

Jovan Ducic

KING RADOVAN'S
TREASURE

A BOOK ON FATE

LEUTAR MORNINGS

MUSINGS ON MAN

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KING RADOVAN'S TREASURE

A BOOK ON FATE

King Radovan is the King of Kings, the Ruler of Fate, the Master of the Universe. On his shoulder he carries a golden ax and rides a steed as huge as a snowy mountain, and on his arm holds an owl with flaming eyes, so that he can see even at night. In my country, only madmen talk of him. But, it came to pass that even sages began believing him real. King Radovan wears a paper crown and fool's bells on his mantle. His arms and legs are green as grass, for he lives both on land and in the sea. Nobody knows where he came from, or the name of his family, nor has anyone heard of his friends or enemies. He surges through the air like a thundercloud, and sails the waters like a ship on fire. No one remembers his battles or triumphs for he leads no hosts, indifferent to conquest. He rules in peace and grandeur, basking in his power and beauty. He is a recluse, yet his face hovers in front of every man's eyes, and his voice rings in everyone's ear. But, where are his gardens and palaces? Where are his fair women, swift steeds, white flocks, and noble hounds? Are his gates guarded by men or dragons? For, only the insane, whose sole master, king, autocrat, and protector he is, know the pathways to his realm, and which bridges to cross to the glory of his provinces, replete with splendor and music. For, our minds are bound by the seen and the heard, and only insanity can free us from the shackles of knowledge and constraints of craft. Liberty means madness, and only the mad are free.

For, King Radovan is the emperor of madmen who never soured on their kindness. That is why he courses through our veins only

when our blood is poisoned, and lives in our minds only when they sink into darkness, and that is why just the people who have lost themselves may stumble upon him, in their midnight wanderings. He is hailed only by those of us unable to recognize anyone else, and addressed by the unfortunates whose words no one understands any more, and by men who have renounced everything human, and earthly. All people were equally blessed with good fortune and cursed with misfortune since the beginning of time, but just the mad nurse each their own, personal happiness. Only they never quite become themselves, but still renew themselves in full. All men see things more or less the same, but just the insane hold their own counsel. For, great wisdom should be sought only at the bottom of an abyss, since just the most afflicted among us have uttered the deepest truths.

For, King Radovan lives only in the eyes of those who have lost their sight. Fools speak of his treasure and search for it night and day, gnawing mindlessly through polar ice and boring through earth and stone, tireless as moles. Such have dug the planet over, rifling lonely vineyards, godforsaken churchyards, run-down palaces overgrown with weeds, wreaking havoc and destruction everywhere. Countless mad hosts have searched from one end of my country to another, crisscrossing it forlorn and out of touch with life – and with us, ordinary mortals. They have sought King Radovan's Treasure with iron tools, sticks and stones, using even tooth and nail, but managed only to dig their own graves. Whole generations of the tormented have looked for the King's Treasure, buried deep within us. Sometimes they got as far as the very center of the earth, toiling without pause or sleep, but the Treasure kept sinking ever deeper, tantalizing them more cruelly than before. And so it shall be, till the end of time.

And they shall keep digging, never the two of them together. For the King's Heir shall be only the man who digs deepest, and dies digging without divulging his secret even upon hitting the gates of

King Radovan's Treasure

the underground palace of King Radovan, the King of Kings, the Emperor of Destinies. Ah, but to keep digging, until someone else takes our stead! For, it is only the others who keep us from finding what we need exactly where we seek it, and the mad know this better than the sane. But, wise people know it also.

Yet, madmen are not the only ones digging for King Radovan's Treasure; everyone knows that a buried treasure awaits each one of us. And so we keep digging: whoever has the initiative, spirit, strength, or faith in life, or even the tiniest shred of a belief in the possible or the impossible. Some people dig in the field, others in the woods – searching for an idea, an ideal, an illusion, persevering by hook or crook, intrigue, or even crime. All of us seek the King of our eternal unrest, and our endless quest. The world would disappear were it not for Him, and go blind without His fabulous Treasure glowing in the dark, and despair were it not for His obsession. For, every man is always in search of something, and has fixed his insane, self-centered gaze upon the place where only he sees the King's Treasure. Not a man amongst us but believes that a part of King Radovan's Legacy is yet to be discovered, and every single one of us knows that the Treasure must be sought in secret, without saying what we are up to even to our dearest and nearest. For, all men are mad, poisoned, and bewitched, and the King's Chambers have always stood far above the Sun in daytime, and above all the stars at night – beyond, even, the Great Bear guarding the Frontier between Hope and Despair. Indeed, all of us are insane.

The King's Treasure is the Venom of This World. Poets dream of It, ceaselessly trying to reach the Divine and witness the Unfathomable through their art.

Heroes dream of It, sure only of the worth of their own sacrifice for Mankind, eager to have each man, woman, and child benefit from their suffering by receiving a part of the Hoard.

Prophets also dream of It – insanely, quirkily proclaiming ever a New Bliss and a new Promised Land.

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And, finally, Kings dream of It in their desire to rule through the power of Love, not Hate.

And Moses dreamt of It when he followed the Pillar of Fire, and Caesar had It in front of his eyes when crossing the Rubicon, and Columbus searched for It, trusting the wind that took him to an unknown land. The King's Treasure is sought by stargazers among the heavenly mists, by botanists in the petals of flowers, and by the priests trying to inspire the faithless. We all seek It, wonderstruck and insane! For our blood has been poisoned by a King Radovan residing in the leaves of grass, and in every drop of clear, pristine water – that is, by a mighty Ruler crossing the sky like a dark cloud, or a ship on fire.

We live on, serfs to The Emperor of Madmen, but also The King of the Men of Action, and an Ideal! The Emperor of those who, in the sacred fever of their minds and hearts, believe in the incredible, and accomplish the impossible! For, King Radovan is The King of Kings, more powerful than Agamemnon, richer than Midas, pro-founder than Ezekiel, wiser than Solomon. For, The Eye of the World is fixed upon Him.

ON HAPPINESS

1.

All philosophy is sad. And, the more you speak of happiness, the sooner you will find yourself uneasy. There is no single human truth that may be followed to its end without peril to one's mind: neither a religious truth, nor a truth about love, nor about death. For, everything deep seems dark and somber at the bottom; no abyss may be stared at for long without vertigo and terror. The more you ponder on life, the more do its ambushes and thickets beset you. Thus, if you insist on talking of misfortune, you end up looking not at life, but misery. Men spend their entire lives amidst countless dangers, yet many live their years through without ever undergoing a major mishap. Moreover, many people spend their lives placidly, watching them flow like the Arethusa coursed from its source on the Peloponnesus right under the sea to Sicily, sweet and charming all the while. That is why the horrors of life partly become our destiny only if we examine them too closely. For, the blessed are incapable of seeing evil, just as some men do not believe in disaster. Neither lose much for being unaware of every ill, nor for not falling prey to all misfortune. Moreover, we can avoid many disasters by not dwelling on them, just as many men often catch the disease they dread the most.

Many complain that they have spent their lives searching for the Meaning of Life which, if it exists, lies entirely in the Search itself.

For, those who never sought It cannot say that they ever lived, while the ones who did can seldom boast of happiness.

Happiness, therefore, is not an idea but an illusion, having little to do with rationality, and much with imagination. That is why so many people believe that they are happy even when not. But misery is as fictional as bliss, for out of a hundred felicities at least a half are either fraud or a conceit. That is why only the issue of happiness or unhappiness itself may safely be examined, not any particular instance of it. Those who think that they are happy, are. It is impossible to convince anyone of his or her happiness or unhappiness by invoking various formulae, or doctrines on happiness. The conceit of happiness, or the illusion of unhappiness, lie beyond reason, most people being sure of their feelings, but few of their convictions.

For, least happy are those who possess all the reasons to feel privileged. Such may bask in gold but feel downcast, in contrast to the others who do not feel unlucky even after personal catastrophes. Therefore happiness is in the mind, with little or no meaning in itself. It is but a fiction, existing only in our desires and wishes – for they engender all our enterprise and action, the only real signs of anyone's life and joy. Doubtless, there are people who cannot be happy regardless of their virtue, or wealth. Such are born for sorrow as others are for music. For, good fortune is a talent, but just the people with a heart can be truly unhappy; small men can be buoyant, but seldom downcast.

For, wealth is not the mainstay of happiness, regardless of what many think. The pretty silver coins of Phocis and Mytilene showed Aphrodite and Sappho, to stress that love and beauty stand above wealth. But neither love nor beauty are enough for the wretched, terrified of life since their first day on earth. That is why such men seek security in gold, but receive only an illusion instead. For, it is in our nature to think by comparison, and analogy; juxtaposed, thus, to the other forms of wealth, material riches do not count for much. That is why they can never bring us complete happiness. Only

personal good fortune – unsharable, incomparable, different from all our other blessings – stands above everything as the source of our love of life, at the very heart of our illusion about fate. This unsharable fortune consists of genius, courage, and honor, since unique and incomparable fulfillment can be reached only through glory.

Moreover, all great joy is chance, and nobody ever discovered or invented a new form of happiness. Some people unjustly claim that each man creates his own fortune: but, it is true only that each of us generates his own misfortune. For, out of countless calamities only death comes of God – though it was never a misfortune, least of all a calamity. All the other miseries, including our afflictions and diseases, are human acts. Thus, if fortune is chance, unhappiness is not: for our every mishap we can blame just our own fickleness, pride, stupidity, or vice. Even physical disease comes from our unhealthy and depraved thinking, whereas our financial troubles are little more than lack of foresight, or our own surfeit of sensuality. For, even a person run over by a car must blame himself first, since as long as we live we do more harm than good to our own selves. What our minds build, our foolishness tears down; our goodness is overshadowed by our vices, and the fruits of our wisdom by the outbursts of our temperament. For, beyond and above all, our powers are ruled by our weaknesses, and even the ancients were aware of mankind's enmity towards itself. Thus, Lucretius, a great poet, listed the five major disorders of the human soul: haughtiness, lechery, anger, luxury, and sloth. Verily, all our wisdom should serve only to prevent this self-inflicted harm, and we should be wary of ourselves more than of all our enemies. For, he who blames others for his woes only confirms his lack of sense, and his own corruption. The science of thought – that is, logic – as well as the science of goodness – morality – are both but teachings on how not to harm oneself, and how to avoid making enemies.

Men have always considered great and disproportionate happiness a gift of God, and great misfortune a punishment by Providence. Only small fortunes and petty mishaps were assigned human origins. For at the bottom of every great event lies a miracle, and nothing of the kind could ever be attributed to man. No curse falls upon everyone equally, just as disease does not afflict everybody. Further, though few people are truly happy, even fewer are totally wretched. It might seem that life is but good fortune alternating with the bad, were it not for a certain, unique habit of ours that elevates us above chance, since no great happiness is attainable without even greater self-deception.

Oriental follow their fate, Westerners their ideal. But every man, regardless, is aware of his inability to escape his lot – whether fatalistically ascribed to chance, or piously, to Providence. Everyone realizes that a thousand small pleasures must be sacrificed for a single major accomplishment: as if our hearts were made just for a single great effort. For, doubtlessly, nobody can achieve more than one supreme triumph in a lifetime. Everyone has his day, when he experiences the ultimate joy possible to him. Grand spirits and great souls cannot imagine fulfillment without glory, nor accept their own greatness without having earned it. The true summit of anyone's happiness is the success of his work, since luck belongs to God, not us. Was joy ever more poignantly expressed than through the cry of Xenophon's soldiers: "The sea! The sea!" But, was there ever a shout more rapturous than that of Columbus' sailors: "Land ho! Land ho!"

For, gold and talent are not the greatest riches available to us: wealth has often been the cause of misfortune, vice, and misdeed, whereas talent has brought more sorrow than joy to many. Still, even some immensely gifted men in history caused great grief to mankind. Truly, we all carry everything within ourselves, as the Latin

saying puts it. Catullus, thus, left this remark to his Stoics: "What you do not have, lend to yourself!"

No one can define true happiness, or unhappiness. Depending on age, culture, or class, everyone sees luck differently, whereas misfortune has so many faces that no one can lump them all into a single category. We just know the depth and the bitterness of our disasters – as we recognize only the graveness of our illnesses – but nobody truly feels the calamities of others. Darwin claimed that none of us would feel a moment of pleasure were we to fathom the true import of death, its very idea being unbearable to the human mind and heart. It may be safe to say that no man would experience a single sunny day were he aware of all the woes befalling the people around him. For me, thus, the most terrible image of wretchedness is a person at once old, sick, and poor. Old age, disease, and poverty, united, doubtless represent the ultimate catastrophe in any man's life.

No one can classify all disasters. Healthy people may suffer because of their dear ones' illness, whereas many others, truly and permanently disadvantaged and neglected, can never achieve anything in life. There are the countless multitudes of men supporting other people – either foreigners, or their own kin or countrymen – toiling away harder than they can bear. There are, moreover, the constantly ill, and the perennially persecuted. Finally, there are the victims of their own unrealizable ambitions, bitter vanities, blood-thirsty envies, mindless jealousies, and hideous dispositions, even some unfortunates boring to friend and foe alike. Two such curses are enough to ruin anyone and turn his life into hell. Some women have to suffer, beside their own shrewishness, their husbands' oppression, or, worse, oppression by their children, no matter how smart and cute the others may find them. For, all the books in the world should serve only to console the wretched, so countless are their numbers. Beside the people genuinely unlucky, many more are unfortunate because of their temperament – those being the melancholics, a most numerous class. Still, the ancients regarded

melancholy as a greatness of spirit, and Aristotle saw Socrates, Plato, and Lysander as men of immense, hidden sadness.

3

However, we are truly good only when happy. For, unhappiness warps the heart and ruins our character. Few persons have withstood venomous bad luck and continued loving the others. For, those whom other men have harmed hate even the innocent. Thus, the only way to avoid this is not to blame your wretchedness on other people, but consider it the Will of God – that is, your own fault to boot. Poverty is a misfortune because it poisons us with hate, and tempts us to think ill of people, as well as abandon our friends. Verily, few men can believe themselves the cause of their own misfortunes, or others worthy of their rewards. In the Middle Ages, the poor were certain that the rich sent plagues upon them; even in the times of faith, few accepted their disasters as coming from the Above. Only in prehistory and in the East did men explain anyone's wealth as personal luck, and hold such people deserving of divine bounty. The wisdom of our age insists that the rich have robbed the poor of their fortune and happiness, and that one man's luck is always another man's downfall. In our pride and vanity, we deem all our successes just, and all our misfortunes somebody else's fault, and loath rejoicing in other people's luck. In Rome, each newly elected Pope was thus greeted by an ancient admonition: "*Non videbis annos Petri!*" meaning: "You will never live beyond twenty five!" Small men do not realize that they should be greathearted not only towards the wretched, but the lucky as well.

Our misfortune lies in our egotism, in wanting others to work for us. For, avoiding toil and effort is the acme of all human aspirations. That is, to earn a fortune without strain or pain and thus gain security and future sloth is to most people a safeguard against labor

as the ultimate curse. For, hate between men always came from a struggle for dominance, and the desire of some to enjoy the fruits of the others' toil. In this everlasting war, the rich develop a different character from the poor. They become noble through vanity and fear, as opposed to the poor who yearn for goodness out of piety and honor. The rich are braver spiritually, the poor physically, since wealthy people seldom feel joy as intensely as the underprivileged. That is, for not expecting or dreaming much, they are rarely surprised, or idealistic, but mostly sated and passive. They are also more depraved, whereas the have-nots are purer, since most perversity comes from glut and sloth – the purity of soul springing from toil, the great moralizer. Thus, some poor people love honesty the way others love riches, becoming fanatics of honor. For, the wealthy are taught honesty by the common people, who remind them of the differences between wealth, and virtue and happiness. Envy, therefore, is the curse of the rich, like slander, whereas ugly words and rough ways belong to the impoverished, though real evil and baleful vengeance remain the mark of the well-off. For, destitute men are limited even in their choice of weapons, just as in everything else. That is why the greatest harmony between character and chivalry was shown by men of renowned, historical families. Marcus Brutus and Cato of Utica proudly bore the names of their famous forefathers, and almost all of the great men of the Roman Empire were the descendants of illustrious ancestors. For, it was Aristotle who defined nobility as the inheritance of wealth *and* honor.

For, people can love, but rarely hate unselfishly. All odium comes from either fear or envy. Most often hate equals fear, since we hate only what we fear. Thus, truly brave men do not hate as much as despise. For, detestation is a pitfall for our own selves, whereas scorn is a mark of pride and superiority, and a belief that we can do without the people whom we despise, and oppose them with impunity. Hate seldom arises from difference of conviction, or principle. That is why real men do not hate even the persons whom they fear. For,

to hate one's betters befits servants, not masters; to detest someone weaker is a moral disorder, and, like leprosy, a curse of the wretched.

4

Halfway between venomous hate and cold disdain lies antipathy. It is silent, emotionless, and changeless. Like attraction it is, above all, physical, having little to do with reason, even less with taste. Dislike is but hidden odium, seldom rational; that is why it always overpowers us. When such feelings exists between people they are a mark of a profound, racial antipathy, or irreconcilable differences in character – as irresistible and malignant as between two animal species, sometimes even stronger. For, the most basic intolerance arises out of antipathy, which is unconscious and therefore unconscionable. It is natural not only among men but among plants and animals, even minerals. In Egypt, ancient sculptors placed objects of alabaster in niches of adobe, since alabaster crumbles if surrounded by stone. Moreover, there exist flowers that should not be put next to some other plants as both will wilt. Even among men few hates are rational, but largely instinctive. Good and cultivated people try to control their natural dislikes, whereas the bad and the petty give in to their instinct – turning corrupt, or criminal. Some people like to wallow in their dislikes, ceaselessly at war even with their moral and spiritual kin. Examine, therefore, your own intolerance and watch it disappear, once you look it squarely in the eye.

For, we are always unjust when thinking and speaking of other people, extolling some and disparaging others after our own idiosyncrasies, all blind and instinctive. The most miserable, thus, are men living off hate, being the first to cut themselves with the knives of their own honing. For, odium grows like spring waters, and few can hold back the deluge of bad feelings once they allow free reign to their imagination, or even the seemingly dispassionate appraisals

of persons whom they dislike. Thus, mankind has misspent centuries hating in the name of religion (while always formally preaching love), despite all our learned talk and lofty thoughts. For, Emperor Vitellius claimed that nothing smells as sweetly as the rotting cadavers of his enemies. But, such sentiments were rare among the ancient Greeks. Plato said: "Love pacifies men and calms the storms at sea, even laying the winds to rest." A man of wisdom nurtures no hate, since our dislikes hurt us more than our enemies. Speak badly of anyone, and feel miserable and embittered; speak of the same person well and become serene, even proud of your feelings, not only words. The way to happiness lies in convincing yourself of love towards your enemies. It is indeed hard to transform dislike into affection, but, bad feelings can be controlled. If someone does you wrong, restrain yourself from detesting him, unless you want to feel further loss and disquiet, and, from perhaps a chance opponent create a lasting foe. If need be, cross swords with him – but not out of odium as respect towards yourself. Love towards one's enemy is a virtue, as great as the love of honor. Even if unnatural, it is blessed, since it does not allow hate to rob us of our sight, and lead us into even greater sin. When men start examining their dislikes, they will realize that many roads lead to happiness, and that treading over losers is not the only way to triumph. Life teaches us that people are not as bad as commonly thought – though they are often denser than anyone can imagine. That is, by forgiving our enemies their stupidity we can absolve them of most of their evil, since no hostility can be rational and noble, but only ugly and unintelligent. For, first and foremost, haters are dunces and cowards, never heroes.

However, it is terrible that many people can never be entirely happy, nor feel worthy, unless they can console themselves with the wretchedness of others. This sorry human need for hate informed even some royal ceremonies: Titus threw three thousand Jews to the lions, to honor his father Vespasian. Tacitus writes of the death

of twelve thousand gladiators on Lake Fucino, who perished shouting to the Caesar: "*Morituri te salutant!*" as the crowd applauded.

This mean joy in someone else's loss of life and limb is well attested by many ancient rituals. Herodotus wrote of the sacrifice of fifty young stallions and fifty choice slaves at a Scythian king's gravesite on the first anniversary of his death. Homer sang of Achilles' sacrifices on Patrocles' grave, when he butchered several Trojan captives in his friend's honor. Men, therefore, used to think that not even their departed friends and kin could rest without another person's grief.

Moreover, there are moments when people fear life more than death; for horror, nothing can surpass that, since such despair leads only to extinction, or crime. For, life demands more courage than does death. I am aware that religious crises are extremely taxing for people of faith, and that even the most stalwart of them sometimes break down and cry. But even harder to bear are the crises of character, when we feel unsure of ourselves. Not to believe in God, until then worshipped with all one's heart, is terrifying, but, to lose faith in one's own self is worse, as it leaves us bereft of both God and our humanity.

5

Happiness, thus, is the feeling of possessing what we need most, though some sages considered it just a surfeit of wellbeing. Good fortune, however, can never be complete if we insist on confusing our whims with our needs, as we so often do. Success and profit are indeed sources of joy, but fulfillment does not lie in ceaseless victory as much as in accomplishing a central task. Therefore, it is quite strange that people have always held humility in such high regard. Thus, the genial Abe Prevoist wrote that all anyone needs is a garden, a cow, and a couple of chickens. Of like mind were the Greeks,