

ASHES

PART-I FLAMES

"Yes, I know from where I came!
Ever hungry like a flame,
I consume myself and glow,
Light grows all that I conceive,
Ashes everything, I leave:
Flame I am assuredly."

– Nietzsche

Only the room in which he lodged was heated. His window looked to the south, towards the rolling ground from beneath which the sun rose on rare fine summer mornings. On better days, the vast desert expanse on which the mountains crashed could be seen from this window. The sky was not so dark now, for it had stopped raining during the night. The morning had opened with a greyish dirty light which had scarcely become brighter as the ceiling of clouds lifted. At two in the afternoon it seemed as if the day were merely beginning. But it was a better day compared to those on which the rain thrashes his wrinkled palms as he fights against the gusts of wind breaking through the plank of wood with a knob that serves as his door.

Poverty was cruel to live in, even without other men it made matters worse. In contrast to such poverty, he who lived like a monk in this remote torn away village, nonetheless satisfied with the little he had and with the rough life, felt no less than a

lord with his whitewashed walls, his narrow couch, his unpainted shelves, and his weekly provision of water and food.

He stepped out, onto the terrace. Today, in this vast landscape he had loved so much he felt alone. May be it was his age, maybe it was the wrinkles on his forehead, his greying hair, maybe it was the dying flame of youth or the absence of the warmth of a woman's skin that made him feel this way.

He didn't learn that the love of a woman, like something good, something great, wants to be beheld only from a distance, and by all means only from below, not from above; otherwise it makes no impression and loses its charm. So, he was frequently blamed for being incapable of true love, for being a bastard who just jumped right out of one bed and into another. He loved from too near, skin to skin, soul to soul, only till the charm lasted. Then he left and later forgot why he was there in that bed of horrors. He loved like a flame and made the women glow and grow in his light. When he left, they were ashes. Nonetheless, he always looked at himself only from a distance in order to find himself even tolerable, or attractive and invigorating.

Now he lives like a monk and spends his night in vigil, celebrating the death of his youthful fervour. But such days sting him. On such days when he can't contemplate anything beyond his loneliness. He walks to

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