



PRE-RACE PARTY GRAND PRIX DE NICE, FRANCE CONSULATE OF SWITZERLAND



Orsi's Benelli racing motorbike, in Italian "race red", or rosso corsa.

PART II: The Grand Arrival of Eusebius Orsi

Just as **Vitez Rychly** was volunteering to retrieve VV himself and make an introduction to **Anezka Novakova**, the double doors at the end of the Great Hall were opened once again. This time, **Sebi Orsi** was seen outside, dressed in leather racing clothes and sporting a bright red scarf. He was perched atop a bright red Benelli racing motorbike, an extraordinary Italian make that was the work of the famed racer, Antonio Benelli, also known as "Tonino the Terrible." Orsi and Tonino were close friends, sharing many of the same passions, which lead the young Italian driver to often visit the Benelli factory in Pesaro during the summer months.

Wrapped in a leather jacket and pants, his helmets and goggles lashed by the rain, **Sebi Orsi** glanced up at the torn canvas of the portico, which had now nearly torn clear away. It did nothing to shield him or his bike from the weather. He looked down upon the red carpet for only a moment before he spun the bike to face the Great Hall and gunned the engine. With a great roar, Orsi drove right up the red carpet and into the



Great Hall, his red scarf snapping behind him, before making a turn and bringing the Benelli smoothly to a stop in front of the bar.

As **Orsi** shut the engine down, a silence overtook the room. He carefully kicked down the bike's stand, leaned it gently to the side and double checked to make sure he had avoided marring the marble floors of the Great Hall. Seeing no damage, he pulled off his goggles and helmet and carefully peeled off his tight leather gloves before pulling off his leather jacket his leather chap pants. Last, he slipped off his riding boots. Beneath the leathers, he wore a fine Italian silk suit. The silk was only slightly wrinkled from the ordeal and only partly wet around the upper part of the right sleeve. Quickly, he retrieved a pair of fine leather shoes from the saddle bags of the Benelli and slipped them on.

Standing nearby at the bar, **Anezka Novakova** was stunned by the transformation before her. She dropped her drink, which crashed onto the floor and shattering the glass and splashing *Abricotine* onto **Rychly's** shoes. A murmur spread through the crowd as **Sebi Orsi** turned to regard her, then with a smile, he simply clapped his hands and called out, "Waiter, another drink for the lady!"

Orsi's grandest of entrances was almost – but not quite – missed by Veronika Vilhelmova, **Rychly's** fiancée, who just then finally had emerged from the bathroom, only to see **Orsi** suddenly together with **Anezka Novakova**. As she watched, dumbfounded, Orsi draped his red scarf around Anezka's neck and handed her a new drink, all the while ignoring Rychly's hand, which was extended in a greeting. The assembled guests could not believe what was happening.

In shock, VV could think of nothing to do – but then, out of control, she suddenly dashed across the room toward the pair in a desperate attempt to separate them. It was apparent that VV's dress was a Novakova original from the Paris Spring 1934 Collection runway, which was why she had gone to such great lengths to be at her best after the rain and wind.

In her race to intercede, VV arrived with all the finesse of a bull in a Spanish ring. Skidding toward the two, she slipped on the wet floor and fell, sliding ungracefully into **Anezka Novakova's** knees, thereby splashing half of her new drink into the glass of *Grappa* that was even then being handed to **Sebi Orsi** by the bartender. Orsi stepped back to regard the stricken figure now prostrate at his feet. Ever the gentleman, **Rychly** reached down to help VV up, but instead she slapped away his hand.

Panting, VV rolled over twice as she slipped yet again, looking like a great caterpillar writhing about on the floor. Then she cursed loudly in Czech before struggling up to push herself between Orsi and the Czech fashion designer, whereupon in an ill-fated



gesture of greeting, she stuck her hand out toward the famed fashion designer, brushing her hair back as if nothing had happened.

Sebi Orsi spoke first, “I see we have mixed a new drink – *Grappa and Abricotine!* I must name it, yes! A toast then to the elixir of love with the new drink, ‘*The Veronika!*’” And with that, he swallowed it like a shot and ordered a round for the house. VV’s reply could not be heard over the laughter that ensued. **Anezka Novakova**, clearly drunk past the point of caring, ignored VV’s greeting and instead took Orsi by the arm, flipped the red scarf back over her shoulder, and bellowed, “Vee must danza, you and me!!” With that, the two pushed past VV into the center of the Great Hall as Orsi called out to the orchestra, “Play jazz!!”

VV let out a wail of despair and although **Rychly** attempted to console her, she spent the rest of the evening in the powder room. Giving up on his fiancée’s behavior, Rychly soon returned to dispatch his head of security, Orlince Strazny, to the paddocks with the command “to guard the Bugatti!”

Across the room, **Godeschalk Hegkman** was still chatting quietly with **Sr. Carmena-Motta**, the Italian industrialist. On seeing Strazny leave the room, his eyes narrowed with suspicion. Quickly, he took his leave, bid the Consul General goodnight, and departed to follow the Czech, Orlince Strazny, out into the rain.

Toasts, Conversation and Dancing

As **Sebi Orsi** and **Anezka Novakova** took the dance floor, the French pilot, **Aristide La Fontaine** made his way over to **Islem ibn-Bilal**, the famous Algerian racing engineer. The Algerian seemed genuinely pleased to make the Frenchman’s acquaintance and it was soon learned that ibn-Bilal had studied engineering in Marseille. Of late, he had been pioneering a new series of gearbox lubricants to improve durability. Aristide was keen to note that applying the Algerian’s advanced research to his car, despite the risks inherent in any new development, was very much of interest to him. He also made clear that the circuit at Nice would require the highest performance from all of the racers’ transmissions.

Their discussion was interrupted by **Louis de Montignac**, who then joined the conversation, interceding by way of handing the pair new drinks and loudly proposing a toast. “To all of the drivers, to the race and to our Italian friend, who perhaps can race a bit better on two wheels than four!” His sly reference to the Italian’s accident in Algiers, when two of his Maserati’s tires blew out and the two tires of the Benelli motorbike, brought a murmur of laughter from the numerous guests from Monaco.



With that, **Louis de Montignac** turned back to the Algerian, **Islem ibn-Bilal**, and instantly offered him a full time, season long position with his engineering team. Surprised but evidently pleased, ibn-Bilal readily accepted, apparently eager to work with the driver who had won at the recent Grand Prix d'Algiers at Staouéli.

Aristide stood listening to the two discuss engineering for a few moments, but then considered that he would make better use of this time by moving on. Containing his consternation and anger, he crossed the room and approached **Onbera Geraxan**, the retired Basque race car driver and engineer from the 1910s and 1920s. He greeted the Basque with great respect, "Buenos Dias, Mr. Geraxan, it is really a great pleasure to meet you as I have heard a lot about you and the races that you have won in past years. Let me introduce you to my wife Maria who came from South America and speaks Spanish...."

Geraxan only nodded and smiled. He responded in perfect French, "I do not speak Spanish so well, but when I am home, only the finer Basque language." With that, he laughed and nonetheless greeted them warmly. Soon Aristide was talking of the previous race, cornering techniques and driving in general. Geraxan, evidently in good humor, was soon sharing his advice for the upcoming circuit.

Yet once again, **Louis de Montignac** walked up with another two drinks, one for **Geraxan** and the other for **Aristide**. He raised his own glass and saluted the Basque driver, who regarded him with a cold eye as de Montignac once again toasted the assembled drivers. Turning back to Geraxan, without pause, de Montignac asked if the Basque too would wish to join his engineering team for the season, a position, he intoned, which would pay well.

Aristide was quiet, regarding **de Montignac** closely and considering his words carefully, wondering how to best address the Monegasque's new strategy for engaging the assistance of the best engineers and innovators in the party.

Yet it was **Onbera Geraxan** who spoke first. "Surely you do not believe that a man like myself, certainly wealthy enough from my own career, would wish to sell myself to a man who spends a Prince's money freely, but has none of his own."

Geraxan threw wide his arms and smiled graciously, "You remind me of the Spanish who would come to the Basque country land and seek to buy our political allegiance and interest with their céntimos, reales and pesetas. I would rather work for free with a driver as talented as **Aristide La Fontaine**, even if he does not know that we Basques would speak our own tongue before any languages of the ruling classes in Madrid!"



The Basque dropped his voice to a hiss, “You should know, dear friend of this Prince, that it was France’s performance in Algiers that I have studied closely and found to be of interest – not yours.” He spat on the floor for emphasis.

“It was **La Fontaine** who drove from the last position to nearly the front by halfway around the course, through the hardest curves and chicanes of Staouéli! If not been for the German, he may have been the victor, not you!”

Louis de Montignac knew when it was best to leave well enough alone. He retreated rapidly from the pair. **Geraxan**, who was both overwhelming and very direct in his manner, turned abruptly to **La Fontaine**. He spat again on the floor and uttered, “You know, I dislike aristocracy. No, let us quit here and go to look over your Salmson racer.”

Geraxan’s eyes were suddenly intense, almost crazed and wide. “You must make some adjustments! I have seen how you could not take the curves without striking the hay bales!! Your suspension can be made better!!!” He punched **Aristide** on the arm, “Firmer, harder, more like a Basque’s car!!”

Even if pleased by his good fortune, **La Fontaine** turned to leave the party wondering just what he had gotten himself into and just what sort of new “friend” he now had.

As they walked toward the door, **Teide “Volcán” Sorolla** clanged his glass and hopped atop one of the chairs, as if to stand higher, above all others in the room. He raised his glass to clink the glass of the hanging chandelier, “A toast to all, and to introduce myself! I am Teide Sorolla of Spain, known as the ‘Volcán’ – I have taken over the team of my countryman, Senor Blanco, and I look forward to the upcoming race.”

He looked across the room, his eyes seemed to be focused off into the distance, “I can see the top of the mountain and I can see the path I must take. I can see myself standing on the top. Remember this – my name is Teide Sorolla and this is what I will do here, climb to the top and be victorious. I can only hope that you will make the race challenging, so that I do not simply drive to the victory lane without opposition.”

He drank, but few of the other drivers seemed interested in joining him.

With his toast finished, **Teide “Volcán” Sorolla** climbed down and walked quickly over to Japan’s Ambassador, **Watanabe Tomitani**. Seemingly adrift in talk of mountain climbing, he began by asking him about Mt. Fuji. Yet while the Ambassador stated that he had climbed the mountain several times – indeed, its splendid trails were often taken by many Japanese – he knew nothing of serious mountain climbing. It seemed to Sorolla that Ambassador Tomitani was polite in his answers, rather than seriously interested.



Soon **Soralla** tried a different tack and began discussing the Bugatti and its handling characteristics. Immediately, it was clear that such conversation was far more to the liking of the Japanese ambassador, who was soon engrossed in the conversation. Shortly thereafter, the two left the party together, as the ambassador was interested in seeing the black Bugatti up close.

For his part, **Sebi Orsi** danced with **Anezka Novakova** until, exhausted and drunk, she passed out in his arms. Sweeping her up onto his shoulder like some prize, Orsi then walked about the room, bidding everyone a good night. He took extra care to stop and apologize to the **Prince of Monaco** for the incident in Algiers, where he had set in motion events that had moved the post-race party from the embassy of Monaco to the Italian industrialist's yacht. It was an apology that may have been missed, however, as the Prince didn't take his eyes off of unconscious form of Miss Novakova as Orsi held her draped over his left shoulder as if she weighed nothing.

Orsi then walked over to **Sr. Carmena-Motta** by the bar and the two exchanged a joke and shook hands. Turning, he laid Miss **Novakova's** unconscious form over the back of his motorcycle, climbed aboard and gently eased the Benelli out into the rain before starting it up and driving off into the night.