

THE EMPEROR'S MEDALLION

Original screenplay by **Unto O. Kaartinen**

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SYNOPSIS

This screenplay is based on a true story told to Unto O. Kaartinen by Olavi Kaaro (false name). All the principal characters have existed and all the major incidents described herein have actually occurred. Olavi Kaaro was shot to death by Soviet guards at the Russian-Finnish border in November, 1966.

An old, delirious man repeating the name "Nina" is crossing the Finnish-Soviet border in November 1966. When he does not stop on the Russian guard's commands, he is shot to death. The guards from both the Soviet Union and Finland check the body and find out that the trespasser has a Finnish name, Olavi Kaaro, a Swedish passport and a US Social Security Card.

Olavi takes us to his childhood, year 1906, growing up in the most beautiful part of Karelia, Russia, as a son of a common farm help. He is very fond of a girl of the same age, Nina, the daughter of wealthy Prince Debikoff. The Debikoffs, as many other rich Russian families come to spend summers in Karelia, and the prince sees nothing wrong with the two children playing together, despite the huge difference: Nina's family belonging to the high-class Russian royalty, Olavi's mother a Finnish servant and father unknown. Nina studies ballet and eventually becomes such a promising dancer that the Czar Nicholas II personally gives her the Imperial Medal for Outstanding Artistic Achievement, the Emperor's Medallion. She also becomes one of the most popular performers in the Karelian farm workers summer theater, where Olavi usually sings the beloved, traditional Well Song.

Nina meets a gypsy woman, who tells her fortune: "Much love, travel and sorrow. You will lose your valuable Medallion, but in the end you will get it back." It is not before Nina and Olavi have grown from children into young adults that Prince Debikoff realizes they are in love; he feels Olavi is not good enough for his daughter and sends Nina away. Before leaving, Nina gives Olavi something to remember her by, the greatest material treasure she has, the Emperor's Medallion. With Nina gone, Olavi joins the Russian army and they don't see each other for two long years.

At a Russian army officers' get-together, Prince Debikoff hears the Russian high-ranking officer Prince Buboff sing the popular Well Song. His voice and face are uncannily like Olavi's. Emptying a bottle of Russian champagne and vodka, he confronts Prince Buboff who finally admits to being Olavi's real father. The royal blood in Olavi's veins changes everything: Prince Debikoff tells Nina his approval of the couple's relationship--but Olavi is nowhere to be found.

Year 1917: The Russian Revolution begins and St. Petersburg is on fire. Prince Debikoff refuses to escape in spite of warnings from loyal servants. He tells Nina to leave for Switzerland where he has deposited money for her in a secret bank account. Nina makes a narrow escape pretending to be a nurse in a revolutionary sick train, while the revolutionary Bolsheviks slaughter her father and other wealthy and royal Russians.

Olavi is traveling in a train with other Russian soldiers unaware that the revolution has started. Suddenly, the Bolsheviks derail the train. The nearby forest is full of gunfire, but Olavi escapes dressed in a new uniform he steals from an enemy officer wearing a red arm band. On his way out one of his own soldiers confronts and shoots Olavi in the shoulder, thinking him a revolutionary. A revolutionary comrade arrives to transport Olavi to a sick train for medical treatment. Here--in a train full of wounded Red soldiers--Nina finds Olavi. With the help of another nurse, Irina, they spend the loveliest and most

romantic afternoon together, in the privacy of the nurse's cabin. A badly wounded Red army soldier realizes who Olavi, Nina and Irina are and starts shouting for help. To silence his cries, Irina pushes a pillow over the man's mouth, and accidentally suffocates him. She writes a report that the man died from his wounds, but another Red army soldier notices small feathers sticking out between the dead man's lips. He wants to sell his silence to Nina for sex, but is outraged when Nina refuses. Olavi arrives in the compartment. He points his gun at the Red and arrests him. The Bolshevik runs out to the train's platform, at the end of the coach. There is a struggle that ends with Nina shooting the man. He falls off the train, but drags Olavi with him. Both men disappear into the darkness.

When the Red sick train arrives in Odessa, at the Black Sea, Nina and Irina escape. Using the jewelry they have on them as bribery, Nina and Irina make their way along the River Danube through Romania, Serbia, Hungary and Austria to Switzerland--just in time to hear that Czar Nicholas II and his family have been murdered--Finland has declared independence--and the war has ended.

Years later, we find Nina in Paris, France, living with her five-year-old son, Sergei Olavi. One day, she runs into her former ballet teacher from St Petersburg, Andrei Eglewsky, who also escaped the Russian revolution. He asks Nina to come to teach at his school, which Nina does. She also starts dancing again, small parts at the Paris Opera, and when Andrei Eglewsky dies, she takes over the ballet school.

More than ten years later, in the middle of a very cold winter, Nina decides to take a ballet tour to the Baltic countries. She arrives in Tallinn, Estonia, but immediately realizes that two KGB agents, former workers of her father's factory in Russia, are following her. Nina decides to escape to Finland, together with a group of other performers. They rent a large boat with an Estonian captain and start traveling across the freezing cold and stormy Gulf of Finland. During the voyage Nina gets soaking wet from the large waves, and when the group finally reaches the Finnish coastline, she is running a high fever.

At the Finnish garrison, they are warmly welcomed. What Nina really wants is to go to see her childhood places in Karelia. So, she tells the Finnish officer in charge that they--the ballet group from Paris--would like to tour the front lines--in Karelia--and perform for the Finnish soldiers. Although concerned about Nina's condition, the officer gives his permission. They are taken by train to Karelia, to the front line where the Finns are fighting with the Soviet army. At a 'Soldiers' Home' they perform a new piece, 'Summer in Karelia.' What Nina does not know is that Olavi is alive and a captain in the Finnish army here, and now sitting in the front row. When the pianist starts playing, the soldiers cannot hide their astonishment. What they hear from this French group, is a variation of the Well Song, the very same song that their captain so many times has sung to them.

When Nina enters the stage, Olavi immediately recognizes her and stands up, absolutely still. Nina starts dancing, after a moment looks at Olavi's direction and freezes. Olavi walks to Nina and takes her in his arms. The soldiers in the audience start singing the 'captain's song,' the Well Song. But suddenly, Nina collapses in Olavi's arms.

Nina has double pneumonia and she is in very bad shape. She is sent back to Finland, to an army hospital, with Olavi her escort. When Nina wakes in the hospital, the couple spends hours talking about the missed decades--Nina tells him about the son, Sergei, he fathered, and Olavi tells her how his life was saved when he fell off the train. "I did not spend one day without thinking of you," she manages to say. "Did you think of me?" Olavi smiles, unbuttons his jacket and takes the Medallion from his neck, carefully putting it around Nina's neck. She smiles and closes her eyes--for the last time.