



Five

tales

of mystery

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16+

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«ЛитРес: Самиздат»

2012

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Five tales of mystery / Д. А. Власов — «ЛитРес: Самиздат», 2012

Сборник включает пять рассказов на английском языке: «Таинственное исчезновение», «Иллюзионист», «Часовых дел мастер», «Литературный критик», «Изабель» в авторском переводе. В рассказах затрагиваются темы мистики и философии. Произведение «Таинственное исчезновение» завоевало бронзовое призовое место на литературном конкурсе «Маленькие шедевры» в 2020г. Сборник подходит для обучения навыкам чтения и подготовки к ОГЭ или ЕГЭ. Сочинения подготовлены носителем-редактором. Рассказы неадаптированные, продвинутый уровень.

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Денис Власов

Five tales of mystery

Mysterious Evanescence

Arthur R. Berg was a very wealthy man. He was a renowned businessman in his field. He achieved his goals by any possible means. Yet, this story is not about how he achieved dizzying success in financial affairs, and his brilliant business acumen, but about the fantastic misadventure caused by his mad passion for painting. This enthusiasm was expressed in collecting original paintings by famous artists. As a person who saw any deal from a commercial point of view, his love for art was automatically considered by others to be an effective investment. But, to Berg, art was more than money framed on a wall. An educated man, perceptive of culture, and a connoisseur of fine arts, he regarded a piece of art to the highest degree of its manifestation. For the past 17 years, he had gathered an impressive collection. To store it, an enormous mansion-gallery was made available in London, where he spent most of his free time. There, he got an aesthetic pleasure alone with his grand collection. In complete quiet, he wandered from one room to another, beheld full palettes of works by great masters, and admired the elegance of the portraits and the flourish within the landscapes. He could stand for hours in front of a picture of some genius, just getting a grasp at every stroke.

For Berg, a picture was like a book to be read, and which he was eager to read over and over again. Sometimes, he got so lost in the exhibits that he daydreamed himself into scenes from picnics in meadows to cavalry clashes on battlefields. Occasionally, he visited major exhibitions only for the sake of one picture, to understand and meditate about.

One day, in a large antique shop, he saw a picture of medium size, behind the counter, of a young, beautiful lady from what he gathered was a higher secular society in the early 19th century. She was in a luxury dress, in a chair. Her features were angel-like. A small table in front of her featured a chessboard. Her opponent was a gentleman in a tuxedo. But he was on the couch opposite, and thoughtfully held the white king in his left hand, pondering and not knowing where to retreat under the pressure of the young socialite. The game was in full swing, and by the position of the pieces on the board it could be judged that the priority in the struggle belonged to the young lady.

The painter managed to capture the gleam in her eyes, on the cusp of victory. Near the chessboard was a bunch of papers that seemed to be financial documents, and it could be assumed the game was not for the curiosity of the onlookers gathered, but for the documents. The bystanders were exclusively men, and the occasion was some dinner party. Berg was almost spellbound by the picture, and said almost aloud, "I'd give anything in the world just to play a game of chess with this stunningly beautiful creature."

At that moment, a manager of the shop was passing by, and Berg pulled him by his sleeve nervously and demanded, "How much is this picture? I am buying it now."

"Sorry, but this picture isn't for sale," the manager replied coldly. "What do you mean, not for sale? Then why is it on the display?"

"You are not the first person in our antique shop who would like to see this work of art in a collection. This picture is not for sale. Let me explain: The picture is our charm. It has been here since we started this business. As long as we have it, we believe our family business will only thrive. So, no," the manager said in a cool tone.

"Who started your business? I want to see *him* and have a talk," Berg almost screamed, as a man not accustomed to the word "no".

"To see *her*," the manager corrected, and pointed to the lady in the picture. "Baroness von N is the founder of our antique trading house."

“Now I see,” Berg said.

“This is the only image of her. The artist is unknown.” With that, the manager moved on.

Berg left the shop in deep thought. For the rest of the night, the picture haunted his mind. The next morning he came back to the shop, still trying to persuade the manager, this time in his office.

“Look, if I can’t buy this painting, can it be rented for a certain period of time? For the period it’s leased, the picture will be insured. I guarantee one hundred percent prepayment. You are a businessman, and I offer the most preferential terms. I believe nothing will happen to your family business if this ‘charm’ is out of your respected shop. Give me a week, or a month. Unlike what you think, the painting’s absence will bring you only a good profit. What do you say to my proposal?”

“Hmm, I find this deal rather strange. You are the first person to offer to rent a picture from our antique shop. I’d understand it if you were a museum, but you, it seems, are not going to set it to any display, I hope? The manager looked at Berg rather queerly.

“I assure you, I’m not. I need it only to satisfy my own aesthetic needs.” Berg smiled. After a short but agonizing silence, the manager said,

“Well, the transaction will be forwarded to our legal department. But” – he pointed out expressly – “the lease term is one week. One hundred percent down payment, insurance at your expense. And, yet, I find your proposal extremely eccentric.”

“Maybe you’re right. But I love art,” a contented Berg replied.

The transaction was executed properly, and a week later the painting was hung in the living room of Berg’s country mansion. For the past five days, the admirer of fine arts spent all of his free time with the painting. He fell in love with the image of the lady, and sometimes he even talked to her. It came to a point where a similar chair and a table with a chessboard were brought to the same living room. All of Berg’s thoughts were devoted to the beautiful lady in the picture.

On the sixth day, Berg returned late to his country house after a hectic day, and sent away all the staff and security guards for the weekend. After dinner, he went to the living room to wish “Good night” to his beloved, as he’d done in the five previous days. He felt a deep melancholy. He did not want to part with her, but kept in mind that according to the contract, the picture should be returned to the owner the following day. The clock struck midnight. He went closer to the picture, and started to examine the very familiar features of the baroness’ beautiful face. All of a sudden, a thud on the windowpane brought him back to reality with a fright. *What on earth?* Alarmed, he went to the window. Drawing open the blind, Berg saw in the moonlight only dark trunks of trees in the grounds, and a cloudless sky lit with bright stars. Not a soul. *Perhaps it was a bird*, he assured himself. *What a beautiful full moon.* There he was standing, admiring the moon and contemplating the night quietness for about five minutes, when suddenly he heard a low, velvet voice from behind his back:

“Would you like a game of chess?”

It was a feminine voice. Inhuman panic and fear gripped Berg. He was too scared to turn around.

“Would you like a game of chess?” the voice insisted.

Berg slowly turned around, and saw the replica chair was occupied by Baroness von N in the same dress from the picture. Smiling, she invited him by pointing to the table with the chessboard. The chess pieces had been placed. Automatically, he glanced at the picture – the chair was empty there. “You have little time. Either you play, or I’m leaving,” the baroness said. Berg was horrified. His heart was beating faster, and his face was sweating. He wiped his face fiercely, and slowly walked over to the couch opposite the chair, sat on the edge of it, and stared at the guest. His trembling hand made the first move of white pawn from the king one square forward.

Under the terms of the lease agreement, Berg returned the painting to the antique shop on the seventh day. He was also different. He became less interested in business, and started drinking heavily. Some weeks later, he retired from all business, and transferred all of his fortune and money to the account of the antique shop. Later that same day, he disappeared in mysterious circumstances. The best detectives of the city were unable to find him. One person knew, however. The manager of

the antique shop noticed another freshly painted figure was added to the crowd watching the game of Baroness von N.

“Well,” the manager said to nobody in particular, “here’s another one who has lost his game.”

The Magician

A travelling circus was giving the first performance of the season in a small country town. The striking billboards invited the townspeople not to miss a fairytale show. The circus tent-pavilion was erected right in the town center. The stage was decorated with colorful fairy lights. The town residents were not spoiled by frequent visits from performing guests like these, so the tickets were instantly sold out five shows ahead. The influx of spectators was so considerable, that the circus manager set up an additional standing-room.

The tent was ready, the stage was set, and a crowd was forming outside. But one hour before the first show, a novice magician went up to the propman and demanded he be given a box for a rabbit to fit in, immediately. He explained that his magical black box got lost somewhere, and he couldn't perform his act without it. The elderly propman pondered a little, and finally promised to find something alike. Ten minutes later, the magician had in his hands a wooden black box. It was a rather old and worn-out prop with faded sides but, unfortunately, the propman didn't have something newer. Having opened the prop, the magician examined it carefully, and was really surprised at finding a mirror attached to the inner side of the lid. The conjuror had a few minutes before his appearance on the stage, so he didn't have enough time to think about the purpose of the mirror.

It should be noted that the novice magician was a budding actor. The circus manager saw a creative personality in him. His repertory did not include a set of standard trivial tricks. The actor successfully materialized his fantasy on the stage after desperate creative searches and trials. Astonished spectators went into raptures over his honest deception. His bewildered colleagues frequently attacked him with queries such as, *How did you manage to perform this trick? What is your secret?* The conjuror replied that he drew his inspiration from nature, trying to reveal details that ordinary people were unable to see. And that set the right tone in his work.

The ringmaster had already announced the magician to be on the stage, so he ran into the arena along with his assistants. In the glare of the circus spotlights, he went ahead with the act. The magician demonstrated intricate tricks, including objects moving in the air. His artistry, agility, and dexterity marveled the public. Manipulation and illusion were elegantly presented, and the virtuosic master received roaring applause more than once. The program should have ended with the above-mentioned box. When the moment came, a pretty assistant showed the empty prop from inside and put it on the table in the center of the arena. Our illusionist announced that a rabbit would appear inside the box from absolutely nowhere. Having said that, he knocked three times on the lid, and opened it. As expected, a white rabbit jumped out. The assistant demonstrated the marvelous result of the trick to the public. Success and tremendous applause! However, it should be noted here that the illusionist did not expect any kind of animals to appear at all. At that moment, he felt panic attacking him. After recollecting his self-control, he suppressed the horror that gripped him because of the rabbit's appearance. His face had a kind of contorted smile. He stared at the rabbit and could not believe what happened. Something went wrong. Backstage, the manager ran up to the actor with the rabbit in his hands, hugged him paternally, and said loudly, "Well done! The public is thrilled to bits! But wait. Where did you get this rabbit from? Changes like this in your program must be coordinated only with me." "The rabbit should not have appeared!" the pale artist interrupted, screaming at the manager. "I don't understand the way the rabbit got into the box. There should not have been any kind of trick at all! Do you remember the script? I had to open the empty box without any animals at all, then clowns would run out into the arena and turn it into a farce!"

"Then whose evil joke is this? Maybe the tamer's? But he works only with predators, so he can't be responsible." the manager said thoughtfully, walking away. The conjuror took the rabbit by the ears and went into the dressing room. He examined the box carefully from every side more than once, but couldn't find the slightest clue. Tired, he threw it into a corner, and looked at the rabbit.

It was snow white, sitting on the table and basking under the lamp, and crunching on a third sweet carrot. At the same time, he was wiggling his ears with pleasure.

Long after midnight, the illusionist was still sitting in a chair in the dressing room, trying to understand. A knock at the door brought him back to reality.

“Who is it?”

The white-haired propman showed his head from behind the door.

“May I come in?”

The actor did not answer, so the propman went in anyway, and went over to the rabbit, and stroked him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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