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Birds and a Stone. Sensei of Shambala

People are like birds and stones. For some, just a **hint**, a single word is **enough** to be prompted to the spiritual height. And their **awakened essence** will soar **towards perception** of the infinite universe. While others... Well, a stone is merely a stone.

DUTY

“Lord, what a dull pain! Seems like it’s not my liver, but a solid yawning wound. When will it stop torturing me? When will it all end? This hell of a cirrhosis... At such a wrong time. Dam it, the death! We’ve already been face-to-face with this raw-boned friend several times. But my daughter... She is to graduate from college. Who will help her in this nasty life? No, I can’t, I simply have no right to die!.. I need to hold out for three years. I have to hold out at any cost. It’s OK, it’s nothing, I must stay firm. We shall still fight the Raw-boned for Rebrov’s body...”

The ringing phone brought Rebrov back to the grey routine reality. “What is happening today? It was never like this before... Well, the world is really on the road to ruin. How could you leave your child alone...”

— Major Rebrov, officer on duty, fifteenth department. Can

I help you?

Twelve hours passed after Major had taken over his daily duty in the district department of Internal Affairs. During the latest days, the situation was very tough. A new gang was operating in the district for already three months. Within such a short period of their insolent and brutal activity, the felons already committed several robberies using fire-arms. People were horrified by these monsters' barbarity. The department staff now had to collect information virtually in crumbs because the population reluctantly contacts militia.

After a number of successful robberies, getting a taste for entire impunity, the gang flew into a passion. Its members killed a female director of a local commercial store after torturing her savagely. The murder exasperated both local inhabitants (especially those involved in business) and the law-enforcement authorities. Paradoxically, grief and despair became the very things to temporarily unite people working in spheres so differing.

Life is life. And it includes various situations that each person evaluates from his or her own angle, according to his or her personal outlook at this very moment. Yet, there is also a certain boundary, common to all mankind, which invisibly exists in the subconscious of all people. And those who dare overstep it, not only incur others' anger, but also destroy all the greatest valuables inside themselves, not even noticing it.

Having performed a deed through mind weakness, one thing is then you endeavour to correct it for good and to find reconciliation, first in your inner world rather than the outer. It's quite another matter though when you tightly close the lou-

vers of your consciousness, this lucid window in the temple of your soul. Then precisely comes a moment when, as ancient Slavs used to say, "...a ferocious rage chills heart with its power, dims eyes with a mist of anger, and a person falls into a trap of dark thoughts which burn down his essence worse than a fierce fire. He stays all alone like a raven on a charred tree in the middle of ruins..."

Nearly all the officers of the district department worked under pressing regime for already ten days in search of the murderers. No wonder, the staff's nervous condition came to a breaking point. Telephone was ringing in the duty room incessantly. Its deafening sound made all present shudder each time, like a burst of thunder.

Major Rebrov tried to answer clearly and calmly although it took him quite a great effort. His body was simply falling apart with terrible pain. His head was breaking, his liver was aching, and his stomach was causing him trouble responding with a strong pain to any exertion and nervousness which there were plenty of. Apart from titanic exertion at work, it turned out that Rebrov had serious health problems. His liver "showed" itself at a very inappropriate time. Rebrov was dilatory hoping it would turn out all right. But, as Russians say, "a man won't cross himself until a thunder begins". With heavy paroxysm, without his family's and colleagues' knowledge, he went to see his friend who was a doctor. After respective tests, the diagnosis was more than unfavourable: developing liver cirrhosis. And no predictions on how the liver would do in the nearest future.

For Rebrov, it was not a stroke of bad luck, but rather a

knockout. He would not be so afraid to die, if he lived alone. But he had a family — a wife and a daughter, his closest people on Earth for whom he felt inexplicably responsible. While Major was a single family bread-winner. His wife could hardly find any job, for she was suffering from asthma for already four years. His daughter attended the Pedagogical College where they charged big money for education. So, Rebrov's salary remained the only source of the family income. And, despite the fact Major could retire even two years ago, he continued working in order to support his daughter until her graduation. And, all of a sudden, he got such a "luck"!

Certainly, his friend recommended him the best doctors, advised him to take care of his health (because time wouldn't wait), to go into a hospital for treatment. Yet, the treatment would cost quite a lot even by a minimal calculation. Major would not surely afford such enormous additional expenses. Innate honesty and conscientiousness would not allow him to borrow such a big amount from his friends, since his few friends were living from payday to payday just like him, merely making both ends meet. Finally, Rebrov immediately rejected his friend's suggestion to pawn or to sell his realty. Firstly, his entire realty was a two-bedroom apartment which at one time he had awaited for almost fifteen years. And, secondly, he couldn't allow himself to leave his family homeless for the sake of his own salvation. Thus, by his Consciousness's standards, Rebrov's choice appeared to be simple and narrow — to sweep away all medical predictions and to do his utmost to live another three years, so that his daughter would successfully graduate from college. And, then, whatever

works... He decided to stand firm at any cost, all the way until his last breath.

Having recorded another telephone call in the journal, Rebrov took a pill of analgin to abate the pain which persistently reminded of the approaching inevitable end. Although his friend recommended ketanov, but the latter was much more expensive than analgin. Major always saved on himself believing it's better to buy sweets or to otherwise entertain his child. Now, all the more, he would not spend up on his "shabby shell" as he lately began to name his body.

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The district department was buzzing like a bee hive. Everybody was rushing about with their faces concerned. The tenth day of futile search was ending, and the atmosphere was nervous and extremely irritable. After all, except the urgent work, there were plenty of usual routine matters.

New "clients" – some tree hypes and a locally famous grubby beggar – were just brought to the pre-trial prison or "the monkey-house" as the Department staff called it. The beggar was always brought here when criminal statistics went down, as if no other beggars were found around. Department officers jokingly called this poor fellow Vasia, for in some way he was a local scapegoat. Once, a street gang beat him much heavily than they did with other beggars. The other time, an installation suddenly inflamed at a garret where he was spending winter; and, despite all Vasia's efforts to extinguish the fire, he was the one to be accused of the arson by house lodg-

ers. Still another time, he became an onlooker of such bloody doings which would shock any human being. Hence, Vasia constantly got into troubles.

Rebrov looked around for Chmil, his assistant, senior lieutenant. That one had asked leave for five minutes to speak to a pal, and disappeared for entire half an hour. Not seeing Chmil at his desk, Major held keys to a sergeant, his second assistant.

—Kostushkin, open.

—Hi, Rebrov! — captain Onishchenko who was accompanying the group of prisoners entered the duty room. — Why are you so morose? How are you doing?

—Nothing good, — Major waved his hand.

—Oh, please! Cast aside your gloomy thoughts. We all have “nothing good”, —Captain grinned. — You know very well: all the good in this life is either illegal or immoral or leads to obesity...

—True, — Rebrov agreed, trying to show a likeness of a smile. — Where have you “dug out” such dandies?

—Imagine, we were checking one address...

Onishchenko didn't had time to finish when one of the hypes, who was obviously out of his consciousness in full, suddenly turned from a passive “client” into a particularly aggressive one.

— Get up, everyone! You, goats! I'll shoot down you all! — he shouted at the top of his voice, then switched to obscene vocabulary and started gallop around the room at rabid speed dumping chairs which were almost broken even without that.

Rebrov and Onishchenko reacted immediately, sergeants

joined couple moments later. The entire crowd had to calm down the hype.

The other two hypes were observing this brawl with absolute indifference, while the beggar noted such active attention of the staff to a single person, quietly squatted and started to grabble rapidly towards the exit. However, at a very wrong time for him, senior lieutenant Chmil appeared at the door, hurrying to help his colleagues. His impressive figure which nearly occupied the entire doorway made the beggar exclaim. Without slowing down, the poor man turned around harshly and made his way back with the same nimbleness and speed and in the same pose. Once he reached his prison cell, he quickly took the vertical position and occupied his previous place beside the two drug hypes. Casting a sidelong look at Chmil, the beggar pulled a suffering face, and then continued to watch the brawl in the duty room. Rebrov's assistant got amused with such a clownery, but he had no time to deal with the beggar at that moment. Having passed the unlucky escaper, the lieutenant only shook his fist at him, checking smile with difficulty. The beggar ceremoniously nodded with understanding. At that, the incident was closed, imperceptibly for those around.

Somehow, the furious hype was finally suppressed. He went limp as suddenly as he had gotten into rage before. All prisoners had got locked up in "the monkey house". The men who had participated in the brawl, were now pouring out their emotions.

—Damn it, what a nervous day! — captain Onishchenko complained.

—Captain, it's never so bad that it couldn't become worse,
— Chmil giggled.

—Curse that tongue of yours! — Captain responded rapidly.
— We've been rushing about the whole day, as overworked hounds... People are going crazy. Each time they bring new surprises.

—Perhaps, the Moon has turned to a wrong side. Look through the window: it's huge, round, it's full indeed...

The men laughed.

—Yeaa, it's really full... Today, four out of ten calls have been idle. People get worried over a single knock.

—Well, there was an announcement on TV... So, they keep vigil.

—It would be good if witnesses were as watchful! Yet, the lady's been killed inside her own shop, while nobody saw nothing and heard nothing! We have a great deal of matters even without this... Just imagine, the damn "guest performers" have showed up again...

—That would be the last straw! — Rebrov uttered with bitterness.

—Agree, — Captain nodded. — What a life! Everyday huge piles for a paltry monthly salary!

—Captain, try being optimistic! — the senior lieutenant said.

—You're too young to know what life is. An optimist is a former pessimist who has full pockets of money, whose stomach works excellently, and whose wife has left the city.

The men burst out laughing again.

—Chmil is queerly merry today. Do you agree, Rebrov? —

Onishchenko asked teasingly.

—He's like this after he seeing that pal of him, — Major answered with a mysterious smile.

—With a pal?! — Onishchenko's eyes flashed with zest. — I've seen his "pal" on the porch! Well-shaped pal, I'd say... What a bosom, what a "moon"!

—All right, all right! — Chmil said with a contented smile. — What if it's love at first sight?

—Aha! Which one this time? — Onishchenko asked with a jeer. — You should marry, 'cause love at first sight is becoming your chronic conjunctivitis.

—What? — the senior lieutenant asked to repeat.

—Eye disease.

—You're jealous, Captain, aren't you? By the way, all people are born free and equal, — and, after making a pause, Chmil cunningly added: — But some get married later on.

—Well, finished as usual! — captain Onishchenko gave up, and the duty room got filled with laughter again.

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The workday was almost over. It was indeed very intensive and hard both for the city inhabitants and local militia. The evil generated by the new gang's activity was spreading by leaps and bounds. It was sowing out more and more fear in people, and attracted all the worst like a magnet. Besides the "the guest performers", a group of drunk teens appeared in the city streets, trying to demonstrate their collective force to passers-by. Household crimes became more frequent. It

seemed like people were losing their genuine cast of mind, surrendering to the negative side of their personality.

The district department became noticeably deserted around midnight. Only the operations group and officers on duty remained. People felt sleepy over the accumulated tiredness. Lost in thought, the senior lieutenant Chmil walked up and down the department and stopped in front of “the monkey house”. Quiet puffing of sleeping “residents” was heard from the inside. Satisfied with this serene atmosphere, the senior lieutenant sat into an old, worn arm-chair which the department had inherited from the former district socialist club. He put his legs on a single safe chair. Having settled in such way, he took some out-of-date newspaper and made a concentrated face in attempt to probe into the printed information. In half an hour, however, the newspaper was already peacefully heaving of senior lieutenant’s muted snore.

Sitting at the side desk, sergeant Kostushkin attempted to overcome sleep, but his young organism came into its own. His eyelids became leaden-heavy, and then he fell into a youthful slumber, carelessly propping up his cheek with his hand. Only when the telephone started ringing, both assistants started and woke up. But, once they saw there were no outside bosses around, they fell into sweet dreams again.

Only Rebrov sat at his duty post, not having a wink of sleep. That pain would not set his body free. Analgin deadened it for a while, but didn’t relieve for keeps. Major had never had such prolonged bouts before. He felt as if his body was belonging to someone else, and had to apply sizeable force to make it move. Needlessly, he would not want to budge at all.

His consciousness instead... It rolled feverishly, conducting an internal analysis of the life spent. And all this was happening at peculiar consciousness estrangement from the body, through a misty shroud of the dull ache.

Rebrov still couldn't calm down after the last telephone call. "What's happening to humans? What's happening to the world? Seems like everyone has got wild, embittered... And this old hag... She might have fallen into insomnia. We have such a strain here without her, while she took it into her head to lecture me on the phone at midnight. "Militia is useless nowadays!"... Anyone knows how to criticize! But let's take them here to work as "a human waste cleaner" for a while! Respectable citizens do not see a hundredth of the filth that militiamen have to deal with... They'd better pay more attention to their children's and grandchildren's upbringing rather than throwing curses around. Most teens are left on their own! They kick up a row, they hype from sheer boredom and idleness, taking their "advanced" pals as an example. While a little time needed for a mind to be cracked... A youngster starts with a small dose so that his pals would not call him a loser, and then he takes no note of how he's becoming totally dependent on that damned stuff. A hype can sell his mother for a dose! Yet, when we arrest teens, their parents commonly say: "My son would't do this", "You've arrested him for no reason at all". And, looking like a fool, you start vindicating yourself, you try to reveal the real facts and to show them their near cheerless future. What do I need this all hell for, I ask? Life is far from being a honey anyway...

Say, militia bosses castigate the operations for the low

crime unraveling statistics. But how can the crimes be effectively unraveled, if militia works only at its enthusiasm? The Ministry of Internal Affairs budget is cut down by the Parliament almost each year. The city patrol service is totally messed-up, while it used to be the one to mainly help unraveling most of street crimes, hot on the heels. Again, experienced employees, being disillusioned about everything and everybody, further tend to leave the law-enforcement service due to money dearth. What has it all resulted in? Nothing good. The professional core of many service bodies have actually been destroyed; the positions previously occupied by high-rank specialists are now taken by the raw youth, half of those not even possessing college education. Besides, what stimuli do those youth really have? Officer's honour, decency, dignity like in my times? Not at all. The main stimulus nowadays is craving for power and easy gains. Using the law as a cover, they shameless fleece citizens, and even dare being rude with those, — Rebrov looked at Kostushkin and Chmil sleeping peacefully. — Not everyone, of course, but great majority. Thus, how can militia be trusted by people whose interests, in fact, it should protect?"

Major massaged his eyelids and forehead to somewhat ease the dull pain.

"Well, on the other hand, I can understand the guys, — he went on thinking. — They need to support their families. Who wants to put his ass under fire and fray his nerves daily inside this filth for such a paltry pay? Looks like an exclusive circle... And I'm sitting here on the phone like a scapegoat and listen to complaints about the system..."

All of a sudden, Rebrov keenly sensed the caustic smell of the room again, exactly like on the day he had first entered the duty subdivision. It was a pungent, strong, very specific smell of sweat, tobacco and stuffiness, intrinsic in such authorities... One just could not get rid of this smell. It saturated him and his clothes with its miasma, and accompanied him everywhere like a stigma, notifying those around him of the place such individual works in. At first, working in the duty subdivision, Rebrov couldn't get used to it a long while, but afterwards he even forgot about its existence. And now this smell struck his nostrils again, as if somebody thrust an open bottle of ammonia under Major's nose. Rebrov hastily popped out to the corridor, opened the door-lock and got outside.

It was late autumn, and the weather was chilly enough, but Major liked the sensation of humid, fresh and bracing air. "What's happening indeed? — he complained to himself, somewhat coming round after the unexpected suffocation. — That would be the last straw... Calm down, Rebrov, calm down..."

Major took out a cigarette, struck a match and began to smoke, trying to quiet his lately shattered nerves. However, obtrusive thoughts threaded one after another along an invisible spiral of logical reasoning on the sense of being.

"Well, life has flown by like a spark of this match. It hasn't had enough time to kindle, while it already goes out with a waft of somebody's will from above... From above?! — Rebrov got wondered at himself. — Am I getting old? Seems it's not that age yet..."

It's a paradox though: your body is falling into pieces, as if

you're a decrepit old man, while there is a feeling inside that you're full of strength and youth... Youth... Oh! What a golden time that was! No burdens, only bright dreams and the unflinching faith in better future. The first true love... Yea, it was really the best part of my life..."

Major recollected how he dreamt of entering a literature college after the army service. He was very good in Russian language and literature as early as in the secondary school. But his fellow-countryman Sergei together with whom he was called up to the army asked for his help with entering a law school. As a joke, Rebrov applied to the same school to keep his company. He wrote a literature essay for two of them at the exam. They managed to pass the history exam somehow, same was with English. They amused a young teacher at the latter exam, and she was indulgent with them. Thus, jokingly, Rebrov entered the law school together with his friend. Being a lawyer was very prestigious during the Soviet times, too. Young people were as well educated by means of movies in which officer dignity, honour, fortitude and heroism were glorified. Both Rebrov and his friend were gripped by such a romantic appeal and aspired to become like their favourite movie characters.

Later on though, when they started working, their romantic youthful ardour somewhat diminished in view of the reality they faced. His friend left the service almost at the start, while Rebrov stayed and devoted himself to "the people of his Nation". He changed jobs inside the service between preliminary and main investigations several times, and nearly everywhere he had steady conflicts with his management because of his

honesty and straightforwardness. Then, he was enlisted with the Criminal Investigation Department headed by an “old school” man as honest as himself. Rebrov spent around fourteen years on the operations job, and it’s impossible to mention everything he saw and faced during those years...

The recent considerable conflict recurred to Major’s memory, after which militia bosses dismissed him from the operations, having accused him of “rude communication with senior officers”. The situation was as follows. For two years, the operations were tracking down a scum who had twice been imprisoned before and was related to numerous local crimes. Yet, it was very hard to prove his participation in those crimes was, for he managed to commit those with other people’s hands, formally remaining pure under the law. Nevertheless, once he made a floater. The operations had to follow on his and his partners’ heels for almost four days. Owing to such persistent work, they succeeded in preventing another crime. Two of Rebrov’s colleagues were heavily wounded upon detention of the criminal group. Finally, their hard work was depreciated. A member of the criminal group assumed responsibility for the crime preparation, whereas the main suspect was set free “due to evidence insufficiency”. At that, all major documents which could be used for his accusation mysteriously disappeared from the files. Two years of work and the colleagues’ wounds turned out to be idle. Why? Rebrov believed it was his duty to reestablish the truth in front of militia bosses who had actually ordered to release the main suspect. As a result, Rebrov was driven from the operations with a scandal, and neither his former merits nor the Investigation

Department head's intercession could mend matters. The best thing his honest boss could do for him was placing him into a duty subdivision of one of the remote city districts, and then hushing up the unpleasant affair.

At heart, Rebrov still felt aggrieved. The militia bosses actually showed they cared neither for his services nor for the fact he and his colleagues risked their lives while the bosses were comfortably sitting in their offices. Nor they cared for the fact Rebrov ruined his health doing his job. Cirrhosis was the outcome. No wonder, this disease could be called "a militia operations disease". Daily violent stresses, dead bodies, rivers of blood... How could a normal organism endure this? Nearly the only way to relax was drinking vodka, so as to digress from the lingering shock state at least a little.

Major hastily searched for any sense in his entire service to which he had devoted the greater part of his life. "How have I spent my life? I've always been fighting for justice... How many real gangsters have I imprisoned? None! Those who must be in jail are now delegated to local councils or sit in the city administration, being considered "respected people". But they precisely are the criminals! While who is imprisoned? A one who stole a hen from an old farmer in the market, or a car from his neighbour, or a beam from the factory? Well, they committed such crimes through starvation or drunk foolery! We imprison those who have no money to pay off, while the real gangsters don't care! They just bribe, and a case is dismissed. It's time to set official prices and let people do what they want... Why getting under fire and risking life? Chaos..."

Although the air was very refreshing, Rebrov got nervous

again. A tangle of thinking again started to wind painful thoughts which had been already over-thought numerous times with anger and hatred. Major put out the cigarette end, crushing it under his foot with such frenzy as if it was guilty of all the troubles in Rebrov's life. Having entered the building, he closed the door behind himself and returned to his office. The disgusting smell inside was now felt muted, but still disturbed his nose with its stuffiness which seemed to be the stuffiness of the law-enforcement system as a whole.

Low snoring resounded in the duty room. Senior lieutenant Chmil opened one eye, examined the situation and fell asleep again. Major approached the peaceful, dozy "monkey house". "H'm! Beggars, hypes... Same faces always. Ensuring statistics?! On these people? It's so stupid... Everyone well understands this "civilization waste" is only a consequence of the surrounding mess, while the reason is in those who shamelessly produce such "waste". And everybody keeps silent, trembling with fear. Where can we find justice in this country? And who really needs justice defenders now, when such terrible things are happening around? Feels like I was born not in my times...

Life, life... Who invented it as it is? When you are young, you dream, plan something, but eventually you get something else which is completely unexpected, and you flounder inside it your entire life. Looking into it deeply, all this around is not mine. All my life, I worked here just because it turned out this way. Besides, I needed to support my family. I thought I would realize my literary dreams once my daughter graduated, and I could retire... And there you are — cirrhosis... It ap-

pears that life is already coming to its end. Yet, what have I had time to do out if the things my soul desired? Nothing. It would be foolish to think I still have time. Even if there's time, it is only here and now. And it should be used rationally, without losing a single chance, a single precious moment of life.

Who knows why I was born in the Earth at all... To assure continuation of my kin? But a child grows up in some eighteen years. What's next? Grandchildren, the old age... Everything moves in a constant wild flow of looking after posterity, just like any animal has. Then what distinguishes a human from that animal? It is an ability to think? But what should one think about? About how to set a dwelling, to procreate children, to raise and support them? It turns out a human being differs from an animal only by the fact that it does everything instinctively, while he does same things deliberately? Judging from life, it does turn out like this. Yet, why does inside one want something greater, something exceeding the bounds of this exclusive circle drawn for ages? Yes, posterity is splendid. But you are born alone, you stew in the pot of your life almost on your own as well (because your family can be some external incentive and support for your personal life program), and finally you die alone, experiencing this event solely on your personal inner level. For, at bottom, no one knows either your thoughts, or your true feelings, or your real life with all "video" and "audio" reflections of the reality pictures inside your brain. Then why does nature need to accumulate such inner information, i.e. human thoughts? After all, not a single living thing except oneself needs it. What hides in the depth of this mystery of nature? If

you spent eighteen years raising children (and at times you don't understand whom you have brought up, for some of their thoughts and deeds remain an undiscovered secret for you), then for "nurturing" or for, better to say, "accumulation" of your inner fortune you spent your entire conscious life since the early childhood and until your last day on the Earth. So, what is the sense? Why are we given all these stages of difficulties and sufferings? Why the transient youth favours you with such instants of inner happiness for which you then long the rest of your days? What is the true basis of human existence? Who am I eventually? Am I just a body? Definitely, I'm not. Why does this sack bones and liquid move, thanks only to my will power? My will power? And who am I then, if I think regardless of the body pain? What is pain at all? Who am I?!

Rebrov even winced of such new thoughts, having swept over him suddenly and touched the very depth of his heart. He slightly shook his head. Something unusual was happening to him this night, which had never come about before. His consciousness was accustomed to answer questions through logical, irrefragable reasoning. And now he was asking himself questions so simple at first sight, but yet incredibly intricate and broaching something deeply personal, such that his mind with its customary militia officer's logic was nearly exploding of the overstrain of searching answers. Rebrov shook his head slightly again, fondly expecting to get rid of these thoughts in such a way. However, they did not disappear and only intensified their attack, in eager rivalry grappling with his usual somber thoughts of the daily routine. At that, his body continued to signal painfully of the serious defects inside of it. A

next telephone call at 3 a.m. caught Major in such a terrible condition. Rebrov lifted the receiver and automatically responded with a tired voice:

—Major Rebrov, officer on duty, fifteenth department...

A female voice started to chatter on the other side of the line. There was a habitual event – a drunken brawl. Somebody's prolonged birthday party which included excessive doses of alcohol has turned a private apartment into a boxing ring. And "the heart-to-heart talk" has resulted in bloodshed... Rebrov connected to the operations group on duty through an internal telephone line. After a while, captain Onishchenko entered the room, looking half-asleep.

—Well, who else has broken his madcap in crapulent and hungry state at 3 a.m.? — he asked, rubbing his eyes.

—Look, — Rebrov pointed to the journal.

Captain glanced over the latest notation.

—Not bad! We have to go to the very other side of the district! Eh, our hard lot...

Onishchenko looked at Chmil sleeping with his face under the newspaper, smiled and softly sneaked up to him closer.

— Squadron, stand up! Senior lieutenant Chmil, two duties out of turn! — he commanded loudly.

Sleepy Chmil sprang up in the stand of attention instinctively, having dropped the only intact chair and accidentally pushed down an ash-tray full of cigarette stubs. But he came to his senses right away. Sergeant Kostushkin jumped up frightened together with him.

—Damn, Onishchenko! You'll make me childless once, — Chmil grumbled with displeasure.

—Why childless? — Captain wondered laughing.

—Why, why... — Chmil mimicked him. — Because... Do you know how one's mind is affected by...

—A-a-ah..., — Onishchenko drawled and then added: — Well, “authority loses its appeal without abuse”. These are your words, aren't they?

—Well, yeah, it's called “even a story-teller dozes off without urging forward”.

It became somewhat livelier in the duty subdivision. While Onishchenko was talking with Chmil, two more operations officers and a driver came.

—All right, we are going, — Captain uttered leaving the duty room.

—Good luck, — Rebrov replied.

After the operations group had left, Chmil wandered around the room, like a bear awoken in the middle of its winter hibernation. Kicking the chair wreckage, he muttered:

— This Onishchenko... is like a dog in the manger. He's interrupted the dream at such a passage, reptile...

—Sit down to the control desk, and I'll make coffee, — Rebrov said, staring at the senior lieutenant.

Chmil gave up his “occupation” and heavily seated himself on the chair, looking around for somebody to vent his bad mood upon. Rebrov was obviously not suitable for this purpose. He was of senior rank, and furthermore he was a good man always conducting himself humanly, unlike that Onishchenko. Chmil glanced over the room. “Maybe, I'll drop into the “monkey house”, — he thought, having rested his gaze at the cell. But suddenly Kostushkin entered the room,

having returned from the lavatory. And Chmil chose an ideal target for letting the “steam” out on. He made a stern face and, profiting by the fact Rebrov was in the other room, articulated imperiously:

—Sergeant Kostushkin, why is there rubbish in the duty room? — he pointed his finger at the cigarette stubs scattered on the floor and ordered: — Take a besom and tidy the territory now!

—But why me? Was it me who threw them about? — Kostushkin replied in a similar flatulent tone.

Chmil was nearly struck dumb with surprise.

—Look at this youth nowadays! How dare you speaking like this to a senior officer?!

—Oh, come on, Chmil! Why are you jumping on me? You’ve dropped this, so you’re to sweep it yourself.

—What, what?

The senior lieutenant began to rise from the table slowly. Looking at his impressive figure, Kostushkin even shriveled for he did not particularly distinguish himself for the musculature. Thus, when Chmil menacingly half-rose in his not full hefty height, the sergeant no more tried his destiny and saluted, standing at attention.

—Sir, yes, sir! Let me take a besom and tidy the territory!

And right then he passed out of sight to get the necessary cleaning tools. Chmil smacked his lips contentedly, seated himself again and grumbled:

—There you are...

When Rebrov brought coffee for all three of them, the senior lieutenant was instructively lecturing Kostushkin on how

he should fulfill orders while working in militia. Meanwhile, Kostushkin was sweeping the last stubs, glancing askance at Chmil with displeasure.

—Ah, you're doing the room! Good fellows! — Rebrov praised. — OK, let's have a snack.

Major took out a big sandwich cautiously prepared by his wife and cut it into three portions.

—Here, dinner is served.

Sipping hot coffee, Chmil softened his aggressive tone.

—Well, coffee — he glanced at his watch — at 20 minutes past 3 is a heavenly delight! Kostushkin, you should value the instants of youth! Where else could you drink coffee like this at 3 a.m., close to those exotic individuals, — Chmil pointed to “the monkey house”, — with such special admixtures of various aromas?

Rebrov faintly smiled, already foreknowing where Chmil was driving at. And the latter continued to pile it on:

—Just imagine: you are sitting and drinking black coffee at such a dismal night (it's a pity it's not Friday the 13th), under the light of full moon in black-black clouds, when vampires and werewolves agitate the city with their drawling howl...

At that very moment, a dog actually howled somewhere nearby. Kostushkin almost dropped his cup. However, aloud he said:

—Aha! You'll now tell about vampires... Stop duping me, noodle!

—Me?! Duping you?! Never! Rebrov won't let me lie, — and he went on with an ominous voice: — Two months ago, in a neighbouring village not far from here, a vampire died

under very strange circumstances. His name was Luka. If you visited his house and especially his little shed... you would die of terror! Even the operations veterans couldn't sleep for several weeks after being there because Luka kept looming to them. Just imagine: a large preparation table, blood, bowels, stench, ten corpses hanging...

Kostushkin, being already impressed by the story, choked with coffee. He started coughing and rushed out to the lavatory.

—What a fellow! — Chmil gave up. — Weakling!

—Well, ten corpses have been excessive, — Rebrov said.
— For this guy, a single one would be enough for an effect.

—Oh, it' nothing, I only wanted to tickled his nerves a little, — Chmil laughed off.

At this moment, there resounded an acute, deafening telephone call. Chmil and Rebrov flinched simultaneously.

—Yeah, brother, we all have weak nerves! — Rebrov said, grinning at such a reaction, and picked up the receiver.

—Major Rebrov, officer on duty, fifteenth department.

—Come here promptly! — a trembling voice of an old lady was heard on the other side. — There... there is... shooting..., something's happening, the boy's crying...

—Just a minute. Please, give your given name, family name, address...

The granny began to speak unevenly, being nervous and all along repeating that something had happened behind the wall, that the child's crying, and that militia had to arrive urgently. At some mysterious level, the old woman's troubled state passed to Rebrov as well. Something clenched inside him. But

Major endeavoured to hold on in cold blood while clarifying all details of the situation. He was supposed to do so under regulations, although he understood very well how stupid and absurd these questions seemed to those on the other end of the line. A person was in a shock condition, and somebody was asking his or her name. But, on the other hand, someone had to keep composure in order to think sensibly and intelligibly no matter how tense the situation could be, for any kind of panic only aggravated the stress.

After couple of minutes, Major finally clarified the matter. The telephone call came from neighbours living in the same private house with victims. An old married couple woke up because they had heard sounds similar to shooting. Afterwards, there started some ado, bustle, child's cry. So, they phoned to militia.

Rebrov strained his memory. The address seemed to be familiar. And suddenly he remembered... Of course! When Rebrov was still in the operations, he met the owner of that house. The latter was quite a good man who worked in the street patrol as a volunteer and once helped the operations to detain an inveterate criminal. He now had a private business, and lived together with his wife, ten-year-old son and aged mother. He and his wife sold clothes in the local marketplace. They were neither poor nor rich, just earning enough living. The man did not drink alcohol and didn't smoke. He had some health problem, a sort of stomach ulcer... No, a drunken brawl could be anywhere, but not in that house.

Rebrov became tense. A vague inexplicable feeling of unrest was growing like a snowball. "No, something's wrong,

something really grave has happened there. The operations group must be sent there immediately. Wait a minute...” The group was at the far end of the district. Rebrov counted the time: whilst he would inform them, whilst they would arrive, it could already be late. Too late!!! Rebrov didn’t know himself why he was so sure the operations would not be on time. But he felt at a subconscious level that something should have been done right away and very fast. Major sprang to his feet and rushed to the other room to take his jacket.

—What is it again? — Chmil had no time to finish when Rebrov interrupted him, having paused half-way.

—OK, Chmil, communicate the recorded address urgently to the operations. Have them go there as soon as possible!

Becoming aware of the entire gravity of the situation, Chmil asked:

—Damn it, what happened?

—The granny heard shooting and fighting behind the wall... That house is two blocks from here... Do you mind having a refreshing run? — Rebrov tried to speak more or less easy, but he was not really good at it.

—Sure, — Chmil said in bewilderment, shrugging his shoulders. — What about the duty division?

At that moment, sergeant entered the duty room.

— You play funny tricks at night! — Kostushkin said laughing, having taken this scene for a practical joke.

—Kostushkin, you’ll remain on the phone. Chmil, call the operations right now!

Rebrov hurried to get his clothes. Chmil started calling the duty operations group.

—What has happened? — Kostushkin got alarmed.

—Militia officers not only sleep at night, but also work from time to time, — the senior lieutenant said sarcastically.

— Why are you staring at me? Fulfill the order!

He contacted the operations and illustrated the situation.

—Why, do I have to stay here alone?! — Kostushkin finally understood, and his eyes turned round-wide. — It's contrary to regulations!

—But why alone? You have so many interlocutors here! — Chmil spitefully nodded in the “monkey house” direction, putting his jacket on. — One's better than the other.

—Regulations do not permit this! — Kostushkin did his utmost to cover his fear with a hysterics.

—Listen, you, milksop! — Chmil grabbed sergeant and shook him violently. — Stop harping on the same string: “Regulations, regulations”... Consider this an emergency situation. Do you understand?! Rebrov and I, we'll come back soon. You will sit here and be totally fine. Are you scared like a molly?!

The last phrase had a sobering effect on Kostushkin. Rebrov, having dressed, appeared just at the moment.

— All right, let's go, — he commanded, checking his gun on the move. — Kostushkin, close the door after we leave.

—Should I call to the authorities, if it's an emergency? — sergeant murmured with dismay.

—Don't you dare! — Chmil threatened. — Why disturbing people for nothing at 3:30 a.m.? Maybe, everything's OK there, the neighbours might have misheard... We'll see and come back. Clear?!

—Yes, — doomed Kostushkin mumbled.

—I don't hear you!

—Yes, sir! — he reported.

—That's a horse of a different colour. Good boy! — Chmil stated with satisfaction.

—You're wasting time on trifles. Let's go quicker! — Rebrov hurried the senior lieutenant.

* * *

It was pretty cold outside. The prickly north wind was blowing. The ground was slightly iced. No one was around. Rebrov and Chmil were running along the sleeping block of grey nine-storey apartment houses. Their tramping sounded loud all through the neighborhood, but hardly anyone heard it. Lights were already put out in windows, and dwellers were peacefully sleeping in this before-dawn hour in their cozy beds, enjoying their sweet dreams.

Chmil was running ahead, and at that managed to talk to Major.

—Don't worry that much! Maybe, the granny has misheard. Or a young company parties, launching petards. I was young myself, and I know how it can be.

—I see,.. look at this "old man",.. — Major uttered with short breath.

Rebrov fell somewhat behind. He tried to run as fast as he could. His body was falling apart from terrible pain, and each shake-up was felt in a burning liver colic. His feet turned numb. There was a hum in his ears and a mist in his head. But

Rebrov still continued this race so arduous for him as if he was surmounting not the two city blocks, but a distance equaling to his lifetime.

Chmil turned around. Looking how much effort Rebrov was making in order to cover the given distance, he felt his heart clench. The senior lieutenant dropped speed and aligned with Major.

—Listen, why are we running like hell?! Let's walk a little. The old woman might have had a nightmare, and we are hurrying for a date with her at 3:30 a.m. like idiots! — and then he added wittily: — Are you and I some gerontophiles, or something of that sort? As for me, I have a strictly traditional sexual orientation.

—Run forward! — Rebrov croaked.

—Forward is forward... I don't mind really, — and Chmil went on ironically: — Eh, so it be! After all, as the saying goes, one should experience everything in life... Hey, what if I visit that granny myself? I would find everything out, and you'll wait in the department till we sort out our relationship...

—Life isn't all beer and skittles... — Rebrov tried to respond likewise with a joke, choking with rapid running.

A block of nine-storey apartment buildings remained behind at once. There began labyrinths of small private houses.

—Where are you, Chmil? — Rebrov called to senior lieutenant.

—Why? The street is on that side! — he pointed.

—No... there, — Major waved and started to run in the front, showing the way.

Awaken by the patter of their feet, dogs set up restless bark-

ing all through the neighbourhood. Finally, there appeared the needed street, and the necessary last house at the corner, located on the crossroad. Rebrov ran up to the wicket and stopped, drooping over it and trying to recover his breath. Chmil also bent, leaning his hands against his knees and catching his breath.

— It's truly hard... to keep pace with you, — he said, puffing.

Chmil raised his eyes at Major who got fishily quiet. Rebrov stopped dead, holding his breath and staring at something inside the yard. And, should he not lifted his hand showing "Attention!", Chmil would really think he passed away. There was light in the side and front windows of the house, probably in one and the same room. People's shadows were showed up behind the curtain.

Rebrov opened the wicket silently and entered the yard together with Chmil. A dead dog was lying in a small dark puddle. Chmil squatted down and touched the sticky liquid with his finger. "Blood", — he nodded assent.

— Approach from the left, — Major whispered, pointing at the side window.

Chmil nodded again. Bending down and making short dashes along desolate outhouses, he reached a low fence separating the yard from a little flower bed near the house, faced by the side window. Despite his impressive figure, the senior lieutenant jumped over the fence almost noiselessly and disappeared in the dark.

Rebrov wiped sweat from his forehead, pulled his gun out of the holster, released the trigger lock and approached the

door. His heart was throbbing inside his chest, resounding in the whole body. His breath was quickened. His hands were trembling of the fast running and extreme overstrain. His throat was parched. He seized the handle and slightly pulled the door. The latter yielded easily because it appeared to be open. Rebrov opened the door a little as accurately as he could and entered the house inaudibly. Moving ahead in the dark almost by touch, he stumbled on something soft and carefully squatted. In a faint beam of light coming from under the next room door he discerned an old woman's hand. He felt the pulse. It was default, however the body was still warm. "Apparently, the lady's taken on the first attack, — flashed through Rebrov's mind. — And it's happened very recently..." Major overstepped the corpse, holding the grip of his gun tighter, and started noiselessly moving towards the ribbon of light.

Having reached the next door, he again slowly pulled it. This room was a communicating one. The light was switched on in a neighbouring premise on the left. There was exactly from where the child's cry was being heard. Male voices were brutally demanding money. Muted knocks and groaning wafted. Rebrov squatted near the doorway and peeped out carefully. Two armed gangsters in black masks were beating the house owner who was lying on the floor, fastened down, and were demanding to show them a place where the money was kept. One of them had an automatic gun hanging over his shoulder, the other one held a pistol in his hand. A third bandit was standing on the left, holding an axe and watching the action of his pals. There was a boy behind him who was tied to a

radiator next to the window. He was plaintively crying, screwing up his eyes with fear. A woman was lying on a couch to the right, bound with a linen rope and gagged.

Rebrov frantically tried to think out what to do next. But, all of a sudden, the gangster with the automatic gun grasped the man's hair and, pointing to the child, yelled: "Watch, you rubbish!" He beckoned to his pal, and the latter lifted the axe against the child's fragile body. The boy let out a deafening squeal...

Rebrov as if got discharged. Not taking a single instant to ponder, he made a dart, shouting out some standard phrases and not even hearing his own voice. The only thought frantically pulsating in his mind was to rescue the child at any cost. At that moment he felt as if a bright sizzling ray pierced him from behind in the back of his head. It seemed to have exploded inside his body, generating multiple shivers like after a mighty discharge of electric current. From that very moment, Rebrov's perception pattern completely changed. Thoughts disappeared. Lucidity and absolute peace set in. Time seemed to slow down.

He saw a gunpoint aimed at him, but felt no fear. There was only lucidity of mind and cold intention. His eyesight was concentrating unusually and clearly fixed how the bullet was flying out of the gangster's gun barrel. Rebrov mechanically deflected his head from the bullet flight path. And only afterwards he saw the fire bursting from the round black outlet.

He glanced at the right shoulder of his adversary. Strangely, Rebrov neither his clothes nor even his skin, but just a shoulder joint being torn by a bullet. He pulled the trigger mechan-

ically. And, in an instant, the bullet pierced his adversary precisely in the target point set by his eyes. Acting almost automatically, Rebrov took a jump incredible for his age towards the gangster with the axe and stroke the gangster's chest with his left foot as if he practiced Oriental fighting techniques during his entire life. His adversary heavily knocked against the wall, then bounced back off it like a ball and fell to the floor, having dropped the axe.

Rebrov slightly turned his head to the right. The third bandit, having let go the man's hair, was already raising himself and aiming the automatic gun at Major. Rebrov acted rapidly, easily and coherently as if he had been practicing these movements for years up to automatism. He kicked off the gun aside and then held it down with his right foot. Carrying on with the movement, half-squatted, he turned his entire torso and struck a mighty blow from behind the gangster's ear with his left elbow. The bandit collapsed unconscious, having fallen straight on the house owner. Rebrov shifted the gun into his left hand and started to pick up the automatic gun with the right one. At that moment, he fixed something strange with his side vision.

Major turned his head. In the Further in the communicating room, near the doorway where he had stood a second ago, he saw a transparent shining silhouette. Its features were further becoming clearer and more distinct, and finally an image of a beautiful face appeared. The creature's gaze was penetrating deep into the soul with any hindrance, illumining its most secret stratum with its light. Rebrov felt he could neither endure the power of this gaze, nor he was able to turn away from its de-

lightly pleasant and kind gravity rejoicing his heart.

However, in a second, to Rebrov's ineffable amazement, his side vision worked in such a way as if he looked straight at what was happening sideways. Rebrov discerned in the smallest detail how the window was shattering to pieces, how a wood log was flying into the room, having broken the window frame, and how the senior lieutenant Chmil's robust figure was tumbling in afterwards. Wondering at such an unusual quality of his vision, Major hardly tore his eyes from the shining face and looked at the window which strangely appeared to be intact. But suddenly the glass indeed shattered to pieces, and the scene recorded by Rebrov's mind accurately recurred in reality. Chmil flew into the room like a hurricane. But, seeing Major alive and unhurt as well as the gangsters lying around him, he stopped taken aback. Having overcome his numbness quickly, the senior lieutenant began to tie the bandits' hands.

Rebrov was in the same state of absolute peace. He again glanced towards the communicating room which attracted most of his attention. But the room was already empty and gapingly dark. Only a slight dissipating light was fluently moving away, shimmering from the corridor. Rebrov moved to follow it without hesitation.

The world was changing its outlines with his every step. The further Rebrov was moving away from the bright light, the more focused and condensed the space around him was becoming. Having entered the darkness of the corridor, he seemed to plunge into a slowly revolving tunnel. Round "walls" and "floor" were in an amorphous condition. Putting it more precisely, "walls" and "floor" were notions from Re-

brov's past. Now he saw something like various by configuration and subdued light congestions of atoms and molecules which were changing their shape as if being animate and were copying imprints of his steps. Rebrov's hand freely penetrated the "walls" of this mass. Though his hand turned to be not a hand, but a streaming flow of multicoloured energies enveloped with same ultimate particles as the corridor "walls" and "floor".

In the front, he saw strangely grouped atoms and molecules mixed up with scattering light of fading energies. "The old lady", — flashed in his head. A slight luminescence was surrounding her body. In the head area, in its very middle, a little jelly-like paste was pulsating with golden-reddish light. A small glaringly bright clot was hanging poised above the body. Rebrov somehow comprehended that the clot of energies and the pulsating jelly-like paste piece were a single whole constituting the very essence of a human residing in a corporal shell. It seemed to him this small beaming Something was a living indeed, perennial creature. He felt its invisible gaze at himself along with tension and some soul-oppressing yearning. And he understood what it was without any words. "Everyone's alive, alive", — Major uttered in his mind. The creature perceived his thoughts precisely. It burst with smooth, incredibly warm play of colours, duplicating these tints on the jelly-like paste and leaving a similar appealing and placatory sensation in Rebrov's heart. And it suddenly dawned upon Rebrov that there was no death existing as such!

Such revelation astonished him, having opened the door to a world unknown before, but yet more than real, to a world of

eternity, filling his life with a totally new sense of existence. Having come outside, Rebrov found himself in a world kind of familiar, but completely different at the same time. Flows of charged particles washed his body with a gust of quite palpable living power which people call “wind”. These particles penetrated the corporal shell and saturated with their energy other particles which transmitted their power to the rest by chain, generating feelings of vivacity and freshness in the entire organism.

The world was by no means painted in dark colours. It was shimmering with a fantastical light of life which Rebrov had never noticed before. Everything around was beaming with variegated colours. And there was no division into animate and inanimate objects. Everything was living in its own way, moving, uniting, acquiring unique scales of tints and tinges, coming apart into separate pulsating hues, transforming its states unusually...

Stunned with what he saw, Rebrov squatted on a porch edge. And only then he noticed that he was seeing in a strange mode like a chameleon. His range of vision widened significantly. He could watch almost everything located above, below, behind and sideways without turning his head. Only a small zone located behind and below remained invisible. He needed to turn his head slightly to observe that part of space. Rebrov could not understand what had happened to his eyesight. He closed his eyes, having covered them with his hand. Yet, although his eyelids were now closed, Rebrov strangely saw his own hand with the fingers out over the eyelids. Moreover, he saw everything happening around him as if

there was no obstacle at all.

Rebrov removed his hand from his face in shock and looked at it. But then he discovered other surprising abilities of his eyesight. The more he focused his attention on his finger tip, the deeper his gaze delved into, enlarging the visible range numerous times like through a magnifying lens. Although Rebrov simultaneously felt he was holding his hand at the same distance from his eyes. He saw the patterned outline of his fingers in smallest details, in a form of quaint labyrinths. They resembled a dodging area indented with uneven ditches and flat hills. Another invisible world was disappearing behind this mysterious relief. A pink paste enveloped forked mouths of supple bluish tubes. The latter ones strongly pulsated, pushing impetuous flows of red liquid along their tangled passages with an enormous internal pressure. But inside this incredibly lively world there existed a still subtle world. Rebrov even felt a little dizzy of such a deep concentration. He mechanically diverted his look from his finger, and his eyesight became defocused again, restoring the finger in its habitual shape.

Trying to come to his senses, Rebrov switched his attention to sounds. Yet, there he also faced a unique phenomenon. He didn't hear sounds as usual, but rather sensed those with his entire body. Major began to study the new talents of his body with unconcealed curiosity. First, he felt dogs' barking. These waives seemed to be a living independent force with its own energy store. Springing up and passing their extremely short lifetime, they changed the surrounding space with their vibrations. Rebrov sensed how the resilient waves were hitting his body like sea surges rolling one after another, how they were

washing him like a violent undercurrent would wash an underwater stone. He senses still other, more subtle noises and the living power of those energies.

Rebrov started focusing on various sensations with rapture. And there he revealed an absolutely marvelous picture of the universe. All the colourful hues of the surrounding space appeared to be nothing else than various energies of diverse wavelengths. Furthermore, all animate and inanimate objects were indeed energetic particles generating specific waves. Their variety and interaction impressed. The waves were bearers of diverse power and energy, moved at their own speeds, intensified each other meeting in the space, reflected, got absorbed or merged into a different energy. Observing this entire splendour, Rebrov unexpectedly made another astonishing discovery: this life wouldn't end! There was no "death" notion in it. Energies representing the very essence of life simply turned from one state into the other, changing shapes. They existed perpetually!

Such discoveries took Rebrov's breath away. A prodigious joy and a boundless love for all existing swept over him. He wanted to embrace the whole world and to dissolve completely in its stunning harmony. Gripped with inspiration, Rebrov delightedly looked at the vast space of the night sky sparkling with dazzling stars. From up there he felt noises which he had never heard before. Or rather there were not noises, but some symphony which composed all sounds into one lovely melody or charmed ears by separate sounding of a magnificent solo. This music enchanted with its soft modulation, with its uncommon internal beauty.

Rebrov enjoyed the harmonious sounding of the outer Space. He clearly felt some inner inseparable connection between himself and the wonderful universe. He had a feeling as if he knew exactly where and what is located: where there was a red-hot star, where there was a planet, where there was simply light of a long ago transformed energy of some extinct form. And in certain dark zones of the Space he distinctly sensed the existence of galaxies and planets, invisible for a human eye, which had perfectly real and similar life prototype. Rebrov felt not just his unity with the Space, but some inexplicable connection of every atom of his body with each electron of heavenly bodies. He understood at an unknown level of his consciousness that, if he stayed in this astounding state of deep penetration into mysteries of the universe, something totally other-worldly would be eventually revealed to him. And, at that very instant, he felt very bad. It seemed he would become unconscious any moment. Rebrov lowered his look to the earth, making efforts to come to his senses.

The operations group arrived. People began scurrying about at the doorway. Rebrov's nostrils got struck with smells of blood, gun powder, gasoline, mixture of male and female perfumes with the acrid stink of the duty department and a dozen of some characteristic smells of the house. Cars from the prosecutor's department, the organized crimes department and the ambulance arrived. Active movement started in the yard.

Rebrov watched fussing people in detachment. They looked like mighty sources of various waves emanating from them. Those waves rapidly filled the space around the house with

their energy vibrations. Major for the first time saw that a human occupies a much bigger volume than he could have imagined. A human body by appearance resembled a swarm of tiny bees moving in various groups in their own directions. That swarm of atoms and molecules mixed with internal energies was encircled with an opaque mist around twenty centimetres thick. The mist was covered with an unusual half-metre luminescence from above. And this entire cocoon intensively radiated energies which were exactly the ones to fill the space around at an unbelievable speed.

Rebrov was patted on the back, was asked something, and he answered not drawing his inner look from contemplation of what was happening. A doctor came up to him and asked whether he was wounded. And then Major turned and paid attention to this man. The fact was that he had grasped the question much faster than the man had time to pronounce it. Yet, simultaneously Rebrov perceived also other, much more powerful mental waves as if different people were speaking inside the doctor about totally discordant matters, with an obvious superiority of negative ones. At that, Major was feeling the doctor's thoughts so distinctly as if that all was taking place in his own head.

Finally, the bustle came to an end. Rebrov was sent home by the authorities. He got into a militia SUV together with other colleagues who had volunteered to accompany him. The engine scarcely began to roar when Major switched to another perception. His attention was attracted by the operating engine. Oddly to say, Rebrov viewed what was happening inside it. He clearly saw how the shimmering gasoline was sprin-

kling and mixing with the air, how the spark was igniting that mixture, how the explosion was occurring. The explosion force pushed the piston, the latter transmitted energy to the crankshaft. Through the crankshaft, the energy flew to the wheels, and the wheels were turning, clinging to the road asphalt. And it seemed the converting energy which was moving the SUV should have been bringing Rebrov closer to his house, but, strangely enough, he instead felt his house approaching him.

Major observed this whole enigmatical world with unconcealed surprise. He seemed to have become double. On one hand, this all was new for him, although on the other hand he felt he had already seen this all: the outer Space, the atoms, the waves. He was familiar with that world!!!

As a precaution, Rebrov told nothing about his fabulous sensations to his colleagues in order not to be called insane. Although, looking at the real surrounding beauty of the transformed world, he realized somewhere deep inside that it was the human world to be considered insane due to its emotional filth and bodily needs.

Having got home, Rebrov quietly entered his apartment so as not to wake the family. He even didn't switch on lights because he could perfectly see in the dark. As a matter of fact, there was no darkness as such. The world was playing with manifold light spectrum. Each Major's step or touch to anything generated a new surge of wave vibrations and their interaction.

Rebrov made up a couch in the sitting-room and lay down, or rather sank, like a stuffing in a puff pastry, into a similar

unusual environment of atoms and molecules moving along various trajectories. He felt a state of blissful relaxation and tried to close his eyes. However, even when he shut the eyelids, he could still see the volumetric picture of the room with all the living movement of the “immovable property”. Rebrov grinned to himself: “How am I now supposed to sleep?” Not having an idea of what to do, he started to examine the wonderful independent life of his apartment. Later on, all the last night’s events began scrolling in his mind on their own in a reverse order. And, once his thought came up to the stunning penetrating gaze of the light creature’s face, a bright blinding flash flared in front of Rebrov’s eyes, and he fell into profound sleep.

* * *

Major woke up when it was already noon. His eyesight was usual as it had been before. Nevertheless, Rebrov felt himself a completely different person as if an **extensive** positive revolution had taken place inside him. His body strangely was not aching at all. On the contrary, it was full of strength as if a second adolescence began. His entire organism had become light and vigorous.

Nobody else was home. His daughter left for the college; his wife, most probably, went shopping. Whistling a cheerful melody, Rebrov made some body exercises which he had not done for quite a while. He lifted dust-laden dumb-bells and went to the shower in excellent mood. Having washed himself, still singing, he squeezed a shaving cream from a tube as

usual and began to apply it to his two-day bristle with a shaving-brush. And suddenly Rebrov saw himself in the mirror and froze. His hair having started to turn grey fifteen years ago, were now umber. The netting of little wrinkles vanished from his face. Under-eye bags and skin yellowness disappeared. The face incomprehensibly regained its natural healthy colour. Yet, the main thing was about his eyes. They not only became rich brown in colour, but also reflected such power and brilliance that were not in Rebrov's nature even when he was young. Major squatted on the bath-tub board and then jumped up again peering into his own reflection. He tried to conceive: what metamorphoses had happened to his organism? But then he stopped tormenting himself with such "trifles". After all, it was merely a body.

Having finished the morning treatments, Rebrov went to the kitchen and made a habitual tea. Taking a sip, he strangely felt the true aroma and taste of this flavoured water for the first time in his life. It whetted the healthy appetite. Having rummaged in the nearly empty fridge, he took out some food remains, created sandwiches out of those and started eating with pleasure. Rebrov ate his breakfast with pleasure for the first time in many years. Crooning the same cheerful melody, he got dressed and went to the district department to report on his "unauthorized heroism".

Walking the habitual road which he had been going along for a number years, Rebrov got more and more certain that an amazing world was around him indeed, and that he was a part of this natural miracle. Rebrov walked and didn't feel his own body. Colours around were much brighter and richer as if

muddy scales had fallen from his eyes. He saw the genuine, living surrounding beauty. He heard how actually birds were signing. Even in sparrows' chirping he distinguished an unpretentious dispute. He began to comprehend this world at a non-verbal level.

Rebrov came up to a bus stop. Waiting for his bus, for the first time in life he drew attention to a rind of a tree nearby. Thin, elegant curves alternated with thick, bulging parts, charmingly playing with chiaroscuro of each vein. And all these together constituted a magnificent, enigmatic picture looking like a mysterious labyrinth drawn by an invisible hand from the roots to the very top. There was a whole life inside, a whole destiny outside... So many various events took place for other creatures near this tree and owing to it...

Major thought: "Yes, everyone is assigned own place in this life. And everyone in this life is a perpetual destiny-creating element... Strange... Striking... And why these mysteries of being have revealed to me?" He simply couldn't get rid of this question.

The bus arrived at that moment, and a door opened in front of him. "Prove" — Rebrov heard an unnaturally loud fervent voice of a young woman behind him. Major turned back, having thought for some reason that it had been said to him. But, seeing a hugging young couple who didn't pay any attention to him and simply enjoyed their happiness, he got a little confused and entered the bus.

Rebrov barely squeezed inside not to block the way to the exit and stopped near sitting old ladies peacefully chatting with each other. The unfamiliar girl's word was echoing in his

mind. And, all of a sudden, one of the old ladies uttered a phrase with, as seemed to Rebrov, the same unusual intonation: “To God that...” Major was somewhat surprised with such concurring sound frequencies. The words sank into his heart. And, no matter how attentively he listened to their conversation afterwards, he heard nothing like this anymore.

Rebrov alighted from at his bus stop, puzzled. The words which had been pronounced by different people lined up on their own in his head: “Prove to God that...” Passing by a theatre, Major habitually glanced at playbills and immediately drew closer attention to those. Among the overall nonsense there was an unusually written phrase “you are Human”. Rebrov turned away for an experiment. Then he looked at the gaudy playbill again. And right away his eyesight accurately seized the same words as if that information was the most important for Rebrov at that moment. He shook up his head, being slightly taken aback because of his new discoveries, and continued walking his way.

Only a short distance of about two hundred metres remained to the district department, and there was a park on the way. Rebrov was walking leisurely, pondering over the unusual phrase which had formed. “Prove to God that you are Human... Prove to God that you are Human”, — the words were scrolling in his mind. Suddenly, a sonorous child’s voice loudly uttered close nearby: “...and God will have faith in you”. Major gave a start and even turned around with astonishment.

—Is it correct, granny? — a five-year-old boy prattled, happily smiling and shaking hand of his grandmother who was

sitting on a park bench.

—Correct, correct, my dear, — the touched old woman answered and kissed her grandson's forehead.

This scene and mainly these words simply staggered Rebrov deeply in his heart. The ready sentence forthwith assembled in his mind: "Prove to God that you are Human, and God will have faith in you". Something Existent was communicating to him as a totally living being. It gave him the answer to his vital question by using signs. Suddenly, it dawned upon Rebrov: it had always been like this! That Existent neither appeared from anywhere nor disappeared, but it was constantly beside him throughout his entire life. Yet, being like blind, he had never noticed that support and those signs which his Destiny had been generously showering on him. Everything was so simple, wise and clear... "Prove to God that you are Human, and God will have faith in you..."

* * *

Rebrov entered the district department and was surprised with his own new discoveries and observations. When some people were talking about his last night's action, they seemed to be trying on that "blanket". They regarded the situation though a shroud of envy. Others were proud of themselves for working with a person who would always lend a helping hand. Several others were rejoiced over benefits of the grown unraveling statistics and over the reward they were to obtain for such a subordinate. Still others secretly laughed at Major, considering him "a duffer" and "a loser" who voluntarily "put

his ass under fire for the sake of some shopkeeper's family". And only individuals, being his true friends, were candidly happy for the fact that everything had turned out all right and their friend was alive and unhurt. Rebrov seemed to be feeling people from their inside. In an incomprehensible way he sensed what they were really thinking. It appeared that out of a hundred percent of all greeting words only ten percent conformed to sincere, pure intentions. The remaining ninety percent were indeed from the evil one. Oh, humans, humans... Nevertheless, such circumstance made Rebrov rather laughing than angry because each of his colleagues fondly believed his thoughts were known only to himself. But that was precisely where Rebrov viewed a holistic illusion, feeling he was surrounded mostly by clones of the Ego legion very few of whom were truly individuals alighted with the truth of their spiritual world.

Rebrov looked at life from another visual angle. Passing by "the monkey house", he thought: was there a real difference between the inner essence of department officers and detainees? None, both were same people. Previously, Rebrov had regarded detainees as potential criminals, as dregs of human society, whereas now he first looked at them with humane eyes. They were same people with their own souls, inner world, good and bad intentions, imperfections, weaknesses. And the external difference was merely in the fact that once they had given in to provocation of their negative side which in its turn inevitably engrossed them with generated circumstances. After all, no one including the department staff was insured against such lot since it's all about the internal holistic

battle of good and evil inside each person.

Surprisingly, people with extremely malicious cast of mind avoided Rebrov that day, as if they were afraid to whiten themselves with something buoyant and kind and to shake their life position once chosen. There appeared to be not many of such inner wicked ones in the district department, though there were only few candidly kind, too. Rebrov viewed the majority of people as standing on the border between good and evil. They inclined to where a thought would tempt them, behaving like drunkards swinging from one extreme to another. Nonetheless, they persistently clambered to the neutral zone, as if fearing to lose sight of this important life landmark. But the people didn't see the volumetric picture like Rebrov who could grasp everything at once, for they were creeping in a circle.

Major sat in the duty room to write a report, but, being regularly distracted by congratulators, he was able to finish only towards evening. People came in one by one. They just seemed to be never tired of talking to him. They were telling their life stories, jokes, sundry trifles only in order to prolong being near Rebrov. In the evening when the bosses had left, in the duty room there gathered a big noisy company. If previously officers hurried home after work, that day no one wanted to leave. Everybody laughed, jested, cheered Major up and "blessed" him for new feats. Men inspired each other with cheerful laughter, finding peace of mind. And the most unbelievable thing was that they neither drank that night nor even thought of alcohol. As the saying goes, when a soul sings a body is thoroughly delighted.

Rebrov returned home way after midnight. Going to bed, he still could not calm down after the day's rich impressions. And he felt he continued to change inside all along, although he didn't have time to conceive and to explain everything with common logic. He now simply trusted his intuition. Rebrov was sure — it knew nearly everything about the world. When he was writing the report that day, his intuition suggested those were his last report papers in the district department though his logic asserted rather the counter. “Well, — he thought, — we shall see what we shall see”.

* * *

The next day, Rebrov was to visit his doctor-friend for another medical examination. He felt himself perfectly healthy, but the remains of his old consciousness required evidences proving his body's real apple-pie order.

Seeing Major freshen up, abruptly changed, the friend was unspeakably surprised. He examined him, palpated his liver, took his blood pressure and... shrugged his shoulders with confusion. Not trusting his own eyes, the doctor sent Rebrov to second chemical tests, asked him to pass the ultrasonic analysis and then to come back in couple hours.

Major was worrying like a student at an exam during those two hours. To be precise, it was his external, superficial “I” related to his old habitual thinking which was worrying. Whereas the great “I” gaining the internal tremendous power which emanated that very intuition remained serene. Hence, Rebrov, thinking, sometimes was walking back and forth

racking his brains over an uncertain future, and sometimes got inspired with such composure which made any fears fade away like melting snow under warm rays of the blazing sun.

Having scarcely waited until the appointed time, Major hurried to the hospital. Approaching the doctor's door, he stopped at pause. In his mind he suddenly caught a glimpse of a grey door in that private house behind which an ominous uncertainty was waiting for him one recent night. But the vision lasted for just a second. To his surprise, Rebrov easily overcame his transient fright. Something good captured Major from the inside again, and that something allowed him to see the world in light colours attuning his consciousness solely to a positive wave. Rebrov opened the door with confidence and stepped towards his destiny.

His fiend looked somewhat perplexed.

—Come in... Your results have just been delivered. Sit down, please...

The doctor studied the papers for a while, collating the data with his previous records. Rebrov was sitting silently. Following a longstanding habit of an operations officer, he was stealthily observing expressions on the doctor's face. The latter rubbed his forehead, adjusted his glasses, raised his eyebrows in astonishment, and compared something with interest. The patient understood even before the actual conversation: what had been the most dreadful for him, was over now.

—Listen, I don't understand a thing... Looks like everything's OK, everything's back to normal... You're healthy like a bull. Now tell me, what kind of treatment have you had out there?

—No treatment really, — Rebrov shrugged his shoulders and added: — Just visited one sorceress...

—A sorceress?! Probably, young and pretty one? — the doctor hemmed. — Will you introduce me?

—With pleasure! But I have her address at home...

—No problem if it's home, I'm patient and able to wait... Well, what else can I say on your account... — he pointed to the medical examination results. — As they say, if a person really wants to live, medicine is powerless there.

They laughed. Having resolved all the issues, Major hastily bade farewell.

—Don't forget about the address! — the doctor reminded him in the end.

—I'll try, — Rebrov answered, perfectly understanding that he'd hardly ever comply with such request.

* * *

On the third day Rebrov got somewhat adapted to his new state of unusual vision of the world. Everything seemed to remain the same, however he perceived everything differently, so as if his consciousness had crossed a certain border behind which there seethed a full-flowing living power overflowing the soul with Good and Love and pouring the amazing inner Freedom out into the world. Rebrov rather felt this state than comprehended. An indefatigable thirst for knowledge had arisen inside him as if he had been starving for centuries and now was in front of a door to a world full of juicy fruits. He wanted to try everything, to appraise diverse

tastes, colours and their beauty, to drink from a life-giving spring. In other words, he wanted to get satiated to his heart's content with what he had lacked for so long.

Rebrov sincerely pitied people not seeing the entire magnificence of what existed right under their noses. They wandered around like mummies bandaged all over with perpetual problems. And, despite the fact they were suffering, they actually didn't want to get rid of those bandages separating them from the real world because they feared to lose their fictitious principles and to dissolve in an unexplored environment. Nevertheless, Rebrov perfectly understood that all those fears were in fact an illusion, a deception evoked by the insatiable Ego for its slaves. People in general were devoid of beauty due to an animal whim, for they didn't know about their main power — the genuine Freedom of Soul.

That day Major was called to the district department although he had a free day. Certain formalities were to be settled in connection with that unforgettable duty. Today he felt himself in some special way. In addition to the wonderful state of consciousness in which Rebrov had been for already several days, he also clearly sensed someone's stimulant presence beside him. The marvelous sensation of the energy of good, of some powerful soul very dear to his heart returned his mental look to the shining face which had engraved on his memory that destiny-creating night. Such subconscious feelings became particularly intense today for some reason, and it was lending Rebrov an inexplicable confidence in his future.

Approaching the district department, on a road side he bumped into Vasia, the beggar who regularly resided in their

“monkey house”. Obviously, he had just been released after the statistics had become proper to be shown to higher authorities. Seeing Major, the beggar lighted up with a gap-toothed smile as though he met a close friend of his.

— Hi, Rebrov!

Major grinned. It was the first time when the beggar pronounced his surname in full, with the “R” letter.

—Hello, Innokentiy! You’ve been released, haven’t you?

—They don’t need me anymore! — the beggar waved his hand. — There have appeared much more interesting guys.

—Naturally.

—Do you have a cigarette? — the beggar inquired politely.

Rebrov fumbled in his pockets, took out a pack and handed it to his accidental interlocutor.

— Here, take it.

The beggar took one cigarette with an emphatic accuracy.

—You may take the whole pack! I’ve quitted smoking.

—Thank you very much... It’s good you don’t smoke anymore, — the beggar mumbled, avidly hiding the pack into his shabby pocket. — Got a light?

Rebrov took out a lighter and said with a smile:

—Take it as a present.

—Many thanks, — Innokentiy articulated with a satisfied voice and, having sighed affectedly, added: — Eh, I wish I had your iron will...

—Who really hampers you to have it? — Rebrov grinned.

—Circumstances.

Major shook his head, smiling.

— Yeah, yeah, yeah, — the beggar chattered. — Don’t have

any doubts. Exactly the circumstances: no domicile, no money...

—Nonsense! You know, there's a saying: "A one who wants achieves more than a one can".

—It may be true, of course... But it's too late for me to achieve anything. My person is not called for this life festival.

—Well, I wouldn't agree... Everyone can find their place under the sun. Desire is all you need for this.

—Eh, if the sun would only help growing... But it decomposes as well.

—Well, Innolentiy, you're a master of philosophizing, — Rebrov grinned, getting ready to bid this "individual" a farewell.

However, the beggar seemed to become jammed in impetuous twaddle.

—Well, I... If only I had a suitable job... I would move mountains... And also some dwelling...

—Then get employed as a street cleaner or a guard: you'll both have dwelling and earn living, — Rebrov proposed, more and more often looking towards the district department.

—My doctor's degree does not allow me to descend that low.

Major stared at the beggar in surprise and asked, hardly restraining himself from laughter:

—Which degree?

—Doctor's... You've heard correctly... I was a beggar not my entire life, but only for the last ten years... And before I used to work in the north. I'm a geochemist... I studied the distribution of chemical elements migration processes in the

earth's crust...

Rebrov's laughter vanished immediately, giving way to a sincere interest.

—Why haven't you ever told about it?

—Aah, — Innokentiy waved his hand. — What's the sense in telling? To make people laugh? A whole doctor who's a beggar.

Rebrov felt uneasy. He communicated with this man for a number of years and knew nothing about him in essence.

— Well, — the beggar continued, flattered with Major's attention. — There was the time... I used to study works of Vernadskiy, Fersman, Goldsmith... Defended the thesis. And there you are – the Soviet Union collapsed! Our institute was closed, and everybody was no more needed. Well, I thought, where do I go now? I went home. My parents live in a village not far from here. I spent some time there sweating, and then moved to the city. Settled with an acquaintance in a civil marriage. But job was a problem. I went to one place — they wouldn't hire me, to another one — same thing. In a third place they told me to come in three months because a junior research assistant position might have become vacant. Can you imagine: a Doctor of Science is offered a junior assistant position like a charity, with a "might be" extension! — he poked into his chest. — I got so angry then!.. And I sent them all to hell. It turned out that nobody needed my knowledge! I took umbrage on the entire world. And it's all about the political bosses who are totally guilty for having dilapidated such a country...

—Wait, wait... You seem to have had domicile, identifica-

tion docs...

—Not any more, — the beggar muttered with discontent, being annoyed for the fact he had been interrupted at his favourite point. — I started to drink out of grief. And my concubine turned me out together with all my belongings. And then it rolled... I drank away all my things, the documents got stolen... I started spending nights at railway stations and on house garrets. First it was frightening, but later I got used to it.

—Are your parents alive?

—I don't know. Once I left for the city, I never visited them.

—Why?

—It's awkward somehow... Leaving as a Doctor of Science and returning as a beggar... No, it's better if the village people think I'm still a scientist... My parents were so proud of me... This is what my bitter destiny is like... Yet, should there was a right regime in this country, nothing like this wouldn't have happened...

And then the beggar darted — in a raised voice he switched to insulting expressions regarding “the persons guilty” in his life. Rebrov was deep in his own thought meanwhile. This aging man found himself nearly at the bottom, but he went on living in illusory ambitions of the past. He considered important not everyday self-improvement and overcoming of his idleness and egocentrism, but rather preservation of his far-fetched myth about himself in front of the people who actually did not need it. Major clearly understood that neither government nor the current time of changes were to be blamed for his interlocutor's destiny. It was he himself to be blamed.

He had let anger and pride occupy his consciousness, entwine him with its greedy roots. He unfurled his laziness and transmuted into a complete alcoholic. This man had ignominiously lost his vital internal battle. Therefore, he accused everyone and everything around instead of blaming the main originator of his troubles — his own Ego whose slave he had become for the rest of his life. People are not born slaves, but become slaves.

Life gave Rebrov a demonstration of this glaring example as if it intended to emphasize the significance of internal victory over a monstrous sovereign — the egocentrism which threatened majority of human beings. It showed that a person needed to chain this dragon very tightly in his or her consciousness and to restrain it with the power of will and all-embracing love. Only in such case the black cloud of negative would vanish, and there would arise a long-awaited lucidity and clearness of vision. And that's exactly when the world would disclose all its genuine valuables before such person's pure look.

Major was standing in thought near the chattering complaining beggar, when suddenly a screech of a brand-new modern car brakes resounded. A driver peered at a strange couple for a moment, then clapped the steering wheel and started to get out of the car.

— There you are, Rebrov! How many ages since we've seen each other?

Major looked around, and his eyes vividly gleamed:

— Whom am I seeing?! Sergei!

The beggar also looked around and busily set out to leave.

—OK, I have to go...

—Take care, — Rebrov nodded, not diverting his eyes from his brother-soldier through whose help he once had taken the law path. — I can't believe it!

They firmly shook each other's hands and embraced like true brothers.

—I haven't seen you for years... You look very well, fine fellow! — Sergei said smiling.

—And you, as I see, have grown a little “mom's paunch”, — Rebrov jested using their old college slang.

—That's true! It fits to my current position, — he slapped his belly covered with a jacket of an expensive business suit.

—Where did you get lost? Since you quitted militia, there has been not a sound from you. You could at least send a postcard stating you're alive, healthy and so on.

—You know yourself what kind of a writer I am! Remember how I was preparing a literature essay?!

They laughed recollecting the details of that story.

—Such things are impossible to forget, — Rebrov noted.

—Trust me, I'm not able to write still now.

—Yet, how do you work?

—I don't write, but put signatures.

—Aah, no wonder in such case...

They burst laughing again.

—Where do you actually work?

—I own a holding company.

—Really?!

—It's been seven years. Luckily, I got legal education when being young. One should be on his guard in nowadays busi-

ness, particularly with documents. All the time someone tries to seize as much as possible. Competition, as you understand... Listen, it's great we've come across! I've been rack-ing my brains, in fact... I awfully need a security service di-rector. Would you come to work for me? You're an honest, respectable man. I'm familiar by hearsay with your operations feats. News flies quickly, after all... I'll provide you with a car, and I'll help with an apartment if necessary. Salary is two thousand dollars...

—A year?

—Hey, Rebrov, you are totally behind the times in your dis-trict department! — his friend hemmed.— A month, of course. Plus a quarterly bonus payment. Well, agreed?

Rebrov was standing dumbstruck of such an unexpected of-fer. Somebody approvingly tapped him on the right shoulder. Major turned around, but no one was behind. He glanced at the grey district department building, and it seemed like a load had been taken off his heart. Rebrov felt he had done everything he had needed to do on this crossroads of desti-nies. Nothing kept him here anymore. Major felt this internal freedom. Having looked into the sky, he saw the dazzling sun appearing from behind the clouds. Rebrov screwed up his eyes, and for just an instant there appeared a vision of the familiar shining face smiling. Having turned to his friend, he happily responded:

— Well, why not!

EVERYTHING IS SO SIMPLE

*He appears in simplicity.
Complicating the simplicity,
We lose Him.
While everything is so simple!*

Rigden Jappo

The sun was slowly rising above the horizon, illumining all living around with its warm, caressing light. A tiny river started to sparkle with its waters movement, coquettishly winking at surrounding nature. The graceful beauty of the river's fluent curves charmed the endless green field which was holding it in its emerald embrace. Every morning, a thousand diamond dew-drops on the field grass bestowed minutes of admiration upon the river with an inimitable play of bright flashes. And the higher the sun was rising, the further rarely the river was sighing languorously, and the more it uncovered its genuine beauty from under a subtle veil of the milky fog.

An old fisherman was sitting on the bank of this miracle of nature. There was no bite that day for some reason, so his mood was not the best. The fog, rising above the river, seemed to purposely hide the surrounding scenery under its muddy blanket, separating the human being from all outward things and immersing him into his inner life. Charming monotonous swinging of the fishing float automatically evoked sad thought about himself, about the spent life and his uncommon destiny.

It's hard to mention what Grigoriy Timonnikov hadn't experienced during the years of his life. There was everything: troublesome childhood, wild adolescence, a great love, a horrible war, famine, devastation, then his family, kids, hard work, honour and respect, retirement,

grandchildren, his wife's death... It looked like destiny tested him in all hypostasis: sometimes it showered with long-awaited happiness, then it cruelly bereaved of it, then it rewarded again and again deprived. It was impossible to get used to its sudden turns, to drastic ascents and downfalls. Yet, Grigoriy was persistently overcoming all the difficulties, step by step. They were inuring his temper, strengthening his will, begetting consistency of his goals. And it seemed now that life was over, that no destiny tricks could be faced in his old age However...

He had never earnestly thought of what the old age would be like. Being young, he believed that heady happiness and enjoyment of youth would last forever. During the war, thoughts of the old age never called on him at all because nobody knew what would happen even the next minute. During his mature years, this subject was not topical either for he had enough daily cares both at work and at home. He saw old people around, he helped them, but never had a notion that once he would reach such venerable age himself.

Strangely enough, his life passed like a single instant. And here it came, the old age... His body became wrinkled, his skin turned pendulous, his hair grew thin, his movements became confined. And sundry health disorders started to bother. Even before, Grigoriy rarely scrutinized himself in the mirror, and now all the more he was afraid of looking there. His face looked totally different once he got old. Perhaps, the expression in his eyes merely remained the same, with their colour having slightly faded and the naughty zest inside them having gone out. But, most paradoxically, he was still young at heart. His emotional impulses of joy, of delight were preserved in their primeval state, while his body unfortunately was no more capable of expressing these feelings in their entirety.

The greatest resentment and the very gist of old age is the enormous

gap between the internal and the external states. Probably, it's the reason he could ever hardly picture himself being old. He simply couldn't feel the inward state of being old.

Strange feelings... You haven't had time to actually live, and suddenly you are on the threshold to the eternity... What is the sense of such being? Why has the destiny endowed you with so many difficulties and asperity? What are all these durability ordeals and hard work for? As a matter of fact, if you grasp it, everything that you worked on each day, that you spent so much time and effort on, taking it to heart, everything that you completely devoted yourself to, has appeared to be just a one-moment harvest. So, years have been spent for the sake of several moments which you used to consider important, but, if looking at those from the height of your current age, they prove to be absolutely needless and senseless. Why do such intricacies determine a human destiny? He crawls about like a worm... What is the point of it? Well, he can surely find numerous excuses and assure himself his life has had meaning. But since the "what have you lived for?" question arises at all, it means something agitates the human subconscious, as if he hasn't done or finished something... What in particular though?

Grigoriy scanned his memory over and over. He brought up good kids who, in their turn, gave birth to nice grandchildren. As they say, the house has been built, and the garden has been planted. Still, there was an inexplicable emotion deep inside... It disturbed him not in the sense of external living, but rather at some level of inner awareness. From time to time, Grigoriy felt he's close to a clue, whereas at times it seemed to him this secret would come to light only in the face of death. He was not afraid of the death itself. The war taught him very well to overcome this fear. But he suffered rather from subsequent obscurity, fearing that

in the last moment it would be too late to conceive the life he had, for he would not have any more time to improve or to change anything.

Grigoriy often pondered over this during his last years. He had plenty of time for thinking. He had nowhere to rush to any more. He had long ago got rid of all duties and obligations towards society, his employers and his family. His body was decrepit and did not require as much care as before. So, reviewing the lived years was now all he remained with. And Grigoriy was plunged in thought over and over, all by himself.

Senile loneliness is probably the only ordeal which is hard to become accustomed to. It was killing with its ambient silence, with despair and total despondency. It evoked feelings of bitterness, loss and inanity of existence. It depressed and generated fear that everyone would forget him, gave rise to the feeling that he's a useless, worn-out thing lying desolate in a dusty attic. Grigoriy never supposed the old age would call such an unpleasant feeling as if you were discharged from a ship as not wanted and left on a desert island. A whole ocean of life is boiling up around, but you are only an outside spectator of the thrilling element. Memory of the days spent inside the element never leaves you in peace. The soul longs to go back, while the "body-boat" is too threadbare and full of holes. And you have neither might to repair it nor an opportunity to build a new one...

A person fears loneliness throughout his entire conscious life and, in the end, he gets it as an inevitable circumstance. Who needs an old substance? Nobody needs, and neither he does himself, because he would like to live and to enjoy all the world's fascinations just like before. But the old age deprives him of many pleasures. Its jingling surrounding silence makes a person start thinking of the sense of his existence. It multiplies the inner state and thoughts which were prevailing

during his lifetime.

Grigoriy had nothing to reproach himself with. He always followed the laws of his Conscience. It was the main criterion of evaluating all his deeds and life decisions. He lived for people and for people's sake. And people gave him love and respect in return. Grigoriy had many pals, but, unfortunately, his close friends with whom he could share his troubles and pains were already gone. His wife died. His children lived far away with their families. He wanted to overburden them neither with his age nor, particularly, with his emotions. Hence, at the end of his life it appeared he even had no one to tell his thoughts to, whereas now it was exactly the time he would like to hear cordial, comforting words, to feel a kindred soul beside him, to dispel his fear of the obscurity waiting for him across the inevitable line of existence.

The old man was sitting on the bank, slightly stooping from his oppressing thoughts. Fish still simply wouldn't bite. He pulled the rod out of the water absentmindedly, checked the bait, adjusted the float, and casted the line again.

— Eh-eh-eh, — the old man signed, massaging his numb neck.

The scar on his face, extending from his right ear to his lower jaw, slightly ached. The old man got somewhat surprised and tense at the same time. It always happened in the most important moments of his life. This marvelous inner “alarm” as well as a redly pink spot around his first jugular vertebra showed up during the war, after a most enigmatical event in his life.

It happened in the autumn of 1942. After another Germans' attack, the Soviet soldiers were resting, having settled near the recent battle field. Grigoriy and his friend Nikolay Veperskiy were lying in a dug-out. It was drizzling outside. Hitlerites fired on Russian stands every now and then. Explosions and scattered submachine-gun volleys re-

sounded now here, now there. Young reinforcements shuddered, gazing around, while veterans regarded the situation more tranquilly, trying to slumber at least a little and to spare their strength.

A soldier of about thirty years old entered the dug-out and articulated loudly with his unusually tuneful voice:

— Timonnikov, Veperskiy, the commander calls you both urgently!

Grigoriy caught a glimpse of the soldier. He was obviously a recruit for he was dressed in a brand-new uniform. Their looks intersected suddenly, and Grigoriy got nearly seized with the guy's surprisingly strong and, at the same time, dear and cordial look. His lucid eyes were shining with an extraordinary inside power and purity. Grigoriy never faced anything like that throughout his entire life, neither before nor afterwards.

Another explosion thundered not far from the dug-out. Grigoriy and his friend quickly slipped their tent-capes on, took their weapons, left the dug-out and started advancing along the trench. Their boots were sinking in slushy mud. The swelling rain was beating in their faces. The chilling wind was blowing.

Veperskiy was moving in the front, Grigoriy was following him, and the strange soldier was bringing up the rear. And, as soon as they were going round the first trench turn about ten meters from the dug-out, there resounded a swelling whizz of a shell flying towards them. Grigoriy, being a war-dog, reacted immediately. To all appearances, the shell was to blow up somewhere close at hand. They hardly had any time. Having turned around harshly, he was about to throw the young soldier down on the ground. Grigoriy shouted "Get down!", but his hand cut through the void. At that very moment, there happened an explosion.

The shell bumped into the dug-out. Like in time-lapse filming,

Grigoriy observed dispersing beams, mud pieces, some items... And, all of a sudden, a snow-white dove, having miraculously appeared from nowhere, flew up from under his feet. And the bird was so close that its bluish-white wing even touched on Grigoriy's face. He felt his head spin and started falling down, as if he was descending into a soft feather-bed. Everything was seen through a mist. He watched his colleagues and a medical orderly bend forward to him. They were shaking him. "Contusion", someone shouted somewhere in the distance. Then they carried him somewhere. Yet, he was thinking of that guy who had called them to the commander. Was he alive? Did he have time to save himself? He saw the radiant blue eyes in front of himself just as vividly as there in the dug-out, at that short, but memorable instant...

However, the strangest things were to occur after he regained consciousness.

—You're born under a lucky star, pal, — an elderly male nurse said, dressing Gridoriy's wounds. — If you lingered a little, you'd be dead now. I'm anyway surprised that your head wasn't blown off with the air-blast.

—Is he... alive? — Grigoriy asked with weak voice.

—Who? Veperskiy? This one's fully unhurt... Unlike you, crazy, he hid at the bottom of the dug-out. He's only broken his wrist when falling down.

—That... guy who called... us to the commander?

—Oh, but nobody else was there with you... And who could really call you to the commander? The commander had left for the headquarters three hours before. You might be delirious, pal... Try to sleep, you need energy now. And grasp everything afterwards...

Terrible news leaked out the next day: almost entire their battalion

had fallen in the night battle. Grigoriy got astonished with such an unbelievable destiny turn. He pondered over the mystery of his salvation again and again, analyzing each detail. Grigoriy recalled when that guy entered the dug-out his clothes were not simply brand-new, but absolutely dry as well, while it was raining outside. Having walked from the command post to the dug-out in such weather, one would be completely sodden... And that dove... Where could the marvelous snow-white creature appear from in the middle of a battle field? Yet, that was not a mirage. Grigoriy clearly saw it as well everything else, he really felt the bird touched him when taking wing. Although doctors were persuading it had been merely a shell splinter having scratched his face. There was nothing terrible, even the bone wasn't hurt. Only the skin was cut from his right ear to his lower jaw. A tidy scar remained with him for the rest of his life. The scar and a redly pink spot which appeared then around his first jugular vertebra were the two reminders of that unforgettable day. Doctors nearly convinced him of the fully natural origin of these "marks". Just a scratch, just a bruise. In addition, for some reason Veperskiy completely denied everything, contending that there was no guy, and that they left the dug-out solely by chance, to take tobacco from their colleagues. Hence, when Grigoriy was leaving the hospital, he almost believed in that already.

Nonetheless, his life started to repeatedly refute his beliefs on its sudden turnings. Every time Grigoriy was in grave danger or faced moments of a crucial choice, his scar started slightly aching. Grigoriy felt what's better for him to do by a degree of that ache. Owing to such peculiar "dialogue", he managed to avoid numerous perils and to adhere to the right line of his conscience throughout his life.

And, now regarding that war incident in the light of the years spent thereafter, he understood the event not only saved his life, but also de-

terminated something important inside him which affected his entire subsequent life. He often remembered that young guy and talked with him mentally when his heart was most heavy. Amazingly, such talks comforted him, dissipated fears and despair. And the unforgettable radiant eyes fastened on Grigoriy restored tranquility, lent certainty and burst of energy.

Even more strange metamorphoses happened to his friend Nikolay. They knew each other since their childhood, lived in the same district and were very close. They were conscripted to the front jointly. They shared combat rations and endured all war severities together. Nikolay was a good friend and comrade. Shortly before that memorable incident he met a girl from the household subdivision, named Clara. Nikolay started dating her, and it looked like he became a different person. First, the changes were insignificant, but every day they became further worse, ensnaring his consciousness with some fixed ideas. The ideas were patently of an alien nature, not his own. Clara played with Nikolay's soul at her will, having finally turned the young man into a moaner, a miser and a bore. He started shunning his friends and became canny. His bygone courage changed into fear of even a slightest danger. Nikolay endeavoured not to show himself out of the trench. He noticeably fell behind during attacks, hiding in the background and pleading bad health.

Should this happen in the time of peace, no one would attach much importance to it. But at the front where all human qualities sharply become keener and more apparent, such weaknesses are clearly visible. Some people regarded Nikolay's behaviour as cowardice and treason. Some believed the man had simply lost heart. There were many men at the front whose mind couldn't stand heavy daily stresses. And only Grigoriy, who had known his friend for many years, un-

derstood the true reason of those destructive changes. In theory, love should treble one's courage and strength. But it was just the other way round with Nikolay. Grigoriy saw his friend falling to pieces. In every possible way he tried to dissuade him from seeing that woman. Nikolay seemed to agree because the new image his "sweetheart" was modeling of him was disgusting for him himself. Yet, once there was an opportunity, he again rushed to date her headfirst, as if he was possessed.

After the memorable incident when their lives had been saved, Nikolay changed completely. Together with Grigoriy he got into the hospital with his right wrist broken. He decidedly denied their salvation by a miracle and everything Grigoriy was telling, and parroted his own version of the occurrence. Grigoriy was scarcely exasperated with all that. He felt no anger, but had the only question: "Why Nikolay denies what's so evident?"

Later on their front-line ways forked. Clara was transferred to the home front to work in supplies. While Nikolay was in the hospital, she managed to get him married to herself, she legalized him as a disabled soldier and got him transferred to a new service at the home front with her. He no longer resisted as had done before. On the contrary, he tried his hardest to defend her in front of his friend. So, Grigoriy parted from him as far back as during the war.

After the victory, they came across in their native district. Nikolay put on much weight on public food. They both had the major rank, and both had medals all over their chest. But, in contrast to Nikolay, Grigoriy remained with serene conscience. Each medal was not only a piece of metal for him, but rather a reminder of the unforgettable heroic days of his life, of the summits of his bravery and courage. He was not ashamed to look into people's eyes. And, above all, he was not

ashamed in his own face for the spent years.

Grigoriy hired out as a tractor driver in the local collective farm, while Nikolay got a job in the district communist party committee, as his wife insisted. When Grigoriy was elected the collective farm chairman, Nikolay became the chairman of the district party committee nearly at the same time. And, whereas previously their life paths crossed abruptly, at this life stage they joined in a single track.

Although Nikolay and Grigoriy were ex-friends and ex-brother-soldiers, Nikolay constantly provoked conflicts between them and, as the saying goes, put spokes in Grigoriy's wheel. And whatever Grigoriy initiated to improve people's lives and well-being, Nikolay overloaded him with requirements and paper work. That was how their invisible opposition went on. Several times Grigoriy tried to draw Nikolay out in order to resolve all issues one and for all, for not only he suffered from such an unjustified malice, but other people around, too, what was much more regrettable. Nonetheless, Nikolay avoided a straightforward conversation, either pleading his work pressure or breaking the friend's initiative off rudely and arrogantly. After years, he gained naughtiness and certitude of his party-boss person inaccessibility.

Years passed. Grigoriy had a relatively happy family life. He had five children, whereas Clara hardly gave birth to a single one after several unsuccessful attempts. That single boy was groomed and pampered, growing in comfort and every sort of amenities. However, he developed into an arrant sponger and drunkard. And the faster years flew, the stronger that family suffered from various troubles. First, their only son died, and his death was stupid at bottom — being drunk, he was run over by a train. Clara got stricken by paralysis. She was bed-ridden for many years and had an agonizing slow death. Nikolay had two

heart attacks. He remained the only living family member. And neither accumulated money nor connections and party bosses and medical luminaries helped to prevent the family's tragedy.

In his old age, Nikolay remained completely alone. He was awful to look at, being haggard and bony, with hollow eyes and mummy-dried skin. He lived two blocks from Grigoriy in a good solid house which he had built during party career. Grigoriy's collective farm became leading with time. Houses had all the conveniences inside, roads were asphalted. So, the farm aspired to be a small town. And landscapes were particularly picturesque there: fields, forests, the river... Many party bosses built houses to live there after retirement, including Nikolay who through used to put numerous obstacles in the way of Grigoriy doing his best for the farm.

Despite Nikolay's prosperity, his house was empty. Even neighbours didn't associate with him much because he was reputed to be grumbler always malcontent. It turned out that Grigoriy was the only person regularly visiting him. Although Nikolay caused him plenty of trouble in the past, Grigoriy anyway supported him sometimes with a daily bread, sometimes a comforting word. He was the one and only interlocutor having enough patience to listen to all his friend's complaints and to stand his resentment and displeasure.

Yet, once, almost right before his death, Nikolay suddenly turned into the bygone himself, into a kind guy whom he used to be before the war. All of a sudden, he opened his heart and started to tell Grigoriy about his real life. But a thing most devastating for Grigoriy was said at the end of his confession.

—Do you remember the day the dug-out blew up? — Nikolay asked with a hoarse weak voice.

—How can I forget?!

—I want you to know... I also saw the blond guy. He really entered the dug-out and called us to the commander... I still can't forget his eyes... They followed me my whole life, like a nightmare... Forgive me... I lied to you, but I lied to myself indeed. That guy simply wouldn't leave my head. That instant... I clearly remember it even now, as if it's now happening. When I heard the whizz, you know, I... I shrunk... As if I became double... In fact, I turned around, too. You were turning towards the dug-out, but nobody was behind you. I wanted to cover you because you inevitably risked your life. But then, all of a sudden, I got very scared... I was afraid to die, and I decided to save my own skin!!! Do you understand? Decided to save my own skin!.. Then, I was ashamed of myself... I was a true riffraff...

Nikolay's eyes started to water of the past days bitter taste.

—Ooh, pack it in, don't torment yourself. After all, everything turned out all right, — Grigoriy hurried to console him.

—Wait, don't interrupt me... I want to have time to finish. You see, it was not a simple misdeed. I was so wretched... as if I betrayed myself. I was a traitor!!! Do you understand?! I felt so badly, so badly thereon! I was such a fool! I should have talked to you, but I was afraid you would condemn me. While my soul was aching. I thus confined everything to Clara. And she insisted that I should keep silent and deny everything, making a laughing-stock of you and telling that we had simply went to take tobacco. I took her advice, idiot... although I observed some radiance in your eyes and saw a burst of energy inside you. I understood then that something had happened to you, too, but it had been something good. Do you understand – goooood!!! While I fell into my shit which I stank of my entire life afterwards and couldn't ever wash away! I don't know why, but each time I came across you, that guy appeared in my head with his eyes full of reproach... It oppressed

me so much, and such a pain emerged from inside my soul! And the memory all along scrolled that instant, the instant of my meanness and unpardonable weakness. And I simply could not overstep myself to beg your forgiveness. Once I nearly ripened, but did not dare to approach you. And instead of talking to you humanly, I felt angrier and angrier with myself, pouring this anger out on you in the first place. You can't imagine how many dirty tricks I played on you, which you never even suspected...

—Stop it, Nikolay, stop it... I forgive you everything. We're friends, after all. I know that you are a good man. If it were not Clara...

—That Clara was a hag! She ruined my entire life! — Nikolay sobbed, not being ashamed of his tears. — If I only knew... I didn't expect... you'd say this. I was afraid you'd never forgive me... What kind of a fool I am! I've been living with such evil my whole life! It has corroded me from the inside already and worn my soul out... While everything's appeared to be so simple! My dear friend, you are the only person remaining beside me in the face of death...

—All right, all right... We shall still fight it, — Grigoriy said, wiping away his tears. — There are two of us, and the death is alone.

—Yes, just like then, in that dug-out. We're together again, my friend...

When Grigoriy was leaving, Nikolay asked him:

—Please, bring me a mug of fresh milk tomorrow. I'd love to drink it, like in the early childhoode...

The next day, Grigoriy woke up earlier and hurried to a neighbour who sold fresh milk. He hardly waited till the yield was finished and nearly ran to Nikolay's house with a three-liter bottle of milk. It was the first time in many years when he was carrying it to his true friend! But when he entered the room, Nikolay was already gone. His face

expressed great commotion, and grief stiffened in his open eyes. Grigoriy sat down at the edge of his bed and started trembling with silent weeping...

Despite all reversals of fortune, he felt really sorry for that man. He lived with his evil for so many years! It turned out that inside he didn't live at all, marking no headway from that memorable day and wallowing in his own fear. Grigoriy believed that, being close to death, a person could conceive something profound, lying beyond bounds. Nikolay was talking about such a sentimental thing as forgiveness, while Grigoriy forgave him long ago. However, it could be sentimental for him, whereas for Nikolay it was something greater, a certain insuperable life barrier which he was building himself daily brick by brick with his anger. Grigoriy realized how hard it was for his friend to breach this barrier, to overstep his own wall of egocentrism. It's a pity he was only intending to make the step of Conscience for so many years, for nearly all his life. While he could resolve everything right away in the autumn of 1942. His life might have been completely different in such case, it could comprise more inner victories, and the real truth could open up for him before he died. Though... Grigoriy doubted himself whether the truth would be needed at such hour, for it was just inner revelations. Yet, he recalled the special expression on his dead friend's face, full of suffering and grief, and all his doubts dissipated, being replaced with perennial questions. Nobody knows what waits for a person after death... Is there really only a body decay in the wasteless manufacture of nature? Then why are there so many complexities in life along with permanent opposition between human thoughts? And, finally, why do people arrive at the old age with its inevitable sizing-up, mentally again? Where does a thought go afterwards, if it governed and ruled a body during its entire lifetime? There are continuous questions and no clear

answers...

* * *

—Eh-eh-eh, — the old man sighed again, pulling out his fishing-rod from the water so as if he tried to find the answers to his endless questions on the hook.

But, having looked at the twitching worm, he casted the line again with a secret hope something would bite at last.

“It may be same in life”, — the old man continued pondering. — If you catch out a good thought, you’ll have a good take; if you catch out a bad one, the nature will respond accordingly. Everything’s well considered and interrelated...”

—Hello, Grigoriy, — a melodious male voice sounded from behind.

—Hello, if you’re not joking, — Grigoriy answered, turning around old-mannishly.

A blond young man came up, smiling. He was around thirty years old, and was sturdy. He wore a modern tracksuit and a baseball cap with long peak protecting his eyes from the sun. He held a brand-new fishing-rod in his hands. Grigoriy saw city guys using such rods when they came here to fish. It’s a good rod, indeed, but costs too much, they say.

—How is the biting?

—No good! — the old man waved his hand. — I’m sitting here since dawn. Not a single fish has bitten!

—Maybe, they have a holiday today, — the guy jested. — What bait do you use, sir?

—Earth-worms.

—Fish is already sick of worms! Here, try this grub. Fish might bite such a delicacy.

—Thank you.

The old man took the bait box being handed to him.

—Do you mind, if I sit alongside?

—Why would I mind? Sit down. It's more fun whiling away the time together.

While the guy was preparing his rod, the old man tried heartily to recollect whose son he was. The guy looked very familiar. He obviously lived in town and very likely came here to see his parents. Since he knew Grigoriy and communicated with him so easily, it meant he grew up here. “Well, — the old man lamented over himself, striving to recall the guy's name, — looks like I've got a senile sclerosis in addition to my “bouquet”...”

—It's OK, Grigoriy, — the young man said kindly, as if responding to his thoughts. — We'll burst through! Let's take a chance! — and he added little later: — Fish will now scent our grubs, and we'll hardly have time to pull out the rods.

The old man grinned at such optimism.

—I had a front-line pal, a Siberian. He was as lively and merry man as you. We went all the way to Berlin together. He always wanted me to come to Siberia and go fishing with him. Have you ever heard of the Baikal lake?

—Of course! It's the deepest freshwater lake in the world with rare flora and fauna.

—Yeah... Those places are marvelous. We exchanged letters with my friend a long while. He sent photos and kept inviting me. He visited me couple times as well. But I never had a chance to go there, some urgent affairs always interfered... He brought a fish, this big, around four kilos. It's called the Baikal omul. It may be found nowhere in the world, but there. That would be a real fishing! Once I saw that fish, I got a burning desire to go to Baikal. I wanted to catch such

fish so much! I thought I'd retire and realize my fishing dream. But no chance! I either could not afford such trip because of money problems or had to support my children, and now I'm too decrepit for that. Such trip's no longer possible. And my omul has remained an unrealizable dream...

—Who knows, — the guy shrugged his shoulders. — Any dream comes true some day.

—Maybe for someone, yet not for me... Besides, it's been two years since I got the last message from my friend. He might be seriously ill or even dead. It's no wonder in our age... As the saying goes, Как говорится, once your hair becomes grey — your happiness goes away. The years have flown away like spring waters.

—Well... If humans knew their future, they would not be so happy giving up their past.

—What, what? — Grigoriy asked to repeat, having got plunged in thought.

—Oh, don't bother, — the guy waved away and changed the topic. — How is Ivan?

Ivan was Grigoriy's youngest son. Once the guy mentioned his name, the old man stopped to question himself whence he knew him. Since he asked about Ivan, he should either be his friend or acquaintance, or they had studied together.

—Thanks God, he's doing quite well. He got married at last. My daughter-in-law is a nice girl. They have a baby daughter. They came to see me recently, in spring. Did you see them?

—No, unfortunately... I wasn't in the district then.

—I see... Now I have no fears for him either.

—Why would you have any fears? He's a nice and handy man. He'll always be fine.

—Who knows? Life is complex...

—Depending on how you view it. If you live in accordance with your conscience and dignity, destiny will only support you.

—You might be right. But... If you take me, for example, it seems I've always lived by conscience and dignity, and I truly have nearly nothing to blame myself with. Yet, was my life full of sugar indeed? War, famine, collapse were "the gifts" I got from it.

—Everyone has a solely personal impression of life. Let's say, people treat roses differently. Some regard them as a beautiful creation and sense their amazing aroma, whereas others notice only thorns and feel their unpleasant pricks. Everything depends on a person and his or her ability to contemplate and to apprehend this world.

—It's also true, — the old man agreed, and added after a short pause: — Deeply thinking, I have nothing to blame my life for. I gained several true friends during the war, through the time was really terrible then... And I met my wife when there was epidemic famine around. I remember, we had nothing to eat and chewed plain grass, while the thoughts whirled solely around love and dating. It's funny to recall this now... With famine and destruction all around, we were not afraid to build up a family. Our children were born one after another. We temporarily lived in a clay-walled hut then. I remember how we huddled together in it. And it was OK... The main thing is that we didn't care about the cram. On the contrary, we lived in solidarity and supported each other... Currently young people live in such comfortable conditions, but there is no harmony in most families.

—Everything is in people's minds, sir. Say, a person builds a palace of good inside himself. People then gravitate to him with their souls, and his life goes right. But if his inward life is similar to the den life of a bear, if he's too lazy to build such palace, then he will spent his en-

tire life in his den just like an animal. And no external conveniences will be able to satisfy his insatiable inner needs.

—You're right about the insatiability. For instance, a friend of mine used to live not far from here...

—Veperskiy?

—Yes, — the old man nodded, and noted in his mind that the guy's definitely a native because he knew about Nikolay. — He spent many years constructing and equipping his house, hardly being able to satisfy his wife's demands.

—Clara's demands?! — the young man grinned. — Was it ever possible to satisfy her with anything?! In her family, there was a genetic need: they want more no matter how much they get. The "holy love" for silver and gold was transferred from generation to generation, and Clara absorbed it with her mother's milk. How else could she conduct herself?

—Exactly. Nikolay finally understood it, but too late, unfortunately. Thus, he suffered from her his entire life, as if she was an incurable disease. I remember very well how they had met. It was so spontaneously...

—Don't defend him, Grigoriy. A person can spontaneously get only those events which he or she internally agrees with. If Veperskiy got together with such a woman, it meant there were secret desires and qualities predominating in his subconscious which he found embodied in her. He was turned into a slave not by his wife, but rather by his own weaknesses which he gave free rein instead of suppressing them firmly, while Clara was only stimulating and supporting those. So, everything occurred at his personal choice. For life is just a reflection of human inward views.

—You might be right all in all... You have a very interesting reason-

ing. I should admit, having lived a long life, I've never come up to such simple and wise conclusions, — the old man smiled. — I haven't suspected, nowadays youth is so conversant in subtle matters of human life. It's good news to me. Probably, the technical evolution helped, and young brains are more capable than ours.

—Not really, sir. It's all not about times, conversance and brains. The thing is that the true wisdom is a property of soul. And a young body is not necessarily an indicator of a real soul's age.

—Soul's? — the old man repeated, and then responded to himself: — Yes, soul... If one could only know for sure he has it inside...

—Yes, a soul cannot be examined in a microscope, — the young man smiled. — Neither can be a human thought. Say, neurophysiologists assume a thought is a movement of a certain electromagnetic wave in cerebral cortex which goes from one neuron to the other. But they still know nothing about how thoughts appear and what generates them. Neither they do on numerous other matters related to human nature. People only surmise, but have no facts at their disposal. Because the answers to such questions are concealed far beyond the verge of their world perception range outlined by egocentrism. And, to find the answers, a person should overstep his Ego, should get to the very depth of his own subconscious... Yet, it takes much time and effort even to clear away the trash floating on the consciousness surface, to remove the remains of our internal untidiness. Although, anything's achievable if one craves for it.

—Well, surely... However, it's important to know that you clear away that trash, and not add to it yourself...

—Conscience will always prompt the right direction.

—Yeah, Conscience is a good assistant, — the old man agreed.

They lapsed into silence for a while. The old man tried to compre-

hend what the guy had said, but, not having quite grasped it, uttered pensively:

—How does it happen in life? Like at the front. You always try to keep the defense line of your Conscience. The older you get, the pushier becomes the attack from that side of trenches, and the more bombs explode around, leaving dense holes of your life troubles. You surely fear, but still endeavour holding your position at any cost, for you have nowhere to retreat. Our Motherland is behind, and you are still to live in it. Thus, by no means you can abandon your Conscience's position... I saw myself how my best friend surrendered, and what it eventually caused him. I watched him dying during his entire and felt how the winning evil was tormenting, torturing and destroying him from the inside. I think it's better to live in good Conscience, or else not to live at all.

—The ancients wrote that Conscience was a degree of the Spirit greatness. When a person reaches the old age, the Conscience particularly bares his “nerve-endings” and reveals his genuine essence. Hence, for someone the old age turns into a moonlight glimmering in black, hooked clouds of darkness and illusion, whereas for someone else the old age is a shining, dazzling sunset showing to the inner eye its thin green ray which fulfills all wishes.

—A beautiful speech. Only what wishes can there be in the old age? Just thinking... But if a person could know his genuine nature...

—Genuine nature? — the young man smiles mysteriously, replacing the hook and the bait on his rod. — There's a very ancient Oriental parable regarding the genuine nature...

He put the line out as far as possible, sat down and lighted up a cigarette. The old man got ready to listen.

—So, the parable is as follows... Highly in the mountains, on a

sparkling snow-white alp, there was born a limpid, baby-tear-like crystal of ice. By day, it was admiring the sun and playing with light on its facets having been shaped by creative nature. By night, it was rejoicing over stars and examining these strikingly shining creatures. It grew up but by bit, absorbing more and more energy of the caressing luminary. Once, when the crystal became so big it could discern not only the sky, but the surrounding world as well, it discovered something absolutely miraculous. The clouds which were roofing the mountain bottoms, stepped aside, and it beheld a magnificent valley buried in unusual bright emerald colours. The crystal was thrilled with this sight so strongly that it got inflamed with a desire to descend to that heavenly nature's spot and to experience all its fascinations.

The crystal strained every its nerve to change into water and rushed downwards. The faster it was descending, the more it was growing in power. Its stream was becoming wider and wider, and raged with an unbridled passion. It was rushing toward its dream, overcoming stone impediments, destructive rapids and giddy falls on its way with enviable persistence. It was excited with a spirit of novelty and an aspiration for meeting the cherished goal.

And there came a splendid moment when it happened. Its waters gushed out into the valley, being already a river. Its banks were so lovely, being buried in bright greenery! The water surface was dappled with sunlight so beautifully! Everything around was so rejoiced over vivifying water coolness! The crystal felt how it was satiating each plant with ravishing liquid, and how much pleasure it gave to those coming to its banks to slake their thirst. It sensed how a new-born life was splashing in its waters, and it became a receptacle of that life. And this was a real happiness for it!

Its life flew on in such a way. By day it slaked thirst of all needy,

whereas by night it scrutinized the sky reflection in its waters, marveling at wonderful worlds and recollecting its faraway home. It seemed to it that such happiness would last forever.

However, once its waters reached the end of the valley and spread into a lake. Life became steady and serene. A brown slime started covering the waters which used to be seethe and gorgeous and were now turning into a musty bog. Now, hardly anyone came to these banks... There was neither bygone power nor bygone life in its waters. Fear and despair took a grip on the former crystal. It started to dread the sun. Each appearance of the luminary gave rise to a horrifying imaginary picture webbed of its own evaporating waters — a mirage of its end and relentless fate. Bubbles of doubt swelled one by one. It was afraid of becoming a steam, of losing its personality, of losing its freedom. It found its only comfort in the nights which cloaked it in the coolness of bygone memories. It looked at the shining stars with anguish, yearning for inaccessible faraway worlds and admiring their immutable beauty.

And once, at the dawn time, it got a brain-wave: it became aware of the gist of life, of the gist of eternity, it got a sensation of its genuine nature which finally awaked the soul inside it! At that moment, the dazzling sun disk showed up above the horizon. “God! — it exclaimed from the depth of its water remains. — Everything is so simple!” It rushed towards caressing rays of the powerful luminary, transforming its water into steam. A capful of wind easily caught it up and carried it high into the air, moving away from its habitual space. The former crystal was flying and experiencing an amazing feeling of weightlessness and novelty. And only then it realized that it was exactly the real, long ago lost, but so delightful veritable freedom. It was overwhelmed with sensation of all-embracing happiness, of its unique individuality

and, at the same time, of its infinite unity with the enormous stunning universe which proved to be much wider than it had ever imagined. “Everything is so simple”, — its spirit repeated again and again, reveling in the flight. “Yes, now I know my genuine nature”, — it thought, fluently descending onto one of the next sparkling mountain tops...

The young man became silent. The old man was sitting in deep thought, smitten with the innermost sense of the parable. And suddenly his face brightened. His eyes started shining with a lively zest. And he quietly exclaimed: “Oh, God! It is really so simple!” The old man, full of ecstasy, turned in order to impart his stupendous discovery to the interlocutor. But... the guy was no longer there. The old man half-rose and looked around in confusion. Nevertheless, there was only a boundless green field stretching around. There was not a living soul anywhere... Grigoriy even suspected himself of beginning to have hallucinations in the old age. Yet, the abandoned guy’s fishing-rod and also his smouldering stub on the ground evidence his recent, perfectly real presence.

The old man looked at the lonely rod of his strange interlocutor with regret and some soul-aching yearning. Suddenly, the float on the rod started to rapidly submerge into the water column. The old fisherman absentmindedly leaped to the guy’s rod, pulled it out, and... Glittering in the morning sun rays, a huge Baikal omul darted out from the water, having thrown up placers of diamond splashes. Dumbfounded of such fortune, the old man froze, marveling at the flight of this rare fish, absolutely fantastic for the locality. And then, having gathered his wits, he began to pull the fish ashore and to take it off the hook. Not quite trusting his eyes, he lifted the twitching omul up with his both hands and scrutinized this miracle of nature dazedly. His eyes

grew bright with tears of happiness. And suddenly Grigoriy remembered. He remembered where he had seen that guy... A loud burst of senile laughter deafened the neighbourhood. The old man came up to the water, kneeled and gently put the fish into the river. Having raised his shining eyes, he directed it towards the powerful luminary. And, bathing in the rays of dazzling inner happiness, he cried:

— God! Everything's so simple!

BIRDS AND A STONE

PREFACE

Seashore is astonishing in its entire boundless beauty. It manifests a harmonious combination of different elements which seem to be totally opposite to each other. On one hand, there is burning hot sand – the inexorable and pitiless warrior of destructive Desert. On the other hand, there is cool water – the vivifying power of the World Ocean creator. Looks like death and life have got entangled in this place, creating unusual conditions of existence for those who have found themselves at the border of two worlds by will of destiny.

Shiny polished stones and pebbles, scattered along the beach, claimed a title of long-livers in this mysterious Portal. And, one would think, none else, but these stones and pebbles, should know the major secrets of being. Yet, is it true as a matter of fact? Were they really aware of what was outside the space they physically occupied?

A stone is a stone, a hard fossil as the saying goes. It used to be a part of an enormous rock, its top resting on the Heaven itself. However, residing in unity, the stone dreamt of independence. With time, numerous cracks of doubt have done their destructive job, thus making its dream a reality. But the long-awaited independence has appeared not as joyful as the stone imagined. Every day, the elements started testing its durability, as if they were competing. The stone was inflating with anger and resentment. It desperately resisted the wind which exfoliated its grains, gradually transmuting it into dust. It resisted the sun which incandesced its surface. The stone opposed even the water, being secretly drawn to it, especially when the water washed it with its vivifying coolness, rescuing it from the burning sun rays. It liked to be such a forbidden essence even in front of rhythmi-

cally rolling waves.

The stone was proud of itself, of its shape, of its independence. It laughed at sand which was easily governed by the elements. It had not a slightest suspicion that it would suffer the same fate in the course of time.

Most of its days, the stone was bored, observing depressive sameness and monotony of the surrounding landscape. From time to time, it entertained itself with a question: “But what is the sense of all this?” Watching birds fly, the stone envied their freedom as well as the easiness with which they reached most radiant heights and unknown ethereal expanses. There were moments when it craved for exchanging its whole long dreary life for a short instant of their delightful impetuous flying.

And so the stone led his entire boulder existence within itself and solely for itself. It didn’t even perceive the wonderful and enigmatic place which destiny had conveyed it to. It didn’t see how much effort and time the sun, the wind and the water spent to transform its stupid, hard essence into a qualitatively new state. Its arrogance was really too strong over the ages. Its substance was too heavy indeed.

Apparently, this is the reason why the stones which lie at the two worlds junction are aware only of their own humdrum lives. And, though some of them have ideally polished external facets for already a long time, they still remain plain stones inside.

I tossed up a stone,
And it dropped.
I tossed up a bird,
And it started to fly.

Rigden Jappo

A florid crowd of people was pottering about an overfull beach. From above, it seemed a living mass gathered here solely for taking pleasure of the nature's gifts. And it was understandable. Sun, air and water — what else could be better and alluring than those in a summer heat? Only mountains, perhaps. But that's a lot for the elite, as they say.

Approaching this freakish mass, one could discern small groups of different people similar for their talks and behaviour. And, having got into its very middle, one could as well distinguish separate individuals. Each of those, obviously, differed from each other not only by appearance, but also by his or her life. However, looking more attentively, one could discover that even such so called individuality was on one and the same foundation of same endless human problems, desires and needs. It was even slightly boring to contemplate one-type routine thoughts differing merely by forms they were vested in. Probably, exactly for this reason, when a true Personality — a Homo Verus (a Human the Real) — appears among such a mass of stamped "individualities", then even gods cease yawning of centuries-old human dead-level and start following the course of changing destinies and developing events with interest.

But, if for gods a Homo Verus shines amidst a crowd like a giant diamond in a road dust, for people it's hard to discern such one because lenses of their own arrogance are too thick and distorting. Everything around seems small and useless to them. And only a pure look full of "love power" can easily distinguish inside a faceless grey mass such many-sided diamond – the Existent which helps a biped animal become a Human the Real.

The weather was splendid. And everything was same as a year, a century and a millennium ago. There surely had become more people, their clothes were now different, and they spoke different languages, but the sense of their speech hadn't changed. Just as always, relaxing people were basking their bodies in the sun, cooling them in the fresh water from time to time. Children, as always, were frisking near the sea side, running away from rolling waves with laughter and squealing. And the same freakish hum was everywhere around. Someone was calling somebody. A fervent guffaw of a merry young company was heard. And, just like in the past times, all these incessant human noises merged with the rhythmic surf of waves and the cry of snow-white gulls circling above the sea.

Not far from a big gathering of people, a blond man was lying, having put his back under the warm morning sun rays. He was dozing. About twenty metres from him, there was camping a company of four Caucasian men and a young blond woman with a four-year-old girl. The adults were drinking wine. With every glass their laughter became louder and louder, the movements became more and more uninhibited, and the speech was turning further fiery. The child was con-

stantly fidgeting, trying her mother's patience with never-ending requests. The little girl couldn't understand why her mummy and those strange men were eating and drinking for so long when it was much more interesting to play, to jump or to clap hands in the "ladushka" game. Finally, she for bored to sit, took her only toy — a blue plastic scoop which she had found on a playground and ran to the sea. Her mother only turned around jauntily, having casted a hateful glance at the running child, and then again stretched her young lips in a charming smile, having turned back to her generous casual acquaintances.

The girl reached the sea side skipping. She splashed through the water, ran along the beach from one side to the other, floundered in the shoal until her teeth started to chatter, basked in sun to imitate grown-ups. Then she started building sand houses decorating them with shells and little stones. And the higher she tried to build them, the more often they broke down under the damp material weight. The girl became angry, curled her lips, destroyed everything and proceeded with constructing short-lived structures. After one of such unsuccessful attempts she scattered the sand from a built house all over around. Part of it accidentally dropped on the back of the man lying not far off.

—Max?! It's you again! When will you calm down?

The man turned his head towards the little girl.

—What else do you want from me?

The girl stared in the man's eyes in surprise. Then she flinched somehow unnaturally and started blinking very rapidly. Finally, she pronounced with a changed, more gruff voice:

—Sensei?!

—Yeah, it's me, — the man said wearily and grinned with sadness, having glanced at the sandy heaps. — Well, looks like you are still building your castles on sand?

—Castles?

Max looked around and half-rose.

—Where am I? — he still couldn't come to his senses, gazing around in fright.

—Where, where... On the Earth, of course. Where else could you be? — Sensei answered reluctantly.

Suddenly, Max noticed his child's hands and recoiled from them as if they belonged to someone else.

—What's happened to me?!

—Nothing can happen to you except for what's already present.

—No, really, Sensei?! Are these some of your tricks? Is it hypnosis?

—Hypnosis? Tricks?! — Sensei grinned, turned around and sat up on the sand. — Welcome to the world of your reality! Remember how you used to say: "Life is as follows: either you rule or you are ruled".

—OK, Sensei, joking apart, — Max was casting his eyes around in fright. — Where am I? What has happened to me? How have I gotten here? What is this nonsense all about?

—Nonsense?! — Sensei grinned again.

And his grin immediately disappeared from his face. He looked at Max earnestly with eyes full of austerity and reproach.

—Now, go back and recall.

Max screwed up his eyes rather because of fear than because he attempted to recollect something. In the darkness he felt himself even better than in the frightening unbelievable reality. But the more he was calming down, the more frequently his consciousness restored fragments of some fantastic, deep-laid memory of his. The memory was unusual, vivid and real.

* * *

Max felt himself inside his new car purchased couple months ago. He regained the feeling of complacency with his life. He finally attained his long-awaited dream — he became really rich. He was having great prospects ahead. And his imagination pictured him a fabulous future. His hands were clinging to a brand-new steering wheel smelling with leather. Max was returning home, and not to a mossy rented room, but to a luxurious villa. Half a year ago he purchased it and made a splendid European-style renewal to jaundice all his friends. Yet, the most important thing was that though some false transactions he had merged a company of his friend whom he had brought to bankruptcy, and such merger was to secure him a well-off existence for many long years as he believed.

Max was overflowing with self-satisfaction. He made the radio louder to listen to a modern hit song and started to croon the melody. Finally, his life was a success! Nevertheless, he felt somewhat uncomfortable deep inside. There was arising an unpleasant feeling that he still had missed something very significant. Though his golden dream had come true, Max for

some reason didn't sense a complete satisfaction. Yes, he achieved what he had desired. But eventually he didn't get the expected feeling of all-embracing happiness which he had been enticed with in his thoughts for so long. Why? Doubts about his happiness automatically began rising to the surface of his consciousness as if coming from some unexplored depths of his self. Max tried to resist them transferring his thoughts to the acquired material welfare, but that inner Something was relentlessly attacking the Ego empire, evoking an intolerable pain inside his chest. What was wrong indeed? Max was lost in conjectures, searching for reasons of such uneasy state.

An SUV dashed out from the corner at an enormous speed. The car was rushing towards Max straightly head-on. Max's eyes turned round with terror. His heart started beating rapidly inside the chest. His hands chilled. The distance was shortening inexorably. The bright beams of SUV headlights illuminated the luxurious passenger compartment of Max's car. He harshly turned the steering wheel, trying to avoid crash. The car began to spin. Such crazy bend took Max's breath away, as if it was not his car, but his entire life spinning. He was helplessly dangling in a shell of his long-awaited illusions, not being able to escape the horrifying inevitable reality. Animal fear locked his body, and a single Sensei's phrase, which he had forgotten long before, flashed through his mind: "Life is an illusion of self-deception". And, like an evidence of this thesis, Max felt a strong, unbearably painful blow. He never understood whether it was an external blow, or it was his soul breaking into pieces.

* * *

The little girl desperately shook her head as if trying to get rid of a dreadful nightmare.

— It's impossible, — Max whispered, being horrified with his conjecture.

The child's hands were slightly trembling. He felt the same panic fear of all his hopes collapse as he had had in the car then. Cold sweat stood out on the wincing little body. The intolerable inner pain pressed the chest with a new force, preserving its aching acuteness even in this strange reality.

—It's impossible, — Max repeated trying to calm down. — No, no... If I am thinking, it means I'm alive... Probably, I've lost consciousness, or I'm in a hospital, seeing a dream about all this.

—Aha, and I am your greatest nightmare! — Sensei grinned. — Oh, humans... Look around, my sleeping beauty! What were you then saying about facts? If certain facts don't confirm a theory, one should get rid of them. Well, now try to get rid of the evident.

—“Evident”?! “Then”?! I am really dead? — Max began to panic. — Dead indeed?!

—Oh, Max, I understand that everyone is entitled to stupidity. Yet, it should be used moderately.

—No, but am I really dead?! Dead?!

—How many more times are you going to repeat “dead”? At least, I see you inside a body, — Sensei said smiling.

—Inside a body?

Max started scrutinizing his body in fright, touching it with his child's hands, as if he didn't believe his own sensations.

—But... it's... it's not me...

When he reached the lower part of his body, his eyes turned still more round. He looked down with terror, then stared at Sensei and, half-whispering as if it was an immense secret, announced a striking news:

—It is...it is...feminine!

Looking at his face, Sensei simply couldn't refrain from roaring with laughter.

—And what would you expect? This is what you've merited!

—What have I merited?!

Max's horror was boundless. He always considered women to be inferior creatures designed solely for serving and satisfying his masculine person. "Merited... merited... merited...", — the word gleamed in his mind, carrying his consciousness away to an unknown headlong rotation. After a bright blinding flash, Max felt himself in his dear body again. He was standing in a gymnasium, in a crowd surrounding the Teacher.

—Each person gets what he or she merits, — Sensei answered to a next Max's question. — If during your life you haven't changed inside for good and haven't proved God that you're a Human, not an animal, then you accordingly get an animal's destiny, but in worse conditions than before. As they say, God's requitals to you fully answer your deeds.

—But I know a person can repent before he dies, and he will be pardoned. God is reputed to be all-forgiving.

—You know, there is a witty Russian proverb: “A repentance is useless if it’s a deathbed repentance”. Yes, God is indeed all-forgiving. However, if you’re going to postpone God to an indefinite “later on”, satisfying your animal whims, and you eventually arrive to Him with an empty bag on the bottom of which there will be only your repentance, then be sure — God will postpone you to an indefinite “later on” as well.

—No, why would I postpone to an indefinite “later on”? Traditionally, by the old age...

—The old age? Are you sure you’ll live up to it? Why do you think you’ll know when your last day will come? Death won’t ask your permission, it’ll just come and cut you down. And what will you really have time for? To conceive how stupidly and uselessly you have spent the given time, not having fulfilled the main thing for which you’ve come to this life?!

—It’s true, — near-standing Volodya, the special assignments unit commander, said in a bass voice. — You can’t breathe in for your entire life right before your death, and afterwards it’ll be too late thinking of a doctor.

—Absolutely, — Sensei confirmed.

Max found nothing to respond. A long pause set in.

—It’s a pity though that human life is so short, — Max’s friend Andrew noted. — Let’s say, a stupid sequoia tree lives for up to four thousand years, while people hardly reach a one hundred!

—Why stupid tree? — Sensei uttered. — It’s quite beautiful and useful. And as for the transiency of human life... People are way too lazy. If they would be given considerably more

time, they would totally in matter.

—You're right, — a stout fifty-year-old man said thoughtfully, being one of the conversation listeners. Guys called him "Varenik" behind his back, since his face with a prominent plump lower lip somewhat resembled a Ukrainian dumpling bearing such name. — Being aware of life's fleetingness and death inevitability, a person is forced to value life and to use time fruitfully.

—Death kind of summarizes the spent life, — Volodya said.

—And impulsively acts upon the living people, — "Varenik" further added.

—Absolutely right, — Sensei confirmed again. — Awareness of the perishability of a physical body makes a person search for answers to eternity questions, makes him or her care for spiritual evolvment and change internally. Death is given to people just because that, remembering of its inevitability, they can learn to understand their genuine essence, to transmute themselves and their nature, to value the times given for their spiritual maturing. Death is a sort of a door to the genuine reality. And one's life is generally reckoned up exactly by such person's accumulated spiritual wealth. What you'll gather here during your life defines what reality will expect you behind that door.

—Well, but why do we then so strongly aspire to secure our future as if we intend to live forever? — "Varenik" asked.

—Because such aspirations mostly arise from the depth of the subconscious. They derive from the very soul. And the soul always strives for reuniting with God, that is for securing

its long-awaited future, but not for wandering in instants from one body to another. Yet, through a person's mind our matter tries all the time to make the soul's deepest aspiration serve itself, serve Ego. That's why a person is almost never satisfied with what he or she externally achieves in live. For the true treasures needed to secure one's future are spiritual treasures, and not material.

—It's even hard to believe that we shall all be dead once, — a guy said, standing next to Max.

—Why once? Nobody knows what will happen to him or her in a minute. But it all is not about the destiny lines. The major point is what luggage we'll have together with us at the moment we stand in face of the genuine reality. People strive after eternal life because there is a small part of eternity contained inside them. But mind with its animal nature distorts this inner craving in its own manner — into an eternal life in a physical body, on Earth of course, for other reality except this terrestrial space is unknown and even unacceptable for the animal nature...

People invented so many ways to deceive themselves! Many think: “Why would I exercise in spiritual things such as prayers, meditations, control of thinking or nurturing love for my neighbour? I shall spend my whole life on this. And what if it's given only once? What if after death there's only a coffin and damp soil where both me and my coffin will simply turn into dust?”

Some of the present including Max dropped their eyes simultaneously without even noticing this. Apparently, Sensei's last words coincided with their thoughts.

— Isn't it the greatest argument of the animal nature aimed to suppress spiritual surges in one's mind and to reinforce one's craving for the matter?! Still other people even try not to think about death at all. They endeavour to escape from this obtrusive, worrying thought like an ostrich which dips its head into sand and believes there's no danger. This is all nonsense! Go ahead and read hagiography. Take at least the example of Seraphim of Sarov. He kept a coffin inside his monk cell in order to have a permanent reminder of body mortality in front of his eyes. Saint people never created illusions for themselves regarding mundane future. Their life was in "to-day". They were expecting to appear before the Most High Court exactly today, therefore they worked so hard on their spiritual path, and that's the reason they achieved results in awakening "the Power of Love". And that was where their miracles – spiritual and physical cure of people – derived from... While the majority of people postpone their spiritual work for "tomorrow" and don't even suppose that "tomorrow" may never ever come for them... The greatest sorrow is that at certain point everyone understands the irrevocability of passed valuable moments, but it already late, too late...

* * *

"Too late, too late...", — was echoing in Max's head. Past life scenes were gleaming before his inner eye. Some vivid moments of the most striking emotional impressions mixed with his thoughts and also with diverse images of ex-friends, relatives and close people. At certain points the scenes slowed

down, and those were mostly scenes connected with Sensei. Max as if split, living through these moments anew. Now he was regarding those events from a completely different standpoint. And, while in that previous life Max evaluated what was happening from the point of his material being, now he regarded everything from his soul's position...

* * *

Max got to Sensei's practices by mere chance. He had heard so lot about his training that decided together with a friend of his to attend the Oriental fighting section which had already become legendary in their town. They came, looked around and stayed. And, while his friend was more eager to practice fighting techniques, Max was interested in Sensei's uncommon philosophy. Max was quite erudite, widely-read and versed in philosophy owing to his scientific family background. Thus, in Sensei's person he found a truly worthy interlocutor for himself as well as a critic for his dogmas.

Sensei's extraordinary world outlook was more and more captivating Max's inquisitive mind. He simultaneously believed and disbelieved in what he was hearing. His belief was coming from somewhere inside, based on remote intuitive feelings. While he disbelieved with his logic and intellect, calling in question everything Sensei was saying and trying to find his own proofs, confirmations from literature, from life, from his own experience and sensations.

Once, he accidentally overheard a conversation between

Volodya and Sensei relating to their company.

—Why are you taking trouble over them like over little children? You are simply wasting your time. Will they really ever amount to anything? They are so lazy! They don't want to work even on their bodies, not to mention the spiritual. They are constantly gnawed by doubts! They worry all the time, thinking somebody here wants to shape something odd of them, to seduce their precious persons... But who really needs them except their beloved themselves?! If they want to perceive themselves, let them do it themselves! And if they don't want, then leave them alone! Why do you scatter your time and efforts for them?! Take at least Max who always doubts something...

—No, Volodya. If a person doubts, it means he's in search. And, if he aspires to search, it means he wants to perceive... There's an opposition of the two powerful natures inside him. On one side, there's soul trembling, jingling like a bell, giving him no rest. And, on the other side, the matter presses at its full capacity. As a result, his permanent doubts are normal effects of that inner opposition.

—Inasmuch as he is not strong in his choice, he doesn't have chances.

—He surely has little chances to break free. But he does have them. Everything is in his own hands.

Listening to this entire backstairs conversation, Max was perturbed. Sometimes he flew into a rage, sometimes he felt himself doomed, still sometimes he was gladdened with Sensei's intercession. In the end, Sensei's last words finally inspired him, wakening his spirit of search. "Yes, every-

thing's in my own hands!!!”

* * *

Days went by, moments vanished into air, whilst Max was still oscillating like a pendulum between the material and the spiritual. His rebellious personality still couldn't find a point of rest. He was rushing about in search of answers to his questions. He stumbled across diverse variants. He called those one by one in question and remained face to face with the same questions all over again. It was becoming his intrinsic state. However, being near Sensei, he felt himself different. He couldn't explain it, but he felt unusual peace... Sometimes Max was listening to Sensei, but totally did not hear him. He was rather simply fond of their dialogue sounding. Yet, there were moments as well when Ego loosened its bridle, and then Max was not only hearing what Sensei was saying, but also felt his own soul trembling, imbuing his body with an extraordinary joy. Such moments in particular were now emerging from his deep-laid memory. Those were the meeting moments where not words were important, but rather what was happening inside the soul – a certain inner burst during which the love for all existing filled his mind while the animal nature temporarily yielded its positions.

Max was now again distinctly hearing Sensei's words taking him back to those unforgettable moments of the spent life. That day he and his friend stayed for a supplementary class for the pure sake of chatting with Sensei after training.

In fact, such irregular attendance of supplementary classes

began when Max once accidentally stayed longer after common training and heard Sensei's individual disciples discussing quite an interesting spiritual practice of the Lotus Flower. He was most of all amazed that it wasn't an ordinary meditation, but it was exactly the practice which had lead Siddhartha Gautama himself to spiritual awakening and had transmuted him into Buddha — the God-like creature. This same practice had been mastered by selected pharaohs of the Ancient Egypt. Reverberations of perfection of this practice were praised in ancient Indian books written in Sanscrit, in treatises by Chinese sages, in the Ancient Greece epos. Max simply couldn't miss such information. Everything in it was attracting him: antiquity, mysteriousness and, of course, the divine sanctity achieved by those who had mastered this practice. He regarded it as an opportunity to change transform himself, and above all to become an important person in this world.

Max importuned Sensei with questions about this spiritual practice. And, as soon as he had got it, he rushed home happy like a thief over a stolen treasure. During the first three days he diligently exercised and, strangely enough, turned out to be much better in this practice than in other meditation and contemplation techniques taught by Sensei at Oriental fighting classes. Later on, Max diverted his attention towards routine problems of material being, and his eagerness to master the spiritual practice faded away. Soon, the everyday routine engrossed him totally. A usual phase of despondency ensued for Max during which he again started to make futile attempts to grow a “flower” inside him. And, since he achieved no success, he ran to Sensei to “cry on his shoulder” and to look

anew for the answers to his inconsolable questions.

— Sensei, what's my mistake? Seems I've done doing everything correctly... In a quiescent state I imagined how I planted a seed in the solar plexus area. Then I started to "nourish" it with the power of Love, I kept to positive thoughts in mind... In the beginning, I even felt a slight vibration in the solar plexus area and visualized that the seed grew through... But after several days, there was nothing... I cannot even feel that primary warmth...

—Correct. When you were doing everything with a feeling of Love, it turned out well. Yet, when you digressed and attempted to practice only with your mind, you had no success. It's natural. The Lotus Flower is a steady control and a perpetual longing for Love. In order to grow this "flower", one should always attune oneself to love for God, to love for all existing. Such internal state should be maintained in spite of any fortune reversals. And, I emphasize once again, the "flower" should be nourished not with thoughts, but with a sincere feeling. The whole gist of this spiritual practice is in awakening of the Love feeling with its further strengthening and permanent, I repeat, permanent preservation, right up to a physical sensation appearance in the solar plexus area.

—And why exactly in that area? Generally speaking, are there any explanations for this from a human physiology standpoint? — Max rushed into questioning.

Sensei grinned almost inconspicuously. At that moment, Volodya joined them on the bench. And, since the supplementary class was nearly over, other guys caught up with him as well.

—It may as well be explained from a human physiology standpoint, say at a very rough, primitive level, — Sensei responded.

—Why physiology is a primitive level? — Max asked with his favourite jeer, feeling his person was in the centre of everyone's attention.

—Oh, primitive – to be sure! — Sensei smiled. — A human being is in fact a pure physics, a set of sheer formulas of energies movement. And the entire human chemistry derives from there. While what I'm trying to explain to you is merely a most primitive layout on fingers of your physiological associations.

—I would listen about this “primitive layout” an extra time with great pleasure, too, — Voloday said in a bass voice. — Although in your performance such “extra time” is never superfluous. I always hear some new addition.

—I think so, too, — Stas, a tall athletic guy, uttered.

His friend Eugene, being in no way inferior to him by his height and dimensions, half-rose from the bench and in jest solemnly shook Stas's and Volodya's hands.

—I absolutely agree with you.

—Well, taking into account such collective intention, let's do it, — Sensei gave up. — Let's review one of the past lessons. So, all of you imagine what the solar plexus is. — He rested his gaze on Max who nodded in bewilderment having said neither yes nor no. — OK, I see. This plexus otherwise called the celiac plexus constitutes an aggregate of ganglions of various size and shape, conjunct between each other with a numerous connecting branches of manifold length and thick-

ness. The plexus may be quite different by the number of nervous tubes approaching, by the number of ganglions forming it, and by the form of this mighty conglomeration. The solar plexus in its centre more resembles connected apexes of a triangle, while by its external form it most often looks like an uneven circle because nerves radially diverge from the solar plexus extensively to the abdominal cavity organs like rays of sunlight. And, of course, there are plenty of nerve-endings there. The solar plexus belongs to the largest vegetative plexuses. It is even called the “abdominal brain”.

Now, what happens when a person is doing the Lotus Flower spiritual practice? If we would figuratively project the process of internal energies circulation to human physiology, we'll get the following picture. When a person purposefully concentrates attention on his or her solar plexus with a feeling, I emphasize – a *positive* feeling, there appears an irritation of nerve-endings including the Vagus nerve – one of the twelve pairs of cranial nerves, or the so-called wandering nerve. By the way, let me point to the fact that both the right and the left wandering nerves participate in constitution of the solar plexus as its parasympathetic part. Moreover, the plexus includes the largest part of the common rear tube of both wandering nerves. Now, let's go back to concentration. After the wandering nerve is irritated, signals are transmitted along this nerve to the cerebrum. And there, having passed through distributing ganglions, the signals get to hypothalamus.

—Hypothalamus? — Max roused himself and asked already with an explicit interest: — Isn't it the one being called the “ancient brain” or the “snake's brain”?

—Yes, — Sensei confirmed. — There are also other names such as “the primary brain”, “the dinosaur’s brain”, “the reptilian brain” and many more. Hypothalamus is indeed one of the most ancient formations. Yet, even chordates, the most primitive of all vertebrate animals, have a prototype of hypothalamus area. Whereas the human hypothalamus has been brought to perfection, one might say.

—And why is it called the brain of reptiles, dinosaurs, but not the brain of chordates or amphibian’s for example?

—You see, exactly in the time of the most ancient reptiles which were the first truly land vertebrate animals, hypothalamus had to be significantly improved and differentiated in line with adaptation to land existence. Hence, the human variant of hypothalamus became merely a superstructure over the basic design of ancient reptiles’ hypothalamus area. And they differ from each other... let’s say, like the very first electronic calculating machine differs from a modern computer. Same in principle, but completely different abilities...

—Not bad, — the only thing Max thought of to reply, being astonished with what he’d just heard.

—So, let’s return to the human hypothalamus. In order to understand what really happens inside it after the irritation is transmitted there, let’s recall what we know about hypothalamus, as of today at least. Hypothalamus is the superior centre where all data about the internal state of one’s body are accumulated. It is a quasi mediator between the nervous system, the body organs, the tissue liquids, and it’s also, I would add, an energy converter. Receiving nervous impulses from the cerebral cortex, hypothalamus retranslates them into a lan-

guage comprehensible for the organism liquids.

—And how?

—Well, in those liquids it changes the ratio, the concentration of hormones, ferments, salts etc. By the way, no part of the cerebrum other than the hypothalamus area has such a privilege in supplying blood. Chemical agents coming from blood continually signal about the state of body organs and systems at each moment in time. Putting it more simply, hypothalamus is a good manager who perfectly gets on both with the enterprise owner and the workers, and skillfully disposes of resources being entrusted to him. Therefore, the enterprise operates as a single mechanism. In general, this manager ensures complete homeostasis of the enterprise.

—Homeo... say again, what? — Max quietly asked Eugene to repeat, for the latter was sitting next to him.

Eugene smiled almost unnoticeably and answered quietly and very seriously:

—Musses, of course. Haven't you ever heard this expression? It's when an enterprise has not been visited by a tax officer for a long time.

—A-a-ah, — Max drawled meaningly and added in bewilderment: — Yeah, I remember now.

Sensei heard this and smiled:

—Homeostasis is a constancy of the internal environment.

He glanced at Eugene with a slight reproach. The latter made an unruffled face and started to justify himself:

—Why? It's precisely what I've said. When does an enterprise have the internal environment constancy? If a tax officer hasn't been there for a long time.

Guys burst with laughter, and Sensei waved his hand towards him hopelessly.

—Who is the owner of the organism then? — Max interested, casting sidelong looks at Eugene.

—Epiphysis, — Sensei answered ordinarily as if it went without saying. — Thus, we've cleared up that hypothalamus is the main subcortex centre of vegetative provision and control. It takes the most active part in regulating the operation of cardiovascular system, the alimentary tract, the body temperature, the organism's biochemistry; it also regulates biorhythms, sensations of hunger, appetite, thirst; it influences sexual behaviour and so on. Well, and, of course, hypothalamus coordinates various forms of nervous activity starting from vigil and sleep states, and right up to generation of positive and negative emotions, to organism's behaviour during adaptation reactions... But I tell this all only for your reference, for you to better understand the following. Now, let's talk about the essentials. Exactly inside hypothalamus, there are two ancient centres located. Looking at a cranium from above, you can imagine these centres making a certain internal triangle together with the pineal gland, and epiphysis is the apex of this triangle. These centres were called differently in different times, but their essence never changed. One of the version of their names mentioned in ancient manuscripts is "agathodemon" and "kakodemon". Agathodemon stimulates generation of positive thoughts while kakodemon stimulates generation of negative ones.

—Say again? "Demon"? — Max asked to repeat. — Does it mean "devil" if you translate?

—In translation from Greek “demon” (daimon) means a “deity”, a “spirit”. Yet, later Christianity adopted this word from Greeks and gave it such definition as you’ve mentioned.

—And “kako”? — Max asked again.

—“Kako” is indeed “kako”, — Sensei joked. — The “kako” prefix springs from the Greek “kakos” meaning “bad”.

— Here! I also always referred to multifunctional use of this international word, — Eugene noticed cheerfully.

Guys burst out laughing again.

—Well, if “kako” is “bad”, does “agatho” mean “good” then? — Max verified.

—Just so, it is “good”. By the way, such definition of the positive thoughts centre was known already to ancient Egyptians. And for this reason in Ancient Egypt there appeared a medallion that later became a talisman named “agathodemon” in Greek-Egyptian tradition. It included an image of a snake with lion’s head and seven shining stars (the latter were changed into crowns afterwards).

— So, it looks like Greeks adopted their knowledge from Egyptians? — Volodya asked.

—Yes. And, while Egyptians had at least some of the original knowledge, Greeks adopted and further turned that knowledge into mythology. Thus, in Greek tradition there appeared the agathodemon — a good spirit following a person throughout his or her life. He was considered a mediator between people and gods.

—And, having turned the internal into the external, people have lost the first one, — Volodya commented with a smile, using Sensei’s expression.

—Absolutely.

—So, thoughts originate from hypothalamus? — Max hurried to return to the conversation on the topic of his vivid interest.

—Well, not from a piece of matter as you think, — Sensei responded. — Like I said, it's only a figurative comparison, a projection of energies onto matter. Thoughts originate not directly from a cerebral substance called hypothalamus. They are being born in the two centres which I've been telling about. These centres are certain chakrans of subtle matter which our thoughts consist of. And, should they ablate this cerebral area from one's brain, such person will end up with certain psychical malfunctions in thinking, perception, memory and so on, but he or she won't stop generating thoughts.

—Clear.

—These centres are sort of semiconductors between the subtle matter and the nervous system. They receive the nervous system signals transferring them into the subtle matter, and at the same time they can encode information into a signal and send “mental orders” by nervous tracts... I would add something you already know, namely that, upon stimulation of both positive and negative emotions, the activity of parasympathetic section of the nervous system predominates, and one of the most important nerves of that section is just the wandering nerve.

Let's now go back to the beginning. What is happening when you're doing the Lotus Flower spiritual practice? When irritation induced by concentration of positive feelings in the

solar plexus area goes from the wandering nerve to hypothalamus, the nervous signals, first of all, go through both of these centres. At that, along with greater stimulation of agathodemon, there is also a feebly marked stimulation of kakodemon. When the agathodemon centre is stimulated with such type of energy, more simply the energy of “Love”, a person feels bliss and all-embracing joy.

Now, let's take Max's example. Basically, something similar is experienced by nearly all beginners. Should a person loosen his or her attention or fully digress to an animal feeling, there occurs a surge accumulated though parallel stimulation of the kakodemon centre. At first, such process manifests itself in appearance of negative thoughts and agitation of negative emotions. This is followed by doubts arising. And (please, note it particularly!) when you give your power, your attention to such thoughts, as a result of such synthesis you get an irritation of a number of other nervous system centres because of which a person sinks into depression, becomes despondent or aggressive. Later on the process of your attention seizure by negative thoughts further aggravates, and the kakodemon centre is further being stimulated. It turns out to be an exclusive circle. And the person, say, falls into the animal nature's net again.

—How could one break this exclusive circle? — Max asked.

—That's the whole point! Human brain is attuned to the animal nature's frequency from the very birth, although it's the most primitive program out of all brain's abilities. The kakodemon centre is stimulated nearly all the time by a person

who lives an ordinary life and does not participate in its spiritual nature's evolution. Therefore, such individual stably possesses such elements as envy, anger, hatred, greediness, cupidity, jealousy, fear, egoism etc. Some have them more expressed, others – less. However, from day to day, such people bite their own tail and suffer of this biting still more. They have extremely rare stimulation of agathodemon, mostly in the form of weak irritations of this centre and for very short periods of time. At that, such surges are subsequently overpowered by the more stimulated centre of kakodemon.

In contrast to the latter, people following the spiritual path purposefully work on the agathodemon centre stimulation. Where does it lead them? Let's particularly take the Lotus Flower because its circuit inside a human organism is the very result of any spiritual path which leads to, say, one and the same inner Gate. Thus, if a person practices the Lotus Flower correctly, controls his or her emotions, thoughts, power of attention and endeavours to be in the state of Love most of the time or better constantly, localizing this feeling in the solar plexus area, such person is able achieve the following. Permanent irritation and stimulation of the agathodemon centre intensifies its activity, switching on certain mechanisms which deaden a little by-stimulation of the kakodemon centre... Here there's already pure physics, so I won't go into details incomprehensible for you. To cut a long story short, figuratively speaking in physiology language again, something similar to total or partial inhibition of the kakodemon area takes place. It results in extrication of an energy sharply intensifying agathodemon's activity, which in its turn leads to a surge actively stimulating the pine-

al gland. This gland is also called epiphysis. And the very consequence of epiphysis operation in such new conditions (more simply, the consequence of the wave frequency change) is that a person experiences opening of spiritual vision or the “Third Eye” as they call it in the East. Well, and this in its turn promotes awakening of tremendous powers of the soul. Such person not simply changes internally, but he or she starts to reveal a well of genuine knowledge, the reality of superior worlds...

Sensei lapsed into silence.

—I still don’t understand, — Max repeated shrugging his shoulders, — how can some pineal gland transform a person so profoundly? I may admit this about the central nervous system. But epiphysis?!

—The central nervous system holds one of the privileged positions in the organism management system. Nevertheless, the master of all the internal is precisely epiphysis. It’s sort of a superior control organ which exerts its significant influence only when there are really holistic changes going inside a person. Yet, if there are no such changes, epiphysis just “watches”, and from time to time controls and adjusts the overall attuning of cerebral structures, either stirring up or reducing certain processes. But the main thing about epiphysis is that it’s exactly the one to contain informational matrixes, sort of holograms, storing all the information about the individual including that from his previous lives. This is the most secret “safe” of one’s memory, having a “double fireproof bottom” for it is also a charkan. Everything you see, feel, experience during your life, that is all your internal and external, is being

recorded in the pineal gland. It is a sort of inner Guard of the Gate, which always knows everything about you including all your secret and manifest desires. By the way, the first Christ's adherents interpreted this information as a personal page in a book of life kept in God's hands where everything about a person was being written... And so, if the animal dominates in you, if your thoughts are mostly about constant accumulation of the material, then, no matter how hard you try to externally demonstrate your "angelic" nature, all your efforts will be vain. The Gate may be opened only through the spiritual, through a permanent sincere desire filled with your pure Faith and Love... And what else is interesting. This Guard not simply records person's intentions and deeds, but it also strengthens what is dominating in thinking. Therefore, if you switch your attention to negative perception, the Guard will support the negative in you, intensifying what you possess. And, should you switch to the good, the Guard will intensify these feelings inside you.

—Is epiphysis as ancient as hypothalamus? — Max wondered.

—Undoubtedly. Epiphysis and the hypothalamus area are the most ancient formations. All vertebrates have epiphysis, though it varies by its organization. For instance, the pineal gland of inferior vertebrates (lizards, amphibians, some species of fish) is represented by a paired organ having intracerebral and surface-located parts.

—Surface-located? — Stas asked again. — How is it?

—Well, it's a form of the third, so-called parietal eye located straight under skin and skull cover.

—Does it mean a lizard can see through this parietal eye?

—Of course! There is a lens having a form of the upper wall of the eye bleb, a cavity filled with light-refracting substance, and a pigment, — everything as it should be.

—Does it really see directly through its skin? — Max got amazed.

—Yes. The epiphysiar cornea, that is the skin above the parietal eye, is transparent. The higher vertebrates have an unpaired epiphysis. And the human pineal gland, located in the rear part of the third ventricle between the quadruplet bodies, is really something unique and peculiar. The human epiphysis, compared to that of other higher vertebrates, was significantly changed due to individual's duality – material and spiritual. Therefore, epiphysis is not only the master of a human body, but also a gate to the spiritual, more superior world, sort of a portal. So, it is exactly the epiphysis which controls any change in one's state of consciousness.

—And how does it look, this epiphysis? — Max asked thoughtfully.

—It's a small rough formation, triangular-oval in shape, somewhat flat from the front to the rear. It looks greyish-pink, though the colour may change depending on the filling of blood-vessels. And its weight is... surely individual for each person. The average is about 0.13 grams. Although completely lost persons have it with a much lighter weight coming down as low as to 0.025 grams. While spiritually evolved people have even 0.43 grams and over. Everybody is different.

—Amazing! It's so small, but so powerful! — Max was to-

tally wonder-struck.

—You think purely subjectively and measure with habitual material criteria. Yet, considering it objectively, sizes in space essentially play no special part for energetic objects. Let's take, for example, the "Po" particle. It's so small that contemporary scientists are still not able to get to it, despite all their advanced technologies. Nevertheless, everything is webbed of its impositions: not only ourselves, but the entire boundless outer Space with all galaxies. So, sizes per se are a relative notion.

—Does epiphysis grow during one's life?

—It depends... Epiphysis weight constantly grows until a person reaches the age of ten to fourteen years old, i.e. the puberty age. Then there occurs a considerable surge of prana – the vital energy. And, starting from this point, if a person sinks in the material like a pig in a puddle, his or her epiphysis weight nearly doesn't change. But if a person spiritually evolves — it's a quite another story... Refer at least to some literature describing events when people including children manifested extraordinary mental abilities upon having an enlarged pineal gland, and you'll grasp everything yourself.

—But, given this pineal gland is so important in the human organism, why is there no information about it anywhere? — Max articulated with a slight reproof.

—What do you mean – no information?! — Sensei resented. — Have you ever thoroughly looked for it? Surely, not! It's amazing how people enjoy complaining that there are no references without any endeavour to search those. Remember, Max: who searches will always find, who knocks will get the door

opened for him.

People knew about the pineal gland a long time ago, and they knew it exactly as a gland and not like any other formation. Take the ancient India, for instance. Two thousand years before Christ, there was a true golden age of epiphysis studies. Indians were already aware that this gland for a human being was not only the clairvoyance organ and the memory store of all previous soul's incarnations, but also the main chakran concentrating superior energies... Moreover, this knowledge had been possessed still earlier by the first pharaohs of Ancient Egypt, though in a slightly different interpretation. Ancient China, Tibet inhabitants knew about the pineal gland as well. By the way, in these lands from time immemorial there existed a ritual of the dead high clergyman cremation after which his closest disciples looked for the so-called ringseh. It's a hard substance more resembling an small amber stone. By its size, disciples judged what spiritual level their Teacher had achieved. It was believed that the larger was ringseh the higher the dead person had been spiritually. Yet, ringseh is nothing else than a cerebral gravel of epiphysis. This gravel still remains one of the biggest mysteries for contemporary scientists, whereas people in ancient Tibet knew it as a place of psychic energy accumulation...

So, the pineal gland was known long ago. However, this organ used to be called differently. In principle, it started to be called pineal from the second century A.D. when Galen, the ancient Roman physician, compared it with a pine-cone. And so it went. In Latin they began calling epiphysis glandula pinealis, by the name of Italian stone pine.

—What about the “epiphysis” name?

—Epiphysis is a Greek name meaning an “adnate”.

—Yeah, it’s easy to get confused with all these nicknames,

— Eugene jested.

—But the most interesting thing is that, the further people were moving away from the ancient knowledge, and the more intensively the orthodox medicine was developing, the faster they lost the true information about functions of this gland. During a long time, epiphysis used to be considered a rudiment at all, though some keen minds succeeded to get to the truth anyway. For example, Rene Descartes who lived at the beginning of seventeenth century. An outstanding person! No wonder that his intellect and aspiration for self-perfection allowed him to be a philosopher, a mathematician, a physicist and a science methodologist at the same time. Hence, he also expressed an opinion that a human soul had its site in a small pineal gland located in the cerebrum centre. Say, he was close to the truth and almost got to it... Furthermore, already then Descartes had pointed to an existing functional link between the pineal gland and the visual system which was proved much later.

—Do you think people will ever succeed to prove the epiphysis connection with the soul scientifically? — Max asked distrustfully.

—Quite possible. Epiphysis is currently being studied intensively, although only on a chemistry level. But its leading role in the human organism is already recognized as of the most important link in the neurohumoral system and a neuro-endocrine organ. Nobody doubts anymore that epiphysis is

the main mediator between the external and internal environment of the organism, securing vital functions regulation of all organs and systems subject to living conditions, i.e. alterations of day and night, seasons, temperature, humidity, activity of the Earth electromagnetic field, ionizing radiation level and so on. It is known that the pineal gland is the very one to exert significant influence on behaviour, particularly on research behaviour, ability to learn, memory, locomotive and convulsive activity, sexual and aggressive behaviour. Scientists have discovered not only the pineal gland interaction with the hypothalamus-hypophysis-adrenal complex, but also an existence of an epithalamus-epiphysis system as a parallel backup mechanism in emergency situations. They are studying the epiphysis innervation with upper jugular vertebrae, i.e. with sympathetic nerves. There are attempts to study its connection with the parasympathetic system. The pineal gland influence upon immunity, upon neuroendocrine glands is noted... Owing to the latest scientific achievements, people now have access to information on the histostructure, the chemical composition, on some epiphysial hormones and hormonoids. The pineal gland frequency characteristics are being studied...

However, it's only the beginning of this mysterious organ exploration. Everything discovered until today is a mere mote on a water surface. People don't even know yet that this water is an ocean, not to say about the knowledge on a quality of this ocean itself. And the future medicine will surely reveal the secret of epiphysis, if such future ever comes, of course. Basically, it's not very complicated. Suffice it to learn to read

information from its holograms. But, should the human science have time to get to this, the world would turn over.

—To which side?

—It all depends on people. While currently people rummage in exploring the material world and coarse energies, the mechanisms of managing those, then, after having decoded epiphysis structure and information on its holograms, people will be able to learn operating subtle energies as well...

—Yeah... Most probably, I won't live till those enlightened centuries, — Max joked.

—Why would you wait till then? — Sensei responded, matching his tone. — Who wants, can always find this knowledge inside oneself, and at any time, not being dependant on the overall level of human enlightenment. What people are now trying to do jointly by means of their science, to put it mildly, is a mere attempt to reach the left ear with the right hand. It's little complicated, yet so entertaining... The ancients knew a shorter way — through their internal. After all, the whole point is not about reaching the ear, but rather about comprehending what this organ is like and how to use it.

For an individual, it's always more important to get through his or her internal than to observe the external in confusion. For, if someone else works on self-improvement and achieves certain spiritual levels, there is no benefit to you out of this. Because everyone must work independently on his or her own inner field in order to gain a valuable fruit for oneself.

And there always have been plenty of instruments to cultivate one's spiritual. Chose whatever you like. But, using any of such instruments, a person anyhow always arrived at one

and the same outcome — the stimulation of epiphysis through growing the power of Love and surmounting one's animal nature (the ancient dragon), i.e. hypothalamus. It is the rule which exactly had been reflected in the very first, original spiritual practice of the Lotus Flower included in Belyao Dzy science adjusted for people at certain point of time. And everything built up on later is only various complicated combinations of this practice which one way or another lead to the initial core.

— Well, it's clear in particular, — Max nodded because it seemed to him that Sensei was explaining more to him than to the others. — Yet, in the largest accounts... nothing's clear. How could the Lotus become a foundation for everything, if there are so many diverse ways in the world? In my mind, for example, the Lotus Flower is more associated with Buddhism. But there is Christianity, Islam and, I know, Krishnaism. And, while here we have a dynamic meditation as you call it, there they have prayers, some verbal drumming into the subconscious. It's a completely different impact on one's organism!

— Well, you know... The primary impact is different, — Sensei uttered. — However, these are only various ways of getting rid of negative thoughts, of one's animal nature. But the subsequent way of soul awakening is identical for everybody.

Let's take Christianity, the Orthodoxy for example. In its spiritual practice, to achieve the sanctity state they use an ancient inward prayer called in Christianity “the incessant prayer”, “the sensible prayer” or “the hearty prayer”, but it's more famous as “the Prayer of Jesus”. It consists of just several words: “Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy upon

me”. Or a short version: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me”. What this prayer basically does is that a person, continually repeating it with “the mouth, then the mind and then the heart”, gradually plunges into the same state as achieved in the Lotus Flower. Many people achieved the soul awakening with the help of this prayer.

The prayer is very powerful and efficient. It’s described in detail in the ancient book of “the Good Nature”. This book for people who are clever and versed in spiritual sacraments is the second important after the Gospel. There are advises and instructions of twenty-five monks describing practices under this prayer. And, though they all were recognized as “saints”, only few of them had really achieved sanctity having perceived the inward prayer sacrament. These old men described the three keys of this prayer: frequent repetition of Christ’s name and addressing to him, attention to the prayer or, more simply, full concentration on it without any other thoughts, and, finally, immersion in oneself which churchmen considered a great sacrament of this prayer and called “mind joining the heart”.

In principle, it’s a religious, longer way to the pure knowledge that is to awakening in the Lotus Flower, to opening of the soul. Yet, in Christianity, for beginners and not for people who already follow this prayer, there are certain religious rules applied. The beginners are forbidden to practice it without proper guidance, i.e. without a living instructor. This rule is reasoned in such a way that, without an instructor, people uttering this prayer might “suddenly get under grip of uncontrollable mental states”.

Whereas, in fact, there's nothing terrible there because a beginner simply practices an ordinary auto-training, self-disciplining oneself, passes the very first meditation steps, learns to concentrate his or her attention on the prayer, removing all outside thoughts and gradually increasing the time of prayer performance. Thus, these stages when a beginner utters the prayer "with mouth and then with mind" is a plain hammering of it into the subconscious in order to facilitate fighting against one's animal nature through concentration on the very prayer and thereby achieving "the purity of intentions".

Many people start performing this inward prayer either over a fear of "hell torments" or because of personal self-interest for the future. Although the saint men whom the prayer had really lead to opening of their own inner soul temple, warned that "fearing hell torments was the way of a slave, and desiring a reward in the Kingdom was the way of a mercenary", — saying the latter words, Sensei glanced at Max with such an unusual, penetrating look that a shiver went up and down Max's spine. — "Whereas God wants people to go to him along a filial path, i.e. to behave honestly out of love and eagerness for Him and to enjoy the salutary joining with Him in their souls and hearts". God may be perceived only through internal pure Love. In St. John's chapter 4, verse 18 it is mentioned: "In love there is no fear, yet perfect love banishes fear for in fear there's tormenting; who fears is imperfect in love". As St. Gregory the Sinaite wrote in his instructions to the Good Nature, in part 1, on page, — Sensei softly closed his eyes, recalling, — on page 119, about the Prayer of Jesus:

“Love this one prayer and strive to acquire it in your heart, keep your mind not dreamy. Don’t be afraid of anything with it; for the One Who said: dare, I am, don’t fear, — is with us Himself”. “Who will be in Me, and I will be in him, will create a great fruit”, — as stated in the New Testament, in St. John’s chapter 15, verse 5.

Thus, the first two stages of the prayer “with mouth and mind” are only a prelude, while the greatest sacrament, in churchmen’s opinion, is when “mind joins the heart”, when “the name of Jesus Christ, descending to the depth of one’s heart, will subdue the pernicious serpent and revive the soul”, when “mind puts the prayer into heart, and the heart begins to utter it”. This is actually the transfer from the verbal to the sensual, more simply — the meditation beginning. For meditation is nothing, but working at the sensual level without any words.

A versed person reading the Good Nature, rejecting all religious rubbish, will understand the core of this way, and his or her eye will find the necessary. For instance, Simeon the New Theologian, describing the methods of “joining the heart” in Word 68 of the Good Nature, wrote: “You should obey the three things above all: unconcern with anything, even with blessed, and not only with unblessed and vain, or in other words – disregard of everything, pure conscience in everything so as it would not condemn itself of anything, and complete impartiality so as your intention would not tend to anything”. This is the first-rate basis for opening one’s soul.

In the Good Nature, there can be found description of different ways how people who had perceived the inward prayer

sacrament achieved the stage of “mind joining the heart”.

—Why different? — Max wondered.

— Well, each person is special in his or her own way, each one, say, has his or her own step length... Thus, some concentrated on their heart, trying to mentally imagine how the prayer was being uttered with each heart beat. Others exercised in breathing, on the inhale pronouncing: “Lord Jesus Christ”, and on the exhale — “have mercy upon me!”, again concentrating these words on the heart. Still others practiced self-contemplation. For example, St. Gregory the Sinaite mentions the following: “...bring mind from your head down to your heart and hold it there, and from there appeal with your mind and heart jointly: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me!” Hold your breath as well so as to breathe without impudence for it disperses your thoughts. If you see thoughts appearing, don’t heed them even if they are simple and kind, not only empty and impure”. Or, for instance, in the second part of the Good Nature Nikiphoros the Monk recommends, in case one fails in such inward breathing, “... to force oneself to yell this only prayer inside instead of any other words (thoughts). Patiently remain in such deed for just some time, and an entrance to the heart will open for you through this without any doubt as we have perceived from our own experience”.

It’s splendid, of course. However, they were concentrating on the heart. Therefore, those who practiced the inward prayer soon started feeling pain in this body organ. And many fell into this dangerous trap. What do I mean? Heart is a muscle, an organism engine, the soul was never inside it. Heart should work autonomously. And concentrating on this organ is a

tremendous risk. What kind of risk? If a person has even slightest doubts during such concentration, if he performs this prayer as an idle experiment, not changing his inner life holistically, not having made a firm decision to follow his soul, i.e. not awakening the genuine faith in God inside himself, but simply playing with it by whim of his good mood, he can easily get a nice heart attack. Nonetheless, truly spiritual people possessing steady faith, sincere, pure love for God, successfully passed even such stage, although it wasn't painless for the heart, until they got deep inside their soul, to the solar plexus area. They felt as if their mind was descending there. And exactly from there they started to feel warmth spreading from chest all over the body and causing pleasant sensations. As saints wrote, "a light flares up which embraces you from inside with the fire of God's Love". More simply, the solar plexus chakran started to work, and such person felt a vibration coming out of the chest, a warm wave carrying those words from the soul depth: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". The person felt the God's Love emanation inside and amplified this Love with subsequent concentration on it. "Blessed are those pure in heart for they will view God". According Pheolipth's the Metropolitan dicta written in part two of the Good Nature: "Having secluded externally, dare to get further inside the most internal watchtower of the soul which is the house of Christ where there's always peace, joy and silence. Christ, the mental sun, emanates these gifts like some rays out of Him and gives them like a recompense to the soul which accepts Him with faith and good nature".

—I haven't quite understood about the heart, — Max said.

— How those spiritually advanced could avoid heart attacks? If they also concentrated attention on the heart, why did their solar plexus snap into action?

—Because, if a person opens with Love for God, the God's Love will safeguard him or her, no matter which way he or she is going. The main thing is aspiration on the way. In such case, sooner or later the searcher will arrive at the needed result. At bottom, if a person is steadfast in one's spiritual zeal and does not assume any doubts even in thinking, everything works just like it should.

Max looked at Sensei with the same lack of understanding.

—Well, what else I can say to explain to you... If you are not lazy to refer to human neurophysiology, you'll see that heart is connected with the solar plexus through innervation.

—Well, and...

—The Power of Love is certain energy. Pure concentration of it even on one's heart will localize this power in the solar plexus one way or another.

—A-a-ah, — Max drawled affectedly. — Now it's clear.

—God be praised! — Sensei said in a similar tone, jokingly wiping "sweat" from his brow.

Guys around smiled.

—At the beginning, you mentioned the prayer was ancient,
— Volodya reminded, wishing to continue the topic.

—Yes. It traces its roots back to extreme antiquity. It used to be called the "Prayer of soul", and concentration took place exactly on the centre "between chest and belly", i.e. on the solar plexus. In general, it's a certain adaptation of the Lotus Flower. The inward prayer may be found in crypto-knowledge

of any serious religion.

—Why is it called “the Prayer of Jesus” in Christianity? Did Jesus give it to his disciples? — Max asked.

— Well, say, for himself and his personal disciples Jesus used the pure knowledge including the Lotus Flower as the simplest and most effective method of taming one’s animal nature, for such work was conducted on a sensual level. For clever people he gave the inward prayer as the most acceptable, habitual form of spiritual practice. Certainly, the latter method involves a little detour through verballity and the subconscious, but the result is still entrance to the sensual level. And, for everybody else who had the animal nature prevailing, Jesus framed the knowledge in a form of parables with a double clue which fitted minds of both laymen and versed people. Everyone could discover his or her inner treasures with that clue.

After Jesus, the inward prayer became the key one for the leading group of his true progenies. And the apostles conveyed it to their disciples already with Jesus’s name in it because, even to present day, His name as of the son of God arouses absolute trust in many people which’s very important. For, once all doubts are rejected, the spiritual way passage becomes much easier. Thus, the prayer started to be called “the Prayer of Jesus”, and also “the hearty prayer”, for Jesus often used the word “hearty” in a meaning of “emotional” as it was in those times. And, by the way, in the beginning the prayer was conveyed correctly, just as Jesus had taught — with the subsequent concentration on the solar plexus area. Through this prayer, numerous people among the first

Christ's followers freed themselves from material shackles.

However, after certain time there appeared such individuals among Christians who, having got some smattering of the Teaching, tried to organize their own cult by means of that knowledge, to establish their own significance in masses, using Christ's name as a cover. Humans almost always remain humans... Exactly with such ignoramuses the genuine knowledge hiding started, and the inward prayer was further performed with concentration on the heart. Yet, some true Christ's followers still managed to preserve the pure knowledge for their offspring. They called their secret "the great secret" between themselves.

—Is there a reference to the inward prayer in the Bible?

—There are references in certain passages. You see, the Bible was developed from selective records, moreover under the control of emperor Constantine. What was preserved there are mostly parables and oblique hint at this inward prayer.

—Can you give an example? — Max didn't abate.

—An example is Jesus's parable about the tax collector. It's narrated in the Gospel according to St. Luke, chapter 18, verses 10 through 14. It tells about two men coming to a church to pray. One was a Pharisee, another was a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and prayed as follows: God! Thank You that I'm not like other people, robbers, offenders, adulterers or like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, give away a tenth share of everything I acquire. Meanwhile, the tax collector, standing some distance away, didn't even dare to look up to heaven, but was beating his chest, saying: 'God, have mercy on me, the sinner that I am!' I tell you that this one

went back home more acquitted than the first one, because any man glorifying himself will be lowered while a man belittling himself will rise”.

Of course, these are not precise Jesus’s words, something was added, something omitted, but the overall sense is remained correct. For majority of people in this parable Jesus tried to disclose elementary notions on the human nature... For an animal cannot be told what spiritual is in its pure form. It would be same as explaining a blind from birth who has spent his entire life in desert sands what the beauty of an autumn forest is like at sunset. Therefore, one has to use associative comparisons and images. As for spiritual people, they understand each other without any words. It’s a completely different level of perception.

—In this parable the “sinner” is mentioned as usual, — Eugene noticed. — Oh, priests are so fond of this prejudice!

—They are fond of it because it’s their daily bread. Imputing depravity to a person standing on spiritual way, they hammer a guilt complex into his or her subconscious. And such complex is like “a stone fastened to feet” on the way... Yet, on the way to God there should not be any doubts, everything is rejected, only pure Love remains. If a person becomes truly free inside, rejecting everything except Love, Love for God, all shackles simply vanish for they are nothing, but an illusion. Such person is aware that his or her body is only a vehicle which goes where his or her genuine self, i.e. the soul, wants to.

—So, does it mean that a person performing the inward prayer also balances spiritual and material natures inside him-

self at first? — Max said thoughtfully.

—Yes, he just needs more time for this way.

—And, for a person performing the inward prayer, would those stages of “mouth” and “mind” be in particular the general battle, the personal Armageddon you’ve told about? — Max asked, endeavouring to clarify something for himself.

—No, — Sensei answered. — It is only a preparation fire. The general battle for a person following the spiritual way will take place when an earnest internal work starts, when the person will reject all conventions and will truly cultivate inner Love, will go straight ahead to God in spite of everything. In plain words, it will take place when he or she approaches the Gate and steps on the single bridge or path (whatever you may call it) leading thereto. In principle, all people achieving a certain level of spiritual maturity have to pass this main ultimate leg regardless of the exact way they have taken to reach it. In the highest accounts, all these manifold ways are merely different methods of searching that sole path which leads to the Gate.

—Yet, how would you know whether you’ve found that path or you’ve gone in circle to a primeval forest again? — Max expressed his doubt.

—Don’t worry. Anyone having stepped on that path will feel everything. Moreover, he or she will then be followed with signs.

—Signs?

—Well, yes, certain indexes in a spiritual guide-book.

—Could you, please, tell more on this subject?

—I do may tell you more... I shall omit all those external

signs which a person begins to see and to understand owing to amplification of his or her intuitive perception, and shall tell only about the principal inner sign which appears when such person steps on that bridge or path, i.e. when he or she enters the final battle with his or her animal nature for the soul supremacy in a given body. This sign appears in a form of head of an ancient reptile, serpent or dragon. But most often people start seeing as if an open-hood cobra is gazing at them. Its gaze is not aggressive, but serene. It looks eye to eye, most likely even at one's nasal bridge. At that, a person sees its image in front of oneself both with closed and open eyes. At this leg of spiritual way it appears intermittently in front of one's face even in everyday life. Sometimes it seems to people that they start having some haunting hallucinations. A snake shows up or crawls by now here, now there. Such visions are normal for those crossing the bridge.

Each person surely has his or her own reptile image. It partly connected with one's inner imagination, with currently possessed versions from associative memory. And one's attitude towards that reptile's appearance is also different. If a person has grown up in a region where a snake's worshiped as a sacred animal, he or she will react more or less tranquilly. Whereas another one in whom a fear has been instilled from childhood will naturally feel dread and disgust as the first reaction. Yet, however that may be, when a person overcomes his or her illusions including fear, when he or she completely abandons negative and becomes aware of the truth, exactly then he or she realizes that the Serpent is only the First Guard. The latter is necessary because any further advancement is

possible only under observation, for at this leg of spiritual way some more mighty energies come into force...

—How mighty? — Max wondered.

—Well, judge for yourself. A person having passed the First Guard acquires such abilities thanks to which he or she can govern not only natural elements, but people's destinies as well...

—Yeah, not bad, — Max said in surprise.

—And so, when a person completes, say, crossing the bridge, i.e. wins the final battle, the personal Armageddon, having chained up his or her animal nature, then the Serpent disappears. The person spiritually becomes much more sublime and purer... To put it bluntly, this whole process is just a stage of operation of the hypothalamus centres which we've spoken of, up to full or partial inhibition of the negative thoughts centre — the kakodemon. By the way, such process in ancient yoga was associated with awakening of a dormant serpent and its ascent along one's spine up to the "Milfoil" chakran which is an epiphysis projection.

—And what's next? — Max was excited with curiosity.

—Next?! — Sensei grinned. — Try to pass at least the way described. Out of all people walking the spiritual paths, only a few reach the bridge, not to mention the Gate. Although it's the most primitive and elementary in the true spiritual work... And then... Then there starts a path of the chosen ones, connected with epiphysis opening. On this path, there appears another, more superior sign — the Eye, or the All-seeing Eye as they also call it. In the East, this sign is named the All-seeing Eye of the East. In Ancient Egypt it was called the Eye of Ho-

rus. And its very first, most ancient name was the Eye of Phaeton Goddess. Only some individuals have walked along such path out of entire humanity having ever lived on our planet... Hence, for the time being you don't need to know about it. Your mere task is to reach the Gate. Basically, the Lotus Flower brings to this level in particular. And then there begin totally different meditations with new goals and tasks... But, as a matter of fact, people don't need this information. That's the path of Boddhisatvas...

—So, the “Flower” is sort of a stage in acquiring the inner Freedom, — Max resumed for himself.

—Absolutely. People who have passed the final leg of spiritual way up to the Gate understand each other without words when they meet. They meet as brothers, although they may belong to utterly different religious organizations. Why? Because they become free inside and understand that they serve one and the same God, no matter how people call Him. It's just that each of them serves in his or her own way. And such understanding is beyond words...

A person being in God is absolutely free from any prejudices. Finding God inside oneself, he or she per se finds the genuine self, finds the eternal happiness which is incomparable to any terrestrial pleasures. And such person would never exchange an hour, a minute, even a second of this blissful state of living in God for decades of youth, health, material pleasures and delights, even if a power over the entire world would belong to him or her. Because for him or her it would be same as exchanging, for instance, tea-drinking in a warm, cosy house with the closest, dearest person for hanging on a stake

amid a square when you're being beaten, tortured or cauterized with red-hot iron. This is how different it is for the knowing people.

A human being without God in heart is like an exile. Such person spends nearly all life in idle mirages, in bitter and sweet illusions which come to an end anyway, no matter how he or she wants to retain them. And it's impossible to prolong this unreal life of one's matter even for a second. Many people ask themselves a question: "What do I live for?" Do we really live for the purpose of stuffing our stomachs, making children, purchasing and wielding?! These all are only dust in an instant. And what's next?..

* * *

After that conversation, Max was in euphoria for several days. On such wave, he thoroughly studied all the literature he could find, comparing what he found in books about ancient civilizations with the information heard from Sensei. He was not simply surprised, but rather astonished with the outcome.

For the next training Max arrived earlier. Luckily, Sensei and his guys were already in the gym...

—Look what I've found, — Max bragged, displaying the results of his research to Sensei. — And look at this. This find dates back to Sumerian civilization ages... It is now kept in the Louvre in Paris.

—Ah, Gudea's goblet, — Sensei said tranquilly, looking at diversely foreshorten photos, as if it was a well-known piece

for him.

The photos pictured a goblet with a strange raised pattern. Two snakes were twining around a baton. Snakes' open jaws were facing each other and touching only a water-pouring hollow at the upper rim of the goblet. On each side of the snakes, there were standing two winged monsters with dragon heads, panther or lion bodies, predatory animal claws on their forepaws and eagle pounces on their feet. A tail of each of those was tipped with a scorpion sting. In their forepaws they were holding sort of a sword with a hilt or a baton.

—What is this? — Volodya wondered.

—It's a ritual goblet, — Sensei responded, — made in the twenty-second century B.C. for Gudea, the ruler of Lagash.

—The ruler of what? — Volodya asked to repeat.

—Lagash. Lagash was an ancient Sumerian state with a capital of the same name, located in Southern Mesopotamia... The goblet seems to be made of green steatite.

Max rummaged in his records and said perplexedly:

—There's nothing written about it here.

Sensei only smiled mysteriously. Max flicked through the records again.

—Well, doesn't matter. Look at the pattern. Referring to your description of the processes taking place in one's brain during the spiritual practice, here hypothalamus is represented in a form of an ancient dragon, say, the external Guard, in a double form besides, which opens the door for epiphysis stimulation. Remember, you've said that in yoga this association is connected with a snake ascending along one's spine... Have I understood correctly that these images on the goblet

mean cipher knowledge?!

—What can I say? — Sensei smiles. — I'm glad that this time my words haven't turned into just another air vibration for you. Yes, it's true. The goblet pattern depicts the entrance to a Portal through hypothalamus and epiphysis stimulation.

Max smiled as well, fully pleased with himself. He looked into his records again.

—There's also written that "... as the decoded legend on it says, the goblet was dedicated to ..." some Ningishidza...

Eugene, listening to this conversation, grinned.

— Here's a fine kettle of fish! The twenty-second century B.C., and Georgians were already there! I never knew they were so ancient.

— Not Ningishidza, but Ningishzida, — Sensei corrected, smiling.

Max read the word attentively.

—Exactly!

—That's it! — Eugene complained jokingly. — Such little inattentiveness causes big, I'd say fatal, historical mistakes of the "brightest" minds...

Everybody laughed.

—Oh, please, — Max said huffily and continued the interrupted story. — In short, this Ningishzida, — he articulated, — was a local god of spring, healer and fertility protector. He was also called a "master of the forest of live", a "master of surplus water". And I've found in the encyclopedia that this Ningishzida..., — he glanced into the writing-book and read, — "is a htonic deity, a son of Ninazu, the underground kingdom god who's called a "servant of w faraway land", a guard of

evil demons exiled to the underground, a god, protector and patron of Gudea”. Furthermore, it’s considered that, under ancient Sumerians’ concept, Ningishzida is an envoy of the Great Mother-Earth to whose estate in springtime he brings moisture and warmth from the heaven from Ningarsu. That is he’s a mediator between Earth and Heaven. And that Ningarsu or Ningirsu is supposedly one of gods, a son of god Enlil who brings up storm-clouds with winds from the mountains.

—What, what?

Now it was Sensei’s turn to get surprised. He couldn’t restrain himself and began to laugh.

—This is how it’s written here, — Max said in confusion, running through the record lines and thinking he had mistaken in names again.

—Oh, those fibbers! — Sensei commented, laughing. — “Ahtonic deity”... Clowns! Ningishzida, speaking in Russian, was simply Sokrovennik, and Ningarsu was Mezhanin.

—And who are those? — Max wondered.

—Mezhanin is a person having access to Shambala through the Threshold and communicating directly with Mahatmas. And Sokrovennik is a disciple of Mezhanin, also possessing certain spiritual knowledge. He is able to attend only the Threshold of Shambala... “Ningishzida” in Sumerian means “the master of pure (holy) tree”. Better to say, he possessed some knowledge of Shambala science. “Ningarsu” is translated as “the main sower”, later they started translating it as “the supreme ploughman”, “the master of agriculture”. Enlil is one of the names of Mahatma belonging to the seven of Shambala Boddhisatvas.

Mac thought for a while, reread the previous sentences and said:

—As a matter of fact, for sure. The information is apprehended quite differently from such standpoint. I actually wondered right at the start why there's such a primitive test attached to the picture of the goblet having such earnest patterns on it.

—Well, Max, these images became earnest for you only recently, too. Still a week ago you'd vouchsafe them no attention, having flicked through the page, and only might have thought how naïve the ancients had been. It's always like this: for crowd such information is given in entertaining associative images whereas for versed people it's given as knowledge for internal work.

—I'd like to ask also the following. Why are there two twisted snakes depicted on the goblet, ascending the baton?

—Well, firstly it shows the specific moments of epiphysis stimulation during the spiritual practice... Secondly, two snakes in Oriental symbolism belong to one of Shambala sign symbols translated as “the Threshold”. And, thirdly, prior to the period of complete anthropomorphism...

—I haven't got it, what? — Max asked to repeat.

—Representation of human forms... So, in ancient times gods were depicted in animal forms. And a serpent was one of the major symbols. Two twisted serpents meant “bringing abundant fruit”, i.e. personified the most fertile form of life. And each person got one's own notion from that definition, in accordance with one's inner evolution level.

Max rummaged in his records once again.

—Besides, I’ve an ancient legend about Gilgamesh, a Sumerian and Akkadian mythical hero.

—Well, he’s not that mythical, — Sensei mentioned like among other things.

Max paused awaiting Sensei would add something, but he was silent.

—In general, — Max continued, — according to the myth, there was a man named Ut-Napishti who had obtained a great gift of immortality from gods. He revealed a “secret word” to Gilgamesh about the eternal youth flower and advised him to dive to the ocean floor in order to pick that plant of immortality. Gilgamesh did so, but his imprudence ruined him. On his way home he saw a water basin. While Gilgamesh was bathing in it, a snake stole the flower and then, having shed its skin, grew younger right away. Whereas Gilgamesh remained mortal just like the entire mankind.

—Perfectly correct. This myth as you call it was described in the Epic of Gilgamesh, a piece of Babylonian culture. At that, the poem itself is rooted in the pre-written period of Mesopotamia. As a matter of fact, Gilgamesh was a completely real man, the fifth ruler of the first dynasty of Uruk, a Sumerian city-state. And “the eternal youth flower”, which the ancients also called “the immortality plant”, “the immortality herb”, was nothing else than lotus the seeds of which preserve germinating power for thousands of years. Ut-Napishti’s knowledge was indeed revealed to Gilgamesh. Working on his internal, he became able to attend the depth of his consciousness and perceived a lot. However, he failed to pass the Guard-Serpent, i.e. to overcome his animal nature. Therefore,

he remained mortal.

You see, on your way life puts bars so various that even hard to imagine. And they are needed only to stop you. The higher a person ascends spiritually, the grosser those bars may be. And if the person doesn't care a damn for them, they simply vanish like a mirage, like an illusion. They actually don't exist at all. Yet, when a person is entrapped by his or her animal nature, it evidences that he or she is material, is in conflict with oneself and does not fully belong to the spiritual. When the person gives up, it means he or she does not deserve abandonment of the reincarnation circle...

—It's also said here, — Max said, — that it is one of the first written documents in history where a snake's immortality is mentioned.

—Well, let's assume it is one of the first notorious.

—Listen, I've also found a Greek myth about a snake. It says that Zeus, the supreme god, presented a miraculous remedy for eternal youth to people. But, instead of carrying this precious gift themselves, people loaded it on a donkey which passed its burden to a snake. Since then people carry the heavy old ages weight, while snakes enjoy eternal youth, gaining knowledge and wisdom with years.

—Well, let's say it's a Greek version of the myth about Gilgamesh.

—Most probably, — Max nodded. — There's another Greek myth telling nearly the same... Here! "Once, Asklepios was invited to the palace of Minos, the legendary Cretan king, son of Zeus and Europa, in order to resuscitate his dead son. He saw a snake on his staff and immediately killed it. But another

snake appeared with a curative herb in its mouth and enlivened the killed. Asklepios used the same herb and succeeded in resuscitation of the dead”. It is further said here that he healed human diseases with this herb. In a different version of the myth, Asklepios was invited to Glavk stricken by a lightning. During examination of the patient, a snake crawled into the room, and he killed it with his staff. A second snake immediately appeared with a herb in its month and brought the killed back to life. Asklepios healed Glavk with the same herb and added it to his arsenal”. They make a conclusion here as if Asklepios found that same herb which Gilgamesh had lost and gave it back to serve people.

—Exactly “as if”, — Sensei responded to Max jokingly. — If and if only, and if not for, one would be a general long ago, — and he added, turning to Volodya: — You see how people start interpreting the antiquity with time. This is precisely what we’ve been talking about.

Max saw Volodya’s silent agreement and hurried to continue his topic so that the conversation would not take a different course.

—As I’ve understood the snake symbol was worshiped from the earliest times, since there was a whole cult. It turns out, still in the matriarchy epoch when people used to live in groups, kins or tribes, the snake was one of popular totems. It was particularly spread in the Ancient East. The Mother-Earth as well as bull and snake images related to her were the main goddess there. Snakes were highly respected in the Tripole culture. According to archeological investigations, reptilian tracery was one of prevalent subjects in Tripole orna-

ments of the matriarchy epoch. At that, there were solitary and paired snakes twining around the Great Mother's breast. They assumed to have carried out protecting, guarding functions. The Tripole people regarded snakes as mediators between Heaven and Earth, as envoys of their unity.

Sensei kept silence, in no way responding to what Max was telling with such an enthusiasm.

— I've also noted that, in the first ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, the fertility cult was interlaced with water element idolization, with the idea of a dying and reviving god of grain and, again, with totemic bull and snake images. At that, snakes were called "living near the spring". So I thought, if information is encoded in images, the "spring" should in principle mean "the pure knowledge"... And then some other interesting facts cropped up. In Babylon, a snake was called nothing else than "a child of the Earth goddess", in Europe — "the life of the Earth", and snakes were often depicted as an ornament on kings' and pharaohs' crowns. Yet, what is most interesting is that many nations of the world had similar conceptions. By the way, "life" and "snake" in Arabic are pronounced equally — "el hai". And there is same coincidence in languages of many Indian tribes...

This information made no expected impression on Sensei either. And so, Max decided to state his last "weighty arguments".

— By the way, I've discovered that ancient Egyptians had a legend that the heavenly water situated in the upper Heaven above the sun and stars was guarded by the Great Serpent of Apop. You can imagine what information is disclosed if we

translate this legend into the language of knowledge of the internal! If “serpent” is the Guard “water” is the spring of knowledge and “land” is our mind.., — Max was nearly breathless with his discoveries, while Sensei just quietly smiled. — This same legend says that, exactly by Apop’s will the heavenly water is being poured, fertilizing the land. This Serpent was also considered an embodiment of darkness and evil, a perennial enemy of Ra, the sun. And in some legends this Serpent comes out as a water absorber. And, most interesting, this same thing is found in ancient Indian legends, but there Apop’s role is played by demon Vritra, a snake-type creature which was an opponent of Indra, the main heaven god. At that, Vritra is not only a heavenly moisture guarder, but also a creature regulating supply of water and the sun, and regulating natural elements.

I have discovered so much there! There are plenty of information about a water absorbing snake which “blocks up the heavenly moisture flow” also in African, Mongolian, Japanese conceptions. Not even to mention the Chinese. The latter since far antiquity worshiped Dragon as a master of moisture and wisdom. It embodies “yang”, the masculine nature merging with “yin” element, where “yang” was considered “fire” and “yin” — “water”. And, could you imagine, water is its external environment, while fire is its inner essence!

— I can imagine, — Sensei responded not without humour. — Chinese approached this subject very subtly and closely indeed.

— You see! That’s what I’m saying! I’ve been astonished that nations of nearly all continents – Europe, Asia, America,

Africa – regarded a serpent as an embodiment of the two opposite natures — good and evil. Remember you told about the centres in hypothalamus?! And, above all, there are plenty of legends telling how the serpent was defeated – by Apollo and Heracles in Ancient Greece, by George the Victorious in Christianity... Besides, — Max simply couldn't stop, — I've read in ethnography that various nations — Slavs, Greeks, Georgians and others preserve legends and fairy tales telling that a person eating snake's heart and liver was endowed with ability to comprehend animals' and birds' language as well as with clairvoyance and superhuman talents.

—Each legend remains a legend. Yet, not every fairy tale is a fairy tale, — Sensei grinned.

—Moreover, I've got very interesting information relating to Slavs. It turns out that Russian people wore serpentine guarders from the immemorial, and such guarders were considered being able to protect from all diseases and troubles. It's written that the serpentines origin is rooted in the remote thousands of years.

—Yes, they were used in Sumer and much earlier, — Sensei added. — They existed in the antiquity of which you've never even heard.

Max kept quiet for a while and then added:

—You know, the image on such serpentine guarder has interested me as well. The most ancient Russian serpentine guarders had a round shape. Seven- and twelve-head snakes or dragons, other monster guarders were depicted on one side. And on the other side there was...

—The sun with a triangle and an eye inside, — Sensei fin-

ished the sentence.

—Exactly! — Max said dazedly. — And later, when Christianity appeared, this antique symbol regarded as pagan was replaced with an Archangel image. So, together with snakes it became shaped as a peculiar combination of pagan and Christian elements... And what is this sign?

—It's the Shambala stamp.

—The Shambala stamp? — Eugene and Volodya asked almost in chorus.

—With Slavs? — Max uttered perplexedly.

—Why are you so surprised? — Sensei shrugged his shoulders. — The Slavs are a nation distinguished long before its birth and formation. In Slavs, a tremendous spiritual potential is concealed, capable of changing the whole world. Therefore, they are distinguished, say, from their birth with a Shambala sign. By the way, this sign can be found nearly in every church. Some Russian tsars were crowned under this sign.

—Impossible! — Max exclaimed in astonishment.

—Go ahead and refer to the official history. Even the last Russian tsar Nikolas II was crowned under the Shambala stamp. And it was considered the greatest honour...

—Yeah, poor Russia, — Volodya said with regretfully, thinking something. — Now it will hardly rise again as such a Powerful state. They have really knocked us out! The entire Slavic nation got beaten with a single punch.

— It's all right, Volodya. The flesh has been knocked out, but not the Spirit. Believe me, Russia will be reborn, and there will be Slavs' unification which will later be named the great. For it is said: "when the sun rises above Russia's head

for the second time, the Slavonic spirit will gain power and will start radiating in its purity and unity among nations”. And I think soon you’ll be personally watching how... Someone who had gained power will ascend the Russian throne. And the whole world will see him making his oath to the Slavic nation under the Shambala stamp.

— I hope God will allow this, — Volodya responded.

—God does allow. And not only allows, but also rewards, — Sensei uttered in thought. — By the way, this event will take place two months and eight days before a sign of the times predicted by the ancients.

—A sign of the times? — Max asked with curiosity. — What kind of a sign is it?

—Fall of fiery birds on Egypt which will take place eight years five months and six days before the world renewal...

At that point Max did not even think that day – the day of his personal discoveries, of touch with the past and the future – would impress him so much... Now he understood why Sensei was smiling so mysteriously during the entire conversation about his “grandiose finds”.

* * *

Time was flying impetuously like an arrow fired from a drawn bow. Nonetheless, Max was still residing in utopia of his illusions, thoroughly considering all “pros” and “cons” of Sensei’s philosophy. He was swaying on his mind’s swing light-headedly, admiring sometimes the spiritual height and sometimes the height of his animal nature, pleased his vanity

with the idea that he had his own opinion and even joked about the two sides' positions. He was fond of ratiocinating, of rummaging in essence. However, all such intellectual exercising were in fact only slight air oscillations arising during one's flight. Words were wasted the further the more often, mostly rending the air, but not touching the soul. His swing continued swaying despite the fleetingness of running days. And only seldom, when Sensei was uncommonly sincere communicating with Max, the latter began to understand a little more. Just such moments, the moments of the lost "paradise", were now emerging for him with incredible clearness.

* * *

He was sitting in a car together with Sensei, waiting for a meeting with one man regarding the Cassandra company issues. Max was enduring not the best days of his life, as it seemed to him. He was in a somber mood because of all this everyday fuss. Max recalled how several days before he had given up the Lotus Flower practice again, explaining it to himself in such a way that the practice exercising didn't amount to much for him. Moreover, he had plenty of issues at work which required urgent solution. At that, no matter how hard he tried to pay attention to and to resolve the issues, the number of those didn't decrease. Max became dejected over again, and again started to think of restarting spiritual practices seriously... He raised this very topic in conversation with Sensei, using the opportunity to talk to him in private.

— Why do I have no result in practices? — Max com-

plained. — I start exercising the Lotus and seem to have a surge of joy. But then...

He waved his hand.

— It's a natural process, — Sensei answered. — Many people experience the same thing. At first, everyone feels a surge of spiritual agitation, could say an emotional ascent and an extraordinary comprehension of the divine nature depth. For many, it seems so simple that they wonder why they haven't understood such elementary things before. That is a person is spiritually awaking. But... in a day or two a spiritual recession begins. The animal nature livens up. The person does not feel that agitation any more. Mean and dirty thoughts start attacking him or her, says all spiritual is nonsense, is a trickery. The person begins to think that it's all a marasmus, a stupidity, that he or she starts going crazy, to rave, nearly to have schizophrenia because he or she becomes different from others. Such person turns lazy to pray, to meditate, finding thousands of excuses that he or she is too tired or has no time... There arises a feeling of awkwardness, sometimes of a heavy guilt for the experienced moments of spiritual upsurge. Yet, towards whom the guilt is? Towards the own animal nature! Or certain problems begin pressing such person, some trouble happens. The person gets absorbed in that bustle. In this way, everything possible is being done in order to grab one's attention from the spiritual. And, yielding to such provocations, the person simply loses the battle with his or her own animal nature and completely forgets what took place just couple days ago.

Whereas a clever person will look inside himself or herself,

will try to understand why there is no more such spiritual intention, such bygone agitation and pleasure during spiritual practices. He or she will understand that it's simply the animal nature having livened up... And a stupid person will follow his or her matter's tastes. Nevertheless, after a while, when the animal nature's pressure abates, he or she will again rush to search for the spiritual, will start reading, rereading... Such person always needs examples, some proofs, some demonstration of spiritual abilities. All this will cause another mighty spiritual surge. This process may be compared with a release of adrenalin into one's blood during an excessive exertion. But later, when the action of such "hormones" finishes, the person again has a break-down during which he or she again surrenders to the animal nature. To avoid such recessions, one should clearly know a lot of things, should be aware of his or her position and be ready for the forthcoming competition. When such material barrier arises, it should be simply put away, say one should "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". The person should remain on the spiritual side and double-strengthen his or her urge. The goal is to come out of the situations fashioned by the animal nature with the preserved "flower". You should divert your attention from the imposed negative which will press down on you from every quarter. Attention should be diverted towards the inner love, the positive. You should have firm belief inside you because your faith is your future reality.

—It's difficult to maintain the inner love inside oneself, —
Max complained.

—Actually, it only seems to be difficult. Difficult because there are plenty of temptations around, because numerous thoughts start scrolling in your mind and you scatter your attention on those. But in reality everything is simple. Is it complicated for you to drink a glass of water? No. Would this distract you from a thought you're considering? No. Same is there... During his or her life, a human being seems to be running through a forest swarmed with the animal nature thoughts. And there are many tricks, catches, traps and dug holes in this forest. Nonetheless, the human being must run with open eyes, learn to avoid and to notice such traps, to understand that all those are not his or hers.

—Yeah, the animal nature hitches up strongly.

—Certainly. That is what it's supposed to do. Its aim is to bring you under its control, otherwise it will be under your control. It's a war, Max. Your war in which faith is your main weapon. A one who has chosen the spiritual path should just give up all vain illusions like "a mirage in the desert" as saints used to say. The one should learn to comprehend that this entire material world is merely an instant before eternity. But the trouble is that, at the beginning of this way, many people stumble over one and the same block: a person is not able to believe in infinity of the future existence, in the fact that there's an eternal life there and only a temporary life here. The person needs proofs, but when he or she gets such proofs it often becomes too late to change anything. Yet, if a person has enough power, he or she does not need any proof, feeling and understanding everything without that.

—And what kind of power do you mean?

—The power of soul. It's a small part of God inside a human being! But this part is, say, not activated. And our true choice is a catalyst for its activation. A person can become saint here, on Earth. A person who has overcome his or her animal nature and achieved enlightenment, does not die, but simply passes to God...

—What do exactly I do wrong? I'm not totally hopeless, am I? — Max joked.

—Not totally, — Sensei responded in a like humorous manner. — Hope, as they say, dies the last.

—But what is my problem really?

Sensei looked at Max wearily.

—Same as many others have. You enjoy watching the battle field from afar and commenting the battle, but not participating in it. Your doubts are not just a fly in the ointment. They are a whole dinosaur, because they not only spoil, but totally destroy all the best in you... You need to overcome your doubts, or they will draw you into slough. Cast them far aside! Live in a kind, good way, with God in your heart. Don't do anything wrong even if it's disadvantageous for you... A truly spiritual person does not really care for all these material problems, for they all are a mere mirage and illusion which will eventually fade away.

—But can one not care? How to live in the world then? Problems are to be resolved somehow. You cannot simply sit on your hands, especially if problems concern not only yourself, but your family as well.

—You haven't understood me. Problems should, of course, be resolved, however they shouldn't become a sense of one's

being. And the main thing is that, no matter what happens, no matter how many problems you face, it's important for you to remain a Human, because any trouble in your life is, first of all, nothing else than a test of your animal nature extent. Therefore, a spiritually steady person simply does not care for having certain difficulties from time to time. Such person deals with those, not permitting their enslaving supremacy in thinking. Whereas a stupid person yields to such provocation of the animal nature and permits to lead himself or herself like a donkey being lured on a carrot, not even noticing that he or she approaches the brink of a precipice. So, at bottom, any external problem which you take seriously is your inner problem, your personal internal conflict between yourself and your animal nature. Everything is inside you!

Max cheered up after these words and even held steadily on the positive wave for a certain while. But then Sensei's words got forgotten, and Max from mere habit became utterly absorbed in his everyday occupations, moving away from the spiritual and perplexing in the further tangled labyrinths of the animal nature's life.

* * *

The little girl started and opened her eyes.

—Sensei, how could this happen? I didn't suppose... How will I live with all this from now on?

He looked at his little child's body.

—Why are you taking it so hard? — Sensei encouraged him merrily. — You used to like wearing plait. Now you'll

fully enjoy it, even with a nice bow. And you don't need to care about bristle any more.

—Sensei, I am in no laughing mood. I'm serious!

—I'm serious, too.

—But really? How could this happen to me? I did try to follow the spiritual way...

—Exactly! You tried, but not followed, — Sensei said earnestly. — The spiritual way is not an amusement park. If you stepped on this way, you should approach the top and not demonstrate just a resemblance of walking — two steps forward and three steps back... You should be thankful at least for obtaining another body. It could turn out much worse...

Previously Max would certainly make a joke in response after hearing something like this, because he would regard Sensei's words as a jest, whereas now he had no doubts about the truthfulness of Sensei's words. But such awareness came across to him too late.

Max dropped his eyes. A slight shiver ran through his little body.

—I pity you, — Sensei uttered with grief. — If you had really wanted, you would be able to break free from the reincarnation circuit already in that life. You had such chance which only few got during their lives.

—But why..., why... — Max murmured in bewilderment.

—Why, why, — Sensei grinned bitterly. — You should have been more careful with your desires.

—Desires?

Max glanced at Sensei, and an episode from the past life recurred to his memory...

* * *

Once, during one of training classes, Sensei was explaining a meditation aimed at improving martial art skills. He casually touched upon the topic of clairvoyance, having mentioned that even an ordinary person could possess such blow skill. After training, the most curious guys began to question Sensei on such phenomenon as usual. Most of them naturally doubted its reality. Consequently, their conversation flew not in the direction of explaining the phenomenon itself, but rather touched corresponding examples from history. In the end Sensei gave up on those particularly doubting, being tired of proving what was quite evident. He proposed to receive evidence through an experiment. The point of the latter was as follows. Anyone could make a phone call to his friend, relative or acquaintance. Before such call Sensei would tell where that person was, what he or she was wearing and doing at that same moment.

The group became animated, discussing among themselves who would participate in the experiment. Then everybody moved to the coach's office where there was a telephone. Everything happened just like Sensei had said. Each next participant sat down opposite to him. Sensei closed his eyes, concentrated. Then he effortlessly announced corresponding information which the participant's subsequent telephone call proved true with striking accuracy. The most interesting thing was that the most impression was created upon those to whose friends they called. The other experiment spectators trusted

and, at the same time, distrusted such demonstration of phenomenal human talents. Each one wanted to get convinced in purity and reality of the occurring on his personal acquaintances. But Sensei demonstrated that only three thrice.

Max was among the spectators and, as usual, casted doubt on that Sensei's demonstration. Everything looked too simple to him. He heartily endeavoured to find his own logical explanation of what was happening. But, except an obtrusive idea that everything perhaps had been plotted in advance, nothing sensible came to his mind, although he doubted his own idea as well.

In a couple weeks Max recollected that Sensei's demonstration again because of an unforeseen incident. His neighbours' granddaughter got lost. The teenage girl together with her friend went to a discotheque and didn't return. Her friend was found dead in two days, with multiple knife wounds. What happened to the neighbours' grandchild, nobody knew. Relatives telephoned around all the city hospitals, morgues, reanimations without any result.

The girls' grandmother was a devout person and regularly attended church. However, in this situation she gave way to such despair that even decided to visit a fortune-teller. Right upon leaving the apartment, she ran across Max at the entryway. He asked out of politeness how the search was advancing. Instead of an answer, the old lady burst into tears and started talking on the sore subject.

—I don't really know what to do...Where to look for her? I'm going to an old fortune-teller now... People speak goodly for her. They say, she tells fortune very well. I know it's a sin.

I've never got involved in this, but now I have nothing else to do. My granddaughter is more important for me than myself and my own life. She's our single grandchild, you see.

—Why would you go to a fortune-teller? I have an acquaintance, my coach. He has demonstrated some clairvoyance things to us. If all this is true, of course, then he has quite good abilities. If you want, I can introduce you. And there won't be any sin, I believe. For all that, he's a doctor and a sportsman, not a fortune-teller.

—Oh, Maxim, sonny, please, introduce us if you can! For I'm going to her, and my heart is heavy like a stone... — the old woman started begging Max.

—OK, I'll take you to him. Though he has demonstrated some different method of clairvoyance, something might come out of it.

The old lady agreed to everything. They appointed a meeting, and the old woman returned home with a noticeable relief. In the evening, as he had promised, Max drove her to the gym in his car. The entire way he listened to hysterical lamentations about her granddaughter. When they arrived, Max proposed to wait for Sensei outside, hoping this would somewhat calm her down. But she would not grow quiet even there, attracting passers'-by attention. When Max saw Sensei arriving, he even had a sigh of relief.

Having alit the car, Sensei confidently made his way directly to them as if he knew that Max had brought this lady just to meet him. This first peculiarity slightly surprised Max, but he hardly paid attention to it, saluting Sensei and explaining the situation. Instead, another peculiarity struck him, having

somewhat affected Max's Ego. He was standing and talking about the trouble having happened in his neighbour's family, but he had a feeling he was telling everything to himself, because nobody was listening to him at all. Sensei was looking into the old woman's eyes. She was looking at him, not saying a word, although just five minutes before it had been impossible to manage her impetuous sobbing. A non-verbal dialogue seemed to be taking place... The old woman started to tremble gently. Her skin became covered with goose pimples. The tears slowly streamed down her cheeks. After a minute of such uncommon mutual eye-to-eye looking, the lady said with an entreaty in her voice:

—I shall give up my life for her, if only she'd return alive.

Continuing to explain the situation, at that very moment Max stopped short. He felt himself not wanted there, but kept on standing as if rooted to the ground. He was wondering himself how this all would end. Meanwhile, the old woman repeated her request:

—I shall give up my life for her, if only she'd return alive...

—You're asking for a wrong thing, lady, — Sensei uttered in an unusual voice. — You should think of the eternal life, not the temporary.

—It's my life which is already temporary. And she has still so many years ahead...

—They are a mere instant.

—An instant for me, but she could live and live...

Sensei lowered his gaze as if deliberating something. An unnatural silence set in so that Max's ears even started ringing. Sensei looked at the woman again.

—All right, go. Be it your way, — and he said addressing to Max: — Take her home.

Then he turned around and went to the gym without saying goodbye. Max only caught how, moving away from them, Sensei uttered in a hushed tone as if speaking to himself: “They listen, but don’t hear”.

Max drove the lady back, being slightly puzzled after that entire very strange scene. It seemed to him that he had listened to that dialogue sort of in an alien language. He saw everything, but comprehended nothing. The old woman was quietly praying half-way, then she got engrossed in thought for long and, when they were already approaching the house, started crying again, reducing herself to hysterics. For the umpteenth time that day Max regretted he had got involved with her at all and had offered his help.

The subsequent night turned out to be restless. At half past three in the morning the old lady’s husband came running to Max to call an ambulance, since the woman had had a heart attack. However, before the ambulance arrived the old lady already died. Everything happened so fast Max simply didn’t have time to believe and to become aware of the fact that a person to whom he had spoken the day before was not alive anymore. Somebody else’s death always shocks people reminding of their own short sojourn in this world. The morning news staggered Max still greater: the girl had been found. There was a telephone call from a neighbouring town hospital. It turned out that she had been there unconscious throughout that entire time and had come to her sense only that fateful morning.

Max was astonished. He tried to conceive everything that had happened over the last day. All those events looked quite natural at first sight. The old lady had been indeed extremely nervous during the last days... And she had had a heart attack once before. While the girl... If somebody had had the sense to call to the neighbouring town, she would have been found, and her grandmother would have been all right. Everything seemed to be logical, if not for that strange conversation which Max had witnessed. He remembered that the old woman had begged the girl's life in exchange for her own. That was what exactly happened. And it gave Max no rest... He was going for the next training class to Sensei, hoping that the latter would give him intelligible explanations of such a puzzling event. He met Sensei at the doorway to the gym in order to speak to him in private and told him what had happened.

—No one could do anything about it. Each person makes his or her own choice, — Sensei said pensively.

He looked around and strangely uttered in a form of either a question or a statement:

—Well, is this instant really worth the eternity?

Max also looked around in bewilderment.

—I don't understand.

Sensei glance at him and said with sorrow:

—You see, Max, now and then some people get a chance to ask for what they need. Yet, for some reason, they choose perishable momentary desires, trampling on the eternity.

Max thought for a while and said once again:

—Sensei, I still don't understand. What do you mean?

—Nothing, Max. You'll understand everything when the

time comes...

Sensei was right: the time came for Max, too. Now he finally grasped the stunning sense of those words. Indeed, what had he troubled about then? What did he crave for in his by-gone life? Reviewing his desires, to his horror he realized that everything he had asked God for during that life related to his former body: momentary luck, successful resolution of some issues, money, health etc. Nearly all was added up to indulging and exalting his mortal Ego. But he had asked for a dust indeed, not for his soul and the real eternal life! And what had he remained with? All his material possessions dispersed like a mirage. He now found himself in a different body, in a different place, moreover under far worse conditions. He was overtaken by just what he had feared the entire life. And he had feared, first of all, to appear in a state of a loser, in a state of brutal deception over his precious personality. Right now he felt himself exactly in such state. And the main thing was that he had ended up in this shit because of his own animal nature which had cleverly and subtly substituted the Real Life conception for him. Max felt himself faint of such thoughts. He now regarded such squandering of desires as an unforgivable foolishness. But why had he looked right through this before? And he had seemed to be confident of doing everything right... Suddenly, he recollected one more conversation.

* * *

Once, talking to Sensei, Max heard the words which had then astounded him and inclined his consciousness towards

the soul anew. Max was jokily telling about a city march of krishnaites dressed in their distinctive clothes. Sensei responded to his speech in a completely unexpected manner, having turned it from a joke to a serious conversation, and it surprised Max a lot since generally Max's jokes had ended with Sensei's cheerful comments.

— Many people play faith in God, but in reality do not believe, do not live in this faith. Many of them pull on themselves diverse distinctive attributes, clothes, but all this is mostly a mere acting. But the true faith in God is particular inner purity. A truly spiritual person would never engage in window-dressing because his or her genuine internal treasure is his or her secret known to God. A person following the spiritual way would not show off in front of crowd, waving a flag to demonstrate what a believer he or she is! Never! The most such person may allow himself or herself to do is to ask or to prompt a direction, or to share experience with a fellow traveler, but nothing more, for people who go to God and truly believe don't brag about their faith, don't play any roles... They clearly understand what this world is like and what uniting mind is behind it.

—Uniting mind?

—Yes. There are individual minds, a collective spiritual mind, and there is a uniting animal mind of humanity which is managed, by the way...

—How? Like an ant hill or a herd of buffalos is managed during migration?

—Approximately, — Sensei answered, grinning. — The animal nature is the animal nature indeed. This uniting animal

mind of humanity exists according to its certain laws. It has its own internal and external hierarchy. And people mostly live inside the skilled organization of this animal mind subordinating them to its system, imposing game rules and existence conditions upon them. And, in principle, when a person follows the spiritual way, when he or she lives with God inside, he or she does not advertise it, understanding that it would immediately evoke the animal mind's aggression. And it's a natural reaction. The animal mind is a sworn enemy of all spiritual. Therefore, highly spiritual people like, for example, Bodhisattvas born in physical bodies, having fallen into the system of social animal existence, endeavour to pose as ordinary persons for the external world, not giving themselves away, at that remaining the very Essence inside and residing truly with God and in God.

* * *

Strangely, Max hadn't fully understood Sensei's words then, but now he perfectly realized why. Because he then had been himself living in the system of all-human animal mind's values, not even noticing it. While the case was obvious. Even now he perhaps came to understand, only because his soul kept latest after-death memories, fresh sorrow of the reincarnation, and the "there" and "here" notions were too striking different. Against the background of everything he had lived through, Max viewed the world totally otherwise now and reinterpreted what Sensei had once said. He was sorry for the past, scrolling in his memory the instant named "life". If only his mind then had not been so vain and egoistic, if only he had

found courage not to play faith, but to really believe, if only he had not constantly postponed spiritual practices for later... If only, if only, if only... There were mere illusory conditions and no actual, practical result. Yet, he had been given a CHANCE so many times! His soul had awoken so many times after conversations with Sensei! He had needed to support it, to assert it, to defend from the animal and to break free... And he had let that awakening wither on the vine through his doubts, and had fallen into the dirt of the material over and over again. And everything had again gone in circle. All those moments in corporality, in the animal nature's grip, now seemed to be such nonsense, such waste... He felt severe pain for such a suicidal spending, for dull squandering of the tremendous vital power — this jumping-off place to the eternity. And his soul had been thrilling so rapturously, residing close by the One who had already reached those heights... And, all of a sudden, Max regained his sight in full. Sensei was nobody else than... Two culminating points for the past life recurred to Max's memory to the smallest detail. These were the moments of his highest spiritual ascent. Now, contemplating them from the position of what he had experienced, Max realized those had been the exact moments when he had been very close to revelation of his soul. The latter had not been simply trembling – it had been knocking and forcing the door of his mind, had been shouting with all its might in order for him to hear and to direct his power of attention towards it. Paradoxically, being in the different body, he soundly sensed that delightful soul's flight. And just now he realized the entire bitterness of his loss, the loss of the great

chance to find his Nirvana — the eternal life in God, in absolute Love.

* * *

That trip to Kiev became unforgettable for Max. His memory recalled it to the minutest detail. Together with Sensei they went there to obtain license documents for their company. They spent half a day haunting thresholds of various authorities, and only after lunch they managed to break away from that bureaucratic bustle and to have a walk around the ancient city founded, as historians assumed, as long ago as in the fifth century to be the centre of East-Slavic polyan tribe.

In old times Kiev was called the city of three hills and later – the city of seven hills, for its unique location on the right-bank steeps of the Dniپر river. The further civilization was advancing, the more hills it occupied. The city managed to preserve its attractiveness even during the scientific and technological progress epoch, combining modern structures not only with ancient buildings, but with primeval nature plots as well. Kiev has always been and still remains one of the most enigmatical cities on Earth.

Max was surprised to see so many churches, ancient temples and representatives of diverse religious confessions. When he expressed his amazement to Sensei, the latter just smiled mysteriously and responded:

— The throne is never vacant.

Old Orthodox churches were certainly prevailing in Kiev.

It's understandable. Despite all the mishmash people had brought into history throughout centuries, the christening of Russia did begin exactly from Kiev which was then the capital of the Old Russian state... Having gazed long enough at architectural monuments, Sensei suggested Max to visit the Kiev Pechersk Lavra. There was no problem with finding this object of note, for any Kiever explained the way in such detail as if explaining it to close relatives.

The Kiev Pechersk Lavra nobly resided on two steep hills buried in verdure. A magnificent view of the Dniper opened up before one's eyes from there. Just watching this picturesque heavenly spot could take one's breath away already. A seven-metre stone wall had been constructed around the Lavra once, apparently for fortification purpose. And behind it there appeared a whole galaxy of glaring church domes among which the golden dome of the Great Lavra Bell-tower specially stood out.

Max and Sensei bought tickets to the Upper Lavra — the museum included in the UNESCO World Heritage list, and came in through the central entrance. The main gate located under the Troitska Church which had been constructed in a form of a peculiar arch. Sensei scarcely stepped under the arch together with Max when suddenly a sonorous chiming of Lavra bells started ringing out. Several tourists and some passing-by monks glanced at the Great Bell-tower in amazement, stopped and began to cross themselves. Max gave a start at the unexpected ringing.

— Very nice chiming. I've never heard the bells ringing like this. Is it a holiday today?!

— Well, it depends for whom, — Sensei responded in an unusually soft, melodious voice.

Max looked at Sensei and was astonished with the way his face had changed. At that moment, they had just walked out to light from under the Troitska Church arch. Sensei seemed to have transformed. His eyes were shining with an unusual light, radiating mighty power of some harmony and inner purity. He slightly bowed as if saying “hello” to this place. An invisible grace was emanating from Sensei, arousing a felling of extraordinary pacification and tranquility inside Max. His state reminded blissful quiet joy. He didn’t even want to speak at that moment. Max deeply inhaled and looked around. There was only beauty in everything. He didn’t understand then why he had felt so good all of a sudden. “Probably, it’s such a special place here”, — Max thought. In that uncommonly elevated state it seemed to him that he had got into a totally different world, the world of unreal existence where he could even easily touch the sky with his hand. In his joy, having noticed a nearest icon store, he ran to buy everything he liked, while Sensei, waiting for him, was contemplating everything around, and people in particular. Having enjoyed Lavra’s hospitality each in his own way, they started the sightseeing.

There were so many interesting things in the museum territory! Besides the old churches and the monks’ hostel, there located a museum of historical valuables where diverse golden and silver Scythian adornments were demonstrated, a theatre museum, a musical museum, a museum of cinematography, a historical library, a museum of books and typography, a museum of folk ornamental art, not to mention numer-

ous shops and stores selling everything possible to be sold, starting from icons and books down to jewelry and food. In contrast to Max, Sensei passed round all the latter “points of interest” in the Upper Lavra without any enthusiasm, having lingered on the old churches, books and an observation site from which there opened up a gorgeous view of the Lower Lavra and the famous river named differently in different times — Borisphen, Slavutich, Dnepr. Sensei was standing there a long while, thoughtfully looking somewhere into the distance, while Max was shopping. In the end they went to the holy of holies — the Lower Lavra territory where, properly speaking, the Kiev Pechersk Lavra had originated from.

Having come down along quite a steep slope paved with stones, they found themselves in a monastery street. There was a variety of book and icon shops. In the end of the street, there was a free entrance to the Lower Lavra territory, provided for believers. Cash desks for those who wished to have a guided tour of the caves were located not far off. Max suggested Sensei to join a group which was just being formed. A man of around forty years old happened to be their guide. Having gathered an ample number of people, he led the group down a wide paved street, past the monastery garden. They walked up to the Church of the Exaltation of Cross where there was an entrance to the Near Caves, and the guide started telling.

— We are now in the territory of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra monastery which has endowed the Orthodoxy with many more saints than any other cloister. From the earliest times, this place was called an abode of the Holy Spirit, the Earthly

Heaven. The Pechersk monastery's history dates back to the XI century when there were created the main points of interest of nowadays Lavra — Antony's and Theodosius's caves, or the so called Near and Far Caves according to their remoteness from the Uspensky (Assumption) Cathedral. 1015 is considered to be the foundation year...

In accordance with the chronicles, a person named Antipa from the city of Lubichi situated in Chernigov land, conducted a pilgrimage to one of Afon monasteries. He adopted monasticism there and got the name of Antony. At that time, Christianity was merely arising in Russia. Antony was sent by the Afon monastery abbot to Kiev to found a new cloister. According to the Kiev Pechersk Lives of the Fathers, Antony visited Kiev twice: in 1013 and in 1051 when there was the alternation of power. During his first visit, he stayed in the Varangian Cave which exists until now and is a part of Theodosius's caves. The second time he settled in a small cave on this same hill. Due to discrepancies in the old chronicles, it's impossible to say who had dug it. One way or another, Antony started living there, extending his cave and praying for his soul's redemption. The rumour about the saint cave recluse possessing extraordinary healing and prophecy talents began to spread about the Russian land. People started coming to Antony, and some of them stayed to live together with him. The cave was continually deepened and soon turned into a whole labyrinth of the Far Caves with cells and churches. Around the year 1062, Antony appointed Varlaam to be the monastery abbot, while he himself, craving for solitude, moved to the neighbouring hill. There he started to dig a new

cave which later was called the Antony's. The old monk died in 1073 and was buried in the Near Caves...

Theodosius became famous for having established a ground monastery on the cave hermitage spot. He became the Pechersk Monastery abbot in that same year 1062, in view of Varlaam's transfer to a different place. Saint Theodosius was quite famous religious and political figure of his times. He was born in 1036 in the town of Vasilkov near Kiev in a well-off family which owned large estates. Still being a child, he was fond of reading divine books. In his youth he was often beaten by his mother for attempting to run away from home to the Holy Land. Upon his last escape he managed to reach Kiev where he settled in Antony's caves. In 1058 Nikon made him a monk. Having become an abbot, Theodosius was the first to implement the Monastery Statute imposing on each monk the strict discipline and total obedience to the abbot as well as renunciation of all property forms. Rest of Kievan Rus' cloisters later followed this example. Theodosius ruled in Pechersk monastery with an iron hand. Insubordination, failure to fulfill duties and missions were regarded as terrible sins and were subject to punishment. During Theodosius's abbacy, all major temple buildings and cells were constructed. Moreover, the St. Stephan's House and Church for patients and beggars were built close to the monastery. He died in a year after Antony, in 1074, and was buried in the Far Caves. The particular role of Theodosius's activity for the Orthodoxy is proved by the fact that he was the second, judging from chronicles, saint canonized in 1108.

—And who was the first? Antony? — someone in the group asked.

—No. The first ones ranked as saints in 1020 were martyr princes Boris and Gleb who had been assassinated in 1015 by the order of prince Sviatopolk. At those times Russia was pagan, so the new Christian faith was being spread with difficulty. Thus, the canonization of Theodosious, whose abbacy had been marked with the conversion of a cave cloister into the first monastery in Russia, strengthened the Kiev Pechersk monastery's position as of the leading centre of Kievan Rus' in contrast to the metropolitan's chair. Expecting this canonization, Nestor the Chronicler, the Tale of Bygone Years author, wrote the Live of Theodosius of Pechersk. Nestor's undecayable relics are also kept here in the Near Caves. And now we shall go directly to the cave...

The group entered the Church of the Exaltation of Cross built in 1700, as the guide explained. Descending underground, each person lit a church candle, for the caves were illuminated only with little lamps placed beside the saints' icons. Such gloom plunged Max into a special mood of mixed curiosity, fear and some mysteriousness of the milieu.

— The current length of the Near Caves is three hundred fifty-two metres. The length of the Far Caves together with the Varangian Caves is four hundred eighty-nine metres. The caves were dug in the layer of porous sandstone. Thanks to this natural material, the temperature inside the Lavra caves is constant throughout the entire year — plus ten-twelve degrees Celsius. The depth of the caves is four to twelve metres. The width of the passages is half a metre, the ceiling height is two metres... Along the passage there are arcosoliums, original recesses of about two-metre long, in which there are tombs with

relics of the Lavra saints, placed under glass. The tombs are mostly made of cypress. Cypress has been considered a holy tree since Christ was crucified on the cypress cross. Near the tombs, as you can see, there are portraits and alight icon-lamps. Icon-lamp are considered a symbol of souls...

The guide started selectively telling in short about who lay where, and what each saint had become famous for. Believers among the group crossed themselves and reverently kissed the glass coffin lids. Others just examined portraits and dried dark-brown hands lying on brocade-covered remains of the saints in some coffins. The group attended the cell and the underground church of Antony of Pechersk, from where, according to legends, there started subterranean passages under the Dniپر and to the Upper Lavra, to the underground Church of Varlaam of Pechersk, to tombs of other saints.

— And here you can find the undecayable relics of Athanasius the Hermit famous for his miraculous recovery in the cave. He lived in hermitage for twelve years thereafter. In general, hermitage was voluntary. It was considered that through renunciation of all mundane comforts and through incessant prayer one could win the grace in Heaven. A monk entered a cell. The entrance was hermetically blocked up with bricks. Food mostly consisting of bread and water was served through a single remaining small window. And, if a monk bringing food to the hermit didn't receive an answer to his request of blessing, i.e. if the blessing hand didn't reach out from inside the cell, the monk doubted whether the hermit was still alive. The cell was unsealed, and they checked if the monk was living or dead. If he was dead, his body was either

left in the cell which was converted into a burial recess or extracted from there, wrapped up into a wide and long cloth and exposed in the recess for worship... Monks spend different time periods in hermitage. A hermit sometimes died after several months, sometimes lived there for several years...

The group walked down the winding passage labyrinths. It was impossible to get lost there, since many passages were blocked, and there couple monks being on duty.

— In this crypt lie the relics of Ilya Muromets, the really existed, famed epic hero born in Murom city. Admittedly, he was initially buried in the St. Sophia's Cathedral. His relics were transferred to the Kiev Pechersk Lavra in the mid XVIII century when the Clerical Synod, having reviewed his life course, ranked him among the saints. He's considered a patron of all men. Men come to his tomb to pray and to ask Ilya for filling them with strength and energy... There exists a special list describing whom each saint patronizes. For instance, in this small tomb beside the wall there lie the undecayable relics of infant John. He was killed in 983 together with his father Theodor. This infant is reputed to be a patron of all little children, and also to help women suffering from sterility. On the left there's the tomb of Lucas, the Pechersk householder...

At that moment Max came up to the opposite wall and began scrutinizing a wall image of the Mother of God. He quietly called Sensei.

—Look! Mother of God has “the Third Eye”.

—It is...

Sensei didn't have time to finish because the guide just

came up.

— And here lies Nikon the Dry who died in 1101. He became famous for being taken as prisoner in 1096 by Polovtsian khan Boniak and for being crippled in captivity. But he was carried to the Pechersk monastery by a miracle... Besides, you can see a fragment of a wall-painting here. This is another enigmatical mystery of the Lavra caves. The painting was discovered by mere chance during the last archaeological dig in 1978 and caused much amazements and discussions. It was always considered that monastic underground walls in antiquity had been simply of sandstone or later covered with bricks, plastered and whitewashed. Thus, nobody suspected such frescos could be found under the whitewashing layer. These paintings presumably date back to XVIII century. However, the greatest surprise was that this painting had been drawn on top of a more ancient painting. In particular, we see such one now. Mother of God is depicted here, holding the infant God in her arms. The XVIII century painting was laid on top of the earlier one. This was discovered upon restoration. Fragments of these frescos have been cleared only partially, although it's easy to notice they have a sequel under the wall whitewashing... And now let's move to the underground Church of Presentation of the Most Holy Mother of God in the Temple... It's one of the most enigmatical places in the Near Caves...

When they entered the church, Max bent to Sensei's ear and whispered delightedly:

—Look! There is the Shambala stamp in the iconostasis centre, — he pointed to a triangle with an eye inside it, sur-

rounded with the sunbeams. — Why is it here?

—It's a special place, — Sensei responded as quietly. — Furthermore, in these caves there lie the relics of Boddhisatva Agapit...

—Whose relics? — Max asked to repeat.

—I'll tell you later...

—In this place an unusual energy radiation has been detected, — the guide continued. — Here lie the undecayable relics of saint Agapit who was one of the most famous doctors in XI centuries... We don't know when and where he was born. It's assumed he was from Kiev. Agapit was one of the first who came to Antony to adopt monasticism. According to the Kiev Pechersk Lives of the Fathers, Antony appointed Agapit his deputy in the wonder-working healing skill. Agapit was a model of humanness verging on self-sacrifice. He cured heavy internal diseases, treating everybody — both poor and rich. He even cured those whom already nobody agreed to treat. He wouldn't leave a patient until putting him or her on feet completely. He was called the God-born doctor because "God Himself had given him the healing talent"... Agapit was talented and competent doctor. He had a good knowledge of folk medicine, of Hippocrates's and Galen's works. He was fluent in Greek language... He always came where his help was needed. For his philanthropy and cordial attitude to patients Agapit gained unprecedented glory among people not only in Kiev, but far beyond its borders. He also healed Vladimir Monomakh, the Chenigov prince who had got seriously ill and was dying... Agapit passed away in October 1095. His mummified relics have remained preserved to our time...

In 1988—1990 scientists examined over fifty relics from the Near Caves, studied their anthropometrical and morphological characteristics. Anthropological measurements allowed to restore appearances of such saints as Agapit, Nestor the Chronicler, Ilya Muromets, Varlaam, Policarp... Moreover, Kievan bioenergetics researchers have ascertained that Agapit's relics possess stupendous bio-motive features, specifically they are growth accelerators which has been proved on diverse plants seeds. Besides, it has been discovered that the relics protect from radiation and have a strong bactericidal influence upon the air inside the Near Caves. Well, and the most interesting perhaps is the fact that already nowadays there have been detected several thousand cases of people's healing by Agapit's relics. Indeed, you can imagine what kind of spiritual healing power he had, given he continues curing people for already nine centuries after his death... And now let's move further along the passage. Concluding our tour...

A part of the group followed the guide, the other part clustered beside St. Agapit's coffin. Some were praying, some were just examining the underground Church of Presentation of the Most Holy Mother of God in the Temple. Max and Sensei were standing behind people, waiting for their turn to approach the tomb. A quietly dressed old woman with a walking-stick was standing beside them, holding a small suitcase. She had constantly lagged behind the group being heavily lame on her leg and endeavoured to kiss every tomb, whispering prayers. One could say from her face that it was very hard for her, since she obviously had to overcome acute pain. But her tenacity and inner strength of mind could indeed be en-

vied. Still earlier, during one of their marches around the cave, Max “sympathetically” noted: “The granny is a true champion, though she can barely walk...” Sensei responded as follows: “This lady is in deep faith... You can’t imagine what pain she suffers walking. She’s got a deforming arthritis of the hip joint”. “Really?!” — Max was astonished, turning round towards the woman. Now they were standing together, being nearly the last in the line to St. Agapit’s tomb.

When majority of people had left, Max approached the relics, while Sensei let the old woman pass forward. She looked at him with gratitude and murmured: “Thank you, son”. She came up to the tomb and started whispering a prayer. At that moment Max tried to read the St. Agapit’s prayer posted in a frame on the left wall. He wanted to ask Sensei something. However, having turned around, he saw Sensei standing with his eyes closed. His face was concentrated. Suddenly, Max felt unusually hot. First he thought it was his purely subjective sensation, but then he noticed several streams of sweat leaking down a forehead of a man standing close to him. A boy of around seven years old gently tugged at his mother’s sleeve and said quietly: “Mom, it’s become hot here”, to which his mother responded: “It’s good, son. It’s the Holy Spirit having descended to this cloister owing to our prayers”. The old lady began to cross herself strenuously, muttering the prayer. Max got such impression as if an unusual heat wave had rolled though his body towards Agapit’s tomb. At the peak moment of this unnatural tension a cry broke from the old woman: “Lord, please, forgive me!” Her walking-stick dropped down with a crash. All the people present gave a start and turned

round. Sensei fluently opened his eyes and made a deep breath. The old woman evidently got scared of such crash herself and, as if apologizing for breaking the silence, she jumped up lively and picked up her stick. Max looked at the old lady who had grown younger in her movements with an increasing amazement. The lady didn't realize right away what had happened. Then she examined herself in wonder and walked back and forth, touching her hip joint. Her eyes grew bright with tears. She was so moved she could not utter a word, but was just looking delightedly at her joint, then at the tomb, then at the people standing around. The latter were also silently gazing at her, not believing their eyes. The old woman ran up to Sensei who was the only person she had spoken to in the caves and began to jabber merrily: "I can walk, I can walk, I can't believe it, I can walk! It's been five years..." All of a sudden, she glanced into Sensei's eyes and fell silent, having lifted up her brows. She shifted her gaze to Agapit's portrait, then back to Sensei. And, as if having awakened, she said: "Oh, I am sorry. St. Agapit is still on my mind. It's such happiness! I'll go and buy more candles..." She ran to the holy relics, kissed the tomb, crossed herself and hurried to the exit, continually turning round to Sensei in wonder, happily crossing herself and praying. The remaining people including Max mobbed near the tomb. Sensei was still standing between the church columns.

—And your friend does look very much like Agapit, but in his young age, — a man standing next to Max said.

—Impossible! — Max tried to elbow his way to the portrait.
— Where?

—Here, look for yourself. Young man, I'm a professional painter and have an absolute memory for faces and images.

Max finally managed to scrutinize the portrait.

—Hem, indeed! Look... — Max turned to draw Sensei's attention to such resemblance.

However, he was not inside the church anymore. Max hurried to get out the mobbing group of people and caught up with Sensei already at the caves exit.

—Go there, look! Imagine, there's your portrait in the old age!

—I've seen, — Sensei said in an everyday tone, as if they were talking about the image he had known long ago.

They left the caves and found themselves inside the Church of the Exaltation of Cross. Their group had already dispersed. Max and Sensei walked around the church room, then went outside and moved towards the Far Caves. Max was still unable to forget what he had observed.

—I can't believe the old lady has recovered! But what if she's been a pretended sick person? Though, on the other hand, how could she be pretended if majority of people had already left! Yet, really, how has she managed?! Sensei, how?

—Well... Ordinarily. Faith is a great power... and a good conductor.

—This is clear. But how has it happened?

—You are such a pesterer, — Sensei said with with a note of humour in his voice. — You've heard: there were tests and examinations, and devices overloaded near those relics, etc...

—Yet, why haven't other people experienced such evident manifestation of the relics power? Most people have been

standing right near Agapit's relics.

—Well, still Jesus used to say that everyone would get according to one's faith.

Max understood this time he would not be able to wheedle a more detailed information of his interest from Sensei. So he didn't lose time and switched to another topic.

—What were you telling about Agapit? Was he a Bodhisatva? It means from Shambala?

Sensei nodded.

—Then, to all appearances, our guide has been interpreting the story you know in a different way, — Max continued alluding.

—Generally, yes. But it's not the guide's fault, — Sensei answered, enigmatically smiling.

—Where is a gap then?

—Agapit wasn't Antony's disciple. Rather vice versa. And not because of the age. Antony met Agapit at Afon, and Agapit was exactly the one to teach him the genuine skill of healing by means of prayers and herbs. However, it was not the main thing. Thanks exactly to Agapit, Antony was ordained into guardians of the Lotus Temple located in Kiev from the time immemorial... Having fulfilled his mission in the East, Agapit came to Antony's caves where he spent the rest of his terrestrial life in physical body. And the fact that recoveries take place here is solely due to the location of Agapit's relics inside which the Holy Spirit himself resided on Earth. No wonder other relics that have been lying beside him become curative. Here, anyone who addresses God with pure faith, regardless of religion he or she practices, will be re-

warded... — Sensei reflected on something and then uttered: — It's pity though that many people still keep asking not for the soul redemption, but rather for their bodies healing. For the Holy Spirit has the power to liberate souls. And bodies... are only clothes change...

Max was silent for a while and asked again:

—Where could a Lotus Temple appear from in those times in this place?

—This temple had been here long before those times, and it's still here.

—“Long before” means when? — Max attempted to clarify.

—In the times of the previous civilization of Alt-Landa.

—Atlantida?!

—Yes, — Sensei nodded. — At that time, Rigden Jappo's residence was situated almost in the middle of the Black Sea. There was no sea then. There was only a small lake with beautiful, picturesque shores... In those very times, an underground Lotus Temple was laid in this place, with a fragment of Chintomania as a source of power and a place of the future renaissance of humanity. This is the very reason why spiritual people are so attracted to this place to present day.

—But, if the temple is still here, does it mean there are its guardians? — Max asked with a gentle hint.

—Surely, if there is something to be guarded, it means there are guards, — Sensei answered in a similar tone. — Although this temple is anyway inaccessible for an ordinary person, in the same way as Shambala.

—Have you been there yourself? — Max wondered half in jest and half-serious, apparently expecting either to laugh to-

gether with Sensei should it be a joke, or to ask for seeing the temple should it be the truth.

Sensei smiled and answered in a similar tangled manner:

—Max, like I've said, it is inaccessible for ordinary people.

At that point they were approaching the Far Caves, the entrance to which located inside the Church of the Conception of St. Anne built in XVII—XIX centuries. On their own they walked around the cave galleries where there were also tombs with saints' relics of later ages. In a recess behind bars, in a closet covered with glass there were also the famous chrism heads of unknown saints. Max tried very hard, but still couldn't discern anything in candle light. Of course, he immediately had his say about falsification, to which Sensei responded: "Max, it is only your mind which needs an outward appearance in order to prove what does not need any proofs. Close your eyes and confide in your intuition. It will tell you much clearer where there's a falsification and where there's a genuine holy spring. If a person craves for God with his soul, it's difficult to deceive him, for he internally feels much more than his eyes see"...

Having walked out the caves, they stood on the hill slope for a while, peering at the beauty of surrounding nature. Then they started descending. Many monks of various ranks came across them since their cells as well as the Theological Seminary were situated nearby. Some higher-ranked monks drove by in fancy cars. Max observed such welfare, listened to everyday speeches of random passers-by dressed in black cassocks and said with a smile: "Maybe, I should become a priest. Judging by their faces, they are supported quite well

here”. At that moment, a skinny monk walked from around the corner. He was so old that definitely had been in monasticism from the very times of atheism. He was walking plunged in himself, and was incessantly stirring his lips in prayer. “This one is not like the others. He’s an exclusion”, — Max hurried to add. And Sensei responded: “Max, what do you expect from them? They are just as mere people as you are, with same troubles and issues in life. They simply study and do their job as you studied at the university and then went to work according to your qualification. These guys are ordinary people, whereas this monk is completely different. He truly follows the way to God. And the difference between him and them is huge, though they all wear identical clothes”.

Max and Sensei passed the Far Caves and went up the monastery street towards the exit. Meanwhile, the bells started going with their rolling chiming again. The street was quite crowded: some people were coming out the caves and some were just about to visit them. At the very entrance-exit, there stood several nuns who had arrived to the Lavra from remote convents. They were gathering donations. Handing out money to them, Sensei approached an old nun sitting on a stool due to her old age. Sensei hardly had the time to put money into her box when suddenly she roused herself, seized Sensei’s hand and fell to her knees, having toppled over the box with coins tinkling and falling around. “Bless, bless my soul!” Max who was walking alongside even instinctively plunged from her of such suddenness. Rest of people stopped at a distance and began curiously watching what was happening. Sensei tried to lift her, whispering something in her ear. The woman

first would not agree, but then lit up, half-rose and started crossing herself and whispering a prayer. A young nun who was standing not far from them ran up to her old sister and began to gather the scattered coins. When Sensei and Max walked substantially away from the old woman, Max somewhat came to his sense and uttered: “She has frightened me to death indeed! Is she a lunatic? She was sitting there quietly, not disturbing anybody, and then...! What has she wanted from you?” “Doesn’t matter”, — Sensei said reluctantly, apparently not willing to talk about it, and turned their conversation to everyday subjects.

* * *

Now Max realized how hard it had been for his soul to knock to him to be heard, even when his body had been in a state of the highest spiritual upsurge, for his mind had been evaluating the world through a prism of material being. It had been constantly persuading Max that it had been the only right reflection of reality. Now Max came to understand how distorting the mirror had been. But what was the use of such understanding now? It had been in his past life when had had a power to transform himself and a real chance to burst from the reincarnation circuit. Consequently, his animal nature had been so industrious in seducing him and dimming his eyes with its phantom illusions. Yet, he had needed only to change his vision angle, to remove all doubts and to rely fully on his spiritual nature instead of giving priority to his animal instincts. It’s so obvious now, and it had seemed so incredibly

hard then! He was painfully sorry for his own stupidity, for he had had not just a single chance... But he'd had many chances! He'd had lots of them during his life! It was easy to notice their quantity now. And there's no excuse for himself, while he indeed had got a fortune ticket then. The brightest of his lost opportunities recurred to Max's memory...

* * *

Max saw himself sitting on a wooden bench in a company of guys. They were inside a little tidy house where Sensei received his patients. He was reputed as a skilled doctor far outside the region. People from various parts of the country came with their troubles to this small private house situated outskirts of an industrial miner city. Sensei received up to five hundred people a day and refused nobody in reception, often finishing his work at two or even three o'clock at night. But that day Sensei got free early to his measure — at eleven p.m. Guys were arriving closer to the end of reception day. Everyone came for his own reason, but mostly to talk about life. They were simply longing to see Sensei every day after the daily bustle. Such trips became sort of a tradition for them. Fortunately, they were young and had plenty of spare time.

Last patients left the waiting room – a small room with a trestle-bed, two chairs and an icon in the corner illuminated with a lamp. That was the entire furniture. The guys were sitting in the next room which was slightly wider, but just as simply furnished. Benches, a hall tree and also a stove, God knows how it had been preserved from the bygone times.

Despite there were no more patients, Sensei didn't hurry to go home as if waiting for somebody. In about fifteen minutes a slow step indeed resounded in the corridor. Somebody knocked at the door politely. The door opened. Two old nuns entered holding the arms of an unusually looking old man. He was around ninety years old by appearance, little withered, very tall – up to one metre ninety centimetres. He had regular Slavic face features. His beard and slightly curly long hair were white like snow. He was dressed in a warm, somewhat old-fashioned cassock and quilted village boots. The old man's legs were evidently diseased since he was making his every movement with great difficulty. In spite of such outward wildness, his eyes radiated with life-giving kindness and inner force.

— Peace to you, peace to your home, — the old man said having crossed himself and bowed.

The nuns did the same thing. The guys sitting on the benches were actually struck dumb of such wonderful, long ago forgotten words and the extraordinary appearance of the old man.

— Hello, — was the only thing they could say, perplexedly nodding in response.

At that moment Sensei came out his reception room.

— Peace to your soul, Antony, — he uttered in an unusually changed sonorous voice imbued with some pacifying good power.

Once Sensei entered, the nuns bowed and began crossing themselves strenuously, while the old man lit up and attempted to throw himself to his feet. There burned such spiritual

impulse in the old man's eyes that it seemed there were absolutely no corporal obstacles in front of him. Sensei easily caught him up and said:

—It's not good for you, Antony, to kneel before this body.

—I kneel not before the body, but before the Holy Spirit.

—Your entire life, Antony, spent in God's love is the true worship.

Gently holding the old man's arm, Sensei led him to the waiting room. The nuns humbly sat down on a vacant bench, continuing to cross themselves and to whisper prayers. The guys were naturally little shocked with such spectacle, but not for long. Something usual always happened near Sensei. In a minute they were already carried away with talks about daily stuff. Max was sitting closer to the waiting room than everybody else, so he could see and hear what was going on therein.

Having entered the room and seeing the Saviour's icon, the old man crossed himself again. Sensei seated Antony on a chair, and sat on the trestle-bed edge himself.

—Thanks God, I have another chance to meet with You. My soul is rejoicing and thrilling of the grace, being next to You.

The old man whisked away a running tear.

—Antony, has there been a single day in your life when I wasn't there beside you?

—It is true. But still... Your gaze soothes my soul with Your light like the lucid sun in pure skies.

—Oh, Antony... Soon you will be comforted under this sun eternally.

—It's a great joy, a true gain for the soul... However, a pain

for those who will stay just wouldn't abandon me. A terrible time awaits them. How their fate can be eased?

—My light Antony... I'm delighted over your love and care for those living in this moment. But is it worth tormenting your soul for those who listened, but didn't hear, who acted with their bodies without feelings and did not imbue with the soul?

—Yet, not everyone is lost. There are aberrant, too. Who will search for them amidst the slum of unbelief?

—I know what you've come to ask me for, Antony. I know your secret ideas. Although there are only few pillars like you remaining in my favourite Orthodoxy capable of striking divine sparks, my hand will not rise to prolong your torment.

— Yes, my body is feeble, but my spirit is firm and powerful... I still can lead out to God's light at least a single soul, at least by the hand.

A kind laugh resounded.

—Oh, I know you, Antony! Should you're allowed to lead by the hand, you will kick your entire herd to the heavenly garden.

—Forbid me, my Most Holy Light! Yet, I've been shown all the torments of hell which the lost children will suffer. And those children are like little kittens, blind from their birth. They don't see where they go.

—They don't see indeed. But the Word has been given to them, and they've heard it, but don't trust it. Whereas God should be trusted. It's been said: "Keep vigil!" It means – keep vigil! It's been said: "Win love", so one should win it.

—All this is right... But their deafness is due to lack of un-

derstanding. Visions of the hell desert mirages seduce them. They don't know it's a ghostly illusion which leads a soul to ruin.

—It's not that they don't know, my light Antony, but they don't want to admit it. They think only of idle things which are dust in essence. Nothing can be done about it. If a gardener does not fight worms, he can't obtain a worthy fruit...

—It is the mundane vanity which gives them no rest.

—Vanity? Vanity, Antony, in not in the world. They are wearied not with the external, but rather the internal preys upon them. I've come in this body just in order to live a human life and to see with my own eyes whether anything hinders a human being on the way to God. Nothing hinders! Only total laziness and craving for perishable temptations.

—Yes, children are weak in spirit yet. They don't see greater behind a little. Forgive me my words, but why don't You reveal your Genuine face before the lost herd? People would find faith which leads to redemption of their souls. It's a different time now.

—Eh, Antony, my godly light... My spirit is here not for preaching, but for Accusation, because the balance given by God has been broken. Should I disclose my Genuine face, for many it would be like death, since souls of sinners would not endure the pure light like darkness does not endure the bright sun. It can be viewed only by righteous people, pure in soul and mind... Now people need not preaching of redemption, but rather actions. Nobody will now be able to justify one's ignorance, saying something like: "Lord, I've been searching and haven't found". The lights of truth burn throughout the

Earth. Who wants will find.

—It's true indeed. It's a pity that time is almost up, and people have too little faith. Nonetheless, the soul cares for these sinners and intercedes for them. Many of them lack just a little to acquire confidence on their way to Lord's Gate. Help them with the power of Your holiness...

—How can I reject the request of you who are filled with such a great compassion for human souls' salvation... Let it be as you wish... For merits of yours and all those Praying like you, I shall give for the lost herd an edifying luminary prayer filled with God's power. But remember that this prayer is like the God's Finger. For anyone who knows it, but makes a false step, it will be like a stone on the neck of a drowned, for their abandonment will be similar to fighting God. Whereas those who will perform it upon their righteous deeds, with pure conscience, will find forgiveness already in this life. And the words of this prayer are the following: "My Genuine Father! I trust in You Only. And I ask You, Lord, solely for my soul redemption. Let it go by Your holy will..."

* * *

On these words his vision abruptly came to an end. No matter how hard he tried, Max was not able to remember the sequel of that edifying prayer which now became so important and so valuable for him. He understood through some intuitive sensation that, should he recall it in full in his memory, he would not fear any hardships. He felt this prayer indeed contained a tremendous hidden God's power. His soul was not

just thrilling, but, even while remembering that life fragment, it became saturated with the ravishing power of the prayer like a thirsty traveler in a desert would be saturated with spring water. The blissful touch of the first drops of invigorating freshness. And... the spring's lost again. "How could this happen? — Max was puzzled. — How could I neglect such a valuable treasure? I did hear everything, heard every word, but didn't perceive. I even didn't recall it a single time thereafter. Am I now supposed to wander around this hellish desert under the burning sun? There is no death, but there is no life either. There's only a slow agonizing fading! How has this happened? I've passed by the most important... I was so close, close to Him!

How could I disregard what was so obvious? How could I be so deaf and blind, not seeing and not hearing what was happening in reality, exactly in the reality which I foolishly considered an illusion? What have I wasted my entire life for? For idle vegetation in petty matters? I did feel the eternity. So why did I exchange it for worthless instants of my mortal Ego's whims? It's a pity the valuable time have passed irretrievably. How could this happen?!"

The little body was shuddering with intolerable inner pain as if a thousand beasts of prey were tearing it to pieces from inside with their sharp claws. Intolerable pain along with horrible fear gripped his entire being. And... the deepest anguish. This burdensome feeling of centuries-old languor of the soul. A cry burst from the very depth of his heart with an extraordinary sincerity: "God! What have I got this for?!" Just at that moment a horrifying picture of his steep spiritual degradation

emerged in Max's memory. The disgusting scenes of monstrous absorption by the matter... He didn't even resist, simply falling like a stone into an abyss prepared for him by his Ego.

* * *

After a certain time, the companies founded by Sensei, disintegrated as suddenly as they had been established. Max was deprived of his cool image and director status all at once. An incredible rage gripped him, and he chose exactly Sensei to be its target, considering that the associated companies could be saved. The animal nature burst outside like an explosion of a volcano which had been accumulating its toxic gases for ages. The fury was blazing like a burning fire. Life got covered with a thick layer of red-hot ashes. Max was seized by a dreadful idea to become rich at any price. His mind definitively persuaded itself that life's given only once, and so it should be lived to the fullest. He wanted to become rich here and now, no matter which way, and later – come what may. Max started cherishing his dream day and night. Watching how well-off people lived, he envied, felt angry and hated himself for being unable to achieve the same prosperity. Yet, he wanted so much to resolve all issues with a single pressure of a knob on his mobile phone, just as earlier when he had been in Sensei's team.

Life turned into a series of misfortunes without a single gleam of hope. Problems were pressing one after another. Max found himself face to face with a frightening living reality the existence of which he had never presumed. In the be-

ginning, he still resisted somehow, but then became totally disheartened. Max blamed Sensei for the fact that life had let him down in such humiliating way, had turned him into a slave and not into a master. However, everything could have been different, mindful. A different way out of the situation could have been found. Everything had been damned: life, business, philosophy. He found a reason to hate Sensei. Yet, at the same time he realized that reason was a mere consequence of his own inner crisis which had not been fully perceived, but was causing suffering and aching of the soul. The process of his steep degradation appeared to be too painful.

In such shattered state Max ran once came across his old friend who had used to work in Sensei's team. His friend had also little pulled about by his destiny, but happy marriage had redeemed his position. With his father's-in-law help he had acquired an own store in the market-place where he sold automobile paints. Max moved to the city where his friend lived and started assisting him. Eventually he became his business partner. Nonetheless, his craving for being cooler and richer still didn't abandon him. It became soft of a fixed idea.

Several years before Max coarsely tripped his friend up having left his family with scarce livelihood and severe debts, that friend received an unusual parcel by mail with a book strangely named "Sensei of Shambala". He read it and hurried to share his impressions with Max, particularly the Lotus Flower practice which had greatly captivated him. Furthermore, he frankly told about the staggering sensations he had experiences after performing that spiritual practice and confessed he had never achieved such inner state of spiritual in-

tegrity in his life before.

The admiring opinion of his friend slightly bewildered Max. He borrowed the book to read and plunged into Sensei's harmonious world again. His soul began to thrill of bygone memories... Max suspected that the book most probably had been written by a girl who had also attended training classes and interested in the spiritual way of evolution. He was still puzzled why she had taken Sensei's philosophy so seriously. Max also noted that the book had been written in a fiction from, but it was too authentic. He recognized many events which had taken place in real life. He remembered Sensei. He didn't feel annoyed towards him anymore. All secret thoughts of his Ego were now associated with the current business participants. Without the bygone thick shroud of rage Max felt his soul had always been fond of this man. A slight nostalgia for the past came over. He even tried to restart spiritual practices, however now he did much worth than upon his least successful attempts in the past. Max got angry with himself. Losing the previous steadiness, his Ego hurried to re-impose its dominating position. From malice and inner feebleness of his spiritual, Max told his friend that fiction was fiction. "All this universal love distracts from the main conception – the business". Max was internally delighted when he saw his friend losing his heart at those words. One of his secret desires came true at last: his words, but not Sensei's words produced an effect on his friend. Finally he, Max, gained the long-awaited power, at least a small one, at least over his own friend, but still his own power!..

* * *

Max's young little body was shaking from such terrible memories as if in fever. Only now he understood how total his own Ego's seizure had been over him. After all, even when Max had been falling into the abyss of his matter, even at the exact moment of his fatal collapse Sensei had extended a helping hand to him, while he had simply ignored such friendly gesture because of his exaggerated self-esteem, foolishly thinking he had been flying to his own paradise. He hadn't even assumed that paradise would in reality turn into the perfect hell.

In several years his long-awaited dream had come true. Max invented and played a combination which enriched himself like in a fairy tale. Big money was in the kitty. For the transaction he induced his friend to take a sizeable bank credit. His friend pledged all his immovable property. Could he really think at that point that his old friend and partner Max would bring him to ruin and would shamelessly rob his family of everything being earned during a number of years?..

Max became rich precisely at the expense of such "insignificant sacrifice for the sake of the great dream". Everything changed in his life in a twinkling. He began to live in comfort, having become the director of his own enterprise. Many people started working for his benefit. Money began flowing like water... And, all of a sudden, there came emptiness and darkness instead of enjoyment of his own power, there came complete feebleness and inability to change whatsoever.

* * *

Dreadful despair was reflected in the child's face. The little girl began looking around fearfully. She rested gaze at her mother who was ardently hugging and kissing with the unfamiliar men. Max imagined his burdensome future and yelled with tears in his eyes:

—No-o-o! Sensei, bring me back to the past! I know it's within Your power. I swear I've understood everything!

—The past? — Sensei uttered tranquilly. — Why do you need that past? Look inside yourself. What is drawing you to the past now? Social status, material welfare?

—No... Yes... No... Sensei, I don't know. But I'll change without fail! I have realized everything! Only take me away from here!

—Residing in this body is the consequence of your past. It was your choice!

—I didn't know, I didn't think that you were then telling...
— Max stopped short.

—Telling the truth? — Sensei finished his thought. And, having been silent for a while, he said with grief: — You had more than a real chance in that life. All possible spiritual tools were available for you. However, did you use at least a single one of those in order to build a saving ark for yourself? While you were scrutinizing those tools, looking for defects and advantages in them, the time assigned for you came to its end. Reap the fruits of your doubts now.

—Forgive me... What will happen to me now?! Sensei, you are my friend... How? Why me?... Why don't you believe me?

—And why did you never believe me? — Sensei questioned in response.

—But I've understood everything! Change my destiny at least! Should I from now on flounder in such shit my entire life?!

Sensei just grinned and uttered wearily:

—You've understood nothing... You still crave for bananas... Well, you will have according to your faith...

The little girl began to blink rapidly. Her look became childishly naïve again. She wiped out the moisture which had appeared on her face for some unknown reason. She glanced at the sand houses which had remained intact, then stood up, made a displeased face and angrily crushed them underfoot. Having grabbed her favourite blue scoop, she ran to her mother. Time seemed to slow down scrolling her every withdrawing step on its invisible film.

Sensei shifted his gaze to one of the pebbles lying nearby which the girl had used to decorate her buildings with. He picked and tossed it up. The pebble rocketed, playfully gleaming in the sun with its smoothly polished surface. The exerted force started to decrease gradually. Having consumed it, the pebble reached its culmination point. It hung poised in mid-air for a mere fraction of a second and began rapidly at progressive speed. From the heavenly height it collapsed heavily on the burning hot sand and occupied its habitual position. Sensei looked at the pebble regretfully. Then he picked cupped hands of sand and focused his gaze on them. And several seconds after he opened his palms. Two beautiful birds were spreading their wings there. He gently tossed them up.

And they started to fly, fluently moving away into the heavenly distance. Sensei smiled, following them with his eyes. Later on he lowered his gaze and looked around. Time continued scrolling its slow-motion outdated film, unhurriedly moving people. Sensei heavily sighed, watched the little girl go and quietly uttered:

— Oh, humans, humans... For how long will you take care of instants, trampling on the eternity?

The books by Anastasia Novykh:

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The books by Anastasia Novykh are well-known all over the world as spiritual, intellectual bestsellers that give answers to exclusively personal questions of every person, that give a deep understanding of the world and oneself, strengthen the best human qualities, inspire to inner self-knowledge, inspire to broaden one's outlook, win victory over oneself and do real good deeds. The books of the writer - **"Sensei of Shambala"** (four volumes), **"Ezoosmos"**, **"Birds and a Stone"**, **"Crossroads"**, **"AllatRa"** are translated into many languages. They have become a handbook for people of different ages, nationalities, religions, living on different continents, in various countries.

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website of the author <http://schambala.com.ua>,
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The unique books by Anastasia Novykh have become the basis for a large-scale association of like-minded and kind people all over the world. Thanks to these books, good people from all over the world who want to apply their skills and abilities towards creative activity unite. These people implement large-scale projects that develop and strengthen morality, spirituality and culture in the world community. The example of such an association of kind, unselfish people is ALLATRA International Public Movement www.allatra.org, which global international activity plays today an invaluable role in the formation of spirituality, morality and humanity all over the world.



ALLATRA IPM is a global association of those who actually do Good and maintain Peace for all people. ALLATRA movement unites people all over the world regardless of status, social categories, political and religious views. In a short period of time hundreds of thousands of like-minded people in more than 200 countries around the world have become active participants of the movement.

Our strategic goal is to induce people to actively participate in life of the society and together with people of good will from various countries be involved in useful activity for the world community. We are outside of politics and outside of religion.

Thanks to the initiative and unselfish actions of active participants of the ALLATRA International Public Movement, various creative projects and good deeds aimed at creating conditions to unlock the creative potential of people and at revival of universal human spiritual and moral values in the whole global community are implemented around the world.

Among the projects are:

- *the nationwide initiative - "ALLATRA Global Partnership Agreement" www.allatra-partner.org;*

- *international Internet TV - "ALLATRA TV"*
www.allatra.tv;
- *international web portal for bringing people together in common socially important affairs - "ALLATRA – Crowdfunding with Conscience"* www.allatra.in;
- *creative media space - "ALLATRA RADIO"*
<http://allatra-radio.com/en>;
- *"ALLATRA SCIENCE" - modern innovative research in the spheres of climatology, physics, psychology*
<http://allatra-science.org/en>;
- *International portal of global positive information space - "ALLATRA News"* <http://allatravesti.com/en> and many others.

We do not divide people into leaders and executors, every one of us is a leader and an executor, and together we are force.

Our General Manager is CONSCIENCE.

We invite everyone who would like to show kindness and to help the international community to take the path of spiritual and cultural development through socially important joint projects. Everyone who wants, who is able and who acts is with us. It is timely and fashionable to be a good person!

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**ALLATRA TV - International Volunteer Internet TV
of the ALLATRA International Public Movement**

Official website: www.allatra.tv

ALLATRA TV is the international, nationwide Internet TV with relevant and interesting videos on various subjects: psychology, science, good news, information and analysis programs, interviews with famous people, friendly humor, educational animated videos, family programmes, and many other sincere and positive programmes which increase humaneness, kindness, and unity in the society. The reality that affects us all!

The ALLATRA TV shows are interesting to all people who are striving for self-improvement, spiritual and cultural development, and strengthening of the best qualities in themselves and the society around them.

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Thanks to the programmes, one can gain practical experience of knowledge and personal contact with the LIFE-GIVING ONE.

Within the programmes is unique information that reflects the path of self-knowledge of man, primordial knowledge about the Holy Spirit, its important role in the spiritual development of man and mankind; deep self-realizations and the deepest feelings of contact with the spiritual world.

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