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Through the Eyes of Time

A Senior Creative Thesis

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Crossing Time

Sasha couldn't find him.

There was no question about it this time. Sasha hated to admit defeat, but hours had gone by, searching and searching, and still there was no trace of Batbayar Orus. The infuriating part was that Batbayar himself was easy to spot, or would have been, but there were so many people that stood out to Sasha that he was lost in the crowd. Searching for Batbayar was like trying to find Waldo in a vivid rainbow, whose distracting colors kept leading her away from her original search for the little man in red, white, and blue.

The city section was a jumbled mess of merchants, royal officials, princes, courtiers, and tradesmen, as well as the women and children milling around the streets that one could only see when looking very, very hard. And Sasha was looking very, very hard, so naturally the women and children were quite clear, but of course, that wasn't who Sasha was looking for. It was frustrating that such a search, which had covered years and even decades of Batbayar's life, had turned up absolutely nothing. The only comfort Sasha had right now was that this search would certainly not span centuries, not even one, for by then Batbayar would be dead, and few people in Krosva felt obliged to remember him even while he was alive. Like so many, he had come to this city, done his business, and then left without leaving any trace except for a slight shift in the air around him, an unheard conversation with another tax collector, and, perhaps, a footprint. But there were many footprints in Krosva, and Sasha didn't have the time to go through them all.

Did the heat have to be so unbearable? Yes, it was January, but just because there was snow on the ground did not mean that one had to wear summer clothes indoors to be

at a reasonable temperature. Sasha wiped a bead of sweat off her forehead and shifted two steely blue eyes away from the Krosvan markets and towards the large tree. Its withered and twisted branches stuck out like tally marks on a page, counting the many generations that it had seen pass by. Sections of the tree were missing, but from what Sasha could gather, Batbayar had not left his imprint anywhere in that tree, much less near it. The most frustrating part was that the tree had the biggest number of leaves that Sasha had seen in this kind of tree—eleven, to be precise—and still there was no sign, not even a hint, of the Mongolian tax collector or of his descendants.

Eleven pages ruffled in the temporary breeze caused by Sasha's sudden exhalation of breath.

“~#@!”

Sasha slammed the *Chroniika Krosvii* shut, stormed over to the window, and threw it open. Throwing the book *out* the window would have been more satisfying, but Sasha took a deep breath of the cold January air and forcefully distracted herself by watching the people walking on the paths below. Their paces varied from leisurely walk to frantic skateboarding—or at least it looked frantic, since Sasha had never seen anyone skateboard at a pace slower than breakneck speed. Why was Batbayar nowhere in the book's records? He had appeared in those of other cities, so why not Krosva's? Sasha arched her back, trying to loosen up after sitting hunched over the chronicle for two hours. If her search was in vain and Batbayar had not actually visited Krosva, did this mean that Krosva had really escaped the brunt of the Mongol invasion and dominance of the thirteenth century? Now *that* revelation would really blow a hole in her book's thesis—

Sasha jumped as the door to the office reverberated with three sharp thuds, made by an unseen hand that barely managed to wait one second before opening the door.

“Sorry to interrupt, but I’d like to speak with you, Professor Kowalski,” an all-too-familiar voice said. Dr. John MacDonald waltzed into her office, smiling broadly.

“Yes, Dr. MacDonald, please come into my office without waiting for my invitation,” Sasha said coldly.

“It’s actually *Dean* MacDonald. I’m the newly appointed Dean of Studies here.” He extended his hand. “Nice to see you again, Sasha.”

Sasha didn’t move an inch. “Just because you’re a dean doesn’t allow you to barge into my office. I could have been engaged in a private conversation with one of my students.”

“Well, if I had, I’d hope that you wouldn’t be discussing anything too scandalous.” MacDonald retracted his hand. “I’d hate for you to lose your job here because you got involved with a student.”

Speaking from personal experience, MacDonald?

“Especially since you are one of the leading female experts of Russian history.”

Okay, this guy needed to leave. “Get out of my office.” One of the leading *female* experts? As if she was only valuable to the field because she was a woman?

“Look, I do need to talk with you about something of great importance. Can we sit down? Please?” MacDonald waved his hand impatiently at the empty chair before Sasha’s desk, his jovial grin replaced by an irritated frown.

Sasha paused. MacDonald seemed serious enough about talking with her, and she really didn't want to start a fight right now, especially with all the students and other faculty running around nearby. "Fine."

MacDonald shut the door and took his seat as Sasha returned to her own desk. For the first time, she noticed that MacDonald had a fancy-looking briefcase with him, made of what looked like black leather and clearly high in quality. Sasha sincerely hoped that he wasn't going to pull anything out of it and show it to her. The last time that had happened, he had whisked out an article that Sasha had originally deemed important but then later realized was completely inaccurate and irrelevant to her field. That had been a very frustrating waste of time, and Sasha was not about to repeat that scenario.

MacDonald took a moment to survey the small office around him. "Do you mind if I closed the window? It's rather cold outside," he asked.

"Vanderbilt Hall has an overenthusiastic heating system," Sasha said bluntly. "I'd keep the window open, if I were you."

"If you say so." MacDonald cleared his throat. "You seem to have a lot of volumes of *Kritika*." He pronounced the word in a surprisingly confident and blatant American accent. "Do you use them for your research?"

"No, I just keep them there because they look pretty," Sasha said sarcastically.

MacDonald smiled again, which made Sasha frown. "Your humor is as dry as ever, Sasha. May I call you Sasha? We've crossed paths for so long, I feel like we practically know each other."

"I prefer 'Professor,' thank you."

“Yes, well...” MacDonald tapped his index finger twice on the briefcase. “You published in *Kritika* a while ago, right?”

“Correct.” Sasha tried not to fidget, wondering where this was going.

“Have you published anything else recently?”

“Some other articles for leading journals like *Central Asian Survey* and *Journal of Eurasian Studies*. I’m currently working on a full-length manuscript.” Sasha thought about explaining the manuscript’s thesis but decided against it.

“Really? About what?” MacDonald pushed.

Guess I have to say now. “About the political and economic relations of medieval Russian princedoms with the *baskaki* and other administrators from Sarai during the time of the Golden Horde.”

“Oh. The Mongols, right?”

Sasha did not roll her eyes. “Yes.”

MacDonald nodded. “Sounds interesting. Yes, I remember you always liked that period. How close are you to publishing?”

“I still have a lot of work to do on the manuscript, but it’s making progress,” Sasha fibbed. She glanced at the *Chroniika Krosvii*, hoping that suddenly the book would come to life and flip to the page that contained Batbayar’s name, thus transforming her blatant lie into a plausible truth.

“I’m glad to hear it’s going well,” MacDonald said. “Have you published anything recently?”

“I’m a tenured professor, Dean MacDonald. Do you think I’ve had time to publish anything recently?” Sasha narrowed her eyes. “Besides, why are you concerned with my career? I thought you were always preoccupied about yours.”

“Actually, I’m also preparing to publish a book.” MacDonald grinned to himself. “It’s coming out this fall and should make a significant contribution to my field—our field, I mean.”

I bet. “So this is the purpose of your meeting—to come bother me with idle chit-chat?”

MacDonald chuckled, which made Sasha immediately tense up. “No, of course not. I actually wanted to talk with you about Professor Stevenson.”

“What about her?”

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that question?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Let me back up.” MacDonald leaned forward. “Several students have recently emailed me, asking about why Professor Stevenson’s courses are no longer on the AskBanner academic website. I’ve tried talking with the department chair about where Professor Stevenson is, but Professor Imbrascio is stubbornly quiet.”

“Good,” Sasha said firmly. “It’s a nasty affair.”

“Really?” MacDonald’s eyes twinkled. “Well, in that case, maybe you would be able to tell me what’s going on. Obviously if it’s very personal stuff, I don’t need to know details, but I would like a general hint. Quite frankly, Professor,” and here MacDonald leaned forward, the twinkle in his eyes diminishing, “I’m worried about my

students. They're very confused and they need answers, and I don't know where else to turn."

MacDonald continued to stare straight at her with such a surprising intensity that Sasha temporarily lost her train of thought. She realized that she had never actually studied MacDonald's eyes up this close. She had always thought they were light brown, but on further examination they were much darker than she had expected.

"Please, Professor. If not for me, then at least for the students," MacDonald said.

Sasha took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Something in his tone had jolted her back to the reality of the situation. "No."

MacDonald's dark brown eyes widened. "No?" he repeated, as if by repeating what she had just said, he could change the answer.

"No." Sasha took another breath, her brain clicking into action. "If Professor Imbrascio is keeping silent about it, then I'm not going to be that one professor that spills the beans when the beans shouldn't be spilled."

MacDonald sputtered. "But—"

"That's all you're getting from me."

MacDonald stared at her for a full three seconds and then stood. "Well, Professor, you've been most helpful." The sarcasm practically dripped off his tongue.

"Happy to help, Dean MacDonald. If that's all, I'm assuming you can show yourself out."

MacDonald made to leave but then paused. "Actually, there is one more thing. If Professor Stevenson is leaving, then who is taking over her classes?" To justify his

question, he added, “At least tell me so I can tell my students that they don’t need to find replacement courses.”

Sasha scowled. Unfortunately, MacDonald’s reasoning was sound; no student (or professor, for that matter) ever wanted to deal with the Add period for classes if they could help it. Besides, MacDonald was going to find out sooner or later who was teaching what, so she might as well tell him. “Professor Muppidi is teaching her foreign relations section, Professor Tomlin is doing the World War II class, and I’m taking over her Cold War seminar.”

“Oh.” A pleased smile crept across MacDonald’s face, which made Sasha feel slightly sick. “I’m glad to hear that you’re taking over the seminar. You’re probably the best person in the department to teach it, aside from Professor Stevenson, of course.”

“Thanks,” *I guess*.

“I hope they’re compensating you for your overtime?”

“The college and I have worked it out,” Sasha said vaguely.

“I see. Well, in that case, take care, Professor Kowalski.” MacDonald practically skipped out of her office.

Once the door had slammed behind him, Sasha leaned back in her chair. A gleeful MacDonald was always a bad sign. Why was he excited that she was overloading this semester? Three classes *and* working on her manuscript...it wasn’t possible—no, it most certainly was possible, Sasha was going to figure out a way of how to do it. She could handle the pressure, no matter what that snide MacDonald tried to imply. What was he up to, anyway, coming into her office like that? He could have asked any of the history

professors about Miriam Stevenson—Gemley would have spilled the beans faster than—
than what? Her thoughts were flying too fast for her to keep up.

Trying to distract her racing mind, Sasha sat up and pulled the *Chroniika Krosvii* towards her. She flipped to a random page and read aloud, “*The eighth day of December, in the year of our Lord 1271.*” A section she had read so many times, she felt like she could see the words etched in her brain if she just closed her eyes. “*After Yona the Fierce and his band of warriors left Krosva, Prince Prolesius fell ill of a most terrible sickness that caused him pain in his stomach and head. The physicians did what they could to heal him, but nothing seemed to cure him of the illness that had fallen on him. Realizing that he was not long for this world, he called his two sons, Adrios and Pavel, and instructed them to rule over Krosva together in peace and unity. After teaching his sons in all the wisdom he possessed, Prolesius succumbed to his illness and died in his bed, leaving his two sons and his city to mourn the loss of so dear a prince.*”

Sasha shut the book and pulled out her notebook. It was almost 10am, time to meet with her first thesis student. “And would he have divided up his kingdom if he had known what would happen?” she asked herself, even though she already knew the answer.

No. He never would have.

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“Please let us see him,” Pavel begged.

The guard frowned. “Doctor’s orders that he receives no visitors. I am sorry, princes.”

“We’re his sons. You need to let us at least say good-bye to him.”

Adrios glanced down the hall. The doctor, Mailkov, was busy talking with one of the noblemen's wives. *Hurry, Pavel. If we want to speak with Papa, now is the time.*

"I cannot," the guard repeated.

"Wouldn't you want to say good-bye to your own father if he was dying?" Pavel pressed.

The guard narrowed his eyes. "I am not about to let you two catch the same illness that Prince Prolesius has and leave our city again without a ruler."

"Move, Markus," Adrios snapped. *Time is almost up.*

"Adrios," Pavel hissed.

Adrios knew this hadn't been their initial strategy in dealing with the guard outside their father's door, but he ignored his younger brother and pressed on. "We need to speak with our father about his plans for Krosva. We can't speak with him if he's dead." Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Pavel winced at the harshness of his words. Adrios's own stomach churned uncomfortably, too, but the words had already been said.

"I'm sorry—" Markus tried again.

"Markus Petrovich, don't make us resort to force," Pavel said quietly, correctly reading the look on Adrios's face.

Markus's brown eyes flickered back and forth between the brothers and the doctor Mailkov, who was clearly preoccupied with his own conversation. "Don't tell him," Markus said quietly.

"We won't," Pavel quickly assured him.

Markus sighed and stepped back. Adrios and Pavel brushed past him and into the room.

“Papa,” Pavel said as he rushed to Prolesius’s bedside, “it’s us. It’s Adrios and Pavel.”

This isn’t Papa. The skin looked too yellowed for Prolesius’s, and his hands seemed to have shriveled from the illness, *or have they always been that shriveled?* The dim light of the rising sun made it difficult for Adrios to distinguish his father from the rest of the room. He glanced around while Pavel gently tried to wake Prolesius.

Everything looks the same, and yet something feels out of place. What? It’s the bed— Papa’s never in bed whenever I come in here. The scene felt so wrong.

“We’re here, we’re here,” Pavel kept whispering.

Prolesius stirred. Adrios came over and stood just behind Pavel.

“Do you think he’ll wake?” Pavel asked, not taking his eyes off their father.

“I think so. He’ll want to see us.”

“I do.” Prolesius slowly opened his eyes. A smile broke out across his face. “My sons. How are you?”

“We’re fine,” Pavel dismissed. “How are you doing? Are you in pain?”

Prolesius shifted and winced. “I’ll be fine, Pavel.” He tried to smile reassuringly, but the watering in his eyes told Adrios just how much pain their father was in.

Adrios crouched down next to Pavel and took Prolesius’s hand. It was hard to believe that two weeks ago, his father had stood so powerfully on top of the city’s wall, defending Krosva from the Tatars, and now...this old, bedridden man wasn’t the same person. The sight made Adrios’s heart hurt, as if it were about to crack. “What are the doctors saying?”

“Nothing good, but I’m not surprised by that. That’s what they said when I contracted a fever after my second trip to Sarai. And look.” Prolesius’s eyes briefly twinkled. “Didn’t stop me then.”

Adrios glanced at Pavel. *I don’t know what to say.*

Pavel caught Adrios’s gaze and wiped tears from his blue eyes. He slightly shook his head, as if to say, *I don’t want to broach this with him yet.*

Adrios nodded.

They sat in silence, listening to Prolesius breathe.

Pavel raised his eyebrows slightly, almost pleadingly. *Can you ask?*

No, Adrios did not want to ask, but there was no way he was going to make Pavel do it. He reluctantly nodded again and took a deep breath. “Papa, there’s something we wanted to ask you—”

“We know you’re going to be okay,” Pavel cut in quickly.

No, we don’t know that. Adrios exhaled slowly, trying not to let his temper rise at his brother’s unrealistic optimism. “Yes, we know that. But if in the future you get sick again, we need to know your plans for Krosva after—not that it would...”

“I understand.” Prolesius squeezed Adrios’s hand. “My sons, I have been blessed to have had you with me all these years. Watching you grow. Watching you defend Krosva and her people. I know the city is safe as long as you two are in charge. That is why I ask you to promise that after my death, you will continue to care for Krosva together.”

Pavel and Adrios stared at each other in shock.

“You’re not giving Adrios Krosva and me Maitalva?” Pavel asked.

“No. Maitalva is too small a city and not fit for a principedom. Besides, you two have already proven your ability to govern Krosva jointly. Promise me that you will continue to do so together after my death.” He stared fixedly at them, to the point that Adrios began to feel uncomfortable. “Promise me.”

“I promise, Papa,” Adrios said.

“As do I,” Pavel added.

Prolesius nodded and closed his eyes. “Good. Now I can rest in peace, knowing that Krosva has a secure future in you two.” He suddenly lurched forward into a coughing fit. Pavel grabbed his shoulder to keep Prolesius from tipping too far forward. For one terrible minute, the room was silent except for the harsh, racking gasps of a dying man. With each passing moment, Pavel’s grip on Prolesius’s shoulder grew tighter and tighter, refusing to let go. *This is killing my brother as much as it is my father.*

Markus poked his head in. “Prince Prolesius?”

“Pavel, go find Mailkov,” Adrios directed sharply.

Pavel shook his head. “I’m fine—”

“Go find Mailkov. Do it.” Adrios tried to soften his tone. He hoped that Mailkov was on the other side of the fortress right now. “Pavel, please go. I need you to do this.” *I can’t watch this destroy you.* He put his free hand on Pavel’s shoulder, meaning to pry his brother away, but he ended up just resting his hand there.

Pavel’s shoulders started shaking. He rose fast and hurried out of the room without saying a word to Adrios.

Adrios said to Markus, “Go with him.”

Markus took the hint and left, closing the door.

~~*~~*~*~~*~~

The unwanted call came at 2:43p.m. Sasha remembered the time, because she spent a good ten seconds staring at the wall clock before answering her phone.

“Hello?” she asked.

“Oh, hey, Sasha, I just wanted to talk to you about Mom and Dad’s anniversary, see what your plans were and all. You know how *particular* Mom gets about the details.”

“I have a meeting in fifteen minutes.”

“Don’t worry, Sasha, I only wanted to talk with you about a couple things.”

Sasha picked up her pen. She decided she would draw a flower first—a banal choice, if Sasha was being honest, but she didn’t know where else to start.

Taylor began: “So I know that Mom and Dad wanted to go out to dinner, and I was wondering if you would be able to drive down Thursday afternoon to join us. I misplaced your schedule, so I don’t know if you have any classes or meetings at that time, but you know, Mom and Dad would really love for you to be here. They keep talking about how you’re always up north and how they never see you, and I really think they’d appreciate you coming down for their anniversary, so, you know, we can be a—we can be a family again.”

There was a three-second pause that made Sasha temporarily stop doodling. She asked, “What do—” at the same time that Taylor said, “Sasha?”

“You go ahead,” Sasha said.

“No, please, you go, I wanna hear what you have to say.”

Sasha tried not to audibly sigh. “Just because we’re not in the same room all the time doesn’t mean that we’re not a family.”

“No, of course not! Sasha, you know I didn’t mean it that way.”

Sasha sketched the stem of her flower. “I have a class at 9am on Fridays.”

“Dear gosh, what kind of a time is that?” For once, her sister sounded as shocked, even outraged, as Sasha had when she’d discovered the time of her class last semester.

“Not a fun one. The point is that I don’t think I could make Thursday dinner without killing myself to get back to campus.”

“I mean, couldn’t you drive back on Thursday night? The traffic shouldn’t be too bad then, and you can always stop at a hotel at night if you get too tired.”

“I’d rather not,” Sasha said simply. “What else do you want to talk about?” It was 2:47pm.

“Well, before I get to that, I was just thinking that maybe you can come down for lunch on Thursday? I mean, I know Mom and Dad really wanted Thursday dinner with you, but if that doesn’t work in your schedule, then maybe we can—”

“I’m busy all Thursday.” Which was true: she had a meeting with her thesis student at 10am, class from noon to 1:30, another thesis meeting, a meeting with Professor Gemley at 3 (he better not be late today), and then she had to go home and do her own research and prepare for her 9am class at the crack of dawn on Friday (which she decided not to think about right now—this conversation with Taylor was stressful enough). “Let’s just drop the idea of me coming down, okay?”

“Oh.” Taylor hesitantly ventured, “Well, could we do Friday?”

Now that, Sasha reluctantly admitted to herself, was an option. On Friday she had nothing aside from her 9am and a thirty-minute meeting with the history librarian at noon. “Let me think about it.”

“Sure. Just let me know as soon as you can.”

Sasha waited to make sure Taylor’s silence was meant for her and then said,

“Okay.”

“Okay. So, the other thing I wanted to discuss is the trip during Spring Break—your Spring Break, obviously—to go to Mexico. Have you booked your flight yet? Also, I was wondering about booking the hotel rooms...”

Sasha drew while her sister talked, keeping her eye trained on the clock. As the bigger hand neared twelve, she started checking it every thirty seconds, almost frantically, until the bigger hand was almost perpendicular to the floor. “Taylor, I have to go,” she interrupted.

“—hoping to find something fun to do—what?”

“I have to go. My meeting’s now.” And it was—the clock by the chapel had just issued its first chime for three o’clock.

“Oh.” Taylor sighed the way she always did whenever she was frustrated. “Will you at least let me know what you think about all this?”

“Yes, I’ll let you know.” Sasha scribbled on the side of the paper, *Talk with Dad about Mexico trip asap*. “See you.”

“Wait wait wait, Sasha, I need to know about coming down on Friday—”

“I’ll tell you later. I’ve got to go. Bye.” Sasha hung up and glanced quickly around the Retreat. Aside from a few students studying, there was no sign of Professor Gemley. That didn’t make Sasha any less nervous.

She glanced down at her paper. Two flowers, one with five standard oval-shaped petals, one with crinkles around its edges like an autumnal mum. One star. Three hefty

parallel lines, all made by her surprisingly thin pen. When had she made those lines? Was it when Taylor had mentioned the beach? No...

Sasha stared at the flowers and then pulled out her notes. This new book on the *Chronika Krosvii* was taking a lot longer than she had expected. Where was Professor Gemley? The clock on the wall said 3:01. Sasha checked her watch—3:02. Was the clock on the wall a minute slow, or was her watch a minute fast? Why was Gemley late?

Stop it, Sasha, she thought. *You've met with Sean Gemley multiple times before. It's not a big deal*—but what if something had happened, or maybe Dean MacDonald had intervened in an attempt to thwart her research? *Stop it, Sasha*. But what if?

Sasha flipped through her notes to the section she was trying to write about Prolesius Vasilievich. The more she researched him, the more interesting he became. He'd lived through the Mongol invasion as a child and then had dramatically risen to become the next prince of Krosva (the former prince and his family had been wiped out by the invaders). Sasha still needed to do more research on Prolesius's political and economic rule in Krosva, but she did know some things about his personal life. Like how only three of his six children lived to adulthood (although Pavel Prolesiovich had died at sixteen, so Sasha wasn't sure whether to add that as a fourth death or not). Despite all her work, Sasha still had questions about Prolesius's family. How had he met his wife, Anna of Novgorod? Was it through his connections with her uncle, Alexander Nevsky? Did Anna know, Sasha mulled (and here she noted with relief that her heart rate, which had been pounding rapidly a few minutes ago, had finally slowed), did Anna know about the two bastard children Prolesius had? Anna's death date was unknown (typical), so it was unclear whether she'd been alive when Yona had attacked Krosva in 1272.

“Sasha, sorry I’m late,” Sean Gemley said as he materialized by her side. He set down his messy stack of papers with a loud rustle that shook the rickety tabletop.

“No worries.” Sasha shuffled her notes to the side to make room and glanced at the clock. 3:10. *I guess Taylor could have kept going.* Maybe Sasha felt a twinge of guilt at that realization, but she brushed it aside and returned to her meeting. Her heart started to beat a little faster, although there was no reason why it should. “So what’s our plan?”

“Slow down there, Sasha, I need to get something to eat first.” Gemley made a beeline for the kiosk in the corner of the room, leaving Sasha fuming with her thoughts for another ten minutes. When Gemley came back, she had reorganized her papers for the third time and drawn two additional flowers next to the ones she had made during Taylor’s conversation.

“How’ve you been?” Gemley asked as he casually sat down and opened his yogurt.

Sasha sighed. “I’ve been fine.” She lowered her voice. “This morning had a strange visit from Dean MacDonald today. He was asking about why Miriam wasn’t teaching any classes this semester.”

“MacDonald who? Did our administration suddenly become a chain restaurant?” Gemley chuckled at his own joke.

Sasha rolled her eyes. “John MacDonald, newly appointed Dean of Studies.”

“Oh, okay. Yeah, I’d guess he’d be curious about stuff like that. It’s good to keep the deans of the college informed.” Gemley added a few raisins to his yogurt.

“Sometimes, but not in this situation,” Sasha murmured, almost to herself. She wondered how quickly Gemley would have told MacDonald about Miriam. *At least I can*

be grateful that MacDonald visited me instead. The situation with Miriam was really quite sad, and the fewer people that new about it, the better. “Is it okay if we get started while you eat?”

“Oh yeah, sure.” Gemley took a bite of his yogurt and chewed. “What’s up with the book?”

“I’m stuck on this one section.” Sasha flipped to the page. “It’s about Prolesius’s son, Adrios. I’m trying to look for information about his policies on succession and diplomacy, but this chronicle is giving me pathetically little information.”

“Hmm.” Gemley finished his yogurt and picked up a sandwich. “Have you tried looking at other chronicles? Maybe a last testament?”

“Adrios didn’t leave a last testament.”

“Huh. Then how did they know who his successor was? Wait.” Gemley wagged his sandwich for emphasis. “Wasn’t his younger brother supposed to take over the throne or something?”

“No. Pavel was Adrios’s co-ruler. He died a year after Prolesius did and Adrios assumed sole control of the throne.” Sasha shuffled the pages so that the corners lined up. “Probably for the best.”

“That’s a harsh thing to say.” Gemley slowly peeled the crust off his sandwich. “Didn’t Pavel’s death create a political crisis?”

“No. this was the first time in Krosvan history that anyone joint-ruled a principedom.”

“Sounds unique.”

“It was a stupid idea that didn’t work out well. Siblings should never co-rule

together.” Sasha glanced up as MacDonald walked by and took a seat two tables away from them. “How’s your article going?” she asked Gemley.

“Oh, fine as it can be. I’m trying to get some good work in before the weekend. My daughter’s getting married on Sunday.”

“Congrats. Sounds like it will be a fun weekend.”

“Yes, I am very much looking forward to it.” Gemley took a bite of his sandwich, swallowed, and clutched his throat.

Immediately Sasha was on her feet, waiting, desperately hoping he wouldn’t choke and die on her. “Heimlich?” When he didn’t respond, she repeated, “Sean, do you need me to do the Heimlich?”

Gemley shook his head and started coughing. Sasha didn’t sit down until the coughing stopped and he looked up at her with watering eyes. “I’m fine, Sasha. Thanks for being so alert, though.”

Sasha sat back down, sensing that MacDonald’s eyes were on her. “Are you okay? Can I get you water or anything?”

“No, no, I’m fine.” Gemley simultaneously coughed and chuckled. “Just went down the wrong pipe, that’s all.” He leaned back and studied Sasha. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. You just seemed to be in trouble and I wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“Well, I appreciate it, but don’t worry. I’m fine now.”

“Why did you think I was not okay?” Again, Sasha felt MacDonald’s eyes drilling deeper into her back.

“I mean, don’t get me wrong, I’m glad you responded fast. But even when I first

sat down...you just seem more on edge than usual.”

“It’s just a busy time of the semester, what with classes and everything, but nothing that I can’t handle.”

“Mm.” Gemley put down his sandwich and picked up his water—*he can still choke on water but at least—stop it, Sasha.*

“I’m not usually this rattled,” she defended.

“I’d disagree.” Gemley kept studying her with an expression that looked like concern. “You’re always running off to do something. Have you ever thought about taking a break every now and then?”

“That’s what Spring Break is for.” *Although we’ll be going to Mexico, so who knows how much of a break that will be.* “Besides, the semester just started. I’ll be fine once I get back into my rhythm.” Sasha did her best to sound casual. Because yes, it was busy, but she’d be fine—she survived four years of college and another seven years of studying for her Ph.D. This position was cake compared to that.

Gemley shrugged. “True. Sometimes we just need to adjust. Speaking of adjusting, I was actually thinking of rewriting my article’s thesis.”

“Your whole argument?” Sasha’s eyes widened. “But that’s going to set you back months—”

“I can’t seem to find enough evidence about the treatment of illegitimate children in the late Victorian household. I’m thinking of maybe looking at birth demographics instead. Or conduct manuals.” Gemley grinned. “Those are always fun to read.”

Sasha raised her eyebrows. “You and I have very different definitions of fun.”

“And both are completely valid.” Gemley put down his water and eyed his

sandwich. “May I delve into this mustard-laden deliciousness without you panicking?”

“Only if you don’t choke again.” Sasha glanced at her watch—not quite yet 3:30. The day felt incredibly long; she could hardly believe that she had talked with MacDonald about Miriam Stevenson just this morning. For a moment, she wanted to close her eyes and take a nap, but that wasn’t about to happen. “After you’re done eating, tell me how I can help you brainstorm your new article topic.”

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Kings and Kin of Krosva: A Working Book Title

By Sasha Kowalski

Section 10: Tyrgol’s Siege of Krosva in 1272

Prolesius’s hope that a co-reign between his sons Adrios and Pavel would make Krosva stronger against her enemies was quickly destroyed when a much larger Mongol force, led by the military commander Tyrgol, advanced on the city gates in July 1272. Little is known about Tyrgol before 1261, when he fought in Berke Khan’s army against Berke’s rival Hügalü in the Persian Ilkhanate. Having distinguished himself in Persia, Tyrgol went on to serve in several campaigns for both Mongol and Russian rulers. His shifting alliances attest to the complex relationship between invaders and invaded. As the Rus’ princedoms grew more accustomed to the presence of the Mongols, resistance gave way to reliance. The Mongols intervened in Russian affairs, raiding and attacking as their interests matched with those of particular Russian princes (de Hartog 65-6). Tyrgol’s army supposedly had the additional nominal and even military support of Novgorod, who had been engaged in a border quarrel with Krosva since 1262. Tyrgol’s invasion also served Mongol interests as well as Novgorodian ones. Prolesius’s policy

of neglecting Mongol taxes, which probably led to Yona the Fierce's initial attempt to capture the city in 1271, continued in the reign of his sons Adrios and Pavel and hurt Krosva's standing with the Golden Horde. Tyrgol arrived to remedy the situation:

And the Tartars [Mongols] came and established their camp outside the noble city of Krosva. For three days and three nights Adrios and Pavel boldly defended the city against the Tartars' onslaught...On the fourth day the Tartars broke through the city's defenses and massacred all who lived there. The buildings burned, the people wailed, and the streets were drenched in blood. "God, please hear the calls of Your people! Spare this city from its destruction!" ...the Tartars invaded the fortress to kill the princes. Evil crept into Pavel's heart and he attempted to betray Adrios and the city to the Tartars, promising the Tartars much wealth and power if they killed his brother and gave the throne to him...The pious Adrios, however, found out about his brother's plot and killed Orthane [Tyrgol's commander and Pavel's co-conspirator]. The Tartars found out about Adrios's escape and in a rage killed Pavel. Thus the despicable traitor of Krosva died, leaving the righteous Adrios to rule over Krosva alone.

(Chroniika Krosvii 292-4).

The chronicler's account of the siege should be taken with a teaspoon of salt. Clearly the Mongols did not massacre everyone in the city if there were still people to "wail" and if Adrios lived to rule Krosva until 1302. Moreover, the story of Pavel's betrayal is told using a didactic tone: the evil and selfish prince dies while the good and selfless one survives. While Pavel may not have necessarily been "evil," it is possible that he became

fed up with co-ruling with his demanding older brother and sought to use the Mongol attack to his advantage.

Instances of brother turning on brother were not uncommon in Mongol-occupied Russia. Just a few years later in 1281-82, Alexander Nevsky's sons Dmitrii and Andrei raised separate armies and fought each other for greater political influence and territory. Seeing the Mongols as potential allies, both bolstered their ranks with Tartar troops; the Tartars used the Nevsky family quarrel to further their own interests in Russia, intervening and fighting for their preferred brother to become the next Grand Prince of Vladimir. Unlike Adrios and Pavel, however, Dmitrii and Andrei eventually reconciled (de Hartog 69-70). Given the exaggerated narrative of the chronicle, the author's account of Pavel's betrayal is not to be completely trusted. It is highly unlikely that the Mongols killed Pavel simply because they flew "in a rage." A more plausible explanation is that Pavel tried to seize power in a manner that both Adrios and the Mongols found offensive. Mongol tolerance for Russian spiritual practices¹ also extended to political succession, as the Mongols upheld Russian policies of giving the principdom to the most senior male member of the family (de Hartog, especially pgs. 6-7; Martin 26-7). As Prolesius had no brothers who survived the Mongol invasions of 1237-40, his eldest son Adrios was the next logical candidate for the throne, not Pavel. The chronicler critiques Pavel not only for his fratricidal intentions but also because Pavel, as a junior member of the family, sought to defy the established political system of Mongol Russia and to usurp power from his older brother. The fact that Prolesius had sanctioned Adrios and Pavel's

¹This concept has been upheld by many scholars, particularly de Hartog's *Russia and the Mongol Yoke*, Halperin's *Russia and the Golden Horde*, and Pospelovsky's *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*. See also "Religion in the Mongol Empire," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundations, Inc., 14 April 2018, web. 8 May 2018), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_Mongol_Empire.

co-reign did not in the eyes of the chronicler make Pavel an equal to Adrios, and the death of Pavel restores the balance of power that both Russians and Mongols found agreeable.

The Krosvan situation demonstrates the interwoven complexities of family and state politics in post-Kievan Russia and the dangers that sibling rivalries posed to the health of the princedoms. The brothers' continued vacillation over whether to pay the Mongol tax meant that Krosva was unprepared to pay and unprepared for a siege. Amidst the confusion and contradiction within the narrative and within the brothers' politics, however, one thing is certain: the destruction and psychological trauma inflicted by the Mongols severely weakened Krosva and left Adrios with the difficult task of rebuilding the city after so devastating an invasion.

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First Impressions

The market street in Krosva boasted of various stands and shops that lived as long as the sun was up, or as long as there was produce to sell. Despite it being early morning, the street was bustling as if the bell tower had struck high noon. It was so busy that Adrios, who had been trying to inconspicuously follow the flow of the crowd, narrowly avoided getting run over by a woman carrying two basketfuls of onions that were more than her arms could handle.

“Watch out!” she called to no one in particular. Adrios blinked and looked behind him, wondering if she was talking to him, but by then she had disappeared into the crowd.

Adrios resumed fighting his way through the throng of people and animals, avoiding Tyrgol’s patrols as much as he could as he searched for Louka. After about five minutes of ducking, weaving, and searching, Adrios realized that he had almost no idea what Louka looked like in daylight. He stepped out of the stream of people, trying to get a better view of the crowd, and found himself next to a potato stand.

“You look lost,” the grizzled woman running the stand grumbled.

“I’m fine.” Adrios noticed the old woman’s missing eye and wondered how she’d lost it. A Tatar arrow, maybe? Her other eye was a pale blue that stared fixedly at him to the point that he began to feel very uncomfortable. Trying to distract himself from her gaze, Adrios explained, “I’m looking for someone.”

“Want to buy a potato while you wait? Three rubles a spud.”

“I’m fine.” Adrios kept his eyes on the crowd. It was taking all of his concentration to search each face, looking for the mercenary.

“You look familiar.” The old woman leaned forward. “I’ve seen your face.”

Adrios inwardly groaned. “You must be mistaking me for someone else.” *Would she stop talking already?*

“Young man, I’ve lived in this town for fifty-nine years and I never forget a face, especially the eyes...yes, especially your eyes. They’re what make your face look so...royal.” The old woman cackled at her own joke.

“You’re crazy,” Adrios snapped. “I’m not Prince Adrios.”

“I never said that.” The woman smiled. Adrios was surprised to see a mouth full of mostly intact teeth. “Although now that you mention it, that would be my first guess. Am I right?”

“Prince Adrios!” The head of Fedor Bukharov, one of the nobles at Adrios’s court, popped up out of the crowd and swiveled around until his eyes came to rest on Adrios. Immediately Bukharov began to wade his way through the sea of people towards the potato stand. “Prince Adrios!”

The woman’s smile increased at the sight of Adrios’s scowl. “You do look quite a lot like your father, you know.”

“Sometimes I wish the opposite were true,” Adrios muttered as he ducked into one of the side alleyways and moved away from the market square, hoping Bukharov wouldn’t notice where he’d gone. The sun had not yet risen over the wall, so the alley was still cold. An involuntary shiver ran down Adrios’s back.

“What are you doing here?” Bukharov asked as he caught up with Adrios, to Adrios’s dismay. “With no guards? Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

Adrios walked back towards the market square, hoping to lose Bukharov in the crowd. Bukharov, however, sensed Adrios’s plan and stepped in front of him, blocking his way back to the market square. “Don’t tell me you’re going to go see the mercenary,” Bukharov accused.

“I was, until you yelled my name in the middle of the streets so that all of Tyrgol’s soldiers could hear.” Adrios tried to step around Bukharov, but Bukharov was unexpectedly nimble and cut him off again. Adrios exhaled, feeling his temper start to rise. “Let me guess: you think this is a bad idea.”

“You met this man on the streets of Krosva at night. That’s not a good sign.”

“Maybe it is, if he can help us.” Adrios sidestepped again.

Bukharov remained inconveniently in the way. “I don’t care about what you told General Zeyzut, that he fought alongside you against Tyrgol’s patrol. Or that he can speak Tatar. He still fought for Tyrgol.”

“If we want a good treaty with Tyrgol, we have to be able to negotiate, and to do that, we need a translator.” Adrios glanced up at the sky. He couldn’t see how high up the sun was in the sky, which made him nervous. How soon would the bell chime eight?

“You’re just repeating back what Zeyzut told you to say. Adrios, listen to me.”

“Fedor Ilievich Bukharov, as ruler of Krosva, I command that you let me pass.”

“No, not this time.” Bukharov’s hand clenched. “I lost my father and my son in that siege. I’m not about to watch you turn into your two-faced brother and try to negotiate with the monsters that came here!”

Adrios was faster with his fists than Bukharov was. One swift swing of his arm and Bukharov was clutching his eye.

“I’m not my brother,” Adrios said flatly. Before Bukharov could answer, Adrios had re-entered the market square and disappeared into the crowd. After being in the cold shadows of the alley, the body heat of the people and animals around him should have made him feel warmer, but it didn’t.

The bell tower struck eight. Adrios looked around, more frantically than he had before, but when he saw Bukharov running towards him, he gave up his search for Louka and dove deeper into the mass of people. The voluminous noise produced by vendors hawking their wares, friends calling out to each other, and carts rattling down the street

made it difficult for Adrios (and hopefully others) to hear Bukharov calling out Adrios's name.

“Prince Adrios—”

“—apples, two rubles an apple—”

“—I caught him in the barn the other day—”

“—Adrios—”

“—sewing for Alexandra Petrovna's new skirt—”

“—yes, Cook, what can I do for you today—”

“—where are you—”

“—don't cheat me—”

“—Pavel—”

Adrios ducked this way and that, trying not to think about anything but losing Bukharov. His vision was starting to blur, most likely from all the spinning he was doing. And it must be well past eight by now—which meant he had blown his chance to meet with Louka. Adrios swore and tried to fight his way out of the square, only to run into a cart of wheat. He staggered back, clutching his sore arm, while the cart shook like a dog and shed wisps of grain.

“Hey!” The man driving the cart marched up to Adrios. “Watch it, will you?”

“You watch where you're going, peasant,” Adrios shot back.

“I'll show you—”

Adrios was dying for a fight, but before he could engage, someone yanked him back into the crowd and guided him away from the man, who kept hollering, “Come back here!” Adrios stumbled along, unable to tug himself free from the man's grip, until they

finally emerged back at (oh no) the potato stand. Adrios shook the stranger's hand free and rubbed his arm. Behind him, the throng of indistinguishable men, women, and children glided on like an unending river. Neither Bukharov nor the man from the hay cart was in sight.

"Looks like I saved your neck again, Adrios." Louka leaned back against one of the stand's posts. "You're late."

Adrios narrowed his eyes. "I didn't need your help."

"Oh, yes you did, young man," the potato woman called out from behind her stand. "You almost got into quite a fight with Leon Ivanovich."

Adrios opened his mouth to retaliate, thought about what he was going to say, and wisely decided to ignore her comment. Instead, he took a moment to study Louka in broad daylight. The mercenary looked to be about average height, and his dark hair had no speck of gray. Louka's eyes, however, were difficult to interpret: their shape was similar to that of the other Tatars Adrios had seen, but their color was a strange light brown like that of a Krosvan's. The ambiguity did not make Adrios like Louka any better.

"Well?" Louka asked. "Did you consider my offer?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"You worked for the Tatars once before. How do I know you won't betray us to them?"

"If I were going to betray you, Adrios, I would have done so the other night."

"That doesn't give me any reason to trust you now."

Now it was Louka's turn to study Adrios. Some sort of emotion flickered across the mercenary's face—maybe anger, maybe something else—but whatever it was, it worried Adrios. He wished he knew why it worried him.

Was this really a good idea?

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[26 January, 10:04 a.m. Inbox of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear Professor Kowalski,

On behalf of the Dean of Studies office and the department of History, I would like to thank you for stepping in and teaching Miriam Stevenson's Cold War seminar this semester. I would also like to add that if you ever need any good articles on the Soviet Union in the twentieth century, let me know. I will be happy to provide them, as I know this field of Russian history particularly well and would like to help ease your burden of teaching this class as best I can, what with your book and all.

Best,

John MacDonald, Ph.D.

Dean of Studies at Vassar College

Brigham Fellow at Wintercard Institution

[2 February, 4:34 p.m. Inbox of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear Professor Kowalski,

I am checking in to ask how your semester is going. Considering that you have not responded to my previous email, I imagine that you are pretty busy right now. Let me know if there is anything I can do.

On a related note, I've had several students from your Cold War seminar visit me and voice their concerns about Rudy Applegate, whose behavior has become more disruptive and appears to be impeding both his academic growth and that of his peers. I would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss the situation and to plan a course of action for dealing with Mr. Applegate. Email me as soon as you can to set up a time to meet. My hours are weekdays 8:30am-5pm.

Best,

John MacDonald, Ph.D.

Dean of Studies at Vassar College

Brigham Fellow at Wintercard Institution

[8 February, 4:53 p.m. Inbox of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear Professor Kowalski,

I do need to meet with you about Applegate. He's become a major concern to me and to several students and we need to address this as soon as possible. Are you free to stop by my office at 12:30pm this Wednesday to discuss him?

In addition, I was perusing some recent editions of the journal Kritika and came across an article that discussed negotiation tactics between the Golden Horde and Appanage Russia. I thought I'd send it your way—it will help with your research on Krosva. I happen to know the man who wrote it and his credentials in the fields of Russian studies are extraordinary.

By the way, may I call you Sasha? I know you want to be addressed by your official title but given that we're peers and that we've known each other for so long, I'd prefer to use a more informal tone towards one another.

Best,

John MacDonald, Ph.D.

Dean of Studies at Vassar College

Brigham Fellow at Wintercard Institution

[8 February, 9:27 p.m. Unsent Draft of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear "John MacDonald, Ph.D.,"

If you can't sign your emails without pasting your fancy titles and fellowships at the bottom, then forget about calling me "Sasha." And you can stop sending me useless articles about scholars who have been living in retirement on some Florida beach for the past five years.

[11 February, 11:39 p.m. Unsent Draft of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear Yuri Arkhipov,

I am writing to inquire about a colleague of mine, John MacDonald. I think he's trying to sabotage my research, and I want to know why. I heard that you did some work with him at the Krosvan dig site and was wondering if there was anything you could tell me about him that would incriminate him in some way, or would give me some leverage to use against him, so that I can finally get him off my back, because this has been going on for thirteen plus years and I'm sick of it.

[12 February, 12:21 a.m. Sent Mail of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear Dr. Arkhipov,

I am a professor of history at Vassar College and am currently working on a book project that studies the princedom of Krosva during the Mongol rule. My colleague, Dr. John MacDonald, mentioned that he worked on the Krosvan dig site with you in July 2012. I would like to talk with you about your experience with MacDonald during the dig, as it would greatly assist me in writing my book. I am happy to talk through email or on the telephone. Please let me know if you are interested.

Thank you in advance, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Sasha Kowalski, Ph.D.

Professor of History

Vassar College

[19 February, 12:30 p.m. Sent Mail of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear Dr. Arkhipov,

I am following up to see if you received my previous email regarding your participation with Dr. John MacDonald on the Krosvan dig site in July 2012. It would be a huge benefit to my research if I could talk with you about your experience with MacDonald during the dig. I understand that the academic calendar can be very busy this time of year, but please let me know as soon as you can if you are interested.

Best regards,

Sasha Kowalski, Ph.D.

Professor of History

Vassar College

[24 February, 2:41 p.m. Inbox of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Hello Professor Kowalski,

Yes, I worked with Dr. MacDonald on the Krosvan site. I will be in New York City during the first week of March. I can stop by Vassar if you would like to meet in person.

Д-р Юрпий Архипов

Профессор истории и археологии

Московский государственный университет имени М. В. Ломоносова

[25 February, 9:56 a.m. Sent Mail of sakowalski@vassar.edu.]

Dear Dr. Arkhipov,

Thank you for your willingness to discuss your research with me. You are welcome to stop by my office (Vanderbilt Hall, Room 304) during my office hours, which are Tuesdays 1-3pm and Thursdays 3-5pm. We can also schedule an appointment if those times do not work with your schedule.

Sincerely,

Sasha Kowalski, Ph.D.

Professor of History

Vassar College

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“Put the potatoes on the stove! No, not those ones, the other ones, can’t you tell that green potatoes are not good potatoes? Greta, come here. Take those up to the prince’s table and set them down. Fedor, did I *not* tell you that green potatoes are not good potatoes? Throw those out! Greta, where are you?”

A blonde-haired girl scurried up. “Yes, Cook?”

“Help Masha with the soup, she’s struggling on her own. And box Fedor’s ears on your way out.” Cook ignored the little boy’s cries and turned to the preparation of the meat. “Don’t mutilate the squirrel meat, Sasha. Treat it gently.” Taking the knife from the young man, she showed him the proper cuts he needed to make. Behind her, over the din of the kitchens, her sharp ears picked up Greta’s soothing words to Fedor, followed by the sloshing of the soup against the pot as Greta and Masha carried it out the door.

“The Prince is coming!”

Cook cursed under her breath and handed Sasha back his knife. The people in the kitchens bowed as Adrios entered, followed by General Ivan Zeyzut. Adrios glanced around, not seeming to see anything, but when he spotted Cook his eyes cleared and he asked her, “Everything well?”

“Yes, Prince,” she replied.

“Good.” He addressed the general kitchens. “You may get back to work.”

The workers resumed their tasks, although at a more subdued din. Cook wiped her hands on her skirts (as usual, it would need a thorough washing at the end of the day) and walked over to him.

“Why does the prince of Krosva grace us with his presence today?” Cook grumbled. “You could have picked a less busy time.”

“Cook, we need Ivan Vasilievich to give us his daily reports of the pantry.” Zeyzut stepped forward. “We figured that this would be a good time to check on the provisions and see how the kitchens have been stocking up after the siege.” Behind Zeyzut, Cook saw Fedor Bukharov, Kiril Morav, and another man that looked vaguely familiar standing in the kitchen doorway.

“Watch that knife, Sasha,” Cook said, not taking her eyes off Zeyzut. In her peripheral vision, Sasha pulled his fingers quickly out of the way of his blade and glowered at her back. Cook ignored him. “I’ll go tell Ivan Vasilievich for you. He’s in the back doing important work. Is that all?”

Adrios had been silent during their exchange, but at the phrase “important work” a smile flickered across his face. Zeyzut did not pick up on Cook’s implication and instead puzzled over her decision to voluntarily do so lowly a task as fetch the supervisor of the kitchens. “Yes, that’s all,” Zeyzut dismissed. He glanced around at the bustle of people one more time. “Smells good.”

“Good to hear. Now get out, we have work to do for tonight. Oh, wait—Adrios, Ivan Vasilievich wanted to speak with you personally. Kiril Ivanovich, don’t you dare pick your nose in my kitchen. Fedor Andreevich, stop staring at Anna.”

Morav and Bukharov both glared at Cook and left, muttering amongst themselves. Once Zeyzut and the other man had gone after them, Cook headed towards the pantry where the provisions were stored, stopping here and there to critique a worker’s actions and taste a dish. Whereas her comments normally were met with grumbles and grudging respect, today everyone was quick to do what she said, an unusual pattern that told her Adrios was still following her. She did one last check to make sure that the kitchens

would continue running while she was away—they would, as Masha and Greta had just returned—and then entered the pantry, praying that this conversation would go well as she closed the door after herself and Adrios.

“Does Ivan Vasilievich want more vodka?” Adrios asked wryly.

“What is wrong with you, Adrios?” Cook said seriously.

Adrios’s eyes hardened. “I’m not having this conversation with you.”

“I know Pavel’s death affected you.” It was very difficult, when talking with Adrios, to keep her voice down. “Tell me what happened.”

“I’m not telling you anything!”

“Oh yes you are.” Cook rose to her full height and stared Adrios straight in the eye. Although she was no longer taller than Adrios, she was pleased to note that he still shrank slightly when she used this tone of voice. “I may not be your mother, but remember that I practically raised you. So stop denying it and tell me how he died.”

“There’s nothing to tell!”

“Yes, there is. You haven’t talked about Pavel since he died. You haven’t mourned his death. You’re not sleeping—”

“I don’t need advice from an old woman like you,” Adrios snapped.

“Don’t use that tone with me,” Cook said sharply. A faint rustling came from the opposite side of the door, but Cook forced herself to ignore it. “Stop acting like a boy and start acting like a man.”

“I am acting like a man.” Now Adrios straightened up and took a step towards Cook. “My brother was a traitor and a coward. He died the death he should have. Why should I mourn him?” He took a deep breath. “I am doing everything I can to help this

city and its people recover from what Tyrgol and his troops did. I don't need you or anyone else to keep bringing up that madman who tried to negotiate with Tyrgol. He was a fool and you know it, so *stop*—” Adrios faltered, but only for a second. “—So *stop* pretending that he was a good man, because he wasn't. Are we clear?”

It was the first time Adrios had said or done something that sent a shiver of fear through Cook's spine. This wasn't Adrios—this wasn't the boy who had run around the halls with his younger brother, laughing and fooling around and getting into places they shouldn't, just for the fun of it.

“I know you don't mean any of that,” she said quietly.

“I mean all of it.” Adrios's eyes were grave, to the point that they looked almost lifeless.

Cook was momentarily speechless. This was not how she was hoping this conversation would go, but at this point there was no dissuading Adrios. “Fine, then. Live in a lie for the rest of your life.”

“It's not—” Adrios began.

Cook heard the rustling by the door again and raised her voice over him. “Trust me, Adrios,” she said as she backed towards the pantry door, “you and I are going to have a long talk.” Swiftly she threw open the door in time to see the unknown man who had been standing behind Zeyzut now jump back in surprise from the doorway. *Caught you.*

Cook studied him in silence. Yes, she recognized him now, from that terrible day when Tyrgol had broken down Krosva's gates and Pavel had died. He was the man that had staggered into the kitchen, clutching his bleeding side and screaming in broken Russian for help. Sasha had wanted to kill him, since he was dressed like a Mongol

warrior, but Cook had instead bandaged up his side as best as she could and laid him with the dying, not sure if he'd make it.

“I didn't expect to see you walking around so soon,” she said.

The man just stared. Cook wondered if he even recognized her.

“You know him?” Adrios asked in surprise.

“I've meet him before, but I don't remember his name.” Cook looked expectantly at the man.

“Louka,” he said. His expression was a mixture of shock and fear.

“Louka,” Cook repeated, storing the name in her mind. “Good name, but not for someone who sneaks around to overhear private conversations.”

“I didn't overhear anything, I was just trying to find Prince Adrios,” Louka protested. He turned to the prince. “It's Zeyzut—he wants you at the stables, urgently.”

“Really.” Cook looked back at Adrios, eyebrows raised. “What's Zeyzut doing this time, Adrios?”

Adrios brushed past Cook and headed out of the kitchens. At the doorway, he nearly bumped into Greta, and for a moment Cook thought she saw—but Adrios was gone before she could register what look had passed between the two.

Cook refocused on Louka. “How well did it heal?”

“Fairly well. You kept it from getting infected. Thank you,” he added.

Cook nodded and glanced at the now-empty doorway. “Does Adrios know who you are?” She didn't mention the Tatar commander's name, since a few ears were turned their way. However, when Louka didn't say anything, she added quietly, “That you worked for Tyrgol?”

“Oh.” Louka seemed to relax. “Yes, he knows I served as a mercenary.”

Cook squinted at him. “And why were you eavesdropping?” The look he was giving her was frighteningly familiar.

As if sensing that she was trying to identify him, Louka broke eye contact and surveyed the kitchens. “I wasn’t, I just came by the door because I heard Prince Adrios’s voice, but I didn’t want to interrupt...” Louka saw the expression on Cook’s face and wisely switched topics. “Where is Ivan Vasilievich?” He pronounced the name with a distinct Tatar accent.

“Sleeping behind the boiler, as always.” A clattering pot caught Cook’s attention. “Do me a favor and come back in an hour. I’ll have the report ready for Adrios.” When Louka hesitated, Cook shooed him away. “Go on, then!”

Louka turned and wove his way back through the crowd and out of the kitchen. Cook sighed. He definitely had some Tatar blood in him, from the shape of the eyes to his dark hair, but the color of his eyes was too light for a Tatar. Maybe he had more connections to Krosva than he would like to admit—but if so, why was he hiding it when it could help him gain influence and support in Adrios’s court?

Well, whatever Louka’s secret was, Cook was going to find out.

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Sasha was immensely relieved that today was a Thursday. Especially since it was Thursday at 4:30pm, which usually meant that students were heading to class, professors were heading to department meetings, and the ever-nosy John MacDonald was stuck in his office dealing with “official Dean of Studies business.” Cracking open the *Chroniika Krosvii*, Sasha began the laborious task of reading the bedside lament of Prolesius of

Krosva for his father. It contained some interesting family history, although in her opinion the poetry of the chronicler (as far as Sasha could translate it) was nowhere close to impressive. But then again, Sasha reflected, she had very high standards for poetry.

...O father Vasilii, so soon departed from this world!

Your eyes, green as moss but with flecks of brown,

Are the color of the earth that you have returned to.

Why can you no longer see me with your eyes?

Why will you not awaken and return the gaze

Of my eyes, green as moss but with flecks of brown?

Although you are but shortly buried,

Your memory already disappears into the ground

And all I have to remember you are my eyes

And the eyes of my son Adrios, green as moss but with flecks of brown.

Oh! why are you not here to see the blooming of your son

While you, once a noble and beautiful flower, have died and vanished?

Oh! why are you not here to see your son

Three knocks sounded on the door.

Slightly exasperated, Sasha looked up from the tome. "Come in." The clock read 4:55pm. Of course someone had to come just before her office hours ended.

The man that entered was not the Dean of Studies, although like MacDonald he was dressed in slacks and a collared shirt. "Hello, Professor Kowalski," he said in what was unmistakably a Russian accent. He extended his hand. "Dr. Yuri Arkhipov."

He came to my office? But of course, his email mentioned he'd be in the States.

Sasha rose and shook his hand. She tried to stop staring at his eyes and focused her attention on an imaginary spot above his head, but she soon got distracted by the fact that his hair had an inclination to spring as far away from Dr. Arkhipov's head as possible, regardless of any prior combing or gelling.

He must have read her confusion on her face, because he asked, "These are your office hours, yes? You weren't expecting anyone else, were you?"

"No, I wasn't." Sasha finally found her voice. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Arkhipov. Please take a seat."

"Actually, I was on my way to meet a colleague of mine for dinner. We were wondering if you wanted to join us."

"Um..." *It better not be who I think it is.* "I wouldn't want to intrude on your dinner plans."

"You won't be. Katya says she's been meaning to catch up with you for a while, and I know you wanted to meet to hear about my research on Krosva. This is the only time I'm free to do so."

"Katya Ivanova?" Sasha breathed a huge sigh of relief and, now that she had gotten over the surprise, surveyed Dr. Arkhipov. Despite his dark hair that stuck up in unfashionable places and made him seem a little on edge, Dr. Arkhipov seemed remarkably calm and at ease. "Well, in that case, I'd be delighted to join. Give me a minute to pack up."

"Certainly." Dr. Arkhipov casually walked over to the bookcase while Sasha tried to pack up her bag and surreptitiously study him at the same time. Her mind felt like it

was in twenty different time zones, and for good reason. As she picked up the *Chroniika Krosvii*, her eyes caught the familiar epithet: “*Your eyes, green as moss but with flecks of brown.*”

The author should have replaced “your” with “Arkhipov’s.”

~~*~~*~*~~*~~

Allies and Foes

“Katya!” As Sasha hugged her old school friend, her tongue loosened and before she knew it they were speaking about *druga* and *rabota* and *kak zheezhiin? Eto buila tak dolga*. How long had it been? The memories were coming back faster than the two women could move their lips, and when Katya slyly mentioned the “rainbow shark”—she couldn’t help herself—Sasha laughed so loud that someone at the restaurant raised an eyebrow in their general direction. That subdued the volume of their talk, but Katya was still grinning as they sat down to eat.

The conversation was a mix of Russian and of English, which Sasha could tell confused their neighbors, but she didn’t care. She wanted to go on talking with Katya for hours and hours, with no one else around but the two of them, it felt so good to relax with someone she trusted and to say what she wanted without a filter (especially when they were speaking in Russian). Well, almost without a filter, because every now and then Katya would turn to her left and engage Arkhipov with a question and a smile. The inclusion was so effortless, so natural, that was as if Arkhipov had been living with them at MGU; it created a feeling of camaraderie that Sasha knew she could never have

introduced into the conversation. Even when Katya and Sasha were simply going at it, arguing over the Russian presidential elections or laughing about how they almost got lost in Nizhny Novgorod, Arkhipov's attentive listening seemed to contribute as eagerly and as fully to the conversation as much as Katya and Sasha's words did. At random points during the dinner, Sasha wanted to turn and ask Arkhipov what he knew about MacDonald, but she didn't want to spoil the lovely evening that they were having by bringing up such an unpleasant subject.

Unfortunately, her cell phone spoiled it for her.

She had ignored the first two calls from her sister, but when Taylor rang for the third time, Sasha figured she better deal with whatever painful conversation Taylor wanted to have sooner rather than later. Excusing herself, Sasha squeezed past the rows of chairs again and squirmed into her coat, trying not to elbow the man currently waiting by the door for an open table. She ignored his judgmental squint and pushed open the door, letting in a gush of cold air as she stepped outside.

She decided that twelve steps away from the front of the restaurant was as good a distance as she could get without being too far away. She redialed Taylor's number and held the phone up to her ear, waiting. Taylor answered on the second ring.

"Taylor, if this is about the family reunion, I don't want to be a part of it—"

"Sasha—"

"I already told you that I'm working on an important manuscript and that I can't make it—"

"Sasha—"

"So please stop bothering me about this—"

“SASHA!”

Sasha well remembered the last time she'd heard her sister speak in that tone. She had been eleven, Taylor had been nine, and their dog had just gotten stuck in a particularly nasty patch of briars. Taylor had loved that dog more than life itself. Sasha had absolutely hated the mutt, but she had been the only one close enough for Taylor to call out to, begging her to come help. Sasha almost hadn't come, until she'd heard that tone of voice.

“What?” Sasha asked.

“It's Dad—he's dead.”

Sasha felt her whole body go numb and wished she could grip onto the back of a chair for support. Instead she gripped her phone. “What are you talking about?”

“He—he passed away this afternoon. I tried to call you but you weren't picking up—”

Sasha waited for her sister to start crying, but no sound came from the other end of the line, which was more frightening. “I was at dinner with some friends. I thought you were—”

“Calling about the anniversary.” Taylor's voice sharpened. “I know.”

The wind picked up from a whisper to a heavy rustling. Sasha shifted her grip on the phone, which sent pinpricks of pain through her half-frozen fingers. “Do I need to come down?” Her brain felt as numb as her hands.

“No, not yet. I can help Mom start arranging for the funeral.”

“Are you sure you don't need me there?”

“We'll be fine, Sasha.”

“I can help with the paperwork—”

“I said I’m fine.”

Sasha wanted to feel grief, or anger, or sorrow, but the only thing she could feel right now was how cold her fingers were. It felt so wrong, to be more worried about a few numb fingers than about her father’s—death. She thought about switching hands but decided against it, in case during the transition she missed whatever Taylor said next, which was this:

“Oh gosh, Sasha, why did this have to happen now?”

Sasha could barely bear her silence to that question, so she asked, “Is there anything else I should know?” When Taylor said no, Sasha merely told her to call or text if anything came up and if they needed her down there. She thought about saying “I love you,” but it felt too cliché and out of place, especially after their previous conversation, so she simply said “Bye” before she hung up.

She had wanted to ask how he died, but for some reason, it felt like the wrong thing to say. It would have made her father’s death too real. Right now it just felt like a nightmare, and Sasha desperately wished she could turn over and fall back into a dreamless sleep.

Afterword

To put it simply, this thesis is a tale of two stories. And the stories, like Dickens's Paris and London, are both very different and very alike. They parallel each other, never touching as they navigate completely different problems, expectations, and realities. Despite all that Sasha reads and analyzes, she can never see Adrios's perspective without negotiating with her own identity, personal drama, and cultural background. Adrios, too, has no idea that Sasha is studying him and his family, nor does he have any idea what the future will be like in 750 years. On the other hand, Sasha and Adrios are quite similar: both deal with a lot of pressure, both have complicated relationships with their siblings, both face death at difficult points in their lives. As much as they are separated by time, they are united by common human experiences.

The challenge in writing this thesis was due in large part to the fact that, like Sasha, I am not living in 1272 medieval Russia. Naturally, a lot of research went into writing this thesis, both on the primary sources produced during the period and on the contemporary scholarship around those sources. I particularly struggled with writing the *Chroniika Krosvii* in a way that represented the language of the time but was accessible to an English audience. To be frank, I'm still not satisfied with it. Many of the chronicles use religious language to explain and explore history, and while I do want to explore that aspect of Russian history in depth (and bring it in dialogue with the present), I was concerned that I had neither the time nor the space to pull that off successfully and in a way that honors the religious beliefs and spiritual devotion within medieval Russia while recognizing how that language could be and was warped to fulfill political motives. The other difficult part about writing in Adrios's time was writing the small, ordinary details:

what people ate, where people slept, what the houses looked like. These bits of information are less likely to be recorded than prominent military battles and political stances, so I had to use my creativity in addition to research to make those scenes as realistic as I could, given the limits of my information and experience.

Writing Sasha's story also required a significant amount of research, although of a more scholarly kind. Not only did I have to be aware of the dialogue among current historians about medieval Russia and the Mongols, but I also had to research the politics and administrative practices behind running a college, especially as I was writing MacDonald's role. Professor Michael Joyce, my thesis advisor, played a significant role in helping me make MacDonald's actions more realistic. There are also some nuances about Sasha's campus that are distinct to those of Vassar College, from the AskBanner website to the Retreat café. Vanderbilt Hall itself is a fictionalized version of Swift Hall. Like all good stories, therefore, there is some truth among the fiction even among the people that Sasha writes about. Berke Khan, Hülagü, and Dmitrii and Andrei Nevsky did exist, as do the scholars Leo de Hartog and Janet Martin. Novgorod and Nizhny Novgorod are real cities in modern-day Russia, although Krosva is not and never was. I freely confess that while I did a significant amount of research for this project, there is so much more reading and scholarly work that I could have done. I hope that in the future I can explore the literature and scholarship of pre-modern Russia more thoroughly and critically in this piece.

Writing the characters themselves was simultaneously straightforward and unexpected. I had been thinking about the Adrios storyline for over three years, but Sasha's character arc was completely undeveloped when I started writing this thesis. It

was exciting to explore who Sasha was while aligning her story with the familiar one of Adrios. Interweaving the two narratives was a challenge, as I wanted each part to function on its own, contribute to the one character's storyline, and reference the other character's journey. Plot parallels played a key role in uniting the two characters: in the section "First Impressions," for example, both Sasha and Adrios meet new allies (Arkhipov and Louka) that strike them in various ways. Themes of eyes and sight also connect the two stories in a more physical and metaphorical way. As much as I intentionally planned some of the events, characters, and themes, others appeared out of the blue. Adrios has always been hot-tempered and stubborn, but Sasha's sass was a surprise. So, too, was the realization that as much as Sasha dreaded interacting with the chatty and outgoing Taylor, Taylor also dreaded talking over the phone with her detached and straightforward sister. There were some parts I did write, such as the revelation of Louka's true identity, that I wanted to include in my thesis but decided against it because doing so would have forced the flow of the story and made the narratives speed up too fast.

This story was never meant to be forty-eight pages. It continues and continues, far beyond what I can delve into here. I hope that in the future, I will one day finish the story and publish it in book format so that the reader can learn what happens to Sasha, Adrios, and their various friends and allies. Until then, the best I can give you is just a fragment. I hope that you enjoy it, that it makes you think, and that this narrative has impacted you in a positive, encouraging, and transformative way.

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I can't begin to express how grateful I am to have had this opportunity, and I am so thankful for the support of everyone who helped make this happen. Colossians 3:23 stands out in my mind; I hope that it is true for this thesis, and that what I have said and done here bring love, light, and truth into a world that desperately needs it.

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