Catherine the Great: A Fine Example

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract
Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, reigned from 1762 until her death in 1796. Her reign would be called Russia’s golden age and she would expand and bring enlightened reforms to Russia. Catherine was born German and had no claim to the throne by birth. She would spend her life cultivating herself, studying, and maneuvering to achieve her ruling ambitions. She was an underdog figure that would overcome many hurdles and is an example for anyone striving to achieve greatness. She had challenges, highs and lows in her life, and a determination to pursue ambition that was remarkable. She is a person who lived a life worthy of study in order to learn how she became “great” so that others can learn how to succeed in their own ambitions.

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I am an accounting major who chose to write a research paper on a woman ruler from a foreign country. Catherine the Great does not directly correlate to my major. As an accounting major I love numbers and finding the story of a business through its balance sheet and income statement. I am also a person who loves to read and libraries are a place I enjoy spending free time in. My freshman year of college I got to campus at the end of July to report for soccer preseason. We had workouts twice a day, but other than that we had time to for ourselves to spend how we chose. I would spend a number of my free hours in the library simply walking around picking up books that would catch my eye. I was on one of those strolls when I spotted a book with red binding with the title of *Memoirs of Catherine the Great*. My curiosity drew me to pull it from the shelf, sit right on the floor in front of the book case, and read. I had to know of this woman who had managed to get “the great” attached to her name. I had only heard of men accomplishing that such as Alexander the Great and Peter the Great. When the time came to select an honors thesis subject, I knew I had the passion and strong motivation for researching Catherine the Great. I desired to learn the stories and events of her life that led her to the position she held and the feats she achieved. I can only hope that this paper will do her justice and that readers can learn from a woman who became one of “the greats.”

After my research and analysis I did not further my technical knowledge of accounting, but rather knowledge on political savviness and relations between people. The saying of, “it is not what you know, but who you know,” is applicable to many situations. Catherine was someone who was very skilled at winning people over, people who held influence and who would be crucial for her ambitions. At the same time she had a lot of technical knowledge that she had acquired over years of tutors and personal study. The combination of knowing influential
people and being intelligent paved the way for Catherine to live out her ambitions. When others would have probably held grudges, she did not. She did not burn too many bridges which served her well in her life. She realized who were the people that she needed to please and who held decision making power and she aligned with them when she had just come to Russian court.

I am starting a career in public accounting in two months at the second largest accounting firm worldwide. There is no doubt in my mind that while I will be evaluated on my technical performance, I will need to figure out the politics of the office and make sure I am pleasing my bosses. Like Catherine, I will need to demonstrate a passion and devotion to the position I was selected for. The glass ceiling is a term that is used today that refers to how minorities and women are sometimes restricted from making equal amounts of money as men and climbing the corporate ladder as high as men. If Catherine could become a large nation’s ruler in back the eighteenth century, then I can be successful and climb as high as I desire in the twenty first century.
Introduction

Few have achieved the prestige of having “the great” attached to their names; Empress Catherine of Russia, who ruled from July 1762 until her death in 1796 at the age of sixty seven years old, achieved this feat. The immediate question posed is, how? Catherine got the title “the Great” five years into her reign when she organized a large commission of nobles, landowners, and representatives to analyze current Russian legislation and come up with ways to improve it. The congregated group she had assembled insisted on debating what title they would bestow on the empress to show their appreciation prior to starting their work on the legislation. The titles of “the Great” and “All Wise Mother of the Fatherland” were the most favored by the delegates. Catherine, at the time very frustrated that the delegation she had brought together was spending time discussing her virtues instead of law, tried to refuse the titles. She took a humble attitude, at least put on a humble front, by saying she had not earned the titles and that her legacy could be the only judge of her achievements and God could be the only one called “All Wise.” Catherine “the Great” received the most votes and while she discouraged people from calling her that, claiming her name was Catherine II, the fact that her subjects wanted to bestow that title on her said a lot about her. People wanted to call her “the great” five years into her reign, while Peter the Great received his title from the Senate after four decades of reigning. Catherine was held in high esteem in the minds of her constituents. Her constituents were at the time voicing their appreciation of their ruler who was seeking out their opinions and input in the shaping and modifying of the laws of the country. Catherine held onto her power in some moments, shared it, and sought the help of others in different moments, the modifying of the laws of Russia was a moment of sharing her power and ability to change the country.
Catherine was unlike the common man or woman with an intense focus in her youth of one day ruling Russia, while at the same time being common in the heartbreaks she endured, the poor treatment by others, and challenge after challenge thrown her way. She is an example to be studied by people wanting to achieve great measures in life, especially if the person learning of her is a woman. While she had womanly tendencies in some moments, there are other moments in her life when she defies stereotypes and rises above pettiness, pride, and does not back down when people come against her. After research and analysis I have come to believe that it is Catherine who made history and is an individual whose actions could not have been performed by another with as much success as she had. She truly was remarkable, and while she may seem immoral in some regards, I believed her “goods” outweighed her possible “bads” and not many can claim that accomplishment. I will map out my evidence of this thesis through different sections including her youth experiences, coming to the throne, and being on the throne. To conclude there will be a reflection section that sums up what there is to learn from Catherine. It was an Italian philosopher named George Santayana who said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” That statement has been rephrased in many ways and is always applied to the negative events in history. In the case of people who reached greatness and accomplished so much during their lifetimes, I think the phrase applies, but in the case of Catherine the Great it is in efforts to replicate some of her characteristics and choices. As I learn about Catherine I start to think that if more people knew about the person she was and what she achieved they might be inspired to also achieve greatness and be a person of great qualities as she was. She was a German princess who came to be the empress of Russia and maintained her rule for thirty years achieving so many social advances. She is to be respected and admired for all of time for her contributions and service.
Brief Russian Ruler Information

For a person to grasp how hard it is to obtain the position of Empress and how easily the position can be snatched away I have written a brief history leading up to Catherine taking the throne. I start from Peter the Great since he is also a very recognized name and a person, who similar to Catherine, gave Russia so much more than was ever expected of him. The important thing to see from the history below is that the right to rule is one that is not always given, but a right that must be claimed and fought for.

The famous ruler of Russia, Peter the Great, was the grandfather of Peter who would be the husband to Catherine the Great. Catherine herself was not a direct heir to the throne. Peter the Great bore fifteen children, nine boys and six girls, from two women. Only two daughters and one son, Anne, Elizabeth, and Alexis, survived past age seven. Peter the Great was married to a woman named Eudoxia, who bore him his son Alexis, but he sent Eudoxia off to a convent and married the mother of Anne and Elizabeth, a Livonian peasant Martha Shavronskya, later to be renamed Catherine. Before Peter the Great died he had changed the rule of male primogeniture, the practice of passing down the crown from father to the eldest son. Peter changed the practice so that the ruler could designate their own successor. He designated his wife Catherine. His daughter Anne was courted and married to the Duke Charles Frederick of Holstein while a proposed marriage between Elizabeth and Louis XV of France fell through when he married a Polish princess instead. At that time Elizabeth had been engaged to Charles Augustus, but in May he became ill and died four days later from small pox. If Elizabeth would have married Charles Augustus, Catherine the Great would have been related to Elizabeth through marriage. Charles Augustus was the cousin of Elizabeth’s brother-in-law, Charles Frederick who was married to her sister Anne. Charles Augustus was the brother of Johanna, Catherine the Great’s
Elizabeth’s mother was a peasant, and Elizabeth may have been born out of wedlock, worrying the French that they could have a bastard near the throne, so she was passed over. Elizabeth would one day prove to the French that she was worthy of rule when she would claim the Russian throne.

Peter the Great died in 1725 at age fifty two, just three years after he changed the designation succession. Peter’s wife Catherine I then became Empress. Twenty-seven months after Catherine I became empress she came down with the chills and died in the month of April. Catherine I designated Peter the Great’s grandson Peter II successor. Peter II was the son of Alexis, Peter the Great’s only son. This time was a lonely point for Elizabeth as her sister and brother-in-law departed for Kiel, Germany. Her mother and the man she was about to marry died and she was left alone in St. Petersburg and was possibly next in line to rule.

Elizabeth, instead of posing a threat to Peter II, became his friend. She took advantage of her lack of duties and found joy in pleasure seeking and being friendly with guards and soldiers. Friends encouraged her to seek the power and she had the opportunity in 1730. Young Peter II was fourteen at that time and contracted smallpox and died. Elizabeth was awakened in the middle of the night and encouraged to rise and go proclaim herself empress, but she sent her encouraging physician away. The next day the Imperial Council had elected her thirty-six-year-old cousin Anne of Courland as Empress. Elizabeth chose not to seek power at that moment because she was worried if her attempt failed she would be disgraced, possibly imprisoned, and she knew she was not ready at the time. Anne was chosen because she could be influenced by the council. In the same time period Elizabeth’s sister Anne died several days after giving birth to Peter III, who would later become emperor from Elizabeth’s succession designation. Now, Elizabeth was a threat to Anne because of her possible claim to the throne. She was the only
living child of Peter the Great and a beautiful, popular person of the court. She was unable to marry because no royal person in Europe could have their son marry her because it would be seen as an act against Empress Anne. Elizabeth was not upset by this problem because she enjoyed the freedom and found most of her romantic interest in men of humble origins. Anne had no children so to produce an heir she brought her niece, Catherine of Mecklenburg, to Russian court and converted her to Orthodoxy with the name of Anna Leopoldovna, to court and arranged a marriage that soon after produced a son that was named Ivan after Anne’s father.

Although Elizabeth was passed over three times to rule, she did not mind and spent her time well often in the streets of St. Petersburg and walking through the guards barracks. She became popular and beloved by the Russian people, making her more of a threat to Anna and Ivan. In 1741, Anna grew very leery of Elizabeth and rumor had it that Anna was near sending Elizabeth to a convent. That November Elizabeth’s doctor came to her in the night and said, “Madam, you must choose finally now whether to be empress or to be relegated to a convent and see your servants suffer under torture” (Massie 38). She quickly rallied the guards in the night and claimed the throne on November 25, 1741. She was merciful on Anna and Ivan, sparing their lives and sending them off to Riga where soon after Ivan would be imprisoned the rest of his life. It would be Elizabeth that would summon her nephew Peter III to Russian court to attempt to groom him to become her successor one day. Who she thought first would be a suitable successor for her would later on prove to be a mere vessel for the ruler who would truly be impactful for Russia.

The history above gives a glimpse into the intricacies of how difficult it can be to gain access to the throne of Russia. A direct descendant of Peter the Great was passed over for the throne three times. This shows how low the odds were for an outside, unrelated party such as
Catherine to have the opportunity to rule. She had some luck or possibly fate in the connection of her family to the throne, her mother just happening to be the sister of the Empress’s dead fiancé. Catherine took the situation she was born into and took every opportunity she could to achieve the highest position anyone could have in the place and time she lived in.

Catherine’s Youth

Catherine experienced a youth fairly removed from the limelight of Russian court until the age of fourteen when she was summoned there. Her childhood would be the foundation to her entire life. The struggle to gain acceptance from her mother would be practice for her later struggle to please Empress Elizabeth who would be key to ensuring her marriage to Peter which would lead her to the Russian throne. The early ambition she had and her focus on developing her intelligence and virtues set her on a path to grasp the opportunity that came her way when a chance at Russian court arose.

Catherine was not born into royalty or into direct inheritance lineage to Russia. She was born as Sophia Augusta Fredericka to Prince Christian Augustus of Anhalt-Zerbst and Princess Johanna Elizabeth of Holstein-Gottorp. Her mother, Johanna, came from a family a rank above her father, and when she was confined to living the life of a military garrison wife, Johanna grew bored and dreamed a child would supply her with an adventure and fuel her own ambitions (Massie 5). On April 21, 1729, Sophia was born to the couple. Sophia would later be converted to orthodoxy and be called Catherine. The conversion to Orthodoxy was important because without the conversion she would have had little credibility and acceptance by the Russian people reducing her potential to rule one day. Eastern Orthodoxy was the widely practiced religion of Russia and Catherine could not have married Peter without converting. There was
speculation about how sincere her conversion was, but she displayed her devotion to the new religion well. For example, when she came down with pneumonia she asked for an Orthodox priest to see her instead of a Lutheran one, the religion that she raised in. On a side note of the great acts she did tied to religion, she created legislation for religious freedom and tolerance in Russia and it was her reign that started separation of church and state practices in Russia.

She did so much and would have hundreds of books written about her later on, but it is ironic how her birth might not have even been properly recorded. The only record of Sophia’s birth is a letter her father wrote to his cousin to announce that his child had been born safely: “...her birth nor her baptism was registered in nay Stettin church, an extraordinary omission for such a pious family” (Anthony 10). Sophia received little to no maternal feeling and care from her mother and was cared for by the wet nurses and servants. Her mother was disappointed she had not borne a son, but little did she know how influential and monumental the daughter she had produced would become. A year and a half later Johanna gave birth again to a boy whom she showered with love and attention, unlike she had done with Sophia. As Sophia grew up her mother thought her to be arrogant and rebellious. Believing she needed to lower her daughter’s pride, she continually told Sophia later she was ugly and disrespectful. Sophia wrote in her Memoirs:

I do not know whether I was really ugly as a child; but I remember very well that I was often told that I was and that for this reason I ought to strive for inward virtues and intelligence, I was firmly convinced of my ugliness and for that reason actually strove for inward excellence and was not so much concerned with my outward appearance. (13)
It was because of this poor treatment that Sophia started to learn how to act to manipulate situations and to please others. Sophia was forced to kneel and kiss the hems of the skirts of all visiting women of her house while also being forbidden to speak. She learned to conceal her pride and show humility which was what her mother desired, and Sophia's tactics would support her ambitions far down the road (Massie 9). Sophia had a questioning mind which challenged some of her tutors. Pastor Wagner, an army chaplain who was designated to teach Sophia religion, geography, and history, grew frustrated when Sophia would ask questions such as: "Why were great men of antiquity such as Marcus Aurelius eternally damned because they had not known of Christ's salvation and therefore could not have been redeemed?" (Massie 7). When he replied that it was God's will, Sophia was unsatisfied and continued her probing difficult questions. Her questioning and striving mind would be a large asset to her in her pursuit of authority.

Along with her tutors she had a governess named Babet Cardel who was affectionate and dedicated to Sophia's supreme education. Sophia was always thankful and recognized the gift she was given by having such a great caring teacher. Babet Cardel not only educated Sophia, but was a role model early on. Although Babet Cardel had a low position of governess, she had a strong sense of self-respect, dignity, and pride that Sophia picked up on and would mimic the rest of her life. Babet provided the nurturing and affectionate relationship she lacked from her mother and instilled in Sophia the importance of education and learning.

Sophia's relationships with other children foreshadowed her future rule, as she would usually be in command due to her natural tendency to lead and to come up with creative games (Massie 9). Starting at about age eight Sophia was being taken along with her mother to visit relatives and to be considered for a future arranged marriage. Sophia knew this purpose for their
visits and approved of an arranged marriage for herself because it could be a way to escape her mother and ensure she did not end up a spinster like some of her aunts. Sophia enjoyed visiting her aunts who lived in abbeys. One of her aunts had sixteen pug dogs that she kept in her bedroom and in that room the dogs ate, slept, and attended to their bathroom needs. Sophia wanted to get married to avoid living a life like her spinster aunts. Luckily, Sohpia had high ambitions at a young age and a mother who was relentless in her pursuit to find a great match for her daughter. Sophia wrote about the beginnings of her ambitious feelings in her Memoirs:

The first stirring of ambition that I ever felt was stimulated by Herr Bolhagen. In the year 1736 he read in my room a newspaper notice concerning the marriage of the Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, my cousin in the second degree, with the Prince of Wales, son of King George II of England. Apropos of this he said to Mademoiselle Cardel, “Do you know, this princess is by no means as carefully educated as our and not withstanding she is now destined to become Queen of England. Who knows what ours may become yet?” He then began to preach to me about wisdom, Christian virtue, and strict morality, in order that I might be more worthy to wear a crown should I ever be awarded one. This crown never went out of my head and afterwards gave me a great deal to do. (Anthony 13)

Reading these words about how someone had thought Sophia had the potential for greatness displays how the words of one person can create a desire that can shape and define a person’s entire life. Around the time Sophia was thirteen years old her physical attributes were starting to come in, but it was her other qualities that were starting to shine, her intelligence, wit, and ability to win people over. She did not use seduction, but instead the examples she saw of warmth and sympathetic understanding which had been shown to her by others in (Catherine 12).
Sophia learned that people like to talk about themselves, and by using this knowledge she gained their trust and friendship. Sophia's mother, while being a negative influence because of her lack of compassion for Sophia and her strict discipline of her, provided a difficult personality that Sophia had to learn to work with and manipulate. This training from within her immediate family would later serve her well in Russian court. As her physical attractiveness and her intelligence developed, she drew a suitor, her uncle. He even proposed to her, and she said she would agree to it if her parents would, but she was summoned to Russian court before her parents made a determination and she left the idea of marriage behind when she left for court.

Sophia knew that her purpose for being summoned to Russian court was to be evaluated for the chance to become the future wife of Peter III who was next in line to rule and she was excited. Her childhood while it started off rough with her mother being unwelcoming of Sophia. The reality was Johanna had produced a daughter that would go down in history as one of the most famous female rulers of any country for all time. When Johanna started to see Sophia's path develop, she then took more interest in her promising daughter. While her mother could be hard on Sophia at times, Sophia had the encouragement of her tutors and people such as Herr Bolhagen who instilled the idea she could become a person of status no one in her family had ever reached before. Her journey to the position of rule would require sacrifice and one of those sacrifices was having to put up with the man she would marry, Peter III.
Her Future Husband Peter

Significant others can often be a source of joy and security. They can be of great quality or we can pick poorly and end up with someone we do not love nor see good qualities in. Catherine ended up with someone who had few, if any good qualities, whom she did not love, and whom did not bring her much happiness. Luckily for Catherine, Peter would become a husband that would place her in the most opportune position to seize power when the time came.

In 1739 Sophia's uncle, Adolphus Frederick, was appointed guardian of the young orphaned Duke of Holstein, Charles Peter Ulrich, after his mother, Empress Elizabeth’s sister Anne and Duke Charles Frederick had died. Young Peter was a pathetic individual who never had ruling qualities, but he was the only living grandson of Peter the Great of Russia and his Aunt chose him to be her successor because of her love for her sister, his deceased mother. Peter physically was small, appeared sickly, delicate, and had protruding eyes. His emotional state was no better than his physical state, although that might have not have been entirely his fault. When Peter was orphaned he was placed in the care of his uncle who was abusive both physically and emotionally to Peter. His uncle would beat him and deny him food when he found Peter’s learning and actions unsatisfactory. By the time Peter was put under the care of his aunt, Empress Elizabeth, either he had an innate character of shallowness, simplicity, and stupidity, or enough damage had been done and he would never grow out of his foolishness.

Peter’s physical appearance declined more when he developed smallpox; Catherine was about sixteen at that time. She and he were kept apart over six weeks to protect Catherine from the disease. Peter recovered which was important because it kept Catherine in line to have a chance to rule one day although the smallpox took a toll on his face, scarring him greatly. During
Peter’s illness people of court were already changing their attitudes towards Catherine: “Already in St. Petersburg, certain courtiers, foreseeing the death of the grand duke, were turning away from her” (Massie 73). Catherine did the only action she could to maintain her future of power which was to write letters to the Empress Elizabeth expressing concern for Peter’s health. The first time she saw Peter after his recovery his face was “ravaged, swollen, and pitted with still unhealed pockmarks...Despite the poor light, Catherine was unable to mask her horror; she later described her future husband as ‘hideous’” (Massie 77). Empress Elizabeth at this point feared Catherine might break off the engagement because of Peter’s appearance. Little did she know Catherine had intentions of marrying for her ambitions to rule. She had few cares about the face she would have to marry to do so.

Catherine’s relationship with Peter became one of friendship rather than romance. She soon saw that Peter was consumed by his toy soldiers and ordering around his servants foolishly, and acting childish. She won his trust by listening to his ramblings of military marching formations and being a playmate within his antics at times. Peter was whimsical, having scattered ideas and plans. When he spent one entire winter planning out a country house Catherine played along, listened intently, and even drew sketches for him. Catherine realized he was foolish and said this of his ramblings, “of a dullness...that I have never seen equaled. When he left me, the most boring book seemed delightful” (Massie 144). Catherine spent much of her free time reading, and it was this action that helped her to learn the Russian language which would increase her popularity with the Empress and the Russian people. Peter thought her too much of a friend instead of a mate in that he would even tell her how he developed feelings for particular ladies in waiting of Catherine. Peter’s inappropriate desiring for her ladies in waiting and her composure to not react displayed the steadfastness of Catherine. She knew she had to
patiently wait and while she endured Peter’s antics and Empress Elizabeth’s constant judgement. Catherine was not the only one who could see how poorly suited for rule Peter was. His own aunt, Empress Elizabeth once wrote, “my Nephew is a fool, may the devil take him” (Massie 212). Catherine could have easily decided she was not happy in her situation and left court to live out an easier more joyful life, but she stayed. Her pride and ambition kept her in a focused and determined state. There was no guarantee she would ever rule. Peter was in line next and then whatever children they produced would technically be the next heirs, and there was also a chance there might be a coup that would overthrow Peter or herself during their rule. With only the slight chance at ruling one day, she stayed the course and worked constantly to influence and win people over, creating alliances she would one day need.

Elizabeth had desired an early marriage for Peter, but doctors were advising her that he needed to age more first because of his small stature and physical disposition. An attack of small pox that came close to killing Peter would be the event that triggered his marriage to Catherine. Empress Elizabeth feared that another illness could come along that might kill Peter and an heir needed to be produced. The wedding was set for July 1st 1745. Elizabeth wanted the wedding to be extravagant to demonstrate the Russian monarchy was strong and enduring. Catherine wrote in her Memoirs, “And the nearer the time came, the less could I avoid seeing that my marriage might be very unhappy. But I had too much pride and too much self-respect to make complaints or to let the world even guess that I thought myself unloved” (Anthony 66). Peter and Catherine had little if any love between them and the odds of them producing an heir were bad because of it. In her memoirs, Catherine recapped the night of her wedding saying after she had been led to her apartment she waited two hours for Peter and when he finally came he got into bed made a joke about how funny the servants would find it to see them in bed together and then fell asleep
It would be at least nine years until they had intercourse, but it did not mean they were both alone. Catherine bore Peter’s indiscretions with as much composure as she could. In 1750 the Princess of Courland was brought to court for a period of time and Peter grew attached to her. Peter’s feelings for another woman was very insulting to Catherine as the woman was short, hunchbacked, and unattractive. There was even a night when Catherine left the group containing Peter and the Princess of Courland because she could not bear to witness more of his attention to her, and when he came to bed he was very malicious about his feelings. He listed the qualities he saw in the princess and when Catherine pretended to be asleep he punched her hard twice, but she pretended it never happened and let the incident go (Massie 138). Peter would go on to pursue various ladies in waiting of Catherine, and Catherine would start to look for love from other men.

Peter became involved with one of Catherine’s maids of honor, Elizabeth Vorontsov, and he would continue this affair, even threatening Catherine with a divorce so he could marry Elizabeth Vorontsov. She was hardly a fine specimen as she was also hunchbacked, her face scarred by smallpox, and had a rowdy disposition. Catherine was not emotionally hurt since she had her own lovers, but if Peter somehow got his way and managed to divorce Catherine then she could be removed from the opportunity to rule. Peter’s relationship with Elizabeth Vorontsov posed a possible opportunity of a scandal that could harm Catherine’s ruling chances.

Marrying Peter would prove to be a burden, but the burden was necessary for her to ascend to the position she desired. His indiscretion was not as emotionally harming to Catherine as it could have been due to her taking on men as lovers. While Peter had chosen a lover who was mediocre to ugly in looks, Catherine always chose young, handsome men who were all too willing to become her intimate companion.
Catherine’s First of Many Lovers

Catherine was a believer in love and had a constant desire to have love in her life. This characteristic would lead her down a path of many men. I do not think Catherine was desperate, but instead a lover of love. She knew her disposition and had said, “The trouble is only that my heart cannot be content even for an hour without love…” (Montefiore 121). Some of these men simply were companions, others made her laugh, others advised her and changed Russia, and a few left her heartbroken. While some could view her many relationships she had through the course of her life as immoral, I believe she treated the men she loved with great compassion, care, and kindness and that she would not have achieved as much as she did without them in her life. She confessed to one of her more dear lovers who had a tendency of jealousy that if she had only married a man of high quality from the start she would have never taken on all the men she loved. History made it so she married a worthless man, and then she went on to love many men, each particular and elevating her in some way. Some only made her happy while others helped her achieve feats.

The first lover of Catherine was Sergei Saltykov. He was a handsome man with the highest charm and he tirelessly pursued Catherine until she gave in and they were lovers, he was the first man to cause her heartbreak when he later pulled away from her. He had been married when he was seeing her, but the real cause of his departure was his restless nature of chasing women. He was significant because he was the start of her finding love with men, and it would be a later affair that would help her achieve her ruling position. In 1754 Catherine became pregnant and gave birth to her son Paul on September 20, 1754. Her son was immediately taken into the care of the Empress and Catherine hardly saw him. She had been restricted from seeing Sergei and now losing access to see her son made her very depressed. Once again reading began
to fill her time. This period of reading that followed contributed to her later enlightening rule. She read Montesquieu’s *L’Esprit des Lois*, Voltaire’s *Essai sur les Moeurs et l’Esprit des Nations*, and Tacitus *Annals* (Massie 168). It was Tacitus’s book that made her think that strong personalities instead of processes create history, which aligns exactly with how I believe she made history. Montesquieu’s work made her see both pros and cons of despotic rule, despotic rule being a rule where one leader holds absolute power which was how the monarchy was set up. She set herself apart from other rulers in her passion to read and her willingness to have an open mind to changing her governing structure in a way that would detract from her own power. This preliminary reading would lead her on a course of having a personnel correspondence with Voltaire and other philosophers who would provide her with ideologies and views that would shape her rule. It would not be until the French revolution that she would shy away from the enlightened theories in order to protect and maintain her monarchy.

Her eagerness to learn would serve her well both prior to her gaining her ruling position and during her rule. While Peter would often bring the official issues that were designated to him to Catherine to help him make decisions, Catherine prided herself in taking time to read treaties, documents, being informed on the matters of the country. Catherine used the time well she had under the care of Empress Elizabeth until her passing, by studying the Russian language, history, customs, and becoming well read. Peter was less prepared to assume the throne, and when the time came for him to step up to the throne, he did not have the political savviness to maintain his position, and it was a matter of time before he would be dethroned. If Catherine had not done it, another person or group would have.
Empress Elizabeth's Passing and Peter's Short Reign

Empress Elizabeth was a smart woman and was not blind to her nephew Peter's shortcomings. She had to have known that someone with the reputation and lack of skills he had would not last in a ruling position. She set up her nephew for a position he was not qualified for and she put the country she had prioritized her life around at risk by her negligence. Peter made radical unpopular changes that created an environment that supported a coup. Elizabeth’s poor judgement should not be judged too harshly because one alteration could have led to Catherine never having come to the throne.

Empress Elizabeth may have had significant doubts about her nephew’s incompetence and fitness to rule, but she never changed the succession before her passing in December 1761. As Elizabeth was on her death bed, Peter made public claims on his plans to divorce Catherine and marry his mistress and to sever Russia’s current alliances and align with its current enemies. Those claims caused dissension about his popularity as ruler. It appeared the rule would pass to Peter, but Elizabeth could have changed the line of succession and appointed Catherine and Peter’s son Paul, making Catherine a possible regent until he came of age. Elizabeth died after suffering a stroke on December 25, 1761, never changing the succession from Peter to someone else.

Catherine may have had the misfortune of a pitiful husband, but as he enjoyed his short reign he would turn people against him due to some unpopular choices. Soon people were starting to look to Catherine as a solution and approaching her with plans. In the time period immediately following Empress Elizabeth’s death, he was disrespectful during the mourning period and the funeral ceremonies. While Catherine understood the value of public image and
opinion, Peter did not. Catherine displayed her grief by being near the coffin and demonstrating weeping; Peter, on the other hand, refused to sit or stand near the coffin. While in the Cathedral Peter talked loudly, made jokes, laughed and even stuck his tongue out at priests (Massie 240). Maybe the worst sign of disrespect he made in relation to his aunt’s death was when Elizabeth’s body was being moved from the Cathedral to the mausoleum on the island fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. During the procession Peter walked behind Elizabeth’s coffin as it was being carried. He was wearing a long ceremonial train that required two people to follow behind him holding it. Peter would stop walking, let the coffin be walked far away from where he was standing, approximately seventy meters, then he would run to catch up. The two train holders could not keep up and his train would flap in the wind causing a scene. He committed this joke several times during the procession, showing outright disrespect.

The Russian public did not approve of Peter showing such disrespect to the deceased empress and a figure who had bestowed him the opportunity to rule. Empress Elizabeth had liked Catherine a lot which explains why she chose her to marry her nephew and kept her at court the length of time she did, but the death of Elizabeth allowed Catherine to no longer have someone over her dictating her life and reprimanding her. When Peter became emperor after Elizabeth’s death, Catherine made the decision to lay low and let him dig himself into a hole. She would spend his reign waiting for the moment when she might act and take power for herself. She would not spend the time waiting alone. She would fall in love with a man that would catapult her to the throne.

Peter III became Emperor on January 5, 1761. While he only reigned for six months he did make some significant changes for Russia and enacted over 200 new laws. When Peter became Emperor he extracted Russian forces from the Seven Years’ War and made a Peace
Treaty with Prussia. The Seven Years’ War had been started by King Frederick of Prussia when he found out that Russia, Austria, France, and Saxony had made a secret alliance against Prussia. Also Empress Elizabeth had hated the King of Prussia because he had made remarks about her private life and she had never forgiven him. Peter ending this war and making a peace treaty with Prussia was controversial because Russia was prior an enemy of Prussia and now they were going to be allies. This switch was not popular with many Russians, causing a huge shift in power between the European countries. This military decision was not popular with the people of Russia, but his second pivotal military decision was supported. He had planned a war against Denmark to reconquer lands that had in the past belonged to Peter’s birthplace of Holstein. Catherine would use these war plans as a reason to move against him. She said that the war against Denmark was “both untimely and extremely useless to the Russian state” (Leonard 147). Peter made a few positive changes during his rule. He took lands away from the church and redistributed the land, creating a more market-driven agriculture system. Short term this caused state revenues for Russia to increase and long term the economy was strengthened. Peter felt secure in his position and did not anticipate a coup led by his wife Catherine. It was Louis XV of France who said, “the fault of Peter III consists in having given his spouse too much independence and in having been insufficiently watchful of the party of ambitious men around her” (Leonard 139). Louis XV’s remark questions the reliability of Catherine’s and many others’ negative views of Peter and his nature.

Whether he was a good ruler or not before he was overthrown does not mean Catherine necessarily did a bad action by staging a coup. If Peter was a ruler who had such little political savviness and awareness, then he could have let his country be conquered or manipulated by
other country’s rulers. Catherine saw an opportunity and seized it. Many world leaders have done this. What is remarkable was able to do this as a woman and then hold power for so long.

*Gregory Orlov, Possibly the Most Important Man She Ever Loved*

Catherine had many lovers and each served a purpose. Gregory Orlov was a man with more rugged qualities of strength and military abilities while falling short in the categories of sophistication, intelligence, and political savviness. This would serve Catherine well because of the role he played in getting her to the throne and limiting his involvement in participating in the government afterwards. I have suspicions that if he would have stayed loyal to her and continued to accomplish big feats for Catherine from time to time she may have kept him in her personal company for the duration of her rule. However, he would come to demand too much of Catherine. She would place him in a position she had placed everyone and everything most of her life, second to her ambition to rule Russia.

Catherine was smart and formed alliances with powerful people. One of those was a pivotal ally, Gregory Orlov, a war hero who came from a military family with a past of exemplary bravery. His grandfather was in a corps of pike men founded by Ivan the Terrible that revolted against military reforms of Peter the Great. When Peter the Great captured the pike men group that Gregory’s grandfather had been a part of, he sentenced many of them to death by beheading. When it was his grandfather’s turn to be executed, the man unhesitatingly walked across the stage where it was set to occur, used his foot to nudge aside a severed head and said, “I must make room here for myself” (Massie 230). Peter was impressed by the man’s lack of fear of death and pardoned him on the spot and placed him into one of his own regiments. Gregory was one of five brothers, all of whom were physically strong, brave, and loyal to Russia and its
army, making him a prime ally. Catherine started seeing Gregory Orlov while she was married to Peter before he became emperor in the summer of 1761 before Empress Elizabeth died. Although the literature I read did not indicate that Catherine took into account the military influence Gregory Orlov held at the time that could be utilized in her overthrowing her husband, I cannot imagine that she did not take his influence into consideration. Gregory Orlov and his brothers were unhappy with the changes Peter was making to the government when he became emperor.

It was Gregory Orlov’s brother Alexis who awoke Catherine in the night to start the coup that overthrew her husband Peter. Catherine was forever grateful to the Orlov brothers’ support and gave them great wealth and titles after they helped her seize power. She may even owe them thanks for eliminating the threat of her husband Peter ever trying to regain the throne. After she claimed rule, she was merciful to Peter and instead of calling for his execution, she had him confined with military guards in a small house away from St. Petersburg. Gregory Orlov’s brother Alexis was in charge of Peter’s supervision and treatment and would be the one to write a letter to Catherine explaining Peter’s death. Peter mysteriously died one year into Catherine’s reign when one evening the guards and him all got drunk during dinner at the house, started to argue, and somehow Peter ended up being strangled. While it was said Catherine had never intended for that accident to happen she created an opportune situation for it. Alexis Orlov, who was in charge of the imprisonment, had a violent manner to him and being the brother of Gregory Orlov he had his brother’s best interest in mind. Gregory had wished to marry Catherine at that point, but was unable because of her still being married to Peter technically. It would take nothing less than Peter’s death to make marriage a possibility between them. The official proclamation of his death stated he died naturally of hemorrhoids. Catherine covered for her
friends and had the doctors perform an autopsy on Peter, searching narrowly for only poison traces and ignoring the strangle marks on him. She had very loyal medical examiners, “She had the body dissected by doctors who could be trusted to clear Orlov. The doctors opened the body, and, as they were told to do, looked only for evidence of poisoning” (Massie 273). Peter being alive would have made him a threat to her, but people disliked him so much that she had felt no need to have him killed. She really intended to let him live out his life in not luxury, but not a brutal harsh imprisonment either. Peter’s death would not be the last time Peter would cause her trouble.

In October of 1773 Catherine would be challenged by the image of Peter once again in a bloody violent upheaval surrounding an imposter claiming to be her dead husband Peter. The imposter rose up from the Cossack community, which was a community that had been formed by groups of people who had refused the imperial rule and fled across the Russian border. Because much of the Russian nation was uneducated and Peter reigned so short a time that many citizens did not know what he physically looked like, the imposter’s lack of resemblance was not challenged. This imposter was named Emelyan Pugachev. He served in the Russian and Polish army and was a deserter who looked nothing like the deceased Peter. He rallied people behind him, claiming he would provide forgiveness to all Cossacks for their previous crimes, provide more land for people, provide food, and twelve rubles a year to every Cossack along with their freedom so they would no longer have to work for the nobles. He made malicious commands stating that nobility must be killed and his followers carried out his demands:

Noblemen were dragged from their hiding places, flayed, burned alive, hacked to pieces, or hanged from trees. Children mutilated and slaughtered in front of parents. Wives spared only long enough to be raped in front of their husbands;
then they had their throats cut or were thrown into carts and carried off as prizes.

(Massie 399)

The terror the imposter was creating was growing with the acts he was having his rebel group commit. Catherine may have not perceived the rebel leader as much of a threat when Emelyan started his uprising, but within a year she knew he had to be stopped. She assigned an experienced General, Alexander Bibikov, to handle the situation. The general started his mission, but died from fever before he could complete it and General Peter Panin took up the mission. Catherine’s approval of him to take command of this military mission displayed her maturity and exemplified why she deserved the position she held. General Peter Panin was someone who on a personal level she did not particularly like. He had stated before that in his opinion Russia should be ruled by a man. Instead of refusing him the position because of their differing views, she acknowledged he was the most qualified candidate for the job. It would seem as though an empress or emperor would have too large of an ego to allow themselves to be insulted in any way, but Catherine had in mind her country before her own pride. In September 1774, a group of his lieutenants aiming to save themselves grabbed Emelyan in his sleep and delivered him to General Peter Panin. The lieutenants who handed him over were pardoned while Emelyan was beheaded and four of his other lieutenants were beheaded and quartered. Catherine showed great leniency in the treatment of his other followers who had participated in the revolt. She ordered his name never be spoken, the town where he was from renamed, and the people who had death sentences were made instead to endure a life of hard labor or exile to Siberia.

This episode of an imposter challenging Catherine’s reign forced her to defend her throne. She did not reign for thirty years without stress or worry of a coup against her. She had Emelyan pose as her dead husband and he rallied a good number of people behind him to rise
against Catherine. The event opened Catherine’s eyes and probably made her thankful that the real Peter was dead. She knew after this imposter scare that she could not take her position for granted and had to be ready for others to try and unseat her. Afterwards she recognized that she should have acted sooner and she paid the price for being slow to act.

Prior to Emelyan rising up and creating chaos for Catherine she had desired to try and free the serfs of Russia. After the uprising, that would be impossible for her. Part of Emelyan’s strategy and rise to power involved convincing serfs to rise against their noble landowners. Many serfs murdered these landowners and after the uprising many held a grudge against the serfs. It would have been very unpopular with her noble supporters if she had taken actions to completely free the serfs. She did enact legislation that allowed serfs to file complaints against the nobles they worked for if the nobles did not uphold their responsibilities to the serf. Her slow response on the Emelyan uprising caused her to have to abandon her desire to have the serfs freed and could have cost her the position of Empress if he would have succeeded.

Gregory Orlov’s Accomplishment and Exit

Her relationship with Gregory Orlov was one of her longer love affairs, lasting over eleven years. While she did love him, she did not desire to marry him as it could detract from her power, and the public would most likely frown upon her marrying a person of lower social class and sophistication. Gregory did achieve a significant accomplishment during his time as her lover for which Catherine owed him much appreciation. Before I say what Gregory achieved, I will give some information of the health advancements Catherine helped Russia make that led to him taking on the challenge he did and succeeding.
In 1763, only the second year of Catherine’s reign, she founded Russia’s first college of medicine for training Russian doctors, surgeons, and apothecaries. She also soon after, with her personal funds, established a hospital just for unwanted babies to reduce infanticide which was common for unmarried impoverished women. The mother’s anonymity was kept and all children were accepted and cared for at the hospital and educated (Massie 384). She also issued a decree that the capital of every province needed to have a general hospital, while every county in the province needed to have a physician, a surgeon, two surgical assistants, two apprentices, and an apothecary. These changes she made for Russia were needed and I doubt a male ruler would have made these advancements as much as a priority as she did. Male rulers might not have put as much emphasis into the health and education sector as she did, but Catherine demonstrated just as much sternness and courage as the greatest male leaders, in my opinion.

Catherine had faced illnesses in her lifetime, but overall she did not want much doctoral care for herself and tried to keep herself healthy on her own terms, until she encountered smallpox during her reign. She knew smallpox was deadly, as it had killed some of her relatives and members of court she had known, so she took it very seriously. First, she secluded herself and her son Paul in a country estate to avoid crowds and then she started talking to medical professionals about inoculation. She then had herself inoculated, which meant she had injected into her smallpox matter. At this point in history the smallpox vaccination had not been discovered yet. This action was very risky and an unproven process for making one immune to the disease. Catherine had strong conviction and reason for her inoculating herself. She told the Senate and Legislative Commission, “My objective was, through my example, to save from death the multitude of my subjects who, not knowing the value of this technique, and frightened
of it, were left in danger” (Massie 388). Within twelve years over two million Russians had been inoculated because of the example Catherine had set.

There would be another illness that would challenge Catherine and that Gregory Orlov would help her save her people from. In March of 1770, the plague started to cause death in Russian troops. After limited quarantining, bans on public gatherings, and a strong frost, the death rate declined and it appeared the scare was over. By March 1771, the plague was back and in stronger force. By fall the daily death toll was around three to four hundred in the city of Moscow, and the people were beginning to riot, only spreading the plague more. That was when Gregory probably did his most brilliant act. He asked for permission to travel to Moscow to bring order to the city and stop the raging epidemic. It seemed like a suicide mission, and while even the governor fled the city, he went right into the heart of it. He brought with him physicians, military personnel, and administrators to help him. It took him two and a half years to achieve his mission, but he saved many lives. “Deaths in the city, which had risen to 21,000 in September, dropped to 17,561 in October, 5,255 in November, and 805 in December. In part, this was a result of Orlov’s actions; in part, it was a function of the arrival of cold weather” (Massie 391). It was estimated over 220,000 Russians had died from the plague, Gregory Orlov was credited for preventing many more deaths and Catherine was very grateful to him. The saying all good things must come to an end, came true for Gregory Orlov in 1772 when Catherine sent him away.

Gregory was given another big task, to negotiate peace with the Turks. Negotiations were halted after he had shown too much arrogance and undiplomatic behavior. That, along with Catherine receiving news he had started a new love affair, pushed her to the point where she chose to end the relationship. A plot to overthrow her also exposed anti-Orlov sentiments and
encouraged her decision to be rid of him. A plot had been discovered that a group of guards had planned to overthrow Catherine, banish the Orlov brothers, and place her son Paul on the throne, and if Paul refused then both he and Catherine would be killed. When Catherine heard of the plot, she fled St. Petersburg for Finland with her most trusted advisors, and Gregory Potemkin would be within that group (Smith 4). Like others she had ended relations with, she treated him well by providing for him financially and allowing him to use the title of the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire. Gregory Orlov begged to see Catherine, but she held steadfast and refused. She took on a new lover, Alexander Vasilchikov. She, like many women, chose the wrong man in Alexander. Poor Alexander was dull, not specifically intelligent, and even failed to make Catherine laugh. She soon recognized his faults and sent him off to a large country estate with a hefty pension to sustain him. Once again her generosity and lack of hard feelings toward her ex-lovers was unwavering.

Gregory is an example of a person who seized a great opportunity in becoming close with someone in power and then got greedy and lost all the ground he had made. He had pushed Catherine to marry him and she was reluctant, not because she did not love him enough, but because of how it might detract from her power and upset the public. When she refused him and he started other affairs with women she had to make a tough decision. Marry him and risk her ruling position or choose to continue her reign alone and probably lose him. Her choice may have been out of selfishness to keep her ruling position, but she suffered emotionally from losing him. She loved him for thirteen years and had him and his brothers to thank for helping her achieve the position of Empress. She would not be lonely long, and she would come to love another man much deeper than she ever loved Gregory Orlov.
There would be another Gregory who Catherine would love and this time with more sincerity and wholeness than Gregory Orlov. Gregory had helped Catherine in various prospects during her rule, but it would be another lover that would be a very important advisor to Catherine and a consistent companion until his death. He was rumored to even possibly have been Catherine’s husband. Catherine’s love for this man is an example of how even the greatest and strongest rulers can fall for someone who can cause emotional turmoil in their lives and still they remain with them. They were a timeless couple: “Their love affair and political alliance was unequalled in history by Antony and Cleopatra, Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, Napoleon and Josephine, because it was remarkable for its achievements as for its romances, as endearing for its humanity as for its power” (Montefiore 5). Even the “greats” can be susceptible to a person they love who may hurt them over and over emotionally. For as much emotional pain he caused her to suffer, he caused her blissful joy and helped her expand the Russian empire.

Gregory Potemkin was present the night Catherine seized power from Peter. While she was leading the march to Oranienbaum to arrest her husband Peter to ensure her new position, she was dressed as a Preobrazhensky guard, but was missing an article of uniform. It was then that Gregory Potemkin, only twenty two years old at the time, rode out of the ranks and handed her a sword to complete her uniform. When she asked his name little did she know this would be the man that she would love for the longest amount of time in her life and would be maybe her biggest ally during her rule. It was even rumored and believed that Potemkin and Catherine were wed in secret in June 1774. There were a couple reasons to keep the wedding secret if it did take place. First, when Gregory Orlov had wanted to marry Catherine there had been backlash and a
plan to assassinate him should the marriage take place. Second, a marriage by Catherine might spark the worries of the succession rights of her son Paul.

Their relationship was a roller coaster; they would be very much in love and arguing the next moment. When Potemkin went away for a period of time he even selected favorites to keep his “wife” happy in the long period he was away. He selected young guards who were of little threat to his position with Catherine, but who he knew would be loyal to him and please Catherine in companionship and in bed. He was not alone though without companionship; he had many more lovers than Catherine. Many of these were the married wives of his own officers and others who were rumored to be his own nieces. Though both Catherine and he had their other lovers, they each held a special place in each other’s hearts and Potemkin would have much positive influence over Russia. Catherine and Potemkin wrote thousands of notes to each other as it was a way to feel connected during the days when they were apart and Catherine was busy attending to state matters. Potemkin had issues with jealousy of Catherine’s prior lovers and was always suspicious and worried he could and would be replaced. Catherine wrote many letters reaffirming her love and loyalty to him. In a letter to him she wrote, “My sweet beauty to whom no King can compare. I am very gracious and affectionate toward you, and my protection you have and will have for all time” (Smith 31). During the same month she wrote again very affectionately, “Hello, sweetheart. The Truth must be told- we are both so dear to one another. There’s nothing like it in the world” (Smith 34). But Potemkin was weighed down by mood swings, fits of anger, and sulky depressions. If modern diagnosis were made on him he would have probably been diagnosed with maniac depression.

Potemkin started to gain positions and influence; he was appointed vice president of the College of War and governor general of new Russia, which was a stretch of land north of the
Crimea and the Black Sea. Because of the position he had at the College of War he had much influence on military decisions. He advised and helped Catherine when the Pugachev rebellion occurred and Emelyan was pretending to be Peter III. He was to remain an advisor and deep love to Catherine until he died in October of 1791, after which Catherine wept greatly knowing the man she had loved so deeply was gone forever and that she had lost maybe the best advisor she ever had, with no possible chance of replacing him.

I cannot even fathom how many men she came to love physically and emotionally during her life. She sought out her lovers not primarily for physical pleasure, but because she was a true romantic and desired deep emotional love at all times. She may have had a habit of choosing men who were often quite young and good looking, but she desired the qualities of intelligence, wit, and supportiveness from them. She wanted someone that at times she could confide in and lean on for advice and support. She suffered heartbreak after heartbreak as some of her lovers left her, others died, others she sent off. One heartbreak can hold someone back their whole lives and Catherine took one after the other and managed to repeatedly pull herself together and continue to rule the Russian empire.
Catherine may have been such a good ruler and able to seem powerful among men and fit amongst them because she had less interaction with women then she did with men growing up and in the Russian court life. She wrote once to a Madame Bjelke,

> From my fifteenth to my thirty-third year, I have never really had the opportunity to converse with women; I only had handmaidens about me. When I wished to speak to anyone, I had to go to another room where there were only men. So it is due partly to habit and partly to my taste that has been so formed that I really understand only how to carry on a conversation with the latter. (Anthony 208)

This limited interaction with women and abundance of it with men may have groomed her to be someone who could handle a ruling position where she would constantly have to win the minds of men. While she most often dealt with men in her political dealings she kept women in mind and made some advancement for her fellow women of Russia. At the time of her rule prostitution was causing venereal diseases to spread rampant in her country. To combat this she built a hospital for women suffering from those infections. Peter the Great died young due to a venereal disease and Catherine had each of her lovers examined by a trusted advisor before she became sexually involved with them (Anthony 209). She also took over a prior convent and turned it into a school for young ladies to further education for five hundred ladies at a time.
Truly Was Great

Catherine was a humble person and modest of her achievements. While people tried to call her Catherine the Great during her lifetime she told them to call her Catherine II. It was after her death that Russians began speaking of her as Catherine the Great. Catherine rivals Peter the Great in Russian prominence, and the only woman to equal her in a European ruling position was Elizabeth I of England. Catherine assembled one of the greatest art galleries in Europe during her reign; set up hospitals, schools and orphanages; persuaded her people to be inoculated against smallpox; and opened access to the Black Sea for Russia. She brought her passion for moral, political, and judicial philosophy to Russia and was a passionate learner and reader. She is a symbol of strength and a person who persevered and made her own way. She overcame challenge after challenge and ruled with grace. She dedicated her life to putting Russia first in her life and made sacrifice after sacrifice for the country she loved so much.

An Example

If I could be a fraction of the person Catherine was I would have accomplished more than I could ever hope to. Being an ambitious woman is not always a welcomed persona and she embodied that mindset back when women had few avenues to exercise those internal stirrings of drive. I personally want to accomplish so much in my lifetime and Catherine has helped inspire me to stay active in pursuing my deepest ambitions. She demonstrated that getting all you want out of life requires immense sacrifice and sometimes making some hard choices on the path there such as how she had to marry a man she did not love. She displayed forgiveness and grace over and over when people wronged her and it was she, not them, who went down in history as one of the greatest rulers in Russian history. We all experience setbacks, failures, people treating us
badly, heartbreak, and sometimes it can feel like no one could ever understand how we feel.

Reading various accounts of Catherine’s life has shown me a woman who desired an empire and experienced every ache and pain I have and more, overcame it all. She will live on forever in history books and will remain someone who I want to continue to study throughout my life.
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