



Unspoken

a novel by Viacheslav Pihida

It was cold. But then, it was almost always cold and cloudy here. This is how it is in port cities. They are cold, full of people that come and go. And they are hollow.

Maybe, all cities were like that, for all he knew. Or almost like that. He never was out of his city and he could not prove the idea wrong or right. Nor had he wanted to. He was accustomed to the life in the way it was here. All that was here might as well have not existed - the people, the dull gray architecture. Nothing here had any impact on his life. He was whole to himself.

He got himself into art, struggling for years to learn by himself. In the meantime he had gotten a guitar, and that had proven to be a matter even more difficult to deal with. But, as it was, there was not much else to do. The part-time job was barely noticeable, and he had time to spend. He clearly could not understand the belief that there was never enough time.

Sometimes he felt empty, just like the world around him. He was doing whatever he wanted to most of the time. He felt interest in the process and was disappointed in between of the activities. He even tried writing. Now he had a few paper sheets with his poems. Very few had made it as far as to be kept. Now they were left in a stack of papers. After he had finished writing, there was no use for them.

But life seemed dreary still. It is as if there was something far greater left in the past, but, no matter how he looked at it, he remembered no ambitions and no big dreams. He went past hoping for a miracle. And he did not choose to break away from everything to move on. On the contrary, he kept progressing here and there, very slowly. It filled his days and nights, but in retrospective it seemed that nothing improved at all.

Being a free spirit, he tended to take walks. He even was at that same place, just once. It was just as deserted; but

now he lived way farther from it and had an excuse to not to visit it. Instead, he walked the nearest seaside that was covered in stone bricks. But he still sought a pleasant elevation to escape the world. Beyond the paved road lay a shore with rocks around. People were here sometimes, unfortunately. But it was not crowded here, especially at night.

This evening, too. As he came, he noticed no-one around. That was not surprising; it happened sometimes. The waves were moving slowly. The water was dark in the distance and transparent nearby. He made his way to a rock as gravel made cracking sounds, with pebbles rubbing against each other under every step. He put himself down. Gloved hands in jacket pockets, hood covering the short hair. He did not like to get frozen to sickness any more. It was nasty to deal with each time, and costly at that. Utterly annoyed by consequences, he started dressing warmly. A long time ago. It was still cold, but not unbearably. The limbs did not go numb, and that was unironically convenient. Only the face was pinched by the wind, but that was not really disturbing.

The water splashed loudly in a well formed by rocks. It was not the sound that was loud. It only seemed loud because it was echoed in the well. It was just much more audible than the waves that hit the shoreline.

He watched the waves absently, as he heard the splash again and again. With a sad sigh, he rose. He walked to another rock, slowly. The wind whistled slightly, it was barely possible to pick that sound out. Waves hit the shoreline over and over, endlessly. They drew back from pebbles and seaweed, left stones drip water into numerous cracks. And then the waves stopped and turned back. They crawled onto the ground and then split in many drops at a sudden halt. It was a slow process to observe, and yet it was repeated very often. Again and again. It was a natural movement of water, entirely

usual. Just like the stars and the clouds above, just as the trembling grass somewhere on the dirt ground, the waves were absolutely usual and almost as beautiful.

He did not go far and it did not take him long. Watching the sea seemed to take a lot of time, and it was unclear how a minute was different from two minutes, five, ten, or a whole hour. He sat again.

The water was not really different from the countless previous times he had seen it. The same transparent dark blue fabric that folds in different shapes; never changing, always changing. It seems to be the same each time. And it is still pleasant to look at it. It is the same as always: meaningless and calming. Whether it swirls, stays, ripples or sways, it is just the same.

He put his chin on a palm and stayed like this, watching the sea water and thinking of nothing, very specifically. For a little eternity, nothing changed.

It was much later when he had noticed something in the sea, somewhere to the left. He was almost surprised. As he looked, he saw that it was a female. She was drifting, not far away. She was conscious, her eyes were open. And yet, she made no effort to stop swaying in the very cold water.

This brought distress to him, and he stood up. He looked closer. He saw entirely wet dark hair enveloping her head, with its ends spreading in the water. As she bobbed in the water, her shoulders, covered by a shirt, were rising just above the water level and coming down in nudges. He noticed a belt-style chocker on her neck. This aroused his memory; it felt as if something was there, some sort of reminiscence. The feeling was sweet and very intriguing, as it always is with something seemingly worth remembering. With that, he squinted to see her face. And indeed, it was barely familiar. The bright intrigue

dissipated into absolutely neutral acknowledgement. Then the acknowledgement became just a bit nice. He had seen her somewhere. Twice, maybe, thrice. Somewhere in the city, he could not remember. She was passing by, going somewhere. Nothing, entirely nothing specific was in the memory regarding her. She was just a person who appeared in the city sometimes.

It suddenly struck him that he had to do something. A moment passed since the thought. The unknown female stayed in the water, moving obediently with the waves.

He sighed, feeling troubled, but, unbeknownst to himself, excited. He emptied his pockets at once and came running, hastily unzipping the jacket. He threw it behind, not looking. The cold wind rushed against his torso. Then, he jumped. He wanted to close his eyes, tense himself. Perhaps, he did. He also somewhat wanted to not to go into the water. But that was somewhere at the back of the conscience.

He fell down into the water. Body stiffened at the cold immediately, eyes opened wide in physiological shock. He could not decide whether to scream or just hiss, and he did not have to, since his teeth were shut very tightly. The cold made the skin prickle all over and burn with pain. He did not understand how much time passed before he could start thinking and moving. He did not do *that* kind of action for years.

He located her some distance from himself. Water contorted the surface and it was very hard to tell whether she was near or far. Sometimes, waves lowered or raised him. Sometimes they splashed against his face, blinding him and relieving from the crispy frost of the wind just to replace it with the fluid cold and then change it back again. He barely understood what happened next. He was swimming, then he grabbed her clumsily. It was difficult to count the times he tried to wrap his hand around her. And then he was moving directly

the shortest route to the shore. As he approached, water went suddenly very shallow and the moves became heavy. Stumbling, he dragged himself and the female out of the water. He noticed only now that she was feebly holding him with one hand. He lowered her. The frost started overcoming him with hysteria. Confused, he wanted the cold to cease at once because it was maddening. He wanted to stay down, but it hurt to stay down. He wanted to get away, but it was unbearable to think how far he has to go. He forced himself to stand up steady and clear his mind, even if for a second. Having made decision to simply act, he started trembling again. He looked around and found his belongings. Running after them and with them helped to regain some control.

This is when the haze started wearing off. With a jacket in hand, he approached the lady. No, the young lady. Rather, the girl. Yes, she was still the same as in his memory. A girl just out of her teens. She was breathing heavily and shaking. Other than that, she did completely nothing.

He was trembling and holding the jacket. He was thinking whether he should take it on to make sure he will be able to carry her all the way. To his surprise, the chivalry won and he pulled it on her shoulders, helping her get into the sleeves as he tried to control his wildly trembling arms.

He then wrapped his arm around her waist and nudged both of them up. She stumbled, but stood. He started walking, and she did not resist. He looked at her and could not gather any information. She seemed to be not quite here. She shook and walked and blinked, but she looked somewhere off, with her eyes directed down.

He understood that he can do only as much as to hold her straight and walk. It was not difficult at all, since the only thing that occupied his mind was the painful frost that grew from numbing pain to sharp pangs when the wind came

striking at him. He could only help her walk and walk himself. He had no strength for anything else.

What happened soon afterwards was all blurry – the memory made gaps here and there, though it seemed that he was fully conscious each moment. What he knew is that they crossed the pavement shoreline and walked a pair of streets. He opened the first cafe door without thinking and forced them in. He stumbled a pair of steps in and stopped. For a minute, he did nothing. The body burned and the feet were numb. As some more time passed, he found the door opening and staggered away from it. Someone walked in, openly staring at a soaking young man, then at a wet young lady, and left. This was when he looked around. He noticed a few people in the cafe. Some were busy with whatever they were doing, and some quickly turned the gaze into another direction when their eyes met with his. He did not look at the barista. He figured that they two were standing in a cafe, covered in water. He started feeling even more uncomfortable, and this time, internally. He walked back to the exit. He looked at the girl, but she did not change in any way. He opened the door and strode off.

The short break made his body crave for rest, but it also restored some energy. With pace hastened, he crossed some city blocks and reached for the keys. The hand happened to be almost as numb as the feet were, and it took him some noticeable effort to pull them out of the pocket, then not drop them and then open the door. He walked both of them inside of the building and walked to the nearest heater. The sensation in hands changed to a different one. The warmth flowed from fingertips into the palms, and the pain that came was intertwined with all of the other discomfort in the body. But the relief made it relaxing.

Feeling that the primal fear of death was not controlling

his thoughts, he looked over to see what she was doing. Just like him, she put her gentle but violet hands on the metal of the heater and stared at them, turning them over. It struck him as a weird behaviour.

He sighed cathartically, leaning against the heater. It screeched under the weight, and he drew back quickly. Knowing not to push it too much, he adjusted himself closer and started recollecting the strength he required in order to think.

They were inside the building and he needed to get them inside his apartment. Which was tiny. That was not a problem for now, since he needed any place to come back to senses. He can take her in and talk it all out. But first, he has to take her in and get them both warm. And then, take care of nutrition. Then he will talk; then, rest.

He looked at her. She was all messed up. Her hair was split in locks sharply, and they were sticking to her cheeks, neck and shoulders. She was wearing a shirt. He saw her breasts lined out by the folded and surrounding fabric. He felt some sweet excitement, but was immediately disgusted by it. The arousal passed away as fast as it appeared. Next, his mind made out a long skirt and warm shoes. And she was wearing the choker and his jacket. Of course.

She was standing almost normally when he decided it was time to go. He had come to find that wrapping arms around her is not polite at all, so he stretched out his hand and took hers in his. It was smaller and frighteningly cold. He looked her in the eyes. They darted at him in some discomfoting emotion, but it changed to indifference the next moment.

He suddenly figured out that the look she gave him might have meant that she was afraid to let go of the heater, but suppressed it. He wondered with genuine and tender fear

whether she was alright, or, rather, how bad was her situation.

He walked up the staircase and down the corridor to the door to his apartment. She followed behind as he dragged her by the hand. It felt as a very confusing situation. He was trying to think of anything to say. Nothing came to mind. This way, he had arrived to the apartment door, automatically reaching for the key and unlocking it. He had to look at the door for a moment, and he did not really watch her during the walk. Now he turned to face her.

She was looking down, just as she was before. She was not trembling, but shivering slightly, with her clothes sticking to her. She did not react to the door opening.

He was standing there, holding the handle and her hand. He let go of her hand. This time, she looked at him. Face features did not carry any information. Only the lowered eyelids made her look weary as she looked at him. He felt anxious.

“This is my apartment. Come in.” It seemed not forcing before he pronounced it, but it sounded just wrong. As trivial and as informative as the sentence was, it had become demanding and strange. In his mind, he sighed. He did not like to talk.

She looked at her hands and rapidly moved her fingers into all kinds of gestures. At first, he was confused. He understood very fast then that this was the sign language.

“Oh, sorr...” He meant to apologize, then muttered, “... Right.” He really hated talking.

He returned his gaze from her fingers back to her face and made a straight welcoming gesture with his arm. His face was showing kindness mixed with concern, but it was enough to signal her that he did not understand. She looked inside the doorway, then stepped in. He followed her, locking the door.

Inside of the apartment, he turned on the light and

looked at the lifeless girl. He took an inhale to form a sentence and stopped short. He could not talk because she would not hear. He had to write. He looked inside the only room, eyeing paper and pencils. Right away, he threw off his shoes carelessly, sending them scattering near the door. Footsteps in wet socks felt discomfoting. Near a table, he snatched a pencil and wrote what he thought of.

“This is my apartment. Go take a shower, it’ll help you get warm.”

He dropped the pencil and returned to the girl with the paper. She could have not known the language. But she did. She read it quietly. He opened the bathroom door and gestured her in. She went in, and he pressed the door closed, nodding supportively.

He sighed with relief and went into the room to change. Taking off his clothes with significant effort, he understood that the towels were in the bathroom. The only other option was the kitchen towel. Grimacing at the decision, he made use of the small piece of fabric to rub off most of the water and then tossed it away to wash later. He hurried to dress up, instinctively not wanting to be naked in the wrong moment. He got into the dry clothes, but they stuck to his partially wet body. It finally started to feel warm.

About that time, he understood that she had no change at all. He sighed heavily. He scanned the small closet and picked a pair of jeans, a belt and a T-shirt. With these over his arm, he walked to the small desk on which the paper was lying. He put the clothes down on the only one chair in the apartment. As he already had a pencil in hand and sentences forming in his mind, his gaze fell upon a trusty machine. He took a pile of sheets from his device and inserted a blank page in it.

Weeks passed since the last time he wrote anything on his own typewriter. He did use one at the post for mundane

tasks, and it was all worn out and failing. His typewriter was in good shape because it was in such state when he bought it and since then he used it not too often. He had enough experience with it over the past few years, knowing how to operate it, how hard to push the buttons and levers; he also got to know when and how the paper gets jammed and which screws tend to get loose. He knew how often he had to rotate the tape manually, since it did not exactly fit this model of typewriter. Or, maybe, this typewriter never had a feature to rotate the tape back. He never knew.

Bent over the desk, he pulled the device to himself. Rubber padding fretted against the surface soundlessly. He took quite a liking to the elegant device, and it never left him, even if he abandoned the typewriter for many days. Just like that, he put his hands on the device as he always did, and paused to finalize the sentences in his mind.

Sound of water flowing was present. He had realized it only now, though it had been so for some time. That meant she can handle herself, at least for now. She should feel better soon.

“Sorry, I don’t have suitable clothes for you. Please, take these on. And come over to drink tea.”

He wanted to add a question regarding the type of tea she drank, but he really did not have anything to offer other than plain mild green tea. He stamped a period and rolled the sheet out of the holder. Three short sentences made two perfectly even lines at the top of the sheet. They were contrastingly small compared to the yellowed white field they were put on. He checked for typos, even though he rarely made them; then he folded the clothes and the belt and put the piece of paper on top. He brought this pile over to put in front of the bathroom door carefully. He heard the water dripping and trickling.

Not without ado, he walked to the tiny kitchen and

ignited the rusty burner ring. He set the tattered tan-coloured teapot there. He also started another fire, setting the pan. He went about making an omelette.

He did not really know anything about her. Only how she looks and that she does not talk. What was the colour of her eyes? He does not remember. Not that it matters.

At this moment, he did not know what to do with her. Get her back to the more or less healthy state and temperature; give her tea and omelette. Then... Of course - to discuss... matters. He can ask her where she is from and where he can take her. Except that he can not... Not tomorrow, at least – he had a shift to take. And, he remembered, for that he needed dry clothes and shoes. He had only one pair of warm shoes, so it is important for him to get them warm soon.

He gathered them from where they were laying, in puddles of dirty water. He brought them under the heater, then tucked the wet clothes in it.

He returned to the omelette to turn it over slowly.

She was still in the bathroom, which was, probably, normal. Since he had his hair cut short, he did not spend much time washing unless he was very moody. He did not know for how long she was already there. Slight paranoia about taxes and simple curiosity made him make approximate calculations. She was there now for about twenty to twenty-five minutes, which was mostly normal.

He cut the omelette, put it on two dishes. He usually did not care about the etiquette, eating up in whatever state the food was, but now he had a visitor. A first one in years, and a female one at that.

The kitchen table was tiny and locked in place. Because of that he moved the mess of papers and tools from the desk onto the floor and hauled it to the sofa. The desk was heavy and it took him more time than effort to push it there. He

located the dishes and mugs on it, rolled the blankets from the sofa and put them away. Then he sat down to wait.

He was a little tired and hungry, and he became bored as soon as he settled. He looked at the bathroom door. He looked at it for about a minute, and nothing happened. Thinking about the time again, he looked at the mechanical clock on the shelf.

Ten post meridiem. It is late.

Perhaps non-existent form of time, but a correct one. It was not precisely ten, though. The thin long arrow was just finishing the rotation, and swept past the topmost point. It was one minute past ten. The arrow kept moving.

He heard *click* of the doorknob. He rose and approached. The creaking door slowly rotated outwards. It hit the clothes softly and sent the letter flying. In the doorway stood she. She was standing and holding the handle as the door came to a halt after colliding with the clothes.

He crouched down to pick the sheet and take the clothes. He stood up. Outstretching the hand with the modern reach-me-downs and the shirt to her, he held the page up front to her. She reacted, for once.

At first, she held still. She was even more wet. The skirt and the blouse let the water trail down her skin. But it was now clean and soft.

Then she tilted forth unsteadily and squinted at the letters. He turned the page around in disbelief. Decisively, he took her hand, and put the vestments in it. With a page now spattered by her hand, he left and returned in several seconds. He wrote in large and clear letters:

“Please, take these clothes on. And use the towel, this time.”

He held the paper very close, but not too close so as not to be intrusive. He watched her face. She squinted with far less

effort. Her eyes jumped over the lines. Corners of her mouth jerked up, only a little. It did not look like a smile because her expression did not correspond to the movement at all. And yet, for a short moment, she looked like a tired demure young lady. He saw that her eyes were blue-gray. In an instant, the lips relaxed back. She looked at the clothes, turned around and closed the door. This time, she did it herself. What he noticed, however, was that she was still in soaking boots.

Did she... just stand under the shower in clothes? That was not good. But what was with the sudden change? Taking long showers was soothing. Maybe, it had helped her not only with the temperature. He hoped she used warm water, but he did not see steam when she showed up.

He waited as irregular sounds of fabric were emitted from behind the door. This situation whole was unlikely. Things like that did not happen, only if in books. They usually were resolved in some fabulous way, without many stitches in the story, but with various unexpected situations that were unlikely enough by themselves, not to mention when set in a surreal sequence.

It was almost as if...

The memory of a gorgeous red-haired girl was unpleasant. But it was also nicely sorrowful. In such retrospective, her presence was tantalizing. Smile, sound of wind, kiss, some stories she told. Then, nothing. It was likely that his current visitor would leave without a trace, too... just like she should.

He waited not half as long as he did the previous time. She opened the door. Jeans and shirt were noticeably big for her and settled rather clumsily. The belt loosely fastened the trousers with a tilt visible even under the shirt. One end of the belt was hanging freely halfway down the thigh. The shirt was somewhat wet on breasts. Her hair happened to be not dark, but

rather deep brown, alike chestnut colour. It was not much long: styled in cascade but now tangled and shapeless, it covered her shoulders just barely. The clothes did not make her look worn. On the contrary, she looked fragile. She would have looked even soft, if not for her dead face.

He gestured her to the table in a benign way. She took two barefoot steps unsteadily. He gave her a hand and she did not reject it. He walked her to the settee and let her sit down. He felt slightly cold, so he put the thick blanket over her shoulders. He took a thin one for himself. He found that she buried herself slightly in the blanket.

He did not feel like pointing hands at everything he had to mention. Instead, he turned over the page he held all along, picked the pencil from above his ear, settled himself and wrote:

“This is omelette and green tea. I can’t do much more for now.” He paused. She was reading, almost involuntarily. She looked at him. Lack of expression started frightening him. *“You can eat now,”* he added. He did not know whether he should wish good appetite, so he just let it be.

She was not decisive still. He carefully handed over one of the mugs into her hands. The tea was not hot by now. Feeling awkward, he took his mug. She stared at the tea for several seconds. But then she brought it to her lips and drank. Unsure at first, she soon started gulping down greedily. As soon as she finished, she lowered her mug rapidly to her lap and coughed loudly. The cough was natural in this situation, but from the crisp one the sound changed to deep. She coughed four times total, jerking each time. He put down his mug and worriedly rolled the blanket around her more closely. She was breathing heavily and her exhalations had a wheeze to them. She reached her hand for the second mug and coughed once more abruptly. He helped her to it, taking away the empty one. She drank fast, but not all at once. After several sips

interrupted by breaths, she put the mug on the edge of the desk and sighed heavily with an internal whistle. Her breath was forced but slow now.

He waited several seconds, observing her. She was shaking a bit and she held her head lowered. Soon, she inhaled deeply, straightening with the motion. She tucked the blanket ends deeper into creases. Her eyelids were wearily lowered. She then looked at the dish on the table. Half a second later, she grabbed it by the end and pulled. He snapped to assist her, but he only supported the dish from the other end. She stabbed the fork into food without elegance and upthrusted a huge part of it. She took a confident bite. Her eyes widened a bit and she started doing the same thing she did with the tea. The omelette split and slapped flat on the dish. He snatched his fork and pulled at the dish. She gave him a look that read both surprise and plea. He did not pull any closer and, seeing from the corner of his eye that she chews and swallows heavily, divided the meal into uneven slices. He let go of the dish, with his hands up in an unambiguous gesture of no ill will. She stopped chewing and looked on the pieces. Her lower eyelids rose.

Since then she masticated in normal pace. While she did so, he took his dish and started thoughtfully segmenting it. He finally tried a piece. He was still hungry, despite the disconcertment. Because of hunger, it tasted good. Finally, he sighed too, in relief. He took more in his mouth and chewed thoroughly. By that time she was finishing her part, forking the second before last piece. He unceremoniously brought his dish to hers and tried to unload some off of it. But she stopped chewing, jolted the dish away and shook her head confidently. He drew back. Either she was not as hungry as she was thirsty or she had regained her senses enough to be polite. Either way, the momentous reaction was a change for the better.

He looked at her face as she fixed her gaze on him. She

moved her jaw around twice, then swallowed. She blinked at him. There was no smile nor brow movement. And yet she had come to be alive. He smiled kindly. She did not respond to it. She put the dish up on the desk towering above the sofa, and burrowed once again.

He did not have as much appetite as he had at first, and now his meal was noticeably lukewarm, so he hurried to finish it. As he digested, he gave her some rest, only watching her with peripheral vision. She rocked from side to side perpetually, but soon toppled heavily onto his shoulder, slipping further forward off the settee. He caught her with an elbow movement. He placed the dish on the tabletop, careful not to stir the supporting hand. Then he slid to the side and then out of the sofa, lowering her. She was fast asleep. The blanket was twisted and folded on her. He covered her feet with his own blanket and shivered.

In such momentary physiological distress he concentrated on the priorities. He finished the omelette, then hauled the dishes into the sink and washed them. He then entered the bathroom. Her stockings, skirt and shirt were evenly hanging on the heater pipes right next to a towel. Directly underneath were the shoes, slightly to the right side of the heater. The jacket was hanging on a hook. He acknowledged the diligence, then grabbed a different towel and took a shower. The warm water made frozen skin feel even more cold, but it soothed to the relief very soon.

So much for talking to her. But he will talk to her in the morning. Rather, write to her. He can ask where she lives and help her to get there... for whatever reason she ended up in the sea. Of course, she was sick now and needed treatment. He had a small box full of medicine, especially against the cold. He might be in need of it tomorrow as well. After all, throat gets the worst in the morning after the influenza infection.

He indulged in warmth for some more, even though it did not feel as blissful as it was at the beginning. Then, assured that he was not frostbitten any more, as well as clean, he put on the same clothes he was in.

He had considered rinsing his throat with mild baking soda solution just in case, but he did not want to intrude her sleep. And he was tired enough to want to sleep more than anything. He only brushed his teeth and returned to the room.

She was sleeping peacefully. In rolled and folded fabric sheets she was laying in rest. Her legs were bent in knees. Her one arm, on which she partially lay, was bent too, while the arm that was above hung freely over and out of the couch. Messy hair flowed over her cheek, covering almost half of her face. She breathed with open mouth. Even so, in such state she was lovely. She was fragile but in safety. And she was at rest, not troubled any more. He smiled ruefully.

There was the problem that he had nothing else to sleep on. There was the desk, sure. But it was turned to the settee and it was not the best thing to sleep on. He did not have extra blankets, either. Desperate, he pulled out some broad and almost soft clothes and formed them into a floor-level bed, yawning in the process. He did not have any extra thick counterpanes, but he had a second woollen cover. It was smaller than the one he covered her with. Because of that he put on some warmer clothes. He turned off the lights and laid down at last.

By now he had a girl he knew nothing about and she was sick. He somehow had her at home and he should help her get back on her way. Which he did not know either.

He rolled to the side; curled to relative comfort. He sighed in the new relief. Then he did not have any thoughts or words forming. For several seconds.

This might be a difficult night. Insomnia could drive

one insane easily, always. Between wanting to sleep very much but being unable to, there was not much but continuous unrest. He rolled over to another side to see her. Her placid form was calming. He could barely see her face now, but he somewhat remembered it.

He hoped for her wellbeing and that made him happy. He also worried. He still remembered that he needed to take out the medicine. He did not want to stand up and turn on the lights and search it now. Absolutely. He shall not need it until tomorrow. For tomorrow he needed to wake up by his usual alarm. The alarm clock stood on the shelf above the sofa. He scrambled himself up unwillingly, but it was easier to do than he expected. He reached for the device and carried it over her, cautiously supporting it, making sure it does not fall. With the ticking small alarm clock in hands, he stood. Night light coming through the window was not even remotely bright. The room was in darkness.

With a time-measuring device he was in front of a girl who somehow happened to be found by him in a desperate state. He lowered the clock and moved closer to her face. She was breathing evenly with silent wheezes. He smiled to her carefree face, wondering what exactly was so magical in this situation. Serene night and a peaceful visitor. He did not pay much attention to her face until now. It was still obscured by the locks, but he could make out a small pointy nose, smooth skin and even shape that remotely reminded an ellipse. Her brows and lashes were relaxed.

He had a wish to do something, maybe to reach her or to arrange her hair. He did not know why. It was touching and unclear. He forcefully decided not to disturb her and backed away, locating the alarm on the site of the makeshift bed that was farthest from her. He laid down again, facing her deliberately. Being sure of tomorrow made falling asleep

easier. Or, maybe, it was because of her.

He jolted to take down the alarm. He woke up in an unusual place and it took him several seconds to stop the ringing. He looked around and saw her sleeping just as soundly. He yawned broadly and stood up.

Gray and depressing, such was the street outside the window. But it was well. Lifeless, deserted pavement between buildings created inspiring despair. This view was one of the many paradoxical things that were bad enough to be good. He was used to it, of course, but it supported his melancholy to this day.

It was not long before he poured hot water over oat flakes and then tea leaves, making a simple breakfast for two. Having the chair by the previous desk location, as he left it yesterday, he turned it around to watch her and began with his meal. Several seconds in, he decided that it is meddlesome of him to stare like that, so he shifted to look into the window.

A vague memory lingered in his mind. In it, he had seen the girl with the red curls. In a train. The girl he had not seen her for over a year was some distance away from him. He had turned away. This was the last time he had seen that girl. The last after the last.

The memory was unforgettable, but unclear. It seemed to be a dream from this morning, but he remembered that it actually happened... vaguely. He did not remember what preceded and what followed it. Because of that he was already doubting whether it was a dream or not. It seemed to him that he had remembered this episode already, but he could not tell for sure.

It was strange to remember it now. Even poetically ironic, now that he had a girl with him. Back then, she was not really with him. And this girl, too, had nothing binding her to

him. It seemed sad. He was going to go to the job, and then what? She probably is not going to wake up before he leaves. He could have awakened her, but he did not want to, especially with the state she was in. He was lucky and immune enough to get over the cold, but she got it hard enough yesterday.

He had finished the breakfast soon, then placed her share on the desk and brought the medicine box there, too. He picked an empty paper and put it on the same tabletop. He had specified which drugs were meant for what; when and how to take them. He lined them out on the table and moved the box away. He also added:

“You can have the porridge and the tea. If there’s anything else you need, check the fridge and the kitchen drawers. Feel free to get yourself anything.

I’ll be home in the evening.

Please, don’t leave.”

The last line resounded. He truly did not want her to leave. He did not want her to abandon the apartment unlocked, and then get even more sick. But he also wanted her to stay. He had wanted to help her all the way. And he had wanted to see her happy.

But she will leave. She does not need to stay, she has no reason to. She will just go wherever she needs to. Maybe she will get lost or dive into the ocean again. That was a horrible opportunity. If that happened, he had no way of knowing where or when she will be. Hardly she shall visit the same spot at the same time. The only way he could stop her was to ask her. It was his only option.

He turned the letter so that she would be facing it when she looked at the desk. He put on appropriate clothes quietly, did the same with the almost dry shoes. Then he cast the last look at her before stepping out of the door.

The thoughts he just went through were with him all the

way to the post building. It had come to him that she might be dangerous. She might have been doing burglaries or murders in the past. He knew nothing of her past. It was rare for a very young lady to become a criminal. They were the victims much more often. And even if this city was rather peaceful and prosaic, it was still possible. Of course, she was tender and feeble and could not move by herself yesterday. But if she was dangerous, there was nothing he could do now. He already let her in and he is going to help her. It was what little he could do in life.

If she stayed.

He still was processing it whilst haling the boxes and fetching the letters and occasionally typing in records, but he was mostly busy, so he did not come up with anything new. Except that he understood that he should get home as soon as possible. Whatever could have happened to her while he worked.

He tried to eavesdrop on what the customers said, hoping to hear something related to her. If she ran away, there was a chance that someone was looking for her and then there was a chance that someone might just be coming to post and maybe willing to ask about it. But the talk around was as annoying and useless as it always was. It would have been enough if the customers spoke of the destination and provided all the necessary information, but they butted in with jokes, complaints or impatient rudeness.

Usually when he was not pacing towards the packages and back from them, he tried to concentrate on a rhyme or a story or something not related to the job. This time he was thinking of her. No matter who she was, she was sweet and attractive and he already missed her.

He ended the long shift with the care for her in his mind. He was anxious to see her. He strode out of the post

quickly, almost running. He was thinking of what kind of medication and treatment she needed, but also what could he cook for the two of them. He got home swiftly, jumping up the staircase and opening the door anxiously.

She was standing near the desk unsteadily and drinking from a mug with abnormal haste. She stopped to put something in her mouth and continued. Then she rummaged on the tabletop, tossing around medication boxes and pills, tried to grab a hold of the latter, but staggered. The mug shattered against the floor, leaving a splat of water and she, too, came to a hard impact with the surface.

“No, no, no, no, no, no!” He rushed towards her, but she had already lost conscience.

Why the hell did she do that?

For several seconds he watched her outstretched body. He jumped up to the phone that was hanging on a wall. He could dial either the private or the free clinical centre. He chose the former without second thoughts. He used both numbers time to time, depending on the situation. He was keeping the spare money exactly for the inconvenient occasions that happened to happen because he was not paying much attention to his health until it was urgent.

He tapped on the wall impatiently, staring at the unmoving body. As soon as he was connected, he hastened to describe the situation, saying what he saw and answering the questions regarding the supposed consumed drugs. He was informed the approximate amount of time he had to wait. It was some number less than twenty; in minutes. He wanted to ask or say something else, but there was really nothing to add. He ended the call and started pacing the room.

He knew better than to try to help her without any medical knowledge himself. He might have felt his insides twisting at the sight, but he could only wait. Having aimlessly

paced for several minutes, he prepared his wallet and counted his savings several times. Partly satisfied, he tucked it inside a jacket pocket. He looked at the paper sheet on the desk. Then on the pile of different papers. He snatched a small notebook and a pencil and tucked them into the different jacket pocket. He had also prepared the thin coverlet. Then he escaped to the street, leaving the door unlocked, to wait for the escort.

Since then the hassle lasted until he got into a hospital room. There was the ride, then she was taken away and he was left to inquire the staff. Apparently, she was undergoing some procedure. He absolutely did not want to know the details regarding it. Instead, he asked what could be done afterwards, what can happen and how long can recovery last. The answers were not clear, but as he described more, it was established that she had to spend at least a day here. If she made it. Which was likely, given that he called in immediately after she got intoxicated. He was unsure he should have asked the staff about her origins because he was not ready to answer anything like that himself. So he kept quiet about finding her by chance.

It had come to a halt only when he settled to watch her in a room provided. She was laying on the hospital bed without conscience and had an intravenous therapy device inside her left arm. She was breathing steadily and was in no risk of dying. He was still stressed, so he took his time examining the room before taking a chair and putting it in front of the bed. He set the chair back to the front and folded arms on it as he sat down.

By that time it was already late evening. Hospital staff was kind enough to offer a light dinner, and he agreed. He had not eaten anything since a miserable lunch at the post. He did not feel hunger and barely wanted to eat. The snack tasted good, however. By far better than anything he had eaten at

home.

He then sat and watched her. Aside from returning the food plate and utensils to the staff and visiting the restroom he did nothing at all. He was only sitting by her side and observing her state. He got as comfortable as he could on the chair and lost track of time.

“Why?..”

The whisper was faint. It was she who whispered.

“You... can talk,” he said, astonished.

“I... hate talking...”

He gave her a sincere gaze. “I feel the same.” Talking never did any good. If he had just hated it all along, she had the courage to reject it altogether. Not only that, she had also had enough courage to...

He snapped to yell, “Don’t you bloody do that again!” He was not used to yelling, so he was not controlling how his tone rose midway the sentence and went silent again by the end.

She made a disappointed expression. Very disappointed; it was even as if she let herself drown in despair.

She did not say anything.

“Why did you do that? Why...” He pieced it together.

“Why did you go into the sea?”

“I... wanted the sea... to take me.” She looked at the ceiling, or just in front of herself. Or somewhere far away. Her eyes were wet.

He did not know how to inquire. He then thought he simply should not. He just looked at her. He felt pity and anger, and fear for her. Mostly for her life, but also for what she is.

She was still looking away as she said, “Will you... leave me?”

“No... not in that state.” The answer was obvious to

him.

She faced him. “Why?”

He half-groaned, half-moaned. They were keeping eye contact. She was sad... and beautiful. Too beautiful to die. He exhaled heavily. “You’d do that again, don’t you?” Once again, she did not react. He then silently added: “Please, don’t.”

She let out barely audible “Why?”

If her life depended on it, he might as well say it. “You are... too beautiful... to... die.” On that he grimaced and looked away. He had desperately hoped that would work, but he knew better than that. If she tried it twice – at least! – surely his words would not help. And yet he wished they could. She was tender. She really should not... do that. Why? “Why,” echoed his recent memory. Why, truly? He did not know. But he certainly did not want someone so beautiful to die. He did not want *her* to die, specifically. On even the possibility of that something in his breast hurt, giving an urge to cry. He somehow nursed her to life yesterday... probably yesterday. He looked at the clock... or for the clock. It was nowhere to be found. He did not know how much time he spent here.

“Will you take me?”

“What?” That was something he was not ready for.

“Take... me.” She was looking at him. With kindness. Her gray eyes were too much too look at.

He held his breath, thinking about the answer. “I guess, if you need to recover... But you can do it here. I- I promise I won’t spare money,” he inhaled through the clenched teeth, “If you need... You can stay here as long as you need.” He really did not care much about the savings now.

At that she blinked. “You can... take me?” Her wording was surprisingly, frighteningly close to the one she referred to the suicide. But something here was different. In her eyes was hope. With tears not yet flowing and with barely open lips, she

was pleading.

“...Yes,” he uttered, unsure. Then, added with more confidence: “Yes.” This was plainly weird. But not impossible. “Don’t you have a home, though?” Many things could have happened, really.

She shook her head.

“A family? Relatives?”

She made the same response. This was weird and barely possible. But it could have been figurative, as she was left by them. Or she was an orphan. But then...

“But you’ve got to have something.”

She repeated her answer. That was not possible.

“Nothing?” He raised his eyebrows. She was looking at him earnestly. “How?”

“I don’t have past.”

“But how?”

This time she shook her head very slowly.

“Fine. I’ll take you. Don’t worry.”

Upon hearing that, she smiled. For the first time. He could not help but smile back. He could not say no. He could not have said it at all. He placed his chin on his arms. She was looking very nice with a smile. He did not want to look away. He felt very good. Very tranquil and happy. He blinked. She blinked, too. It was all right. She was all right.

Then, she was motionless. It was clear, she was dead. She said, she does not want to. It was understandable. He was very dizzy and very scared. Fright made him cold and it was painful. He just saw her, and then he saw nothing. Vision just shrunk.

He rocked back in a chair with a start. In panic, he looked at her. She was lying with her eyes closed. He was too

scared to move, he was locked in place. Painful surreal cold was still with him and he hyperventilated.

He saw that blanket over her breast was raising and lowering back. Slowly, in even ebb and flow. He thrust his hand through his hair. He gasped for air.

She was breathing and she was sleeping.

His arm was almost completely numb from wrist to the fingertips. Sleeping on a chair was awful. Entirely. He unsteadily crawled out of it. Not only his hand was numb. His body felt bad. He stood. He squinted from the sensation and from tiredness, but kept the gaze on her. He then stretched his neck with a loud *crack*. Sleeping on a chair was downright awful.

He took a careful step towards her and stopped. He did not know what he was going to do. But he felt like he wanted to do something. Just anything, so she does not die. But she should not. Staff told him everything already. Then why was he so afraid? Surely, it was that nightmare. In reality, she was all right. And very lovely.

Gently, he touched her cheek without fully understanding or thinking. She was relaxed, but then weakly smiled.

“Sleep...” Whisper escaped her slightly open lips.

He snatched his hand back. She opened her eyes wide and squinted in the next moment. He was staring nervously. He whispered loud, “Why aren’t you sleeping?”

“IV,” she said and moaned, “It hurts so much.”

“Damn it,” he darted his eyes around the room frantically. “You... ugh... I’ll be right back!”

He ran out of the room. Was she feeling it for long? For how damn long was she in pain?

He kept his pace civil for a clinic, and it felt especially important to keep it silent in the nighttime. He reached the help

desk not as soon as he had wanted to. The nurse looked ready for trouble instead of being frightened. Stuttering, he told the nurse the situation and asked for painkillers. Nurse agreed, since that was exactly what should be done - he inquired of it earlier. He tapped nervously at the wall for seconds. The nurse walked off to somewhere hastily. He told the nurse the room number and heard back that it was already known.

He rushed back and left the door open. She looked at him, weary and sad. He hesitated, grabbed his own arm, and immediately let go of it. Instead, he touched her arm; not the one that had the needle inserted. Her skin was soft and hot.

He spoke with mouth dry, "It'll be better. They are bringing the painkillers." She stopped squinting, now only looking tired. He felt pressure from her arm and saw her squeeze her hand on fabric. "Don't concentrate on the pain, now... It won't be for long. I'm sure. You'll be okay... Ughh..." With that, he was out of the words. He strained his hearing for footsteps, and, sure enough, he heard them. "You hear them? Almost here." He looked away and at the door. He could have counted the steps. He listened in anguish to the irritatingly slow crescendo. He gave space to a different nurse, who held a glass and a pill. The lights flashed bright, hurting the eyes. He wanted badly to support her back, but the nurse had done it herself. He just was leaning against the wall in unrest. The nurse turned around to leave, finished.

He asked, "How long until it starts?"

"Depends," said the nurse apologetically. He growled. The nurse spoke again, "is it bad?"

"Yeah."

Both he and the nurse looked at her. She was laying down, tilting her brows helplessly.

Nurse added, "I'm sorry. It doesn't take longer than half an hour. But usually the effect is seen in about ten to fifteen

minutes.”

With that, the door closed and the two were left alone. She murmured, “Lights... please.”

“Right.” He jumped to the switch to comply. On his way, he hit his shoulder against the cornering wall. It was not bad, however, so he carried on.

In the dimness he squeezed himself on the very corner of the bed. He clasped her hand. She held his.

He did not realize that it would take time for the medicine to work when he rushed to get it. Now he was uncomfortable. He shifted and gritted teeth soundlessly. But he did not let any movement to stir her hand. For the next minutes he did not have any specific sentences or thoughts. He was only looking after her and suffering. Sheer empathy bedevilled him, and he could not rest. He wanted badly for her pain to end. He did not know that it hurt now or when it would stop. He did not know for sure, but he was at the same time assured that it was not over yet. And her crooked smile made him assured furthermore. He wanted it to end badly. He remembered the pain that he felt during some of illnesses, and that only made the matters worse for now. He squeezed her hand a bit. She squeezed back. He squeezed again. She squeezed harder. He looked at her startled, but she was smiling, even if with effort. He squeezed her hand again, just as gentle. She pressed back with force. He then enclosed her hand with his other one. She played her fingers in the formed slit, tapping them as much as his soft pressure allowed her. He tapped on her wrist in return.

She giggled. His heart skipped a beat.

She relaxed her hand. “Thanks. It’s kicking in.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Sleep.” She yawned, clicking with her tongue. She rolled to the side, but then remembered about the injection

and located herself just slightly different from how she was.

“Well,” he murmured. Her actions were very convincing. She did not seem to force them. “Uh, good night.”
“Night.”

He let go of her hand very slowly. All the while, she was smiling.

The chair. It was awful. He remembered it. He pouted for a moment, then rolled his jacket into an improvised pillow and settled on the same chair in front of a small table. He now had the chair back appropriately supporting his lower spine. He set his head on the jacket that scattered the sparse medicine on the tabletop off to the corners. It felt comfortable and very natural. He did sleep on the desk at home sometimes. That hurt in the end, but falling asleep so was very nice. He had his head facing the bed, so he saw her resting soundly. He found his eyes closed, so he opened them and looked again. He loved her.

He woke up already tired and was sore all over. He hated waking up on the table. It was already bright, so he was obviously late for the job. Usually, that did not happen, but sometimes it did. And the surroundings were very weird...

In seconds he remembered the previous events. And he also understood that he was supposed to go to the post this morning. He rubbed his eyelids. Then he heard knocking and the door opened.

A man with gray hair came in. The man was the same one that he saw the previous day among those who took care of her. The doctor was about to start speaking, but she quickly made a few gestures. They were shaky, because of the catheter or her state overall. The doctor caught up and gestured in return. With the two communicating so he could only watch the scene with no understanding. As they seemed to finish, he called out, “Excuse me, I don’t understand.”

The doctor frowned, just a little. Then spoke, “Her condition is improving swiftly. We will commence with the release this evening, as was planned.” Apparently, the doctor was either polite or paid enough or even both to not to inquire of the matter of communication.

“I see. Thank you,” he said silently.

The doctor smiled, closing eyes, and, gesturing and talking at once, said, “I must go now. I’ll see you in the evening. Good morning and get well!” With that, the doctor walked to the door.

He knew virtually nothing about the sign language, but he was assured that such action was impressive. Playing guitar and singing simultaneously was very difficult, and this seemed similar.

This left them alone. He looked at her with attention. She lay there peacefully. Her gaze was locked on him. He waited in curiosity... for nothing. He inhaled deeply. And then calmly remembered about the notepad in the pocket.

He wrote, “*Are you alright?*” and let her read. She concentrated on the spacious text, then nodded with a smile. He turned the page, “*Does anything hurt?*” She shook her head. He smiled. And then there was nothing to say or write. He did not have anything specific in mind. Silence lasted for minutes, and he tried to relax in the chair instead of continuing the dialogue. She did not seem to mind.

Breakfast was brought in soon. Once again, the porridge looked far more appetizing than his usual meals. But he waited for her to eat. She helped herself confidently, but left enough for him. She handed the dish over to him and he accepted it with appreciation.

It was after the breakfast that he found himself bored.

“*You said that you have no past,*” he wrote next. She only gave a positive answer. He started yet another page,

“Why?” She stopped being relaxed in an instant. She did not change much, but her face altered to a full unamusement. She reached for the notepad; he gave it to her with the pencil.

She looked close at the paper and wrote, “*That life wasn’t my life.*” Her writing was malformed and written by the unsteady right hand. She showed no signs of pain, so the needle must have provided only mechanical difficulties.

He took the notepad and rocked back in the chair, seriously considering this. He was frowning and looking at her; not with aggression, but with thoughtfulness. Her look was resembling the dead expression he found her with. He felt a shiver crawling his spinal nerves. Thankfully, there was a subject to change to.

“*You have sight problems, right?*” He had shown the text to her grimly. She nodded shortly. “*Myopia?*” She nodded even more surly. He hurried to write, “*Sorry.*” To that she only blinked. He wrote more: “*But you understood the doctor?*” She gave him tired eyes and took the notepad. She returned it with “*I’m not blind*” If earlier he was not sure whether he should change the topic, he had no doubts now.

He looked at a new page for over a minute.

“*You’ve no past. Do you have present?*” He considered it a worthy and important question, if peculiar. But she answered it with ease, both swiftly and calmly.

“*You see it whole*”

He rubbed his chin. The next question was obvious. “*What about the future?*”

She returned the instrument of communication fast. “*With you*”

He blinked. He was surprised, but not as much as he was last night. This meant that she was serious. This also brought back the touching memories. He looked her in the eyes and felt his breath alter a bit. He certainly would. He surely

would take her.

Suddenly nervous, he nodded bashfully with a smile. She beamed, just a bit. This moment lasted. Not for the first time, he did not know what he wanted to do. He looked at the page again. "*With you*". The two words looked very stirring.

He sighed with no woe. "*I've got not much money. And space,*" he was quick to remember. She read it and bowed an acknowledgement. He tapped the pencil against the notepad. He had nothing to add for now, so he put these away.

Abruptly, she pushed away the blanket and swung her feet off the bed. He rushed to assist her. He took her hand. It was all he could do, since she rose with vigour. In the last movement she leaned onto him, however. She bumped herself slightly against his torso and kept herself so for several seconds. He was deeply shocked by the elation. She walked to get her intravenous therapy stand and then to the restroom. He watched her very carefully, ready to support; though his mind was halfway elsewhere. He waited for her for some time and then they walked to the window.

He had aplenty of time to spend, and before the noon it had occurred to him that they lack two crucial objects. Specifically, her shoes. He made sure to spend as little time on the road as he could, but he stayed home for several minutes to clean up. He hastily hid the medicine, gathered the mug particles and rubbed the floor virtually dry. He put away the dishes. Then he left for the hospital.

She was released in the evening, after a lunch and a survey; and they left. They stepped out onto streets. It was bright and mostly cloudless since morning, but it was still cold. The cover he first put on her he took for himself and exchanged it for the jacket, closing it on her pedantically. He also pulled

the hood over her head carefully. Her hair stuck out of it in all directions. It made her look adorable. He smiled coyly.

He took her hand and began navigating the avenue. Her hand was warm. He was satisfied with the outfit distribution and he was glad that she did not dispute. The coverlet was flapping around him, partially exposing his light sweater to the wind. It was still cold, but it also was sunny.

They walked barely longer than a minute until he found a specific indistinct store among many other medicine-related stores. He pulled the notepad out of her jacket pouch. Frostbitten fingers and flapping paper were a nuisance, though it was still more pleasant than speaking.

“Did you use to have glasses?”

She gathered some of her hair, read, and nodded. He suspected she should have had some throughout her life. Her previous life. That could have been figurative, but there were things that could not be discarded with a single decision. Although she did try to discard much more than she managed to. He did not concentrate on the thought. He put the pad back, took her hand again and lead them into the optical store.

It was possible that she had successfully killed herself, metaphorically; thereby living a new life now instead of actively ending her existence. If not - and even if it was indeed so, too - he will keep her safe.

He gestured her to go forth. In the store she was met by an old austere man. She signalled to the man. The man saw her actions, frowned with wrinkled forehead, then addressed a woman. The woman clasped and exclaimed, “Oh goodness! Yes, come here, my dear.” The girl reacted already when the man turned around, so she saw the following gestures of the woman in fullest. As the woman acted, the girl came closer. They exchanged several rapid hand movements and she nodded. The woman let out a kind “Uh-huh.” and left to return

soon with a pair of glasses.

She took them and put them on. She looked around, blinked. She faced the motherly woman and returned the glasses, making a new series of gestures. The woman answered with a cheerful “Oh!” and provided a different pair. The girl did the same sequence of actions, but kept the oculars. The woman nodded vividly and made some more gestures.

She turned to him and nodded unambiguously. He approached the woman and provided the funds. The cost had come to be highly concerning.

The couple escaped the store, and she clung to his arm. He thought, she would eventually let go. She did not; not in the slightest. She was clinging to him all the way through the streets amidst tall lanterns, buildings and rare trees, until they reached home.

As they came and relieved themselves of their footwear, she slid away to take a shower. He had allowed himself to drop on the sofa. He lay there for minutes. At first, he thought of nothing but the comfort of his own home. Then he was relieved to acknowledge that they made it through. And she was with him. She was to stay, and she was his as much as he was hers. To support her he has to put more effort into working. He has to make a call to the post to inform that an emergency kept him from coming. But it was late to do now, and he could call tomorrow. So he enjoyed the serenity.

He sprung on the faint sound of a door lock. He could not recall whether he fell asleep or stayed awake, so it was likely that he was napping.

She appeared in her blouse, but she kept the oversized trousers. Her hair still looked messy, but it had a distinct, arranged shape. Her locks curled just barely, glistening nicely under the plain lamp light. She kept a weary stance and sent a flash over her new glasses as she rubbed her eye. She yawned,

barely opening her mouth.

She was stunning.

He stood as she walked into the room; made an unsure gesture for her to occupy the settee. She nodded gratefully and spread her body on it luxuriously. He let her be and left for a shower himself.

He did not concentrate his thoughts on what he was doing. He saw her. Her gentle body wrapped in a shirt and jeans that covered her feet was just as fragile as he remembered it. Her hair was flowing free in a wonderful cascade, almost hiding the peculiar choker. And her face was unforgettable. Small lips, smooth outer jaw curves and a little nose that supported the glasses. The glasses framed the eyes nicely; irises shone the hues of gray with a blue tint, and lashes and brows made her look entirely innocent. He did not have to memorize her; she was well in his memory and he could see her over and over again.

Only when he cut the water current did he hear the familiar sound of chords. He got himself dry, put the clothes on and went to the room to discover that she was playing his guitar. He found her atop the desk, her feet set on the sofa. She was sitting with her back to him, so she cast a glance and returned to strumming. He circled her and settled on the sofa comfortably.

She was striking the strings almost confidently, with knowledge and a bit of a delay. The detainment took place only in between of dissimilar patterns, and soon she was dispersing melody after melody, immersed in the process and rocking visibly. He was immersed as much as she were or even more so. He was listening to the flawless play, something he never could achieve, but could easily imagine. The tones felt as if they were played entirely effortlessly. He knew enough to know better, and this made it even more mesmerizing. This

understanding turned something as trivial as a skill into an incomprehensible talent. He might have heard some of the songs before, and he clearly recognized one of them. From what she played there were many more unknown pieces that combined minor tones into touching tragic sequences.

He watched her in awe. He never saw her enjoying herself. It was a glorious scene. There was no place for words.

He did not make a move to stop her, almost not shifting at all, until the moment she finished. She put the guitar down on the table as she slid from it. She looked him in the eyes again, but that was unnecessary - he watched her and she was seeing him, observing his reaction all along.

She stood and stretched with a whine of pleasure. Then yawned a long one. He clenched his teeth to suppress his own gape and headed for a light switch to flip it off, then found his way to the makeshift bed he had left for himself. The clothes slid apart slightly, but they were still remotely soft. He laid down comfortably and serenely.

And then he heard a rustle of a falling fabric nigh, followed by a quieter susurration. He felt a thud from the side as she laid right next to him. She pulled the blanket over them both and kept her back still against his spine.

He felt her breathe in. And then breath out.

He realized that with her his life had stopped being dull.

