



“frae the stoupit trance”

JOHN BUCHAN

FOIRSPEIK

THE LASS CAM ben the ruim wi a dertin muivement lik a swallae, luikin roun wi the samen bird-lik quiknes, an than run acorss the polist fluir ti whaur a ying cheil sut on a settil wi ae shank liggit alang o'd.

“A hae pit by this danss fur yow, Quentin,” shae sayed, pronuncin the nemm wi a bonie sindert lilt. “Ye maun be lanerlie no linkin, sae A wul sit wi ye. Whitlik wul we speik o?”

The ying cheil didna awnser belyve, fur hiz vissie wes hauddit bi hir faiss. He nivver dramed at the ill-shakken an a bittie hamelt lassie he rampit wi lang syne in Paris wuid growe until sicna be-in.

The clane delicat lings o hir feigur, the by-ordinar delyte an perfit cullourin o fax an huil, the chairmin ying ogartnes o the ein, this wes bewtie, he reflekkit, a marakil, a clairance. Hir maiden finerie an hir habuliment, at wes the litt o whyt fyre, gied hir the kest o a craitur o eiss an flamb.

“Anent yeirsell, pleise, Saskia,” he sayed. “Ar ye happie nou at ye ar ane up-grown leddie?”

“Happie!” hir voss hed a dirl intilt lik muisik, freistie muisik.

“The days ar owre schortsum. A gruche the ours whan A maun slepe. Thai say it is said fur me ti out-cum at a tim o weir. Bot the warl is verra kynd ti me, an eftir aw, it is a weir o victorie fur wir Roushiaie. An leisten til me, Quentin. The morn A'm ti be alloued ti stert nourissin at the Alexander Ospital. Whitlik dae ye think o thon?”

The tyme wes Januar eir 1916 an the plece a ruim in the gryte Nirski Pailace. Nae myout o weir, nae breith o the snaw-sell rews, intert that kwerious chaumer whaur Prence Peter Nirski hauddit a curn o the foirmaist o hiz fawmous traisurs. It wes kenspekkil fur its waant o hingins an cushinin – anerlie a sonk ir twa an a pukkil fine ruggs on the arbor-vitae fluir. The waws wes o a grene marmore vaned

DALQUHARTER

lik caprois, the ruif wes o a mair dirk marmore inset wi whyt inkervit desings. Skailed about aw owre wes taibils an caibinets laidit wi fine cheinie lames, an kervit jaud, an ivors, an skimmerin Persiane an Rhodes veshels. In aw the ruim the wes skarcelins oniethin o metall an no a tiche o giltin ir bricht cullour. The licht cam frae grene alabast cruises, an the plece swoumit in a cauld grene lowe lik a cove aneith the sie. The air wes waarm an odoratif, an tho it wes verra quate thare a bum o vossis an the streinyies o danss muisik driftit tilt frae the stoupit transs whaur cuid be sein the gliff o the lichts frae the gryte bawin-ruim ayont.

The ying cheil hed a tin faiss wi lings o doul roun the mou an ein. The waarm ruim hed gied him a heich cullour, at inressit hiz kest o brukkilnes. He feillit a whein smuired bi the plece, at semed til him fur baith bodie an mynd a het-houss, tho he kent verra weill at the Nirski Pailace on this gala evenin wesna in onie wey teipical o the laun ir its maisters. Anerlie ane ouk syne he bene aitin blak breid wi its awner in a bothie on the Volhynian frunt.

“Ye hae cum ti be dumfounnerin, Saskia,” he sayed. “A winna ruise ma auld pley-fer; ye maun be weiriet o thon. A wiss ye happienes aw the lang day lik a fairie-taill prenses. Bot ane auld crok lik me canna dae mukkil ti halp ye tilt. The sairvice semes the wrang wey roun, fur heir ye ar, wystin yeir tyme crakkin wi me.”

Shae pit hir haun intil hiz. “Puir Quentin! Is the shank gey sair?”

He lauched. “Och, na. It’s mendin fawmouslie. A’l be yibbil ti git about ouden a staif in anither moneth, an than ye maun leir me aw the nyow danssis.”

The jiggin muisik o a twa-staup flaitit doun the transs. It med the ying cheil’s brou kontrak, fur it brocht til him a veisioun o deid faissis in the mirk o a Novemmer glomin. He hed aince hed a frein at uised ti whussil that tuin, an he hed sein him die in the Hollebeke glaur. The wes sumthin gruesum in the souch ... he wes shuirlyie dowf this evenin, fur the’r semed nocht gruesum about the houss, the ruim, the danssin, the hale o Roushiaie ... thur laist days hed bene tholin a sinse o mishanter threitenin, o a mirk hinger drawin doun upo

JOHN BUCHAN

a brow warl. Thai didna grie wi him at the Embassie, bot he cuidna tyne the norie.

The quyne sein hiz suddent dwam.

“Whitlik ar ye thinkin on?” shae speired. It bene hir favourit quastioun as a bairn.

“A wes thinkin at A lik wissed ye wes in Paris.”

“Bot whitwey?”

“Acause A think ye wuid be saufer.”

“Ai, whit blethers, deir Quentin! Whaur suid it be sauf gif no ben ma ain Roushiaie, whaur A hae freins – ai! sae monies, an clans an clans o kin? It is Fraince an Inglan that ar daungerous wi the Germane gunns grummilin at thair duirs – ma mane is at ma lyfe is owre settilt an pluffit. A’m owre siccar, an A dinna ettil ti be siccar.”

The ying cheil liftit a wechtie kistie frae a taibil at hiz elbuk. It wes o a dirk grene impyre jaud, wi a byous kervit lidd. He aff tuik the lidd an pikit up thrie wie orrals o ware – a preist wi a berde, a peirie sojer, an a draucht-ox. Pittin the thriesum in a tryangil, he ballanced the jaud kist atap o thaim.

“Luik, Saskia! Gif ye wes bydin ben thon buist, ye’l wuid think it geyan siccar. Ye wuid vissie the bouk o the waws an the hairdnes o the stane, an ye wuid drame awaw in a pecefu grene glomin. Bot aw the tyme it wuid be uphauddit bi truffils, brukkil truffils.”

Shae shak hir heid. “Ye dinna unnerstaun. Ye canna unnerstaun. We ar a verra auld an strang lede wi ruits howe in the yird.”

“Leise on God ye ar richt,” he sayed. “Bot, Saskia, ye ken gif A’l can ivver serr ye, ye hae anerlie ti commaund me. Nou A’l can dae nae mair fur ye nir the mouss fur the lyoun, at the stert o the store. Bot the store hed an en, ye mynd, an sum day it mote be in ma pouer ti halp ye. Hecht ti sen fur me.”

The lass lauchit mirrie-lik. “‘The Keing o Spanyie’s dochter’,” shae quottit,

‘Cam ti veisit me,
An aw fur the luve
O ma littil nit-trie.’

DALQUHARTER

The ither lauchit alse, as a ying cheil in the uinifurm o the Preobrajenskae Gairds approchit ti clame the lass. “Ein a nit-trie wul can be a beild in a storme,” he sayed.

“In course A hecht, Quentin,” shae sayed. “ Au revoir. Suin A’l cum an tak ye ti sipper, an we wul speik o naethin bot nit-tries.”

He waached the twasum quat the ruim, hir gown lowin lik a tung o fyre in the umbrakkilt duirwey. Than he slawlie rase til hiz feit, fur he thocht at he wuid waatch the danssin fur a wie. Sumthin muived asyde him, an he tirmed in tyme ti let the jaud kistie frae stramashin ti the fluir. Twa o the stoups hed skytit.

Then he pit bak the objek on its richt taibil an stuid seilent fur a bittie.

“The preist an the sojer gane, an anerlie the beiss o birn levit ... gif A hed ane inklin ti be freitie, A suid cry that an ill foirtaikin.”



"Guthrie Memorance Kirk"