

GIACOMO CASANOVA

THE MEMOIRS OF
JACQUES CASANOVA DE
SEINGALT, 1725-1798.

VOLUME 27: EXPELLED
FROM SPAIN

Giacomo Casanova

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CHAPTER VII

I Make a Mistake and Manucci Becomes My Mortal Foe—His Vengeance—
I Leave Madrid—Saragossa—Valentia—Nina—I Arrive at Barcelona

If these Memoirs, only written to console me in the dreadful weariness which is slowly killing me in Bohemia—and which, perhaps, would kill me anywhere, since, though my body is old, my spirit and my desires are as young as ever—if these Memoirs are ever read, I repeat, they will only be read when I am gone, and all censure will be lost on me.

Nevertheless, seeing that men are divided into two sections, the one and by far the greater composed of the ignorant and superficial, and the other of the learned and reflective, I beg to state that it is to the latter I would appeal. Their judgment, I believe, will be in favour of my veracity, and, indeed, why should I not be veracious? A man can have no object in deceiving himself, and it is for myself that I chiefly write.

Hitherto I have spoken nothing but the truth, without considering whether the truth is in my favour or no. My book is not a work of dogmatic theology, but I do not think it will do harm to anyone; while I fancy that those who know how to imitate the bee and to get honey from every flower will be able to extract some good from the catalogue of my vices and virtues.

After this digression (it may be too long, but that is my business and none other's), I must confess that never have I had so unpleasant a truth to set down as that which I am going to relate. I committed a fatal act of indiscretion—an act which after all these years still gives my heart a pang as I think of it.

The day after my conquest I dined with the Venetian ambassador, and I had the pleasure of hearing that all the ministers and grandees with whom I had associated had the highest possible opinion of me. In three or four days the king, the royal family, and the ministers would return to town, and I expected to have daily conferences with the latter respecting the colony in the Sierra Morena, where I should most probably be going. Manucci, who continued to treat me as a valued friend, proposed to accompany me on my journey, and would bring with him an adventuress, who called herself Porto-Carrero, pretending to be the daughter or niece of the late cardinal of that name, and thus obtained a good deal of consideration; though in reality she was only the mistress of the French consul at Madrid, the Abbe Bigliardi.

Such was the promising state of my prospects when my evil genius brought to Madrid a native of Liege, Baron de Fraiture, chief huntsman of the principality, and a profligate, a gamester, and a cheat, like all those who proclaim their belief in his honesty nowadays.

I had unfortunately met him at Spa, and told him I was was going to Portugal. He had come after me, hoping to use me as a means of getting into good society, and of filling his pocket with the money of the dupes he aspired to make.

Gamesters have never had any proof of my belonging to their infernal clique, but they have always persisted in believing that I too am a "Greek."

As soon as this baron heard that I was in Madrid he called on me, and by dint of politeness obliged me to receive him. I thought any small civilities I might shew or introductions I might give could do me no harm. He had a travelling companion to whom he introduced me. He was a fat,

ignorant fellow, but a Frenchman, and therefore agreeable. A Frenchman who knows how to present himself, who is well dressed, and has the society air, is usually accepted without demur or scrutiny. He had been a cavalry captain, but had been fortunate enough to obtain an everlasting furlough.

Four or five days after his appearance the baron asked me quietly enough to lend him a score of louis, as he was hard up. I replied as quietly, thanking him for treating me as a friend, but informing him that I really could not lend him the money, as I wanted what little I had for my own necessities.

"But we can do good business together, and you cannot possibly be moneyless."

"I do not know anything about good business, but I do know that I want my money and cannot part with it."

"We are at our wits' end to quiet our landlord; come and speak to him."

"If I were to do so I should do you more harm than good. He would ask me if I would answer for you, and I should reply that you are one of those noblemen who stand in need of no surety. All the same, the landlord would think that if I did not stand your surety, it must be from my entertaining doubts as to your solvency."

I had introduced Fraiture to Count Manucci, on the Pando, and he requested me to take him to see the count, to which request I was foolish enough to accede.

A few days later the baron opened his soul to Manucci.

He found the Venetian disposed to be obliging, but wary. He refused to lend money himself, but introduced the baron to someone who lent him money on pledges without interest.

The baron and his friend did a little gaming and won a little money, but I held aloof from them to the best of my ability.

I had my colony and Donna Ignazia, and wanted to live peacefully; and if I had spent a single night away from home, the innocent girl would have been filled with alarm.

About that time M. de Mocenigo went as ambassador to France, and was replaced by M. Querini. Querini was a man of letters, while Mocenigo only liked music and his own peculiar kind of love.

The new ambassador was distinctly favourable to me, and in a few days I had reason to believe that he would do more for me than ever Mocenigo would have done.

In the meanwhile, the baron and his friend began to think of beating a retreat to France. There was no gaming at the ambassador's and no gaming at the Court; they must return to France, but they owed money to their landlord, and they wanted money for the journey. I could give them nothing, Manucci would give them nothing; we both pitied them, but our duty to ourselves made us cruel to everyone else. However, he brought trouble on us.

One morning Manucci came to see me in evident perturbation.

"What is the matter?" said I.

"I do not know exactly. For the last week I have refused to see the Baron Fraiture, as not being able to give him money, his presence only wearied me. He has written me a letter, in which he threatens to blow out his brains to-day if I will not lend him a hundred pistoles."

"He said the same thing to me three days ago; but I replied that I would bet two hundred pistoles that he would do nothing of the kind. This made him angry, and he proposed to fight a duel with me; but I declined on the plea that as he was a desperate man either he would have an advantage over me or I, over him. Give him the same answer, or, better still, no answer at all."

"I cannot follow your advice. Here are the hundred pistoles. Take them to him and get a receipt."

I admired his generosity and agreed to carry out his commission. I called on the baron, who seemed rather uncomfortable when I walked in; but considering his position I was not at all surprised.

I informed him that I was the bearer of a thousand francs from Count Manucci, who thereby placed him in a position to arrange his affairs and to leave Madrid. He received the money without any signs of pleasure, surprise, or gratitude, and wrote out the receipt. He assured me that he and his friend would start for Barcelona and France on the following day.

I then took the document to Manucci, who was evidently suffering from some mental trouble; and I remained to dinner with the ambassador. It was for the last time.

Three days after I went to dine with the ambassadors (for they all dined together), but to my astonishment the porter told me that he had received orders not to admit me.

The effect of this sentence on me was like that of a thunderbolt; I returned home like a man in a dream. I immediately sat down and wrote to Manucci, asking him why I had been subjected to such an insult; but Philippe, my man, brought me back the letter unopened.

This was another surprise; I did not know what to expect next. "What can be the matter?" I said to myself. "I cannot imagine, but I will have an explanation, or perish."

I dined sadly with Donna Ignazia, without telling her the cause of my trouble, and just as I was going to take my siesta a servant of Manucci's brought me a letter from his master and fled before I could read it. The letter contained an enclosure which I read first. It was from Baron de Fraiture. He asked Manucci to lend him a hundred pistoles, promising to shew him the man whom he held for his dearest friend to be his worst enemy.

Manucci (honouring me, by the way, with the title of ungrateful traitor) said that the baron's letter had excited his curiosity and he had met him in St. Jerome's Park, where the baron had clearly proved this enemy to be myself, since I had informed the baron that though the name of Manucci was genuine the title of count was quite apocryphal.

After recapitulating the information which Fraiture had given him, and which could only have proceeded from myself, he advised me to leave Madrid as soon as possible, in a week at latest.

I can give the reader no idea of the shock this letter gave me. For the first time in my life I had to confess myself guilty of folly, ingratitude, and crime. I felt that my fault was beyond forgiveness, and did not think of asking Manucci to pardon me; I could do nothing but despair.

Nevertheless, in spite of Manucci's just indignation, I could not help seeing that he had made a great mistake in advising me, in so insulting a manner, to leave Madrid in a week. The young man might have known that my self-respect would forbid my following such a piece of advice. He could not compel me to obey his counsel or command; and to leave Madrid would have been to commit a second baseness worse than the first.

A prey to grief I spent the day without taking any steps one way or the other, and I went to bed without supping and without the company of Donna Ignazia.

After a sound sleep I got up and wrote to the friend whom I had offended a sincere and humble confession of my fault. I concluded my letter by saying that I hoped that this evidence of my sincere and heartfelt repentance would suffice, but if not that I was ready to give him any honourable satisfaction in my power.

"You may," I said, "have me assassinated if you like, but I shall not leave Madrid till its suits me to do so."

I put a commonplace seal on my letter, and had the address written by Philippe, whose hand was unknown to Manucci, and then I sent it to Pando where the king had gone.

I kept my room the whole day; and Donna Ignazia, seeing that I had recovered my spirits to some degree, made no more enquiries about the cause of my distress. I waited in the whole of the next day, expecting a reply, but in vain.

The third day, being Sunday, I went out to call on the Prince della Catolica. My carriage stopped at his door, but the porter came out and told me in a polite whisper that his highness had his reasons for not receiving me any longer.

This was an unexpected blow, but after it I was prepared for anything.

I drove to the Abbe Bigliardi, but the lackey, after taking in my name, informed me that his master was out.

I got into my carriage and went to Varnier, who said he wanted to speak to me.

"Come into my carriage," said I, "we will go and hear mass together."

On our way he told me that the Venetian ambassador, Mocenigo, had warned the Duke of Medina Sidonia that I was a dangerous character.

"The duke," he added, "replied that he would cease to know you as soon as he found out the badness of your character himself."

These three shocks, following in such quick succession, cast me into a state of confusion. I said nothing till we heard mass together, but I believe that if I had not then told him the whole story I should have had an apoplectic fit.

Varnier pitied me, and said,—

"Such are the ways of the great when they have abjured all virtue and honesty. Nevertheless, I advise you to keep silence about it, unless you would irritate Manucci still farther."

When I got home I wrote to Manucci begging him to suspend his vengeance, or else I should be obliged to tell the story to all those who insulted me for the ambassador's sake. I sent the letter to M. Soderini, the secretary of the embassy, feeling sure that he would forward it to Manucci.

I dined with my mistress, and took her to the bull fight, where I chanced to find myself in a box adjoining that in which Manucci and the two ambassadors were seated. I made them a bow which they were obliged to return, and did not vouchsafe them another glance for the rest of the spectacle.

The next day the Marquis Grimaldi refused to receive me, and I saw that I should have to abandon all hope. The Duke of Lossada remained my friend on account of his dislike to the ambassador and his unnatural tastes; but he told me that he had been requested not to receive me, and that he did not think I had the slightest chance of obtaining any employment at Court.

I could scarcely believe in such an extremity of vengeance: Manucci was making a parade of the influence he possessed over his wife the ambassador. In his insane desire for revenge he had laid all shame aside.

I was curious to know whether he had forgotten Don Emmanuel de Roda and the Marquis de la Moras; I found both of them had been forewarned against me. There was still the Count of Aranda, and I was just going to see him when a servant of his highness's came and told me that his master wished to see me.

I shuddered, for in my then state of mind I drew the most sinister conclusions from the message.

I found the great man alone, looking perfectly calm. This made me pluck up a heart. He asked me to sit down—a favour he had not hitherto done me, and this further contributed to cheer me.

"What have you been doing to offend your ambassador?" he began.

"My lord, I have done nothing to him directly, but by an inexcusable act of stupidity I have wounded his dear friend Manucci in his tenderest part. With the most innocent intentions I reposed my confidence in a cowardly fellow, who sold it to Manucci for a hundred pistoles. In his irritation, Manucci has stirred up the great man against me: 'hinc illae lacrimae'."

"You have been unwise, but what is done is done. I am sorry for you, because there is an end to all your hopes of advancement. The first thing the king would do would be to make enquiries about you of the ambassador."

"I feel it to my sorrow, my lord, but must I leave Madrid?"

"No. The ambassador did his best to make me send you way, but I told him that I had no power over you so long as you did not infringe the laws."

"He has calumniated a Venetian subject whom I am bound to protect," said he.

"In that case," I replied, "you can resort to the ordinary law, and punish him to the best of your ability."

"The ambassador finally begged me to order you not to mention the matter to any Venetian subjects at Madrid, and I think you can safely promise me this."

"My lord, I have much pleasure in giving your excellency my word of honour not to do so."

"Very good. Then you can stay at Madrid as long as you please; and, indeed, Mocenigo will be leaving in the course of a week."

From that moment I made up my mind to amuse myself without any thought of obtaining a position in Spain. However, the ties of friendship made me keep up my acquaintance with Varnier, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, and the architect, Sabatini, who always gave me a warm welcome, as did his wife.

Donna Ignazia had more of my company than ever, and congratulated me on my freedom from the cares of business.

After the departure of Mocenigo I thought I would go and see if Querini, his nephew, was equally prejudiced against me. The porter told me that he had received orders not to admit me, and I laughed in the man's face.

Six or seven weeks after Manucci's departure I, too, left Madrid. I did so on compulsion, in spite of my love for Ignazia, for I had no longer hopes of doing anything in Portugal, and my purse was nearly exhausted.

I thought of selling a handsome repeater and a gold snuff-box so as to enable me to go to Marseilles, whence I thought of going to Constantinople and trying my fortune there without turning renegade. Doubtless, I should have found the plan unsuccessful, for I was attaining an age when Fortune flies. I had no reason, however, to complain of Fortune, for she had been lavish in her gifts to me, and I in my turn had always abused them.

In my state of distress the learned Abbe Pinzi introduced me to a Genoese bookseller, named Carrado, a thoroughly honest man, who seemed to have been created that the knavery of most of the Genoese might be pardoned. To him I brought my watch and snuff-box, but the worthy Carrado not only refused to buy them, but would not take them in pledge. He gave me seventeen hundred francs with no other security than my word that I would repay him if I were ever able to do so. Unhappily I have never been able to repay this debt, unless my gratitude be accounted repayment.

As nothing is sweeter than the companionship between a man and the woman he adores, so nothing is bitterer than the separation; the pleasure has vanished away, and only the pain remains.

I spent my last days at Madrid drinking the cup of pleasure which was embittered by the thought of the pain that was to follow. The worthy Diego was sad at the thought of losing me, and could with difficulty refrain from tears.

For some time my man Philippe continued to give me news of Donna Ignazia. She became the bride of a rich shoemaker, though her father was extremely mortified by her making a marriage so much beneath her station.

I had promised the Marquis de las Moras and Colonel Royas that I would come and see them at Saragossa, the capital of Aragon, and I arrived there at the beginning of September. My stay lasted for a fortnight, during which time I was able to examine the manners and customs of the Aragonese, who were not subject to the ordinances of the Marquis of Aranda, as long cloaks and low hats were to be seen at every corner. They looked like dark phantoms more than men, for the cloak covered up at least half the face. Underneath the cloak was carried el Spadino, a sword of enormous length. Persons who wore this costume were treated with great respect, though they were mostly arrant rogues; still they might possibly be powerful noblemen in disguise.

The visitor to Saragossa should see the devotion which is paid to our Lady del Pilar. I have seen processions going along the streets in which wooden statues of gigantic proportions were carried. I was taken to the best assemblies, where the monks swarmed. I was introduced to a lady of monstrous size, who, I was informed, was cousin to the famous Palafox, and I did not feel my bosom swell with pride as was evidently expected. I also made the acquaintance of Canon Pignatelli, a man of Italian origin. He was President of the Inquisition, and every morning he imprisoned the procuress who had furnished him with the girl with whom he had supped and slept. He would wake up in the morning tired out with the pleasures of the night; the girl would be driven away and the procuress imprisoned. He then dressed, confessed, said mass, and after an excellent breakfast with plenty of good wine he

would send out for another girl, and this would go on day after day. Nevertheless, he was held in great respect at Saragossa, for he was a monk, a canon, and an Inquisitor.

The bull fights were finer at Saragossa than at Madrid—that is to say, they were deadlier; and the chief interest of this barbarous spectacle lies in the shedding of blood. The Marquis de las Moras and Colonel Royas gave me some excellent dinners. The marquis was one of the pleasantest men I met in Spain; he died very young two years after.

The Church of Nuestra Senora del Pilar is situated on the ramparts of the town, and the Aragonese fondly believe this portion of the town defences to be impregnable.

I had promised Donna Pelliccia to go and see her at Valentia, and on my way I saw the ancient town of Saguntum on a hill at some little distance. There was a priest travelling with me and I told him and the driver (who preferred his mules to all the antiquities in the world) that I should like to go and see the town. How the muleteer and the priest objected to this proposal!

"There are only ruins there, senor."

"That's just what I want to see."

"We shall never get to Valentia to-night."

"Here's a crown; we shall get there to-morrow."

The crown settled everything, and the man exclaimed,

"Valga me Dios, es un hombre de buen!" (So help me God, this is an honest man!) A subject of his Catholic majesty knows no heartier praise than this.

I saw the massive walls still standing and in good condition, and yet they were built during the second Punic War. I saw on two of the gateways inscriptions which to me were meaningless, but which Segulier, the old friend of the Marquis Maffei, could no doubt have deciphered.

The sight of this monument to the courage of an ancient race, who preferred to perish in the flames rather than surrender, excited my awe and admiration. The priest laughed at me, and I am sure he would not have purchased this venerable city of the dead if he could have done so by saying a mass. The very name has perished; instead of Saguntum it is called Murviedro from the Latin 'muri veteres' (old walls); but Time that destroys marble and brass destroys also the very memory of what has been.

"This place," said the priest, "is always called Murviedro."

"It is ridiculous to do so," I replied; "common sense forbids us calling a thing old which was once young enough. That's as if you would tell me that New Castille is really new."

"Well, Old Castille is more ancient than New Castille."

"No so. New Castille was only called so because it was the latest conquest; but as a matter of fact it is the older of the two."

The poor priest took refuge in silence; shaking his head, and evidently taking me for a madman.

I tried vainly to find Hannibal's head, and the inscription in honour of Caesar Claudius, but I found out the remains of the amphitheatre.

The next day I remarked the mosaic pavement, which had been discovered twenty years before.

I reached Valentia at nine o'clock in the morning, and found that I should have to content myself with a bad lodging, as Marescalchi, the opera manager, had taken all the best rooms for the members of his company. Marescalchi was accompanied by his brother, a priest, whom I found decidedly learned for his age. We took a walk together, and he laughed when I proposed going into a cafe, for there was not such a thing in the town. There were only taverns of the lowest class where the wine is not fit to drink. I could scarcely believe it, but Spain is a peculiar country. When I was at Valentia, a good bottle of wine was scarcely obtainable, though Malaga and Alicante were both close at hand.

In the first three days of my stay at Valentia (the birthplace of Alexander VI.), I saw all the objects of interest in the town, and was confirmed in my idea that what seems so admirable in the descriptions of writers and the pictures of artists loses much of its charm on actual inspection.

Though Valentia is blessed with an excellent climate, though it is well watered, situated in the midst of a beautiful country, fertile in all the choicest products of nature, though it is the residence of many of the most distinguished of the Spanish nobility, though its women are the most handsome in Spain, though it has the advantage of being the seat of an archbishop; in spite of all these commodities, it is a most disagreeable town to live in. One is ill lodged and ill fed, there is no good wine and no good company, there is not even any intellectual provision, for though there is a university, lettered men are absolutely unknown.

As for the bridges, churches, the arsenal, the exchange, the town hall, the twelve town gates, and the rest, I could not take pleasure in a town where the streets are not paved, and where a public promenade is conspicuous by its absence. Outside the town the country is delightful, especially on the side towards the sea; but the outside is not the inside.

The feature which pleased me most was the number of small one-horse vehicles which transport the traveller rapidly from one point to another, at a very slight expense, and will even undertake a two or three days' journey.

If my frame of mind had been a more pleasant one, I should have travelled through the kingdoms of Murcia and Grenada, which surpass Italy in beauty and fertility.

Poor Spaniards! This beauty and fertility of your land are the cause of your ignorance, as the mines of Peru and Potosi have brought about that foolish pride and all the prejudices which degrade you.

Spaniards, when will the impulse come? when will you shake off that fatal lethargy? Now you are truly useless to yourselves, and the rest of the world; what is it you need?

A furious revolution, a terrible shock, a conquest of regeneration; your case is past gentle methods, it needs the cautery and the fire.

The first call I paid was on Donna Pelliccia. The first performance was to be given in two days. This was not a matter of any difficulty, as the same operas were to be presented as had been already played at Aranjuez, the Escorial, and the Granja, for the Count of Aranda would never have dared to sanction the performance of an Italian comic opera at Madrid. The novelty would have been too great, and the Inquisition would have interfered.

The balls were a considerable shock, and two years after they were suppressed. Spain will never make any real advance, until the Inquisition is suppressed also.

As soon as Donna Pelliccia arrived, she sent in the letter of introduction she had received from the Duke of Arcos, three months before. She had not seen the duke since their meeting at Aranjuez.

"Madam," said Don Diego, the person to whom she was commended, "I have come to offer you my services, and to tell you of the orders his grace has laid on me, of which you may possibly be ignorant."

"I hope, sir," she replied, "that I am not putting you to any inconvenience, but I am extremely grateful to the duke and to yourself; and I shall have the honour of calling on you to give you my thanks."

"Not at all; I have only to say that I have orders to furnish you with any sums you may require, to the amount of twenty-five thousand doubloons."

"Twenty-five thousand doubloons?"

"Exactly, madam, two hundred and fifty thousand francs in French money, and no more. Kindly read his grace's letter; you do not seem to be aware of its contents."

The letter was a brief one:

"Don Diego,—You will furnish Donna Pelliccia with whatever sums she may require, not exceeding twenty-five thousand doubloons, at my account. "THE DUKE DOS ARCOS"

We remained in a state of perfect stupefaction. Donna Pelliccia returned the epistle to the banker, who bowed and took his leave.

This sounds almost incredible generosity, but in Spain such things are not uncommon. I have already mentioned the munificent gift of Medina-Celi to Madame Pichona.

Those who are unacquainted with the peculiar Spanish character and the vast riches of some of the nobility, may pronounce such acts of generosity to be ridiculous and positively injurious, but they make a mistake. The spendthrift gives and squanders by a kind of instinct, and so he will continue to do as long as his means remain. But these splendid gifts I have described do not come under the category of senseless prodigality. The Spaniard is chiefly ambitious of praise, for praise he will do anything; but this very desire for admiration serves to restrain him from actions by which he would incur blame. He wants to be thought superior to his fellows, as the Spanish nation is superior to all other nations; he wants to be thought worthy of a throne, and to be considered as the possessor of all the virtues.

I may also note that while some of the Spanish nobility are as rich as the English lords, the former have not so many ways of spending their money as the latter, and thus are enabled to be heroically generous on occasion.

As soon as Don Diego had gone, we began to discuss the duke's noble behaviour.

Donna Pelliccia maintained that the duke had wished to shew his confidence in her by doing her the honour of supposing her incapable of abusing his generosity; "at all events," she concluded, "I would rather die of hunger than take a single doubloon of Don Diego."

"The duke would be offended," said a violinist; "I think you ought to take something."

"You must take it all," said the husband.

I was of the lady's opinion, and told her that I was sure the duke would reward her delicacy by making her fortune.

She followed my advice and her own impulse, though the banker remonstrated with her.

Such is the perversity of the human mind that no one believed in Donna Pelliccia's delicacy. When the king heard what had happened he ordered the worthy actress to leave Madrid, to prevent the duke ruining himself.

Such is often the reward of virtue here below, but the malicious persons who had tried to injure Donna Pelliccia by calumniating her to the king were the means of making her fortune.

The duke who had only spoken once or twice to the actress in public, and had never spent a penny on her, took the king's command as an insult, and one not to be borne. He was too proud to solicit the king to revoke the order he had given, and in the end behaved in a way befitting so noble-minded a man. For the first time he visited Donna Pelliccia at her own house, and begging her to forgive him for having been the innocent cause of her disgrace, asked her to accept a rouleau and a letter which he laid on the table.

The rouleau contained a hundred gold ounces with the words "for travelling expenses," and the letter was addressed to a Roman bank, and proved to be an order for twenty-four thousand Roman crowns.

For twenty-nine years this worthy woman kept an establishment at Rome, and did so in a manner which proved her worthy of her good fortune.

The day after Donna Pelliccia's departure the king saw the Duke of Arcos, and told him not to be sad, but to forget the woman, who had been sent away for his own good.

"By sending her away, your majesty obliged me to turn fiction into fact, for I only knew her by speaking to her in various public places, and I had never made her the smallest present."

"Then you never gave her twenty-five thousand doubloons?"

"Sire, I gave her double that sum, but only on the day before yesterday. Your majesty has absolute power, but if she had not received her dismissal I should never have gone to her house, nor should I have given her the smallest present."

The king was stupefied and silent; he was probably meditating on the amount of credit a monarch should give to the gossip that his courtiers bring him.

I heard about this from M. Monnino, who was afterwards known under the title of Castille de Florida Blanca, and is now living in exile in Murcia, his native country.

After Marescalchi had gone, and I was making my preparations for my journey to Barcelona, I saw one day, at the bull fight, a woman whose appearance had a strange kind of fascination about it.

There was a knight of Alcantara at my side, and I asked him who the lady was.

"She is the famous Nina."

"How famous?"

"If you do not know her story, it is too long to be told here."

I could not help gazing at her, and two minutes later an ill-looking fellow beside her came up to my companion and whispered something in his ear.

The knight turned towards me and informed me in the most polite manner that the lady whose name I had asked desired to know mine.

I was silly enough to be flattered by her curiosity, and told the messenger that if the lady would allow me I would come to her box and tell her my name in person after the performance.

"From your accent I should suppose you were an Italian."

"I am a Venetian."

"So is she."

When he had gone away my neighbour seemed inclined to be more communicative, and informed me that Nina was a dancer whom the Count de Ricla, the Viceroy of Barcelona, was keeping for some weeks at Valentia, till he could get her back to Barcelona, whence the bishop of the diocese had expelled her on account of the scandals to which she gave rise. "The count," he added, "is madly in love with her, and allows her fifty doubloons a day."

"I should hope she does not spend them."

"She can't do that, but she does not let a day pass without committing some expensive act of folly."

I felt curious to know a woman of such a peculiar character, and longed for the end of the bull fight, little thinking in what trouble this new acquaintance would involve me.

She received me with great politeness, and as she got into her carriage drawn by six mules, she said she would be delighted if I would breakfast with her at nine o'clock on the following day.

I promised to come, and I kept my word.

Her house was just outside the town walls, and was a very large building. It was richly and tastefully furnished, and was surrounded by an enormous garden.

The first thing that struck me was the number of the lackeys and the richness of their liveries, and the maids in elegant attire, who seemed to be going and coming in all directions.

As I advanced I heard an imperious voice scolding some one.

The scold was Nina, who was abusing an astonished-looking man, who was standing by a large table covered with stuffs and laces.

"Excuse me," said she, "but this fool of a Spaniard wants to persuade me that this lace is really handsome."

She asked me what I thought of the lace, and though I privately thought it lace of the finest quality, I did not care to contradict her, and so replied that I was no judge.

"Madam," said the tradesman, "if you do not like the lace, leave it; will you keep the stuffs?"

"Yes," she replied; "and as for the lace, I will shew you that it is not the money that deters me."

So saying the mad girl took up a pair of scissors and cut the lace into fragments.

"What a pity!" said the man who had spoken to me at the bull fight. "People will say that you have gone off your head."

"Be silent, you pimping rogue!" said she, enforcing her words with a sturdy box on the ear.

The fellow went off, calling her strumpet, which only made her scream with laughter; then, turning to the Spaniard, she told him to make out his account directly.

The man did not want telling twice, and avenged himself for the abuse he had received by the inordinate length of his bill.

She took up the account and placed her initials at the bottom without deigning to look at the items, and said,—

"Go to Don Diego Valencia; he will pay you immediately."

As soon as we were alone the chocolate was served, and she sent a message to the fellow whose ears she had boxed to come to breakfast directly.

"You needn't be surprised at my way of treating him," she said. "He's a rascal whom Ricla has placed in my house to spy out my actions, and I treat him as you have seen, so that he may have plenty of news to write to his master."

I thought I must be dreaming; such a woman seemed to me beyond the limits of the possible.

The poor wretch, who came from Bologna and was a musician by profession, came and sat down with us without a word. His name was Molinari.

As soon as he had finished his breakfast he left the room, and Nina spent an hour with me talking about Spain, Italy, and Portugal, where she had married a dancer named Bergonzi.

"My father," she said, "was the famous charlatan Pelandi; you may have known him at Venice."

After this piece of confidence (and she did not seem at all ashamed of her parentage) she asked me to sup with her, supper being her favourite meal. I promised to come, and I left her to reflect on the extraordinary character of the woman, and on the good fortune which she so abused.

Nina was wonderfully beautiful; but as it has always been my opinion that mere beauty does not go for much, I could not understand how a viceroy could have fallen in love with her to such an extent. As for Molinari, after which I had seen, I could only set him down as an infamous wretch.

I went to supper with her for amusement's sake, for, with all her beauty, she had not touched my heart in the slightest degree. It was at the beginning of October, but at Valentia the thermometer marked twenty degrees Reaumur in the shade.

Nina was walking in the garden with her companion, both of them being very lightly clad; indeed, Nina had only her chemise and a light petticoat.

As soon as she saw me she came up and begged me to follow their example in the way of attire, but I begged to be excused. The presence of that hateful fellow revolted me in the highest degree.

In the interval before supper Nina entertained me with a number of lascivious anecdotes of her experiences from the time she began her present mode of living up to the age of twenty-two, which was her age then.

If it had not been for the presence of the disgusting Argus, no doubt all these stories would have produced their natural effect on me; but as it was they had none whatever.

We had a delicate supper and ate with appetite, and after it was over I would have gladly left them; but Nina would not let me go. The wine had taken effect, and she wished to have a little amusement.

After all the servants had been dismissed, this Messalina ordered Molinari to strip naked, and she then began to treat him in a manner which I cannot describe without disgust.

The rascal was young and strong, and, though he was drunk, Nina's treatment soon placed him in a hearty condition. I could see that she wished me to play my part in the revels, but my disgust had utterly deprived me of all my amorous faculties.

Nina, too, had undressed, and seeing that I viewed the orgy coldly she proceeded to satiate her desires by means of Molinari.

I had to bear with the sight of this beautiful woman coupling herself with an animal, whose only merit lay in his virile monstrosity, which she no doubt regarded as a beauty.

When she had exhausted her amorous fury she threw herself into a bath, then came back, drank a bottle of Malmsey Madeira, and finally made her brutal lover drink till he fell on to the floor.

I fled into the next room, not being able to bear it any longer, but she followed me. She was still naked, and seating herself beside me on an ottoman she asked me how I had enjoyed the spectacle.

I told her boldly that the disgust with which her wretched companion had inspired me was so great that it had utterly annulled the effect of her charms.

"That may be so, but now he is not here, and yet you do nothing. One would not think it, to look at you."

"You are right, for I have my feelings like any other man, but he has disgusted me too much. Wait till tomorrow, and let me not see that monster so unworthy of enjoying you."

"He does not enjoy me. If I thought he did I would rather die than let him have to do with me, for I detest him."

"What! you do not love him, and yet you make use of him in the way you do?"

"Yes, just as I might use a mechanical instrument."

In this woman I saw an instance of the depths of degradation to which human nature may be brought.

She asked me to sup with her on the following day, telling me that we would be alone, as Molinari would be ill.

"He will have got over the effects of the wine."

"I tell you he will be ill. Come to-morrow, and come every evening."

"I am going the day after to-morrow."

"You will not go for a week, and then we will go together."

"That's impossible."

"If you go you will insult me beyond bearing."

I went home with my mind made up to depart without having anything more to do with her; and though I was far from inexperienced in wickedness of all kinds, I could not help feeling astonished at the unblushing frankness of this Megaera, who had told me what I already knew, but in words that I had never heard a woman use before.

"I only use him to satisfy my desires, and because I am certain that he does not love me; if I thought he did I would rather die than allow him to do anything with me, for I detest him."

The next day I went to her at seven o'clock in the evening. She received me with an air of feigned melancholy, saying,—

"Alas! we shall have to sup alone; Molinari has got the colic."

"You said he would be ill; have you poisoned him?"

"I am quite capable of doing so, but I hope I never shall."

"But you have given him something?"

"Only what he likes himself; but we will talk of that again. Let us sup and play till to-morrow, and tomorrow evening we will begin again."

"I am going away at seven o'clock to-morrow."

"No, no, you are not; and your coachman will have no cause for complaint, for he has been paid; here is the receipt."

These remarks, delivered with an air of amorous despotism, flattered my vanity. I made up my mind to submit gaily, called her wanton, and said I was not worth the pains she was taking over me.

"What astonishes me," said I, "is that with this fine house you do not care to entertain company."

"Everybody is afraid to come; they fear Ricla's jealousy, for it is well known that that animal who is now suffering from the colic tells him everything I do. He swears that it is not so, but I know him to be a liar. Indeed, I am very glad he does write to Ricla, and only wish he had something of real importance to write about."

"He will tell him that I have supped alone with you."

"All the better; are you afraid?"

"No; but I think you ought to tell me if I have anything really to fear."

"Nothing at all; it will fall on me."

"But I should not like to involve you in a dispute which might be prejudicial to your interests."

"Not at all; the more I provoke him, the better he loves me, and I will make him pay dearly when he asks me to make it up."

"Then you don't love him?"

"Yes, to ruin him; but he is so rich that there doesn't seem much hope of my ever doing that."

Before me I saw a woman as beautiful as Venus and as degraded as Lucifer; a woman most surely born to be the ruin of anyone who had the misfortune to fall in love with her. I had known women of similar character, but never one so dangerous as she.

I determined to make some money out of her if I could.

She called for cards, and asked me to play with her at a game called *primiera*. It is a game of chance, but of so complicated a nature that the best player always wins. In a quarter of an hour I found that I was the better player, but she had such luck that at the end of the game I had lost twenty pistoles, which I paid on the spot. She took the money, promising to give me my revenge.

We had supper, and then we committed all the wantonness she wished and I was capable of performing, for with me the age of miracles was past.

The next day I called to see her earlier in the evening. We played again; and she lost, and went on losing evening after evening, till I had won a matter of two or three hundred doubloons, no unwelcome addition to my somewhat depleted purse.

The spy recovered from his colic and supped with us every evening, but his presence no longer interfered with my pleasure since Nina had ceased to prostitute herself to him in my presence. She did the opposite; giving herself to me, and telling him to write to the Comte de Riela whatever he liked.

The count wrote her a letter which she gave me to read. The poor love-sick viceroy informed her that she might safely return to Barcelona, as the bishop had received an order from the Court to regard her as merely an actress, whose stay in his diocese would only be temporary; she would thus be allowed to live there in peace so long as she abstained from giving cause for scandal. She told me that whilst she was at Barcelona I could only see her after ten o'clock at night, when the count always left her. She assured me that I should run no risk whatever.

Possibly I should not have stayed at Barcelona at all if Nina had not told me that she would always be ready to lend me as much money as I wanted.

She asked me to leave Valentia a day before her, and to await her at Tarragona. I did so, and spent a very pleasant day in that town, which abounds in remains of antiquity.

I ordered a choice supper according to her instructions, and took care that she should have a separate bedroom so as to avoid any scandal.

She started in the morning begging me to wait till the evening, and to travel by night so as to reach Barcelona by day-time. She told me to put up at the "Santa Maria," and not to call till I had heard from her.

I followed all the directions given me by this curious woman, and found myself comfortably lodged at Barcelona. My landlord was a Swiss who told me in confidence that he had received instructions to treat me well, and that I had only to ask for what I wanted.

We shall see soon what was the result of all this.

CHAPTER VIII

My Imprudence—Passano—I Am Imprisoned—My Departure from Barcelona—Madame Castelbajac at Montpellier—Nimes—I Arrive at Aix

Although my Swiss landlord seemed an honest and trustworthy kind of man, I could not help thinking that Nina had acted very imprudently in commending me to him. She was the viceroy's mistress; and though the viceroy might be a very agreeable man, he was a Spaniard, and not likely to be easy-going in his love affairs. Nina herself had told me that he was ardent, jealous, and suspicious. But the mischief was done, and there was no help for it.

When I got up my landlord brought me a valet de place, for whose character he said he could answer, and he then sent up an excellent dinner. I had slept till three o'clock in the afternoon.

After dinner I summoned my host, and asked him whether Nina had told him to get me a servant. He answered in the affirmative, and added that a carriage was awaiting my commands at the door; it had been taken by the week.

"I am astonished to hear it, for no one but myself can say what I can afford or not."

"Sir, everything is paid for."

"Paid for! I will not have it!"

"You can settle that with her, but I shall certainly take no payment."

I saw dangers ahead, but as I have never cared to cherish forbodings I dismissed the idea.

I had a letter of introduction from the Marquis de las Moras to Don Miguel de Cevallos, and another from Colonel Royas to Don Diego de la Secada. I took my letters, and the next day Don Diego came to see me, and took me to the Comte de Peralda. The day after Don Miguel introduced me to the Comte de Ricla, Viceroy of Catalonia, and the lover of Nina.

The Comte de Peralada was a young man with a pleasant face but with an ill-proportioned body. He was a great debauchee and lover of bad company, an enemy of religion, morality, and law. He was directly descended from the Comte de Peralada, who served Philip II. so well that this king declared him "count by the grace of God." The original patent of nobility was the first thing I saw in his antechamber, where it was framed and glazed so that all visitors might see it in the quarter of an hour they were kept waiting.

The count received me with an easy and cordiale manner, which seemed to say that he renounced all the dignities of his rank. He thanked Don Diego for introducing me, and talked a good deal about Colonel Royas. He asked me if I had seen the English girl he was keeping at Saragossa, and on my replying in the affirmative, he told me in a whisper that he had slept with her.

He took me to his stables, where he had some splendid horses, and then asked me to dine with him the next day.

The viceroy received me in a very different manner; he stood up so that he might not have to offer me a chair, and though I spoke Italian, with which language I knew him to be well acquainted, he answered me in Spanish, styling me 'ussia' (a contraction of 'vuestra senoria', your lordship, and used by everyone in Spain), while I gave him his proper title of excellence.

He talked a good deal about Madrid, and complained that M. de Mocenigo had gone to Paris by Bayonne instead of Barcelona, as he had promised him.

I tried to excuse my ambassador by saying that by taking the other route he had saved fifty leagues of his journey, but the viceroy replied that 'tenir la palabra' (keeping to one's words) comes before all else.

He asked me if I thought of staying long at Barcelona, and seemed surprised when I told him that, with his leave, I hoped to make a long stay.

"I hope you will enjoy yourself," he said, "but I must warn you that if you indulge in the pleasures which my nephew Peralada will doubtless offer you, you will not enjoy a very good reputation at Barcelona."

As the Comte de Ricla made this observation in public, I thought myself justified in communicating it to Peralada himself. He was delighted, and told me, with evident vanity, that he had gone to Madrid three times, and had been ordered to return to Catalonia on each occasion.

I thought my best plan would be to follow the viceroy's indirect advice, so I refused to join in any of the little parties of pleasure which Peralada proposed.

On the fifth day after my arrival, an officer came to ask me to dinner at the viceroy's. I accepted the invitation with much pleasure, for I had been afraid of the viceroy's having heard of my relations with Nina, and thought it possible that he might have taken a dislike to me. He was very pleasant to me at dinner, often addressing his observations to me, but always in a tone of great gravity.

I had been in Barcelona for a week, and was beginning to wonder why I had not heard from Nina; but one evening she wrote me a note, begging me to come on foot and alone to her house at ten o'clock the same night.

If I had been wise I should not have gone, for I was not in love with the woman, and should have remembered the respect due to the viceroy; but I was devoid of all wisdom and prudence. All the misfortunes I have experienced in my long life never taught me those two most necessary virtues.

At the hour she had named I called on her, wearing my great coat, and with a sword for my only weapon. I found Nina with her sister, a woman of thirty-six or thereabouts, who was married to an Italian dancer, nicknamed Schizza, because he had a flatter nose than any Tartar.

Nina had just been supping with her lover, who had left her at ten o'clock, according to his invariable custom.

She said she was delighted to hear I had been to dinner with him, as she had herself spoken to him in my praise, saying how admirably I had kept her company at Valentia.

"I am glad to hear it, but I do not think you are wise in inviting me to your house at such late hours."

"I only do so to avoid scandal amongst my neighbours."

"In my opinion my coming so late is only likely to increase the probability of scandal, and to make your viceroy jealous."

"He will never hear of your coming."

"I think you are mistaken."

I went away at midnight, after a conversation of the most decent character. Her sister did not leave us for a moment, and Nina gave her no cause to suspect the intimacy of our relations.

I went to see her every evening, without encroaching on the count's preserves. I thought myself secure, but the following warning should have made me desist if I had not been carried away by the forces of destiny and obstinacy in combination.

An officer in the Walloon Guards accosted me one day as I was walking by myself just outside the town. He begged me in the most polite manner to excuse him if he spoke on a matter which was indifferent to him but of great consequence to me.

"Speak, sir," I replied, "I will take whatever you say in good part."

"Very good. You are a stranger, sir, and may not be acquainted with our Spanish manners, consequently you are unaware of the great risk you run in going to see Nina every evening after the count has left her."

"What risk do I run? I have no doubt that the count knows all about it and does not object."

"I have no doubt as to his knowing it, and he may possibly pretend to know nothing before her, as he fears as well as loves her; but if she tells you that he does not object, she either deceives herself or you. He cannot love her without being jealous, and a jealous Spaniard . . ."

"Follow my advice, sir, and forgive my freedom."

"I am sincerely obliged to you for your kind interest in me, but I cannot follow your advice, as by doing so I should be wanting in politeness to Nina, who likes to see me and gives me a warm welcome. I shall continue to visit her till she orders me not to do so, or till the count signifies to me his displeasure at my visits to his mistress."

"The count will never do such a thing; he is too careful of his dignity."

The worthy officer then narrated to me all the acts of injustice which Ricla had committed since he had fallen in love with this woman. He had dismissed gentlemen from his service on the mere suspicion that they were in love with her; some had been exiled, and others imprisoned on one frivolous pretext or another. Before he had known Nina he had been a pattern of wisdom, justice, and virtue, and now he had become unjust, cruel, blindly passionate, and in every way a scandal to the high position he occupied.

All this should have influenced me, but it had not the slightest effect. I told him for politeness' sake that I would endeavour to part from her by degrees, but I had no intention of doing so.

When I asked him how he knew that I visited Nina, he laughed and said it was a common topic of conversation all over the town.

The same evening I called on her without mentioning my conversation with the officer. There would have been some excuse for me if I had been in love with her, but as it was . . . I acted like a madman.

On the 14th of November I went to see her at the usual time. I found her with a man who was shewing her miniatures. I looked at him and found that he was the scoundrel Passano, or Pogomas.

My blood boiled; I took Nina's hand and led her into a neighbouring room, and told her to dismiss the rogue at once, or I would go to return no more.

"He's a painter."

"I am well acquainted with his history, and will tell you all about it presently; but send him away, or I shall go."

She called her sister, and told her to order the Genoese to leave the house and never to enter it again.

The thing was 'done in a moment, but the sister told us that as he went out he had said,—

"Se ne pentira." ("He shall be sorry for it.").

I occupied an hour in relating some of the injuries I had received from this scoundrelly fellow.

The next day (November 15th), I went to Nina at the usual time, and after spending two hours in pleasant converse with her and her sister I went out as the clocks were striking midnight.

The door of the house was under an arcade, which extended to the end of the street. It was a dark night; and I had scarcely gone twenty-five paces when two men suddenly rushed at me.

I stepped back, drawing my sword, and exclaiming, "Assassins!" and then with a rapid movement, I thrust my blade into the body of the nearest assailant. I then left the arcade, and began to run down the street. The second assassin fired a pistol at me, but it fortunately missed me. I fell down and dropped my hat in my rapid flight, and got up and continued my course without troubling to pick it up. I did not know whether I was wounded or not, but at last I got to my inn, and laid down the bloody sword on the counter, under the landlord's nose. I was quite out of breath.

I told the landlord what had happened, and on taking off my great coat, I found it to be pierced in two places just below the armpit.

"I am going to bed," I said to the landlord, "and I leave my great coat and the sword in your charge. Tomorrow morning I shall ask you to come with me before the magistrate to denounce this act of assassination, for if the man was killed it must be shewn that I only slew him to save my own life."

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