

# THE RED, RED LOVE

A STORY

BY RITA LIEPA

**G**REEN IS HOPE, Malvina used to say on Monday morning, when she took the girl between her fat knees and tied a yard of ribbon in her hair. Maya nodded sullenly, bored with Malvina and prettiness. But this was the run of things, and the week should be started with hope.

"Blue stands for faith," Malvina would explain on Tuesday — and a blue bird sat down in Maya's hair.

"Yellow means jealousy," was to be announced at midweek — and the flame of ill will leaped on Maya's head.

"White is innocence," Malvina would sigh on Friday, looking so much relieved, as though they had escaped from some mischief always lurking around the corner.

After she had carried Hope, Faith, Jealousy and Innocence on her curly head the week through, Maya was presented with what she desired above everything. Love was reserved

for the weekends. On Saturday morning, the pressure of Malvina's knees softened, and her voice would take an elevator to heaven.

"Red is love, red is love, red is love," she would ring. This is how Maya came to know that the candy which Konstantin gave her was the candy of love.

He had lots of candy in the bag: pure white Innocence along with pale green Hope and delicate yellow Jealousy. They all rained into the demanding palms the girls held out to him, as he was leaning there against the chestnut tree in the backyard. Maya was standing aside, but her eyes held Konstantin like two tight lassoes.

This was a special day. The roofs were about to lose their snow hats. The sky was hanging low and mellow as if sweet cream were to pour down from the clouds. Spring had planted its first anemone amid snow. The air

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was full of perfume as though Mama's skirts were sweeping the whole world.

Rising above the girls and giving them green, white and yellow candy, Konstantin had the air of a prince looking for a Cinderella. His freckled nose emerged between the shallow cheeks with great confidence. Now and then he tossed his head, and the coarse red mane flew a long way back.

This was a very special day. It was not enough that Konstantin could play a piece called *Der Tuerkische Marsch* on the piano. Now he had beaten all the boys by wearing the first pair of long pants around the place. Now he could cross his legs, look down his nose and whistle like a sailor.

"Hi, Maya, want some?" he shouted.

All girls turned their heads, with cheeks bulging, mouths chewing. Two black pebbles came flying towards Maya — the eyes of Konstantin.

The world began to dance before her eyes. It was a carrousel which stopped when Konstantin took her limp hand and slipped something into it, wrapping her fingers around, as if this were a secret. She stared at him and saw a halo above his head, as he was swaying there, hands in the pockets of those long pants, a new dashing Konstantin added to the diligent one who could play the *Tuerkische Marsch* on the piano.

She opened her hand slowly, and as they both looked down, they knew what it was. The candy of love.

She closed her hand and ran. Her white bow fluttered to the ground. Konstantin picked it up with the tip of his shoe.

## II

Maya wrapped the candy of love in a silk petticoat of her favorite doll and put it under the pillow on her bed. It was then that Mama swished into the room, with coat and hat and everything.

"Want to come along?"

"Where to?"

"To see Madame Papatte."

Maya galloped three times around her mother, just to scare her a bit. There always were so many things not to be messed up, I beg you. Things such as a coiffure, a lace ruffle, a chapeau.

"Stop it, I beg you," Mama would cry.

They strolled the streets hand in hand, mother and daughter. Now and then Maya would give a proud sidelong glance to that abundance of velvet eyes, white skin, lustrous hair and rustling silk that altogether was her Mama. Yet no window-shopping was done today, as Mama passed all temptations with a firmly set face. Soon, too soon they saw the copper plate blinking at them with a gra-

ciously curved engraving: "Eugenia Paparde — Modiste."

Madame Paparde was thin and flat, like a flower pressed in a book. One would expect her to fall to pieces then and there. At places where Mama was well rounded, Madame Paparde looked rather plain. When she moved on her knees, wrapping Mama in yards of silk, she was no more than a swift shadow. If other people talked through their teeth, Madame Paparde spoke through a mouth full of pins.

"This décolleté suits Madame perfectly wonderfully," she would snap between her pins, for instance.

"Don't you think it's a little bit daring?" Mama would cover her throat with a long white hand.

"Oh, but no, not at all! With such a figure as Madame's one can afford anything!" the pins would sound.

Maya's curious eyes took in the new dresses hanging here and there, lacking only but heads and feet to look like perfect ladies. Then her eyes sped to the familiar spot above Madame Paparde's couch. A black velvet piece was fastened there, and on it two white swans were embroidered, holding two lines of scarlet letters between their yellow beaks:

A woman is born  
But to love and suffer.

Maya already had learned to connect these red words with the large

picture which rested on Madame Paparde's mantelpiece and showed so huge a man that one picture could hardly take him in. The beard alone occupied a great part of it.

"Who is it?" Maya had once asked.

"Why, it's Paparde himself," had come an answer from between the pins, and Madame Paparde's face had looked as if she had said it was the President. Then she had taken the picture in such a manner as if only two of her fingers were good enough to touch it. She had placed the picture in Maya's eager hands, with the words: "Take a good look now. This is a real man." She had smiled, and that had made her eyes look even sadder. Then they had learned that Paparde one day up and sailed into the wide world. He seemed never to have found the right haven again. This had happened years ago, and Madame Paparde kept on loving and suffering.

Maya could not help thinking about the red words — a woman is born but to love and suffer. Was that so?

What was love that it made women suffer until they became pale, flat and miserable like Madame Paparde? For Madame Paparde too once had looked different. There, on the funny shelf called *étagère*, was a picture, and in the middle of it a young and gay Madame Paparde standing, her foot in a white shoe put forward

sprightly, and holding a white parasol with the two very best of her fingers.

What was love that it made Malvina sometimes stare at the blank kitchen wall and let the milk run over, while she stood there saying that Joe the iceman was late again? At night, she would write letters to one Jacob out in the country, pushing her tongue from one cheek to the other and weighing upon the pen with the vigor of deep love. Those rose-colored sheets, covered with ink and tears, did they tell of love and suffering? "Dear Jacob, I am suffering!" Were these the words Malvina was writing while blowing her nose in affection, or sipping strength from the coffee pot?

And the wife of the housekeeper, did she love and suffer, as she stood there at the washtub, her arms soaking in water and soap while her husband snored in bed? And that young lady from upstairs, running all the way downstairs on her high clicking heels to meet her friend who was whistling *Sentimental Journey*, did she love and suffer?

"Madame looks tired today," said Eugenia Papyarde to the white face in the mirror.

"Oh, it's just the headache." Mama's eyebrows twisted like two little black snakes.

"I see," said Madame Papyarde, "I see." And she sighed.

Mama searched Mama's face anx-

iously. It was as though darkened by a veil. Two deep lines spread from the nose to the edge of her mouth. Those awful headaches she had lately!

## III

They were silent on their way home. Maya glanced up now and then, opened her mouth and closed it again. But then the words simply would not stay in her mouth any longer.

"Do all women have to suffer?"

"Why, darling?"

"Because of love."

Mama let her hand go, then took it again and pressed tenderly. "What puts such ideas into your head?"

"But Madame Papyarde — she loves and suffers, doesn't she?"

"Her husband left her, dear."

"Didn't he love her then?"

"He did, but does no longer."

"How come? Did love, but loves no longer. Is that love?"

"I don't know, darling. Really. You had better stop teasing me. You know I've got a bad, bad headache."

For a while they walked quietly, then the question slipped out: "Does love last forever if one has a figure?"

Mama gave a little smile. "Silly, you! It is much too early for you to trouble your head with such things. Keep away from love as long as possible, then you'll be a smart girl."

"I don't want to be a smart girl," said Maya, "I want love!"

"Love is not to be had by force, darling. There is nothing you can do about it. You may deserve it, and still not get it. Love is there, and you don't know why. Or it isn't, and you don't know why either."

"But if I had love, what then? Would it make me suffer? I don't want to suffer! I simply won't!" She pressed Mama's hand hard, angry with the red, red love. There was the candy of love waiting for her under a pillow.

At home, Mama wearily removed coat and hat, kissed Maya between the eyes and went to her room, locking the door behind her.

"The master won't be home for supper again," said Malvina, angrily looking at the closed door.

"Mama has an awful headache," Maya explained. And then she popped her question: "Say, Malvina, must women suffer when they love?"

"My goodness!" Malvina gasped, struck with heavy suspicion. "What are you up to now?" She looked down at Maya as indignantly as when she had brought dirt in with her shoes. Then Malvina straightened up and

cast one more gloomy glance towards the closed door.

"Yes," she snapped. "They must. Suffer like hell."

"Can't one do without suffering?"

"No," Malvina said firmly, as though Maya had asked her a favor.

That night before dark, Maya was waiting on the stairway for Konstantin, who returned from his piano lesson, carrying a black folder with "Music" in gold lettering on it.

Her hand extended, she went towards him. They both looked down at the candy of love laid on her palm.

"I don't want it," she said.

And she told herself that Konstantin was just a boy with freckles on his nose.

She spent the evening sitting on the window sill and looking across the roofs of the city. She tried to play her old game: she was a giant's daughter and could jump from roof to roof and run to the end of the city. But she could not imagine anything. She pounded her brow against the windowpane, repeating:

"But no, but no, but no. . . ."



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## THE SKEPTICS' CORNER

by BERGEN EVANS

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### *That opposites attract*

Although Dr. Horace Gray of the Stanford University School of Medicine found, in an analysis of 271 married couples, that introverts seem, on the whole, attracted to extroverts, a number of other studies have shown that in social matters likeness attracts or, at least, strangeness repels.

Professors Burgess and Wallin, in a study of 1000 engaged couples, found that similarity in religion, background and interests was the rule. Dr. E. Lowell Kelly, in an earlier study of 3300 engaged couples, found striking similarity in each couple not only in religion and social background but in a whole series of personality traits.

One of the most curious reports was that made by Marvin Koller (in the *American Sociological Review*), who in 1948 examined the distance from home which various males in Columbus, O., ventured in the perilous search for a mate. The median

was thirteen blocks. The bolder blades, 24 to 27 years old, went further afield, but the younger men, who were probably splendidly impatient, went less. Men over 35 averaged less than seven blocks. Whether they were decrepit, desperate or cynical, or whether Columbus is so rich in attractive marriageable women that it makes no difference, the report did not say.

### *That David slew Goliath*

To doubt that David slew Goliath would seem to those who would rather venerate than read their Bibles a straining to be incredulous. But if anyone with an elementary knowledge of the Bible's peculiar typography reads I Samuel xvii and II Samuel xvi, he will perceive that the wicked Goliath was slain three times, twice by David and once by Elhanan, a fellow townsman of David's. As a giant-killer, this Elhanan rivals the