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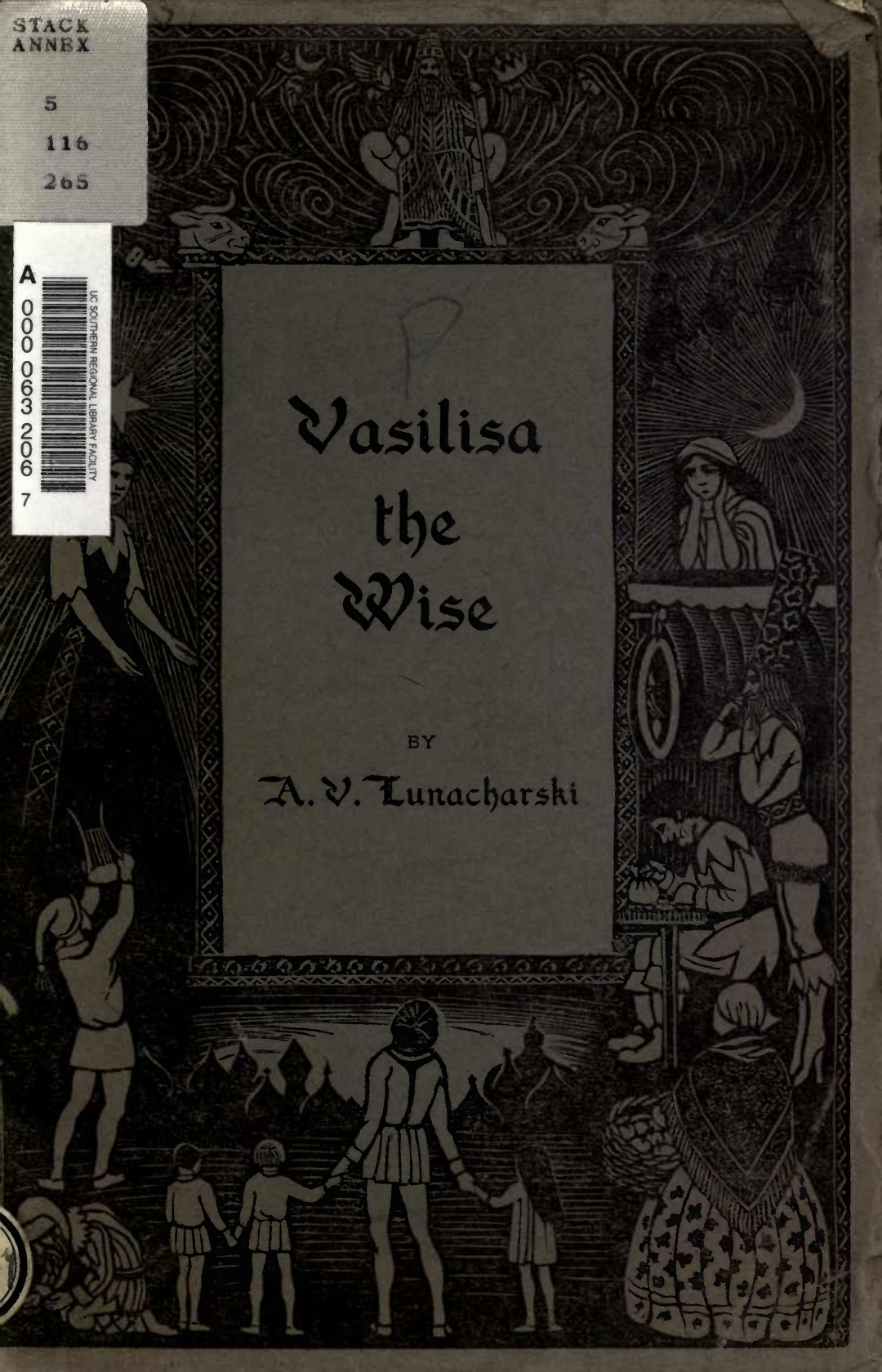
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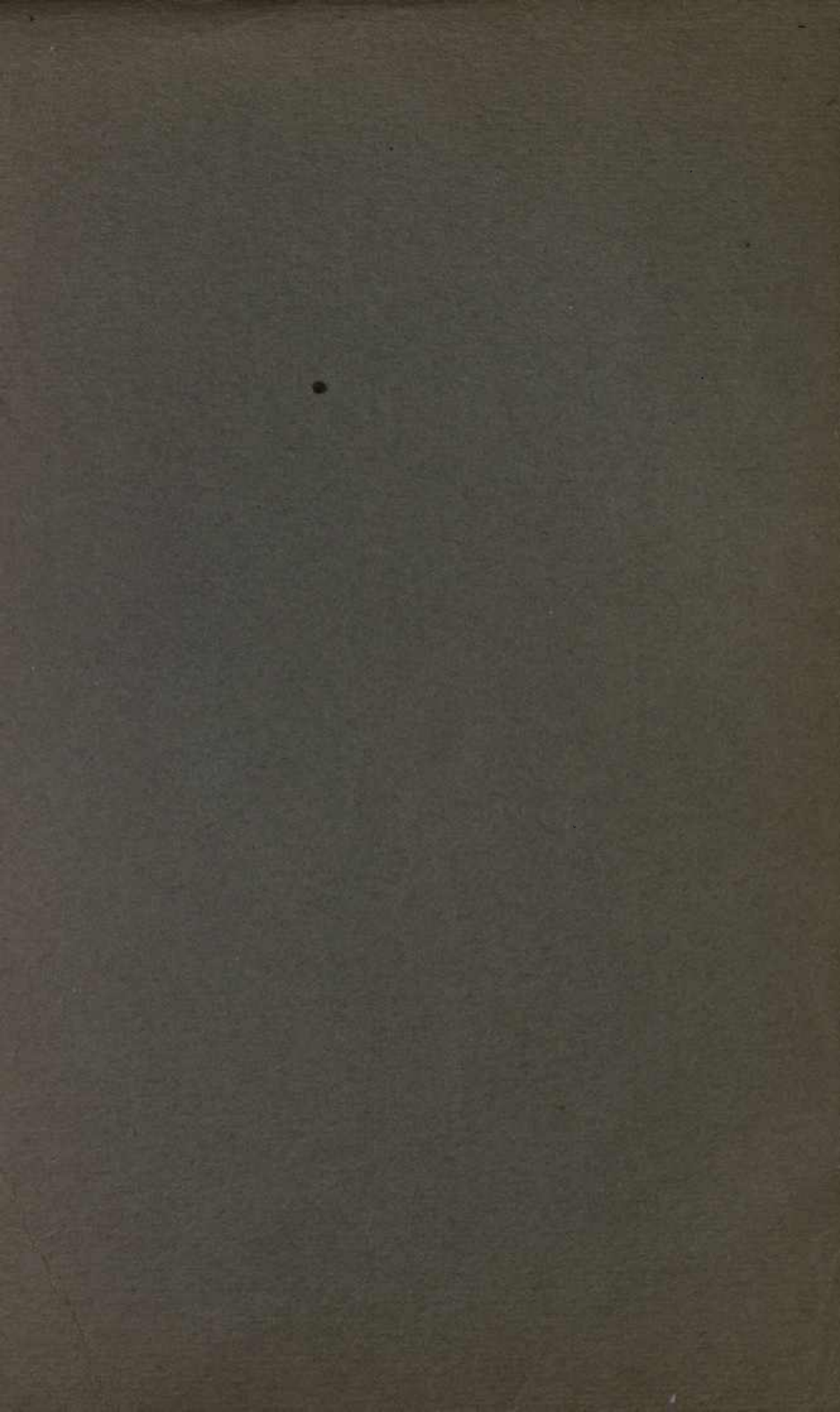
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Vasilisa
the
Wise

BY
A. V. Lunacharski





Vasilisa the Wise

A DRAMATIC FAIRY TALE

BY

A. V. Lunacharski

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION

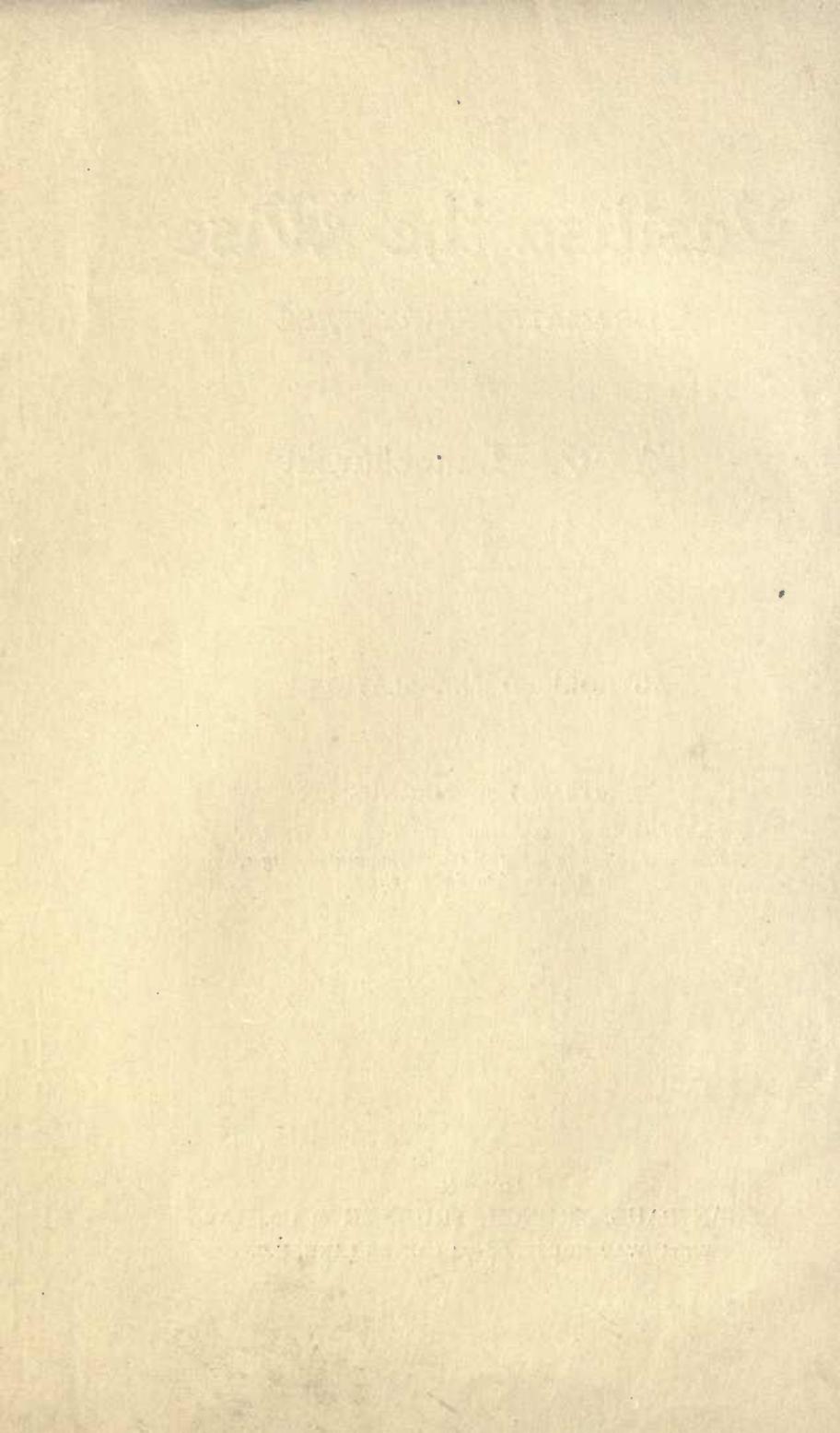
BY

LEONARD A. MAGNUS.

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Editor and Translator of "The Armament of Igor,"
"Russian Folk Tales," etc.*

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRUBNER & Co., LTD.,
BROADWAY HOUSE, 68-74 CARTER LANE, E.C.



AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

The English reader may be interested to know something about the inception of the dramatic fairy-tale now presented to him. Anyone, however ill-informed on the history of Russia during the last four years, will understand that the quantity of work thrust on me since my appointment as People's Commissary for Education has been overwhelming. During this labour, incessant, responsible, and very varied, I have been even more oppressed by the extraordinarily exacting experiences and vicissitudes of the tragic struggle maintained by our party with its many enemies at home and abroad. There could never be any thought of rest or respite. So it occurred to me to create some mental relief for myself by taking up my pen and writing a poetic work, if possible, entirely unconnected with activities around me.

Naturally, my mind was filled with all sorts of emotions and ideas, thronging in from all sides through the circumstances of life. The first product of this kind was the dramatic phantasy, *THE MAGI*. When I read it to my friends and told them that it had been written in eight nights, other Russian writers, including amongst them Valeri Briusov (whose fame as a poet has also spread to England), refused to believe in the possibility of such intensity of work, especially as the result was so finished and smooth. In my preface to this drama I refer to the immense mental relief afforded to me by the addition of eight sleepless nights to the eight days of work. Naturally, a little later, in January, 1919, I decided to repeat my experiment, and then there emerged, and was written in the course of a fortnight, the dramatic fairy-tale, *VASILISA*.

Personally, I feel no necessity to expound it. In one review of it, Briusov, the poet I have mentioned, whilst admitting it to be the best of my works, also said that it was too understandable, that all the symbols had been decoded to excess, that it was too much intellectualised. This is not my opinion, because, on the contrary, other readers have found in it much that to them is unexplained and obscure.

I have never, of design, in any of my writings, sought after obscurity ; but neither have I been a disciple of rationalism in art. Possibly, to the very curious it will appear that VASILISA verges upon a problem play, and to folk of a different calibre that it is indefinite. This very fact, it seems to me, proves that some measure has been observed—that there is in it a real thought, which is, however, not expressed exegetically, but artistically.

The subject of VASILISA, the style of its composition—which is fairly novel, I think, in Russian literature—the great approbation I have received, amongst others from my friend Maxim Gorki—these are all motives that have made me continue with the elaboration of the same material. The result of this has been the second part of VASILISA, called MITRA THE SAVIOUR, a long dramatic poem, for the publication of which for various reasons I do not consider the present time opportune. I also propose writing a third part, to be entitled THE LAST HERO. The whole trilogy will delineate in fabulous form a periphrasis of what I may term my social philosophy. This trilogy can only be published in the course of some years. Meanwhile, VASILISA can stand as an independent drama, rounded off and complete in itself.

A. LUNACHARSKI.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

In introducing Lunacharski's *VASILISA THE WISE* to English readers, I only wish to state for myself, that, although my name appears on the title-page, I feel that the merit of the translation is due to the patience and skill of my collaborator, Mr. Karl Walter. I wish also to thank Miss Phyllis Gardner for the design of the cover.

In the matter of style and metre, I have tried to adhere rigidly to the Russian, and to convey in English the rhythm of the original.

I have often spent pleasant hours in translating from Russian ; but, in this case, I cannot adequately express my feelings of gratitude to the author-creator, as such, or for the assistance he has rendered me.

It will perhaps be useful to give some hints to the reader regarding pronunciation. Every Russian name and word has been accented, and it will render the reading much easier and more harmonious if readers will attend to the accentuation. The vowels are to be sounded as in Italian : *y* as a vowel, something like *i* in the word *swim*. *G* is always hard ; *ch* as in *church*, *zh* as the *s* in *leisure* ; *kh* as German or Scotch *ch* ; *s* never as *z*, but always hard as in *sat*, *sit* ; *z* always soft as in *zone*, *zero*.

In the scenes in Moonland, the language has been faithfully transliterated, and the text is thus rendered at the author's express desire. Here, again, the vowels are to be sounded as in Italian ; *Ng* as *ng* in *strong* ; and the accentuation should be followed when indicated ; otherwise, the accent is even.

Very soon, we hope to publish translations of the other parts of this great Trilogy, each in its own way just as wonderful.

After my dry prologue, let me, like *Ngi*, ring up the curtain on Fairy-land.—*Béyuli-lyúmi-Táizei*.

L. A. M.

Vasilisa the Wise.

CHARACTERS.

Vasilisa the Wise.

Mámelfa, her nurse.

Kirbit, her father.

Merodákh, a god.

Fúnduk, a king.

Churilo,
Seredin, } his sons.
Iván,

Kíkhrom, a noble.

Polosátik, } jesters.
Zliúka,

Yálya-m, a foreign queen.

Ngí, an interpreter.

Three Magi.

Svetozár,
Yálya-da, } the children.
Mitra,

Herald and other attendants at the court of Tsar Fúnduk. Maidens in attendance on Vasilisa. Boy-maidens, warriors, and other attendants at the court of Yálya-m. Persons in the visions.

SCENES.

- Scene I. *The Castle of Merodákh.*
 „ 2. *The same.*
 „ 3. *The Court of Tsar Fúnduk.*
 „ 4. *The Throne Room.*
 „ 5. *The Palace Garden.*
 „ 6. *On the Steps of the Palace.*
 „ 7. *Nursery in the Palace.*
 „ 8. *In the Desert.*
 „ 9. *The Court of Yálya-m.*
 „ 10. *A Room in Vasilisa's Palace.*
 „ 11. *The Court of Yálya-m.*
 „ 12. *In the Desert.*
 „ 13. *The Palace Garden.*
 „ 14. *On the Steps of the Palace.*

Vasilisa the Wise,

A DRAMATIC FAIRY TALE.

Scene I.

[A veranda in the castle of Merodákh-Rámmon. A garden visible below. Beyond a fence, sands and hills, the sea and the sky. Merodákh-Rámmon sitting on the balcony between two lofty white columns, surmounted with carved bulls' heads. He has a curly beard and is resting his head on his hands, staring in front of him. Kírbit enters from behind, and for a moment stands silent. Kírbit is grey. Merodákh looks round slowly.]

Merodákh. Thou'rt here? I had already summoned thee.
We must now venture!

Kírbit. All seems here transformed!

Merodákh. Aye, here I am God. But I too have changed.
I had been ever busy ceaselessly
Enlarging my experience, increasing
My reason's range, till one clear day I heard
A whisper in my heart: "But what of Love?"
And straightway, in a rosy wreath of vapours,
My brother Gods swirled round me, and my spirit
Was gently held in sweetest lassitude,
And dreams unveiled themselves, like flowers in rain;
And rays of starlight rang in melody. . . .
A passion and a splendour! Expectation!
Then, in my paradise of visions all
Uncontemplated, then at last I met
The queen and sovereign of my changèd soul,—
That queen thy daughter, King of the realm of ice,
Wise brother mine.

Kírbit. Aye, aye. . . .

Merodákh. Yea,—heretofore, I took no petty portion
Of the whole universe, wherein to see
My soul as in a mirror. And faithfully
Did all things mirror me! My intellect
Resolved all, all lay open, all lay bared,
But all too clear and plain, known, void and empty!
I have too long beheld, revealed to view,
The molecules' wild revelry of dance,

Which jig in figures whose repeating series
 Only cold thought could trace. But now, but now—
 Look, friend, upon that Ocean! Seest thou how
 With new life I have plenished it? For I
 Was weary and displeas'd with darting dolphins,
 With big-mouthed sharks that swam the ocean depths,
 And agile wonderful cephalopods.
 So now thou wilt see playful sirens there,
 Who flash their tails and gleam like diamonds,
 And wave their silvery arms enticingly,
 Tresses wild-blown, drenched in the salty sea.
 For them my passion has conceived yon Proteus,—
 Fat-bellied dolt, web-footed Proteus,—thus
 For ever trying on his scampish tricks,
 For ever fooled. Behold him how he snarls,
 And twists and rolls his eyes at their mocking laughter;
 And hear him quack in fury and groan; and then
 He'll burst, and all the sea will be a motley
 Of creaming foam! Or look upon those hills,
 Those birds, all sorts, with human heads, some crowned,
 Some plumed with diadems of golden flowers,
 Some silent, some that coo or sing or speak.
 Listen to them; they grieve and call for help.
 There, too, in a garden, round an apple-tree
 A red-scaled snake coils; out of his gaping maw
 The quivering tongue slides diamond-shaped; his eyes
 Mesmeric stare.
 Some flowers are there, blue, with peals of bells
 Chiming like distant gongs, and some send forth
 A fragrance visible.
 Along that little path there, suddenly,
 The earth will thrill where Vasilisa's feet
 Shall in due season deign to tread the sod. . . .
 And what is in my castle? It is full
 Of butterflies and of coy stillnesses,
 Of shadows, raptures, murmurs of low prayers.
 There Demon Passion seals his ruby lips
 With his own finger to restrain himself.
 Now, Kírbit, grey old sage, look well on me,
 Me, Merodákh, on Merodákh-Rámmon,
 Me, the magician of Chaldaean spells,—
 'Tis I that love the godlike Vasilisa!

Kirbit. Yea, yea. . . .

Merodákh. What say'st thou of it? Ope thine eyes
Upon the misty future! Tell me this, how much
Of happiness bodes there for me?

Kirbit. No need
To look so far.

Merodákh. But thou, art thou not glad
That Merodákh is wooing Kirbit's daughter?

Kirbit. On earth are many maids, but there are none
Like Vasilisa. Of the men on earth,
Wisest of all, most powerful and best,
Purest of all, is Merodákh the Prince.

Merodákh. Let us give praise to Fate!

Kirbit. Aye, render praise;
For to give praise to Fate is never vain.
And at this very moment, she herself
Is choosing at her mirror, for herself.

Merodákh. Then let us hasten thither.

Kirbit. Nay, no need.
Hasten there but in thought, and look on her,—
I see her now.

Merodákh. Lend me thine eyes! I, too,
Can see them.

[*Vasilisa's upper room comes into view.*]

Scene II.

[*Merodákh and Kirbit on the veranda, as in last scene. The back of the stage represents Vasilisa's broad carved upper room. Vasilisa herself is sitting in the middle of the room, in front of a large mirror, with two candles burning, though it is daylight. On carpeted benches along the walls, maidens are sitting in bright dresses. The nurse Mámelja in the corner.*]

The Maiden's Chorus. The white world has no boundary.
Little mirror, let me see!
Nought is far and nought is nigh.
Little mirror, teach the eye!
Youth to youth, and peer to peer,—
Comeliness is beauty's right.
Who shall be our master here,
Bright little moon to give us light?

Vasilisa. Sing on, sing on ! I see something.

Mámelfa. Better I should utter a spell.

Show ! Show !
 Search high and low !
 On the wondrous champion
 Shall our wind-borne breath not blow ?
 On our little mirror here
 Cause his image to appear !
 Bright as sunshine bid it glow !

Vasilisa. I see . . .

Mámelfa. My little lady, let me have a look ! What a fine man ! Oh, his eyes ! They frighten me—his curly beard—the strength of his lips—the manhood in his temples ! As a lion among animals, is he among men ! He is splendid, my *Vasilisa* ! I can be glad that such an eagle will live with thee as thy very own.

Vasilisa. Splendid, but I want to choose, I want to choose !

Mámelfa. The best of men to the best of maids !

Vasilisa. That is not my will.

Mámelfa. If thou wilt it not, there is an end of it. Who dare stand against thy desire ? Thou art wisest of all.

Vasilisa. Sing on, maidens, that the glass show, not the best of men, but another.

The Maidens' Chorus. Hearts will choose, hearts will be free ;
 Mirror, gleam again for me !
 Better, worse,—words void and vain ;
 Heart's own love alone shall reign.
 Mirror, set them side by side ;
 Heart's own choice is greatest bliss.
 He shall win her as his bride,
 And her red lips he shall kiss.

Vasilisa. The vision is forming ; sing on, sing on !

Mámelfa. Better I should utter a spell.

Swift the fierce wild beast can race ;
 Set thou forth upon the chase !
 Fly, white hawk, resplendently !
 Some new face let us now see ;
 Other men there are of might ;
 Let gleam below another light.

Vasilisa. He is really beautiful ; so valorous !

Mámelfa. I know him ; that is Eruslán the Knight. Thou needst not look further. He is our own Knight, a good Russian. And how he will love ! Yes, he will forget his prowess, let his steed grow fat in the stable, to sit beside Vasilisa.

Vasilisa. What ? I am to choose him ?

Mámelfa. Yes, my little lady, choose him !

Vasilisa. My mirror, show me yet another. Be not long in searching ; show me now the one who is nearest and dearest. Oh, Mother,—look !

Mámelfa. But this man is quite different from the others. He is—oh, too much himself !

Vasilisa. It is he I want.

Mámelfa. But why, Vasilisushka, why, my little lady ?

Vasilisa. Mother, their part is accomplished, his has not begun. With a fine array of many hued silks on a cloth all white, marvellous a pattern appeareth in my sight. I will deck out his soul with his own thoughts and desire ; I will re-gild his heart with his own hot fire. Comrade mine, dear one, thou canst not sound how many treasures within thee abound. Dear mirror mine, I thank thee anew—thou hast shown me the unknown, thou hast shown me the unready ! Sweet it is to be thinking of him sitting beneath that tree, with his eyes drooped, and wotting not that Vasilisa is gazing at him, that Vasilisa loves him, that she will soon summon him, will soon fondle him, curtesy to him humbly and call him her lord,—that she will soon gather herself up together and bestow herself on him as a gift unstinted ! Oh, Ivánushka, my love and darling, be of all men the happiest ! Grieve not, Iván, my love ;

let my voice reach out unto thee! Gaze, gaze upon the ground! Behold! It is not grass in front of thee, but a green abyss. Gaze on, gaze on; 'tis myself thou seest, my blue eyes and my dark brows, my golden locks, my red lips, my mouth, my spirit in the heights and in the depths. Canst thou not hear my heart, how hotly it beats? Knowest thou that destiny is reckoning every one of those beats? Gaze deeper into the green abyss! Little heads of children are beckoning to thee. Those, Iván, are our son and our daughter!—My Iván accepts them; he has smiled.

[*Vasilisa's upper room disappears.*]

Kirbit. Yea, yea.

Merodákh. No, I will not lift a finger,
Nor struggle, whatsoe'er portend. So be it!
But—for long time to come, let all things shroud
Themselves in cerements of night, and I
Will sleep. For I no longer wish to live.

Kirbit. Thou'rt mighty.

Merodákh. Hence I suffer mightily.

CURTAIN.

Scene III.

[The dining room in Tsar Fúnáuk's palace. Dinner is just over. The servants are clearing up. Zliúka and Polosátik by a long table. Zliúka is sullenly counting up the leavings, gathering them up into a bag. Polosátik is looking at him and laughing. Zliúka is a dwarf, old and hunchbacked. Polosátik is younger and more good humoured, also very small, but merry.]

Polosátik. What is your hoard for ?

Zliúka. Sh——! For a rainy day. . . . But don't tell anyone !

Polosátik. I should eat them up.

Zliúka. Hush! You might. . . . But don't disturb my count.

Polosátik. Do you even count the crumbs ?

Zliúka [muttering]. Eleven—twelve—thirteen.

Polosátik [laughing aloud]. What's the use of your sweeping them so carefully into a corner ? His Highness the Prince will look after you all right.

Zliúka. Stop talking ! You are a fool, and I am sensible. You were born to be a dwarf, with a very scanty supply of wits, but I was born to be a great man. My mother, be she accursèd, dropped me one day and broke my spine ; but I have a big head, out of proportion. I was meant to be big, but I have a bent backbone. I am become a dwarf and a fool ; I might have been a merchant—or even a sacristan. But any proper man has an instinct for the accumulation of property. To have no property is to have no body. That's why I am a collector. I sleep with my poor treasure by me ; and feel all the time, " I have something of my very own."

Polosátik. Oh, what a sage you are, Zliúka, you son of a dromedary ! I never accumulate things ; I like to think of giving up even other people's treasures ! Yes, to give it all up ! ' Mine ' and ' Thine ' indeed ! I have played at mud-pies and laughed at it all ; for Kings do the same with the kingdoms they call their own—just the same kind of dirt ! But to give it all up, to escape into the woods, the fields, where there is not a human being near you, only birds and beasts ; there to heave a sigh of relief, to look out on the horizon of the white world—to feel it is all, unfenced, unpreserved, all mine ! The bright moon in the heavens, and his image on the lake ; the

silent trees ; the song of the goldhammer ; sweetness at heart, and a hallowed calm over the whole of the sky ;—to embrace the whole world—so—with my little dwarfish hands, and call it mine ! Then I who am so little, so very small, just as well as the biggest giant on earth, I can bestow myself on the world, and say, ' Accept this of me.'

A Servant [*sweeping*]. You dirty fellow, what a mess ! Shoo, you ragamuffin ! Get out from under the table there, you bandy-legged fool, you silly idiots, both of you !

[*Polosátik runs away and sits on his heels and smiles. Zliúka is angrily pushing his possessions into his bag, when the servant scatters them with a broom.*]

Servant. Shoo ! Off you go, you vagabond ; trying to sneak the crumbs away, are you ? I'll sweep 'em up ! That's for the dogs.

Zliúka [*hurriedly picking them up*]. Let me have them, let me have them. Don't give yourself the trouble.

Servant. Get out ! [*Hits him with the broom*].

Zliúka [*yells and rubs the sore spot*]. I won't give them up ! Don't touch them ! They're mine !

[*Enter Kíkhrom, a boyár from the steppes : he sits on a couch and breathes heavily.*]

Kíkhrom. Mf—get me some brandy !

Servant. Yes, my Lord and Sire. [*Leaves the room.*]

Kíkhrom. What are you after, Zliúka, under the table there ?

Zliúka. Gathering up the crumbs, gracious Lord. My patrons allowed me the crumbs, and I danced with joy ; I barked like a dog, and crowed like a cock ; I have earned them, my most gracious lord !

Kíkhrom. He-he-he ! I see Tsar Fúnduk is an open-handed man. He keeps you all in the lap of luxury. What a host of henchmen he feeds ! He is very kind. So, you have a good time, do you ? Tell me, do you pray, night and morning, for the Tsar ?

Zliúka. We do very comfortably, very comfortably.

Kíkhrom. And you, Polosátik ?

Polosátik. We are so contented, my lord, that if I were to be asked, 'Polosátik, would you like to change places with Kíkhrom?' I should say, 'No!'

Kíkhrom. He-he-he! [*Suddenly becomes serious.*] What a stupid thing to say! That's an impertinence! Go and fetch me that stick there!

Zliúka. That's right! That's the way!

Polosátik. What are you going to beat me for?

Kíkhrom. If only to teach you what differences are! And I must have some exercise after dinner. I will thrash you; then you will tell me whether you would like to change places with me!

Polosátik. But, if you please, sir, if you really want to become a Polosátik, I will oblige you, and dispense with the beating.

Kíkhrom. What a swelled head you have! You're too smart! You must be thrashed; then we'll see which side of your face you're laughing on!

Zliúka. Don't pardon him! Give him a lesson!

Kíkhrom. Bring me that stick!

[*Enter Iván Tsarévich.*]

Iván. Kíkhrom going to beat somebody? He shall do nothing of the sort. Look at me, Kíkhrom Fungásych. If you touch one hair of Polosátik's head, I'll comb your beard for you!

Kíkhrom. A bad fellow, a bad fellow, the Tsar's third son! He's never got anywhere! Bring me that stick! I'll flay you alive. I must have some distraction.

[*A Herald runs in, out of breath.*]

The Herald. Oyez, oyez, oyez! Tsar, Tsarévichi, generals, peers, peeresses, servitors, courtiers, chamberlains, butlers, treasurers, grooms, cooks, scullery-maids of the ante-chamber, serfs of the courtyard! Oyez, oyez, oyez! Make ready! Great events are coming about. The Magician Kírbít is coming here in a golden chariot, drawn by eight horses, and with him in her own person, Vasilísa, the Royal maiden, on whom the sun never sets but stands still in wonderment. . . . Mph—I must draw breath!

[*The room fills with Nobles of the Court. Prince Churílo and Prince Seredín also enter.*]

The Herald. The Magician Kírbit is approaching ; he is coming not idly, but of set purpose. A thing unheard of, unseen,— a father bringing his daughter for betrothal. Never has Tsar been thus honoured, never has a proper bridegroom been offered such a prize ! Vasilísa is asking to marry our Prince !

Kíkhrom. Which one ?

Churilo. St, you fool—though you are a noble ! Which one, indeed ? Look at us and then say !

Kíkhrom. Of course ! Who could the bridegroom be but Churílo Fúndukovich ?

Churilo. Of course ! Yes, but I must hurry up and dress ! I have such a big looking glass now, I can see myself from tip to toe ! Come along Pán'ka, Gán'ka, Strízhka, Polubrátik ! Come and help me to dress !

[*He goes out with his pomaded suite. Tsar Fúnduk enters, in his dressing gown.*]

Fúnduk. What is the matter here ?

The Herald. Tsar-bátiushka, make ready ! Great events are coming about ! The Magician Kírbit is approaching ; he is coming in a gold chariot drawn by eight horses. . . .

Fúnduk. Yes, yes ?

The Herald. And with him Vasilísa in her own person, the royal maiden on whom the sun never sets but stands still in the heavens in wonderment. . . .

Fúnduk. Yes, enough of that ! Come to the point ! What does he want here ?

The Herald. A husband for his daughter.

Fúnduk. This is serious business ! And I am only in my dressing gown ! I must, at least, get my crown on ! And tell them to light the stove in my throne-room ; it's always chilly there.

Kíkhrom. Why, your Majesty, it's summertime now !

Fúnduk. Light the stove ! I haven't been in there since the winter. Besides, it shows kindness and consideration. Kírbit is coming and is bringing his daughter ! How the neighbouring Tsars will envy me ! But, the wedding will have to be at his expense ; my exchequer won't run to such an outlay ! Hey, there ! Bring me my crown, at once !

CURTAIN.

Scene IV.

[*The Throne Room in Tsar Fúnduk's Palace. Fúnduk on the throne with his crown on. The Court around him. At his feet a dog, Polosátik, an ape, and Zliúka. In front of the throne, Churílo, bedizened; beside him, Seredín, also in new clothes.*]

- Churílo.* Isn't this fine! Look at this hat,—isn't it tall? It's so tall, that it couldn't pass under the door; so I had to give it to my halberdier to carry in front of me, like a holy thing! And my boots—they have gilded and pointed toes; no one else could walk on such fine toes; anyone else would stumble and sprain himself; but I could do a knee-dance in them! Have you seen my brocaded belt? Sable! And foreign velvet! And then this! Just smell my head! That's something if you like! Distilled roses from Arabia, made and sent by the Queen Sheherazáda. And look how my barber Futyr has pointed my beard to a finger-point,—quite ravishing! I looked into the glass, and was amazed. I thank my papa and mamma, that they bore me to their glory. And I—well, I know enough to put a rich harness on a fine horse! Indeed, I have my doubts whether Vasilísa Kirbitevna is quite the mate for me.
- Polosátik.* Prince Seredín, step forward as well. Possibly Vasilísa the Wise is coming after you. [*Laughter, jeers.*]
- Seredín.* Well? We have little to say in the matter. Either she has made her choice, or she has not. We shall go on just the same. There are plenty of other girls in the world.
- Fúnduk.* Seredín's a most, most sensible fellow. Churílo's a fop, but Seredín's a man of sense.
- Kíkhrom.* And Prince Iván has a spotty face and walks with a limp, and as for his brains—he hasn't any! He's a degenerate.
- Fúnduk.* He had a different mother. They all had. Churílo's mother was a French princess, very slender in body, and witty in mind, finicky and most difficult to get on with.
- Kíkhrom.* She died—did she not?

Fúnduk. No, but she eloped, thank the gods! A detestable hussy! She had a secretary, and I wished him further. . . . Well, let's say no more about it. State secrets he-he-he! And Seredín's mother was a German. She gave me splendid dinners! So cheap and satisfying! She, really, did die. She loved eating. On her death-bed she called me to her, went through all her books and accounts, one by one, and then said, 'There you are, Fúnduk Volotóvich, it's all straight,' and then she died.

Zliúka. That's a queen, if you like!

Fúnduk. As for Iván! I was getting on in years, and this very Kírbit, as a kindness, sent me a young Tatar woman—just to keep me warm. Oh, what a shy young girl she was! She bore me Iván, and died in childbirth. She was silent, all her life, and in death.

Kíkhrom. Stop! They have arrived! Beat the drums! Sound the trumpets! Cry, 'Hail, noble visitors!'

[*Drums, trumpets and shouts. Kírbit enters, in a fantastic costume, as a Mongol Prince; and Vasilisa, veiled.*]

Fúnduk. Welcome Kírbit Yatmánovich! Thou hast caused us great joy in deigning to come. Hail!

Kírbit. Tsar, I have a wise daughter, wiser than her father, the maiden Vasilisa; whate'er she wish, she does, and I help. She has decided to marry thy son, and so it shall be. I hope that thou will consent, brother Fúnduk.

Fúnduk. Wherefore should I not consent? Dowries are given not for bridegrooms, but with brides. Only—my exchequer is a bit shaky, and a wedding would mean a feast for everyone. . . .

Kírbit. Of that no more! The fame of the wedding shall spread over all lands. The casks of wine in Kírbit's cellar have already been broached. We will pay for it all! Drink, and be merry, honourable people, at the wedding of Vasilisa!

Fúnduk. Let me kiss thy hand, Kírbit Yatmánovich! [*He descends from the throne and they kiss.*] Behold my boy, Churílo, Tsarévich of Dark-Russia!

Vasilisa. That is not he.

- Churilo.* Not he? Vasilisa! [*Struts round her like a peacock.*] Come and kiss me, my betrothed! I am Churilo Fúndukovich, I am he! Blush not! Be not abashed! Do not thrust thy sleeve forward to hide thyself! Do not droop thine eyes! I see thou art indeed my proper mate, my equal.
- Vasilisa.* Thou art not the man. . . . It was not he that I saw, not he I chose. I have nothing to hide; I do not droop my eyes. But I am not thy mate, nor thine equal. Thine, indeed? Why, Churilo, thou art a fop, and a coxcomb!
- Churilo.* Oh Vasilisa, be not ashamed! Oh Vasilisa, be not coy! I will love thee, I swear it! Why wilt thou not acknowledge that it was my image, my eyes, that ensnared thy heart? A Venetian painter painted my portrait. I had one hundred copies reproduced. All the princesses asked for copies; and they sigh, when they look upon the picture, and press the gilded frame to their white breasts.
- Vasilisa.* This is not the man, I repeat. Has not Churilo any brothers?
- Seredin* [*Flushing all over*]. Yes, he has; I am . . .
- Vasilisa.* Nor is he the man.
- Seredin.* I knew it. She'd never suit me! Let the Firebird into the palace, and nothing will come of it but a fire! [*He retires into the crowd.*]
- Kirbit.* Where is the third prince? It is evidently he Vasilisa seeks. Is there a third?
- Fúnduk.* A third? There is—but he . . .
- Kikhrom.* . . . has a spotty face, walks with a limp, and has no brains.
- Zliúka.* He has run away. He doesn't want to see Vasilisa. He has run off into the wood, he-he-he. . . . He is lying down somewhere on the grass, as he always does—his hands under his head, his nose pointing to the sky, lying flat! Lucky, if he's not singing, too!
- Polosátik.* I know where he is! If it's any use, I'll run and tell him; I'll be back in an instant. He is quite near by, in the garden, by the pond, listening to the frogs.

Zliúka. He-he! The frogs are holding assembly, and he is keeping order with a stick! Our third prince is half-witted.

[*Polosátik runs out.*]

Fúnduk. Kirbit Yatmánovich, what man would be his own enemy? I desire such a bride in my house; but I advise thee not to give Vasilísa to Iván. If she wish for a man to boast of, take Churílo; if she wish for a man who will be companionable, let her take Seredín. I am your friend. I do my friend my best obeisance. Buy a horse from the stud, not a pig in a poke. Take a hawk of mine, not a chicken!

Vasilísa. Call him hither, bring him; I wish at once to see him, eye to eye, to take him by the hand and kiss his lips.

Fúnduk. That's a jolly sort of girl!

Kíkhrom. I have an idea! If the third son suit them, it's all the same to us; the price is the same, and the profit may be even greater.

[*Enter Polosátik leading Iván Tsarévich by the hand. The latter has his harp under his other arm.*]

Polosátik. Here is our darling Ványa, the harpist—Iván Tsarévich, Prince of Dark-Russia.

PAUSE.

Vasilísa. Iván Tsarévich, beloved bridegroom,
My darling bridegroom, my blue-eyed sweetheart!
Like a pure white birch-tree, a lofty birch-tree,
A maiden flourished with curling tresses,
Like a dark red raspberry, sweet red raspberry!
On the sun she gazed, and sucked in sweetness.
Her stately figure, her eyes swift-darting,
Her lips like coral; above her eyebrows
A brow reflective, her golden tresses
Like ears of corn bewildering,—
A heart of happiness, a mind of wisdom.
A gift of wizardry, a well of prophecy,—
All this for thee was to the world begotten,—
All this for thee had bloomed and blossomed,
That thou shouldst be happy, that thou be contented;
That, for this bounty, thou give gratitude
To Fate the Omnipotent, our sovereign mistress. . . .
Give me thy marriage-ring, Iván Tsarévich.

Iván.

It is difficult to speak with thee. I will not spurn the cup of happiness. Let my harp now help me. Only be my song worthy for such an hour!

Whence, oh whence, this golden shower, whence descends it on me streaming?
 Why, oh why, hath it thus happened, happiness of long-drawn dreaming?
 How shall I uphold this chalice? It is full to overflowing;—
 How shall I preserve this bounty, lest it flit without my knowing?
 How believe myself? Or can I, can I, ever touch this vision?
 What if from such dreams I waken, sobbing in my self-derision?
 No, I dare not touch it, nor believe this noontide sun, nor measure
 With mine eyes these dreadful wondrous depths of happiness and pleasure.
 Yet, my hands stretch forth! Fingers, dare to kiss those fingers yonder!
 My heart's blood and my heart's feeling shout, grow hot, rejoice—and wonder
 Will my fingers falter, finding nought to caress me or avow me?
 Will my hand drop empty, will the weight of woe descend and bow me?
 Will my head droop down for grieving and my curly locks grow grey,
 When I lose these hopes, these yearnings, which now hold me in their sway?

Churilo.

What a long yarn!

Vasilísa.

I am alive, I am burning! I am here, all here! I love thee! Dear gentle-featured harpist, thy beseeching song is but too late, for the hour is come for the shout of victory to re-echo.

Polosátik.

Rejoice, honourable people! Cry, Hurrah! Iván Tsarévich and Vasilísa the Fair have found each other for all time!

[*Drums, trumpets, shouts.*]

CURTAIN.

Scene V.

[*The pond in Tsar Fúnduk's garden. Just before dawn. Frogs croaking. Iván Tsarévich at the edge of the pond.*]

Iván. My beautiful one is asleep. I asked her: 'Tell me whom am I to thank?' 'Sovereign Destiny,' she replied. Oh, Sovereign Omnipotent Destiny, I am in thy debt, in debt eternal and unpayable! I will consent to die, not once, but a thousand times,—to undergo torment and martyrdom,—and will never leave off praising thee. Nothing on earth can ever equal my happiness. . . . How can this be? Why does she love? Sudden she came, mine she became! I was just now caressing her with these very hands! The bliss is too great for my heart to hold. . . . It will soon be dawn; the dew is glistening. The mist is curling over the pond. Oh, think . . . I cannot think! A golden sea at full tide has swept into my heart and splashes majestically, melodiously. I drowned in an ocean ethereal, there where my goddess lies asleep; I sat breathless with love.

Here on this bank some god abideth,
 Here the altar of godly power;
 Here the heart of the world resideth,
 The sun's own goblet, 'mid lilies aflower.
 Mine to be the Priest at the Gate;
 I will make my censor to glow.
 God's descent here I will await,
 Flashing like lightning to us below.
 Undismayed, I will shield my sight;
 Marriage divine is above all desires.
 I sing the song of earthly delight;
 Our best gift is the sigh that aspires.
 There on her purple couch without rising,
 Stretching to me her arms like rays—
 (She is like springtime, like rejoicing,—
 She is like love and melodious lays!):
 "Why dost thou linger so long, belovèd?
 I have dreamed of none but of thee.
 Come, my betrothed, embrace me, kiss me;
 I am all thine; be lord unto me!"

Vasilisa [*approaching him*]. Iván Tsarévich.

Iván.

My goddess !

Vasilisa. Look around thee ! Thou seest—the dawn has kindled with a streak of light to the East ; seest thou those grey clouds ? Now the pond is turning a cold steel-blue ; now that bush is silently rustling. . . . Thou hearest, a shepherd far away plays on his pipes, and the birds are chirruping here and there, as they list. Remember : every moment may be an eternity ; every moment may be as a seal. At this moment our love in this life has been sealed, and in all lives to come. . . . Here we shall love inseparably ; and beyond—everywhere—we shall seek each other. Not marriage for this life is it I offer thee, but for ever. Think, and say, wilt thou ?

Iván.

Think ? I wish only to kiss the earth at thy feet.

Vasilisa.

Better kiss me on my lips !

[*They kiss.*]

Open thine eyes, my silly boy ! The sun is rising ; his rays are kindling the horizon.

CURTAIN.

Scene VI.

[By the staircase in front of the Palace. The Tsar and his Court, jesters, etc.]

Fúnduk. Oh, how bored I am! [*Yawns.*]

Kíkhrom. Yes, those jesters ought to be whipped! If the King's bored, send the fools to the stable yard.

Polosátik. Alas! our jigs and ingenuity now weary Tsar Fúnduk; all of our devices only annoy him. With all your whippings you cannot whip anything more out of us. But, if you want to cheer the royal spirit, whom should you request but Princess Vasilisa—she is so resourceful, she is all but a magician!

Fúnduk. True, I forgot. . . . Call me my children hither! And bring me my bowl! And let Vasilisa make me merry!

Polosátik. Oh, our dear old King's aweary!
It's the devil of a teazer!
Bring some punch to make him cheery,
Vasilisa—will it please her?

Zliúka. Oh, a wondrous queen—ahá!
Vasilisushka-á-á!
We had wine—a full half-tun—
But, alas, its gone and done!
Now we silly jester-folk
Have forgotten how to jest!
She shall wear our tattered cloak!
We can give ouselves a rest!

[Enter Iván and Vasilisa, Churlto, Scredin, and others.]

Fúnduk. Now my pet, Vasilisushka, show us something interesting. I am growing old; I am bored; I nod; and I feel our bare-bone Godfather looking over my shoulder.

Vasilisa. How shall I make thee merry, Tsar Fúnduk?

Fúnduk. If only I knew how! But already thou hast smiled, and I am the merrier. Thy smile is so beautiful; it is as though it gleamed with pearls, and so I too laugh. Oh, Iván has a fine wife!

Vasilisa. Wouldst thou, Tsar, that I should show thy sons, each as he really is?

- Fünduk.* But how ?
Vasilisa. Do ye all look yonder at that big granary ?
Kíkhrom. How wonderful ! It has disappeared behind a mist !
Vasilisa. Now I breathe on the mist ! Now ye shall behold
 Churílo's soul !

CHURILO'S SOUL.

[*A street with houses on both sides. Churilo, absurdly overdressed, is walking along the street, and after him a chorus of girls, young women and widows.*]

- The Women's Chorus.* Oh ye gods and holy saints !
 He's going so far we're like to faint !
 Once we have seen Churílo's face,
 After him we all must race.

[*Spoken in dialogue.*]

He looked at me, he aimed at me—
 He winked my dear, he winked at me !—
 No, 'twas at me he smiled so sweetly,
 Like a turkey stepping neatly !—
 I shall fall upon my knees
 In my love's high ecstasies !—
 Look again, Churílo dear !
 See you no more sweetmeats here ?—
 Oh, one word of thy dulcet speech !—
 One lock as keepsake, I beseech !—
 If he kissed me, I should die !—
 Oh, we women are much too shy !—
 Whom thou lovest, do but say !—
 Order us, and we obey !—

- Churilo* [*in the vision*]. Bah ! How they weary me ! I cannot make my way for this rabble of women ! I must take my hunting-stock and whip them out of my way ! I know I am very dapper, but must they therefore tear me into little bits ? Listen, whichever of you I want, I will whistle for, and drive ahead ; until then, stop your babble ! Oh—the youths are assembling as well !

[*The youths come in, gloomily crowding together and murmuring.*]

The Youths.

Envy gnaws us ravenous ;
 Yet, we're helpless,—all of us !
 Let me take my axe and—crash !
 His looks simply send us smash !
 This accursed Churílo's charms
 Sap our strength and slack our arms.

Churilo [*in the vision*]. What are you grumbling about ? If you want to enter my service, you are welcome ; if you want to contend with me, I'll have you soundly drubbed.

Look ! The moon is rising in the sky. You silly thing, what big round eyes you are making at me ! Don't glower at me ! I know I'm very pretty, but it isn't for your sake, you white-jawed thing !

The stars, too, play at being coy maidens ; they open and blink their eyes. Even in the heavens above, all things that are, are smitten with me ! It amazes me how beautiful I am !

If I look into the water, the water stops. The wind dandles my curls on my temples, and hushes. And the animals,—they, too ! Look ! The little hare darts by, cocks her eye at me, and *halte!*—she is rooted to the ground ; and then she tumbles down the dell head over heels ! Silly thing, she has fallen in love with me !

So, such a paragon am I, that I take my airy way, knowing that all things on earth are in love with me, and that those who are not, are envious ! My life is like one long honey-bath—ha-ha-ha !

[*The mist rises.*]

[*Everyone laughs aloud.*]

Churilo. What are you all cackling about ? What is there funny about it ? Am I not beauteous ?

Polosátik. Oh yes, very beauteous !

Churilo. Then don't cackle ! You're a lot of idiots ! How I can stand your company !

Fúnduk. Now, my entertainer, my wise-woman, show me Seredin's soul.

SEREDIN'S SOUL.

[A brilliantly lit dining-room. A table well set with cakes, mead and ale. Children, big and little, sitting on the benches; a stout young wife looking out of the window.]

The Wife. Hush, children! Daddy's come home!

The Children [merrily, but in a subdued tone]. Daddy's come home!

[Enter Seredín.]

Seredín. Well, well! We have had a very successful journey! Kiss me, my wife! Children, come and kiss my hands! Have you been good children? I will give each of you who has been good a gingerbread; those who have been up to pranks, a good hiding! Come, sit down at table,—in your proper places—the elder servants at the bottom of the table, holiday style.

[The servants, entering, bow low to their master; all sit at table and eat in silence.]

Seredín. Remember, at my table everyone eats in silence. I don't like talking and joking. If you're doing something, do it! If you're eating, eat! Time is not given you for idle chatter and games. That's my rule. Isn't that what I tell you?

From all sides. Yes sir, yes sir, quite so!

A Young Servant [entering]. Prince Seredín, Lord and Master, Limón Limónych, our neighbour, is in serious trouble; he has important business, so he says, urgent business. Shall I admit him?

Seredín. Let me see! Limón is a man of consequence. Certainly, admit him! He will be a good friend to have.

Limón Limónych [entering]. I salute you, Prince Seredín!

Seredín. Be so good as to come in and sit down. With what may I regale you? [To his wife] Serve him, my wife! My servants, lay a place for Limón Limónych.

Limón Limónych. Excuse my disturbing you at table—I am not hungry. My neighbour, the brigand Kózlup, is attacking me; he won't listen to anyone, judge or king. He won't even give any reasons. He is laying waste my fields, burning my villages, and boasts he will drive me out and usurp my little principality. It's a long way to the Tsar Fúnduk, and you're my neighbour, friend Seredín Fúndukovich. Help me! Do me the favour! Send your horsemen out against Kózlup! You are a just man!

Seredín. I am a just man. That is quite true. Please take a cake, friend Limón. Won't you, really? These are very nice chicken patties. Yes, I am a just man; but not a warrior; and I don't like mixing myself with others' affairs. Kózłup himself once asked me to take part in his valorous adventures, which I could not assent to. I said, 'I stand for myself. I do not wish to offend anyone. What's mine's mine; what's yours, yours.' Isn't that what I always tell you?

From all sides. Yes sir, yes sir, quite so!

Seredín. Now, listen! I am sorry for you. You are an honourable man. Kózłup is a powerful man. You had better share out with him and come to terms. How, you know best. But don't drag me into it. Now, let me pour you out some mead. No? My mead, Limón Limónych, is mellow, and well-casked.

Limón Limónych. But, I implore you! He will ruin me, this Kózłup! I can only flee before him, or he will not make a light job of it! He will smash me to bits! He will carry off my whole household! He is a monster, is Kózłup!

Seredín. Oh, Limón, there's a deal of truth in what you say, a deal of truth! [*He drinks.*] Such misfortunes will overtake mankind. Destiny throws a cloud over a man's head. When lightning strikes someone down, you say to yourself involuntarily: 'There, but for the grace of the gods, goes the skull of Seredín Fúndukovich!'

Limón Limónych. You are a hard man, Seredín, a heartless man! I go more miserable than I came.

Seredín. No, Limón, I am a kind man. My children, my henchmen, am I not a kind man?

From all sides. A kind man, sir.

Seredín. So, you see?

Limón Limónych. Whither shall I betake myself? Where repose my sorry head?

Seredín. Only—not with me, dear friend. You come in vain. I have no quarrel with Kózłup. I live at peace with all men.

[*Limón Limónych puts on his hat and leaves without bowing.*]

Seredin. What wrong-headed people there are! Woe has befallen him, and he heaps his wrath on the innocent! Well, we have dined, and now we can go to bed. While I was out riding, I was dreaming of my feather-bed. Oh-oh-oh! There is nothing better than the sleep of the just.

[*The mist rises.*]

Seredin. But, my dear little sister, that is nothing short of blackening the family name.

Churilo. Vasilisa has overshot the mark.

Fúnduk. You think so? She is amusing me. She has made me laugh, till the tears rolled down my cheeks. Seredin is an upright man! That's about what you will be like, when you marry.

Churilo. Let her just show us her dear Ványa's soul. Ho-ho-ho!

Fúnduk. Yes! Call up Iván's soul for us to see!

Vasilisa. I do not wish to do so, Tsar. There is very little to laugh at in it; and you wanted to be amused.

Seredin. No, no! All of us, please!

Iván. Vasilisa, my incomparable wife, it may not be amusing, but I should like it.

Vasilisa. Then I will, at thy command

THE SOUL OF IVAN.

[*Lofty crags, deep precipices. The Green Star glistening over the snowy surface. Iván Tsarévich, in the half-light, walking with a shepherd's crook.*]

Iván. I will succeed, or die! My feet are all bloodstained, my skin is all torn. But all my strength yet remains with me. Oh my Star wonderful, green as emerald; I will gain thee or die.

How can I fare? No path anywhere! Silent as 'mong the dead. Wait—a bridge ahead, as fine as a thread, across the precipice. But if there I tread, death awaits me there. Yet I must go on, nor of myself have care; what reck I of life or soul; my star beyond is my one goal. So on, still on, though my head is turning, and black the abyss that beckons me! To my one star my soul is yearning, be it for death or victory!

[*He walks on the threadlike bridge.*]

Someone supported me invisibly ; on someone's shoulder I could rest ! Oh, my friend, my one affinity, with love for thee I am possessed. Me gently everywhere thou supportest ; in the snowdrifts my chill body thou warmest.

[*He crosses the bridge, stops, and looks round.*]

I am cold ! I am hungry ! Not a house in sight ! I am so high up ! Oh, my strength fails me ! [*He falls.*] Now Death is surely at hand ! Yet ere death come, let me see thee,—thou, my friend invisible !

Graciously someone lifts me from the snow, warms me and my limbs miraculously glow. On my way again, a long, long way ! But with my eye, I can descry my goal and destiny. To the stars the madman soars !

[*He presses ahead with all his might.*]

Across my path a torrent roars. Shall I plunge there ? Then death were unavoidable. Yet surely everywhere about me lurks death. Let us be hardy and inflexible ! Death like victory accomplisheth !

[*He flings himself into the waves of the torrent.*]

I am swept away ! I am lost ! Farewell, my dreams ! Farewell, my Star ! Oh ! [*A wave flings him on the opposite bank. He comes to himself again.*] Where am I ? Alive ? Victory ! My ally, to thee my thanks ! But what is this ?

Gates heavily barred ! With fiery eyes, a tall stern guard ! From his shaggy brows the cold blows hard. He wears a sword. Who art thou ? The master of the marvellous hoard ? Beyond the gates, the gleam of my Star ! Thou, ancient guard, avaunt ! With all the force of my will, I rend the bar.

The Guard. Halt ! No passage here ! Here all effort is frustrated.

Iván. What ? I have come so far, and everywhere some secret help accompanied me ? And shall I now be forgotten and meekly wait, until the mist engulfeth me ? Defend thyself !

[*The Guard smites him with his sword. Iván falls stunned.*]

Iván [*slowly raising himself*]. I cannot believe myself betrayed ! Surely I had a goal ? Surely those flowers will not fade that have blossomed in my soul ? Strength to rise now, I have none ! I can wait ; my race is run. Perhaps my brothers will come on. Is it death ? E'en Death can answer. Yea, Death alone can say me nay.

PAUSE.

[*Iván groans and tosses. The Guard stands impassively over him. Suddenly the bars fall apart, the gates open, and behind them stands Vasilisa in a dazzling garment of green, the Star apparently shining from over her head.*]

Iván. Thou ? The star shines over thee ? Thou wast my aid ; art thou my aim and prize ? Thou wast the trumpet summoned me ; art thou also the pipes of paradise ?

[*Vasilisa descends towards him. Then it becomes clear that the Star is as remote as ever, but shines with a light not the same as before.*]

Vasilisa. No, not yet, my Prince, my Pilgrim ; I am not the Star ; it is still far ahead. Thy vow, my Prince, thy vow still remember—still forward tread !—But thou hast attained me, who am wise and mighty ; we twain will wend the road without end ; the secret of birth and the secret of sepulchre, we two together must learn and perpend. Two-fold the links, the links are welded, reaching the Emerald Star on high. Trust me, though *our* ways are nought but desperate, those on the Road shall never more die.

[*The mist rises.*]

Fúnduk. I don't understand a word of it !

Churilo. What a long yarn !

Seredin. Vasilisa has overshot the mark !

Polosatik. Some people it is unwise to understand ; but, as to this, one must go on tiptoe, and still never get at it.

Fúnduk. It all bores me frightfully !

Iván. [*to Vasilisa*]. Be thou blessèd among women, be thou blessèd. Accursèd be he who, even for a moment, betray such a love !

Vasilisa. Hush ! Hush !

CURTAIN,

Scene VII.

[Nursery in the Palace of Iván and Vasilisa. Their baby boy sleeping in the cradle. Mámelfa, as nurse, putting clean baby clothes in order. Vasilisa singing in a low tone.]

Vasilisa. Homeward turn thy memory,
Newborn manling, heart of me,
Whom, from somewhere far or near,
Hearts concordant summoned here.
In the ocean of fiery foam
Lies Life's uncreated home.
Straight therefrom, into the Dark,
To my bosom flies a spark.
Dipped in blood, the Spark grows warm ;
Love shall give thee bodily form.
With my soul's whole potency
I create thee silently,
A new flow'ret from my root,
From the sun another shoot.
Earthly art thou and divine,
Darling thou and son of mine !
Thou didst dive to depths below,
Titan there in strength to grow.
Thence thou shalt on outspread wings
Raise to Heaven all nether things.
Home to Ocean, then, and pay
Dark Earth's tribute to the Day.

Mámelfa [approaches]. He is too much like the Prince !

Vasilisa. All the greater joy !

Mámelfa. For what ? That he is never one thing or another for long at a time ?

Vasilisa. He desires better things. He is a traveller.

Mámelfa. On the threshold—where one stumbles !

Vasilisa. No.

Mámelfa. But yes !

Vasilisa. He is my love.

Mámelfa. Thou lovest weakness, because thyself thou art strong.
Thou wert born to be a mother ! Now when thou hast
a little boy, perhaps thou wilt at last understand the
need of a master in the house. Yes, thus it is, little
lady.

Vasilisa. Had I twenty children I should love Iván none the less. And what children we all are! Which in itself is splendid.

Mámelfa. Were thy son like to thee, I had said: 'Here is one on whose brows great deeds are written by his ancestry.' But—as he is—who can tell?

Vasilisa. Look how pretty he is!

Mámelfa. Were he but like thee, then!

Vasilisa. Enough! I shall be angry!

[Enter the Mistress of the Toy-room.]

Mistress. Will it please the Lady Vasilisa to look what toys have been made in the toy-room?

Vasilisa. Stay thou with him, Mámelfa. I have had carved some wooden toys for him, for which I gave them the design. I will be back immediately; and, when he wakes up, I will have them ready to give to him. [She leaves the room.]

Mámelfa [after a long look at the baby]. A fine boy! But still, Vasilisa made a mistake. I was all the time looking for another man, Rámmon Nébukhovich. He would have had a son! Oh, a son! Yes, a son! Perhaps it might have been the Long-awaited one himself. Yes, perhaps. . . . She is wise,—very wise; but, very wayward. Does she want to be the master? A woman must see God in her husband. If only the man adores, no good can come of it.

[Enter Ivan and Polosátik.]

Iván. Where is Vasilisa?

Mámelfa. She has gone to the toy-room.

[Iván Tsarévich sits down by his son's cradle, Polosátik standing near by.]

Polosátik. Oh, my dear Ványa. Thou has frightened me. Oh! Say but a word!

[Iván is silent and melancholy.]

Polosátik. Thou wast like this erewhile. Thou wouldst sing and laugh—and all at once fall bemused. Beneath thy flowers and thy greensward lie blind depths. Who is it has stung thy soul? What has pierced thy heart?

PAUSE.

Polosátik. But I think thou wilt tell this to Vasilísa, and then I faint with fear !

Iván. Thinkest thou she will be angry ?

Polosátik. Yet, Ványa, consider for thyself, my friend ! You have been married one year. Thy wife is the beauty of beauties,—so sage, that all the sages on earth gape at her ; thy son is two months old ; yet thou . . .

Iván. Even therefore.

Polosátik. Why so ?

Iván. I am too happy. I walk as in a dream. I am not myself. I am so dazzled that I cannot see. I walk in the azure skies. There is nought left to desire. I am melting in molten gold. My soul has softened from surfeit, has become unedged like a ball of butter. Not that I desire woe,—no, but exertion. I want to wish. I want there to be something lacking. That is it ! I wish to wish, and my wish is strong, so strong that it makes me unhappy. I am unhappy from happiness. Happiness is not for me. A man must move, but I lie in a lotus-eaters' bower, and slumber. The bird of eternity sings to me. I desire to awake. I am losing myself in bliss. She will understand, will Vasilísa.

Polosátik. [*shaking his head*]. Oh, Iván Tsarévich, ill bodes it if thus it be ! Dost thou not value happiness ? Dost thou peer out of thy golden paradise into the murk ? When thou goest forth from the gates, thou shalt know what sorrow is. And when thou art gazing on the gleam of the rays of lost Eden, then, Tsarévich, thou wilt weep !

Iván [*frightened*]. I should come back, Polosátik ; I should run back !

Polosátik. Thou wouldst not be allowed. Thou wouldst be told, ' Thou who dost not value happiness, go forth into the outer darkness ! '

Iván. Do not frighten me, Polosátik ! That makes it terrible.

Polosátik. Stay here !

Iván. I cannot ; it beckons me ; as from a lofty bridge into the abyss, it says, ' Leap down, leap down ! '

Polosátik. It is the demon calling.

Iván. Nay, my soul! Perchance my soul is a demon.

Polosátik [*aside*]. Mámelfa is listening.

Iván. Didst thou hear me, nurse? I desire to ask my leave.

Mámelfa. Art thou not the man and the master? Or hast thou sold thyself for a season like a serf?

Iván. But thou, how dost thou counsel me?

Mámelfa. Go thine own way. Whate'er thou dost, do swiftly!

Iván. My heart is torn.

Polosátik. Farewell, Tsarévich; thou hast—may I put it thus?—but devisèd thee thy sorrow from very surfeit.

Iván. I know not; but my heart is troubled.

[*Enter Vasilisa, happy, carrying a bundle of toys in her apron.*]

Vasilisa. Look, Ványa, look! I have just had these carved out of some of my own designs. There's a fine couple! The Wandering Jew, thin as a screw! Look at this Shah Shar Puzán. Look at his dear little Tatar smile!

Polosátik. He who is lean is bitter, he who is fat is sweet; but surfeit does not always bring happiness. Lady, I kiss thy fingers.

[*He goes out.*]

Vasilisa. Iván Tsarévich is again overcast? I look again into the belovèd eyes and see the night glooming. Hide not thine eyes! Gaze into mine! I want to read thee.

[*She looks hard at him, and becomes serious.*]

Go, Tsarévich, go! Who holds thee back? Go, my blessing! Speed forth swiftly! Remember, we with our little hero will await thee. [*She smooths his brow.*] Now, be merry! Within seven days thou shalt be on the road. What? Thou art easier already? Yes. So let us have these seven days. Shall it be thus?

Iván. The tears that are welling in my eyes—it is from adoration of thee.

Vasilisa. I see, I see! From my eyes bitter tears have flowed. But I am not foolish! I have released my hawk from his jess. From his eyes sweet tears are flowing. Let my hawk remember he is free. But it is I am in his cage, in his chamber. I have now nowhere to go. My heart is of one piece; I gave it, indivisible; I bestowed it, irresumable.

Look, he has woken up joyous! He has woken up with the morning. Godling of the springtime, little lamb, my little bird! Look at these many-coloured toys! He is smiling! The babe has smiled from very joy! The golden trumpets in heaven have resounded. There is little pure joy on earth; for the sake of that, the world exists. Come, my lord Svetozár Ivánovich, come to thy mother's arms!

CURTAIN.

Scene VIII.

[*Moonlight. Iván Tsarévich in his tent. A camel close by. Polosatík lying asleep.*]

Iván. If I had wings . . . but I cannot ! I hardly close my eyes, and I see Vasilísa. As one thirsting for water, to her I turn ; and the leagues between us are riven together. Some demon has driven me so far ! Oh, to haste home !

Polosatík. Yes, let us haste away ! We have seen enough. I wish to sleep ! In my sleep I shall dream of all the countries we have visited, and at dawn the best of them, of my little room in thy palace, where I am at home. To live, to sing like a canary ! But listen, what is this strange music that is being wafted towards us ? As if the Lady Vasilísa were laughing at us from below, as if she were trickling a chain of pearls. The heart trembles and sinks ; sometimes to weep is comforting. It makes one think Iván has attained happiness !

Iván. Sleep, sleep, good jester, sleep on !

PAUSE.

Iván. To me sleep is loth to come. I see my home wraithlike : my wife smiling, my son putting forth his hands. I am sore at heart and will ease me.

[*He takes his harp.*]

Billows of the ocean flow between us,
 Many leagues between us of the yellow sands ;
 Will my song fly to the heart belovèd,
 Will it wake an answer in the loving heart ?
 No, it halts for pinions of the azure,
 And the winds support not its gay plumage ;
 Half way across my song now faltereth,
 And pants for breath and fails and fainteth.
 Now my song is for its death preparing ;
 Now its golden beak in blood empurpleth.—
 Oh, my wife, my one belovèd,
 Step forth at night-time on thy stairway.

Gaze on the moon ; let summer breezes whisper,
 And for me, my wife, for me, be anguished !
 Be anguished, and sing, with thy voice tuneful,
 Sing, with thy voice silver-ringing !
 Like a swan, bid thy song melodious
 On white wings surmount the horizon,
 Fly to me in the land far-wondrous !—
 But, half way across, it flags and wearies,
 Painfully flaps its wings, so wearily. . . .
 And half way across, two birds are meeting ;
 They have met and are comforted.
 They sing a new song, like their first singing ;
 They embrace again, breast to breast clasping ;
 And they kiss again, beak to beak cleaving.
 Our souls in a blissful throbbing
 In cloudland have met in the moonlight.

[As soon as the sound of Iván's song and harp dies away, music is heard inexpressibly and unbearably sweet, like the tinkling of lights.]

Iván. What is this ? Never in my life have I heard such
 songs ! Such harmonies have never been known !
 [Raises himself.] What are these marvellous travellers ?

[Ostriches pass by in pairs, in glittering harness. Strange persons are seated on silver saddles : it is impossible to tell their sex. They wear silver chain mail instead of clothes, and their skin is like white ivory ; their bodies are brittle, and their heads top-heavy with the weight of their black hair ; their eyes are terribly big and mournful, their mouths also mournful but small. The first ostrich is led by the bridle by one such boy-maiden, who, however, wears an Arab burnus and fez ; the other boy-maiden mounted on this first ostrich, rides with his head thrown back, looking at the moon with both eyes wide open, like two dark globes of night, and singing. The others are playing on strange instruments.]

The Boy-Maiden [sings]. Nannaú knuyayá-nannau-ú-u
 Minyatá-a-ai.
 Ei-ai
 Lyu-lyú
 Tannagó natalpí Kannayá-a
 Ta-nga-nga-a
 Ei-ai,
 Gar-gár,
 Ger-gér.

Iván. Halt ! What manner of people are ye ?

The Caravan Leader. Hail, good traveller! We are returning to the land of Aë-va-ú, the Land of the Moon. We have descended from our mountains to get the golden sand and other materials. I am the interpreter, Ngi, and these are Pyati-ai, the rays of the moon, our Knights and Ambassadors.

Iván. Is your country far away?

Ngi. It is near by. One day's journey. Only, none but we know the way thither.

Iván. And what is the odour that makes me faint and blissful?

Ngi. That is tummí-yayú, the scents of our Queen.

Iván. And where is your Queen?

Ngi. At home. Wherever we go we carry with us her scents and her portriat.

Iván. Show me the portrait.

Ngi. It is better not. You will be enchanted. Her hair and eyes are not those of humans; but a human cannot tear himself away from them. She scarcely ever moves; but when she raises her hand to her head or smiles, the Mighty Ones themselves stretch forth their arms and are grateful.

Iván. What is her name?

Ngi. Her name is Yálya-m, the dumb Queen.

Iván. Why is she so called?

Ngi. Because she never speaks.

Iván. Let me look at the portrait.

Ngi speaks to the boy-maiden on the camel, who was singing. The latter takes a little jewelled portrait out of his case.]

Ngi. Look!

Iván. Take me with you!

Ngi. I cannot!

Iván. I desire it!

Ngi. [*looks at him fixedly*]. Let us go!

[*Takes him by the hand and they pass on.*]

Nannau, knuyayá nannau-ú-u
 Minyatá-a-ai
 Ei-ai
 Lyu-lyú.

[*The song dies in the distance.*]

Polosátik [*awakening*]. Where art thou, Iván Tsarévich?—Where is he? What, he has gone away? Where has he gone? Oh,—alas! Look! He has left his harp behind and forgotten it, and Polosátik as well. He has forgotten his jester Polosátik. [*He weeps*]

[*The song is heard from a great distance.*]

Tannagó natalpí kannayá-a
 T-nga-nga-ai,
 Ei-ai,
 Gar-gár,
 ger-gér.
 Aeó-aeó lyu-lyu-ú.

INTERLUDE.

[*A blue, black and silver curtain descends. The interpreter Ngi advances to the front of the stage. He is dressed in a silver net and ruby fez with a blue tassel on his abundant locks. He sits down on the bench in front, takes out a silver flute, and plays a song on it. Then he sings :*

Uya-lálu,
 Layu-lálu,
 Ammenai, layáyi loyálu.

Ngi. I am going to tell you about Aë-va-ú.

I love my country. There is no sun there, no night; it is the colour of the blue moon. A little country and fresh, is Aë-va-ú.

There are lakes there, and they are calm.

Pashti-Muri, the white lizard, raises his head on his flexible neck out of the water to the moon, and looks up with his amber coloured eyes, and says: yagiya-yagiya-yagi.

There are rivers there ; they foam and purl softly. Their song is called *frilul-zelzar*, the murmur of the earth. This is the name we give to every other prayer. The plants there have broad pale leaves or long flexible needles. Our flowers are very, very much larger than the heads of men ; and they are fragrant. Most lovely of all is the odour of the flower *Ya-yu*. It is of this our Queen smells and the Spring smells.

We call Spring the season when *Ya-yu* blossoms. We all then are gently elated. We go forth into the woods, and sing, and love. Winter we call, the season when *Ya-yu* withers and dies. We all then return to work. What work ? We, too, have work to do. Our work we call *pfa-shakē*, which means 'compulsory trifles.'

We build palaces. The columns are very slender, for everything amongst us is very light ; I do not know why. Our people find it very difficult to walk on the earth ; but we dance when we are at home ; and we therefore call your earth *rgarg*, which means 'clumsiness.' We build slender towers of many-coloured glass.

I could tell you more, but you would not believe me.

Very well ! I will go ! But I wanted you to know something about *Aē-va-ú*.

Prince Iván is there now. He is our guest. We call him *Liumi-Taize-Vevan*, dear guest Iván. Will you also please be our dear guests for a few minutes ?
Béyuli-liumi-taizei ! Greetings, dear guests !

(*The Curtain rises. He goes.*)

Scene IX.

[*The Court of Queen Yálya-m, in the country of Ae-va-ú. The light there is always pale blue, even blue. The further wall is open, the patterned canopy supported by very thin columns. A glittering blue landscape vaguely discernible beyond. The rooms are filled with marvellous plants with big leaves and many blooms. Birds with long tails and crests perch on silver trapezia ; multi-coloured patterned lanterns ; from various directions thin streams of fountains can be heard.*

On the bed, facing the audience, in the attitude of a Sphinx, lies Yálya-m, looking out with kindly childish eyes. Her small mouth is that of a mute ; her luxuriant curly hair seems alive. About her, other women and boy-maidens. Iván Tsarévich near the bed lying on cushions.

When the curtain rises music behind the stage is heard, brittle as glass ; and someone singing.]

Yai, matebézi amaleli yai.
Ii samasama eiyavani ii.

[Very gradually string instruments and glasses and bells chime in.]

Iván. How much time has elapsed since I came here ? Ten years ? A hundred years ? How can I tell ?—I feel so strange here and everything remains strange to me. It is as though I had died, and were really in the world beyond.

Sometimes one recovers from the forgetfulness and one thinks many hours have passed by,—and sees that Yálya-m, who had been raising her hand up to her head, is just dropping it. Or, again one thinks a moment only has passed by ; but the flowers that had been so fresh are already faded.

I myself have become as dull as a flower ; there is next to nothing left in me of the human. Happy ? Unhappy ? Once upon a time I was happy, and I quitted my happiness. And now—a dream, a strange blue dream, which benumbs me.

Yálya attracts me, for she is strange, and her scents intoxicate one. There is nothing human in her. It is as impossible not to stoop and smell the budding rose in the summer on Earth.

Yálya ! Yálya ! Unseal thy lips ! Say something, if only in thine own tongue ! Yálya ! Yálya ! Smile ! Thou seest I smile. Smile ! It is like a seal, the red spot of her lips.

[He gets up and approaches her.]

Yálya-m, I am putting my hand on thy luxuriant head. My hand is heavy, Yálya-m, it is bowing thy head down ; now look at me ! Let, if only thine eyes, tell me, dost thou like me to touch thee, or is it unpleasant ? The two dark eyes do not change.

[He seizes her violently.]

I have clasped thee to me. Thou crackest in my embrace! I kiss, kiss that red seal! Become hot, ye red lips! Do thou embrace. . . . [*Casting her from him*]. . . . Doll!

[*Yálya-m again takes the pose of a sphinx.*]

Oh, you stupid beauty, Yálya-m,—listen to me! I will go away altogether! I will leave thee! Ngi! Ngi! Where is the interpreter?

[*One of the boy-maidens goes out.*]

Iván. How shall I shatter the wall? Passion, possession, even birth, will not shatter the wall!

Ngi [*enters*]. What wilt thou, Liumi-Taize-Vevan?

Iván. Tell thy queen I wish to go.

Ngi. There is no need.

Iván. Tell her!

Ngi. It is painful!

Iván. Tell her!

Ngi. Yálya-m, Liumi-Taize-Vevan iliiif-vau itulaki-ho.

Yálya-m [*rising, almost throws herself back, wringing her hands and groaning*]. A-a, á-a! ó-o, ó-o!

Iván. She loves me?

Ngi. Certainly she loves thee! Everyone knows this. Thinkest thou she would have had thy daughter, did she not love thee? We have no slaves, as ye have—we have only women.

Iván. Why then is she wordless, smileless, kissless?

Ngi. She is Yálya-m. She does all these things. But she does it inside her heart.

Iván. Yet, when I asked her questions, she deigned to dance. Tell her now, I ask her to dance.

Ngi. Yálya-m, Liumi-Taize-Vevan meliilif-vau noyámi Yálya-lyayul-lyayál.

Iván. Oh, is 'layúl-layál' 'to dance'?

Ngi. It means to dance, Liumi-Taize.

Iván. She will ?

Ngí. Thou seest.

[All the suite quickly take up triangles and strange little drums and thin flutes, and one of them sings, whilst Yálya-m raises herself, closes her eyes, and stands in the middle of the round carpet. Without moving her legs, she sways her body, arms and head.]

The Song. Ai-Yálya-m-be
Ai-Lattya-nga-belem
Ten-zeni-yai-rru
Ten zeni zang belem.

[She stops, opens her eyes, sets her hair straight with a wonderful gesture of her thin arm, then quietly re-assumes her favourite attitude. Meantime, while the same music proceeds, a sturdy, pretty woman in lunar dress, holding a one-year-old baby high above her head, moves rhythmically, surrounded by the Court, towards the bed, advancing and receding. The minstrels sing more joyously and quickly.]

The Song. Pong-Yalya-da-be,
Pong-Lattya-Ne belam,
Lyu-zani-ii-go
Lyu-gniyi-da-belem.

[The people of the country all smile.]

Iván. What has happened ? What are you rejoicing at ?

The Woman with the Child [asks it]. Tiyi-Yalya-da : mama ?

The Child. Mama.

[They all smile.]

Ngí. Thy daughter has to-day said, 'Mama.' She is a princess who has said it. She is Yálya-da. Therefore we are glad.

Iván. And what does 'Mama' mean in your language ?

Ngí. The same as in yours.

The Woman with the Child [approaches the Princess and says to the child]. Tiiki Yalya-ki-da : ma-ma.

The Child. Ma-ma.

[Then Yálya-m smiles. All the birds are excited. The flowers open wider ; the leaves rustle in the blue atmosphere. The others all clap their hands and open their little mouths in one happy exclamation, 'Oh !' Iván Tsarévich smiles with the same very kindly smile.]

CURTAIN.

Scene X.

[A room in Vasilisa's palace. At the back, a large mirror, with a curtain raised to the violet borders of it. Red candles in silver candlesticks burning beside it. Vasilisa sitting on a tripod beside the mirror, and anxiously looking into it, her golden hair over her shoulders, her hands loosely on her knees.]

Mámelfa [enters]. Thou seest, little lady, it is empty. It is only thy thin face thou seest there, and thy tremulous eyes. There is nothing else. He is gone.

Vasilisa. No, he is not dead. I have enquired everywhere. I asked even Marana, and he is not among the dead.

Mámelfa. Nor yet among the living.

Vasilisa. My thoughts cannot find his image. I have, in the darkness of thought, searched the seven worlds—and no one knows.

Mámelfa. Stop wondering, then! Cease loving!

Vasilisa. I can cease to live, but never to love. The seal has been set. My soul has been tinged for eternity with love to its last drop of blood. And this is well; for though he is not, love is; and the little Knight also is. I have Svetozár. Were it not for him, there were nought to keep me on earth, I would find wings, or even half-wings, and fly away. I might be happy with the trolls and the nymphs; I might fly thither; but I must remain with Svetozár. He is sufficient for my happiness. So great is my little boy, that sometimes I grieve for Iván, and wonder—is it not a sin? Is not happiness passing thee by? Does not the voice of happiness echo here in the garden?

A Servant [running in]. Lady Vasilisa, Polosátik has arrived.

Vasilisa. Polosátik? This is a reproof to me, who am called wise; I was enquiring of everyone and forgot Polosátik. So little we think of little things. Bring him in! Bring him in!

[Enter Polosátik. He is bowed and grey.]

Vasilisa. Polosátik, dear friend, where is Iván, the sweet Prince? Where didst thou leave him? What news does thou bear me of him?

Polosátik. Vasilisa, I never left Iván, the sweet Prince! He, Iván, left me in the distant Sahara and the shifting sands, forgot me,—deserted me.

Vasilisa. Forgot thee?

Polosátik. Well, what if he did? I am very little. But not only me. His harp, as well.

Vasilisa. Where is his harp?

Polosátik. I have it here.

Vasilisa. Give it to me! [*She takes the harp and presses it to her bosom.*] Tell me . . .

Polosátik. We went to sleep, and I woke up, and he was not there. But there was a fragrance around inexpressibly sweet. Has he been taken up to heaven?

PAUSE.

I am tired. Let me only rest!

Vasilisa. Come,—wash, warm and feed and tend Polosátik. Put him to sleep on a feather bed. He is my friend, not my jester.

[*Kisses him on his brow.*]

Polosátik. Lady, when I shall die my body will decay, but thy kiss shall rise from the grave like a beam of fire and kindle aloft with the stars.

[*He kisses her hand and goes out.*]

Mámelfa. Give me the harp! What song of his shall I recall? It shall be the first song he sang to thee.

[*She strikes the strings and sings.*]

Whence, oh whence this golden shower, whence descends it on me streaming?

Why, oh why, hath it thus happened, happiness of long-drawn dreaming?

How shall I uphold this chalice? It is full to overflowing.

Look! Look!

[*The mirror shows Ydlya-m's room, the Queen herself in the attitude of a sphinx, and Iván looking at her little lips. Vasilisa quickly sweeps the curtain over the mirror.*]

Mámelfa. Thou sawest it ?

[*Vasilisa says nothing.*]

Mámelfa. He has betrayed thee ?

Vasilisa. No.

Mámelfa. He has betrayed thee. He loves another !

Vasilisa [*in anguish*]. He ? He cannot, cannot love another !

Mámelfa. Console thyself ! Forget him now ! Be not anxious, and I will think of him !

Vasilisa. Dare not to do him any harm !

Mámelfa. I will not do him any harm,—but thou, forget him !

Vasilisa. Leave me !

[*Mámelfa goes out. Vasilisa throws the curtain back again, strikes the chords of the song again, and the vision reappears. She looks long at Ydíya.*]

Vasilisa. The flow'ret is alive. [*She looks at Iván.*] But thou art a wrong-doer ! I see thy soul. My pattern on it is effaced. Thou hast forgotten *Vasilisa*. Thou has forgotten *Vasilisa* for a childish fairy-tale. [*In grief.*] *Iván* the fool, *Iván* the fool ! Thou has riven the ring ; it cannot be welded again !

[*She lets the curtain drop, and sighs.*]

Nurses, attendants, bring me my little Knight.

[*A nurse brings in little Svetozár. He has a big helmet on his head and a big sword in his belt.*]

Thy grandfather's helm and sword ! Oh, my little warrior, against whom art thou campaigning ? Thou wilt hurt somebody. Dost thou wish to hurt somebody ?

Svetozár. I want to defend peoples, Mama.

Vasilisa. But whom ?

Svetozár. The dood peoples.

Vasilisa [*smiles*]. And against whom ?

Svetozár. The naughty peoples who till them.

Vasilisa. Who told thee this ?

Svetozár. I saw it my own self.

Vasilisa. Where ?

Svetozár. Zliúka was beating his doggy Shalikh.

Vasilisa [*seriously*]. There will be work enough for thy sword all thy life long. Do, Svetozár, defend the good ! Take thy helmet off and let me kiss thy face, my little treasure ! There is no sweeter blessing for thy mother's lips than to kiss thy face !

Svetozár [*in her arms*]. Mama, mama, dear mama !

[*Kirbit has entered and looks on.*]

Kirbit. Daughter, dismiss thy suite ! I am come to speak with thee.

Vasilisa. Do ye all go !

[*They all go, taking Svetozár with them.*]

Kirbit. I am come to speak with thee. [*Pause.*] Is Iván no longer dear to thee ?

Vasilisa. I know not ; but I can tell thee—I care not, though he have died.

Kirbit. Thou art, then, widowed ?

Vasilisa. Yes.

Kirbit. Become the wife of Merodákh !

Vasilisa. I honour him ; but I have had enough of the love of men. I have whom I may love otherwise.

Kirbit. Not for thine own sake, shouldst thou marry him.

Vasilisa. I will not serve another man in love ;
For who am I ? My own will,—not a slave !

Kirbit. But, ponder ! For thyself, thou canst be wife,
And for one other's sake, yet not a husband's.
Thou canst yet love another for his child.

Vasilisa. I have my son.

Kirbit. Yet listen, daughter, to me !
The world awaiteth. Nature stirs to spring-time ;
A mighty spirit moves upon the earth !
For Merodákh begets a son called Míttra,—
Míttra, whom Vasilisa bears to him !
Shall any doubt or feeling or desire
Dare to obstruct the golden road of Being ?

Vasilisa. But Svetozár ?

Kírbít.

I see him with his sword,
Knight-errant, golden-locked, enter the world ;
And I see, leaning on his shoulder, Love—
Aye, Love himself, in person come to earth.
But not for thee the higher powers to obey :—
Thou—thou art free, and nowhere shall be found—
In heaven, on earth, or in the hells beneath—
Any to sway thy will. Yet thou must obey
The holy Mitra, must obey thy son,
The Child Divine who here shall be conceived ;
For at the gate of space there waiteth now
The Long-awaited.

Vasilisa [*bowing*].

Be it so at thy will !

[*A melodious, majestic trumpet call. The doors roll open. Two Assyrian warriors sound golden trumpets, two others lead enchained lions. Outside there is a thunder of chariot wheels and a clash of many weapons.*

Dignified, wjth eyes like stars, dark locks and black beard, enter Merodákh-Rámmon, in the guise of a Ninevean King. Merodákh and Vasilisa, the golden tressed and blue eyed, stand facing each other ; she bears herself erect, in a dress of flaming red brocade.]

Merodákh. Oh, wondrous, beauteous maiden, all has been accomplished !

If I might only deem that thou wilt deign to love me,
I pray thee speak !

But, it may be that thou canst only love the humble ;
I will be weak.

Or, dost thou wish me as a young lamb to be gentle ?
I will be meek.

Or, if thou will, by my mysterious enchantment,
I should assume the form and shape of Íochánan,—
I will obey.

For I, the King, the demi-god, the great magician,
I, Merodákh-Rámmon, when I see Vasilisa,
Resign my sway.

Vasilisa. I hail thee, father of our sovereign Mitra !

[*Golden trumpets sound prolonged thunderous chords.*]

CURTAIN.

Scene XI.

[Room in Ydlya-m's palace. The same decoration as before. Ydlya in the same attitude, but near her Ydlya-da playing in her cradle. Iván asleep on cushions and very many flowers around him.]

Voices [from behind, far off]. Pong. Tanzei.

Voices [from behind, nearer]. Pong. Tanzei.

Ngí [enters]. Yálya-m, Taize iliif-be.

[Mámelfa enters with her basket on a yoke; she is accompanied all the way by a red ray, crossing the motionless soft blue of Va-ú.]

Mámelfa. Oh—how wonderful! What places one can travel to nowadays! Oh! But who is he? He belongs to us, not to you.

Ngí. He is Taize-Vevan, the husband of our Queen. He came from the land of rgarg. So too have you, I think?

Mámelfa. Where is your Queen? Ah, I see, I see! She is indeed beautiful! I bow to the earth to thee, Queen Yálya! Wouldst thou not like some rosy apples from Earth? I was told ye had no apples. Please ask the Queen, may I offer her some fruit?

Ngí. Yálya-m, Taize-de, biya haargarga-bombi?

[Ydlya-m sits up, and nods her head.]

Mámelfa [opening the basket]. Here they are, apples ruddy as your sun! This is the finest of them. Taste it!

[Yálya accepts the apple, and smiles. She takes it, claps her hands, and says:

O!

She throws the apple into the air and catches it. Then she turns to the child and gives her the apple. The child turns it round in her hands and carries it up to her mouth. Yálya quickly takes the apple away. She plays with it in front of the child, and suddenly bites it. She immediately rises, becomes erect, straight as a cord, and falls down, as if stricken. A moment of silence. Mámelfa crumples up like a spider, her hands in her basket.

The Moon-people approach the bed on tiptoe on all sides. One of them touches Yálya's hand, and utters a shrill and despairing cry of:

Mga!

The cry is taken up by all present: 'Mga! Mga!' The flowers shrivel, the leaves droop, the birds flutter, the fountains stop.

Iván [*awakening*]. What strange cries! Oh, I have been asleep! I was nowhere and—where am I now? Oh yes, in Aë-va-ú. Who is shouting and crying? [*He springs to his feet*]. What has happened?

[*Mámelfa rises, takes up the basket of accursed apples, and flings it with all her might into the depths of the scene. A terrible explosion; the blue world bursts asunder; a vast precipice becomes visible, a black abyss with sharp crags. Loud cries of:*

Mga!

The Moon-people take up the dead Princess and carry her away anxiously and hurriedly. Mámelfa leaves hastily, wrapping herself in a black cloak. Iván rubs his eyes.]

Iván. What has happened? What has happened? I am trembling all over. My teeth are chattering.

[*The blue, black and silver curtain drops. A dim sound of singing is heard from behind the curtain, and from time to time a horrible rasping of iron. The curtain rises. Burning torches pass across the stage, suspended in double file, and pass beyond, sinking lower and lower, beyond the broken crags into the black abyss. A procession marches at a slow pace in the same direction. In the first rank come the leaders of Va-ú, in blue armour and plumed helmets, thick-set men looking like crabs. The heads of their lances gleam. They march with a heavy tread onward into the gulf, into the black void. They are followed by tall women in light blue shrouds, carrying the coffin of Ydlya-m, which glitters with moving colours, sparks and reflections of blue. Next come the boy-maidens, carrying long flowers, and birds on their shoulders, and utensils and vessels. Iván stands and looks at Ydlya-da's cradle with terror in his eyes. They are all singing:*

Rrakh-mene-gugulimm-reddai,
Zhdai naim gugulimm hagadzan
Mga!

[*At this last cry a ghastly rasping of iron.]*

Yaff-savvavá-ravváí, reddai
Zhdai ugrufú, ravvai-hagadzan
Mga!

[*The coffin is let into the grave and plunges into the abyss of the black void; the rest follow, down to the end of the procession. The last couple of boy-maidens disappear, wringing their hands, crying:*

Mga! Mga!

Then the torches go out one after another and the stage becomes dark.]

Iván [at the front of the stage, as pale as chalk, but his face lit by some strange beacon of light]. Mga! Mga! That means death. Everything has been destroyed and has perished here. My little girl, my poor little one, let us follow Mama! [He takes her by the hands and raises her high above his head.] Some madness has seized me. I go to meet death face to face. No, those torches cannot light our path.

Now on the road accursèd we will go.
Hell's mouth is gaping for us there below.

Hail Death!

Now say farewell, there is nought to fulfil,
Better our destruction than insolent ill,—

Hail Death!

[He goes to the edge of the precipice. At the very edge, the image of Vasilisa arises with a warning gesture. Iván steps back in even greater confusion.]

Iván. What have I remembered?

Two-fold the links,
The links are welded,
Reaching the Emerald Star on high.
Trust me; though our ways are nought but
desperate,
Those on the Road shall never more die.

[The vision of Vasilisa vanishes, but the Emerald Star shines brightly over the abyss.]

Iván. Daughter, let us go hence, let us go seek a road to Vasilisa. Thither there is no road! To her heart there is no road! Where shall be my home or a shelter for me? The grave, or my own country! What has become of me? I am wretched, I am an orphan. Forgive me, Vasilisa, forgive me!—But my daughter, I will not abandon her. Yálya-da, Yálya-da, thou criest? I also am crying, little Yálya-da!

[He goes stumbling into the darkness, not knowing where.]

CURTAIN.

Scene XII.

[A boundless yellow desert of sand. An ass too tired to move. On the ass on one side a pack, on the other a basket in which Ydlya-da, now two years old, is sitting. Iván, looking older, with a long beard and an Arab burnus, walking leaning on a big staff.]

Iván. The beast is weary, and even-tide draws nigh.
The sun that scorched us, all day merciless,
Is tranquil now, and his slant beams but graze
The waves of this great sea of sand and merge
A yellow shadow into the vast blue
Around me. So let us rest awhile here.

[He slowly unloads the ass. He plants a post and makes a primitive tent, under the shadow of which he puts the basket with the child. The ass stands dolefully by. Iván throws it a handful of dry grass.]

Iván. Was I not told it was but one day's journey
To where the Northern caravans set forth?
Three days we now have travelled, so may-be
Have lost our way. Then we shall perish? No,
Perish we cannot! This I will not believe,—
Nought will I e'er believe but death itself,
Which can and may pronounce the baleful No.
Till then we will fight on.—Was that a sound?
A bell? Aye, a bell it was. Nor far from here
My caravans.

[Listens.]

The sound—it now seems nearer.

[Makes a speaking trumpet of his hands.]

Hallo, hallo!

[Answering shouts of, 'Hallo! Hallo!']

Iván. They answer and draw nigh.

[He steps back a little way to meet them and looks round. Three travellers with long shepherds' crooks enter, one an old man, one middle-aged, the third, a youth.]

Iván [bowing to the earth]. All welcome to you, Sheikhs! Oh, will ye favour
Eván, your sorry servant,—bid him mount
Your camels Northward bound?

Eldest Traveller. Hail, hail to thee, poor man ! Whither goest thou ?

Iván. I travel to the North ; I am returning
Home, to my distant home, which lies afar,
Where for six months the ice enchains the streams.

Eldest Traveller. We, too, go thither, to that land of midnight,
To the Dark-Russian land ; thither do we,
The sages, Azar, Afraim and Geza,
Now make our weary way.

Iván. My heart is troubled.
Thither, I too would go.

Eldest Traveller. But wherefore so ?

Iván. There, there, maybe, my old, old father lives—
Yet lives ; my brothers should be there, my wife,
And, too, my son.

Second Traveller. But what the grave affairs
Could wrest thee from a hearth whose memory
Makes tears well from thine eyes ?

Iván. Desire to see
Strange lands.

Second Traveller. I understand then ; thou art not
Mean-souled ; but thy mind is curious, thy spirit
Restless. Yet, of all lands on earth, more strange,
More marvellous than Dark-Russia is none.
Thence streams the light. There rules the wondrous
Tsar
And his most wondrous Queen, to whom is born,
As we, the Magi and Chaldeans trow,
Mitra, who is on earth the god incarnate.

Iván. What Tsar is it holds sway now o'er this Dark-Russia ?
Has then the old Tsar Fúnduk died ?

Eldest Traveller. Not dead :
But slumbering in peace, departing hence.
And, like the sun to earth, there has come down
To Russia, Rámmon-Merodákh-Kaldú.

Iván. Whence came to rule my native land a prince
So mighty ? From the East, as conqueror,
To hew a passage to the throne ?

Second Traveller.

Not thus ;—

Fúnduk himself surrendered his own throne
 To Merodákh ; his sons went their own way,—
 For who durst argue with the all-wise demi-god,
 In whom, in heaviest hour of invasion's stress,
 The only refuge then appeared ? Merodákh
 Came down to them, obeying Heaven's will,
 Who gave the Star to him to be his wife.
 For, as there shines beside Shamash-Baál,
 The Sun-god, beauteous Ishtar at the morn,
 So doth the sovereign empress Vasilisa
 Fill all the world with softest, sweetest light.

Iván.

This I had long foreseen, but now . . .

Second Traveller.

So thither

Let us repair, if there thou too wouldst go ;
 For we desire to offer to the Babe,
 Mítira, our myrrh and frankincense and gold.

CURTAIN.

Scene XIII.

[Garden in Vasilisa's palace. By the pond at night. Iván Tsarévich sitting in a ragged dress by the water-edge.]

Iván. Two years . . . two years have now passed by since I returned. I have not dared to look on her. I am held back by some iron hand. She is happy, and I am an evil-doer. I serve as a shepherd in my father's house, and thus I keep my beautiful little daughter, lovely as a fairy-tale. Thus I live, and still, somehow, I hope for something. I have only seen her twice. Once with the King on a lofty chariot. They are a noble pair. Anyone who sees them carries away in his heart a reverend joy. The other time, in a field, by herself. Whither was she going? Her eyes were half closed in thought. . . . How my heart throbbled! How I yearned to cast myself at her feet! But some invisible iron hand bent me to the ground, held me firmly down. The wind is blowing . . . it is cold. . . . I wander like one of the damned; I seek something on the way, and I know what I am seeking. It will soon be dawn. There I see a streak of light to the East kindling. . . . [*Leaps to his feet*]. Stop, Iván, remember! This is the very place. . . . 'Look around thee! Thou seest—the dawn has kindled with a streak of light to the East; seest thou those grey clouds? Now the pond is turning a cold steel blue. Now that bush is silently rustling. . . . Thou hearest, a shepherd far away plays on his pipes, and the birds are chirruping, here and there, as they list. Remember: every moment may be an eternity; every moment may be a seal. At this moment our love in this life has been sealed, and in all lives to come. . . .'

[*He sobs silently*

[*Meanwhile, a lofty black barge appears on the pond, with Merodákh standing at the bow, rowed by two Assyrians.*]

Merodákh. Stop! Who is this sobbing here?

[*Iván raises his head and bows to the earth.*]

Merodákh [*looking at Iván*]. Stand, and let me see thee. . . .

[*Looks at him long, and says to himself:*

Burn him to ashes . . . expel him. . . .

Iván. Thou tremblest, Lord, so let me die
The last death of eternity,
Of rest and non-existence !

Merodákh. God, even, cannot slay what is immortal.

Iván. Then I, if I must live, am everywhere
One living hope, that I attain forgiveness.

Merodákh. Thou wilt contend ?

Iván. Slay me, I will thank thee.

Merodákh. I have no strength, no strength to vie with thee.—
Thou traitor, faithless menial, I might
Consume thee in a fire, like to a straw. . . .
Yet I am powerless. Oh Íochánan,
My happy brother. . . .

Iván. Oh, thine eyes are sad !

Merodákh. But not for long ! None is there who dare pity
Me, Merodákh-Rámmon, the great enchanter,
Father and King, who, plighted unto sorrow,
Must wear the clinging marriage-wreath of woe.
Row on ! Row on !

[*The barge disappears in the mist, like a ghostly vision.*]

PAUSE.

Iván. This is a marvel ! I shudder as though fever-stricken.
My eyes are full of tears of terror and joy. Will some-
thing happen ?

[*Enter a servant.*]

Servant. Where are you ? I have been searching high and low
for you ! The little girl told me you were wandering
in the garden. Come ! King Seredin is calling for
you. He'll tear you to shreds !

Iván. What for ?

Servant. He asks no questions ; he is Seredín. It would be
better did he hit you outright, for when he starts using
the sharpness of his tongue, there is nothing more to be
said.

Iván. I will go ; but I will fetch my daughter. She has woken
up, and is frightened, when she is alone ; for she is
always with me.

[*They go out.*]

CURTAIN.

Scene XIV.

[*Meroddkh's new palace in Fínduk's capital city. Two gigantic pylons with statues of winged gods, and a majestic staircase of seven-hued steps leading up to the palace portal. Mitra and Svetozár sitting on the bottom step. Svetozár is carving a little boat; Mitra is watching him work. Enter Servant, Iván and Yálya-da.*]

Servant. This is the way to Seredín. Don't take the little girl any further! Seredín is none too fond of his own children, so leave her here. No one will hurt her here.

Svetozár [*raises his head*]. Where I am, no one may hurt anybody.

[*He fixes his look in astonishment on the little girl. Iván follows the servant, Yálya-da remains behind.*]

Svetozár. Mítrochka, Mítrenka, do look what a beautiful little girl! Just as if she had stepped out of a fairy story!

Mitra [*lifting his blue eyes under heavy eyebrows*]. Yes.

Svetozár. Come here, little girl, come here! Don't be afraid!

Yálya-da. What is there to be afraid of? Here I am.

Svetozár. How pretty she is! Her hair—do look, Mitra, her hair is like braided silk! And what big eyes! Bigger than yours! And the little mouth—ha-ha-ha!—is as small as a strawberry. Little girl, kiss me, little bird!

Yálya-da. Yes, tiss me. [*They kiss.*]

Mitra [*putting out his lips*]. Me too! [*They kiss.*]

Svetozár. Whom do you belong to?

Yálya-da. My papa herds your cows.

Svetozár. Oh, does he? Will he let you come and play with us?

Yálya-da. Yes, he will.

Svetozár. And will Mama?

Yálya-da. My Mama is a Princess of the Moon. She died. She went into the night. She was even prettier than me. She never said anything, but only danced. She loved papa, loved me, bit an apple, and *Mga*—she died. Papa has told me about her.

Svetozár. You hear, Mítrik? It's just like a fairy-tale. Well, now I love you, little girl. What is your name?

Yálya-da. Yálya-da.

Svetozár. Yálya-dew-berry! My little strawberry, I take you by your little ears, and kiss your eyes. Tell me, doesn't anyone, anyone, hurt you? I am a Knight, and am under a vow to defend the weak

Yálya-da. No one ever hurts me. Who is your mama?

Svetozár. My mama? My mama is Vasilisa. There is one sun in the heavens and one Vasilisa on earth. My mama is the queen of all mamas.

Yálya-da. Is she pretty? Is she alive? Does she pet you?

Svetozár. Yes, she does.

Yálya-da [turning to *Míttra*]. And him, too?

Svetozár. Him, too.

Yálya-da. Which does she pet more?

Míttra. Him; but then, too, I love him more than myself.

Yálya-da. Oh, but . . . and your papa?

Svetozár. We have different papas. My papa is Iván Tsarévich, a splendid brave knight,—and so kind! He went away and vanished, but I think he will come back—Oh, come back, do, daddy! I want to show you how well I can ride and how far I can shoot with my bow.

Yálya-da. What do you mean? One mama and two papas?

Svetozár. Yes, of course. Mine went away and his arrived.

Míttra. His papa will arrive, and mine will go away.

Svetozár. No, I really do love his papa; he is strong, handsome, and wiser than anybody else on earth. And he loves me; he pats me on the head and lets me have a ride on his horse. For Tsar Márduk I would lay down my head and die.

Yálya-da. Will you take me as your little sister?

Svetozár. Will you be my bride? Will you? How I shall love you! No one shall ever touch you. Will you?

Yálya-da. Your sister.

Svetozár. If you like then, my sister. You must stay with us for ever. My name is Svetozár, his Míttra. I go in front of him and prepare the way for him, and he follows me. Mítrenka, my light, my little golden sun, my Mítrik, my little God! For Mítrenka, my little brother, I would lay down my valorous head and die!

Mitra. Svetozár, tell us a story, the first that comes into your head!

Svetozár. I will, *Mitra*, I will.

Little *Yálya* was walking in the garden. Suddenly from somewhere or other there comes the Loathly Worm. You know how red he is, like a hot stove, and his yellow eyes, like a cat's, but as big as a dinner plate. He brandishes his scaly tail, snaps the trees, and says, 'I'll eat *Yálya* up.' And she cries! *Svetozár*, the hero-knight, hears her shrieks. He was still quite young, only eight years old; but he snatched up the sword of his step-father, *Merodákh* the Tsar, rushed into the garden and attacked the dragon. And the dragon takes to his heels—ha-ha-ha!—and curls his tail like a dog between his hind legs. But *Svetozár* slashes him in the back with his sabre. He didn't want to kill him; he felt sorry for him. The dragon sat up, hisses, covers up his eyes under his brows, and squeaks out, 'Spare my life!' And so it all turns out a joke. And that's the end of my story.

Mitra. A fine story, too! Now, *Yálya*, tell us a story. The first that comes into your head!

Yálya-da. Once upon a time there was a little blue girl. Ever so little. At night she got into a big flower, and the flower rocked, and she went to sleep. At dawn, a little sunbeam flew up to her and said, 'Tk, tk, tk,—time to wake up!' The little girl got out, sat on a butterfly and flew away. The butterfly flies and flies and flies, ever so far. Where? I don't know. What is over there? The little girl flew away ever so far on the butterfly, and never came back.

Mitra. A fine story!

Svetozár. I would have followed on a horse, and found her, too!

Mitra. You with your horse! You couldn't get there on horseback. You want to get everywhere on a horse, *Svetozár*. To get there you can only ride on a butterfly.

Svetozár. Yes, I suppose so.

Mitra. I will tell a story. This is it.

It was ill with all men, and all men wept. A little boy came. 'Why is it ill with you? Why do you

weep?' 'We have a naughty Tsar.' So the little boy marched on to see the Tsar. 'Tsar, why are you naughty?' 'But I am not naughty; I get angry because there are no good people, and so I become naughty.' 'But I am so good.' 'That's not true! There are no good people.' And the little boy said: 'You are angry and want to punish. I am little and have not done anything wrong; so punish me for all of them.' 'Why should I punish the innocent?' 'It is easier for me to endure than for all of them to be tormented.' The Tsar grew very angry at this. 'What, you sly-boots, trying to get the better of me!'—and he started tormenting him and left off tormenting the others. He tormented him, and said, 'Now if you would rather, I will leave off tormenting you, and will torment the others.' 'No, I would rather not.' Then the naughty Tsar wept and said: 'You are good. Will you forgive me?' And the little boy forgave him. And then the music began to play.

[*Svetozár weeps; Ydlya-da looks in front of her, thinking. A silence. Vasilisa, pensive, comes down the steps. She stops and looks around.*]

Vasilisa.

What is it in me is happening?
 Why is it my seer-craft faileth?
 What is it now lulls my keenness,
 Blurs my vision of the distant?
 But my heart is all on fire,
 And my heart is torn asunder!

PAUSE.

Why is it the sun is dimmer?
 Why are all the flowers odourless?
 Into my soul afar and faintly
 Why is it that sounds are wafted?
 Surely I live happily on earth!
 He is kind to me, none nobler;
 He is kind to me, and loves me!
 My desires are granted instantly;
 All things smile to me, as to the morning.
 And have I so few rare jewels?
 My two treasures are incomparable,
 One a childlike heart, so ardent,—
 And another heart ineffable.

PAUSE.

Woe is me, but stolen and taken
 From my soul is the heart's necessity,
 What the heart needs and desires.
 Thief, return me my lost treasure!
 Years go by, and youth is fading,
 Life approacheth the autumn-tide.
 And my bosom yearns for embraces,—
 Whose?—Yes, No-one's,—the Unforgotten.
 I forbade myself forgetfulness,
 And my memory is a torment.
 I had one love unreplaceable;
 Of that love I enjoyed so little.
 From my soul a thief hath stolen
 What my heart needs and desires.
 Thief, return me my lost treasure!
 Oh, return the unreplaceable!

Svetozár. Mama dear, thou art singing very sadly.

Vasilisa. Ah, here you are, children! Who is that with you?

[*Approaches her, and looks at her, startled.*]

Whose little girl is it?

[*Takes her and leads her away.*]

Oh, whose child is she?

Let me look into thine eyes! These are not earthly forces. Who art thou?

Svetozár. It is Yálya-dew-berry! Our little sister. She will remain with us for always. Her mama is a Princess of the Moon. She—*Mga*—died, from eating an apple And her father herds our cows.

Vasilisa. Little maiden, my little maiden, visitor from another country. Daughter of Iván, my traitor, of my own love unforgotten, daughter of him, cruel faithless! Child, my child, born of a weakling, of one senseless, ever restless, one so poor and so embittered—foreign daughter of my anguish!

Wilt thou be their sister? Be a sister to my little boys?

How my heart beats, rends my bosom! Children, would that I might perish! Glistening on thy raven tresses, Vasilisa's tears are streaming, like bright diamonds they hang there.

Mitra. I know now!

Svetozár. What do you know?

Mitra. I've guessed it!

Svetozár. What?

Mitra [to *Vasilisa*]. Mama, I will tell you. You must own up.

Vasilisa. Well, my heavenly sunbeam, tell me!

Mitra. The papa of Yálya who herds our cows is the papa of Svetozár.

Svetozár. Ho-ho-ho—what? What are you making up? Stories, or is it true? Tell me!

Mitra. You love him, wait for him, Mama Vasilisa; and he is come.

Vasilisa. *Mitra*, *Mitra*, *Mitra*, my little boy!

Mitra. You love him more than my papa. We will not be angry, mama. You love Svetozár more than *Mitra*; I also love him better. Do not weep. He who herds our cows—him one must love very deeply. He is here, he is thin, he is afraid, he is wrinkled;—love him! My papa will not be angry. I, also, want you to give all your love to Svetozár. Mama, if he is sad, you must pet him; for pain is very painful to him. I love him. If you find it hard to love him very much, to love him and his papa, and to love me as well, and my papa, then do not love us at all, Mama. We will not cry. We will not be angry. We will be merry, Mama! Svetozár and Yálya, let's go and play!

[*He leads the children away. Svetozár moves away slowly, looking at Mitra and asking him some question; but little Mitra goes ahead, taking the others by the hand up the steps. The children go out.*]

Vasilisa. And it is I who cast the first shadow on *Mitra's* soul! He must suffer, and it is I, his throne and his root, who first torment him! But in Rámmon, and the son of Rámmon, suffering flowers into a marvellous blossom. Iván is coming! He is coming!

[*Enter Iván and Seredín.*]

Seredín. Here you have your wages ! A man who doesn't sleep at nights, doesn't work by day. The night was made for sleep, the day for work. Our time was not allotted to us for roystering and mooning. So let's see no more of you ! Men must be men, and masters masters. Any half and half sort is superfluous,—might even be a thief ! Off you go !

[*Iván moves away slowly without his cap.*]

Vasilísa [*standing midway up the steps*]. Iván Tsarévich !

[*Iván stops as though nailed to the ground, looks round and trembles.*]

Seredín. Tsarévich ? What do you mean, Lady ? [*He looks at Iván*]. Tfu ! Damn—what a blundering ass !

[*Retires hastily, wringing his hands.*]

Iván. I will go, I will flee. . . .

Vasilísa. Iván, come to me.

[*Iván ascends slowly up the steps.*]

Iván [*stumbles on a step*]. No,—I cannot.

Vasilísa. Iván !

[*Iván gets up, moves again, and again falls down and sobs.*]

Vasilísa [*raising him up*]. What is there to forgive ? Thou art mine and I am thine.

[*Iván sobs.*]

Vasilísa [*embracing him*]. My joy ! My eldest son ! Vanished, returned. . . . I hunger for thee ! I had no bread and they gave me precious stones for food.

Iván. Vasilísa, let me weep—only weep ! By my tears let me absolve myself !

[*Merodákh slowly comes down the steps from above.*]

Vasilísa [*not noticing Merodákh*]. Weep, Ivánushka, weep, my heart's own, if the heart wish to weep ! But thou hast naught to repine at. I have nothing to forgive thee. Thou hast nothing to forgive me.

Two-fold the links, the links are welded ;
 Now we separate, now we unite again ;
 Now we are parted, now we embrace again ;
 Or we are cast on strands far distant,
 Yet, after æons, we meet again.

Merodákh. Queen !

Vasilisa. King Rámmon !

Merodákh. To Iöchánan's heart thou now returnest.

Vasilisa. He has returned to my heart, *Merodákh.*

Merodákh. The cycle is fulfilled ; my bliss is gone.

Vasilisa. I have fulfilled my duty ; *Mitra* lives.

Merodákh. Give me thy hand, place thy hand on my heart.

Vasilisa [*touching his heart*]. Oh, *Merodákh* my friend, what pain is thine !

Merodákh. Thou understandest. Yet even sevenfold
 The pain thy son, bright *Mitra*, has to brook
 In life. With both my hands, I shall hold back
 My heart henceforth ; for now I cannot stay
 With you : so to the Fathers I return.

Vasilisa. Yea, *Merodákh*, depart. I venerate
 In thee the husband's strength and majesty
 Of grief. Give thou my brow the hallowed kiss.

Merodákh. I give thy lofty forehead now the kiss of anguish,
 The kiss of love, the kiss of this, my last farewell !

[*He turns towards the palace.*]

Ye heavens, my Sire, now open wide to me the gates !
 Shamash-Baál, who art adorned with gleaming arrows,—
 White-tressed Zin, whose eyes are deep with mystery,—
 And wizard of the depths, E, Eä, first born of the
 ocean,—

Amid the thrones, my throne is set inviolate.
 Ye heavens, my Sire ! Now open wide to me the gates,
 Fair sister, *Ishtar*, let me quaff Eternity !

[*He ascends. The palace above the steps is transformed. Blinding beams of light pour downward. Golden trumpets resound in chords. The Heavens are revealed. Gigantic golden thrones are seen, and on them the outline of the great gods ; at the threshold, Ishtar, titanic, who smiles eternally. She*

offers a goblet. Merodákh, advancing, expands to titanic stature; he embraces and kisses his sister; the gods, drawing close together, yield him his place. The Heavens are then withdrawn from view. Only the echo remains, rumbling over the shaken earth.

Iván and Vasilisa are standing on either side of the lowest step, bowed down. When the last echo has rumbled away, the palace is seen as before, at the top of the steps. The door opens, the three children enter and descend. Svetozar is leading, bearing a sword in front of him, and behind follows Mítva, who looks into the distance.]

- Vasilisa.* Whither are ye going, children ?
- Svetozár.* On to the earth. We are going to defend the good folk from the evil. That is our game, Mama.
- Vasilisa.* Iván, how wonderful the children are—all the children—thine and mine ! Is it not so, Iván ? I have long since thought, but now I understand : we must live for the children, we must serve the children.
- Iván.* I saw them a long time ago, Vasilisa. Once I was sitting in the garden, bemused, and suddenly the earth parted from under me, and a blue abyss opened out. There I saw two little children's hands beckoning—one light haired, with dancing eyes—charming—and the other with black locks and big eyes. And somebody spoke to my heart, saying : These are thy son and thy daughter ! And, gazing even deeper, I saw behind them a wondrous angel, like this little boy, full of thought ; and I beheld a green Star over their heads. It was then, also, I saw thee, Vasilisa.
- Vasilisa.* We must live for children ! We must love for children ! The race of man will be wise and happy, when children live for joy, and the elders live for children. Then, we shall go forward ! At the height of my earthly wisdom I understand this.
- Iván.* The children go on. . . . Ye of the future, be ye blessed !
- Vasilisa.* Iván, didst thou see the Heavens revealed ?
- Iván.* I dared not raise my eyes.
- Vasilisa.* Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Heaven for the gods, but the earth for children.
- Iván.* This is the language of mankind's autumn.

- Vasilisa.* A season wise and ripe, the season of golden fruits.
- Iván.* And Yálya did not die : she had children, and prevails over death.
- Vasilisa.* Everyone who serves children is immortal.
- Iván.* Look, Vasilisa, how the sunbeams light up Mitra !
How beautiful he is ! He raises to the sun his hands !
- Vasilisa.* And man's divinity on earth shall be the child.

THE END.

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