



神秘に生きた者が

目にする、それは

「FGO」登場サーヴァントの生前の姿を描く
桜井光書きおろし短編小説!

原作:TYPE-MOON

文:桜井光 イラスト:松竜

Fate/Grand Order

英霊伝承 ～エレナ・ブラヴァツキー～

**Those two witnessed something in the
mountains, shrouded in mystery—**

『或いは、彼女の見た光』

西暦一八九一年、六月二十三日。

——ヒマラヤ山脈。

命を落としたはずの人間二名が其処にいた。

一人は女。先だって五月某日にロンドン某所で眠るように死したはずの魔術師。

一人は男。先だって四月某日にスイス某所の滝にて最期を迎えたはずの紳士。

「いい空気！」

女が言った。青く澄み渡る空の下――

山道を歩きながら少し訛りのある英語を口にする彼女は、未成年のようだった。防寒用の分厚いマントの下、リボンとフリルの目立つ可憐な服装に包まれた華奢な肢体はおおよそ十代半ばといったところ。少女と称して構うまい。多分にあどけなさを残した幼い顔立ちであるのに、まなざしは長い年月を経てきた賢者のそれであるかのよう。

大人のような少女。

或いは、少女のような大人。

何処か、ちぐはぐな印象を見る者に与える小柄な女ではあった。

「ほら、ご覧なさいなミスター。空がこんなに澄み渡って見えるわ」

「素晴らしい風景だ。世界の果てにも等しきヒマラヤの山嶺から、ドルゴコフ王家の末裔たる姫君と共に見渡す世界がこのように映えるとは。ワトソンあたりは大いに羨むだろうが、あまりに空想の物語めいて現実味が薄いと文句を言うかもしれないな」

対して、男は実に背が高い。

マント以外は軽装と言える少女の様子とは打って変わって、頑丈な登山靴と重く大きな背囊、いかにも探検を目的とした完全装備で險しい高山に挑む男。理性と知性に溢れた瞳は、至極穏やかに、ヒマラヤの山道に佇む少女の姿を捉えている。インド亜大陸とチベット高原との境として横たわる世界最高の大山脈のただ中に在りながら、まるで、座り慣れた安楽椅子の設置された居間にいるかのような落ち着きを持って佇む男だった。

人を寄せ付けない秘境にて、異郷の王女と共に旅をする――

そんな幻想的な光景の中にあつてさえ夢想せず、彼の瞳は現実のみを見る。

「さてドルゴコフの姫君。そろそろ山登りに音を上げたくなかった頃だろうか」

「まさか。甘くみないでくださるかしら？」

「おっと、これは失礼」男は深く被った帽子の鍔に触れながら「だが、ああ。これは奇妙なこともあるものだと思うね」

「うん？」

「神が如き知識を求める神智学。古くはグノーシス主義、中世錬金術やカバラの系譜の果てにバラケルススのような新プラトン学派を経て、西欧の社交界及び新大陸、そして一部のインド社会にキミは現代神智学と言うべきモノを花開かせた訳だが……そんな進歩的見地の持ち主が、高名なるブラヴァツキー夫人その人が、まさか古き魔獣の存在などに興味を抱くとは！」

「嫌味はやめて頂戴な。それに、そんなに驚くことじゃないでしょう？」

少女は――

エレナ・ブラヴァツキーはくすりと笑って、

「現代を生きるあたしたちだって、そういうものに興味を抱くこともあるわよ」
背の高い紳士シゲルソンへと告げるのだった。

エレナ・ブラヴァツキー。ノルウェー籍を自称する英国人探検家シゲルソン。

世間では逝去したとされている両名は、互いにひとつの目的のために協力し、ヒマラヤの山嶺を進んでいたのだった。

すなわち、十九世紀末の現代に尚も残ると密かに噂される神祕の具現。

光纏う、翼ある魔獣と出逢うために。



「蝶か、小鳥になつてみたいわ」

そんな風に言つたのを、今でもよく憶えている。

本当に小さな女の子だった頃よ。

そう、幼い頃は翼あるものになりたいと思つていた気がする。故郷でも一番のお気に入りだったヴォルガ湖畔を歩いては、小鳥や動物、蜂と話をしたわ。ええ。蜂。虫の中でも蜂とは話が良く合ったように思うの。変かしら？

いいえ、小さな子にありがちな空想の中での出来事なんかじゃないの。

ぜんぶ本当のこと。

少なくとも、今でもあたしはそう信じてる。

この背中に翼が生えて飛び立っていくのを夢見ながら、翼あるものたちと会話して、時には妖精や精霊の姿だつて見つめたわ。……なかに、ここで言う精霊というのは例えば時計塔の魔術師たちの言うガイアの精霊か、或いはバラケルスス言うところの四大の顕れたる元素霊か？ さあ、ふふ。どうかしら。子供の頃のあたしは、大人の目に見えない友人たちとよく遊んでいたっけ。精霊も妖精もあたしにとってはその一員にすぎないの。

Just what was the light that she saw?

June 23rd, 1891 A.D. Located somewhere in the Himalayan mountain range.

Two people who should already have lost their lives were walking. One of them was a woman, a mage who should've passed away in her sleep on a certain day in May. One of them was a man, a gentleman who should have reached the end of his life at a Swiss waterfall on a certain day in April.

"The air is so fresh!"

The woman exclaimed, standing under that perfectly clear blue sky—

As she walked along the rough mountain road, speaking English with a slight accent, she didn't yet appear to be an adult. She had wrapped her slender limbs in a thick winter cloak, and the pretty, frilly clothes that she wore made her look more like a girl in her mid-teens. For all intents and purposes, we may as well actually call her a girl. But despite her innocent, childlike features, the look in her eye was more akin to a wise old sage who had lived a good many years.

She was a young girl who acted more like an adult. Or rather, a grown woman who acted more like a young girl. Either way, she was a petite young woman who gave anyone who looked at her a rather mismatched impression.

"Why, just take a look, Mr. Sigerson. The sky seems so unbelievably clear."

"It's quite an amazing sight, to be sure. These Himalayan mountains which may as well stand at the end of the earth, and the princess descended from the Dolgorukov royal family who stands overlooking them, are both quite a sight to behold. Watson would no doubt be envious, but I suspect he would complain that such a tale would seem highly fantastical and far too unrealistic."

By comparison, the man was extremely tall.

Unlike the girl who was dressed quite lightly aside from her cloak, the man looked prepared to challenge the steep mountain climb: he was clad from head to toe in exploration equipment, complete with sturdy, mountain-climbing boots and a huge, heavy backpack. He took in the sight of the girl standing on the Himalayan mountain road quite calmly, his gaze full of reason and intellect.

Even as he stood in the middle of the highest mountain range in the world, nested between the Indo-Gangetic plain and the Tibetan plateau, the man looked as comfortable as if he were reclining in his living room armchair.

Traveling to an unexplored, sparsely populated region alongside a foreign princess—

Even amidst such a fantastical scene, he paid no mind to such dreamlike sights, and his gaze looked only at reality.

“By the way, little Dolgorukov princess. Could it be that you’re making such exclamations because you intend to climb the whole mountain?”

“Of course not. Could you not tease me so?”

“Oh my, how rude of me.” The man touched the brim of his hat apologetically. “But well, you see, I did think it was rather curious.”

“What was?”

“‘Theosophy’ involves the search for divine wisdom. In the past, through a combination of Gnosticism, medieval alchemy, and the genealogy of Kabbalah put forth by Neoplatonic scholars such as Paracelsus, you managed to bring the idea of modern theosophy to life across western Europe, the new world, and parts of Indian society.

However... how strange it is, to think that the famous Ms. Blavatsky, responsible for such a forward-thinking point of view, is actually interested in researching the existence of demonic beasts!”

“I don’t appreciate your sarcasm. Surely it’s not really so surprising?”

The girl—

Or rather, Elena Blavatsky let out a small laugh.

“Even though we^(occultists) live in the modern age, some of us are still interested in such things.”

She informed all of this to the tall gentleman, whose name was Sigerson.

Elena Blavatsky. And Sigerson, a man who claimed to be Norwegian but who was actually a British explorer. As far as the rest of the world knew, these two people should have already passed away, but they nonetheless proceeded across the Himalayan mountain range together as they cooperated with one particular goal in mind.

In other words, they were there to investigate a mystery that was rumored to secretly still exist in the present day, at the end of the nineteenth century: a winged demonic beast, said to be cloaked in a mysterious light.

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“I wish I could be a bird or a butterfly.”

Even now, I still remember saying something like that once. I really must have been quite a little girl at the time.

Yes, when I was a girl I'm quite sure that I always wanted to have wings. Back when I still lived in my homeland^(Russia) I would walk along the shores of my favorite place, Lake Volga, and talk to the birds, small animals, and bees. Yes, that's right. Bees, too. Out of all insects, I think bees were the best for conversing with. I wonder, does that make me strange?

No, no, I'm quite sure that it wasn't one of those little daydreams that children tend to have sometimes. All of it really happened. Or at least, I choose to believe it did even now.

While dreaming that I might someday sprout wings and fly away myself, I would talk to the little winged creatures around me, and sometimes I would even catch sight of fairies and spirits.

...Oh my, would you like to know if the spirits were the same as the divine spirits of Gaia that the Clock Tower teaches about, or if they were the four elemental beings of the earth theorized by Paracelsus? Well, now. Hehe... who can say? All I know is that when I was a child, I used to play with so many invisible friends that the adults around me couldn't see. To me, spirits and fairies were just a few of them.

お父さまは嫌な顔をしたけれど、お母さまはそうでもなかったわね。

「まあ、まあ。エレナ。今日はヴィイと遊んだのね。怪我はしなかった？」

ロシアのジョルジュ・サンドと謳われてペリンスキーにも絶賛された作家にして、ロマノフ家に連なるエレナ・ドルゴコフ王女の娘であつたお母さま。流石に王家の末裔ともなれば……って、なしなし。あなたがドルゴコフなんて言うものだから、つられそうになつちやうたじゃない。お母さまが生まれるまでの系譜がどうあれ、あたしはあたし。

ええ、ええ。家族には恵まれていたのだと思う。

フォン・ハーン家の一員にしてロシア陸軍大將であつたお父様は、厳しくはあつたけれど同時に優しくもあつて。生意気な弟だつて子供の頃はちっちゃくて、いつもあたしの後ろをくつついて歩いて、本当に可愛かつた。妹だつてそうよ。

え？

ああ、うん。そうよ。

あたしには力があつた。

奇妙な力——手を伸ばさずとも、幾つかのことを成し遂げられたわ。

超能力者なのか、魔術師なのか？ さあ？

物体の重さを操つたり、隠されたものを見つけたり、心に向けて直接囁くことで生き物の行動をちよつぱり操つてみたり。家族は最初のうちこそ驚いたり感心したり怖がつたりしていたけど、最後にはすっかりオカルト好きになつていったっけ。

……ふふ、心に向けて直接、のくだりで大袈裟にのけぞつてみせたわね。でも、ただのお芝居でしょう、シゲルソン。あなたには精神操作なんて効きそうにないもの。防御の術式を仕込んだ護符でも持ち歩いているのか、よほど自分の精神の城塞に自信があるか。言うまでもなく後者でしょうね、きつと。

鴉のお守り？

なあにそれ、アーサー王関係じゃなければ極東あたりの護符かしら。クマノ？

あなたって謎めいているわ、シゲルソン、あたしも極東には行つたけれど、あなたの方が余程詳しくそう。もしかして、あたしの知らない伝説を知つていたりして。ああ、うん。

そんなに大層なものじゃなくても構わないわ、ほんのお伽噺くらいのもので充分よ。

お伽噺は好き？

そうね、英国風に言えばフェアリー・テール。

「おかあさま、おかあさま。次のお話はなあに？」

幼い頃は、毎晩そう言つてお母さまにせがんだっけ。

竜退治の物語も、妖精の伝説も、あやしげな錬金術も、すべて纏めて好んで触れた。

聖ジョージも、妖精境もドモヴォイも、賢者の石もバラケルススもみんな好き。

あたしは多分——普通ではないモノに惹かれていたのだでしょうね。

うん？ なに？

可愛い少女だつたのだろうね、って？

ふふ。それはね、それなりに。でもね、手の付けられないくらいに我が儘な小娘だつたのだと思う。そうでもなければ十五歳でポール・ヴァシリエヴィッチ・ドルゴコフいおじいさまが遺してくれた図書館に入り浸つて魔術書を読み漁つたりはしなかつたらうし、十七歳の時に会つたはげ鳥のニキフォルを魅了なんてしなかつたらうし。

ええ。魅了。そう言つたわ。

だって、当時の家庭教師が挑発してみたことを言つてきたのだから。

「ニキフォルさまがお嬢さまをお構いになるのは恋愛感情云々ではなくて、いつまでも子供のようにはしゃぐエレナお嬢さまをご心配されているに違いありません」

とか、確かそんな風に。あたしもムキになつて、本気で女の魅力的なアレをアレしてしまつたら、あのニキフォル・ブラヴァツキーが三日後に求婚してきたのよ。

……こほん。

ええつと、ともかくね。

急な思い付きで結婚して、数週間はお嫁さんというものを体験して、それからまた急な思い付きでお嫁さんを辞めたの。そ。辞めた。離婚こそできなかったけれど、あたしはニキフォルの妻としては生きられなかつた。家庭教師の言う通り、あたしには無理だつたのね。我が儘で手の付けられない小娘のままだつたんでしよう。

うん。やつぱり、あたしは可愛い子なんかじゃないわ。

勝手に飛んでいつてしまふ渡り鳥。可愛さで言うなら、そうね。離婚の後、世界中を巡っている最中に会つた人々のほうがよほどそうだわ。充分凄い才能を持っているのにすぐ暴走してしまふミスタ・エジソン、本物の天才であるがゆえにいつも孤独を選んでしまふニコラ・テスラ。一癖も二癖もある問題児たちだけど、みんな根はいい子なのよ。大人になつても心のどこかが少年のままなのね。我が永遠の右腕たるオルコット大佐だつて、うん、少しはそういう所があつたかもしれない。

夢や希望のきらめきで瞳をいっぱいにして——

そう、あの瞳。彼らとそっくり同じに瞳を輝かせながら、いつもあたしの名前を口にしながら笑顔で駆け付けてくれた優しい男の子がいたっけ。ミスタ・エジソンやニコラ君の精神をかたちにして顕在化させたらこんな姿になりそうな程の、可愛い子！

「エレナさま！」

そう呼び掛ける声も透き通るかのよう。

ふふ。急に思い出したわ。

インドで出会つた子。世界の多くを旅してきたけれど、最も好きな場所はどこかと尋ねられたら、やつぱりインドになるのだと思う。アドヴァイタ哲学や古代アーリア宗教の秘

My father often gave me a sour look whenever I would mention such things, but my mother was different.

“Now, now, Elena. So you played with Viy today? You’re not injured, are you?”

My mother was a famous writer, often cited as the "George Sand" of Russia and quite acclaimed by the famous literary critic Belinsky himself. She was also the daughter of Princess Yelena Dolgorukov, a member of the Romanov family. And speaking of the descendants of that royal family... no wait, let's not. I'm already telling you about the Dolgorukovs, so let's not get caught up on the other details. No matter what the details of my mother's birth may have been, I have always simply been myself. Truly, I think my family life was very blessed.

My father was a member of the von Hahn family and a general in the Russian army. He was very strict at times, but also very kind. And I remember that when he was small, my younger brother would often trail along behind me, clinging to my back as we walked. He was such a cheerful child, so adorable, really. And my younger sister was very much the same.

Hm? Oh yes, it's true. I did have special powers.

And very strange powers, at that—I was often able to do things without even moving my body. Was it some sort of supernatural ability, or was it magic? Well, who can say? But I was able to lift impossibly heavy objects as though they weighed nothing, find objects whose locations I should have had no way of knowing, and I could get animals to do what I wanted just by speaking to them with my mind. At first my family was surprised, in awe, and just a tad afraid of me, but eventually they became quite comfortable with all of my occult powers.

...Hehe. I'm a bit surprised at just how dramatic and direct I'm being, baring my heart to you like this. But to you, Sigerson, this must be like nothing more than watching a play. I doubt that such emotional appeals would work on you. Do you carry talismans to ward off attacks on your psyche, or is your mental fortitude just that strong? No doubt, in your case the answer is most definitely the latter.

A crow talisman? My, do those exist? That certainly doesn't sound like something out of the tale of King Arthur. I wonder if it's some charm from the Far East? Oh, it's a tale from the Kumano province in Japan? You're truly a mystery to me, Sigerson. I've been to the Far East as well, yet you seem vastly more familiar with it. You say that perhaps you knew of some grand Far Eastern legend that I wasn't aware of? Oh yes, perhaps. It doesn't even have to be a legend necessarily. I'm sure there are plenty of smaller children's tales I'm unaware of as well.

Do I like such stories for children, you ask?

Why yes, although in proper English I suppose they'd be called fairytales.

“Mommy, mommy, will you tell me another story?”

When I was little, I used to pester my mother every night by asking her such things. Fairytale legends, stories where brave knights defeated the dragon, even tales about suspicious alchemists in their towers—I liked all of them. I'd listen to tales about anything, whether it was about St. George, the fae realm, the little household spirit Domovoy, Paracelsus, or the Philosopher's Stone. I think that perhaps—something in me was drawn to such otherworldly tales.

Hm? What's that? You say I sound as though I was a rather adorable child?

Hehe. I suppose so. But you know, I think I was unimaginably self-indulgent for a little girl. If I hadn't been so willful, I doubt I would have perused the shelves of the library left by my great-grandfather, Pavel Vasilevich Dolgorukov, searching for any books I could find on magic at age fifteen. And by age seventeen, I surely wouldn't have been so fascinated by that bald old egg Nikifor, and all of his interest in the occult.

Oh yes, absolutely fascinated. I mean it, you know.

At the time, my private tutor was quite perplexed by my fascination, too.

"What you feel for Sir Nikifor isn't true love, child, heavens. Just how long are you going to keep entertaining such childish thoughts, Miss Elena?"

She would always say something along those lines. But you know, if I had truly gotten serious about it and gone all out trying to show off my more feminine charms, I'm quite sure I could've gotten a proposal out of that old Nikifor Blavatsky even sooner, within three days at most.

...Ahem. Well, I suppose that's beside the point.

I was rather taken with the idea, and so we had quite the sudden marriage. Then, I experienced life as a bride for the next few weeks, and just as suddenly I washed my hands of married life. That's right. I left him. Back in those days, you couldn't exactly get a divorce, but I couldn't keep living as Nikifor's wife, either. I suppose my tutor was right, and such a thing was simply impossible for me. Deep down, I was still an unimaginably self-indulgent little girl.

So you see, there was nothing particularly adorable about me after all.

I was truly like a migratory bird, flying wherever I wanted of my own accord. If you think I was adorable, you should have seen the people I met once I left him, when I began traveling the world.

I met Mr. Thomas Edison you know—quite a talented man, but I'm afraid his recklessness meant he never put his talent to proper use. And there was Nikola Tesla, too—that one was a real genius, but he always remained so self-isolated. I suppose you could say they both had their flaws, but they were honestly very pleasant people. They were both fully grown by the time I met them, but still they acted like little boys at heart. Even Colonel Olcott, forever my right-hand man, bless him, still retained something of that boyish quality as well.

Back in those days, everyone's eyes were sparkling with hopes and dreams—

Oh yes, such hopeful eyes. I've just remembered, there was also the sweetest little boy, whose eyes would light up just like theirs as he would rush in the room and call my name with a smile. He was so adorable and precocious, I feel as though he could have easily become on par with Mr. Edison and dear Nikola themselves!

"Miss Elena!"

I remember the way his voice would ring out, as clear as a bell.

Hehe. It's all coming back to me now. I met him while I was in India. You know, I've traveled so many places across the world, but I think if someone asked me which one was my favorite, I'd have to say India.

儀をもたらしにくれた土地であり、あたしにとっても良くしてくれたパラモンたちの棲まう場所。ううん、それらが丸ごとなかったとしても、好き。大好き。

何もかもが暖かくて。

優しく、穏やかで。

あの子、名前はなんと言ったかしら。

ナイドゥ。確かそう、そんな名を聞いたわ。あたしに多くの時と力を割ってくれたインド人一家の末っ子で、才能豊かで、瑞々しい感受性に溢れていて。お茶の時間にも食事の時間にも、読書の時間にも、ずっと人懐っこい笑顔を浮かべていた男の子。そうそう、あの子、お昼寝している最中にもここにこしていたわ。

きらめく瞳。磨き抜いた黒曜石のような美しい瞳で、よくあたしを見上げてきたわ。

「いつか、エレナさまが見るようにして世界を見てみたい。ほくにも、マハトマのお声が届けばいいのにな」

そう言って笑う顔、とても可愛くて。



「……とても可愛くて」

一旦言葉を切って――

エレナ・ブラヴァツキーは大きく深呼吸していた。

酸素の薄い山道を歩きながらずつと喋り通していたせいで、見るからに足下がおぼつかない。大きく右に左にふらついて、遂に、前のめりになって転びそうになる。放っておけば顔から地面に突っ込んでしまっただろう。

「気を付けたまえ、レディ」

転倒寸前。探検家の大きな手が目前に差し伸べられていた。

頷いて、エレナはその手を握る。

「ありがとうシゲルソン。調子に乗ってお話すぎたみたい」

「休み休み行くべきだろう。キミは確か、長い時間をかけて秘教真理の要たる書を紡いでみせたばかりの身である筈だ」

「そうね」

社交界のパーティの最中でもあるかのように上品に微笑んで、小さく会釈ひとつ。

杖代わりに一度は握ったシゲルソンの手を離しながら、

「でも、ううん。あなたが言っているのが『秘密教義』のことなら、そんなに大袈裟なものじゃないわ。前著の……『ヴェールをとったイシス』の二〇倍は良い本になったろうけど、それだけ。真理そのものを納めた本なんかじゃなくて、ただの……」

ふと言い淀む。

異国語の言葉には慣れたつもりでもこうしてよく引つ掛かってしまう。老女の姿でいるうちには隠すべく躍起になった癖ではあったものの、今となっては構うまい。たつぷり二秒の時間を取って、よく考えてみる。何を言うのが順当だろう。

「切っ掛け？」

「そうね」結局助け船を出されてしまった。やれやれ。「切っ掛け。きざはし。そういう主旨の本にしたつもり。十五歳のあたしが、バラケルスの書に感じたようなものを……他の誰かが感じられるように、ってね」

話しながら紫色の髪をいじってしまうのは、自分より何歳も年若い紳士のいように会話を誘導されている事実が気恥ずかしいから。やられた。でも、怒ったりはしない。最後の著書を書いた時には些細な言葉ひとつに激怒していたけれど、今はもう怒らない。オカルティズムに対して否定的な学者たちのように論理立てて詰め寄られたらどうなるかわからないまでも、なるべく、怒りたくない。

微笑んでいよう。

できれば、本当に死んでしまう瞬間まで。

優しい自分でいたいから。

「……でも、それも過去。神智学を興したオカルト好きなエレナおばあちやまとして振る舞うのは終わり。これからはまた遠慮なく、あたしは、希望と可能性に溢れた優しくして大人数の子として生きていくの」

探検家は何も言っていない。

否定も肯定もなし。続く言葉を待っている。

それなら、とエレナは空を見上げる。青く、青く、どこまでも続く蒼穹を。

「あたしは自由！ ネチネチと嫌味を言い続ける英国の心霊研究会からも、古果たる神智学協会からも、そして我が最愛たるマハトマからもね！」

両腕を広げて鳥のように舞う。

実際に空を飛んだりはいしなくても、充分、地上から遠く離れた高山の道だ。きつと空を舞うのと大差ない。波瀾万丈と言える数十年の人生の積み重ねの中で、とうとう背に翼を生やす奇跡は得られなかったとはいえ、これはこれで心地良い。

「エレナ・ブラヴァツキー。実にキミは美しい。瑞々しい肌、煌めく瞳、生気に溢れた唇。そして紫に染めた髪。かつてロンドンで出会った頃の少女の姿だ」

「その頃のあたしはブロンズじゃなくって？」

舞うのを中断しながら笑顔浮かべて、

「本当はおばあちやまなのに、その気になれば肉体をこうして自由に調整できるのはマハトマのお陰ね。それとも時計塔風に言うなら、あたしという魔術師ないし超能力者の素

It's a land full of mystery, where I first learned about the philosophy of Advaita and the Arya Samaj religion, and the Brahmin I met while I was living there always treated me so well. India may be quite a divided place, but I truly liked everything about it. No, I loved it. Everyone there was so warm and kind, always so sweet.

I wonder, just what was that child's name...?

Was it Naidu? Yes, I think it was. I'm sure that was his name. He was the youngest boy of an Indian family that had spared me quite a lot of their time and charity, and he was quite talented, with a real sensitivity for the supernatural. That boy, he never stopped smiling, whether at tea time, or meal time, or while he was reading. Even when he would take a nap, I swear the smile never left that boy's face.

He really did have the most beautiful eyes. He used to look up at me with those eyes, sparkling like polished obsidian, and say,

"I hope I can see the world the way you do one day, Miss Elena. I want to hear Mahatma's voice, too!"

And the smile on his face whenever he would say that was the most precious thing in the world.

- - - - -

"...the most precious thing in the world."

Finally, her words trailed off—

And Elena Blavatsky took a long, deep breath.

Perhaps she was a bit dizzy because she had been talking for so long as they traveled the mountain road, up high where the oxygen was very thin. As a result, she wasn't watching where she put her feet very closely. She swayed a bit, first to the right, then to the left, and finally lurched forward as though she were about to fall. If no one had intervened, she surely would have plummeted to the ground face-forward.

"Do be careful, my lady."

Just before she could actually fall, the explorer reached out his reassuringly sturdy hand in front of her and caught her. With a nod, Elena took his hand.

"Thank you, Sigerson. I do believe I got a bit carried away with telling my story."

"Perhaps it's time for you to take a break. You must have spent quite a long time weaving such a masterful tale of esoteric truth, after all."

"Yes, you're right."

As if she were in the middle of some high-class social gathering, she gave him an elegant smile and a small bow.

And as she released Sigerson's hand, with the same hand that she had once clutched her cane—

"But that's not quite right. If you're referring to the 'secret doctrines' of our esoteric philosophy, I'm afraid you're mistaken. They really aren't anything so dramatic. Those doctrines would make for about twice as good a book as my previous work, 'Isis Unveiled,' but that's about it. They aren't works that contain the truth itself, so much as they're..."

She trailed off rather suddenly.

Even though English was a foreign language to her, she spoke it so often that she felt she should be rather used to its vocabulary by now. Still, she often found herself at a loss for words. While she had still been an old woman, she had tried rather hard to hide this fact from others, but now that she had taken on this form again, she felt as though it might be okay to show when she was struggling.

"A starting point?"

"Yes, that's right." In the end, he had to extend her a helping hand with that, too. My my, she thought. "A starting point. Like a flight of stairs that leads you up. That's all that I intended them to be. The way I felt when I was reading Paracelsus' books at age fifteen... I wanted other people to be able to feel that way."

In reality, she felt quite embarrassed at having to be guided on the correct words by a gentleman who was many years her younger, and so she played absentmindedly with a strand of her purple hair. She had been caught a bit off guard. However, getting angry over something so trivial was beneath her. Back when she wrote her last book, just one word was enough to set her off, but by now, she wasn't quite so short-tempered. She could still remember what it was like to be pressed by those skeptics who all looked down on occultism, how they would try to shoot everything down with logic, but still, she refused to get angry.

And so, she decided to smile instead.

If possible, she wanted to keep smiling even until the moment she died.

Because she wanted to remain the kindest version of herself.

"...But well, that's all in the past. From now on, I'm done acting like the quirky, eccentric Auntie Elena who founded theosophy and was obsessed with everything occult. From now on, I'm determined to live my life like a quiet, well-behaved young woman full of hope and brimming with possibilities!"

The explorer beside her didn't respond.

He neither refuted nor affirmed her words. He simply waited patiently for whatever she might say next.

Then, Elena looked up at the sky above. So vast, so endlessly blue, as though it might go on forever.

“I’m free now! Free from the British Society for Psychical Research^(SPR) who kept pestering me with their incessant sarcasm, from my old home, the Theosophical Society, and from their beloved Mahatma, too!”

She spread her arms wide and spun about like a bird.

Although there was no way for her to actually take flight, she was here on this elevated mountain road, so far from the ground below. Surely it couldn’t be much different from soaring through the sky.

In all the many years that she had lived, so full of ups and downs, she had never once achieved the miracle of sprouting wings. But this was comfortable in its own way.

“Miss Irena¹ Blavatsky, you are truly beautiful. Your skin looks clear and youthful, your eyes are sparkling with excitement, and you look so lively when you talk. And with your hair dyed purple, well, you look every bit the same as when I met you in London when you were a young woman.”

“Oh? Wasn’t I blonde at the time?”

She stopped dancing around long enough to throw him a smile.

“I really am quite an old lady, you know. It’s only thanks to Mahatma’s power that I can freely adjust my body at will like this.

¹ I know the official localization used “Yelena” in Lostbelt 2, but I can’t agree with that translation. Helena Blavatsky’s actual name in her native language *is* actually Yelena, and she repeatedly notes in this story that Sigerson is *not* calling her by her name and corrects him constantly. I don’t want to claim that he’s referring to her as “Irene Adler” either, so I’m going with a more neutral “Irena,” especially as he talks about both “Irena” and “Elena” stemming from the same root of “Helen” later on.

養がなさしめる業かしら」

「マハトマか」目を細めながらシゲルソンが言う。「キミたちの分野については不勉強ゆえか、私にはかの大師なる存在が実在するか否かを断言できない。夫人、今まで同様の質問を数多く向けられただろうが——」

素直に述べてしまえばいいものを。

迂遠な言葉は必要ない。

彼はこう尋ねているのだ、エレナの語るマハトマは真に実在するのか、と。

肯定するのは簡単。否定も同じく。だったらせいぜい、氷のような冷やかさで現実を冷徹に見据える男を困らせてあげるとしよう。自分が知る限りでも、この紳士は女に翻弄されることにはあまり慣れていない。何がイレエナだか。

「それこそ、あの本を読めば分かるわ」

悪戯っぽく笑う。

決して彼女のそれではなく——

十五歳の少女の表情を形作れたという自信があった。



アメリカ合衆国はニューヨークにて設立されたという、神智学協会。

稀代の神祕主義者として知られるエレナ・ブラヴァツキー夫人が魂を捧げた叡智の凝集にして、神祕、隠秘なるものへの彼女の理解の結晶とも言うべきものだろう。古代インドに由来する顕教神話にはじまり、アドヴァイタ哲学、古代アリア宗教を参照しながら、多くの神話伝説を彼女は再解釈した。新大陸西海岸の先住民の古記録に言及されていることを理由に、スクレーターの語るムー大陸ことレムリア大陸はインド洋ではなく太平洋上にかつて存在し、其処には超古代文明が在った——とする異説を急速に広めたという事実については、オカルティズムに明るくないワトソンとはいえ何処かで聞き及んでいるだろう。

英領インド帝国に本拠を移してから後の活動は大いに現地インド人の支持を受け、時のバラモンたちの強力な後援をも受けながら、華々しく発展するかに思えたが、けれど彼女にとって栄光の日々は長く続かなかった。

大英帝国本土のSPR……

すなわち心靈現象研究会が発表したとある報告書、エレナ・ブラヴァツキー夫人の語る言葉は悉く虚偽であり人心を惑わすものである、という旨の激しい糾弾によって、勝ち得た信用も積み上げてきた信条も、一度は地に墮とされたのである。だが、それでも夫人は諦めなかった。

アカデミズムからの非難を浴びながらも自らの拠り所を信じ、マハトマなる超越的存在から授かったとする知識を元に、新たに書物として編纂してみせた。それこそが『秘密教義』、今なお多くのオカルティストたちに愛読される前著『ヴェールをとったイシス』を更新するという名目によって出版される、複数冊から成る執念の書である。

間違ひなく、後世のオカルティズムの歩みに大きな影響を与えるだろう。

しかし、最終巻の発行を前にして彼女は命を落とした。

自らが創立した神智学協会が如何にして今後発展していくのか、或いは、如何にして衰退していくのかを見届けることなく。——まあ、ひとまずはそういうことになっている。

(探検家シゲルソンによる記録)



ヒマラヤの奥地には未だ知られざる秘境が数多存在する。

そして其処には、いずれの博物誌にも記されず、周辺地域の僅かな口伝でのみ細々と伝えられる常識の埒外にある生き物が棲息しているのだろう。新種の動植物であるのか、または神祕の顕れとしての幻想種か。

シゲルソン氏はどうやら前者と考えているらしい。

エレナはあまり深く考えていない。ヒマラヤの麓の人々の話では、光輝くもの、翼あるもの、この世ならざる超常の兆しであると伝えられていて、思うにガルド神ないし迦楼羅天の伝承が変化したものか、何らかの神性の随獣の一種か。幻想種だとしても、流石に神獣が十九世紀の現代に生存しているとは思えないから、やはり魔獣だろう。

「うちのばあさまが子供の頃、ひいばあさまから聞いた話なんだけど。そいつは、現世と隠世の間を羽ばたくんだとさ」

と、麓の村の老人は口にしていた。

「光つてるとか、何とか。見れる奴と見れない奴がいるらしいんだがねえ」

なるほど、と老人の話聞いて頷いた異邦人は自分だけではなく、背の高い英国人探検家——どれだけ山道を歩いても息ひとつ切らず、視線の鋭さが緩むこともないシゲルソン氏であったのだ。

彼とは古い知己だけれど、約束を交わして合流した訳ではない。

まったくの偶然による再会。不思議なこともある、とはエレナもシゲルソンも言わなかった。遍く世界に在るのは必然ばかりだと自分は考えるし、すべての事柄は論理的な帰結であるとの探検家は言っている。

「できれば、インドの神々にまつわる神祕であると嬉しいわ」

「どうだろうね。逆、ということも考えられる」

Or if you were to put it in Clock Tower terms, I suppose I have the same background as a mage, or someone with psychic abilities?”

“Mahatma, you say?” Sigerson asked, narrowing his eyes. “I’m not particularly knowledgeable in your field of study, so I can’t say for sure whether your great teacher^(Mahatma) actually exists or not. Madame, I’m certain others have probably asked you the same question many times, but—”

For a moment, he pondered how to phrase it.

But ultimately, he decided not to beat around the bush.

In the end, he asked Elena in a very straightforward manner: “Does the Mahatma you always speak of really exist?”

It’d be a simple matter to give him a straight yes-or-no answer to his question. At the very least, the icy, level-headed composure with which the man before her always regarded the truth left her feeling considerably annoyed. Here, she thought, was a man who was most definitely not accustomed to being bested by a woman. And why the hell did he keep calling her Irena?

“Well, I suppose if you actually read that book^(doctrine) then you’d have your answer.”

She gave a mischievous laugh as she said it, as though she were playing a prank on him. By no means did it sound like the laugh of an old woman—

No, she was quite confident that in that moment, her face had looked like that of a fifteen year old girl.

The Theosophical Society was said to have been founded in the United States, in New York. The peerless mystic^(occultist) herself, Ms. Helena Blavatsky, had dedicated her entire soul to studying theosophy. One might say that the Theosophical Society itself was an agglomeration of all her wisdom, a crystallization of all the mysteries and secrets of theosophy that she had spent her life in pursuit of understanding.

She reinterpreted many ancient Indian myths and legends which would become the basis for her society’s own beliefs, including Buddhist mythology, the philosophy of Advaita, and the Arya Samaj religion. And after studying the myths about the lost continent of Mu, or Lemuria, put forth by Philip Sclater, she asserted that ancient records left by indigenous peoples who lived on the western coast of the New World indicated otherwise.

According to her, they said that such a landmass existed not in the Indian Ocean, but somewhere along the Pacific Ocean instead, and that it had once been home to a super-ancient civilization. Such a drastically alternative theory made quite the impression and it began to spread rapidly—even people without a lick of interest in occultism like Watson may have heard of it.

After she moved to British-occupied India, her theosophical movement received strong support from the local Indians living there, particularly the backing of the influential Brahmin class, and for some time it seemed as though the movement would continue to spread and develop. However, those prosperous days wouldn't last long for her.

The Society for Psychical Research, or SPR, which existed on the British mainland... They released a report claiming that Ms. Blavatsky was a fraud, and that her theories were massive falsehoods meant to trick people by appealing to their emotions instead of reason. They denounced her work completely, and in an instant all of the hard-earned credit and belief that she had accumulated disappeared. However, that still wasn't enough to make the lady give up.

Even as she continued to face relentless criticism from most academics, she nonetheless stood her ground in her beliefs and wrote a new book, compiled from all the knowledge she had received from the transcendental being known as Mahatma. That book became what is known as "The Secret Doctrine," though it was originally published under the pretense of being an update to her previous work, "Isis Unveiled," a book still beloved by many occultists today. "The Secret Doctrine" was a two-volume work written with an incredible level of persistence. The book itself had an undeniably huge impact on the future course of occultism. However, she passed away before she could see the final volume published.

She passed on, unable to see how the Theosophical Society that she herself had founded might develop or decline in the future. —Or at the very least, let's just say that's what happened for the time being.

(The above was an excerpt from a record left by the explorer, Sigerson)

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There were many secluded, seldom-explored areas within the hinterlands of the Himalayas. And it's often rumored that those areas are inhabited by strange and mysterious creatures which forego the limits of common sense, unrecorded in the museums of natural history and only conveyed in detail by the traditional oral tales of the indigineous peoples in the surrounding area. Were they simply hereto-undiscovered fauna or flora, or were they perhaps some sort of phantasmal species, brought to life as a true manifestation of mystery made real?

Mr. Sigerson seemed to believe that it must be the former.

But Elena wasn't so convinced. The people who lived at the base of the Himalayan mountains told tales of all sorts of paranormal phenomena, including sightings of strange beings engulfed in light, or mysterious winged creatures. They sounded too different from the Indian myths of Garuda, or Karuraten. Surely it must be some sort of divine beast, no doubt. But no—even if it

were a phantasmal species, it was just too unlikely that a divine beast would be alive here in the nineteenth century. So it must be a demonic beast instead.

“It’s a story my old gran heard when she was a girl, from her own gran. Supposedly, there was some kinda creature that managed to fly between this world, and the world o’ the dead.”

That was what an old man who lived in a village at the foot of the mountain had told them.

“It was bathed in light? Or somethin’ along those lines? Apparently some folks can see it, and some folks can’t.”

Of the two gentiles who stood listening to his story, the one who nodded along as though he’d just understood something wasn’t Elena, but the tall British explorer—as expected of Mr. Sigerson, no matter how long he walked along the mountain road, he never seemed to grow short of breath, and his gaze never wavered.

The two foreigners were old acquaintances, but it wasn’t as though they had made a promise to meet up in this specific place.

Their reunion was by pure coincidence. And neither Elena nor Sigerson commented on the strangeness of their chance meeting. All Sigerson said was that he believed there were no coincidences in the world, only the inevitable, and that everything was the logical consequence of some other action.

“I’ll just be happy if this mysterious creature is related to the Indian mythos in some way.”

“I wonder about that. The exact opposite could be true, you know.”

「神秘の存在が神話にフィードバックされたってこと？」

「可能性のひとつだよ」

どちらでもいい。

エレナは微笑んで、白い息を吐きながら高山を歩く。なぜ微笑んだのかをシゲルソンが訝しんできても返答せず、再度、微笑んでみせる。秘境を目指すこの旅は、そう、目的そのものには大した意味もない。

しがらみから解放された状態で旅をするという行為自体が、楽しいのだから。

「最早、山道と呼べるものもない。この白い世界は既に秘境と言えるのかな」

「さあ？ シエルバを雇うべきだったかしら」

「かもしれない。しかし、何と言う美しさだ。この空の青といったら！」シゲルソンが目を細めている。猛禽が遠い目をしている姿が想像されてちよつと可笑しい。「それに、無限に続くかのような白い山嶺。先日にもトマス・エジソン氏が発明したという装置があれば、この美しさを文明圏に持ち帰ることもできるだろうが」

「ああ、キネトグラフ？」

「流石はキミだ。耳が早い」

「大切な友人の業績だもの」

そう言ってから、ふう、と深く息を吐く。

いったん立ち止まる。歩き詰めで疲れてしまった。少女と呼んで差し支えない若くて体力に溢れた肉体に変化していても、さらに身体強化の術式をこつそり仕込んでいても、流石に長時間の登山となれば疲労は蓄積するばかり。

そろそろ休みたい。

麓の村で準備を整えている最中に、確か、このあたりに用意しておいたのだ。

でも、自分から言い出すのはいかにもおばあちゃまっぽいので、できれば避けたい。

「休憩しようか、イレナ」

ナイスタイミング。流石は英国紳士。頷きかけて、エレナは慌てて首を振る。

「……って、違う違う。エレナよ。英国の人々はエレナってよく呼んできたけれど」

「エレナもイレナもトロイのヘレンに由来する名前だとも」

「傾国の美女ヘレン？ 素敵ね。でも」肩を練めつつ、「あたしはあなたのいい人じゃないの。ちゃんとエレナって呼びなさい、ミスタ・シゲルソン」

そう言って。

ぱちん、と指を鳴らす。

やや遅れて発生する低い震動音と共に、分厚い雪に覆われた岸壁の一角が変化する。

現地の人々でさえ避ける秘境である筈なのに、見るからに人造の「扉」が山の岩壁に現出する。もつと具体的に言うならば、英国の古典主義建築風の扉。

「これはキミの魔術かい」

顎に手をやって、シゲルソンは片眉を上げながら扉を観察している。

「ええっと、休憩用のキャンプみたいなのよ。開けゴマ！」

合い言葉で施錠の術式を解除しながら、見た目は重厚なものの意外なほどに軽い「扉」を開いて、部屋の中へと入る。玄関ホールはなく、いきなり応接間兼書斎があつて、奥にはさらに書斎と客間が二つずつあつて、食堂と厨房もあつて、一番奥には浴室と寝室と研究室がある。場所さえ考慮しなければ、特に珍しいものもない小さな屋敷の中だ。本や遺物はそれなりに多いけれど。

取り敢えず、久しぶりの応接間兼書斎。空気が冷たいものの、暖炉に火を入れればすぐに暖まってくれるだろう。入口の観察を続けたいという雰囲気を出している探検家には可哀想だけれど、「冷気が入るから早く入って締めて頂戴」と声を掛ける。

「では、お言葉に甘えて邪魔しよう」

入室するシゲルソン。

感嘆の声を漏らしたりはしないだろうと思つたら、その通り、まったく驚いた素振りもない。表情もいつもの仮面のような冷静さのまま。予想が当たっても嬉しくないことであるわよね、とエレナは溜息をひとつ。

「何の変哲もない我が家へようこそ、ミスタ・シゲルソン」

「空間を別の場所に繋いだのかい」

「違う違う、自動操縦で先に此処まで飛ばしておいたのよ。真正正銘、あたしの移動研究室はここにあるわ。具体的な説明は避けるけど」

「夢のようだ」

そんな風に言うなら、もつと夢見るような顔になりなさいな。まったく。

壁を埋め尽くして並ぶ本棚に納められた無数の本を眺めて、シゲルソンは何やら眩きながら頷いている。それから、机の上に積み上げられた本の山の上にちょこんと座った、髭のある小さな人形に目を留める。

人形は複数あつて、部屋のあちこちに置かれている。

「ドワーフの人形かな。いや、この髭の具合はオルコット大佐の似姿か」

「ふふ。可愛いでしょう？」

そう言いながら——分厚い防寒着を脱ぎ捨てて。

すると、部屋中の髭人形がひとりでに動き出してふわりと浮遊。そのうち二体が、脱いだばかりの衣類を器用に受け止めてクローゼットへと消えて行く。

「使い魔か」シゲルソンが呟く。

「あたしのオルコットたち。とっても便利なのよ」

両肩が軽くなって気分がいい。

“You mean, the creature itself could have resulted in those myths and legends existing in the first place?”

“It’s simply a possibility.”

Whatever the answer was, it didn’t really matter.

Elena smiled as they walked across the tall mountain range, her breath exhaling in white puffs of steam. She refused to answer whenever Sigerson would ask why she was smiling, only replying with a yet-more-mysterious smile in return. It was true, after all, that this journey of theirs to an unexplored region didn’t have any particular deeper meaning to it. But it was the act of traveling itself, after being freed from all her shackles, that was fun.

“This little path can hardly even be called a mountain road anymore. Do you think this vast white world that we’ve found ourselves in already counts as an unexplored region?”

“Who can say? Though I do wonder if I should’ve hired one of the Sherpa people to guide us.”

“Perhaps you should have. But still, this place is so beautiful! Just look at how blue the sky is here!”

At her words, Sigerson squinted upwards. It was almost amusing, really—he looked a bit like a bird of prey, honing in on its prey with its keen-eyed vision.

“In any case,” he said, “this entire mountain range seems to stretch on forever. If only we had the device that Mr. Thomas Edison invented recently, we’d be able to capture some measure of this place’s beauty and take it back with us to the civilized world.”

“Oh, do you mean the Kinetograph?”

“I thought you might know of it. As expected, word gets back to you quickly.”

“Well, it’s an achievement by quite an important friend of mine, you know.”
Saying that, she exhaled deeply and finally came to a stop.

She was quite tired from walking around so much. Even though she was now in the body of a young girl and full of physical vigor, and even though she had secretly strengthened her body further with magic, it was only natural that she would eventually become fatigued after climbing a mountain for such a long time.

She was ready to take a break, in any case.

While she had been training in the village at the foot of the mountain she had made preparations to take a break once she got to this area, but she felt that saying so now would

make her seem rather like a frail old woman, so she wanted to avoid saying it herself if at all possible.

“Shall we take a break, Irena?”

What lucky timing. She’d expect no less from a British gentleman. Elena gave a thankful nod, before quickly stopping and shaking her head.

“...Wait just a minute, that’s not right. My name is Elena, you know. Though sometimes in Britain they do call me Helena instead.”

“Well, both Elena and Irena are names derived from Helen of Troy.”

“You mean Helen, the most beautiful woman in all of Greece? How nice. However,” she said with a shrug, “I’m not nearly such a nice or beautiful person. Call me Elena properly next time, Mr. Sigerson.”

And with those words, she snapped her fingers.

A moment later, there was a low vibration, and one corner of the snow-covered cliff wall before them began to change. Despite the fact that this was an unexplored area that even the locals avoided, a man-made “door” clearly began to appear on the rocky cliffside of the mountain. More specifically, it was a door in the British classicist architectural style.

“Was that your magecraft?”

With a hand on his chin, Sigerson carefully examined the door while quirked one eyebrow.

“Hmm, well, you can think of this place as a sort of rest camp. Open sesame!”

The mechanism unlocked as soon as she said the magic words, and although it looked heavy, the “door” was surprisingly light as it swung open and allowed them to enter the “room” inside.

There was no entrance hall: instead, they came upon the reception room and the study all at once. Further inside, there was another study, a parlor, a kitchen and dining room, a bathroom, a bedroom, and a research laboratory. All in all, it was about the size of a somewhat normal, unassuming small mansion, as long as you didn’t consider the unusual location. There were quite a lot of books and ancient relics lying about, though.

In any case, it was their first time coming across a reception room and a study in quite a while. The air inside was chilly, but if they lit a fire in the fireplace, it was sure to warm up quickly. The explorer wanted to keep studying the entrance—Elena felt a bit bad for him, but she nonetheless told him, “The cold will come in if you stay like that, so please come inside and shut the door behind you.”

“Pardon me for the intrusion.”

Sigerson did as she asked and followed her into the room.

She hadn't expected the secret mansion to make him exclaim with wonder and amazement, and sure enough, he didn't show even the slightest sign of surprise. His expression was fixed with the same mask-like calm as always. Elena sighed, thinking that there were some predictions she would rather not have come true.

"Welcome to my unconventional little home, Mr. Sigerson."

"Did you connect this space to somewhere else?"

"Heavens no, I used the autopilot to fly here first. My mobile research laboratory is genuinely in this place. Though I'm afraid I'll have to avoid giving you a more specific explanation than that."

"It's like something out of a dream."

If he was going to say something like that, the least he could do is have a more dreamlike expression while he said it, Elena thought with some exasperation.

With a nod, Sigerson began muttering to himself as he examined the rows of books lining the bookshelves against the walls. Then he noticed a little bearded doll, who was sitting atop a stack of books that had accumulated on the desk.

The doll was one of many more just like it, which were scattered here and there all over the room.

"Is this doll supposed to be a dwarf? No wait, I imagine the beard is supposed to resemble Colonel Olcott's?"

"Hehe. It's cute, isn't it?"

While saying that, she began to take off her heavy winter clothes.

At that moment, the bearded dolls in the room began to move on their own and gently floated through the air. With dexterous movements, two of them picked up the clothes that she had just discarded and put them away in the closet.

"Are they your familiars?" Sigerson murmured.

"They're my little Olcotts. They're very convenient."

防寒用のマントを外したお陰で、首から肩にかけて肌がむき出しになる。ついでに言う
と太股も。外の気温を思うとあまりに寒々しい恰好ではあるものの、暖炉には既に火を入
れた。屋内なら、むしろこれぐらいの薄着が快適だ。

「んー……」

両腕を上げて伸びをすると、シゲルソンが顔を伏せるのが分かった。

急にどうしたのだろう。呼び掛けようとしたが、ああそうか、と納得して口をつぐむこ
とにした。自身の外見をもっと自覚すべきね、とエレナは内心で述べる。見下ろすまでも
なく、少女の真つ白な両脇が露わになっている。子鹿が首を伸ばすが如き若々しく微笑ま
しい有り様ではあっても、精神の年嵩を考えれば歴とした成人女性のそれだ。淑女の素肌
を凝視する等とは紳士の矜持にもとる、等と考える英国人男性がいても何の不思議もない
だろう。

「ふふ。ごめんあそばせ？」

「やれやれ。キミはもっと自身の見目に自覚的になるべきだ」

息を吐きながらシゲルソンがパイプを取り出して火を点ける。

落ち着きたいのならそうさせておこう。魔術による着火を勧めてみるも、彼はこれを固
持した。マッチで充分と。

「……堅物ね、ミスタ・シゲルソン」

「世界に真実の魔術が在ることを知ってはいるが、なるべく私は遠慮しておきたい」

「そういうところが堅物なのよ。そこはミスタ・ドイルを見習っておくべきね」オルコッ
ト人形に指示を出しつつ「すぐに用意できるけど、湯浴みはいかが？」

「遠慮しておこう。仮にも人跡未踏とされる秘境の奥地だ。こうも簡便に文明を目の当た
りにできるのは有り難いが、ともすれば精神の平衡が保てそうにないからね」

「そ。私は入るけど……」

言い掛けて、ふと動作が止まる。

意外な言葉が耳に届いていたような。思わず、首を傾げてしまう。

「もしかしてあなた、結構驚いてるの？」

「それなりにね」

そう返答されて、思わず笑ってしまった。

あなたは損をしているわよ。もっと、感情に沿った表情を浮かべなさいな。

そう言って微笑むと、一瞬——何かが羽ばたく気配があった。焦点を合わせようとする
と何も見あたらない。

まさか。件の魔獣の影でも感じ取ったのだろうか？

半日に及ぶ休息の後。

エレナとシゲルソンは一つの洞穴を発見していた。

麓の村の老人曰く、翼あるものは山嶺の中にあつて暗がりには浮かび上がるといふ。なら
ばこの洞穴こそが魔獣の住処という可能性がある。もともと、洞穴はひとつきりとは限ら
ないから、ここで喜び過ぎて宜しくない。浮かれるのはしゃぐのも我慢して、どうあ
れまずは第一の洞穴を探索してみる他にない。

「仮初めの光」

短い詠唱で、エレナは魔力で構成された明かりを浮かび上がらせる。

洞穴の暗闇が僅かに晴れる。

一方、シゲルソンはランタンを灯す。

魔獣の危険度は不明。穏やかな性質、臆病な性質、凶暴な性質、いずれも有り得る。麓
の村に残る口伝は人との遭遇を具体的に示すものではないから、探索にあたっては慎重さ
が肝要だというのが両者の統一見解だった。

ゆつくりと洞穴を進む。

自然、交わす言葉も少なくなつて。

幾つもの分岐と驚くべき深さを持つ洞穴を進み、小一時間ほど過ぎた後のこと。

——怪物が姿を見せていた。

獅子に似た四足獣の外観を持ちながら、獅子ではない。

獅子は昆虫の如き複眼を備えてはいない。

大蛇に似た頭部を備えた尾をしならせることもあるまい。

異常発達した胴部及び前脚の筋肉。金属の質感を持った甲殻で全身を覆われたその姿
は、装甲を施された凶猛の異形、という印象を見る者に与えるだろう。洞穴の奥から姿を
見せた時にはもはやと期待しかけたものの、エレナは落胆を隠せずに叫んでいた。

「これ、合成獣*よう！」

「そのようだ」

「魔獣*といえは魔獣だけど、人造だし……在り方も格も違うわ！ 何よりこれって趣が
まったくないじゃないの。翼もないし……」

こんなものを採しに来た訳じゃない。

だってこれは、まず間違いなく、時計塔の魔術師あたりが造り出したものだ。

溜息を吐きながら首を振るエレナに対して、体長五メートルの合成獣は唸り声を上げて
飛び掛かってくる。ウエイト差どうこうと考えるまでもなく、この巨体に組み敷かれてし



She felt better now that there was no longer so much weight on her shoulders. Since she'd removed the thick winter cloak that she'd been wearing, the skin of her neck and shoulders was now exposed. Come to think of it, her thighs were, too. Considering the freezing cold temperatures outside, she seemed far too lightly dressed, but fortunately a fire had now been lit inside the fireplace. As a result, she was actually quite comfortable in such light clothes.

"Hmm..."

As she raised her arms above her and stretched, she realized that Sigerson had turned his face away.

What on earth was the matter with him? She was about to ask him, but then with a start, she suddenly realized and closed her mouth. Sheepishly, Elena thought to herself that she should be more aware of her own appearance. She didn't need to look down to see that the pale skin of a young girl^(herself) was exposed.

Despite the fact that she looked like a young fawn stretching its neck, so cheery and full of life, inside she was nonetheless an extremely old woman who had lived quite a long time. But considering her outward appearance, it was only natural that he may have felt that staring at a young lady's exposed skin would go against his pride as a polite British gentleman.

"Hehe. Could you ever forgive me?"

"My goodness. You really should be more aware of yourself, lady."

With a sigh, Sigerson took out a pipe and lit it.

Apparently he had decided to try and put himself at ease. He could have used magecraft to light the pipe, but he was set in his ways, and lit it with a match instead.

"...I must say, you're remarkably stubborn, Mr. Sigerson."

"I'm well aware that true magic exists in this world, but nonetheless I'd like to refrain from using it myself."

"It's that part of you that I'm calling stubborn. You'd do well to take a leaf out of Mr. Doyle's book instead." She paused and turned to give instructions to one of her Olcott dolls, then said, "Would you care for a bath? I could have one prepared right away."

"Allow me to refrain for now. We're in the hinterlands of a desolate, unexplored region after all. As grateful as I am for this brief glimpse of civilization before my eyes, I don't think I'd be able to maintain the appropriate state of mind if I indulged for too long."

"I see. Well in any case, I think I'll take one..."

Elena began to walk, but suddenly stopped in her tracks as the meaning of his words suddenly occurred to her. She tilted her head as though curious.

“Could it be, you’re actually quite surprised by all this?”

“You might say that.”

She let out an unintentional laugh in response.

“You’re losing out, you know,” she said. “You should let your expressions show on your face a little more than that.”

Elena laughed again, and in that moment—she saw a sudden movement out of the corner of her eye, like the flapping of wings. But when she tried to focus and look for it again, she couldn’t find anything.

It couldn’t be... Had she really seen the shadow of a demonic beast?

- - - - -

They rested for about half the day, then left.

After that, Elena and Sigerson happened upon a cave. According to what the old man at the base of the mountain had told them, some winged creature lived in this mountain range, and it usually lurked in dark, secluded spaces. From this, they supposed that the demonic beast might have made a home for itself in a cave somewhere. But there could very well be plenty of caves all over the mountain, so they couldn’t be certain that it was living in this specific one just yet.

They could hardly just run around or yell while looking for the beast, so they had no choice but to explore as they went, starting with the first cave they came across.

“Transient light!”

With a short chant, Elena brought about a floating light, composed entirely of magical energy. And the darkness of the cave lessened slightly.

In the meantime, Sigerson lit a lantern for himself.

They had no idea how dangerous this demonic beast might be. Its temperament could be calm, timid, or incredibly ferocious. There were no oral tales in the village of anyone ever having an encounter with the beast and making it back alive, so both of them agreed that they needed to be extremely cautious while they searched.

They progressed slowly through the cave. And of course, the further in they went, the less they exchanged words.

And after the two of them had spent about an hour going through the cave, exploring several of its branching paths, amazed at its depth—

—The monster finally appeared.

It was a four-legged beast, somewhat similar in appearance to a lion, though it wasn't a lion at all. Lions didn't have compound eyes like insects, after all. Nor did they have tails that whipped around, ending in the head of a serpent.

The muscles of its torso and front legs seemed to have developed abnormally. They were so hardened that they resembled a crustacean's shell, covering the creature's entire body to the point of grotesqueness. Anyone looking at it might have thought that it was covered with metal armor instead. Elena had initially been hoping they might find something incredible, but when the beast finally emerged from the back of the cave, she let out a small scream, not even trying to hide her disappointment.

"But that's just a synthetic beast^(chimera)!"

"It would appear so."

"I mean, I suppose they're a type of demonic beast... but they're man-made, so they don't really count. And whoever made this one was absolutely tasteless... it doesn't have any wings, either..."

She hadn't come searching all this way for something like this.

Without a doubt, some mage from the Clock Tower had probably created this creature.

As Elena sighed and shook her head, the five-meter-long chimera let out a low growl and leapt at her.

まえば少女の腕力では振りほどけまい。身体強化の術式を掛ける時間もない。細くて白い首を野太い牙で挟まれるか、頭ごともぎ取られるかして、それで終わりで。

手段はなくてもないが戦うのは得意じゃない。けれど、此処にはシゲルソンがいる。

「……ッ！」

彼の、鋭く息を吐く音が洞穴に反響する。

次の瞬間。今まさにこちらを押し倒そうとして空中に飛び上がった獣の体軀は、凄まじい勢いで岩壁へと叩き付けられていた。ごきり、ぐしゃり、と全身の骨格が^{しし}拉げる音がする。なんと呆気ない。体長も肩高も獅子の倍はありそうな合成獣が、銃弾さえ弾き返してしまいうような装甲を有した凶猛の塊が、エレナにはよく分からない東洋武術の絶技を操るシゲルソンによって投げ飛ばされたのだった。

「第三の光」

すかさず、エレナの唇からこぼれる詠唱によって導かれた魔力が炸裂する。

超高熱焼却。身動きも取れずに極撃するしかない合成獣が、哀れ、消し炭と化す。

「……眠りなさい。ごめんね」

眼を閉じて僅かに黙祷。

怒りたくはない。だからせめて悲しもう。溜息を吐きながら呟く。

「まったくもう、どういふつもりなのかしら。あたし、時計塔の子たちに狙われるようなことをした？ マハトマなんかいないんだから別に何をしようと構わない、とか言ってるんぜん生前には近付いてこなかった癖に」

「おそらく、死を偽装したことによって警戒されたのだろうね」

視線鋭く洞穴の奥を見つめてシゲルソンが言う。

「警戒？」

「現代オカルティズムを西洋文明社会に流行させた立役者である、天才、ブラヴァツキー夫人が、表向きの立場を自ら消去したことで、いよいよ本格的に魔術世界へと活動の場を移すのではないか——とね」

「そんなに重要視されてたの、あたし？」

「ふむ。本人の自覚というのはそんなものかもしれないな」シゲルソンは頷いて、「十九世紀末たる現代西欧は空前のオカルト流行の渦中にあるのだよ、レディ。真なる魔術の世界などには到達できずとも、降霊や超常現象を信じる人々の層はキミが思うよりも数段は厚く、SPRの糾弾にも揺らいではない。もはや社会現象だ。魔術協会も完全には無視できない。無論、キミの動向に注目しているとも！」

「そうなの……」

シゲルソンの元気の良さに合わせようと思ったのに、できなかった。

つい。寂しく微笑んでしまつて。

「後のことはアニーに任せて、あたしは自由になリたただけなのにね」



「では改めて確認します。『秘密教義』第五巻の遺稿の行方については？」

「そのような原稿は目にしたこともありません」

「本当に？」

「私は……彼女の遺稿管理人に指定された身ではありますが、彼女のすべてを把握できていた訳ではありません。気まぐれで。奔放で。ええ、彼女はまるで自由な蝶のよう」

(アニー・ベサントに対する某組織の聴取記録より)



闇があたりをどつたかのような、黒色の人影。

真つ黒な防寒具。真つ黒な手袋。真つ黒な頭巾。洞穴の闇に紛れてこちらを襲うためなのだろうとは分かっている。ついで、エレナは思つてしまふ。洞穴の中ならともかく、外の白い山嶺で遭遇したらどうするつもりだったのだろう。黒装束だなんて、目立ってしまつて仕方がないだろうに。それともわざわざ装束を二種類用意した、とか。やはり、魔術を用いて外観を変えていると見るべき？

そのために魔力を費やすのも馬鹿馬鹿しいから、護符の類だろうか。

準備周到と言う訳か。

「そんなにまでして、あたしを殺したいのね。あの子たち」

エレナ・ブラヴァツキーは小さく、声なき声で呟く。

隠形の呪術を応用させた隠れ身で姿を隠しつつ、灼き尽くされた合成獣の痕跡から少し離れた場所ですととして。黒装束に身を包んだ数人の刺客たちがこちらを探してやって来るのを、ぼんやりと眺めながら——

「七人もいるなんて」

「全員、魔術師だろう。法政科あたりの工作員か、それともいずれかの学科による暴走なのかは分からないが」

魔術を利用した音声なき言葉で遠方のシゲルソンと会話をしている。

姿を隠してじっとしている自分とは異なり、彼は洞穴の奥で仕掛けの真つ最中。

背が高くて頼もしいあの英国紳士曰く、この場を切り抜けるのは容易い、とのこと。こちらが本気を出せば問題なく叩きのめせるだろう、と。確かに。巨体の合成獣を一撃で行

Needless to say, the creature was several times heavier than her: if an enormous beast like that leapt on top of her with its huge body, she wouldn't be able to get it off even if she pushed with all her strength. She didn't have time to amplify her physical strength with magic, either. Her only options were to let the beast tear her pretty white throat out with its fangs, or let it rip her whole head off. And that would be the end for her.

It wasn't as though she had no means of resisting, but she still wasn't particularly good at fighting. However, Sigerson was there with her.

“—!”

His sharp inhalation echoed throughout the cave.

And in the next moment, he slammed the huge beast against the cave wall, just before it could pin Elena to the ground. The creature's whole body began to make a cracking, snapping sound as Sigerson pressed it to the wall, crushing its skeleton. It was over in the blink of an eye. And then that fearsome chimera, which was twice as long and tall as a lion and covered with armor that could have repelled bullets, was flung away effortlessly by Sigerson, who was well-versed with a form of oriental martial arts that Elena wasn't familiar with.

“Third light!”

At once, the magical power exploded into flames, guided by Elena's words. The flames were as hot as an incinerator, and without even being given a chance to move, the chimera was burned away until nothing was left but a pitiful pile of dust.

“...Rest in peace. I'm sorry.”

She closed her eyes for a moment as she offered a silent prayer to the beast. She didn't want to get angry. So at the very least, she would grieve. She muttered that reminder to herself under her breath as she sighed.

“Well now, what could this be about? Did I do something for those mages at the Clock Tower to target me? That'd be ironic, considering when I was alive they told me that Mahatma didn't exist, so I was free to do whatever I liked as long as I stayed far away from them.”

“Most likely, someone was wary that you may have faked your death.”
Sigerson suggested, his eyes sharp as he stared at the back of the cave.

“Wary? But why?”

“The Great Genius, Madame Blavatsky, who popularized occultism across western civilizations, may have finally moved to the true, authentic realm of magic by erasing her public position with her own two hands—perhaps that was their train of thought.”

“Was I really such an important person?”

“Hm. I’m merely suggesting that the person in question may have regarded you as such.” Then with a nod, Sigerson said, “My lady, the occult is in the middle of an unprecedented boom in popularity throughout western Europe right now, here at the end of the nineteenth century. Even though you never actually reached the realm of magic in your lifetime, there are a good many more people who believe in ghosts and paranormal phenomena than you might think, nor are they swayed much by the SPR’s public denunciation of you.

It’s become a social phenomenon by this point. You can’t completely deny the possibility that the Mage’s Association might be involved. Of course they’re aware of your influential status!”

“I see...”

Elena tried to match Sigerson’s level of energy, but couldn’t quite manage it.

Without meaning to, she gave him a rather lonely smile.

“You know, I really had just planned on leaving the rest to Annie². All I ever wanted t was to be free.”

- - - - -

“Okay then, let me ask you again. Where is the manuscript for the fifth volume of ‘The Secret Doctrine’ located now?”

“I’ve never heard of any such manuscript existing.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well, I... She left me in charge of her manuscripts, but it’s not as though I knew everything about her. She was whimsical, marched to the beat of her own drum. Just like a butterfly, floating on the breeze.”

(—from a certain organization’s audio recording from a conversation with Annie Besant)

- - - - -

Shadowy figures emerged, as if the darkness had taken shape.

They were clad in black, heavy winter clothes from head-to-toe, from their gloves, to their hoods. Even though Elena knew they were dressed like that in order to attack them from the darkness of the cave, she still couldn’t help but wonder. Just what would they all have done if they had come across each other outside instead, in the sheer white vastness of those mountains?

² Annie Besant, a reformer who joined the Theosophy Society and was appointed by Helena to be the new head of the Blavatsky Lodge in 1890.

Those black clothes would've stood out like a sore thumb. Had they maybe prepared a second set of equipment for each of them? Or perhaps they would've just used magic to change the appearance of their clothes?

It'd be ridiculous to use mana for something so trivial, so no doubt they'd have to use a charm. Maybe they really had just come prepared for anything.

"So those Clock Tower mages really do want me dead, I see."

Elena Blavatsky murmured those words aloud, in a voice that was hardly above a whisper.

She and Sigerson were now both some distance from the scorched remains of the chimera, though she had used invisibility magic to erase their figures from view. And while they crouched, idly watching the black-clad assassins who were searching for them—

"I can't believe they thought this was a seven-person job."

"All of them must be mages. Although I don't know if they're all Sealing Designation Enforcers sent by the Mage's Association, or if they're rogue mages from one of the other departments who came here of their own accord."

Sigerson was standing a little ways away from her, but by using magic they were still able to communicate telepathically.

Unlike Elena, who was staying as still as possible while hiding out of sight, Sigerson was in the middle of setting up traps near the back of the cave.

According to that tall, reliable British gentleman, they should be able to get through those assassins without a problem. As long as they were careful, they could probably beat them easily.

動不能に陥れる程の不可思議かつ壮絶な体術を操るシゲルソンと、生来あれこれと神秘を操るすべを備えていて、さらにマハトマから授かった叡智で幾らかそれを強化してきた自分がいれば、黒装束の刺客たちの全員を殺し尽くしてしまえるのだろう。

肉を裂いて、骨を砕いて。

光で灼いて、炎で貫いて。

凍結や電撃、腐食や崩壊という手もある。しようと思えば他に幾らでも列挙できる。でも、そうしたくない。

「殺さないでね。できれば全員、生かして家に帰してあげて」

「それは……」

「お願い。ミスター」

誰であろうと殺したくなかった。

たとえば自分の尊厳を傷付けてきたSPRの人々であろうと、こうして自分を殺そうとするような魔術師たちであろうと、殺したくはない。先年の著作製作中には気持ち焦っていたものだからしばしば怒って、焦熱地獄にでも行くといいわ、なんて酷い言葉を愛しい弟子たちに口走ったこともあったが、今は違う。怒りたくない。心穏やかでいたいし、誰にも平等に優しくありたい。かつてのマハトマがしてくれたように。

そう、母のような優しさを持ちたい。

それに――

「あたしね。もう、おばあちゃまなの。子供も孫もいないけど、それくらいの年頃の子たちの命をあたしが奪うのは多分、間違ってるわ。だってあたし、もう死んだのよ」

「レディ。キミの死はあくまで偽装だろう」

「ええ。でもね、世界との関わりを断った時点で、やっぱりあたしは死んでいるわ」

「……キミの想いは尊重するよ。そこでじっとしていたまえ」

「ありがとう」

頷いて、瞼を閉じる。

そこから先は本当に簡単だった。

あつという間にシゲルソンが洞穴のあちこちに仕掛けた罠の数々は見事に刺客たちを翻弄し、怪我を負わせても殺しはせず、骨を折りしはしても臓腑までは引き裂かず、彼らをたちまち追い詰めていった。よく考えればあちらは七人、こちらは二人でしかも一人は何もせずに動かずじっとしているのだから、幾らでも逆転の機会はあったろうけれど、可哀想に、彼らは冷静さを取り戻すことができなかった。

一人、また一人と洞穴から逃げるようにして去って行く。

黒色に塗られた鋼線に足を取られて重傷を負ってしまった刺客の一人を目にした時は、

手を差し伸べそうになるほどエレナは心配した。

七人の刺客。魔術師たち。彼らを情けないとは思わない。

仕方がない。だって、相手はあのシゲルソンなのだ。知恵の怪物だ。正面切つての火力での勝負ならいざ知らず、活路を見出す要素がほんの僅かだけでも存在しているなら、世界最高の頭脳は間違いなく敵を打ちのめす。むしろ活路が存在していないなら、無理矢理にでも生み出してみせることもあるような男だ。

或いは、彼らは正規の時計塔の刺客ではないのかもしれない。

それならこの練度の低さも頷ける。

法政科の陰謀でもどこかの科の暴走でもなく、個人の暴走の可能性もある。

何にせよ、早く終わって欲しいと心から願う。

誰も傷付かなくていい。誰も死ななくていい。

こんな風に、死後を楽しんでいるかのような自分のために――

その時だった。

瞼を閉じて大いなるものへと祈ってから、再び瞼を開けた刹那。

視界の端に何かが見えた。

羽ばたくもの。光。翼。ああ、これは、もしかして。

「……蝶？」

唇から言葉が漏れていた。音声ある言葉。洞穴の岩壁に反響してしまふ。

隠形を維持するための集中も途切れて、姿が露わになって。

「エレナ・ブラヴァツキー――」

覆面越しのくぐもった声が届いていた。

視線の先にいるのは、黒装束の人物。六人目までは洞穴から逃げていったから、これが七人目の刺客なのだろう。最後の最後まで諦めずにシゲルソンの仕掛けた恐怖の数々に耐えきった魔術師と言う訳だ。体格からすれば男性。二十代か三十代か。こちらとの相対距離はおよそ四メートル程度、接近戦の心得のないエレナとしては魔術の類を使うしかないが、いかにせん、殺さずに捕らえる程度の魔術の覚えとなると心許ない。

けれど、仕方ない。

ここで何もしなければ確実に殺されてしまふ。

「……ごめんね」

詠唱の代わりに謝罪の言葉を述べて。

詠唱不要。魔術ならざる生来の能力で空間ごと対象を破壊すれば――そう思考するエレナの視線が、覆面の隙間から覗く刺客の視線と合さる。目と目。瞳。

Without a doubt. With the two of them here—a man who had defeated a chimera in a single blow with a mysterious, incredibly strong martial art, and a woman who could manipulate nature to her whim and was privy to the world's mysteries through the wisdom of Mahatma—they could surely kill every single one of those assassins.

Tear their flesh and crush their bones.

Engulf them in light and burn them with flames.

Freeze them, shock them, corrode them with acid or disintegrate them. If she really made up her mind to do so, there were any number of methods they could use to kill the assassins.

However, Elena didn't want to.

"Don't kill them. If possible, I'd like for everyone to make it out of this alive."

"That request is a bit..."

"Please, Mr. Sigerson."

No matter who they were, she didn't want to kill them.

Not even the people from the SPR who had trampled all over her dignity, or these mages who had been sent here to kill her. When she was writing her book a few years ago, she had often grown impatient and lashed out at her disciples, telling them to all go to hell, but she felt differently now. Now, she didn't want to take out her anger on others. She wanted to remain calm and composed, to treat everyone with equal kindness, just like Mahatma used to.

Yes, she wanted to treat everyone with an almost motherly kindness. And also—

"You know, I really am quite an old lady. I never had any children or grandchildren in my lifetime, but if I had, I imagine they'd be around the same age as those young people over there. And I don't think I could possibly cut their lives short, when I think of it like that. After all, I'm technically already dead."

"Lady, your 'death' was merely an illusion."

"Yes, it was. But still, I might as well have died the moment that I cut off my relationship with the rest of the world."

"...I'll do my best to honor your request. Stay right there for a little while longer."

"Thank you."

She nodded and closed her eyes.

After that, it was a truly simple matter.

In the blink of an eye, Sigerson set off all of the traps that he had placed around the cave, which sent the assassins flying. Although a few of them suffered some broken bones in the process, none of them were killed, and none of them were injured beyond repair. Soon, he had them all completely cornered. Thinking about it, while they were technically seven people against two, one of those two^(Elena) was sitting still for the duration of the fight, so there were probably many opportunities for them to turn the tables if they had tried. But sadly, they couldn't regain their composure enough to do so.

One by one, the assassins began to make a run for the entrance of the cave, trying to escape. As she saw one of the assassins trip and fall over a black steel wire, hurting their leg quite badly, Elena was so worried that she almost reached out to help.

But these were seven assassins sent to kill her. Mages. She shouldn't feel sorry for them.

Still, she couldn't help it. They were up against Sigerson, after all, and the man's knowledge in a fight was terrifying. Even in this terribly bleak situation where they were vastly outnumbered, with very few means of escape, this man, one of the smartest in the entire world, would surely find a way out. And even if there was no way out, he was determined enough that he would make one himself.

With that in mind, Sigerson considered that these assassins might not have been sent by the Clock Tower after all.

That would certainly explain their inexperienced style of fighting. If they weren't rogue mages sent as part of some conspiracy by the Sealing Department, they could very well have been sent by some private client.

But no matter who had sent them, Elena only hoped that it would all be over soon. That way no one else would have to get hurt. No one would have to die. No one would have to get hurt because of her, just because she'd been trying to enjoy her little "afterlife" like this—

And then, it happened. She had closed her eyes, praying for some sort of miracle to occur, and it happened at exactly the moment that she opened them again.

She caught a glimpse of something out of the corner of her eye. Something that seemed to be flying. Emanating light. Something with wings. Could it really be...?

"...A butterfly?"

Unconsciously, the word slipped from her lips. She had said it aloud, not telepathically. The sound of that single word reverberated off the walls of the cave.

And in that moment, she lost the concentration that she had needed to maintain her invisibility magic, and her form was suddenly exposed again.

“Elena Blavatsky!”

One of the assassins shouted her name, his voice muffled behind his mask.

His black-clad figure was only a little ways away from her. By now, the other six assassins had escaped through the cave entrance, so this was probably the remaining seventh one.

This lone mage had been the only one to endure Sigerson’s horrific traps all the way until the end without giving up or running away. Judging by appearance, he seemed to be a young man, perhaps in his twenties or thirties. He stood about four meters away from her, and since Elena wasn’t particularly skilled at close combat, she knew she would need to use magecraft instead. But unfortunately, in the heat of the moment, she couldn’t remember any magecraft that would capture someone without killing them.

She didn’t have any choice, then.

After all, if she didn’t do anything now, she would be killed for sure.

“...I’m sorry.”

Instead of casting a spell, she mumbled that small apology.

She didn’t need to say anything aloud in order to use magic. She could use her innate supernatural abilities to destroy things instead, without relying on magecraft. And as she thought that—Elena met the assassin’s eye, peeping out behind the gap in his mask as he stood in front of her. Their gazes locked. And she couldn’t look away.

磨き抜かれた黒曜石を思わせる、美しい瞳がそこにはあつて。

「え？」

何もできなかった。

ただ、刺客の瞳を見つめたまま硬直していた。

そこに刺客が体ごとぶつかってくる。痛みと呼べるほどのものはなかった。胸が、胸の中央が熱い。熱いものがどつと溢れ出す。胸が詰まったような感覚は、肺へと流れ込んでくる血液のせいなのか、過去と現在の接続に想いを馳せたがゆえの感慨なのか。

「ナイドゥ」

そう、名を呼んだつもりだったけれど。

ごぼりと口元から赫色がこぼれて、しっかりとした言葉にはならなかった。

「エレンさまのお言葉、ばくはきつと一生忘れません」

幼かった彼の声が聞こえる。

ああ、ナイドゥ。ナイドゥ！

かつて無垢な少年であつた彼はその才能を見事に開花させて、如何なる経緯によつてか時計塔に身を寄せ、このようにして神秘の隠蔽を実行するための工作員として認められるまでに至つたのだろうか。いいや、違うかもしれない。聖堂教会や、社会の裏側に潜む他の数多の結社にだってエレン・ブラヴァツキーは嫌われているのか？

そんなことはどうでもいい。構わない。

自分の胸に刃を突き立てている彼。ナイドゥかもしれないあなた。使用している術式、護符のすべては一目で把握できた。身体強化。精神鎮静の魔術も使っている。かの『東方見聞録』や『モンテ・クリスト伯』に記される暗殺教団の伝説では暗殺者の精神を冷静に保つために薬物を用いたというが、成る程、彼は是を魔術で成したのか。

大振りのナイフが一度引き抜かれて、再度、胸を抉ってくる。

今度は正確に心臓を突かれた。

傷口は修復できるかもしれない、けれど。

ああ。彼はもう一本のナイフを更に取り出している。頭部を両断するのか、頸部を断とうというのか。どちらにせよ正解だ。蘇生の可能性も反撃の可能性もどちらもゼロにできるのだから。賢い子、ナイドゥ。

外してはだめよ。

よく狙つて、ちゃんと殺さない。

そういえばあなたは手先が器用な子で、いざという時の度胸さえあつて――

「イレナ！」

誰の声？ ああ、シゲルソン。駄目。そんなに怒らないで。

ナイドゥを殺さないで。

それから、最後くらいはちゃんとエレンと呼んで頂戴な。



瞬時に、刺客を地面に叩き伏せる。

背中を強かに打たれながらも奴はナイフを離さなかった。それでも更に彼女を攻撃しようとするその胆力は、大したものであると言わざるを得ない。だが、それ以上させる訳にはいかない。私は刺客の可能性のすべてを奪うべく、手に力を込めようとする。

「だ、め」

血の塊を吐いて彼女が言った。

殺すな、と紫色の瞳が叫んでいた。

私は頷いて刺客を気絶させ、当面の危険性のみを排除する。

「あり、がとう。ミスタ・シゲルソン……いいえ……シヤールロック……」

彼女が微笑んでいる。

初めてロンドンで目にしたのと同じ、美しい笑顔だった。

「こんな、偶然って……あるのね……ううん、それこそ……必然……かしら……？」

この感触は知っている。

命の灯が消えていく。彼女は死ぬ。此処で、その生涯のすべてを終える。

修復の魔術を用いなかっただのか？

私は、震え始めた彼女の手を強く握る。

そして、私は目にした。

果たしてそれはヒマラヤの奥地に棲息するという神秘の具現か。

もしくは、愛弟子の最期を看取るために降臨を果たした超越の大師の遣いたる、星々の

海を渡る銀色の船であつたのか。

「ねえ、見えていて……シヤールロック……？」

「ああ」

「とても、眩しい……光の――」

或いは。

目を細める彼女がこぼした、雫のきらめきであつたのか――

His eyes were beautiful, the same dark color as polished obsidian.

“Huh?”

She couldn’t do it.

Her whole body went stiff as she looked into the assassin’s eyes.

And then, the assassin collided into her with his whole body. She didn’t feel any pain at all. She only felt as if the center of her chest was burning. And something hot suddenly began to overflow from deep within her chest. Was the painful feeling clogging her chest because of the blood now pouring into her lungs, or was it because of the strong emotions rushing through her mind as she thought about the connections between the past and the present?

“Naidu—”

Elena had meant to call his name...

...But bright red blood came leaking out of her mouth instead, and she couldn’t manage to get the word out.

“Miss Elena, I don’t think I’ll ever forget the things you taught me—not for my whole life.”

She felt as if she could still hear him saying that to her.

Oh, Naidu. Naidu!

He had been such an innocent boy. She wondered if his blossoming talent had been recognized by the Clock Tower, if they had had eventually designated him to become one of their mysterious Enforcers. No, perhaps that wasn’t right. Maybe he’d been sent instead by the Church or one of the many other organizations that were known for hating Elena Blavatsky? Whatever the answer, it didn’t matter. She didn’t care.

She had a blade sticking out of her chest. And the one who put it there might be Naidu. She could tell exactly which magical techniques and charms he had used at a single glance. He had reinforced his physical strength. And he was also unnaturally calm. According to the “Travels of Marco Polo,” and “The Count of Monte Cristo,” the assassins in those tales had often used a drug^(hashish) to keep themselves calm whenever they were sent to kill. Had he used some sort of magic to do the same?

Suddenly, he pulled the large knife out of her chest, then thrust it back in again.

And this time, he stabbed her directly through the heart.

Perhaps it was still possible to heal the wound with magic...

...Ahh, Elena realized suddenly that he was now taking out another knife. Was he going to stab her in the neck, or cut off her head? Either one would be the smart answer. Both options left the

target with no chance of survival, and in her current condition she was unable to fight back. Naidu had always been such a smart boy, she thought.

She prayed that he wouldn't miss.

Aim well, and kill me now, she thought.

You've always been so brave even at the most difficult times, and I know your hands are steady enough to do it—

"Irena!"

Whose voice was that? Oh right, it must be Sigerson. This wasn't good. He couldn't let anger cloud his judgment.

Don't kill Naidu, she wanted to tell him.

And also, at least call me Elena for once, here at the very end.

In an instant, I sent the assassin sprawling to the ground.

He still hadn't let go of the knife, even when I'd struck him hard from behind. I had to commend him on his courage, attacking her^(Irena) of all people. But I refused to give him any further opportunities. I decided to cut all possibility for retaliation off from this assassin, and I began to prepare my hands to deliver the killing blow.

"Don't, do it..."

Blood spilled from her mouth as she uttered those words.

Her purple eyes were screaming at me to not kill the man.

I nodded and decided to only eliminate the prospect of immediate danger instead, promptly knocking the assassin unconscious.

"Thank, you... Mr. Sigerson... No, I... I suppose... I should call you... Sherlock..."

She said with a smile.

It was the same beautiful smile that she'd worn when I had met her in London for the very first time.

"These types... of coincidences... do happen... Or should I, call this... fate... I wonder?"

I knew this feeling quite well.

The feeling of watching all the life and light go out of someone. She would definitely die from this injury. Very soon, she would meet the end of her life here.

Was she unable to use magecraft to heal herself?
As her hand began to tremble, I clasped it tightly in mine.

And then, I saw it.

Was it truly the embodiment of all the mysteries said to inhabit the Himalayan hinterlands?
Or was it a silver ship that had traversed the sea of stars, sent by that transcendental great teacher to honor their beloved disciple, here at the end of her life?

“Hey, Sherlock... Do you, see it...?”

“I do.”

“That, light... It’s so, bright—”

Or perhaps.

Did I only see the glint of the tears that spilled from her eyes as she closed them one last time—?

(Fin.)