

BOOK IV: UNDER THE FLAGSTAFF

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. May 1, 1907.

For some days after the last adventure I was in truth in a half-dazed condition, unable to think sensibly, hardly coherently. Indeed, it was as much as I could do to preserve something of my habitual appearance and manner. However, my first test happily came soon, and when I was once through it I reacquired sufficient self-confidence to go through with my purpose. Gradually the original phase of stupefaction passed, and I was able to look the situation in the face. I knew the worst now, at any rate; and when the lowest point has been reached things must begin to mend. Still, I was wofully sensitive regarding anything which might affect my Lady of the Shroud, or even my opinion of her. I even began to dread Aunt Janet's Second-Sight visions or dreams. These had a fatal habit of coming so near to fact that they always made for a danger of discovery. I had to realize now that the Lady of the Shroud might indeed be a Vampire—one of that horrid race that survives death and carries on a life-in-death existence eternally and only for evil. Indeed, I began to EXPECT that Aunt Janet would ere long have some prophetic insight to the matter. She had been so wonderfully correct in her prophetic surmises with regard to both the visits to my room that it was hardly possible that she could fail to take cognizance of this last development.

But my dread was not justified; at any rate, I had no reason to suspect that by any force or exercise of her occult gift she might cause me concern by the discovery of my secret. Only once did I feel that actual danger in that respect was close to me. That was when she came early one morning and rapped at my door. When I called out, "Who is that? What is it?" she said in an agitated way:

"Thank God, laddie, you are all right! Go to sleep again."

Later on, when we met at breakfast, she explained that she had had a nightmare in the grey of the morning. She thought she had seen me in the crypt of a great church close beside a stone coffin; and, knowing that such was an ominous subject to dream about, came as soon as she dared to see if I was all right. Her mind was evidently set on death and burial, for she went on:

"By the way, Rupert, I am told that the great church on time top of the cliff across the creek is St. Sava's, where the great people of the country used to be buried. I want you to take me there some day. We shall go over it, and look at the tombs and monuments together. I really think I should be afraid to go alone, but it will be all right if you are with me." This was getting really dangerous, so I turned it aside:

Really, Aunt Janet, I'm afraid it won't do. If you go off to weird old churches, and fill yourself up with a fresh supply of horrors, I don't know what will happen. You'll be dreaming dreadful things about me every night and neither you nor I shall get any sleep." It went to my heart to oppose her in any wish; and also this kind of chaffy opposition might pain her. But I had no alternative; the matter was too serious to be allowed to proceed. Should Aunt Janet go to the church, she would surely want to visit the crypt. Should she do so, and there notice the glass-covered tomb—as she could not help doing—the Lord only knew what would happen. She had already Second-Sighted a woman being married to me, and before I myself knew that I had such a hope. What might she not reveal did she know where the woman came from? It may have been that her power of Second Sight had to rest on some basis of knowledge or belief, and that her vision was but some intuitive perception of my own subjective thought. But whatever it was it should be stopped—at all hazards.

This whole episode set me thinking introspectively, and led me gradually but imperatively to self-analysis—not of powers, but of motives. I found myself before long examining myself as to what were my real intentions. I thought at first that this intellectual process was an exercise of pure reason; but soon discarded this as inadequate—even impossible. Reason is a cold manifestation; this feeling which swayed and dominated me is none other than passion, which is quick, hot, and insistent.

As for myself, the self-analysis could lead to but one result—the expression to myself of the reality and definiteness of an already-formed though unconscious intention. I wished to do the woman good—to serve her in some way—to secure her some benefit by any means, no matter how difficult, which might be within my power. I knew that I loved her—loved her most truly and fervently; there was no need for self-analysis to tell me that. And, moreover, no self-analysis, or any other mental process that I knew of, could help my one doubt: whether she was an ordinary woman (or an extraordinary woman, for the matter of that) in some sore and terrible straits; or else one who lay under some dreadful condition, only partially alive, and not mistress of herself or her acts. Whichever her condition might be, there was in my own feeling a superfluity of affection for her. The self-analysis taught me one thing, at any rate—that I had for her, to start with, an infinite pity which had softened towards her my whole being, and had already mastered merely selfish desire. Out of it I began to find excuses for her every act. In the doing so I knew now, though perhaps I did not at the time the process was going on, that my view in its true inwardness was of her as a living woman—the woman I loved.

In the forming of our ideas there are different methods of work, as though the analogy with material life holds good. In the building of a house, for instance, there are many persons employed; men of different trades and occupations—architect, builder, masons, carpenters, plumbers, and a host of others—and all these with the officials of each guild or trade. So in the world of thought and feelings: knowledge and understanding come through various agents, each competent to its task.

How far pity reacted with love I knew not; I only knew that whatever her state might be, were she living or dead, I could find in my heart no blame for the Lady of the Shroud. It could not be that she was dead in the real conventional way; for, after all, the Dead do not walk the earth in corporal substance, even if there be spirits which take the corporal form. This woman was of actual form and weight. How could I doubt that, at all events—I, who had held her in my arms? Might it not be that she was not quite dead, and that it had been given to me to restore her to life again? Ah! that would be, indeed, a privilege well worth the giving my life to accomplish. That such a thing may be is possible. Surely the old myths were not absolute inventions; they must have had a basis somewhere in fact. May not the world-old story of Orpheus and Eurydice have been based on some deep-lying principle or power of human nature? There is not one of us but has wished at some time to bring back the dead. Ay, and who has not felt that in himself or herself was power in the deep love for our dead to make them quick again, did we but know the secret of how it was to be done?

For myself, I have seen such mysteries that I am open to conviction regarding things not yet explained. These have been, of course, amongst savages or those old-world people who have brought unchecked traditions and beliefs—ay, and powers too—down the ages from the dim days when the world was young; when forces were elemental, and Nature's handiwork was experimental rather than completed. Some of these wonders may have been older still than the accepted period of our own period of creation. May we not have to-day other wonders, different only in method, but not more susceptible of belief? Obi-ism and Fantee-ism have been exercised

in my own presence, and their results proved by the evidence of my own eyes and other senses. So, too, have stranger rites, with the same object and the same success, in the far Pacific Islands. So, too, in India and China, in Thibet and in the Golden Chersonese. On all and each of these occasions there was, on my own part, enough belief to set in motion the powers of understanding; and there were no moral scruples to stand in the way of realization. Those whose lives are so spent that they achieve the reputation of not fearing man or God or devil are not deterred in their doing or thwarted from a set purpose by things which might deter others not so equipped for adventure. Whatever may be before them—pleasant or painful, bitter or sweet, arduous or facile, enjoyable or terrible, humorous or full of awe and horror—they must accept, taking them in the onward course as a good athlete takes hurdles in his stride. And there must be no hesitating, no looking back. If the explorer or the adventurer has scruples, he had better give up that special branch of effort and come himself to a more level walk in life. Neither must there be regrets. There is no need for such; savage life has this advantage: it begets a certain toleration not to be found in conventional existence.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. May 2, 1907.

I had heard long ago that Second Sight is a terrible gift, even to its possessor. I am now inclined not only to believe, but to understand it. Aunt Janet has made such a practice of it of late that I go in constant dread of discovery of my secret. She seems to parallel me all the time, whatever I may do. It is like a sort of dual existence to her; for she is her dear old self all the time, and yet some other person with a sort of intellectual kit of telescope and notebook, which are eternally used on me. I know they are FOR me, too—for what she considers my good. But all the same it makes an embarrassment. Happily Second Sight cannot speak as clearly as it sees, or, rather, as it understands. For the translation of the vague beliefs which it inculcates is both nebulous and uncertain—a sort of Delphic oracle which always says things which no one can make out at the time, but which can be afterwards read in any one of several ways. This is all right, for in my case it is a kind of safety; but, then, Aunt Janet is a very clever woman, and some time she herself may be able to understand. Then she may begin to put two and two together. When she does that, it will not be long before she knows more than I do of the facts of the whole affair. And her reading of them and of the Lady of the Shroud, round whom they circle, may not be the same as mine. Well, that will be all right too. Aunt Janet loves me—God knows I have good reason to know that all through these years—and whatever view she may take, her acts will be all I could wish. But I shall come in for a good lot of scolding, I am sure. By the way, I ought to think of that; if Aunt Janet scolds me, it is a pretty good proof that I ought to be scolded. I wonder if I dare tell her all. No! It is too strange. She is only a woman, after all: and if she knew I loved . . . I wish I knew her name, and thought—as I might myself do, only that I resist it—that she is not alive at all. Well, what she would either think or do beats me. I suppose she would want to slipper me as she used to do when I was a wee kiddie—in a different way, of course.

May 3, 1907.

I really could not go on seriously last night. The idea of Aunt Janet giving me a licking as in the dear old days made me laugh so much that nothing in the world seemed serious then. Oh, Aunt Janet is all right whatever comes. That I am sure of, so I needn't worry over it. A good thing too;

there will be plenty to worry about without that. I shall not check her telling me of her visions, however; I may learn something from them.

For the last four-and-twenty hours I have, whilst awake, been looking over Aunt Janet's books, of which I brought a wheen down here. Gee whizz! No wonder the old dear is superstitious, when she is filled up to the back teeth with that sort of stuff! There may be some truth in some of those yarns; those who wrote them may believe in them, or some of them, at all events. But as to coherence or logic, or any sort of reasonable or instructive deduction, they might as well have been written by so many hens! These occult book-makers seem to gather only a lot of bare, bald facts, which they put down in the most uninteresting way possible. They go by quantity only. One story of the kind, well examined and with logical comments, would be more convincing to a third party than a whole hecatomb of them.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. May 4, 1907.

There is evidently something up in the country. The mountaineers are more uneasy than they have been as yet. There is constant going to and fro amongst them, mostly at night and in the grey of the morning. I spend many hours in my room in the eastern tower, from which I can watch the woods, and gather from signs the passing to and fro. But with all this activity no one has said to me a word on the subject. It is undoubtedly a disappointment to me. I had hoped that the mountaineers had come to trust me; that gathering at which they wanted to fire their guns for me gave me strong hopes. But now it is apparent that they do not trust me in full—as yet, at all events. Well, I must not complain. It is all only right and just. As yet I have done nothing to prove to them the love and devotion that I feel to the country. I know that such individuals as I have met trust me, and I believe like me. But the trust of a nation is different. That has to be won and tested; he who would win it must justify, and in a way that only troublous times can allow. No nation will—can—give full meed of honour to a stranger in times of peace. Why should it? I must not forget that I am here a stranger in the land, and that to the great mass of people even my name is unknown. Perhaps they will know me better when Rooke comes back with that store of arms and ammunition that he has bought, and the little warship he has got from South America. When they see that I hand over the whole lot to the nation without a string on them, they may begin to believe. In the meantime all I can do is to wait. It will all come right in time, I have no doubt. And if it doesn't come right, well, we can only die once!

Is that so? What about my Lady of the Shroud? I must not think of that or of her in this gallery. Love and war are separate, and may not mix—cannot mix, if it comes to that. I must be wise in the matter; and if I have got the hump in any degree whatever, must not show it. But one thing is certain: something is up, and it must be the Turks. From what the Vladika said at that meeting they have some intention of an attack on the Blue Mountains. If that be so, we must be ready; and perhaps I can help there. The forces must be organized; we must have some method of communication. In this country, where are neither roads nor railways nor telegraphs, we must establish a signalling system of some sort. THAT I can begin at once. I can make a code, or adapt one that I have used elsewhere already. I shall rig up a semaphore on the top of the Castle which can be seen for an enormous distance around. I shall train a number of men to be facile in signalling. And then, should need come, I may be able to show the mountaineers that I am fit to live in their hearts . . .

And all this work may prove an anodyne to pain of another kind. It will help, at any rate, to keep my mind occupied whilst I am waiting for another visit from my Lady of the Shroud.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. May 18, 1907.

The two weeks that have passed have been busy, and may, as time goes on, prove eventful. I really think they have placed me in a different position with the Blue Mountaineers—certainly so far as those in this part of the country are concerned. They are no longer suspicious of me—which is much; though they have not yet received me into their confidence. I suppose this will come in time, but I must not try to hustle them. Already they are willing, so far as I can see, to use me to their own ends. They accepted the signalling idea very readily, and are quite willing to drill as much as I like. This can be (and I think is, in its way) a pleasure to them. They are born soldiers, every man of them; and practice together is only a realization of their own wishes and a further development of their powers. I think I can understand the trend of their thoughts, and what ideas of public policy lie behind them. In all that we have attempted together as yet they are themselves in absolute power. It rests with them to carry out any ideas I may suggest, so they do not fear any assumption of power or governance on my part. Thus, so long as they keep secret from me both their ideas of high policy and their immediate intentions, I am powerless to do them ill, and I MAY be of service should occasion arise. Well, all told, this is much. Already they accept me as an individual, not merely one of the mass. I am pretty sure that they are satisfied of my personal bona fides. It is policy and not mistrust that hedges me in. Well, policy is a matter of time. They are a splendid people, but if they knew a little more than they do they would understand that the wisest of all policies is trust—when it can be given. I must hold myself in check, and never be betrayed into a harsh thought towards them. Poor souls! with a thousand years behind them of Turkish aggression, strenuously attempted by both force and fraud, no wonder they are suspicious. Likewise every other nation with whom they have ever come in contact—except one, my own—has deceived or betrayed them. Anyhow, they are fine soldiers, and before long we shall have an army that cannot be ignored. If I can get so that they trust me, I shall ask Sir Colin to come out here. He would be a splendid head for their army. His great military knowledge and tactical skill would come in well. It makes me glow to think of what an army he would turn out of this splendid material, and one especially adapted for the style of fighting which would be necessary in this country.

If a mere amateur like myself, who has only had experience of organizing the wildest kind of savages, has been able to advance or compact their individual style of fighting into systematic effort, a great soldier like MacKelpie will bring them to perfection as a fighting machine. Our Highlanders, when they come out, will foregather with them, as mountaineers always do with each other. Then we shall have a force which can hold its own against any odds. I only hope that Rooke will be returning soon. I want to see those Ingis-Malbron rifles either safely stored in the Castle or, what is better, divided up amongst the mountaineers—a thing which will be done at the very earliest moment that I can accomplish it. I have a conviction that when these men have received their arms and ammunition from me they will understand me better, and not keep any secrets from me.

All this fortnight when I was not drilling or going about amongst the mountaineers, and teaching them the code which I have now got perfected, I was exploring the side of the mountain nearest to here. I could not bear to be still. It is torture to me to be idle in my present condition of mind regarding my Lady of the Shroud . . . Strange I do not mind mentioning the word to myself now. I used to at first; but that bitterness has all gone away.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. May 19, 1907.

I was so restless early this morning that before daylight I was out exploring on the mountain-side. By chance I came across a secret place just as the day was breaking. Indeed, it was by the change of light as the first sun-rays seemed to fall down the mountain-side that my attention was called to an opening shown by a light behind it. It was, indeed, a secret place—so secret that I thought at first I should keep it to myself. In such a place as this either to hide in or to be able to prevent anyone else hiding in might on occasion be an asset of safety.

When, however, I saw indications rather than traces that someone had already used it to camp in, I changed my mind, and thought that whenever I should get an opportunity I would tell the Vladika of it, as he is a man on whose discretion I can rely. If we ever have a war here or any sort of invasion, it is just such places that may be dangerous. Even in my own case it is much too near the Castle to be neglected.

The indications were meagre—only where a fire had been on a little shelf of rock; and it was not possible, through the results of burning vegetation or scorched grass, to tell how long before the fire had been alight. I could only guess. Perhaps the mountaineers might be able to tell or even to guess better than I could. But I am not so sure of this. I am a mountaineer myself, and with larger and more varied experience than any of them. For myself, though I could not be certain, I came to the conclusion that whoever had used the place had done so not many days before. It could not have been quite recently; but it may not have been very long ago. Whoever had used it had covered up his tracks well. Even the ashes had been carefully removed, and the place where they had lain was cleaned or swept in some way, so that there was no trace on the spot. I applied some of my West African experience, and looked on the rough bark of the trees to leeward, to where the agitated air, however directed, must have come, unless it was wanted to call attention to the place by the scattered wood-ashes, however fine. I found traces of it, but they were faint. There had not been rain for several days; so the dust must have been blown there since the rain had fallen, for it was still dry.

The place was a tiny gorge, with but one entrance, which was hidden behind a barren spur of rock—just a sort of long fissure, jagged and curving, in the rock, like a fault in the stratification. I could just struggle through it with considerable effort, holding my breath here and there, so as to reduce my depth of chest. Within it was tree-clad, and full of possibilities of concealment.

As I came away I marked well its direction and approaches, noting any guiding mark which might aid in finding it by day or night. I explored every foot of ground around it—in front, on each side, and above. But from nowhere could I see an indication of its existence. It was a veritable secret chamber wrought by the hand of Nature itself. I did not return home till I was familiar with every detail near and around it. This new knowledge added distinctly to my sense of security.

Later in the day I tried to find the Vladika or any mountaineer of importance, for I thought that such a hiding-place which had been used so recently might be dangerous, and especially at a time when, as I had learned at the meeting where they did NOT fire their guns that there may have been spies about or a traitor in the land.

Even before I came to my own room to-night I had fully made up my mind to go out early in the morning and find some proper person to whom to impart the information, so that a watch might be kept on the place. It is now getting on for midnight, and when I have had my usual last look at the garden I shall turn in. Aunt Janet was uneasy all day, and especially so this evening. I

think it must have been my absence at the usual breakfast-hour which got on her nerves; and that unsatisfied mental or psychical irritation increased as the day wore on.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. May 20, 1907.

The clock on the mantelpiece in my room, which chimes on the notes of the clock at St. James's Palace, was striking midnight when I opened the glass door on the terrace. I had put out my lights before I drew the curtain, as I wished to see the full effect of the moonlight. Now that the rainy season is over, the moon is quite as beautiful as it was in the wet, and a great deal more comfortable. I was in evening dress, with a smoking-jacket in lieu of a coat, and I felt the air mild and mellow on the warm side, as I stood on the terrace.

But even in that bright moonlight the further corners of the great garden were full of mysterious shadows. I peered into them as well as I could—and my eyes are pretty good naturally, and are well trained. There was not the least movement. The air was as still as death, the foliage as still as though wrought in stone.

I looked for quite a long time in the hope of seeing something of my Lady. The quarters chimed several times, but I stood on unheeding. At last I thought I saw far off in the very corner of the old defending wall a flicker of white. It was but momentary, and could hardly have accounted in itself for the way my heart beat. I controlled myself, and stood as though I, too, were a graven image. I was rewarded by seeing presently another gleam of white. And then an unspeakable rapture stole over me as I realized that my Lady was coming as she had come before. I would have hurried out to meet her, but that I knew well that this would not be in accord with her wishes. So, thinking to please her, I drew back into the room. I was glad I had done so when, from the dark corner where I stood, I saw her steal up the marble steps and stand timidly looking in at the door. Then, after a long pause, came a whisper as faint and sweet as the music of a distant AEolian harp:

“Are you there? May I come in? Answer me! I am lonely and in fear!” For answer I emerged from my dim corner so swiftly that she was startled. I could hear from the quivering intake of her breath that she was striving—happily with success—to suppress a shriek.

“Come in,” I said quietly. “I was waiting for you, for I felt that you would come. I only came in from the terrace when I saw you coming, lest you might fear that anyone might see us. That is not possible, but I thought you wished that I should be careful.”

“I did—I do,” she answered in a low, sweet voice, but very firmly. “But never avoid precaution. There is nothing that may not happen here. There may be eyes where we least expect—or suspect them.” As she spoke the last words solemnly and in a low whisper, she was entering the room. I closed the glass door and bolted it, rolled back the steel grille, and pulled the heavy curtain. Then, when I had lit a candle, I went over and put a light to the fire. In a few seconds the dry wood had caught, and the flames were beginning to rise and crackle. She had not objected to my closing the window and drawing the curtain; neither did she make any comment on my lighting the fire. She simply acquiesced in it, as though it was now a matter of course. When I made the pile of cushions before it as on the occasion of her last visit, she sank down on them, and held out her white, trembling hands to the warmth.

She was different to-night from what she had been on either of the two former visits. From her present bearing I arrived at some gauge of her self-concern, her self-respect. Now that she was dry, and not overmastered by wet and cold, a sweet and gracious dignity seemed to shine from her, enwrapping her, as it were, with a luminous veil. It was not that she was by this made or

shown as cold or distant, or in any way harsh or forbidding. On the contrary, protected by this dignity, she seemed much more sweet and genial than before. It was as though she felt that she could afford to stoop now that her loftiness was realized—that her position was recognized and secure. If her inherent dignity made an impenetrable nimbus round her, this was against others; she herself was not bound by it, or to be bound. So marked was this, so entirely and sweetly womanly did she appear, that I caught myself wondering in flashes of thought, which came as sharp periods of doubting judgment between spells of unconscious fascination, how I had ever come to think she was aught but perfect woman. As she rested, half sitting and half lying on the pile of cushions, she was all grace, and beauty, and charm, and sweetness—the veritable perfect woman of the dreams of a man, be he young or old. To have such a woman sit by his hearth and hold her holy of holies in his heart might well be a rapture to any man. Even an hour of such entrancing joy might be well won by a lifetime of pain, by the balance of a long life sacrificed, by the extinction of life itself. Quick behind the record of such thoughts came the answer to the doubt they challenged: if it should turn out that she was not living at all, but one of the doomed and pitiful Un-Dead, then so much more on account of her very sweetness and beauty would be the winning of her back to Life and Heaven—even were it that she might find happiness in the heart and in the arms of another man.

Once, when I leaned over the hearth to put fresh logs on the fire, my face was so close to hers that I felt her breath on my cheek. It thrilled me to feel even the suggestion of that ineffable contact. Her breath was sweet—sweet as the breath of a calf, sweet as the whiff of a summer breeze across beds of mignonette. How could anyone believe for a moment that such sweet breath could come from the lips of the dead—the dead in esse or in posse—that corruption could send forth fragrance so sweet and pure? It was with satisfied happiness that, as I looked at her from my stool, I saw the dancing of the flames from the beech-logs reflected in her glorious black eyes, and the stars that were hidden in them shine out with new colours and new lustre as they gleamed, rising and falling like hopes and fears. As the light leaped, so did smiles of quiet happiness flit over her beautiful face, the merriment of the joyous flames being reflected in ever-changing dimples.

At first I was a little disconcerted whenever my eyes took note of her shroud, and there came a momentary regret that the weather had not been again bad, so that there might have been compulsion for her putting on another garment—anything lacking the loathsomeness of that pitiful wrapping. Little by little, however, this feeling disappeared, and I found no matter for even dissatisfaction in her wrapping. Indeed, my thoughts found inward voice before the subject was dismissed from my mind:

“One becomes accustomed to anything—even a shroud!” But the thought was followed by a submerging wave of pity that she should have had such a dreadful experience.

By-and-by we seemed both to forget everything—I know I did—except that we were man and woman, and close together. The strangeness of the situation and the circumstances did not seem of moment—not worth even a passing thought. We still sat apart and said little, if anything. I cannot recall a single word that either of us spoke whilst we sat before the fire, but other language than speech came into play; the eyes told their own story, as eyes can do, and more eloquently than lips whilst exercising their function of speech. Question and answer followed each other in this satisfying language, and with an unspeakable rapture I began to realize that my affection was returned. Under these circumstances it was unrealizable that there should be any incongruity in the whole affair. I was not myself in the mood of questioning. I was diffident with that diffidence which comes alone from true love, as though it were a necessary emanation from

that delightful and overwhelming and commanding passion. In her presence there seemed to surge up within me that which forbade speech. Speech under present conditions would have seemed to me unnecessary, imperfect, and even vulgarly overt. She, too, was silent. But now that I am alone, and memory is alone with me, I am convinced that she also had been happy. No, not that exactly. "Happiness" is not the word to describe either her feeling or my own. Happiness is more active, a more conscious enjoyment. We had been content. That expresses our condition perfectly; and now that I can analyze my own feeling, and understand what the word implies, I am satisfied of its accuracy. "Content" has both a positive and negative meaning or antecedent condition. It implies an absence of disturbing conditions as well as of wants; also it implies something positive which has been won or achieved, or which has accrued. In our state of mind—for though it may be presumption on my part, I am satisfied that our ideas were mutual—it meant that we had reached an understanding whence all that might come must be for good. God grant that it may be so!

As we sat silent, looking into each other's eyes, and whilst the stars in hers were now full of latent fire, perhaps from the reflection of the flames, she suddenly sprang to her feet, instinctively drawing the horrible shroud round her as she rose to her full height in a voice full of lingering emotion, as of one who is acting under spiritual compulsion rather than personal will, she said in a whisper:

"I must go at once. I feel the morning drawing nigh. I must be in my place when the light of day comes."

She was so earnest that I felt I must not oppose her wish; so I, too, sprang to my feet and ran towards the window. I pulled the curtain aside sufficiently far for me to press back the grille and reach the glass door, the latch of which I opened. I passed behind the curtain again, and held the edge of it back so that she could go through. For an instant she stopped as she broke the long silence:

"You are a true gentleman, and my friend. You understand all I wish. Out of the depth of my heart I thank you." She held out her beautiful high-bred hand. I took it in both mine as I fell on my knees, and raised it to my lips. Its touch made me quiver. She, too, trembled as she looked down at me with a glance which seemed to search my very soul. The stars in her eyes, now that the firelight was no longer on them, had gone back to their own mysterious silver. Then she drew her hand from mine very, very gently, as though it would fain linger; and she passed out behind the curtain with a gentle, sweet, dignified little bow which left me on my knees.

When I heard the glass door pulled-to gently behind her, I rose from my knees and hurried without the curtain, just in time to watch her pass down the steps. I wanted to see her as long as I could. The grey of morning was just beginning to war with the night gloom, and by the faint uncertain light I could see dimly the white figure flit between shrub and statue till finally it merged in the far darkness.

I stood for a long time on the terrace, sometimes looking into the darkness in front of me, in case I might be blessed with another glimpse of her; sometimes with my eyes closed, so that I might recall and hold in my mind her passage down the steps. For the first time since I had met her she had thrown back at me a glance as she stepped on the white path below the terrace. With the glamour over me of that look, which was all love and enticement, I could have dared all the powers that be.

When the grey dawn was becoming apparent through the lightening of the sky I returned to my room. In a dazed condition—half hypnotized by love—I went to bed, and in dreams continued to think, all happily, of my Lady of the Shroud.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. May 27, 1907.

A whole week has gone since I saw my Love! There it is; no doubt whatever is left in my mind about it now! Since I saw her my passion has grown and grown by leaps and bounds, as novelists put it. It has now become so vast as to overwhelm me, to wipe out all thought of doubt or difficulty. I suppose it must be what men suffered— suffering need not mean pain—under enchantments in old times. I am but as a straw whirled in the resistless eddies of a whirlpool. I feel that I MUST see her again, even if it be but in her tomb in the crypt. I must, I suppose, prepare myself for the venture, for many things have to be thought of. The visit must not be at night, for in such case I might miss her, did she come to me again here . . .

The morning came and went, but my wish and intention still remained; and so in the full tide of noon, with the sun in all its fiery force, I set out for the old church of St. Sava. I carried with me a lantern with powerful lens. I had wrapped it up secretly, for I had a feeling that I should not like anyone to know that I had such a thing with me.

On this occasion I had no misgivings. On the former visit I had for a moment been overwhelmed at the unexpected sight of the body of the woman I thought I loved—I knew it now—lying in her tomb. But now I knew all, and it was to see this woman, though in her tomb, that I came.

When I had lit my lantern, which I did as soon as I had pushed open the great door, which was once again unlocked, I turned my steps to the steps of the crypt, which lay behind the richly carved wood screen. This I could see, with the better light, was a noble piece of work of priceless beauty and worth. I tried to keep my heart in full courage with thoughts of my Lady, and of the sweetness and dignity of our last meeting; but, despite all, it sank down, down, and turned to water as I passed with uncertain feet down the narrow, tortuous steps. My concern, I am now convinced, was not for myself, but that she whom I adored should have to endure such a fearful place. As anodyne to my own pain I thought what it would be, and how I should feel, when I should have won for her a way out of that horror, at any rate. This thought reassured me somewhat, and restored my courage. It was in something of the same fashion which has hitherto carried me out of tight places as well as into them that at last I pushed open the low, narrow door at the foot of the rock-hewn staircase and entered the crypt.

Without delay I made my way to the glass-covered tomb set beneath the hanging chain. I could see by the flashing of the light around me that my hand which held the lantern trembled. With a great effort I steadied myself, and raising the lantern, turned its light down into the sarcophagus.

Once again the fallen lantern rang on the tingling glass, and I stood alone in the darkness, for an instant almost paralyzed with surprised disappointment.

The tomb was empty! Even the trappings of the dead had been removed.

I knew not what happened till I found myself groping my way up the winding stair. Here, in comparison with the solid darkness of the crypt, it seemed almost light. The dim expanse of the church sent a few straggling rays down the vaulted steps, and as I could see, be it never so dimly, I felt I was not in absolute darkness. With the light came a sense of power and fresh courage, and I groped my way back into the crypt again. There, by now and again lighting matches, I found my way to the tomb and recovered my lantern. Then I took my way slowly—for I wished to prove, if not my own courage, at least such vestiges of self-respect as the venture had left me—through the church, where I extinguished my lantern, and out through the great door into the open sunlight. I seemed to have heard, both in the darkness of the crypt and through the dimness

of the church, mysterious sounds as of whispers and suppressed breathing; but the memory of these did not count for much when once I was free. I was only satisfied of my own consciousness and identity when I found myself on the broad rock terrace in front of the church, with the fierce sunlight beating on my upturned face, and, looking downward, saw far below me the rippled blue of the open sea.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. June 3, 1907.

Another week has elapsed—a week full of movement of many kinds and in many ways—but as yet I have had no tale or tidings of my Lady of the Shroud. I have not had an opportunity of going again in daylight to St. Sava's as I should have liked to have done. I felt that I must not go at night. The night is her time of freedom, and it must be kept for her—or else I may miss her, or perhaps never see her again.

The days have been full of national movement. The mountaineers have evidently been organizing themselves, for some reason which I cannot quite understand, and which they have hesitated to make known to me. I have taken care not to manifest any curiosity, whatever I may have felt. This would certainly arouse suspicion, and might ultimately cause disaster to my hopes of aiding the nation in their struggle to preserve their freedom.

These fierce mountaineers are strangely—almost unduly—suspicious, and the only way to win their confidence is to begin the trusting. A young American attache of the Embassy at Vienna, who had made a journey through the Land of the Blue Mountains, once put it to me in this form:

“Keep your head shut, and they'll open theirs. If you don't, they'll open it for you—down to the chine!”

It was quite apparent to me that they were completing some fresh arrangements for signalling with a code of their own. This was natural enough, and in no way inconsistent with the measure of friendliness already shown to me. Where there are neither telegraphs, railways, nor roads, any effective form of communication must—can only be purely personal. And so, if they wish to keep any secret amongst themselves, they must preserve the secret of their code. I should have dearly liked to learn their new code and their manner of using it, but as I want to be a helpful friend to them—and as this implies not only trust, but the appearance of it—I had to school myself to patience.

This attitude so far won their confidence that before we parted at our last meeting, after most solemn vows of faith and secrecy, they took me into the secret. This was, however, only to the extent of teaching me the code and method; they still withheld from me rigidly the fact or political secret, or whatever it was that was the mainspring of their united action.

When I got home I wrote down, whilst it was fresh in my memory, all they told me. This script I studied until I had it so thoroughly by heart that I COULD not forget it. Then I burned the paper. However, there is now one gain at least: with my semaphore I can send through the Blue Mountains from side to side, with expedition, secrecy, and exactness, a message comprehensible to all.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL—Continued. June 6, 1907.

Last night I had a new experience of my Lady of the Shroud—in so far as form was concerned, at any rate. I was in bed, and just falling asleep, when I heard a queer kind of scratching at the glass door of the terrace. I listened acutely, my heart beating hard. The sound seemed to come

from low down, close to the floor. I jumped out of bed, ran to the window, and, pulling aside the heavy curtains, looked out.

The garden looked, as usual, ghostly in the moonlight, but there was not the faintest sign of movement anywhere, and no one was on or near the terrace. I looked eagerly down to where the sound had seemed to come from.

There, just inside the glass door, as though it had been pushed under the door, lay a paper closely folded in several laps. I picked it up and opened it. I was all in a tumult, for my heart told me whence it came. Inside was written in English, in a large, sprawling hand, such as might be from an English child of seven or eight:

“Meet me at the Flagstaff on the Rock!”

I knew the place, of course. On the farthest point of the rock on which the Castle stands is set a high flagstaff, whereon in old time the banner of the Vissarion family flew. At some far-off time, when the Castle had been liable to attack, this point had been strongly fortified. Indeed, in the days when the bow was a martial weapon it must have been quite impregnable.

A covered gallery, with loopholes for arrows, had been cut in the solid rock, running right round the point, quite surrounding the flagstaff and the great boss of rock on whose centre it was reared. A narrow drawbridge of immense strength had connected—in peaceful times, and still remained—the outer point of rock with an entrance formed in the outer wall, and guarded with flanking towers and a portcullis. Its use was manifestly to guard against surprise. From this point only could be seen the line of the rocks all round the point. Thus, any secret attack by boats could be made impossible.

Having hurriedly dressed myself, and taking with me both hunting-knife and revolver, I went out on the terrace, taking the precaution, unusual to me, of drawing the grille behind me and locking it. Matters around the Castle are in far too disturbed a condition to allow the taking of any foolish chances, either in the way of being unarmed or of leaving the private entrance to the Castle open. I found my way through the rocky passage, and climbed by the Jacob’s ladder fixed on the rock—a device of convenience in time of peace—to the foot of the flagstaff.

I was all on fire with expectation, and the time of going seemed exceeding long; so I was additionally disappointed by the contrast when I did not see my Lady there when I arrived. However, my heart beat freely again—perhaps more freely than ever—when I saw her crouching in the shadow of the Castle wall. From where she was she could not be seen from any point save that alone which I occupied; even from there it was only her white shroud that was conspicuous through the deep gloom of the shadow. The moonlight was so bright that the shadows were almost unnaturally black.

I rushed over towards her, and when close was about to say impulsively, “Why did you leave your tomb?” when it suddenly struck me that the question would be malapropos and embarrassing in many ways. So, better judgment prevailing, I said instead:

“It has been so long since I saw you! It has seemed an eternity to me!” Her answer came as quickly as even I could have wished; she spoke impulsively and without thought:

“It has been long to me too! Oh, so long! so long! I have asked you to come out here because I wanted to see you so much that I could not wait any longer. I have been heart-hungry for a sight of you!”

Her words, her eager attitude, the ineffable something which conveys the messages of the heart, the longing expression in her eyes as the full moonlight fell on her face, showing the stars as living gold—for in her eagerness she had stepped out towards me from the shadow—all set me on fire. Without a thought or a word—for it was Nature speaking in the language of Love,

which is a silent tongue—I stepped towards her and took her in my arms. She yielded with that sweet unconsciousness which is the perfection of Love, as if it was in obedience to some command uttered before the beginning of the world. Probably without any conscious effort on either side—I know there was none on mine—our mouths met in the first kiss of love.

At the time nothing in the meeting struck me as out of the common. But later in the night, when I was alone and in darkness, whenever I thought of it all—its strangeness and its stranger rapture—I could not but be sensible of the bizarre conditions for a love meeting. The place lonely, the time night, the man young and strong, and full of life and hope and ambition; the woman, beautiful and ardent though she was, a woman seemingly dead, clothed in the shroud in which she had been wrapped when lying in her tomb in the crypt of the old church.

Whilst we were together, anyhow, there was little thought of the kind; no reasoning of any kind on my part. Love has its own laws and its own logic. Under the flagstaff, where the Vissarion banner was wont to flap in the breeze, she was in my arms; her sweet breath was on my face; her heart was beating against my own. What need was there for reason at all? *Inter arma silent leges*—the voice of reason is silent in the stress of passion. Dead she may be, or Un-dead—a Vampire with one foot in Hell and one on earth. But I love her; and come what may, here or hereafter, she is mine. As my mate, we shall fare along together, whatsoever the end may be, or wheresoever our path may lead. If she is indeed to be won from the nethermost Hell, then be mine the task!

But to go back to the record. When I had once started speaking to her in words of passion I could not stop. I did not want to—if I could; and she did not appear to wish it either. Can there be a woman—alive or dead—who would not want to hear the rapture of her lover expressed to her whilst she is enclosed in his arms?

There was no attempt at reticence on my part now; I took it for granted that she knew all that I surmised, and, as she made neither protest nor comment, that she accepted my belief as to her indeterminate existence. Sometimes her eyes would be closed, but even then the rapture of her face was almost beyond belief. Then, when the beautiful eyes would open and gaze on me, the stars that were in them would shine and scintillate as though they were formed of living fire. She said little, very little; but though the words were few, every syllable was fraught with love, and went straight to the very core of my heart.

By-and-by, when our transport had calmed to joy, I asked when I might next see her, and how and where I might find her when I should want to. She did not reply directly, but, holding me close in her arms, whispered in my ear with that breathless softness which is a lover's rapture of speech:

“I have come here under terrible difficulties, not only because I love you—and that would be enough—but because, as well as the joy of seeing you, I wanted to warn you.”

“To warn me! Why?” I queried. Her reply came with a bashful hesitation, with something of a struggle in it, as of one who for some ulterior reason had to pick her words:

“There are difficulties and dangers ahead of you. You are beset with them; and they are all the greater because they are, of grim necessity, hidden from you. You cannot go anywhere, look in any direction, do anything, say anything, but it may be a signal for danger. My dear, it lurks everywhere—in the light as well as in the darkness; in the open as well as in the secret places; from friends as well as foes; when you are least prepared; when you may least expect it. Oh, I know it, and what it is to endure; for I share it for you—for your dear sake!”

“My darling!” was all I could say, as I drew her again closer to me and kissed her. After a bit she was calmer; seeing this, I came back to the subject that she had—in part, at all events—come to me to speak about:

“But if difficulty and danger hedge me in so everlastingly, and if I am to have no indication whatever of its kind or purpose, what can I do? God knows I would willingly guard myself—not on my own account, but for your dear sake. I have now a cause to live and be strong, and to keep all my faculties, since it may mean much to you. If you may not tell me details, may you not indicate to me some line of conduct, of action, that would be most in accord with your wishes—or, rather, with your idea of what would be best?”

She looked at me fixedly before speaking—a long, purposeful, loving look which no man born of woman could misunderstand. Then she spoke slowly, deliberately, emphatically:

“Be bold, and fear not. Be true to yourself, to me—it is the same thing. These are the best guards you can use. Your safety does not rest with me. Ah, I wish it did! I wish to God it did!” In my inner heart it thrilled me not merely to hear the expression of her wish, but to hear her use the name of God as she did. I understand now, in the calm of this place and with the sunlight before me, that my belief as to her being all woman—living woman—was not quite dead: but though at the moment my heart did not recognize the doubt, my brain did. And I made up my mind that we should not part this time until she knew that I had seen her, and where; but, despite my own thoughts, my outer ears listened greedily as she went on.

“As for me, you may not find ME, but I shall find YOU, be sure! And now we must say ‘Good-night,’ my dear, my dear! Tell me once again that you love me, for it is a sweetness that one does not wish to forego—even one who wears such a garment as this—and rests where I must rest.” As she spoke she held up part of her cerements for me to see. What could I do but take her once again in my arms and hold her close, close. God knows it was all in love; but it was passionate love which surged through my every vein as I strained her dear body to mine. But yet this embrace was not selfish; it was not all an expression of my own passion. It was based on pity—the pity which is twin-born with true love. Breathless from our kisses, when presently we released each other, she stood in a glorious rapture, like a white spirit in the moonlight, and as her lovely, starlit eyes seemed to devour me, she spoke in a languorous ecstasy:

“Oh, how you love me! how you love me! It is worth all I have gone through for this, even to wearing this terrible drapery.” And again she pointed to her shroud.

Here was my chance to speak of what I knew, and I took it. “I know, I know. Moreover, I know that awful resting-place.”

I was interrupted, cut short in the midst of my sentence, not by any word, but by the frightened look in her eyes and the fear-mastered way in which she shrank away from me. I suppose in reality she could not be paler than she looked when the colour-absorbing moonlight fell on her; but on the instant all semblance of living seemed to shrink and fall away, and she looked with eyes of dread as if in some awful way held in thrall. But for the movement of the pitiful glance, she would have seemed of soulless marble, so deadly cold did she look.

The moments that dragged themselves out whilst I waited for her to speak seemed endless. At length her words came in an awed whisper, so faint that even in that stilly night I could hardly hear it:

“You know—you know my resting-place! How—when was that?” There was nothing to do now but to speak out the truth:

“I was in the crypt of St. Sava. It was all by accident. I was exploring all around the Castle, and I went there in my course. I found the winding stair in the rock behind the screen, and went

down. Dear, I loved you well before that awful moment, but then, even as the lantern fell tingling on the glass, my love multiplied itself, with pity as a factor.” She was silent for a few seconds. When she spoke, there was a new tone in her voice:

“But were you not shocked?”

“Of course I was,” I answered on the spur of the moment, and I now think wisely. “Shocked is hardly the word. I was horrified beyond anything that words can convey that you—YOU should have to so endure! I did not like to return, for I feared lest my doing so might set some barrier between us. But in due time I did return on another day.”

“Well?” Her voice was like sweet music.

“I had another shock that time, worse than before, for you were not there. Then indeed it was that I knew to myself how dear you were— how dear you are to me. Whilst I live, you—living or dead—shall always be in my heart.” She breathed hard. The elation in her eyes made them outshine the moonlight, but she said no word. I went on:

“My dear, I had come into the crypt full of courage and hope, though I knew what dreadful sight should sear my eyes once again. But we little know what may be in store for us, no matter what we expect. I went out with a heart like water from that dreadful desolation.”

“Oh, how you love me, dear!” Cheered by her words, and even more by her tone, I went on with renewed courage. There was no halting, no faltering in my intention now:

“You and I, my dear, were ordained for each other. I cannot help it that you had already suffered before I knew you. It may be that there may be for you still suffering that I may not prevent, endurance that I may not shorten; but what a man can do is yours. Not Hell itself will stop me, if it be possible that I may win through its torments with you in my arms!”

“Will nothing stop you, then?” Her question was breathed as softly as the strain of an AEolian harp.

“Nothing!” I said, and I heard my own teeth snap together. There was something speaking within me stronger than I had ever known myself to be. Again came a query, trembling, quavering, quivering, as though the issue was of more than life or death:

“Not this?” She held up a corner of the shroud, and as she saw my face and realized the answer before I spoke, went on: “With all it implies?”

“Not if it were wrought of the cerecloths of the damned!” There was a long pause. Her voice was more resolute when she spoke again. It rang. Moreover, there was in it a joyous note, as of one who feels new hope:

“But do you know what men say? Some of them, that I am dead and buried; others, that I am not only dead and buried, but that I am one of those unhappy beings that may not die the common death of man. Who live on a fearful life-in-death, whereby they are harmful to all. Those unhappy Un-dead whom men call Vampires—who live on the blood of the living, and bring eternal damnation as well as death with the poison of their dreadful kisses!

“I know what men say sometimes,” I answered. “But I know also what my own heart says; and I rather choose to obey its calling than all the voices of the living or the dead. Come what may, I am pledged to you. If it be that your old life has to be rewon for you out of the very jaws of Death and Hell, I shall keep the faith I have pledged, and that here I pledge again!” As I finished speaking I sank on my knees at her feet, and, putting my arms round her, drew her close to me. Her tears rained down on my face as she stroked my hair with her soft, strong hand and whispered to me:

“This is indeed to be one. What more holy marriage can God give to any of His creatures?” We were both silent for a time.

I think I was the first to recover my senses. That I did so was manifest by my asking her: “When may we meet again?”—a thing I had never remembered doing at any of our former partings. She answered with a rising and falling of the voice that was just above a whisper, as soft and cooing as the voice of a pigeon:

“That will be soon—as soon as I can manage it, be sure. My dear, my dear!” The last four words of endearment she spoke in a low but prolonged and piercing tone which made me thrill with delight.

“Give me some token,” I said, “that I may have always close to me to ease my aching heart till we meet again, and ever after, for love’s sake!” Her mind seemed to leap to understanding, and with a purpose all her own. Stooping for an instant, she tore off with swift, strong fingers a fragment of her shroud. This, having kissed it, she handed to me, whispering:

“It is time that we part. You must leave me now. Take this, and keep it for ever. I shall be less unhappy in my terrible loneliness whilst it lasts if I know that this my gift, which for good or ill is a part of me as you know me, is close to you. It may be, my very dear, that some day you may be glad and even proud of this hour, as I am.” She kissed me as I took it.

“For life or death, I care not which, so long as I am with you!” I said, as I moved off. Descending the Jacob’s ladder, I made my way down the rock-hewn passage.

The last thing I saw was the beautiful face of my Lady of the Shroud as she leaned over the edge of the opening. Her eyes were like glowing stars as her looks followed me. That look shall never fade from my memory.

After a few agitating moments of thought I half mechanically took my way down to the garden. Opening the grille, I entered my lonely room, which looked all the more lonely for the memory of the rapturous moments under the Flagstaff. I went to bed as one in a dream. There I lay till sunrise—awake and thinking.