

GIACOMO CASANOVA

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

VOLUME 12: RETURN TO
PARIS

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CHAPTER V

My Fortune in Holland—My Return to Paris with Young Pompeati

Amongst the letters which were waiting for me was one from the comptroller-general, which advised me that twenty millions in Government securities had been placed in the hands of M. d'Affri, who was not to go beyond a loss of eight per cent.; and another letter from my good patron, M. de Bernis, telling me to do the best I could, and to be assured that the ambassador would be instructed to consent to whatever bargain might be made, provided the rate was not more disadvantageous than that of the exchange at Paris. Boaz, who was astonished at the bargain I had made with my shares, wanted to discount the Government securities for me, and I should very likely have agreed to his terms if he had not required me to give him three months, and the promise that the agreement should hold even in the case of peace being concluded in the meanwhile. It was not long before I saw that I should do well to get back to Amsterdam, but I did not care to break my word to Therese, whom I had promised to meet at the Hague. I received a letter from her while I was at the play, and the servant who brought it told me he was waiting to conduct me to her. I sent my own servant home, and set out on my quest.

My guide made me climb to the fourth floor of a somewhat wretched house, and there I found this strange woman in a small room, attended by her son and daughter. The table stood in the midst of the room, and was covered with a black cloth, and the two candles standing upon it made it look like some sort of sepulchral altar. The Hague was a Court town. I was richly dressed; my elaborate attire made the saddest possible contrast with the gloom of my surroundings. Therese, dressed in black and seated between her children at that black table, reminded me of Medea. To see these two fair young creatures vowed to a lot of misery and disgrace was a sad and touching sight. I took the boy between my arms, and pressing him to my breast called him my son. His mother told him to look upon me as his father from henceforth. The lad recognized me; he remembered, much to my delight, seeing me in the May of 1753, in Venice, at Madame Manzoni's. He was slight but strong; his limbs were well proportioned, and his features intellectual. He was thirteen years old.

His sister sat perfectly still, apparently waiting for her turn to come. I took her on my knee, and as I embraced her, nature herself seemed to tell me that she was my daughter. She took my kisses in silence, but it was easy to see that she thought herself preferred to her brother, and was charmed with the idea. All her clothing was a slight frock, and I was able to feel every limb and to kiss her pretty little body all over, delighted that so sweet a being owed her existence to me.

"Mamma, dear," said she, "is not this fine gentleman the same we saw at Amsterdam, and who was taken for my papa because I am like him? But that cannot be, for my papa is dead."

"So he is, sweetheart; but I may be your dear friend, mayn't I? Would you like to have me for a friend?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried, and throwing her arms about my neck gave me a thousand kisses, which I returned with delight.

After we had talked and laughed together we sat down at table, and the heroine Therese gave me a delicate supper accompanied by exquisite wines. "I have never given the margrave better fare," said she, "at those nice little suppers we used to take together."

Wishing to probe the disposition of her son, whom I had engaged to take away with me, I addressed several remarks to him, and soon discovered that he was of a false and deceitful nature, always on his guard, taking care of what he said, and consequently speaking only from his head and not from his heart. Every word was delivered with a quiet politeness which, no doubt, was intended to please me.

I told him that this sort of thing was all very well on occasion; but that there were times when a man's happiness depended on his freedom from constraint; then and only then was his amiability, if he had any, displayed. His mother, thinking to praise him, told me that reserve was his chief characteristic, that she had trained him to keep his counsel at all times and places, and that she was thus used to his being reserved with her as with everyone else.

"All I can say is," said I, "your system is an abominable one. You may have strangled in their infancy all the finer qualities with which nature has endowed your son, and have fairly set him on the way to become a monster instead of an angel. I don't see how the most devoted father can possibly have any affection for a son who keeps all his emotions under lock and key."

This outburst, which proceeded from the tenderness I would fain have felt for the boy, seemed to strike his mother dumb.

"Tell me, my dear, if you feel yourself capable of shewing me that confidence which a father has a right to expect of a good son, and if you can promise to be perfectly open and unreserved towards me?"

"I promise that I will die rather than tell you a falsehood."

"That's just like him," said the mother. "I have succeeded in inspiring him with the utmost horror of untruthfulness."

"That's all very well, my dear madam, but you might have pursued a still better course, and one which would have been still more conducive to his happiness."

"What is that?"

"I will tell you. It was necessary to make him detest a lie; you should have rather endeavoured to make him a lover of the truth by displaying it to him in all its native beauty. This is the only way to make him lovable, and love is the sole bestower of happiness in this world."

"But isn't it the same thing not to lie and to tell the truth," said the boy, with a smile which charmed his mother and displeased me.

"Certainly not; there is a great difference—for to avoid lying you have only to hold your tongue; and do you think that comes to the same thing as speaking the truth? You must open your mind to me, my son, and tell me all your thoughts, even if you blush in the recital. I will teach you how to blush, and soon you will have nothing to fear in laying open all your thoughts and deeds. When we know each other a little longer we shall see how we agree together. You must understand that I cannot look upon you as my son until I see cause to love you, and I cannot have you call me father till you treat me as the best friend you have. You may be quite sure that I shall find a way to discover your thoughts, however cleverly you try to hide them. If I find you deceitful and suspicious I shall certainly entertain no regard for you. As soon as I have finished my business at Amsterdam we will set out for Paris. I am leaving the Hague to-morrow, and on my return I hope to find you instructed by your mother in a system of morality more consonant with my views, and more likely to lead to your happiness."

On glancing at my little daughter, who had been listening to me with the greatest attention, I saw that her eyes were swimming with tears, which she could hardly retain.

"Why are you crying?" said the mother; "it is silly to cry." And with that the child ran to her mother and threw her arms round her neck.

"Would you like to come to Paris, too?" said I to her.

"Oh, yes! But mamma must come too, as she would die without me."

"What would you do if I told you to go?" said the mother.

"I would obey you, mamma, but how could I exist away from you?"

Thereupon my little daughter pretended to cry. I say pretended, as it was quite evident that the child did not mean what she said, and I am sure that her mother knew it as well as I.

It was really a melancholy thing to see the effects of a bad education on this young child, to whom nature had given intelligence and feeling. I took the mother on one side, and said that if she had intended to make actors of her children she had succeeded to admiration; but if she wished them to become useful members of society her system had failed lamentably, as they were in a fair way to become monsters of deceit. I continued making her the most pointed remonstrances until, in spite of her efforts to control herself, she burst into tears. However, she soon recovered her composure, and begged me to stay at the Hague a day longer, but I told her it was out of the question, and left the room. I came in again a few minutes after, and Sophie came up to me and said, in a loving little voice,

"If you are really my friend, you will give me some proof of your friendship."

"And what proof do you want, my dear?"

"I want you to come and sup with me to-morrow."

"I can't, Sophie dear, for I have just said no to your mother, and she would be offended if I granted you what I had refused her."

"Oh, no! she wouldn't; it was she who told me to ask you just now."

I naturally began to laugh, but on her mother calling the girl a little fool, and the brother adding that he had never committed such an indiscretion, the poor child began to tremble all over, and looked abashed. I reassured her as best I could, not caring whether what I said displeased her mother or not, and I endeavoured to instill into her principles of a very different nature to those in which she had been reared, while she listened with an eagerness which proved that her heart was still ready to learn the right way. Little by little her face cleared, and I saw that I had made an impression, and though I could not flatter myself that any good I might do her would be lasting in its effects as long as she remained under the bad influence of her mother, I promised to come and sup with her next evening, "but on the condition," I said, "that you give me a plain meal, and one bottle of chambertin only, for you are not too well off."

"I know that, but mamma says that you pay for everything."

This reply made me go off into a roar of laughter; and in spite of her vexation the mother was obliged to follow my example. The poor woman, hardened by the life she led, took the child's simplicity for stupidity, but I saw in her a rough diamond which only wanted polishing.

Therese told me that the wine did not cost her anything, as the son of the Rotterdam burgomaster furnished her with it, and that he would sup with us the next day if I would allow him to be present. I answered smilingly that I should be delighted to see him, and I went away after giving my daughter, of whom I felt fond, a tender embrace. I would have done anything to be entrusted with her, but I saw it would be no good trying to get possession of her, as the mother was evidently keeping her as a resource for her old age. This is a common way for adventuresses to look upon their daughters, and Therese was an adventuress in the widest acceptation of the term. I gave her twenty ducats to get clothes for my adopted son and Sophie, who, with spontaneous gratitude, and her eyes filled with tears, came and gave me a kiss. Joseph was going to kiss my hand, but I told him that it was degrading for one man to kiss another's hand, and that for the future he was to shew his gratitude by embracing me as a son embraces his father.

Just as I was leaving, Therese took me to the closet where the two children were sleeping. I knew what she was thinking of; but all that was over long ago; I could think of no one but Esther.

The next day I found the burgomaster's son at my actress's house. He was a fine young fellow of twenty or twenty-one, but totally devoid of manner. He was Therese's lover, but he should have regulated his behaviour in my presence. Therese, seeing that he was posing as master of the field, and that his manners disgusted me, began to snub him, much to his displeasure, and after sneering at the poorness of the dishes, and praising the wine which he had supplied, he went out leaving us to finish our dessert by ourselves. I left myself at eleven, telling Therese that I should see her again

before I went away. The Princesse de Galitzin, a Cantimir by birth, had asked me to dinner, and this made me lose another day.

Next day I heard from Madame d'Urfe, who enclosed a bill of exchange on Boaz for twelve thousand francs. She said that she had bought her shares for sixty thousand, that she did not wish to make anything of them, and that she hoped I would accept the overplus as my broker's fee. She worded her offer with too much courtesy for me to refuse it. The remainder of the letter was devoted to the wildest fancies. She said that her genius had revealed to her that I should bring back to Paris a boy born of the Mystical Marriage, and she hoped I would take pity on her. It was a strange coincidence, and seemed likely to attach the woman still more closely to her visionary theories. I laughed when I thought how she would be impressed by Therese's son, who was certainly not born of the Mystical Marriage.

Boaz paid me my twelve thousand francs in ducats, and I made him my friend, as he thanked me for receiving the moneys in ducats, and he doubtless made a profit on the transaction, gold being a commodity in Holland, and all payments being made in silver or paper money.

At that time gold was at a low rate, and nobody would take ducats.

After having an excellent dinner with the Princesse de Galitzin, I put on my cloak and went to the cafe. I found there the burgomaster's son, who was just beginning a game of billiards. He whispered to me that I might back him with advantage, and thinking he was sure of his stroke I thanked him and followed his advice. However, after losing three games one after the other, I took his measure and began to lay against him without his knowledge. After playing for three hours and losing all the time, he stopped play and came to condole with me on my heavy loss. It is impossible to describe his amazed expression when I shewed him a handful of ducats, and assured him that I had spent a very profitable evening in laying against him. Everybody in the room began to laugh at him, but he was the sort of young man who doesn't understand a joke, and he went out in a rage. Soon after I left the billiard-room myself, and, according to my promise went to see Therese, as I was leaving for Amsterdam the next day.

Therese was waiting for her young wine merchant, but on my recounting his adventures she expected him no longer. I took my little daughter on my knee and lavished my caresses on her, and so left them, telling them that we should see each other again in the course of three weeks or a month at latest.

As I was going home in the moonlight by myself, my sword under my arm, I was encountered all of a sudden by the poor dupe of a burgomaster's son.

"I want to know," said he, "if your sword has as sharp a point as your tongue."

I tried to quiet him by speaking common sense, and I kept my sword wrapped in my cloak, though his was bared and directed against me.

"You are wrong to take my jests in such bad part," said I; "however, I apologize to you."

"No apologies; look to yourself."

"Wait till to-morrow, you will be cooler then, but if you still wish it I will give you satisfaction in the midst of the billiard-room."

"The only satisfaction you can give me is to fight; I want to kill you."

As evidence of his determination, and to provoke me beyond recall, he struck me with the flat of his sword, the first and last time in my life in which I have received such an insult. I drew my sword, but still hoping to bring him to his senses I kept strictly on the defensive and endeavoured to make him leave off. This conduct the Dutchman mistook for fear, and pushed hard on me, lunging in a manner that made me look to myself. His sword passed through my necktie; a quarter of an inch farther in would have done my business.

I leapt to one side, and, my danger no longer admitting of my fighting on the defensive, I lunged out and wounded him in the chest. I thought this would have been enough for him, so I proposed we should terminate our engagement.

"I'm not dead yet," said he; "I want to kill you."

This was his watchword; and, as he leapt on me in a paroxysm of rage, more like a madman than a sensible being, I hit him four times. At the fourth wound he stepped back, and, saying he had had enough, begged me to leave him.

I went off as fast as I could, and was very glad to see from the look of my sword that his wounds were slight. I found Boaz still up, and on hearing what had taken place he advised me to go to Amsterdam at once, though I assured him that the wounds were not mortal. I gave in to his advice, and as my carriage was at the saddler's he lent me his, and I set out, bidding my servant to come on the next day with my luggage, and to rejoin me at the "Old Bible," in Amsterdam. I reached Amsterdam at noon and my man arrived in the evening.

I was curious to hear if my duel had made any noise, but as my servant had left at an early hour he had heard nothing about it. Fortunately for me nothing whatever was known about it at Amsterdam for a week after; otherwise, things might not have gone well with me, as the reputation of being a duellist is not a recommendation to financiers with whom one is about to transact business of importance.

The reader will not be surprised when I tell him that my first call was on M. d'O, or rather on his charming daughter Esther, for she it was on whom I waited. It will be remembered that the way in which we parted did a good deal towards augmenting the warmth of my affection for her. On entering the room I found Esther writing at a table.

"What are you doing Esther, dear?"

"An arithmetical problem."

"Do you like problems?"

"I am passionately fond of anything which contains difficulties and offers curious results."

"I will give you something which will please you."

I made her, by way of jest, two magic squares, which delighted her. In return, she spewed me some trifles with which I was well acquainted, but which I pretended to think very astonishing. My good genius then inspired me with the idea of trying divination by the cabala. I told her to ask a question in writing, and assured her that by a certain kind of calculation a satisfactory answer would be obtained. She smiled, and asked why I had returned to Amsterdam so soon. I shewed her how to make the pyramid with the proper numbers and the other ceremonies, then I made her extract the answer in numbers, translating it into French, and greatly was she surprised to find that the cause which had made me return to Amsterdam so soon was—love.

Quite confounded, she said it was very wonderful, even though the answer might not be true, and she wished to know what masters could teach this mode of calculation.

"Those who know it cannot teach it to anyone."

"How did you learn it, then?"

"From a precious manuscript I inherited from my father."

"Sell it me."

"I have burnt it; and I am not empowered to communicate the secret to anyone before I reach the age of fifty."

"Why fifty?"

"I don't know; but I do know that if I communicated it to anyone before that age I should run the risk of losing it myself. The elementary spirit who is attached to the oracle would leave it."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw it so stated in the manuscript I have spoken of."

"Then you are able to discover all secrets?"

"Yes, or I should be if the replies were not sometimes too obscure to be understood."

"As it does not take much time, will you be kind enough to get me an answer to another question?"

"With pleasure; you can command me in anything not forbidden by my familiar spirit."

She asked what her destiny would be, and the oracle replied that she had not yet taken the first step towards it. Esther was astonished and called her governess to see the two answers, but the good woman saw nothing wonderful in them whatever. Esther impatiently called her a blockhead, and entreated me to let her ask another question. I begged her to do so, and she asked,

"Who loves me most in Amsterdam?" The oracle replied that no one loved her as well as he who had given her being: Poor Esther then told me that I had made her miserable, and that she would die of grief if she could not succeed in learning the method of calculation. I gave no answer, and pretended to feel sad at heart. She began to write down another question, putting her hand in front so as to screen the paper. I rose as if to get out of her way, but while she was arranging the pyramid I cast my eyes on the paper whilst walking up and down the room, and read her question. After she had gone as far as I had taught her, she asked me to extract the answer, saying that I could do so without reading the question. I agreed to do so on the condition that she would not ask a second time.

As I had seen her question, it was easy for me to answer it. She had asked the oracle if she might shew the questions she had propounded to her father, and the answer was that she would be happy as long as she had no secrets from her father.

When she read these words she gave a cry of surprise, and could find no words wherewith to express her gratitude to me. I left her for the Exchange, where I had a long business conversation with M. Pels.

Next morning a handsome and gentlemanly man came with a letter of introduction from Therese, who told me that he would be useful in case I wanted any assistance in business. His name was Rigerboos. She informed me that the burgomaster's son was only slightly wounded, and that I had nothing to fear as the matter was not generally known, and that if I had business at the Hague I might return there in perfect safety. She said that my little Sophie talked of me all day, and that I should find my son much improved on my return. I asked M. Rigerboos to give me his address, assuring him that at the proper time I should rely on his services.

A moment after Rigerboos had gone, I got a short note from Esther, who begged me, in her father's name, to spend the day with her—at least, if I had no important engagement. I answered that, excepting a certain matter of which her father knew, I had no chieffer aim than to convince her that I desired a place in her heart, and that she might be quite sure that I would not refuse her invitation.

I went to M. d'O— at dinner time. I found Esther and her father puzzling over the method which drew reasonable answers out of a pyramid of numbers. As soon as her father saw me, he embraced me, saying how happy he was to possess a daughter capable of attracting me.

"She will attract any man who has sufficient sense to appreciate her."

"You appreciate her, then?"

"I worship her."

"Then embrace her."

Esther opened her arms, and with a cry of delight threw them round my neck, and gave the back all my caresses, kiss for kiss.

"I have got through all my business," said M. d'O—, "and the rest of my day is at your disposal. I have known from my childhood that there is such a science as the one you profess, and I was acquainted with a Jew who by its aid made an immense fortune. He, like you, said that, under pain of losing the secret, it could only be communicated to one person, but he put off doing so so long that at last it was too late, for a high fever carried him off in a few days. I hope you will not do as the Jew did; but in the meanwhile allow me to say that if You do not draw a profit from this treasure, you do not know what it really is."

"You call this knowledge of mine a treasure, and yet you possess one far more excellent," looking at Esther as I spoke.

"We will discuss that again. Yes, sir, I call your science a treasure."

"But the answers of the oracle are often very obscure."

"Obscure! The answers my daughter received are as clear as day."

"Apparently, she is fortunate in the way she frames her questions; for on this the reply depends."

"After dinner we will try if I am so fortunate—at least, if you will be so kind as to help me."

"I can refuse you nothing, as I consider father and daughter as one being."

At table we discussed other subjects, as the chief clerks were present—notably the manager, a vulgar-looking fellow, who had very evident aspirations in the direction of my fair Esther. After dinner we went into M. d'O's private closet, and thereupon he drew two long questions out of his pocket. In the first he desired to know how to obtain a favourable decision from the States-General in an important matter, the details of which he explained. I replied in terms, the obscurity of which would have done credit to a professed Pythoness, and I left Esther to translate the answer into common sense, and find a meaning in it.

With regard to the second answer I acted in a different manner; I was impelled to answer clearly, and did so. M. d'O asked what had become of a vessel belonging to the India Company of which nothing had been heard. It was known to have started on the return voyage, and should have arrived two months ago, and this delay gave rise to the supposition that it had gone down. M. d'O— wished to know if it were still above water, or whether it were lost, etc. As no tidings of it had come to hand, the company were on the look-out for someone to insure it, and offered ten per cent., but nobody cared to run so great a risk, especially as a letter had been received from an English sea captain who said he had seen her sink.

I may confess to my readers, though I did not do so to M. d'O—, that with inexplicable folly I composed an answer that left no doubt as to the safety of the vessel, pronouncing it safe and sound, and that we should hear of it in a few days. No doubt I felt the need of exalting my oracle, but this method was likely to destroy its credit for ever. In truth, if I had guessed M. d'O—'s design, I would have curbed my vanity, for I had no wish to make him lose a large sum without profiting myself.

The answer made him turn pale, and tremble with joy. He told us that secrecy in the matter was of the last importance, as he had determined to insure the vessel and drive a good bargain. At this, dreading the consequences, I hastened to tell him that for all I knew there might not be a word of truth in the oracle's reply, and that I should die of grief if I were the involuntary cause of his losing an enormous sum of money through relying on an oracle, the hidden sense of which might be completely opposed to the literal translation.

"Have you ever been deceived by it?"

"Often."

Seeing my distress, Esther begged her father to take no further steps in the matter. For some moments nobody spoke.

M. d'O— looked thoughtful and full of the project which his fancy had painted in such gay colours. He said a good deal about it, dwelling on the mystic virtues of numbers, and told his daughter to read out all the questions she had addressed to the oracle with the answers she had received. There were six or seven of them, all briefly worded, some direct and some equivocal. Esther, who had constructed the pyramids, had shone, with my potent assistance, in extracting the answers, which I had really invented, and her father, in the joy of his heart, seeing her so clever, imagined that she would become an adept in the science by the force of intelligence. The lovely Esther, who was much taken with the trifle; was quite ready to be of the same opinion.

After passing several hours in the discussion of the answers, which my host thought divine, we had supper, and at parting M. d'O— said that as Sunday was a day for pleasure and not business he hoped I would honour them by passing the day at their pretty house on the Amstel, and they were delighted at my accepting their invitation.

I could not help pondering over the mysteries of the commercial mind, which narrows itself down to considerations of profit and loss. M. d'O— was decidedly an honest man; but although he was

rich, he was by no means devoid of the greed incident to his profession. I asked myself the question, how a man, who would consider it dishonourable to steal a ducat, or to pick one up in the street and keep it, knowing to whom it belonged, could reconcile it with his conscience to make an enormous profit by insuring a vessel of the safety of which he was perfectly certain, as he believed the oracle infallible. Such a transaction was certainly fraudulent, as it is dishonest to play when one is certain of winning.

As I was going home I passed a tea-garden, and seeing a good many people going in and coming out I went in curious to know how these places were managed in Holland. Great heavens! I found myself the witness of an orgy, the scene a sort of cellar, a perfect cesspool of vice and debauchery. The discordant noise of the two or three instruments which formed the orchestra struck gloom to the soul and added to the horrors of the cavern. The air was dense with the fumes of bad tobacco, and vapours reeking of beer and garlic issued from every mouth. The company consisted of sailors, men of the lowest-class, and a number of vile women. The sailors and the dregs of the people thought this den a garden of delight, and considered its pleasures compensation for the toils of the sea and the miseries of daily labour. There was not a single woman there whose aspect had anything redeeming about it. I was looking at the repulsive sight in silence, when a great hulking fellow, whose appearance suggested the blacksmith, and his voice the blackguard, came up to me and asked me in bad Italian if I would like to dance. I answered in the negative, but before leaving me he pointed out a Venetian woman who, he said, would oblige me if I gave her some drink.

Wishing to discover if she was anyone I knew I looked at her attentively, and seemed to recollect her features, although I could not decide who she could be. Feeling rather curious on the subject I sat down next to her, and asked if she came from Venice, and if she had left that country some time ago.

"Nearly eighteen years," she replied.

I ordered a bottle of wine, and asked if she would take any; she said yes, and added, if I liked, she would oblige me.

"I haven't time," I said; and I gave the poor wretch the change I received from the waiter. She was full of gratitude, and would have embraced me if I had allowed her.

"Do you like being at Amsterdam better than Venice?" I asked.

"Alas, no! for if I were in my own country I should not be following this dreadful trade."

"How old were you when you left Venice?"

"I was only fourteen and lived happily with my father and mother, who now may have died of grief."

"Who seduced you?"

"A rascally footman."

"In what part of Venice did you live?"

"I did not live in Venice, but at Friuli, not far off."

Friuli . . . eighteen years ago . . . a footman . . . I felt moved, and looking at the wretched woman more closely I soon recognized in her Lucie of Pasean. I cannot describe my sorrow, which I concealed as best I could, and tried hard to keep up my indifferent air. A life of debauchery rather than the flight of time had tarnished her beauty, and ruined the once exquisite outlines of her form. Lucie, that innocent and pretty maiden, grown ugly, vile, a common prostitute! It was a dreadful thought. She drank like a sailor, without looking at me, and without caring who I was. I took a few ducats from my purse, and slipped them into her hand, and without waiting for her to find out how much I had given her I left that horrible den.

I went to bed full of saddening thoughts. Not even under the Leads did I pass so wretched a day. I thought I must have risen under some unhappy star! I loathed myself. With regard to Lucie I felt the sting of remorse, but at the thought of M. d'O— I hated myself. I considered that I should cause him a loss of three or four hundred thousand florins; and the thought was a bitter drop in the

cup of my affection for Esther. I fancied, she, as well as her father, would become my implacable foe; and love that is not returned is no love at all.

I spent a dreadful night. Lucie, Esther, her father, their hatred of me, and my hatred of myself, were the groundwork of my dreams. I saw Esther and her father, if not ruined, at all events impoverished by my fault, and Lucie only thirty-two years old, and already deep in the abyss of vice, with an infinite prospect of misery and shame before her. The dawn was welcome indeed, for with its appearance a calm came to my spirit; it is, the darkness which is terrible to a heart full of remorse.

I got up and dressed myself in my best, and went in a coach to do my suit to the Princesse de Galitzin, who, was staying at the "Etoile d'Orient." I found her out; she had gone to the Admiralty. I went there, and found her accompanied by M. de Reissak and the Count de Tot, who had just received news of my friend Pesselier, at whose house I made his acquaintance, and who was dangerously ill when I left Paris.

I sent away my coach and began to walk towards M. d'O-'s house on the Amsel. The extreme elegance of my costume was displeasing in the eyes of the Dutch populace, and they hissed and hooted me, after the manner of the mob all the world over, Esther saw me coming from the window, drew the rope, and opened the door. I ran in, shut the door behind me, and as I was going up the wooden staircase, on the fourth or fifth step my foot struck against some yielding substance. I looked down and saw a green pocket-book. I stooped down to pick it up, but was awkward enough to send it through an opening in the stairs, which had been doubtless made for the purpose of giving light to a stair below. I did not stop, but went up the steps and was received with the usual hospitality, and on their expressing some wonder as to the unusual brilliance of my attire I explained the circumstances of the case. Esther smiled and said I looked quite another person, but I saw that both father and daughter were sad at heart. Esther's governess came in and said something to her in Dutch, at which, in evident distress, she ran and embraced her father.

"I see, my friends, that something has happened to you. If my presence is a restraint, treat me without ceremony, and bid me go."

"It's not so great an ill-hap after all; I have enough money left to bear the loss patiently."

"If I may ask the question, what is the nature of your loss?"

"I have lost a green pocket-book containing a good deal of money, which if I had been wise I would have left behind, as I did not require it till to-morrow."

"And you don't know where you lost it?"

"It must have been in the street, but I can't imagine how it can have happened. It contained bills of exchange for large amounts, and of course they don't matter, as I can stop payment of them, but there were also notes of the Bank of England for heavy sums, and they are gone, as they are payable to the bearer. Let us give thanks to God, my dear child, that it is no worse, and pray to Him to preserve to us what remains, and above all to keep us in good health. I have had much heavier losses than this, and I have been enabled not only to bear the misfortune but to make up the loss. Let us say no more about the matter."

While he was speaking my heart was full of joy, but I kept up the sadness befitting the scene. I had not the slightest doubt that the pocket-book in question was the one I had unluckily sent through the staircase, but which could not be lost irretrievably. My first point was how to make capital of my grand discovery in the interests of my cabalistic science. It was too fine an opportunity to be lost, especially as I still felt the sting of having been the cause of an enormous loss to the worthy man. I would give them a grand proof of the infallibility of my oracle: how many miracles are done in the same way! The thought put me into a good humour. I began to crack jokes, and my jests drew peals of laughter from Esther.

We had an excellent dinner and choice wine. After we had taken coffee I said that if they liked we would have a game of cards, but Esther said that this would be a waste of time, as she would much prefer making the oracular pyramids. This was exactly what I wanted.

"With all my heart," I said.

"We will do as you suggest."

"Shall I ask where my father lost his pocket-book?"

"Why not? It's a plain question: write it down."

She made the pyramid, and the reply was that the pocket-book had not been found by anyone. She leapt up from her seat, danced for joy, and threw her arms round her father's neck, saying,

"We shall find it, we shall find it, papa!"

"I hope so, too, my dear, that answer is really very consoling."

Wherewith Esther gave her father one kiss after another.

"Yes," said I, "there is certainly ground for hope, but the oracle will be dumb to all questions."

"Dumb! Why?"

"I was going to say it will be dumb if you do not give me as many kisses as you have given your father."

"Oh, then I will soon make it speak!" said she, laughing; and throwing her arms about my neck she began to kiss me, and I to give her kisses in return.

Ah! what happy days they seem when I recall them; and still I like dwelling on these days despite my sad old age, the foe of love. When I recall these events I grow young again and feel once more the delights of youth, despite the long years which separate me from that happy time.

At last Esther sat down again, and asked, "Where is the pocket-book?" And the pyramid told her that the pocket-book had fallen through the opening in the fifth step of the staircase.

M. d'O— said to his daughter,

"Come, my dear Esther, let us go and test the truth of the oracle." And full of joy and hope they went to the staircase, I following them, and M. d'O shewed her the hole through which the pocket-book must have fallen. He lighted a candle and we went down to the cellar, and before long he picked up the book, which had fallen into some water. We went up again in high spirits, and there we talked for over an hour as seriously as you please on the divine powers of the oracle, which, according to them, should render its possessor the happiest of mortals.

He opened the pocket-book and shewed us the four thousand pound notes. He gave two to his daughter, and made me take the two remaining; but I took them with one hand and with the other gave them to Esther begging her to keep them for me; but before she would agree to do so I had to threaten her with the stoppage of the famous cabalistic oracle. I told M. d'O that all I asked was his friendship, and thereon he embraced me, and swore to be my friend to the death.

By making the fair Esther the depositary of my two thousand pounds, I was sure of winning her affection by an appeal, not to her interest, but to her truthfulness. This charming girl had about her so powerful an attraction that I felt as if my life was wound up with hers.

I told M. d'O that my chief object was to negotiate the twenty millions at a small loss.

"I hope to be of service to you in the matter," he said, "but as I shall often want to speak to you, you must come and live in our house, which you must look upon as your own."

"My presence will be a restraint on you. I shall be a trouble."

"Ask Esther."

Esther joined her entreaties to her father's and I gave in, taking good care not to let them see how pleased I was. I contented myself with expressing my gratitude, to which they answered that it was I who conferred a favour.

M. d'O went into his closet, and as soon as I found myself alone with Esther I kissed her tenderly, saying that I should not be happy till I had won her heart.

"Do you love me?"

"Dearly, and I will do all in my power to shew how well I love you, if you will love me in return."

She gave me her hand, which I covered with kisses, and she went on to say, "As soon as you come and live with us, you must look out for a good opportunity for asking my hand of my father. You need not be afraid he will refuse you, but the first thing for you to do is to move into our house."

"My dear little wife! I will come to-morrow."

We said many sweet things to one another, talked about the future, and told each other our inmost thoughts; and I was undoubtedly truly in love, for not a single improper fancy rose in my mind in the presence of my dear who loved me so well.

The first thing that M. d'O said on his return was, that there would be a piece of news on the Exchange the next day.

"What is that, papa dear?"

"I have decided to take the whole risk—amounting to three hundred thousand florins—of the ship which is thought to have gone down. They will call me mad, but they themselves will be the madmen; which is what I should be if, after the proof we have had, I doubted the oracle any more."

"My dear sir, you make me frightened. I have told you that I have been often deceived by the oracle."

"That must have been, my dear fellow, when the reply was obscure, and you did not get at the real sense of it; but in the present case there is no room, for doubt. I shall make three million florins, or, if the worst comes to the worse, my loss won't ruin me."

Esther, whom the finding of the pocket-book had made enthusiastic, told her father to lose no time. As for me, I could not recall what I had done, but I was again overwhelmed with sadness. M. d'O— saw it, and taking my hand said, "If the oracle does lie this time, I shall be none the less your friend."

"I am glad to hear it," I answered; "but as this is a matter of the utmost importance, let me consult the oracle a second time before you risk your three hundred thousand florins." This proposition pleased the father and daughter highly; they could not express their gratitude to me for being so careful of their interests.

What followed was truly surprising—enough to make one believe in fatality. My readers probably will not believe it; but as these Memoirs will not be published till I have left this world, it would be of no use for me to disguise the truth in any way, especially as the writing of them is only the amusement of my leisure hours. Well, let him who will believe it; this is absolutely what happened. I wrote down the question myself, erected the pyramid, and carried out all the magical ceremonies without letting Esther have a hand in it. I was delighted to be able to check an act of extreme imprudence, and I was determined to do so. A double meaning, which I knew how to get, would abate M. d'O—'s courage and annihilate his plans. I had thought over what I wanted to say, and I thought I had expressed it properly in the numbers. With that idea, as Esther knew the alphabet perfectly well, I let her extract the answer, and transfer it into letters. What was my surprise when I heard her read these words:

"In a matter of this kind neither fear nor hesitate. Your repentance would be too hard for you to bear."

That was enough. Father and daughter ran to embrace me, and M. d'O—said that when the vessel was sighted a tithe of the profits should be mine. My surprise prevented me giving any answer; I had intended to write trust and hazard, and I had written fear and hesitate. But thanks to his prejudice, M. d'O— only saw in my silence confirmation of the infallibility of the oracle. In short, I could do nothing more, and I took my leave leaving everything to the care of chance, who sometimes is kind to us in spite of ourselves.

The next morning I took up my abode in a splendid suite of rooms in Esther's house, and the day after I took her to a concert, where she joked with me on the grief I should endure on account of the absence of Madame Trend and my daughter. Esther was the only mistress of my soul. I lived

but to adore her, and I should have satisfied my love had not Esther been a girl of good principles. I could not gain possession of her, and was full of longing and desire.

Four or five days after my installation in my new quarters, M. d'O—communicated to me the result of a conference which he had had with M. Pels and six other bankers on the twenty millions. They offered ten millions in hard cash and seven millions in paper money, bearing interest at five or six per cent. with a deduction of one per cent. brokerage. Furthermore, they would forgive a sum of twelve hundred thousand florins owed by the French India Company to the Dutch Company.

With such conditions I could not venture to decide on my own responsibility, although, personally, I thought them reasonable enough, the impoverished state of the French treasury being taken into consideration. I sent copies of the proposal to M. de Boulogne and M. d'Afri, begging from them an immediate reply. At the end of a week I received an answer in the writing of M. de Courteil, acting for M. de Boulogne, instructing me to refuse absolutely any such proposal, and to report myself at Paris if I saw no chance of making a better bargain. I was again informed that peace was imminent, though the Dutch were quite of another opinion.

In all probability I should have immediately left for Paris, but for a circumstance which astonished nobody but myself in the family of which I had become a member. The confidence of M. d'O— increased every day, and as if chance was determined to make me a prophet in spite of myself, news was received of the ship which was believed to be lost, and which, on the faith of my oracle, M. d'O had bought for three hundred thousand florins. The vessel was at Madeira. The joy of Esther, and still more my own, may be imagined when we saw the worthy man enter the house triumphantly with confirmation of the good news.

"I have insured the vessel from Madeira to the mouth of the Texel for a trifle," said he, "and so," turning to me, "you may count from this moment on the tenth part of the profit, which I owe entirely to you."

The reader may imagine my delight; but there is one thing he will not imagine, unless he knows my character better than I do myself, the confusion into which I was thrown by the following remarks:

"You are now rich enough," said M. d'O—, "to set up for yourself amongst us, and you are positively certain to make an enormous fortune in a short time merely by making use of your cabala. I will be your agent; let us live together, and if you like my daughter as she likes you, you can call yourself my son as soon as you please."

In Esther's face shone forth joy and happiness, and in mine, though I adored her, there was to be seen, alas! nothing but surprise. I was stupid with happiness and the constraint in which I held myself. I did not analyze my feelings, but, though I knew it not, there can be no doubt that my insuperable objection to the marriage tie was working within my soul. A long silence followed; and last, recovering my powers of speech, I succeeded, with an effort, in speaking to them of my gratitude, my happiness, my love, and I ended by saying that, in spite of my affection for Esther, I must, before settling in Holland, return to Paris, and discharge the confidential and responsible duty which the Government had placed in my hands. I would then return to Amsterdam perfectly independent.

This long peroration won their approval. Esther was quite pleased, and we spent the rest of the day in good spirits. Next day M. d'O—gave a splendid dinner to several of his friends, who congratulated him on his good fortune, being persuaded that his courageous action was to be explained by his having had secret information of the safety of the vessel, though none of them could see from what source he, and he only, had obtained it.

A week after this lucky event he gave me an ultimatum on the matter of the twenty millions, in which he guaranteed that France should not lose more than nine per cent. in the transaction.

I immediately sent a copy of his proposal to M. d'Afri, begging him to be as prompt as possible, and another copy to the comptroller-general, with a letter in which I warned him that the thing would certainly fall through if he delayed a single day in sending full powers to M. d'Afri to give me the necessary authority to act.

I wrote to the same effect to M. de Courteuil and the Duc de Choiseul, telling them that I was to receive no brokerage; but that I should all the same accept a proposal which I thought a profitable one, and saying that I had no doubt of obtaining my expenses from the French Government.

As it was a time of rejoicing with us, M. d'O— thought it would be a good plan to give a ball. All the most distinguished people in Amsterdam were invited to it. The ball and supper were of the most splendid description, and Esther, who was a blaze of diamonds, danced all the quadrilles with me, and charmed every beholder by her grace and beauty.

I spent all my time with Esther, and every day we grew more and more in love, and more unhappy, for we were tormented by abstinence, which irritated while it increased our desires.

Esther was an affectionate mistress, but discreet rather by training than disposition the favours she accorded me were of the most insignificant description. She was lavish of nothing but her kisses, but kisses are rather irritating than soothing. I used to be nearly wild with love. She told me, like other virtuous women, that if she agreed to make me happy she was sure I would not marry her, and that as soon as I made her my wife she would be mine and mine only. She did not think I was married, for I had given her too many assurances to the contrary, but she thought I had a strong attachment to someone in Paris. I confessed that she was right, and said that I was going there to put an end to it that I might be bound to her alone. Alas! I lied when I said so, for Esther was inseparable from her father, a man of forty, and I could not make up my mind to pass the remainder of my days in Holland.

Ten or twelve days after sending the ultimatum, I received a letter from M. de Boulogne informing me that M. d'Affri had all necessary instructions for effecting the exchange of the twenty millions, and another letter from the ambassador was to the same effect. He warned me to take care that everything was right, as he should not part with the securities before receiving 18,200,000 francs in current money.

The sad time of parting at last drew near, amid many regrets and tears from all of us. Esther gave me the two thousand pounds I had won so easily, and her father at my request gave me bills of exchange to the amount of a hundred thousand florins, with a note of two hundred thousand florins authorizing me to draw upon him till the whole sum was exhausted. Just as I was going, Esther gave me fifty shirts and fifty handkerchiefs of the finest quality.

It was not my love for Manon Baletti, but a foolish vanity and a desire to cut a figure in the luxurious city of Paris, which made me leave Holland. But such was the disposition that Mother Nature had given me that fifteen months under The Leads had not been enough to cure this mental malady of mine. But when I reflect upon after events of my life I am not astonished that The Leads proved ineffectual, for the numberless vicissitudes which I have gone through since have not cured me—my disorder, indeed, being of the incurable kind. There is no such thing as destiny. We ourselves shape our lives, notwithstanding that saying of the Stoics, 'Volentem ducit, nolentem trahit'.

After promising Esther to return before the end of the year, I set out with a clerk of the company who had brought the French securities, and I reached the Hague, where Boaz received me with a mingled air of wonder and admiration. He told me that I had worked a miracle; "but," he added, "to succeed thus you must have persuaded them that peace was on the point of being concluded."

"By no means," I answered; "so far from my persuading them, they are of the opposite opinion; but all the same I may tell you that peace is really imminent."

"If you like to give me that assurance in writing," said he, "I will make you a present of fifty thousand florins' worth of diamonds."

"Well," I answered, "the French ambassador is of the same opinion as myself; but I don't think the certainty is sufficiently great as yet for you to risk your diamonds upon it."

Next day I finished my business with the ambassador, and the clerk returned to Amsterdam.

I went to supper at Therese's, and found her children very well dressed. I told her to go on to Rotterdam the next day and wait for me there with her son, as I had no wish to give scandal at the Hague.

At Rotterdam, Therese told me that she knew I had won half a million at Amsterdam, and that her fortune would be made if she could leave Holland for London. She had instructed Sophie to tell me that my good luck was the effect of the prayers she had addressed to Heaven on my behalf. I saw where the land lay, and I enjoyed a good laugh at the mother's craft and the child's piety, and gave her a hundred ducats, telling her that she should have another hundred when she wrote to me from London. It was very evident that she thought the sum a very moderate one, but I would not give her any more. She waited for the moment when I was getting into my carriage to beg me to give her another hundred ducats, and I said, in a low tone, that she should have a thousand if she would give me her daughter. She thought it over for a minute, and then said that she could not part with her.

"I know very well why," I answered; and drawing a watch from my fob I gave it to Sophie, embraced her, and went on my way. I arrived at Paris on February 10th, and took sumptuous apartments near the Rue Montorgueil.

CHAPTER VI

I Meet With a Flattering Reception From My Patron—Madame D'Urfe's Infatuation—Madame X. C. V. And Her Family—Madame du Romain

During my journey from the Hague to Paris, short as it was, I had plenty of opportunities for seeing that the mental qualities of my adopted son were by no means equal to his physical ones.

As I had said, the chief point which his mother had impressed on him was reserve, which she had instilled into him out of regard for her own interests. My readers will understand what I mean, but the child, in following his mother's instructions, had gone beyond the bounds of moderation; he possessed reserve, it is true, but he was also full of dissimulation, suspicion, and hypocrisy—a fine trio of deceit in one who was still a boy. He not only concealed what he knew, but he pretended to know that which he did not. His idea of the one quality necessary to success in life was an impenetrable reserve, and to obtain this he had accustomed himself to silence the dictates of his heart, and to say no word that had not been carefully weighed. Giving other people wrong impressions passed with him for discretion, and his soul being incapable of a generous thought, he seemed likely to pass through life without knowing what friendship meant.

Knowing that Madame d'Urfe counted on the boy for the accomplishment of her absurd hypostasis, and that the more mystery I made of his birth the more extravagant would be her fancies about it, I told the lad that if I introduced him to a lady who questioned him by himself about his birth, he was to be perfectly open with her.

On my arrival at Paris my first visit was to my patron, whom I found in grand company amongst whom I recognized the Venetian ambassador, who pretended not to know me.

"How long have you been in Paris?" said the minister, taking me by the hand.

"I have only just stepped out of my chaise."

"Then go to Versailles. You will find the Duc de Choiseul and the comptroller-general there. You have been wonderfully successful, go and get your meed of praise and come and see me afterwards. Tell the duke that Voltaire's appointment to be a gentleman-in-ordinary to the king is ready."

I was not going to start for Versailles at midday, but ministers in Paris are always talking in this style, as if Versailles were at the end of the street. Instead of going there, I went to see Madame d'Urfe.

She received me with the words that her genius had informed her that I should come to-day, and that she was delighted with the fulfilment of the prophecy.

"Corneman tells me that you have been doing wonders in Holland; but I see more in the matter than he does, as I am quite certain that you have taken over the twenty millions yourself. The funds have risen, and a hundred millions at least will be in circulation in the course of the next week. You must not be offended at my shabby present, for, of course, twelve thousand francs are nothing to you. You must look upon them as a little token of friendship."

"I am going to tell my servants to close all the doors, for I am too glad to see you not to want to have you all to myself."

A profound bow was the only reply I made to this flattering speech, and I saw her tremble with joy when I told her that I had brought a lad of twelve with me, whom I intended to place in the best school I could find that he might have a good education.

"I will send him myself to Viar, where my nephews are. What is his name? Where is he? I know well what this boy is, I long to see him. Why did you not alight from your journey at my house?"

Her questions and replies followed one another in rapid succession. I should have found it impossible to get in a word edgewise, even if I had wanted to, but I was very glad to let her expend her enthusiasm, and took good care not to interrupt her. On the first opportunity, I told her that I

should have the pleasure of presenting the young gentleman to her the day after tomorrow, as on the morrow I had an engagement at Versailles.

"Does the dear lad speak French? While I am arranging for his going to school you must really let him come and live with me."

"We will discuss that question on the day after tomorrow, madam."

"Oh, how I wish the day after to-morrow was here!"

On leaving Madame d'Urfe I went to my lottery office and found everything in perfect order. I then went to the Italian play, and found Silvia and her daughter in their dressing-room.

"My dear friend," said she when she saw me, "I know that you have achieved a wonderful success in Holland, and I congratulate you."

I gave her an agreeable surprise by saying that I had been working for her daughter, and Marion herself blushed, and lowered her eyes in a very suggestive manner. "I will be with you at supper," I added, "and then we can talk at our ease." On leaving them I went to the amphitheatre, and what was my surprise to see in one of the first boxes Madame X– C– V–, with all her family. My readers will be glad to hear their history.

Madame X– C– V–, by birth a Greek, was the widow of an Englishman, by whom she had six children, four of whom were girls. On his death-bed he became a Catholic out of deference to the tears of his wife; but as his children could not inherit his forty thousand pounds invested in England, without conforming to the Church of England, the family returned to London, where the widow complied with all the obligations of the law of England. What will people not do when their interests are at stake! though in a case like this there is no need to blame a person for yielding, to prejudices which had the sanction of the law.

It was now the beginning of the year 1758, and five years before, when I was at Padua, I fell in love with the eldest daughter, but a few months after, when we were at Venice, Madame X. C. V. thought good to exclude me from her family circle. The insult which the mother put upon me was softened by the daughter, who wrote me a charming letter, which I love to read even now. I may as well confess that my grief was the easier to bear as my time was taken up by my fair nun, M– M–, and my dear C– C–. Nevertheless, Mdlle. X. C. V., though only fifteen, was of a perfect beauty, and was all the more charming in that to her physical advantages she joined those of a cultured mind.

Count Algarotti, the King of Prussia's chamberlain, gave her lessons, and several young nobles were among her suitors, her preference apparently being given to the heir of the family of Memmo de St. Marcuola. He died a year afterwards, while he was procurator.

My surprise at seeing this family at such a time and place may be imagined. Mdlle. X. C. V. saw me directly, and pointed me out to her mother, who made a sign to me with her fan to come to their box.

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