

Visions: A Phantasy

Ivan Turgenev

D O D O  **P R E S S**

Visions: A Phantasy

I.

FOR a long time I tried in vain to sleep and kept tossing from side to side. "The devil take all this nonsense of tipping tables," I said to myself, "it certainly shakes the nerves." At length, however, drowsiness began to get the upper hand.

Suddenly it seemed to me that a harp-string twanged feebly in my chamber. I lifted my head. The moon was low in the sky and shone full in my face; its light lay like a chalk-mark on the carpet. The strange sound was distinctly repeated. I raised myself on my elbow, my heart beat forcibly. A minute passed so — another — then in the distance a cock crowed and a second answered him from yet further.

My head fell back on the pillow. "It comes even to that," I thought, "my ears are fairly ringing."

In a moment more I was asleep, or seemed to myself to be sleeping. I had a singular dream. I thought that I was in my own chamber, in my own bed, wide awake. Suddenly I hear the noise again. I turn. The moonbeam on the floor begins to waver, to rise, to take shape, stands motionless before me like the white figure of a woman, transparent as mist.

"Who are you?" I ask, trying to retain my composure.

A voice resembling the sighing of the wind among tree-tops answers me. "It is I — I — I. I am come for you."

"For me? But who are you?"

"Come at nightfall to the old oak tree at the edge of the wood. I will be there."

I wish to see more closely the features of this mysterious being; an involuntary cold shudder runs through me. I find myself not lying,

Visions: A Phantasy

but in a sitting posture on my bed, and where the appearance of the figure was there is a long pale moon streak on the floor.

Visions: A Phantasy

II.

I do not know how the next day passed. I tried, I remember, to read and to work a little, but could accomplish nothing. Night fell; my heart beat as if I had been expecting some one. I went to bed and turned my face to the wall.

“Why did you not come?” The whisper was plainly audible in the chamber.

Hastily I turned my head.

There was the form again, the mysterious being with fixed eyes in its rigid countenance, and an expression of woe.

“Come?” I heard faintly.

“I will come,” I answered with uncontrollable terror. The shape wavered, sank into itself like a puff of smoke, and once more it was only the wan moonlight that lay on the smooth floor.

Visions: A Phantasy

III.

I passed the day in excitement. At tea I nearly emptied a bottle of wine, and for a moment stood hesitating at the open door, but almost immediately turned back and threw myself upon my couch. The blood rushed at fever-speed through my veins.

Again I heard the tones. I shrank, but would not look up. Then suddenly I felt myself tightly clasped by something, and a whisper in my very ear, "Come, come, come!" Trembling with fright I stammered, "I will come," and raised myself upright.

The woman's form was bending over the head of my bed. It smiled slightly, and faded, but not before I had been able to distinguish the features. It seemed to me that I had seen them before, but where — when? It was late when I rose, and I spent almost the whole day in the fresh air, went to the old oak tree at the edge of the wood and regarded it thoroughly. Toward evening I seated myself beside the open window in my study. My housekeeper brought me a cup of tea, but I was unable to taste it. All sorts of thoughts besieged me, and I asked myself seriously whether I was not on the road to madness. It was just after sunset, and not only the sky but the whole atmosphere was suddenly suffused with a supernatural purple light; leaves and weeds, smooth as if freshly varnished, were alike motionless, there was something singular, almost mysterious, in this absolute quiet, this dazzling sharpness of outline, this combination of intense glow with the stillness of death itself. A large gray bird flew noiselessly toward me and settled itself upon the balustrade of my balcony. I looked at it and it looked at me, its head sideways, with its round, dusky eye. "Are you sent to remind me?" I thought.

The bird spread its wings and flew away as silently as it had come. I remained at the window for some time longer, but no longer absorbed in thought. I seemed to be under a spell, a gentle but irresistible power controlled me, as the boat is swept on by the current long before the cataract is in sight. When I regained possession of myself the glow was gone from the sky which had

Visions: A Phantasy

grown dark and the enchanted stillness had ceased. A light breeze had sprung up, the moon rode bright and brighter through the blue expanse, and in her cold light the trees shimmered, half dusk half silver. My old servant entered with a lamp, but the draught from the window extinguished the flame. I waited no longer, thrust my hat on my head and hurried to the old oak tree at the edge of the wood.

Visions: A Phantasy

IV.

YEARS ago this oak had been struck by lightning; its top was shivered and entirely blasted, but the trunk had still vigor for coming centuries. As I approached, a filmy cloud drew over the moon; blackest shadow lay under the broad branches. At first I was not conscious of anything unusual, but as I glanced to one side my heart throbbed — a white form was standing motionless by a tall sapling between me and the tree. My hair stood on end, but I plucked up courage and walked steadily on.

Yes, it was she, my nightly visitant. As I drew near, the moon shone out in full splendor. The figure seemed woven, as it were, out of a half transparent milky cloud; through the face I could see a twig that stirred with the wind, only the hair and the eyes were of a somewhat darker coloring, and on one finger of the folded hands I saw the faint glimmer of a narrow ring. I remained standing before it and attempted to speak to it, but my voice died in my throat; although I was no longer sensible of fear. Its glance was full upon me, the expression was neither of grief nor of gladness but a rigid, unlife-like attention. I waited to be addressed, but it kept immovable and silent with its death-like stare fixed on me. Again I felt my self-possession failing.

“I am come,” I said at last with a mighty effort. My voice was hollow and unnatural.

“I love you,” returned a whisper.

“You love me?” I asked in amazement.

“Give yourself to me,” was answered, still in the same tone.

“Give myself to you? You are only a ghost. You have no bodily existence.” A peculiar excitement had taken possession of me. “What are you? Smoke — air — vapor? Give myself up to you? First answer

Visions: A Phantasy

me — who are you? Have you lived on earth? And whence do you now come?"

"Give yourself to me. I will do you no ill. Say but two words: 'take me.'"

I looked at it attentively. "What is it talking about?" I thought. "What does it all mean? How can it take me? Shall I venture?"

"Very good," I answered so that it should hear, with unexpected loudness indeed as if some one had hit me from behind, "Take me!"

I had hardly pronounced the syllables when the form bent forward with a smile so that the features trembled for a moment, and slowly extended its arms. I would fain have drawn back but found it already out of my power. It twined about me, my body was caught up a yard from the ground, and gently and not too rapidly I floated over the still and dewy grass.

Visions: A Phantasy

V.

MY head swam. Involuntarily I closed my eyes, only to open them, however, the next moment. We were still floating upward. But the wood was no longer to be seen. Under us lay a wide plain, flecked here and there with shadow. With horror I realized that we had gained a fearful height.

“I am lost. I am in the Devil’s clutches,” was the thought that shot lightning-like through my brain. Till this moment the idea of demoniacal interference in my undertaking had not occurred to me. We were borne constantly farther and took our flight higher and higher as it appeared.

“Where are you taking me?” burst from me at length.

“Wherever you will,” answered my guide. It clung closer and closer to me, its face almost touching my own. Yet I could not feel the contact.

“Take me back to the earth. This height makes me giddy.

“Good; only shut your eyes and hold your breath.”

I followed this counsel and found myself immediately sinking like a stone, the wind fairly whistling through my hair. When I recovered myself we were hovering just above the ground, so that we stirred the tops of the grass-blades.

“Put me down,” I said, “on my feet. I have had enough of flying. I am no bird.”

“I believed it would be pleasant to you. We have no other power.”

“We? Who are you, then?”

No answer.

Visions: A Phantasy

"Can't you tell me anything?"

A woful tone, like that which had wakened me the first night trembled at my ear. All this while we had been moving almost imperceptibly through the damp night air.

"Set me down," I repeated. My guide moved quietly aside, and I stood upon my feet. It remained before me again with folded hands. I had regained my composure and looked closely in its face. There was the same expression of a melancholy not human.

"Where are we?" I inquired, for I did not recognize my surroundings.

"You are far from home, but in a moment you may be there."

"What? Must I trust myself to you again?"

"I have done you no harm and will let none come to you. We can fly till dawn, not later. I can take you wherever you may desire — to the ends of the earth. Resign yourself to me; say once more, 'take me.'"

"Then — 'take me.'"

Again she clasped me. I was lifted from the ground and we floated in air.

Visions: A Phantasy

VI.

"WHITHER?" she asked me.

"On, straight on."

"But here are trees."

"Rise above them — only gingerly."

We soared upward and took once more an onward course. Instead of grass, the tops of the trees waved under our feet. The wood, seen from above, presented a singular appearance with its moon-lighted, prickly back. It was like some monstrous sleeping creature, and the low, steady rustling of the leaves, like measured breath, carried the resemblance yet farther. Now and then we passed above a little clearing, along whose edge a charmingly indented line of shadow lay. Occasionally we heard below us the plaintive cry of a hare, nearer, the hoot of owls rang dolefully; the air was full of wild and piny smells; on all sides the moonlight lay absolute and cold, and high above our heads shone the Pleiades. Speedily we left the wood behind us, and debouched upon a plain through which some stream ran like a ribbon of mist. We flew along its bank over bushes that were still and heavy with dampness. Here the little waves swelled blue on the river, there they rose dark and threatening. Sometimes a fine faint fragrance rose in a wonderful fashion, as if the water were taking life and soul; it was where the water-lilies unfolded their white petals in a maidenly splendor, conscious that no hand could reach them. The whim seized me to gather one of these, and behold me already at the surface of the stream. There was an unpleasant sensation of moisture in my face as I broke the tough stem of a great flower. We flew from shore to shore like the jack-o'-lanthorns which we saw glittering about us, and which we seemed to chase. At times we hit upon whole families of wild ducks squatting in a circle in a hollow of the reeds, but they did not stir; it was a chance if one or another would drowsily withdraw its head from its wing, look about it, and hasten to bury its beak again in the soft down, or make a

Visions: A Phantasy

feeble cackling accompanied by a shake of the whole body. We roused a heron; he emerged from a clump of willows, stretched his legs, spread his clumsy wings, and flapped heavily away. Nowhere did a fish leap in the water, apparently they also slept. I had by this time become accustomed to the sensation of flying, and even began to find it agreeable; every one who has dreamed of flying will understand this. I began to scrutinize the wonderful being who bore me, and whom I had to thank for these incredible experiences.

Visions: A Phantasy

VII.

IT had the appearance of a woman with delicate, not Russian, features. Grayish-white, nearly transparent, with scarcely perceptible shading, it reminded me of an alabaster vase, and once more seemed suddenly, strangely familiar to me.

"May I talk to you?" I asked it.

"Speak."

"I see a ring on your finger. You have lived on earth then, have been married?"

I stopped, but there was no answer.

"What is your name, or rather what was your name?"

"You may call me Ellis."

"Ellis! That is an English name. Are you an Englishwoman? Have you known me before?"

"No."

"Why have you appeared to me then?"

"I love you."

"Well — does this satisfy you?"

"Yes; we are flying and circling together in pure space."

"Ellis!" I cried, "can it be that you are a lost soul?"

My companion's head sank. "I do not understand," she whispered.

Visions: A Phantasy

"I conjure you in the name of God" — I began.

"What are you saying?" she asked, bewildered. And I fancied that the arm that surrounded me like a chill girdle, trembled slightly.

"Do not fear, my beloved," Ellis said, "do not fear." Her face turned to mine and approached it closely, and I felt a curious sensation on my lips, like the prick of a fine needle.

Visions: A Phantasy

VIII.

I LOOKED down. We had again ascended to a tremendous height and were flying over a large city unknown to me, which was built on the side of a high hill. Church-spires rose here and there from the dark mass of roofs and gardens, a bridge arched the river-bend, everything lay in the deepest stillness, bound in sleep. Domes and crosses glimmered faintly in the peaceful light; a gray-white road ran still and straight as an arrow from one end of the city and vanished still and straight in the dim distance among the monotonous fields.

"What is this city?" I asked.

" — sow."

" — sow is in the — schen province, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Then we are a long way from home."

"For us distance is not."

"Truly?" A sudden recklessness awoke in me. Take me to South America then."

"To America — there I cannot. There it is day."

"So, we are birds o' night then, both of us. Well, wherever you can, only let it be right far."

"Shut your eyes and hold your breath," was Ellis's response, and we began to move with the swiftness of a hurricane. With stunning violence the wind rushed past my ears.

Visions: A Phantasy

We stopped, but the rushing sound did not cease. On the contrary, it increased to a frightful roar, like a thunder peal.

“Now you can open your eyes,” Ellis said.

Visions: A Phantasy

IX.

I OBEYED. Good Heavens, where am I?

Over me heavy clouds are hurrying across the sky like a herd of angry beasts, and below is another monster, the sea, in wildest rage. White foam is spouting and seething madly, waves tower mountain-high and dash themselves with hoarse fury against a gigantic, pitch-black reef. Everywhere the howling of the tempest, the icy breath of the revolted elements, the hollow roar of the breakers, through which at times I caught something like loud lamentations, distant cannon and the peal of bells; ear-splitting grate and crunch of the chalk cliffs, the sudden cry of an unseen gull, and against the gray horizon the outline of a reeling vessel — everywhere confusion, horror, and death. My head swam, my heart stopped; I closed my eyes anew.

“What is that and where are we?”

“Off the southerly coast of the Isle of Wight, before the Blackgang Rock where so many vessels are lost,” replied Ellis, this time with great distinctness of tone, and, as I fancied, a shade of joyous excitement

“Take me away — away from here — home.”

I shrank into myself and pressed my hands over my eyes. I could feel that we were moving more swiftly than before; already the wind ceased to howl and shriek, it blew evenly in my face, but so strongly that I could hardly breathe.

“Take your foot-hold,” I heard Ellis say.

I made a mighty effort to regain my full consciousness and the mastery of myself. I felt the ground beneath my feet, but could hear no more than if everything about me lay dead; only on my own

Visions: A Phantasy

temples the veins throbbed violently, unevenly, and with a little inward ringing; I was still half fainting. But I stood up and opened my eyes.

Visions: A Phantasy

X.

WE were on the bank of my own pond. Straight before me I could see through the slender willow leaves the glassy surface of the water, dappled here and there with mist. On the right was a ryefield in tremulous motion, on the left rose steady and dewy-wet the trees of my garden. The morning had already breathed on them. In the empty gray sky a pair of narrow clouds hung like smoke-wreaths; they were russet, the first faint hint of dawn had reached them, God knows how; the eye could not distinguish as yet any spot on the wide horizon where the daylight should break. The stars were gone, there was no stir yet in the magical half-light everything drew consciously to its awakening.

“Morning, morning is here!” Ellis murmured in my ear. “Farewell till to-morrow.”

I turned to her. She rose, lightly swaying, from the ground, and lifted both arms above her head. Head, arms, and shoulders were suddenly suffused with a warm, rosy flesh tint, the fire of life glowed in the shadowy eyes, a smile of secret joy played over the scarlet lips, it was a charming woman all at once who stood before me. But almost instantly she sank back as if exhausted, and melted away like mist.

I stood motionless.

When things about me had reassumed the aspects of ordinary life, I looked round and it seemed to me as if the rosy glow that had irradiated the form of my shadowy companion had not faded, but still permeated the air and surrounded me on every side. It was the Dawn. An irresistible languor crept over me, and I went to the house. As I was passing the hennery my ear caught the first morning gabble of the young geese (of all winged creatures these are the earliest to stir) and I saw the jackdaws perched on the ridge-pole busily preening their feathers and outlined sharply against the milky-colored sky. From time to time they all flew off

Visions: A Phantasy

simultaneously and after a short flight settled again silently in their old places. From the wood at hand sounded twice or thrice the shrill cry of a mountain cock that had alighted in the dewy grass to seek for berries there. With a slight chilliness in all my limbs I reached my own bed and sank at once into a profound sleep.

Visions: A Phantasy

XI.

ON the following night as I neared the oak tree, Ellis glided to meet me as toward a familiar friend. Nor did I experience the horror of yesterday in her presence, indeed I was almost glad to see her; I did not even speculate on what might happen, but only desired to be taken to some great distance and to some interesting places.

Ellis placed her arm about me and our flight began.

"Fly with me to Italy," I whispered in her ear.

"Where you will, my beloved," answered Ellis in low glad tones, and turned her face to mine with a gentle caressing movement. She did not seem so nebulous as on the previous night; more substantial, more womanly, she brought to my recollection the beautiful creature who had vanished from me in the dawn.

"To-night is a festal night," she continued. "It falls but seldom; when seven times thirteen — "

Here some words escaped me.

"On this night one can see things hidden at other times."

"Ellis!" I entreated, "who are you then? Tell me at last!"

But she silently raised one white arm above her head.

There in the dark sky where her finger pointed, a comet gleamed like a red ribbon among the stars.

"Who am I to understand you?" I began. "Do you mean that as yonder comet wanders forever between stars and planets, you wander between men and — what other race, Ellis?"

Visions: A Phantasy

Ellis's hand covered my eyes. It seemed to me as if a thick river-fog veiled them.

"To Italy! to Italy!" she whispered. "This is a festal night."

Visions: A Phantasy

XII.

THE mist before my face parted; I saw a vast plain under me. Already I could perceive by the warm, soft air which fanned my cheek that I was no longer in Russia, nor did the plain which I saw bear any resemblance to our Russian steppes. This was a vast dark expanse, apparently quite waste, not even grass-grown, with here and there pools of stagnant water which shone like the fragments of a shattered mirror, and in the far distance I vaguely recognized the still unrippled sea. Large stars shone through the rents of the clouds; a ceaseless thousand-voiced, yet not a loud hum, rose up on all sides; wonderfully it rang, this pervading, drowsy murmur, this night voice of the wilderness.

"The Pontine Marshes," Ellis said. "Do you hear the frogs? Do you smell the sulphur?"

"The Pontine Marshes!" I repeated with a sudden sense of depression. "Why should we loiter over so dreary a place? Let us hasten to Rome."

"Rome is not far," Ellis replied; "prepare yourself!"

Our flight was along the old road from Latium. A wild ox lazily stretched his rough, shapeless head with its shaggy mane and its curving horns up from the sticky slime. He glared about him with his little evil eyes and blew a cloud of steam from his wet nostrils, as if he were defiantly conscious of our presence.

"We are nearing Rome!" whispered Ellis. "Look, look up!" I raised my eyes.

What is the black line there at the world's edge? Are those the high arches of a giant bridge? What is the stream that flows beneath? Why is it broken here and there? No, this is no bridge, it is an old aqueduct. Round us lies the sacred Campagna; there in the distance

Visions: A Phantasy

are the Alban Hills, the rising moon gilds their summits and softens the ridge-line of the aqueduct.

We checked ourselves abruptly, and hung poised in the air above a lonely ruin. No one could have declared its use in other times, whether palace, strong-hold or mausoleum. Black ivy clung to it on every side with its fatal embrace; the half-crumbled walls yawned like a vengeance below us. A damp odor of decay rose from this heap of thickset stones, from which the coating of plaster had long since mouldered away.

"Here!" Ellis said, and stretched out her hand. "Here! Say three times loudly, the name of the great Roman."

"What will follow?"

"You will see."

I reflected for a moment. "Divus Caius Julius Cæsar!" I shouted suddenly, "Divus Caius Julius Cæsar," I repeated yet more loudly, "Cæsar!"

Visions: A Phantasy

XIII.

SCARCELY had the echo of my last word died away when I perceived —

I can with difficulty express what it was. At first I heard something like a vague, hardly distinguishable, yet ceaselessly repeated clamor of trumpets and applause. It seemed as if somewhere, in an unfathomable depth, at a measureless distance, I could hear the tumult of a mighty throng, swelling and subsiding, one calling to another with faint cries as in dreams. The air was set in motion; a new kind of darkness brooded over the ruin. And next I seemed to see myriads of shadowy figures, millions of shapes, some round like helmets, some long extended spears; in the moonlight these spears and helmets glittered like blue sparks, and the whole immense troop swarmed ever nearer and nearer, more and more distinct grew the stormy sounds. An impalpable force, strong enough to move the world in space, appeared to impel the throng onward, but as yet no single form stood plainly out. Suddenly a thrill seemed to pass through the whole great body; it parted in monstrous waves and made room — “*Cæsar, Cæsar venit!*” rang the voices with a sound like a wind-swept forest, and a pale, stern face, the eyelids drooping, the forehead crowned with a laurel wreath, gradually detached itself to my vision. The head of the Emperor!

Language has no words to express the frenzy or horror that I felt at this sight. I believe that I must have died, had this head raised its eyes or opened its lips.

“*Ellis!*” I groaned, “I will not — I cannot! Away from this awful place, in God’s name, away!”

“*Faint heart!*” she murmured, but our flight began. The brazen, and this time, the thunderous cry of the legions rose again, but behind me, and then the darkness swallowed all.

Visions: A Phantasy

XIV.

"LOOK round you," said Ellis, "and calm yourself."

I obeyed and the first impression was so exquisite that I gave a sigh of relief. A soft silvery radiance — or was it mist? surrounded me completely. At first I could distinguish nothing, the blue light blinded me, but soon the outlines of beautiful mountains and forests began to stand out; a sheet of water lay widespread under us with the stars glittering, reflected in its depths, and with ripples that caressed, murmuring, the shore. The perfume of orange blossoms stole up to me, and like the wave beats and at first blended with them, the fresh, pure tones of a woman's voice pulsed the air. The odor, the sound drew me downward; I let myself sink to a stately marble chateau that gleamed white in a grove of cypresses. The singer's voice streamed out of the wide-set windows, the water washed softly under the very walls of the building, and just opposite, completely mantled with orange and laurel shrubs, flooded with moonlight and tricked with many a fair statue and slender column, a round high island rose from the water's lap.

"Isola Bella," Ellis told me. "Lago Maggiore."

An "ah!" was my only answer; I sank lower and lower down. Louder and clearer the woman's voice sounded from the chateau; it compelled me irresistibly, I must see the face of the singer who filled with such strains such a night. We stopped before one of the windows.

In the middle of a room decorated in the Pompeiian manner and resembling an old temple more than a modern salon, filled with Greek statues, Etruscan vases, exotic flowers, rare and costly stuffs, a young girl sat at a piano full in the light of two lamps that burned softly overhead in their alabaster vases. With head slightly thrown back and eyes half closed, she sang an Italian aria; she sang and smiled, yet at the same time her features wore an expression of glowing earnestness, token of the intensest enjoyment. She smiled,

Visions: A Phantasy

and it seemed as if the lusty young Faun of Praxiteles smiled back to her out of his corner behind the oleanders through the thin smoke that curled up from a brazen censer on a tripod. The beauty was alone. Entranced by the song, by the light, by the splendor and fragrance, and stirred to the depth of my soul by the sight of this young, tranquil, perfect happiness, I had entirely forgotten my companion and the extraordinary wise in which I had become the witness of a life so foreign and so far from my own, and I made a movement to step within the window and to speak.

Instantly my whole frame thrilled with a heavy electric shock. I turned, Ellis's face, spite of its transparency, was gloomy and menacing; in her suddenly wide-opened eyes gleamed wrathful fires.

"Come!" she said in an angry whisper, and again I felt tempest-speed, darkness, and the sensation of swooning. But this time it was not the cry of the legions but the voice of the songstress broken off at a high note that lingered in my ears.

We paused. The same high note rang steadily, continued, though I was conscious of another air and quite a different odor. A fresh, invigorating breeze, like one blowing over a large body of water, and the smell of hay, smoke, and hemp, met me. A second long-sustained note followed the first, then a third, and with an expression so simple, a modulation so familiar and homely, that I said to myself on the spot, "That is one of Russia's sons who sings a Russian ballad." In the same instant everything about me grew clear.

Visions: A Phantasy

XV.

WE found ourselves over a flat shore. To the left extended endlessly, mown meadows with enormous hay-stacks here and there; to the right, just as endlessly, spread the glassy surface of a broad stream. A little way out from shore some boats swung duskily at their moorings, their slender masts swaying to and fro like idly pointing fingers. From one of these boats came the tones of the pathetic song that had fallen on my ear. On the same boat a fire was burning, whose long red reflection quivered along the water like a snake. Here and there, both on the water and on the land, but whether far or near the eye could not determine, was the glow of other fires; sometimes low, sometimes brilliantly blazing. Countless crickets were chirping away, recalling without resembling the noise of the frogs in the Pontine Marshes, and from time to time the dim, low-bending heavens rang with the mystical cry of some unfamiliar bird.

“We are in Russia?” I asked of Ellis.

“That is the Volga,” she replied.

We pursued our way along its shore. “Why did you snatch me away from that glorious spot?” I began. “What was your grudge? It is not possible that you were jealous?”

Ellis’s lips moved a little, and there was a threatening flash of her eye. But her features took directly their usual fixed expression.

“Take me home,” I demanded.

“Nay, wait,” Ellis said, imploringly. “To-night is a night of marvels, and the opportunity will not soon return. You shall witness — only wait.”

And we took sudden flight obliquely across the Volga, low, close to the water and darting like two swallows before a storm. Under us surged the billows, a cutting wind struck us in powerful gusts, and

Visions: A Phantasy

soon the lofty bank began to ride before us. Steep cliffs, jagged with deep ravines appeared, to one of which we drew near.

“Shout ‘Sarin Nakitschu!’”* breathed Ellis in my ear.

*The cry of the pirates of the Volga on attacking a vessel.

I thought of the panic that I had experienced at the appearance of the Roman legions; I felt, besides, weariness and a curious sense of gloom, and I struggled to resist the saying of the fatal words, sure beforehand that at their repetition something alarming would come to pass. But half against my will my lips unclosed and I called in the same unwilling manner, with a voice that was weak and thin “‘Sarin Nakitschu!’”

Visions: A Phantasy

XVI.

FOR a moment there was no change, as it had been before the Roman ruin, but suddenly a boisterous *burlakisches* * laughter pealed close beside me, and something fell with a splash and began to gasp. I started, there was nothing to be seen, yet the sound was echoed loudly from the bank, and in another instant a deafening tumult had arisen on every side. What sound was that mingled in this chaos? Shriek and moan, curses and laughter, laughter dominating all, stroke of oar and hatchet, crashing sounds as of doors and chests broken in, the creak of cordage and pulleys, the stamping of horses, clanking of chains, whistling of the wind, hollow roar and crackling of a conflagration, drunken songs, confused cries, passionate weeping, despairing entreaties, imperious commands, the death-rattle, shrill piping of orders, screeches, and the tramp of many feet. "Strike! To the yard-arm! Overboard with him! Off with his head! Good! Good! No quarter!" It was all perfectly distinct, even to the panting of the breathless, hurrying men; yet all around, as far as the eye could reach, everything remained the same, the waves rolled gloomily by the desolate, bare shore — that was all.

* "Burlak" is the name given to the sailors on river craft, especially on the Volga.

I turned to Ellis, but she laid her finger on her lips.

"Stepan Timopheitch! Stepan Timopheitch comes!" rose a shout, "our captain, our benefactor, our father!" And although there was nothing visible, I knew that a gigantic form was advancing toward me. "Frolka! Dog! Where art thou?" thundered a terrible voice. "So! Fire it on every side and out with your axes!"

I felt the heat of a fire close at hand, and a suffocating smell of tar and smoke reached me; at the same time something warm like blood sprinkled my hands and face. Wild laughter burst forth on every side.

Visions: A Phantasy

Consciousness forsook me. When I came to myself, Ellis and I were floating quietly along the familiar edge of my own woodland, straight to the old oak tree.

“Do you see that path?” Ellis said to me. “The one yonder, dim in the moonlight, where two young birches let their branches hang? Will you enter it?” I felt myself so shaken, so exhausted, that I could only sigh, “Home, home.”

“You are at home,” answered Ellis.

In fact I stood directly in front of my own door and alone. Ellis had vanished. The watch-dog approached me, snuffed at me distrustfully, and ran howling away.

I dragged myself heavily to my bed, threw myself upon it without undressing, and slept.

Visions: A Phantasy

XVII.

THE next morning I had a headache so severe that I could hardly stir, yet my bodily pain was the lightest; regret and vexation gnawed at me.

I was extremely annoyed at myself. "Fainthearted!" I ceaselessly repeated. "Yes, Ellis was right. Why did I fear? How could I let the chance slip by un-used? I might have seen Cæsar himself — and was half dead with fright — must need screech and hide my face like a child afraid of a whipping. Stenka Rasin — that was a different matter. As a nobleman and a landholder — but even here was it worth while to be so panicstricken? O fainthearted! fainthearted!"

"Is it possible that I have only dreamed all this?" I queried at last. I called my housekeeper.

"Marfa, when did I go to bed last night, do you remember?"

"But who can tell that, gracious master? It must have been late enough. At twilight you left the house and after midnight you were running round your chamber. Decidedly it must have been near morning; yes, decidedly. And so the night before last. Ah! some care must lie heavy on you?"

"Lo!" I thought. "No doubt about the expedition then. Well, how do I look to-day?" I added aloud.

"How do you look? Na, let us see. But weak. And you are pale, gracious little master, not the smallest trace of color in your cheeks."

I shrank a little and sent Marfa away.

"This will certainly bring a man to suicide or to madness," I said to myself, sitting at my window. "I must drive it all out of my head. The experiment is too dangerous. And now I can feel that my heart is beating in a very unusual way. And I remember that while I am

Visions: A Phantasy

flying it seems as if some one were sucking the blood out of it, something trickling out of it, as in spring the sap runs out of a fir tree that is cut. It is a pity. And then Ellis — she plays with me as a cat does with a mouse — it is beyond a question that she is evilly inclined. I will trust myself to her for the last time, will see my fill and then — . But suppose that she really sucks my blood? That is a horrible idea! Besides it is impossible that motion so rapid should not be hurtful. I have heard that in England it is forbidden by statute to travel more than one hundred and twenty versts an hour on the railways.”

And so forth. I reasoned with myself all day, and at nine o'clock I stood waiting at the oak.

Visions: A Phantasy

XVIII.

THE night was dull and overcast, with a small rain in the air. To my amazement there was no one at the tree. I walked round it several times, went to the edge of the wood, returned, peered sharply into the shadows; no one to be seen. For awhile I waited, then I called Ellis by name, softly at first, then more and more loudly, but she did not make her appearance. I was disappointed, aggrieved even; my earlier suspicions had vanished and only the thought remained that my companion might return no more.

“Ellis! Ellis! Will you not come to me?” I cried for the last time.

A raven that my voice had disturbed from sleep, began to stir in the top of a tree near me; he hopped from twig to twig and flapped his wings. Ellis came not.

I turned back to the house with head hanging. Before me rose black the clump of willows at the brink of my pond, and the light in my study flickered through the trees; flickered a moment and went out, as if it had been the eye of some one watching me who found himself discovered. All of a sudden there was a swift, rushing sound behind me as if the air were cloven, and something seized and lifted me in very much the same way that a hawk pounces upon a chicken. It was Ellis who had swooped upon me thus. I felt her cheek against mine, her arm encircled my body like a girdle, and like a sharply cold breeze her whisper reached my ear: “I am come.” I was startled and delighted at once. We floated along at no great height from the ground.

“Did you not mean to come to-night?” I asked.

“Did you desire me? Do you love me? O you are my very own!”

Ellis’s words made me a little uncomfortable. I did not know how to reply.

Visions: A Phantasy

"They kept me," continued she. "They watched me."

"Who watched you?"

"Where will you go?" asked Ellis, leaving my question unanswered, after her usual fashion.

"Take me to Italy, to that lake — you remember?"

Ellis moved a little away from me and shook her head, denying this. When first I discovered that she had ceased to be transparent, and that her face had also gained coloring; a clear, rosy tint was spread over the mist white. I looked into her eyes and had an uneasy sensation; in these eyes something seemed to stir with the slow, continuous, uncanny motion of a chilled snake that is beginning to return to life under the rays of the sun.

"Ellis," I cried, "who are you? Tell me who are you?"

But Ellis only shrugged her shoulders.

It vexed me. I resolved to have my revenge upon her, and the idea came suddenly to me that she should take me to Paris. "You shall have food enough for your jealousy," I thought. "Ellis," I said aloud, "do great cities terrify you. Paris, for example?"

"No."

"No? Not even the places where it is as light as the Boulevards are?"

"It is not the light of day."

"That is fortunate. You shall take me then to the Boulevard des Italiens."

Ellis threw one end of her wide flowing sleeve over my head. A curious faint smell, like poppies, overpowered me, and everything vanished, light, even consciousness itself. Only the assurance of

Visions: A Phantasy

living remained in some way; nor was there anything disagreeable in the rest.

By and by the odor was withdrawn abruptly as Ellis freed my head from her drapery, and I saw beneath me a mass of buildings closely packed together, brilliant light, motion, bustle — it was Paris on which I looked down.

Visions: A Phantasy

XIX.

I HAD been in Paris and at once I recognized the place to which Ellis had directed our course. It was the garden of the Tuileries, with the old chestnuts, iron gratings, the moat, and the brutal Zouaves at their posts. Past the palace and the church of St. Roche, on whose steps the first Napoleon spilled French blood for the first time, we stayed our flight high above the Boulevard des Italiens where the third Napoleon did the same thing and with the same results. Crowds of people, fops, young and old, workmen, women gayly apparelled, thronged the promenades; restaurants, and cafés were brilliantly lighted, cabs and carriages of every sort and appearance rolled along the Boulevard; wherever the eye fell it was on glare and bustle. Yet, strange as it may seem, I felt no desire to leave my pure, dim, airy height to mingle with these human ant-swarms. Life was too crowded; it seemed to ascend to us, a heavy, heated, redly-glowing vapor, half fragrant, half nauseous. I was still hesitating what to do when suddenly, sharp as the clash of steel on steel, the voice of a street lorette reached my ear. Like a poisonous tongue it darted up and stung me. I pictured to myself the sharp, greedy, shallow French face with vicious eyes, rouged and powdered, hair crimped, and a bouquet of artificial flowers, nails like claws, and a deformity of crinoline. Then I thought in turn of one of my own countrymen in his foolish gambols after this coy damsel. I imagined him disconcerted to boorishness and confused by the rapid nasal speech, wearied by the effort to attain the elegant manners of the waiters at Vefour's; whispering, fluttering about her, seeking to ingratiate himself; and I was seized with disgust. "No," I thought, "small cause for Ellis to be jealous here."

Meanwhile, I became aware that we were sinking, and that Paris with all its tumult and confusion, was coming near and nearer.

"Stop!" I said, turning to Ellis. "Do you not feel a sense of feverish oppression here?"

"You yourself bade me bring you hither."

Visions: A Phantasy

"I have changed my mind. I recall the wish. Take me away, Ellis, I entreat you. Look, there is at this moment Prince Kulmametow sauntering along the Boulevard, and there is his friend Serge Waraxin who is beckoning with his delicately-gloved hand and calling, 'Ivan Stepanitsch! *allons souper vite, j'ai engagé Rigolboche en person.*' Yes, take me away from this Mabilie, these maisons Dorées, from Gandin's and the Biches, from the Jockey-club and Figaro, these smooth shaven soldier faces and these smooth plastered barracks, from the sergents de ville with their goatees, from the domino-players in the cafés and the players at the Bourse; from the red ribbons in coats and paletôts, from M. de Foy the inventor '*de la spécialité de mariage,*' and the consultations gratis of Dr. Charles Albert; from liberal journals and official brochures, from French comedy and French opera, French wit and French witnesses — away! away!"

"Look down," Ellis answered quietly. "You are no longer over Paris."

I turned my glance to earth. It was true. A dusky plain, streaked here and there with white highways, seemed to be flying from under us, and far behind us on the horizon, like the glare of a monstrous conflagration, lay the wide reflection of the lights of the world's capital.

Visions: A Phantasy

XX.

AGAIN a mist before my eyes; again my senses failed me. Finally it cleared.

What is it now below me? What is that park with its avenues of trimmed lindens, its firs standing singly and cut fan-shaped, its summer-houses à la Pompadour, its statues of nymphs and satyrs after Bernini's school; its rococo tritons in winding artificial lakes which are kept within their borders by a marble rim? Can it be Versailles? No, Versailles it is not. A tiny palace, also rococo, is half hidden behind a group of gnarled oaks. The moon, covered with light clouds, shines but dimly, and a thin mist spreads over the ground; the eye cannot distinguish if it is moonlight or vapor. Swans are asleep in the basins, their long backs gleam frostily, and glowworms glitter like diamonds in the blue shadow at the statues' bases.

"We are at Mannheim," Ellis said; "that is the park of Schwetzingen."

"In Germany then," I thought, and listened for some sound. Silence; only that from somewhere came the dull murmur of a waterfall. It seemed to be repeating one strain; "Yes, yes, yes; forever yes." All at once I believed that I saw in one of the avenues between the formal hedge rows, a cavalier in red-heeled shoes with gold-embroidered coat, lace ruffles, and poignard; on his arm hung a dame with powdered hair and many-colored silken gown. Wondrous pale faces which I am eager to scrutinize closely, but they fade, and only the water murmurs as before.

"Those are ghosts that are walking," Ellis whispered. "Yesterday you could have seen many more of them. But to-day they shun mortal eyes. Let us go on."

We ascended and flew on. So still and even was our flight, that I could hardly persuade myself that it was we who moved, and not

Visions: A Phantasy

the earth which sped beneath us. Dark and billowy, some forest-clad mountains came in sight; they loomed up before us, swept toward us. Already they are passed with all their curves, their ravines, the glimmering lights in the sleep-bound villages, the rushing brooks in the valleys, and before us yet other hills swell and sink behind. We are in the midst of a wilderness.

Mountains and yet more mountains appear: and forests, beautiful, old far-reaching. The night is so clear that I can distinguish easily the different trees; the silver firs, with their straight, shining stems, are the loveliest of all. Now and again deer peep out of their covert, slender and alert they stand and listen, turning their delicate ears from side to side continually. On the summit of a naked rock an old castle rears its dismal, shattered walls; how peacefully the stars shine above the ruins. >From a small dark lake rises like a lamentation the croak of frogs; it seems to me that I can hear yet other long-drawn tones, mournful as those of an Æolian harp. It is the land of romance. The same fine, moonlit mist that had charmed me in Schwetzingen covers everything here, and the more remote the mountains the thicker their veil. I can count five or six distinct gradations of shadow on the mountain-slopes, and over all this soundless variety the moon reigns in melancholy splendor. The wind is soft and light. My mood is also equable and gently melancholy.

"Ellis, is not this place dear to you?"

"Nothing is dear to me."

"Indeed? And I — ?"

"You — yes;" is her tranquil answer.

I fancy that her arm clasps me more closely than before.

"On! on!" she says with a kind of cold exaltation.

"On!" I repeat.

Visions: A Phantasy

XXI.

SOME strong, clear, shrill tones make their way to us of a sudden; first above, then somewhat in advance of us.

“Those are belated cranes flying northward,” Ellis said. “Would you like to join them?”

“By all means.”

Upwards we swung and in a moment more found ourselves near the moving troop.

They were large and beautiful birds, thirteen in all. Their flight was in the shape of a triangle, firm and measured the broad wings beat the air. With head and legs stretched stiff, and proudly opposing breasts, they flew on, steadily and so swiftly that they made a whistling in the air. It was a curious sight to see this warm, strong life, this unbending will at such a height and such a distance from any breathing thing. Victorious and pauseless the cranes parted the air, now and then exchanging a cry with their leader; there was something proud and grave, a certain unwavering self-reliance in this call, this interchange of speech in the cloud confines. “We will, at any cost, reach our goal,” they seemed to encourage each other in turn. The thought rose involuntarily that there were but few people in Russia — yet why should I say Russia alone? — in the whole world there but few who would bear a comparison with these birds.

“We are flying in the direction of Russia,” breathed Ellis. It was not the first time that I had noticed that she seemed to divine my thoughts. “Shall we turn?”

“Yes, let us turn back — or stay; I have been in Paris, take me now to St. Petersburg.”

“At once?”

Visions: A Phantasy

“At once. But cover my head with your mantle or I shall be giddy.”

Ellis extended her arm, but before the mist veiled me I felt on my lips the prick of a firm, sharp needle.

XXII.

"AT-TENTION!" fell on my ear with long drawn cry. "At-tention!" a second answered it from a distance. "At-tention!" a third died away somewhere at the very end of the world. I aroused myself. A lofty gilded spire met my eye, and I recognized the fortress Petropawlowsk.

Pallid, northern night! Is it really night and not rather a wan and sickly day? I have never liked the nights of St. Petersburg, but this time I experienced actual fear; Ellis's features vanished utterly; she melted like a morning mist before July sun, and I saw distinctly my own body as it floated alone in air with all its weight, at a height equal to the Alexander column. So here is St. Petersburg. Yes, not to be mistaken. These gray, broad, empty streets, these whitish-yellow houses, plaster-covered and with plaster peeling from them, with their deep-set windows and glaring sign-boards, with sheet-iron pent-houses over the entrances and the miserable huckster stalls; these gables, inscriptions, sentry boxes; the gilded dome of St. Isaac's Church, the gay Exchange, overloaded with ornament, the granite walls of the fortress; the boats laden with hay or wood, this mingled smell of dust, cabbages, tan, and stables; these hostlers apparently petrified in their sheepskins before the house-doors, and coachmen sound asleep upon their waiting droschkas; yes, it is unmistakably our northern Palmyra. Everything is easily to be recognized; everything is unnaturally distinct and clear, and everything lies in sombre sleep. The twilight glow, a kind of swooning redness, is not yet gone and will not vanish before morning from the white starless heavens; it is reflected in long streaks on the mirror-like surface of the Neva, that hardly seems to move, so quietly its cold blue waters flow.

"Let us fly hence?" Ellis implored me.

And without waiting for an answer she bore me over the Neva to the Palace yard. We heard steps and voices under us, and up the street came a little party of young fellows with haggard faces, still talking

Visions: A Phantasy

over the night's exploits. "Second Lieutenant Stolpatof, No. 7!" called suddenly a half-asleep soldier on watch beside a pile of rusty cannon-balls. Somewhat further, at the open window of a house, I saw a girl in a fanciful silken garb, sleeveless, with a string of pearls in her hair and a cigarette in her mouth. She was completely absorbed in a book, one of the productions of our latest Juvenal.

"Let us leave this," I said to Ellis.

An instant later and we were already passing the dismal fir-forests and swamps that environ St. Petersburg. We held our way straight south. Heaven and earth took momentarily a darker coloring. The unwholesome day, the unwholesome night, the unwholesome city, all were left behind.

XXIII.

OUR flight was less rapid than usual, and I could follow with my eye the unfamiliar aspect of the familiar ground as it unrolled like an endless panorama before me. Woods, bushes, fields, ravines, streams, occasionally villages and churches; then fields, woods, bushes, and ravines again. I had a feeling of sadness and also of indifference, almost of ennui; but not in the least because it was Russia over which we were taking our flight. No; the earth in and for itself; this flat plain that spread beneath me, the whole planet with its short-lived, helpless races, oppressed with poverty, sickness and care, chained to a clod of dust; this rough and brittle crust, this sediment upon our planet's fiery core on which a mould is grown that we call by the high-sounding title of the vegetable world; these men-flies, a hundred times less useful than the flies themselves, with their dwellings of clay and the fugitive trace of their little monotonous lives, their eternal strife against the inevitable and the immutable — how it shocked me! My heart beat heavily in my bosom; the desire to contemplate any longer these unmeaning pictures had entirely left me. Yes, it was ennui that I felt, but something sharper than ennui as well. Not once did I feel pity for my fellow-men; every other thought was swallowed up in one that I hardly dare to name; it was loathing, and the profoundest, deepest loathing of all was — for myself.

"O cease," breathed Ellis, "cease your thoughts, else it will be impossible for me to carry you. You are too heavy."

"Home!" I cried to her with the tone in which I had summoned my driver once when at four o'clock in the morning I took leave of the friends at Moskow with whom I had been discussing Russia's future. "Home!" I repeated and closed my eyes.

Visions: A Phantasy

XXIV.

IT was not long till I opened them. Ellis began to nestle against me in a singular way; she nearly stifled me. I turned my eyes upon her and the blood curdled in my veins. Every one will understand me who has ever chanced to catch an expression of extreme terror on a stranger's face without any suspicion of its cause. A transport of horror drew and distorted Ellis's pallid, almost blotted-out features. Never had I seen the like on mortal face; here was a bodiless, nebulous ghost, a shadow, and such rigidity of fear!

"Ellis! What is the matter with you?" I asked at last.

"He! It is he!" With difficulty she brought the words forth.

"He? Who is he?"

"Do not name him, do not name him," Ellis stammered in haste. "We must seek some refuge, else it is all at an end, and forever. Look! There!"

I turned my head to the side where her shuddering finger was pointing, and was conscious of Something — something that was indeed awful to look upon.

This something was the more frightful that it had no decided form. A clumsy, horrible, dark-yellow Thing, spotted like a lizard's belly, neither cloud nor smoke, was crawling snake-like over the earth. Its motion was measured, broad-sweeping from above to below and from below to above, like the ill-omened flight of a bird of prey that seeks its booty; from time to time it swooped upon the earth in an indescribable, hideous way; so the spider pounces upon the entrapped fly. Who or what art thou, grewsome Shape? Under its influence — I saw and felt this — everything shrivelled and grew rigid. A foul, pestilential chill spread upward. I felt myself fainting; my sight grew dim, my hair stood on end. It was a Power that was approaching; a power that knows no obstacle, that subjects

Visions: A Phantasy

everything to itself; that, blind and formless and senseless, sees everything, knows everything, controls everything; like a vulture selects its prey, like a snake crushes it and licks it with its deadly tongue.

“Ellis, Ellis,” I shrieked like a madman, “That is Death! The very, living Death himself!”

The lamentable sound that I had heard before escaped Ellis’s lips, only this time it was far more like a mortal cry of despair; and we flew on. Our flight was singularly and frightfully unsteady; Ellis turned over and over in the air, plunged first in one direction then in the other, like a partridge that, wounded unto death, still endeavors to distract the dog from her brood. But in the meanwhile long feelers, like extended arms, or rather lassos, had disengaged themselves from the lump, and were stretching out after us with groping movements. And then of a sudden it rose into the gigantic shape of a shrouded figure on a pale horse. It grew, filling the Heavens themselves. More agitated, more desperate became Ellis’s flight. “He has seen me — it is all over — I am lost,” I caught in broken whispers. “O miserable that I am! The opportunity so close! Life within my grasp! and now — nothingness — nothingness!”

I could bear it no longer. Consciousness left me.

XXV.

WHEN I came to myself I was lying on my back in the grass, and I felt all through my body a dull ache as if after a heavy fall. Morning flickered in the sky. I could clearly distinguish my surroundings. Not far off there was a willow-fringed road that ran beside a birch wood. The region seemed familiar. I began to recall what had happened to me, and could not repress a shudder as I remembered the last awful spectacle.

“But what can have terrified Ellis?” I thought. “Can she be subject to his power? Is she not immortal? How is it possible that she can be doomed to annihilation?”

A low moan sounded not far away. I hastily turned my head in that direction, and there, two paces from me, lay the motionless form of a young woman in a white garment, with thick, unbound hair, and shoulders bared. One arm was over head, the other had fallen across her bosom, the eyelids were closed, and the tightly-compressed lips were stained slightly with a reddish froth. Could it be Ellis? But Ellis was a ghost, and it was a real woman whom I saw. I crawled over to her and bent above her. “Ellis, is it you?” I cried. The eyelids quivered, slowly uplifted; dark, expressive eyes fixed themselves earnestly on my face, and in the next instant a warm, moist, fragrant mouth was pressed to mine, slender, strong arms clasped themselves round my neck, a hot breast swelled against my own. “Farewell! farewell!” the dying voice said, and everything disappeared.

I staggered to my feet like a drunken man, passed my hand across my forehead, and looked about me. I found myself on the — schen road, two versts from my country-seat. Before I reached home the sun had risen.

For some nights following this I waited, let me confess it, not altogether without fear, for the return of my companion, but she came no more. One evening, indeed, I stationed myself at the old place, at the old hour, but nothing unusual occurred. After all, I

Visions: A Phantasy

could not regret the end of so singular an intimacy. I pondered much and earnestly upon this inexplicable, incomprehensible experience, and had to come to the conclusion that not only positive science is in no condition to handle it, but that it is out of the range of legends and fairy tales even. Indeed, what was Ellis? A ghost, a wandering soul, an evil spirit, a sylph, a vampire, finally? At times the fancy possessed me that Ellis was in truth a woman whom I had known; and I ransacked my memory to find where I might have seen her before. Hold! a moment more and I have it! But it never came. Everything grew confused like a dream. Yes, I have thought much and, as is very often the case, have arrived at no conclusion. I could not bring myself to ask the advice or the opinion of others, for fear of being taken for a madman. At last I gave up all my gropings; to tell the truth, I had other things to think of. First, the emancipation of the serfs and the equal distribution of lands, etc., intervened; then the condition of my health, that has received a shock; I have pain in my chest, cough much, and suffer from sleeplessness. I am visibly growing thin. I am as yellow as a mummy. The doctor assures me that I suffer from consumption of the blood, calls my complaint by a Greek name, "*anæmie*," and declares that I must go to Gastein.

IVAN TURGENIEV.