UKRAINIAN LITERATURE

A Journal of Translations

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Ukrainian Literature
A Journal of Translations

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Introduction

This third issue of *Ukrainian Literature* appears much later than I had intended. The fault is entirely mine. When I took on the editorship of this journal, I was fully aware of how much work such a responsibility entailed but I nevertheless believed it would fit comfortably into my other responsibilities. I was wrong. My obligations at the University of Toronto and the desire to keep up my own scholarly research and writing became insurmountable obstacles in the timely production of this next issue of the journal. For this I apologize. I know that some of the lessons learned will help me produce the next issue in less time than was required for this one. Despite the delay, I take pride in the fact that this third issue has appeared. There is no other journal of translations from Ukrainian literature. There are few other forums where such translations appear. The continued existence of this journal still serves an important function, and I do not intend to abandon this endeavor. But the editors and the readers of this journal must be reconciled to its irregular, infrequent appearance.

Both the selection of works and the nature of the translations of these works appearing in this issue are heterogeneous. True, in the selection of works that our translators have chosen, there is an emphasis on contemporary Ukrainian literature. I welcome and encourage this emphasis for a number of reasons. Contemporary writing in Ukraine is frequently of high quality and merits a wider audience. Contemporary writing is more likely to appeal to contemporary readers. Contemporary writing is more likely to find a sympathetic translator who can find the appropriate language to render a text that is understood, appreciated, and apprehended from a perspective of familiarity. Contemporary writing is also more likely to attract a commercial publisher and thus an ambitious translator who hopes for greater recognition and remuneration. That's all for the good. But contemporary writing also holds its own peculiar pitfalls for the translator.

In Ukraine today, writers are producing works that are linguistically, intellectually, and structurally more complex than much of what preceded them in the history of modern Ukrainian writing. Authors employ a wide variety of linguistic registers, differentiated by social, geographical, demographic, and historical criteria. They use the street slang of young adults, the vocabulary of professional intellectuals, the dialects of remote mountain territories, and the personal idiolects that arise from their own or their characters' experience. They mention antiquated toponyms, they refer

to people and events that were for many years deliberately kept unknown, and they cite texts that the reader might not recognize. This accumulation of nuance adds energy and life to contemporary Ukrainian writing. It also presents challenges to the translator and editors.

In our work on the texts in the journal Uliana Pasicznyk and I don't enforce any particular approach to translation, although we don't pretend to be without personal preferences. The journal follows American (rather than British) vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation, but that pragmatic choice does not resolve the myriad difficulties that arise, for example, in translating Zhadan's *Depeche Mode*. The novel is a repository of Ukrainian street slang with a particular wealth of derogatory terms for various types of individuals. Contemporary Ukrainian is rich in terms like *pidar, chuvak, uiobok, lokh, debil,* etc. Neither the translator nor the editors are especially fluent in this subset of the English language. Besides, American English usually prefers the f-word for most such expressions. Overuse of that word would make for a bland, unsatisfactory translation.

Another set of problems arises in works like Moskalets's *Evening Mead* and Prokhasko's *The UnSimple*. Both works contain a wealth of allusive reference that may escape the reader's notice, particularly in translation. For example, Moskalets quotes poems by Mykola Riabchuk, sometimes without clear attribution. These poems don't exist in translation. The English reader cannot possibly recognize them (many Ukrainian readers also won't!). The text is characterized by the (often inebriated) wordplay of a group of intellectual writers. The exact puns do not translate, of course. That leaves the translators looking for reasonable equivalents, which they do very successfully, but, nevertheless, the translation loses some of the peculiar references of the original, for example, in the terms for drunken hallucination that are tied to the word "squirrel." There are also many factual references (the philosopher Saul Kripke, for instance) whose connection to the text (often a pun) is hidden in the translation. These problems, and others, are also found in *The UnSimple*, where the geography, history, botanical specificity, material culture, and dialects of the Ukrainian regions of the Carpathian mountains inundate the translator and the reader with unfamiliar (in English) material. But these are the ineluctable challenges of all translators. To the degree that these challenges have been successfully overcome, the reader will, I hope, discover in these texts the wonderful beauty, vitality, complexity, and diversity of contemporary writing in Ukraine. For their courageous efforts, the translators deserve our gratitude and praise. They certainly have mine. And I encourage them and other skilled translators to submit their work to our journal for publication. There are many grateful readers waiting. Not least among them—

Maxim Tarnawsky
Toronto, 2011

Evening Mead

Kostiantyn Moskalets

BOOK ONE
WINTER IN LVIV

I

The pine-scented, evening snow did not thaw. The crosses atop the cathedrals were golden and the birds—black. "And on this day the fetters of barrenness were lifted, for God had heard Joachim and Anna," and they meet by the Golden Gate, dazed and saintly, and they embrace, and an old chestnut tree, flying past in a streetcar's window, brings to mind the crack that cuts through that binary figure in Giotto's Padua fresco; the evening snow and chrysanthemums, fresh, pale-yellow, and fragile; and the black birds fly in circles in the earthly heavens—silent circles, clear invisible lines, a sudden flash of a candle in the windowpane—and slender books on the table.

One floor above, a girl plays the flute. She's blind and doesn't attend school. The flute was purchased recently. *O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde groß…* And she weeps for him with unseeing eyes and invisible sounds as evening approaches—snow pours down from milky-gray and purple clouds and I don't know her name.

Here a candle burns, there a flute plays, but in essence they're one and the same, as fire simply becomes a voice, just like, in the highest of heavens, *civitas terrena* is transformed into *civitas Dei*; and when my wanderings here conclude, when this old pilgrim finally returns Home, these slender books will undoubtedly be among those that are carried away from here; look, we flow in a canal, we float past a cathedral and pray in a language that has long been forgotten, and the cathedral is so tall that the ravens above it are the size of black butterflies. And I am delighted anticipating how I'll sit down in a warm, quiet study, behind a desk which I haven't approached for so many years; how I'll begin to pick through notes filled with distant times and lands. Without thinking, I'll flip open one of the books, wanting to read my favorite poem, —and I won't be able to resist crying out in shock because the poem I'll find will be my favorite poem and yet, simultaneously, not my favorite poem, changed somehow in syntax and grammatical form, with either fewer or more lines, at times assuming completely different metrical feet, in a new Ukrainian language. And at that

time I'll recall the words of a certain bishop of Hippo concerning the beauty contained within a work of art, how it stems from a higher beauty, how it reminds us of it and how it induces us to fall in love with it.

And so—winter, a stack of clean sheets of paper and the voice of your flute. I'll tell you a little bit about each of these poets and you'll be an attentive, grateful listener. As precisely as possible, I'll try to explain to you what to others seems to be as obscure or self-sufficient as faith, as scorned metaphysics; I'll help you to believe in the bitter and transparent black currant, to hope for the blinding sheen of the snow, to see the candle that burns among the reeds; I'll be able to do this, otherwise, how will this miracle occur—that you will see me?

There was a time when the soul was ailing and the sorrowful fragrance of withered grass and smoke from burning leaves filled every crevice of consciousness, and it was no longer possible to peek through the cracks of the bright sheen of eternity, in which I am free, and this freedom resembles the snowflake that is forever a snowflake but whose form is never duplicated; this is the true picture of this young and archaic eternity: water that crystallizes into the enchanting and unrepeatable form of self-essence at the peaks of the spirit, where it is cold and the air is thin, but later, having descended here, once again becomes water, the turbid water of a flood; but do not be alarmed, little girl, water is eternal, water is eminent, like the eternal and eminent summer, autumn, winter, and spring. All of this is just snow, young and eternal, always the first snow; because of it we live and never die, for we, in our own way, are also sacred snow.

II

This, Andrusia, happened a very long time ago—I believe it was in February, on the eve of my birthday. Vovchyk and I wandered about Bakhmach looking for wine and finally found some in a small store next to the poultry farm. Purple twilight snow was lying all around, it smelled of tree sap, of the winter of the final school year, pine trees began just beyond the brick wall that surrounded the poultry farm. And we walked towards those pines with their twisted trunks, up to our knees in snow, out of which protruded remnants of park benches and plaster statues of Pioneer boys and girls with missing heads and arms. We gathered kindling, lit a modest campfire, and uncorked the first bottle. The wine was very red and very cold. There was lots of it, and we were in no hurry to go anywhere.

"Take a swig," said Vovchyk, lighting up a Bilomorkanal.

"No, you go first."

"You first, it's your birthday, not mine. Happy birthday."

"Thanks."

"May you grow big and strong."

I swallowed several gulps, passed the bottle to Vovchyk, and also lit up a cigarette. The smoke was very blue. The world was very beautiful. The world was turning seventeen and it eagerly revealed all the signs of its maturity. And wine facilitated this process. The frost was intensifying with the night.

"The booze has hardened," said Vovchyk, uncorking the second bottle.

"But, as Ivancha says—the hell with frost and fortified land."

"This wine is also fortified."

"It's wine meant for strong men."

"And for Kripke."

"Shall we strengthen ourselves some more?"

"Let's fortify our souls. All right! Cheers!"

Vovchyk took a couple of big gulps, passed the bottle to me, and lit himself another cigarette.

"I forgot to tell you. Riabchuk sent me a book and a couple of new poems."

"Let me have a look."

"You can take the poems, I've read them, but I'll keep the book a while longer."

The book was a pale orange color and had a Russian title, *Structuralism: Pros and Cons*. I randomly flipped open to a page and read the Russian text out loud:

"'Language is possible because every speaker imagines himself as a *subject*, and designates himself or herself as the *I* of his or her speech. As such, this *I* constitutes a second person which, being absolutely foreign in its relationship to my *I*, becomes my echo, to which I refer as *you* and which refers to me as *you*.'"

"Forget it," said Vovchyk. "Constitutes-shmonstitutes. Drink wine, smoke cigarettes, and celebrate your birthday with me.

I returned the pale orange book to him.

The snow around us was littered with birds' tracks and stained with their droppings. Our hands had become numb and resembled the color of the Soviet flag. It was getting dark but Vovchyk still had a bottle in his briefcase and once again we began to gather kindling. The sky was the color of our hands while the snow resembled a lilac. We drank wine and placed our hands straight into the fire. Our palms hovering above the flames resembled the gesture made by a priest imparting a blessing. We were imparting a blessing. This was a very ancient and very significant gesture. This gesture was provoked by the surrounding winter which, I guess, we loved, because we could not live without it. Whatever you can't live without, you can only love, Andrusia. For example, I cannot live without you. Which means that—

"Don't get off track," said Andrusia. "I know very well *what that*

means. Continue telling your story. I would have loved to have been there with you guys."

"You were still very little at that time."

"Like a fly."

"Oh yes, like a fly, or a little bird." Then Vovchyk says, "Someday we will remember this day. About twenty years from now. And then everything will be different."

"Ukraine will have become independent, Riabchuk will be the editor of a journal, and the two of us will have published our poems and novels in that journal."

And we roared with laugher, Andrusia; we were as drunk as doors.

"Like 'The Doors,'" added Andrusia.

Yes, of course, you know everything. We were laughing so hard that we keeled over, gripping our stomachs. We patted one another on the back, we were burning up, we were mad with the happiness that we had right here, in this hicksville, bird-shit-covered park, more than three thousand kilometers from structuralists and postmodernists; proudly yelling "Glory to Ukraine!" we grabbed handfuls of snow and threw it up towards the sky, bird-shit came back down onto our hats, inside our coat collars, into our gloves, and then suddenly Vovchyk grabbed me by the hand and said in a very odd voice, "Look—over there."

At first I didn't see anything out of the ordinary. The white brick wall glimmered, the pine trees stood covered lightly by snow, the campfire glowed.

"Look higher," he said.

I looked up and saw them. They looked like fruits. But large fruits like that don't grow on pine trees. The only things that grow on pine trees are small pinecones. But these things were very big, very still, and somewhat otherworldly, I felt this at once—that they're from a different realm, that they're nourished by a different time and infused with a space unlike ours; they remained silent, so I assumed that they were sleeping.

"Are they sleeping?" I asked.

"They're dead," replied Vovchyk.

On each pine tree, on almost every branch, clutching fiercely with their claws, were birds; there were lots of them, a great number, hundreds, they occupied the whole park, they had frozen in their sleep, unable to endure the long February frost. On each pine tree and on almost every branch. Tens and hundreds—Andrusia, you can't even imagine it. Dejected, we finished off the last bottle and covered the embers with snow; after walking Vovchyk to the Dankivka bus, I headed home.

Standing in front of the restaurant was my former classmate Serhii, demanding "Your cigarettes or your life" from passers-by; I offered him a smoke.

"Let's go drinking, buddy," said Serhii, "ma-a-a-an do they piss me

off, damn Sovietized bastards—but you're ok, let's do a shot and then beat the shit out of them, let's have a drink, I can't look at them any more, well, you know what I mean, let's go, I'm buying, we'll show 'em what life's all about."

We entered the restaurant and each had a glass of dry red wine, which, amazingly, made me sober.

"You stay here, buddy, and I'll be right back," said Serhii and then disappeared forevermore. It was very hot and noisy there, the waitresses argued with the barflies, the barflies yelled and sang that folk song about Halia and the water that she carried and about the troubles she had carrying it, about the fantastically vivacious Ivan—in other words, everything was as it always is. I got up and left.

By the firehouse stood a kiosk, and behind its broken glass sat stuffed birds and squirrels. They were illuminated by electric lamps, had glass eyes, and held real pinecones in their paws. "There seem to be too many of you here today," I said out loud, and recalled that earlier, about twelve years ago, these very same stuffed animals sat on top of the bookshelf in our nursery school; back then, I had a great urge to reach out and touch them, but my teacher forbade it. I was convinced that if I were to grab them, press them against my chest, breathe on them, and pet them, then the birds and squirrels would shudder, warble, caw, chirp, and start flying and running all around the nursery school and we'd rejoice and chase after them, playing blind man's bluff; often I would dream about this. When father was drunk and mother was working the night shift there would be nobody to pick me up at school, and I would sit with the school housekeeper-cum-nanny and with these birds and squirrels until the late hours. Although she had proscribed picking up the stuffed animals too, one time she did allow it; then, trying to restrain my inner trembling, I began to carefully pet a little starling on its head and I breathed into its eyes, which fogged up but wouldn't blink, no matter how much I wanted them to; nor would the squirrels, or the white-sided magpies, or the crow would blink, no matter what I said to them, no matter what pet names I called them, mimicking my mother, who knew how to converse with dogs, and with cats, and with birds, using a particular intonation that I cannot recreate today. After that, time, I became completely indifferent to all stuffed animals in the world, forevermore.

Searching my pocket for a cigarette, I chanced upon some sheets of paper and pulled them out—they were Riabchuk's poems; I lifted a sheet to the light behind the kiosk and read it, believing my eyes less and less with every line I read:

here I am
my dear poets
trying poetry

oh yes
I too
fall for the ancient temptation
to perfect the world

and so
I try to warm
the frozen birds

to straighten
the tatty pigeon's wings

maybe something will change
the wind will rise
the wings will spread
and the sawdust won't burst out
and those glass eyes
may blink

III

A cold drizzle has been falling for four days straight—the city is drowning in a fog, all of its lampposts predict a catastrophe involving the Italian-style courtyards filled to the rim with floating plants and drowned birds and cats, involving the riverbeds of narrow streets which cannot accommodate the water that pours from the heavens, involving us, who have nowhere to go to chat about Kokh's, Kaufman's and Saienko's paintings over a cup of coffee, or about this accursed downpour, or about the talented and hapless Dem, or about the equally hapless Siur, or about the fact that novels are already being written about us, and that Radio Lux mentions us, and that films are being shot about us, and that ballets and theatrical presentations are being staged about us. This damned, loathsome, eternal, never-ending downpour……...…… ……..…… a downpour that is never-ending, eternal, loathsome, damned, this downpour, for the fourth day—the fourth century—in a row, not abating even for a second, the same thing, over and over: wet stone lions, wet cobblestones, the rattling of a streetcar, long queues standing under umbrellas, and, I quote: "*No one is buying anything, there are no jars, nets, packages, or bags to be seen, people silently pattering their feet, switching from one queue to another like molecules under a microscope,*" end quote, a downpour of stone, ruthless, directly over this city—this last remaining refuge for creative people, artists and philosophers—directly over

these black cats in whose health we continue to announce toasts downstairs in The Nectar bar, directly over these retailers and middlemen. Maybe it's because of them that we have this downpour, maybe, maybe it is because of this endless haggling, a punishment from the heavens, yes, that must be it, but does that make things any better? Any drier? Alcoholic beverages, the Elzbieta church, a downpour of alcohol, a chamber wind ensemble performs a Skoryk composition and Kos-Anatolsky systematically rolling around in his grave, "I'll buy me a phone, I'll call you, farewell my dear, I can't hear you" ……..…….....……
……..……
…….…… Do you hear, Krilyk? Cactus, can you hear it? Chemodan, can you hear it? Yes, son, I can hear it: four days now and it hasn't stopped raining, can you hear it or can't you? Has this downpour plugged your ears and mouths, and certain other orifices that every person has, if they're normal, and which a person—as long as they're normal (Misko, you're not normal, she said to me!)—tries, as much as possible, not to mention in public, of course. What person? Where did a person come from, when any idiot will tell you that up to this point it's been about artists and other vendors, about prostitutes and lions, about cats and plants who exotically float in overfilled, Italian-style courtyards, mixed in with composers; a lot, for God's sake, has been discussed up to this point, but this doesn't mean that some kind of, excuse me, person, must necessarily appear; that, at least, is how I see it, I, Misko, the municipal mystic or the mysterious Misko, if this indeed is a city, and I am I, etc. ……..……
……...……..……
……..…… this person is Trotsky. Trotsky has a hangover. Trotsky's hangover began when it started raining, in other words, it's an almost everlasting hangover. Trotsky, together with his hangover, walks by The Nectar and peeks inside.

But, aside from the downpour, there is nobody. Only the downpour, Trotsky, and his hangover.

And then, Dem appears.

"Down to The Nectar we won't sink,

'cause that's where drunk Dem likes to drink!"

chant Trotsky and his hangover, with hope in their eyes.

But Dem is sober, and instead of having a hangover he has a cat sitting on his shoulder.

"Is that a cat or a *katzenjammer*?" asks Trotsky.

"Yes, it's a cat in the rain," affirms Dem.

"A very important discernment. Do you think he's got a dollar to spare?" inquires Trotsky diplomatically.

"No, he doesn't have one, but I do, and I won't give it to you."

"Well, I don't need your mangy, tattered, lousy, stupid—and possibly even wet—cat!" says Trotsky, getting upset.

"But you do need a dollar," discerns Dem.

"I do. Otherwise I'll die and go insane. First the former and then the latter."

"I'm going to go buy flowers for Ira," says Dem, justifying himself.

"Flowers?! For Ira? Looks like you're the one who's gone nuts, Dem. Why does Ira need flowers, why does Flowa need iras?"

"Because it's her birthday," hesitates Dem.

"Go," says Trotsky to Dem with a blessing. "Go, and don't just go but go f….find Ira flowers. "

Dem continues to hesitate, which proves to be a fatal mistake.

Because at that moment Bielov shows up with a hangover as bad as Trotsky's, but then again, maybe it's even worse.

All six of them lazily greet one another.

Bielov's hangover lazily greets Trotsky's hangover, Trotsky's hangover lazily greets Bielov's hangover, Bielov greets Dem, Dem lazily greets Bielov, Trotsky greets Bielov, Bielov lazily greets Trotsky, Bielov's hangover lazily greets Dem, Dem lazily greets Bielov's hangover, Bielov lazily greets the cat on Dem's shoulder, Dem's cat lazily greets Bielov, Bielov's hangover lazily greets Dem's cat, Dem's cat lazily greets Bielov's hangover, and after everyone has so civilly greeted one another, Bielov says that Ukrainian Affairs has beer.

Beer rules! It kills hangovers. And Dem has money, but Dem is planning on spending this money on flowers for Ira, but a cat is not such a bad gift either, and Bielov quickly grabs hold of the situation and says that his grandmother, who lives in the Levandivka neighborhood, grows as many flowers as there are stars in the sky, and then Dem finally gives in. Dem cracks apart into pieces—at first in half, then into four pieces, then into six bottles per kisser, not counting the cat; and everyone, in a friendly herd, runs knee-deep through the water that is a mix of today's and yesterday's and the day-before-yesterday's and the day-before-the-day-before-yesterday's rainy morning, and the two hangovers glance at each other sadly, because they have been fated to die at this time, to die having drowned in Lviv beer, (they, two hangovers, unhappy ephemeralities, they, the enemies of progress, thought and freedom) the hangovers glance at each other sadly and then smile—they know very well that they are dying today in order to be re-born tomorrow, because they are hangovers, phoenixes and eternal revolutionaries; Bielov smiles, Trotsky smiles, Dem's cat—who will soon become Ira's cat—smiles; Ira will feed the cat eggs, sparrows, milk and cream, and on holidays she'll pour him a couple of drops of valerian; Dem is the only one not smiling; Dem feverishly tries to plan a way out of this situation but each plan leads to beer, every plan, every situation, throughout, always and everywhere leads to—or begins with—beer, every situation, every plan, throughout and everywhere, always and every time, every, every, every, every, every, every, every, every, every, every, every, every,

every, every, every, every, every, every, ev…

Dem spits in anger and is the first to enter Ukrainian Affairs.

IV

This quiet rock music at sunrise, this whispered scream, in which Andrusia, your-my-our defective dreams vanish and fade, transformed into a frenzy of condensed, pocket-sized stadiums recorded on a cassette tape, right up against the heart—both the cassette and the heart can be forgotten; O Lord, thank You that there is at least something that can still be forgotten, boundless gratitude, O Lord, that there at least exists this one "can," which does indeed exist, just as the Lychakiv Bee Garden, the Hlynian Path, and Kavaleriiska Street exist, just like

poems at dawn
the finest

do exist, just as we, after the umpteenth glass of champagne, decided to visit that loner in the swirl of June's flowers, figuring that he was at home, and not at the café, or at the book store, and we knocked on the porch door, and we knocked on the windows veiled by snowy-white and red curtains, and we were in the midst of deciding where else we should knock when suddenly you saw something and started to laugh, rudely pointing your finger; and there, on the windowsill (no, it wasn't Cactus), stood a sign, either pilfered or borrowed from a museum, which announced to those interested, to those engaged, to those eager, to those resolute, to those intoxicated, to those possessed, that "The Exhibit is in Restoration." The Exhibit was in restoration, it hadn't gone to a restaurant, or to The Nectar, it had chosen June, this was a June Restoration, Andrusia, after which must come the July Monarchy. So we decided to announce this major, majestic, magistratically-magniloquent restoration to all those who were also (still) as young and nonchalant as we, and whose intentions also gravitated towards The Dnister or The Centaur bar or towards the underground Writers' Union's Club, or both these and those; and those and these; or those and these and these and those; or, and those and these and/or these and those, because in June people hadn't yet left for the seashore or for the Carpathian Mountains, or for God knows where else; we walked over to the No. 2 streetcar's last stop and you were pondering where was this Restoration that The Exhibit was in at this moment, and from your deep well of cleverness gushed out the idea that this Restoration was being royally consummated by The Exhibit—pretty clever, and I publicly scolded you, and you were publicly embarrassed but did not alter your position, you didn't renounce your views or the words you had conceived, you didn't change a single

letter or mark of punctuation, you didn't compromise your-my-our dreams and visions to transitional, politically correct factors, because it was June, it had been half a month since I had returned from the army, and candles burned in the cathedral, and a priest wearing gold eyeglasses strolled about, and people crept to the altar on their knees and this meant that freedom was ubiquitous and eternal, freedom at the peak of totalitarianism, antiquarianism, authoritarianism, KGB-ism, Cage-ism, exhibitionism and befuddlement, and thus, you read, out loud:

poems at dawn
the finest

they're
like a dream
fading away
to be forgotten

you wanted to smoke, because you've always wanted to smoke, and we foolishly bought a small, clay whistle, and we drank coffee on Skelna Street, summarizing and joking about all the impressions we had developed from what we had heard, seen, and read today, the coffee was bitter, the cigarettes—strong, your slender, little fingers just barely trembled, your lipstick left a trace on the rim of every subsequent cup of coffee you drank, your gray eyes squinted from the setting, very green, and very red sun, your lips uttered words that were a thousand years old, your golden hair steeply hung down—and evening was upon us.

Kaleidoscopic, huge crowds flowed past the Hotel George; azure unicorns with sorrowful eyes from which brilliant reflections of memories and dreams swelled out pulled a lavish, gold-plated carriage packed with drunk generals and no less intoxicated whores, flowering chestnut trees showered ice cream and champagne all over Akademichna Street, elegant porters metamorphosed into lions with yellow and blue ribbons in their cologne-scented manes. We ran into Ivanka, she too was all perfumed-up and radiant and she invited us to go to the Philharmonic for a performance of Kagel's "Hallelujah." "Let's go!" I said ardently. "We're not going!" you said icily, and grabbed Ivanka by the hand.

"Let's go to Pohulianka Park, to listen to the nightingales," decreed Andrusia. "Are you nuts, Andrusia, nightingales in June?!" exclaimed a startled Ivanka. "There's a whole bunch of nightingales there, and fireflies and water nymphs, the spring waters bubble over with rum and brandy there, and pudgy little bears wearing tuxedos serve ice cream and chocolate on silver platters—let's go!" said Andrusia. "Let's go!" yelped Ivanka, but then, suddenly, a German appeared and dragged her away and we went to The Mosquito bar, fiercely arguing about whether Kagel was truly a

charlatan and a dilettante, as you insisted, and discussing other, no less important things as well.

We were already approaching the Opera when suddenly you stopped and commandingly waved down a taxicab; the cab stopped to find out what you wanted, Andrusia. "To Pohulianka," you said, jumping onto the back seat of the cab; furious, I sat down next to you. "Don't be angry, sweetie," you whispered, sliding closer to me, "would you like me to recite you a poem?" The cab reeked of burnt buckwheat, Lviv shimmered past us—but now everything was in reverse: Kohutyk Bar, the monument to Mickiewicz, a mob in front of the Philharmonic, The Nectar, Ivan Yakovych Franko Street, the Krushelnytska Music School, Zelena Street, which is as long as the road that leads into bright nonexistence. Tickling my cheek with her hair, Andrusia moved even closer and whispered right into my ear:

poems at dawn
the finest

they're
like a dream
fading away
to be forgotten

a trail of smoke
from the day's first cigarette
a coarse butt
the onset of a buzz

"I know that poem," I said, slowly moving away. "I'm the one who taught it to you. If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't even have heard about it."

"You sure are rude!" Andrusia said indignantly. "Just you wait. Just wait until we get to Pohulianka. I'll let the wolves have their way with you."

"Well, I'm not going to pay for the cab fare. I don't have enough money to fund the whims of a drunk—and an altogether unbalanced, more precisely, overbalanced, woman."

"Asshole," immediately rebutted Andrusia. "I'll pay for it myself."

"Sure, and what with?" I cunningly smirked, feeling more and more like an inquisitor.

"Jerk-off," Andrusia said calmly.

We got out near the winery. From across the fence empty bottles clattered about and motors roared.

"So, where are your nightingales? Maybe it's actually just your so-called 'crystal' that rings from within the walls of this fantastic palace."

"Shut your trap," Andrusia advised.

The air smelled of acacias and of a potentially serious argument, so I

reluctantly forced myself to shut up. The factory drone gradually subsided and soon we couldn't hear anything but the closest of sounds. *The stars were ablaze, twigs snapped beneath our feet, young leaves rustled, the green-yellow flicker of fireflies sparkled, the spring waters gurgled, an unknown bird shrieked, hops were airing out, and everything was finding its proper place, I followed a barely visible figure, suddenly understanding how good it was that you took me away from that whirlpool of lights and countless human faces, not knowing how to thank you, with what words to convey the authenticity and essentiality of this night in the ravines and forests, between the stars and the fireflies, between the hops and sobriety, between you and me, between a wasted day and this night, which ended up being the daily bread of a wasted day; I didn't know what to say, how to apologize, and then God glanced at my speechlessness, because I remembered that whistle, which we bought, in jest, this morning; the whistle needed to be filled with water and I filled it with the world's cleanest spring water; you noticed that I had stopped walking but you kept walking, further and further, disappearing into the mysterious darkness, immersing yourself deeper and deeper into the stillness of the clouds' dark snow, and in order to stop you, to keep you and bring you back to make peace with you and save myself, I raised the whistle to my lips and blew into it; a nightingale's voice echoed through the forest, shredding the night and alienation in a flash of black-silver lightning; the nightingale's voice baffled the heavy masses of frustrated time and the suffocatingly tight space; they slammed against each other and ignited an unprecedented thunder of sunrise rock music; and a brisk snow tumbled down from the starry heavens, completely covering in just a moment the flowers and spring waters; in just a moment the leaves yellowed and scattered, in just one, single moment we were buried up to our knees in a snowdrift, and the nightingale kept singing and singing, just like Jim Morrison, or Janice Joplin, you stopped as if dumbstruck, I caught up to you, stumbling into holes hidden by the snow and darkness, getting tangled in thickets of blackthorns, blackberries, and syntactic periods, stomping on frozen myrtle berries and the icy yarrow of strawberries, using all my strength to pull my legs out from the snares of determinism, which were slyly laid by evil hunters all over Pohulianka Park; I caught up to you and turned your face towards me in order to sense with my own lips that which the heart was screaming about, muffling the voice of the nightingale; you were crying, well of course you were crying, the weeper, the whiner, the wailer, my beloved and cherished one, my only one, the most beautiful one in the world, which is flooded with snow and with your tears. "If you want, I can give you the whistle" I said; "I do," you answered with a sob.*

We made our way home; in passing the deteriorating gravestones of the Polish Orlęta, Andrusia stopped blowing into the whistle and handed it back to me; it was dawn, a new day was unfolding; the unfolding of a new

day, a day unfolded anew, new, not old, it was not the previous day that was unfolding but a new one, the street-sweeper meticulously swept the pavement in front of the entrance to our building, the mailbox apologetically stretched its empty mouth.

"We won't argue any more today," I declared.

"Of course we won't," said Andrusia, turning the key in the lock, "and you know why?"

"Because we're going to sleep all day. Like those bears that you love so much. That's why. It's winter in Lviv." I said, switching on the quiet madness of Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven*.

"Wow, sometimes you really manage to come up with some extraordinary ideas," Andrusia said, delighted. "But before we go to sleep, listen, listen very carefully because you didn't let me say everything that I wanted to say. So, listen from the beginning:

poems at dawn
the finest

they're
like a dream
fading away
to be forgotten

the trail of smoke
from the day's first cigarette
a coarse butt
the onset of a buzz

rays peeking in from under the curtain
the shadow of a Saint-Simonian slave

Monsieur, have you great things to do? asked Andrusia, looking me straight in the eye.

O indeed! I replied without hesitation.

V

Winter is ever closer. A green desk lamp in the middle of a white and azure landscape with a river and hills, a crystal apple, at the core of which Andrusia hoped to see our future, but saw nothing but a few strands of a rainbow; a stereo full of wonderful music—from classic Pink Floyd to brand-new Bach, which Andrii brought with him from Strasbourg, along with some Ceylon tea and a carton of Gauloises—the smoke of choice for

Alain Delon, who had played Trotsky, that is, the role of Trotsky. *There are more and more yellow leaves outside the window, the early frosts grip the ground ever more tightly*, and a few boiled potatoes left behind in a ceramic bowl on the porch entwine each other with thin needles of bluish frost; you can't decide what to do with these potatoes: it would be a shame to throw them away but it would also be rather disgusting to eat them, they're so rigid and extraterrestrial, like meteors, like weapons, like ammunition for the sling-shots of heavenly Neanderthals. *It's high time to replace the broken window pane, to tape over the cracks in the frame—winter is ever closer*—winter, so beautifully painted by Pieter Bruegel the Elder and then later copied by Pieter Bruegel the Younger, a winter with ice skaters and a bird trap—but for which birds? For those that sit in the surrounding bushes? Are those birds even alive? Didn't they freeze for eternity back in that archaic and youthful February—of which you were so jealous, Andrusia—with its red wine and pale orange structuralists? But anyway; a trap is set up in order to capture live birds, somehow managing to ignore the existence of dead birds; can you hear their chirping? Can you see how hungry they are, how they covetously peck at the seeds that are scattered beneath their captivity, or maybe, their death—so, it is a trap for dead birds, isn't it, birds that will be dead in the future? *A trap to turn the living into the dead! OK, enough of that. There are ever more leaves between the frames, on the floor, in the buckets of water, and even in the cup of tea which was to have warmed you*; but what can cheer you up when, spontaneously and completely, you end up in that panoptic painting by Bruegel, in the sixteenth century?

"It's not the sixteenth century."

"Which one is it?"

"It's eternity."

They're as small as hummingbirds, *winter is ever closer, the air in your enormous apartment is ever more sonorous*; you thirstily gulp down very strong and very repugnant tea, which reeks of motor oil, which is why it is so cheap, you walk across the ice of the frozen Seim River with a cup in your hands; some kids who had been ice-skating run up to look at you, to look at you, to look at you and at how that mysterious drink steams, and at how you attempt to keep your balance on the slippery surface, being careful not to slip and fall and not to spill even one single drop that would melt the ice, ignite the snow and turn into ashes this entire postcard landscape—or is it Bruegel's self-portrait?—a landscape or a postcard, in which you timidly smile at the kids, holding the cup to your heart with all your might.

"Where's your Andrusia?" "Where, oh where, is your Andrusia?" the kids ask mockingly, coming closer and closer, signaling one another, holding fists full of stones behind their backs.

"How do they know about Andrusia? Who told them? Who let them know?" I wonder, moving backwards while continuing to smile timidly. At

that moment one of the stones hits me in my right shoulder, while another strikes directly into the cup next to my heart.

"Oh no-o-o!" I wail, falling to my knees, with my palms trying to gather what spills out in a dark, chestnut-colored blot on the crystalline surface of the hard apple, but it's too late, it's useless, irreparable, unavoidable—willow bushes and poplars flare-up, the white-white-white snow flares-up, the red-black flame licks the hill and the church on top of it, the postcard crumples, it darkens, disappears—*and leaves rustle loudly beneath your feet, as you walk with the cold cup from one window to another, awestruck by the first snowfall.*

A startled Andrusia shakes my right shoulder with all her might, "Wake up already—I beg you, wake up! I'm right here next to you, right here, it's me!" I open my eyes and run my hand across my face—it's wet.

"You were screaming again, it was so scary, you called for me and cried out. What's with you, my darling, my love, my one and only?" Andrusia caresses my head, wipes my face with a handkerchief, and kisses me, and only then do I lean up onto my elbow, look out the window where Lviv's monotonous, heavy rains are pouring down, and say in a voice not my own:

"I dreamt that you were gone; and some kids—you know that demons always appear in my dreams as kids, so obnoxious and vulgar—they asked me where you were, and I didn't know what to tell them because you really weren't there."

"I am here," says Andrusia quietly and convincingly, "I'm here, really, you can touch me, or better yet, kiss me; Good Lord, you're still such a little boy! I do exist, I love you, I love, love, love you, so that I may exist, I exist in order to love you, my soulmate, my love, my one and only, I will cease to exist only when you cease to exist, we'll die on the same day, and on that very day we'll meet in heaven, do you believe this?"

VI

One bright July day, Lord Krishna is standing across from the Boim Chapel selling *The Bhagavad Gita As It Is*, *The Source of Atma*, and some pocket calendars.

But then Trotsky shows up, LOADED.

"Hare Krishna!" says Trotsky in greeting very courteously and very loudly, leaning on the table of books. Exhaustion.

"Get out of here, Trotsky, go away, don't obstruct my work," says Lord Krishna quietly.

But no, Trotsky has already arrived.

"So when are you gonna buy me some BOOZE to settle up for that piece of rubber I gave you?" asks Trotsky threateningly.

"Come to The Nectar this evening and I'll set you up with GALLONS OF BOOZE, but for now, BEAT IT."

"A snowstorm, a snowdrift, a snowstorm," Trotsky starts singing a Belarusian tune in a perfect Belarusian accent.

Assessing the situation, Lord Krishna quickly gathers his books into a bag, comes out from behind the table, and says:

"Let's BLOW OUT OF HERE. You FUCKED UP everything."

And then Bumper ROLLS UP, loaded.

"Howdy fellow drinkers!" the loaded Bumper shouts elatedly. "Trotsky, when are you going to come over to paint those windows?"

"Let's get out of here—now!" says the loaded Trotsky, all excited.

"No, not now. You'll have a drink? I'm buying. There's still time—it's not evening yet. It's not now yet. How about tomorrow morning?"

"You've gone nuts, Bumper," Trotsky shakes his head disappointedly. "How many times have I told you, don't drink so much. And now look, you've gone nuts."

"Why is it that, all of a sudden, I've gone nuts?" Bumper ponders.

"Be-because tomorrow morning we'll be undergoing medical treatment at a hospital bearing the name Ukrainian Affairs. They have I-Vs filled with beer and ampoules filled with port wine, my dear PORTOLLA."

"No, I'm not gonna drink tomorrow. W-w-why are you so zoned out, Krishna?" asks Bumper anxiously.

"Becaus-s-se there's no way I'll be able to catch up to you boys today," explains Krishna with melancholy.

"Don't worry, you have a whole day ahead of you!" hollers Bumper.

And then, out of nowhere, The Nectar rises up, or, maybe, is created, right in front of them; sitting by its entrance are a very pale Dem and a very red Bielov.

"Wa-s-s-s-up Dem, you nut!" yells Bumper. "You wanna have a drink? I'm buying."

Dem doesn't say anything.

"He's gotta have a drink," calmly explains Bielov. "He's FLIPPED OUT and *indubitably* hasn't said a word for three hours."

"Who *indubitably* is gonna go to the store?!" shouts Bumper. "Are we gonna save Dem *indubitably* or not, you fuckers?"

"Stop yelling, Bumper," Lord Krishna says quietly. "I'll go—just stop yelling."

"Shut up, I *indubitably* command you!" says Bumper, becoming frantic.

"Give me THE DOUGH," Krishna sighs.

Bumper gets THE DOUGH and starts counting it. There's a lot of DOUGH, it'll come out to three bottles of PORTOLLA per sucker. Bielov and Trotsky glance at one another—maybe that's a bit excessive, but it's too late.

"Don't worry Dem!" Bumper is signaling with his hands. "You're a

talented artist, you can't be zoned out so much. Your paintings hang in a museum of Ukrainian art in New York, for God's sake, right next to Dali's and Picasso's—you're a genius, Dem, it's not like you're just one of these Trotskys who, for two weeks, has been *indubitably* promising to paimt my vindows, you're a rare talent, if you want, I'll *indubitably* get on my knees in front of you, if that'll keep you from zoning out? *Indubitably?*"

"I have to point out that Picasso and Dali *indubitably* were not Ukrainians," interrupts Bielov.

"What do you mean, they *indubitably* weren't?" Bumper asks disconcertedly. "Well, then, they will be! Everyone will *indubitably* be Ukrainian, sooner or later—you included, you damn Muscovite, even if you *indubitably* don't want this to happen!"

"And everybody will *indubitably* be hung," adds Trotsky.

"That's it, Trotsky, you've pissed me off, shut up, you don't understand SHIT, unless you're talking crap like Trotsky," says Bumper with irritation.

Romko walks up to them.

"Greetings, distinguished gentlemen," says Romko. "Who is it that's insulting Bumper?"

Romko has had an operation and doesn't GET TRASHED anymore, but he still regularly ventures down to The Nectar.

"Romko, being that you don't GET TRASHED for weeks in a row, tell us: Is Dem a genius or not?" Bumper addresses him imploringly.

"Of course he's a genius," says Romko, shrugging his shoulders. "Could anyone ever doubt it?"

"You got that, Trotsky? You got it, you dog?" proudly asks Bumper, and commandingly lifts his finger to the heavens.

And then Lord Krishna, who has already managed to take his books back home, change clothes, and buy ten FIFTHS of Sloviansky wine, a loaf of bread, and five squares of spreadable cheese, comes up to them.

"Let's go to the Green Eye," decides Bumper suddenly. "Why should we stand here SHITTING IN OUR PANTS every time we see another retarded cop? Romko, are you coming?"

Roman stays behind while the rest of the group heads for the trolley-bus, although none of them, except Bumper, really wants to leave this privileged, nectarous affluence. But evening is still far away, the keeper of the Sloviansky wine is Bumper, and it looks like there's no hope in the near future, so Trotsky, Dem, Bielov, Lord Krishna, and Bumper disappear into the depths of Green Eye Park for the sake of conversing with nature and wine, for the sake of heroically preserving the never-fading, liberating ideals of Lviv gypsy life, for the sake of singing and dancing in thick, tall grass, for the sake of reciting marvelous poems, singing rollicking old Lviv *batiar* and other drinking songs, for the sake of standing on your head, puking in the bushes, for the sake of manifestations of a friendship that exists before

and after death, for the sake of permanent hiccups and arguments over the correct pronunciation of the transcendental syllable: "OM," "OUM," "EOM," or "OUN," which escalates into a fight between Lord Krishna and Bumper; all potential supplies of cigarettes are quickly being used up for the sake of reconciliation, towards which Bielov, Trotsky and the eight FIFTHS work most actively, while Dem continues to remain silent, unaware that the ninth FIFTH is now almost empty, it's getting dark, windows, stars and the headlights of trolley-buses and cars are flickering, and someone remembers that soon The Nectar and the corner store will be closed at which point it will be necessary to pay a ridiculous price to Niuska or Franek or some other scum-bag who makes a fortune at twilight, in the evening, and at night; and so the guys jump up from their well-warmed seats, forgetting about Bielov, who is in the midst of a peaceful and gentle snooze, but not forgetting about the last bottle of Sloviansky wine, which Trotsky regrettably smashes against the trolley-bus bench; the gang frantically curses Trotsky and no less frantically tries to calm an extremely incensed older woman, whose back, unfortunately, is now wet with the fragrance of the steppe, of the estuary, of the Dnister River, of golden autumn, of the *Valley of Narcissi*, of the valley of death; finally, they all successfully land in front of The Nectar and take the trouble to attentively count what's left of Bumper's DOUGH; there's enough only for some dribbles, for three FIFTHS but just then Lord Krishna interjects and asks, extending his index finger into Dem's chest:

"Are you gonna talk today or not? If you talk, I'll pitch in for three more bottles, if not, then I'm going home—happy holidays, bye-bye. To sea, or not to see, vot ist ze kveshchenz!"

Faced with such an alternative, the crew shudders and shuts up, and all eyes turn to Dem.

Dem straightens his glasses and dithers.

"C'mon Dem!" Trotsky says pleadingly. "Alright, alright, I'm the clumsy oaf who broke the bottle; but three FIFTHS aren't something you find just lying there on the street, are they Dem?"

Dem takes off his glasses and begins to rub them earnestly with a handkerchief.

"Dem!" says Bumper. "It would be a real injustice if an alented tartist like Dem ended up being the reason for the downfall of all our efforts and hopes."

Dem fills his lungs with the twilight, nectarous air and says:

"Friends! Colle-e-e-g-z! I love you all so much. I am so happy to have such friends. It's not about BOOZE, even though BOOZE is important. The point is that all day I have tried to figure out *what* it was that I wanted to say, because I really wanted to speak, but I couldn't speak, not knowing *what* I was supposed to say; I found it very difficult to grasp the thought that sat upon my shoulders and tugged at my ears; wine has flowed, cigarette

smoke has drifted up to the heavens, Bumper has smacked Krishna, life has passed on by; I sifted through all possible thoughts that might be worthy of your benevolent attention, but they all seemed trite and senseless compared to Bumper's generosity, to Trotsky's unwavering optimism, to Krishman's kind and peaceful disposition, to the sharp and clever intellect of Bielov, who, by the way, seems to be missing. I chided myself with the worst of profanities and confessed to all mortal sins, but I still wasn't able to grab this thought by its tail. All that appeared to me were phrases and I was occupied with these phrases when there was really only one thing that needed to be done: to phrase this thought and express it out loud. We drank all of the wine and smoked all of the cigarettes, we ate our daily bread and our daily cheese, we returned to The Nectar, we sang, danced, fooled around and amused ourselves to our hearts' content, but this thought remained as distant and unreal as the pains of tomorrow's hangovers are today; and I was ready to burst into tears because of my weakness and worthlessness, because I was as equally unable to stop remaining silent as I was to begin talking; at the same time I couldn't say something else, say something just for the sake of saying something, in order to assume a presence in your communicative space; it seems to me that all the ills of mankind, including yours and mine, exist because language replaces thinking: language and feelings are a great substitute, sure, but you can't just live with surrogates and substitutes your whole life; language is like wine, by the way, so go ahead, Krishman, before the corner store closes. Now where was I, okay, language—is wine, and thinking is holy sobriety. Everyone except for Trotsky knows that drunkenness is temporary and accidental, while sobriety is constant and customary; just recall your childhood—how soundly and clearly we were able to think back then, how we were able quickly to grasp every thought and idea that appeared before our eyes. 'Why?' you may ask me, Bumper and Trotsky, my dear buddies and fellow countrymen. Because, I will reply, in those precious times we were not yet inebriated by language, as we are now. It would enter and leave us like sparkling wine, we barely got tipsy and sobered up right away, and henceforth we played with language and it was not frightening or dangerous to us yet because we were still able to think in silence. However, with time, the amount of language that had been swallowed increased, a dependence on language emerged and we didn't even notice when one fine day we transformed into deeply verbal fish stuck in the depths of that ocean known as the signified world. From that time on we could not exist without language like a fish cannot exist without water, which you all know about as well as I do; we began searching for someone to converse with, we started choking on the crystal clear air in which thinking and remaining silent take place; if we couldn't find someone to talk to, then we grabbed books and beat back the need to think with tons of somebody else's words and all sorts of languages, with studies of the eternal dialogism of human consciousness, of the

unfeasibility of existence beyond a communicational environment and other, similar nonsense. You both know very well the Mystic-Lunatic, but you probably don't know why he WENT NUTS; they say that he was hit on the head with a piece of asphalt but that is not the case. He hit himself over the head with the heaviest, hardest of all asphalts and that, as you may have already guessed, was language. Every day he would read more than the three of us put together could read in a year's time, because we only read bottle-labels, and even that we do rarely: why keep reading the same thing over and over again? So, he read a lot, in Polish, English, German, Russian and, naturally, Ukrainian and on top of that he also wrote a lot; he would lock himself in the attic, he has an apartment on Pekarska Street, where in the pre-Soviet days The Pekelko cafe was found—a most important detail!—sometimes he would lock himself up for three or four days and wouldn't come down from that attic, he always read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, you may say, 'Dem, enough already,' but he didn't say, 'Mystic, enough already,' but just read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, read and wrote, wrote and read, he didn't have broads or friends, he didn't even drink beer, didn't even drink coffee, perhaps only mineral water; I was at his house a couple of times and every time I became frightened, very frightened, like when you have of a bad hangover and you're afraid of even the wimpiest guy and you cross to the other side of the street to avoid any confrontation, so that he won't all of the sudden appear with an elephant's trunk instead of a nose and two green-red little snakes won't slither out of his eyes; well, you know what I'm talking about; so even way back then I said to him, 'Misko, stop all your reading and writing, just drop it, Misko, or, I swear, you're going to lose your mind.' Oh, Krishman has returned; did you get it? Good, let's go to my place, I'll finish the story as we walk, the Nectar has long since closed for the night anyway. You don't want to come to my place? You're afraid of Irka? So am I. Well then, let's go hang out in the passageway. So he says to me, 'You, Dem, are a very talented artist, but your creativity takes place in a boundless, mental space, whereas my creativity lives in the world of language. Language is the home of existence.' 'Misko,' I say to him, 'the mental space is a holding-cell for drunks, because there are lots of cops there and there are grates on the windows; but the living world is beyond these grates, a place where trees stand in the sweet hoarfrost, where nests await warm little eggs, where cats scamper and where there are charming, smiling Galician girls, whose legs run right up to their necks and between whose legs glow such beautiful openings, which get moist when you caress them with your finger; the living world is not the place where you jerk off, dripping black streams of sperm onto the white womb of paper, it's where living children are born,

where there is a lot of hollering and clamor, where it smells of their shit and a happy father washes diapers; the living world is a place where your friends scrape together their pocket change to save you, and simultaneously themselves, from total lunacy and deathly depression, which surrounds our colonial life in the empire of the foul and evil hangover, which, just like Lenin, always lives; the living world is a place where I twist the cap off another bottle, where I have someone to tell that I love him, her, them; the living world is a place where there is life, and not the eternity of yellowed scrolls written by those like us, nobodies, who drank & ate, fucked their lovers, and then croaked; none of them found out any more about what we *truly* know, because human self-awareness is limited for just that reason, because it is human; Misko, damn it, admit it—you're a useless creature, you're hoarfrost on the grass, the sun has set—and now, you're gone; admit it not to me, not in words, but to yourself, to your bookish, lifeless, rustling soul; admit it and you'll save yourself.' Well, a month later, our Mystic comes to The Nectar and mumbles to himself: 'A flood, an endless flood, the fourth century, O Lord, where are our horses,' 'the hum subsided and I climbed up onstage,' and 'it's cold in Europe, it's dark in Italy,' well, you know all his little sayings; they took Misko to the Kulparkiv Psychiatric Hospital, and after some time released him and he wanders around like that to this day, poor guy, but enough of that, let's drink!"

VII

Lord Krishna got lost; he was stuck in a very clever snare, which had been fashioned by the demon Vatsasura in the space between the Halytsky Market, Serbska Street and Rynok Square. Lord Krishna became tired and weak, his insides were being consumed in a forest fire, his trustworthy and loyal friends Dem, Trotsky, and Bumper had melted away into that lustrous ocean known as 'bye-bye,' for the sixth time now he walked to the No. 36 bus stop, angrily spat out bitter, burning pine cones and this year's nests, passed the interurban telephone exchange, made a left, walked up Serbska Street and ended up on Rynok Square, but he had ended up on Rynok Square for the sixth time now, that's why he also spat here, at City Hall and at a strange person holding a trident, and at the storefront of the medical bookshop and at the storefront of The Centaur bar; he desperately turned right and was almost prepared to take a first step towards the potential rescue of Virmenska Street, but the demon Vatsasura had strategically marked a white chalk-line, which Lord Krishna could not cross in any, any, any, any, any-any, any-any, any-any-any circumstance, even if that circumstance was World War Three, even if that circumstance was an unexpected Muscovite, Polish, Mongol-Tartar, or Israeli occupation, therefore he again walked down Serbska Street, pretending that he was just

innocently strolling around Lviv at twilight, delighting in its Renaissance, its Baroque, its Gothic and its god-damned Secessionism, he sat at the dry fountain across from the Halytsky Market, lit up his penultimate cigarette and, exhausted, tried to figure out how he could outwit that bastard Vatsasura, but the figuring proved to be unsuccessful, because, from the start, Lord Krishna was tied to the possible outcomes of his own musings, when what he should have done was abandon the outcomes of his thought process, but he didn't know how to do this, he simply forgot how this is done, because he had flipped out, because it turns out the Sloviansky wine was really gasoline, which does not help put out forest fires but instead helps to spread them, distribute them, extend them, prolong them, this may sound exciting but it isn't exciting, it is not ex-citement it is ex-istence, organized with a clear conscience by the demon Vatsasura together with the KGB and the Angolian Secret Service; that simple, that boundless, that dyed-in-the-wool Lviv, with its High Castle Hill, Bernardines, Dominicans, Poor Clares, Carmelites, Arsenal, Lychakiv, Peter and Paul, Pohulianka, Levandivka with Filipovka, Akademichna with Skelna, Kaizerwald with Stryisky Park, and other kinds of marvels, had completely disappeared, and had turned into a disgusting, spat upon and muddled piece of space between two markets, the Halytsky Market and Rynok Square; why don't the militiamen see this, did their eyes fall out of their heads, where are they looking, why don't the government officials—who are presently snoring away in those parts of this ancient European city that have yet to be bewitched by the demon Vatsasura—see this, where are they looking, where, where, where is that dude with the trident—that bearded asshole who is pretending to be Stefko Orobets—looking, but no it's not Stefko, I know Stefko very well, Stefko wouldn't stand all night in the middle of Rynok Square holding the national symbol, Stefko is not like that; Stefko, please get me out of here, get me out of this cursed, bewitched circle, in which the demon Vatsasura frolics, that Indian shaitan, contraband smuggled in by those dark-skinned dickheads studying at the Medical Institute; Stefko, if you are there, save me, because it's time to go home, I want to go to sleep. Lord Krishna began to cry, to grind his teeth and loudly blow his nose. The clock struck three. A patrol of militiamen walked up to Lord Krishna.

VIII

Trotsky pressed on. He didn't know where he was heading but he was moving along quite well and he didn't give a damn about any of the world's demons, whether they were manufactured domestically or imported; the only one Trotsky feared and truly respected was that monster of alcoholic hallucination, the white squirrel; the white squirrel had a puffy tail and four paws, a jittery, well-intentioned animal carrying a crystal shot glass on a

silver tray. He tamed it about five years ago but still hadn't gotten his fill of its extraordinary wisdom and its companionship. It would often visit Trotsky in the most unexpected places—in the bathroom, in underground passages, in the streetcar, in bed; sometimes it would jump up onto the table at The Nectar, sometimes it would run along the bar in the basement of Under the Tower, especially when, as was often the case, there was a long waiting line leading all the way up to the stairs; the white squirrel loved the hangover but the hangover didn't like the white squirrel and this unrequited love stabbed at Trotsky's heart, especially in the morning when all of his favorite hangouts were in the midst of a sleep as peaceful as death; Trotsky kept riding, napping, and sleepily pondering the white squirrel's love for the hangover until someone vigorously knocked on the streetcar window; Trotsky opened one eye and saw that it was Smetana; Smetana died two years ago, having poisoned himself with anti-freeze and Trotsky was well aware of this but, nonetheless, became uneasy. That's why he opened his other eye. Smetana was walking at the side of the streetcar, to the left of Trotsky slept the big, fat hangover and on the shoulder of the hangover the white squirrel had found a comfortable spot and slyly winked at Trotsky while gnawing on a candy stick manufactured at the local Svitoch Candy Factory.

"Well then, it looks like we're all here," Trotsky announced, yawning and looking over Smetana's shoulder into the street to establish his present location. They were now in the Pryvokzalna neighborhood; the streetcar was heading towards the park.

Careful not to awaken the hangover, Trotsky stepped over its flabby knees, which were clothed in black-patterned Turkish pantyhose, and walked towards the exit. The white squirrel ran up to the front.

"I must have dozed off—please stop here," Trotsky said to the driver, who obediently fulfilled his request.

Trotsky hopped out of the streetcar, took a deep breath of the night air, and looked around. Smetana was hiding behind a shoe store while the white squirrel ran along the streetcar tracks trying to grab the streetcar by one of its wheels.

Trotsky's experienced mind brilliantly took hold of the situation in which he found himself; a situation which, let's be honest, was FUCKED UP, the worst and most important aspect of which was the presence of Smetana because the white squirrel and the hangover, their faults aside, were Trotsky's friends, while Smetana, although he also was a friend, was only a friend while he was still alive, Trotsky had vowed not to converse with the dead, no matter how much they wanted this. Trotsky weighed all the pros and cons and realized that this was not the place for such a serious battle and that it was time to retreat to a defensive position, that is, to the circus nearby where his friend Kolia, an artist, lived. He made the sign of the cross as he passed the Elzbieta Church and walked down the street. Coming right at him was someone very tall and fat.

"The hangover," thought Trotsky.

"Trotsky," thought the hangover.

Trotsky strategically crossed the street. This, however, proved to be a colossal mistake because in the storefront, among the frozen-stiff mannequins, stood the elegantly clothed Smetana, carelessly holding a severed male member in his hand; the member was still energetic and jerked about, which Trotsky was able to notice as he once more crossed the street. "MAN, AM I FUCKED UP," thought Trotsky, and spotted an unfinished cigarette on the sidewalk. Ignoring the threat approaching from the rear, Trotsky quickly picked it up and smoked it. He became very dizzy, but the threat was beginning to fade. The circus was not far ahead. But he knew that running was out of the question in any, any, any, any, any, any, any-any, any-any, any-any-any circumstance, and that they are just waiting for him to lose his self-control, to give himself up, like a whore, to the first horror that should appear, one-two-three-four-seven—no, mustn't count, must think of something else; "well squirrel, well you bitch," whispered Trotsky, "well you bitch, well squirrel, I won't forget this, you goddamn cocksucker, I just need to make it to Kolia's place"; Kolia worked at night because the daylight clamor of streetcars and autos threw off his creative thinking; Kolia's studio was in a marvelous quiet basement where white squirrels were strictly prohibited entry because in the cupboard, hanging above a table of paints, paint thinners, and paint brushes, there always stood five or six little bottles of Troinoi cologne, plus a bookshelf stuffed with detective novels, fantasy novels, adventure novels, prose and poetry; but Trotsky knew with the utmost of certainty that neither detective novels nor fantasy novels should be read at this time, that the first corpse or alien monster that inevitably appears on the initial pages of such a book will immediately materialize in all of its infernal beauty among the canvases and easels, winking and waving its finger at him; I must drink a shot or two of the cologne and read something very peaceful, pleasant, and cheerful, ignoring all the possible rustling, screeching, and coughing of the shadows, the murmuring of the diabolic; there must be some light, they're afraid of the light, those bastards, I need to follow the text very carefully—this year, Trotsky had been particularly infatuated with Shakespeare's comedies—and fall asleep at a table that smells of the reliable fumes of paint and paint thinner, or on an old-as-Lviv, springy mattress that stretches across the studio, but not, God forbid, follow the sounds, glance around the room, or respond to any questions.

"You won't escape!" said Smetana loudly and sharply from behind Trotsky's back.

The minus-thirty-degree July chill scorched his skin, his hair stood up and immediately became covered with puffy needles of hoarfrost, but Trotsky valiantly withstood Smetana's unexpected and underhanded counter-offensive, confidently spat out the cigarette butt, which singed his

lip, and made the sign of the cross. Now he knew that the studio was only one hundred and twenty-four steps away. “So you’re thinking of spending the night at Kolia’s?” said Smetana calmly, once again from behind Trotsky’s back, “Well he’s not home, he’s spending the night in the Sykhiv neighborhood, at Ihor’s place, they’re partying away some cash they just made, and you won’t get away, because you want to see how my face has decomposed and how my eyes have rotted out, look over at me, you hear me Trotsky, I’m talking to you.” “Oh, fuck off,” thought Trotsky, but suddenly a big cat, as fat as a barrel of beer, stepped onto the path and flashed its eyes; the studio was only fifty-eight steps away.” “You think it’s a cat?” Smetana inquired in a benevolent tone. Trotsky turned right and walked past the cat without looking at him; “it’s not a cat,” laughed Smetana maliciously; Trotsky remained silent; he could now see that the studio window was lit up and that he was a mere eighteen steps from salvation, but don’t tell Kolia, explain all of this to him tomorrow, just not today. A piercing whistle squealed from behind. “Trotsky!!!” Bumper, Dem and Smetana shouted in unison, but Trotsky was already ringing the doorbell. “Trotsky, you fag!” Smetana bellowed. “Who’s there?” asked Kolia. “It’s me,” Trotsky answered in a rusty voice; the door lock screeched, light slashed at his eyes, there was the smell of freshly-brewed, extra-strong tea and of various paint thinners, Mick Jagger was happily singing. “Come on in, make yourself at home,” Kolia smiled. Trotsky entered and slowly sat down on a chair.

“Kolia, give me something to read,” he said quietly.

IX

When you first returned from Amsterdam and opened the door to our apartment with your key, you saw a picture that—as you admitted to me later—had nothing in common with either of the Bruegels but which convincingly resembled Bosch: the place was a complete mess, the air smelled unbearably of several weeks’ worth of alcohol, tobacco, and God knows what else, the flowerpots were overfilled with the weird stalks of mysterious desert plants and cigarette butts, garbage spilled out of tightly compressed trashcans, a broken coffee mill lay helpless in the corner, Lord Krishna was decisively and relentlessly puking in the bathroom, I was completely loaded and passed out in the bathtub with a rubber mat under my neck, covering myself with your little bathrobe. “Sweet Mary Mother of Bosch!” Andrianna whispered in shock; this, however, was just the overture; you pushed open the door to the room and stopped dead in your tracks: on the couch sat two aliens, while a third rummaged through the clothes closet, looking for some rope with which to hang himself; that was Trotsky, with an unshaven and swollen face, greasy hair, a banged-up

forehead and all signs of *delirium tremens*; you looked at the Martians more closely—they looked sort of like Dem and Bumper but creepier than they ever had looked before, or would ever after that remarkable day; "*a Martian god, long unshaven, wearing glasses with round lenses and always drunk, concerned with writing an outlandish novel and breeding rabbits*," you recalled the words of a poet; Dem the Martian was missing the left lens of his glasses, a cigarette butt smoldered in his beard, his head was tightly wrapped in a towel soiled with soot and tomato sauce, while his feet were bare; Bumper hiccupped and cursed under his breadth, his hands and face were smeared with soot, the whites of his red eyes glistened sadly while blood dripped from his unnaturally puffy, cracked lips. "*But what he likes best is spiritus vini rectificati with Martian tomato juice and rabbits with red eyes, for whom he consistently pronounces toasts*"—these were the words that swirled through your stunned consciousness. They all ignored you, each consumed with his own important matter: Trotsky with a search for some rope, Dem and Bumper with pulling corks out of empty bottles—because we didn't have a corkscrew, we had been forced to push the corks into the bottles, and when this day of reckoning was upon us, it turned out that the recycling center wouldn't accept bottles with corks in them. Thus everyone was rather busy and for a moment you felt awkward for intruding into this event-filled and, in-its-own-way, intimate space. If not for the macabre sounds of the dialogue between Lord Krishna and the toilet, if not for Bumper's cordial monologue and the popping sound that the corks made as they were eased out of the wombs of bottles, then one could say that the silence in the apartment was eerily perfect. "*They can't hear us, nor we them. We can't hear one another, we sit quietly in a little room in mysterious twilight, lips, unheeded, uttering first Martian words, then whole, clumsy sentences…*" You noticed the legs of a couch that had been broken off, a saucepan with something really horrible lying on the desk, books carelessly scattered on the floor, mounds of cigarette ash, a shattered crystal vase, leftovers, potato peels, empty cans of food, window drapes singed at the bottom—ruin, chaos, and decay; you walked up to the windows and opened them wide, sat on the edge of the couch, and smoked a cigarette, trying to decide what to do next—go to your aunt's place or begin the inquest.

"Trotsky, get away from that closet," you finally said.

Dem and Bumper lifted their heads in unison. Trotsky froze in confusion, holding your shirt in his hands. Then they all glanced at one another.

"The white squirrel?" Trotsky half-assuredly and half-inquisitively began to speak in a trembling voice.

"It's a bit too early for that," Bumper reasoned.

"Well then, what is it?" asked Dem.

"Oh, I'll show you a white squirrel," promised Andrusia. "I'll show

you a whole zoo."

"Andrusia," Trotsky deduced.

"Yes, it's Andrusia," Bumper confirmed.

"It could only be Andrusia," agreed Dem.

And all three simultaneously and spontaneously dropped to their knees.

"Andrusia, have mercy! Spare us! Andrusia, don't show us the zoo! We've had enough without that! We can't take it anymore! You're our only hope! We'll be better!"

"Bozos," said Andrusia, sucking in the smoke furiously. "Bearded cretins. Morons. Alkies, Imbeciles, Drunks. Dorks. Bums. My affliction. A fine welcome I get! So much preparation! Burned the midnight oil! Gave it all that you had!"

Trotsky began to cry. He feared for me. He wanted to wake me so that I could run away, but he didn't have the guts to get off his knees. The only one who was able to save himself that day was Lord Krishna. He heard Andrusia's voice and tiptoed out of the house and then hastily escaped to The Nectar.

"Andrianna, forgive us, we're a bunch of rascals; we wanted to clean up after ourselves but we just couldn't stop. We were planning to do it today but somehow we got caught up with the bottles, and, uh, you arrived and we…," Dem explained uncertainly.

"And here I brought you a brand-name bottle of cognac, just like you wanted," Andrusia continued, ignoring him. "And first-class cigarettes, a carton for each of you. And some nice tea. Hellfire is what you'll get from me now. You pillaged the whole house!"

At the mention of cognac and hellfire, the threesome became completely dispirited. Kneeling was very painful, but they bravely suffered through it. As Dem later admitted, they were ready to suffer through anything, even if Andruisa developed a strong desire to set their beards on fire or smash all the empty bottles on their heads, or, like the inventive Gunther Uecker, bang some nails into their heads. But Andrusia wasn't planning on banging anything into anyone.

"Get up off your knees, you nitwits," Andrusia said with concern. "Bumper, go wash yourself—with soap—and comb your hair. I can't look at your idiotic, black snout anymore. I can't stand to look at you guys at all. How do you think you look right now? When is the last time you looked in a mirror? When is the last time that you actually bathed?"

Bumper tiptoed away to go wash up and wake me, while Trotsky and Dem obediently sat down on the couch anticipating their impending fate and concluding that electric chairs would be preferable, or maybe even just one for both of them. As Trotsky later disclosed, he had been this ashamed only once before in his life—in a playground when he shit his pants, too embarrassed to ask to go potty.

"YO, DUDE, get up, *it's a* FUCKING MESS, get up man, hurry up!" Bumper said, shoving me.

"It's the cops. It's the neighbors. It's a fire." I guessed at the possible reasons for the fucking mess, without opening my eyes.

"It's more fucked up than that; it's ANDRUSIA!"

"O-o-o," I groaned, "It'd be better if it were a fire."

(Don't stare like that, because I can feel it: the hair and clothes, the body, the grass beneath your feet, the tree—all burning.

The whole forest is burning as well as the water in the river.

You stand in the flames and laugh. Don't stare like that, because you'll scorch the Sun and the Earth, somewhere far away and unattainable.)

"To bring yourself down to such a state," Andrusia continued her autopsy, "to drink yourselves into becoming pink elephants, to ruin the apartment, to break the couch, to rummage through my lingerie, to singe the drapes… Jeez, dear mother, and these are artists, musicians, poets! To hell with you and your damned music and poetry. Creative artists! The bright, ever-glimmering geniuses of the Ukrainian nation. Dem, take off that towel, right now! Does your head hurt or what?"

"Yes, it hurts," Dem admitted, unwrapping the turban.

"Serves you right. It should hurt even more" was how Andrusia sympathized. "Trotsky, you're the most disgusting of the lot. Go wash up and shave."

"Andrusia, I can wash up but I can't shave—my hands are shaking, I'll slash myself," Trotsky began explaining in despair.

"That'll be great—then you won't have to hang yourself. Beat it!"

Trotsky beat it. Now it was my and Bumper's turn.

"Aha," said Andrusia.

"Andrusia—" I began saying.

"Not a word more, or I'll kill you. Not one sound. I'm going to have a very special and very long talk with you, don't you worry. I'm off to visit my aunt, and I'll be back in three hours. By that time, I want everything here to sparkle, I want to see flowers and to smell the faint scent of lilacs, not your disgusting, male fumes. There won't be a particle of dust or grime, the couch will stand on all four legs without wobbling like Trotsky does by The Nectar, the shit-bowl will glisten, the windows will be washed, new drapes will be hung, the dishes will be clean, the books will be on the shelves, and so forth and so on. All three of you will be shaven, with washed hair and wearing a fresh change of clothes."

"But there are four of us, Andrusia," Bumper pointed out timidly.

"One escaped. Who was it—Krishman? That just makes it worse for him."

"But this is impossible, Andrusia," I uttered.

"What's impossible?"

"Everything that you told us to do."

"That's your problem."

"Ask her for a swig to kill this hangover, ask her, 'cause we're going to die—she's got some," Bumper groaned into my ear.

"Andrusia, give us a drop of something, anything, because we're hurtin'," I whimpered, fiercely hating myself, Bumper, Dem, Krishman, and Trotsky, and even more fiercely loving the unattainable Andrusia.

You looked at me considerately, shook your head, silently pulled a bottle of French cognac out of your bag, placed it on the table, and left. This was the most terrifying moment in my life. If I had had a pistol, I would have asked Trotsky to shoot me right here, right now, just to close out this scene. The fucking mess was obvious, it was touchable, it had a smell and a taste, it hung in the air, inducing serious depression.

"Y-e-s-s-s," Bumper exhaled.

"It's all over," agreed Trotsky.

"A different woman in such a situation wouldn't have contained herself," said Dem.

"Enough bullshitting," I said, "go rinse out the shot glasses."

With trembling hands we raised a toast to Andrusia's arrival. The cognac was fantastic. I poured everyone another shot and we drank to the resolution of the fucking mess. The depression, now disappointed, floated out of the open windows together with the cigarette smoke. Lines became clearer, colors became brighter. Then we each drank one last shot to the establishment of harmonious order in our souls, in our bodies, and in my house, to the idea of Andrusia forgiving me as soon as possible and to the end of this four-week hell. Then we collected our thoughts and frantically began our battle with INSANITY.

We fluttered about like swallows. We pierced the space in and around the apartment with golden arrows. Empty bottles—Trotsky called them "pelts'—were returned for deposit money, which was then used to purchase roses; because there were lots and lots of bottles, we were able to buy thirty-three roses. Floors and windows were washed, legs were screwed back onto couches, trash was taken out, books were shelved, AC/DC triumphantly blared, a whole bottle of air-freshener was sprayed—onto the walls, onto the freshly hung curtains and onto the surprisingly intact carpet; fresh soil filled the flowerpots in which house plants purchased with the left-over 'pelt' money were re-planted; Bumper donated his coffee-mill, which was exactly like the broken one, noticing, among other things, that the only time he had ever worked so hard in the past was in the army, during his first year of service, under the watchful guidance of the Tambov "elders." Within two hours the apartment sparkled with cleanliness and innocence, no one had ever lived here, the only smell in the room was the faint scent of the French air-freshener; there had never been any hell here, hell was elsewhere, not here; fairies lived here. Surprised, we glanced at one another and laughed; we were sweaty, tired, and out of breath. Then we all scattered to our homes

to wash-up, shave, change clothes, put on white shirts and, of course, neckties; Trotsky didn't own a tie so I lent him one of my own. As for me, I filled the bathtub with hot water and jumped in, washing away the dirty remains of the fucking mess from body and soul with an unparalleled joy.

Andrusia arrived four hours later and, for the second time today, decided that she had opened the wrong door. In the clean, brilliant room, decorated with rose-filled vases the sound of an organ quietly playing Johann Sebastian Bach could be heard; candles were aglow, four young gentlemen wearing ties, with faces shaven to a bluish glaze and only slightly swollen, were conducting a leisurely discourse about the works of Van Gogh; a mellow, cozy twilight filled the room, the spines of books glittered in golden dignity, the flowerpots were full of greenery, and the scent of lilacs gently filled the air.

You leaned your head into the doorway and just stood there, as we silently stared at the slender, golden-haired young woman in a white dress who was looking at us; then, for the first time in my life, I became madly jealous of my friends, for you were looking at all four of us with an equal amount of love, with an equal amount of pity, and with an equal amount of forgiveness.

X

By night's end we no longer cared about the September thunder outside the window, about the roar of the wind or the pouring rain. We were running out of cigarettes, and, as is always the case in such situations, we were getting sleepy. Maybe this night was our only chance, the only way—a stormy, September night, with crisp fresh air flowing through the open-vent window; having gone through a candle, a cassette tape, a bottle, and through words spoken and unspoken, Andrusia, O nightingale, my obsession, my delusion. You know that we all write in this peculiar, playful, poetic way. Maybe this was our only chance, the only way. We all write this way and think this way and speak this way because we are all children of our accursed era, wherever the hell it came from. Because all of us are just us. Sailboats drifting on foggy, nighttime seas; stars obscured by clouds in the autumn heavens—half-, it's always half—of something. Andrusia, you know, you must know the way out of this trap. "Gnaw off your leg and escape on the other," says Andrusia, searching through the ashtray for an unfinished cigarette; you're happy Andrusia, you've been happy your whole life, as far back as I remember you, you've always laughed and made jokes. And how far back do I remember you? Seven or eight years—you are seven or eight years old; on the porch in early morning, in a little white dress, with a bouquet of fiery dahlias, with huge eyes and the thinnest of lips, Andrusia, long before that end of a September night. Why did they deprive us of

childhood? Why did they deprive us of youth? Why did they deprive us of life and of soul, Andrusia, tell me, surely you can tell me, you should know this, you should know at least this, you should know at least something? “I know.” What is it that you know, Andrusia? What could you possibly know? “I know that it’s time for bed.” What bed, Andrusia? What god-damned bed, when it’s already six in the morning, seven or eight, when it’s starting to rain outside, when the trolleys have already begun their rumbling along to Pohulianka and Maiorivka, when, as noted above, we are running out of cigarettes—no, in fact we have run out—when there’s an autumn thunderstorm, when you have no answer to any of those thrice cursed—by me, and by you, and by Him, and by her, and by them—questions I asked you, when we have just enough strength to suffer through this all-encompassing absurdity wherever we find it, and we find it everywhere and always, but it wasn’t always like this, Andrusia, you must know this, can you confirm at least this, can you at least provide an answer to this? “Always,” says (yawns) Andrusia, slipping out of her (black) stockings. “Andrusia, don’t lie down yet, wait a bit, I’ll be right back with cigarettes and coffee, and I’ll get some wine, and we’ll make breakfast, and…” “Oh, I can’t anymore,” says Andrusia, diving under the covers and immediately falling asleep, finding another chance, another way, better than obsession or nightingales. She can’t anymore. Well who can, Andrusia, who? Who can?
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And I fall asleep too, right next to you, fully clothed, Tristan and Isolde, the eternal archetype, only the sword is missing, there's always something missing, whether it's cigarettes, a sword, there's only the gray and unsettling morning outside the windows, crows and jackdaws fly by, the Lychakiv trolleys are rumbling along, the curtain is swept by the cold wind outside, sounds die down, colors fade, a soft heap of fluffy and worriless sleep sifts down upon our city and upon our room, how strange ……………
…………………………………………… *O child, little girl, how I loved you so ……..…………..…………………………………………………………*
and later they wander through this snow-covered city, whose name no one knows. They drink coffee in deserted cafes, watch films in deserted movie theaters, kiss in the empty royal castle situated on a nameless river, oblivious to the stares of the majestic statues standing in the niches, oblivious to the echo of the bells and the fragrance of the oranges that roll down from the giant mountain, on whose peak waves the flag of an unknown country; and first we, and then everybody, runs along the narrow street, heading straight for an invisible police cavalry squadron and not letting go of placards on which something is written in an unknown language, in letters, or maybe hieroglyphs, that have not previously been seen; they pop into, we pop into, you pop into a cold hospital and head straight for nurses carrying trays with chicken-like frozen babies with hollowed out eyes, and I cry out of despair, Andrusia, I don't want you to see this ……………………………………………………………………
……………………………I didn't love—I lived as love, as if in you, as if I were you ………..……………………………………………………………
and rolling into the corridors, with shaved heads, are representatives of various countries and nations, Andrusia, Andrusia, if you would just wake me up, if, for once in your life, you would just save me from these impossible nightmares, but you abruptly turn towards a stone wall covered with splendid stalks of purple-leaved, wild grape vines, your shoulders

tremble because you are crying, I look around just to make sure: the rumbling is actually the sound of your executioner, who dejectedly drags an axe dripping with the glimmering-blue sticky syrup of freshly-frozen blood; I'll save you ……
…… *in your pain and in your sorrow* ……
Andrusia, I'll trade my fate or my clothes with you, he'll get confused and won't know who it is that he's supposed to execute, he'll pull out a steel cigarette case and sit down, leaning up against the stone wall, in order to carefully mull over the situation, and we'll escape, Andrusia, we'll climb up a rope ladder tied to an old ash tree, first you, then me, breathing in the crystal air, which has the slightly bitter aftertaste of a young black currant, and this dream will come to a screeching halt, leaving in its trace the strong scent of Valocordin and the quick, winged shadow of fleeting schizophrenia.

XI

But, Andrusia, we will never part. Your golden braids have the fragrance of fresh water, antique rings slide off your delicate fingers, they are the only mementos of your grandmother, your snow-white gown has the fragrance of your exotic perfumes and you want to buy a couple of small, silver bells, but they are nowhere to be found because, in this country, there is absolutely nothing to be found that is worthy of your attention, that is worthy of you, Andrusia. Well then, let's listen to some music. But you don't want to listen to music. What do you want? You want to go and buy a couple of tiny, thimble-sized, silver bells. You're nuts, Andrusia, but we will never part. "What is the smell of freedom?" you ask me while staring out the window, combing out your long-long braids, thick gold with the fragrance of fresh water. And outside the window SNOW is falling. "Freedom smells like chocolate," I lie, but you turn your head skeptically ....
……
……...*Sybil, woman, prickly one* ……
……
……... how can you explain this snow to the bored masses? How do you explain knowledge that one does not acquire but, rather, is born with? To what manuscripts and scrolls will you refer these creatures, who are thirsty for truth, goodness, and beauty, while taking into consideration their undeveloped consciousness, the absence of gestalt in their souls, recalling their animalistic—and, from time immemorial—hatred of form? "You're right. There is no language," you agree. "There is no SHARED language." We are not obligated to explain, Andrusia, we are called upon to preserve. And you know this perfectly well ……
…… *again it falls, again it covers the dark, chestnut-colored earth,*

re-frozen after the thaw, filling in all the empty spaces, where leaves, warmth, life should be; it knows that nothing should remain unfilled, nothing should cool down, and it unhurriedly settles on bare branches of apple trees, on windowsills, it drifts into the birdhouse that you had hung up a long time ago, it drifts into faces and wide-opened eyes and the obediently open, obediently silent heart ……
……..…….. attentively listening to Bach. Do you remember: a green-pink morning in Cracow, May, the bugler on the tower of St. Mary's Basilica, on empty St. Mark's Street, upon which you run barefoot and bareheaded, barely touching the cobblestones and short of breath? From whom are you running? Whom are you chasing? The memory fades before my eyes, the green and pink lose their color, the bugler is playing out of tune, Vit Stvosh's immortal tree is rotting into dust, and you, in shock, step back from the altar. "Have mercy on us, Mary," whisper your lips, chapped from the cold winter air; out of habit, you try to fix your hair—your hand touches the coarse bristle on your head, which has the texture of a man's several-days-old beard. "They won again," you say to me in confusion, not comprehending the SNOW that is heaping up outside the sharp and narrow windows ……...……...
…….. snow, sprinkled with salt, sand, and yet still uncertain, insidious; snow, littered, stomped on, scorned, will nonetheless melt one day, it will resurrect, it will become clean, leaving them with their salt, sand, dirt, and discarded wrappers, their uncertainty, their insidiousness ……..
……
…….. there are very many of them, all the same height, with high cheekbones, slanted, fat-covered eyes, with a lackluster yellow skin; they're dressed in camouflage; at first, this interests you, you address one of them, then another, and another, but they don't understand, or at least they pretend they don't understand, the English language. You get bored, you get into a car, you want to get out of here, to go to a place where they aren't, where there isn't even one of them, you want to forget about this unpleasant adventure, you turn on the radio, but Munich speaks their language, as do Paris, London and Melbourne. Now you understand the sense of that dream: the slogans on the placards were written in their language, SO THAT THEY COULD UNDERSTAND WHAT WE WERE PROTESTING. But there is nowhere for you to go from here, because 'from here' is everywhere; and you cry sullenly, leaning upon the steering wheel, O Andrusia, my obsession, O Nightingale ..……
…… *Sybil, woman, prickly one ……*
…….... "This can't be real," you sob, "this is all just a nasty, horrific dream, I'll just wake up and everything will be back to normal." You wipe away your tears and begin to think it over. You need to wake up, but how will you do that? Carefully you pinch your left hand with the tips of your nails—you dream of pain. After

hesitating a bit, you open the car door, stick your fingers into the crack and slam the door, shrieking. You dream that your hand is being flooded with blood. From this kind of pain one can lose his mind, let alone wake up. Damn it, something is not quite right. You look at your watch, but the watch has stopped. You look into the rear-view mirror with terror, but nobody is there. "Ah, it must be a dream, because this is impossible," you breathe a sigh of relief, oblivious to the bright, cherry-red drops of blood dripping onto the car seat ……..……. ……...…….. How can I save you, Andrusia, advise me, answer me, respond to me, I'll do anything you ask me to. "Physician, heal thyself," Andrusia advises. You always give good advice. A fresh wind from the Dnipro scatters the fallen chestnut blossoms, the columns of the red university building drip with a creepy light of blood and fire, you dream of nationwide public meetings and political rallies gathering hundreds of thousands, of trash cans overturned by protestors, of newspapers and hunger strikes, of radio for morons, of television for oligophrenics, of idiotic commercials, of banquets for swindlers, of the inexorably growing anger of the masses, of the final days before a civil war, of other ways out that are better than obsession, than the nightingale, and of other delusions; of a populace which will never became a nation, of the Empire of Ukraine and so on …….. ..……..... "They won again," you say to me, failing to understand, not understanding that SNOW which is heaping up outside the sharp and narrow window in our room, coating equally the virtuous and the godless, the victorious and the defeated, that only SNOW, only it, itself, heals the soul, while everything else kills it, that only the first, unbelievably white SNOW is the true savior, and victor, that only SNOW is attained by worn-out mystics through their contemplations, only SNOW, only fire, only love—"*and everything is the same, everything is what it is, and nothing more, everything is the heart of SNOW, the foretaste of it, the forethought of it, the foretelling of cleanliness and silence*"—but you don't understand this, and again I begin to explain to you: look, can you see these live branches of Breugel's trees above the precipice, these weary dogs, eternally returning from ever-fruitless hunting, these hunters not yet old who passionately breathe the aroma of pine trees, do you see the greenish and diamond-hard block of ice below the legs of the skaters; look, finally, do you see this *snow* this eternal, this ever-forgiving *snow* of Bach and Breugel, look, do you see, do you see *yourself*? "*Myself* I do not see," says Andrusia, disconcertedly.

XII

Bielov and I met by The Nectar and started counting the money. There was a lot of money. I was bidding farewell to Lviv. It was someone's birthday—not the Stork's in Riabchuk's story, but the 'birthday' of aerospace—and we set off for "Dem's Kitchen." As always, it was across the street from the Intourist hotel. For starters, we took a couple of bottles of beer and went out onto the street. The warm April breeze drove several flocks of slender-legged Galician girls past us, it flipped through the pages of busy, pleated skirts, it told fortunes with the colorful tarot cards of exquisite dresses and, looking back with fading youth, waved farewell with the supple seaweed of the fragrant girls' bodies. I loved them all. Bielov loved beer. That's why we got two more bottles, and soon Dem appeared before us; his beard and glasses were a convincing attestation that he too was sad, for above him Spring hovered with a skirtful of roses, because above him swam cupids, offering salutes with thousands of golden, sunny arrows which ricocheted off shiny storefronts, drying out the heart and lips, and so Dem wanted to drink, and The "Peretiah" store was selling Sloviansky and the words of a poet circled importunately through the consciousness, pierced by the blinding April luster and indolently spilling over from bottom to top and then back again: "*With chapped lips you kiss the arrow-head—you're insane*"—we had a lot of money, Dem was tormented with thirst, Sloviansky was available right across the street, so why shouldn't we end up where rituals in honor of the glass god had taken place for over a year; even more so, because we still had a full ten hours before the train was to leave, a whole tankard, you might say, of idle time; so the half-empty temple the common people call Ukrainian Affairs ceremoniously and mundanely opened its glass doors for us. "*You reject all faiths—you abandon love and search for a religion that suits your soul*"—and this was the last communion before the long trip into the Alps, where crazy Hölderlin wandered, in search of Dionysus or Hercules, Hercules or Christ, Christ or another opportunity to get together with Suzzette, with Suzzette or Andrusia, who has been watching me from Stuttgart, simultaneously finishing her term paper and sipping rosé wine, which we all despised, preferring, with an extraordinary stubbornness, Sloviansky or vodka, vodka or beer, or beer and Sloviansky which was stronger than all the rosé wines in the world, but vodka was even stronger than Sloviansky, so why shouldn't we end up in the quiet jungles of Stryisky Park, together with two bottles of the abovementioned vodka, with bread and fish, taking into account, moreover. the fact that we still had eight hours before the train was to take off, a whole ocean of sunny time mixed in with young leaves on branches and singing birds, which were performing the works of Hafiz, of Khayyam, and of other, even lesser-known poets, which had been set to music by Bumper, who had crystallized before us near the closed-until-

Judgment Day "Munich" bar and, seeing me, loudly sang for the whole street named after the immortal Ivan Yakovych Franko to hear: "He sold us out for a babe," but then exhibited an utterly noble and, it can be said, natural desire to help carry the bag of booze; a multitude of legs and smiling lips stood at the No. 4 trolley-bus stop, but: "*no longer will you compare women's lips to roses, clothing, or wine, not to mention rubies;*" indeed, it wasn't rubies we had in mind then and there, on the steep bank of the sparkling stream with a temperature of forty degrees—was that Celsius or Fahrenheit? Forty proof, Bielov concluded, and we joyfully celebrated this unusual scientific discovery, for this was a day of scientific discoveries and of conquering the cosmos, the last day that we would be together, because after that day, as Vovchyk pointed out in his novel, "many were bitten by the white squirrel, some counted off their final years at 'nut-houses' or at the drunk tank, and there were also those who found their own less than completely seaworthy little boat called 'taking an active role in life' and, armed with the oars of 'a healthy lifestyle,' set out onto the stormy sea…"—end of quote. And so, six hours remained before the train's departure, not really that much time anymore, but not so little either; the same could be said about the money, but what is money? mere trash, and, let's be honest, what is our life if not a Game, as Trotsky, who was standing by The Nectar for some reason, logically observed; and so, we stopped arguing about the size of the ozone layer above Australia and began the second half of that Game known as life, a Game fiercely hazardous, and, sometimes, fatally uninteresting, with busy skirts and colorful dresses in the background, with a soft, warm April breeze up above, where puffs of clouds hung motionlessly, accurately executed by Botticelli, where trolleys rang their bells, where "My dear wine, my dear red wine" was sung, where Krishna felt queasy and represented "*The universe, ill and in pain*," a minute earlier having admitted that he was the father and the mother of this shitty universe, its foundation, the syllable "OM," and, correspondingly, also the Rigveda, the Samaveda, and the Yajurveda; armed with menacing, and even vulgar, words the vicious sons of tsar Dhritarashtra of Filipovka showed up, and they wanted to hurt Lord Krishna because it seemed to them that it would be the proper thing to do, but we understood that we couldn't just stand back; I couldn't stand back, neither could Bumper, nor Dem, no, even Trotsky couldn't just stand back, and the first among us who couldn't just stand back was Bielov, who fashioned his favorite weapon out of a broken bottle of Sloviansky; and you fought like an incensed and furious tiger, like a round, huge and impetuous monstrosity, and now: "*you hear moans and groans, wails and blood—from all sides*," but there are a full four hours left before the train's departure, loads of time, during which it is possible, in some manner, to lick or wash, and bandage the wounds, rescue the bodies of the fallen, get a few more bottles of something or other—which wasn't going down very well already but nobody seemed to notice that—and celebrate an

ancient Slavic funeral feast, and continue seeing me off from Lviv, a parting for a long, long time, possibly forever, now and forever, amen, because a woman is waiting for you, a woman for whom you traded in your most loyal champions, and a foreign land, unknown, overfilled with attractions and temptations, wealth, democracy and rosé wine, AIDS, and other extraordinary things, abandoning this country, forsaken long ago by both God and people, a land that is destitute, idiotic, insidious, cruel, naïve, sentimental, honest, mendacious, in one mOMentous word "Slavic"; "*you see a woman with wind-blown hair and in parting you talk about meeting—you are not to blame, you're not to blame for anything—you're dreaming*," you're dreaming about this ancient city, these neglected cathedrals, these tiny cafes, this ruining of the spirit, this abandoned place, "*where dust is lifted by bodies, where the winds are the sighs of unseen passers-by, where other captives died*," over fifty million of the drunk, the sober, the virtuous, the aggressive-and-sick, the polite-and-healthy, the geniuses-and-collaborators, the dissidents-and-the morons, the brothers-and-prostitutes, the sisters-and-rabble, in one mOMentous word: the Ukrainians; "*right here, right in the middle of your street you sense an arrow in your chest, its golden arrow-head in your heart.*" "Don't worry" says Mistyk, pensively flipping a young dandelion through his fingers, "don't worry, there's a cabaret troupe with that name, maybe everything will work out, don't worry, we'll smooth out the road for you, and the farther you travel, the more you'll see; if you stare off into nothingness, if you get upset, think of me, brother;" "don't worry" says Bumper, saluting you with a freshly-opened bottle of Sloviansky; "don't worry" says Dem, holding up Krishna's body which, in turn, is holding up a head wrapped up in two facial tissues and, like an echo, repeats "don'tworryOMdon'tworry"—and then fades out; "don't worry," says Trotsky, lighting up the wrong end of a cigarette, "we'll see each other again, and you'll tell us how you're doing, and we'll see how you are." "Don't worry," joins in Bielov, "the land will be ours; and the sky too." They have lined up in a row on the railway platform and offer me their praise, placing their hands on their bare, foolish heads in a salute, passers-by notice them, look askance, and whisper, searching for a cop, but they fear not cops, nor these nervous gazes, they're no longer afraid of anything, and, for the first time since all of this began, I think of counting how many of us there are and with fiery amazement I realize that there are seven of us, a nice number, a lucky number, a mystical number; seven samurai, seven dwarfs, one of which has decided to set out for Snow White; seven apocalyptic ("apoplectic" says, the uncorrectable—"Uncollectible? Then send me to the recycling plant!"—Trotsky, by way of timely correction) angels, six of which are standing on the Lviv railway platform, which drifts out into the enduring past, and the eyes of the angels are, without exaggeration, tearful—FOR REAL GODDAMMIT, I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES—and I wearily sigh, because I'm tired of explaining obscure or self-

sufficient, maybe banal, things, what I'm explaining to you is that these are not, in any way, drunken tears, and these angels aren't drunk, because angels never get drunk, even in their heavenly pub; and later, waking up at some unknown shade of railway Dao, listening to the banging of the wheels and the contemptuous cough of smoky lungs, I look out the window and see how "*stars of tears warm tears fly by along the dark sky stars of tears which don't shine*," and I see an unfamiliar, ever new, ever ancient land and, just before I fall asleep again, I come to realize, in amazement, how beautiful my farewell with Lviv and its *winter* truly was.

End of Book One

Translated by Mark Andryczyk with Yaryna Yakubyak

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conversations with God

Bohdana Matiyash

2

lately we've been left to divide the fish at midnight o Lord
during the day there is not time not patience enough to wait for you
until you are supposed to come during the day the thought does not even
surface sometimes that you may be nearby during the day the fish
root in the earth with their heads during the day the fish root firmly
in the earth with their heads waiting for you for me waiting for when
I shall hear that you are speaking to me my God

and also my Lord during the day bread never gets baked
I cannot even say what hinders it maybe constant hot weather
maybe I am just afraid it will get stale too soon
after all maybe I just forget that you asked me
to prepare us at least a modest supper
to add to the fish and bread some wine and olives
listen Lord why do you never want to remind me during the day
that the evening is close that the night isn't far behind that you my God
would also like to rest though forgive me Lord
I am speaking nonsense again you needn't remind me of my own invitation

you will probably get angry at me but I confess that I accidentally unlearned
how to press grapes my God or maybe not maybe I just missed the time
of their harvest do you remember my Lord those transparent amber clusters
remember how we walked in the vineyards and you kept saying a little
longer and they will be ready to be picked recently I saw that the vines
had withered I totally forgot to water them I stopped attending to them
and besides I listened so indifferently to your request for olives
that now I have nothing to serve you

when at midnight I finally recalled that you were to come when I heard
your steps on the threshold but tell me how long you stood there waiting for
me without even calling when I hugged you Lord hiding my face
wet with tears on your chest when I asked at least today

let there be no miracle why do you always have to do miracles for me
why can't I manage to wait for your coming like normal people
why every day do you give me so much why o my Lord

you just hugged me just wiped my tears my God and you said
don't take it so hard it is only a pity that we have to divide the fish
at midnight when even the bread tastes different and we cannot have
a real banquet you shouldn't eat so late at night and then you go quiet
you sit resting your head on your palms and watch me eat the last crumbs
wearily put my head on my hands and fall asleep exhausted

you know my Lord the worst is that I never have time to thank you
even for the supper just after I fall asleep you probably still do the dishes
because in the morning in the kitchen there are no dirty plates I don't know
what else you do while I sleep or when you leave the house I don't know
why you never come for a visit while I am having breakfast or is it that
in the morning when I am not yet fully awake I just don't notice
your presence

Lord maybe it's better not to multiply this bread so persistently maybe if
you feel compelled to do a miracle every time just give me different eyes
to see you different memory a different voice to speak to you because you
hear how it trembles and fails gets caught in the tree branches stretches
and ruptures o God

maybe my Lord just come more often maybe don't wait until I open the
door maybe come in without knocking maybe just drop in it does not matter
my God whether empty-handed or with rivers full of fish or with rivers
of milk or maybe just never leave me my Lord

7 (10)

just a little more you see and I will be able to speak to you differently
than before though to tell the truth it is a very strange feeling as if
you are learning to walk anew as if they are giving you crutches but do not
stretch out their arms to at least help you up as if you meaning I am being
checked out of the hospital though you know I was never admitted to
a hospital and for that reason I don't know anything about such a feeling
I only know very unexpectedly and unusually that responding to you
covers a greater distance than to God at least he hears right away
what I ask him and what I tell him it is so strange to tell you about him
and him about you you know my room these days reminds me of a fish

bowl though it seems to me for some reason that the walls are bent inward
this is probably due to the lighting and my fatigue though I don't know
either its nature or its origin sometimes while falling asleep in this fatigue
I think I have already told you both too much I should have given you
a ship as a gift you would stow all my tales all these stories of mine
in the hold and finally one day you would sail out to sea and jettison
them as fish food and later maybe you would sail to a completely
different shore with rivers of milk and honey tell me why would you
have to return from there just imagine yesterday while writing
these lines I simply fell asleep I just lowered my head into God's palms
I just got tired of pestering you and him with my stories at least for
yesterday there was more than enough of them you know this morning
for some reason I was imagining that my heart resembles some fruit
something like an almond or a pod with a million different colored seeds
and different smells and right when one seed rolls out and loudly hits
the ground and the ground begins to shake you have never seen this
you are always rather far but if you want have a talk with God ask him
how many cities are destroyed during these local earthquakes for he has
seen them all from first to last yesterday these seeds were rolling and
rolling out one after another and falling into the ground so quietly as if
into cotton for the first time they fell quietly for the first time I just fell
asleep on the word return

10 (32)

so unable so unable was I either to speak or to see tell me God what have
you done with my eyes so unable was I to tell you anything except what you
heard without my saying it except my God tell me what you want from me
you heard my Lord you always know full well what I am asking you

so much I told you with my thoughts great waterfalls would flow if all my
words to you turned to streams of water

my God you are silent though you know that I don't know how to hear you
when you don't speak when you are so firmly not saying a word

you wait so long for some things my Lord until the maple sprouts turn
into powerful trees until the waters of the rivers flow back to their springs
until a mountain comes to another mountain and the abysses close as if they
never existed my God maybe then you will speak maybe then but will you
be speaking to me will I last long enough will I still hear your voice my God

what have you done with my eyes that they cry with such anguish what have you added to this water that it is all sweet like honey and when it falls to the ground it nourishes the grass and flowers planted by your own hand

what do you want my God when you let lips smile heart feel joy eyes cry what o what do you want such tears have never flowed they have never flowed out like water from a spring I have never thus become a tree on which there are leaves my God and dew and fruit what else do you want I have already been for you everything you wanted the earth and adam's rib

I have already been only a voice only a thought merely an intention and yet my God I will become a sound just a breath o God also just memory a leaf of ripple-grass to ease your pain as you look to all four corners of the world to ease your waiting for those whom you love

I beg you make them my brothers make everyone whom you embrace before the sunrise and whom you guide all day until the very sunset and over whom you watch while it is night while even the brightest streetlamp lacks light call them my sisters

just do not grip my heart in my chest like the core of a tree trunk and do not let me vanish like wild poppies that wither after being picked too soon look how the skin of our palms and leaves is the same look how this purple color suits them and then I shall show you my scalded body and arms

my God you for whom my heart so yearns talk to me with unfurled flowers of lilies with transparent water of lakes with the wrinkled hands of beggars and the eyes of bums teary from the wind I so pine for you I so yearn to be with you I so much yearn for you my Lord

17 (59)

and now leave me and now allow me to go and now tell me that not everyone here is tired and burdened and I won't believe you and who will tell us all that he will relieve our burden soothe all our pain calm our hearts that he will reduce this fever this high fever from which our lips crack from which we want to save ourselves with honey and vinegar wrap me my God into some cool wet sheets and let this moisture be unequivocally life-giving because if not you then who will give us this relief but first leave me alone just leave me with my dead body one on one I want to have a good look at it I want to see how you my Lord will breathe life into it and how it will choke from too much air and you keep walking around to look at

your dead trees dead women next to dead gates at blind owls flying in the
blaze of day in the suburbs at small bear cubs in the zoos 'cause where else
will you find bear cubs here go look at the animals that hide by squeezing
between dirty boards and under stinking sand among garbage and stones
covering their heads with their bleeding paws where the animals cry
licking their burning wounds go where I never go because there my heart
becomes very fragile very tender there it breaks out of love and pain
there it starts to resemble a delicate piece of chinese porcelain friends
brothers and all the rest just leave me for a while I will also close my eyes
I will also cover my head with wounded paws I will also listen how from
under my heart blood pours the rust-brown blood of an old shaggy bear

21 (64)

every pain if you wished it my Lord could turn to joy
when the world falls asleep and when I cannot distinguish your features
I think how joy feels to the touch what color it is and how it smells
I think how the human smile is born and how it dissolves just tell me
why it dissolves my God why can't it disperse across the sky like a
seven-colored rainbow or spill forth in the chirping of birds it would be
so nice my God so endlessly happy so transparent you know sometimes
I think that you created this world with amazing joy and then I get so
sad that among your mountains and rivers birds and animals fish and bugs
trees and grass there is so much pain that day and night and morning
and evening are filled with it and it shows up even in the sweetest embrace
I think of those who are grieving and those who are rejoicing and those
who are dying and those who are being born those who are giving
and those who are accepting you know their slightest move each thought
each breath from first to last and also you know how overwhelmingly
and sharply I now feel every joy and how I live every loss how I
suffocate among false things and how few real ones I have how I am
afraid to do harm and afraid to hug because to hug is sometimes the same
as to harm teach me my God to turn all these pains to joys if you teach me
I will almost not want anything I will almost not ask for anything
I will almost not need anything if only you will wish this my Lord

27 (83)

the love that comes tells me to keep giving
wraps a wool scarf around my neck
pours candy and nuts into my cape
as in childhood

watches over me like mountaineers over their fire
wounds me like a branch of wild rose
gliding its hand it says your skin is so thin
your heart so tired

Translated by Oksana Lutsyshyna

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Much Ado about Nothing

Ivan Kernytsky

Our friend Ivan Stepanovych came into the room after everyone else was already asleep. It might have been 11 p.m, or it might have been one in the morning. He had yakked and joked in Barrack 9 until late. He'd been at a christening.

Any other person accidentally finding himself in pitch darkness would invariably have staggered into some bucket of filth or become entangled in the clotheslines, like a fly in a spider web, or even stumbled with probing hands into the wrong family hearth.

Our friend Ivan Stepanovych was not that kind of person. Even though he had been godfather at the christening and stayed very late, having personally communed with more than one glass of beverage, he moored at his cot safely, without any adventures and on his own steam, with no help from anyone. But just as he was about to lie down to sleep, he smacked his forehead on the bed-frame so violently that the whole block shook and plaster sifted down from the ceiling.

"The devil take you!" mumbled our friend affably. Then he lay his weary head on the pillow stuffed with sawdust and instantly fell asleep like a rock.

I'm not denying that at the very moment when Ivan Stepanovych plowed his forehead into the bed-frame Madame Yazychynska was already asleep and that the thunderous crack ringing out in the middle of the night ripped her forcibly from the sweet embraces of Morpheus. But it is equally likely that the good woman was not sleeping but simply lying there, perhaps even waiting for an opportunity to launch her organs of speech into full operation. At any rate, the good lady immediately sat up in bed and began jabbering.

"Who the devil is making such a racket? Who's slamming doors at night and not letting people sleep? Oh merciful God, not only is there not a scrap of peace in this bedlam in daytime, these blasphemers don't even let you shut your eyes at night. Who's running nocturnal excursions out there? What are these nightly promenades, I'd like to know!"

The good lady fell silent and listened. It was quiet. The hall slept on.

Hidden in this ominous silence was the harbinger of an approaching hurricane. All might have ended well if someone had given a sympathetic sigh of solidarity, or at least muttered sleepily, "Oh, yes, yes…You're so right, good lady." A lot of people talk in their sleep, don't they? For

example, Mr. Tsvirkun, patron of literature and arts, who occasionally assists during Holy Mass in the camp’s tiny church and sometimes recites the entire Confiteor in his pleasant baritone… But this time, alas, no one uttered a peep. Everyone kept sleeping as if in a morgue.

This outrageous indifference and unresponsiveness from the hall affected the good lady painfully and, naturally, spurred her to further ruminations.

“I want to know who’s slamming the doors so hard that the barrack is shaking. You don’t have enough during the day that God gives, you rapscallions, so you kick up a row at night, too! You’ve got too much bread! Emigration is much too kind to you! At home you never had it as good as you do here, in a foreign country. Sure—you thump around until late at night and then laze about in bed until noon! Hey, you DP lords, don’t get used to this aristocratic sleeping-in, because one day back home it’ll be hard for you to wake up at dawn and go to the barn with a lantern to muck out the cows! Sweet Jesus, has anyone ever seen the likes of this? People converge from everywhere in the world, but no one does a thing! This one speculates, that one distills moonshine in a bunker; this one puts on shows in the theater, and that one goes and gets married. What people! Every week, three or four weddings in a single barrack! And the boozing! The music! The singing! And the carousing until dawn! And how many politicians have proliferated now, and how many patriots! In every room, behind every folding screen, they’re building Ukraine, but there’s no one to sweep out the courtyard! Oh, this kind of idleness will not end well! The person who created UNRRA was certainly misguided! A cane should be taken to these spongers! Chase them out to work, instead of fattening them up on tins of food!”

The good lady fell silent. She was all ears: no reply. Some twenty-odd émigrés in the hall were snoring, snorting, sniffing, and wheezing in a friendly chorus, if rarely in the same key. The most raucous snoring was emanating from the corner, where our friend Ivan Stepanovych was sleeping the sleep of the just.

The good lady felt a gnawing pain around her heart, and a dull grief crept to her throat. No, this silence was intolerable, and hateful! In this hush the good lady Yazychynska felt so alone, so miserable, and so aggrieved that she was powerless to stop herself from crying bitterly. She began to weep.

“Oh my God, why did I come here? What evil hour transported me from Tluste to such a distant world, all the way to Bavaria? Here I am, as alone as can be—with no family, no relatives, and strangers all around! Oh God—oh God! Did I ever think that in old age I would have to wander around and live in poverty, in louse-ridden barracks, or peer from behind wire fences, like a monkey in a cage? And what kind of honor or pleasure is it for me to look at those demolished Kraut buildings, at those ugly

Germans, and those Americans, white and black, whose jaws keep going back and forth like a hinge because they’re always chewing on something!”

S-l-a-a-a-a-a-m—b-a-a-a-a-a-a-m!

Something solid and heavy, like a lump of coal or even a heavy military hobnail shoe, had whistled noisily through the air and with a deafening crash had collided squarely with the good lady’s nightstand, on which a half-liter glass with her false teeth was standing..

Naturally, the good woman began to shriek:

“Help! Somebody save me! This is outright brigandage! Which of you bandits is throwing shoes? Police!! Call the police!”

“Oy, oy! Who’s being slaughtered there?” groaned Mrs. Triska, who had been sleeping nearby, which is why she was the first to wake up.

“I’m being slaughtered! Murdered! Executed!” shouted her husband sleepily in a voice unlike his own. Mr. Triska, M.A., was a geography teacher at the camp’s high school. It should be noted that Mr. Triska, M.A., was occasionally plagued by frightening and uneasy dreams stemming from the time when he was captured by Red partisans in Slovakia and escaped death only by a miracle. Since then the miserable wretch was constantly dreaming scenes of executions, tortures, and all manner of horrors.

The desperate cries of the poor Master of Arts woke up the entire hall. The little children launched such a symphony that they could have put an entire orchestra of alarm sirens and trumpets of Jericho to shame. From every corner and from behind every folding screen angry protests, grievances, complaints, and heavy curses fell profusely on the head of the good lady.

Meanwhile, after a concerted search the good lady found her false teeth, and then she made an official announcement with content as follows:

“Just so you know—I’m moving out of this lousy camp! What will be, will be! I’m going back, going back home! Don’t try to stop me, and don’t plead with me. Nothing will help! Tomorrow I’m going to go and see the commission!”

“Kindly do us the terrible injustice of going to see it tonight!” someone advised her.

“Lord, take her away to some other Zone—right now!” sighed some of her closest neighbors.

Naturally, these were only fervent wishes, because the good lady had often “moved out” and “set off” but never farther than from the room to the corridor and back into the room. The same thing happened this time. Without further ado, she packed up her belongings (in about twenty-eight trunks, sacks, and boxes), carried all that junk into the corridor, ensconced herself on it like a laying hen on her hatching chicks, and sat perched there until morning.

And so what if she was perched there? No one was able to sleep anyway. Their sleep disrupted, the impassioned and irritated residents of the

hall could no longer keep their nerves in check or maintain their spiritual equilibrium. Passions overflowed like rivers flooding their banks, while arguments and quarrels flared up like sparks! In no time at all, everyone was embroiled in a quarrel: neighbors with neighbors, wives with husbands, parents with children, older émigrés with younger ones, Eastern Ukrainians with Western Ukrainians, Ukrainian Catholics with Orthodox. Things finally escalated to such a point that the block leader, police, camp commandant, and UNRRA director had to be summoned.

Such a hullabaloo broke out—you wouldn’t believe it!

* * *

In the morning our friend Ivan Stepanovych woke up in a fine mood. True, there was a humming in his head like in a grain mill, and he was burping up the disgusting taste of gasoline, but in general he felt quite all right. Meanwhile, his neighbor and fellow countryman Stepan Ivanovych, who slept right next to him, was complaining up, down, and sideways that he hadn’t slept a wink all night.

“But what were you doing during the night?” asked Ivan Stepanovych, yawning deliciously.

Stepan Ivanovych stared at him, his eyes bulging.

“What do you mean, during the night? Didn’t you hear anything?”

“No, not a thing.”

“Good Lord! No one in the hall shut his eyes the whole night! There was such a colossal uproar—it almost led to daggers being drawn. The police were called. Alarm bells rang all over the camp. A dead man would have risen from his grave—and you say you slept?!”

Ivan Stepanovych was completely mystified.

“The devil you say! A real mystery, for sure! But I must tell you, Stepan Ivanovych, that there is a special quality to my sleep. You could say that when I lie down, I sleep. The world can come crashing down around me, but still I’ll sleep. The only thing I can’t figure out is how such a huge bump sprang up on my forehead overnight...”

Translated by Marta D. Olynyk

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The UnSimple[1]

Taras Prokhasko

CONTENTS

[1] The first part of this novel appeared in Volume 2 (2007) of *Ukrainian Literature*.

THE THIRD OLD PHOTOGRAPH—MAYBE FOR LAROUSSE

1. This photo—were someone to ask him unexpectedly—Sebastian would be totally unable to describe exactly and in detail, although he had seen it many times and there was nothing at all complicated shown in it.
It's possible that the very laws of reduction, memorizing and forgetting, which so fascinated Franzysk were at work to the full in Sebastian's relationship with this photograph.
Faces are the best plots, said Franzysk.
Franzysk said, "Plots do not end and do not disappear. They can from time to time be forgotten."
Sebastian recalled the plot of Franz's face differently throughout his life, but never as it was in that photograph.

2. It was taken at Franzysk's funeral in May 1915.
Franzysk lay on a bench covered with a woolen rug next to a hole in the graveyard outside Ialivets. It had been taken in such a way as to show only Franz, and not the funeral. Franz, dressed in an embroidered shirt, wide leather belt, and red trousers, lay with his arms folded on his chest, holding a cross made of two pencils tied together with a wisp of upland grass (this was Loci's idea). The ring with the river stones in it, which Franzysk had made for himself, worn for years without removing, and then taken off but not thrown away, yet refused to put back on, stuck out from between the pencils. The opening for the head and neck in the shirt was covered with a silk cloth.
The head itself lies—more precisely, stands—apart, a little further along the bench. The black beard and long gray hair are combed in such a way that, apart from the eyes and nose, the face is almost hidden from view.

3. Sebastian wasn't at the funeral; he didn't see this. The little girl—Anna's daughter and his daughter, Franz's granddaughter, whom the latter had not lived to find out about—was brought the day before. Franz had had his head cut off two days before. Sebastian was there. Afterwards he waited until the blood drained, washed Franzysk, combed his hair, and dressed him in the shirt and trousers. He laid the head in a basket, covering it with ferns. The next day the courier brought the infant from dead Anna.
The whole day, while Franzysk was being given a ceremonial burial in Ialivets, Sebastian did not leave his granddaughter, who cried constantly, likely on account of an upset stomach.
Sebastian could never memorize the photograph, maybe because he couldn't imagine how things had been at the funeral, but knew only too well what had happened before it.

4. In the spring of 1914 Anna could shoot better than Sebastian. Now he was again spending more time with Franzysk, because Anna would take her rifle and go for several days into the mountains. There she tracked animals, watched them, and discovered things about being a sniper that Sebastian could not know—what a sniper looks like from the opposite end of the rifle. She killed no one, other than the gadflies that tried to land on the udders of the mountain sheep.
"I want you so much," said Anna, "that I don't know if I could fall asleep at all, if I didn't want so much to sleep next to you." And she would fall asleep, needing Sebastian's hand to be under her head. "I want to be your daughter, and for you to be my father. A father is for being dreamed about later."

5. Spring did not begin until April. During the winter an immeasurable amount of snow had gathered, and it all started to melt at once, no matter whether it was on the northern or southern slope or how high it was above sea level.
Somewhere down in the lowlands ran dirty, overflowing rivers, causing floods in various cities, but no one there knew how the snow was melting in the mountains.
Ialivets was also flowing. Every building was washed away a little that spring. All because of the thickness of the winter ice.
On every street in town blazed bonfires, in which they burned the leaves and branches that had shot up from under the snow. The burning of spring smelled different than that of autumn: pruned stems of grapevines already flowing with juices found their way into the fire.

6. All spring Sebastian waited in fear for the attack of his allergy, as in previous years. But there was no allergy attack. This place accepted him without resistance.
On the other hand, he noticed while waiting that the trees opened up in the morning, just as night ended.
Everyone in Ialivets knew about Sebastian already. Often, having gone into some bar with Franz, he would have to tell various groups of people about Africa. The same story, but longer every time. He was even invited to be the survival instructor at a mountain lodge, but he turned it down for lack of time.

7. Because just then Sebastian had a dream.
He and Anna were in town walking along a street, one which did not actually exist in Ialivets. The street was formed by two rows of buildings standing on a bare slope. Behind the buildings there was nothing but alpine

meadows and animal tracks. The street led sharply upwards. The ground floors of the buildings all housed different bars. There were also tables in the interior courtyards, behind closed gates.

They went into each bar in turn, walked up to the counters, which were distinctive in every bar, and knocked back a glass of white wine in a single gulp, memorizing the taste of different years and different vineyards. Dozens of acquaintances sitting in every bar told them something trivial but very interesting. Finally they hooked up with some acquaintances, also a man and a woman, for longer. The women talked about something, and the man invited Sebastian to go for a swim.

They left the bar and went along the street, further up the slope. The street ended suddenly at the snow-covered summit of the mountain. They walked across it to the opposite slope. They came upon a large open-air swimming pool there. Sebastian went into it first. He dived in and swam under the water, feeling that there was a current in the pool, for he was being pulled a little to the side. He surfaced and, treading water, realized that in this position it pulled him even more. The same was happening to his friend.

They drifted towards the side of the swimming pool, which ended not in a wall but in a rope stretched across the surface of the water. The nearer they got to the edge, the stronger the current became, as though all the water wanted to pour out beyond the rope. When they reached the brink, they barely managed to grab hold of the rope. Their legs were carried forward and they lay on their backs, hanging on to the rope. Little white turtles, dredged up from all sides, were disappearing past the rope. Sebastian held on for several minutes. His hands hurt as never before, and he decided to let go and plunge after the turtles. But first he raised his head and looked beyond the rope. There the water became an almighty waterfall, creating a smooth, towering, and seemingly immovable wall. At the very bottom of the falls Sebastian saw everything that could possibly exist in the world. Suddenly, the current completely stopped and then immediately carried him in the opposite direction, finally expelling him painfully at the place where they had entered the water. Sebastian's whole body recalled the short swim with a strange sense of sorrow.

They got dressed and quickly returned the same way they had come to the bar, noticing that balconies that hadn't been there before had appeared on the buildings. The bar was empty, except for two old women playing chess at a table, which rocked every time one of them moved a figure on the chessboard. In the numerous bottles on the shelves behind the counter there was not a single drop of liquid. They had already decided to leave when the old women left their game and approached them. They then realized that these old women were their wives—Sebastian barely recognized Anna—who had been waiting for their husbands, without leaving the bar, for forty years.

8. Sebastian was so struck that the next night he tried to return into a continuation of the dream. But instead he merely dreamed that he was tea with milk, mixed in the proportions that yield the best color.

9. Anna calmly listened to this story and said that it could be that way, but mostly things are completely different, because real pleasure resides not in the vestibular apparatus but somewhere deep in the lungs—something about breathing, filling, emptying, air pressure. A long time ago Franz had said the same to her.

10. In the evening Anna took the shirt off Sebastian and put it on her own naked body. She seated him on the Biedermeier chair, chosen from among all the chairs in the house, found an opened pack of Gitanes Caporal in the cupboard, and put it in his hands. She tore four small strips off the vereta rug, grabbed a bottle of "Pelikan" ink and sat down at the table. Sebastian lit up a Caporal and Anna dipped her finger in the ink and sketched primitive and crude drawings on the strips of cloth—a sun (a circle with a few large rays on all sides), a fir tree (a vertical line in the middle, with short, symmetrical, downward-pointing sticks on both sides), a person (a stick split in two at the top and the bottom, with a small circle between the upraised arms, a stroke pointing towards the earth between the legs), a flower (a large circle, tightly surrounded by smaller semi-circles).
From between the pages of Larousse Anna took a dried flower of good-quality hemp and packed it into a narrow glass tube, while quietly reading some entries from the encyclopedia. Having finished, she pulled the belt out of Sebastian's trousers and tied his hands behind the back of the chair so tightly that his chest muscles became absolutely flat. With her neckerchief she bound his eyes just as tightly. She pulled out a razor from her pocket, opened it immediately with one hand, and without hesitation lightly cut Sebastian three times: on the shoulder, between the ribs and across his stomach. The cuts for a moment remained narrow lines, then their edges came apart, the wounds opened, and the blood ran.
Anna took the stub of the Gitanes from Sebastian's lips and used it to light the flower in the tube. She took a few slow draws, holding in the smoke for a long time after each. Finally she took the tube in her mouth by the end where the hemp was smoldering, and with one breath released some smoke onto each wound. Then she inhaled all that was left, brought her mouth against Sebastian's, and released everything she had. From the surprise Sebastian began to cough and lick his lips—the Gitanes Caporal had left a different taste on his lips.
Only then did Anna seal up the wounds with the painted strips of the vereta. And untie Sebastian, who decided not to ask any questions.

11. That night Sebastian dreamed that he and Anna were walking along a street which led out of Ialivets. Only instead of junipers and mountain pines there were two rows of enormous flowering lime trees, which they knew were about to start speaking, and that then they would have to either say nothing other than a greeting or answer very accurately. The trees were to evaluate something according to criteria known to them. From the sides and from above, through every gap in the treetops, shone an unavoidable sun—like sea water leaking through the holes in a ship, spreading inside it, filling every nook, and drawing it down to the bottom.
He walked along that corridor so purposefully, as though something were pushing against the nape of his neck. Alongside him walked many strangers, but if a photograph were taken of the street with the whole crowd, it would be understood, nonetheless, that the photograph was of him.
Sebastian could see a little way up ahead—underneath the trees lay piles of swept-up leaves, and he saw that the first smoke was already rising from them.
He knew that he would always walk this tunnel, gradually losing himself from rubbing against the light, until he finally passed into eternity, having finally become light.

12. Anna was a grateful student and taught Sebastian to assign and bestow thematic dreams, using the greatest force in the world—vibration. To achieve such pleasure all one needs is a little imagination, to learn for oneself to sense the vibrations in that which you can't even imagine that you should know.

13. Throughout the early summer Anna and Sebastian entertained themselves by pretending that Anna was pregnant.
They began to make love gently. They slept long and did not get up for a long time, caressing once again. They would stroll leisurely out to the meadow to get milk. They would come back past the felled trees, picking the berries nearest them, and making love one last time at the place where the brambles ended. Along the way they recalled their first days together, always finding some details they hadn't noticed before. They always had lunch together on the veranda, just the two of them, and went out somewhere for supper, but always ordering the healthiest food and arranging the table as exquisite still-lifes. They went to shops and tried on dresses for pregnant women. They rearranged the things in their room and planned how they would accommodate the child. They bought children's books for several years ahead in the bookshop, and Sebastian read them to Anna before bedtime. Sebastian washed Anna in the bath, dried her and rubbed her with scented oils. Before bedtime they wandered through the

most beautiful parts of Ialivets, poured heated rain water on the watermelons they were raising on the balcony in a large pan filled with holes, and drank tea made from medicinal herbs. In bed, Sebastian would stroke Anna's stomach under the soft blanket to get her to sleep, so that he could go out onto the balcony for one last cigarette.
In the middle of the night Anna would wake him, and for a long time they would not sleep.

14. On the 28th of June Anna decided she wanted to spend the whole day on her own. She had to finish a letter to the Unsimple and send it with old Beda, who had come to Ialivets for only a few days because of the needs of the Unsimple, who had come up with some great plan. Sebastian didn't leave Franz's side. They conversed, traversing Ialivets, one on foot and one swimming in the canals. Then the survival instructor took their photograph and hung around with them until morning, first at Beda's place, and later God knows where, drinking wine, gin and predicting terrible dangers for the careless Sebastian.

15. At the end of September Anna went to Mezõterebes and signed up as a volunteer with the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen.
The day before, the Unsimple had finally arrived in the town. Anna met with them at the French engineer's place, she lay down to sleep with Sebastian on the gallery, and in the morning she was already gone. There was also no trace in Ialivets of the Unsimple. Franzysk was sure that she had either gone with them, or that they had taken her with them. Sebastian wanted to go somewhere, ask around, at least do something that seemed useful (half a year later he would be thankful to dead Anna for sending him the infant at the very moment when Franz was no longer with him and he had to do something so as not to go mad from loneliness).
Incidentally, running around haphazardly looking for a lost person, asking everyone you meet, is not so completely senseless. For in our mountains, where the waters gather everything and themselves gather in three places, finding a missing person is very easy—as long as they aren't lying under the snow or under a rock. And even then the not-knowing will last no longer than a couple of years.
But Franzysk laughed at Sebastian's impatience and ordered him to sit still as a rock and wait. Because waiting is sometimes the most radical thing one can do. And sure enough, three weeks later the Unsimple came again and began to demand that Franzysk let them see Anna. For the first time Sebastian felt relief.

16. In October a wounded Bosnian captain arrived in Ialivets from the front. Both of his legs had been crushed during the destruction of the Buchach

citadel. They had been amputated, but the phantom legs hurt so much that the captain was advised to come to Ialivets for treatment. Later the hopes of the doctors would prove justified: the captain would stop howling and even write the first volume of a short memoir about the start of the war. Gin really is an effective analgesic.
In the meantime, back in October, when the captain had only just been brought to Ialivets on a stretcher, he told everyone about his operation, which took place in Horonda. The surgeon spent all his spare time at the famous Horonda inn with the commanders of the Sich Riflemen. There he had met the most beautiful woman he had ever seen—Anna from Ialivets in the Carpathians. She had been the favorite sniper of Second Lieutenant Pelensky, Didushko Company. She had advised the surgeon to send the Bosnian to Ialivets (very soon afterwards the company left Horonda for Nyzhni Verechky). This was not only the second relief for Sebastian but also the ultimate one for Franzysk. Anna was free. She wasn't with the Unsimple. There are things more important than fate.
War, it turns out, and that means death, too.

17. The third relief for Sebastian could have come when they brought the child, but he didn't allow himself this luxury and lived with that heaviness to the end of his life, perhaps sharing only crumbs of it, passing them on from Anna to Anna.

18. How Franzysk lived out the final months of his life, Sebastian did not know exactly, because he saw Franz only from afar. In the simplest sense of that word. And only from below.
At the beginning of that very warm winter, Franzysk moved for good out onto the balcony, isolating himself there without any contact with anyone. Sebastian met him only once a week in a bar, where he would go to collect a full gourd of gin. Their meetings were sometimes measured by glasses of juniper vodka with guelder rose syrup. Franz was touchingly friendly, but about family matters he spoke not a word. Sebastian listened, and Franz told him stories of the latest movements of the World War so vividly, as though it wasn't he but Sebastian who sat shut up on the balcony (or as though he had a pair of binoculars that could see for hundreds of kilometers in every direction and even look behind every tree). Sebastian didn't understand how Franz could find out the military secrets of both military blocks, because he couldn't know how Franz lived on the balcony—vines, ivy, and the tops of young cedars all obstructed his view.

19. Back in Africa Sebastian had noticed something interesting: people are very willing to examine things when they have to lower their gaze, and they are terribly inattentive when it comes to looking up.

In summer he and Anna had spent a great deal of time on the balcony to which Franz had moved—they had grown watermelons, smoked, spent the whole day drinking cold mate that had been steeped in a silver jug of hot water the night before. They saw everything that happened on the street. They could even guess at the content of conversations from gestures and lip movements. On the other hand, nobody ever—Sebastian was sure of it, because he never missed a single glance aimed at him—saw what they were doing on the balcony, that they were on the balcony. Because one would have to raise one's eyes ("This, obviously, has something to do with anatomy," thought Sebastian).
Now, looking at Franz's balcony, Sebastian cursed himself for never having taught Anna the first rule of sniping in a city: above all—balconies.
(Much later General Tarnavsky recounted to Sebastian someone else's recollections of the lost street battle in Lviv in November 1918, and Sebastian again thought about snipers and the balconies on which those snipers probably lived before the war.)

20. The last leaves on the vines fell off one night, and Sebastian was able to discern something through the ivy and the cedars. He saw a thin line tied to the balcony, stretching straight upwards towards the clouds. And nothing else in particular. But during their next meeting he warned Franz that the line could be noticed, it was visible.
Franz explained nothing, and Sebastian was left with nothing but to believe his own theory, which was, it seemed, most logical. The line from the balcony leads to a high-flying kite—the kite is fitted with a bird-catching net—the net catches birds—the birds are escaping from their nests at the front—an ornithologist lives beyond Chornohora—the ornithologist puts rings on the birds—the birds are ringed—they fly across Chornohora—they get caught in the net—Franz examines the rings—Franz knows the ornithologist—Franz understands his ring codes—the rings identify nesting places—the birds are escaping from their nests—that means the front has reached those places. Franz lets the birds go and raises the kite again.

21. In April 1915 the battle at Gorlice began (Franz had named the exact location of the offensive in advance).
In May groups of strangers began to pass through Ialivets: the Mazepists were returning to Galicia, the Galicians had been released from Thalerhof and Gmind, the Moscophiles were catching up to the Russians, deportees were fleeing from Russia, Russian spies were infiltrating Hungary, the Hungarians were weeding out spies and hanging Hutsuls, the Hutsuls were wading over to Romania for some cornmeal porridge, Romanian bandits were hunting Hutsul girls, deserters and marauders were trying to avoid one another.

Most of the vagrants avoided Ialivets, but those who appeared in town generally wore arms. In Ialivets there was only Sebastian's African rifle.

22. With Franzysk everything happened very quickly.
So quickly that it seemed to everyone that the head simply fell off in mid-sentence, the way a pipe can fall out of your mouth—if you pick it up quickly you can keep smoking. It would have been nice to do the same thing with the head, before the body collapsed. So that the end of the word wouldn't disappear in the momentary pause.
They were finishing their gin with syrup when the bandits from Maramureş walked into the bar. They paid for their gin with boots gnawed by wolves on the bootlegs. They sat down behind Sebastian, Franz looked at them from time to time, for he was on his guard. He placed his machete on the table, the one he used when he visited Lukach the Serb to hack his way through the dwarf mountain pine that grew incessantly around the forest hut.
The front was retreating, but the birds were not yet returning. Franz had nothing to say and was telling Sebastian about the Unsimple—how when somewhere someone is born they sit right under the windows and make up his story, like earthly gods. And how because they couldn't think up a different one each time they'd dreamt up this war. He was about to finally tell Sebastian what the *bai*maker had thought up for Anna (it was very significant that she was not Anna then) and where he had hidden the film with something the Unsimple were looking for.
Suddenly, one of the bandits came up to their table and said he'd buy the machete. You won't buy it, said Franz. Then I'll take it. You won't take it. Why? Because I need it. And if you won't need it? Then you'll come to me. "I'm already here," said the bandit, "and I want to take it." "If you can hold it," and he looked not at the Romanian's hand, but into his eyes. The bandit turned his eyes away, reached out his hand, looked back, took his hand away. "I can cut your head off," he said in Ukrainian. "If you can, then do so, if not, perhaps you'd better say good…" And that was how their chat ended, because the bandit grabbed the machete and without taking a swing, purely with the weight of the knife, sliced off Franzysk's head. Sebastian heard the rip of the severing tendons. Franz's body sat. The head fell onto the floor and did not roll. Like a clay pipe from a mouth. If only you could put it back in its place quickly to hear that "…*bye*." The second bandit put a bomb down in front of Sebastian and both of them, with the machete, left the bar. Sebastian didn't know what to grab first—the bomb or the head. In the end he took the grenade and threw it into the open stove. At least the explosion went up the chimney—the bats took flight in broad daylight; the body fell onto the floor, knocking the head under the table.

23. The next day the courier brought the infant girl from Anna. Sebastian understood why Franz had died—he had reckoned that he was immeasurably stronger, because there was no other woman in the world whom he would be able to love. Not suspecting that he had a granddaughter. At that moment Anna's daughter was only a day's travel away from Ialivets.

WARS OF THE IMAGINATION—BRIEFLY

1. Why always war? This is what little Anna, daughter of Sebastian, asked when she began to understand more complicated stories. Sebastian was horrorstruck—he really had told the little one about nothing but war, everything about war, although it was already 1921; for two years now he really had taught her nothing but what might be useful in a war, and had been bringing her up like a soldier.
Why is there always war. She turned her head towards him and managed to articulate the question in the time it took the horse to leap over a dogrose bush. The horse's forelegs stretch down to the ground. Sebastian leans back sharply against the fall to avoid striking the child in the face with his chin. Anna turns her head and looks forward again. They speed across the hills. She doesn't wait for an answer too long—she's becoming like Anna, her mother.
Along the road Anna is to remember everything she sees. Then recount it as exactly as possible. And in addition—identify the positions she would choose for shooting, and the points that could serve as hiding places for the enemy. Just a children's game, a first schooling.

2. That evening tired Sebastian took some paper and sat down by a candle in order to sum up the material traces of war (this is how Sebastian illustrated various lessons for Anna—in the form of geometrical problems and formulas).
The war had taken: Franzysk, the machete, Anna.
The war had given: the strange sea buckthorn forests around Ialivets, Anna, a few Russian cartridges, the funeral photograph of Franzysk, and one drawing by Perfetsky.
Things he had done that can only be done in a war: one time he went on reconnaissance, one day he dug trenches, one time he blew up a bridge.
Not much trace at all. The war had, in truth, passed them by. So why always war?

3. Back in autumn 1914 the Ialivtsians decided that this war was not for them. They were Central Europe, and could not have any larger interests. But when the South is fighting against the North, and the East against the West, they fight mainly in Central Europe, where the Carpathians and their rivers are. And the worst thing possible in such times is to play the role of the peaceful population of the Carpathians or a strategically important point on a 1:50,000 topographic map.
For this reason Lukach decided—Ialivets had to disappear. And all around it he planted sea buckthorn bushes, which after a few weeks had grown so

high (for this to happen everyone had to take part in digging a real defense system with several rows of different trenches with passageways between them—it was as though the whole town was playing the old Boiko children's game of moles; but only in this way, assured Lukach, would the sea buckthorn grow fast, high, and thick, hiding the secret paths with its needles) that the city was not visible from any mountain. Only the viaduct, where the Unsimple had once lived, stood out. They gathered all the gunpowder horns they could find. They laid them on the bridge. They opened the windows in all the buildings, and Sebastian fired an incendiary bullet at the powder.
The bridge shuddered, jumped up in the air, the blocks tumbled together and disintegrated into dust, and nothing but sand fell on the town—all this happened at once.
(The few Russian cartridges—sharp bullets with a Cyrillic letter on the shell—had been left with Sebastian by some Lemko deserters, in return for a little ether.)

4. Everything in the world is connected by no more than four steps. So said Franzysk.
Everyone in the world knows each other through no more than four people. Sebastian knew Anna, Sebastian knew Loci. Loci knew Anna, Loci knew Sebastian. Loci knew Perfetsky. The artist Leonid Perfetsky knew Anna. Perfetsky drew Anna in the legion of Sich Rifleman. Loci met with Perfetsky in January 1919 in Stanislav, the temporary capital of the Western Ukrainian National Republic. Perfetsky showed Loci the drawings, and Loci recognized Anna. He told Perfetsky about the woman in the picture, and Perfetsky—as formerly in Franzysk's films—told what had happened before the drawing.

5. Anna was a born spy. She was able to get through anywhere, see everything, memorize everything, and, what was most rare, she could describe it in exact detail. She often disguised herself in different outfits and crossed the front line. That's how it was at Bolekhiv. Once she went behind the front as the Russians were beginning a counterattack. The Austrian units fell back, leaving our riflemen exposed. Three Finnish regiments came at us from three sides. Hand to hand combat began. Many of ours fell; taken prisoner were Captain Bukshovany, Ensign Stepanivna, Ensign Svidersky, Second-Lieutenant Kravs, and Corporal Frei. The rest held firm and fought off the Russians. And suddenly, in the forest on the other side, Anna appeared. She was dressed as a ragged old man, leaning on a long stick. She went straight through them. It wasn't carelessness. Something was guiding her, something no one could guess at. She was chased by three soldiers. Anna took her staff in both hands. It had been honed and was sharp as a

bayonet. And she made a stand against the three of them. She used it like a real rifle without bullets—as though using bayonet and butt. She pierced the throat of one, smashed the head of the second above the ear, and from the third took a bayonet in the chest. The soldier couldn't pull the bayonet out from between her ribs, and Anna seemed to help him, grasping the blade in her fingers. The Russian became frightened and let go of the rifle, which fell and hit the earth butt-first. Anna began to fall forwards but the rifle held her up. By then the bayonet had come out right through her back. In one hand Anna still held her staff. She barely managed to lift it and strike at the rifle that wouldn't let her lie down. The butt slid forward and Anna fell, also forward, with the bayonet in her chest twisting inside her. Some other soldiers ran up and stabbed her as she lay on the earth, as they were taught in training.

6. Perfetsky gave the drawing to Loci. Loci brought it to Sebastian, asking him, "Open the envelope only after I've gone."
In the drawing Anna didn't look dead.
Her head lay on a small mound, her face bright, her lips not tense, her legs slightly bent upwards at the knees; one hand lay languidly by her side, the other was thrown back at the elbow toward her head. There were no features typical of a corpse—no hardness, no withering, no inflammation, no swelling, not even any sharp stiff angles. But for the clothes, it would have looked like a classic nude in an art academy.

7. He couldn't accept that this Anna was his own. Sebastian generally didn't believe in any existence of Anna's that he hadn't seen himself—an aptitude she'd also had during her lifetime.
But, looking at the picture, he felt the same as he had on St George's day in 1914.
On the market square twelve Gypsy trumpeters from Subotica played long into the evening. Gin poured from the fire hydrants. Drunken Lukach planted some shoots in the ground that grew so fast the eye could see it. In the canals there was swimming and dancing. They were swinging on all the swings and trapezes. When everyone had fallen asleep in the street, Lukach took the Gypsies, Sebastian, and Anna back to his place. The Gypsies could barely manage to drink any more. Sebastian didn't manage to get his arms around Anna, and she sat in the embraces of the Gypsies. Then the trumpets fell silent and the singing began. They all sang as though facing the gallows. Until suddenly they all sobered up, remembered everything they knew, and got drunk again—this time for the duration. Sebastian and Anna wanted to make love somewhere in a corner, but it didn't work out because she kept approaching the table as each new song began.
At dawn they made their way home and had nothing to say. Behind them

the nightingales were still singing and before them the larks were awakening. They thought they would lie until daylight with their eyes open but they fell asleep as soon as they lay down in one another's arms. The last thing that went through Sebastian's head was that tomorrow a new life would begin.
He woke up two hours later wanting water. He ran to Lukach's hut. The Gypsies had already risen and were making kasha on the fire. They barely even greeted him. Sebastian couldn't understand what he had felt so close to in the night. And the whole day he waited for night.

8. Looking at the drawing, Sebastian began to think about how a bayonet enters the body.
From that time on he constantly felt something like this. He is being stabbed. He is stabbing. A saber slices skin. The wound heals. He walks the field among the still living but already killed. He slowly dies from a bullet in the stomach. Mud under his boots. Marching in columns. Crossings through cold waters. Purulent wounds cleaned with dirty fingers. Ragged fighters. Rainwater and quagmires in trenches. The wheels of the cart have to be dragged out. Trees are cut down for the road. Explosions nearby. Must stay down. Trees shatter. Columns of deserters. Hangings in orchards. Crawling in the snow. Black figures returning across white hills. Burnt fields. Inflamed eyes. Muscles hurt from sleeping in the cold. Frostbitten hands. Pain, sleeplessness, cold. The constant effort and strain, without which even finding food becomes uninteresting. All this Anna felt too. For the first time in the world—two feel exactly the same thing.

9. In 1921 Sebastian stopped talking about the war, although his imagination was there always. Thinking about something, he always thought about something different than what he was thinking.
But he began to tell the child about animals.
He began to miss Franzysk most of all.

10. That same year the French engineer died. Just as he had expected—from smoking.
It was already quite cold, so all the windows were shut. The shutters on the chimneys were also kept closed. The French engineer finished his last cigarette already in bed, but he didn't put out the stub in the ashtray and instead got up and without putting on his long-johns walked across the room and threw the butt into the stove. He then took a drink of water straight from the bucket. And only then did he lie down to sleep in peace. But the stove was full of waste paper—mainly old rough drafts and notes on completely banal stories (strange, but after the war there were more of these, and he had to throw them out—and this on top of the fact that people began to come to

the notary office of the French engineer much less often: some stories were unspeakable, and others begged to be told both one on one and to whole gatherings). The paper caught fire from the cigarette butt and burned quickly in the closed chimney. The French engineer died sweetly from the toxic fumes.

THE UNSIMPLE

1. They said the Unsimple would come to the funeral. Why they hadn't appeared for all those years, when they had been truly needed, nobody knew. Apparently, it wasn't something they needed. It meant that the death of the French engineer interested them more than Ialivets during the war. Or perhaps the real war, outside Ialivets, was more interesting to them. Here, after all, nothing happened that the French engineer couldn't keep an eye on. If they really are still tied to Ialivets, then they will come in order to do two things: first, to collect something the French engineer had left behind, and second, to leave somebody in his place. Franzysk had said that they were interested in certain people. Sebastian vividly recalled how Franzysk had shielded Anna from them, how he had spoken of the persecution of their family by the Unsimple. The fear that someone might take his daughter (and his Anna's daughter) from him came—at least for a few seconds—every hour. Now it had become all-consuming and pushed Sebastian to his limits. They had to escape somewhere.
Anna slept, and Sebastian grated potatoes and fried some pancakes, so as to have something substantial to take on the journey.
He grated, fried, and thought about something completely different.

2. the unsimple are earthly gods. people, who with the help of inborn or acquired knowledge, are able to do good or harm to others. that point is important—inborn or acquired. they know something. at the same time this can also be learned. acquired. in this way it's possible to become unsimple by learning something.
and the inborn. they were interested in Anna's dreams. was this inborn or acquired. it came from the morphine—acquired. but it came only to Anna. the morphine uncovered something. which meant—inborn. Anna explained some things to me, I learned some things—acquired. Anna said that not everyone could master her teachings. there have to be some features. features are the principal plots. they're intonations. intonations make a voice. something innate and unchanging—it can at most be imitated. to imitate, one must know. imitation is knowledge, because knowledge is imitation. they were interested because Anna knew something they had not learned. which means their knowledge is not limitless. they have to acquire it. add it to features. the unsimple are different. it's impossible for one of them alone to acquire all knowledge. but each one for whatever reason chooses certain branches of knowledge. depending on features. they are of all kinds—cowlike, horselike, catlike, doglike, chickenlike, gooselike, froglike, fishlike, mouselike. like all creatures that from other creatures take nourishment. there is also the snakecharmer, the werewolf, the

stormbreaker, the clouddriver, the peakwalker. there is also the seer and the seeress. but the most important is the *bai*maker, the spellcaster. the most powerful is the spell—speaking, *bai*. *bai*—is not a word. *bai*—is many ordered words. a *bai*—is already a story. for different causes there are different *bai*s. *bai*s are plots. a *bai* is a narrative, telling a story, a plot. causes must also be plots. and in order to find a *bai* for them, they must be told. in this case narrative influences the choice of narrative and then the chosen narrative is narrated. the *bai* is narrated, the *bai* which influences, acts on, the previous narrative-cause and matches the direction in which it is going after the narrative-*bai* towards the narrative-effect. which means that there are only narratives. narrative is all actions, and all actions are narratives. among the unsimple the *bai*maker is number one. his inborn knowledge-features—how to narrate (hearing, articulation, voice, intonation, rhythm, and pace)—are strung together with acquired ones—what to narrate. unsimple must know what to narrate. they need people's narrations—Anna's, the French engineer's, Beda's, the deputy Stefanyk's, General Tarnavsky's. what they know they tell someone else. but whom. to Franzysk, Anna, Loci. afterwards Franzysk makes such films, Anna builds such buildings, that then *bai* something to someone else. and these someones have something they have to re*bai* to someone else. they have to. the unsimple do what they want. wanting also has to be known from somewhere. to know is to hear a narrative. wanting is narrative, *bai*. wanting is had. the unsimple want to have. the best way to have is to be able to narrate, to make narrations. whosoever narrates has everything. narration, therefore, is not only the greatest act, but also the greatest thing, the greatest number. the greatest feature and trait. the unsimple have the most, do the most, signify the most, because they narrate. the mystery turned out very simple. knowing criminals A, crime B is dreamt up for them. the unsimple rule the world. the unsimple come when someone is born, or something is born, and think up his life. they narrate a plot. the narrative becomes the cause, life—the effect of the narrative. and the cause of a new narrative, which can be heard and retold. there is no life without narrative. because narrative is life. plots do not end, said Franzysk. plots hide and emerge. stories, like infections, cause fever, are carried, are passed on, hide, come out and cause fever. they merge, separate, mix together, grow together, break in different places, overturn, crumble, are reborn. to gather plots. to combine plots (analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, mythologization, de-mythologization, analogy, hyperbole, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, accent, timbre, articulation, transfer, cohesion, instillation, elimination, tonality, speed, rhythm, chronotope, personification, allegory, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, construction and deconstruction, comparative linguistics). to give away plots, according to place and time. such is the method of the unsimple. and this method is a

result. for it is as it is said, ordered, related, refused, retold, forbidden, indicated, suggested. what is it for. in order to say.
bai is invisible medicine.
the essence of all form.
the form of essence itself.
that which can be taken into the next world. that which is necessary in the next world. for there there is nothing but voices, eternity and delight. your own eternity with your own voice your own *bai* about your own delight.
no work, no treasure, no strength, no body, no emotions, not far, not near, not much, not little, not sometime, not now, not sometime. your own eternity with your own voice your own delight—your *bai*.

3. Sebastian gave Anna all the pancakes for breakfast, because they had nowhere to go, because there was nowhere to escape to. The main thing is to fear nothing.
Sebastian went to the deceased, prayed (dear God, don't allow me to harm Thee!) for the narrative of the soul of the French engineer and waited until the Unsimple arrived. They asked him not to get in their way and to wait two days, although this family had first sought them out, and not the other way round. Sebastian promised not to take up much time and did not step aside. He told the *bai*maker that he wanted to be a *bai*maker. And he asked to work as a barman in the bar that belonged to the Unsimple.
At that time in Ialivets the bar "What's There Is There" had become the most fashionable post-war locale in a fashionable pre-war Central European resort. After the war the address changed a little, though some basic errors couldn't be avoided. Despite everything, Ialivets was still situated in the Ukrainian Carpathians, and not simply in the Czechoslovak Republic. But Stanislav, Lviv, and Ardzheliudzha were beyond the forbidden line through Chornohora. Now people came for Ialivets's gin mainly from Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Košice, Karlovy Vary, and Uzhhorod. And also from Podebrady and Nusli, from Německý Jablonec, Liberec, and Jozefov. With the foreigners it was easier to communicate in Ukrainian than in German.
The Unsimple without hesitation agreed, but they had one condition. As it happened, Sebastian also had only one condition. Both conditions turned out to be the same: Anna was to be in the bar, beside Sebastian.

TO SAY OR TO STOP

1. Something had to be changed in the bar. Sebastian described to Anna several interiors that he thought he had dreamed of his whole life.
Anna agreed that it was easiest to remember beauty through things. Things endure, they go from story to story. But truly the initial beauty lies in flowers, plants, and that from which they grow and that into which they grow: water, open air, light, and a little warmth and a little cool.
They did whatever the girl wanted.

2. After ending six years of military training, Sebastian always did whatever Anna wanted. He didn't see this as spoiling her. He just didn't know what little girls need (with a boy it would have been different—Sebastian could remember well how he had felt at different times in his childhood; but then it may have been worse, because who knows whether his son would feel things in the same way), and he believed that small people know very well when it's good and when it's bad. The most telling way of summing up childhood is as the correlation between laughter and tears. Some of the Ialivets women tried to help in Anna's upbringing, but Sebastian simply didn't allow them access to the child, and ignored their advice. Although the renovation of the pub left very little free time, Sebastian managed to tell his daughter every day about all the things he had learned from the lives of animals.

3. The pub was transformed into a bar that was open in several places, more like a garden. As for the things in the bar (other than tables and benches)—everything was made of transparent glass.
Mainly it held cut flowers.

4. In the meantime Anna spent more and more time with animals. She especially loved snails. Sebastian liked snails, because they seemed well mannered. Their reserve and lack of emotion demanded more attentive consideration of their snail needs, sympathies, wishes, and intentions. Completely different manners of behavior, self-expression and communication give a generous space for mutual understanding. Anna felt happy when she put a snail on herself in a place from which it didn't immediately want to crawl away. It thanked Anna by slowly and gently sliding across selected areas of her skin.
It was possibly because of this preference that all her life Anna was best able to imitate snails. When they began to make love she became a snail most often and most enthusiastically. Sebastian suspected that in this way she was trying to show him how he was to behave with her. She never dared

to say this to her father in words. Sebastian was surprised—how was it possible to know the secrets of animals so well. "I just didn't have anything to read," his daughter laughed.

5. And really, this Anna didn't even read Larousse, because: Sebastian didn't know French (his fighting had not been in French Africa—Central Europe means the possibility to communicate with neighbors in one's native tongue), in the early years Anna had constantly been becoming a soldier, then they almost never left the bar, going home only to bathe in winter, and in addition, Anna heard so many stories in the bar that the eternal and timeless Larousse would have seemed like yesterday's news to her, and finally, they fell in love in such a way that no encyclopedia could ever contain entries of any use to them.
Next after snails were lynxes and wagtails. Among the insects—crickets.

6. At that time Anna was between ten and twelve years old. Once they were bathing in several streams during a short, sunny September day and followed the Kevelev right to the Tysa. They decided not to return to the mountains until it got dark. They knew that there wouldn't be any more river that year, and walking in complete darkness was actually easier—the soles of the feet themselves found the way.
Sebastian looked at Anna as she jumped into the river and crawled out onto the rocks. He had never seen such women before. And he didn't know if he ever would—Anna would soon grow up, he could already see in her a hint of his first Anna. He felt guilty for not memorizing that beauty. He couldn't remember the Anna from last year, when she was three. It was always today's that moved in his imagination.
"I don't have to remember this," said Sebastian to himself. Remembering childhood is a child's business. I want only one thing—to see the day when there'll be no need to remember her as she once was, when she'll be everyday Anna every day. I want to live only with her. I'm her father and an adult man, I know what I'm saying about my little girl. I don't have to memorize this—after all, she'll also have to have something to tell when she becomes a woman.
(Anna lay in the whirlpools between the rocks.)
All the same he tried to remember things. She was like a slender twig on a branch, whitened and honed, bent and dried by the river water. Dried by the river.
He had to plunge his face into the Chorna Tysa.

7. During the night, as they crossed the Dzhordzhova Pass and could no longer make out one another's features, Anna stopped him by taking his hand and said that a poem had come into her head. It was, probably, very clumsy, but:

how sad oh anno
oh how sad oh
for in anno domini one hundred hundred
it's not just your height I want
just like a clay bowl
fears the growth
of the supple pine
which will carry her efforts
in those places it seems
the wind will release too much
very fine sand
from those rounded hills nearby
for eyes filled with stinging tears
when you touch your cheek
to the palm
which I press
fine hairs rise on your skin
I don't know the *bai*
for this sand
how sad oh
little girl
in a black beret
in thick boots
with a blade of grass
in your wide mouth

She gave the poem to her father Sebastian.

8. Through all these years they worked in the bar, which really did very quickly become the most fashionable in Central Europe.
As Franzysk had once invited Sebastian, Sebastian invited columnists from several major newspapers to try living in Ialivets for a while, ("And anyway," he wrote on the postcards, "There's never anything really important in the newspapers, there's only what causes most of today's problems—an excess of information, which is impossible to retell… it's understood that a certain convention exists that forbids philosophers from looking around and describing certain things…"), to drink gin together and talk as people should talk in Central Europe—to ascertain common places and common people, in this way exposing several parallel webs in which everyone finds themselves.
Ialivets became a paradise for writers, journalists, essayists, columnists, and reporters.

They came for the gin, they came for Sebastian. Some he listened to, some he told stories to. He tried to avoid stories more distant than across four steps.

9. And every day he and little Anna worked night and day, mainly together, sometimes—sleeping in turns. The child grew up in the bar, washing glasses, wiping the tables and the floor. Cutting flowers for all the glass. Sometimes they spoke, but somehow differently. Now they were concerned only with what they thought about whatever they had just seen.

10. Anna liked to have her photo taken, and even those who had never taken photographs liked to photograph her. Only Sebastian didn't like this. For this reason only three photographs, taken and given to them, apparently, by visitors, survived. In one of them Anna is almost ten years old. This photograph is the most interesting.
Sebastian's figure is somewhat blurred. It's no wonder, because at that moment he is spinning around on his axis. In both hands—knives. You can see that he has already started to throw one—he is just letting it out of his hand. Anna grips Sebastian round the waist with her legs, her back touching his knees and her hair touching the ground. In her raised hands are a bottle of gin and a glass. Her smile is distorted by the rush of blood to her face and the centrifugal (centripetal) force (in such situations it's very hard to close an open mouth).
This was a trick they had for their clientele. They would go out into the middle of the bar and, without music, dance a complex tango. At the end Anna would leap up onto Sebastian, they would spin round, Sebastian would throw knives at a target (throwing knives at a target was the most popular form of entertainment at the bar), and Anna would grab a bottle and glass from a table, pour out some gin, and place the glass on the table in such a way that it would slide right up to one of the customers. She never spilled a drop.

11. After Anna's death Sebastian tried to collect at least some of her photographs. He recalled guests who might have photographed Anna, found their addresses, and sent them letters with a single request. But for some reason nothing came of this. No one wanted to give away their photographs, not even those who could fathom Sebastian's suffering.

THIRTY YEARS OF THE FAMILY S.

1. In 1921, when Sebastian went of his own accord to the Unsimple, he chose a strange form of freedom—persistently to tell the Unsimple about the life of his family. To make surveillance by normal methods impossible. In this way he turned himself and his family into a sort of research plantation for the Unsimple.
"To live in such a way," said Franz, "as not to have secrets."
This suited the Unsimple completely and they stopped interfering in their life—they were convinced that Sebastian's experiments with his own life were more inventive and more merciless than anything any of them could come up with.

2. Sebastian sent his observations to the Unsimple on ordinary postcards.
Their code could be called unprose.
The messages did not take the form of normal sentences but contained abbreviated records made according to a certain system of definitions, which he used to give names to things he experienced—actions, impressions, days, people, stories, emotions, ideas, whole microperiods. The Unsimple decoded the unprose and were able to imagine even more (though sometimes something entirely different) than what Sebastian knew.
He would leave the postcards under a stone beside the road leading out of Ialivets. Old Beda, passing through from time to time in his armored car, would collect them and then himself address them to the Unsimple—he always knew where they were wandering, and the mail would be waiting for them at the places where they were to spend the night.

3. Thus passed almost thirty years. In all that time the Unsimple only came to Ialivets a few times. Then they spoke at length with Sebastian and collected any unmailed postcards themselves.
Chronology did not interest them, and for Sebastian it had never even existed.

4. There was only one period when he wrote nothing—in 1934, when the third Anna—his daughter and granddaughter—was born, and Anna, his daughter and wife, died.

5. In 1938, when Carpatho-Ukraine was created, the Unsimple did as Sebastian suggested—they bought a big bus, turned it into a bar, and Sebastian and little Anna set off in it for the capital, Khust. During this time he put together several dozen pages of descriptions of the mountain regions for the government of Avgustyn Voloshyn, and during an hour-long

meeting with Colonel Kolodzinsky, head of staff of the Carpathian Sich, he put forth a detailed plan for the defense of the country by two hundred well-placed snipers, having personally selected every indicated position.
Sebastian continued traveling around in the bar, like a wandering circus, even after the occupation of Carpatho-Ukraine—right up until 1944, when instead of the Hungarians came the Russians. With them around, you couldn't wander for long.
Sebastian barely made it in time to register himself in Deutsch-Mokra, near Königsfeld, moving into the home of a Tyrolian deported by the Hungarians. (The bus-bar he left by the side of the road in Krasnishora, and he heard that a whole squad of Soviet spies had gotten drunk in it for several days and then had drowned in the Teresva, as soon as they started up the bus and began moving.)

6. Sebastian and Anna lived a most primitive life in Mokra. They ate cornmeal porridge three times a day; Anna would be asked to graft the apple trees (she had such a good touch), Sebastian would cure people of their fears. And at night he played a complicated radio game, imitating on the air the activities of several radio stations of a non-existent partisan group called "The Earthspirits."

7. In 1949 Anna was poisoned by rye ergot and began seeing the Middle Ages.
The Unsimple said she had to be with them as soon as she became a woman. Precisely for this reason Sebastian didn't take Anna to see their family places when she turned fifteen.
It was only in late autumn of 1951 that they left for Ialivets.
The NKVD had burned the Unsimple in the spring.
And Anna became a woman in June.
She and Sebastian spent the whole summer and autumn in uninterrupted love-making.

UNPROSE

1. not to talk to w. the same way
(w..—women—Anna is still little, and he thinks up affectionate names for her—he notices that the little girl becomes moody when he uses the same words he used at one time for her mother—even if very effectively—in the narrations he used to narrate to his Anna at least a few words have to be changed before they can please his daughter, even if they are only simple stories from Brehm—and the most important thing is not to speak the same way about making love—it's not only individual words and phrases but also repeating descriptions of emotions—Sebastian crafts a whole erotic lexicon, making love to three generations of his women)

2. tattoo on palm
(Sebastian entertains little Anna by drawing kittens, small fish, fir trees, rabbits, and birds on his hands—Anna watches for hours as the drawings change when he moves his palm in different ways—once in the bar a frog trainer performs—his frogs are tiny, like brambleberries, and of different colors—most of them, though, are white—the trainer has a tattoo—a huge multicolored iris between his shoulder-blades, its long stem wrapped around his whole body—Anna wants a tattoo of her own—they take a long time to choose, looking through a Carpathian plants guidebook—Anna remembers the drawings from her childhood—but she asks for at least a little frog, like the performer's—on her palm—quite a painful place, but Anna is persevering—tattooing Anna, Sebastian thinks about the line of fate—but there are things more important than that—a tattoo on the palm won't be seen by many people—now Anna greets people by raising her hand—they make love, Anna looks at her palm and doubles herself up like a frog—afterwards she exhales all the air out of herself, which in this case enters her together with Sebastian—several hours after Anna's death the frog loses its color and becomes white)

3. fear—the greatest temptation
(Sebastian to Anna—"You are, and the world is together with you, and only fear tears away parts of you and makes another world next to you without you—it's tempting to be afraid")

4. to squeeze an orange out into the mouth
lemon dries white
(one of the bar tricks they invented—cut an orange in half and pour a shot of gin—the customer drinks the gin and immediately throws his head back, opening his mouth—the barman squeezes the orange juice not into the glass

but straight into his mouth)
(Anna is very tired—Sebastian squeezes some lemon juice onto her skin behind her elbows, above her collarbone, on her stomach, between the tendons on her wrists, under her throat—the juice soaks in and relaxes the skin—streams flow out from the lemon lakelets and dry up, leaving thick white trails—in the same way that your fingers go white if you peel a lot of lemons)

5. w. b.; a completely different self
(w. b.—without biography—in Ialivets everybody knows everybody—and all biographies are known—on their free days Sebastian and Anna travel to resorts in the Prut valley—where there are lots of strangers, where nobody knows them—to Tatariv, Dora, Deliatyn and Lugy, Mykulychyn, Iamna—they stay in randomly chosen lodges for a few hours—simply to make love—they tell invented stories about themselves in trains and hotels—they behave differently every time—according to chosen roles—Sebastian sometimes feels as though he has just met this woman—just as with apartments—often after working at night they spend the whole day in the empty apartments of friends—they try themselves out among other people's things, in other people's habits, look at albums of other people's photographs—or languages—they go to shepherds' flocks on the mountainsides—speak Hutsul—ask for milk, *zhentytsia*, *huslianka*, *vurda*, *budz*—they listen to how the Hutsuls try to understand them, to what they say among themselves about them)

6. seventeen stones ahead
(a long time ago, when Sebastian was training his daughter like a soldier, there was this exercise—cross a river without stopping for an instant, jumping from stone to stone, having glanced at the route from the bank for only three seconds; they tried again when the second Anna was pregnant—she saw and calculated seventeen steps in advance)

7. understanding—is the business of whoever must understand
(this is a fragment from a discussion that lasted many years between Sebastian and the Unsimple—they believe that the problem of understanding should be solved by the one who has a need to be understood—Sebastian held the opposite—because what is vital here is the a priori impossibility of identical understanding—and he holds to his point of view in practice—he always narrates as he wants to, though answering fully any questions that arise—he says that he prefers spare rhetoric to excessive rhetoric—more meanings than words, and not the opposite)

8. epos of family places
(Sebastian, following Franzysk, considers the foundation of every private epos to be the enumeration of imagined conceptions about places in which the family history has taken place—a sort of family geography of plants—in the case of the last Anna the main junctions of the epos must be Mokra, Ialivets, Chornohora, Stanislav, Prague, Africa, Lviv, Trieste, Borzhava, Sharish, Bolekhiv, Petros, Chorna Tysa)

9. child—killer
(spring 1944—the last spring of the bus-bar—columns of trucks on the mountain roads—some vehicles stand for weeks—helplessness of the commanders—the only idea—Westward—soldiers live in the trunks of their vehicles, during the day they await the possibility of mobilization, at night they wander in the surrounding area—a few Hungarian corporals drink all night at the bar—Sebastian recognizes among them the two Romanian bandits who twenty years ago cut Franz's head off—he points them out surreptitiously to Anna, as a fragment of the family epos—no way of knowing whether the bandit-corporals might remember Sebastian, but no one says a word to anyone—in the morning the Hungarians go to sleep in the truck, and Sebastian and Anna drive on a little—Anna asks him to tell in great detail what happened to grandpa Franz—during the day the bar is closed—Sebastian puts the child to sleep and falls asleep himself—he wakes up from the feeling that someone is moving his pistol in his belt—he checks, the pistol is in place, and Anna is sitting beside him looking at the clouds—so transparent that you can see what's inside them—tiny bubbles of dampness, like caviar on seaweed, vibrate on narrow strips of dense plumes of steam, everything the same color as gleaming flint—a few days later someone says that two Hungarians, who were, in fact, Romanians, shot themselves in broad daylight right in the vehicle where the corporals slept—Sebastian notices that two bullets are missing from his pistol, Anna is washing glasses—to kill the killers, thinks Sebastian, she would have had to go back ten kilometers by herself)

10. diffusion, to absorb one another, to be absorbed by one another
(a theory of reverse absorption reveals itself to Sebastian—he experiments with roots—applies the findings to people—proves that a man, when he is inside a woman, not only releases fluid that is absorbed by the woman but himself absorbs some of the woman's moisture—according to the laws of empty capillaries and connected vessels—Sebastian believes that in this way a transference of substances takes place world-wide, and this seems extremely important to him—in any case, he wishes to absorb the maximal amount of this extract)

11. cognac with onion soup; juice from the grapevine; porter with wild honey; gin with red ants;
(an Arab back in Africa told Sebastian—first of all teach your sons to make food, they will be wise and joyful—Sebastian doesn't have any sons, but he has a daughter Anna—he teaches her to make food: tells her she shouldn't be afraid to invent, it's the finest of adventures—making food for someone is always sensual, like bringing up a child or looking after plants—tasks that return us to the spontaneity of animals and birds, when questions of what to do and why do not arise—curiosity that can be given—the opposition of different forces and essences that can be taught to live together—the beginning of all tastes is in plants—because there is no end to them, there is no end to the making of food—Anna started from the bar—she boiled porter together with honeycomb from wild bees—she served hot onion soup right after cognac, and then you take another drink of cognac for your scalded palate—into a glass of gin she threw a few dozen red winged ants (believing that to kill for food is not a sin), whose acid gave the spirits a burning quality—in the hungry spring she cut grapes from the overgrown balconies and gathered the juice of the vine, in order to mix it afterwards with juniper vodka in a proportion of one to one-half—and the same with everything)

12. a rainy lodge
(during one of their trips to the Prut valley Sebastian and Anna stop at a small villa built in the Zakopane style—while they make love it starts to rain—when rains like that begin in the Carpathians they last for whole weeks of summer—why do I want you so much today—asks Anna—when she asks Sebastian something, she always does it in a childish way—like a daughter, and not like a wife—Sebastian also forgets that Anna is not a child—he answers simply, genuinely, carefully, vividly, and wisely—so that she will understand for the rest of her life—for the friction and pressure of human surfaces are extremely necessary to a human being—the amount of this is set in advance, like the number of beats of a heart—and we're not for so long—Anna presents various parts of her body—the body—the gate of the soul—the gate is open—the soul is revived by touch—observe the changes in the strength of the downpour beyond the open window—otherwise you may not return from flight—they come out of the lodge—come out of the forest—unexpectedly the rain stops—they walk along the mountainside—Anna wants more—they make love in the warm grass under the rarefied air, which barely restrains the sunlight—Anna feels so good that the surfaces are changing, in such a way that they will want to talk about this tomorrow—if there is a tomorrow, if there is talk, if there are surfaces—because she is absent time and again even here and now—she takes Sebastian with her—he is so far inside her that they think he is no longer visible—birds land on the ground and watch from up close—they

look without shame at the birds and see the openness of the huge Anna, who barely fits in their field of vision—they can no longer give themselves to the sun, but they want to go still deeper—they head for (now Anna becomes a naked little girl with a wide mouth) where it might be wet—they run into a forest villa—maybe we should move somehow, but let us lie still, because my head is spinning—outside the window it is raining—I can give a lot of wetness—they lie still and hold one another—Sebastian imagines Anna feeding just such a little girl for the first time—Anna dreams of seeing just such a little boy for the first time —it's not you that feels good, not I, not we, but the world—you made me like this)

13. story of a view along a cheek
a tale of lips
a whole essay in a matchbox
(the last Anna is a few years old—these are the worst days of 1938—everything that Sebastian tells the little one at bedtime either ends badly or loses sense, because he eliminates non- children's places from the narratives—children have to be read to out loud, Sebastian is convinced—children must look at the book, at daddy with the book, at letters, at the paper with letters—children must want to come to understand the book themselves—because they tell: because that's what is written—to perceive many older voices, in order to better distinguish your own—our Larousses ran out already a long time ago—Sebastian makes weird books—he cuts up postcards and binds the fragments, puts the little scraps of paper together in little numbered bundles in matchboxes, writes all over the walls, the table, the bed, the doors—he himself writes the written—writes in different voices—in the evening he lies down beside Anna and reads aloud the story of the view along her cheek, a tale of her lips, an essay in a matchbox, a chronicle of the lack of a chronicler, an epos of railway stations, fairytales of food for birds, a philosophical tract of ivy—Anna listens to the different voices and tries to hear her own—and indeed, something moved)

14. to kiss often
a kiss through a sweater
(throughout the day dozens of times Sebastian firmly presses his open lips against the clothed Anna and breathes out long and hard all the air in his lungs—through the sweater comes warmth, and somewhere in the middle of the breath the skin at the place of this kiss becomes hot—if this is done often, then using one's own warmth one can perceptibly keep the kissed one warm even in severe cold—the sensation is strengthened by the magical significance of giving from inside yourself into the body of another something which is life itself)

15. this inaccessible structure—like a brain, like a nut, like a closed hand, like a seed
(one time Sebastian feels a certain psychosis developing inside him—between the Annas he doesn't have and doesn't want to have any other women—but during one of these times he understands that the sense of the erotic is not the object but the path—the interrelation of bodily landscapes—entering, penetrating, staying, returning—the wonder of any journey—the path that leads itself—all-encompassing uniformity—a place where one can meet the universe—his psychosis is based on a nostalgia exaggerated by inaccessibility—even neutral situations he sees as being either in or outside—sometimes he even feels that he performs his wanderings along this path at his full height—sliding along, squeezing through, pausing, ceasing, collapsing, gliding, falling—only because the wanderings are imaginary does he think he is not living right, godlessly wasting the gift of life)

16. to see the Middle Ages
(1949—in the mountains there is great hunger—Anna is eating grains of raw rye infected with ergot—she sees the Middle Ages, in which things from the present take place—severed heads, torture, columns of refugees, the arrival of strangers, ruined faces, wide belts, grammar lessons, bestiaries, musicians at feasts, scarcity of food, decimated forests, polluted rivers, mixing of languages, dried fruit, ulcerous diseases, insane exhibitions, lost chronicles, manuscript apocrypha, stinking clothes, dirty dishes, broken arms, crushed legs, stretched tendons)

17. six
(the last Anna is six years old—Sebastian is bathing her—he notices that four spots slightly darker then her skin, under her ribs and on her stomach, are in fact underdeveloped nipples—he recalls Franzysk's greatest dream—would he have dared even to suppose—his great-granddaughter with three pairs of breasts)

18. (For some reason old Beda didn't take one of the bundles of cards from under the stone. They weren't found until the end of the '50s, during the dismantling of Austrian military roads in the Carpathian sub-alpine. Every single one was a photograph from the famous (in the '30s) Chornohora series. The Soviets didn't yet have any printed views of the Carpathians of their own, and these, taken with a fish-eye lens, were taken to the local museum in Vorokhta. The penciled inscriptions on the back were hard to understand.)
feeling of discomfort—this is the traces of a previous taste on the salivary glands that forces you to seek the next one

every period brings new slang; like a new way of life; languages pass more slowly than periods. They accumulate, take up more and more territory, squeezing out the canonical language—they mean more to us. Soon Anna and I will get to the point where we can converse purely in our own phrases
summer of white wine; get used to Austrian green wine
met with the Colonel and Iaryi
all periods pass (I see that already in my second child and third wife)
it's good to know that you are, that always, somewhere, you are
faith in that which was in childhood
to think about how a leg gets caught between legs and gets scraped
she fell asleep by the stove with atlases of plants on her lap
when you pee on moss you flatten moths that sit there pretending to be unfurled leaves
now I shall never envy anyone, for I have seen tears of kindness
she could have done more than (why are some women allowed to do everything, maybe because they are able do everything)
trench diggers eating with their hands
animation on the sun, on the clouds, on the moon
deformation by twisting
such a fullness of being that one could dissolve inside
(If it were possible to know what these un-decoded messages meant—what they mean (my Annas were not, won't be, but are, always are—so good to know that always, somewhere, they just are). If we knew more human fates, said Sebastian. Often in this lies the main therapy of *bai.*)
Now a selection of the postcards of Chornohora is kept at the museum of the Carpathian national nature reserve in Iaremche.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL *BAI* (FOR EXAMPLE)

1. Sebastian told only of how things could be, and therefore things were as Sebastian told.
All the years before starting to speak Sebastian actually did just one thing—he looked and thought about how to tell stories.

2. Sebastian told how he could tell people about their lives in such a way that they would want to live forever, without changing anything. And people really did want to live forever and changed nothing.
Sebastian told how even under interrogation he wouldn't tell everything about his love, his loves with the Annas. And true enough—under interrogation Sebastian did not tell everything, because he overcame himself and spoke not at all as he would have wanted to, as he had never once allowed himself to speak in his whole life.

3. Afterwards he told how he had never heard anything so strange.
He was taken right off the street in Königsfeld.
They were already living in Mokra. Sebastian was walking home, returning from a forester's hut near Tempa. There one forester had been crushed by a falling spruce. It didn't kill him immediately, but he had stopped living—he just lay, neither here nor there. The forester was not a local—he came from somewhere near Bereziv—and so there was nowhere to take him. To bury someone like that would have been a sin, so they came to fetch Sebastian on horseback, with neither saddle nor bridle. He examined the wounded man and saw that he had forgotten how to breathe. He sat next to him and told the necessary *bai*. The Berezivian remembered everything, got up, and invited Sebastian to come and visit him in Bereziv. He had to thank Sebastian somehow, but he was foresting now, so he decided to give Sebastian the only thing he had—a lump of *budz* cheese.

4. Sebastian stayed in the hut a little longer, because he had to hear something about Bereziv—he had never been there, although he knew many Berezivians.
Sebastian said that what was most interesting for him was to listen to someone telling about a place he didn't know. Then he would ask that it be described as though you were walking around, looking, and relating what you see. Then—as though you were riding a bicycle or horse (a little higher, which dramatically changes what you see), and then—as though you had climbed up to the top of a tree. And he would always pull out a map of the place and ask that everything that was marked there be described in words.
Sebastian perceived even wars, camps and all kinds of cataclysms primarily

from this point of view—you meet so many people, who come from and are coming from different places, who have grown up and spent time in different places. Great movements mix people together, and comparative geography becomes the foundation for speaking and ways of thinking.

5. Sebastian carried a lump of cheese to Anna for supper and breakfast. In Königsfeld, by the tailor's door, as always, a table had been carried out into the street, and several men were playing cards. The rest looked on. Sebastian had learned still back in Africa to see the road he walked every day in comparison with the one he had walked the day before. Yesterday (and the day before yesterday and the day before that) three of today's spectators had not been present. When he saw how they were looking at him, he understood that they were there for him.

6. Sebastian could still escape—turn off between the colorful small wooden buildings, run through the gardens to the bank, and swim with the logs down the Brusturianka to the Teresva; the Teresva would carry him down to the Tysa, and then after a few days along the Tysa he could reach the Danube, and then turn either towards Vienna or towards the delta—both this way and the other there are countless places to hide for a lifetime.
After all, he knew that it is rivers that bind an entire continent best, because all places on the continent are connected by no more than four rivers.

7. Back in Africa Sebastian had on more than one occasion been obliged to cover great distances by means of rivers, not coming out of the water for days at a time. He just took everything that could get wet out of his pockets and placed it inside an aluminum canteen engraved with his name and regiment number and swam in his clothes with the current, pushing ahead of him a few light sticks that he had tied together to hold up his rifle.
Surroundings seen from the level of the water's surface—when your view glides along on a tangent—are no less interesting than those seen from a bird's-eye view. And the sculpture of the riverbed is sometimes even richer. To say nothing of the fact that all the most interesting things in the life of human beings happen on the banks, by the waters of rivers.
The last time he had swum into a strange network of canals with water that was almost hot and had an unearthly abundance of plant life on the bottom, and further on—to the ruins of a submerged fort.
For some reason it was precisely this that he dreamed of most often over the course of his life. Such was his nostalgic Africa. And also—transparent bays, and a lot of turtles swimming.
But at that moment he couldn't swim off anywhere—Anna was waiting for her daddy.

8. In Königsfeld Sebastian could only have tried shooting—if he did it first, he could have hit all three, one after the other, so that they would have fallen together. That was how he'd once shot a blind assassin and his child.

9. Those were the times when a great many armed people could be seen wandering around Ialivets, for they had moved their hunt of one another up into the mountains. It often happened that shots were fired first, and only later was the body turned over to see who had been shot. Sebastian had had to keep his pistol ready and near at hand—under the counter, next to the grapefruits, the frosted-glass jar of cinnamon and the large glass of nut vodka he kept for himself.

10. When the blind man entered the bar with his toddler sitting on his shoulders, no one even suspected that they might be dangerous. Sebastian was brewing coffee with hashish for four Rastafarians, who were playing word games with Anna—Anna named the same item in Ukrainian, Hutsul, Polish, German, Slovakian, Czech, Romanian, Hungarian, and they tried to guess what meant what.

11. Sebastian had begun to think up such linguistic games for Anna after he noticed how easily she understood not only the pictures and habits of animals but also their languages. Her fantastic ear heard in the language of animals more subtleties than there are words in everyday human speech. There had been a time when Anna had gone over almost entirely to non-human language, and Sebastian answered her in kind. But after a time he came to his senses—a little longer and they would no longer have been able to speak to each other. And he had invented so many games that now they spoke about linguistics—often in very complicated speculations—as though about something quite ordinary.
Their word play climaxed with a game in which for every word Anna would have to think up a beautiful sentence in different languages, and from those sentences form a meaningful paragraph. The subject of the paragraph was mainly formed by the temperament and mechanics, the way of thinking of the languages used, or, more rarely, was based on articulation—so that it would be pleasant or sad or funny or scary or however else to recite the paragraph.

12. The Rastafarians were hired killers. But no one was afraid of them, because that was well known. The first hired killers in Ialivets after Shtefan. The Rastafarians had come from Budapest and, on the orders of Nanashka from Szeged, were tracking down and wiping out all the merchants in the mountains—Jews, Czechs, and Ukrainians from the *Maslosoiuz* Dairy Cooperative—who were trying to arrange the purchase and export of cheese horses.

After arriving in Ialivets the Rastafarians entered "What's There Is There" and stayed for a few months, partly Latin-Americanizing the Carpathian town—they introduced Ialivets to mate, loose, colorful men's shirts worn over the belt, sung sambas, big knitted berets, and the habits of sleeping in hammocks, putting houseplants out on the front steps in summer, and eating supper on balconies.
They figured they could forego chasing around the mountains after the merchants and instead sit in one place and wait for them all to come of their own accord.

13. Sebastian liked best how they could live for days at a time on the bank of the river—they lay about, bathed, gazed at the water and the clouds, smoked, slept, said nothing, ate a string of cheese horses each, drew something with stone on stone, did handstands. Or just drank gin. Like true predators, they soaked up the sun and moved sparingly. Sometimes they took Anna along.
The girl wasn't bored with them.

14. For some reason Sebastian was absolutely unconcerned when Anna went with the Rastafarians. This was so even though normally he tried to shield his daughter from any customers at the bar who paid her any attention. Especially later, when the second one became a teenager and he himself knew several serious people who came to Ialivets to sit in the bar and watch Anna's hands or lips.

15. One of them was an anonymous sculptor.
Fascinated by the art of medieval sculptural ensembles, primitive folk figures, and ancient African statuettes, he made copies of wooden sculptures and sold the forgeries to collectors, sincerely believing that he was fulfilling a sort of mission, that a sufficient number of these figures could change the world for the better. In the Hutsul villages he was not liked, because he tried to buy up all the figures in the churches and cemeteries for huge sums of money. In refusing him the community was fearful that someday he would return and either steal something or burn the whole lot down in despair.
They weren't far from the truth. In Prague the sculptor had recently been taken to court and given a huge fine for deliberate acts of arson on several small shops selling paper flowers. That was his way of defending true beauty.
Sebastian understood him completely.
The sculptor had already visited several times since the first time he saw Anna. He sat by the bar, drank wine with water, and sketched Anna's every move. He wanted to publish his own artist's guide to anatomy, which would differ from all contemporary notions of the structure of the human body.

He said that Anna was a perfect model for the medieval Queens of Sheba, rural tombstone pietas (Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary—mother of Jacob the younger, Joseph, and Salome) and naked Negro queens (but those from Central Africa—slim, tall, with elongated heads, and very supple), all at the same time. For her appearance, her suppleness, her firmness.

16. At the same time Anna had a strange sense of faithfulness and devotion and an uncommon ability to dictate her own personal distance, which only she had the power to regulate. It was easy to make friends with her, but to seduce her—impossible.
And so Sebastian didn't even hint that she should be careful with the sculptor or the Rastafarians.

17. Incidentally, it was only after Sebastian himself had gone after the night shift to the river with the Rastafarians several times that he became fully aware of how profoundly and sweetly one can do nothing.

18. Very soon another of the Rastafarians' amusements that Sebastian was particularly fond of gripped the whole town.
As they crossed the Ialivets market square, the Rastafarians would gather whole pocketfuls of the chestnuts that that had fallen in great piles under the trees. And throughout the day they did various pleasant and complicated things with them—threw them onto the roofs (and the chestnuts rolled down the tiles, falling onto the pavement as though from a springboard), tossed them into the drainpipes, juggled with them, rolled them across a table, trying to pass a chestnut to each other between bottles, threw them up as high as the birds, threw them to one another, held a few in each hand and dropped them to float in the canals, put them in the bottom of glasses and then poured gin over them, gave them to strangers and friends, left them behind on the bank of the river, on city benches and swings, on the billiard table.

19. During their first week in Ialivets the Rastafarians actually lived on that table. It so happened that in the whole town not a single free room could be found for them. And sleeping somewhere in some corner was not for them.
The Rastafarians paid Sebastian for an hour of billiards but didn't bother to take cues or balls and took off their boots and lay down to rest. One asked if this was okay. Sebastian decided that it was, because they met the two conditions for billiards at the bar—it was paid for and nobody was ruining anything. After the first hour the Rastafarians paid for another two, then for a day, and, finally, for one week in advance.

20. They appeared right in the middle of the grass season, and there was a sea of grass all around. The Rastafarians themselves smoked one joint after

another, and also gave them out to all the guests. Some holiday-makers had already become Rastafarians, and the journalists listened for hours to stories about Jamaica. The bar was so smoky that, like it or not even those who didn't smoke had to breathe in the burning hemp and sooner or later got high.

21. When Sebastian washed his and Anna's work clothes the water that came out was not dirty but yellow from the cannabinol sediment that washed out from between the threads.

22. Little Anna was also constantly stoned.
(Sebastian recalled this in 1947 when the Chuhaistyr detachment stopped to spend the night at a house near Huta. After supper, thirty partisans started smoking the same cheap tobacco, and in the middle of the night it was discovered that a baby who had been sleeping in the house behind a curtain had died from the smoke.)
At first she was a little afraid—she felt so good that it really seemed as though things would stay that way forever.

23. Later Anna smoked often but only in the presence of her father—he didn't want their hemp experiences to be too different.
Once, after smoking hashish, she felt how God stretched out his finger between the clouds; and she raised her own towards the sky, and thus they spent a few silent minutes in infinity, touching the tips of each other's fingers.
However, after a time the times changed and the time of hashish passed.
It's curious, this was much later, when she had grown up and Sebastian would tell her what he felt as he made love to her, Anna would always recall her hemp-filtered perceptions of the whole world.

24. When the blind man with the child came into the bar, she wasn't smoking, only playing word games with the Rastafarians and playing reggae on the Jew's harp.
The blind man was dressed in a typical European suit—only Sebastian subconsciously noted several oddly colored patches in various places on his jacket—and sitting on his shoulders was a young child in a stained sweater. The blind man had no eyes, and about the child it was impossible to say whether it was a boy or a girl. They made for the bar, the little one somehow steering the man with its hands. It had to bend down low towards the blind man's head three times before they reached the counter. It bowed down in order to avoid the backs of the chairs that were screwed on to the ceiling by the legs—Sebastian had made things so that all the furniture in the bar, was replicated on the ceiling, exactly as if in a mirror.

25. Not long before it had been different: the whole ceiling had been studded with many different knives—blades pointing downwards and producing strange reflections, shadows, the blade forest created a unique acoustic and added a pleasant feeling of uneasiness. Sebastian took the knives down after a few Boikos who were stealing horses on the Transcarpathian slopes to take to Galicia got drunk, began to argue, and, grabbing one of their colleague by the arms and legs, gave him a swing, and flung him up to the ceiling.

26. The blind man placed his hands on the counter and ordered strong tea with vanilla, spirits, and a few red berries of whatever sort. The child looked round the bar. Sebastian was measuring out the spirits when he suddenly had the feeling something was wrong. Seeing the man's hands and a sort of elusive gesture made by the child for some reason reminded him of one of his games with Anna

27. They started playing it after they'd thought up a new strategy for themselves—more theatricality in their behavior (then they allowed themselves a kind of mimicry that surpassed even a harlequin's).
He would stand by the counter; he would put his hands behind his back and push his shoulder blades together so far that from the front only his shoulders could be seen. Anna stood behind him—she couldn't be seen at all—and put her hands out in front of Sebastian; it looked as though a large man had a small child's arms, so well did they synchronize Anna's manipulations and gestures with Sebastian's facial expressions and intonations. The game was called "Two barmen—two hands." It was this very allusion—two people but two hands—that put Sebastian on his guard. The man's hands still lay on the counter.

28. Sebastian turned away and took a couple of steps towards the sideboard to take some cherries from a dish. On the way he even managed to take a sip of the tea (he always tried complicated drinks once they were ready, before giving the glass to the customer), and it tasted good. Suddenly he was seized by the feeling he always had when someone unexpectedly, quickly, and quietly ran up behind him. He really hated this, and at such moments he was at his most dangerous.
Sebastian dropped the tea, turned around, grabbed his pistol (the child's hand was under its sweater) and shot twice. So quickly that the child didn't fall from the man's shoulders but they fell together—just as they'd stood, overturning several baskets of large summer apples and various dried fruits that decorated the bar. Sebastian jumped over the counter and bent down to the child, pulling its hand out from under its sweater (only now did he

realize that the stains were made by fine painter's dyes and fit together in an interesting abstract composition). The little hand gripped the butt of a large pistol.

29. From that time on everything that the Rastafarians did was dedicated to Sebastian. They drank only to his health, played with Anna, taught her to lie for long periods of time on the riverbed, looking up through the water (someone even took a photograph of this; when Anna died and Sebastian was searching for her photographs he was sorry that the Rastafarians had not photographed Anna—they definitely would have sent him everything they had), and in every joint they left a few draws.

30. As a sign of gratitude, Nanashka from Szeged sent Sebastian a whole menagerie made of cheese. A horse, a ram, a deer, a billy-goat, an ox, an aurochs, and a unicorn, all life-size, were delivered by some rosy-cheeked, big-boned bruisers, glistening with sweat and somewhat on the plump side, who worked for Nanashka as thugs, intimidators, henchmen, and hitmen, and whose job it was to sample every day all the cheeses and bryndzas at the local markets.
Especially for Anna, Nanashka also sent a necklace made of hardened cheese and a few of Franz's sketches, in which you could see how he had tried to master the symbolism of cheese horses.

31. When skiers began to disappear and the visiting police commission took an interest in Sebastian (too often the missing skiers were last seen at "What's There is There"), the Rastafarians took it on themselves to track down a band of robbers who had been throwing skiers into a ravine, taking their expensive skis, boots, watches, and cameras, and selling them in tourist trains at stations on the Polish side.

32. That day the Rastafarians threw a party especially for Sebastian, Anna, and a few of their friends, renting the whole bar for the entire evening.
One of them performed barman's duties, another cooked a delicious supper, putting a different type of hashish into every dish (sugared hemp flowers and salted seeds were served for desert—that is how Sebastian learned to live on seeds and not necessarily just hemp; he simply collected the seeds of various plants, carried them in the pockets of his leather belt, and nibbled on them on hungry days). Two others led a hired Hutsul band, which was made to play reggae (one day I'll take you to this music, thought Anna about her dad).
At the end the Rastafarians wanted to exchange earrings with Sebastian—and since Sebastian didn't have any earrings, then at least with Anna. For this they had to pierce Anna's ears twice with an arrow from a cross-bow (the Rastafarians didn't sanction the use of fire-arms in their work), and

each of Anna's earrings was divided between two Rastafarians.

33. Somehow everybody forgot that the arrow had been smeared with a substance that prevents the blood from clotting. Her earlobes bled and bled. Neither herbs nor *bai*s helped. Anna even lost consciousness from the blood loss (later she told them that suddenly all colors began to flash and change—but only the colors of objects, which did not spill out beyond the shapes of the objects themselves, and that this weakness was more pleasant than any strength), until the effects of the substance passed. Sebastian took an interest in the liquid and the Rastafarians gave him a whole bottle of it.

34. Sebastian passed the liquid on to the Unsimple for analysis. They may well have used it for other purposes.
An ethnographer from Warsaw was staying in Vorokhta, and having almost solved the mystery of the Unsimple, he was planning to write an article about how these illiterate Hutsul pseudo-sorcerer-charlatans were manipulating Europe and the world through the use of plots. And just then he died in the finest hotel restaurant in Vorokhta, where at one time the young Franzysk, after entire nights spent drawing, used to go for his morning coffee with egg liqueur (the liqueur was in fact alcoholic gogol-mogol, but you could choose the eggs for it yourself: they lay in a large box—different sizes and colors, spotted, monotone, and almost transparent—eggs of all types of mountain birds, gathered among the dwarf mountain pine), which was sometimes finished off late in the evening with mushroom soup, roasted corn on the cob with trout pâté, broad beans in blackthorn sauce, frozen fillet of smooth snake with cranberry paste, and blue ginger vodka—two or three quarts of blue ginger vodka.

35. The ethnographer was dining in the company of the stationmaster, a Roman Catholic priest, the manager of a sawmill, and a doctor from the sanatorium. Suddenly he began to sweat. Very soon, instead of sweat drops of blood appeared on his skin. Blood clouded his eyes. He tried to wipe it off with his hand, but merely smudged the neat, red spots. The blood seeped incessantly. Red stains appeared on his spotless white clothes and quickly got bigger, spread towards each other, and merged into one wet redness. No one knew how to help. There was not a single wound on his body, but blood flowed from every pore.

36. When the party with the Rastafarians was almost over, Sebastian thought about the infinity of wondrous knick-knacks, objects, music, methods, spices, wines and films which—as you are sharply aware—will never, in your lifetime, situated as it is somewhere between the extremes of cold and heat, become a normal part of everyday life.

37. The Rastafarians gave them a very beautiful specimen of an Indian hemp plant in a stone pot, and spent a long time telling them how joyous it would be to live with Anna and start a little plantation from this plant on deserted meadows and mountainsides with maximal exposure to the sun. Because every plant is planted first and foremost for the joy of planting plants.
The next morning Sebastian reminded himself not to forget to ask the Rastafarians how to look after the hemp plant, but it turned out that they'd finally left Ialivets.

38. The blind assassin proved useful once again in 1938.
Sebastian didn't know how to take two pistols into Carpatho-Ukraine. He thought for a long time, until he remembered the blind man's child. He took four-year-old Anna (not the same one who'd been in the bar then) up onto his shoulders, hid the pistols on her, and headed for the checkpoint. He was afraid only that the little one, gripped by a childish desire to shoot everything, might pull the gun out from its hiding place.

39. For some reason Sebastian believed passionately in the triumph of Carpatho-Ukraine, because the plot seemed to be such a good one.
It was of crucial importance to him that the Ukrainian cause begin in Central Europe itself. Although it's well known how a representative of the field reconnaissance unit of the headquarters of the Carpathian Sich, a pure nationalist who at that time was traveling around Transcarpathia in the bus-bar, reported to Commander Klympush his belief that Sebastian was guided more by the idea of landscapes than the idea of nation.
And maybe that was true, for Sebastian's enthusiasm cooled somewhat when he learned of the government's forestry policy plans and saw how the citizens were making use of autonomy mainly to destroy forests, waterways, and stone formations.
After all, the issues of forest and wood have always been critical in these lands.

40. Despite a certain disillusionment (after all, his main quality was contemplativeness—to see everything and know what you see—which leads not to indifference but to the acceptance of everything that occurs), Sebastian hurried to complete the mapping out of all sniper positions necessary to turn the mountains into one enormous fortress.

41. At one of these positions—an incredible metal construction somewhat similar to the Eiffel Tower, with a hole-ridden wooden platform at the top and broken stairs and narrow hatches between the different levels—

Sebastian found a bottle of plum brandy, which he drank on the spot. Only after finishing it did he see the barely visible signs that a Hungarian-Polish diversionary group, the sort of which at that time there were many all over Carpatho-Ukraine, must have stopped there before him. The home brew turned out to have been poisoned (Sebastian's consciousness was not yet ready for quite such a trick).
It got worse and worse. That is, Sebastian felt good—he liked fevers—but the strength of his juices had disappeared somewhere, his lungs barely managed to take in and release air, which was of no help. For some reason his arms began to feel as though they had been burned, and they would have hurt dreadfully if not for the fever. He had to replace quickly all the water in his body.

42. He made his way further up into the mountains—he didn't want to come home and die in front of the child. And he didn't want to go to hospital.
Some time before he had made up his mind—if something happened to him, he wasn't going to call doctors and he wasn't going to lie helplessly at home; instead, like an animal hiding its own death, he would make for the mountains. The mountains would either cure him or quietly swallow him.

43. He had already been in hospital once. It was a long time ago, in winter, when he had just begun to make love with the second Anna, back in Ialivets. He had contracted a strange infection after eating part of an apricot left by a guest, a cavalry officer from a foreign legion—an unimaginably stupid coincidence.
He was arrested, so as not to spread the disease, and taken to a closed mountain hospital in salt caves. Oversized white wards, underground and doorless, led into one another via short corridors that were a little lower but just as wide as the rooms. In every ward patients wrapped in some unknown leaves lay directly on top of piles of salt. Treatment consisted of periodic rubbing with extra-thick oil. Moans of pain reverberated (there seemed to be more individual voices than there really were) and echoed through the underground chambers, the extent of which could only be guessed at.
This hospital was one of the innovations of the Czechoslovak ministry of health, aimed at the elimination of Carpathian syphilis and the destruction of other viruses. The patients were held in prison-like isolation, sometimes for as long as they managed to say alive.

44. Sebastian could no longer imagine what winter on earth looked like, and the salt stalactite next to him had almost touched the stalagmite, when one day Anna appeared in the ward.
This could mean only one thing—she had also been arrested; yet it meant something different. Loyal Anna, unable to get through to her father

(normally such prohibitions did not affect her, and the guards themselves would show her the way along forbidden paths), had come up with the idea of working in the hospital as a nurse—there was always a lack of people willing to work there.
Every day she came to rub him with oil ("You are my finest cream," said Sebastian, "It's you who is mine, and you know why"), and every night—to make love. ("I want to have the same microbes as you do," Anna insisted, "Anyway, it's actually a good thing, because we won't get sick a second time.") By God's grace, she didn't fall ill at all. Soon afterwards Sebastian was let out, and they returned home together.
Winter had not yet passed.
Sebastian didn't dare tell Anna that there was no such thing as immunity against that disease. But apparently it is dangerous only for those who have been in Africa.

45. As a young man in Africa, Sebastian had almost died from the very same illness.
But then it had been even worse—because of the African climate, exotic fungi grew in his lacerations. Nobody knew whether they were the result of airborne spores or whether they were a product of the infected body, but the fungi hurt so badly that Sebastian preferred to cut them off together with patches of skin.
Then he had also been at a sniper's post. It was a large African city made of clay. He could make just one shot, and he was waiting for his chance in a hot attic where there was only room enough to lie down and cut off more and more rotten skin.
Sebastian kept his eye glued to the optical sight. He saw exactly the same thing that was portrayed on that country's most expensive postage stamp—countless white cubes of buildings, a few spindle-like spires, gardens and overgrown orchards on the city's hills, the red clay of the narrow street, coffee brewers on the doorstep of a blue restaurant. His view differed from the philatelic one only due to the presence of flies on his eyes and on both lenses of the sight.
Alongside him lay his beloved African girl. From time to time Sebastian wiped down her sweating body with a wet cloth, and she applied aloe juice to his wounds six times a day.
From then on Sebastian's only erotic fantasy was love-making soaked in aloe. In Ialivets, however, not a sprig of it was to be found.

46. The Annas were never ill.
Once, when they were already in Mokra, the last Anna had wind sickness, if wind sickness can really be called a sickness.
Anna climbed up onto a mountain at the wrong place and didn't manage to

duck to avoid a bad wind. The wind got into her head and blew out all smells.
Sebastian knew only one cure for such an ailment. He led Anna along a narrow path between two mountains and waited for the draft there to blow the wind out of her head. This is just what happened, but then the draft stayed in Anna and softened her head—so that the shape of her skull could be molded with the hands. "Make it like yours," Anna said. "I really love your beautiful head."
Sebastian decided that there was no longer any point in driving out wind with wind—you just end up endlessly exchanging one wind for another (at best you could stop with the one you feel most comfortable with). However, wind can also be frozen out.
On the feast of Jordan they bathed together in the Mokrianka, holding their heads underwater for as long as possible. A Soviet militiaman arrested Sebastian, and naked Anna ran home through the whole village. The militiaman wanted to hold Sebastian for at least a few days for performing pagan rituals during religious holidays, but in the end he gave him a bottle of arnica in alcohol and sent him away to rub it on his daughter. "I have children too," the militiaman said.

47. Poisoned by the diversionists' home brew, Sebastian didn't go to Anna but crawled higher into the mountains.
He knew of a spring where he could replenish all the water in his body. He stopped often to tighten the bandages on his burned hands, which kept slipping off as he crawled. Even more often he passed out for several minutes. Then he had the worst hallucinations possible—that he was stuck in a narrow crevice and couldn't pull himself through to Anna, who was balancing on a ladder flung across a chasm.
When he reached the spring it was already nighttime. He took a drink, wet his hands, and dozed off. After a while he awoke and once again put his hands into the stream, but he couldn't feel the water. Yet someone gave a deathly cry. Sebastian realized he wasn't washing himself but the burnt hands of a woman who had crawled to the spring too and slept alongside him in the dark (something similar, though not very, had happened to him already: He and Anna, when spending the night amongst other people, would resort to an inconspicuous method—under the duvet he would put his finger into Anna. Once they had been sleeping in such cramped conditions that waking up in the middle of the night Sebastian had pulled his finger out not from Anna but from a Hutsul woman who lay on his left. And Anna was sleeping soundly, lying with her back to him, to his right—Sebastian had not noticed when they'd fallen asleep, Anna had turned away, and he had unwittingly placed his released finger somewhere else).

48. By March 1939 his hands had still not healed completely yet every second day Sebastian sent a telegram to Klympush's headquarters, urging that troops be sent to the sniper stronghold he prepared.
Nobody listened to him, and all was lost (almost the same as happened in Lviv because of the balconies).
The Carpathian Sich faced open battle.
This was the unnoticed first act of the Second World War.
But four thousand versus forty. Blood flooded the Tysa.
(A fraction of the Sich fighters got out to Romania, but before long the Romanians gave them all up to the Hungarians, and the Hungarians gave the Galicians to the Poles.)
Sebastian understood that this time someone had thought up a plot that was better than his.

49. But Sebastian believed firmly in the force of his own presence. He knew that there could be nothing bad wherever he might be, because he felt good everywhere.
You have to love places genuinely, so that they will love you.
For this reason, after the massacre at Krasne Pole, he took his rifle and settled down in a comfortable position near Trebusha. One exceptional marksman can change several plots, especially if that marksman is the last one.

50. He waited, crouched behind a small rampart near Trebusha, and waited for the enemy troops (Franzysk had been right: the most radical thing is to wait).
That's the way things happen, thought Sebastian. I wanted to be the most outstanding. Franz also tried to be the most outstanding, and what came of it—he stopped making films (because he was always aiming to make the film of films) and let them chop off his head. Franz really could have been outstanding. But if you're outstanding in everything but not in some one thing you're not—then you're already not the most outstanding. And anyway, for everyone who is most outstanding there will always be someone even more outstanding. That's what happened with Franzysk, that's what happened with Nanashka from Szeged, that's what happened to Klympush. And that's what could happen to him.

51. When the nearly hundred-year reign of Nanashka collapsed, the bar was often broken into by the new boss's bruisers, who stomped around the mountains covered in rifles and powder-horns, imposing their own order.
These were times when Sebastian found himself amazed every night by some new madness, although the previous night he'd always been sure that nothing could surprise him anymore.

Sometimes the thugs would cause him problems, but what could he do, since he called himself the bar-keeper.
Then in his mind he recalled all his boyhood heroisms.

52. He didn't doubt that in their boyhood men do their finest deeds. It's just a shame that afterwards nobody knows about them; it's a shame that boyhood feats don't count.
Sebastian, for example, was the best at jumping off roofs onto the tops of trees—he would fly straight into the leaves without looking. His own body would tear a passage through the leaves and then, already in the midst of the thick foliage, he would grab an oncoming branch and instantly swing himself up onto the next one.

53. True, there were some childhood adventures that were similar to those involving the bruisers.
After such incidents he would replay hundreds of times in his own mind his own, invented, successful version of the events, until he made himself believe that it really could have happened only like that way.
Such stories were created literally once and for all. Apparently, a variant of a *bai*.

54. Crouching in the trench near Trebusha, Sebastian imagined how fine things could be in this little Carpathia, which he, making use of universal chaos, would be able to defend by himself.
He dreamed up a beautiful land around Ialivets, in which there would be no rubbish, everybody would know everyone else's language, and the supreme institution would be the bureau of scripts, where everyone would be able to submit something genuinely interesting, and the government would act on the basis of these plots.
Everything is ruined by would.

55. In March it gets dark early.
Lost in thought, Sebastian barely noticed the detachment of riders in strange uniforms, armed with long rifles. They were headed for Trebusha.
He took off his gloves, laid out a row of bullets by his hand, and pressed his eye to the sight. The riders were speaking to one another (judging by their lips—in Hungarian), and looking at a map (the gothic script looked as though the First World War had never happened). On their uniforms one could make out the badge of the forest guard.
Sebastian took his rifle between his legs, covered it over with a rag, put the bullets into one pocket, his gloves into the other and crawled along the trench on his knees until he reached a large pile of stones. Then he ran

through the forest to the road and ran for four hours without stopping until he reached old Beda's armored car, hidden away in a ravine.

56. The armored car nearly hung over a steep drop, secured by a cable to a thick beech tree. The top hatch was open, and warm air coming from inside vibrated above the opening.
Inside the vehicle it really was warm. Old Beda was making wine and telling little Anna about Francis of Assisi and Franzysk Petrosky. Anna brightened her stay in the car with large paintings on the white walls (Sebastian had once drawn something similar on her mother's hands) and unremitting misuse of the verb "is."
Wasting no time, Sebastian and Beda drank some wine and drove all the way to Kvasy, where the bus-bar was.
Sebastian admitted defeat in his imaginary war.

57. They could hear the bus-bar before they saw it. And then they saw, fairly high up in the sky, a secret sign—six bank swallows, four golden orioles, and one kingfisher. All the birds were flying backwards—forwards one past another but without flying beyond the bounds of a certain hemisphere, like the beams of many searchlights pointed at the cloudy sky above a darkened city. They were held by strong lines that converged somewhere behind a tall hayrick, in which there was almost no hay left after the winter.
Six four one, said Sebastian.
Beda opened a thick notebook and read out—six four one. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it happens; in it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value; if there is any value, it must lie outside of all that happens and exists. For all that happens and exists is accidental. This meant that everything was okay, and they could safely approach the bus, which stood in a hiding place behind the almost empty hayrick, in the very place where the lines attached to the birds converged. And they were attached to the handle of the bus's front door.

58. The all-clear signal had been given by the ornithologist who had once ringed birds in Chornohora, Hryniava, and on the edge of the Hutsul world—in the Tsibo mountains—and who had known Franzysk.
Ornithology had slowly transformed into ornithophilia—he had learned to make love with all birds that laid at least slightly larger eggs. They made love on the highest peaks, where the sky itself spins all around and the entire earth is reduced to an immovable base for feet. The birds gave themselves to him silently, only throwing their heads back and opening their beaks wide, struggling to keep quiet, lest their males should hear them. The latter hated the ornithologist that loved birds—the ornithologist was always

surrounded by an agitated flock of male birds screeching in inhuman voices. The lovers of my lovers, the ornithologist called them ironically.
Later ornithophilia faded, and philosophy took its place. To be more precise—one tract by Wittgenstein. The one-time ornithologist knew it by heart and would always ponder which proposition it was appropriate to quote in a given situation.

59. Therefore, when the ornithologist was being asked to watch the bar while Sebastian fought against the occupying forces, he warned him that on his return the necessary signals would be given via the birds and Wittgenstein. To ensure the signals could be decoded, he gave old Beda a notebook with a handwritten transcription of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. For example, the sentence "Each item can be the case or not the case while everything else remains the same" would be conveyed by one bird of one type, two of another, and one of yet another (one two one). What such a sentence was supposed to signify was up to Sebastian to decide. In any case, Sebastian's conclusion that six four one meant everything was okay turned out to be correct.

60. The ornithophile was probably the most loyal customer at Sebastian's bar. Though over the five years of the war the bus had seen thousands of the most diverse clients. Among them were a few hundred regulars.
The bar functioned very simply. Sebastian drove the bus until someone stopped him. The customer stepped into the bar and they drove on. If the customer didn't want to go anywhere, Sebastian pulled over to the side of the road and for a while the bar operated in one place.
Some clients could travel for weeks in the bar without any aim whatsoever.
Some went too far, and Sebastian would have to turn back.
Sometimes the bar would stop for a long time in some village or other.
Occasionally they would have to pack up unexpectedly and hurry off somewhere.
One could request the bar arrive at a certain time.
And so on, and so on.

61. Sebastian managed to drive the bus, serve his customers, and bring up Anna. Before each town he would stop and walk to it by himself, so as to—an old sniper's habit—scout out the terrain in advance. On top of that he had to listen to various stories, in order somewhere to tell somebody something from someone. This oral postal service tired Sebastian out so much that he could no longer remember what had happened where, when, and with whom. He was traveling in an epos that had nothing to do with him.

62. The only conversations he took part in with his customers in full consciousness were mutual confessions of a certain sort, devoid of refined stylistics but extraordinarily rich in plot—who loves or doesn't love what, what someone likes or doesn't like, what someone finds tasty or not.
Sebastian considered such conversations the basic catechism, the compulsory first level, of any coexistence.
And so, on meeting any of his guests a second time, he knew just what the guest was accustomed to and what to suggest he try.

63. The bar was most popular in the distant villages where few people lived and very little happened.
In such villages each inhabitant had at his disposal only a few stories of his own. He retold each of them countless times to everybody he knew, just as they related their own few stories. Thus there were only a couple of plots that were hard to distinguish between experienced or heard.
The arrival of the bus with its strangers presented an opportunity to connect with something different. And to tell anew your own, which, wrenched from the enchanted circle of listeners, again gathered weight.

64. Sometimes interesting things happened when friends got together with their friends and talked about friends and told stories about friends of friends heard from friends.
It frequently happened that someone would hear a bizarre story from a stranger that turned out to be about him.
Or: at one table the conversation would often be about someone who, unbeknownst to the speakers, was sitting at the next.

65. At one time this was constantly the case with Severyn. Everyone talked about how he had taken some foreign tourists into the mountains to some weird mushrooms, how the tourists had gone crazy and Severyn had gone blind but had nevertheless led the tourists back to safety. This story was retold again and again in various forms.
Nobody knew that Severyn was living with Sebastian then and spent the whole time in the bus. A good thing he couldn't hear all these fables, since he had stopped up his ears and nose with cotton wool soaked in gin to finally dissolve the tumor in his brain that he had refused to allow the younger Mlynarsky to cut out.
Many legends of all sorts about himself were also heard by the ornithologist, who was considered in the bar to be a wandering philosopher—and with time he, retelling the tractatus over and over, stopped mentioning Wittgenstein.

66. Even odder than the ornithophile was, perhaps, the Pope's daughter. Nobody could know if that was true or not but she certainly said it was true. And, in any case, nobody had any intention of contradicting her—everyone was glad to see the impossible.
The Pope's daughter wrote drunken plays. At least, that's what she called her method of writing.
Somehow she got fed up with coming to terms with the fact that the most interesting things happened when she was drunk—the most important stories, the wittiest jokes, the most aphoristic thoughts, the most original ideas, the most paradoxical solutions to the most painful problems. And the tragic thing was—she felt—that a moment later you can't remember a thing. So the Pope's daughter started getting drunk with a pencil in her hand, and writing down every word she said and heard. The dynamics of her plays depended largely on what she drank. Sometimes near the end the actors spoke completely incomprehensible things. And not just that—the Pope's daughter tried yet another experiment: her stage directions indicated exactly the quantity and kind of drink involved, and the author insisted that the actors drink this on stage during the course of the play. It's no wonder this led to some interesting improvisations that took the action to unexpected lengths.
Sebastian's bus was for several years her creative laboratory, study, studio, and home.

67. In 1942 the Pope's daughter decided to write a play about Gypsy children who ran away from a camp, and the Hungarian gendarmes who were trying to find them. The gendarmes come to the conclusion that the children can best be tracked down by a child, who can imagine how the children think and behave, and they call on the help of a girl-detective. The little girl finds the Gypsy children, but with some difficulty—at issue is the otherness of different cultures and civilizations (in reality the children were met by old Beda, who ferried them around in his armored car until the end of the war).
Eight-year-old Anna was required in order to study the language of children. The Pope's daughter gave her deceptively sweet young wine to drink.
When Anna had slept it off and sobered up, she told her father about the grafting of apple trees, pears, peaches, and cherries in such a way that Sebastian became convinced she had been inside the trees and had swum in the sap in their tubules.

68. From that time on the Unsimple occasionally gave Sebastian cigarettes that couldn't be smoked down.
On the inside of the cigarette paper the Unsimple drew plans that Anna was to use to find one or another tree and graft certain cuttings onto them.
They drove to the indicated places in the bar.

69. In general, traveling by bus was very pleasant. It allowed for good drinking and pleasant talking, there was a great view, and somehow you avoided all perils—either you got there early or were fortuitously late.
It wasn't much of a problem that they often didn't have enough food, that in winter they got stuck in snowdrifts, their hands became raw from washing dishes in icy water, and they had to pee straight into the snow outside the door, and that in summer it got so hot that they had to keep wetting their clothes in a tub of rain water and that at night, when it got cooler, it seemed that it was constantly raining outside because of the swarms of insects on the windows and that they had to serve free drinks to the police and officers.

70. In the autumn of 1944 the bus had to be abandoned in Krasnisora. That very day Sebastian and Anna hitched a ride to Königsfeld—villagers who went to Teresva to get bicycles left there by the Germans took them on the handlebars

71. Sebastian could easily have beaten up those three who were in front of the cobbler's workshop in Königsfeld even without a weapon. Without even a stick (and he could easily have come by a stick, because the trees were saturated with water and had become soft—it was a time when water and greenery had triumphed everywhere). Back in the army Sebastian had learned to maim an opponent with his bare hands. And in Africa he had taken part in some pretty theatrical contests—fighting with warriors armed with knives, awls, razors, or knuckledusters ("It's a good thing I have had Africa," thought Sebastian. "It's always possible to explain the origins of many personal characteristics").

72. He approached the three and could vividly see the throat cartilages of the first crushed by a short, straight blow from his straightened fingers, the blood vessels on the temple of the second shattered by an open-handed blow from the left, and the knee and jaw of the third dislocated by his right heel and his right elbow, respectively.
But he had no right to fight.

73. To fight meant to kill; to kill means to run away and spend your whole life hiding. At home Anna was waiting.
Sebastian approached them first, remembering that first and foremost he must always remember to protect life, and he just managed to greet them before they jumped him (presenting their throats, cheekbones, knees, jaws, and solar plexuses in a most inviting way), tied him up, threw him into the trunk of a Studebaker, and drove off in the direction from which Sebastian had just come.

74. What could they beat out of him under interrogation?
At interrogations they ask about secrets, not guilt.
Guilt (husband of a Sich riflewoman, sergeant in a foreign legion, participation in colonial wars, brother-in-law of a famous decadent, Greek-Catholic, Ukrainian, contact with nationalists, Zionists, anti-Semites, white and black racists, anarchists, Trotskyites, monarchists, foreign journalists, boy scouts, monks, officers, government ministers, members of parliament, diplomats, ornithophiles, drug-addicts, relatives of highly placed Vatican officials, hired killers, the murder of three hired killers (one juvenile), sniper, unregistered firearms, banned books, hashish, daughter as second wife, pedophilia, petty entrepreneurship, private property, illegal crossing of borders, witchcraft, local inhabitant, presence in occupied territory, participation in the events in Transcarpathia in 1938–1938, espionage, sabotage, passport violations, supporting the nationalist underground, living in a border zone, unlicensed psychotherapy, Freudianism, Morganism-Weissmanism, Nietzscheanism, Wittgensteinization, departure form the principles of socialist realism in narrative, fault-finding, sympathies with the West, pacifism, half-Lemko, resisting representatives of authority, non-participation in elections to the Supreme Soviet, avoidance of the all-Union census, deliberate unemployment, common drunkenness, illegal income, harboring criminals, observes poorly, listens carefully, remembers a lot, talks too much) doesn't interest them, because it's not a secret.
Live without secrets, said Franzysk.
He doesn't know any secrets.
What does he know?
He knows thousands of places and words.
What does he remember?
He remembers thousands of places and words.
What does he forget?
He forgets thousands of places and words.
What does he recall?
He recalls thousands of places and words.
What does he make up?
He makes up thousands of places and words.
What does he speak of?
He speaks of thousands of places and words.
What does he learn?
He learns thousands of places and words.
What does he love?
He loves thousands of places and words.
What does he choose?
He chooses thousands of places and words.

What does he not choose?
He doesn't choose thousands of places and words.
What can he do?
He can see, know, love, remember, forget, recall, make up, tell, choose, not choose thousands of places and words.
What does he do?
Loves, sees, learns, knows, remembers, tells, forgets, recalls, chooses, makes up, doesn't choose thousands of places and words.
What does he want?
To see, to learn, to know, to love, to remember, to forget, to tell, to recall, to do, to make up, to choose, to not choose thousands of places and words.
What might he do?
See, learn, love, know, make up, not choose, forget, recall, choose, remember, tell, do, want thousands of places and words.
What then is the secret?
How and for what he sees, loves, remembers, tells, knows, wants, might do, can do, does do, forgets, doesn't choose, recalls, makes up, chooses thousands of places and words.
How and for what are there thousands of places and words that are seen, learned, known, remembered, forgotten, recalled, chosen, loved, wanted, might be done, can be done, not chosen.
And that's already not his secret.
He can go to the interrogation confidently. Although, if you don't know at least one secret, pain can't be avoided; but there's no need to bear it—somehow it will pass on its own.

75. On the way Sebastian pressed his neck arteries in order to sleep a little before the interrogation. To sleep is to prolong time by half a lifetime.
They barely managed to wake him for the interrogation.

76. First they offered him a cigarette. He took three or four cigarettes from a full pack of lend-lease Camels.
You have to think of the cigarettes you'll need later even when they've appeared at the present moment only by some miracle; cigarettes are the best proof that everything is coming to an end (Sebastian knew one staunch fascist who had handed himself over to the Americans because in their camps they gave out cigarettes every day).

77. Then they introduced themselves, called themselves folklorists, told Sebastian to prepare himself for a lengthy talk, and appealed to him to be honest.
Sebastian decided not to mention a word about how he had been hurrying to Anna. That might make them want to hold him for as long as possible.

And as for honesty, he knew one pretty good tactic. In *bai* just as in love-making, everything depends on rhythm. If you set a false rhythm, what kind of honesty can there be. Well-composed sentences will lead to nothing. He decided to try the following pattern—six short, one long, one very short going from the bottom upwards, one very long turning into a spiral, and two short unfinished to the right.
Sebastian was so focused in his mind that he heard his own voice before he even started to speak. And he liked that voice.
After all, it had yet to happen that he didn't get the better of someone in a discussion.

78. For some reason Sebastian recalled a story one of the Rastafarians had told, about how Szeged Nanashka had kept a private little prison in Szeged, where chance passers-by were imprisoned in order to tell Nanashka all kinds of stories.

79. When Sebastian was released after a couple of hours and he was once again on his way to Mokra via Königsfeld, hurrying to Anna, he couldn't at all understand why everything had gone so easily and painlessly. Was it because he'd told the folklorists straight away where to look for Dovbush's treasure ("Where valuables are involved, it's better to come clean before the torture starts," he had taught Anna), or because he had been right that endeavoring to reach understanding in different languages is in fact the peak of existence. Although it could have been even simpler: either these people really were folklorists, or the false rhythm had helped. Both were possible.

80. He didn't reach home until the next morning.
Anna slept late into the day, as she'd fallen asleep just before he'd arrived home. Sebastian didn't even take her boots off, so as not to wake her; he sat beside her and waited as she slept so beautifully.
The cheese had begun to stink so he fried it with caraway seeds while she heated yesterday's soup on some soft wet branches: soak bread, onion, wood sorrel, and tree-dried cherries in plum brandy, boil in water with sour cream, add oil, salt, and paprika, serve in bowls—to each portion add a spoonful of vodka and eat while still very hot (on top of all the necessary ingredients Anna dunked all of the fried cheese into the soup).
Then Sebastian said how he had never heard of anything so strange.

IF ACCORDING TO THE MAP (LEGEND)

The brilliant historical essay written in Paris in 1976 by Anna Sebastiani about the psychology of Christian martyrdom, "Irrational coherence is total," has the following lyrical epigraph: "That the saints went through this you will know after a century has passed. Todiaska, 1951."
In all likelihood this phrase is autobiographical and relates to Anna's meeting with the future martyrs of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic underground church on Todiaska mountain. Judging by time and place, that happened during Anna and Sebastian's journey from Mokra to Ialivets.
If this is really the case, then their journey most likely followed the route: Deutsche Mokra — Ruska Mokra — Königsfeld — Svydova — Berliaska — Pidpula — Todiaska — Blyznytsia (the last five are mountains of the Svydovets ridge) — Kvasy — Menchil — Sheshul — Ialivets.

SEVEN

1. It was so cold you couldn't even take off your sheepskin.

2. Sitting on the stone floor of the empty room, they made love so simply that Anna felt as though she'd disintegrated into many parts, each of which was making love to Sebastian.

3. And he felt that he'd learnt to fly, although he understood that this was because he was in Ialivets.

4. The cold could not penetrate into the open gaps in their clothing, because it was met by a surging heat with the distinctive flavor of scent-hallucination.

5. The main thing is not to be in a hurry to leave when nothing is holding you and there is time to talk.

6. If so, you are so big and yet really so small.

7. There's so much and so little of you.

8. That's good for the world, and the world also is good.

9. Although inside you the world is better than outside you.

10. The thing I want most is to touch my pregnant stomach together with you.

11. If you ever have another man, he will die because he has too beautiful a woman.

12. Don't talk to me in such intonations—that's how they talk when the way is closed, when you can't get what you want.

13. I'm beautiful when you tell me about it.

14. Anna dozed off, sitting on Sebastian and resting her forehead on his shoulder, and he had to keep sitting like that even though he dearly wanted to stretch out and lie down.

15. Just as with the previous Annas so with this one it was always like the first time in the world.

16. Later old Beda came for Anna. Nothing had happened to the Unsimple. Plots cannot end. They had decided to go somewhere far, far away, and were waiting for her in the armored car. Anna became terribly sad. Sebastian said he wouldn't give her away to anyone. She drank a lot of gin and began to cry. Beda came back again. Sebastian chased him away and threw a grenade through the window. Anna got drunk and began to think aloud about their family. Sebastian understood for the first time that she saw everything differently than he did. She cried and tried to kiss his hands. He wouldn't let her, she stopped crying and calmly asked permission to kiss each hand once. Sebastian allowed it, and she did what she wanted. The second she kissed for a very long time. He had to take his hand away to throw another grenade. Anna said he was doing too much for her. And went to the door. Sebastian couldn't understand this. Remember, we talked about this? She turned round, but didn't stop—and went out backwards. Sebastian made such a gesture that Anna, when she was already by the armored car, couldn't resist and tried to do the same herself, as though she'd become Sebastian's biographer. What could her father be doing at this moment? Searching for interesting things is the most human of all traits, her father had said. Thus Sebastian had said what Franz said.

17. Sebastian could neither sit nor walk nor stand nor lie down.

18. The depths of his lungs were empty.

19. Three thousand times he thought the word Anna.

20. Not until evening was he able to do anything. And it was four things at once.

21. He pissed in the snow.

22. He examined a tree in which there were some birds that looked, like overripe fruit.

23. He explored the roof of his mouth with the tip of his tongue, and it felt strange from the cold.

24. And he prayed for the souls of the dead for whom nobody else could pray—for Franz, Lukach, old Beda, the French engineer, Loci, the Rastafarians, the blind assassin, his child, the ornithologist, Shtefan, Nanashka, deputy Stefanyk, deputy Lahodynsky, the painter Trush, the painter Perfetsky, the survival instructor, the Bosnian captain, Second-

Lieutenant Pelensky, Captain Didushko, Captain Bukshovany, Colonel Kolodzynsky, General Tarnavsky, his African women, Severyn, the younger Mlynarsky, the Pope's daughter, Brehm, Wittgenstein, the Gypsy trumpeters, Anna, Anna, and Anna.

25. On the apple trees in the old city gardens were a great many apples. Nobody had gathered them and nobody would. From his pocket he pulled out an apple he had picked the day before. He took a bite and found one of Anna's long hairs in his mouth.

26. I love her, and not myself, and she is, always is somewhere, just as beautiful. It's good to have somebody at least somewhere. If only to have somebody to whom to tell the story of the day, which is worth living through for this very reason.

27. In the next world those who feel most at home are not soldiers or doctors, not builders or gardeners, but tellers of stories, *bai*makers.

28. From the highest of the trees that Sebastian had planted in 1914 the magpies took flight and flew into the shadows of Petros.

29. Sebastian counted—seven.

30. In the ornithologist's notebook, seven—Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

31. Of all the proofs of God's existence, this can be considered the best.

Translated by Uilleam Blacker

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Depeche Mode

Serhii Zhadan

The referee's completely pissed
he doesn't like our Metalist

15.02.04 (Sunday)

When I was fourteen and had my own views about life, I first loaded up on alcohol. Up to the gills. It was really hot and the blue heavens swam above me, and I lay dying on a striped mattress and couldn't even get drunk, because I was only fourteen and simply didn't know how. In the last fifteen years, I've had more than enough reasons to dislike this life: from the beginning, from when I first began to become aware of it, it seemed a vile and mean thing, it immediately began creating lousy situations that you try not to remember but cannot forget. For my part, of course, I never made any special demands, my relations with life were okay, in spite of its clinically idiotic nature. For the most part, unless there was some new governmental initiative, I was satisfied—with the circumstances in which I lived, the people I knew, the ones I saw from time to time and had dealings with. For the most part they didn't bother me, and, I expect, I didn't bother them. What else? I was satisfied with how much money I had, which is not to say that I was satisfied with the amount as such —I never really had any dough at all—but I was satisfied with the basic principle of how it circulated around me—from childhood I noticed that banknotes appear when you need them, roughly in the bare minimum required, and normally things worked out: they work out fine, of course, if you haven't lost all sense of decency and at least keep up some appearances—meaning that you brush your teeth, or don't eat pork if you're a Muslim; then the angel with black accountant armbands and dandruff on his wings appears with strange regularity to refill your current account with a certain sum in local currency, just enough, on the one hand, to prevent you from croaking and, on the other, to stop you from screwing around too much and messing up your reincarnation by buying tankers of oil or cisterns of spirits. I was satisfied with this arrangement, I understood the angels and supported them. I was satisfied with the country in which I lived, the amount of shit that filled it, which in

the most critical aspects of my life in this country reached up to my knees and higher. I understood that I could very well have been born in another, far worse country, with, for example, a harsher climate or an authoritarian form of government ruled not simply by bastards, like in my country, but by demented bastards who pass on their rule to their children along with a foreign debt and domestic obscurantism. So I considered my fate not to be so bad, and I didn't worry too much about these things. For the most part I was satisfied with everything, I was satisfied with the television picture I saw through the windows of the apartments in which I lived, which is why I tried not to change the channel too quickly, because I had noticed that attention from the reality installed around me always resulted in some predictable nastiness or simply more of life's routine crap. Reality on its own is cool, but it's a complete bummer once you start going over the post-game statistics, when you analyze your own and reality's major indicators and see that it committed many more fouls than you did but only your side got penalized. If anything really oppressed me it was the television screen's constant, insistent demands for unnatural sexual relations with me—to put it simply, to screw me by taking advantage of my social rights and Christian duties. I've lived my fifteen years of adult life cheerfully, taking no part in the construction of civil society, never turning up at a polling site, and successfully avoiding contact with the oppressive regime, if you know what I mean. I had no interest in politics, no interest in economics, no interest in culture, no interest even in the weather forecast—this was maybe the only thing in the country that inspired trust, but I had no interest in it anyway.

Now I'm thirty. What has changed in the last fifteen years? Almost nothing. Even the external appearance of this… president hasn't changed much; in any case his portraits are airbrushed today in the same way as they were before, even I noticed that. The music on the radio has changed, but by and large I don't listen to the radio. Clothes have changed, but the eighties, as far as I can tell, are still in fashion. Television hasn't changed, it's still as sticky and irritating as lemonade spilled on a parquet floor. The climate hasn't changed, the winters are just as long, and the springs just as long-awaited. Friends have changed, meaning that some have disappeared forever, and others have appeared to take their place. Memory has changed—it has become longer, but not any better. I hope there will be enough of it for about another sixty years of extended pragmatic apathy and unshakeable equanimity of spirit, which is what I wish for myself. Amen.

17.06.93 (Thursday)
INTRODUCTION No. 1

16.50

June 17, near five in the afternoon, Dogg Pavlov tries to enter the subway. He walks up to the revolving door, goes straight up to the woman in uniform, and pulls a veteran's card out of his pocket. The woman in uniform looks at the card and reads "Pavlova, Vira Naumivna." "So?" she asks.

"My grandmother," says Dogg Pavlov.

"Where is your grandmother?"

"This," says Dogg pointing at the card, "is my grandmother."

"What of it?"

"She's a veteran."

"And you, what do you want?"

"She burned in a tank."

The woman looks at the card again. Who knows, she thinks, maybe she did burn—you can't tell from a photograph.

"Well, okay," she says. "And what can I do for you?"

"A pass," says Dogg.

"You burned in a tank too?"

"Listen," Dogg begins to bargain. "Maybe I'm bringing her something to eat."

"What do you mean, to eat?"

"You know, to eat." Dogg tries to remember what his grandmother eats when she is given food. "Dairy products—cheese, for example."

"You're a cheese yourself," says the lady in uniform without animosity.

Dogg understands how all this looks from the side: he's beating his head against an enormous endless wall that separates him from life, beating his head without any hope of success, and all life's pleasures, including a ride on the subway, are just not in the cards right now, that's the way it looks. He gathers all his willpower into his fist and says something like: Listen, lady (of course, he doesn't say it in those words, but the content is approximately the same)—so listen to me carefully—he says—okay? Listen, listen, I want to say something else, listen. Well, in spite of—let's see, how can I say it—you, I don't know, you can take this in your own way, I agree, maybe it means nothing to you but still you have to agree: my grandmother cannot be allowed to die of hunger just because I, her beloved grandson, if you allow me, was denied entry to the subway by some lousy rear guarder. You have to agree, no? (Well, at this point they just lay into one another verbally, but we'll ignore that.) He concentrates all his willpower and suddenly dives under the woman's arms, waving the veteran's card in the air, and disappears into the subway's cool intestines.

"What does he mean, lousy rear guarder who never saw the front lines?" thinks the woman. "I wasn't born 'til 1949."

17.10.

At the stadium stop, Dogg gets off onto an empty platform; in about an hour Metalist is playing its last home game, everyone is getting together, you know how it is, the end of the season, the rainy summer above, the clouded sky and the dilapidated stadium that stands somewhere just above Dogg; in the last few years it's started to come apart, grass springing up between the concrete slabs, especially after a rain, the stands covered in pigeon shit, there's shit on the field too, especially when our team's playing, the country's in ruins, the phys ed movement is in ruins, the big chiefs have fucking wasted the main thing—in my opinion, whatever you say—because under the Sovs there were two things that you could be proud of, the soccer championship and nuclear weapons, and the guys who took these pleasures away from the people will hardly live to a peaceful and carefree old age, for surely nothing undermines karma as much as screwed-up national politics. Dogg stands on the platform a bit longer, his friends are supposed to come from the other direction, so he just has to wait for them. Dogg is tired and worn out, he's been drinking for three days, and the weather's bad too, obviously the weather is affecting him, the pressure or whatever it's called—what do you call the condition when you drink for three days and suddenly stop recognizing your friends and family? It's the pressure, obviously.

He can't even remember what happened—the summer had begun so well, the rains came, Dogg was successfully pissing away the best years of his life, when suddenly his advertising friends dragged the reliably unemployed Dogg into the bowels of the advertising industry: to put it more simply, they hired him as a courier in their newspaper's advertising department. Dogg suffered badly, but he held up and kept going to work. He wasn't much benefit to them, but at least someplace he was considered human, although personally he has never been very concerned about this—well, what are friends for, if not to straighten out your social status through direct intervention. I said from the first that he wouldn't last long but they weren't listening, they said don't worry, on the whole he's a decent guy, a bit fucked up, but okay, okay, and I agreed, okay.

Dogg lasts ten days, after that he goes on a binge and doesn't come to work anymore, and so as not to be found he drinks at the homes of acquaintances; at 19 he knows half the city, one night he even sleeps at the railway station—there he meets some mushroom-picking friends who are taking the early-morning commuter train to somewhere in the Donbas for raw material and spends the night with them under the columns on the street, where he is rousted three times by the patrols; he sticks it out until morning, listening to tales about mushrooms and other thermonuclear stuff,

then he breaks down and takes off for home. Here he encounters a ringing telephone. Under different circumstances Dogg would never have picked it up, but cold silver trout are already swimming inside him after a three-day alcoholic binge and their tails are beating against his kidneys and liver so painfully that his world is getting hazy and so he automatically picks up the receiver. "Dogg?" they shout into the telephone. "Don't you dare put down the phone!" His friends the advertisers Vova and Volodia, who fixed him up with the job in the advertising business to their own detriment, are sitting somewhere in their Komsomol office tearing the receiver from each other's hands trying to convince Dogg to speak to them, occasionally drifting off into profanities. "Dogg!" they say, "the main thing—don't you dare put down the phone. Hey asshole!" they say, reassured that he is listening. "If you put down the phone now, you're dead. We'll bury you, you hear?" "Hello," says Dogg in reply. "What do you mean 'hello'?" say Vova and Volodia, losing their cool. "What do you mean 'hello'? Can you hear us?" "Yes," says the frightened Dogg. "Good," Vova and Volodia answer, encouraged. "Okay, listen, it's now ten in the morning." "What?" Dogg is now finally terrified and lets the receiver drop. The telephone immediately crackles again. He picks up the receiver indecisively. "You!!!" roars the voice. "Asshole!!! Don't you dare put down the phone!!!" Dogg swallows with difficulty. "Do you hear?" "Okay," says Dogg uncertainly. "So it's like this," explode the advertisers. "It is now ten in the morning—don't you dare put down the phone!!! You hear??? Don't you dare put down the phone!!! It's now ten. At half past five we'll be waiting for you by the stadium. If you don't come, we'll rip your balls off. If you come, we'll rip your balls off anyway. But it will be better for you if you come. Understand?" "Yes," says Dogg. "Do you understand!?" the advertisers cannot calm down. "I understand," says Dogg Pavlov, feeling the trout swimming cheerfully somewhere under his throat. "What's with you?" the advertisers finally ask. "Are you feeling bad?" "Yes." "Do you need anything?" "Some vodka." "Asshole," say Vova and Volodia and put down the receiver. Dogg takes a breath. Ten o'clock. He needs to change or have a drink, better a drink, of course. His granny comes out of the next room. This granny, he loves her and all that, even goes around with her veteran's card, you could even say that he's proud of her, not entirely, of course, but up to a certain point, he tells people that she burned in a tank, I have trouble imagining the little old lady in a tank wearing a helmet, although anything's possible. "How are you Vitalik?" she says. "Work, granny, work," says Dogg. "What kind of work is it?" worries the little old lady. "Yesterday, they telephoned all day, asking, 'Where is that asshole?' And I should know?"

17.22

Vova and Volodia jump out of the subway and meet up with Dogg, and they emerge onto the street. You alive? they ask. Dogg is completely

pale, can't get it together; they drag him into the grocery store on Plekhanov Street and buy two bottles of vodka, don't worry, they tell Dogg, first we're going to bring you back to life and then we'll rip your balls off, there's no fun in ripping something off in your state, look at yourself; they take him up to the store window, the grocery is dark and empty, like most of the country's stores during this difficult time—they've brought the country to ruin, the bastards—look, they say to Dogg, look at yourself. Dogg is quite weak, he looks through the window and sees a waitress in a white coat who is also looking through the glass at a couple of jerks who look like dropouts standing on the street directly in front of her. They're holding up a third guy just like them and are pointing at her. She looks at them with contempt; Dogg somehow focuses his eyes, recognizes his reflection, and suddenly notices inside this reflection a strange creature in white clothing who is wearing a large amount of makeup on her face and moving with difficulty within the confines of his body, as though trying to break out from inside him, and he begins to feel nauseous. Of course, thinks Dogg, that's my soul, but how come it's got gold teeth?

17.35–18.15

They spend forty minutes reviving Dogg. They pour vodka into him and in accordance with some law of physics as Dogg fills up with it he floats to the surface, greets everybody, all present also greet him—welcome back, pioneer and hero Dogg Pavlov, great to have you back with us, we missed you, and Oh, says everyone, meaning Vova and Volodia, we simply needed to revive you so we could look once more into your honest if drunken eyes, so that you could tell us why you hate the advertising business in general and us, Volodia and me—says Vova—in particular; what did we do to make you take off without a word, with, by the way, a very important piece of correspondence, on account of which we would, if we could, rip your balls off twice. In this way a kind of friendly conversation takes place between them, you know how it is, and Dogg fully returns to the world, after his own soul had almost pushed him out of it, looks around and listens: the trout are lying somewhere on the bottom, the angry gold-toothed angel in the white coat and nylon stockings has also flown off, the advertisers Vova and Volodia have dragged him somewhere into the bushes behind some white metal kiosks and are giving him generous helpings of vodka. Compromises are required in the social mode of existence.

18.15

Why do they never make it to the stadium on time for the pre-game inspirational music and opening speeches by municipal clerks? First of all, as a rule they arrive less than completely sober and therefore lack a clear idea of the time; sometimes they lack any clear idea whatsoever, not just

about the time of day but even the season of the year, they're invariably in warm sweaters under the hot sun or in wet T-shirts during the first snow. Second, there's always some kind of lottery draw before the game and they categorically do not believe in lotteries. Third, as, you can understand, when you're 19 and you crawl into your section of the stadium and everyone—including the police—can see your wonderful, elated condition, what can be more uplifting? Later, when you grow up and start working in a bank or the offices of the gas utility, when you interact with reality through television, and with your friends by fax—if you have any friends, that is, and provided they, too, have a fax machine—then, naturally, you won't give a good God-damn about crazy drunk teenage hijinks that empty out your wallet and throw you into every plate-glass window in the world, a time when excitement moistens your eyes and the blood stops flowing under your fingernails because several hundred people are watching them entering their section, searching for their places, and carrying someone on their shoulders, calling him a dog for some reason, losing him from time to time among the benches, but then stubbornly and energetically picking him up and dragging him to their assigned places, away from the guards, away from the women selling ice cream, and in general away from the soccer, as they themselves conceive it.

18.25

Dogg Pavlov revives one more time at the stadium, it's good to sit like this with your friends, he thinks, on a bench somewhere under trees that rustle and sway in every direction, no, he suddenly thinks, they're not trees, what are they then?

A few sections over to the left, the opposing team's fans stand under the heavy June rain. There are a few dozen of them, they arrived at the railway station in the morning and several patrols have been trailing after them all day. At the stadium they've been assigned their own section, where they forlornly wave their soaked flags. Just before half-time the locals, disappointed with the score and the weather, break through the fence and begin to beat them. From down below on the field, a company of trainee firefighters runs up. The police don't think of anything better to do than push everybody out of the stadium and so they begin to press the people toward the exit while the first half is still going on; obviously, everyone forgets about the game and begins to cheer for our guys in the stands, the players also take more interest in the fighting than in their own game, it's interesting, after all, and unpredictable, here on the field everything has been clear from the start—in the final minutes someone is bound to screw up and lose the game—but over in the stands, see, there's a real contest going on, a rugby game, now even the firefighters are taking a few hits, but then the first half ends and the players reluctantly make their way to the tunnel, the police drag off the last of the visitors, so when the game resumes

their section is empty. Only trampled and torn banners lie heavily in puddles like fascist standards on Red Square, our survivors return delightedly to their sections, the most passionate and principled among them go off to the railway station to hunt for the visitors as they return home; and then, around the fifteenth minute of the second half, one visitor runs into the stands—some very young kid, disheveled and wet, where he was all this time is a mystery, he has definitely missed all the most interesting stuff—he runs in and sees the signs of a battlefield, the torn flags of his team and none of his friends; where are our guys? he cries, turning to the suddenly silent stands, hey, where are all our guys?!—and no one can answer him. Everyone feels sorry for the kid, even the ultras are silent, having interrupted their endless "the referee's a prick," and look dejectedly at the visitor, feeling embarrassed in front of the kid—it wasn't really very sporting, was it?—and the kid looks up at the now quiet sections, at the wet field on which the teams are churning up the mud, and he looks at the cold and almost motionless sky, and he cannot understand what has happened, where are the boys, what have these clowns done with them, and he picks up the bent plastic trumpet that one of his fallen friends had been blowing, and suddenly begins blowing into it, making a shrill, tearful, and desperate sound that astonishes everyone: he blows with his back turned to the field, to the ultras, and to the now silent and shamed firefighters, he blows a note familiar to him alone, loud and false, breathing into it all his courage, all his despair, all his purely boyish love of life.

19.30

In the rafters above the last rows the sleepy pigeons have grown accustomed to our team's defeats; they coo sleepily and live quietly, bothering no one, delightful wet flocks, but Dogg hears them through his dream, they appear to him in his alcoholic debility and pull him out of it; you know that strange condition in which you see the light ahead with one eye, and with the other—how do you explain this—with the other you see what can perhaps be called the other side of the light, well, you know, in a word when you are shown a lot all at once but are not in any condition to see anything. And you don't want to. That's why Dogg sinks to the cement floor and begins to crawl away toward the exit, crushing the husks of sunflower seeds, cigarette butts, and lottery tickets with his tired chest. He crawls up to the exit, gets to his feet, and shakily keeps going up and up, to the last row; he grasps onto the metal support and hangs off it in complete exhaustion—

don't fall off into the stands and on top of the fans, if you do you'll need to say you're sorry, to talk to somebody, to say something, and then everyone will immediately sense how bad your breath smells and will immediately guess that you've been drinking, so the main thing is not to

speak to anyone and not to turn to anyone and if you fall then definitely someone will talk to you then you won't get out of it they'll say that your breath smells bad they will definitely smell it at soon as they begin talking to you even if you turn away and talk to the side they'll smell it anyway unless you turn completely aside and speak that way—what should I say? what should I say so they don't notice? what should I tell them? Quickly, before they notice and say something—what will they say? they'll say why don't you say something? why aren't you shouting? Why am I not shouting? I need to shout, otherwise they'll notice that my breath smells bad they will say that my breath smells because I'm not shouting or they'll think that I'm drunk because I'm not shouting what should I be shouting? what should I be shouting? well, what, what should I be shouting? I have to ask someone I have to turn aside and ask or turn aside and shout then no one will notice anything in any case they won't notice with all this noise alright I'll shout something to the side no one will notice how my breath stinks but everyone will notice that I'm shouting that means I'm not drunk everything's okay this is an okay plan only what should I shout well what should I shout what are they all shouting? about the ref about the ref only to the side so they don't hear and so they still notice yes I have to shout and definitely about the ref then everything will be okay

—and here our forward breaks away one-on-one with the goalkeeper and shoots, he just fucking blasts it as hard as he can, several thousand wet supporters go still, hold their collective breath, you might say, and at this moment behind their backs in the damp silence a desperate cry echoes:

"Ye-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-s!!! Yo-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u!!!"

And the soaked fans in the nearest sectors turn their heads as though enchanted and see good-old Dogg Pavlov there, whom even all the dogs here know, which is to say every sergeant, he's hanging from the steel support completely exhausted, having turned let's call it his back to the stands, and is emitting a prolonged wail from somewhere into nowhere, or whatever you want to call it.

19.45

Why? Because you're not just some moron who has reconciled himself to the existing unjust state of things and the surrounding accumulated crap, because you're not prepared to tear at someone's throat all your life over the grub they've chewed up. Because, all things considered, you've got something to say if someone asks you about the things that are most important, so that's enough, thinks Dogg, or more exactly, he's actually in no condition to think anything like this, but if he could think at this moment, he, I suppose, would think this, and so he begins to climb up the beam that supports the roof, tearing off the old green paint and the dried birdshit with

his fingernails, pushing himself up against the cold pipe, carefully pulling himself higher, transposing his feet on the ironwork, he climbs directly over the heads of the sergeants who have forgotten about him for the moment, over the heads of all his wet and drunken acquaintances, as many as are here, over the heads of Vova and Volodia. He even recognizes them and stops just above them, examining them from above, thinking, wow, fantastic, if I reach down with my hand I can pull both of them up here, and he reaches out and says something to them, without even noticing how bad his breath smells.

And here our team puts the ball in the back of the net and wet throats roar: Sco-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-r-r-r-r-re!!!!!! Sco-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-r-r-r-r-re!!!!!—they roar and from this roar hundreds and thousands of sleepy pigeons tear themselves out from their dreams and fly out like bullets from their perches nestled with feathers, earth, and lottery tickets, they fly out in a wave into the wet sky, and this wave breaks against Dogg Pavlov, and he can't hold on and goes flying down, dropping a few meters and flopping with a smack onto the bench right next to Vova and Volodia, who finally remember their comrade, turn and see him next to them, just where he should be.

"Oh, Dogg," shouts Vova.

"Dogg, we scored," shouts Volodia.

"Great," says Dogg and smiles for what is the first time in the last three days.

19.50–08.00

Vova and Volodia are afraid to show their IDs and therefore are not allowed to approach Dogg, who is being hospitalized; they explain that they're friends, even relatives, distant but relatives all the same, but are told that they should be ashamed to admit that Dogg is a relative and he is placed—drunk and sleepy—on a stretcher and then quickly pushed into the ambulance, for some reason they all think Dogg is injured and not drunk, this saves him, he's not killed on the spot, as required by the instruction manual of sergeants, officers, and cadets when they are called upon heroically to defend sports complexes, places of mass relaxation for the laboring class during soccer games, political meetings, and other satanic rituals of the sporting-instructional type. Some sergeant with a bleeding heart even comes up to the driver of the ambulance, writes down his name and station number, leaves him his own office telephone number and orders him to immediately rush the badly injured Dogg to hospital, and tomorrow, if there's nothing serious, to bring his patched-up body to them in the district police station for further laboratory tests, there they will establish what kind of Gagarin this is who has fallen out of the fucking sky onto their heads. The driver all but salutes, well, you know what I mean, and the ambulance disappears behind the stadium's green gates, its sirens scattering wet supporters in whose cheerful whirlpool Vova and Volodia disappear—

victories require congregations and a joyful collective mass, toasts, and harmonious choral singing. It's only defeats, bitter personal defeats, that require nothing more than drunken medics and respiratory equipment that doesn't work, or, more accurately, works but no one knows how.

By morning Dogg has barfed all over the bedsheets he was wrapped up in and elicits a reaction of strong disgust from the medical staff. The nurses on duty attempt to telephone somewhere, to find those distant relatives who wanted to take this trash back at the stadium, but no one knows the telephone number, the only document they find on Dogg is a veteran's ID card in the name of Vira Naumivna Pavlova, everyone examines this document—ragged and burned around the edges—but Dogg, any way you look at it, doesn't resemble Vira Naumivna Pavlova, they also look in the files just in case and discover with astonishment that, according to their records, this same Vira Naumivna passed away three and a half years ago, but things like this occur with their files, says the senior nurse on duty, she refuses wholly to believe that this is not Vira Naumivna who is before her but some unidentified scum, so in the morning they call out the ambulance driver, who celebrated the end of his shift by boozing all night, at first he doesn't understand about Dogg, and says that he never picked up a Vira Naumivna at the stadium yesterday, swears that he is married and that he and his wife get on fine, they even have sex sometimes when he isn't on duty, but, then, in the end he understands what they are talking about and gives the nurses the sergeant's phone number, the one who was interested in Dogg's fate. The nurses rush to telephone the sergeant, saying, as it were, we have a problem, comrade sergeant, there's a piece of trash lying here covered in barf; who do you say is there? asks the sergeant with an early morning zest in his voice and begins immediately to note something down, I am taking notes, he says: co-ver-ed–in–barf, and then what? worse than just covered in barf, say the nurses, he doesn't have a passport, yes-yes-yes, replies the sergeant, not so fast: worse–than–co-ver-ed–in, listen, he suddenly asks, it's not my job, is it? maybe he has suffered a concussion? no—say the nurses—he doesn't have a concussion, or a brain, he's some kind of deserter with someone else's documents, ah-hah, rejoices the sergeant, yes, with someone else's documents and also he has barfed all over everything here—the nurses repeat, unable to calm down; well okay, says the sergeant, drag him over here to us, but quickly, my shift ends at nine, and my partner likely won't have anything to do with him—he has high blood pressure. Of course, say the nurses, high blood pressure.

They immediately call out the driver on duty, take away this rubbish, they say, that has barfed over everything and take him to the district police station, there's something wrong with his documents, uh-huh, says the driver, just like that I'm supposed to drop everything and take this trash somewhere to put his documents in order, maybe even take him to the civil

registry office? I don't have anything better to do—in fact he has only just started his shift and really doesn't have anything to do, alright stop making an ass of yourself, says the senior nurse on duty, whose shift is just ending, you'll drive him and come right back, we still have a sea of work, yeah, says the driver, the Black Sea, and squeamishly taking the weakened and demoralized Dogg under his arm he leads him downstairs, opens the emergency vehicle's back doors, come on, he tells Dogg, climb in, sit on the stretcher, or better still lie down, or you'll fall on a turn and break some glass, or cut yourself, or turn over the paint, what paint? asks Dogg, any kind, says the driver, go on, lie down, maybe I should sit? asks Dogg anxiously, don't screw around, says the driver to him and gets behind the wheel. Dogg tries to lie down but immediately feels nauseous and begins to barf—over the stretcher, the walls, some paint, well, you know what I mean. The driver brakes in despair, runs to the back, opens the doors, receives his portion of Dogg's barf, and throws the half-cold Dogg onto Kharkiv's early-morning asphalt, and cursing everything in the world he returns to the hospital, where no one in particular, to be absolutely honest, is waiting for him.

INTRODUCTION No. 2

9.00

"You know, the worst is that I didn't know there were two of them. One was on the balcony."

"So?"

"So, I entered and she's there alone. I didn't know, you see? And she's lying almost totally naked, next to some panties and bras."

"What, several bras?"

"No, just various sorts of underwear."

"What do you mean?"

"Various colors, you know?"

"I don't even want to talk about it."

"That's my point. I don't like underwear in general. Women's underwear, that is."

"Well, sure."

"In short, I see that she's pissed, and start taking off my own clothes. I didn't know they'd been at it since that morning, you know, first swallowed some junk, then chased it down with vodka, just imagine? Drunken bitches. And I'm standing there with an erection."

"Amazing."

"And then the bitch, the second one, comes in from the balcony. And of course gets frightened."

"Naturally…"

"The one in the room is okay, she's used to it, probably."

"To what?"

"To me. She's already seen me like that, you know, with an erection."

"Unbelievable."

"That's what I'm saying. But the other, the one on the balcony, is completely soused, you see, they'd been drinking since morning, the bitches. You get the picture?"

"Yeah, broads. I have a neighbor. He goes out and buys two liters of vodka every morning."

"Two liters?"

"Seriously."

"I feel bad just thinking about it."

"I ask him: man, why the fuck do you need two liters? You won't be able to drink it all. And you know what he says?"

"What?"

"After I finish the first bottle, I'm afraid to go out anywhere. But I still want to drink, I can't stop myself."

"Seriously?"

"What the hell is he afraid of?"

"Well, I don't know, he's terrified. He starts to get this terror after drinking vodka. But he still wants to drink. So he takes two liters right away. Sits and gets pickled."

"Hang on, he downs one container then the second—hell, he finishes drinking it all. Then what?"

"What do you mean, then what?"

"He still wants to drink?"

"Yeah."

"But he's afraid to go out?"

"No, no way, they have this system, you see: when he finishes off two liters—"

"Two liters!"

"—right, two liters—some switch gets flipped and he's not afraid anymore."

"Seriously?"

"I saw it myself."

"Well, how does he feel?"

"What do you mean?"

"How does he feel if he's not afraid?"

"He doesn't give a damn."

"And so then what?"

"And he takes off for more vodka. He's stumbling, but off he goes."

"Yeah…"

"To get more."

"And you say—an erection."

"What erection?"

"You were saying—an erection."

"Well, yes, an erection."

"And then what?"

"Nothing. I'm standing there with my erection."

"Unbelievable…"

"And then?"

"Then this drunken bitch walks in off the balcony, can you imagine?"

"I can't imagine it."

"Well, she sees me, and, you know, thinks—who is this moron, and why is he just standing there?"

"What's standing?"

"Standing, she says to herself. She's thinking: probably a neighbor come to get laid. And so she grabs an empty champagne bottle and fires it into my skull."

"And you?"

"Well, I lost consciousness. I fell down, that is, all covered in blood. And this drunken bitch, just image, runs up to the other one and starts to wake her, get up, she says, we have to tie him up—meaning me. She gets up and on top of everything they take the bedsheets and tie up my arms and legs."

"But they knew you, at least the other one did."

"Yeah, but they were both pissed since morning, the bitches, that's what I'm saying! They ate some junk, and then drank vodka. How that bitch made it back from the balcony I don't know. They could barely recognize one another."

"And then?"

"So they tie me up and drag me to the bath, throw me in, and go to sleep."

"Yeah—"

"And so in the morning one of them, the one who came from the balcony, naturally she has forgotten everything, and makes for the bath to wash. Besides, the beast doesn't switch the light on but gropes her way in. She climbs into the tub, and there I am…"

"Vodka, you know, it jams a woman's signals, they become like fish."

"I once met a ticket controller in a streetcar, she was going around with her ticket punch."

"Don't bullshit."

"What bullshit? Seriously, the broad was going about completely drunk, I give her my ticket and she pulls out a punch from her pocket, can you imagine?"

"Must be cool to have your own ticket validator."

"Exactly."

"Yeah…"

"I tried to rip one out of a streetcar once. I was traveling at night, there was no one else, so I start to break it off, cut my hand open, can you believe it, blood's flowing everywhere, and then the controllers come in."

"Bitches."

"They went straight for me, I was basically the only passenger, there was no one else. Why the hell are you breaking the validator?"

"And what did you say?"

"Me? I said I'm not breaking anything, I wanted to punch my ticket and your fucking machine chewed up my hand. Here, look, I say."

"Cool."

"Yeah…"

Cocoa, sluggish and sweaty, feels pretty good in this company. The little room in which they sit is full of smoke and smells of coffee, there are not enough cups for everyone, they pass the first coffee around, then the second, transferring the cup from hand to hand, then they pass around pieces of white bread, after an hour spent in the room their clothes and hair and they themselves smell of tobacco and bread, even more of bread. Cocoa wipes the sweat off his brow with his sleeve, what's with you, Cocoa, they all laugh, that's your best suit, no trouble, Cocoa blushes, don't worry, I'll wash it, well yeah, they continue to laugh, you've promised to do that for over a year, take some bread, Cocoa takes some fresh white bread from the hands of his friends and continues to listen to the stories, he'd gladly spend all his time with them, he feels good with them, they share their bread and cigarettes with him, and the main thing is no one drives him away. Try in our day to find a group ready to put up for a few days with you and your sand-colored suit that hasn't been washed in over a year, or maybe two.

Cocoa is a bit too plump for this company, and in his suit he looks terrible, but he likes it—I don't even know where they sell that kind. Anyway, Cocoa found it somewhere, considers it stylish, he's up on such things, he's practically the only one of my acquaintances who goes to the hairdresser, uses some kind of gay gel, even shaves from time to time, though this doesn't help. Six of them are in the room, sitting and listening to Little Chuck Berry, who has just explained how he celebrated his birthday, everyone liked the story, Cocoa listened with his mouth wide open; he especially liked the part about the underwear in various colors, and tries to imagine this but cannot. In the meantime Little Chuck Berry passes another cigarette around and suddenly says, Cocoa, tell us something, and everyone agrees, yeah Cocoa, come on, tell us something, how come you just sit there silently, we're interested, come on, tell us something, know what—tell us about your babes, everyone laughs, yeah, they say, Cocoa, come on, tell us about your babes. Cocoa looks embarrassed, he doesn't feel completely sure of himself after all, they're a team and he's just a visitor, but he doesn't want to leave, so he thinks about what he could say that would be about

women. About women. Most of the women he sees are on TV. Maybe he should tell them about television.

One of the event organizers rushes into the room, that's enough, he shouts, come on, come on, quickly, it's time to begin, and they begin to get up and they slide into the corridor walking in a line, one after the other, still munching their bread, finishing their cigarettes, Cocoa follows them, they go through some back alleys, everywhere there are banners with slogans and fire extinguishers on the walls, finally they come out into the light, someone turns to Cocoa and says: alright, pal, wait for us here, okay? we won't be long. How long is this going to take? asks Cocoa; a couple of hours, maybe a bit longer, come on, sit down there by the wall and wait. Can I listen? asks Cocoa. Okay listen, says someone, listen, but really it isn't very interesting—in fact, it's total bullshit. Cocoa can do nothing but take them at their word.

The hall is packed, more than two thousand people have gathered, latecomers are standing in the aisles, pushing and shoving each other up by the stage, the public is freaky: students, pensioners, military, invalids, yes, a lot of invalids, although this is understandable; there are even businessmen wearing suits in harsh colors, and so on. When they appear the hall erupts joyfully, the invalids begin to chant their mantras, they wave their arms at them, smile, even a few bouquets go flying on stage, they come out and unhurriedly pick up their instruments, plug them in, one of them gives a signal to the sound engineers, as though saying more of me, another opens a bottle of water, the crowd continues to chant, creating a celebration, but they don't get into it too much, everyone knows what's happening, who the main attraction really is and how everything is going to end, and when the pumped-up invalids begin to sing in chorus almost no one pays attention, and then, he arrives—

10.00

His reverence Johnson-and-Johnson, sun on the beclouded horizon of American evangelism, star of the biggest mass euphorias on the West coast, leader of the Church of Jesus (United), the pop-star who works the minds of all who desire it and who have come to him on this rainy summer morning in mid-week, his reverence Johnson-and–Johnson doesn't give a damn about all these silly conventions, he's not some Old Believer who only holds services on weekends, what crap, he says, what old-style crap, and everyone agrees with him. He arrived in town a couple of weeks ago, at least that's what's written in the press releases that are being handed to everyone who enters, the concert hall was booked a month in advance, he hired some musicians and now is the third day of his screwing around here preaching God's word to the aboriginals, each day there are more of these aboriginals, his reverence has great PR agents, all the city's newspapers began writing about his arrival a month ago, leaflets with his smiling

American mug were distributed at factories, marketplaces, and banks, on the first day of his arrival he was interviewed on the most popular TV station, and to the great amazement of the viewing public spoke the state language more-or-less respectably, scoring big points from the first moment, he said that he had local roots but in general was a WASP, meaning a hundred-percent white from Texas, not surprisingly the entire city discussed his reverence, during the first sermon there were several television cameras in the hall, all the news channels considered it appropriate to announce that the first sermon of his reverence Johnson-and-Johnson, whom the Bolsheviks had spoken about for so long, had taken place, everything was cool and, dear Kharkivites, you simply have to see this, all the more so because admission is free and everyone gets a free calendar with a glossy color photograph of his reverence: services will be held every day at ten, thirteen, and seventeen hundred hours, seven days a week, until the end of June.

And so this is the fourth day in a row that he's raking in the money preaching three sermons a day, he already has fans here who react devotedly to his reverence's every runny-nosed sob, translated for them by some dame in a gray business suit who works as his reverence's interpreter and apparently doesn't understand him, in any case she translates haphazardly, and his reverence himself obviously can't be bothered to correct her, God's revelations obviously affect his mind, he simply gets high during the sermon, even dope smokers have started to come, they understand the old guy in their own way, showing some sort of universal solidarity among all stoned idiots who in one way or another, each in his own way, of course, are discovering God's secrets—they're all feeling a buzz together now, and there's music playing too.

They're the ones playing the music, in casting his reverence screened them carefully, choosing mainly students of the conservatory, with only Little Chuck Berry coming from the punks, his reverence took him because of his sense of rhythm, overall education was not a deciding factor, the main thing was to look good on stage, and, naturally, no Jews, no Mongols, absolutely no blacks—in a word, real fascist scum, but the people like it.

His reverence gets himself psyched-up in the dressing room, swallows some kind of pills, drinks a lot of decaf coffee, and loudly recites something from De Holy Bible, telling the interpreter to repeat after him, the interpreter stays darkly silent, which winds up his reverence even more, he begins to show the first signs of God's revelation, which with him is like diarrhea, he just bursts and it's all there. One of the organizers comes in, it's time, time to go on, the crowd is waiting, his reverence sips his low octane coffee from a big plastic mug, spills some on his snow-white shirt, shit, he says, fucking shit, the interpreter attempts to translate this for the doofus organizer, but he just waves her off. Fine, says his reverence, I'll have to button up completely, like an oyster or mollusk, like an octopus—in a word, we all walk in God's sight, he adds, and goes out into the corridor. In the

wings, under the stage itself, his reverence stops for a moment, his attention is drawn to a plump young man in a sand-colored suit, just a regular kid, thinks his reverence and slows down for a moment. Who are you? he asks and the backstage shadows are suddenly illuminated by the gleam of his wristwatch. Cocoa freezes and momentarily loses the gift of speech, why don't you talk? says his reverence impatiently, do you have a name? Cocoa nods his large head but doesn't give his name. Well, fine, his reverence loses what remains of his patience, may the Lord's great mercy lie on jerks like you too, the interpreter wants to translate this, but his reverence interrupts her—later, later, he says, and goes on stage, dragging with difficulty the eternally-lit yellow halo above his head.

Cocoa, his eyes popping out, stares at the spot where his reverence just stood, takes a long time to return to consciousness, and his shaky legs carry him along as he looks for the toilet, finally he finds it, uses his remaining strength to open the door, creep inside, and begins to throw up. I noticed a long time ago that when he gets nervous, when he's stressed out or something, he always throws up, he just can't help it, whenever a new session begins it's better to stay away from him, that's the kind of guy he is. "Lord," says Cocoa, "Oh, Lord, is this really me, is it really me whom this man just approached? It cannot be—I know my own worth, I have nice friends, my mother works in the library, they know me fairly well in Makivka and in Milove, but something like this! I don't even know what to think," he thinks and begins to throw up again. "How can it be," he thinks after throwing up, "no one will believe me. They will say you're making it up. Christ, I don't believe it myself. I live like everybody else, do my work honestly, don't get in anyone's way, don't try to mess anybody up, maybe this is God's thanks. Otherwise how —I just don't understand—how could it happen that I, me alone, was approached, just like that, by a man WITH A GOLD-PLATED ROLEX ON HIS WRIST!!!"

Cocoa leans down once more and sees down on the floor by the sink a pile of brochures with his reverence's sermons, he devoutly takes one, examines the slightly crumpled face of Johnson-and-Johnson, examines the rolex on his wrist, and, smiling, hides the brochure in the pocket of his sand-colored jacket.

My dear brothers and sisters! (Dear brothers and sisters! translates the dame in the gray suit.) Through the manipulation of his divine hands the Lord has gathered us here together! (The Lord has made certain manipulations, she translates. A whole pile of them.) So let us thank him for gathering us—you and I—together! (So thank you for gathering here, and myself.) I tell you, brothers and sisters: let us rise, let us rise and pray, in the name of the father, Hallelujah! (Alleluia! says the dame, not quite understanding him.) Lord, I say! (He says "Lord.") Look upon these people who have gathered here this morning! (They gathered early this morning.) Your divine love has brought them here, hasn't it?" (Love hasn't brought

them here.) Yes, Lord! (Yes.) Yes, Hallelujah! (The dame remains silent.) But you might ask why are you, his reverence Johnson-and-Johnson, talking to us about this, we know all this about ourselves, so you better show us a miracle! (We know everything about you! says the dame threateningly. Just ask.)

I want to tell you a story, I want to show you a concrete example, so that you might understand what I have in mind. (For example, I want to show you—you understand what I have in mind.) A girl from southern Connecticut (A girl from the South) lived in great hardship (lived in the South), she had no parents, no friends, no personal psychologist (she practiced psychology, she was a psychologist, her own), she lost all hope of God's revelation, and her days dragged on in an endless stream (she lost everything and threw herself around endlessly). Hallelujah! (The dame remains silent.) One day she came upon a man of God, a clergyman (a man appeared in her life, a male) and he said to her "Sister!" (she was his sister) "Sister!" (another one), abandon this nightmare, you yourself are closing the door through which Jesus could enter your life (close the door, he said, the nightmarish Dzhizus might come). Wherefore do you do this? (Where are you doing this?) And he left her, he had enough of her faithlessness (The old man, it appears, had had her and he had enough of her and left). And she was left all alone, and her days continued to drag on in an endless stream (And she continued to drag herself around all alone) and then once, when she was returning after buying some things (Once, she finally made it out shopping) and was crossing the street, some drunken car enthusiast couldn't stop in time and knocked her down (she was so drunk, she could not stop herself and fell down like a racing groupie), and when she woke up in a trauma unit on the operating table (she woke up on a table, you know, drunk, dirty, in torn clothing, just another hooker) under the surgeon's scalpel (the surgeon was on top of her), she could not remember her name (she could not even remember him. Yes, she forgot everything, she was a lush, a total alcoholic), she had lost her memory! She remembered nothing (she had boozed away everything: her house and things, she emptied her bank account and squandered that too, she found a squeeze and they began to make moonshine), she could not remember where she had come from (where did she come from? worried the neighbors), she could not remember her parents, her father, her mother (your mother, they said, this whore has moved into our building, they'll soon switch off our electricity because of her unpaid bills), she forgot her whole life (we've been working hard all our lives, and then this slut comes along and settles into a cushy easy life and even brings a squeeze along with her), and when everyone, even the doctors, had lost faith (you bitch, we'll show you how we maintain exemplary living standards and the moral code of the builders of communism in our building. We'll rip your legs off, you low-life. And we'll have your squeeze committed to the detox center for treatment), God's

revelation was suddenly upon her (because you've turned into a brazen hussy, you railway-station bitch with your squeeze, you whore, you think that we're going to pay for your electricity, that you're the smartest one on the block, you sea slime with your fucked-up joke of a squeeze, we'll lock him up in rehab for good, no more pandering to that shithead, we'll call the district cop right away, we'll cut off your electricity and we'll circumcise your pimp too, that sailor of the merchant marine, the screwed-up comedian, settling down into the cushy, easy life, what a whore, the tart), and God said to her (fuck off, girlie, get your ass off the beach, we've worked here all our lives and you think what? you think you're number one? you want to hide behind your squeeze, your sailor? The detox lock-up is just crying out for your sailor, you see, yes, the detox). What detox? Johnson-and-Johnson suddenly thinks, what is this fucking bitch translating? He pauses, during which time the weeping of invalids can be heard, then he continues.

Dear brothers and sisters! (Dear brothers and sisters! the interpreter returns closer to the topic.) The Lord said to her: reflect on everything that has happened (the Lord says to you: reflect what's happening!), get up and go! (Leave!), and she went (and she left), and she asked the doctors (ask the doctors): who paid for my treatment? (who's going to pay for everything). And they told her: it's a miracle, the Lord's miracle, but someone paid for your insurance (buy insurance for your little miracle), and someone gave you some clothing and things—that's a second miracle (another thing, someone donated a miracle for you), and someone has rented an apartment for you, you now have a roof over your head, and that's a third miracle (and this miracle is now over your head for the third time). And then she understood: this was the Lord's revelation, a revelation that revealed itself to her (and then she had a revelation), and that Jesus himself was granting her a light, a small one, a small ray of light, like when you open the fridge at night (the nightmarish Dzhizus wants to give her a fridge at night, just a small one). Why must I tell you this, brothers and sisters? (What are you expecting, brothers and sisters?) So that you might understand that the Lord's revelation is like products of the sea (the exhausted dame falls into silence, lost in thought), the main thing is not just knowing how to catch them, the main thing is knowing how to prepare them. The Lord's revelation is like the brain of an octopus: you don't know where to look for it. Because when you walk up to an octopus and look at it you think: Hallelujah! where is this fucking octopus's brain? After all, an octopus must have a brain! But your mind cannot resolve this, your mind is lazy and disillusioned, you cannot simply pick up the octopus and do your thing, you have to consult your inner voice, which tells you "Drop it, drop it, you don't know anything about this, this task is beyond you." And then you begin to doubt yourself. Hallelujah! You think: yes, I am not worthy of this, I am too weak and frail to walk this path to the end and to figure everything out, this is not a job for me. I would rather stand aside. Because when you see his body, it's the

same as your body; and his eyes, they're the same as your eyes; and when you hear his heart beat—praise the Lord—it beats just like yours! And who are you?

"An octopus!" shouts someone in the hall.

"What octopus?" Johnson-and-Johnson is confused, why an octopus? he pauses for a moment, nonplussed, but he doesn't miss the wave and once more dives into the colorful purple sermonizing shit: correct, you are a child of God! We are all God's children! The Lord's revelation is in all of us (Every one of us, joins in the dame, will receive on the way out a brochure and small calendar with his reverence's photo), so let us heed the attention of the almighty (thank you for your attention, all the best, until we meet again at the next sermons of the Church of Jesus (United)), with whom we must meet! (until we meet again, the dame repeats. Don't forget your things, she adds, and get those fucking invalids out of here).

I certainly put on a show, didn't I, says his reverence Johnson-and-Johnson to the doofus organizer. The doofus looks at him with the eyes of a man in love. Yeah, repeats his reverence, I certainly showed them. Only why did I get into the octopus thing again, what is it with me in the last while? he asks the doofus, the moment I take vitamins I start talking about octopuses. I just can't stop myself, he offers in justification, these enchanting creatures turn me on. Oh, how they turn me on, he says joyfully and disappears into his dressing room.

11.00

While all these orthodox believers in the seventh day are still leaving and his reverence, waving his arms, is quitting the stage, Cocoa stays seated on a bench trying to understand what they are talking about, but he has trouble making sense of his reverence's speech, something about electricity and a detox centre, about octopuses. Cocoa is bored, I should have stayed at home and watched television, he thinks, but here in addition to his reverence's revelations, reinforcing the drama of the agitational work among the aboriginals, the "Divine Orchestra of His Reverence Johnson-and-Johnson" begins to play—these are Cocoa's friends, cannon fodder in the decisive stage of the unequal battle between good and evil and his reverence Johnson-and-Johnson's with his own mental enfeeblement. They play blues, some classical pieces selected personally by the boss for them, the invalids in the hall begin to rock in tune, the businessmen unbutton their lettuce-colored jackets, the public livens up, in his dressing room his reverence joyfully wipes the sweat from his face, his rolex flashes, the band gets into its number, they are playing an old theme but gradually moving away from it, then finally letting loose with something they were definitely not taught in the conservatory: "Atomic Bomb Blues," written in the distant postwar years by Homer Harris, who is unknown to anyone here, even to his

reverence Johnson-and-Johnson, whose divine revelation does not find its way into such borderline territory, how could that fucking octopus know about Homer Harris. Cocoa likes this considerably more than his reverence's sermons, he understands everything, he begins to rock in tune with the music behind the stage and suddenly hears someone in the band take off, cutting right across the musical score, Cocoa immediately recognizes the guitar of Little Chuck Berry, who has obviously also caught hold of his revelation and seems to be saying to the crowd of invalids:

Lord, if you can hear me beyond the cries of this beast Johnson-and-Johnson, if you have not totally given up participating in all this, give me a chance, just a few sentences, that is all, and I will quickly explain things to you, the main thing is give me your attention, I am after all playing in the divine orchestra, even if I am complete shit in your eyes and an embarrassment to look at because of everything that I, as it were, do, don't turn away from me for a few seconds more, I feel terrible, God, how terrible I feel no one can know, and I play terribly, but all the same send me just a little ray of light, if I am expressing myself understandably, shake up this sadness in my lungs, in my heart and stomach, all this shit, so-to-speak, do you hear, I am asking only for a little light, I'm only 19, maybe I have waited a very short time, but I am only asking for a small ray of light, a tiny one, the kind you get at night when you open the fridge, you know what I'm talking about, so that I might breathe out all that I have breathed in during those 19 years, just a little joy, God, a minimal amount, don't go to any special trouble, just when you have the chance, hear me, anything at all, just a bit, anything at all, any kind of revelation, do you hear, God, okay? okay? and some sneakers, God, sneakers, a pair of sneakers, do you hear?! do you hear me?!! you, do you hear, do you hear anything I am saying?!!! hey??!!!!! hey?!!! he-e-e-e-e-e-y!!!!!!!!!! he-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-ey!!!!!!!!!!!!

The band picks up this whimsical theme, they all immediately get what a cool guy this Little Chuck Berry is, how neatly he has put it all together, so they each try not to spoil anything, Cocoa had not heard anything this good for a long time, he simply collapsed onto the bench, sat there motionless and listened, listened, while they poured it on and poured it on, and even when the invalids began slithering away, and the businessmen wandered off to their cabs, and the cleaning ladies began going through the rows to collect the empty vodka bottles and the crumpled little calendars with his reverence's American mug, they still could not stop. How they played! Like gods! That is, they were hardly faking it at all.

INTRODUCTION No. 3

00.00

My friends want to be taken seriously. They are very sensitive about how people speak to them and about what, and how people look at them, they try to understand what others are thinking about them while talking, they are always causing scandals, it's hard to have a conversation with them, they get nervous among strangers, from time from time they are thrown out of somewhere, if one of them were to fly in a plane he'd be thrown out of that too, no doubt about it. I used to find all this okay but lately I've started to get upset too. I don't like it, for example, when someone forgets my name, let's say we are talking away and suddenly it becomes clear that no one knows what my name is, there are so many jack-asses around; and another thing I can't stand is when someone has some kind of shit on their face, I'm not talking about them being a one-eyed Cyclops, of course, but about them maybe having cut themselves in shaving, or having blood on their lips or something—I don't like it, to my mind it shows disrespect, to walk around with that kind of crap on your face, if you don't know how to shave then stay home, stare at the television or take up something useful, but no, they have to mess up their mug with some razor and then go meet you on the street and start loading you up with totally useless stuff without even remembering your name, on top of everything. And another thing, I don't like cosmetics, they're terrible things, cosmetics, they're aggressive and smell awful, I can't stand perfumes, I can understand drinking them but in general I don't see it, and various rings, earrings, badges—all of these show disrespect, at least that's how I see it. None of this used to bother me—generally speaking, in the past I just didn't notice a lot of things, life is such a cool thing, but the further you sail into its ocean the more shit there is floating around you, floating without sinking, but on the other hand that also makes it more interesting.

I have quite a few friends, you can't really call us a group, we're more a kind of friendly collection of con-men out to sucker every recruiter and employer, we live in several adjoining rooms on the same floor, sleep wherever there's room, I don't even know everyone, there's only one real friend here—Vasia the Communist—the rest are more or less transients, although they're also our friends, they appear and disappear, sometimes there can be up to ten of them on our floor, at other times I wander around the corridors by myself for days, climb onto the roof and look around. We are all 18 or 19, most of my friends have been thrown out of school, they are now either unemployed or spend their time doing useless things, Dogg Pavlov for example, I never could understand what he really did. Dogg Pavlov's parents are Jews, but he doesn't transfer that on to himself, he says that parents are parents and kids are kids, he is himself; moreover, Dogg Pavlov says that he's right. Consequently, he doesn't live with his parents,

says he cannot live with Jews, hangs around acquaintances, sometimes hangs with us for a week or two, he has a granny too, who's obviously not Jewish, because he sometimes stays with her. From time to time he steals pieces of antique porcelain from his granny's buffet and sells them at the flea market, using the money to buy pills in the pharmacy kiosks near the market and then comes over to our place. Then we don't even leave the room for several days, except maybe to take a leak or to puke—but you can puke in the room, too. You can piss too, come to think of it. I like Dogg Pavlov, even in spite of his anti-Semitism, it doesn't affect me.

It's against Dogg's principles to work, he considers it degrading, "it's degrading to work for them," he says. In general he believes that there's been a putsch in our republic and that the Jews have come to power, yids, he says, there are yids everywhere; I myself think he's wrong, but I don't want to work either. Recently, it's true, our friends the advertisers Vova and Volodia set Dogg up with a job as a courier in their newspaper in the advertising section, Dogg struggled with this for a long time, came to visit us on the floor, wandered around the kitchen, called Vova and Volodia Jews, and vacillated. In the end he plucked up the courage and went to work. He worked for about ten days. Then he disappeared for about ten days, along with some correspondence, Vova and Volodia came to see us but we knew nothing, they phoned his parents, they too hadn't heard anything from their son Dogg for about six months, which apparently suited them fine, the boys even went to visit the granny, she didn't let them in, granny looked at them through the half-open door and didn't understand what they wanted from her, it seems Dogg has finally driven the old woman nuts, try living with a grandson who starts breakfast by drinking vodka and then has everything else. In a word Dogg disappeared and our friends the advertisers threatened to do something terrible to him if he was ever found—"pass on the message to Dogg," they told us, "that we will tear his balls off." I doubted that Dogg could be enticed back to the editorial office this way, but I promised to pass on the message. It wasn't hard for me to do. We didn't like Vova and Volodia too much, but we put up with them, they studied in the history department and, like most of the A students in the history department, they worked for the KGB; the KGB, I think, suffered a lot from the presence in its ranks of two dolts like Vova and Volodia, but order is order, that's what I think, why else would they keep them on staff. Vova and Volodia, obviously with the protection of the KGB, in their first year of studies set themselves up at the advertising agency of one of Kharkiv's first independent newspapers, their newspaper received money from some democratic development fund, the editor was some slimy prick who had been able to get a big grant from the Yanks and they began putting out their independent newspaper, they were one of the first in the city to start printing naked babes on the front cover, and detailed television listings in the centerfold. In addition they constantly attacked our USSR, one might

say that using Yankee money they poured shit on our Soviet fatherland, on the days of our youth, so-to-speak, I didn't like the newspaper, though I liked the babes on the front cover. Vova and Volodia worked, as I said, in the advertising department, I don't know how well, probably badly, because they began dropping in on us once or twice a week, drinking vodka and fighting with each other. Generally speaking they were pals and got on well together. Vova was a bit taller, Volodia a bit heavier, but when they got drunk they would go out unnoticed into the corridor and start bashing each other, for real, no fooling around, with teeth knocked-out, snot and tears running down their faces. So what kind of KGB agents they were, I can't say. At first we would pull them apart, then we realized it was no use, if the fellas want to fight, let them fight. Maybe that's normal among historians, maybe the KGB pays them extra for it, who cares.

And then there's Vakha, who also lives on the floor with us. Vakha's a Georgian, although Dogg calls him a Jew too. Vakha has his own business, near the ring-road just by the exit from the city, quite near us, he has several kiosks in which several vendors work. The vendors live in one of the kiosks, get together for the night, in winter they make a fire, once they almost burned down the kiosk, thank God it was made of steel and they only got roasted a bit but survived. Vakha has two whole rooms. He lives in one himself and keeps his smuggled goods in the other one—various chocolates, colas, heroin, and other lollipops. He pays off the cops, the guards too, but he leaves us alone, so Vakha is a positive hero, completely positive, there's no other word for it. He sells us undiluted vodka but doesn't give us any discount. Vakha is afraid of Dogg, and whenever the latter comes to see us he locks himself up in one of the rooms; at these times I imagine him counting his worn-out banknotes and swallowing gold coins to prevent Dogg, the anti-Semitic Jew, from taking any of it away.

Further down the corridor, somewhere in its depth, lives Cocoa the Donbas intellectual. That is, his mother works in the library of one of the mines. Cocoa is portly and we don't like him, but he's still drawn to us, well, in general he doesn't really have any alternatives, who's going to spend time with a Donbas intellectual. Although he does have some other acquaintances in the city besides us, some musicians, obviously dandies like Cocoa, and after visiting them he crawls home on all fours completely plastered on port wine, and collapses into sleep. Cocoa has a sand-colored suit in which he looks like a total nerd, he just about never takes it off, almost takes it into the shower with him too; when he fills himself with port wine he falls into bed in this suit, it turns out to be a multi-functional thing, this costume of a Donbas intellectual. When he wakes up, Cocoa comes to the kitchen and observes who is preparing what, sniffs the processed foods, and chats about various subjects—sober, portly, in his crumpled dandy costume.

Further down the corridor, somewhere in that labyrinth, lives Sailor, a solitary guy with a torn right ear, he says that a dog bit it off—Pavlov? someone is always sure to ask by way of a joke. Sailor is either God-fearing or maybe just a bit nerdy, I don't even know how to explain it, for example he only washes at night, says he doesn't want to be disturbed—disturbed from doing what? I ask him all the time, Sailor blushes but continues to wash only at night, that's how he is.

Among the others one could perhaps mention Carburetor, that's right, Sasha Carburetor, my good friend, Sasha arrived from some place along the border, though this border is everywhere around us, Sasha in fact came in defiance of his parents' wishes, it turns out that such things do indeed happen, his mother and stepfather are still at home; Sasha finished driver education courses, has a real driver's license, and hopes to start a trucking operation some day, to buy a hearse or something and to transport, say, furniture, he's passionate about technology, if you understand what I mean. One time he even bought himself a textbook with diagrams and descriptions of automobiles and tried to make sense of it all. He began, as you can probably guess, with the carburetor. After this the textbooks disappeared, I figure someone just sold them for alcohol, why not put them to good use. Overall, Carburetor has this capacity for stepping into shit that isn't meant for him.

As for the others, I don't even know them very well myself, various comic book heroes appear from time to time, but to keep track of them all and why they have appeared in our lives is pretty hard to do. Let's say some Ivanenko appears, a curious type, not to say fucked-up, and basically, that's about all that can be said about him. That's all there is.

A nice, eternally hungry crew, held together by no one knows what, because in principle everyone has issues with everyone else, but this is still no reason to avoid healthy interaction. We have nothing to do for the most part, although everyone has his own relations with reality, at our age these come down to some sort of simple whims and desires—to get laid, or something, I don't know what else there is. Women ignore us, even the prostitutes on the ring-road, we occasionally go over to look at the prostitutes, sort of an excursion to see the free attractions, of course we have no money, so we just hang out with them, bum some cigarettes, share various life stories, in a word we get in their way while they're trying to earn prostitution's hard bread. However, they treat us well, out there on the ring-road they're not particularly useful to anybody, just like us, and just like us they don't have enough money or societal love, both they and we have to live through the torrents of rain this summer in an empty Kharkiv suburb overgrown with grass and plastered with advertisements, this fantastic city, these fantastic prostitutes, this fantastic life. We don't practice homosexuality, though everything is leading us in that direction.

7.00

The main thing is to count everything correctly, in this kind of thing if you don't think everything through you'll fall on your face, nothing is as simple as it looks when you start your own business, start to sell something, you have to give it some thought, even if you're dealing with what seems to be an absolute winner of a deal it's best to insure yourself. It's one thing if, for instance, you're dealing with stocks or transfers, in a word if the bucks are not in your hands, someone else can count things up for you, you only have to do what is required of you and not spend time shitting around while on the job. It's a completely different thing if you're working with real live cash, man, with a wad of bills, and there's no office to back you up, when you're face to face—no middlemen—with a living, breathing pile of money, that's when you'd better think things through, or you'll end up screwed, no two ways about it. How many times have I seen otherwise normal people grasp at some obviously losing proposition and then predictably flame out, losing the balance of their financial resources and their social respectability—the average business is so dangerous that even one false step and right away you have a soldering iron up your ass, that's what the primitive accumulation of capital is like in the conditions of a post-totalitarian society.

At first they offered me a piece of the action too, but for some reason I refused, I don't know why, something made me suspicious, I can't even say what—they looked completely serious, my friend Vasia the Communist, a nice guy, an exceptional carefree spirit, suddenly had enough of living on vodka with tea, with constant shortages, added everything up and reached the conclusion that the situation was difficult; the four of them decided to pool their resources, travel to Russia, buy two crates of vodka with all their dollars—buying dollars here and exchanging them in Russia would net them a profit, especially if they worked on a big scale, well two crates is no big scale, but who cares. They were going to travel to Russia and back on the suburban trains, to save money on transport, on the way they would live off the same vodka, they would bring it back and turn it over for double what they paid, then they would travel to Russia again and buy four crates of vodka, bring it back the same way and turn it over the same way, this would take some time but with a couple of nights at Kharkiv's South Station you could sell anything, even your soul, if you had one, and then the most interesting part would begin—they would travel one more time, the last, and with all their dollars would buy eight crates of vodka, transporting it would be a bit riskier, but it was worth a try, if anything happened they would be able to buy off the customs officials with the very same vodka, though that would be a shame.

So, they said to me, we end up with two crates of vodka per mug, can you imagine? Well, I say, and so what? And then, they said with emphasis on the fricative, we guzzle it all!!! What, all eight crates? Yes! We won't be

able to do it, I say. Fuck, says Vasia the Communist, in about three days we will, for sure. I imagined those three days and turned down the offer.

Vasia really knows how to make this kind of thing work, I understand him in principle, he has nothing to lose, this is his chance to have at least a few days without shortages in his food basket, which in his case consists almost exclusively of various liquor and vodka products, actually vodka, what does liquor have to do with it. He collects his boy scouts, convinces Sailor, Sailor agrees pretty quickly—why not make the trip, he says, there's nothing for him to do in the city, even the police are not interested in him, because Sailor is living here without official registration, as one would expect from a sea wolf—during the nights he hides in the shower, during the day he sleeps it off, very few people know about his existence, like a soldier waiting for his discharge, in short, they attract a couple more young guys of uncertain social origins and formal status, Vasia conducts agitational work among them all Wednesday night to Thursday, saying that in Russia you can now buy almost anything for a song, you can even buy a tank and drive it across the border, but they don't want tanks, they want vodka, so the plan appeals to everyone, I would have agreed too, as I already said, but it didn't work out. And so in the morning they get up early to travel in search of their illusory bluebirds of happiness, alcohol at discount prices, they pool whatever money they've got but don't have enough even for an ice cream.

They have to sell something. Someone in the group produces a camera, here's a camera, he says, but won't you regret it? they ask, hah, it's okay, he says, there's nothing to photograph anyway, that's true, everyone agrees, what is there to photograph, Vasia himself finds a pair of forgotten binoculars somewhere, I for one didn't even know he had a pair of binoculars, although we are friends, there's a surprise for you. Well, so now all that's left is for someone to sell all this junk. In principle, thinks Vasia, we could sell it to Sailor, he's a simpleton, he would buy it. But Sailor is part of the group. We could sell it to Cocoa, Cocoa is a simpleton too, and he's not in the group. But Cocoa is not only not in the group, he has completely disappeared, no one has seen him for several days already. And here someone remembers Vakha, right, says Vasia, Vakha's a Georgian, Georgians like optical instruments, don't they? someone in the group asks without confidence, well of course, says Vasia, of course: all Georgians like optical instruments, and they go to Vakha and find him in one of his kiosks, they say something like Vakha, how about buying these optical instruments?

But on this cool June morning Vakha doesn't quite have his head together, he is up to his ears in his own cannabis, which he smokes every evening with his vendors, so Vakha gets scared, what optical instruments, commander? why optical instruments? he asks. Vasia reaches into his bag and pulls out an old pair of binoculars with no straps and an almost unused FED 5 camera in a creaking leather case, here, he says to Vakha, take it, you

won't regret it, it's good stuff. Vakha is still frightened and doesn't leave the kiosk, he sits there with his vendors and looks at Vasia through the narrow service window, but Vasia smiles at him in a friendly manner and the rest of the scouts also smile, although a little tensely, and Vakha suddenly thinks, fuck, he thinks, fuck, what am I doing, why am I sitting here, what time is it, who are these morons standing in front of me and, most important, why are they carrying binoculars?!! But voices whisper something to him and in the end he comes out of the kiosk and takes the optical instruments into his disobedient hands, he is led aside, so that he would have something to look at through the binoculars, the street is empty, the air around the kiosks smells of cannabis and rain. Vakha looks into the binoculars and with religious awe observes the full, quiet bus stop, last stop of the No. 38 bus, several prostitutes at the crossroads, and, further along the curve, an unfinished nine-story building whose walls are being built by cons, a dilapidated Soviet-era supermarket, the No. 20 streetcar crawling out of some wetlands, and going full circle around himself in this fashion his optically privileged eye suddenly hits upon a kiosk, his very own, and before his clouded gaze the sign "PRIVATE SHOP VAKHA" suddenly arises with great clarity— not fucking bad, he thinks, that's me, and he ends up completely amazed.

After selling the optical instruments and receiving a pretty good sum, at least as far as their boy scout needs went, right there over the body of the half-conscious Vakha, our friends buy from his vendors two one-liter bottles of Kaiser-brand vodka and travel directly to the railway station to catch the first suburban train of the day to the town of Belgorod, they are somewhat excited and noisy in the fragrant summer morning under the fresh skies, these fearless seekers of joy and adventure, seen from the side they really do look like tourists, or even more like pilgrims on a pilgrimage to the glorious Rus' town of Belgorod and they're not taking along anything superfluous except the two one-liter Kaisers and their student tickets, and bearing in mind that they will drink the Kaisers before getting to Belgorod they really aren't carrying anything superfluous, like real pilgrims.

11.00

In Belgorod they decide to take a look at the town first, after all it's interesting to see how people live here, then to take what they came for and return by the evening suburban train, there's plenty of time, there's no need to rush, so they exit the vomit-strewn railway station of the formerly glorious Rus' town and immediately they come upon a store with an enormous quantity of alcohol inside. Nah, what's the point of dicking around in Belgorod, says Vasia, and enters. No one contradicts him.

"What would you boys like?" asks the saleswoman in Russian. "Mamasha, mamasha," says Vasia the Communist, "a little vodka." "How much?" asks the saleswoman. "Two," says Vasia. "Twin-packs?" she asks

in a business-like manner. “Crates,” says Vasia. “Boys, are you sixteen already?” Together they all pull out their student cards with the state symbols of their republic. After that the drawbridge is lowered and they are sold the vodka.

“It would have been good to screw her,” says Sailor back at the station. “Young man,” Vasia replies irritatedly, “are you here for business or fucking?” Basically a rhetorical question.

14.00

On the road back they got beaten up by the border guards. Basically it was their own fault, they let themselves go knowing they had the goods in hand, let their guard down and smoked up right in the carriage, and since the carriage was almost empty the border guards practically had no choice, they just walked up to the boys and laid into their backs with batons. The boy scouts remained silent and so as not to express their pain and despair they thought about something good, and because it—this good—was right next to them, under the benches, the thinking was easy and they endured the punishment with dignity. The border guards were obviously expecting some armed resistance, they had been yo-yo-ing back and forth on the train for several hours, you have to see it from their point-of-view, you spend your time traveling on this stinking suburban train along the nation’s border and there isn’t even anyone to start a fight with—it’s all just speculator-housewives, nobody you would want to start a brawl with, they beat up the boy scouts simply out of inertia, just like that, to stay in shape, though it didn’t make anyone feel any better.

“Assholes,” says Vasia, when the border guards disappear. “They should go work in the factory, on the shop floor.” “Right,” says Sailor, “in the foundry.” Everyone agrees—right, in the foundry, the foundry, the foundry—that’s a good one.

18.00

At the railway station in Kharkiv they find some hutsuls who have spent the last two months making their way from somewhere near Kostroma, where they’d been working, and have now been sitting in the Kharkiv station for several days, they have spent all their money and don’t know where to go—back to Kostroma to earn some more money, or just head home because the season is over; they decide to head home, they pool the rest of their money and buy one of the crates of vodka from the boy scouts, the vodka that the scouts are selling is cheaper than anywhere else at the station, so the hutsuls take the crate immediately, who knows what will happen later, better not to take a risk with this kind of thing.

Vasia and his pals suddenly find themselves with a pile of money. The two nameless guys immediately demand that it be divided, but Vasia tells them—fuck no, we’ll do as we agreed, the youths insist; Sailor clearly

doesn't know how to behave in this situation, no one has ever in the course of his life divided money in his presence, so the youths decide that he's also on Vasia's side and they don't dare to simply smash their faces, okay, they say, then just remove our vodka, fuck you—Vasia sticks to some kind of communist principles and refuses to share, then the guys take a bottle in each hand from the bag, which is how many in total—four bottles—and take off, you can give us back the camera later, they say in parting and disappear into the dark underpass. "What's with them?" asks Sailor, he doesn't like the situation, it was such a nice group, they drank vodka, talked about life, no one offended him—Sailor—and then suddenly this. "You see," says Vasia the Communist, "how money spoils people." "Not me," says Sailor. "You don't have any," answers Vasia the Communist and goes off to sell more vodka.

But sales seem to have stalled, the platforms are empty, everyone who wanted to travel has obviously already left. Vasia can't think of anything better to do than go back to the hutsuls, and the hutsuls are so drunk already that they agree to take the vodka, okay, they say, and take several more bottles from Vasia, after which Vasia also expertly foists a bottle onto some granny who is waiting for something hopelessly with her grandson fidgeting by her side, he's about seven-years-old, in fact it's the grandson who advises granny to take the bottle, take it, he says, it will come in handy on the road, granny scolds him but listens to his advice and takes the bottle, so Vasia is left with very little to sell.

From the neighboring platform they have been observed for some time now by three serious dudes in adidas track suits, they approach Vasia and Sailor, force them into a circle and say, who are you?

Vasia begins to explain. The guys listen, then this obviously bores them and they say, listen, we asked, you know, just for decency, but really we don't care who you are and where you're from, and how many of you there are here, this is what we want to tell you: if we see you here again we'll bury you over there, somewhere between the first and second platforms, and then every evening the Kyiv express will blare its horn over your graves, but for the time being we're not going to do that (after this the terrified Vasia relaxes a little, but the terrified Sailor does not), in general, we sell all the liquor here, you might say this is our territory, and you're certainly not needed here (Vasia and Sailor suddenly realize this is true) and now that we've had a little chat with you here, we can see that you are not really competitors, you simply appear to be retards (both mentally agree with this), so we're not going to do anything to you this first time, but as compensation ("Oh no," thinks Sailor; Vasia maintains a terrified silence) we're going to take your vodka. Not all of it, you see what honorable outlaws we are, remember that. They look in the bag and take a bottle each, oh, and one more thing—we wouldn't have paid any attention to you, but you're selling vodka too cheaply, you're undermining the price, get it,

retards?

Vasia and Sailor run into the underground passage and catch their breath. “Assholes,” Vasia takes up his old tune. “They should be sent to work on the shop floor.” But Sailor no longer finds this funny, let’s go home, he begins, fuck, says Vasia, there are five bottles left, we’ll sell them and then leave, they’ll kill us, says Sailor, cut it out, says Vasia, what are you afraid of, we’ll do everything quickly, buy some grub and set off home, come on, don’t be afraid, no, says Sailor, I don’t want to, I’m afraid. Okay—Vasia loses his temper—to hell with you. Here’s some for your work, shove off: he pulls out two bottles and gives them to Sailor. Sailor hesitates for just a second—all things considered, he thinks, in the morning I had nothing. Now I have two bottles. Obviously that’s a plus, he decides, and takes the honestly earned vodka. Okay, take off, says Vasia, we’ll see each other at home. “Yes, he really is a retard,” he thinks, watching his companion leave, his tired, thick-set army-navy figure disappearing into the dark passage. It is also getting dark on the street, the first stars appear, and the birds hide from the rain in the railway building. “If I go home now,” thinks Sailor, “I can lock myself in the shower and drink everything by morning.” And that is what he does.

21.00

He takes everything that he’s got left and walks along the evening platform, you have to take risks, whether you want to or not; when you’re 19 and your head is full of naked women from the front pages of newspapers, advertisements, and propaganda, why should you be afraid on the third platform of Kharkiv’s South Station. At 21.00 the non-stop train for Baku makes a stop, the conductors are from Baku, reliably flush with cash, they’re worth a try. Vasia approaches the first carriage, they tell him to clear off, he goes to the next one, then in the third a thick-set Baku commissar stops him, “The vodka’s not poisoned, is it?” he asks, “It’s good vodka, good,” says Vasia, “Okay, hand it over, let’s go in the wagon,” “Why in the wagon?”—Vasia suddenly turns very tense, “don’t be afraid,” says the commissar, “I’ll just check whether it’s real vodka or not, if everything is okay I’ll take the whole lot at once.” They enter the conductor’s compartment, where it smells of hashish and expensive tobacco, the carriage is warm and half-empty, almost no one is going to Baku, and those who are sleeping, it’s nine in the evening, what else is there for them to do, they’re afraid of going out onto the platform where they might get caught up in yet another customs search, they’ll buy vodka from the conductor later, it’s better not to show your face in the station, they all smell of sperm and hashish from several yards away, as though the whole journey, for several days and nights, these citizens of shithole Azerbaijan have been jerking off after smoking up, “come in,” says the conductor to Vasia, Vasia steps inside the dim compartment and the conductor slams the

door shut after him, "sit there for a while," he says, locks the door and goes off somewhere, Vasia starts to panic, kicks the wall with the toe of his shoe, knocks at the closed door, circles like a rat in the tiny room that reeks of Asian grasses, finally sits on the numbered blanket that covers the shelf and begins to cry as he's squeezing a plastic bag with the vodka under his arm. Well, okay, he says to himself, okay, don't whimper, what can they do to you, well, they can take away the vodka, to hell with the vodka, think—it's only vodka. They can fuck you. Yes, they could fuck you, especially that boar in the railwayman's beret that shut me up here. No, they wouldn't fuck me, how could they fuck me, but Vasia looks at the table strewn with cigarettes and condoms, and thinks that basically they could fuck him. They could sell him to the Chechens for the spare parts they need. Do the Chechens need me? Of course they do. For organs, they'll cut out my kidneys, lungs, balls, tie me up somewhere by my feet in one of their auls and they'll start pecking at my liver as if I were Prometheus, or they'll flay me like a rabbit and they'll make a Chechen war drum out of my skin, my mother won't even come from Cherkasy to visit my grave, I've got to get out of here, get out before the guy from Baku returns; Vasia takes off his belt and ties the handle on the door with it, now they won't get in if they try, he tries to open the window, it gives a little, Vasia sticks his head out into the fragrant railway dusk, he presses down some more, the gap widens, Vasia catches his breath, sees several porno magazines on the shelves and pushes himself with determination into the window. Here the train jerks harshly, its rheumatic joints screech and it sets off in the direction of Baku, dragging—along with everything else—the innocent Vasia the Communist, who's my friend, by the way.

It's always like that: whether you like it or not you have to struggle, otherwise nothing will come of anything, you can either sit at home and keep still or make an effort, grab the tough circumstances by the balls, and afterwards, if everything works out, then the jack-pot will certainly be waiting for you, whatever it is that winners get in such cases—a discount card, permanent sale prices, free sex—in a word, you better hustle 'cause otherwise you'll never get out of this shit; Vasia looks with despair as the last railway building sails past him, the speculators and smugglers disappear, even the cops are no longer visible, in this situation he would have been pleased to see them, but the entire collection of endearing and familiar objects is disappearing somewhere into the blue yonder, and just then the commissar from Baku finishes his simple dealings, remembers the hostage, and tries to enter his own compartment. But the door won't open. Hey, infidel, open up, he shouts something along these lines. The carriage waits in alarm. Vasia moves about feverishly in the window and suddenly realizes that he's stuck. The conductor has no idea what's going on. He speaks in his customary Azerbaidzhani generously interspersed with words from the brotherly Slavic languages, at first he simply curses, then he

becomes alarmed—what if the boy scout is having an apoplectic fit? Then he nervously begins urging Vasia to heed his conscience and to observe public order, he calls on the passengers to be witnesses, the train is by now somewhere in the suburbs and here the window frame in which Vasia the Communist has gotten stuck is unable to withstand the load and cracks, Vasia has just enough time to collect himself, turns himself around in the window and quite expertly, like a courtyard cat used to being dragged around, slips out the window, the wind bursts into the conductor's empty compartment and joyfully throws into the air all the cards, condom wrappers, and pornographic postcards, ruining, to put things succinctly, the established daily routine of this loyal servant of the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The endless train full of bags of coal and suitcases of heroin happily wags its tail and soon its leading carriages enter the territory of Russia, in a word, you cannot envy those guys.

23.00-08.00

Vasia doesn't even break anything, we're not talking about the carriage here but about himself. He simply rolls down the embankment and tears his right pant leg, but he doesn't even drop or break the vodka—which he was convulsively pressing to his heart all this time —not to mention all kinds of ribs, tibia, and other anatomical shit. He gets up as though nothing has happened, shakes off his pant leg, wipes his sweating palms on his sweater—careful so that the vodka doesn't slip out of his hands—and goes off in search of civilization, but what kind of civilization do you expect when you have just fallen out of a railway carriage—you have to walk wherever you can, along factory fences, past what was once the pride of the defense industry, and only the earth splats beneath your feet—sticky and tenacious, like a piece of chewing gum. But suddenly Vasia finds himself on the rails of a streetcar line, well, this is okay, he thinks, all I need to know is in which direction, he sits on the rails and brings out his bottle. He takes a few swigs and considers hiding the bottle, but then decides not to hurry, why hurry, he thinks, I'll make it through to the morning, and then things will become clear, and he continues to drink and doesn't worry too much about this night and all its unsuccessful business. Everything is fine in principle, everything is fine, things could have been much worse, they could have killed me or strung me up somewhere in the carriage vestibule, or fried me in a furnace, those Tungus bums, Vasia puts his lips to the bottle with relish, yeah, he thinks, it's a good thing that there's a lot of vodka, I won't even be able to finish it all. It's a good thing too that I won't be able to finish it, because where could you buy any around here now. Although if the need arose I could make a trip to the railway station and buy some from the hutsuls, he thinks, and sits there, in his torn jeans that are falling down without a belt, in a dark sweater and worn sneakers, on the wet rails which reflect, from time to time, the piercing rays of moonlight.

At one in the morning Vasia is almost run over by the next streetcar. Only at the last moment does the driver notice that there's something on the rails, a dog, he thinks, and decides to crush it, but he still has time to notice that no, it's not a dog, not a dog at all, dogs don't down vodka from a bottle, he just has time to brake, runs out of the streetcar and finds the drunken Vasia on the rails. What are you—a moron? he shouts, I almost cut you in two, you fucking idiot! Sorry, says Vasia, I got separated from my train, here have some vodka, the conductor takes the bottle, a little is good for stress, he says to himself, and sits down besides Vasia. And so they sit there on the rails, without even talking, they just sit in silence and don't get in each other's way—the rails are wide, there's enough room for everyone, a light rain begins to fall, okay, says the driver at last, let's go, I can give you a lift to the park, you can make your way back from there somehow, thanks, says Vasia, but you have to buy a ticket, there are controllers on the line, what controllers? Vasia says in amazement—it's nighttime; oh, says the offended driver, you're used to traveling without a ticket, fine, it's time to go, and they climb into the cold streetcar and drive to the park, on the way a woman controller really does get on, walks up to Vasia, who wants to pay her, searches in his pocket, but finds only a thick wad of Russian rubles there that he bartered from the hutsuls, and that's all, nothing else, here, he says to her, take this. What is this? she asks, money, says Vasia, dirty money. Take it, please. But the controller suddenly says: not a chance, I don't need that kind of money, give me ours. Where can I get it from? Vasia fights back exhausted. From wherever you like, says the controller ruthlessly. I got separated from my train, says Vasia, but the controller doesn't react. Well, if you like I can give you some vodka. No, refuses the controller, I don't want any. Really? says Vasia in astonishment.

"What can you say in a situation like this," he thinks. "You cannot get a ticket, or pay the fine, a total bummer in short." He gets out of the streetcar, sits on the rails and takes out a second bottle. The wet shining rails stretch smoothly away from him, out in both directions into eternity, and it is precisely this that to a large extent reconciles him to reality.

INTRODUCTION No. 4

22.00

When I become an adult and am 64, I will recall all this tedium, if only to establish whether I myself have been transformed into a slow-moving animal that employs its nickel jaws merely to chew grub stored for the long polar winter. What will I feel like at 64? Will all these children of the streets and supermarkets hate me too, the way I hate everyone over 40 who has succeeded in digging themselves in on the green hills of this life, precisely on the sunny side? And what will I think of them? What do you have to do

to your brain over the course of a life to prevent it from finally rotting and becoming a pile of slimy seaweed useless even for making food? I suspect that even if I discover something about this it will be when I'm 64 and won't want to change anything. What's happening to all of them? They also obviously began as decent cheerful inhabitants of our towns and villages, they obviously liked this life, they couldn't at first have been the depressing jerks that they have become now at the age of 50 to 60. If so, where are the roots of their personal great depression, what are its causes? Obviously, the cause is sex, or Soviet rule—personally I can't think of another explanation. I like to look at old photo albums, with photos of the '40s and '50s, in which these cheerful young guys with short haircuts always smile at the camera dressed in military or technical school uniforms, with simple and universally necessary things in their hands: monkey wrenches, depth charges, or at the very least model airplanes—these children of a great people, flag-bearers, holy smokes, where did all this disappear, the USSR squeezed everything human out of them, transformed them into a processed food ready for Uncle Sam, that's what I think. In any case I constantly notice the hatred and aversion with which they observe their own children, they hunt them, catching them in the silent corridors of our enormous country and lay into their kidneys with the heavy combat boots of social adaptation. That's how it is.

19.00

With so many doors in front of you, you never know which you should enter, I think, standing in front of the streetcar. This is the third or fourth that I've let pass, I just can't concentrate and decide what I need and why. Which is to say where I have to go and who is waiting for me there. I have somehow unexpectedly been left alone, without friends or acquaintances, without teachers or guides, only passengers stand here next to me on the last stop, in the rain, they push themselves into the streetcar and, it seems, I'm in their way. In any case they look at me in an unfriendly manner, that's for sure. And then, when I more or less figure out what I want, two figures in raincoats and epaulettes emerge from behind my back and take me with them, at first I resolve to jump into an empty streetcar, but this one is going, well, nowhere near my destination and it wasn't my day—they grabbed me by the arms and pulled me across the square.

19.30

It looks like an army barracks. And it stinks like an army barracks, come to think of it, what does it in fact stink of? canned meat and deserters, idiotic cannon fodder, that's what it stinks of. In a glass booth sits a guard with a sawed-off kalashnikov, he's reading porn and stuffing his face with canned food, picking it from the tins with a folding spoon. When we entered he didn't even move, that's what you call military training and iron nerves.

In the corridor several large lamps hang from the ceiling, in fact the light is not very bright, but my tears have been flowing for about the last half hour, I can hardly see anything, so the lamps blind me, I cannot even make out what kind of canned food the guard is eating. He lets us through without a word, and they don't even greet one another, an ugly people these sergeants, ugly and strict, like Finns or Laplanders. They just hate me, I noticed this at once while still there, at the last stop, those raincoats of theirs, no, they definitely hate me, the fascist scum, they sit here eating their canned food, I would be at home now if it wasn't for these Laplanders. Externally they appear to be ordinary guys, maybe a few years older than me, in different circumstances we could become friends, go to soccer games, the cinema, I don't know, whatever else friends do, yes but people can deteriorate very badly, all they need is to put on the trousers of some uniform, I can only imagine what will happen to them in the future, it won't simply end here, they themselves should understand that, these Laplanders.

19.15

Okay lad, says one of them, obviously the senior guy, or the most fanatical. Either you walk ahead or we kill you now. Wait–wait, I say, you don't understand, I'm clean, let me walk, but in the other direction, in the direction I was going. Where you were going? shouts the senior, you got stuck in the door, people couldn't get in. Seriously? I ask. Well, someone pushed me forward. Who pushed you? he shouts. You simply threw yourself under the wheels and then got stuck in the door. Okay-okay, I say, let me go back there and try again, okay? And I really do try to free myself from their embrace, and it's then that they start beating me. And when this doesn't help they take out the gas tanks and generously douse me all over, while turning away themselves. Obviously they dislike the smell.

22.30

And you, you bastard, who only yesterday did completely insane things on account of your innate alcoholism and cheerful nature, you suddenly find yourself prepared to support all forms of repression and all punitive operations, to waste your time at home reading the crime news and to support not the honest and mad maniacs but the generals from staff headquarters and the brutes from special forces, you become an old reactionary jerk who has forgotten the aroma of the regional offices of Internal Affairs. That's how fascism begins—yesterday's fighters on the invisible front suddenly become transformed into a rich support base for inhumane experiments with reality and consciousness, those who only yesterday returned from the front and its trenches as victors, now, after some ten or fifteen years, find themselves suddenly transformed into fascist pigs, this is the greatest secret of civilization, society devours itself, it becomes heavy and sinks under the weight of the silicone with which it has

pumped itself up.

19.45

"So," says one of the fascists, "take out whatever you have in your pockets."

"I can't," I say. "First take off the handcuffs."

"Don't fuck around."

"Well, at least take them off temporarily, I'll take out my stuff, and then you can put them on again."

"Well, yes, we'll take them off and then you'll try to run away again. Come on, pull your stuff out, or you'll get hit on the head again."

"You have no right to beat me," I tell the fascists. "I'll phone the dean."

"We're the ones who will phone the dean," say the fascists.

"No, he's my dean, so I'll phone him."

"You talk too fucking much," they say.

Yes, our conversation just isn't clicking. I wonder where their gas chamber is, I still cannot see very well. On top of that, the gas combined with what I've already drunk is making some kind of rainbow concoctions in my head.

"Now we're going to photograph you."

"What for?" I ask.

"As a souvenir," laugh the fascists.

"And where's your gas chamber?" I ask.

"What?" they fail to understand.

"You know, the chamber," I say. "With the gas."

"Oh, you mean the shower," they say. "Coming up."

Now they're going to shoot me, I think, the fascist scum. And here a stout captain enters the room, not in the meaning of a ship's captain, he's about fifty, with some residue of good conscience in his eyes and some residue of sandwiches on his uniform jacket. I grasp immediately that this is my chance and decide to hang onto him—well, not by the uniform of his jacket, of course.

23.00

After that comes old age, you're simply empty inside, there's just nothing left in you, it has all been squeezed out, you've been wrung dry and thrown out, so now you can take pride in your artificial limbs and medals. Who needed you, what did you do for the most part all this time, why does everyone hate you and why can't you answer them in kind? Where is your own hatred? Where is your fury? What has happened to you? What has the system done to you? How did it all happen—you began pretty well, when you still were 16 or 17, you were a decent person, not completely polished and with a future not yet wholly predictable, how come you got into this

mess, how will you look the angels in the eyes at the security checkpoint after dying in your own shit, how will you look them in the eyes, what will you tell them, they won't understand you, they don't understand anyone, no one at all.

20.00

"What do you want to be?"

"A teacher."

"What kind of a teacher can you be? You're a total drunk."

Yes, I have to start getting out of here, because this scum is going to shoot me for sure. It appears I made a mistake. You can never trust these fascists, they will always betray you.

"May I ask, sir, what's your name?"

"Mine? Hm. Mykola Ivanovych. Mykola Ivanovych Ploskikh."

"What?"

"Ploskikh."

"May I just call you Mykola Ivanovych?"

"Go ahead."

"Mykola Ivanovych…"

"Well?"

"You know, I don't drink at all."

"I can see that."

"Seriously. I don't drink. At all."

"Then how come you got so plastered?"

"Mykola Ivanovych, you see… It was my dean."

"What dean?"

"Well, it was his birthday today, you understand?"

"Ah, and so the whole faculty was boozing?"

"Well, no, of course. He just asked for help in moving. To a new laboratory."

"What laboratory?"

"A new one. To move. To transfer things there, the equipment—"

"Equipment?"

"Well, yes. Retorts."

"What retorts?"

"You know, retorts—those, kind of—" I try to explain to him what a retort looks like but I can't remember.

"So?"

"We're chemists."

"I can see that."

"Seriously. You know, they have various retorts." (Why am I stuck on those retorts?) "Mykola Ivanovych…"

"Well?"

"Do you have children?"

"Yes," says Mykola Ivanovych, straightening the jacket of his fascist uniform. "A son. The same kind of fuck-head as you," Mykola Ivanovych appears to let himself go a bit. "He's started to sniff glue, the parasite. I got into his nightstand the other day."

"Got into his nightstand?" I fail to understand.

"Well, I had *my* things in there, you understand? I got into it and looked; there's no glue, so I say to him—so, you little prick, first you smoked *my* cigarettes and now you're sniffing *my* glue?"

"Your glue?" I don't understand him at all. What is he talking about?

"I bought it to do some home renovations" says Mykola Ivanovych, offended. "For renovations, is that clear? And how can I do any renovations now, without glue?"

"Right," I say.

"And why did you throw up over yourself?"

"I don't know, Mykola Ivanovych, I have this problem with my nose recently. I sleep badly, can't catch my breath. And I throw up."

"It's your glands."

"You think so?"

"Sure, it's your glands. You should have them cut out."

"Cut out?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, come on," I say. "How can I cut them out? What will I have left then? Maybe my glands are the best thing that I have."

"Oh sonny-boy, sonny-boy. What am I going to do with you?"

"Mykola Ivanovych—"

"What?"

"Let me out. I won't do it any more."

"How can I let you out? In your state they'll pick you up again in five minutes. Those same two assholes who dragged you in will pick you up. They're young, for them it's just like shooting down an enemy airplane—you get to paint another star on the fuselage. So, just sit here. At the moment you're safest here. Okay, now, where are *my* keys—let's go. I'll leave you in the cell until morning.

"The gas cell?"

20.30

It's dark in the cell, along the wall there are two benches, on one lies a young guy in a leather jacket, between the benches is a window with a steel grating over it, Mykola Ivanovych collects my belt and shoelaces and leaves me in the dark. I immediately rush to the window, it can't be, I think, that nobody can escape from here, one can escape from any gas chamber, obviously one can escape from this one too. What are you doing? asks the young

guy, his leather jacket creaking in the dark, I'm trying to get out of here somehow, oh, right, says the guy, then dig a tunnel. You don't mean, I say, that there's no way out of here? None, he says, none. A tunnel is the only way. How do you know? I ask. I sat in this same cell, he says, three and a half years ago, when they picked me up the first time. Wow, I say, so you're at home here? Follow the conversation, man, says the guy, how can I be at home in the cop shop? Sorry, I say, I didn't mean to offend you. What did they pick you up for? In the slammer, says the young guy instructively, his leather jacket creaking offendedly, they don't ask what for, in the slammer they ask what're you charged with, understand? I understand, I say.

We sat together like this until morning. He talked about the slammer and I thought about my own stuff. The benches stank of bedbugs.

18.06.93 (Friday)

7.00

"Mykola Ivanovych?"

"Okay, sonny-boy, get up. We're going for rehabilitation."

"Goodbye," I say to the young guy, but he just creaks sleepily in reply.

So here's how it is: Mykola Ivanovych leads me down battered corridors, out through a side door, I see that we're in the corridor of the passport office, which is also in the same building as the district police station, there is absolutely no one here yet, no visitors, only two cleaning ladies who are washing the corridor from both ends and who give me reproachful looks, each in her own way of course, but reproachful. Mykola Ivanovych opens another door and leads me into a large room with an old fridge and a gas stove, the floor is covered in whitewash, it looks as though they are repairing the room, maybe this is the gas chamber, I think, and they obviously poison people using the gas stove.

"Right, sonny," says Mykola Ivanovych in a business-like manner, "right."

Now, I think, he'll propose that I put my head in the oven and he'll turn on the tap.

"I have decided not to telephone your dean. What do you need that unpleasantness for, right?"

"Right."

"But I don't want this to happen again, is that clear?"

"Clear."

"Well, then," says Mykola Ivanovych, "here's your passport, and here's your belt."

"And my shoelaces?"

"Oh shit, I forgot them. Well, I have to go back anyway. Okay, here's the thing," he doesn't seem to know himself what he wants. "You see that bulb?"

"Yes."

"It's broken, see?"

I look up. It really is broken.

"I see," I say.

"Well, unscrew it. Because I can't climb up there. MY years won't let me."

"Unscrew it?" I ask to make sure.

"Unscrew it."

"And that's all?"

"That's all."

"And then I can go home?"

"Well, no," says Mykola Ivanovych. "You'll stay until evening, so nobody can say anything, and then you'll piss off, to wherever you want."

"Until evening?"

"Until evening," says Mykola Ivanovych. "Go on, climb up."

He positions the wobbly folding ladder for me—it's covered in whitewash and paint— and steps aside. He's probably afraid that I might fall on him. I shift about and hesitate but decide to climb; whatever you say, this Mykola Ivanovych is not such a shit, he is a shit of course, but not that bad, at least he gave me back my passport, even though he did lose my shoelaces somewhere. I climb up and examine the bulb up close, it's not just broken, it's some kind of a poor excuse for a light bulb, all covered in whitewash and paint, I don't know who takes care of repairs around here but whoever it is obviously has a hatred of electricity.

"Well, how is it?" asks Mykola Ivanovych from below.

"In good order," I say.

"What good order?" shouts Mykola Ivanovych. "You little jerk, unscrew it. I don't have time to play around with you."

And here somewhere in the depths of the building, on the other side of the wall, a gunshot is heard, then another, then a round from a kalashnikov, a real firefight, I almost fall off my ladder, well, I think, okay, Mykola Ivanovych thinks the same, obviously he's scared, he pulls out his makarov and disappears into the depths of the passport office. And I'm left on the folding ladder. The shots die off. What's going on? I think. I try to unscrew the bulb some more and suddenly get an electric shock, again I almost fall

to the floor, fuck your district police station, I say, with its passport office included, I climb down the ladder and walk out of the room. On the left is the freshly washed corridor, on the right is some door. I turn the handle. The door opens. Outside, in the courtyard of the passport office, by the door, stands a white volga and that's it, no one else, no visitors, no passport inspectors, no towers with machine-guns and barbed wire. I walk out and stand by the door. Basically, I think, they could shoot without warning. Behind the door another shot echoes. I walk to the gate, open it, and go home.

8.30

At the last stop of the No. 38 streetcar stands Vasia the Communist, he is standing by the kiosks and holding up his jeans. Greetings, I say, what's with you? Oh, says Vasia, I got separated from the train. Where are your shoelaces? Ah, I say, I lost them. I see, says Vasia, shall we have a drink? Okay, I say, except that I don't have any cash. Mykola Ivanovych took it all. What Mykola Ivanovych? asks Vasia. Ploskikh, I say. What? Ploskikh. I see, says Vasia, well, let's go, I have some. What's that smell on you? he asks again. It's not cognac, is it? Bedbugs, I say. What bedbugs? It's a long story, I say. I see, says Vasia.

How's your business? I ask when we have bought some. Ah says Vasia, not good. I decided to quit. How come? I ask. Well, you know how it is, says Vasia, it's impossible to run an honest business in this country. On top of that the dollar exchange rate keeps jumping around.I see, I say.

8.47

At home we find our friend Dogg Pavlov. Greetings, says Dogg, as though that was what was expected—what's up with you—have you brought some booze? We have, says Vasia, we have. What exactly? he sniffs, it's not cognac, is it? Cock-nac, I tell him, and where were you? At the soccer game, says Dogg, we spent all last night there, but no joy at all. So we're all staying inside—we haven't seen each other for a while, and there's plenty to talk about, after all.

"Dogg," I ask. "How'd they play, by the way?"
"Who?" Dogg fails to understand.

Part One
WHOSE DEATH DO YOU WANT FIRST

9.15

This lyrical story begins with a guy in a blue coat carrying a plastic case who appears on the doorstep and spends a long time turning a piece of paper in his hands, looking to see if it's the right address, whether he has come to the correct place, whether someone has bamboozled him, in short—a gloomy, dispirited guy, with this case, on top of it all. Generally speaking I don't know where such people come from and where they are written off afterwards. Finally he plucks up his courage, knocks at the door, enters, and sees us all—me, Vasia the Communist, and our friend Dogg—we smell of morning booze and evening barf, in a word—a workday morning. The guy starts turning the paper in his hands again. Who are you?—asks Dogg. Of the three of us he is the most scared, because after hearing the sounds of a funereal dirge yesterday, that is to say after he slipped like a fish out of the inexperienced hands of Vova and Volodia, it's on his own close-cropped head that he expects to feel the next installment of bad luck, so he's thinking, I wonder if they're coming for me, someone from the editorial office, maybe a hit man, who knows who those assholes have on staff, it's a wealthy newspaper, they could easily rent an assassin by the hour from among former intellectuals, someone who, for instance, used to work recently as an engineer in an institute and now after the default, with unemployment and the disintegration of a big country, has become a free-lance hit man—Dogg is terrified, he's convinced, and in the room silence reigns.

"My name is Robert. Uncle Robert," says the guy, at last putting away his piece of paper. "Where's Sasha?"

"Sasha who?" I ask. Maybe I missed something and some girl called Sasha has moved in with us. In that case the hit man is after us all.

"You know, Sasha, he's supposedly living with you. This is …" he says, again takes out his piece of paper and begins turning it around nervously.

He? Sasha? I think. Is she some sort of hermaphrodite, this Sasha?

"You know—Sasha," Uncle Robert says pleadingly. "He left this address at home, said that he lived here. And told us about you, well, described you, I even imagined you like this," he says and smiles in a friendly way.

Like this? I think. How does he mean? Covered in barf?

"Ah," Dogg is the first to catch on. "He's talking about Carburetor, about Sasha."

"Ah, yes, of course," everyone relaxes at once, it turns out there never was a girl called Sasha among us, and that's a good thing. And this screwy Uncle Robert, it appears, isn't a hit man, although it's hard to say anything

nice about him either. He continues to smile at us in a friendly way. Dogg also begins to show some interest in him, not exactly in him but more in his plastic case; obviously, thinks Dogg, if this screwy Uncle Robert has come to see Carburetor—this is how he thinks—then maybe he's brought him something tasty and nourishing, he hasn't brought crankshafts at any rate, more likely, after all, something tasty and nourishing, there must be, thinks Dogg, some eau-de-cologne in there or marijuana, eau-de-cologne would be better in the morning, I hope it's not crankshafts, in short, at the moment we're all having trouble understanding who this is and what he's talking about. He continues:

"So, you are—Sasha's friends?"

"We," says Dogg without taking his tipsy eyes off the case, "are friends."

"And what's this," asks Uncle Robert, trying to gain our confidence, "drinking cognac in the morning?"

For some reason I immediately stopped liking him after that—some sycophant with a case, standing there talking bullshit.

"Yes, they are." Dogg points at us. "Come on in, sit down. Would you like some tea?"

Dogg last drank tea about two years ago, when still in school. And now just look at how chatty he has become.

"And where's Sasha?" asks the guy worriedly.

And here everyone starts to think—where's Sasha? somehow in the last few days everyone had forgotten about him, I had for sure, it turns out that everyone had business of his own, his own problems, well, you know how it is—you run around doing your stuff and then it turns out you don't even know where your friends have disappeared.

"Maybe he's in class," I say doubtfully.

"No, I've been there," says Uncle Robert. "They told me that classes ended more than a week ago."

"Really?" I ask.

"Yes. They suggested that I come here, to your place."

"Well, that's right," says Vasia to calm him somehow. "That's right. Where else should one look for him?"

"Dogg," I ask, "was he at the soccer game with you?"

"No," says Dogg. "Although in principle," he addresses Uncle Robert directly, "I lost consciousness there, so I don't recall very well, maybe he was."

"So what has happened?" I ask.

"Sasha has a problem," says Uncle Robert, and sits on his case by the entrance. I think to myself that it is actually empty and he carries it around with him to serve as a chair.

"What problem?" I ask.

"His father."

"But he doesn't have a father," I say. "He has a stepfather."

"He was like a father to him," says Uncle Robert.

"Wait a minute," says Dogg suddenly, "a father and a stepfather are completely different things. Although," he adds, "in principle they're both just dicks."

"Wait," I tell Dogg. "Why do you say—was?"

"He died," says Uncle Robert. "The day before yesterday."

"How did he die?"

"Shot himself."

"How?"

"He had a rifle."

Carburetor told us about the rifle. Generally he didn't like to talk about his parents, but he told us a few things here and there, it all sounded screwed up, his father left them when he was still very young, then this guy with the rifle turned up. Carburetor used to say that he was a deadbeat, that he was constantly boozed up, that he would go and shoot every living thing in the neighborhood, he would be taken away time to time but would then be set free together with his rifle, it sounded like something from the Wild West if you listened to Carburetor. He also told us that his stepfather had only one leg, not because he was born that way, of course he wasn't some sort of pathological monster, they simply amputated it at one point, this was during the USSR, but the stepfather had been in his own civil war, from which he returned on an artificial limb. Carburetor loved to tell this story, he relished the details, playing all the roles—in a word, the story appealed to him. As I said, the stepfather dragged a rifle around with him everywhere, a nice collector's item, if Carburetor was to be believed, there was a whole group of crazy scalp hunters there, half of them without licenses, but one of them worked in the regional prosecutor's office so they could even have raced around in panzers if they wanted, no traffic cop would ever have stopped them, they hunted all year round without paying any attention to the season, they would just get boozed up, take a cop car and race off into the steppe in the direction of the Russian border as far as their gas tank would take them, and, as I said, insofar as the USSR was still holding itself together and there was no border, they would just race until they ran out of gas and then, having petered out somewhere in the middle of the spring or winter crops, they would make their way back home however they could, carrying each other, instead of trophies, on their shoulders. I liked this story too, I didn't understand Carburetor in principle, your stepfather, I would tell him, is such a comical screwball, what do you have against him, you should go on a trip with him and come back with some mammoth hide, I could imagine such a trip, basically they could have raced like that all the way to the Caspian Sea, like redskins in the prairies, shooting all the fauna around them, and then when they reached the Caspian they could have shot a whole pile of camels or whatever lives there by the Caspian, and then they could

have returned, very cool; but Carburetor didn't like that kind of stuff, or maybe he liked it but didn't let on. In any case, on one occasion during one of their regular booze-ups, the drunken company drove off into the countryside and got stuck again, so they had to spend the night there. In the morning the combines came upon them, because it was harvest time, not hunting season, and they had gotten stuck somewhere right in the middle of a field that was being harvested. The combines were driving at a distance of a couple of hundred meters from one another and suddenly these redskins appear in front of them, or more accurately—red-faced guys with rifles. At least that's how I imagine it. The nearest combine, which was driving directly at them, began to swerve away and at this moment its reaper got stuck, so the combine stopped, the guy climbed out and quietly cursing the hunters began to stick his leg right into the jaws of his Satanic contraption, trying in this way to clear the clot that was jamming the blades. Carburetor later showed us a diagram, it looked frightening, on the diagram at least. No safety procedures were followed, of course. Who's going to turn off the combine for something like this! After all, it's a question of the struggle for the harvest and all that crap. And here the hunters who still felt that they were on the hunt, suddenly decided to help the guy with the combine, I don't know why, maybe their conscience spoke up, though that's hardly likely, probably they simply found it fun to deal with a monster like this Nyva agricultural combine. "Nyva!" "Nyva!" Carburetor shouted—in this whole story what appealed to him most was obviously these giant machines—and then this stupefied stepfather also stuck his leg in and even cleared the jammed blades, and the cutter's metallic teeth began to turn, swallowing into its jaws the next portion of the people's harvest, along with the stepfather's right leg. They had time to pull the guy back, but without his leg. Things could have been much worse, though. As it was, his leg was bitten off up to his balls, at least that's what Carburetor said. I tried to imagine what happened after that—okay, I thought, he was already missing a leg, they probably drove him to the hospital, although how did they get out of there? On combines or what? Well, okay. And what about the leg? The big agricultural inside of the combine, as I imagine it, was already packed with several hundred kilograms of golden grain, mixed with the stepfather's cartilage and veins as well as inorganic matter—you know, an army boot, a pant-leg—in short, a pile of raw material; it would be interesting to know what the grain farmers did with all this stuff, they certainly didn't dump out a hundred bushels of grain, they probably delivered it to the state, I'm sure they did, I know these despicable grain farmers, they'd deliver their own shit if someone accepted it, and then I go on to imagine the baking and the bread, in a word—a simple boy's bloody fantasies, you know how it is. Anyway, the guy lived on, now with only one leg, but, as I understand it, this was quite sufficient for him, at least he continued to booze and shoot everything that moved, like some sort of monster.

"How can you shoot yourself from a rifle?" Dogg raises his voice. "It has a long barrel, you can't aim it at yourself."

"Well, what about a ricochet?" asks Vasia.

"Oh, sure," I say, "you think he first fired and then threw himself at the bullet, right?"

"No," says Uncle Robert. "He pressed the trigger with his foot."

"He was missing a leg, right?" I ask.

"Yes, his right one," says Uncle. "He pressed with his left."

"What, was he left-handed?" asks Dogg.

"Dogg," we all call him to decency.

"Can you imagine?" says Uncle Robert. "They found him and at first couldn't even recognize him—half his head had been blown off. They recognized him by his sock."

"So you must have a lot of one-legged hunters out there?" I ask, but Uncle Robert doesn't even get offended.

"So where is he now?" asks Vasia.

"In the morgue. The funeral is the day after tomorrow."

"The day after tomorrow?"

"Yes, in the afternoon. They'll try to assemble the pieces of scull, you see."

"What if they can't?" I say.

"Don't know, they'll cremate him, probably. We have to find Sasha, so that he can attend. I've been at his lecture hall but they said to look here."

"He's not here," says Vasia.

"Then where can he be?" asks Uncle Robert.

"Well, stay here," I say, "and wait a bit."

"I can't. They're expecting me at home. My sister needs help with the funeral, then I need to go to the morgue, they'll try to put his head together, it has to look like him."

"Are there a lot of different possibilities, or what?" asks Vasia.

"Listen boys," Uncle Robert gets up off his case and approaches me, "find him. My sister wants very much for him to be there. They didn't get on well, but he's gone, understand? That's the way it is. And you still have time, until the day after tomorrow. Find him. I brought you this." He opens the case and takes out three bottles of cognac.

"You don't have to," I say.

"Yes, really, you don't have to," says Dogg and takes the cognac.

"Find him," says Uncle Robert and goes into the corridor, his figure bent over, and doesn't say goodbye. I don't know, maybe he loved the deceased, who can figure out these redskins.

"Uncle Robert," I say, "Uncle Robert. What a strange name—Robert. Sounds like the title of a gay magazine."

11.15

"Well, what do you say?"

"I don't know. It's scary."

"What is?"

"Well, this Uncle Robert. He's some kind of hit man."

"I think he's a asshole."

"You think so?"

"He's an asshole for sure. Did you see his case?"

"Yeah …"

"What are we going to do?"

"Don't know."

"Maybe we should look for Carburetor?"

"How will we find him? He's not attending classes. I don't even know where else he goes."

"Does he have any friends besides us?"

"I don't have a clue."

"Yeah …"

"Then there's this Uncle. An asshole."

"That's for sure."

"Carburetor will be upset."

"You think so?"

"Sure he'll be upset. It's his father, after all."

"Stepfather."

"One and the same dick."

"Carburetor didn't like him."

"Still, it's family. These kinds of things, they really touch you."

"No they don't," I say. "Naturally, I have nothing against it—family, parents, it's all okay, I'm okay with this stuff. It's just that it really isn't as important as it seems, it's just that everyone has this tendency to say 'family, family' but in reality they don't give a damn, they get together only at funerals and memorial services, and that's all. Do you understand?"

"Well, no," says Vasia. "I disagree. I love my parents."

"When did you last see them?"

"What's the difference?" says Vasia. "I don't need to see them to love them."

"Listen," Dogg suddenly says to him, "can you imagine yourself at your parents' funeral?"

"What's with you? Are you off your rocker?" Vasia is offended. "What are you trying to say?"

"Nothing in particular," says Dogg. "Me, for example, I probably wouldn't get invited to the funeral, that is, if they ever converted."

"And how do you imagine that?" I ask. "Do you expect a special telegram: 'Dear Dogg Pavlov, please come, there are now two Jews fewer in this world!'?"

"Well, I'm not talking about that."

"What then?"

"I don't know, I just think that if something happened to them, they would blame it on me, they've gotten used to blaming me for everything."

"You're just an anti-Semite," I say.

"All the same," says Vasia, "you're disclaiming family ties. In their own way they're fun."

"What, memorial services, you mean?" I say.

"No—you know, parents, family. As soon as I finish up here I'm gonna pack up and go home. My mom's in Cherkasy."

"You know," I tell him, "I've got nothing against it. A family's a family, a mom's a mom. You know, my brother and I once, when we were still in school, cleaned out a palace of culture, a small one. We walked off with the equipment."

"Why?"

"I don't know, we just had this strong desire to do it, we decided we needed to clean some place out. We dragged out some amplifiers, various sound mixers, even part of a drum set, can you imagine."

"And so, what did you do with it?"

"Sold it. To another palace of culture. They didn't even ask us where we got it, the suckers. Basically we sold it for cheap, so there was no incentive to ask. We sold it. And then we went to a store and bought some disks."

"Disks?"

"Yes. A pile of vinyl, and on top of it the guy, the one selling it all, had under the counter a genuine Depeche Mode—think of it, they had just put out their live double album. *10*, it was called. Well, we put down a pile of money for it."

"Really?"

"Yes. And you know what was the best part?"

"What?"

"This was just about the only thing that my brother and I bought TOGETHER."

11.35

Shit, what should we do, I don't think we should go looking for him. Why does he need this, and the deceased—why does he need it, he didn't even need him very much when he was alive, and now he's on the road to his Valhalla, limping through the cosmic darkness on his single leg with nothing but angels standing along the path, giving him a military salute, with fingers raised to their foreheads, or raising arms torn off in battle—the deceased is obviously going to a heaven for invalids, there must be some discrimination there, they don't let them all go through the same gates—though, how should I know? Really, how should I know, maybe it's

precisely the thin and long-legged angels in SS helmets, who hold their Schmeisser submachine guns in front of them and assemble the healthy and the invalids in front of enormous illuminated gates with a sign written in a script designed by Rodchenko that says "Work Makes You Free." They bring everyone together, whoever tries to escape is simply shot down and dragged to the neighboring clouds, finally Saint Peter comes out, a kind of Buratino with a huge golden key, he opens the gates and the angels begin to drive the masses in, pushing them, and there, inside the courtyard of this lousy heaven they, divide them into columns and lead them along various roads, each of which, nonetheless, inevitably ends at an enormous gas chamber.

Therefore the guy still has two full days left to make it to his final stop and come to a standstill forever in his depot, after surrendering his weapons to the angels and obtaining a large iron cross from them for heroism on the eastern front. The fact that he voluntarily dropped his brains onto the kitchen floor doesn't count for anything—there are moments in life when it is the most honorable and greatest of moral acts to release the people around you from your presence, and you have to make allowance for these things.

Actually, there is one district that's kind of an old factory suburb—it lies just past the new circus, stretching from the river right up to the railway station, square kilometers of an impassable private property, immediately behind which the factories begin, a kind of suburb to the factories, you might say—during the summer you won't meet anyone on the streets there, I have no idea where they all go, but you can clamber about for hours over the sand and gravel without meeting a soul, I won't even mention what it looks like in the winter. Here's what I'm getting at: our friend Chapai lives there, in a workshop at a plant that makes equipment for miners, not hammers and picks, but various lights, lanterns and so on—everything that's useful for a miner at work, Chapai says that his grandfather built this plant, so it's kind of a family tradition with them, Chapai's father took to the bottle a few years ago and spent time in a lunatic asylum getting cured, Chapai would visit him occasionally, bringing fresh underwear and newspapers, greetings from brigade leaders, that kind of thing; they lived in one of the barracks right on the river, but then these barracks were leveled, and since in the eighties Chapai the elder had already drunk away all the documents, including the pawn tickets for the St. George Cross and the Order of the Red Flag that the grandfather had received, naturally no one was going to find them a new place. Chapai junior, as the regimental son, went to the director of what was then still a normal Soviet factory and asked to work on the shop floor, in his father's trade, as it were, part of the dynasty and so on, Chapai was good at that kind of thing; I even think that by then he had already reserved a place for himself in the lunatic asylum, in the same ward as his father, that would have made it a kind of ward for

exemplary workers—teams of pioneers could have visited them on trips, listened to their depressing and maniacal stories, and left them packages filled with oranges, cookies, and denatured alcohol on the bedside tables. Representatives of strong professions have to die beautifully, only various intellectual low-life is allowed to drown in slop and suffer from hemorrhoids, but real men who firmly grasp in their right hands whatever-it-is that they grasp in their right hands—who grasp in their right hands the levers of life's chief mechanisms—they have to die at work, fall heroically on the hot foundry floor, suddenly bringing to an end their workplace seniority, dying from delirium tremens and overdrinking, from the various traumas of daily existence, if delirium tremens can be considered a trauma of daily existence.

So where am I going with all this? The director agreed to take him on at work, they fixed something in his documents, and because Chapai had not finished school yet and had no intention of doing so, the director simply brought him into the factory. They allowed him to live in one of the workshops, in the storeroom in fact, with the greasy overalls, and told him not to worry about anything. The director was also in a way part of the dynasty, if you can imagine a dynasty of red directors, although—why not. The plant had by that time begun to lose ground in the market for manufactured miners' accessories, or whatever they are called, well, that's to say there was no market as such, they were considered the only high-profile enterprise in the republic, the factory was starting to fall apart, like everything in the country, whatever could be stolen had been stolen by the director, everything else had been broken by him, in short he acted according to the old civil defense instructions and, foreseeing the advance of the treacherous though invisible enemy, had blown up the machines, the water pump, and the communication just in case, not in the literal meaning of the word, naturally some things continued to work—several workshops, and the company cars kept rolling along somehow—but the general enthusiasm had disappeared and the workers had crawled off into the private sector. Nonetheless, Chapai and the director remained. Later the director had a change of heart and decided to revive at least a part of his exclusive progeny, evidently the ghosts of dead red directors would visit him at night and wave their miner's lamps in front of him preventing him from sleeping, so he started up the business again, found some investors, they reentered the market with some new product and although most of the plant's territory remained mired in crap and ruin, the general impression was that the plant was operating. I'm saying all this because Chapai continued to live in his workshop, expanding his domain to two little rooms, he now worked as an auto mechanic, though he partied at every opportunity, despite which the director liked him, as a specialist, that is. And Chapai, since he had so much free time, took up with the local punks and got some real distilling equipment, which he constructed from diagrams using pieces

of some special equipment he had collected in the factories and workshops, even attached a certificate of quality to it, the entire diabolical machine shone with nickel, copper, and secret aviation duralumin; the director had nothing against it, let him occupy himself, he said, if his soul loves technology—he didn't quite understand, I think, what Chapai was running through the retorts, but the shine of the nickel serpentine tubing calmed him, the more so since Chapai paid for the electricity himself, and the main thing is one's ability to count up every penny earned by workers; as for trade unions, marginal profitability, government support, he never understood any of that junk. And so—here's what I'm talking about—through the punks who would buy from Chapai their hundred grams of alcohol—the commissar's gift for a job well done—Sasha Carburetor got to know him, Sasha was not a punk, in fact he didn't like punks, he liked technology, as I think I've already said, it turned out for some reason—someone introduced someone, someone had a female cousin, someone slept with someone and got two ribs broken for doing it—anyway, it turned out that they became acquainted, Sasha and Chapai, and Sasha would sometimes go to Chapai's workshop, look at the shining and sweating serpentine tubing that was doing the distilling, he would pore over the equipment's diagrams with Chapai, drink the still unsettled mash from a liter-sized mug, well, in a word, all this was his world—not just the mash, but the whole thing, the equipment, the serpentine tubing, the heavy and machine-building industries—Carburetor needed this, and Chapai had a whole plant full of this crap including the surrounding district. So, if our Carburetor was to be found, it was probably there—in the plant's workshop, that's what I'm thinking and I lay all this out in front of my friends, yes, really, there aren't that many places that would let our kind in, and Carburetor had such a place for sure, and so we slowly get ready and start to leave and then unexpectedly, outside, we come across Cocoa. Cocoa is standing in front of the entrance to the stairwell, looking sort of soft and swollen, he sees us, oh—he says—greetings, where are you off to? we, says Vasia, have some business, so go to bed. Can I come with you? asks Cocoa, wiping his sweat off with the sleeve of his jacket, the fat nerd; go on, off to bed, says Vasia sharply; I don't want to go to bed, Cocoa continues to plead—take me with you; fuck off, Vasia loses his temper, you're all we need. Well, where are you going, at least? asks Cocoa plaintively; Cocoa, Vasia says to him, we have business, can't you see? we're looking for Carburetor; Carburetor? really? then listen—says Cocoa; forget it, snaps Vasia, go to bed; look, friends, I can help … says Cocoa in confusion; goodnight, and off we go off, leaving him behind, the pudgy fool.

12.00

Humid foliage sticking to you, wet papers, red buildings—somehow our trip was not a great success; we managed to cross half the city, we made

it into the square, as though we expected to find our friend on the street, finally we get pushed out of the trolleybus by the ticket inspectors, and now we continue on foot, cross the square, walk on, looking at the posters, looking at the advertisements, there's nothing else to look at, Dogg is dragging a backpack with booze; near the bakeshop there's a crowd of crazy hippies, they've crawled together like rats seeking fresh air, they stand around drinking something, and near them are some familiar faces, Sasha Chernetsky is there, and someone else in a leather jacket with badges and medals; we know Sasha, Dogg and I even went to his concert a couple of weeks ago in the palace of culture that's by the stadium, the bouncers drove us out—someone next to us threw a firecracker into the hall, they thought we did it, we barely got away; the crazy hippies are standing by Sasha, it's a nice morning of a nice day.

"All non-conformists should be shot," says Vasia.

"Trotsky said so?" I ask.

"What does Trotsky have to do with it? Look at them standing there, the sons-of-bitches."

"So what?"

"I don't like it," says Vasia and walks on in silence.

In half an hour we cross the bridge, find the plant's fence, and crawl through a hole into the yard.

12.30

We had visited Chapai several times before, he chose his workshop with his friends in mind, because there were several other ones around—half-ruined gray buildings dating back to the first Russian revolution of 1905. Chapai's workshop has "socialism" written on it in green paint and a somewhat rickety star resembling a jelly fish—in color, that is—that was painted on later. Chapai, like Vasia, knows dialectics, they respect one another, it's me and Dogg that are foreigners here—I simply don't like Marx, that's all, but Dogg has his own issues with the old man, you don't have to ask why.

Chapai recognizes us at once; greetings, he says, entering, he lets us into the store room, pokes his head outside, looks around guardedly and shuts the door behind himself. We enter. Chapai, as is the custom among proletarians, cultivates a certain lifestyle, his room is almost empty, in the middle stands the apparatus I have already mentioned, humming alarmingly, under the apparatus there are various retorts, I finally recall what they look like, on the windowsill lie books, I take one—the fifteenth volume of something, I can't quite make out of what, but clearly of something to do with the party, it bears the stamp of the plant's library, he's a serious lad this Chapai, he's older than we are by a couple of years, he's already over twenty, and on top of that he has work experience—he's not just anybody, he follows us into the room and asks us to sit down; in the room there are

several low stools; how are things? he asks; okay, says Vasia, we're here looking for Carburetor, have you seen him recently? Not for a long time, says Chapai; he sits on a stool, throws one leg over the other and lights up a Bilomor.

Chapai is thin and intense, he pays almost no attention to us, sits by himself, leg over leg, reading some party propaganda, he's wearing an old T-shirt, sneakers, and track pants, and he also has glasses, among our friends there aren't many who wear glasses, though maybe he does this just for show, I don't know.

"You wouldn't know where he might be?" I ask.

"No, I don't."

"He didn't say anything to you?"

"Nothing."

"Bummer," I say. "His father died."

"Stepfather," Dogg corrects me.

Chapai remains silent.

"He didn't by chance forget his stuff here?" I continue.

"No."

We can talk this way forever, he speaks in some sort of mantras, having read Engels, and doesn't process normal information, these new communists have their own mixed-up Zen, which you can't really get into, and if you do, you can't get out of it, you'll be spinning your wheels on the slippery tracks of Marxism-Leninism without understanding a thing.

"You reading something?" Vasia asks him suddenly.

"Oh," answers Chapai. "A couple of books were dropped off here. I'm looking through them."

"Uh-huh," says Vasia, they are like-minded thinkers, we try not to get in their way.

"Is it okay if we wait for him here?"

"That's okay."

"We have some booze."

"So do I," Chapai points to his apparatus. "Only I don't drink."

"Why's that?"

"The clap."

"Really?" I place the book back on the windowsill. "Where did you pick that up?"

"Right here, at the plant," Chapai replies calmly.

"At the plant?"

"Yeah."

"There are only guys here."

"Right."

"Who did it to you?" I ask. "Sorry, I mean who did you do?"

"Who—did what?" Chapai fails to understand.

"Well," I say, "do you know who you got it from?"

"Ah," says Chapai, "from no one. I have lifestyle clap."

"What do you mean, lifestyle?"

"Just that. Lifestyle. I don't have sex at all. We were loading some second-hand stuff, and that's how I picked it up."

"I see," say I. "You Marxists are simply angels—you don't fornicate, you don't drink."

"You load second-hand stuff," adds Dogg.

"Listen," says Chapai, obviously so as to change the subject, "do you have any dough?"

"Why?" says Vasia cautiously.

"We can go visit the Roma, get some dope. Then we'll sit here and wait for your Carburetor. Otherwise just sitting here is no fun, I don't drink, you see."

"Okay," says Vasia, "we can go. Do you think he'll turn up?"

"Who knows," says Chapai. "Maybe he will, maybe he won't. By the way, you don't need any rags, do you? There are some jeans and sneakers over there. Second-hand, of course …"

14.00

Vasia agrees to shell out for the taxi, he seems to have finally given up on the idea of going into the vodka business, obviously he's not that kind of guy, he is unable to make money on something sacred, so we follow Chapai out—Chapai, Vasia, and I; Dogg we leave by the equipment, sort of to keep the fire going, so that he can keep an eye on things and place a new retort under the serpent from time to time, Chapai showed him how but gave him strict orders not to drink from the retort, saying it was not hygienic; you rotten clap-carrier, Dogg says to him, why don't you shut up; they start getting worked up but we pull them apart; more precisely, we drag Chapai out into the street, where he relaxes—because he really does have the clap, there's no denying it. As a rule there are no taxis in this part of town, there are excavators, but even they are rare, so we hoof it as far as the circus, by the circus it's deserted, grass is growing through the gray slabs, it looks like it's going to be a nice summer; if we could also get Carburetor to the funeral, things would be great; Chapai tries to catch a car, the drivers are alarmed by his blue track pants and no one stops, in the end he succeeds in stopping something and we cram inside and drive to the Roma, avoiding rainbow-colored puddles.

14.40

The Roma live in a different end of town, past a different river, they have an entire settlement there, the Kharkiv Roma have in their own way realized the ancient Roma dream of a sacred Roma megapolis, they didn't have to get into great conflicts and all the rest of it—battles for independence, struggles for territory, demarcating boundaries—they just

settled en masse, but in a compact manner, by the river, dug themselves in as best they could and in effect dissolved into this hostile eastern capital, in this way they got a kind of illusory City of the Sun, a city within a city you might say; there were streetcar lines that ran through their district and there was even a branch of the subway nearby, but in reality, apart from the Roma there was almost no one else living here, so if you found yourself here (though, why would you ever find yourself here?) and didn't know where you were, you would simply be amazed by the number of Roma on the streets, that is, not that they were actually that many of them on the streets, but simply that they were the only ones on the streets, so you would immediately notice there was something odd without being able to figure out what it was. The Roma lived a collective life and had dug in for a long stay—they had built strong, low buildings out of white brick and surrounded them with walls made out of the same brick, which made their places look like brickyards, it was hard to even figure out what goes on in there, behind these white brick hills, quite amazing to look at. The Roma didn't have antennae or radio transmitters, there were almost no advertisements in the area either, it was some kind of medieval district, I think the walls were so high to prevent the plague from getting into their yards; I could never understand these Roma, but it was here that Chapai had a dealer friend, on a quiet side-street, first you have to drive through the dusty district for a long time, then turn off the main street to the right and stop there. The driver lets us out, spends a long time turning the Russian money over in his hands, calculates the exchange rate, how much we owe him, turns down the fingers of his right hand while counting—I, for one, cannot count like that—then says, good, that's enough, we get out and he quickly takes off.

15.10

So here we are standing among the small hills of white brick, there are almost no trees, the earth is soft beneath our feet, a toxic grass is fighting its way up from under the walls, above, behind the clouds the sun appears from time to time, and there's not a single Roma in sight. What did you expect, I think to myself, these people live without antennae, without transmitters, without Soviet rule, even without numbers on their houses, now the interesting part is how Chapai is going to find his dealer. But Chapai is good at orienting himself in such situations, he adjusts his glasses, sniffs something out, and then says—it's here, I've found it. We approach some rusting gates and Chapai begins to hammer with his fists on the rusty pockmarked surface, while taking the opportunity to inform us that his dealer—Yurik—is in his own way a cool dude, he was born somewhere around here, but, to be sure, he wasn't a successful Roma, after school he tried to make his career in the party and the Roma damned him, smashed his face, and drove him from the district, although he would have taken off himself because they had given him a nice apartment in the center, he

worked, I think, in the Kyiv regional committee, in the cultural department, though what kind of culture could there be in the Kyiv regional committee? For a Roma he did pretty well and they were already getting ready to promote him to the oblast committee, but here his genes took over and—according to Chapai—he either stole something, or screwed someone, in short, he messed up, got kicked out of the regional committee, but remained in the party, they didn't have that many Roma in the party, they sent him off to do similar party work as the head of the club at Chapai's plant, he played the accordion there and organized the chess games. When the plant began to fall apart, Yurik hung on at the club to the very end, by that time he was boozing shamelessly, he would come to the club in the morning, take his accordion and play something from Kobzon, to every melody adding something of his own, something Roma. According to Chapai, Yurik degenerated morally and physically, pissed in his pants right on the club's stage, slept in his own vomit, wrapped in some agitational banners, and this went on until the plant's director took away his accordion and sold it in the marketplace, putting the proceeds, a rather miserly sum according to Chapai, toward the plant's external debt. Yurik pulled himself together a bit, his apartment had already been taken from him by some shareholders' bank, which gave him some shares under the table as compensation, Yurik tried to sell them off somewhere but naturally no one would take them, in a word, his life had come full circle and Yurik had no other choice but to return to his medieval district with its white bricks and strict hierarchy. However strange it may seem, Yurik was welcomed as a native son, the Roma are a communicative people, they smashed his face one more time and forgave him everything, at the same time they took his illegally obtained shares and succeeded in selling them somewhere, sticking them on some sucker farmers, although they didn't share the money with Yurik, but that was their own affair, they knew best. Yurik settled down peacefully in one of the brick buildings behind a white brick wall, he didn't hang around the center anymore, even wanted to get married but couldn't find a wife—obviously their medieval customs forbade them from marrying a communist, it's a good thing they didn't burn him at the stake; he gradually got involved in their community life, at first he sold chewing gum in a kiosk, then took things to a higher level and started selling vodka in a store, then—higher still—sold dope, and finally he just stayed at home, selling the life-healing herb to whoever needed it, whoever didn't need it was told to piss off and he took shots at them with his Berdan rifle from behind the brick wall, having pulled up the drawbridge and flooded the moat with water. He remembered Chapai from his time working in the club. Chapai was a steady client, though it was clear that there was something Chapai wasn't telling, at least that's how it seemed to me.

15.15

After a few minutes the bolt on the door screeches and the dealer's head appears. Yurik doesn't look like a Roma, in any case I imagined the typical Roma differently, naturally I didn't expect some guy wearing a red shirt with large polka dots and carrying a stage-prop guitar in his hands, but we did learn something about the Roma in school, and here this thin albino comes out in a worn gray suit and with a cataract on his left eye and looks us over suspiciously; he and Chapai begin whispering something, taking a close look, practically sniff one another, finally the dealer gives us a sign with his hand and we follow him. I'm curious what lies behind the battlements—cannons, battle-axes, torture equipment—but everything is peaceful, there's a little shed made of white brick standing in the yard, by the house there's a dog kennel, also made of white brick, there are some chickens lying in the kennel, one of them has climbed onto the kennel and is standing there, oh, chickens, I think—actually, that's all I think—and we enter the house. In the room stands a table and nothing else. The walls are bare, on one, it's true, hangs an expensive kilim, whose edges have been hammered in with nails, you can see the nails easily, they are okay—good, solid nails. Yurik says we should wait here and, flashing his cataract, goes into the neighboring room, Chapai is nervous for some reason, although he pretends for our sake that everything is okay, in a moment we'll get some, I examine the nails in the kilim and suddenly see a large fish on the windowsill, I don't even know what kind of fish, I could never distinguish them—fish, you know, frogs and all that—the little window is open and there are several bees flying around the fish, circling lazily, who knows where they came from after the recent weather, they were sleepy and completely unaggressive, although maybe that's how they are supposed to be. They land on the fish's flesh, crawl along it, I walk up closer, try to turn the deceased thing over and immediately pull my hand back—inside the fish has been completely devoured by these winged carnivores, there's an entire hive of them in there, when I touched the fish they all fly out and circle around the fat body but they soon settle down and fly inside once more, how disgusting, I think, a dead fish, a dead gypsy fish, devoured from the inside, what a horror.

Yurik enters with a package of dope, sees me by the fish, and can't tear his eyes from it either, the bees crawl in again, and there's something so horrific in this that we all gaze transfixed at this devilish fish—me, and Vasia, and Chapai, and Yurik—and even the crucified Jesus visible under the latter's shirt looks very attentively at the Roma fish that has been devoured by bees and cannot turn away. Yurik finally puts his package down on the table, and we start to sniff it, feel it, look at it in the light, in short we give every impression that we know what good dope looks like and that you cannot screw us, even if you are three times a Roma and the former director of a club, we can see right through you and we can see right

through your dope, although in reality we cannot see a thing, Vasia takes out a wad of notes, counts them off, Yurik watches piercingly with his cataract, Jesus looks on very attentively, Yurik complains that he will have problems with the rubles, he has to deal with the exchange rate and it's not clear where the dollar stands right now; the dollar is doing fine, says Vasia, the buck is standing firm, your prick is standing firm, Yurik says to him, but he takes the money and leads us out onto the street, I still hear how the bees quietly move their feet in the fish's belly, though, perhaps, it only seemed to me that I did.

On the street Yurik parts from us coldly, we walk off about ten meters, Yurik continues to stand at the gates without entering the yard, and at this point Chapai finally lets his feelings show, he suddenly stops, hang on, he says, we can have some fun with him, what's with you, I say, what for? he's there all alone anyway, didn't you see, he won't do anything, forget it, Vasia says, frightened, let's get out of here, everything's okay, it's okay, says Chapai, don't piss your pants, I'm just going to get him worked up, he takes the package of dope, pokes around in it as though he's checking it, puts it back into his pocket, turns around and goes toward Yurik, a few meters from him he stops and shouts:

"Your dope is shit!"

Oh, fuck, I think, fuck.

"Shit!" repeats Chapai with more assurance.

And here Yurik suddenly takes off and disappears in the yard, we don't know what to do, that is, Vasia the Communist and I don't, but not Chapai—he, it seems, knows what's coming, clearly this is not the first time he has had some fun with his dealer, so he quickly returns and shouts at us to run fast, and we really do run fast and, it has to be said, not without cause, because the gates behind us open again and Yurik jumps out of there with his Berdan rifle, and sparks are flying from his eyes, even the one with the cataract is giving off sparks, although not as strongly, we run, our main goal is to reach the corner, where civilization begins, with its streetcars, subway, fairly normal relations between people, by contrast behind our backs there is Yurik with his Berdan and his medieval castle and its chickens and killer bees, there's plenty to run from and we're starting to tire, Vasia has it the worst—his belt is missing, he holds his jeans up with his hands so as not to lose them, meanwhile Yurik pulls the trigger and fires into the sky above our heads, once, then a second time, he doesn't even aim at us, thank God, otherwise who knows how things might end, he fires into the sky and laughs gleefully, I hear this quite clearly as we turn the white brick corner, the fresh summer wind hits us in the face, lifting into the air the trash, dust and feathers, and these feathers twist above our heads, so I can't even tell what they're coming from—whether from birds in a brick palace or, perhaps, from angels who have just been shot, who have flown to Yurik to lighten his medieval loneliness, while he, the fool, has driven that

snow-white amiable flock away into the rainy sky and has been left alone, standing there in the middle of the empty Roma megapolis—a solitary-lonely dealer, seller of joy, duped by fate, who doesn't even have anyone to talk to, only Jesus swinging sadly on the cross—from left to right, from right to left, from left to right.

17.00-20.00

"You're just unable to understand it. You just say Marxism-Leninism but don't understand what it is."

"Well, yeah, you're the only one here who understands everything."

"What have I got to do with it. It's not about me. You're talking about Marxism. In reality Marxism is winning, understand?"

"Well, of course. And where is it winning, then?"

"Marxism isn't winning in any one place. It's winning in principle."

"Oh, sure."

"The power of Marxism lies in its self-sufficiency. Take Trotsky."

"Trotsky was a Jew."

"Yes. Do you know why Trotsky traveled to Mexico?"

"In my opinion, Koba gave him the boot."

"Koba was a Jew too."

"Koba?"

"Yes. And Illich too."

"Illich was a Kazakh."

"A Tatar."

"A Kazakh."

"What's the difference?"

"Kazakhs are illiterate."

"And what about the Tatars?"

"They are too."

"No, Koba wasn't a Jew. Koba was Russian. His surname was Russian—Stalin."

"That wasn't his surname."

"Whose was it then?"

"It was his son's surname. Vasia Stalin. He was a soccer player."

"Oh, right, and Trotsky was a basketball player. In the labor reserves."

"What does Trotsky have to do with it?" Chapai repeats the phrase that I'm already used to, sitting on his stool and lighting a joint. "Trotsky has nothing to do with anything. You," he says to Vasia, passing the joint to him, "ought to understand that. They," he exhales in our direction, "will never understand this, they are infected with the bacteria of capitalism, but you," he takes the joint from Vasia, takes another drag, and returns the joint to Vasia, "should understand it. You know about the theory of permanent fuck-all-ism?"

"What?" Vasia starts to cough and passes the joint to me. "What fuck-all-ism?"

"Permanent," Chapai adjusts his glasses. "Well, that's my name for it. Generally it's known as the theory of the permanent collapse of capitalism. But I prefer to call it the theory of permanent fuck-all-ism."

"Yeah," interjects Dogg, taking the joint from me, "permanent fuck-all-ism—that's cool."

"What's the theory?" I ask, awaiting my turn again.

"The theory is simple," says Chapai, letting out the smoke and passing the joint further down the circle. "It was developed by comrades from the Donetsk oblast committee."

"Oh," I say, "they are capable of that."

Chapai looks at me questioningly.

"Countrymen," I explain.

He nods his head in agreement, pulls a three-liter jug with some kind of fruit juice from under the table, takes a swig, and offers it to me. No, no, I wave my hand in refusal—I prefer to smoke.

"So," continues Chapai, using his sleeve to wipe the bloody tomato-colored liquid from his mouth. "The theory is in its essence revisionist. It is based on a review of Marx's main ideas. Ideas related to the self-sufficiency of the proletariat as such. Have your read," he turns to me because Vasia has disappeared somewhere behind the smoke, "the correspondence of Marx and Engels?"

"No," I say, "but I know they were friends."

"Correct," says Vasia, "they were friends. And good friends, don't doubt it."

"Clearly," I say, "good friends."

"And their correspondence was cool," says Chapai, "in its own way even cooler than *Das Kapital*."

"What could be cooler than *Kapital*?" inserts Dogg, a little off subject, but I pass him the joint and he shuts up.

"In the USSR," says Chapai, "*Das Kapital* was recognized as the fundamental work. This, in my opinion, was the main, tragic mistake of Soviet ideology. It should have paid attention to the correspondence. To the correspondence of Marx and Engels. The comrades from the Donetsk oblast committee have proved this," he says confidently and finishes the roach.

For about twenty or thirty minutes everyone remains silent, thinking about the comrades from the Donetsk oblast committee. Finally Chapai gets his mind back and begins rolling another joint.

"In one of the letters," says Chapai, taking a drag and passing it to the unconscious Vasia, "this is from the early correspondence," he explains, "from the so-called Hamburg period …"

"Like The Beatles!" I say.

"Marx at the time was experimenting a lot with social consciousness."

"What?" These words wake Vasia up.

"Chapai is saying," I explain, "that in his day your beloved Marx, in

Hamburg, on the Reeperbahn, experimented with expanded consciousness."

"He took acid," Dogg can hardly wait for his turn and shows obvious signs of agitation.

"And as a result of these experiments," continues Chapai, "the EWC principle was revealed to him."

"The what?"

"External Workers' Cell," says Chapai. "The idea is simple—first they show you a false picture of production relations. The falseness," says Chapai, "lies above all in the supposed permanent growth of capital. That's a fiction," says Chapai decisively, grabbing the joint from me out of turn and taking a deep drag.

"What's a fiction?" I say, failing to understand and trying to take the joint back from him.

"It's all a fiction," says Chapai after thinking a moment. "The proletariat is self-sufficient. Therefore the only ideal and ideologically sound principle is that of external workers' cells, the so-called EWC. The external workers' cell on its own is also self-sufficient."

"Listen," I say, "your Marx is some kind of Buddha—"

"Not to speak of Engels," inserts Vasia from sleep.

"This is how it works. Each EWC is formed according to the anthill principle. The basis of the formation is each separate enterprise, whether a plant, a factory, or some other entity. And around this entity the EWC gathers like ants around an anthill."

"Yeah?" I ask. "And who plays the role of the queen ant?"

"The party committee," says Vasia confidently.

"Oh," I say, "so everybody gets to fuck the party committee."

"The party committee," Chapai repeats confidently.

"Fine," I agree. "So, what else?"

"That's it," says Chapai. "Social life is constructed according to this principle, if Marx is to be believed."

"And power?" I enquire.

"Power is not necessary. In this system power is redundant. Power—that's a fiction too. You, for example," Chapai turns to Dogg and tries to get the joint from him, "do you need power?"

"No," says Dogg, "I don't need it."

"And you?" Chapai turns to me, while keeping one eye on the joint.

"Well, some kind of primary, minimal kind," I say.

"That's it," Chapai says solemnly and grabs the joint from Dogg. "That's it. Primary. That's exactly what I'm talking about. Only primary power is absolutely necessary, power built on the principle of autonomy. Everything else is fiction. Every other, more structured power doesn't function. And, therefore, is unnecessary," and he passes me the joint like some audience appreciation award that I have just won. We all forget about Vasia, as he does about us. "Generally speaking," Chapai continues, "most

structures and institutions are unnecessary, so all this crap has to be minimized and gradually destroyed."

"And what does your Marx tell Engels should replace this?" I ask.

"The PuC principle," says Chapai.

"The what?" even Dogg enquires.

"Proletarian Charter," says Chapai.

"Proletarian Charter, that's PC, and not PuC," I say.

"Yes, I know," says Chapai. "That's just for euphony. The PuC principle sets all this in motion, the charter plays the role of the elementary unificatory mechanism. Any further accumulation of capital is brought to an end and its progressive disintegration begins."

"How's that?"

"All very simple." Chapai again puts his mouth to the blood-red jar. "In principle, following the earlier unnecessary and poorly motivated accumulation of capital, an excessive concentration of the means of vital activity has occurred, and as a result the only logical outcome in this situation is the collapse of existing resources."

"How's that?"

"Well," Chapai tries to explain to us, "to keep it short—in reality nothing needs producing. Each separate EWC can survive independently for several decades by means of existing resources. This significantly simplifies the mechanism by which society functions. In practice it looks approximately as follows—let's take our plant, for example. A EWC is created around it, which in turn is subordinated to the local PuC, each EWC takes over a certain number of local objects in the general infrastructure, takes power and runs everything into the ground."

"What for?" I don't understand.

"Here lies the essence of the principle of permanent fuck-all-ism," says Chapai. "We destroy the structure and feed off the obtained raw materials. For instance, we gain control of a bank, but spend the money on the survival and the functioning of the EWC, we gain control of the shopping centers and distribute all the rags evenly among the members of the EWC, we gain control of the offices and take all the working equipment for ourselves, we gain control of the taxis and put them to work for the cell."

"You gain control of the farms and give everyone a cow," Dogg suddenly inserts.

"Yes," says Chapai, "that's it. In short, the comrades of the Donets oblast committee have provided the economic foundation for all this, they have calculated everything, conducted serious monitoring surveys." Chapai pulls out some notebooks and waves them in the air: "It turns out that the existing social infrastructure, the whole contemporary base of capitalism, is capable of feeding itself for at least another 67 years."

"And after that?"

"What do you mean, after that?" says Chapai in confusion. "Afterwards they'll think of something. In principle the theory is new, it hasn't been tested in practice, some changes will, of course, need introducing. But in general," he repeats, "one shouldn't get hung up on the further growth of productive forces—on the contrary, production should be cut back as much as possible, conserved, in a word, and natural resources saved as much as possible since what exists is already enough to last the next 67 years."

"That's cool," I say. "I really like the bit about shopping centers. And about the farms," I tell Dogg.

"Yes," agrees Chapai, "the idea is quite correct. The main thing is that it's fair, without any added capitalist clap-trap."

"Wait," I say, "but how is your PuC going to control all this—after all, there's a whole pile of things that need to be centralized."

"For example?" asks Chapai.

"Well, I don't know. Transport, for example. The subway."

"What's the subway got to do with it?"

"Well, not the subway," I retreat. "But, let's say, airlines. How will your PuC control them?"

"There won't be any airline companies."

"What do you mean there won't be any?" I say in surprise. "So how will people fly?"

"What do they need to fly for? What REAL benefit is there from it? You, for example," he focuses on Dogg, "have you ever flown in an airplane?"

"No," says Dogg, "I basically use streetcars."

"See," says Chapai, "and it's the same for most of the population. Airlines, airports, stewardesses—it's all a fiction. In reality there is no REAL need for it, understand? We need to leave only what is REALLY necessary."

"Okay," I say, "and what about the army?"

"There is no REAL need for the army. What benefit is there from the army? The army was created only to justify the necessity of its existence in our eyes. To this end wars are organized from time to time, bombardments, revolutions, the defense complex operates, scientific-technical potential is built up, a system of propaganda is created. But there is no REAL need for this—if the army was dissolved, society would still continue to function normally, you see, therefore there just isn't any NEED for it."

"Okay," I say again, "what about the security organs?"

"What?" Chapai takes a drink from his blood-colored jar.

"You know, the internal organs. The militia, police, the KGB, CIA, and all that. What are they—a fiction too?"

"Yes, they are a fiction."

"The KGB is a fiction?"

"A fiction."

"Really?"

"Absolutely."

"I like that," I say.

"Look, have you ever had dealings with the KGB?" Chapai continues his persecution of Dogg.

"Yes," Dogg says unexpectedly, "they came to our school once—I was already in the tenth grade, and a KGB guy came. He talked about the work, did his agitation. Said something about the president."

"And so?"

"Nothing. I was impressed, basically. I went up to him in the corridor afterwards, said, 'Commander, can I get a job with your outfit?' He told me to get lost. He says, 'Your breath smells too bad for you to work in the KGB.' And that was it."

"See," Chapai says to him instructively. "All the power organs work EXCLUSIVELY for the support of their own existence—they produce nothing, there is no NEED for them. If they were to be closed tomorrow, nothing would change. Nothing would change if the borders were opened or closed, if the diplomats were let go—one can simply live without external politics. And without internal politics too, in principle. One can live without administrative personnel, with the disappearance of administrative personnel all the other problems for whose solution they have been created also disappear. One doesn't need offices, housing controls, governments, administrations—so one doesn't need any documentation, and vice versa. The EWC controls all that minimal production process that guarantees society's vitality for a whole 67 years. Everything else comes from the devil," says Chapai triumphantly, and he passes me a new joint, but I'm sinking deeper and deeper, like my friend Vasia, pushing aside the heavy blue water with my arms and legs, and I see before me only the worn soles of his old sneakers, so I swim after them and from there I hear

Life is a spaceship, and once you have climbed into it you have to sit still and not touch anything, just be ready for radical changes in your life. In any case, you sure will not have any children. Or even—good sex. You have to take this into account from the very beginning—you have to choose between sex and outer space, and it is an important choice, because any fucking in the world, even the most subversive fucking, is not worth the sublime and beautiful that opens up before your eyes in the field of the spaceship's searchlight; there are horizons in your life, there are landscapes that are worth paying for with the most precious thing you have, namely your erection, but to understand this, you need to be at least an astronaut, or an angel, which in the conditions of capitalism's collapse amounts to one and the same thing.

"I don't understand," I'm saying through my dream. "Why permanent fuck-all-ism?"

"Because," says Chapai, smiling happily to me from behind the transgalactic rays, "everything is a fucking waste of time: money is a fucking waste, planning systems are a fucking waste, investors are a fucking waste, the ministry is a fucking waste"—he's obviously getting worked up—"the state is a fucking waste, spheres of influence are a fucking waste, the extension of the market to the East is a fucking waste."

"The peaceful cosmos is a fucking waste," adds Vasia.

"Without a doubt," says Chapai seriously, and everyone falls silent.

20.30

Somewhere far-far away in the republic's east, very close to the state border, the sky smells of the early morning forest, it smells distinctively of tarpaulin tents and the pine branches that have placed their large paws on these tents. I walk along a forest path for a long-long time, on the left and the right stand tall and warm pine trees that heat up the sand around them with their breathing, and the air, and the Saturday morning forest, and the birds that appear from time to time, and in general the whole sky, and, obviously, the state border—the pines are like batteries that have put down roots right along the river, you can see the river to the left behind the trucks, and we walk along the river, we are in fact climbing, walking against the water's flow, I am six years old, I love the forest and the river, but most of all I love the weekend, I completely understand that the pines are especially warm during the weekend, and the sky is especially peaceful. I am wearing some wretched T-shirt and wretched shorts and dust-covered sandals with which I kick pine cones, raising clouds of morning dust, then the girl who is my companion turns to me and asks me to calm down and stop doing that. My companion is 16, she has agreed to go for a walk with me, in fact, my parents, who are friends with her parents. have asked her, they have all remained behind on the river beach, they are sitting there preparing salads from fresh moist vegetables, swimming in the morning river, the whole weekend lies ahead, so they are occupied with their uninteresting adult affairs, while I have found a path among the pines and my acquaintance, who does not have any particular desire to do so, it should be mentioned, has led me along this path, just so that I can finally take this walk and shut up and leave everyone alone, although she is nice to me, it would be more accurate to say that I am the one who follows her around, but she behaves quite well and does not complain about anything in particular—except that I shouldn't raise the dust or grab her hand, in short, that I shouldn't behave like a moron. I like the sand under my feet, I like the wet grass on the sand, I like the pines with the excited electrons swirling inside them, I like the noisy carefree birds on the high pine branches, I like the sky, because it reaches far-far into the distance and never ends, this I like most of all, I love it when something never ends, and the sky is one of these things, I also love it that this path never ends, it stretches forever, moving against the water's

current, first drawing close to it and then curling around tree trunks, and finally my acquaintance gives in and says okay, let's take a swim and then go back, I try to bargain for one more kilometer but she says, enough, we'll swim and then go back—and I have to accept. She leaves the path and goes straight to the water, I try to keep up, following and examining her black shining bathing suit, that's the kind that was in fashion then, at the end of the seventies, her bathing suit is distinctive—there are yellow, red and orange leaves scattered on its black background, although no one, I think, swims in November, but there is a real falling of leaves on her body, and her body is beautiful and strong, these leaves suit her perfectly, even I who am six understand this, otherwise I wouldn't have followed her, the water has not had time to warm up, the bank is deserted and cool, my friend steers toward the bank and begins gradually to walk into the water, while I observe the soles of her feet disappearing under the water, her high dusky calves, her knees, her thighs, at last she falls onto the water's surface, drowning all her leaves in it—the yellow, the red, and the orange—and turns to me, come on, she shouts, come on, come on in, it's cold, I say from the bank, stop it, she shouts, it's not cold at all, come on in, she swims into the middle of the river, the current begins to carry her down and suddenly I am afraid that it will take her downstream and I will be left alone standing on this bank and of no use to anyone in front of this cold dark water that's flowing who knows where, and I can't stand it and jump into the water, forgetting that I cannot swim, and I move toward her, she notices me and begins to swim to the bank, I thrash the water with my arms, trying not to gulp water, while still in the shallow part, and finally she swims up and, breathing, cries out cheerfully, give me your hand, and I reach out my hand to her and at this moment I get a thrilling feeling, and all this water flows around me, it flows in one direction, always in one direction and I feel great, as though I'm not six but sixteen, like my friend, my big white mama, who drags me with her against the current and holds me so tightly by the hand that if I could I would simply come, but I only hang onto her and can't come, not at all, and that's how it is all my life

"The treasury," he says, "is communal. A general treasury, created by common effort. Acronym— GT."

Having lost Vasia and myself, Chapai is desperately hanging onto his last conversational partner—Dogg.

"A workers' treasury," says Chapai. "No banks. Banks are a useless waste."

"A fiction," suggests Dogg.

"Exactly."

They remain silent for a moment, I fall asleep again, then Chapai says:

"In principle," he says. "There's a treasury here too."

Dogg looks around the room in total confusion.

"At the plant," explains Chapai. "Our director keeps it in the party

committee building. The former party committee," he adds.

"So?" Dogg's ears prick up. I wake up too.

"In principle," says Chapai, "today is a holiday, the guards are only at the front gate. They walk around the territory twice every shift, and I know their route and routine."

"So?"

"In principle," explains Chapai, "it's not his money. He didn't work for it. It's labor's money. Communal."

"Like in Marx?" asks Dogg.

"Like in Marx," agrees Chapai. "We can take it."

"Are you crazy?" I say, waking up. "They'll pick you up immediately. Can't you see?" I say to Dogg, "he's gone for a ride on his PuC, he's not talking to you now, he's communicating with Karl Marx, the one of the Hamburg period."

"Don't whine so much," says Chapai, offendedly. "No one is going to pick you up. There are only two guards. This plant regularly gets robbed, including by the director. There's nothing left to steal here."

"In that case," I say, "why the devil should we poke our noses in there?"

"Today," says Chapai lowering his voice, "I saw the director packing something away in his office."

"What was it?"

"Don't know. Maybe money, maybe equipment. Some shareholders visited him, drove a microbus up and began carrying out some boxes. They completely filled the reception room and then left. But there were a few boxes left, I saw it all myself."

"Oh, right," I say, "they must be some kind of ball bearings, and we're going to risk our necks."

"They're not ball bearings at all," whispers Chapai. "If they were, he wouldn't keep them in the party committee. It's money. Or equipment. The bastard even changed the locks, I saw it with my own eyes."

"The locks?"

"The locks."

"But how will we get in there?" I ask.

"Through the roof," says Chapai. "I know a way. But we have to go now, while it's still light, and sit there on the roof until two o'clock, or until three, when the guard walks by. Then we go down and take it all out. Cleanly, without any traces."

"He will immediately suspect you," I say.

"I have an alibi," says Chapai.

"But in reality he has the clap," Dogg whispers to me, thinking that Chapai can't hear him.

20.45

We agree to go. Without Vasia, I say—let's do it like this: Vasia stays here to kind of keep guard, understand? he's basically part of our group and we'll count him in, but for the moment he's on guard; Vasia at this moment turns over onto his other side and falls from his chair. We pick up his exhausted body and transfer him to the sofa-bed; I look suspiciously at the covers Chapai has put there because Vasia and I still have to live together in one room, he might carry something back with him, well, okay, I think, and we go. Chapai leads us through the evening shadows across the plant, through some half-collapsed buildings in which rats scamper and birds fly, a real nature reserve, Dogg steps on some piece of metallic junk and it rings dully; quiet, hisses Chapai, carefully he leads us down some more corridors, with old newspapers and torn work clothes strewn on the floor, then we pass by the fence itself; careful, says Chapai, what is it? we ask in alarm, don't step into it, Chapai explains curtly; we carefully move through the barbed wire that has been stretched along the fence and find ourselves behind some four-story brick building covered in new slate. Here it is, says Chapai, the party committee. Let's climb up.

Chapai goes first, since he knows the way. Before doing so he takes off his sneakers and hides them in the pockets of his sports pants, what are you doing? I say, this is for comfort, says Chapai, okay—I'm off, and he really does grab the lowest branch of the tree under the very wall, yanks himself up, sits on it, then stands up and begins to move upwards, follow me, he shouts at us from there—what? we don't understand—I say everyone follow me, repeats Chapai; the branch under him cracks and he falls straight at us, I have just enough time to jump aside and he misses Dogg too; ah, Chapai says shaking himself off, I almost made it, you go, he says to me; oh sure, I say, right now, all I need is to fall from the fourth floor on this pile of crap, come on, let's find some other way in. Well, okay, says Chapai, okay. We can just go through the door. It's not locked? I ask. I have the key, explains Chapai, I made a copy. Then why did you try to make us climb the fucking tree? I say, offended. It's more fun that way, says Chapai, and leads us to the entrance. We run across a little square, there really isn't anyone around, but as I understand it the guards can appear at any moment, Chapai quickly unlocks the door and we dive inside. Right, says Chapai, breathing fast, now upstairs, we'll wait there until night, the guards will pass by, then we'll break into the party committee. Maybe you have the keys to the party committee too? I ask hopefully, maybe we don't have to break anything? I did, says Chapai, but that bastard changed them, I told you. Why do you think I brought you with me—I won't be able to break the door down myself. Oh, I say, and I thought it was because we were your friends. The shitty Trotskyist, whispers Dogg. Enough, says Chapai resolutely, let's go upstairs, the patrol will walk by, we'll break down the door and go back, they won't pass by again until morning. And we actually get up to the

fourth-floor landing. Chapai does some incantations over the lock, opens the door, we come right out on the roof, and suddenly see:

21.00

Many-many orange railway tracks to the west, stretching from the railway station, which is darkening to our right, and gleaming in the sun—the sun hangs over the district of Kholodna Hora; cool, I say, I'd live here if I were you, I tell Chapai, you've locked yourself up in your storeroom and are choking on various kinds of denatured alcohol, Chapai croaks confusedly, but holds onto his LSD blotter, you see that, he points to the left, what is it? I ask, examining a strange territory, scrupulously, although somewhat chaotically, filled with iron, machines, concrete, pipes, and other funny stuff, the plants, says Chapai, most of them don't work, understand, they don't work, and they did earlier? I ask just in case, I don't know this district very well, earlier they worked, says Chapai, earlier they all worked, yeah, I say, and continue to examine the railway tracks that are gradually burning out and turning dark, an endless freight train slithers out of the railway station, it's filled with sand and is crawling to the south, what's that over there? Dogg points in the direction of the freight train, that's the south, I say, see the sun on Kholodna Hora, that's the west, and the freight train is heading south, toward the sea, have you ever seen the sea? I ask Dogg, the sea? he repeats, no I haven't, in the summer I go to Saltiv, right, I say, right, you go to Saltiv and the freight trains are heading for the sea, they carry forests, what do they need forests for by the sea? asks Dogg, I don't know, to build something, what? Dogg continues to ask, the navy, Chapai suddenly says, although not quite to the point.

Dogg looks at the sun, which is beginning to dissolve over Kholodna Hora, and says, when I grow up I'll leave this place for sure, yeah? I say, and where will you go? don't know, says Dogg, south, to the sea, I'll join the navy, it's just that I can't leave my parents right now, you see, they're old, I have to look after them somehow, but in a couple of years I'll go for sure, I don't like it here—there's no work, no money, prices are high, I'll wait a couple of years and I'll leave for the south. Just try to survive the next two years, I tell him, sitting down on the sun-warmed roof.

21.30

Chapai advises us to sit here, no one will see us here, even if the security guard enters the party committee building, he won't come up here for sure, we'll just wait here for a few hours and then go down, it would have been harder to get here in the dark without being seen, I've thought of everything, says Chapai, today we're going to smash those capitalist pigs, stop them from getting too fat exploiting the already fucked-over proletarian masses, and we agree with him—okay, okay, if they're fucked-over than they're fucked-over, that's not our concern, we sit in silence, I say, I wonder

where Carburetor is at this moment, maybe he's already at home, sitting there, sifting his stepfather's warm ashes from hand to hand, while here we are searching for him without success, yeah, Dogg says quietly, indicating the surroundings—you won't find him here.

22.15

It starts to rain, the morning was sunny and warm, the air warmed up more, then the roof got hot—I thought alright , a good summer has begun—and here the rain starts up again, not a strong, real one, just a shower that wets the territory, but even so it's unpleasant, especially if you're sitting on the roof of a four-story building on the territory of a hostile plant surrounded by barbed wire, it's not much fun, I pull my old jean jacket over my head and try to fall asleep, does someone at least have a watch, I ask after a long time, we'll take our bearings from the stars, says Chapai—moron, says Dogg, referring to him; he leans against my shoulder and we try to fall asleep. From time to time I hear the voices of the freight trains in the railway station, even announcements can be heard, not from the station itself but from the train yards, their own announcements, meant only for them, they communicate with one another, it seems, only through the loudspeakers, they have a different sense of space and distance; I intermittently drift off into sleep and then back from it, as though moving from shadows to sunlight, I sink into it, as though into a warm black snow, blackest black, but warm all the same—I think, what's Yurik doing at this moment, what is he thinking about in his palace, his crucified Jesus was gold-plated and the cross itself was green. Funny, I think, maybe all the Roma have gold-plated Jesuses, maybe this is a different faith of some kind, a belief that Jesus really was gold-plated, in that case everything in this faith would be different, and their, what do you call them, prophets would have foretold the coming into the world of a little boy, a quite ordinary Eastern boy, whose physiology, or anatomy, would not differ from that of his schoolmates, except for being gold-plated, not metallic, that is, not steely and not painted but simply gold-plated, his skin must have some different atomic or cellular structure, something that has to do with the contents of the salts and calcium in the skin, some chemical stuff, I have to ask Chapai, he knows chemistry, whether there is a genetic technique for gold-plating skin, and how much this might cost the state budget.

23.05

Jesus cannot be gold-plated, Jesus tells me. Why can't he? I ask in wonder. It's impossible, he says, that's not the point. Then why do the Roma think that you are gold-plated? The Roma, he says, know that I am not gold-plated, they simply hide this from everyone else. Why? I say, puzzled. To distance themselves from the rest, the Roma, says Jesus, are corporative, they do not need to have their faith accepted by others,

understand? They specially created a gold-plated image of Jesus so that everybody would think that the Roma consider Jesus to be gold-plated. In reality they know better than everyone that I am not gold-plated. Therefore it is easier for them than for all of you, understand? I understand, I say, I understand. But all the same—why aren't you gold-plated?

But Jesus does not reply. I only see the pregnant Mary in front of me and under her skin, in her belly, the little unborn Jesus, who turns over and talks to me about something—now finally he has gone silent, it looks as though I have disappointed him, so he is simply playing under the skin of his Madonna, turning over in there like an astronaut in a state of weightlessness, touching with his lips and back and other parts of his spacesuit the thin yielding membrane that surrounds him, swimming in his mother's womb, from time to time surfacing and nudging her from within, then his little leg or knee or antennae bend Mary's body, and from under her breasts or from under her belly, as though from inside a rubber bag, Jesus pushes, knowing, unlike me, that in reality there is no body—not mine, nor Mary's, nor his own—and that all this skin has been drawn by the Roma over the fragile and painful bodies of our loves and our sufferings simply so that no one would know that no one and nothing limits us, and that we can swim wherever we like—there are no walls, there are no warnings, there is nothing that can stop you; and when he deforms her skin the next time, right under her throat, Mary laughs happily, flashing her sharp teeth, and I see how her palate is illuminated from somewhere underneath by a soft golden glow, and this golden glow mixes with the white milk in her lungs, then the glow fades and ripples, and her eyes are very, very green.

19.06.93 (Saturday)

02.15

"Listen, either we go break down the door, or we go home. I'm completely wet. Dogg looks like he's dead."

Chapai approaches Dogg and touches him squeamishly with his sneaker.

"It's okay, he's not dead," he says. "He's just fast asleep."

The rain continues to fall—fine, says Chapai, it's probably time, how do you know, I ask, by the stars? by what stars, Chapai says offended, I just heard the security guard enter about 15 minutes ago, so we can go—we wake Dogg, who at first doesn't understand where he is and who we are, but gradually he comes to his senses and we go down below.

2.25

The party committee office is on the second floor. We stand near the door, so this is how it is, explains Chapai, you—he points to me—go

downstairs to the door, you—he points to Dogg—will help me, in a moment I'll find something heavy and we'll hit the door with it, forget that, says Dogg and kicks the door in with his foot—we'll be screwing around here for another half-hour, I smile with pleasure, I would have smashed it in myself, says Chapai, but I have sneakers, yeah, I add, and the clap. We quickly rifle through everything in the room: two cupboards with papers, in one there's a partially drunk bottle of cognac—Dogg immediately puts it into his pant pocket—a table with two sets of drawers as packed with various office shit as a hamburger is with cholesterol, we rummage through the stuff on the windowsill, look on the table, search for hidden compartments or at least a little safe, anything, and suddenly in the corner we see what we have been looking for—a box that used to hold xerox paper, taped and with a seal on top. The moon's gleam forces its way through the blinds on the windows and flares rapaciously on the fresh sealing wax. This is it, says Chapai. I try to lift the box, basically it's not that heavy, we can manage. So, I say, do we take it? Of course we take it, says Chapai, we take it, come on, carry it to my place, we'll look at it there. Maybe we should search some more? proposes Dogg, perhaps sensing something; no, that's all, says Chapai nervously, that's enough, let's clear out. And we walk out of the room, carefully going downstairs, Chapai does some operation with the lock, finally we end up on the street, Chapai closes up after us, and we return home—me in front with the box, Dogg behind me, and Chapai bringing up the rear, splashing through the puddles with his sneakers.

2.55

"Break the seal!" says Chapai to Dogg.

"What is it?" Vasia has woken up and is watching us from the couch in alarm.

"Everything's okay," I say, "Don't be afraid, you'll get your share."

"What share?" asks Vasia fearfully.

"You'll see in a minute," I say.

Among the distilling coils Dogg finds a wide kitchen knife and he cuts through the sealing wax, slowly unwinds the packaging, and uncovers the contents—quicker, quicker! Chapai says impatiently, but Dogg does everything confidently and calmly, he opens the box and says—Oh, a statue! he takes out a bust about half a meter in height and puts it on the side table.

"What is it?" I say, not understanding.

"A statue," says Dogg.

"A bust," Chapai corrects him.

"Whose bust?" I ask.

"Ours," says Chapai.

"That's not what I meant—who is it?" I point at the bust.

Chapai cleans his glasses, lost in thought.

"Maybe the director?" says Dogg.

"No," says Chapai, "it's not the director. The director doesn't have a moustache."

"He could have added it to improve his appearance."

"In any case it doesn't resemble him."

"It's some Marxist," I suggest.

"Trotsky," says Dogg. "See his nose? It's Trotsky."

"It's not Trotsky," says Chapai in irritation. "Trotsky had a beard. This one hasn't got a beard."

"It's Trotsky in Mexico," says Dogg.

"During the Hamburg period," I add.

Vasia is no help at all.

"This isn't Trotsky," Chapai begins to bluster, trying to hide his nervousness. "It's Molotov. A member of the Central Committee."

"Molotov?" I say in complete confusion.

"Molotov," says Chapai. "A member of the Central Committee," he adds just in case.

"How do you like that," I say.

Dogg morosely takes out the stolen bottle of cognac and drinks from it.

"Molotov," continues Chapai, "was the only normal guy among them. He was a hedonist. Like Tito."

"Like what?"

"Like Tito. He liked women, sports, restaurants."

"Cocktails," I say. "What's he doing at your director's?"

"They used to make them," says Chapai, after some thought, "out of waste materials. There was a special workshop here for by-products. My old man told me about it."

"Molotov's bust is what—a by-product?"

"They didn't make just Molotov's bust," Chapai justifies himself.

"What else then?"

"A bust of what's-his-name—Voroshilov. Obviously, this one survived somehow. He wanted to sell it, the bastard," says Chapai fiercely, "the people's bust."

"Listen you!" Dogg can stand it no longer. "It turns out that we broke down the door, hid from the security guards, left a whole trail, and all because of this screwy hedonist?"

Chapai walks up to him, resolutely takes the cognac out of his hands, pours the 200 grams that were left into himself, goes to the couch, pushes Vasia aside, and falls into his dirty, bottomless, clappy bed. Without even taking off his sneakers.

3.30

"So, this is what we do," says the irritated Dogg, "we take all the booze, we drain off the mash, take the dope, the rags," he looks at Chapai,

"no, let him choke on his rags. We take this thing," he points at Molotov, "and we clear out before security has noticed anything."

"And what are we going to do with it?" I ask.

"We'll burn it," says Dogg. "There will be one less monster in the world."

"And Carburetor?"

"What Carburetor?" shouts Dogg. "Don't you understand? We have to clear out! Come on, let's go."

"Where to?"

"I don't know," says Dogg, "home."

"Are you planning to drag yourself across the whole town in this state?" I say. "With a bust in your arms? You'll get picked up by the first police patrol."

"Let's wait until morning," Vasia says suddenly and calmly. He has recovered his consciousness and is walking around the room, taking some brochures from the windowsill, pushing some bitten pen into his pocket, in short—he's the only one not in a panic. "In the morning we'll leave normally and no one will pick us up. The main thing is to wait it out until morning."

"Yeah," I agree, "the main thing is to wait it out."

5.30

I try to wake Chapai, but he just mutters in his sleep in some language of his own, the language of otherworldly Marxist-Leninists, and turns away from me. Okay, I say to Vasia, we'll leave him here, he'll have to deal with things later on his own, basically he dreamed all this up, so it's his problem, okay, says Vasia in turn, right, but we take Molotov with us, what the hell for? I say, why the hell do we need Molotov? in the first place, he'll get us arrested, explains Vasia, if they find him here in the morning Chapai will be finished, they'll figure out at once who broke down the door. In the second place, Molotov can be sold off, he's not just a lump of colored metal, he's also a sculpture, there are people who pay big money for this kind of thing. I don't know, I say, I don't know who would pay big money for Molotov, for the living one yes, but for this mummy, I point at him, well, fine, let's try to sell him off, only to whom?

Which of my acquaintances might buy Molotov's bust? This is how you establish the level of the social milieu in which you find yourself, only this way and no other. Well, I'm not familiar with any antique dealers, jewelers, undertakers who might be able to knock the moustache off this bust and refashion it into the head of some Liudmyla Kuzminshyn Pidzaborna, who died a heroic death under the wheels of streetcar No. 5 at the intersection of Pushkinska and Vesnina Streets, and who is buried at that very spot because it was impossible to collect into a single pile everything that remained of her there at the intersection—well, I'm not acquainted with

any undertakers; to continue, I'm not acquainted with any sculptors for whom this accessory material might at least have some aesthetic value, I don't have any acquaintances among communists, except for Vasia and Chapai, for whom this could become the object of a cult, I have no directors of historical museums among my acquaintances for whom this wretched hedonist might have some sort of historical value—I really don't; moreover, I'm convinced that such museum directors don't exist at all, that's what I think. So there you have it, I don't even have a place to sell off the externally quite decent-looking bust of Molotov, central committee member. Shit, why am I alive and what is my purpose? What is all this for? all this struggle for survival? this game to keep the score level? why do I need this? I'm 19 now—in five years, if I don't die from lifestyle clap, I'll still be only 24! At that age, Arkady Gaidar was no longer commanding regiments, so what about me? in principle I can do anything, well, almost anything, but here's the problem—I don't want to do anything at all! That's what comes naturally to me, although a lot of people don't understand that, that's the problem.

"Marusia!" shouts Dogg, who until this moment has been standing by the window and looking nervously into the fresh June morning. "We can sell it to Marusia—she has a whole apartment full of this kind of crap, maybe she'd like to have this monument too!" And here we all recall Marusia.

But Marusia needs to be phoned ahead of time, we can't just barge in on her—it would make things worse. Marusia is a kind of link to the external world, in fact, it was from her that I first learned that you can actually take a taxi even if you're not late for a train, or going home drunk—but just like that. You step out of your house and you need to go somewhere so you just take a taxi. And most paradoxically, you don't pay the taxi driver until the end of the journey—I also didn't know earlier that you could do that, she was the first one to show me that. And this despite the fact that she is the youngest of us all. She's only 16. Her story goes like this: her father is from the Caucasus—I don't know, he's either a Georgian or an Azeri, I think he's a Georgian, I can't tell the difference—in any case he's a general, a real general with a supply of cannon fodder in the barracks and planes in the hangars, he spent the first part of his officer's life as a nomad, traveling around the Soviet Union, defending, as I understand it, the peaceful skies of our Fatherland. He has spent the last ten years in Kharkiv, he's divorced from his wife, their only daughter eventually grew up and said to hell with both of you, the general bought her a great two-room apartment in a great building on the square, with a view of city hall, but on the top floor, under the tower itself, he either didn't have the money or enough rockets to sell so he could get something a bit closer to the ground, in any case, it's a great place. Marusia went to a top school, had a pile of money, almost gave birth a year ago at 15, her dad the general barely succeeded in

persuading her to have an abortion, and even made her a present of a Zhiguli, Marusia agreed surprisingly quickly, had the abortion, ran the Zhiguli into the ground and continued to live her life, which she, with her hereditary Caucasian wisdom and love of life, divided into the beautiful and the useful—the beautiful in this case was the top school, the two-room apartment, and the beat-up Zhiguli, and the useful was all that trash and trivia with which she occupied her time free from study—Marusia knew Sasha Chernetsky, went to punk concerts, popped pills, smoked dope, drank port wine, although without dependency, which is to say that in the morning she successfully threw up the remainder of the bad alcohol and went off to study Lobachevsky or whoever it is they study in school. Paranoia, in a word, typical paranoia, we loved her for this. You could drop in on her from time to time, after phoning ahead and giving your name—she didn't remember us all, even though she'd slept with all of us, for her it wasn't sex, for her it was something much more interesting, I don't know what. We got drunk in her luxury apartment, shouted on her balcony with the view of city hall, watched her videos, and then fell asleep in her bed, sometimes even without her. In my case it wasn't even the sex so much as the possibility of at least waking up next to someone, not alone, not abandoned solely to your hangover, your own bloody nightmares, at least with somebody—that's always more fun, even if it's Marusia, who doesn't remember your name and what you did with her yesterday. She is unusually indifferent to all of us, more exactly, she would put each of us in our place each time, she seemed to be saying: the fact that you all had me yesterday only bears witness to the fact that now you'll take your barf-covered rags, all your empty containers, all your cannabis, all your personal difficulties, all your shit and clear off into your sewers, and I—Marusia—will remain here, will make myself a milk cocktail and will watch the early morning city hall, which all sorts of elected officials or just ordinary jerks will at any moment now begin entering, and this was always effective, at least it would kill me every time—invariably I would understand everything about myself that my parents never told me for some unknown reason, maybe because they just felt sorry for me.

In any case it wasn't worth going to her without phoning, you could run into the old general, although I can honestly say that I never saw him in the flesh. Marusia somehow was able to keep everything in its own place, she liked herself and her life, and obviously didn't want unnecessary flies floating around in her bouillon, besides that the old man himself probably suspected that his darling daughter Marusia sometimes failed to observe the garrison's internal regimen, therefore, when he wanted to visit his child, he also always phoned her ahead of time, that's their Caucasian custom, then she would throw all her casual guests out of the window, force them to take with them all their empty containers and unfinished boiled kovbasa, she threw the cigarette ends out the little window, tossed the bongs into the

trash, poured the crumbs into the toilet bowl—in short, took down all the decorations and returned to her normal life with her dad the general, the republic's armed forces, regular meals, gyms, tennis courts, decent friends, higher education, nice music—meaning nice live music, not recordings, although there are nice recordings, too—in short, all that minimal collection of artificial limbs and false jaws that has been made to transport you more comfortably through your life, provided for you by the system, on condition that you agree in your will to transfer to its name your kidneys, lungs, sexual organs, and soul. She had all these artificial limbs, so she could allow herself to go wild and occasionally to climb down pretty deeply into society's sewage tunnels, to fly for a couple of twenty-four-hour periods to the other side of the moon, which all the time was located not too far from here—to spend some time there feeding on grass and port wine, to join for a time the Great Nervous System, the Torn and Patched Network of Blood Circulation and Love, to sink her head into the flow of lymphs, excrement, and sperm at the very bottom of which, some people think, can be found the greatest concentration and most wonderful chunks of happiness, although really there is nothing there, you can take it from me.

6.00

So we would have been sure to phone her, if we could have found a phone, but it turned out that the nearest telephone was in the regional militia office, where guards with scimitars and flame-throwers were waiting for us, with hand grenades and anti-personnel mines carefully buried in the factory flower beds, in short—I wouldn't go there, especially carrying a mustachioed Molotov, better to take everything we need—we tell each other—and we collect all the booze and the rest of the dope, Vasia even takes some brochures from the windowsill—and we climb over the fence. I also say, maybe—I say—we should leave a note for Carburetor, so he'll know where to find us, but Vasia says skeptically that this wouldn't be a note for Carburetor but for the district attorney, so really why should we make more trouble for ourselves, now that things have turned out this way, we have to get out of this situation with dignity, there's no other way. Chapai continues to turn around his own axle in bed, as though someone was rotating him in his dreams, like some sort of fly-wheel, and trying to set in motion something very important for the world but it just wasn't working: however the fly-wheel got turned, nothing came of it, this exhausted and sick body would continue to hurt as though a splinter had been inserted by diabolical artillery men into the rear end of Marxism-Leninism and left there as a reminder of one more lost soul.

6.15

We walk through the morning in the private sector, come out onto the same square by the circus, I am carrying the mustachioed Molotov and

Dogg the booze, naturally we didn't drain off the mash, but we kept our own three cognacs, the ones we extracted honestly from Uncle Robert; Vasia isn't carrying anything, he feels the worst, in any case he says so, and we have no evidence to disbelieve him. We only have to cross the bridge, turn toward the church, crawl through several blocks and come out on the square, then cross the street again and jump into the entrance of the building with the tower, and if we are lucky enough not to be stopped, our lives will continue happily for several more hours, until lunch for sure.

6.45

Marusia has colored her hair again. Her real hair color is, I think, black, I'm almost sure it's black, this would be natural, she's from the Caucasus after all, now she has colored it some kind of dark red and cut it very short, she is wearing a black dressing gown, and there's nothing underneath except Marusia herself, she flings all of this out at us, we are already in a bad state and now we have to deal with this. Who are you? she first asks us, then she recognizes Vasia, she never recognizes me, I have even given up being offended by this, and Dogg has no pretensions whatsoever, well—she says—what have you brought? she is still asleep, standing right there in the corridor, she's standing and sleeping, but talks to us about something, badly, to be sure, but at least she's saying something, and it's good that she let us in; what have you brought? she asks again, what have we brought? Vasia asks in puzzlement, yes, you promised, says Marusia, I tense up, there's something wrong here, maybe we should take off right away and not wait for the next unpleasantness from the general's staff, you just phoned, says Marusia, half-asleep, and I asked for some; that wasn't us who phoned, says Vasia, not you? she says in amazement, not us, what is it you need? asks Vasia, we have everything, can we sit here for a while? Marusia lowers her shoulders in disappointment, as though to indicate sit down, what do I care, she turns around and disappears into her room and we are left in the corridor with our friend Molotov, the central committee member.

"Somehow she doesn't seem pleased to see us," says Dogg and goes into the kitchen.

"She's not pleased with anyone," I say, following him. "Why should she be pleased."

"Well, and why not," says Dogg, pouring the cognac into coffee mugs. "If someone brought me three bottles of cognac in the morning, I'd be overjoyed."

"If someone brought me," say I, drinking, "Molotov's bust, I'd have to think whether I should be overjoyed."

"We have to wake her," says Dogg, pouring a new round. "Because it's not right somehow—here we are visitors, sitting around, boozing."

"Yes, it's not right," I say. "But not boozing would be better. We'd do

better to get some sleep ourselves. This is already the second night I can't get some normal sleep. First the cop station, then that Marxist in sneakers. I want to sleep. Let's go to sleep."

"Sleep?" asks Dogg. "You know, right now I'm in such a state that I'm simply afraid to sleep."

"Why afraid?" I ask.

"I'm afraid that if I fall asleep I won't have the presence of mind to wake up, understand?"

Dogg pours again, but I refuse, that's it, I say, enough, let's go to bed, Dogg gets up with displeasure, on the sofa in one of the rooms we find Vasia, who has wrapped himself in some blanket and is sleeping contentedly, and there's nothing left for us but to go and find some other bed or sofa, or something, we go into the other room and see Marusia there in the large bed that is very familiar to us, now without even the dressing gown, she has pushed her head under the pillow and is sleeping that way and is not paying us any particular attention, this is a strange endless night that is now transforming into a similar morning, our friends crawl off into various corners and lose contact with one another at this time, it's as though they die every morning at 7:00 am, it looks like that at any rate, if not more terrifying. That's it, I'm going to sleep, I say to Dogg, he walks up to the bed, move over, he says to Marusia and pushes her to the edge of the bed, you can sleep here—he says to me—no, I say, you sleep by her—why me? asks Dogg—and why me? I say—you want to sleep, don't you, and me—he says—I'm afraid of her. I sigh and agree, but all the same I place Molotov between myself and Marusia, just in case.

9.57

"Oh, hell!" she cries out. "What's that?!"

I wake up and look around in fear. Next to me on the bed sits Marusia, completely naked, covering herself with the pillow and looking at me in fear.

"Hell!" she cries. "Oh, hell! What's that?"

"Don't shout," I say, trying to calm her. "Why are you shouting?"

"What is that?" she says, pointing at the bust and holding the pillow with the other hand. Dogg has also woken up and run off to the door. Marusia must have frightened him.

"It's a bust," I tell her. "Don't shout."

"Hell!"

"What of it?" I say in fear. "A bust. It's just a bust. We brought it."

"What for?" Marusia asks suspiciously.

"For no particular reason," I say. "We thought maybe you could use it."

"I don't need it," she says nervously.

"Okay, then we'll take it away in a moment."

"How did you get in here?" asks Marusia.

"You let us in yourself," I say, confused.

"Why?"

"I don't know," I say. "We came, you let us in."

"Did you bring some?" asks Marusia, obviously remembering something.

"What?" I say, not understanding.

"Well, anything."

"Here," I say. "We brought Molotov."

"What Molotov?" she asks puzzled.

"The central committee member."

"Where is he?" asks Marusia, failing to understand.

"Well, here," I point at Molotov.

Marusia attempts to grasp something. Then she takes a cigarette from somewhere and a lighter and begins to smoke, nervously thinking everything through.

"Have you been here long?" she asks.

"Not very," I say. "About two or three hours."

"I see," she says.

I sit with her in her bed and we look at one another silently. She is nice-looking, she drinks too much but she's still nice-looking. Especially with the pillow.

"You want to smoke?" I ask.

She picks up her cigarette and shows me, as if to say. I am smoking.

"We brought some," I say.

"You brought some?" she suddenly wakes up. It's as though a password has been given, in any case the right combination of words that sets everything in motion. The whole thing even appeals to me, so I repeat it:

"Yes," I say, "we brought some."

"Hell," says Marusia, and looking fearfully at Molotov she puts the pillow in its place.

10.15

In the morning it's better to not look at such things at all, or, if one has to look, then only superficially. That's what I do, and while she is walking around the room and finding her panties and socks, pulling on her torn designer jeans, putting on various medals and bracelets, I go onto the balcony and wait for her there. She comes out with a big black pipe, and after that we just stand on the balcony and talk about almost nothing, just look at the storm clouds in the morning sky; at the city hall, empty on a Saturday, there is so much air and dampness in all this that I get the feeling we are in someone's lungs, for example, the lungs of an old flounder who has swallowed icy arctic waves and is now lying at the

bottom of the ocean, silently suffering from an overdose.

"How are things?" I ask. We saw each other a week ago, it was very cold, we phoned her from the railway station, but what were we doing at the railway station? I cannot remember now, but we phoned her for sure from the station, she said—okay, come on over, just bring some booze, we picked up a bottle of Kaiser, then walked over, she had just been to some massage parlor and smelled of some kind of creams, her hair was a bit longer and, as I recall, a different color, although I can't remember which color.

"Things are bad," she says.

"What happened?"

"It happened," she says. "Things happened. Problems at school. I flunked the exam."

"Cool," I say. "You go to school."

"There's nothing cool about it," says she. "It's completely shitty."

"I see."

"We had to write a paper," says Marusia, warming the pipe in her hands. "You know what the topic was?"

"What?" I ask.

"What I think of city services."

"What's that?"

"City services?"

"Yeah."

"You know, firemen, let's say. Or the gas service. Communal services, in a word."

"I see. And what did you write?"

"I wrote about the street watering trucks."

"What trucks?"

"Watering trucks. The ones that wash the streets in the mornings, have you seen them?"

"Yes," I say. "Do you know something about watering trucks?"

"I had spent a terrible night. Almost no sleep. Came to class and my body was just falling apart, you see? I almost died."

"Well, you should have gone home."

"It was an exam."

"Should have asked dad, he would have sent a couple of armored personnel carriers and solved the problem."

"That's easy for you to say. Your dad's not in the military."

"Yeah," I say, "thank God."

"Actually, he really likes it when I ask him something like that. That's why I never ask him."

"Ah," I say.

"Brother's always milking him."

"He has a brother?"

"I have a brother," Marusia says, finally lighting the pipe. "An older

brother."

"Why have I never seen him?"

"I don't allow him here."

"Why?"

"I hate him. Though before I loved him very much."

"And what happened?"

"He hit on me."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. Once he almost raped me, it's a good thing he was smoked up—he just couldn't do anything. Otherwise, imagine, he could have been my first man."

"Yeah," I say, "it happens. My brother used to stick up for me when I was a kid."

"No one touched me when I was a child," she says. "They were afraid …"

11.00–12.00

"And so?"

"What?"

"You were saying something about street watering trucks."

"Oh, yes," she remembers. We are sitting on the balcony, Dogg is sleeping in the corner, and we are sitting on some carpets and looking into the sky, Marusia is completely lost, she looks around with empty eyes, trying to grasp onto anything at all, she has trouble doing this, but now she has turned her attention to me and she is trying to say something. "I had a vision. I hadn't slept the previous night, you see, and then there was this assignment to write. In a word, I wrote something along the lines of, I don't remember exactly now, but the main idea was that in reality those watering trucks aren't full of water at all."

"What, then?"

"You see," her voice has turned serious and frightened, "I woke up one morning, very early, before six, I think, and something inside me insisted that I need to buy milk, and so I picked up the thermos and went off in my slippers to find milk."

"At six in the morning?"

"I didn't know," she says, "that it was only six. I simply walked out onto the balcony and it was light out, I looked down—below these machines were driving by, you know—the watering trucks, I thought for some reason that they were milk trucks, they look a bit like them, don't you think?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Why?"

"Where have you seen milk trucks pouring milk onto the street?"

"Milk?" Here Marusia turns silent, obviously having another vision, but I succeed in pulling her back.

"Although," I say, "they really are a bit like them. The principle is the

same. They are carrying something around in tanks. Fire-engines are a bit like them too."

"And gasoline trucks," says Marusia.

"Yeah," I say, "fuel trucks look basically like milk trucks too."

"Then I went up to a watering truck with my thermos," Marusia goes on, "and here, you know, a stream of water hit me, it landed right on me, my body, my face, my arms, it even knocked the thermos out of my hands. And then I raised my hands to my face, cold water was running down them, and I smelled them. You know what they smelled of?"

"What?" I ask.

"Gas."

"What gas?"

"I don't know," says Marusia. "But it was a gas, for certain. And you know what I thought, that this could basically be deliberate, you understand—they deliberately add gas as a tonic to the water for watering, maybe on the one hand to stimulate the population before the working day, and on the other hand to direct this same population's energy in a productive direction, because this gas was basically made out of psychotropic stuff, to make people turn on their engines, so to speak, and cheerfully go off to their workplace."

"And you wrote all this down?"

"Yes," says Marusia, "I did. I was having a vision. I also began dreaming up various variations on this theme, such as, for example, that all the elements in this gas, when they find their way into the air, begin to act only after 45 minutes. And if the water trucks sent the gas into the air at 6:15 a.m., it would be only partially activated before 7:00 and would in fact be extremely harmful for the human body."

"Why is that?"

"To regulate the daily timetable in the cities. If you stick your nose out into the street before 7:00, you get your share of harmful liquid and have cramps all day, get it? But if, instead, you leave the house at, say, exactly 7, you get the normal dose of the mixture and cheerfully spend the whole day working for the fatherland, that way everything is economical and rational."

"And you wrote about that too?"

"Uh-huh."

"You know," I say, "if I were you, I would talk to your dad all the same. A couple of armored personnel carriers, and no one would ever learn about that gas in the water… Or just one hydrogen bomb," I add after some thought.

12.00-13.00

"No," she says, "I'll just rewrite it. I'll write about something else. For example, about the streetcar depot."

"I can just imagine your essay! Listen," I say, "we have a real problem

here. Our friend's parents have died."

"Both?" asks Marusia.

"No," I say. "Only one. The stepfather."

"And who's your friend?"

"Carburetor. Remember him?"

"What's he like?

"Well," I say, "he has a funny face, far-eastern. High cheekbones, narrow eyes—remember?"

"He's the one who looks Chinese?"

"More Mongolian," I say.

"What's the difference?"

"Mongolians are illiterate."

"And the Chinese?"

"The Chinese were literate before the Mongols appeared."

"Yes," says Marusia, "I remember him. You brought him along once. And now what?"

"Well," I say, "now we have to find him. The funeral is tomorrow. And there's no sign of him. Can you imagine?"

"Yes," says Marusia, "it's a mess. What did you say his name was?"

"Carburetor."

"Strange name."

13.00–14.00

"Carburetor?"

"Right."

"Listen," Marusia finally lifts her head and looks at me more or less consciously. "Is that the guy whose father died?"

"Stepfather."

"One and the same dick," says Marusia, waking up fully. "Yesterday your friend phoned me, the pudgy, dirty one."

"Cocoa," I say.

"What?"

"That's what we call him—Cocoa."

"What a nightmare," she says. "He phoned yesterday looking for you guys."

"He phoned you?"

"Well, who should he phone?" Marusia tries to get up on her feet. "He was looking for you, talked precisely about your—what did you call him?…"

"Carburetor."

"Right, Carburetor. He said, I think, that he knows where he is."

"Where is he?"

"Carburetor?"

"No, not Carburetor?" I say, getting up too, "this fat jerk."

"He's at Gosha's. That's where he phoned from."

"Who's Gosha?"

"What's the matter with you?" she asks. "Where do you live? Gosha's the editor of our trendiest newspaper. This beast, if I am not mistaken, works for him," says Marusia, pointing at the sleepy Dogg.

"Is he the editor or what?" Finally I'm beginning to get it.

"Right, what do you think I'm talking about?"

"How did our Cocoa end up there?"

"How should I know?" says Marusia and goes out of the room

"Wait!" I call after her. "Do you know his phone number?"

"No," calls Marusia from somewhere in the kitchen. "I know the address. I slept with him a few times, at his place. He has a big apartment, not far from here, on Gogol Street. He lives there alone."

"Wait, just a minute." I find Marusia in the kitchen—she looks in the fridge, gets out a jar of honey, falls into a chair, and begins to eat. "Wait," I repeat, "what else did he tell you?"

"What else?" Marusia thinks for a moment. "Nothing else. He said that he knows where your … well, the one whose father died … rather, stepfather. Said that when you want, you can find him at Gosha's."

"How did he end up there?!"

"Well, and how should I know!" Marusia can't take any more and begins to shout. "How should I know? Maybe Gosha picked him up somewhere and had him!"

"What do you mean, picked him up and had him?" I say, not understanding.

"Silently! Saw him and picked him up and silently fucked him. Don't you know Gosha?"

"No."

"Gosha is a class A jerkoff in this wretched town. That's how he recruits his editorial team. I slept with him on principle too, that was kind of my principle. So, maybe he picked your stinker up somewhere, fucked him, and is now supporting him at his place on Gogol Street, I don't know." She falls silent and continues to lick her hot-yellow cold honey.

14.15

"Listen, we're off."

"Uh-huh," she says.

"Give me Gosha's address."

Marusia takes out some notebook covered in yellow leather, writes something in it, tears out a page, and passes it to me. Here, she says, only you have to ring for a long time, the apartment is large, he can be sleeping and simply not hear you. You can say that I sent you, otherwise he might not let you in, understand? I understand, thanks, well, alright—get out, she says and immediately forgets us. We are on our way out, and here—in the

doorway—I turn to her and say:

"Marusia," I say. "Listen, there's another thing."

"What?"

"Maybe you'd like to take our Molotov?"

"Molotov?" she asks.

"Well, yeah, Molotov. It's tough for us to drag him around all the time, and maybe you'd like him. He was, after all, a central committee member."

Marusia walks up to me, examines Molotov, runs her hands over his face, and says:

"Okay. I'll take him. I like him—he looks like my dad. He has the same bullshit on his jacket."

"It's not bullshit," I say. "It's the order of Lenin."

Okay, says Marusia, to hell with you—here's some money—she shoves me a note, let me drive you, or else you'll get arrested outside the entrance, put—she tells me—put Molotov on the balcony, he's mine now, I obediently carry Molotov onto the balcony, and we go downstairs; Marusia leads us to the garage, the garage door is reinforced with iron and copper, genuine gates of hell, you could hide dragons behind these doors, or nuclear bombers, something apocalyptic at any rate. It's funny, but Marusia only has her run-down Zhiguli in there, the garage door contains another door, a smaller one, covered in steel in the same way, Marusia opens it, come in, she says, maybe, says Vasia, we should open the garage door? You come in, says Marusia, I'll open the garage myself, otherwise someone might see you hanging around the garage—they'll start asking questions, I'll do it myself, get in the car, we walk into a dark garage, and in fact see the beat-up but still fully battle-ready Zhiguli there and the three of us—me, Vasia the Communist, and Dogg Pavlov—squeeze into the back seat, Dogg at first wants to sit in front, but the right door is broken and bent inwards, so we take Dogg in with us, on our knees, so to speak. Marusia stands by the garage door for a while, finds an unfinished cigarette somewhere in the pocket of her jeans, finishes it off quickly and remembers that she has forgotten something, what have I forgotten, she thinks, what? why am I standing by the garage, probably I wanted to drive somewhere, but where? she thinks, and pensively walks inside and sits by the wheel, well, Marusia, Dogg calls to her nervously, are we off? we're off, Marusia reacts to the challenge, she turns on the engine and puts the car in reverse. She has, of course, forgotten to open the garage door.

14.45

"Can you get out?" I ask.

"I can get out, I can get out," says Marusia. "Everything's okay."

"Go home," Vasia says to her. "Can you make it on your own?"

"I can make it," says Marusia.

"Are you sure?" asks Vasia.

"Uh-huh," she says and tries to start the engine again.

Vasia leans over from the back seat and takes the keys from her. We drag our friend out of the driver's seat, close up the garage after ourselves, put the keys in her hands and go off, thinking—will she be okay or not, and if she ends up okay, where will that be? But it turns out that while we're walking to the square and looking up at the building opposite city hall, Marusia miraculously appears on her balcony, she's already sitting there, pressed against Molotov—two unfortunate, wasted creatures, Marusia in her torn designer jeans and Rolling Stones T-shirt, and Molotov, central committee member, old hedonist, lover of cocktails, now closer to the heavens, maybe only by a few meters, but closer.

Translated by Myroslav Shkandrij

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Look for the conclusion of this novel in the next issue of *Ukrainian Literature.*

Elsewhere, Just Not Here

Mykola Riabchuk

I have completely forgotten what he looked like. It's strange, but today I remember only that he was a man already old, wearing wire-rimmed glasses. He appeared to be a foreigner, and he had a rather unusual title: elephant herder. What kind of elephants, he didn't say. He said only that he and his herd roamed the whole planet.

"So, what are you doing here?" I asked.

"Nothing. My elephants weren't allowed into your country, so I have nothing to do. I've just stopped here for an hour, to take a look around. Then I'll go on."

"Where are the elephants?" I asked in wonder.

"They're waiting for me at the border," the man explained.

"You think they won't cross it on their own?"

"They won't," the herder affirmed. "My elephants are very smart. When they met Salvador's elephants, you know what they asked? 'Who painted you?' Ha, ha, ha! Can you imagine that?! Not 'What are you doing here?' or 'Why do you have such long legs?' But 'Who painted you?'!"

"So what did Salvador's elephants answer?"

"Nothing. They didn't answer each other at all. They just asked questions."

"What questions?" I wanted to know.

"How long ago my elephants had left Africa. What the weather's like there. Does the Ivory Coast team play good soccer."

The man smiled and tilted his head to one side. Then he cast a glance around the empty café and stared through the transparent wall.

"It's time to go," he said.

I held out a ballpoint pen, the only thing I had in my pockets to give him—the other things in them were my room key and last month's trolley and tramcar pass.

The herder swiveled on his stool to face the glass wall and in a few short strokes he sketched some elephants and flowers on it. Clearly, these elephants ate nothing but flowers. They were strolling languidly on the grass, on the leafy trees shining through the glass, on the anxious people hurrying somewhere with their briefcases. No one noticed the elephants—their bodies were nothing but outline.

"This is a souvenir for you," said the man, and off he went without a backward glance.

I sat and peered at the wall. Alongside the elephants were a pair of

Hutsuls, a man and woman, that someone had drawn before. They were sauntering through the very flowers that were the elephants’ favorite food.

“And so what?” I thought to myself. “Let them...”

From my small plate of salad I picked out a round slice of radish and rolled it across the table, like a wheel with a red rim.

This café was always empty, even in the evenings. It was called the Friendship Café, and it was located in the students’ quarter. They ate their meals in the dining halls and to relax they went to their dorm rooms.

Today a young woman came running in and took a seat at a table near mine. I went over and sat by her.

“This is the third time you’ve been here. It’s time we met,” I said.

She raised her eyes, amazed.

“Really?”

“I am Hector Rashid Angeles, Jr., a professional boxer.”

“Who?” The amazement in her blue eyes didn’t fade.

“Actually, a former professional boxer. And you, are you a student?”

I had seen her here a few times. She always ordered coffee and drank it slowly, all the while cradling a German textbook of some kind. Along with the textbook she carried a “German-Turkish Dictionary.” A different one every time, I noticed, and each one thicker than the last, though it might have only seemed that way.

“I’m a teacher.”

“Oh. Excuse me then.”

“Nothing to excuse. Your guess was almost right. I finished last year, in Spanish and Polynesian philology. But you can’t do anything with that.”

“Well, I recently left professional boxing. My dream is to herd elephants and travel.”

“But we don’t have any professional boxing,” the teacher countered.

“I worked with Midge Killer himself. He was always saying, ‘Drop your manager and come join us.’ I kept refusing. Then one time, at his villa, he set a python on me.”

“What! He did that, himself?”

“What do you mean, himself? He was the python’s owner—it was trained.”

“There’s no such thing!”

“I remember it as if it were yesterday,” I went on. “He said, ‘Look, it has your manager in its belly.’ And I really did see humps in the snake’s body. And I began to imagine my manager sitting in its belly, having rolled himself up into a ball, and then myself as an embryo positioned just like him. It’s better not to imagine things like that. The python began to move straight at me. He had shining skin with odd-looking patterns on it. His look was hypnotizing me, but then I turned my back to him and ran. I fled through the bushes and over the metal enclosure.”

The teacher listened to me attentively, without the hint of a smile. Then she said:

“Maybe you’re a professional soccer player?”

“No,” I said. “I remember as if it were yesterday. I remember the lush greenery and the python with the patterned skin, looking like it was painted.”

“Like an Easter egg?”

“Like a sketched elephant,” I said.

After that, the teacher and I often met at the Friendship Café. She actually did bring ever thicker German-Turkish dictionaries with her. She’d write down several words from one and sit lost in thought, absentmindedly sipping her coffee. Then she’d write down the same words from another dictionary and think.

“Why do you do that?” I couldn’t help asking.

“I can’t translate the text,” she said. “I’ve been trying for a whole year.”

I nearly laughed.

“Is it worth getting so perturbed about?” I asked.

“Certainly,” said the teacher. “The text is from a school textbook. Listen:

‘*This currant bush of yours, is it white?*’

‘*No, it’s black.*’

‘*Then why is it gray?*’

‘*Because it’s red.*’

That’s the literal translation.”

“So, what about it?”

“It’s absurd!”

“To my mind, it’s a pretty original dialogue.”

“In a school textbook?!”

“Why not?” I said. “Children’s education should keep up with the times.”

“That’s not it,” sighed the teacher. “The translations the dictionaries give are all imprecise. Or maybe in German the words are some kind of homonyms.”

She wrote four words in block letters on the café’s glass wall. I’ve forgotten what the German words were, but I remember they were four adjectives: WHITE, BLACK, GRAY, RED.

That’s how they were translated. Or maybe as something else. Maybe the teacher confused German with Spanish. Or Polynesian. Then, too, words that mean one thing in German might mean something entirely different in Spanish. Or they might mean nothing at all.

After that, I didn’t see the teacher again. Just like the herder. And lots of other people.

But at the Friendship Café they don’t wash the window very often. If you’re lucky enough to get there in time, on the glass wall you’ll see a pair of stylized Hutzuls, a herd of blue, or, to be more precise, transparent elephants, and four colorful, apparently German, adjectives.

As if all these things had something in common.

Translated by Uliana Pasicznyk

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A Few Minutes of Evening

Valerii Shevchuk

I walked out onto the street. Cars were streaming by, one after another, and the trolleys were packed with people, swarming like bees in a beehive. A boy was peering through a rainy window, nose pressed against the pane. It was drizzling, and I couldn't get across the interminable, blaring, surging stream of traffic. A smoggy blue haze hung above the street. A taxi driver spat a cigarette butt out his window. On the opposite side of the street stood an old man who, like me, was waiting to cross.

Above me a small window opened with a splatter. I looked up, squinting.

"Hello!" said Maria. "Where are you off to?"

"Hello," I said. "Just over there."

"Still sulking, huh?"

I whistled softly. Maria didn't like me to whistle, and I knew she'd probably take offense. And she did: the window above my head was already fastened, and the drapes were drawn shut.

I stepped up to the intersection, to cross the street where one should. The old fellow standing on the other side lost patience with the flow of cars. Stepping off the curb, he briskly and bravely darted through the traffic.

I entered the park. The wet paths glistened, the autumn leaves strewn on them giving off a dull sheen. A girl was coming toward me. She was more like two girls, one walking on top of the asphalt and the other in it. Shoes with over-thick soles tread through the leaves, and these shoes were the only thing the two girls shared. I smiled at the girl, but she looked past me—as if there, behind me, a light was about to come on and a screen of gray sky would light up with an unimaginably fascinating movie.

It occurred to me that the girl's hair was cut like mine, and that our hair color was the same. Then it struck me that we resembled each other somewhat. I looked down and saw some young fellow in my shoes, walking in the asphalt and wearing pants that were too wide.

Two aging women were waddling toward me, bobbing slowly down the sidewalk like two big spheres.

"Maya's already married," one of them said in a low voice.

"No—really?!"

“Her husband’s got an apartment—he’s an engineer.”

I again began thinking about the girl who had just passed by me. Rosy crescents had flamed on her cheeks—no doubt she was getting married soon, too. Probably her future husband, too, was an engineer, and had a super-luxurious apartment. For now I was an electrician’s apprentice, so maybe she had reason to look through me as if I were transparent.

I continued walking down the sidewalk and even began wishing that a window would open above me and someone would call my name. But the windows I was passing—storefronts, displays, hairdressers, fashion shops—weren’t concerned with me. I began thinking that I shouldn’t have offended Maria. We should be walking down these streets together, her steady guiding arm in mine.

Two people were coming toward me. A girl led an odd young fellow with flaming red hair by the arm. Her eyes showed that she had been crying. I felt the urge to take her arm away from her young man’s and see a smile light up her sad face. Maybe that was why I smiled brightly at her. But the tearful girl just sniffled and deliberately thumbed her turned-up nose at me.

I crossed the street and made my way down the boulevard. An old man was sitting on a bench, a newspaper spread beneath him. His hands held another thoroughly rain-splattered newspaper and there was a plastic hood over his head—to me he looked like a being from another planet.

My stomach let out a rumble. Mother was working the swing shift today, so there’d been no dinner at home. I went into a cafeteria and bought five meat pies. I ate them standing up, propped at the counter, washing them down with water. Beside me was a drunk with a beet-red nose, drinking beer and making smacking sounds—he was probably sucking yesterday’s dinner out from between his teeth. A girl stood in front of me, but it wasn’t the one that I kept thinking about, the one who had so miraculously become two on the asphalt. This girl was holding a pie with two fingers—one of them with the nail polish half chipped off. She had dainty straight teeth—she ate her pie more by sawing than biting into it.

“Do you know Halia Bondarchuk?” a voice behind me asked.

“Why sure,” came the response.

“Vovko’s going out with her now.”

“You don’t say!”

I knew a Halia Bondarchuk too, but not the one this Vovko was going out with. The one I knew lived at No. 4 and had two kids. When she went out with them, one pulled her in one direction and the other in the opposite one, as if they wanted to rip this Halia apart, like the ancient Derevlianians had once ripped apart Prince Ihor.

“Gimme a cigarette,” the drunk said to me, his red nose gleaming now

that he’d finished his beer.

I gave the man a cigarette. He said nothing in reply.

“Thank you,” I prompted him.

“Wha’d ya say?...”

I was out walking on the crowded sidewalk again. The rain had stopped, but people hadn’t closed their umbrellas. They bloomed strangely alongside the walks and trees, as a blue haze of gas fumes shimmered above the street.

I went into the post office to write a letter. The letter was to a classmate whom fate had swept out of our city. He had come to mind today—actually, his address had fallen out of my notebook. “It’s letter-writing day,” proclaimed the post office billboards, as an eager mass of people pressed to have their envelopes stamped. I let out a laugh and began to write. I wrote that I was an electrician’s apprentice and that I was the only one in our class who had chosen that profession. I wrote about the last soccer match and about an LP record that another classmate, Borys, had given me. I wrote that I didn’t have a girl, that the one I had been going with was on hold at the moment…. I looked up and envisioned an empty path, totally strewn with leaves so that it glistened. A girl was walking through those leaves─she was two girls, one walking on top of the asphalt and the other in it. We looked at one another, and I was again struck by how much she resembled me.

“You’re making it up!” I caught myself. “She didn’t even glance at you.”

Bending over the letter, I brutally scratched out what I’d written about not having a girl. I wrote that I had a new girlfriend. I had met her in the park—my pen kept scribbling—one evening when I was out walking aimlessly…. Suddenly I wanted to crumple the letter up and throw it in the wastebasket. But instead I sealed the envelope and went to have it stamped.

The streetlights were already on. It wasn’t raining, but people were still carrying colorful umbrellas over their heads.

“How nicely the umbrellas bloom!” I remarked to myself, and spat on the ground.

But it happened that the spit landed not on the ground but on a lacquered, remarkably polished and glossy shoe. I looked up into a stare so astonished that I had to bow.

“Excuse me!” I apologized.

The coat sailing past seemed to be one I had seen before. Of course! The girl I was constantly thinking about had worn that kind of coat! I hurried after it, but the profile that turned back to me had such an amazing nose that I halted in my tracks.

A movie theater loomed before me.

“Good film?”

“Yeah—great!” said a big-bellied, burly man. “A spy thri-il-ler!”

I bought a ticket, took a seat, and began to watch. To my left sat a long-haired youth who at first I thought was a girl, and to my right was an old maid with an upturned nose, noisily crunching an apple.

On the screen people were running about and shouting incredibly. I sat looking at the screen, or somewhere past it, or maybe far beyond it. I smelled the fragrance of leaves and the aroma of wet wood benches, and asphalt glistened before me.

“No,” I told myself. “That’s enough—enough about that girl!”

And I did forget about the girl. As I watched the heroes track down the spy, I thought about Maria, sitting home alone and knitting herself some wool gloves. Thrown over her shoulders would be the wool shawl she had made when we were still going together, and on her feet hand-knit socks thrust into worn furry slippers. I recalled that my mother wore the same kind of slippers and that for a couple of months now my dad had been saying he’d buy her new ones.

The spy was finally captured and there was nothing left to do but leave. Outside the theater I again spotted the girl who had made such an impression on me in the park. She was holding the arm of some slick, clever-looking dandy and gazing lovingly into his eyes.

The clock showed ten. I waited for a car to pass and then crossed the street. The light in Maria’s window was on, and now I knew for sure that she was sitting over her endless knitting. I stopped by her window and tapped, expecting it to open and Maria to answer. But around me there was only silence and solitude—not even the passing of a car. Crooking my index finger, I tapped it lightly on the pane three times, as I had a month and more before.

Translated by Uliana Pasicznyk

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Skiing to Africa in a Single Day

Valerii Shevchuk

Kolia poked the map with his finger and said that was Africa.

"What do you mean, Africa?" said Joanna.

Kolia ran up to his mother, who was combing her hair at the mirror. Tugging at her dress, he said, "She doesn't believe the map shows Africa!"

"It does," said Mother.

"See!" said Kolia, victorious.

Mother stopped combing her hair—she was acting strange today. She sat down and let her raised hands fall on her head.

"What's she doing?" asked Joanna.

Kolia replied that Mother was in a bad mood today.

Then they started to look over the supplies they kept in the old suitcase. Kolia called it their gunnysack, but Father said, "Gunnysack—that's not what it is at all!"

"It is too!" said Kolia. His father just laughed.

The gunnysack held various things: a coffee substitute called "Baltica," a half-opened packet of salt, some oatmeal, flour, and matches. Outside the window there was also a piece of dried sausage. It had been spotted by a couple of great tits, who pecked away at it. When Kolia saw what they were doing, he wrapped the sausage in wire netting. The birds kept coming and pecking, but they couldn't grab anything. Kolia stood at the window and laughed.

"So why are you laughing?" asked Joanna.

"Now they can't get at it!" said Kolia.

Joanna looked through the window and wrinkled her small nose.

"They're hungry, those poor tits!" she said.

Kolia just shrugged, and that offended Joanna. When he went out to play, she opened the window and made a small hole in the netting.

"What do you think this is, summer?" said Mother, coming up behind her. Joanna replied that she needed some fresh air. Mother, surprised, allowed her to go out and play.

Joanna got up on her skis and skied down a hill. At the bottom she fell,

legs askew. Vic, the neighbor boy, guffawed loudly and pointed his finger at her; his friend Alex laughed too.

Joanna got up.

“So why are you looking?” she said.

She went off a ways but didn’t ski down again. Vic yawned and turned around to go back to his own yard. Alex yawned too and followed him.

Kolia ran up.

“Want to go to Africa on Sunday?” he asked.

“How?” said Joanna.

“Why, on skis,” said Kolia. “But if you don’t want to go, you don’t have to. I’m not really asking you—except then there’d be nobody to do the cooking.”

Joanna, dismayed, announced that she did want to go. When they were back indoors, she started thinking about Africa. When Mother came in, Joanna asked, “Can you really get to Africa in a day?”

“Of course,” said Mother, laughing. “But it’s very far.”

Then Father came in, and he and Mother began to talk about something incomprehensible. Kolia opened the gunnysack and carefully looked through the supplies.

Mother bent over him and said, “When you grow up, this will all seem foolishness.”

“Why are you in a bad mood today?” asked Kolia, and Mother, amazed, exchanged looks with Father.

“What do you know about being in a bad mood?” said Mother.

Kolia replied that he wasn’t a little kid any more.

The next day Kolia went over to take a look at the sausage. The tits had nibbled it through the hole.

Kolia cried, “Get lost!” He opened the window and patched the hole carefully.

“They’re hungry,” said Joanna.

“I don’t care about that old sausage,” said Kolia. “But if they eat it, then what’ll we have for the road?”

Then Father came in and said, “What do you think this is, summer?”

Kolia quickly shut the window. A man had come with Father and together they began to talk about beams, boards, and floor measurements—things of no interest at all. Kolia bent over his gunnysack, studying something. His face, with eyebrows knitted together, was a study in concentration, as his lips muttered calculations he alone understood. Joanna went up to him, and they began talking about Africa.

On Sunday they got into their ski outfits. Kolia shouldered the knapsack and said, “*They* don’t have to know. We’ll go, and when we get back, we’ll tell them all about it.” They put on their skis and off they went.

The snow dazzled and sparkled. Kolia was cheerful and started to tell Joanna about Africa. It’s a very interesting place, he said, and everything

there is different than it is here—in Africa there are hippos, giraffes, and zebras. And the people there are so completely black, from head to toe, that they’re called negroes, and since they’re almost completely black, they walk around with almost no clothes on.

The silvery snow glistened, blinding them. Going to Africa was grand. Kolia kept laughing, and his laughter was wonderful. Later they skied down a hill and Joanna didn’t fall. The snow was packed and smooth, their faces were rosy and bright—everything was perfect. They skied for a long time. All around stretched enormous fields, and woods shimmered in a blue daze in the distance as their skis glided on and on, swooshing merrily. Then, after a while, Joanna said that she was tired. Kolia turned around and glared at her.

“I knew this would happen! How can anybody get anywhere with someone like you?! I’ll never get anywhere with someone like you!”

Joanna looked at him, dismayed.

“But I ... but I didn’t mean anything!”

The woods lay ahead. Finally they reached them and skied in among the trees. The rustling of the pines made a soft, low sound, and snow lay on the branches like fluffy baseball caps. An enchanted silence took your breath away. Kolia stood on his tip-toes and shouted, “A-hoy-y-y!”

The woods replied, echoes reverberating into the distance.

Then Joanna said she had a blister on her foot and couldn’t go any farther. Kolia turned around again, ready to scold. But a scared, wide-eyed little face was looking up at him. Her teeth were biting her lower lip and strands of hair were sticking to her sweaty forehead. Kolia felt a strange warmth inside. He recognized that this small person was doing everything he asked, and that he was the older one here.

“Okay,” he said. “Let’s go home.”

Relieved, Joanna tucked a strand of hair under her scarf. They took off their skis and started walking through the snow. Then they chanced on a path, and the way became easy.

“Want to stop and eat?” asked Kolia.

They sat down under a pine tree and ate their bread and dried sausage.

“Pretty good, isn’t it?” he said.

“Uh-huh,” said Joanna, her mouth full.

They were getting cold, so they began to run. But the cold still bothered them, so they put their skis back on. They skied down a slope—it wasn’t really a slope, just a slanting incline, so all you had to do was set your poles once in a while and you’d make it down. The snow swooshed noisily under their skis, and a sweet, delicious tiredness filled them through and through.

“We’ll probably get yelled at when we get home,” said Kolia.

“That doesn’t matter,” said Joanna. “They’ll yell, but then they’ll stop.”

They walked into the house with heads bowed low, Kolia hiding the knapsack behind his back and Joanna crunching her wet gloves.

“Where were you?”

“We went to Africa,” said Joanna.

“So!” said Mother, bursting with mirth. “They went to Africa! Skied to Africa—and got there in a single day! Now go change, you two!”

But Mother didn’t sound angry at all. The smile on her face lingered as Kolia and Joanna darted off into the next room.

“Imagine that!” she said to their father. “They went to Africa! Skied to Africa in a single day!”

“We go to Africa too, sometimes,” he replied with a grin.

“What’d he say?” Joanna was asking Kolia.

“He said that they go to Africa too sometimes,” said Kolia.

Joanna shrugged her small shoulders. They looked at each other and plopped down on the couch happily.

Translated by Uliana Pasicznyk

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The Building in the City Center

Vasyl Gabor

I kept walking but I couldn't reach my family home, because it seemed to be retreating from me, so I started to walk faster, but the house too began to move away faster, and I broke into a run, but it began to run away from me even faster, and I began to despair of ever reaching it and seeing my parents again.

So I have been very distressed lately.

You see, more and more often I get the feeling that my parents are dead.

At times like this I write them a letter.

I don't have any newspapers or magazines delivered, so I'm used to the mailbox being empty all the time.

And when I'm waiting for a reply from my parents, I feel a cold draft coming from the mailbox, and I have an almost physical sensation that with every passing day, with every passing moment, they are getting further and further away from me.

At times like this I call myself dreadful names. I reproach myself for being a worthless son and resolve to visit them without fail.

But then a letter comes from home—my parents always write that everything is fine and that I shouldn't be concerned about them, then they go on to list everyone who has died in the village and to inquire mournfully whether I am still living alone in that big, strange city—and I calm down and stop worrying about them, and my resolution to visit them goes right out of my head.

At other times, though, wandering aimlessly through the narrow city streets, I see in my mind's eye my birthplace, my home, and again I think of my old folks.

As was the case today.

In the past I used to get tired and irritated in the narrow, crowded streets of the city.

Now I'm used to them.

I mingle with the motley stream of people carrying me along goodness-knows-where, and I don't care where. I walk amid the noise and the laughter, amid bright cheerful eyes and dull sad ones, among exuberant girls

and old folk bent by the burden of poverty; I walk amid the powerful aroma of fine perfumes and the stench from sewer drains and befouled gates, I pass by old buildings and churches, past stone lions with eyes just as dull as those of the people. As I walk along I feel calmer, at peace with myself.

And I wander around the city like this every day.

But today, I suddenly stopped in amazement in the middle of the street at the sight of a certain building.

How could I have failed to notice it before? After all, how many times had I passed by this three-story, burnt-out building in the city center that had stood in disrepair for several years, with its boarded-up windows and doors?

Casually I surveyed its blackened outlines, experiencing no curiosity or surprise; nothing upset the regular rhythm of my heartbeat.

I recalled that I would occasionally wonder when the municipal authorities might get round to restoring it, but then would immediately forget all about the building and its restoration.

Today I saw it with different eyes.

At the age of thirty-three I often felt myself to be a complete ruin, but I had hardly ever seen what a ruin looked like.

I stood by the road and couldn’t take my eyes off the burnt-out building; it gradually began to seize hold of my imagination and finally captured it completely.

I told myself that others would probably find my perception of the building ridiculous or primitive—but then I don’t wish to share it with anybody in any case.

Yet the longer I stood by this building, the stronger was my impression that there was somebody living and hiding within its walls.

That impression grew to such a degree that I felt drawn to peep through the gap between the planks boarding up the front door.

Eventually, that is what I did.

I saw a hallway soiled by feces and strewn with litter, and I was filled with disgust for the things people do.

I set off for home, and I kept thinking about the burnt-out building.

My curiosity was getting the better of me. If I got in through a window, would I find anything in the empty rooms? For some reason, I was convinced that I would find broken old chairs.

Someone was coming at night, sitting on these chairs, and calmly talking about the past.

That’s right, the past—because that’s all there is to people’s lives.

When it rains, the whole building must leak, and those who go there must keep moving the chairs around, trying to find some drier spot.

Perhaps some retrieve broken umbrellas from under the chairs and open them up with smiles of satisfaction.

The next day I went straight back to the building.

I walked unhurriedly around it, observing the blackened walls and the

clumsily boarded-up windows and doors.

It occurred to me that if I had a ladder, I could easily get in through a window.

Then I thought, what’s the point of aimlessly wandering about? Wouldn’t it be better to go home and fix the lock on the door that always annoys me when I’m in a hurry to get to work?

Then I realized that being here, by this building, was very interesting for me, because even though it was a complete ruin for me it had a certain charm, and it was a great pleasure to imagine its empty rooms, full of useless objects, with litter all over the place.

I wandered through the rooms, trying to imagine what their former occupants were like.

It seemed to me that I was floating away on a river of people, going goodness knows where, and this had a calming effect on me.

Suddenly, I glimpsed Maria in one of the rooms.

She hadn’t changed a bit since the day she left.

She was sitting in a chair, smiling kindly at me.

We did not speak, but our silence was enjoyable and I was loath to interrupt it.

I recalled how Maria once told me about a dream she had had.

“We’re going to visit your parents,” she said.

“We’re traveling in a very old, dilapidated bus,” she continues.

“I remember the way to their house very well, so I’m surprised that we are going through a jungle in the land of the Incas.

“Oh Lord, the Carpathian mountains and the land of the Incas are worlds apart, I tell myself.

“And then, is there a jungle in the land of the Incas? But there must be, if we are traveling through it.

“All around there is bright green foliage and fabulous birds. The bus puffs and groans as it strains to make its bumpy way along a small narrow road that looks like a tunnel.

“Endless and mysterious.

“Occasionally one wall of the tunnel disappears, and then there’s a black, bottomless chasm beneath the wheels of the bus, and I hold you close, my love, afraid to look down because it makes me dizzy.

“At the same time I feel happy, because you’re beside me, and this calms me; I’m no longer so afraid of hurtling down the steep slopes into the valley in this dilapidated old bus that bumps and shakes so violently that you think it’s going to fall to pieces at any moment.

“Then the driver, a young Indian—or he might be of mixed race—tells us that there’s only one more slope to negotiate and the worst part of the journey will be behind us, and he asks us all to fasten our seat-belts.

“The road down the last slope is so steep—it’s almost a vertical wall—that the people look at each other in terror.

“‘Can you really drive down it?’ is the unspoken question.

“‘Isn’t there another way?’

“‘There is,’ says the driver, as though reading their minds, ‘but it means a journey of several years.’

“He acts as calmly as if he were driving down a bank just a few meters high, as he smokes unhurriedly and hums a cheerful tune.

“‘Well, my friends,’ he calls to them after a short while, flashing a white, toothy grin, ‘as Gagarin said, off we go!’

“His grin is somewhat reassuring, but at the same time I’m wondering how, out here in Peru, he’s heard of Gagarin.

“We hurtle downwards at breakneck speed, the wind whistles past the windows, the trees and the lianas merge into one sheer wall of greenery, and the roar of the engine is deafening.

“Suddenly, the bus hits something and shatters to pieces—yet all the passengers survive and laugh gleefully, as though they have hurtled down into the valley to end up rolling in soft, fluffy snow.

“‘I know of a village nearby,’ you say, ‘I’ll get over there and bring people to help.’

“I ask you to stay, not to go into the jungle, because it’s full of danger, but you just smile, hold me tight, and kiss me.

“‘Don’t worry, my dear, I know my way around here very well and I’ll be back in no time.’

“‘And I’ll bring us something to eat.’

“And you go off into the dense green wall of the jungle, disappearing beyond the trees and the liana, and my heart is in my mouth.

“‘Well then, my friends,’ says the driver, ‘we can’t just hang around. Let’s start putting the bus back together.’

“We set to work, but I’m so careless.

“They ask me to hand them a particular part, but I bring something quite different.

“You are on my mind all the time, and I just keep watching the place in the jungle where you disappeared.

“The people put the bus together quickly.

“But you, my love, are still not back.

“The driver says we aren’t going to wait for one person; he wants to set off.

“‘But he went to get help for all of us,’ I say in your defense. But the passengers support the driver and I burst into tears in despair.

“‘I tell you what, friends,’ says the driver, ‘let her sit up on top and keep a look-out from there. If she sees her husband, I’ll stop to pick him up.’

“Oh, I forgot to tell you, my love, about the strange way we rebuilt the bus.

“Now it had no roof, and the seats were arranged one above the other like a strange sort of ladder, with the top seat above the level of the tree-tops.

“With a good deal of trouble I climbed up into it and started to search for you amid the sea of greenery.”

“But you were nowhere to be seen, and the realization began to dawn that it would be impossible to find you and that people couldn’t find their way out of the jungle on their own. I started to cry because I had lost you, but then, suppressing my choking sobs and fighting back tears, I kept calling you and calling you.

“The echo resounded from the jungle with a roar that sent shivers down my spine.

“And I woke up in the night, and when I saw you next to me, I hugged you so very, very tight.

“For nothing, nothing at all can take you from me.”

How well I remember Maria telling me her dream.

At the time I thought, “Oh, good Lord, how much she loves me, even in her dreams,” and I kissed her.

But I didn’t actually say this aloud to her, and now I want so much to call her to me, so we can at least spend a little time together.

I even want to bring her to live in this building.

Can the human soul actually find sanctuary in the wilderness?

I wander around the city, but it reminds me of a desert. I wander about the burnt-out building, thinking of Maria and my frail old parents.

Maria wanted a son.

She told me what a fine boy he would be and how she would love him.

“Let’s not talk about it,” I said.

“Don’t you want to have a son?” she asked in surprise.

“I don’t want to bring children into this world so they will suffer,” I replied curtly.

“You just don’t want me to give you a son.”

I didn’t know what to say in reply, because while still a young boy I had dreamed of my future son.

When I married Maria, I very much wanted us to have a son and not a daughter.

I reasoned that our son would pass on our name to his son and so our whole family would live on, whereas with the birth of a girl it would immediately disppear.

But then a name is just a sound, I thought a while later, and children—I see it in myself—are not much help to their parents.

And I realized, too, that if the Virgin Mary had not given birth to a son, he would not have had to endure such terrible suffering. So why should our son suffer so much in this life?

Now, in my loneliness, I wander through the busy streets, pausing for a long time by the burnt-out building in the city center, recalling Maria and my frail old parents and my son. They capture my imagination, that imagination which I often have difficulty distinguishing from reality.

And Maria’s words still ring in my ears:

“Don’t you want a son? Really?”

I am so exhausted by life that I still don’t know how to reply to her, my unforgettable Maria.

I wish for only one thing: to be dissolved in this world, to be extinguished.

But something is keeping me from departing into that endless expanse; something is keeping me back.

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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The Tree that Bleeds

Vasyl Gabor

All three of us—that is to say, Bendas, Sigeta, and I—had gone through over five months of tough army service when we got news from home that deeply saddened us and brought us closer together.

We learned that Medentsy, who was serving in one of the remote corners of central Asia (so he wrote in his letters), had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

It was evening when we read the letter. The bright red sun was setting behind the barracks, its crimson rays reflected in the windows.

Earlier Bendas had brought half a rucksack of ripe cherries from someone's garden and just then we were polishing them off as we lay in the grass behind the barracks, waiting for Sigeta to come off sentry duty.

He came with the letter, which, in his hurry to join us, he hadn't yet read. He immediately made a bee-line for the cherries, so it was still a while before he opened it.

As he listened to Sigeta, Bendas was grasping a handful of cherries; when he heard about Medentsy, he squeezed them so tightly that the juice squirted over his uniform and streamed thickly through his fingers. In the twilight his hand looked as though it was covered in blood.

We couldn't believe our ears. All kinds of conjectures and suppositions passed through our minds. How could such a thing happen? Could the conditions of his army service have been so unbearable?

Could it be that the constant bullying he was subjected to as a rookie led to his illness?

We thought on: Medentsy was serving on his own and couldn't stand up for himself, whereas we had been lucky—we were together and so the army service was easier to cope with.

None of us for a moment considered that Medentsy might be acting crazy. We knew him well—he couldn't have managed that even if he had wanted to. Right away we resolved to stand by him, whatever condition he was in, and to give him whatever support we could.

A year passed and Medentsy was released from the hospital and discharged from military service on the grounds of ill health. But, according to the letters we received from home, he had become a completely changed man.

When talking with him, you have the impression that he is quite normal. Then all of a sudden he starts to talk about strange things, all kinds of monsters, and trees. His gaze is empty, and you have the impression not only

that he doesn’t see you but that he doesn’t even know who you are. You can’t help feeling that a great void has opened up between you, giving off an icy coldness. With deep sadness you realize what a stranger this Medentsy is becoming to you.

We thought it would be different with us. We were delighted that he was back at home, and we couldn’t wait to get discharged too.

Oh Lord, how happy we were to see Medentsy. But he treated us casually, as though we hadn’t seen each other for just a few minutes, rather than two years. Clearly, Medentsy was still unwell. We continued to visit him. Once, when we asked about his army service, his expression changed markedly. He went pale and said in a quiet voice:

“There was yellow sand everywhere. Blown by the wind, the grains of sand filled the air, and they got into my eyes, my nose, and my mouth, and there was no water.

“Then I caught sight of a road, all lined with flowers. I followed it and came to a big gateway. I knocked and the gate opened. A man came out with a big black book, which he held open. ‘Who are you?’ he asked. I gave him my name. He glanced at the book and said, ‘There’s no one by that name recorded here,’ and he closed the book and went back through the gate, which immediately closed behind him.”

Medentsy didn’t tell us any more, but we realized that he had probably been at death’s door and had survived only by a miracle. We never broached the subject of army service again.

Yes, they were right when they wrote that Medentsy was a changed man, but we hadn’t wanted to believe it then and we still didn’t, because we longed to see the old Medentsy again, the one who could talk for hours on end, telling amazing stories that he had read in books or heard from the old people in whose company we would often find him.

Medentsy was becoming more and more introverted and dejected, and that worried us. We were even more concerned that he was searching for something. For a long time, we didn’t know what that was exactly, but we could tell it was becoming an obsession with him.

The fact that he didn’t share his secret with anyone certainly added to his anxiety. For our part, we didn’t venture to ask any questions. Then, one day, of his own accord he confided in us what it was that was troubling him.

Medentsy was looking in our town for a tree that bled, but he couldn’t find it anywhere. He spoke in such secretive tones that we were afraid to ask why he was looking for it.

After a while, one of us—Bendas, I think it was—remembered that once, before we went into the army, Medentsy had told us about some tree that bled.

Then we all remembered where it was that he had talked about it—by the town library. In front of the library there grew a certain small, exotic tree. None of us, not even Medentsy, knew its name. Its bark was steely

gray in color. It was quite short, and its trunks were so thoroughly twisted and intertwined that they looked like snakes.

This small tree had dried up all of a sudden, and we couldn’t recall what the leaves used to look like. It seemed to keep on growing without any leaves. Could it be this tree that Medentsy occasionally had visions of, we wondered?

But we didn’t say anything to Medentsy, so as not to cause him even greater anxiety. We often joined Medentsy in his search in the town for his tree. We wandered through the suburbs and the town center as the sun mercilessly beat down and the boiling hot tarmac stuck to our shoes like black chewing gum, filling the air with a stifling smell.

On days like this, even the cars went crazy, racing through the streets and throwing up clouds of gray dust in their wake.

Very likely the heat drove Medentsy crazy too, because instead of waiting for it to pass he continued to wander around the town, and we couldn’t leave him on his own.

Medentsy’s tree drove us all a little crazy. We talked about it incessantly, trying to identify all sorts of symbolic meanings and associations, until someone settled us all down with a few curt words or a response that brought us all back to reality.

And then we reasoned soberly that Medentsy probably ought to get medical treatment. But whenever that was mentioned, he began to rant uncontrollably and we had great trouble calming him down.

We realized, sadly, that the hospital he had once been in must have been a living hell for him, if the mere memory of his treatment aroused such panic and fear.

Then one day Medentsy told us he had seen his tree but could not approach it because his way was blocked by a fearsome monster that kept assuming different forms.

With great agitation he told us that it was trying to pierce his chest in order to suck out his blood, so he was forced to run away from it and take refuge at home.

When he woke up in the morning, he felt a wound in his chest, but it was no longer bleeding. Medentsy lifted his shirt and showed us his chest. There was nothing to see, but we nodded, pretending to see an open wound and feeling great sadness.

We sometimes wondered if it would have been better if Medentsy had evaded military service, because then his life would surely have been different, until someone added, “But can one really escape his destiny?”

The monster that was preventing Medentsy from approaching the tree was becoming more and more arrogant. Now his blood wasn’t enough—it strove to control every movement he made, every step he took.

We understood that his illness was worsening, so we made efforts to cheer him up, recalling our childhood pranks and adventures. Then, tactfully, we suggested that he leave his tree alone.

Our words took him by surprise, and he gave a start. He looked frightened and we realized—too late—that Medentsy probably took all our good intentions as manifestations of the sly monster. Abruptly he left us and headed home, as we sadly watched him go.

On another occasion he prayed fervently to God for help, and his prayers alarmed us greatly—there was so much grief and despair in his voice.

At times like this, Medentsy’s quest did not seem unreasonable at all, because it wasn’t the tree he longed to find but something quite different. Once, not having seen Medentsy in town for a long time, we called at his home. Only his mother was there. Tearfully she told us Medentsy had suffered a severe attack and had been taken to the hospital. He never returned home.

We wanted to see him at least once again, and so we set off for the small town where he was receiving treatment. We had the feeling that something was bound to happen that day. I don’t know why, but we decided not to take the local bus to the hospital but to go there on foot.

We were shown the way through a small patch of woodland, but we didn’t end up at the main gate, as we had been told would happen; instead, we found ourselves in an enclosed corner of the courtyard, fenced off by wire netting some five meters high, painted green.

We walked alongside it through tall grass more than waist high. Strangely, the ground on the other side of the fence was trodden flat like the floor of a bird cage, with not a blade of grass to be seen.

Beyond a few trees we could see a long building, its windows reflecting the rays of the sun as it slowly sank behind the mountains. Abruptly, the door of the building opened and strange beings, dressed in dark hospital uniforms, began to emerge into the courtyard. In appearance they were still reminiscent of human beings, but they had long since ceased to be such.

Before us the ghostly figures wandered like sleepwalkers about the courtyard or else stood rooted to the spot, gazing emptily into the distance and perceiving nothing.

Feverishly we searched among them for Medentsy, but they were all so alike that we couldn’t pick him out.

So as not to draw attention to ourselves, we moved on. Then we decided to make our way to the gates, so as to pass along some food for Medentsy.

We walked alongside the green wire-netting fence, but it seemed to be endless, as though it was keeping not only Medentsy but the whole world from us. It was Sigeta first, I think, who said he was very hungry and proposed we take a bite to eat for ourselves.

“But the food is for Medentsy!” objected Bendas.

“We have always shared everything, so why should we draw distinctions between us now?” asked Sigeta, leaving Bendas embarrassed.

“I can’t object, then,” he replied.

Sigeta, it turned out, had brought a bottle along with him. Moving a short distance from the green wire-netting fence, we sat down on the soft moss under the trees and began to eat our lunch. Scarcely speaking, we ate in silence, but when the bottle was passed around we all drank to Medentsy. Having flung the empty bottle at the fence, Bendas suddenly proposed that we go back home.

“Are you drunk, or what?” Sigeta asked him. “How can we go home without first seeing Medentsy? Why did we go to all that trouble to get here?”

“So we could understand that we don’t have to see him,” said Bendas, and he set off at random into the woods.

“I don’t want to let him go off on his own,” said Sigeta, and set off after Bendas, and I followed closely behind.

We caught up with Bendas and together we walked in silence all the way to the station. We were all thinking of Medentsy, of how he was left in a world foreign to us, bleeding on the boundary between forgetfulness and the meaningless progression of an alien life.

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It's Our Destiny, My Love

Vasyl Gabor

Everything had been agreed in advance and we were ecstatic at the prospect that we would at last make our escape from this accursed hell. The only thing that concerned us, perhaps, was that we had paid the people we were dealing with in advance and now they might not come to meet us at the appointed place.

We were not allowed to take anything with us, no possessions. In case we were caught, everything was supposed to look as though my wife and I and our child had gone for a walk in the woods and got lost. As if we had come out onto a country road, a truck had come by, and the driver, taking pity on the child, had picked us up to take us into town. He must have lost his way, and that's why we ended up at the airport.

It was actually at the airport checkpoint that our fate would be decided. If we managed to get past it, the way would be open to the plane, which was supposed to be waiting for us in a corner of the airfield. Afterwards, everything would depend on us alone, on whether we managed to reach the plane in complete darkness, since we had to avoid illuminated areas so as not to be spotted by a guard. We had learned the route to the plane by heart, drawing it in the sand a thousand times as we wandered along the deserted river bank. We were afraid to commit our secret to paper.

Many times we fell to thinking that our plan was scarcely feasible; everything depended on sheer blind chance. But we decided not to give up. We judged that we would stand a better chance of success if we flew out at night.

We are doing this for our daughter's sake, my wife said. If we are fated to reach freedom, God will be on our side, but if not, we will perish together.

I agreed with her, though I was uneasy about deciding our child's fate without her involvement. But then our daughter is still young, I persuaded myself; she can't understand the total hopelessness of the hell we find ourselves in.

Naturally, we had heard a good deal about courageous people who had longed to escape from here, but none of them had achieved their goal in the end. Those who returned faced a terrible life—total humiliation, misery, and the filthiest jobs. My wife and I often thought that they were intentionally not imprisoned, because they had dared to attempt escape and here they were, failures, and their mere presence was a discouragement to others. But these were not faint-hearted people—they were strong and determined. We

even knew some of them. We didn’t possess a fraction of their strength, and we wondered whether it wouldn’t be better to reconcile ourselves to our fate.

“No,” insisted my wife. “We are not going to stay here. We will escape.”

We prayed to God that we would get past the checkpoint, and we prepared ourselves for the appointed time: either the beginning of freedom, or our downfall.

We had heard a good deal about unsuccessful escape attempts. We had been told dreadful things. Some had attempted to escape from here across the impassable mountains. They were expert rock climbers, and in addition to the natural obstacles—sheer rock faces, ledges, and glaciers—they had succeeded in overcoming all kinds of man-made traps. These were activated by concealed devices, and many a courageous fugitive plunged into a black abyss or was crushed by falling boulders; many were killed by man-made avalanches. The greatest obstacle for the fugitives was Three Saints’ Gorge, a kilometer in depth and twenty meters across. Many people who reached it fell to the ground in despair and burst into tears, losing all hope of achieving salvation. There were also those who tried to throw ropes across the gorge in order to reach the other side. Some even managed to get the rope across, but then incredible things happened. Some invisible force would burn the rope through just as the fugitives reached the middle of the gorge, and they would plunge to their death in the abyss. According to legend, only the Three Saints were able to cross this gorge: so great was their faith that they crossed the black abyss through the air.

We did not attempt to escape to freedom across the mountains with our child, although this seemed the safest route to us. Two other routes went across an ocean of sand and water, but we did not want to set off in these directions only to see our child die of thirst and heat-stroke before our very eyes, so we rejected them.

There were two more routes, through the forest and by air. In fact, many people had attempted to escape to freedom both these ways. These two routes seemed to be the easiest of all, but in reality they were the most difficult. They were heavily guarded, and it was here that people perished in the greatest numbers. Yet, knowing this, people still kept attempting to escape.

We had rejected the forest route right away. There was a prohibited zone in the forest, where packs of hunger-crazed dogs prowled. They devoured each other, which made them even more vicious. To negotiate a zone that swarmed with dogs was hardly an easy task, but the main challenge was still to come. Further on there were frontier zones divided off by barbed wire. There were several of these zones, and the last of them was situated above a gigantic ditch that people called the Subterranean Wall of China, That ditch seethed with poisonous snakes. Beyond it lay an unknown land, and everyone believed that on the other side there was a free country and eagerly sought to reach it, forgetting the danger.

There were plenty of resourceful people among the courageous

fugitives. Some of them, the most dexterous, crossed the prohibited zone by making their way from tree to tree with the aid of a rope thrown round the trunks. They had to judge every move carefully, as they were followed all the way by enraged dogs barking crazily and clawing at the trees. If the rope was incorrectly aimed or not firmly attached so that it came away together with the fugitive, a terrible death awaited that person. Even before reaching the ground, he would be torn to pieces by thousands of razor-like jaws.

Then there were the frontier zones to be negotiated. Among the fugitives were people who managed to make strong cages out of wooden poles as thick as a man’s arm. They moved along enclosed in the cages, lifting them just off the ground with wooden crossbars. All around them, dogs went wild, rushing at the cages and gnawing at the poles. The adventurers kept them at bay by stabbing them with knives through the narrow gaps between the poles. The wounded dogs yelped in pain and leapt back from the cage; then their brethren, smelling blood, pounced on the wounded and instantly tore them to pieces.

Occasionally fugitives managed to reach the last zone, above the snake pit. They thought they could cast a rope across it, but they couldn’t, for one simple reason. The ravenous dogs would not leave them alone even for a second. Time after time they pushed the fugitives and their cages into the pit if they approached it too closely. Blinded by hunger, they themselves plunged into the pit after the people. Nothing remained of the adventurers, and the dogs, too, soon perished from the venomous snake bites.

We could not understand why this hell was so closely guarded, or why it was created. Or why we were obliged to spend our short human lives in it.

To be killed by dogs or to see them tear our child apart—we did not want that either. We were told other amazing things about the dogs. Apparently no other creatures had been bred in the zone beyond the forest for a long time, so the dogs were obliged to eat one another. Sometimes they tore apart unwary bitches and their blind newborn pups who had just come into the world on open terrain.

The dogs aroused disgust in us, and we focused on escaping by plane. Yes, of course, there had been plenty of others just as clever as we were. The first of them had attempted to build flying machines themselves in order to escape to freedom, but they had been mercilessly destroyed in the air. Others had tried bribing pilots—a whole industry had sprung up in this sphere, for there were many entrepreneurs hungry for cash. They were able to make arrangements in the appropriate quarters, and people were willing to pay large sums of money as long as they could fly away.

Frequently everything seemed to be working quite well. The escapees reached the aircraft and took off, rejoicing in their anticipated freedom. But everything ended up very mundanely. The planes landed in open airfields crowded with inquisitive citizens who roared with laughter as the fugitives disembarked and returned to their homes.

They immediately joined the lowest strata of the population, losing all their possessions and their last hope of salvation. We were certain nothing like that would happen to us, as we had arranged that there would be no one on board the aircraft besides the three of us and the pilot. My wife and I had discussed our further plan of action down to the minutest details. Most important for us was to evade the checkpoint, find the aircraft, and take off. But my doubts had begun to grow more and more.

“No,” I said to my wife. “It’s madness to fly out from here. After all, people have tried to escape by plane before us, but no one has ever heard of anyone managing to do it.”

“But if some courageous people did manage to do that, how would anyone find out about it?” my wife inquired, and I had to agree with her. We continued to wait patiently for the appointed hour.

And once more I began to doubt whether our plans could succeed. That final step that we had decided to take if we failed did not seem to me to be a means of salvation. For suicide does not liberate a person. We would not be free even if we perished together, for our bodies and our souls would forever belong to that space from which people could never break free.

“You are faint-hearted. We will break free. Just wait and see,” my wife insisted.

I was inspired by the strength of her faith, and I began to convince myself that it would come true. At night I would dream that the appointed time was approaching and that we were being picked up at the agreed place. We successfully avoided the checkpoint, reached the plane, and boarded it. The pilot started up the engine and slowly taxied the plane out to the concrete runway. Then, suddenly, all the security spotlights blinded us, and even above the roar of the engine we could hear the shouts of the guards and the shots they were firing, the barking of dogs and the clatter of steel-capped boots. They were pursuing us from all directions, and we begged the pilot to take off more quickly, but the plane just could not get off the ground. At this point I always woke up and for a long time could not calm my racing pulse.

I didn’t tell my wife anything about my dreams. I always recalled the Three Saints, whose faith was so strong that they crossed the gorge through the air, and I kept thinking that we would only ever escape from this space if our faith was like theirs, for my wife’s faith alone is not enough. I knew one thing for certain: even if we are destined to remain here, we will always keep trying to escape, however many times we fail in the attempt.

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The Aspen in the Garden of Gethsemane

Vasyl Gabor

He no longer had the strength to bear the heavy burden of the curse that he had voluntarily brought upon himself. Before casting the cold snake of a noose around his neck, Judas Iscariot glanced for the last time at the stunted apple tree near which he had spoken with the Teacher, falling on his knees before him.

"My Lord Jesus Christ," he had said then, "I do not even love my own dear mother or father, nor my brothers and sisters, as much as I love you. Until now I have concealed my feelings, but now I must tell all, in order to reveal what is going on in my heart. It grieves me, Teacher, that you will undergo a terrible punishment, sacrificing yourself for the sake of people who are in the thrall of this world's emptiness, and who are not worth even a hair from your head. I understand everything, everything, but tell me just one thing: what punishment befits one who betrays your innocent blood?"

Jesus silently pondered these words. His gaze was turned to the stunted apple tree—twisted and deformed by a storm, it had grown crookedly. The trunk of the apple tree was somewhat reminiscent of a bent knee. On that bulging bend, in a cranny that had been filled with earth by wind and driving rain, a couple of flimsy blackberry shoots had sprouted. This was what had caught Jesus's eye.

Dusk was descending in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here, away from the din and roar of the streets of Jerusalem, all alone with one's own thoughts beneath the bright starry sky, among the olive groves and the occasional apple trees, one could find rest for the soul and regain one's calm and composure. Jesus loved to wander in this place. He always walked alone, without his disciples, but on that day Judas summoned the courage to approach him and, falling on his knees, he began to plead with him:

"My Lord Jesus Christ, hear me."

And then he spoke of everything that was torturing him and waited for a reply. The man from Nazareth remained silent and contemplated the stunted apple tree with its swollen branch sprouting two slender blackberry shoots.

"Teacher, why do you not speak? Are you really surprised by my questions? Do you really think they come from the devil? After all, you know very well how often people break their word and betray one another. Children even betray their parents and sell their graves to their enemies."

The cool evening breeze wafted intoxicating aromas of apple blossom and fresh green grass. Judas grasped the Teacher's right hand, now pressing

it to his cheeks, now covering it with passionate kisses. Jesus did not snatch his hand away, nor did he get Judas to stand up; he continued to silently contemplate the apple tree, covered in its modest blossoms.

“Lord, I know, you have eyes to see, and you have ears and hear all, and I did not need to speak of my love for you. But sometimes the serpent of doubt creeps into the soul: and what if you nevertheless do not know of my love and go to your death not knowing of it?”

As soon as he had spoken, immediately he regretted those words. As long as he held back his feelings from everybody and confided in no one, they sounded sweet, and they were pure and clear. But the moment he pronounced them, they immediately faded, and in uttering them he had lost something valuable.

Jesus freed his hand and with a gesture ordered Judas to arise. The latter obeyed the order at once. He stood face to face with Jesus and looked at him despondently. Judas’s dark, shining eyes were filled with sadness.

“Teacher, forgive me the temerity of my foolish words, and hear me out. All your disciples think I am seized by the spirit of arrogance. It is not true, Lord. I am not filled with self-pride; that is alien to me. I do always wear a frown, but that is merely a mask that conceals from strangers my love for you.”

They remained silent for a while. Judas could hear his heart pounding inside his chest, sending the blood coursing through his veins; it throbbed in his temples.

Now the stars were shining in the sky. The bright moon cast its light on the calm face of Jesus.

“What is destined to be, will be, and there is no stopping it, no going back. And Jesus is now ready for his journey to the cross,” thought Judas, and he recalled the Pharisees and their evil preaching. And he was enraged that they would speak mendaciously of Christ’s passion, and his anger made the blood rush to his head.

“Lord, you say, ‘If someone strikes you on the right cheek, show him the left one also.’ I have obediently followed this commandment, but when I see the Pharisees I cannot be tolerant, and I must oppose evil. Teacher, they themselves prompted me to consider what punishment a person should suffer for betraying your innocent blood. And I realized that this punishment must be so terrible that the mere recollection of it would cause a shiver of fear to run down anyone’s spine. And I know how it should be inflicted.”

Judas spoke hurriedly and with fervor. His face turned purple from the agitation and this showed even by moonlight.

“Lord, if my words are unwelcome to you, I ask you not to banish me but to hear me out. To you my thoughts may seem unworthy, I do not know.

“One thing I can say: I do whatever my heart commands me to do. So hear what I have decided.” Judas swallowed hard and mopped his sweaty brow. His hands were shaking slightly. He gripped the hem of his robe firmly.

“Lord, these thoughts are terrible to me as well, but I must confide in you. Teacher, fate has ordained that you shall be seized and crucified. Therefore I have decided to go to the Pharisees, with your knowledge and your consent, to tell them I will betray you. And I will betray you for a few pieces of silver. They will readily agree, for they rejoice in every thought, in every person, opposed to you and your teaching. All the more will they rejoice that I, one of your disciples, have deserted you. But they will not realize, Lord, that I value them and their teaching at just a few pieces of silver.”

Jesus calmly turned and set off down the hill. Judas caught up with him and fell on his knees before him. His shoulders were shaking as he wept silently. When he raised his head, tears were running down his cheeks.

“My Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me, I beg you—do not be angry with me. Hear my confused thoughts, for it is in your name, Son of God, that I want to suffer dreadful torture—to be cursed. If people learn that one of your disciples has betrayed you, they will curse my name constantly and they will banish me from their homes. Observing my torture, no one will ever want to betray your innocent blood. Do not banish me, Lord; permit me to suffer this punishment. I accept it willingly, so that you will understand how much I love you. Further, Jesus, I will voluntarily accept the burden of the curse from one of your disciples. For if one of them was to betray you, as fate has ordained, he will not now do it. Therefore, I beg you—accept my sacrifice. And when you eat the Passover with us, your disciples, tell them that there sits among us one who will betray you. They will ask his name, but do not tell them, let it remain a secret until the time comes. And when I ask, ‘Lord, can it be me?’ and you say: ‘You have said it!’—this shall be a sign to me that you have accepted my sacrifice, and I will go to the Pharisees. And then all your disciples will say—and they will be deeply convinced of it—that I have become possessed of the devil and that I have betrayed you out of pride.”

Jesus left Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane and went to his disciples, who were sitting by an open fire.

“Oh dear Lord God, how unbearably the burden of this curse oppresses me, how mercilessly the cold serpent of the noose burns me!” Judas weeps, and through his tears he sees, as in a mist, the stunted apple tree and the two flimsy blackberry shoots growing from its swollen branch. The blackberry shoots will probably bear fruit, and in early summer some passer-by wandering into the Garden of Gethsemane will come across the apple tree, and he will be most surprised to see a blackberry bush growing on it and producing fruit. But its roots will certainly not be healthy, and sooner or later it will wither.

When Christ left him alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas was seized by severe doubts. Had it been necessary to mention his terrible thoughts to the Savior? Yet he who seeks to be saved on Judgment Day will

believe firmly in the Kingdom of Heaven and the teachings of the Lord, and he will not contemplate betrayal. If anyone does betray Jesus, perhaps it is better for the black sheep to be excluded from the flock. One should fear only God alone, but I am proposing to Jesus a mortal fear. Surely it is the devil that is prompting me in this, not love. I have doubted myself and I have doubted others. I thought that people, confused by the cunning Pharisees, would not have the fear of God such as it is supposed to be but such as it is not supposed to be. It is supposed to enter one’s heart and soul. Everyone will see this mortal fear, the fear of being cursed; it will be before their eyes always, and they will be fearful of betraying the Savior.

“Perhaps I have indeed succumbed to pride,” thought Judas presently, “if I seek to oppose the fear of God with mortal fear. But I have not yet done so—it is not too late to renounce my intention. Surely Jesus left me in the garden without saying a word in order to give me the opportunity to reconsider everything and to repent. That is so, and I must go as quickly as possible to the Teacher, fall at his feet, and ask forgiveness.”

He set off but stopped beside the apple tree.

“How will he receive my declaration of love for him? He will certainly think that everything I said before was hypocritical, mere empty words.”

He shook his head with its shock of black hair, to drive away these unpleasant thoughts. He was inwardly disturbed, and he did not know what he should now do.

“Perhaps I should go to Jesus, anyway, and tell him all about my indecision, and he will reassure me and forgive me.”

Then this thought was overtaken by another: “What if the Lord thinks that I, fearing torture, am irresolute in my convictions and shames me in front of the disciples?”

His glance fell once more on the apple tree. The moon bathed it in a silver light, caressing it, and Judas recalled the Serpent that tempted Eve. If it were not for Eve’s weakness, if she had not persuaded Adam to taste the fruit of knowledge, would the human race have experienced such suffering? And, come to think of it, was not he, Judas, reminiscent of that serpent, even though he was doing everything with the best of intentions? So he must dissuade himself from carrying out that dreadful intention, and he must go to Christ and beg for forgiveness. For evidently the Serpent and his cunning are present here also.

“Dear Lord, grant me steadfastness, help me to withstand the wiles of the devil.”

The stars flickered in the dark blue sky, the moon flooded the earth with its light, and in the Garden of Gethsemane it was as bright as on a fine day.

Somewhere in the distance, as though beyond a thick wall, the croaking of frogs could periodically be heard, and it surprised Judas. At first their croaking seemed meaningless, but he perceived in it a harmonious, coordinated chorus of praise to the heavenly Creator. They were not

troubled that someone could be betrayed; the main thing was to sing their thanks to God.

“If only one could just pray like that and not think, not torture oneself.” Judas brushed his cheeks with his hands and, kneeling down near the apple tree, he recited the Lord’s Prayer over and over again. The longer he prayed, the more relieved he felt and the more his doubts receded.

“His fate will be as it is ordained. Perhaps I am suffering needlessly? Jesus will not want to accept my sacrifice, he will not want my name to be cursed forever. It is certain that everything will come to pass as it is intended—there is no point in suffering.”

He was grateful that unintelligent creatures—the frogs—had persuaded him to praise God in prayer. Surely Christ would not be willing to accept such a terrible sacrifice from him. For the mere thought of one’s name being cursed for eternity is sufficient to instill horror.

“But why should Jesus not accept my sacrifice, if I willingly consent to it and wish to do it for the greater good? No, no, there is no need to think about this; it is better to pray once more, for no good deed can justify betrayal.”

He went towards the fire, whispering the Lord’s Prayer. The glow of the open fire was scarcely visible among the trees. The disciples were sleeping peacefully around it. Whenever one of them awoke, he probably threw another branch on it, so the flames were not dying out but quietly smoldered in the peace of the night. Judas lay down to sleep at the feet of Christ.

The next day the disciples asked Jesus where they should prepare the Passover for him. And he told them to go into the city and find a man bearing a pitcher of water and to follow him. And when he entered a house, they were to ask its owner: “Our Teacher asks: ‘Where is my guest room, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?’” And he would show them the guest room.

The disciples carried out Christ’s command. That day Judas busied himself with all kinds of chores, now running to buy flour, now seeking out wine, now washing the floor. Something seemed to be torturing him and he sought to relieve the pain through hard work.

When all was prepared and the disciples had taken their places at table, anxiety seized Judas’s soul. With bated breath he looked at Christ. The Lord was silent, and this long silence threw Judas into a fever. The sweat stood out on his brow, and his heart beat so hard that he was afraid someone would sense this tell-tale beating; unobtrusively he rested his chest against the table.

“Truly I say to you,” Christ began, “One of you who eats with me will betray me.” At this they were all struck speechless, and then they growled menacingly:

“Who is it, Lord? Tell us the traitor’s name. Name the renegade!” Peter seized a knife. His eyes were aflame with rage.

“Name him, Jesus, name him!” the others demanded, their faces, too, burning with hate.

Judas felt his shirt sticking to his body.

“No, I won’t betray Jesus. I am not capable of it. I have taken on too heavy a burden. Let Christ think I have broken my word, let Him consider my confession worthless, but I will not carry out what I had intended. I will fall at his feet and confess.”

“In truth, the Son of Man will go as it is written of him,” said Jesus, “but woe to him who betrays Him; it would be better for him if he had not been born!”

“My sacrifice is sincere, and Christ accepts it. And if he says it would be better for his betrayer to have never been born, then I must carry out my intention. I must submit to that dreadful punishment.

“But what if Jesus is testing me, giving me an opportunity to confess?” Judas suddenly thought.

He mopped the sweat from his face and took a breath. All the time that Jesus was speaking, Judas was afraid to look Him in the eye. Eventually he summoned the courage to look up. Jesus was calm. It was difficult to believe that in a few days’ time he would accept the terrible punishment of the crucifixion for the sake of people not worth a hair on his head. Jesus’s eyes radiated love and warmth, and his movements were unhurried.

“Lord, tell us the name of the traitor! Name him!” the disciples were insistent.

“Is it not me, Teacher?” asked Judas in a quiet voice.

“You have said it,” replied Christ.

Judas did not feel his trembling legs bear him from the room. Tears ran involuntarily down his cheeks. He walked through the dark streets of Jerusalem and went to the Pharisees.

“Dear Lord, no one will ever learn the truth about me. No one will wish to mention my name or to say a prayer for my soul. Lord, give me strength to bear my cross! For unless it was your will, Jesus would not have accepted my sacrifice.”

And again the thought came to him: was the Teacher not giving him an opportunity to resolve everything himself, was he not testing him? Then Judas dismissed the idea. He whispered that all was God’s will, and he prayed.

He walked on through the narrow streets, turning now left, now right. They seemed endless, boundless, like a maze from which everyone must find their own way out. It may be that there was only one way out but various streets lead to it. And again it seemed to him that Jesus had deliberately spoken of a traitor in order to test him, Judas. Jesus wanted him to confess of his own accord.

His legs were taking him to the Pharisees, and he could not now turn back and return to Jesus; he no longer had the strength. And now everything

was happening so quickly. He had told the Pharisees that he would betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, and they had agreed. They rejoiced that the Messiah had been deserted by one of his disciples. Everyone tried to shake Judas’s right hand and several of them even embraced him.

“So where should we seek the Nazarene?” they asked.

“In the Garden of Gethsemane,” replied Judas without hesitation. He was convinced that Christ would be in that very place, perhaps standing beside the stunted apple tree with the gnarled trunk, on which two frail blackberry shoots were growing.

As he walked at the head of the armed throng, he was painfully aware that he was about to see the Teacher for the last time but would not be able to say farewell to Him, that he would not be able to fall on his knees before Him and kiss His hand. This distressed him so much that he bit his lips until they bled and dug his nails into the palm of his hand yet did not feel any pain. He struggled to conceal his emotions, in case the Pharisees became suspicious. In an instant, the thought came to him that there was a way for him to bid farewell to Jesus. He stopped and spoke to the mob:

“The one that I kiss will be Jesus.”

He said this, and then he froze at the thought that his kiss would be one not of farewell but of betrayal.

He went pale and his eyes looked wild. In a moment, in just an instant, he would fall to the ground, grovel in the dust, and gnash stones so that none of this would happen, so everything would be reversed. But it was clear that fate had already determined everything and that there was no turning back. So as not to succumb to weakness, he shouted at the top of his voice:

“What are you waiting for?! Come on!! Hurry!!” He ran, and the mob could scarcely keep pace with him.

Jesus was standing by the apple tree, as though He had expected them. He looked sorrowfully at Judas, who felt his strength ebbing and his legs giving way.

“Why have you come, my friend?” asked Jesus in a loud voice.

Judas trembled at these words. They radiated a fresh, moist warmth, and Judas felt his strength returning.

“Hail, Teacher!” he said faintly, and he kissed Christ.

Hurling themselves at Jesus, the mob uttered a roar, but Judas no longer heard or saw anything. He hurried away, running into the darkness of the city to return to the Pharisees the thirty pieces of silver that burnt his palm like fire.

Here and there groups of people were standing on the street, talking animatedly. He heard someone say:

“One of the disciples has betrayed the Messiah!”

The cold serpent of the noose wound itself around the neck of Judas, and he glanced at the stunted apple tree with its gnarled trunk where he had

spoken with Jesus for the last time, where he had bid Him farewell for the last time.

“Lord, forgive me my terrible sin, save my soul, Lord!” Forgive me for not possessing the strength to bear my cross. It is unbearable, this cross of the people’s curse.

Hot tears flowed down Judas’s cheeks. An aspen leaf rustled treacherously above his head, the only aspen in the Garden of Gethsemane. Who knows how it had taken root and grown here. Could a seed have been carried on the wind, or by a bird, or by a person, so it grew alone among the olive trees and the apple trees, though it is quite out of place in an orchard? Judas continued to pray, whispering through his parched lips:

“My Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me also my excessive love for You…” These were the last words of Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ.

It was a peaceful, moonlit night in the Garden of Gethsemane. The full moon bathed the aspen in a silvery light as it treacherously rustled its leaves above the head of a silent Judas.

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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The High Water

Vasyl Gabor

And it was here, in this very place, in these mountains reaching up to the skies, that I began to be pursued by the high water. I could hear it getting closer. If I closed my eyes for an instant, I could see a colossal wall of muddy water overwhelming me and engulfing the mountains at incredible speed. I saw the massive volume of water destroying everything in its path, spinning around in a wild maelstrom uprooted trees, roofs torn from buildings, and all manner of household implements, livestock, and domestic animals—cows, pigs, chickens, dogs, and cats. Amidst all this, human beings, dead and alive, were also being whirled round. The living desperately clutched at the branches of trees, planks of wood, and logs that were floating in the water, in an instinctive attempt to save themselves and their dear ones. But could anyone survive under the pressure of such deep water? The roar of the water grew louder and louder; it sounded as though some gigantic wounded beast was approaching. I could even hear the cold breathing of the watery beast, and then I quickly opened my eyes to see my last moments. Suddenly the vision disappeared, and peace and quiet reigned all around. From time to time it was interrupted by the deep buzz of a bumble-bee or the pleasant hum of a honey-bee. The blue mountains could be seen in the distance, and above them an eagle was circling, a tiny dot scarcely perceptible against the clear sky. Only the birds will survive the high water, I thought. But who knows whether they will be able to remain airborne for such a long time. As their wings become stiff with exhaustion, the birds will plunge like stones into the water's bottomless depths. For there is no escape from the high water.

I try to fathom what it is that is disturbing me, why I began to have this vision of water, purifying water, water that brings people into the world and carries them away. Can it be that the very water that created the world will also cause it to perish? Terrified, I close my eyes and again I see the gigantic wave, like a wide wall many kilometers high. Roaring, it is rushing towards the mountains, and I think of my parents, my brother and his family, I think of my wife and our children, all of whom I left behind in the valley. I run after them. I arrive, all out of breath. And they are all very peacefully sitting around in the dining room, calm as you like, chatting away happily while sitting at the table and enjoying their food and drink. I call out to them that the high water is coming, but they look at me in surprise, almost as though there were something wrong with me.

I see only the fear in my wife’s eyes—not for herself, but for our children. I ask my father and brother to bind together with wire and chains the planks that have been lying in two piles in the garden, drying in the sun, for years now. My brother gives my father a quizzical look, but the latter gives him a nod, indicating that he should do as I ask. We only just manage to tie together the two piles of planks and get on the raft, taking with us a little bread and two axes, when we hear the frightful roar of the high water. Nobody had seen anything like it before. People began to rush about crazily, hurrying to untie the cattle and bring in or out some valuables, while others do the opposite, shutting themselves indoors.

Father tied us all to one rope and then to the raft, and just then we caught sight of the gigantic wave, so high it half blotted out the sky. Nothing will be left of us when that wall of water falls on us, I thought involuntarily. Amazingly, the water engulfs us and then lifts us, raft and all, and in a crazy maelstrom throws us up to the surface. And we all survive, though we are swamped by filthy, salty water. Oh God! All sorts of stuff is floating about—so much of it! In the whirling maelstrom we see people and terrified cattle, but we can’t hear either human voices or the bellowing of the beasts above the water’s roar. We push away the tree trunks and drive away the frightened livestock from our raft, to prevent them from capsizing it. Under the weight of our bodies the raft is already sitting quite low in the water, and the waves submerge it time and again, so if it were not for the fact that we are tied to it, we would be swept away into the inky black depths.

Survivors spotting our raft began to swim toward it from all directions, their eyes blazing maniacally. To them our raft was the last hope of salvation. We realized that if they climbed aboard we would all perish, because the raft would either capsize or sink. We exchanged glances among ourselves. We all knew that if we wanted to survive we would have to repel the people from our raft—our neighbors, our kin, and our best friends. We would even need to use the axes, because the poles would not be enough—the people we drove off would keep trying to clamber onto the raft again and again. We knew that once we raised the axes against someone, we would become murderers. Was it worth surviving, in that case? And then, even if we managed to survive, I thought, wouldn’t we be merely prolonging the agony of dying? After all, our bread would run out and we would be left alone in the middle of the sea created by the filthy, salty high water. What would our fate be then?

The shouting of the people got louder, and dripping wet hands grasped at our raft as the first people began to clamber onto it.

“Push them off! Push them off!” shouted our womenfolk inaudibly. “Save our children!”

The axes trembled in our hands.

“I can’t do it!” shouts my brother. Like them, he is shouting too, but I can’t hear his words.

“Neither can I!” says my father, shaking his head.

We drive the terrified people off with the poles; we are soaked in sweat and water, and they keep swimming towards the raft. Our arms are already becoming numb, and all our strength is deserting us.

“Oh God, if they get onto the raft we’ll all perish,” shout the women. We still can’t hear their voices above the roar of the water, but we can read their words on their lips and in their eyes, full of despair and terror.

And we know it will be as our women say, since there are crazed looks in the eyes of the people who want to be saved, and wild, hoarse screams struggle to escape from their throats. All that is left of our former fellow villagers, our best friends and neighbors, is their human form. The high water has turned them into animals. But wait a moment, are we really any better? Perhaps we are the animals, because we are cruelly driving people away from our raft instead of offering them a helping hand.

And then our father fell, and they started to drag him into the water. How fortunate that he was tied to us by the rope. We rush to his aid and strike at the arms of the attackers with the butts of the axes. We rescue our father, but he is hardly breathing. Blood is flowing from the scratches on his face. The women are crying.

“Leave our raft alone!” we keep shouting, but our attackers don’t hear us and clamber up.

We know that our raft is an uncertain means of survival, yet it gives us at least some faint hope. But more and more people are trying to get aboard.

I can’t watch this frightful vision any longer, and I open my eyes. The vision disappears, but I can still hear the roar of the rushing high water in the distance.

I can’t understand why it is pursuing me. I try to think about something else, to get it out of my head, but it steals up on me like a gust of wind, making itself felt like a gentle breath of air, which is enough to strike fear into my very soul. It seems to me that I used to experience feelings like this when I was fifteen years old. For a long time then I kept having the same dream again and again. I dreamt that I was being led through a cemetery by someone who was very close to me and yet was a stranger, who was showing me the graves of my descendants. I see the names of members of my family carved on the headstones, with the dates of their birth and their death below: the year 6500, the year 6900. I was surprised and gratified to see how prolific our family turned out to be, but I was terribly afraid to look around, since I knew that my own grave was behind me. I was gripped by fear at the very thought that I would see the date of my own death on a headstone. At that point, I started to run. First I ran through the whole cemetery, then through the town. The town was large and empty, like the cemetery—its buildings and roads were black. Only when I collapsed, exhausted from running and not far from our house, did I see that the road and our building were different in color. At this point I always

woke up, with incredible relief and joy in my heart that I had not looked round and seen the year of my death on a gravestone.

Ah, I thought, so this dream was not pointless—it was a premonition of danger. In those days of my youth, that alien force could not get the better of me, and it left me in peace. But now it had returned and was trying to force the vision of the high water on me. Of course, I know very well that it can end only in death—but does anyone want to see his own demise, or that of other people?

True, initially the idea of committing suicide had come to my mind, so as to obliterate the vision of the high water absolutely. But, I thought, in that act I would discover only my own powerlessness and weakness, and in the end would not avert the coming of the high water. What disturbed me most was that by this act I would not only distress those dearest to me, but I would leave them to face the high water on their own. When it comes, I want to be by their side—and my sense that it is approaching is ever more keen. In despair I wipe my face and squint. Once more I see myself with my family and my brother with his family and our elderly parents on the raft, driven by the waves to the farthest edge of the wall of water that extends over many kilometers. It begins to dawn on me that the high water is carrying with it all that is living and non-living on the earth, like a wheel destroying everything and crushing everything into a mire. Is it really our turn now to hurtle into the black abyss? No, no! I shake my head, banishing the vision as my heart starts to race and my hands tremble. Why should it be me that suffers all this? Why can’t I get rid of these terrifying premonitions? And why did the vision of the high water start to appear here, of all places, in the mountains, which one would think cannot be threatened by any water? Are they the first to sense our demise, and are they already weeping over our final days?

Don’t come, high water, I whisper faintly, and I find that I am ridiculous: for it is already on its way and nothing can stop it now...

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Lonely Women

Vasyl Gabor

You can't breathe—it's stifling in a department where all the workers are women. Most of them have grown old here as well, and it often seems that misery rules in this place. When you are always in the company of such lonely women, you anticipate that a similar fate awaits you, too. Yet they are all wonderful people and good housekeepers, except for being excessively modest, shy, and indecisive. They never go anywhere, knowing only the way to work and back home again, so they have never managed to find a fiancé and in their hearts they bear a great grudge against this world and this life. When they see that you are still young and not yet withering away here in the department, they want to advise you to chuck this job, simply to tear yourself away from this loathsome place, because out there—somewhere else—you might just meet someone and marry him and then you would have your own family, have children. But actually they are envious that, unlike them, you can still be happy, and because they feel that way, they are angry with themselves; at such times they become impatient and pick on one another over matters of no consequence, which inevitably leads to squabbles and ends up with everyone involved breaking down and weeping hysterically. On days like this, their boss, an unhappy woman no different from them, sends those who have been quarrelling home early. The following day they come to work feeling guilty and tearfully apologize to one another, and then from their bags they take out a delicious pie or cake (there's never a shortage of coffee in the department, by the way) and invite everyone to come to the table and help themselves. Some of those present rather timidly suggest to the boss that another kind of contribution might not be amiss, and then those who had been involved in the squabbling blush and lower their gaze in embarrassment, because they have actually brought along some of the strong stuff. But you know in advance that the boss will very firmly say "no," and indeed she does. That's because on one occasion, you surmise, she must have agreed to it; then, after finishing off a bottle of cognac, and eager to maintain their feminine daintiness, they went home and behind closed doors were bored out of their minds, even more so than before, and no doubt quietly went on drinking. To shut everything out. And then it occurs to you that when the boss realized these unhappy women might become addicted, she banned them from bringing any form of alcohol to work. You imagine how the women used to come to work after such binges—quite depressed, with aching heads, yet all trying hard to appear

cheerful and happy, though aware of the futility of the act they were putting on and asking themselves despairingly, “Oh God, when will this comedy they call life come to an end?” When you first came to work in the department, you still witnessed the aftermath of rowdy birthday parties, but the boss banned birthday celebrations as well, because every year brought more gray hairs, progressively more difficult to dye convincingly, more wrinkles on the face and neck, progressively more difficult to mask with rouge. And you watch the women’s complexions change as they age along with the women themselves. Nothing can restore their former freshness now, though their cheeks may momentarily acquire a pinkish glow if they drink a glass of cognac—but the boss is adamant.

Sometimes you wonder what keeps these lonely women in the department (and you too, of course). After all, the pay here is minimal, and the prospects are not great—you can become a senior worker in the department, and that’s it. And it isn’t likely that one of them will be made head of department, since there is only one department and it’s already got a head their own age—anyway, that position is usually filled by an external appointment.

Is your work actually of use to anyone, you sometimes wonder. After all, people live quite happily without it, and you wonder why the state created this department and others like it in every large city in the country. And you remember reading somewhere (was it in Kafka?) that in ancient China, the village assembly used to elect one of their number to the position of community idler. He would sit in the shade with a cool drink while all the others toiled away under the baking sun (building the Great Wall, perhaps?). You try to understand why the ancient Chinese did this but you can’t concentrate, because something else is occupying your mind: in contrast to the idler, you dutifully come to work day in and day out. All day you work conscientiously, but you don’t actually gain anything at all from it, do you? And since to you your work seems to be of no use to anyone, your arms drop to your sides, you lose heart, and you even begin to envy that community idler back in ancient China his ability to accept his role so philosophically. At times like these, you feel the lack of air in that stifling department, which often seems to be a living creature that has hypnotized all of you here, binding you forever in chains, like slaves in a galley. And you no longer have the strength to sit here. You haven’t! No, you have not! You want to tear yourself away, to escape, just following your nose, but you can’t, because you feel completely deprived of your own free will. This is also the effect of that living creature, the department. You try to cool down by thinking other thoughts; you tell yourself, don’t fill your head with all kinds of nonsense. All these notions about the department are pure nonsense. You’re not really slaves. Aren’t you doing things you chose to do of your own free will? Don’t you feel free, actually? When men stop by at the department, all you women engage in witty conversation with them,

cracking jokes and smiling charmingly at them, and they are always extremely polite. You smile at the men yourself and joke with them, and you observe that they enjoy your company. It has even happened that such men have invited you for a cup of coffee, and you even had hopes that you would start seeing someone. But this department must be a real curse—those who previously took an interest in you later began to avoid you, even though you are an attractive woman, not some dog—that you know, because you see yourself in the mirror every evening and see that you have a fine, attractive body. And again you are beginning to think that the spirit of the department has penetrated your body to such an extent that it drives men away, just as they were repelled by those unhappy women that you work with and have already grown old here. So you shut out the bad thoughts, consoling yourself with the knowledge that you still have everything to look forward to and again you try to focus on the ancient Chinese.

Occasionally you feel like asking the boss for time off to go on an imaginary date, but you realize that the women in the department have already been through this phase themselves, that they will easily see through your pretense and will pity you and give you sorrowful looks—and you don’t want anybody’s sympathy. Because you know that somebody else’s sympathy would make you feel even sorrier for yourself and you might burst into tears in public, which is precisely what you don’t want to happen, because you hate looking pitiful. Once again you try to understand the significance of the story about the Chinese idler and you can’t find the answer. In the end you conclude that not everything under the sun makes sense or can be explained logically, yet it’s all brought about by something or other, even if it is as senseless as this life of ours.

Every Saturday you buy a bottle of cheap Isabella wine, since you can’t afford brandy on your wages, and in the evening you take a shower (as the other women in your department do, you recall), sit down at a table laid for two, and drink your cup of sorrow in silence while the second glass stays untouched. Your youthful body burns with desire on the pure white sheets and your lips search in vain through the emptiness for a man’s lips. You weep softly, overcome with despair, because you will never, ever get over that wall—invisible to all—that cuts you off from the world. On Monday, you dutifully turn up for work, and it starts all over again, just like last week, last month, last year, and the years before that. From time to time, various things may happen—once again someone loses her temper, and once again a quarrel breaks out among the women—but the next day all is sweetness and light once more. Sitting at a table stacked with good food, you’re thinking one couldn’t wish for anything more. The only thing missing is men. Men, who might be captivated by fine womanly cooking and baking and, what’s more, by the women themselves.

There’s nowhere to dash off to after work, so every day the women spend a long while saying goodbye, wishing one another all the best; then

with heavy hearts they all go their separate ways, to homes where nobody is waiting for them. And you do the same, you feeling that you are becoming more and more like them. One day, just recently, when the boss was sending them off home, you thought—good heavens, for these women you work with the department that they all hate is actually a refuge, in fact, from their loneliness. Like a wall, it shuts them off from human happiness, the sight of which is painful for them all. In the department, they all find peace and quiet—even if it is pervaded by the evil spirit of unhappiness.

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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How to Find Ovid

Vasyl Gabor

We were staying at Salt Lakes—my goodness, what a pleasure it is to bathe there, as the water supports you on the surface even if you can't swim and you aren't in the least afraid of drowning—and we had missed the afternoon train in the Small City. There was plenty of time before the evening train, so we decided to set off to the Big City. We had been coming to Salt Lakes for many years but had never actually been to the Big City, so we were glad to have the opportunity now. In any case, we only had a few things with us, including a little book of Ovid that I always take with me when I travel—it weighs nothing at all, and it adds pleasure to the trip. We asked passers-by for directions to the center of town, but to our amazement they shrugged their shoulders in surprise, as though they had never heard of its existence. Then we started to ask what the largest square in their Big City was, and where the main shopping center was to be found. They said you had to go past the old salt mines and across the market square where military barracks had once been, and from there it wasn't far to the first shops.

We walked at a leisurely pace past the Small City. The low, neat houses made it look more like a village. In front of the gates to the houses, goats were grazing contentedly, tethered to the trees, and hens and geese were wandering about without a care in the world. The road then led us under an old, gray concrete bridge, among mounds of salty earth, which must have been the old salt mines. In the distance, the long structures of the former barracks were already coming into view.

When we reached the marketplace, we were taken aback by its dreadfully dilapidated state. All the windows and doors had been stripped from the barracks. Undoubtedly the floorboards had been ripped out as well, but we didn't feel like approaching the buildings, with their deserted air, any closer. Yet not long ago soldiers had marched about here. I seemed to still hear orders being given and the rattle of weapons. Strangely, though, it was not our soldiers who came flooding into my mind but Roman legionnaires, drawn up in rows and standing to attention. The legionnaires shouted loud greetings to the commander who had led them all this way, to Scythia, quite unaware that before long these barren, inhospitable lands would become the last resting place for many of their good friends and countrymen, exiles from the empire. Among them I saw Ovid, whose fortunes had changed. He trod the dust and the marshes of this land, and an icy chill overcame his spirit in its cold snowdrifts.

At this point I heard my wife’s voice, and the vision disappeared. I saw that I was walking through a former barracks that had been converted into a marketplace between the Big City and the Small City. It seemed very inconvenient. No buses came this way, so everyone struggled to the market on foot. It was deserted now. Everywhere you could see torn newspapers along with empty tin cans and bottles. At the far end of the marketplace we saw several women and men dismantling the remains of one of the barrack buildings. Wrapped in old rags, they were using axes to pry bricks out from the walls and stacking them in small piles. It looked as if the Tower of Babel had collapsed here and these people were scavenging what they could for their houses.

“Let’s walk faster,” said my wife.

“Don’t be afraid, Natie,” I said reassuringly.

The sun was high in the sky, and walking side by side we cast short shadows on the ground.

On the former parade ground stood crooked rows of fading grayish tables, protected by makeshift wooden shelters. They looked like temporary shacks. The wind swirled along the empty rows, stirring up the dust. There wasn’t a living soul anywhere, except for the dark-skinned gypsy caretaker we saw over by the gate. He was stripped to the waist and a substantial paunch overhung his belt. He was sweeping up the litter.

I greeted him and inquired about the quickest way to the Big City. He understood me, but he replied in Hungarian. He pointed out the shortest way: it led through the rubbish dump, beyond which the Big City was visible.

“Isn’t there a better way?”

He nodded, indicating the asphalt road that led to the Big City but followed a big arc.

I had no desire to walk across the rubbish dump and we set off on the longer route.

The Big City was built in an extraordinarily chaotic manner. A cluster of high-rise buildings stood in one area, five hundred meters away stood another cluster, over there yet another, and so on. It seemed as if the town had been cut apart and scattered in all directions. And besides, something was missing in this town, though I couldn’t figure out what.

On the way we met the occasional, peculiar-looking passer-by: a cripple who resembled a black spider with crooked arms and legs, a woman with a deformed face and bulging eyes, and a man shouting in a loud voice and spluttering as he stumbled awkwardly on crutches along the path.

Having reached the middle of a somewhat larger group of buildings, we realized that this was the center of the Big City. We began to look for a café, and instead came across a kiosk that was selling beer. In front of it were two tables with benches, so we decided to rest for a while. No sooner had we sat down and poured out the beer than another cripple trundled up to us in a wheelchair. He stared at the bottle of beer and began gesturing for

some to be poured for him as well. He gave off an awful smell.

I was furious. The arrogance of the cripple’s unceremonious demand annoyed me. Besides, I had no particular wish to share his company or to put up with that stink.

“Sir, would you kindly leave us alone?” I requested coldly. The cripple, displeased, rolled his wheelchair away as he rebuked me:

“Well, Ovid would never have acted like that.”

My jaw must have dropped in surprise, because at that moment I recalled the little book of Ovid that was in my shoulder bag.

“Which Ovid do you mean?”

“The Roman with the big nose, of course,” he replied indifferently, turning sideways to us.

“Naso?”

“That’s right. Everyone around here knows him. He’s easy to find but difficult to meet.”

“Does Ovid live here, then?”

“You’ll see for yourself. There’s no need for me to show you,” replied the cripple brusquely and he trundled away in his wheelchair.

I had now lost interest in the beer, and we set off along the street, which took a sharp turn towards the river. The street was laid with old, pale-gray paving stones, hewn in a uniform rounded shape and packed tightly together. But they were laid in such a way that they looked like waves, in the troughs of which people who walked up the middle of the street could easily find support for their feet. I had never seen anything like it before.

From what visitors to Salt Lakes had told us, I already knew that everywhere around here the ground had a high salt content, so people drew water only from the river as they had done for many hundreds of years, carrying it in buckets on a yoke or driving it in barrels placed on carts.

We slowly made our way downhill, and suddenly I stopped in amazement in front of an old two-story building. On the external wooden front with its boarded-up windows I had caught sight of a Gothic inscription in English: “Death.”

“Death lives here,” I involuntarily exclaimed, as all my dreadful encounters passed before my eyes as if on a screen, and I still clearly heard the cripple’s words about Ovid. This all seemed to be total fantasy. Even here at Salt Lakes, it seemed, I was continually thinking about Ovid and imagining that traces of him were surely to be found in these outlying lands.

“Bendas, I want to get back to the Small City and catch the train,” my wife called to me.

I nodded in agreement, but I couldn’t tear myself away and stood staring at that strange building. The entrance was through a shady courtyard paved with square paving stones, green with moss. There was a tiny first-floor balcony, boarded up with crossed planks. The grapevine growing over it was so dense that it must have grown wild from neglect. The deserted

garden, paved in gray stone, was full of wild roses. A happy, well-to-do family with a love of beauty must have lived here at one time, I thought. The husband and wife must have enjoyed sitting in the garden or on the balcony of an evening, admiring the sunset, drinking red wine, and serving the children rose tea with all sorts of sweet treats. Then one day, after a visitor had come to their house, the family’s happiness had been ruined. The same thing had happened to Ovid. To all appearances, nobody had lived in this house for years and years now. I wanted to ask the neighbors about it, but I didn’t have the courage.

“Let’s get away from here, Bendas,” my wife pleaded.

I took one more parting look at the house, the steep paved street that I might never have the chance to stroll down again. And then my gaze wandered over the roofs of the houses and I stared into the distance, where blue mountains rose beyond the river—that was already in a foreign country. I spotted a small town—it could have been a painting—with many church spires and red-roofed houses, and suddenly I realized what it was that was lacking in the Big City: I hadn’t seen any churches anywhere. My wife and I were just reaching the top of the street when the cripple came trundling straight toward us in his wheelchair. Apparently he had been waiting for us a long time.

“I have Ovid’s last letter,” he said.

“Bendas, he wants a drink, give him some money,” my wife quietly suggested.

“No,” the cripple shook his head. “I can read it to you without getting a drink.” And he began to read without waiting to be asked.

“Naso sends greetings to Celsus!

“One day your face came into my mind and I thought you were the only person to whom I could entrust my last thoughts. I believed you would accept them not as the fruit of a sick mind but as a farewell to you and my city of Rome, so I am writing this letter. Read it aloud, so that at least in words I can once more stroll through the streets of my city, Rome...”

I was terribly intrigued by what the cripple in the wheelchair was telling us. After all, Naso really did have a true friend named Celsus. But I saw that it was no good asking my wife to wait, so I shrugged my shoulders apologetically and offered him some money. He would not take it and just gave me a sympathetic smile.

“Who lived in that house?” I ventured to ask the man as we were departing.

“Couldn’t you sense it?” he said and gave me a sad glance. We walked on in silence to the Small City. In the west, the sun’s red orb was settling behind the mountains. I kept wondering over and over why the cripple in the wheelchair had started to tell us about Ovid.

“Bendas,” said my wife, “somebody in that town of theirs must have been nicknamed Ovid.”

“Probably, but the man in the wheelchair did mention the name of Naso’s friend in that letter. It’s a pity that we didn’t wait.”

The last rays of the sun shone on our backs. We cast such enormous shadows on the ground that they stretched as far as the first houses in the Small City. It seemed that they too, like my wife, were very frightened by something and were fleeing ahead of us.

I tried to imagine Salt Lakes as an outpost of the Roman Empire. The harsh terrain and natural environment make human existence unbearable here. As it was for Ovid in his old age. I tried to remember where and when I first had the feeling that Ovid once spent some time here, but my memory failed me. In the end, that wasn’t actually important. I was convinced of just one thing: that the shadow of the Great Exile had once fallen on this long forgotten land, and that it had left a deep mark on the soul of one of my distant ancestors.

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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A Selected Bibliography of Translations
2000–

Marta Tarnawsky

¶ 21. Andrukhovych, Yuri. *The Moscoviad*. Tr. from the Ukrainian by Vitaly Chernetsky. New York City: Spuyten Duyvil [©2008]. 185 p.

Translation of the novel *Moskoviada.* With brief notes about the author and the translator on p. [186] and a comment about the novel by Askold Melnyczuk on the back cover.

¶ 22. Antonych, Bohdan Ihor. *The Grand Harmony.* Tr. from Ukrainian with an introd. and notes by Michael M. Naydan. Lviv: Litopys, 2007. 117 p. col. illus.

A parallel text edition: Ukrainian and English.
Contents of English language material: A biographical note on Bohdan-Ihor Antonych. • Antonych writing God in *The Grand harmony* / Michael M. Naydan. • Acknowledgements. • **The Grand Harmony**: Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus. That in all things God may be glorified (You've placed a dreadful burden on my shoulders). • Veni Sancte Spiritus. Come, Holy Spirit! (Come, come to me, Holy Dove). • Musica noctis. Music of the night (Light up the torch of the pale moon in the sky). • De morte, 1. On death, 1 (Only later I will bow my head in thought). • Gloria in excelsis. Glory in the highest. (To embrace all people). • De morte, IV. On death, IV (I am calm as silence on the water). • De morte, II. On death, II (I don't know how to ask anyone). • Duae viae. Two roads (I've searched for you, Lord, on long roads). • Ars poetica, II, 1. The art of poetry, II, 1 (I am an ordinary poet). • Amen (The concert is over). • Vinea Divina. The Lord's vineyard (O, life has thousands of enticements). • Deus magnificus. God magnificent (On the highest crests of mountains—is He). • Te Deum laudamus, I . We praise thee, O Lord, I (The earth is a million-stringed, golden-stringed harp). • Advocatus diaboli. The devil's advocate (When I stand before Your fiery face).• Resurectio. The Resurrection (Bells peal in early morning for the morning sun rises). • Momentum cum Deo. A moment with God (How hard, how hard, how hard it is). • Litania. A prayer (Lord, do You know

how much we need faith). • A prayer (A mortal's prayer is like smoke). • A weekday (At five o'clock in the morning). • Sacred simplicity (The world is great and wide). • Naïveté (Whom does it trouble). • Ars poetica, II, 4. The art of poetry, II, 4 (A captivated full-grown child). • Veni creator! Come, Creator! (Creator of thousands of moons, millions of stars). • Confiteor. I confess (I have fought with God intently and did not). • Mater dolorosa. The sorrowful mother (The wind was blowing into the dark). • Liber peregrinorum, 3. Book of pilgrims, 3 (Jerusalem) (The yellow road beneath my feet). • Ave Maria. Rejoice, Maria! (I whisper Your resounding name in the morning on a sunny day). • The Green Holy Day (Today is the Green Holy Day). • De morte, III. On death, III. Requiem (Already the hand of an angel has touched your proud brow). • Ars poetica, II, 2. The art of poetry, II, 2 (To sing of a house). • Ars poetica, II, 3. The art of poetry, II, 3 (For me a day). • Triangulum. A triangle (Faith, hope, love) (You desire what is unknown). • The woodcutter, Part 2 (O black screech owl, don't howl). • The fourth angle (Faith, hope, love, 2) (O, human souls eternally yearn). • Credo. The creed (Faith, hope, love, 3) (Many strings). • Spes. Hope (Faith, hope, love, 4) (When all around night is black). • Agnus Dei. Lamb of God (You are not a proud gray-winged eagle). • Mater gloriosa. Glorious Mother (Play, harps, play, lyres, play, lutes, play, zitherns). • Ascensio. The ascension (Closed are the doors of heaven). • Apage satanas! Be gone, satan! (I finger the nights and days like rosary beads, one at a time). • Te Deum laudamus, II. Let us praise the Lord, II (For You the sea plays a radiant, spirited psalm). • Kyrie eleison. Lord have mercy! (I lift my hands in mute ecstasy). • Magnificat. Glorification (Sing, my soul, a praiseful psalm to the Lord). • Ars poetica. The art of poetry (Hexameters, trochees). • Salve Regina. Hail, Holy Queen! (Salve Regina).

¶ 23. Dovzhenko, Oleksandr. *The Enchanted Desna* / Alexander Dovzhenko. Tr. by Dzvinia Orlowsky. Marshfield, MA: House between Water [©2006]. 61 p.

Translation of *Zacharovana Desna*.

¶ 24. *Down Country Lanes*: selected prose fiction by Tymofey Bordulyak, Mykola Chernyavsky, Ivan Franko, Bohdan Lepky, Dmytro Markovych, Les Martovych, Stepan Vasylchenko, Volodymyr Vynnychenko. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. Toronto: Language Lanterns Publications, 2008. 409 p. (Ukrainian short fiction in English).

Contents: Introduction / Paul Cipywnyk .• **Tymofey Bordulyak (1863–1936)**: Worry. • The message .• The jubilarian. • **Mykola Chernyavsky (1868–1946)** : The dragon. • **Ivan Franko (1856–1916)**: How a Rusyn busied himself in the other

world. • How Yura Shykmanyuk forded the Cheremosh. • A thorn in his foot (A story about Hutsul life). • As in a dream. • **Bohdan Lepky (1872–1941):** Nastya. For her brother. • The peasant woman. • The sacrifice. Vengeance .• The daughter and the mother. • **Dmytro Markovych (1848–1920):** Omelko the convict.• The shmatok. • Ivan from Budzhak.• The Vowk's hamlet. • **Les Martovych (1871–1916):** The sinner.• A matter of life and death. • **Stepan Vasylchenko (1879–1932):** In a hamlet .• Cornflowers. • At home. • Rain. • The witch .• The peasant angel.• Petrunya. • **Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1880–1951):** A curious scene with Kost .• Beauty and strength. • Glossary. • Biographical notes.

¶ 25. Franko, Ivan. *Behind Decorum's Veil*. Selected prose fiction. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Toronto]: Language Lanterns, 2006. 406 p. (Ukrainian short fiction in English) (Ukrainian male authors, 1880–1920).

Contents: Introduction. • For the home hearth. • Pillars of society. • Glossary. Translations of the novels *Dla domashnoho ohnyshcha* and *Osnovy suspilnosty*.

¶ 26. Franko, Ivan. *Beacons in the Darkness*. Selected prose fiction. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Toronto]: Language Lanterns, 2006. 430 p. (Turbulent Times; a trilogy, v. 2.) (Ukrainian fiction in English) (Ukrainian male authors, 1880–1920).

Contents: Introduction. • Unknown waters. • Lel and Polel. • Notes. • Glossary. Translations of *Ne spytavshy brodu* and *Lel i Polel.*

¶ 27. Franko, Ivan. *Fateful Crossroads*. A novel. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Toronto]: Language Lanterns, 2006. 373 p. (Turbulent Times, a trilogy, v. 3) (Ukrainian fiction in English) (Ukrainian male authors, 1849–1920).

Contents: Introduction. • Fateful crossroads. • Glossary.
Translation of *Perekhresni stezhky*.

¶ 28. Franko, Ivan. *Ivan Franko's Lyrical Drama of Withered Leaves*. 3rd ed., updated. Tr. from the Ukrainian by Ivan Teplyy. Lviv: Spolom, 2009. 138 p.

A parallel text edition: Ukrainian and English. **Contents of the English material**: To the anglophone reader / Ivan Teplyy (26–29). • Preface (31) • Foreword to the second edition (33) • **The first cluster (1886–1893)**: 1, I (Upon that long, hard stupefaction) • 1, II (I wonder what attracts me to you, draws • 1, III. (Neither God, nor the demon I fear) • 1, IV (What for, my beauty, do I love you so) • 1,V (When we chanced once upon seeing) • 1,VI (You're my only and true love, indeed) • 1,VII (Your own eyes are like the deep sea) • 1,VIII. "No hope shalt thou nurture" (How could you say it so impartially) • 1, IX (I pin no hopes altogether) • 1,X (The

boundless field in the snow-drift abundant) • 1, XI (Should you see me anywhere) • 1, XII (Do not pass by scornfully) • 1, XIII (I'm not a human! Often to hush) • 1, XIV (Like that wall insurmountable, has the lot) • 1, XV (It's more than once that I have dreamt about) • 1, XVI The funeral of Mrs.A.H. (It happened! In a coffin, metal-clad) • 1, XVII (I didn't curse you, my star dear) • 1, XVIII (You're crying. Streams of bitter tears) • 1, XIX (I make no complaints against you, my fate) • 1, XX The spectre (A chilly night. Serenely, gravely, freely) • Epilogue (Be gone with the whirlwind, my kind leaflets faded).• **The second cluster (1895):** 2, I (In Peremyshl, the green San where flows) • 2, II (The Noon) • 2, III (Green is the sycamore, green is the sycamore) • 2, IV (Oh you, young lady, beauty most sound) • 2,V (Red guelder-rose, meadow's, why do you bend low?) • 2,VI (Oh you my leafy oak-tree fine) • 2,VII (Oh pity, my pity) • 2,VIII (I do not love you, no, I don't) • 2, IX (Why cannot one hear your laughter?) • 2, X. In the railway carriage (As if scared, for no reason) • 2, XI (Laugh at me, stars everlasting!) • 2, XII (What for do you appearing keep) • 2, XIII (This fine path runs here) • 2, XIV (If spell I had found that would stop a cloud) • 2, XV (What's happiness? Illusion) • 2, XVI (When I cannot see you) • 2, XVII (When at night, in the dark, by your window alone) • 2, XVIII (Though never will you like a flower flourish) • 2, XIX (An ox in yoke, so much like day by day) • 2, XX (Strews, and strews, and strews the snow) • **The third cluster (1896)**: 3, I (Should a grip of frost batter) • 3, II (She's died already! Hearken! Dong! Ding-dong!) • 3, III (I'm most indifferent to-day) • 3, IV (On summer night once, in an alley) • 3,V (A small room and kitchen, two ground-floor windows) • 3,VI. (Despair! What I once believed) • 3,VII (I cannot live, I cannot perish) • 3,VIII (I meant an end of this life make) • 3, IX (Three apparitions of my love I had) • 3, X (A night comes round. And I have of it fear!) • 3, XI (Deuce, the demon of separation) • 3, XII (And he appeared. Not as hallucination) • 3, XIII (Mummy dear of mine, most beloved!) • 3, XIV (Oh you, my song, dear shot down birdie) • 3, XV (So, farewell, — never again) • 3, XVI (Too late, my song! Your charm's forlorn) • 3, XVII (A bow to you, Buddha!) • 3, XVIII (The Soul is deathless! It is to live forever!) • 3, XIX. ("Self-destruction is cowardice) • 3, XX (This instrument of smaller style).

The first attempt of a complete English translation of Franko's poetry collection *Ziviale lystia*. The misleading designation "3rd ed." refers to Ukrainian editions. The translator's essay "To the anglophone reader" also includes the full text of John Weir's translation of Franko's poem 2, XVII (Should at night through the rain) and Ivan Teplyy's translation of Maksym Rylskyi's poem "Franko (The son of Yats the smith, the Ivan of red hairs)" (14 lines).

¶ **29. Franko, Ivan**. *Winds of Change*. Selected prose. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Toronto]: Language Lanterns, 2006. 334 p. (Turbulent Times, a trilogy. v. 1) (Ukrainian fiction in English) (Ukrainian male authors, 1880–1920).

Contents: Introduction. • From the turbulent years: Hryts and the Young Lord.• The Cutthroats. • The Involuntary Hero. • The Raging Tempest. • Glossary.

Translations of *Hryts i panych, Rizuny, Heroi ponevoli,* and *Velykyi shum*.

¶ 30. *From Days Gone By*: Selected prose fiction by Yuriy Fedkovych, Ivan Franko, Borys Hrinchenko, Hnat Khotkevych, Oleksander Konysky, Panteleymon Kulish, Bohdan Lepky, Panas Myrny, Oleksa Storozhenko, Sydir Vorobkevych. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. By Sonia Morris. Toronto: Language Lanterns Publications, 2008. 410 p. (Ukrainian short fiction in English).

Contents: Introduction / Paul Cipywnyk. • **Yuriy Fedkovych (1834–1888**): Who is to blame? • The opryshok. • The Dnister's vortex. • The soldier's daugther. • **Ivan Franko (1856–1916)**: Mykytych's oak tree. • The gypsies. • It's his own fault. • The forest nymph. • **Borys Hrinchenko (1863–1910**): A dearth of grain. • Little sister Halya. • The hut in the valley. • **Hnat Khotkevych (1863–1910)**: From days gone by. • **Oleksander Konysky (1836–1900)**: A tormented soul. • **Panteleymon Kulish (1819–1897):** A proud couple. • A maiden's heart. • **Bohdan Lepky (1872–1941):** In the forest. • The mother. • The deceased. • Revenge. • **Panas Myrny (1849–1920)**: Ensnared by the Evil One. • The thief. • **Oleksa Storozhenko (1805–1874)**: The married devil. • The devil's tavern. • The fated one. • The miller. • **Sydir Vorobkevych (1836–1903**): The Gypsy girl. • Glossary. • Biographical notes.

¶ 31. *In a Different Light*: a bilingual anthology of Ukrainian literature. Tr. into English by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps as performed by Yara Arts Group. Comp. and ed. with foreword and notes by Olha Luchuk. Introd. by Natalia Pylypiuk. Lviv: Sribne Slovo, 2008. 790 p. illus. (part col.).

Contents of English language material: The private collection: In a Different Light / Natalia Pylypiuk (31–35). • Dialogue of cultures through space and time / Olha Luchuk (36–39). • Poetry as text for theatre / Virlana Tkacz (40–43). **I. In the light**: • **A light from the East: Taras Shevchenko:** The sky's unwashed... (The sky's unwashed and the waves are sleepy). • A cloud, flouting behind the sun (A cloud, floating behind the sun). • In God's home behind the front door (In God's home behind the front door there lay an ax). • **Pavlo Tychyna:** Instead of sonnets or octaves : Dawn (Dawn now, but the mist still lingers). • Autumn (Fungus grows on the cultures of the world). • Terror (So again we take the Bible, philosophers, and poets). • Lull (I sleep—I stir, I fulfill a will. Fill). • The highest power (— "Get dressed for the execution!" — someone shouted and pounded on the door). • Rhythm (When two slender girls walk by—with red poppies). • Evohe! (The creators of the revolution are mostly lyric poets). • You tell me (A short drizzle—and the pavements are spotted with typhus...).• Chauvinistic (They take the bread, coal, sugar, and say, as if toasting us:). • Test (We just started to love the land, took the spade in our hands). • Hollow (I wash myself. Water—chimes. Curtain—a banner). • Wheat rot (They shoot the heart, they shoot the soul —). • **II. Poetry in performance: On word, thru word, forward!: Mykhail Semenko:** Village landscape (O). • **Pavlo Tychyna:** Pastels (I. A ray of sun runs. II. The iron day. III. Flutes swayed. IV. Cover me, cover). • From my diary: (III. The lake flows-blue tears). • We live as a commune (X. We live as a commune, work). • Over sheer

cliffs... (Over sheer cliffs). • War (I. I lay down to sleep. II. On the right—the sun). • **Radio eternity: Volodymyr Svidzinsky:** Tired, leaning on the hills (Tired, leaning on the hills). • The pendulum's tired (The pendulum's tired). • The morning gathers (The morning gathers). • **Oleh Lysheha:** Song 212 (There are so many superstars, overgrown with weeds). • song 2 (When I leave this little town). • The mountain (It was almost autumn...) [prose]. • **Mykola Riabchuk**: To think about eternity (To think about eternity—to think). • **Explosions: Natalka Bilotserkivets:** May (A soft sob at midnight. Still asleep you can't remember). • **Oksana Zabuzhko**: Prypiat. A still life (This, I think, is dawn). • Love (Our embraces flow like water). • **Iryna Zhylenko:** In the country house (Now back to the chores. Rake out the ashes). • **Heart pic(k)s: Ukrainian love poetry: Vasyl Stefanyk:** Early in the morning she combed her hair (Early in the morning she combed her hair) [prose]. • **Vasyl Holoborodko:** Her name (You told me to guess your name). • **Yurko Pozayak:** Come see me tomorrow (Come see me tomorrow). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:** Despite it all it was you I loved (Despite it all it was you I loved, loved, loved!) • **Attila Mohylny:** Spontaneous motion (Downpour in the projects). • Blond (1. In autumn. 2. In the park. 3. I love you. 4. Evening arrives. 5.We talk with friends). • Beatles (a cycle) (1. I want to tell you about. 2. When I hear this music from Liverpool. 3. When I think of writing about you. 4. Believe me. 5. I see the guys on our block). • **Index on censorship**: Oksana Batiuk: Columns of hermetic reality (Columns of hermetic reality). • It's so hard to be somebody (It's so hard to be somebody). • **Serhiy Lavreniuk:** I am a Raphael without hands (I am a Raphael without hands). • **Oleh Lysheha:** On learning new Party hymns (I am scum). • **Body parts: Yurko Gudz:** Mantra for the first week of winter (Black trees). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:** Symptoms of poetry (I know I will die a difficult death). • **Victor Neborak:** Flying head (It lifts up, like a head). • **Attila Mohylny:** Flying south through the night (Flying south through the night).• **Victoria Stakh:** Enough (Enough). • Ode to the brain (My brain's in pain). • **Antonia Tsvit:** I'm flying (I'm flying above the concrete). • **Serhiy Lavreniuk:** A kiss (A kiss). • **Language of space: Yuri Andrukhovych:** Library (we search for the most esoteric knowledge). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:** Letter from the summer house (Hello, dear. After the recent acid rains). • **Victoria Stakh:** Outdoors it's day (Outdoors it's day). • **Bohdan Ihor Antonych:** Walk out of the room (Walk out of the room, walk out of the room).• **Oceanic consciousness: Volodymyr Svidzinsky:** Terrifying (Terrifying—I was once an animal).• **Victor Neborak:** Fish (cold-blooded beings). • **Oleh Lysheha:** Swan (God, I'm slipping). • **Spinning spells: Poetry of Ukrainian women: Lyudmyla Taran:** India ink (The spot of India ink is beautifully). • How much garbage (How much garbage have I swept up). • The blues (My movements, gestures). • Where is my Robert Penn Warren (Where is my Robert Penn Warren?) • Like him (Like him). • **Oksana Batiuk:** Run (Run). • September poem (Tree spirits). • **Larysa Nedin:** I don't have (I don't have). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:** An ironic nocturne (Moonlight rounds the edges). • Through the looking glass: Mrs. Merzhynsky (In the most real of all possible worlds). • **Hot house: Poems of heart and home: Maria Rewakowicz:** Home (I. hands. II. a memory. III. remember. IV. then. V. there's m m. VI. two oceans of solitude. VII. mother. VIII. a shred of a torn dream. IX. no good-byes. X. land). • **Serhiy Lavreniuk:** The leaves (the leaves turned yellow long ago). • **Oleh Lysheha:** Bear (After dining in the moonlight). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:**

A portrait: K.M. Hrushevska in her youth (Katherine Mykhailivna, Miss Kate!). • **Seven veils: Mykola Vorobiov:** Searches for balance (If you pick up a pear that rolled away). • Cage—balcony—frost—dream (for the lonely a cage). **Victor Neborak:** Subjective point of view (Someday). • **Anka Sereda:** I don't want to be a poet (I don't want to be a poet). • **Mykola Miroshnychenko:** The stars (The stars). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:** Cinderella (A contemporary version) (...All you're left with is a bad taste in your mouth). • **Ten years of poetry: Oksana Senatovych:** Wife of an artist (Triptych) (1. Spring won't blossom without you. 2. I sleep the sleep of a fireman. 3. You turned me into a shadow). • Ballad about hands (In the concert hall). • **Messenger: Ihor Rymaruk:** Glossolalia (verily I say unto you). • **Natalka Bilotserkivets:** A knife (A knife). • **Yuriy Kovaliv:** To see with eyes of a blackbird (to see with eyes of a blackbird). • **Yuriy Vynnychuk**: Letters to mother (Hello). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:** Finale. Counterpoint (from Night butterflies) (In the piercing light of the cold harsh dawn). • **In verse: From Poetry installations to *A Hundred Years of Youth***: **Attila Mohylny:** A bridge crosses the pond (A bridge crosses the pond). • **Oksana Senatovych:** Pear (Autmn comes ringing bells...). • **Neda Nezhdana:** We belong in the darkness (We belong in the darkness). • **Marta Tarnawsky:** Vae victis (Touch the iron of the old canons). • Rainbow (The sun's out. I wash the car). • **Natalka Bilotserkivets:** Saxophonist (In the tunnel next to the pale girls selling flowers). • Crazed airplanes (crazed airplanes). • **Taras Luchuk:** Great-grandfather's stars (great grandfather's head). • Dead sea (those who don't learn to swim). • Refined taste (Eel is best in the spring). • **Victor Neborak:** Novel (There will be a happy ending). • What he does (what he does). • **Oksana Zabuzhko:** Clytemnestra (Agamemnon is coming).• **Kolo nas: Andriy Bondar:** Slavic gods (slavic gods play dominoes). • The Roman alphabet (I've long had). • **Serhiy Zhadan:** The end of Ukrainian syllabotonic verse (they once lived in this building). • **III. Into the wilderness and the past: Yara's Forest Song: Lesia Ukrainka:** The forest song [Drama in three acts, with a Prologue]. • **Waterfall / Reflections: Incantations:** Incantation to water at midsummer (Greetings, dear water, primordial queen). • Incantation to the sun (Dearest sun, so bright and beautiful). • Incantation to cleanse the waters (Sacred water, cleanse our lake). • **Traditional songs:** Hold a candle (Hold a candle). • White dove (White dove). • Before the world began (Before the world began). • **Black sea: Legends:** Sweet Michael and the Golden Gates [Prose]. • The grass they call yevshan or chornobyl [Prose]. • **Epics:** About a sister and a brother (Oh, on Sunday the holy day of rest). • Captive's lament (Oh, that was not a falcon cawing and crying). • About a widow (Oh, on Sunday the holy day of rest). • **Song tree: Traditional songs in Yara's shows**: So. The wind blows from above and swallows the blue sea. • Honest woman wake up, don't sleep. • A bee flies through the field in search of honey. • **Events: The productions which generated the translations: I. In the light** [factual information, critical reviews]. • **II. Poetry in performance** [Factual information, critical reviews]. • **III. Into the wilderness and the past:** [Factual information, critical reviews]. • **Notes. Biographical notes and indices: Notes on the authors:** [with portraits]: Yuri Andrukhovych. • Bohdan Ihor Antonych.• Oksana Batiuk. • Natalka Bilotserkivets. • Andriy Bondar. • Yuriy Vynnychuk. • Mykola Vorobiov. • Vasyl Holoborodko. • Yurko Gudz. • Serhiy Zhadan. • Iryna Zhylenko. • Oksana Zabuzhko, • Yuriy Kovaliv. • Serhiy Lavreniuk. • Oleh Lysheha. • Taras Luchuk. •

Mykola Miroshnychenko. • Attila Mohylny. • Victor Neborak. • Larysa Nedin. • Neda Nezhdana. • Yurko Pozayak. • Maria Rewakowicz. • Ihor Rymaruk. • Mykola Riabchuk. • Volodymyr Svidzinsky. •Mykhail Semenko. • Oksana Senatovych. • Anka Sereda. • Victoria Stakh. • Vasyl Stefanyk. • Ludmyla Taran. • Marta Tarnawsky. • Pavlo Tychyna. • Lesia Ukrainka. • Antonia Tsvit. • Taras Shevchenko. • **Notes on the translators** [with portraits]: Virlana Tkacz. • Wanda Phipps. • **Editor** [with portrait] Olha Luchuk. • **Acknowledgements. • Index of names. • Index of texts. • Index of events.**

¶ 32. Izdryk, Iurii. *Wozzeck /* Izdryk. Tr. and with an introd. by Marko Pavlyshyn. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2006. xxi, 130 p.

Translation of the novel *Votstsek*.

¶ 33. Makhno, Vasyl. *Thread and Selected New York Poems.* Tr. from the Ukrainian by Orest Popovych. New York City: Meeting Eyes Bindery [©2009]. 126 p. port. on back cover.

A bilingual edition: poetry in Ukrainian and English. **Contents of the English language material:** A note on the poetry of Vasyl Makhno / Michael Naydan (7–8). • About the translations / Bohdan Rubchak (8). • **Thread:** thread (like a woolen thread you slide). • Every thing has its place (A violin in a green velvet case). • Gertrude Stein (messages written in recent times). • The weekend of an "American Family". • Automotive erotica (this journey across the landscape of your body). • Poetry reading (beloved—it's Whitman crisscrossing Brooklyn). • "Would you stop loving her if you knew she's a lesbian (for a few months the Muse). • The New York Group (an empty East Village—stubbles on the cheek). • Notebook (glancing through my old notebook). • Yehuda Amichai (Herbert brought to me Yehuda Amichai whom I preserved as a herbarium). • The dog (this wind that comes to me as a dog). • America (this country is strange—it's a ship between two oceans). • Chinatown: Fish store (they cackle like Peking geese). Peking opera (in a Peking opera the actors). The Chinese poor (in the morning Chinese women). • To Petro Moroz (a ukrainian poet). • La Mama (La Mama—you). • The port (in the port they unload fish from China). • About the flight of an angel and a black and a green fox (everyone hears that every thing—whatever is). • Astor Place (someone). • SS Brandenburg year 1913 (The ship SS Brandenburg puts out). • Federico Garcia Lorca (Who licks up the warm yolk of the moon). • Poet, ocean and fish (life smells of the ocean—like fish smells the poet who tries his fate at the bottom). • Bukowski (this old man in his T-shirt and jeans who sits on the street). • A fiesta (time—it seems—has lain dormant in this butcher shop). • A festival of poetry (10 poets). • Advice on how best to write poetry (one of your eyes reads Cyrillic letters). • An aviation response to Yuri Andrukhovych (Pilots aren't born—but what about poets?) • New Orleans (here the arrival of winter can be baffling). • Brooklyn elegy (each morning the Jewish bakeries open up out of the darkness). • A ballad about 8 poems (the assertion by German poet Gottfried Benn). • Charlottenburg (In this city the coffee houses are scattered—like coffee beans—). • A farewell to Brooklyn (in my

bulging book of farewells I write down a few words). • [Notes about the author and translator plus a note about the author on the back cover by Askold Melnyczuk].

¶ 34. Odrach, Fedir. *Wave of Terror* / Theodore Odrach. Tr. from Ukrainian by Erma Odrach. Introd. By T.F. Rigelhof. Chicago: Academy Chicago [2008]. xv, 326 p. (An Anita Miller book).

Translation of the novel *Voshchad.*

¶ 35. Ryl's'kyi, Maksym. *Autumn stars: the selected lyric poetry.* / Maksym Rylsky. Tr. from Ukrainian with a translator's introd. and notes by Michael. M. Naydan and with an introd. by Maria Zubrytska. Lviv: Litopys, 2008. 300 p.

A parallel text edition. Introductions and poetry appear both in Ukrainian and in English. **Contents of English language material**: Translator's introduction / Michael M. Naydan (7–8). • Acknowledgments (9) • Between the lyric and ideology: the duality of Maksym Rylsky's poetic world / Maria Zubrytska (15–22). • **On white islands (1910):** A sleepless night (It's stuffy, quiet sand dark everywhere). • As the pink evening descends onto the earth. • On white islands. I. The immeasurably heavenly blue ocean. II, White, buoyant sleepwalking clouds III. I float along on an island cloud IV. Farewell, suffering. V. I awakened... the wind is blowing VI. Once again the sun weavwes a golden head scarf. VII. The evening rushes about. VIII**.** I sleep and see a dream... On a floating island. IX. The sun rises, the sun plays. X. On a floating island. XI. These are just daydreams, just daydreams. • **Beneath the autumn stars (1918**): I wait for a word from you. • These apples have ripened so prematurely. • The last (Quieter... Stand there. Don't speak). • Who painted thick-leafed chestnuts. • In solitude I leaf through. • Ridiculed by myself. • Whether it's love or not—I don't know. • Lights. A boisterous evening. • The voice of poison (I love poison hidden in the lily). • A wintry pane (So sad, so boundlessly sad). • To my Leonora (A drunken sonnet) (No, you are not here, not in the world).• Like a kiss through a veil. • Shadows are shifting along the valley . • In the café it's empty. The minions are murmuring. • In a deep remote spot. • How sweet it is in the midnight silence. • Love nature not like the symbol. • **Beneath the autumn stars, II (1926):** Dew has settled onto the white buckwheat. • Summer stopped on the doorstep. • Snow fell silently and evenly. • In the spring we used to ride to the field. • The field blackens... Clouds pass. • The lilacs are blooming, the orchard in white. • Like Odysseus, wearied by wandering. • The apples ripened, the apples are red. • The rain has ended. The azure's clearing. • There is a name, a woman's, soft and clear. • Black roses (We were walking in a foreign city). • Music (In the night they swooped down). • Outside the walls the cold night is blowing. • It is not the clear-eyed image of Beatrice. • Frost! You are the soul of a Parnassian singer. • From your voice it's fragrant and wafts. • When everything in life's haze. • Green shadows flashed along your soul. • Eternity writes its endless folio. • Let the cold, web-footed snow fall. • The tomatoes are already turning red. • **The blue distance (1922):** The blue distance: I (In the world there is the singing Langedoc). II. (Let the Venetian waters at least in dreams). III. (Old tracery buildings). • Silence (A rondo) (There

are no words! An evening wind). • In the mountains among the stone and snows. • Sonnet of boredom and hope (There is nothing worse that being bored). • The phantasmagoric brig (Octaves): I. (I've forgotten you. Farewell. Blue snow). II. Tall masts, white sails). III. (The helmsman is wise, the captain chipper). IV. (O joy of unseen shores!) V. Like Childe Harold courageously abandoning his. VI. My name is John, I'm a cook from a family of cooks. VII. A storm approaches, howling and whistling. VIII. Farewell, lady! The bottle has floated off! • A veranda, grapes, the humming of bees in white. • Once again the road and splashes under wheels. • An unknown guest. • Tristan saddles his horse. • Once again I am riding on a wood-slat cart. • Sappho to Aphrodite (Don't plait for me). • Nietsche [sic] (In the high mountains he blessed). • Heine (Harlequin with a rose in his hand). • Shakespeare (I wandered alone).

¶ 36. Shevchenko, Taras. *Vybrana poeziia. Zhyvopys. Hrafika. = Selected poems. Paintings. Graphic works.* Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 2007. 607 p. illus. (part col.) 25cm. x 20cm.

A bilingual Ukrainian-English edition of Shevchenko's poetry and reproductions of his works of art, supplemented by bio-critical articles and notes. The translations are by Vera Rich. **Contents of the English language materials:** Taras Shevchenko / Ivan Dziuba (46–69). • **Selected poems:** Bewitched (Roaring and groaning rolls the Dnipro) • Ballad (Water flows to the dark-blue sea) • Ballad (Wild wind blowing, wild wind blowing!) • Ballad (Weary-dreary lags and drags) • Ballad (What good are my dark brows to me) • The night of Taras (At the crossroads sits a kobzar) • To the eternal memory of Kotliarevskyi (Sunlight glowing, breezes blowing) • Perebendia (Perebendia, old and sightless) • The poplar (Through the oak-grove the wind whines) • To Osnovyanenko (The rapids pound, the moon is rising) • Ivan Pidkova I. (Once, of old, in Ukraina). II. (A black cloud from beyond Lyman) • O my thoughts, my heartfelt thoughts • To N. Markevych (Bandurist, your [sic] mighty eagle) • As a memento to Shternberg (Far away you'll travel) • The wind blows, speaking with the grove • Hamaliya ("Ah, there comes, there comes nor wind nor a wave) • The plundered gravemound (Peaceful land, beloved country) • Chyhyryn, o Chyhyryn! • The dream (A comedy) (To every man his destiny) • Why weighs life so heavy? Why drags life so dreary? • To Gogol (Thought after thought flies in swarm never-ending) • Have no envy for the rich man • The heretic (Evil neighbours came) • The great vault (A mystery play): Three souls (Like snow, three little birds came flying) I. (When I was of human-kind) II. (As for me, my dearest sisters) III. (And in Kaniv I was born;) Three crows: (Kr-rr, Kr-rr, Kr-rr!) Three lyre-minstrels (One was blind, another lame) • The servant girl. Prologue (Early morning on a Sunday) I. (There lived an old couple) II. (And then it happened the old couple) III. (From joy they asked no less than six) IV. (Many seasons passed away) V. (A week went by, and the young women) VI. (Thrice the winter ice was frozen) VII. (She went within. And Kateryna) VIII. (Marko journeys with the chumaks) • The Caucasus (Mountains beyond mountains, crags in stormclouds cloaked) • To my fellow-countrymen, in Ukraine and not in Ukraine, living, dead and as yet unborn my friendly epistle (Dusk is falling, dawn is breaking) • The cold ravine (To every man his own misfortune) • To little Maryana (Grow up, grow up, my little bird,) • Days are passing, nights are passing • When I die, then make my grave • The

russalka (“So it was my mother bore me) • In the fortress (Remember, then, my brothers true...) • I. (All alone, all alone,) • II. (Wooded gullies all round,) • III. (It does not touch me, not a whit,) • IV. (“Don’t leave your mother!” They all warned you). • V. (“Why to the gravemound roam you always?”) • VI. (Once three pathways, broad and wide,) • [VII]. To N. Kostomarov (The joyful sun its face has hidden) • VIII. (Beside the house, the cherry’s flowering) • IX. (Early morning, at first dawning,) • X. (Hard in captivity... though truly) • XI. The reaper (Through the broad field he goes,) • XII. (Shall we yet know another meeting,) • N.N. (The sun sets, and dark the mountains become,) • My thirteenth year was wearing on) • Irzhavets (Once the Swedes made for themselves) • We ask each other, aye enquiring, • I’ll gaze again on steppe and plain, • Lord, do not give to any other • The prophet (As if to children righteous, good) • A little cloud glides to the sun • Drowsy waves, sky unwashed and dirty • O my thoughts, my heartfelt thoughts • Not for people and their glory, • By the grove, in the open field, • So it was my mother bore me • The wind howls along the road • Ah, I sit outside the house • Plaintively the cuckoo called • Beer and mead have not been drunk here • Kateryna had a house • Beyond the grove the sun comes up • There are no such enemies • Say, why have you grown so black • This is not a lofty poplar • Both the valley stretching wide • Once more the post has brought to me • Thorns have overgrown the paths • On Easter Sunday, on the straw • ...Together we grew up of old • Unfree I count the days and nights • Blaze of lights and music calling • The Neophytes: a poem. (Beloved of the Muses, Graces). I. (Not in our country, dear to God) II. (That Star already was beginning) III. (Then it was that her Alcides) IV. (And in the Thermae, too, reigns orgy) V. (On the Cross,) VI. (Now it seethes) VII. (A strange feast they’ve devised, indeed) VIII. (There before) IX. (On the third day it was permitted) X. (And you stood there like a dark rock) XI. (And into Rome the galley sailed) XII. (A second day) XIII. (From the spectacle, when the evening) XIV. (She rested there awhile) • Fate (You never acted as a trickster) • The Muse (And you, maiden most pure and holy) • Unfree I count the days and nights • The dream (She reaped the wheat in serfdom’s labour) • I am not ill, touch wood, not I • Paraphrase of the Eleventh Psalm (Merciful God! How they do wane now) • To Marko Vovchok (Lately, beyond the Urals straying) • N.N. (Once a lily like you, growing) • Dear God, evil once more runs riot!...• Ah, I have eyes, have two eyes to me given • Hosea, Chapter XIV. Paraphrase (And thou shalt perish, Ukraina) • I. (A pretty maiden with dark brows) • II. (Oak-grove, darkly-shadowed spinney) • The years of youth have long ceased flowing • Day comes and goes, night comes and goes • Water flows from beneath the maple • Once I was walking in the night • Should we not then cease, my friend. • **Paintings. Graphic works:** Taras Shevchenko’s works of art / Tetiana Andruschenko (490–496). • [Reproductions, with Ukrainian and English captions, 497–589]. • Notes (597–603). • Vera Rich. Biographical information / [unsigned, i.e. Roksoliana Zorivchak]. (604–605). • Contents (607).

About the Authors

Vasyl Gabor was born in 1959 and lives in Lviv. He is the editor of a series of anthologies of contemporary writing in Ukraine entitled *Pryvatna kolektsiia* (Private Collection). He is the director of the Foreign Press Research Division of Lviv's Stefanyk Library.

Ivan Kernyts'kyi was born near Lviv in 1913 and died in New York in 1984. His career as a writer began before WWII in Western Ukraine but he is best known as a humorist in the Ukrainian postwar community in the United States, where his short pieces frequently appeared on the pages of the newspaper *Svoboda.*

Bohdana Matiyash was born in Kyiv in 1982. She studied at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy. She writes poetry and literary criticism.

Kostiantyn Moskalets' was born in 1963 in the village of Matiivka near Baturyn. He has returned to live there, in a natural environment enjoying relative isolation, devoting himself to literary and artistic work.

Taras Prokhas'ko was born in Ivano-Frankivsk in 1968. Before turning to writing he studied biology at Lviv University.

Mykola Riabchuk was born in 1953 in Lutsk. He is a central figure in the revival of Ukrainian literature and culture in the last quarter of the 20th century. Today he is best known for his writings about politics, particularly cultural politics, in Ukraine.

Valerii Shevchuk was born in 1939 in Zhytomyr. He is one of Ukraine's best-known literary figures. He lives in Kyiv and has had a very prolific career as a writer and translator.

Serhii Zhadan was born in 1974 in a village in Luhansk oblast and studied at Kharkiv's Skovoroda Pedagogical University. He is a prolific author of both poetry and prose.

The Shevchenko Scientific Society is an organization of scholars dedicated to the advancement of Ukrainian studies. It is the oldest Ukrainian academy of arts and sciences, and its activities have formed a mainstay of Ukrainian scholarly and cultural life for over a century. Founded in 1873 in the city of Lviv, Ukraine, it was liquidated by the Soviet regime in 1939. The Society was reestablished in Western Europe and the United States in 1947, in Canada in 1949, and in Australia in 1950. In 1989 it resumed its activity in Ukraine.

The Society's headquarters in the United States, located at 63 Fourth Avenue in New York City, include offices, lecture halls, and a specialized library and archives pertaining to Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora. Its membership of four hundred fellows and associate members is organized in six scholarly sections: Mathematics & Sciences, Medicine & Biology, Philology, History & Philosophy, Social Sciences, and the Arts. The Society's publications in these fields comprise over 160 volumes. The Shevchenko Scientific Society in the U.S.A. is proud to include *Ukrainian Literature: A Journal of Translations* in its list of publications.