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GRIGORI
RASPUTIN



THE BIOGRAPHY

GRIGORI RASPUTIN

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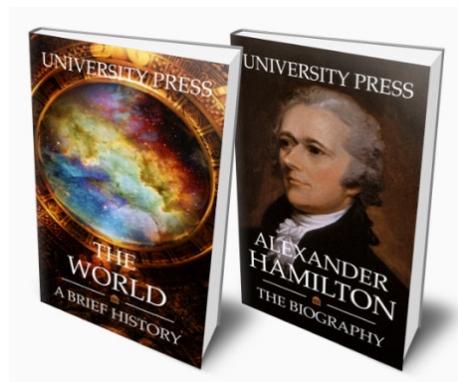
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Cover Image:

Portrait of Grigori Rasputin, December 1909



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Introduction

Errors, omissions, rumors, and fabrications abound in retellings of the life story of Grigori Rasputin. Born to a peasant family in a small village in Siberia, Rasputin was an unusual child and, like many unusual children, believed that he was going to change the world. From a young age, Rasputin believed himself to be a mystic, a spiritual being who was closer to God than anyone else he encountered. Rasputin never held an official position in the Orthodox Church in which he was raised. Instead, he followed his own spiritual code and quickly amassed a dedicated group of followers who believed him to be a true starets (holy man).

Had Rasputin's followers been exclusively of the peasant class, his life would likely have had little impact on modern Russian history. However, through a series of introductions and invitations, Rasputin eventually made the acquaintance of the most powerful couple in the country, Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra. Rasputin's remarkable ability to seemingly heal the tsar and tsarina's son, and heir to the Russian throne, Alexei, who suffered from hemophilia, made him indispensable to the imperial couple.

Over the years of Rasputin's friendship with Nicholas and Alexandra, he increasingly used his influence to meddle in the affairs of both Church and State, accruing a number of powerful enemies in the process. With Russia's entry into the First World War, the popularity of the tsar and tsarina reached an all-time low. Rasputin too had a terrible reputation as a drunkard, an abuser of women and an opportunist who readily took bribes, even from German sympathizers. All of this may have been true. The Russian people could not understand the hold Rasputin had over the imperial couple and, when Rasputin finally met his violent end, the nation rejoiced.

The story of Rasputin's death is almost as difficult to unravel as that of his life. The most reliable account of Rasputin's murder describes him being lured to the palace of Prince Felix Yusupov where he was poisoned, shot,

and severely beaten. Presumed dead he was thrown into the icy Neva River where he eventually drowned.

A Soviet policy that aimed to strictly control how information about the Soviet Union circulated in the world and sought to limit what we know about Nicolas II and his reign has made it difficult for biographers to confirm details about Rasputin's life. The date he was born, details about his parents, how he lived and, finally, how he died, have been debated by scholars over the years until archival information released by Russia in the early nineties helped to give more definite answers.

The question of whether Rasputin was a saint or satanic, whether he was a holy man or a debauched lunatic, cannot be answered satisfactorily using archive material. Although undeniably a spiritual man, Rasputin was painfully human and the trajectory of his life entered its downward spiral due to painfully human failings. Lust, greed, and a desire for power brought Rasputin down, as it has done many men and women throughout history. We may never understand why Rasputin reached the heights he did, nor how he became so reviled, but we can at least understand how.

Chapter 1

A Peasant Child in Siberia

Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin was born in the isolated village of Pokrovskoye on the western bank of the Tura River in Siberia. The mystery of Rasputin begins with his date of birth. For many years Rasputin's exact date of birth was unknown. Rasputin's daughter, Maria, claimed that he was born at midnight on an evening in January 1873 at the same moment a comet was shooting across the sky. According to recently recovered documents, Rasputin was born on the 22nd of January 1869.

Rasputin's parents, Anna and Efim, were peasants who worked the land. Efim was a church elder; a wise and learned man said to have a developed taste for the local vodka. At first, there was little money in the Rasputin household, but once Efim secured a plot of land made up of the fertile, black soil of Pokrovskoye and built a small farm of cows and horses the family grew comfortable. Rasputin was neither the first nor the last child to be born to Anna and Efim, but all seven of their other children died in childhood. It is thought that a ninth child may have been born to the Rasputin family after Grigori, a girl who survived into adulthood, but there is no evidence that Rasputin had a sister.

That Rasputin was born and raised in an isolated village in Siberia had a profound effect on his character and beliefs. A vast expanse of land, Siberia, then part of the Mongol Empire, came up against Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century. Once conquered, the land became dotted with small villages as pioneering settlers arrived to make a new home in the wilderness. By the time Rasputin was born, the majority of Siberian peasants were fully immersed in the Russian Orthodox faith and followed the same harsh lifestyle of fishing, farming, and hunting they had for centuries before.

During his childhood, Rasputin shared the back-breaking physical labor of running a farm with his father. In later years, Rasputin credited this lifestyle as a wellspring of spirituality, and he returned to his peasant village at least once a year to restore his faith. Raised within the Russian Orthodox Church, Rasputin internalized its Christian teachings and firmly believed that God ordained everything that happened to him. Rasputin was illiterate, as were the rest of his family and, in all likelihood, most of his village.

Rasputin was an outsider and experienced tragedy first-hand at just eight years old when he and his friend Dimitry fell into a stream. Both boys developed pneumonia and, while Rasputin survived, Dimitry died of his illness. Perhaps as a result of his isolation, the hardships of his life and the trauma he experienced as a young boy, Rasputin believed himself to possess mystical powers. As an adult, Rasputin captivated his followers with tales of the miracles he had performed as a child. For example, Rasputin insisted that, as a child, he could spot a thief just by looking at one; a vision of whatever that person had stolen would magically appear before his eyes.

By the time Rasputin reached the age of seventeen, he had a reputation for being a drunk, a brawler and a womanizer. Mysterious and moody, Rasputin offended the respectable citizens of his village and became known as the local trouble-maker. And yet, Rasputin commanded the attention of every person he came into contact with, burning through them with his intense stare and speaking in a bizarre stream-of-consciousness manner on religion, life, and sex.

In 1886, Rasputin made a pilgrimage to the Znamensky Monastery in Abalak, Tobolsk. Rasputin had already made this pilgrimage several times in his life with his parents, but this time something extraordinary happened - Rasputin fell in love. The object of Rasputin's affection was a local peasant girl named Praskovaya Dubrovino. Rasputin had a reputation for being sexually aggressive, and women were forced to either fight him off or succumb to his advances, reluctantly or willingly. However, with Praskovaya things were different. Rasputin wooed Praskovaya for five months before she eventually agreed to marry him. The couple was married

on February 2nd, 1887, and Praskovaya followed the custom of the time by joining Rasputin at his parent's home in Pokrovskoye.

Praskovaya and Rasputin's first child Michael (born in 1888) died aged four, and their twins, Georgy and Anna (born 1894) both died of scarlet fever while infants. Three more children followed, Dmitry (born 1895), Maria (born 1898) and Varvara (born 1900) and all lived into adulthood, but a seventh child (Praskovaya (born in 1903) died as an infant. The union of Praskovaya and Rasputin seems on the surface to have been harmonious. Incredibly, Praskovaya seemed to accept that infidelity and alcohol abuse were part and parcel of Rasputin's character and bore his antics with grace, even believing that they were a manifestation of his divine calling.

At one point during his early married life, Rasputin was accused of stealing parts of his neighbor's fence. The neighbor allegedly caught Rasputin in the act and beat him severely with a wooden stake. The beating disfigured Rasputin's face, and he later grew his hair long to hide the permanent lump on his forehead. After this incident, Rasputin later said that he grew dissatisfied with his life. Although still convinced that he had spiritual gifts, he abused alcohol ever more readily to cope with the pain and humiliation of this attack.

Chapter 2

A Holy Pilgrim

In 1897, Rasputin's life took a dramatic turn. Accused of stealing horses from the same neighbor that had beaten him years before, Rasputin was banished from his village. Protesting his innocence, Rasputin agreed that he would instead go on a pilgrimage to the Siberian monastery of Saint Nicholas at Verkhoturys. In the spring of 1897, Rasputin left his wife and baby son and the only home he had ever known behind and took to the road.

Rasputin spent two weeks walking the 300-plus miles from Pokrovskoye to Verkhoturys. There he came into contact with Brother Makary. An illiterate mystic monk who wore chains to mortify his flesh, Makary was said to have the ability to commune directly with God. Inspired by Makary, Rasputin found God in Verkhoturys and in the months he lived there learned how to read and write. Now convinced more fully than ever before that he was put on this earth to lead people to God's truth, Rasputin returned to his village emaciated and disheveled, loudly proclaiming his conversion.

Rasputin gave up alcohol and became a vegetarian, setting himself apart from the other Orthodox Christians in his village. A small group of people in Pokrovskoye accepted Rasputin as their religious leader and began attending secret services with him in the cellar of his father's home. The meetings featured several ceremonial rituals. Local girls washed Rasputin before he preached from the altar. Then his followers sang strange, non-traditional hymns.

A rumor circulated that Rasputin was heading a congregation of the Khlysty sect, a controversial religious cult whose core belief was that sin brought its members closer to God. This is not the case. Although the Khlysty sect's insistence that ordinary people possessed divine gifts certainly struck a

chord with Rasputin, he shrewdly understood that the Russian elite would never accept the sexual element of their faith. Rasputin knew he had to lead his own religious revolution.

In the early 1900s, Rasputin wandered all over his country as a *s tranniki* (holy pilgrim), visiting holy sites, even walking as far as Mount Athos in Greece, then the center of the Eastern Orthodox world. Rasputin was disillusioned by the homosexuality he found at Mount Athos and, in 1902, returned briefly to Pokrovskoye before leaving for the sprawling city of Kazan, located on the banks of the Volga River.

Rasputin established himself in Kazan as a spiritual leader and became known as a *staret*, a powerful mystic who could offer prayers and spiritual guidance to his followers. In the early 20th century the Russian Orthodox Church was in crisis across Russia. Many of the faithful criticized the close connection of church and state and the excessive iconography that separated ordinary people from their god. As a result, the people of Kazan were especially susceptible to a new approach to faith.

Father Gavril, Father Superior of the Seven Lakes Monastery was so taken with Rasputin that he insisted the strange, young, peasant *staret* visit church leaders in Saint Petersburg. Father Gavril even wrote a letter of recommendation for him. Rasputin reached Saint Petersburg in the comfort of a first-class train compartment in March 1903, an experience that differed dramatically from the years he spent traversing Russia on foot. St Petersburg in 1903 was a bustling metropolis of over 1 million people. Made up of islands, split by canals, and linked with bridges, much of St Petersburg was designed by Italians in the Baroque style. More European in temperament, the people of St Petersburg were less defined by the Orthodox Church and more open to progress.

Rasputin's first port of call was the Alexander Nevsky Monastery where he met Bishop Sergei. At the time this monastery was one of the most important religious centers in the Russian Empire and Bishop Sergei, its most influential representative. Sergei was so taken with Rasputin that he invited him to live with him and introduced him to other Bishops and

learned men. Talking frankly about his spiritual awakening and making predictions about the Bishop's private lives (predications that, according to Rasputin lore, all came true), Rasputin fulfilled St Petersburg's Orthodox elite's idea that God worked through ordinary men.

The next prominent member of Russian society to befriend Rasputin was Archmandrite Feofan. Feofan was the inspector of the theological academy and acted as confessor to the Tsar and his wife. Feofan insisted that Rasputin move into his apartment and enthused about him to his students, insisting that God had delivered Russia's savior in the guise of a Siberian peasant. With his patron, Feofan, Rasputin spent time studying at the St Petersburg Academy and was propelled into elite social circles.

Religious discontent amongst St Petersburg's elite was common, with many turning to spiritualism and mysticism as an alternative to the Orthodox church. Rasputin offered a mystical direct line to God, and he fascinated the aristocracy, most notably Grand Duchesses Militsa and Anatasia of Montenegro. These young princesses were taken from their home in an obscure kingdom in the Balkans and brought to Saint Petersburg by Alexander III to be educated in the city. Now firmly established members of the upper echelons of society thanks to strategic marriage to the tsar's cousins, the sisters – also known as the 'Black Pearls' or the 'Black Peril' - are thought to be responsible for introducing Rasputin to the tsar.

Chapter 3

A Special Friend of the Tsar

Nikolay Alexandrovich Romanov, the last tsar of Russia, rose to the throne in 1894, aged 26. As a child, Nicholas had witnessed his grandfather Alexander II die a horrible death when a bomb was thrown at his feet by revolutionaries. Horribly disfigured and bleeding profusely, Alexander was rushed back to the Winter Palace where Nicholas and the rest of his family witnessed the last painful moments of his life.

By the time Nicholas met Rasputin on the 1st of November 1905, he had already been the tsar for ten years. Although devoted to his role as tsar, Nicholas was known to be impulsive. His belief that he had been chosen by God to rule Russia led him to make decisions based on faith instead of clear judgment. Nicholas viewed the care of the Russian people as his responsibility and swore that he would never agree to a representative government in Russia because it would be harmful to the people.

On the 26th of November, 1894, Nicholas married Alix of Hesse, the grandchild of Queen Victoria of Great Britain. Alix had already been received into the Orthodox Church as Alexandra Fedorovna in October 1894, when it became clear that Nicholas would soon be the tsar. The timing of the Romanov's wedding was poor from a public standpoint, as Nicholas's father, Alexander III, had died just a week earlier and the country was still in mourning. Alexandra was never a popular empress with the people of Russia or the aristocracy, and as she aged, she gradually retired into private life.

During the first six years of her marriage to Nicholas II, Alexandra gave birth to four daughters, but in order to secure the patriarchal lineage of the throne, the couple knew they must provide a son. Nicholas and Alexandra's views were so Orthodox that they believed that Alexandra's inability to bear

a son was a result of her having displeased God in some way. Eventually, on July 30th, 1904, Alexandra gave birth to a son named Alexei.

Soon after his birth it became clear that Alexei was suffering from some kind of illness - his skin often erupted in large, dark bruises and ordinary cuts and scratches bled profusely. Eventually, it was concluded that Alexei had hemophilia, a disease that ran in the bloodline of his maternal grandmother, Queen Victoria. Alexei endured a long period of painful suffering throughout his childhood as his parents were distrustful of modern medicine and would not accept the diagnosis that there was no cure for their son's disease. It was into this unhappy home that Grigori Rasputin ingratiated himself.

The Grand Duchesses Militsa and Anatasia of Montenegro introduced Rasputin to Nicholas and Alexandra at their home in Peterof in the autumn of 1905. Rasputin was introduced as a 'man of God' from Tobolsk province. Eight months passed between Rasputin's first meeting with the tsar and his second, but once Rasputin was welcomed into the tsar's household, he never looked back. The tsar and tsarina took to Rasputin so readily that he was soon introduced to their children.

The friendship between the Romanov family and Rasputin developed until one day, in the early summer of 1907, Rasputin was the first person summoned to pray for the young Alexei. Alexei had fallen and was undoubtedly suffering from an internal hemorrhage. Miraculously, Rasputin's prayers seemed to encourage Alexei's body to heal, and Alexandra became convinced that Rasputin had been sent by God to save her son.

Now Rasputin was beginning to develop real power and used his status as a mysterious staree to defy expectations of how a peasant should behave around the elite. Rasputin took time to listen to the confessions of high society ladies and manipulated them with sympathy and guilt. Some of these women adored Rasputin, gave him gifts and fawned over him. Some even claimed that Rasputin had cured their illnesses.

By the time Rasputin made another pilgrimage back to Pokrovskoye in Autumn 1907 he was greeted as a hero. Four of Rasputin's 'little women' as he called them, accompanied him back to the place he claimed was closer to God than any other, and the whole party stayed in a large house on the Tura River. The house had been purchased for Rasputin by the Grand Duchess Militsa of Montenegro. Although Rasputin was undeniably enjoying playing the wealthy host to his society friends, he also shared his new wealth with the peasants of his village. Yet while some villagers worshiped Rasputin and appreciated his generosity, some could not forgive him the sins of his past and refused to believe that he was sincerely a man of God. For the rest of Rasputin's life, the Russian people would be divided along hard lines - those who loved him and those who loathed him.

Chapter 4

A Heretic

In September 1907 two Pokrovskoye priests officially denounced Rasputin as a heretic. An investigation was launched against Rasputin by the Church, that accused him of spreading false doctrine. Rasputin was threatened with excommunication and investigators spent six months interrogating everyone who knew him, hoping to unearth proof of his wrong-doing. Despite the best efforts of Rasputin's enemies, the investigation failed. There are many anecdotes about Rasputin's voracious sexual appetite and drunken behavior, but at that time, there was no discernible proof that he was not a man of God. The relationship between Rasputin and the Church was at an all-time low, and he turned to early religious texts such as the writings of saints and church fathers to find spiritual sanctuary.

Back in Saint Petersburg another plan was hatched to bring Rasputin's influence over the royal court to an abrupt end. Prime Minister Peter Stolypin launched his own investigation through the Russian police department. The Romanov family's safety was a significant and relevant concern at this time. Russia was teetering on the brink of a full revolution; the regime had only barely managed to survive the uproar of 1905, and the lives of the tsar, tsarina and tsarevich were undoubtedly at risk. Rasputin complained to Nicholas about being tailed continuously by the police and the tsar organized a meeting between himself, Rasputin, and the Prime Minister, Peter Stolypin.

Accounts of this meeting paint an interesting picture. Supposedly Rasputin became so enraged at Stolypin's threats that he tried to put Stolypin under some kind of hex. Fixing Stolypin with his notoriously tense eyes, he mumbled phrases from the scriptures and passed his hands over the Prime Minister. As soon as Stolypin came to his senses, he ordered Rasputin to leave Saint Petersburg or be arrested for secularism. Rasputin managed to

evade the police forces who tried to arrest him the next time he arrived at the train station in Saint Petersburg, and he returned to his village. Stolypin was furious that he had missed his chance to apprehend Rasputin but was forced to drop his charges.

Alexandra launched her own informal investigation into the accusations being leveled at Rasputin, namely that he was a secularist, he was a member of the Khlyst and that he was sexually deviant. Reports were inconclusive and Alexandra preferred to believe what she wanted to believe, namely that Rasputin was a powerful mystic who had the power to heal her son's hemophilia.

By now, Rasputin had amassed a number of powerful enemies. In 1909, his enemies had even more ammunition to remove Rasputin from the court when he raped Khioniya Berlatskaya, a member of his inner circle who had been a follower of his since his earliest days as a spiritual leader. Berlatskaya went to Father Feofan with her complaint, and he joined the campaign to reveal Rasputin as a false starets and remove him from the Romanovs.

Rumors of Rasputin's immoral behavior and acts of sexual violence against women became too much and two of his most ardent supporters, the Grand Duchesses of Montenegro, became hostile towards him. This hostility intensified when the governess of Alexandra and Nicholas's four daughters complained that Rasputin was visiting the girls in their bedrooms at night. The oldest girls were fifteen and thirteen at the time, and the governess was scandalized. Incredibly, Nicholas stood by Rasputin and dismissed the governess.

Alexandra dismissed the claims of members of her family and household that Rasputin had assaulted them, but soon the press caught wind of the scandal and in summer 1910 launched an orchestrated campaign to discredit him. It seems that Alexandra and Nicholas were not ignorant of Rasputin's dark side, his drunkenness and 'sexual dissoluteness' but did not think that these human failings prevent him from being a true holy man. They wanted to believe in Rasputin, and so they did.

Chapter 5

A Man with Influence

In 1911 yet another report on Rasputin was placed in the hands of the Romanovs, and this time it was something they could not ignore. Nicholas had asked Rasputin to use his influence to bring a particularly powerful new politician in line – Iliodor. Iliodor's rise to prominence came as a result of the revolution of 1905. Convinced that he had a divine mission to save Russia, Iliodor aligned himself with far-right organizations that had a talent for propaganda and terrorized the left with acts of violence. Iliodor's views were extreme, and his followers radicalized. Both the Church and the imperial family realized that Iliodor had to be brought into line, and fast.

Rasputin promised to tame Iliodor at Nicholas' request. Rasputin organized a meeting between Alexandra and Iliodor during which Iliodor signed a paper agreeing to stop his attacks on Russian authorities. Although Rasputin and Iliodor's alliance began on good terms with both men getting what they wanted - Rasputin gaining more favor with Queen Alexandra and Iliodor making peace with the Imperial Family – the relationship soon soured. Rasputin invited Iliodor to Pokrovskoye where he got drunk and boasted of his influence over the tsar and tsarina. Later regaling the pious Iliodor with tales of sexual debauchery, Rasputin shot himself in the foot. Iliodor returned to his militarized compound convinced that Rasputin had far too much power in the government and with a renewed determination to bring down the entire Romanov regime.

Next, Rasputin came up against Captain Alexander Mandryka, who was sent to try to calm the waters between Iliodor and the tsar. Mandryka visited the Balashevskaya Convent near Iliodor's compound at Tsaritsyn at Rasputin's suggestion. Rasputin believed that Sister Maria, a friend of Rasputin's and also Mandryka's cousin, could persuade Mandryka to write a report favorable to Rasputin's ends. This plan backfired when the nuns at

Balashkevskaya used Mandryka's visit to finally have their say on what they thought of the famous starets. The nuns told Mandryka that Rasputin seduced them and orchestrated orgies, raping any nuns who refused. What is more, Mandryka was shown a telegram sent from Rasputin to Sister Maria, urging her to use her womanly influence on him.

Mandryka was horrified and returned to Saint Petersburg to deliver his news to Alexandra and Nicholas who were in turn genuinely outraged. Rasputin avoided the imperial family for several months after this incident but continued to live a debauched lifestyle. One evening Rasputin attended a party at the home of ballerina Lisa Tansin. Lisa had also invited several prostitutes to her party, and late in the evening, while heavily intoxicated, Rasputin stripped naked and was photographed in a series of compromising positions with the women. A victim of blackmail, Rasputin took copies of the photographs to Nicholas who thanked Rasputin for his openness and decided that the best course of action would be to send him on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Rasputin's life had changed dramatically from his early days as a pilgrim, traveling on foot and depending on charity to eat, and in all likelihood, he made the first part of this pilgrimage in a first-class train compartment. Once Rasputin reached Odesa, he boarded a ship to traverse the Black Sea. Rasputin visited the Cathedral of St Sophia in Constantinople and traveled to Mitylene before eventually reaching Jerusalem.

However spiritually rewarding this pilgrimage may have been, Rasputin instantly re-immersed himself in the political chess-game between Church and state on his return to Saint Petersburg. Rasputin used his influence over the imperial family to have his friend, a monk by the name of Varvana, promoted to the level of bishop. This move was significant considering Varvana was born a peasant and it was against Church policy to promote a man of low-breeding to this position. Rasputin also petitioned Nicholas to return a bishop by the name of Alexis to the Crimea, after he was sent to Siberia as punishment for living openly with a woman to whom he was not married. Rasputin was also instrumental in the elevation of Vladimir Sabler

to the position of ober-procurator of the Church. Rasputin's choice of these three men was calculated as they all became important allies in the future.

By 1911 Rasputin had so firmly re-established his position as Nicholas' right-hand man that Nicholas involved him in state affairs at the very highest level. Peter Stolypin's time as Prime Minister was coming to an end and Nicholas was searching for a suitable replacement. Nicholas and Stolypin traveled to Kiev for the fiftieth anniversary of the abolition of Serfdom. Standing with the masses as the parade surrounding the tsar and his Prime Minister passed by, Rasputin experienced a frightening premonition and screamed that he could see the figure of death following Peter's carriage. The next night, on the evening of September 1, 1911, Stolypin was assassinated while watching a performance at the theatre. The imperial family was shocked and upset at Stolypin's death, and Rasputin did his best to comfort them while strongly suggesting that Vladimir Kokovstov should be the next prime minister of Russia.

Chapter 6

A Healer

Still, Rasputin's enemies tried to discredit him. During a 1912 meeting of the Holy Synod in the Duma, several members criticized the ober-procurator for allowing Rasputin to meddle in Church affairs and reported yet more complaints from their constituents about Rasputin's immoral behavior. At the same time, almost the entire imperial court launched their own campaign against Rasputin, complaining one at a time to Nicholas and Alexandra that Rasputin's influence on the household was a negative one. Even more upsetting for the imperial family, letters from Alexandra and her daughters to Rasputin appeared in the press. The letters were very affectionate, although clearly platonic. Regardless, Rasputin's enemies took the letters as proof of the theory that Alexandra and her spiritual guide were lovers. This damaging rumor has endured to his day despite a lack of evidence.

In September 1912 the tsarevich Alexei fell while the imperial family was on holiday in Bialowieza, Poland. The family regularly visited Poland to hunt and rest away from the pressures of their lives on home soil. The fall did not appear to be severe, and the family moved on to their remote forest lodge at Spala. There Alexei, then eight years old, became gravely ill with substantial internal hemorrhage. For days Alexei lay in unimaginable agony with doctors unable to stop the swelling or alleviate the pressure on his internal organs. Alexei's hemophilia was a secret, and although his agonized screams could be heard throughout the lodge, the family tried to carry on as usual, even entertaining guests while their son lay at death's door.

As the first week in October passed by Alexei's condition grew worse. He had, in all likelihood, developed septicemia by now. The imperial family finally agreed to make a public announcement that the tsarevich was ill, and millions across the empire prayed for his recovery. Alexei received his Last

Rites on the 8th of October, 1912, and in a last, desperate attempt to save her son, Alexandra appealed to Rasputin. The telegram that Rasputin sent that night has become legendary. 'Fear nothing,' it said, 'the illness is not as dangerous as they are saying. See that the doctors do not bother him.' These simple words were enough to assure Alexandra that Alexei would recover and, remarkably, he did.

Within 24 hours, Alexei's life was no longer in danger, and while it took months for him to be able to walk and live normally again, his life had been spared. Even now, Rasputin's ability to alleviate the effects of Alexei's hemophilia is baffling. Some have suggested that Rasputin used hypnotism or drugs to calm Alexei, which would, in turn, allow his body to focus on healing itself. However, in truth, there is no real explanation for Rasputin's influence. For his part, Rasputin attributed his 'miracles' to God and insisted that his ability to heal was an expression of divine grace. Far from being a saint, Rasputin was an intermediary, a middle man between the imperial family and God.

Despite being the closest spiritual guide to the imperial family of Russia, Rasputin struggled financially. He did not even have enough cash to get to and from the palace when summoned, and he had to borrow money from friends for transport. And so, in 1913, Rasputin began the shady enterprise of taking bribes for his influence in official matters. This clear and blatant corruption did not go unreported in the press and contributed to Rasputin's most significant unraveling.

Although triumphant in his miraculous ability to heal the tsarevich, Rasputin entered a deep depression in the winter of 1913. His alcohol addiction grew increasingly dangerous; he experienced a genuine spiritual crisis and gave in to sexual temptation more regularly and with more abandon. Meanwhile, Russia was experiencing its own spiritual crisis. Mysticism was on the rise. Many intellectuals and aristocrats rejected the values of the Orthodox Church and embraced the values that Rasputin personified - namely a rejection of traditional morality, an embrace of sexual freedom and an esoteric approach to spirituality. Yet while Rasputin was all for the loosening of traditional morality he was very much anti-war,

a stance that put him at odds with most of the society he was mingling with in Saint Petersburg.

In 1913, Russia was set to go to war in the Balkans. In 1912, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece had attacked Turkey, and many in Europe called for Russia to intervene. As the Austro-Hungarian Empire prepared to invade Turkey, Russia was moved to protect her fellow Slavs, but Rasputin was not swept up in the fever to go to war. As a former member of the peasant class, Rasputin had a keen sense of what war meant for ordinary people. Rasputin also shrewdly understood that if Russia declared war on Austria, Germany would be forced to enter the war and would in all likelihood defeat Russia. Defeat meant revolution and the destruction of the imperial-led Russia that Rasputin loved. Rasputin gave interviews to the press detailing his anti-war sentiments, and they seemed to have an impact on Russia's decision to preserve the peace. For the time being.

Chapter 7

A Hunted Man

Rasputin's influence in Russia had reached its apex and Nicholas II, who was under considerable pressure with the war in the Balkans and revolution in Russia a constant threat, began to turn against him. Nicholas sent Rasputin into exile to his home town of Poskroyske in early 1914, but Alexandra stepped in, and Rasputin was permitted to return with the understanding that he would no longer meddle in political affairs.

On 28th of June 1914 members of a Serbian secret military society, Black Hand, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo. No one in Russia, or indeed the world, realized at first that this event would mark the beginning of the First World War. Austria intended to punish Serbia for the assassination of the Archduke and his wife, but Russia warned that if it did it would support the Serbs. France pitched in and confirmed that they would stand behind Russia while Germany allied themselves with Austria. Tensions between these nations grew as Europe waited for Austria's retaliation.

A few weeks after this incident, Rasputin left his house in Pokrovskoye and was approached by a peasant woman wearing a scarf across her nose and mouth. The woman was 33-year old Chionya Guseva, and as Rasputin rummaged in his pockets for change, assuming she was asking for money, Chionya lunged at him with a knife and stabbed him in the stomach. The wound was deep and wide, and Rasputin could feel the blood pouring from his body as he was carried back to his house. A doctor was called for and performed emergency surgery to close the wound. Telegrams were sent back and forth between Rasputin and Alexandra in the coming days in which Rasputin protested that all was well even though he was still gravely ill. Rasputin recovered in a hospital in Tyumen where his notorious

reputation drew in journalists, photographers, and well-wishers from all over Russia.

Rasputin believed that Chionya was sent to assassinate him on the orders of Iliodor, Rasputin's old rival. In the time since Iliodor and Rasputin had parted ways, Iliodor had been defrocked and blamed Rasputin for double-crossing him. Seized by bystanders immediately after she attacked Rasputin and dragged to the local police station, Chionya was revealed to be a barely literate seamstress and servant who followed a strict orthodox faith. She believed that Rasputin was a false prophet, and it was her destiny to kill him. Police reports of the incident included a very curious detail – Chionya was missing her nose and had only a hole in its place.

Investigators questioned how Chionya could finance her protracted pursuit of Rasputin and tried to get her to admit that Iliodor had been behind the attack. As soon as Iliodor learned that he was under suspicion, he fled the country to Norway, further incriminating himself. However, Chionya would not admit to Iliodor's involvement. Nor would she acknowledge that she had been in the throes of religious mania or insanity during the attack. Even as Chionya insisted that she was of sound mind when she attempted to kill Rasputin, the Tyuman District Court found Chionya 'insane' at the time of the act, and she was spared criminal proceedings and sent to the Tomsk Regional Clinic for the Insane. Initially incarcerated for two months, Chionya was held until February 1917 when she disappeared entirely from public view.

While Rasputin was convalescing in the hospital throughout the summer of 1914, he was horrified to read in the newspaper that Russia had finally been forced to mobilize its army. The tsar was furious when Rasputin sent a telegram urging him to keep the peace warning that Russia would lose 'to the last man.' Germany declared war on Russia on the 1st of August 1914 and Nicholas responded with his own call to arms. Perversely, the declaration of war on Germany united the Russian people with their tsar. The tension between Nicholas and his people dissolved as the country united in their desire for victory. On the 1st of August Nicholas stood on the

balcony of the Winter Palace and listened to an almighty crowd sing the national anthem.

Chapter 8

A Fixer in Petrograd

Russia's entry into the First World War was a disaster of monstrous proportions. Hopes for a speedy Russian victory were dashed when the Russian First Army fell at Tannenburg in August 1914. German forces were better trained, better organized, and better equipped to fight, and by mid-September, the Second Russian Army had been defeated and driven from East Prussia. In the first month of fighting over 30,000 soldiers died on the front and over 200,000 were taken prisoner. Russian munitions came close to running out entirely, and victory for Russia became an ever more remote possibility.

Rasputin moved into an apartment in Saint Petersburg, recently renamed the more patriotic 'Petrograd' by Nicholas, at 64 Gorokhvaya Street. This apartment would be his home for the remainder of his life. The relationship between Nicholas and Rasputin was icy at this point. Nicholas had threatened to put Rasputin on trial for treason following his sending of an anti-war telegram that was released to the press. Yet Nicholas protected Rasputin from further assassination attempts by stationing a 24-hour guard at his home.

Rasputin's influence on the imperial family and reputation as the nation's most sacred starek was still strong enough to bring hundreds of people to his door each day. Not all of the people lining up to see Rasputin were looking for spiritual guidance, however. Many of the men wanted Rasputin's help with lawsuits and promotions while widows who had lost their husbands in the early days of the war asked for financial assistance. Rasputin was said to be especially kind to beautiful young Jewish women who were in Petrograd without residence papers and sent them on to Jewish millionaires with whom he had become friends.

Later in the war, Rasputin's circle of visitors grew to include a number of undesirables, including people who were clearly working for the Germans or at the very least would benefit from a German victory. Yet Rasputin was patriotic and, although a pacifist, prayed for Russia's victory in the war. Rasputin's actions during the war are no different from his actions at any other time of his life; he did whatever served his own interests best.

Through Alexandra the tsar received scores of petitions from Rasputin, asking for his intervention in military and administrative matters, and he became irritated with his old friend. This irritation turned to fury as he learned of Rasputin's shady dealings with entrepreneurs determined to profit from the war. In March 1915, Alexandra sent Rasputin to Moscow in an attempt to improve his reputation as a holy man. Alexandra suggested that Rasputin pray at the Kremlin and encouraged the press to take an interest in the story of the famous starets's visit. Unfortunately, coverage of Rasputin's trip to Moscow offered only scandalous details of an outrageous incident at a famous Moscow restaurant.

According to reports, Rasputin had arrived at the restaurant already drunk and took a private room on the second floor where he continued to drink and assaulted several of the restaurant's dancers. Rasputin became angry when the dancers tried to fight him off and eventually dropped his pants, revealing himself to a crowd of shocked onlookers. The Moscow police force arrested Rasputin although he was released hours later.

Vladimir Dzhunkovsky, assistant minister of the interior and police director, was landed with the unenviable task of sharing the news with Nicholas but he took his directive too far and shared the official report on Rasputin's behavior with other members of the imperial family. Alexandra was furious at what she saw as a clear attempt to discredit Rasputin and by extension herself and saw to it that Dzhunkovsky was fired. In his place, Nicholas appointed Alexis Khvostov, a close ally of Rasputin.

In the world outside of the imperial palace, the First World War raged on. Nicholas had appointed his cousin, Nicholasha as commander-in-chief of the Russian forces with the clear conviction that he would defeat the

Germans. However, the Russians were always on the back foot due to a lack of munitions and disorganization at the highest levels of the military machine. In September 1914 Nicholas left the palace for the army headquarters in Baranovichi, a town located between the German and Austrian fronts.

For all her outward displays of patriotism at this time, Alexandra fell out of favor with a large section of the Russian people. Weary and disillusioned with the realities of war, millions of Russians wanted someone to blame and became convinced that Alexandra, who was indeed of the House of Hesse, was pro-German and working towards Russia's defeat. This animosity also included Rasputin whom many Russians viewed as a traitor.

Russia's position in the war became ever more dire. In May 1915 the Central Powers (Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) launched a maliciously effective offensive that saw over 100,000 Russian soldiers slaughtered in Galicia. Now more than one-and-a-half million Russian soldiers had perished, and Russia was in retreat. Nicholas fired his cousin, Nicholasha and decided to take control of the army himself, leaving his wife Alexandra and, by extension, her spiritual guide, Rasputin, in charge of state affairs. This decision put Rasputin in a position of power far greater than even his most committed enemies could have thought possible.

Chapter 9

The Reign of Rasputin

On the 4th of August 1915, Nicholas informed his highest ministers of his decision to take over the role of commander-in-chief of the Russian army, leaving his wife as head of the government in his absence. The news threw the entire government into disarray. Rasputin's detractors were convinced that with he and Alexandra in charge of the country Russia would most definitely fall. Ten of Nicholas' highest ministers signed a letter vowing to resign should Nicholas move forward with his plan. This was an act of protest unheard of in imperial Russia and Nicholas was furious. He would not allow his ministers to resign. Alexandra ecstatically celebrated Nicholas' decision, assuring him that he had secured the glory of their reign and that 'Our Friend' was praying for his success.

Nicholas organized for Alexei, now eleven, to join him at the army's General Headquarters in Stavka. Alexei's time with the army was brief but powerful. Inspecting troops and visiting hospitals, Alexei came face-to-face with the men who were fighting and dying for Russia and for him. Alexei's handsome figure, glimpsed strutting along in full uniform with his imposing father reminded many soldiers what they were fighting for and boosted morale. Alexei was still, of course, a sufferer of hemophilia and one day caught a bad cold that led to a nosebleed that would not stop. Alexei was rushed back to Saint Petersburg, bleeding profusely all the way, where doctors came to his aid and cauterized his nose. Rasputin was called to Alexei's bedside, and Alexandra gladly credited him with the boy's recovery, deftly ignoring the doctors who had expertly stopped the bleeding.

Incredibly, Nicholas believed Alexandra when she agreed not to share any of the strategic military intelligence she learned of with Rasputin. In reality, Alexandra was feeding information directly to her spiritual guide, who in

turn offered his prayers and advice. Unsurprisingly Alexandra and Rasputin's amateur speculations on the war effort went largely unacknowledged. The pair were against the iconic Brusilov Offensive, fearing the loss of Russian life would be too high. The offensive went ahead and became Russia's most monumental military effort in the war - and also one of the most deadly battles in modern history.

In military terms, the offensive was a success as it demolished the Austrian Army and removed the Hapsburg Kingdom from the war. The Austrian army lost 750,000 men, but Russia sustained over 1.4 million deaths and casualties. The Brusilov Offensive was not in vain, it had saved the French at Verdun by forcing German troops to retreat and join the defense at Brusilov, and yet by the summer of 1915, it was clear that Russia was losing the war. By the time the German Army took the Polish capital, Warsaw, Russia had lost over 2.5 million of its men who had either killed, severely wounded, or were being held in POW camps.

While the battle raged on the front lines, the people of Petrograd felt the effects of the conflict in their daily lives. There was a shortage of food in the city, and the agricultural infrastructure was slow and ill-equipped for even a small crisis in supply and demand. Russia's rail system was inadequate to deal with the heavy use of soldiers moving to and from the battlefields. Fuel became hard to come by, and people queued for hours to buy a loaf of bread, reaching the front of the line only to find that there was none left.

Nicholas, Alexandra and Rasputin all subscribed to the idea that Russia was not ready for a constitutional government and that the tsar should have full authoritarian control over the people. The tsar appointed all officials, and when the people pushed for a 'Ministry of Public Confidence,' the tsar stood firm. The tsar and his tsarina were convinced that their subjects were simple, orthodox, uneducated people who were all unwaveringly loyal to the throne. They were wrong.

Rasputin's bribe-taking and meddling in the lead up to and early years of the war had ensured that he was perfectly placed to decide who should be

elevated to vacant positions within the state. When the time came for a new Prime Minister to take over from the aged and ineffectual Goremykin, Rasputin was invited to speak with a potential candidate, Alexander Khvostov. Rasputin did not take to Khvostov, but an old and forgotten statesman by the name of Sturmer met with Rasputin and promised to be his henchman. Sturmer was appointed Prime Minister of Russia in January 1916. At this critical moment in Russian history with the First World War still active and the tension between the imperial family and the people at its peak, a peasant starets, Rasputin, was pulling the strings. The newspapers began to refer to this era as the 'reign of Rasputin.'

Rasputin's influence was seriously challenged for the first time in the summer of 1915 with Alexander Samarin's appointment as Ober-Procurator, head of the Holy Synod, the most powerful position in the Russian Orthodox Church. Samarin was anti-Rasputin and a well-respected man across Russia. Samarin's appointment made people feel free, for the first time in years, to express their disapproval of Rasputin and his interference with the church.

Samarin and Nicholas clashed horns almost immediately over Bishop Varavana's desire to canonize John Maximovich, a Siberian monk who died in the 18th century. Samarin argued that there was no evidence (such as the incorruptibility of Maximovich's corpse) to demonstrate that he was a saint. Varavana wanted the prestige and attention for his cathedral and appealed to Rasputin who in turn convinced Nicholas to pass the canonization. Samarin protested, and after just two months in office, Nicholas had him fired.

Soon after Nicholas installed a bishop by the name of Pitrim in the position of metropolitan of Petrograd, the most prestigious position open to a bishop in the Russian Orthodox Church, on Rasputin's advice. This was too much. Pitrim was considered one of the biggest scoundrels and liabilities in the church. Pitrim was openly gay, and while he was Bishop of Tula, he had lived with his lover, the two of them using the church treasury as a personal piggy bank. Demotions had been followed by promotions when Rasputin intervened. Pitrim brought a number of his friends to the capital and installed them in prominent positions. He also opened up the monastery to

wild parties with enough alcohol and sexual promiscuity to attract Rasputin himself to attend.

A man named Nicholas Raev was chosen to replace Samarin as ober-procurer on Rasputin's advice. The man Rasputin described as 'a god's send' was in reality, utterly unfit for the job. A man about town, Raev was popular in high-class social circles (he ran a casino in Petrograd) but had no career in the Church. However, none of these appointments were as scandalous as Nicholas' decision to make Alexander Protopopov Minister of the Interior. Protopopov had syphilis, was mentally ill, a drug addict, and completely unqualified for the job.

This blatant defiance of the Holy Synod's authority and the ridiculous swiftness with which he was hiring and firing inadequate men in top ministerial positions backfired on Nicholas. The war had damaged his reputation dramatically and now the people of Russia, across an entire spectrum of political position, believed that Nicholas was failing as the tsar. Although anti-monarchy propaganda circulated in Petrograd throughout the war, it was the anti-Rasputin propaganda (including cartoons and pamphlets with obscene doctored images of Rasputin and Alexandra) that had the greatest effect.

Chapter 10

The End

By December 1916 Rasputin was tired, sick and depressed. He had been receiving death threats for months, anonymous letters that promised Rasputin that his life was in danger. Rasputin had also been physically assaulted several times. On a few occasions, Rasputin was beaten by officers or other civilians who took umbrage at the way he spoke about the empress and her children. It seems that on more than one occasion, Rasputin was also driven off the road.

Rasputin saw the imperial couple for the last time on the 2nd of December 1916. When Rasputin arrived at the home of Alexandra's friend Anna Vyubova in Petrograd on a snowy winter afternoon, the imperial couple were already there waiting. The three old friends who had by this time been through so much together took tea in Anna's cottage before exchanging a tense farewell. Sombre and withdrawn Rasputin seemed to know what the future had in store for him as when Nicholas asked Rasputin to bless him as usual, he responded that it was he who needed to be blessed.

Rasputin had enemies throughout Russia in the highest levels of the church, the state, and even the monarchy. One such enemy was Prince Felix Yusupov, heir to what was thought to be the largest fortune in the world, and husband of Irina, the daughter of Nicholas's sister, Xenia. Rasputin and Prince Yusupov became acquainted in 1909, and while Rasputin found much to admire in the young Prince who lived a scandalous lifestyle and was openly gay, Prince Yusupov did not like Rasputin. When Yusupov's father, Alexander Michaelovich, was fired from his position as governor-general of Moscow in 1915 this dislike turned into hatred.

Convinced that Rasputin was a German spy and that his negative influence on the tsar and tsarina was destroying Russia, Yusupov took matters into his

own hands. In recent years historians have speculated that the plot to kill Rasputin originated with others and Yusupov was merely lured in to carry out the act. Some have even suggested that the British Secret Intelligence Service had a hand in the plot to kill Rasputin. Nicholas' cousin, Nicholas Michaelovich, is also believed to have been involved in planning Rasputin's demise.

Whoever came up with the original idea that Rasputin must be killed, it was Yusupov who enlisted others to the cause. Leader of the liberal party, Vasily Maklakov was supposedly recruited to the assassination attempt and gave Yusupov a box of cyanide crystals to get the job done. Grand Duke Dmitry Pavolovich, monarchist Vladimir Purishkevich, Lieutenant Sukhotin, and Dr. Stanislaw Lazovert were also involved in the conspiracy.

Yusupov pretended to be in ill health and flattered Rasputin by telling him no doctor could help him; he needed the starets' healing powers. Soon the pair had developed a friendship and could be found dining together in Petrograd. Yusupov had lured Rasputin into believing the two men were friends and so when he was invited to Moika Palace at midnight on the 16th of December to meet Yusupov's wife, Irina, he found nothing to be suspicious about.

Around 11 pm, the other four conspirators arrived at Moika Palace and settled in the basement where they set the scene. Cyanide crystals were crushed into powder and sprinkled into cream cakes and a large glass of wine intended for Rasputin. Rasputin's daughter Maria did not want her father to leave their apartment that night, knowing that rumors were circulating in the city about his imminent demise and that he had no security after midnight.

Rasputin arrived in the palace and was greeted by the man who would murder him. Yusupov took Rasputin to the cellar while the other four men were waiting in his nearby study. Seated at the table, Rasputin drank several glasses of poisoned wine and ate several poisoned cream cakes but seemed to be completely unaffected. This detail is difficult to prove but is a significant proponent of the legend surrounding Rasputin.

Horrified that the poison was having no effect, Yusupov tried to kill time and stop Rasputin from leaving the palace. If the poison finally took hold once Rasputin was at home, the cause of death would be apparent during the autopsy, and this would lead the police straight to Yusupov's door. Eventually, Yusupov took a revolver and shot Rasputin in the chest. Rasputin collapsed onto the floor, and the commotion brought the other four men tumbling into the cellar. The assassins planned on 'driving Rasputin home' with one of the men posing as Rasputin and one posing as the Prince in an attempt to gather witnesses who saw Rasputin leave the palace safe and well.

After this charade had been completed, the men returned to the basement where Yusupov leaned over Rasputin in an attempt to check that he had finally expired. At that moment Rasputin opened one eye, fixed it on Yusupov, and stumbled to his feet, roaring with rage. Terrified Yusupov escaped his grip and Rasputin managed to stumble from the palace out into the snow-covered courtyard. Purishkevich managed to shoot Rasputin in the back as he attempted to escape, then put a final bullet in his forehead.

The shots were heard for miles and when police arrived Purishkevich readily admitted to the crime. Remarkably the police left the scene. Rasputin's corpse was dragged back inside the palace and now lay at the top of the stairs leading to the basement. Yusupov became hysterical and battered Rasputin's prone body with a dumbbell. Yusupov was put to bed as the other four men bound Rasputin's body in a curtain, carried him to a car and drove him to the Great Petrovsky Bridge where they hurtled him into a hole in the iced-over Neva river. In their haste to have the job done, the men had forgotten to weigh down the body with chains.

It was not unusual for Rasputin to be out all night but, considering the constant threats to Rasputin's safety in recent months, his maid, Katya was alarmed when she found that his bed had not been slept in. Police were immediately suspicious about Yusupov's involvement. The fact that gunshots had been heard at the Moika Palace and Purishkevich had already admitted to the crime in front of police officers did not help his case. When

police tried to search the palace, Yusupov denied them entry, warning that only the tsar could order such a violation. Fearing that their beloved Rasputin had been killed and that Yusupov was in some way to blame, Nicholas and Alexandra were not prepared to protect Yusupov. In fact, Alexandra ordered that Yusupov be arrested and held under house arrest.

Even before Rasputin's body was discovered, newspapers in Petrograd ran stories announcing that he was dead. A censor was in place, stopping the press from mentioning Rasputin by name, but reporters got around it by mentioning his address. The people of Petrograd rejoiced. Rasputin's body was found three days after he was killed, frozen into the Neva River. The position Rasputin had frozen into, with his arms extended and his knees raised, prevented him from being put into a coffin, so he was placed into a packing case and taken to hospital to await an autopsy. Following the autopsy, Rasputin's body was prepared for burial by one of his most loyal followers, Akilina Laptinskaya, and taken to Tsarskoye Park for burial. Alexandra, Nicholas and their daughters attended the services but for some reason kept the location of the burial a secret from Rasputin's daughters.

The service was brief, and many of the usual customs were omitted. The ground was frozen solid. Alexandra distributed flowers that were dropped onto Rasputin's shallow grave in the church's foundations. Grigori Rasputin left this world in a fashion as unconventional as that in which he had lived his life.

Conclusion

As with most other significant events in Rasputin's life, the details of his death are contentious. A report of the autopsy performed after Rasputin's death disappeared after the Bolshevik Revolution, and secondary accounts of its findings (such as in the press) cannot be trusted. It was widely believed that the autopsy reported finding water in Rasputin's lungs, signaling that despite being poisoned, beaten and shot, Rasputin was alive when he was thrown into the frozen river. This cannot be proven, but the incredible difficulty Yusugov and his accomplices had in taking Rasputin's life added to the mystery that surrounded his life.

There is also a story that after Russia's February Revolution, a group of men dug Rasputin's body from his grave and burned it in a fire. The men were horrified when, decomposed and aflame, Rasputin's body appeared to sit up. To many, Rasputin was much more than a man, and these stories added to the legend of the starets whose influence on Russia was so destructive that he had to be killed. If indeed this incident did occur, it is possible that Rasputin's body was simply reacting to the heat of the fire; his body was prepared for burial, not cremation, so certain measures (such as severing tendons in his legs) to prevent the body from reacting to heat would not have been carried out.

Some also believe that British Intelligence agents had a hand in Rasputin's murder. Rasputin's politics were indeed damaging to the British war effort as he made it widely known that he was anti-war and insisted upon Russia's withdrawal from the Eastern front. Had this withdrawal occurred, Allied armies would have been overwhelmed by the influx of German soldiers moving from the Eastern to Western fronts. Whether the British were involved in Rasputin's murder or not, they were certainly happy to see him out of the picture.

With a Provisional Government of Bolsheviks in charge of the country, Russia stood on the brink of civil war and famine. Rasputin's widow, Praskovaya lost what remained of her husband's estate to the courts, and she and her daughters found themselves in increasing danger from the new Soviet government. Eventually, Praskovaya, her son Dmitry, and his wife were forced into exile in Siberia with no possessions except the clothes on their backs.

The tsarist regime of Nicholas II fell in March 1917. Nicholas abdicated on behalf of his brother, Grand Duke Michael, who declined to accept the throne until the people of Russia voted to keep the monarchy or begin a republic. Neither the French nor the British would offer the former-tsar and his family asylum, and they were held in captivity in the Governor's Mansion in Tobolsk between August 1917 and April 1918.

In April 1918 the Romanov family were escorted to the town of Yekaterinburg where they lived in a small house known as Ipatiev House. There, on the 17th of July, 1918, the entire Romanov family was executed. Nicholas, Alexandra, Alexei, daughters Anastasia, Tatiana, Olga and Maria, and the family's doctor, maid, chef, and footman, all faced a firing squad of ten soldiers. The executioners finished the job with bayonets and daggers.

Rasputin's life is intricately intertwined with that of the Romanov family. The relationship between Rasputin and the imperial couple began with good intentions and a shared desire to do what was right, both in the eyes of God and for the benefit of Russia. However, Rasputin's greed, Nicholas' weakness, and Alexandra's blind faith combined to create a situation that was simply untenable. By the end of his life, Rasputin had been allowed to meddle in church and state affairs to such an extent that he was effectively deciding who the next Prime Minister of Russia would be. Genuine staret or greedy false-prophet, Rasputin flew too close to the sun for far too long and changed Russia forever.



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