

Red Velvet

by

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IRA (CONT'D)
So...You really a journalist?

HALINA
Yes, yes...I have my...job...papers.

She rummages through her bag and finds her press papers. She also gets her notebook and pencil.

IRA
See that full moon? Like a bowl of milk,
hanging so low I wanted to drink it...
Pass me that box.

Halina passes the biscuit box.

IRA (CONT'D)
Amanda baked them herself but they
crumbled, every last one of them.

HALINA
Amanda your wife...

IRA
I scoop them out in handfuls like the
Indians do.

He offers it to her. Halina gingerly takes a scoop and eats them with difficulty.

IRA (CONT'D)
Tastes of...home.

Ira dusts Halina's mouth of crumbs. Halina opens her notebook.

HALINA
...so, how you feeling?

IRA
About?

HALINA
You were being...you were sick...

IRA
Health makes dull conversation.

HALINA
I'm sorry...I just wanted...

Ira starts to take off his shoes, undoes his cuffs, loosens his tie. Halina is uncomfortable, unsure.

IRA
...Boy?!!

Ira's shout makes Halina jump. Casimir enters.

CASIMIR

Mein Herr?
(Sir?)

IRA

I need light.

CASIMIR

Tut mir Leid...verzeihung, mein Herr...
(I am sorry...I am so sorry sir...)

HALINA

Drehen Sie die Lampen hoch.
(Turn the lamps on.)

Casimir does so.

IRA

You smell that? Been fifty years but I'm still there. Craning my scrawny neck as far as I can, peering at the stage over the bars. Joshua, a few years older than me, holding me back in case I fall. Under a spell at the back of the gods, a sea of red below filled with expectations of greatness...

HALINA

So...I wanted to ask you about...

IRA

Something about velvet - a deep promise of what's to come, the sweat of others embedded in the pile. A crushed map of who was here folded in.

Casimir gets no instruction and reluctantly leaves.

IRA (CONT'D)

You from here?

HALINA

Er...now...not before...well..my family are from Radom...in...

IRA

...the east. So you're Russian.

HALINA

No I am Polish.

IRA

But Poland doesn't exist.

HALINA

Of course we do but Prussian king and Russians are not admitting it.

IRA

Russians - an enduring people but they got nervous leaders. Uneasy about who's lurking in the dark. Banned my Scottish King - afraid it would give the people ideas. Birnham Wood coming to Moscow. That's the beauty of Shakespeare - he unnerves you.

HALINA

...You are from New York?

IRA

And you have done your homework.

Ira massages his neck and shoulder.

IRA (CONT'D)

Lear makes me stoop. Sits on me like a weight. I must wear him, not just his shoes...

Ira unbuttons his waistcoat.

HALINA

So...? Do you find Lodz much changed?

IRA

The rail line comes all the way in now. There are more houses, more people, more streets...In the suitcase...the dressing gown...

She is not a dresser but she goes to the suitcase and passes him the gown.

HALINA

Everyone wants our cotton. Mr Sheibler's building two more factories.

IRA

Karol's a clever man.

HALINA

You are nonstop on tour?

IRA

I'm in demand.

HALINA

Of course. You must be meeting many people of interest. I read in paper you receive Knighthood...

IRA

From the Duke of Saxe-Meinengen yes.

HALINA

And you met Emperor Franz Joseph also?

IRA

There was a small presentation in Vienna...

HALINA

And London?... You must miss London?

IRA

Not really.

HALINA

You do not long in all these travelling to be...working at home? With your wife, children, friends ...?

IRA

I go home when I can.

HALINA

Your wife is politician's daughter. Is...?

IRA

That was Margaret, my first wife.

HALINA

I make bad mistake. I...

IRA

She passed three years ago. Get your facts right.

HALINA

Yes...sorry...Your children must miss her.

IRA

We didn't have children.

HALINA

But I read you have four?

IRA

With Amanda, who used to be an opera singer. You want me to write this for you?

HALINA

I'm sorry I'm confused. Your eldest son is eighteen?

IRA

Uh huh.

HALINA

And just to be total clear for me ...you married Amanda...?

IRA

Two years ago.

Halina scribbles.

HALINA

So...you haven't play London since ...I have it here...sorry...my notes...Covent Garden was in....

She rifles through her notebook.

IRA

...'33.

HALINA

Yes...here. I have it here, '33...

IRA

I played the Lyceum in '58.

HALINA

I did not find information of that.

IRA

Hard to keep track of it all.

HALINA

But still you have not played Covent Garden again since...

IRA

I have played Cologne, Vienna, Dresden, Leipzig, St Petersburg, Moscow, Berlin, Prague, Stockholm, Budapest...I've been busy. I've recently agreed to play The Academy of Music in New York at the end of this month.

HALINA

Oh?

IRA

Four thousand six hundred seats, it's the Bolshoi twice over. D'you know I just found out that I'm the highest paid artist ever in Russia.

HALINA

Yes, no question. So many places. Which one you most enjoy?

IRA

Which one did I enjoy?

HALINA

Yes...it's alright to ask...?

IRA

Strangely...simple.

HALINA

I'm sorry I...

IRA

Rybinsk...north of Moscow. Not easy by road but the theatre was crammed. They'd never heard of Shakespeare. Can you imagine that? Every time I raised my hand - they literally gasped. It was a pin drop performance...

HALINA

You are English now.

IRA

...there was a flawed perfection in it. There really was.

HALINA

...I always thought, that for Englishmen, I mean for all actor...that London...is the er... absolute...roof...sorry, peak.

IRA

And I played it.

HALINA

But Covent Garden is more than...over 30 years past. You don't desire to go back?

IRA

I prefer to go forward.

HALINA

The reviews were...well, I...I met someone who said...

IRA

Gossip is not a good foundation for an interview.

HALINA

Gossip? Not gossip he is expert on...

IRA

I was there, just ask.

HALINA

Is it..is it not like addiction, once you play you must play more? To know your... your value and get...how you say... recognize for craft?... What I mean...I ask...why you have not played Covent Garden since?

IRA

Well...let me see...

HALINA

Halina.

IRA

...Halina...London is a limited pocket of work. Same faces...same buildings...same critics writing the same things. There's an indolence amongst those who have everything on their doorstep. So I chose to tour Europe - because one finds there is a thirst and one is invited to offer a glass of water. I've played Rybinsk and once you've done that it's hard to...to settle...for London.

HALINA

Yes...but London is...

IRA

I think that's enough.

HALINA

You played for...

IRA

I have to prepare...

HALINA

..only two nights...

IRA

For the long storm ahead.

HALINA

....why was that?