I have stated, I was the one to suggest to the Maestro that any direct attack we mounted on the crowning event was not likely to succeed. We could, of course, initiate many an episode. Nowhere in Europe could we field as many agents and clients as in Russia. A number were of high rank. We possessed more than one Grand Duke and Duchess among the several

branches of the royal family. We infested the Okhrana. We certainly had more agents among these secret police than did the Cudgels. We also had government ministers who were as loyal to us as hounds slavering over kibble. We were well-installed among all the royal families of Europe, not to mention the nobility and/or the generals. Nouveau riches lay before us like an open whore. Tycoons were among our most valued and protected clients. We also had our share of anarchists, nihilists, and terrorists. When it came, therefore, to calling upon such actors, we knew that if we were ready to accept the cost, we could bring off a major disruption on Coronation Day.

Nonetheless, I was opposed to such ventures. Our losses, as I saw it, could be immense, and sympathy might well be created for the new Tsar. So, I dared to propose to the Maestro that we postpone our attack until the Peasants' Festival which would take place four days later. When the Maestro accepted my proposal, my delight was, however, mixed with woe. What if I was wrong? Did I begin to comprehend the monumentality of Russia? Not only could we muster our hordes of devils, but Moscow and St. Petersburg now held a large assembly of angels. Never had I felt the D.K.'s presence so directly. It was obvious—God wanted this Coronation to succeed! I knew we

would pay heavily for any direct offensive. This lay upon my judgment with all the weight of a hard fact—a stone too heavy to lift. Moreover, a large source of my dread remained. Was even the Maestro able to explain God's immense commitment to this Coronation?

In recent years, the Lord had invested in a variety of Russian people and Russian causes. Attention had been paid to Monarchists and to Republicans, to the most established aristocrats and to revolutionaries who were ready to die for the honor of overthrowing these overlords. Nor for that matter, did He ignore the Pope and the Vatican (but then, neither did we!) He was open to the calls of liberty and to the injunctions of autocracy. As the Maestro once remarked, "It is not difficult to hear the workings of His Mind. 'I may make My mistakes,' He says, 'but I do pay attention to who wins. That is the best way to discover what works.' "Why, after all," added the Maestro, "did He give liberty to men and women? Obviously, the Dummkopf wanted to obtain some notion of what He had actually put together."

The Maestro might be enjoying his irony, but what if God had decided that His best prospects now rested on the need for a Tsar who could enjoy a close alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church? So, He was encouraging a

monumental ceremony that would fortify Crown and Cross. Guided by Him, the new young Tsar might even be able to obtain some purchase on the vast if inchoate energies of the Russian people.

If true, this was an amazing decision. To depend on Russia—so invested with corruption. So teeming with injustice! It was what we looked to find. We searched for injustice. It was a yeast to inspire hatred, envy, and the loss of love. If we had an all-purpose rule of thumb, it was to encourage injustice wherever we could. For rare was the man or woman who did not possess an intense sense of the injustice done to them each day. It was our taproot to every adult. It was a fury in every child. Our work would fall apart if humans ever came to brood as intensely upon the injustice others might be suffering.

I concluded, therefore, that an answer might be found in the young man who would soon be crowned. Was there something angelic about him? I made a request to the Maestro: Could I devote my efforts to learning as much about Nicholas as was possible? "Do what you can," was the reply. I could hardly decide whether I was being promoted, or abandoned.

As I soon learned, it would not be routine to approach this Nicky—which is how everyone in his large family referred to him. Nicky had a beautiful Danish mother, Empress Marie, the widow of his recently dead father, Tsar Alexander the Third, and four Grand Dukes for uncles, as well as brothers, sisters, cousins and in-laws. So far as one could discern, these relatives seemed surprisingly fond of him.

But I could not, as I say, come near. I had never encountered a human being so well guarded by squadrons of angels. Usually, I can call upon keen senses that enable me to take in the spiritual weight of a human being. From the far end of a large room, I can perceive flaws of character in the corner of a nostril or the ridges of an ear. Yet, I do not look to muster these fine senses for all occasions. Satanic existence would be enervating if we were always obliged to operate at our highest level of readiness. Instead, we only call upon these gifts when the need is present to learn a good deal quickly about a particular man or woman.

I was not able to approach Nicky, however—too many Cudgels. Once again, I had to rely on materials that our Russian devils had picked up from royal valets working in the palaces of St. Petersburg or serving in the churches

and offices of the Kremlin. They were able to provide copies of numerous letters and diaries. It seemed as if everyone in every royal family of Europe was writing letters to parents, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, and intimates. In addition, they kept diaries. The Tsarevitch, soon to be Nicholas the Second, had made an entry in his embossed little book every day from boyhood on. By the time of the Coronation he felt so close to Alix (his soon-to-be Tsarina Alexandra) that she was always by his side. Literally. His diary was not only open to her perusal, but to her additions. She added entries to many of his pages.

I was fascinated. These two young people were related to the highest monarchs in Europe. Alix might be only a princess from Hesse, but her mother, Alice, had been one of Queen Victoria's three daughters, and when Alice died, Alix was only seven years old. Queen Victoria then paid loving attention to the child and brought her to England on frequent visits.

There was also Wilhelm the Second, who would yet become the much-reviled Kaiser Wilhelm of World War I. He happened to be married to Queen Victoria's oldest daughter. So, he was Alix's uncle. She called him Uncle Willy. The English prince who would yet become King George the Fifth of

England was Nicky's cousin. In time, King George's oldest son would become Edward the Eighth until he abdicated the throne to marry Wallis Simpson. Surrounded by our devils, that couple would live on for decades as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. (The D.K. did not even bother to assign an angel to them.)

If I list such family ties, it is to emphasize how closely related was European royalty to Nicky and Alix. All seemed to agree that they were very much in love, a rare and bona-fide love.

The Maestro, however, had his doubts. To me, he remarked, "The Dummkopf presents Himself as the Almighty Avatar of Love. He is Love, and those who Love Him are full of Love, and Love itself will solve all human problems. With this noxious pomade, He not only gulls a good three-quarters of his humans, but deludes Himself. No one believes in Love so much as the Dummkopf."

Could this account for the number of Cudgels here? Had God retreated to His medieval assumption that monarchy was there to provide the best foundation for society? Did He actually suppose that if a handsome young king and attractive young queen remained magnificently in love with each

other, and were wholly devoted to belief in His Goodness, why, then, He, God, was ready to underwrite a bold experiment? Might it turn out better than some of His other ventures? Most previous monarchies had, after all, been notably void of love between the principals.

I was relieved. I now had a premise. The D.K. was no longer in full possession of His Faculties. Was that true or false?

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All the same, such debate was disturbing. How could the Lord be senile? When, on occasion, I find myself near the sea, it is difficult to believe that He is suffering any loss of His powers. For that matter, similar uneasiness can be aroused in me by a fine field, a rocky crag, a peerless sunset or the retort of the heavens as lightning is followed by thunder. One can even cite the dazzlements of grass when dew is on the ground.

Of course, He could have fashioned all this eons ago, back at the peak of His Creative Powers. In that case, did He now brood on the possibility that humankind had become His least successful Creation? Were we now awash in the dithering of an old divinity? This Nicky and Alix—they seemed so naïve,

so unfitted for any vast project. While I had not been able to get near to their living presence, I had certainly absorbed the tone of their love, their piety, their innocence. I had read hundreds of their communications back and forth. If I now choose to present a few of those missives, it is to provide a sense of how young they were.

In June of 1894, when their engagement was just two months old, Nicky wrote to her in English, a language they shared:

**I love you too deeply and too strongly for me to show it:
it is such a sacred feeling, I don't want to let it out in
words that seem meek and poor and vain! But now I will
try to break the habit of hiding my feelings, because I
think it wrong and selfish in some occasions. Darling
primrosy-mine, I love you my darling!!!!**

Be it said, I took pains to count the exclamation marks. Is that not, after all, a point of kinship between us? The observant reader may have noticed that I am fond on occasion of such emphasis at the end of a parenthesis. (Interruptions of attention should pretend, at least, to be vital!)

Four months later, Nicky's father is grievously ill. Alix, always ready to add her sentiments to Nicky's diary, offers this:

Tell me everything, dushka, you can fully trust me, look upon me as a bit of yourself. Let your joys and sorrows be mine, so that we may be ever drawn nearer together. My sweet One, how I love you, darling treasure, my very own One.

Only yours, quite your very own little spitzbub, Pussy mine!"

Nicky's diary, 20 October, Livadia:

My God, my God, what a day! The Lord has called unto Him our adored, dearly beloved Papa.

My head is going round, I cannot believe it—it seems inconceivable, a terrible reality.

It was the death of a Saint! Lord, help us in these terrible days!

Later, I learned that Nicky was thinking of the hour in his childhood when a nihilist had managed to plant a small bomb in the railroad car where the royal family was traveling. When the explosion went off, the blast blew the roof upward. As a result, no one was injured, but almost immediately the roof began to settle down on them. Alexander III, a giant of a man, used the holy and unholy strength of his arms to support the collapsing structure long

enough for his wife and children to be rescued. Only a saint was capable of such strength, declared Empress Marie, a small and beautiful woman.

Nicky, being short like his mother, also revered Alexander's powerful torso. Through his adolescence, Nicky had worked, therefore, at body-building. He also excelled at horsemanship and at hunting—a point of honor to him. He also grew a fine brown mustache and beard, yet he never became large enough to look like a Romanov.

Nicky, Diary, 21 October, Livadia:

After luncheon we held Prayers for the Dead and again at 9 o'clock in the evening. The expression on Papa's face was wonderful, smiling as if he were about to laugh!

22 October.

Last night we had to carry Papa's body downstairs, as unfortunately, it has rapidly begun to decompose.

Indeed, they soon had to cover the Emperor with an imperial cloth. His hands and face were turning black.

The marriage to Alix came just a few days after the funeral—It would not do for the Tsar to remain an unmarried man. Nonetheless, it was an immense event and had taken place a full year before I arrived in Russia. I was, however, offered enough accounts by our resident devils to inspire the confidence that I had been there standing in the Winter Palace with 10,000 of the gentry. Mind you, they were without chairs. The Russians seem to believe that devotional services should exact a penance on the body. The mighty had to remain on their feet for three hours while liturgies were recited. All the while, choral music continued, sad, but in its way, majestic, due to the length of the occasion. It is as though the deepest groans of Jesus Christ had to be heard again and then again before the Bride might be proclaimed Empress. All were quick to comment on her dignity, her beauty, and on the manner in which her head bowed whenever she greeted anyone. Our devils, being not in the least generous about such matters, remarked that this bobbing of her head was reminiscent of a pigeon.

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Staying by themselves in Tsarskoe Selo, Nicky wrote in his diary:

**Such a dear place for us both; for the first time since
our wedding we have been able to live alone and live
truly soul-to-soul.**

Alix added:

*Never did I believe there could be such utter happiness
in this world, such a feeling of unity between two mortal*

beings. I love you—those three words have my life in them.

On the next day she wrote:

*At last united, bound for life, and when this life is ended,
we meet again in the other world to remain together for
all eternity.*

I was intrigued by her confidence that they owned the same passport to the Eternal. Rarely had I encountered newly-weds who seemed as infatuated. Yet Nicky was twenty-six, and no neophyte in these matters. Since Alix had been a virgin, I was disposed to look upon her entries as much too concerned with the absolute necessity to show Nicky's diary how much she was in love.

Of course, I could not be certain. Whenever Nicky passed by a fine forest, he would be able to remind himself that this loveliness was his land. He had been chosen by God. Yet, he certainly felt unready. How, then, could he fail to see Love as a vertiginous ascent where you could only maintain your balance by always climbing upward.

Still, the damnable question remained. Was it not conceivable that in His Desire to nourish their marriage, God was enriching them with physical ecstasies? How could I know? I had only the language of their letters, and the reasonable assumption that if God was going to choose a Tsar, He would be ready to support him with Wisdom and Strength—against, of course, the not small skills of the Maestro.

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On the other hand, one could also ask how well had God prepared this young man to be the Tsar? It is certain that the court had not. Everyone had supposed that Alexander the Third would rule for at least another generation.

Nicky, Diary, 17 January 1895, St. Petersburg:

An exhausting day. I was in a terrible state about having to go to the Nikolayevsky Hall and deliver a speech to the representatives of the nobility, and the town committees.

He had been closeted with the Grand Dukes before he gave the speech. They had assured him that he must follow in his father's footsteps. "Nicky, you must be absolute!" His grandfather, Alexander II, had been assassinated. His father had had that close call on the train. Absolute allegiance to autocracy—that must be proclaimed again and again.

From Nicky's speech:

17 January 1895, St. Petersburg:

I am aware that recently in some *zemstvos* there have arisen the voices of people carried away by senseless dreams of taking part in the business of government.

Let everyone know that I will retain the principles of autocracy as firmly and unbendingly as my unforgettable late father.

Despite such promises, his official duties oppressed him. He kept lamenting that he could not spend enough time alone with Alix.

As the first winter of their marriage came to an end, she began to develop symptoms. We counted on that. Symptoms were our stock-in-trade. (Victorian women were never easy to invest, but we could always send a

shiver into their corseted defense of personal virtue by tainting their dreams with one or another smelly thought.)

Nicky's diary, 9 April, 1895, St. Petersburg:

Unfortunately, dear Alix's headache continued all day. She did not go to church nor to luncheon.

Nicky's Diary, 10 April 1895, St. Petersburg:

Dear Alix still has an unbearable pain in the temples and she was obliged to remain in bed, on my advice.

An ongoing headache! When intense enough to be characterized as migraine, these headaches speak of a clear desire to commit murder. I did not believe Alix had such sentiments toward her husband, but it had to be another matter with her mother-in-law. The Empress Marie had adored her huge husband for the best of reasons and one of them was that she had been the Empress. Between the two women, animosities were developing.

By June, Alix was free, however, of her worst headaches. She was also pregnant. I suspect that her mother-in-law was, in consequence, able to exercise less pressure upon her temples. In an entry to Nicky's diary on June 10, Alix wrote:

My sweet old darling manykins, Wify loves you so deeply and strongly, you are my one and my angels, what intense happiness. . .ours. . .our very own. . .what happiness could be greater; only Wify must try and be as good and kind as possible lest another little person suffer for it. A big kiss.

This is June, but the baby will not be born until November. Is Alix suggesting that they have no contact down below until the baby arrives?

My comprehension was not advancing. None of us was ready to admit as much to ourselves (and never, certainly, to the Maestro) but the presence of real love often blurred the clarity of our analysis. We could penetrate every aspect of false love, and be demonic at converting the sensitivities of love to the imperatives of lust. Of course, there are special occasions when God decides that lust will be beneficial for one of His chosen, yes, there is Godly Lust as well, and so the issue can offer ambiguity.

It is a curious contest. The angels have powerful sweets to offer, but, in turn, I would say we possess more improvisational skills than the Cudgels. We also lack a quality I do not wish to confess, although I must, or what I offer will make no sense. It is that I know everything about love but Love

itself. I do not like to make this confession. Yet, it is true. I recall nothing of my existence as a human, nor even whether I was, to the contrary, always a spirit. This, however, I can say—I have never known Love. I can expatiate upon its properties and tendencies, its dilemmas, its dissipations, I can delineate most of the reasons for its presence or disappearance, I can inspire jealousy, doubt, even periods of revulsion toward the beloved, I can tell you everything about Love except that I cannot distinguish true love from its artistic substitutes.

Witness, then, my confusion concerning Alix. I could comprehend Nicky more easily. He needed love the way others require drink. But Alix? I could not say. Could it be that her amorous hysteria was the best way of believing that she felt heights of passion, pleasure, and devotion?

Given, however, one curious line in her letter, "Wifey must try and be as good and kind as possible lest another little person suffer for it," I came to a conclusion. She was declaring a temporary moratorium on sex. On many a milk-run, I had watched any number of pregnant women enjoying the act in the eighth or even the ninth month. Of course, Alix was preparing for the next Tsar, and one wouldn't dare to bruise the development of that royal head, but

still!—was there to be no sex on the schedule until November? After all, she was writing this in June. I now leaned to the hypothesis that Alix had strained mightily to rise to the passionate heights she deemed necessary for this first period of their marriage, but that accomplished—at least in part—and the heir-to-be now in place, she was ready to take a rest. Yes, we must not do it "lest another little person suffer."

Alix was more than pregnant. Her belly was huge. They were all full of anxiety awaiting the birth of an heir—the young swimming train baby who would soon be Tsarevitch to Nicholas II.

It is the task, however, of Romanov breeding that no disappointment was mouthed when a stopping ten-pound female came forth.

It did not matter that much to Nicky—Alix, at least, was safe!

Nicky's Diary 3 November 1895 Tsardom of Siles

A day I will remember forever. At exactly 9 o'clock P.M. a baby was delivered and we all breathed a sigh of relief. With a prayer we named the daughter from

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Alix was more than pregnant. Her belly was huge. They were all full of anxiety awaiting the birth of an heir—the young bouncing male baby who would soon be Tsarevitch to Nicholas II.

It is the mark, however, of Romanov breeding that no disappointment was mouthed when a strapping ten-pound female came forth.

It did not matter that much to Nicky—Alix, at least, was safe!

Nicky's Diary 3 November 1895 Tsarskoe Selo

A day I will remember forever. At exactly 9 o'clock P.M. a baby was delivered and we all breathed a sigh of relief. With a prayer we named the daughter from

Almighty God "Olga!"

Two days later, Nicky is fascinated by some unexpected aspects of infant nutrition.

Nicky, Diary 5 November 1895 Tsarskoe Selo

The first attempt at breastfeeding took place and ended up with Alix successfully feeding the son of the wet-nurse while the latter gave milk to Olga. Very funny!

6 November 1895

Thank God, all is well, but the baby does not want to take her breast so we had to call the wet-nurse again.

I was not surprised. A few of us have developed the power to discern the sentiments of an embryo during the final months. By the last trimester, they are able to declare themselves through their mothers' dreams. So we knew that most infants come into the light of the birthing room feeling affection or antipathy toward the benevolent caretaker (or the surly warden) who so recently constituted the walls of their womb. That is exactly why women feel desolate when their milk is refused by their babe.

Nonetheless, these two, the wet-nurse and the young Empress, were doing their best to avoid such a recognition. So was Nicky. I expect he was ready to tell himself that huge little Olga has the sturdy instinct to wish to smell and taste the paps of a strong Russian woman. And I, from my funds of cynicism, think that the two women, so profoundly different, were ready to enjoy this open (if still surreptitious) connection of the flesh.

In any event, less than half a year later, Alix has certainly resumed relations with Nicky.

29 March St. Petersburg

*sweet precious Nicky mine, no words can express
how deeply I love you--more and more, day by day,
deeper--truer. Lovey sweet do you believe it, do you
feel hearty throb so quickly, and only for you, my
husband.*

Nicky had been so good about the birth of a princess rather than a prince, that Alix to her sweet surprise had a "hearty throb" on the moment he entered her, a novel event, or, at least, I assume it was novel. Besides, fleshy determinations can shift. Olga, for example, has come to accept the given.

Now, she feeds at her mother's breast even as Alix is taking morning coffee with the Emperor.

Our closest attention, however, was on the Coronation of Nicholas II. It was approaching. It is safe to add that there could have hardly been a devil present who was not experiencing his share of elation and dread. There is never a time when the presence of crowds can feel as demonic to us as at a great occasion with a massive ceremony.

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Festivities for the Coronation would take place in Moscow on May 14th and everywhere one saw two large letters, "N" for Nicky, and "A" for Alix. Countless numbers of platforms had to be erected for the spectators, as well as false fronts to hide the ugliest buildings on the route. Moscow was awash in officers speaking many a tongue, and came from many a nation. Those who lived on the route of the Coronation parade were renting their abodes to spectators. A window on the street could be leased from dawn to sunset for 200 rubles on any one of the days following the entrance parade on May 9th to the coronation itself on May 14th. Carriages accompanied by coachmen cost 1200 rubles for the month. Useless to argue that one only wanted the coach

for the week, or that one could buy ten good horses for such an amount. 1200 rubles! Even to acquire a limited view in a narrow space on a flimsily-built platform came to 10 or 15 rubles—woe to the obese. To afford a balcony you had to spend 500.

Those wealthy enough to rent apartments overlooking the parade on May 9th, might expect to pay up to 2500 rubles. Nor were hotel rooms easily available. The government had taken over whole floors for foreign princes and princesses, diplomatic representatives, noblemen, honored artists, nabobs, moguls, and tycoons. The French, being determined for reasons of state to leave an imprint on the occasion, proceeded to spend 200,000 rubles. Were they not, after all, the great and good ally of the Tsar? Since that had once been a role for Germany, those diplomats responded by moving out of Moscow to a palace in the woods costing only 7000 rubles, a modest gem, but then the Germans did not even give a ball, just a musicale. They may also have been gambling on bad weather. If so, they lost. The procession on May 9th offered beautiful skies.

The parade had to be comparable to the most splendid royal occasions of the past. Nicky and Alix would make their entrance into the Spassky Gate

of the Kremlin from a temporary residence in Petrovsky Park, situated on the northern outskirts of Moscow and so six miles away. Since it was no secret that this event looked to equal the majestic entry of Louis XIV into Reims in 1654, a procession stepped out then in full panoply on the morning of May 9th to exhibit for the world the exceptional resources of the Russian Empire. First came the Cossacks with their scarlet tunics, their silver epaulettes, their blue trousers and black boots; on came Asian princes from unpronounceable regions, wearing costumes never seen before in Europe, representatives of far-off barbarian lands which the Russians had conquered over several centuries, and they were followed the Arch Grand Master of the Coronation Ceremonies and his associates, twelve Chamberlains and twenty-five Gentlemen of the Chamber, then came Marshalls of the Court, and the members of the Council of Empire, to be succeeded by the regiments of the Royal Army, then Nicky himself, born, as all too many were whispering, on the sixth of May. Thousands of Russians were passing such information to each other, for May 6 was the Orthodox Feast Day of St. Job the Sufferer, one of the most sinister dates on the calendar. No one would ever wish to repeat the sufferings of Job.

Nicky was most aware of this. In the first weeks of their betrothal, he had felt it was his duty to warn Alix. He could do no less. And she replied that it would now be her duty to stand beside him. In union with each other, they would overcome such an omen. This had to be a test given to them by God. So she saw it. God wanted them to love each other so well that they would not have to suffer like Job, not if they were ready to love God even more than had St. Job.

Just so much did I learn on the day they entered the Kremlin. I had been able at last to enter Nicky's mind, and never in my experience were so many angels surrounding a human being. Yet, on this day, as he paraded his pale English mare along the six miles from Petrovsky Park to the Spassky Gates of the Kremlin, I was able to approach his thoughts. Be certain, it was a small entry, but the approaches to his mind were not wholly barricaded. Hosannas to the Maestro! Ten years ago when the Tsarevitch was an eighteen-year-old cadet, he had had a lustful set of encounters with one of our devils. She had appeared in the form of a gypsy prostitute, a tsvigane. Since the affair occurred years before the Cudgels had begun to devote their massive efforts to

protect him, the Maestro had succeeded in finding an unprotected if mostly narrow ingress into Nicky's mind.

Now, he had chosen to post me in this hard-won passage and I was there for the length of the march up Tverskaya Street to the Kremlin, and so could pick up the thoughts that passed through that region of his royal head.

There were surprises. On this ride, to what he once he had been, a young Colonel in the Life Guards, and he did recognize—for one moment, no more—how much happier his days might have been if they could have been spent in that rank. I supposed that such thoughts were aroused by the enthusiasm of the troops. Their roar of joy at the sight of him left a pang. In five days, he would receive the Crown and be overwhelmed with duties.

Nicky's recollections now turned libidinous. The devil who had been installed into his young experience was one whore still calling to him. Each great cheer from the troops stirred in his groin. The English mare, so elegant, so pale, must also have been alert to such arousal, for she now began to offer new steps. How she pranced!

After no more than another minute, however, the fine spirits shared by horse and rider sank back into gloom. Born on the Feast Day of St. Job the Sufferer. What, indeed, had God intended?

Just as quickly, however, did his good mood return. I did my best to follow. Nicky's thoughts came pell-mell, full of clatter and echo, and even a dark mood could not prevail for long in the face of this promenade. So many decorations had been hung upon the facades of the homes on Tverskaya Street. Moscow, on this morning, had the radiance of an old lady who had never been as beautiful before, and the glory of the light occasioned Nicky to think of his best hunting days when Alexander III had seen fit to compliment his prowess. Nicky blushed on receiving so rare a compliment from his parent, and proceeded immediately to give the credit to his hunting dogs. Whereupon, Tsar Alexander the Third had said, "One can measure a man by his dogs."

Yes, let the Almighty see him as the most loyal of His dogs. He knew animals, he knew them. Almost always, when drinking the blood of a stag just hunted down, the echo of the last shot still alive in the forest, he would feel close to God. The stag, so immaculate in form, had just lost its existence. Why? For whom? To Nicky, the answer was simple but profound. The death

of this beautiful beast would bring a closer understanding between God and man. For it was God who had given human beings the right to take the lives of these exquisite creatures. Now, Nicky remembered a blasphemy that once had burned in his throat. It came as he drank his first cup of stag's blood. He had thought: "This blood must be like Christ's blood? How else can it taste so pure?" Remembrance of such a blasphemy made him wince. It also made him think of obligations yet to come. He might feel close to God, he could certainly feel close to beautiful animals, but now there were always ministers around, eager to see him, looking to use him. The loyalty of those ministers was most attached, however, to the aggrandizement of their office. Deceit was at their fingertips. Self-interest was in their skin.

He could withstand them. So, he told himself. He had a trinity of values with which to protect himself, his father's guide—Honor, Tradition, Service. Yet, to remain faithful to three such principles would demand unyielding strength. Honor could fall into dishonor, Tradition grow stiff, and Service wear one out. He was not the man to deal with endless intrigues. To keep up with such ministers was like falling through a stairwell. Whereas to kill an animal, yet know compassion for the beast—marrow for the soul!

At this moment, his mare reared up. Had she just had an image of the stag's blood? A cry of fear rose from the spectators for the mare stood on her hind legs. But then the crowd applauded. On the streets, at the windows, upon the balconies, from the roofs of Tverskaya Street—out of the tens of thousands who witnessed this moment rose a great wave of applause. Nicky, most gracefully, had kept his seat and calmed his horse. The sound of the crowd's elation traveled all the distance up to the Spassky gate of the Kremlin. Other tens of thousands of spectators still ahead on the line of march did not see this episode and so did not know why they had heard such applause, but they too began to applaud. And Nicky was flushed with pleasure.

Not for long—his future duty was still before him. He was doomed to work with his ministers and they would never respect him. They were accustomed to the force of his father.

He knew that their opinions would usually override his own. They knew more. For example, he had not planned this procession. They had. They had told him that this long entrance to the Kremlin would be his triumphant introduction to the world. That was why it must be so long a parade in length. It was crucial that he be seen at the front of these many miles

of procession. Yet to keep expectations alive for the onlookers, his mother and Alix would only be seen in their two golden coaches at the conclusion. This arrangement, the ministers insisted, was the most dramatic way to demonstrate the great and near-to-endless extent of Russian power.

Alix had wanted, however, to be nearer to him. Nicky tried to explain the intentions of the ministers. She was silent, but unhappiness remained in her eyes. It was one matter for Nicky to feel like a dog before God, but quite another to suffer such a sentiment with one's wife. Nothing is worse for an animal who would be brave than to be told by the eye of his beloved that he is no more than a timid and conceivably ignoble creature.

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To precede the Coronation on May fourteenth, Nicky and Alix were caught up in ceremonial receptions that required them to offer a good welcome to many a high official from home and abroad. This ability to remain affable while not shifting one's feet, nor indicating strain, was a measure of royal competence. As he complained afterward to Alix and to his mother (with a smile), his cheeks were sore from being kissed by plenipotentiaries with stiff mustaches.

On May 13th, when sacred ornaments were transported to the throne hall of the Kremlin Palace, a host of anxieties rose into his mood. The ceremonies were, by now, familiar, but he felt as if hell itself was waiting. He wanted

nothing to go wrong. For he saw the 14th of May as deliverance. By its end, he would no longer be acting Tsar, but consecrated as the Tsar.

I suspect he knew that something malign was in the offing. But he had no instinct for when it would happen. Each day from the tenth to the thirteenth seemed as dangerous to him as the next.

For that matter, he was not alone in these anticipations. Given the firm Russian expectation that nothing good can prevail for long, many were certain all this good weather would disappear by the morning of the Coronation. Instead, on the 14th of May, Moscow was alive with early morning sunshine. Morose predictions had to be postponed. Any number of women who had been quick to predict floods of downpour were still convinced something would yet go bad. Since Alix had converted to Russian Orthodoxy immediately after the demise of Alexander III, these women now said, "She comes to us behind a coffin." Given, however, the beauty of this exceptional day, a counter-sentiment soon arose. Many were now saying, "We are close to the end of the century. Maybe the new one, this Twentieth Century, will be different. Let miracles of beauty and comfort come to us."

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Soon enough, I will be able to speak with some detail of our contribution scheduled to occur four days after the Coronation, but I am not able to offer much concerning that particular ceremony. The Maestro did not include me among those devils who were going to work upon a few aspects of the event. I did not protest. The most dependable route to his favor was to accept without comment the position you had been assigned. Besides, he even told me, as if by now I might be developing into one of his intimates, "Across the grand scheme of things, the Coronation will yet be seen as a petty event. You will miss nothing."

I was not present, therefore, in any of the cathedrals, not the Assumption, the Archangel, nor the Annunciation, but I was told over and again of the unspoken scandal of the event at the Cathedral of the Assumption.

Soon after the Tsar and Tsarina had mounted their thrones, the Chain of the Order of St. Andrew broke. Even as the Tsar was bending his head to receive it, the chain broke! Given the number of Cudgels surrounding this ceremony, was it possible that we had accomplished this? Or was it a gift of chance?

It is not routine to be precise about these matters—there is a labyrinth of relations, after all, between the Maestro and the Dummkopf. I could list an endless register of compromises, brutalities, games, and deceits on both sides. So, there is much to contemplate about these Russian ceremonial procedures, fortified as they are with their relics, their icons, such instruments of Monarchical ascension as the Chain, the Cross, the Crown, the Sceptre and the Orb. Then, there is the Throne itself, resonant with blessings and curses, that same Throne upon which Tsar Michael Fyodorovitch sat in the year 1613. Of course, some of the faithful believe that the ceremony itself emits an indispensable Godly power which enters the pores, the flesh, and the heart of

the Tsar. But I would suspect that this magic did not emanate entirely from the Dummkopf. The Maestro took pride in smuggling his wares into God's gifts.

We were not wholly unsympathetic, therefore, to the intensity with which Nicky believed in the Lord Almighty. The Maestro would look to turn such sentiments to our advantage. So, I also knew many of us would be present when the procession set out from the Palace at half past ten, each step buried in the peals of a thousand church bells, some as light as the rustle of leaves, others as heavy as the groans that issue from the heart of the heavy metal. The priests inside Assumption Cathedral came out to the paradon to welcome the Monarchs and give them the Holy Cross to kiss. The Trinity was invoked—three times were prayers repeated, three times were the holy icons embraced. Nicky and Alix then ascended the steps of the dais in the center of the cathedral. We knew it well. We were present when Michael Fyodorovitch, the first Tsar of the Romanov dynasty, had ascended to this same Throne, so I will not elaborate on how the Imperial Regalia were placed, nor repeat the address of the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg as he importuned Nicholas II to make his public confession. And Nicky did indeed make such a public confession, but in a voice spoken so low and with such brevity that no

one could hear. After which, the Tsar read the prayer for the day, and the Metropolitan said, "The blessing of the Holy Spirit be with thee. Amen."

I can say that we are always ready to feel the approach of the Holy Spirit. (On many an occasion, His Blessing is infiltrated with our spirit.) Indeed, it was at this point that the Chain of the Order of Saint Andrew broke. Of course, the priests ignored this startling event. It is a rule of order never to indicate that some element in a sacred service has gone awry. Without pause, therefore, the Metropolitan, made the sign of the cross, laid his hands on the Tsar's head, and said two prayers, after which Nicholas the Second was able to take up the Crown, place it upon his own head, and proceed to hold the Sceptre to his right hand and the Orb in his left. He then placed his royal hindquarters once more on the seat of the throne of Tsar Michael Fyodorovitch. Whether or not he felt any residual resonance from such ancient contact, he rose but a few moments later, handed over the Regalia to his attendants, and beckoned to Alix, who knelt before him on a crimson cushion, its border of golden lace. Again cannon sounded from one hundred and one guns.

The ritual continued. Orthodox service on such occasions is never brief. Many, who had felt some inner illumination at the commencement, now settled into the weariness of their limbs. Boredom entered the Divine Liturgy. I have to wonder if that is not part of the genius of Russian worship. For the length of the service captured many in the congregation who were without real interest at the start. Ergo, there is no need to enumerate every step taken by the Tsar and the Tsarina once they descended from the dais. A measured three paces here, three there, the Trinity to be commemorated again and once again. Indeed, the Maestro always spoke well of the Trinity as if he knew something others did not. I have seen the best man at a wedding who, unknown to all but the bride, has had carnal knowledge of the lady, and there is a subtlety in the posture of such a fellow that I do not find dissimilar to the nuance of appreciation our Maestro is always offering to the Holy Ghost. That is always the point of his attack. Since the Holy Ghost is the embodiment of the love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father, so is it always a point of attack chosen by the Maestro in order to weaken that quintessential integrity.

I believe therefore that it was the Maestro's act which broke the link in the chain of the Order of Saint Andrew.

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The Tsar and his retinue would move from Assumption Cathedral to Archangel Cathedral where, with a few variations, the service would be repeated before going on to the Annunciation Cathedral.

I was told that the Tsar and Tsarina were in need of rest, but were facing a ceremonial meal in the Hall of Facets. In his diary, he would write, "All that happened in the Assumption Cathedral, though it seems but a dream, is not to be forgotten for life." To that he added, "We went to bed early." Whether this was from fatigue, or a resurgence of lust from the good and happy sense that it was done, and they would never have to do it again, I cannot say. I would

certainly have liked to have been in their room. At the least, I would have learned how much the corrupted sanctity—I use precisely those two words—the corrupted sanctity of these holy Metropolitans had to do with Nicky and Alix's raptures. Had these endless ceremonies served some sweet bubble of concupiscence? I suffered all the pains of exclusion.

If it seems strange that I am always hungry to learn more, let me dispel the common assumption that God and the devil have all the knowledge they need. I would suggest that the easiest approach to comprehending my powers, is to assume that I am about as much endowed beyond an accomplished scholar as he is in turn is more knowledgeable than a clod from a poorly endowed school. Since I hardly command every answer to questions that bedevil humankind. I, too, can be unmanned by what I do not know.

That night, occupied with my own preparations for the Peasants' Festival to take place four days later, I also missed the banquet in the Palace of Facets. It was the event of the season for Moscow and for Russia—one of those social occasions which can offer great advancement to one's future if one has been invited—an orgy of putative achievement, therefore, to the richest of the nouveau riche.

Of course, there was also much curdling of expectation among many of these ambitious souls. They were not always happy with where they had been seated. Studying other placements in the room gave them too close a measure of their present status in the world. Had it been lowered recently? Indeed, only the most elevated of the guests were in the same room as the Tsar and Tsarina. The cream of the diplomatic corps was there, and the Holy Synod, as well as the Grand Marshal and the Grand Master of Ceremonies, the highest ministers and some of the exceptionally wealthy. The remainder had been assigned to the Hall of Saint Vladimir.

A blunting of one's sense of self-importance is, however, the last punishment a monarch would care to arouse among rich, celebrated and powerful guests—nor does it require the wisdom of Machievelli to be aware of this. So Nicholas, in company with Alexandra, made a point of visiting every table in both rooms, followed by the Dowager Empress Marie, the Queen and Prince of Naples, the Duchess of Edinburgh, the Crown Prince of Sweden, Duchess Elisabeth and Grand Duke Alexei, all of them proceeding to table after table through the Hall of Saint Vladimir, and were in turn greeted at each seating with the kind of ovation that issues from the parched throats of people

who had been all too ready to assume that no matter what trials they had suffered to obtain an invitation, they might still be ignored. What applause, then, to see the Tsar and Tsarina approaching.

I will barely describe the meal. It would give me no pleasure to carry on about the gold plate, the French dishes, the categories of caviar, the wines (French and Crimean), the vodka, the champagne. Banquets succeed almost always in generating the same gastric acids, but here the guests were personally served by three waiters in red coats with gold trim. The menus were illustrated, the Imperial Band played throughout dinner, and the Palace of Facets sparkled.

In that era, journalists were not encouraged to speak ill of the great and mighty. So they all declared that this occasion, a culmination of the Feast of Lights, would never be forgotten by posterity. The Palace of Facets was, after all, renowned for the rarity of its celebrations. Only the most important events in Russian history offered the sanction to open such ancient doors. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great had held their Coronation banquets here. One of the reporters from America, bewitched by the honor of attending, concluded her piece by adding:

So ended the greatest day of our lives, the one to be remembered for years. We all felt that we had seen the grandest sight that could possibly be imagined and we were pretty lucky mortals, everything had gone so beautifully.

Another reporter from America, John Logan, stated that he not only believed now in Russia's immense potential for grandeur, but in Nicholas' legitimacy. If there were those who would challenge his opinion, he, for one, would add that Russia was more prosperous and more peaceful than she had been for years.

...Nicholas II begins his reign with the good wishes of the entire world. Monarchies, empires, and republics alike united to wish him 'bon voyage' on his momentous journey. From Germany, from France, from a venerable Queen who has reigned longest in the history of England's throne, from our own President, and from many other rulers of nations great and small, he received messages of warmest greeting, and above all, the great heart of the common people with a single impulse felt that it has in the kindly, smiling face of this youthful Tsar the promise of a reign beneficial and just.

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I could understand why Nicky's ministers considered it mandatory that this Coronation surpass every grand European celebration of the past. They were facing gigantic problems. If Russia was immensely rich, it was also extraordinarily poor. For the country to become an economic power comparable to Great Britain or to America, the rapid completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, begun years earlier, was now paramount. Ever in need of a large inflow of foreign funds to complete work on the track, Russia had been obliged five years before the Coronation to export most of its grain to the West. The Minister of Finance under Alexander III had declared that there

was no other choice. Grain was the only commodity Russia could offer in bulk. So the largest portion of the harvest had been exported. That brought on the famine of 1891. Millions of peasants died.

Now, hundreds of thousands of the relatives of these peasants had come to Moscow where they congregated at various railroad stations in the city. Many slept on the floor. This occasioned a comment from the Maestro: "Of course these peasants are looking to stay in railroad stations. Five years ago they watched their grain being taken away on freight cars. Now, they wait at the depot to see what will come back."

The peasants were certainly of interest to us. Without their loyalty, how could Nicholas II exercise his rule? He could not count on the cities. The proletariat, most recently peasants themselves, now lived with their diseases—cholera, typhus, syphilis, and tuberculosis. Alcoholism was one social problem, prostitution another. Both were immense. Housing was overcrowded, and desperately.

The sale of the grain in 1891 had, however, served the economic purpose. Investment in heavy industry had tripped over the next ten years.

To balance such growth, the now over-crowded sewers of Moscow flooded slum streets in summer even as workers froze to death in winter.

Those who remained in their villages still lived in one-room log cabins with interiors blackened by smoke. Cheap reproductions of icons were on the wall, but any visitor who came into a peasant's cabin felt obliged, nonetheless, to bow before these faded representations. Only then would he greet the master of the house who, as master, had the best place to sleep—which was on top of the oven, still warm from the remains of the fire that had heated the evening meal. The rest of the family slept on the dirt floor. To undress was unheard of, but if the room was not too cold, the men would take off their boots before lying down. They had a saying: "The reek of your feet will scatter the flies."

Nonetheless, I respected the peasants I saw at the railroad stations. If the men and women were old before their time, and had few teeth, they were as strong, nonetheless, as draft animals. For that matter, they rarely moved—they had the patience of cattle. Yet, my study gave me some intimation of why the Dummkopf might be devoting so much attention to Russia. These poor, ugly, big, strong, dumb men with their plain, sturdy, and

often misshapen wives might be mean, small-minded, ignorant, bewildered, even stupefied, but all that could amount to no more than protective wax over a fine jelly in a jar. Beneath their torpor, I could sense a capacity to be strong, wise, generous, fair, loyal, yes, even understanding, or so had Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky harangued their readers. If future genius was to be found in the peasantry of Russia this was of grave concern to us. Our aim, after all, was to keep reducing human possibilities to the point where we could take the reins away from the Dummkopf.

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My day was arriving. An immense gathering, scheduled to take place in Khodynskoe Field on May 18 would honor all the peasants now in the city, a convening for those who had traveled hundreds of miles by railroad, by wagon, even some few on foot in order to be in Moscow when the Tsarevitch became the Tsar.

The event on the field had been planned to demonstrate Nicky's love for his people. It would celebrate their value. It would entertain them. Circus performers, singers and dancers would appear, and at numerous stands and kiosks on the field, gifts offered by the Tsar and Tsarina were to be distributed. The great open stretches of Khodynskoe were ready to receive half a million

souls. Four hundred thousand iron mugs, painted in red and gold, bearing Nicky's initials, would be given out free. There would also be silk scarves for the women, ten thousand gallons of beer, and countless packages of food containing Russian bread, walnuts, sausage, cookies, and jam accompanied by a small book about the Coronation bearing the Tsar and Tsarina's initials.

To face the horde, Nicky, Alexandra, and members of the court would arrive after midday and sit in state on a Royal Pavilion recently erected at one end of the parade ground. It would offer places to a thousand notables. Nearby would be another pavilion with seats for an additional thousand who were ready to pay for the privilege.

Among a few officials, there was considerable concern on the night before. There might not be enough police. Only three officers had been assigned to oversee a company of one hundred and fifty Cossacks brought in to serve as enforcers. One hundred and fifty Cossacks to control half a million Russian souls? Their commander applied for more guards, but was told there was a shortage of police. After all, many areas of the city had to be guarded against demonstrations by rowdies or revolutionaries. Moreover, the government had already spent large sums maintaining security for the Tsar

during the ceremonial week. Now, there was not enough money available for new security. It was obvious to me that the relative absence of police at the Field might well to reflect the hand of the Maestro.

We were ready to take advantage. Thirteen years ago, following the Coronation of Alexander III, Khodynskoe Field had also served as the site for a peasants' festival. While several unhappy episodes took place, and thirty peasants lost their lives, it was considered an acceptable loss. One could not be held accountable for every mishap in so large a gathering.

Indeed, it was Nicky who decided to hold the Peasants' Festival in the same place again. That might initiate a new tradition. "From what you tell me," he told his ministers, "we need more traditions."

One problem that was not examined, however, was the field. In 1891, a large exhibition had been held on its ground, and temporary construction had been thrown up. Afterward, no funds were available for filling the excavations. So this immense parade field was now scarred with sand pits, small gulches, un-capped wells and abandoned foundations. Broad paths had been laid out to skirt these hindrances and it was assumed people would move prudently. There was, after all, enough level space for half a million visitors.

In truth, there had been more immediate concerns than Khodynskoe Field. The multitudes who were coming to Moscow had to be sheltered. Some peasants might have family members who worked in factories, and so had lodgings. The grease of sheep-skin jackets and sweat-ridden capes, caftans, and black woolen coats, would hardly be unfamiliar odors. And, of course, there were the railroad stations. They did serve as housing. What was not anticipated, however, was the great number of peasants who decided to come to the field on the night before. By evening, multitudes were already encamped. There was drinking, there was singing, there were bonfires. Balalaikas were played. Word had gone out through the city. Gifts would be distributed early. We had disseminated that rumor. Yes, the best stuff would go first. Thousands of peasants moved up, therefore, and started pressing on the wooden barriers that shielded the huts and kiosks and counters which housed the gifts. Others began to push forward from behind. Then, hours before first morning light, some good part of the working populace of Moscow started to arrive. The slums were marching in. They, too, had heard the rumor.

On this night of the 17th, a gala also took place at the Bolshoi Theatre. Many ladies were wearing their diamonds, so many that the glow of the gems—as a good number remarked—might be ready to compete with the footlights. Yet, most of the gentry were talking about the Field. It was said that by late morning one million souls would throng to Khodynskoe. One million souls! "Yes," was the word at the Bolshoi, "Never before have so many of the common people been ready to offer their reverence to the Tsar."

That was at the gala. At the Field, there was a dreadful restlessness. Some peasants began rocking the posts that supported the barriers. "The good stuff is gone," our agents were there to say. "The mugs are gone. The beer is gone." "No," went a counter-rumor, "the beer is not gone, but there is little left." The first barriers began to tilt. Then, they fell. The closest kiosks were overrun. Even as some were reaching for the gifts, they were knocked down by the throngs pushing up from the rear. Thousands were jamming into the thousands already up front. A man had no more than to stumble and another would crash over him. A third would go down, a fourth was left prostrate. More bodies pushed forward. Women screamed. Children wailed. It grew worse. Masses of men, women, and children were now being driven pell-mell

into the largest of the sand pits where they thrashed about at the bottom in a hurly-burly, searching for a grip on a body by which to climb out of the pit even as others fell over them. Suffocations began. Women screamed, children wailed. I had never heard such woe. Thousands of throats were roaring with rage. Some were shrieking in terror. Smaller men and women were now thrown upward like spray. Children moaned under the weight of boots clambering over them. The sounds became unearthly. Who was to count how many hundreds of heels were now grinding down upon hundreds of torsos? Or noses. Or eyes or teeth. A few even escaped. Some! A few children were lifted and passed backward over head from arm to arm. Adults able to reach the edge of the crowd collapsed like minnows in the shallows, not able to breathe nor stir, then able to breathe, or just about. Others were braying out the names of family members. Faces were already petrified by grief.

Yet, in the manner that a storm dies down, it came to an end. Those who had broken through to the booths and trampled over the kiosks were forced to keep moving forward by the ongoing pressure of those behind—until finally they reached one end of the field. Others squeezed their way off to the side. Some in the rear, hearing screams ahead, drew back and pushed no

longer. As the frenzy abated, flocks moved off in four directions. The dead lay in the pits and on the flats.

In these early hours of daylight, some of the fallen still quivering, disorder spread to the streets of Moscow. Tens of thousands of Muscovites who had been planning to be present at the official opening later that morning had chosen to leave their homes early. Now, as they approached on foot, wagons were coming toward them carrying the dead, and these bloody wagons were surrounded by men and women wailing in grief. Some were hysterical. They would laugh for one moment, groan at the next. Not knowing whether to consider themselves blessed for having escaped, they also had to fear they were in peril of losing their souls. So many felt an unholy readiness to laugh. How could they not when the smallest part of them had secretly despised the dead relative for years?

Those who were still coming toward Khodynskoe grew bewildered before all these screaming faces, coming toward them from the field. Every wagon carried bodies clothed in various stages of ruined peasant finery. Many of the dead still lay on the field with their shattered noses, bloody faces, broken limbs, cock-eyed jaws, twisted bodies near to nude. On the wagons,

more than a few had been covered over in the remnants and rags of other people's clothes torn from one corpse to protect the nakedness of another.

Later came estimates of the number of lives that had been lost. At first, Nicky was told that the number was three hundred, but this minister was well known for reducing bad news by ninety per cent. Later, Nicky was told that it was 1300 people. The final toll was three thousand.

Earlier, the first wagon-loads of unidentified dead had been taken to Vagankovsky Cemetery. Until this hour, that ground had been kept exclusively for followers of Orthodoxy. On this morning, however, that could hardly be determined, especially since the first impulse on the arrival of higher police officials was to get the bodies off the field before the Tsar arrived. Time later to count the dead.

Meanwhile, the morning was reaching into its full glory. It was the tenth fine day in a row. The onion domes of the forty times forty churches of Moscow were resplendent in the sun. The domes, covered with gold leaf, glowed as if they were children of the sun, and their bells, celebrating this event, came forth in a variety of clangor, loud or delicately toned. But to the ears of those walking away from the field, the sound of wailing was still in

their ears, a cacophony of whimpering, howling, sorrowing, blubbering, bawling and lamentation in whole and unholy disharmony to the bells.

I, however, aroused by the extent of our triumph, felt as if I could see into the failings of half the people I passed. So many were sick in heart, sick in soul, sick in stomach, slime clinging to their spirit, lost in the vortex of a dream. Meanwhile, the sun reflected the gold of the onion domes above each church. For the past half year, laborers in high peril of slipping off the steep pitches of church roofs rimed in winter ice had labored nonetheless at fastening new leaf to these gilded domes.

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At noon, before the Tsar and Tsarina arrived, most of the litter on Khodynskoe Field had been cleared. There was still torn clothing on the sand and in the pits, but the bodies were gone. Several companies of soldiers had been brought in to move the last of the dead out to areas beyond the outlying kiosks. There, laid in orderly rows, they would remain until the wagons could transport them to a cemetery, or relatives came upon their remains with shouts and screams of recognition. Of course, Nicky and Alix, on their arrival, were seated far enough away not to hear such sounds. Instead, a chorus of a thousand young men and women had been installed in front of the Royal

Pavilion, and their voices prevailed. The viewing stands were filled with distinguished foreigners and Muscovites in their best uniforms, the ladies in afternoon finery. The social principle that one must never recognize unpleasantness during a formal occasion was in force. I have been present at galas when a guest, usually one of ours, breaks wind. The repugnance of those nearby sits in the air for a few moments. Sometimes, longer. No one remarks on it. For the social record, it has not happened. This ability to ignore the repellent has always been the ingrained strength of the upper classes.

Now, hearing this gifted chorus of one thousand heavenly voices offering a vocal collation, who would be in a rush to recognize that a few hours ago, horror had taken place? No, the well-dressed Russians in the pavilions, given their desire to ape the best manners of the British upper classes, now carried themselves like privileged onlookers during a notable day at the races. The ladies and gentlemen in the stands looked near to perfect, and would have been, but for one contretemps. An unbelievably strong wind blew up without warning, and scattered clouds of dust across the parade ground. This noxious whirlwind soon reached the pavilions at the edge of Khodynskoe. There should have been no such wind on so glorious a day. All

had been still. Yet, the gust had come. I hardly knew if I was witnessing the fury of the Dummkopf or the rage of the dead.

On the tail of this wind, the Tsar and Tsarina arrived. Everything changed. It was as if the gale was ready to be dispelled by one more uproar of cheers so loud one could barely hear the band, that immense orchestra of national brass as it played the anthem with stentorian exaltation. Khodynskoe Field was now only half visible because of the fresh dust roused by the carriages of all the latecomers coming in now after the tumult of the morning. Soon enough, Nicky and Alexandra waved to people flocking in, and shortly after, left the pavilion to step into their carriage and be driven a few hundred yards over to Petrovsky Palace where the Tsar would now receive selected groups of chosen citizens. In the glimpse I caught of him, he looked exceptionally pale and I wondered if he knew what had happened. I suspect his information was still highly imperfect, but in any event, the prearranged ceremonies were maintained. Not a quarter mile from Khodynskoe, Nicky and Alix now stood at the Petrovsky gates to receive these new delegations. There were fourteen groups in all bearing gifts. A special offering from the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was presented to Nicky and Alix first—a large

platter for ceremonial bread and salt. Nine months had been spent by eight men carving this platter out of crystal. Nicky screwed up his buttocks to force a little gratitude into his expression, and then proceeded to thank the eight workers for the splendid niceties of their work. Next came a Cavalry regiment, the Georgiyevskys. A delegation of peasant women was followed by distinguished artists of the Moscow Imperial Theater. After which, a delegation from the Moscow coachmen paid their respects. There was even a gift from the Moscow All-Believers who offered a silver platter on which Nicky's initials had been laid out in diamonds. They were soon replaced by an army of contractors who had decorated Moscow with lights and false fronts for the Processional on May 9th. Representatives of the caterers, plus the Society of the Hunt, the Moscow Racing Club, and even (for their centuries of service since the time of Peter the Great) a few leaders of the long-established German colony in Moscow came filing by. After this, Nicky and Alix were able to enter the palace and preside over a feast for the honored representatives of the common people. Inserting his remarks between choruses of cheers, Nicholas II spoke to these plebian elders: "The Empress and I heartily thank you for

your expression of love and dedication. We do not doubt these feelings are shared by your fellow villagers. Care for your welfare is close to my heart."

I happened to look at the time. To me, this is no more than a phrase. I do not need a watch. No devil is ever without a clear sense of the hour, the minute, even the second. So I can state that as the Tsar was making his speech, a simultaneous event occurred at a morgue—a devil reported the exact time of this other occasion. Two of the corpses who had been carried from the transport wagons and laid out on morgue tables, happened to rise up out of their comatose state. They even cried out in unison. From opposite ends of the room! They had appeared to be dead, but now they were obviously alive.

If I mention these upstarts, it is to emphasize the conjunction of the two occasions. I would even learn that Alix was suffering her own climax of foreboding at what had to be close to the same moment. To each of the guests who came forward, she had smiled and bobbed her head, still a pouter pigeon. She was, however, living in terror. She was filled with a thought that her own death was near and so was Nicky's. In what danger was her husband! She even allowed herself to feel some open wrath against the Russian people. Why, she asked herself, had they felt so obliged to riot? She even said to her

husband, "There is little courtesy among our Moujiks." Nicky did not know whether to be offended or pleased that she spoke of our Moujiks. (These thoughts I received at second hand from a special Russian devil who maintained his entree to one of Alix's ladies-in-waiting.)

A half mile away from Petrovsky Palace, some soldiers were laying out the last of the victims, and on those far fringes of Khodynskoe Field, other hundreds of peasants and Muscovites were searching for lost family. Meanwhile, Nicky proceeded from table to table offering greetings to the villagers as they ate their Poltava Borscht, their veal with fresh greens, cold whitefish, roast spring chicken, duckling, fresh and pickled cucumbers, dessert, fruit, wines.

Back in the stands, jugglers and gypsy dancers were performing for the gentry. Ice cream was being sold. And behind the hutches, corpses were still being laid out in rows while distraught relatives kept staring into the battered faces of cadavers who had perished hours ago but might, despite all disfigurement, still retain a recognizable feature. A few of the disappointed even laid a copper coin on the cold chest of a stranger. In some places, piles of bodies remained in a heap, fifty here, twenty there, arms and legs at outraged

angles, filthy clothing. Doctors knelt in the dust to see if anyone stirred. All of a sudden, one of the dead was no longer to be counted as dead. He rose up. His wife, who had been weeping beside him, began to beat herself on the breast. "God is here!" she screamed, "God is here! God has saved you!" But another family, just fifty feet away, engaged in false mourning for the demise of a long-lived family patriarch, were now shrieking. For that old tyrant also opened his eyes. "The devil sent you back, you monster!" his aged wife cried out.

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I was not a leading actor during the riots just described. The Maestro had stated it directly: I was not sufficiently familiar with Moscow to command the local devils. Instead, I was to continue my watch on Nicky since family discords were bound to break out. I had to recognize that I had not been seen as pitiless enough to lead on the Field. That pinched my vanity. I saw myself as capable of any task, high or low, but I should have known that my assignment to study the letters and diaries of the Romanovs would remain my basic role. Nonetheless, the knowledge proved of use for years to come. The Romanovs did not perish in a bloody muck of broken bones on that day, but they would suffer depredations in the aftermath.

An immediate result was the lowered efficiency of the Cudgels. There were now gaps in the circle of protection they formed around Nicky. I was able, for example, to approach within viewing distance of the Tsar when he and Alix showed up at mid-day to sit in the viewing stands. By grace of the passage which the Maestro had succeeded in keeping open to his thoughts, I could detect that Nicky was not only unseemly pale as he approached the pavilion, but that this pallor came from an unruly passion. I could feel its intensity. Some turn red with rage. He was pale with unspoken fury. Like Alix, his primal displeasure was directed toward the peasants. How could they have been so ungrateful, so self-destructive? Yet—heavy as chains lying upon his heart—it was his duty to forgive them. Could he call upon such a noble sentiment when he was marooned in anger? There were so many aspects to his fury. For he was equally enraged at the ineptitude of the police. And soon enough, was furious at himself. He had not paid attention to the arrangements for security. Much of this could have been prevented. Or was that true? Had the event been inevitable? Were his fortunes cursed? He did not know. He could hardly know. That night, he wrote in his diary:

Up till now, thank God, everything went perfectly but today a great sin has taken place. The crowd spending the night on the Khodynka meadow broke through the barrier and there was a terrible crush, during which it is terrible to say about 1300 people were trampled.

I kept studying the phrase, "a great sin has taken place." Was it the rioters or himself to whom he referred? For on the afternoon of May 18th, Count Witte, who was the particular statesman Nicky listened to most, had sent word: "In respect for the dead, all festivities should be cancelled immediately." Then, Witte added, "Most particularly, the French Ambassador's Ball." That was scheduled to take place on this very night, and it had been planned as the grandest evening of the Coronation.

Disagreement with Count Witte came quickly. Nicky's uncle, the Governor General of Moscow, the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, married to Alix's older sister, Ella, had taken over, among his other duties, the position of Director of the Peasants' Festival. By messenger, Sergei Alexandrovich sent a reply to Witte: "The Tsar considers Khodynka a great disaster, but

would inform you that in effect it was not so great a disaster that it should darken the Coronation holiday."

The older Grand Dukes, brothers to this Governor-General, were in accord. Their sentiments, however, were revolting to Nicky's cousins, the younger generation of Grand Dukes. Indeed, Nicky's dearest friend—his first cousin, Sandro, who was married to Nicky's sister Xenia—declared that the attitude of his uncles, these older Romanovs, this senior level of Grand Dukes, could only be described as "monstrous." And Sandro's brothers, the sons of grand Duke Mikhail, were in passionate agreement. Under no circumstances should Nicky attend the French ball tonight. What an outrageous insult to the dead! Where was Russia's honor? The Tsar, four days into his Coronation, was ready to agree with Sandro, but just then came Uncle Alexey into the room, and this Grand Duke was the oldest remaining brother of his dead father.

"Nicky," said Uncle Alexey, "surely you are aware that your cousins, these Mikhailovichs, and Sandro most particularly, are not people you can afford to listen to. They are young and inexperienced. They are radical. They are silly. They are worse than silly. I tell you, they will never admit it

to themselves, but they are siding with unholy forces. They wish to depose Sergei Alexandrovitch so they can put in one of their own as Governor-General of Moscow. Think what that will do to Sergei Alexandrovitch and to Ella. Your wife will be distraught that her beautiful sister Ella has to suffer this disgrace."

I was near enough to hear these opinions. Again, the Cudgels were not about. A host of just-perished souls must be in need of succor—perhaps the Dummkopf had dispatched the Cudgels to the morgue. This once, at any event, it was not at all difficult to stay close to Nicky.

So, I heard Sandro's brother, Nicolai Alexandrovich. So soon as Uncle Alexey marched off, he was ready to speak. "Nicky, I beg of you, do not go tonight to the French Ball. Recognize what I am saying. Whether we like it or not, we are still living in the shadow of Versailles. Louis the XVI and Marie Antoinette could dance all night because they were naïve. They had no sense of the approaching storm. But we do. We know!

"Nicky, search into your heart. What happened, has happened. The blood of these men, these women, and these children will remain forever upon your reign. That is unfair, because you are good, you are kind. I know, if you

could, you would revive the dead. But you cannot. So, Nicky, you must show your sympathy to their families. Your allegiance to them. Your respect. How can you allow the enemies of this regime—and they are everywhere—to be able to say that our young emperor was engaged in dancing through the night while his slaughtered subjects were still unburied?"

His eloquence succeeded. Nicky now knew that he did not want to go to the Ball. But his cousin was unable to maintain the high level of his argument, and soon surrendered eloquence to rage. "Why, I would ask," he went on, "didn't Sergei Alexandrovitch anticipate how great was the need for police? Any fool could have told him." Soon enough, he was all but saying that nasty tricks had been played with the coronation. Could this cousin have been listening to the same rumors I had heard? In Moscow, the word was out that the Governor-General had been siphoning off Coronation funds to pay for his gambling debts. It was not true. Sergei Alexandrovitch was not guilty of that. It happened to be his assistant. (That fellow was not only in debt to certain gamblers, but to us—one more of our Russian agents. Indeed, it was this assistant who had initiated the rumor that the Governor-General was corrupt.)

Poor Nicky. If he had one weakness, it was that he could not hold two opposed ideas in his mind long enough to decide which argument might have more to offer. Just as he was in the midst of giving real attention to cousin Nikolai's fine speech, so two of his uncles came back to the room. They proceeded to explain, and in the sharpest terms, that it would be an international insult should Nicky not be present at the Ball. The French Embassy had made expensive preparations. The absence of the Tsar and Tsarina would affect relations between the two countries. "Nicky, we depend upon the French alliance. For that alone, you must attend. The French take pride in measuring themselves by the sanity they can muster in crises. They detest sentimentality. They are proud of their froideur. If you are absent, they will see you as a womanly creature, swayed by compassion, exactly when we are in need of sound diplomacy. Foreign policy must not be affected by accidents."

Nicky attended the ball given by the French Ambassador. He had the first dance of the evening with Countess Montebello who was the wife of the French Ambassador, and Alix danced with the Count. In his diary, Nicky left this comment:

**The Montebello Ball was very magnificently done,
but the heat was unbearable. We left after supper at
two o'clock.**

Meanwhile, the Governor-General of Moscow was smiling. He was enjoying the Ball. Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovitch had a favorite saying: "It does not matter how awful the day has been. One must possess the character and the wit, to be able, when the music is lively and your drinks inspire, to enjoy an evening to the full. That is also our duty."

Sandro and his brothers had long been aware of Sergei's credo. So, on this night, they found his presence doubly intolerable. They made a point of leaving at the moment that dancing began. Uncle Alexey spoke out loudly: "There go the four imperial followers of Robespierre."

I was content. The Maestro would be pleased. He would also be amused, I was certain, when he learned that I had been able that night to insinuate myself into the Royal Chamber. That would hardly be believed. I had reached the Bedroom. The Cudgels were in more disarray than I could ever recall.

For a few minutes, (just before the Cudgels returned and I hurried to decamp) I was able to insinuate myself a little further into Nicky's mind and could report that he felt doomed. Doomed and damned. He knew this with certainty. It would take more than two decades to confirm what he knew on this night, but this night he knew. He was truly appalled. He told Alix that it might be his duty to retire to a monastery where he could pray for the victims. It was no way to speak to a wife on a night so full of a sense of doom. It may even account for the letter Alix would yet write to her friend, the German Countess Rantzau.

**I feel that all who surround my husband are
insincere. And no one is doing his duty for Russia.
They are all serving him for their career and personal
advantage and I worry myself and cry for days on end
as I feel my husband is very young and inexperienced—
of which they are taking advantage.**

How much more she might have wept if she had known what the ladies in Moscow were saying about her.

Before the Coronation, she had made a critical mistake. She had confided to her closest lady-in-waiting that she adored Nicky. "I love him so much. I call him secret names."

"What are these secret names?" asked the Lady-in-Waiting.

"Oh, I cannot tell you. They are so secret. I call him many sweet words, usually in English. For me, that is a warm language. Most hospitable."

It came out. Bit by bit. At last, it was in the air—her secret. The big secret that the Lady-in-Waiting swore she would never pass on to a soul. And the Lady-in-Waiting did not—not for a day or two. Then she told it to only one dear friend, and this lady swore in turn that she could be trusted altogether and forever.

In the event, the dear friend did not feel free to give the secret away at once. It took a few nights before she told one friend and then another. They, too, took a vow of silence, but did not wait as long before breaking their oath. Moscow's society was soon snickering over the Tsarina's much avowed love of English. Anyone who had a reputation for knowing what others did not know was now familiar with Alix and Nicky's secret words to each other. "Lovy, Boysy, Sweet one, my soul, mannikins mine, sweety, pussy-mine."

After they finished laughing at Alix, one of the ladies felt bound to remind the others, "She comes to us from behind a coffin. She carries misfortune."

For that matter, the Governor-General of Moscow was now called "The Prince of Khodynka."

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In the week that followed, there were eight days of fetes, dances, receptions, state visits, and musicales. On May 19th, there was a banquet in Alexander Hall in the Kremlin, and on the 20th, the Governor-General of Moscow gave his own ball. The 21st brought the Moscow nobility together at the Hall of Columns, Prince Trubetskoi as host. Four thousand guests appeared. On the 22nd, Nicky and Alix made a state visit to the Troisky-Sergeyevsky monastery, and on the morning of the 23rd, Nicky gave 20,000 rubles as a first installment on a children's home for the orphans of Khodynka. That evening, there was dinner with the English Ambassador at a palace ball in the St. Andrew Hall of the Kremlin. Thirty-one hundred guests. The

Germans, laying low, gave no more than a Musicale at their embassy next evening which was followed by a Palace dinner for all the ambassadors on the 25th. For conclusion, they were back at Khodynka Field on the 26th to witness a military review. The pits had been filled by then. It was another brilliant day and Nicky's carriage was drawn by six white horses. Thirty-eight thousand, five hundred sixty-five enlisted men marched in company with 2,000 officers. Sixty-seven generals watched.

By now, I was awaiting orders to leave. I did not know if I could acclimate myself to Hafeld after these exceptional days in Moscow, but the Maestro was quick to tell me: "Respect Hafeld. It is important." There was no reason to believe or disbelieve him—his real opinion was, after all, concealed behind the mirrors of his impenetrable bearing, but I can say that on my arrival back to Austria, I did feel better than I had in years. Khodynka was the largest operation in which I had participated for a long time. Or, so it seemed.

It is sad that few devils are permitted to retain much memory, but the Maestro employs the same principle as intelligence agencies. No one in intelligence is supposed to know anything about a project until there is a need

to know. We, in turn, are not encouraged to remember whatever we will not use for a new project.

Since I believe that I have been a devil for many centuries and have risen in rank and been demoted, it could be asked why, with such a history, I still had to learn a good deal while in Russia. It is because a newly-gained sophistication fades once a venture comes to an end. So, we gain many interesting qualities of mind, but soon lose them. What is of interest here is that the Maestro allowed me to keep these recent experiences intact.

Khodynka remained in my memory and my morale stayed close to excellent. Returning to the Hitler family, I could, given our success in Russia, believe again that the Maestro's aims were not small for this client, this young Adolf Hitler.

Filled now with a lightness of spirit altogether apart from the heaviness that is requisite to being loyal when there is no choice, I felt elevated upon my return to Hafeld. Soon enough I no longer thought about Nicky or Alix. Where was the need? If in future I was to be called back to Russia, the necessary recollections would be reconstituted.

In fact, it is interesting that I had such thoughts for, indeed, I was sent back in 1908, and would remain in Russia intermittently until the murder of Rasputin eight years later—that incomparable Rasputin, a most exceptional client. He was able to work in the closest union with me, but did insist upon continuing as well in the service of an astute and elevated Cudgel. What wars we had over Rasputin's soul.

I may yet look to portray these exceptional events, but that is not for this book. All large interruptions concluded, I now wish to record what happened to Alois, Klara, and Adolf over the next nine years. That will bring a close to this literary venture. For the present, then, we are back at the farm.

From here, I can see the path that leads to Der Alte's house.

BOOK IX

ALOIS-JUNIOR

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There was an odd matter waiting for me on the return to Hafeld. I had to convince Der Alte to burn one of his hives. He had been stung so severely by his bees that I found him in bed and with a cruelly swollen face. Several of the stings had come close to his eyes.

Given Der Alte's skills, he could not comprehend how so embarrassing an event had occurred in the course of looking into one of his better hives. While attempting to replace the queen—she was showing the first

unmistakable signs of final fatigue—he had been attacked by her escort. Der Alte was able to subdue this revolt with his cigar which he happened to be smoking at the time, but so drastic a revolt of his creatures had not visited him in years. It aroused my paranoia—always there in ready supply (for it is preferable to poor powers of anticipation.) I had to assume that this attack by the bees was a gift of the Cudgels, and so the hive had to be destroyed.

Upon receiving this order—which I passed into him as he slept—Der Alte did not obey quickly. A few days went by. Again, I sent the thought into his sleep, but now with harsh enough emphasis for him to recognize it could not be construed as a dream, but as an imperative. All the same, our old fellow was full of dismay. "Do it," I repeated in his sleep, "it will be good for you. Tomorrow is Sunday. That will augment the good effect. Sundays provide double value. But do not employ a sulphur bomb. Too many could survive. Rather, soak the hive with kerosene. Then light it, box and all."

He groaned in his sleep. "I cannot do that," said Der Alte. "The Langstroth cost me dearly."

"Burn it."

Der Alte followed my orders. He had to. At his age, he knew how deeply we were infiltrated into him. He did not wish to live with the terrors we could arouse, fears as real to his flesh as an ulcer. Death was close to his thoughts, sometimes as close as a caged beast in the next room. All of this, however, left me indifferent. It is hard not to feel contempt for old clients. They are so submissive. Of course, he did it. What facilitated the act is that a good part of him was enraged. His sense of the given had been upset and old habits can afford few shocks.

Sunday morning, he laid the hive on the ground and doused it. Staring into the commotion that seethed up in its flames, he did feel better. I was on the mark. It had been good for him. But he was perspiring like a horse. He was, after all, full of woe at the incineration itself—that did violate his professional instincts. He expected to weep for all those innocents now scorched into extinction with the guilty—but to his surprise, a rare sweetness returned to his loins. This was the first such sugaring of his body he had felt in years. Like many an old man, his lust had been confined to his head. It had been a long time since any accompaniment to a libidinous thought had been more memorable than a twinge of his groin.

I will mention that Adi happened to be present at the burning. He, too, had been given a message in his sleep and had no difficulty in accepting it. He slipped away from Klara and Angela even as they were preparing to go to church. Nor did this escape bother Klara unduly. Besides, Adolf was no joy to bring along. If not squirming in his seat, he would commence a contest with his step-sister to see who could succeed in pinching the other. On the sneak.

Yes, to be alone with Angela on Sunday morning allowed her to feel a little closer to her step-daughter. If the truth be witnessed, Klara was also content not to bring Edmund along, nor to be obliged to hold Paula at her breast through the service, hoping all the while she did not wish to be fed. Today, Alois had said he would remain with the two little ones. Klara could hardly believe such generosity. Was he softening? Was that possible? That was certainly another question I might have to explore. But, first, I would speak of Adi's excitement during this burning of the bees. His toes tingled, his heart shook in its chamber, he did not know whether to scream or to roar with laughter before this auto-da-fe. The ardors of living in Russia had, however, left me a touch indolent. I did not, as yet, feel eager to re-enter the complexities of this particular six-year-old. My morale was, as I have said,