

Spirits

By Ivan Turgenev

For a long time I could not get to sleep, and kept turning from side to side. ‘Confound this foolishness about table-turning!’ I thought. ‘It simply upsets one’s nerves.’ . . . Drowsiness began to overtake me at last. . . .

Suddenly it seemed to me as though there were the faint and plaintive sound of a harp-string in the room.

I raised my head. The moon was low in the sky, and looked me straight in the face. White as chalk lay its light upon the floor. . . . The strange sound was distinctly repeated.

I leaned on my elbow. A faint feeling of awe plucked at my heart. A minute passed, another. . . . Somewhere, far away, a cock crowed; another answered still more remote.

I let my head sink back on the pillow. ‘See what one can work oneself up to, I thought again, . . . ‘there’s a singing in my ears.’

After a little while I fell asleep—or I thought I fell asleep. I had an extraordinary dream. I fancied I was lying in my room, in my bed—and was not asleep, could not even close my eyes. And again I heard the sound. . . . I turned over. . . . The moonlight on the floor began softly to lift, to rise up, to round off slightly above. . . . Before me, impalpable as mist, a white woman was standing motionless.

‘Who are you?’ I asked with an effort.

A voice made answer, like the rustle of leaves: ‘It is I . . . I . . . I . . . I have come for you.’

‘For me? But who are you?’

‘Come by night to the edge of the wood where there stands an old oak-tree. I will be there.’

I tried to look closely into the face of the mysterious woman—and suddenly I gave an involuntary shudder: there was a chilly breath upon me. And then I was not lying down, but sitting up in my bed; and where, as I fancied, the phantom had stood, the moonlight lay in a long streak of white upon the floor.

II

The day passed somehow. I tried, I remember, to read, to work. . . . everything was a failure. The night came. My heart was throbbing within me, as though it expected something. I lay down, and turned with my face to the wall.

‘Why did you not come?’ sounded a distinct whisper in the room.

I looked round quickly.

Again she . . . again the mysterious phantom. Motionless eyes in a motionless face, and a gaze full of sadness.

‘Come!’ I heard the whisper again.

‘I will come,’ I replied with instinctive horror. The phantom bent slowly forward, and undulating faintly like smoke, melted away altogether. And again the moon shone white and untroubled on the smooth floor.

III

I passed the day in unrest. At supper I drank almost a whole bottle of wine, and all but went out on to the steps; but I turned back and flung my elf into my bed. My blood was pulsing painfully.

Again the sound was heard. . . I started, but did not look round. All at once I felt that someone had tight hold of me from behind, and was whispering in my very ear: 'Come, come, come.' . . . Trembling with terror, I moaned out: 'I will come!' and sat up.

A woman stood stooping close to my very pillow. She smiled dimly and vanished. I had time, though, to make out her face. It seemed to me I had seen her before—but where, when? I got up late, and spent the whole day wandering about the country. I went to the old oak at the edge of the forest, and looked carefully all around.

Towards evening I sat at the open window in my study. My old housekeeper set a cup of tea before me, but I did not touch it. . . I kept asking myself in bewilderment: 'Am I not going out of my mind?' The sun had just set: and not the sky alone was flushed with red; the whole atmosphere was suddenly filled with an almost unnatural purple. The leaves and grass never stirred, stiff as though freshly coated with varnish. In their stony rigidity, in the vivid sharpness of their outlines, in this combination of intense brightness and death-like stillness, there was something weird and mysterious. A rather large grey bird suddenly flew up without a sound and settled on the very window sill. . . . I looked at it, and it looked at me sideways with its round, dark eye. 'Were you sent to remind me, then?' I wondered.

At once the bird fluttered its soft wings, and without a sound—as before—flew away. I sat a long time still at the window, but I was no longer a prey to uncertainty. I had, as it were, come within the enchanted circle, and I was borne along by an irresistible though gentle force, as a boat is borne along by the current long before it reaches the waterfall. I started up at last. The purple had long vanished from the air, the colours were darkened, and the enchanted silence was broken. There was the flutter of a gust of wind, the moon came out brighter and brighter in the sky that was growing bluer, and soon the leaves of the tree; were weaving patterns of black and silver in her cold beams. My old housekeeper came into the study with a lighted candle, but there was a draught from the window and the flame went out. I could restrain myself no longer. I jumped up, clapped on my cap, and set off to the corner of the forest, to the old oak-tree.

IV

This oak had, many years before, been struck by lightning; the top of the tree had been shattered, and was withered up, but there was still life left in it for centuries to come. As I was coming up to it, a cloud passed over the moon: it was very dark under its thick branches. At first I noticed nothing special; but I glanced on one side, and my heart fairly failed me—a white figure was standing motionless beside a tall bush between the oak and the forest. My hair stood upright on my head, but I plucked up my courage and went towards the forest.

Yes, it was she, my visitor of the night. As I approached her, the moon shone out again. She seemed all, as it were, spun out of half-transparent, milky mist,—through her face I could see a branch faintly stirring in the wind; only the hair and eyes were a little dark, and on one of the fingers of her clasped hands a slender ring shone with a gleam of pale gold. I stood still before her, and tried to speak; but the voice died away in my throat, though it was no longer fear exactly I felt. Her eyes were turned upon me; their gaze expressed neither distress nor delight, but a sort

of lifeless attention. I waited to see whether she would utter a word, but she remained motionless and speechless, and still gazed at me with her deathly intent eyes. Dread came over me again.

‘I have come!’ I cried at last with an effort. My voice sounded muffled and strange to me.

‘I love you,’ I heard her whisper.

‘You love me!’ I repeated in amazement.

‘Give yourself up to me,’ was whispered me again in reply.

‘Give myself up to you! But you are a phantom; you have no body even. A strange animation came upon me. ‘What are you—smoke, air, vapour? Give myself up to you! Answer me first, Who are you? Have you lived upon the earth? Whence have you come?’

‘Give yourself up to me. I will do you no harm. Only say two words: “Take me.”’

I looked at her. ‘What is she saying?’ I thought. ‘What does it all mean? And how can she take me? Shall I try?’

‘Very well,’ I said, and unexpectedly loudly, as though some one had given me a push from behind; ‘take me!’

I had hardly uttered these words when the mysterious figure, with a sort of inward laugh, which set her face quivering for an instant, bent forward, and stretched out her arms wide apart. . . . I tried to dart away, but I was already in her power. She seized me, my body rose a foot from the ground, and we both floated smoothly and not too swiftly over the wet, still grass.

V

At first I felt giddy, and instinctively I closed my eyes. . . . A minute later I opened them again. We were floating as before; but the forest was now nowhere to be seen. Under us stretched a plain, spotted here and there with dark patches. With horror I felt that we had risen to a fearful height.

‘I am lost; I am in the power of Satan,’ Hashed through me like lightning. Till that instant the idea of a temptation of the evil one, of the possibility of perdition, had never entered my head. We still whirled on, and seemed to be mounting higher and higher.

‘Where will you take me?’ I moaned at last.

‘Where you like,’ my companion answered. She clung close to me; her face was almost resting upon my face. But I was scarcely conscious of her touch.

‘Let me sink down to the earth, I am giddy at this height.’

‘Very well; only shut your eyes and hold your breath.’

I obeyed, and at once felt that I was falling like a stone flung from the hand . . . the air whistled in my ears. When I could think again, we were floating smoothly once more just above the earth, so that we caught our feet in the tops of the tall grass.

‘Put me on my feet,’ I began. ‘What pleasure is there in flying? I’m not a bird.’

‘I thought you would like it. We have no other pastime.’

‘You? Then what are you?’

There was no answer.

‘You don’t dare to tell me that?’

The plaintive sound which had awakened me the first night quivered in my ears. Meanwhile we were still, scarcely perceptibly, moving in the damp night air.

‘Let me go!’ I said. My companion moved slowly away, and I found myself on my feet. She stopped before me and again folded her hands. I grew more composed and looked into her face; as before it expressed submissive sadness.

‘Where are we?’ I asked. I did not recognise the country about me.
‘Far from your home, but you can be there in an instant.’
‘How can that be done? by trusting myself to you again?’
‘I have done you no harm and will do you none. Let us fly till dawn, that is all. I can bear you away wherever you fancy—to the ends of the earth. Give yourself up to me! Say only: “Take me!”’
‘Well . . . take me!’
She again pressed close to me, again my feet left the earth—and we were flying.

VI

‘Which way?’ she asked me.
‘Straight on, keep straight on.’
‘But here is a forest.’
‘Lift us over the forest, only slower.’
We darted upwards like a wild snipe flying up into a birch-tree, and again flew on in a straight line. Instead of grass, we caught glimpses of tree-tops just under our feet. It was strange to see the forest from above, its bristling back lighted up by the moon. It looked like some huge slumbering wild beast, and accompanied us with a vast unceasing murmur, like some inarticulate roar. In one place we crossed a small glade; intensely black was the jagged streak of shadow along one side of it. Now and then there was the plaintive cry of a hare below us; above us the owl hooted, plaintively too; there was a scent in the air of mushrooms, buds, and dawn-flowers; the moon fairly flooded everything on all sides with its cold, hard light; the Pleiades gleamed just over our heads. And now the forest was left behind; a streak of fog stretched out across the open country; it was the river. We flew along one of its banks, above the bushes, still and weighed down with moisture. The river’s waters at one moment glimmered with a flash of blue, at another flowed on in darkness, as it were, in wrath. Here and there a delicate mist moved strangely over the water, and the water-lilies’ cups shone white in maiden pomp with every petal open to its full, as though they knew their safety out of reach. I longed to pick one of them, and behold, I found myself at once on the river’s surface . . . The damp air struck me an angry blow in the face, just as I broke the thick stalk of a great flower. We began to fly across from bank to bank, like the water-fowl we were continually waking up and chasing before us. More than once we chanced to swoop down on a family of wild ducks, settled in a circle on an open spot among the reeds, but they did not stir; at most one of them would thrust out its neck from under its wing, stare at us, and anxiously poke its beak away again in its fluffy feathers, and another faintly quacked, while its body twitched a little all over. We startled one heron; it flew up out of a willow bush, brandishing its legs and fluttering its wings with clumsy eagerness: it struck me as remarkably like a German. There was not the splash of a fish to be heard, they too were asleep. I began to get used to the sensation of flying, and even to find a pleasure in it; any one will understand me, who has experienced flying in dreams. I proceeded to scrutinise with close attention the strange being, by whose good offices such unlikely adventures had befallen me.

VII

She was a woman with a small un-Russian face. Greyish-white, half-transparent, with scarcely marked shades, she reminded one of the alabaster figures on a vase lighted up within, and again her face seemed familiar to me.

‘Can I speak with you?’ I asked.

‘Speak.’

‘I see a ring on your finger; you have lived then on the earth, you have been married?’

I waited . . . There was no answer.

‘What is your name, or, at least, what was it?’

‘Call me Alice.’

‘Alice! That’s an English name! Are you an Englishwoman? Did you know me in former days?’

‘No.’

Why is it then you have come to me?’

‘I love you.’

‘And are you content?’

‘Yes; we float, we whirl together in the fresh air.’

‘Alice!’ I said all at once, ‘you are perhaps a sinful, condemned soul?’

My companion’s head bent towards me. ‘I don’t understand you,’ she murmured.

‘I adjure you in God’s name . . .’ I was beginning.

‘What are you saying?’ she put in in perplexity. ‘I don’t understand.’

I fancied that the arm that lay like a chilly girdle about my waist softly trembled .

‘Don’t be afraid,’ said Alice, ‘don’t be afraid, my dear one!’ Her face turned and moved towards my face. . . . I felt on my lips a strange sensation, like the faintest prick of a soft and delicate sting. . . . Leeches might prick so in mild and drowsy mood.

VIII

I glanced downwards. We had now risen again to a considerable height. We were flying over some provincial town I did not know, situated on the side of a wide slope. Churches rose up high among the dark mass of wooden roofs and orchards; a long bridge stood out black at the bend of a river; everything was hushed, buried in slumber. The very crosses and cupolas seemed to gleam with a silent brilliance; silently stood the tall posts of the wells beside the round tops of the willows; silently the straight whitish road darted arrow-like into one end of the town, and silently it ran out again at the opposite end on to the dark waste of monotonous fields.

‘What town is this?’ I asked.

‘X . . .’

‘X . . . in Y . . . province?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m a long distance indeed from home!’

‘Distance is not for us.’

‘Really?’ I was fired by a sudden recklessness. ‘Then take me to South America!’

‘To America I cannot. It’s daylight there by now.’

‘And we are night-birds. Well, anywhere, where you can, only far, far away.’

‘Shut your eyes and hold your breath,’ answered Alice, and we flew along with the speed of a whirlwind. With a deafening noise the air rushed into my ears. We stopped, but the noise did not cease. On the contrary, it changed into a sort of menacing roar, the roll of thunder . . .

‘Now you can open your eyes,’ said Alice.

IX

I obeyed . . . Good God, where was I?

Overhead, ponderous, smoke-like storm-clouds; they huddled, they moved on like a herd of furious monsters . . . and there below, another monster; a raging, yes, raging, sea . . . The white foam gleamed with spasmodic fury, and surged up in hillocks upon it, and hurling up shaggy billows, it beat with a sullen roar against a huge cliff, black as pitch. The howling of the tempest, the chilling gasp of the storm-rocked abyss, the weighty splash of the breakers, in which from time to time one fancied something like a wail, like distant cannon-shots, like a bell ringing—the tearing crunch and grind of the shingle on the beach, the sudden shriek of an unseen gull, on the murky horizon the disabled hulk of a ship—on every side death, death and horror . . . Giddiness overcame me, and I shut my eyes again with a sinking heart

‘What is this? Where are we?’

‘On the south coast of the Isle of Wight opposite the Blackgang cliff where ships are so often wrecked,’ said Alice, speaking this time with peculiar distinctness, and as it seemed to me with a certain malignant pleasure . . .

‘Take me away, away from here . . . home! home!’ I shrank up, hid my face in my hands . . . I felt that we were moving faster than before; the wind now was not roaring or moaning, it whistled in my hair, in my clothes . . . I caught my breath . . .

‘Stand on your feet now,’ I heard Alice’s voice saying. I tried to master myself, to regain consciousness . . . I felt the earth under the soles of my feet, and I heard nothing, as though everything had swooned away about me only in my temples the blood throbbed irregularly, and my head was still giddy with a faint ringing in my ears. I drew myself up and opened my eyes.

X

We were on the bank of my pond. Straight before me there were glimpses through the pointed leaves of the willows of its broad surface with threads of fluffy mist clinging here and there upon it. To the right a field of rye shone dimly; on the left stood up my orchard trees, tall, rigid, drenched it seemed in dew . . . The breath of the morning was already upon them. Across the pure grey sky stretched like streaks of smoke, two or three slanting clouds; they had a yellowish tinge, the first faint glow of dawn fell on them; one could not say whence it came; the eye could not detect on the horizon, which was gradually growing lighter, the spot where the sun was to rise. The stars had disappeared; nothing was astir yet, though everything was already on the point of awakening in the enchanted stillness of the morning twilight.

‘Morning! see, it is morning!’ cried Alice in my ear. ‘Farewell till tomorrow.’

I turned round . . . Lightly rising from the earth, she floated by, and suddenly she raised both hands above her head. The head and hands and shoulders glowed for an instant with warm, corporeal light; living sparks gleamed in the dark eyes; a smile of mysterious tenderness stirred the reddening lips. . . . A lovely woman had suddenly arisen before me.

But as though dropping into a swoon, she fell back instantly and melted away like vapour.

I remained passive.

When I recovered myself and looked round me, it seemed to me that the corporeal, pale-rosy colour that had flitted over the figure of my phantom had not yet vanished, and was enfolding me, diffused in the air. . . . It was the flush of dawn. All at once I was conscious of extreme fatigue and turned homewards. As I passed the poultry-yard, I heard the first morning cackling of the geese (no birds wake earlier than they do); along the roof at the end of each beam sat a rook, and they were all busily and silently' pluming themselves, standing out in sharp outline against the milky sky. From time to time they all rose at once, and after a short flight, settled again in a row, without uttering a caw. . . . From the wood close by came twice repeated the drowsy, fresh chuck-chuck of the black-cock, beginning to fly into the dewy grass, overgrown by brambles. . . . With a faint tremor all over me I made my way to my bed, and soon fell into a sound sleep.

XI

The next night, as I was approaching the old oak, Alice moved to meet me, as if I were an old friend. I was not afraid of her as I had been the day before, I was almost rejoiced at seeing her; I did not even attempt to comprehend what was happening to me; I was simply longing to fly farther to interesting places.

Alice's arm again twined about me, and we took flight again.

'Let us go to Italy,' I whispered in her ear.

'Wherever you wish, my dear one,' she answered solemnly and slowly, and slowly and solemnly she turned her face towards me. It struck me as less transparent than on the eve; more womanlike and more imposing; it recalled to me the being I had had a glimpse of in the early dawn at parting.

'This night is a great night,' Alice went on. 'It comes rarely—when seven times thirteen . . .'

At this point I could not catch a few words.

'To-night we can see what is hidden at other times.'

'Alice!' I implored, 'but who are you, tell me at last?'

Silently she lifted her long white hand. In the dark sky, where her finger was pointing, a comet flashed, a reddish streak among the tiny stars.

'How am I to understand you?' I began, 'Or, as that comet floats between the planets and the sun, do you float among men . . . or what?'

But Alice's hand was suddenly passed before my eyes . . . It was as though a white mist from the damp valley had fallen on me

'To Italy! to Italy!' I heard her whisper. 'This night is a great night!'

XII

The mist cleared away from before my eyes, and I saw below me an immense plain. But already, by the mere breath of the warm soft air upon my cheeks, I could tell I was not in Russia; and the plain, too, was not like our Russian plains. It was a vast dark expanse, apparently desert and not overgrown with grass; here and there over its whole extent gleamed pools of water, like broken pieces of looking-glass; in the distance could be dimly descried a noiseless motionless sea. Great stars shone bright in the spaces between the big beautiful clouds: the murmur of thousands, subdued but never-ceasing, rose on all sides, and very strange was this shrill but drowsy chorus, this voice of the darkness and the desert . . .

‘The Pontine marshes,’ said Alice. ‘Do you hear the frogs? do you smell the sulphur?’

‘The Pontine marshes . . .’ I repeated, and a sense of grandeur and of desolation came upon me. ‘But why have you brought me here, to this gloomy forsaken place? Let us fly to Rome instead.’

‘Rome is near,’ answered Alice. . . . ‘Prepare yourself!’

We sank lower, and flew along an ancient Roman road. A bullock slowly lifted from the slimy mud its shaggy monstrous head, with short tufts of bristles between its crooked backward-bent horns. It turned the whites of its dull malignant eyes askance, and sniffed a heavy snorting breath into its wet nostril, as though scenting us.

‘Rome, Rome is near . . .’ whispered Alice. ‘Look, look in front. . . .’

I raised my eyes.

What was the blur of black on the edge of the night sky? Were these the lofty arches of an immense bridge? What river did it span? Why was it broken down in parts? No, it was not a bridge, it was an ancient aqueduct. All around was the holy ground of the Campagna, and there, in the distance, the Albanian hills, and their peaks and the grey ridge of the old aqueduct gleamed dimly in the beams of the rising moon. . . .

We suddenly darted upwards, and floated in the air before a deserted ruin. No one could have said what it had been: sepulchre, palace, or castle. . . . Dark ivy encircled it all over in its deadly clasp, and below gaped yawning a half-ruined vault. A heavy underground smell rose in my face from this heap of tiny closely-fitted stones, whence the granite facing of the wall had long crumbled away.

‘Here,’ Alice pronounced, and she raised her hand: ‘Here! call aloud three times running the name of the mighty Roman!’

‘What will happen?’

‘You will see.’

I wondered. ‘*Divus Caius Julius Caesar!*’ I cried suddenly; ‘*divus Caius Julius Caesar!*’ I repeated deliberately; ‘*Caesar!*’

XIII

The last echoes of my voice had hardly died away, when I heard . . .

It is difficult to say what I did hear. At first there reached me a confused din the ear could scarcely catch, the endlessly-repeated clamour of the blare of trumpets, and the clapping of hands. It seemed that somewhere, immensely far away, at some fathomless depth, a multitude innumerable was suddenly astir, and was rising up, rising up in agitation, calling to one another, faintly, as if muffled in sleep, the suffocating sleep of ages. Then the air began moving in dark currents over the ruin.

Shades began flitting before me, myriads of shades, millions of outlines, the rounded curves of helmets, the long straight lines of lances; the moonbeams were broken into momentary gleams of blue upon these helmets and lances, and all this army, this multitude, came closer and closer, and grew, in more and more rapid movement . . . An indescribable force, a force fit to set the whole world moving, could be felt in it; but not one figure stood out clearly. . . . And suddenly I fancied a sort of tremor ran all round, as if it were the rush and rolling apart of some huge waves. . . . ‘*Caesar; Caesar venit!*’ sounded voices, like the leaves of a forest when a storm has suddenly broken upon it . . . a muffled shout thundered through the multitude, and a pale stern head, in a wreath of laurel, with downcast eyelids, the head of the emperor, began slowly to rise out of the ruin.

There is no word in the tongue of man to express the horror which clutched at my heart. . . . I felt that were that head to raise its eyes, to part its lips, I must perish on the spot! 'Alice!' I moaned, 'I won't, I can't, I don't want Rome, coarse, terrible Rome. . . . Away, away from here'

'Coward!' she whispered, and away we flew. I just had time to hear behind me the iron voice of the legions, like a peal of thunder . . . then all was darkness.

XIV

'Look round,' Alice said to me, 'and don't fear.'

I obeyed—and, I remember, my first impression was so sweet that I could only sigh. A sort of smoky-grey, silvery-soft, half-light, half-mist, enveloped me on all sides. At first I made out nothing: I was dazzled by this azure brilliance; but little by little began to emerge the outlines of beautiful mountains and forests; a lake lay at my feet, with stars quivering in its depths, and the musical splash of waves. The fragrance of orange flowers met me with a rush, and with it—and also as it were with a rush—came floating the pure powerful notes of a woman's young voice. This fragrance, this music, fairly drew me downwards, and I began to sink . . . to sink down towards a magnificent marble palace, which stood, invitingly white, in the midst of a wood of cypress. The music flowed out from its wide open windows, the waves of the lake, flecked with the pollen of flowers, splashed upon its walls, and just opposite, all clothed in the dark green of orange flowers and laurels, enveloped in shining mist, and studded with statues, slender columns, and the porticoes of temples, a lofty round island rose out of the water. . . .

'Isola Bella!' said Alice. . . . 'Lago Maggiore. . . .'

I murmured only 'Ah!' and continued to drop. The woman's voice sounded louder and clearer in the palace; I was irresistibly drawn towards it. . . . I wanted to look at the face of the singer, who, in such music, gave voice to such a night. We stood still before the window.

In the centre of a room, furnished in the style of Pompeii, and more like an ancient temple than a modern drawing-room, surrounded by Greek statues, Etruscan vases, rare plants, and precious stuffs, lighted up by the soft radiance of two lamps enclosed in crystal globes, a young woman was sitting at the piano. Her head slightly bowed and her eyes half-closed, she sang an Italian melody; she sang and smiled, and at the same time her face wore an expression of gravity, almost of sternness a token of perfect rapture! She smiled . . . and Praxiteles' Faun, indolent, youthful as she, effeminate, and voluptuous, seemed to smile back at her from a corner, under the branches of an oleander, across the delicate smoke that curled upwards from a bronze censer on an antique tripod. The beautiful singer was alone. Spell-bound by the music, her beauty, the splendour and sweet fragrance of the night, moved to the heart by the picture of this youthful, serene, and untroubled happiness, I utterly forgot my companion, I forgot the strange way in which I had become a witness of this life, so remote, so completely apart from me, and I was on the point of tapping at the window, of speaking . . .

I was set trembling all over by a violent shock—just as though I had touched a galvanic battery. I looked round. . . . The face of Alice was—for all its transparency—dark and menacing; there was a dull glow of anger in her eyes, which were suddenly wide and round. . . .

'Away!' she murmured wrathfully, and again whirling and darkness and giddiness. . . . Only this time nor the shout of legions, but the voice of the singer, breaking on a high note, lingered in my ears.

We stopped. The high note, the same note was still ringing and did not cease to ring in my ears, though I was breathing quite a different air, a different scent . . . a breeze was blowing upon me,

fresh and invigorating, as though from a great river, and there was a smell of hay, smoke and hemp. The long-drawn-out note was followed by a second, and a third, but with an expression so unmistakable, a trill so familiar, so peculiarly our own, that I said to myself at once: 'That's a Russian singing a Russian song!' and at that very instant everything grew clear about me.

XV

We found ourselves on a flat riverside plain. To the left, newly-mown meadows, with rows of huge hayricks, stretched endlessly till they were lost in the distance; to the right extended the smooth surface of a vast mighty river, till it too was lost in the distance. Not far from the bank, big dark barges slowly rocked at anchor, slightly tilting their slender masts, like pointing fingers. From one of these barges came floating up to me the sounds of a liquid voice, and a fire was burning in it, throwing a long red light that danced and quivered on the water. Here and there, both on the river and in the fields, other lights were glimmering, whether close at hand or far away', the eye could not distinguish; they shrank together, then suddenly lengthened out into great blurs of light; grasshoppers innumerable kept up an unceasing churr, persistent as the frogs of the Pontine marshes; and across the cloudless, but dark lowering sky floated from time to time the cries of unseen birds.

'Are we in Russia?' I asked of Alice.

'It is the Volga,' she answered.

We flew along the river-bank. 'Why did you tear me away from there, from that lovely country?' I began. 'Were you envious, or was it jealousy in you?'

The lips of Alice faintly stirred, and again there was a menacing light in her eyes. . . . But her whole face grew stony again at once.

'I want to go home,' I said.

'Wait a little, wait a little,' answered Alice. 'To-night is a great night. It will not soon return. You may be a spectator. . . . Wait a little.'

And we suddenly flew across the Volga in a slanting direction, keeping close to the water's surface, with the low impetuous flight of swallows before a storm. The broad waves murmured heavily below us, the sharp river breeze beat upon us with its strong cold wing . . . the high right bank began soon to rise up before us in the half-darkness. Steep mountains appeared with great ravines between. We came near to them.

'Shout: "Lads, to the barges!"' Alice whispered to me. I remembered the terror I had suffered at the apparition of the Roman phantoms. I felt weary and strangely heavy, as though my heart were ebbing away within me. I wished not to utter the fatal words; I knew beforehand that in response to them there would appear, as in the wolves' valley of the Freischütz, some monstrous thing; but my lips parted against my will, and in a weak forced voice I shouted, also against my will: 'Lads, to the barges!'

XVI

At first all was silence, even as it was at the Roman ruins, but suddenly I heard close to my very ear a coarse bargeman's laugh, and with a moan something dropped into the water and a gurgling sound followed. . . . I looked round: no one was anywhere to be seen, but from the bank the echo came bounding back, and at once from all sides rose a deafening din. There was a medley of everything in this chaos of sound: shouting and whining, furious abuse and laughter, laughter

above everything; the splash of oars and the cleaving of hatchets, a crash as of the smashing of doors and chests, the grating of rigging and wheels, and the neighing of horses, and the clang of the alarm bell and the clink of chains, the roar and crackle of fire, drunken songs and quick, gnashing chatter, weeping inconsolable, plaintive despairing prayers, and shouts of command, the dying gasp and the reckless whistle, the guffaw and the thud of the dance . . . ‘Kill them! Hang them! Drown them! rip them up! bravo! bravo! don’t spare them!’ could be heard distinctly; I could even hear the hurried breathing of men panting. And meanwhile all around, as far as the eye could reach, nothing could be seen, nothing was changed; the river rolled by mysteriously, almost sullenly, the very bank seemed more deserted and desolate—and that was all.

I turned to Alice, but she put her finger to her lips. . . .

‘Stepan Timofeitch! Stepan Timofeitch is coming!’ was shouted noisily all round; ‘he is coming, our father, our ataman, our breadgiver!’ As before I saw nothing but it seemed to me as though a huge body were moving straight at me. . . ‘Frolka! where art thou, dog?’ thundered an awful voice. ‘Set fire to every corner at once—and to the hatchet with them, the white-handed scoundrels!’

I felt the hot breath of the flame close by, and tasted the bitter savour of the smoke; and at the same instant something warm like blood spurted over my face and hands. . . . A savage roar of laughter broke out all round.

I lost consciousness, and when I came to myself, Alice and I were gliding along beside the familiar bushes that bordered my wood, straight towards the old oak. . . .

‘Do you see the little path?’ Alice said to me, ‘where the moon shines dimly and where are two birch-trees overhanging? Will you go there?’

But I felt so shattered and exhausted that I could only say in reply:

‘Home! home!’

‘You are at home,’ replied Alice.

I was in fact standing at the very door of my house—alone. Alice had vanished. The yard-dog was about to approach, he scanned me suspiciously—and with a bark ran away.

With difficulty I dragged myself up to my bed and fell asleep without undressing.

XVII

All the following morning my head ached, and I could scarcely move my legs; but I cared little for my bodily discomfort; I was devoured by regret, overwhelmed with vexation.

I was excessively annoyed with myself. ‘Coward!’ I repeated incessantly; ‘yes—Alice was right. What was I frightened of? how could I miss such an opportunity? . . . I might have seen Cæsar himself—and I was senseless with terror, I whimpered and turned away, like a child at the sight of the rod. Razin, now—that’s another matter. As a nobleman and landowner . . . though, indeed, even then what had I really to fear? Coward! coward!’

‘But wasn’t it all a dream?’ I asked myself at last. I called my housekeeper.

‘Marfa, what o’clock did I go to bed yesterday—do you remember?’

‘Why, who can tell, master? . . . Late enough, surely. Before it was quite dark you went out of the house; and you were tramping about in your bedroom when the night was more than half over. Just on morning—yes. And this is the third day it’s been the same. You’ve something on you mind, it’s easy to see.’

‘Aha-ha!’ I thought. ‘Then there’s no doubt about the flying. Well, and how do I look to-day?’ I added aloud.

‘How do you look? Let me have a look at you. You’ve got thinner a bit. Yes, and you’re pale, master; to be sure, there’s not a drop of blood in your face.’

I felt a slight twinge of uneasiness . . . I dismissed Marfa.

‘Why, going on like this, you’ll die, or go out of your mind, perhaps,’ I reasoned with myself, as I sat deep in thought at the window. ‘I must give it all up. It’s dangerous. And now my heart beats so strangely. And when I fly, I keep feeling as though some one were sucking at it, or as it were drawing something out of it—as the spring sap is drawn out of the birch-tree, if you stick an axe into it. I’m sorry, though. And Alice too. . . . She is playing cat and mouse with me . . . still she can hardly wish me harm. I will give myself up to her for the last time—and then. . . . But if she is drinking my blood? That’s awful. Besides, such rapid locomotion cannot fail to be injurious; even in England, I’m told, on the railways, it’s against the law to go more than one hundred miles an hour. . . .’

So I reasoned with myself—but at ten o’clock in the evening, I was already at my post before the old oak-tree.

XVIII

The night was cold, dull, grey; there was a feeling of rain in the air. To my amazement, I found no one under the oak; I walked several times round it, went up to the edge of the wood, turned back again, peered anxiously into the darkness. . . . All was emptiness. I waited a little, then several times I tittered the name, Alice, each time a little louder, but she did not appear. I felt sad, almost sick at heart; my previous apprehensions vanished; I could not resign myself to the idea that my companion would not come back to me again.

‘Alice! Alice! come! Can it be you will not come?’ I shouted, for the last time.

A crow, who had been waked by my voice, suddenly darted upwards into a tree-top close by, and catching in the twigs, fluttered his wings.

But Alice did not appear.

With downcast head, I turned homewards. Already I could discern the black outlines of the willows on the pond’s edge, and the light in my window peeped out at me through the apple-trees in the orchard—peeped at me, and hid again, like the eye of some man keeping watch on me—when suddenly I heard behind me the faint swish of the rapidly parted air, and something at once embraced and snatched me upward, as a buzzard pounces on and snatches up a quail. . . . It was Alice sweeping down upon me. I felt her cheek against my cheek, her enfolding arm about my body, and like a cutting cold her whisper pierced to my ear, ‘Here I am.’ I was frightened and delighted both at once. . . . We flew at no great height above the ground.

‘You did not mean to come to-day?’ I said.

‘And you were dull without me? You love me? Oh, you are mine!’

The last words of Alice confused me. . . . I did not know what to say.

‘I was kept,’ she went on; ‘I was watched.’

‘Who could keep you?’

‘Where would you like to go?’ inquired Alice, as usual not answering my question.

‘Take me to Italy—to that lake, you remember.’

Alice turned a little away, and shook her head in refusal. At that point I noticed for the first time that she had ceased to be transparent. And her face seemed tinged with colour; there was a

faint glow of redd over its misty whiteness. I glanced at her eyes . . . and felt a pang of dread; in those eyes something was astir—with the slow, continuous, malignant movement of the benumbed snake, twisting and turning as the sun begins to thaw it.

‘Alice,’ I cried, ‘who are you? Tell me who you are.’

Alice simply shrugged her shoulders.

I felt angry . . . I longed to punish her; and suddenly the idea occurred to me to tell her to fly with me to Paris. ‘That’s the place for you to be jealous,’ I thought. ‘Alice,’ I said aloud, ‘you are not afraid of big towns—Paris, for instance?’

‘No.’

‘Not even those parts where it is as light as in the boulevards?’

‘It is not the light of day.’

‘Good; then take me at once to the Boulevard des Italiens.’

Alice wrapped the end of her long hanging sleeve about my head. I was at once enfolded in a sort of white vapour full of the drowsy fragrance of the poppy. Everything disappeared at once; every light, every sound, and almost consciousness itself. Only the sense of being alive remained, and that was not unpleasant.

Suddenly the vapour vanished; Alice took her sleeve from my head, and I saw at my feet a huge mass of closely-packed buildings, brilliant light, movement, noisy traffic. . . . I saw Paris.

XIX

I had been in Paris before, and so I recognised at once the place to which Alice had directed her course. It was the Garden of the Tuileries with its old chestnut-trees, its iron railings, its fortress moat, and its brutal-looking Zouave sentinels. Passing the palace, passing the Church of St. Roche, on the steps of which the first Napoleon for the first time shed French blood, we came to a halt high over the Boulevard des Italiens, where the third Napoleon did the same thing and with the same success. Crowds of people, dandies young and old, workmen in blouses, women in gaudy dresses, were thronging on the pavements; the gilded restaurants and cafés were flaring with lights; omnibuses, carriages of all sorts and shapes, moved to and fro along the boulevard; everything was bustle, everything was brightness, wherever one chanced to look. . . . But, strange to say, I had no inclination to forsake my pure dark airy height. I had no inclination to get nearer to this human ant-hill. It seemed as though a hot, heavy, reddish vapour rose from it, half-fragrance, half- stench; so many lives were flung struggling in one heap together there. I was hesitating. . . . But suddenly, sharp as the clang of iron bars, the voice of a harlot of the streets floated up to me; like an insolent tongue, it was thrust out, this voice; it stung me like the sting of a viper. At once I saw in imagination the strong, heavy-jawed, greedy, flat Parisian face, the mercenary eyes, the paint and powder, the frizzed hair, and the nosegay of gaudy artificial flowers under the high-pointed hat, the polished nails like talons, the hideous crinoline. . . . I could fancy too one of our sons of the steppes running with pitiful eagerness after the doll put up for sale. . . . I could fancy him with clumsy coarseness and violent stammering, trying to imitate the manners of the waiters at Véfour’s, mincing, flattering, wheedling . . . and a feeling of loathing gained possession of me. . . . ‘No,’ I thought, ‘here Alice has no need to be jealous. . . .’

Meanwhile I perceived that we had gradually begun to descend. . . . Paris was rising to meet us with all its din and odour.

‘Stop,’ I said to Alice. ‘Are you not stifled and oppressed here?’

‘You asked me to bring you here yourself.’

'I am to blame, I take back my word. Take me away, Alice, I beseech you. To be sure, here is Prince Kulmametov hobbling along the boulevard; and his friend, Serge Varaksin, waves his hand to him, shouting: "Ivan Stepanitch, *allons souper*", make haste, zhay angazha Rigol-bouche itself!" Take me away from these furnished apartments and *maisons dorées*, from the Jockey Club and the Figaro, from close-shaven military heads and varnished barracks, from sergents-de-ville with Napoleonic beards, and from glasses of muddy absinthe, from gamblers playing dominoes at the cafes, and gamblers on the Bourse, from red ribbons in button-holes, from M. de Four, inventor of "matrimonial specialities," and the gratuitous consultations of Dr. Charles Albert, from liberal lectures and government pamphlets, from Parisian comedies and Parisian operas, from Parisian wit and Parisian ignorance. . . . Away! away! away!'

'Look down,' Alice answered; 'you are not now in Paris.'

I lowered my eyes. . . . It was true. A dark plain, intersected here and there by the whitish lines of roads, was rushing rapidly by below us, and only behind us on the horizon, like the reflection of an immense conflagration, rose the great glow of the innumerable lights of the capital of the world.

XX

Again a veil fell over my eyes. . . . Again I lost consciousness. The veil was withdrawn at last. What was it down there below? What was this park, with avenues of lopped lime-trees, with isolated fir-trees of the shape of parasols, with porticoes and temples in the Pompadour style, with statues of satyrs and nymphs of the Bernini school, with rococo tritons in the midst of meandering lakes, closed in by low parapets of blackened marble? Wasn't it Versailles? No, it was not Versailles. A small palace, also rococo, peeped out behind a clump of bushy oaks. The moon shone dimly, shrouded in mist, and over the earth there was, as it were spread out, a delicate smoke. The eye could not decide what it was, whether moonlight or fog. On one of the lakes a swan was asleep; its long back was white as the snow of the frost-bound steppes, while glow-worms gleamed like diamonds in the bluish shadow at the base of a statue.

'We are near Mannheim,' said Alice; 'this is the Schwetzingen garden.'

'We are in Germany,' I thought, and I fell to listening. All was silence, except somewhere, secluded and unseen, the splash and babble of falling water. It seemed continually to repeat the same words: 'Aye, aye, aye, for aye, aye.' And all at once I fancied that in the very centre of one of the avenues, between clipped walls of green, a cavalier came tripping along in red-heeled boots, a gold-braided coat, with lace ruffs at his wrists, a light steel rapier at his thigh, smilingly offering his arm to a lady in a powdered wig and a gay chintz. . . . Strange, pale faces I tried to look into them. . . . But already everything had vanished, and as before there was nothing but the babbling water.

'Those are dreams wandering,' whispered Alice; 'yesterday there was much—oh, much—to see; to-day, even the dreams avoid man's eye. Forward! forward!'

We soared higher and flew farther on. So smooth and easy was our flight that it seemed that we moved not, but everything moved to meet us. Mountains came into view, dark, undulating, covered with forest; they rose up and swam towards us. . . . And now they were slipping by beneath us, with all their windings, hollows, and narrow glades, with gleams of light from rapid brooks among the slumbering trees at the bottom of the dales; and in front of us more mountains sprung up again and floated towards us. . . . We were in the heart of the Black Forest.

Mountains, still mountains . . . and forest, magnificent, ancient, stately forest. The night sky was clear; I could recognise some kinds of trees, especially the splendid firs, with their straight white trunks. Here and there on the edge of the forest, wild goats could be seen; graceful and alert, they stood on their slender legs and listened, turning their heads prettily and pricking up their great funnel-shaped ears. A ruined tower, sightless and gloomy, on the crest of a bare cliff, laid bare its crumbling turrets; above the old forgotten stones, a little golden star was shining peacefully. From a small almost black lake rose, like a mysterious wail, the plaintive croak of tiny frogs. I fancied other notes, long-drawn-out, languid like the strains of an Eolian harp. . . . Here we were in the home of legend! The same delicate moonlight mist, which had struck me in Schwetzingen, was shed here on every side, and the farther away the mountains, the thicker was this mist. I counted up five, six, ten different tones of shadow at different heights on the mountain slopes, and over all this realm of varied silence the moon queened it pensively. The air blew in soft, light currents. I felt myself a lightness at heart, and, as it were, a lofty calm and melancholy. . . .

‘Alice, you must love this country’

‘I love nothing.’

‘How so? Not me?’

‘Yes . . . you!’ she answered indifferently.

It seemed to me that her arm clasped my waist more tightly than before.

‘Forward! forward!’ said Alice, with a sort of cold fervour.

‘Forward!’ I repeated.

XXI

A loud, thrilling cry rang out suddenly over our heads, and was at once repeated a little in front.

‘Those are belated cranes flying to you, to the north,’ said Alice; ‘would you like to join them?’

‘Yes, yes! raise me up to them.’

We darted upwards and in one instant found ourselves beside the flying flock.

The big handsome birds (there were thirteen of them) were flying in a triangle, with slow sharp flaps of their hollow wings; with their heads and legs stretched rigidly out, and their breasts stiffly pressed forward, they pushed on persistently and so swiftly that the air whistled about them. It was marvellous at such a height, so remote from all things living, to see such passionate, strenuous life, such unflinching will, untiringly cleaving their triumphant way through space. The cranes now and then called to one another, the foremost to the hindmost; and there was a certain pride, dignity, and invincible faith in these loud cries, this converse in the clouds. ‘We shall get there, be sure, hard though it be,’ they seemed to say, cheering one another on. And then the thought came to me that men, such as these birds—in Russia—nay, in the whole world, are few.

‘We are flying towards Russia now, observed Alice. I noticed now, not for the first time, that she almost always knew what I was thinking of. ‘Would you like to go back?’

‘Let us go back . . . or no! I have been in Paris; take me to Petersburg.’

‘Now?’

‘At once. . . . Only wrap my head in your veil, or it will go ill with me.’

Alice raised her hand . . . but before the mist enfolded me, I had time to feel on my lips the contact of that soft, dull sting.

XXII

'Li-i-isten!' sounded in my ears a long drawn out cry. 'Li-i-isten!' was echoed back with a sort of desperation in the distance. 'Li-i-isten!' died away somewhere far, far away. I started. A tall golden spire flashed on my eyes; I recognised the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul.

A northern, pale night' But was it night at all? Was it not rather a pallid, sickly daylight? I never liked Petersburg nights; but this time the night seemed even fearful to me; the face of Alice had vanished completely, melted away like the mist of morning in the July sun, and I saw her whole body clearly, as it hung, heavy and solitary on a level with the Alexander column. So here was Petersburg! Yes, it was Petersburg, no doubt. The wide empty grey streets; the greyish-white, and yellowish-grey and greyish-lilac houses, covered with stucco, which was peeling off, with their sunken windows, gaudy sign-boards, iron canopies over steps, and wretched little green-grocer's shops; the façades, inscriptions, sentry-boxes, troughs; the golden cap of St. Isaac's; the senseless motley Bourse; the granite walls of the fortress, and the broken wooden pavement; the barges loaded with hay and timber; the smell of dust, cabbage, matting, and hemp; the stony-faced dvorniks in sheep-skin coats, with high collars; the cab-drivers, huddled up dead asleep on their decrepit cabs—yes, this was Petersburg, our northern Palmyra. Everything was visible; everything was clear—cruelly clear anti distinct—and everything was mournfully sleeping, standing out in strange huddled masses in the dull clear air. The flush of sunset—a hectic flush—had not yet gone, and would not be gone till morning from the white starless sky; it was reflected on the silken surface of the Neva, while faintly gurgling and faintly moving, the cold blue waves hurried on.

'Let us fly away,' Alice implored.

And without waiting for my reply, she bore me away across the Neva, over the palace square to Liteiny Street. Steps and voices were audible beneath us; a group of young men, with worn faces, came along the street talking about dancing-classes. 'Sub—lieutenant Stolpakov's seventh!' shouted suddenly a soldier, standing half-asleep on guard at a pyramid of rusty bullets; and a little farther on, at an open window in a tall house, I saw a girl in a creased silk dress, without cuffs, with a pearl net on her hair, and a cigarette in her mouth. She was reading a book with reverent attention; it was a volume of the works of one of our modern Juvenals.

'Let us fly away!' I said to Alice.

One instant more, and there were glimpses below us of the rotting pine copses and mossy bogs surrounding Petersburg. We bent our course straight to the south; sky, earth, all grew gradually darker and darker. The sick night; the sick daylight; the sick town—all were left behind us.

XXIII

We flew more slowly than usual, and I was able to follow with my eyes the immense expanse of my native land gradually unfolding before me, like the unrolling of an endless panorama. Forests, copses, fields, ravines, rivers—here and there villages and churches—and again fields and forests and copses and ravines. . . . Sadness came over me, and a kind of indifferent dreariness. And I was not sad and dreary simply because it was Russia I was flying over. No. The earth itself, this flat surface which lay spread out beneath me; the whole earthly globe, with its populations, multitudinous, feeble, crushed by want, grief and diseases, bound to a clod of pitiful dust; this brittle, rough crust, this shell over the fiery sands of our planet, overspread with

the mildew we call the organic, vegetable kingdom; these human flies, a thousand times paltrier than flies; their dwellings glued together with filth, the pitiful traces of their tiny, monotonous bustle, of their comic struggle with the unchanging and inevitable, how revolting it all suddenly was to me. My heart turned slowly sick, and I could not bear to gaze longer on these trivial pictures, on this vulgar show. . . . Yes, I felt dreary, worse than dreary. Even pity I felt nothing of for my brother men: all feelings in me were merged in one which I scarcely dare to name: a feeling of loathing, and stronger than all and more than all within me was the loathing—for myself.

‘Cease,’ whispered Alice, ‘cease, or I cannot carry you. You have grown heavy.’

‘Home,’ I answered her in the very tone in which I used to say the word to my coachman, when I came out at four o’clock at night from some Moscow friends, where I had been talking since dinner-time of the future of Russia and the significance of the commune. ‘Home,’ I repeated, and closed my eyes.

XXIV

But I soon opened them again. Alice seemed huddling strangely up to me; she was almost pushing against me. I looked at her and my blood froze at the sight. One who has chanced to behold on the face of another a sudden look of intense terror, the cause of which he does not suspect, will understand me. By terror, overmastering terror, the pale features of Alice were drawn and contorted, almost effaced. I had never seen anything like it even on a living human face. A lifeless, misty phantom, a shade, . . . and this deadly horror. . . .

‘Alice, what is it?’ I said at last.

‘She . . . she . . .’ she answered with an effort. ‘She.’

‘She? Who is she?’

‘Do not utter her name, not her name,’ Alice faltered hurriedly. ‘We must escape, or there will be an end to everything, and forever. . . . Look, over there!’

I turned my head in the direction in which her trembling hand was pointing, and discerned something . . . something horrible indeed.

This something was the more horrible that it had no definite shape. Something bulky, dark, yellowish-black, spotted like a lizard’s belly, not a storm-cloud, and not smoke, was crawling with a snake-like motion over the earth. A wide rhythmic undulating movement from above downwards, and from below upwards, an undulation recalling the malignant sweep of the wings of a vulture seeking its prey; at times an indescribably revolting grovelling on the earth, as of a spider stooping over its captured fly. . . . Who are you, what are you, menacing mass? Under her influence, I saw it, I felt it—all sank into nothingness, all was dumb. . . . A putrefying, pestilential chill came from it. At this chill breath the heart turned sick, and the eyes grew dim, and the hair stood up on the head. It was a power moving; that power which there is no resisting, to which all is subject, which, sightless, shapeless, senseless, sees all, knows all, and like a bird of prey picks out its victims, like a snake, stifles them and stabs them with its frozen sting. .

‘Alice! Alice!’ I shrieked like one in frenzy. ‘It is death! death itself!’

The wailing sound I had heard before broke from Alice’s lips; this time it was more like a human wail of despair, and we flew. But our flight was strangely and alarmingly unsteady; Alice turned over in the air, fell, rushed from side to side like a partridge mortally wounded, or trying to attract a dog away from her young. And meanwhile in pursuit of us, parting from the indescribable mass of horror, rushed sort of long undulating tentacles, like outstretched arms,

like talons. . . Suddenly a huge shape, a muffled figure on a pale horse, sprang up and flew upwards into the very heavens. . . . Still more fearfully, still more desperately Alice struggled. ‘She has seen! All is over! I am lost!’ I heard her broken whisper. ‘Oh, I am miserable! I might have profited, have won life, . . . and now. . . Nothingness, nothingness!’ It was too unbearable. . . . I lost consciousness.

XXV

‘When I came to myself, I was lying on my back in the grass, feeling a dull ache all over me, as from a bad bruise. The dawn was beginning in the sky: I could clearly distinguish things. Not far off, alongside a birch copse, ran a road planted with willows: the country seemed familiar to me. I began to recollect what had happened to me, and shuddered all over directly my mind recalled the last, hideous apparition. . . .

‘But what was Alice afraid of?’ I thought. ‘Can she too be subject to that power? Is she not immortal? Can she too be in danger of annihilation, dissolution? How is it possible?’

A soft moan sounded close by me. I turned my head. Two paces from me lay stretched out motionless a young woman in a white gown, with thick disordered tresses, with bare shoulders. One arm was thrown behind her head, the other had fallen on her bosom. Her eyes were closed, and on her tightly shut lips stood a fleck of crimson stain. Could it be Alice? But Alice was a phantom, and I was looking upon a living woman. I crept up to her, bent down. . . .

‘Alice, is it you?’ I cried. Suddenly, slowly quivering, the wide eyelids rose; dark piercing eyes were fastened upon me, and at the same instant lips too fastened upon me, warm, moist, smelling of blood . . . soft arms twined tightly round my neck, a burning, full heart pressed convulsively to mine. ‘Farewell, farewell for ever!’ the dying voice uttered distinctly, and everything vanished.

I got up, staggering like a drunken man, and passing my hands several times over my face, looked carefully about me. I found myself near the high road, a mile and a half from my own place. The sun had just risen when I got home.

All the following nights I awaited—and I confess not without alarm—the appearance of my phantom; but it did not visit me again. I even set off one day, in the dusk, to the old oak, but nothing took place there out of the common. I did not, however, overmuch regret the discontinuance of this strange acquaintance. I reflected much and long over this inexplicable, almost unintelligible phenomenon; and I am convinced that not only science cannot explain it, but that even in fairy tales and legends nothing like it is to be met with. What was Alice, after all? An apparition, a restless soul, an evil spirit, a sylphide, a vampire, or what? Sometimes it struck me again that Alice was a woman I had known at some time or other, and I made tremendous efforts to recall where I had seen her. . . . Yes, yes, I thought sometimes, directly, this minute, I shall remember. . . . In a flash everything had melted away again like a dream. Yes, I thought a great deal, and, as is always the way, came to no conclusion. The advice or opinion of others I could not bring myself to invite; fearing to be taken for a madman. I gave up all reflection upon it at last; to tell the truth, I had no time for it. For one thing, the emancipation had come along with the redistribution of property, etc.; and for another, my own health failed; I suffered with my chest, with sleeplessness, and a cough. I got thin all over. My face was yellow as a dead man’s. The doctor declares I have too little blood, calls my illness by the Greek name, ‘anæmia,’ and is sending me to Gastein. The arbitrator swears that without me there’s no coming to an understanding with the peasants. Well, what’s one to do?

But what is the meaning of the piercingly-pure, shrill notes, the notes of an harmonica, which I hear directly any one's death is spoken of before me? They keep growing louder, more penetrating. . . . And why do I shudder in such anguish at the mere thought of annihilation?