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—Chicago Tribune

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THE REGIME

THE
EVIL ADVANCES
REGIME
BEFORE THEY WERE LEFT BEHIND

TIM LAHAYE

JERRY B. JENKINS



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The Regime

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*To the memory of
Dr. Arthur Peters,
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he taught so well*

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T h e P r i n c i p a l s

Nicolae Carpathia, 24, multilingual, import/export business tycoon in Bucharest, Romania

Viviana Ivinisova (aka Viv Ivins), Russian-born spiritualist, Luciferian, adopted aunt of Carpathia

Reiche Planchette, regional director of Romanian Luciferian Society

Irene Steele, wife of Rayford Steele, new believer in Christ

Rayford Steele, 33, Pan-Continental Airlines pilot

Jonathan Stonagal, American, international banker and financier

PROLOGUE

From *The Rising*

By age twenty-one, Nicolae Carpathia was nearly finished with graduate school and ran an import/export empire with Reiche Planchette low on his payroll. Carpathia was on the cover of every business magazine in Europe, and while he had not yet made the cover of *Time* or *Global Weekly*, that couldn't be far off.

He lived in a mansion on the outskirts of Bucharest, not a half mile from where his biological fathers had been assassinated a few years before. Viv Ivins enjoyed quarters on the top floor and managed his personal affairs. She supervised his valets, his drivers, his household and garden staff. His every need was cared for.

Nicolae was in the middle of two projects: clandestinely hiring an off-the-books cadre of professional facilitators who would make sure his least cooperative competitors met the same fate his fathers and his mother had, and surrounding himself with the politically astute.

His next horizon was government. First he would get himself elected to the Romanian parliament. Then he would angle for the presidency. Next step, Europe. Ultimate goal: the world.

There was no such position yet, of course, leader of the world. But by the time he ascended, there would be. He just knew it. . . .

[Three years later] Nicolae Carpathia was awakened from a sound sleep. At least he thought he was awakened. Maybe he was still dreaming. There had been no noise, no light. His eyes had simply popped open.

As was his custom when a dream seemed too real, he reached under his silk pajamas and pinched himself. Hard. He was awake. Just like that, on full alert. He sat up in the dark bedroom and peered out the window.

What was that? A figure sitting on the roof? There was no way up there without a serious ladder. Another ten feet and the figure would have reached Aunt Viv's level. Nicolae was tempted to direct it that way. If the figure had an ill motive, better her than him, and he would have time to escape.

But the figure wasn't moving. Holding his breath, Nicolae slipped slowly out of bed, quietly drew open the drawer of his bedside stand, and pulled out a massive Glock handgun. As he crept toward the window, the figure turned to look at him, and Nicolae froze, though there was no light in the room, no way for the figure to see him.

He lifted the Glock to eye level, hands shaking. But

before he could pull back the firing mechanism, the figure lifted a finger and shook its head, as if to say he wouldn't need that. "I am not here to harm you," Nicolae heard, though not audibly. "Put down your weapon."

Nicolae set the Glock on the bureau and stared. His heart rate slowed, but he didn't know what to do. Unlock and raise the window? Invite the figure in? In the next instant he was transported outside, still in his pajamas, and now he and the figure, a male, stood in a desolate wasteland. Nicolae tensed at the growls and howls and whines of animals. He pinched himself again. This was real.

The figure was draped head to toe in a hooded black robe, his face and hands and feet hidden. "Wait here," the man said. "I shall return for you in forty days."

"I cannot survive here! What will I eat?"

"You shall not eat."

"Where will I stay? There is no shelter!"

"Forty days."

"Wait! My people—"

"Your people will be informed." And with that the figure was gone.

Nicolae wished the time would speed as it had when he had moved from the bedroom to this place. But it did not. He was aware of every crawling second, the heat of the day, the bone chill of the night. Nicolae had grown accustomed to creature comforts. He was not used to hunger, to fear, to darkness. He might have tried to walk home had he any idea which direction it was. All he saw was nothingness on every side.

After several days Nicolae thought he would go mad. He tried to mark the time by gouging the ground with a stick every sunrise. His hair and beard grew; his pajamas became tattered. He feared he was wasting away. Time and again he called out for the figure, finally screaming maniacally for hours, "I will die of hunger!"

Nicolae lost all track of time, not sure whether he had missed a day or two or added marks too often. At the end of a month he lay in a fetal position, his bones protruding, his teeth filmy. He rocked and wept, willing himself to die.

Hours and days passed long after he believed the forty days were up, until he despaired of ever being rescued. He slept for long periods, waking miserable, filthy, trembling, utterly surrendered to his fate. He had had a good run, he told himself. At twenty-four he was already one of the most promising, revered men in the world. He didn't deserve this.

Finally, at long last, the robed man reappeared. Nicolae tried to muster the strength to attack, to harangue, but the spirit again lifted a finger and shook his head. "Are you the chosen one?" the figure said.

Nicolae nodded, still believing he was.

"Look around you. Bread."

"Nothing but stones," Nicolae rasped, cursing the man.

"If you are who you say you are, tell these stones to become bread."

"You mock me," Nicolae said.

The spirit did not move or speak.

“All right!” Nicolae shouted. “Stones, become bread!”

Immediately the rocks all around him became golden brown and steaming. He fell to his knees and lifted one to his nose with both hands. He thrust it to his mouth and began to devour it. “I am a god!” he said, his mouth full.

“Are you god?” the spirit said.

Suddenly Nicolae stood at the top of the temple in Jerusalem, warm bread still in his hand. “I am,” he said. “I am that I am.”

“If you are, throw yourself down and you will be rescued.”

Shuddering, wasted, standing barefoot in tattered silk, Nicolae felt full of bread and full of himself. He smiled. And threw himself off the tower of the temple. Hurling toward the rocky Temple Mount, he never once lost faith in himself or the promise of the spirit. Twenty feet from impact he began to float, landing on his feet like a cat.

Suddenly Nicolae and the spirit were at the top of a mountain, barefoot in the snow. The air was frigid and thin, and Nicolae felt his chest heaving, fighting for enough oxygen to keep him alive.

“From here you can see all the kingdoms of the world.”

“Yes,” Nicolae said. “I can see them all.”

“They are yours if you but kneel and worship me, your master.”

Nicolae dropped to his knees before the spirit. “My lord and my god,” he said.

THE REGIME

When Nicolae opened his eyes, he was back in his bed. That the experience had been real was borne out by his own stench and filth and ratty garments. He staggered from his bed and noticed a sheet of paper under the door. It was in Viv Ivins's flowing script:

Shower, change, and come down, beloved. Barber, manicurist, masseuse, and cook are here and at your service.

ONE

THE WHITE BENTLEY glided beneath the canopy over the veranda of the most expansive estate in Romania. From the two-story foyer, Nicolae Carpathia watched through the draperies as the driver and a security guard stepped quickly from the vehicle.

The driver stood next to his door. The guard hurried to the opposite back door, awaiting Carpathia. Both, Nicolae knew, bore compact Uzis beneath their uniforms.

The approach of the car had triggered a coded signal inside the house and brought one of the maids hurrying to the door. She slowed, then stopped when she saw Nicolae at the window.

“I have it, Gabriella,” he said without turning. He could see her bowing and retreating in the reflection.

He had to admit it was out of character for him to be impatiently waiting for his ride. Commonly his house staff

would have to come find him in his office or the library or wherever. His was the only schedule that mattered.

But today Nicolae was eager. He'd enjoyed one full day and night since his ordeal—forty days fasting in a desolate wilderness that should have cost him at least twenty-five pounds. Indeed, when he had found himself back in his bed in his tattered silk pajamas, it seemed he could see every rib, feel every bony protrusion.

Nicolae had gathered his household and import/export business staff and had them quickly bring him up to speed. Meanwhile, he slowly introduced small meals throughout the day. To his amazement, his body seemed to fill out and strengthen, almost as if he had not endured the fast. By the end of the day he had felt himself again. It was as if the flesh had returned to his skeleton.

If he had never before felt like a man of destiny, Nicolae did this morning. Besides what had always seemed his superhuman mental acuity, after the encounter in the desert he now believed he had a mission. He had humbled himself, dedicated himself to a being greater than himself, submitted himself to the ultimate spirit guide, who promised Nicolae the world in exchange for his devotion. Such a great prize for such a small price.

His human counselors had proven inept, naïve, weak. Reiche Planchette was twice Nicolae's age and yet was easily bullied. His ersatz aunt, Viv Ivins, was immensely helpful and valuable, but too starry-eyed and fawning to take seriously as a counselor. Not that she didn't try. The

staff knew she spoke for him and thus respected her; they didn't have to know he barely listened to her.

It was neither Planchette nor Ivins who suggested his course of action this day. Rather it was his own spirit guide. Nicolae was nearly drunk with the privilege of essentially going over the heads of other humans to communicate directly with the spirit world. He had not yet determined, this exercise being barely twenty-four hours old, whether the being he prayed to was the same one who had accompanied him to the wilderness. It didn't matter. He had access to what appeared unlimited power, a sea of resources. All Nicolae wanted was to know what was expected of him. He already knew what had become his entitlement: nothing less than all the kingdoms of the world.

Pan-Con Airlines heavy-craft captain Rayford Steele looked different, at least to himself. As he left the flight center at O'Hare well after midnight for the drive home to Mt. Prospect, he wondered if others could see in his face what he felt so deeply. The embarrassment of having to ride back to Chicago on another Pan-Con plane rather than pilot his own craft back was one thing. It was not uncommon for a pilot to be put on temporary leave as a near crash was investigated both by Pan-Con and the National Transportation Safety Board.

What had shaken Rayford, naturally, was his brush with death. He hated rehashing it, but missing a jet on

the ground by inches refused to be set aside in his mind. All the what-ifs and why-nots swirled until they nearly drove him mad. Especially after having to rehearse it for hours at Los Angeles International Airport.

He had cried out a prayer when he believed he was going to die, and he couldn't just pass that off now. Rayford had meant it. He had made some promises. He had to at least talk to Irene about them.

His wife was a woman of insight; he had to give her that. Intensely loyal and loving, she seemed to know him better than he knew himself. And while they had had their fights and disagreements, he felt they were solid—despite his nearly having strayed once at an office Christmas party she couldn't attend.

That was far enough in the past that Rayford believed he had already made it up to Irene, though he had never confessed it and never would. But this—this whatever-had-happened-to-him—he couldn't keep to himself. And Irene was the only person he felt he could tell.

He'd never seriously considered God, even as a child when his parents took him to church every Sunday. It was just something they did. That was the way it was now too. Irene was more devout, it seemed. More interested, anyway. Rayford didn't mind missing a Sunday due to work. Sometimes he found reasons to miss even when he was off. But Irene was determined to take the kids, and while she had apparently learned not to nag Rayford, she couldn't hide her feelings when he made her go alone.

Irene was waiting by the door when he arrived home.

The kids were in bed. “Peek in on them,” she said, “but don’t wake them.”

“Okay,” he said, “and then we have to talk.”

“I can tell,” Irene said. “Anything I need to worry about?”

“Nah. Just something I have to tell you.”

“Good morning, sir,” the bodyguard said, opening Nicolae’s car door. “How’s the most successful businessman in Europe this morning?”

“Bored,” Nicolae said.

That was his typical response, but it jangled even in his own ears today. He was anything but bored now. He used to say it to indicate he was not at all satisfied with his prodigious accomplishments yet. There was so much more on the horizon, so many more battles to wage and win.

But to have the world at his feet and know it beyond doubt? Nicolae Carpathia was anything but bored. Drunk with intrigue was more like it.

The only reason he had not summoned the physician to his own home was that the clinic had all the equipment necessary for the complete physical assessment he coveted.

So far the spirit had not revealed any timetable for his ascendancy, but his entire life had aimed at this. Nicolae had assumed he would have to do it on his own, and perhaps he could have. But with these new resources, what chance did anyone else have?

Rayford told Irene all about his new first officer, the engine oil light, the maintenance record that showed metal shavings, the seeming innocuousness of it all, and how he had been fully confident he could get the craft down safely in Los Angeles.

There had been no problem, even when he lost one engine. That wasn't common, but he had flown heavies that way before. The problem was the weather—not being able to see until they broke through a low cloud cover, committed to landing—combined with miscommunication with a US Air jet on the ground that thought it had been cleared for takeoff.

“I had to pull up and go around,” Rayford said. “And I still can't believe I didn't hit that plane. It's likely we'd have lost everybody on board both craft.”

Irene sat shaking her head. “I pray for your safety, you know.”

“Well, it worked this time. I prayed too.”

She took a breath as if to speak but hesitated.

“I did,” he said. “I did everything I knew to do, but I was still sure we were going to collide, and I found myself calling out, out loud, in front of this new guy, ‘God, help me!’”

“And He did, Rafe.”

“He must have. The promises though, they were silent. Think they still count?”

She smiled. “The promises? What did you promise?”

“Church every Sunday and prayer every day.”

Irene embraced him and laughed. “And you a straight

arrow who always follows through on his commitments.” She released him and sat back. “I can tell you’re shaken and exhausted, but I’ve got something to tell you too. Maybe I’ll save it until tomorrow when you’re up to it.”

“I’m a little wired. I’ll hear it now.”

The female nurses and even some of the males seemed unable to take their eyes off Nicolae Carpathia as he made his way to the changing room at the clinic. He was used to that. Enough people had told him how attractive he was, how he had a matinee idol’s look. He was less concerned with that just now than he was with how the forty-day fast in the wilderness had affected his health.

“Remind me,” the doctor said as he prepared a stress test, “what made this exam so urgent.”

“I got lost hiking and my people did not find me for forty days.”

“I heard nothing of that. You’d think it would have made the news.”

Nicolae smiled. “I could not have my competition so encouraged. My staff would not report my death until months after it occurred.”

The doctor measured and weighed him. “Do you have a problem with fibbing, Mr. Carpathia?”

“Me? No. Why?”

“What did you eat while you were stranded?”

“Precious little.”

“What?”

“Virtually nothing.”

“Please. No small animals, plants, berries, other fruit?”

Nicolae held up both hands. “On my honor, I ate nothing. I do not recall even drinking water.”

“A man cannot live without water. Food maybe, for a while, but not water. You had to have been getting hydration from somewhere.”

“Perhaps. But as you can imagine, after a while I was delirious. In fact, I was amazed to find I had been out there for only forty days. It seemed months.”

“Would it surprise you to know that you are down only three pounds since I saw you last year?”

“Yes, that is a surprise.”

“It’s also incongruous with your story, sir.”

“I cannot fool science, can I?”

“No, sir. You cannot. And if you were literally twenty-four hours from having fasted for forty days in the elements, I would not be subjecting you to all these physical tests today. But your resting pulse is as low as a marathon runner’s, and—”

“I have run marathons.”

“But surely you did not exercise during your ordeal.”

“Of course not.”

“Your respiration seems normal. Your blood pressure. Sugar. Everything.”

“Then crank up that treadmill.”

Irene was nervous. Hopefully, because of what Rayford had just been through, he would be receptive to what

had happened to her. But she didn't want to presume. She eased into it.

"I've told you about Jackie, the one at the park—"

"The religious nut who calls you Eye, sure."

"She's not a religious nut, Rafe."

He shrugged. "That's how you made her sound. Trying to get you to come to church, always talking about Jesus her personal Savior, that kind of stuff. Reminds me of an obnoxious friend I had when I was a kid."

Irene's shoulders slumped. "Forget it."

"No, I'm sorry, babe. Go ahead. I was just saying I know who you're talking about."

"Well, if you think she's a nut, you may not like what's happened."

"You didn't tell her we'd visit her church, did you? Please, not that."

"No. In fact, the truth is, Rafe, she almost pushed me too hard. It got to where I didn't want to hear it anymore. She said her church was full of born-again Christians trying to get other people into heaven."

Rayford stood. "See, that's just it. They ought to worry about getting themselves to heaven and let us take care of ourselves."

"But, no, they're born-again—"

"Whatever in tarnation that means . . ."

"—so they're already in. She says her pastor teaches straight out of the Bible."

"Sounds boring."

"And she wanted to know if our church taught salvation."

“Salvation? Well, ’course it does. Doesn’t it, Irene? I mean, isn’t that what any church is about? You get together, sing, worship, help people, learn how to be a better person, and that makes you one of the good guys. I know I’ve been lax about it, but now I’ve made these promises, so I figure you don’t have to worry about me anymore, and neither do I.”

Irene knew this wasn’t going to go down easily.

“I didn’t say we would come to their church.”

“But?”

“Well, she started changing her tune a little. It must have been obvious I was uncomfortable talking about it. So she quit bringing it up.”

“That’s a relief.”

“She talked about everything but that for days, Rafe. Frankly, I started to miss it.”

“You’re kidding. All that pressure?”

“The fact is, hon, our pastor doesn’t teach straight from the Bible, and we don’t talk about salvation. All that is just sort of understood and assumed and not discussed.”

“My kind of place.”

“Anyway, she told me she cared about me and said the last thing she wanted to do was offend me or push me away, so would I just take a brochure and think about it.”

“I’ve seen those. Weird.”

“This one wasn’t.”

“Uh-oh.”