



Yvonne A. Pereira
by the Spirits Leo Tolstoy and Charles

SUBLIMATION



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YVONNE A. PEREIRA

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By the Spirits

LEO TOLSTOY AND CHARLES

Translation by Aluizio Porcaro Rausch



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PREFACE

This book is not, properly speaking, new. Part of it, that is, the tales by the Spirit Leo Tolstoy, are precisely ten years-old. The last two chapters, signed by the entity Charles, are approximately thirty years-old. If you ask me the reason why they were saved for such a long time, I will not know what to answer. One could guess, however, that the benevolence of their spiritual authors was utilizing my forces in more challenging works, and left these ones, rather lighter, already drafted, for the final part of my psychographic-literary journey. In any case, here is SUBLIMATION. I feel happy to deliver it to the reader, because of the great emotions provided to me through the visions granted me during its reception, and the daily encounters with the two beloved entities who dictated them are the greatest gratitude I could feel and know in the fulfillment of mediumistic duty.

May the reader accept this book as the loving product of two great workers of the Spiritist field: Leo Tolstoy and Charles.

YVONNE A. PEREIRA

Rio de Janeiro, May 18, 1973

PRESENTATION

Many years ago, before abandoning to Earth my carnal spoils, I promised God and myself that I would write something to counter suicide. It was not possible for me, however, to fulfill this promise until now, because arguments and possibilities, with which to demonstrate the logic of the harm that suicide represents for Humanity, escaped me. Several times I was grieved by the news that one then another, and again another woman, carried away by the passion of human love, had copied the gesture of a certain famous hero from one of my romances,¹ offering themselves to the tragedy of suicide, inspired by her. In more than one book that I wrote, back then, I portrayed the suicide of its heroes, leaving out, however, the moral concept, the terrifying consequence of such a gesture in the After-Life, for those who do it on Earth. If the offenders were inspired by the stories told by me, which were frequently read and well received, I felt guilty for being cause of that misfortune, and I even came to regret the inspiration that led me to finish intimate and social dramas with suicides as impressive as the ones I created for my characters. I do penance because of this fault before God and the readers, declaring that I have been trying everything in order to repair it.

After a long time of patient expectation, I attained the means to initiate an attempt to fulfill the promise, at least in respect to literature. If my mind, conceiving literary suicides that molded other suicides, involved me in this tormented wavelength, today, having overcome the unbalance originated from it, I will try to comfort fragile hearts, hesitant in the difficult moments of ordeals, thus leading them away from the dreadful abyss.

May God bless the good souls who help me lift the weight of the remorse from the conscience, which had compromised my peace.

LEO TOLSTOY

Rio de Janeiro, June 13, 1973

¹ Ana Karenina.

1

OBSESSION

Leo Tolstoy

- “The observation demonstrates that, in the instant of death, the perispirit’s detachment is not suddenly complete: on the contrary, it happens gradually, and in a slowness highly variable according to each individual”.
- “These observations also prove that the affinity, persistent between soul and body, in certain individuals, is very burdensome at times, inasmuch as the Spirit may experience the horror of decomposition”.

(The Spirits’ Book, by Allan Kardec, 2nd part, chapter III, “On the Spirit’s return, when ceased corporeal life, to the spiritual life”, number 155, 32nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation²)

Katia Andreevna took the paper sheet from the servant’s hands, who gave it out of goodness, unbeknownst to the house’s administration. Katia thanked the servant tenderly, with a “God bless you, little mother”, spoken in a whisper, and started to write a letter to her friend Aglaida Petrovna, wife of a man knowledgeable in the matters related to the Spirits and the other world, that is, the world of the souls.

The story took place in a manor on the outskirts of Smolensky, not far from Moscow, I believe in the year 1907, but the letter was written in the private room number six of an asylum in Moscow.

Here is the letter:

“My dear friend Aglaida Petrovna:

It seems unbelievable that, after so many disappointments endured, confusion and expectation, my executioners (my family, if you prefer) would

lock me in a room, the very one I write from, with a single window secured by iron bars, like a prison window. The air here is humid, heavy, smelling like moldy clay, as any place not visited by the fresh air from the country or cleansed by the protecting sun rays. I shiver from cold in this dark and oppressive cubicle, my teeth grind, I don't know whether out of cold or anxiety, from feeling so lonely; my fingers, hardened, barely have dexterity to move the feather and write, and from here I don't even see the blue horizon, but for a pale strip of the atmosphere, where neither the perfumed breeze from a meadow in bloom nor the festive flocks of noisy swallows travel, even though spring is already in the middle of its stroll. And not even console me the solitude of hours, the sound of peasants laboring the farmed "deciatines", not even the sheeps' bleat or the cattle's moo, let alone the shepherd dogs' bark, the honk of wild geese, and the healthy laugh of our village's children, in frisky run-arounds.

All that, Aglaida Petrovna, my friend, was now substituted by the hallucinated scream of my misfortune fellows, by the laugh of hysteric agglomerates in the courtyard, by the blasphemies of the enraged ones that went insane, indeed, after so much misunderstood suffering, of such violence and unreasonableness of the treatments applied allegedly for recovery, and when no more capable to resist the disappointment of seeing themselves thus displaced from their own home, hurt by the longing for those they most loved and who were so ungrateful by throwing them in this sinister place, where they saw themselves buried alive before going mad... because, my friend, it was in here that they actually went mad: when they arrived, they were only afflicted by uncommon causes, which the respectable psychiatrists have not yet succeeded in understanding in order to quench...

I don't know, Aglaida Petrovna, my friend, if one day you tried to comprehend what, in reality, an asylum is. But, I am authorized to reveal to you that an asylum is the extension of a mythological hell, that not even the fiery imagination of our helpful "popes" manages to conceive. It certainly is the branch, if not the headquarters, of that hell which the reprobates of the other world created with the phantasmagoria of their own thoughts, prostituted by the seven deadly sins committed during life. What I know is that I stopped walking through these immense corridors, through the galleries and courtyards, so not to cross paths with those winged ghouls who, alongside us, those regarded as mentally ill, wander around all the corners of this

asylum: some, screaming alarmingly, as from reprobates, making us also scream from the terror that their hateful threats communicate to us; others, desperate and angry, avengers resulting from the visions of evils suffered in the past, inducing us also to uncontrollable fury due to the revolt their deeds awake in us, and others, such sufferers, ugly and repulsive, with their blazing eyes, their dark and torn garments, their long robes like haunted shrouds, that madness also reaches us and we start to laugh out of horror and terror, without realizing why we laugh, when we suffer so much, without being able to stop laughing, when our desire is rather to cry, as if our nerves, our minds, our psychic-vibrational strengths were all contaminated by a virus unknown to Humanity, a psychic virus that, without affecting our animal organic system, nonetheless ruins all our system of nerve vibrations and cerebral irradiations, reducing us to the abnormality that, several times, we feel constrained to. Sometimes, my dear Aglaida Petrovna, I find myself wondering, during the singular conversations that, lately, I have been having with winged individualities, unknown to me, who visit me, infusing me with courage and hope for better days,³ I wonder who the real insane are: us, who are confined in here, or those who raised this terrifying building, without requesting celestial intervention to cure us, once they themselves confess being incapable of doing it?

I am not crazy, I am pretty sure of it. The mad do not think, and I think and reflect deeply. The mad do not remember, while I remember even my childhood toys, even the ungratefulness with which the false friends repaid me the good I had done them. The mad also do not love, whilst I feel the heart full of holy emotions and painful longings when invoking my Theodor Theodorovitch. What happens with me, according to the winged individualities who, lately, kindly visit me, is a strange and beautiful phenomenon, although also dramatic, which I deem unknown to most men, once I never heard about it before. I see those who already died, Aglaida Petrovna, my friend! Yes, I see them, I talk to them, I laugh with some, I mingle with many, our conversation is normal, even though not pleasant, according to the character of my interlocutor, but no one believes that I can, in fact, do it, and so they declare I am insane. They put me in this cell exactly for this reason, despite my knowing I am absolutely not insane, as they suppose. However, I foresee that I will go mad from indignation, discomfort and astonishment if they retain me here without arranging legitimate means

for my cure. Aglaida Petrovna, my friend, these drugs they make me take, these pills, these powders, these infusions, and these shocks only manage to depress even further my organism and to excite my intimate revolt, deepening the worry of what happened to Theodor Theodorovitch has been causing me, an event that I do not understand, and which alarms me, confuses me to point of perplexity. I rather wish the comprehensive prayer of Love, the holy consolation of an invocation to the Creator in favor of what happens to me and to Theodor, because I consider that, if so many stars of Science cannot cure me of what I feel, it is because I am not sick, but I only struggle between forces unknown to men, as I was informed by my good winged visitors, forces that only God is sufficiently capable of dominating in order to solve.

However, I don't know whether you know how and why I am here. It all happened a few days after the disaster with my Theodor Theodorovitch.

Shaken by his unexpected alleged death, during a bear hunt, as you know, when he was hurt in the chest by a rifle shot, I spent those first days in crises of despair that completely disorganized my system of nerve vibrations, as the doctors here say. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, and I forgot my prayers to God to try to accept the situation. After thirty days, more or less, already exhausted from suffering, I managed to fall asleep late in the night. But, in a little while, maybe half an hour, maybe one hour, I am not sure, I woke up startled, hearing the screams from Theodor Theodorovitch, calling me:

- Katia Andreevna, Katienka, my darling, help me! They buried me alive, supposing I was dead, when I had just passed out! Save me, Katienka, me, you betrothed, your dear daddy! I am under the ground, Katienka, stuck in a grave in the cemetery, not able to get out!...

I got up from the bed in panic, but also crazy happy, realizing that my so beloved fiancé was alive. And, under the impulse of this alarm, I jumped outside the room, dressed up in a hurry, not to lose time, while answering Theodor, who continued calling for me:

- Theodor Theodorovitch, I will save you, my dear beloved, my husband, my daddy! Yes, I see you, I recognize you, I know you are alive, I hear what you say to me, you didn't die, no, and I will free you from your grave...

And I called “mamienka” and “batiuchka”⁴, so they could bring me a pickaxe, a hoe, and a shovel, and follow me to the cemetery, because Theodor was alive, was calling me and I should help him before the asphyxiation would involve him, causing his death.

With my screams, everyone in the house woke up and an indescribable conflict started. They grabbed me, detained me by force, not allowing me to get dressed decently, to put on the boots to go to the cemetery, because it was in the middle of the night and the last snows of the year were still falling, whitening the village’s streets.

I struggled furiously, repelling the oppression of those that were not more than soulless assassins, who had buried my Theodor alive and now prevented me from running to free him. However, everyone combined their strengths against me, they did not believe in me or they pretended not to believe, when I asked them to be silent a little so they would also hear Theodor’s screams for help. “Mamacha”⁵ was crying, kneeling down before her “icone”,⁶ repeating while zealously bowing:

*- My Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, our Redeemer, save my dear daughter from insanity, my poor girl suffers from the unexpected death of her beloved fiancé, whom she loved so much. Save her, save her, Lord! And I promise to give you two wax candles, each a meter tall, one from her, and one from myself!*⁷

My dad ran to the street saying that I raved and that it was necessary to find the doctor, even though it was in the middle of the night, while Illia and Yakov, twisting my arms backwards, held me secured by the hands, forcing me into a painful immobility.

However, in the following afternoon, I escaped from the vigilance they imposed on me, and managed to leave.

I took the hoe, the pickaxe and the shovel, then I connected, by myself, the sleigh to the white horse, which is meeker than the dapple-bay horse, and guided it easily, things I had never done before.

When I reached the cemetery, I ran to Theodor Theodorovitch’s still fresh grave, tired of the ride and trembling from distress. There he was, half body

outside the grave, not able to stand up and free himself from the pile of dirt and stones that held him. His eyes were frenzied, haggard, his mouth open as if struggling to inhale air without being able to, his hands clenched, grabbing the edge of the grave, as his face was so white and squalid that it, actually, looked like the face of a ghost.

- Help me, Katienka, save me. I am suffocating, stifled under the ground! I am alive, my dearling, and I am yours, don't you recognize me anymore? They thought I was dead and buried me alive!...

I did not flinch. It was necessary to show him that I recognized him, and that I continued to love him. I started to dig in order to free him, crazy from the happiness of finding him alive, and, to calm him down and to encourage him, while I removed the dirt, I started to tell him, in that decisive moment in our lives, our habitual words:

- I am here, Theodor Theodorovitch, the fiancé God gave me, my holy dear husband, and I will soon free you, be sure of it... Just a little longer, sweetness of my life, my daddy, while I remove this dirt with the hoe and shovel that I brought... and you will return home with me so we can plan our wedding, because the spring is coming and it was agreed that we would get married exactly now... Courage, courage, my Theodor Theodorovitch...

However, I did not manage to dig him up, because my tormentors arrived, that is, "mamienka", "batiuchka", Illia, Yakov, the neighbors, and even our "pope", who is very diligent in doing good to everyone around, but, this time, harmed me.

They grabbed me, tied me up with some ropes and took me home in a horrible cart, while I screamed desperately, asking them to let me save Theodor Theodorovitch from suffocating underground.

But they did not do it. Neither did I get discouraged, Aglaida Petrovna, my friend, because love is strong as the storm wind, invincible as the ocean, and I cannot stop obeying my Theodor's clamors, who is alive and suffering.

Days later (I don't know how many days, sometimes I feel that I forget things due to the anguish and distress that torture me), but, days later, as you see, the snow stopped falling and I noticed that. Spring had come, finally. My lover's voice kept calling me, anguished, desperate. It had been many nights

that I could not sleep, and I felt consumed. However, even like that, without sleep, it seemed like I dreamed... and so I would go to the edge of Theodor's grave, to visit him, I would see him desperate, and I would hear him say, disfigured by crying:

- See, Katienka, mommy, a disgrace happened to me. I am alive, and I am dead at the same time! I am lost in a nightmare that grabs me like the tentacles of an octopus to a human being, preventing me from reasoning. I see myself divided in two: one underground; the other, both underground and aboveground... One is alive and the other one is dead... I don't understand anything... Some soulless enemy practiced witchcraft against me... Maybe it was Nikolai Prokofitch, who liked you? Or maybe it was Yvan Semione, who coveted my race horse? Yes, I went mad from despair, without understanding what had happened to me. I am absorbed by a dementia that not even in hell exists. Help me, Katia Andreevna, if it is true that you love me... Call my brothers, my friends from the cavalry, the neighbors, the police... Free me from this unexplainable nightmare...

I dreamt. And so much I dreamt that, days later, I went out, resolved to do anything.

It was sunny and I realized that the sky was blue and clear, the trees decorated themselves with new foliage; the snow, melting away, dropped from the houses' cornices and from the pine branches, forming shining little streams across the ground, under the fluid light of the sun, while birds, restless, welcomed the new season of the year giving away their happy chirps.

It was spring coming back... and my wedding with Theodor Theodorovitch was supposed to happen now, in this first festive week.

When I arrived at the cemetery, the swallows greeted me with their tumultuous uproar, hidden among the cypress branches, and I realized that they, supportive of me, sang to cheer me up, saying:

- "Here comes Katienka,

Happy bride,

Seeking the husband

Whom God will give her,

To him wed...
He is Theodor Theodorovitch,
Proud and gentle
Captain of Cossacks,
Dexterous and brave,
Blond and beautiful,
Ruddy and cheerful,
The best knight
From the Don, the Tula and the Volga
Katia and Theodor
Will get married
In the time of flowers
Of laughter and celebrations...
May you be happy,
Katia and Theodor
Wife and husband,
Husband and wife
May God bless you
May you be fortunate...
May Heaven bless
Your life and your home.

My holy husband, who God would give me, was crying, inconsolable, poor thing, sitting on the pile of dirt and stones from its own grave, with his hands covering his face, like an indigent without bread or family, without strength to scream or speak, complaining of sleepiness and tiredness.

I called him:

- Theodor Theodorovitch, my holy love, let's go, I came to fetch you, it is time of our wedding, you promised to marry me now, in the spring... Don't you hear the swallows' greetings?...

However, unexplainably, my holy love that God gave me replied:

- No, Katia Andreevna, dear beloved, I cannot go with you, don't you see as well? I cannot release myself from here... I am bound to the "other", to the "other myself" that is here, suffocated and miserable, and I can't detach myself from him... What can I do, Katia Andreevna, my darling, what can I do? I cannot go and marry you...

Then, I started to dig like the other time, to dig, to dig, to dig to also see what happened underground, which I did not understand what it could be, and thus freeing Theodor. However, suddenly, the cemetery's gravedigger came running, with brute and scared gestures, to disturb me:

- What are you doing, Katia Andreevna? Are you mad, girl unable to accept her own luck?! You cannot do this! Give me this hoe! Where did you find it?

- This hoe is mine and I don't want to give it to you! I need to help my holy husband that God wants to give me... he is alive...

We argued. I asked him to help me, instead of insulting me with those bad words, because I needed to free Theodor Theodorovitch, who was there, crying, but who was also bound, underground, to his "other himself", as he was explaining to me...

He laughed at me, the soulless gravedigger, and answered that Theodor Theodorovitch was dead and very dead, and that, now, he only needed prayers and masses to save himself from hell, and not hoes or pickaxes, because neither hoes nor pickaxes would be able to make him come back to life or to free him from the claws of his own sins...

The insults infuriated me:

- Go away, Satan, stay away from me! Go to hell, where is your place, and leave me alone to fulfill my duty as a wife – I answered. And I called him

assassin and bastard, liar and treacherous, and I threw stones at him to make him go away. He said he would call the police if I continued with that joke of digging up my fiancé, because I was demented, possessed by a demon, that I was a heretic, that I was desecrating graves.

Then, Aglaida Petrovna, my friend, a red cloud of blood crossed my senses, dazzling my reasoning. I hated that guard with all the fury in my distressed heart. I suddenly advanced towards him and hit him in the head with the hoe many times. He fell, and the blood gushed from his hurt front head, the bad blood of the insults he had thrown at me. I started to scream, desperate, terrified by what I had done, without knowing for sure why I had done it, and I ran away. But, many people were entering the cemetery by then, attracted by my screams. Arriving were “mamienska”, “batiuchka”, Illia, Yakov, the neighbors, and again the “pope” and two more “mujiks” whom I did not know, I did not even know their names. They tried to catch me, but I ran from them between the graves, and got free. What they all wanted was Theodor Theodorovitch’s ruin and my own. They only managed to catch me, because I slipped on a pile of stones and fell flat on the ground. They bound me, then, again, with the same ropes, and put me in a closed cart. The “mujiks”, two strong and smelly men, went inside with me, watching me I don’t know why, as I still was bound by the ropes and there was nothing I could do against them or anyone else. However, “batiuchka” rode on the dapple-bay horse, following the cart. Illia and Yakov rode on their mules, and the “pope” rode at the front with the coachman. Our “pope” is very humble and helpful, he is prideful, he subjects himself to anything in the services to God, which are the services of charity. Every now and then, “batiuchka” would approach the cart’s window with his head, peeked inside and asked out loud to the two “mujiks”, crying:

- How is she now, quiet? Don’t harm her, daddies, by the seven wounds of Christ, I beg you.⁸

And I saw that he was crying a lot. He cried while talking.

I travelled many hours, I don’t know where to, because I was laying down on the floor of the cart, over some old mantles. And, finally, I arrived here, in this horrible house. By the look of it, this is an asylum, because everyone thinks I am crazy. But, Aglaida Petrovna, my friend, I swear to you on the

love of my Theodor Theodorovitch that I am not crazy. Everything I report here is the expression of truth. What happens is that I am distressed with the tragedy I contemplate: Theodor is alive, he calls me, talks to me, asks for my help, I see him, I understand him, he suffers, he is hallucinated, dead and alive at the same time, buried and not buried, but I cannot help him, I do not know what to do, here, enclosed in this cell, hearing still and always his impressive supplications:

- Save me, Katia Andreevna, dear mommy! They deemed me dead, they buried me, but I am alive and I cannot detach myself from the “other myself”, who is underground...

You, however, Aglaida, who is married to a wise man, who so much understands the mad and knows the mysteries of life and death; you, who is good and kind, and so well knows how to speak with the truly crazy (I am not crazy) and to calm them down, do something for me, for I am suffering, and for Theodor Theodorovitch, who suffers even more. Share this with the police authorities that force me to live in an asylum, even though I am not mad. Go to the cemetery, take my hoe and my pickaxe, and free the husband God wants to give me from the witchcraft that was done to him. Do this, Aglaida Petrovna, I beg you by the love of the Son of God, who died for us. And accept the thankful blessings from the heart of your friend.

KATIA ANDREEVNA (KATIENKA)”

Three weeks later, Katienka received the reply to that letter. The same helpful friend, from the hospital, moved by the young girl’s story, who had lost the fiancé in a bear hunt accident, but assumed that he was buried alive, sent the first letter to the addressee, and now acted as intermediary for the reply. Katienka, taking the letter from the servant’s hands, read the following:

“To my dear Katia Andreevna:

The human soul is immortal, my friend, and for that your Theodor Theodorovitch will continue to live the sublime life of the Spirit, without ever annihilating himself in the absorption of nothingness. His body of clay, calcium, iron, hydrogen, etc, indeed returned to earth’s bosom, from where it had derived. What happens, Katienka Andreevna, my friend, and what so much confuses and disorients you, is that not always the creatures’ soul is ready for the chocking renovation that the death of the body of clay imposes

on it, and, because of it, it is deterred in the perplexity in which the holy husband God wanted to give you was stuck. He was a man of the world, coarse Cossack cavalry captain, materialist, forgotten of the things of God, without divine aspirations, without faith or charity, and died violently, facts that deeply disturb a soul after its escape from the body of clay, stunning it, not recognizing where it is located and how it is doing. But, this is a momentary crisis in the story of a soul that returns to immortality, my friend, a crisis that the succession of days will correct, and which the very reality of the fact will explain itself to the recently deceased. I have, indeed, that “spiritual gift” of talking to the soul of those who have already died, and to be in friendly terms with them, a gift the “Acts of the Apostles” report, and I managed to speak very peacefully with the soul of your Theodor Theodorovitch.

After I received your letter, I visited his own grave, as you had suggested. However, instead of using hoe and pickaxe to help him, I freed him from the incomprehension in which he was asphyxiating, with prayers to God on his behalf, talking to him, moreover, with a frank and loving heart about what was happening around him. I told him that, yes, his body of dirt and mud had died, but the soul did not die because it is immortal, and it only felt mentally and suggestively attached to the body to which it grew accustomed during the existence, keeping itself confused in a period of transition, a natural occurrence in the course of such an important event. That, on the contrary of what he assumed, instead of being chained to the stench of a grave, he could, now, evolve in superior acquisitions, cross the spaces and travel the infinity, because already freed from the chains of a carnal imprisonment, being sufficient, for such, the mental renovation in himself, and also the reeducation of feelings, attuning himself with the diapason of respect to God, and not continuing submerged in the darkness of detrimental preconceptions. Theodor reflected about my exposition, understood the facts, which before he regarded as witchcraft, woke up from the nightmare of the mind disturbed by the trauma of violent death, freed himself from the perplexity, accepted the event of his unexpected corporeal death, resigning himself to the inevitable, accepted, moreover, the entering in the world of the Spirits – our true homeland –, laughed about his own ignorance, and ended up confessing himself marveled by the certainty, which he now has, that he possesses an immortal individuality like the Holy Ghost itself.⁹

Regarding you, Katia, my friend, it is good that you know that you also have the “spiritual gift” of seeing the dead, and of talking to them, even though you ignored it so far, a gift which, still not being appropriately studied and cultivated in your personality, deviates itself to certain troubling anomalies, chocking you, under the current circumstances, when the capacities of your psychic nature explode, under the imperative of a strong impression. However, also this crisis is momentary, and quickly you will rise from the abnormality that you currently suffer, because Theodor Theodorovitch, oriented to the normal situation of spiritual existence, no longer will disturb you with his screams, and, in the future, may even be able to help you being happy during your life...

Seek, however, to rest in order to calm yourself, be passive in the medical treatment, because your system of nerve vibrations was shaken, and you need this treatment. Above all, bring yourself back to God by way of the humble and confident prayer, recommending to Him the soul of your fiancé who, as the gravedigger you hurt very well had alerted you, indeed needs wishes of compassion, and blessings of love to rid himself from the memories of the bad habits acquired while in the human state, and to be able to elevate himself in the conquest of Life Eternal. Accept the imperative of the Law of Creation, because you are not the only person in this world to see a beloved one die, being assured, however, that death really does not exist anywhere, that everything transforms itself and evolves in the sempiternal resurrection, marching always to the glory of millennia... and a day will come in which you will meet your Theodor Theodorovitch again, and will be enveloped in his love, if not in the current life, at least in others that the Eternal will give you both, in addition to mercy, because the human being must be dignified and heroic when facing the bitter facts of existence, because revolt is a resource of the weak and of the unbalanced of reasoning and character.

When you leave this hospital – because you will –, blessed refuge where you will reestablish yourself from the nervous shocks derived from the harmful infiltrations of Theodor’s disturbed mind over your passive mind, seek to love again, another fiancé that God will give you... because, my dear Katienka Andreevna, the human heart, created to evolve until integrating itself into the Divine Heart, was destined to unfold itself infinitely, in the sublime functions of Love, and, because of it, it can never renounce the supreme glory of loving and being loved...

Yours truly,

AGLAIDA PETROVNA”.

² TN: despite the United States Spiritist Federation having published the English version, we kept this reference in accordance with the original text in Portuguese.

³ Spiritual guides.

⁴ “Mamienka”: mommy. Expression of affection to address the wife of the “pope”, but also used among the people.

“Batiuchka”: daddy. Expression of affection to address the “pope”, but also commonly used. To address one’s own father, the true diminutive is “papotchka”. The term “matushka” was also used, which also translates into “mommy”.

⁵ Mommy.

⁶ Painted image of a saint, preferably kept in a niche.

⁷ Old superstition from the orthodox mysticism, which the logic repels as useless to praise God and to the faith.

⁸ The wounds in the hands, feet, knees and the side of the belly.

⁹ To indoctrinate a disincarnated Spirit, certainly it will not be necessary to visit his or her grave. It can be concluded, here, that such visit is a literary expression to beautify the work. Notwithstanding, many disincarnated prowl around their own carnal spoils for variable periods of time, while it is possible to talk to them in any place. (Medium’s note).

2

IMMORTAL LOVE

Leo Tolstoy

- *“Could two beings, who have already known and loved each other, meet in another corporeal existence and recognize each other?”*

“They may not recognize each another, but they might be attracted to each other. the attraction stemming from the ties of a former life is often the cause of the most intimate unions. in your world, two people are drawn together by circumstances that seem to be chance, but are really due to the attraction of two spirits who are instinctively looking for each other in the crowd.”

(The Spirits' Book, by Allan Kardec, 2nd part, chapter VIII, “Return to Physical Life”, number 386, 32nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation¹⁰)

I

The end of this story, which happened at the time I became an obscure extra in it, was in the year of 1920.¹¹

The so called Great War had ended in 1918, and Europe, if not properly the world, still found itself stunned by the violence of the tragedy that blooded it during four years. I lived in England by this time, having exiled myself there, as many other compatriots of mine did, who in time understood the surprises that would come for Russia in a state of war.

Doctor Natacha Anna Pavlovna, notable psychoanalyst physician, was another exiled, voluntarily, in England, who, with her husband, also a well-known psychologist analyst, dedicated herself to researching the supernormal planes of life, that is, she deepened herself in the research of authentic facts of the beyond-grave. She had studied in London, conquering nothing less than three university diplomas, and was considered highly skilled by her numerous admirers.

Anna Pavlovna ignored nothing about the matters of the other world. She knew the investigations of the famous Professor Myers, and those of the not less famous Professor William Crookes; those of Robert Hare, of Colonel de Rochas, of Counselor Aksakof, of the astronomer Zoellner, and of the astronomer Flammarion, and of other Spiritist investigators who struggled to show the world that the human soul survives to the destruction of the body, confirming the news that France had bequeathed to the world through the philosophical expositions of Professor Rivail about the same subject.¹²

I went to see her in a certain day of the beginning of Spring in that year, around four o'clock in the afternoon, because, in the morning, I had received a kind card, written by her own hand, inviting me to have the afternoon tea in her company.

Conducted to her office by the servant who had received me, I greeted her, still holding the hat (the servant had not taken it from me), reluctant if I would continue to hold it, or if I would lay it on the silver table next to her armchair, in front of the desk which was always loaded with books and papers. I ended up deciding, however, and I put the hat on a chair next to my own. In the

presence of this beautiful woman, I felt very disturbed, humbled before her singular *madonna* beauty, and even more affected by her mainly talent, which seemed to mock my hope of one day surpassing it.

Thinking about those things, I remembered that my hat presented a very sad image, resting in the chair where I put it. So, I grabbed it and, not knowing what to do with it, I put it on another chair.

She smiled, seeing me blush for the hat indecision, took it from the chair and put it on the mentioned silver table, which made me blush even more, and, with a soft voice, very polite, said:

- Pardon me, Excellency. Our main servant fell sick, and the substitute, a shy Scottish girl, still has not learned that she is supposed to take the hat and the cane from our guests to store them until they leave. Please sit closer...

I sat, timidly, keeping the knees together, for it seemed to me more respectful if I did it, as a girl would do it in her first contact with society, without courage to initiate any conversation, stunned by seeing myself alone, for the first time, with this beautiful Annutchka Pavlovna, with whom I felt in love, and whom the boys my age loved for her spiritual beauty, her natural grace, and her talent, notwithstanding the forty years-old that she courageously confessed to be, and the husband's vigilance, who, even though also being famous, loved her dearly, jealous of her charms.

- I received your message, my Lady - I finally said, feeling disturbed by the emotional sound of my own voice, and for that taking the hat from the silver table to spin it between the hands -, and I have the honor to answer it, considering myself fortunate for that... - and I gave her a rose bouquet that I had brought and forgotten to deliver, leaving it on another armchair when I entered.

- I summoned you, Mr. Count - she answered, aspiring the roses -, because I obtained something that might interest your good taste of collector of transcendent matters, for comparative analysis with real life, and consequent literature. It is common, nowadays, that famous men are concerned with supra-normal apparitions, mediums, and other facts related with the existence beyond the grave. And as Your Excellency is beginning

your literary career, and those matters are sensational, I decided to talk to you about it, offering you, thus, a theme of the highest category.

– But, I am not a famous man, my lady, just a modest observer, a writer in search of originalities, trying to win... – I responded, showing lack of interest. However, she did not reply, and continued:

– Yes, the outer world’s souls, and their affairs are trendy... Do you who died, Count Filipe Filipovitch? – continued her abruptly, without waiting my answer, which, by the way, could not be manifested, because I did not know about whom she was referring to.– Do you know who died? It was Varvara Dimitrievna, that compatriot of ours exiled in Brazil, the excellent researcher of psyche, whom Your Excellency so much admired through the reports of our psychic magazines, and whose dedication to her own ideal was something respectable and enchanting...

I did not answer, limiting myself to staring at her with surprise, and to emitting a pious “Ah!”, while the beautiful interlocutor kept on:

– She died in Brazil, where she lived for many years ago. A month, more or less, before her death, I received this mail from her, and yesterday it came to my hands a letter from a Brazilian friend of hers, informing me about her passing. As you know, Varvara Dimitrievna and I exchanged letters since long ago, given that I also dedicate myself to the psychic phenomena, and collaborate, on the matter, in the same journals in which she collaborated. This here – and she showed me a big, voluminous envelope –, this here smells like mystery and spiritualism, the quality of angels and sublimation. I assure you, Count Filipe Filipovitch, that we rarely face a theme more touching and enthralling. I know that Your Excellency is a writer, and intends to write about transcendental research, which can reinvigorate readers’ trust on the immortality of the soul, and, for that, I trust to you the last letter Varvara Dimitrievna wrote me, along with the report of a unique fact experienced by herself. Read them among the perfume of the lilac trees in your garden, and the enchantment arising from those pages will be even more grateful in your heart. What lies here well deserves the reverence of our hearts, once it is the shout of a faithful soul who knew how to love well the grandeur of her own ideal...

I took the envelope, which brought to my senses the escaping perfume of dried roses, and I put it in the interior pocket of my coat. Anna Pavlovna offered me a cup of hot tea with honey, and butter biscuits, which I took, blushing at every instant I heard the prosaic sound my own teeth produced when crushing the biscuits, while I thought, confused and stunned:

– What I do not understand is how a woman, so gallant and spiritual as this Pavlovna, offers butter biscuits to the boys who court her with the hearts full of dreams and romantic desires...

Arriving at my home, loyal to the insinuations of my forty-springs beauty (I was twenty-five), I sat close to the lilac tree branches, which spread in the air their first perfumes. Spring had arrived, and there, protected by the afternoon fresh air, I opened the envelope and read what follows, while the heart expanded in emotions at every page read, stunned in face of the novelty that presented itself to my examination of a candidate writer of psychic phenomena:

– “My dedicated friend

Doctor Natacha Anna Pavlovna:

In your last letter, you asked me, my friend, to describe something original that had happened in my life, something worth of the observations to which you dedicate yourself as psychic and researcher, at the same time preventing me that, regardless of what I describe, you will use it in the drafting of a literary-spiritualist paper for study and meditation of the technicians in the supernatural matters. These matters have been largely discussed and appreciated lately, there is no denying that, and I do not doubt that the paper you desire to see written with the theme exposed by me will be successful. I will tell you, thus, one of the most singular events of my own existence fertile in singular events of a mediumistic-spiritist character, a real fact, in which the romance only very little interferes, and only so whatever you write, or order to be written, does not end up overshadowed by the insipidity of the restricted report. Moreover, it will be good that I do not keep to myself a revelation that contains teaching and beauty, and which, for this same reason, can edify other hearts anxious for unveiling the path of life beyond death. Here follows, thus, what you asked for in your last month’s so considerate letter.”

Unheard-of emotion interrupted my reading. Although I did not know Varvara Dimitrievna personally, I, in fact, admired her deeply by her important mediumistic work, of which I received the news, and by her spirit of dedication to her own ideal, which she always gave proof of. I loved her indeed, with a certain feeling, a mix of veneration, respect and enchantment, as generally reveals itself the feeling inspired by the interpreters of the spiritual world. The hands, thus, went cold, pressed by the emotion, the heart jumped inside the chest, and a sensation of mistrust and angst started to cloud the good moral dispositions in which I saw myself. I lit up a cigarette and smoked it, thinking, while around me the lilac trees in the garden continued to sweeten the air with their perfume, and the strange image, almost enigmatic, of Varvara Dimitrievna came into my thoughts with her certainly deep eyes, veiled with incomprehensible sadness, after which, turning the notebook's page, which rested on my knees, I read the strange narrative that follows.

II

REPORT BY VARVARA DIMITRIEVNA TO DOCTOR NATACHA ANNA PAVLOVNA

“– Notwithstanding that I have been raised under the catholic principles of the Orthodox Church, I always was dedicated to the observations of supernormal nature, because since very early, around my five years-old, I was witness to the existence of the souls of the dead around us, as if they continued to live on Earth.

I left school when I was sixteen years-old. I believe, indeed, that I was expelled from the Convent where my education took place, because I suffered constant visions, I talked with individualities from the other world, I foresaw events with two or more days before they happened, once my invisible friends revealed them to me so I could trust their loyalty when the events predicted where verified, and I even came to guess little secrets about my friends and – something unbelievable! – also about the good nuns, our educators. All the community considered me demented, abnormal, devil possessed, accomplice of witches, although I gave frequent proof of reasonableness and intelligence, and was diligent with school obligations, always achieving excellent grades in the most difficult tests.

However, because they so regarded me, they gave me humiliating punishments and penances, allegedly to help me resist against the advances of the so-called demons who disturbed me. I submitted myself, then, humble and passive, to that religious tyranny, sacrificing myself in the penitents’ chapel until late hours of the night, having as light only two candles put on the altar, on my knees, and with the forehead touching the cold stone, but very certain that the ghosts that I saw, and with which I talked, could not be demons, because they were the dear souls of my mother, who I knew had been good and kind as a saint; of my father, who had been such a friend of the family, and died blessing even his own enemies; of my aunts Agafia and Lisa, who helped raising me as if my mothers; of old Mathew Nikolaievitch, my father’s childhood friend... and of another ghost who presented himself with the characteristics of a young man of around thirty years-old. This last one, however, I did not recognize, or at least I supposed not to recognize,

considering him strange, even though I confessed to myself being vividly touched by the attention he fondly demonstrated towards me. He told me, for example, sweetly whispering in my ears, that he had loved me in other past lives (we, the children of God, are born and reborn many times, on Earth as on other sidereal planets, even though such news irritate those who do not have the conscience in peace), that he had loved me in other lives, that he had been indeed connected to me by the bonds of marriage, but that I had broken our commitment of love and fidelity, and that such crime, on my part, and his resulting despair dragged him to discouragement and suicide, creating a painful drama in our destinies, the consequences of which were still in turmoil of pain, notwithstanding more than one century had already passed since the tragic day of our misfortune; that I hid in a new incarnation hoping to rehabilitate myself through the pain of a rescue, but that he had preferred to stay in the state of winged ghost in order to better strengthen himself for future reparations, customary of suicide, in reincarnations to come, and as such, disincarnated, follow my steps as to guard my moral rising, because he loved me still and forever, deeply, he had already gladly forgiven the offense inflicted to his personal dignity, due to my regret, which he regarded as sincere, and he expected to be able to join me forever, throughout the future centuries. He said that he called himself Yvan Yvanovitch¹³, and that he had been a doctor in a far region of Russia by the end of the XVIII century.

Although he was a ghost-man, and not properly a man, those revelations afflicted me very much. I felt really guilty, the conscience accused me, indeed, of such crime, and in the sacred depths of my soul I promised to myself a life of labors dedicated to the love of God and my neighbor, as testimony of my desire for conscience rehabilitation and regret for the wrong done a century before.

In the confessional I narrated, in tears, sincerely moved, all those singular facts to the “startsi”¹⁴ who, in person, took our confession every week, from him expecting good advice and consolation to my discontent for having wronged in remote incarnation. However, instead of counseling and consoling me, the “startsi” did not absolve me from my sin, preventing me, thus, from communion, and answered that I was nothing more than a sick person, mentally ill, hysteric, who needed grave corrections, in addition to fasting and penances; that it was the devil manifesting to me, taking the appearance of a

romantic gallant, in order to better seduce me to the kingdom of darkness... So, that was when they made me spend days and nights on the cold stones of the chapel, bent over and hands laid, repeating prayers to the altar, which caused me intense pain in the kidneys, knees, and head. No one, moreover, would approach me or address me. During the classes, I had to sit apart, in a corner of the room, hidden from the other students behind a small folding screen. If they found me in the corridors, my classmates, before so gentle, would turn around on their heels, emitting a squeal of frighten, and run away scared, while the nuns, if would not run when they saw me, they would make the sign-of-the-cross, whispering prayers. I slept alone, in a distant cell of an isolated corridor, locked from the outside, when I would not spend the entire night in the chapel, equally alone, fulfilling the penances imposed by my confessor. Many times, exhausted by tiredness and the frequent fasting, I would faint, falling on the chapel floor, and there I would sleep deeply, notwithstanding the cold that tortured me, only to be considered, in the following morning, a relapse penitent in the fulfilling of duty, having to renew the same ordeals and punishments.

They called, then, the doctor.

The good man, after auscultating the chest, the back, pressing several regions of my body, and observing the eyes, tongue, throat (he made me open the mouth with a spoon handle), palms of the hands, and fingers and knees, softly hitting them, and asking questions so indiscrete that I do not understand how a man uses such indelicacies with a lady, the doctor turned to the vigilant nun, who witnessed the examination, while reading from his notes, and concluded:

– This girl is not sick, she is perfectly normal.

Finally, the boarding school's administration, not bearing such ungrateful state of things, sent a mail to my tutor, explaining the events: they stated that I made up fooleries to avoid studying; that I scared the community with diabolic narratives; that I was lazy, and that I did not want to learn, justifying the laziness with alleged visions, in order to skip classes and go to the chapel pretend penances; and they ended with the request that he should take me from there, because I had become hated by the community, everyone rejected me, and feared the abnormalities that characterized me, and, not being

possible my education under such circumstances, they asked the favor of taking me away from the institution as soon as possible.

And this is how I arrived in Saint Petersburg on the day of May 10, 1880, checking-in in the pleasant residency of my tutor, located in the extreme of Kriestrovsky¹⁵ island. He was a widow, dedicated to the experiments of spiritual phenomena, then so common everywhere, seventy years-old, and so my friend as not even my father could have been, respecting me and admiring me exactly due to supernatural manifestations that happened to me.

The good man was called Stanislaw Pietrovitch.

III

I felt myself renewed then, and my life began to gradually transform, leading me to several actions touched by psychic events, or supernatural, that last still today, when old age already knocks on the doors of my existence, crowning with mist my hair which, one day, had been blond and glazed with the June sun rays. I easily concluded my studies, and became a teacher, without ever losing, however, the opportunity to continue studying.

Mr. Stanislaw Pietrovitch had a library of books that dealt with my favorite subject, books that raised since-remote-times magna question, that is, the question of exchange between human beings and Spirits, and of the rebirth of the human soul in new bodies, or reincarnation. I dedicated myself to study them attentively, without being interrupted. My mental exchange with the souls of so beloved deceased continued, even with more intensity, now that the cultivation of mind and heart, provoked by the study, predisposed my psychic strengths in such a way that I came to regard as very natural such super-human coexistence, getting used to it.

The dear ghost Yvan Yvanovitch, on his turn, revealed himself to be satisfied with the resolution I reached of dedicating myself to the development of the psyche, and to the charity works he instigated, and he did not lose the opportunity to repeat, making himself understandable to the depths of my heart:

– Yes, study, study the great science of immortality, my dear! Prepare yourself in the worship of God in spirit and truth, in the practice of loving the neighbor, in the respect to duty, moral, and justice, in the meditation about the philosophy and the science of life, because it is to enrich the treasures of your soul with the indispensable knowledge for rising the virtues, which you need to develop in your personality. It was like this that I wanted to see you in the past, in our last life on earth, but you resisted my requests...

Anxious to please him now, compensating him for the misdeeds that I had caused him in the past, I kept studying, with ever increasing dedication and spirit of observation and analysis, the new science, which thrilled me. I made the primitive Christianity, exemplified by Jesus Nazarene, my religious devotion by excellence, the luminous patter of virtues where I should

replenish the energies for the labor of my moral renovation, and I applied myself so much in this task that I forgot that I was young and beautiful, that I need to think about the preparation of a social future for myself, that the natural laws of human existence compelled me for performances particular to Humanity: love, marriage, constituted home, children... or joys, delights, social conquests. I forgot those things, feeling that something superior to all of that called me to an uncommon destiny, where I should remain attentive to the voices of Spirituality, in order to transmit them to people, and, thus, soften their troubles, guide their lives to redemptive goals indicated by the inspirations of Good.

Equally very dedicated to the cultivation of the spiritual science, the old Stanislaw Pietrovitch, my tutor, gave me free reign with the mediumistic performances, and, once in a while, stimulated me with his paternal goodwill:

– Study, my dear, study and work, perfecting the gifts of your soul, as your spiritual friend Yvan Yvanovitch have been counseling you. This noble labor will conduct you to the most dignifying result that you would ever expect. Superior to the conquests of the heart and of society, if you dedicate yourself to practicing what you learn in it, you will find the true motor of life, and, thus, the pillars of peace of conscience. You are medium of powerful forces, which means you will be the interpreter of the will of deceased souls who inhabit the Beyond; you will receive their orders, and, if you conclude that they are reasonable, coinciding with the criteria of your studies, you will act confidently under their guidance, and, then, new horizons will open up for the exercise of humanitarian deeds: here, a poor mother crying will regain enthusiasm for the obligations of existence, which she had despised because the cried-over son proved his own survival by sending her a letter he wrote using the supernatural forces that you lent him for the pious goal; furthermore, you will console the desolated wife, writing letters of love from the deceased partner, whose spiritual individuality equally will be served of your hand to address it; yonder, you will provide physical energies so a friend can be ecstatic before the humanized ghost of the friend allegedly deceased many years before, while, in accomplishing all this, you will share with humanity that the soul is immortal, that a new world unveils itself for our souls, when they suppose that we are won over by time under the weight of a grave, and that, thus, your commitments to the laws of God and to Humanity are great and sacred. You do not belong to the world, my dear Varvara

Dimitrievna, you will not belong to the world not even for the future days. Be ready, then, for the tasks that concern you, that is, for the tasks of the Spirit.

I could not understand very well what my tutor meant with such sermons. The fact that I could communicate with the souls of the other world seemed to me so natural that, to me, it was ordinary. I was not thrilled by the spiritual gifts that were inherent to me, I was not vain by the fact that I possessed them, I was not surprised by the victories I contemplated over death. All of that was perfectly natural to me, common, destitute of sublimation, and, because of it, sometimes, I felt bored by listening to such sermons, which I considered fruit of my tutor's fanaticism, when, in fact, they were fairly prudent warnings, meant to call my attention to the sense of responsibility. However, I grew accustomed to that life dedicated to the study and to the transcendental observations, without realizing that time passed by, and that rigorous philosophical, scientific, and moral-religious initiation was happening to me. The winter would always find me in this soft detachment, I had already overcome twenty years-old and I was not even seduced by the balls, parties, theaters, dinners, meals, and teas, so common in Saint Petersburg during this season of the year. And, when the spring would return, and the lilac trees of the garden again dressed themselves in blooming and perfumed branches, it gave me pleasure to write and meditate about spiritual matters on one or another bench close to them, while the birds rattled among the renewed tree leaves.

IV

Protected by my dedication to study, and abstraction from the things of this world, that I voluntarily imposed to myself, my supra-normal faculties, which had somehow manifested during the childhood, now progressed easily, acquiring considerable elasticity and value, allowing me then the accomplishment of important experiences that never came short from confirming the veracity of the phenomenon of exchange with the Beyond, and the good fruits of a labor entirely dedicated to the Good. On its turn, the cherished souls of my mother, my father, and many other friends who, since times past, started to testify their love and protection towards me, and, above all those, the beloved soul of Yvan Yvanovitch, repeated to my spiritual audition, in protecting compositions, offering me conditions corresponding to my quality as intermediary of two worlds, or writing instructions through my own hands, in unforgettable moments of epistolary confessions:

“– To better serve the Divine Science as interpreter of spiritual spheres, a lot of courage, a lot of dedication to the good are necessary, a lot of patience, and a lot of love. Do not assume that the gift of talking to the dead is a human property, to be guided as wished. No! The gift that you possess is a special celestial force that God gave to those who failed their duties in the past, to help them rise themselves from the shame of grave past delinquencies. You will serve, thus, God and your neighbor with it, while in its exercise you will rehabilitate yourself from the past full of sin to a new life, inspired on love and on justice, which is the reason why you should respect and love this gift”.

And he added, loving and caring, the sweet companion of my past destinies:

“– I was a doctor on Earth, my Varienka, before reaching the current spiritual state, and because of it I continue a doctor in the after-life. Be passive to my wishes, and I promise to help your conscience rehabilitation, practicing Medicine through your mediumistic gifts and, thus, serving those disinherited of earthly goods, also testifying to the world the grandiosity of eternal laws in the thrilling phenomenon of a girl, fragile and inexperienced as my Varienka, absolutely ignorant of medical science, curing the sick whose disturbances defy human possibilities! So, submitted to me, you will aid me

as I you, because I need to expand myself in intense labor in the fields of charity, both in the invisible and in the earthly society, in order to, on my turn, rebalance myself from the mistake of having disharmonized myself from the law of Creation: I killed myself, disgraced myself for your love, while the despair of losing you, in the pain of perjury, stripped away my sense of reason, precipitating myself in an abyss of the conscience from which I painfully free myself. Let us help ourselves, thus, mutually, considering that once together we also wronged in the past...”.

And so I cured the sick, not with the imposition of hands, as once the ancient followers of the Divine Master, but obtaining medical prescriptions under the vibrational impulse of the intelligence of Yvan Yvanovitch, who had been a doctor and now answered my call to help the ill through me; I taught Spiritist philosophy and transcendental sciences, within my reach, to those thirsty for knowledge and spiritual progress; I consoled the sad and the suffering with the bread and blanket for the body, which I collected among merciful hearts to distribute to those who nothing had, and, with the softness of fraternal love, which came from the after-life over my soul, I visited places of sorrow, trying to ease vexing situations: shacks, hospitals, miserable houses, where hearts hopeless from the roughness of misfortune suffered the shame of society’s indifference, a society that forgot them, and encouraged them all with the aid to the body and the news received from the after-life, which gave myself new strength, trying to reconcile them with God and with themselves.¹⁶

At night, my sweet spiritual friend appeared to me in dreams, to repeat:

“– Keep going, my Varienka, keep going... You have the luck of accomplishing your rehabilitation under the patronage of consoling celestial inspirations. Be faithful to the generous principles of the Doctrine of Love which redeems you from the wrong committed yesterday... And, later... Yes, later, after the hard work of fulfilled duty, new dawns will renew our path towards God, unifying us again with the insoluble bonds of Love...”.

After a few years, my love for the protecting ghost grew in intensity and respect, transforming itself into an immortal veneration. I grew accustomed to his presence, he was the partner of my mediumistic labors, partner of my dreams, studies and meditations to which I imposed myself, and, more than

never, I felt connected to him through the bonds of reincarnatory past. I loved him deeply, I unfolded myself lovingly in the benefit of my neighbor, thinking about rehabilitating myself from the bad past I had lived, and my major concern was to conduct myself in a way that, in the end of my existence, I would be able to hear, in the depths of my conscience, the echo of those touching words from the Nazarene to the submissive and crying woman at his feet:

“– Your many sins have been forgiven, as your great love has shown”.

V

In a certain night, I asked the ghost of Yvan Yvanovitch to indicate me the medical treatment for a sick child, whom the doctors had just said was beyond saving. Along six years of mediumistic dedication, aided by him, I had observed that the dear friend loved the children, and that his medical treatment was, perhaps, even more efficient for them than for the adults. There were several consultation requests and, during more or less two hours, the celestial mystery took place once more, in the serene room where I entrusted myself to the mediumistic exercise: the spiritual being of a doctor, who had lived on Earth, transmitting, through my hand and pencil, which were profane, as using a telegraphic apparatus, the treatment convenient to a case of enteritis in a child of only a few months-old; to another case, now renal congestion, in an adult, and to another still, anemia and vertigo in another adult...

In that night, I found myself in our delightful home on Kriestrovsky island, because only later, after the death of Stanislaw Pietrovitch, I moved to my cottage in Pargalovo.¹⁷ It was, then, the month of March of 1886. The snow still came down vigorously from the frozen spaces, notwithstanding the promise of spring, and the fireplace fire crackled warming me in the solitude of the study where I was used to work. And a little kerosene lamp allowed a soft twilight in the room, merely illuminating the paper on which I wrote under the impulse of spiritual force. When the work was done, I thanked the ghost of Yvan Yvanovitch the favor given, on behalf of the aided sick, I presented my wishes of peace and spiritual prosperity, and I finished the session, to which he and I co-attended. However, the beloved friend would not go away, he remained by my side, thinking, visible to my clairvoyance, as if something more he had to say. I understood he was sad, perhaps afflicted by anguish, which reflected in myself with the taste of live restlessness.

– What else, beloved brother and friend? – I asked.

But, the silence remained, and, starting to wonder about that unusual behavior, I repeated:

– What else, dear soul, my little brother? What is the matter? Did I offend you, perhaps? Did I commit any further mistake? Forgive me, and help me

repair it, you well know the fragility of my character...

I saw him perfectly visible to my faculty, standing, in front of me, his head down, as if discouraged to leave me. On my turn, I feared looking at him, and, faced with that rare phenomenon, which the notable researchers of psyche, in all Europe, provoked to patiently reach the borders of reality, but which the sublime force of love had given me positively and willingly, I never behaved carelessly. On the contrary, I always conducted myself with respect and in a passive manner, discouraged of treating him as a human being, despite of the deep bonds of love that united us. However, abruptly, he “spoke”, expressing himself in spiritual language, that is vibration, speaking in a whisper, only comprehensible by me, which rumbled in my being as unstoppable defeat:

– I come to say goodbye to you...

At first, I thought I had not understood properly the mental irradiation with which he addressed me, and, stunned, I asked him out loud, as if I spoke to a human:

– Saying goodbye to me?...

– Yes, I come to say goodbye to you... – he confirmed.

– But... why? Have we perhaps offended again the honor of God’s laws? Does this farewell imply a punishment, a penalty?

– No, my dear, be calm! This time, we did not disobey the law of God, it is not about punishment... It is reincarnation that attracts me with its powerful impulses, moved by the law of progress... and I must absent myself to prepare for it...¹⁸

– Couldn’t you delay a little longer this accomplishment, until I return to the spiritual life? How can I be without you, without your protection, the true single happiness I have in this world?

– No, I cannot. Remember that, before the divine codes, I am nothing more than a rebel, a criminal who inflicted harm to duty, because I was, or I am, a suicide that redeems the fault. I cannot advance in the lines of progress without returning to Earth to cover the time I still had to live with the body that I voluntarily destroyed, which means that, once reincarnated, I will have

a brief life and will abandon, maybe, the body in full youth, or I will continue, enjoying the opportunity for new realizations. The extension that you suggest I have already done under my own responsibility, and I did it for loving you, because long ago I should have returned in new human forms... However, now, it is a sacred duty that I must fulfill. For you, my absence from your current path will signify a test ever so more burdensome as you have already grown accustomed to me, testifying to me, now, through a sublimated dedication, the fullness of the love that I always desired to find in your heart, in the days past. You will suffer, thus, the anguish of my absence, understanding, only now, a century after our drama, the pain that I myself suffered when you abandoned me for the heat of youth's passions. For me, this separation will be the pain of missing you, of the inconsolable loneliness, which only in the love of God one can find relief. But, I will not forget you, my star, my dear! I was yours in the past, I am yours in the present, and I will continue yours by the bonds of immortal love, through future ages... We will not meet each other, however, in the present journey, we will be in opposite situations, irreparable, because the testimonies we are called to give do not involve our approximation in carnal life. But, through the sleep of each night, my soul, once reincarnated, will search yours, and we will remain united by the Spirit, and by the attraction of the in-love and wishful thought... and later, when possible, I will prove to you that not even the separation motivated by a new existence will make me leave you. I implore to you that you pray to God on my behalf, and that you provide me the solace of your fidelity to my love. "Goodbye!".

The beloved silhouette extinguished itself slowly, in the suggestive twilight of the room, and I continued there, seated, surprised, annihilated as if I had just saw dying in my arms the being that I most loved in my life, but without a tear, stunned by the deception, the eyes dilated and dry fixed in the fireplace's flames, feeling rumbling still, in the depths on my being, the humble farewell of the one that I so much loved through time: "Goodbye!".

VI

One could say that the disappearance of Yvan Yvanovitch for reincarnation marked a new phase in my life. A long series of misfortunes, challenges, and testimonies came down over me, defying all my efforts to remedy it or prevent it. Stanislaw Pietrovitch died right after Yvan Yvanovitch's farewell, and, as I no longer had relatives to aid me, I saw myself in the need of living accompanied only by a housekeeper, who directed the house. I delivered to Stanislaw Pietrovitch's heirs the beautiful residence on Kriestrovsky island, and, as I still owned a two-floors cottage, in Pargalovo, I retired to that solitude, and kept my duties as a creature of God, full of responsibilities. Fortunately for me, and my Spiritist studies and experiences, I started to teach private students, and could still count with some financial resources, remainders of my father's fortune, and for that reason I never lacked light for the winter and the daily bread. If, however, those material goods comforted my physical existence, the moral pains, arising from the isolation and helplessness in which I lived, hurt my heart deeply. I turned myself, then, more than ever, to the duties imposed by my Spiritist faith, and dove into the works of social charity, to the extent the circumstances of my life allowed. However, I will not dwell in those particularities, because I am embarrassed to list the situations in which I was able to serve my neighbor, as the Holy Scriptures prescribe. In any case, I will add that the years went by, I was already thirty years-old, and I never again received news about the beloved ghost who had been the enchantment of my childhood and youth. Ten years passed since he had left my presence, and, in this time, aiming to entertain myself during the rigorous winters of our homeland, filling with something useful my hours of leisure, so empty, I dedicated myself to the study of Esperanto, a new language that came out in Poland, since the year 1887, and which goal was to strengthen the friendship relations among the people and nations through its study and cultivation. This because it is very true that one of the great factors of existing divergences between people is the impossibility of a person to learn all languages in order to talk with the natives of all other nations, establishing friendly interchange.¹⁹ But, once people learn such language, which would allow them linguistic exchange, the difficulty would be removed: comprehension would lead to fraternity, and faraway peoples would start to cherish each

other as good friends. This language, which, one can say, had been inspired by the spiritual potencies to its creator, came out, as I said, in Poland, by the genius of a medical doctor, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof – whom you very well knew –, and I, informed about the advantages its acquisition offered, sought to learn it, which I easily managed, practiced it with dedication and respect, and inscribed it in the heart as a second religious motive, notwithstanding it being a lay language, absolutely without religious character.

However, existence became difficult for me on Pargalovo. My financial resources diminished clearly, and very quickly I was surprised by the need of riding myself from the last belongings I had, and even from the cottage where I lived, in order to pay my debts, and free myself with dignity from the difficult situation I found myself in. It was necessary that I worked to improve my life condition, and, as I was a teacher, speaking and writing well French, English, and German, like all Russian of regular education, beyond Esperanto, I easily managed to find a position in the house of an English family residing in Saint Petersburg, the head of which was attached to his country's embassy in Russia. So much appreciated were my methods of discipline and education to the children, and so much ability they found in my system of directing the house that, when the family went back to England, I was invited to follow it, and to definitely remain as preceptor of the little ones, and housekeeper-for-life of the noble house, because, in effect, they were representatives of the famous and traditional English nobility.

I left, then, to London, but sometime later I saw myself in the need of again following my masters, as they went on a new diplomatic mission in a foreign land – this time, Brazil, in the remote South America.

It was like this that I came to live in the faraway South-American country, distancing myself so much from Russia, and from it being uprooted in such a fashion that, sometimes, contemplating the vigorous Brazilian landscapes, the aspect of which so much differed from the Russian landscapes, that I muttered to myself:

– One could say, God Our Father, that I exist now in a new reincarnation: I was born, I lived, and I died in Russia, I interned in England, and later I was reborn in a new body in Brazil!

Many times, the pain of stinging longings tortured my heart. The scenarios of my childhood: my father's manor, the beloved figure of my parents, the garden, the orchard of our homestead, the quiet and embracing city, and even the covenant, where they made me suffer so much, presented themselves to the mirage of my recollections, and the tears afflicted me, at the same time that strong feelings informed me that it would never be possible for me to return to Russia. However, my sweet Spiritist belief, infusing manly courage in my heart, predisposed me to conformity: the beloved friends from the after-life, coming to remind my reasoning that the Spirit is a citizen of the universe, and, therefore, living in any latitude of the planet, it will always be in its homeland, I would calm down, and say to myself:

“– I know I live days of trial, redeeming the offenses thrown at the law of life by vile acts that I practiced in remote existences...”

And that consoled me. Moreover, Brazil was singularly convenient to my Spirit needs of rehabilitation labors, given the softness of the laws that allow full freedom for the practice of vary religious, philosophical, and scientific beliefs, which would have been hard to find in my homeland. In fact, I felt protected by the Brazilian laws, and in its fraternal climate I kept exercising my supranormal forces in favor of the Spiritist truth, and of my neighbor in need of help and affection.

Life, thus, went on like this, for me, among labors, trials, and love for those around me. It was not bad, because I felt consoled by the enchantments of Spiritist truth, which strengthened and thrilled me, but neither could it be regarded as a happy life, because loneliness, arising from the lack of a home that would reinvigorate my heart, was heavy and helpless, and, beyond all that, I already had grown used to any adverse circumstance, and the nature of the philosophy that sustained my beliefs brought me the certainty of fulfilled duty, which gave me peace of mind. And, finally, I became so fond of this great South-American land that I chose never to abandon it, staying here even when the English family, with which I was so connected, decided to go back to their homeland.

By this time, I had already managed to save certain sum in cash. I associated myself with a fashion store for ladies, and lived modestly from the fruit of my labor, not forgetting, however, my Spiritist duties.

But, the year of 1910 had arrived, and I was surprised to observe that I had then reached forty-seven years-old. I received the happy birthday wishes from friends and Esperantist co-idealists from all around the world, notably, however, among so many cards and letters I received a postcard coming from Warsaw, in the distant Poland, written in Esperanto, which I so much loved. The correspondent was signed by Frederyk Kowalski, and he confessed that he was twenty-three years-old, had a medical degree, and was still attending university, in order to become a professor of a certain specialty in Medicine.

I do not know why, but an uncontrollable burst shacked the fibers of my soul in face of that simple postcard from Warsaw. I had the impression that I recognized the more than gentle expressions, quite affectionate, which were addressed to me, and that who was writing was the very Yvan Yvanovitch, who reappeared in a new body, from the solitude of the grave, and thus fulfilling the promise made when saying goodbye to me for reincarnation.

An affectionate correspondence in the universal language – the Esperanto – was established between me and my new friend. Enchanted, I recognized in the expressions of the kind correspondent from the martyred Poland the expressions of the old spiritual friend Yvan Yvanovitch, and I lost myself in alarming suppositions, while I remembered his farewell for reincarnation:

“– We will not personally meet each other in the next earthly journey. We will be in opposite situations, because the testimonies we are called to give do not involve our approximation in corporeal life. But, I will not forget you, my dear, so certain as I am of the sublimation of the feeling that I have towards you. My soul, once reincarnated, will seek yours through the sleep of each night, we will be united by the Spirit, and by the attraction of the in-love and wishful thought... and later, whenever possible, I will prove to you that not even the separation motivated by my new existence will make me leave you. I was yours in the past, I am yours in the present, I will remain yours by the bonds of immortal love in the future ages... And, willingly, and with the permission of the laws directing our destinies, I drew the plan of the task to be fulfilled on Earth, in order to serve God and my neighbor intensely, even eliminating marriage from my thoughts”.

Well, strange facts now happened between me and my pen friend Frederyk Kowalski. We dreamed together the same dreams, in the night, and our letters, mutually reporting the event, crossed each other in the ocean, bringing

us the confirmation of the encounters between our lover-souls. In his love letters, the distant sentimental friend would say:

“– Everything speaks to me about you, and your presence is so real with me that, sometimes, I feel your face together with mine, and the perfume of your hair makes my heart shake. I have the impression, my dear, that I write to a great friend of other times, whom I have been loving since remote ages, and whom I lost from sight, I do not know how or why... although I cannot explain the phenomenon of the feeling that agitates me. I do not know if I lived, or where I lived, before feeling myself in the personality of Frederyk Kowalski. The instincts tell me that we all live and relive in this world, I do not know how... and that my feeling knows you since centuries, that I so much wronged and suffered for you, and that now I continue suffering the pain of not being able to see you alongside me. Some days ago, I visited my city of birth, Sosnowiec, for a season of rest. Alongside my mother, I desired to refresh my heart, which feels oppressed by the thousand daily concerns, and by the longing of you, which torments it. I am poor of riches, I struggle harshly for subsistence, I do not have, for now, any possibility to cross the seas, and to rest with you. Then, I rest with my mother, because she is the only woman who can represent you in my heart. But, I see you everywhere, the longing never fades away. If there is moonlight, I contemplate the moon, because maybe also my Varienka is looking at it. If I aspire a perfume, I wish that you would also aspire it. If I hear music or read a beautiful literary page, I become sad, because you are not there to share the same satisfaction that absorbs me. I have been connecting you to each moment of my life...”.

Other times, the letter would reveal very human desires, like these:

“– Spring has returned, the pines renovated themselves in more alive tonalities, the snow moves and spreads itself, melted, in silver mantels along the fields, where the snipes flutter. The garden’s lilac trees ascend more intense perfumes, and roses do wait to color the grids of lordly mansions. Everything is life, beauty, joy, and poetry. But nothing of it makes me fortunate, because you are so far away, my Varienka! Each flower, each bird song, and even the stones on the road speak of you, and with me they mourn the pain of your absence. However, despite of all this, I am happy, because I know that I am loved by your heart, your presence is alive in me, the sweet impression of your touch warms my body, I hear your voice speaking to me

kindly: “Frederyk, my sweet beloved!”. Such a sweet voice, that it will be impossible that anyone else in the world has one equal. But, it is all a dream. The reality is terrible and irreparable. You are still far away. And I shall spend life like this, without you?...”.

I comforted him as much as I could, concerned that, one day, he would visit me, because, in truth, I was twenty-four years older than him, and I feared that his youth would not resist the reality shock, seeing me personally, outside the vapors of his dreams, regretting, very justly, the difference of our ages. And, a certain time, I wrote to him, trying to sway his thoughts from human love, which seemed to disturb him, to direct him to the sublimation of immaculate love, serene and spiritual, the only one with which I could repay the heated claims of his twenty-three springs teeming with life:

“– You told me, my friend, that you will offer me your photo, but you ask, apprehensive: ‘Won’t you feel unhappy if the Frederyk of your dreams is very different from what I really am?’ No, my sweet friend, I will not feel unhappy because of that, because the Frederyk of my dreams is not the man that you actually are, but the ideal being who always lived in the aspirations of my soul, he is the loving heart that so generously loved and understood my own, the balanced and just character that I see in the expressions of these beautiful letters, which enchant the softness of my soul. Beautiful or not, as you may be, generous or not, for me you will always be the ideal being, because it is your spiritual being that I preferably distinguish in you, and whom I desire to love forever, even beyond death...”

However, I would add, incapable of choking the longing that tortured my heart, the sorrow of seeing myself helplessly separated from him:

“– Through the open window I see the moonlight, its splendor brightens the streets of Warsaw, where daily you walk, the hospital where you work, the school where you perfect your studies in Medicine, the house where you live. And I meditate, comforted by this supreme balm: ‘How God is good, allowing that the same moonlight ray that touches the table where I write also illuminates the windows from the room where rests the one I mostly love in this world’²⁰

For four years, those letters strengthened our hearts, bringing our souls closer to each other in the sacred bonds of a feeling that remained burning and

alive, taking over the hours that we lived, and even protecting us against anguish and less positive inclinations, always possible in the daily life. It was as if we lived tightly together, never separated, not even for one hour. Given the modest financial means of my dear correspondent, which prevented him from personally coming to meet me, there was no other way but to be satisfied with our dear letters, and the sweet encounters in Spirit, during the sleep of each night. Fulfilled, then, the prophecy of Yvan Yvanovitch, when saying goodbye for reincarnation:

“– We will never meet in the next earthly journey”.

VII

In the year of 1914, happened in Sarajevo, city of the old Serbia, the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, crown prince to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife, Comtesse of Chotek, Duchess of Hohenberg, by the young student Jarilo Prinzip. The sad event, that shocked the whole world, was one of the grave reasons, if not the main one, that motivated the Great War of 1914-1918. When news of the declaration of war that followed the ultimatum from the powerful Austria to the little Serbia reached me, I feared for my sweet friend from Warsaw, who was in military age, was a doctor, and, certainly, could not avoid the possibility of also marching to the front of the conflict. Russia became allied with France, England, Italy, Belgium, Japan, and, therefore, with Serbia, the country involuntarily responsible for the terrible world conflict. Germany became allied with Austria-Hungary, to which also joined Bulgaria and Turkey, as you know. I imagined that Poland, a pacific nation par excellence, but squeezed between belligerent nations, could not avoid suffering intensely, after all, always pressured by Russia, it would be dragged to the conflict, as it indeed was.

The last letter from my sentimental correspondent Frederyk Kowalski told me that he had been recruited for a battalion of Russian forces that would serve on the battle front as a doctor of the Red Cross, that he wrote in a hurry, and that, certainly, he would not have other possibilities of writing, because the war threatened to be violent, and the international communications would become difficult, if not impossible. But, he added, as Yvan Yvanovitch twenty-eight years before:

“– I will never forget you, my dear! If I die in this fight, my immortal soul will search yours, proving that not even death will be capable of keeping me away from you. Trust in my love, and remain certain that, more than in the present, I will stay with you in the future. Love me always and think about me: I will trust in you, and I will never feel alone or miserable, in the hardships of war, because you will be the good angel that will follow me always, with the sublimity of the love that you devote to me.”

The terrible world-wide catastrophe lasted four years, and I never again had the fortune of feeling in my hands other letters like those, which so much

had comforted my heart, helping me to keep living. There was not, in reality, any possibility of mail exchange with whomever it was: the seas mined, policed by submarines, the desolating distance, from one pole of the world to the other, the difficulty in hospitals and war trenches... the death, the death, that day by day destroyed the human contingents, everything was impossibility between me and my sweet Frederyk. However, something was certain: many times, at night or during the day, if I were asleep, my soul would abandon the flesh burden on the bed, immersed in deep sleep, and search, in dark and busy places, the beloved silhouette, and would find it.²¹ Frequently, I saw my beloved like that, I saw him fighting in desperation to save the hurt in the battle fields, I saw him suffering a thousand pains and difficulties, I saw him crying of longing and anguish, I saw him marching, exhausted and suffering, through the fields seeded with death and desolation. In other times, he would also be asleep. Then, my spirit would take his away from that exhausted body, and we would go very far away, we would reach favorable spiritual resorts, and we would be refreshed from the ordeals' pain by friendly beings from the afterlife, holders of charity to their neighbor. Finally, I witnessed his death during a violent bombing that did not even spare the Red Cross, and then, always in spirit, that is, in dream, I cried over his inert body, that remained there, far from me, in the field sinisterly affected by human incomprehension, while the Spirit would be led to the headquarters of recovering created by the love of God in the vastness of sidereal spaces...²²

A few months went by, and Frederyk, the old Yvan, came back to visit me. His ghost would appear to me, speak to me as before, before reincarnation. Through the psychographed messages, he now gave me new letters, always the same, sweet, romantic and full of love, like those written from Warsaw:

“– Here I am, my darling Varienka, still and always, alive and master of myself as I never was before, once that, now, I am redeemed from my mistake of suicide. Our love will go on through the millennia, because it has put down roots in the very laws of God. Do not fear, Varienka, be confident and serene, because shortly we will be united forever: our past crime was purged by the great pain of an unavoidable separation...”

However, I was tired of fighting and suffering. I grew old, and, although the strength of my Spiritist ideal heroically revived my heart, a secret

desire to return to the life of the Spirit now insinuated itself in my prayers:
“Grant me, Lord – I would mutter in prayers –, grant me the fortune of
leaving to your reign of peace, strengthened by the hope in your justice...”.

VIII

“My dear Doctor Natacha Anna Pavlovna:

I am, now, gravely ill, my strength fades away quickly. I write this last page from a hospital bed, aided by the pillows that two bedside neighbors provided me. The dear ghosts of my mother, my father, my good aunts Lisa and Agafia Dimitrievna, Mathew Nikolaievitch, my father’s dear friend, Stanislaw Pietrovitch, my very dear friend Frederyk Kowalski (the Yvan Yvanovitch from other times) frequently visit me. I see them, as always, I speak with them, I know they came to infuse confidence in my soul, in the moment of my trespass. I know I will have a happy spiritual awakening in this lovely company, and I smile indeed, very glad, while I draft these last phrases. This is, thus, the report that, per your request, I conclude on the eve of my death.

Thankfully and truly yours,

VARVARA DIMITRIEVNA”

IX

The night was falling when I finished reading the strange Varvara Dimitrievna's document. The lilac trees, indeed, smelled intensely, under the spreading dew that started to humidify them. The big city lights, already lit, seemed to be wet inside their protecting globes, unsure under the fluidity of the fog that thickened by every instant. Closing the notebook, I started to look at the passer-by, without, however, paying them the minimum attention, sadly thinking about what I had just finished reading.

In London, many were undergoing, it was certain, supranormal investigations. Many clubs dedicated to psychic experiments, offices, private groups, domestic groups, institutes, and associations of study and experimentation on the notable question existed there, attended by an intellectual elite, which aim was the acquisition of scientific-spiritual truth. During a few days, I systematically thought about Varvara Dimitrievna's report. It worried me the fact that the report was way too incomplete. It only revealed the effect of a cause, and not the moral logic that necessarily should exist behind that drama. Why that intolerable, absurd separation between two souls that adored each other? God, then, was so severe in his punishments? Was not Love, then, God's law? Why did destiny give the poor Varienka the luck of loving and of being loved by an incorporeal being, first, and then by this same being transformed in man, but ironically twenty-four years younger than her, a fact that anyway separated them, preventing the matrimonial union, because this singular woman had personality enough to not expose herself to such a conjugal disparity, even if her beloved could overcome it? Why a love so alive and passionate, if the co-participants had never seen each other? Would be exact the explanations presented by the notable disciple of psyche?

I had the right to try something to investigate the subject, because I was motivated by the sincere desire of clarifications, I needed to write the fact for the greater public, and I could not do it without really grasping them. I prepared, then, an experimentation session, aided by a completely trusted medium, whose supranormal powers were considerable, and I asked the ghost of Varvara Dimitrievna to agree with satisfying the investigations, in the name of Truth and Love.

I was successful in my intent, right on the third day of attempting this contact. The disincarnated entity Varvara Dimitrievna made itself present, identified itself with certainty, and satisfied my questions. In the experimentations room, were only the medium, two Spiritist technicians, and I. The silence was complete, once the ten o'clock-of-the-night bells had already sounded. The room, little illuminated by a discrete lamp, facilitated the operation, and, then, the following conversation was established:

– I read the report on the events around you, the spiritual entity Yvan Yvanovitch, and the Polish doctor Frederyk Kowalski – said I –. I was deeply moved by this story of loved sublimated by suffering. However, I still would like to know something more positive, so the literary commentary that I will write about it to the public may be as complete as possible. Are you willing, or can you, comply with me?

And the entity answered:

– Speak, Count Filipe Filipovitch, I will answer whatever love and reason may allow me.

– I will ask, then, thankful for your gentleness. Tell me: was the Polish doctor, indeed, the reincarnation of that disincarnated intelligence Yvan Yvanovitch, who stated he had been a doctor in the Ural region, and your husband, during another earthly existence that you had? Wouldn't this assumption be an illusion of your mind fanaticized by meditation, or by your temper, sentimental par excellence?

The character from the other world seemed to flinch, as if consulting someone by its side, but, later, answered with resolution:

– No, it was not fanaticism from my mind dedicated to study, or the sentimental inclination of my character, because the Polish doctor really existed, he was a man of flesh and blood, and, notwithstanding never having met me in person, he loved me with the devotion characteristic of Yvan Yvanovitch, never having heard about the existence of the latter... Yes, now I know with the maximum certainty: the Warsaw doctor was the reincarnation of the husband that I should have loved and honored in a past existence. I knew that, I never doubted it, and today I have absolute certainty.

– Where did the existence you had together take place?

– In a distant and small city of Ural. Then, he was a humanitarian doctor, like yesterday he was in Warsaw.

– You, Varvara Dimitrievna, who now covers a larger panoramic spectrum of the past, could better inform the real reason why you became separate nowadays, submitted to a moving destiny, if not irritating, that defied the possibilities of a personal approximation?

– It was a punishment by the law of Creation, which acted as effect of a cause: I had failed before as a wife, offending the law of love in marriage, as the adulteress that I was; he had failed as a suicide, offending the law of Nature, which prohibits a creature from rebelling against the determinations of the Creator. We were two criminals who did not deserve the tranquility of the satisfied love. Our separation, determined by the effect of an ungrateful cause, by ourselves created, constituted a rough lesson for us both: it hurt me with the lack of a home composed by the dedication of a loving and good partner, who would aid me in the earthly march of progress, culminating with our reencounter from afar, without possibility of personal approximation; it hurt him, because, loving me as before, he really saw himself obliged to live without my presence by his side, a fact to which he had not submitted himself when he had lived under the personality of Yvan Yvanovitch, rather choosing the suicide.

– Could you tell me, Varvara Dimitrievna, if the punishment ended now, or if you continue separated, isolatedly advancing through life in the beyond-grave?

– Oh, no! Now everything changed! We suffered with resignation and humbleness the dramatic consequences of the mistake we made in the past. Our love has sublimated itself, by the humiliation of pain and longing... and, now, having overcome our own selves, that is, against the disordered passions that made us unhappy, we are forever reunited, attracted one to the other by the irresistible law of affinity that regulates and equalizes everything in the spiritual life.

– Are you, then, happy?

– We are very happy, enchanted by the sublime fortune that true love allows those who feel it in the Spirit life. The long suffering borne after the

mistakes made, the painful experience of separation, when our feelings remained intense, served for the integral solidification of those same feelings, which since past centuries have been unifying us many times, in an intense back and forth of pain and joy...

– And your age disparity in the existence just now ended?

– Disappeared! We are normal Spirits, we have mental-vibrational forces capable of presenting ourselves with whatever plastic spiritual configuration that we desire. We now desire to be beautiful and young as we were when we were married... and so we are!

– Are you here alone, in this meeting, or...

– Yes, my sweet correspondent of Warsaw is present, we never get separated...

– Now I would like to ask you the last question, my dear Varvara Dimitrievna...

– Ask away, Count Filipe Filipovitch.

– ... But I fear that I will hurt you...

– I know very well what you would like to ask me, I read your thoughts... But, ask away, ask...

– If you loved him so much, your husband from other earthly migrations, why did you betray him?

– The woman, many times, loses herself by the excess of vanity, pride, idleness, freedom, sick sentimentalism, ignorance, disbelief in God, disrespect towards the family and herself... and throws herself into the abyss of vexing situations for her Spirit, from which only the centuries will manage to move her away. Fragile and loving heart, it is easily sensitized with transitory illusions, and, with her heart discretionary by nature, she harms herself and disgraces, many times, those who love her and whom she loves the most...

– Were you, then, entirely forgiven by your past husband?

– How would I not be? Isn't this God's law? He wants me with an immortal feeling, and didn't the Apostle²³ proclaim that love is patient and

forgiving?

– And... Varvara Dimitrievna, my dear sister and friend... what about the other one?... The lover... That one who disgraced you and your beloved, the causer of the intense drama that I just came to know... What happened to him?

Again, the beloved ghost, through its mediator, seemed indecisive, but, following, in deep breath, as if in a burdensome lamentation, exclaimed in a whisper:

– You should rather consult your own heart, your own intuitions, Count Filipe Filipovitch, and you will find him... It was not in vain, my poor friend, that you were the chosen one by law of reparation to write this singular theme to the greater public...

I lowered the forehead, humiliated, certain that I had been the same infamous agent of the drama here described, and I closed the session among tears.

X

I just finished writing the following letter to Doctor Natacha Anna Pavlovna:

“– My most excellent Madam:

I fulfilled Your Excellency’s desire, I wrote for the greater public the story of the *Immortal Love* that has been uniting two hearts along the centuries. I made up nothing, I changed nothing, I only narrated what Varvara Dimitrievna had exposed. In truth, I was not the one who wrote the story, but Varvara Dimitrievna, that burning and singular soul, who knew how to live it intensely. Today, in the afternoon, I will bring the originals for your learned examination... and I will accept from your generous hands a cup of hot tea with butter biscuits, if Your Excellency would give me the honor of offering them to me during the visit.

Your dedicated servant and admirer

FILIFE FILIPOVITCH, COUNT

¹⁰ TN: See Note 2.

¹¹ The reader should understand that this information is nothing more than the literary style in which the spiritual author of this tale wanted to write it. Leo Tolstoy was never exiled in England and, by the year 1920, was already disincarnated, once he died in 1910. It is, thus, a literary technique commonly used by the time of the great writer (Medium’s note).

¹² Hippolyte-León Denizard Rivail – Allan Kardec.

¹³ Still today it is unpolite, in Russia, to address someone only by the given name.

¹⁴ Respectful title granted to old monks of the ancient Russian orthodox clergy, specially dedicated to the confessional services.

¹⁵ One of the islands of the Neva delta, in Saint Petersburg.

¹⁶ This list of charitable activities accomplished by the Spiritists is characteristic from the Spiritist Codification. In Russia, there were translations of Allan Kardec’s works, since the beginning of Spiritism, done by the sage Alexandre Aksakof (Medium’s note).

¹⁷ Village in the outskirts on Saint Petersburg, on the road to Finland.

¹⁸ The Spirit candidate to return to Earth prepares its own reincarnation, helped by its Spiritual Guides or, in its impossibility, by its Guides on its behalf. Sometimes, this preparation is long.

¹⁹ Leo Tolstoy was Esperantist. He learned Esperanto’s grammar in two hours, but only manifested

himself about it six years later, which gave great impulse to the propagation of such language. (Medium's note).

20 From Brazil to Poland, the time difference is approximately four hours.

21 The incarnated Spirits recognize each other when they meet during sleep, even if they have never seen each other in the present, once they had known and loved each other in past existences and remember those existences during the interregnum of sleep.

22 Such possibilities are more frequent than we suppose, however, generally, we do not remember them when we wake up. (Medium's note).

23 Paul of Tarsus.

3

SUBLIME DESTINIES

Leo Tolstoy

“Tribulations can be imposed on hardened Spirits, or on extremely ignorant ones, to lead them to make a conscious choice. Penitent Spirits, however, willing to repair the harm they have caused, and to better behave themselves, freely choose the tribulations. Like one who, having badly performed a task, asks to restart it, so not to lose the fruits of labor. Tribulations are, thus, at the same time, expiations of the past, which in them receives the deserved punishment, and tests with respect to the future, for which they prepare. Let us praise God who, in his goodness, allows men to repair their mistakes, and does not condemn them irrevocably for a first shortcoming.”

(The Gospel According to Spiritism, by Allan Kardec, chapter V, “Blessed are the afflicted”, number 8, 32nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation²⁴)

I

Not very far away from V..., there was a grouping of poor houses and profuse plantations, dominated by the figure of another bigger house, well built in wood, and very ample, which they called the Lilac Tree Mansion. It was the village of K..., lost in the frontier regions of the Caucasus, humble and poetic like the legitimate crib, only adorned by Nature's splendor. In V... I remained for four years, serving in the Russian military forces that patrolled the frontiers, keeping the indigenous Caucasians pacified in their "aius",²⁵ an attempt to submit them to the government of all the "Russias".

The village of K... had been erected in Russian territory, but it was so close to the Caucasian mountains that, in a day of an eventual prosecution to an even more eventual criminal, he or she could easily disappear between the forest trees, and seek a hideout among the natives of the "aius", or villages, of Caucasus.

During the time that I served there as an official in one of the companies of the forces of the gracious Czar Alexandre II,²⁶ I exchanged knowledge with a singular man, and after a few months of solitude and monotony, during which I visited him as often as possible, I became his assiduous messmate, while a loyal esteem was established between us, uniting us with bonds of spontaneous fraternity. He lived in the little village of K..., and was the owner-dweller of the Lilac Tree Mansion. He was called Andrzej Semionovitch,²⁷ or at least he said that was his name, because the truth was that no one had the expectation of knowing him well, and the place was so deserted and distant from the rest of the world that the individuals who were there, avid for human contact, would not remember to verify the identity of anyone else, rather thanking God for having found someone with whom to exchange ideas.

When I met him, he already was fifty years-old approximately, maybe a little older, although he looked like he was sixty years-old, and dressed himself oddly, wearing very large pants, made of crude cloth, black, tucked inside a pair of boots that reached the middle of his shanks, and a tunic also oddly large and equally black, adjusted on the waist by a belt from the same quality, which he fastened with sloppiness, destitute from any vanity. Over

the head he wore some sort of cap made of the same black textile, or, more accurately, a kerchief tied as a cap, or a turban. He had long hair, and a beard that reached his chest, both grizzled. The aspect of this Andrzej Semionovitch was, thus, dark, having nothing of beauty, although ornate with the clothes, the cap (or turban), the beard, and the hair.

By this time, and for more than a century, it was common for the great figures of Russian society to go into exile, temporarily or not, in the furthest corners of the country, and to live there humbly, as monks or hermits, growing small crops, raising goats and chicken, praying for the conversion of sinners, and doing the good to the extent possible. Such an exile, it seems, was penitence or initiation, because many of those figures later would go to the East in pilgrimage or joined cloisters to be ordained. Andrzej Semionovitch was one of those figures, although it was unknown whether he was famous, with the difference that he had never thought about becoming a “pope”, to be living there for twenty years, and even to be raising horses, in addition to goats and chicken, selling them to whomever wanted to buy, whether Russian, Caucasian, or Tartarian. However, and notwithstanding his oddity, after being acquainted with him, or even by simply observing his life style, one would find incalculable beauties in him, full of attraction and enchantment. Noticeably, however, he did not possess large intellectual culture, but his conversation was attractive and varied, although he spoke little, and his behavior was so sweet, his voice so grave and involving that, unwillingly, the interlocutor would be bound to his words, without minimum embarrassment. He had, as we said, magnificent horses, which he rode with such dexterity and mastership, executing so many twirls in the horse games he would make up for himself and his neighbors, that he received the admiration from horseman in the Russian companies themselves, who would see similarities with the prowess of the Cossacks of the Don.

Andrzej was Russian and greatly esteemed in the region, and even the commander of the fort and his assistant would visit his house and have dinner with him every other Sunday. He used to say that he was alone in the world, that he did not have a family, and that he had never been loved by any heart in this world. “Just the dogs and the horses love me”, he used to say, and, in those occasions, one could observe in him a certain anxiety, a certain bitterness in his behavior. And, in fact, he also had twenty-five dogs, which would follow him as if children, or would lie down at his feet, if he allowed

them to. He was single but with the particularity of having transformed his house into a hostel for travelers, a shelter for the elderly, and an orphanage for the children. He himself directed everything and educated the children (I came to know there a dozen orphans, whom he raised), he took care of the elderly and cooked for everyone when there was not anyone else to do it, and he cooked very well the cabbage and turnip soup, and the goat roasted in olive oil with chestnut. He would never get angry with those singular guests. The neighbors said that such amenity was indifference towards life, inconsolable discontent, but not virtue. The guests, however, affirmed it was sanctity, because Andrzej Semionovitch was an apostle disguised of rude peasant to console Gypsies, suffering Caucasians, and even Tartars, because he did not nurture any prejudice, something that existed a lot in those lands. His house was large, and, notwithstanding being built of wood, was pretty and comfortable, painted in blue, with fireplaces, an office, sleeping rooms for the children, the elderly, and the pilgrims, and windows ornate with white curtains. The Gypsy and the soldier women used to help him in the services of his holy inn. They would ask for his blessing, and he would bless them, saying: "It is God who blesses, not me". However, he rarely allowed himself to have conversations with them. Many times, I helped him taking care of the children myself, because I admired his abnegation, although I did not understand him. And even the Russian ladies, wives of the officers serving in the fort, used to visit him if any children got sick, when they visited their husbands. I liked to observe Andrzej Semionovitch, intrigued by his life style, and I found out that in the garden there was a great lilac tree, and next to it a small blue bench built in wooden planks, looking like a rustic furniture for children. In addition to this one, there were other lilac trees everywhere, and, when in bloom, the air would become so fragrant that it was enchanting to enter that area. Daily, at dusk, he would sit there, lower his head, cross his hands, and, with the arms on his knees and his forehead on his hands, he would meditate, maybe even pray. Everyone respected those moments, me including, no one daring to question him, and never interrupting him. The elderly affirmed that he carried a great intimate discontent, which had only been dominated, without despairing him, by reason of the great respect for God that animated him. However, he would certainly never complain about any disappointment suffered, to whomever it may be.

II

When summer came in 1860, it became clear, at least to me, the enigma that involved Andrzej Semionovitch's life.

Summer in that year arrived earlier than expected. In the day now remembered, it was sunny, although pale, in the village of K..., and a calm air, embalmed in the scent of roses, mixed with that of pines and lilac trees, involved the surroundings. In the afternoon, the sky still blue and calm, Andrzej sat on the garden's grass, satisfied and smiling, which did not happen often. Shortly after, the dogs came around (because they are always first than people, in searching their master), then the children, and later the elderly. The goats bleated here and there, grazing in a small field by the house, followed by Tania, the housekeeper, who was already thinking about conducting them back to the cote, but the horses neighed in satisfaction a little further away, by the edge of the woods, lively in the afternoon's warmth, which allowed them freedom until the last sun redness.

Andrzej Semionovitch's house laid on an elevation, from which the royal road could be seen, crisscrossing the slope underneath. Later, that road started to ascend, found cover in the hill's curves, and then reappeared, suddenly, in front of the garden.

The lilac trees let out penetrating fragrances, and one would say that sublime celestial anointment reached the intimacy of the creatures that lived sweetly connected in that lovely residence. I spent part of that day there, as it also was my day off, and, desiring to avoid the perils of the quarters' bohemia, which invited me to gambling and vodka, I sought the companionship of that friend and of his cohort of children and elderly, whose presence would be favorable to my desire of peace. I sat by his side, on the grass, and we started a conversation:

– Have you ever missed Russia, Andrzej Semionovitch? To be more precise, Saint Petersburg, Moscow, civilization, in short, your friends, remaining isolated for so many years in these borders of the Caucasus? – I asked right off.

I noticed that his eyes blinked faster than usual, and that he, lowering them and distractively plucking off some grass blades, and biting on them, said, as if talking to himself, thinking out loud:

– Yes, I have, Captain Nowak, I have... despite of how much civilization made me suffer...

I do not know if the contagious afternoon warmth influenced in the always compressed nerves of the strange protector of the elderly and children, because, with this beginning of conversation, and without my absolute expectation, he opened his heart in confidences to me, right after. Maybe his heart desired to expand itself a little, after twenty years of silence and oppression, during which not even one complaint, not even one venting of intimate revolt escaped his lips to reveal his so simple, but also common and dramatic history. What I know is that he confessed me everything right then and there, sitting on the garden's grass, and biting those juicy grass blades, with his sweet and grave voice, which he preferred to lower a little more, while the children rattled around, playing with the dogs, the elderly laughed and clapped their palms at each new feat of them, children and dogs, the goats, very close, bleated, and the horses, further, neighed, lively.

– Why don't you visit, then, once in a while, our good cities, seeing civilization again? – I asked, observing that he yearned to open himself up.

– Because civilization did not want me, the good cities, as you say, expelled me from their bosom... I already told you, I guess, Captain Nowak, that I had never been loved by anyone?... that is, I mean, I guess I was loved, but...

I stared him, interrogative, and he, corresponding my stare, but with an almost mad expression, in an uncontrollable impulse, kept on:

– Well... I, in fact, don't exist anymore, Alexis Nowak, and because of it I could not present myself to any friend, even if I still had any from the old days. I died twenty-five years ago for this world of controversies and hostilities, to resurge from my own ruins and keep living for God, with rules different from those buried with me. I am not called Andrzej Semionovitch, my name was another... I was called Anatole Mikechine... However, now I

am called, in fact, Andrzej Semionovitch. How do you want, then, that I go back to the places where I used to be known?

I kept staring at him. He plucked the little grass blades, at times just one or two, at times a handful, and threw them away, but then plucked another, just one, to nibble between the teeth. And, suddenly,, he said...

III

“– This is what happened:

I was a Cossack official and served as an assistant to General Olaf Golovin-Kriestrovsky, who cherished me and who, for this same reason, always demonstrated his appreciation and protection towards me. He used to say: “I will find a way for you to attend the Superior School, and you still will be a great military and servant of our Land. It’s a pity that you don’t have a title of nobility. If you had one, you would enter the Page Corps, and nothing else would be necessary. However, serving somewhere distant and dangerous, in a risky expedition, for example, it won’t be hard for you to obtain concessions from the Emperor and to reach an elevated position in his army, as you can count on my protection.”

I grew vain with such demonstrations of sympathy, and I sincerely believed in the goodwill of my illustrious protector, far from imagining, however, that the General expressed himself like that merely in observation of to social practice of those times, which dictated the fashion of kind expressions excess everywhere. In addition to being General, my protector also was Count Golovin-Kriestrovsky, very rich and well connected, privy of the Imperial Palace’s intimacy, because in fact he had weekly dinners with the Empress and other people close to the throne. He had three children: Ygor Fiodor Golovin-Kriestrovsky, the first-born; Piotre Golovin, a youngster who served the Page Corps, proud and ambitious for a superior position in court, and Isabela Golovina Kriestrovskaia, beautiful seventeen years-old girl, when I had the misfortune of getting to know her. I was riding master to several noble young men and women, although still being young myself, and Count Ygor, who was not a military and wanted to follow the diplomatic career, being, for this same reason, very criticized by his parents and brother, requested my services as horseman, and I started to teach him horse riding, which made us good friends and me intimate of the house. The General’s wife, however, Anna Kriestrovna, was hostile, treating me with arrogance and ill will, never extending me her hand in greeting, limiting herself to answer my salutations with a short head nod, because she could not bear the presence of Cossacks in her house. Many times, I sat at Count Kriestrovsky’s table, even in days of celebration, because my position as Cossack officer, despite

lack of nobility, raised the interest of the guests that appreciated horse riding, extending their respects to the dexterous horsemen in whom all could see the value in arms and skill in horse riding. In such occasions, that is, when they invited me to join the table, the Countess discretely refused to take part in the conversations during the meal, not even, many times, sitting at the table, excusing herself for headaches. She despised me because I did not have nobility and because I was a Cossack, even though I was legitimate Russian.

Despite all that, things went well, and I believed in the General's promises, noticing, however, somewhat internally worried, that he was not in a rush to lobby for my promised promotion, and I also believed in Ygor Fiodor Golovin-Kriestrovsky and Piotre Golovin's esteem, when there was a great horse riding competition in which I triumphed over the most famous horsemen in Russia. My name was acclaimed by all voices, in the army fields, and, in that evening, I even received kisses and gifts from illustrious ladies of the court itself. However, only Isabela Golovina Kriestrovskaia's congratulations really cherished me up, who gave me the rose that embellished the bodice of her pretty blue dress, and the golden necklace that encircled her white little and flexible neck. In that afternoon, oh my!, I realized that I was in love with her, and that I was corresponded vehemently, because her eyes revealed to me in the moment she offered me the precious gifts of her admiration for my horse riding success, saying:

– Now, give me something of your own, Anatole Mikechine, as a remembrance of this unforgettable day...

However, I had nothing with me that I considered sufficiently worth of her, and she, seeing me surprised and undecided, took from my hands my “nagaika”²⁸ and, smiling, pressed it to her chest, as if it were a trophy.

From that day on, Isabela Golovina and I really started to love each other with a mixed feeling of human ardor and angel-like quality, a love that, through its great sincerity, could make us the most fortunate couple in the world, but which, in fact, brought us both nothing other than helpless bitterness. Clocked by the enthusiasm of loving and being loved, I fed foolish dreams of marriage with the proud Kriestrovsky, weaved reckless projects, conserved hopes that were nothing more than illusion, believing, with the sincerity that dominated my heart, that my love would be approved and

respected by Isabela Golovina's entire family and by the Russian society, inattentive to the painful reality that never a small Cossack official, without nobility, without fortune and without good future opportunities, would be accepted as a suitor to marriage alliance with a family of princes, counts and generals, who felt proud for having the intimacy of the imperial family itself. On her turn, Isabela, still very young, and loving for the first time, seemed happy, and incentivized me to court her, even in the presence of her parents, which I avoided doing, fearing the very reprisals that later came.

In the gardens of Palace Kriestrovsky, in Saint Petersburg, there was a magnificent lilac tree which inebriant fragrance, during spring and summer, was the enchantment of the house dwellers. Under its branches, which bent in arcs, there was a very graceful little blue bench, specially done, they said, for Isabela when she was a child, who liked to play there with her brothers, under the watch of their "nianas".²⁹ Now, however, it was there that we met, because it was a quiet place, removed from the house and discreet, anxious as we always were for a few moments of happiness alone, when, then, we gave ourselves to our dreams of love, programming the joys of the future days that we planned to live, once united in marriage. Nobody ever surprised us during our innocent conversations, because the garden was huge and, after the tea, the Countess went to rest before dinner, and the General, talking with one or another guest, or busy in the Palace of War, did not pay attention to us. The servants, on the other hand, they knew about everything, but they were faithful to Isabela and me, protecting us always with their vigilance..."

I payed maximum attention to that sentimental narrative, foreseeing, with sorrow, the misfortune that would follow, which epilogue was that shelter-house for the elderly and children, and that very narrative that I heard. Andrzej Semionovitch was getting anxious, plucking, now with greater impetus, the small grass blades, and tearing them apart between his teeth, then spiting them far. The evening came, and he resumed:

– One day, however, when we had already decided to throw ourselves at the General's feet asking for mercy for our love, a terrible event disrupted our hopes. Isabela Golovina's was asked in marriage by the Prince Rudolph Nikolaievitch, and the Emperor himself had addressed Count Olaf Golovin on the matter, which equaled a binding order, no excuses allowed. By the way, the suitor belonged to the best social and moral category, and the Count, to

make him justice, only had to thank them both, the Emperor and the suitor, for the honor granted to him and his daughter.

The order was well accepted, thus, on behalf of both parties, but Isabela revolted against the arbitrary imposition, and, without consulting me, in a moment of despair, declared to her parents that it was me whom she loved, that she would not marry another man, if not me, and that she would throw herself at the Empress' feet asking mercy and protection to our love, and her intervention with her imperial husband for our union. Such insolence, during a solemn moment for the family, which had gathered in council and concluded that the engagement matter was closed, and set the date for the public announcement's celebrations, rendered to my dear Golovina a slap in the face by her mother and a severe reprehension by her father. Great confusion then ensued. Desperate, Golovina succumbed in an anxiety attack, and fell ill. Ygor Fiodor Golovin Kriestrovsky was entrusted by his father to seek and inform me that, by order of the General, I was prohibited from attending his house any further, and fired me from the horse-riding classes as well. However, he did not confess the reason for such resolution, and, notwithstanding my questions, he remained silent about the motive, shielding himself behind the great pride that was characteristic of the Kriestrovsky. Only two days later, through a letter from Isabela, I found out what happened, and you can imagine, Captain Nowak, what then went through my soul.

Nevertheless, the engagement of my Isabela Golovina with the Prince was officially announced. Our encounters, nonetheless, under the lilac tree, by dusk, remained as before, not with the same frequency, it was true, but once or twice a week. What we did was reckless and, fearing to be discovered, we started to meet a little later, after dinner and the house would go silent. Sometimes, we met even after midnight, aided by Isabela's room servant and by a servant grateful to me for having given him free horse riding classes during a past summer in the rural estate of Count Golovin.

The both of us suffering from that distressing situation, we ended up deciding that Isabela should address her fiancé, confessing the revulsion that such an engagement caused her, which infallibly would lead him to avoid the marriage with her. And she did exactly that. However, Prince Rudolph, who, in fact, had an excellent character, declared he could not do anything about it, because the marriage between them was determined by the Emperor, so the

families Kriestrovsky and Oblonski, and himself, Rudolph Nikolaievitch Oblonski, counseled her to remain prudent and obedient, as a refusal would offend His Majesty and many things could happen: the Kriestrovsky would fall from his good graces and be repelled everywhere; reprisals would ensue against the Cossack who dared such a high aspiration, and herself, Kriestrovskaja Golovina Isabela, could be detained in a religious convent and there stay for a period of time by the Emperor's whim.

The excellent Prince continued, thus, his ceremonious courtship to the beautiful betrothal, and nothing shared with the future father-in-law, or tried against me, just counseling me, through a servant, to leave Saint Petersburg as soon as possible for my own benefit and, above all, for Isabela Golovina's benefit.

IV

“With desperation, I saw the day of Isabela’s wedding come closer. I refused to comply with the Prince Rudolph’s advice and remained in Saint Petersburg, lacking the peace of mind to think rationally about the situation and, thus, ever more in love with my pretty beloved. Sometimes, however, I would even hate Isabela, concluding that she submitted herself way too passively to the marriage imposed on her. Always when I saw her in a carriage, accompanied by the Countess and the fiancé, my humiliation was such and the revolt in my heart was so despairing that I thought to commit misdeeds, got drunk, incited fights among friends and contemplated suicide. In a certain time, I even cut my own wrists (and so he showed me the scar, rolling up the tunic’s long sleeves), but people rescued me in time; another time, I shot myself with pistol, but I missed the target, which was my heart, just hurting myself only lightly. Being aware of my misdeeds, which tortured her greatly, Isabela Golovina asked me serenity and patience, because she assured me not having lost hope in the victory of our love in a remote future. And our encounters at the lilac tree, thus, were ever more cherished and anxiously waited for, interweaved, however, with tears and complaints from my heart, and replies and hopes from her. Nonetheless, I realized that my beloved stayed less and less during those encounters and, sometimes, not even attended them, making me wait in vain through the night. Her touch was now short and scared, not allowing me to enjoy the past enchantment, which meant my reason for living. I implored her several times to be loyal and confess if she stopped loving me in favor of the fiancé. But she would crumble down in tears, repeating only:

– I love you always, my poor Anatole, but what can we do? I love you still and forever, but our love is impossible in this world, only in Heaven we can be happy...

Well, I had a brother in arms who had come with me from the government of Don to the military service in the Russian troops, and who cherished me like no other friend ever cherished me. He was called Andrzej Semionovitch, and he was trying everything, in that dramatic occasion, to take me away from Saint Petersburg, counseling me to look somewhere else the oblivion of that unhappy episode of my life, in order to acquire peace. He proposed to follow

me, that is, to ask the regiment for our admission in the forces that served in the Caucasus, where we could even progress, acquiring a better position in our military career. Understanding that this proposal was helpless, because I did not agree with leaving Saint Petersburg, he ended up proposing:

– Well, then, let us kidnap your beloved... let us prepare everything, and leave to somewhere far away... to the East, to anywhere that is not Russia, where you could get married and be happy...

Such a reckless suggestion managed to give me new strengths, bringing me some serenity: it was a hope that shined in the depths of an abyss of causeless despair. Without saying anything to Isabela, not even asking her about her will or revulsion of following me towards an uncertain life, the only prospective of which were sacrifice, I surprised her with the kidnap in the first encounter under the lilac tree after my conversation with Andrzej Semionovitch. I took her away, gagged and covered under a mantel, during the night, and, mounted on our fast horses, Andrzej, me and her in my arms, rode during the rest of the night and part of the following day towards southeast, where I planned on finding help among our brothers of Cossack race for the desperate undertaking. However, in the end, I did not succeed. Once the kidnap was found out in the Kriestrovsky Palace, in the morning of that very same day, measures were taken by Count Olaf Golovin and Prince Rudolph. The Czar himself, informed about the disturbing facts, moved troops around in search of us, and throughout the four corners of Russia, horsemen squads, armed with rifles, were ordered to detain and recover the kidnapped young girl, because the Count servants, our accomplices, corroded by regret for having betrayed their lords and fearing the young lady's fortune, spontaneously confessed their own participation in our furtive encounters, affirming they did not doubt the reality of a kidnap promoted by me. And, in fact, we were detained before reaching our destination, when we again stopped so Isabela could rest for a few hours. My beloved was rescued by her fiancé himself, who had joined that squad, and I even suffered the shame of seeing her supplicate her fiancé's protection for me, and to return her to her father's home, because she did not want to follow me under those conditions, as she was surprised by the kidnap in the gardens of her own house when she left, during the night, to calm herself, under the fresh dew, from the anxiety that tormented her.

Then, I was arrested with my poor brother in arms, Andrzej Semionovitch. However, by Prince Rudolph's orders, who had discretion over that matter, granted by the Emperor himself, we were not conducted to any prison in Saint Petersburg. We remained in Moscow, where, then, our Calvary really started. We were both demoted from our positions as officers, and condemned to suffer a thousand lashes, which, within two days, were reduced to five hundred by Isabela Golovina's intervention, who begged to the fiancé on my behalf, because, she said, as I later was informed, I had so behaved because I loved her very much and I was desperate, and that I treated her with such respect during the kidnap that I ought to be compensated for that; and, beyond that, she did not desire my ruin.

In fact, the flogging punishment was not considered a death penalty, or capital punishment, but it was certain that the ill-fated condemned to such an ordeal hardly resisted to it, as you know. For a Cossack, Alexis Nowak, it was the supreme shame, and not even us were used to suffer such an insult. I underwent, then, the flogging torture in a public square applied by five hundred soldiers – I, a Cossack! – which was even more shameful, while Andrej suffered the same in the following morning. Once returned to prison, semi-dead by the lashes, we were submitted to treatment, to improve healing of our wounds, as we had resisted the ordeal without dying and our backs were lacerated, in raw flesh, bleeding, with deep wounds like long cuts, which were very painful. However, we were young, and our vigorous constitution, our strong and healthy blood resisted well to the martyrdom, and we felt recovered after two months.

Nonetheless, our brothers of race felt offended by the insult inflicted to us, and even more so because it was not due to a military reason, but private, to which no military reprisal was applicable. They felt offended and came to our aid. They visited us in prison, counseling us indifference and submission, and promising us their help in escaping. We ought to leave Russia forever – they advised – and go to the Caucasus, then reaching Turkestan and later the East, until we were completely forgotten by the authorities of our country. But, I rejected the suggestion, still having hope for the future, and accepted the present. Isabela Golovina married Prince Rudolph in the meantime, she having informed me about it herself a few days before, because, employing a thousand cautious circumstances, she came to Moscow and visited me in prison, saying good-bye in tears, while asking for my forgiveness, affirming

that I would never be forgotten by her heart. We hugged tenderly and kissed each other just like we used to do in those sweet dusks under the lilac tree, and until today, more than twenty-five years later, I never saw her again...”

Andrezj Semionovitch, that is, Anatole Mikechine, whom they supposed to be called Andrezj Semionovitch, now spoke with great emotion, panting. He no longer chewed on the grass blades; he grabbed them in handfuls, and held them with closed hands, without plucking them. He had the eyes fixed on the ground, and his voice now became hoarse and grave. Suddenly, he turned his back towards me, rolled up the tunic and showed me his naked torso, saying:

– Look, Captain Nowak, the only inheritance civilization granted me: five hundred lashes! They humiliated me like this, almost killed me. And for what? Just because I loved with fervor a woman that was not mine. Twenty-five years ago, this happened, and, in my body, there are still the lashes’ marks... and you ask me why I do not return to our good cities?... you are a military and now you know the truth. If you want, you can denounce me...

The white scars there remained, in his very white skin, testifying the cruelty of the punishment. Nothing finding sufficiently eloquent to express my painful impressions of what I heard, and not responding to his challenge to denounce him, I asked, just to say something:

– After you recovered from your wounds, you were certainly released from prison, or dismissed from the military service?

– No, we were neither released nor dismissed from military service. We were deported to a belligerent zone of the Caucasus, destitute of all benefits and demoted from the position we had achieved, under orders of being put in the most advanced outposts.

“We went, in fact, right in the first days after our recovery, to the most perilous regions, being put on fact-finding and sentinel missions. There were heavy fights, and we were gravely injured. Andrzej, injured in the abdomen, died not long after, not even receiving treatment, which came too late. But, before going silent forever, he had time to recommend me the following:

– No one knows us here, Anatole Mikechine, we arrived six days ago, and not even our names are well-known in the outpost we are stationed at. In our tent, you will find my tin chest, where my small savings are. I do not have a

wife, children, parents or siblings. My only brother is you. You keep everything that is mine, before the soldiers take it and get drunk with what belonged to me...

I tried to cheer him up the most I could, washing his face with water from the flask, and giving him some sips of vodka, which he rejected, asking me to help him pray to obtain God's blessing, because he was dying... after the improvised prayers, he went silent, started to gasp strongly, and died without receiving the aid of men...

My intention, however, was not to take possession of his name, but just to keep whatever he had offered me before dying. But, when our official entered the tent and saw me also wounded, he asked, joking: "Who died, the illustrious kidnapper of young ladies, or his servant?", I quickly reflected and thought prudent to pass as my poor friend Andrzej Semionovitch. I did not do it out of cowardice, fearing this or that, but out of need of peace to think and to reconcile with myself. They believed me easily, because there the name of a Cossack had little value, deemed a savage and just admired for his personal strength and his horseman abilities.

Ever since, I was called Andrzej Semionovitch, and Anatole Mikechine was considered dead, and, as such, buried. When recovered from my wound, I went on to establish new norms for my future, and continuously thought about how I should proceed in order to leave the troop, to which I no longer wanted to serve. I felt my heart mortally wounded, my soul remained inconsolable, and it would not be in the roughness of military life that I would morally recover. I started, then, to look for ways of freeing myself from the captivity that no longer attracted me like in the past. The way was fleeing. I fled, and went deep into the woods...

V

Two years had passed since my misfortune took place and that I lived as fugitive from village to village. After much seeking help, or a way to rebalance myself for life, I found a Cristian hermit saint, about whom a lot was said in the villages that I visited, who possessed great goodness, and lived in a simple shack, among the Caucasus mountaineers, educating those poor natives who only accepted the God of Mohamed, and I asked him to conveniently teach me in the sacred scriptures of Jesus Christ, because I felt exhausted of living to the world and its pleasures, and I desired to renew my heart to save my soul from the sins that damned it. Two years I spent there, next to that godly soul that protected and consoled me in my ruin. I wanted to return to Saint Petersburg to see Isabela Golovina again. However, my holy friend convinced me not to bring new misfortunes to myself and, above all, to respect her as the wife of another man, who she now was, because I myself would not wish for me what I intended to do to another man. How could I delude myself to the point of concluding that Isabela would compromise herself before her family and society, answering the impetuosity of a Cossack? Two years having passed, she should already be a mother, and have forgotten the brothers' poor horse-riding master, there was no doubt about that... What between us had come to pass was a dream of youth, nothing more... And he advised me, then, to rather sublimate my heart's desires, deviating the love from whom was so dear to me to the love of God and my neighbor, and, still today, I remember that he used to say, at dusk, when I cried of longing, remembering my encounters with her alongside the lilac tree and my honored life in Saint Petersburg, at the door of his shack, caressing my head buried between my hands:

– If all that happened, Anatole, is because the Lord called you to his services, which are sublime and only trusted to those who inspire him trust. You possess a fiery and sincere heart, capable of a lot of loving and expanding. Those are the ones that the Lord needs for his labor. Return to the world, now that you know the path of eternal truth; forgive the offenses received, and seek to forget that reckless past, which tormented you. Feel sorry for the pride of those who insulted you, but do not seek vengeance, because if you avenged yourself you would incur in a fault even greater than theirs, losing, then, the rights of heavenly complacency. Rather, copy the

servants of the Christ of God: protect the orphan, the elderly, and the sick, once you are young and healthy. Defend the weak, and be the defender of the oppressed, you who knows oppression; defend truth and justice, without delighting in evil, and open your soul frankly to the kiss of divine inspiration, and there you will find the peace that you have been lacking. When our desires cannot be satisfied in this world, it is because other destinies more sublime await us, here and now, or in the after-life, to the greater glory of God, and sublimation of our soul, daughter of Heaven...

– But... what about Isabela, my holy daddy, then I will never see her again, never again? – I asked, faithful to the obsession that made me unhappy, still strange to the need of renouncing even to the longing that lacerated my heart. And the old man answered:

– Once you cannot forget her, love her in silence, with resignation, in the depths of your heart, cultivate the longing of the past by loving those who suffer at your feet, and offer your unhappy love to the Lamb of God sacrificed at the cross, because also he loved without being loved. Love your Isabela Golovina in the white hair of an old and abandoned woman, whom nobody tolerates for being weak, ugly and unfortunate; love her in the sad smile of an orphan, who will not be loved if a noble heart does not dilatate itself in generosity to grant him the caress he lacked after the loss of those who could not protect him until the end; love her in the howls of a sick, whom you will help with the balm of fraternity, which the world's selfishness denied you; and also love her even in the care of plants and animals, never forgetting that God is love, and through the love of God we should love the whole Creation. This is the path that you must follow, the only one that is convenient to you, and not the paths that take you to Saint Petersburg. For the hearts that suffer, like yours, from the torture of an impossible love, the noble recourse is the love to God and to your neighbor. Any other, my friend, will be inefficient and unreliable...

In the Caucasian and Tartarian villages, there were not the conditions I needed to try renovating myself to the services of good, services which, deep in my heart, I felt that I should perform as soon as possible. In my dreams, while sleeping on a mat next to my good counselor, I would feel that my soul was taken to places illuminated by an unknown sun. I would see a good man come close to me, whose face was impossible for me to look at, and I heard

him say very fraternally, extending me a white handkerchief of immaculate scintillations:

– Gather in this handkerchief your bitterness and start a new life, Anatole Mikechine. Don't cry anymore, don't regret the past, but take ownership of the present, and work for the Christ of God, who needs your services alongside those who are even weaker than you. And you will see that the fraternal work, whatever it may be, not only will strengthen your soul, but also will console the deceptions suffered by your heart...

I would wake up in tears, report to my counselor what happened, and he would say:

– You must leave and get to work. Your dream is a warning from Heaven, showing the precise moment you should not let slip away. Go, then, and Heaven will help you.

I returned, then, to Russia, that is, I established myself in this village of K... and, with the savings left by my friend Andrzej Semionovitch and my own, as I always have had a frugal life-style, I started the work that was counseled me. At first, I fought a thousand difficulties, without assistants who would join me in the necessary struggles, but, with time and relentless dedication, which I understood were needed, other resources came about and the work took root. It has been twenty-five years that I left the world and live exclusively for my dear elderly, to whom I am the only support in the sunset of life, and for my beloved little orphans, who recognize in me a friend that substitutes their parents, who no longer exist on Earth. Many of my elderly died in my arms. Others, the youngsters, got married and I was able to bless their marriage, thinking that, even if I had not been able to marry the woman I loved, nonetheless I had the fortune of being able to make happy many hearts next to me; if I did not have children of my own marriage, which never took place, nonetheless God trusted me the children without parents so I could love them as if they were mine.

– And... did you manage to forget Isabela Golovina? – I asked, just to say something and hide the commotion that threatened making me cry.

Anatole took a while to answer, grabbed two or three grass blades, threw them away, without biting them, and answered:

– How could I forget her, if she was the only love who made my heart shake, and I was sincere? I tied her memory to my work of fraternity, and I cultivate the longing with resignation, waiting for one day obtaining God’s grace for the forgiveness of my sins, which are many...

But, a child fell down and cried. Anatole let go of the grass, stood up in a rush, run to attend to her, and went inside the house with her in his arms. He washed her soft little face, washed her gracious little hands, with short and fatty little fingers, and the feet maculated with dust. He laid her down on a poor crib, but well kept, and said, as a mother would say, tenderly:

– Stay right there quietly, daddy will bring you some pap right away... You need to sleep, the night is coming along, the little birds have already gone to their nests, and the good little boys also sleep early, on their beds, lulled by the angels of Heaven...

Indeed, it was nightfall. Dusk was falling. A nightingale was already modulating its sweet melody among the linden and lilac trees. Anatole came back, delivered the feeder to his pupil and, on the tip of his toes, left the dormitory and descended the small wood steps, reached the garden and took shelter behind the lilac trees. I felt the need to wait the boy finish his meal, so I could take the feeder back and tuck him in, and, while I contemplated him sucking in the food, unaware and happy, I thought to myself, feeling a tender tear running down my face:

– My God, what a weird destiny this man had! Why did all that happen? How could it happen? After all, what is life? I do not understand it...

VI

I remained in V... for two more years. From that afternoon on, though, I became even more friends with Andrzej Semionovitch (I continued to address him like that), came to respect him even more, now unwilling to criticize his way of dressing himself. I visited him with more frequency and, inspired by his singular manner of conducting himself through life and loving those near him, I copied him. With him, I learned to love those children and those elderly, and I found myself, to my surprise, many times acting as a nurse of children and of the sick from decrepitude. With him, I even learned to love and protect animals and plants, and how many times I realized that I would take off my uniform of Russian imperial cavalry officer to wear the ungainly “mujik” shirt and go to the shed milk the cows, feed the calves and wash the horses! Only to later wield the watering can and irrigate the vegetables. I confess that I would feel great if I could forever remain in that piece of land in the Caucasus, under the protection of that oasis of love and patience that I contemplated. That corner of Russia, for me, was like a slice of earthly paradise, which men had forgotten to corrupt with bad actions and, because of it, remained with the pure and inoffensive life of the first days of Creation, according to the pretty esoteric legend of the Bible. However, a soldier is not his own master, and the day came that I had to leave the village, the fort where I was stationed at, and paradisiac tranquility of K..., in order to return to Saint Petersburg.

I hugged Andrzej Semionovitch in tears, and for a very long time we both remained embraced, mixing our crying. I blessed those children, whom I had so many times given bath in the morning and fed in the afternoon, and, on my turn, I bowed before those snowy-heads elderlies and asked for their blessing, in tears. I left never to return, because, exposed to the heavy rumble of the world, the heart quickly forgets the soft nuances of Heaven. And, on a horse, alongside my cavalry company, I went on, waving my handkerchief, once in a while turning back as the distance grew, observing that, from the top on the little hill crowned with beautiful trees and fragrant lilac trees, Andrzej and his pretty cohort of pupils were there, retributing my waving, while the dogs barked as if demonstrating that also they had understood. Later, everything got confused amongst the steppe mists. The distance was great, I could not see anything else. Then, I rode faster so the horsemen would not see me cry.

And never again I heard about Andrzej Semionovitch.

VII

This episode of my life came to pass during the second half of the XIX century, when I still was very young. Maybe I would have forgotten it forever, in the depths of my conscience archives, if right after my entrance into the Spirit life I had not been given the honor and happiness of being visited by Andrzej Semionovitch, or better saying, by my friend Anatole Mikechine, his true name, in my beyond-grave stay. It took me a while to recognize him, so transformed as he was, and it can even be said that I only recognized him by the nature of his personal vibrations, which woke up in my being remembrances of the past that were asleep, so I would relive the landscape of the village lost in the Caucasus solitude, with the lilac trees mansion. Andrzej looked handsome, rejuvenated, and smiling: beautiful hair, curly as would be Apollo's, wearing shining clothes of enchanting vibrations; I had the impression that I was facing an angelic being who granted me the charity of its visit during a dream. Finally, I recognized him and jumped in his arms, bathed in tears, because the landscape of my memories, when around him, stopped at the day of my departure, which, naturally, in a retrospective sensation, made me repeat the commotion scene of the past farewell. And, after some indecision, he told me about the remainder of his last earthly pilgrimage and consequent entrance in the after-life, starting the narrative exactly after I had left the village of K... to return to civilization. This is what he told me:

– I still lived twenty years, after you left, my dear Alexis Nowak, always in the same conditions: among the love of my children, who succeeded one another as the oldest became adults, and my grandpas and grandmas, who also succeeded one another as the oldest returned to the Spirit life. Many times, I cried for missing you and prayed for you, at dusk, under the sweetness of the lilac trees... because you were the most cherished friend I managed to find after my dear Andrzej Semionovitch, whose name I used for so many years...

– Under the sweetness of the lilac trees, you say? But... the lilac trees? – I asked, surprised, because I had always thought that, in those private moments, he would give himself entirely to the memories of Isabela Golovina.

However, he cut off the possibility of an indiscretion from my part, and kept on:

– Did you think that under the lilac trees I would only recall the past troubles? I indeed felt that you did not properly understand those conversations I had with myself... But, no... I retired to my trees to pray, asking God to grant me the grace of patiently atoning for my sins through pain, resignation, patience, and forgiveness, so I would be able to renew my soul and receive his approval. I also prayed for Isabela Golovina, for you, for my children, for my elderly, for my brothers of Humanity. How could you deem me so selfish to the point of spending forty years exclusively thinking about a painful event of my youth? One day, however, casually, I received a visit of a lady from Saint Petersburg, whose son served in the fort of V... She was extremely rich and delivered me large alms for my children and elderly. After visiting all the dependencies and taking a bowl of fresh milk with honey, I also offered her a tea cup with sugary biscuits, and she, very impressed by what she saw there, told me, while she drank the tea, slowly:

– Your charity work, daddy, makes me remember the holy work performed by a friend of mine in Saint Petersburg, Princess Oblonski, born Countess Golovina Kriestrovskaja...

I stared the visitor with ease, without being startled, paying maximum attention to her, but not asking anything.

– Princess Isabela Oblonski is an extraordinary woman. Daddy would like to talk to her, exchanging ideas about this pretty ideal of loving one's neighbor, because your tendencies are identical. She could, yes, enjoy all the pleasures of society, because she is a princess, and very rich, but she prefers to dedicate herself to the good for God's love sake, for she is very pious, and, then, she became a good angel for those who suffer. With dedication, she aids the sick, helps miserable children and parents, reforms the drunk and the vagabonds back to work and family, and in order to accomplish all that she founded an association of ladies, which she directs with great ability, assisted by other ladies. And she even extends her charity to prisons, making the effort so also the condemned may have their misfortunes softened. Ten years ago, she transferred herself permanently to a village, so to help the children of the "mujiks", who were being raised without anyone's proper assistance. And she goes by herself, sometimes, guiding a "troika" or slide, from village to

village, even during winter, visiting and helping those who need something, who are many. They say she suffered a great misfortune in her youth: they killed her fiancé, whom she loved very much, and so it is to console herself from this trial that she does those things, devoted to the good. He was a Cossack officer, and the family opposed itself. Daddy understands, it would have been a very uneven marriage, right? The parents were right... But this must be a legend... Idle people always create stories around those who distinguish themselves from vulgarity through elevated qualities... It is certain that Princess Golovina Oblonski is the good angel of her own home and others', because she is a great mother to two young girls who recently got married, great wife, who understands so well the duties of marriage that she even dedicates herself to reconcile quarreling married couples... Moreover, daddy, her husband also has an excellent heart. This one, indeed, is a true Prince! Not only he approves the wife's charity works, but he even joins in them with patience and goodwill.

Sometime after that day, I started to dream with Isabela almost every night. I would see her like before, in her seventeen years-old, like I had seen her for the last time, when we were separated forever. She would bring a branch of lilacs, pluck one of them, touch my completely grayish head with it, smile and mumble:

– Anatole, I never forgot you, my poor love...

Later, with the succession of days, I would also see her during the waking hours, always the same, cheering me up with the certainty that no abyss separated us any longer. I realized that she had died and, resigned, I prayed for the salvation of her soul. Then, sometime later, when I also passed to this world, I saw her in the same way by my death bed, but, this turn, she merely said:

– Come, Anatole, I have been waiting for you for so long...

– Do you mean that, now, you are gathered here, in the serenity of infinite life? – I asked, eager for clarifications that eased my desire for comprehension of problems for which I still had not found satisfactory solution. – Are you, then, consorted, as souls detached from a material body?

Anatole smiled and answered with ease:

– Consorted, as we understood the word marital consortium, in the earthly narrow sense, no, we are not, because we are souls freed from the flesh, and the spiritual consortium differs from the earthly one. Our souls, however, are consorted because they want each other, they seek each other, and interpenetrate their own general vibrations, in a harmonious statement that nears the spiritual ecstasy, and this produces a state of integral happiness, indescribable: it is the state, sort to say, of integration in the great divine whole, where there are nuances of fortune that will only be understood when we have tuned in our own vibrations through the tuning-fork of superior emanations, or divine...

– But... if you are so united like that, why did you undergo the torture of impossible love on Earth? Were you transgressors in past earthly situations?...

– The fact that we are spiritually united does not exempt us from the possibility of separation during an earthly existence. There are serious feats, which we are called to accomplish on Earth, that we would be hindered from performing if we lived in a state of complete satisfaction of the heart. My friend! I believe you still did not have the time to meditate on certain details of God's law, and for this fact you accept the set of laws as a rule for specific cases. However, no, it is not exactly like you deem: not everything that one suffers on Earth is expiation/atonement, punishment for certain misdeed, repression for this or that rigorous discrepancy done in past lives. It is worth remembering that the planet's own material and moral conditions can cause harm to its inhabitants, no punishments implied. Many times, it also happens that, in order to progress and renew our moral and intellectual values, it is convenient that we may be deprived of facilities in the conquest of worldly goods and, stimulated by pain, there we will find the auspicious state for that renovation. No other nature of suffering better fosters self-reeducation than the humiliation, the torture caused by unhappy love. Isabel and I, since lives past, which we experienced together, had the need of spiritual progress through love towards our suffering neighbors. If, in our last earthly presence, we had got married, we would have been happy, but we would remain bound by the same selfishness of the past that had made us live only for the enjoyment of our happiness. When we reincarnated, we understood the benefit of our separation on behalf of spiritual union throughout Eternity, and for this reason we agreed to face sentimental adventures that God's law

presented us as stimulus for our progress through fraternity, because, if not like that, continuing to be involved by our love, we would only think about ourselves, about the possibility of being ever more happy, and we would remain indifferent to the need of dedicating ourselves to the Good. Suffering, however, the redemptive humiliation that we suffered, we turned ourselves unconditionally towards God, through charity, in as much we needed consolation for the tortured heart, advanced significantly in the moral-spiritual progress, and acquired merits for future enterprises, oriented by the superior spheres of Love... Here, in the spiritual life, thus united, we work not only for the spiritual plain but also for the earthly one, in constant collaboration with men/people/human beings, and we always have good opportunities to assist associations like the ones we created and directed when incarnate, in the solitude of our villages... the impossibility that separated us on Earth was, thus, the true nuptial blessing that allowed us the union for the future centuries...

However, Anatole Mikechine was in a hurry and could not extend our conversation any longer. Sacred duties called him to other fields of Infinity. I saw, then, sweet Isabela Golovina for the first time. She came to pick him up; they should, together, perform sublime tasks. It seemed to me that I saw before me not merely a female silhouette, but an angel haloed with light, emitting lilac fragrances. She took Anatole by the hand, after kindly nodding towards me. He departed smiling, saying to me:

– I will be back later, Captain Nowak, I still need to tell you certain things regarding the enchanting laws of God, about which I already had the opportunity to meditate...

And, seeing them go, I said to myself:

– Anatole Mikechine is right! The pain that stings the heart in earthly plains is the harbinger of sublime destinies for our immortal being, in the fullness of the Spirit's life...

²⁴ TN: See Note 2.

²⁵ Plural of “aul”, Tartar term meaning village. The Caucasus populations were only submitted to Russia in 1864.

²⁶ Russian Emperor from 1855 until 1881.

27 Andrzej: a Polish personal name. It is pronounced Ândjiei (Andrew).

28 Small leather whip used by the Cossacks.

29 Nanny.

4

KARLA ALEXEIEVNA

Leo Tolstoy

“The man never has the right of disposing of his own life, in as much only God can relieve him from Earth’s captivity, when He deems it convenient. However, divine justice can soften its rigors, according to the circumstances, reserving, in any case, all severity for that one who intended to subtract himself from the challenges of life. The suicide is like a prisoner who evades prison before serving his time; when he is arrested again, he is more severely treated. The same happens with the suicide who deems escape the miseries of the present, and dives into worse misfortunes.”

(The Gospel According to Spiritism, by Allan Kardec, chapter XXVIII, Preface of “Prayer for a Suicide”, number 71, 32nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation³⁰)

I

I was ten years-old and lived in Odessa with my parents and my grandmother from my mother's side, when, in a certain day, by accident, I heard my mother say to my grandmother, during a friendly conversation:

– Mamacha, my dear, I cannot go to Kazan with you as we had agreed. I don't have anyone to take care of the house and Gregory Mikail Melvinski, my husband, would not agree with staying here alone. I will not go, thus, to the baptism of Iosif Zakarevitch, despite how much attending this baptism entices me. Well, look: the "child" they will baptize is a twenty-one years-old young man; he has long hair, braided in two strips crossed at the nape and raised to top of the head, where they are bound by a stripe of black cloth... and a hat on top of everything, to cover the shame...

Going silent, my mother laughed, while my grandmother got upset:

– More respect, please, Anne Mikailovna, for other people's feelings! You know very well it is about a promise made to Our Lady of Kazan by Iosif Zakarevitch's mother when he contracted smallpox and almost went blind. The strips will be cut right after the baptism...

– What I also wished to witness is the patriarch's sermon, who will vehemently scold the parents, false believers, who he certainly will regard as negligent, as they kept a gentile in their home until this age, under the pretext of promises... But, I cannot go. Mamacha will go and do me the favor of taking Alex Melvinski, who is crazy about going to Kazan to meet Karla Alexeievna...

Alex Mikailovitch Melvinski was me.

In fact, I was anxious to see a young man wearing braids and hat, pagan submissive to a baptism that, everyone was saying, would be turbulent, once the patriarch in person would not allow himself to remain silent before such a distasteful vow to Our Lady of Kazan, who, certainly, would find it ridiculous. However, above all, what I wanted was to get to know my great-aunt Karla Alexeievna. They said she was extremely rich, even though she did not belong to nobility, rather being the daughter of an old hussar colonel of the Imperial Guard; that she had a beautiful mansion in the outskirts of

Kazan, with a farm, cattle, mills, woods, lakes, agriculture, horses, “troikas” and carriages. They said she played piano like a true artist, that she had learned music in Germany and that she had been a student of the virtuous Ludwig van Beethoven;³¹ that she had been betrothed to a German Count, who loved her very much, but that, in the month of the wedding, she had renounced the marriage and never again thought about getting married; that she prayed many times every day, methodically, that she was a very good person and helpful to everyone who sought her, and that she embroidered indefinitely more and more pieces of trousseau and layette, to later gift them to the poor brides and newly born; that she was good to the children of her “mujiks”; that almost all of them were her godchildren and protected by her; that she taught them how to read, write and count, and even sing in the church parties, but, despite all that, she was crippled and had a horribly ugly body, even though the face was pretty as an angel’s, and that she could only move around aided by two crutches. Lastly, they said that aunt Karla was a woman of sixty-five years-old, that she had been very beautiful during her youth, before the accident that rendered her disabled for social life.

I heard such comments and did not assimilate them very well, but I could not take my mind away from aunt Karla and the virtuous Ludwig van Beethoven, whom she loved very much and whom I imagined as being her fiancé, in addition to being a saint; the strips of the pagan young man, whom I deemed had a pact with the demon for not being baptized, and the deformity of Karla Alexeievna, my grandmother’s sister, for whom I felt a lively affection and an indescribable compassion, in my ten years of age.

Finally, in a certain cloudy morning made fresh by an impertinent mist, we climbed the carriage, wrapped up and joyous, and went to Kazan.

However, I went alone with my grandmother. Anne Mikailovna, my mother, stayed at home, notwithstanding the desire of contemplating the baptism candidate’s braids, and hearing the patriarch’s sermon, something I had no idea of.

II

I could never forget the strange attraction that I felt for aunt Karla Alexeievna in the moment I, arriving at her house, entered through the dining room and saw her sitting on an armchair by the fireplace. Cold sun beams came in through a close by window, which stained glasses, displaying the multicolor silhouette of the Lady of Kazan, filtered suggestive reflexes that framed the Karla's singular figure.

– Your blessing, mommy... – I exclaimed, trembling out of respectful emotion and facing her curiously. – I am Alex Mikailovitch Melvinski, your great-nephew...

She hugged me with tears in her eyes, not saying anything, making the sign-of-the-cross upon my head.

My grandmother came close, crying. The two sisters hugged each other among tears, by the mere pleasure of shedding them, dramatizing an encounter that rather should motivate joy, and later smiled at each other, and talked, and laughed.

Iosif Zakarevitch was the son of Karla's general-administrator. I met him in those first hours after our arrival, and soon a burning sympathy attracted us to each other, although he was a man and I a child. I thought he was handsome, with his eyes of a strong blue and long eyelashes, a beautiful posture of young peasant, and I could hardly notice the signs of smallpox he had contracted when a child, which had determined the illogical promise of his mother, of conserving him pagan and with long hair, braided, until the age of twenty-one years-old. His face was serene and white as my own face. Very subtly, however, I started to search the braids in his hair. But, no matter how much I investigated, ducking down to peek them, and going around him, anxious, I managed to discover nothing. If he took off the hat, something that was not frequent (he had permission from Karla to conserve the hat on inside the house), a black cloth would appear tied around the head, in gypsy style, and nothing could be seen. I grew disinterested, thus, in Iosif's braids, although I remained his friend during my stay in Kazan and, until the present days, when I miss him very much, because the truth is I could never forget him.

The baptism happened on the following Sunday, and Karla Alexeievna was the godmother. She had to use the crutches to go to the church, aided by the old housekeeper Sofia, who went in the carriage with her and my grandmother. But, in opposition to what my mother, Anne Mikailovna, had in mind, the patriarch did not attend the ceremony. An assistant substituted him, delivered a beautiful philosophical sermon to the parents in general, enticing them not to let the children ignorant about the God's law and the Gospel, because what truly makes a man Christian – he clarified – is not properly the baptism, but the knowledge and the practice of those laws, and lastly he inspected the young man's knowledge about the Christian Doctrine. He, on his turn, performed well the hard test. No one expected a braided man to know so well Jesus Christ's life as exposed in the four Gospels. He proved that, theoretically at least, he was a Christian, as he knew by heart the most expressive passages of the Gospels. He spoke as an orator, which charmed the attendants, because the church was full, many of whom even knelt when he discoursed about the Passion. The priest was silent, nothing having to admonish about a man who knew so well the Lord's Doctrine, and went on baptizing him, while I heard what Sofia said softly to my grandmother:

– This is Karla Alexeievna's work, mommy; she gave him Gospel lectures ever since he was a child. I've never seen so much patience and love for the children...

– The hardest, Sofia, is not to teach, teaching anyone can do, but exemplifying what one teaches...

– And Karla does not exemplify? It looks like you don't know your sister. Be aware, mommy, that Karla Alexeievna exemplifies, yes, she does! My lady's life is a constant hymn to God, by the good examples that she gives...

A country party among Iosif's parents and his friends followed the baptism. However, I did not attend that party, which would take place at Karla's rural mansion; I was dead tired. In the following day, noticing that Iosif no longer wore a cloth around his head nor the hat, but pretty golden-yellow hair, thin as silk, because the braids had been, indeed, sacrificed, I returned to my aunt Karletchka, in order to observe her better. It could be said that I had fallen in love with her, and that it had been the first love of my life.

In the days that followed, I examined the house, which were, in fact, very beautiful, with its Louis XV furniture, and I observed Karla.

In my simple kid's understanding, Karla was a saint, and near her I struggled to become a saint as well. For example, in addition to praying at the table during the meals, thanking for lunch and dinner and other daily favors, at the Angelus hour, Karla would take her pupils who were present and bring them to the oratory she had built in her house, and taught them to pray to the Lady of Kazan.³²

Later, she would sing a hymn in choir with them, as it was common among orthodox believers, and offered prayers to the suffering souls. At meals' table, she was the first to arrive, after the tinkler sounded. But, she would not sit. She waited, standing, supported by the crutches, until the last child showed up to take part in the table with the others. Then, she prayed, and the attendants accompanied the prayer mentally. Regardless if there was a visitor or not, the program was that. And everyone followed it, impressed by Karla's fine education and by the tenderness irradiations that came off that woman of sixty-five years old.

Sofia served the children and then herself, Karla, and the meal extended itself softly, until she would stand up and return to her needlework. Sometimes, she would rest at the balcony, from which one could see the orchard and the garden and, further, the peasants entertained in their labor, or the cattle coming and going through the field. And, then, she would smile openly, delighting herself in Nature's splendor, which she understood and loved to the point of veneration. For me, it was an enchantment to share that table, those prayers, the life style of that home. And, if today I am a sincere believer in God's paternity, I owe a lot to the examples I received from Karla during the frequent periods I spent with her, starting from my ten-years old on.

I continued to observe.

Karla gave lessons to her pupils and to the children of her servants, daily, before lunch, and, in the afternoon, she taught them the Gospel and manual works. She surrounded herself by them in the dining room, made them sit on the floor, or on the carpet, or on small stools, and thus taught them from reading and counting until the arts accessible to her possibilities. Only for

writing she made them sit at the great table, and Sofia would watch over, so the table would not be stained by ink or pencil scraps. And, while she taught them, always tranquil and serene, she did needlework, making socks and winter coats, quilts and shawls, and sewed. From there she directed her estate, talking with the administrators and servants, if she spent periods of time on the field. And, in the city mansion, she received visits and honored them with exquisite teas and piano concerts, because she had not yet abandoned the divine art that Mr. Ludwig van Beethoven had transmitted to her in her youth. Three times per year there was a play in her house. The children were the actors, the singers, and the musicians, and invitees arrived to watch the representations, and later would delight themselves with fine sweets, liquors and refreshments. It was a busy and full of life home, and Karla was far from being a defeated woman, or traumatized by her misfortune of being a cripple.

– I am not a cripple – she would say, if someone lamented, in her presence, the disaster that prevented her from walking and maintain social life. – I have a perfect brain, good sight, a life full of to-dos, I try to be useful to those around me, and I handle very well all the undertakings to which I commit myself. I am not, therefore, a cripple!

And, indeed, she spread the good everywhere, protected, consoled, taught, cheered up, wrote letters, and many were the persons benefitted by her.

III

One morning, when Iosif Zakarevitch was entrusted by Sofia with polishing the furniture in the guest room, I followed him around. After some time of childish conversation, because Iosif was very humble, and during which I admired the precious ornamental pieces of that lovely home, I asked my friend:

– How did my aunt Karla Alexeievna become a cripple? What made her end up with such an ugly body?

– I know what happened, but I shouldn't say, Alex Mikailovitch, I shouldn't. She is my godmother and my second mother. What right do I have to intrude in her life, commenting the past?

– But, I want to know, Iosif Zakarevitch! I am her great-nephew, I also have the right to know... What harm can arise from telling me what you know?

– Ask Sofia to tell you. She is the one who recommended me not to comment on Karla's life, so not to relive the past. But, she herself is more than happy to tell everything to whomever is interested in the case, as long as Karla does not know it. And she does it with such love... She says it is about a "delicate romance", what happened with Karla. Ask Sofia, ask her...

– I am afraid Sofia will reprehend me.

– Oh! She will not do it! She respects you, daddy, and, after all, she dies for telling those stories, and is used to see Karla as a heroine of a real drama...

That same afternoon, while my grandmother and my aunt Karla talked on the balcony, savoring their tea with biscuits, contemplating the old trees in the garden, which grew up with them, I asked Sofia, timidly:

– Tell me a story, mommy. Iosif Zakarevitch told me that you know pretty stories... and that aunt Karla's life is a "delicate romance". Tell me: what happened to my dear great-aunt for her to only be able to walk supported by crutches nowadays?

– Ah! Even you want to know something about my lady! I shouldn't tell you nothing. This is your mother's job. But, mothers nowadays do not educate their children with feelings. This is a matter of heart's sensibility, you know? They do not have sensibility...

– They, who?

– Mothers, who else? When someone has a relative as worth as your great-aunt, one shouldn't lay aside talking about her or him to the children of the family. So, I will tell you what I know. They say you're smart. If this is true, I ask you a favor: keep what you hear to yourself. When you become a man, write about the episode I will tell you and publish it. It will be good that other women look up to my lady's example and save themselves from despair, like she did, when misfortune arrives...

We talked in the small room where Sofia sewed, next to a window. I sat down on my bench, the other children laid down on the floor, to hear; Iosif started perusing a book, as he had already heard the same story about Karla a hundred times, narrated by Sofia, and she cleared her throat. She stood up, arranged the shawl over the shoulders, served us tea, offering cake; drank water with sugar after the tea, and came back, sitting down, then, on the same armchair. I came close to her and waited. Everybody waited. Then, she started:

“– Many women, around the world, for a lot less than what happened to Karla, finish their lives. But, it is because they did not have faith in God and in themselves, did not have acceptance and patience, and did not display a superior moral education, like Karla did. The good education someone has is also a prevention against suicide: the unruly personalities, used to always see their own desires fulfilled, are more inclined to despair when facing reality, just as those of weak will. The humble and comprehensive rarely kill themselves, because they receive with resignation the misfortunes that existence presents them, which lead them towards God, and the truth is that God is our Father and sends us the help we need when we are overloaded by afflictions, but remain trustful in his mercy...”

I confess that I understood nothing of what Sofia said back then, and only today, a century later, recalling the facts, I can assimilate everything and

appreciate the truth of what the humble servant said, although I paid her a lot of attention. Sofie kept on:

“– Well, see, my boys and girls! Karla Alexeievna was nineteen years-old and was one of the most beautiful young girls in our Holy Russian Empire. Very sweet and gentle, joyous and helpful, she was her parents’ enchantment, who did everything for her and her sister, and she had both beauty and virtues. Three Russian princes wanted to marry her. However, she rejected all of them, because she wanted, first, to have as much formal education as possible. She was educated in France and Germany, where she perfected her music knowledge with Mr. Ludwig van Beethoven...”

I do not know why, at this point, I crossed myself and sighed, moved. I could not hear about Mr. Ludwig van Beethoven without being moved and crossing myself. I guess I have already declared that I deemed him a saint, my great-aunt’s music master, and that I thought he had been the fiancé she had so much loved.

– Why do you cross yourself, daddy? – Sofia asked.

Not knowing what to answer, I smiled, and Sofia, who had learned with her mistress how to be kind, caressed my hair and continued:

– In Germany, while she studied music, Karla Alexeievna met the Count Rupert van Gallembek, a German of good family traditions. He was a pianist too, student, as she was, of Mr. Beethoven, and the two of them got very well along and fell in love one for the other.

When the beautiful young girl Karla returned to Russia, Count Rupert could not accept the separation: he organized his own affairs, gave orders for his business the best he could, and moved here. Once in Russia, he bought land and grew crops in them; he also bought a beautiful mansion, dealt with agriculture and industries, and asked Karla in marriage.

The suitor was accepted, joy spread in both families, and the betrothed confessed themselves ever more in love, anxious for their marriage.

However, as it seems, this marriage was not provided for in God’s laws, maybe because both Karla and her fiancé needed a trial to get closer to God.

Sometimes, my children, complete happiness makes us selfish and leads us astray from the good path to Heaven...”

– What is that path, mommy? – asked an older boy, who paid a lot of attention.

Sofia explained as she could:

– This is just a figurative way of speaking, daddy! The path towards Heaven is the virtuous behavior of the person who loves and respects God, and who fraternizes oneself with her neighbor, that is, with her bothers in Humanity.

We did not understand well, but Sofia resumed her exposition:

– Then, if we stray from this path, or from this norm of life, suffering presents itself as a saving blessing, leading us back to the straight road which will test our virtues before God’s laws...

IV

It was a precisely a month until the wedding. Everything was ready for the big day. Rupert van Gallembek's family had just arrived from Germany to attend the ceremonies that, apparently, would be gorgeous. On their turn, Karla's relatives arrived from all four corners of Holy Russia, opened up their Kazan mansions or rented houses, shopped or had made garments worthy of the grand ceremony.

The elders used to say that the bride should not visit the house where she would live, after the wedding, before it takes place. It brings misfortune. I do not believe in this, its superstition, but the elders used to say it. What I know is that it was a month until Karla got married when Rupert invited her, insistently, to visit the mansion he had prepared for her.

The mansion was on the country side, distant from Kazan approximately eight "versts". The family got excited by the invitation and it was decided that a cavalcade should be organized, as the gentlemen do so well; they would have lunch in the woods and would examine the estate in the afternoon. The horses appeared and the ladies, enthusiastic, looked charming in their excitement, smiling, the faces blushed. Karla Alexeievna, in the splendor of youth, could not be more joyous, and went galloping in the front, with the fiancé, anxious for examining the details of the romantic nest Rupert had prepared for them both.

All happened according to the plan. Karla seemed to be dreaming, contemplating the tenderness with which the fiancé had thought about everything. They deliberated, then, in front of everyone, that they would reside there during spring and summer, and that part of fall and winter they would spend in the city, if they so wished, because Rupert would deal with the farming, he had great passion for Nature. The return from the ride was not less joyful than the going, at least its start was followed by the joy of happy and well-educated creatures.

It was dusk when they started to turn around the edge of the woods. There were stone blocks here and there, and streams formed by small springs that ran down from the mountain. The horses were frisky, and, among them, the

mare Karla mounted was a jumpy animal and very sensible. Karla Alexeievna and Rupert van Gallembek rode ahead, as they had done on the way there.

The custom of a lady riding sitting on one side, on the appropriate saddle, in which the leg is hooked, is wrong because it is extremely dangerous, and many fatal accidents happen due to such a custom, which does not offer minimum safety to the horsewoman.

They rode along the road, confident, the happy betrothed, when, suddenly, two great hares jumped on the road, one following the other, from one side of the woods to the other. The mare Karla Alexeievna mounted got scared, and a threatening neighing, translating terror, broke the solitude's harmony. The beautiful animal reared, twirled, with the front hoofs up in the air. Karla tried to regain balance, to dominate the mount, which snorted, terrified and enraged. Rupert intervened, immediately, getting his horse close and talking to the animal tenderly, as it was the manner, trying to calm it down. As it seems, however, the mare got even more scared with the screaming of the other horsemen, started kicking and humping, and, suddenly, went on a rampant gallop. Terrified, Karla tried to maintain herself on the saddle, but she did not manage it. When the horse jumped a small stream, in the terrible gallop, it threw the young girl far away, and kept on running, only stopping further away and grazing. If Karla's skirt had been tied up in the saddle's hook, the young girl would have been lost. She would have died, reduced to pieces. However, the skirt did not tie up in the saddle's hook, and she could save herself. The fatality caused, however, my poor lady to violently fall on a stone block, which lay on the side of the road, and to fracture the thigh and the right leg, in two places, to fracture the iliac and to dislocate the right shoulder blade.

She laid, then, extended on the stones, as if dead. Part of that night the horsemen remained there, desperate, without knowing what to do, while the others run to the city in search of medicine, a carriage, a hospital stretcher. And Rupert, desperate, cried like a child, assuming her dead.

V

After three days, Karla regained conscience. She recognized everyone, muttered their names, and kissed her parents' hands. When she noticed the fiancé's presence, however, who had remained by her bedside day and night, full of anxiety, she cried copiously and exclaimed, while sobbing:

– It is all over, my Rupert! It was just a dream!

The treatment was hard. The fractures were serious, and surgery back then was incapable of the orthopedic miracles nowadays observed in our Russian cities... Karla, excessively modest and scrupulous, did not allow to be undressed to be properly examined in the effort of remedying the wrong by amending the broken bones and deviated tendons. The deformity settled: the bones solidified out of the proper place, without surgical intervention. For this reason, the harmed leg became shorter than the other, without movement, swinging in the air. The shoulder blade, deviated, altered the torso's perfect lines, and an ugly projection presented itself, helpless. One shoulder remained, then, higher than the other, the perfect side dwarfed by the harmed one, which had grown in volume.

After six months, Karla managed to stand with effort, but could not walk. It took her two years to reacquire the movements and move around, aided by crutches. She cried a lot and seemed inconsolable, because it was her own life ruined forever that she contemplated. During this period, Rupert, whose affectionate assistance had never lacked, proposed, many times, to do the wedding. But the young girl was against it:

– No, my friend, no! I love you too much to agree enslaving you to the ruin I am reduced to...

– But... my dear! More than ever our union should happen. I don't care about...

– I sincerely thank you your chivalry, the pious feeling you devote me. However, I cannot and I should not accept your sacrifice.

– Karla Alexeievna, what are you doing? Come back to me, my dear, and reflect! Are you abandoning me, then? I suffer as well, I need you, let us

relieve our mutual suffering, binding ourselves forever!

– You feel compassion towards me, and no one should get married out of piety. If we got married, the first months would be fine. However, after a year, I would weigh excessively in your life. When a misfortune like this happens to someone, it is because this someone is called to God for a life different from the one led before. My task in this world – now I know – is not the marriage. It should be to console and help the little ones, like those Jesus mentioned. I love you, Rupert, and I will always love you, but I renounce the happiness of belonging to you. I do not want to see you anymore. Now, your presence makes me suffer. I need to forget you. Do not visit me anymore. I need tranquility to reorganize my thoughts and feelings, and to render myself to God, in order to see how I should be useful in this world. I return to you the word you gave me. I give you the freedom to choose another fiancé and to marry her.

– Do your parents agree with this resolution? – he said terrified, desolated.

– They left me the discretion to decide what is best.

And there was no one who could convince the worthy young girl that she should not leave in desperation a fiancé who demonstrated her so much love, despite of the misfortune that happened to her.

– It is for his and my own good that I do this – she repeated to her parents, when those reproached her for the rude resolution. – He will accept it, and he will be happy without me, I am sure of it...

And Karla, trying to forget the beloved fiancé, devoted herself to God, devoted herself to understanding the Holy Scriptures, and sought to put in practice the lessons she was learning. She dedicated herself, first and foremost, to the children, the humble sons and daughters of her parents' "mujiks". She taught them how to read, she gave them clothes and coats that she made herself, she educated them, made them useful to God. And she brought to live with her the ones who were orphans. She taught them how to sing, to declaim, as it was so common at the time, to dance the beautiful dances of our country.

Rupert, repelled, then visited her monthly, despite of her objections. She needed to forget him, and it was not by seeing him monthly that she could

bane him from her thoughts. Nonetheless, Karla Alexeievna missed her fiancé, she cried a lot, and only God knows the martyrdom she imposed on herself to confirm the painful renunciation. I believe that many women around the world, for having suffered a lot less than her, seek in suicide the fictitious relief to their own suffering.

Little by little, however, Karla accepted the inevitable that had posed itself between her and her young girl's dreams. At night, she dreamed that angelic entities came to her and said, hugging her, while she broke down in tears:

– It must be like this, my dear, to sublimate your feelings, which for centuries lives and relives in your heart... You and Rupert, although loving each other very much, also have been infringing the Almighty's laws. However, the moment has come to repair the past mistakes, for sublimation through pain, so your union can be legitimate in God's presence. Direct yourself towards Heaven and follow Jesus. Consolation will come down from Above to relieve your sorrows. And later... Wait, my dear, because you will still bless the bitterness that today desolate you, for love to the joy that awaits you...

Then, Karla followed Jesus and received consolation.

One of the tasks she imposed herself was to protect poor betrothed, so they could accomplish their wedding plans. To do that, she sought work for the men, offered trousseaus to the brides, prepared them morally for the great commitment as matrons.

Five years after her renunciation of Rupert, in a foggy fall afternoon, when the garden lilacs agonized, bending over under the weight of their branches, that mindful fiancé visited her one more time, bringing her a bouquet of roses, the last ones of the season, obtained from the garden of the mansion that should have been hers.

Karla Alexeievna welcomed him. She accepted the roses, thanked him for them, and invited him to sit down and have some tea with cream and honey biscuits.

Rupert sat down by her side, by the greenhouse, as always, and during the conversation he explained the reason of the visit:

– A man needs to get married, Karla! You have abandoned me, giving me the freedom to marry another woman...

– Vey well! I remember that. I did what I had to do...

But, her heart trembled, anxious. She stared the visitor furtively. He had never seemed more good-looking, with his majestic posture, his well-cut coat, the “cutlets” advancing to the middle of his cheeks. He kept on and she listened:

– I need to constitute my family, indeed, dear Karla. It is contrary to a man’s nature to live alone... a man needs a companion, a woman, who helps him to live... I am getting married, Karla!

She was moved until the most hidden fiber of her heart, but answered:

– You do well, my friend, I understand...

– Don’t you want to know whom I am getting married with?

– Whoever your bride may be, she must be worthy of you.

– Well then. She is your friend Halina Vacilievna. This way, I will be closer to you...

And he got married.

Karla suffered, cried alone, by herself and with God, but when the nuptial procession passed by her house, on its way to the cathedral, she showed herself indifferent and kept needleworking, telling stories to the children who surrounded her.

Rupert turned back in the carriage, examining with his eyes the windows of his old bride’s mansion: they remained closed. Karla Alexeievna had not deigned coming to the window to see him passing by.

VI

For twenty-five years, life did not change for Karla Alexeievna. She kept needleworking, weaving wool socks and shirts for the winter, praying, directing, from her armchair, the assets she had, raising children of others, educating them and instructing them.

During this long period of time, her parents died, and she, more than never, felt sad. Some of the friends from her youth died, some moved to Moscow or Saint Petersburg, and others, for never seeing her in social events, little by little, spaced their visits and forgot her.

Rupert visited her still a few times, embarrassed, after the wedding, but Karla welcomed him ceremoniously, addressing him by “Excellency”, which seemed to embarrass him even more. When his first child was born, he went, personally, tell the news to the former bride. When the second child was born, he repeated the visit and the news telling. The same happened three more times, because the Gallembek couple was blessed by God with the gift of five beautiful children. Every time, Karla thanked him the visit and news, and, in the following day, sent a generous present to the newly-born and a flower bouquet to the mother; however, she never visited them, because Halina also never visited her since she had gotten married. Thus, she never met Rupert’s children personally.

On the day of her saint, however, which was in summer, Rupert would send her a flower bouquet, complimenting her.³³ As you can see, Rupert was the fiancé who, during a long time, did not forget her and suffered for her, the punished friend, loyal to his own feeling, who struggled to console her and himself. However, later on, the family responsibilities increased as the children grew up. The daily preoccupations, the intensity of the business, the social obligations, Karla’s own avoidances, and, finally, time, this benevolent healer of grief and wounds, made him space ever more the visits and, in the end, not even Christmas and name day compliments Karla Alexeievna received. Rupert ended up forgetting her. Everything was so distant! Who could require from a man’s heart fidelity to a dead dream?

Karla did not suffer for this. She accepted it. She expected exactly that from him. It had been for that reason that she had refused the marriage,

certain that her disablement would move him away from her. This is human, it is almost reasonable. And continued, as always, in her faithful position of protecting the little ones, serving Jesus-Christ in the person of her suffering and humble neighbor.

After twenty-five years, when she already was fifty years-old and her hair was totally white, Karla, waking up one day, heard the cathedral tolling the death bells, painfully. It was time of her first prayers of the day. She did not know who had passed. However, she dedicated that morning's prayer to the honor of that soul who abandoned the body to the earth, from where it had come, for the fortune of spiritual resurrection. She called the kids, made them pray with her, explaining, as always:

– When we know that someone delivered the soul to the Creator, we have the duty to help her, with our prayers, searching after God's bosom, wishing her peace and spiritual lights...

And, later, she headed to her needlework and lessons to the children.

I had gone to the mass, in the morning – resumed Sofia, after a pause, during which she seemed sad –, and I came to know, in the church, for whom the bells tolled so sadly; but, when I returned home, I did not have the courage to tell Karla the sad news. At lunch, however, I could not restrain myself, I understood that I had the duty of making my lady aware of what happened, and I exclaimed with certain fear:

– The cathedral tolled the death bells today...

– Yes, it did, I heard. It sounded them since very early, and it still sounds them once in a while. Someone very dear to our city flew today to heaven. I already prayed to God on his behalf...

– So, you don't know who died, mommy?

– No, I don't know. How could I?

– It was Rupert van Gallembek, my dear! He died before dawn... He had been sick for two months...

Karla did not answer. She finished eating more slowly, in silence, and during the prayer thanking for lunch, always out loud, so we could follow

mentally, she prayed for God on his behalf.

In the following morning, before noon, I came in the room where Karla taught the children and exclaimed, thinking I was being pleasant to her:

– Mommy! Mommy! Karla Alexeievna! The funeral procession of Count van Gallembek! It's going to pass under your windows. Don't you want to see it?

However, Karla did not answer. She stood up, however, with difficulty, aided by the crutches. I had to help her. Thus, standing, she crossed the hands in prayer and prayed, the soul concentrated before God, paying a last earthly tribute to him whom she had known to love in silence during twenty-five years of sorrow and longing. After, she sat down and continued the lesson to the children, angels who supported her in the solitude that has been her life...

The procession had passed by...

And so, it has been, children, until today.

Here stopped the report of Sofia, the dedicated housekeeper of my great-aunt Karla Alexeievna. She was covered in tears. Iosif Zakarevitch continued reading the book. The wind blew strong outside. A hailstorm was falling, announcing the first snows, and the trees bended, whipped by the gale.

I confess that, then, I understood very little of Sofia's report. Very clear to my heart, however, was that my great-aunt had been young and very beautiful, that she was very kind to others and loved God, and that she had suffered a major fall from the horse she rode and, because of it, she had gotten that horrible deformity, and, for this reason, the Count, a very rich and good man, her fiancé, married another woman. Only later, after I became a man, I could evaluate the greatness of that woman's heart, which had sought refuge in worshiping God and in the practice of Jesus-Christ's Gospel in order to better bear the misfortune of her own life, thus avoiding the despair that could have led her to suicide.

Karla Alexeievna died at sixty-eight years-old, due to a quick heart illness, exactly three years after I had seen her for the first time, when I went to Kazan with my grandmother to attend Iosif Zakarevitch's baptism.

VII

By the year 1872, when I already was a grown man, I had the opportunity to travel through Europe and I saw myself stopping at Paris. In this famous capital, which were, it could be said, the capital of Europe, in addition to being the capital of France, people talked a lot about the conversations with the souls from the other-world, which, as they said, dictated beautiful messages in prose and in verse, and identified themselves perfectly to their friends and relatives through a table that served as a transmitting device of the thoughts from the after-life inhabitants. To this phenomenon, they gave the name “typtology”. Many Spiritism sessions were held, and they happened not only in the rooms suitable for these transcendental investigations, but even during social reunions. Many times, during a ball, or a private recital, spaces would be opened for a “conversation with the table”, evoking the soul of this or that deceased through it. People were not aware that the phenomenon was of the highest spiritual transcendency, a divine revelation that would shake the world, in order to implant itself in Humanity’s heart.

Well, I had been invited by a Russian friend, who resided in Paris, Mr. Boris Polianovski, to have dinner in his company, a dinner to which the writer Victor Hugo would attend, recently arrived from his exile in Guernsey, and the dramaturg Victorien Sardou, two of the most expressive figures of the international Fine-Letters and adept of the blossoming belief in the communion of the souls of the dead with human beings, through the table phenomenon or, simply, the hand of a person, or medium, that is, the human transmitting device.

After dinner, which had been the most pleasant possible, the young girl Aglaee, the house owner’s daughter, proposed, maybe carelessly, certainly inspired by Heaven:

– Should we interrogate the table, daddy? Maybe we will manage to receive something pleasant tonight? Mr. Alex Melvinski certainly has never attended something like this in his cold Russia?

– I confess that I completely ignore what interrogating the table may be, “Mademoiselle”... – I answered.

The young girl went pick up a light three-feet table, proper for the occasion, while white sheets of paper and pencil were put on the table where we had just had dinner and the remaining guests still talked.

The house owner, my friend Boris Polianovski, agreed to his daughter's intention and went about inviting Mr. Hugo and Mr. Sardou to help with the evocations.

In that time, I no longer thought about my great-aunt Karla Alexeievna, and even less about the possibility of talking to her after her death. She died when I was a thirteen years-old boy, and the struggles I had withstood through the existence had swiped away from my impressions the sorrow I had felt for her death, in the first times after her passing. However, a great surprise was reserved for me in this unforgettable night.

Everyone in position for provoking the phenomenon, I was requested to softly put my hands on the table, my friend Boris Polianovsky and her daughter did the same. Mr. Hugo and Mr. Sardou wielded the pencil and papers, and the alphabet board as well, for the necessary counting of knocks on the table, willing to take note of the possible dictations transmitted through it.

After two or three mediocre displays, which did not interest us because coming from frivolous souls, the table dictated, knocking with the feet on the floor, while Victorien Sardou counted the knocks, pointing to the alphabet, and Hugo wrote:

– I need to make an important declaration to today's visitor, I ask that you provide me silence and attention...

Mr. Victor Hugo interrogated, serious:

– We are three visitors today, in this house: Mr. Alex Mikailovsky Melvinski, from Russia, Mr. Victorien Sardou, from Paris, and I, also from Paris. Who do you mean?

– My great-nephew, Alex Melvinski, whom I loved very much...

– What is your name?

– Karla Alexeievna. I lived in Kazan. Forty years ago I left this world.

– We are ready, Karla Alexeievna, dictate what you want... – resumed speaking the great writer, who seemed to preside the meeting, as usual, according to what I came to know later.

– This mean of manifestation is slow and burdensome for all of us. I ask Victorien Sardou the favor of wielding the pencil. I will write using his hand. It is more convenient.

My emotion was deep. I had never attended a session with souls from the after-life as accomplices, although I had heard of it. A world of memories came to my mind. Karla appeared in my recollections with all the details of her life and the misfortune that she had lived through: the deformity, the disillusion of love forever lost, her life full of longing, of prayers to God, and work for the poor, her eternal needlework, her children, the fireplace by which she sat during winter, the stained glass portraying the Lady of Kazan, the sun reflexes filtered through the multicolor stained glass coming down over her head, where the white hair showed prematurely... not even Iosif Zakarevitch's braids I could not remember.

Tears clouded my eyes. A sob long suffocated in the throat revealed me that aunt Karla, my childhood, my love for my family were still intact in my heart. I pulled up the handkerchief, dried my eyes, blew my nose discretely and silenced myself, respectful thoughts in my mind.

Victorien Sardou wrote quickly, he was Karla Alexeievna's medium.³⁴

After a few minutes of expectation, the great dramaturg's hand stopped, abandoning the pencil. The message had been given, the lesson Heaven had sent, a revelation that greatly edified the hearts there present. There was an order for it to be read, so all could hear that letter coming from the invisible world, in such singular circumstances. The letter was read by Aglaee, and this is what we heard:

VIII

“– I know, Alex Mikailovitch Melvinski, that, since your childhood, you sympathized with me and was very much amazed about my life’s misfortune. I know that you loved me, and I thank you, daddy, the affection demonstrated to my humble person. I appreciate feeling in me your sympathy. One day, after my passing to the Spirit life, I promised myself to report you the cause of my ordeal on Earth, if God would allow me. Today, the occasion waited for so many years has come.

You know, Alex Melvinski, that the ordeals we live in the earthly world always have cause in our misdeeds of the past, lived by ourselves, in other existential ages. Nothing happens outside God’s law. We, souls and human beings, are immortal individualities, with the particularity that we live many phases of corporeal life, relive in the spiritual state, and return to occupy earthly bodies, in new lives, restarted from a new birth, as human beings.

Before I was the personality of Karla Alexeievna, I had lived with another personality and another name, and I had loved my dear Rupert, who also had lived with other physical features, another personality, using another name. This is reincarnation, which the Spirits of the Lord currently explain to human beings.

We were spouses and we loved each other tenderly. However, our happiness had a short duration. My dear Ygor Fiedorovitch, as he was then called, died in a war, by the time of Peter, the Great.³⁵ Desperate, disillusioned, not even being able to cry over my beloved’s grave, ruined, ill, I lost faith in God and in myself, and, one day, I jumped from the third floor of where I resided and where the misfortune had entered after the disappearance of my Ygor, falling on the courtyard’s stones. My body, mistreated by the fall, fractured, injured, dislocated, died three days later, victim of myself, making me suffer intensely, because I could not, I did not want to live without my Ygor.

However, the suicide is a grave crime, which heavily weighs in the scale of the divine law.

Very soon I realized that I had a soul that survived the destruction of the body.

I felt alive, separated from that body, but suffering the same distresses of losing my Ygor, without being able to see him, without obtaining news of him, away from all those who loved me and whom I had offended with the suicide, and, horrible thing!, also suffering the painful consequences of the body suicide in my spiritual structure. I felt the bones fractured, notwithstanding being disconnected from the body, unable of reorganizing themselves. I felt crippled, deformed, ugly, more in pain and desperate than ever before. I could not keep away from the scene of my fall from the loft. I saw it and suffered it at the same time, taken by panic and real sensations, as if from time to time I threw myself again, to suffer the same, eternally. I spent a long time like this, I do not know for how long, lost in the darkness of that indescribable distress, stuck in an incomprehensible nightmare, which subjugated my will. One day, however, I felt heavily asleep, I believe during a long time, and, later, when I woke up, I understood what had happened. I had killed, in me, only the fleshly body, but the soul, built out of immortal essences, survived my despair and there it was, alive and rational, regretful, suffering, ashamed of its crime before God and itself. I had strengths to pray and I prayed, asking forgiveness to God, run down by tears.

Friends and assistants arrived with the goal of helping me. They were souls, like me, but happy, because they had peace of mind, and had come to aid me. I did not recognize them, because I hardly distinguished them in the strong darkness of the aura that surrounded me. I was a rebellious soul, who did not have the sensibility to see and understand the angels of God.

They told me that I had committed a very serious offense, and that one century would be not enough for me to repair it, rehabilitating myself before the Supreme Law. They taught me certain details of that Law, very important and necessary for all of us, assuring me that I could recover under the shadow of Jesus-Christ. A vast landscape of ways to live well for God and for one's neighbor was presented to me. I examined it at length, and reflected about it, after which they told me:

“– Choose by yourself what you should do to redress the consciousness and to rehabilitate yourself from suicide. Whatever you choose will be taken into consideration and will happen. However, reflect maturely about all that is

convenient to you, because, once chosen, the path to be followed will be irrevocable. By choosing, you will be signing your own sentence. If you had the strength to infringe God's law, you will also manage to rehabilitate yourself from the shame of having infringed it. However, be aware that the deeds to be performed for this unappealable service will be tested on Earth, you will be living in a new human body, in the way earthly material bodies generally are.”

I meditated deeply about those warnings. After a certain time of deep and burdensome meditations, I came to the conclusion that I had to do the following:

I had gravely infringed God's law, killing myself, because I had not accepted living without my Ygor, who had died in the battle field. Well, I should, then, repair my fault, proving to myself my regret for that act committed, accepting to live without Ygor after, again, in a new existence, having loved him. Jesus would give me the support and consolation, so I could come out victorious of this terrible testimony.

My petition was presented to the assistants that served me, it was approved deemed correct, coherent with the Supreme Law. They showed me, then, Ygor, for the first time, after many years, after he had fallen on the battle field. He had returned to Earth in a new existence and was two years-old. I saw him play in the balcony of his parents' mansion, under the care of a housekeeper. He was of a noble family and now was called Rupert van Gallembek. I recognized him immediately as being my beloved Ygor Fiodorovitch, notwithstanding the difference of human fleshly garment. I felt reliving in my soul the old flame of love that I had consecrated to him before, and my joy was immense when recognizing that our love had not been extinguished, it would rather be reborn in fact more sublime than in the past.

– Don't forget, beloved Karla, that you will be separated from him in the next earthly existence. Your testimony entails the need of resignation before his absence from your life – my assistants timely reminded me.

I completely agreed with the need that imposed itself and I started, then, to prepare myself for the great journey of reincarnation of trials, filled by the will of freeing my consciousness from the shame of suicide, an act characteristic of weak and inconsequential personalities.

I, however, still had not freed my mental vibrations from the conscience weight of having deformed and killed my body, so beautiful and young, destroying it with the fall from the loft. Sometimes, I still felt myself deformed, as the body had been, crippled, the bones fractured. I knew that this complex danger could powerfully influence my future earthly physical condition. It was the reflex of suicide, which, possibly, would follow me to the reincarnation and maybe would cause the separation between me and Ygor, so the testimony could be complete. However, I feared nothing. It is so painful the distress of regret in the after-life that we, the guilty, subject ourselves to everything in order to free ourselves from it. I turned myself back to God, instructed myself in the recommendations of the Gospels, and, after a certain time... I was reborn in Kazan and was called Karla Alexeievna. What my life was and the testimony that I gave to God's Law, infringed by me once, with the suicide, you know. Today, I feel myself redeemed from that sin. And here it is, my dear Alex, the explanation you wished about the cause of that deformity that troubled you. It was my redemption!"

Karla Alexeievna's firm signature followed.

The reader interrupted herself, moved. I took advantage of the harmonious silence that had fallen and asked, mentally, to Karla's Spirit, who I felt still fluttering around us:

– Tell me, dear aunt, if possible: and today, are you alongside Count Rupert van Gallembek? Have you found him again in the after-life? This clarification will be very important, very significant for all of us, who have also been seeing our beloved ones die...

After a few moments, Victorien Sardou's hand agitated itself again, he grabbed the pencil and wrote the following:

“– At last, I have to say that, today, I am happy here, alongside my Rupert, my Ygor from times past, whom I very and very much love. We are united forever, under the blessings of the Supreme Law, because we love each other spiritually, in fact even more tenderly than in past lives on Earth, and no longer we will be separated, because our love sublimated itself in the Pain and in the respect for God Almighty.”

IX

It has been many years that this happened. More than a century ago. However, still today, when I remember Karla and that session in my friend Boris Polianovski's house, in presence of Mr. Victor Hugo and Mr. Victorien Sardou, my eyes are filled with tears...

³⁰ TN: See Note 2.

³¹ Famous German composer, author of the most beautiful symphonies (1770-1827).

³² Mary, mother of Jesus, largely venerated in the past in the city of Kazan, during the Imperial Russia.

³³ Not only in Russia, but in many other countries in Europe, still today, people celebrate, in addition to the person's birthday, the day of the saint whose name the person received.

³⁴ Victorien Sardou: a productive French drama author. He was born in Paris, in 1831, and there he passed in 1908. He was Spiritist and medium until the end of his life, a great friend of the writer Victor Hugo.

³⁵ Peter I, the Great, Czar of Russia, from 1682 to 1725. Possessing an iron will and an incomparable energy, he knew to benefit and aggrandize the homeland. He was the greatest ruler of Russia of all times.

5

EVOLUTION

Charles

“Reincarnation, which asserts that people have many successive lives, is the only theory that satisfies the idea that we form of God’s justice with regard to those who are placed in morally inferior conditions. It is the only one that can explain the future and give us hope because it offers us a way to make amends for our errors through new trials. This concept is indicated by reason, and taught by the Spirits.”

(*The Spirit’s Book*, by Allan Kardec, 2nd part, chapter III, “Return to the Spirit World from the Physical Life”, number 171, 32nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation³⁶)

I

In the year 40 of the Christian Era, in a corner of Asia, since long ago absorbed by Persia, there was a little country governed by a despot sovereign, proud and neurasthenic, whose only concern was the ruling over his enslaved subjects and his weaker-in-power neighbors. He was called Sakaran, but his nickname was “the terrible”, because his iron laws spared no one. The guilty and the helpless innocent alike were arbitrarily crushed without possibility of escape, because the sovereign punished at first impression, according to the good or bad state of his nerves on the day the offense complaint was received.

He was a rich and handsome sovereign, but gloomy and rude. A satrap obsessed with power and authority. Never smiling, eternally worried and meditative, uneasy and, sometimes, depressed under the indefinable bitterness of an odd distress, incomprehensible even to himself, he was, above all, an unhappy man, enigmatic and contrary to any social intimacies that people tried with the goal of relieving the moral weight that his behavior meant for everyone. They would say that his soul had been weaved with bronze, because he was incapable of a soft gesture; that a secret wound mortified it and, in order to avenge his own dissatisfactions, he drowned himself in crimes against his subjects, creating for them arbitrary laws, promoting conflict in the region, ordering sacks and killings.

Sakaran, despite all that, was cultured, because he had received education from great Persian and Egyptian masters, and with them he had even drunk precious principles which would be used a lot, later, by his spirit fated to a long and burdensome earthly migration spin.

This man had never loved.

He was sober in appetites of the flesh, which caused admiration among his subjects. His major inclinations were towards the sciences, in general, and external politics. However, corrupted in his ideals, very used to the iron age in which he lived, he let himself be taken away by despotism, deeming to have the right of establishing it as law.

The first years after the presence of the Divine Missionary on Earth went by. However, to the region of the Persian tycoon had not yet arrived the sweet

news from Bethlehem, informing that the kingdom of Heaven had extended itself over Earth in the person of the Christ of God, who had just visited it.

Tranquility ruled in Sakaran's country, where herds of extremely valuable cattle and cereal fields helped bursting with gold the chests, ever larger, of the feared sovereign.

Sakaran was then forty-five years old, but his gentle appearance, his prince-like elegance, his handsome forehead, where the gray hair had not yet sprouted, gave him the aspect of youth, which he had not yet lost.

Fifteen wives, chosen by his emissaries among the young girls with greater plastic perfection in the country and neighboring kingdoms, thrived idly in the gardens of his palace of marble and porphyry, like flowers of exciting scents, to attract the sovereign to the liking of love. However, Sakaran did not love them, did not have any preferences and, many times, when visiting them in the flowery reclusion, that is, in the delicious parks where the beautiful prisoners lived like loving fairies waiting for a gesture, a look, a smile of the handsome Lord who never caressed them, many times, when visiting them there, Sakaran just took the effort of contemplating them with indifference or asking them if the servants were attentive. However, contrary to what many sovereigns of the time did, he never whipped them, never condemned them to punishments or repudiated them, other than because of stealing and adultery, which rarely happened. And he granted them freedom, if he saw them in distress. He promoted, on the other hand, sumptuous feasts in order to delight the poor captives with entertainments and joys fitting their condition. Then, they were allowed to dance in public, exhibiting mesmerizing forms to the avid eyes of the invitees, and Sakaran, many times, proud of the perfection of his harem, allowed himself the kindness of gifting the sovereign invitees with one or more slaves from his collection, receiving in exchange many others, or heads of cattle, corn, cotton, linen, wine, or art objects. The splendor of those parties, the singular beauty that this strange sovereign – an aesthete – caused them rendered him famous and reverberated in other regions, attracting the curiosity of the ambitious.

Despite all that, the neurasthenia of this insensible and rude prince deepened, making his despotism grow and, in consequence, tyrannical laws continued martyring his unhappy people.

II

It was again Sakaran's birthday.

On this occasion, the prince traditionally received homage from his people, and he himself distributed wine, meat, wheat, olive oil, received gifts and offered his court one of his sumptuous parties.

On that day, then, he spent hours receiving gifts from his subjects, gifts that could be from a simple flower or fruit until portions of wheat, cattle or precious jewelry.

Among his servants, one distinguished himself for the truly fraternal loyalty devoted to the sovereign, and whose functions were, more or less, those today attributed to an attorney-general and marshal, at the same time. This man was Persian by birth, like his prince. However, he had lived for a while in Galilee and Judea, and there he converted himself to Christianity since he had heard Jesus of Nazareth's discourse delivered at the hill, discourse which they called Sermon on the Mount, and since he had seen the good Master, so understanding and consoling, hanging from a cross, as a wrongdoer. This man was called Osman, he was advanced in age, and he had a goal which was holy for himself: to convert the sovereign to the soft doctrines of the Nazarene, so, by accepting them, Sakaran could regenerate his own feelings, thus easing the rigors when dealing with the people.

Osman always had a humble behavior, inspired by the Good, he was compassionate and sober, of modest dressing and life style, and a white beard, which reached his waist, gave him the appearance of an apostle. It was this man, strong in his simplicity, the shield standing between the sovereign and that unhappy people, mitigating, when possible, the ferocity of Sakaran's laws. On his turn, the prince respected him, recognizing his superiority with respect to the common people, which was the reason he did not incur bigger excesses.

Psychologist and inspired, Osman, like any staunch Christian, understood one day that Sakaran lacked a precious element, irresistible, capable of helping him overcome himself, changing his temper: real love, feeling extracted from the heart and not only from the senses. Sakaran did not even

love a woman. Sakaran had fifteen wives, which was a tiny number for a sovereign like himself. He had them, but forgot their names, not always recognized them in the party room, and, frequently, preferred to spend time with his dogs than kissing the gorgeous goddesses who enchanted all other men. Sakaran preferred to study the sciences of Egypt and the old Persian sages to the intimacy of the silk alcoves scented like roses and benzoin. Because of it, he spent long days and nights over old papyrus and books which, for a heavy price, he ordered his emissaries to purchase at the old temples in Egypt and Arabia.

III

On that great day, on which his sovereign turned forty-five years-old, midst the sumptuousness of the night celebration, which exceeded all invitees' expectation, the respectable figure of Osman presented himself before the sovereign's throne which was surrounded by the fifteen beautiful chosen-ones, knelled with the proper respect and, asking permission to speak, sweetly exclaimed:

– My lord, the last of your servants would also like to present you a birthday present. It is a Greek jewel, my lord, of the most perfect lapidation, and be aware that this country, Greece, has the unparalleled talent of creating beauties...

The throne, now carefully set in the room of dances, was in the middle of a table containing fine delicacies, in case the prince wished to savor something while he had fun with the representations in his honor. He was surrounded by cushions and couches, where the odalisques laid, that is, the fifteen wives, mixed with the monarch's dogs. Notwithstanding, to the sovereign's right stood a cushion more sumptuous than the rest, with upholstered backrest and arms made of velvet and golden fringes. It was the place dedicated to a hypothetical favorite one. None of his wives, however, ever dared to sit there, and the beautiful cushion remained waiting a beloved, who did not show up, or an heir.

In front of this admirable set was the long table, very appropriate for whom ate lazily reclined on couches. It was short, it had very short feet, and on it golden goblets, plates and jars encrusted with pearls and other precious gems glittered beneath fine delicacies, delicate fruits, sweets and liquors with which, now and then, the sovereign delighted himself and toasted to the dogs, despite of the wives' tender looks, who were not remembered.

The dancers had already exhausted their artistic resources, struggling to deserve their lord's applause. The musicians had already drawn from the flutes, harps, oboes and lutes the most melodious sounds from the time's inspiration. The subjects had already deposited riches at the sovereign's feet, during the entire day, in servile homage. The eternally sullen one did not let escape, among so many expressions of esteem, one single satisfaction look,

one smile of thanks. Indifferent and almost rude, he heard Osman's greetings and waited for the case where the jewel lapidated by Greek artists would reveal itself, wondering why the servant had not presented it immediately.

However, Osman stepped aside and did not present a case, however small it may be. In fact, he walked a few paces, made a sign, and the orchestra of flutes and lutes resounded sweetly the notes of a sacred dance of Greek temples. A rain of rose petals came down over Sakaran, perfuming the room. The vaporous curtain on the rear opened, slowly, and a semi-naked dancer, wearing only fluctuating veils, blond and beautiful like a sun appearing in the saloon, appeared on the immense floor, in gracious rhythms, unknown to the Persian.

The dancer took her time going around the saloon. She did not rush going to kneel at the sovereign's feet, greeting him for his birthday, as it was her duty. She came in dancing. She continued dancing. Her delicate forms, white and pure as the camellia, insinuated themselves under the undulations of the transparent veils and were contemplated with admiration by the attendees, who saw in her the ideal goddess in human form. She glittered. She was like a star which had come to shine in the sovereign's honor, overcoming the splendor that the feast, until now, had displayed to Sakaran.

However, the human goddess did not seem to concern herself with the powerful birthday person. She just danced, danced... Sakaran felt the neglect. He frowned. His features hardened. A quiver of despair run down the guests' spines. Who dared penetrating the feast's saloon without previously kneeling before the prince, humbly greeting him? Suddenly, the dancer, in fanciful rhythms and sensual hips-swings, nimble, dizzy of vivacity, like seductive and irresistible moth, came close to the feast's table. There, on the other side of the table, Sakaran, astonished, but frowned, stared at her curiously. She turned her back to him. In a bizarre movement, she bends backwards over the table, showing him the gorgeous and white face, thus, semi-falling on her back, grabs a cherry from a fruit bowl, cracks it between the teeth and exclaims, laughingly:

– Hail! My beloved prince!

However, suddenly, boldly, she turned around, went over the table and, quickly, put the rest of the cherry inside the sovereign's mouth and ran away,

continuing to dance to the sound of lutes and flutes.

At the first moment, Sakaran made a brutal gesture. He stood up, suddenly, with a punch on the table, shaking the goblets. The harem ladies, frowning, revolted, by the sovereign's face. The palace guards waited, distressed, the order to arrest the blond moth and bring her to the executioner, to be whipped on the spot, before the sovereign and the diners. However, the Greek temples' goddess, certainly playing with her luck, and certainly, as well, mistress of what she did, came back to the table and, always dancing, stared the monarch face-to-face. She stared him for a long time, with serene and sweet features, a half smile on her lips, seduction in the great sapphire eyes, a dominion over the brave gestures, and as powerful in her frailty and grace as the sovereign's rudeness.

The order to arrest and whip her never came. Sakaran sat down again. The ladies sat down and they stopped frowning. The palace guards started breathing. Osman smiled. The Greek goddess moved the goblets and fruit bowls, always dancing, leaving an emptiness on the center of the table, where Sakaran sat, and hid in an extreme of the room. Sakaran, then, ate the cherry remains stuck between his teeth. However, unexpectedly, the provoking Hellas goddess ran in dancing flips from the room's extreme to Sakaran's table and, without a minimum respect for the prince, climbed the table in a jump tumbling goblets and fruit bowls, and, standing up before him, opened her arms so he could bring her down from the table.

Surprised, the monarch stands up. He takes her in his arms, descends her from the table and sits down. He measures her from top to bottom, with the black and shining eyes. He stares at her with a curiosity unusual for her. She lets herself be admired, smiling. She does not lower her eyes, she does not bend over to kiss his hands and, without minimum ceremony, she sits by his side, on the empty chair awaiting for a favorite.

Sakaran smiles and his eyes shimmer. She shows her smile, provocative. A servant serves her a goblet of liquor, and she drinks it with the eyes embedded in the prince. He bends towards her and tells her, between a smile and a frown:

– A beautiful gift from Osman... You are, indeed, a jewel of superior cut... But, you also are a bold child. You disrespect a sovereign...

And she answers, with sweetness:

- No, my prince, I am a virgin who loves you...
- How did you encourage yourself in behaving so?
- It was the only way you would pay attention to me...

He smiled again, paused, then resumed:

- You are a girl. How old are you?
- Seventeen years-old...
- Child! I'm going to order you to be punished!
- You're not going to do it. I'm Greek from birth, but Roman by acquired rights. A Greek is always free, even in slavery. A Roman cannot be enslaved. I'm twice free in your kingdom.
- And for that you insult me?
- I didn't insult you, my prince. I love you, and I desired to be noticed by you.
- Where were you born?
- In Delphos, I was consecrated to the temple...
- Who brought you?
- I came with my father, for leisure. Osman became our friend. It's been a year that I live in your kingdom.
- How can you love me?
- I saw you in your park, six months ago, when you played with your dogs, making them jump through an arch... I loved you and I asked Osman to bring me to you, as your birthday gift.
- What do you expect of me?
- Nothing. Just your heart.
- What if I don't give it to you?

– Too bad for you. You won't know the fortune of being loved with ardor, while I, young, will have sovereigns at my feet, whenever I want.

– Why did you prefer me over the Greeks and Romans? I'm not young nor that handsome, and I'm not sufficiently rich...

– Osman affirms that my love for you is a mystery brought inside my soul from birth...

– Osman became a Christian and went mad... he believes in legends...

– Yes, he is Christian. He believes in the resurrection of the souls for immortal life.

– This belief is beautiful and consoling. Osman talks to me about it frequently. Only if I could also believe in it... And you, do you believe in it? Women enjoy phantasies and legends...

– I don't want to believe, for now. It's a very serious commitment with the God of the Christians. He, the God of the Christians, is powerful. They say that, out of love for human beings, he immolated his own son, making him come to Earth to teach a celestial doctrine, and the son obeyed, letting himself to be tortured in a cross to exemplify Love and Forgiveness. All of it is seductive, but I'm afraid...

– Yes. I'm also afraid. Osman affirms that he resurrected from the grave three days after his death. I heard many things about this son of Heaven who immolated himself out of love for Humanity. What is your name?

– I'm Lygia.

The orchestra of flutes and lutes continued to play soft melodies. However, they did not hear it. They felt good talking among themselves. She grabbed some grapes and ate them. Suddenly, she takes the remaining ones and puts them again inside the sovereign's mouth. Again, he agitates himself and frowns. But, she lets out a childish laugh and says:

– My prince! You are the most beautiful man that I know and the only one worthy of being loved by my heart!

IV

From that night on, a singular transformation started in Sakaran's character. One week later, he married the dancer and made her his favorite. He became, then, the humblest slave of his kingdom, because a slave to love. No other exceeded him in humility, attention and ardor for the object of his cult. Lygia, the young Greek girl, became the sovereign who dominated, above all, the monarch's heart and will. Through Lygia, Osman loosened the rigor of several laws and the people's situation was softened. The sovereign's passion for the gorgeous foreigner became popular. The country's bards celebrated her in sweet ballads, the commentators created legends about it, and everyone admired the power of that naughty child over the heart of a forty-five years-old man, who, before, so much neglect had had for love. The fifteen harem wives were freed and sent to their respective countries or homes. The dogs were no longer the favorites. Lygia imposed her will and her slave, the first prince of the kingdom, gave in to her whims. They loved each other deeply, sincerely, and they came to know happiness.

What sublime mysteries had infiltrated into those two strange souls, so they would give themselves like that, suddenly, to one another, one declining towards the winter of live, the other in the breaking of a mighty dawn, vibrating life and hopes?

Only God knows!

Lygia, however, dies very soon, suddenly, during a brilliant feast, in which she was poisoned with a wine cup, for political reasons, according to some; certainly, others would say, out of vengeance from the repudiated former wives.

Sakaran, then, went mad by pain. However, before going mad and killing himself, not being able to withstand the misfortune that had befallen upon him, he orders excessive punishments to the suspects of the crime, demands the criminals to be found, hangs and tortures, from right to left, disoriented and inconsolable in his supreme grief.

And time went by...

V

After some time as suffering errant Spirit, during which he endured the terrible effects of his suicide act; after suffering the hell his consciousness had become, where surprising visions bulged, displaying the crimes committed against the people he had governed, crimes ended with a new and serious crime: the suicide; after looking for, as crazy, hallucinated, desperate, his beloved Lygia in all corners of the great city that had been his, and where he had seen himself commemorated and respected, one day Sakaran saw himself imprisoned by entities unknown to him, who intuitively murmured to his weakened and terrified understanding:

– Enough foolishness. God’s law orders you to be rescued, so you can progress and win!

Sakaran reincarnated, then, in the very kingdom that had been his, in the very city where he had shone like a sun, master whose wishes were laws. However, he returned as a man no longer on the splendor of a throne, no longer surrounded by glories and flattery, but to suffer the rigor of the laws he had himself created for his former subjects.

Now, he is a beggar, miserable, slave, son of slaves under tyrant masters, who require of him rude labor, violent, from sun to sun. He is the unfortunate who received, as closure for sacrifices endured, the degrading shroud of leprosy, which corrodes him, making him suffer the painful consequences of the deviations undertook as sovereign. He lives alone, hungry, ragged, without a home, without a family, by the gutters of the iron metropolis in which he reigned, he is the man that everyone repels, whom the children throw stones at and provoke the dogs to attack, whom the authorities force to go to the country, to find shelter in some cave, so not to contaminate the city air, where healthy people live. And he obeys, he goes away from the city, gathering in the street corners pieces of bread that the good souls throw at him from their doors or terraces. He leaves... he returns... he leaves and returns again, in a dramatic back-and-forth, searching for food...

And, in that city, which had been his, he suffers the rudeness of the laws he himself had created in the past, when he was the sovereign, for that oppressed and suffering people. He suffers, beyond that, the inconsolable pain of lost

love, which his consciousness registers in the depths of his soul, he feels the undefinable longing of the love that had tortured his soul, confiding him that he had already lived happily in those palaces of marble and porphyry, which were there aligned and so much attracted him, which he now sadly contemplated, envying the tycoons who went up and down, every day, its polished staircases. He suffered, above all, the unsatisfied desire of loving and being loved; craving for affection throbbed in his heart. However, he had not managed to find love in his life and he consoled himself with dreaming, stuck in his cave or stretched out on the sidewalk of those palaces, now closed to him. In fact, his Lygia had not followed him in this punitive existence. He had lost her from sight, as Spirit, ignoring that she also evolved, like him, in other locations of Earth, in order to improve her own character in the sequence of moral-spiritual enhancement.

However, a new dawn arose in the desolate soul of this beggar who had been king.

One day, in the city that had been his, a holy man showed up, humble and poor, who knew how to talk to the unfortunate and console them. He heard him from afar, distanced from the crowd, as it was proper for a leper. However, he heard him. His voice came to him lively and fresh. The man said he was a disciple of the Christ of God that had descended to Earth in redemptive mission, and he brought a message of love and hope for the misfortunate. The sweet voices of Christianity, then, consoled his soul and opened a new road for the future. He became Christian, he was heard and rescued by the good man, and he consoled himself. The sublime figure of the Son of God, expiring in a cross out of love for human beings, took possession of his soul forever, to never leave it. His tears stopped. Hope illuminated his heart and life. The voices of the Christ of God populated his loneliness... and he died confident, in the shadow of his cave.

And time went by...

VI

Once again in the other-world, he recognized that the beggar's miserable life had been beneficial for the Spirit. It had brought merits to the spiritual life and new strength encouraged him to continue the reparation journeys. He had been resigned, he had never murmured against his own state of scarcity, he had looked for the paths that lead to God. This, the miserable life, is a benefit for those who live it. The suffering, by itself, however, had not been sufficient. Reparations would also be necessary, edifying accomplishments for the collectivity. As he now knew how to pray, he asked and obtained from Heaven new opportunities to better himself, morally progressing.

... And he was born in Rome, the Rome of the Caesars, the great center of world civilization.

He occupies high political positions. He is cultured, poet, speaker, fine politician, writer. He does what he can to serve well the people, with whom he sympathizes. He suffers from the injustices he observes being performed against that very people. He is Christian, loved by Christians. His affection for the sweet voices of Christianity consoles and encourages him to continue on the path of Good. He attends the catacombs, where he prays, hidden, with his brothers of ideal, and he protects those as much as he can, from the heights of the chair he occupies. And he manages to save many of them from prison and circus arenas. Lygia now follows him, she is his wife and he is her forever slave. However, the gorgeous Greek woman from the past allowed herself to be invaded by mundane passions, and no longer is the naughty and humble dancer from before. She is the ambitious woman who desires to get close to the throne, she wants to win, climbing positions despite how many impossibilities appear. Lygia is his wife, beautiful, lively, fascinating as ever. However, she cheats on the husband, who is modest and without ambition, defiling the matrimony within the arms of a lover. Nonetheless, she loves him. She only let herself to be taken away by the prejudices of the environment in which she lives. He becomes, however, a suspect of complicity with the Christians and he is assassinated by a slave under the service of the political party to which he belongs, who stabs him in an ambush inside his own residence, behind a curtain.

With respect to Lygia, she marries the lover, adapts herself to the life of Rome, repudiates the Christians and entertains herself in the circus watching them die, loses herself in the night of sins.

And time went by...

VII

A blow of tragedies pursues, thereafter, these two Spirits in the scenarios of Rome. They love each other despite their shortcomings, they never abandon one another. They reunite today and separate tomorrow, in the course of reincarnations, only to feel awful because of the other's absence. They once again reunite to idolize each other even more, in an ever-growing impulse of love, love which tends to sublimate itself in the spiral of evolution.

However, descends upon the world the dark veil of the Middle Age, with its constables and fire pits. They lived, then, some fortunate stages during different phases of those ten centuries of shadows. He was prince, priest, physician, professor, musician, poet, artist, ideas renovator, conspirator, worker, friend to the humble, protector of the unfortunate. He again came to know thrones and ruled. He came to know prisons, convictions, injustices, decapitation, richness, poverty, love. But, he remained loyal to his Christian faith.

A few times, his Lygia follows him in the reincarnation, and he gets disturbed in the labors of his own evolution, with the violence of their love. He hides, frequently, in cloisters, being he a religious person or not, for study, meditation, intellectual work, spiritual recomfort, consolation against the barbarism that plows around the world. However, she pulls him out from there frequently as well, so to share with her, sometimes, thrones, sometimes, marital beds...

We see him, later, in India, the ancient homeland of philosophy and the cult to the Spirit. His soul is tired of earthly passions and aspires the tranquility and purity of divine love...

He abandons the principality that belonged to him... and now he is the solitary thinker who hid himself from the world aiming for spiritual conquest. He initiates himself in the majestic details of the secret sciences. He familiarizes himself with the other-world, he penetrates spiritual mysteries and he climbs elevated positions which can be aspired the adepts of Light in the sacred temples of India.

But, in his life as a sage, as a spiritualist master, existed a shadow of longing that knowledge could not fulfill. For a long time, Lygia was absent from him. She disturbed his progress. The justice from High Above, then, kept her away, so he could obtain freedom and tranquility to work, accomplish, evolve, spiritualize himself.

From the reincarnate stage in India on, human love lost meaning for him and he started to love Lygia and his neighbor in one single breath of spiritual love. Nothing in him resembled of Sakaran anymore. Nineteen centuries of suffering, work and accomplishments had transformed him. He had died, suffered, fought, worked, loved, served, conquered himself, and renovated himself for God. He had progressed. He had come to know the hardship of progress through all the social classes. He had educated himself. He had completed himself. He deserved, thus, a prize, and he received it: on the XVI century, he gave his life for the Gospel of the Christ of God, in the tragic days of Saint Bartholomew, during the massacre of protestants in the France of Catherine de Médici and Charles IX.

Dying for the Christ! It was the supreme glory for whom had resuscitated from sin after the irresistible call of the Sermon on the Mount!

In the present days, the former Persian sovereign is happy: he serves the Christ of God, his Master, in the person of his neighbor, incarnate or disincarnate, who deserves all his love. He enjoys the trust from the High Above. He serves Art, Philosophy, Science, Love, Charity, always proceeding in the ascension towards Light. And Lygia follows him, spiritually loved, with him learning how to love and to serve God.

VIII

...I was Sakaran...

³⁶ TN: See Note 2.

6

NINA

Charles

“Love, then, thy neighbor; love him as you love yourself, because you already know, now, that, repelling an unfortunate, you will be, maybe, putting away a brother of yours, a father, a friend from the past. If it is so, what a great despair you will feel when recognizing him in the Spirits’ world!”

(Sister Rosalia – *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, by Allan Kardec, chapter XIII, “Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”, number 9, 58nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation³⁷)

I

On that beginning-of-winter night, it was being presented, at the Royal Theatre of Madrid, “The Barber of Seville”, by Gioacchino Rossini, opening the season. This beautiful opera had been premiered not long before, in Italy, and now run Europe’s capitals, in gala recitals, where a bright society gathered to applaud it.

The Count Ramiro de Montalban was a passionate admirer of good music, he personally knew the play’s author, once he had himself attended a piano course in Milan, and he yearned for this premier in Madrid, his homeland.³⁸ He had, thus, his box in the Royal Theatre and, on that day, after lunch, he wrote the following letter to his bride, ordering it to be delivered at her residence by his room servant Manuel Garcia:

“– My dear Constanca: today, at the Royal Theatre, is the premier of Rossini’s play, which I told you about days ago. I yearn for seeing it, but I wanted you to join me. I will pick you up at eight o’clock, because the play starts at nine and I do not want to lose even one scene of the first act, even though it is elegant to arrive at the theater after the play has started. Wait for me ready to go. – Your Ramiro”.

The Count de Montalban was a young Madrilenian of twenty-six years-old, heir of a Spanish nobility’s traditional name, but, on the occasion, he had already consumed part of his fortune in philanthropic works, since he divided himself in charity actions everywhere, he maintained a hospital almost exclusively by himself, he protected the orphans in charity houses, and in his own home – the De Montalban Palace – was like a shelter for the deprived ones, because, on some occasions, the guests he received were homeless mothers, sick children, young people with no resources, who were oriented and recovered by him, in addition to students and poor artists, in need of encouragement and aid. Everyone sat with him at his table, even if other guests, aristocrats like himself, were present. He had founded, moreover, jointly with equally idealistic friends, the “Charity Association for the Recovery of Youth”, and, then, it could be seen the miracle of juvenile souls, already lost in vices, being raised again for the honest and useful life. Many of those souls were, in fact, unfortunate, abandoned, and not perverse. Don

Ramiro understood the painful problem and, with the aid of his fellows, made them resurge for God and for themselves. Those fellows, on their turn, were always spiritualists: esoterics, theosophists, rosicrucianists, etc. The Spiritists, however, still had not received this definition, although the belief in reincarnation and in the communication of Spirits were since long ago accepted and practiced. Nonetheless, that sort of guests despaired the servants, who utterly disliked serving such a class, mainly Manuel Garcia and his mother, the housekeeper Rosaria Maria do Espirito Santo. Even his bride, the beautiful Constancia de Vilares, deeply disliked those charity “excesses”, as she classified the fiancé’s philanthropy, because she feared seeing him completely ruined due to the expenses he was obliged to incur for those services. Constancia was beautiful and rich, twenty years-old and extremely proud, far from sharing the fiancé’s generous feelings towards the suffering and poor ones of this world.

Ramiro was a physician, philosopher, pianist, cultured and bearer of a loving heart, a man ahead of his time, yearning to expand himself in charity breaths for Humanity. Deeply adept of spiritualist doctrines, he loved the Gospel of Christ and sought to comply with it, with immense fervor for the Master’s Doctrine. He was, in addition, a Rosicrucian and affiliated to a certain Masonic Lodge from Paris, being respected by his fellows of ideal as an example of honor and righteousness of character, despite of his youth. He did not entice prejudices, but respect for society and his own conscience, and did not diminish himself by maintaining friendly relationships with the poor classes, and even Gypsies. People saw him, thus, frequently, around the poor or sordid neighborhoods, around tenements, around hospitals, bringing his services as a physician, his humanitarian assistance and his Christian fraternity.

An inseparable friend followed him in those journeys, also a physician and as humanitarian as himself, the Viscount Carlos de C..., to whom fortune had never favored, because he did not have any income, but whom his virtues aggrandized in the general opinion.

Ramiro de Montalban had a sister, the young Cristina, a student of the Dominican Nuns, as noble and generous as her illustrious brother. Cristina de Montalban and Carlos de C... loved each other, but difficulties interposed between the two youngsters, because the remaining members of the family,

except Ramiro, objected the wedding, considering Carlos' obscurity, holder of a title, it is true, but a mere physician who worked to live, while she had one of the most illustrious names in Spain.

On that day of the gala recital at the Royal Theatre, after dinner, the young noble Ramiro de Montalban got ready, with care, assisted by Manuel Garcia, and, concluding that he looked good, called for the solemn-days carriage and went to pick up the bride, arriving at her residence at exactly eight o'clock. But, Constanca had not rushed, and for that reason she was not ready. Knowing that the fiancé had arrived, she ordered him to be told, by the servant, to wait, because the play would only start at nine o'clock and it still was eight o'clock.

Ramiro did not complain, but, in order to hurry her, he did not go up to the living room; he remained at the hall, standing on his feet, for half hour, talking with the doorman.

This wait would have a powerful influence in the following events around our characters.

II

Constancia was Portuguese by birth, daughter of a Portuguese nobleman and a Spanish woman from the high bourgeoisie. She owned a good fortune inherited from her parents, because her mother had brought to the marriage, in addition to a great beauty and the talent of lyric singer, valuable assets and the manor where now resided Constancia herself. Beyond this fortune, she also had a pleasant and prosperous farm in the surroundings of Lisbon, where she had been born. She divided her time, thus, between her two residences, the one in Portugal and the one in Spain, but, after becoming Count Ramiro's betrothed, she now remained in Madrid, affectionate to his presence. She was an orphan, once her mother had died early, and she had been raised by her grandparents and by a housekeeper, who loved her with maternal zeal, and this housekeeper was none other than the same Rosaria Maria do Espirito Santo, now housekeeper of Ramiro's residence. She had been chosen, because, excessively jealous, watchful of every moment and thoughts of whom she would marry, Constancia had convinced Ramiro about the need of good direction in his house, given that he lived alone and received, frequently, groups of strangers and uneducated people as guests. Rosaria would keep there the respect and discipline, while taking care of the expenses, avoiding waste, even safeguarding art objects and the behavior of the remaining servants and those very guests. Manuel, her son, would assist her, because they were both entirely trusted by the Vilares family, since, if Rosaria had been Constancia's nurse, Manuel had been raised as her brother, and had grown up alongside her under the roof of the ancient Lisbon mansion.

Ramiro understood that the bride was right, and that her vision had been very correct, trying to help him, because his house really needed a loyal and friendly direction, and he agreed completely. Constancia, thus, from Rosaria's installation in the mansion on, which soon would also be hers, was informed about everything that happened over there, even about Ramiro's mail, which was read by Manuel, in secret, and reported to Constancia loyally, when it was not possible to bring it over so Constancia could examine it herself. The wedding date had been set for the spring, because Ramiro wanted to redo the paintings in his mansion before the marriage.

Half hour after his arrival at the Vilares mansion, Ramiro Montalban took the carriage with his bride and headed towards the Opera. They rode alone, which was not usual or very recommendable for a lady of the time.

The four carriage horses marched solemnly when, suddenly, they stopped. The coachman turned to them and clarified:

– My lord, it is impossible to pass through the square. Excavations were made, there are piles of dirt and stones, and a ditch, around here...

– What can we do, then? Through where should go to reach the theater?

– We must go back, sir, go up the short Vilares ramp, and go on the street above, the Gypsies' Street... and we will reach the Avenue New World...

– Oh! It is not very advisable to drive on that street, the Gypsies'... They say that... – intervened Constanca.

– Doesn't matter, Felicio, go on. I must arrive at the theater before the opening.

Felicio made the horses and the carriage turn around, not without certain difficulty, turned on a small slope to the left and continued in normal march for a heavy vehicle along a narrow road, dark and badly kept.

Suddenly, however, the horses stopped for the second time and voices from a small crowd that applauded something could be heard, followed by claps and requests:

– Again! One more presentation, one more! We will pay well! We want to see Nina dancing. Nina! Nina! Nina!

– What do we have now, Felicio? Another excavation? – asked the Count.

– No, my lord, there is no excavation here. We are in front of the Hostel Good Star, there is a stage in front of the building, illuminated by lanterns, and Nina dances on the street to attract customers inside. The performance starts at eight-thirty, daily, it just started, and it will continue throughout the night, until dawn...

– Who is Nina? – asked the couple at the same time.

– It’s a young Andalusian Gypsy girl, she is very famous around here now, in the bohemian circles, with her pretty ballet and folk dance from our Spain. She sings and dances like a goddess... Look, sir, there she is, starting to dance again, while the Gypsy violins resume playing...

The crowd moved away, letting the vehicle pass, recognizing in the carriage Don Ramiro de Montalban’s coat of arms, humanitarian physician, esteemed and respected as friend and protector of the poor classes. However, he, curious to see what happened on the street, ordered:

– Stop, Felicio!

And the horses stopped in front of a stage set at the entrance of a club of sorts, a cabaret more or less well structured. Through the house’s windows, one could see the circular dance floor, little table for the meals, lanterns lit, chain of flowers and fruits decorating the walls and chandeliers, and curtains at the doors, all very loud, but inviting for the bohemian and nocturnal people. There gathered Madrid’s bohemia, until late hours in the night, to dance, eat, drink, play, and even noblemen and sons of good families, militaries, artists, students did not refuse to have fun there, listening the pretty Gypsy orchestras side by side the gorgeous dancers who appeared non-stop. This season, Nina was the major attraction, with her uncommon beauty, her inviting laughs, her sensual dances and her inebriating manners.

Don Ramiro suspended the curtain from the little carriage window, looked outside and saw Nina dancing as if in a vertigo, barely touching the stage floor with her agile little feet, which seemed to have wings.

A chill of unusual emotion run along the sensitive fibers of the young nobleman, followed by inexplicable distress and discomfort. He displayed a gesture of surprise, which was not unnoticed by Constanica. A burdensome sensation supervened, and it was as if he asked himself in the intimacy of his soul touched by affliction:

– But, how can “she” be here, in this sordid place? Why? Why is “she” here? No, it cannot be, this is a crime, I cannot agree with this!

But... she, who? He did not know that street dancer. She was a Gypsy from Andalusia, he had never seen her, but for that very moment. Why, then, he was uneasy because of her? Why that affliction in his heart? Why the

emotion that oppressed his soul and cooled his hands? He looked, looked with a painful interest. What did he have to do with that Gypsy girl? He forgot Constanica, he forgot “The Barber of Seville”...

However, the music stopped, and the dancer halted. The applause came, and the tips fell inside a metal tray she extended to the public.

Don Ramiro pulled out the wallet, grabbed a bank note and told Felicio to bring it to Nina. She thanked him, smiling, without knowing who gave her so generously. Constanica, however, remarked:

– Move the horses, Felicio, we are late...

And the carriage took off in a fast lope, without Ramiro uttering one more single monosyllable.

During the opera presentation, he seemed to pay attention to everything, but he did not make any comment. He was lost in thought and worried, and Constanica noticed it. Every so often, he looked at the watch.

The show ended at mid-night, and he reconducted the bride to her residence. They had to ride through the Gypsies’ Street. They did. But, Ramiro seemed not to pay attention to the Hostel Good Star, when they passed in front of it. Everything continued festive and illuminated around there. But the street remained deserted. Strong frost wetted the stage where Nina danced hours previously, and it was cold. When saying good-bye to his fiancé, at the entrance, she invited him:

– Let’s go in, my love, and have a coffee together, it is cold...

– No, my darling, it is not advisable. It is almost one o’clock...

He kissed her forehead and moved away, but Constanica stopped him:

– Promise me, Ramiro, that you will not go to the hostel...

He showed a strange expression of boredom and merely answered:

– Don’t be silly, my dear, or think about things you should not think about...

III

“Consider, as well, that, very often, the child you rescue was esteemed in another reincarnation, so, if you could remember, you would no longer be doing charity, but fulfilling a duty.”

(A Familiar Spirit – *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, by Allan Kardec, chapter XIII, “Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand gives”, number 18, 58nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation)

Getting in the vehicle to return home, Don Ramiro would not need to pass through the Gypsies’ Street. Nonetheless, he ordered the man on the driver’s seat, barely having sat on the comfortable car pillows:

– Let’s go to the Hostel Good Star, Felicio...

The servant smiled imperceptibly and said to himself:

– Even you, sir, Don Ramiro?!...

It was a little after one o’clock in the night, when the young Count pushed the movable door and entered the Hostel. The room was crowded with visitors and, on the dance floor, Nina still danced, shaking herself as if in a vertigo, creating consecutives figures, followed by the music and a sweeping choir of castanets.

He was immediately recognized, and more than one voice murmured, surprised:

– You, sir, Don Ramiro, here?!

He approached the dance floor and stopped to contemplate the dance. His features were heavy, the eyebrows frowned, denoting preoccupation, and the distress oppressing his heart.

A Gypsy man who, by his behavior, was the boss of the group that was performing, said something to Nina, which he could not hear, when the dancer turned close to the place where he was. The young Gypsy girl, then, came, wallowing, close to the Count, whirled, provocative, in front of him, and, at a certain moment, she let the dress’ bodice slide down by the shoulders, striping the breast, and, like that, she continued dancing. However, quickly, so quickly that many people did not notice it, Constancia’s betrothed

took off his own cape that he wore, advanced towards the dancer and wrapped her with it, taking her away from the dance floor.

There were protests:

– This cannot be, we want to see her dance, we paid for this...

However, the Count did not answer. Proud and honorable, he led her, holding her by the shoulders, as a father to a daughter, to a table next-by, made her sit down and exclaimed in a high and energetic voice, as if he had authority over her:

– It is a crime making you dance until now. For four hours you extenuate yourself, you are exhausted, you are disfigured! It is a crime, it is a crime!

The protests went silent. Don Ramiro was known as a philanthropist. He was a doctor. He had, in fact, authority.

– Sir, once you are interested in me, pay for my dinner... I'm hungry – supplicated the dancer with humble voice, where one could guess tears hid.

Ramiro ordered dinner and sat in front of her without, however, taking part in the meal. He held, though, her hands, as if listening to them, touched her forehead and verified that the wretch had a fever.

The boss of the gypsies – Michaelus – introduced himself:

– Pardon me, my lord... But, my dancer needs to return to the dance floor. I cannot dismiss her, the public complains... My losses will be great...

Comprehending that the Gypsy wanted to exploit him, but not desiring to cause scandal, he asked:

– How much do you want to leave her alone?

Michaelus made a cynic reverence, smiled and answered:

– At your disposal, my lord...

Ramiro, then, threw at him a little purse full of coins, while asking Nina, who felt shy and ashamed, and the Gypsy man moved away:

– Who is this man?

– He is my friend, sir. I’m his slave. He exploits my services, sells me to other men, as he just did, the money I make is all his, he hits me, and the little he gives me is barely enough for me not to starve to death. I want to break free from him. But, how? Yes, I’m sick, sir, but I cannot afford treatment...

Constancia’s betrothed heard her with embarrassment, the eyes fixed in her, who ate with appetite:

– You want to break free from him, you say?

– Yes, my lord, but I don’t know how to do it.

– Don’t you enjoy your profession?

– My lord, I’m too wretched to enjoy it... I live in hell, sir, I don’t have hopes to break free from him, I wanted to live honestly, peacefully... Dancing attracts me, but, lately, it tires me so.

– I’m going to free you from all that. What is your name?

– Eponina Vidigal.

– So, you’re not a Gypsy?

– No, sir! I pretend to be Gypsy, because that is convenient for Michaelus.

– And your parents, your family?

– They died. My dad was an acrobat. He was a great artist of the trapeze and circus horse-riding, and a dancer. He was the one who taught me to dance. My mom died when I was three years-old. When I turned seventeen years-old, my father died. The company kept on. But, a nobleman brought shame to me... and my stepmother threw me out because I was going to be a mother...

– And your son?

– He died when he was one year-old, for lack of treatment. A Jewish merchant, who loved me and felt sorry for me, rescued me. He gave me a room, in the back of his store. However, a brother-in-law of his killed him, throwing a piece of iron at his head, one day when he was hitting his wife because of me, as she had offended me greatly. She was jealous of me and

mistreated me. And I was again thrown out. Everyone throws me out... My son was born in his house... but, then, we were in misery. That is when Michaelus showed up. I'm Jewish from Andalusia, sir, not a Gypsy, but my brothers of race despise me because I shame our tradition...

– How old are you, my daughter?

– I'm twenty years-old, sir, I will turn twenty in two months from today...

Tears were running down her cheeks, slowly, while she dined and spoke. Don Ramiro asked further:

– Where do you live?

– In a tenement in the Gypsy Neighborhood. It is not far from here...

Nina finished the dinner. He paid the check. Next, he stood up and helped her to stand up, because she was exhausted, while he said:

– Let's go to your house. I will take you. You need to rest.

He led her out holding her shoulders, moved by her misfortunes, in which he sincerely believed. The surrounding people did not notice it. Such events were common there and other dancers were performing now, delighting the public. It was cold. Nina remained wrapped in the broad and scented cape of her philanthropist protector. They got in the carriage, which was parked in front of the hostel, and they headed to the Gypsy Neighborhood.

After roughly twenty minutes riding, they stopped, as indicated by the dancer, in front of a great gate surrounded by solid walls, in a dark and mistreated street. Felicio got scarred and exclaimed:

– My lord, Count, here is dangerous, we can be mugged...

– Don't be afraid, Felicio. Nothing will happen to us. I will come back soon.

He climbed down the carriage and helped the lady to climb down with the same gallantry he was used to when dealing with the ladies of his own social level. The gate was widely open. There was a tallow-candle lantern illuminating the path, hanging from an angle in the wall, which dull reflexes lent sinister shades to the place. They walked down a soft slope and, soon,

Ramiro found a small square surrounded by dreary houses, old, composed by a small living room and a kitchen, and a stair, and a room on the floor above. They could be called miserable lofts. Some women sat on the floor, mixed with their men, eating, drinking or singing obscene songs. To the right of this square, there was another gate, leading to a courtyard narrower than the first one, which houses, identical to the other ones, were, however, less ruined. People talked, in this courtyard, in loud voice and, on a balcony decorating the larger house –, Michaelus' residence –, women laid down wrapped in their mantles, while the men who visited them drank, played, and smoked. Many lanterns hang from this balcony's ceiling, sinisterly illuminating the den.

Nina went in through this second gate, followed by the philanthropist. Suffocated laughs, maybe out of surprise, reached the ears of Constancia's betrothed, who was dressed in great ceremony, that is, wearing a coat, once he had given the cape to the dancer:

– Hem?! What is this? Well, well! Michaelus will make a good profit... Nina “won” a nobleman! And she comes wrapped in his cape... Good night, my lord! Good night, my lady!...

Don Ramiro delicately corresponded to the salutations received, entered into the small living room of Nina's house, which door was closed by the old doorknob, climbed the staircase, which stairs creaked under his feet, entered the dancer's bedroom. He lit up a candle. Then, Ramiro examined, quickly, everything and he could notice the misery in which lived that poor woman whom he accompanied: a sordid bed, with rags for keeping warm; a small table, an old mirror, clothes hanging from nails in the walls, here and there, already in a bad state, because the fancy dancing costumes belonged to the company, and a bowl and a tin jar with water. Caved in the wall, which was double, as usually is the case with walls of old colonial houses of the poor, a ridiculous stove, where the wretch warmed herself and cooked where there was wood.

The nobleman commented nothing, he merely said:

– Lie down and rest, my daughter. Tomorrow I will have you picked up before lunch, to go to the hospital. You need to be examined and treated. I'm a physician and I have a hospital. You will be admitted in it. I will treat you.

And remember what I'm going to say to you: don't see in me a man who desires you as a companion. Absolutely, it is not that! I'm a brother of yours, who wishes to help you, softening your suffering. Lie down and sleep. You're exhausted!

He said that while his right hand was on her head, and moved away. Nina stopped him:

– You forgot your cape, sir. Here it is! I'm very grateful to you.

– Wrap yourself in it, my daughter. It's cold, it warms well...

He went away, causing surprise even in Felicio, who waited for him full of fear.

Nina lay down, disturbed, not understanding anything, deeming to dream, trembling with fever and emotion. And she started to cry.

When Don Ramiro de Montalban arrived at his mansion, it was three o'clock in the night. Manuel Garcia was waiting for him, alarmed. And, as he enjoyed freedom in that meritorious house, he answered the master's salutation with the following words:

– The opera ended late this time, my lord...

Don Ramiro did not answer and went to his own rooms, closing himself in them. He dismissed, thus, the servant's services. Later, taking off the coat and the collar, he started walking around the room, coming and going on the tapestry, concerned, the forehead frowned. In his heart, however, there was this interrogation:

– My God! My God! It must be her, yes! It must be my poor sister from the past... What am I going to do, my God? How can I rescue her, how?...

IV

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

(Jesus – Matthew, 25:40)

In that time, Allan Kardec had not yet appeared with the Spiritist Codification. It was its eve, however, and the Spirits, messengers of the Christ, who would perform this magnificent work, did not spare efforts to awake people’s attention to the spiritual matters. In all Europe and also in America, people did experiments through the phenomenon of turning tables, and important revelations, authentic dictates, edifying reports were granted by the Lord to those who, sincerely and judiciously, wanted to investigate the science of beyond-grave that so presented itself, so humbly, coming from Infinity, to aggrandize and console the world. In addition, Don Ramiro de Montalban was a staunch adept of transcendental spiritualist doctrines, he knew Esoterism, Theosophy, was a great scholar who sought to learn everything, about the destinies of the human soul and its immortality, from the trustworthy sources that deserved his confidence. He knew the reports, then existing, about the phenomena and manifestations of extra-human order around the famous Swedenborg,³⁹ he faithfully accepted reincarnation, so well-known by those doctrines, and, frequently, obtained about it valuable teachings through the tables phenomenon, in meetings with researchers and scholars of Madrid and Paris.

Well, a certain day, during one of those meetings, edifying phenomena were obtained, one year before the events narrated here, and, at one point, the table dictated, using the classical knocks, this sensational warning:

“– You, brother Ramiro, I must warn about a fact that will have capital importance in your life. This kind of warnings are granted, preferably, through a dream. However, I have the order to dictate directly, through this mean, what will happen to you, so the conviction of all of you in these phenomena can take root forever, inasmuch as I see that some among you flinch in accepting them: you will find, in your path, a soul that was summarily dear to you in past earthly reincarnations. A great spiritual love unites you. However, she committed great a crime before the Supreme Law:

she committed suicide, after squandering, morally, her own life. And she reincarnated to expiate the crime in bitter conditions.”

Don Ramiro did not give more than relative credit to this warning, because it was not appropriate to accept literally those reports, which could be the work of a frolic inhabitant of the invisible plain, willing to have fun on the expense of credulous people. A few days past, however, he dreamed that, walking through the streets of Seville,⁴⁰ he came across a gorgeous street dancer, who seemed to be Gypsy. His surprise was great, because he recognized in the dancer, a little less than a beggar, his sister “Angelica”. Great commotion shook his soul. He ran towards her, took her in his arms with infinite tenderness and exclaimed in tears:

– Oh, my dear Angelica, you, here, in this state?...

However, in the current existence, the young nobleman did not have a sister called Angelica. His only sister was called Cristina and she was a student of the Dominican nuns, not a Gypsy dancer. The dream could only refer, thus, to a past existence, as the table phenomenon had affirmed.

He woke up moved, retaining in his memories the pretty and sad looks of the young girl, her loud clothes of street dancer, and her gallant swings.

As the days went by, however, the impressions quieted down and he no longer thought about the phenomenon of the table or the dream.

On the night of “The Barber of Seville” presentation, however, seeing Nina dancing on the stage at Hostel Good Star, he recognized in her the vision of his dream. He remembered, then, the warning of the table’s spiritual manifestation... and it was all that which he thought about, walking back and forth, uneasy, around his bedroom, after returning from the Theater.

What could he do? Yes, his heart, his very reason secreted him that poor Nina had been deeply connected to him in a remote age, or maybe even recently. The attraction he felt for her since he had seen her in his dream, and dancing on the stage, at the Gypsies’ Street, confirmed the two premonitions. And, now, an immense compassion, a strange tenderness, a deep pain in his soul, for seeing her so distanced from him, propelled him to seek her, to protect her, to rescue her. Did not God’s law state that it was indispensable to love and serve one’s neighbor? Was he not struggling, since adolescence, to

serve his neighbor? How many mothers abandoned by their husbands or lovers he and his friend Carlos had aided and oriented? Why, now, he would not rescue that unfortunate woman who, everything pointed out, was spiritually connected to him?

But... what about society? What would the world say, his friends, seeing him interested in a hostel dancer, although he did it fraternally, out of love for the good? What would Constancia do, when she realized that he had become the protector of a disqualified woman, she, who did not see with good eyes his deeds of charity for the underprivileged? Would she tolerate the fact, maybe? And Nina herself, did she want to be rescued? He did not even know her, he did not know what her character was! During the brief conversation he had had with her at dinner, in the hostel, he regarded her to be humble, simple, really suffering. However, merely giving her alimony for regular meals, covering her expenses, so she would not go hungry or cold, leaving her to remain in abandonment, lost in shame? No! This would not even be decent or honest. He felt that he should not proceed like that. It was necessary to take her away from vice, to rehabilitate her, to educate her, to orient her to God, because the wretch was destitute of everything, even from the supreme consolation of a religion.

And he thought, questioning himself:

– The suicide in one existence, then, triggers reincarnation like that, so cruelly expiatory? What would have happened before, to her, in a previous life, so the poor woman would have sought suicide? Is it, thus, such a great crime the killing of oneself?

Yes, it is. It is the supreme defiance to God! Yes, the suicide drags to an existence like that, like Nina's, if the suicidal, before the atrocious gesture, morally squandered his or her own life, dishonored him or herself, and dishonored his or her home and family. And there was the result, with Nina herself: no family, no home, no friends, no resources, no health, no hopes. Only a fatal beauty, which dragged her ever more to moral misery, humiliation and dishonor, in which band she had voluntarily involved herself in a previous life.

In those uneasy dispositions, Don Ramiro saw the break of day without being able to sleep. He lay down, then, on the bed, until Manuel Garcia

arrived to arrange his bath and fresh clothes for the hospital services, as he remained dressed with the theater garment.

At eight o'clock, Manuel showed up, fulfilling the obligations of chamber servant and serving him the first meal. In the middle of the service, however, the servant asked, because he enjoyed the intimacy of his foster sister's fiancé:

– Sir, I did not find your ceremonial cape, maybe you forgot it at the theater?

– Ah! The cape?! It must be in the carriage...

– No, sir, it is not. I just looked for it in the carriage. I did not find it in there...

Ramiro laughed, good-humored, which intrigued Manuel, and replied:

– Ask Felicio if he did not see it...

– I asked, sir, he does not know your cape's whereabouts...

– Well... Then, I indeed lost it. Let's not worry about it any further.

He stood up, where he had just had the meal, left the palace and went to the hospital.

On the way, he said to Felicio:

– I thank you the discretion about my cape. For now, it is for the best. I know that you don't ignore that it is not about a lover...

– I know, my lord. You are goodness in person... But, Manuel Garcia tried to make me confess. He wanted to force me to say where you have been after the theater...

– What an audacity! And what did you respond?

– I told him that, after the theater, we went to the Vilares' mansion... and I did not lie! Manuel seems like a spy, he doesn't lose you from sight...

– I know, but it doesn't matter.

Arriving at the hospital, he climbed down the carriage and, turning back to the servant, he added:

– Now go to the Gypsies' Neighborhood, where we were yesterday, look for the dancer and deliver this note to her. She will come here with you, because I will hospitalize her, she is ill.

He wrote down some phrases in a sheet of paper from a notebook he took out of the pocket and handed it out to the coachman. The latter departed, willing to loyally comply with the order he had been given. Felicio was a faithful servant, he respected his master and would not be capable of betraying his own duty.

Don Ramiro entered the hospital and soon found his friend Carlos, who waited for him ready for the nursery visit.

While performing the humanitarian service, Ramiro reported to his friend the previous night's events, with his characteristic loyal frankness. He added that he had ordered Nina to be picked up to hospitalize her for treating her health, because the wretch displayed symptoms of serious lung infection; that he would protect her regardless of any difficulties, because it disgusted his heart the indifference of abandoning her to the misery where he saw her, making use of the shame of prostitution to subsist; and that he was convinced that the wretch was the same one he had seen in his dreams and whom he had recognized as being his sister, the very same one that a certain entity, in Paris, had announced that he would meet, when granting him a premonitory communication through the table phenomenon. And he finished with the following request to the friend:

– Help me, Carlos, to protect her and save her, you who are free. I will have to fight many difficulties. I know that Constancia will flatly oppose that I aid her, unjustly suspecting of me. Spiritually, I love Nina and I need to save her. Since yesterday I suffer, because I feel, I'm sure she is connected to me through the past centuries... and she will also be connected to me through the future centuries...

He spoke with commotion and thrill, and Carlos noticed it. Very considerate, the Viscount of C... answered:

– I praise your feelings of humanity towards this poor creature you found, my Ramiro, and you can count on me, as always. We will help her, as we have been helping others. But, I observe that you are moved in a way I have never seen you before. You need more serenity and reflection. Don't guide yourself only by the heart... Equally consult reason. Could you, maybe, be in love with this poor dancer?

– I'm as in love with her as a brother would be with his sister fallen in ruin. It's the passion of piety, Carlos, the tenderness of compassion, which, you know, is also strong. I repeat: she is connected to me through the centuries...

– You ought not interpret very literally certain prophecies or reports from the past, given by Spirits... You know that they can also be the product of mystifying people who might want to confuse or afflict us... Moreover, are you certain that the dancer wishes, in fact, to be aided? Because there are those who delight themselves in vice... And for those we cannot do anything... The best thing is not to rush and to wait the events unfold themselves. Don't take her from her domicile, leave her there, for now, although you can help so her misery may be softened. Don't subsidize her at your expenses, either. It would not be prudent. This is a matter for the Association of which you are the president... Observe, first, before taking her from her domicile if, indeed, what she told you is true... You could be deceived, my friend, because you are generous, known as a protector of the underprivileged, but the world still isn't good... Let's deal with her health, in the first place, once she is sick, and later we will see what can be done on her behalf. I'm certain that inspiration from the other-world will point out the best path to be taken in this case...

Don Ramiro seemed to calm himself down with the friend's judicious words and he said nothing else until the end of the visitation to the sick.

Meanwhile, Felicio arrived at the Gypsy Neighborhood and entered the slum where Nina lived. Everyone still slept, because they were bohemian, nocturnal. One or another older woman had woken up earlier and was sweeping the floor, taking care of the courtyard's cleanliness.

Felicio knocked on the door of the gorgeous dancer's room, of whom he was a great admirer. She answered promptly, because she was waiting the driver to take her to the hospital, according to the nobleman's promise. She

had not been able to sleep during what was left of night. Her benefactor's image moved her to the point of anxiety and tears, she felt shame, disgust, fear, anguish, anxiety, and she trembled. She had taken off the loud clothing she had worn on the night before, and now she wore a skirt of dark cloth, very wrinkled, reaching her feet, and a large blouse, with long sleeves, commonly worn by workwomen. She had washed herself, removing the make-up from the face, and she had brushed her hair discretely. Felicio found her haggard, sad, displaying nothing that resembled that gallant Nina who danced, making the public rave. Anyone who saw her now and did not know her would see in her the image of a suffering, humble, and shy angel. And, indeed, but for the hours of performance, Nina was the angel of suffering, who never smiled, never raised her eyes, never spoke to anyone, a creature indeed amid expiation labors.

– Miss, my master, the Mr. Count Ramiro de Montalban, ordered me to pick you up, sending you this note – said Felicio.

The poor creature took the treasure that she was given – because a note from her benefactor was a treasure for her –, turned it around twice in her hands and then gave it back, clarifying:

– Read it for me, sir, I cannot read...

Felicio could read, because he had learned it in the school maintained by the Charity Association of which his master was the president. He read the note out loud and Nina, taking it afterwards, folded it and put it in the skirt's pocket. Next, she wrapped herself in Ramiro's cape and climbed down the stairs, following the servant. In the courtyard, she came across the women who swept the floor:

– Where are you going, Nina? A carriage awaits you...

The young woman did not answer, but Felicio answered for her:

– My master is a physician, he ordered me to bring her to the hospital, she is sick...

– We know that, that she is sick, and very sick... Go, Nina, stay there, with your nobleman from yesterday, don't come back here, otherwise Michaelus

will kill you of starvation and beating, when you no longer give him the profits he expects... Don't come back, my daughter, stay there...

Nina climbed up the carriage and soon enough found herself before the one who, from that moment on, would be a god for her, her moral life's support, for the redemption that she needed.

Don Ramiro introduced her to Carlos, who stared at her with sharpness and interest. Nina lowered her eyes and redness blushed her cheeks. Nurses came in. Don Ramiro told them to take her and to prepare her to be examined.

Don Carlos de C... became lost in his own thoughts and murmured to his friend:

– You're right. She's shocking. And she's very sick. We need to help her.

V

“Jesus straightened her up and asked her: – Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? – No one, sir – she said. – Then neither do I condemn you – Jesus declared. – Go now and leave your life of sin.”

(John, 8:10-11)

Nina’s treatment was long and meticulous. A generalized weakness had invaded her organism tired of fights, sufferings and excessive work, and deprivations, ever since childhood. The exhaustive dance to which she dedicated herself killed her slowly, being a true phenomenon of will power, or of need, the fact that she kept dancing a whole night. Her physician, however, was not Ramiro, but, in fact, Carlos, assisted by his assistants. Ramiro looked after her, nonetheless, comforting her, counseling her, analyzing her character, in order to recognize the possibilities of educating her, making her change her lifestyle. He realized, then, that it was not very easy to accomplish his intent with respect to this soul traumatized by suffering. Nina presented herself as a soul revolted against Humanity, unbeliever in God and in creatures’ hearts, she had given herself to misfortune without hope in the future, a heart, finally, which, in his own understanding, would only recover with divine intervention acting in its favor. On the other hand, he knew that his protégé had brought, when reincarnating, the compromise of past debts to pay, which indicated unending suffering for her life. However, he was willing to help her in any case, softening those sufferings. And his heart told him:

– Help her. But, don’t expect from her a complete recovery, because that’s impossible in the brief period of one existence. The suicide is an abyss that torments its victim during secular stages...

While her treatment proceeded, Constancia’s fiancé meditated about what would be his protégé’s future, once her health had been recovery. Allowing her to return to her den was a proposition he did not admit. Nina only knew how to dance and sing. How could she work honestly, a creature who since the childhood had lived in bohemian venues? She had confessed she did not know how to read, how to count, not even how to deal with money, because she hardly managed to have any in her hands. He even thought to make her

join in, at his expenses, the convent where his sister lived, in order to educate her, taken by the anguish of the serious situation, and the affective impulse that she inspired him, as his former sister. He felt he had this duty, because he regarded himself as her brother, and a devastating feeling of compassion tortured him. Because of it, he visited the convent and proposed what he had in mind. But, his petition was not accepted. Nina could not live among the nuns and angelical girls. And when he asked if she would like to receive education in a convent school, the dancer started to cry and answered:

– Sir! I’m way too dismal to think about such a destiny for me. The shame and humiliation would kill me in a short time... Beyond that, I’m Jewish, I would not be accepted in a convent school...

Finally, the sick woman had improved sensibly and should leave the hospital. But, she was not definitely cured. It would be necessary a prolonged convalescence in the good country airs, healthy meals, rest, moral comfort.

During this time, tuberculosis still was an unknown evil, so to speak. People treated it as if it were a grave cold, which gradually victimized the sick person. Well, Nina’s illness was incipient tuberculosis, that is, lung weakness, of which tuberculosis itself could derive. They called it, then, the “consumption” illness, and the diagnostic was imperfect.⁴¹

– I will take her to my country house. I will not consent with the poor creature returning to the den which misery and nastiness I witnessed, to die in a short time... – exclaimed Don Ramiro to his friend Carlos, during a conversation in which they deliberated which future they would give to the sick woman.

– You won’t do such a thing, my friend! It’s necessary to verify, first, if she will subject herself to the transformation you wish to provide her. It’s necessary to know her better...

– But, I’ve been doing the same with other creatures equally in need...

– However, the present case is special. I notice that you feel veneration for her, and that’s dangerous. You could give in...

– I assure you that I will not give in. Nina is more than a sister to me, she’s a daughter that I want to save. I know that I face a decisive testimony before

the supreme law. Well, then! I will give the testimony to God: I will not give in! Nina is my sister, and as such I regard her, she's my daughter!

Finally, they decided that the sick woman would not return to the Gypsy Neighborhood, because she herself had pleaded, in tears, to be removed from there, she no longer could withstand the torture experienced there. She would go to Ramiro's country house, but she would live in the house of a couple who were the nobleman's tenants, managing and taking care of the estate. There, Nina would recover, and, later, if necessary, they would revisit the matter.

Quite satisfied for being free from the terrible shame that her life was, Nina agreed, because, sincerely, she desired to remain on the path she was now treading. Don Ramiro's presence, the celestial love he inspired her, his advices, his warnings were effective. She respected him, her great love for him strengthened her in the good resolutions to take, and it was with happiness that the wretch young woman let herself be received under that friendly roof, the Christian protection under which she prepared her redemption to herself.

Everything went well in the first months. Michaelus disappeared from Madrid, having returned to Seville, playing his inglorious role alongside the dancers, and Nina never saw him again. He was afraid that Ramiro would denounce him to the police for the infamous treatment given not only to Nina, but also to the other young women victims of his harmful control. Constanca ignored everything. She never again heard about Nina, and the concerns that afflicted her on the night of "The Barber of Seville" play gave room to a perfect tranquility, because the fiancé was the attentive friend of always, who did not spare efforts to honor her and make her happy. Manuel Garcia, on his turn, convinced that the master's cape had been, indeed, lost at the theater, not only did not remember to report the fact to his foster sister, but never again remembered the event altogether. And all was in peace...

Don Ramiro visited Nina frequently, just like Carlos and some other collaborators of the Charity Association, including charity ladies, all of them rejoicing for seeing her recover, molded to the discreet life that was convenient for her, and focused on the studies, because he, Ramiro, even taught her how to read and had provided her a teacher of domestic dealings, in the person of his estate administrator's wife.

One day, however, she confessed to him that she felt recovered and would like to earn her own livelihood with her labor, not indefinitely living on someone else's expenses. She had always worked and she did not fear the fight for living. Moreover, the peaceful country life did her good, but she felt heavily saddened by the lack of some distraction, even the work's distraction, because, there, in the country, she lived idly, solely concerned with studies and domestic dealings. She missed dancing. She was and always had been an artist, although unhappy. She asked him, thus, permission to go back to dancing, but not among the Gypsy, but on the stage of a certain honestly-constituted theater, which troupe was serious and used to perform in the country's interior, and even in Portugal. She promised her benefactor, however, to follow his advices and to make an honest profession out of her art. She would never disappoint him, returning to vice, or would give him any regret, because the truth was that she had never accommodated herself to the irregularity of the life she had previously led. The theater company she referred to had invited her many times before to join the cast. But, Michaelus was against it: he had threatened to kill her if she escaped him and, for letting her go, he had asked such high compensations to the hirers that they had never been able to accept the requirements of the ambitious Gypsy man. But, now, once she was free and recovered... Yes! She wanted to dance again. Her art was her life... and she, in the name of God, fortified by his affection, Ramiro, so generous, promised to be faithful to duty, she would make mistakes no longer!

What could the philanthropist do? Retain her as a prisoner was unthinkable. He, in fact, wanted to take her to his house, adopt her as daughter or sister, give her dignified and respectable life. But, the world was evil and would not understand the nobility of his intentions. Constancia would be against it, and everyone's life would be hell on earth. Despite of his dislike, he agreed and granted her freedom, disconnecting her from the Association's tutelage for being physically and morally recovered. They settled, however, that he would look after her and that they would be in permanent contact, because neither one of them wanted to lose the other from sight. Once they could not live under the same roof, may them, at least, see each other frequently. Yes, they loved each other with the holy love of souls connected through the centuries.

And Nina, then, went back to dancing, fulfilling the promise of loyalty to her own duty.

VI

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

(Jesus, Matthew 5:20)

Ramiro and Constancia's wedding would take place in two months. Everything was prepared for the significant ceremony. However, Constancia had a capricious character, which raised objections to everything the family and her fiancé, as well, decided. Don Ramiro felt frequently upset, but, having a soft and loving heart, and possessing flawless education, never revealed irritation and, avoiding disharmonies, always tolerated the bride's arbitrariness, which took visible ascendancy over him. He agreed, thus, in delaying the wedding for two more months, even when his desire was to have it on his birthday, in a month.

He continued visiting Nina and giving her reading classes, verifying that she kept her promise to him, because she remained discreet, struggling not to give in to vagrancy, living for her profession which, now, allowed her to earn her own livelihood, and for the purpose of improving and progressing always.

Don Carlos was of the opinion that she did well in following her artistic tendency, because she was a wretch who could not have hopes of happiness but for, indeed, in her professional career. Ramiro, then, gave her moral-fraternal assistance, vigilant so a new phase of misery and degradation would not strike her. Certainly, he suffered, once his wish was to adopt her more directly. However, this not being something advisable, he accepted the reality, ready to help her when necessary. On her turn, Nina respected him, beyond loving him feverously, from the depths of her heart. She did not reveal it, though, and Don Ramiro was far from suspecting the veneration he was the object of. An efficient work of redemption underwent in the poor creature, who had never been bad but unhappy, and sought to rid herself from the past disorders and to lead a regular life, to avoid seeing herself abandoned by him.

However, the young nobleman hid from the bride his own attendance to the dancer, from Manuel Garcia and his mother as well. He knew that he would not be understood, that Constancia would try to force Nina away from

their path, that his explanations would not be accepted, and, for this reason, he delayed the moment of notifying her about the humanitarian protection that he and Carlos granted to also this wretch, recovered under his disinterested tutelage. He awaited, thus, a favorable occasion to inform her about everything. He had only told her, a few times, that he and Carlos were performing a renovation work in a poor woman still almost a teenager, who subjected herself to the advices of them both as if she were an obedient daughter.

Constancia de Vilares was a jealous and proud woman, she nurtured ferocious class prejudices, she despised the underprivileged, or she was indifferent to their fortune, she hated the decayed women, not ever thinking about the grave problem that society feeds, that is, the unhuman abandonment towards the young people who make mistakes, sometimes, involuntarily or unwarranted, without effort of detaining it on the slide towards evil. She censored the fiancé and his friend for dedicating themselves to such a hard and reproachable assistance, because she understood that such class of women did not deserve the charity or protection from honest people; rather, what they deserved was society's repudiation and execration.

Ramiro protested:

– This humanitarian work for the poor creatures is not, properly, performed only by us, but by the Charity Association that we direct. You should not think like that, my darling, but join us to share your personal value and your virtues as example for those who need our support to rehabilitate themselves...

But, she was not convinced.

She got upset, revolted, cried, cursed and ended up demanding him to withdraw from this humanitarian service which, in her opinion, was only suitable for priests and nuns, not lay people.

– No, my dear! The service of charity to the suffering and wrongdoers is characteristic of the Christian, of all who feel the inspiration of the Divine Love, even if they don't believe in God...

But, as she resumed the discussion, he shut up, then said goodbye and did not touch the subject again.

Getting close, however, to the date of his marriage, he wondered whether it would be prudent to let his future wife know about his particular interest for Nina, whom he estimated nobly and would not agree in abandoning to the miserable life from which he had rescued her. He waited, thus, an opportunity to inform Constanica of what was happening, and to reveal the identity of his protégé, because he disliked the idea of getting married while leaving the wife in ignorance about a particularity of capital importance to him.

– I know that Constanica was jealous of Nina and me, although there were no grounds for it. I need to prove to her that Nina is recovered, that she had always wanted to recover, that she is, for me, like a daughter, a sister who needs support and consolation. Who knows, maybe once we are married, my Constanica will assist me in helping my sufferers, including Nina, the most deprived creature I have ever found until now?

This opportunity came up during his own birthday, Ramiro's, which happened before the wedding.

VII

“Always be aware that, when repelling a poor person, maybe you are repelling a Spirit who has been very dear to you and, now, is in a position inferior to yours.”

(Sister Rosalia – *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, by Allan Kardec, chapter XIII, “Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”, number 9, 58nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation)

Don Ramiro de Montalban rarely promoted parties in his house. He was modest and simple, and he did not have the frivolous social behaviors of the time. He loved, though, the good music and he frequently invited his friends to concerts and recitals in his house. He himself attended those programs, once he rejoiced for being a serious musician and talented pianist. Not rarely, then, in those occasions, he would invite this or that professional artist to brighten up those meetings, who would go there to sing or declaim poems to the sound of violins or piano, as it was so common then, and even theater actors concurred with their art to these domestic events, a practice employed since centuries past and conserved even until the end of the XIX century. The young nobleman, thus, also being an artist, in addition to being a doctor, philosopher and philanthropist, decided to promote an artistic program to illustrate the day in which he would turn twenty-seven years old. He had intended to get married on that day. However, Constancia was of the opinion that it was excessively plebeian to marry someone on the person’s birthday, and had not agreed, as always, with the fiancé’s desire. They would get married, then, in the following month.

On his birthday, the respectable nobleman offered a celebratory lunch, a banquet, and invited his friends to attend. The invitation was extended to Don Carlos de C... and to the assistant physicians of the hospital, and they all should wear the garment of their own profession.

At the proper time, they sat at the table and the banquet started. It took place at his rural residence, in the outskirts of Madrid, an inviting mansion of legitimate colonial style, where he enjoyed spending the Sundays, in order to rest from the weekly labor.

Less than a quarter of hour since they had gathered at the table and Don Ramiro exclaimed, laughingly, to his invitees:

– My dear friends! I know that all of you gathered here appreciate our good folklore music and dances. I have the honor, thus, to offer you a presentation of Spanish, Oriental and Gypsy dances, followed by typical orchestras that I myself rehearsed for today. While we are at the table, you will watch, from here, in this room, the presentations I offer you, and I am certain that you will not regret it. Among the dancers that I will present you, a young Gypsy dancer stands out, whose perfection in dancing is, indeed, surprising. She’s a hit in Madrid’s stages, and among you, certainly, there may be someone who knows her. She is Nina Vidigal, a protégé of our “Charity Association for the Recovery of Youth”, a loyal and good-willing person, who resurges to life supported by the Christian principles. I ask you benevolence towards her, as an incentive to her pursuance of the redemptive path she has been treading on...

He spoke and shut up, emotional. The attendees complimented him on the good taste displayed in honoring them and for the action in benefit of the disfavored, because they all knew about his activities in the philanthropic sector, while Carlos remained concerned.

Sitting by his side, Constanica paled, and she frowned her forehead, hearing not only the presentation announcement, but, particularly, the name Nina Vidigal.

She remembered, then, the night of “The Barber of Seville” premier at the Opera, the Hostel Good Star, the stage prepared in front of it, and the young Gypsy woman dancing under the night’s dew... She remembered that she had asked the fiancé not to return to the Hostel after they came back from the Opera. But, now she understood that he had, in fact, returned, and that Nina had intruded in her life. A thousand thoughts and anguishing suppositions raised in her heart, and she felt that the atrocious pain of jealousy, the revolt of hurt pride, froze the very blood in her veins. But, she did not say anything. She waited the events develop.

At a birthday boy’s signal, the master of ceremonies opened a curtain, which covered a door at the back of the room, and the cast of dancers appeared, marveling the attendees for the couples’ beauty and the good-taste of the expensive costumes.

Shy and mesmerized by the noble ambiance's sumptuousness, which she had never seen before, Nina showed herself more beautiful and fascinating than ever, in the splendor of her twenty springs, which gave her an appearance of teenage virginity.

Applauses sounded, because, truly, that cast was well-known in all Madrid and Nina was admired as its first dancer.

The orchestra, placed on a chosen corner, initiated its accords and the dancing started, after the presentations and the greetings to the noble men and women attending it.

The hall where the banquet took place was not the mansion's noble dining room. It was merely an ample space on the first floor, the double staircase of which communicated with the lobby that gave access to the exterior. It was, so to speak, the first floor's lobby.

In that very space the dancers danced, while the noblemen served themselves of the fine delicacies, detaining themselves at every instant to better pay attention to this or that presentation and applaud the artists. As always, Nina, much appreciated, smiled while dancing, because she felt admired by her protector and exhibited herself with perfection, inasmuch he was there, it was for him that she danced, it was his birthday that she celebrated with her heart, in those dances applauded by him with the generosity that was so characteristic of him. Constancia herself could not help herself from admiring the spectacle, which she had never watched before, and once in a while she applauded it, without, however, applauding Nina. Don Ramiro was radiating, hopeful that his plan of approximating Nina and Constancia would be successful, because his biggest desire was that the future wife would better understand the situation of the poor Nina in her life.

Finally, the artists carried out the entire program and the dances stopped. The guests, at the banquet's table, ingested, now, the dessert and fine liquors, while the cigars were delivered by the servants as upshot to such significant ceremony.

Stepping ahead, the master-of-ceremonies exclaimed, addressing the dancers:

– Mr. Don Ramiro invites you, now, to have lunch in the room next to this one. Please have the kindness of following me.

Under the enthusiastic applauses of the young philanthropist's guests, the artists saluted the noblemen, bowing respectfully, and went away, following the master-of-ceremonies. Suddenly, however, Ramiro's voice dominated the moment. He stood up from his place at the table, walked towards the group, held Nina by the arm and said, simply and naturally:

– Come, my daughter, I would like to introduce you to my future wife, Countess Constanca de Vilares, with whom I will get married in a month from today.

The guests stood up, gently; Constanca did not have other choice but to imitate them, visibly constrained, lips closed, demonstrating upset, and very pale and anxious.

Nina came close with fear, guided by the host, who held her by the arm. She made a gracious reverence, bowing without saying a thing, while Ramiro waited the fiancé to give her the hand to be kissed. But, Constanca did not do it. She remained erect, she did not respond to the salutation, she turned her back and sat down. The guests, however, remained standing-up, once the owner of the house had not yet sat down, while Nina walked away, blushing by the offense received, to join the remaining dancers and to have lunch in the next room.

What followed, then, certainly would not have happened if Constanca had behaved herself more reasonably, if she had treated the guest with less contempt, and if she had not disappointed the fiancé in the presence of his guests. In fact, Don Ramiro resented the gesture of his future wife. A deep emotion made him pity Nina, who walked, humbly, to join her friends. As never before, the reminiscence of his spiritual past spoke in the depths of his soul. He felt that Nina was, truly, his sister, connected to him by indestructible spiritual bonds, and that she could not be treated like that in his house. He thought it was a crime, an offense to his feelings of humanity to shirk Nina, like that, from the table that he himself presided on the day of his own birthday, when it was his habit to allow even beggars to sit by his side, at the table. An intense compassion for her spoke more loudly, in his heart, than all social decorum; an unstoppable revolt clouded his reason. Then, reaching

her, in a leap, at the extremity of the hall, he took her by the arm and said, with resolution:

– No, my daughter! You will have lunch with me, at my table...

Considerate, a servant brought a chair to his side, at his direction, and Nina sat down, shy and not knowing how to behave in that ceremony table, surrounded by gracious ladies and brilliant noblemen.

The guests started to applaud the friend's gesture, very characteristic of him, because it was common knowledge that Don Ramiro did not feel demoted by bringing to his table humble guests in social occasions, thus literally complying with the Gospels' suggestions themselves:

– “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”.⁴²

None of them reproached that gesture, maybe a little improper for a banquet table, but essentially fraternal and Christian.

However, Nina barely sat down, very timidly, at her protector's side, Constancia stood up with a blunt gesture, punching the table with the hand and exclaiming, outraged, while she moved the chair:

– I must leave, Lord Count! I must not sit at a table where a woman of this type takes place. What you do is an insult to your guests!

He tried to circumvent the situation, pale and surprised:

– For all that you are, my dear Constancia, try to understand, help me!

Hearing the protest of her protector's bride and the insult directed to herself, the poor dancer stood up, alarmed, a sob escaped from her chest, and she walked away, running, from the table, she went down the stairs in hurry, with visible intention of fleeing from there. Disoriented, Ramiro ran after her and, reaching the top of the staircase, he screamed to the servants who guarded the lobby:

– Hold her, do not let her leave!

Assuming it was theft that the Gypsy woman had committed in the palace, the servants stopped her with rudeness, twisting her arm backwards, which made her let out a scream of pain. Nina cried, but Ramiro arrived, held her by the shoulders, comforted her:

– You're going to have lunch with me, my daughter, have no fear!

He made her climb up the stairs, and sat her down by his side, giving orders for her to be served, and he served himself again, to make her company. Constancia, who watched the events standing on her two feet, saluted the guests and walked away from the hall, the fiancé not seeking to stop her.

Delighted by the novelty of the program, the guests made a toast to the dancer who so much entertained them, having the ladies present followed the toast gently.

Nina only excused herself from the table when her benefactor and educator authorized her to do it. Felicio drove her to her house in the master's carriage.

VIII

Constancia had not returned to the banquet hall, nor Ramiro went after her. He feared further misunderstandings, because he knew the bride was impetuous and headstrong. However, once the guests had left, the young philanthropist went to the interior of the house and sought her in all rooms and chambers. Not finding her, he addressed Rosaria Maria and asked:

– The lady Vilares... where is she?

Demonstrating embarrassment, the housekeeper declared:

– Well, she left to her house a long time ago, my lord...

– Who accompanied her?

– She was accompanied by her preceptor, my lord, and left with her...

Don Ramiro said nothing else. He went to his rooms, took off the ceremony garments, put on the common ones, and left to the Palace Vilares. He went to clear the misunderstanding with the bride, reason with her and convince her she was mistaken about him and Nina, that what he accomplished about the wretched young woman was a Christian work, the redemption of a creature abandoned and suffering since birth.

Constancia, however, refused to receive him. She dismissed him through her housekeeper, saying that she was indisposed and that she could not receive anyone in that afternoon. Don Ramiro insisted. Constancia maintained the unusual behavior, and the Count had to leave, lamenting the misunderstanding between them. In the following morning, he sent her a bouquet of roses through Manuel Garcia and an affectionate letter, asking for news on her health and promising to visit her in the afternoon. Manuel stayed at Constancia's house for two hours. The young woman brought him to her private chamber and made him confess what happened in the rural mansion after she had left. Lacking any scruples, Manuel reported, then, that Nina had only left at four o'clock in the afternoon, with the remaining guests, and she was wrapped in the Count's cape that had disappeared some time ago. That Nina had remained at the table, in cheerful conversation, and that she had received a lot of gifts from the surrounding guests. That one of the ladies

present offered her a golden bracelet, which she took off from her own arm, as a prize for her dances, which had amazed her. That another lady offered her own silk shawl. That another took from her hair an ornate comb, studded with stones, and also gave it to her, as a remembrance of that happy afternoon, and that Ramiro, radiant by the way they treated his protégé, took from his pants' pocket a little case, opened it and put in her finger a little ring, saying that it was a modest gift for the brightness she had brought to his birthday banquet, with her art. That Nina had cried out of emotion, and thanked everyone, and later wanted to pay her respects to those people, who so tenderly treated her, with a special dancing presentation, the only thing she had to repay the kindness received. There still were a few musicians around. She had called them to play and dance oriental dances of great beauty, but that Don Ramiro had stopped her from continuing dancing, so she wouldn't get tired; that he had given her a recomforting drug, with the recommendation that she should rest until the time of the presentation at the theater, because she was supposed to still make a stage presentation that night. And he ordered her to go home in his own carriage, driven by Felicio. The plotting and unfaithful servant omitted nothing, poisoning the events with each sentence spoken and lamenting the attention his master paid to such lower creatures. It could be said that Manuel Garcia was jealous of his step-sister and intended to take her away from her fiancé, narrating, intentionally, what had happened at the rural mansion after Constancia herself had left. And so it was, indeed. Manuel Garcia loved Constancia, and he suffered with the impossibility of revealing his own feelings.

The result of the conversation between the Countess and the servant was that Constancia did not accept the roses bouquet that the fiancé gently had sent her. She sent it back along with the letter which he had written asking about her health, and wrote another, releasing him from his promise to her and returning to him the engagement ring that he had given her as a symbol of the commitment between them.

The young philanthropist received everything, surprised and shocked with the bride's violent behavior. Very disappointed, he tore apart the letter he had written and which was returned, archived the one he had received in a special safe, as well as the two engagement rings, and told Rosaria Maria to put the roses in a jar and to take them to his bedroom.

The days went by without any change to the situation. Constanca remained inflexible in her decision. She did not trust the fiancé. In her opinion, Ramiro secretly loved Nina and, invaded by a violent jealousy, she started to hate him. In vain he tried to get close to her, to explain himself, to prove that she was mistaken. Then, Don Carlos de C... interfered, giving his own word that his friend was innocent of the accusations he suffered. That Nina was a poor suffering creature who did not aim romance but to be able to live without hunger and cold, whom he and Ramiro helped inspired by charity, as they did to many others, wishing to recover them to God and society, something they were easily managing to do, inasmuch the poor young woman was not evil or corrupted, but a wretch deserving the aid she received. Constanca ended up accepting the reconciliation. But, for that, she asked a such high and unhuman price that the two philanthropists could not accept: that Ramiro and his friend obtained from the police authorities the expulsion of Nina from Madrid.

Discouraged, Don Ramiro became quiet and accepted the bride's abandonment. He continued in his hospital, attending the sick and with ample freedom to protect those miserable people whom he loved as true brothers, and by whom he was equally loved.

A certain day, however, when all seemed normal around his dear Nina, a young dancer man arrived at the hospital in the morning looking for Don Ramiro de Montalban. Brought to his presence, as soon as possible, the young man explained:

– My lord, Count, Miss Vidigal asked me to come here. She fell ill suddenly yesterday, after the presentation. She felt sick, the fever came and, during the night, a bloody cough started, which kept her in bed until now. We did everything possible, but she did not get better.

Don Ramiro did not finish hearing. He went, in a rush, to his protégé's home and brought her right away to the hospital.

But, the pretty Jewish woman's health state was grave, and not only Don Ramiro, but also Don Carlos and the other doctors of the hospital did everything they could for her. Her infirmity could not be cured, and of that everyone was aware. Nina was "consumptive", as, then, tuberculosis was

called. They concluded that she was extenuated, that her profession as a dancer had drained the last energies she had.

Feeling sad, Ramiro dedicated himself to her treatment as a father would do for a daughter. He never left her bedside, he had, actually, moved to the hospital after he had seen her in risk of death. Nina received from her benefactors all the treatment available through the Medicine of the time, and so intense was the dedication of the doctors and nurses who treated her that she could, after some time, not properly recover, but to stop, temporarily, the march of the terrible evil that put her to bed. She stood up, finally, from her bed and Ramiro, relieved from the apprehensions that distressed him, told her in all frankness, assisted and supported by his friend Carlos and the other doctors of the hospital:

– Nina, my daughter! You were close to the grave! With a lot of effort, and thanks to divine intervention, we managed to remediate your situation. But, you must know that you never again will be able to dance or work. You need rest and uninterrupted treatment...

– But, this is impossible, my lord, Count, I cannot afford it...

– I decided to adopt you before God, and from now on I will support you. You will go to my house and you will be like my sister, my daughter before God... You cannot live alone and it would be unhuman to leave you to yourself, once our Association still isn't ready to shelter a sick person like you. You need a home, and I will give you mine. There, you will receive everything, and I will be in peace.

Nina wanted to protest, because in the intimacy of her heart she feared the approximation of Don Ramiro, she feared his house, she feared Constancia, she feared the servants. Were those, perhaps, premonitions of her tortured soul about what the future had reserved for her?...

But he replied:

– Fear nothing. My bride broke up with me. There won't be any wedding. Nothing unpleasant is going to happen, I'm sure of it. I have a housekeeper who truly is a mother for me. She will also be that for you. I'm going to give you, by the way, a tutoress, who will take care of you and, also be your nurse and maid. Thus, my dear Rosaria won't be overwhelmed.

The philanthropist's intentions were utmost sincere and commendable, but Nina had taken an existence for painful redemptions, as expiation for mistakes done in the past, and nothing is capable of fending off an expiation from the penitent, once its goal is to operate her conscience redemption.

Nina moved, then, to the De Montalban Palace, because, after all, she had nowhere else to go. She reeducated herself, found reassurance, received the gift of a religion: the religion of duty, of love, of forgiveness, and had Don Ramiro as dedicated defender who looked after her, requiring from everyone who surrounded her respect and attention towards her. The dancer, on her turn, remained shy and humble, distrusting everything, never abusing the rights her protector gave her, never requiring anything, nothing asking or desiring, and if now she had beautiful and elegant dresses, it was because her tutoress provided them, inasmuch the humanitarian Count recommended that she should be treated as his legitimate sister, using his own name.

Nonetheless, Rosaria Maria and Manuel Garcia did not easily accept the dancer's presence in that house, where they lived as masters of all, and in which their dear Constanica should be living, and not that woman from an inferior class. They were hostile to the new guest like they had never been to anyone else Don Ramiro had brought home. They hated her, they informed Constanica about everything that happened, as always, and they did not forgive the fact that she had stolen from Constanica the heart of the man she loved, because, for both of them, as for Constanica, Nina was Don Ramiro's lover, and the revolt boiled in their hearts the desire of vengeance against the helpless dancer. On her turn, Constanica remained humiliated, dominated by the contempt of seeing herself relinquished over such an inferior creature, because, in her understanding, her fiancé had abandoned her for Nina.

Eager for vengeance against the woman who had stolen her fiancé, Constanica, informed about everything, planned with Rosaria and Manuel, and gave them suggestions against the sick woman, suggestions which, religiously, were put into practice by mother and son. An evil current of intrigue and bad wishes established itself, then, in that place which was being made unhappy by the presence of two false friends, incapable of recognizing the high pattern of beneficence that Don Ramiro de Montalban struggled to maintain in favor of others.

The young philanthropist, incapable of judging anyone to be evil, and even less those in whom he deposited utmost trust, noticed nothing, suspected nothing, and he even seemed to have totally forgotten his former bride. His multiple duties kept him constantly away from home. Frequently, he ate his meals at the club or at the hospital, because his residence was far from the city center. Well, Rosaria Maria used those circumstances to delay Nina's meals, which should be served at the hours prescribed by the doctors, so she would not suffer from lack of nutrition weakness, thus changing the hours in which her medicine was taken, because some of them also depended on the meals.

In vain the tutoress insisted this should not happen, because the sick woman was harmed and she, the tutoress and nurse, had double responsibility. In vain she threatened to inform the Count about the irregularity, which seemed premeditated in disfavor of poor Nina, in whom the housekeeper and remaining servants, influenced by her, insisted on seeing as the hostel dancer and not as the "lady" protected by their master. The setbacks succeeded each other, Nina was distressed and cried, understanding herself to be the cause of the domestic misunderstandings; the situation was difficult for the tutoress, who felt the responsibility weigh over her shoulders, because, affected by the events, Nina neither was getting better nor agreed that the tutoress should let the Count know about what happened within those old walls. But, one day, seeing that Rosaria seemed indeed interested in harming the sick woman, the tutoress started a violent discussion with her and Manuel, which resulted in her being away from Nina's care for a while. Don Ramiro, hearing the explanations of the three servants, peacefully exclaimed:

– Rosaria Maria is an irreplaceable servant. She is who manages my home with efficiency and I put absolute trust in her, because my house is not easy to manage, even though I'm a single man. I cannot, thus, fire her. I propose the three of you to reconcile yourselves with one another, because I need all of you, and please seek to understand each other and myself better, for the good of all of us...

However, the tutoress disagreed. She declared that, under the housekeeper's management, it would not be possible for her to fulfill her own duty, because Rosaria deliberately restricted her action, undermining the sick woman's treatment, and finished accusing Don Ramiro, to his disbelief:

– Your Excellency, my lord Count, will still convince yourself that this woman and her notable son are terrible enemies of your pupil, and they will do everything to disgrace her, and you will be responsible for what happens!

She resigned from her post, and Nina was alone with Rosaria. After this, Nina begged to Don Ramiro to let her return to her theater companions, with whom she had lived so well, in an old mansion. She would live with them, she would be careful, she would not expose herself. Once her presence caused disharmonies in the palace, it would be prudent that she went away.

But, the Count was against it:

– You cannot leave this place, my daughter, you need special treatment, comfort, I need to follow your general health state... And don't think like that, this anxiety doesn't do you any good... You're in your home, because you are in mine. Rosaria is a good servant, a good friend. What happened was because she felt jealous that I had trusted you to a stranger, because she doesn't accept that another servant intervenes with her management of the house. I now trust you to her, and you will see how everything will go back to normal...

What a sick creature like Nina could do, without resources, without family, without hope? She conformed herself and trusted Don Ramiro, whom she loved like someone loves a divine being.

IX

However, Don Ramiro had to be absent from Madrid for a few days. A congress of Rosicrucians required his presence in Paris and he could not avoid attending this important event.

Nina jumped when she heard the news, foreseeing bigger misfortunes in her already so bitter existence, and she begged her benefactor:

– Take me with you, my lord Don Ramiro, I'm afraid of staying here in your absence... I will be the humble sister of always...

Nina was simple, she not always thought about what she said, and she did not measure the inconvenience of what she was asking. Don Ramiro smiled, caressed her pale face and answered:

– This is not possible, my daughter. You would not withstand the journey, you need rest...

– I beg you, then, my lord, leave me in your hospital; I will help the nurses, I will do something...

– No, poor angel! You cannot stay in the hospital. You will stay here, in your home, because my home is your home as well...

– What will become of me without you, my lord?...

– Don't be afraid, Rosaria will take care of you and will watch over everything. Don't you see how everything got better since the tutoress left? I will give order to Felicio to drive you around in my carriage, as we daily do, to breath fresh air... You will go wherever you want. Rosaria can go with you, if you want...

Nina was humble, she deeply respected her benefactor. She could not react. She resigned herself.

On the day of Ramiro's departure, she cried copiously and murmured, suffocated by tears:

– I know I won't see you again, my lord Count...

– Fear nothing, my daughter. Everything is arranged with Rosaria for your own good. If you need a doctor, you will go to the hospital. Carlos is going with me to France, but our assistants will help you, they have been informed and they know you well.

There was no remedy. Nina's ordeal imposed itself over her life, as imposes itself the ordeal of all of those who incarnate to the labors of expiatory testimonies.

Don Ramiro left, and she saw herself alone and isolated in that immense century-old palace, because Rosaria Maria never made her company, did not comply with the orders received from the Count to take care of the sick woman, or allowed the minor servants to serve her. She would forget to call her for lunch, of serving her the meal prescribed by the doctors, and there were days in which Nina only managed to eat in the evening. She started, then, to perform her own housework, because the housekeeper said, in her presence, to the other servants:

– Don't serve her. She is sick because she is reckless, she doesn't deserve to be served by us, once we are serious and honest. She stole from our dear Constancia the heart of her fiancé... and, beyond all that, she is sick, she suffers from a plague, a God's punishment, which will contaminate you, if you serve her...

Nina grew weaker and suffered, without means to free herself from that new ordeal. She felt the lack of regular meals, the lack of rest, the bitterness that accumulated. She had, thus, to cook for herself, receiving rations from the housekeeper's hands, in abandoned kitchens of the courtyards, and she washed her own clothes as she could, draining herself more each day that went by. Seeing her, one day, at the courtyard, doing those services, inadequate for a sick person, Felicio, who had always been a great admirer of Nina, felt astonished by what he saw and sought explanations from the housekeeper. But, the latter repelled him, threatening to fire him if he tried to interfere again in the palace's internal dealings. That he was a mere driver, keeper of horses and not the palace's police. That the guest did what was proper, because the remaining Count's guests also did it. She assured him that she followed the orders of the house's owner, and she knew very well what she was doing.

A violent discussion followed. Felicio declared he did not believe the master would have ordered such rigor toward the sick woman, who had always received from him generous charity and a lot of affection. Manuel intervened, supporting his mother in the discussion. A certain moment, the two men, who started to insult each other, jumped on and hit each other regrettably. Rosaria, then, who had received from the master complete authority to manage the house and keep the order in his absence, fired Felicio, and the loyal driver, the only true friend Nina still had in that home, could not do anything but to receive his salary, gather his clothes and leave to some unknown destination.

Meanwhile, arriving in Paris, Don Ramiro wrote a fatherly letter to Nina, comforting her, recommending her rest and assiduity in the medications, and promising to come back as soon as he discharged the tasks that had brought him there. He still had to visit Belgium in service of his Medicine ideals, that is, to visit hospitals to learn about their progress, in benefit of his own hospital in Madrid: for this reason, he asked her not to get impatient and to comply with Rosaria, who deserved from him utmost trust. He equally wrote to Rosaria, making a thousand benevolent recommendations in favor of all his protégés and with respect to his pupil, in particular. But, the letter to Nina was intercepted, to rather be delivered to Constanca, and the young dancer did not learn about it. She came to know, however, that Don Ramiro, in the letter to Rosaria, told the latter to inform the former that her benefactor had ordered her to leave his house and to return to her stage fellows, once she had intended to it before, because he would not return to Spain anytime soon, and, when returning, he wanted the house free of guests, because he planned to get married immediately and he no longer could commit himself with her protection or of any other person forsaken by society.

Nina doubted the truthfulness of this ultimatum. It was not possible that her benefactor would throw her in the streets, sick, incapacitated for work, after so many proofs of benevolence and charity. But, the letter was presented to her. Nina did not know the Count's calligraphy, she was a naïve and inexperienced person, used to mistreatments and injustices from everyone, and she could barely read, because, although Don Ramiro sought to teach her to read and had given her a tutoress, her health state did not allow her to apply herself seriously to learning anything. Manuel Garcia had forged the letter, with the abetment of Constanca and his own mother, imitating as much as

possible the master's irregular handwriting, who was a doctor and did not write elegantly, and the former ballerina could not help herself but to submit herself to the evidence of her stiff destiny.

They consented that she could take some clothes with her, and they gave her a little purse with some coins, which Nina accepted with the cheeks wet with tears. And, two days after receiving the letters, Nina left sobbing, almost hidden, through a lateral gate, giving the impression that she ran away, once more ridden away from a home, to try to live however she wanted or could.

The unfortunate woman got in a carriage, one of those that serviced the poor, and sought the residence of her former dancing companions, asking for work, whatever it may be. They, however, apologized themselves, full of pity, saying that she was sick, that she could no longer dance, they were poor and did not have conditions to support her, and another job would not be convenient because her sickness was dangerous and could affected them as well. She should look for help in the hospital where she had been and was known. They did not offer her lunch, and Nina did not eat that morning. Neither did she tell them that she had been sent away by Don Ramiro himself, nor her former mates asked her the reasons why they saw her like that now.

However, she accepted the suggestion received and went to the hospital. To the doormen and servants who received her, she explained that she had been hospitalized there before, that she was Don Ramiro and Don Carlos' protégé and that she needed the house's aid, because she was homeless, without knowing where she would spend the night; that they should take her to the doctors of the day, she knew them all and she would explain whatever was necessary.

They answered her that all beggars and vagrants of Madrid that showed up there said they were protégés of Don Ramiro and of Don Carlos; that they both were traveling and that the remaining doctors were busy, and that it was past the time of consultations. A more human servant, seeing her trembling and haggard, gave her a plate of food, secretly taken from the kitchens. And, that night, Nina slept outside, curled up in a niche at the noble entrance of a palace.

In the following morning, ordered to leave that place by a servant who polished the marble steps, the suffering woman remembered that she had a

few good friends at the Gypsy Neighborhood, where she had once resided. She went there on foot, saving some coins which, certainly, she would later need to eat. She walked during part of the day, reaching her former and sad home by dusk.

They welcomed her with unpleasant surprise, not inviting her to enter or even offering her hot coffee.

Nina asked for work, whatever it may be. They answered her that she was haggard and squalid, that she no longer had any conditions for the night life, because she looked like a beggar; concerning work, it was not possible: that cavernous coughing was a bad symptom and it could infect the others... They asked her, however, about the nobleman who had patronized her and taken her away. Nina did not answer and started to cry. She was exhausted and trembling, and she coughed. She spent some coins buying bread and a piece of meat, which a boy sold in a basket, and she asked to spend the night there, because a fine and cold rain was falling. They agreed, under the condition of her spending it in the balcony where the women smoked and drank with their men, in the hot nights. Nina, then, curled up in the darkest corner and made herself comfortable. She remembered Michaelus and asked for him, remembering that, in his time, she had never spent a night outside. They answered that her former boss had left Madrid and that they had never heard about him again. And, that night, starving, cold, she put on Don Ramiro's coat, which had disappeared since she went to the palace, discouraged, helpless and bitter about the incomprehensible behavior of her benefactor, Nina, contemplating the little window of her old home, missed the time she had resided there and lamented to herself:

– At least there I was not on the street. Michaelus was not evil... He was the only one who never put me out...

The following morning, she did not take any measure to leave. She had coughed the entire night, she had a fever and was exhausted, but they asked her to leave. They had no conditions to shelter her. Her former companions saw the two dresses that Rosa Maria had given her, when she left. They were good, they liked them and Nina sold them.

And she went away...

She returned to the palace of her benefactor. It was completely shut. She spent part of the day there, not having where to go, waiting for something indefinable. What was she waiting for? She herself did not know it. She sat down on the sidewalk and started to cry. The few passerby of the noble neighborhood, seeing her cry and cough, gave her alms, and she accepted them...

But, the doorman saw her, he recognized her. He reported that to Manuel Garcia. The latter called for a policeman and the former ballerina was expelled to another neighborhood, having been warned that, if she insisted on staying in front of the gates of His Excellency, she would be taken to jail.

On their turn, Rosaria Maria, her son and the gorgeous Constanca rushed to answer the Count's letter. Rosaria wrote to him, revealing worry and distress when informing him that, barely he, Don Ramiro, had left, Nina Vidigal ran away with a Gypsy dancer, her former lover, who since long, it had been discovered, was prowling around the palace's gates. That she had decided no longer to bear that life in confinement, and that, until the day that letter was written, it had not been possible to find her, there being suspicions that she had left Madrid. Neither the two servants nor Constanca feared the consequences of that intrigue: the Count blindly trusted Rosaria. Nina was, undoubtedly, a woman of bad habits, who well could have behaved like the report in the letter, and if she came to be found and revealed the truth, Rosaria would know how to speak against her in the master's presence, as a schemer, profligate and slanderer. Constanca would be free from suspicions, and, who knows, maybe later the Count would not return to his former fiancé's arms?

Evil and ignorant, Rosaria did not want to predict consequences, and she did not meditate that, by acting that way, she offended the laws of God.

When he received the mail from his trusted servants, Don Ramiro felt distressed and beaten, and his first impetus was to immediately come back to Madrid to search for his pupil. Don Carlos also felt bad, and a profound worry took over the two great friends of poor Nina. However, their commitments were great, they ought still visit, for research in favor of the hospital they directed, the hospitals in Belgium, in addition to not being able to interrupt their attendance to the important events of the congress they had come for.

Don Ramiro, particularly, accepted faster the news from Rosaria because Nina herself had confessed that, in his absence, she did not want to remain in the palace; she was, in fact, embarrassed by his refusal of temporarily removing her from there; and convinced that, upon his return, it would be easy to find her in the places to which she had been connected before.

On his turn, Don Carlos warned him:

– I believe you struggle in vain, my dear Ramiro. Nina will never adapt herself to the moral level you dreamt for her. Remember that she received terrible education from her elders, and that her youth is being spent in bohemian environments...

The Count did not answer, but great bitterness tortured his heart and he decided, then, to wait for the end of the congress and research trip to Belgium, once he could not, after all, make Nina submit herself to his generous protection.

Don Carlos, however, went back to Madrid quicker. Worried about the sick people he had left at the hospital, under the responsibility of younger assistants with little experience, he returned to his own services as soon as he discharged himself from the duties to the congress he had attended, giving up the hospital research, which fell under exclusive responsibility of his friend de Montalban.

X

“Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble”

(Psalms, 41:1)

Well, a few days after Don Carlos’ return to Madrid, Nina Vidigal again surrounded the bars around the park of her benefactor’s palace. She counted, daily, the absence of he who, for having shown mercy towards her – the only man who, truly, had concerned himself with her and respected her –, deserved the veneration of her heart. It was difficult for her to believe in the truthfulness of that letter read for her by the housekeeper Rosaria Maria. Sometimes, however, she tended to believe in that inhuman expulsion. Then, she felt distressed up to desperation, and it was when, without consolation, without hope, she measured the streets of Madrid in long walks, until falling exhausted at some doorway or some cathedral steps. She became a beggar and her dresses were, now, dirty and repulsive. The tuberculosis devoured her, and she kept standing up, certainly, because of a miracle from the desire of getting back her protector.

That day, after walking a lot, she tried to reach the bars of the De Montalban Palace, in the hope of finding some vestige of the return of her well-beloved Count. It had been three months since Don Ramiro’s absence. It was not possible that he had not yet returned. She needed to find him, talk to him, ask him for help, once he helped so many, and to tell him about the inhumanity she had been victim of. What if, however, she would be by himself, personally, repelled? And how could she present herself in the deplorable state she found herself? She had gone back to the hospital more than once. She had been repelled like in the first day. However, now she placed herself in front of the palace’s entrance, by the main gate, because she knew that through there the carriage of His Excellency would enter. To avoid falling, because she felt exhausted, she grabbed the bars with both hands, and she remained like that for a long time, observing with anxiety those closed windows and doors, which never opened.

Suddenly, however, she could no longer resist the anxiety, the tiredness, the hunger, the cold, that punished her since the morning, because it rained.

She fell helplessly on the floor, and there she remained unconscious, semi-dead.

However, another character also surrounded the vicinities of the palace for several days already, hoping that the Count had already returned from his trip, because he needed to talk to him and ask for his old job as a private driver, from which he had been unjustly fired. It was Felicio, who was still unemployed and did not accept the injustice suffered from the trusted servants of his very dear master.

Felicio walked slowly, under the fine rain that announced frost, when, suddenly, she found a woman – a beggar – laying on the sidewalk. He bent down to observe whether she was alive or dead and, after some hesitation, he recognized, in that human wreck, the gorgeous Nina Vidigal, of whom he had been a great admirer.

He called her by her name, he examined her heart, her eyes. She was alive.

What should he do? He needed to help her. He had learned with his master to be humanitarian, to help the unfortunate. He thought about calling the doorman and ask help in the palace. But, he understood that it would be in vain and even dangerous. Nina, laying there, in that deplorable state, confirmed the terrible drama of which she had certainly been victim.

– No! No! – he thought. – Don Ramiro has not yet returned. If he had returned, Nina would not be here, dying from misery at his door!

Distressed, he looked around for a cheap car, which fare was always more accessible to the poor. Finding it, he brought it to Nina, took her in his arms, put her inside the car, aided by the driver, and asked to go to the Hospital of the Charity Association.

Arriving there, he entered with the poor woman in his arms and declared that he wanted to speak with Dr. Carlos de C... or with a substitute of his, in case he had not yet returned from his trip. But, servants and assistants answered that it was not the time for consultations, he should come back the next day, in the morning.

– How come?! – exclaimed Felicio loudly. – This poor woman was found by me half-dead of misery on the street, under the rain, she is sick, as you see,

I bring her here, looking for help to save her life, and you tell me to come tomorrow? This hospital is for the poor, directed by my master, Mr. Don Ramiro de Montalban, I am his private driver; he is the charity in person, and you dare to go against his orders? I know very well that the order here is to help the unfortunate at any moment they knock at this door! I will not leave, I want to speak with Don Carlos and will do so, even if I have to break these doors! Do you know, by any chance, who is this poor woman that I carry in my arms? She is the dancer Nina Vidigal, the one you applauded at the Hostel Good Star, in your bohemian nights, and now you leave her to die without help?

He yelled angrily, presenting his reasons. A student heard the screaming, from a room next by, and went to find out what happened. Recognizing Don Ramiro's servant and being informed that the woman, almost unrecognizable, was Nina, the pupil of the president of the Association which sponsored that hospital, he made someone bring a hospital stretcher quickly, took her to the consultations room and warned Don Carlos. Surprised, the latter did not lose time. He examined her, observed the starvation that afflicted the poor woman and how far the terrible disease that victimized her had advanced. He attended to her quickly, giving her later to the nurses, so they could clean her and take her to a private room, as Don Ramiro had done. Intrigued, he asked Felicio what had happened to Nina, because what he knew was that the dancer had left the palace voluntarily, in the Count's absence, fleeing with her former Gypsy lover. But Felicio did not agree with the version and answered:

– I don't believe the poor Nina would run away, sick as she was. I don't know, though, what actually happened, because when I was fired by the housekeeper, she was still there...

– You were fired? Why?...

– Because, one day, outraged by the mistreatment Nina received from the housekeeper and her son, I protested and threatened to bring to my master's knowledge what was going on. It's enough to say, my lord Viscount, that there were orders for Nina to be treated as my master's true sister. However, Rosaria Maria prevented her from even receiving regular meals. The poor woman starved inside in the palace of Don Ramiro, the most humanitarian man of Madrid, called the protector of the poor. In his absence, lately, Rosaria made her wash her own clothes, to cook for herself, if she wanted to eat, to

organize and clean the rooms she used. And she being sick, “consumptive” as now... Rosaria didn’t give her sufficient food for her to prepare her own nutrition, and I myself, many times, helped Nina buying food for her... and all that in a house that hosts the poor and even beggars from everywhere. The tutoress quit, because she knew all this, she defended Nina and was accused by the housekeeper before my lord, the Count. He, however, didn’t give credit to what the tutoress said, about the mistreatment of Nina, he completely trusted Rosaria, and the tutoress quit...

Don Carlos went silent, overwhelmed. He understood that a serious plot had been prepared and that his friend had been deceived by the servants, judging by what he saw and heard.

The following day, Nina felt better and was able to speak. Don Carlos sat in front of her bed, took the sick woman’s hand, which was cold and almost inert, and asked her, tenderly:

– What happened to you, my daughter? Why did you leave the house of your protector? He is unhappy with your behavior, which he did not expect... Trust me, tell me everything!

The wretched woman started to cry and answered, shaken by the hiccups, the voice hoarse and low as those afflicted with tuberculosis have on their last days of earthly life, feeling tired and panting at each word:

– I did not leave my benefactors house, my lord, Don Carlos; he wrote to the housekeeper, from Paris, ordering me to go away because, when he coming back, he would need his palace empty, as he would get married immediately...

Don Carlos protested, surprised:

– But, I am certain that Don Ramiro did not do it, he would be incapable of behaving like that with whomever it may be, even less with you, whom he loves deeply... neither does he intend to get married...

– They put me out. Everyone puts me out... only Michaelus never put me out. They denied me aid, I could not find work, all this time I slept in the open, receiving alimony from whomever passed by and saw me coughing...

– Why didn't you come to this hospital, where you would have been sheltered? There were orders for you to be taken care of at any time...

– I did, but the employees put me out... Everyone puts me out...

And Nina, in tears, narrated the drama she lived since her benefactor's departure. Don Carlos, then, murmured to himself:

– We were reckless, we didn't protect Nina sufficiently, to absent ourselves, she being a special case, as she is... I told Ramiro not to take her into his house, I foresaw everything... But, he loves her, he didn't want to be apart from her...

Nina, however, kept on, after a few minutes of silence, during which the nurse fed her with a reinvigorating soup, spoonful after spoonful:

– I'm going to die, my lord, Don Carlos, but before I do I would like to thank you the kindness and the work you've shown towards me, who isn't worth anything. My greatest pain is not to see again my lord, Don Ramiro, before I die. I pray you will tell him that I thank him from the depths of my soul what he has done for me; that I didn't run from his house, no! I left because so mandated the letter he wrote to his housekeeper; that I never again wronged, ever since I met him, I fulfilled the promise I had made to him; that I love him holy, and if, indeed, I have an immortal soul, as he says, it will be converted to God by the love he has inspired in me...

She removed from the finger, not without effort, the little ring she had received on the memorable day of his own birthday, and concluded:

– I pray you will deliver to my benefactor the ring which he gave me on the day I danced for him, in his country house. I suffered misery and pain, but I kept it. It's valuable, the only jewelry I ever had in my life. It's fair that I return it to its owner...

She fell exhausted on the pillows and silenced. Those were the last sentences that Nina Vidigal said.

In the following night, she died, attended by Don Carlos de C... and a nurse.

XI

Approximately one month after Nina Vidigal's death, Don Ramiro de Montalban returned to the homeland. His departure from Brussels happened in a rush, because of an unusual fact that happened to him. He did not conclude, thus, the research he was doing, he left everything due to the anxiety he felt after the strange event. In fact, the night when Nina agonized in Madrid, he went to his hotel room in search of rest. He never again had news from his protégé. Don Carlos nothing knew about her other than what he himself, Ramiro, knew. The only news that he managed to get was so overwhelming that, every time he remembered it, he sought to expel from the memories the poor creature whom he had wanted to save from the shame of prostitution: Rosaria, his trusted servant, told him, in a long letter, that Nina had ran away with her former lover – Michaelus – and never again showed up, because, as her former companions reported, she had returned to Andaluzia, which is the reason why no one could find her. Discouraged, outraged, assuming a rebelliousness, an ingratitude from Nina, the nobleman resisted the first intuitive impulse he had: to return immediately to Madrid and to look for his protégé. He left himself, however, be entwined by his housekeeper's mischiefs, in whom he trusted, and reflected that Nina still was not morally mature for the renovation that he insisted on wanting to persuade her of. He closed the bitterness in his heart and continued his duties that had taken him to France and Belgium, but never again he felt satisfied with himself.

That night, he returned earlier to his hotel room, in Brussels, and, after dinner, he started reading the day's newspaper, sitting on a couch next to a little table, where stood the candle holder under which light he read. The room's door was half open, because a servant should bring the tea by him requested. A certain moment, he heard a soft knock on the door. Deep in reading, without raising his eyes, he said in a half voice, assuming it was the servant arriving:

– You can come in, Roger. Put the tray on the table...

And he kept reading, because the subject interested him. But, a few seconds passed, the knock on the door repeated itself with more strength and

he, raising his voice, said again:

– You can come in, I already said, put the...

And he directed his eyes towards the door. Then, surprised, he dropped the newspaper, stood up and exclaimed, smiling:

– Nina, my daughter! So you came?...

And he walked towards her, to welcome and hug her.

But, Nina hid from him, walking towards the corridor where the remaining hotel apartments aligned themselves.

Don Ramiro went to the door with speed, looked for Nina, but he did not see her, there was no one there. He examined the neighboring doors. They were closed. On the extreme of the corridor, appeared the hotel servant with the tea he had requested. He went to his encounter and asked, excited:

– Did you see a young woman dressed in a Spanish mantel, the hair loose?

– No, my lord, Count, I didn't see anyone here...

Ramiro silenced and entered the room. Amazed, he murmured to himself:

– However, it was Nina, I saw and recognized her... My God! How she looked tired and sad!

He picked up his pocket watch and looked at the time. It was 10:40 pm.

In Madrid, Nina entered into agony state after the conversation with Don Carlos, on the hospital bed, after referring to him full of pain and longing, to next go silent forever.

The following day, the young philanthropist left Brussels for France, on the way to his homeland.

Don Ramiro was welcomed with commotion in his palace. He was not expected, and he found his servants unprepared. The doorman did not have the chance to warn the chamber servant and the housekeeper, and the Count entered alone, leaving his luggage at the entrance, so Miguel Garcia and the

other servants could go pick them up. The tapestry muffled his steps, and no one foresaw his entrance in the great residence. Hearing, however, loud voices and laughter in a certain room, he went there, knocked discretely on the door and opened it suddenly. He stopped, however, full of astonishment: the Countess de Vilares, his former bride, was there with her escort, Rosaria, Manuel Garcia and two common servants. They sat around a table and they had tea with biscuits and cakes, served by the two young servants. Constanca seemed to be among family, so comfortable and cheerful as if she were in her own house. Seeing, appalled, the former betrothed standing at the doorway, she stood up in a rush, flushed and trembling, while the servants, Rosaria and Manuel, stood up and walked towards him, exclaiming, filled of confusion:

– Oh, my lord, Don Ramiro, we didn't know about your return... Welcome!

The owner of the house greeted them with a ceremonious bow, not saying anything, and went to his rooms. With a serious tone, he said to Manuel only:

– The luggage is in the hall.

And he did not leave his own rooms during the rest of the day, because he felt tired.

Constancia's presence in his house upset him, as did the servants' easiness around her. That familiarity allowed by Constanca, so proud and jealous of her own social position, rather seemed to him complicity, whatever its nature; who knows whether she planned, in fact, his reconciliation with her, a fact that he would repel with all his strength? Ramiro had forgotten Constanca's love and nothing in his heart propelled him to resume the former relationship. On her turn, the young Countess left immediately, without retributing him the greetings, dazed by seeing herself surprised by the former fiancé, because she came to his house unbeknownst to him, and, on that day, she was barely found by him while examining his rooms and files, as the young philanthropist did not carry all his keys with him when traveling.

In the afternoon, he ate a light meal, remaining in a strange silence, despite Rosaria's efforts to call his attention. The memories of Nina saddened him. He asked for the keys to her room and went there, alone. Rosaria and Manuel wanted to follow him, lamenting the absence of the ungrateful young woman.

But, he did not allow it. He entered there and remained inside for about half an hour. He examined the closets, drawers, shelves, dressing tables. Everything was organized. What had belonged to Nina, given by him, was still there: clothes, shoes, jackets, mantels, perfumes, jewelry, pieces of art, medicine. It could be said, indeed, that his protégé had abandoned and rejected everything, to follow the lover.

– She must love him very much, to renounce everything like that – he thought, sadly.

He left later, keeping the keys with himself, and said to Manuel Garcia:

– Call for Felicio with the carriage. I will not eat dinner here.

The unfaithful servant, confused, went to the door, but turned around suddenly and clarified:

– I will drive you myself, my lord, Felicio quit his job at the palace and we still have not been able to find another recommendable driver...

The Count stared at the servant, surprised, and asked him:

– Felicio quit? Why? What happened, after all, here, in my absence?

– I don't know the reason, my lord, nothing important happened, he didn't explain, he simply quit... Maybe my mother knows something, but she didn't say. I'm sorry. I will drive the carriage myself...

However, the young philanthropist stopped him, saying:

– I don't like the way you drive the horses. Call for the rental carriage.

The carriage arrived at the gate and Don Ramiro climbed it, ordering to the man at the front:

– To the Gypsy Neighborhood, gate number ten...

Arriving at the place, which he already knew, he went to the second courtyard, where Nina lived. At that time of the afternoon, still early, the place was almost empty. However, three women ate, drank and smoked at the entrance balcony of the great house, where Michaelus had resided and where,

now, resided the richest dwellers of the place. He was immediately recognized by one of them, who exclaimed, when she saw him:

– It's Nina's nobleman. Good afternoon, sir!

Don Ramiro greeted them with respect and got straight into business:

– And Miss Vidigal? Did she come back here?

The three women thought the question was odd, stood up, curious, and answered:

– No, my lord. Nina didn't come back to us...

– And Michaelus? I was told she came back for him... Didn't they show up around here?...

– Such news must be false, sir! Michaelus left Madrid and we never heard about him again. Nina showed up here asking for work, about three months ago, but she was alone. She was so sick, and so miserable that she sold us the only two dresses she had...

One of them went inside the house and brought the dresses, displaying them to Don Ramiro, who listened to everything, intrigued. The other continued:

– We couldn't take her in because there was no room available. She spent the night on this balcony, sitting at that corner, over there, and she coughed and cried the whole night... and we heard she say, in tears, that "when Michaelus was around, at least I never slept outside"... Therefore, she didn't return to him... We were very sorry for her. She asked for work, but what could that wretched woman do, if she could no longer dance nor served any longer for the bohemian life? She didn't answer and started to cry. And we never saw her again.

Don Ramiro thanked them and left, heading to the dancers' house, friends of his protégé. He received the same report that he had just received in the Gypsy Neighborhood. Then, we went to the hospital. Being so sick, it was possible that the young dancer would look for help at the hospital where she had received treatment. And he meditated, while the carriage rode:

– Nonetheless, Rosaria affirmed that Nina ran away with Michaelus...

Now at the hospital, the young nobleman found Felicio washing the hall with a broom and a bucket full of water. The servant greeted him with eyes full of tears, while the master asked him:

– Felicio, why are you washing the floor?

– I'm an employee here, my lord!

– When you finish, come look for me at the physician's room. I need to talk to you.

He said that, and went inside the hospital, greeting tenderly everyone he met on the way.

He found his friend, Don Carlos, at the office, curved over books, eager to know ever more the science to which he dedicated himself. The two friends hugged each other effusively and exchanged various impressions, after which Don Ramiro, revealing his anxiety and embarrassment, asked Don Carlos:

– And Nina? Is she here, hospitalized, maybe? I just heard she was gravely ill...

Don Carlos stared at him, feeling sorry, and answered:

– Yes, Nina was here, hospitalized, but not anymore, she left...

The two men stared at each other again, maybe curious, maybe embarrassed, and Ramiro asked, the voice grave and hoarse:

– And do you know what happened to her? Where did she go? I know that you know. Tell me, Carlos!

– She is buried. She died a month ago.

The Count didn't say a thing. He started to measure the room with long steps, and thought:

– She, or her soul, went to warn me, in Brussels. I knew it, I knew it...

But, suddenly, Carlos said:

– Why did you expel her in those conditions? That was unhuman! You have never done such a thing with any of our protégés. Did she, maybe,

disrespect your house? Nina was recovered from her wretched destiny. You could have sent her here, or to the country, if you didn't want her in your house, with the others. She was gravely ill. You rushed her death with that letter...

But Don Ramiro did not understand what the friend said. He protested: he had not expelled Nina, he would never be capable of expelling anyone from his house, he loved her as a true sister and he had wanted to protect her, make her happy or, at least, comfort her. She was the one who fled from him, following the former lover, hurting him with ingratitude, as his housekeeper reported in a letter wrote for him in France. Who, then, had created mischievous plot against him; Nina herself, maybe?

Then, Don Carlos told his friend, in detail, what had happened to Nina, as she had informed him in her death bed. He told him about the letter Rosaria Maria had presented as having been written by him, Ramiro, ordering Nina to leave the palace, because he needed his residence with urgency, as he would get married as soon as he returned from his trip. He told him about the misery that the wretched woman suffered after being put on the street by the palace's servants, sleeping outside, suffering all kinds of penury and discomfort. He explained him the former dancer's deplorable state of decadence when taken in by hospital from Felicio's humanitarian arms. He transmitted him the message she had sent him a few hours before dying and delivered him the ring which he had given her during the memorable feast of his birthday, when she had danced for him and his guests, and he even told him about the bitterness that tore apart the wretched woman's heart, a bitterness that she took with herself to the tomb.

Meanwhile, Felicio was called and narrated to the former master everything he knew about the mistreatments inflicted upon Nina by the housekeeper, her son, and the remaining servants, by them instigated. Don Ramiro felt consumed and confused for all this drama having been played out under his welcoming roof and, what was worse, under his name's responsibility, while he ignored it all. He later went to the house of Nina's tutoress, followed by Felicio, and he heard her testimony about the matter. She not only confirmed what she had told Felicio, but also clarified some particularities, which she had not dared tell Don Ramiro on that day of altercation between her and Rosaria, for knowing she would not be believed,

because the particularities would reveal the complicity of Constancia in the plot that had destroyed Nina in such dramatic circumstances.

That night, the young philanthropist did not return home. He slept over at the hospital, he took care of the sick, he reduced sufferings, while he himself felt the pain and the revolt in his heart by the treason from those in whom he trusted, and he encouraged with phrases of inflaming faith those who feared death. He worked his shift at the hospital like a humble student who needed better grades for the graduation exams.

The following day, however, before lunch itself, he went to the palace, taking Felicio with him. He had already spent half an hour there, questioning Rosaria and Manuel Garcia about Nina's flight, when Don Carlos and the tutoress arrived.

The two servants felt terrified by the questioning, something they did not expect, certain as they were about the unconditional trust that the Count deposited in them. They stumbled at each of the master's questions, contradicting themselves, making up sophisms, accusing the dead woman, at the same time staring at Felicio, anxiously. But, in the presence of Don Carlos and the tutoress, everything was clarified. They both spoke what they knew about Nina and, encouraged by Don Ramiro to present the letter in which there was the expulsion order, they did not know what to say, and they defended themselves without conviction, while the tutoress turned to the Count and exclaimed, nervously:

– I told you, my lord, Count, that this woman was a terrible enemy of Nina, a humble and harmless creature, martyr of others' evil, but you didn't believe in me. Now you see with your own eyes that I was right. Nina would never run away with whomever it may be, because she respected you, and even less with her tormentor Michaelus.

Certain about the treason of the servants in whom he absolutely trusted, revolted against the unhuman act performed in his name against a protégé, gravely ill and unprotected, from the noble Association created and directed by him, Don Ramiro de Montalban made a brutal gesture for the first time in his life, a gesture not Christian at all, but which revealed the very times in which he lived and which he, in the future, would expiate bitterly: he threatened the servants with having them questioned by police inquisitors if

they did not reveal then and there, immediately, all the details about the unhuman plot. As they had, indeed, made a mistake and abused of the master's trust, they feared the threats they heard and, at a certain point, Rosaria confessed, enraged:

– Yes, my lord, Don Ramiro! I hate Nina with all my strengths and I don't regret having put her out of this house. I hate her, and I would be capable of killing her with my own two hands, if she had not already died, as you just say, and gone to hell, which houses women of her quality. I want hell to devour her throughout all centuries of centuries, because, due to her, my Constanca suffers until this day; she stole your heart from my dear Constanca... It was my hatred that wrote those two letters: one in your name, expelling her from here, and another to you, telling you about her flight. No, she didn't flee, she was put out, and I was the one who expelled her from here... and be certain, my lord, that if she had not left that same day, I would have killed her, and not even you and no one else would ever know about it, because I would have buried her in this very place, in the grounds of this park of yours, and...

But, Don Ramiro did not let her finish speaking. He went out for a few minutes, telling the others to wait. He went, by himself, to the stables, looked for and found the driver's whip, and returned running up the stairs that led to the room from which he had come. Arriving there, he raised the whip over Rosaria and Manuel Garcia, brutally driving them out, under lashes, until the street door, as he had never done with any animal, made them take a rental carriage, pushing them inside, and exclaiming:

– Go away! Go away, you barbarians, hateful people, to your noble master, it's there your place, not in my house!

The remaining servants, accomplices of Rosaria by obedience, were fired that same day. There wasn't any more guests in there, because the housekeeper had dismissed them all, as she had done with Nina. Don Ramiro, later, ordered Felicio to organize his baggage with his clothing and some indispensable objects, and to take them to the hospital, to take the horses to the rural mansion and to totally close the palace. Felicio would be, now, the loyal servant, his chamber servant.

And Don Ramiro started to reside, definitively, at the hospital.

XII

“The Spirits of the Lord, who are the virtues of Heaven, like immense army that moves after receiving the orders of its commander, spread themselves over the whole surface of Earth and, similar to falling stars, come to illuminate the ways and open the eyes of the blind.”

(Spirit of Truth – *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, by Allan Kardec, Preface, 58nd edition by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation)

Around this time, it was published, in France, the doctrinal code of Spiritism, that is, *The Spirits' Book*. Also arriving at Spain, this book was well received by the lucid minds and generous hearts, and the transcendental doctrine revealed by the Superior Spirits to Allan Kardec counted with very loyal adepts in the country. Among those, Don Ramiro de Montalban and Don Carlos de C... were some of the most devoted and understanding, because both had knowledge about the matter, besides knowing Esoterism and Theosophy. They accepted, thus, with happiness and enthusiasm the code of laws that is *The Spirits' Book* and started to observe the principles exposed in the same book. However, morally very hurt by the recent events in his life, Don Ramiro decided to return to France, visit Allan Kardec, the famous author of the book, and deepen himself in the psychic experiences and studies alongside the master. Thus, he left to France for an undetermined period of time, while a new servant was charged with taking care of his residence, which remained closed, and Felicio would follow him as his new chamber servant.

Arriving in Paris, the young philanthropist rented a small house in a modest residential neighborhood and started to spend a very discreet life, exclusively dedicated to his new studies and to the Spiritist experiences with the group directed by Allan Kardec.

Approximately two months after his arrival in Paris, Don Ramiro started to see the spiritual silhouette of Nina in his home. At first, he saw her indecisively, but, with the continuation of apparitions, he could distinguish her with precision and even recognize her. A limitless satisfaction invaded his soul: Nina lived – which confirmed the revelation of the Spirits –, she thought about him, because she sought him, even though she no longer belonged to

the earthly world, and she was the same as always: humble and quiet, seeming shy before him, as she always had been, and very sad. Then, he would go to his room, pray and start to mentally talk with his former protégé:

– How are you now, my dear? Do you feel, perhaps, the suffering caused by your illness? Do you know that you no longer belong to the material world and, therefore, no longer can physically suffer? Do you know that your carnal body disappears in the grave, and that your soul is immortal, and for this reason you are here, and you see me, and I see you and speak to you, and I know that you hear me and understand me? Don't be afraid, my dear little sister! God will allow you to be aided, and you will receive the reward for the much you have suffered in this world...

Nonetheless, Nina's Spirit did not answer. It remained sad, sometimes it disappeared, to reappear later. Don Ramiro, however, continued to mentally talk and console her:

– Don't think that I wrote that letter dismissing you from my home. No, my dear, I would never do it with anyone, and much less with you, whom I hold so dear! You were, you are my much beloved sister, and I suffer deeply for what happened to you in my absence...

One day, however, the young nobleman attended a mediumistic experience of a few collaborators of Allan Kardec when he saw Nina gliding through the room where they were gathered. He prayed in her favor, thinking:

– Nina suffers. She hasn't found peace in the other world...

Suddenly, one of the mediums present started to write quickly and Don Ramiro saw that it was Nina who, by his side, gave him her thoughts, so the human tool would transmit it to him, Ramiro. She was supported by an instructing entity and wrote with ease.

Several paper sheets were filled with that nervous writing that translates the action of a discarnate over a medium, and Ramiro waited, serene, the end of the manifestation to know the letter's content that, certainly, was directed to him. After ten minutes, the medium's hand stopped. Nina disappeared from her former benefactor's view, and the medium woke up and said:

– It’s for you, brother Ramiro... – because among that homogeneous group of apprentices of the Great Doctrine disappeared all noble titles, so they could regard each other as equals before God, made siblings by the Christian love.

Don Ramiro took those pages, organized them and then read the message out loud, to also edify the others:

“– Yes, my good friend and protector, I suffer, and I haven’t yet found the peace that your generous heart wishes for me. But, it’s not the memory of my bad physical state that makes me suffer. I confess that I didn’t keep that impression from matter, because I felt that I needed to die, or disappear from the earthly world, and I still breathed in my physical body and I already knew that I was leaving the world where I suffered so much, to present before God the account of my deeds.

After my last breath in the physical body, I entered a stupor... I fell asleep and only noticed, like in a dream, that Don Carlos and the good Felicio conducted me to the cemetery, the only friends that I had to accompany me to the last earthly dwelling place. I thank Don Carlos for bearing the costs of my funeral... God will compensate him for this additional charity, because I cannot compensate him if not with love and the gratitude of my soul.

I fell asleep... I don’t know how long I remained that way, quiet and unconscious, as if fainted. I woke up, however, slowly, not knowing where I was, because I saw myself surrounded by mist, like winter fog. However, I remembered that I had been hospitalized and, then, I went to the hospital, where they treated me with such kindness, and I returned to the room that I previously had occupied. The bed was empty, redone, waiting for some other occupier. I sat at its border and started to reflect. Where to would I go now, if I was still alive, if I had not died and nothing indicated what I should do in my favor? The affliction felt on Earth with my misery continued in this other world, which I didn’t understand. And, in this state of indecision, the entire panorama of my unhappy life passed before me, and I saw the display of my acts as if they were a theatrical drama that remained archived inside myself. The shame that my life had been, the mistakes that I had made, the shame of having to sell myself to whomever paid better so I could live, smashed my soul, because you know, my beloved friend, that I have never adapted myself in good mind to the sad life I led. I feel ashamed before myself, before you, whom I love and respect, before God, to whom I must present the account of

my deeds, because today I reflect that, with a small parcel of efforts, I could have rather used honest labor as a resource for living, instead of giving myself to the easy life of bohemia, dragged by my own weaknesses, by which I didn't know how to avoid the bad companies. Sadness, however, reached the level of desolation, and my soul, when I saw myself walking around the streets of Madrid, hungry and sick, frozen by the cold, with nowhere to rest, without a shelter to protect me from the rain or frost, sent away by everyone, like the street dogs perhaps never were. Your memory came to me, then, like supreme consolation, but of little duration. And, then, I asked, addressing God, in thought:

– Why, why, my lord God, you, who are the Father of Infinite Mercy, allowed me to suffer so, albeit not being guilty of anything?

Why was I unhappy since childhood, without a home, without friends, without protection, thrown to the evil of the world like a deplorable rag, passing from hand to hand, and from each one leaving more hurt and ashamed?

Why was destiny so cruel with me, throwing me into the world in full teenage years, to consume myself in the street like an animal without shelter? Perhaps aren't you also my Father?

Why so later did I manage to find the support of a generous heart, which nothing consistent could do for me because I was already condemned by the past and with the future forever compromised?

Sitting, there, on the very bed where my poor body had gone silent forever, seeing, in front of me, extracted from myself, the painful life I had led since birth, I broke down in desperate tears, and if I didn't blasphemed, my dear lord, Don Ramiro, it was because you had taught me to respect and bless the name of God, even when misfortune afflicted me.

However, suddenly, I saw myself involved by a band of silver light. My tears ceased as by a spell. I don't know if I got scared, or if the perception of the presence of friends, invisible to me, cherished me. I felt that something extraordinary was being performed in my favor, and the terror of abandonment and solitude, which had martyred me so during my life, faded, while a dawn of confidence broke in my being. I was softly taken from the

hospital room, floating in the air like a feather, and surrounded by a luminous blue halo, as if I gravitated over a large field. Beneath me, I could see the city midst the fog, a silhouette like painted in fragile colors. An affectionous voice made itself heard, terrifying me more than comforting me. And I understood that it was directed to me, and told me:

– You invoke the holy name of God, my daughter, among distressing questions, about the reason for your misfortunes... Your questions were taken into consideration and here I am, charged with satisfying them. Why didn't you have a home, or friends, or even the personal honor because you were a poor creature discredited even before itself?

In fact, you yourself will answer your questions... and those answers are archived in the depths of yourself, in your spiritual being...

Confused, I didn't understand what I was hearing.

Next, a strange vertigo involved me. My brain was confused, agitated. I was shaken by painful emotions, strange, and, at a certain moment, I saw my poor burial, followed by Don Carlos and Felicio. I returned, then, to the life that I had just left behind, but in the opposite direction, that is, I reviewed my drama backwards: from death to birth.⁴³ I relived and suffered again all the steps that I had already lived, until reaching the point in which I was a newborn child and sucked on my mother's breast, involved in wool bands. However, I didn't stop there. Terrible darkness involved me next: I had reached, in the regression of my spiritual memory, an existence before the one I had just left behind. I saw myself in the depths of waters, drowning, struggling for a hypothetical saving, injured, mutilated, desperate and terrified by what I had just done, because I felt that I had committed suicide, throwing myself in the sea so not to suffer the shame of becoming a single mother...

I was going to be a mother and I did not tolerate the idea of this child that dishonored me...

A new drama displayed itself, then, in front of me, I telling myself what this drama was: I saw myself as the daughter of a noble man, surrounded by respect, attention and comfort. However, I was a bad daughter to my parents, I didn't love them properly, I didn't respect them, I betrayed and lied to those who loved me, I mocked the good-name that I used with the disrespect

towards myself, giving myself voluntarily to personal dishonor, motivated by inferior passions that I could have dominated, but which I chose to nurture. You were, then, my older brother, a second father, to whom I owed respect and whom I loved very much, and I was called, then, “Angelica”... But, I also despised your advices, even though you were so dear to me, losing the opportunity of salvation that Heaven provided me through your person, who loved me and tried to direct me to the Good. I lost myself, then, I disgraced myself voluntarily, when all along I could have been good and happy, because I had opportunities to be so. The remorse about the foolishness that I had committed made me pray to God the punishment that was fair. I, once again, took another carnal body, in order to expiate my mistakes and to complete the time of existence that I still had to live when I preferred suicide, and I was reborn as the wretched daughter of a poor acrobat, who died early and left me unsupported, abandoned to the world. I was Eponina Vidigal... And what I suffered you already know, my lord, Don Ramiro: it was the redemption, the punishment for that Angelica, daughter of nobles, who had not been able to honor her parents, who disrespected her own home with her dishonest behavior and who returned to Earth alone and abandoned, dishonored and disrespected, in order to learn the respect owed to the family, the meaning of having a family and, above all else, that suicide is a crime that delays for centuries the mental and vibrational balance of those who perform it. Forgive me, my lord, Don Ramiro! Forgive me, my beloved brother!”

Don Ramiro read, in tears, the message received and, while the meeting fellows commented on its worth, he exclaimed:

– I knew that Nina Vidigal had been my sister in a previous life and that she had been called “Angelica”... The heavenly love that I gave her, the strange piety that she inspired me could not have been anything else...

However, one of the assistants, unappeased by the phenomenon observed there, raised a doubt and exposed it to the others:

– How Nina, as a suffering Spirit, recently disincarnated, because it had only been half a year that she freed herself from the carnal burden, barely knowing, during life, how to read and write, could now dictate a communication of such high value, correctly written?...

The medium once again concentrated, as if asking clarification from the invisible friends there present, and soon his hands, moved by them, wrote nervously:

“– In the depths of the spiritual being of the communicating sister resides the intellectual knowledge acquired by her in previous existences and in the wandering state itself. During the last incarnation, which was of an atoning nature, that knowledge remained compressed in her deep consciousness.⁴⁴ Once freed from the carnal prison, it shone again, illuminating her mentality. Moreover, the circumstance that the communicating entity is not alone: invisible protectors assist her and helped her in this venting out, which her soul needed, on top of which it was also necessary that she gave her testimony of survival in this hour that a new dawn of spiritual knowledge outlines itself in the horizons of human life...”

The session was closed, and Don Ramiro returned home meditative and comforted by good impressions.

³⁷ TN: See Note 2.

³⁸ Rossini lived from 1792 to 1868.

³⁹ Emmanuel Swedenborg: mystic Swedish philosopher (medium of great power). He was born in Stockholm and died in London (1688-1772). He had visions, established relations with the spiritual world, made important revelations and created numerous disciples. He foresaw certain and important discoveries: the crystallography and its essential principles, and others.

⁴⁰ Seville – capital of Andalusia, Spain.

⁴¹ The tuberculosis' microbe (Koch bacillus) was only discovered in 1882. Its discoverer was the German physician Robert Koch, who managed to make cultivations of the microbe. He was born in 1843 and died in 1910. Koch also discovered the microbes of anthrax and cholera, which decimated whole stocks and populations, respectively.

⁴² Luke 14:12-14.

⁴³ See Spiritism classic works: Leon Denis, Gabriel Delanne, Colonel de Rochas, Ernesto Bozzano, Camille Flammarion, etc. Memory regression in the spiritual state.

⁴⁴ Or subconsciousness.

CONCLUSION

Ramiro de Montalban lingered one year in France. During this time, he deepened himself in the Spiritist studies, he did experiments, he followed the remaining adepts of Allan Kardec in the observations and investigations necessary for the progress of the cause, and for the greater good. Never again, though, he saw or felt the presence of the Spirit Nina. He received, however, news, through the mediumistic exercise of one of his fellows of Spiritist labors, that the beloved Spirit was in an educational internship in the spiritual life and that it was not convenient to disturb it with calls from the physical plane, but that the same Spirit was somewhat impatient and rebellious, it still needed future reincarnations, in order to educate itself properly, balancing itself in the good march towards God. That its past debts, since the medieval ages, were grave and that it needed a lot of moral strength to repair them all. That its Spiritual Guides did not advise an immediate reincarnation, because Nina needed to instruct herself in the matters related to the law of God and the law of Life, to reeducate herself, getting ready to overcome herself, as she needed to present hard testimonies to the divine codes. However, she loved Earth, and she was anxious for an incarnation that made her forget the terrible past that she had just lived and suffered. And that they should pray for her because she was, truly, in need.

By the end of the year, he returned to Spain and retook his own duties. Now, however, better illuminated by the instructions of the Spirits who established the Doctrine through Allan Kardec, he was able to develop with more confidence and efficiency the services to his Charity Association. Never again he hosted deprived people in his residence, but he donated to the Association a small mansion he owned, which was transformed into a shelter for the sick who, like Nina, didn't have any protection from anyone. On the other hand, he repaired his former palace and put it in good conditions of being inhabited. He dedicated himself to music and spiritual experiences, in addition to the services of his Association, at the same time practicing Medicine gratuitously, exclusively for the poor.

Around this time, Don Carlos had created a maternal shelter for orphans and Don Ramiro found, there, ample field to expand his heart's affections, which dwelled in his being. Dealing with children, teaching them how to speak, guiding their first steps in life, educating them, alphabetizing them, admiring them was a sublime joy for his heart. Don Carlos had adopted as son a little orphan of one-month-old, whose mother was Jewish and father, a nobleman, had abandoned both in dishonor and misery. The poor young woman, however, had died in the hospital and the child would remain in complete abandonment if the generous heart of this noble physician had not adopted him. He gave the child his own name and his title of Viscount, even though he did not have assets to give him. The boy received the name *Carlos*, like his adoptive father, and was raised in the family's residence, that is, by Don Carlos' mother and sister, who lived in Madrid, with him. This child also filled Don Ramiro's heart, who dedicated himself to her with the enthusiasm of a second father, committing himself, along with his penniless friend, to provide for his education. And, for the first time, since he had terminated his engagement with the pretty Constanica, Don Ramiro thought about getting married.

But, getting married, how?, if there were no perspectives in his life for the important event?

He did not think about Constanica anymore. He had forgotten her! However, he had heard, from mutual friends, that the young Countess had sent Rosaria Maria and her son to Portugal, upset by the disrespectful events that had taken place between them and Don Ramiro, and no longer thought about bringing them back to her house, notwithstanding still giving financial support to the woman who had cradled her in the arms. The young philanthropist, then, wishing to get married, but not having a betrothed, continued his charity campaign, awaiting the future to address him. And six years went by... Don Ramiro now was thirty-four years-old, but remained single...

During this period of time, his mediumistic faculties had manifested themselves, and he could see and talk easily with the inhabitants of the spiritual world, either through automatic writing, or through audition and mind, as often happens to the sufficiently developed and responsible mediums.

For this very reason, on one night when he read again his favorite Spiritist works, in the tranquility of his working office, he saw the Spirit Nina subtly come closer, resting on his desk. He understood that she still respected him as before, because her discrete behavior was the same as from previous time of earthly life. Feeling the caring vibrations that irradiated from her, he saluted her, feeling moved:

– God bless you, my dear spiritual daughter! Do you wish to speak to me? Are you happy? Do you suffer, perhaps? What can I do for you? I’m at your disposal... Speak away! And I will serve you in what God allows!

She answered, speaking the Spirits’ language to her medium:

– I wish to thank you for what you have done for me... I haven’t forgotten you... and tell you, as well, that I love you deeply. I have always loved you...

– I know, dear Nina! For a long time, now, I know that you love me like that, and I thank you.

– I was your sister in more than one existence, almost a daughter. Our souls are powerfully connected by affection links for many centuries... and this certainty consoles me and cherishes my poor soul...

– I also knew that, my dear, and immense joy penetrated my soul as well...

– I don’t want, I cannot separate myself from you... When I separate myself from you, just like yesterday, I become wretched...

Don Ramiro had his eyes full of tears, when he answered:

– You need to be strong, my sister, to trust in God to face and succeed in the martyrdom of a separation through punitive rebirth...

– ... And for that I come to ask you a favor, once you also love me...

– Ask away, my daughter!

– I love Constancia as well...

Don Ramiro jumped, painfully, but waited.

– ... and I’m equally connected to her by the bonds of the past... She loves you since centuries ago, she always wanted to be your wife, but until today

she hasn't managed to accomplish this dear dream of her heart...

The Count went silent, a little embarrassed, and Nina kept on:

– I was, involuntarily, the cause of your current quarrel... but, I would like, now, to repair the misunderstanding between you and her. I plea to you, my beloved brother: write to Constancia, proposing a reconciliation. She waits for you for so many years...

– Oh! But, wouldn't that be somewhat burdensome for me? Constancia isn't remembered with longing by my heart...

– Living together will resurrect the love, which is offended and dormant, but not forgotten... Marry her! I'm in need of returning to Earth, and I wanted to be your daughter, because, in the past, I had been almost a daughter for you... Only this way I will reach happiness. I don't know how to be sensible or happy away from you...⁴⁵

Don Ramiro's heart vibrated of violent emotion. Tears ran freely down his cheeks and he answered:

– Oh, Nina, my daughter! Having you with me, without anyone accusing me for that, embracing you in my arms as father, because I always wanted you paternally, teaching you how to speak since little, guiding your first steps, providing for everything you may need, so you will lack nothing, compensate you for the martyrdom that you suffered yesterday even, like Nina, giving you a new body so you can progress towards God under my care, giving you my name, so you can be respected like I myself have been... oh, yes, my beloved! It's the supreme desire, the supreme happiness of my heart! But... tell me, my dear: do you decide this by yourself, or do you have the blessing of God's laws for this important event?

– My good counselors have approved this petition of mine, appealing, rather, to the Greater Counsel that inspires them. They said that this will be a reward for the much I have suffered now, with patience and humility, because, living as Nina Vidigal, I never rebelled or complained. It will be a new opportunity that God's law grants me to progress, a reward, because, if I'm obedient to the moral direction that, as a father, you give me, I will have taken a major step towards my spiritual redemption...

Don Ramiro cried, while she continued:

– They also told me that you need to use rigor and energy in my education, because I bring with me bastard inclinations from other times, which will have to be corrected. I need severe discipline, in addition to love and evangelical education, not to fall into error again...

– How will I use rigor with you, my daughter, if you are a sufferer and I desire to compensate you for the painful past you just lived?

– You're a sincere believer in God. You'll receive inspiration for this service, which won't be easy. Parents shouldn't be excessively complacent with the arbitrary desires of their children. Moreover, I love you very much. A severity of yours towards me will be worth as protection, which I'll receive and thank. Do you accept, my lord, Don Ramiro?

– How can I resist to such an event that would be, for me, the greatest happiness of my life: being your father?! Oh, I feel in my heart that I already am!

– Then, write to Constancia. I will help you...

Somewhat confused for having to write to the former betrothed, trembling, anxious, thinking that he dreamed, but, in truth, suffering strong mental pressure from Nina – a mediumistic trance, it can be said –, Don Ramiro wrote the following letter:

“– My dear Constancia: it's time, in my understanding, to undo your misunderstanding about me, which extends itself for seven years! I ask you to authorize me to visit you, so we can reestablish our engagement and deal with the future. I wait for your answer – Your Ramiro”.

Once written the letter, the young philanthropist no longer felt the presence of the Spirit that so significantly activated him. He stored the letter in a drawer of his desk and tried not to think about it anymore. Sweat covered his forehead and he trembled out of emotion. He understood that he had just experienced a pronounced trance, positive. He prayed to God, plead for Nina and for himself. The holy feeling of spiritual love, without limits, flooded his being, almost making him suffer, because, in the incarnate state, the truth is

that the Spirit does not have the strength to withstand this sublime feeling and exasperates itself, and suffers.

He left the office, opened the windows of his favorite room, so the night breezes would encourage him, and tried to play in the piano one of his favorite pieces. But, he could not. He felt excessively moved to translate with precision the musical thought of those master of the good music, and spent the night without sleeping, feeling, sometimes, the eyes wet with tears.

The fact of writing so humbly to Constancia, who had hurt him so, upset him. What would she say? What if she repelled him? Maybe Nina, who wasn't a very evolved entity, was mistaken, and Constancia, in fact, would no longer accept him?

He returned to the office, thinking about correcting certain expressions in the letter, for example: *My dear Constancia* and *Your Ramiro*. But, he felt discouraged in altering the thought provided by a being from the other world.

The following day, already at the hospital, he looked for Carlos and told him what had happened. The friend remained in his thoughts for a while, rationalized and answered.

– I don't doubt that this interesting phenomenon happened, because the discarnate Spirits' daily intervention in our lives is positively demonstrated and it is bigger than we suppose. I regard, indeed, that Nina's communication is consoling and very beautiful: you have all the conditions to become her father. It's a revelation for us, who initiate the walk in the transcendental matters... Beyond all that, you desire, indeed, to get married. Why not choose Constancia as wife, if we know that she loves you and remains loyal to your love, waiting for you, single, for such a long time? My opinion is that you should send the letter. And if Nina, truly, comes back to Earth as your daughter and hers... God be praised! who allowed us to contemplate this wonder from Heaven! One advice, though, I dare to give you: never reveal to Constancia this event. She isn't ready to withstand it...

Don Ramiro meditated still a few days. He thought about the circumstances, reflected the convenience and inconvenience of the marriage with the former betrothed, and prayed for inspiration from Above, understood that the matter would be his free-will's decision and not imposition of a

spiritual being and, finally, transcribed the letter to his letterhead, assumed responsibility for the act he performed and sent the letter to Constanica through a special mail service, followed by a bouquet of roses.

The young Countess received and read that letter with the cheeks flooded with tears and the heart beating of joy. She loved, truly, the former betrothed and regretted a lot the incomprehension she had had towards him. In the afternoon, she replied the letter through her personal servant, thanking for the roses and inviting the Count to have dinner with her the following day. They talked easily and the old idyll was renovated with even more passion.

Two months later, Don Ramiro de Montalban married her with the blessings and joys of family and friends, and, after a certain stay in the pretty mansion that Constanica had in the outskirts of Lisbon, they returned to Madrid, moving to the old and suggestive De Montalban Palace, which we know very well.

A few months later, the pretty Constanica de Vilares, now Ms. de Montalban, gave birth to a gorgeous girl, who filled with joy the hearts of her parents, strengthening forever the links of love that since past secular ages connected those two hearts. Don Ramiro cried when holding in his arms that fragile little being, and, among kisses and caresses to that dear daughter, whose Spirit he well knew who was, he mentally prayed:

“– My God, Lord and Father! I promise to employ maximum effort to direct this well-beloved soul to your kingdom of light. I’ll love her like since millennia I’ve been loving her, Lord, and, with my protection and your mercy, I wish to compensate her for the much she suffered and cried under my sight, yesterday, without me being able to rescue her. Help me, Lord, to educate her, dignifying her for the reign of your love!”

Don Ramiro de Montalban was a devoted and loyal father, he fulfilled his promise to the Supreme Creator and, still today, more than a century after that auspicious day, he guides the steps of his daughter in her spiritual ascension towards God.

With respect to Constanica, who one day denied her own hand for the dancer Nina Vidigal to respectfully kiss, and who did not agree to sit at the table where this very unfortunate Nina had been invited to sit... had to cradle

her in her arms as a daughter and feed her with the very blood from her breast.

So is reincarnation, dear reader, a blessed opportunity provided for in God's law for the labors of reconciliation, progress and perfection of the Spirit!

“Oh, Spiritists! May you understand the great role of Humanity; understand that, when you produce a body, the soul that incarnates in it comes from space to evolve; learn about your duties and put all of your love in bringing this soul closer to God; that is the mission entrusted to you and which reward you will receive, if you loyally fulfill it”

(Saint Augustine – *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, by Allan Kardec, chapter XIV,
“Honor your father and mother”, n. 9, 58nd edition by the Brazilian
Spiritist Federation)

⁴⁵ These conversations between Spirits and incarnate individuals happen, preferably, or generally, in the other world, during the bodily sleep of the latter. Much more rare, because difficult, is they happening mediumistically. Notwithstanding, they can and do happen. (*Medium's note*).



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