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THE REPUBLIC OF
THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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**THE REPUBLIC OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS
AND OTHER STORIES**

By Valery Brussof

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THE SOUTHERN CROSS
AND OTHER STORIES**

BY
VALERY BRUSSOF

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY BY
STEPHEN GRAHAM

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INTRODUCTION

VALERY BRUSSOF

VALERY BRUSSOF is a celebrated Russian writer of the present time. He is in the front rank of contemporary literature, and is undoubtedly very gifted, being considered by some to be the greatest of living Russian poets, and being in addition a critic of penetration and judgment, a writer of short tales, and the author of one long historical novel from the life of Germany in the sixteenth century.

He is a Russian of strong European tastes and temperament, a sort of Mediterraneanised Russian, with greater affinities in France and Italy than in his native land; an artificial production in the midst of the Russian literary world. A hard, polished, and even merciless personality, he has little in common with the compassionate spirits of Russia. If Kuprin or Gorky may be taken as characteristic of modern Russia, Brussof is their opposite. He sheds no tears with the reader, he makes no passionate and "unmanly" defiance of the world, but is restrained and concentrated and wrapped up in himself and his ideas. The average

length of a sentence of Dostoieffsky is probably about twenty-five words, of Kuprin thirty, but of Brussof only twenty, and if you take the staccato " Republic of the Southern Cross," only twelve. His fine virile style is admired by Russians for its brevity and directness. He has been called a maker of sentences in bronze.

It is curious, however, that the theme of his writing has little in common with the virility of his style. As far as our Western point of view is concerned it is considered rather feminine than masculine to doubt the reality of our waking life and to give credence to dreams. Yet such is undoubtedly the preoccupation of Brussof in these stories.

He says in his preface to the second edition of that collection which bears the title *The Axis of the Earth*, " the stories are written to show, in various ways, that there is no fixed boundary line between the world of reality and that of the imagination, between the dreaming and the waking world, life and fantasy ; that what we commonly call ' imaginary ' may be the greatest reality of the world, and that which all call reality the most dreadful delirium."

This volume, to which we have given the title of *The Republic of the Southern Cross* contains the best of Brussof's tales, and they all exemplify this particular attitude towards life. Six tales are taken from *The Axis of the Earth*, but " For Herself or Another " is taken from

the volume entitled *Nights and Days*, and "Rhea Silvia" and "Eluli, son of Eluli," from the book bearing the title of *Rhea Silvia*, in the Russian Universal Library.

In Russia, as I have previously pointed out, the short story is considered of much more literary importance than it is here. It is the fashion to write short stories, and readers remember those they have read and refer to them, as we do to the distinctive and memorable poems on our intimate bookshelves. But, then, as a rule in Russia a short story must possess as its foundation some particular literary idea and conception. The story written for the sake of the story is almost unknown, and as a general rule the sort of love story and "love interest" so indispensable with us is not asked there. It often happens, therefore, that a volume of short tales makes a real and vital contribution to literature. I think possibly that these specimen volumes of Russian stories which I have edited from Sologub Kuprin and Brussof may be helpful in our own literary world as affording new conceptions, new models, and showing new possibilities of literary form. Brussof's volume is an emotional study of reality and unreality cast in the form of brilliant tales.

"Rhea Silvia," the longest and perhaps the best, tells of the dream which becomes reality in the Golden House of Nero which had been lost; the subterranean

Rome where a Goth can meet a crazed girl who imagines she is the vestal Rhea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus who founded Rome itself, and that the Goth, one of the barbarian destroyers of Rome, is the god Mars; the whole before and after intermingled.

In "The Republic of the Southern Cross" Brussof projects himself several centuries into the future and imagines an industrial community of millions of workers, so divorced from reality that they are living at the South Pole where no life is possible, in a huge town called Star City where no star is visible, because they have built an immense opaque roof to the town—literally a "lid," as they imagine it in New York, where they give you the freedom of the city "with the lid off"; where the polar cold is defied by machinery which keeps the temperature at the same point for ever, and the six months' polar night—and, indeed, no night—is ever known, because the great box is kept constantly illuminated by electric light; Star City, where the Town Hall is actually built on the *spot* of the South Pole, the centre of the town, whence you can only walk northward, whence the six main roads, with thirteen-story buildings on each side, go out like meridians of longitude, and the cross-roads are concentric circles of latitude; Star City, stricken at last

by the disease of contradiction, which creates anarchy between the ideal and the real, impulse and action, as if the approximation of latitude and longitude had hypnotised men's souls; plague-stricken Star City, where the only refuge is the Town Hall where all earthly meridians become one, is all used with appalling power by Brussof to suggest his mental conceit. I once read outside a Russian theatre, "People of weak will are asked to refrain from taking tickets for this drama." A similar caution might be addressed to those who turn to read "The Republic of the Southern Cross."

"The Mirror," into which the vain woman looks and sees a reflection which is not quite herself, who detects the particular personality of her reflection, becomes afraid of it, is finally overcome by it and forced to step into the mirror and let the reflection get out and walk about the world, is subtly suggestive of the instability of what we call the real, the solid ground under our feet. A characteristic detail is that the special mirror before which the woman stands is a revolving one, and when she gets angry she can make it go round like the earth on its axis, and as the glass goes over and under, in again and out again, so it is, as it were, night and day, dream and waking, reality and unreality.

The drunken locksmith, seeing the seventh-century-old Italian bust of a woman in the house to which he has been called to repair a desk, and becoming obsessed with the idea that it is the face of a woman whose love he betrayed, the woman of his bright and fortunate days, who tells the long sad story which is more real to him than the realities of the prison or the doss-house, though he does not himself know whether the story be truth or whether he invented it, is another hauntingly suggestive tale.

In "Eluli, son of Eluli," two excavators in the French Congo discover a marvellous Phœnician tomb somewhere about the equatorial line and only partially decipher the curse on those who shall disturb the rest of the sleeping Eluli whose tomb it is. It is in a fever-stricken district of exhausting climate, and the older and weaker of the archæologists becomes obsessed with the reality of the dead Eluli, son of Eluli, who visits his bedside and pronounces over him the awful curse. Both men eventually perish. Only the normal and stronger man, namely, the one further away from the axis of reality, remained untouched and unseeing.

"For Herself or Another," one of the cleverest tales in this selection, describes the doubt that a Russian tourist has that a fellow-countrywoman whom he sees in the crowd is or is not his long-cast-off sweetheart. She

is so like as to be a perfect double. It seems impossible that such similarity between two persons should exist. The man conceives the idea that the woman is feigning to be someone else merely to punish him. He is so persistent that she for her part agrees to pretend that she is indeed his old-time friend, and some of the most tantalising description is that in which she seems to pretend that she is that she is.

What the new realists who dominate our Western schools of philosophy would say to Valery Brussof would be curious. He is not an hysterical type of writer and is not emotionally convinced of the truth of his writing, but wilfully persistent, affirming unreality intellectually and defending his conception with a sort of masculine impressionism. He drives his idea to the reader's mind clad in complete armour, no tenderness, no apologetics, no willingness to please a lady's eye in the use of his words and phrases.

The theme of several of the stories might have been worked out readily by our Mr. Algernon Blackwood, but so would have been more discursive, and the mystery of them better hidden. But Brussof, as it were, draws the skull and crossbones at the top of the page before he writes a word and then goes on. Inevitably the interest is reflected from the stories to the personality of the author.

It should be said that a slight strain of madness seems to cast a sort of glamour on an artist in Russia, whereas in the West, unless the artist be a musician, it is certainly a handicap. One of the strongest prejudices against taking Nietzsche seriously in England is that he finished his days in an asylum. And it is as prejudicial to be thought *pas normal* in France as to have lost a mental balance with us. But Russia, with her epileptic Dostoieffsky, hypochondriac Gogol, inebriate Nekrasof, has other traditions, and it is not unfitting that the artist who made hundreds of marvelous studies of a primeval demon, the most clever painter of modern Russia, Michael Vrubel, should have painted as his last picture before removal to an asylum, Valery Brussov, the author of these tales, a reproduction of this portrait serving aptly as a frontispiece for this book.

Both Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells have been described as average or standard types of intelligence, and both are proud of level-headedness. But in the Russian literary world claims of that kind are not put forward nowadays. In fact, Russia, though most heartily progressive—perhaps too heartily from our point of view—does not reckon the credibility of the earth and light and truth and ordinary measurement as in any way superior to the credibility of the world of fantasy. It is worth while writing in Russia, not so

much to affirm the real as to find and then set in ever more striking pose the paradoxes of human life.

Brussov's poetry, for which he enjoys a great reputation, is dedicated to the same ideas as his stories, though in them he is before all else a most polished craftsman and cares more for perfection of technique than for anything else.

His poetry is not difficult, and can be recommended for those who read Russian and prefer to study up-to-date matter. In my opinion, however, the best volumes of Balmont have more lyrical beauty than the best of Brussov. There is, moreover, a good deal of erotic verse which is bankrupt of real vital thought, as there are stories of this kind not by any means commendable for British consumption. Brussov evidently reads English, and one or two of his poems are reminiscent of better things at home.

In the midst of his wide literary activities Brussov is also an interesting critic, and I know few more elucidative volumes than "*Dalekie i Bliskie, Near and Far,*" a collection of essays on the Russian poets.

STEPHEN GRAHAM.



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THE REPUBLIC OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS

THERE have appeared lately a whole series of descriptions of the dreadful catastrophe which has overtaken the Republic of the Southern Cross. They are strikingly various, and give many details of a manifestly fantastic and improbable character. Evidently the writers of these descriptions have lent a too ready ear to the narratives of the survivors from Star City (*Zvezdny*), the inhabitants of which, as is common knowledge, were all stricken with a psychical distemper. For that reason we consider it opportune to give an account here of all the reliable evidence which we have as yet of this tragedy of the Southern Pole.

The Republic of the Southern Cross came into being some forty years ago, as a development from three hundred steel works established in the Southern Polar regions. In a circular note sent to each and every Government of the whole world, the new state expressed its pretensions to all lands, whether mainland or island, within the limits of the Antarctic circle, as

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also all parts of these lands stretching beyond the line. It announced its readiness to purchase from the various other states affected the lands which they considered to be under their special protectorate. The pretensions of the new Republic did not meet with any opposition on the part of the fifteen great powers of the world. Debateable points concerning certain islands lying entirely outside the Polar circle, but closely related to the Southern Polar state were settled by special treaties. On the fulfilment of the various formalities the Republic of the Southern Cross was received into the family of world states, and its representatives were recognised by all Governments.

The chief city of the Republic, having the name of Zvezdny, was situated at the actual Pole itself. At that imaginary point where the earth's axis passes and all earthly meridians become one, stood the Town Hall, and the roof with its pointed towers looked upon the nadir of the heavens. The streets of the town extended along meridians from the Town Hall and these meridians were intersected by other streets in concentric circles. The height of all the buildings was the same, as was also their external appearance. There were no windows in the walls, as all the houses were lit by electricity and the streets were lighted by electricity. Because of the severity of the climate, an impenetrable and opaque roof had been built over the

town, with powerful ventilators for a constant change of air. These localities of the globe have but one day in six months, and one long night also of six months, but the streets of Zvezdny were always lighted by a bright and even light. In the same way in all seasons of the year the temperature of the streets was kept at one and the same height.

According to the last census the population of Zvezdny had reached two and a half millions. The whole of the remaining population of the Republic, numbering fifty millions, were concentrated in the neighbourhood of the ports and factories. These other points were also marked by the settlement of millions of people in towns which in external characteristics were reminiscent of Zvezdny. Thanks to a clever application of electric power, the entrance to the local havens remained open all the year round. Overhead electric railways connected the most populated parts of the Republic, and every day tens of thousands of people and millions of kilogrammes of material passed along these roads from one town to another. The interior of the country remained uninhabited. Travellers looking out of the train window saw before them only monotonous wildernesses, white in winter, and overgrown with wretched grass during the three months of summer. Wild animals had long since been destroyed, and for human beings there was no means of sustenance.

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The more remarkable was the hustling life of the ports and industrial centres. In order to give some understanding of the life, it is perhaps enough to say that of late years about seven-tenths of the whole of the world's output of metal has come from the State mines of the Republic.

The constitution of the Republic, according to outward signs, appeared to be the realisation of extreme democracy. The only fully enfranchised citizens were the metal-workers, who numbered about sixty per cent of the whole population. The factories and mines were State property. The life of the miners was facilitated by all possible conveniences, and even with luxury. At their disposal, apart from magnificent accommodation and a *recherché* cuisine, were various educational institutions and means of amusement: libraries, museums, theatres, concerts, halls for all types of sport, etc. The number of working hours in the day were small in the extreme. The training and teaching of children, the giving of medical and legal aid, and the ministry of the various religious cults were all taken upon itself by the State. Ample provision for all the needs and even whims of the workmen of the State factories having been made, no wages whatever were paid; but families of citizens who had served twenty years in a factory, or who in their years of service had died or become enfeebled, received a handsome life-

pension on condition that they did not leave the Republic. From the workmen, by universal ballot, the representatives of the Law-making Chamber of the Republic were elected, and this Chamber had cognisance of all the questions of the political life of the country, being, however, without power to alter its fundamental laws.

It must be said that this democratic exterior concealed the purely autocratic tyranny of the shareholders and directors of a former Trust. Giving up to others the places of deputies in the Chamber they inevitably brought in their own candidates as directors of the factories. In the hands of the Board of Directors was concentrated the economic life of the country. The directors received all the orders and assigned them to the various factories for fulfilment ; they purchased the materials and the machines for the work ; they managed the whole business of the factories. Through their hands passed immense sums of money, to be reckoned in milliards. The Law-making Chamber only certified the entries of debits and credits in the upkeep of the factories, the accounts being handed to it for that purpose, and the balance on these accounts greatly exceeded the whole budget of the Republic. The influence of the Board of Directors in the international relationships of the Republic was immense. Its decisions might ruin whole countries. The prices

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fixed by them determined the wages of millions of labouring masses over the whole earth. And, moreover, the influence of the Board, though indirect, was always decisive in the internal affairs of the Republic. The Law-making Chamber, in fact, appeared to be only the humble servant of the will of the Board.

For the preservation of power in its own hands the Board was obliged to regulate mercilessly the whole life of the country. Though appearing to have liberty, the life of the citizens was standardised even to the most minute details. The buildings of all the towns of the Republic were according to one and the same pattern fixed by law. The decoration of all buildings used by the workmen, though luxurious to a degree, were strictly uniform. All received exactly the same food at exactly the same time. The clothes given out from the Government stores were unchanging and in the course of tens of years were of one and the same cut. At a signal from the Town Hall, at a definite hour, it was forbidden to go out of the houses. The whole Press of the country was subject to a sharp censorship. No articles directed against the dictatorship of the Board were allowed to see light. But, as a matter of fact, the whole country was so convinced of the benefit of this dictatorship that the composers themselves would have refused to set the type of articles criticising the Board. The factories were full

of the Board's spies. At the slightest manifestation of discontent with the Board the spies hastened to arrange meetings and dissuade the doubters with passionate speeches. The fact that the life of the workmen of the Republic was the object of the envy of the entire world was of course a disarming argument. It is said that in cases of continued agitation by certain individuals the Board did not hesitate to resort to political murder. In any case, during the whole existence of the Republic, the universal ballot of the citizens never brought to power one representative who was hostile to the directors.

The population of Zvezdny was composed chiefly of workmen who had served their time. They were, so to speak, Government shareholders. The means which they received from the State allowed them to live richly. It is not astonishing, therefore, that Zvezdny was reckoned one of the gayest cities of the world. For various *entrepreneurs* and entertainers it was a goldmine. The celebrities of the world brought hither their talents. Here were the best operas, best concerts, best exhibitions ; here were brought out the best-informed gazettes. The shops of Zvezdny amazed by the richness of their choice of goods ; the restaurants by the luxury and the delicacy of their service. Resorts of evil, where all forms of debauch invented in either the ancient or the modern world were to be found, abounded. However, the governmental regulation of

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life was preserved in Zvezdny also. It is true that the decorations of lodgings and the fashions of dress were not compulsorily determined, but the law forbidding the exit from the house after a certain hour remained in force, a strict censorship of the Press was maintained, and many spies were kept by the Board. Order was officially maintained by the popular police, but at the same time there existed the secret police of the all-cognisant Board.

Such was in its general character the system of life in the Republic of the Southern Cross and in its capital. The problem of the future historian will be to determine how much this system was responsible for the outbreak and spread of that fatal disease which brought to destruction the town of Zvezdny, and with it, perhaps, the whole young Republic.

The first cases of the disease of "contradiction" were observed in the Republic some twenty years ago. It had then the character of a rare and sporadic malady. Nevertheless, the local mental experts were much interested by it and gave a circumstantial account of the symptoms at the international medical congress at Lhasa, where several reports of it were read. Later, it was somehow or other forgotten, though in the mental hospitals of Zvezdny there never was any difficulty in finding examples. The disease received its

name from the fact that the victims continuously contradicted their wishes by their actions, wishing one thing but saying and doing another. [The scientific name of the disease is *mania contradicens*.] It begins with fairly feeble symptoms, generally those of characteristic aphasia. The stricken, instead of saying "yes," say "no"; wishing to say caressing words, they splutter abuse, etc. The majority also begin to contradict themselves in their behaviour; intending to go to the left they turn to the right, thinking to raise the brim of a hat so as to see better they would pull it down over their eyes instead, and so on. As the disease develops contradiction overtakes the whole of the bodily and spiritual life of the patient, exhibiting infinite diversity conformable with the idiosyncrasies of each. In general, the speech of the patient becomes unintelligible and his actions absurd. The normality of the physiological functions of the organism is disturbed. Acknowledging the unwisdom of his behaviour the patient gets into a state of extreme excitement bordering even upon insanity. Many commit suicide, sometimes in fits of madness, sometimes in moments of spiritual brightness. Others perish from a rush of blood to the brain. In almost all cases the disease is mortal; cases of recovery are extremely rare.

The epidemic character was taken by *mania contradicens* during the middle months of this year in

Zvezdny. Up till this time the number of cases had never exceeded two per cent of the total number of patients in the hospitals. But this proportion suddenly rose to twenty-five per cent during the month of May (autumn month, as it is called in the Republic), and it continued to increase during the succeeding months with as great rapidity. By the middle of June there were already two per cent of the whole population, that is, about fifty thousand people, officially notified as suffering from "contradiction." We have no statistical details of any later date. The hospitals overflowed. The doctors on the spot proved to be altogether insufficient. And, moreover, the doctors themselves, and the nurses in the hospitals, caught the disease also. There was very soon no one to whom to appeal for medical aid, and a correct register of patients became impossible. The evidence given by eye-witnesses, however, is in agreement on this point, that it was impossible to find a family in which someone was not suffering. The number of healthy people rapidly decreased as panic caused a wholesale exodus from the town, but the number of the stricken increased. It is probably true that in the month of August all who had remained in Zvezdny were down with this psychical malady.

It is possible to follow the first developments of the

epidemic by the columns of the local newspapers, headed in ever larger type as the mania grew. Since the detection of the disease in its early stages was very difficult, the chronicle of the first days of the epidemic is full of comic episodes. A train conductor on the metropolitan railway, instead of receiving money from the passengers, himself pays them. A policeman, whose duty it was to regulate the traffic, confuses it all day long. A visitor to a gallery, walking from room to room, turns all the pictures with their faces to the wall. A newspaper page of proof, being corrected by the hand of a reader already overtaken by the disease, is printed next morning full of the most amusing absurdities. At a concert, a sick violinist suddenly interrupts the harmonious efforts of the orchestra with the most dreadful dissonances. A whole long series of such happenings gave plenty of scope for the wits of local journalists. But several instances of a different type of phenomenon caused the jokes to come to a sudden end. The first was that a doctor overtaken by the disease prescribed poison for a girl patient in his care and she perished. For three days the newspapers were taken up with this circumstance. Then two nurses walking in the town gardens were overtaken by "contradiction," and cut the throats of forty-one children. This event staggered the whole city. But on the even-

ing of the same day two victims fired the *mitrailleuse* from the quarters of the town militia and killed and injured some five hundred people.

At that, all the newspapers and the society of the town cried for prompt measures against the epidemic. At a special session of the combined Board and Legal Chamber it was decided to invite doctors from other towns and from abroad, to enlarge the existing hospitals, to build new ones, and to construct everywhere isolation barracks for the sufferers, to print and distribute five hundred thousand copies of a brochure on the disease, its symptoms and means of cure, to organise on all the streets of the town a special patrol of doctors and their helpers for the giving of first aid to those who had not been removed from private lodgings. It was also decided to run special trains daily on all the railways for the removal of the patients, as the doctors were of opinion that change of air was one of the best remedies. Similar measures were undertaken at the same time by various associations, societies, and clubs. A "society for struggle with the epidemic" was even founded, and the members gave themselves to the work with remarkable self-devotion. But in spite of all these measures the epidemic gained ground each day, taking in its course old men and little children, working people and resting people, chaste and debauched. And soon the whole of society was

enveloped in the unconquerable elemental terror of the unheard-of calamity.

The flight from Zvezdny commenced. At first only a few fled, and these were prominent dignitaries, directors, members of the Legal Chamber and of the Board, who hastened to send their families to the southern cities of Australia and Patagonia. Following them, the accidental elements of the population fled—those foreigners gladly sojourning in the “gayest city of the southern hemisphere,” theatrical artists, various business agents, women of light behaviour. When the epidemic showed no signs of abating the shopkeepers fled. They hurriedly sold off their goods and left their empty premises to the will of Fate. With them went the bankers, the owners of theatres and restaurants, the editors and the publishers. At last, even the established inhabitants were moved to go. According to law the exit of workmen from the Republic without special sanction from the Government was forbidden on pain of loss of pension. Deserters began to increase. The employés of the town institutions fled, the militia fled, the hospital nurses fled, the chemists, the doctors. The desire to flee became in its turn a mania. Everyone fled who could.

The stations of the electric railway were crushed with immense crowds, tickets were bought for huge sums of money and only held by fighting. For a place

in a dirigible, which took only ten passengers, one paid a whole fortune. . . . At the moment of the going out of trains new people would break into the compartments and take up places which they would not relinquish except by compulsion. Crowds stopped the trains which had been fitted up exclusively for patients, dragged the latter out of the carriages and compelled the engine-drivers to go on. From the end of May train service, except between the capital and the ports, ceased to work. From Zvezdny the trains went out overfull, passengers standing on the steps and in the corridors, even daring to cling on outside, despite the fact that with the speed of contemporary electric railways any person doing such a thing risks suffocation. The steamship companies of Australia, South America and South Africa grew inordinately rich, transporting the refugees of the Republic to other lands. The two Southern companies of dirigibles were not less prosperous, accomplishing, as they did, ten journeys a day and bringing away from Zvezdny the last belated millionaires. . . . On the other hand, trains arrived at Zvezdny almost empty ; for no wages was it possible to persuade people to come to work at the Capital ; only now and again eccentric tourists and seekers of new sensations arrived at the towns. It is reckoned that from the beginning of the exodus to the twenty-second of June, when the regular service of trains ceased, there

passed out of Zvezdny by the six railroads some million and a half people, that is, almost two-thirds of the whole population.

By his enterprise, valour, and strength of will, one man earned for himself eternal fame, and that was the President of the Board, Horace Deville. At the special session of the fifth of June, Deville was elected, both by the Board and by the Legal Chamber, Dictator over the town, and was given the title of Nachalnik. He had sole control of the town treasury, of the militia, and of the municipal institutions. At that time it was decided to remove from Zvezdny to a northern port the Government of the Republic and the archives. The name of Horace Deville should be written in letters of gold among the most famous names of history. For six weeks he struggled with the growing anarchy in the town. He succeeded in gathering around him a group of helpers as unselfish as himself. He was able to enforce discipline, both in the militia and in the municipal service generally, for a considerable time, though these bodies were terrified by the general calamity and decimated by the epidemic. Hundreds of thousands owe their escape to Horace Deville, as, thanks to his energy and organising power, it was possible for them to leave. He lightened the misery of the last days of thousands of others, giving them the possibility of dying in hospitals, carefully looked after, and not

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simply being stoned or beaten to death by the mad crowd. And Deville preserved for mankind the chronicle of the catastrophe, for one cannot but consider as a chronicle his short but pregnant telegrams, sent several times a day from the town of Zvezdny to the temporary residence of the Government of the Republic at the Northern port. Deville's first work on becoming Nachalnik of the town was to attempt to restore calm to the population. He issued manifestos proclaiming that the psychical infection was most quickly caught by people who were excited, and he called upon all healthy and balanced persons to use their authority to restrain the weak and nervous. Then Deville used the Society for Struggle with the Epidemic and put under the authority of its members all public places, theatres, meeting-houses, squares, and streets. In these days there scarcely ever passed an hour but a new case of infection might be discovered. Now here, now there, one saw faces or whole groups of faces manifestly expressive of abnormality. The greater number of the patients, when they understood their condition, showed an immediate desire for help. But under the influence of the disease this wish expressed itself in various types of hostile action directed against those standing near. The stricken wished to hasten home or to a hospital, but instead of doing this they fled in fright to the outskirts of the town. The

thought occurred to them to ask the passer-by to do something for them, but instead of that they seized him by the throat. In this way many were suffocated, struck down, or wounded with knife or stick. So the crowd, whenever it found itself in the presence of a man suffering from "contradiction," took to flight. At these moments the members of the Society would appear on the scene, capture the sick man, calm him, and take him to the nearest hospital ; it was their work to reason with the crowd and explain that there was really no danger, that the general misfortune had simply spread a little further, and it was their duty to struggle with it to the full extent of their powers.

The sudden infection of persons present in the audience of theatres or meeting-houses often led to the most tragic catastrophes. Once at a performance of Opera some hundreds of people stricken mad in a mass, instead of expressing their approval of the vocalists, flung themselves on the stage and scattered blows right and left. At the Grand Dramatic Theatre, an actor, whose rôle it was to commit suicide by a revolver shot, fired the revolver several times at the public. It was, of course, blank cartridge, but it so acted on the nerves of those present that it hastened the symptoms of the disease in many in whom it was latent. In the confusion which followed several scores of people were killed. But worst of all was that which happened in the Theatre

of Fireworks. The detachment of militia posted there in case of fire suddenly set fire to the stage and to the veils by which the various light effects are obtained. Not less than two hundred people were burnt or crushed to death. After that occurrence Horace Deville closed all the theatres and concert-rooms in the town.

The robbers and thieves now began to constitute a grave danger for the inhabitants, and in the general disorganisation they were able to carry their depredations very far. It is said that some of them came to Zvezdny from abroad. Some simulated madness in order to escape punishment, others felt it unnecessary to make any pretence of disguising their open robberies. Gangs of thieves entered the abandoned shops, broke into private lodgings, and took off the more valuable things or demanded gold ; they stopped people in the streets and stripped them of their valuables, such as watches, rings, and bracelets. And there accompanied the robberies outrage of every kind, even of the most disgusting. The Nachalnik sent companies of militia to hunt down the criminals, but they did not dare to join in open conflict. There were dreadful moments when among the militia or among the robbers would suddenly appear a case of the disease, and friend would turn his weapon against friend. At first the Nachalnik banished from the town the robbers who fell under

arrest. But those who had charge of the prison trains liberated them, in order to take their places. Then the Nachalnik was obliged to condemn the criminals to death. So almost after three centuries' break capital punishment was introduced once more on the earth. In June a general scarcity of the indispensable articles of food and medicine began to make itself felt. The import by rail diminished; manufacture within the town practically ceased. Deville organised the town bakeries and the distribution of bread and meat to the people. In the town itself the same common tables were set up as had long since been established in the factories. But it was not possible to find sufficient people for kitchen and service. Some voluntary workers toiled till they were exhausted, and they gradually diminished in numbers. The town crematoriums flamed all day, but the number of corpses did not decrease but increased. They began to find bodies in the streets and left in houses. The municipal business—such as telegraph, telephone, electric light, water supply, sanitation, and the rest, were worked by fewer and fewer people. It is astonishing how much Deville succeeded in doing. He looked after everything and everyone. One conjectures that he never knew a moment's rest. And all who were saved testify unanimously that his activity was beyond praise.

Towards the middle of June shortage of labour on

the railways began to be felt. There were not enough engine-drivers or conductors. On the 17th of July the first accident took place on the South-Western line, the reason being the sudden attack of the engine-driver. In the paroxysm of his disease the driver took his train over a precipice on to a glacier and almost all the passengers were killed or crippled. The news of this was brought to the town by the next train, and it came as a thunderbolt. A hospital train was sent off at once; it brought back the dead and the crippled, but towards the evening of that day news was circulated that a similar catastrophe had taken place on the First line. Two of the railway tracks connecting Zvezdny with the outside world were damaged. Breakdown gangs were sent from Zvezdny and from North Port to repair the lines, but it was almost impossible because of the winter temperature. There was no hope that on these lines train service would be resumed—at least, in the near future.

These catastrophes were simply patterns for new ones. The more alarmed the engine-drivers became the more liable they were to the disease and to the repetition of the mistake of their predecessors. Just because they were afraid of destroying a train they destroyed it. During the five days from the eighteenth to the twenty-second of June seven trains with passengers were wrecked. Thousands of passengers

perished from injuries or starved to death unrescued in the snowy wastes. Only very few had sufficient strength to return to the city by their own efforts. The six main lines connecting Zvezdny with the outer world were rendered useless. The service of dirigibles had ceased earlier. One of them had been destroyed by the enraged mob, the pretext given being that they were used exclusively for the rich. The others, one by one, were wrecked, the disease probably attacking the crew. The population of the city was at this time about six hundred thousand. For some time they were only connected with the world by telegraph.

On the 24th of June the Metropolitan railway ceased to run. On the 26th the telephone service was discontinued. On the 27th all chemists' shops, except the large central store, were closed. On the 1st of July the inhabitants were ordered to come from the outer parts of the town into the central districts, so that order might better be maintained, food distributed, and medical aid afforded. Suburban dwellers abandoned their own quarters and settled in those which had lately been abandoned by fugitives. The sense of property vanished. No one was sorry to leave his own, no one felt it strange to take up his abode in other people's houses. Nevertheless, burglars and robbers did not disappear, though perhaps now one would rather call them demented beings than criminals.

They continued to steal, and great hoards of gold have been discovered in the empty houses where they hid them, and precious stones beside the decaying body of the robber himself.

It is astonishing that in the midst of universal destruction life tended to keep its former course. There still were shopkeepers who opened their shops and sold for incredible sums the luxuries, flowers, books, guns, and other goods which they had preserved. . . . Purchasers threw down their unnecessary gold ungrudgingly, and miserly merchants hid it, God knows why. There still existed secret resorts, with cards, women, and wine, whither unfortunates sought refuge and tried to forget dreadful reality. There the whole mingled with the diseased, and there is no chronicle of the scenes which took place. Two or three newspapers still tried to preserve the significance of the written word in the midst of desolation. Copies of these newspapers are being sold now at ten or twenty times their original value, and will undoubtedly become bibliographical rareties of the first degree. In their columns is reflected the horrors of the unfortunate town, described in the midst of the reigning madness and set by half-mad compositors. There were reporters who took note of the happenings of the town, journalists who debated hotly the condition of affairs, and even feuilletonists who endeavoured to enliven

these tragic days. But the telegrams received from other countries, telling as they did of real healthy life, caused the souls of the readers in Zvezdny to fall into despair.

There were desperate attempts to escape. At the beginning of July an immense crowd of women and children, led by a certain John Dew, decided to set out on foot for the nearest inhabited place, Londontown. Deville understood the madness of this attempt, but could not stop the people, and himself supplied them with warm clothing and provisions. This whole crowd of about two thousand people were lost in the snow and in the continuous Polar night. A certain Whiting started to preach a more heroic remedy: this was, to kill all who were suffering from the disease, and he held that after that the epidemic would cease. He found a considerable number of adherents, though in those dark days the wildest, most inhuman, proposal which in any way promised deliverance would have obtained attention. Whiting and his friends broke into every house in the town and destroyed whatever sick they found. They massacred the patients in the hospitals, they even killed those suspected to be unwell. Robbers and madmen joined themselves to these bands of ideal murderers. The whole town became their arena. In these difficult days Horace Deville organised his fellow-workers into a military force, encouraged them

with his spirit, and set out to fight the followers of Whiting. This affair lasted several days. Hundreds of men fell on one side or the other, till at last Whiting himself was taken. He appeared to be in the last stages of *mania contradicens* and had to be taken to the hospital, where he soon perished, instead of to the scaffold.

On the eighth of July one of the worst things happened. The controller of the Central Power Station smashed all the machinery. The electric light failed, and the whole city was plunged in absolute darkness. As there was no other means of lighting and warming the city, the people were left in a helpless plight. Deville had, however, foreseen such an eventuality and had accumulated a considerable quantity of torches and fuel. Bonfires were lighted in all the streets. Torches were distributed in thousands. But these miserable lights could not illumine the gigantic perspectives of the city of Zvezdny, the tens of kilometres of straight line highways, the gloomy height of thirteen-storey buildings. With the darkness the last discipline of the city was lost. Terror and madness finally possessed all souls. The healthy could not be distinguished from the sick. There commenced a dreadful orgy of the despairing.

The moral sense of the people declined with astonishing rapidity. Culture slipped from off these people

like a delicate bark, and revealed man, wild and naked, the man-beast as he was. All sense of right was lost, force alone was acknowledged. For women, the only law became that of desire and of indulgence. The most virtuous matrons behaved as the most abandoned, with no continence or faith, and used the vile language of the tavern. Young girls ran about the streets demented and unchaste. Drunkards made feasts in ruined cellars, not in any way distressed that amongst the bottles lay unburied corpses. All this was constantly aggravated by the breaking out of the disease afresh. Sad was the position of children, abandoned by their parents to the will of Fate. They died of hunger, of injury after assault, and they were murdered both purposely and by accident. It is even affirmed that cannibalism took place.

In this last period of tragedy Horace Deville could not, of course, afford help to the whole population. But he did arrange in the Town Hall shelter for those who still preserved their reason. The entrances to the building were barricaded and sentries were kept continuously on guard. There was food and water for three thousand people for forty days. Deville, however, had only eighteen hundred people, and though there must have been other people with sound minds in the town, they could not have known what Deville was doing, and these remained in hiding in the houses.

26 REPUBLIC OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS

Many resolved to remain indoors till the end, and bodies have been found of many who must have died of hunger in their solitude. It is remarkable that among those who took refuge in the Town Hall there were very few new cases of the disease. Deville was able to keep discipline in his small community. He kept till the last a journal of all that happened, and that journal, together with the telegrams, makes the most reliable source of evidence of the catastrophe. The journal was found in a secret cupboard of the Town Hall, where the most precious documents were kept. The last entry refers to the 20th of July. Deville writes that a demented crowd is assailing the building, and that he is obliged to fire with revolvers upon the people. "What I hope for," he adds, "I know not. No help can be expected before the spring. We have not the food to live till the spring. But I shall fulfil my duty to the end." These were the last words of Deville. Noble words!

It must be added that on the 21st of July the crowd took the Town Hall by storm, and its defenders were all killed or scattered. The body of Deville has not yet been found, and there is no reliable evidence as to what took place in the town after the 21st. It must be conjectured, from the state in which the town was found, that anarchy reached its last limits. The gloomy streets, lit up by the glare of bonfires of furniture and

books, can be imagined. They obtained fire by striking iron on flint. Crowds of drunkards and madmen danced wildly about the bonfires. Men and women drank together and passed the common cup from lip to lip. The worst scenes of sensuality were witnessed. Some sort of dark atavistic sense enlivened the souls of these townsmen, and half-naked, unwashed, unkempt, they danced the dances of their remote ancestors, the contemporaries of the cave-bears, and they sang the same wild songs as did the hordes when they fell with stone axes upon the mammoth. With songs, with incoherent exclamations, with idiotic laughter, mingled the cries of those who had lost the power to express in words their own delirious dreams, mingled also the moans of those in the convulsions of death. Sometimes dancing gave way to fighting—for a barrel of wine, for a woman, or simply without reason, in a fit of madness brought about by contradictory emotion. There was nowhere to flee; the same dreadful scenes were everywhere, the same orgies everywhere, the same fights, the same brutal gaiety or brutal rage—or else, absolute darkness, which seemed more dreadful, even more intolerable to the staggered imagination.

Zvezdny became an immense black box, in which were some thousands of man-resembling beings, abandoned in the foul air from hundreds of thousands of dead bodies, where amongst the living was not one

who understood his own position. This was the city of the senseless, the gigantic madhouse, the greatest and most disgusting Bedlam which the world has ever seen. And the madmen destroyed one another, stabbed or strangled one another, died of madness, died of terror, died of hunger, and of all the diseases which reigned in the infected air.

It goes without saying that the Government of the Republic did not remain indifferent to the great calamity which had overtaken the capital. But it very soon became clear that no help whatever could be given. No doctors, nurses, officers, or workmen of any kind would agree to go to Zvezdny. After the breakdown of the railroad service and of the airships it was, of course, impossible to get there, the climatic conditions being too great an obstacle. Moreover, the attention of the Government was soon absorbed by cases of the disease appearing in other towns of the Republic. In some of these it threatened to take on the same epidemic character, and a social panic set in that was akin to what happened in Zvezdny itself. A wholesale exodus from the more populated parts of the Republic commenced. The work in all the mines came to a standstill, and the entire industrial life of the country faded away. But thanks, however, to strong measures taken in time, the progress of the disease was arrested

in these towns, and nowhere did it reach the proportions witnessed in the capital.

The anxiety with which the whole world followed the misfortunes of the young Republic is well known. At first no one dreamed that the trouble could grow to what it did, and the dominant feeling was that of curiosity. The chief newspapers of the world (and in that number our own *Northern European Evening News*) sent their own special correspondents to Zvezdny—to write up the epidemic. Many of these brave knights of the pen became victims of their own professional obligations. When the news became more alarming, various foreign governments and private societies offered their services to the Republic. Some sent troops, others doctors, others money; but the catastrophe developed with such rapidity that this goodwill could not obtain fulfilment. After the breakdown of the railway service the only information received from Zvezdny was that of the telegrams sent by the *Nachalnik*. These telegrams were forwarded to the ends of the earth and printed in millions of copies. After the wreck of the electrical apparatus the telegraph service lasted still a few days longer, thanks to the accumulators of the power-house. There is no accurate information as to why the telegraph service ceased altogether; perhaps the apparatus was destroyed. The last telegram of Horace Deville was that

of the 27th of June. From that date, for almost six weeks, humanity remained without news of the capital of the Republic.

During July several attempts were made to reach Zvezdny by air. Several new airships and aeroplanes were received by the Republic. But for a long time all efforts to reach the city failed. At last, however, the aeronaut, Thomas Billy, succeeded in flying to the unhappy town. He picked up from the roof of the town two people in an extreme state of hunger and mental collapse. Looking through the ventilators Billy saw that the streets were plunged in absolute darkness ; but he heard wild cries, and understood that there were still living human beings in the town. Billy, however, did not dare to let himself down into the town itself. Towards the end of August one line of the electric railway was put in order as far as the station Lissis, a hundred and five kilometres from the town. A detachment of well-armed men passed into the town, bearing food and medical first-aid, entering by the north-western gates. They, however, could not penetrate further than the first blocks of buildings, because of the dreadful atmosphere. They had to do their work step by step, clearing the bodies from the streets, disinfecting the air as they went. The only people whom they met were completely irresponsible. They resembled wild animals in their ferocity and had to be captured

and held by force. About the middle of September train service with Zvezdny was once more established and trains went regularly.

At the time of writing the greater part of the town has already been cleared. Electric light and heating are once more in working order. The only part of the town which has not been dealt with is the American quarter, but it is thought that there are no living beings there. About ten thousand people have been saved, but the greater number are apparently incurable. Those who have to any degree recovered evince a strong disinclination to speak of the life they have gone through. What is more, their stories are full of contradiction and often not confirmed by documentary evidence. Various newspapers of the last days of July have been found. The latest to date, that of the 22nd of July, gives the news of the death of Horace Deville and the invitation of shelter in the Town Hall. There are, indeed, some other pages marked August, but the words printed thereon make it clear that the author (who was probably setting in type his own delirium) was quite irresponsible. The diary of Horace Deville was discovered, with its regular chronicle of events from the 28th of June to the 20th of July. The frenzies of the last days in the town are luridly witnessed by the things discovered in streets and houses. Mutilated bodies everywhere: the bodies of the starved, of the

suffocated, of those murdered by the insane, and some even half-eaten. Bodies were found in the most unexpected places: in the tunnels of the Metropolitan railway, in sewers, in various sheds, in boilers. The demented had sought refuge from the surrounding terrors in all possible places. The interiors of most houses had been wrecked, and the booty which robbers had found it impossible to dispose of had been hidden in secret rooms and cellars.

It will certainly be several months before Zvezdny will become habitable once more. Now it is almost empty. The town, which could accommodate three million people, has but thirty thousand workmen, who are cleansing the streets and houses. A good number of the former inhabitants who had previously fled have returned, however, to seek the bodies of their relatives and to glean the remains of their lost fortunes. Several tourists, attracted by the amazing spectacle of the empty town, have also arrived. Two business men have opened hotels and are doing pretty well. A small café-chantant is to be opened shortly, the troupe for which has already been engaged.

The Northern-European Evening News has for its part sent out a new correspondent, Mr. Andrew Ewald, and hopes to obtain circumstantial news of all the fresh discoveries which may be made in the unfortunate capital of the Republic of the Southern Cross.

THE MARBLE BUST :

A TRAMP'S STORY

HE had been tried for burglary, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. I was struck by the behaviour of the old man in court and by the circumstances under which the crime had been committed. I obtained permission to visit the prisoner. At first he would have nothing to do with me, and would not speak ; but finally he told me the story of his life.

“ You are right,” said he. “ I have seen better days, and I haven't always been a miserable wanderer about the streets, nor always slept in night-houses. I had a good education. I—am an engineer. In my youth I had a little money and I lived a gay life : every evening I went to a party or to a ball and ended up with a drinking bout. I remember that time well, even trifling details I remember. And yet there is a gap in my recollections that I would give all the rest of my unworthy life to fill up—everything which has anything to do with Nina.

“ She was called Nina, dear sir ; yes, Nina. I'm sure of that. Her husband was a minor official on the

railway. They were poor. But how clever she was in making of the pitiful surroundings of her life something elegant and, as it were, specially refined. She herself did the cooking, but her hands were, as it were, carefully wrought. Of her poor clothes she made a marvellous dream. Yes, and the whole everyday world, on contact with her, became fantastical. I myself, meeting her, became other than I was, better, and shook off, as rain from my clothes, all the sordidness of life.

“May God forgive her sin in loving me. Everything around her was so coarse that she couldn't help falling in love with me, young and handsome as I was and knowing so much poetry by heart. But when I first made her acquaintance, and how—this I cannot now call to mind. Separate pictures draw themselves out from the darkness. See, we are at the theatre. She, happy, gay (this was so rare with her), is drinking in every word of the play, and she is smiling at me. . . . I remember her smile. Afterwards, we were together at some place or other. She bent her head down to me, and said: ‘I know that you will not be my happiness for very long; never mind, I shall have lived.’ I remember these words. But what happened directly afterwards, and whether it is really true that all this happened when I was with Nina, I don't know.

“Of course, it was I who first gave her up. This seems to me so natural. All my companions acted in this way:

they flirted with some married woman, and then, after a while, cast her off. I only acted as everybody else did, and it didn't even enter my mind that I was behaving badly. To steal money, not to pay one's debts, to turn informer—this was bad, but to cast off a woman whom one has loved was only the way of the world. A brilliant future was before me, and I could not bind myself to a sort of romantic love. It was painful, very painful, but I gained the victory over myself, and I even saw a *podvig* in my resolution to overcome this pain.

“ I heard that Nina went away afterwards with her husband to the south, and that soon after she died. But my memories of Nina were so tormenting that I avoided at that time all news of her. I tried to know nothing about her and not to think of her. I had not kept her portrait, I had returned her letters, we had no mutual acquaintances—and so, little by little, the image of Nina was erased from my soul. Do you understand? I gradually came to forget Nina, forget her entirely, her face, her name, and all her love. It came to be as if she had actually never existed at all in my life. . . . Ah, there's something shameful for a man in this ability to forget !

“ The years went by. I won't tell you now how I 'made a career.' Without Nina, of course I dreamed only of external success, of money. At one time I had

nearly obtained the complete success at which I aimed. I could spend thousands, could travel abroad. I married and had children. Afterwards, everything turned to loss; the works which I designed were unsuccessful; my wife died; finding myself left with children on my hands, I sent them away to relatives, and now, God forgive me, I don't even know if my little boys are alive. As you may guess, I drank and played cards. . . . I started an agency—it did not succeed; it swallowed up my last money and energy. I tried to get straight by gambling, and only just escaped being sent to prison—yes, and not entirely without reason. My friends turned against me and my downfall began.

“ Little by little I got to the point where you now see me. I, so to speak, ‘dropped out’ of intellectual society and fell into the abyss. What place could I presume to take, badly dressed, almost always drunken? Of late years I have worked for months, when not drinking, as a labourer in various factories. And when I had a drinking bout—I would turn up in the Thieves’ market and doss-houses. I passionately detested the people I met, and was always dreaming that suddenly my fate would change and I should be rich once more. I expected to receive some sort of non-existent inheritance or something of that kind. And I despised my companions because they had no such hope.

“ Well, one day, all shivering with cold and hunger, I wander into someone’s yard without knowing why, and something happens. Suddenly the cook calls out to me, ‘ Hallo, my boy, you don’t happen to be a locksmith, do you ? ’ ‘ Yes, I’m a locksmith,’ says I. They wanted someone to mend the lock of a writing-table. I found myself in a luxurious study, gold all about, and pictures. I began to work and did what was wanted, and the lady gave me a rouble. I took the money, and, all of a sudden, I saw on a little white pedestal, a marble bust. At first I felt faint. I don’t know why. I stared at it and couldn’t believe :
Nina !

“ I tell you, dear sir, I had quite forgotten Nina, and at this moment specially, for the first time, I understood it, understood that I had forgotten her. Suddenly her image swam before my eyes, and a whole universe of feelings, dreams, thoughts, buried in my soul as in some sort of Atlantis—woke, rose again, lived again . . . I look at the marble bust, all trembling, and I say : ‘ Permit me to ask, lady, whose bust is that ? ’ ‘ Oh, that,’ says she, ‘ is a very valuable thing ; it was made five hundred years ago, in the fifteenth century.’ She told me the name of the sculptor, but I didn’t catch it, and she said that her husband had brought this bust from Italy, and that because of it there had arisen a whole diplomatic correspondence between the Italian

and Russian Cabinets. 'But,' says the lady to me, 'you don't mean to say it pleases you? What an up-to-date taste you have! Don't you see that the ears,' says she, 'are not in the right place, and the nose is irregular . . .?'—and she went away; she went away.

"I rushed out as if I were suffocating. This was not a likeness, but an actual portrait; nay more—it was a sort of re-creation of life in marble. Tell me, by what miracle could an artist in the fifteenth century make those same tiny ears, set on awry, which I knew so well, those same eyes, just a tiny bit aslant, that irregular nose, and the high sloping forehead, out of which unexpectedly you got the most beautiful, the most captivating woman's face? By what miracle could there live two women so much alike—one in the fifteenth century, the other in our own day? And that she whom the sculptor had modelled was absolutely the same, and like to Nina not only in face but in character and in soul, I could not doubt.

"That day changed the whole of my life. I understood all the meanness of my behaviour in the past and all the depth of my fall. I understood Nina as an angel, sent to me by Destiny and not recognised by me. To bring back the past was impossible. But I began eagerly to gather together my remembrances of Nina as one might gather up the shattered bits of a precious vase. How few they were! Try as I would I could get

nothing whole. All were fragments, splinters. But how I rejoiced when I succeeded in making out in my soul something new. Thinking over these things and remembering, I would spend whole hours ; people laughed at me, but I was happy. I was old ; it was late for me to begin life anew, but I could still cleanse my soul from base thoughts, from malice towards my fellows and from murmuring against my Creator. And in my remembrances of Nina I found this cleansing.

“ I wanted desperately to look once more at the statue. I wandered whole evenings near the house where it was and I tried to see the marble bust, but it stood a long way from the windows. I spent whole nights in front of the house. I knew all the people who lived there, how the rooms were arranged, and I made friends with a servant. In the summer the lady went away into the country. And then I could no longer fight against my desire. I thought that if I could see the marble Nina once again, I should at once remember everything, to the end. And that would be for me ultimate bliss. So I made up my mind to do that for which I've been sentenced. You know that I didn't succeed. They caught me in the hall. And at the trial it came out that I'd been in the rooms on pretence of being a locksmith, and that I'd often been seen near the house. . . . I was a beggar, I had forced the locks. . . . However, the story's ended now, dear sir ! ”

“ But we'll make an appeal for you,” said I. “ They will acquit you.”

“ But why ? ” objected the old man. “ No one grieves over my sentence, and no one will go bail for me, and isn't it just the same where I shall think about Nina—in a doss-house or in a prison ? ”

I didn't know what to answer, but the old man suddenly looked up at me with his strange and faded eyes and went on :

“ Only one thing worries me. What if Nina never existed, and it was merely my poor mind, weakened by alcohol, which invented the whole story of this love whilst I was looking at the little marble head ? ”

FOR HERSELF OR FOR ANOTHER

I

“IT is she! No, it can't be, but yet of course it is!” said Peter Andreyevitch Basmanof to himself, as a lady who had previously attracted his attention passed for the fifth or sixth time the little table at which he was sitting.

He no longer doubted that it was Elizavieta. Certainly, they had not met for nearly twelve years, and no woman's face could remain unchanged during such a period. The features, formerly thin and sharply defined, had become somewhat fuller; the glance, once confiding as a child's, was now cold and stern, and in the whole face there was an expression of self-confidence which used not to be there. But were they not the same eyes which Basmanof had loved to liken to St. Elma's fires, was it not that same oval which by its purity of outline alone had often calmed his passion, were they not the same tiny ears which he had found so sweet to kiss? Yes, it must be Elizavieta: there could not be two women so much alike—as much alike as the reflections in two adjoining mirrors!

Basmanof's mind went quickly over the history of his love for Elizavieta. Not for the first time did he thus survey it, for of all his memories none was dearer or more sacred than this love. The young advocate, just stepping forth into life, had met a woman somewhat older than himself who had loved him with all the blindness of a fierce, unreasoning, ecstatic passion. Elizavieta's whole soul had been absorbed by this love, and nothing else in the world had mattered to her except this one thing—to possess her beloved, give herself to him, worship him. She had been prepared to sacrifice all the conventions of their "set," she had begged Basmanof to allow her to leave her husband and go to live with him ; and in society not only had she not been ashamed of her connection with him—which, of course, had been talked about—but she had, as it were, gloried in it. Basmanof had never since come across a love so self-forgetful, so ready to sacrifice itself, and he could not have doubted that if at any time he had demanded of Elizavieta that she should kill herself she would have fulfilled his behest with a calm submissive rapture.

How had Basmanof profited by such a love, which comes to us only once in life ? He had been afraid of it, afraid of its immensity and its strength. He had understood that where infinite sacrifices are made they are necessarily accompanied by great demands. He had

been afraid to accept this love because it would have been necessary to give something in exchange for it, and he felt himself spiritually lacking. And he had been afraid that his just-blossoming career might be checked. . . . Basmanof, like a thief, had stolen half a year's love, which could not have been his had he been frank and shown his real character from the first, and then he had taken advantage of the first trifling excuse to "break off the connection."

Ah, how ashamed he was now to recall their last meeting before this took place. Elizavieta, blinded by her love for him, could not understand, could not see, that her beloved was too low for her to abase herself before him, and she had begged him on her knees not to forsake her. He remembered how she, sobbing, had embraced his feet and let herself be dragged along the floor, how in despair she had beaten her head against the wall. He had learnt afterwards that his desertion had sent Elizavieta nearly out of her mind, that at one time she had wished to enter a convent, and that later when she became a widow she had gone abroad. Since then he had lost all trace of her.

Was it possible that here at Interlaken he was meeting her now again, twelve years after their rupture, calm, stern, beautiful as ever, with her inexplicable fascination for him and her tormentingly-sweet reminders of the past? Basmanof, sitting at the little

café table, watched the tall lady in the large Paris hat as she went by, and his whole being burned feverishly with images and sensations of the past, suffusing in a moment the memory of his mind and the memory of his body. It was she, it was she, Elizavieta, whom he had not allowed to love him as fully as she had wished, and whom he himself had not dared to love as fully as he might, as much as he had wished ! It was she, his better self, restored again to him when his life had almost passed, she, alive still, the possibility incarnate of reviving that which had been, of completing and restoring it.

In spite of his self-possession Basmanof's head was in a whirl. He paid the waiter for his ice, got up from his seat, and walked out by the path along which the tall lady had passed.

II

When Basmanof overtook the tall lady he raised his hat deferentially and bowed to her. But the lady showed no sign of recognition.

“ Is it possible you do not recognise me, Elizavieta Vasilievna ? ” asked Basmanof, speaking in Russian.

After some hesitation the lady answered in Russian, though with a slight accent.

“ Pardon me, but you've probably made a mistake. I am not an acquaintance of yours.”

“ Elizavieta Vasilievna ! ” exclaimed Basmanof deeply hurt by such a reply. “ Surely you must recognise me ! I am Peter Andreyevitch Basmanof.”

“ It’s the first time I’ve heard that name,” said the lady, “ and I don’t know you at all.”

For several seconds Basmanof gazed at the lady who thus spoke to him, asking himself whether he had not made a mistake. But there was such an undoubted likeness, he so definitely recognised her as Elizavieta, that blocking up the pathway to this lady in the large Paris hat, he repeated insistently—

“ I recognise *you*, Elizavieta Vasilievna ! I understand that *you* may have reasons for concealing your true name. I understand that you may not wish to meet your former acquaintances. But you must know that it’s absolutely necessary for me to speak a few words to you. I have gone through too much since we separated. I must put myself right with you. I don’t want you to despise me.”

Basmanof hardly knew himself what he was saying. He wanted only one thing—that Elizavieta would acknowledge that it was she. He was afraid that she might go away and not come back, might vanish for evermore, and that this meeting might prove to be a dream.

The lady moved quietly to one side, and said in French :

“ Monsieur, laissez-moi passer, s'il vous plaît ! Je ne vous connais pas.”

She showed no agitation whatever, and at Basmanof's words the expression of her face did not change in the least. But all the same he could not let her go, but followed her.

“ Elizavieta ! ” cried he. “ Curse me if you will, call me the most worthless of men, tell me that you no longer wish to know me—I will take it all humbly, as I ought. But do not pretend that you do not recognise me ; that I cannot endure. You dare not, ought not, to insult me so.”

“ I assure you,” the lady interrupted in a more severe tone, “ that you mistake me for someone else. You call me Elizavieta Vasilievna, but that is not my name. I am Ekaterina Vladimirovna Sadikova, and my maiden name was Armand. Surely that is sufficient evidence for you to allow me to continue my walk, as I wish to do ? ”

“ But why, then,” cried Basmanof, making a last attempt, “ why have you borne with me so long ? If I am an utter stranger to you why didn't you at once order me to be silent, or call a policeman ? No one behaves as gently as you have done towards a scoundrel of the street ! ”

“ I see quite clearly,” answered the lady, “ that you are not a street scoundrel, and that you would not

allow yourself to take any liberties. You've simply made a mistake: my likeness to some lady of your acquaintance has led you into an error. That is no crime, and I've no occasion whatever to call the police. But now everything has been explained—good-bye!"

Basmanof could insist no longer. He stood aside, and the lady walked slowly past him. But the whole of the conversation, the tone of the lady's voice, her movements, everything about her—only accentuated his belief that this was—Elizavieta.

Disturbed and agitated, he went back to his room at the hotel. Beyond the green meadow, like some gigantic phantom, shone the eternal snow of the Yungfrau. It seemed near, but was immeasurably far. Was it not like to Elizavieta, who had seemed risen from the dead, but who had again retreated into the far unknown?

It was not difficult for Basmanof to discover the address of the lady whom he had met. After some hesitation he wrote her a letter, in which he said that he had no wish to argue about what was evident. He had clearly made a mistake in taking an unknown lady for an old acquaintance of his, but their short encounter had made a deep impression on him, and he begged permission to bow to her when they met, in memory of an accidental acquaintance. The letter was couched in extremely cautious and respectful

terms. When on the following day Basmanof met the lady who called herself Mme. Sadikova she bowed to him first and herself began to speak to him. And so their acquaintance began.

III

Mme. Sadikova gave no signs of ever having previously known Basmanof. Quite the contrary ; she treated him as someone whom she had never met before. They talked about unimportant matters, connected chiefly with life at the watering-place. Mme. Sadikova's conversation was interesting and clever, and she appeared to be very well read. But when Basmanof tried to pass to more intimate, more painful questions his companion lightly and deftly evaded them.

Everything convinced Basmanof that she was Elizavieta. He recognised her voice, her favourite turns of speech ; recognised that intangible something which expresses the individuality of a person but which it is difficult to define in words. He could have sworn that he was not mistaken.

Certainly there were slight marks of difference, but could not these be explained by the interval of twelve years ? It was natural that from Elizavieta's flaming passions the experiences of life should have forged a steely coldness. It was natural that living abroad for many years Elizavieta should have somewhat forgotten

her native tongue and speak it with an accent. Finally it was natural that in her behaviour, in her gestures, in her laughter, there should appear new features which had not been there before. . . .

All the same, Basmanof was sometimes seized by doubt, and then he began mentally to notice hundreds of tiny peculiarities which distinguished Ekaterina from Elizavieta. But he only needed to look once more into Mme. Sadikova's face, to hear her speak, and all his doubts would disperse like a mist. He felt in himself and his soul was aware that this was she whom he had once loved.

Of course he did all he could to unravel the mystery. He tried to confuse her by asking unexpected questions; she was always on her guard, and she easily escaped out of all his snares. He tried to question her acquaintances; no one knew anything about her. He even went so far as to intercept a letter addressed to her; it proved to be from Paris, and consisted only of impersonal French phrases.

One evening, when the two were together in a restaurant, Basmanof could endure the continuous strain no longer, and he suddenly exclaimed—

“ Why do we keep up this tormenting game? You are Elizavieta—I am sure of it. You can't forget how you once loved me. And of course you can't forget how basely I cast you off. But now I bring you all my soul's

repentance. I despise myself for my former conduct. This is what I propose : take me for the whole of my life if you can forgive me. But I say this to Elizavieta, I give myself to her, not to any other woman."

Mme. Sadikova listened in silence to this little speech, transgressing as it did the limits of Society small-talk, and answered calmly—

"Dear Peter Andreyevitch. If you are speaking to me I might answer you, perhaps, but as you warn me that you are speaking to Elizavieta there's nothing for me to say."

In the greatest excitement Basmanof got up from his seat and asked her :

"Do you wish to insist that you are not Elizavieta ? Well, say so once more to my face without blenching and I will go away, I will at once hide myself from your eyes, I will vanish out of your life. Then there will be no more reason for my living."

Mme. Sadikova smiled sweetly.

"Do you wish so much that I were Elizavieta ?" asked she. "Very well, I will be Elizavieta."

IV

Then the second game began, a more cruel one perhaps than the first. Mme. Sadikova called herself Elizavieta and treated Basmanof as an old acquaintance. When he spoke of the past she pretended to

remember the persons and events of which he spoke. When he, all trembling, reminded her of her love for him, she, laughing, agreed that she had loved him ; but she hinted that in the course of time this love had died down, as every flame dies down.

In order to play her part conscientiously, Mme. Sadikova herself would sometimes speak of the happenings of the past, but she mixed up the dates, remembered the wrong names, imagined things which had never occurred. It was especially tormenting that when she spoke of her love for Basmanof she referred to it as to a light flirtation, the accidental amusement of a lady in society. This seemed to Basmanof an insult to sacred things, and almost with a wail he besought her to be silent.

But this was little. Imperceptibly, step by step, Mme. Sadikova poisoned all Basmanof's most holy recollections. By her hints she discrowned all the most beautiful facts of the past. She gave him to understand that much of what had appeared to him as evidence of her self-forgetful love had been only hypocrisy and make-believe.

" Elizavieta ! " implored Basmanof once of her. " Is it possible for me to believe that your passionate vows, your sobs, your despair, when you threw yourself unconscious on the floor—that all this was feigned ?

The most talented dramatic actress could not act so well. You are defaming yourself."

Mme. Sadikova, answering to the name of Elizavieta, as she had been doing for some time, said with a smile—

"How can one distinguish where acting ends and sincerity begins? I wanted at that time to feel strongly and so I allowed myself to pretend to be despairing and out of my senses. If in your place had been not you but some other, I should have acted just the same. And yet at that very moment it would have cost me nothing to overcome myself and not sob at all. Aren't we all like that in life—actors—we don't so much live as act the part of living?"

"That's not true," exclaimed Basmanof. "You say this because you do not know how Elizavieta loved. She would never have spoken so. You are only playing her part. It's evident you are not she—you are Ekaterina."

Mme. Sadikova laughed, and then said in a different tone—

"Just as you like, Peter Andreyevitch. I only played the part to please you. If you wish it I will become myself again, Ekaterina Vladimirovna Sadikova."

"How can I know where you are real?" hissed Basmanof through his teeth.

He began to feel that he was going out of his mind.

Fiction and reality for him had become confused. For some minutes he doubted who he was himself.

In the meantime Mme. Sadikova got up and proposed a walk and she again began to speak to him as Elizavieta.

V

The days went by. The season at Interlaken came to an end.

Basmanof, obsessed by his connection with this mysterious acquaintance of his, began to forget everything else; forgot why he had come to Interlaken, forgot all his business, answered no letters from home, lived a sort of senseless life. Like a maniac, he thought only of one thing: how to guess the secret of Elizavieta—Ekaterina.

Was he in love with this woman?—he could not have said. She drew him to herself as to an abyss, as to a horror, to a place of destruction. Months and years might go by and he would be glad to go on with this duel of mind and ready wit, this struggle of two minds, one of which sought to preserve her secret and the other strove to tear it from her.

But suddenly, early in October, Mme. Sadikova left Interlaken. She went away, neither saying good-bye to Basmanof nor warning him of her departure. On the following day, however, he received a letter from her, posted from Berne.

“ I will not deprive you of the satisfaction of guessing who I am,” wrote Mme. Sadikova. “ I leave the solution of this problem to your sharp wit. But if you are tired of guessing, and would like to have the simplest solution, I will tell it you. Suppose that I was really a complete stranger to you. Learning from your own agitated accounts, how cruelly you had once treated a certain Elizavieta, I determined to avenge her. I think I have attained my object ; my revenge has been accomplished : you will never forget these weeks of torture at Interlaken. And for whom I took this vengeance, for myself or for another, is it not all the same in the long run ? Good-bye, you will never see me again. Elizavieta-Ekaterina.

IN THE MIRROR

I HAVE loved mirrors from my very earliest years. As an infant I wept and trembled as I looked into their transparently truthful depths. My favourite game as a child was to walk up and down the room or the garden, holding a mirror in front of me, gazing into its abyss, walking over the edge at every step, and breathless with giddiness and terror. Even as a girl I began to put mirrors all over my room, large and small ones, true and slightly distorted ones, some precise and others a little dull. I got into the habit of spending whole hours, whole days, in the midst of intercrossing worlds which ran one into the other, trembled, vanished, and then reappeared again. It became a singular passion of mine to give my body to these soundless distances, these echoless perspectives, these separate universes cutting across our own and existing, despite our consciousness, in the same place and at the same time with it. This protracted actuality, separated from us by the smooth surface of glass, drew me towards itself by a kind of intangible touch, dragged me forward, as to an abyss, a mystery.

I was drawn towards the apparition which always rose up before me when I came near a mirror and which strangely doubled my being. I strove to guess how this other woman was differentiated from myself, how it was possible that my right hand should be her left, and that all the fingers of this hand should change places, though certainly on one of them was—my wedding-ring. My thoughts were confused when I attempted to probe this enigma, to solve it. In *this* world, where everybody could be touched, where voices were heard—I lived, actually ; in *that* reflected world, which it was only possible to contemplate, was she, phantasmally. She was almost as myself and yet not at all myself ; she repeated all my movements, but not one of these movements exactly coincided with those I made. She, that other, knew something I could not divine, she held a secret eternally hidden from my understanding.

But I noticed that each mirror had its own separate and special world. Put two mirrors in the very same place, one after the other, and there will arise two different universes. And in different mirrors there rose up before me different apparitions, all of them like me but never exactly like one another. In my small hand-mirror lived a naïve little girl with clear eyes, reminding me of my early youth. In my circular boudoir mirror was hidden a woman who knew all the diverse sweet-

ness of caresses, shameless, free, beautiful, daring. In the oblong mirrors of the wardrobe door there always appeared a stern figure, imperious, cold, inexorable. I knew still other doubles of myself—in my dressing-glass, in my folding gold-framed triptych, in the hanging mirror in the oaken frame, in the little neck mirror, and in many other mirrors which I treasured. To all the beings hiding themselves in these mirrors I gave the possibility and pretext to develop. According to the strange conditions of their world they must take the form of the person who stands before the glass but under this borrowed exterior they preserve their own personal characteristics.

There were some worlds of mirrors which I loved ; others which I hated. In some of them I loved to walk up and down for whole hours, losing myself in their attractive expanse. Others I fled from. In my secret heart I did not love all my doubles. I knew that they were all hostile toward me, if only for the fact that they were forced to clothe themselves in my hated likeness. But some of these mirror women I pitied. I forgave their hate and felt almost friendly to them. There were some whom I despised, and I loved to laugh at their powerless fury ; there were some whom I mocked by my own independence and tortured by my power over them. There were others, on the other hand, of whom I was afraid, who were too strong for me and who dared

in their turn to mock at me, to command me. I hastened to get rid of the mirrors where these women lived, I would not look in them, I hid them, gave them away, even broke some in pieces. But every time I destroyed a mirror I wept for whole days after, conscious of the fact that I had broken to pieces a distinct universe. And reproachful faces stared at me from the broken fragments of the world I had destroyed.

The mirror with which my fate was to become linked I bought one autumn at a sale of some sort. It was a large pier-glass, swinging on screws. I was struck by the unusual clarity of its reflection. The phantasmal actuality in it was changed by the slightest inclination of the glass, but it was independent and vital to the edges. When I examined this pier-glass at the sale the woman who reflected me in it looked me in the eyes with a kind of haughty challenge. I did not wish to give in to her, to show that she had frightened me, so I bought the glass and ordered it to be placed in my boudoir. As soon as I was alone in the room, I immediately went up to the new mirror and fixed my eyes upon my rival. But she did the same to me, and standing opposite one another we began to transfix each other with our glance as if we had been snakes. In the pupils of her eyes was my reflection, in mine, hers. My heart sank and my head swam from her intent gaze. But at length by an effort of will I tore my eyes away

from those other eyes, tipped the mirror with my foot so that it began to swing, rocking the image of my rival pitifully to and fro, and went out of the room.

From that hour our strife began. In the evening of the first day of our meeting I did not dare to go near the new pier-glass ; I went to the theatre with my husband, laughed exaggeratedly, and was apparently light-hearted. On the morrow, in the clear light of a September day I went boldly into my boudoir alone and designedly sat down directly in front of the mirror. At the same moment, she, the other woman, also came in at the door to meet me, crossed the room, and then she too sat down opposite me. Our eyes met. In hers I read hatred towards myself ; in mine she read hatred towards her. Our second duel began, a duel of eyes—two unyielding glances, commanding, threatening, hypnotising. Each of us strove to conquer the other's will, to break down her resistance, to force her to submit to another's desire. It would have been a painful scene for an onlooker to witness ; two women sitting opposite each other without moving, joined together by the magnetic attraction of each other's gaze, and almost losing consciousness under the psychical strain. . . . Suddenly someone called me. The infatuation vanished. I got up and left the room.

After this our duels were renewed every day. I realised that this adventuress had purposely forced

herself into my home to destroy me and take my place in this world. But I had not sufficient strength to deny myself this struggle. In this rivalry there was a kind of secret intoxication. The very possibility of defeat had hidden in it a sort of sweet seduction. Sometimes I forced myself for whole days to keep away from the pier-glass ; I occupied myself with business, with amusements, but in the depths of my soul was always hidden the memory of the rival who in patience and self-reliance awaited my return. I would go back to her and she would step forth in front of me, more triumphantly than ever, piercing me with her victorious gaze and fixing me in my place before her. My heart would stop beating, and I with a powerless fury would feel myself under the authority of this gaze.

So the days and weeks went by ; our struggle continued, but the preponderance showed itself more and more definitely to be on the side of my rival. And suddenly one day I realised that my will was in subjection to her will, that she was already stronger than I. I was overcome with terror. My first impulse was to flee from my home and go to another town, but I saw at once that this would be useless. I should, all the same, be overcome by the attractive force of this hostile will and be obliged to return to this room, to this mirror. Then there came a second thought—to shatter the mirror, reduce my enemy to nothingness ; but to

conquer her by brutal strength would mean that I acknowledged her superiority over myself : this would be humiliating. I preferred to remain and continue this struggle to the end, even though I were threatened with defeat.

Soon there could be no doubt that my rival would triumph. At every meeting there was concentrated in her gaze still greater and greater power over me. Little by little I lost the possibility of letting a day pass without once going to my mirror. *She* ordered me to spend several hours daily in front of her. *She* directed my will as a hypnotist directs the will of a sleepwalker. *She* arranged my life, as a mistress arranges the life of a slave. I began to fulfil her demands, I became an automaton to her wordless orders. I knew that deliberately, cautiously, she would lead me by an unavoidable path to destruction, and I already made no resistance. I divined her secret plan—to cast me into the mirror world and to come forth herself into our world—but I had no strength to hinder her. My husband and my relatives seeing me spend whole hours, whole days and nights in front of my mirror, thought me demented and wanted to cure me. But I dared not reveal the truth to them, I was forbidden to tell them all the dreadful truth, all the horror, towards which I was moving.

One of the December days before the holidays

turned out to be the day of my destruction. I remember everything clearly, precisely, circumstantially. Nothing in my remembrance is confused. As usual, I went into my boudoir early, at the first beginnings of the winter dawn twilight. I placed a comfortable armchair without a back in front of the mirror, sat down and gave myself up to *her*. Without any delay she appeared in answer to my summons, she too placed an armchair for herself, she too sat down and began to gaze at me. A dark foreboding oppressed my soul, but I was powerless to turn my face away, and I was forced to take to myself the insolent gaze of my rival. The hours went by, the shadows began to fall. Neither of us lighted a lamp. The glass of the mirror glimmered faintly in the darkness. The reflections had become scarcely visible, but the self-reliant eyes gazed with their former strength. I felt neither terror nor ill-will, as on other days, but simply an intolerable anguish and a bitter consciousness that I was in the power of another. Time swam away and on its tide I also swam into infinity, into a black expanse of powerlessness and lack of will.

Suddenly she, that other, the reflected woman, got up from her chair. I trembled all over at this insult. But something invincible, something forcing me from within compelled me also to stand up. The woman in the mirror took a step forward. I did the same. The

woman in the mirror stretched forth her arms. I did so too. Looking straight at me with hypnotising and commanding eyes, she moved forward and I advanced to meet her. And it was strange—with all the horror of my position, with all my hate towards my rival, there fluttered somewhere in the depths of my soul a painful consolation, a secret joy—to enter at last into that mysterious world into which I had gazed from my childhood and which up till now had remained inaccessible to me. At moments I hardly knew which of us was drawing the other towards herself, she me or I her, whether she was eager to occupy my place or whether I had devised all this struggle in order to displace her.

But when, moving forward, my hands touched hers on the glass I turned quite pale with repugnance. And *she* took my hand by force and drew me still nearer to herself. My hands were plunged into the mirror as into burning-icy water. The cold of the glass penetrated into my body with a horrible pain, as if all the atoms of my being had changed their mutual relationship. In another moment my face had touched the face of my rival, I saw her eyes right in front of my own, I was transfused into her with a monstrous kiss. Everything vanished from me in a torment of suffering unlike any other—and when I came to my senses after this swoon I still saw in front of me my own boudoir

on which I gazed *from out of* the mirror. My rival stood before me and burst into laughter. And I—oh the cruelty of it! I who was dying with humiliation and torture was obliged to laugh too, to repeat all her grimaces in a triumphant joyful laugh. I had not yet succeeded in considering my position when my rival suddenly turned round, walked towards the door, vanished from my sight, and I at once fell into torpor, into non-existence.

Then my life as a reflection began. It was a strange, half-conscious but mysteriously sweet life. There were many of us in this mirror, dark in soul, and slumbering of consciousness. We could not speak to one another, but we felt each other's proximity and loved one another. We could see nothing, we heard nothing clearly, and our existence was like the enfeeblement that comes from being unable to breathe. Only when a being from the world of men approached the mirror, we, suddenly taking up his form, could look forth into the world, could distinguish voices, and breathe a full breath. I think that the life of the dead is like that—a dim consciousness of one's ego, a confused memory of the past and an oppressive desire to be incarnated anew even if only for a moment, to see, to hear, to speak. . . . And each of us cherished and concealed a secret dream—to free one's self, to find for one's self a new body, to go out into the world of constancy and steadfastness.

During the first days I felt myself absolutely unhappy in my new position. I still knew nothing, understood nothing. I took the form of my rival submissively and unthinkingly when she came near the mirror and began to jeer at me. And she did this fairly often. It afforded her great delight to flaunt her vitality before me, her reality. She would sit down and force me also to sit down, stand up and exult as she saw me stand, wave her arms about, dance, force me to repeat her movements, and burst out laughing and continue to laugh so that I should have to laugh too. She would shriek insulting words in my face and I could make no answer to them. She would threaten me with her fist and mock at my forced repetition of the gesture. She would turn her back on me and I, losing sight, losing features, would become conscious of the shame of the half-existence left to me. . . . And then suddenly, with one blow she would whirl the mirror round on its axle and with the oscillation throw me completely into nonentity.

Little by little, however, the insults and humiliations awoke a consciousness in me. I realised that my rival was now living my life, wearing my dresses, being considered as my husband's wife, and occupying my place in the world. Then there grew up in my soul a feeling of hate and a thirst for vengeance, like two fiery flowers. I began bitterly to curse myself for having, by my

weakness or my criminal curiosity, allowed her to conquer me. I arrived at the conviction that this adventuress would never have triumphed over me if I myself had not aided her in her wiles. And so, as I became more familiar with some of the conditions of my new existence, I resolved to continue with her the same fight which she had carried on with me. If she, a shadow, could occupy the place of a real woman, was it possible that I, a human being, and only temporarily a shadow, should not be stronger than a phantom?

I began from a very long way off. At first I pretended that the mockery of my rival tormented me quite unbearably. I purposely afforded her all the satisfaction of victory. I provoked in her the secret instinct of the executioner throwing himself upon his helpless victim. She gave herself up to this bait. She was attracted by this game with me. She put forth the wings of her imagination and thought out new trials for me. She invented thousands of wiles to show me over and over again that I—was only a reflection, that I had no life of my own. Sometimes she played on the piano in front of me, torturing me by the soundlessness of my world. Sometimes, seated before the mirror she would drink in tiny sips my favourite liqueurs, compelling me only to pretend that I also was drinking them. Sometimes, at length, she would bring into my boudoir people whom I hated, and before my face she

would allow them to kiss her body, letting them think that they were kissing me. And afterwards when we were alone she would burst into a malicious and triumphant laugh. But this laugh did not wound me at all ; there was sweetness in its keenness : my expectation of revenge !

Unnoticeably, in the hours of her insults to me, I would accustom my rival to look me in the eyes and I would gradually overpower her gaze. Soon at my will I could already force her to raise and lower her eyelids and make this and that movement of the face. I had already begun to triumph though I hid my feeling under a mask of suffering. Strength of soul grew up within me and I began to dare to lay commands upon my enemy : To-day you shall do so-and-so, to-day you shall go to such-and-such a place, to-morrow you shall come to me at such a time. And *she* would fulfil them. I entangled her soul in the nets of my desires woven together with a strong thread in which I held her soul, and I secretly rejoiced when I noticed my success. When one day, in the hour of her laughter, she suddenly caught on my lips a victorious smile which I was unable to hide, it was already too late. *She* rushed out of the room in a fury, but as I fell into the sleep of my nonentity I knew that she would return, knew that she would submit to me. And a rapture of victory gushed out over my involuntary lack of strength, piercing

with a rainbow shaft of light the gloom of my seeming death.

She did return ! She came up to me in anger and terror, shrieked to me, threatened me. But I was commanding her to do it. And she was obliged to submit. Then began the game of a cat with a mouse. At any time I could have cast her back into the depths of the glass and come forth myself again into sounding and hard actuality. But I delayed to do this. It was sweet to me to indulge in non-existence sometimes. It was sweet to me to intoxicate myself with the possibility. At last (this is strange, is it not ?) there suddenly was aroused in me a pity for my rival, for my enemy, for my executioner. Everything in her was something of my own, and it was dreadful for me to drag her forth from the realities of life and turn her into a phantom. I hesitated and dare not do it, I put it off from day to day, I did not know myself what I wanted and what I dreaded.

And suddenly on a clear spring day men came into the boudoir with planks and axes. There was no life in me, I lay in the voluptuousness of torpor, but without seeing them I knew they were there. The men began to busy themselves near the mirror which was my universe. And one after another the souls who lived in it with me were awakened and took transparent flesh in the form of reflections. A dreadful uneasiness

agitated my slumbering soul. With a presentiment of horror, a presentiment even of irretrievable ruin, I gathered together all the might of my will. What efforts it cost me to struggle against the lassitude of half-existence! So living people sometimes struggle with a nightmare, tearing themselves from its suffocating bands towards actuality.

I concentrated all the force of my suggestion into a summons, directed towards her, towards my rival—"Come hither!" I hypnotised her, magnetised her with all the tension of my half-slumbering will. There was little time. The mirror had already begun to swing. They were already preparing to nail it up in a wooden coffin, to take it away: whither I knew not. And with an almost mortal effort I called again and again, "Come!" And I suddenly began to feel that I was coming to life. *She*, my enemy, opened the door, and came to meet me, pale, half-dead, in answer to my call, with faltering steps as men go to punishment. I fastened my eyes on hers, bound up my gaze with hers, and when I had done this I knew already that I had gained the victory.

I at once compelled her to send the men out of the room. *She* submitted without even making an attempt to oppose me. We were alone together once more. To delay was no longer possible. And I could not bring myself to forgive her craftiness. In her place, in my

time, I should have acted otherwise. Now I ordered her, without pity, to come to meet me. A moan of torture opened her lips, her eyes widened as before a phantom, but she came, trembling, falling—she came. I also went forward to meet her, lips curving triumphantly, eyes wide open with joy, swaying in an intoxicating rapture. Again our hands touched each other's, again our lips came near together, and we fell each into the other, burning with the indescribable pain of bodily exchange. In another moment I was already in front of the mirror, my breast filled itself with air, I cried out loudly and victoriously and fell just here, in front of the pier-glass, prone from exhaustion.

My husband and the servants ran towards me. I could only tell them to fulfil my previous orders and take the mirror away, out of the house, at once. That was wisely thought, wasn't it? You see she, that other, might have profited by my weakness in the first minutes of my return to life, and by a desperate assault might have tried to wrest the victory from my hands. Sending the mirror out of the house, I could ensure my own quietude for a long time, as long as I liked, and my rival had earned such a punishment for her cunning. I defeated her with her own tools, with the blade which she herself had raised against me.

After having given this order I lost consciousness. They laid me on my bed. A doctor was called in. I

was treated as suffering from a nervous fever. For a long while my relatives had thought me ill, and not normal. In the first outburst of exultation I told them all that had happened to me. My stories only increased their suspicions. They sent me to a home for the mentally afflicted, and I am there now. All my being, I agree, is profoundly shaken. But I do not want to stay here. I am eager to return to the joys of life, to all the countless pleasures which are accessible to a living human being. I have been deprived of them too long.

Besides—shall I say it?—there is one thing which I am bound to do as soon as possible. I ought to have no doubt that I am *this* I. But all the same, whenever I begin to think of her who is imprisoned in my mirror I begin to be seized by a strange hesitation. What if the real I—is there? Then I myself who think this, I who write this, I—am a shadow, I—am a phantom, I—am a reflection. In me are only the poured forth remembrances, thoughts and feelings of that other, the real person. And, in reality, I am thrown into the depths of the mirror in nonentity, I am pining, exhausted, dying. I know, I almost know that this is not true. But in order to disperse the last clouds of doubt, I ought again once more, for the last time, to see that mirror. I must look into it once more to be convinced, that there—is the impostor, my enemy,

she who played my part for some months. I shall see this and all the confusion of my soul will pass away, and I shall again be free from care—bright, happy. Where is this mirror? Where shall I find it? I must, I must once more look into its depths! . . .

PROTECTION :

A CHRISTMAS STORY

COLONEL R. told me this story. We were staying together at the estate of our mutual relatives, the M's. It was Christmas-time, and in the drawing-room one evening the talk turned on ghosts. The Colonel took no part in the conversation, but when we were alone together—we slept in the same room—he told me the following story.

This happened five-and-twenty years ago, and more : it was in the middle of the seventies. I had only just got my commission. Our regiment was stationed at *, a small provincial town in the government of X. We spent our time as officers usually do : we drank, played cards, and paid attentions to women.

Among the people living in the neighbourhood, one stood out above the rest, Mme. C—— Elena Grigorievna. Strictly speaking, she did not belong to the society there, for until lately she had always lived at Petersburg. But being left a widow a year previously she had settled down to live on her country estate,

about ten versts from the town. She was somewhat over thirty years of age, but in her eyes, almost unnaturally large, there was something childlike, which gave her an inexplicable charm. All our officers were attracted by her ; but I fell in love with her, as only twenty can fall in love.

The commander of our company was a relative of Elena Grigorievna, and we obtained access to her house. She had become somewhat tired of being a recluse, and liked to have visits from young folks, though she lived almost alone. We sometimes went to dinner, and spent whole evenings there. But she behaved with so much tact and goodness that no one could boast of the slightest intimacy with her. Even malicious provincial tongues could bring no gossip against her.

I was sick of love for her. What tortured me more than all was the impossibility of frankly confessing my love. I would have done anything in the world just to fall on my knees before Elena Grigorievna and say aloud to her : " I love you." Youth is a little like intoxication. For the sake of having half an hour alone with her whom I loved, I resolved on a desperate measure. There was much snow that winter. In the Christmas holidays there was not a day but the wind raised the dry snow from the ground into the air in whirling eddies. I chose an evening when the weather

was particularly bad, ordered my horse to be saddled, and set out over the fields.

I don't know how it was I didn't perish by the way. Everywhere the snow was whirling and the air was so thick with it that at two paces from me there stood, as it were, grey walls of snow. On the road the snow was almost up to one's knees. Twenty times I lost my way. Twenty times my horse refused to go further. I had a flask of cognac with me, and but for it I should have frozen. It took me just on three hours to travel the ten versts.

By some sort of miracle I arrived at the house. It was already late, and I hardly succeeded in knocking up the servants. When the watchman recognised me he exclaimed in wonder. I was all over snow, covered with ice, and looked like a Christmas mummer. Of course I had prepared a story to account for my appearance. My calculations were not at fault. Elena Grigorievna was obliged to receive me and she ordered a room to be prepared for me to stay the night.

In half an hour's time I was seated in the dining-room, alone with her. She pressed me to have supper, wine, tea. The logs crackled on the open fire, the light of a hanging-lamp enclosed us in a circle which to me seemed magical. I felt not the slightest tiredness and was more in love than ever.

I was young, handsome, and certainly no fool. I had

every right to the notice of a woman. But Elena Grigorievna, with unusual dexterity, evaded all talk of love. She compelled me to talk to her exactly as if we had been at a party in the midst of many other people. She laughed at my witticisms, but pretended not to understand any of my hints.

In spite of this, a special kind of intimacy sprang up between us, allowing us to speak more openly. And at length, knowing that it was nearly time to say good-night, I made up my mind. My consciousness, as it were, reminded me that such a suitable occasion would not repeat itself. "If you don't take advantage of to-day," said I to myself, "you have only yourself to blame." By a great effort of will, I suddenly broke off the conversation in the middle of a word, and in a moment, somewhat incoherently and awkwardly, I said out all that had been hidden in my soul.

"Why are we pretending, Elena Grigorievna? You know very well why I came to-day. I came to tell you that I love you. And now I say it to you. I cannot but love you and I want you to love me. Drive me away and I will humbly depart. If you don't tell me to go I shall take it as a sign that you love me. I don't want anything in between. I want either your anger or your love."

The childlike eyes of Elena Grigorievna became cold. They looked like crystal. I read such a clear answer

in her countenance that I got up without another word and wanted to go off straight away. But she stopped me.

“That’s enough! Where are you going? Don’t behave like a little boy. Sit down.”

She made me sit down near her and began to speak to me as if she had been an elder sister talking to a wayward child.

“You are too young yet, and love is something new to you. If another woman were in my place you would fall in love with her. In a month’s time you would begin to love a third. But there is another kind of love which drains the depths of the soul. Such a love I had for Sergey, my husband, who is dead. I have given to him all I can ever feel. However much you may speak to me of love, I shall hear you no more than if I were dead. You must understand that I have no longer any capacity to attach any meaning to such words. It’s just as if you spoke to someone who could not hear you. Reconcile yourself to this. You can no more be offended than if you were unable to make a dead woman love you.”

Elena Grigorievna spoke with a slight smile. This appeared to me to be almost insulting. I imagined that she was laughing at me, in thus putting forward her own love for her dead husband. I felt myself grow pale. I remember the tears springing to my eyes.

My agitation was not unobserved by Elena Grigorievna. I saw the expression of her cold eyes begin to change. She understood that I was suffering. Restraining me with her hand, as she saw I wanted to get up without replying, she drew her chair nearer mine. I felt her breath on my face. Then lowering her voice, although we were alone in the room, she said to me, with a real frankness and tender intimacy :

“ Forgive me, if I’ve offended you. Perhaps I am mistaken about your feeling, and it’s more serious than I thought. So I will tell you the whole truth. Listen. My love for Sergey is not dead, but living. I love him, not for the past, but in the present. I am not separated from him. I take your confession to me seriously ; take mine in the same way. From the very day of his death, Sergey began to show himself to me, invisibly but clearly. I am conscious of his nearness, I feel his breath, I hear his caressing whisper. I answer him and I have quiet talks with him. At times he almost openly kisses me, on my hair, my cheeks, my lips. At times I see his reflection dimly in the half-light, in a mirror. As soon as I am alone, he at once shows himself to me. I am accustomed to this life with a shadow. I go on loving Sergey in this other form of his, just as passionately and tenderly as I loved him before. I want no other love. And I will not break faith with the man who has not left me, even though he has passed

beyond the bounds of this life. If you tell me that I rave, that I have an hallucination, I shall answer that it makes no difference to me what you think. I am happy in my love, why should I refuse my happiness? Let me be happy."

Elena Grigorievna spoke this long speech of hers gently, without raising her voice, and with deep conviction. I was so impressed by her earnestness that I could find no answer. I looked at her with a certain awe and pity, as at someone whom grief had crazed. But she had become the hostess again and spoke now in another tone, as if all she had said previously might have been a joke :

" Well, it's time for us to go to bed. Matthew will show you your bedroom."

Matthew was an old servant of the house. I mechanically kissed the hand she held out to me. And in another minute Matthew was asking me, in a lugubrious voice, to follow him. He led me to the other side of the house, showed me the bed which had been prepared for me, wished me good night, and left me.

Only then did I recover myself a little. And, isn't it strange, my first feeling was that of shame? I felt ashamed at having played such an unenviable rôle. I felt ashamed to think that though I had been alone for two hours with a young woman, in an almost empty house, I hadn't even got so far as to kiss her lips. At

that moment I felt more malice than love towards Elena Grigorievna and a wish to revenge myself upon her. I had ceased to think that her mind might be unhinged, I thought she had been making fun of me.

Sitting down on my bed, I began to think matters over. I was familiar with the house. I knew that I was in the dead Sergey Dmitrievitch's study. The room next was his bedroom, where everything was left exactly as in his lifetime. On the wall in front of me hung his portrait in oils. He was in a black coat and was wearing the ribbon of the French Order of the Legion of Honour, which he had received—I don't know how or why—in the time of the Second Empire. And by some sort of strange connection of ideas, it was this ribbon specially which gave me the idea of the strangest, wildest plan.

My face was not unlike that of the dead Sergey Dmitrievitch. Of course he was older than I. But we both wore a moustache and did our hair alike. Only his hair was grey. I went into his bedroom. The wardrobe was unlocked. I looked for the black coat of the portrait and put it on. I found the ribbon of the Order. I powdered my hair and my moustache. In a word, I dressed myself up as the dead man.

Probably if my design had been successful I should be ashamed to tell you about it. I confess that what I planned was much worse than a simple joke. It

would have been absolutely unpardonable had I not been so young. But I received the due reward of my action.

Having finished the change of my attire, I directed my steps towards Elena Grigorievna's bedroom. Have you ever chanced to creep along at night in a sleeping house? How distinct is every rustle, how terribly loud is the creak of every floor-board in the silence! Several times it seemed to me that I should arouse all the servants.

At length I gained the wished-for door. My heart beat. I turned the handle. The door opened noiselessly. I went in. The room was lighted by a lamp, which was burning brightly. Elena Grigorievna had not yet gone to bed. She was seated in a large arm-chair in her dressing-gown, in front of a table, deep in thought, in remembrance. She had not heard me come in.

I stood for some minutes in the half-shadow, not daring to take a step forward. Suddenly, Elena Grigorievna, becoming conscious of my presence, or hearing some sort of noise, turned her head. She saw me and began to tremble. My stratagem had succeeded better than I might have expected. She took me for her dead husband. Getting up from the armchair with a faint cry she stretched out her arms to me. I heard her voice of joy :

“Sergey! It is you! At last!”

And then, all trembling with agitation, she sank down again, seemingly unconscious, into her chair.

Not fully aware of what I wanted to do, I ran towards her. But the instant I came close to the arm-chair I saw before me the form of another man. This was so unexpected that I stood still, as if the rigour of death had overtaken me. Afterwards I reflected that a large mirror must have stood there. This other man was a perfect replica of myself. He too wore a black coat; on his breast he too wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honour. And in a moment I understood that this was he whose form I had stolen, he who had come from beyond the grave to protect his wife. A sharp terror ran through all my limbs.

For several seconds we stood facing one another by the chair in which lay unconscious the woman for whom we were striving. I was unable to make the slightest movement. And he, this phantom, quietly raised his hand and made a threatening gesture towards me.

I took part afterwards in the Turkish War. I have looked on death and have seen all that would be counted terrible. But I have never again experienced such horror as then overcame me. This threat from the other world stopped the beating of my heart and the flow of blood in my veins. For a moment I almost

became a corpse myself. Then without another glance, I rushed to the door.

Holding on by the walls; staggering along, not caring how loudly my steps resounded, I reached my own room. I had not sufficient courage to look at the portrait hanging on the wall. I threw myself flat on the bed, and a sort of black stupor held me fast there.

I wakened at dawn. I was still wearing the same false attire. In an agony of shame I took it off and hung it up in its place. Dressing myself in my own uniform, I went to find Matthew, and told him I must leave at once. He was evidently not in the least surprised. I asked the housemaid Glasha if her mistress were still asleep, and got the answer that she was sleeping peacefully. This cheered me. I begged her to say that I apologised for leaving without saying good-bye, and galloped off.

A few days later I went with some friends to visit Elena Grigorievna. She received me with her usual courtesy. Not by a single hint did she remind me of that night. And to this day, it is a mystery to me; did she or did she not understand what happened?

THE "BEMOL" SHOP OF STATIONERY

From the life of "one of the least of these."

AS soon as Anna Nikolaevna had finished school a place was found for her as saleswoman in the stationery shop "Bemol."¹ Why the shop was called by this name would be difficult to say; probably music had once been sold there. It was situated in a turning off one of the boulevards, had few customers, and Anna Nikolaevna used to spend whole days almost alone. Her only assistant, the boy Fedka, lay down to sleep after morning tea, woke up when it was time to run to the cookshop for dinner, and on his return slept again. In the evening the proprietor, an old German woman, Carolina Gustavovna, came in for half an hour, collected the takings, and reproached Anna Nikolaevna for her inability to attract customers. Anna Nikolaevna was dreadfully afraid of her and listened to her without daring to utter a word. The shop was closed at nine; Anna Nikolaevna went home to her aunt, drank weak tea with stale biscuits, and went at once to bed.

¹ Russian shops are often given fantastic names which are printed above the windows instead of the names of the owners.

At first Anna Nikolaevna thought she could find distraction in reading. She got as many novels and old magazines as she could, and read them conscientiously through page by page. But she mixed up the names of the heroes in the novels, and she could never understand why they wrote about the various imaginary Jeans and Blanchés, and why they described beautiful mornings, all of them exactly like one another. Reading was for her labour and not relaxation, so she gave up books. Young men did not unduly pester her with their attentions, for they did not find her interesting. If one of the customers stayed too long talking amiabilities to her, she went away into the little room behind the shop and sent Fedka out. If any one tried to speak to her on her way home, she would say no word, but either hasten her steps or just run as fast as she could to her own door. She had no friends, she did not keep up a correspondence with any of her schoolfellows, she only spoke to her aunt about two words a day. And in this way the weeks and months went by.

Then Anna Nikolaevna began to make friends with the world which lay around her—the world of paper, envelopes, postcards, pencils, pens, the world of pictures, pictures in sets, pictures in relief, pictures for cutting out. This world was to her more comprehensible than that of books and was more friendly to

her than the world of people. She soon learned to know all the kinds of paper and pens, all the series of postcards, and she named them all instead of calling them by numbers ; she began to love some of them and to count others as her enemies. To her favourites she allotted the best places in the shop. She kept the very newest boxes, those with an edging of gold paper, for the writing-paper from a certain factory in Riga having the watermark of a fish. The sets of pictures representing types of ancient Egyptians were arranged in a special drawer in which she kept only these and some penholders with little doves at the end of the holder. The postcards on which were drawn " The Way to the Stars " she wrapped up separately in rose-coloured paper and sealed them with a wafer like a forget-mè-not. But she hated the thick bloated-looking glass inkstands, hated the lined transparent paper which would never keep straight and seemed always to be laughing at her, hated the rolls of crinkled paper for lampshades, proud and sumptuous looking. These things she would hide away in the remotest corner of the shop.

Anna Nikolaevna rejoiced when she sold any of her favourite articles. It was only when her store of this or that kind of thing began to run short that she would get anxious and even dare to beg Carolina Gustavovna to obtain a new supply as soon as possible. Once she

unexpectedly got sold out of the parts of the little letter-weights which acted badly and of which she had grown fond because of their misfortune, the proprietor herself sold the last one evening and would not order any more. Anna Nikolaevna wept for two whole days after. When she sold the articles she did not care for she felt vexed. When a customer took whole dozens of ugly exercise books with blue flowers on the covers, or highly coloured postcards with the portraits of actors, it seemed to her that her favourites had been insulted. On such occasions she so stubbornly dissuaded the customers from buying that many of them went out of the shop without purchasing anything at all.

Anna Nikolaevna was convinced that everything in the shop understood her. When she turned over the leaves of the quires of her beloved paper they rustled so welcomingly. When she kissed the little doves on the ends of the penholders they fluttered their little wooden wings. In the quiet wintry days when it was snowing outside the hoar-frosted window-pane with its ugly circles made by the warmth of the lamps, when for whole hours no one came into the shop, she would hold long conversations with all the things standing on the shelves or lying in the drawers and boxes. She would listen to their unuttered speech and exchange smiles and glances with the things she knew.

In a rapture she would spread out on the counter her favourite pictures—of angels, flowers, Egyptians—and tell them fairy tales and listen to their stories. Sometimes they all sang to her in a hardly audible chorus, a soothing lullaby. Anna Nikolaevna would listen to this until an entering customer would smile unkindly, thinking he had awakened her from sleep.

Before Christmas Anna Nikolaevna had a bad time. Customers were unusually frequent. The shop was filled up with a pile of gaudy eye-offending cards, with ugly crackers and gilt Christmas-tree decorations, exposed in flimsy boxes. On the walls hung pull-off calendars with portraits of great men. The shop was full of people and there was no escape from them. But all the summer Anna Nikolaevna had a complete rest. There was hardly any trade, very often the day passed without a copeck being taken. The proprietor went away from Moscow for whole months. In the shop it was dusty and suffocating, but quiet. Anna Nikolaevna distributed her favourite pictures all over the shop, placed her favourite pencils, pens and erasers in the best positions in the glass cases. She cut out narrow ribbons from coloured cigarette-paper and wreathed them round the stiff columns of the cupboards. She spoke in loud whispers to her beloved objects, telling them about her own childhood, about her mother, and weeping as she did so. And it seemed

to her that they comforted her. And so months and years went by.

Anna Nikolaevna never dreamed that her life might change. But one autumn day Carolina Gustavovna, having come back to Moscow in a particularly bad and quarrelsome mood, declared that there would be a general stock-taking. The following Sunday a notice was pasted on the door: "This shop is closed to-day." Anna Nikolaevna looked on mournfully while the proprietor's fat fingers turned over the leaves of her best notepaper, those delicate and elegant sheets, crumpling the edges; carelessly flinging on to the counter her cherished penholders with the doves. In the trade-book, where Anna Nikolaevna had written in her timid pale handwriting, the proprietor scrawled rude remarks with flourishes and ink-blots. Carolina Gustavovna found many things missing—whole stacks of paper, some gross of pencils, and various separate articles—a stereoscope, magnifying glasses, frames. Anna Nikolaevna felt sure she had never seen them in the shop. Then Carolina Gustavovna calculated that the takings had been growing less every month. This she brought to the notice of Anna Nikolaevna and blamed her for it, called her a thief, said she had no further use for her services, and dismissed her from her post.

Anna Nikolaevna burst into tears, but did not dare

to utter a word of protest. When she got home, of course, she had to listen to her aunt's reproaches, who at first called her a good-for-nothing, and then changed her tone and threatened to prosecute the German woman, saying she couldn't allow her niece to be insulted. But Anna Nikolaevna was not so much afraid of losing her place nor troubled by the injustice of Carolina Gustavovna ; she could not bear to be separated from the beloved things in the shop. She thought of the pictured angels balancing on the clouds, of the heads of Marie Stuart, of the paper bearing the watermark of a fish, of the familiar boxes and drawers, and sobbed unceasingly. She remembered that happy evening hour when the lamps had just been lighted, remembered her silent conversations with her friends and the almost inaudible chorus sounding from the shelves, and her heart was rent with despair. At the thought that never, never should she see her loved ones again, she threw herself down upon her little bed and prayed that she might die.

After about six weeks her aunt was happy to find her a new situation, once more in a stationery shop, but in a much-frequented and busy street. Anna Nikolaevna entered upon her new duties with a pang at her heart. There were two others beside herself in the shop, another girl and a young man. The master also spent the greater part of the day there. Ther

were many customers, for the shop was near several educational institutions. All day Anna Nikolaevna was under the eyes of the others, and they laughed at her and despised her. She did not find her former beloved objects in the new shop. All the things were ordered through other agents from different firms. Paper, pencils, pens—nothing here seemed to be alive. And if there were any things like those in "Bemol," they did not recognise Anna Nikolaevna and it was useless for her when she had a moment to whisper to them their tenderest names.

The only pleasure she had now was to look in at the windows of her old shop on her way home in the evening, as it closed later than the new one. She gazed through the dusty windowpanes into the well-known room. Behind the counter stood the new saleswoman, a good-looking German girl with her hair in curling-pins. In Fedka's place was a tall fifteen-year-old lad. Customers came laughing out of the shop, they had found it pleasant inside. But Anna Nikolaevna believed that her friends, the pictures and penholders and exercise books, remembered her and liked it better in the old days, and this belief comforted her.

For a long while Anna Nikolaevna nursed the fancy that she would one day go inside the shop once more and look again on the old cupboards and show-cases, to show her beloved things that she still remembered

them. Several times she said to herself that it should be that day, but changed her mind, being specially afraid of meeting the proprietor. But one evening she saw Carolina Gustavovna come out of the shop and drive away in a cab. This gave her courage. She opened the shop door and entered with a beating heart. The German girl in the curl-papers was preparing a captivating smile, but seeing a lady customer she contented herself with a slight inclination of the head.

“What can I do for you, miss?”

“Give me . . . give me . . . some note-paper . . . a quire . . . with the fishes.”

The German girl smiled condescendingly, guessing what was meant, and went to the cupboard. Anna Nikolaevna watched her with distrustful and mournful eyes. In her time this paper had been kept in the box with a gold border. But the box was not there now. In its place there were ugly black drawers labelled No. 4, 20 copecks, Ministry Paper 40 copecks. The best places in the cupboards were occupied by the glass inkstands. A pile of crinkled paper took up the whole of the lower shelf. The postcards with the portraits of actors were arranged fan-wise and fastened here and there on the walls. Everything had been moved, displaced, changed.

The German girl put the paper in front of Anna Nikolaevna, asking her which sort she wanted. Anna

Nikolaevna eagerly took into her hands the beautiful sheets which once had responded to her caressing touch, but now they were stiff as death, and as pale. She looked round piteously, everything was dead, everything was deaf and dumb.

"Thirty three-copecks to you, miss."

Even the price was altered. Anna Nikolaevna paid the money and went out of the shop into the cold, holding the roll of paper tightly in her hand. The October wind penetrated her short, well-worn coat. The light of the street lamps was diffused in large blobs in the mist. All was cold and hopeless.

RHEA SILVIA

A STORY FROM THE LIFE OF THE SIXTH CENTURY

I

MARIA was the daughter of Rufus the Scribe. She was not yet ten years old when on the 17th of December, 546, Rome was taken by Totila, the king of the Goths. The magnanimous victor ordered bugles to be blown all night, so that the Roman people might escape from their native town as soon as they realised the danger of remaining there. Totila knew the violence of his soldiers and he had no wish that all the population of the ancient capital of the world should perish by the swords of the Goths. So Rufus and his wife Florentia fled with their little daughter Maria. An enormous crowd of refugees from Rome left the city through the night by the Appian Way; hundreds of them falling exhausted on the road. The greater number, among whom were Rufus and his family, succeeded in getting as far as Bovillæ, where, however, very many were unable to find shelter. Many of them had to camp out in the open. Later on they were all scattered in various directions, seeking some place of refuge. Some went to

the Campagna and were taken prisoners by the Goths, who were in possession there ; some got as far as the sea and were even able to set out for Sicily. The rest either remained as beggars in the neighbourhood of Bovillæ or managed to get into Samnium.

Rufus had a friend living near Corbio. To this poor man, Anthony by name, who earned a living by rearing pigs on a small plot of land, Rufus brought his family. Anthony took the fugitives in and shared with them his scanty store. And while living in the swineherd's wretched hut Rufus heard of all the misfortunes which came upon Rome. At one time Totila threatened to raze the Eternal City to its foundations and turn it into a place of pasture. But the Gothic king afterwards relented and contented himself by burning several districts of the town and pillaging all that still remained from the cupidity and violence of Alaric, Genseric and Ricimer. In the spring of 547 Totila left Rome, but he took off with him all the inhabitants who had remained in the city. For forty days the capital of the world stood empty : there was not a human being left in it, and along its streets wandered only frightened animals and wild beasts. Then, timidly, a few at a time, the Romans began to return to their city. And a little later Rome was occupied by Belisarius and was once more united to the dominions of the Eastern empire.

Then Rufus and his family returned to Rome. They sought out their little house on the Remuria, which by reason of its insignificance had been spared by the spoilers. Almost all the poor belongings of Rufus were found to be intact, including the library and its rolls of parchment, so precious to the scribe. It seemed as if it might be possible to forget all the misfortunes they had undergone, as in some oppressive dream, and to continue their former life. But very soon it became clear that such a hope was deceptive. The war was far from being at an end. Rome had to endure another siege by Totila when again the inhabitants died in hundreds from hunger and lack of water. Then when the Goths at length raised their unsuccessful siege, Belisarius also left Rome, and the city acknowledged the rule of the covetous Byzantine Konon, from whom the Romans fled as from an enemy. At a later period the Goths, taking advantage of treacherous sentries, occupied Rome for the second time. This time, however, Totila not only refrained from plundering the city, but he even strove to bring into it some kind of order, and he wished to restore the ruined buildings. At length, after the death of Totila, Rome was taken by Narses. This was in 552.

It would be difficult to show clearly how Rufus managed to live through these six calamitous years. In the time of war and siege no one had need of the art

of a scribe. No one any longer gave Rufus an order for a transcription from the works of the ancient poets or the fathers of the Church. In the city there were no authorities to whom it might be necessary to address petitions of various kinds. There were not many people, money was very scarce and food supplies scarcer still. He had to make a living by any kind of accidental work, serving either Goths or Byzantines, not disdaining to be a stone-mason when the town walls were being repaired or to be a porter of baggage for the troops. And with all this the entire family often went hungry, not only for days, but for whole weeks. Wine was not to be thought of ; the only drink was bad water from the cisterns or from the Tiber, for the aqueducts had been destroyed by the Goths. It was only possible to endure such privations by knowing that everybody without exception was subject to them. The descendants of senators and patricians, the children of the richest and most illustrious families would ask on the streets for a piece of bread, as beggars. Rusticiana, the daughter of Symmachus and widow of Boethius, held out her hand for alms.

It was not to be wondered at that during these years the little Maria was left very much to her own devices. In her early childhood her father had taught her to read both Greek and Latin. But after their return to Rome he had no time to occupy himself further with

her education. For whole days together she would do just what she thought she would. Her mother did not require her help in housekeeping, for there was hardly any housekeeping to be done. In order to pass the time Maria used to read the books which were still preserved in the house as there was no one who would buy them. But more often she would go out of the house and wander like a little wild animal about the deserted streets, forums and squares, much too broad for the now insignificant populace. The few passers-by soon became accustomed to the black-eyed girl in ragged garments, who ran about everywhere like a mouse, and they paid no attention to her. Rome became, as it were, an immense home for Maria. She knew it better than any writer who had described its noteworthy treasures of old time. Day after day she would go out into the immense area of the city, where over a million people had once dwelt, and she would learn to love some corners of it and detest others. And it was often not until late evening that she would return to her father's cheerless roof, where it often happened that she would go supperless to bed, after a whole day spent on her feet.

In her wanderings through the town Maria would visit the most remote districts on either side of the Tiber, where there were empty partly burnt down houses, and there she would dream of the greatness of

Rome in the past. She would examine the few statues which still remained whole in the squares—the immense bull on the Bull forum, the giant elephants in bronze on the Sacred Way, the statues of Domitian, Marcus Aurelius, and other famous men of ancient time, the columns, obelisks and bas-reliefs, striving to remember what she had read about them all, and if her knowledge was scanty, she would supplement it by any story she had read. She would go into the abandoned palaces of people who had once been rich, and admire the pitiful remains of former luxury in the decoration of the rooms, the mosaic of the floors, the various-coloured marble of the walls, the sumptuous tables, chairs, candlesticks, which in some places still remained. In this way she visited the ruined baths, which were like separate towns within the city, and were entirely deserted because there was no water to supply their insatiable pipes ; in some of the buildings could still be seen magnificent marble reservoirs, mosaic floors, bathing chairs, baths of precious alabaster or porphyry, and in places some half-destroyed statues which had escaped being used by Goths and Byzantines as material for hurling at the enemy from the ballista. In the quietness of the enormous rooms Maria would hear echoes of the rich and careless lives of the thousands and thousands of people who had gathered there daily to meet friends, to discuss litera-

ture or philosophy, and to anoint their effeminate bodies before festival banquets. In the Grand Circus—which now looked like a wild ravine, for it was all overgrown with weeds and tall grasses—Maria thought of the triumphant horse-racing competitions, on which thousands of spectators had gazed and deafened the fortunate victors with a storm of applause. She could not but know of these festivals, for the last of them (oh! pitiful shadow of past splendour) had been arranged once more in her own lifetime by Totila during his second sovereignty in Rome. Sometimes Maria would simply walk along the Tiber bank, sit down in some comfortable spot under some half-ruined wall, and look at the yellow waters of the river, made famous by poets and artists, and in the quietness of the deserted place she would think and dream, and think and dream again.

She became accustomed to live in her dreams. The half-ruined, half-abandoned town fed her imagination generously. Everything she heard from her elders, everything she read in her disorderly fashion from her father's books, mingled itself together in her brain into a strange, chaotic, but endlessly captivating representation of the great and ancient city. She was convinced that the former Rome had been in reality the concentration of all beauty, a marvellous town where all was enchantment, where all life had been one con-

tinuous festival. Centuries and epochs were confused in her poor little head, the times of Orestes seemed to her no further away than the rule of Trajan, and the reign of the wise Numa Pompilius as near as that of Odoacer. For her, antiquity comprised all that preceded the Goths ; far away but still happy was the olden time, the rule of the great Theodoric ; the new time began for her at her birth, at the time of the first siege of Rome, in the time of Belisarius. In antiquity everything seemed to Maria to be marvellous, beautiful, wonderful ; in the olden time all was attractive and fortunate, in modern times everything was miserable and dreadful. And she tried not to notice the cruel reality of the present, but to live in her dreams in the antiquity which she loved, with her favourite heroes, among whom were the god Bacchus ; Camillus, the second founder of the city ; Caesar, who had been exalted up to the stars in the heavens ; Diocletian, the wisest of all people, and Romulus Augustulus, the unhappiest of all the great. All these and many others whose names she had only heard by chance were the beloved of her reveries and the ordinary apparitions of her half-childish dreams.

Little by little in her dreams Maria created her own history of Rome, not at all like that which was told at one time by the eloquent Livy and afterwards by other historians and annalists. As she admired the statues

which still remained whole and read their half-erased inscriptions, Maria interpreted everything in her own way and found everywhere corroboration of her own unrestrained imagination. She said to herself that such and such a statue represented the young Augustus, and nothing would then have convinced her that it was—a bad portrait of some half-barbarian who had lived only fifty years ago, and had forced some ignorant maker of tombs to immortalise his features in a piece of cheap marble. Or when she looked at a bas-relief depicting some scene from the Odyssey she would create from it a long story in which her beloved heroes would again figure—Mars, Brutus, or the emperor Honorius, and would soon be convinced that she had read this story in one of her father's books. She would create legend after legend, myth after myth, and live in their world as one more real than the world of books, and still more real than the pitiful world which encompassed her.

After she had dreamed for a sufficiently long time, and when she felt tired out by walking and exhausted by hunger, Maria would return home. There her mother, who had become bad-tempered from the misfortunes she had endured, would meet her gloomily, roughly push towards her a piece of bread and a morsel of cheese, or a head of garlic if there happened to be one in the kitchen, adding occasionally some scolding

words to the meagre supper. Maria, unsociable as a captive bird, would eat what was given her and then hasten away to her little room and its hard bed to dream again until she slept and then dream again in her sleep about the blessed, dazzling times of antiquity. On especially happy days, when her father happened to be at home and in a good temper, he would sometimes have a chat with Maria. And their talk would quickly turn to the ancient times, so dear to them both. Maria would question her father about bygone Rome, and then hold her breath while the old scribe, led away by his theme, would begin to talk of the great empire in the time of Theodosius, or recite verses from the ancient poets, Virgil, Ausonias and Claudian. And the chaos in her poor little head would fall into still greater confusion, and at times it would begin to seem to her that her actual life was only a dream, and that in reality she was living in the blessed times of Ennius Augustus or Gratian.

II

After the occupation of Rome by Narses, life in the city began to take more or less its ordinary course. The ruler established himself on the Palatine, some of the desolated rooms of the Imperial palace were renovated for him, and in the evenings they were lit up with lamps. The Byzantines had brought money with

them, and trade in Rome began to revive. The main streets became comparatively safe and the impoverished inhabitants of the empty Campagna brought provisions into Rome to sell. Here and there wine taverns were reopened. There was even a demand for articles of luxury, which were purchased mainly by the frivolous women who, like a flock of ravens, followed the mongrel armies of the great eunuch. Monks went to and fro along all the streets, and from them also it was possible to make some sort of profit. The thirty or forty thousand inhabitants now gathered together in Rome, including the troops, gave to the city, especially in the central districts, the appearance of a populous and even of a lively place.

There was found at length some real work for Rufus. Narses, and afterwards his successor, the Byzantine general, received various complaints and petitions for the copying of which the art of a scribe was in request. The edicts of Justinian, acknowledging some of the acts of the Gothic kings and repudiating others, afforded pretext for endless chicanery and processes of law. Rufus sometimes had to copy papers addressed directly to His Holiness the Emperor in Byzantium, and for these he was comparatively well paid. And more important orders came to him. A new monastery wanted to have a written list of its service-books. A whimsical person ordered a copy of the poems of the

famous Rutilius. In the house of Rufus there was once more a certain sufficiency. The family could have dinner every day and need no longer feel anxious about the morrow.

Everything might have been well in Rufus' home if the scribe, who had aged greatly in consequence of years of deprivation, had not taken to drink. Oftentimes he left all his earnings in some tavern or other. This was a heavy blow for Florentia. She struggled in every way to combat the unhappy passion of her husband and tried to take from him all the money he earned, but Rufus descended to every sort of artifice and always found means of getting drunk. Maria, on the contrary, loved the days of her father's drunken bouts. Then he would come home in a gay mood and pay no attention to the tears and reproaches of Florentia, but would eagerly call Maria to him, if she were at home, talk to her again endlessly about the old greatness of the Eternal City, and read to her verses from the old poets and those of his own composition. The half-witted girl and her drunken father somehow understood one another, and they often sat together till late in the night, after the angry Florentia had left them and gone to bed alone.

Maria herself did not change her way of life. In vain her father when sober forced her to help him in his work. In vain her mother was angry with her

daughter for not sharing with her the cares of house-keeping. When Maria was obliged she would against her will sullenly transcribe a few lines or peel a few onions, but at the first opportunity she would run out of the house to wander all day again in her favourite corners of the city. She was scolded on her return, but she listened silently to all reproaches and made no reply. What mattered scoldings to her when in her vision there still glistened all the sumptuous pictures with which her imagination had been soothed while she had been hidden near a porphyry basin in the baths of Caracullus or had lain secreted in the thick grass on the banks of old Tiber. For the sake of not having her visions taken from her she would willingly have endured blows and every kind of torture. In these visions were all her life.

In the autumn of 554 Maria saw in the streets of Rome the triumphal procession of Narses—the last triumph celebrated in the Eternal City. The eunuch's troops of many different races—among whom were Greeks, Huns, Heruli, Gepidæ, Persians—passed in an inharmonious crowd along the Sacred Way, bearing rich booty taken from the Goths. The soldiers sang gay songs in the most diverse languages and their voices mingled in wild and deafening cries. The general, crowned with laurel, drove in a chariot drawn by white horses. At the gates of Rome he was met by

men dressed in white togas making themselves out to be senators. Narses went through half-demolished Rome, along streets in which the grass had grown up between the mighty paving-stones, in the direction of the Capitol. There he laid down his crown before a statue of Justinian, obtained from somewhere or other for this occasion. Then he went on foot through the town once more, going back to the Basilica of St. Peter, where he was met by the Pope and clergy in festival robes. The Roman people crowded into the streets and gazed at the spectacle without any special enthusiasm, though the chief actors had done their utmost to make it magnificent. The Byzantine triumph was for Romans something foreign, almost like a triumph of the enemies of their native land.

And on Maria the triumphal procession made no impression whatever. She looked with indifferent eyes upon the medley of colours in the soldiers' garments, on the triumphal toga of the eunuch—a small, beardless old man with shifty eyes—and on the festal robes of the priests. The songs and martial cries of the soldiers only aroused her horror. It all seemed to her so different from the triumphs she had so often imagined in her lonely visions—the triumphs of Augustus Vespasian, Valentian! Here everything appeared to her to be strange and ugly; there, all had been magnificence and beauty! And without waiting to see the

whole of the procession, Maria ran away from the basilica of St. Peter on to the Appian Way, to the ruined baths of Caracullus, which she loved, so that in the quietness of the marble hall she might weep freely over the irrevocable past and see it anew in her dreams, living and beautiful as it alone could be. Maria went home late that day and did not wish to answer any questions as to whether she had seen the procession.

At this time Maria was nearly eighteen. She was not beautiful. She was thin, her figure was undeveloped and with her wild black eyes and the hectic colour in her cheeks she rather affrighted than attracted attention. She had no friend. When the young girls of the neighbourhood spoke to her she answered abruptly and in monosyllables, and hastened to bring the conversation to an end. How could they—these other girls—understand her secret dreams, her sacred visions? Of what could she speak with them? She was thought not so much to be stupid as imbecile. And then, she never went to church. Sometimes, on the deserted streets a drunken passer-by would come up to her and try to take her arm or embrace her. Then Maria would turn on him like a wild cat, scratching, biting, hitting out with her fists, and she would be left in peace. One young man, however, the son of a neighbouring coppersmith, had wanted to pay attentions to her. When her mother spoke to her about him Maria heard

the news with unfeigned horror. When her mother became insistent, saying that she could not now find a better husband anywhere Maria began to sob in such desperation that Florentia left her alone, making up her mind that her daughter was either too young to be married or that she was indeed not quite in her right mind. So Maria was allowed to live in freedom and to fill up her endless leisure time as she pleased.

So passed days and weeks and months. Rufus worked and drank. Florentia busied herself over her housekeeping and scolded. Both thought themselves unhappy, and cursed their wretched fate. Maria alone was happy in the world of her fancies. She began to pay less and less attention to the hateful actuality of her surroundings. She went deeper and deeper into the kingdom of her visions. She already held conversations with the forms which her imagination created as with living people. She used to return home with the conviction that to-day she had met the goddess Vesta or the dictator Sulla. She would remember the things she had imagined as if they had actually taken place. When she talked with her father at nights she would tell him all her remembrances, and the old Rufus would not be amazed. Every story of hers gave him a pretext for being ready with some lines of poetry—he would complete and develop the insane fancies of his daughter, and as she listened sleepily to

their strange conversations Florentia would sometimes spit and pronounce a curse, sometimes cross herself and whisper a prayer to the Holy Virgin.

III

In the spring following the triumphal procession of Narses Maria was one day wandering near the ruined walls of the baths of Trajan, when she noticed that in one place, where evidently the Esquiline Hill took its rise, there was a strange opening in the ground, like an entrance somewhere. The district was a deserted one; all around there were only deserted and uninhabited houses; the pavements were broken and the steep slope of the hill was overgrown with tall grass. After some effort Maria succeeded in getting to the opening. Beyond it was a dark and narrow passage. Without hesitation she crawled into it. She had to crawl for a long way in utter darkness and in a stifling atmosphere. At the end of the passage there was a sudden drop. When Maria's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness she could distinguish by the faint light which came from the opening by which she had entered that in front of her was a spacious hall of some unknown palace. After a little reflection the girl considered that she would not be able to see it without a light. She went back cautiously, and all that day she wandered about, pondering on the matter. Rome

seemed to her to be her own property, and she could not endure the idea that there was anything in the city about which she knew nothing.

The next day, having secured a home-made torch, Maria returned to the place. Not without some danger to herself she got down into the hall she had discovered and there lighted the torch. A stately chamber presented itself to her gaze. The lower half of the walls was of marble, and above it were painted marvellous pictures. Bronze statues stood in niches, amazing work, for the statues seemed to be living people. It was possible to distinguish that the floor, now covered with earth and rubbish, was of mosaic. After admiring this new spectacle, Maria was emboldened to go further. Through an immense door she passed into a whole labyrinth of passages and cross-passages leading her into a new hall, still more magnificent than the first. Further on was a long suite of rooms, decorated with marble and gold, with wall paintings and statuary ; in many places there still remained valuable furniture and various domestic articles of fine workmanship. Spiders, lizards, sow-bugs ran all around ; bats fluttered here and there ; but Maria, enthralled by the unique spectacle, saw nothing of them. Before her was the life of ancient Rome, living, in all its fulness, discovered by her at last.

How long she enjoyed herself there on that first

day of her discovery she did not know. She was overcome, either by her strong agitation or by the foul atmosphere. When she came to her senses again she was on the damp stone floor, and her torch was extinguished, having burnt itself out. In utter darkness she began gropingly to seek a way out. She wandered for a long time, for many hours, but only became confused in the countless passages and rooms. In the misty consciousness of the girl there was a glimmer of a notion that she was fated to die in this unknown palace, which was itself buried under the ground. Such an idea did not alarm Maria ; on the contrary, it seemed to her both beautiful and desirable to end her life among the splendid remains of ancient life, in a marble hall, at the foot of a beautiful statue somewhere or other. She was only sorry for one thing—that darkness lay around her, and that she was not fated to see the beauty in the midst of which she was to die. . . . Suddenly a ray of light shone before her. Gathering up her strength, Maria went towards it. It was the light of the moon shining through an opening like that by which she had entered the palace. But this opening was in an entirely different hall. By great efforts, scrambling up by the projections of the walls Maria got out into the open air in an hour when the whole city was already asleep and the moon reigned in her full glory over the heaps of the

half-ruined buildings. Keeping close by the walls, in order to attract no attention, Maria reached home almost dead from exhaustion. Her father was absent, he did not come home all that night, and her mother only uttered a few coarse outcries.

After this Maria began daily to visit the subterranean palace she had discovered. Little by little she learnt all its corridors and halls, so that she could wander about them in utter darkness without fear of losing her way again. She always carried with her, however, a little lamp or a resin torch, so that she could adequately enjoy the sumptuous decorations of the rooms. She learnt to know all about them. She knew the rooms which were covered with paintings and decorations in crimson, others where a yellow colour predominated, others which by the green of the paintings reminded her of fresh meadows or of a garden, others which were all white with ornamentations of black ebony : she knew all the wall paintings, some of which depicted scenes from the lives of gods and heroes, some showed the great battles of antiquity, some showed the portraits of great men, others the ridiculous adventures of fauns and cupids ; she knew all the statues that were preserved in the palace, both bronze and marble, the small busts in the niches, the glorious piece of sculpture of entire figures of enormous size which represented three people, a man and two youths, who were encircled

in the coils of a gigantic serpent and were vainly striving to free themselves from its fatal embrace.

But of all the decorations in the underground palace Maria specially loved one bas-relief. It represented a young girl, slim and graceful, resting in a deep sleep in a kind of cave; near her stood a youth in warlike armour, with a noble face of marvellous beauty; above them, and as it were in the clouds, was depicted a woven basket containing two young children, floating on a river. It seemed to Maria that the features of the young girl in the picture were like her own. She recognised herself in this slim sleeping princess, and for whole hours she would untiringly admire her, imagining herself in her place. At times Maria was ready to believe that some ancient artist had marvellously divined that at some time a young girl Maria would appear in the world, and that he had by anticipation, created her portrait in the bas-relief of the mysterious enchanted palace, which must have been preserved untouched under the earth for hundreds of years. The significance of the other figures in the bas-relief was not realised by her for a long while.

But one evening Maria happened once more to have a talk with her father, who had come home drunk and in a gay mood. They were alone, for Florentia, as usual, had left them to their foolish chattering and had gone to bed. Maria told her father of the underground

palace she had discovered and of its treasures. The old Rufus listened to this story in the same way as he heard all the other fancies of his daughter. When she used to tell him that she had that day met Constantine the Great in the street and that he had graciously conversed with her, Rufus would not be surprised, but he would begin to talk about Constantine. And now, when Maria spoke to him of the treasures of the underground palace the old scribe at once talked about this palace.

“ Yes, yes, little daughter,” said he. “ Between the Palatine and the Esquiline, it really is there. It is the Golden House of the emperor Nero, the most beautiful palace ever built in Rome. Nero had not sufficient space for it and he set fire to Rome. Rome was burnt, and the emperor recited verses about the burning of Troy. And afterwards, on the space that had been cleared, he built his Golden House. Yes, yes, it was between the Palatine and the Esquiline ; you’re right. There was nothing more beautiful in the city. But after Nero’s death other emperors destroyed the palace out of envy, and heaped earth upon it ; it existed no longer. They built houses and baths on its site. But it was the most beautiful of all the palaces.”

Then, having become bolder, Maria told her father about her beloved bas-relief. And again the old scribe was not surprised. He at once explained to his daughter what the artist had wished to express—

“That, my daughter, is Rhea Silvia, the vestal virgin, daughter of King Numitor. But a youth—this god Mars, fell in love with the maiden and sought her out in the sacred cave. Twin sons were born to them, Romulus and Remus. Rhea Silvia was drowned in the Tiber, the infants were suckled by a wolf and they became the founders of the City. Yes, that is how it all was, my daughter.”

Rufus told Maria in detail the touching story of the guilty vestal Ilia, or Rhea Silvia, and he at once began to recite some lines from the “*Metamorphoses*” of the ancient Naso :

*Proximus Ausonias iniusti miles Amuli
Rexit opes . . .*

But Maria was not listening to her father, she was repeating quietly to herself :

“It is—Rhea Silvia ! Rhea Silvia !”

IV

After that day Maria spent still more of her time looking at the wonderful bas-relief. She would take a scanty luncheon with her, as well as a torch, so that she might stay some hours longer in the underground palace, which she considered to be more her own home than her father's house. She would lie on the cold and slippery floor in front of the sculptured daughter of Numitor, and by the faint light of her resinous torch

she would gaze for long hours at the features of the slender maiden sleeping in the sacred cave. With every day it became more apparent to Maria that she was strangely like this ancient vestal, and little by little in her dreams, she became less able to distinguish which was poor Maria, the daughter of Rufus the Scribe, and which the unhappy Ilia, daughter of the King of Alba Longa. She always called herself Rhea Silvia. Lying in front of the picture she would dream that to her, in this new sacred cave, the god Mars would appear, and that from their divine embraces there would be born of her the twins Romulus and Remus, who would become the founders of the Eternal City. True, she would have to pay for this by her death—and be drowned in the muddy waters of the Tiber—but could death terrify Maria? She often fell asleep while musing thus before the bas-relief, and dreamed of this same god Mars with his noble face of marvellous beauty and his divine, consuming embrace. And when she awoke she would not know whether it had been dream or reality.

It was already scorching July, when the streets of Rome at midday were as empty as after the terrible command of King Totila. But in the underground palace it was damp and cool. Maria, as before, went there every day to muse, in her habitual sweet reveries, before the pictured Ilia, who lay dreaming of the god

destined for her. And one day, when in a slight doze, she was once again giving herself up to the ardent caresses of the god Mars, suddenly a noise of some kind forced her to awake. She opened her eyes, not understanding anything as yet, and glanced around. By the light of the little torch which she had placed in a cranny between the stones, she saw before her a young man. He was not in warlike armour, but wore the dress usually worn at that time by poor Romans ; his face, however, was full of nobility, and to Maria it appeared radiant with a marvellous beauty. For some moments she looked with amazement on the unexpected apparition, on the man who had found his way into this enchanted palace which she had thought unknown to anyone save herself. Then, sitting upright on the floor, the girl asked simply :

“ You have come to me ? ”

The young man smiled a quiet and attractive smile, and answered by another question.

“ But who are you, maiden ? The genius of this place ? ”

Maria answered :

“ I—am Rhea Silvia, a vestal virgin, daughter of King Numitor. And are you not the god Mars, come in search of me ? ”

“ No, I am no god,” objected the young man. “ I am a mortal, my name is Agapit, and I was not

searching here for you. But all the same, I am glad to find you. Greeting to you, daughter of King Numitor ! ”

Maria invited the young man to sit down beside her, and he at once consented. So they sat together, youth and maiden, on the damp floor, in the magnificent hall of Nero's Golden House, buried under ground, and they looked into each other's eyes and knew not at first what to talk about. Then Maria pointed out the bas-relief to the young man and began to tell him all the legend of the unhappy vestal. But the youth interrupted her story.

“ I know this, Rhea,” said he, “ but how strange ! The face of the girl in the bas-relief is actually like yours.”

“ It is I,” answered Maria.

So much conviction was in her words that the youth was perplexed and knew not what to think. But Maria gently placed her hand on his shoulder and began to speak ingratiatingly, almost timidly.

“ Do not deny it :—you are the god Mars in the form of a mortal. But I recognise you. I have expected you for a long while. I knew that you would come. I am not afraid of death. Let them drown me in the Tiber.”

For a long while the young man listened to Maria's incoherent speech. All around was strange. This

underground palace, known to no one, with its magnificent apartments where only lizards and bats were living. And the obscurity of this immense hall, barely lighted by the faint light of the two torches. And this obscure maiden, like the Rhea Silvia of the ancient bas-relief, with her unintelligible speeches, who in some marvellous fashion had lighted upon the buried Golden House of Nero. The young man felt that the rude actuality of the life he had lived just before his entrance into the underground dwelling had vanished into thin air as a dream disappears in the morning. In another moment he might have believed that he himself was the god Mars, and that he had met here his beloved, Ilia the vestal, the daughter of Numitor. Putting the greatest restraint upon himself, he broke in upon Maria's speech.

"Dear maiden," said he, "listen to me. You are mistaken about me. I am not he for whom you take me. I will tell you the whole truth. Agapit is not my real name. I am a Goth, and my name is really Theodat. But I am obliged to conceal my origin, for I should be put to death if it were known. Haven't you heard, by my pronunciation, that I am not a Roman. When my fellow-countrymen left your city, I did not follow them. I love Rome, I love its history and its tradition. I want to live and die in the Eternal City, which once belonged to us. So now, under the name of

Agapit, I am in the service of an armourer ; I work by day, and in the evenings I wander about the city and admire its memorials which have escaped destruction. As I knew that Nero's Golden House had been built on this spot, I got in to this underground palace so that I could admire the remains of its former beauty. That is all. I have told you the whole truth, and I do not think you will betray me, for one word from you would be enough to have me put to death."

Maria listened to the words of Theodat with incredulity and dissatisfaction. After a little thought she said : " Why are you deceiving me ? Why do you wish to take the form of a Goth ? Can I not see the nimbus round your head ? Mars Gradivus, for others thou art a god, for me thou art my beloved. Do not mock thy poor bride, Rhea Silvia ! "

Theodat looked again for a long while at the young girl who spoke such foolish words, and he began to guess that Maria was not in her right mind. And when this thought came into his head he said to himself, " Poor girl ! I will never take advantage of your unprotected state ! This would be unworthy of a Goth." Then he gently put his arms around Maria and began to talk to her as to a little child, not contradicting her strange fancies but acknowledging himself to be the god Mars. And for a long while they sat side by side in the semi-darkness, not exchanging one

kiss, talking and dreaming together of the future Rome which would be founded by their twin sons Romulus and Remus. At last the torches began to burn low, and Theodat said to Maria :

“ Dear Rhea Silvia, it is already late. We must go away from here.”

“ But you will come again to-morrow ? ” asked Maria.

Theodat looked at the young girl. She seemed to him strangely attractive, with her thin, half-childish figure, the hectic flush on her cheeks and her deep black eyes. There was an incomprehensible attraction in this meeting of theirs in the dim hall of the buried palace, before the marvellous bas-relief of an unknown artist. Theodat desired to repeat these minutes of strange intercourse with the poor crazy girl, and he answered :

“ Yes, maiden, to-morrow at this hour, after my day’s work, I will come again to you here.”

Hand in hand they went in the direction of the way out. Theodat had a rope ladder with him. He helped Maria to climb up to the hole which served as an entrance to the palace. Evening had already fallen when they reached the streets.

Before they separated Theodat said once more, looking into Maria’s eyes :

“ Remember, maiden, you must not tell anyone that

you have met me. It might cost me my life. Good-bye until to-morrow."

He got out first into the open-air and was soon out of sight round a bend of the road. Maria went slowly home. If it happened that evening that she had a talk with her father, she would not tell him that at last Mars Gradivus had come to her.

V

Theodat did not deceive Maria. Next day, towards evening he really came again to the Golden House and to the bas-relief representing Mars and Rhea Silvia, where Maria was already awaiting him. The young man had brought with him some bread and cheese and some wine, and they had their supper together in the magnificent hall of Nero's palace. Maria mused aloud again about the beauty of life in the past, about gods, heroes, and emperors, mixing up stories of her own experiences with the wanderings of her fancy; but Theodat, with his arm around the girl, gently stroked her hand or her shoulder, and admired the black depth of her eyes. Then they walked together through the empty underground rooms, shedding the light of their torches on the great creations of Greek and Roman genius. When they parted they again exchanged a promise to meet on the following day.

From that time, every day, when Theodat had

finished his dull labour at the armourer's workshop, where they made and repaired helmets, pikes, and armour for the company of Byzantines who were garrisoning Rome, he went to meet the strange young girl who thought herself to be the vestal virgin Ilia, alive once more. There was an unconquerable attraction for the young man in the lissom body of the girl and in her half-foolish words, to which he was ready to listen for whole hours together. They explored together all the halls, corridors, and rooms of the palace, as far as they could get ; they rejoiced together over each newly-found statue, each newly-noticed bas-relief, and there was never a day but some unexpected discovery filled their souls with a new rapture. Day after day they lived in an unchanging happiness—enjoying the creations of Art, and in moments of emotion before a new-found marble sculpture, the work perhaps of Praxiteles, young man and maiden would lean towards one another and embrace in a pure and blessed kiss.

Imperceptibly Theodat began to consider the Golden House of Nero as his own home, and Maria became to him the nearest and dearest being in the world. How this happened Theodat himself did not know. But all the rest of the time which he spent on the earth seemed to him a burdensome and distasteful obligation, and only the time that he spent with Rhea Silvia

underground, in the palace of the ancient emperor, seemed to him to be real life. The whole day the young man awaited in a torture of impatience the moment when he could at last leave the brass helmets and hammers and pincers, and with the rope ladder hidden under his garments run off to the slope of the Esquiline for his secret meeting. Only by these meetings did Theodat reckon his days. If he had been asked what attracted him in Maria he would have found it difficult to answer. But without her, without her simple talk, without her strange eyes—all his life would have seemed empty and void.

On the earth, in the armourer's workshop, or in his own pitiful little room which he rented from a priest, Theodat could reason sanely. He would say to himself that this Rhea Silvia was a poor crazy girl, and that he himself perhaps was doing wrong in corroborating her pernicious fancies. But when he went down into the cool damp obscurity of the Golden House, Theodat, as it were, changed everything—his thoughts and his soul. He became something different, not what he was in the sultry heat of the Roman day or in the stifling atmosphere of the forge. He felt himself in another world there, where in reality could be met both the vestal virgin Ilia, daughter of King Numitor, and the god Mars, who had taken upon himself the form of a young Goth. In this world everything was possible

and all miracles were natural. In this world the past was still living, and the fables of the poets were clearly realised at every step.

Not that Theodat fully believed in Maria's delusions. But when, before some statue of an ancient emperor she would begin to speak of meeting him on the Forum and talking with him, it seemed to Theodat that something of the sort had actually taken place. When Maria told him about the riches of her father, King Numitor, Theodat was ready to think that she was speaking the truth. And when she had visions of the glories of the future Rome, which would be founded by the new Romulus and Remus, Theodat himself was led to develop these visions, and to speak about the new victories of the Eternal City, its new conquests of territory, its new world-wide fame. . . . And together they would imagine the names of the coming emperors who would rule in their children's city. . . . Maria always spoke of herself as Rhea Silvia and of Theodat as Mars, and he became so accustomed to these names that there were times when he deliberately called himself by the name of the ancient Roman god of war. And when both of them, young man and maiden, were intoxicated by the darkness and by the marvellous creations of Art, by their nearness to one another and by their strange half-crazy dreams, Theodat almost

began to feel in his veins the divine ichor of an Olympian god.

And again the days went by. At the very beginning of his acquaintance with Maria, Theodat had promised himself to spare the crazy girl and not to take advantage of her weak intellect and her unprotected state. But with each new meeting it became in every way more and more difficult for him to keep his word. Meeting every day the girl he already loved with all the passion of youthful love, spending long hours with her alone in this isolated place, in the half-darkness, touching her hands and shoulders, feeling her breathing close beside him, and exchanging kisses with her ;— Theodat was obliged to use greater and greater effort not to press the girl to himself in a strong embrace, not to draw her to him with those caresses with which the god Mars had once drawn to himself the first vestal. And Maria not only did not avoid such caresses, but she even, as it were, sought them, leaning towards him, attracting him to her with all her being. She lingered in Theodat's arms when he kissed her, she herself pressed him to her bosom when they were admiring the statues and pictures, she seemed every moment to be questioning the youth with her large black eyes, as if she were asking him, " When ? " " Will it be soon ? " " I am tired of waiting." Theodat would ask himself

“— And can it be true that she is crazy? Then I must be crazy too! And is not our craziness better than the reasonable life of other people. Why should we deny ourselves the full joy of love?”

And so that which was inevitable came to its fulfilment. The marriage chamber of Maria and Theodat was one of the magnificent halls of the Golden House of Nero. The resin twists, lighted and placed in ancient bronze candlesticks in the form of Cupids, were their bridal torches. The union of the young couple was blessed by the marble gods, sculptured by Praxiteles, who looked down with unearthly smiles from their niches of porphyry. The great silence of the buried palace hid in itself the first passionate sighs of the newly-wedded pair and their pale faces were overshadowed by the mysterious obscurity of the underground palace. There was no solemn banquet, no marriage songs, but long ages of glory and power overshadowed the bridal couch, and its earth and ashes seemed to the lovers softer and more desirable than the down of Pontine swans in the sleeping apartments of Byzantium.

From that evening Maria and Theodat began to meet as lovers. Their long talks were mingled with long caresses. They exchanged passionate confessions and passionate vows—in almost senseless speeches. They wandered again through the empty rooms of the

Golden House, not so much attracted now by the pictures and statues, the marble walls and the mosaics, as by the possibility in the new room to fall again and again into each other's embraces. They still dreamed of the future Rome which would be founded by their children, but this happy vision was already eclipsed by the happiness of their unrestrained kisses in whose burning atmosphere vanished not only actuality but also dreams. They still called themselves Rhea Silvia and the god Mars, but they had already become poor earthly lovers, a happy couple, like thousands and thousands of others living on the earth after thousands and thousands of centuries.

VI

Never, outside the hall of the subterranean palace, did Theodat try to meet Maria nor she him. They only existed for one another in the Golden House of Nero. Perhaps they might even not have recognised one another on the earth. Theodat might have ceased to be for Maria the god Mars, and Maria would not have seemed to Theodat beautiful and wonderful. Truly, after their union, the honourable young Goth had said to himself that he ought to find out the real relatives of the young girl, to marry her and openly acknowledge her as his wife before all people. But day after day he put off the fulfilment of this resolve ; it

would have been terrible for him to destroy the fairy-like enchantment in which he was living, terrible to exchange the unheard of ways of the underground hall for the ordinary realities. Perhaps Theodat did not thus explain his delay to himself, but, all the same, he did not hasten to bring to an end the burning happiness of these secret meetings, and every time he parted with Maria he renewed his vow to her that on the morrow he would come again. And she expected him and asked for nothing more ; for her this visionary blessedness was sufficient—to be the beloved of a god.

“ Thou wilt always love me ? ” Theodat would ask, pressing the lissom body of Maria in his strong arms.

But she would shake her head and say :

“ I will love thee until death. But thou art an immortal, and soon I must die. They will drown me in the waters of the Tiber.”

“ No, no,” Theodat would say, “ that will not happen. We shall live together and die together. Without thee I do not wish to be immortal. And after death we shall love each other just the same there in our Olympus.”

But Maria would look at him distrustfully. She expected death and was prepared for it. She only wished one thing—to prolong her happiness as long as it was possible.

The young man told himself that he ought secretly to follow Maria and find out where she lived—go to her

real home and to her true father and tell him that he, Agapit, loved this young girl and wanted to make her his wife. But when the hour of parting drew near, when Maria having heard Theodat vow that he would come again to-morrow to the Golden House, glided away like a thin shadow into the evening distance—the youth would once more postpone his action. “ Let this be put off another day ! Let us meet once more as Rhea Silvia and the god Mars ! Let this fairy tale still continue.” And he would go home, to the little room he rented from the priest, to dream all night of his beloved and solace himself with the new happiness of remembrance. And Theodat never asked anyone about the strange black-eyed girl, though almost everyone in Rome knew Maria. But in reality he did not wish to know anything about her except this—that she was the vestal Ilia, and that every evening she lovingly awaited him in the subterranean hall of Nero’s underground palace.

But one day Maria having waited till the evening, awaited Theodat in vain ; the youth did not come. Grieved and disturbed, Maria went home again. Her mind had in a way become somewhat clearer since she had given herself to Theodat and she was able to console herself with the thought that something must have prevented him from coming. But the youth did not come the next day, nor the next. He suddenly

disappeared completely and it was in vain that Maria waited for him at the appointed place hour after hour, day after day—waited in anguish, in despair, sobbing, praying to the ancient gods, and using the words which her mother had once taught her : there came no answer to her tears and prayers. As before, an unearthly smile played over the faces of the gods in their niches in the walls ; as before, the superb rooms of the ancient palace gleamed with paintings and mosaics, but the Golden House suddenly became empty and terrible for Maria. From a blessed paradise, from the land of the Elysian fields, it had suddenly been changed into a hall of cruel torture, into a black Tartarus where was only horror and solitude, unendurable grief and unbearable pain. With an insane hope Maria went every day as before to the underground dwelling, but now she went there as to a place of torture. There awaited her the hours of disappointed expectation, the terrible reminders of her late happiness and her long-renewed inconsolable tears.

It was most terrible of all, most distressing of all, near the bas-relief which represented Rhea Silvia sleeping in the sacred cave with the god Mars coming towards her. All her remembrances drew Maria to this bas-relief, yet near it the most unconquerable grief would overwhelm her soul. She would fall on the floor and beat her head against the stone mosaic pavement,

closing her eyes that she might not behold the radiant face of the god. "Come back, come back!" she would repeat in her frenzy. "Come just once again! Divine, immortal; have pity on my sufferings. Let me see thee once again. I have not yet told thee all, have not given thee all my kisses; I must, I must see thee once again in life. And after that let me die, let them cast me into the waters of the Tiber, and I will not resist. Have pity on me, Divine One!" And Maria would open her eyes again, and by the faint light of the torch she would see the unmoved face of the sculptured god and then once more the remembrance of the blessedness which had suddenly been taken away from her would overwhelm her and she would burst into new tears and sobs and wails. And she herself would hardly know if the god Mars had come to her, if in her life there had been those days of perfect happiness or if she had dreamed them amongst thousands of other dreams.

With every day her expectations grew more hopeless. Every day she would return to her home more anguished and more shaken. In those hours when there were glimmerings of consciousness in her soul she remembered dimly all that Theodat had once told her about himself. Then she would wander through the streets of Rome, and under various pretexts she would look into all the armourer's workshops, but nowhere did she meet with him she sought. To speak to anyone of

her grief and of her vanished happiness was impossible for her and no one would have believed the stories of the poor crazy girl—everyone would have considered them to be new wanderings of her disordered imagination. So Maria lived alone with her grief and her despair, and her mother only shook her head dejectedly as she saw her becoming thinner and more wasted, her cheeks more sunken and her eyes burning more feverishly and with more strange and fiery reflections.

But the days passed by inconsolably—for the poor crazy girl, for the despoiled Eternal City, and for the whole world in which a new life was slowly coming to birth. The days went by; Justinian celebrated his final victories over the remaining Goths, the Lombards thought out their Italian campaign, the popes secretly forged the links of that chain which in the future would connect Rome with all the world, the Romans continued to live their poor and oppressed lives, and one day Maria understood at last that she would become a mother. The vestal Rhea Silvia to whom the god Mars had condescended from his Olympus, began to feel within herself the pulsations of a new life—were they not the twins, the new Romulus and Remus who must found the new Rome?

To no one, neither to father nor to mother, did Maria speak of what she felt. It was her secret. But she was strangely quieted by her discovery. Her dreams were

being completely fulfilled. She must give birth to the founders of Rome and afterwards await death in the muddy waters of the Tiber.

VII

Sometimes guests would gather together in the house of old Rufus, a neighbouring merchant who sold cheap women's finery on the Forum, the coppersmith's son who at one time had wished to court Maria, an infirm orator who could no longer find a use for his learning, and a few other poverty stricken people who were dejectedly living out their days, only meeting one another to complain of their unhappy lot. They would drink poor wine and eat a little garlic, and among their customary complaints they would cautiously interpolate bitter words about the Byzantine rule and the inhuman demands of the new general who lived on the Palatine in place of the departed eunuch Narses. Florentia would serve the guests, and pour out wine for them, and at the speeches of the old orator she would quietly cross herself at the mention of the accursed gods.

At one of these gatherings Maria was sitting in a corner of the room, having come home that day earlier than usual from her wanderings. Nobody paid any attention to her. They were all accustomed to see among them the silent girl whom they had long ago

considered to be insane. She never joined in the conversation and no one ever addressed a remark to her. She sat with her head bent in a melancholy fashion and never moved, apparently hearing nothing of the speeches made by the drinking party.

On this day they were talking especially about the severity of the new general. But the coppersmith's son took upon himself to defend him.

"We must take into account," said he, "that at the present time it is necessary to act rigorously. There are many spies going about the city. The barbarians may fall on us again. Then we should have to endure another siege. These accursed Goths, when they took themselves out of the town for good, had hidden their treasures in various places. And now first one and then another of them comes back to Rome secretly and in disguise, digs up the hidden treasure and carries it away. Such people must be caught, and it would never do to be easy with them; the Romans will have all their riches stolen."

The words of the coppersmith's son aroused curiosity. They began to ask him questions. He readily told all that he knew about the treasures hidden by the Goths in various parts of Rome, and how those of them who had escaped destruction strove to seek out these stores and carry them off. Then he added :

"And it's only lately they caught one of them. He

was clambering up the Esquiline, where there is an opening in the ground. He had a rope-ladder. They caught him and took him to the general. The general promised to spare him if the accursed one would show exactly where the treasure was hidden. But he was obstinate and would say nothing. They tortured him and tortured him, but got nothing out of him. So they tortured him to death."

"And is he dead?" asked someone.

"Of course he's dead," said the coppersmith's son.

Suddenly an unexpected illumination lit up the confused mind of Maria. She stood up to her full height. Her large eyes grew still larger. Pressing both hands to her bosom, she asked in a breaking voice :

"And what was his name, what was the name . . . of this Goth?"

The coppersmith's son knew all about it. So he answered at once :

"He called himself Agapit ; he was working quite near here, in an armourer's workshop."

And with a shriek, Maria fell face downwards on the floor.

Maria was ill for a long while, for many weeks. On the first day of her illness a child was born prematurely, a pitiful lump of flesh which it was impossible to call either a boy or a girl. Florentia, with all

her harshness, loved her daughter. While Maria lay unconscious for many days her mother tended her and never left her side. She called in a midwife and a priest. When at length Maria came to her senses Florentia had no reproachful tears for her, she only wept inconsolably and pressed her daughter to her bosom. Her mother-soul had divined everything. Later on, when Maria was a little better her mother told her all that had happened and did not reproach her.

But Maria listened to her mother with a strange distrust. How could Rhea Silvia believe it, when she was destined, by the will of the gods, to bring forth the twins Romulus and Remus? Either the girl's mind was entirely overclouded or she believed her former dreams more than actuality—at the words of her mother she merely shook her head in weakness. She thought her mother was deceiving her, that during her illness she had borne twins which had been taken from her, put into a wicker-basket and thrown into the Tiber. But Maria knew that a wolf would find and nourish them, for they must be the founders of the new Rome.

As long as Maria was so weak that she could not raise her head no one wondered that she would answer no questions and would be silent whole days, neither asking for food nor drink nor wishing to pronounce a monosyllable. But when she recovered a little and found

strength to go about the house Maria continued to be silent, hiding in her soul some treasured thought. She did not even want to talk to her father any more and she was not pleased when he began to declaim verses from the ancient poets.

At length, one morning when her father had gone out on business and her mother was at market Maria unexpectedly disappeared from home. No one noticed her departure. And no one saw her again alive. But after some days the muddy waters of the Tiber cast her lifeless body on the shore.

Poor girl! Poor vestal of the broken vows! One would like to believe that throwing thy body into the cold embraces of the water thou wert convinced that thy children, the twins Romulus and Remus, were at that moment drinking the warm milk of the she-wolf, and that in time to come they would raise up the first rampart of the future Eternal City. If in the moment of thy death thou hadst no doubt of this, thou wert perhaps the happiest of all the people in that pitiful half-destroyed Rome towards which were already moving from the Alps the hordes of the wild Lombards.

ELULI, SON OF ELULI

A STORY OF THE ANCIENT PHŒNICIANS

I

THE young scholar Dutrail, whose works on the head ornaments of the Carthaginians had already attracted attention, and Bouverie, his former tutor, now his friend, a corresponding-member of the Academy of Inscriptions, were working at some excavations on the western coast of Africa, in the French Congo, south of Myamba. It was a small expedition, fitted out by private means, and originally consisting of eight members. Most of them, however, had been unable to endure the deadly climate, and on one pretext or another had gone away. There remained only Dutrail, whose youthful enthusiasm conquered all difficulties, and the old Bouverie, who having all his life dreamed of taking part in important excavations where his special knowledge was concerned, had in his old age—thanks to the patronage of his young friend—obtained his desire. The excavations were extremely interesting ; no one had supposed the

Phœnician colony to have spread itself so far south on the West Coast of Africa, extending even beyond the Equator. Every day's work enriched science and opened up new perspectives as to the position of Phœnicia and her commercial relations in the ninth century B.C.

The work was, however, extremely arduous. No European had remained with Dutrail and Bouverie except their servant Victor ; all the workmen were negroes of the place. True, it had been decided that in place of those who had left other archæologists should come and bring with them not only some French workmen and a new store of necessary instruments, guns, and food supplies, but also the letters, books, and newspapers of which Dutrail and Bouverie had long been deprived. But day followed day, and the wished-for steamer did not appear. Their stores were decreasing, they were obliged to hunt for their food, and Dutrail was especially anxious about the exhaustion of their supply of cartridges ; the natives were already sullen and insubordinate, and in the event of a riot among them their lack of arms might be dangerous. Besides this, the Frenchmen suffered greatly from the climate and from the intolerable heat, which was so great that in the daytime it was impossible to touch a stone without burning the hand. And now at last the bold archæologists seemed likely to be overcome by the

malevolent local fever which had attacked several of the company before their departure.

Dutrail triumphed over everything. Day after day he subsisted on the flesh of seabirds tasting strongly of fish, and drank the warmish water from a neighbouring spring ; he kept the mutinous crowd of negro-workmen in check and himself worked with them, and yet still found time at night to write his diary and to keep a detailed account of all the archæological treasures they had obtained. In the tiny hut which they had built under the shelter of a cliff he had already put in order a whole museum of wonderful things which had lain almost three centuries in the earth and now being restored to the world would soon bring about a revolution in Phœnician lore. Bouverie, on the contrary, though desiring with all his soul to remain with his young friend, was manifestly becoming weaker. It was more difficult for an old man to struggle against misfortunes and deprivation. Often, as he worked, his spade or his gun would simply drop from his hands and he himself would fall unconscious to the ground. Added to this he had begun to have attacks of the local fever. Dutrail tried to cure him with quinine and the other medicines which were in their travelling medicine-chest, but the old man's strength was utterly giving way ; his cheeks had fallen in, his eyes burned with an unhealthy glitter, and at night-time he was

tortured by paroxysms of dry coughing, shivering fits, fever and delirium.

Dutrail had long ago made up his mind to compel his friend to return to Europe as soon as the steamer should come, but for a long while he had been afraid to speak about the matter. He felt that the old man would certainly refuse—would prefer, as a scholar, to die at his post, the more so as lately he had often spoken of death. To Dutrail's astonishment, however, Bouverie himself began to speak of leaving, saying it was evident that they must part, and although it was bitter for him to abandon the work he had begun, his illness compelled him to go, so that he might die in his native land. In the depths of his soul Dutrail was almost offended by these last remarks of the old man, who could prefer his superstitious desire—to be in his native land at the moment of his death—before the high interest of scientific research, but explaining this by Bouverie's illness he at length applauded his friend's resolution, and said all that might be expected from him under the circumstances—that the fever was not so dangerous, that it would pass with the change of climate, that they would still do much work together, and so forth.

Two days later Bouverie astonished his friend still further. On that day the excavators had come upon a new and rich tomb. Dutrail was in ecstasy over such

a discovery and he could neither speak nor think of anything else. But in the evening Bouverie called his former pupil to his side in his half of the little hut and begged him to witness his will.

“ I’m much to blame,” said Bouverie, “ not to have made my will before, but I’ve never had the time. All my life I’ve been entirely taken up with science, and I have never had time to think about my own affairs. But my health is getting so much worse that perhaps I shall never get away from here, so I must formulate my last desires. We are only three Europeans here, but you and Victor are enough to witness my will.

So as not to agitate the old man, Dutrail agreed. The will was quite an ordinary one. Bouverie left the little money he had to dispose of to a niece, for he was unmarried and had no other relatives. He left small sums to his old servant, to the owner of the house in which he had lived for forty years, and to various other people. His collection of Phœnician and Carthaginian antiquities, gathered together during his long life-time, the old man bequeathed to the Louvre, and some separate small things—to his friends, Dutrail among the number.

Coming at length to the last clause, Bouverie said, in an agitated manner :

“ This, strictly speaking, ought not to be included in

the will. It is simply—my request to you personally, Dutrail. But listen to it all the same.”

The request was that after his death Bouverie wanted his body to be sent to France and buried in his native town by the side of his mother. As he read this last clause of the will the old man could not restrain his tears. In a breaking voice he began to implore that whatever might happen his request should be fulfilled.

By a great effort Dutrail controlled his anger and answered as gently and tenderly as he could.

“ Devil take it, dear friend ! You see, I’m quite sure you’re not so ill as you think. If I agreed to witness your will, I did so for one reason, to please you, and for another, because it is never superfluous to put one’s affairs in order. But as I am strongly convinced that you will get better and will laugh at your present anxiety about yourself, I will permit myself to make some objections.”

With the greatest caution Dutrail pointed out to Bouverie that his request could hardly be fulfilled ; there were no means at hand for embalming the body and no coffin which could be hermetically sealed. And he asked whether it were worse to lie after death under African palms side by side with the dead of the great past than in some small provincial French cemetery. The only thing it was possible to promise in any case, under such circumstances, was that his body should be

buried here in Africa at first and afterwards taken to France, though this would be difficult, troublesome, and, above all, useless.

“That’s what I was afraid of!” cried the old man despairingly. “I was afraid that you would say just that. But I beg of you, I conjure you, to fulfil my request, whatever it may cost you, even though . . . even though you may have to give up the excavations for a time.”

Bouverie entreated, begged, wept. And at last, in order to pacify the old man, Dutrail was obliged to consent, to give his word of honour and even his oath. The will was signed.

II

Next day, even before the sun had risen, their labours were resumed. They began to excavate the magnificent tomb which they had come across the evening before. It was evident that the Phœnician settlement would show itself much more significant than they had at first supposed. At least, the tomb they had discovered had clearly belonged to a rich and powerful family, several generations of which had not only spent their whole lives under the inhospitable skies of equatorial Africa, but had also prepared here for themselves an eternal resting-place. The sepulchre was built of massive blocks of stone and ornamented

with bas-reliefs. Dutrail untiringly directed the workmen and often took a pick or a spade himself.

After great difficulty they succeeded in discovering the entrance to the tomb—an enormous iron door that in spite of the twenty-eight centuries which had elapsed since it was closed had to be carefully broken to pieces. Having succeeded at last in forcing an entrance and letting fresh air flow into the recesses of the tomb Dutrail and Bouverie went in themselves, carrying torches in their hands. The picture which presented itself to their gaze was enough to send an archæologist out of his mind with delight. The tomb was apparently absolutely untouched. In the midst of it a stone coffin was raised upon a stone platform in the shape of a fantastic monster, and around this were many articles for household use, some fine specimens of crescent-shaped lamps, implements of war, images of gods, and other articles whose significance it would have been difficult to define at once.

But the most striking fact was that the inner walls of the tomb were almost entirely covered with paintings and inscriptions. With the inrush of the fresh air, the colours of the paintings, as is always the case, swiftly began to fade, but the inscriptions, which were written in some sort of black composition and even cut out to some depth in the stone, seemed as if wrought but yesterday. This especially enraptured Dutrail,

for until then he had come across very few Phœnician inscriptions. He already had visions of unearthing here entirely new historical data, information, for example, about the connection of the Phœnicians with Atlantis, of which Shleeman's nephew had read in a Phœnician inscription on a vase found in Syria.

In spite of the scorching heat, Dutrail busied himself in transferring all the things they had found to the museum, and he did not stop until the last crescent-shaped lamp had been placed in the wished-for spot. Then, carefully closing up the entrance to the tomb, the young scholar lay down to rest ; but no sooner had the heat abated a little than he was again at work. He occupied himself in copying and deciphering the inscriptions, a work which with all his splendid knowledge of the language was extremely complicated. When evening came he had succeeded in copying only an insignificant number of the inscriptions and in approximately deciphering still fewer.

That night, sitting in their little hut, by the dim light of a lamp, Dutrail shared his discoveries with Bouverie and begged his help in the interpretation of various difficult expressions. One series of inscriptions was clearly a simple genealogy leading up through ten or twelve generations. But one contained an adjuration against violators of the peace of the tomb. Dutrail interpreted it approximately thus :

“ In the name of Astarte who has been down into hell may there be peace for me, Eluli, son of Eluli, buried here. May I lie here for a thousand years and for eternity. Nearest and dearest, fellow-countrymen and strangers, friends and foes, I adjure : ‘ Touch not my ashes, nor my gold, nor the things belonging to me. If people persuade thee, give no ear to them. And thou, bold man, reading these words which no human eye should ever see, cursed be thou upon the earth and under the earth where is neither eating nor drinking. Mayest thou never receive a place of rest with Rephaim, never be buried in a tomb, never have a son nor any issue. May the sun not warm thee, may wood never bear thee up upon water, may there not depart from thee for one hour the demon of torture, formless, pitiless, whose strength never becomes less.’ ”

The inscription was continued further, but the end was unintelligible. Bouverie listened to the translation in profound silence and did not wish to take any share in deciphering the rest. Pleading illness, he went off to his own half of the hut behind a wooden partition. But Dutrail sat on for a long while over his notes, consulting books they had brought with them, thinking over every expression and striving to understand every shade of meaning in the inscription.

III

Late that night, when Dutrail was already sleeping the sound sleep of a wearied man, he was suddenly awakened by Bouverie. The old man had lighted a candle, and by its light he seemed still paler than usual. His hair was in disorder, his whole appearance indicated an extreme degree of terror.

“What is the matter, Bouverie?” asked Dutrail. “You’re ill?”

Though it was difficult to struggle against his desire to sleep, Dutrail made an effort to awake, remembering the serious illness of his old friend. But Bouverie did not answer the question; he asked, in a broken voice:

“Did you see him too?”

“Whom could I see?” objected Dutrail. “I’m so tired at the end of the day that I sleep without dreaming.”

“This was not a dream,” said Bouverie sadly, “and I saw him go from me towards you.”

“Whom?”

“The Phœnician whose tomb we dug out.”

“Your mind’s wandering, dear Bouverie,” said Dutrail. “You have fever: I’ll prepare a dose of quinine for you.”

“ I’m not wandering,” objected the old man obstinately. “ I saw this man quite clearly. He was shaven and beardless, with a wrinkled face, and he was dressed as a soldier. He stood by my bed and looked threateningly at me, and said . . . ”

“ Wait a moment,” interrupted Dutrail, trying to bring the old man to reason—“ in what language did he speak to you ? ”

“ In Phœnician. I don’t know if perhaps at another time I should have understood the Phœnician language, but at that moment I understood every word.”

“ What did the apparition say to you ? ”

“ He said to me : ‘ I—am Eluli, son of Eluli, he whose peaceful repose you, strangers, have disturbed, not dreading my curse. Therefore I will have vengeance on thee, and what has befallen me shall come upon thee. Thy ashes shall not rest in thy native land, but shall be the prey of the hyena and jackal. I will torment thee both sleeping and waking, all thy life and after thy life, and until the end of time.’ When he had said this he went towards you, and I thought you would see him too.”

Dutrail felt convinced that his friend’s state was the result of illness, easily explained by the heat, by his continuous thinking about death, and by the agitation consequent on their remarkable discovery. Wishing to bring the old man into a reasonable frame of mind,

Dutraill did not remind him that apparitions were a delusion of sight, but he tried to make clear all the implausibility of the vision.

“ We did not excavate the tomb,” said he, “ to insult the ashes lying there, or to profit by the things collected there ; we had a disinterested scientific object. Eluli, son of Eluli, has no reason for being angered with us. Science resurrects the past, and we, in raising up Phœnician antiquities, have also raised up this Eluli. The old Phœnician ought rather to be grateful to us for calling him from oblivion. If it hadn't been for us, who in our day would have known that a thousand years before Christ there once lived in Africa a certain Eluli, son of Eluli ? ”

Dutraill talked to the old man as to a sick child. At first Bouverie would not listen to any arguments and he demanded what was clearly impossible—that all the things should be taken back to the tomb at once, and the tomb itself buried anew. Little by little, however, he began to give way, and agreed to postpone the decision of the matter until the morning. Then Dutraill lifted the old man in his arms and laid him on his bed, covering him with quilts as he began to shiver, and sat down by his bedside until the sick man fell into a restless and disturbed sleep. “ What havoc illness plays with even the clearest mind ! ” he thought sadly.

IV

On the morrow, logic and the obviousness of Dutrail's arguments gained the day. Bouverie agreed that his vision had been the result of a feverish delirium. He also agreed that it would be a crime against science and against humanity to fill up the excavations of the tomb. The work went on with the former enthusiasm. And in the tomb of Eluli and in others near it they found even more precious historical things. The friends only awaited the arrival of the steamer with the necessary tools and some European workmen to begin excavating the town.

But Bouverie's health did not improve. The fever did not leave him ; he often cried aloud at night and leapt from his bed in unreasoning terror. Once the old man confessed that he had seen the Phœnician Eluli once again. Dutrail thought it good to laugh at him, and after this the old man spoke no more of his visions. But, all the same, he seemed to fade daily, and he even began to manifest signs of mental disturbance : he was afraid of the darkness and of the night, he did not wish to go into the museum, and presently he absolutely abandoned the excavations. Dutrail shook his head and waited impatiently for the steamer, hoping that a sea-voyage and his return to France might do the old man good.

But in vain did the two friends await the steamer. When at length it arrived, in the place where the members of the expedition had established their little settlement nothing was found but a heap of ashes and charred wood. It was evident that the negro-workmen had mutinied, killed the Europeans and stolen their property and carried off all the things which had been arranged in the museum. The great discovery of Dutrail and Bouverie, which they had dreamed would enrich Phœnician lore, was lost to mankind.

IN THE TOWER

A RECORDED DREAM

THERE is no doubt that I dreamed all this, dreamed it last night. True, I never thought that a dream could be so circumstantial and so consecutive. But none of the events of this dream have any connection with what I am experiencing now or with anything that I can remember. Yet how otherwise can a dream be differentiated from reality except in this way—that it is divorced from the continuous chain of events which occur in our waking hours?

I dreamed of a knight's castle, somewhere on the shore of the sea. Beyond it there was a field and a stunted yet ancient forest of pines. In front of it there stretched an expanse of grey northern billows. The castle had been roughly built with stone of a terrible thickness, and from the side it looked like a wild and fantastic cliff. Its deep, irregularly placed windows were like the nests of monstrous birds. Within the castle were high gloomy chambers with sounding passages between them.

As I now call to mind the furniture of the rooms, the

dress of the people about me, and other trifling details, I clearly understand to what period my dream had taken me back. It was the life of the Middle Ages, dreadful, austere, still half-savage, still full of impulses not yet under control. But in the dream I had not at first this understanding of the time but only a dull feeling that I myself was foreign to that life into which I was plunged. I felt confusedly that I was some kind of new-comer into that world.

At times this feeling was more intense. Something would suddenly begin to torture my memory, like a name which one wants to remember and cannot. When I was shooting birds with a cross-bow I would long for another and more effective weapon. The knights, encased in their armour of iron, accustomed to murder, seeking only for plunder, appeared to me to be degenerates, and I foresaw the possibility of a different and more refined existence. As I argued with the monks on scholastic questions, I had a foretaste of some other kind of learning, deeper, fuller, freer. But when I made an effort to bring something into my memory, my consciousness was bedimmed anew.

I lived in the castle as a prisoner, or, more truly, as an hostage. A special tower was allotted to me. I was treated with respect, but was kept under guard. I had no definite occupation of any kind, and the lack of employment was burdensome to me. But there was

one thing which brought happiness and ecstasy into my life : I was in love.

The governor of the castle was named Hugo von Rizen. He was a giant with a voice of thunder and the strength of a bear. He was a widower. But he had one daughter, Matilda, tall, graceful, bright-eyed. She was like St. Catherine as the Italians paint her, and I loved her passionately and tenderly. As Matilda took charge of all the housekeeping in the castle, we used to meet several times a day, and every meeting would fill my soul with blessing.

For a long while I could not make up my mind to tell Matilda of my love, though of course my eyes betrayed my secret. I uttered the fateful words quite unexpectedly, as it were, one morning at the close of winter. We met on the narrow staircase leading to the watch-tower. And though it had often happened that we had been alone together—in the snow-covered garden, and in the dim hall, under the marvellous light of the moon, for some reason or other it was specially at this moment that I felt I could not be silent. I pressed myself close up against the wall, stretched out my hands and said, " Matilda, I love you." Matilda did not blench, she simply bent her head and answered softly, " I love you too, you are my chosen one." Then she ran quickly up the stairs and I stood there, against the wall, still holding out my hands.

In the most consecutive of dreams there is always some break in the action. I can remember nothing of what happened in the days immediately following my confession of love. I remember only that I was walking with Matilda on the shore, though everything showed that some weeks must have elapsed. The air was already filled with the odours of spring, but the snow still lay on the ground. The waves, with thunderous noise, were rolling in with white crests on to the stony beach.

It was evening, and the sun was sinking into the sea, like a magic bird of fire, setting the edges of the clouds aflame. We walked along side by side.

Matilda was wearing a coat lined with ermine, and the ends of her white scarf floated in the wind. We dreamed of the future, the happy future, forgetting that we were children of different races, and that between us lay an abyss of national enmity.

It was difficult for us to talk, because I did not know Matilda's language very well, and she was quite ignorant of mine, but we understood much, even without words. And even now my heart trembles as I remember this walk along the shore within sight of the gloomy castle, in the rays of the setting sun. I was experiencing and living through true happiness, whether awake or in a dream—what difference does it make?

It must have been on the following morning that I was told Hugo wished to speak to me. I was taken into his presence. He was seated on a high bench covered with elk-furs. A monk was reading a letter to him. Hugo was glowering and angry. When he saw me, he said sternly :

“Aha! Do you know what your countrymen are doing? Was it such a little thing for us to defeat you at Isborsk. We set fire to Pskov, and you besought us to have mercy. Now you're asking help from Alexander, who glories in the appellation of Nevsky. But we are not like the Swedes! Sit down and write to your people of our might, so that they may be brought to reason. And if you refuse, then you and all the other hostages will pay cruelly for your refusal.”

It is difficult to explain fully what feelings took possession of me then. Love for my native land was the first which spoke powerfully in my soul—an elemental, inexplicable love, like one's love towards one's mother. I felt that I was a Russian, that in front of me were enemies, that here I stood for all Russia. At the same moment, I perceived and acknowledged with bitterness that the happiness of which Matilda and I had dreamed had for ever departed from me, that my love for a woman must be sacrificed to my love for my native land. . . .

But scarcely had these feelings filled my soul, when

in the very depths of my consciousness there suddenly flamed an unexpected light. I understood that I was sleeping, that everything—the castle, Hugo, Matilda, and my love for her, everything was but a dream. And I suddenly wanted to laugh in the faces of this stern knight and his monk-assistant, for I knew already that I should wake and there would be nothing—no danger, no grief. I felt an unconquerable courage in my soul, because I could go away from my enemies into that world whither they were unable to follow me.

Holding my head high, I replied to Hugo :

“ You know yourself that this is not true. Who called you to these lands ? This sea is Russian from time immemorial, it belonged to the Varyagi. You came here to convert the people, and instead of that you have built castles on the hills, you oppress the people and you threaten our towns even as far as to Ladoga itself. Alexander Nevsky undertook a holy work. I rejoice that the people of Pskov had no pity on their hostages. I will not write what you wish, but I will encourage them to fight against you. God will defend the right ! ”

I said this as if I were declaiming upon a stage, and I purposely chose ancient expressions so that my language might fit the period, but my words threw Hugo into a frenzy.

“ Dog ! ” cried he to me. “ Tartar slave ! I will order you to be broken on the wheel ! ”

Then there came swiftly to my remembrance, as if it had been a revelation, given to a seer from on high, the whole course of Russian history, and I spoke to the German triumphantly and sternly, as a prophet :

“ Know this, that Alexander will overcome you on the ice of the Chudsky Lake. Knights without number will there be hewn down. And our descendants will take all this land under their domination and have your descendants in subjection to them.”

“ Take him away ! ” cried Hugo, the veins of his neck swelling and purpling with anger.

The servants led me away, not to my tower, but to a noisome underground place, a dungeon.

The days dragged away in the damp and darkness. I lay on rotting straw, mouldy bread was thrown into me for food, for whole days I heard no sound of a human voice. My garments were soon in rags, my hair was matted, my body was covered with sores. Only in unattainable dreams did I picture to myself the sea and the sunlight, the spring, the fresh air, and Matilda. And in the near future the wheel and whipping-post awaited me.

As the joy of my meetings with Matilda had been real to me, so were my sufferings in her father's dungeon. But the consciousness in myself that I was sleeping and having a bad dream did not become dim. Knowing that the moment of awakening was at hand

and that the walls of my prison would disperse as a mist, I found in myself the strength to bear all my tortures unrepiningly. When the Germans proposed that I should buy my freedom with the price of treachery to my native land, I answered with a defiant refusal. And my enemies themselves esteemed my firmness, which cost me less than they thought.

Here my dream breaks off. . . . I may have perished by the hand of the executioner, or have been delivered from bondage by the victory of the Battle of Ice on April 5th, 1241; as were other hostages from Pskov. But I simply awakened. And here I am, sitting at my writing-table, surrounded by familiar and beloved books, and I am recording this long dream, intending to begin the ordinary life of this day. Here, in this world, among these people who are in the next room I am at home, I am actually . . .

But a strange and dreadful thought quietly arises from the dark depths of my consciousness. What if now I am sleeping and dreaming—and I shall suddenly awake on the straw, in the underground dungeon of the castle of Hugo von Rizen ?

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