

## MARY AND MARTHA

### An Allegory

BY RUDOLPH KASSNER

Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary.—St. Luke x. 38-39.

Many years have passed over the land since the two princesses, of whom I want to tell, lived and died in the old Castle. You can still see the old Castle lying on the borders of the lake, and when the storm drives into the waves of the lake, the lake roars out loud and shouts rough words which nobody can interpret and which are always the same, and it closes its eyes like a man who is about to dive under the water; and only when the storm has flown and is far away in another country, the lake laughs and opens its eyes once more, and sees the whole sky over-head, and the willows on its banks, and the swallows and eagles, which circle above it.

The two princesses were twins, and on the same day in which their Mother bore them, messengers brought her tidings, that the Duke, her Consort, and father to the new-born twins, had fallen in his fight against Klingsor, the wicked magician. For in those days magicians still lived, and did all they could to disturb the happiness of men and the Wish of God. The people whispered to each other that Klingsor could pour water into fire without extinguishing it; and the Duke had also heard tell of Klingsor, that he could mingle truth and falsehood in such a way, that only he, who killed Klingsor could separate falsehood and truth once more. And that is why the Duke went forth to kill the magician. He had promised God to do so, because otherwise truth would remain in falsehood and falsehood in truth for ever, and no mortal would be able to disentangle them again.

The soul of the Duchess had become confounded by her great sorrow—it had taken away the light of her days. From the moment it happened, the Duchess began to speak words whose meaning her servants could not understand, she wandered about the old Castle from room to room and opened and shut the many windows, and nobody could make out why she did so. Or else she ran round the lake, when the storm lay in the waves and when the lake groaned aloud. As soon as the nurses came towards the Duchess and showed her the little Princesses, fear took hold of her and she ran away without recognizing her children. It was very rare that she stood still and gently touched her children and asked after their names, but when she did so, she mistook them, and called one Princess by the name of the other and laughed out loud.

In this way the two Princesses had never seen their father and were not known to their mother, and that is why they were always alone and played in the park, or else chased the deer out of the bushes, or scared the little squirrels on the trees. The serving-men and maids left them to their own devices, and had only forbidden them strictly to go down to the lake. They said, that a wicked fairy lived in the lake, and that she came up and fetched little children when they went down to its shores. But in spite of this warning, curiosity often led the Princesses quite secretly down to the lake when the servants were not looking, and then the lake laughed and had its eyes wide open, and saw the whole sky overhead and the willows on its banks and the swallows and eagles circling above it, and it also saw the two Princesses when they stepped quite close, and bent their little heads down over its borders.

The names of the Princesses were Mary and Martha. In spite of their Mother having born them in the same hour, Mary was beautiful and Martha ugly. And they were both well aware of this fact; Mary knew that she was beautiful, and Martha knew that she was ugly, for they had both seen their reflection in the lake, on bright sunny days. But Mary and Martha never spoke of that which they had seen in the lake, and loved each other. In fact, Mary and Martha did not only love each other because they were sisters and always alone and because they had never seen their father and were not known to their mother, but Mary loved Martha because Martha was ugly, and Martha loved Mary because Mary was beautiful. Neither the servants in the Castle nor the gardeners in the Park,

nor the fishermen on the lake ever saw Mary without Martha, or Martha without Mary. And he, who could have understood God would have known why God wished just this, that Mary should be in Martha, and Martha in Mary, and why God's Wish never would have parted Mary and Martha.

But the magician Klingsor wanted to part the two, for he hated God, and he only waited for the moment; and the moment for his villainy was soon to come, for without the moment Klingsor could do nothing.

Years had gone by; the Duchess had died without knowing her two children, and Mary and Martha were grown up, when, on a certain day the King's heralds rode up from the town and proclaimed, that the moment had come for the King's son to woo a Princess. All the Princesses in the whole Kingdom were to adorn themselves with roses, like brides, and were to come to the feast by which the King was about to celebrate his son's marriage. And the King's son would present his Mother's veil to that Princess upon whom his choice would fall among the many, and she would then become the Consort of the King's son, and after the King's death she would be Queen of the whole country. Mary and Martha were also commanded to adorn themselves with roses like brides, and to appear before the King's son on the wedding day.

The same proclamation was announced in all the Palaces and Castles of the Dukes and Princes in the whole Empire, and it also reached Klingsor, who hears everything. The magician laughed aloud, for now the moment for which his villainy had waited since the death of the Duke was come. I have told you that the people declared Klingsor knew how to pour water into the fire without extinguishing it, and that he could mingle truth and falsehood in such a way, that only he who killed Klingsor could separate falsehood and truth once more. And this time he again mingled truth and falsehood and took fire and water, and out of these he made two mirrors of truth and falsehood, and both mirrors had the power to show everyone who looked into them that which is not, and by this to make the good bad, and the bad good. And on the day before Mary and Martha, adorned with roses like brides, were to set out upon their journey to attend the marriage of the King's son, Klingsor ordered two of his many invisible servants, who enter and depart through the windows without opening them,

like light and darkness, to carry the two mirrors of truth and falsehood, and to place one in Mary's bed-chamber and the other in Martha's. Now when Mary, decked as a bride, stepped before the mirror of truth and falsehood on the morning of the feast, she, who was beautiful, saw herself ugly; and when Martha, at the same moment, stepped before the mirror of truth and falsehood, decked as a bride, she, who was ugly, saw herself beautiful. And Mary and Martha were frightened, and would not believe the mirrors and wanted to break them, and Mary tried to tell Martha, and Martha tried to tell Mary, that she did not believe in the mirror and wanted to break it. But when Mary spoke to Martha and said: "What is the secret that you are keeping from me, Martha," Martha answered quickly: "I am keeping no secret from you, Mary," and looked onto the ground. And when Martha spoke to Mary and said: "What are you hiding from me, Mary?" Mary looked onto the ground and answered: "I am hiding nothing from you, Martha." For without Mary's seeing it Shame had come to her, and stayed with her by day and by night. And without Martha's seeing it Envy had come to her and stayed with her by day and by night. And while many Princesses out of the whole Kingdom, decked with roses, like brides, stood before the King's son, and the King's son presented the bride upon whom his choice had fallen among the many with the veil of his mother before the eyes of all the people, Mary and Martha sat forgotten in their bed-chambers before the mirrors of truth and falsehood.

And next to Mary, invisible, stood Shame, and Mary saw in the mirror of truth and falsehood that she was ugly; and next to Martha, invisible, stood Envy, and Martha saw, in the mirror of truth and falsehood, that she was beautiful. And Mary and Martha never spoke of that which they saw in the mirror, and Mary and Martha hid the mirrors before each other, and their eyes avoided each other. It is true that there were days in which they both remembered the years of their youth and then they took hold of each others hands, because they had done so as children. But whenever they did this Mary's Shame and Martha's Envy mingled, and when the sisters walked out together in the park, Falsehood stepped quite softly between Mary and Martha, and Falsehood held Mary's hand in Martha's, and spoke not a word. For as the mirror of truth and falsehood was made up by the mingling of fire and water, thus was

Falsehood made up by the mingling of Mary's Shame and Martha's Envy. And when Mary and Martha let go of each others hands, Falsehood quite silently separated herself as well, and Shame led Mary secretly down to the lake and poured many hurried words into her ear, as the storm pours its words into the lake, and when Mary looked into the lake she did not see that she was beautiful; and Envy led Martha secretly down to the lake and poured many hurried words into Martha's ears, as the storm pours its words into the lake, and when Martha looked into the lake she did not see that she was ugly. And thus Shame never left Mary and slept with Mary, and Envy never left Martha and watched with Martha; and Mary and Martha lived for a long time before they were able to tell each other what each of them had seen in the mirror of truth and falsehood; for Falsehood lived with them and watched, and when Mary and Martha should have said the truth Falsehood caught up their words and threw them to the wind.

It was not till many years, one after the other, and many hours, one after the other, had passed away—had flown like big and little birds over the lake and the big forests till there, where Mary and Martha could not see them any more, and only one last little hour for both Mary and Martha remained behind, and even this last little hour wanted to get away, that a youth, beautiful and strong and clothed in a robe of gold and purple like a King's son stood before Mary and Martha, and Mary and Martha knew him immediately for Death. And Mary and Martha also guessed, that God had sent Death to them, as a King sends his son—And Death spoke gently to Mary and told her what Martha had seen in the mirror of truth and falsehood; and Death spoke gently to Martha and told her what Mary had seen in the mirror of truth and falsehood. And Mary and Martha understood Death and forgot Shame and Envy, and without saying a word they embraced each other and were like two children and knew everything. And Death lifted Mary and Martha up in his arms and kissed them, the wings of Death flamed through the blue night like a great conflagration, and Death carried Mary and Martha upwards to God, past the big and the little stars; for God did not want to part Mary and Martha, for God never had parted Mary and Martha. Now Mary's Shame and Martha's Envy remained behind, alone in the Castle, and Shame and Envy mingled with Falsehood, and Falsehood went out of the

Castle and through the Park down to the lake, and threw herself into the lake. Though the night was quite still and no storm was raging—for Falsehood cannot live in the storm—all the waves started up one by one in their fright when Falsehood threw herself into the lake; and one wave fought with the other over Falsehood's body, and one wave tried to rob the other of Falsehood's body, and the waves tore the body of Falsehood to pieces, and each wave swallowed and ate up a piece of Falsehood's body. The fishermen in their huts wondered when they heard the lake roaring so loudly, for no storm was blowing and the night was still and all the big and the little stars were twinkling in the sky. And not till the sun came out over the lake in the morning, was Falsehood quite torn to pieces by the waves, and the lake was filled and still, and it laughed and saw the sky overhead and the willows on its banks, and the swallows and eagles which circled above it.