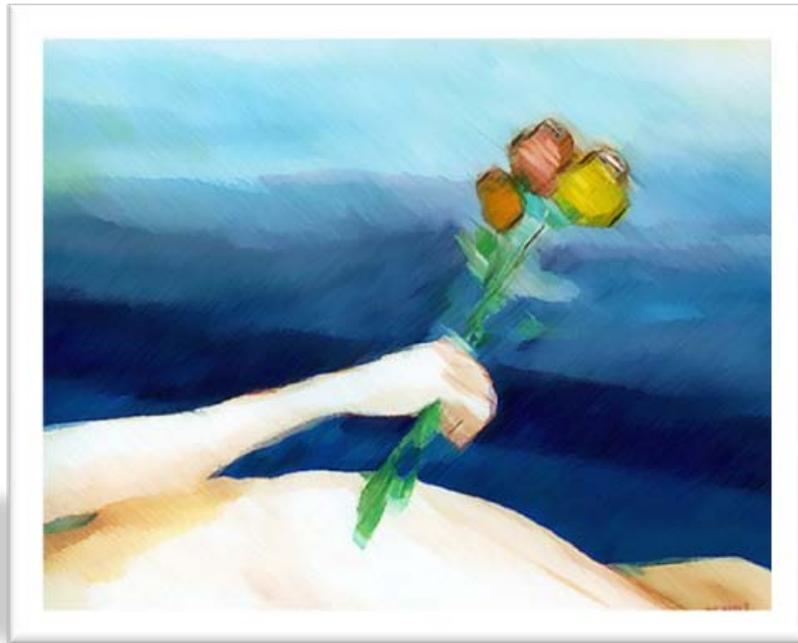


The chalice of love

Short story by
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Ferrada-Noli. *Flowers by the sea.*

As for myself, I woke up this morning with the notion that the proof of this thesis is not whether fantasy can be truth, but whether truth can be possible.

Prologue

A Sunday in June, a late evening in the predictable summer by the harbour of Vaxholm, I get a tremendous hit on the upper back and I fall into the sea, striking the waves firstly with my eyes.

While I am drowning I notice I have lost the sensibility of both of my legs. Must be the hit. I cannot breath, but I can think. I can fantasise of everything except death, for death is now my reality, and dreams are now what I have left undone in life...

It must have gone one minute now since I fell. It's getting darker and darker. I can hear my thoughts but I cannot feel my brain. I have my eyes open and I start to cry. I even think that it is useless to cry with open eyes if one is surrounded by the black waters in the deep of the Baltic Sea. It's like being in the middle of an automatic crow, in a sunny day which warms no body.

Now I do not hear any longer the beatings of my heart. It doesn't matter, I suppose, since neither again I shall hear other's beats. Still I can remember the blond scent of your hair or the blue passion in your eyes. Still I can touch your forms; but now you too are becoming diffuse.

Well, this is the end, and there were no Gods or Demons. Oh my, how I wish now to have a heart! At least enough to say your name. Touch my hand...

I

Close to sharp rocks, near Vaxholm, a terrible situation caused my fall into the sea, where I was drowning, as you understood. A man who witnessed everything, and rescued me, is coming in a short time to meet me. He has promise me that he'll tell me everything he knows of what really happened that Sunday.

I have to explain that even if all that happened for a year ago, he had until now refused to tell me the all truth, and I really hope he had a good reason for that. We shall see. I feel a bit nervous, uneasy, not for the waiting but for the meeting. Where in the hell is he now ("the hell is in the middle of paradise, but paradise is in the centre of hell", he said to me once). If I complain to him and I say 'time goes, you know', he will surely say "no, time comes". It's useless. He has announced that he will come with his boat. Some times all this can be very irritating. But, on the other hand, he literally saved my life just after the door of hope had closed behind me. After that sort of happening -any one could understand this- life can not be the same for a person.

Or, as my friend would have put it, "a person can no be the same for life".

We have met several times since then, always out in nature. In the beginning I felt I had to listen to him as matter of social gratitude. Then, with time, I began to realise that what he really had rescued me from, was the life I had led until that unexpected meeting with death.

I also have to explain that I still know very little, or put it this way, this man still surprises me, and very much. Think that I could even call him my friend yet still I am not sure about his name, or where he comes from. While being lifted up into the ambulance, I managed to ask him for the first time who he was. He said, bluntly, "a man". Later, when I asked him his real name, he answered abruptly: "my real name is Z". Perhaps it was stupid to ask him his "real" name, especially as I thought he had not mentioned any name at all (Z said to me, probably noticing my embarrassment, that even worse is to ask people for their "unreal" names, just because they appear a bit mysterious).

Talking about mystery, I do not remember very many details of the facts immediately before the accident, if it was an accident. Neither can I remember details of the rescue.

I do remember however, the words of Z after I 'woke up', if I may say so. I was lying on the shore looking up at the sky, trying to identify what those things were that looked like stars. Then I hear this man saying "they are stars", and continued very calmly:

“Stars have poetry only for those who contemplate beyond, and forgetting the multitude. Don’t you look at the stars together; look at them instead one at the time. For each star has a soul of their own, and two equal souls shall form a universe”.

He was on his knees beside me whilst pressing my chest with his hands. A lot of papers, my wallet, and even the heavy bag I had on my back when I fell were scattered over the rocks. Then he bent towards me, and whispered these two sentences in my ear. He said (I remember so well): "I apologise from rescuing you from drowning". "But thank you for allowing me to save your life".

I said, “I do not understand you”.

"Of course not", he said, "You are a psychologist".

I could not get a clear thing, then, about this man. He had the possibility of making common educated logic sound like nonsense. If you stay with me in this story, a story that comes truly from life, neither you will be so sure any longer that "reason" is so "rational" or that "surrealistic" could not be, in fact, a matter of clear cut existence.

I use to think that always, or nearly always, happened something dramatic when I met this man, Z. But he had somehow proved to me that in fact there had been dramatic episodes in my life a shortly before we met. I don't know. Perhaps it's as simple as he put it in one of our last conversations:

“The statement that even the most simple or everyday facts can be meaningful or dramatically beautiful to our senses, depending upon the significance we shall give to them, may sound a common place. But less known is the magic of looking intensively to one’s own hands in order to identify within ourselves the wrong believe that love is what we are used to have, and to understand that the love we call impossible is the one we are afraid to touch. Passion solely, may not be total love. But love without passion is not life”.

Right now I remember that sometime ago, being in this same place, I had started to comment to Z that "Lidingö, from the sea, is a beautiful landscape, it's a pity that . . .," and then he in a huff interrupted me saying "have you thought what the landscape thinks about you?"

I have learnt from an early stage in our contact that one way to reach him is by mentioning colours, so I asked him to tell me his opinion of the colours that we could see on the shore. And then he said:

“I have always believed that the Swedish flag was created in the autumn. Perhaps some inspired sailor viewing the shore right from this spot, late in the afternoon”. And then he added:

“You can see whatever you want to see, and you could possibly forget what you do not want to feel. But you could never miss the deep yellow of the leaves when decisively confronting the blue ad infinitum of one September afternoon sky”.

‘Are you really talking about the Swedish flag’ I asked surprised, and yet more surprised with Z’s answer:

“Shall a real man feel to love with real passion a woman from this forest, he would search for the bluest eyes, the blondest hair, and with a *tucilago* decorating her soul. Her breast should be round like the cup of his hands; her lips should be reddish like the point of his lance”.

It would take a year for me to understand what Z was referring to. In the beginning, replying to my repeated curiosity, he used to say, humble: “I have only some words to describe what I am allowed perceive; but the words to describe what I am allowed to admire, belongs to nature”. But one day I saw him from distance, on his knees, making two cups with the flat of his hands, putting them first together and thereafter, separately, on the soil. When I approximated I saw that under each hand was a hand written paper, like a letter divided in two pieces. When he suddenly discovered me, amid my embarrassment, he just sat and said calmly, while folding an obviously hundred times re-read letter:

“When nature decides to speak trough it most beautiful colours, takes the form of a woman in love”.

“So, Z”, I said, “Are you perhaps some day going to tell me about your experiences?” And then Z told me sharp “I do have experiences which I will not talk about, but above all I have a destiny. And it’s not my experiences, or any other’s experiences, what could be a help for your development. Rather, it is the way as to how understand life -and your position in the centre of its destiny- what puts life right in the middle of your soul. All that way has a code, which I shall describe to you some day, with the help of the loving cup”.

That was the first time Z told me about what it was going to result in the essence of this story.

This reminds me that it’s getting late now, I wonder whether he’ll come, anything could happen.

II

Once I inevitably commented to Z how lucky I was that all that had happened in the summer. I said something like that during the summer, the calm gathering of people around the coast, because of the warm weather, probably makes it more possible that some one like him could observe what was going on, and then could come and rescue me, etc. He abruptly interrupted me and said:

"No, you do not understand, it is the other way round: Because people have more time and the weather is as it is in the summer, they can hurt themselves more during the summer around the ports, beaches and in the sea".

At that point his remark did not fit in with what I have learnt about the matter. "It is common knowledge", I said, "namely, that more people actually die of drowning during the autumn and spring, statistics say so".

Z replied: "No, you do not understand". "Those figures apply mostly to people who commit suicide".

Aha! I said they do not try in the summer because they know people could rescue them.

"No", said Z, "People who seriously attempt suicide, do not reason in those terms. Their belief is probably the opposite, that people would not rescue them. Their conviction is that people do not give a damn about their fate, and it is probably because of that conviction that they have decided to commit suicide".

"If they suicide more in spring and autumn, is not a case of weather or natural rhythm. It is the human rhythm that is upset. In the autumn is the anxiety of one more summer without the fulfilment of love, and in the spring it is the fear of one more summer without human contact".

"But why"? I asked.

"Because loneliness and isolation beats harder when you are deprived of having dreams".
"And by the way, people in the summer are so occupied by getting either bored or excited, so they could hardly notice the difference between swimming and falling."

So, once more I had to correct myself and realise that truth is not always in articles and books. But it is not always easy for me to accept that he is right about things that I am supposed to be expert on, because of my profession. So I said to Z, pretending I was "giving up" because the subject was rather boring and dry:

"All right, we say as you wish: all people in Sweden suicide more in the autumn and spring, and that's it".

And I really thought that after my last remark, Z, or truth, or whatever, were to leave me in peace. I was again mistaken. Z said after a long pause:

"No, not all people. The immigrant suicide more in the summer. You will understand this the day I tell you the real story of the Sisyphus myth.

III

The middle of the Archipelago is the middle of many things. It is, for sure, in the centre of what boring people call 'contrast'. The Archipelago is probably the only luxurious place around Stockholm where the only way to enjoy nature is by means of most anti-luxurious resources.

Now he is approaching.

My friend Z will arrive in a boat, an old wooden sailing boat, and shall pick me up amid the noises of the big engine of motor-boats 'made by and for plastic', as he used to say.

Actually, the first time I saw his boat, and possibly realising that I was looking intensely at it, he said, as a manner of greeting, whilst we shook hands:

"I hope it is unsophisticated enough for you."

I still wondered what that he really meant by that. Is it so that people can make a fashion of everything? And if so, did he mean that to be "unsophisticated" could also be a trend? One more trend in which we try to compete for be perceived "inn"? I don't know, I did ask him about, but he did not want to comment.

There, on that island of landscape, lives a beautiful friend of mine. I like her very much. When she speaks it's like watching pearls falling into a transparent sea. The words remain in the bottom.

Actually, her real name, if names could be translated is, in English, "Light". Besides, Light is a beautiful woman. Some years ago she told me a terrible truth. And together with her story came also - yet a truth to understand - that beautiful people can say such a terrible things in such uncomplicated fashions.

What she told me was that once on the road to the south, with her husband driving, a bird in flight suddenly hit the windshield. They stopped, and watched the bird's agony.

Both wanted to take care of the bird, and at the same time they realised that it would die anyway because of the injuries. Since both of them are doctors and doctors are naturally more prone to discuss ethics than medicine, they found themselves suddenly faced with the following dilemma:

There are two ways to kill a bird in agony lying in the middle of the road. One way is to kill him slowly, by letting him stay alive in agony. The other way is by finishing its life promptly, conscious at the fact that the accident had been unavoidable.

I never asked them what happened to the bird, which certainly did die. I was perhaps in need to find the answer by my self, and I was reflecting upon that when Z surprised me with his silent arrival.

IV

Z opened a bottle of red Italian wine that he had in his old leather bag ("a retired bag", he used to say), and with some olives and the newly baked bread I had taken with me, we sat in the boat while we make turns at the stirring. The wind was decided but calm.

He went directly to the central point of the reflections I had when he came.

"Have you heard about her?" He asked firmly.

I hesitated.

"Is it now totally finished between you and her?" He insisted, louder, provoking me even more, to remain silent.

He was standing on the roof and preparing the main sail, waiting for my answer. I could only see his shoulders and I reflected on the tension in his muscles and thought perhaps he was preparing himself for the worst. At least, so I thought, since for me it felt like the worst.

"She has recently told me, that if we met again, every time we shall meet, it will be the last time."

Z finished the sail; he came back and took a long drink pouring afterwards the last drops of his glass into the air. He filled our glasses again with the red wine and spoke to me, as though looking straight into my brain. He spoke in a surrealistic voice, as not being his own, but that of the wind carrying a soft whisper:

"Before, I used to receive the fall of love in my bare hands. But inescapably after a while it ran down between my fingers. I became, because of that, several times dispirited and empty".

And he continued:

"It was then, on one of those evenings, when you know there is a full moon, but still you do not feel like looking at it. You don't dare to look at it.

"You know, one of those evenings when you think, 'there it is, the circle of possibility, in which I became an outsider'."

"You think that everybody knows that full moons are the landscape of satisfaction. You think that everybody knows that a full moon is the medal on the chest of a night in victory".

Z took a large pause, looking all the time at the glass he was holding, and said:

"A full moon is the fulfilment of our dream of passion. However, for those where passion transforms dreams into sorrows, and promises into rain, for those, a full moon is a mirror of their soul. It is a big round white soul deprived of colours".

"The moon becomes a witness which we may wish being off dead".

"It is then when you don't want to look up at the sky, and gravity attracts your look to the centre of earth. You do not have any other choice than to look at the soil".

"Listen: It was then when I happened to see my cry mixing with the mud on top of the earth, giving glimpses of scattered lights. And it was then when I got the idea of making a bowl with that mixture. I just added some seeds of purple hope and dark-green hope, of course, and also a bit of deep-red humbleness".

"So, I thought, next time love comes, I will receive it in this bowl, so it will not run down between my hands and fingers."

I wondered what he meant with the different colours of hope, but he also seemed to have noticed that I was more concerned with a sort of bowl he had taken from inside his leather bag; it looked more like a chalice.

"I am curious about what you say, but I am more curious about what you have", I said. "I don't know, could you not promise me that you will tell me about the colours of hope, some other time?"

His eyes took on the dimension of childhood. I thought I'd probably hurt him.

He looks hesitant, mumbling something to the air, together with the sound of the waves. Then suddenly he turned to me and said:

"All right, but if I tell you some other time, I might refer to some other colours".

"Life changes, not colours", I protested.

"Colours change, life remains", he said, while looking at my hair.

I felt a bit embarrassed. It is true that my hair has become notoriously grey, especially after the happening. But his chromatic way of thinking made me sometimes feel like a life outsider. Like being in the cave of Plato's Republic. But in addition of having chains, with my eyes covered, blindfolded, and without knowing it.

It was my turn to talk, but I said nothing. Silence occupies the place of shame, I thought. Better curiosity without questions than questions without answers. Should I dare to ask again?

Undetermined matters remained cruising in the warm air, and I was so decisively eager. I wanted so much to see the bowl!

So, just in case I have made him sad, I decided to apologise for what I had said before, when I interrupted him.

- "Sorry, I did not mean that" I said.

- "You did not mean what?"

- "If I have hurt you, I don't know. . ."

- "No, you don't understand, you are the one who is hurt. For every time you see sadness you are reminded of the sadness in your own".

And continuing: "do not worry about this; I am not sad because of your psychologist's trick"

- "What trick!" I protested.

- "Well, listen: If a mother consults you professionally and asks you "what should I say to my child who persists in going out to play without enough warm clothes, after I've told him over and over again not to"?"

"How would you advise her?"

I began to feel uneasy. It was always so with Z, on certain points.

He used to say in those moments, when he noticed he made me feel nervous, that it was not people or the external world that make us react that much, more the truth that our heart whispers in our mind.

He even said once that everything depends on the whisper, that whispers have different colours, and so on. I smiled at the idea of using Z's own colour-stuff in my reply:

"Well, I would advise her to say something in this style: Child, when you go out and play, will you take the black coat or the white coat? You see? Simple."

- "You mean that you just do not give any chance of refusal, with respect to the main issue"

- "Right"

- "You mean, you give the child the idea that apparently he is deciding for himself, since he is the one who chooses which of the coats to take"

- "Exactly, a coat in any case, and he takes either one. He goes out to play, the mother succeeds, and everybody happy"

- "No, you don't understand. The psychologist would be happy. But not the mother or the child. No mother could be happy about deceiving her child. No child could be happy when it discovers its mother's deceit. To catch a cold once, as a child, because of a missing coat, is nothing compared with a mental wound an adult carries out in his mind."

V

. . . Z took the chalice with care, trying to keep it level, as if it contained something. He was still holding it, and since I had one of my hands on the steering stick, I could hardly lean over to look inside the bowl. Then I saw it was empty, or looked empty, like an uninhabited house or a prairie without horses. Z noticed my disappointment and looked down.

I felt that it was a long meaningless prologue. Even if I can now understand that the source of my disappointment stemmed more perhaps from my own expectations, my own need to find an answer, and not so much as to what Z had promised me. I then felt, very irritated.

We had just passed *Stege Sund* and not far from there, on the bay to the left of the channel, one could see an abandoned bridge with moles. Then I said,

"Look there instead, there on the shore; do you see that little harbour without boats, empty? That is your bowl!"

"No", Z said, calmly, "You do not understand: vessels are not there in life to decorate ports; in their true nature, the boats belong to the oceans, also in their true nature they are for navigating, not to stay permanently on shore." And added:

"The point is not whether a port is devoid of boats, but whether a boat has no port to go to. Destiny can manage without love, true, but love can not live without a destiny."

"Also the point about you," he continued, "is that in the first place you don't see what you don't want to see". "Even if you have eyes, your heart refuses to read. You forget that what you refer sometimes as defences, are not protections that come from the things you want so much to observe. They are obstacles grown within your mind."

"In fact, if you come closer, more with your touch than with your sight, if you take a closer look at the bowl after you have embraced it, you will see that the bowl might look empty, but not dry," and offering the bowl to me, continued:

"It is moist in the bottom, you see?" "When the red-deep desire meets the perfume of love, the fluid of love is transformed into a transparent feeling, leaving in the bottom just the humidity of the unchangeable, this is what you can see, and of course there is also the intangible."

"The unchangeable? The intangible?" I asked, questioned.

"Yes, the unchangeable, the eternal principle that all matters come to an end. Love cannot possibly change that, not even the purple-hope that colours the garments of the Gods."

"And then the intangible, the part of love that you cannot touch, and therefore you cannot possibly give form to"

"But," I said, "I heard you saying that it is inside the bowl."

"You do not understand! It is free; love is free but a prisoner. As long as love cannot leave the bowl, it is a hostage of what you might call false expectations, but also of your self."

"Remember what I say." He continued: "Love is a vessel whose destiny is in a harbour, but lives in the sea."

Like a slash in my throat I inevitable associated his last words with thousands of wars, victories and defeats. Humanity enslaving humanity, people liberating people. Slaves being free by the killing of slavery, which was first the massacre of the slaves. Captors of thousand years living in the jail of their mistake.

I thought of those, now so many, young men and women, as we, when young, still in captivity, and still having the mental freedom to live in our unrealistic reality, believing that the assailant is himself a victim, and still dreaming of that "better" world, still denying that we are considered antagonists to our antagonists, as they are to us.

I thought of my love, falling to the ground in small fragmented dreams, and still forming a pile of a thousand hopes.

Is hope a reality? Is life a fantasy?

So I look strait into Z's eyes, and said to them, with triumph:

"But then that thing in the bottom of the bowl, it cannot be love, since love vanishes."

Z said:

"Don't you understand? Yes, it is love, and in its most dramatic sense: it is memory." "It is the appreciation of what we have had, after we have lost it."

"As I have lost you," I thought, "As I have lost myself"

Could it be so, that we love most, when we are longing for love, for we know what we have lost? Was it because of this that the moisture in the bottom of the bowl looked like screaming?

I started to get Z's point, I believed for a second, during all the long seconds he remained silent leaving me to grieve in peace. The wind whispered something to the sails, something that sounded important, and then I heard Z speaking to me with his voice as coming from the ocean:

"I do not mean to comfort you, but you should not mourn the death of a beautiful period, as if it were the death of love. Go ahead and take up that fight, don't explain yourself, don't ever apologise for having loved".

"Perfection is to make mistakes; mistake is to believe that love is perfect"

"You're after what is yours, because love is not something someone gives to you, you earn it, it was offered to you, just because you were what you are. Besides, you constructed that feeling together and together means also your own sweat. You are missing the part of your soul that was stolen from you, and I am telling you that to take it back you will have to start taking the moon by assault, and then to defeat the Gods that defend it."

"Can you see now what is in the bottom of the love-bowl" asked Z at last

- "Yes Z, it looks like my own blood."

VI

I have been waiting to meet Z in order to enunciate my reflection to him. I even caressed the conviction on that he was going to like my paradox.

My brain was smiling while I waited for him to come and seat.

Soon he came and sat in front of me, with his back to the evening sun. And then I said with triumph in every letter:

- If the government does not want, or does not dare, to take from the rich and give it to the poor, then is best to take poverty from the poor and give it to the rich!

"That was a good reflection", Z said. And then I understood that something went wrong, since I knew that for him thoughts or reflections are correct or incorrect, never "good" or "bad".

"Yes, but?" I interrogated

"Yes, but. Giving poverty to the rich makes the rich both rich and poor, but leaves the poor even more miserable". "Give to every one according to his needs and take from everyone according to his capacity remains still the ultimate utopia of humankind, for we know nothing about our real capacity, and much less about the needs of others"

Silence again, and again the thunder:

"And with respect to our capabilities, the problem is that no one is interested. What society is interested in it is your performance; the particular performance to succeed in doing the task they think is worth to have profit for"

Well, that is depending who governs society, I said to my self, nearly whispering. It did not help.

"God, Z said, and the priests, they govern" "So, you go out and take from the rich and give it to the poor. But what you take from the poor, best you give it to God."

But, why?

"To teach him a lesson about solidarity."

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