

A Secret Affair of The Twin

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Ghosts of past deeds can haunt for decades, shadows of memories can be permanent, and consequences of wrong choices devastating, altering our future in an unimaginable way. In summer of 2023, while I was deep in my ancestry research, piecing together the mystery puzzle of my birth and background, I was approached by a 'Frenchman' who called himself 'Michel CANTON'.

Little did I know that his real motivation was not about help in my ancestry research, but surveillance, and an attempt to slow down and confuse my investigation with an ulterior motive of finding out some information in regards to my biological father. For, 'Michel CANTON' was [my twin brother](#) whom I have never met.

In December 2021, I did my first DNA test with [My Heritage](#) company, since I had long suspected that the family I grew up in was foreign to me in all senses. I did try to fit in and build proper relationships with my foster relatives, yet could not succeed, no matter how hard I tried. My foster father looked past me, my foster mother competed with me, my foster brother ignored me.

When I received [the results](#) of my first DNA test, they confirmed what I'd already felt in my heart — my biological family was elsewhere.

In the beginning of my investigative journey I did not know much about DNA, ancestry research, or genealogy, but I was eager to learn, for I had a genuine wish to find my relatives and to reunite with my biological family.

In 2022, I did two more DNA tests with [Ancestry](#) and [23andME](#) in order to cross reference my results received from My Heritage, and see if anything else would surface that could help my investigation. Unfortunately, the DNA matches on all three sites did not show anyone closer than 4th cousins. My closest match was my 4th cousin, Igor Malinen, whose wife built an extensive Family Tree for him on My Heritage. Hence, I decided to start my ancestry investigation with my closest DNA match, Igor, my ethnic maps, and Igor's Family Tree.

Applying analytical skills, logic, creative thinking, and using my ethnic maps as my compass, I was able in a course of one year to build my biological mother's Family Tree. According to it, my biological mother was [Sophie de Prittwitz](#), married name [Sophie Druon](#) (1952-), a woman of Russian aristocratic émigré circles, born and raised in Paris, France.

In parallel, I was also investigating the mystery of my birth and events that happened prior and after it. This proved as challenging as piecing together my Family Tree with a handful of DNA matches.

My foster mother, whom I first turned to, was not inclined to share any information, suddenly having amnesia in regards to supposedly the most important events of her and my life. Having achieved nothing there, I decided to contact the [Institute Ott](#) in Saint Petersburg, the medical institution that was frequently cited as my birth place.

In October 2022, I requested a copy from the Institute's birth journal, which earlier, in 2018, they referenced in connection to my supposed time of birth. However, in November 2022, my request was rejected. The quoted reason for that being confidentiality of requested information.

In May 2023, I appealed to the [Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation](#) and asked for aiding in the process of my investigation. This resulted in a sequence of paper requests that descended all way down to the Director of the [Institute Ott](#), Kogna I. Y. ([Коган Игорь Юрьевич](#)). Surprisingly as it might sound, on 7th June 2023 I received an official letter from the Director, in which he clearly refused to co-operate and reveal the page of the birth journal that I requested. Apparently, he had twisted the rules of requesting the information, and said that I did not comply with the rules that he himself changed on the go. Three months prior to these events, in March 2023, I made my mother's Family Tree public on [GENEANET](#), [GENI](#), WIKITree, and GedMatch platforms. I also had the same Tree on Ancestry but it stayed private.

The public exposure of the Tree led to interesting developments. It heralded an appearance of several personages — all seemingly interested in my ancestral discoveries and DNA tests.

They were:

June 2023:

Alicia Galitzin (New York), Thomas Huggins (Virginia, USA), Michel CANTON (France)

July 2023:

[Anthony Gurney \(Australia\)](#), followed in August 2023 by Maria Monte Aguiar (Portugal)

September-October 2023:

Georg Velmogin (Russia) and Maryna Zhubryk (Ukraine-Italy).

The person from this group who contacted me first was Alicia Galitzin.

On 10th of June 2023, just three days after the refusal of my request sent to the [Institute Ott](#) in Saint Petersburg, Alicia contacted me via email, claiming she'd discovered my Family Tree on GENI and WIKITree. The following day, on 11th June 2023, she sent another email where she mentioned that she had read my article: '[Extraordinary in an Ordinary DNA File.... — Part One](#)' published on Medium. In the same email she cced a certain Thomas Huggins, 'a highly knowledgeable and skilled geneticist', as she had put it, saying that Thomas could provide 'some knowledgeable insights to your tests'.

The next day, Thomas connected with me on Facebook and wrote to me in the FB Messenger, going straight to the topic of explaining my chimerism — the [presence of Y-DNA information](#) in one of the DNA files (My Heritage one).

On 18th June 2023, just three day before I received yet another 'indecent' letter from the Director of the Institute Ott, Kogna I.Y. ([Коган Игорь Юрьевич](#)), a certain 'Michel CANTON' made his appearance on to the stage.

Michel contacted me via [GENEANET](#) with a cryptic message, saying that I matched his cousin — a Jean-Jacques DARD, and to determine the origin of the connection it would be great if I uploaded my DNA file onto My Heritage site. This surprised me as I was already on My Heritage. I checked the mentioned cousin and could not find among my matches any Jean-Jacques DARDs. Nonetheless, I replied to Michel.

On 21st June 2023, the date when I received the communication from the Institute Ott, Michel made his own ‘indecent’ proposal which he worded in English as follows: ‘If you want, i could send you french copies of actes.’ Since I ignored his proposition, the offer was reinforced two more times on on 22nd June and 23rd June. Regardless my continued ignoring the topic, Michel charged ahead, saying — ‘For French documents, it is just a proposition. In deed, the French acts often gives indications about birth location, hour, witnesses,... These informations could be use to you to complete your story. Let me some time and i will send you it then it would be interesting or not for you.’

Meanwhile, beginning of July 2023, [Anthony Gurney](#) from Australia wrote an introductory email to me, referring to GEDMatch platform and his searches on there regarding Droutskoy-Sokoliinsky male lines and mentioning variations of Golitsin surnames. [Anthony](#) also presented his ‘mystery’ related to his father’s background of which, as Anthony put it, he knew nothing. Some time later, in August 2023, he included Maria Monte Aguiar into the conversation who also had her own ancestral mystery and was somehow related to Portuguese aristocracy. Similar to Anthony, her mystery was also connected to her biological father. The introduction resulted in intense email exchanges between three of us that took place over several months from July to December 2023. They were mostly about Anthony’s and Maria’s fathers’ mysteries that they claimed they tried to solve. Perhaps they genuinely did. But I never found any true links to either of them. However, the exchanges although intriguing drew my attention from my own research and investigation.

As I was trying not to engage too much with the ‘mysteries’ of Anthony and Maria, I received a message from Michel that he was ready to share the promised French act documents related to [Sophie de Prittwitz](#). They were some 101 documents — mostly acts of birth, marriage, and death related to Sophie’s close relatives such as parents, grandparents and other ancestors and relations. I found them interesting as they had added a nice touch to my research, yet did not bring anything fundamentally different. Except for one detail, which, at first, I did not pay attention to. The detail concerned the absence of any information about the son of [Sophie de Prittwitz](#) marked as ‘Druon’. Obviously, Michel knew about the existence of the son otherwise he would not have include him into the Tree. I thought this was odd, but, at the time, did not have much time or energy to look into the matter.

Meanwhile, in September 2023, a new personage appeared, — Georg Velmogin, a rather bizarre character who contacted me on GENI. His strangeness mostly expressed as one line plentiful messages that he sent to me on daily basis. His main story, apart from taking DNA tests and finding links to some aristocratic DNA matches, was that he was a descendant of Maria Nikolaevna Romanova — one of the daughters of Nicholas II. Although I do not exclude the possibility of such event, but, to my mind, his story was way too fantastical and did not make any sense in terms of historical chronology. I told him about it, but he persists in his pursuit. At some point, I directed his emails to spam, yet still kept an eye on his communications.

The most interesting character of all and the one I believe who is directly connected to ‘Michel CANTON’ was Maryna Zhubryk. She contacted me in September 2023 on GENI in regards to ancestry research and family trees. We first talked on GENI, then moved to emails, and, finally, to messaging on Whatsapp. If Georg was plain annoying, Maryna was mysteriously interested in keeping in touch and shared far more than one would share with a stranger, including her personal stories which, if I were her, I would keep private. What drew my attention most was that she ‘pretended’ to be a victim of life circumstances when, in fact, she was not. Her personal story made little sense, as she wanted to portray herself as an ordinary young woman without any high education from a little town in the Ukraine — Nikolaev, but, in fact, she had way too worldly opinions, knew a lot about ancestry research and different DNA platforms, spoke several languages, and even wrote poems in Russian, Ukrainian, Italian, and English.

While other characters soon ‘calmed down’ and sort of retreated, Maryna and Georg relentlessly persisted in communicating with me.

Regardless whether I replied to him or not, Georg kept writing his one line messages via email, and Maryna moved from ancestry and her somewhat fantastical personal stories to the topic of my biological father. She regularly asked how my research on him is progressing, and from time to time released snippets of ‘wisdom’ and information which at the close examination were not so far from the truth.

At first, I thought that the unusual characters that appeared in my life so unexpectedly after I had published my Family Tree online were not related. But with the time I noticed that they

all somehow knew each other — Alicia knew Thomas and was connected to him on FB, Maryna also was connected to Thomas and regularly talked to him, Georg claimed it was Maryna who advised him to contact me, although she does not recall that. Anthony was certainly connected to Maria for it was him who introduced her into our email exchange. It appeared as a network of people who approached me one after another in a matter of 2–3 months and kept engaging with me, mostly deflecting from the main research and focus, but also trying to stay social and friendly.

So, where does the helpful ‘Michel CANTON’ with his French acts fit here?

In the two years since the appearance of these ancestry related characters and their fathers’ ‘mysteries’ I have made progress in my own investigation and discovered that I have [a twin brother](#) — whom, at first, I considered dead as Thomas was hinting that the presence of Y-DNA information which partially got written into one of my genomes belonging to [my twin brother](#) meant that he died before or during birth. However, as it turned out he deflected me. [My twin brother](#) was alive.

The story goes that I was born a twin in Paris, France to [Sophie de Prittwitz](#) and a Soviet undercover agent working in diplomatic services in the French capital. The couple was not married. According to the Soviet intelligence services protocol children had to be given up to the Soviet system to avoid security risks for my father. Yet, they decided to ‘sacrifice’ only one child — me. My twin stayed in Paris with our mother. I was brought to Leningrad, USSR, and placed in a foster family.

As I had pieced this part of the story together, I returned to the French act papers and the Family Tree ‘Michel CANTON’ provided me in summer 2023. And as I did, suddenly the truth revealed itself, I realised that the very person whose data was not present in the Tree e.g. the son of [Sophie de Prittwitz](#) marked as ‘Druon’ was not Sophie’s son by her husband Druon. The ‘Druon’ was my twin brother! Now, the reason for Michel not sharing any information about him became clear. Michel and ‘Druon’ were one and the same person. My twin brother decided to conceal his date and place of birth because they would match mine, revealing that he was alive. As soon as I realised this, I wrote to Michel asking for clarification of his connection to [Sophie de Prittwitz](#) and pointed out the fact of his concealing the information about ‘Druon’ son.

‘Michel CANTON’, however, chose not to budge and in his reply that took him one week to write deflected from the topic. I did not give up and tried him two more times, yet he still came up with deflective answers.

At the same time, before writing to Michel I messaged Maryna about my suspicion in his regard as I wanted to see her reaction. For, already some time ago, I realised that Maryna might be connected to Michel. Perhaps even being Michel himself, since I never saw her in person, nor spoke with her on the phone. She replied that she also thought that Michel was my brother, and sent me her song — a music video which contained a hidden message in the form of the following words — ‘Вот я тебя и нашла, но ты какой-то грустный. Это наверное без меня в твоей жизни было пусто’, which means ‘So, I’ve found you at last, but you seem to be sad. Perhaps it is because your life was somewhat empty without me.’

The music video came before Michel’s first deflective reply. The video itself was a confirmation of my guess — Maryna admitted it, yet Michel avoided the direct confrontation. I was disappointed and felt deeply betrayed.

The reasons for my twin brother’s need to come up with such an elaborate scheme, instead of simply making his presence known and visible, can be plentiful. However, based on the evidence and the pattern of his behaviour I believe his ulterior motive was getting close to me to find out as much information about our father as possible. For, deep in his heart ‘Michel’ still holds a grudge against him and wishes to seek revenge.

Poor little idiot. He should have known better, as the quote from The Count of Monte Cristo goes: ‘Fool that I am... that I did not tear out my heart the day I resolved to revenge myself!’

It is hard to admit, but as it stands now, both of my families — the foster and the biological ones, specifically my twin brother and the mother — seem to have failed me, choosing games instead of telling the truth, sticking to their own comfort instead of facing the reality, and, perhaps, being more interested in financial gains than in close and loving relationship and real connection.

