

Those Rumours About Catherine the Great
Jason Shannon

Stanislav rushed through the lavish winter palace, panting as he ran. He went up an ornate staircase, and sprinted through a parlour where the oligarchs were enjoying a most splendid vodka tasting at this late hour.

“Calm down, my good boy,” called Vlad Lenkov, the preppy heir to the vast Lenkov estate in Estonia. “You’re going to give yourself a stroke.”

“Russia is at war with the Turks!” Stanislav bellowed, charging towards to the east wing and the empress’ master bedroom.

Rushing through domed hallways, a dusting of snow on the terrace just beyond the French doors, he panted. Arriving at the most opulent wing of the palace, sweating profusely, he found the chambermaid Yekaterina Konstaninovna, a pretty blonde thing who he’d fancied for a time, and had been wishing to court.

Ignoring his feelings, however, he barked, “You *must* wake the empress at once. We are at war!”

“At war?” the maiden retorted, aghast. “But... well, very well, I shall awaken her majesty.”

Yekaterina rushed into the empress’ vast bedchambers, through an boudoir and sped to wake the sovereign.

In the next ten minutes, as Yekaterina was speedily dressing the empress, lacing up her most elaborate bodice and powdering the elder woman’s flowing hair, Stanislav was at last permitted to enter.

He strode into the boudoir, where Yekaterina worked diligently on the empress’ gown at a vanity. Bowing deeply, his wig now moistened with sweat, he broke the news, and informed his sovereign of the late-night missive sent by Lord Commander Zadakovsky in Crimea.

“Those damned Muhammadans,” grunted the empress. “Yekaterina, forget the powder, I shall make haste for Crimea at once. Can’t trust that dandy Zadakovsky to handle this himself.”

Yekaterina set down the comb and bowed pliantly. “I shall ensure your most trusted steed, Secretariatov, is prepared, my liege,” the girl declared. “Lord Harkin, proceed to the stables forthwith and—”

“Er, uh, no... prepare another horse, please.”

The queen suddenly looked less sure of herself. Perhaps this news of war had her feeling flustered.

In the brief moment of silence, a sound came from the other room; the bedchambers beyond this boudoir. Perhaps it was one of the empress’ lovers, snoring or rolling over in his sleep. The whole court knew of their sovereign’s lust, though politely ignored it—

The sound... Stanislav could swear it was a horse neighing softly in the room.

Never mind that, he must ride out for war.

Ignoring the sound, Yekaterina said, “Of course, your majesty. Lord Harkin, prepare instead the mount Russian Pharaohkin.”

He turned to go. Now, facing the other way, he saw a giant artificial phallus hanging on a coat rack, molded from rubber perhaps. It was attached to some sort of harness, leather belts with many buckles. Stanislav had seen war wounds before; he immediately thought of an artificial limb buckled onto a stump. But this looked like the sort of thing a man would buckle over the hips after a castration.

And, moreover, it was... well, he’d squired as a boy, and knew what an equine phallus looked like.

How queer. How queer indeed.

Yekaterina quietly cleared her throat. “Lord Harkin,” she said with insistence.

Stanislav quickly snapped to it, brought his leg forward to march for the door.

In the same instance, the empress exclaimed, “Is there a problem?”

“Uh, no, my liege. I shall ride out to Crimea forthwith.”

Stanislav Harkin died in the first hours of the war. His family alleged it was ‘friendly fire’, though this could never be substantiated.

*

Copyright 2022 by Jason Shannon.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions.

No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without prior written permission by the author, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents are either the product of the author’s imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, or locales is purely coincidental.