

Lord, Lord
Seek in the heavens and see
And search this vine
That Thou hast planted,
And make it perfect...

The first (i.e. third) day
Of playing Little Red Riding Hood

Every evening and every morning, the Mother of God, the Holy Virgin, falls before the Heavenly Throne, makes obeisance in all humility and says: Lord, I who, while on earth and being made from earth, in ages long past received a sign through the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and then, receiving from them the Annunciation, in wondrous wise conceived Jesus, Thy son, to redeem the ancient sin and for Him to ascend into Thy kingdom, and Jesus, the Son of Man, living among men, established for them, as the Christ, the New Covenant, whence commenced a new numbering of the years and a new age of the world, and He strengthened that Covenant with His own precious blood, sacrificing Himself on the Cross, when he was crucified in the time of Pontius Pilate, I pray Thee now, Good and Merciful One, Treasurer of all good things and Giver of life, in Thy boundless goodness and in Thy limitless compassion, seek out and have mercy upon Thy servant:

PELAGHIA

and forgive her for the sins, witting and unwitting, in deed, in word and in thought, which she may have committed this day and in all the days of her life, and in particular that terrible sin, that deadly sin, let its name not be uttered, to which she has been devoting herself for many years, unable to rid herself of it, for her anxious soul has battened on the soul of that man whose name I shall pass over in silence, they have both fallen into the voluptuousness of that bodily sin from which they can no longer release themselves and they have intertwined together in that sin like two intertwining lindens, trees that you can only separate by severing them at the root... Do not sever them yet, Good Lord, find in Thy boundless compassion a path to redemption for them too and in the host of Thy numberless mercies save them, for, although caught into the snares of sin, yet do they seek Thee in humility. Listen, Lord, be mindful, Lover of men! Have mercy, be compassionate and

redeem their vile souls, confound the machinations of the deadly foe, deliver them from the world's shame and guide them patiently along the path of righteousness, for they have no other God and no other hope than in Thee, heavenly God, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Creator of all things visible and invisible, in heaven and on earth. Amen.”

The Mother of God knows very well what she is talking about. For, prior to falling before the Heavenly Throne, she herself had listened mindfully to the humble and ashamed prayer of Mrs Pelaghia, from the second floor, and the words of the Holy Virgin merely repeat what she had heard from that unworthy servant of hers a short while before.

Every evening and every morning, Mrs Pelaghia falls before the icon of the Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, fervently praying that she beg the forgiveness of her Son and Our God for that terrible sin, for that mortal sin, according to the Holy Scriptures and the old canons of the Church Fathers, for that sin of which she cannot rid herself, for her agitated soul has batted onto the soul of him with whom she sins. With breaking heart she prays and with vanquished soul, making countless genuflections and countless, devout obeisances, confessing her guilt and begging whispered forgiveness, spiritual peace, help to do good deeds, and health for her husband Costică and her parents, Mrs Alice and Mr Vasile. It is superfluous to say that all these prayers are not in vain. They straightaway return to caress her soul like a blessing, for when, at last, she rises, from numbed knees, she feels better, more tranquil, more at peace with herself, as though she had wept.

Then, if it is evening, she goes to bed and lies under her cold and unwelcoming quilt, which is to say in the same bedroom where she has said her whispered prayers with the door locked, separate from her lawful husband, who has remained in the living room and will watch some football match or current-affairs talk show on the television until he falls asleep on the sofa, vanquished by the toil of the day. And if it is morning, Mrs Pelaghia drinks her cup of coffee and smokes a cigarette, the only one of that day, and hurries to work. But as soon as she arrives on the landing, where the light of day never penetrates, because the architect did

not think of putting a window there, and the light bulb that ought to illumine it is always dead or sooner missing, she pauses for a few moments in front of the hole left in the wall by the erstwhile light-switch, ripped from its place by the forces of darkness, and, with a seemingly careless gesture, she casts there a small, insignificant pellet of paper, about the size of a plum stone. The gesture, however careless it might be intended to look, is not without a certain amount of risk, for the two electrical wires of the erstwhile light switch, which continue to be live and whose ends are not isolated, as stipulated by health and safety regulations, might at any time produce an electric shock in whoever might, whether recklessly or accidentally, cause them to cross.

But there are also risks greater than electrocution, at least in the case of Mrs Pelaghia. Whoever might be curious enough to follow what happens afterwards would see that, a quarter of an hour later, the lift stops on the second floor.

From the lift emerges a middle-aged man, whose name we shall pass over in silence. He traverses the landing with even steps, nevertheless taking care not to make any sound to attract the attention of the neighbours. When he reaches the erstwhile light switch, he takes a biro from his pocket and skilfully employs it to extract from the hole of the erstwhile light switch that small, insignificant pellet of paper the size of a plum stone...

Whoever might curiously persist in following what the middle-aged man does next would see him descending the two remaining floors by the stairs. Once he has reached the ground floor, he takes the pellet of paper from his pocket, unravels it and reads what is written there. In short: it is in fact a note whereby Mrs Pelaghia informs the middle-aged man at what time and where exactly they will meet that afternoon, after she finishes work. The place is not indicated by any precise landmark, but codified in the form of a beautiful metaphor. For example: "by the melancholy willow tree" in fact means on the banks of the Bistritza River, a short way uphill from the amusement park island, where there is indeed a willow tree melancholy by its nature. The formula "peanut cake" indicates the Zodiac Buffet, the premises resulting from the privatisation of a former state cafeteria. The favourite place of rendezvous nevertheless remains the so-called

“dancing in the rain”, situated in the little park by the railway line. What does “dancing in the rain” mean? We shall find out at the appropriate moment.

Today, however, they shall meet earlier, in a wholly unforeseen place, for Mrs Pelaghia has to go to a funeral, and thus the place initially chosen for the rendezvous, known under the codename “peanut cake”, has had to be changed at the last moment. Why at the last moment? Instead of a long and rather complicated explanation, let us rather tell the truth: Mrs Pelaghia had forgotten that she had to go to the funeral of the husband of one of her workmates. She only remembered that morning, as she was getting ready to leave, and she gave a start, frightened at what might have happened had she not remembered in time. While Mr Costică was shaving in the bathroom, she hurriedly wrote the note in order to change the co-ordinates of the rendezvous established the previous day. Instead of the usual codified formulas, she found herself forced to use an explicit and quite ordinary language. If someone else, and not the gentleman whose name we shall pass over in silence, had read the note, Mrs Pelaghia’s public image and the honour of her family would have been gravely affected, and Mrs Alice along with Mr Vasile would have suffered cruelly. Fortunately, no one paid any attention to the pellet of paper that had, who knows how, got into the hole in the wall left by an erstwhile light switch. With the exception, of course, of a middle-aged man, whose name we shall pass over in silence. Let us retain that, on the morning of Monday, 5 October, he did not descend in the lift from the fifth floor, where he lives, but by the stairs, because the lift was out of order. Why it was out of order is a complex problem, to which we shall return. For the time being, let us try to decipher the contents of the note: “We have to talk. Your wife has sent an anonymous letter to my parents, my dad phoned and told me. Mum doesn’t know I know. We’ll meet at 11, in the entrance of the paying polyclinic, because after that I’m going to a funeral. Can you come too?” In fact there is nothing to decipher. At eleven o’clock they will meet in the entrance of the polyclinic, as if by accident, they will talk for a little, and then they will leave in different directions, Mrs Pelaghia heading for the home of her workmate whose husband is deceased, and the middleaged

man waiting on the route to the cemetery for the funeral cortege, which he will join unobserved by anyone, except, of course, Mrs Pelaghia. They will then have at least two hours together at their disposal.

In the case of Mr Thoma, from the third floor: his conceptions had evolved greatly since the day he started listening to the BBC's Romanian-language broadcasts. Nor had things been very rosy up until then. His frank and forthright way of being had brought him plenty of troubles. And that is without taking into account his slightly exaggerated inclination to trust in the sincerity of others, from which had gradually resulted, consequent to countless disappointments, a great mistrust in anyone and anything. For years on end, he had gawped like an idiot at the television (the expression might seem too harsh, but it should be known that it belongs to Mr Thoma himself and that, in general terms, it characterises his way of thinking) in the conviction that everything he saw there was the naked truth. Now, when he looks back on those times, Mr Thoma shakes his head and smiles sceptically. Almost touched. It cannot be said that he no longer watches television at all, on the contrary, but now there is nothing that can fool him. His critical spirit functions ruthlessly. The famous talk shows, which provoke in others verbal attitudes that are on no few occasions vehement, leave him cold. When some minister or parliamentarian or other makes a shattering revelation, speaking about the extent of corruption, or about the cigarette-smuggling mafia, Mr Thoma snorts through his nose with bitter irony. In the first place, he does not smoke. Or to put it better, in the second place. Because in the first place all these so-called news-items and so-called sensational revelations were well known to him long before, from the BBC.

*Excerpt from the novel **Simeon the Liftite**. Novel with Angels and Moldavians*

*“At once tender and unbridled in its parody, without anything holy, but always tingling with the ironic breeze of divine mystery, the novel **Simeon the Liftite** by Petru Cimpoșu brings to post-1989 Romanian prose an almost incredible freshness of tone and vision. (...) The source of comedy, the intersection between the plane of frenetically lived mythologies of consumption and the plane of a hazy mystical aspiration, is nevertheless not a mechanical, ultimately tiring procedure. (...) There is a permanent ambiguity in this novel, whose world never takes on the aspect of caricature, but is rather viewed with understanding and*

*even, quite often, warmth. The lack of aggression comes from an aesthetic attitude. The serenity of tone here has its origin in the pure pleasure of constructing a story. (...) **Simeon the Ljfiite** is (also) a book to delight the reader. And if it gives food for thought, then so much the better!"*
(Mircea Iorgulescu)