

GIACOMO CASANOVA

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

VOLUME 25: RUSSIA
AND POLAND

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Casanova de Seingalt, 1725-1798.
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CHAPTER XIX

My Stay at Riga—Campioni St. Heleine—D'Asagon—Arrival of the Empress
—I Leave Riga and Go to St. Petersburg—I See Society—I Buy Zaira

Prince Charles de Biron, the younger son of the Duke of Courland, Major-General in the Russian service, Knight of the Order of St. Alexander Newski, gave me a distinguished reception after reading his father's letter. He was thirty-six years of age, pleasant-looking without being handsome, and polite and well-mannered, and he spoke French extremely well. In a few sentences he let me know what he could do for me if I intended to spend some time at Riga. His table, his friends, his pleasures, his horses, his advice, and his purse, all these were at my service, and he offered them with the frankness of the soldier and the geniality of the prince.

"I cannot offer you a lodging," he said, "because I have hardly enough room for myself, but I will see that you get a comfortable apartment somewhere."

The apartment was soon found, and I was taken to it by one of the prince's aides-de-camp. I was scarcely established when the prince came to see me, and made me dine with him just as I was. It was an unceremonious dinner, and I was pleased to meet Campioni, of whom I have spoken several times in these Memoirs. He was a dancer, but very superior to his fellows, and fit for the best company polite, witty, intelligent, and a libertine in a gentlemanly way. He was devoid of prejudices, and fond of women, good cheer, and heavy play, and knew how to keep an even mind both in good and evil fortune. We were mutually pleased to see each other again.

Another guest, a certain Baron de St. Heleine from Savoy, had a pretty but very insignificant wife. The baron, a fat man, was a gamester, a gourmand, and a lover of wine; add that he was a past master in the art of getting into debt and lulling his creditors into a state of false security, and you have all his capacities, for in all other respects he was a fool in the fullest sense of the word. An aide-de-camp and the prince's mistress also dined with us. This mistress, who was pale, thin, and dreamy-looking, but also pretty, might be twenty years old. She hardly ate anything, saying that she was ill and did not like anything on the table. Discontent shewed itself on her every feature. The prince endeavoured, but all in vain, to make her eat and drink, she refused everything disdainfully. The prince laughed good-humouredly at her in such a manner as not to wound her feelings.

We spent two hours pleasantly enough at table, and after coffee had been served, the prince, who had business, shook me by the hand and left me with Campioni, telling me always to regard his table as my last resource.

This old friend and fellow-countryman took me to his house to introduce me to his wife and family. I did not know that he had married a second time. I found the so-called wife to be an Englishwoman, thin, but full of intelligence. She had a daughter of eleven, who might easily have been taken for fifteen; she, too, was marvellously intelligent, and danced, sang, and played on the piano and gave such glances that shewed that nature had been swifter than her years. She made a conquest of me, and her father congratulated me to my delight, but her mother offended her dreadfully by calling her baby.

I went for a walk with Campioni, who gave me a good deal of information, beginning with himself.

"I have lived for ten years," he said, "with that woman. Betty, whom you admired so much, is not my daughter, the others are my children by my Englishwoman. I have left St. Petersburg for two years, and I live here well enough, and have pupils who do me credit. I play with the prince, sometimes winning and sometimes losing, but I never win enough to enable me to satisfy a wretched creditor I left at St. Petersburg, who persecutes me on account of a bill of exchange. He may put me in prison any day, and I am always expecting him to do so."

"Is the bill for a large sum?"

"Five hundred roubles."

"That is only two thousand francs."

"Yes, but unfortunately I have not got it."

"You ought to annul the debt by paying small sums on account."

"The rascal won't let me."

"Then what do you propose doing?"

"Win a heavy sum, if I can, and escape into Poland."

"The Baron de St. Heleine will run away, too if he can, for he only lives on credit. The prince is very useful to us, as we are able to play at his house; but if we get into difficulty he could not extricate us, as he is heavily in debt himself. He always loses at play. His mistress is expensive, and gives him a great deal of trouble by her ill-humour."

"Why is she so sour?"

"She wants him to keep his word, for he promised to get her married at the end of two years; and on the strength of this promise she let him give her two children. The two years have passed by and the children are there, and she will no longer allow him to have anything to do with her for fear of having a third child."

"Can't the prince find her a husband?"

"He did find her a lieutenant, but she won't hear of anybody under the rank of major."

The prince gave a state dinner to General Woyakoff (for whom I had a letter), Baroness Korf, Madame Ittinoff, and to a young lady who was going to marry Baron Budberg, whom I had known at Florence, Turin, and Augsburg, and whom I may possibly have forgotten to mention.

All these friends made me spend three weeks very pleasantly, and I was especially pleased with old General Woyakoff. This worthy man had been at Venice fifty years before, when the Russians were still called Muscovites, and the founder of St. Petersburg was still alive. He had grown old like an oak, without changing his horizons. He thought the world was just the same as it had been when he was young, and was eloquent in his praise of the Venetian Government, imagining it to be still the same as he had left it.

At Riga an English merchant named Collins told me that the so-called Baron de Stenau, who had given me the forged bill of exchange, had been hanged in Portugal. This "baron" was a poor clerk, and the son of a small tradesman, and had left his desk in search of adventure, and thus he had ended. May God have mercy upon his soul!

One evening a Russian, on his way from Poland, where he had been executing some commission for the Russian Court, called on the prince, played, and lost twenty thousand roubles on his word of honour. Campioni was the dealer. The Russian gave bills of exchange in payment of his debts; but as soon as he got to St. Petersburg he dishonoured his own bills, and declared them worthless, not caring for his honour or good faith. The result of this piece of knavery was not only that his creditors were defrauded, but gaming was henceforth strictly forbidden in the officers' quarters.

This Russian was the same that betrayed the secrets of Elizabeth Petrovna, when she was at war with Prussia. He communicated to Peter, the empress's nephew and heir-presumptive, all the orders she sent to her generals, and Peter in his turn passed on the information to the Prussian king whom he worshipped.

On the death of Elizabeth, Peter put this traitor at the head of the department for commerce, and the fellow actually made known, with the Czar's sanction, the service for which he had received such a reward, and thus, instead of looking upon his conduct as disgraceful, he gloried over it. Peter could not have been aware of the fact that, though it is sometimes necessary to reward treachery, the traitor himself is always abhorred and despised.

I have remarked that it was Campioni who dealt, but he dealt for the prince who held the bank. I had certain claims, but as I remarked that I expected nothing and would gladly sell my expectations for a hundred roubles, the prince took me at my word and gave me the amount immediately. Thus I was the only person who made any money by our night's play.

Catherine II, wishing to shew herself to her new subjects, over whom she was in reality supreme, though she had put the ghost of a king in the person of Stanislas Poniatowski, her former favourite, on the throne of Poland, came to Riga, and it was then I saw this great sovereign for the first time. I was a witness of the kindness and affability with which she treated the Livonian nobility, and of the way in which she kissed the young ladies, who had come to kiss her hand, upon the mouth. She was surrounded by the Orloffs and by other nobles who had assisted in placing her on the throne. For the comfort and pleasure of her loyal subjects the empress graciously expressed her intention of holding a bank at faro of ten thousand roubles.

Instantly the table and the cards were brought forward, and the piles of gold placed in order. She took the cards, pretended to shuffle them, and gave them to the first comer to cut. She had the pleasure of seeing her bank broken at the first deal, and indeed this result was to be expected, as anybody not an absolute idiot could see how the cards were going. The next day the empress set out for Mitau, where triumphal arches were erected in her honour. They were made of wood, as stone is scarce in Poland, and indeed there would not have been time to build stone arches.

The day after her arrival great alarm prevailed, for news came that a revolution was ready to burst out at St. Petersburg, and some even said that it had begun. The rebels wished to have forth from his prison the hapless Ivan Ivanovitz, who had been proclaimed emperor in his cradle, and dethroned by Elizabeth Petrovna. Two officers to whom the guardianship of the prince had been confided had killed the poor innocent monarch when they saw that they would be overpowered.

The assassination of the innocent prince created such a sensation that the wary Panin, fearing for the results, sent courier after courier to the empress urging her to return to St. Petersburg and shew herself to the people.

Catherine was thus obliged to leave Mitau twenty-four hours after she had entered it, and after hastening back to the capital she arrived only to find that the excitement had entirely subsided. For politic reasons the assassins of the wretched Ivan were rewarded, and the bold man who had endeavoured to rise by her fall was beheaded.

The report ran that Catherine had concerted the whole affair with the assassins, but this was speedily set down as a calumny. The czarina was strong-minded, but neither cruel nor perfidious. When I saw her at Riga she was thirty-five, and had reigned two years. She was not precisely handsome, but nevertheless her appearance was pleasing, her expression kindly, and there was about her an air of calm and tranquillity which never left her.

At about the same time a friend of Baron de St. Heleine arrived from St. Petersburg on his way to Warsaw. His name was Marquis Dragon, but he called himself d'Aragon. He came from Naples, was a great gamester, a skilled swordsman, and was always ready to extract himself from a difficulty by a duel. He had left St. Petersburg because the Orloffs had persuaded the empress to prohibit games of chance. It was thought strange that the prohibition should come from the Orloffs, as gaming had been their principal means of gaining a livelihood before they entered on the more dangerous and certainly not more honourable profession of conspiracy. However, this measure was really a sensible one. Having been gamesters themselves they knew that gamesters are mostly knaves, and always ready

to enter into any intrigue or conspiracy provided it assures them some small gain; there could not have been better judges of gaming and its consequences than they were.

But though a gamester may be a rogue he may still have a good heart, and it is only just to say that this was the case with the Orloffs. Alexis gained the slash which adorns his face in a tavern, and the man who gave the blow had just lost to him a large sum of money, and considered his opponent's success to be rather the result of dexterity than fortune. When Alexis became rich and powerful, instead of revenging himself, he hastened to make his enemy's fortune. This was nobly done.

Dragon, whose first principle was always to turn up the best card, and whose second principle was never to shirk a duel, had gone to St. Petersburg in 1759 with the Baron de St. Heleine. Elizabeth was still on the throne, but Peter, Duke of Holstein, the heir-presumptive, had already begun to loom large on the horizon. Dragon used to frequent the fencing school where the prince was a frequent visitor, and there encountered all comers successfully. The duke got angry, and one day he took up a foil and defied the Neapolitan marquis to a combat. Dragon accepted and was thoroughly beaten, while the duke went off in triumph, for he might say from henceforth that he was the best fencer in St. Petersburg.

When the prince had gone, Dragon could not withstand the temptation of saying that he had only let himself be beaten for fear of offending his antagonist; and this boast soon got to the grand-duke's ears. The great man was terribly enraged, and swore he would have him banished from St. Petersburg if he did not use all his skill, and at the same time he sent an order to Dragon to be at the fencing school the next day.

The impatient duke was the first to arrive, and d'Aragon was not long in coming. The prince began reproaching him for what he had said the day before, but the Neapolitan, far from denying the fact, expressed himself that he had felt himself obliged to shew his respect for his prince by letting him rap him about for upwards of two hours.

"Very good," said the duke, "but now it is your turn; and if you don't do your best I will drive you from St. Petersburg."

"My lord, your highness shall be obeyed. I shall not allow you to touch me once, but I hope you will deign to take me under your protection."

The two champions passed the whole morning with the foils, and the duke was hit a hundred times without being able to touch his antagonist. At last, convinced of Dragon's superiority, he threw down his foil and shook him by the hand, and made him his fencer-in-ordinary, with the rank of major in his regiment of Holsteiners.

Shortly after, D'Aragon having won the good graces of the duke obtained leave to hold a bank at faro in his court, and in three or four years he amassed a fortune of a hundred thousand roubles, which he took with him to the Court of King Stanislas, where games of all sorts were allowed. When he passed through Riga, St. Heleine introduced him to Prince Charles, who begged him to call on him the next day, and to shew his skill with the foils against himself and some of his friends. I had the honour to be of the number; and thoroughly well he beat us, for his skill was that of a demon. I was vain enough to become angry at being hit at every pass, and told him that I should not be afraid to meet him at a game of sharps. He was calmer, and replied by taking my hand, and saying,—

"With the naked sword I fence in quite another style, and you are quite right not to fear anyone, for you fence very well."

D'Aragon set out for Warsaw the next day, but he unfortunately found the place occupied by more cunning Greeks than himself. In six months they had relieved him of his hundred thousand roubles, but such is the lot of gamesters; no craft can be more wretched than theirs.

A week before I left Riga (where I stayed two months) Campioni fled by favour of the good Prince Charles, and in a few days the Baron de St. Heleine followed him without taking leave of a noble army of creditors. He only wrote a letter to the Englishman Collins, to whom he owed a

thousand crowns, telling him that like an honest man he had left his debts where he had contracted them. We shall hear more of these three persons in the course of two years.

Campioni left me his travelling carriage, which obliged me to use six horses on my journey to St. Petersburg. I was sorry to leave Betty, and I kept up an epistolary correspondence with her mother throughout the whole of my stay at St. Petersburg.

I left Riga with the thermometer indicating fifteen degrees of frost, but though I travelled day and night, not leaving the carriage for the sixty hours for which my journey lasted, I did not feel the cold in the least. I had taken care to pay all the stages in advance, and Marshal Braun, Governor of Livonia, had given me the proper passport. On the box seat was a French servant who had begged me to allow him to wait on me for the journey in return for a seat beside the coachman. He kept his word and served me well, and though he was but ill clad he bore the horrible cold for two days and three nights without appearing to feel it. It is only a Frenchman who can bear such trials; a Russian in similar attire would have been frozen to death in twenty-four hours, despite plentiful doses of corn brandy. I lost sight of this individual when I arrived at St. Petersburg, but I met him again three months after, richly dressed, and occupying a seat beside mine at the table of M. de Czernitscheff. He was the *uchitel* of the young count, who sat beside him. But I shall have occasion to speak more at length of the office of *uchitel*, or tutor, in Russia.

As for Lambert, who was beside me in the carriage, he did nothing but eat, drink, and sleep the whole way; seldom speaking, for he stammered, and could only talk about mathematical problems, on which I was not always in the humour to converse. He was never amusing, never had any sensible observation to make on the varied scenes through which we passed; in short, he was a fool, and wearisome to all save himself.

I was only stopped once, and that was at Nawa, where the authorities demanded a passport, which I did not possess. I told the governor that as I was a Venetian, and only travelled for pleasure, I did not conceive a passport would be necessary, my Republic not being at war with any other power, and Russia having no embassy at Venice.

"Nevertheless," I added, "if your excellency wills it I will turn back; but I shall complain to Marshal Braun, who gave me the passport for posting, knowing that I had not the political passport."

After rubbing his forehead for a minute, the governor gave me a pass, which I still possess, and which brought me into St. Petersburg, without my having to allow the custom-house officers to inspect my trunks.

Between Koporie and St. Petersburg there is only a wretched hut for the accommodation of travellers. The country is a wilderness, and the inhabitants do not even speak Russian. The district is called Ingria, and I believe the jargon spoken has no affinity with any other language. The principal occupation of the peasants is robbery, and the traveller does well not to leave any of his effects alone for a moment.

I got to St. Petersburg just as the first rays of the sun began to gild the horizon. It was in the winter solstice, and the sun rose at the extremity of an immense plain at twenty-four minutes past nine, so I am able to state that the longest night in Russia consists of eighteen hours and three quarters.

I got down in a fine street called the Million. I found a couple of empty rooms, which the people of the house furnished with two beds, four chairs, and two small tables, and rented to me very cheaply. Seeing the enormous stoves, I concluded they must consume a vast amount of wood, but I was mistaken. Russia is the land of stoves as Venice is that of cisterns. I have inspected the interior of these stoves in summer-time as minutely as if I wished to find out the secret of making them; they are twelve feet high by six broad, and are capable of warming a vast room. They are only refuelled once in twenty-four hours, for as soon as the wood is reduced to the state of charcoal a valve is shut in the upper part of the stove.

It is only in the houses of noblemen that the stoves are refuelled twice a day, because servants are strictly forbidden to close the valve, and for a very good reason.

If a gentleman chance to come home and order his servants to warm his room before he goes to bed, and if the servant is careless enough to close the valve before the wood is reduced to charcoal, then the master sleeps his last sleep, being suffocated in three or four hours. When the door is opened in the morning he is found dead, and the poor devil of a servant is immediately hanged, whatever he may say. This sounds severe, and even cruel; but it is a necessary regulation, or else a servant would be able to get rid of his master on the smallest provocation.

After I had made an agreement for my board and lodging, both of which were very cheap (now St. Petersburg, is as dear as London), I brought some pieces of furniture which were necessities for me, but which were not as yet much in use in Russia, such as a commode, a bureau, &c.

German is the language principally spoken in St. Petersburg, and I did not speak German much better than I do now, so I had a good deal of difficulty in making myself understood, and usually excited my auditors to laughter.

After dinner my landlord told me that the Court was giving a masked ball to five thousand persons to last sixty hours. He gave me a ticket, and told me I only needed to shew it at the entrance of the imperial palace.

I decided to use the ticket, for I felt that I should like to be present at so numerous an assembly, and as I had my domino still by me a mask was all I wanted. I went to the palace in a sedan-chair, and found an immense crowd assembled, and dancing going on in several halls in each of which an orchestra was stationed. There were long counters loaded with eatables and drinkables at which those who were hungry or thirsty ate or drank as much as they liked. Gaiety and freedom reigned everywhere, and the light of a thousand wax candles illuminated the hall. Everything was wonderful, and all the more so from its contrast with the cold and darkness that were without. All at once I heard a masquer beside me say to another,—

"There's the czarina."

We soon saw Gregory Orloff, for his orders were to follow the empress at a distance.

I followed the masquer, and I was soon persuaded that it was really the empress, for everybody was repeating it, though no one openly recognized her. Those who really did not know her jostled her in the crowd, and I imagined that she would be delighted at being treated thus, as it was a proof of the success of her disguise. Several times I saw her speaking in Russian to one masquer and another. No doubt she exposed her vanity to some rude shocks, but she had also the inestimable advantage of hearing truths which her courtiers would certainly not tell her. The masquer who was pronounced to be Orloff followed her everywhere, and did not let her out of his sight for a moment. He could not be mistaken, as he was an exceptionally tall man and had a peculiar carriage of the head.

I arrested my progress in a hall where the French square dance was being performed, and suddenly there appeared a masquer disguised in the Venetian style. The costume was so complete that I at once set him down as a fellow-countryman, for very few strangers can imitate us so as to escape detection. As it happened, he came and stood next to me.

"One would think you were a Venetian," I said to him in French.

"So I am."

"Like myself."

"I am not jesting."

"No more am I."

"Then let us speak in Venetian."

"Do you begin, and I will reply."

We began our conversation, but when he came to the word *Sabato*, Saturday, which is a *Sabo* in Venetian, I discovered that he was a real Venetian, but not from Venice itself. He said I was right, and that he judged from my accent that I came from Venice.

"Quite so," said I.

"I thought Bernadi was the only Venetian besides myself in St. Petersburg."

"You see you are mistaken."

"My name is Count Volpati di Treviso."

"Give me your address, and I will come and tell you who I am, for I cannot do so here."

"Here it is."

After leaving the count I continued my progress through this wonderful hall, and two or three hours after I was attracted by the voice of a female masquer speaking Parisian French in a high falsetto, such as is common at an opera ball.

I did not recognize the voice but I knew the style, and felt quite certain that the masquer must be one of my old friends, for she spoke with the intonations and phraseology which I had rendered popular in my chief places of resort at Paris.

I was curious to see who it could be, and not wishing to speak before I knew her, I had the patience to wait till she lifted her mask, and this occurred at the end of an hour. What was my surprise to see Madame Baret, the stocking-seller of the Rue St. Honoré & My love awoke from its long sleep, and coming up to her I said, in a falsetto voice,—

"I am your friend of the 'Hotel d'Elbeuf.'"

She was puzzled, and looked the picture of bewilderment. I whispered in her ear, "Gilbert Baret, Rue des Prouveres," and certain other facts which could only be known to herself and a fortunate lover.

She saw I knew her inmost secrets, and drawing me away she begged me to tell her who I was.

"I was your lover, and a fortunate one, too," I replied; "but before I tell you my name, with whom are you, and how are you?"

"Very well; but pray do not divulge what I tell you. I left Paris with M. d'Anglade, counsellor in the Court of Rouen. I lived happily enough for some time with him, and then left him to go with a theatrical manager, who brought me here as an actress under the name of de l'Anglade, and now I am kept by Count Rzewuski, the Polish ambassador. And now tell me who you are?"

Feeling sure of enjoying her again, I lifted my mask. She gave a cry of joy, and exclaimed,—

"My good angel has brought you to St. Petersburg."

"How do you mean?"

"Rzewuski is obliged to go back to Poland, and now I count on you to get me out of the country, for I can no longer continue in a station for which I was not intended, since I can neither sing nor act."

She gave me her address, and I left her delighted with my discovery. After having passed half an hour at the counter, eating and drinking of the best, I returned to the crowd and saw my fair stocking-seller talking to Count Volpati. He had seen her with me, and hastened to enquire my name of her. However, she was faithful to our mutual promise, and told him I was her husband, though the Venetian did not seem to give the least credence to this piece of information.

At last I was tired and left the ball, and went to bed intending to go to mass in the morning. I slept for some time and woke, but as it was still dark I turned on the other side and went to sleep again. At last I awoke again, and seeing the daylight stealing through my double windows, I sent for a hairdresser, telling my man to make haste as I wanted to hear mass on the first Sunday after my arrival in St. Petersburg.

"But sir," said he, "the first Sunday was yesterday; we are at Monday now."

"What! Monday?"

"Yes, sir."

I had spent twenty-seven hours in bed, and after laughing at the mishap I felt as if I could easily believe it, for my hunger was like that of a cannibal.

This is the only day which I really lost in my life; but I do not weep like the Roman emperor, I laugh. But this is not the only difference between Titus and Casanova.

I called on Demetrio Papanelopulo, the Greek merchant, who was to pay me a hundred roubles a month. I was also commended to him by M. da Loglio, and I had an excellent reception. He begged

me to come and dine with him every day, paid me the roubles for the month due, and assured me that he had honoured my bill drawn at Mitau. He also found me a reliable servant, and a carriage at eighteen roubles, or six ducats per month. Such cheapness has, alas! departed for ever.

The next day, as I was dining with the worthy Greek and young Bernardi, who was afterwards poisoned, Count Volpati came in with the dessert, and told us how he had met a Venetian at the ball who had promised to come and see him.

"The Venetian would have kept his promise," said I, "if he had not had a long sleep of twenty-seven hours. I am the Venetian, and am delighted to continue our acquaintance."

The count was about to leave, and his departure had already been announced in the St. Petersburg Gazette. The Russian custom is not to give a traveller his passports till a fortnight has elapsed after the appearance of his name in the paper. This regulation is for the advantage of tradesmen, while it makes foreigners think twice before they contract any debts.

The next day I took a letter of introduction to M. Pietro Ivanovitch Melissino, colonel and afterwards general of artillery. The letter was written by Madame da Loglio, who was very intimate with Melissino. I was most politely welcomed, and after presenting me to his pleasant wife, he asked me once for all to sup with him every night. The house was managed in the French style, and both play and supper were conducted without any ceremony. I met there Melissino's elder brother, the procurator of the Holy Synod and husband of the Princess Dolgorouki. Faro went on, and the company was composed of trustworthy persons who neither boasted of their gains nor bewailed their losses to anyone, and so there was no fear of the Government discovering this infringement of the law against gaming. The bank was held by Baron Lefort, son of the celebrated admiral of Peter the Great. Lefort was an example of the inconstancy of fortune; he was then in disgrace on account of a lottery which he had held at Moscow to celebrate the coronation of the empress, who had furnished him with the necessary funds. The lottery had been broken and the fact was attributed to the baron's supposed dishonesty.

I played for small stakes and won a few roubles. I made friends with Baron Lefort at supper, and he afterwards told me of the vicissitudes he had experienced.

As I was praising the noble calmness with which a certain prince had lost a thousand roubles to him, he laughed and said that the fine gamester I had mentioned played upon credit but never paid.

"How about his honour?"

"It is not affected by the non-payment of gaming debts. It is an understood thing in Russia that one who plays on credit and loses may pay or not pay as he wishes, and the winner only makes himself ridiculous by reminding the loser of his debt."

"Then the holder of the bank has the right to refuse to accept bets which are not backed by ready money."

"Certainly; and nobody has a right to be offended with him for doing so. Gaming is in a very bad state in Russia. I know young men of the highest rank whose chief boast is that they know how to conquer fortune; that is, to cheat. One of the Matuschkins goes so far as to challenge all foreign cheats to master him. He has just received permission to travel for three years, and it is an open secret that he wishes to travel that he may exercise his skill. He intends returning to Russia laden with the spoils of the dupes he has made."

A young officer of the guards named Zinowieff, a relation of the Orloffs, whom I had met at Melissino's, introduced me to Macartney, the English ambassador, a young man of parts and fond of pleasure. He had fallen in love with a young lady of the Chitroff family, and maid of honour to the empress, and finding his affection reciprocated a baby was the result. The empress disapproved strongly of this piece of English freedom, and had the ambassador recalled, though she forgave her maid of honour. This forgiveness was attributed to the young lady's skill in dancing. I knew the brother of this lady, a fine and intelligent young officer. I had the good fortune to be admitted to the Court, and there I had the pleasure of seeing Mdlle. Chitroff dancing, and also Mdlle. Sievers,

now Princess, whom I saw again at Dresden four years ago with her daughter, an extremely genteel young princess. I was enchanted with Mdle. Sievers, and felt quite in love with her; but as we were never introduced I had no opportunity of declaring my passion. Putini, the castrato, was high in her favour, as indeed he deserved to be, both for his talents and the beauties of his person.

The worthy Papanelopulo introduced me to Alsuwieff, one of the ministers, a man of wit and letters, and only one of the kind whom I met in Russia. He had been an industrious student at the University of Upsala, and loved wine, women, and good cheer. He asked me to dine with Locatelli at Catherinhoff, one of the imperial mansions, which the empress had assigned to the old theatrical manager for the remainder of his days. He was astonished to see me, and I was more astonished still to find that he had turned taverner, for he gave an excellent dinner every day to all who cared to pay a rouble, exclusive of wine. M. d'Alsuwieff introduced me to his colleague in the ministry, Teploff, whose vice was that he loved boys, and his virtue that he had strangled Peter III.

Madame Mecour, the dancer, introduced me to her lover, Ghelaghin, also a minister. He had spent twenty years of his life in Siberia.

A letter from Da Loglio got me a warm welcome from the castrato Luini, a delightful man, who kept a splendid table. He was the lover of Colonna, the singer, but their affection seemed to me a torment, for they could scarce live together in peace for a single day. At Luini's house I met another castrato, Millico, a great friend of the chief huntsman, Narischkin, who also became one of my friends. This Narischkin, a pleasant and a well-informed man, was the husband of the famous Maria Paulovna. It was at the chief huntsman's splendid table that I met Calogeso Plato, now archbishop of Novgorod, and then chaplain to the empress. This monk was a Russian, and a master of ruses, understood Greek, and spoke Latin and French, and was what would be called a fine man. It was no wonder that he rose to such a height, as in Russia the nobility never lower themselves by accepting church dignities.

Da Loglio had given me a letter for the Princess Daschkoff, and I took it to her country house, at the distance of three versts from St. Petersburg. She had been exiled from the capital, because, having assisted Catherine to ascend the throne, she claimed to share it with her.

I found the princess mourning for the loss of her husband. She welcomed me kindly, and promised to speak to M. Panin on my behalf; and three days later she wrote to me that I could call on that nobleman as soon as I liked. This was a specimen of the empress's magnanimity; she had disgraced the princess, but she allowed her favourite minister to pay his court to her every evening. I have heard, on good authority, that Panin was not the princess's lover, but her father. She is now the President of the Academy of Science, and I suppose the literati must look upon her as another Minerva, or else they would be ashamed to have a woman at their head. For completeness' sake the Russians should get a woman to command their armies, but Joan d'Arcs are scarce.

Melissino and I were present at an extraordinary ceremony on the Day of the Epiphany, namely the blessing of the Neva, then covered with five feet of ice.

After the benediction of the waters children were baptized by being plunged into a large hole which had been made in the ice. On the day on which I was present the priest happened to let one of the children slip through his hands.

"Drugoi!" he cried.

That is, "Give me another." But my surprise may be imagined when I saw that the father and mother of the child were in an ecstasy of joy; they were certain that the babe had been carried straight to heaven. Happy ignorance!

I had a letter from the Florentine Madame Bregonci for her friend the Venetian Roccolini, who had left Venice to go and sing at the St. Petersburg Theatre, though she did not know a note of music, and had never appeared on the stage. The empress laughed at her, and said she feared there was no opening in St. Petersburg for her peculiar talents, but the Roccolini, who was known as La Vicenza, was not the woman to lose heart for so small a check. She became an intimate friend of a

Frenchwoman named Prote, the wife of a merchant who lived with the chief huntsman. She was at the same time his mistress and the confidante of his wife Maria Petrovna, who did not like her husband, and was very much obliged to the Frenchwoman for delivering her from the conjugal importunities.

This Prote was one of the handsomest women I have ever seen, and undoubtedly the handsomest in St. Petersburg at that time. She was in the flower of her age. She had at once a wonderful taste for gallantry and for all the mysteries of the toilette. In dress she surpassed everyone, and as she was witty and amusing she captivated all hearts. Such was the woman whose friend and procuress La Vicenza had become. She received the applications of those who were in love with Madame Prote, and passed them on, while, whether a lover's suit was accepted or not, the procuress got something out of him.

I recognized Signora Roccolini as soon as I saw her, but as twenty years had elapsed since our last meeting she did not wonder at my appearing not to know her, and made no efforts to refresh my memory. Her brother was called Montellato, and he it was who tried to assassinate me one night in St. Mark's Square, as I was leaving the Ridotto. The plot that would have cost me my life, if I had not made my escape from the window, was laid in the Roccolini's house.

She welcomed me as a fellow-countryman in a strange land, told me of her struggles, and added that now she had an easy life of it, and associated with the pleasantest ladies in St. Petersburg.

"I am astonished that you have not met the fair Madame Prote at the chief huntsman's, for she is the darling of his heart. Come and take coffee with me to-morrow, and you shall see a wonder."

I kept the appointment, and I found the lady even more beautiful than the Venetian's praises of her had led me to expect. I was dazzled by her beauty, but not being a rich man I felt that I must set my wits to work if I wanted to enjoy her. I asked her name, though I knew it quite well, and she replied, "Prote."

"I am glad to hear it, madam," said I, "for you thereby promise to be mine."

"How so?" said she, with a charming smile. I explained the pun, and made her laugh. I told her amusing stories, and let her know the effect that her beauty had produced on me, and that I hoped time would soften her heart to me. The acquaintance was made, and thenceforth I never went to Narischkin's without calling on her, either before or after dinner.

The Polish ambassador returned about that time, and I had to forego my enjoyment of the fair Anglade, who accepted a very advantageous proposal which was made her by Count Brawn. This charming Frenchwoman died of the small-pox a few months later, and there can be no doubt that her death was a blessing, as she would have fallen into misery and poverty after her beauty had once decayed.

I desired to succeed with Madame Prote, and with that idea I asked her to dinner at Locatelli's with Luini, Colonna, Zinowieff, Signora Vicenza, and a violinist, her lover. We had an excellent dinner washed down with plenty of wine, and the spirits of the company were wound up to the pitch I desired. After the repast each gentleman went apart with his lady, and I was on the point of success when an untoward accident interrupted us. We were summoned to see the proofs of Luini's prowess; he had gone out shooting with his dogs and guns.

As I was walking away from Catherinhoff with Zinowieff I noticed a young country-woman whose beauty astonished me. I pointed her out to the young officer, and we made for her; but she fled away with great activity to a little cottage, where we followed her. We went in and saw the father, mother, and some children, and in a corner the timid form of the fair maiden.

Zinowieff (who, by the way, was for twenty years Russian ambassador at Madrid) had a long conversation in Russian with the father. I did not understand what was said, but I guessed it referred to the girl because, when her father called her, she advanced submissively, and stood modestly before us.

The conversation over, Zinowieff went out, and I followed him after giving the master of the house a rouble. Zinowieff told me what had passed, saying that he had asked the father if he would let him have the daughter as a maid-servant, and the father had replied that it should be so with all his

heart, but that he must have a hundred roubles for her, as she was still a virgin. "So you see," added Zinowieff, "the matter is quite simple."

"How simple?"

"Why, yes; only a hundred roubles."

"And supposing me to be inclined to give that sum?"

"Then she would be your servant, and you could do anything you liked with her, except kill her."

"And supposing she is not willing?"

"That never happens, but if it did you could have beaten her."

"Well, if she is satisfied and I enjoy her, can I still continue to keep her?"

"You will be her master, I tell you, and can have her arrested if she attempts to escape, unless she can return the hundred roubles you gave for her."

"What must I give her per month?"

"Nothing, except enough to eat and drink. You must also let her go to the baths on Saturday and to the church on Sunday."

"Can I make her come with me when I leave St. Petersburg?"

"No, unless you obtain permission and find a surety, for though the girl would be your slave she would still be a slave to the empress."

"Very good; then will you arrange this matter for me? I will give the hundred roubles, and I promise you I will not treat her as a slave. But I hope you will care for my interests, as I do not wish to be duped."

"I promise you you shall not be duped; I will see to everything. Would you like her now?"

"No, to-morrow."

"Very good; then to-morrow it shall be."

We returned to St. Petersburg in a phaeton, and the next day at nine o'clock I called on Zinowieff, who said he was delighted to do me this small service. On the way he said that if I liked he could get me a perfect seraglio of pretty girls in a few days.

"No," said I, "one is enough." And I gave him the hundred roubles.

We arrived at the cottage, where we found the father, mother, and daughter. Zinowieff explained his business crudely enough, after the custom of the country, and the father thanked St. Nicholas for the good luck he had sent him. He spoke to his daughter, who looked at me and softly uttered the necessary yes.

Zinowieff then told me that I ought to ascertain that matters were intact, as I was going to pay for a virgin. I was afraid of offending her, and would have nothing to do with it; but Zinowieff said the girl would be mortified if I did not examine her, and that she would be delighted if I place her in a position to prove before her father and mother that her conduct had always been virtuous. I therefore made the examination as modestly as I could, and I found her to be intact. To tell the truth, I should not have said anything if things had been otherwise.

Zinowieff then gave the hundred roubles to the father, who handed them to his daughter, and she only took them to return them to her mother. My servant and coachman were then called in to witness as arrangement of which they knew nothing.

I called her Zaira, and she got into the carriage and returned with me to St. Petersburg in her coarse clothes, without a chemise of any kind. After I had dropped Zinowieff at his lodging I went home, and for four days I was engaged in collecting and arranging my slave's toilet, not resting till I had dressed her modestly in the French style. In less than three months she had learnt enough Italian to tell me what she wanted and to understand me. She soon loved me, and afterwards she got jealous. But we shall hear more of her in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XX

Crevecoeur—Bomback—Journey to Moscow—My Adventures At St. Petersburg

The day on which I took Zaira I sent Lambert away, for I did not know what to do with him. He got drunk every day, and when in his cups he was unbearable. Nobody would have anything to say to him except as a common soldier, and that is not an enviable position in Russia. I got him a passport for Berlin, and gave him enough money for the journey. I heard afterwards that he entered the Austrian service.

In May, Zaira had become so beautiful that when I went to Moscow I dared not leave her behind me, so I took her in place of a servant. It was delicious to me to hear her chattering in the Venetian dialect I had taught her. On a Saturday I would go with her to the bath where thirty or forty naked men and women were bathing together without the slightest constraint. This absence of shame must arise, I should imagine, from native innocence; but I wondered that none looked at Zaira, who seemed to me the original of the statue of Psyche I had seen at the Villa Borghese at Rome. She was only fourteen, so her breast was not yet developed, and she bore about her few traces of puberty. Her skin was as white as snow, and her ebony tresses covered the whole of her body, save in a few places where the dazzling whiteness of her skin shone through. Her eyebrows were perfectly shaped, and her eyes, though they might have been larger, could not have been more brilliant or more expressive. If it had not been for her furious jealousy and her blind confidence in fortune-telling by cards, which she consulted every day, Zaira would have been a paragon among women, and I should never have left her.

A young and distinguished-looking Frenchman came to St. Petersburg with a young Parisian named La Riviere, who was tolerably pretty but quite devoid of education, unless it were that education common to all the girls who sell their charms in Paris. This young man came to me with a letter from Prince Charles of Courland, who said that if I could do anything for the young couple he would be grateful to me. They arrived just as I was breakfasting with Zaira.

"You must tell me," said I to the young Frenchman, "in what way I can be of use to you."

"By admitting us to your company, and introducing us to your friends."

"Well, I am a stranger here, and I will come and see you, and you can come and see me, and I shall be delighted; but I never dine at home. As to my friends, you must feel that, being a stranger, I could not introduce you and the lady. Is she your wife? People will ask me who you are, and what you are doing at St. Petersburg. What am I to say? I wonder Prince Charles did not send you to someone else."

"I am a gentleman of Lorraine, and Madame la Riviere is my mistress, and my object in coming to St. Petersburg is to amuse myself."

"Then I don't know to whom I could introduce you under the circumstances; but I should think you will be able to find plenty of amusement without knowing anyone. The theatres, the streets, and even the Court entertainments, are open to everyone. I suppose you have plenty of money?"

"That's exactly what I haven't got, and I don't expect any either."

"Well, I have not much more, but you really astonish me. How could you have been so foolish as to come here without money?"

"Well, my mistress said we could do with what money we got from day to day. She induced me to leave Paris without a farthing, and up to now it seems to me that she is right. We have managed to get on somehow."

"Then she has the purse?"

"My purse," said she, "is in the pockets of my friends."

"I understand, and I am sure you have no difficulty in finding the wherewithal to live. If I had such a purse, it should be opened for you, but I am not a rich man."

Bomback, a citizen of Hamburg, whom I had known in England whence he had fled on account of his debts, had come to St. Petersburg and entered the army. He was the son of a rich merchant and kept up a house, a carriage, and an army of servants; he was a lover of good cheer, women, and gambling, and contracted debts everywhere. He was an ugly man, but full of wit and energy. He happened to call on me just as I was addressing the strange traveller whose purse was in the pocket of her friends. I introduced the couple to him, telling the whole story, the item of the purse excepted. The adventure was just to Bomback's taste, and he began making advances to Madame la Riviere, who received them in a thoroughly professional spirit, and I was inwardly amused and felt that her axiom was a true one. Bomback asked them to dine with him the next day, and begged them to come and take an unceremonious dinner the same day with him at Crasnacaback. I was included in the invitation, and Zaira, not understanding French, asked me what we were talking about, and on my telling her expressed a desire to accompany me. I gave in to appease her, for I knew the wish proceeded from jealousy, and that if I did not consent I should be tormented by tears, ill-humour, reproaches, melancholy, etc. This had occurred several times before, and so violent had she been that I had been compelled to conform to the custom of the country and beat her. Strange to say, I could not have taken a better way to prove my love. Such is the character of the Russian women. After the blows had been given, by slow degrees she became affectionate again, and a love encounter sealed the reconciliation.

Bomback left us to make his preparations in high spirits, and while Zaira was dressing, Madame Riviere talked in such a manner as to make me almost think that I was absolutely deficient in knowledge of the world. The astonishing thing was that her lover did not seem in the least ashamed of the part he had to play. He might say that he was in love with the Messalina, but the excuse would not have been admissible.

The party was a merry one. Bomback talked to the adventuress, Zaira sat on my knee, and Crevecoeur ate and drank, laughed in season and out of season, and walked up and down. The crafty Madame Riviere incited Bomback to risk twenty-five roubles at quinze; he lost and paid pleasantly, and only got a kiss for his money. Zaira, who was delighted to be able to watch over me and my fidelity, jested pleasantly on the Frenchwoman and the complaisance of her lover. This was altogether beyond her comprehension, and she could not understand how he could bear such deeds as were done before his face.

The next day I went to Bomback by myself, as I was sure of meeting young Russian officers, who would have annoyed me by making love to Zaira in their own language. I found the two travellers and the brothers Lunin, then lieutenants but now generals. The younger of them was as fair and pretty as any girl. He had been the beloved of the minister Teploff, and, like a lad of wit, he not only was not ashamed but openly boasted that it was his custom to secure the good-will of all men by his caresses.

He had imagined the rich citizen of Hamburg to be of the same tastes as Teploff, and he had not been mistaken; and so he degraded me by forming the same supposition. With this idea he seated himself next to me at table, and behaved himself in such a manner during dinner that I began to believe him to be a girl in man's clothes.

After dinner, as I was sitting at the fire, between him and the Frenchman, I imparted my suspicions to him; but jealous of the superiority of his sex, he displayed proof of it on the spot, and forthwith got hold of me and put himself in a position to make my happiness and his own as he called it. I confess, to my shame, that he might perhaps have succeeded, if Madame la Riviere, indignant at this encroachment of her peculiar province, had not made him desist.

Lunin the elder, Crevecoeur, and Bomback, who had been for a walk, returned at nightfall with two or three friends, and easily consoled the Frenchman for the poor entertainment the younger Lunin and myself had given him.

Bomback held a bank at faro, which only came to an end at eleven, when the money was all gone. We then supped, and the real orgy began, in which la Riviere bore the brunt in a manner that was simply astonishing. I and my friend Lunin were merely spectators, and poor Crevecoeur had gone to bed. We did not separate till day-break.

I got home, and, fortunately for myself, escaped the bottle which Zaira flung at my head, and which would infallibly have killed me if it had hit me. She threw herself on to the ground, and began to strike it with her forehead. I thought she had gone mad, and wondered whether I had better call for assistance; but she became quiet enough to call me assassin and traitor, with all the other abusive epithets that she could remember. To convict me of my crime she shewed me twenty-five cards, placed in order, and on them she displayed the various enormities of which I had been guilty.

I let her go on till her rage was somewhat exhausted, and then, having thrown her divining apparatus into the fire, I looked at her in pity and anger, and said that we must part the next day, as she had narrowly escaped killing me. I confessed that I had been with Bomback, and that there had been a girl in the house; but I denied all the other sins of which she accused me. I then went to sleep without taking the slightest notice of her, in spite of all she said and did to prove her repentance.

I woke after a few hours to find her sleeping soundly, and I began to consider how I could best rid myself of the girl, who would probably kill me if we continued living together. Whilst I was absorbed in these thoughts she awoke, and falling at my feet wept and professed her utter repentance, and promised never to touch another card as long as I kept her.

At last I could resist her entreaties no longer, so I took her in my arms and forgave her; and we did not part till she had received undeniable proofs of the return of my affection. I intended to start for Moscow in three days, and she was delighted when she heard she was to go.

Three circumstances had won me this young girl's furious affection. In the first place I often took her to see her family, with whom I always left a rouble; in the second I made her eat with me; and in the third I had beaten her three or four times when she had tried to prevent me going out.

In Russia beating is a matter of necessity, for words have no force whatever. A servant, mistress, or courtesan understands nothing but the lash. Words are altogether thrown away, but a few good strokes are entirely efficacious. The servant, whose soul is still more enslaved than his body, reasons somewhat as follows, after he has had a beating:

"My master has not sent me away, but beaten me; therefore he loves me, and I ought to be attached to him."

It is the same with the Russian soldier, and in fact with everybody. Honour stands for nothing, but with the knout and brandy one can get anything from them except heroical enthusiasm.

Papanelopulo laughed at me when I said that as I liked my Cossack I should endeavour to correct him with words only when he took too much brandy.

"If you do not beat him," he said, "he will end by beating you;" and he spoke the truth.

One day, when he was so drunk as to be unable to attend on me, I began to scold him, and threatened him with the stick if he did not mend his ways. As soon as he saw my cane lifted, he ran at me and got hold of it; and if I had not knocked him down immediately, he would doubtless have beaten me. I dismissed him on the spot. There is not a better servant in the world than a Russian. He works without ceasing, sleeps in front of the door of his master's bedroom to be always ready to fulfil his orders, never answering his reproaches, incapable of theft. But after drinking a little too much brandy he becomes a perfect monster; and drunkenness is the vice of the whole nation.

A coachman knows no other way of resisting the bitter cold to which he is exposed, than by drinking rye brandy. It sometimes happens that he drinks till he falls asleep, and then there is no awaking for him in this world. Unless one is very careful, it is easy to lose an ear, the nose, a cheek, or a lip by frost bites. One day as I was walking out on a bitterly cold day, a Russian noticed that one of my ears was frozen. He ran up to me and rubbed the affected part with a handful of snow till the circulation was restored. I asked him how he had noticed my state, and he said he had remarked

the livid whiteness of my ear, and this, he said, was always a sign that the frost had taken it. What surprised me most of all is that sometimes the part grows again after it has dropped off. Prince Charles of Courland assured me that he had cost his nose in Siberia, and that it had grown again the next summer. I have been assured of the truth of this by several Russians.

About this time the empress made the architect Rinaldi, who had been fifty years in St. Petersburg, build her an enormous wooden amphitheatre so large as to cover the whole of the space in front of the palace. It would contain a hundred thousand spectators, and in it Catherine intended to give a vast tournament to all the knights of her empire. There were to be four parties of a hundred knights each, and all the cavaliers were to be clad in the national costume of the nations they represented. All the Russians were informed of this great festival, which was to be given at the expense of the sovereign, and the princes, counts, and barons were already arriving with their chargers from the most remote parts of the empire. Prince Charles of Courland wrote informing me of his intention to be present.

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