

GIACOMO CASANOVA

THE MEMOIRS OF
JACQUES CASANOVA DE
SEINGALT, 1725-1798.
VOLUME 23: ENGLISH

Giacomo Casanova
The Memoirs of Jacques
Casanova de Seingalt,
1725-1798. Volume 23: English

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CHAPTER X

Eccentricity of the English—Castelbajac Count
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Club—The Charpillon

I passed a night which seemed like a never-ending nightmare, and I got up sad and savage, feeling as if I could kill a man on the smallest provocation. It seemed as if the house, which I had hitherto thought so beautiful, was like a millstone about my neck. I went out in my travelling clothes, and walked into a coffee-house, where I saw a score of people reading the papers.

I sat down, and, not understanding English, passed my time in gazing at the goers and comers. I had been there some time when my attention was attracted by the voice of a man speaking as follows in French:

"Tommy has committed suicide, and he was wise, for he was in such a state that he could only expect unhappiness for the rest of his life."

"You are quite mistaken," said the other, with the greatest composure. "I was one of his creditors myself, and on making an inventory of his effects I feel satisfied that he has done a very foolish and a very childish thing; he might have lived on comfortably, and not killed himself for fully six months."

At any other time this calculation would have made me laugh, and, as it was, I felt as if the incident had done me good.

I left the coffee-house without having said a word or spent a penny, and I went towards the Exchange to get some money. Bosanquet gave me what I wanted directly, and as I walked out with him I noticed a curious-looking individual, whose name I asked.

"He's worth a hundred thousand," said the banker.

"And who is that other man over there?"

"He's not worth a ten-pound note."

"But I don't want to hear what they are worth; it's their names I want."

"I really don't know."

"How can you tell how much they are worth, not knowing their names?"

"Names don't go for anything here. What we want to know about a man is how much he has got? Besides; what's in a name? Ask me for a thousand pounds and give me a proper receipt, and

you can do it under the name of Socrates or Attila, for all I care. You will pay me back my money as Socrates or Attila, and not as Seingalt; that is all."

"But how about signing bills of exchange?"

"That's another thing; I must use the name which the drawer gives me."

"I don't understand that."

"Well, you see, you are not English, nor are you a business man."

On leaving him I walked towards the park, but wishing to change a twenty-pound note before going in I went to a fat merchant, an epicure whose acquaintance I had made at the tavern, and put down the note on his counter, begging him to cash it for me.

"Come again in an hour," said he, "I have no money by me just now."

"Very good; I will call again when I come from the park."

"Take back your note; you shall give it to me when I hand you the money."

"Never mind; keep it. I don't doubt your honesty."

"Don't be so foolish. If you left me the note I should certainly decline to hand over the money, if only for the sake of giving you a lesson."

"I don't believe you are capable of such dishonesty."

"Nor am I, but when it comes to such a simple thing as putting a bank note in your pocket, the most honest man in the world

would never dream of having such a thing in his possession without having paid the money for it, and the least slip of memory might lead to a dispute in which you would infallibly come off second best."

"I feel the force of your arguments, especially in a town where so much business is carried on."

When I got into the park I met Martinelli and thanked him for sending me a copy of the Decameron, while he congratulated me on my re-appearance in society, and on the young lady of whom I had been the happy possessor and no doubt the slave.

"My Lord Pembroke has seen her," said he, "and thought her charming."

"What? Where could he have seen her?"

"In a carriage with you driving fast along the Rochester road. It is three or four days ago."

"Then I may tell you that I was taking her to Calais; I shall never see her face again."

"Will you let the room again in the same way?"

"No, never again, though the god of love has been propitious to me. I shall be glad to see you at my house whenever you like to come."

"Shall I send you a note to warn you?"

"Not at all."

We walked on talking about literature, manners, and so forth, in an aimless way. All at once, as we approached Buckingham House, I saw five or six persons, relieving nature amidst the

bushes, with their hinder parts facing the passers-by. I thought this a disgusting piece of indecency, and said as much to Martinelli, adding that the impudent rascals might at least turn their faces towards the path.

"Not at all," he exclaimed, "for then they might be recognized, whereas in exposing their posteriors they run no such risk; besides the sight makes squeamish persons turn away."

"You are right, but you will confess that the whole thing strikes a stranger as very revolting."

"Yes, there is nothing so ineradicable as national prejudice. You may have noticed that when an Englishman wants to ease his sluices in the street, he doesn't run up an alley or turn to the wall like we do."

"Yes, I have noticed them turning towards the middle of the street, but if they thus escape the notice of the people in the shops and on the pavement they are seen by everybody who is driving in a carriage, and that is as bad."

"The people in the carriages need not look."

"That is true."

We walked on to the Green Park, and met Lord Pembroke on horseback. He stopped and burst into exclamations on seeing me. As I guessed the cause of his surprise, I hastened to tell him that I was a free man once more, to my sorrow, and felt lonely amidst my splendour.

"I feel rather curious about it, and perhaps I may come and keep you company to-day."

We parted, and reckoning on seeing him at dinner I, went back to tell my cook that dinner was to be served in the large room. Martinelli had an engagement and could not come to dinner, but he led me out of the park by a door with which I was not acquainted, and sent me on my way.

As we were going along we saw a crowd of people who seemed to be staring at something. Martinelli went up to the crowd, and then returned to me, saying,—

"That's a curious sight for you; you can enter it amidst your remarks on English manners."

"What is it?"

"A man at the point of death from a blow he has received in boxing with another sturdy fellow."

"Cannot anything be done?"

"There is a surgeon there who would bleed him, if he were allowed."

"Who could prevent him?"

"That's the curious part of it. Two men have betted on his death or recovery. One says, 'I'll bet twenty guineas he dies,' and the other says, 'Done.' Number one will not allow the surgeon to bleed him, for if the man recovered his twenty guineas would be gone."

"Poor man! what pitiless betters!"

"The English are very strange in their betting proclivities; they bet about everything. There is a Betting Club to which I will introduce you, if you like."

"Do they speak French there?"

"Most certainly, for it is composed of men of wit and mark."

"What do they do?"

"They talk and argue, and if one man brings forward a proposition which another denies, and one backs his opinion, the other has to bet too, on pain of a fine which goes to the common fund."

"Introduce me to this delightful club, by all means; it will make my fortune, for I shall always take care to be on the right side."

"You had better be careful; they are wary birds."

"But to return to the dying man; what will be done to his antagonist?"

"His hand will be examined, and if it is found to be just the same as yours or mine it will be marked, and he will be let go."

"I don't understand that, so kindly explain. How do they recognize a dangerous hand?"

"If it is found to be marked already, it is a proof that he has killed his man before and has been marked for it, with the warning, 'Take care not to kill anyone else, for if you do you will be hanged.'"

"But supposing such a man is attacked?"

"He ought to shew his hand, and then his adversary would let him alone."

"But if not?"

"Then he is defending himself; and if he kills his man he is acquitted, provided he can bring witnesses to swear that he was

obliged to fight."

"Since fighting with the fist may cause death, I wonder it is allowed."

"It is only allowed for a wager. If the combatants do not put one or more pieces of money on the ground before the fight, and there is a death, the man is hanged."

"What laws! What manners!"

In such ways I learnt much concerning the manner and customs of this proud nation, at once so great and so little.

The noble lord came to dinner, and I treated him in a manner to make him wish to come again. Although there were only the two of us, the meal lasted a long time, as I was anxious for additional information on what I had heard in the morning, especially on the Betting Club. The worthy Pembroke advised me not to have anything to do with it, unless I made up my mind to keep perfect silence for four or five weeks.

"But supposing they ask me a question?"

"Evade it."

"Certainly, if I am not in a position to give my opinion; but if I have an opinion, the powers of Satan could not shut my mouth."

"All the worse for you."

"Are the members knaves?"

"Certainly not. They are noblemen, philosophers, and epicures; but they are pitiless where a bet is concerned."

"Is the club treasury rich?"

"Far from it; they are all ashamed to pay a fine, and prefer to

bet. Who will introduce you?"

"Martinelli."

"Quite so; through Lord Spencer, who is a member. I would not become one."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like argument."

"My taste runs the other way, so I shall try to get in."

"By the way, M. de Seingalt, do you know that you are a very extraordinary man?"

"For what reason, my lord?"

"You shut yourself up for a whole month with a woman who spent fourteen months in London without anybody making her acquaintance or even discovering her nationality. All the amateurs have taken a lively interest in the affair."

"How did you find out that she spent fourteen months in London?"

"Because several persons saw her in the house of a worthy widow where she spent the first month. She would never have anything to say to any advances, but the bill in your window worked wonders."

"Yes, and all the worse for me, for I feel as if I could never love another woman."

"Oh, that's childish indeed! You will love another woman in a week-nay, perhaps to-morrow, if you will come and dine with me at my country house. A perfect French beauty has asked me to dine with her. I have told some of my friends who are fond

of gaming."

"Does the charming Frenchwoman like gaming?"

"No, but her husband does."

"What's his name?"

"He calls himself Count de Castelbajac."

"Ah! Castelbajac?"

"Yes."

"He is a Gascon?"

"Yes."

"Tall, thin, and dark, and marked with the smallpox?"

"Exactly! I am delighted to find you know him. You will agree with me that his wife is very pretty?"

"I really can't say. I knew Castelbajac, as he calls himself, six years ago, and I never heard he was married. I shall be delighted to join you, however. I must warn you not to say anything if he seems not to know me; he may possibly have good reasons for acting in that manner. Before long I will tell you a story which does not represent him in a very advantageous manner. I did not know he played. I shall take care to be on my guard at the Betting Club, and I advise you, my lord, to be on your guard in the society of Castelbajac."

"I will not forget the warning."

When Pembroke had left me I went to see Madame Cornelis, who had written a week before to tell me my daughter was ill, and explained that she had been turned from my doors on two occasions though she felt certain I was in. To this I replied that

I was in love, and so happy within my own house that I had excluded all strangers, and with that she had to be contented, but the state in which I found little Sophie frightened me. She was lying in bed with high fever, she had grown much thinner, and her eyes seemed to say that she was dying of grief. Her mother was in despair, for she was passionately fond of the child, and I thought she would have torn my eyes out when I told her that if Sophie died she would only have herself to reproach. Sophie, who was very good-hearted, cried out, "No, no! papa dear;" and quieted her mother by her caresses.

Nevertheless, I took the mother aside, and told her that the disease was solely caused by Sophie's dread of her severity.

"In spite of your affection," said I, "you treat her with insufferable tyranny. Send her to a boarding-school for a couple of years, and let her associate with girls of good family. Tell her this evening that she is to go to school, and see if she does not get better."

"Yes," said she, "but a good boarding-school costs a hundred guineas a year, including masters."

"If I approve of the school you select I will pay a year in advance."

On my making this offer the woman, who seemed to be living so luxuriously, but was in reality poverty-stricken, embraced me with the utmost gratitude.

"Come and tell the news to your daughter now," said she, "I should like to watch her face when she hears it."

"Certainly."

"My dear Sophie," I said, "your mother agrees with me that if you had a change of air you would get better, and if you would like to spend a year or two in a good school I will pay the first year in advance."

"Of course, I will obey my dear mother," said Sophie.

"There is no question of obedience. Would you like to go to school? Tell me truly."

"But would my mother like me to go?"

"Yes, my child, if it would please you."

"Then, mamma, I should like to go very much."

Her face flushed as she spoke, and I knew that my diagnosis had been correct. I left her saying I should hope to hear from her soon.

At ten o'clock the next day Jarbe came to ask if I had forgotten my engagement.

"No," said I, "but it is only ten o'clock."

"Yes, but we have twenty miles to go."

"Twenty miles?"

"Certainly, the house is at St. Albans."

"It's very strange Pembroke never told me; how did you find out the address?"

"He left it when he went away:"

"Just like an Englishman."

I took a post-chaise, and in three hours I had reached my destination. The English roads are excellent, and the country

offers a smiling prospect on every side. The vine is lacking, for though the English soil is fertile it will not bear grapes.

Lord Pembroke's house was not a particularly large one, but twenty masters and their servants could easily be accommodated in it.

The lady had not yet arrived, so my lord shewed me his gardens, his fountains, and his magnificent hot-houses; also a cock chained by the leg, and of a truly ferocious aspect.

"What have we here, my lord?"

"A cock."

"I see it is, but why do you chain it?"

"Because it is savage. It is very amorous, and if it were loose it would go after the hens, and kill all the cocks on the country-side."

"But why do you condemn him to celibacy?"

"To make him fiercer. Here, this is the list of his conquests."

He gave me a list of his cock's victories, in which he had killed the other bird; this had happened more than thirty times. He then shewed me the steel spurs, at the sight of which the cock began to ruffle and crow. I could not help laughing to see such a martial spirit in so small an animal. He seemed possessed by the demon of strife, and lifted now one foot and now the other, as if to beg that his arms might be put on.

Pembroke then exhibited the helmet, also of steel.

"But with such arms," said I, "he is sure of conquest."

"No; for when he is armed cap-a-pie he will not fight with a

defenceless cock."

"I can't believe it, my lord."

"It's a well-known fact. Here, read this."

He then gave me a piece of paper with this remarkable biped's pedigree. He could prove his thirty-two quarters more easily than a good many noblemen, on the father's side, be it understood, for if he could have proved pure blood on the mother's side as well, Lord Pembroke would have decorated him with the Order of the Golden Fleece at least.

"The bird cost me a hundred guineas," said he, "but I would not sell him for a thousand."

"Has he any offspring?"

"He tries his best, but there are difficulties."

I do not remember whether Lord Pembroke explained what these difficulties were. Certainly the English offer more peculiarities to the attentive observer than any other nation.

At last a carriage containing a lady and two gentlemen drove up to the door. One of the gentlemen was the rascally Castelbajac and the other was introduced as Count Schwerin, nephew of the famous marshal of that name who fell on what is commonly called the field of glory. General Bekw— an Englishman who was in the service of the King of Prussia, and was one of Pembroke's guests, received Schwerin politely, saying that he had seen his uncle die; at this the modest nephew drew the Order of the Black Eagle from his breast, and shewed it to us all covered with blood.

"My uncle wore it on the day of his death, and the King

of Prussia allowed me to keep it as a noble memorial of my kinsman."

"Yes," said an Englishman who was present, "but the coat-pocket is not the place for a thing like that."

Schwerin made as if he did not understand, and this enabled me to take his measure.

Lord Pembroke took possession of the lady, whom I did not think worthy of being compared to Pauline. She was paler and shorter, and utterly deficient in Pauline's noble air; besides, when she smiled it spoiled her face, and this is a defect in a woman, to whom laughter should always be becoming.

Lord Pembroke introduced us all to each other, and when he came to me Castelbajac said he was delighted to see me again, although he might easily have pretended not to know me under my name of Seingalt.

We had a good English dinner, and afterwards the lady proposed a game of faro. My lord never played, so the general consented to amuse the company by holding the bank, and placed a hundred guineas and several bank notes on the table. There might be a thousand guineas in all. He then gave twenty counters to each punter, saying that every counter was worth ten shillings. As I only staked gold against gold I would not accept them. By the third deal Schwerin had lost his twenty counters and asked for twenty more; but the banker told him he must pay for them, and the self-styled field-marshal's nephew lapsed into silence and played no more.

At the following deal Castelbajac was in the same position as his friend, and being on my side he begged to be allowed to take ten pieces.

"You will bring me ill-luck," I said, coldly, warding off his hand; and he went out to the garden, no doubt to swallow the affront he had received. The lady said her husband had forgotten his pocketbook. An hour afterwards the game came to an end, and I took my leave, after inviting Lord Pembroke and the rest of the company to dine with me the next day.

I got home at eleven o'clock without meeting any highwaymen as I had expected, indeed I had put up six guineas in a small purse for their special use and benefit. I woke up my cook to tell him that the next day I should have twelve people to dinner, and that I hoped he would do me honour. I found a letter from Madame Cornelis on my table telling me that she and her daughter would drive with me on the following Sunday, and that we could go and see the boarding-school she had selected.

Next day Lord Pembroke and the fair Frenchwoman were the first to arrive. They drove in a carriage with two rather uncomfortable seats, but this discomfort is favourable to love. The Gascon and the Prussian were the last to come.

We sat down to table at two and left it at four, all of us well pleased with the cook, and still more so with the wine merchant; for though we had emptied forty bottles of wine, not one of us was at all intoxicated.

After coffee had been served the general invited us all to sup

with him, and Madame Castelbajac begged me to hold a bank. I did not wait to be pressed but placed a thousand guineas on the table, and as I had no counters of any kind I warned the company that I would only play gold against gold, and that I should stop playing whenever I thought fit.

Before the game began the two counts paid their losses of the day before to the general in bank notes, which he begged me to change. I also changed two other notes presented to me by the same gentleman, and put them all under my snuff-box. Play began. I had no croupier, so I was obliged to deal slowly and keep an eye on the two counts, whose method of play was very questionable. At last both of them were dried up, and Castelbajac gave me a bill of exchange for two hundred guineas, begging me to discount it for him.

"I know nothing about business," I replied.

An Englishman took the bill, and after a careful examination said he neither knew the drawer, the accepter, nor the backer.

"I am the backer," said Castelbajac, "and that ought to be enough, I think."

Everybody laughed, besides myself, and I gave it him back courteously, saying politely that he could get it discounted on 'Change the next day. He got up in a bad temper, and left the room, murmuring some insolent expressions. Schwering followed him.

After these two worthy gentlemen had left us, I went on dealing till the night was far advanced, and then left off, though

I was at a loss. However, the general had a run of luck, and I thought it best to stop. Before leaving he took me and Lord Pembroke aside, and begged me to contrive that the two knaves should not come to his house the following day. "For," said he, "if that Gascon were to be half as insolent to me as he was to you, I should shew him out by the window."

Pembroke said he would tell the lady of the general's wishes.

"Do you think," said I, "that those four notes of theirs can be forgeries?"

"It's very possible."

"What would you advise my doing to clear the matter up?"

"I would send them to the bank."

"And if they should be forgeries?"

"I would have patience, or I would arrest the rascals."

The next day I went to the bank myself, and the person to whom I gave the notes gave me them back, saying, coldly,—

"These notes are bad, sir."

"Be kind enough to examine them closely."

"It's no good, they are evident forgeries. Return them to the person from whom you got them, and he will be only too glad to cash them."

I was perfectly aware that I could put the two knaves under lock and key, but I did not want to do so. I went to Lord Pembroke to find out their address, but he was still in bed, and one of his servants took me to them. They were surprised to see me. I told them coolly enough that the four notes were forged, and that I

should feel much obliged if they would give me forty guineas and take their notes back.

"I haven't got any money," said Castelbajac, "and what you say astonishes me very much. I can only return them to the persons who gave them to me, if they are really the same notes that we gave you yesterday."

At this suggestion the blood rushed to my face, and with a withering glance and an indignant apostrophe I left them. Lord Pembroke's servant took me to a magistrate who, having heard my statement on oath, gave me a paper authorizing me to arrest two counts. I gave the document to an alderman, who said he would see it was carried out, and I went home ill pleased with the whole business.

Martinelli was waiting for me; he had come to ask me to give him a dinner. I told him my story, without adding that the knaves were to be arrested, and his advice delivered with philosophic calm was to make an auto-da-fe of the four notes. It was very good advice, but I did not take it.

The worthy Martinelli, thinking to oblige me, told me that he had arranged with Lord Spencer the day on which I was to be introduced to the club, but I answered that my fancy for going there was over. I ought to have treated this learned and distinguished man with more politeness, but who can sound human weakness to its depths? One often goes to a wise man for advice which one has not the courage to follow.

In the evening I went to the general's, and found the self-styled

Countess Castelbajac seated on Lord Pembroke's knees. The supper was a good one, and passed off pleasantly; the two rascals were not there, and their absence was not remarked. When we left the table we went into another room, and played till day-break. I left the board with a loss of two or three hundred guineas.

I did not wake till late the next morning, and when I did my man told me that a person wanted to speak to me. I had him shewn in, and as he only spoke English the negro had to be our interpreter. He was the chief of the police, and told me that if I would pay for the journey he would arrest Castelbajac at Dover, for which town he had started at noon. As to the other he was sure of having him in the course of the night. I gave him a guinea, and told him it would be enough to catch the one, and that the other could go where he liked.

The next day was Sunday, the only day on which Madame Cornelis could go abroad without fear of the bailiff. She came to dine with me, and brought her daughter, whom the prospect of leaving her mother had quite cured. The school which Madame Cornelis had chosen was at Harwich, and we went there after dinner.

The head-mistress was a Catholic, and though she must have been sixty, she looked keen, witty, and as if she knew the ways of the world. She had received an introduction from Lady Harrington, and so welcomed the young lady in the most cordial manner. She had about fifteen young boarders of thirteen or fourteen years of age. When she presented Sophie to them as a

new companion, they crowded round her and covered her with caresses. Five or six were perfect angels of beauty, and two or three were hideously ugly; and such extremes are more common in England than anywhere else. My daughter was the smallest of them all, but as far as beauty went she had nothing to fear by comparison, and her talents placed her on a par with the eldest, while she responded to their caresses with that ease which later in life is only acquired with great difficulty.

We went over the house, and all the girls followed us, and those who could speak French or Italian spoke to me, saying how much they would love my daughter, while those who could not speak sufficiently well held off as if ashamed of their ignorance. We saw the bedrooms, the dining-room, the drawing-room, the harps and the pianos—in fact, everything, and I decided that Sophie could not be better placid. We went into the head-mistress's private room, and Madame Cornelis paid her a hundred guineas in advance, and obtained a receipt. We then agreed that Sophie should be received as a boarder as soon as she liked to come, that she was to bring her bed with her, and all the necessary linen. Madame Cornelis made the final arrangements on the ensuing Sunday.

Next day the alderman told me that Count Schwerin was a prisoner, and wanted to speak to me. I declined at first, but as the alderman's messenger told me, through Jarbe, that the poor devil had not a farthing in his pocket, I was moved with compassion. As he was charged with uttering forged notes he had been taken

to Newgate, and was in danger of being hanged.

I followed the magistrate's messenger, and cannot say how the woeful aspect, the tears and supplications for mercy of the poor wretch, moved my heart. He swore that Castelbajac had given him the notes, but he added that he knew where they came from originally, and would tell me if I would release him.

A little bitterness still remained in my breast, so I told him that if he knew who forged the notes he could certainly escape the gallows, but that I should keep him prisoner till I got my money back. At this threat his tears and supplications began over again and with renewed force, and telling me that he was in utter poverty he emptied his pockets one after the other to shew me that he had no money, and at last offered me the bloodstained badge of his uncle. I was delighted to be able to relieve him without any appearance of weakness, and accepted the bauble as a pledge, telling him that he should have it back on payment of forty pounds.

I wrote out a formal release, and in his presence and in that of the alderman I burnt the four notes and set him free.

Two days afterwards the so-called countess came to my house, saying that now Castelbajac and Schewirin were gone, she knew not where to lay her head. She complained bitterly of Lord Pembroke, who deserted her after making her give him the clearest proofs of her affection. By way of consolation I told her that it would be very foolish of him to have abandoned her before instead of after.

To get rid of her I was obliged to give her the money to pay her journey to Calais. She told me she did not want to rejoin the Gascon, who was not really her husband. We shall hear more of these persons in the course of three years.

Two or three days later an Italian called on me, and gave me a letter from my friend Baletti, which recommended the bearer, Constantini, a native of Vicenza, to my good offices. He had come to London on a matter of importance in which I could help him.

I assured M. Constantini that I was only too happy to do anything to justify the confidence placed in me by one of my best friends, and he said that the long journey had almost exhausted his purse; but he added,—

"I know that my wife lives here, and that she is rich. I shall easily find out where she lives, and you know that as I am her husband all that is hers is mine."

"I was not aware of that."

"Then you don't know the laws of this country?"

"Not at all."

"I am sorry to hear it, but such is the case. I am going to her house, and I shall turn her out of doors with nothing else than the dress on her back, for the furniture, clothes, jewels, linen—in fact, all her possessions, belong to me. May I ask you to be with me when I perform this exploit?"

I was astonished. I asked him if he had told Baletti what he intended to do.

"You are the first person to whom I have disclosed my intentions."

I could not treat him as a madman, for he did not look like one, and, concluding that there really might be the law he had alleged, I replied that I did not feel inclined to join him in his enterprise, of which I disapproved very strongly, unless his wife had actually robbed him of what she possessed.

"She has only robbed me of my honour, sir, and she left me, taking her talents with her. She must have made a great fortune here, and have I not a right to take it from her, were it only for vengeance sake?"

"That may be, but I ask you what you would think of me if I agreed to join you in an undertaking which seems a cruel one to me, however good your reasons may be. Besides I may know your wife, she may even be a friend of mine."

"I will tell you her name."

"No, I beg of you not to do so, although I do not know any Madame Constantini."

"She has changed her name to Calori, and she sings at the 'Haymarket.'"

"I know who she is now. I am sorry you have told me."

"I have no doubt you will keep my secret, and I am now going to find out where she lives; for that is the principal thing."

He left me weeping, and I pitied him, but at the same time I was sorry that he had made me the depository of his secret. A few hours after I called on Madame Binetti, and she told me

the histories of all the artistes in London. When she came to the Calori she told me that she had had several lovers out of whom she had made a great deal, but at present she had no lover, unless it were the violinist Giardini, with whom she was in love in earnest.

"Where does she come from?"

"From Vicenza."

"Is she married?"

"I don't think so."

I thought no more of this wretched business, but three or four days later I had a letter from King's Bench Prison. It was from Constantini. The poor wretch said I was the only friend he had in London, and that he hoped I would come and see him, were it only to give him some advice.

I thought it my duty to accede to his request, and I went to the prison, where I found the poor man in a wretched state, with an old English attorney, who spoke a little bad Italian, and was known to me.

Constantini had been arrested the day before on account of several bills drawn by his wife which had not been taken up. By these bills she appeared in debt to the amount of a thousand guineas. The attorney had got the five bills, and he was trying to make some arrangements with the husband.

I saw at once that the whole thing was a scandalous swindle, for Madame Binetti had told me that the Calori was very rich. I begged the attorney to leave me alone with the prisoner, as I

wanted to have some private conversation with him.

"They have arrested me for my wife's debts," said he, "and they tell me I must pay them because I am her husband."

"It's a trick your wife has played on you; she must have found out you were in London."

"She saw me through the window."

"Why did you delay putting your project into execution?"

"I meant to carry it out this morning, but how was I to know that she had debts?"

"Nor has she any debts; these bills are shams. They must have been ante-dated, for they were really executed yesterday. It's a bad business, and she may have to pay dearly for it."

"But in the meanwhile I am in prison."

"Never mind, trust to me, I will see you again tomorrow."

This scurvy trick had made me angry, and I made up my mind to take up the poor man's cause. I went to Bosanquet, who told me that the device was a very common one in London, but that people had found out the way to defeat it. Finally, he said that if the prisoner interested me he would put the case into the hands of a barrister who would extricate him from his difficulty, and make the wife and the lover, who had probably helped her, repent of their day's work. I begged him to act as if my interests were at stake, and promised to guarantee all expenses.

"That's enough," said he; "don't trouble yourself any more about it."

Some days after Mr. Bosanquet came to tell me that

Constantini had left the prison and England as well, according to what the barrister who had charge of the case told him.

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. The lover of his wife, foreseeing the storm that was about to burst over their heads, got round the fellow, and made him leave the country by means of a sum more or less large."

The affair was over, but it was soon in all the newspapers, garnished with all the wit imaginable, and Giardini was warmly praised for the action he had taken.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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