

Chapter 17: Safe Arrival In England

It was talking one night with a certain prince, one of the banished ministers of state belonging to the Czar, that the discourse of my particular case began. He had been telling me abundance of fine things of the greatness, the magnificence, the dominions, and the absolute power of the Emperor of the Russians: I interrupted him, and told him I was a greater and more powerful prince than ever the Czar was, though my dominion were not so large, or my people so many. The Russian grandee looked a little surprised, and, fixing his eyes steadily upon me, began to wonder what I meant. I said his wonder would cease when I had explained myself, and told him the story at large of my living in the island; and then how I managed both myself and the people that were under me, just as I have since minuted it down. They were exceedingly taken with the story, and especially the prince, who told me, with a sigh, that the true greatness of life was to be masters of ourselves; that he would not have exchanged such a state of life as mine to be Czar of Muscovy; and that he found more felicity in the retirement he seemed to be banished to there, than ever he found in the highest authority he enjoyed in the court of his master the Czar; that the height of human wisdom was to bring our tempers down to our circumstances, and to make a calm within, under the weight of the greatest storms without. When he came first hither, he said, he used to tear the hair from his head, and the clothes from his back, as others had done before him; but a little time and consideration had made him look into himself, as well as round him to things without; that he

found the mind of man, if it was but once brought to reflect upon the state of universal life, and how little this world was concerned in its true felicity, was perfectly capable of making a felicity for itself, fully satisfying to itself, and suitable to its own best ends and desires, with but very little assistance from the world. That being now deprived of all the fancied felicity which he enjoyed in the full exercise of worldly pleasures, he said he was at leisure to look upon the dark side of them, where he found all manner of deformity; and was now convinced that virtue only makes a man truly wise, rich, and great, and preserves him in the way to a superior happiness in a future state; and in this, he said, they were more happy in their banishment than all their enemies were, who had the full possession of all the wealth and power they had left behind them.

Nor, sir," says he, "do I bring my mind to this politically, from the necessity of my circumstances, which some call miserable; but, if I know anything of myself, I would not now go back, though the Czar my master should call me, and reinstate me in all my former grandeur."

He spoke this with so much warmth in his temper, so much earnestness and motion of his spirits, that it was evident it was the true sense of his soul; there was no room to doubt his sincerity. I told him I once thought myself a kind of monarch in my old station, of which I had given him an account; but that I thought he was not only a monarch, but a great conqueror; for he that had got a victory over his own exorbitant desires, and

the absolute dominion over himself, he whose reason entirely governs his will, is certainly greater than he that conquers a city.

I had been here eight months, and a dark, dreadful winter I thought it; the cold so intense that I could not so much as look abroad without being wrapped in furs, and a kind of mask of fur before my face, with only a hole for breath, and two for sight: the little daylight we had was for three months not above five hours a day, and six at most; only that the snow lying on the ground continually, and the weather being clear, it was never quite dark. Our horses were kept, or rather starved, underground; and as for our servants, whom we hired here to look after ourselves and horses, we had, every now and then, their fingers and toes to thaw and take care of, lest they should mortify and fall off.

It is true, within doors we were warm, the houses being close, the walls thick, the windows small, and the glass all double. Our food was chiefly the flesh of deer, dried and cured in the season; bread good enough, but baked as biscuits; dried fish of several sorts, and some flesh of mutton, and of buffaloes, which is pretty good meat. All the stores of provisions for the winter are laid up in the summer, and well cured: our drink was water, mixed with aqua vitae instead of brandy; and for a treat, mead instead of wine, which, however, they have very good. The hunters, who venture abroad all weathers, frequently brought us in fine venison, and sometimes bear's flesh, but we did not much care for the last. We had a good stock of

tea, with which we treated our friends, and we lived cheerfully and well, all things considered.

It was now March, the days grown considerably longer, and the weather at least tolerable; so the other travellers began to prepare sledges to carry them over the snow, and to get things ready to be going; but my measures being fixed, as I have said, for Archangel, and not for Muscovy or the Baltic, I made no motion; knowing very well that the ships from the south do not set out for that part of the world till May or June, and that if I was there by the beginning of August, it would be as soon as any ships would be ready to sail. Therefore I made no haste to be gone, as others did: in a word, I saw a great many people, nay, all the travellers, go away before me. It seems every year they go from thence to Muscovy, for trade, to carry furs, and buy necessaries, which they bring back with them to furnish their shops: also others went on the same errand to Archangel.

In the month of May I began to make all ready to pack up; and, as I was doing this, it occurred to me that, seeing all these people were banished by the Czar to Siberia, and yet, when they came there, were left at liberty to go whither they would, why they did not then go away to any part of the world, wherever they thought fit: and I began to examine what should hinder them from making such an attempt. But my wonder was over when I entered upon that subject with the person I have mentioned, who answered me thus: "Consider, first, sir," said he, "the place where we are; and, secondly,

the condition we are in; especially the generality of the people who are banished thither. We are surrounded with stronger things than bars or bolts; on the north side, an unnavigable ocean, where ship never sailed, and boat never swam; every other way we have above a thousand miles to pass through the Czar's own dominion, and by ways utterly impassable, except by the roads made by the government, and through the towns garrisoned by his troops; in short, we could neither pass undiscovered by the road, nor subsist any other way, so that it is in vain to attempt it."

I was silenced at once, and found that they were in a prison every jot as secure as if they had been locked up in the castle at Moscow: however, it came into my thoughts that I might certainly be made an instrument to procure the escape of this excellent person; and that, whatever hazard I ran, I would certainly try if I could carry him off. Upon this, I took an occasion one evening to tell him my thoughts. I represented to him that it was very easy for me to carry him away, there being no guard over him in the country; and as I was not going to Moscow, but to Archangel, and that I went in the retinue of a caravan, by which I was not obliged to lie in the stationary towns in the desert, but could encamp every night where I would, we might easily pass uninterrupted to Archangel, where I would immediately secure him on board an English ship, and carry him safe along with me; and as to his subsistence and other particulars, it should be my care till he could better supply himself.

He heard me very attentively, and looked earnestly on me all the while I spoke; nay, I could see in his very face that what I said put his spirits into an exceeding ferment; his colour frequently changed, his eyes looked red, and his heart fluttered, till it might be even perceived in his countenance; nor could he immediately answer me when I had done, and, as it were, hesitated what he would say to it; but after he had paused a little, he embraced me, and said, "How unhappy are we, unguarded creatures as we are, that even our greatest acts of friendship are made snares unto us, and we are made tempters of one another!" He then heartily thanked me for my offers of service, but withstood resolutely the arguments I used to urge him to set himself free. He declared, in earnest terms, that he was fully bent on remaining where he was rather than seek to return to his former miserable greatness, as he called it: where the seeds of pride, ambition, avarice, and luxury might revive, take root, and again overwhelm him.

Let me remain, dear sir," he said, in conclusion - "let me remain in this blessed confinement, banished from the crimes of life, rather than purchase a show of freedom at the expense of the liberty of my reason, and at the future happiness which I now have in my view, but should then, I fear, quickly lose sight of; for I am but flesh; a man, a mere man; and have passions and affections as likely to possess and overthrow me as any man: Oh, be not my friend and tempter both together!"

If I was surprised before, I was quite dumb now, and stood silent, looking at

him, and, indeed, admiring what I saw. The struggle in his soul was so great that, though the weather was extremely cold, it put him into a most violent heat; so I said a word or two, that I would leave him to consider of it, and wait on him again, and then I withdrew to my own apartment.

About two hours after I heard somebody at or near the door of my room, and I was going to open the door, but he had opened it and come in.

My dear friend," says he, "you had almost overset me, but I am recovered. Do not take it ill that I do not close with your offer. I assure you it is not for want of sense of the kindness of it in you; and I came to make the most sincere acknowledgement of it to you; but I hope I have got the victory over myself."

"My lord," said I, "I hope you are fully satisfied that you do not resist the call of Heaven."

"Sir," said he, "if it had been from Heaven, the same power would have influenced me to have accepted it; but I hope, and am fully satisfied, that it is from Heaven that I decline it, and I have infinite satisfaction in the parting, that you shall leave me an honest man still, though not a free man."

I had nothing to do but to acquiesce, and make professions to him of my having no end in it but a sincere desire to serve him. He embraced me very

passionately, and assured me he was sensible of that, and should always acknowledge it; and with that he offered me a very fine present of sables - too much, indeed, for me to accept from a man in his circumstances, and I would have avoided them, but he would not be refused. The next morning I sent my servant to his lordship with a small present of tea, and two pieces of China damask, and four little wedges of Japan gold, which did not all weigh above six ounces or thereabouts, but were far short of the value of his sables, which, when I came to England, I found worth near two hundred pounds. He accepted the tea, and one piece of the damask, and one of the pieces of gold, which had a fine stamp upon it, of the Japan coinage, which I found he took for the rarity of it, but would not take any more: and he sent word by my servant that he desired to speak with me.

When I came to him he told me I knew what had passed between us, and hoped I would not move him any more in that affair; but that, since I had made such a generous offer to him, he asked me if I had kindness enough to offer the same to another person that he would name to me, in whom he had a great share of concern. In a word, he told me it was his only son; who, though I had not seen him, was in the same condition with himself, and above two hundred miles from him, on the other side of the Oby; but that, if I consented, he would send for him.

I made no hesitation, but told him I would do it. I made some ceremony in letting him understand that it was wholly on his account; and that, seeing I

could not prevail on him, I would show my respect to him by my concern for his son. He sent the next day for his son; and in about twenty days he came back with the messenger, bringing six or seven horses, loaded with very rich furs, which, in the whole, amounted to a very great value. His servants brought the horses into the town, but left the young lord at a distance till night, when he came incognito into our apartment, and his father presented him to me; and, in short, we concerted the manner of our travelling, and everything proper for the journey.

I had bought a considerable quantity of sables, black fox-skins, fine ermines, and such other furs as are very rich in that city, in exchange for some of the goods I had brought from China; in particular for the cloves and nutmegs, of which I sold the greatest part here, and the rest afterwards at Archangel, for a much better price than I could have got at London; and my partner, who was sensible of the profit, and whose business, more particularly than mine, was merchandise, was mightily pleased with our stay, on account of the traffic we made here.

It was the beginning of June when I left this remote place. We were now reduced to a very small caravan, having only thirty-two horses and camels in all, which passed for mine, though my new guest was proprietor of eleven of them. It was natural also that I should take more servants with me than I had before; and the young lord passed for my steward; what great man I passed for myself I know not, neither did it concern me to inquire. We had

here the worst and the largest desert to pass over that we met with in our whole journey; I call it the worst, because the way was very deep in some places, and very uneven in others; the best we had to say for it was, that we thought we had no troops of Tartars or robbers to fear, as they never came on this side of the river Oby, or at least very seldom; but we found it otherwise.

My young lord had a faithful Siberian servant, who was perfectly acquainted with the country, and led us by private roads, so that we avoided coming into the principal towns and cities upon the great road, such as Tumen, Soloy Kamaskoy, and several others; because the Muscovite garrisons which are kept there are very curious and strict in their observation upon travellers, and searching lest any of the banished persons of note should make their escape that way into Muscovy; but, by this means, as we were kept out of the cities, so our whole journey was a desert, and we were obliged to encamp and lie in our tents, when we might have had very good accommodation in the cities on the way; this the young lord was so sensible of, that he would not allow us to lie abroad when we came to several cities on the way, but lay abroad himself, with his servant, in the woods, and met us always at the appointed places.

We had just entered Europe, having passed the river Kama, which in these parts is the boundary between Europe and Asia, and the first city on the European side was called Soloy Kamaskoy, that is, the great city on the river

Kama. And here we thought to see some evident alteration in the people; but we were mistaken, for as we had a vast desert to pass, which is near seven hundred miles long in some places, but not above two hundred miles over where we passed it, so, till we came past that horrible place, we found very little difference between that country and Mogul Tartary. The people are mostly pagans; their houses and towns full of idols; and their way of living wholly barbarous, except in the cities and villages near them, where they are Christians, as they call themselves, of the Greek Church: but have their religion mingled with so many relics of superstition, that it is scarce to be known in some places from mere sorcery and witchcraft.

In passing this forest (after all our dangers were, to our imagination, escaped), I thought, indeed, we must have been plundered and robbed, and perhaps murdered, by a troop of thieves: of what country they were I am yet at a loss to know; but they were all on horseback, carried bows and arrows, and were at first about forty-five in number. They came so near to us as to be within two musket-shot, and, asking no questions, surrounded us with their horses, and looked very earnestly upon us twice; at length, they placed themselves just in our way; upon which we drew up in a little line, before our camels, being not above sixteen men in all. Thus drawn up, we halted, and sent out the Siberian servant, who attended his lord, to see who they were; his master was the more willing to let him go, because he was not a little apprehensive that they were a Siberian troop sent out after him. The man came up near them with a flag of truce, and called to them; but though

he spoke several of their languages, or dialects of languages rather, he could not understand a word they said; however, after some signs to him not to come near them at his peril, the fellow came back no wiser than he went; only that by their dress, he said, he believed them to be some Tartars of Kalmuck, or of the Circassian hordes, and that there must be more of them upon the great desert, though he never heard that any of them were seen so far north before.

This was small comfort to us; however, we had no remedy: there was on our left hand, at about a quarter of a mile distance, a little grove, and very near the road. I immediately resolved we should advance to those trees, and fortify ourselves as well as we could there; for, first, I considered that the trees would in a great measure cover us from their arrows; and, in the next place, they could not come to charge us in a body: it was, indeed, my old Portuguese pilot who proposed it, and who had this excellency attending him, that he was always readiest and most apt to direct and encourage us in cases of the most danger. We advanced immediately, with what speed we could, and gained that little wood; the Tartars, or thieves, for we knew not what to call them, keeping their stand, and not attempting to hinder us. When we came thither, we found, to our great satisfaction, that it was a swampy piece of ground, and on the one side a very great spring of water, which, running out in a little brook, was a little farther joined by another of the like size; and was, in short, the source of a considerable river, called afterwards the Wirtska; the trees which grew about this spring were not

above two hundred, but very large, and stood pretty thick, so that as soon as we got in, we saw ourselves perfectly safe from the enemy unless they attacked us on foot.

While we stayed here waiting the motion of the enemy some hours, without perceiving that they made any movement, our Portuguese, with some help, cut several arms of trees half off, and laid them hanging across from one tree to another, and in a manner fenced us in. About two hours before night they came down directly upon us; and though we had not perceived it, we found they had been joined by some more, so that they were near fourscore horse; whereof, however, we fancied some were women. They came on till they were within half-shot of our little wood, when we fired one musket without ball, and called to them in the Russian tongue to know what they wanted, and bade them keep off; but they came on with a double fury up to the wood-side, not imagining we were so barricaded that they could not easily break in. Our old pilot was our captain as well as our engineer, and desired us not to fire upon them till they came within pistol-shot, that we might be sure to kill, and that when we did fire we should be sure to take good aim; we bade him give the word of command, which he delayed so long that they were some of them within two pikes' length of us when we let fly. We aimed so true that we killed fourteen of them, and wounded several others, as also several of their horses; for we had all of us loaded our pieces with two or three bullets apiece at least.

They were terribly surprised with our fire, and retreated immediately about one hundred rods from us; in which time we loaded our pieces again, and seeing them keep that distance, we sallied out, and caught four or five of their horses, whose riders we supposed were killed; and coming up to the dead, we judged they were Tartars, but knew not how they came to make an excursion such an unusual length.

About an hour after they again made a motion to attack us, and rode round our little wood to see where they might break in; but finding us always ready to face them, they went off again; and we resolved not to stir for that night.

We slept little, but spent the most part of the night in strengthening our situation, and barricading the entrances into the wood, and keeping a strict watch. We waited for daylight, and when it came, it gave us a very unwelcome discovery indeed; for the enemy, who we thought were discouraged with the reception they met with, were now greatly increased, and had set up eleven or twelve huts or tents, as if they were resolved to besiege us; and this little camp they had pitched upon the open plain, about three-quarters of a mile from us. I confess I now gave myself over for lost, and all that I had; the loss of my effects did not lie so near me, though very considerable, as the thoughts of falling into the hands of such barbarians at the latter end of my journey, after so many difficulties and hazards as I had gone through, and even in sight of our port, where we expected safety and deliverance. As to my partner, he was raging, and declared that to lose his

goods would be his ruin, and that he would rather die than be starved, and he was for fighting to the last drop.

The young lord, a most gallant youth, was for fighting to the last also; and my old pilot was of opinion that we were able to resist them all in the situation we were then in. Thus we spent the day in debates of what we should do; but towards evening we found that the number of our enemies still increased, and we did not know but by the morning they might still be a greater number: so I began to inquire of those people we had brought from Tobolski if there were no private ways by which we might avoid them in the night, and perhaps retreat to some town, or get help to guard us over the desert. The young lord's Siberian servant told us, if we designed to avoid them, and not fight, he would engage to carry us off in the night, to a way that went north, towards the river Petruz, by which he made no question but we might get away, and the Tartars never discover it; but, he said, his lord had told him he would not retreat, but would rather choose to fight. I told him he mistook his lord: for that he was too wise a man to love fighting for the sake of it; that I knew he was brave enough by what he had showed already; but that he knew better than to desire seventeen or eighteen men to fight five hundred, unless an unavoidable necessity forced them to it; and that if he thought it possible for us to escape in the night, we had nothing else to do but to attempt it. He answered, if his lordship gave him such orders, he would lose his life if he did not perform it; we soon brought his lord to give that order, though privately, and we immediately prepared for

putting it in practice.

And first, as soon as it began to be dark, we kindled a fire in our little camp, which we kept burning, and prepared so as to make it burn all night, that the Tartars might conclude we were still there; but as soon as it was dark, and we could see the stars (for our guide would not stir before), having all our horses and camels ready loaded, we followed our new guide, who I soon found steered himself by the north star, the country being level for a long way.

After we had travelled two hours very hard, it began to be lighter still; not that it was dark all night, but the moon began to rise, so that, in short, it was rather lighter than we wished it to be; but by six o'clock the next morning we had got above thirty miles, having almost spoiled our horses. Here we found a Russian village, named Kermazinskoy, where we rested, and heard nothing of the Kalmuck Tartars that day. About two hours before night we set out again, and travelled till eight the next morning, though not quite so hard as before; and about seven o'clock we passed a little river, called Kirtza, and came to a good large town inhabited by Russians, called Ozomys; there we heard that several troops of Kalmucks had been abroad upon the desert, but that we were now completely out of danger of them, which was to our great satisfaction. Here we were obliged to get some fresh horses, and having need enough of rest, we stayed five days; and my partner and I agreed to give the honest Siberian who conducted us thither the value

of ten pistoles.

In five days more we came to Veussima, upon the river Witzogda, and running into the Dwina: we were there, very happily, near the end of our travels by land, that river being navigable, in seven days' passage, to Archangel. From hence we came to Lawremskoy, the 3rd of July; and providing ourselves with two luggage boats, and a barge for our own convenience, we embarked the 7th, and arrived all safe at Archangel the 18th; having been a year, five months, and three days on the journey, including our stay of about eight months at Tobolski.

We were obliged to stay at this place six weeks for the arrival of the ships, and must have tarried longer, had not a Hamburger come in above a month sooner than any of the English ships; when, after some consideration that the city of Hamburg might happen to be as good a market for our goods as London, we all took freight with him; and, having put our goods on board, it was most natural for me to put my steward on board to take care of them; by which means my young lord had a sufficient opportunity to conceal himself, never coming on shore again all the time we stayed there; and this he did that he might not be seen in the city, where some of the Moscow merchants would certainly have seen and discovered him.

We then set sail from Archangel the 20th of August, the same year; and, after no extraordinary bad voyage, arrived safe in the Elbe the 18th of

September. Here my partner and I found a very good sale for our goods, as well those of China as the sables, &c., of Siberia: and, dividing the produce, my share amounted to 3475 pounds, 17s, 3d., including about six hundred pounds' worth of diamonds, which I purchased at Bengal.

Here the young lord took his leave of us, and went up the Elbe, in order to go to the court of Vienna, where he resolved to seek protection and could correspond with those of his father's friends who were left alive. He did not part without testimonials of gratitude for the service I had done him, and for my kindness to the prince, his father.

To conclude: having stayed near four months in Hamburgh, I came from thence by land to the Hague, where I embarked in the packet, and arrived in London the 10th of January 1705, having been absent from England ten years and nine months. And here, resolving to harass myself no more, I am preparing for a longer journey than all these, having lived seventy-two years a life of infinite variety, and learned sufficiently to know the value of retirement, and the blessing of ending our days in peace.