

BLAVATSKY

HELENA

PETROVNA

NIGHTMARE TALES

Елена Блаватская

Nightmare Tales

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Nightmare Tales

A BEWITCHED LIFE (As Narrated by a Quill Pen)

Introduction

It was a dark, chilly night in September, 1884. A heavy gloom had descended over the streets of A – , a small town on the Rhine, and was hanging like a black funeral-pall over the dull factory burgh. The greater number of its inhabitants, wearied by their long day's work, had hours before retired to stretch their tired limbs, and lay their aching heads upon their pillows. All was quiet in the large house; all was quiet in the deserted streets.

I too was lying in my bed; alas, not one of rest, but of pain and sickness, to which I had been confined for some days. So still was everything in the house, that, as Longfellow has it, its stillness seemed almost audible. I could plainly hear the murmur of the blood, as it rushed through my aching body, producing that monotonous singing so familiar to one who lends a watchful ear to silence. I had listened to it until, in my nervous imagination, it had grown into the sound of a distant cataract, the fall of mighty waters ... when, suddenly changing its character, the ever growing "singing" merged into other and far more welcome sounds. It was the low, and at first scarce audible, whisper of a human voice. It approached, and gradually strengthening seemed to speak in my very ear. Thus sounds a voice speaking across a blue quiescent lake, in one of those wondrously acoustic gorges of the snow-capped mountains, where the air is so pure that a word pronounced half a mile off seems almost at the elbow. Yes; it was the voice of one whom to know is to reverence; of one, to me, owing to many mystic associations, most dear and holy; a voice familiar for long years and ever welcome: doubly so in hours of mental or physical suffering, for it always brings with it a ray of hope and consolation.

"Courage," it whispered in gentle, mellow tones. "Think of the days passed by you in sweet associations; of the great lessons received of Nature's truths; of the many errors of men concerning these truths; and try to add to them the experience of a night in this city. Let the narrative of a strange life, that will interest you, help to shorten the hours of suffering... Give your attention. Look yonder before you!"

"Yonder" meant the clear, large windows of an empty house on the other side of the narrow street of the German town. They faced my own in almost a straight line across the street, and my bed faced the windows of my sleeping room. Obedient to the suggestion, I directed my gaze towards them, and what I saw made me for the time being forget the agony of the pain that racked my swollen arm and rheumatical body.

Over the windows was creeping a mist; a dense, heavy, serpentine, whitish mist, that looked like the huge shadow of a gigantic boa slowly uncoiling its body. Gradually it disappeared, to leave a lustrous light, soft and silvery, as though the window-panes behind reflected a thousand moonbeams, a tropical star-lit sky – first from outside, then from within the empty rooms. Next I saw the mist elongating itself and throwing, as it were, a fairy bridge across the street from the bewitched windows to my own balcony, nay to my very own bed. As I continued gazing, the wall and windows and the opposite house itself, suddenly vanished. The space occupied by the empty rooms had changed into the interior of another smaller room, in what I knew to be a Swiss ch  let – into a study, whose old, dark walls were covered from floor to ceiling with book shelves on which were many antiquated

folios, as well as works of a more recent date. In the center stood a large old-fashioned table, littered over with manuscripts and writing materials. Before it, quill-pen in hand, sat an old man; a grim-looking, skeleton-like personage, with a face so thin, so pale, yellow and emaciated, that the light of the solitary little student's lamp was reflected in two shining spots on his high cheek-bones, as though they were carved out of ivory.

As I tried to get a better view of him by slowly raising myself upon my pillows, the whole vision, *châlet* and study, desk, books and scribe, seemed to flicker and move. Once set in motion they approached nearer and nearer, until, gliding noiselessly along the fleecy bridge of clouds across the street, they floated through the closed windows into my room and finally seemed to settle beside my bed.

"Listen to what he thinks and is going to write" – said in soothing tones the same familiar, far off, and yet near voice. "Thus you will hear a narrative, the telling of which may help to shorten the long sleepless hours, and even make you forget for a while your pain... Try!" – it added, using the well-known Rosicrucian and Kabbalistic formula.

I tried, doing as I was bid. I centered all my attention on the solitary laborious figure that I saw before me, but which did not see me. At first, the noise of the quill-pen with which the old man was writing, suggested to my mind nothing more than a low whispered murmur of a nondescript nature. Then, gradually, my ear caught the indistinct words of a faint and distant voice, and I thought the figure before me, bending over its manuscript, was reading its tale aloud instead of writing it. But I soon found out my error. For casting my gaze at the old scribe's face, I saw at a glance that his lips were compressed and motionless, and the voice too thin and shrill to be his voice. Stranger still, at every word traced by the feeble, aged hand, I noticed a light flashing from under his pen, a bright colored spark that became instantaneously a sound, or – what is the same thing – it seemed to do so to my inner perceptions. It was indeed the small voice of the quill that I heard, though scribe and pen were at the time, perchance, hundreds of miles away from Germany. Such things will happen occasionally, especially at night, beneath whose starry shade, as Byron tells us, we

... learn the language of another world ...

However it may be, the words uttered by the quill remained in my memory for days after. Nor had I any great difficulty in retaining them, for when I sat down to record the story, I found it, as usual, indelibly impressed on the astral tablets before my inner eye.

Thus, I had but to copy it and so give it as I received it. I failed to learn the name of the unknown nocturnal writer. Nevertheless, though the reader may prefer to regard the whole story as one made up for the occasion, a dream, perhaps, still its incidents will, I hope, prove none the less interesting.

I The Stranger's Story

My birth-place is a small mountain hamlet, a cluster of Swiss cottages, hidden deep in a sunny nook, between two tumble-down glaciers and a peak covered with eternal snows. Thither, thirty-seven years ago, I returned – crippled mentally and physically – to die, if death would only have me. The pure invigorating air of my birth-place decided otherwise. I am still alive; perhaps for the purpose of giving evidence to facts I have kept profoundly secret from all – a tale of horror I would rather hide than reveal. The reason for this unwillingness on my part is due to my early education, and to subsequent events that gave the lie to my most cherished prejudices. Some people might be inclined to regard these events as providential: I, however, believe in no Providence, and yet am unable to attribute them to mere chance. I connect them as the ceaseless evolution of effects, engendered by certain direct causes, with one primary and fundamental cause, from which ensued all that followed. A feeble old man am I now, yet physical weakness has in no way impaired my mental faculties. I remember the smallest details of that terrible cause, which engendered such fatal results. It is these which furnish me with an additional proof of the actual existence of one whom I fain would regard – oh, that I could do so! – as a creature born of my fancy, the evanescent production of a feverish, horrid dream! Oh that terrible, mild and all-forgiving, that saintly and respected Being! It was that paragon of all the virtues who embittered my whole existence. It is he, who, pushing me violently out of the monotonous but secure groove of daily life, was the first to force upon me the certitude of a life hereafter, thus adding an additional horror to one already great enough.

With a view to a clearer comprehension of the situation, I must interrupt these recollections with a few words about myself. Oh how, if I could, would I obliterate that hated *Self*!

Born in Switzerland, of French parents, who centered the whole world-wisdom in the literary trinity of Voltaire, J. J. Rousseau and D'Holbach, and educated in a German university, I grew up a thorough materialist, a confirmed atheist. I could never have even pictured to myself any beings – least of all a Being – above or even outside visible nature, as distinguished from her. Hence I regarded everything that could not be brought under the strictest analysis of the physical senses as a mere chimera. A soul, I argued, even supposing man has one, must be material. According to Origen's definition, *incorporeus*¹ – the epithet he gave to his God – signifies a substance only more subtle than that of physical bodies, of which, at best, we can form no definite idea. How then can that, of which our senses cannot enable us to obtain any clear knowledge, how can that make itself visible or produce any tangible manifestations?

Accordingly, I received the tales of nascent Spiritualism with a feeling of utter contempt, and regarded the overtures made by certain priests with derision, often akin to anger. And indeed the latter feeling has never entirely abandoned me.

Pascal, in the eighth Act of his "Thoughts," confesses to a most complete incertitude upon the existence of God. Throughout my life, I too professed a complete certitude as to the non-existence of any such extra-cosmic being, and repeated with that great thinker the memorable words in which he tells us: "I have examined if this God of whom all the world speaks might not have left some marks of himself. I look everywhere, and everywhere I see nothing but obscurity. Nature offers me nothing that may not be a matter of doubt and inquietude." Nor have I found to this day anything that might unsettle me in precisely similar and even stronger feelings. I have never believed, nor shall I ever believe, in a Supreme Being. But at the potentialities of man, proclaimed far and wide in the East, powers so developed in some persons as to make them virtually Gods, at them I laugh no more.

¹ ἀσώματος.

My whole broken life is a protest against such negation. I believe in such phenomena, and – I curse them, whenever they come, and by whatsoever means generated.

On the death of my parents, owing to an unfortunate lawsuit, I lost the greater part of my fortune, and resolved – for the sake of those I loved best, rather than for my own – to make another for myself. My elder sister, whom I adored, had married a poor man. I accepted the offer of a rich Hamburg firm and sailed for Japan as its junior partner.

For several years my business went on successfully. I got into the confidence of many influential Japanese, through whose protection I was enabled to travel and transact business in many localities, which, in those days especially, were not easily accessible to foreigners. Indifferent to every religion, I became interested in the philosophy of Buddhism, the only religious system I thought worthy of being called philosophical. Thus, in my moments of leisure, I visited the most remarkable temples of Japan, the most important and curious of the ninety-six Buddhist monasteries of Kioto. I have examined in turn Day-Bootzoo, with its gigantic bell; Tzeonene, Enarino-Yassero, Kie-Missoo, Higadzi-Hong-Vonsi, and many other famous temples.

Several years passed away, and during that whole period I was not cured of my scepticism, nor did I ever contemplate having my opinions on this subject altered. I derided the pretensions of the Japanese bonzes and ascetics, as I had those of Christian priests and European Spiritualists. I could not believe in the acquisition of powers unknown to, and never studied by, men of science; hence I scoffed at all such ideas. The superstitious and atrabilious Buddhist, teaching us to shun the pleasures of life, to put to rout one's passions, to render oneself insensible alike to happiness and suffering, in order to acquire such chimerical powers – seemed supremely ridiculous in my eyes.

On a day for ever memorable to me – a fatal day – I made the acquaintance of a venerable and learned Bonze, a Japanese priest, named Tamoora Hideyeri. I met him at the foot of the golden Kwon-On, and from that moment he became my best and most trusted friend. Notwithstanding my great and genuine regard for him, however, whenever a good opportunity was offered I never failed to mock his religious convictions, thereby very often hurting his feelings.

But my old friend was as meek and forgiving as any true Buddhist's heart might desire. He never resented my impatient sarcasms, even when they were, to say the least, of equivocal propriety, and generally limited his replies to the “wait and see” kind of protest. Nor could he be brought to seriously believe in the sincerity of my denial of the existence of any God or Gods. The full meaning of the terms “atheism” and “scepticism” was beyond the comprehension of his otherwise extremely intellectual and acute mind. Like certain reverential Christians, he seemed incapable of realizing that any man of sense should prefer the wise conclusions arrived at by philosophy and modern science to a ridiculous belief in an invisible world full of Gods and spirits, dzins and demons. “Man is a spiritual being,” he insisted, “who returns to earth more than once, and is rewarded or punished in the between times.” The proposition that man is nothing else but a heap of organized dust, was beyond him. Like Jeremy Collier, he refused to admit that he was no better than “a stalking machine, a speaking head without a soul in it,” whose “thoughts are all bound by the laws of motion.” “For,” he argued, “if my actions were, as you say, prescribed beforehand, and I had no more liberty or free will to change the course of my action than the running waters of the river yonder, then the glorious doctrine of Karma, of merit and demerit, would be foolishness indeed.”

Thus the whole of my hyper-metaphysical friend's ontology rested on the shaky superstructure of metempsychosis, of a fancied “just” Law of Retribution, and other such equally absurd dreams.

“We cannot,” said he paradoxically one day, “hope to live hereafter in the full enjoyment of our consciousness, unless we have built for it beforehand a firm and solid foundation of spirituality... Nay, laugh not, friend of no faith,” he meekly pleaded, “but rather think and reflect on this. One who has never taught himself to live in Spirit during his conscious and responsible life on earth, can hardly hope to enjoy a sentient existence after death, when, deprived of his body, he is limited to that Spirit alone.”

“What can you mean by life in Spirit?” – I inquired.

“Life on a spiritual plane; that which the Buddhists call *Tushita Devaloka* (Paradise). Man can create such a blissful existence for himself between two births, by the gradual transference on to that plane of all the faculties which during his sojourn on earth manifest through his organic body and, as you call it, animal brain.”...

“How absurd! And how can man do this?”

“Contemplation and a strong desire to assimilate the blessed Gods, will enable him to do so.”

“And if man refuses this intellectual occupation, by which you mean, I suppose, the fixing of the eyes on the tip of his nose, what becomes of him after the death of his body?” was my mocking question.

“He will be dealt with according to the prevailing state of his consciousness, of which there are many grades. At best – immediate rebirth; at worst – the state of *avitchi*, a mental hell. Yet one need not be an ascetic to assimilate spiritual life which will extend to the hereafter. All that is required is to try to approach Spirit.”

“How so? Even when disbelieving in it?” – I rejoined.

“Even so! One may disbelieve and yet harbor in one’s nature room for doubt, however small that room may be, and thus try one day, were it but for one moment, to open the door of the inner temple; and this will prove sufficient for the purpose.”

“You are decidedly poetical, and paradoxical to boot, reverend sir. Will you kindly explain to me a little more of the mystery?”

“There is none; still I am willing. Suppose for a moment that some unknown temple to which you have never been before, and the existence of which you think you have reasons to deny, is the ‘spiritual plane’ of which I am speaking. Some one takes you by the hand and leads you towards its entrance, curiosity makes you open its door and look within. By this simple act, by entering it for one second, you have established an everlasting connexion between your consciousness and the temple. You cannot deny its existence any longer, nor obliterate the fact of your having entered it. And according to the character and the variety of your work, within its holy precincts, so will you live in it after your consciousness is severed from its dwelling of flesh.”

“What do you mean? And what has my after-death consciousness – if such a thing exists – to do with the temple?”

“It has everything to do with it,” solemnly rejoined the old man. “There can be no self-consciousness after death outside the temple of spirit. That which you will have done within its plane will alone survive. All the rest is false and an illusion. It is doomed to perish in the Ocean of *Mâyâ*.”

Amused at the idea of living outside one’s body, I urged on my old friend to tell me more. Mistaking my meaning, the venerable man willingly consented.

Tamoora Hideyeri belonged to the great temple of Tzi-Onene, a Buddhist monastery, famous not only in all Japan, but also throughout Tibet and China. No other is so venerated in Kioto. Its monks belong to the sect of Dzeno-doo, and are considered as the most learned among the many erudite fraternities. They are, moreover, closely connected and allied with the Yamabooshi (the ascetics, or hermits), who follow the doctrines of Lao-tze. No wonder, that at the slightest provocation on my part the priest flew into the highest metaphysics, hoping thereby to cure me of my infidelity.

No use repeating here the long rigmarole of the most hopelessly involved and incomprehensible of all doctrines. According to his ideas, we have to train ourselves for spirituality in another world – as for gymnastics. Carrying on the analogy between the temple and the “spiritual plane” he tried to illustrate his idea. He had himself worked in the temple of Spirit two-thirds of his life, and given several hours daily to “contemplation.” Thus *he knew* (!) that after he had laid aside his mortal casket, “a mere illusion,” he explained – he would in his spiritual consciousness live over again every feeling of ennobling joy and divine bliss he had ever had, or *ought to have had* – only a hundred-fold

intensified. His work on the spirit-plane had been considerable, he said, and he hoped, therefore, that the wages of the laborer would prove proportionate.

“But suppose the laborer, as in the example you have just brought forward in my case, should have no more than opened the temple door out of mere curiosity; had only peeped into the sanctuary never to set his foot therein again. What then?”

“Then,” he answered, “you would have only this short minute to record in your future self-consciousness and no more. Our life hereafter records and repeats but the impressions and feelings we have had in our spiritual experiences and nothing else. Thus, if instead of reverence at the moment of entering the abode of Spirit, you had been harboring in your heart anger, jealousy or grief, then your future spiritual life would be a sad one, in truth. There would be nothing to record, save the opening of a door in a fit of bad temper.”

“How then could it be repeated?” – I insisted, highly amused. “What do you suppose I would be doing before incarnating again?”

“In that case,” he said, speaking slowly and weighing every word – “in that case, *you would have, I fear, only to open and shut the temple door, over and over again, during a period which, however short, would seem to you an eternity.*”

This kind of after-death occupation appeared to me, at that time, so grotesque in its sublime absurdity, that I was seized with an almost inextinguishable fit of laughter.

My venerable friend looked considerably dismayed at such a result of his metaphysical instruction. He had evidently not expected such hilarity. However, he said nothing, but only sighed and gazed at me with increased benevolence and pity shining in his small black eyes.

“Pray excuse my laughter,” I apologized. “But really, now, you cannot seriously mean to tell me that the ‘spiritual state’ you advocate and so firmly believe in, consists only in aping certain things we do in life?”

“Nay, nay; not aping, but only intensifying their repetition; filling the gaps that were unjustly left unfilled during life in the fruition of our acts and deeds, and of everything performed on the spiritual plane of the one real state. What I said was an illustration, and no doubt for you, who seem entirely ignorant of the mysteries of *Soul-Vision*, not a very intelligible one. It is myself who am to be blamed... What I sought to impress upon you was that, as the spiritual state of our consciousness liberated from its body is but the fruition of every spiritual act performed during life, where an act had been barren, there could be no results expected – save the repetition of that act itself. This is all. I pray you may be spared such fruitless deeds and finally made to see certain truths.” And passing through the usual Japanese courtesies of taking leave, the excellent man departed.

Alas, alas! had I but known at the time what I have learned since, how little would I have laughed, and how much more would I have learned!

But as the matter stood, the more personal affection and respect I felt for him, the less could I become reconciled to his wild ideas about an after-life, and especially as to the acquisition by some men of supernatural powers. I felt particularly disgusted with his reverence for the Yamabooshi, the allies of every Buddhist sect in the land. Their claims to the “miraculous” were simply odious to my notions. To hear every Jap I knew at Kioto, even to my own partner, the shrewdest of all the business men I had come across in the East – mentioning these followers of Lao-tze with downcast eyes, reverentially folded hands, and affirmations of their possessing “great” and “wonderful” gifts, was more than I was prepared to patiently tolerate in those days. And who were they, after all, these great magicians with their ridiculous pretensions to super-mundane knowledge; these “holy beggars” who, as I then thought, purposely dwell in the recesses of unfrequented mountains and on unapproachable craggy steeps, so as the better to afford no chance to curious intruders of finding them out and watching them in their own dens? Simply impudent fortune-tellers, Japanese gypsies who sell charms and talismans, and no better. In answer to those who sought to assure me that though the Yamabooshi lead a mysterious life, admitting none of the profane to their secrets, they still do accept pupils,

however difficult it is for one to become their disciple, and that thus they have living witnesses to the great purity and sanctity of their lives, in answer to such affirmations I opposed the strongest negation and stood firmly by it. I insulted both masters and pupils, classing them under the same category of fools, when not knaves, and I went so far as to include in this number the Sintos. Now Sintoism or *Sin-Syu*, “faith in the Gods, and in the way to the Gods,” that is, belief in the communication between these creatures and men, is a kind of worship of nature-spirits, than which nothing can be more miserably absurd. And by placing the Sintos among the fools and knaves of other sects, I gained many enemies. For the Sinto Kanusi (spiritual teachers) are looked upon as the highest in the upper classes of Society, the Mikado himself being at the head of their hierarchy and the members of the sect belonging to the most cultured and educated men in Japan. These Kanusi of the Sinto form no caste or class apart, nor do they pass any ordination – at any rate none known to outsiders. And as they claim publicly no special privilege or powers, even their dress being in no wise different from that of the laity, but are simply in the world’s opinion professors and students of occult and spiritual sciences, I very often came in contact with them without in the least suspecting that I was in the presence of such personages.

II The Mysterious Visitor

Years passed; and as time went by, my ineradicable scepticism grew stronger and waxed fiercer every day. I have already mentioned an elder and much-beloved sister, my only surviving relative. She had married and had lately gone to live at Nuremberg. I regarded her with feelings more filial than fraternal, and her children were as dear to me as might have been my own. At the time of the great catastrophe that in the course of a few days had made my father lose his large fortune, and my mother break her heart, she it was, that sweet big sister of mine, who had made herself of her own accord the guardian angel of our ruined family. Out of her great love for me, her younger brother, for whom she attempted to replace the professors that could no longer be afforded, she had renounced her own happiness. She sacrificed herself and the man she loved, by indefinitely postponing their marriage, in order to help our father and chiefly myself by her undivided devotion. And, oh, how I loved and revered her, time but strengthening this earliest family affection! They who maintain that no atheist, as such, can be a true friend, an affectionate relative, or a loyal subject, utter – whether consciously or unconsciously – the greatest calumny and lie. To say that a materialist grows hard-hearted as he grows older, that he cannot love as a believer does, is simply the greatest fallacy.

There may be such exceptional cases it is true, but these are found only occasionally in men who are even more selfish than they are sceptical, or vulgarly worldly. But when a man who is kindly disposed in his nature, for no selfish motives but because of reason and love of truth, becomes what is called atheistical, he is only strengthened in his family affections, and in his sympathies with his fellow men. All his emotions, all the ardent aspirations towards the unseen and unreachable, all the love which he would otherwise have uselessly bestowed on a suppositional heaven and its God, become now centered with tenfold force upon his loved ones and mankind. Indeed, the atheist's heart alone —

... can know,
What secret tides of still enjoyment flow
When brothers love...

It was such holy fraternal love that led me also to sacrifice my comfort and personal welfare to secure her happiness, the felicity of her who had been more than a mother to me. I was a mere youth when I left home for Hamburg. There, working with all the desperate earnestness of a man who has but one noble object in view – to relieve suffering, and help those whom he loves – I very soon secured the confidence of my employers, who raised me in consequence to the high post of trust I always enjoyed. My first real pleasure and reward in life was to see my sister married to the man she had sacrificed for my sake, and to help them in their struggle for existence. So purifying and unselfish was this affection of mine for her that when it came to be shared among her children, instead of losing in intensity by such division, it seemed only to grow the stronger. Born with the potentiality of the warmest family affection in me, the devotion for my sister was so great, that the thought of burning that sacred fire of love before any idol, save that of herself and family, never entered my head. This was the only church I recognized, the only church wherein I worshipped at the altar of holy family affection. In fact this large family of eleven persons, including her husband, was the only tie that attached me to Europe. Twice during a period of nine years, had I crossed the ocean with the sole object of seeing and pressing these dear ones to my heart. I had no other business in the West; and having performed this pleasant duty, I returned each time to Japan to work and toil for them. For their sake I remained a bachelor, that the wealth I might acquire should go undivided to them alone.

We had always corresponded as regularly as the long transit of the then very irregular service of the mail-boats would permit. But suddenly there came a break in my letters from home. For nearly

a year I received no intelligence; and day by day, I became more restless, more apprehensive of some great misfortune. Vainly I looked for a letter, a simple message; and my efforts to account for so unusual a silence were fruitless.

“Friend,” said to me one day Tamoora Hideyeri, my only confidant, “Friend, consult a holy Yamabooshi and you will feel at rest.”

Of course the offer was rejected with as much moderation as I could command under the provocation. But, as steamer after steamer came in without a word of news, I felt a despair which daily increased in depth and fixity. This finally degenerated into an irrepressible craving, a morbid desire to learn – the worst as I then thought. I struggled hard with the feeling, but it had the best of me. Only a few months before a complete master of myself – I now became an abject slave to fear. A fatalist of the school of D’Holbach, I, who had always regarded belief in the system of necessity as being the only promoter of philosophical happiness, and as having the most advantageous influence over human weaknesses, I felt a craving for something akin to fortune-telling! I had gone so far as to forget the first principle of my doctrine – the only one calculated to calm our sorrows, to inspire us with a useful submission, namely a rational resignation to the decrees of blind destiny, with which foolish sensibility causes us so often to be overwhelmed – the doctrine that *all is necessary*. Yes; forgetting this, I was drawn into a shameful, superstitious longing, a stupid, disgraceful desire to learn – if not futurity, at any rate that which was taking place at the other side of the globe. My conduct seemed utterly modified, my temperament and aspirations wholly changed; and like a weak, nervous girl, I caught myself straining my mind to the very verge of lunacy in an attempt to look – as I had been told one could sometimes do – beyond the oceans, and learn, at last, the real cause of this long, inexplicable silence!

One evening, at sunset, my old friend, the venerable Bonze, Tamoora, appeared on the verandah of my low wooden house. I had not visited him for many days, and he had come to know how I was. I took the opportunity to once more sneer at one, whom, in reality, I regarded with most affectionate respect. With equivocal taste – for which I repented almost before the words had been pronounced – I inquired of him why he had taken the trouble to walk all that distance when he might have learned anything he liked about me by simply interrogating a Yamabooshi? He seemed a little hurt, at first; but after keenly scrutinizing my dejected face, he mildly remarked that he could only insist upon what he had advised before. Only one of that holy order could give me consolation in my present state.

From that instant, an insane desire possessed me to challenge him to prove his assertions. I defied – I said to him – any and every one of his alleged magicians to tell me the name of the person I was thinking of, and what he was doing at that moment. He quietly answered that my desire could be easily satisfied. There was a Yamabooshi two doors from me, visiting a sick Sinto. He would fetch him – if I only said the word.

I said it and *from the moment of its utterance my doom was sealed*.

How shall I find words to describe the scene that followed! Twenty minutes after the desire had been so incautiously expressed, an old Japanese, uncommonly tall and majestic for one of that race, pale, thin and emaciated, was standing before me. There, where I had expected to find servile obsequiousness, I only discerned an air of calm and dignified composure, the attitude of one who knows his moral superiority, and therefore scorns to notice the mistakes of those who fail to recognize it. To the somewhat irreverent and mocking questions, which I put to him one after another, with feverish eagerness, he made no reply; but gazed on me in silence as a physician would look at a delirious patient. From the moment he fixed his eye on mine, I felt – or shall I say, saw – as though it were a sharp ray of light, a thin silvery thread, shoot out from the intensely black and narrow eyes so deeply sunk in the yellow old face. It seemed to penetrate into my brain and heart like an arrow, and set to work to dig out therefrom every thought and feeling. Yes; I both saw and felt it, and very soon the double sensation became intolerable.

To break the spell I defied him to tell me what he had found in my thoughts. Calmly came the correct answer – Extreme anxiety for a female relative, her husband and children, who were inhabiting a house the correct description of which he gave as though he knew it as well as myself. I turned a suspicious eye upon my friend, the Bonze, to whose indiscretions, I thought, I was indebted for the quick reply. Remembering however that Tamoorā could know nothing of the appearance of my sister's house, that the Japanese are proverbially truthful and, as friends, faithful to death – I felt ashamed of my suspicion. To atone for it before my own conscience I asked the hermit whether he could tell me anything of the present state of that beloved sister of mine. The foreigner – was the reply – would never believe in the words, or trust to the knowledge of any person but himself. Were the Yamabooshi to tell him, the impression would wear out hardly a few hours later, and the inquirer find himself as miserable as before. There was but one means; and that was to make the foreigner (myself) see with his own eyes, and thus learn the truth for himself. Was the inquirer ready to be placed by a Yamabooshi, a stranger to him, in the required state?

I had heard in Europe of mesmerized somnambules and pretenders to clairvoyance, and having no faith in them, I had, therefore, nothing against the process itself. Even in the midst of my never-ceasing mental agony, I could not help smiling at the ridiculous nature of the operation I was willingly submitting to. Nevertheless I silently bowed consent.

III

Psychic Magic

The old Yamabooshi lost no time. He looked at the setting sun, and finding probably, the Lord Ten-Dzio-Dai-Dzio (the Spirit who darts his Rays) propitious for the coming ceremony, he speedily drew out a little bundle. It contained a small lacquered box, a piece of vegetable paper, made from the bark of the mulberry tree, and a pen, with which he traced upon the paper a few sentences in the *Naiden* character – a peculiar style of written language used only for religious and mystical purposes. Having finished, he exhibited from under his clothes a small round mirror of steel of extraordinary brilliancy, and placing it before my eyes, asked me to look into it.

I had not only heard before of these mirrors, which are frequently used in the temples, but I had often seen them. It is claimed that under the direction and will of instructed priests, there appear in them the Daij-Dzin, the great spirits who notify the inquiring devotees of their fate. I first imagined that his intention was to evoke such a spirit, who would answer my queries. What happened, however, was something of quite a different character.

No sooner had I, not without a last pang of mental squeamishness, produced by a deep sense of my own absurd position, touched the mirror, than I suddenly felt a strange sensation in the arm of the hand that held it. For a brief moment I forgot to “sit in the seat of the scorners” and failed to look at the matter from a ludicrous point of view. Was it fear that suddenly clutched my brain, for an instant paralyzing its activity —

... that fear

When the heart longs to know, what it is death to hear?

No; for I still had consciousness enough left to go on persuading myself that nothing would come out of an experiment, in the nature of which no sane man could ever believe. What was it then, that crept across my brain like a living thing of ice, producing therein a sensation of horror, and then clutched at my heart as if a deadly serpent had fastened its fangs into it? With a convulsive jerk of the hand I dropped the – I blush to write the adjective – “magic” mirror, and could not force myself to pick it up from the settee on which I was reclining. For one short moment there was a terrible struggle between some undefined, and to me utterly inexplicable, longing to look into the depths of the polished surface of the mirror and my pride, the ferocity of which nothing seemed capable of taming. It was finally so tamed, however, its revolt being conquered by its own defiant intensity. There was an opened novel lying on a lacquer table near the settee, and as my eyes happened to fall upon its pages, I read the words, “The veil which covers futurity is woven by the hand of mercy.” This was enough. That same pride which had hitherto held me back from what I regarded as a degrading, superstitious experiment, caused me to challenge my fate. I picked up the ominously shining disk and prepared to look into it.

While I was examining the mirror, the Yamabooshi hastily spoke a few words to the Bonze, Tamoorā, at which I threw a furtive and suspicious glance at both. I was wrong once more.

“The holy man desires me to put you a question and give you at the same time a warning,” remarked the Bonze. “If you are willing to see for yourself now, you will have – under the penalty of *seeing for ever, in the hereafter, all that is taking place, at whatever distance, and that against your will or inclination*– to submit to a regular course of purification, after you have learned what you want through the mirror.”

“What is this course, and what have I to promise?” I asked defiantly.

“It is for your own good. You must promise him to submit to the process, lest, for the rest of his life, he should have to hold himself responsible, before his own conscience, for having made an *irresponsible* seer of you. Will you do so, friend?”

“There will be time enough to think of it, if I see anything” – I sneeringly replied, adding under my breath – “something I doubt a good deal, so far.”

“Well, you are warned, friend. The consequences will now remain with yourself,” was the solemn answer.

I glanced at the clock, and made a gesture of impatience, which was remarked and understood by the Yamabooshi. It was just *seven minutes after five*.

“Define well in your mind *what* you would see and learn,” said the “conjurer,” placing the mirror and paper in my hands, and instructing me how to use them.

His instructions were received by me with more impatience than gratitude; and for one short instant, I hesitated again. Nevertheless I replied, while fixing the mirror:

“I desire but one thing – to learn the reason or reasons why my sister has so suddenly ceased writing to me.”...

Had I pronounced these words in reality, and in the hearing of the two witnesses, or had I only thought them? To this day I cannot decide the point. I now remember but one thing distinctly: while I sat gazing in the mirror, the Yamabooshi kept gazing at me. But whether this process lasted half a second or three hours, I have never since been able to settle in my mind with any degree of satisfaction. I can recall every detail of the scene up to the moment when I took up the mirror with the left hand, holding the paper inscribed with the mystic characters between the thumb and finger of the right, when all of a sudden I seemed to quite lose consciousness of the surrounding objects. The passage from the active waking state to one that I could compare with nothing I had ever experienced before, was so rapid, that while my eyes had ceased to perceive external objects and had completely lost sight of the Bonze, the Yamabooshi, and even of my room, I could nevertheless distinctly see the whole of my head and my back, as I sat leaning forward with the mirror in my hand. Then came a strong sensation of an involuntary rush forward, of *snapping* off, so to say, from my place – I had almost said from my body. And, then, while every one of my other senses had become totally paralysed, my eyes, as I thought, unexpectedly caught a clearer and far more vivid glimpse than they had ever had in reality, of my sister’s new house at Nuremberg, which I had never visited and knew only from a sketch, and other scenery with which I had never been very familiar. Together with this, and while feeling in my brain what seemed like flashes of a departing consciousness – dying persons must feel so, no doubt – the very last, vague thought, so weak as to have been hardly perceptible, was that I must look very, *very* ridiculous... This *feeling*– for such it was rather than a thought – was interrupted, suddenly extinguished, so to say, by a clear *mental vision* (I cannot characterize it otherwise) of myself, of that which I regarded as, and knew to be my body, lying with ashy cheeks on the settee, dead to all intents and purposes, but still staring with the cold and glassy eyes of a corpse into the mirror. Bending over it, with his two emaciated hands cutting the air in every direction over *its* white face, stood the tall figure of the Yamabooshi, for whom I felt at that instant an inextinguishable, murderous hatred. As I was going, in thought, to pounce upon the vile charlatan, my corpse, the two old men, the room itself, and every object in it, trembled and danced in a reddish glowing light, and seemed to float rapidly away from “me.” A few more grotesque, distorted shadows before “my” sight; and, with a last feeling of terror and a supreme effort to realise *who then was I now, since I was not that corpse*– a great veil of darkness fell over me, like a funeral pall, and every thought in me was dead.

IV A Vision of Horror

How strange!.. Where was I now? It was evident to me that I had once more returned to my senses. For there I was, vividly realizing that I was rapidly moving forward, while experiencing a queer, strange sensation as though I were swimming, without impulse or effort on my part, and in total darkness. The idea that first presented itself to me was that of a long subterranean passage of water, of earth, and stifling air, though bodily I had no perception, no sensation, of the presence or contact of any of these. I tried to utter a few words, to repeat my last sentence, “I desire but one thing: to learn the reason or reasons why my sister has so suddenly ceased writing to me” – but the only words I heard out of the twenty-one, were the two, “*to learn,*” and these, instead of their coming out of my own larynx, came back to me in my own voice, but entirely outside myself, near, but not in me. In short, they were pronounced by my voice, not by my lips...

One more rapid, involuntary motion, one more plunge into the Cimmerian darkness of a (to me) unknown element, and I saw myself standing – actually standing – underground, as it seemed. I was compactly and thickly surrounded on all sides, above and below, right and left, with earth, and *in* the mould, and yet it weighed not, and seemed quite immaterial and transparent to *my senses*. I did not realize for one second the utter absurdity, nay, impossibility of that *seeming* fact! One second more, one short instant, and I perceived – oh, inexpressible horror, when I think of it now; for then, although I perceived, realized, and recorded facts and events far more clearly than ever I had done before, I did not seem to be touched in any other way by what I saw. Yes – I perceived a coffin at my feet. It was a plain unpretentious shell, made of deal, the last couch of the pauper, in which, notwithstanding its closed lid, I plainly saw a hideous, grinning skull, a man’s skeleton, mutilated and broken in many of its parts, as though it had been taken out of some hidden chamber of the defunct Inquisition, where it had been subjected to torture. “Who can it be?” – I thought.

At this moment I heard again proceeding from afar the same voice —*my voice* ... “*the reason or reasons why*” ... it said; as though these words were the unbroken continuation of the same sentence of which it had just repeated the two words “to learn.” It sounded near, and yet as from some incalculable distance; giving me then the idea that the long subterranean journey, the subsequent mental reflexions and discoveries, had occupied no time; had been performed during the short, almost instantaneous interval between the first and the middle words of the sentence, begun, at any rate, if not actually pronounced by myself in my room at Kioto, and which it was now finishing, in interrupted, broken phrases, like a faithful echo of my own words and voice...

Forthwith, the hideous, mangled remains began assuming a form, and to me, but too familiar appearance. The broken parts joined together one to the other, the bones became covered once more with flesh, and I recognized in these disfigured remains – with some surprise, but not a trace of feeling at the sight – my sister’s dead husband, my own brother-in-law, whom I had for her sake loved so truly. “How was it, and how did he come to die such a terrible death?” – I asked myself. To put oneself a query seemed, in the state in which I was, to instantly solve it. Hardly had I asked myself the question, when, as if in a panorama, I saw the retrospective picture of poor Karl’s death, in all its horrid vividness, and with every thrilling detail, every one of which, however, left me then entirely and brutally indifferent. Here he is, the dear old fellow, full of life and joy at the prospect of more lucrative employment from his principal, examining and trying in a wood-sawing factory a monster steam engine just arrived from America. He bends over, to examine more closely an inner arrangement, to tighten a screw. His clothes are caught by the teeth of the revolving wheel in full motion, and suddenly he is dragged down, doubled up, and his limbs half severed, torn off, before the workmen, unacquainted with the mechanism can stop it. He is taken out, or what remains of him, dead, mangled, a thing of horror, an unrecognizable mass of palpitating flesh and blood! I follow

the remains, wheeled as an unrecognizable heap to the hospital, hear the brutally given order that the messengers of death should stop on their way at the house of the widow and orphans. I follow them, and find the unconscious family quietly assembled together. I see my sister, the dear and beloved, and remain indifferent at the sight, only feeling highly interested in the coming scene. My heart, my feelings, even my personality, seemed to have disappeared, to have been left behind, to belong to somebody else.

There “I” stand, and witness her unprepared reception of the ghastly news. I realize clearly, without one moment’s hesitation or mistake, the effect of the shock upon her, I perceive clearly, following and recording, to the minutest detail, her sensations and the inner process that takes place in her. I watch and remember, missing not one single point.

As the corpse is brought into the house for identification I hear the long agonizing cry, my own name pronounced, and the dull thud of the living body falling upon the remains of the dead one. I follow with curiosity the sudden thrill and the instantaneous perturbation in her brain that follow it, and watch with attention the worm-like, precipitate, and immensely intensified motion of the tubular fibers, the instantaneous change of color in the cephalic extremity of the nervous system, the fibrous nervous matter passing from white to bright red and then to a dark red, bluish hue. I notice the sudden flash of a phosphorous-like, brilliant Radiance, its tremor and its sudden extinction followed by darkness – complete darkness in the region of memory – as the Radiance, comparable in its form only to a human shape, oozes out suddenly from the top of the head, expands, loses its form and scatters. And I say to myself: “This is insanity; life-long, incurable insanity, for the principle of intelligence is not paralyzed or extinguished temporarily, but has just deserted the tabernacle for ever, ejected from it by the terrible force of the sudden blow... The link between the animal and the divine essence is broken.”... And as the unfamiliar term “divine” is mentally uttered *my* “**Thought**” – laughs.

Suddenly I hear again my far-off yet near voice pronouncing emphatically and close by me the words ... “*why my sister has so suddenly ceased writing.*”... And before the two final words “*to me*” have completed the sentence, I see a long series of sad events, immediately following the catastrophe.

I behold the mother, now a helpless, grovelling idiot, in the lunatic asylum attached to the city hospital, the seven younger children admitted into a refuge for paupers. Finally I see the two elder, a boy of fifteen, and a girl a year younger, my favorites, both taken by strangers into their service. A captain of a sailing vessel carries away my nephew, an old Jewess adopts the tender girl. I see the events with all their horrors and thrilling details, and record each, to the smallest detail, with the utmost coolness.

For, mark well: when I use such expressions as “horrors,” etc., they are to be understood as an after-thought. During the whole time of the events described I experienced no sensation of either pain or pity. My feelings seemed to be paralyzed as well as my external senses; it was only after “coming back” that I realized my irretrievable losses to their full extent.

Much of that which I had so vehemently denied in those days, owing to sad personal experience I have to admit now. Had I been told by anyone at that time, that man could act and think and feel, irrespective of his brain and senses; nay, that by some mysterious, and to this day, for me, incomprehensible power, *he* could be transported *mentally*, thousands of miles away from his body, there to witness not only present but also past events, and remember these by storing them in his memory – I would have proclaimed that man a madman. Alas, I can do so no longer, for I have become myself that “madman.” Ten, twenty, forty, a hundred times during the course of this wretched life of mine, have I experienced and lived over such moments of existence, *outside of my body*

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