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"Christ Is Risen"

An Easter Story

IN the Church of St. Vasily, situated in the fashionable quarter of Moscow, the majority of the Easter worshippers were men and women who belonged to the "gentry." But the servants and artisans and clerks mingled freely among the lords and principals, for on this morning all were brothers and sisters.

A little to one side, at the foot of the roffin containing the image which is always used in the Easter rites, a young girl was supporting on her arm an old woman. The girl's face was pale but radiant with a spiritual adoration. Her large blue eyes were fixed upon space as if lips were slightly parted. Not far away a young man leaning against a pillar stood statue-like with his eyes fixed upon the girl. He, too, was pale but his eyes shone with adoration of things not altogether spiritual.

Slowly the faint dawn shone through the stained glass windows, dimming the lights of the blinking candles. Suddenly the organ pealed forth a joyous one, a chorus of voices thundered out he wails. "Christ has arisen." There was an instant hush among the worshippers, and then one and all answered joyously.

"Blessed art thou, Christ, who hast indeed arisen!"

The young girl at the foot of the coffin turned to her mother, exclaiming joyously: "Mother, Christ has arisen, and with her sprouts-tips still parted, he imparted the triple kiss upon her mother's cheeks and nose."

The young man approached her timidly.

"Fedora," he said in a soft pleading voice, "let us rejoice."

She looked up at him with that same impersonal, superior eyes and started at him as if in laughing. "Yes, let us rejoice for Christ has indeed arisen," she answered softly, lifting her face to him. He bent over her, and they exchanged the triple kiss mechanically.

"And now that our hearts are purged, Fedora, I ask you to forgive me. Let our quarrel end in peace," he pleaded.

The girl flushed and for a moment the order was broken by her religious transports dimmed, her lips parted.

"Ivan," she said, after a moment of indecision, "I do forgive you. Mother wishes it. Is it not so?" She turned to her mother.

Ivan silently exchanged the triple kiss with the mother.

"But, Fedora," he said, turning again to the girl, "it is not only for today you have forgiven me, is it? I cannot bear to think that."

Again the girl's brow clouded. She closed her eyes and crossed herself as if she had not heard him.

Fedora and her mother walked slowly to the end of the sidewalk, where their carriage awaited them. Ivan followed every step, as if fearful of losing the opportunity of saying more toward the reconciliation. Before entering the carriage Fedora divided the contents of her purse among the beggars who lined the walk. Her mother smiled.

"Fedora," fostered Ivan, "you are so kind to the beggars, will you not be kind to me too?"

"I have given all my money away," she answered, with a bit of coquetry in her smile.

He flung his purse to the beggars. "You know that I want to know only if we are to be friends again," he said.

"Don't speak of it now," Fedora answered quickly.

"Come home with us to breakfast," said the mother, seeing the look of pain in the young man's eyes.

He questioned the girl with his eyes.

"Yes," she said, "come with us. There is room in the carriage." He entered, dizzy with happiness. They rode on in a silence that was broken only by the remarks of the mother about the service at the church.

When the carriage stopped before her imposing residence Fedora alighted quickly and vanished into the house, leaving her mother to Ivan's care.

"Be of good cheer, Ivan," the mother said. "We breakfast in twenty minutes. Meanwhile make yourself at home either in the house or in the garden. You know the place so well."

As Ivan walked through these old paths all the doubts and fears and hopes prayed again in his heart. Suddenly he forgot his anxiety. Fedora was beside him, a white lily in her hand. She had changed her gown and there was a morning's freshness and grace about her little form and charming face.

"Ivan," she said softly, "I was wicked. Forgive me. Last night I confessed my waywardness and jealousy to the priest, and he absolved me from my sins. I prayed before the Virgin that you should come and forgive me. You did come. You did forgive me," she added, pushing him away gently as he tried to embrace her.

"Yes, you are wicked," he whispered, bending over her.

"Only an Easter kiss," she whispered back lightly, pressing her lips to his cheeks and mouth. Sonia V. Medvedoff in Chicago Tribune

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