

Phorfor

By M. P. Shiel

Áú! áú! ôÛõ ÊõèÝñáéáõ!

They reckon ill who leave *Me* out!

When me they fly—I am the Wings! I am the Doubter and the Doubt;

And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.—R. W. Emerson

At that more sombre season called Opora, which fills the interval between the rising of Sirius and the rising of Arcturus, when the cycled year dying as the phoenix, forest-leaves glow red-reflective of the conflagration, and birds fly migratory from the world-wide majesty of the pyre—I passed on horse-back over the blue and high-surgng undulations of the Orchat Mountains, whose broad swell is as the Eastern heave of a jeweled bosom; thence through lower-lying slopes, and delicious groves of citron, almond, and maple; and thence through a seine of streams, over-waved by that bulbous Nile-lily which the Greeks called “lotus”; till, entering the domain of Phorfor, I drew up, as night fell, at the entrance of the far-reaching castle by the sea.

The ancient home! I had worn its dark forests as an easy old garment; listened through the whole dead summer-day by its brook-banks to the abstracted talk of my cousins Sergius and Areta, children then like me; splashed in the waters of its day. But a sudden pride, quickened by another’s malice, impelled me to wide wanderings over the world, from which, after too many years, I now returned with little won—a knowledge of constitutions, modes, of the swellings of cities, artfulness of art; and a longing beyond language for heavenly message of the eyes of Areta, and the benign wisdom of the lips of Sergius.

A letter of announcement had preceded me by some days. An old serving-man waited me at the entrance. I recognized him well, but to my smile he returned no answering smile. In silence he led the way, doddering with prone neck and angled knees, through a series of lofty glooms, till in the recesses he stopped before a high, embossed, and arched brazen gateway, to the curtained wicket of which he pointed, bowed, and retired.

I passed inwards. Here sight groped with somewhat more surety; though a thick odour of the smoke of myrrh smothered out the atmosphere. On a cushion on the ground I saw Areta sit: an easel before her. On the easel a square of ivory, in the centre of which, by medium of *coccus*, the scarlet dye of the kermes-berry, she stained a small head. The brush was between her fingers. Wide and wild over the marble *dalles* of the flooring were spent the light purplish largesses of her main. Her back was towards me.

“Areta!”

Eagerly she painted. But she was conscious of my voice, for, without turning, she said in a

thick, hurried murmur:

“You are come, then. See—*your* work.”

She pointed with the handle, and continued her task.

I, looking, saw in misty distances of the chamber—a bed. But how *my* work? I drew gently near it. It was strewn with splinters of fragrant agalloch-wood. I saw a noble, cold forehead. The body was robed in splendid volutions of cloth-of-gold; the red lamp of a ruby glowed large at his breast; the head was crowned with daphne: an expression all this, as I knew, of Count Zinzendorf’s whim, that death, so far from being the chill passage through any valley of any shadow, is, without metaphor, a jubilant bursting from sleep at day-break. But how *my* work? Wherein was *I* guilty? That question I asked myself. A coffin of sarcophagic limestone lay on chairs beside the low bed.

Eagerly Areta painted. From behind I saw that the effort was to preserve the august likeness in death; and already I was able to predict failure: no truth could an eye so wild interpret to a hand so unstable. I sat near her in the numbness of awe, and hours of the night rolled over us.

Later, I crept from the room. As I passed through one of the outer halls, a stupendous stalking figure moved diagonally across a far corner of it. The light was dim, but his step slow, and my eyes searched him fully. I knew the Elder, Theodore. A simple garment of blood-red silk, with amice of orphreyed black, tuned on the marble an intermittent musing to his strides. A mist of hair, crowned with the fanon, floated in wide white vagueness over his back. A great veil of yellow cloth covered his face, as a veil covered the face of the Prophet of Khorassan. I cannot at this moment picture forth all that passed within me at this sight: the intense impressions of first youth stamped themselves once more deep upon me. Once more it was Theodore, the omnipotent, that I saw. And though his head was immobile aversion as he passed through, I knew that he knew my presence.

I inquired of the old serving-man who attended me in my room at supper an hour later as to the arrangements for the burial of Sergius. He answered, “At the next rise of dawn he was to have been interred in the vaults of the rock-chapel.”

“*Was* to have been?”

“But since your arrival—within the hour, in fact—time Elder Theodore has come in person from the Tower, and suggested to the lady Areta that the body be embalmed.”

I started, understanding enmity—a deadly thrust at my own heart.

“And she?”

“Eagerly consented. The constant presence of the body will be her unhopéd consolation. The

Elder, skilled, sir, in all designs, has himself undertaken the work, and the confined frame has even now been conveyed by boat across the water to the Tower.”

I retired weary to my bed. But though morning was near, sleep was an ambition merely. I lay and swept clean the house of memory, building in the deep the old life up again. Of Sergius I thought, and his singular likeness to the boy, Christ; his questionings, answers, parables; his sibylline intensity of interest in sounds, and strata, and the shapes of things, and the hues of birds; how eagerly he accepted anything out of the ordinary course as a doubly-direct revelation of Omnipotence to himself. After a time, every appearance was to him a rune: like old augurs and æonoscopi, he followed within musing eye the course of all winged creatures. The fragments of a rainbow had pythmic meanings for him. He contrasted the notes from the vocal organs of many living things; showed how this sound or odour was really identical with that appearance, and how the difference of their mode of occurrence was not intrinsic, but due merely to the differentiation of our own sense-organs. His little museum was full of strangely sorted specimens of this and that: seeds, zoolites, spotted eggs, fuci, spawn, spongiadæ, chips of chert, bars of bast. Once, having spent the night in the forest, he came at dawn to where I, enfolding Areta, sat on the sea-terrace. His white brow was radiant. He told how all the night he had listened in a thicket to the song of a nightingale: a song which, he said, *was not her native*. I long remembered the impression which the quaint high things he thereupon uttered made upon us. And I thought of his smooth-mindedness, as of that Jesus whom he aped. If by chance he encountered rudeness, dullness, it was good to see within how light-like a power he appeased it. I would often cavil at the obscure and loosely-metred *extravaganzas* which he sometimes sang to us; and always would he graciously pause to show how under the appearance of ease lay a strenuously-reached fitness; how beyond the cloud was light. “To what metre,” he asked one day, “do earth-sent angels tune the dithyrambs of their exultation?” “To a metre,” I answered. “which ‘ear hath not heard,’ nor can hear.” But he: “Oh yes! heard indeed, but with scentless and purblind ears.” He then took jewels of different sizes and colours; laid them in a line. All the syllables of each foot of the metre he marked by stones of the same hue; the *length* of the syllables he indicated by the varying sizes of the stones. No sooner had he done this, than Areta, perceiving a vision of some beauty in the combination, clapped hands; while I, observing indeed a picturesqueness, ended. “You here see,” said Sergius, “that the first foot is a trochee (long followed by short syllable), while the last is an iambus (short followed by long): a symbolism, you will at once say, of the fall and rising again of Man; and, if you compare nearly all the Shemitic dialect-versions of the hymn I have in my mind, you will find the same general alternation: a beginning of long-and-short, and an ending of short-and-long, or long-and-long.” And then, with exquisite clearness of rhythm, he proceeded to chaunt in Hebrew an improvization of the angel-song of the Gospel, beginning, “Fear not,” and ending, “shall be called the Son of God.” Night-dews gathered in the eyes of Areta as the melody rose from him; myself not all unmoved. Nor did Sergius ever leave the reason restive. He pointed out now, for example, the coincidence that in the Greek version, too, of the words their alpha is a trochee, and their omega an iambus, and so even in later versions, as the Latin, French, English, and many others. It was at moments such as this that Areta would rescue her hand from mine with a rashness almost angry, and

sidling towards her brother, lean a passionate face to peace on his bosom; and many hours, many longing days, might pass, before her dear favour returned to me. In such constant rivalry for her lived Sergius and I. I have won her from him by a hairataghan of agates, a cameo of onyx, or a bird from the sunset, spoil of my skill with the bow; and he back again by the solution of some problem in ciphers or lines, by a psalm, on earnest chansonnette. A very slight divergence, I remember, once occurred in the march of their thought. It was the custom at the time for one or other to read aloud by a deep-shadowed brook in the Wood, the "Giornale di un Viaggio di Constantinopoli in Pohonia," by the idealist mathematician Ruggiero Boscovich: a book of books for my cousins. During one such *séance*, Areta set up claim to Boscovich as supporting the cosmothetic view of the impressions of the senses, her own strongly marked leaning being toward that subjective idealism of Fichte which attributes the orderly succession of sensible changes to the nature of the individual mind in which they are perceived. To Sergius, on the contrary all was directly God— every event, sight, sound, God's quite special act: and hence it was, perhaps, that in *his* eyes the Bishop of Cloyne loomed immense, as the greatest who ever breathed. The divergence, I say, was slight, for to neither mind, as a thing of course, did any such idea as the absolute existence or agency of matter ever occur: yet Sergius frowned at the interruption—a sign in him of strong displeasure. Boscovich, he said, austerely, was "*other than she thought.*" Morning redness over-swept Areta: a vice caught her nether lip. For a week she abandoned herself wholly to me. Deep in the glens and bowers we wandered, hiding through the night in the darkness of caves, folded together. Sergius was a mateless bittern by the pool. One other singularity I may mention as often noticed in my love: her bird-like flightiness of motion, giving sometimes the impression of translation through space. Walking with her along the path of the wood, I have lifted my head to a squirrel's perch, or stooped to a fallen catkin, and turning again, lo, have seen her rapt well beyond me, beckoning airily perhaps from the summit of a rising ground. Her computations, too, of the dial's variations were not always in strict harmony with common notions; when, after my long absence, I returned as related to Phorfor, she said, "You are come, then," and the murmur had precisely that intonation with which one speaks of an interval of hours.

I lay in the darkness, and I swept clean the house of memory. Of the Elder Theodore I thought. We children called his name in pious, lower voices. Vast powers over nature, vast mystery of lore, we gave to him. Our imagination crossed itself at him. Only at night, on every seventh day, in the reluctant gloom of the rock-chapel, did we come at sight of the hem of his garment; for our awful lids would not lift to his veiled face. Here, kneeling, we took from his hands the elements of the Holy Supper; whereupon he made haste to disappear into the black *adyla* of the sanctuary. He was, Sergius hinted, of Aramæan, or Syro-Chaldean race; or else he derived from among the priests of the Cophti. The veiling of the face might be due to some disease of the blood which rendered him all too chill a horror for the glance of a fellow-mortal. The Tower was his solitary abode: a tall structure rising from the sea of our land-locked bay, about two stone-throws from the beach; it tapered upward pyramid-wise in seven brick terraces, each lacquered in a glaring colour. By day it cast on the vapouring purple water the reflection of a gaudy basking lizard. Above all was the observatory. There

the sun sometimes fired through narrow openings a tangled refulgence of sextants, armillary spheres, gimbals, the cannon of a telescope, azimuth compasses, pictured charts. In the deepest night we opened the eyes and thrillingly knew that the Elder pored into the ever-written red-letter scroll of the past and the to-come. Neither I nor the orphans ever understood what had been his precise relation to their parents; that they had revered him above mortal we understood; also that the guardianship of our lives was in some sort bequeathed to his hands. But was it by childish sure instinct, or a series of trivial and now forgotten incidents, that I came to know that *I* was by no means included in the scheme of Theodore's providence? that *I*, the waif, the Hagarson, might become, perhaps was, an obstacle to the unfolding of that elaborate forethought? This consciousness at any rate grew gradually mine. When at last I fled from Phorfor, I was a missile from the suggestion, tense, compelling, secret, of the Elder of the Tower.

Thus I built in the deep. But with the morning I despatched a note to Areta, asking if I might hope that day for the sight of her face, but for a word from her. She apparently did not receive, or read, the paper; for I waited without reply. The galleries, park, gardens, fed my memory with here an ancestral effigy, there a grove or stream. Another day passed, and another. But at the fourth dusk, a boat lay moored at the water-steps of the terrace. Its benches sustained in a glazed coffin of light pagodite the body of Sergius already cured to perpetuity by a miracle of asphaltum, natron, bitumens; a dwarf rower of dark skin held the skulls of the bow; fastened to the stern by a twine floated a little shallop of mother-of-pearl. *I*, standing near, waited. Areta in purity of white came slowly from the portico of the mall, walking down an aisle of the double xystum of Corinthian columns which lined the terrace; palms on either hand over-shaded her; and she came the full and sudden moon through the palms, walking in shining. My hand touched my mouth; *I* was at once abashed and excited at her developed splendour. As she passed, she extended laterally her left hand, without seeming to see me. *I* burned it within a kiss. She descended the stairway, looked upon the steadfast face of Sergius, and stepped into the shallop. *I* following, the dwarf began to paddle.

Here the sands and the low cliffs all along the two folded claws of the bay are of a very pale pink colouring; the sea being an extremely vivid purple resembling the hue of the dye called Phœnician, and remarkably shallow throughout. Here and there the cliffs project bluffly quite into the bay, thus blocking the continuity of the sand. The water is but very slightly brackish. A

bright-hued sea-weed, scallops, and star-fish visibly carpet the bottom; while moon leaved water-growths cluster into groups of silvery greenness over the surface. From the terrace our rower slowly conveyed us a hundred yards to the left, and there turned into an opening in the coast-rock about four feet wide through all its length; up this the sea, far-winding, slumbers in breathless gloom, covered thick with the drowsy grace of Egyptian lotus-lily. Three wide steps near the end of the inlet lead into a low square chapel excised from the mountain-rock, its roof being supported by the ebony columns of twin stylobats.

Areta had not spoken. Her face was the uttermost expression of a rigid woe. Arrived at the chapel entrance, she looked up, and stepped readily from the shallop. The dwarf and I bore the now lightened body in its shell to trestles near a purple catafalque before the altar-rail. On the craped altar itself a taper on either side of the pyx nimbused itself with a little sphere of little rays, giving all of light we had. The black hangings of gold-fringed velvet made the distant places of the excavation a vastness of darkness.

Areta, seating herself on the altar-step near the body, motioned to us to leave her. I, seeming to obey, retired; ordered the dwarf back to the Tower; and took my place in the obscurity of a recess. Hence I could watch her tearless pain. She leaned her head on the rail sideways, and watched obliquely the steadfast dead. She did not move. As the spaces of the night marched by, the taper-flames began to leap duskily, and one of them puffed suddenly out. She rose then; and opening a cista behind the altar, obtained two others; and was about to light them, when I, buying up the opportunity, stepped boldly forth. I took the tapers and lit them, and adjusted them to the candlesticks. She showed no surprise at my bodily presence near her. We sat together on the altar-step by the coffin; together we gazed. The face before us was unchanged and Sergius's own; a mournful richness of gold involved him. Her hand did not refuse the ring of warmth in which till morning I fostered it.

When the deeper shadows had thinned to a twilight in the chapel, she rose and walked to the doorway. I, entering with her paddled in the shallop down the winding way, and so out to the sea. The sun was now bright above the circling blue mountains of Phorfor; nature looked wide-eyed in pricked alertness; the water a flushed and many-gifted soul under the blaze of light and the roughening reel of routs of zephyrs, morning home-returners. White, long-necked birds, scarlet-legged, flew hither and thither, uttering a swancall akin to the viola-note. I watched anxiously to read the countenance of Areta. For a moment the throes of vacillation had her; for a moment she struggled to maintain the grey face of grief—but a single sobbing gasp of laughter burst suddenly forth from her bosom, and instantly the hilarity of the sky, and the frolic of the world was in her look. She hurriedly buried a crimson face in the draperies of her arm.

To this I had looked forward with the precision of certainty—if she remained at all the same Areta that I knew. Never was Areta other than the unfailing exactest mirror of environment; a condition which no doubt arose from her belief—so deep as to be part of herself—that environment was, in fact, the exact mirror of herself; and this again from her disbelief in the existence of matter. Now, it is no doubt true that most cultivated people of the outer world accept such non-existence as an intellectual thesis, whether tentatively in the form presented by Malebranche, Geulinx, and the so-called Cartesian school; or in the form of the absolute phenomenalism of Hume, Browne, and the middle German teaching; but in most minds, as I imagine, a lingering half-faith in Lockes "thing in its real essence" (Kant's 'thing in itself') must persist to the end, for the very reason that the fancy, by long habit of youth, has already grown to hold the earth-rock genuine solid, and the sun very "substance." To my cousins, however, even from the first dawn of thought, all was pure spirit; the one "substance" the consciousness of their own inner souls; the world a thin picture on the senses, resolvable as

mirage. And this knowledge, so far from being an affair of the mere reasoning understanding, was their very life itself. To them no other possibility suggested itself. The slightest change in the environment of Areta would indicate to her a preceding change in her own mental being. Sergius, looking up, would question the causing Mind; she, looking inward, asked, How has the alteration been produced in *me*? I remember them thus affected by the disappearance of many things around them. In the bursting Spring I have known Areta a wild ass's colt on the hills with twinkling feet and bacchant stare; in the chiller season puritan and wise. That her consciousness should now evolve a gay picture of nature, she, feeling the discord within her sorrow for Sergius, doubtless marked as a strangeness in herself.

Having arrived at the terrace-steps, she raised her face, and leapt to the land. I proceeded to make fast the shahlop, but on reaching the top of the hanging-stage, saw her already beneath the pediment of the portico, on the point of disappearing within the castle. There I heard that she had retired to a distant part, and would be seen no more until sunset.

It was dark when she reappeared at the waterside. We then proceeded as before to the chapel, and renewed our silent vigil. Her face had lost nothing of its hard misery. She seemed not to know me, though I clasped her hand. Within the intrusion of the morning, I suggested that we should return to the castle. She slowly turned her head, and within the raised eyebrows of surprise, looked at me fully; then, frowning, said, "Leave me! leave me!"

I could not but obey. Later I heard that on the preceding day a side-apartment of the chapel, of which there were many, had been fitted up as a chamber for her. This then was to be her constant abode of gloom.

In the evening I returned. She frowned, but did not deny me place by her side. There watching through the slow circle of the night, I was near happiness, for I was near her. Yet she was far from me. So months, many months, passed over us. Every sun divided us, but with the drawings of the moon we flowed together again. Upon the steadfast face of Sergius our gazes fell.

* * *

Rarely at midnight would the Elder Theodore step from a boat at the entrance, and walking toward the sacrarium, reappear huge at the altar within chrisam and plaque and chalice, bearing the Host and Wine of the Eucharist. Blessed then it was, as we knelt, to see the face of Areta, adoring spirit's more than woman's. We sang no hymn; a few muffled Greek words rumbled like the echo of a reverberation from Theodore; whereupon his feet resought the way they had come. Areta might then melt somewhat; speak a word to me; her kindled pity for the Redeemer's trouble seeming to suage into twilight the starlessness of her own crude night. She might produce from her chamber hooks, and I at her bidding would read, perhaps von Hardenberg's Hymn to the Night commencing: "Once when I was shedding bitter tears; standing by the grave which hid the Form of my Life; chased by unutterable woes; forward could not go nor backward; lo, from the azure distance fell chill breaths of Twilight; and the

band of Birth, the fetter of Life, was rent asunder; thou, Night's inspiration, Slumber of Heaven, overcamest me; to a cloud of dust that grave expanded; through the cloud I beheld the transfigured features of my Beloved"; or the mystical aphorisms of *Siris* would fit her mood; or Arthur Collier's ideality in *Clavis Universalis*. And sometimes within the passing months I would tremble to see her wan face dimple fleetingly into the very smile of Areta; and noticing one night her spinning-wheel of electrum—quick-gleaming alloy of gold and silver—stand by contrivance of my artifice with violet-dark wool on distaff near the coffin, she did at length stretch out doubting fingers, and commence a woven undertaking. And the droning incessant circle bred a stirring in the roots of speech. At last—I shot a glance of triumph at Sergius—she yielded to the impulse of words.

"He had long, you know, been ailing; phthisis was his worm. And the intense contemplation of sleepless weeks was its fattening aliment. For the last few months of life the spirit might be said to sway half-disembodied; but eschewing his bed, he still studied and roamed. I never left him. You know the unspeakable sympathies which from our dual birth united us; but now for the first time our two souls lost definiteness, and hovered into one. I was lifted at times into awful heights to share his apocalypse of the world. Nothing seemed any longer secret to him. The illusion of Time, for instance, ceased to cloud him: he knew the past and the future. He re-arranged his little museum, changing the relative position of this and that, into a quite wonderful beauty; then locked the door, and threw the key into a hot sulphur-spring in the forest. Once, as he lay in languid sleep at noonday, I heard him twice call your name, 'Numa! Numa!' When he woke he said, 'Numa, I know, is moved toward us again; but I could wish he were now here; I could then commit you, with confidence, to him.' Speech was now a gasping difficulty with him, and I wondered especially that he should speak so of you and me. He seemed to forecast—I know not what. Soon subsequent, absolute powerlessness confined him to an easy-chair in the chamber where you first saw his body. I read to him through the day from the Hebrew scriptures, from his beloved Bishop Berkeley, and the hymns of Pindar. At every sunset he swooned to sleep; and slept happily to the next noon. Once, surprising from a mid-day trance, he dictated to me runningly in Hebrew three of those his imponderable metrical *capriccios*, and then fell back wearily to instant sleep again. I had followed him far, but as to these last words, the meaning was of subtler element than my spirit, and out-soared me. They may have been simple prophecy of quite simple events; they may have been parable or rhapsody, or prayer. His dear hand could no longer lift the pencil's weight; his eyes were two twice-illuminated moons. A little yellow bird called Beatrix, which it had been his whim to overpaint to a sombre grey hue, fluttered constantly in his breast, shrilling his name. He had so trained it from its motherless birth. I have everywhere sought it since his death, but in vain. At the beginning of the last week he again sighed your name; and henceforth every noon hoped aloud for you. On the third day he minutely directed me to draw a Key on paper, which, when it was finished, I immediately recognized as the 'key' figured in Wilhelm Meister's *Wanderjahre*; beneath this he told me to write the opening words of the angels' song in the Gospel of Luke beginning 'Fear not.' These two, the former above the latter, were to be inlaid in gold on the headpiece of his inner coffin; and this, as you see, has been properly accomplished by the Elder. On the next day he called me close; I kneeling

before him, his hand rested upon my head. 'I do not doubt,' he said in the whisper of the dying wind, 'that he for whom I wait will come speedily. The hoofs of the rider's horse are urgent on the mills. I bless you then, Areta, and say good-bye. Yield yourself utterly to God, little one. Give to every passion its wine, to every pulse its throb, to every song its dance. *He*, in truth, is pulse and blood, song and singer. Yield freely to him. If you would be perfect in divinity, let the Wind, passing, win from the whole intense gamut of your chords a wafture of richest perfected humanity. Ah, little sister, quick—my harp! my harp!' Quickly I reached him his kithara; held it before him; handed him the quill plectrum. He faintly delved from it a distant air— ah me, an air known even in the highest cycle of heaven—which since childhood I had not heard from him. He then had measured it to the Gospel words: 'Fear not... he shall be great... and shall be called the Son of God.' Ardently did I pray that while the harmony still clung in the web of my consciousness I might have opportunity to transcribe it into musical signs; but at that moment a hot messenger entered with your note of announcement. Even while I glanced through it, Sergius knew its meaning; and having uttered a sigh of rest, the visual body slid from him."

"But the melody?"

"Passed utterly from me. In vain have I mined into myself for it. If I could hear it again—ah me, but once again—I think that the love and the hope of life, which seem dead within me, might yet—again—"

Sudden tears shined from her uplifted eyes. Her hands clasped rigidly.

So she spoke with me through the show circle of the nights, spinning. The chiller season passed, and the spring, and the leafiest weeks of summer. She had settled into an unvarying morne mood; words she uttered, only livid in hue, and pregnant always with the odour of the grave from which they winged. But to sit always and watch her loveliness, so sad, so lunar, was already the dizziness of frenzy. She had dressed herself in the mourning of loose purple draperies, made of a very flimsy diaphanous cloth. A fillet of gold circled her head. My blood railed at its channels; with torrent fury I leapt the barriers, and spoke to Areta—of our old loves among the caves and crannies—of the wild hopes which had led me back to Phorfor. I think she did not at all comprehend my meaning; quite simply, with mournful gaze upon the dead, she said: "Our whole love is hid in him now—yours and mine; conscript to the memory of what he was, and to this little all that remains to us of him." It was then that I knew that Sergius, living, was strong; dead, was invincible; and it was then that I called down upon that Argus cunning which, on my coming, had impregnated his body with eternity, the bale of every imprecation.

Yet, I too, won my small triumph. For on an afternoon of beginning autumn, when the sun had sunk not yet below the west-looking harbour-hills, I—induced her with me to the terrace! It was my tingling Marathon. "Bright! bright!" she cried, hiding her face. Blood surged to her lewd limbs; visible to me was the ravelling of the cerements from the risen, pulsing flesh. We sat on a couch of alabaster on the lowest stratum of the terrace, quite near to the marble

balcony-rail overlooking the bay. In the circling pink arms of the sands the purple basin of sea looked a dew-splashed violet cosy in the heart of a rose. Areta lived again. Sweet-linked waftings from the parterres set out staggering-adventurous to reach her, and reached her fainting. The sun, all glory-clouds and shekinahs, like the God of some mad universe belalalah'd *en route*, with cymbals and with dances, flamed down afloat in the *gluth* of a passion which he never assumes but when he would enkindle to mutual ardours the light-thoughted mother-hills of Phorfor.

Areta was simple childhood itself. Looking abroad on the rich vision, she laughed a laugh of perfect *bonne camaraderie*; nested herself snakily at the end of the seat; I reclining at length, watching close the spiritual play of her face. And we really spoke at last of things other than Sergius and his mummy.

"See," I said, "how the sun's rim demarks into seven contrasts of fire the colours of the tower. The glazed bricks have the appearance of red and blue and yellow heat."

Looking, she laughed.

"Mens agitat molem."

"The Elder's mind—"

"No, the sun-god's: kindled by us; and kindling by means of us."

"And in another sense the Elder's, too,—from within."

"In literal truth, yes: man, as Novalis without metaphor said, being a sun, of which his senses are the planets. In the case of such as Theodore above all."

"Singular man!"

"He walks his uplifted way alone: dead to sorrow, hope, desire; in a strict sense king of the world."

"But listen, Areta: you miss the mark here: Theodore, I know, is not dead to desire."

"Not? Then to what desire not dead?"

"The conservation in his hands—"

"Of the meanings of the stars."

"Of the opulent territories of Phorfor."

"Fie! of the revelations of God."

"The keeping of *you* safe—"

"From what?"

"From me."

An oval "O!" of lower' comedy answered nine.

"And I tell you truth, Areta, the day may come when you will confront the necessity of choosing between me, your cousin, and the Elder Theodore, whose face you never beheld."

"Really so? and whom think you I would choose—my father's prophet, the guiding forefinger of my brothers thought, grey hunter in old alchmymics and astrologies—or you, a worldly wanderer, lithe hopper in every grass?"

"I know well whom you would *once* have chosen; but as to now, of course"

Sweetly she smiled.

"And am I then so greatly changed in—how many years?— six, I think? You are, as of old, *Numa*'; a light-footed boy, I remember, somewhat empty of thought, lengthened now only by a sixfold growth of the leopard's beard—which also could be sheared."

"Call the beard 'fantasy of your dream,' and me still rubious Numa, capricious with you in the long grasses of the valley."

"What other than 'fantasy of my dream'? and yet to *me* very hyacinthine real."

"Card it with carding fingers: I promise you no dream but substance enough."

"If my finger's would but assume the office of the carder's comb! But is feeling then less fantasy than sight? You do not mean this that you say of 'substance.' "

"So men speak and think in the world, Areta."

“You mean among savage tribes?”

“No, but among races considered civilized.”

“The gravers of their great men must scratch a shallow tracery on this ‘world’ of yours!”

“Oh, very shallow indeed! There are many conflicting voices, you know; the writings cross and re-cross on the basalt; and as they rather lack the genius of sharp distinction between the really great and the only seeming, so confusion comes, and continual movement in a circle in place of locomotion.”

“But you do not mean that they have a genuine conception of a material universe?”

“Extremely genuine and material, in the case of the great majority at least.”

“They are not Christian?”

“Oh yes!”

Areta’s laugh had a resemblance to the chirping of the cicada: so shining, and lalling, and dry.

“Not Christian: for what account can they possibly render themselves of the many feats of magic performed by Jesus?”

“The feeding of the multitude, and so on? I hardly know. Some disbelieve them; some nebulously-shruggingly neither believe nor disbelieve; some, in a fury of faith, charge them to the conniving *leger-de-main* of Omnipotence.”

“The con—! but these last are either hypocrites or self-deluders. They cannot conceive the inconceivable. If nature be phenomenon and nothing else, it *is* conceivable how one mind may, by its forceful action upon other *minds*, effect in them a sense of variation from the usual succession of phenomena. With such a hypothesis, magic becomes natural and easy. But like only can conceivably act upon like; you cannot, for instance, feed mind with broths, or blood with thoughts. Where therefore you introduce a conception of packed matter, the conceivability of magic—or indeed of any action whatever of spirit, divine or not, upon the phenomena perceived by other spirits—utterly collapses. And in the case of those who only half believe in the eyewitnessed performances of Jesus, there is, of course, no pretension to belief—”

“But there is: many of these last indeed cling on with quite riotous vigour to the *rest* of the

torn Book.”

The sun had set, Areta’s profile looked duhwan, a misty crescent in the sudden dusk. Her drooped lash was as a trait of sea-weed dark on the spume of breakers under the Cyprian moon. Her voice tuned every moment to a lower sadness.

“Yet Jesus was the most ideal of the idealists. ‘Matter’ to him was less than the dream of a dream. What, for instance, do these persons make of his saying: he that hath his spirit in such and such a way shall announce to the mountain: Be thou plucked-up! and it shall obey him? They must either think that he had a meaning, or hold him for a rhetorician—or, lower still, an orator.”

“But the world, Areta,” I said, “does not, you understand, call itself a thinking world, but an acting. Very slowly indeed, in its preoccupation, do the thoughts of its deep ones filter through the whole: and the reason is that pointed out by Des Cartes in *Principia*, and I think also by Malebranche, that the faculties we have are few, and designed for support and pleasure, rather than to penetrate the essence of things.”

“But—I like your distinction between thinking and action. If there be nothing but spirit, upon what can action act, and by means of what? There is in truth no action but thought; to aspire is to be an adventurer; to dream is to be practical; to feel is to be a man of affairs; and when your world calls itself an acting one, it may simply use a euphemism for vague or wrong thinking. As for the Cartesian view which you mention, compare with it Berkeley’s saner one: that ‘some truths there are so *near* and *obvious* that a man need only open his eyes to see them; and such I take this one to be, that all the choir of the heavens and the furniture of the earth, have not any substance without a mind; that their being consists in being perceived.’ And now, having proved that, say, *fire* is nothing more than a particular combination of colour and form, and that colour and form can no more exist without a seeing spirit than a sound without an ear, Berkeley, you know, disdains to proceed to prove that this purely notional appearance cannot, for example, *burn*: merely remarking that that at least is *obvious*; and this is certainly the conclusion of Hume, Comte, and the rest. So that the faculties would seem to require no very ‘penetrative’ acumen for the perception of truths so superficial.”

“And yet,” said I, baiting my hook, glad at the drone and harping of her voice, “I venture to say that these truths are in fact so far from ‘obvious’ to the untrained mind, that they may even seem rather ridiculous to it.”

“And why? Does the untrained mind then suppose that fire or rock is anything *more* than colour and form? and if so, what? what invisible, inconceivable thing does the colour and form hide from us? They would, at least, make the same impressions upon us, if this singular thing of which we are never cognisant were not there: and we cannot, therefore but assume it to be absent; since, too, we cannot imagine the unimaginable, to *speak* of it is to use words without meaning. If, moreover, a thing perceived be really nothing more than colour and form, the

'untrained mind may readily arrive at the certainty that it can neither burn, nor do anything whatever; and hence that no power, as no substance, can be other than spiritual. As to how, in such case, phenomena have the 'power' of producing impressions upon our consciousness, one opinion may differ from another. Singular Jonathan Edwards in his *Original Sin* is, you know, actually driven to assume the constant re-creation of all existing objects for the purpose of reimpresing us at every moment; but to me there seems no necessity for the creation or recreation of anything; it is only necessary that *we* should be, and should dream. Only in the mysterious loom of the spirit can the woof of the world be spun; for if phenomena were in truth external, how could they, not being spirit, make impressions upon spirit, unlike upon unlike, especially as, being passive, they can do 'nothing whatever'? There may indeed be a law of our mind that every time we are conscious of proximity between a form and colour called 'hand' and a form and colour called 'fire,' we shall also be conscious of pain: as to which, Sergius, you know, declared that every such consciousness of pain was the special act of the Divinity,—thus bringing Him in very deed 'closer than breathing,' 'in our hearts and in our mouths.' But at any rate, we can have no certainty that such law is universal, or that such special acts are inevitable: for is it not too probable that there are fingers in the universe which, plunged into flame, would feel torture indeed, but the torture of Arctic cold? the flame then must be without property, substance: and only substantial the nervous, visionary *ich*. And even for us, the law, if it exists, may not be always strict; the dream of yesterday was well-ordered; but as sometimes happens in the less lucid visions of the night, the phantasmagory of to-morrow may melt and writhe into strange distortions. Nay, on a night, I actually *had* the trance that he, my splendid dead king, held to the furnace a parchment which, like the bush of Moses, burned unconsumed. Ah, but let us return—to him!"

She stood upright, tall and grey. The moon was abroad in the heavens. I, conquering her hand in the trouble of love, kissed it.

"Areta! Areta! this one night grant me, I implore! Do not return. For one night only leave Sergius to his death. Sleep, for me, in the castle!"

She smiled at my zeal with a shaken "No!"

"Only this one night, for me?"

"Shall we not go and sit *together* by him?"

"My first prayer since I have come back to you: ah, Areta!"

"Really your first?"

"You know."

"You make it late."

"Then grant it early!"

"Always wilful of bead, little Numa! and a lubricant for persuasiveness!"

It was really night. I, twining round her arm, led her pouting recalcitrant, to the portico. Far within the halls she must needs part from me; mounted on wings the marble stairway, torch in hand; waved me a swift spirit's good-night; calling, 'the *second* may be harder i' the winning!'

I had no hope, no wish for sleep. Plying the paddle of the shallop, I circled many times the basin of the bay, now halting in the shadow of a bill, now basking in the moon's utmost noon. A red light, steadfast to the changing hours, burned through a slit of the ripple on the shelly sands F peace, low-sobbed, of an night tense in an agony of stars, distraught of eye as the patient stricken ox, and dumb with the pains of its passion, as I with the pains of Areta. Her words, the odour of her, her sweet yielding, had purged my blood to the ultimate element of flame; her name was nightmare in my aching gorge. I came to the inlet; passed upward. It was midnight. Here no gloating ardour of the heavens trenched upon the supremacy of Shadow in which the reach of fan-shaped lotus, close-clustering, slept a perfect nepenthe. I stepped from the shallop; entered the chapel. The darkness was complete. Long on the altar-step, on the spot, where she sat, I sat. Aloud now I found utterance to call her name. Then falling to my knees, I overcast the coffin with my arms, my head fallen above his head, beseeching him as a god. "Sergius! if death have ears, solitudes! if ghosts be veined with the ichor of human pitifulness! open your lean and lungless bosom—stretch your adamant arms of Polar ice: grant me, still quick, lustful, craft to wrest her from your mortality! give her back to me!" A sudden glimmer like a taper-light seemed to glance behind me. I sprang panting to my feet: but all was dark as before. I returned to the shallop, and so out upon the bay. The steeply-slanting constellations, stepping foot and foot with the night, were evidence of its revolving. Having surfeit of the water, I came to land; and finding beneath the portico a hung heptachord, took it, and made a circuit of the spread castle. I was faint with the long sickness of desire; my lips lay dead for lack of the carnal life-flame of her kiss. To the East I stood beneath a square turret in a garden of spices. In a chamber on the second stage I knew that Areta slept. It was beginning morning: night, throeing with dissolution, spread out, like old misers on lamp-lit death-beds of velvet, a gluttony of bulging jewels; a languid, low-looming moon wrapped in elfin satins the crimson of pomegranate, and the grey-green of the tower, and the sardius of asphodel-berries, and the purple of myrtle-fruit. Here in galaxies fireflies poise uncertain, sun-birds and droning coccinellæ dart. Turtles and nightingales hang their harps upon its willows. Inconsequent hints of zephyrs, hoth with the fragrance of clove and jasmine, came with healing in their wings to my parched lips and forehead. I sent up from the lyre a lullaby, tuned to the splash of a fountain which gushed from a basin of cipolin—a cold white spirit in the midst of the garden; muttering; wreathing with aureoles of the lunar rainbow her far-tossed hair of dew. I sent up the melody, and with it my soul, hoping for her face at the window: when a sudden consciousness of

danger, a sense of some luminous descending mass, appalled me. My eyes being turned upward, I clearly saw whence it came—from a window of the third stage, that immediately above Areta. I had but the to rush backward before it fell to the earth. It appeared in the moonlight to be a great quantity of grey powder; and almost immediately on contact with the ground, it uttered a fremor of froth, and burst vividly forth into a carmine flame, mingled with writhing tongues of cobalt.

I hurried to the terrace. The red light burned steadfastly in the topmost Tower. Till morning I watched in vain to see a huge expected form emerge from the castle. Expected, I say, and yet with endless doubts; for Theodore's boat was a visible spot of blackness floating by the Tower-wall. I was confounded. Was his arm, I asked myself, indeed longer than the arm of man? Soon after the full dawn, the dwarf set out from the Tower, broom by side, towards the chapel. I beckoned him to me.

"Is the Elder Theodore," I asked, "now in the Tower?"

He nodded.

"And has been throughout the night?"

"Ha, master! that I do not know."

"You know with what knot you last moored the boat; has she been since removed?"

"Not, for certain."

I loitered for some hour or two among the parterres. It was a dank, secretive morning. The mountains donned grey veils of pudicity, low-lashed matin nuns after the glut and riot of a night. Areta came to the portico, looked abroad, her face sedate. My heart leapt to see the purple mourning gone, and a peplos of saffron in its stead. A broader regency of gold chapleted her head. The mists seemed to rarify at the yellow sun of her. I went and took her hand.

"I heard your sleepless moonings."

"And did not show a face?"

"Being sleeper than you! and their end, moreover, was so abrupt."

I said nothing of my narrow escape.

We walked to the parapet. Just then the dwarf, paddling near the shore, was returning from

the chapel.

“Call him that he may take us back,” she said.

“Already, Areta—already!”

“It is fitting now. Let us look with quiet joy—”

“Give me till noon.”

“Till noon, persistent Numa? Well, till noon. You shall read to me in the castle. Call him that he may fetch the book.”

“I will myself bring it. What book?”

“John Norris.”

I set off rapidly in the shallop, passing on the way the dwarf, who was making for the terrace. In the chapel I lingered a very long time, and when I returned, returned without the book. I had forgotten it. Strong agitation, half joy, half fear, throbbed within me.

Areta, looking, saw my pale face, and caught its pallor, fore-knowing. As I sprang to the stage, the dwarf, coming with a weighted basket from the castle, descended the steps to the boat.

“You were even now in the chapel?” I said to him. “Yes, master.”

“Did you miss sight of nothing?”

“Of nothing, sir.”

“And all you found as usual?”

“Yes, master.”

“What is it? What is it?” cried Areta. I sprang to her side.

“Areta—love—I know not how—I swear to you—but the coffin and the body of your Sergius

have vanished from the chapel.”

Never could I have expected such result. With the sudden curvature of a cankered lily, her head drooped forward. Heavy she lay on me as a white column of Corinth aslant in arms of a bower of bindweeds. I bore her to a couch in the castle, and there till the gathering of darkness watched the wanness of her apathy.

She rose, a straining, a luminous strange questioning in her deep eyes; dashed back her hair; Niobe bereft; and instantly fled from the room. Swiftly as I followed, she was already far in the shallop when I reached the landing-stage. Having no boat, I sprang to the sands, and ran along them till stopped by a projecting cliff; thence made my way to the inlet through the sea, which at no point reached me above the middle. On the altar of the chapel a light glowed. Areta, sitting on the altar-step, pored upon chasms, a pity to see. Sergius had left not a rack. It was a second death of the beloved to her; a twice-whetted knife piercing home from breast to back; acuter than at first, suddenness lending point. She was such that her heart was as a quicksand, deep-secretive of every cherished object. Excision implied always the drawing of blood, and, it might be, the tapping of life. And the vitality of her ideal view of the world was oil to these flames; the loved thing, held the creation of her own soul, grew into the substance of its god, pant of her pulse, beat of her blood. And the embalmed body was all she had possessed of her Sergius; for the unfinished stained head of her attempt had been thrown aside as worthless. Thinking so, I stood near, moved with pity. She lifted her eyes and saw me; flashed a ray of mistrust at me.

“How of the body, Numa?”

I started.

“Were it not well to question as to that the Elder Theodore?”

“The Elder? No! The Elder was in the Tower: I, standing by the parapet, saw no one pass on the water: the dwarf had the boat: left all as usual in the chapel! *his* strength could not have sufficed to move the weight: then *you* went to the chapel—”

Her head followed her wringing hands downwards. I was appalled at the close welding of this chain of inference.

“You suspect me? Areta! With what motive—”

“Alas! it is hard to tell: with no motive but one unworthy our race! Except indeed my fantasy be all awry—my love to him unknowingly estranged—or his to me—some punishment for I know not what—”

She stopped suddenly short, and together we darted wild eyes around the chapel in the infinity of new surprise. A voice in the air, in liquidest falsetto, in breathless impatience, called:

'Sergius! Sergius! Sergius!' And instantly from the depths of the black recess behind the reredos of the altar there slid like slanting light-rays through the air a little creature, a tenuous grey bird, an embodied breeze, a flash of life. It settled, still minstreling its luted sibboleth, to a fluttering rest in the panting bosom of Areta.

"Beatrix! Beatrix!" she called, in a note lucid-high as that of the tiny thing she fondled, "Beatrix! little herald! whisperer of his secret! fledged dove of my comfort! Thou art come then?" Close she hugged it, trouling, laughing, trilling, light-wheeling to the hint of a dance, a maiden-canephorus tripudiary in the comus of the Dionysia. The transit from despair to frolic was perfect. No question she asked as to whence the bird of Sergius had come after so long an interval. It was a heavenly benison—a dear revelation—unaccountable but real: she made no scrutiny. The slim-sloping little bird, nothing but a winged voice, unappeasably garrulous of its Becket vocabulary, throated and throated again its shrill *euion* of Sergius! Sergius!—and every twittered sesame availed to open wide the heart of Areta to ever a fresh flood of Libyan buoyancies. Breast fluttering to breast, she flitted and whirled with the new love to the door of the chapel; and, heedless quite of the old, floated rapidly in the shallop down the inlet. Following, I dimly saw her disappear behind a winding of the rock; heard yet a last echo of the ceaseless pipe. Then walked drearily backward, as before, through the sea.

After this very many weeks passed away before I again looked upon the face of my love.

* * *

I won from the mysterious tongue of an old stepdame almost daily whisperings of her; how she spent herself upon the bird; fed it at every hour from her own hand; slept only tranquilly when it lay warm in the happy valley of her breasts; laughed with it, danced with it, was a wanton in the abandonment of her kisses; never wearied of the hypocrite zeal of its monotone. How sometimes, she would descend by a narrow stair to a side-garden of the castle, high-walled between two buttresses; daily there an hour or two; but how, as the suave winter of Phorfor drew on, her chamber had her always. This I learned. Several letters I wrote to her, protesting my innocence in the matter of the mummy; my constant longing for her; and once received a verbal reply that she would see me shortly. Hope burst at once into flower within me; but after many days of straining outlook, I dropped limp from my watch-tower, and fell to wide listless roamings over the domain. During all this time I was wary as to my life, knowing it in danger; kept circumspicent eyes; barred my doors; never slept twice following in the same bed.

When the mourning-doves had once more resumed the practice of their elegies in the copses, I stood often near the small side-garden; and when spring had blown into still freshest summer, I quickened every day more ears at the gate than Typhon guardian-eyes before the garden of the daughters of Hesperus. Areta came at last one noon; I heard her step on the shells of the walk; the call of the bird. Outside I bent listening to her stirrings; listened till, after an hour, she walked back into the castle. At the same hour of the next day she returned. I, procinct with the sword of adventure, tapped at the wicket. She instantly lifted the latch, opened, and was before me, laughing cascades and carillons.

“Little Numa! *you?* say ‘little Numa! little Numa!’ ”

“Sergius! Sergius!” shrilled Beatrix, picking a crush of grapes and rose-buds from her lips, upturned.

She was dressed only in a thin llama Greek robe of umber brown, and through the shaken folds her limbs glanced, bluish to aspiration’s eye, as limbs of new-sprung Aphrodite mirrored fluctuant among brown sea-weed in the Paphian shallows. Her head thrown far back gave me view of the full convex of her throat, white as brandished legs of hamadryads in Apidamian glens by moonlight. Blue-blooded Areta! long-legged!—she was younger than the summer; she was the hopeless Ideal to the spring of the *folie* of perfect loveliness.

We sat beneath an almond-tree in blossom, obstinate snow beneath the universal sweat and glister of the sun. Before us a monarch-peacock, Argus-tailed, stormed its little hour on the path. The air of the garden was full of roses.

“And Numa has not been to see us!” she cried, billing to Beatrix, larks prattling to the sunlight in her voice.

“Sergius! Sergius!”

“Areta!—you are light with me.”

“Not at all: I have been here: you might have come.”

“But could I know—”

“You have been brooding upon the death of Sergius! He has been giving way to melancholy broodings upon the death of our sw-e-et, sw-e-et Sergius!”

“Sergius? Sergius?”

“I!—you certainly mistake me as to that. Sergius is dead, Areta—dead as flint—as carrion—”

“He vibrantly lives!”

“Dead, Areta! and so long ago—”

“Fie! you let the delude you so? It was yesterday as much as a year ago, a thousand æons ago. Time is the counter by which ploughmen—and little sw-e-et Beatrixes—reckon the

number of their successive ideas; we surely should feel in subtler algebras.”

“That is so, Areta: that I know to be so: yet, as you must see this same Time is the fated element in which we breathe. And Sergius, as men reckon, actually did die—”

“Did I tell you that he dictated three far-meaning fantasias to me just before death? One of them had clear reference to this subject of Time, though of none have I been able to follow more than a footprint or two. Would you hear them?”

“Them—or anything you say to me.”

She repeated the compositions, slinging a knee between catapult arms, looking up, wondering at distance. Two of these, on later familiarity with them, I tried to translate into common English verse from the rhythmic Hebrew in which they were dictated; but I found their metrical parallelism packed with those archaisms and Chaldee-Aramæan enrichments (often obscure) in which the prophets delighted; so that owing to this, as well as to the extreme tenuity of their meaning at all points, I failed in the attempt. In the case of the opener third, however, I may have come somewhat better out of the thicket:

“Shapes in the Fire come and go: an orb from Scorpio swoons—(empurpled woe!) and horns hath she, and eyes, and lethal trance, and voice that, as she hies, the swan’s death-nocturne tunes.

“I see a headlong Messenger: her robe a crocus flame—(confide in *her!*); thrills shake her plumes amain: her passion’s load, the burthen of her pain, is the burthen of A NAME.

“There smiles a lady, veiled, in death; bright angels round her chaunt—(mellifluous breath!); she, from the VIIth sphere, regards the VIth where gleams her lovely bier, and sighs her ancient haunt.

“List to the Organ’s roaring throat! Hymen’s loud *euois* swell—(triumphal note!): this day two souls entwine: their purple orgies drenched in aphrian wine, and Priap loves, a-dell!

“I doze below four lax-zoned moons: nude wails of woman rave—(lugubrious tunes!); nude, by a beach of bones, their pallid pomp in torchlit dolor moans, seeking a new-oped grave.

“Lo!—one I see—a child of man! his outlines laved in light—(complete in plan!); eternal smiles he wears: no clothing on his chiselled lustre bears, and yet is clothed in White.”

So for a long time I sat by Areta; she lithe as phosphorescence, and full of aery, moth-winged words; yet words infect always with the lues of Sergius and his mortality. And the next day she again admitted me to the garden; and so at every noon we sat beneath the almond-tree; amid saw the long-trained peacock, proud as a lady, step; and talked together in the interludes of the Corybant *orgia* of Beatrix. Once she came with me beyond the garden-gate. It was a morning magnificently broad and bright. Deftly I snatched the bird from her finger, and before she knew my meaning, ran backwards with it to the castle; passed up a stone stairway, along three corridors, and so to her chamber; saw all windows closed; posited the

bird up on her square low bed, of ivory, arabesqued in a fan-tracery of gold; reclosed the door; and flew back to regain her. She, coming to meet me, stood: rather scared to see at first: then, guessing my thought, with the shaken pendulum-shoulders of half-comic reluctance. Further and further that long day did I first, then she, beck like folly-fire into the glades of the forest; umbrageous valleys of Phorfor thick with dews and gloom; Calypso-antrums dishevelled with maiden-hair, for all that diamond intergleams of stalactics pin the frivolous tresses; azure-brown steep-banked rills we knew of old; boskets dim and tremulous and secret as the soul of treasure-finders; and where, at midnight, dumb footfalls heat to syrinxal lutings not of men, and routs of freakish ægipeds chase eyesidling Kupris under the tense-lipped leer of the witched, subconscious moon. Areta, finding herself in the very lap of summer, was impotent; resigned herself; fled before me, unattainable, calling; was a town-bred *grisette* rolling concupicent in feathery beds of heather. Not till dusk did we return, languid; passed slowly by the terrace; saw the shallop bobbing in the quiet twilight by the landing-stage; and the large boat by the Tower-steps; round in the little garden fell wearily to the seat, she leaning a pale face against the tree-trunk; then, with closed eyes:

“Haste and fetch me my little Beatrix.”

As I passed along the second of the three angled corridors, I seemed to hear a rustling train on the floor of the third; but when I reached it, found it lonely. Entering the chamber, I looked for the bird; looked long in the agony of interest. Fearing, doubting, I returned to Areta.

Glancing, she saw me come from the door without the bird; and sprang pallid to her feet.

“Areta! the bird—”

Again that under-look of mistrust, heartpiercing!

“Where is she, Numa?”

“It is very singular—she seems to have left—or been taken from—the chamber—”

She, suddenly tragic, cried: “Oh why—why are you here to plague me! If I but walk with you, talk with you—pain—bitter—falls to me—” drooped then to the seat, face caught in hands, weeping.

Presently she rose, and with grave bent head, walked slowly without speech into the castle. Diligent search was made for Beatrix, the servants all requisitioned. Areta pined in her chamber; “heart-broken,” said her waiting-woman. Beatrix had swerved like a vision into the breaths of the wind, slipped quite back into the jaws of the abyss whence she came. On the fifth evening, however, a letter, as I heard, was handed to Areta from the Elder Theodore. Though it was then near midnight, she at once set out alone; passed over the bay to the chapel; and the next morning sent word by the dwarf that daily food should be taken her from the castle, as in the days of her first seclusion.

That night I, too, took boat to the chapel. Areta, I found, had retired to her side-chamber. In front of the altar, on the spot where the body of Sergius once lay, another coffin, a malachite shell, now shimmered dully under a taper-glow; stretched, open, on the old trestles. In the headpiece was gold-inlaid the Key and angel-song, as before. Supine within lay a figure—a marble statue. I wondered at the minute burin, so intimate with the genius of death, subtle to catch in stone the inmost thought of the Azrael. Here was flesh twice mortal; here was Sergius himself, stiff-fixed in a sleep doubly eternal. As the Greeks in the days of their hairiest niceties over-painted every part of their marbles, wreathing the lips in rosy smiles of supernal loveliness; so here, with opposite hope was the figure painted over-all. Too clearly with opposite hope: for I knew not which to say prevailed in naked ghastliness, the stained face and slumbering lids, yellow as fennel; or the beard and lashes, matted black; or the leaden lips, or greenish ears, or livid finger-tips, or winding-sheet of gold.

As I stood regarding this effigy, lo, black velvet hangings parted before a doorway, and Areta, licked below the haunches by curling purplish tongues, loomed cold in a splendid unbroken gown of soft silk, all whiteness, like taper snowbergs, sun-smearred, clear against the black of Polar precipices.

“You see, Numa,” she said, coolly splenetic in voice, “I am not all alone. The Elder, knowing my loss—”

“Stay, Areta!” I cried, “can it be that you still suspect me of that wanton act?”

“In the *first* case, I seemed to wrong you; in the second I knew not how to imagine—the inference looked so clear—”

“But you cannot believe this! I had no wish to rob you of your Beatrix! Were we not happy together? Can you not see that in all this there is a design deeper than our probing—a force stronger than we? That your suspicion is quite ill-aimed? and your trust?”

“Forgive me then if that really so.” Her voice mellowed. “The objects of our apprehension come and go, melt and harden before us in endless flux, and we are apt to seek for explanation in the activities of other minds, when perhaps it is we that vary in the temper of our loves and hates, passions and wills. At any rate, with the sight we now see before us I am well content; it has been graciously fashioned for me by the Elder’s own cunning and will more than replace

“But, Areta! you will not look upon this hideousness from day to day—promise me

“Numa! it is the very placidity of Sergius in death; full of a mournful greatness. If to your eyes hideous, to mine far from that. But I will sleep now. In the day-time you will come and sit by me.

She turned and went.

As I passed over the water to the castle, a sudden thought took me, as when deserted ships are

smitten fervently aback into new lays on a gusty day. It had reference to the Key and Angel-motto ordered by Sergius to be inlaid on his coffin, and it was the fresh sight of these that night which must have pricked me to the thought. A troubled instinct seemed to rise in me that the significance of the device—too well I knew Sergius to doubt that it had significance—might not be deeper than earnest study. I knew that he had *sung* the words to an air of his finding; that he had measured them out in metrical feet. For many days after this I kept close, profoundly engaged upon the task. Long years before, on reading the *Wanderjahre* of Goethe, I had wondered at the introduction of this figure into the work; wondered that so meaningful a writer, with no apparent reason, should plump this seemingly absurd drawing, without intimacy with the context into the thick of his seriously-intended book. The 'key' had then seemed to me not only very frivolous, but even rather stupid. But later on I came to the certainty that in Goethe's mind at least (with its strong bias towards the mystical) the figure was alive with some secret meaning; and now assurance was doubled in me; for I knew that this must have been the thought of Sergius also, to the flame-jet of whose genius the hardness of the riddle had doubtless soon solved to fluid clearness.

I reproduce the figure; and it may perhaps be well if I barely indicate the very slow and steep road by which I toiled to some sort of apprehension of the significance given by Sergius (and I presume by Goethe) to this singular key. And first I was led by the extreme non-resemblance of the figure itself to my own ordinary notions of the *genus* key, to ask myself for what reason the author could have chosen to call the drawing a "key" at all; and hence was confronted, in the first place, with the necessity of defining the word "key." What then, I asked myself, is a "key"? "That which opens," I at once answered; and that this is the commonest conception I was convinced by the occurrence in most languages of such metaphors as the "key of the situation," etc.: so Bosphorus was called the "key" of Pontus. But reflection showed me how far is this from a satisfactory definition; for crowbars open, hands, winds, many things; nor do all keys open, as in those cases where the casket or safe, once locked by one key, can only be re-opened by pressure upon a secret spring—a spring which is, in fact, *another* key. And what I needed was a definition inclusive of all keys, and exclusive of all other than keys.

I was therefore compelled to step deeper, and then arrive at the certainty that a key is that rather which *locks*—which alone locks; nor are any exceptions to this truth other than apparent, as when automatic locks fasten keylessly, in all which cases the key-principle is, of course, concealed in the mechanism; and this fact is expressed in the German Schlüssel (key), *i.e.* *locker*, and so with clef, clavis ÷*äåßò* (all related to English cleave, close, include, etc.). The key, then, I said, locks, welds together; and I thus got the idea of binding force. But looking at the figure, I could not but observe how the four small circles at the corners of the handle are bound to the large central circle by the two lines running at right angles within the handle; and how the fifth, further away, at the top of the key, is also (less directly) connected with the same large circle by the shaft, or body, itself. Whereupon there arose within me the conception of a sun *binding* to itself five surrounding planets; and instantly I remembered Areta's repetition of von Hardenberg's apothegm that "man is a sun of which his senses are the planets"—*four* senses (of sight, smell, hearing, and taste) closely connected with the

cerebral centre of light and thought; and a *fifth* (of feeling) more distantly related to it by its diffusion over the body; there thus took shape in me the double notions of flame and human life: notions, indeed, so closely allied as to be almost one—as is proved not only by their interweaving in all the theosophies that have been, but by the common use in language of such expressions as “glow,” “fire” of life; and etymologically by the identity between such words as breath, spirit, etc., and *purify*, *purge*, *fire*, etc., all connected with Greek *pur* (fire). With the notion, too, of flame is allied (indirectly through the notion of breath) the notion of *music*; especially of such music as is sung, or won from wind instruments. But, says Goethe, in reference to the key: “Does it not remind you of arrows with barbs? God help us!” Arrows with barbs—the unvarying symbol of flight with wings! and having reached this point, a glimmer of the connection between the key and the coffin-motto, “Fear not... he shall be great...” “lit me—the motto *sung* by the *flaming* and *winged* and *human-shaped* messenger to the maiden of Nazareth; and since this motto had yielded to the scrutiny of Sergius a metre, and been hymned by him to a melody, I no longer doubted that in the key would in very deed be found the key to this melody.

Remembering, then, my twin notions of flame and the human being, I set myself to seek in the key itself more definite expression of them; nor was it long before I observed that the whole figure is little more than a reproduction over and over again of the figure this figure, it will be seen, is formed by the “binding” lines in the handle with each of the small circles at the corners; and formed again by each of them with the large central circle; and formed again by the shaft with the circles at its top and bottom; above all the whole key, if inverted, is, in its *ensemble* (omitting the barbs or *wings*), a general reproduction of it. But the figure is the antique and most elementary conceivable representation of the *wingless* human form, regarded as consisting of head and body; it also represents a burning and haloed candle or torch; a globed lamp; a tailed and flaming comet.

The figure, then, I assumed to be the *rationale* and *motif* of the whole key; and having determined this, I could not fail to remember that this very figure is also the obsolete Greek letter *koppa*. Now, *koppa* occurring between *pi* and *rho* would, had it been retained in the alphabet, have occupied the very place which the central *u* now occupies in the word *pur* (fire); it accordingly corresponds with our Latin *q*, and its line extended upward through its circle in fact makes a kind of double-*q*: *ö* But as the whole Key, inverted, is *koppa*, so *q*, inverted, is none other than *b*; and the elements of this letter *b* (a semicircle and a straight line) are actually formed no less than eight times in the key by means of the “binding” lines and the central circle. If, then, the Key indeed represented the key of the melody sung by Sergius, I had at last (remembering the flat delineation of the figure) the tangible result of B flat. And in this conclusion I was confirmed, when I considered that by means of the “binding” lines within the handle, in conjunction with part of the central circle, and part of the curves bounding the whole handle, the elements of the “flat” sign in music are produced no less than eight times over: thus *b*; and now I was able to see for what reason these boundary curves had not been made to bulge *outward* (a conformation which would have made the key a perfect *koppa*) instead of inward: for the inward curve was absolutely necessary in order that they

might touch the central circle at four points, and so help to produce the eight repetitions of the character *b*.

It now only remained for me to take the Hebrew version of the words "Fear not," etc., and write down all the successive letters corresponding to the first seven (*a* to *g*) of the Latin alphabet: I thus obtained my *notes*. *Time* I determined by dividing two such letters, if they occurred consecutively by the semi-quaver, using quaver, minim, or crochet as one or more of the letters subsequent to *g* intervened. (In this convention I counted the Hebrew vowel-points as real letters.) Turning now to the organ, and trying my result in the key of B flat on the treble notes, I won—as any one may henceforth win—an air so Orphic-wild, and—to *my* seeming—so mournful, that it bore me captive as it floated upward; an air, too, at which the ears of memory pricked: I gradually coming to realize that this was no other than the very tune which in early childhood I had heard from Sergius.

All this time I sat often with Areta beside the statue. Autumn and winter supervened. Her quick fictile spirit likened more and more to the marble shape of gloom upon which she looked. "Deaths dreeriment" prevented and pervaded her. She sat and read and wove and gazed. Her mood deepened to resemblance within that of the more hyper-spiritualistic of the Herrnhüters, and the Moravian and Bohemian brethren—the complex religiosity of the Brahmin *yati* basing itself upon the simple Christian faith. Her only books now were Spinoza's *Ethics*, and the three treatises of Jacob Böhme: The high and deep searching of the three-fold Life of Man according to the Three Principles; the Introduction to the real Knowledge of the Great Mystery; and the Supersensual Life. She reverted to her habit of watching through the night, and sleeping by day; she clothed herself in the black habit of a recluse; the wanness of long fastings made her in the grey darkness of the chapel stranger than water-ladies hair-wringing beneath unnatural gloatings of the moon; her diet was cream thickened with raw crushed Persian apples. I wondered that two environments could so of one make two: such varieties were infinite in Areta! Not now was she the same but lately mænad-irrational with the lechery of spring. One link only seemed to bind her any more to me: her eagerness that I should convert to sympathy with her feeling. It was a quiet settled mania with her. She besieged me with meek persistence at every point.

"Little Numa," she said, taking my hand in her two, "were you not ever my unrelenting shadow, hot-hunting me whither I fled from you? So now must you follow me where I go—as I *him*."

She kissed me, once and again, motherly-familiar, on the forehead, I manœuvring flagrant lips to the tingling transport of her cheek.

"And where that is you know. Is it not" —summoning the *Uebersinnliches Leben* of Böhme—

"there where no creature dwelleth? where, having ceased from all thinking and willing, we hear what God unspeakably speaketh? To be real sovereigns of nature and ourselves, must we not be silent and quiet, and then are we as God was before nature and creature. We must learn to distinguish between the thing and that which is only the image of it; that which is

properly angelical, and that which is no more than bestial. For" — what says the writing? — "if thou rulest over the creature externally only, and not from the right inward ground of thy renewed nature, then is thy ruling verily in a bestial kind, and a sort of imaginary government; but if thou hast put off the bestial or ferine nature, then thou art come into the Super-imaginariness, which is a state of being above figures and shadows: and so rulest over all, being reunited to thy original in that very source out of which they came; and henceforth nothing on earth can hurt thee, for thou art all things, and nothing is *unlike* thee."

She held my hand: she kissed me — lingeringly — again and yet again, on the brow.

But I: "Yet here you seem wayward, Areta. As for me, I fly from my mast the flag of Sergius. Sergius and Jacob Böhme, it seems clear, looked through eyes of different-coloured irises. For, so far from bidding you cease from all willing, did he not say" — was it not his last word to you —

"give to every passion its rein —"

"Sh-h-h!" She extinguished my mouth with swift smothering hand, "you cannot suppose that the maxim will fit *you* — rudderless little Argonaut that you are! Nor yet me. Sergius it fitted: for in him every 'passion' was spiritual, and winged colt born of that instinctive mother-purity of his, which everywhere saw God: to give to such its rein was to be snatched into heaven. But *you* — thick, all clay —"

She swooped like a fishing-bird upon a sighted kiss in my hair.

But I again: "And is clay then, Areta, less divine than spirit? Not so, I am certain, did Sergius think. 'Give,' he said, 'to every song its dance' — and to you he said this, specially to you. Ah, Areta! is not body sweet as soul? Does not God beat and burn in both? To feast then must be divine as to fast: to kiss sublime as to pray. For is He not kiss, and kissed, and kisser; prayer and shrine, and pilgrim? So said Sergius."

A disdainful sidling look, pouting resentment, kept her from answer.

One night — it was then beginning spring — she, looking upon the statue-face, said, frowning: "I somehow seem conscious of some sort of change. Look, Numa, see if the same effect is not wrought upon you, too."

I looked, but shook my head. Yet the change, very gradually growing from day to day, had long been far from unknown to rue.

"And with this consciousness of change, Areta, does not your fondness for the marble lessen?" She seemed astonished.

"How could that come? You appear to cling most persistently to the notion of some inherent reality in the things we see. If I see a thing, which I *know* can be nothing more than the image of my own mind, must I not also know that any seeming change in it is an exact reflection of

some real change in me, by some means produced? so that, supposing I love the thing, my relative position to it must be at all times unaltered; and love, so long as it can realize the identity of the thing, follows it through all its modifications, as Boötes hunts Harmaxa, or as the suns in the tail of the Bear follow it through all its circhings round the Polar star."

"But suppose," I said, "you know the *means* by which the change is wrought in you—the definite will of another mind working upon yours; suppose, for instance, the Elder, willing that you should be conscious of change in this statue, effected his purpose, in the fashion taught by experience to be possible and easy, by applying to it a burin, while you slept—"

"In that case, indeed, some loves might spread wings from their object; but as for me, even in that case, I feel sure—and your supposition is as wild as little Numa hunting hares of old on the mountains!"

She caught my head between antipodean hands, and dipped at it a steep kiss, motherly-playful. Little by little Spring slackened her girdle, swelling nymphic-gravid. Change in the statue now grew amain.

For this, not Theodore, but I, was responsible. Despair at its ghastliness and the deepening gloom of Areta had spurred me at last to come to the chapel during her sleeping-hours, and with furtive tremulous chisel to soften the face into a semblance somewhat more life-like; the chipped part I would then resmear with a hue less lethal, yet not too discrepant. And the effect upon her was very quickly evident.

One noon a mountebank, from a townlet beyond the mountains, arrived laggard at Phorfor. I hurried to the chapel.

Down a side-aisle I ran to her chamber. She slept. I intruded my head between the velvet hangings of the door-way, and called:

"Areta! Areta!"

She was as when the first presentiment of morning stirs in the plumage of the eider-duck; strained the ivory coronal of a bare arm lazily round her head; jerked suddenly stark, as in the last throe before death; and lay outlined sideways, hills and a central mountain in Lihhiput under the thin green coverlet, eyeing me through imbecile eyes.

"Areta! a punchinello!"

"A punchinello! O joy..."

Fleeter than the ether wings of instinct, more oilily than interfluent mercury, she leapt instantly before me, standing hot and rosy, clean-cut through the smoke-puff of a night-veil of gauze. Then quickly scarlet with remembrance—

"Numa! go..."

I waited in the chapel, dubious, yet buoyed on the memory of all the craze and fervours which the appearance of a mountebank had meant to Areta, a girl.

She came presently, dressed in black. And mournfully negative, said:

“I cannot go with you.”

“How! you will not let the man return—”

“Let him be fed and paid.”

“I certainly shall not stir without you, Areta.” She stood looking at the changing statue.

Then rushing furiously downward at its eyebrow a skew and still-born kiss, throttled my wrist.

“Come then!” Dragged me toward the door.

We sat beneath the almond tree of the little garden, and the punchinelho set his stage and puppets before us; fussy puppets with breath to grin, and caper, and perorate. Areta looked—mostly pale, averted,—with nostrils panting thorough-bred; now and then flushing into crimson; now and then rippling into sheer oblivion of laughter. The new sunlight seemed to wind her with ecstasy. That night I was able to force her to sleep once more in the castle. The greater part of it I spent in chiselling at the statue.

In the morning I returned within her to the chapel, she guilty and silent. We stood by the altar-rail—for a long the stood dumb, gazing on the emptiness where the statue had lain. The spirit of its pallid granite had passed into Areta; only, she just moved her head measurely from side to side, woe-ridden. Two hours before I had left the coffin safe by the rail.

All at once paroxysmal in queenhiness, horizontal from shoulder-blade to rosy-armed forefinger-tip, she cried to me—

“Oh go! go!—far from Phorfor—whence you came—”

I bowed. The suddenness of high blood had ever been a trait of our race, nor was I all undowered with its quiet-quick arrogance. I bowed—and walked instantly from the chapel, through the sea, to the castle.

So then Areta had dismissed me as a hireling from the ancient home of my family. I passed to my chamber, crammed a few pieces of clothes into a travelling-bag, and descended to the stables at the back. I saddled my horse, and was about to mount, when the dwarf, appearing from behind an angle, shambled briskly toward me, and handed me a parchment.

“From whom?”

“The Elder Theodore, master.”

I broke the seal, and read:

“The Lady Areta has now commanded you from Phorfor. I, her protector, suggest that this

injunction meet instant obedience.

“Theodore.”

On the document I made haste to scribble in pencil the words:

“I shall *not* go: and I defy you, Theodore”; handed then the parchment to the dwarf; unsaddled the horse: and returned to my chamber.

The thought which shadowed me all the day was the wonder that Theodore should know of Areta’s “go! go!” He had heard it, then: but how? We two stood alone in the chapel; his boat was by the Tower. Had he asses’ ears? My faith in magic, to Areta possible as nature, was small. I sought deeply for explanation. I remembered how, praying one night by the coffined Sergius, a taper-flash seemed to glance behind me in the chapel: yet Theodore’s boat was by the Tower. And I thought of the fall of luminous powder as I harped beneath the turret-window: yet the boat was by the Tower. And from what hand had Beatrix flown to us out of the chapel-recesses? How had she disappeared? The boat was then by the Tower.

At midnight I dressed in white, and crawling flat-faced along the marble terrace, reached the landing-stage; thence dropped to the sands; and so, still crouching, entered the sea, four-square; with hands bloody from the barbed star-fish of the bottom, I came to the inlet, fairly sure that I had thus cheated the eyes of Theodore. Having reached the reredos-end of the chapel, I struck light to a taper, and passed straight onward through a draped doorway. Never beyond this point had I dared before, nor, as I knew, had Areta, nor Sergius. A long and steep corridor, with branches veining out every-way stretched before me. After hours of search, I found that the alcoves, vaults, chambers of every shape, both along the main corridor and its ramifications, were past numbering. Many of these were doorless; many had doors, but open, admitting me to examination; one only, near the end of a long and very precipitate corridor which was the branch of a branch, hid from me behind a locked door. The position of this I marked, and judging that the time had now come when the night shudders into a deeper gloominess at the instinct of the near darts of morning, I returned with like secrecy to the castle.

At the next midnight I crawled back with the same furtiveness to the chapel, and made for the marked door. I carried a bunch of old keys, one of which chance at length fitted to the lock: there was no creaking, and I guessed a well-used mechanism. Within I found a large chamber, black every-way with its own bare rock, and empty. I walked round it, once and again, and met everywhere—nothing. Surprised, I again set out, holding the taper high; but happening now to come nearer one of the corners than before, I stepped upon air; plunged downward into the throat of an abyss; and bumping in my descent upon steep stone gradients, arrived at the bottom all shock and amaze. But I held the taper: in five minutes I was conscious of this. And light was in my pocket. I rekindled the flame, and found myself at the angle of two subterranean galleries. And now truth dawned upon me. For it was clear from their general directions that of these, one led beneath the sea to the Tower, and one beneath the inlet and the land to the vaults of the castle.

Here, too, having passed cautiously along the Tower-gallery, I found a honeycomb—clefts and crannies everyway, veins, chambers. The chief artery itself was full of windings, angles. For about two hours old Erebus blinked in every nook at the innovating flicker (if my taper. I went so far sea-ward as to see the steps leading down from the lower: their length showed me the great depth of the excavation beneath the water. Then back again into the side-catacombs, eyes stepping in my careful feet, a thief in the night, all leers and tremors. Once, far in the labyrinth, I stumbled over some rock-debris. Instantly there was an answering sound: a faint stirring as of shaken plumage, and this barely-whispered, sleepily-voiced interrogatory: "Sergius? Sergius?"

It came from behind a bolted door opposite where I stumbled. I drew the staple; entered; roused grey Beatrix in her hung cage of reeds to a sage lateral interest of round eyes in roe; saw the mummy of Sergius in its shell; and near it the statue in its coffin; then, knowing morning near, rebolted the door; returned to the chapel-level; locked the door of the stair-chamber; and with elaborate secrecies made my way to the castle.

Before midnight of the same day I had toilsomely lifted the statue-weight from its coffin, and round its neck fastened a provided rope: with this, having slung the Beatrix-cage upon my back, I dragged draught-cattle-wise, barked at by Cerberus echoes. Progress was slow. The taper, carried in an alternate resting hand, showed me now, what I had previously noticed indeed, but not in such numbers—large cloth bags, stuffed with some soft substance, laid here and there on the ground of many parts of the labyrinth. Resting, I happened to see a little of the powder which as (I concluded) filled the bags, spilt by chance at my feet; it was grey, and I remembered the descending mass beneath the turret-window. I stooping to examine it, a flake of hot grease fell near. The powder instantly volleyed me such a hoot, that space seemed to split fragmentary round me, and I woke to sense prostrate against the wall, deaf but to the booming buzz of my own waltzing brain, and blind but to the two bluish round ghosts that hovered before me in the darkness. When I had relighted the taper, Beatrix was still fluttering and screaming with fright. I had now passed through the length of the vein, and was near the main artery. I dragged the statue after me up a step, and proceeded slowly on this final stage toward the stair. I had not consumed many yards, however, before there sounded upon my palsied consciousness from behind an angle of the corridor the stalk of an approaching step—and, O Heaven, the rustle of silk. I spun motionless, fled riveted, was fixed in sick gyrations, like the statue of a whirlwind, was everything in a moment and nothing, a circle in flesh, symbol of infinity, sign of zero. But only for one eternal instant: in the next I had extinguished my light, had lifted the statue in my arms, and, shuddering under the incubus, had plunged into the dark orifice of a cranny near me; just as Theodore, holding a candlestick, loomed into view. He came close, tremendous, heavy, veiled, himself a phalanx, a marching pyramid—passed close to my breath, unsuspecting—went yet a few strides beyond: when Beatrix, tempted, called, as if uncertain, "Sergius? Sergius?" Theodore stopped statuesque, angled his head sideward; his cars a pair of scales, zealous to weigh the very dust of sound; and so for a full minute stood. Hearing nothing, he again strode two steps forward; and again the new sound stirred the bird to call, briskly now and loud. Theodore turned, hesitating, came towards me, glanced at the black mouth in which I hid, and passed

somewhat beyond. Once more the bird uttered a note, and once more he halted short, the stone monument of an ear, grandly patient, his back towards me broadly immobile. Not now did I hesitate a moment: my shoes were already done off. Creeping from my retreat, I drew on tiptoe near him, all bloodless, collected, a concentrated corpse, and stretching a sudden head above his shoulder, puffed utterly out the flame of his candle. An "Ah—h—..." broke from him like the menace of thunder. I flew back to my cranny, expecting him now to return to the Tower for new light; instead of which he immediately came in my direction, and walked away towards the chapel, blocking my exit! In the chapel, I knew, he would procure a light, and return armed. I, clasping desperation to my bosom, grasped the statue-rope, and tugged towards the Tower; and finding progress all too slow, summoned the cracking thews of Atlas, and lifted the burthen, running, laying it down, running again, until I stood at the foot of the Tower stairway. All this time, Beatrix, wildly swinging in her cage, was two ecstatic winnowing-fans in a granary of chaff. From the step-foot I half hoisted, half dragged, the burthen up the stairway, and had overcome more than threequarters of its steep length, when I beheld Theodore heaving rapidly towards me along the corridor a mountain in travail, steel glinting in his right hand, as when a regiment winks moving on the hillside. Upon the strength of Atlas I piled the fury of Samson—the statue grew light at my maniac tendons. Before the Elder of the Tower had halved the stairs, my head was prising up the trap-door of iron above: it gave sluggishly—I urged and hunted the statue through the aperture—pelted myself madly after it—and slapped down the ponderous metal upon the snapped point of Theodore's blade.

Having spindled the hasp on the top of the trap-door, I found myself in a dark room; but quickly discovering the locked door, the key of which projected inwardly, I opened it, and easily towed the statue over the glazed bricks of the flooring to the boat by the Tower-steps. The wakeful dwarf, dumb at my apparition, gazed upon me with fish-mouth vacant as his eyes. I was soon by the landing-stage, and so with my burthen reached the castle. Looking in the darkest morning from a casement, I dimly discerned Theodore wading to the Tower through the sea— vast as a reef when it awfully forges through the fog athwart the drifting mariner.

* * *

I cull some few sentences from a journal which I kept at this time:

Elaphebolion, 3rd (*hist.*). Areta, then, will not see me. Will let me go without one last look or word. My note of to-day was the third in which I have declared my power to prove the quite natural means by which her mementoes of Sergius have disappeared. She sends no answer. Her old waiting-woman has been with me again by stealth: is all in my favour, and full of sibilant talk, breathless news. Theodore, it seems, plies Areta with missives: warns her presumably against seeing my face. I work all the night, and nearly all the day, upon the statue and the bird. The thought that I have thereby made the spirit of Areta somewhat brighter will be to my exile like fruit in winter: she will see my hand, my care for her, and

remember how I loved.

Elaph. 4. This day I have received the first message from Theodore since the incidents in the galleries. My minute outlook seems to have filched him of the hope of assassinating me by cryptic drugs and dirks. And so open murder is to sit arbiter upon us. His parchment was a conjugation of the verb dare: you dare, you have dared! "We cannot *both* abide at Phorfor." Foolish old man! he does not know how soon Phorfor will heave a rid bosom at me. I wrote on the parchment: "I will not go. Swords punctually at midnight of the 9th in the chief underground gallery of the chapel." An hour after the answer came:

"It is well."

Elaph. 5. I am toiling as before at the statue and the bird.

Elaph. 6. By the 9th all will, I conclude, be ready. I shall leave a note for Areta, and set out by dawn of the 10th, provided only that Theodore's sword do not prove longer than my life.

Elaph. 7. Areta's room is constantly warm with her: so the old dame reports. The Mahlström of the spring, it is clear, has not caught her in its now widening whorls. The three last troparions of

Sergius she has written out afresh, and studies them long. These, and a few books marked with his name, are all she has of him.

Elaph 8. This day I have been pondering upon my appointed meeting with Theodore. An unwillingness has arisen and grown almost compulsory within me. He is an old man; many reasons come to me. Yet he must not think me dreadful of his power. Time must decide for me.

* * *

On the 9th no entry appears. During the evening of that day I sat and wrote my letter of farewell to Areta. The room was the one in which I had chiefly lived of late; vastly domed; tapestried in Utrecht velvet of red, but blood-black under the orbed moon of pink light pendent from the centre. It jutted from the castle on the second stage, somewhat basilica-shaped, the roof being low and flat over the semi-circle at the far end. On one side it looked east towards the mountains, and west over the bay on the other. A palisade of taper stained-windows, Gothic-mullioned, surrounded it. Half the length of the west side was filled by a ponderous organ, the most important of the three in the castle. I sat and wrote my letter, and had not finished, when, hearing an opened door, I looked, and saw, to my confusion, Areta herself stand; simple in silver-white linen *chiton*, zoned with gold-cloth; an azure and rosy diamond in her forehead flirting lissom at hide-and-seek with the various spirit of light.

A thick sadness veiled her face.

"I have come, Numa, in friendship, to bid you farewell—having just heard of your resolve to

go from us to-morrow."

"Ah, that is kind. And you do not fear the Elder's malison, I hope?"

"I fear nothing, Numa. But you speak lightly, sir, of the great Theodore."

We sat together on a couch within a small recess. The hangings before us half hid us from the room.

"It is a pity," she said, "that you have so acted as to rouse his gentle mind to displeasure. You and he cannot, it is certain, now live upon the same atmospheres. One must disappear—you are a boy—he hoar with the snows of reverence—ah me!"

"Yet not for the displeasure of Theodore do I go: be sure of that, Areta: but because you, with your own lips, have bid me."

"That was the mere wind of the blow which struck me; the flash of the sword which pierced me. I was deeply wounded, you must know. Forget that, Numa. But now a far stronger reason urges. Theodore is mortally angry with you, sir."

"And because I have committed the sin of loving you."

"Of— —? No! of *not* loving me, you mean."

"Areta! why, the pebbles on the beech moan with the torment of their thirst when you pass on them—the callous heart of ocean flares into scarlet flames at you! And how have I shown this impossible lack of love? By removing, of course—"

"Yes, Numa."

"But in that case my only motive must have been jealousy, which is but the yellow mustard-flower of love."

"And some such half-notion it was which has helped me towards softer thoughts of you. Yet it was a base jealousy—of one far nobler than you—and so venomous bitter in its effects—"

"And now, if after all it be not true that I did remove your treasures, Areta?"

"In each case the Elder saw you in the act: in his wisdom, though absent in space, not merely saw, but foreknew: and warned me beforehand that if I laughed with you, went abroad with you, you would be led to do so and so, with such and such motive. All which unheeding, I rushed on, and was punished."

"Have you slept to-day, Areta?"

“Yes.”

“Then stay with me to-night—the last—till midnight, at least. It will be a memory to me.”

“And why midnight?”

“I may leave you then for a while. Before, I should without advantage pain you by turning all you hold light into the blackness of darkness; your childhood’s *eidolon* of truth into the very Isis of lies. But after midnight, if fortune steer my steel, I may to good purpose hold to your eyes lenses rather less distorting.”

She did not understand. We sat together silent. The spaces of the night marched by us. She was the grey symbol of apathy beside me, a grey pen in the gloom of the recess, still wearing on her pensive forehead the jewel without name of her lost celestial home. Did she not care that I should leave her lonely in the morning? Was Sergius still the just dead bridegroom of her widowhood? She took from the *sinus* of her dress a small roll, the three new-written fantasias of his deathbed. Pored over them in the dim light, bent, forgetting me. Then suddenly vocal:

“What, think you, did he mean by ‘suns whose rays are *living lutes*’?”

“I cannot tell, Areta. Read the whole.”

The cooing doves of her voice were like a bath of lukewarm luxury to my wallowing. She read the poem.

“Sergius best knew his own winged meanings, Areta: they may, as you once said, have been prophecy, or rhapsody, or prayer.

“The *second* was the prayer of a Moses dying at sunset on Pisgah.”

She read it, bent grey in the gloom.

“The third seems mere poetry.”

“Do not think so!—he never conceived *mere* poetry.” This too she commenced slowly to read: Please note that this text was taken without permission from another source.

“Shapes in the Fire come and go:
an orb from Scorpio swoons— (empurpled woe!)
and horns hath she, and eyes,
and lethal trance, and voice, that as she hies, the swan’s death-nocturne tunes.

I see a headlong Messenger:
her robe a crocus flame—
(confide in *her!*)
thrills shake her plumes amain:
her passion's load, the burthen of her pain, is the burthen of A NAME."

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"Areta!" I cried, breaking in, ecstatic. A sudden flash seemed to enkindle a whole landscape of truth to me. "Areta, love!" I sprang to my feet. "A crocus flame!—thrills shake her plumes—my God! the burthen of a *name!* You shall see!" Heedfulness died in me, moderation, remembrance, and hurrying to an opposite recess, I dashed aside the draperies, mounted on moveable steps, and threw wide the doors of a high-hung cage. There was a stirring, a meditation, a poisoning, and instantly a little saffron bird, yellow-bright as orpiment, took flight, clipping within twinkling tongue and wing a ruled and fluid pathway through the air—alighting upon the high white bosom Areta spread to it.

Her face changed to the beaming sunlight of joy. She knew Beatrix, though changed by my earnest lavings from the grave grey of Sergius to her native gold of Canary.

"And thou hast come back to thy Areta's soul"—whispering low—"ah wild, wild aeronaut"—hugging it to her throat—"come back in gaudier robes—and yet I love, I love, I love thee just so, too—no other than just so, little prodigal! But say your master's name—lisp, lisp it to my secret ear—sw-e-et—Sergius!"

"Numa! Numa! Numa!" shrilled Beatrix, recovered in breath, eloquent of the briefer euphony of my own arduously inculcated name.

Areta slid into waltzing with the bird, her head tossed back, laughing.

"O changeling Beatrix! O wanton breeze! O whirling whisp! What, another name, then? No longer deserted Sergius? And does the new-launched burthen loll move lightly, then, on the ebb and flow of its little, little, liquid throat? Ah, it is well! it is well!"

We sat again within the recess, the bird swiftly fickle from her to me, an incessant slim bobbin zealous for the net, a frantic ploughshare in the sands, stitching us together with a million airy threads. Numa was her constant burthen.

"Confide in *her*, Areta! ha, love! can you not now believe that the mighty soul of your brother lovingly foreknew me?"

She looked upon me and smiled.

A huge clock of greenish-black augite under the rosy central lamp tolled midnight.

“It is midnight. Whither was it you spoke of going?”

“Nowhither, Areta. I will not leave you to-night.”

The indecision had frozen together into sudden resolve within me. No blood, I decreed, of me or by me, should spill at that final parting-time. Theodore, if he dared, might think one of my race a coward. In the morning he would know me gone for ever.

But I rose, and bearing the steps to one of the high western windows, mounted upon them, and slightly opening a stained half on one side of the mullion, peeped through. Theodore would probably go to the meeting-place by the underground way, but if he took boat, I was there to wave him signal of my changed purpose. He would not wait to see me leave the terrace in the shallop, knowing that I now knew the subterranean way from the vaults of the castle.

Several minutes passed; then concluding that he had by that time reached the *rendezvous* I commenced to descend; but was arrested—seeing a shadow, the shadow surely of Theodore, pass by a blind of the Tower. Awe and confusion filled me, dread of his dreadful subtlety. What woof did he weave? He was not in the Tower having *returned* from the meeting-place: for this the time since midnight was utterly insufficient. He had not therefore gone at all. But for what reason? As I stood debating, a horrible bursting and cracking, uproars of wrack and shock, earth-heavings, throbbed and thundered at my ear, loosened my knees. Enceladus, compact with tremors, crawled beneath us. The castle, flicked but by the tail of the explosion, shivered as with the coldness of horror. Looking in the direction of the chapel, I saw the wide winging of smoke, flying rocks, a dull lurid flare. Then I knew in my hurrying heart how precipitous was the ruin I had shunned; how stern, majestic the wrath of Theodore. There came a moment of lull—a sickening treachery of peace—and in the next instant the Tower in the sea sent up to heaven a wild shrieking bellow, and from the centre of its summit an infinite clean spear of crimson and blue and greenish flame laddered yells of horrid menace to the stars. The earth-shock, immeasurably fiercer in its effects than its author’s thought, had communicated the fury of its fires along the underground gallery to the witches’ cauldron of volatile chemicals in which Theodore brewed the sorceries of his dark will. The Tower throed, and frittered, and spat red bricks as a grounded pugilist his bloody teeth. For a moment, on the topmost parapet of all, a hunted monumental form appeared—a veiless face—with a similitude of excrescent horns on the forehead—a face which was but a dead and thick and featureless lump of lavender-leprous flesh, lit and lashed by scorpion whips of flame from his silken robes and wide-burning fleece of hair; but the gallery cracked from under him; he lurched ponderously, and lancing a far-circling shrill, empurpled, to my fancy, with a strange chaunted hint and cadence of a death-melody, fell—like holocausts slung flaring from the battlements of heaven—old Lucifer hurtling rotary in somersaults of steep combustion through the interspaces. And immediately thereupon the whole fabric burst, and rumbled down upon him, building him a funeral mound of hissing bricks broad above the surface of the water.

Of all this Areta had seen nothing. She stood in the middle of the room, three-eared, with lifted auditory hand.

“O Numa, tell me—what is it?” she cried, wan in voice and face.

I led her by the hand to the recess.

“Listen, Areta, and believe serenely that all is of God—the Elder Theodore is dead.”

She doubled, hiding her face in her lap.

“Dead...”

To her it was the dissilience of whole Scorpio from the zodiac.

I, in solemn peace, spoke low, unveiling all. Her face was buried from me; she made no sign; only, when I told how that Theodore had lied to her, she shook her head, quick-sobbing:

“Oh no, no, no...”

For a long the then we sat speechless. Her face I could not see, but I knew it veiled with the crape of tragedy. The spaces of the night marched by us. The clock chimed three.

“What can *he* have thought, seeing all?”

“Sergius?”

“Yes.”

“Sergius, I incline to think, probably mastered long before death, to a far greater degree than you or I, Areta, the alphabeta of that dark Sanscrit in which Theodore’s soul languaged itself. But he, like Theodore, is dead now; and it can be of little moment to us what he thinks.”

There was silence between us for a while, till she, as if reasoning with her own thoughts, said, “But strange! strange!” and began again to read slowly the vision of Sergius:
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Shapes in the Fire come and go:
an orb from Scorpio swoons— (empurpled woe!)
and horns hath she, and eyes,
and lethal trance, and voice that, as she hies, the swan’s death-nocturne tunes.

I see a headlong Messenger:
her robe a crocus flame—

(confide in *her!*)

thrills shake her plumes amain:

her passion's load, the burthen of her pain, in the burthen of A NAME.

There smiles a lady, veiled, in death;

bright angels round her chaunt— (mellifluous breath!);

she, from the VIIth sphere,

regards the VIth where gleams her lovely bier, and sighs her ancient haunt.

List to the Organ's roaring throat!

Hymen's loud *euois* swell—

(triumphal note!):

this day two souls entwine:

their purple orgies drenched in aphrian wine, and Priap loves, a-dell.

Please note that this text was taken without permission from another source.

"But," I cried aloud, suffused, and, as it were, electrically shocked, by a revelation, "this—this was no voice of man, but of a glowing spirit from heaven!" and rushing to the organ, I furiously filled its mighty frame with wind; sat before the notes, and in victorious euphony, in pealing acclamation, I sent boasting and gaudent through the timid silence of the morning the angel-song of Sergius. The air was his intact; but instead of the sad minor-key, transposition to a major; instead of the solemn serenity, the light step and golden pomp of wedding marches. The bass was my own. Never so shall I play again. Areta was behind me, her hand on my shoulder, trembling; her face pressed hot to mine. Beatrix, long since flown to her sleepy perch, but pricked to sympathy by the practice of her own native art, warbled a continuous drowsy serenade of my name. All this has self-maturing memory brought me back. But for the time I was lost to sense. Music was a well of living water within me; the broad bosom of the organ shivered at me as when a Pegasus finds its unappeasable rider. I leaned faint upon it when my tyranny was accomplished.

"O Numa" —her two hands on my shoulders, her face a rosy lake-ripple looking up at dawn—

"O Numa, you have—"

She stopped.

"And whence, of whence, have you drawn this power over me? You seemed to me a little Numa-god as you played!"

"The piece, you see, is changed in movement and key from the melody as sung by Sergius."

"Changed—and glorified."

A pain went lightning through me.

"You like it better so?"

"Yes—that even *must* be."

"The written music, if I go in the morning, you shall have."

"If you go. But not the pipping of every popinjay is a prophecy, nor the whisper of every wind a warning!"

She laughed, mocking my impotence.

"And do you not see it surely true, Areta, that the great soul of your Sergius lovingly foreknew me?"

Her look rested upon my face: her hand fell to mine.

We sat again within the recess. I opened to her the pit whence I had digged the lost jewel of the melody. Grey spaces of the morning now shivered past like home-turning ghosts. After long intimacy with her, I bent the trickle of our talk to our child's friendships, delights and abandonments together in the deep places of Phorfor. She turned herself from me.

"Children," she said, "are—"

"Yes?"

"Are—"

"Tell me!"

"Sensual."

The word rived her with a shudder; but if of luxury, or if of self-retention, I could not say.

"And men too, Areta, and women. Is it not the barm of the Holy Spirit lovingly uneasy in our bodies? So said Sergius."

She made no answer. Stealthy mists of seriousness had again crept gradually large around her. Contact was no longer possible. She became burrs to me and a battery, memorable to pilgrim fingers. The shadow of some thought in her stretched between us.

Morning threw wide casement after casement: the cock was as a herald with clarion vacillant between hand and lip, tiptoe-parturient with the yet unvoiced evangel: Behold the Bride-groom.

An aged man-servant for whom I had drawn back the lever of a bell, appeared, bearing comfitures on a salver, and a mama of wine. I, pouring a glassful, presented it to her. "No! the day now begun is marked as a fast-day with me."

"See, Areta, how the night hops away with bedraggled wing, like a faint, wounded raven: Please note that this text was taken without permission from another source.

'And now does the cock,

Half anxious its crow

Of tribrach and long, Shrill: doesn't it GROW...'

Please note that this text was taken without permission from another source. my hour them is near: will you not drink me a parting *salve* in this glass?"

This I said craftily, with hope in her answer. Her eyes leapt upon me in eager query.

"Oh... you do not mean—"

"Have you not *bid* me go? and you have not yet unbid me."

Her lashes fell in long curvature upon a perfectly pallid cheek. I could see that she debated keenly within herself. After a time she spoke, arguing to her lap:

"Well, if you will go, you will go. I here will give myself utterly to those vigils and tears and prayers which made *her* saintly; prayers, Numa, in which *you* shall not be forgotten."

My heart sank horribly.

In saying "her," she pointed to a picture in oils of a long-dead lady of our race hung on the opposite wall: a middle-aged lady, with meekness in her look, and a radiance of unearthly sunlights in her smile, far known of old beyond the bounds of Phorfor as St. Anna, the blessed.

I, pale as she, held the wind before her.

"Drink for me, Areta!"

"No! why urge me so? I have told you no—no."

The flash of her anger singed me of enterprise. I sat again mouse-quiet by her side.

“To what a point,” she said, looking up at the beatitude of St. Anna, “must she not have adventured on the greased mast of spiritual attainment! Her life was a long upward gaze: an eye turned white to heaven. Before death she is said to have been familiar with the facial expressions of many of the winged things of the cycles of the skies. But—how singular—that we should speak of her—to-night!” and she repeated:

Please note that this text was taken without permission from another source.

“There smiles a lady, veiled, in death:
bright angels round her chaunt— (mellifluous breath!);
she, from the VIIth sphere,
regards the VIth where gleams her lovely bier, and sighs her ancient haunt.

List to the Organ’s roaring throat!

Hymen’s loud *euois* swell—
(triumphal note!);
this day two souls entwine:
their purple orgies drenched in aphrian wine and Priap loves, a-dell!

I doze below four lax-zoned moons:
nude wails of women rave—
(lugubrious tunes!)
nude, by a beach of bones, their pallid pomp in torchlit dolor moans, Seeking a new-oped grave.

Lo!—one I see—a child of man!
his outlines laved in light—
(complete in plan!);
eternal smiles he wears:
no clothing on his chiselled lustre bears— and yet is clothed in White.”

Please note that this text was taken without permission from another source.

“Then, Areta—then— —” I cried, frantically stamping to my feet, “*then* was the Sergius we knew indeed true prophet, and sibyl, and seer!”—and flying towards the far semi-circular end of the chamber, I sent hissing apart along a brazen bar the two halves of a silken curtain, and revealed between the divided drapery, standing poseful on an *estrade* in the alcove, a statue of marble. Areta at the sight flew wide-winged towards me, rhythmic-swaying to the throb of timbrel and cymbal, eating up with inconceivable swiftness the vast length of the room. And we looked together, she leaning heavy upon me. Soft glammers of blue and crimson light, levelled by the now high-prospering day-spring through the stained windows, lotioned the head in a dream of colours. Only by the thick-matted black hair could she know it the very block of the Sergius-statue: in all else death had been wonderfully burined into life—the painted cerements all chipped from it, and in their place the white clothing only of

its own immaculate marmor.

“But, Numa—it is you! it is you!”

She compressed from my sight a face all inflamed in her two tight hands. Twin-sisters, lake-women, rowed competitive to rhymes in the milky hollows of her breasts!

“It is you, Numa! It is you!”

It was indeed I; I smiling rosy patronage; I nude; express; accomplished Man.

Areta blushed. She was a vomiting Ætna of blushes.

But I violently tore her hands from her face, and I held them in mine, both in both, swinging them. And she, with prudish under-glance, looked up into me, I deep into her.

O broken heart of Love! in her eyes were films, and meanings, and the everlasting and impetuous YEA.

* * *

That morning a thievish sprite in my feet led me a-hunt through all the nooks and by-ways of the castle. By a studied plea I had escaped from Areta. Yet Sergius, either with design or without, had left little of himself behind: some sandals I found, a few gowns woven without seam, three books of Bishop Berkeley marked with his name. These I took, and kissing them one by one, worshipping, praising him as a god, I locked them in a cabinet, and flung the key far. An hour thence, I, rejoined to Areta, was with her in the woods, gathering flowers: she dancing raillery at every rein. Her lips and pure white dress were stained with the dribble of the syrupy magenta wine of the grapes of Phorfor, her eyes all glairy with its tipsy yeast. We had, indeed, tiddled freely of its whispering nectar; and as the garland of ivy and violets with which I had crowned her had toppled aslant on her head, my riotous love had somewhat the look of an awry Bacchante rather drunken among the forest-glades. For many generations no marriage at Phorfor had been dehymenised by any such thing as benefit of clergy, and the laying on of frog-chill agastric hands: nor, as I knew, would Areta have tolerated any such. But from a slight gash in my fingertip she stained her tongue with my sucked blood; I mine with hers. Then repairing to her chamber with the gathered flowers, we bent to build the Altar of our Covenant: and, truly, it was upper Aiden and the very hair-curling tortion of delight to watch Areta, with what sighing pains, wifely collusions as of Bertha the Good, she took part in the making. It was low and broad by the side of her bed, and directly faced the rising sun. Plushy we made it, and furry, with riches and thicknesses of velvets; over-shading it with canopy of silk; and over and around the velvets we heaped a strew of ivy and violets (the blend worn in chaplets by the *phallophoroi* in the Great Dionysia); and over this we sprinkled poppy-flowers; and over this parsley mixed with barley-groats; and over this tufts of wool; and over all—on the front, and on the back, and on the sides, and on the top—we traced out in characters of the immortal flowers of amaranth this word:

APHRODITE PEITHO